

THE FIFTY-DOLLAR BILL.

Mrs. Dean sat alone in her little kitchen. She never used her parlor. There was the extravagance of an extra fire to be considered—the fact that the best rag carpet, woven by her own skillful hands, must not be worn out too recklessly, the dread possibility of sunshine fading out those chair covers. Mrs. Dean was an economist. She believed in making everything last as long as it possibly could. And so she made the kitchen her headquarters, and sat there knitting, with her feet comfortably balanced on the stone hearth, the saucer of apples bubbling softly away at the back, and the sound of her husband's axe ringing from the back shed. She was a little, wrinkled-faced woman of fifty, with stiff ribbon bows to her cap, hair that seemed dried up instead of silvered, and keen blue eyes that twinkled as if they had discovered the secret of perpetual motion. To save money was her chief end and aim in life. The very mittens she was knitting were to be sold at the village store in exchange for tea, sugar, spices, and all such groceries. "A penny saved is as good as a penny earned," was the golden rule by which she shaped her life. "I'm glad I took that money out of the savings bank yesterday," said Mrs. Dean to herself as the bright needles slied merrily away. "People say it isn't safe; and one can't be too careful. But then, again, there's the danger of burglars—though, to be sure, no burglar," she added, with a complacent inward chuckle, "would ever think of looking in the folds of the old Clinkerville Clarion newspaper in the wall-pocket on the wall. It's the bureau drawers and the trunks, and all locked up chests they aim for. A new \$50 bill—a clean, crisp, new \$50 bill. And all the savings, too, out of the house money." Just then there sounded a knock at the door, and in came old Dr. Bridgman, rubicund with the touch of the March wind. "Good day, Mrs. Dean, good day!" said he. "No, thank you; I can't sit down. I'm a deal too busy for that. But I heard yesterday that you took \$50 out of the savings bank?" "Yes," said Mrs. Dean, her face involuntarily hardening. "I did!" "We are taking up a subscription to get little lame Dick Bodley a cart and donkey, so that he can go around peddling tinware," said the doctor. "It's pretty hard for any one afflicted as he is to get along, and if you can help us a little—"

said Mrs. Dean. "But I intend to keep that money for myself, Mrs. Graham." Mrs. Graham took her departure, acknowledging within herself that her errand was a failure, and Mrs. Dean, left to herself at last, indulged in a nap, with the knitting work in her lap—a nap wherein she dreamed that the \$50 bill had taken to itself legs and was running away from a crowd of pursuers, herself among the number. When she awoke, roused by the noise of coal being poured upon the stove, a candle was burning and Mr. Dean was laughing at her. "Why, Betsy," said he, "I thought you never were going to wake again. Here you sat with the fire dead out, and I've had to kindle it up again!" "Bless me!" said Mrs. Dean, "I must have been asleep quite a while. But"—as she started up she saw that the old wall pocket opposite was empty—"where is that old number of the Clinkerville Clarion?" "It was last week's paper," said Mr. Dean, calmly. "We had both read it, so I just took it to kindle the fire." "You burned it up!" "Yes," said Mr. Dean. "Why shouldn't I?" For half an hour Mrs. Dean sat silent and never spoke a word. And her first utterance was: "It's the Lord's judgment upon me!" Mrs. Dean was a resolute woman, full of character. She went to her table drawer, took out a sheet of paper and wrote to Dr. Bridgman inclosing \$1 towards lame Dick Bodley's horse and cart. She sent another dollar to Mrs. Graham for the little O'Hara, and promised to donate a barrel of russets, a bushel of potatoes and some of her husband's cast-off clothes to cut over for the children. And she sent for Helen Hurst to come and see her. "I can't lend you \$10, my dear," said she, "because I haven't got it. But I'll tell you what I will do. I'll let you make your home here as long as you please. There's a nice spare room, and it's an eighth of a mile nearer than Mrs. Swipes' to the district school." "Oh, how good you are!" said Helen, her eyes swimming with grateful tears. "Good!" cried Mrs. Dean. "I'm just beginning to see what a selfish, greedy, creature I've been all my life." She opened her parlor, shook out her curtains and built a fire in the air-tight wood-stove. "Dean likes the parlor," she said, "because it has such a nice south window, and I don't see why we shouldn't enjoy it." She baked a fresh batch of gingerbread, and sent a loaf to old Mrs. Mudge; she renewed her subscription to the church charity. "I can't be very liberal!" she said, "but I am determined to do what I can." "That's right, my dear—that's right!" said her husband. "We shall be prosperous, never fear. I'm awfully sorry about burning up your \$50 bill, but if it's going to open your heart like this, it's the best thing that could have happened to us." "Mrs. Dean was sweeping out the kitchen. She looked around with a smile as she moved the wide leaved table which always stood under the wall pocket and took down the pocket itself, a rude structure of splints, lined with red cambric, to dust it out. "Yes," she said; "I'm afraid I was getting to be a little miserly, and—why, what's this?" Mr. Dean stooped and picked up a slip of crumpled dark green paper, which had fallen out from the wall pocket as his wife turned it upside down. "It's the \$50 bill!" said he, with mouth and eyes opening in unison. "It must have slipped down from the folds of the newspaper." "The Lord has sent it back to us," said Mrs. Dean, reverently; "and He has sent a lesson wise and merciful with it." "Why," said Mr. Dean, after a moment or two of silence, "there's a lesson in almost everything He does, if we did but know it."

ONLY A PRIVATE SECRETARY. "Both are handsome and have equally accomplished manners, I hear. They will make a most welcome acquisition to the limited society of this poor little village," remarked Claudia Thorne, with great animation, that was suddenly augmented by the appearance of an elegant equipage that she had just seen coming down the pleasant shadowy street. "There they are now, Aggie, dear," she continued excitedly; "and is not that carriage altogether too stylish for this dreadfully unfashionable and prosy place? and that prancing, speckled, reddish horse must be a priceless 'flyer,' I think," she commented somewhat doubtfully, for she was conscious of her utter deficiency in equine lore. Meanwhile the spirited, dappled roan—an animal neither extraordinarily fine nor fast—was trotting past the garden gate, the fragrant blossoms of the lofty locust trees falling in white showers over gilded harness and glittering wheels. "The gentleman—the one with that Saxon and distinguished look and the tawny, curling hair and beard—he who is driving—must be the millionaire who, I am informed, is the son of a nobleman, but is too Americanized or republicanized to assume his illustrious title. The other with the dark hair and stoutish figure must be the private secretary or traveling companion. One can always discern the difference between the patrician and the plebeian, can one not?" "Certainly, I have no such subtle gift of discrimination—in the sense you infer. One whose soul is ignoble must be a plebeian, I think, however aristocratic the birth or *tout ensemble* of that one may be," answered Agnes Rothsy, quietly. She and Claudia Thorne were cousins and ostensibly friends, and were living together a genteel life of economy, having jointly inherited a small legacy devised by an eccentric relative recently deceased. In the picturesque and tiny hamlet of Rosebith—a haven of roses—they had made their summer home. Agnes had been pleased and contented with the small tranquil place, with its wide, grassy, unbragous streets, and sparse clusters of quaint houses built about the obtuse, wooded angle of crags that juttled into the tumbling waters, just where a wild, narrow stream frothed into the surf of the sea. But Claudia had thought it all—the serene seclusion, the isolated but imposing scenery, simple habitants with their homely way—uninteresting and insufferably dull. They were very unlike—those two young ladies, who had yet all the bloom and brightness of fresh, sweet womanhood. Miss Rothsy was a tall and notably graceful blonde, with that rare and peculiarly fair complexion that no care can wrinkle and no time can yellow. Her fine features were much too mobile for the artistic Grecian type, and her large eyes—splendid and indescribable—were too passionate and tender to be gay, and too discerning and imperious to be the ideal and poetic blue. Her magnificent masses of hair and the subtle and beautiful shades of amber and ruddy auburn, and her action, her manner of speaking, were distinguished by a majesty, a dignity, and a gentle graciousness that were as natural as irresistible. Among inferiors she would have been misunderstood and possibly hated, feared and traduced. Among her peers she was loved and respected. Claude Thorne belonged to quite a dissimilar sphere of mind, feeling and volition. She had more cunning than intellect; she was more emotional than sympathetic; she liked only the excitement that could be made egotistically sensational, and she was inordinately ambitious for a very eminent social distinction. She hated the legator who had bequeathed her a humble competence instead of an exhaustless income. It would seem that she was pitifully unappreciative of small favors—that she sadly lacked the sense of gratitude. Nevertheless, she was a witching little ladykin, with ever restless fairy feet and singularly pretty, elfish hands. She was dark and petite; her hair was jetty black, and her black eyes were brilliant with mesmeric hues; she had red, laughing lips, and a dainty scarlet color always over her babyishly rounded cheeks. She effected the naive with the most flattering success. And she seemed very childishly ingenuous, indeed, when she first smiled beguilingly in the admiring eyes of him whom she supposed to be wealthy and titled. Apparently that first meeting was entirely accidental. The gentleman had been piscatorially busied in a deliciously cool niche among the willows, whose foliage of topaz and emerald left flickering shadows along the margin of a still pond where a strata of rock had dammed the stream, and where a myriad

silvery fins glanced through the clear brown water. He had heard a lazy and irregular sound of oars, and had glanced with small interest across the high green reeds and low flowered lily to see a gaudily gilded and very small skiff rocking dangerously among the water lilies just before him. The single occupant of the boat was a brunette fay, wearing a fancy costume of some dark, ruddy bronze stuff, with gold-hearted lily buds in her corsage and an aigrette, tipped with white gold, in her jaunty bronze velvet cap. As the young gentleman regarded her with a half-enchanted gaze, she extended her dusky jeweled hands toward a snowy blossom, dropping her oars with a pretty, careless gesture. The next instant the oars were drifting slowly away on the sluggish current; the next instant there was a splash and a musical cry for help. The light craft was capsized and Claudia Thorne was struggling and gasping among the lilies. How the spectator of the catastrophe rescued her he could never quite clearly remember; however, he might never forget the sensation of the pleasurable triumph he felt as she lay at last helplessly in his arms—a saved, thankful nymph; so drenched and seemingly frightened that one much less gallant and susceptible than he must, perforce, have said to her something very flattering and agreeable. That episode was the beginning of a charming little romance. "If my mishap be known I shall be ridiculed," declared pretty Claudia, diplomatically, whereas she had purposely caused the accident. "I have always been awkward with my oars. There is a standing prediction, I believe, that I should be capsized some time. I must invent some neat fiction to account for these wet flounces and this poor spoiled hat." She was turning slowly away, and her manner would seem to express that her gratitude was too great to be uttered in the ordinary phraseology considered conventional on such an occasion. The gentleman imagined that he understood that simulation of graceful timidity. He thought her the handsomest, the most ingenuous, and the most charming young lady whom he had ever met. "Shall I never see you again?" he inquired almost beseechingly. "Perhaps you may," she returned, with a coquettish and bewitching smile. "I row, or ride, or walk every morning in this delightful place. I am absurdly fond of the bridle path along the river bank, and of the cool promenade among the willows." "And so am I," he asserted, quickly and respectfully. "I shall see you often; but perhaps you will not think proper to recognize me, if we should meet?" he supplemented unceasingly. With seeming bashfulness she averted her bright face and brilliant eyes; but as she vanished among the golden green willow shadows, she murmured "au revoir!" in encouraging accents. Claudia went slowly homeward. Her mood was thoughtful and speculative. "He is certainly interested, and perhaps infatuated," she mused with great satisfaction. "I shall meet him often, and long before we shall be formally introduced I shall be the betrothed wife of my titled millionaire, whom most fortunately for poor, ambitious, deceitful me, I already adore." With all her unwomanly faults Claudia keenly comprehended that a marriage without reciprocal love is only an unholy sham. The flirtation under the willows progressed as she had predicted, and as favorably as she could desire. "I shall allow you to tell me nothing about yourself at all. Practical details would spoil all the romance of our pleasant summer dream," asserted Claudia one morning. She spoke with a semblance of that blind and trusting faith that she well knew pleases and flatters and deceives even the shrewdest of lovers. And moreover, she presumed herself about to become a modern Lady Burleigh, although one might doubt if she would ever be very conscientiously perplexed. "With the burden of an honor—Unto which she was not born." "But our romance is no summer dream, darling, protested Hubert Saunders, earnestly. "You are to be my wife, you know, and before we are married I should like you to thoroughly understand my social and financial rank." "I will listen to no prosy explanations," she persisted, pressing her pretty hands over her ears. "I love you and will be your dutiful wife, trying always to make you happy and our home pleasant. Is not that sufficient?" Claudia spoke with sincerity. For love was producing one of those beautiful and mysterious psychological phenomena that occasionally redeem the most faulty souls. "Is not that sufficient, Hubert?"

she iterated, with a smile that the man who loved her thought superlatively artless. "Certainly it ought to be so," he allowed half doubtfully, and unpleasantly conscious of an indefinable sense of dissatisfaction, "but still I think it best and wisest for any lady to know thoroughly the prosy and practical part of life of the man to whose keeping she consigns her freedom and happiness." But the wilful girl would not listen. In her vain egotism she imagined that she already knew as much, or more, than he could possibly tell her. That night they met at a garden party—a rather recherche affair, with an afternoon of croquet and tennis and an evening of dancing and banqueting under a round, opaline moon, among magnificent old trees of oak and elm. In the midst of the festivity, while Claudia was for a moment alone in a cool, arborescent nook fantastically illumined by the pale red light of a gorgeous paper lantern swinging from an arch of thick ivy, she saw Agnes Rothsy approaching. "Miss Rothsy wore a simple and exquisite costume of darkest, richest violet silk, with sprays of snowy, gurgling in her hair and corsage. She looked very happy as she stopped beside her pretty cousin. "Claudia, dear, will you congratulate me?" she whispered bashfully. "I am betrothed—really affianced to the baronet. One day while you were rowing after lilies the pastor's wife brought my Jack for a formal call. He was foolish enough to honor me with his admiration, and he sent all those lovely flowers you wondered about so much. But I was never quite sure he loved me until to-day. But only a little while ago he met me down there among the willows and wild roses, and he told me how very dear I had become to him, and he kissed this ring before he put it on my finger." She flung aside a bit of delicate lace drapery and presented a graceful hand upon which glittered a magnificent ring of diamonds and gold. "I am very happy, cousin dear, for I know that my Jack is one of the noblest of all men. I should never have just the same if he were a bricklayer instead of being a baronet." "Your Jack—the baronet! What do you mean, Agnes?" gasped Claudia. Miss Rothsy for a moment regarded her cousin with much perplexity. But just then two gentlemen advanced through the vista of green branches hung with grotesque illuminations of gaudy iridescence. "Hush, dear, Edmond is searching for me, I think. He is coming this way, and Hubert Saunders—his private secretary—you know, is with him." Claudia Thorne stood motionless and voiceless. She could not utter one word, not even when Agnes and the baronet had gone, leaving her alone with her lover, who regarded her with a troubled, loving gaze. Possibly he comprehended all, but if he did his affection was too loyal to be weakened by the fault of the handsome girl whom he knew loved him. "Why are you so white and mute, my darling?" he inquired tenderly. "Would you be more fond of me, dear, do you think, if I happened to have wealth and a title?" All that was womanly and redeeming in her ambitious and subtle nature conquered the sharp pang of disappointment. She was only conscious that he was dearer to her than rank or riches, and unspeakably grateful that he had forgiven a folly that she was well aware he more than suspected. "No wealth and no title could ever make my respect and affection for you greater," she answered him with simple earnestness. He was pleased and satisfied with the frank answer. "My pretty Claudia," he said, "I shall make your wifehood so happy that you will never regret marrying only a private secretary."

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