

ERLE COX

THE MISSING ANGEL



SCI-FI NOVEL

Erle Cox

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Chapter I

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To-know all is to forgive all. So, therefore, if you would censure Tydvil Jones because of what happened when he made the attempt to recapture his lost youth, you should know why and how he lost his youth.

A biographical introduction to a story is always boring, but I cannot help that. You must know how Tydvil was brought up or it will be impossible to understand him. When you know he began life with a handicap that not one man in a million could carry to the winning post you will recognise that he might have been much worse than he was.

To begin with Tydvil was an only child. His father was middle-aged when Tydvil arrived, and was a man deeply absorbed in his business. His mother was a woman of iron will and an ultra pious disposition. That she insisted on calling her son Tydvil because his father had been born in Merthyr Tydvil, and had her way, is one proof of the inflexibility of her purpose.

It was the boy's good luck that with his mother's will he inherited the business ability of his father. As there was not room in one family for two will-powers such as her own, Mrs. Jones, senior, did her best to eradicate that of her son in his infancy; but never recognised that, though suppressed, it remained latent.

Now, Mrs. Jones as the moving spirit in half a dozen societies for the moral improvement of everybody and everything, obtained an insight into aspects of life that are

usually kept decently covered up. Not being as wise as she believed herself to be, and seeing results without understanding causes, she was firmly convinced that all men were brutes. She asserted her belief so often that the natural brutality of man became the basic axiom of her life.

She was determined, therefore, that her son would grow up an exception, and took measures accordingly. It was the boy's hard luck that; as an only child, she was able to devote her entire attention to him while she was not otherwise engaged in reforming society.

To give her her due, she was well equipped for the job. It would have been better for Tydvil perhaps had she not been entitled to sign herself M.A. By the time he was aged eighteen years he was better furnished educationally than thousands of public school boys. Otherwise the results of his home training were deplorable beyond words.

He knew no other boys of his age except at long range. His only sport was tennis played with serious-minded seniors of either sex on the family court. On the rare occasions when he came into contact with youths of his own age, he could not understand them. He considered their outlook on life to be sinful. Their opinion of him, expressed with the freedom of youth, was far from flattering.

On one occasion, after reflecting on their manners and customs to two amazed boys, he only escaped gathering the full harvest of his temerity by one restraining the other on the plea that it was impossible to strike a lady. They parted with him after giving him a brief, but lurid, summary of his character that left him pink to the ears.

The truth was, that at this age, a more intolerable and obnoxious young prig than Tydvil Jones could not have been found outside the pages of "Sanford and Merton," a literary masterpiece that is, fortunately, forgotten by the present generation.

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To his father, Tydvil's belated arrival had been a cause of embarrassment rather than pleasure. He felt secretly relieved when his wife had undertaken to deal with a domestic problem with which he felt himself unable to cope. He had his doubts as to the value of the boy's education at home. But he concealed them from his wife. Thirty years of married life had made him a domestic diplomat.

It was a relief, too, when his wife decided that Tydvil had arrived at the age when he should enter his father's office. It was his unspoken fear that his wife would demand a professional career for their son.

Away back in the '50's of last century, there had been established the firm of Craddock, Burns and Despard. The firm had flourished exceedingly. Burns's daughter had married a Jones in the '70's. Subsequently, through a series of vital and commercial dissolutions, the father of Tydvil Jones became the sole partner and owner of the firm of Craddock, Burns and Despard. The head office was housed in a vast six-storied building, and the women of six States paid tribute into the coffers of C. B. & D.

For the first time in his life, Tydvil Jones came into direct contact with his father. It was a belated contact that led to a mutual respect, based, although they did not recognise the fact, on mutual suffering.

The loosening of the apron strings, however, by no means meant emancipation. In the warehouse, Tydvil

experienced the isolation of "the boss's son." It was the isolation of the man who would eventually take the reins. Departmental heads who imparted information were courteous but restrained. The general staff, both office and warehouse, viewed his advent with suspicion.

The boy's natural reticence increased, and, denied friendship, he threw himself wholeheartedly into his work. He had sufficient sense not to make his position too obvious to the staff. The natural ability he had inherited from his father found a proper outlet, and it was not long before Tydvil began to make his mark.

Gradually the staff recognised he was not presumptuous. Moreover, to their great and abiding joy, they discovered that he was innocent of the world and the flesh to an extent that was unbelievable to a horde of average business pagans.

The typists found with delight that, on being spoken to by one of them, he would blush a rosy pink. Therefore, they made opportunities to approach him, and the eyes of a dozen other minxes watched for the tell-tale blush.

There grew up around Tydvil legends of his innocence, that lost nothing in the telling. "Have you heard Tyddie's latest?" became a stock question. None the less, while the staff grinned joyously at his blameless life, they began to have a real respect for him as a business man.

Said one departmental head to another: "He may be a mug in many respects, but there was nothing of the mug in the way he handled that old swine Graham of Graham and Stone over those contracts. You know the old man's gift of language when the spirit moves him?"

The other nodded, and laughed.

"Well," the narrator continued, "he cut loose on young Tyddie. He had hardly got his first 'damn,' when the lad pipes up, 'You will be good enough not to use obscene and blasphemous language in my office. It does not impress me, and it is offensive. Kindly confine your remarks to business.'"

The listener laughed. "That must have improved the atmosphere."

"A close-up of old G's face would have been worth a fortune. He gulped out, 'I've done business with this house for five and thirty years, and have never been spoken to like that.' 'Hump,' snapped Tyddie, 'then it's about time someone took you in hand. If you don't like the way I talk to you, you can get out and close the account.'"

"That, to old Michael Graham?"

"Just that! And believe it or not, he bullied the old devil till he didn't know whether he was awake or enjoying a nightmare. He signed up for all the allowances we asked for and agreed to replace the defective stuff. Tyddie may be a perfect lady, but he is no mug."

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In his twenty-fifth year, Tydvil Jones married. Had he been asked at the time, he would have said he had made free selection. Really, the choice had been his mother's. That matron was somewhat disappointed at the result of her matchmaking.

She knew Amy to be very pious and serious but she under-estimated her generalship and fighting strength. Amy suddenly developed a will that was more inflexible than her own. In the several ruthless but brief battles fought for the ownership of Tydvil Jones, Amy was signally victorious.

The bone of contention knew nothing of the war that had been fought. He found he had merely exchanged one domestic ruler for another. To him the gynaecocracy that would have driven another man to drink or crime, was a normal state of affairs. The only effect of the change was that he noticed Amy talked a good deal more than his mother did.

After his marriage his home life took on a new aspect. Under his mother's rule Tydvil had been able to avoid taking part in her activities for the reformation of society.

Amy had other ideas.

First, she waged war on her mother-in-law to obtain control of several of her pet societies. To give the elder woman her due, she put up a perfectly willing fight. Outside of actual physical violence, there was no limit to their

endeavours. The war was waged under Rafferty's rules, and Amy was again victorious.

What Mrs. Jones, senior, said about Mrs. Jones, junior, though in the main true, was libellous and scathing. Indeed, there was no need to embroider the stories, the facts were more scandalous than anything she could have invented. Amy's methods were new and atrocious beyond the wide experience of her vanquished mother-in-law.

Who but Amy would have thought of telephoning to every one of her mother-in-law's supporters, on the morning of a vital meeting, that the meeting had been postponed? But Amy did that, and came down with her own gang and elected all her own nominees for office unopposed.

Partly to irritate his mother, and partly for her own convenience, Amy enlisted Tydvil for social service. Having no other interests outside his business, he found the work an outlet for his surplus energies. Amy found his clear judgement no small assistance in her campaigns.

Therefore, in certain circles, Tydvil Jones became a somewhat notable figure. He studied social questions and spoke from many platforms. He also subscribed to causes the value of which he doubted, though at that period his doubts were kept to himself.

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At the age of thirty an avalanche smote the life of Tydvil Jones. In the one six months he lost both his parents. Early in the year, a moment of indecision settled the fate of his mother. The driver of the motor car was severely censured by the coroner, though the jury brought in a verdict of misadventure.

Just six months later, his father relinquished his life as unobtrusively as he had lived. Their actual loss had little effect on their son. Neither had been demonstratively affectionate. None the less, the result was to sweep Tydvil from a harbour of comparative calm into an ocean of serious responsibilities.

He knew when he succeeded to the control of Craddock, Burns and Despard, that his father's death had made him a wealthy man. But when the figures relating to the estate were known, conferees of the deceased merchant opened their eyes with astonishment, and the State Treasurer of the day licked his lips over the death duties.

Thanks to his previous attitude towards his staff, the succession of Tydvil Jones to the throne of C. B. & D. was accomplished without friction or unrest. Despite its great prosperity, the thirty years of conservative autocracy of the late ruler lay heavily on the warehouse. Without undue haste, and carefully feeling his way, the new ruler instituted reforms that sent a sigh of relief from basement to roof.

But, from the day he assumed the reins, Tydvil began to live a double life—but not in the usually accepted sense of the term. One was the domestic life in which he was the subject of an autocrat. The other, his real life, was as ruler of an establishment capitalised at three-quarters of a million, and controlling the destinies of some four hundred fellow beings.

From his elevated position his horizon was enlarged. He came into direct contact with his peers in business, who received him with some circumspection, having heard stories of his peculiar views. It was not long before they recognised that he was a man not to be despised in the game of buying and selling by which they all made a more or less honest living.

Outside their common interest, however, they were at a loss what to make of him, and he could not understand them. But after relinquishing the first very natural idea that he was pulling their legs, they summed him up as a most amazing prig.

There was some justification for their verdict. He had been brought up to believe that a theatre was a vestibule to Hades, and shared with race-courses and hotels the distinction of wearing the hall-marks of depravity. If you hammer a doctrine, however fantastic, into a human being from childhood, it will take an immense amount of eradicating.

But, in these early days of his responsibilities, Tydvil did a lot of quiet thinking and observing. It did not take him long to arrive at the conclusion that it was he and not his business associates who were abnormal. Then the

revolutionary truth gradually shaped itself in his mind, that all his life he had allowed others to do his thinking, and he awoke to the knowledge that all his ideas apart from his business, were second hand.

At home he allowed no sign of his changing ideas to be noticed. He entered into his social activities as an observer rather than a participator. His admiration for his associates faded when he noticed how they fawned on Amy. He also awoke to the fact that it was the cheque book of Tydvil Jones rather than Tydvil Jones himself that commanded the respect given to him. He obtained a good deal of cynical amusement from watching how eagerly Amy lapped up the flattery of her friends.

It was about this time that Tydvil began to study his wife. But it was a study of her habits and customs and not a study of her comfort. Amy was good looking; there was no doubt about that. But there were lines about her mouth that were seldom seen by anyone but her husband. They showed up immediately he questioned any act or opinion of hers. When her friends complimented him on the unfailing sweetness of "dear Amy," Jones agreed cheerfully and dutifully, but the thought of those lines was always in the background.

Few but he recognised the diamond hardness of the sweet nature of Amy. He had occasionally met other women who took the good things of life thankfully and graciously. They were women who laughed naturally and who did not want to reform society.

Once, experimentally, he suggested a modification of her Spartan hair dressing and more expensive frocks. After

Amy's first shock of surprise, her discourse on frivolous dressing lasted for 45 minutes. Who had hinted she was unbecomingly clothed? Had she ever shown a tendency to extravagance? Nothing but her knowledge of his impeccable life saved him from a suspicion of having sideslipped from grace. Indeed, her insistence on returning to the subject of the reasons for his suggestion awoke in Jones the thought that she would find the pain of a misdemeanour eased by the joy of reforming him, if necessary.

However, as he listened to her homily, he tried, without much success, to reconcile her ideas of economy in dress with a twenty-roomed house, three motor cars and eight maids.

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However, Tydvil's study of Amy led him to the discovery that though he had been married to her for six years, he knew very little of his wife. It was a little disconcerting at first to realise that she was no saint, and that in pursuit of her objectives her methods were, to put it mildly, peculiar. Recollections of passages between Amy and his mother, unnoticed at the time, strengthened this conviction.

Then the discovery of a letter from his mother to his father opened his eyes still wider. It narrated the episode of Amy's telephone tactics before referred to, and wound up with a summary of Amy's character as it appeared to the writer: "A more selfish, deceitful and hard-hearted woman never existed. I feel that her piety is the grossest hypocrisy, and that faith and charity are as far beyond her as my poor son is beyond hope in her hands."

Allowing for his mother's habit of emphasis, Jones was forced to conclude that there was something in the unflattering sketch of Amy. Then he remembered his father's self-effacement, and he saw a light. As he ripped the letter viciously to pieces, for the first time in his life, at the age of thirty-two years, Tydvil Jones swore. "No more! No more!" he said aloud, bringing his clenched fist down on the table before him, "I'm damned if I'll stand it any longer!" The trouble was, that Tydvil learned he had been robbed of his youth and the joy of living it. That the robbery was committed with pious intent, was no salve to his feelings.

Affection may have misled his mother, but Amy had been an accessory, not for love, but ambition. It was not sweet to realise that he was subject for amused pity among the men he met in business. The worst of it was he felt his case was beyond remedy.

Two incidents occurred about this time that made him resolve on emancipation. In both of these he was an unwilling eavesdropper.

One night, while returning home from a meeting, he entered an empty railway compartment. At the next station, two men, well known to him, took the adjoining compartment. When he recognised their voices, he was prevented from making his presence known by their first words, evidently the continuation of a discussion. "Tydvil Jones—heavens, what a name!—is a hopeless wowser. And I can't stand a wowser."

The rest of the conversation came in illuminating patches. "I don't believe he ever..." What it was, the angry listener could not catch, but the shout of mirth that accompanied the expression of unbelief, made Tydvil's blood boil. "McRae or Darglish should take him in hand and complete his education..."

"He would be an awfully decent fellow if someone would de-moralise him."

Fortunately, in the midst of ribald suggestions for the improvement of Tydvil Jones, the train drew up at a platform, and the subject of their speculations, stooping low, fled.

The second incident was far more pleasant, and gave Tydvil even more food for reflection.

One evening he was working back in his office some time after the staff had left. Through a mind concentrated on his work, he became conscious of voices near him, but for some time their purport did not sink in. Then suddenly, without volition, he found himself alert and listening to the words, "Well, anyhow, Tyddie is a dear in spite of his innocence."

The voice was that of his senior typist. In a moment he realised that to make his presence known at that juncture would be exceedingly embarrassing both to himself and the speaker. With a grim smile, he felt that, of the two, he would suffer the more acutely. He hoped the conversation would lose its very personal note.

But the next words convinced him that the hope was vain. "I'll bet," came a second voice, and he recognised the accents of that impertinent little Miss Marsden, "that no one has ever told Tyddie how good looking he is. I just love the way his hair waves, and those brown eyes of his. Did you ever notice what a kissable mouth he has?"

The listening man felt perspiration on his forehead. Then came the voice of the senior typist. "Why don't you tell him that, Jess?"

There was a ripple of happy laughter, and Jess replied: "Poor Tyddie! If I told him that I would be tried for manslaughter. Tyddie would perish from spontaneous combustion brought on by his own blushes."

Little Miss Jessica Marsden never knew how near she was to bringing about that catastrophe. "It's a jolly shame to think he's tied up to Amy," from the senior typist. "My sister, Jean, was at school with her, and she says that Amy wasn't

fit for human consumption." Jones started, and drew a deep breath. This was getting home with a vengeance.

"She is a beast," commented Jess simply and sincerely.

The senior typist took up the tale. "It gives me the pip to see her come sailing along with her condescending—'Is Mr. Jones in his office, my dear?'"

The words were such a perfect imitation of his wife's voice, that it took Jones all his time to keep still. "Pity she can't get someone to tell her how to dress herself."

Jessica echoed the wish, and went on, "I always call them the beauty and the beast. It's a reversal of roles, but it's accurate."

The voices died away down the empty warehouse. When he was sure they had departed, the sole partner of Craddock, Burns and Despard drew a long breath of relief. The next thing he did was rather unusual for him. He rose and walked across the room to the mirror that hung over the fixed basin behind the screen in the corner. Jones surveyed his reflection long and earnestly. Whether Miss Marsden's judgements were right, he was too modest to decide. But he did think that thirty-three years of sober and upright living had left him looking curiously youthful. The discovery was not unpleasing.

On the following Friday evening when the senior typist and that impudent little Miss Marsden received their pay envelopes, they were amazed to find a wholly unexpected and totally unaccountable increase of ten shillings a week in their salaries.

Had they known that the portent announced the awakening of Tydvil Jones, they would have been still more

bewildered.

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So now we see why Tydvil Jones was ripe for rebellion against life in general, and his wife in particular. He felt he had had a raw deal. He did not quite know what to do about it, but he was determined to do something, and in the humour he was in, he did not care much what he did.

The overdue explosion occurred about a fortnight after the episode of the two typists. He entered his breakfast room, as usual, the first arrival. It was Amy's practice to appear at breakfast always, but unless she had something particular to say to him, usually annoying, she seldom arrived on the scene until a few minutes before he was timed to depart for his office.

She did not like early rising, but she did like to say to her friends, "I think, my dear, it is a wife's duty to give her husband her society at breakfast." She considered it marked her as a devoted spouse who was willing to sacrifice her comfort for her husband's pleasure. She certainly did sacrifice her comfort, but whether Tydvil found pleasure in it is open to argument.

The maid who attended to his simple wants found the master unusually unresponsive. He was as much loved by his household staff as Amy was disliked—which says volumes for his popularity. Tydvil had slept badly, and was still simmering from a domestic argument of the previous night.

There was, among others, an institution known as the Moral Uplift Society, of which Amy was president. Its aim was to assist unfortunate girls, who had run off the rails, back to the tracks of righteousness. Jones had, on several occasions, contributed lavishly to its upkeep. A quiet investigation, however, had suggested to him, that though its expenditure was real, the results accruing from its efforts were doubtful.

His insistence on being given some concrete evidence of its usefulness was met with replies so vague, and so conflicting, that he arrived at the conclusion that its secretary was a son of Ananias, and several of the helpers were daughters of Sapphira. Moreover, his requests for a balance sheet had been fruitless, though he admired the skill with which his curiosity on the subject was baffled.

For several days Amy had been angling for a cheque for one thousand pounds for the Moral Uplift Society. Usually he submitted to her exactions patiently. This time, however, she met with a flat refusal until he had seen a balance sheet prepared by his own auditor.

Amy was annoyed, but had no misgivings as to the outcome of Tydvil's extraordinary stubbornness. On the previous evening she had given up an engagement to devote herself seriously to the matter. From eight o'clock until ten-thirty, when he fled to his room, still recalcitrant, and locked himself in—and her out—she had wrought with him faithfully. He had remained silent, sullen and unyielding under the ordeal by tongue.

All this may explain, if it does not excuse, the outburst of Tydvil Jones as his eyes ran over the columns of the

newspaper the maid had placed beside his plate. Suddenly he sat erect. He dropped his half lifted cup back into the saucer with a clash of china and jingle of silver that shattered the dignified silence of the room.

In both hands he grabbed the paper, and glared at it with incredulous eyes. It was no wonder he doubted their accuracy, for he read, under triple and flattering headlines, the following paragraph: "Members and friends of the Moral Uplift Society passed a hearty vote of thanks to Mr. Tydvil Jones, the well known philanthropist, at their monthly meeting yesterday afternoon. Mrs. Tydvil Jones, the president of the Society, read a letter from her husband in which he offered a donation of one thousand pounds to be used for any purpose the committee may direct. This is the third cheque for a similar amount which Mr. Jones has contributed to the funds of the society."

"That well known philanthropist, Mr. Tydvil Jones," read that paragraph three times before its enormity filtered thoroughly into his system. The third time, he read it standing up. The startled maid regarded her employer with wide-eyed concern. She thought he was choking, so suffused had his face become. Then the long suppressed volcanic eruption took place. Tydvil hurled the newspaper to the floor and ground it tinder his heel. This was bad enough, but his language..."It's an outrage!" he shouted. "A damned outrage and a damned conspiracy! Not a penny! Not one damned penny!"

Fate decreed that, at that moment Amy entered the room and both saw and heard her husband's demonstration. It was only when his wife had advanced towards the table that

he was aware of her presence. Not that that made any difference, Tydvil was beyond caring two hoots for Amy or anyone else.

Scenting battle, the wide-eyed maid fled—but not out of earshot. Amy advanced, showing no sign of emotion, and, stooping down, drew the newspaper from under her husband's foot. Deliberately she smoothed out the creases of the torn page, and quietly placed it on the table. Then, as quietly, she walked round the table and took her seat. She leaned back in her chair with her cold eyes fixed on his flushed face. There was a long thirty seconds' silence.

Then Amy spoke calmly, "I am waiting, Tydvil."

"For what?" he snapped.

"For your apology." Her eyes never left his for a moment.

"Then you'll wait a dashed long time!" He had leaned towards her with both hands resting on the edge of the table, and his out-thrust chin gave him an unusually bellicose air.

The lines about Amy's mouth hardened. Her lips compressed to a straight pink line, and there was cold fury in her grey eyes. Very few of her friends would have recognised "Dear Amy" at that moment.

"I think, Tydvil, dear," she said evenly, though the white knuckles clenched on the arm of her chair showed what it cost to control her voice—"I think, Tydvil, dear, that you have been overworking yourself. I will ask Dr. Morris to call this evening. Perhaps a holiday will be necessary.

"Morris, be hanged!" he snorted.

Amy raised her brows slightly. "Perhaps, my dear Tydvil," she knew of old how the reiterated "Dear Tydvil" grated,

"you will explain the cause of your irritation. Your conduct may be, indeed is, unpardonable." She waved a hand slightly and went on, "I am quite unused, as you know, to hearing such language. Neither am I used to being sworn at before my servants."

The statements were unassailable facts. Usually she would have side-tracked Tydvil into a defence that he had not sworn at her. But he was too full of wrath to be distracted by minor issues. He snatched up the crumpled paper and, in a voice that she scarcely recognised, he read that outrageous paragraph aloud. "What's the meaning of that infernal falsehood?" he demanded. "You know I have refused to subscribe to that den of racketeers. Eh? Eh?"

There was a nasty little smile on the corners of Amy's lips as she answered.

"The paragraph is quite in order, my dear Tydvil. It states what actually took place at our meeting yesterday." She paused, and the smile deepened. "Indeed, I handed the paragraph into the newspaper offices myself."

"Meeting—yesterday—afternoon!" He gasped his surprise with each word. "You told me you knew I particularly wished to be present. You told me yourself it was—postponed." Amazement struggled with his wrath.

Amy nodded slightly, quite unabashed. "I am quite aware of that, as I was aware that you intended to make a very disagreeable fuss over a quite unnecessary balance sheet. I most strongly object to your interference in matters in any of my societies that do not concern you."

Staring at her, open mouthed, Tydvil sank slowly back into his chair. "But the letter!" he gasped, "the letter..."

"I saw to that, too." She spoke as though humouring a petulant child.

Jones turned the revelation over in his mind. "Do you mean to tell me you wrote that letter yourself?" he said at last.

She nodded. "I typed it myself, and read it to the meeting. It was not signed, and no one saw it but myself."

"And," his voice shook with his rising wrath again, "you expect me to hand over that cheque!"

She nodded emphatically. "I most certainly do."

"Then let me tell you this," he shouted, thumping the table while everything on it jangled to his blows, "I'll see you to Jericho before I give you a farthing; and you can explain why as you dashed well please."

"After the publicity the matter has been given, you will find it rather awkward to say that you have changed your mind." Amy smiled her derision.

Jones pressed his finger furiously on the bell button. The maid arrived with a rapidity that would have excited suspicion had either combatant been in a mood to notice trifles.

He turned to her. "Tell Carter to bring round the single-seater," he said abruptly. "Tell him I wish him to drive me to the office." The girl vanished on the word.

Meanwhile, the tension between the two increased. Up till now, Tydvil's actions, to use diplomatic phraseology, had been merely unfriendly. The ordering of the car had been a declaration of war. Like some other good people, Amy's self-denial extended only to others. She had laid it down that the exercise of the walk along St. Kilda road to the city was

necessary for his health. Moreover, it set the staff an example of un-ostentation. Now, his ordering of the car was flat and flagrant rebellion.

When the maid disappeared, Amy said acidly, "I think, Tydvil dear, we have already settled the question of your using a car to take you to the office."

"Well, I'm unsettling it," he snorted. He picked up the paper and, turning a most aggressive back on his wife, he pretended to read.

Five minutes passed in strained silence. The maid returned. "The car is waiting, sir."

Before Jones could move, his wife said quickly, "Oh, Kate! Mr. Jones has changed his mind. Tell Carter to take the car back."

This was one of Amy's choicest methods of management. She relied for its success on Tydvil's horror of scenes, even in private, and felt certain he would shrink from a brawl before the maid. But, for, once, she had misjudged the extent of the revolt.

Jones sprang to his feet, and arrested the maid as she moved, with a barked "Wait!" The girl stopped. "If you convey that message, both you and Carter will be summarily dismissed. Bring me my hat and coat."

The girl hesitated, and looked at her mistress for guidance. She was between a horde of devils and a very deep sea. "Do you hear me!" thundered the voice of the master, and never before had she heard it with such a ring of fury. Suddenly she recognised that she was a spectator to a revolution. When, a minute later, she returned, Amy was sobbing, with her face in her plate.

"Oh, Tydvil! To think you would insult me before the maids!"

"I haven't begun insulting you yet!" he growled truculently. "Just wait a bit!" and he left without even glancing at her again.

That he reached his office by car instead of using his legs, added one more link to the chain of circumstances. He arrived just twenty minutes before the time his staff had learned to expect him, and saw certain things that were as unexpected as he was.

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Beside the door of Tydvil Jones's private office at the warehouse, was a railed enclosure containing a large writing table. This was presided over by Miss Geraldine Brand, who was a young woman of no small importance in C. B. & D. She was not only guardian of the door, but was Tydvil's private secretary and his link with the departmental heads.

The self-possessed and entirely adequate Geraldine knew as much of Jones's affairs as did his banker or his solicitor. Heads of departments paused at her desk and treated her as a fellow and an equal. From her they learned if their visits were propitiously timed.

Tydvil, who had tested her carefully, knew that she would correct lapses of English in his dictation, and that she knew how to keep silent in matters where silence was golden. She remembered nothing which she should forget and forgot nothing she should remember. Their relations were entirely impersonal. To him, she was a perfect instrument for his business needs. No one ever knew what Geraldine thought of Tydvil.

On the morning of the revolution, Geraldine arrived on the stroke of nine. In the inner office she spent a few moments patting a helmet of hair, more red than gold, into order. Systematically she surveyed the great oaken desk, saw the date stamp had been altered, straightened the wide blotting pad and glanced over, the pen stand. Then she opened one of the two office safes, and took from it two

basket of papers, one of which she placed on either side of the blotting pad. Satisfied that all was well, she seated herself opposite the leather padded chair for the first work of the day.

There was a long pause until she heard the sound of hasty steps approaching. A junior hurried in bearing a large bag, from which he sent an avalanche of letters on to the table in front of Geraldine. As the boy turned away, she halted him with a peremptory "Stop!"

He looked at her uneasily. "Listen, Jimmy," she said decisively, "this is the third time in a fortnight you have kept me waiting. If it happens again you'll be hunting another job—understand?" She cut short a glib explanation with, "No good, Jimmy! I've heard that yarn better told by a procession of your predecessors. Your job is to have the mail on this table at nine. Chase yourself!" The boy fled. With the deftness of long practice, Geraldine sorted the letters into piles. Some few she passed untouched to the blotting pad opposite. Then, taking a long, pliant blade, she swiftly cut envelope after envelope along three sides, leaving the contents undisturbed. As she cut them she stacked them neatly at her right hand.

She was so intent on her work, that the new-corner who had entered quietly, had ample time to enjoy the picture she made before a movement on his part impelled her to turn. The slight frown at the interruption changed to a smile as he walked round the table and, without ceremony, seated himself in the chair sacred to Tydvil Jones.

After the first glance, the girl had turned to her work again without speaking. The man watched her for a while as