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\* THE FIRST PRIZE \*

\* By Frances Elizabeth Lanyon \*

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"If I only win the first prize!"

Roscoe Merriam paused there, for a vivid picture filled his mind. His mental vision wove a glowing fairy trail of thought—travel, a renewed wardrobe, better living quarters and—Shirley.

Prize or no prize, as his award might be, he had one overpowering satisfaction—though competing for the same, he had come across Shirely Moore and that meant delight and longing, and hope at times only, for he was poor and obscure and was finding the literary path neither one of roses or reward.

A frail stipend attended certain newspaper writing a part of the day. Roscoe had leisure for real literary work and had completed a novel. It was the day the last page was written that he noted an advertisement in a bookman's magazine. Duryea & Nevis, publishers, offered three prizes for the three best novels handed in within 90 days. The first prize was \$5,000. The novel was ready for immediate delivery. He packed up his manuscript neatly and went direct to the office of the publishing firm.

Then—Shirley. She was the secretary of Mr. Woods, editor of the establishment. She was, as well, the information clerk, when not engaged in taking dictation. There was something of a mutual but unspoken exchange of soulful sentiment through the interchange of a glance.

Beyond taking the manuscript, giving it a number and encouragingly complimenting Roscoe on having made the first entry in the competition, the lovely young secretary had nothing further to say during later calls of the anxious author, except to express the hope that he would win the award. The reading of the novel rested with Mr. Woods, she told Roscoe simply. As to the later vis-

its of Roscoe, they were purely incidental and resulted from his chancing to come across Miss Moore in a restaurant. She nodded and smiled and even moved her chair at the table, tacitly inviting his company.

He was, indeed, nothing loath, and she showed that she liked this manly young fellow. He dropped in at the publishing office one day as if quite casually. The acquaintance ripened. He invited her to the theater on the



"I Wouldn't Go Back and Work for Them."

strength of free passes. The friendship grew and there was a mutual pleasure experienced in discussing the past, their hopes and their future.

Roscoe called upon her one evening and found her more cheery and sympathetic than ever. She had some news for him, she said, but oh! he must guard intelligence as strictly confidential.