

WIRED LOVE:

**A ROMANCE
OF
DOTS AND DASHES**

BY

ELLA CHEEVER THAYER.

"The old, old story,"—in a new, new way.

DEDICATION.

**DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF A DEAR FRIEND BUT FOR WHOM THIS LITTLE
WORK HAD NEVER BEEN**

[Transcriber's Note. The dedication was printed in American Railroad dialect of Morse. It cannot easily be represented in ASCII as it requires dashes of different lengths]

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WIRED LOVE.

CHAPTER I.

SOUNDS FROM A DISTANT "C."

-. . . — .-. . . -.

Just a noise, that is all.

But a very significant noise to Miss Nathalie Rogers, or Nattie, as she was usually abbreviated; a noise that caused her to lay aside her book, and jump up hastily, exclaiming, with a gesture of impatience:—

"Somebody always 'calls' me in the middle of every entertaining chapter!"

For that noise, that little clatter, like, and yet too irregular to be the ticking of a clock, expressed to Nattie these four mystic letters:—

"B m—X n;"

which same four mystic letters, interpreted, meant that the name, or, to use the technical word, "call," of the telegraph office over which she was present sole presiding genius, was "B m," and that "B m" was wanted by another office on the wire, designated as "X n."

A little, out-of-the-way, country office, some fifty miles down the line, was "X n," and, as Nattie signaled in reply to the "call" her readiness to receive any communications therefrom, she was conscious of holding in some slight contempt the possible abilities of the human portion of its machinery.

For who but an operator very green in the profession would stay *there*?

Consequently, she was quite unprepared for the velocity with which the telegraph alphabet of sounds in dots and dashes rattled over the instrument, appropriately termed a "sounder," upon which messages are received, and found herself wholly unable to write down the words as fast as they came.

"Dear me!" she thought, rather nervously, "the country is certainly ahead of the city this time! I wonder if this smart operator is a lady or gentleman!"

And, notwithstanding all her efforts, she was compelled to "break"—that is, open her "key," thereby breaking the circuit, and interrupting "X n" with the request,

"Please repeat."

"X n" took the interruption very good-naturedly—it was after dinner—and obeyed without expressing any impatience.

But, alas! Nattie was even now unable to keep up with this too expert individual of uncertain sex, and was obliged again to "break," with the humiliating petition,

"Please send slower!"

"Oh!" responded "X n."

For a small one, "Oh!" is a very expressive word. But whether this particular one signified impatience, or, as Nattie sensitively feared, contempt for her abilities, she could not tell. But certain it was that "X n" sent along the letters now, in such a slow, funereal procession that she was driven half frantic with nervousness in the attempt to piece them together into words. They had not proceeded far, however, before a small, thin voice fell upon the ears of the agitated Nattie.

"Are you taking a message now?" it asked.

Nattie glanced over her shoulder, and saw a sharp, inquisitive nose, a green veil, a pair of eye-glasses, and a strained smile, sticking through her little window.

Nodding a hasty answer to the question, she wrote down another word of the message, that she had been able to catch, notwithstanding the interruption. As she did so the voice again queried,

"Do you take them entirely by sound?"

With a determined endeavor not to "break," Nattie replied only with a frown. But fate was evidently against her establishing a reputation for being a good operator with "X n."

"Here, please attend to this quick!" exclaimed a new voice, and a tall gentleman pounded impatiently on the shelf outside the little window with one hand, and with the other held forth a message.

With despair in her heart, once more Nattie interrupted "X n," took the impatient gentleman's message, studied out its illegible characters, and changed a bill, the owner of the nose looking on attentively meanwhile; this done, she bade the really much-abused "X n" to proceed, or in telegraphic terms, to

"G. A.—the."

"G. A." being the telegraphic abbreviation for "go ahead," and "the" the last word she had received of the message.

And this time not even the fact of its being after dinner restrained "X n's" feelings, and "X n" made the sarcastic inquiry,

"Had you not better go home and send down some one who is capable of receiving this message?"

Now it would seem as if two persons sixty or seventy miles apart might severally fly into a rage and nurse their wrath comfortably without particularly annoying each other at the moment. But not under present conditions; and Nattie turned red and bit her nails excitedly under the displeasure of the distant person of unknown sex, at "X n." But no instrument had yet been invented by which she could see the expression on the face of this operator at "X n," as she retorted, and her fingers formed the letters very sharply;

"Do you think it will help the matter at all for you to make a display of your charming disposition? G. A.—the—."

"I am happy to be able to return the compliment implied!" was "X n's" preface to the continuation of the message.

And now indeed Nattie might have recovered some of her fallen glories, being angry enough to be fiercely determined, had not the owner of the nose again made her presence manifest by the sudden question:

"Do you have a different sound for every word, or syllable, or what?"

And, turning quickly around to scowl this persevering questioner into silence, Nattie's elbow hit and knocked over the inkstand, its contents pouring over her hands, dress, the desk and floor, and proving beyond a doubt, as it descended, the truth of its label—

"Superior Black Ink!"

And then, save for the clatter of the "sunder," there was silence.

For a moment Nattie gazed blankly at her besmeared hands and ruined dress, at the "sunder," and at the owner of the nose, who returned her look with that expression of serene amusement often noticeable in those who contemplate from afar the mishaps of their fellow beings; then with the courage of despair, she for the fourth time "broke" "X n," saying, with inky impression on the instrument,

"Excuse me, but you will have to wait! I am all ink, and I am being cross-examined!"

Having thus delivered herself, she turned a deliberately deaf ear to "X n's" response, which, judging from the way the movable portion of the "sounder" danced, was emphatic.

"A little new milk will take that out!" complacently said the owner of the nose, watching Nattie's efforts to remove the ink from her dress with blotting-paper.

"Unfortunately I do not keep a cow here!" Nattie replied, tartly.

Not quite polite in Nattie, this. But do not the circumstances plead strongly in her excuse? For, remember, she was not one of those impossible, angelic young ladies of whom we read, but one of the ordinary human beings we meet every day.

The owner of the nose, however, was not charitable, and drew herself up loftily, as she said in imperative accents,

"You did not answer my question! Do you have to learn the sound of each letter so as to distinguish them from each other?"

Nattie constrained herself to reply, very shortly,

"Yes!"

"Can you take a message and talk to me at the same time?" pursued the investigator.

"No!" was Nattie's emphatic answer, as she looked ruefully at her dress.

"But your instrument there is going it now. Ain't they sending you a message?" went on the relentless owner of the nose.

At this Nattie turned her attention a moment to what was being done "on the wire," and breathed a sigh of relief. For "X n" had given place to another office and she replied,

"No! Some office on the wire is sending to some other office."

The nose elevated itself in surprise.

"Can you hear everything that is sent from every other office?"

"Yes," was the weary reply, as Nattie rubbed her dress.

"What!" exclaimed the owner of the nose, in accents of incredulous wonder. "All over the world?"

"Certainly not! only the offices on this wire; there are about twenty," was the impatient reply.

"Ah!" evidently relieved. "But," considering, "supposing you do not catch all the sounds, what do you do then?"

"Break."

"Break! Break what? The instruments?" queried the owner of the nose, perplexedly, and looking as if that must be a very expensive habit.

"Break the circuit—the connection,—open the key and ask the sending office to repeat from the last word I have been able to catch!"

Then seeing unmistakable evidence of more questions in the nose, Nattie threw the ink-soaked blotting-paper and her last remnant of patience into the waste basket, and added,

"But you must excuse me, I am too busy to be annoy—interrupted longer, and there are books that will give you all the information that you require!"

So saying, Nattie turned her back, and the owner of the nose withdrew it, its tip glistening with indignation as she walked away. As it vanished, Nattie gave a sigh of relief, and sat down to mourn her ruined dress. Whatever may have been her previous opinion, she was positive now that this was the prettiest, the most becoming dress she had ever possessed, or might ever possess! Only the old, old story! We prize most what is gone forever!

"And all that dreadful man's—or woman's—fault at X n!" cried Nattie, savagely. Unjustly too, for if any one was responsible for the accident, it was the owner of the nose.

But not long did Nattie dare give way to her misery. That fatal message was not yet received.

Glancing over the few words she had of it, she read; "Send the hearse," and then she began anxiously "calling" "X n."

"Hearse," looked too serious for trifling. But either "X n's" attention was now occupied in some other direction, or else he—or she—was too much out of humor to reply, for it was full twenty minutes before came the answering,

"X n."

At which Nattie said as fiercely as fingers could, "I have been after you nearly half an hour!"

"Have you?" came coolly back from "X n." "Well, you're not alone, many are after me—my landlord among others—not to mention a washerwoman or two!"

Then followed the figure "4," which means, "When shall I go ahead?"

"Waxing jocose, are you?" Nattie murmured to herself, as she replied:

"G. A.—hearse—"

"G. A.—*what?*"

"Hearse," repeated Nattie, in firm, clear characters.

To her surprise and displeasure "X n" laughed—the circumstance being conveyed to her understanding in the usual way, by the two letters "H a!"

"What are you laughing at?" she asked.

"At your grave mistake!" was "X n's" answer, accompanied by another "Ha!"

To convert a *horse* into a hearse is really an idea that merits a smile!"

As the consciousness of her blunder dawned upon her, Nattie would gladly have sunk into oblivion. But as that was impossible, she took a fresh blank, and very meekly said,

"G. A.—horse—!"

With another laugh, "X n" complied, and Nattie now succeeded in receiving the message without further mishap.

"What did you sign?" she asked, as she thankfully wrote the last word. Every operator is obliged to sign his own private "call," as well as the office "call," and "O. K." at the close of each message.

"C." was replied to Nattie's question.

"O. K. N. B m," she then said, and added, perhaps trying to drown the memory of her ludicrous error in politeness, "I hope another time I shall not cause you so much trouble."

"C" at "X n" was evidently not to be exceeded in little speeches of this kind, for he—or she—responded immediately,

"On the contrary, it was I who gave you trouble. I know I must certainly have done so, or you never could have effected such a transformation as you did. Imagine the feelings of the sender of that message, had he found a hearse awaiting his arrival instead of a horse!"

Biting her lip with secret mortification, but determined to make the best of the matter outwardly, Nattie replied,

"I suppose I never shall hear the last of that hearse! But at all events it took the surliness out of you."

"Yes, when people come to a hearse they are not apt to have any more kinks in their disposition! I confess, though," "C" went on frankly, "I was unpardonably cross; not surly, that is out of my line, but cross. In truth, I was all out of sorts. Will you forgive me if I will never do so again?"

"Certainly," Nattie replied readily. "I am sure we are far enough apart to get on without quarreling, if, as they say, distance lends enchantment!"

"Particularly when I pride myself upon my sweet disposition!" said "C."

At which Nattie smiled to herself, to the surprise of a passing gentleman, on whom her unconscious gaze rested, and who thought, of course, that she was smiling at him.

Appearances are deceitful!

"I fear you will have to prove your sweetness before I shall believe in it," Nattie responded to "C," all unaware of what she had done, or that the strange young gentleman went on his way with the firm resolve to pass by that office again and obtain another smile!

"It shall be my sole aim hereafter," "C" replied; and then asked, "Have you a pleasant office there?"

"I regret to say no." Then looking around, and describing what she saw—"a long, dark little room, into which the sun never shines, a crazy and a wooden chair, a high stool, desk, instruments—that is all—Oh! And me!"

"Last but not least," said "C;" "but what a contrast to my office! Mine is all windows, and in cold days like this the wind whistles in until my very bones rattle! The outward view is fine. As I sit I see a stable, a carpenter's shop, the roof of the new Town Hall that has ruined the town, and—"

"Excuse me,"—some one at another office on the line here broke in—and with more politeness than is sometimes shown in interrupting conversations on the wire—"I have a message to send," and forthwith began calling.

At this Nattie resumed her interrupted occupation of bewailing her spoiled dress, but at the same time she had a feeling of pleased surprise at the affability of "C" at "X n."

"I wonder," she thought, as she took up her book again, and tried to bury the remembrance of her accident therein, "I do wonder if this 'C' is *he* or *she*!"

Soon, however, she heard "X n" "call" once more, and this time she laid her book aside very readily.

"You did not describe the principal part of your office—yourself!" "C" said, when she answered the "call."

"How can I describe myself?" replied Nattie. "How can anyone—properly? One sees that same old face in the glass day after day, and becomes so used to it that it is almost impossible to notice even the changes in it; so I am sure I do not see how one can tell how it really does look—unless one's nose is broken—or one's eyes crossed—and mine are not—or one should not see a looking-glass for a year! I can only say I am very inky just now!"

"Oh! that is too bad!" "C" said; then, with a laugh, "It has always been a source of great wonder to me how certain very plain people of my acquaintance could possibly think themselves handsome. But I see it all now! Can you not, however, leave the beauty out, and give me some sort of an idea-about yourself for my imagination to work upon?"

"Certainly!" replied Nattie, with a mischievous twinkle in her eye that "C" knew not of. "Imagine, if you please, a tall young man, with—"

"C" "broke" quickly, saying,

"Oh, no! You cannot deceive me in that way! Under protest I accept the height, but spurn the sex!"

"Why, you do not suppose I am a lady, do you?" queried Nattie.

"I am quite positive you are. There is a certain difference in the 'sending,' of a lady and gentleman, that I have learned to distinguish. Can you truly say I am wrong?"

Nattie evaded a direct reply, by saying,

"People who think they know so much are often deceived; now I make no surmises about you, but ask, fairly and squarely, shall I call you Mr., Miss, or Mrs. 'C'?"

"Call me neither. Call me plain 'C', or picture, if you like, in place of your sounder, a blonde, fairy-like girl talking to you, with pensive cheeks and sunny—"

"Don't you believe a word of it!"—some one on the wire here broke in, wishing, probably, to have a finger in the pie; "picture a hippopotamus, an elephant, but picture no fairy!"

"Judge not others by yourself, and learn to speak when spoken to!" "C" replied to the unknown; then "To N.—You know the more mystery there is about anything, the more interesting it becomes. Therefore, if I envelop myself in all the mystery possible, I will cherish hopes that you may dream of me!"

"But I am quite sure you can, with propriety be called *Mr. 'C'*—plain, as you say, I doubt not," replied Nattie. "Now, as it is time for me to go home, I shall have to say good-night."

"To be continued in our next?" queried "C."

"If you are not in a cross mood," replied Nattie.

"Now that is a very unkind suggestion, after my abject apology. But, although our acquaintance had a *grave re-hearse-al*, I trust it will have a happy ending!"

Nattie frowned.

"If you will promise never to say '*grave*,' '*hearse*,' or anything in the undertaking line, I will agree never to say '*cross*!'" she said.

"The *undertaking* will not be difficult; with all my heart!" "C" answered, and with this mutual understanding they bade each other "good-night."

"There certainly is something romantic in talking to a mysterious person, unseen, and miles away!" thought Nattie, as she put on her hat. "But I

would really like to know whether my new friend employs a tailor or a dressmaker!".

Was Nattie conscious of a feeling that it would add to the zest of the romantic acquaintance should the distant "C" be entitled to the use of the masculine pronoun?

Perhaps so! For Nattie was human, and was only nineteen!

CHAPTER II.

AT THE HOTEL NORMAN.

Miss Nattie Rogers, telegraph operator, lived, as it were, in two worlds. The one her office, dingy and curtailed as to proportions, but from whence she could wander away through the medium of that slender telegraph wire, on a sort of electric wings, to distant cities and towns; where, although alone all day, she did not lack social intercourse, and where she could amuse herself if she chose, by listening to and speculating upon the many messages of joy or of sorrow, of business and of pleasure, constantly going over the wire. But the other world in which Miss Rogers lived was very different; the world bounded by the four walls of a back room at Miss Betsey Kling's. It must be confessed that there are more pleasing views than sheds in greater or less degrees of dilapidation, a sickly grape-vine, a line of flapping sheets, an overflowing ash barrel; sweeter sounds than the dulcet notes of old rag-men, the serenades of musical cats, or the strains of a cornet played upon at intervals from nine P. M. to twelve, with the evident purpose of exhausting superfluous air in the performer's lungs. Perhaps, too, there was more agreeable company possible than Miss Betsey Kling.

Therefore, in the evening, Sunday and holiday, if not in the telegraphic world of Miss Rogers, loneliness, and the unpleasant sensation known as "blues" are not uncommon.

Miss Betsey Kling, who, although in reduced circumstances, boasted of certain "blue blood," inherited from dead and gone ancestors—who perhaps would have been surprised could they have known at this late day how very genteel they were in life,—rented a flat in Hotel Norman, on the second floor, of which she let one room; not on account of the weekly emolument received therefrom, ah, no! but "for the sake of having some one for company." In this respect she was truly a contrast to Mrs. Simonson, a hundred and seventy-five pound widow, who lived in the remaining suite of that floor, and who let every room she possibly could, in order, as she frankly confessed, to "make both ends meet." For a constant struggle with the "ways and means" whereby to live had quite annihilated any superfluous gentility Mrs. Simonson might have had, excepting only one lingering remnant, that would never allow her to hang in the window one of those cheaply conspicuous placards, announcing:

"Rooms to Let."

Miss Betsey Kling was a spinster—not because she liked it, but on account of circumstances over which she had no control,—and her principal object in life, outside of the never-expressed, but much thought-of one of finding her other self, like her, astray, was to keep watch and ward over the affairs of the occupants of neighboring flats, and see that they conducted themselves with the propriety becoming the neighbors of so very genteel and unexceptionable a person as Miss Betsey Kling. In pursuit of this occupation she was addicted to sudden and silent appearances, much after the manner of materialized spirits, at windows opening into the hall, and doors carelessly left ajar. She was, however, afflicted with a chronic cold, that somewhat interfered with her ability to become a first-class listener, on account of its producing an incessant snuffle and spasms of violent sneezing.

Miss Rogers going home to that back room of hers, found herself still pondering upon the probable sex of "C." Rather to her own chagrin, when she caught her thoughts thus straying, too; for she had a certain scorn of anything pertaining to trivial sentiment. A little scorn of herself she also had some-times. In fact, her desires reached beyond the obtaining of the every-day commonplaces with which so many are content to fill their lives, and she possessed an ambition too dominant to allow her to be content with the dead level of life. Therefore it was that any happy hours of forgetfulness of all but the present, that sometimes came in her way, were often followed by others of unrest and dissatisfaction. There were certain dreams she indulged in of the future, now hopefully, now utterly disheartened, that she was so far away from their realization. These dreams were of fame, of fame as an authoress. Whether it was the true genius stirring within her, or that most unfortunate of all things, an unconquerable desire without the talent to rise above mediocrity, time alone could tell.

Compelled by the failure and subsequent death of her father to support herself, or become a burden upon her mother, whose now scanty means barely sufficed for herself and two younger children, Nattie chose the more independent, but harder course. For she was not the kind of girl to sit down and wait for some one to come along and marry her, and relieve her of the burden of self-support. So, from a telegraph office in the country, where she learned the profession, she drifted to her present one in the city.

To her, as yet, there was a certain fascination about telegraphy. But she had a presentiment that in time the charm would give place to monotony, more especially as, beyond a certain point, there was positively no advancement in the profession. Although knowing she could not be content to always be merely a telegraph operator, she resolved to like it as well and as long as she could, since it was the best for the present.

As she lighted the gas in her room, she thought not of these things that were so often in her mind, but of "C," and then scolded herself for caring whether that distant individual was man or woman. What mattered it to a young lady who felt herself above flirtations?

So there was a little scowl on her face as she turned around, that did not lessen when she beheld Miss Kling standing in her door-way. For Miss Rogers did not, to speak candidly, find her landlady a congenial spirit, and only remained upon her premises because being there was a lesser evil than living in that most unhomelike of all places, a boarding-house.

"I thought I would make you a call," the unwelcome visitor remarked, rubbing her nose, that from constant friction had become red and shining; "I have been lonesome to-day. I usually run into Mrs. Simonson's in the afternoon, but she has been out since twelve o'clock. I can't make out—" musingly, "where she can have gone! not that she is just the company I desire. She has never been used to anything above the common, poor soul, and will say 'them rooms,' but she is better than no one, and at least can appreciate in others the culture and standing she has never attained," and Miss Kling sneezed, and glanced at Nattie with an expression that plainly said her lodger would do well to imitate, in this last respect, the lady in question.

"I am very little acquainted with Mrs. Simonson," Nattie replied, with a tinge of scorn curling her lip, for, in truth, she had little reverence for Miss Kling's blue blood. "Her lodgers like her very much, I believe; at least, Quimby speaks of her in the highest terms."

"Quimby!" repeated Miss Kling, with a snuffle of contempt. "A blundering, awkward creature, who is always doing or saying some shocking thing!"

"I know that he is neither elegant nor talented, and is often very awkward, but he is honest and kind-hearted, and one is willing to overlook other deficiencies for such rare qualities," Nattie replied, a little warmly, "and so Mrs. Simonson feels, I am confident."

Miss Kling eyed her sharply.

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