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**NOTHING.**  
A MODERN STORY OF  
THE WANTED BELLUM DAYS  
BY  
**JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH**  
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CHAPTER XII.  
What a beatification the world had magically undergone for him! Even the dismal pattering of the rain on the grassless dooryard had suddenly grown musical. The monotonous thud of the locust branches against the closed wooden shutters had lost their power to irritate. The sparks danced upward in the black throated chimney with fascinating scintillations. Neck or Nothing had been glorified by the unexpected coming of a girl.

He soared in temporary superiority to all that was rasping and incongruous in his daily life. The silver lining to his cloud was beginning to show. Rose tinted possibilities began to float in dazzling multiplicity before his eyes. From this precarious exaltation of spirit he

was suddenly hurled by that challenging question, "And you?" She looked at him with cool inflexibility, settled herself so far back in the big splint bottomed rocking chair that only the small pointed toes of her well worn boots touched the sunken bricks of the hearth, folded her plump hands with the air of one prepared to listen long and attentively and said, "Well?" in a coaxing, encouraging tone.

But it is not easy to relax shame locked lips. She beat an impatient tattoo with one foot.  
"I have told you all about myself, Strong, all about darling old daddy, fighting like a hot headed boy, and he 63 years old, all about the closed college, every professor in the army, all about Annabel's troubles, and now I think I am entitled to some return confidences."

"I have nothing to tell you."  
"Nothing to tell?"  
"Nothing."  
"Nothing to tell in these stormy times, when just to be a man is an extra privilege?"  
"Nothing."  
"What have you been doing since you carried off the first honors at college?"  
"Nothing."  
"What are you going to do?"  
"Nothing."  
"Well?"

A volume in four letters. He did not look at her. He knew just how full of scorn her bright, clear eyes were just then. He would have found it a pleasant relief at that moment to have marched up to the mouth of a loaded cannon. A second later he was grinding his teeth in impotent rage. His short hour of bliss was culminating in gloom and bitterness.  
With a slight forward motion she had set the heavy rocker in motion, and looking at him with concentrated interest said demurely:  
"You might take out a contract to supply the army with turnips. There is no risk in that."

He grew white to the very edge of his lips. She turned her bright, dry eyes from his tortured face to say in low tone confidence to the backlog:  
"And we need men so much right now."  
"Mamie!"  
It was the cry of a wounded animal. He looked at her across the broken brick hearth, with all the agony of his soul stamped on his face. The hot light in her eyes was quenched in sudden tears. She flung out her hands with a passionate gesture.  
"How could you disappoint me so? You promised me you would do great things for my sake, because I believed in you straight through. Your opportunity, such a golden one, has come. What are you doing with it? Rusting out, just rusting out, in ignoble ease, in disgraceful idleness. I never thought to have found you here. Of course I supposed you were fighting, but you loved your ease better than you did my good opinion!"

"Ease! Good God!"  
"Yes, ease, Strong Martin. Father, my darling, delicate man of books, is sleeping this moment, if he ever does sleep these awful days, on a pile of straw, I suppose, with snakes and things crawling all over his blessed body. Perhaps he tramped all day long on an empty stomach too. They say our soldiers are all half starved to death. But what do you care? And his shoes—father's, I mean. He made a picture of them in his last letter, for 'my diversion,' he wrote. It threw me into hysterics. The letter was written on wall paper too. But I'd rather, yes, ten thousand times rather, have him tramp all over the state of Virginia without any shoes at all on his feet than to stay at home and have the finger of scorn pointed at him. Bless his dear old heart! I made him two shirts out of the parlor curtains last week and sent them to him with some socks I knitted for him. I do hope they will fit him—the shirts, I mean, but they did look dreadfully corkerscrew, and perhaps, oh, perhaps, he'll get shot in one of those very shirts. But I don't

care, I don't care, he's doing a man's part, while you!"  
A hot rush of tears rendered her next words unintelligible. Strong sprang from his chair and began the circuit of the room like a hunted thing seeking a point of egress.  
"I am not worth one single tear from a good woman's eyes," he said, stopping in front of her and speaking in a stifled voice.  
From behind Miss Colyer's damp handkerchief assent came with cruel promptness.  
"I know you are not. Of course you are not. But I told you a woman had to make a fool of herself about somebody."  
"I will enlist tomorrow."  
"What for?"  
She emerged into view suddenly, with recovered composure.  
"Because you want me to."  
"That is an excellent motive. Strange it did not move you to enlist earlier in the action."  
"Mamie, will you hold your scorn in hand a few moments? It cuts like a whiplash. I want to say a few words in self defense."  
"Well."  
He did not sit down. With his hands folded behind him he stood in front of her, resolved for this one time only to vindicate his attitude in words.  
"I don't think I am a coward. Perhaps I deceive myself, but I am not in sympathy with this thing. I think it is an accursed mistake from beginning to end."

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(To be Continued.)



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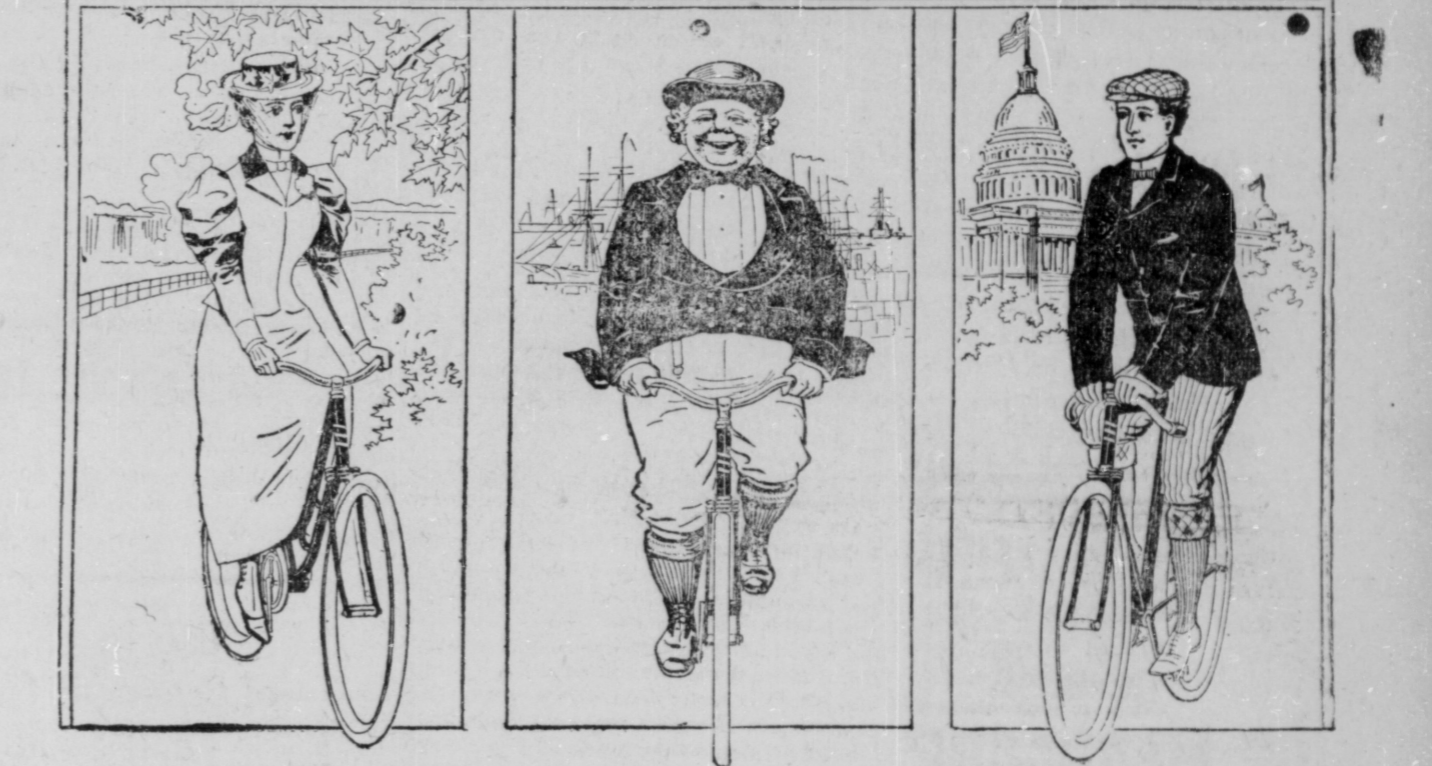
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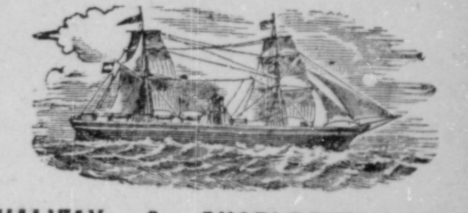


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