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PRIDE.

"I think a man who proposes to a girl before he is in a position to marry is nothing more nor less than a cad." The speaker uttered the words angrily, and a dull flush spread over his handsome face.

Madge Elton, a pretty girl of twenty, regarded him pensively. "I don't think you would say that if you had ever been really in love, Mr Gray," she replied in cold tones.

It was June, and a sunny afternoon. The two were seated in deck chairs in the garden of Madge's home.

Though only a clerk—and a junior one at that—in Billing's the big advertising house, Randall Gray was made welcome at John Elton's home, despite the fact that the latter was a wealthy stockbroker with an only and very attractive daughter.

For John Elton was a generous and large-minded man. A month before, Gray had done him a service, which he had rewarded by throwing open the hospitality of his house to the former. The stockbroker reckoned himself no mean judge of men; he felt that Gray was to be trusted.

And there he was right. Though Randall Gray was not proof against the charms of Madge Elton, he possessed an obstinate pride that prevented him from showing his real feelings.

He would have died rather than confess his love for Madge until he could provide her with the worldly position he deemed she deserved.

Yet Madge liked him. Her mother noted with growing alarm the usual symptoms, Madge's appetite fell off perceptibly, and she became prone to fits of abstraction after Randall Gray's visits.

But Madge, too, was proud. Until Gray showed his true feelings she preferred to maintain an outward appearance of cold aloofness, rather than give the slightest hint of her regard for him.

So, whilst her father and mother in secret conference, felt there was no danger of what they would term an "unfortunate" match, they both wished Randall Gray, whom they genuinely liked, would either inherit a fortune, or else be replaced by a more eligible suitor.

Unhappily, from their point of view, neither of these alternatives appeared probable.

Their sole safety lay in the strength of pride of Madge and Randall.

This afternoon, though warm and pleasant out of doors, there was a hint of thunder in the air.

Randall and Madge had talked on general matters, until imperceptibly the conversation had drifted on to marriage.

Without realising it Randall had allowed himself to declare his opinions with more heat and emphasis than usual; with the result that a slight coolness had fallen between the two.

"So you think, Miss Elton," remarked Gray, "that selfishness is consistent with real love?"

There was a faint note of sarcasm in his voice. The colour in Madge's cheeks deepened.

"I am afraid I don't quite understand you."

"Don't you think a man would be a selfish brute to take the woman he loved from a home where she enjoyed every comfort to a life of penury—if not actual poverty?"

"He would, if the girl did not know what his circumstances really were."

"And even if she did?"

"He could ask her to wait until he had bettered himself."

Gray shrugged his shoulders.

"Supposing he never succeeded in bettering himself?" he said.

"If a man has only grit in him, he will succeed," answered Madge disdainfully.

For a moment Randall Gray did not reply. Then suddenly he rose to his feet.

"I'm afraid we don't see things alike," he said, looking down in Madge's eyes.

"Perhaps it's pride—or maybe just sheer foolishness—but, to my way of thinking, a man should prove himself first in such a case."

She met his gaze frankly. Never had she seemed so beautiful to him; never so attractive. Her daintiness and grace thrilled and intoxicated him. The air was rich with the scent of flowers, and a gentle breeze disturbed the stillness of the garden. From afar off came the distant rumble of thunder.

"Good-bye," he said, and extended his hand.

She, too, rose to her feet—in surprise.

"You are going so soon?"

He nodded.

They shook hands and Madge wondered at the serious look that had come into his eyes.

Gray went straight back to his lodgings. A wave of resolution had overcome him. He knew that he loved Madge more than anything else in the world. But he realised also the futility of his love in his present position.

So he sat down and wrote to her father.

"Dear Mr Elton," he wrote. "Please do not think me impolite or ungrateful to you for your generous hospitality. But, in the circumstances, I think it is advisable for me to discontinue my visits to your house. I am sure you will understand. With always my best wishes, I remain, Yours sincerely,

"Randall Gray."

The letter arrived by the last post that night. When he read it, John Elton passed it across to Madge without a word of comment. He watched her face closely whilst she read it.

She went a trifle pale, but offered no reply.

Yet, when Madge went to sleep that night, her pillow was damp with tears.

II.

Many are the reasons that spur men on to make money.

With some there is happiness in the mere feeling that they are making it. With some it is to hoard their wages and build up a fortune. Some make it to spend it as fast as they get it. And with a few it is with a definite object in view.

Randall Gray was one of the last. His own tastes were simple, his mode of living plain. But he was actuated by one great, overwhelming desire. He wanted to marry Madge. He wanted to make a home. He wanted to live in comfort with an assured future, untroubled by the dangers of poverty and worry.

So straightway, after writing that note to Madge's father, he began to devote all his energies to the accomplishment of those ends.

The firm at which he worked was a large one. Moreover, it was, if anything, rather over-staffed. Promotion was slow. The "top" men were youngish. So, besides putting his soul in his work, he kept his eye open outside.

At about that time a famous daily newspaper made an offer of £100 for an advertising idea. Now a hundred pounds is a very useful sum. Many a successful man to-day started business with less. Randall Gray thought he could find a very good use for it.

When, therefore, he returned to his lodgings in the evening, after his day's work, he spent the hours planning and scheming. In the end he produced a half a dozen fairly good ideas which he duly sent in.

Then one day, shortly before the award was to be closed, his brain was visited by a truly admirable idea. It was simple but brilliant.

That night he lavished unremitting care upon polishing and shaping the idea. He launched it into the pillar-box trembling with excitement and anticipation.

A fortnight later he received the compliments of the great newspaper together with a hundred pounds' cheque.

"Well," he murmured to himself in high elation, "that's chapter one."

The newspaper did not rest content with giving the award. It published Randall Gray's name. It expressed the opinion that his effort was the most novel and ingenious of any that it had received for a long time. In fact, it was very generous in praise. And it wrote him a letter saying politely that it would be glad to consider any further ideas he might care to submit.

His employers saw the announcement. Even the directors were impressed. They made inquiries of the manager concerning Gray.

So the manager sent for him.

The manager said he was very pleased to see that Gray had won the hundred pounds. He congratulated him. At the same time, he felt he ought to remark that

Gray must not forget that his first duty was to his employers. He thought that they had first call on Gray's brains.

Gray was not surprised.

"In fact, sir," he said, "you wouldn't have minded in the least my sending in as many ideas as I liked—so long as I wasn't successful."

"Not at all," said the manager, "I don't say that. But—"

A few weeks later Randall Gray sent in his resignation, and launched out for himself. With the hundred pounds and his own savings which amounted to a further fifty pounds he started a small advertising business.

His fellow-clerks roared at the idea. They regarded him as being quite mad. They predicted an early downfall, and drew vivid pictures of Gray sleeping on the Thames Embankment.

Randall Gray smiled. He knew that this attitude is always the inevitable accompaniment of enterprise that begins in a small way.

But when he went home to his lodgings at night, the thought of Madge Elton kept him firm in his resolve.

III.

Five years had passed. It was autumn, and the trees were clothed in tints of copper-bronze. The afternoon was warm and sunny; to Randall Gray all was well with the world.

He was alone in his car—a sporting two-seater, and was whirling along the Portsmouth road.

That morning there had been a general meeting of the Metropolitan Publicity Company, Limited, of which Randall Gray was managing director. A handsome dividend had been declared. The shareholders had been pleased, his fellow-directors had been pleased, and Gray himself had been pleased. For he was making money fast. Already he was marked down as a coming man.

He was filled with joy of life. The worldly success for which he had strived had been achieved. His position was assured. And now his mind was solely occupied by the thought of Madge.

For five years he had neither seen nor written to her. Religiously he had excluded her as far as possible from his thoughts that he might concentrate the more fully upon his business.

But to-morrow—to-morrow he was going to visit her father. To-morrow he was going to ask the stockbroker for formal permission to pay attentions to his daughter. To-morrow he was going to show John Elton the pass book of his banking account. And Madge?

Well, Randall Gray realised that Madge would probably be cool towards him at first. Five years is a long time. He could now woo her with an ardour that need be unrestrained. Besides, he had now the confidence of a successful man.

So, as his smart little car was gliding smoothly through the sunshine of the afternoon, Randall Gray's thoughts were pleasant ones, and his eyes were bright and smiling.

He decided to pull up at Ripley, and there partake a cup of tea. He ran the two-seater into a garage. After his tea he strolled off the road along a quiet path to indulge in a cigarette before returning home.

The path ran along the edge of a large, still lake; in the afternoon sun the beauty of the surroundings was exquisite. As he gazed across the water, it is small wonder that Gray fell into a mood of contemplative calm.

He was aroused from his reverie by the sound of a light footstep a few yards in front of him. He glanced up. Along the path a girl was approaching him.

It was Madge Elton.

IV.

For an instant Madge did not recognise him. Then suddenly he saw the colour desert her cheeks. She uttered a little exclamation of surprise.

"Mr Gray!"

He raised his hat and advanced towards her, extending his hand.

"How do you do, Miss Elton?"

She scrutinised him closely. He had aged but little in the five years. But he had grown a trifle stouter, a trifle broader. And he seemed to have hardened.

As for Madge, he thought she was prettier than ever.

For a moment after their greeting neither spoke. Both felt a certain awkwardness.

And then:

"It's curious meeting you like this to-day," he said. "It seems almost as though Fate had intended it. For to-morrow I was going to call upon your father."

Madge raised her eyebrows.

"Really," she said in rather cold tones.

"Why I thought you must have completely forgotten us, Mr Gray."

He regarded her steadily.

"I have never forgotten you," he said.

"Do you really think I could?"

"It wouldn't have been at all surpris-

ing—avoiding us as you have done all this time."

"I had a reason—" He paused. And then he went on. "Surely you guess why it was I deserted you so suddenly?"

Madge did not reply. She gazed reflectively across the lake. The colour had returned to her cheeks. Then presently she looked at him and said:

"The world seems to have been using you well, Mr Gray."

"Yes," he said. "Success has come my way." There was a note of pride in his voice. "I have worked hard," he continued, "towards a certain end. I have a definite aim in view."

"And have you accomplished your object?"

"Partly. Though my worldly success has only been a means to an end."

Madge glanced at her wrist-watch.

"I'm afraid I must be going," she said.

Gray turned.

"I, too, am going back to the road. I will accompany you—if you've no objection."

They began to walk slowly back.

"Do you remember," said Gray, "that conversation we had the last time we were together, in the garden of your house?"

"Five years is a long time," said Madge.

"It was about marriage. We had an argument, if you recollect, about whether a man should propose to a girl before he is in a position to marry, or whether he should wait until he has made good."

"Well?"

"I was wondering if you still hold the same views."

"Nothing has occurred to make me change them."

"Then you still think a poor man should sink his pride?"

Madge Elton's beautiful eyes flashed.

"Pride!" she exclaimed in angry tones.

"Pride! What sort of man it is that puts his pride before his love! It is really is in love with a girl, isn't it possible that she, too, may care for him?"

Is it fair to her to remain silent? Is it any spirit, do you think it will make any difference whether the man's poor or rich? I think that a man who from pride or any other reason remains silent when it is his duty to speak is too selfish to know the real meaning of the word love!"

"Too selfish!"

"Let me tell you something, Mr Gray, that seems to have escaped you. Worldly success is a very fine thing, and every man who is worth the name will strive to get on. Money, position, power—who does not desire them? But money cannot buy everything. And love is one of the things it can't buy."

Madge spoke quietly and earnestly: as Randall Gray listened, the words seemed to scorch his brain. Despite himself he could not restrain a growing anger within him. The thought that after his five years ceaseless striving in silence Madge should greet him like this irritated him beyond measure. It was so utterly ridiculous. This deadlock of ideas had occurred when they had parted five years ago; and now it recurred as a barrier between them.

"How like a woman!" he reflected bitterly.

So a silence fell between them. They traversed the last few yards without speaking. When they reached the road Madge said:

"I see my friends are waiting for me over there in that car. So I'll say good-bye, Mr Gray."

"Good-bye, Miss Elton."

He watched her run lightly along the road to where a big, touring car stood. She jumped in, glancing back as she did so.

A minute later the car had disappeared from sight along the road.

V.

During the days that followed, Randall Gray carried out his work in mechanical fashion. There was a lack of spirit in his energies, and a lack of purpose in his work.

He knew he still loved Madge with the old ardour. It was the thought of losing his attentions where they were so tasteful that galled him. What did she think of him in her heart? Was she still cold towards him? Had the lapse of time killed any regard that he had? She had felt formerly? It seemed so.

His pride was piqued. Rightly or wrongly, he felt that at least he had set in an honourable fashion and from good motives.

And so, he forebore from carrying out his original intention. He decided to keep away from the Eltons altogether, preferring instead to let himself become hopelessly wretched and miserable.

Then Destiny took a hand in the game. It happened a few weeks later, as he was crossing a busy city thoroughfare.

A heavy motor lorry, turning a corner suddenly, struck Randall Gray down.

He was taken, senseless, in an ambulance to the hospital.

He was suffering badly from concussion, and his left arm was quite crushed. The surgeon did not hesitate. Gray was