

The Daily Novelette

Whole Hearts and a Shattered Car
By H. Irving King

IT WAS a dark, stormy night; the wind swept in fierce gusts along the barren hillsides and moaned through the leafless trees, driving before it sheets of pouring rain, as a solitary car might have been seen making its perilous way along the deserted country road at the wheel of the storm-tossed vehicle, his face set in grim determination, was a young man of about twenty-five. Long years of hard service had left the machine in the shape of a car that ought to have been taken abroad in such a night. The object of Franklin Madison's nocturnal expedition was one of serious import—it was to pay off the mortgage on the old home.

The holder of the mortgage on Franklin's old home was a chum of Franklin's about his own age, a youth possessed of much money who spent his summers with an uncle in Middletown. When Franklin had inherited the farm and the mortgage, he found that his father had been paying seven per cent interest and mentioned the fact to his friend, Martin Fairbanks.

"Outrageous," said Martin. "Pay the old thief off. I'll lend you the money to do it and take a mortgage from you for the amount at five per cent." And so it was done.

The mortgage fell due on December eighth and Franklin, now being in a position to do so, wanted to take it from a tree in the woods. He was leading the single life along the Great White Way, asking him to empower some one in a public way to act in order to discharge the obligation. To Franklin's surprise, for Martin seldom visited Middletown in the winter, he received a reply saying that that place on December 8, and if Franklin would drive down from the farm on that date they could do business. But he and Martin would not arrive until eight o'clock in the evening and would have but a few minutes to spare. This sounded rather curious, but Franklin, anxious to get the mortgage out of the way, started for Middletown on the evening specified, regardless of the howling storm and frailty of his driver. He had advanced as far as the outskirts of the town. Then just where the road descends the hill, the night-havens expected happened. A branch, torn from a tree by the gale, struck his windshield, smashing it and cutting him about the head and face. He lost control of the wheel for a second, the car slid to a roadside ditch and turned over with an exploding tire and a broken axle.

Franklin crawled from under the wreck, bleeding profusely but not otherwise much injured—some contusions and sprains and a slight internal shake-up. As Franklin cleared the momentary haze from his mind he saw that he had been wrecked in front of a trim white house, the light-streaming windows of which gave promise of help, medicine and sticking plaster. He knew the place well; it was the home of prosperous Silas Merrivether, Middletown's hardware merchant, who possessed, among other things, a daughter, Millie, a charming creature about Franklin's own age and, as her father said, as "smart as a log of tummy nails."

Franklin knocked at the door, which was presently opened by Millie, and he staggered into the hall. Millie did not faint at the going, but she was not of the fainting kind; but she screamed a scream which brought the rest of the family running. They got Franklin into the sitting room, and Mrs. Merrivether and Millie went to work on him with warm water, provide of hydrogen and cortisyl. Silas Merrivether, however, telephoned for the doctor and the patient discussed disintegrated of wrecked cars and flying limbs. Franklin was really sorry when the ministrations of his amateur surgeons were so soft and pleasing had been the touch of Millie's fingers, so close her tempting lips had come to his as she searched for overlooked abrasions.

Franklin had long looked longingly at Millie Merrivether and had not been mistaken in thinking that Millie was not entirely indifferent to him. But between Franklin and Millie was no intervening obstacle in the person of Caroline Sigsby, a sprightly and comely young lady of the town, with well-to-do parents and a longing for the good, the beautiful and the true. Caroline and Franklin were not formally engaged, but it was an understood thing that they were to be married as soon as Franklin got on his feet, as the saying is. The two young people had drifted into this position, a drift which Franklin had not regretted until he had come to know and appreciate Millie. Then he secretly kicked himself for not having taken to his ears in time. Now it was too late.

"Bless me!" suddenly cried Franklin, in whom the presence of Millie had dulled all sense of the "Bless it!" "It's after nine o'clock. I must try to get downtown."

Just then the telephone bell rang. Millie answered it and this is what she heard over the wire: "Is this you, Millie? This is Caroline. I've such a surprise for you, Martin Fairbanks and I have just been married. Only the immediate family present. We made up our minds very suddenly and decided to have the wedding very quiet, on account of—oh, you know—that sort of understanding between Franklin Mason and me. I am afraid Franklin will do something desperate when he hears. Martin and I are leaving for New York on the 9:30 train. Franklin was to have been down to meet Martin this evening, but it occurred to he didn't come and so, Martin, you must be careful of the awful duty of telling him."

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what we were going to do. Oh, Millie, dear, you are my dearest friend, and it is to you I intrust the sacred duty of breaking the sad news to Franklin. Poor boy, I know his heart will be forever broken. Break it to him gently won't you, Millie dear?"
Millie promised, hung up the receiver and whirling about in her chair repeated Caroline's message word for word, watching Franklin's face intently the while. Franklin looked a little flustered, perhaps a little piqued, but by no means broken-hearted. In fact after telephoning to Martin's uncle and finding that Martin had left with him a power of attorney to act in the matter of the mortgage, the young man gave evidence of being in a highly satisfied, even genial frame of mind. He and Millie were married in June and Franklin is now one of the largest fruit growers in New England. Mr. and Mrs. Franklin visit the Madisons every summer. Caroline will believe to her dying day that Franklin married Millie in a fit of wild desperation and despair at the loss of herself.

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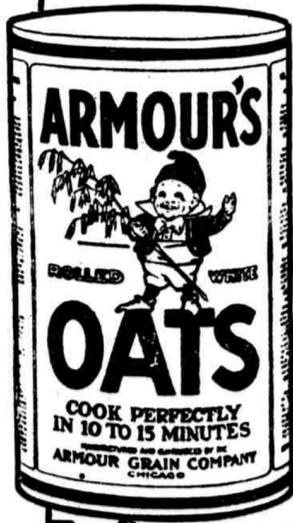
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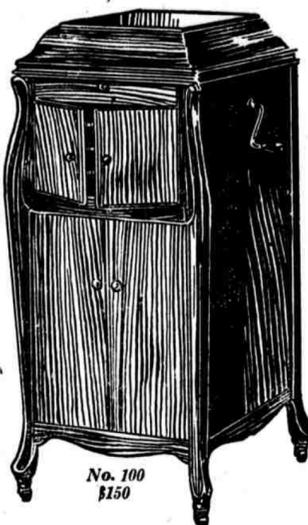
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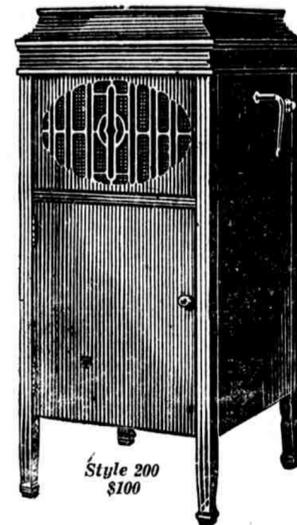
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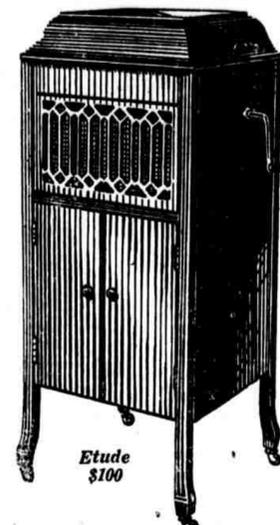
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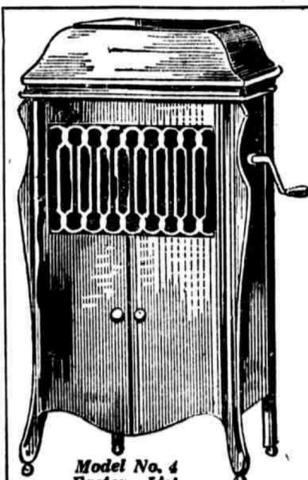


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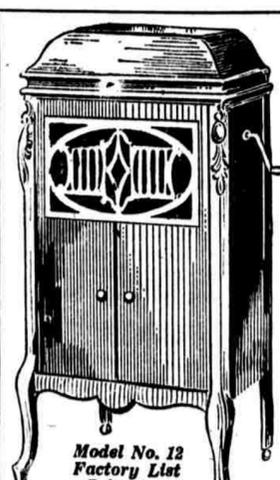
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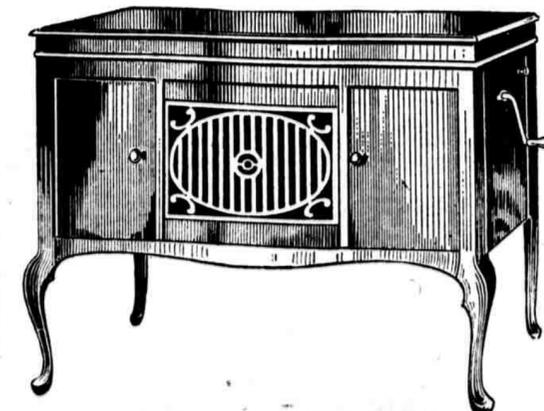
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