

# THE LION AND THE MOUSE.

By CHARLES KLEIN.

A Story of American Life Novelized From the Play by ARTHUR HORNBLLOW.

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"Five thousand dollars?" echoed Shirley. "That's a lot of money."

"Smiling, she added: 'It appeals to my commercial sense. But I'm afraid the subject does not arouse my enthusiasm from an artistic standpoint.'"

Ryder seemed amused at the idea of any one hesitating to make \$5,000. He knew that writers do not run across such opportunities every day.

"Upon my word," he said, "I don't know why I'm so anxious to get you to do the work. I suppose it's because you don't want to. You remind me of my son. Ah, he's a problem!"

Shirley started involuntarily when Ryder mentioned his son. But he did not notice it.

"Why, is he wild?" she asked, as if only mildly interested.

"Oh, no; I wish he were," said Ryder. "Fallen in love with the wrong woman, I suppose," she said.

"Something of the sort. How did you guess?" asked Ryder, surprised.

Shirley coughed to meet her embarrassment and replied indifferently: "So many boys do that. Besides," she added, with a mischievous twinkle in her eyes, "I can hardly imagine that any woman would be the right one unless you selected her yourself!"

Ryder made no answer. He folded his arms and gazed at her. Who was this woman who knew him so well, who could read his inmost thoughts, who never made a mistake? After a silence he said:

"Do you know you say the strangest things?"

"Truth is strange," replied Shirley carelessly. "I don't suppose you hear it very often."

"Not in that form," admitted Ryder. Shirley had taken on to her lap some of the letters he had passed her and was perusing them one after another.

"All these letters from Washington consulting you on politics and finance—they won't interest the world."

"My secretary picked them out," explained Ryder. "Your artistic sense will tell you what to use."

"Does your son still love this girl? I mean the one you object to," inquired Shirley as she went on sorting the papers.

"Oh, no, he does not care for her any more," answered Ryder hastily.

"Yes, he does. He still loves her," said Shirley positively.

"How do you know?" asked Ryder, amazed.

"From the way you say he doesn't," retorted Shirley.

Ryder gave his caller a look in which admiration was mingled with astonishment.

"You are right again," he said. "The idiot does love the girl."

"Bless his heart!" said Shirley to herself. Aloud she said:

"I hope they'll both outwit you."

Ryder laughed in spite of himself. This young woman certainly interested him more than any other he had ever known.

"I don't think I ever met any one in my life quite like you," he said.

"What's the objection to the girl?" demanded Shirley.

"Every objection. I don't want her in my family."

"Anything against her character?"

To better conceal the keen interest she took in the personal turn the conversation had taken, Shirley pretended to be more busy than ever with the papers.

"Yes—that is, no—not that I know of," replied Ryder. "But because a woman has a good character, that doesn't necessarily make her a desirable match, does it?"

"It's a point in her favor, isn't it?"

"Yes, but"—He hesitated as if uncertain what to say.

"You know men well, don't you, Mr. Ryder?"

"I've met enough to know them pretty well," he replied.

"Why don't you study women for a change?" she asked. "That would enable you to understand a great many things that I don't think are quite clear to you now."

Ryder laughed good humoredly. It was decidedly a novel sensation to have some one lecturing him.

"I'm studying you," he said, "but I don't seem to make much headway. A woman like you whose mind isn't spoiled by the amusement habit has great possibilities—great possibilities. Do you know you're the first woman I ever took into my confidence—I mean at sight?" Again he fixed her with that keen glance which in his business life had taught him how to read men.

He continued: "I'm acting on sentiment—something I rarely do, but I can't help it. I like you, upon my soul I do, and I'm going to introduce you to my wife—my son."

perial rulers. I'm sure of it now." Ryder listened to her in amazement. He was not quite sure if she were making fun of him or not.

"Well, of all"—he began; then interrupting himself he said amiably, "Won't you do me the honor to meet my family?"

Shirley smiled sweetly and bowed. "Thank you, Mr. Ryder, I will."

She rose from her seat and leaned over the manuscripts to conceal the satisfaction this promise of an introduction to the family circle gave her. She was quick to see that it meant more visits to the house and other and perhaps better opportunities to find the objects of her search. Ryder lifted the receiver of his telephone and talked to his secretary in another room, while Shirley, who was still standing, continued examining the papers and letters.

"Is that you, Bagley? What's that? General Dodge? Get rid of him. I can't see him today. Tell him to come tomorrow. What's that? My son wants to see me? Tell him to come to the phone."

At that instant Shirley gave a little cry, which in vain she tried to suppress. Ryder looked up.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, started.

"Nothing, nothing!" she replied in a hoarse whisper. "I pricked myself with a pin. Don't mind me."

She had just come across her father's missing letters, which had got mixed up, evidently without Ryder's knowledge, in the mass of papers he had handed her. Prepared as she was to find the letters somewhere in the house, she never dreamed that fate would put them so easily and so quickly into her hands; the suddenness of their appearance and the sight of her father's familiar signature affected her almost like a shock. Now she had them, she must not let them go again; yet how could she keep them unobserved? Could she conceal them? Would he miss them? She tried to slip them in her bosom while Ryder was busy at the phone, but he suddenly glanced in her direction and caught her eye. She still held the letters in her hand, which shook from nervousness, but he noticed nothing and went on speaking through the phone:

"Hello, Jefferson, boy! You want to see me. Can you wait till I'm through? I've got a lady here. Going away? Nonsense! Determined, eh? Well, I can't keep you here if you've made up your mind. You want to say goodbye. Come up in about five minutes, and I'll introduce you to a very interesting person."

He laughed and hung up the receiver. Shirley was all unstrung, trying to overcome the emotion which her discovery had caused her, and in a strangely altered voice, the result of the nervous strain she was under, she said:

"You want me to come here?"

She looked up from the letters she was reading across to Ryder, who was standing watching her on the other side of the desk. He caught her glance and, leaning over to take some manuscript, he said:

"Yes, I don't want these papers to get—"

His eye suddenly rested on the letters she was holding. He stopped short, and reaching forward he tried to snatch them from her.

"What have you got there?" he exclaimed.

He took the letters, and she made no resistance. It would be folly to force the issue now, she thought. Another opportunity would present itself. Ryder locked the letters up very carefully in the drawer on the left-hand side of his desk, muttering to himself rather than speaking to Shirley:

"How on earth did they get among my other papers?"

"From Judge Rossmore, were they not?" said Shirley boldly.

"How did you know it was Judge Rossmore?" demanded Ryder suspiciously. "I didn't know that his name had been mentioned."

"I saw his signature," she said simply. Then she added, "He's the father of the girl you don't like, isn't he?"

"Yes, he's the"—

A cloud came over the financier's face. His eyes darkened, his jaws snapped, and he clenched his fist.

"How you must hate him!" said Shirley, who observed the change.

"Not at all," replied Ryder, recovering his self-possession and suavity of manner. "I disagree with his politics and his methods, but I know very little about him except that he is about to be removed from office."

"About to be?" echoed Shirley. "So his fate is decided even before he is tried?" The girl laughed bitterly.

"Yes," she went on, "some of the newspapers are beginning to think he is innocent of the things of which he is accused."

"Do they?" said Ryder indifferently.

"Yes," she persisted, "most people are on his side."

She planted her elbows on the desk in front of her, and looking him squarely in the face she asked him point blank:

"Whose side are you on—really and truly?"

Ryder winced. What right had this

woman, a stranger both to Judge Rossmore and himself, to come here and catechise him? He restrained his impatience with difficulty as he replied: "Whose side am I on? Oh, I don't know that I am on any side. I don't know that I give it much thought. I—" "Do you think this man deserves to be punished?" she demanded. She had resumed her seat at the desk and partly regained her self-possession. "Why do you ask? What is your interest in this matter?" "I don't know," she replied evasively. "His case interests me, that's all. It's rather romantic. Your son loves this man's daughter. He is in disgrace—many seem to think unjustly." Her



"What have you got there?"

voice trembled with emotion as she continued: "I have heard from one source or another—you know I am acquainted with a number of newspaper men—I have heard that life no longer has any interest for him, that he is not only disgraced but beggared, that he is pining away slowly, dying of a broken heart, that his wife and daughter are in despair. Tell me, do you think he deserves such a fate?"

Ryder remained thoughtful a moment, and then he replied: "No, I do not—no—"

Thinking that she had touched his sympathies, Shirley followed up her advantage:

"Oh, then, why not come to his rescue—you, who are so rich, so powerful; you, who can move the scales of justice at your will—save this man from humiliation and disgrace!"

Ryder shrugged his shoulders, and his face expressed weariness, as if the subject had begun to bore him.

"My dear girl, you don't understand. His removal is necessary."

Shirley's face became set and hard. There was a contemptuous ring to her words as she retorted:

"Yet you admit that he may be innocent!"

"Even if I knew it as a fact, I could not move."

"Do you mean to say that if you had positive proof?" She pointed to the drawer in the desk where he had placed the letters. "If you had absolute proof in that drawer, for instance, wouldn't you help him then?"

Ryder's face grew cold and inscrutable; he now wore his fighting mask.

"Not even if I had the absolute proof in that drawer!" he snapped viciously.

"Have you absolute proof in that drawer?" she demanded.

"I repeat that even if I had I could not expose the men who have been my friends. It's noblesse oblige in politics as well as in society, you know."

He smiled again at her, as if he had recovered his good humor after their sharp passages at arms.

"Oh, it's politics! That's what the papers said. And you believe him innocent. Well, you must have some grounds for your belief."

"Not necessarily."

"You said that even if you had the proofs you could not produce them without sacrificing your friends, show—"

[Continued next week.]

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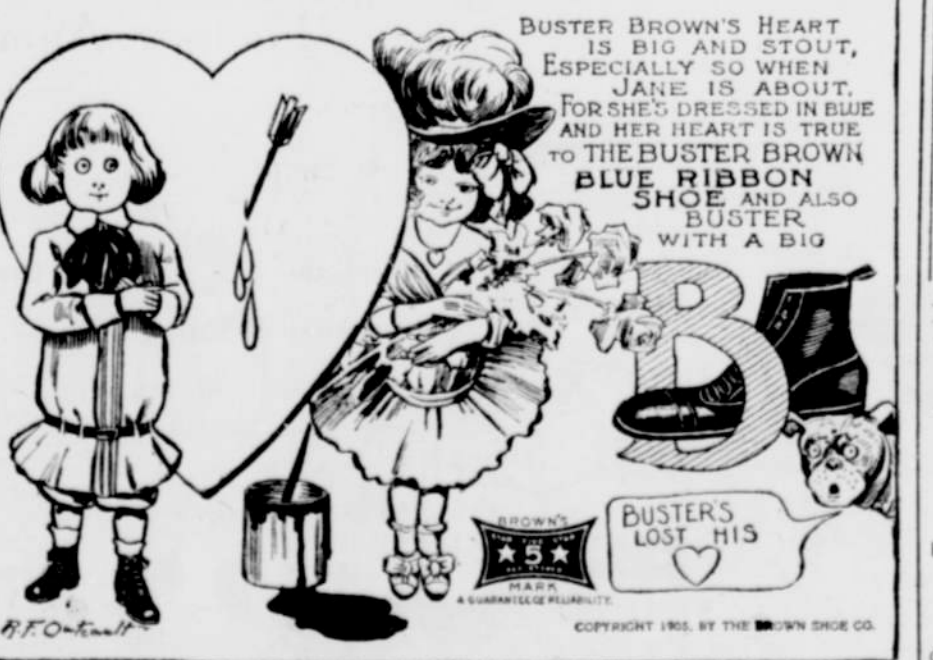
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