Who Wrote It?

The Breadwinners, by ?

A Romance of Love and Labor

Can You Tell?

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTER.—Maud Matchin, a working girl, is loved by Sam Sleeny, a carpenter. But aspires to marry Capt. Arthur Farnham, a young millionaire. Sleeny, through jealousy, joins a brotherhood of laboring men known as "The Breadwinners," managed by a demagogue named Offitt. Offitt secretly loves Maud and seeks Sleeny's downfall. Maud resolves to tell Farnham she loves him.

CHAPTER II.

An Interrupted Love Scene.

FARNHAM, meanwhile, was blissfully unaware of the siege which was planned against his heart. For one thing, he was the least conceited of men, and saw in Maud Matchin's visits nothing but a natural desire on her part to win a lucrative position at the Buffland Library. For another, a growing rumor of impending labor troubles which threatened certain of his financial interests occupied much of his attention.

The chief cause of his immunity, however, sprang from the fact that Alice Belding had returned from New York, where she had just been graduated from Mme. de Veaudrey's exclusive school.

Mrs. Jairus Belding, widow of Buffland's richest iron magnate, was Farnham's next-door neighbor, and had been a dear friend of his and his parents before him. The two families were most intimate, and few days passed without an informal interchange of visits between the adjoining households.

Since Alice Belding had returned from school an unconfessed but none the less ardent attraction had sprung up between Farnham and the tall, fair girl. He had not yet dared to speak; but Alice filled his thoughts to the utter exclusion of any and all other women.

The words of Bott, the spiritualistic medium, lingered obstinately in Maud Matchin's mind. She gave herself no rest from dwelling on them. Her imagination was full, day after day, of glowing pictures of herself and Farnham in tete-a-tete; she would seek in a thousand ways to tell her love—but she could never quite arrange her avowal in a satisfactory manner. Long before she came to the decisive words which were to kindle his heart to flame in the imaginary dialogue, he would himself take fire by spontaneous combustion, and, falling on his knees, would offer his hand, his heart, and his fortune to her in words taken from "The Earl's Daughter" or the "Heir of Ashby."

At length, having oftimes rehearsed her speech of avowal, she brought her courage to the sticking point and went one morning to the Farnham home.

As she drew near the little gate in the garden wall she thought, "I hope Sam isn't there."

Sam was there, just finishing his work upon the greenhouse. Farnham was there, also; he had come down to inspect the job, and he and Sleeny were chatting near the gate as Maud opened it and came in. Farnham stepped forward to meet her. The unexpected rencontre made her shy, and she neither spoke to Sam nor looked toward him, which filled him with a dull jealousy.

"Could I have a few minutes' conversation with you, sir?" she asked, with stiff formality.

"Certainly," said Farnham, smiling. "Shall we go into the house?"

"Thank you, no," she rejoined, severely decorous.

They walked up the garden path together, and Sam looked after them with an unquiet heart.

She was walking beside Farnham with a stately step, in spite of the scabbard-like narrowness of the dress she wore. She was nearly as tall as he, and as graceful as a young pine blown to and fro by soft winds. The carpenter, with his heart heavy with love and longing, felt a bitter sense that she was too fine for him. They passed into the house, and he turned to his work with a sigh, often dropping his busy hands and looking toward the house with a dumb questioning in his eyes.

After a half hour, which seemed endless to him, they reappeared and walked slowly down the lawn. There was trouble and agitation in the girl's face, and Farnham was serious also. As they came by the rose house, Maud paused and looked up with a sorrowful smile and a question. Farnham nodded and they walked to the open door of the long, low building. He led the way in, and Maud, looking hastily around, closed the door behind them.

"He's goin' to give her some of them roses," said Sam, explaining the matter to himself. But he worked for some time with his blond beard on his shoulder in his impatience to see them come out. At last he could resist no longer. He knew a point where he could look through the glass and see whatever was taking place among the roses. He walked swiftly across the turf to that point.

He looked in and saw Maud, whose back was turned toward him, talking as if she were pleading for her life, while Farnham listened with a clouded brow. Sleeny stood staring with stupid wonder while Maud laid her hand upon Farnham's shoulder.

At that moment he heard footsteps on the gravel walk at some distance from him, and he looked up and saw Mrs. Belding approaching. Confused at his attitude of espionage, he walked away from his post, and, as he passed her, Mrs. Belding asked him if he knew where Mr. Farnham was.

"Yes," he answered, "he's in there. Walk right in;" and in the midst of his trouble of spirit he could hardly help chuckling at his own cleverness as he walked, in his amazement, back to the conservatory.

While she was in the house, Maud had confined herself to the subject of the vacancy in the library. She rushed at it, as a hunter at a hedge, to get away from the other matter which had tormented her for a week. When she found herself alone with Farnham she saw that it would be "horrid" to say what she had so long been rehearsing.

But during the interview she could find no opportunity to speak the words that filled her heart, and at length she rose to go. Farnham accompanied her across the lawn.

"Stop at the rose house a moment," said he, "and I'll give you some roses."

They entered the building, unconscious of Sleeny's jealous glare.

"What sort will you have?" said Farnham, reaching for the gardener's shears.

"Never mind the roses," she said, in a dry voice which she hardly recognized as her own. "I have something to say to you."

He turned and looked at her with surprise. She raised her eyes to his with a great effort, and then, blushing fiery red, she said in a clear, low voice, "I love you."

Like many another daughter and son of Eve, she was startled at the effect of these momentous words upon herself. Of all forms of speech these three words are the most powerful, the most wonder working upon the being who utters them. It was the first time they had ever passed her lips, and they exalted and inebriated her. She was suddenly set free from the bashful constraint which had held her, and with a leaping pulse and free tongue she poured out her heart to the astonished and scandalized young man.

"Yes, I love you. You think it's horrid that I should say so, don't you? But I don't care. I love you. I loved you the first time I saw you. And I thought of you day and night, and I longed for the day to come when I might see you once more, and I was glad when I did not get that place, so that I could come again and see you and talk with you. I can tell you over again every word you ever said to me. You were not like other men. You are the first real man I ever knew. If I am not to be your wife I must never see you again; you know that, don't you?" and, carried away by her own reckless words, she laid her hand on his shoulder. His frown of amazement and displeasure shook her composure somewhat. She turned pale and trembled, her eyes fell, and it seemed for an instant as if she would sink to the floor at his feet.

He put his arm around her to keep her from falling and pressed her closely to him. She threw her head back upon his shoulder and lifted her face to him.

He looked down on her, and the frown passed from his brow as he surveyed her flushed cheeks, her red, full lips parted in breathless eagerness; her dark eyes were wide open, the iris flecked with golden sparks and the white as clear and blue-tinged as in the eyes of a vigorous infant; her head lay on his shoulder in perfect content, and she put up her mouth to him as simply and as sure of a response as a pretty child.

He was entirely aware of the ridiculousness of his position, but he stooped and kissed her.

Her work seemed all done; but her satisfaction lasted only a second. Her face broke into happy smiles.

"You do love me, do you not?" she asked.

"I certainly do not," he answered; and at that instant the door opened and Mrs. Belding saw this pretty group of apparent lovers on a rich background of Jacqueminot roses.

Startled more at the words of Farnham than at the entry of Mrs. Belding, Maud had started up like Vivien, "stiff as a viper frozen." Her first thought was whether she had crushed her hat on his shoulder, and her hands flew instinctively to her head-gear. She then walked tempestuously past the astonished lady out into the garden and brushed roughly by Sleeny, who tried to detain her.

"Hold your tongue, Sam! I hate you and all men;" and with this general denunciation, she passed out of the place, flaming with rage and shame.

(To Be Continued.)

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