His Little Scheme.

By ALICE LOUISE LEE.

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CLAUDIA TEN EYCK was driving along the boulevard alone, her fluffy little head full of ideas of economy, which she was endeavoring to exercise for the benefit of Tennyson Benham, pedestrian, swinging rapidly down the bicycle path ahead of her.

"Oh, Tenny!" she called softly, drawing the mare up under the trees which separated the path from the highway. "I was just wishing"— Her voice did not finish the remark, but an engaging display of dimples did as she patted the seat beside her.

"It would be lovely," returned Tennyson morosely, "if it were my trap or my horse."

Claudia added a laugh to the dimples as the morose one climbed into the trap. "It will all come some day," she continued, laughing gayly.

"It's no laughing matter, Claudia," groaned Tennyson. "Here I am possessed of a law education which is rusting for lack of use, a few debts, fewer dollars and no prospects"—

"Tenny!" reproachfully.

"Only the doleful prospect of having to wait eternally for the dearest, sweetest, daintiest"—

Claudia blushed and hastened to interrupt. "I think the law is tiresome. Papa sits in his library all day, and I don't see why he should insist on your working."

Again Tennyson groaned at her viewpoint. The pater Ten Eyck, being confined to the house with the gout, did sit in his library all day, but he sat between a telephone and a stenographer, with a clerk in the background and a messenger boy or two at his command.

Soon the trap left the boulevard and plunged down the steep Mount Hope road into a narrow valley. At the foot of the mountain the highway broke up into a number of rude tracks traversing the valley. Into one of these Claudia turned the mare. "I want to see what is on the other side of that," she explained, pointing to a shoulder of the mountain around which the road curved.

In a moment her longings were gratified. They rounded the corner and came on a little cabin surrounded by pigs, chickens and children. A man with a gun stepped from the doorway and motioned them to stop.

"You git back thar," came his determined command. "I'll have you understand that this 'ere is private property, and there ain't goin' to be no trespassin' while I can handle a gun."

"How much do you charge per trespass?" inquired Tennyson gravely.

"I charge more'n you've been willin' to pay so far."

"So far," echoed Tennyson.

"Ain't you the Consolidated Suburban Rapid Transit company?" demanded the man suspiciously.

"My good sir," ejaculated Tennyson "I am not consolidated nor even united—yet."

Claudia's dimples began to play, and she looked hard down the valley.

The man came nearer and rested one foot on the hub of a front wheel. "Say!" he broke out suddenly. "Mister, look 'ee here. That blamed agent says

"AIN'T YOU THE CONSOLIDATED RAPID TRANSIT COMPANY?"

he can take my land whether or no. He says he can come right through my pigpen over there, and I can't stop him. Can he?"

"My first client," murmured Tennyson in Claudia's ear. Then he turned to the man. "I'm afraid that agent is telling the truth," he began. Suddenly he paused and looked around. "What part of your land do they want to run the track through?"

The man dropped his gun and pointed. "He says they'll come right through Morrison's dugout yander and down this side of the valley where the grade is easy and smack through my pigpen—plague take their hides! I'll shoot 'em unless they put me up another pen"—

Tennyson interrupted. "How much land do you own here?"

The man jerked his thumb over his shoulder, "Jest that narrer strip acrost there between them wires."

Tennyson's eyes roved round the narrow farm meditatively. "Why not sell your entire farm? As it is the road will cut it up badly."

The man pushed his hat back and scratched his head. "Guess I know that. But who'd want to buy the null thing except such another blame fool as I was when I bought?"

There was a suppressed excitement in Tennyson's manner which aroused Claudia's curiosity. He took the reins from her hands and turned the mare about carefully. "I'll be back here in three hours or less to talk business to you," he said briefly, and after a few moments' silent climb the mare was trotting along the boulevard again toward Scranton.

"How mean of the law to go through a man's pigpen!" cried Claudia. "Can it go anywhere?"

Tennyson gave a preoccupied laugh. "Yes, under the laws of Pennsylvania all kinds of property—with one exception—can be condemned."

"Condemned," puzzled Claudia. "What does that mean?"

Tennyson explained, watching with delight the wise little wrinkle that appeared between the blue eyes and knowing that twenty-four hours would efface all recollection of the rights of eminent domain.

But for once he was mistaken. The responsibilities of life were weighing heavily on Claudia, and certain resolutions to understand more of economy and of law were becoming fixed. She had forgotten to ask Tennyson what one kind of property was exempt from condemnation, but there was her father.

"Now, papa, I want to know something," she began, planting her dimpled elbow on the table as they sat at dinner.

"I never got to the table yet but what you bothered me with your fool questions," grumbled Peter Ten Eyck.

Claudia, oblivious of the acidity in his tone, prefaced her question with "Papa, what kind of property can't the law go through?"

"The devil!" ejaculated Peter. "What are you talking about?"

She proceeded to elucidate. "Now just suppose a transit company or something wanted to go through a man's pigpen"— Peter stared hard. "Well, you know they can. But there's one kind of land they can't. What is it?"

"You're enough to turn a lawyer's hair white," said her father after a pause. "Probably you mean a cemetery." Then he gave her a shrewd look and said nothing more until they had finished dinner, when he asked abruptly, "Who were you driving with this morning?"

Claudia raised her brows inquiringly. Tapping her cheek thoughtfully with a forefinger, she responded unblushingly: "Let me see. Was his hair black or brown?"

Ten Eyck grinned despite himself. "Brown."

"Oh, yes!" with an effort of the memory. "Then it was Ten—Mr. Benham."

"So I suspected—that nefarious little popinjay of a lawyer without any practice who is trying to marry money"—

"No, he isn't, papa," responded Claudia serenely, "for he refuses to marry me—that is, right away!" And she ran away, laughing mischievously.

That very evening Tennyson called. He was in high spirits. "Behold me!" he said, with a mock heroic bow. "At last I am on the highroad to fame and fortune. I am a real estate owner."

"Really, Tenny," excitedly. "Enough to build our house on?"

Tennyson threw his head back and broke into a peal of boyish laughter. "There's a house on it already and a pigpen too. I own the land formerly owned by the man with the gun."

Claudia's eyes grew large and round. "You've bought that horrid, desolate looking place. What for?"

"Don't tell me, dear, that you wouldn't like to live there!"

"Tenny!" she expostulated, but Tennyson evaded all further questions about his purchase. "Wait until I've struck it rich on my real estate, dear, and I'll tell you all about it."

With that he supposed his fiancee was content, but she was not. After his departure she repaired promptly to the source of wisdom.

"Papa, what is there down in the Mount Hope valley to bring money? Just supposing you had bought the land of that man with the pigpen down there, what should you expect to get out of it?"

The clerk and stenographer exchanged glances. Peter's brows contracted as he snorted. "The knowledge that I was a fool probably," and Claudia, sadder, but no wiser, retired.

Perhaps much learning with no outlet for it was making Tennyson insane, she reflected, and her theory was strengthened on the next occasion of their meeting, which was on Lackawanna avenue.

Tennyson's face was aglow with excitement. His spirits, so often at zero, were near the boiling point. He was ready to discuss their future, the probabilities of bearding Ten Eyck soon in his library and of the renting of a suitable home. So far Claudia's theory was discredited. But presently they passed a basement laundry out of which a Hungarian shuffled, making signs to Tennyson.

"Will you walk on slowly, Claudia? I won't be here but a moment," said the latter hurriedly, and Claudia did as he requested.

In a moment he had rejoined her, his face beaming. "At last I've secured one," he exclaimed.

"What?" asked Claudia curiously.

"A corpse!" was the astounding response, at which Claudia stopped short and gasped, too amazed for speech.

A spice of mischief crept into Tennyson's voice and shone in his eyes as he continued: "And it came dirt cheap too. I've got $5 left to conduct the funeral. Oh, I tell you, Claudia, I'll make it yet!"

"Make what?" breathed Claudia in a horrified whisper.

"That's a secret, a dead secret," was the prompt rejoinder.

"I can keep a secret."

"Of course you can, dear." Then ungallantly, "But so can I."

And he thought he was keeping it. So also thought Claudia and was deeply grieved over it.

A note from Tennyson the next day, however, alleviated her grief, but aroused her curiosity. "Dearest," it

THEY FOUND HIM BESIDE HIS TABLE.

ran, "I know I ought not to give you an inkling of the truth and not tell it all, but when it can be told you will understand why I must keep my secret."

Claudia had never read a note of his where anticipation so bubbled over between the lines. Therefore she was unprepared for his appearance when several days later he walked into the music room. His face was tragic—with real tragedy this time. He did not even kiss her. Instead he folded his arms and began with a little catch in his voice: "Claudia, I've come to give you your freedom. I'm a penniless wreck."

"Tenny!" cried Claudia. The tears filled her big blue eyes. She stood before him and touched his arm wistfully, but it did not draw her closer. "I don't want it—my freedom, I mean! I won't take it! Whatever has happened?"

Tennyson looked away. "A good thing has just slipped through my fingers—unexpectedly slipped through. Now, so long as there's no further need for secrecy I'll explain"—

But he didn't, being interrupted by a call from the library. Peter Ten Eyck wished to see both Benham and his daughter at once.

They found him beside his table, his gouty foot on a cushion.

"Good day, sir," he said briskly, shaking Benham's hand cordially.

Claudia, regarding her father's pleasantry apprehensively, sat down on a sofa facing him. Peter motioned Tennyson to a place beside her.

"I've called you in here," Ten Eyck then began, "to ask a favor of you. But, as a preface, I'll relate a bit of your personal history which has come to my ears."

Claudia started, and Tennyson's hand moved nearer hers in spite of the fact that he had just heroically given her up.

"Personal business history, Mr. Benham," he amended dryly.

But at the next sentence Tennyson's back straightened with a sudden jerk.

"Mr. Benham, you are the young man who combined wit enough and law enough to buy up a strip of land in Mount Hope valley lying across the prospective route of the Consolidated Suburban Rapid Transit company."

Tennyson gasped.

"Then you proceeded, warily, as you thought, to get a Hungarian to bury his brother on your land. At the same time you applied for a charter incorporating the Mount Hope Cemetery company."

"How did you find out, and why did you find out?" interposed Tennyson.

Then Ten Eyck almost smiled. "As to the 'how,' you'll never know. As to the 'why,' it was very much to my interest to know, since I am—well, to all intents and purposes, as will soon be known, the Consolidated Suburban Rapid Transit company."

Tennyson's mouth opened, but no sound came.

"If I hadn't found out just as I did, young man, and stopped your game I suppose you'd have bled the Transit company a round number of thousands for the privilege of going through your cemetery, eh?"

Tennyson moistened his lips. "That was my intention."

"Now," began Peter, rubbing his forehead violently, "so much for the past. The favor I want to ask of you is this: Will you accept the position as counsel to the Consolidated?"

A light broke over Tennyson's face. "Will I?" he exclaimed. "I should be most happy to serve you, sir," he finished perfunctorily.

Peter rubbed his forehead again. His voice was sly. "I didn't know," he began, "but that you had a return favor to ask me," and he glanced meaningly at Claudia.

"Papa!" cried Claudia, pink to the tips of her little ears. She threw her arms about his neck, impulsively kissed his bald head, and fled.

"Better not run chances of losing in that game, young man," she heard her father say dryly, and a moment later Tennyson joined her in the music room.

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