



# THE CRITICAL MISS DEVINE

BY EMMA WOLF

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SHE had all the assured repose of her caste, yet merely to look at her banished ennui. Or, as Tom Josselyn put it, in her quietest moments she brought with her a sense of "something doing." That the "something" was altogether mental Tom and his kind never took time to realize, and she was far too clever to let them bore themselves with the knowledge. Now she stood in character, at two o'clock of the morning, as radiant as a hollyhock in her shimmering, rosy robes, unwittingly dominating the shifting scene. The Josselyns' automobile was late, and she waited with them.

Ducroix, the French consul, had drawn her aside for a moment's adieu and was bending to the peculiar grace of her bright, tip-tilted head as if sipping nectar, while the lights glowed softly in the picturesque hall and the stringed instruments from the distant ball-room throbbed romantic accompaniment and farewell to the gaiety of the slowly departing guests.

The Frenchman had made some appreciative remark about the delightful evening just passed when somebody moving on interrupted with a merry good night, and Miss Devine had merely smiled in response to his gallicism from the slightly lowered lids of her inattentive eyes.

"You will allow me to count it one of my few rose-colored nights," he persisted, with sententious flattery, glancing at her gown shimmering through her open wrap. "You have been truly gracious to me—ah, in spite of that blank stare. I only hope you found the evening half so charming."

"Charming, Mr. Ducroix?" she repeated absently, with roving eyes. "But everything—anything—is charming these days, is n't it? It's a very fashionable word."

"You say that in mockery."

She forced herself to attend. "Not at all. Its use expresses, at least, an amiability of diction. Do you know that story of an unhappy compatriot of yours, who, while in the act of committing suicide by hurling himself from the top balcony of a high hotel, caught sight of a beautiful woman on a balcony below and, as he whirled to his death, murmured gallantly, '*Charmante*'?"

Ducroix laughed. "In spite of your naïve expression, it sounds almost satirical, and you never—"

"Satirical! Why it's just funny. I—" But just then her questioning gaze reached the upper landing of the broad stairway near which they were standing, and the light in her soul went out. For a moment she forgot her social poise, then she managed to drag out from the sudden darkness of her faculties: "I find most things funny, don't you, when you come to think of them?"

The Frenchman noticed, all solicitude.

"Pardon," he murmured devotedly. "You are pale from standing so long. Let us find—"

But Tom Josselyn's voice came providentially. "Margaret, here's the machine." And Margaret turned away with her accustomed swift grace and, with the imperceptible frou-frou of a woman of some importance, passed out into the night.

Tom, sitting beside her in the tonneau, was pleased to be jolly as they flew along, and Margaret laughed at him stonily, saying little. They rode, and the fiends of her despair shrieked through her sick numbness. This, she thought with fantastic wildness, was the swift purgatory, through which her dead soul, in a hideous phantasmagoria, had to be whirled before the great quiet would come. It would come when Tom would stop talking, when she would be alone, when—

"I said your word stamped a reputation indelibly," the young fellow rattled on, "and Pritchard had the nerve to say it was n't what you said, but the way you said it, that gave a thing meaning. He said it was n't the *word* that parted your lips, but the *way* you parted your lips, that did the work. He said you were a great actress incognito, with only one give-away—Hallie Darrow, your claque."

Margaret laughed stonily even at this as the car swung around a corner. It occurred to her that a laugh is a conversational bridge highly convenient to span just such perilous chasms of silence as this.

"By George! you can't deny it!" he laughed in return. "I mean about Hallie. She's the prettiest little mouse of a girl a fellow 'd care to tuck under his arm; but even you must admit that her opinions are only soft acquiescences—except in the case of *your* opinion. Then, Lord! how she claps! She's positively the after-clap to your thunder. I swear she 'd sign her own death-warrant if you 'd give her the tip."

"Idiotic!"

"Who, me? Well, you know what I mean. But Hallie's no fool. I heard her telling Horace Clement that you said she always held a 'bridging' mind. And when Clement laughed and said she was the most appreciative dummy Miss Devine would ever find, she said she was proud to play Boswell to your Johnson. I wish you could have heard the dear little pensive way in which she said the big thing. It was delicious."

Tom's lingering chuckle was like a kiss of memory. She wondered if all men, thinking of Hallie Darrow, looked back at her in just that lingering way; she supposed that Horace Clement always had. She was seeing clearly enough now. If

love is blind, jealousy provides a marvelous incandescence, and even before the machine and the tumult it and Tom's chatter seemed to create had stopped, many a verifying word or scene or look had flashed anew into her excited vision, cruelly confirming her prepossession.

She trailed herself up-stairs into the privacy of her own room, asking herself why she took the trouble to move. As if anything mattered! As if anything were worth while! Why not stop just there? But all the while, with a sense of irony, she knew she was moving on.

The room seemed cold and empty, reflecting the coldness and emptiness of her outlook henceforth. There rushed upon her the crushing sensation of utter failure—the failure of Margaret Devine, who stood the mental queen of all her coterie. "The critical Miss Devine!" She knew they called her so, often to her face, in playful acknowledgment of her infallibility. And she had accepted the merry homage merrily, her future festively bright with the promise she seemed to hold within her own grasp. She looked back and down at the assumption with a sneer. She!

What would her aunt say when she would hear the news? She could picture her look of frigid astonishment merging to displeasure as she turned, frowning, to her for explanation. They, the Houghtons,—her aunt and uncle—had expected everything from Horace Clement's attentions; in a severer sense, they had "expected" Margaret to bring those attentions to a triumphant issue. And she had failed to make good. The viper of dependence bit into her consciousness, distorting vision. They had been so good to her, gladly, generously good, expecting much. And now?

The coldness and emptiness grew upon her as she sat there in the dark on the edge of her bed, where she had seated herself in her blinding abstraction. Other girls might hug a sorrow to them in the luxury of abandonment; she must always first admit into an introspective orgy the stern knowledge of her dependence, which stood over her emotions like a guard. And yet—

The vision of Horace Clement standing with Hallie Darrow on the upper landing, just in the shadow of the lights below, unseen by all save her, persisted

torturingly. Horace Clement, ostensibly fastening Hallie's wrap at her throat, his hands over hers, his head bent to her uplifted face, a depth of tender understanding between them in both their attitudes and expressions! For them the world well lost; for her—

She sat immovable on her luxurious bed, her soft, white wrap still about her, gazing at the picture of their sweet ecstasy. A dark, penetrating atmosphere like a fog seemed to sweep in and about her, enveloping her, separating her from them. As the night crept on to day and the fog lifted, there emerged from the mists a canny woman in the grip of a vindictive hate—hate for all things, for life itself, but, above all, hate for Hallie Darrow, her best friend; but a thinking woman nevertheless—a woman whose un-resting mind must ever gallop, gallop to some definite purpose. She regarded the bitter fact steadily now. That she had sensed the situation there was no doubting. Neither Horace Clement, whose impersonal formalities had become a jest among his familiars, nor Hallie Darrow, who, for all her appealing softness, was never consciously a flirt, could have so forsaken his or her habitual self unless under the stress of a great emotion. And Margaret Devine, whose peculiar psychic clairvoyance needed no interpreting word, had, in a flash, put the exact value upon the proprietary air of the winning man, the capitulating look of the conquered woman.

Yet again and again she wondered how she had so easily deluded herself hitherto; whether it had been only a fond folly which had made her, and her aunt, think Horace Clement had always turned to her with a visible gladness which he evinced for no one else, as though her companionship were not only refreshing, but precious, as though he might say: "Here is my element; here I find myself." She had never let him see how his obvious preference for her had quickened her pulses, had informed her days with joy. She exulted now in the self-assurance that she had manifestly accepted it as an expression of camaraderie. Camaraderie! That was it; that was all. Any bright young fellow would have done as well. It was the absolute femininity of Hallie Darrow which had won—Hallie Dar-

row, woman from the crown of her pretty brown head to the tip of her dainty foot, the traditional woman made for love, the one woman for Horace Clement.

The one woman. When the analytic Miss Devine concluded thus, she had, after her own fashion, laid at Hallie's feet the great all, the *summum bonum* of her glittering girlhood dreams. Having done so, she contemplated the victor with passionate contempt. What could a child-woman like that have in common with Horace Clement? Why, they were mentally miles apart. Bah! what did that matter? This was natural love, no more, no less, as Horace Clement was man, no more, no less.

Oh, yes, she could see now how hard, by contrast, her own brilliancy might resound. She sneered at her own envied "crispness," as she termed it, her own perfectly groomed talent and personality. If she had only remembered that men must love in the humble, natural way, she might have softened to his need, to his imagination—she whose wit had, in all else, so seldom failed her. If she only had another chance, now that she realized, only the smallest ghost of a chance! If—

She held her senses numb against the sudden dart of light. But they struggled alert, quivering with desperate daring. She defended herself breathlessly. Did she *know* that there was an understanding between them? How could she be supposed to know a thing which had never been told her? How could intuition be sure? She rested a moment dizzily on the doubt.

But the pacifying hope faded in the swift vision of Hallie Darrow coming in at that door yonder, in the glow of her rapture—coming to *her*, as she invariably came with her "bridging" mind, laying out her hand for Margaret's commanding—for Margaret's commanding, for the approving or disapproving of her dearest friend, the critical Miss Devine. Back in the past—how far back in her memory it seemed to sound, yet it was only yesterday!—she had heard a sharp woman say: "Girls little realize how great an effect their carelessly spoken words have upon the decisions of their silly girl friends."

Their careless words! But what if such words were only *seemingly* careless?

"She would sign her own death warrant if *you* gave her the tip." Who had said that?

B-r-r! how cold it was! Yet the next instant she threw off her wrap as if it were suffocating her, rose suddenly, and walked, she knew not why, to the other end of the room. But she found herself securely caged in her inspiration. Run about as she might, she could not escape its tyrant hold.

"You have a power," it whispered close to her; "use it once for yourself. *You* know his faults; they never deterred your love. But for Hallie Darrow to see them, *as you could make her see them!*" She trembled violently in mere contemplation of her imaginary coward thrust, but caught herself harshly from the weakness. "Then, when she loosens her hold, take him, with all your might put to the test. You can make up for her, doubly, trebly."

Her feet seemed fixed to the floor. Presently she moved them consciously, making herself walk like a puppet to her dressing-table. With fixed, downcast eyes she let her rings slip from her slender fingers. Then, absently looking up, her gaze encountered the face of Margaret Devine in the mirror—the Margaret Devine of yesterday. A terrible blush like a flame covered her. Her eyes dropped quickly, she choked down a sob, and, turning her head away, with strange desperation she began to undress.

THE day broke prettily, waking Hallie Darrow from her late sleep to a joyous consciousness of the thrill of life. She sprang up and ran to the window, parting the curtains to gaze out upon the wonderful world. Not that she thought of it in this wise,—life had always been so good to Hallie she had had little practise in thinking upon it,—but now it seemed such an ecstatic place to be in. For all her happy times she had never been "it" before; and she was "it" now, since Horace Clement loved her.

It had come as such a confusing surprise that she was still blinking from it. She had never thought of his "niceness" to her as different, except in its funny, habitual dignity, from that of any other man's. She had certainly not known she loved him until he had spoken

those few startling words. Could love come at call, or only, to her, at Horace Clement's call? She hugged her pretty self close in smiling wonder of herself. At any rate, it was solely due to her perturbation that she had begged him for another day, "to find out."

As though they did not both know! She laughed a rippling, girlish laugh, remembering how indulgently he had submitted to her after pretense of forethought—to her make-believe hesitation after she had so completely given herself away. Well, to-night there would be no withholding, as he knew well.

What would Margaret say? Of course there were her own mother and sisters to tell, but she knew well enough how delighted they would be. But Margaret, her rare Margaret! She had asked herself that question almost simultaneously with the hearing of his avowal last night, and she had repeated it again and again through her visions and dreams when she was alone. There was little reflection in the question; it was only an instinctive flight of fancy, grown instinctive through habit. It had not arrested the smile in her soul for a single minute; it had only kissed deeper the smile upon her lips as she fell asleep, almost seeing Margaret's bright nod of approval.

Now, as she moved in a dancing dream through the stages of her toilet, she began to think more deliberately. It was a joy to remember how unmistakably Margaret admired Horace. Of course she admired him,—the whole world was agreed in admiring him, she thought with a quick flush of possessive pride in the thought of what her lover stood for,—but Margaret, who judged so truly, so much more deeply than the rest of the world, had actually picked him out for her favor. What splendid friends they were! How very fortunate it was, because,—after they were married,—of course she would want to have Margaret with her as much as possible. And how perfectly *dear* it was that they, Horace and Margaret, were so fond of each other! Well, they were equals, she thought contentedly, as she fastened her belt and noted fastidiously her dainty, daintily attired little figure. Oh, she knew well enough that Horace regarded her very much as a trinket, a charm, but beyond and above that she,

with her woman's tuition, felt that which took her as into port.

She had nothing to say as yet to her family, but she found it absolutely peremptory that she see Margaret at once.

She puzzled her pretty brow into a frown as she walked gaily to her friend's house, wondering how she would lead up to it. She knew of a certainty that she would tell, but she was bent upon making the surprise perfect even to the manner of its announcement. However, when she reached the Houghtons' steps, her mind was still in a chaos of suppressed excitement, and she decided to leave the revelation to chance.

She found Margaret at her writing-table, still in charming negligée. She did not look up at her blithe greeting.

"'Morning, Margaret," chirped the girl.

"'Morning, Hallie," responded the other, receiving the light kiss on the back of her neck without ceasing her rapid writing. "Just a minute, till I finish this card. Aunt Agnes is sending out cards for a dinner, you know."

The girl's tone had pronounced sentence. Margaret's pen moved in jerky, harsh dashes. She needed just a minute to get a good clutch upon her equilibrium.

When, with a slight sound of attention, Margaret put aside her work, Hallie whirled about from her close scrutiny of a familiar picture and flung herself, a figure of dimpling blushes, among the cushions of the couch.

"Is n't it a gorgeous morning!"

Margaret heard the sound; she sensed no meaning save that of the telltale glow—the glow she had foreseen with such madness in the watches of the night. If she could only blot it out now, somehow, from her memory and sight!

"Was n't last night perfectly lovely!"

"Oh, passionately."

Hallie laughed. "Am I so exaggerated?"

"Did I say you were?"

"Oh, you—Margaret! And you were stunning in rose-color; you should always wear it. I don't like that gray thing on you. Horace Clement—"

Hallie could have beaten herself for her uncontrollable precipitancy. And what would Margaret think of her burning face?

"Yes?" The cool, even tone caught her as she tripped.

"Er—what?" She was completely lost.

"What about Mr. Clement?"

"Mr. Clement? Why, what was I saying? Oh, ye-es. He said all you needed was a crown."

"Of thorns?" flashed through the other's bitterness.

But Hallie waited for no reply; she rushed from the persuasive opening. "They say the French consul is such a clever man. He makes me nervous. When he talks he makes me think of a man walking barefoot on pins—he talks so carefully. Was n't he with you a lot last night? Do you like him?"

"Why, a sonnet is a very fine thing in its way."

"Well, it's above me. I do like the easy people, don't you? Horace Clement said—"

"Yes?"

"Margaret, I've often wondered whether you ever read 'Don Quixote' through."

"I certainly do think high heels are injurious to the health, though beautifying to the foot."

The girl's silvery laugh rang like a bell. "We *are* getting rather mixed, are n't we? But somehow I—you seem to be sitting there waiting for my next sentence just like—like—"

"A commentary?"

"That's just it. I never noticed it before. Not that—"

"Oh, don't try to soften it. I appreciate the distinction with which I've labeled myself. It sort of sets one apart, having a label, being a titled person, as it were. Come to think of it, we might daub everybody distinctively with the same literary brush. You, dear, for instance, we might call Vers de Société; Tom Josselyn, Doggerel; Will Pritchard, A Satire; my Aunt Agnes, A Cook Book, or Hints to Housekeepers; Dolly Brainerd, The Romance of a Rich Young Girl; Mr. Allan, Sayings, Wise and Otherwise; Mrs. Forbes, Fashions; Mrs. Jennings, A Prescription Against the Garrulity of Young Motherhood; Jim Duncan, Sports; Olive—"

"Now you sound like a catalogue," cried Hallie, clapping her hands to her



ears. "Stop! stop! I hate catalogues. But tell me, what—what,"—she laughed foolishly, but, recognizing her chance, plunged in resolutely,—“how would you label—how would Horace Clement be entitled?”

“Oh, he. Did n't I put him on my book-shelf? I'm out of titles for the moment; but let's see. Here's a book; there may be something suggestive at the back.”

Affecting a playful concern, she turned partly from her to reach for a small, leather-bound volume which lay upon the table, ostensibly in jest, in reality to clear her mind of its fevered, hesitant impulse. Her hand shook slightly as she opened it, but she controlled the tremor sharply as Hallie's murmurous little laugh of impatient curiosity rippled into and on in her consciousness. Of a truth, she had lost her bearings for the instant, and she looked vacantly down at the exquisitely etched words upon the ivory book-mark which fell into her hand from the pages of the book.

“Well?”

If she had only kept silent!

But the airy happiness of the eager tone sent arrows of poison into the quivering soul of the dispossessed girl sitting with averted head and downcast eyes. Her faculties leaped into violent action.

She laughed a slight, low laugh, and began to speak in staccato uncertainty, as if improvising:

“He ate—and drank—the incense brought,—

His chest tones grew robust,—

He bent to little you and me

As to adoring dust.

His spirit loved the precious fumes,—

He smiled! He knew indeed

'T was but his due. So happily

May man on Ego feed!”

“Not bad, is it?” she concluded, with a gurgle of self-appreciation, flinging the book-mark to the girl upon the couch.

“What is it?” questioned the little, stilly voice as Hallie received the flying ivory and looked dazedly down upon the beautifully chiseled lines.

“An impromptu on Horace Clement, with apologies to Emily Dickinson. There, you have the original in your hand. Was n't I apt? Read it.”

But Hallie could not read. “Then you consider him a—a conceited fool?” She laughed, a forced little effort, trying in vain to keep the quaver from the sound, endeavoring to find light in the sudden confusing blur of things.

“Miss Darrow,” returned Miss Devine, raising her head, lowering her eyelids, deepening her voice, marshaling her words in slow impressiveness, “you pain me beyond expression.”

The mimicry was so perfect that Hallie could have cried aloud against the vision invoked. For it left in its wake a startling caricature of the man she had held so proudly in her heart; it relentlessly tore away all illusions, and held to her view what she recognized in a flash as truth—Horace Clement, the ludicrously arrogant and insufferable egoist.

In the faint pause which followed she sat, such a drab-colored little girl, a piteous smile playing over her fallen countenance, pretending to read Emily Dickinson's charming tribute to a book.

Margaret ran on. “It's the easiest thing in the world to parody. The thing is to find a suggestive verse. How is this on *ce cher M. Ducroix*? U-m-m! Wait a minute. Here:

Oh, thou Ducroix diplomatic, oh, thou  
manner—scarce a man,

Oh, thou perfect social meter, I would  
rather Whitman scan!”

“Awfully cute,” smiled Hallie, uncomprehending, shivering, as she arose. “Do you know, I think I've caught cold, I feel so shivery all of a sudden. I really can't shop with you this morning, Margaret; you won't mind, will you? I'm going straight home.” She came toward her, and stooped to kiss her. “Good-by, dear.”

“Nonsense! You're all right. Well, if you must. 'By, Hallie. But I'm sure it's nothing—only late hours. Of course I'll see you at Dolly's this afternoon?”

“Of course—if these shivers stop. 'By, Margaret.”

“'By, Hallie.” She waved her hand gaily to the retreating figure.

Margaret sat, head up, moveless. A cold, gripping hand seemed to hold her heart from beating; only conscience, or consciousness intensified, was alive and fighting with itself. She could almost see

her malicious suggestion taking effect in the susceptible little mind of her rival. She could follow its evolution from the first surprised resistance to questioning doubt, reluctant acknowledgment, humiliated acceptance, and finally the shattered idol. She could watch the little agonizing soul turning and twisting, first in its self-contempt, and then in its hostile rejection and distaste for the now glaring faults of the person which the caricature had blazed for her.

Caricature! Here her psychologic vivisection paused under the accusation of conscience. But if people had no sense of ridicule! She shrugged mentally; but it was a weak pretense. Libeled Horace Clement? Pooh! It was only a tottering understanding that would accept a bit of exaggerated fun poked at a friend as anything but fun. Surely a versifier had to meet his rhymes, even if it had to be at the expense of absolute truth. It was a debt of art, not of honor. As if *she* would hurt Horace Clement! She! The tears sprang to her eyes in self-justification, and she sat awhile in a passionate glorification of her love.

As for her responsibility to Hallie, how was she supposed to know that his name meant more to her than that of any other man? She remembered many a piquant case in which one girl had expressed an innocent contempt of a man to another girl and soon after received word that the latter was affianced to that man. As if a girl's light prejudice could affect another's true love! After all, Hallie might dismiss her words without another thought. The soothing sophistry quieted her for a moment; in her blind mental gallop she seemed to have reached a blank wall.

Moreover, the business of the day suddenly turned her about. The small Houghtons came in, clamoring for Christmas "ideas," and Margaret was forced to find her familiar, lightsome leadership again. It was a stiff pull, but she accomplished it with no visible straining. It was Macaulay who asserted with such cold-blooded common sense that a poor washerwoman with a dozen children to feed does not die of a broken heart. Analogously, Margaret was in like grim security; with her several duties to despatch she could not give her whole mind to her own misery.

Hallie did not appear that afternoon at Dolly Brainerd's bridge-party. She sent word that she was suffering from an exceedingly bad cold, and could not venture out. When the message was repeated to Margaret she chose to accept it at its face value, deciding sophisticatedly that a fit of the blues is an old-fashioned luxury for which the modern social stress can find no time. In the late afternoon she sallied down to Hallie's house, attentively solicitous.

"Why," exclaimed her younger sister, Frances, in surprise, "did n't Hallie tell you this morning she was going to run down to Hollywood this afternoon for a stay of a few days?"

"I don't remember that she did," faltered Margaret, taken aback.

"I thought she said something about having mentioned it to you. Anyway, she looked 'all in' when she came home this morning, and when mother insisted she should go to bed, she was so cross, mother was hurt. But she finally said she would n't go to bed, but, since mother thought she needed a rest, she would run down to Hollywood for a few days,—the Higginses are there as caretakers, you know,—and she left on the four o'clock train."

"Alone?"

"I should think so. The mere suggestion of any one's accompanying her sent her into a spasm of temper. It's so unlike Hallie, you know. She frightened mother, but she made me angry." The girl flashed a resentful frown.

"Perhaps she was n't well—grippe or something."

"I don't believe it. She was crazy as a lark this morning before she left. I begged her to shut up; I could n't practise, she was bouncing in on me every minute. And then when she came home! I say, Margaret, did you give her a cup of cold poison to quiet her?" She laughed mischievously over her sensational suggestion, and Margaret laughed shortly with her.

"Well," Frances continued disgustedly, "I think Hallie ought to be ashamed to behave so disagreeably. She has such a good time; everybody is so attentive to her. Just after she left, Mr. Clement telephoned, and when I answered, 'Hallie's not here,' he went on in a blissfully

deaf way to say: 'I just wanted to assure her I am coming to-night. It was an appointment, but tell her I have n't forgotten.' He seemed really silly. But when I told him she had left town, he said, 'Oh—indeed!' in such a die-away voice I thought he was fainting; but the next minute he seemed to perk up and asked if she had left any message for him. Of course I had to tell him she had n't. But don't you think it was nasty of her, Margaret?"

"She probably wrote him a note, and will be back to-morrow," responded Margaret, half-believing, half-hoping against the truth of her suggestion.

"Well, I should think she would," returned Hallie's sister, indignantly.

So Margaret found the little train she had so cannily started bounding along the track designed. As she walked down the avenue, luxuriously wrapped in her becoming furs, an observer might have noted her with envy, unaware that her vision of life was all awry, that she could not set it straight, that she was chafing under an unspeakable discomfort against which she was resentfully but vainly fighting with all her strength of will.

It seemed like a prearranged plan that, just as she turned a corner, she should perceive Horace Clement coming her way.

She felt first a bound of trepidation, then an ugly dauntlessness. Here was the chance she had coveted, and she had staked much to win. She chose to ignore his evident desire to pass her with a courteous bow.

She stood expectant before him.

"You seem walking for a wager. Trying to work up a glow or an appetite?"

"Either—both, perhaps!" He appeared waiting, ready to move on, unresponsive, despite the polite smile upon his serious lips. "It is disagreeably cold." He edged off as if he had discharged an obligation.

She held him by a movement of her muff. "I expect you to-night, you know," she said gaily, backing a step from him, yet holding him, as she knew she would, by her words.

"To-night!" he repeated blankly, his face flushing darkly in surprise.

"Why, of course. To-night, Thursday night—you know you promised. Now, don't disappoint me." She backed a few

steps more, laughing at his dazed expression, turned fleetly, and was gone.

Promised? When? Horace Clement frowned as he resumed his way. He could remember no such promise. But it might be; it might be that, through his impetuosity of the preceding night, he had forgotten previous obligations. He was unused to impetuosity. He had lost his balance for once, and had not yet regained it. Miss Devine might be right. He might be bound to her for the evening by a forgotten engagement, and—and there was now no other engagement to excuse his non-appearance. He had always been a punctilious man in such observances, and he resumed his nice habit, dully acquiescent. No doubt the evening would pass; Miss Devine was a ready talker.

It is not always easy to roll down the moral height. Margaret walked home rapidly, palpitating with excitement over her temerity. It had been such a little white lie, it had fitted in so perfectly, almost instinctively! If it worked well, for her, might she not consider it as obvious destiny? Should not a woman such as she hold herself responsible, as the most pliable factor, in the working out of her own destiny? She grew severely, stoically calm in her stern self-justification.

She informed her aunt carelessly that she expected Horace Clement that evening,—Mrs. Houghton expected to be informed about all Margaret's little doings,—and the lady, in her weighty fashion, smiled benignly upon her and advised her to wear her violet *voile*. Margaret felt a fierce desire to turn upon her and demand an explanation of that insinuating smile.

Instead, she graciously accepted the suggestion, and, when she came down to receive Horace Clement, appeared perfectly attired, perfectly poised. He returned her greeting in his usual somewhat stilted, ceremonious fashion, and Margaret, the astute, assumed her accustomed nonchalant dominance. He presented an interested, often smiling attention, but Margaret could actually watch both smile and interest struggle to the front through the frown of his ultimate consciousness. And she knew that the reaching of her goal demanded of her diplomacy the uplifting of that frown.

She approached it unobtrusively, letting



rather the spirit than the letter of her wooing coax the change. And she did gradually smooth him out with the delicate manipulations of her psychologic massage. As the evening moved on, he seemed to regard her through a soothed pensiveness, and when he left her he said "good night" in so low a tone that it was almost a confidence; and he pressed her hand.

Now, Horace Clement had never pressed her hand before. He had taken it, held it for an instant, shaken it in moments of unusual cordiality, but he had never pressed it as if with an unspoken, gentle message. She crushed her palms against her burning cheeks, wondering if that would check their fever and the quickened beat of her heart. She felt so deliciously exhilarated her pulses seemed to sing in their light bounding.

"Cat!" she mentally apostrophized herself.

She paused midway up the stairs. The exhilaration ceased. The call was not repeated. She walked more slowly on with a face of drear determination.

A day passed, two, and Hallie had not returned. Margaret saw nothing of Horace Clement. Then, not unexpectedly, she met him at a dinner. It was her fortune to be seated opposite him, her fair chance to note a subtle change in him. He seemed to address his partner not only distantly, but with effort; he looked not only unsocial, but ill. And Horace Clement was not used to showing his heart *en négligée*. Perhaps, she reasoned, it was not distraction at all; perhaps he really was indisposed.

She found him near her later, in the drawing-room, in the slight interval between coffee and bridge. But, society being neither a confessional nor a clinic, the question trembling to her lips was swallowed in a conventional flippancy, and the object of her concern returned an answer in kind.

But it was not his light words which dammed up utterly and forever the current of her hopes. It was the absolutely polite indifference of his eyes, which regarded her as one of many, no more, no less. In that one revealing instant all life seemed to end. The next, she knew she was playing her recognized rôle without a falter, without a flaw. But, like all intense souls,

she felt that the one great live wire of her being was dead. What she did not know was that there are many wires.

It was only when, a few mornings thereafter, she came suddenly face to face with Hallie Darrow in the course of shopping that a great wave of consternation broke the ice about her heart.

"Why, Hallie," she cried, vainly endeavoring to overcome the hoarse alarm in her voice, "when did you come home? Why did n't I know?"

The girl was blinking into her face with a sort of mechanical smile. "Is n't the light strong!" she laughed querulously. "I can scarcely see you, Margaret. I just got home. There was n't any time to let you know."

"And—and—are you quite well again, dear—darling?"

"Why, I'm well," returned the girl, angrily. "Why do you ask such a question? Do I look ill?" She seemed to menace her.

"No; but Frances said—"

"Frances is an imaginative little fool. Good-by, Margaret. I'll see you soon." She turned and was gone.

Why did her jacket hang so loosely at the back? Margaret asked herself fretfully. Why did her shoulders look so narrow? Why was she such a perfect dodd?

And her face! That was the dowdiest of all—hungry, sharp, seedy. She was n't even pretty—not even her mother could find her pretty to-day. The dimples, the glow, the soft roundness of youth—all gone!

"You did it, you did it!" pattered the avenging imp, hurrying along with her. "You did it, Margaret Devine."

She was glad when she reached the shelter of her own room and could let herself relax, glad to loosen the strain upon her facial muscles as, with one long sigh of defeat, she laid her head upon the table and sobbed out her forlorn contrition.

When she looked up, drying her eyes ineffectually with her wet ball of a handkerchief, all the ice had melted from her heart. The tremulous, humble knowledge which had been forced upon her, that the love she had thought so great was only a passionate egoism,—since it was willing to barter his happiness for her own ambitions,—had followed quick upon

the accusing testimony of Hallie's face. Whether her previous acceptance of failure had paved the way for her emotional abandonment, or whether her quick insight had solved the inevitable end, all the factors being given, would be hard to judge, but her proud spirit bent, capitulated to the strong circumstantial evidence.

"I will go to her and undo it," she told herself. "I will go this afternoon. I—I can do it without—confessing. It will be very easy." She wept a few more self-pitying tears of farewell, and turned her imagination upon the melancholy act of a magnificent, though concealed, penitence.

But her pretty, self-conciliatory plan was doomed to a speedy cataclysm.

While she was still engaged in obliterating the flaming traces of emotion from eyes and nose before descending to the scrutiny of the luncheon-table, there came a single sharp rap upon the door, and, almost before she could respond, it opened, and Hallie Darrow stepped into the room.

The swift closing of the door behind her gave the effect of her having been blown in. She stood quivering like a blade as Margaret turned to her in speechless questioning. They faced each other, moveless, the one struggling for expression, the other stunned, waiting.

"I came," labored the girl—"I came—to tell you—I don't—don't give a hang for what you say!"

She had fired the first gun. It was a grand but terrible revolution, this fierce declaration of State's rights, and it left them both shaken with excitement, though Margaret still maintained her attitude of questioning, her pale, uplifted face meeting the attack squarely.

"I know—now—I *never* cared a hang," the girl panted roughly. "I know now that you only knocked me silly. When I

saw you this morning you did n't seem so much; you were only one in the crowd. Why—why should I take *you* for an oracle? What's Horace Clement to you, or you to Horace Clement, that you should presume to judge him? I who love him know—know better—know him better than you with all your—your critical superiority can ever know him. What do I care if he does seem a clown of egoism and arrogance to you! *Let* him be! I don't care what he is; I love him! Do you hear, Margaret Devine? I love him—and I'm going to tell him so—now—this minute!"

She was quite hoarse, quite blind, in her raging, elemental recovery as she wheeled about toward the door, forgetting, as Margaret had forgotten, that the situation called for further explanation. She looked down dazedly at what was tugging at her skirts, drawing her back.

It was Margaret on her knees before her, clutching at her, flinging her arms desperately about her.

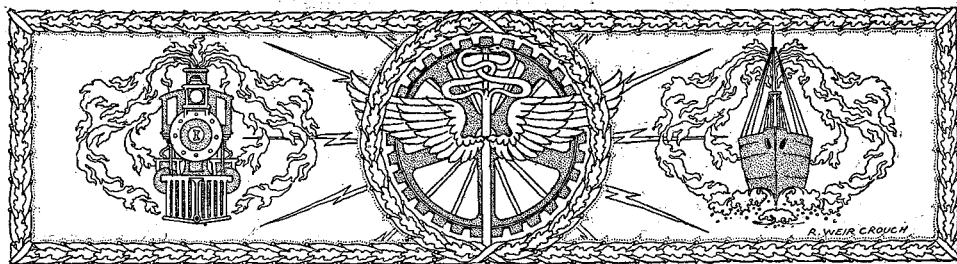
"Why, Margaret, Margaret!" she cried, forgetting everything in her consternation over the abject posture of this proudest of all proud creatures. "What are you doing? What do you mean? Why are you acting so?"

"Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" came the smothered supplication, as Margaret crushed her face against her. "Please, *please* forgive me, Hallie dear! I'll never, never do it again!"

"Are you laughing—or—what?" laughed Hallie, piteously, pushing back the humbled head with all her might. "No; you are crying! What are you crying about, Margaret?"

"It's because—because I'm so happy, you little goose!" sobbed Margaret, rocking to and fro. "Can't you see it's because I'm so happy?"





# BUSINESS SUCCESS AND FAILURE

REMARKABLE AMERICAN STATISTICS—INSTANCES OF SUCCESS AFTER FAILURE—CHIEF CAUSES OF BANKRUPTCY—OUTSIDE SPECULATION A SMALL FACTOR—PREVENTABLE CAUSES

BY FRANK GREENE

ONCE when taxed with losing a large number of men in winning a battle, a celebrated French general replied that omelets could not be made without the breaking of eggs. So it may be said that in a country where 1,500,000 persons or corporations are engaged in business, there is bound to be some friction, some loss, and consequently some failures. Commercial wreck must overtake some of the frail barks that put forth on trade's ocean, for not all the argosies that set sail can hope to reach port safely. Still, there are some popular ideas regarding the liability to failure of commercial enterprises which have been disproved by the results of laborious research. Chief of these probably is the tradition, repeated so often that it has assumed the appearance of an axiom, that ninety-five per cent. of the men who enter business life ultimately fail.

To begin with, it is well to keep in mind the central fact that there is more than one kind of business failure. The first, and what might be called the only true, failure in business from a statistical standpoint is that where a person fails owing money to others. This is the failure in which the business world is really interested, because in it is involved the loss of other people's money. The failure merely to succeed, and the temporary or permanent withdrawal of the failing trader with only the loss of his own capital, cannot have the interest for the community at large that would follow if the failing trader had lost some other person's money

besides his own. For the first kind of failure there is usually a public record of some kind which can be statistically measured; for the second there is really no record at all, and the unfortunate business mariner sinks without the traditional ripple. As regards the latter sort of failure, it is well to remember, too, the old saying regarding square pegs and round holes. A man may fail to succeed several times, yet ultimately win in another line of business, and some of the most conspicuous final successes in business have sometimes met with these temporary discouragements.

Perhaps the most conspicuous living example of success following earlier failure is the Hon. Levi P. Morton, former Vice-President of the United States, who, while a member of the dry-goods firm of Morton, Grinnell & Co., was forced to see his house suspend. In 1861 this firm stopped payment, later compromising and settling in part with its creditors. Men in business still recall the dinner given by Mr. Morton a few years later, where each creditor-guest found a check for the amount owed, with interest, a most pleasing sort of souvenir to bring away from a banquet. A pleasant story is also told in connection with the embarrassment, years ago, of Mr. Quincy A. Shaw, a Boston banker and capitalist. This gentleman was willing to give up everything, including his home, but this was insufficient to pay all his debts. Among the assets were some mining stocks of then little realizable value, and Mr. Shaw's creditors, who