

A Business Engagement

By JOHN WORNE

From his early youth Jiggins cultivated the hard-headed, common-sense side of his nature and firmly suppressed the dreamy and the mystical whenever it threatened to appear.

At the right moment he discreetly retired from business with a considerable amount of capital and became a financial magnate, with a taste for cornering articles of general consumption and selling at his own price. His "cornering" operations had been uniformly successful hitherto and the power of his capital had invariably crushed all opposition.

It was with a light heart, therefore, that he had entered upon the task of obtaining control of the supply of hairpins, with the object of selling them at a big advance and bring the womankind of the world to his feet. It was a stupendous scheme worthy of his great brain.

The scheme had at first promised well. He began quietly by buying up two or three hairpin businesses and supplying the article at a price ridiculously low, which, of course, involved a considerable loss to himself. Each day brought him the news of the failure of two or more firms. The market took fright, as markets do, and became unsettled; hairpin stock showed a downward tendency and the time approached when Jiggins would be the only man or woman who could lay his hand upon a hairpin.

But one morning, when he sent out a clerk with a check to buy up another business which had collapsed, the boy returned with the startling news that it had already been bought by somebody else, but the man in the office would not say who it was. Jiggins smiled a confident smile and reduced the price of hairpins by another cent per hundred and the market positively screamed with agony. He pitied the fool who tried to make headway against his bank account and signed a larger check, but the boy returned with this also; the business was not to be had at any price. "Very well," thought Jiggins, "we shall see," and, turning to his telephone, he sent the price of hairpins still further down all over the country.

Next morning when he reached the office he was told that his unknown competitors had made another cut in the price of hairpins. Jiggins sat for a time stunned. If this sort of thing were to go on every woman would have a stock of hairpins sufficient to last a century and his "corner" would be futile. He drew himself together and then he gave interviews to his agents through whom he had been able to spread a financial net over the world. Each brought the same news: Some secret immovable power was meeting him at every point. Some colossal mind, with a colossal purse equal to his own, was quietly check-mating him wherever he turned, and he was unable to locate it. If he could have found an individual responsible he would have felt less helpless.

Finally his right-hand man told him to try 494 Broadway, Hairpins Unlimited.

He jumped at the suggestion of a definite address, which surely meant a definite person. Putting his check book in his pocket he hurried out and drove to 494 Broadway, prepared to encounter the enemy face to face. He was himself again, smooth, diplomatic, alert. A brass plate informed him that Hairpins Unlimited was on the fourth story. He went up and knocked. A small boy opened a dingy door and he handed him his card.

The boy went and returned.

"You can have nine minutes and a half," he said. Jiggins realized that that precision showed the presence of the master mind which had dared to wrestle with his own. He followed the boy into a comfortably and daintily furnished room. The boy placed a chair and retired. Jiggins sat down. There was only a woman in the room and he looked round in some surprise. "I've come to see the manager of the company," he said.

She didn't look up, but replied: "Please wait one moment."

She went on writing and he tapped his foot on the ground impatiently. This was not the way he was accustomed to be treated.

"Kindly do not shuffle with your feet," she said abruptly. He started.

"My name," he said, is Jiggins; Josiah Jiggins."

"You are expected," she said and went on writing. Beyond that she did not seem impressed.

After about two more minutes she said: "I should be obliged if you would let me know when the manager can see me."

"Now," she replied, and looked at him keenly.

He rose, thinking he was going to be shown into another room.

"Please don't trouble to rise," she said. He sat down again, feeling smaller than he had ever done in his life.

This woman had an eye that quelled him.

"Well, sir?" she said inquiringly.

"I came to see the manager of Hairpins Unlimited."

"I am the proprietor; what is your business?"

"But"—he said, and gasped.

"You have come with a check book," she said curtly.

"Yes," he replied.

"You have decided to offer a large sum."

"You anticipate what I was going to say exactly."

"If I do not accept your offer you will be bankrupt in a week."

That was almost the literal truth. He realized that he must pull himself together and get a word in.

It was distressing to be taken off one's guard like this in a matter of business.

"Am I to understand—" he said, with a great effort to be cool and collected.

"That I am the head of the firm which is underselling you in hairpins? Yes," she said, without giving him time to complete his sentence.

He had prepared to lead up gradually by means of threats to a reasonable offer, but this bluntness put everything out of his usually well ordered head.

"You're a remarkable woman," he blurted out.

"I have five minutes to spare," she said sternly.

"You have guessed quite rightly what I came for."

"Then there is no need to explain it; need you stay longer?"

This was unbearable and not diplomacy. Honor forbade him to remain, but the thought of bankruptcy within a week prevailed, and she was a handsome woman. He pulled himself together.

"I was going to suggest," he said, "that no good seems likely to come to anybody from this cut-throat competition."

"Except to the consumer," she put in.

He pooh-poohed the suggestion that that should affect the question as between men and women of business and she did not press it further. Till he saw that she meant nothing by it his opinion of her fell; but he was reassured and it rose again. He smiled and they tacitly agreed in treating the consumer as a joke.

"Well, madam," he said (feeling that the form of address was out of place in the case of so charming a woman), "Well, madam, I do not know how it strikes you, but it occurs to me that in another week, even though I may be bankrupt, there will be such a large stock of hairpins in every household in the country that you will find it difficult to avoid the same fate. Nobody will take the things as a present by that time."

She smiled slightly, but said nothing.

"I have more respect for your business ability"—he bowed and she bowed in return. "I have—ahem! more respect for your business ability than to suppose that your object in this is to crush me without regard to what is to happen to yourself."

He was gradually making up his mind for a great stroke and felt more confident.

"I presume you alone are concerned in this admirable scheme?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"It was too complete—too—too—homogeneous, if I may use the word, to be anything but the work of one mind, and that, as I recognized at once, a mind of quite extraordinary capacity." She put her hand before her mouth to hide a coming smile and turned away a little.

"You will understand, of course, that I have met many remarkable minds in the course of my career."

"Yes," she said, "I have watched it."

This was gratifying.

"So many of such minds," she said, "find their way ultimately to the penitentiary."

"Only the inferior kind," he replied. "One can never respect the man who allows that to happen."

"It is so much a matter of luck," she said.

"Oh, no, I think not; I think not. Now I was once in partnership with a man—"

He stopped, remembering that there was no time to indulge in reminiscences, however much they were to his credit.

"I have not been in partnership with anybody since," he said, thoughtfully.

"You found the risk too great? The partner is apt to give the whole thing away?" she inquired.

The way she grasped his meaning was wonderful.

This was a woman in a million.

"Most men are fools," he said.

"And women?"

"I have not had much experience; such as I have had has created a favorable impression."

"I am glad," she said.

"Till to-day it was practically nothing," he said.

"I see," she replied, "you mean that you have a pretty high opinion of me?"

He was a little startled. "Yes," he said; "that is what I meant."

"I am accustomed to being told that by many people."

"And you deserve it," he said gallantly.

"Possibly," she replied airily; "have you any further suggestions?" And she looked up at the clock.

He had; but they couldn't be made in the sudden way she apparently intended.

"I have often thought that it is sometimes lonely when one is not in partnership."

"But safer," she said curtly.

"You never do anything great if you always play for safety."

"I am told that is the principle on which people marry."

"It may be," he replied; "it seems a good one."

There was a pause.

"I'm afraid I'm keeping you from your work," he said.

"You are," she replied.

He had never met such remarkable directness. He was enraptured.

"My excuse is that I have a rather important proposal to make." He arranged his necktie. "As I said before I have a very high opinion of your intellect."

"Yes," she said.

"And I have for some time been looking for a partner whom I could trust with the management of a fair share of my business."

"Such persons are difficult to find."

"They are; but I have come to the conclusion that I have found one."

"I was under the impression that you would have no business to manage by the end of next week."

"That depends," he said. "It has also occurred to me that for a man in my position who may at any moment be some unfortunate accident he involved in a colossal bankruptcy it is very useful to have a wife."

"Who may come forward at the proper moment before your creditors as the real owner of all your property; that is true," she said.

"You understand me perfectly. Now, on the other hand, you are liable at any moment to be made bankrupt, and I think you admitted that crushing me will very likely ruin you."

"There is a bare possibility."

"A possibility from which you will be freed if you have a husband to carry on the business in his own name. You keep the money; he incurs liabilities and the creditors get nothing. I think that is the law."

"Yes, roughly that is so," she said pensively.

"The alternative is that we cut each other's throats and both become bankrupt."

"You suggest that we should marry?" she asked.

"That is what I propose."

"It seems a reasonable compromise."

He went on in glowing terms: "Between us we control the whole market. United, we shall be irresistible. The world will be at our feet; for all practical purposes we should be king and queen of the country. It seems to me a proposition advantageous to both of us."

He bent over the table earnestly, but stopped, for she was not listening. She was engaged in some complicated calculation, occasionally putting down a note on the paper before her. He was about to go on, but she said: "I shall not require to hear you further. I have sufficient data to form a conclusion." So he waited for her decision. He felt more anxious than he had ever before even over his most gigantic company flotation.

At last she looked up and said, with some deliberation: "I am in the habit of making up my mind rapidly. You must not suppose I am always as slow as this. I have considered your proposal in all its bearings and it seems to me likely to lead to important results."

"Yes," he said impatiently.

"I think, on the whole," she said, "the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages."

"Then you will be mine?" he cried, with an unbusiness-like fervor which he regretted at once.

"I will be yours," she said firmly, "subject of course to the usual legal and ecclesiastical formalities."

"Of course," he replied, "subject to the usual formalities. Will you arrange about that, or shall I?"

She looked at the clock and replied: "I think we can settle that to-morrow. I can see you"—she consulted a dairy—"from 11:30 till 11:37 to-morrow morning."

He took out his pocketbook.

"I am afraid I am engaged at that time," he said; "can you give me an appointment between two and three?"

"Yes," she said, "2:15 till 2:25 will suit me excellently."

"That is better," he said. "Three minutes longer. I must not delay you." He took up his hat and rose to go.

"Pardon me," he said; "before going, as there are now no secrets between us, may I ask how you managed to undersell me?"

"Quite simple," she replied, smiling sweetly; "I was able to buy hairpins from you so cheaply that it was possible to lay in an enormous stock and practically give them away at a trifling expense."

He staggered back.

"Then these"—he pointed to a pile on the floor—"are really mine?"

"They will belong to the partnership now. Good-morning."

He left the room dazed, but wondering whether there was an economic fallacy underlying her scheme. However, no law of economics or any other law could prevail against such a woman, and he congratulated himself on the finest piece of work he had ever done in his life.

But in the midst of his joy there was a mysterious feeling that he had forgotten something, but he could not imagine what. As he reached the bottom of the stairs it struck him what it was.

"By Jove!" he said. "Of course!"

He went up again and knocked. The boy said she was not in. Clever boy that. He said he had only forgotten something; it would only take one second. So he was allowed to enter. She looked up, a little annoyed at the interruption.

"I am afraid I forgot something," he said with hesitation.

"Most unbusiness-like," she said sternly.

"Don't we—don't we—er—kiss—er—something?" he faltered.

"I suppose we do," she said. So they did.

FATE AGAINST THEM

LOVERS' ROMANCE SPOILED IN STRANGE FASHION.

Letters "Posted" in Hollow Tree Became the Sport of Squirrels—Each Probably Believed the Other to Be Untrue.

In the hollow of an old tree which they chopped down in a field near Richfield, N. J., recently workmen found two letters. The first was in a woman's hand. It said:

"Dear Jim—I got your letter all right the day it was left here—our little post office—but it is only now that I have had a chance to leave a reply. I think you meant what you said, although at times I have believed you were untrue. I have been watching since your letter came, and had a long wait before the opportunity arrived for me to slip out with the reply. I want to meet you some night—say, next Thursday—and we will both go away together. I will be all ready, and if you are not on hand and the letter is gone I'll be convinced that you don't want me. Then I'll go away myself, and you'll never again hear from me. Good-by.—Alice."

This was dated Wednesday, June 10, 1881. The other letter, written in a man's hand, was dated ten days later. It read thus:

"Dear Alice: I have waited so long for a reply that I have begun to think that you have gone back on me. I have come to the tree many times, and looked in vain for an answer. Night and day I have thought of you, wondering if it could be possible that you had forsaken me. I have heard all about the other fellow, but cannot make myself believe that you care for him. I will wait five days more. Then if I don't hear from you I will be convinced that I am not wanted. After that I will leave you alone to enjoy the happiness which you may find with him. I'll go far away from here and try to forget.—Jim."

There was a small opening in the tree about seven feet from the ground. From this opening the hollow, bored out by squirrels, ran clear to the ground. The woodchoppers believe that the missives fell or were dragged clear to the ground after they had been deposited in the "post office."

"Alice" and "Jim" were probably in the habit of leaving letters in the aperture, which could be taken out with the hand until the squirrels had bored up from the bottom and reached the point where the letters lay soon after the girl left her last message there. Both letters were crumpled and eaten away at the edges, giving rise to the belief that they were probably dragged down into the hollow trunk by the squirrels.

WOMAN BRAVES FROZEN NORTH.

Makes a Trip of 1,100 Miles on Snow shoes or Dog Sled.

After a trip of 1,100 miles through the unknown northland, Mrs. Beech has arrived in Winnipeg with her husband and son, none the worse for the trip, which was the longest ever undertaken by a white woman under similar conditions, says the New York Press. With 18 dogs, they left their homestead, north of the Churchill river on December 10, the trip occupying a little more than three months. Their adventures and the privations they suffered were far worse than they had expected.

Mrs. Beech is more than 55 years years old, and the trip was made against the advice of traders in the far north. She arrived, however, in excellent health. For the first week the snow was in first-class condition for fast time and they reached the Nelson river on the seventh day out. They found the river flowing, however, and crossing impossible. Food was scarce, and after 23 days in which they were close to starvation they were able to cross the river and obtain supplies from the Hudson Bay post.

For 45 days Beech and his wife and their son were continuously on snowshoes. The worst experience of the trip was from January 23 to 27, when the thermometer registered 60 below zero. The party managed to kill a polar bear, which provided needed food for the travelers and their dogs, the skin eventually being disposed of to the Hudson Bay company for \$30. Beech witnessed a queer Indian funeral on his way down. It was that of Chief Sinclair of the Norway House Indians, the body being followed to the grave by 3,000 members of his tribe.

Beech was once a prominent member of the Winnipeg grain exchange, but several years ago lost heavily on wheat, and then decided to go into the north country for rest and means of earning a livelihood.

HA-HAI I TOLD YOU SO.

"You took 'em off last week, ha! ha! And now you shiver in the breeze; Your eyes are red, O you're a sight; Go it, old boy! enjoy your sneeze. Oh, that's a frightful cold you have. But I've no sympathy, Oh, no! You took 'em off—ha, ha! old man, I told you so."

"Excuse me if I have to smile. It really tickles me to see That you are suffering this way. You should have given heed to me. It's all your fault, you were a fool. The fiddler you must pay, you know; Still you'll remember, if you think, I told you so."

"I know I've got an awful cold. By head is stuffed so very tight, I caddot speak a single word. Ad I can't open sleep at night. But I could stand de cold, by Gub! Without complaining ob by woe, If I could dodge the fools who say 'I told you so.'"

—Detroit Free Press.

TOO LATE TO BEGIN.



"Why did old Skinney insist that his wife should give away the bride when his daughter was married?"

"O! He said he'd never given away anything yet, and he was too old to begin!"—Northern Budget.

April.

A little bit of sunshine and
A little dash of rain;
A little frost throughout the land—
The fruit crop's failed again!"

—Washington Star.

At the Dance.

He—Miss Huggins has a great deal of color to-night.

She—She must have.

"Haven't you seen her?"

"No, I have not, but I knew you had been with her, and I see there's some red on your coat!"—Yonkers Statesman.

Spiteful.

Mrs. Bacon—Does your husband use a safety razor?

Mrs. Egbert—Yes, he does.

"Does he like it?"

"No, I don't think he does; I think he only uses it to spite me. I can't cut my corns with it at all."—Yonkers Statesman.

A Little Misunderstanding.

"Don't give me any rosy fairy tales about the business," said the proprietor of the musical show. "I want a bald statement of the attendance."

"Oh, it's all right about the front row," said the business manager, absently.—Baltimore American.

Those Seaside Sounds.

The Landlubber—Captain, did you ever hear me sing "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep?"

The Captain—No, sir; but the first days aboardship I heard you make a lot of other funny sounds with your throat.—Yonkers Statesman.

Of Course.

"What is the first thing a young lady should do at a formal reception?" asked the fair debutante.

"Arrange her back hair, of course," remarked her father, who had overheard the conversation.—Detroit Free Press.

Out of the Dim Past.

Samuel Woodworth had just written "The Old Oaken Bucket."

"Nothing in it!" he muttered as he read it over and reflected upon the probable price it would bring.

But posterity evidently found something in it.—Chicago Tribune.

Very Dull.

"She's not a very brilliant conversationalist."

"No?"

"No, we went to the theater together, and would you believe it, she never spoke a word while the play was going on."—Detroit Free Press.

Modern Advice.

"My boy," said the father, "never marry for money, but if you do—"

"Well, then what?"

"Marry one who is rich enough to bear the expenses of the divorce proceedings."—Detroit Free Press.

That Depends.

"You know, my dear boy, that we really gain by our trials in life."

"That depends altogether on the kind of lawyer you get to conduct 'em."—Baltimore American.

Up to Date.

"Is this flat thoroughly up to date?" asked the prospective tenant.

"Yes, ma'am," replied the landlord. "Even to a pay-as-you-enter arrangement."—Detroit Free Press.

Reverse English.

"Johnnie, don't stuff yourself so. If you eat properly you'll live long."

"Nothin' in that, maw. I'd rather eat long an' live properly."—Chicago Tribune.

When Conkling Posed.

When the first suspension bridge was thrown over Niagara there was a great and tumultuous opening ceremony, such as the Americans love, and many of the great ones of the United States assembled to do honor to the occasion, and among them was Roscoe Conkling. Conkling was one of the most brilliant public men whom America has produced; a man of commanding even beautiful presence, and of, perhaps, unparalleled vanity. He had been called (by an opponent) a human peacock. After the ceremonies attending the opening of the bridge had been concluded Conkling, with many others, was at the railway station waiting to depart; but, though others were there, he did not mingle with them, but strutted and plumed himself for their benefit, posing that they might get the full effect of all his majesty.

One of the station porters was so impressed that, stepping up to another who was hurrying by trundling a load of luggage, he jerked his thumb in Conkling's direction and:

"Who's that feller?" he asked. "Is he the man as built the bridge?"

The other studied the great man a moment.

"Thunder! No," said he. "He's the man as made the falls."—Putnam's Magazine.

Smokeless Powder Machines.

One of the most successful enterprises in Brunswick, Germany, is the manufacture of machines for the production of smokeless powder. The firm has recently received important orders, not only from European but more distant countries, for the equipment of factories for the manufacture of smokeless powder, gun wool, dynamite, celluloid, etc. In these plans the gun wool or collodian wool is manipulated with a mixture of cotton and sulphuric acid and changed into gun wool, which is the basis for the celluloid and the artificial silk employed in the manufacture of smokeless powder. The firm claims that this process was first made use of by their nitrate centrifugal, which has been so improved that the conversion of the ingredients into smokeless powder takes only half an hour to an hour.

Not the Right Name.

She was extremely bashful when she entered the florist's shop.

"I—I'd like to get some flowers for a young man's birthday party," she said, blushing a cherry red.

"Yes, miss," replied the polite florist, with a low bow. "How would sweet williams do?"

She was all confusion.

"I'm afraid they wouldn't answer," she faltered. "You see, he is not a William; he—he is a sweet Charlie."

Modernized Version.

Pythias had returned, just in time to save the life of Damon.

"Gee!" exclaimed Dionysius. "Boys when that story is worked into a play it will make a great hit."

"Most noble tyrant," said Pythias, venturing to correct him, "it's merely a sacrifice hit."

Many of the scorers, however, having only a superficial knowledge of the game, marked it down as a double play.

Why She Smiled.

"Nonsense! who told you Miss Pecks had a good disposition?"

"Why, she's always smiling. Doesn't that show a good disposition?"

"Not necessarily. It may simply show good teeth—and dimples."

Study at Home.

"Maud graduated from your cooking school last spring, didn't she?"

"Yes, but she's going to take a post-graduate course next fall."

"Going back to the same school again?"

"Oh, no! She's to be married to a poor young man."—The Catholic Standard and Times.

Seeing the Wind Blow.

Wind is air in motion. Sometimes you hear people declare on a sultry day that there is "no air." Of course, that is impossible; there is always plenty of air, but there is not always a wind. Strange to say it is possible to see the wind, if the right means are employed.

Take a polished metal surface of two feet or more, with a straight edge; a large hand-saw will answer the purpose. Take a windy day for the experiment, whether hot or cold, clear, or cloudy, only let it not be in rainy, murky weather.

Hold your metallic surface at right angles to the direction of the wind—i. e., if the wind is north, hold your surface east and west, but instead of holding it vertical incline it about 42 degrees to the horizon, so that the wind, striking, glances and flows over the edge, as the water flows over a dam. Now sight carefully along the edge some minutes at a sharply-defined object, and you will see the wind pouring over the edge in graceful curves. Make your observations carefully and you will hardly ever fail in the experiment; the results are even better if the sun is obscured.

Kindred Spirits.

Nothing is more certain than that our manners, our civilization, and all the good things which are connected with civilization, have in this European world of ours, depended for ages upon two principles, and were indeed the result of both combined; I mean the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion. The nobility and the clergy, the one by profession, the other by patronage, kept learning in existence even in the midst of arms and confusion, and while governments were rather in their causes than formed. Learning paid back what it received to nobility and priesthood, and paid it with usury, by enlarging their ideas and by furnishing their minds.—Edmund Burke.

Quiet Nights Assured.

"I see where some wizard has evolved a barkless tree," remarked the scientific boarder as he helped himself to the hot cakes.

"Great Jupiter!" exclaimed the comedian boarder. "Wouldn't it be a great benefit to the world?"

"What?"

"Why, if some wizard could evolve a barkless dog."