**The Enchanted Profile**

O. Henry

There are few Caliphesses. Women are Scheherazades by birth, predilection, instinct, and arrangement of the vocal cords. The thousand and one stories are being told every day by hundreds of thousands of viziers’ daughters to their respective sultans. But the bowstring will get some of ’em yet if they don’t watch out.

I heard a story, though, of one lady Caliph. It isn’t precisely an Arabian Nights story, because it brings in Cinderella, who flourished her dishrag in another epoch and country. So, if you don’t mind the mixed dates (which seem to give it an Eastern flavour, after all), we’ll get along.

In New York there is an old, old hotel. You have seen woodcuts of it in the magazines. It was built—let’s see—at a time when there was nothing above Fourteenth Street except the old Indian trail to Boston and Hammerstein’s office. Soon the old hostelry will be torn down. And, as the stout walls are riven apart and the bricks go roaring down the chutes, crowds of citizens will gather at the nearest corners and weep over the destruction of a dear old landmark. Civic pride is strongest in New Bagdad; and the wettest weeper and the loudest howler against the iconoclasts will be the man (originally from Terre Haute) whose fond memories of the old hotel are limited to his having been kicked out from its free-lunch counter in 1873.

At this hotel always stopped Mrs. Maggie Brown. Mrs. Brown was a bony woman of sixty, dressed in the rustiest black, and carrying a handbag made, apparently, from the hide of the original animal that Adam decided to call an alligator. She always occupied a small parlour and bedroom at the top of the hotel at a rental of two dollars per day. And always, while she was there, each day came hurrying to see her many men, sharp-faced, anxious-looking, with only seconds to spare. For Maggie Brown was said to be the third richest woman in the world; and these solicitous gentlemen were only the city’s wealthiest brokers and business men seeking trifling loans of half a dozen millions or so from the dingy old lady with the prehistoric handbag.

The stenographer and typewriter of the Acropolis Hotel (there! I’ve let the name of it out!) was Miss Ida Bates. She was a hold-over from the Greek classics. There wasn’t a flaw in her looks. Some old-timer paying his regards to a lady said: “To have loved her was a liberal education.” Well, even to have looked over the black hair and neat white shirtwaist of Miss Bates was equal to a full course in any correspondence school in the country. She sometimes did a little typewriting for me, and, as she refused to take the money in advance, she came to look upon me as something of a friend and protégé. She had unfailing kindliness and a good nature; and not even a white-lead drummer or a fur importer had ever dared to cross the dead line of good behaviour in her presence. The entire force of the Acropolis, from the owner, who lived in Vienna, down to the head porter, who had been bedridden for sixteen years, would have sprung to her defence in a moment.

One day I walked past Miss Bates’s little sanctum Remingtorium, and saw in her place a black-haired unit—unmistakably a person—pounding with each of her forefingers upon the keys. Musing on the mutability of temporal affairs, I passed on. The next day I went on a two weeks’ vacation. Returning, I strolled through the lobby of the Acropolis, and saw, with a little warm glow of auld lang syne, Miss Bates, as Grecian and kind and flawless as ever, just putting the cover on her machine. The hour for closing had come; but she asked me in to sit for a few minutes in the dictation chair. Miss Bates explained her absence from and return to the Acropolis Hotel in words identical with or similar to these following:

“Well, Man, how are the stories coming?”

“Pretty regularly,” said I. “About equal to their going.”

“I’m sorry,” said she. “Good typewriting is the main thing in a story. You’ve missed me, haven’t you?”

“No one,” said I, “whom I have ever known knows as well as you do how to space properly belt buckles, semi-colons, hotel guests, and hairpins. But you’ve been away, too. I saw a package of peppermint-pepsin in your place the other day.”

“I was going to tell you all about it,” said Miss Bates, “if you hadn’t interrupted me.

“Of course, you know about Maggie Brown, who stops here. Well, she’s worth $40,000,000. She lives in Jersey in a ten-dollar flat. She’s always got more cash on hand than half a dozen business candidates for vice-president. I don’t know whether she carries it in her stocking or not, but I know she’s mighty popular down in the part of town where they worship the golden calf.

“Well, about two weeks ago, Mrs. Brown stops at the door and rubbers at me for ten minutes. I’m sitting with my side to her, striking off some manifold copies of a copper-mine proposition for a nice old man from Tonopah. But I always see everything all around me. When I’m hard at work I can see things through my side-combs; and I can leave one button unbuttoned in the back of my shirtwaist and see who’s behind me. I didn’t look around, because I make from eighteen to twenty dollars a week, and I didn’t have to.

“That evening at knocking-off time she sends for me to come up to her apartment. I expected to have to typewrite about two thousand words of notes-of-hand, liens, and contracts, with a ten-cent tip in sight; but I went. Well, Man, I was certainly surprised. Old Maggie Brown had turned human.

“‘Child,’ says she, ‘you’re the most beautiful creature I ever saw in my life. I want you to quit your work and come and live with me. I’ve no kith or kin,’ says she, ‘except a husband and a son or two, and I hold no communication with any of ’em. They’re extravagant burdens on a hard-working woman. I want you to be a daughter to me. They say I’m stingy and mean, and the papers print lies about my doing my own cooking and washing. It’s a lie,’ she goes on. ‘I put my washing out, except the handkerchiefs and stockings and petticoats and collars, and light stuff like that. I’ve got forty million dollars in cash and stocks and bonds that are as negotiable as Standard Oil, preferred, at a church fair. I’m a lonely old woman and I need companionship. You’re the most beautiful human being I ever saw,’ says she. ‘Will you come and live with me? I’ll show ’em whether I can spend money or not,’ she says.

“Well, Man, what would you have done? Of course, I fell to it. And, to tell you the truth, I began to like old Maggie. It wasn’t all on account of the forty millions and what she could do for me. I was kind of lonesome in the world too. Everybody’s got to have somebody they can explain to about the pain in their left shoulder and how fast patent-leather shoes wear out when they begin to crack. And you can’t talk about such things to men you meet in hotels—they’re looking for just such openings.

“So I gave up my job in the hotel and went with Mrs. Brown. I certainly seemed to have a mash on her. She’d look at me for half an hour at a time when I was sitting, reading, or looking at the magazines.

“One time I says to her: ’do I remind you of some deceased relative or friend of your childhood, Mrs. Brown? I’ve noticed you give me a pretty good optical inspection from time to time.’”

“‘You have a face,’ she says, ‘exactly like a dear friend of mine—the best friend I ever had. But I like you for yourself, child, too,’ she says.

“And say, Man, what do you suppose she did? Loosened up like a Marcel wave in the surf at Coney. She took me to a swell dressmaker and gave her *a la carte* to fit me out—money no object. They were rush orders, and madame locked the front door and put the whole force to work.

“Then we moved to—where do you think?—no; guess again—that’s right—the Hotel Bonton. We had a six-room apartment; and it cost $100 a day. I saw the bill. I began to love that old lady.

“And then, Man, when my dresses began to come in—oh, I won’t tell you about ’em! you couldn’t understand. And I began to call her Aunt Maggie. You’ve read about Cinderella, of course. Well, what Cinderella said when the prince fitted that 3Ѕ A on her foot was a hard-luck story compared to the things I told myself.

“Then Aunt Maggie says she is going to give me a coming-out banquet in the Bonton that’ll make moving Vans of all the old Dutch families on Fifth Avenue.

“‘I’ve been out before, Aunt Maggie,’ says I. ‘But I’ll come out again. But you know,’ says I, ‘that this is one of the swellest hotels in the city. And you know—pardon me—that it’s hard to get a bunch of notables together unless you’ve trained for it.’”

“’don’t fret about that, child,’ says Aunt Maggie. ‘I don’t send out invitations—I issue orders. I’ll have fifty guests here that couldn’t be brought together again at any reception unless it were given by King Edward or William Travers Jerome. They are men, of course, and all of ’em either owe me money or intend to. Some of their wives won’t come, but a good many will.’”

“Well, I wish you could have been at that banquet. The dinner service was all gold and cut glass. There were about forty men and eight ladies present besides Aunt Maggie and I. You’d never have known the third richest woman in the world. She had on a new black silk dress with so much passementerie on it that it sounded exactly like a hailstorm I heard once when I was staying all night with a girl that lived in a top-floor studio.

“And my dress!—say, Man, I can’t waste the words on you. It was all hand-made lace—where there was any of it at all—and it cost $300. I saw the bill. The men were all bald-headed or white-whiskered, and they kept up a running fire of light repartee about 3-per cents. and Bryan and the cotton crop.

“On the left of me was something that talked like a banker, and on my right was a young fellow who said he was a newspaper artist. He was the only—well, I was going to tell you.

“After the dinner was over Mrs. Brown and I went up to the apartment. We had to squeeze our way through a mob of reporters all the way through the halls. That’s one of the things money does for you. Say, do you happen to know a newspaper artist named Lathrop—a tall man with nice eyes and an easy way of talking? No, I don’t remember what paper he works on. Well, all right.

“When we got upstairs Mrs. Brown telephones for the bill right away. It came, and it was $600. I saw the bill. Aunt Maggie fainted. I got her on a lounge and opened the bead-work.

“‘Child,’ says she, when she got back to the world, ‘what was it? A raise of rent or an income-tax?’

“‘Just a little dinner,’ says I. ‘Nothing to worry about—hardly a drop in the bucket-shop. Sit up and take notice—a dispossess notice, if there’s no other kind.’”

“But say, Man, do you know what Aunt Maggie did? She got cold feet! She hustled me out of that Hotel Bonton at nine the next morning. We went to a rooming-house on the lower West Side. She rented one room that had water on the floor below and light on the floor above. After we got moved all you could see in the room was about $1,500 worth of new swell dresses and a one-burner gas-stove.

“Aunt Maggie had had a sudden attack of the hedges. I guess everybody has got to go on a spree once in their life. A man spends his on highballs, and a woman gets woozy on clothes. But with forty million dollars—say, I’d like to have a picture of—but, speaking of pictures, did you ever run across a newspaper artist named Lathrop—a tall—oh, I asked you that before, didn’t I? He was mighty nice to me at the dinner. His voice just suited me. I guess he must have thought I was to inherit some of Aunt Maggie’s money.

“Well, Mr. Man, three days of that light-housekeeping was plenty for me. Aunt Maggie was affectionate as ever. She’d hardly let me get out of her sight. But let me tell you. She was a hedger from Hedgersville, Hedger County. Seventy-five cents a day was the limit she set. We cooked our own meals in the room. There I was, with a thousand dollars’ worth of the latest things in clothes, doing stunts over a one-burner gas-stove.

“As I say, on the third day I flew the coop. I couldn’t stand for throwing together a fifteen-cent kidney stew while wearing, at the same time, a $150 house-dress, with Valenciennes lace insertion. So I goes into the closet and puts on the cheapest dress Mrs. Brown had bought for me—it’s the one I’ve got on now—not so bad for $75, is it? I’d left all my own clothes in my sister’s flat in Brooklyn.

“‘Mrs. Brown, formerly “Aunt Maggie,"’ says I to her, ‘I’m going to extend my feet alternately, one after the other, in such a manner and direction that this tenement will recede from me in the quickest possible time. I am no worshipper of money,’ says I, ‘but there are some things I can’t stand. I can stand the fabulous monster that I’ve read about that blows hot birds and cold bottles with the same breath. But I can’t stand a quitter,’ says I. ‘They say you’ve got forty million dollars—well, you’ll never have any less. And I was beginning to like you, too,’ says I.

“Well, the late Aunt Maggie kicks till the tears flow. She offers to move into a swell room with a two-burner stove and running water.

“‘I’ve spent an awful lot of money, child,’ says she. ‘We’ll have to economize for a while. You’re the most beautiful creature I ever laid eyes on,’ she says, ‘and I don’t want you to leave me.’”

“Well, you see me, don’t you? I walked straight to the Acropolis and asked for my job back, and I got it. How did you say your writings were getting along? I know you’ve lost out some by not having me to type ’em. Do you ever have ’em illustrated? And, by the way, did you ever happen to know a newspaper artist—oh, shut up! I know I asked you before. I wonder what paper he works on? It’s funny, but I couldn’t help thinking that he wasn’t thinking about the money he might have been thinking I was thinking I’d get from old Maggie Brown. If I only knew some of the newspaper editors I’d—”

The sound of an easy footstep came from the doorway. Ida Bates saw who it was with her back-hair comb. I saw her turn pink, perfect statue that she was—a miracle that I share with Pygmalion only.

“Am I excusable?” she said to me—adorable petitioner that she became. “It’s—it’s Mr. Lathrop. I wonder if it really wasn’t the money—I wonder, if after all, he—”

Of course, I was invited to the wedding. After the ceremony I dragged Lathrop aside.

“You are an artist,” said I, “and haven’t figured out why Maggie Brown conceived such a strong liking for Miss Bates—that was? Let me show you.”

The bride wore a simple white dress as beautifully draped as the costumes of the ancient Greeks. I took some leaves from one of the decorative wreaths in the little parlour, and made a chaplet of them, and placed them on née Bates’ shining chestnut hair, and made her turn her profile to her husband.

“By jingo!” said he. “Isn’t Ida’s a dead ringer for the lady’s head on the silver dollar?”