

For a moment the wild hope came to Littlefield that he was going to be discharged. What irony! If so, he need only accept his dismissal and walk straight out, the bag in his hand! That would indeed be retribution, and a counter blow to the miserable fate that dogged him.

Johnson looked up. "Well, Mr. Littlefield, you don't look very happy," he said. "You seem to go about your work with a perpetual glower—at least when I meet you."

Was he playing with him? Or was this the preliminary to his discharge? Littlefield's hopes grew.

"Put your bag on the table, Mr. Littlefield," continued Johnson. "You look as though you were afraid I was going to open it. Come set it down beside me—never mind these papers."

Littlefield flung the bag down defiantly and stood facing his tormentor. Johnson arose slowly, and suddenly clapped his hand on the other's shoulder. Littlefield knew then that the truth was known. He listened as in a dream.

"We've been looking over your record since you came here, Mr. Littlefield," said Johnson, "and it makes a very creditable showing. Mr. Sleigh, you know, is leaving to accept the cashier's position with Brown & Seagull. We are going to promote you to his place at the salary which always goes with it—two thousand to start and an annual increase of a hundred up to twenty-five hundred." Littlefield still stared at him; he had not yet understood.

"So you see," continued Johnson, "we have not failed to recognize the zeal that you have shown in our interests. I may tell you in confidence that there was much difficulty in deciding between you and another member of our force, and that you were selected on my insistence for the reason that I have given you."

Littlefield understood at last, and he swung round impulsively and looked into Johnson's face.

"I have thought sometimes that you had taken a dislike to me," continued the manager.

"No, sir; no," blurted out Littlefield. "I must have given a false impression. I—"

"I am indeed glad to hear it," answered Johnson, wringing the other hand warmly. "And now permit me to offer you my best and sincerest congratulations."

Littlefield found himself outside the office again. He walked idly toward the door. He did not quite know where he was going. He was recalled to himself by Jacks, who thrust a letter into his hand.

"Just come, sir," said Jacks, smiling. Littlefield looked hard at the porter. Why, he was the acme of friendliness. What had been the matter with him? Had he, Littlefield, been seeing everything through the mirror of his morbid and perverted mind?

He tore open the envelope with trembling fingers. The letter was from Lucy.

"My dearest," it ran, "forgive me a thousand times for my unkindness to you. I was so hurt by what you said"—here Littlefield remembered the cause of their quarrel—"but I see now how wrong I was when you have always been so kind and good. I trust you as every one trusts you. You are the soul of honor—"

A rush of tears blinded the man's eyes. He could not read the letter further, then. So it was all in his own mind, everything, the sense of injustice, the quarrel with Lucy, Johnson's assumed unfriendliness, Jacks' antipathy—all his fears and wrongs and injuries!

He took his bag and crept back into the cashier's cage.

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Always put scrubbing brushes to dry with the bristles face downwards. This lengthens their lives considerably, as if dried the other way the water naturally soaks into the wood and rots the bristles.