

# **AN AMBITIOUS MAN**

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An Ambitious Man by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

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**ELLA WHEELER WILCOX**

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*Ella Wheeler Wilcox*

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BY

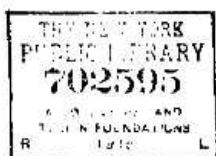
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# AN AMBITIOUS MAN.

## CHAPTER I.

PRESTON CHENEY turned as he ran down the steps of a handsome house on "The Boulevard," waving a second adieu to a young woman framed between the lace curtains of the window. Then he hurried down the street and out of view. The young woman watched him with a gleam of satisfaction in her pale blue eyes. A fine looking young fellow, whose Roman nose and strong jaw belied the softly curved mouth with its sensitive darts at the corners; it was strange that something warmer than satisfaction did not shine upon the face of the woman whom he had just asked to be his wife.

But Mabel Lawtonde was one of those women who are never swayed by any passion stronger than worldly ambition; never burned by any fires other than those of jealousy or anger. Her meager nature was truly depicted in her meager face. Nature is oftentimes a great liar and a cruel jester, giving to the cold and vapid woman the face and



form of a sensuous siren, and concealing a heart of volcanic fires, or the soul of a Phryne, under the exterior of a spinster. But the old dame had been wholly frank in forming Miss Lawrence. The thin, flat chest and narrow shoulders, the angular elbows and prominent shoulder blades, the sallow skin and sharp features, the deeply set, pale blue eyes, and the lusterless ashen hair, were all truthful exponents of the unfurnished rooms in her vacant heart and soul places.

Miss Lawrence turned from the window, and trailed her long silken train across the rich carpet, seating herself before the open fireplace. It was an appropriate time and situation for a maiden's tender dreams; only a few hours had passed since the handsomest and most brilliant young man in that thriving eastern town had asked her to be his wife, and placed the kiss of betrothal upon her virgin lips. Yet it was with a sense of triumph and relief, rather than with tenderness and rapture, that the young woman meditated upon the situation. Triumphant over other women who had shown a decided interest in Mr. Cheney, since his arrival in the place more than eighteen months ago, and relief that the dreaded role of spinster was not to be her part in life's drama.

Miss Lawrence was twenty-six—one year older than her fiancé; and she had never received a

proposal of marriage or listened to a word of love in her life before. Let me transpose that phrase—she had never before received a proposal of marriage, and had never in her life listened to a word of love; for Preston had not spoken of love. She knew that he did not love her. She knew that he had sought her hand wholly from ambitious motives. She was the daughter of the Hon. Sylvester Lawrence, lawyer, judge, state senator, and proposed candidate for lieutenant-governor in the coming campaign. She was the only heir to his large fortune.

Preston Cheney was a penniless young man from the West. A self-made youth, with an unusual brain and an overwhelming ambition, he had risen from chore boy on a western farm to printer's apprentice in a small town, thence to reporter, city editor, foreign correspondent, and after two or three years of travel gained in this manner he had come to Beryngford and bought out a straggling morning paper, which was making a mad effort to keep alive, changed its political tendencies, infused it with western activity and filled it with cosmopolitan news, and now, after eighteen months, the young man found himself coming abreast of his two long established rivals in the editorial field. This success was but an incentive to his overwhelming ambition for

place, power and riches. He had seen just enough of life and of the world to estimate these things at double their value; and he was, beside, looking at life through the magnifying glass of youth. The Creator intended us to gaze on worldly possessions and selfish ambitions through the small end of the lorgnette, but youth invariably inverts the glass.

To the young editor, the brief years behind him seemed like a long hard pull up a steep and rocky cliff. From the point to which he had attained, the summit of his desires looked very far away, much farther than the level from which he had arisen. To rise to that summit single-handed and alone would require unremitting effort through the very best years of his manhood. His brain, his strength, his ability, his ambitions, what were they all in the strife after place and power, compared to the money of some commonplace adversary? Preston Cheney, the native-born American directly descended from a Revolutionary soldier, would be handicapped in the race with some Michael Murphy whose father had made a fortune in the saloon business, or who had himself acquired a competency as a police officer.

America was not the same country which gave men like Benjamin Franklin, Abraham Lincoln and Horace Greeley a chance to rise from the lower ranks to the highest places before they reached