Warner & Wife

by Rex Stout, 1886-1975

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I

LORA WARNER, AFTER A leisurely inspection of herself in the pier mirror next the window, buttoned her well-fitting blue jacket closely about her, put on her hat, and caught up a bulging portfolio of brown leather that was lying on the dressing table. Then she turned to call to her husband in the adjoining room:

"Timmie!"

When she had waited at least half a second she called again, this time with a shade of impatience in her voice: "*Timmie!*"

The door opened and a man appeared on the threshold. Picture him a scant three inches over five feet in height, weighing perhaps a hundred and fifteen or twenty pounds; in short, a midget. A thin forelock of reddish hair straggled over

his left eyebrow; his mustache, also thin and red, pointed straight down in a valiant but abortive attempt to reach his full lips; his ears, of generous size, had an odd appearance of being cocked like those of an expectant horse.

The small and deep-set eyes, filled as they were with timidity and self-deprecation amounting almost to docility, seemed nevertheless to possess a twinkle of intelligence. This was Timothy D. Warner.

"Good morning, my dear!" said he, stopping three paces from the threshold like a well-trained servant.

"Where were you at breakfast?" returned his wife, scorning the convention of salutation.

Mr. Warner blinked once, then said pleasantly:

"I haven't been."

"Indeed! I supposed as much, or I would have seen you. I told you last night I wanted to talk over this Hamlin & Hamlin matter at the breakfast table."

"I know. I'm sorry. But you see"—Mr. Warner appeared to hesitate—"I—the fact is, the beastly alarm clock failed to go off."

"Did you wind it?"

"No." This manfully.

Lora Warner sighed. "Timmie, you are unthinkable! What about Hamlin & Hamlin? Did you look it over?"

This simple question seemed to upset Mr. Warner completely. He grew red, hesitated, and finally stammered:

"No—that is—I read something—"

"Do you mean you didn't?"

He nodded reluctantly.

"Then what were you doing? There was a light in your room when I went to bed."

Mr. Warner gazed on the floor, and was silent.

"What were you doing?"

Still silence.

"I have asked you twice, Timmie, what you were doing." The tone was merciless.

Mr. Warner, seeing there was no help for it, raised his eyes and met her gaze. "I was playing solitaire," he announced bravely.

Then, before the storm had time to break, he continued apologetically:

"I didn't know there was any hurry about it, my dear, or I would have looked it over at once. The case doesn't come up till the twenty-fifth. Besides, you said you had it all worked up, and merely wanted my opinion on one or two minor points. If I had known you really needed—" He stopped suddenly.

"Well? If you had known I really needed—"

"Nothing," said Mr. Warner lamely.

"What were you going to say?"

"Why—advice—if you needed my advice—"

"Your advice! Do you think by any chance I need your advice?"

"My dear, goodness no!" exclaimed Mr. Warner, as though the idea were preposterous.

"I should hope not," his wife agreed. "I am quite able to manage my business without you, Timmie. Only, as you do nothing but sit around and read, I thought

you might have happened on something that would throw light on the question of annulled liens, which is intricately involved and has an important bearing on this case. But I believe I have it very well in hand."

"There is plenty of time till the twenty-fifth," Mr. Warner observed diffidently.

"There is," assented his wife. "But that has nothing to do with this. The case has been put forward. It is calendared for today."

"Today! But what—then perhaps—I can look it over this morning and see you at lunch—at recess—"

"My dear Timmie," smiled Mrs. Warner, "you appear to think I do need your advice. Don't trouble yourself. I have it well in hand. Play solitaire by all means." She moved toward the door.

"At ten dollars a point," announced Mr. Warner to her back, "I am sixty-two thousand dollars ahead of the game."

"Fine!" She sent a derisive smile over her shoulder. "By-by, Timmie!"

Mr. Warner gazed at the closed door for a full thirty seconds, then turned and went to his own room to complete his interrupted toilet. That done, he went downstairs to the dining room.

Sadie, the cook, appeared in the doorway.

"Good morning!" she observed unamiably.

"I see I am late," returned Mr. Warner with a weak attempt at cheerfulness. "Do you suppose I could have a couple of eggs, Sadie?"

"Fried or boiled?"

"Well—shirred."

Mr. Warner never ate his eggs any other way than shirred, and as Sadie never failed to ask him, "Fried or boiled?" he was forced to begin each day with the feeling that he was being somehow put in the wrong. A most uncomfortable feeling, but one to which he was so well accustomed that he shook it off almost immediately and fell to thinking of other things.

First of the case of Hamlin & Hamlin vs. the Central Sash and Door Company, which was to come up that day in court. No use to worry about it, he decided; no doubt his wife, as she had said, had it well in hand. His wife usually had things well in hand. No less could be expected of her, being, as she was, the ablest lawyer in the city of Granton, excepting neither man nor woman.

Everybody said so, including Mr. Warner; indeed, he had said it before anyone else. He had expected it of her from the first; and during all the fifteen years of their married life she had been mounting steadily, with never a faltering step, to the height of his expectation and her own ambition.

Mr. Warner often pictured her to himself as he appeared on that day when he had first seen her in the law school in New York. His attention, which had just begun to be solidly fixed on torts and evidence, had suddenly wavered, fluttered through the air, and settled inextricably in the fluffy brown mass of her glorious hair.

It had taken him just three seconds to discover that her face was as fresh and beautiful as any phrase in Blackstone—in fact, a little more so—which was quite a discovery for a man of the temperament and inclinations of Timothy D. Warner.

The puzzle of his life was, why had she married him? When, some years after the event, in a moment of astounding intrepidity, he had asked her this question

directly, she had replied with cynical humor that every ship needs an anchor for safety. Mr. Warner understood quite well what she meant, but he was inclined to doubt.

He had at one time distinctly heard her pronounce the words, “I love you,” and, since there had been nobody else in the room but himself, he felt justified in believing that they were addressed to him. For six months after the wedding she had openly fed this belief; since then her time had been completely occupied with her own career.

They had been married within a week after the end of their three years in law school, and had gone immediately to Granton, a town of sixty thousand in the Middle West—Lora having declared there was no time to waste on a honeymoon.

Luckily, Mr. Warner had inherited an income of some three thousand dollars a year from his father, so they were not forced to dig for bread.

He had supposed, not unreasonably, that they would open an office together, for Lora had stipulated that her marriage should not interfere with her ambition. But she vetoed this idea without ceremony. No partnership for her. She would carve out her own future, unhampered and alone. So he rented an office for her in the finest building on Main Street, and another for himself two blocks farther down.

From the first she had been successful. The New Woman had just become fashionable in Granton, and the city received its first female lawyer with open arms.

Her first two or three cases, unimportant of course, she won easily. Then called in consultation as an experiment by the corporation which owned the largest factory in the city, she had saved them a considerable amount of worry and a large sum of money by showing wherein a certain annoying statute could be proved unconstitutional.

She and Mr. Warner had sat up every night for a week, studying this problem. It was, of course, by the merest luck that Mr. Warner happened to be the one who discovered the solution. So said Mr. Warner, and his wife politely agreed with him.

Nor could she see any necessity for mentioning her husband’s name when she carried the solution to the board of directors in her own pretty head.

At any rate, it earned for her a share of the corporation’s law business, and in addition the amazed respect of the solid businessmen of the city. They began to take her seriously. At the end of a year one of these men actually placed an important case entirely in her hands. She was half afraid to take it, and told her husband so.

“My dear,” said Mr. Warner, “you are far too modest. You’ll win it, sure as shucks.” And he had straightway sat down and attacked the case on both flanks and in the center, with the result that in less than a fortnight he had it bound, gagged, and delivered into her hands.

Mrs. Warner acknowledged the obligation in private with a kiss—the first he had received in four months. That was his reward. Hers consisted of a fee in four figures, an immense gain in prestige, and the clamorous eulogy of the men higher up.

From that day forth her office was filled with clients and her portfolio with briefs.

As for Mr. Warner's office, it was never filled with anything but tobacco smoke, for Mr. Warner himself occupied a very small portion of space, and no one else ever set foot in it.

Nevertheless, for fifteen years he continued his habit of visiting it for an hour every day, usually about two o'clock in the afternoon. He would lean back in the swivel chair, cock his feet on the edge of the desk, and light his pipe. Thus he would remain, looking meditatively out on Main Street for the space of three pipefuls; the time varied from forty-five minutes to an hour and a quarter, according to the kind of pipe he happened to be smoking.

Then he would return home and bury himself in the library with the documents relative to some one of his wife's important cases which she had recommended to his study.

For it must be understood that Mr. Warner did all his wife's "preliminary work." That was what she called it—not inaccurately, for what he exactly did was to work up her cases for trial. That is, the difficult and doubtful ones.

"But," you will exclaim if you happen to be a lawyer, "that is all there is to the case. The preparation is the difficulty. Anyone with a little wit and common sense can do the court work."

That may be true. I am not a lawyer, and am not qualified to judge. You may take the facts as I give them for what they are worth.

To resume. Mr. Warner's time was so taken up with his wife's preliminary work that he had none left to search for clients on his own account. Besides, was he not the happy possessor of an exciting avocation? Any man who has won sixty-two thousand dollars from himself at solitaire, even at ten dollars a point, has had his hands pretty full.

Mr. Warner had been driven to solitaire by loneliness. The loneliness was a natural growth. His brilliant and beautiful wife, drawn more and more as her popularity increased into the whirl of Granton society, had at first attempted to take her husband along, and he had not been averse. But he soon had enough of it.

Two teas and one dinner were sufficient to make it plain to him that his position was perfectly analogous to that of the husband of a prima donna. His wife was courted, sought after, flattered, fawned upon, flirted with. She was beautiful, witty, graceful, and four inches taller than her husband. He was—well, he was Timmie.

So he went home and played solitaire.

He played for hours, days, weeks, months—whenever he could find a respite from the preliminary work. He played all the kinds he had ever heard of, and when they became tiresome, invented new ones.

Then, one day he had an idea. He had had it before, but never had it struck him so forcibly. All day it remained in the front of his brain, and that night after dinner he spoke to his wife about it. It was an embarrassing idea, and he grew red and stammered for a full ten minutes before Mrs. Warner grasped the meaning of his disconnected and halting sentences. When she did understand, she stopped him with an exclamation.

"My dear Timmie! You know very well it's impossible. I regret it as much as you do. I—I would like to have—to be a mother, too. But right in the middle of my career—it takes time, you know—and there is the danger—really, it's impossible.

It's too bad, Timmie; but one can't have everything. Here are those Tilbury supply contracts; look them over, will you? They must be absolutely tight."

Mr. Warner took the contracts and went to his room. That night was the most uncomfortable one he had ever known. He had seen a glorious vision of a little Timmie sitting on his knee, and to have it so rudely snatched away was sadly bewildering. It was this experience that planted within him the germ of dissatisfaction with life which was destined to prove his salvation.

By this morning on which we have seen Mr. Warner descend to his breakfast this germ had grown and begotten a family. It stirred around within him as he consumed his shirred eggs, and made him gloomy. Even the remembrance of his brilliant victory at solitaire the night before could not bring ease to his mind.

"Something's wrong with me," he muttered to himself as he wandered into the library. "Something inside, I mean." He kicked viciously at a chair that had thoughtlessly gotten in his path. "Can't be stomach—breakfast tasted good. I guess I need some air."

He went out for a walk. Down the broad residential-street, lined with great trees and extensive lawns, he strolled aimlessly; but as soon as the fresh morning air got well into his lungs he quickened his pace, and soon found himself on the outer edge of the city.

After another half-hour of brisk walking he was surrounded by woods and fields and green meadows; and, turning down a narrow, winding lane, entered a shady wilderness. Somewhere quite near he could hear a brook. He found it, and flopped down on the bank.

For two hours he lay there, dozing.

Three o'clock found him at home again, feeling a little guilty that he had not been there to lunch with his wife. He always liked to hear her talk of the proceedings at court on days when she attended, not to mention the fact that she liked him to listen. Besides, was there not something in particular he wanted to ask about?

Something—to be sure. The Hamlin & Hamlin case, of course. No doubt it would be all right, but he really should not have neglected it, and she should have told him sooner that it had been put forward. A glance at the clock showed him that it was past four; too late now, anyway. He wandered aimlessly around the house for a while; then took a book from the library and went up to his room to read.

An hour later he heard the hall door leading into the adjoining room open and close, followed by the patter of quick footsteps to and fro, barely audible through the thick wall. Mr. Warner laid down his book and leaned forward attentively, trying to discover the temperature of the room beyond the wall by whatever sounds might reach his ear.

Suddenly his wife's voice came:

"Timmie!"

He jumped hastily to his feet, crossed to the mirror and arranged his tie, cleared his throat twice and walked reluctantly, by a circuitous route, to the door. There he stood.

"*Timmie!*"

He opened the door and went in.

"Good evening, my dear," said he, stopping three paces from the threshold.

Mrs. Warner was seated at the dressing table arranging her hair. Her lovely face, wearing an unwonted flush, looked across at her husband from the mirror. There was also an unusual redness about her eyes, which he noted and wondered at.

"I didn't see you at lunch," she began abruptly.

Mr. Warner blinked. "No," he said, and stopped.

"Where were you?"

"Why—I—the fact is, I went for a walk."

Mrs. Warner turned around to look at him.

"A walk?"

"Yes, in the country. The jolliest woods out on the Wakarusa Road. Perfectly full of trees."

"That is a habit of woods, isn't it?" suggested Mrs. Warner sarcastically. Then she had the grace to laugh at herself; but Mr. Warner thought she was laughing at him and became uncomfortable.

"I was sorry to miss lunch," said he, to change the subject. "I wanted to ask about Hamlin & Hamlin. I suppose it came out all right."

"Well, you suppose wrong. It didn't."

"What!" Mr. Warner took a step forward. "You don't mean—"

"Yes. We lost."

"But that's impossible!" cried the little man, aghast.

"No. It's true. Good heavens, Timmie, do you think I can always win?"

He answered simply:

"Yes."

At that tribute she turned again to look at him, and her eyes softened. "I believe you really do think so," she said. "You're a dear, Timmie." Then she exploded with sudden violence: "I just wish old Hamlin had heard you say that!"

Her husband blinked at her, utterly bewildered.

"What?" he stammered.

"What you just said." She turned about to face him. "Timmie, do you think I am a woman naturally inclined to give way to tears?"

"My dear goodness, no!" Mr. Warner actually smiled, the idea was so very amusing.

"Well, I did this afternoon. It was old Hamlin's fault.

I hate him! Do you know what he said? He said that you win my cases for me. At least he intimated it. 'My dear Mrs. Warner, it is quite evident that we have not had the benefit of your husband's advice in this case. I shall pay your fee with reluctance.' That was the way he put it. Just because he was angry at losing! I won't take a cent!"

"But why on earth should he say such a thing?" demanded Mr. Warner.

"I don't know. Of course, it's absurd. But he'll shout it all over town, and I have enough enemies to make it embarrassing."

"No one will believe it."

"Oh, yes they will. The envious are easily persuaded. But not for long. I'll show them." Mrs. Warner's pretty lips narrowed to a thin line. "As far as old Hamlin is concerned," she continued, "it is easy enough to understand him. He hasn't

forgotten ten years ago, when he had the impudence to try to make love to me. I told you about it at the time."

"I know," said the little man, looking away. He was thinking that old Hamlin was not the only one, and telling himself that this was a good opportunity to say something that had been on his mind for months, if he could only find the courage. He ended by blurting out:

"There is young Nelson, too."

Mrs. Warner looked up, frowning. "What do you mean by that?"

"Why—you know—he is—that is, you see him—"

"Don't be a goose, Timmie." The pretty lips parted in a smile, possibly at the idea of her husband being jealous. "Of course I see him. I can't very well snub the son of the man who owns the Granton Electric Railway Company—they are my best clients. But don't get any silly notions in your head. You know very well I haven't time to allow myself to be in love with Jack Nelson or anyone else. Not even you, Timmie, dear. Now off with you; I must get ready for dinner. It's nearly time."

"But people are bound to talk—"

"Timmie!"

Mr. Warner went. The germ of dissatisfaction was stirring within him, and he wore a gloomy countenance as he took off his brown tweed suit and got into a dinner jacket. He wondered why it should render him utterly speechless to hear his wife say "Timmie!" like that.

Then the dinner bell sounded, and he gave it up with a sigh.

II

During the month that followed, Mrs. Warner found abundant justification for her prophecy that old Mr. Hamlin would "shout it all over town." More accurately, he whispered it, which in such cases is far more effective.

The first rumor of his pernicious utterances came to her ears from the lips of her friend Mrs. Lodge, at a dinner party at the latter's home. It appeared that Mr. Hamlin had assured Mr. Lodge—strictly sub rosa, of course—that the brilliant and eminent Mrs. Warner was really nothing more than a pretty dummy whose strings were worked by the subtle brain of her insignificant-looking husband.

"Of course," said Mrs. Lodge in conclusion, "it's all the veriest bosh. Haven't we all heard you make the most wonderful speeches? Thomas Hamlin is an old crank. But it is really too bad, because some people are going to believe it."

And a week later, at a meeting of the city bar association, of which she was vice president, Mrs. Warner overheard several unpleasant witticisms that were quite evidently intended for her ears. They were actuated, she told herself, by the contemptible envy of disgruntled lawyers who hated her for her preeminent success. Nevertheless, they left their mark.

She began to fear for her prestige.

Fed for ten years on a rich diet of eulogy and adulation, the horrible thought entered her mind that she might end by finding a seat at the table of ridicule. As for a shrinkage in fees, she did not care about that, having made herself independently rich.

But the fees, instead of shrinking, were augmented, and new clients came while old ones stayed. She naturally considered this a good sign and her fear dwindled. And when President Nelson, of the Granton Electric Railway Company, informed her that the defense of the famous Holdup Suit, as the conservative press had nicknamed it, was to be left entirely in her hands, she felt herself able to laugh at her enemies and detractors.

The Holdup Suit, brought by the City of Granton against the Granton Electric Railway Company, to collect thirty thousand dollars in profits in accordance with a clause of the franchise, was a political move on the part of the new liberal city administration.

Everyone knew that the city could not possibly win. Every lawyer in Granton had declared both in public and private that the case had not a leg to stand on. But the administration was making an immense hit with the people by bringing it, and it was being gloriously frontpaged by the press.

No wonder Mrs. Warner felt proud that she had been selected to defend it, though she was naturally a little vexed that it should be so universally known that her task was absurdly simple. As she overheard one lawyer say, “Nelson won’t even have to defend the action. As soon as the city presents its case the judge will throw it out of court.”

It was in connection with the Holdup Suit that Mrs. Warner conceived her great idea.

One sunny afternoon in August as she was being carried swiftly down Main Street in her motorcar on her way to the offices of the railway company, her face suddenly took on an expression of deep thought, then lighted up with a victorious smile.

“I’ll do it!” she said to herself with prompt decision. “It’s just the thing! Nobody could talk after that.”

She spent two hours with President Nelson in his private office, examining innumerable documents and pamphlets. When they had finished, and Mr. Nelson had expressed his admiration of her sagacity and penetration, she informed him that she had a question to ask.

“Fire away,” said the great man genially.

“I want to know,” returned Mrs. Warner, rising and putting on her gloves to indicate that the point was really unimportant, “if it would make any difference to you if Mr. Warner—my husband—should be chosen to represent the city in this case?”

Mr. Nelson stared for a moment, then permitted himself a smile of surprise. “Of course not,” he ended by declaring. “But why—I didn’t know—”

“It isn’t decided yet,” Mrs. Warner explained. “But I have reason to believe he is going to be retained. Of course, this is in the strictest confidence.”

Mr. Nelson, still smiling, assured her that he would keep the secret. “I don’t care if they retain Satan himself,” he declared. “We can’t lose.” Then he added hastily, “with you.”

Mrs. Warner thanked him for the expression of confidence and departed. At the door of the outer office she found herself suddenly confronted by a tall young man, hat in hand, bowing and smiling.

"Mrs. Warner, I've been waiting here two endless hours for a word with you. I had begun to fear Father was going to keep you locked in there forever. Won't you let me drive you home? My car is outside." This all came out in a breath.

"My car, too, is outside," smiled Mrs. Warner.

"Please," said the young man persuasively.

She ended by accepting. No sooner had they seated themselves on the soft leather cushions than the young man pulled out his watch and preferred a second request.

"Couldn't we drive round awhile?" he pleaded. "It's only four o'clock, and such a jolly day."

But this met with a firm refusal. "I am not good-for-nothing like you, Jack. I have work to do. Straight home!"

"Please?"

It was difficult to resist the pleading brown eyes, for he was a good-looking and pleasant youth, besides being the son of Henry Blood Nelson. But Lora Warner was not the woman to make even so slight a mistake as this would have been. She repeated, "Straight home!" in a firmer tone than before, and shook a menacing finger at him. The car shot off down Main Street.

Twenty minutes later, as she stood on the steps of her home shaking hands with her escort, she looked up to see a familiar figure turn in from the street and come up the walk. Nelson, noting her raised eyes, turned and caught sight of the newcomer.

"Good evening, Mr. Warner," he said pleasantly.

"Good evening," replied the husband, coming up to them. The men shook hands. "Home so early, my dear?" he continued, turning to his wife. Then, without waiting for an answer, he went into the house.

"Thank you for bringing me home," said Lora; and the young man lifted his hat and departed.

At the dinner table that evening Mr. Warner wore the appearance of one who has communed with himself in sorrow. His constitutional cheerfulness had been slipping away from him for some time now, thanks to the ravages of the germ of dissatisfaction; but on this occasion he was absolutely dumpish. Lora noticed it with surprise and a little discomfort.

"Is there something wrong, Timmie?" she demanded.

"Everything," he replied rashly, without thinking; and then, aghast at his own nihilism, he stammered something about not feeling well.

"I'm sorry," said his wife, not without feeling. "Is there anything I can do?"

He replied with a simple "No," and attacked the roast.

After dinner Mrs. Warner led the way to the library, saying she had an important matter in mind which it would be necessary to discuss at length. In dreary silence Mr. Warner followed her to a divan between the windows and seated himself on the arm of a chair.

This in itself was a revolution. Only a free and bold man, a man of initiative, deposits himself on the arm of a chair. Mr. Warner had never done it before save

in the privacy of his own room, having, like all others who are timid, weak, or downtrodden, invariably chosen the seat.

He went still further. Before his wife had time to introduce her important matter he opened his mouth and said distinctly:

"I saw old Mr. Hamlin today."

Lora, feeling the electricity in his tone, looked up quickly.

"Well? Is there anything so very strange about that?"

"He came to see me at the office."

"At the office?"

"At my office."

"Oh, he did! What about?"

"About his case against the Central Sash and Door Company. You know, he appealed."

"But why should he go to see you?"

Mr. Warner appeared to hesitate. The fact was, he hadn't intended to mention this affair at all. What was it that forced the words to his lips? Perhaps the memory of seeing his wife standing on the steps with her hand in that of young Nelson; perhaps merely—and this is a better guess—the germ of dissatisfaction within him. He continued:

"He wanted me to take the case. In spite of the fee he seemed to think it wasn't necessary—that is, to think about you."

"Did you take it?"

"Of course not. No. Hadn't he insulted you? I told him so. I told him some other things, too. He's a very energetic man."

"Energetic?"

"Yes. He actually tried to throw me out of the office. Must be fifty years old if he's a day. But then I'm not so very big, and he thought he could do it. I pushed him out and locked the door."

Mrs. Warner smiled. "It must have been a very exciting encounter."

"It was. Quite hot for a minute. I thought you might want to know about it."

"Of course. I'm glad you told me. I didn't know you were a fighter, Timmie."

"Well"—the little man was evidently trying not to look pleased with himself—"to tell the truth, I didn't, either. But I couldn't stand still and let him put me out of my own office."

"I'm glad to know it," continued Mrs. Warner. "That you're a fighter, I mean. Because it will make it all the more interesting. You have to fight me now."

Mr. Warner blinked three times before he could find his tongue.

"Fight you!" he exclaimed finally, quite as though he had been informed that he was about to charge on the German army.

"Yes. That is what I wanted to talk to you about. My dear Timmie, you are to represent the city in the Holdup Suit."

"The city! Me! What—why—" He was staggered out of coherence.

"Exactly. The city and you. You are to handle the case for the City of Granton."

Mr. Warner was blinking at the rate of fifty times a second.

"My dear Lora," said he—and you may believe he was strongly agitated when he called his wife his dear Lora—"my dear Lora, I haven't the slightest idea what you are talking about."

Mrs. Warner began her explanation. “It’s very simple,” she declared. “In fact, there’s nothing more to say. As you know, I am retained for the railway company. You will represent the city. We will be opponents. It is my own idea.”

“But why?” He was still bewildered.

“Silly! Don’t you see it will put an end to all these absurd rumors about my being—what old Hamlin says?”

“Oh!” said Mr. Warner, suddenly comprehending.

“They can’t very well say we are in partnership when we are opposed to each other,” continued his wife. “It will work out beautifully. The only difficulty is to get the brief for you. But you ought to be able to manage it. Mayor Slosson is still a good friend of yours, isn’t he?”

Mr. Warner nodded.

“Then it shouldn’t be so difficult. Besides, they know very well there isn’t a chance in the world of winning, so they won’t care who handles the case. If necessary, you could offer your services without fee. You had better see the mayor in the morning.”

“But—”

“Well?”

“Would it be professionally correct?”

“Correct? How?”

“For us to take retainers in opposition.”

“Good Heavens! Why not?”

“I don’t know. I thought perhaps—I suppose it would be all right.” He hesitated for a minute, then added diffidently, “Naturally, you know, I don’t like to take a hopeless case.”

“I know. I thought of that. But nobody expects you to win. Every one knows you can’t win.”

“True.” The little man walked across to a window and stood looking out on the night. This for perhaps ten seconds; then he returned to the chair and sat down, not on the arm, but in the seat. He looked up at his wife and found her regarding him expectantly; he kept his eyes steadfast, noting her fresh velvety skin, her pretty parted lips, her mass of glorious brown hair. Then he looked away, blinked and sighed.

“I’ll see Mayor Slosson in the morning,” he said.

Lora sprang up from the divan, ran to his chair and threw her arms about his neck. “You’re a dear, Timmie!” she cried.

When he got to his room ten minutes later his face was still flushed with the remembrance of her kiss.

III

At ten o’clock the following morning Timothy D. Warner called on Mayor Slosson at the city hall, and was shown at once into the private office.

Mayor Slosson, a square-jawed, athletic-looking man of thirty-two or-three, had been carried into office by a wave of liberal sentiment that had swept the city at the last election.

He had been a factory hand, had risen to the position of superintendent, and some five years before had started a factory of his own with capital borrowed from one Timothy D. Warner. He had paid back the money, but it will be seen that he considered himself still in debt.

"Pretty busy?" inquired Mr. Warner, dropping into a chair. "There's a crowd outside. I supposed I'd have to wait."

"Beggars, most of 'em," commented the mayor. "I'm never too busy to see you, Mr. Warner. Thank God, I haven't reached the point yet where I forget my friends. I've discovered that most people have. How's everything?"

Mr. Warner replied in a somewhat doubtful tone that everything was all right. Then, because what he had to say tasted badly in his mouth, he got it out at once, without preamble.

"Jim, I want to represent the city in the Holdup Suit."

The mayor whistled in mild surprise; but before he had time to put it into words his visitor continued:

"I know it's a great deal to ask, and I'd rather bite my tongue off. But—that is—I have a personal reason. I ask it as a favor. It isn't as though you were endangering your case, because everyone says you haven't any."

Some inward thought had brought a grin to the mayor's face.

"Isn't Mrs. Warner representing Nelson?" he asked curiously.

The other replied simply: "Yes."

"Then—would it be professional?"

"I think so. We are not partners, you know."

There was a pause, while the mayor gazed thoughtfully at a paperweight on his desk.

"I don't see why you shouldn't have it," he said finally. "Gray, the city attorney, could appoint you as temporary assistant and give you the assignment. He'd be glad of the chance, for I'm afraid they're right when they say we haven't a case. It's a pity, too. The people are entitled to that money and they ought to have it. I know they say we are trying to make political capital, and maybe we are, but it's a just claim for all that."

"Then do you think—shall I see Gray?"

"Yes. Wait a minute." The mayor looked at his watch. "He ought to be in now. Come on—we'll go round there together."

Thus it happened that at two o'clock that afternoon Mr. Warner entered his office on Main Street with a huge bundle of papers under his arm and a worried frown on his brow. The papers he had got from City Attorney Gray, who had evidently been glad to get rid of them; the frown came from a certain newfound perplexity that was destined to give him many uncomfortable hours in the immediate future.

Mr. Warner's trained legal mind had shown him at a glance that Mayor Slosson was indisputably correct in his contention that the city's case was a just one. Also, that it was as hopeless as it was just. But the curious thing was that, finding himself thus accidentally the leader of a lost cause, he felt suddenly freed from his

immemorial timidity and diffidence. Instead, he felt a new instinct stirring within him—a glorious, breathtaking instinct—the instinct to fight.

He sat down at his desk, untied the bundle of papers, and read over the clause in the franchise that was the center of dispute.

> ARTICLE 14—It is further agreed that whenever the net profits of the party of the first part for any fiscal year, beginning on the first day of July and ending on the thirtieth day of June following, shall be shown to be in excess of eight per centum of the amount of capital stock as stated in the papers of incorporation, the party of the second part shall receive an amount not less than fifty per centum of such excess, to be paid within sixty days from the expiration of the fiscal year in which such excess was realized. (Net profits defined below.) Furthermore, that the party of the second part, through its representatives, shall at all times have access to the books, papers and accounts of the party of the first part, in order to determine such excess.

"Not a chance," Mr. Warner muttered to himself. "We can't win. It's as simple as A B C. That part of the railway which runs to Vinewood Park, being without the city limits, is not covered by the franchise, and the city can't collect a cent on its profits. And yet it's the city people that use it and they're certainly entitled to their share. The man that signed this franchise for the city was either a crook or a brainless fool!"

He read on through the articles to the end, including the stipulation for fines for violation of franchise and the conditions of revocation. Then he returned to Article 14 and read it over several times, shaking his head dismally. Then—suddenly he stopped short, uttered a sharp exclamation, and glanced up at a calendar on the wall.

"August thirtieth," he observed, while his eyes shone with excitement. "I wonder—but they wouldn't be such fools. They're too sharp for that. Anyway—"

He turned to the telephone. A short wait—then:

"Hello! Mayor Slosson? This is Mr. Warner. Warner. I want to see you for a minute. Will you be in? I'll run right over. Yes. Something important."

These were the sentences—short, snappy—of a man of ability and decision in action. Mr. Warner had not talked like that for fifteen years. Some such thought crossed his mind as he ran out to hail a Main Street car. He felt dazed and intoxicated, but thoroughly alive.

His interview with Mayor Slosson was a short one. As soon as they were alone in the private office he fired a question:

"Jim, has the Granton Electric Railway Company sent the city a check for its share of the excess profits last year?"

The mayor looked surprised. "Why no, of course not," he replied. "That's what they won't do. We claimed thirty thousand"—the mayor looked at a paper on his desk—"$31,254.65 for our share, including the profits on the Vinewood Park line, and they refused to pay it."

"I know," said Mr. Warner impatiently, "but have they paid the ten thousand they admit they owe?"

"No."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive."

"Have they offered it?"

The mayor thought a moment. "I don't know," he said finally. "I think not. Metcalf, at the city treasurer's office, could tell you. Why? Is it important?"

"Rather," said the lawyer dryly.

"Well, here's the telephone."

But Mr. Warner was already halfway to the door. "No telephone for this," he declared. "It has too many leaks. I'll go and see Metcalf. And listen, Jim, don't breathe a word of what I've asked you. Not a word to anybody."

And he was gone before the astonished mayor could frame a reply.

Metcalf, at the city treasurer's office, proved to be a thin, sorrowful-looking young man with an immense white brow and a mass of coal-black hair. When Mr. Warner had explained his errand, after swearing the young man to the strictest secrecy, he turned to a large book and examined its pages attentively, after which he turned over one by one the contents of a bulging letter file. Then he turned to the lawyer:

"They have never sent a check, Mr. Warner. I was sure of it, anyway, but I thought I'd better look it up. On July twentieth we wrote demanding the payment of $31,254.65. They returned a refusal and a denial of the obligation on July twenty-third. On the twenty-fourth we replied that if the amount were not paid by the end of the month we would bring suit. On the twenty-fifth they told us to go ahead. The correspondence, with our copies, can be placed at your disposal at any time."

"Who signed the letters?" Mr. Warner's eyes positively glittered.

"John Henry Nelson, the secretary of the company—old man Nelson's son," replied the young man.

Mr. Warner returned to his office. His eyes shone more than ever, but the frown had deepened. His perplexity was great and intolerably painful, and it entirely overshadowed his elation.

He knew one thing for certain—he could not face his wife with defiance in his heart and get away with it. At least, not at home. The fighting instinct had done valiant work within him in the past hour, but he had not reached so sublime a height as that.

So, lacking the firmness of moderation, he adopted the only course left to a desperate man. He burned his bridges. In other words, he went to a Main Street restaurant and ate two mutton chops and some fried potatoes; and on his way back to the office he stopped at a furniture store and made certain purchases, stipulating that they be delivered within the hour.

Ten minutes later he stood before his desk regarding the telephone that stood upon it with an expression of fearsome dread. He was saying to himself, "I am about to perform the bravest act of my life—that is, I hope I am."

He coughed twice for courage, whistled aloud, pressed his lips firmly together and stretched out a trembling hand toward the receiver. As he did so the bell rang violently. He jumped backward halfway across the office, knocking over a chair and bumping his head on the chandelier.

But it was only Mayor Slosson calling up to ask if he had seen Metcalf. Mr. Warner replied that he had.

"What did he have to say? Had they sent the check? What's the game, Mr. Warner?"

"I can't tell you over the telephone," replied the lawyer; and hung up with a bang.

After a wait of a few seconds he took the receiver down again and gave the operator the number of his own home.

"Hello!"

Mr. Warner recognized the voice of Higgins, the maid. He requested in a firm tone that Mrs. Warner be called to the phone.

"Who is it wants to speak to her?" came the voice of Higgins.

"Mr. Warner."

"Who?"

"Mr. Warner!"

"I can't hear you."

"Her husband—Timmie!" shouted the unhappy man.

"Oh—wait a minute!"

And then, in much less than a minute, came a well-known voice, clear and pleasant:

"Hello! Timmie?"

"Good evening, my dear," said Mr. Warner.

"It would be a better one if you would come home to dinner." There was a smile in the voice. "Where on earth are you? It's nearly seven o'clock."

Mr. Warner took his courage between his teeth. "I'm at the office. I'm going to sleep here. I'm having a cot sent in. I want to know if you could send Higgins or somebody over with my bag—a comb and brush—my things, you know—"

"My dear Timmie!" Mr. Warner could feel her astonishment and incredulity oozing through the wire. "Are you crazy? Come home at once."

"No. I'm going to sleep here."

"In the name of goodness, why?"

"Because I don't think it would be exactly right for us to—that is, live together—while we—while this case—the Holdup Suit, you know. I'm retained for the city. I saw the mayor this morning. I'm going to stay here till the case is decided."

"My dear Timmie"—his wife's voice was becoming deliberate—"of all the silly notions you've ever had, this is certainly the silliest! What possible difference does that make?"

"It makes lots of difference. Will you send the bag?"

"No, I won't! Come home!"

"Will you send it?"

"No!"

"Then I'll do without it," declared Mr. Warner with strange calmness; and again he hung up with a bang. Never in all his life, before that day, had he hung up with a bang even once.

He dropped into a chair, mopping his brow with a handkerchief. The deed was done. Strange, bizarre emotions were leaping wildly about in his breast. He felt capable of anything. Suddenly he looked up quickly, while an expression of

apprehension shot into his eyes. Suppose she did! It would be just like her. He walked to the door and locked it and put the key in his pocket.

As he sat down again the telephone bell rang. He turned around and eyed it malevolently. It rang again—a long insistent jingle. He reached out, took the receiver from the hook and set it on the table. Then, grinning, he took out his pipe, filled and lighted it, and cocked his feet upon the desk.

He had been in this position, puffing jerkily, for half an hour, when a knock sounded on the door. He jumped up, startled; then, remembering his purchase at the furniture store, crossed leisurely, taking the key from his pocket. But before he inserted it in the lock he called out:

"Who is it?"

Silence; then another knock.

"Who is it?" he repeated.

A well-known voice came:

"It's I—Lora. Let me in!"

Mr. Warner felt his knees come together. He had not really expected this. He hoped the door was good and thick. Clutching the key firmly in his hand as though it were a weapon of defense, he called huskily:

"I won't!"

"Timmie, open the door!"

"I tell you I won't," repeated Mr. Warner. Some of the huskiness left his voice. "I can't, Lora. The mayor wouldn't want me to. It wouldn't be right. Did you bring the bag?"

"Yes. I want to give it to you." The voice sharpened a little. "Don't be an ass, Timmie! Open the door!"

But the brilliant Lora had made a mistake. At her confession that she had brought the bag Mr. Warner felt his heart leap with an intoxicating thrill. She had admitted to herself the possibility of defeat, then. He pressed his lips tightly together.

"If you've got the bag," he said finally, between his teeth, "leave it in the hall and I'll get it when you're gone. I can't let you in. I'm—I haven't any clothes on." This was a lie, but the poor man needed it. "Anyway," he continued, "why should you want to come in? What do you want?"

"I want you to come home, of course." The tone could not be called one of appeal, but neither was it that of command. "I honestly believe you need someone to look after you, Timmie. You've been acting queerly for weeks. Please open the door!"

"No!"

"*Please!*"

It was awfully hard; he could not remember that she had ever said please to him before. He gritted his teeth. "Go away!" he shouted savagely.

Silence followed for perhaps ten seconds; on the part of Mr. Warner, a breathless silence. Then came a sound as of something heavy dropped on the floor outside, and retreating footsteps. He ran to the window and looked out, and saw his wife cross the sidewalk and enter her car at the curb. The car started forward with a jerk and disappeared down Main Street. Mr. Warner dropped into a chair as one exhausted.

A little later he went into the hall and got the bag, which he found outside the door. Soon after that the cot came, and he put it up in a corner and went to bed, to dream strange dreams.

IV

The following morning Mr. Warner received a call from Mayor Slosson, who appeared to be slightly irritated at the discourtesy he had been subjected to the evening before. But he accepted the lawyer's apology without reservation, and proceeded at once to inquire into the reason for the mysterious questions concerning the check the railway company hadn't sent.

"There's no reason why I shouldn't tell you," replied Mr. Warner, glancing up at the calendar. "It's August thirty-first, and it doesn't matter now if the whole town knows it. Only we might as well keep the secret till we get in our work."

"What is it?" inquired the mayor. "A puzzle?"

"Why, yes. It's a puzzle to me, and a joke, too. But it won't be a joke to Mr. Henry Blood Nelson. Listen."

And Mr. Warner leaned forward and began to whisper. He whispered steadily for five minutes, save when he was interrupted by an exclamation of astonishment and delight from the mayor, which was often. When he had finished the mayor's face was a study in exultation, glee, and triumph.

"By God, we've got 'em!" he cried; and he was not naturally a profane man.

"I think so," agreed the lawyer.

"It's certain. Certain! I'll leave all details to you, Mr. Warner. But make the appointment for tomorrow if you can, and call me up as soon as you know. Of course, I won't say a word to anyone."

The mayor stayed half an hour longer, discussing the case from every possible angle. When he had gone Mr. Warner drew forth a sheet of paper from a drawer of his desk, took up a pen and wrote as follows:

MRS. LORA WARNER,
621 Main Street,
... City.

Dear Madam: I am writing to ask if it would be convenient for yourself and a representative of the Granton Electric Railway Company to receive a call from the undersigned in your office sometime tomorrow (Friday, September 1). Mayor James L. Slosson will probably be with me. We wish to confer concerning the suit brought by the City of Granton against the Granton Electric Railway Company.

Yours very truly, TIMOTHY D. WARNER.

A grim smile hovered about Mr. Warner's lips as he signed this letter, sealed, and stamped it. Then he put on his hat and went out to the mailbox on the corner.

The following morning brought a reply, typewritten:

MR. TIMOTHY D. WARNER,
417 Main Street,
Granton.

Dear Sir: Replying to your favor of August 31, I wish to say that Mr. John Henry Nelson, secretary of the Granton Electric Railway Company, and myself will expect you and the mayor at my office at 11 a.m. tomorrow (Friday). But I also wish to say that if it is your intention to offer any compromise in this matter the conference will be fruitless. My client has too high a confidence in the justice of his case to submit to any compromise whatever short of an unconditional withdrawal of the suit.

Yours truly, LORA WARNER.

Up to the receipt of this letter Mr. Warner had been conscious of a stubborn disinclination to do what he felt to be his duty both to the city and to himself. But the mention of young Nelson's name drove away the last vestige of a qualm. Indeed, when he called up Mayor Slosson to tell him the hour of appointment there was a note of vindictiveness in his tone that caused the mayor to grin to himself. He thought he knew the reason for it, and perhaps he was not so far wrong at that.

At exactly one minute to eleven Mr. Warner and Mayor Slosson turned in at the entrance of 621 Main Street and mounted a flight of stairs to the most luxurious suite of law offices in Granton. The door at the end of the hall bore the inscription in gold letters:

LORA WARNER
Attorney at Law

"This way, gentlemen," said a neatly dressed female clerk; and they were ushered through a door on the right into a large, sunny room facing on Main Street. At one end of a shining mahogany table sat Mrs. Lora Warner; behind her chair stood John Henry Nelson.

Everyone said good morning at once, and young Nelson placed chairs for the newcomers. None of the four appeared to be exactly at his ease; constraint was in the air. Mrs. Warner, who had remained seated at the end of the table, motioned young Nelson to a chair at her right; her husband, seated at the other end, was busily fumbling among some papers in a portfolio. His face was flushed.

"We await your pleasure, gentlemen," said Mrs. Warner in a most professional tone.

The mayor glanced at Mr. Warner, who cleared his throat and looked around the table with steady eyes.

"In the first place," he began, "we wish to announce our intention of withdrawing our suit against the Granton Electric Railway Company for excess profits. I speak for the City of Granton"—he looked at the mayor; the mayor nodded—"and we admit that under the terms of the present franchise our claim cannot be justified at law."

An involuntary exclamation of surprise came from the lips of young Nelson; but Mrs. Warner maintained her professional gravity.

"Will you give us a notice of this withdrawal in writing?" she inquired coolly.

"Certainly. I have it here." Mr. Warner tapped his portfolio. "But I wish first to speak of another matter." He opened the portfolio and took from it a sheet of paper, which he unfolded. "This is a copy of the franchise under which the Granton Electric Railway operates. No doubt you are familiar with it, but I shall take the liberty of reading a portion of Article Fourteen.

"*It is further agreed that whenever the net profits of the party of the first part for any fiscal year, beginning on the first day of July and ending on the thirtieth day of June following, shall be shown to be in excess of eight per centum of the amount of capital stock as stated in the papers of incorporation, the party of the second part shall receive an amount not less than fifty per centum of such excess, to be paid within sixty days from the expiration of the fiscal year in which such excess was realized.*

"You will notice it is provided and agreed that the excess of profit shall be paid within sixty days after the end of the fiscal year. Obviously, an infraction of this rule would constitute a violation of franchise. Such violation has been consummated. The Granton Electric Railway has admitted in writing an excess of profits amounting"—Mr. Warner consulted a slip of paper—"to $10,604.20, and no payment, or offer of payment has been made. This is the first day of September. The sixty days have terminated."

"Of course not!" cried young Nelson, springing to his feet. "Of course we haven't paid! You know very well we have merely been waiting till the dispute was settled. We've been willing to pay the ten thousand at any time. The sixty-day clause has nothing to do with it. As a matter of fact, only last year we didn't send the city a check till well in October. I signed it myself."

"Pardon me, Mr. Nelson," put in Mrs. Warner, whose face had suddenly gone white. She turned to her husband and stretched out a hand that trembled. "Will you please let me see that franchise?" she asked, with an evident effort at control.

"With pleasure," replied the lawyer. "But just a moment, please." He turned to young Nelson. "The fact that your check last year was not sent till October proves merely that the preceding city administration were better friends of yours than they were of the city's." Then again to his wife, holding up the franchise:

"You will notice, here at the bottom, it is provided that any violation of franchise shall be deemed sufficient cause for revocation. We wish to announce our intention to take full advantage of this technical violation. Here are our terms:

"The Granton Electric Railway Company is to pay the city $31,254.65, the full amount of its claim for excess profits. It is to submit to the revocation of the present franchise and accept a new one which shall include the Vinewood Park line in the computation of future profits. The alternative is that we will revoke the present franchise by law and refuse to grant a new one."

"It's blackmail!" cried young Nelson, again starting to his feet; but at a glance from Mrs. Warner he sat down again.

"Will you please let me see that franchise?" she repeated, and this time her voice plainly trembled.

Mr. Warner handed the paper across the table.

"You may keep it," he said politely. "It's only a copy."

Then he gathered the rest of the papers into the portfolio and rose to his feet. The mayor also rose.

"We will wait till noon tomorrow for your decision," said Mr. Warner. "Unless our demands are met by that time, we shall at once enter an action to annul your franchise." And he turned to go.

Mrs. Warner looked up from the paper; the print was dancing before her eyes.

"But—wait!" she cried. "Timmie!" She stopped short, while her face reddened to the tips of her ears. Then her head went up proudly. "I mean Mr. Warner," she amended. "Will you give me time to get in communication with Mr. Nelson?"

Mr. Warner turned at the door. "Mr. Nelson is here," he said, dryly.

Again his wife's face grew red. "I mean Mr. Henry Blood Nelson," she explained. "The president of the company."

"He can communicate with me at my office at any time," replied the lawyer. "But our terms, as I have given them, are final." With that he departed, followed by the mayor.

"The blackmailers!" cried young Nelson at the closed door.

"Mr. Nelson," came Mrs. Warner's voice, curiously steady, "you are talking of my husband."

The young man turned, flushing. "I'm sorry, I—really, I forgot."

"Very well. I understand. Now go—your car is outside, isn't it?—go to your father's office and tell him I shall be there in half an hour. Don't say anything about what has happened. I'll tell him myself. I deserve it."

She sent him away, in spite of his remonstrances. When she found herself alone she sat down with the franchise before her on the table and began to read Article Fourteen.

V

That night Mayor Slosson and Mr. Warner sat up till eleven in vain expectation of a word from the hostile camp. Then, considering it useless to wait longer, the mayor arose to go.

"We'll hear in the morning," he observed hopefully. "You don't think it possible they've found a loophole?"

"Not a chance," declared the lawyer confidently.

As soon as his visitor had departed he undressed and lay down on the cot. He felt that he had done a good day's work, both for himself and for others. But somehow this feeling brought no comfort. His wife's face, white with consternation and dismay, would not leave his Vision. He wondered if she had gone to bed, and if so, whether she slept.

For an hour he lay thus, uneasy, in torment. Suddenly he sprang up from the cot, turned on the light, took a pack of cards from a drawer of the desk and sat down. He began to lay them out for his favorite game of Canfield: One up, six

down, one up, five down, one up, four down, one up, three down. He had nearly completed the pleasant task when his face suddenly filled with an expression of disgust.

"Silly fool!" he muttered aloud, brushing the cards onto the floor and rising to his feet.

Again he sought the cot and lay there, with eyes alternately open and closed, till morning. Then he arose, dressed and went out to a restaurant for breakfast.

The first word from the enemy came a little before nine o'clock in the form of a telephone message from Mr. Henry Blood Nelson. He wished to know if he could call on Mr. Warner at his office at a quarter past nine.

"We've got 'em," said Mr. Warner, hanging up the receiver and turning to Mayor Slosson, who had just come in.

"We have," agreed the mayor. "Shall I leave?"

"No. I may want you."

The mayor sat down and lit a cigar.

The little office at 417 Main Street saw more bustle and excitement in the next three hours than it had witnessed in all the fifteen years of its uneventful career.

First came Mr. Henry Blood Nelson, to depart sputtering with wrath. Then his son, John Henry Nelson, who departed likewise. Then different officers of the Granton Electric Railway Company, singly and in bodies, armed with books, arguments, and protestations. Then Mr. Arthur Hampton, of the firm of Hampton and Osgood, who had been the G. E. R. lawyers before the advent of Mrs. Warner.

And, finally, came again Mr. Henry Blood Nelson, with hatred in his heart and a check for $31,254.65 in his hand. It was surrender.

"Mr. Warner," said the mayor, when he found himself again alone with the lawyer, "I want to congratulate and thank you on behalf of the people of Granton. You used sharp weapons against the enemy, but it is the only kind that will pierce their dirty, thick skin. And I thought I was doing you a favor when I gave you the case!"

Late that evening Mr. Warner, after dining at the Main Street restaurant, walked wearily up the two flights of stairs that led to his office. In his hand were two evening newspapers, and on the front page of each was a three-column picture of Mr. Warner himself. He had not read the accompanying articles, but their tenor may easily be guessed.

As he ate his dinner he had marveled somewhat at the pictures. To his certain knowledge there was not a photograph of himself anywhere in the world except the one he had given to his wife some fifteen years before, and he had supposed it had long since been destroyed. Yet here it was, staring him out of countenance from the columns of a newspaper!

He wondered vaguely how they had managed to get hold of it. He remembered now that when he returned from a long walk late that afternoon the man in the office next door had told him that some reporters had been hanging around since one o'clock.

He sat down at his desk, turned on the light—it was nearly eight o'clock—and opened one of the papers. So that was how he had looked fifteen years ago! Not so bad—really, not so bad. Silly mustache, though—kind of funny-looking. Had time

improved it any? He got up and looked in the mirror over the mantel. As he turned again to the desk he was startled by hearing the telephone bell.

He took up the receiver.

"Hello."

"Hello. Is this Mr. Warner?"

He recognized the voice at once. "Yes. What is it, Higgins?"

A pause followed, during which a mumbling of voices came over the wire. Then Higgins:

"Mrs. Warner wants to know if you're coming home to dinner."

"I'm not coming—" began Mr. Warner impulsively, then he stopped short. He reflected that such a message should not be given to a servant. But why not? The whole town would be talking of it in a day or two. He turned to the transmitter and spoke distinctly:

"Tell Mrs. Warner I'm not coming home at all."

Then he hung up.

He opened a paper, sat down and tried to read. But the print was a vacant blur to his eyes, though he tried hard for five minutes.

"What the devil!" he muttered angrily, aloud, "am I losing my eyesight? Am I a baby?"

He threw the paper on the floor and picked up a law book, but with no better success. Somehow the page bore a distinct resemblance to a tangled mass of brown hair.

"If I'm going to do this I may as well do it like a man," he growled; and to show that he meant what he said he got up and began to pace up and down the room. This for half an hour; then he crossed to the window and stood looking out on dimly lighted Main Street, two stories below.

In the show windows of the Thayer Dry Goods Company, directly opposite, wax dummies stood simpering at the passersby. Half a block down were the red and blue lights of Rowley's drugstore; a block in the other direction was the arc over the entrance of the restaurant of which he had become a patron two days before. The street itself was nearly deserted; perhaps a dozen pedestrians were in sight, and now and then a carriage or buggy came along.

The whirr of an automobile sounded from the north, and soon the car itself appeared around the corner of Washington Avenue. It crossed, and came up the west side of Main Street; slowed down, and stopped in front of 417, directly beneath the window.

Mr. Warner felt something catch in his throat. "It can't be," he muttered. But he knew it was, and hence felt no additional surprise when he saw a familiar figure leap from the tonneau and start for the entrance. But he felt something else. What was it? What was the matter with him? He only knew that he seemed suddenly to have been paralyzed, that he could not move a muscle to save his life. He remained staring stupidly out of the window, feeling as though he were about to be shot in the back.

A moment passed that seemed an hour, and then he heard the door open and close and a voice sounded behind him:

"Timmie."

He turned slowly, as on a pivot. Lora, with flushed face and strange eyes, stood with her back to the closed door.

"Good evening, my dear," said Mr. Warner. Then he wanted to bite his tongue off. Next he tried, "Won't you be seated?" and felt more foolish than before. So he kept still.

"I've come," said Lora, advancing a step, "to take you home."

The lawyer found control of his tongue. "I'm not going home," he declared calmly.

"Yes, you are. You have to."

"Why?"

"Because I want you."

"Is my own inclination to be disregarded?"

"Oh!" She caught her breath. "Is that it? Don't you want to live with me anymore?"

"Yes, that's it. That is—See here, Lora. Sit down. Let's talk it over."

She crossed to the chair he placed for her with a curious hesitancy in her step he had never seen before, and waited for him to speak.

"You say you want me," he began abruptly. "You don't mean that. You mean you are used to me—miss me, like you would Higgins. Just now you asked me if I didn't want to live with you. That's just it. I've been living with you for fifteen years. If I were to say what I wanted, I'd say that I want you to live with me for a while."

"It's the same thing—" began Lora, but he interrupted her:

"Pardon me." He caught her eye and held it. "Do you know what I meant?"

Her gaze fell. "Yes," she admitted.

"Then don't pretend. You see, the trouble is you shouldn't ever have married me. Perhaps you shouldn't have married anyone. But don't think I'm saying you're a great lawyer. I used to think that, but I don't anymore. Any smart lawyer, even, would have seen that sixty-day clause in that franchise the first time he glanced at it. And you didn't see it at all."

He stopped; his wife raised a flushed face.

"You are pretty hard on me, Timmie."

At that, moved by a swift, uncontrollable impulse, he sprang to his feet and shouted:

"Don't call me Timmie!"

Lora looked amazed. "Why not?"

"Because it's a fool name. *Timmie!* No woman could think anything of a man with a name like that. That's why I don't blame you. It's the most idiotic name I ever heard."

"It's your name. That's why I like it."

"And that's why I hate it." Mr. Warner actually glared. "I should never have let you call me Timmie. I shouldn't have let you do lots of things—at the beginning, I mean—but I was so crazy about you I couldn't help it. I thought—"

She interrupted him:

"You were crazy about me?"

"Of course."

"Do you mean you were in love with me?"

"I do."

"It's funny you never said anything about it."

"Good Heavens!" Again the little man glared. "It was you who wouldn't let me say anything! Simple enough, since you weren't in love with me."

"That isn't true."

"It is."

"I say it isn't."

Mr. Warner advanced a step. "What do you mean by that?" he demanded. "*Were* you in love with me?"

Silence. He advanced another step, and repeated his question. "*Were* you in love with me?"

Lora nodded her head slowly up and down, and there came to Mr. Warner's ears a barely audible: "Yes."

That, entirely unexpected, brought him to a halt. He didn't know what to say, and ended by dropping back into his chair and muttering "Too bad it ended so soon."

Five seconds passed in silence, then Lora suddenly fired a question.

"Timmie, why do you think I came here for you tonight?"

"Because you missed me," he replied moodily.

"Worse than that. Because I couldn't live without you. I know now, because I've tried it."

She rose from her chair, crossed to his side and laid a hand on his arm. "Listen, dear." He stirred uneasily. "No, don't move. I'm not going to make love to you, and I don't want to argue. I just want to ask you once more to come home with me, and tell you why.

"Last night I nearly cried my eyes out. I was miserable and unhappy and I couldn't go to sleep. I tried for hours, and then I got up and went to your room and cried all over your pillow. I don't know whether I love you or not, but I do know that unless you come home with me I don't want to live. You said something just now—I know I'm not a lawyer; that is, your kind of a lawyer. I found it out last night. I'll admit I'd hate to give up my office, because there are parts of the work I love. But—couldn't we make it Warner & Warner? Of course, the first Warner would be you. Or even"—she smiled—"Warner & Wife."

It would seem that so extended and gracious a speech as that would deserve a careful and thoughtful answer. But Mr. Warner appeared to think otherwise. All he said was:

"Why did you cry last night?"

"Because I wanted you. I wanted you worse than I've ever wanted anything in my life."

"And you—cried on my pillow?"

"Yes."

"Which one? The one on the outside?"

"Yes. It seemed to bring me nearer to you. I kissed it, too. I—I wished it was you, Timmie. Wasn't I silly?"

"No." Something seemed to be wrong with Mr. Warner's voice. "No, I don't think you were silly."