

THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF
CLEVERNESS

Manuscripts, to receive prompt attention, should be addressed, "Editor of THE SMART SET."

CONTENTS

THE ASSAULT OF WINGS	Charles G. D. Roberts	1
VIRGIN ISLE	Florence Brooks	7
YOU NEVER CAN TELL	George Sterling	8
THE HOUSE IN DEMETRIUS ROAD. Part II	J. D. Beresford	9
UNDER THE SNOW	Richard Le Gallienne	42
PAS DE TROIS	Bias Casman and Mary Perry King	43
PRISON-MADE	Freeman Tilden	47
FORTY POUNDS OF GOLD	George Catton	55
HOUSES	Ludwig Lewisohn	61
PERTINENT AND IMPERTINENT	Owen Hatteras	62
THE WIDOW OF WASDALE HEAD. Play in One Act	Arthur Wing Pinero	63
A SPRING SONG	Robert Loveman	82
ONE MAN TO EVERY FAMILY	Evelyn Gill Klahr	83
THE SEA	Louise Driscoll	88
THE JOKE TOWNS OF AMERICA. Essay	George Jayenne	89
DEAD DREAMS	Blanche Shoemaker Wagstaff	95
THE WOMAN-AT-ARMS	Victor Starbuck	96
A MENIAL	Louis Livingston	97
SUNDAY NIGHT	Louis Untermeyer	104
THE TRIBE ON VACATION	Basil Macdonald Hastings	105
DELICATESSEN	Joyce Kilmer	111
IN A CELLAR	Donn Byrne	113
THE CALL	Faith Baldwin	120
HAMLET AND THE AMERICAN STAGE	George Jean Nathan	121
V—FOR VERA	Cid Carr	124
IN THE CASE OF BRADNER	Hugh Irish	125
WHY HE DIVORCED HER	Paul Hervey Fox	133
THE SIGNOR SEEKS ADVENTURE	H. D. Couzens	135
WILD SWANS	Skipwith Cannell	141
THE MULE DRIVER	Henry Herbert Knibbs	142
LE JUSTICIER. In the Original French	Jean de Kerleq	143
THE MIRACLE IN THIRTY-NINTH STREET WEST	George Jean Nathan	145
THE HARP, THE SACKBUT AND THE PSALTERY	H. L. Mencken	153

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A MENIAL

By Louis Livingston

"All men are created equal." As a political theory this is excellent. As a matter of everyday practice, it carries no weight whatever. America, in spite of its vaunted liberty, is full of the spirit of caste; and this "thriller" shows to what lengths it may be carried. Mr. Livingston is a new writer and this is his first story.

THE Senator's daughter had not yet recovered consciousness, but her brain was working as in a turbulent dream, and her eyes were open and staring, and seeing things in a vague sort of half-understanding way. She was quite still—had not moved a muscle of her body since she had been catapulted from the automobile to her present position, where she lay, huddled up in a heap, amidst dried autumn leaves and coarse, dead grass, by the side of a narrow road. It was a lonely spot on the Senator's country estate; a back road leading through a patch of woods, not far from the house, yet isolated and little used.

The girl appeared to be occupied in idle contemplation of the shocking scene that stretched before her glazed, uncomprehending eyes. There at the foot of a gigantic oak lay the remains of her father's new touring car, looking for all the world as if it had become involved with the tree in a deadly fight to the finish. It was plainly evident that it had been the aggressor, and that it had been repulsed and badly worsted. The tree had suffered but a trifling loss—a few patches of bark—while the automobile, with one wheel gone, rested on its side in complete disorder.

And, she mused, it was by all odds the best car that the family owned, or ever had owned. It was only two weeks old and had cost seven thousand dol-

lars. Yet, come to think of it, seven thousand dollars was to father by no means a forbidding sum. Recently he had cheerfully paid considerably more than that for her beautiful pearl necklace, his gift on the double occasion of her birthday and coming-out party. Father could buy another automobile. But he must order one equally good, or Paul would be inconsolable.

Paul had been quite mad about the new machine. He liked it better than any other he had ever driven. He said he would care for it so conscientiously that it would last for years and improve with age. But he had failed to figure on the possibility of a mishap, such as the foolhardy fight with the tree.

She had experienced one real ride in fast time, however; and the try-out had conclusively established the merits of the new motor. One day, when nobody was the wiser, they had opened it up, she and Paul, to seventy-two miles an hour by the new speedometer. But she had not slipped out from the garage alone with Paul on this particular drive. The Senator had taken charge of the present expedition.

The family had planned to close the country house on the following day, preparatory to moving into their Washington home for the winter, and the Senator had wished to cast a final glance over several improvements that were being made on his place, and to pay

two or three calls on nearby neighbors. So he had ordered up the new car soon after breakfast and bade his daughter accompany him. His wife was busy in her garden, so the girl took the seat in the tonneau alongside the Senator that was usually occupied by her mother. With Paul at the wheel, they were soon well on their way along the carefully kept private roads of the extensive estate. Then had come the crash. Strangely enough, it had been heard by no one.

The girl's undiscerning eyes fluttered away from the mangled wreckage and fell upon the prostrate forms of the two men. They seemed to be sleeping peacefully enough, although Paul's position looked none too comfortable, while one of her father's legs was bent beneath him in a most peculiar manner. What good-looking men they were, both of them, although of strictly opposite types. Her father had always been considered conspicuously handsome. She suspected, however, that his appearance might have attracted less notice had he not consistently bestowed the strictest attention to the very last detail of his attire. Though short and slight, he had an excellent figure, and dressed perfectly. What would Paul be like with such advantages!

Her father's iron gray hair was one of his most striking characteristics. Set off by a certain solemnity, a certain severity of expression and manner, it gave him a dignified and impressive air. He was forceful and peremptory toward all with whom he came in contact, and was held in awe by many. But not by his daughter. She never displayed lack of respect for his austere authority, and he never suspected that she often cherished private reservations. When she secretly rebelled at an injunction or prohibition, her father would be none the less in the dark than her trusting mother. They believed implicitly in the beautiful innocence and simplicity of the young girl, their only child. And she, for her part, had considerable affection for her parents, but hesitated not at all at the occasional necessity of pulling the wool over their adoring eyes. Sometimes she even felt

a sensation of sly amusement at their absolute ignorance of the real life and character of their own flesh and blood.

The unseeing gaze of the girl dwelt heavily on Paul. He lay eighteen or twenty feet from her father, crumpled up in an ungainly heap. Poor soul—what an awkward position! His legs were actually higher than his head. His hat was gone, but she did not object to that, as it was a comfort once in a while to see him out in the open with at least one detail missing of that hateful, demeaning uniform.

His hair was all tousled, his splendid, fair hair. Nobody had finer hair than Paul's, nor finer teeth, nor finer eyes, nor a finer physique. Yet, with all his physical attributes, this boy of the people was also endowed with mentality that was replete with splendid possibilities. Since, at her instance, he had taken to reading good books and trying seriously to educate himself, his improvement had been wonderful. For a long time he had avoided the contaminating influence of association with his confrères, and spent many of his free hours in solitary study.

Her recent absence at the seashore had caused her many pangs. She had missed Paul intensely. But the separation had not been entirely devoid of compensation. Daily she had driven—alone when possible, otherwise with some youthful companions—to the post office for his morning letter, and had then had reason to delight in the glowing evidences of his progress. The summer before he had written like a boy; but this year his letters, full of feeling, intelligence and humor, had been truly the work of a man.

Dreamingly she recalled the occasions when one or another of her girl friends happened to recommend to her a book that had thrilled their shallow imaginations—some new book, as a rule, of the rich, rapid and racy type—and how difficult it had been for her, at these moments, to suppress a derisive smile! Her days of enjoyment of light modern novels had long since passed. They were all based on love stories. And how petty seemed the fabricated affairs of

these fictitious characters when compared to the big, beautiful, tormenting, terrible life that she and Paul were living!

At length the busy, disordered brain began to clear. The young woman became partially sensible to her physical discomforts. Her gloved hand pressed one, then another spot on her aching body, remaining longest on one of her ankles. She was awaking to a realization of her injuries. Groaning with the effort, she struggled into a sitting position. She looked around; at first dazedly, then comprehendingly. Shrinking from the sight that met her eyes, she screamed in terror. The air became alive with her shrieks. She got herself to her feet, and shouted to the unconscious men: "Paul! Father! Paul!" She staggered from one to the other, standing for a moment over each, constantly calling their names and moaning to herself. She waved her arms in the air, pounded her sides, clutched at her hair. She prayed with distracted fervor. She called on God—remembered at this moment—for help and for mercy.

She reeled toward her father, sank at his side, and implored him to open his eyes and speak. His face was ghastly, but she saw that he was breathing, that he was not dead. She went to Paul. His face was nearly as white as her father's. And he was very quiet. She was terrified.

Paul's chest was rising and falling, softly but visibly. She knew that he, too, was alive; but how badly hurt he might be she trembled to think. There were no outward signs of injury.

He wore no overcoat, only his tweed livery. Not conscious of her actions, she took off her speckled fur coat and placed it over his twisted body, leaving herself to withstand the cold air dressed in a light autumn suit. Then she leaned down and grasped the coat again and dropped it aside on the grass. She sank down, sobbing and groaning, beside the chauffeur. She straightened out his hunched-up arms and legs. She unbuttoned his waistcoat, unfastened his collar and neckband, untied his tie. She gathered him in her arms, laid his head

against her breast, rubbed his hands, stroked his forehead, ran her fingers through his hair; the while weeping and crying, "Paul! Paul! Paul!"

She thought that she had heard her father move. She raised herself and went to him. There was no change. Sight of the grim, white face caused her to shudder anew. She noticed that one of his legs was doubled up beneath his body. With great difficulty she released it, unconscious of its disjointed limpness, but noticing the gasping sigh, as of relief, that simultaneously escaped his lips. The faint sound startled her; quickly she turned to his face; but he was apparently as insensible as before.

She looked at Paul, lying stark and still, and wondered if there were anything else that she might do. She could think of nothing. She ought to go for help. But would she be able to walk even as far as to within shouting distance of the house? She was afraid not. But she must! Somehow, she must! Her ankle hurt her terribly. Her body was covered with bruises. She felt pitifully helpless, and broke into a fresh outburst of weeping.

Suddenly she appeared to be seized by a new thought. Her entire attitude changed. Her tears dried on her face, as if frozen. The heavy, sodden expression was transformed in a twinkling to one of alert alarm. The eyes, swollen and shrunk by grief, took on a look that bespoke activity. She straightened up, turned her head toward Paul, then hobbled to him as fast as her wounds would allow and threw herself on her knees at his side.

At this moment the Senator recovered consciousness. His eyes opened; he stared around him. With his face distorted in pain he made as if to speak; but no sound came. He was startled by his daughter's actions. He lay back and watched.

She was evidently searching the chauffeur's pockets. Her hands ran in and out of his clothes. She drew forth a number of letters and rapidly scanned the handwriting on each. Some she dropped in her lap; the others—the ones she wanted—she crunched, as she came

to them, into a pocket of her own coat. She replaced the undesired ones.

Apparently much relieved, she was about to rise. Then another thought struck her, and again she commenced a search. This time she drew forth a gold watch and set about to open it. She inserted her nail in the aperture of the case and pressed at it and picked at it in frantic haste. Each time that her nail slipped there came a sharp cry of impatience; but at length her efforts were successful; a tiny photograph dropped in her lap. She picked it up and thrust it deep in the hidden recesses of her waist. She put back the watch. Then she began to talk to the chauffeur.

"Paul," she murmured, "Paul, wake up and speak to me. It is Bunny, your Bunny, Bunny who loves you."

Then she kissed him—kissed him on the eyelids, on the lips. She covered the inanimate form with her overcoat and stood up. Her father closed his eyes.

He heard her sigh and talk to herself inaudibly, then come and stand over him. He knew that her gaze was upon him, but in spite of the tempest that raged within he suffered not a muscle to quiver in his ashen countenance. Then she limped off, and was gone. She had set out for help.

He opened his eyes. He tried to rise, but fell back, shivering with pain. His hand went to his left leg. It was broken. He groaned in agony and impotent rage. For a moment, with gritted teeth ground together, with livid lips sealed and set, with the flash of blood in his distended eyes, he lay and glared at the chauffeur. Again he made an effort to get up, and again failed. He leaned toward the insensible man, as if trying to reach over the distance of three or four times his length which separated them. He stretched out his arms, and fell forward on his face. He seized a tuft of withered grass and jerked it out by the roots. His fingers, in search of something substantial to fasten upon, fluttered this way and that over the hard, scraggy ground. He found a frozen furrow and gripped it. It held. He pulled himself a yard or more. Other similar efforts

failing, he took to drawing his knee up and back, up and back, and shooting his toe along the ground, blindly feeling for a foothold by which to force his way ahead. The expression of his face and the movements of his arms and leg were like those of a man, ignorant of the art of swimming, who had been thrown into the sea by an enemy and was trying to flounder back to shore. His breathing was labored and lustful, like the panting of a foxhound mad for his prey.

His heavy overcoat greatly increased his difficulties. His uninjured leg constantly became entangled in the lining. But he was not conscious of this impediment, nor of his frightful pain. Governed only by one desperate determination, he fought his way ahead, inches at a time. His eyes never wavered from the object of his passion. The nearer he got the more savagely they glared. His mouth was opened wide, and his chin trembled; his head shook. His bursting breath blew in and out. The last few feet were passed in frenzied crawls. He reached out—and caught the bottom of his daughter's leopard skin coat. He pulled it to him and cast it aside. Gurgling oaths and horrible imprecations, he seized a booted foot. He tugged and dragged himself to the side of the other, and lay by him lengthwise.

He reached for the head, and struck the senseless man one and another and another feeble, ferocious blow full in the face. Then he drew himself up on his victim's chest and drove his fingers into the thick throat. He pinched and squeezed with maniacal satisfaction. First with one hand, then with the other, then with both, he maintained a deadly grip. The man's lids quivered. His eyes flickered open—and stayed open. For an instant they seemed to see. Then gradually they grew glassy. The face commenced to change color. The vicious clutch relaxed. The aching fingers had finished their work.

The Senator's daughter, judging by ordinary conditions, had not far to go: not more than half a mile. The way led through a deep thicket of woods along a

narrow, winding lane that seemed lonely and secluded, until it suddenly opened on an immense clearing where stood the great house and its companion buildings. The girl had in mind—her only concrete thought—the flower garden. That was where her mother had been, and might still be. The flower garden lay between the house and garage, slightly nearer than either. It was her goal.

But her progress was painful and slow. She was bruised and stiff. Each time that she put her weight on her left foot she whimpered in pain. Her ankle was severely sprained. Every little while, when she was forced to stop and rest, she screamed for help, only to have her cries smothered in the trees or carried back by the wind. She limped and hobbled along, and with thumping heart and fevered brain, wondered what was going to happen.

It was a blessing that she had thought of the photograph and letters. Were they to take Paul to his room and undress him, there would be a possibility of discovery, calamity. The letters were signed with her pet name, the name that he loved to call her by, but were in her well known handwriting, which somebody would be sure to recognize. How dreadful of him to preserve the letters, to carry them about with him! By the way in which he had remembered and repeated so many of her thoughts sent back to him from the seaside, she had suspected, in spite of his merry denials, that he had disregarded her injunctions as to the precaution of destroying letters. But it was a sign of his love!

And the photograph—a laughing snapshot taken in her bathing suit. It was the only picture he could have of her—a little one, cut down to fit in his watch. She need not have been so frightened about that. Nobody would be apt to open his watch. Except if he were to die! Oh, God! Could it be possible that Paul might die? What could she do? Aside from anything else, how could she go on, day after day, if she were in one world, Paul in another? She stopped at the roadside and shuddered with dread. Then she went on, telling her-

self that her lover was not going to die, that it was impossible, that God could not be so cruel.

Besides, he had been breathing quietly and regularly when she left him. He had been merely rendered unconscious, like herself, and would recover in the same way. It was naturally taking him longer because of his heaviness and the consequently greater shock of his fall.

But suppose he had been internally injured, as she had read of in cases of automobile accidents, by being thrown against the steering wheel before the car toppled over! Agitated by dire thoughts one moment, and comforted by consoling ones the next, the girl dragged on until she saw that she was not far from the end of the wooded road, whereupon she set up a series of loud cries for help. At length they were heard.

As she limped into the open, her mother, followed by a gardener, was in sight, running in her direction. She sank on the grass. Long before she could understand the words, she heard her mother's frightened voice.

"Daughter, daughter!" shrieked the Senator's wife, as she drew within earshot. "What has happened? Your father hasn't been killed?"

"No—they are unconscious."

"Where? What happened?"

"We had a blowout—just this side of the old cabin—Paul couldn't keep the car on the road—we hit a tree—all thrown out."

"Is your father badly hurt? Oh, God! Oh, God!"

"I don't know. No—I don't think so. Try to keep calm, mother."

"I will, I will. How are you? Are you all right?"

"Yes; I have a bad ankle, that's all."

"Nothing else? Are you sure? Your father—are you sure he is all right?"

"He was knocked unconscious—we all were—I came to sooner."

"What is to be done? We must get a doctor—there is no one in the stable or garage. James, you can run the little car?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Well, get Dr. Fisher as fast as you

gan. Don't stop to say a word to anybody."

And the man was off at a run.

"Daughter, dear, I will go on—you go to the house. Oh, I am so frightened! I have always been afraid that something like this would happen. Those terrible automobiles!"

"It will all come out right, mother," said the girl, still sitting on the ground. "Please don't be excited."

"Let me help you up, dear. Oh, you look dreadfully!" cried the older woman. "Are you sure you are not hurt? Go to the house and get your ankle bathed, and have them telephone for another doctor to come and take care of you."

"Yes, I will," replied the girl. "But please don't worry about me. Do go on—it will take you only a few minutes to walk there."

After more hurried exclamations and admonitions, the Senator's wife started to go to him; at first running, then walking, then running again. Her daughter watched her until she was hidden by the trees. Then, with a heavy sigh, she rose to her feet and followed.

The deed done, the Senator had fallen back on the grass, where he remained for a long time inert, his eyes raised to the sky, his intellect questioning his God. Spent by nervous and physical exhaustion, and racked by paralyzing pain, he fought against collapse. Should he succumb, several lives would be blasted. He prayed for the strength to save innocent and guilty alike from paying the toll of sin. Evidence of his act must be eradicated.

He turned to the dead man, and fingering the open lids, contrived to shield partly from sight the glazed and staring eyes. Laboriously he set himself to the ugly task of readjusting the linen collar and retying the necktie, thus hiding the impressions of his guilty fingers. He drew his daughter's coat completely over the corpse, and turned away in shivering relief. He looked at the worn spot in the tangled grass to which he must return, and, steeling himself against his increasing weakness, lurched forward and pushed on for the

first step of the way. But it was the only headway that he made. Strong as was his will and his purpose, the frenzy had passed and his mind was now acutely conscious of the convulsive shafts of pain that shot through his crippled frame. The fractured leg made every effort an agony. After a few futile attempts he lay still, his feet turned toward those of his victim close by. He could combat nature no further.

He heard a voice calling through the woods. It was his wife, crying his name. In a few moments she was weeping at his side. He heard himself request her to drag him away. She protested, and begged him again and again for assurance that he was not seriously hurt. He seemed not to hear her, and repeated his request. Not understanding, nor trying to, only anxious to serve her stricken husband, she bravely helped him to the spot where she supposed he thought that he would rest more comfortably.

Once there, he was able, in a dreamy, drowsy manner, to give a few monosyllabic replies to her more urgent and emphatic questions. Thus she learned that the chauffeur had broken his neck, and that her husband had been painfully but not fatally injured. After gleaning these facts she observed the silence that he dumbly solicited, and impatiently awaited the arrival of the doctor. But her daughter got there first.

When the girl had gained her feet and made the start to follow her mother she perceived that her short rest on the grass had done her no good. Her bruised body had grown stiffer and the swollen ankle more painful. She knew that she ought to direct her steps to the house, but an overpowering desire to return to the scene of the smash-up ruthlessly fascinated her into casting precaution aside and reassuming the arduous trip through the woods. It would have been impossible for her to go home and there quietly await the news. She was mad to know what had happened in her absence. Paul would be up on his feet, she was sure, probably commenting upon the perpetual treachery of tires. Then would come an opportunity for a crown-

ing display—to each other—of their remarkable powers of self-possession. They had always prided themselves on their ability to disguise, when not alone, by studiously suppressing all signs of self-consciousness, their excited sense of each other's presence. Their training in this direction would stand them in good stead today. Paul would flash to her a quick, sympathetic, warning look, and thereafter whatever words might pass between them would be perfunctory.

And she felt sure that her father would also be up and around. He would, in all likelihood, be discussing the whys and wherefores of the catastrophe. She only hoped that he would in no way hold Paul responsible. That was hardly to be feared, however, as the Senator had always thought the world of Paul. He had a habit of ungraciously commiserating with less fortunate people who sometimes experienced trouble with their motors by dilating upon the virtues of his own chauffeur—a wonderful mechanic, and the most expert and careful of drivers, whose cars were always in perfect order. He was enthusiastic about Paul, and proud of him—proud of him as of all his possessions, great and small. He was proud of his wife, a handsome woman; proud of his daughter, a fine girl; proud of his social position, second to none; proud of his eminence and power in the councils of his party; of his city house, country place, carriages, automobiles and cook. He invariably observed Paul's driving closely and was pleased with him in the same way that he might be with his chef for preparing excellent salad dressings. Paul was a good man in his capacity, in the eyes of his employer; but a servant, none the less.

He often expressed this estimate of his chauffeur's rank in a way that sorely wounded the girl. At the dinner table—at their intimate, formal little dinners of three—when her father spoke enthusiastically of Paul, she wondered what prevented the warm blood from flaming to her cheeks; but when he referred to him in belittling terms, as though he were a common menial, she turned cold in silent, angry rebellion. And she

would say to herself: "Wait, just wait, you hard, proud man."

With such recollections flowing unremittently through her tortured brain the girl pressed doggedly on. She suffered constant bodily distress but gave little thought to her physical condition. Her mind was on herself only in relation to the accident and its results. And to learn of these as soon as possible was the desire that controlled her senses. But she did not neglect to warn herself again to maintain, come what might, her accustomed demeanor of rocklike self-control. Her anxiety must be all for her father, as her mother's had been. There must be no danger of her betraying an unseemly interest in the fate of Paul.

She was drawing near. Another turn in the road and she would be almost there. She stumbled on in desperate impatience. Her heartbeats went faster. She was around the turn. Fifty yards more to go. She could see parts of the automobile. She broke into a running limp. She heard voices! In excitement and trepidation her heart pounded in her breast. She caught sight of her mother. She was talking to the Senator. Where was Paul? Never mind Paul; she would see him in a moment. If her father had revived, Paul certainly had. For the present she must concentrate on her father—greet him happily and affectionately. Her mother, sitting beside her prostrate husband, looked up and saw her.

"Why did you come back, you poor child?" she asked disapprovingly.

The girl paid no attention to the question, but limped up to them and cried:

"Father, thank heaven you are all right. You are not badly hurt? I was so afraid."

No response. Where was Paul? She must have passed by him. He was back of her, but she must not look around—not yet. She went on, in a light tone:

"Father, dear—" As she spoke, her eyes fell on his, and something gripped her in the throat. What a terrible expression! She had never before seen anyone look like that. Could he have struck his head in falling and lost his reason?

Paul! She *must* find out about Paul. Slowly she turned around. There was her coat, as before. But now it covered his entire body, head and all. What could it mean? A weight fell on her thumping heart. She told herself to keep cool, at all hazards. In another moment she was beside Paul. She stooped to lift the coat. Her father shouted hoarsely: "Stop! Stop!" And at the same instant her mother cried: "He is dead; I don't want you to look at a dead man!" But she heard neither. She drew back the coat—and saw the face.

After a single glance she straightened up, with her back to her parents, stared into space, swayed slightly from side to side, and struggled for the self-control, for the mastery over her emotions, that would save her. "He is dead. Oh, God, give me courage to bear up until I reach my room!" She fought back the thoughts of what Paul's death would mean to her. She strained for a sem-

blance of calm. She partly succeeded in dominating her feelings. Bravely, she started to face around. But, unfortunately, in turning she cast an involuntary glance at her dead lover. It was a case of one more look, in spite of herself.

Something had happened to Paul—something had been done to him! His face was discolored, his features distorted. That expression of agony had not been there before! This was not an accidental death! She turned on her father, ablaze with fury, horrified, maddened. Her eyes caught his. He gazed at her fearlessly, firmly; not guiltily but rather accusingly. There was hatred in his look—hatred and contempt. It brought her to a sense of her real situation. This was her own father, with whom she was doomed to live the endless days to come. . . .

"Henry!" cried the Senator's wife, looking up in alarm. "Virginia has fainted!" And she hurried to her daughter.

