

come again and were outstretched over the white crib. It was a sorry period for Drake. He was doing all he could, and yet orders were falling off day by day. He was absolutely certain that the fault was not his. He was young at the business, to be sure; but he was no tyro. He knew how to sell goods, and had made a success of salesmanship before he went with the Winship Company. But for some reason he was now losing his grip on the game. The Valley storekeepers, many of them good friends of his, were either cutting their customary orders in half or were withholding them entirely. Drake had to work eighteen hours a day to make any kind of showing in his orderbook. And all the while Ripley kept banging away at him with his "What's the matter?" letters.

IT was just about this time that Drake began to think. Three turndowns in a single day started it. There was still one other storekeeper to be seen in the town; but Drake did not go to him. Instead he went to his room in the hotel and got out his orderbook. Page after page he studied, and each one, he found, recalled something unpleasant. One by one the protests and complaints of the customers were conjured up. He got out Ripley's letters and reread them. He cast his mind back over the last three weeks, and he weighed and thought and weighed. Suddenly there flashed into his mind the words he had overheard Elliott use that evening in the Miller House at Stockdale. Upon a swift impulse he slapped the orderbook shut and flung it across the room. "I'm on now, all right! They're crooks—that's what they are!" he said aloud. "Elliott was right. They're rotten—Ripley's rotten—they're all rotten! And I called Elliott a liar!" He dropped his chin into his hand and stared at the floor. "They're just playing me, that's all," he said at last, "making me do their dirty work! They know they're crooked too, or they'd never have shut me off when I wrote in."

Drake saw it all now. He wondered why he had been such a fool as not to see it long ago. He saw too that the storekeepers knew all about it, just as Elliott knew it, and that just for friendship, or whatever it was, had not spoken to him as they should have. Theirs had been

intimations merely when they should have been something straight from the shoulder. And it had taken him weeks to understand! It made him furious with himself.

The more he thought of it the more angry and determined he became. "They've tried to make a crook out of me—and here's where I quit!" he exclaimed, springing from his chair. A half-hour sufficed to get his baggage, samples and all, in order and his hotel bill settled. The end of the half-hour found him at the railway station.

WHAT are you doing back here? Why aren't you down in the Valley?" This was the surprised and irritated inquiry Ripley flung at him as he entered the sales manager's office.

Drake walked over to Ripley's desk, thrusting the visitors' chair aside in order to stand the closer. "I'm here because I've quit, that's why!" he replied, his voice as hard as steel on steel. "Now you shut up and listen to me!" Ripley had made an impatient gesture. "This house is crooked, and you know it. You've been doing crooked things with the orders and making me square you ever since you've thought you could put it over me. And here's where I get off! I wouldn't work another hour for you if I starved for it!"

Ripley, purple in the face, struggled to his feet, sputtering. "How dare you talk to me this way? Get out of this office, or I'll put you out!"

"You'll what?" Drake narrowed his eyes and leaned forward. "I wish you'd take just one shot at that, Ripley."

Discreet Ripley made no move to carry out the threat. He merely stood shaking, pointing a trembling hand at the door. Drake, lusting for physical combat, waited, hoping that Ripley would make just one little ill-considered gesture.

"I see you get me, all right," he said at last. "Now hunt up a crook to travel the Valley for you—I'm done!" Then he turned upon his heel and went out, leaving the door open behind him.

By the time Drake had walked a block or two he succeeded in getting himself more or less in hand. He saw

now the smoke of his burned bridges. What he had done he had done hastily, to be sure; but it had been right, however he reviewed it. But it was not the loss of his job that now worried him the most: it was the homegoing to his wife and the announcement to her of what he had done. There was no doubt in his mind that she would understand and approve; but neither of them could gainsay that it had all come at a sadly untoward time.

"Just couldn't do anything else," he said to himself, "and she'll see that I did right—she couldn't see it any other way. She wouldn't stand for it any more than I would."

There were many "buts" that crowded into his mind as he walked, and each one of them he met and disposed of. There could be no reasonable "buts" in a case like this, he assured himself. And in his thoughts, side by side with his wife and child, stood Elliott, the man he had sworn at and threatened to beat up, the man who had taken everything in silence, the man who had all the time been right. He recalled everything he had said to Elliott, and a tingle of pain came into his heart where the hate had been. He cursed himself for a fool. "I can square myself at home, all right," he muttered; "but I can't square myself with Elliott. I'd hate to know what he thinks of me. But why didn't he come to me and tell me?"

CITY HALL PARK lay in Drake's path homeward, and as he went down one of the walks to short-cut his journey he stopped a moment at a secluded bench to think things over before going on. His mind was so full he wanted to set it somewhat in order against the telling of the unhappy news. Also he wanted, in a way, to take stock of his assets and liabilities. These must be considered calmly.

"Hello, Drake!" A voice that might have been familiar save for a new tone of kindness in it swung him about. Beside the bench stood Elliott.

Confusion twice confused took possession of Drake. For once in his life he had not the remotest idea what

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MY HUSBAND'S CLASSMATE

By MARY WYMAN

AIMLESSLY I embroidered lingerie on the porch. I was not happy. Jack claims that I cannot be silently happy—I was alone!

The 'phone rang, and I rose briskly. At least the monotony of the Wallachian stitch was broken. Jack's voice said, "Hello!"

"You dear old thing!" I cried enthusiastically. "I know just what you're going to say. You've got the afternoon off, and are coming home, and we're going to drive out to the country club, and play golf, and then have lunch, and after that go on the river for awhile. And on the way back we'll drive around by way of that little—"

"No!" shouted Jack. "Oh, Jack, then you've got tickets for the Gueusionians tonight. Aren't you a brick? Hurry home, Dear, and we'll eat dinner early, and have plenty of time for a short spin on the machine before we get fixed up. Then we'll get ready, and I'll wear—oh, Jack, I wish I had—"

Just then Jack got the floor. He can do it occasionally over the 'phone—but nowhere else. "Billy!" he said sternly; then kept right on talking without any breaks between the words. "Stop guessing a moment, please. I am sending Sandy Carter, an old college chum, up to call on you, and I want you to try to persuade him to take dinner with us; though he says he can't. You've heard me speak of him frequently. He's the one—"

"Oh, Jack!" I interrupted with dawning interest. "Is he the one—"

"Yes," went on Jack in sort of a tantalizing, triumphant way. "he is,—the man, the only man, in fact the only person, whose copious, fluent volubility approaches, nay, I must say surpasses, the fluent, copious volubility of my wife!"

"Jack!" I shouted. "Wretch! You know he can't—"

"It does seem impossible, my dear; but I think he can. In fact," my husband's tone was entirely too confident. "I'm even willing to wager that he can. That new dress that thou hast longed for, Billy dear, is yours tomorrow if in conversational controversy this afternoon you defeat said Sandy Carter for ten short minutes. Lord! how I'd like to be present!"

"Jack!" I was indignant now. "You're talking nonsense, perfect nonsense! Did you ever hear a man talk when I wanted to? Have you ever known me to fail? The gown is mine. And, Jack, it will take nine yards of lace—no end of silk—chiffon—braid—do I get—"

A receiver clicked. Jack is almost rude over the 'phone. He seldom says goodby.

Out on the porch again I pondered his words scornfully. He, my own husband, believed this college chum of his would win. Not one word should he say! Even if he thought me queer at first, I would explain later, and we could both enjoy the joke on Jack. Then I set to work remembering him, and had already recalled several stories by the time Mr. Sandy Carter arrived.

With the happy, carefree stride possessed by Jack and



"Now Own Up That I Won the Wager!"

all other college men he came up the walk; in his hand the inevitable and welcome box of bonbons.

I slipped my watch on the table and rose to greet him, courage undaunted.

"Mr. Carter," I said cordially and calmly, "I'm so glad to see you. Jack's old friends, especially his college friends, and most especially those celebrated occupants and members of Dormitory B, are always welcome here. It is one of my fondest hopes that in time I myself shall be well enough acquainted with you all to be able to recognize you at sight in the stories Jack tells of you. Through his college books and yarns and pictures, I can almost do that now. You, for example, I remember well; for some of Jack's stories fairly hinge on the name of Sandy Carter."

With due modesty I could see that even this small sample of my powers slightly fazed my famed opponent; for he stood looking at me in surprised, dazed fashion, trying to begin a word now and then, and never sitting down until I had insisted upon it. And all the time I talked on easily.

"Yes, indeed," I asserted. "It's always 'Sandy this' and 'Sandy that' with Jack. You must have played a leading part in all important college events."

He opened his mouth and shook his head vigorously; but little good it did him to be modest now.

"You may try to deny it," I checked him off pleas-

antly; "but I've a good memory, and those tales are oft repeated here. You too were of Glee Club fame with Jack. How often I've laughed over that time you both went to Hampton! You forgot your dress suit; so borrowed Jack's, and were already at the concert hall before he even thought of getting dressed. Ha-ha! That was a good one on Jack!"

Plainly he wanted to tell his side of the story; but I couldn't let him now.

"And you were the man on the football team who captured all the hearts as well as the balls. Oh, you're too modest, Mr. Carter. You try to deny that too; but I won't let you! No, not a word! The girls were all fairly wild about you, no matter what you say."

Herewith I entered into a little discourse upon college, glee clubs, dramatics, athletics, and thought contentedly of my prospects. Time was going fast, and my new gown was assured. A fig for Jack's judgment! My man had not uttered two consecutive words. He seemed resigned but uneasy. It was tame to beat him on the home field; but I would explain shortly, and how we would laugh at Jack!

"As to Jack's singing," I concluded thoughtfully—then glanced at my watch and broke off abruptly, but absolutely unwearied.

"Now I have an explanation and apology to make, Mr. Carter," I said; "but you'll forgive all when I tell you that the joke is on Jack. How we will laugh at him at dinner—I insist that you stay for that. Ever since I've known him he has told me boastfully that Sandy Carter was

the noted conversationalist of his day and age. Jack admits that I myself have leanings that way; but he has repeatedly ventured his opinion that you could defeat me at my own game. And this afternoon when he 'phoned that you were coming he went so far—you see, he had just been talking with you—as to bet a new gown that in a conversational bout of ten minutes I would come out second. So now that you see that I'm not quite crazy, you'll pardon me, won't you, and own up to Jack that I won the wager?"

I smiled my sweetest at him and held out my hand penitently. Then a most incomprehensible thing happened. For he rose from his chair, circled widely about mine, edged to the end of the porch, and began backing away from me down the steps, nervously fumbling with the box in his hand. After receding still farther down the walk, he stopped and looked up to where I stood, thoroughly bewildered, hand still extended.

"There is no question in my mind, Madam," he said with conviction. "of your ability to win the wager. In this package—just a moment, Madam," he glanced at me apprehensively—"I have a sample of one of the finest rotary egg beaters ever invented; but," his eyes followed the figure of a man who came swinging toward us, "I will not show it to you this afternoon, Madam, for I observe that your husband's classmate has arrived."