

# TEA LEAVES

By HENRY S. WHITEHEAD

THE Spanish War had not yet broken in upon the late nineties when the great day came for Miss Abby Tucker—the day on which she deposited the last fifteen dollars which completed her Europe Fund. Five hundred dollars. At last the end of that desperate scrimping! Here was the price completed of a Cook's Tour, and an extra hundred for presents, every expenditure planned and polished to a hard brilliancy in the imagination-mill of a frugal little New England school-teacher.

Few people had heard of "nervous reactions" in 1897, but Miss Abby had one as she stepped out of the bank. Perhaps a too-steady diet of bread and tea had something to do with it. But for all her meager little body, Miss Abby possessed a soul above nervous reactions. She stopped, and drew several deep breaths when her heart began to flutter and race, but she soon dispelled the effects of her "turn" by the recollection that it was now only the beginning of the Easter Vacation. She had three whole months left in which to arrange the last, fascinating detail of her tour!

There was, for example, the Tower of London. There was also Stratford-on-Avon. There was Vesuvius, and the Temples at Paestum. Miss Abby did hope they might go to Paestum. That was culture! She had steeped her soul in culture, at second-hand, chiefly through the works of Miss Constance Fenimore Woolson, of which Sophia Granniss approved strongly. Miss Granniss, who taught English Literature at the High School, insisted, too, on the necessity of a sojourn on or near the Grand Canal, the study of the Doge's Palace, and at least slight cultural familiarity—as she called it—with the great Church of Santa Maria della Salute. There were, too, the pigeons on the Piazza. That Piazza! Miss Abby's thoughts carried her happily to all these, and to other, anticipated delights. There was the Campanile, and the Four Bronze Horses of San Marco. Napoleon, she knew, had either brought them there or carried them away! She never could remember which. She must look that up. Anyhow, they were there now to be gazed at. Sophia Granniss said that

the glimpse one had of Monte Rosa over in Italy, as one traversed the Gemmi Pass from Spiess to Kandersteg, was "sublime," and urged Miss Abby not to miss that whatever else she might do. "You simply must take that walk, Miss Tucker," she had remarked. "If you don't, you'll live to regret it. Now mark my words!"

The nervous reaction had gone about its business. Miss Abby picked her careful way along the muddy street to her boarding-house. It would not be necessary to crimp quite so closely during the last school term before vacation in June. Miss Abby gained a pound and a quarter during that term.

It was a happy period for her, what with its constant references to the guide-books she got in turn from the public library of the little Vermont town, the minute arrangements for her departure, and especially, the high lights of certain necessary purchases. These included a steamer-rug, a shawl-strap with a leather handle, which Sophia Granniss had insisted upon, and a new valise. Then there was finally the almost suffocating experience of drawing the four hundred dollars for Thomas Cook and Sons and sending it off in four postal money orders at one fell swoop.

The next day after the closing of school she went to Boston to interview the agent of the steamship line about her accommodations. Sophia Granniss had insisted that "the personal touch" in all such matters was absolutely necessary, and Miss Abby, feeling—a little goaded, went. She did not succeed in interviewing the steamship agent himself, although she inquired for him. She did see a very polite young English clerk, however. He was very polite indeed.

"I've come to see about my accommodations on board the *Ruritania* sailing the twenty-third, from Hoboken, New Jersey," began Miss Abby. The clerk smiled delightfully, Miss Abby thought.

"I'm sorry. There are no accommodations on board the *Ruritania*. That is a 'one-class' ship, you know, and Cook and Sons have booked her all up."

"Yes, thank you, I know that. You see, I'm going with that—ah—group. I only wish to make the arrangements about my cabin."

The clerk disclaimed responsibility.

"That, you see, is all arranged between the agency and the—that, ah—you—their clients, you know. I mean to say we only make over the entire ship to them and they make the individual arrangements."

Miss Abby was distinctly disappointed. The "personal touch" then, would involve going on to New York and interviewing Messrs. Cook and Sons. That was out of the question, impossible—financially impossible. She ruminated, a gloved finger against her lips.

"But I'm quite certain to have a cabin to myself, am I not?" she asked anxiously.

"Well, you see—I mean to say—that—ah—depends! Might I venture to inquire—ah—how much—hm! I—ah—mean to say—"

Miss Abby relieved the embarrassment of the young Englishman.

"I am paying four hundred dollars," she informed him.

"I fear—I really am afraid—that you wouldn't have the sole use of a cabin. These tours are very popular, you know, and there will be a good many people going. Probably they will pack you in, rather."

Miss Abby thanked him, and took advantage of being in Boston to visit her married sister in Medford. She returned two days later, regretting the certainty that at the price she had paid she could not have the privacy of even the tiniest cabin, but resolved that, come what might, the strong-minded Miss Granniss should keep her finger out of the pie from then on! It was to be *her* tour; not Sophia Granniss' Sophia Granniss had had hers!

At last the day of departure dawned. Several friends came to the station to see her off, proffering advice to the very last. The traveler for foreign parts sighed with relief as the train chugged its deliberate way out of the railroad station with stentorian whoopings from the engine-whistle. She settled herself luxuriously to the perusal of a newly-bought magazine, but the perusal was sketchy for her heart was singing within her exultantly.

**I**N A KIND of happy daze she braved the unaccustomed terrors of crossing New York City, of threading the mazes of an uncharted Hoboken, of finding the right pier, and finally, of making herself known to the tour conductor. If anybody had taken especial notice of Miss Abby—which nobody did—while the liner was slipping down the bay with her nose to the open sea, such person would have caught a glimpse of a perfect, whole-souled happiness.

She was, indeed, far too happy to be seasick! She ate every meal with a sound appetite, and she liked everything but the coffee. That was, to her boarding-house nurtured palate, altogether too powerful a drink, and she soon reverted to her more accustomed tea.

Her attention to the tea leaves diverted her fellow travelers greatly. By long practice she had become accustomed to mixing the tea about with her spoon so that the tea leaves would accumulate on the bottom of the cup, and then, deftly, she would drink the remaining tea and set the cup down with a kind of snap and peer at the picture on the bottom. She had acquired great skill in discerning the meanings in these omens! Now for the first time in her life, however, the patterns puzzled her. The word "bow" kept turning up with monotonous frequency. Sometimes it would be an arrangement of the tea-leaves like a tied ribbon; sometimes the very letters themselves made their appearance. One day she blushed to herself over the implication which she found. A queer little homunculus near the side of the cup bowed grotesquely to the figure of a seated figure at the bottom, and "beau" was inevitable! Miss Abby hastily disarranged this embarrassing scene with her teaspoon lest any prying, neighborly eye should see it too and, perhaps, think her somehow unmaidenly!

Then, too, the numbers four and seven would get themselves mixed in with the "bow" pictures. Miss Abby went the length of publicly interpreting this to mean, under pressure of onlookers, that when her beau appeared he would be forty-seven years of age. "Or," said she archly, "perhaps it means that I shall be forty-seven when he makes his appearance!" and she smiled at her fancy to the verge of blushing.

She enjoyed every minute of that propitious voyage.

At Gibraltar, she secured, after considerable bargaining with an opal-eyed nondescript, a lace mantilla for her cousin Emmaline in Bellow's Falls, and this at a price thirty-five cents less than

she had planned on for Emmaline's present.

This securing of presents for relatives and friends was part of a long-made plan. From Salvati's in Venice she added largely to her store in the matter of mosaic brooches. In Bavaria she loaded up her luggage with somewhat bulkier gifts for the juvenile nieces and nephews in the shape of wooden toy-animals.

Nearly every place contributed its quota to this impedimenta, until as the tour neared its end the list at last became complete. Every single present was bought. Everybody had been remembered. The list was checked.

It was not, indeed, until that tour drew to a triumphant close with what has sometimes been described as "Seeing England in Five Days," that it occurred to Miss Abby that in her concern for the others she had quite forgotten to expend the two dollars and a half which she had mentally set aside for the purchase of something for herself.

It was three days before the date set for sailing for home when this fact popped into her head. They were in London. The Tower had been viewed *en masse*. So had St. Paul's Cathedral, The Houses of Parliament, and Westminster Abbey, Poet's Corner and all! Hampton Court had got a glance. So had several other places of interest, which had passed under the breathless purview of those personally conducted. The next day they were to journey to Limehouse and London Docks. Miss Abby thought of her souvenir at luncheon. They had come back to their hotel direct from Trafalgar Square, the party joker, who had urged the conductor to show them Sherlock Holmes' house in Baker Street, having failed dismally! She decided that she would skip the regular program for the afternoon, and go shopping instead. It was the first item she had missed, that afternoon's fly-about.

At dinner, later, she seemed preoccupied. Bewildered among the riches of London town after a long shopping trip upon which she had looked at many things and had bought nothing, she had at last realized that she was "as good as lost," and had enquired of a policeman the shortest route back to the hotel. He directed her, and the route led through a narrow, dingy street, little more than an alley, connecting two great thoroughfares. She had been much nearer the hotel than she had imagined. She had traversed this short-cut about halfway when she came before a small shop on the corner formed by the intersection of

another alleyway. In the shop-window was displayed a miscellaneous collection of merchandise. There were ladies' watches, paper-cutters, bangles of many kinds, old rings, silver and wooden book-markers, pocketbooks, various set and unset semi-precious stones of dubious appearance, umbrellas, a lone lorgnette which appeared second-hand, and a bead necklace. This last caught Miss Abby's eye and she stopped to look at it. It was of medium-sized, pinkish beads. It was dusty and badly soiled, but it had a tiny gilt clasp which seemed to Miss Abby to set it off very well, and the beads themselves were well proportioned and nicely graded.

Miss Abby had always—all her life—wanted a pink bead necklace. Here was one, modest, commending itself therefore to the taste of a self respecting spinster a little past the first bloom of youth. This, too, it was probable, would be inexpensive, and that was a strong recommendation for it!

**M**ISS ABBY, always a cautious soul, took rapid stock of the small shop, and decided that it appeared respectable. In this process she glanced at the doorway, which bore the number forty-seven. She smiled, remembering the omen of the tea-leaves. Across the alleyway her swiftly roving eye caught a street sign. It was dingy and the lettering was almost obliterated, but seeing it, Miss Abby came very near to having one of her "turns." For the faded letters spelled BOW LANE!

She gasped for breath, pressed her hand against her fluttering heart, and entered the shop almost grimly. The proprietor, wiping the crumbs of a tea-cake from his narrow face, and aroused by the tinkle of the little bell which the opening of the door sounded in his back room, emerged from that mysterious recess.

"I'd like to look at that necklace, please," said Miss Abby, pointing to it where it hung in the shop-window.

The shopkeeper detached the necklace from where it hung on a wire, blew upon it to free it from the surface dust, and placed it on the counter. Miss Abby picked it up and looked at it closely. Save that it badly needed a good scouring it was precisely what she wanted.

"How much is it, please?" she enquired.

"Well now, nobody's asked to see that there necklace," remarked the proprietor, as he poked at it with a soiled forefinger, "since I bought this 'ere shop with its stock and fixtures, nineteen year now come Michaelmas. It was one bit

of the old stock at that, Miss. I'll let you 'ave it for—well—say sixteen bob. 'Ow's that, Miss?"

Miss Abby did some mental arithmetic. Sixteen shillings! That would be about four dollars—three eighty-four. That was rather more than she had planned to spend on herself. Then she remembered that this was Old England and not New England! Here one was expected to "bargain."

"I'll give you eight shillings," she said, crisply. . . .

They came to an agreement on the sum of twelve shillings, but Miss Abby could not quite bring herself to the point of closing the bargain and walking off with the necklace. She examined it again, the shopkeeper waiting in silence. It was fifty cents, or thereabouts, more than she had planned. Still!

She bought it at last, counting out the money carefully lest she make a mistake, and walked out with it wrapped up, in her pocket, in whitey-brown paper.

She went straight to the hotel and took the necklace to her room. There she prepared some warm suds and soaked it. She had to change the water more than once. At last it was clean. She rinsed and dried it thoroughly. It looked much better now. There was a kind of shine to the beads which was very attractive. Then she polished the tiny gilt clasp as well as she could. She laid it away after wrapping it up, when she had it as clean as she could make it, and descended for dinner on the dot. Three days later she was *en route* for home.

She took out her necklace several times aboard ship and looked at it. On the last evening aboard, the evening of The Concert, she wore it. No one noticed it, but that did not trouble Miss Abby. She had chosen it chiefly because it was plain and inconspicuous. She declared it with the rest of her purchases at the value of two dollars and eighty-eight cents. The inspector glanced at her and then took one perfunctory glance at the contents of her grip, now covered with "etiquettes" and pasted his little paster on the end, and she was "through."

She was well settled into her accustomed routine by Christmas. Her tour had supplied her with culture enough and memories enough to last her for the lifetime of more or less sordid drudgery which was the best she could possibly anticipate for the future. But Miss Abby wasted no time over gloomy anticipations. She accepted all of the few joyful things that came in her way and she

sang a little tune as she dressed for the Christmas party in her boarding-house. She put on the necklace last of all, and glanced at it with approval in the glass as it hung gracefully about her slim but by no means unbeautiful neck. Then, almost running, she went through the hallway and downstairs.

It was the usual country party. There were games, and a great deal of high-pitched conversation, and later, a substantial supper. It was long before the supper though that Miss Abby discovered the presence of a young man, a stranger to her, who seemed to glance at her in a certain way. She decided that the proper descriptive adjective was "respectful." He looked at her respectfully, with interest. She was strong-minded and she knew that she was thirty-seven, but when she caught him looking at her for the fourth time, she could feel her heart speed up again slightly, and she said "Oh!" almost out loud!

For this was a very nice-looking young man, this stranger. He was, she considered, about her own age, perhaps a trifle more mature. He was still young, though! He was dressed quietly, in good taste, and his patent leather shoes gave him, Miss Abby considered, quite an urban touch. There was a suggestion of the man-of-the-world about those shoes—a look of sophistication. Miss Abby found herself cataloguing him. He looked like someone in a bank. He looked as though he might be, on Sunday, a Superintendent of a rather modern kind of Sunday School. That kind of a young man.

Miss Abby's heart gave an unmistakable flutter later when she observed the young man, in polite conversation with their hostess, and approaching her where she sat on a sofa, under the guardianship of a tall India-rubber plant.

"Let me make you acquainted with Miss Tucker," said the landlady, on her arrival. "Miss Tucker, Mr. Leverett, of Bellow's Falls."

Mr. Leverett of Bellow's Falls bowed—a very nice bow, Miss Abby thought to herself. She murmured something appropriate to the introduction and Mr. Leverett sat down beside her on the sofa and began to talk pleasantly.

THEY put each other at ease immediately, without any conscious effort on the part of either. Almost at once the talk fell into a confidential tone, as though each had many things to say to the other—sometime! Miss Abby could not help telling herself that Mr. Leverett's still entirely respectful gaze

had something else behind it—something much more personal than the weather and the party, which topics had been so far exclusively discussed between them! There was a curious feeling, an indescribable kind of atmosphere, or glow, about those first few minutes of conversation, the kind of glow of which Romance is sometimes happily woven.

When Mr. Leverett switched from the weather and the party and very respectfully enquired if he might ask "a personal question," Miss Abby, while far from surprised, felt her heart give one of those little jumps which by now she had learned to associate with an "experience." She reassured herself with the consideration that there could hardly be any "personal question" of any grave import which could well be asked after five minutes' conversation on first acquaintance!

"Why, certainly," she replied, very brightly, and looked up at him almost quizzically.

Mr. Leverett—he really was, said Miss Abby to herself afterwards, a very nice young man—blushed, positively blushed.

"I thought, perhaps, you wouldn't mind my asking where you got that necklace you are wearing," said Mr. Leverett, without more than two stammers. "You see, I'm in the jewelry business over at Bellow's Falls, and I'm very much interested in anything like that. It's rather odd, that necklace."

Miss Abby, such is the human heart, was at once relieved and vaguely disappointed.

"It's only a little thing I bought last Summer in London," she replied, taking it off and laying it, warm from her pretty throat, in Mr. Leverett's hand. "It's pretty, I think," she continued as he looked closely at the necklace, "but it was very inexpensive. It's only a trifle."

"Hm!" remarked Mr. Leverett, still looking closely at the necklace, "do you happen to know what the beads are made of?"

"Why, really, I don't think I ever noticed exactly. But I've always supposed they were a kind of good imitation of coral, or perhaps of carnelian. I've thought several times I got a pretty good bargain, don't you?"

"I think they are something else. The beads are of a different texture from either coral or carnelian. I'd certainly like to look at them under a magnifying-glass. Would you, er—mind—ah—telling me. . . O please forgive me! You see I'm a jeweler, and I'm so much interested! I was actually going to ask you how much . . ."

Again Mr. Leverett blushed.

"That's all right," reassured Miss Abby, in an even tone. It's a perfectly proper question, I'm sure. I paid twelve shillings for them, about two dollars and eight-eight cents."

Mr. Leverett peered at the necklace closely, with a kind of professional squint as though he were looking at the works of a watch.

"If it were not too preposterous," he said, slowly, "I'd say they were something like pearls, a very finely-made imitation of pearls, and colored, of course, artificially, with that peculiar shade of pink which you naturally associated with coral or carnelian. Yes—very well made, indeed. You certainly got a tremendous bargain."

"How much should you say they might be worth?" It was Miss Abby who blushed this time.

Mr. Leverett cogitated this question, rolling the extended string of beads over and over in his hands.

"It's very hard to put a price on anything like these," he remarked at last, judiciously, "as you can easily see. They are very fine workmanship, almost 'ancient,' I should say. Beautiful work—beautiful! It is real jeweler's hand-work of the best quality. The clasp, and the metal string, and the exact piercing all show fine work. To get a set like these, made today, you would certainly have to pay—um—let me see! Well, I should be inclined to think, about five hundred dollars." Then, as she exclaimed, "I'll tell you what to do, Miss Tucker. Why not take them to Boston and have them properly valued? You could take them into one of the great jewelry stores like Muffen's, where they would be in a position to give you a proper estimate; to look at them with good glasses and all that. You see, these might be worth even more than five hundred dollars. I only made a very rough guess."

Miss Abby could hardly compose herself to sleep that night. Just suppose! Five hundred dollars! The complete expenses of her trip! It wouldn't be right; it would not be fair to the man in the little shop there in Bow Lane, London! Miss Abby had a New England conscience—an old-fashioned one, in good working-order! Still, she was no fool. If they were of some considerable value, it was just the man's sheer carelessness that had not found it out. He had confessed to having the beads for nineteen years!

It occurred to her that she had several days before school started up again, and a little morey in hand. She was not saving nowadays for a Europe Fund!

It doesn't cost such a terrible lot of money to get to Boston, and she could stay with her sister in Medford. She made up her mind to go, abruptly, and with this anticipated adventure clasped close, she fell quickly asleep.

The next afternoon Miss Abby was asking for an interview with a member of the firm at Muffen's jewelry store in Boston. She was received by a gentleman named Mr. Hay. He listened gravely to her story, took the necklace, and requested her to return the next morning at eleven.

She was promptly on hand and found Mr. Hay wearing an expression of restrained enthusiasm. He was very cordial, and received her as though he had known her for some time! Miss Abby sat, tight-lipped, awaiting the verdict.

"I have made a very careful examination of your necklace," said Mr. Hay, with some deliberation. "Two of our men in the store have also examined it at my request. We are at one in our conclusion. The necklace is of pink pearls, and these are among the most valuable of pearls when in perfect condition. A further and more exhaustive examination would have to be made, doubtless. But, as you said yesterday, you managed to get a real 'bargain.' I think I may tell you at once that we are prepared, in case you wish to dispose of the pearls, to give you our cheque for six thousand dollars."

Miss Abby uttered a little gasp. Her eyes were shining. But she was careful, even in that overwhelming moment, not to interrupt Mr. Hay, who had only paused, and seemed about to continue.

"At the same time," he added, "we feel unwilling to take any undue advantage of our comparative ignorance of the true value of the necklace. We therefore feel that we should advise you, definitely, to take this course—" Mr. Hay paused again, and continued:

"We suggest that you allow our offer to stand. We are ready to carry through that arrangement at any time. But we suggest to you that you take the necklace first to New York, to Dufane's, where Dr. Schwartz, the pearl-expert is employed. Show the pearls to him and get his valuation. We do not imagine that it will be less than ours; it may very likely be more. In that case, it will be to your advantage to sell them elsewhere."

Mr. Hay bowed Miss Abby politely out, and she emerged upon the street walking on air. She wasted no time. This was sound advice and she knew it. The next morning she bade her relatives good-bye and took the early train to New York.

Her interview with the great pearl-expert proved a very simple matter. She went straight to Dufane's, and told the first person she saw that she was bringing some pearls from Muffen's in Boston to Dr. Schwartz for valuation. She had not meant to deceive her interlocutor, but he gathered the natural impression that she was in the employ of the Boston jewelers, and she was shown in to Dr. Schwartz at once. He took the pearls and gave her an appointment for the next afternoon at two o'clock.

Leaving the great store she took, for the first time in her life, what she called "herdie," or four-wheeler cab, and was driven to the Grand Union Hotel. After dinner there, being tired, she said her prayers and retired at eight o'clock.

THE next morning dragged. She had arisen, according to her habit, bright and early, made her bed, eaten breakfast at an hour when no one else except an early-starting commercial traveler or two was in the dining-room, and was engaged in addressing picture-postal cards when the hotel chambermaid came in about ten o'clock. The maid gasped and beat hasty retreat, never before had she known a guest of the hotel to "do" her room herself!

Miss Abby, somewhat appalled at the prices in the hotel dining-room took her lunch at a small restaurant, and shortly thereafter went to keep her appointment at Dufane's.

She was agreeably surprised on entering that great store to be addressed by name. Wondering somewhat at this distinction, she followed her guide to the sanctum of the pearl-expert. Here a surprising exercise was taking place. It was a good-sized room, up three flights in the elevator, and it was filled with men; filled almost uncomfortably. There were men with beards and men without; tall, thin men, and short, fat men. She counted nineteen, though she could not be certain she had included them all, for they kept moving about in the most extraordinary way. Little groups and knots of men kept forming, breaking up, and re-forming again. Everybody seemed to be talking in every imaginable language, including the Scandinavian! But this was only the impression she got on her arrival. The talking and the group-shifting stopped abruptly at her arrival, and everybody present turned to stare at her. Miss Abby had never been so embarrassed in her life! Then Dr. Schwartz rescued her and showed her to a seat at the end of the long table which ran down the length of the big room.

The pearl-expert coughed slightly and said:

"Will you please oblige us, Miss Tucker, by telling us about this necklace; and first, if you please, how it came into your possession?"

Miss Abby told them.

When she finished her brief and matter-of-fact recital there was a moment of silence, silence that is, like the calm before the storm. Then the storm broke. A kind of roaring hum burst forth simultaneously from the throats of all the men present. Every one was talking at once; nobody listening. Miss Abby tried to listen, but it was too much for her. She was completely nonplussed for the very first time in her life. It seemed to her that some of these men whom she had never seen or heard of before were shouting at her! It was dreadful! It was like being plunged suddenly into a meeting in a madhouse. The little groups formed afresh, only more rapidly now. Men gesticulated, and shouted at the tops of their voices. Two dark-skinned gentlemen who gesticulated more than any of the others seemed at one moment to be about to begin a duel, but they ended this demonstration very queerly, Miss Abby thought, by clasping each other in their arms and kissing each other! A phlegmatic gentleman with a thick, guttural accent, was waddling up and down the whole length of the room, much like a caged polar-bear, and waving his arms like flails all the time. He was rumbling, in his deep voice, "incredible, incredible, incredible," over and over again.

Even Dr. Schwartz, to whom she looked as her anchor in this tumultuous sea—even Dr. Schwartz was waving his arms about, and shouting with the rest!

It occurred to the distracted Miss Abby that perhaps she was going to faint. While she was wondering, Dr. Schwartz, who had waved his arms and shouted, after all, to some purpose, succeeded in establishing something like quiet. "Gentlemen, GENTLEMEN!" he was shouting.

At last he prevailed, and in the comparative silence which ensued he addressed Miss Abby a second time:

"You will understand," he said, "my dear lady, that an event like this does not occur every day among jewelers. These gentlemen and I have all examined your wonderful necklace. We are unanimous in our opinion. There is indeed, no room for doubt. This necklace is unique. Not one of us was aware of its existence, that is for the past two

centuries, since it disappeared from the British Museum, in eighteen hundred and one. There is, I may inform you, really no criterion by which it may be properly valued. Will you look here for a moment; look through this glass—ah, here is the adjustment—yes, like that. Do you see?"

Miss Abby saw. It came abruptly into focus as she turned gingerly the adjustment-screw in the great magnifying instrument which stood upon the table, below the sight of which the tiny, gilt clasp was held in place by small clamps. She saw, but she could not speak. For she was petrified. The inscription, far too fine even to be noticed without the aid of a powerful magnifying agent, read:

#### ELIZABETH, FROM RALEIGH.

Miss Abby took a deep, deliberate breath, and read it aloud, slowly, in a tiny, clear and perfectly audible voice, not at all like her ordinary voice, in the midst of a dead silence. Miss Abby felt again as though she were going to faint. She could not be sure; she had never fainted before! But she needed air, badly, just then. She did not faint. She was too much interested to faint just then!

She listened very carefully to Dr. Schwartz, who seemed to be speaking in a very muffled, distant voice. He was saying:

"... So that Dufane and Company are prepared, in case you are willing to dispose of this necklace, to pay the sum of two hundred and fifty-thousand dollars. We feel bound to inform you, however, that if you care to hold it—your title is undoubtedly clear—and decide to offer it to the British Museum, it is not unlikely that. . . ."

Miss Abby did not wish to hear any more. She had heard enough, she thought. With lightning-like rapidity she reviewed the various estimates upon the value of the necklace: "Sixteen bob."—"Well, I should be inclined to think, about five hundred dollars."—that was Mr. Leverett. Then Mr. Hay: "We are prepared . . . to give you our cheque for six thousand . . ." And now—"Two hundred and fifty thousand dollars!" And it had cost her twelve shillings, twelve shillings, bargained for; argued over! She straightened up in her chair, and looked Dr. Schwartz in the eye.

"I will accept your offer," she said

simply. Then the bedlam broke out afresh. Men were crowding about her, pressing towards her . . . She fainted for the first—and last—time in her life.

The next evening she arrived home, tired out. The hotel bill had been rather more than she had anticipated, and with that and the railway fares nearly all her ready money was gone. In fact, she arrived at her boarding-house with precisely eight cents in coins and a certified cheque for two hundred and fifty-thousand dollars.

The first thing she did after removing her gloves, was to get a cup of tea. She needed the tea badly. When she had drunk it she noticed a large letter "L" in the bottom of the cup. It looked rather like the shape of Lucerne outlined in its lights in the evening as one gazed down upon that city from the heights of Mt. Pilatus—as Miss Abby had, in fact, looked down upon it three months previously. She sighed, reminiscently, and laid down her teacup.

In her bedroom she found a letter on the bureau. The postmark was Bellow's Falls. She opened and read it. It was from Mr. Leverett. He wrote to ask if he might have the privilege of coming over soon to call upon her. He suggested the next Sunday afternoon, if she were not otherwise engaged then. Miss Abby was not otherwise engaged. "I'll have those custom duties to pay," she thought, irrelevantly, as she finished her letter.

She stood there in her bedroom with her letter in her hand. The eight cents and the certified cheque lay before her, side by side on the mean little bureau which had served her now continuously for some thirteen years. Miss Abby looked back over those thirteen years with her mind's eye, looked back, and shuddered. They had been dreary years, those thirteen. Then she ventured to look forward into the possible future—a tiny peep. She glanced appraisingly at the bureau and about her room and out the window. Then, without so much as removing her hat, she read Mr. Leverett's letter through a second time, and glanced down at the coins and the cheque.

Miss Abby looked up from the very end of her letter, where Mr. Leverett had signed his name, modestly, without any flourish, and in the glass. She caught herself blushing.

"I believe I shall marry him," said she, in a whisper, and started to take the pins out of her hat.

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