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Little Stories of Courtship

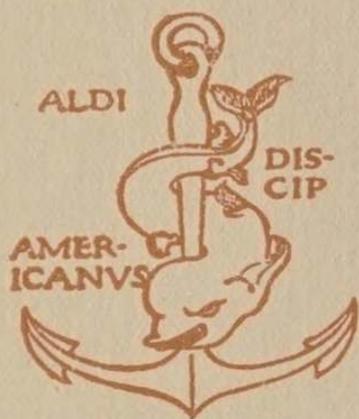


“Don't mention it,” said Mr. Belmore tranquilly; “it was more fun than a goat.”

Little Stories of Courtship

By

Mary Stewart Cutting

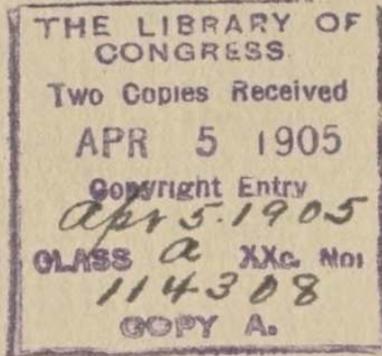


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Paying Guests

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A Practical Love Story

MISS ALETHEA BENNETT turned the corner by the drug store in a fierce gust of November wind, passing unnoticed as she did so the rather tall, thin and distinguished figure of a young man forging ahead with a long, swinging stride in the other direction. Other women's garments blew loosely against the horizon, but hers remained compact and trim, her brown cloth skirt well held together above her slender, prettily-shod feet, and the brown tendrils of her hair kept in place under her brown felt hat by the net veil she wore. She had that air of subdued and graceful modishness which was inseparable from her, although she was on her usual depressing errand of "getting something" for lunch. Luncheon was a fell meal, involving thought when you didn't expect to give it; it was constitutionally supposed to take care of itself from the provender of the day before, only to fall short of completion at the last minute when the butter, or the eggs, or the bread hadn't come, or the

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cold roast of mutton, which Bridget had vaunted as enough for "the whole bilin' of 'em," turned out to be a scrag of bone with a few scraps of meat adhering to it. Bridget was of a strictly economical frame of mind, with an imagination which turned two leaves of lettuce on a saucer in the ice-box into "the makin's of a salad" at any time, but she was a person on whose experience Alethea couldn't help relying confidingly, in spite of finding the support slip from under her almost daily; she had so little experience herself that she had to lean on some one.

To a woman who had spent nearly ten of her thirty years under foreign skies, with no greater responsibilities than to read and drive with a pleasantly invalided father, and to attend social functions with a pleasantly fashionable aunt, and assist at charming little teas in their own apartment, the process of keeping boarders in an American suburb, in the old house which had turned out unexpectedly to be her sole patrimony, was necessarily perplexing. She had agreed, if blindly, with her advisers, at the end of the year of settlement that followed her home-coming on the death of her two protectors, that it was quite providentially the thing for her to

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do when she had a house on her hands that was too big and unmodern to be either rented or sold. Her only alternative — and one not to be considered — was the home of a half-brother, across the seas in Naples, whose wife was distinctly antagonistic to “in-laws.”

But the bright Italian days were far from her thought at present. What should she get for lunch? That was the question. For herself she did not care; she had come to feel in the last two months that she could almost have eaten sawdust with a contented spirit if only her own comfort were involved, but when you had people in your house who paid for things — hungrily expectant mortals, shorn of responsibility — ! She had learned that a meal was a sacred thing, not to be held lightly. She gazed up and down the village street now in vain hope that the shops might suggest some unhackneyed article of food in an emergency.

There was the bakery, with the same chocolate and angel cake, and the two pies and small pink and white cakes which were always in the show window — mysteriously arid confectionery, both hard and crumbling, sandily suggestive of the desert. There was the fish man's, littered with oyster shells,

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past which you walked quickly. There was the butcher's, with two preternaturally long-necked and yellow-skinned chickens hanging dismally in the foreground, and there were the hardware and the fancy goods stores and the plumber's shop, before you came finally — as you always *had* to come finally — to the grocer's. One window of it now was unimaginatively given over to serried ranks of blue bottles containing mineral water, and the other to a chill green and white tea-set flanked by yellow packages of breakfast food, the acquisition of the former depending, as a notice set forth, upon the purchase of the cereal.

Even the inner shelves gave hint of nothing more available in a hurry than the cold canned salmon that was a confession of her incompetency. She was in the act of purchasing it when she turned at a voice beside her.

“Good-morning, Miss Bennett.”

“Oh, good-morning, Mrs. Fort,” said Alethea. She had but slight acquaintance in the place, but she recognized the speaker as a neighbour who was in her own line of work, and had been kind to her in little ways. She was a slight, gentle looking woman, dressed in black.

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“You are on the same errand I am, I see.” She held up a package. “I’ve been wanting to see you lately and find out how you’re getting along.”

“Oh, I’m getting along quite well, thank you,” said Alethea. She hoped she was telling the truth. “But I *don’t* seem to fill the house — it’s so far from the town.”

“Are the Meyerses with you yet?”

“Why, yes,” said Alethea, with that fearsome pang she was learning to feel at a hint of dissatisfaction. “Had they intended leaving? Mrs. Meyers has seemed so pleasant lately.”

“They’ve probably thought better of it,” said Mrs. Fort evasively. “I believe they did go to inquire about board at Mrs. Hurd’s, and they came to me, but lots of people like to inquire that way when they’ve really no thought of leaving. I told Mrs. Brulwyne the other day — I met her at her daughter Cora’s — to tell Mrs. Meyers that if anything was wrong to just speak to you, and I knew you’d make it right. I’m glad I met you now, I’ve just sent Mr. Conway to your house to see if you could take him. They have the measles at Mrs. Hurd’s and he has to leave on account of the choir. You must have passed him on the way.”

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“Mr. Conway — ?” asked Alethea.

“Yes, don't you know? He's the temporary organist at St. Mark's; he's only been here a few weeks. He's very nice, I know you'll like him.”

“It was very kind of you to send him to me,” said Alethea, the more resolutely because the prospect of sheltering a strange young man offended her. But what was she to claim an immunity beyond her fellows?

“His coming will please the Meyerses, anyway,” stated Mrs. Fort significantly. “Women do like to have a man in the house, and when it's Mr. Conway — ! They say he's gone on Florrie.”

“Oh!” said Alethea, unpleasantly enlightened. She hurried home, her heart sinking as she entered the house, for it was after twelve o'clock, and the Miss Cosletts, who were teachers, came home promptly. They were women who never complained, and it went to her heart to fail them. But to her surprise when she reached the kitchen she found Sarah already carrying in the dishes to the dining-room, and Bridget, whom she had left sourly dumb and lowering, cooking merrily now in the height of garrulous good humour.

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“Sure whin ye was so late I had to knock up something,” she explained cheerfully. “It’s what I’m always tellin’ you, there’s no sinse in buyin’ things continual for the likes of them, when there’s the makin’s of a meal in the house. ’Tis dollars I’m savin’ you where many another would have no conscience. Hurry and take this in, Sarah, and tell ’em there’s apple fritters comin’.” She gave a detaining wink to her mistress. “Bide you here for the minute, Miss Bennett. Sure they wants to be findin’ out from Sarah about the grand young man that’s just been after takin’ the corner room since you’ve gone. He said ’twas Mrs. Fort sent him, so I gave Sarah the tip that the price was eight a week in *advance* — and that’s a dollar more than you’d be askin’ yourself. He’ll bring his traps here this afternoon unless word is sent to the contrary. Sarah said as the ladies was all spyin’ out their room doors as she took him up and down. Just you hear Mrs. Meyers now — butter wouldn’t melt in the mouth of her.”

“It’s twenty-eight cents a pound,” said Alethea absently. “We can have salmon croquettes to-morrow, Bridget.” She added gratefully, “I’m *very* much obliged to you,

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Bridget, for taking charge so well when I was out.”

It was late when she finally nerved herself, as she always had to do, for the plunge into the presence of the feeders in the dining-room. The Miss Cosletts indeed were just leaving — tall, fair-haired, pleasant looking women, of whom Alethea would have liked to see more if they had not lived in an enclosure filled so obstructively with extra work and examinations and engagements that she could only shake hands with them, as it were, across the palings. For the rest, Alethea was sensitively quick to note any sign of disapproval, but to-day Mrs. Meyers, who gave the keynote, was all smiles. She was a heavily built person, with a narrow face, a high Roman nose and greyish sandy hair, rolled off her forehead. She wore gold eye-glasses and was usually arrayed, as at present, in an ancient silk or satin garment remodelled from the fashion of a past day. She had a large graciousness of manner as she said:

“You did not tell us that we were to have Mr. Conway here, Miss Bennett.”

“I didn't know it myself until just now,” said Alethea.

“The mean thing! He never breathed a

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word about it when I saw him last night," said Miss Meyers. "I know he just did it to tease me." She tossed her head coquettishly. She was a floridly handsome, large-featured girl with magnificent red hair and a brilliant complexion; if her lips were too full, her teeth were very white and continually in evidence. She wore a green shirt-waist of cheap material, with an exaggerated collar and belt, in the extreme of the fashion.

"Why, Florrie! When did you see Mr. Conway last night?" asked Mrs. Meyers, with a side glance at Mrs. Brulwyne, who was stretching out her small grey head, turtlewise, and under cover of the conversation surreptitiously spearing a fritter from the distant dish, although she had already one uneaten upon her plate.

"Oh, I only stopped him to say good evening," said Florrie airily, "he was coming out of the drug store with the Dawson girls. I knew he'd leave Mrs. Hurd's before long."

"It's because the little Hewlit boy has the measles," explained Mrs. Brulwyne, in a thick disagreeable voice. "I heard it at my daughter's this morning. You can pour some more chocolate in my cup, Sarah, that I had last time is too sweet. One thing is certain,

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Mrs. Hewlit will *have* to look after her child now, she's neglected him shamefully. Cora met her on the train going into town every single day last week. Of course you know she's going to get a separation from her husband, he has a fearful temper for all he looks so pleasant. They say he tore up six white starched collars the other day in one of his rages; the chambermaid found them on the floor, and he *almost* swore when she put them back on the chiffonier — he said they were frayed on the edges, and he'd been trying for weeks to keep them out of the laundry. As if that was any excuse!"

"Mr. Conway has a lovely disposition," proclaimed Mrs. Meyers, officially. "Of course, singing in the choir as Florrie does, she has every chance to know. Sarah, *I* will have some more chocolate as well as Mrs. Brulwyne, if you *please*."

"It's such fun to try and make him mad, said Miss Meyers, with a smile of reminiscence. "Have you met him, Miss Bennett?"

"No," replied Alethea. She had forgotten to eat anything herself.

"He's a nice looking young fellow, but I don't see what there is about him that is considered so attractive," said Mrs. Brulwyne,

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disparagingly. "They *say* he's gone on one of the Dawson girls."

"The idea! He hardly knows them," cried Miss Meyers, eagerly.

"I was going to tell you"—Mrs. Brulwyne's voice became deeper — "that just as soon as Cora heard there was a chance of Mr. Conway coming here, Miss Bennett — it was the grocer's boy told her — she went at once to the doctor's and asked if there would be any danger on account of my going backward and forward so much, but he said he thought it would be safe to try it, although he *quite* agreed with Cora that taking the children's temperature every two hours for the next ten days could do no *harm*. Of course she felt very much relieved. Cora just worships Dr. Baffy, he is so good with the children."

"Safe! Well, I should think so," said Mrs. Meyers, contemptuously, harking back to the text of the discourse. "The idea of trying to keep Mr. Conway from coming! — Sarah, are there *no* hot fritters? Then will you please hand the dish here? Miss Florence has had only one."

She gave a glance of extreme disfavour at Mrs. Brulwyne, who indeed presented a peculiarly indigent and unattractive appearance,

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due partly to the shapeless black gowns she wore, guiltless of collar or bow. She was not a pleasing person to have in the house. She had a miraculously absorbent power for any sort or kind of gossip, and she was inconceivably greedy, appropriating the larger portion of every dish that came upon the table. She spent the greater part of every day with her wealthy daughter, who had a large establishment around the corner, returning, however, for her meals. Rumour said that Mrs. Brulwyne performed the office of extra seamstress and nurse-maid there, and that her son-in-law, who refused to have her as an inmate, paid her board on these conditions. Alethea felt sometimes a sympathy with the son-in-law, much as she disapproved of him; there were hours when she could hardly bring herself to sit at the same table with Mrs. Brulwyne. She looked at her now, and wondered if she would get dulled to the situation in time, or if she would only mind it more — and then came back to the present with the voice of Miss Meyers.

“Mr. Conway is so fond of olives, Miss Bennett — I thought you’d like to *know* — and chocolate cake. A friend of mine — Mrs. Steers, I’m at her house a great deal — al-

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ways has a bottle of olives and a chocolate cake for him when he comes to read Italian with Mr. Steers. It was such a shame that he wasn't well enough to come last week; he wrote such a lovely note, saying how disappointed he was. I think fellows who are away from home appreciate little attentions like that, don't you? It gives them the home feeling."

"I suppose it does," said Alethea, with a mirthful flash.

"First impressions are so much," stated Mrs. Meyers, ponderously. "Sarah, you had better not put that salt-shaker at Mr. Conway's place to-night, it delivers rather freely; Miss Florence knows how to manage it. If we can assist you in any way, Miss Bennett, with your arrangements, at such short notice, I hope you'll let us know."

"If you want a large chair for Mr. Conway's room I can easily spare my big rocker," said Miss Meyers, affectionately. "He's so regardless of his own comfort. I know his ways so *well*, he'd never think of asking you for one. I wouldn't mind in the *least*."

"Thank you, there is an arm-chair in the room," said Alethea, with sedateness. Never had assistance been offered her before.

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As she went upstairs now to see that everything was in order for the new "guest," she knew that she ought to be very glad that another room was taken, to the possible furthering of paying one's mortgage and expenses. She was growing to feel with inward panic that she was not a good manager — as indeed how should she be one? She had never had anything to manage.

Alethea's had been a life distinctly dependent on the pleasure of others, while at no time appearing in a sacrificial aspect. She had been attendant always on her father and her aunt, and though in American society abroad she was spoken of as popular and admired, and supposed to have many lovers, yet her experience in that line, since her early youth, had been limited. She couldn't help wondering sometimes why this was so; there seemed to be a bright little enamel-like casing to her manner that kept people on the outside. Now, however, although up to her thirtieth year Alethea had been only the conventional young woman of society, poverty made it a very respectable age for depending in this way on her own exertions, although it annoyed her to have to explain this to people, for she looked much as she had done at twenty-

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five, and that was little different after all from the way she had looked at twenty, save for that touch of experience which time inevitably brings.

She had a supple figure, more beautifully rounded than in the days of her girlhood, a charmingly erect carriage, and a small oval face, with a proud upper lip, a pretty nose, slightly curved, soft dark eyes and soft dark hair that escaped into wavy tendrils. She had at once a delicate neatness and a delicate brightness about her. She had a certain quality of remaining passive until a ray from another consciousness reached her, when jewel-like she sparkled and glowed from every depth of her being.

Alethea was something on the order of the puzzle whose solution is to be found in trumpet, but not in drum, and in lettuce, but not in laurel. She felt tall, but was barely medium in height; she thought herself humble, but it was the humility of pride. She was sensitively unpractical in large matters, but felt capable of whatever work any other woman could do. She had that form of feminine courage which consists in being afraid of everything, and shrinking from nothing which offered itself as a duty. If she had been told to drive a pair

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of wild horses as a part of her woman's work she would have gathered her skirts decorously together as she stepped into the wagon, and though her small soft hand trembled on the reins that leashed her steeds for their mad flight, her eyes would have been steady with the inherited spirit in them of a long line of gallant ancestors. She was lonely, yet she would have died rather than offer herself for pity; she would assume rather that loneliness was the natural condition of life, and quite pleasurably expected. She was always generously ready to save sympathetic people from being sorry for her. Yet she was very unmodern for all; she had no ambition to earn money. She had no ambition to be independent. She was glad of the opportunity to earn her living, but if it came to *preference* — the natural desire of a woman to lie softly and live delicately with no effort of her own was ineradicably born in her. She would have liked to be taken care of, if love had gone with the care, better than anything else in the world.

Keeping a house for people who pay for their accommodation is not conducive to meditation. Alethea had had a change of mind from those inexperienced fore-

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castings when she had thought it would be so much easier to take "paying guests" than entertaining on a large scale — one would have only the meals, and, say clean towels, to look after. Her afternoon had been passed in the frustrated work incident on a collapsing stove-pipe, and another errand all the way into the town for a bottle of milk to be used in the unforeseen manufacture of a pudding. Alethea had sometimes a bitter feeling that a whole herd of cattle wouldn't obviate Bridget's daily necessity for extra milk.

She was just sitting in her room for a few minutes' rest when Sarah's voice announced that "the gentleman" was below.

"Very well," said Alethea.

She must go down stairs again. She rose to smooth her hair perfunctorily, and stood in front of the glass, her arms resting absently on the table. The gown she had on was of distinctly Parisian manufacture, although it was severely plain in its curves and folds; she had worn it first two winters ago, when — what was it that took her suddenly away from the scene, and transported her once more to Rome? She was at St. Peter's, with multitudes and multitudes and multitudes of people, and

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with multitudes crowding at the doors, and an old man in white robes with his hand outstretched in benediction.

Some one was playing on the piano downstairs! Alethea flew thither on light feet with an impulse that came from the old life that was hers no more; flew down the stairs breathlessly and into the darkening room of the winter afternoon, where a young man sat with his hands on the piano, playing. He paused to turn his head at the light step behind him.

“Oh, go on, go on!” cried Alethea, imperatively. “Those were the trumpets — it’s what they played at St. Peter’s when the Pope —” her eyes were fastened on his.

The young man nodded. “Yes.”

“Oh, *go on*, please!” she urged, with a deeply thirsting heart. She dropped into a low chair by the piano with her eyes fixed on his face, although she was not conscious of it. She was under the great dome once more, her father was with her, the gorgeous uniforms, the mass of colour from the swaying crowd, all of it came to her with those bright trumpet strains, that breathed of a childlike joy. And over all was the blue sky of Rome.

“Were you there last year?” he asked after

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a while, as his fingers touched the keys more softly in an old chant.

“No, it was the year before that.”

“So was I.”

“Oh,” her eyes glowed upon him. She was aware suddenly that he was young, that he was good to look at, and that he was of her world. “I’m so glad — it seems so long since I’ve met anybody. We spent a great many winters in Rome, my father and my aunt and I, but that last one my father was ill. Please go on playing.”

“I was there only that one winter, but I went back last Easter. I had friends — the Carletons. If you lived there so long you must have known them.”

“The *Carletons!* Why, *of course!*” She gave a joyous little laugh. “Every one knows the Carletons. But” — she looked mystified — “how do you happen to be here?”

He laughed. “Oh, I’m acting as substitute for the organist. My friend who has the position — Herbert Johns — is off for his health, and I’m just keeping the place for him in his absence. I’m waiting myself on a diplomatic appointment abroad. I hope to be back again in Rome this Easter.”

“Oh!” her eyes looked wistfully eager.

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‘Were you at Isabel Carleton’s wedding, perhaps?’

“I certainly was,” he asserted smilingly, his fingers lightly weaving into the wedding march. “You may have heard my name — Malcolm Conway.”

“The Carletons’s Malcolm Conway!”

She rose, as he did also, and stood gazing up at his smiling face, with the kind, deep-set dark eyes, the dark moustache and small pointed beard, as if it were the face of a friend. “Why, I should think I *had*! Oh, if you knew what it was to see any one from *that* life! I haven’t any friends here — we stayed away too long — it was a mistake. What is it, Sarah?” She broke off to go with her graceful, gliding step toward the beckoning figure in the doorway.

“Did you mane the chops for breakfast?” Sarah’s voice was a discreet whisper.

“Yes, I ordered three pounds.”

“’Twas only five chops come. The butcher he left the things on top of the ice-box whin Bridget had her back turned, and she’s only just after findin’ them.”

“I’ll go out and get some more at once,” said Alethea, with a heart which she sternly forbade to sink.

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“And we’ll want a dozen of eggs and a can of tomatoes and a yeast cake, Bridget says. She forgot when ye was out before.”

“Very well,” said Alethea in futile exasperation. Sarah was needed in the kitchen, and she would be obliged to carry these warring packages herself. Her arms ached already at the prospect.

Conway had stopped playing, and was standing by the window, and although he turned once more and smiled at her approach it was as if he had just remembered her presence again. Something had gone from the interview. He was holding an open pocket-book in his hand.

“I beg your pardon — I was looking to see if I had the wherewithal for my landlady,” he explained apologetically. “The maid impressed it on me with extraordinary firmness this morning that I was to pay *at once* in advance; probably the last man defaulted. I’m the most forgetful of mortals. I suppose I ought to see Miss Bennett, I sent up my name to her.”

“I am Miss Bennett,” said Alethea.

“I mean the Miss Bennett who keeps the house.”

“I am the Miss Bennett who keeps the

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house," repeated Alethea with a dignity which removed her into chill impersonal space. "You may pay me now, if you desire."

"Oh!" said Conway, staring. There was a dead pause. He hesitatingly proffered the bills he held in his hand, with sudden, stiff embarrassment.

"Is this correct?"

"Quite," said Alethea, receiving them in her white palm. Something burnt that palm, and choked her throat, and forced a scalding tide to her face; it was the first time in her life she had ever taken money from a young man. A delighted laugh from behind her emphasized a fact hitherto forgotten — he was the young man who was said to be "gone on" Florrie Meyers.

NOT another meal will I cook for that Mrs. Meyers — no, not if she got down and prayed me to!"

"But, *Bridget!*" Alethea looked imploring. "You can't mean that, you know I couldn't keep this house without you — and you've been *so* good." She spoke feelingly, there was something very human about Bridget.

"If you can get another to do your work you're welcome to. To say that the coffee was

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made with dirty water! Sarah does be tellin' me that not a meal goes by without her givin' me a black eye."

"Ah, and that she does," said the mischief-making Sarah, sympathizingly. "The tongue of her — !"

"'Tis she or I that can be going," said Bridget, still rampant. "No fault have I to find with you, Miss Bennett, that's a lady born — 'tis like me own mother ye've been to me — but not for no one will I slave for that Mrs. Meyers, and the fire in the range gone out on me since six o'clock this morning with the broken grate that I do be proppin' up with bricks continual till the knees is wore off me."

"O-oh!" said Alethea, enlightened at last. Bridget's complaints always crawled backward, crab-like, to their source. "I'm so sorry you had trouble with the range. I'll send for a man at once to fix it." She hastily escaped at the first gleam of peace only to find Sarah weeping on the stairs. "What *is* the matter?"

"Oh, sure, ma'am, it's Bridget that's takin' the heart out of me."

Alethea looked astounded. "Why, I thought you were such friends!"

"Friends—oh, ma'am!" said Sarah, deeply.

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“Since Mr. Conway give me a dollar last Saturday she’s that strained on me not a bite nor a sup will she let me have, but sets the food in the closet and stands with her back agin’ the door.”

“Well, never mind,” said Alethea, patiently. “I’ll see that you get something to eat after this, Sarah. You go for the stove man now and I’ll clear off the luncheon dishes in the dining-room.” She was conscious that it had been so far a particularly inauspicious day; it was the beginning of January, and cloudy and dark at midday; the roof had leaked with the weight of snow, and the coal hadn’t come to tone up the weak fire in the furnace. A group of her inmates were gathered now around the burning logs in the drawing-room, behind the portières. Alethea was too busy with her work at first and the clatter of the dishes to take note of the conversation, until familiar words forced themselves upon her ear:

“Of course I suppose she does the best she can, but when you *pay* for things, you do have a right to expect — Yes, it’s very trying.” Mrs. Meyers’s upraised voice showed that she had touched upon a subject of absorbing interest. “I *did* think that with a gentleman in the house, the meals would have improved,

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but there has been a great falling off in the last month. Miss Honora Coslett came in my room for a few minutes yesterday; you know she never complains, but she said she was just a *little* afraid her sister's health wouldn't stand it."

"What did you think of the butter giving out at the table again to-day?" said Florrie, with a laugh.

"I thought it was disgraceful," chimed in Mrs. Brulwyne. "*Did* you notice how hard the potatoes were at dinner? I had to try four before I found one that was eatable."

"Mine was done," said Mrs. Meyers, impartially, "but I know the potatoes are often hard—yes, often. I said to her last week, 'Miss Bennett, will you ask Bridget to cook the vegetables longer? When a person has a sensitive digestion like mine it makes such a difference.' She promised to see about it; she always *is* nice when you speak to her about things, I will say that, but they do *not* improve. The servants impose on her. It is even impossible to get Florrie's egg boiled properly; I *insisted* on her leaving it to show Miss Bennett this morning. What I object to mostly, however, is the lack of variety. They say Mrs. Hurd sets an elegant table."

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“Three kinds of dessert every night,” asserted Mrs. Brulwyne, with gluttonous intonation. “My son-in-law was very indignant when Cora told him what we were getting here lately, he says he always believes in getting your money’s worth, if it’s only a nickel. I will have to ask for a gas stove to dress by, the furnace gives so little heat.”

“Well, poor Mr. Conway went out of the house hungry last night,” said Florrie, lightly. “The beef Sarah brought him was done to a cinder. I wanted him to send it back again, but he pretended it was all right, so as not to hurt *her* feelings, of course. I just made a joke of it, to please him. Did you see the look she gave us when we were laughing together?”

“No,” said Mrs. Brulwyne, yawning.

“Well, I think she acts awfully queer about him,” continued Miss Meyers, interestedly. “Mother has noticed it, haven’t you, mother? Anything to attract his attention! Shouldn’t you think a woman as old as she is would know better? And she’s *so* inconsiderate, letting him carve that tough chicken for her the other day, when a *musician* has to be so careful about straining his hands. You know she hardly ever speaks to him at the table, but one

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day when he was alone in here, playing some queer thing on the piano, she dashed right in and said, 'Oh, you know I can't stay away when you play that!' I followed right behind to ask what it was, and he got up from the piano and said, 'I should never play it for *you*, Miss Meyers — I know your taste too well,' and he stalked right away. Wasn't it bold of her! And I've met her in the village with him several times just when he comes back from practising on the organ. We just rattle on together, and she hardly ever says a word. I don't think he likes it at *all* — her meeting him."

"A woman in her position cannot be too careful," said Mrs. Meyers, sagely.

Alethea went to the door to close it — she had forgotten that there was a door — and met Miss Honora Coslett coming through the hall. The Miss Cosletts were having an unforeseen holiday; the school was closed on account of illness. Her face was pleasant, as usual, yet there was a faint shade across it.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Bennett, but *will* you see about Sister's milk? It's been sour for three evenings, and at this season of the year, I'm afraid it must be carelessness. I'm so sorry to speak of it, but you know how

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Sister depends on the milk since her illness last year.”

“Oh, it is a shame!” said Alethea, with all her heart. “Indeed, Miss Coslett, it shall not occur again.”

“And if you could let us have a little oil stove or something — You see, Mrs. Brulwyne keeps the register open in her room *all* the time, and we can’t get any heat. In mild weather we haven’t minded, but now — We are very comfortably arranged here, the room is very nice, and being so near the school we would *rather* not make a change.”

“No, indeed,” responded Alethea, with that pang which she was only too used to feeling, of such a rending nature that it seemed to rip a chasm in the solid earth below. Mrs. Meyers was right; people ought to have what they paid for. Even the kind Miss Cosletts knew that. Her incompetency wore on her nerves, and hurt her sense of hospitality. But back of this rankling sense there was another rankling thought — in regard to Malcolm Conway.

It was useless to pretend that she did not mind his laughing and talking as he did with Florrie, and all the more because she knew that he was not in the least “gone on” her. Her feelings in regard to Florence Meyers

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were a puzzle to her in their icy dislike. She would have liked to take Miss Meyers up with a pair of tongs, at arm's length, and deposit her somewhere over the border.

After the discovery that he was the Carletons's Mr. Conway — who had once been nearly engaged to Isabel — and after the gradual subsidence of her first confusion, by some miracle there had been a midday meal alone together and in the hour following he had played for her, and they had talked and talked of the old life like two people of one kind meeting on an island. But after that, which had seemed such a promising beginning of a friendship, she had taken herself uncompromisingly to task. Such companionship was not for her.

Malcolm Conway! Her memory had reconstructed the image once given her by his friends, to add to her knowledge of him now; a man of bright temper, of fine grain, of many talents, whom every one liked, a man with a career before him. Yes, but she was no "young lady" to meet him half-way in pleasant social intercourse; "a woman in her position" — she had anticipated Mrs. Meyers's words, and tried to keep them steadily before her in the six weeks that were past. They were answer-

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ble for a fresh accession of that little enamel-like casing of manner which kept people on the outside. Her eyes were brightly chill when he glanced her way, and made Conway uncomfortable, all the more because he had seen the eyes when they were soft. A man may not care to claim consideration, and yet like to be liked.

He was doing an act of kindness to a friend by staying in this hole; if he was bored it didn't count for much, after all. He was a fellow who did kind acts easily, and he was used to being somewhat bored while he did them. He was in fact a man not made for a self-centred and solitary life, but for the joys of home and a family; he had wanted to be married young — he was one of those fellows who grow up early, and at twenty are men, not boys — but the joy had passed him by and taken with it something of the ardour of youth. Since those days he had come gradually to have only the desire of the artist for a picturesque state of existence at some future time, but the impetus to seek it had left him; he did not particularly care to seek anything. While still in the midst of the enjoyment of life he was beginning to feel an odd desultoriness in it. Although he was a favourite with

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women and a man of the world, the critical or unreceptive mood in a woman curiously alienated him; he was almost supersensitively quick to feel it. Perhaps the real reason was that underneath his assured manner was an innately modest diffidence in his own powers of pleasing which no success could do more than overlay. It warmed his heart to be welcomed on the instant, he liked to be smiled upon; Isabel Carleton's greatest attraction for him had been this talent for frank welcoming.

The only youthful sunshine he got here was from Florrie. After the chill aloofness of Alethea it was pleasant to turn to the effulgent smile of as handsome a girl as Miss Meyers. She was trivial and common, she bored him when she talked, but beauty is a concrete good to the masculine eye, and he had a kindly feeling toward her because she liked him. He was of too robust a masculine nature to be overcome outwardly by the fact that he was the only man among six women, but it perhaps showed in the sense that he did not always take his honours well, though young and old fluttered appreciatively when he came among them.

There was a manner Alethea liked, and the

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manner she didn't like. He was invariably courteous and deferential to the Miss Cosletts, charming them sometimes by soaring in company to those regions of higher information which they adored, but there were other times when he slid unexpectedly from under the conversation, and became frivolous and obstructive; he sometimes responded in kind to Mrs. Meyers's intimacy, and sometimes ignored it; to Mrs. Brulwyne he was distantly civil, and no more; to Florrie — a woman can stand seeing a man to whom she feels attracted, in love with a woman below his standard, if the strength of his passion be sufficient to win respect, but cannot with equanimity view his frivolous companionship with such a woman. It hurt Alethea's thought of him the more because through all his attitude to the others he always remembered her in a way that was different. There was a subconscious intimacy that could not be denied. His manner to her when she spoke, his gesture of attention, the way he held her chair for her, his involuntary, anxious glance to see how she took things, breathed a subtle deference and recognition; it was a tacit upholding to have him there. Neither could move nor speak unnoticed of the other; they might have con-

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versed for years in society and never have got so near as here in their apparent separateness.

Alethea needed upholding. Life was growing very hard for her. An awful premonition of entangling failure was taking her heart's blood, although she still held her head high, and gave no sign with the courage of her cowardice. What was there for her if she failed? Just because she was a woman it seemed as if there must be some one back of all this venturing with fortune to whom she could go and say:

"This really is too much for me; I can't do it as I thought," and find herself comfortably helped out of it all. It gave her such a queer feeling to think that she must always try to earn her living, that there was no support back of her own efforts. She knew how to do so little, that was the trouble; she didn't even know how to be businesslike, to begin on.

"May I come in and sit down?"

Alethea, at three o'clock, setting the now deserted drawing-room to rights, looked up to see Malcolm Conway standing in the doorway.

"Yes, do," she replied unguardedly. He had a way of entering the house and meeting her at odd times and seasons, but no matter

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how unforeseen his appearance, it was usually promptly discovered by some of his admirers. He relapsed now into an easy chair like a man who was glad to rest, and sat in silence watching her round and supple figure in its gown of grey, made with an odd little morning jacket, with a lacy frill at the throat, and tied with ribbons at the waist. She was a woman whose gowns were always soft and trailing, yet never in the way; they seemed indescribably to facilitate her rapid and gliding motion instead of impeding it, and a single touch of her hand swept one at any time into a modest cluster of drooping folds. If she were not accomplished in the coarser kinds of household work, her dusting was a fine art, so exquisitely swift and delicate was it, so poised and graceful her movements as she bent over a chair rung, or reached her arms upward to the tall vases on the mantelpiece, while the colour rose in her cheek, and her lips insensibly parted. She seemed to leave a flower-like freshness where her hands had touched.

Conway, lying back in the easy chair, his face resting on one of his long, thin hands, and his deep-set eyes following Alethea, approved the home-like picture. He was even smiling a little, thoughtfully, to himself when

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she stood suddenly in front of him, her tone a tacit acknowledgment of the underlying bond.

“No, don’t get up! I’ve been wanting to ask you something. If you *would* pay a little more attention to the Miss Cosletts.” She dropped into a chair in front of him and looked appealingly.

“The Miss Cosletts!” He looked amazed.

“If you would talk to them more,” said Alethea with hurried impulsiveness, “it would please them *so* much! They are such good women, and they work so hard, and it means so much to them to talk to a man — I never knew myself until I lived in this way what it meant. A little intelligent conversation is such a treat. They *did* want so much last night to hear about Russia!”

“Oh,” said Conway, unreceptively. Her words did not appeal to him; she could not know how many times he had been asked to talk to women who didn’t interest him. She had imagined him sensitively apologetic at being confronted with his omissions, and recognized instead by the light of experience the well known fractiousness of the man who feels taken to task.

“Really, I’m sorry, you know, if these ladies rely on me for their entertainment,”

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Conway went on. "They talk with such monotonous distinctness, don't they? I feel as if I were a kindergarten."

"Oh, if you prefer Miss Meyers's voice," said Alethea independent of her will.

"Miss Meyers's!" He looked again surprised and somewhat ruefully amused; he shook his head expressively, but he shut his lips tight, only opening them to say: "Miss Meyers is a very handsome girl; she seems to be good-hearted. But for Heaven's sake don't let's talk of any of these people now! I never see you alone. I beg your pardon, but why do you stay in this dreadful mill anyway? Your brother — ?"

"His wife," said Alethea, in a low voice, and this time she shut her lips.

"But —" he hesitated. "*Can't* I do anything to help you? I'm sure you're not getting on."

"Thank you; I need no help," returned Alethea, smiling proudly, in swift defence. Her troubles were her own, not the property of people who paid.

He gazed at her thoughtfully for a moment, opened a book on the table carelessly and looked at the writing on the fly leaf, and then sauntered over to the piano, touching the keys

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softly in the trumpet strain, watching for the quick response in her face.

“I’ve just had a letter from Carleton,” he said abruptly, “I’d like to show it to you. You know I’ve been appointed consul to —” he named the port in Italy. “My time is about up.”

“In Italy!”

“Oh, Mr. Conway!”

It was Miss Honora Coslett, tall, well set up and radiant, pushing back the portières. “Mrs. Meyers said she *thought* she heard the piano! I must go back and tell Sister to hurry. What a treat, to have some music this snowy afternoon!”

“I hear you had quite a concert,” said Miss Meyers at the dinner table. The soup had been removed, and she was looking coquettishly at Conway, who sat beside her as she crumbled her bread. “Weren’t you the mean thing to have it without me!”

“Why, it does look that way,” said Conway, lazily.

“I think he ought to give me a concert by myself, don’t you, Miss Bennett?”

“Certainly,” said Alethea. “You may bring in the mutton, Sarah, we’re waiting. What’s the matter?”

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Sarah stood stiffly. "It's not cooked yet."

"Not cooked?" said Alethea; her cheeks began to tingle; every one was listening keenly; she felt a dire premonition of evil. "There was no need of having dinner until it was ready, but you can bring the meat in as it is now."

"Sure it's raw yet," stated Sarah, laconically.

"Raw!"

"Yes, ma'am. Bridget said —" Sarah became a mere funnel for excited speech — "Bridget said as how the man never came to fix the grate of the range and roast twelve pounds of mutton she could not with the oven at a timperature you could hold your two hands in it for hours, and for yourself that's a lady born, she'd make a fist at it but the heart was wore out of her slavin' for them that thinks of naught but the fill of their stomachs."

"And where is Bridget, now?" asked Alethea.

"She's gone to bed with a sore tooth," said Sarah relapsing suddenly into stoicism with her silver tray held in front of her at the correct angle.

"Well, upon my word!" cried Mrs. Brulwyne, fiercely, trembling with anger, as she

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helped herself incessantly to the olives on the dish before her. "Upon my *word*, Miss Bennett, this is going beyond! No meat! No *meat*! If you expect Mrs. Meyers and I are going to keep on paying for what we don't get —"

"Really, Mrs. Brulwyne," said Mrs. Meyers, haughtily, "pray do not drag me into the discussion! Will you kindly hand me that dish? *Mr. Conway* has not had an olive! Thank you. I'm sure, Miss Bennett, you have my sympathy both for the class of help and the class of people you seem obliged to take."

"*We* don't mind going without the meat at all," said Miss Meyers, encouragingly, "do we, Mr. Conway? You needn't mind about *us*, Miss Bennett."

"No, *indeed*," murmured the Miss Cosletts in unison. "If Sister could have an egg"—this from Miss Honora.

Only Malcolm Conway had said no word. Alethea divined that the situation was unendurable to him, and Mrs. Brulwyne's vulgarity was less odious to her than his pity. Pity from a man who let himself be considered one with a Florrie Meyers! She turned her head proudly from his sudden gaze, a look that seemed as if wrested from him with a wince.

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“I’m very sorry all this has happened,” she said, rising from the table, “but perhaps I can cook something in the chafing-dish. I’ll help you get the things, Sarah.”

Alethea knew how to preside over a chafing-dish; as she bent over the silver circumference, her slender wrists deftly stirring and mixing, not once, but a second and a third portion, the scene faded away. She was no longer at this mercenary board; she was back in their apartments in Rome, her father was smiling at her from his invalid chair, Aunt Susan in black lace, was talking to Count Marinelli, Herbert Carleton and Baron von Inten were beside her. She reached for a cruet, absently, and her hanging sleeve caught in the stand of the chafing-dish, and touched a blue flame. The next instant Florence Meyers had thrown herself with a scream in Conway’s path — it was Miss Coslett’s blue shawl that smothered the blaze, and called forth Miss Meyers’s shuddering note of thankfulness:

“I never was so frightened in my *life*! Malcolm Conway, what were you *thinking* of? A musician like you! You might have *ruined your hands*!”

An irrepressible smile came to Alethea’s lips, even through the sick heartbeat that followed

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her danger; it was at the infuriate glare on Conway's face.

ALETHEA was putting the finishing-touches to her toilet, tying a piece of black velvet ribbon over the wrist that had been scorched. Moved by some impulse she had put aside her usual plain evening garb, and arrayed herself in one of the gowns taken from her stores of a couple of years before. It was of some filmy, black material, cut slightly low in the neck to show her lovely white throat, and finished with a tucker of black net. The elbow sleeves had ruffles of the net, falling over the small, rounded arms, and in her hair she wore a soft black rosette. The gown, like all her gowns, though guiltless of furbelows, had the ineffaceable Paris cut and air.

On the table stood a tall vase filled with red roses, and after hesitating a moment she took out one, with its long stem and green leaves, and pinned it at her belt. It was the crowning touch. She stood looking in the glass for a few minutes, as she had a fashion of doing since hers was the one familiar face she saw, and then smiled at the picture, half sadly, half gaily, as she left the room. It was her

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protest against fate — she would meet failure gallantly, half-way, and go down with her flags flying.

It was the day after the barbarous dinner, and a day, when, in spite of dire forebodings, all had gone well. The breakfast and the luncheon had been the culinary triumphs of an ominously peaceful Bridget, with promise of an evening meal as good, though the range man, on coming, had done no more than take a mysterious and hitherto unseen number, and depart. There had been an unusual solemnity about the partaking of food — it was as loudly patent in its silence as the clanging bell that was now proclaiming the death of a town official. As Alethea swept her train to one side on entering the dining-room, revealing the jet-beaded slipper on her small foot, she felt at once the eyes fastened on her, and that every inch of her attire was taken note of. She had been wise in her generation; with the donning of the old-time raiment had come a fresh access of the old-time spirit. She felt daintily disregarding of the daily vexations, and smiled when Mrs. Meyers asked blandly if she were expecting company.

“Why — perhaps !” said Alethea with one of her sudden flashes of unusual daring.

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Maybe some one *would* come; who knew? How could any one ever tell the times and seasons for any happening in this world? She might be welcoming a knight errant from Italy before midnight. She was removed even above her usual nervous tremor when things went wrong, and put aside her wretchedness at her incapacity for some future time. When Sarah, at her elbow, announced that the powdered sugar was "out" she only stated succinctly, "I ordered it this afternoon, but it hasn't come; I suppose the snow has interfered with the delivery." She did not even say that she was sorry. Conway was very silent, although Florrie sat with her arms on the table throughout the meal, at an angle that gave him a view of her face, and talked to him in a low voice. She wore a showy, turquoise waist from which the bloom had been rubbed a little, though the brilliant colour made her hair glitter like ruddy gold. It was very beautiful, but the throat below it was not beautiful — the line where it joined the ear was mean and sinewy. One could not imagine a lover wanting to kiss Florrie on her throat.

When the ladies rose to leave the room Conway, as was his wont, held the door open for them. But Alethea did not pass through with

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the rest, and lingering to speak to Sarah, heard Conway's low voice beside her.

"I'm going out now, but I want to see you a moment after I get back."

"Very well," said Alethea. She touched the rose she wore lightly, and looked at him with her rare, diamond sparkle.

She heard the others talking in the drawing-room after he left.

"So it was *sugar* we went without to-night!" What do you suppose she called him back for? She was trying to make him look at her all dinner time; that's what she put on that dress for. Well, she got left."

"It was very inappropriate for one in her position," said Mrs. Meyers, with ponderous disapproval.

"I thought it becoming," said Miss Honora, hesitatingly; but still her tone took on new interest — "they say Mr. Conway is very attentive to that Miss Bunny Schwartz; she sings in the choir, you know."

"The idea! Attentive to *her*! Why, he — " Alethea escaped before the last words could reach her, smiling irrepressibly, as she had smiled over that glare of Malcolm Conway's at Miss Meyers last night. But she had another reason for her lightsomeness — this was her

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birthday, a fact unknown save by herself and one other. She had always had a particular feeling about her birthday; it had been a day of gladness to her all her life long; she had her own little secret observances of it. All those who had loved her from her birth were no longer upon this earth, but she felt no gloom to-day in the fact, but instead a sense of happiness in their unwonted nearness, the real though unseen presence of love. She wasn't keeping a boarding-house; she was at the behest of no "paying guests" to-night; she was not owned by anybody — for a few hours she belonged to herself.

Her very step had in it almost the insolence of wealth as she trailed through the halls. She was oblivious to the glances cast upon her as she sat by herself in the chill sitting-room opposite the drawing-room, reading. Miss Meyers drummed on the piano, with intermittent journeys to the window to look down the white and snowy street and wonder aloud why Mr. Conway did not come back. There was an inferential disquietude in her manner possibly traceable to the repudiated Miss Bunny Schwartz. The others inaugurated a game of whist with the table moved near the fire; it was a game scheduled two weeks

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before by the Miss Cosletts, who planned their pleasures mathematically. Once Mrs. Meyers called over to Alethea and asked if she were not cold in there without anything around her, and there was an animated discussion as to what you had to wear to bed these nights; Mrs. Brulwyne's head, as most sensitive to chill, requiring a worsted shawl around it, while Mrs. Meyers protected her feet — which she described metaphorically as being “perfect icebergs” — with knitted shoes under the covers and a weighting pillow atop. The Miss Cosletts, on the other hand, found it more what they needed to wear woolen wrappers that covered the back, though Sister was occasionally obliged to resort to a flannel around her throat, the reason for which was left in the dark owing to the discovery by Miss Honora, in gentle, but firm rebuke, that This was not Whist.

At ten o'clock the players departed promptly for bed, the unwilling Florrie called peremptorily by her mother a half hour later. Each person who said good-night to Alethea asked her if she were not going up also, and she had replied, “Oh, yes, soon.” She waited until she heard the doors above locked for the night. Then she went in the other room,

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turned down the light, and moved a big, old-fashioned easy chair nearer the wood fire. She put more logs on and poked them into a blaze, and then leaned back, watching it. She could never get used to the custom of going to bed just as the evening was beginning, and she was going to give herself a little luxury to-night. Probably Malcolm Conway had forgotten his wish to speak to her, and wouldn't be home until the clock struck twelve. A perfectly causeless sense of well-being possessed her; she was calmly happy, although she was alone in the world save for a negligent brother and a disaffected sister-in-law across the seas; she was surrounded by people who regarded her actions solely in the light of their monetary value to themselves; kind Mrs. Fort, who had been thirty years "at it," was the only person who had really tried to help her. She was incapable of fulfilling that which she had undertaken; you couldn't ask people to pay for being experimented on! She was doomed to failure in this project, she didn't dare look at her accounts, all the misery, the anxiety, the degradation, grew like a grey wall closer and closer around her with each returning day, and yet — for a little space the old life had come to her. Alone in the empty

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room in this cozy chair by the firelight, in her soft gown, her daintily slippers feet pushed out toward the fire, the red, red rose at her bosom, she went back through the years for the glamour that love had always thrown around her birthday. The look of it was in her eyes as she raised them with that little radiant, welcoming smile through their dreaminess, when the front door unlatched and Malcolm Conway came in. She did not move or speak as he divested himself of overcoat and hat.

Almost ludicrously repelled by any sign of preoccupation or indifference, no man on earth was quicker to perceive and respond to the receptive mood in one he liked. The brilliant smile which leaped to his eyes was of forty-candle power compared with her little softly glimmering rush-light as he drew up another easy chair beside hers, and sat down.

"I ought to go up to bed, you know," she said, basking happily in his radiance.

"Yes, but you are not going to."

"If Mrs. Meyers hears us —"

"For Heaven's *sake!* forget the Meyerses." His tone was so disgusted that Alethea hastened to placate:

"The roses were so lovely." She caressed the one at her belt and her glance thanked him

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sweetly. "How did you know it was my birthday?"

"I saw the date in a book I took up yesterday; I'm glad you liked the flowers."

"I have the others upstairs; you see I didn't put them on the table."

"I should hope *not*. If you had — "

They both laughed. They seemed to have dropped into an intimacy that needed no explanation, that was as if it had always belonged to them, and only lapsed for a while. He looked at her with an air of satisfaction.

"Red roses are becoming to you. You've heard that before, though, many times."

"I should have missed it if you hadn't said it," said Alethea, simply, still with the rare diamond sparkle.

"It was kind of you to wait for me."

"I didn't. I don't know, perhaps I did."

"May I look at this?" He touched the wrist that was shielded by the velvet. She held it out to him, and he untied the ribbon, looking with compressed lips and black and lowering brows, at the long, red mark, before he replaced the band, though he said nothing. Then he rose and turned the gas still lower, so that it was only a flickering pin-point, and

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seated himself once more by her in front of the fire, with a return to his former manner.

“Now isn’t this cozy! — What in thunder’s that?”

“It’s Mrs. Meyers in the room above,” answered Alethea.

“She rambles about like an elephant, doesn’t she?” said Conway carelessly. “Heavens and earth! Is the house falling down?”

“No, she’s only moving her furniture,” said Alethea. “She often does it when she can’t sleep. Hark! She isn’t unlocking the door, is she?” Alethea stood up nervously. “Suppose she should come down here?”

“She won’t — it’s too late,” said Conway with confidence.

“Too late! Oh! then, if she *did* — what would she think?” Alethea stopped and turned horrified eyes upon him. “I must go up.”

“No, it’s all right now,” said Conway, after a moment’s listening. His thin face with the firm lips relaxed, the dark, deep-set eyes seemed to glow from within. His pleasure made it impossible for her to chill it, but she murmured uneasily, “we must talk very softly.”

“So you are thirty,” he announced, still

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looking at her. The words were brusque, but the tone subtly caressed; it said: "You are thirty and beautiful and young." "I know your age, you see, as well as the day. It's just a year less than mine, but no one would ever dream it."

"Ah, but for a *man!*" said Alethea. "Your life is just beginning; you have your career before you. I suppose a married woman of thirty would be young, too, but I — I always thought I'd mind, but I don't, not at all. I sometimes wish I were a *very* great deal older." Her voice sank almost to a whisper for a moment and she looked at him with a sudden scared helplessness that subsided gradually as it met the reassuring confidence in his eyes. Her look of dependence on him, this helplessness which required reassuring, was to Conway the dearest, the most touching expression a woman's face could wear. All the manhood in him longed to spring to her protection. He wondered —

"Why haven't you married?" he asked, abruptly.

She smiled. "I was engaged once."

"Well, aren't you going to tell me about it?"

"I don't see why." She meditated. "But there's no reason why I shouldn't. I was very

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young. He was a nice boy, and very good looking, but he was very jealous of me, and I didn't understand. He couldn't dance himself and if I danced with anybody else he wouldn't speak to me."

"Nice, unselfish kind of a brute," said Conway.

"And once I waltzed half the evening with my cousin, a fellow from the South, and Horace left without waiting to take me home. We had a quarrel. He said he would never come to see me again until I sent for him, and I didn't send. I did feel dreadfully about it, but after all it was a relief."

"I should say so," said Conway, energetically.

"And after that?"

Alethea laughed. "Oh, there were people—I! I have always known men."

"Whom you refused?"

"Oh, no—nothing as far as that—there was a German count who proposed for me once, but when he found I hadn't enough money he gracefully retired. Of course, it's the custom there — but he *was* disappointed."

"Sad," said Conway dryly. He hesitated, and then asked in a particularly casual tone to cover his audacity, "And have you never real-

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ly cared for anybody?" He couldn't help being curious, she seemed so sweetly and unaffected virginal in spite of her experience of the world.

The colour rose to her face and overspread it. She covered her eyes with her hand for a moment, but when she lifted them they had a thoughtful serenity.

"I don't know whether a man would call it caring. I've had my dreams, like every one else. There was some one — I only met him a few times — he never thought of me that way, and I knew he didn't. But I have always been glad I knew him; it put something into my life —" she hesitated again — "that I might have gone without."

"No," said Conway, "I don't think a man would call that caring — much." His voice had a cheerful ring in it, although he found he had a dislike to pursuing the subject. "A man could feel that way to a good many women."

"To Miss Meyers, for instance?" asked Alethea, with a sudden feline impulse.

"Oh," said Conway savagely. A dull red flushed his face. "She's — the *limit*." He shook himself as if to get physically free.

Alethea hastened to interpose. "You haven't

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told me any of your heart history." The fire-light was in her hair and in her eyes now.

"I haven't any."

"That means, of course, that you've been falling in love off and on ever since you were in frocks."

Conway laughed. "Just about."

"And have been engaged half a dozen times."

"No, once was enough."

"And why — ?"

"She threw me over."

"Oh!" said Alethea, with unconscious resentment in her tone. "Didn't you — *mind*?"

"Yes, of course I minded. I was a fool. I've been glad since — after a fashion. She wouldn't have suited me now, I suppose. Still, I don't know that it's any advantage to get more and more critical as one gets older. My brother and sisters and nearly all my friends are married. The boy-and-girl-marriages are, perhaps, the best after all."

"Yes," said Alethea. "There was Isabel Carleton," she added.

"Yes, there was Isabel — she was a nice girl." He spoke heartily. "I'm awfully glad she's got such a good fellow." He went on thoughtfully: "One is apt to lose the trick of

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really falling in love after a while, I suppose. . . . It's a pity. I'm used to sliding down the track just so far, and no farther; to save my soul I can't get past a certain point. Yet there are times — ” his eyes dwelt on her with a new mischievousness in them, tenderly, reliantly intimate with something more beneath — “there *are* times — ”

An entirely unexpected exhilaration possessed him as he looked at her lying back in the chair, her soft trailing gown, the white hands clasping in her lap, the red rose at her breast, her soft hair, her soft eyes, the mingled glow and sparkle of her face. He changed his tone abruptly.

“How long are you going to keep up this murderous farce of taking boarders? You are the most ludicrously incompetent person I've ever seen.”

“Oh, don't speak so loud,” exclaimed Alethea nervously. “We *must* go upstairs. What are you doing?”

“I want to play on the piano,” said Conway, straying over towards it.

“No, no, you mustn't,” said Alethea, in alarm.

He seemed capable of anything.

“Sit down, then, we haven't had our talk

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out." He looked so extraordinarily boyish and happy that she gave way again, though she was sure that she heard sounds above.

"I didn't show you the letter I spoke of. My friend is all right now, and is coming back for Sunday to take up his duties. I ought to get off to-morrow, but I *cannot* leave you without — Hark! What's that?"

"Something fell," whispered Alethea. "Listen!"

"Was that her door unlocked?"

"Yes."

"Hark! Great Heavens, is she coming down?"

A ponderous footstep had already begun to descend the long stairs, with a lighter one behind it. The eyes of Conway and Alethea met as they both rose. Then he pushed the chairs away from each other with incredible swiftness, turned out the glimmer of gas, and the two, moved by one impulse, fled noiselessly on tiptoe back through the dining-room to the kitchen, standing there breathlessly in the darkness. Conway put out his hand and touched Alethea's face. He let his fingers linger there a moment. "I wasn't sure it was you," he murmured frivolously.

"Hush," whispered Alethea. A voice from

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beyond reached them: "See if the front door's fastened, Florence. The *idea* of leaving the fire here; we might be burned in our beds!"

The light of a candle, held unsteadily, wavered into view. It was coming through the dining-room, toward the kitchen!

"*Here!*" breathed Alethea. Her fingers swiftly unbolted the cellar door and drew him blindly after her down the cellar stairs over toward the coal bin. They were none too soon, as the words of Mrs. Meyers showed.

"The cellar door open — such carelessness I *never* saw! The house might be full of thieves and robbers, and probably is. You may say what you please, Florrie, I *know* I heard breathing."

"Mother, don't go down there!" pleaded a weary voice, the voice of Florrie. "I wish you'd come upstairs and let me go to sleep."

"Florence Meyers, hold your tongue! You will go where I do." A heavy step on the creaking, wooden stairs was heralded by the light of the candle, which finally brought into the view of those crouching back in the darkness a weird and ferocious figure of strange shape, clad in a long and woolly gown. The features of Mrs. Meyers were at no time melting, but they had now an extraordinarily pro-

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nounced appearance, her Roman nose and double chin being framed by two little grey wisps of braided hair fastened neatly at the ends, at either side of her head, instead of the high roll with which it was usually topped.

Conway's arm drew Alethea further back into the shadow of the coal bin in the face of the advancing light. There was a ludicrously poignant movement. Another six inches —

There was a pause. Then the candle light wavered backward and the creaking step receded with it. A moment more — the door closed, and the bolt was shot into place at the head of the cellar stairs. "If there's anybody down there they can stay there," proclaimed the voice of Mrs. Meyers.

WELL this *is* a fix," said Conway, shortly, after a moment or two of listening to hear the sound of the retreating footsteps above. His hand dropped from its hold on Alethea's as he took a match from his case and lighted it to view the scene.

Alethea still had the sentiment of girlhood, which, once set springing, maintains its current through any environment, however unromantic. She had been conscious of partner-

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ship in a gay and perilous pleasure, with that secret daring which was one of her unsuspected characteristics, and was quick now to feel the withdrawal of his mood.

For Conway's sentiment was that of a man of thirty, who has its manifestations under distinct control; he takes it up or leaves it off at will. In the present instance the tender tone of a moment before had entirely left him, as she sensitively felt; he had, in fact, all the irritation of the man who has let a woman get into an awkward situation; he would have characterized another fellow as a "jay."

The lighted match revealed a black, cavernous depth, with the black pillar of the furnace rising in the midst, and the black gleam of coal heaps at either side. The fire in the furnace had been deadened for the night, and was black, too. Another and yet another match showed that there were no windows in this section but a narrow slit banked up fast with snow, and a slanting cellar door, padlocked on the outside, as both remembered, in the old-fashioned way.

"You can't open it," said Alethea.

Conway made no answer, he was studying the door thoughtfully, and fingering the big, rusty hinges on the inside. Then he went back

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into the cavern, his presence only to be inferred from the intermittent spark of the match; when he came back he was carrying something.

“Now you can take the case and light the matches for me,” he said in a tone of satisfaction that seemed to make her a partner in it once more. “Don’t burn your fingers.”

She saw that he had a hatchet. “You’re not going to chop the door down?”

“No, that would make too much noise. You’ll see! I wish I had something better, but this will have to do.”

He slipped the edge of the hatchet into one of the large screws in the hinge like an enormous screw-driver, turning it half way and taking it out, so that he could turn it again, patiently putting it back if it slipped, with his eyes fixed in one place. Alethea saw him bending over and turning his hatchet, and still bending, through the volcanic waves of darkness set in motion by her taper match. Presently something clinked upon the floor, where he had thrown it.

“One screw out,” he said tersely.

“How many more?”

“Two in this hinge, three in the next.”

“There are only two matches left,” said Alethea.

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“Never mind, I can feel my way now all right.”

She stood for what seemed a long time, hearing him breathe and hearing the recurrent slips of the hatchet, while he worked and worked and gave no sign. But at last he said cheerily. “It’s all right, now.”

The next minute he had bent the door outward, and helped her up the steps, and straight out on to the dazzling crust of the snow under a moon that poured its high light down upon them from the heavens. They stood enthralled and speechless.

It all looked traditionally pure and peaceful, and very cold. The forms of Conway and Alethea made long, blue shadows upon the icy waste, but they themselves took on a poignant and fantastic beauty between this glittering white expanse of snow and the gleaming white radiance above. His lithe, well-knit, straight figure had the lines and the poise of the song-heroes, as he threw his head back and lifted his face to the moonlight. His lips lost the mould of deliberateness or that other cast of humour, and became gentle and very sweet; his eyes showed the rays from the fire within. Alethea’s trailing black dress lay upon the snow, her head drooped a little, her wavy hair

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had become loosened in this wild flight, and lay in curling tendrils against her cheek and the bare white circle of her throat; the atmosphere of delicate brightness around her, ever to be felt, seemed actually visible. Neither seemed to look at the other; it was like the spirit translation which needs no material means of sense. A bloom even lay upon the cold, which kept it from being felt. There was only a white, intoxicating, sparkling joy.

“It’s great, isn’t it?” said Conway, after some moments, drawing a long breath. He turned his eyes upon her for a fleeting instant and shifted them again, as if the beauty were too deep. She did not know whether she had answered or not. The burden of each thought was far away from the other, yet they were one in the unison of it; the keynote of this moonlight sonata was the words, “I remember.” Strange that to remember a past should seem to make the future one!

“You haven’t a thing around you.” said Conway. His voice sounded odd in this white stillness. He began to take off his coat.

“No!” protested Alethea, daintily shrugging her shoulders.

“Nonsense!” He wrapped it around her with an air of tenderly passionate possession,

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a caress in his finger tips, lifting a strand of hair elaborately out of the way of the garment. Her hair was always a lovely thing, softly curling and smelling of violets.

“Of course you’re in slippers — on such a night! Just like a woman. Here, stand on the back steps; they’re clear of snow. I’m going to reconnoitre.”

He came back to say: “The windows are bolted all too well. Do you know what time it is?”

“No,” said Alethea, smiling starrily, with a potent faith in him not to be daunted; she had no care; this was his responsibility, not hers.

“It’s a quarter to one. Hark, there’s the train; I’ll wait till it gets a little nearer.” He had mounted on an oil barrel below the window of the kitchen pantry and as the engine sent forth its long midnight screech she heard a simultaneous crash; a pane of glass had been knocked in. The window was pushed up, she saw him scramble up and through it. The door behind her was opened.

“Come in,” said Conway, with the ring of relief in his words.

Together they stole back through the house to the deserted drawing-room. The fire had

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died down, only a few sparks remaining. Conway noiselessly lighted the gas a little in the hall and sent a dim ray up the stairway.

"We must go up *very* softly," whispered Alethea. She put out her hand. "Good-night."

"All right, you go first," murmured Conway. His voice had all the tenderness of a lover. "Good-night, good-night, *liebste Freundin* — sweetest friend." He took her hand in his, and brushed the hair out of her eyes with the intimate protecting touch given to a child, and smiled at her with the relief of one who has passed a danger. He looked as if he must kiss her, but he did not.

"Sleep well."

"Oh, I shall," said Alethea. She bent over and slid off her high-heeled slippers, and holding them both in one hand, stole up the stairs noiselessly on her delicately stockinged feet, turning back when she neared the top to wave a last adieu. He watched her with his fingers on the gas burner, until she had gained the upper flight, then turned out the light and taking off his own shoes went up himself. His tone and his look had been the tone and the look of a lover, but he had said no lover's word. During all his work he had felt her

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presence headily near him; through the thrill of it he had wondered —

Under the inherently impulsive, hot, boyish nature was the cool stratum of reason that makes the man. He must think this thing out for himself.

“Sleep well,” he had said, but it was far into the morning when Alethea’s white eyelids closed, with her arms crossed above her head. She was wakened it seemed all too soon by a knocking at the door, and the voice of Sarah.

“There’s a man downstairs to see you about orderin’ ice for the summer, ma’am.”

“Ice for the summer! Tell him I don’t want any.” She jumped out of bed with a sudden consternation. “A man to see me *now*? Why, what time is it?”

“It’s goin’ on after nine o’clock, ma’am.”

“Goodness!” said Alethea, beginning wildly to dress. “I’ll be down in a few minutes, Sarah. Is everything all right downstairs?”

“No, ma’am, it is not.”

“*What*? Where’s Bridget?”

“She’s afther havin’ a sort of a fit, ma’am.”

“A *fit*?”

“Well, not *exactly* a fit — but a *sort* of a fit, like.” It was Sarah’s mill-stream utterance

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now. "When I come down to the kitchen the range was black out; the man he haven't sent the grate yet — an' Bridget lyin' her len'th on the floor, as you might say unconscious-like. It took meself and Mr. Conway holdin' her to keep her from weltin' herself with her two hands, and doin' herself an injury. He's afther sendin' her sister's little boy for her now, on his own way to the early train."

"Mr. Conway *gone*?"

"Yes, ma'am. He says if the express comes for his trunk will you give it to 'em. He's afther leavin' for good. But the ladies is all sittin' below this long time, waitin' for their breakfast, with Mrs. Brulwyne goin' on *awful*, and not a wink of sleep among 'em last night by reason of the burglars."

"Burglars!" said Alethea, guiltily.

"Yes, ma'am. They broke the long window in the pantry and the cellar door is wrenched."

"Why on earth didn't you wake me before?" groaned Alethea.

"I didn't like to be disturbin' you," said the futile Sarah.

As Sarah went down, a hurried footstep came up. There was another knock at the door.

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“Miss Bennett?”

“Yes, Miss Honora, I’ll be down in a minute.”

“If you could kindly let us know where the alcohol is so that I could heat some milk in the chafing-dish for Sister.” Miss Coslett’s voice was agitated. “She is getting a little faint.”

“Make Sarah get it for you,” ordered Alethea in a firm voice. “She knows where it is, and I will be down *at once*.”

Oh, but the birthday glamour had left with a vengeance! Conway had not only gone off early to avoid seeing her, but he was to send for his trunk; he must then be going to leave for good, as Sarah said, and without further farewell. How could it be possible? Yet such things were — a hundred instances returned to her. Men did such things! A chill and bitter contempt for herself, for him, for all the soft thoughts and palpitating fancies of the night before, iced the blood that flowed to her heart and aged her by ten years. She felt at once indescribably cheapened and revolted as the swift thoughts hurtled through her mind, making her fingers shake ineffectively as they tried to hook and tie. No, he would not go without any word — she would hear from him

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after a fashion. She could picture Florrie's saying that he wasn't the kind of a gentleman to skip his board, he would send her a cheque. Ah, but her pride was whipped bare!

She slipped downstairs past the stony visages in the drawing-room, and hurried to see about serving what she could, setting different things upon the table, with Sarah following her and plucking inanely at whatever she touched.

"Miss Bennett!"

"Yes, Mrs. Brulwyne." There was a new tone in Alethea's voice. She dropped down into her place by the table, and faced her accusers. Mrs. Brulwyne's huddled slop-shop gown, her small, dark, protruding face, her narrow, vindictive eyes and old, misshapen lips brought the turning point.

"When will breakfast be ready?"

"There will be no more breakfast than this," said Alethea, calmly. She pointed to some uncooked cereals and bread, and a pitcher of milk.

"*What?*"

"It's ready now, all there is." She raised her voice to the other room. "Will you kindly come in now? I can cook eggs in the chafing-

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dish, but anything more is unfortunately impossible. There is no fire."

"Eggs cooked in the chafing-dish sound very appetizing," murmured Miss Coslett, wan, but considerate always.

"This is no breakfast!" said Mrs. Brulwyne, passionately. "My son-in-law pays for my breakfast, and I won't be cheated out of it. I'll not stay another day. I'll have the law on you! I'll have you arrested for getting money under false pretences. I call Mrs. Meyers to witness —"

"Pray madam, let my name alone," cried Mrs. Meyers, quivering with wrath. Mrs. Meyers looked grey, the deep lines in her face seemed to have sunken by an inch. She addressed herself to Alethea.

"It is a great mistake, a *very* great mistake, Miss Bennett, let me tell you, to take persons of this class under your roof. When their *own relatives* cannot stand their table manners, *other* people of refinement should not be called upon to endure them. Florrie knows the struggle I have had with myself repeatedly before I could make up my mind to sit at the table with Mrs. Brulwyne. I have been *sorry* for Mrs. Brulwyne on account of her daughter's unnatural behaviour to her. I spent

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one hour in her room yesterday trying to soothe the feelings of a neglected mother; but when she goes secretly into the kitchen as she did this morning and pours *all* the cream on saucer after saucer full of Shredded Screenings, as Sarah can testify, while my daughter Florence and I had been awake since midnight, *starving*”—Mrs. Meyers raised her handkerchief to her eyes in trembling agitation.

“Yes, it’s very trying,” said Alethea.

“But even if I could stand Mrs. Brulwyne any longer,” went on Mrs. Meyers, tumultuously, “even if I could stand the uncertainty about the meals — I have tried to make allowances, Miss Bennett, but when a person’s digestion is sensitive it *has* to be considered — even if I could stand all this, after the attempt on this house last night by burglars, I could not feel that it was safe for my daughter Florence or myself to remain another night without a man in the house, now that Mr. Conway has left so unexpectedly. Of course we took the rooms for the winter, but I must tell you that Florence has gone out now to inquire about getting accommodations *at once*.”

“I think you have all of you every justifica-

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tion in leaving," agreed Alethea, with a polite smile.

It was only what she expected when a little later Miss Honora's gentle deprecating voice begged an audience of her. She was so sorry, but Sister's health — she hoped Miss Bennett would forgive their very sudden moving, this morning, but as they were only having a holiday this week —

"Why, yes," said Alethea, "suit your own convenience."

It was all that she could expect, in her position, that people should suit their own convenience.

"And of course," said Miss Honora, simply, "as we're leaving without any warning — Sister and I know what it is to have to depend on one's own resources — we want to pay ahead for the two weeks remaining in the month — my *dear!* Now you mustn't let the tears come in your eyes. It's only customary."

"It may be customary with you," said Alethea, with all her heart, "but I've given nothing really in exchange for what I've received from you already. I can't take it, dear Miss Honora."

She forced the tears back, but the starved

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heart felt its need the more after this crumb of comfort had been offered it.

The day wore on amid preparation for and bustle of departure. Conway's trunk went betimes; Alethea held the receipt for it. Bridget and the grate had both appeared at noon, but the paying guests had gone, the Meyerses to Mrs. Hurd's. She had heard Mrs. Meyers confiding to Miss Coslett that there was a young gentleman who played the cornet at Mrs. Hurd's, a Mr. Grooler, who was quite "gone on" Florrie; and Miss Coslett had capped the information with news interestedly gathered that morning, that Mr. Conway was reported to be engaged to a young widow in England, who had Money.

She sat at last in her own room again, in the quiet and peace of the deserted house, before the friendly mirror, with her hair curling over the loose gown that bared her arms. It was with weary irritation that she heard a familiar knock.

"What *is* it, Sarah?"

"It's a letter for you, ma'am; Mr. Conway was after leavin' it this morning and 'twas behind the clock I put it; it slipped me mind till this same minute."

"Oh!" said Alethea.

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She took the missive, locked the door and sat down once more, looking, womanlike, again and again at the outside of it. It was in this that he would inform her courteously of his departure, having well bethought himself of the sentiment of the night before. She was glad at least that he should be courteous. It would probably contain a cheque. At the very thought the blood flamed. Not one penny of his had she ever touched; it lay as he had given it — cheques, after those first bills — in a box in her drawer. He didn't know it, but he had been the one guest whose money had not paid — not paid for entertainment; it was her bread he had eaten. All the time, all the time, the thought of him—It seemed too bitter to be borne, that through poverty and justice to those in whose debt she was, his money must be used now. Life — life — life — why should that one monosyllable beat upon her brain? This was life, to never be anything more, to have neither youth nor money nor love, not even a friend; just life to struggle for and to be a failure in that struggle! If you couldn't support yourself at *all*, what happened? If you couldn't die when you wanted to? You'd *have* to! For a moment she faced the darkness — in the eyes reflected back to

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her from the mirror that showed her a soft, hunted, frightened thing, thrust out from love, on whom the dogs of a mercenary war were let slip.

Her blood reasserted itself. She sat up straight and opened the letter.

Two hours later she was still re-reading it, this letter in which was no cheque, but only Malcolm Conway's heart. He had written in the night watches, when the soul of a man may know itself and speak unhindered. That masterful joy that still spoke an inner humility — those simple, almost boyish words that could be said to but one alone in this life — there were warm tears in her eyes, and a tremor on her lips. Ah, how quickly love can grow to starry heights, when the word of a man sets it springing!

At the close he said: "If you consent, I can take you to-morrow to my cousin, Mrs. Mills, in town, whom I shall see to-day, and we can be married next week, and sail on Saturday, so that I can be at my post. It's a prosaic wooing, dear, but at five o'clock this afternoon I'll *see* you."

Alethea had taken one of the red roses from the vase again to fasten at the belt of her plain cloth gown, when Sarah knocked once more.

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“Mr. Conway’s below.”

No need to tell her that! It was the song of the trumpets, odd and sweet and compelling with the childlike heart of gladness in it. She came toward him with her swift gliding step as he sat at the piano, his hands upon the keys, the face with the deep-set eyes and fine bearded lips turned to her. The eyes took note of hers with that quick covert look she knew so well, only to change to triumph, to delight! If he kept on with the strain it was in subtle service to his sweet lady; it brought in vividest picture the emblazoned scene, the throng in St. Peter’s, the benediction, the blue sky of Rome above, and one thought to both.

“Yes, we will see it together this year,” he assented, smilingly, with a quick breath, and took his hands from the keys to throw his arm around her waist, and draw her gently down upon the seat beside him. There was all the exhilaration of a boy in the backward toss of his head as he murmured, with his joyous eyes upon her:

“To see everything again with *you!* Ah, it’ll be great, won’t it?”

Henry

Henry

A Humorous Love Story

IT was in January that we got engaged, and I never saw any one so much in love as Henry was. I had been keeping company with him for about six months, but I never was quite certain in my mind that Henry wanted me until the words were said. I had no doubt after that. Now Joshua Gibson, *he* had a way of asking me to marry him, sort of free and careless-like, every week or so, and I'd answer him: "No, not at present," as if 'twas all a joke. He was a jolly sort of a fellow, with red hair and blue eyes; real good company, though not handsome.

Henry used never to take his dark eyes off my face, no matter whom I talked to, but he never said much. He was very tall, and thin, and a little yellow, because he hadn't any digestion, and was never without pain. He *would* eat crullers because I made 'em, though I knew it hurt him awful.

He was so quiet, as a general thing — except for sighing, which he did sometimes incessant — that I wasn't prepared for the

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burst of eloquence he let forth when once he'd made up his mind to ask me. He brought in the moon and stars, the planets and creeping things, Leviathan, that great beast, and the whole book of Job (for he was ever a great reader of Scripture) to prove how much he loved me; and when he got through he wept like a babe, and so did I.

He was so overcome that he didn't even kiss me until the third day was passed, and then he trembled so from top to toe, that I thought he'd faint, and wanted to go for a bottle of salts to use if 'twas necessary. But the action seemed to revive him instead, and after a while he got so that he'd just hold my hand and kiss it when he found himself going off, and it always brought him to.

Henry's mother and sisters came to see me, they were all tall and dark like him, but yellower, and they all worshipped him. They were from the South, their name was Gamble, and they thought a sight of themselves. They said no Gamble had ever married a Yankee before, but that Henry's bride should be welcome. Aunt Martha was as polite as could be to them, but we were both glad when they went.

Henry couldn't bear to live away across the

Henry

town from me, so he took a room just opposite us, where he could see my goings out and my comings in. He always came over before breakfast to find how I'd slept, and then afterwards on his way to work, and when he came home, and, of course, after supper.

Sometimes we asked him to meals, but it was sort of uncomfortable, because he was always afraid I'd choke, or something. He made me promise not to eat fish, he was that afraid of bones, and if I had a glass of lemonade he'd ask me a dozen times if I was quite sure there weren't any seeds in it. (He never ate much himself, unless it was lobster or cheese, his appetite was so delicate.) If I raked down the stove he was afraid I'd set myself afire, and if I ran upstairs he thought it might give me heart trouble, and if I ran down it scared him for fear I'd fall and break my neck. I *never* saw any one so careful about everything, and I would get all in a shake after a while, with taking such extra pains to keep from what was dangerous.

He gave me a ring, but I was just a little disappointed, for I had set my heart on a solid gold one, with a stone in it. This was a black ring which he had cut out of a rubber button when he was ten years old — *he*

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thought a sight of it, because he had made it himself, and I tried to.

He was always bringing me presents of things he had when he was a boy; pieces of old stones, and bird's nests, and willow whistles, and twisted nails, and acorns, and a broken jack-knife, and a potato his mother made him carry once for rheumatism. One day I was cleaning out my bureau drawers, and Aunt Martha came in, and when she saw all Henry's treasures that he'd given me, lying there, she just screeched out laughing, and for the life of me I couldn't help joining in, though my face was as red as fire, and I wanted to pitch the things into the street.

"Land sakes!" said she. "Annie Louise, can't ye get a beau that'll make ye better presents than those? You're a real good looking girl, though I do say it, with them light curls of yours, and your pretty blue eyes, and dimples, and don't need to play second to nobody, but ye don't seem to have no sense about Henry, if ye did graduate first at the High School."

"Don't you like Henry, Aunt Martha?" said I, flaring right up.

"Oh, um, I didn't say that," she grumbled. "If you're suited it's nothing to me, and

Henry

I guess he's got enough money to keep you decent after you're married, if he *is* close now."

When it came on May, Aunt Martha asked Henry when we were to be married, for she wanted to go off and make a visit in Pennsylvania afterwards. Henry had always spoken of getting married in the spring, and I'd been making my wedding clothes all winter. Henry didn't give her any real kind of answer; he said he would talk it over with me first. We didn't intend to have any fine doings, he knew that, for I couldn't afford it, and we'd settled to have the ceremony plain and private at home.

But that evening, when we were sitting close on the side piazza and the mist was rising up over the meadow, and the tree-toads were going on like mad down by the pond, he told me that he'd always had a dreadful queer feeling about getting married since he knew me. He said he loved me so much that he couldn't get over the idea that there was a Doom about it, and he was sure certain that if the day was set, and him looking forward to it, that when the minister came and the words were to be spoken that made us one, he'd just drop down dead with joy be-

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fore he could say, "Annie Louise I take thee!"

"Well, then, aint we ever to be married?" I said, a little huffy, though I could feel his form quiver with the tumultuous throbbings of his heart.

Then he explained his plan to me. He said the dream of his life was to call me his, but it was the anticipation which his sensitive spirit could not stand. Instead of setting the day he wanted to leave word with Dr. Macfarren to come in any evening that was convenient and marry us out of hand. It wouldn't take but a minute after he once came, and it would be all over almost before we knew it was going to be done.

I thought it was a mighty queer way of doing things, but he talked to me, low and fondly, until he made me see it all as he did, and then we set out for a month the like of which I think nobody ever went through before. Aunt Martha had a wedding cake made, and I packed my valise, for we had settled to go right into Jersey City the first thing, and from thence to Paterson to see Henry's married sister, and the Falls (if they were falling) and I kept my blue duck suit, and white straw

Henry

hat and gloves ready to put on and start off with at a moment's notice.

It was awful exciting, I can tell you. Every evening I wore my white dress, for I was set on being wedded in white, and sat on the piazza or in the parlour with Henry from eight till ten o'clock, waiting to hear the sound of Dr. Macfarren's footsteps coming down the street. We couldn't talk or even sit in comfort, for just as soon as we did begin to forget for a moment one or other of us would be sure to start and say, "What's that sound?" or, "Didn't you hear the gate click?" and then we would watch and listen again.

Henry always came at half-past seven — he didn't visit with me in the daytime any more, he was working so hard — and he always whispered as he embraced me:

"I feel that we shall seal the bond to-night, Annie Louise!" and if he spoke at all afterwards it was about the shortness and uncertainty of human life, and the vanity of our wishes. When he left, at half-past ten, for Aunt Martha was very strict, he would be so affected at the parting that it was a real relief to me to see him the next evening looking as if he didn't enjoy any poorer health than usual.

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I couldn't do a thing that was useful in the daytime, but keep my white frock washed and ironed to be fresh enough to wear every evening, and set the parlour to rights, so that everything would be in order for the ceremony, for there were two or three neighbours in the street who expected to come over when the knot was tied. But I couldn't sew a stitch, nor do any housework, nor read any of the novels I got from the library, real elegant ones, and just what I'd always liked before. I did want to go to Coney Island once or twice, to get out of sight of the parlour and the leather bag and my wedding clothes, but Henry was too awful fearful of boats to have me go on one, and we might miss the minister. I got so that I sat in my room a good deal and cried; life seemed so sort of solemn, and real, with Henry.

Those evenings, oh, those evenings! The neighbours began to snicker when Henry passed down the street, and Aunt Martha was furious, and I didn't have any more appetite than Henry, and got so nervous and shaking I thought I'd go wild. Aunt Martha said that Dr. Macfarren had forgotten all about us, and she made Henry go and leave word again. We found then that he had been away

Henry

on a vacation, but he promised to come around the first chance he got.

Two or three nights afterwards Mrs. Leggett's little boy came to get some of Aunt Martha's cough syrup for the baby. While Aunt Martha was making it up. I told him I'd go around to his house with it, for he had another errand, and I was so wild I felt as if I *must* go out for a minute.

Henry looked at me sort of queer, but he didn't make any objection; he offered to come with me, but I told him it was too damp for him, and I wouldn't be a moment.

I was gone a little longer than I intended, for who should I meet on the way but Joshua Gibson. I hadn't seen him hardly any since I was engaged, and he seemed real glad to stop and talk a little, though *he* watched me kind of curious, I thought. When I ran in the house Aunt Martha was rocking backward and forward in her chair, and crying.

Henry looked agitated, and he opened his arms and folded me in them in a solemn embrace.

"Oh, stop that!" says Aunt Martha. "The minister's been here, and you out, Annie Louise! I never see no such doings, not in all

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my born days. We'll be the laughing stock of the whole place."

"Why didn't you keep him?" I said, turning hot and cold, "You knew I was coming back!"

Henry shook his head sadly. "He was on his way to visit the sick, and had only a few minutes to spare for us. This is a cruel, cruel blow, my own heart's treasure!"

He staggered, but I didn't take any notice of him, and just went and hung up my hat on a nail.

"We needn't sit up any longer, that's one good thing," I said. "Good-night, Henry Gamble!"

I didn't sleep much that night, for I couldn't get it out of my head that Henry had known all the time that Dr. Macfarren was coming, and I felt sick. *Did* he want to marry me, or did he not?

The next evening, however, Henry seemed more wrapped up in me than ever. He brought the wedding ring in his pocket and made me try it on, and though it was pretty big, it was real nice. Aunt Martha wanted to up and tell him there was to be no more shilly-shallying, but I wouldn't let her.

Thursday night I felt just as if something

Henry

was going to happen. The moon was big and golden, and the air was soft and warm.

I did up my hair on top of my head, with a lot of cute little curls on my forehead, and put on that everlasting white dress again with the white satin belt, and it seemed for once as if there might something come of it at last. But after supper I had a note from Henry, saying that his mother was ill, and had sent for him, and he wouldn't be able to see me until the next day. A boy had brought the note, and while I was standing on the front steps reading it, who should come past but Dr. Macfarren. He took off his hat and said:

"Ah, Miss Price, you are all ready, I see! I wish I could stop now, but I will be with you later, without fail."

"*What!*" said I.

"I told Mr. Gamble only a few moments ago that I would perform the ceremony at half-past nine this evening," he continued, "so good-bye until then, Miss Price."

I rushed down the yard to the lilac-bushes, where Aunt Martha couldn't see me, and hid my face in the leaves. What *did* it mean? I just choked, and began to tremble so that I thought I should fall, when I felt a manly arm steal around my waist. I thought 'twas Henry,

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but when I looked up, if it wasn't Joshua Gibson!

"Why Josh!" I said faintly. He looked so wholesome, and kind, and like old times, that I just put my head on his shoulder and let it stay there for a couple of minutes, while he patted me in a comfortable way that did me good.

"Now," he said, "Annie Louise, I heard you talking to the minister, and I saw you felt so bad that I couldn't help following after you. There's something up, and I want you to tell me what 'tis. Ain't I been watching ye for a month past, and seen you losing all your pretty colour, and getting thinner every day, and sort of scared-looking? Why, I loved you long before that yellow-complected fool ever set eyes on you, and I thought you were going to love me too, before he came to hand. Tell me all about it!"

Well, I did, I just told him the whole thing, and oh, it *was* a relief! I told him how careful Henry had always been of me, and about the presents, and the month we'd been waiting minute by minute, as one might say, to be married, and how the minister was coming to-night at last, and Henry had known it all the time, and had given me

Henry

the slip; and when I finished I burst right out crying.

“I made up my mind this afternoon,” said I, “that if I wasn’t married to-night, I never should be!”

“You poor little soul,” said Josh, and oh, he was comforting, though I think he swore some under his breath, and he held me up strong.

“As for that sneaking lizard, that —”

“Oh, Josh!” I cried.

“I’m going to *say* it, Annie Louise; he’s a —” Well, there, he did call Henry some *real wicked* names, and I knew I ought to be angry, but I wasn’t — I was glad.

“Do you know,” said he, “that Henry Gamble is making up to that rich Mrs. Hunter that lives in Jay Street? She’s had two husbands already, and I reckon he thinks she’ll take him for the third. He stays there all day, he don’t do no *work*, he’s too lazy.”

I began to tremble again, and when Josh spoke his voice was full tender.

“See here, Sweety,” said he. “You don’t love that idiot any more, do you?”

I shook my head and sobbed.

“Don’t you think you’re going to like me a sight better?”

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I nodded, and stopped crying, for there was something queer in his tone.

“Then lets *us* get married this evening, Annie Louise, lovey, as long as you set this time in your mind for it, and the minister coming, and you shall have a wedding that’ll *be* a wedding, as sure as my name is Joshuay Gibson!”

“But Josh!” said I, leaning against him and starting to cry again. “He’s—he’s—kissed me lots of times, and you wouldn’t like that.”

Josh gave a gulp, and then he says:

“Well, I’m going to kiss you now, Annie Louise, I’m going to kiss you for all the rest of your life, if I have good luck, so *that* don’t cut no ice. And we’ll drop that subject for good and all, for ’taint healthy. We must go in the house now and tell Aunt Martha, and you get your things ready, quick.”

“Oh, they *are* ready,” said I. I told him about the travelling dress and bag, and about the journey we were to have made into Jersey City, and from there to Paterson; and Josh slapped his hand on his knee and declared that it was all fine.

Then we went back to Aunt Martha, and broke the news to her gently — at least we meant to.

Henry

Aunt Martha couldn't get it through her head, at first; her agitation certainly was great, but she came up to time afterwards, as Josh said.

He left the house to make his preparations, and Oh, my! how we flew round. Aunt Martha cried a little, but she hugged me, and she said.

"Annie Louise, I've known Josh Gibson since he was a boy, and I'm glad you've got a *man* this time."

I went upstairs and took off my dress and fixed my hair all over again. Aunt Martha called out to know what I was doing and I said:

"I put on my frock before for Henry, and I'm going to dress myself all over again for Josh."

I hadn't hardly got dressed before there was a thundering knock at the door, and then another, and another. Oh, my, oh, my! How my heart did jump. If Josh hadn't sent roast chickens and hams, and salad, and a tub of ice-cream, and a keg of beer. And next a whole army of men trooped in that belonged to Josh's singing club; they had a meeting that night, and they adjourned to see him married. A crowd of people came up the street and

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walked in, almost everybody in the neighbourhood, and when I looked out there was a row of Chinese lanterns hung on the front piazza that made it as light as day.

And next Josh arrived, and he did look so handsome — he just beamed with happiness. He beckoned me into the kitchen, and took out of his pocket two velvet cases with rings in them. They were both *solid gold* and weighty, but one had three elegant red stones in it.

“Ain’t that a sparkler?” he said. “That’s your engagement ring, Sweetie; you see we’ve got to do it all up in a bunch, but I’m bound that you shall have all that’s right and proper. You’re the prettiest, and dearest, and sweetest girl in the world, Annie Louise, and the trustiest; and you’ve got the right feller this time, one that’s going to do his level best to make you happy, if he knows it!”

Then he kissed me once, solemnly, and Dr. Macfarren arrived to tie the nuptial knot. He looked surprised not to see Henry, but Josh took him aside and explained, and then Dr. Macfarren congratulated me, and seemed real hearty.

So we were married. There had never been a wedding like it in town — such a supper,

Henry

and such singing, as good as an opera. The Club sang "My Lady Lu," and the "Watch on the Rhine," and "Daisy" and "Oh, where and oh, where has my Little Dog Gone" — Josh told 'em to give us everything, ancient and modern, and I guess they did. We made the minister stay to supper, but he didn't look quite easy, and left right afterwards; Aunt Martha said she thought he had a toothache.

And then we danced — Oh, how we danced! Josh and I were partners all the time, and the way that cornet played, with the concertina chiming in! All who couldn't dance, beat time with their feet.

It was nearly four o'clock in the morning before every one left, and Josh and I walked down to take the milk train for Jersey City. My blue duck suit was all covered with rice, and an old shoe had knocked Josh's hat off, so that 'twas a little dusty, but we didn't mind. Josh carried our two valises, and my feet felt as light as a feather, they were so in time with the dancing and the day was just dawning over the salt meadows, all fresh and sweet, and the birds were beginning to sing.

I was so happy, without trying to think why, that I could hardly keep from little bub-

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bles of laughter, and Josh looked at me, and said I matched the morning.

“But why are we going to Jersey City?” said he, stopping suddenly, and letting the valises rest on the ground.

“Why,” said I, “so we can go and see the Falls, and your — no, *Henry's* married sister, at Paterson!”

“*What!*” says he, as mad as thunder, and then he burst into a roar of laughter. “If that isn't the best I ever heard! Annie Louise, we ain't running on Henry's ticket this time. We won't stop at Jersey City, we'll go right over the ferry to New York and take the train for a real falls, and that's Niagary. My week's vacation's just begun, and I've got a roll of bills in my trousers' pocket to spend on my girl — and what does she say to that?”

I couldn't say anything but Oh, *Josh!* Though it seemed most too good to be true, for just then the train came lumbering in and we had to run to catch it. But as Josh pulled me up with him on the car platform, we looked back and there was Henry, with Mrs. Hunter, making for it, too.

Josh said something — it was the worst I *ever* heard — and then he took a flying jump and *lit* on Henry. I ought to have been

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sorry, but I wasn't; I was *glad*. But I shut my eyes, and when I opened them again Josh's arm was around me, and the sweetest smile I ever saw upon a husband's lips was on his.

L. cf C. 1

When Love Is Kind

When Love Is Kind

A Problem Love Story

OH, I thought you knew. She's engaged to Mr. Lloyd — Harland Lloyd — perhaps you've seen him coming here. He's a tall fellow with dark hair, and rather a set face until he smiles; *then* it lights up. I said to my daughter the other day: 'Anna, Harland is really very good-looking when his face lights up!'"

Mrs. Lane fixed her eyes genially upon her visitor, a lady so stiffly encased in high-priced raiment as to present no other individuality than that of a formal caller. Kind Mrs. Lane's family sometimes bewailed the fact that she had a startling lack of "company manners," the quality of her unstrained confidences falling, like mercy, on all alike. She went on now with amiable generosity, after a polite murmur from the caller.

"I tell you who he looks like, although Anna doesn't like me to say it — it's the ashman, the one with the white teeth and the large family. He is always asking me for clothes for them. What was I talking about?"

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. . . Oh, the dance, of course. I wish that Latimer — my oldest son, you know — was going to be home for it. It is really given for Anna and Mr. Lloyd; it will be their first appearance at anything of the kind together since the engagement was announced. There were several places that they expected to go to before, but he was always prevented at the last moment; this time, however, the Wiltons changed the date especially to suit him, and it happens to be Anna's birthday. She has been doing really nothing all the morning but looking at the pearl ornament he sent her. I never knew before what it was like to have a daughter engaged. I have only the one, you know. They are very devoted — of course, that's only to be expected, but it does take up a great deal of her time. Oh, Anna!" she called to the young girl who, with a companion, was passing lightly through the hall, with a mass of fluffy, white stuff in her arms. "Anna, come in, won't you? I think you've met Mrs. Wagner — and this is Anna's friend, Miss Loring, who has come on from Boston for the dance. If you've been pressing your dress, Anna, I wish you'd bring it in and show it. Well, Anna, don't look like that. Mrs. Wagner

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has daughters of her own, and I'm sure she likes to see pretty things as much as any of us."

"Yes, I shall be much pleased," affirmed Mrs. Wagner, with a patronizing elegance that seemed to cover some surprise.

"She made it all herself," continued the mother, displaying the robe her daughter resignedly handed her. "Don't you think that's a sweet idea, going off the shoulders that way?" She dropped her voice mysteriously. "You would never guess how much it was a yard — *only twenty-five cents!* Such a bargain. Of course, with Mr. Lane's business affairs as they are at present, I don't want people to think we're extravagant. Anna was so clever about fixing up this lace; I just said to her, 'Anna, if you go upstairs and look in one of the trunks in the tank-room, I'm sure you'll find an old dress of your cousin Louisa's that —'"

"If mother only wouldn't," moaned Anna Lane, with her head pressed in the soft shoulder of her friend, after the two girls had escaped upstairs with the garment. She began to laugh in spite of herself. "Poor Mrs. Wagner! She looked so bewildered; she expected to see something really handsome after mother's praises."

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“The dress is lovely, anyway,” said Ethel comfortingly, “and it just suits you. Wait till Mr. Lloyd sees you in it.”

“I hope he’ll like it,” said the other, a soft colour coming into her cheek. Every stitch in that gown had been taken with the thought of Harland in her very finger-ends. She did want to look lovely for him! He had good taste; he was no man-milliner, but he had the artistic sense of proportion and fitness which so many men possess to an unsuspected degree. Anna had divined the pleasure that certain harmonies gave him. This gown was simple, but the folds of the twenty-five cent material fell softly, the renovated lace had little pink rosebuds worked through its silky meshes, the white satin straps that held the bodice over her satin-white shoulders were worked with rosebuds, too. When the eyes of her lover first dwelt on her so attired —

The thought was too much to be shared even in the company of Ethel. She went into the hall as if looking for something, and stood there in the shadows leaning against the wall. There was always something shadowy about Anna herself; her dark hair kept her down-dropped face in shadow, her long, long lashes made shadows on her cheek; a wilful, petu-

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lant, eluding personality, dangerously sweet, allured as through a dusky veil. But the veil was lifted for a moment now. She was so captured by love that it made her a little breathless; it showed her every present joy in the white, backward-reaching light of a joy to come. This was her birthday — the first birthday since she had been Harland's — her future birthdays would be spent as his wife. The white gown her fingers had made was but the precursor of a wedding-gown; their first public appearance together but antedated their public appearance together in the ceremony of marriage. If she had not spoken of all this to him, she knew that he understood. She was glad that he was a man, not a boy, with eight years more as a makeweight for her twenty. It was different with Ethel — she was provisionally engaged to a youth of her own age.

“Do you think Jakey will get down from college?” Anna asked of her friend, as she went back into the room. “I'd feel so sorry for you if he couldn't manage it after all.”

Ethel raised her small, round face, of a deceptive candour, from the lacy underwaist in which she was running ribbons with a bodkin.

“Do I think Jakey 'll get here? Well, you

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can just believe it. That's why I brought that old blue dress to wear — it's nearly in rags, but I always have the loveliest time when I've got it on. Jakey wants a piece of it for a souvenir. Oh, he'll come, even if he has to make 'cuts' ruinously to do it — his supply must be about exhausted now. That's one awfully dear thing about Jakey, he always keeps his word; he's perfectly absurd and crazy, and all that sort of thing, but if he makes you a promise he'll keep it, through thick and thin."

"Well, of course," said Anna temperately, looking through the shadow of the dark hair that she was brushing out over her rose-coloured dressing-gown.

"No 'of course' at all! What do you think, last year he told a girl he'd take her to the races. I know she made him ask her. She was a horrid looking thing — as thin as a slat — and they missed the train, so he went and found a carriage and drove all that distance rather than disappoint her, though the man charged him *thirty dollars*, and he was down to his last five until the end of the month. But he was just as game as he could be; he said his watch was already 'doing time,' so he got another fellow to pawn his and lend him the money. That's the spirit I like in a man!"

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“What is that you like in a man, dear?” inquired Mrs. Lane, coming into the room. “Here’s a box from the florist’s, Anna, roses from Harland — I just opened it to see, I thought you wouldn’t mind. Now, don’t be foolish. What difference does it make who sees them first? And here’s something else that just came — a telegram — I sort of hated to bring it up to you, though I know it’s absurd to feel so in these days, when people send telegrams for everything. I suppose it is just more congratulations. Well?”

Anna was scanning the yellow paper she had unfolded, and looked up incredulously.

“It’s from Harland. What does he mean? He can’t mean — he *can’t* mean — that he isn’t coming!”

“Give it to me,” cried Ethel, snatching the telegram from her. She read aloud:

Have just been called to Philadelphia for important business meeting. Would have come to tell you, but must catch the six-thirty train. Very sorry not to be with you to-night. Will write on the train.

H. LLOYD.

“It certainly does mean that he isn’t coming,” said Ethel blankly. “It’s too bad, Anna.

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If Latimer were only at home! But, of course, you *can* go with your brother James."

"He is going to take Gertrude."

"You know you can come with *us*, anyway," offered Ethel generously. "I'll make Jakey give you some of the dances he has with me, and —"

"I won't go at all!" cried Anna, with a heaving bosom. She ran down the hall and disappeared from view.

"Have you been in there?" Mrs. Lane questioned mysteriously of Ethel, later.

"I've been to the door, but she asked me not to come in," replied the visitor, bare-armed, lustrous-eyed, and fragrant of violet, in the first stages of a "party" toilet, pleasantly secure from disappointment in her own case. The house had been given up to a hurried and spasmodic dinner in the tumult attending the advent of Mr. Jakey Van Dorn, which seemed to necessitate endless runnings up and down stairs, and into different rooms on the part of James, with occasional loud slamming of the front door, in the effort to supplement the wardrobe of his guest in the matter of collar-buttons and studs and clean linen and ties, Mr. Van Dorn having arrived hastily by train in an imperfect condition, with but three cents

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and a postage stamp for negotiable purposes. Ethel was blissfully unconscious that the flowers which he presented to her were a token paid for with the last available funds of an obliging James. She lent her cheerful sympathy now to the perturbed mother, who continued:

“She’ll *have* to go, you know, the Wiltons have put off this dance especially for her and Mr. Lloyd. I’ve been talking to her, but I couldn’t seem to make any impression at all. She said she didn’t want to talk — she kept her face turned away in the pillow. I used every argument I could think of. Of course, it *is* disappointing, and I do think Harland might have managed things differently; it’s happened so many times before, though not quite like this, but he has never been able to go with her anywhere, and it *is* trying. When Anna sets her heart on anything, she wants it so dreadfully — It really uses me all up.” Poor Mrs. Lane’s eyes had a piteous appeal in them. To match the ache in Anna’s young breast was the almost worst ache of the mother, who can do nothing to heal her child’s hurt. In Anna’s young days the mother could have been her adjusting providence, but the girl’s happiness had gone

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beyond her keeping. She went on with forlorn distraction.

“I told her if she expected to get married, she must get used to disappointments; many people had far worse ones. There was Cousin Louisa Grefe, she married such a fine-looking man, he came of a splendid family; his mother used to have a plantation in the South, and a coloured mammy who always called her Ole Miss. It was really beautiful to hear him talk of it, and after all he caught cold and got bronchial asthma, so that he had to sleep in a chair for fifteen years. And there was Hannah Peterson, who — But there was no use of my saying a word. Anna’s father thinks she is too foolish for anything, that it was the only thing Harland could do, if business called him. He’d have no respect for Harland if he hadn’t gone.”

“Oh, she’ll *have* to go to the dance,” said Ethel decidedly. “She will, you’ll see. She’ll have a good time, anyway. Of course, it won’t be what she expected — but she cannot be rude to the Wiltons.”

“That’s just what I told her,” said the anxious mother, endeavouring to reach some sustaining comfort. “Perhaps you can have some influence with her, Ethel. Really, she was so

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unresponsive that I had to tell her that I thought she might try to answer a little more pleasantly, and get over that habit she has of poking up one shoulder when she doesn't want to hear. I'm sure I don't know what excuse she would offer to the Wiltons, if — ”

“Oh, she'll go,” said the other again, patiently.

It was a proud and beautiful Anna who came down, finally, in the white gown with the pink rosebuds to go to the Wiltons's party — defiant of sympathy, cold to view, yet palpitating with a fiery pain. She was going out to be sympathized with for Harland's defection, pitied and commented on for it, behind her back.

“Do you suppose he cares for her so very much?” she could hear the whispers. “It always seemed to me it was more on her side.”

Yet not in the comments was the real sting, but the fact that he had exposed her to them — and that he was not with her. She ran back after she had gone down the steps to give a fierce little contrite embrace to the loving, helpless mother, with the words, wrung from her:

“Don't mind so much, mother. It isn't worth it.”

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It was a slight thing in its way, this defection of Harland's, but it seemed to prefigure an endless difference between them — even those moments in which she did justice to his reason opened the vista down into a well of bitter waters. There was a world in which she had no rights. Her passionate young soul was racked in a way that seemed unbearable, a torture whose steel fangs pierced inward the more fiercely, the harder she tried to push it from her. In this comfortable, placid, commonplace, home atmosphere, love had gripped hold of Anna as in the days of the Greeks, with the old, unmodern, overmastering power that shook her into exquisitely strange exaltations and abysmal depths.

As she had lain on the bed in the darkness, sullen to her mother's pleading, jealousy of all of her lover's life that was not hers was looming into her, and the thirst to hear his voice when she needed it to still this unreasoning tumult, and the lack of any comfort from him until hours and hours and hours had passed, and his letter came. She imagined to herself his words of passionate regret that he had had to fail her — and his longing for her — poor little, shadowy-sweet Anna — who had been but a child so lately that she did not as yet

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know how to bear this new pain of being a woman; who must dance with it consuming her, and lie down on her bed once more, after the long, glittering, waste hours of the ball, and rise up again in the morning, still accompanied with it, against her sick will.

Jakey Van Dorn — shining antithesis to Harland! chivalrously willing to ruin his prospects for any girl, went back to his studious lair early, though Anna heard him go. She was listening for the postman's whistle. There was no letter in any of the morning mails, though Mrs. Lane lay in wait for the postman herself, and announced loudly from afar the nature of the epistles delivered, in tones of eager cheerfulness, to forestall disappointed expectation, while Anna and Ethel talked over all the minutiae of the dance. But at last the letter from Harland came. Mrs. Lane, breathless and flushed with haste, handed one out of the sheaf to Anna, who disappeared with her treasure into the next room. It had come! She hungered for the opening words: "*My darling, my darling, I'm so sorry, it hurt me more than you —*" oh, that would stop the pain!

She opened the letter and read:

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Thursday, 8 P. M. On the train.

My dearest girl:

Here am I, going farther and farther from you, at the very time when I should be going *to* you. It's hard luck, isn't it, that every one but me will see you in the pretty gown you told me you were making. Perhaps you'll wear it for me some evening, will you? And that will be better yet.

I hope you'll have just as good a time as you possibly can, and dance every dance. I trust you made all the proper apologies for me. Of course, I'm sorry not to be there, but, as far as I am concerned, I'd far rather spend an evening just with you, than waste it at a dance. . . . I have been looking out of the window just here; it is very pretty in the moonlight. There is a woman in the seat in front of me who isn't pretty, though — she has been nagging at her husband ever since we started. He must find it something awful. I can't imagine what I'd do in his position — thank God, I'll never know. Anna, when I think of you — I stop, and that is all that I can say — *Anna, when I think of you!* I never supposed, dear, that I could care so much—more than I've even tried to tell you. Just think, we might have been married for the last four years, if we'd only known each other sooner. What a waste of time! You will get this to-morrow, only a few hours before I see you, for I will get back to my rooms about seven o'clock to dinner, and will come to you as soon after as possible.

Always yours,

H. L.

“Well, what does he say?” questioned Mrs. Lane interestedly, as Anna came into

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the room. "Come now, Anna, what does he say?"

"Nothing," said Anna, "except that he expects to be here this evening." Nothing indeed, but what he had said many times before. The very fact that he did not seem to know that he had done her an injury but served to deepen it. It is one of the subtle and curious torments of love that what should be its bliss is so often its bane; no matter how deeply felt and expressive of the heart of the sender a love letter may be, if it falls short of the need love has set for it, it becomes only a stinging ill.

"He's coming to-night," repeated Mrs. Lane, her eyes searching her daughter's face for the longed-for signs of happiness. "Well, I'm sure, that's very nice. Anna! *Anna!* Come back here a moment. I wish you'd go downstairs and see if those seeded raisins came — the grocer forgot them the first time. Now, *wait* — I have not finished. Tell Susan if he doesn't bring them soon, she cannot have the suet pudding for dinner, it takes so long to boil — yet I don't know what else to have. See if you cannot find something in the cook-book that she can make quickly; we have plenty of milk. Now, Anna, I wish you

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wouldn't look like that. Here you've had a letter from Harland, and he's coming to-night, and — If you'd only take a little more interest in the house, it would be far better for you, you do entirely too much as you please. I know you were disappointed yesterday, and I know you are tired from being up so late last night, but if you would only learn a little more self-control —”

Mrs. Lane was happily unconscious of the fact that she had never learned it herself. She could have cut off her right hand for her daughter, but she positively couldn't let her alone.

Ethel ventured a word on the subject when the two girls sat before the bedroom fire, preparatory to dressing for dinner.

“You needn't go on, Ethel,” said Anna, with a sudden sweet, forlorn smile. “Poor mother! I know I was horrid — but you needn't talk about the other part. I know everything you are going to say. You see this isn't the first time — it's all happened before. Harland does just what he pleases, that's just what it comes down to, without any reference to me. He'll never in this world own that he's wrong about anything, because he always thinks he's right.”

When Love is Kind

She looked with half-averted face from under her long lashes, in the drooping shadow of her hair.

“But when it’s business —” remonstrated Ethel sensibly.

“Business! Yes, that’s the excuse for everything. I’ve been asking myself seriously, ‘Hasn’t a promise to a girl any weight? Doesn’t it mean *anything*? Couldn’t he have said to the people who wanted him,’ “I cannot go that day, on account of an engagement which I cannot break, made two weeks ago?” I believe he could have said it, if he had only thought he could — he simply takes it for granted that he can’t. I’ve been trying my best to think of it all in *his* way — and I can’t! I never can.” She stopped and then went on again scornfully. “If it was our wedding day, I suppose he wouldn’t come if he was called away on business!”

“Now that’s silly,” said Ethel. Anna rose and took a letter from the desk in the corner. “I want you to hear what I’ve written to him.”

Dear Harland:

You kindly wrote that you would be here to-night. As I will not be at home, I send this to tell you so, although I suppose it is unnecessary, for you have, probably, no

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more intention than usual of keeping your word. The position you put me in last night was sufficiently obvious, without further explanation. I don't know whether it's worth while to say that there are some things one naturally expects of a gentleman.

Yours truthfully,

ANNA LANE.

"Anna!" cried Ethel, in consternation. "What a dreadful note! You can't possibly send that; he'll never forgive you."

"I don't want him to."

"Oh, but you will!" Ethel was thoroughly roused. "I'll own it was horrid to be treated in that way — I'd have hated it — but there are some things you can't say to a man, they're so queer, they mind so terribly! Now, we could just squabble and get over it, but they — Don't you remember James, when Jakey made the fuss about the golf sticks, and said that James didn't tell the truth? Jakey was only being disagreeable because he was put out, he really didn't mean anything; but James was *livid*; he made Jakey knuckle right down, he said he'd thrash him if he joked that way again. If you send that letter to Harland, it will hurt him more than you can ever make up, and you'll be sorry when it's too late."

When Love is Kind

“He doesn’t care whether he hurts me,” said Anna unchangeably. “It would be like this all our lives. I won’t marry any one who counts me out in that way — it isn’t fair!”

“Well, if you send that note, he won’t want to marry *you*,” Ethel’s tone was vigorous. “It says the kind of thing he won’t stand; it hits at his self-respect. He just won’t *like* you any more, that’s all there is about it.”

“I am going to send it,” said Anna, calmly.

“You can’t get it to him in time — it’s six o’clock now!”

“When James comes home — There he is now. Oh, James, please come up here. Are you going around to Gertrude’s to dinner?”

“Yes,” said James, appearing at the door. “Hello, Ethel, wish I was going to stay home with you; wouldn’t have to exert myself then.” He stopped to yawn irrepressibly. “They always have these dances last too long. I like it well enough until midnight, and then I want to go home. This dancing until three o’clock in the morning makes me feel rotten. What do you want with me, Anna? Say it quick, and let me go.”

“I want to know if you’ll leave this letter at Harland’s on your way.”

“Yes, all right. Here, give it to me. What’s

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the use of putting on that 'Politeness of James'? Slam on the blotter. There, that'll do."

"You won't forget it?"

"No, I'll not forget it," said James. He went off, to call upstairs after a while:

"Where in thunder are my gloves, Anna?"

"Look on the table. Have you got my letter?"

"Yes, I've got it. The gloves aren't there."

"Perhaps you left them in the cosey corner in the hall."

"No, I didn't."

"Look under the pillows."

"All right, I've got them."

He was gone at last. If Anna's heart had begun to fail her in those last minutes, it was too late now. The deed was done — her letter to Harland had gone; the crude, smarting impulse had had its way.

She was so brightly composed at dinner, so cheerfully conversational that even the watchful mother tried to believe that the girl was happy once more, although some inner sense puzzled over what could still be wrong. And dinner time passed, and the evening began. Ethel had gone into the library to write to Jakey. Mr. Lane had disappeared upstairs

When Love is Kind

with a headache, and Anna herself dropped into the cushioned and canopied corner in the hall, safe from inspection by the maternal eye. She felt a chill coming over her now, after the fever of her unused passion was spent. There was a tenseness of expectation that made her lean forward, listening, her head upon her slender hand. Expectation of what — ? The canopy shadowed her drooping face, framed in its falling hair, the long lashes making shadows on her cheeks. The pink lamp sent a rosy glow over the folds of her pearl grey gown. But the chill grew. She began to realize that she would not see Harland — not that night, perhaps not at any other time. He would be very kind to her, but he would never be her lover again. Unerring was the cleaving knowledge of the truth as Ethel had spoken it.

Like people who imagine themselves dead, yet able to weep in luxurious sympathy with the survivors, Anna had felt that she could have the merciless pleasure of repudiating Harland while still enjoying his loved presence — but now the truth struck home. If the woman whom he had asked to be his wife could write him such a note, he would not come. He was no light-o' love, erratic, irre-

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sponsible boy, like Jakey, but a very self-respecting man, with a strong will and a certain sternness of dignity about him when his honour was questioned. There was a gleam in his eye which had scared Anna not unpleasantly once or twice. She had been proud of that very spirit in him, and had felt her own rise unwontedly to meet it. Oh, she was proud of him, and that was why it had been so bitter a mortification not to have him with her at the dance—he was head and shoulders above those other men! And they had thought her slighted! Why, she knew he was longing to be with her every minute of the time. She knew that if he decided what was right for him to do, he paid her the compliment of thinking that she would understand. Her womanhood still cried out defiantly: “He should have kept his word to me, no matter what the cost!” Yet her womanhood cried out for his dear presence then, that minute, whatever the cost of that, no matter what had been said or done. And now he would not come. If his promised wife could write him a letter like that, he would not come. Oh, if she had not sent it! A wild unreasoning frenzy possessed her. Take back as she might her written words, she could not give him back

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the dear image of his trusting girl-lover — that was gone forever. Yet, if he did not come to-night, she would die!

She lay back further under the Turkish canopy as her mother passed under the stairway. It grew nearly nine o'clock. She had had a wild, insistent hope, despite all her knowledge of him, that he might come. She buried her head now in the pillows, that her burning eyes might have a little rest. Something stiff rattled out from under her hand; she took it up and looked at it, at first mechanically, and then in startled incredulity. It was a sealed letter, and on the light blue envelope was written in her own handwriting:

Harland Lloyd, Esq.,
Politeness of James.

It had never gone — No, it had never gone. Everything was as it had been before — that was the lightning flash from the heavens! James had dropped the letter looking for his gloves. *Everything was as it had been before.* Anna rose with a beating heart.

And what was that sound that broke upon the stillness of the night far down at the crossing, growing nearer and nearer as she lis-

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tened? A quick, ringing tread, firm, but very, very rapid, as a footstep seldom sounds, but at one time in a man's life, with the hurry of his joy, his possession — He was coming to her as a lover comes.

Ah, no shadowy Anna this, who awaited his arms around her, but a lovely, joyous, rosy thing of palpitating light! What mattered the eternal differences — the questions to be settled? They could be lived out together.

“Anna!” Mrs. Lane's busy tones came from the hall above. “*Ann-na!* Harland is coming; I thought you'd like to know, so that you could open the door for him.”

She sank back unseen, with deep relief, into the chair by the upper window, at which she had been standing to watch. The scourge of Love is far-reaching. Poor Mrs. Lane was, as she murmured to herself, all worn out.

Latimer's Mother

Latimer's Mother

A Family Love Story

IF it were only Maudie Caswell instead of that Miss Slombruger that Latimer was attentive to!"

Mrs. Lane looked appealingly at her pretty brown-haired daughter, a two-months' bride, who, brave in her wedding finery, sat now with a temporary effect in a big arm-chair, watching the clock, at the close of a day spent in her old home.

"Do you suppose I ought to go and call on her, Anna?"

"Oh, mother, no! Of course not!" Young Mrs. Harland Lloyd's tone was final. "It isn't as if anything had been announced; we're not supposed to know about it at all."

"Yes, I *know*, Anna, but still —" Mrs. Lane was plainly unconvinced. "When everybody is asking me if they are engaged — the Caprons go to all those club-dances in Bridge-road and bring back all kinds of reports — when even Mrs. Wagner actually congratulated me, it seems to me very singular that his *mother* should be expected to take no notice of

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it whatever. When you read love stories they always make it seem as if there were only the two young people in the world — I dare say they think so themselves — but they're very much mistaken. I think the family has a great deal to go through." Mrs. Lane paused to add uncomfortably: "Slombruger seems such an extraordinary name — and *Anemone* Slombruger! It doesn't sound quite — ladylike."

"They say it was originally Von Slombruger," interrupted Anna, over whose lovely face little causeless, tremulous blushes had been coming and going, as if, while her mother talked, she herself were holding secret converse with Love. "They say there was a castle on the Rhine — before the father went to Nevada."

"Yes, my dear, so I've heard. But she seems such an unnatural sort of person for my boy to like — Latimer has just the same look in his eyes that he had when he was a baby, and his hair falls over his forehead the same way, for all he is so grown up and so broad, and has done so well in business. I can't seem to hear anything about this Miss Slombruger except that she only cares for dancing and is very attractive to men. Now you know yourself, Anna, you can't make a home for a man on *that*.

Latimer's Mother

I wish I had taken more notice of her at your reception — I *did* see that she was very tall, and white, and thin, and dressed magnificently, but I never thought of her in connection with Latimer; she put me out a little by shaking my hand up by my ear, with that odd, mannish kind of a grip that some girls have. It seems so odd that she should have come on to visit at the Caswells — such nice, comfortable, old-time people — making such a long stay too, and the brother coming out from town so often. *He* was quite nice looking.”

“They say he is devoted to Maudie,” interpolated Anna again.

“Yes, so you told me. When Latimer began suddenly going there, I *did* hope it was for her. She was always such a dear child, and there's been something in her manner to me since her mother's death that has always appealed to me — though since they moved to Bridgeroad and that grandmother came to live there, we've sort of lost sight of them. She got along with your father so beautifully at the reception; he was very much pleased with her. Do you know, Anna — you'll laugh at me — but there was something, just a little *something* in her eyes when she handed

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Latimer her oyster plate that made me feel as if she cared."

"Miss Slombruger is terribly bad style," said Anna decidedly. "She tried to flirt with Harland at the reception — that placed her at once with me; the brother was very nice to me. But Latimer has had so many affairs, probably this won't amount to anything."

"Oh, my dear! You needn't tell *me*." Mrs. Lane shook her head with melancholy certainty. "You may think a person is in earnest, but when you see the real thing you *know*. Why he never has his Sunday dessert any more—not even when it's Nesselrode pudding, and you know how fond he is of that — because he is in such a hurry to get that two o'clock train that makes connection for Bridge-road. If dinner isn't on the table at the moment, he goes around with his watch in his hand counting the seconds, and you know how your father hates to have anything hurried. Oh, Latimer isn't like himself at all. He looks so strained and excited."

"Harland's mother invited him to her musicale — she counted on his violin — and he never came, and never sent any word. I was *so* ashamed," said Mrs. Lloyd. "Of

Latimer's Mother

course Harland wouldn't have minded for himself, but when it was his mother —”

“Well, Harland will have to stand it like anybody else,” announced Mrs. Lane stubbornly. “I hardly see Latimer at all — he never comes in before one o'clock at night. The other evening I tried to get a chance to speak to him while he was buttoning his collar, saying people had been asking me about his going so much to Bridgeroad, and he only said, in that emphatic way of his, ‘When there's anything to tell you, mother, you may be sure I'll tell it.’ Oh, dear me! You don't have to put on your things and go already, do you?”

“Yes, I'd better,” said Anna, who had risen and was putting on her hat. The lovely colour deepened in her soft cheeks — she looked with starry eyes at her mother. “Harland is so foolish; if he gets home before I do he feels so lonely, he won't even sit down until I come in.”

“Yes. Oh, well, he'll get over that,” stated Mrs. Lane absently. She returned yearningly to her troubles. “I can't get used to your living out of the house, Anna, and going to Harland's mother's to Sunday nights' tea. Of course it's all right, but I can't say I don't

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miss you; even Harland couldn't expect me to say that I don't *miss* you, Anna."

"Now you know you have me every day in the week," returned the daughter in a cheerful tone, stopping in the arrangement of her veil to lean caressingly against the motherly shoulder near her, with a quick little upward, loving glance that took in the tears Mrs. Lane was bravely endeavouring to keep under cover. "I wouldn't worry about Latimer. She *is* horrid, but something may come to break it off. Didn't you say I was to have some of those biscuits to take home with me?"

Mrs. Lane brightened visibly. "I've got them in a box downstairs for you, dear, and a piece of the chocolate cake. And, Anna, you'll laugh at me, but I put in two of those croquettes; you liked them so much for lunch, dear. Don't let Gunda burn them up when she warms them over."

She would have liked to send around a whole dinner, but Harland mightn't like it. The Lloyds's little dwelling was charming, but Anna as her mother's helper and Anna as housekeeper on her own account were two very different things. The meals those two young people sat down to wrung Mrs. Lane's heart. The thought of Latimer, her darling

Latimer's Mother

boy, starving with a Miss Slombruger who only cared for dancing, was really too much. Miss Slombruger! In spite of being still young, and in spite of daily association with the present generation, Mrs. Lane had a queer little old-fashioned streak in her that didn't belong in this age — she was, like her bedroom, black walnut to the core. The United States of America consisted of a territory some twenty-five miles square, in which Everybody lived and the capital of which was her home. People who came from elsewhere might be nice, but even then she was relieved when they went back to their strange outlands. She was so very much herself that it was hard for her to put herself in the place of her children, though she yearned unspeakably for some real, living sympathy in her care for the beloved son, her strong young Prince among men, whose future happiness was, alas! in his own inexperienced hands.

“Is Latimer detained to-night?” asked Mr. Lane at dinner, looking at the place opposite James, the younger son. Mr. Lane's high, grey-crowned forehead and Roman nose made anything he said impressive.

“Why, I suppose so,” said the wife hurriedly. “It's dreadful the way he is kept at the

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office. He has hardly been home to dinner a night this week."

"Well, he isn't kept at the office to-night," said James the care-free. James was a college youth who enjoyed life. "I met him on the train to-night coming out with Maudie Caswell."

"Maudie!" Mrs. Lane's heart gave a glad leap.

"Well, he was with her at first, and then they paired off with that Slombruger crowd — they make me tired. Latimer had on one of my new neckties, too, one I've been saving to wear. Oh, you bet he tried to dodge, but I saw him. When he forgets to send his things to the laundry he just walks in and takes mine. I won't stand it any longer, and I'll tell him so, too, when I get the chance. He acts as crazy as a loon over that girl — he acts *crazy!*"

"If you will allow me to speak," said Mr. Lane, with dignified displeasure, "I would like you, my dear, to request Latimer to lock the hall door when he comes in so late. Ellen informed me this morning that the key had not been turned in the lock nor the chain put up for two nights."

"I don't see why she told you," murmured Mrs. Lane with a flash of resentment and a

Latimer's Mother

quick decision to muzzle Ellen for the future. "Poor Latimer! He's so tired when he comes in these nights after that long journey from Bridgeroad, I suppose he can hardly see to get upstairs."

The father waved an impatient hand.

"Latimer is old enough to look after himself. If he is tired, it's his own lookout. *I want that door locked.*"

"Very well, dear," said Mrs. Lane abjectly. She was the recognized means of transmission between her husband and his household. She hastened, now, to place the evening lamp in the little study off the library, wondering whether she ought to speak to him about Miss Slombruger or not. That little old-fashioned streak was answerable for her position toward her husband. Mr. Lane, an intelligent and upright man, somewhat stiff and diffident by nature, had been so surrounded with sacred observances by a sacrificial wife that his every peculiarity had been heightened, until he was now a being apart. In the inclosure in which he lived, every pebble had been so carefully removed that a grain of misplaced sand irritated him. He always sat in the study, no matter what went on in the house, and when mistaken strangers hospitably insisted on en-

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tertaining him, under the impression that he was being neglected, "the family" always got nervous. Yet there were times when "father" had been known to come out of his shell and talk delightfully, and there was an implicit confidence in his affection. As he smiled now at his wife she took the plunge.

"Theodore!"

"Well, my dear?"

"Latimer is — well, I don't know that he is, but — he hasn't *told* me that he was engaged yet, but I think that's what it is. She is considered a very — *attractive* girl, the daughter of the Hon. Zachary Adolphus Slombruger, of Nevada, but I *think* he comes from — Germany."

"Germany!" Mr. Lane sat up straight, his Roman nose looking like an ensign. "He comes from a little back Jersey town. A daughter of *Zach Slombruger's!*" A dull red crept up to his narrow temples, his eyes glittered. "Then all I can say is, she's the daughter of one of the worst scoundrels unhung. The way he behaved about that Undine water deal was a *notorious* scandal — he's a man I wouldn't let come inside my door. Will you kindly push that footstool a quarter of an inch further this way? Thank you."

Latimer's Mother

“But *Theodore!* What am I to do about it?” Poor Mrs. Lane was agonized. “If Latimer *loves* her, Theodore —”

“I don't know what you're going to do about it. I wash my hands of the whole affair. But I give you fair warning, you'll be very sorry if you encourage Latimer in any such folly. If you take my advice you'll put a stop to the whole thing at once. I don't care what the girl is like, it's bad stock, Nannie. That's what it is, it's Bad Stock! Have this lamp taken out of the room at once, if you please, and attended to properly. The odour is disgusting.”

“Oh, Theodore!” said poor Mrs. Lane again, with a heart whose swift sympathy leapt beyond the trivial manifestation of his perturbation to the real cause of it. Bad Stock! She knew what the words meant to him — and to her, too. An honourable, upright, God-fearing ancestry — that was the foundation of family living that every one must have. Yet Anemone might be the flower on a dunghill.

She went to the hall door to look out for a moment in the hope of seeing her boy, and surprised two large ladies about to ring.

“Why, Aunt Margaret!” she cried. “And

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Maggie, too. How did you get here? Come right in. Have you had your dinner?"

"Oh, don't speak of dinner!" said the younger woman, who was not so very young, and who had an air of brisk benevolence. "We came up this afternoon from Bridge-road to a meeting of the Daughters, and there was *such* a collation! We thought we would just drop here for five minutes on our way back to the train, we see you so seldom."

"I'm so glad you did," said Mrs. Lane warmly. "I do wish the boys were home to see their Aunt Margaret, but James has just gone out, and Latimer is hardly ever home to dinner now; he works so hard in the office."

"Indeed! We hear of Latimer quite frequently at the Caswell's in the next street," said Aunt Margaret. "Mrs. Slope — she lives next door to them — runs in two or three times a week to have a little chat with us. She says old Mrs. Caswell is really worn out with so much company. Ever since that dreadful girl from the West arrived the house has been full of young men, staying until all hours. Poor Maudie is so tired she doesn't look like herself at all."

"Well, I must say I don't think old Mrs. Caswell puts herself out very much," retorted

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Mrs. Lane, a furious tide rising in her. "I know Latimer has gone there straight from the office, without any dinner, several times when he has been kept late, and has never been offered a thing to eat. No young man ever comes to my house in that way without my finding out if he's had his dinner, but when it's *my* child, he has to go without. I suppose it's because Mrs. Caswell is just a grandmother, and doesn't want the trouble. If those boys stay too late it's her *own* fault. I'm sure I've often *wished* she'd allude to the time in some way, pleasantly, of course, so they'd have *some* idea of the hour. One night Latimer missed the last train, and had to walk *three miles* to the trolley, and they never even asked him to stay all night."

"Well, of course, if you're satisfied to have him there so often, Nannie, it's all right — if you're satisfied with his attentions to Miss Slombruger. Mother thought — but if you are satisfied it's all right," said Cousin Maggie agreeably, with, however, a mysterious air of reservation all through the rest of the visit that Mrs. Lane scorned to inquire into. She was trembling with an indignation which, however, left her forlorn, when they departed; she was sick of the sound of Miss Slombrug-

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er's name and sick of the whole thing. The tide of report ran but one way. The blue eyes of her eldest born, her bright, warm-hearted, honest, whole-souled boy looked at her as for the last time. Some way she must not let him make this suicidal marriage — the dreary years of consequences stretched murderously before her. But how to stop him? If she pleaded he would not listen; if his father commanded he would not obey. What could you do with children who were bent on folly after they were grown up? She had a sudden yearning for Maudie, for the little, homelike girl with the tender eyes, who had looked as if she also cared for him.

“Oh, Latimer! My dear boy.” She ran to the head of the stairs as he came up. “I could hardly believe it was you — so early. Oh, my boy! What *is* it? *Latimer!*” She clasped her hands around his arm, and he pushed along toward his room without turning to her, but stopping when he got there to say mechanically:

“What did you say, mother?”

Then he broke out, suddenly and strangely. “They came up to the dance at the Club Hall here to-night, and they didn't ask me to go with them. What do you think of *that*? What

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do you think it *means*? Anemone said —” He stopped, with an odd, twisted, breathless smile, his eyes staring past her as if through a haze.

“I’m as jealous — as — the deuce!” he said in an odd, breathless tone that matched his smile. “I’m as — *jealous* — as the deuce! It’s the fire of — Go, mother!”

She felt his arm around her for a moment, as he suffered her embrace, and then she was outside the door he had closed, trembling and shaken at this glimpse of a great, primitive passion. It was so strange that anything like this should happen “in the family.”

She had a fierce rage at the girl who was playing with her boy’s heart, yet an exultant, traitorous hope that she might throw it quite away. That would settle everything. What mattered the knife thrust of a little pain now, if it was to save the tragedy of a marred future? She was already beginning to plan the desserts she would have for him when he stayed at home once more for his Sunday dinner, and stopped her planning only to head off tall young James as he came up to the landing.

“Latimer doesn’t feel very well,” she said. “I think he’s in some trouble about that girl.”

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James was always a rather combative confidant, but she was fain of any at the moment.

“All right; better leave him alone, then,” said James philosophically.

“Oh, James! You are so unsatisfactory. All my children are so — so *intense*, in their own way.” Mrs. Lane wandered off distractedly. “I don’t get any good of anybody. There is Harland; we used to be so intimate when he was coming here to the house, but now there’s that little *feeling* — I can’t explain it. He is just as nice and respectful to me as he can be, and he brought me that lovely pitcher from their wedding trip, but, somehow, he seems to feel as if Anna belonged to *him*. Well, I suppose she does, in a *way*, but still —”

James put up a quick, detaining hand.

“Hark, mother! What’s that?”

The street had suddenly become full of voices, and the noise of people running heavily in one direction. Some one called shrilly to another in answer — “The Club Hall! The Club Hall! Awful accident! The flooring’s given way!” The Club Hall — that was where the big dance was to-night!

James had gone as his mother turned to him. Then Latimer’s door opened, and he shot down the stairway. She cried out help-

Latimer's Mother

lessly at the sight of his face, and hid her eyes.

“Oh, my God! Don't let him suffer like that. Give him anything he wants, *anything*, as long as it isn't wrong,” she sobbed, wringing her hands. “Oh, my God! Don't let him suffer.” Then she caught up a cloak and ran out into the night too, though it was the time that Mr. Lane always had his glass of milk.

As she tried to hasten along she heard somebody say, “Why, it's Mrs. Lane! Is there anybody you know down there? What? Jump right in. I'll get you there in a second,” and she was being whizzed in an automobile through the hurrying crowd. Wherever they went there was a crowd abreast of them, and Latimer's face somewhere in the darkness ahead. When the car stopped, just outside the lines, she seemed to be waiting endlessly amongst shouting, and calling, and darkness, and confused runnings to and fro. Then, somehow, that was Maudie who was handed into her arms, crying, “Oh, Mrs. Lane! Oh, Mrs. Lane!” and then — “Latimer is with *her* — I sent him. She isn't killed. She isn't killed! Tell me she isn't!”

“No, dear. Oh, no!” said Mrs. Lane mechanically. “Poor little girl! *Poor* little girl!”

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She held the shaking form fast to her motherly bosom with a sudden, intuitive knowledge of womankind, brought by the touch of the arms that clung to her. Maudie clung to her that way because she was Latimer's mother and they both loved him; she seemed to have known always that Maudie loved her boy. There was a bond between them that must forever remain unspoken. They must both give him up. To give him up for what was not the best — there lay the hurt. Oh, how much a man might lose for not being able to see the best that could come to him, for not wanting to see it! — Then she was, somehow, not surprised to find her husband beside them, taking charge of her and Maudie, too.

“Well, mother, now you look something like!” Anna Lloyd gave a last, affectionate dab with the comb at her mother's hair. “The idea of your running off to that dreadful place, and then collapsing up here as soon as father got you back! You're just like a child when you haven't me to look after you.”

“You're sure everything is all right?”

“How many times must I tell you? Anemone came to long before they got her here; she was smiling at Latimer when he carried

Latimer's Mother

her in. She's on the sofa in the library. The doctor said she was to be kept quiet for half an hour after what he gave her, and Maudie's in the next room. Latimer has been telephoning all over. Father has had his glass of milk — he was very good about waiting for it — and Harland is with him now. Harland's promised not to talk of any of the Subjects of the Day, they differ so about them."

"That is *very* kind of Harland," murmured Mrs. Lane. "Go down now, Anna. I'll be there in a moment."

Her quick ear had detected Latimer's footstep coming to her door. She forced herself to meet his shining eyes that seemed to perceive her through a great light.

"Mother!"

"Yes, my son."

"I said I'd tell you when there was anything to tell, and now there is — so much."

She tried to draw him down to her, but he still stood erect, as beautiful as an angel, she thought, in his happiness.

"It was all — a mistake. I told you I was jealous — well, she was jealous, too. She thought I didn't care for her. Think of it! And so we misunderstood, until to-night, when I found her — until to-night. Then we *knew*."

Little Stories of Courtship

Mother, I know you and the rest haven't taken to Anemone, but you don't know her. She's got a heart of gold. She wanted to get a chance to tell me just as soon as she found it out. . . . Mother, will you come downstairs? There's a little girl there who wants you to love her. She's waiting now for you to take her into the family."

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Lane quietly, and went down on his supporting arm, feeling very queer and tottering on her legs — they seemed to buzz, somehow, like the automobile. But, as she entered the library and saw who awaited her, she stopped short, bewildered, her mind rushing backward with a lightning stroke, to take swift tally of her boy's actions, of his words, and find that the meaning she had read into them was all her's — and the world's! Not his at all, not his! This girl, whose sweet eyes sought her's with a lovely, eager confidence in her oneness with their happiness —

"Maudie!" cried Mrs. Lane, as she put her joyful arms around the two. "Maudie, my dear, *dear* child! Oh, Maudie, Maudie, Maudie!"

In Cinderella's Shoes

In Cinderella's Shoes

An Every-Day Love Story

AS the clock struck nine from the church tower in the square, Miss Margaret Woodford started, and looked musingly out of the window beside her at the lights of the city, and thence to the heap of shining apparel that lay spread out on the bed in the small fourth-story room. Then, as if making a decision, she pushed aside the proof sheets that lay stacked up before her, removed both the pen and the pencil which had decorated her hair, and rose from the table by which she had been sitting, with slight intermission, ever since she had come home from the office and a hard day's work, four hours ago.

At the moment she was a slender, brown, unnoticeable woman, in a businesslike, short, brown walking skirt and flannel shirt-waist, but it was a dainty lady of fashion, in a trailing robe of white silken stuff, with white neck and arms, and a knot of yellow velvet on her shoulder and in her dark hair, whose sparkling brunette face was reflected in the little toilet glass an hour later

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She pinned the lace in the front of her bodice with an oddly-shaped, old-fashioned topaz brooch, that had been her grandmother's, and a wistful smile hovered around her mouth, for she used to have to beg to wear it in the old days when she was a happy girl in her Virginia home.

"I look all right, but I wonder if, after all, it is foolish of me to go?" was her unspoken comment, as she flung a white crêpe shawl around her head and shoulders, burnoose fashion, and, gathering up her fan and gloves, ran down the dingy boarding-house stairs to the carriage that awaited her.

She had not dared to count up the precious money spent on that carriage and the gown, with its dainty equipments — to what end? What right had a hard-working, solitary business woman with such things? What place could there be for her in society? With Emma de Lacy's invitation to the New Year's reception had come a sudden and uncontrollable longing for a little luxury; a luxury that embraced not only the soft raiment and the pleasures of the rich, but the sight of old friends — the luxury of a little love. Old friends! That was the cord that underneath all was drawing her. She was lonelier than

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any one knew. Would they be glad to see her? There was Captain Gordon, for instance, who had just returned with his regiment; he might not even remember her. He had been such a dear boy, only, after all, she would not marry him, and she had never quite known whether she was wise then or not.

“Why, Miss Woodford! Can it really be you? Where are you going on New Year's Eve? Wait — let me help you in.”

She turned on the carriage step, laughing, half shamedfacedly, as she looked up at the very tall young man, with a smooth-shaven face and merry eyes, who was bending over her.

“Yes, Mr. Austin, it's I! I'm in Cinderella's shoes to-night. I'm going to a ball. Don't tell it at the office to-morrow.”

“I don't see why not,” He gazed at her with a surprised admiration that brought the colour to her cheeks. “You're *awfully* swell! I'm on my way home to dress, for I'm in for the social act myself to-night. I wish it combined with yours.”

“I wish so, too,” she replied, longingly. “I'm glad you're here to start me off, anyway. Jump in and let me take you to your corner; it's on my way. I felt so lonely and unspon-

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sored before you came, though I'm going to meet old friends to-night — people whom I haven't seen for years."

"I think it was very unkind of you to have Cinderella plans, and not let me know," he retorted. "I come to you with all mine. As for your old friends, I don't wonder the thought of them depresses you. I feel in advance that I should hate them."

"Oh!" she laughed outright. "Please don't be so radical. But I have read wretched stories of women like me, who have scrimped and saved for one night's enjoyment, only to be cruelly snubbed and neglected, and come back home with all the heart crushed out of them. That would be sad. Do you think me very foolish to go? Am I making a mistake?"

"*Did* you scrimp and save?" he asked, irrelevantly.

"Oh, yes, yes! I didn't care to go in half-way, poor-relationy clothes; I wanted them to be *real*. I love pretty things. Are you smiling because I never wear them?"

He leaned forward and clasped both her small, gloved hands together in his large one.

"No; I'm grinning horribly because I've got to leave you to your old friends, and I don't want to. There's my corner. Good-bye!"

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“Good-night!” she called after him, as the carriage rolled away, leaving him on the sidewalk, and then she sank back in the cushions, feeling indescribably enlivened and gay. There was always something bracing about Jack Austin.

The De Lacy's drawing-room was full as she swept into it, and Emma De Lacy herself, stout, good-natured, and homely, in green velvet and diamonds, received her with affectionate impressiveness.

“Jasper,” she said to her husband, “here's Margaret Woodford; we ought to consider ourselves very lucky. I'm glad you've emerged from your shell for once, Meg; it's ridiculous for a woman of your age and looks to drop out of society. Imagine it! You were my bridesmaid at sixteen! How terribly early we Southern girls used to come out; *my* daughter will be in the school-room for years yet. Let me introduce Mr. Julian. Why, *dear* me! What am I thinking of? You and George Julian are old friends, of course?”

“You haven't changed in the least, Miss Margaret,” said Mr. Julian, gallantly. He was very stout, and very red, and very shiny, and Margaret felt that she was gazing at him with suspicion. Was *this* the George Julian

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who had sung to his guitar for her in his slim young college days?

“I’m awfully glad to see you,” he was saying. “How it brings the old times back! This New Year’s reception of Mrs. De Lacy’s is a lovely idea. My oldest boy will be fourteen in May; it seems odd for me to have a boy that age, doesn’t it? He’s very clever — very, so his teachers tell me.”

“That must please you,” said Margaret.

“Ah, yes — yes, it does. He takes after his mother — intellectual, you know; not like his dad. I’m fond of golf, and that sort of thing. Never cared for books. My wife isn’t here tonight; she’s home with the neuralgia. She’s a great sufferer from nervous neuralgia. She’s taken chloral, and she’s taken phenacetine, and she’s taken morphine, and she’s taken every treatment you can think of, from Swedish to Mesopotamian, and none of it does — one — bit — of — good! The doctor says the strength of her nerves is something wonderful — you can’t control ’em.”

“How — how sad!” said Margaret, with wandering eyes.

“Margaret! Margaret Woodford!” Somebody clutched at her effusively — a tall, sal-low woman, with a high roll of grey hair, black

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eyebrows and very bare neck, surmounting an airy toilet of spangled *chiffon*.

“It's good to see you again, Meg; you don't change at all. How do you manage it? Just see how grey my hair is — but every one says it's becoming to me. Do you write as much as ever? Why don't you come to see us? We lunch at one.”

“I can't make calls, Kitty,” said Margaret, smiling. “Writing is only half my work. I'm a very busy woman, you know.”

“Busy — don't speak of it!” exclaimed her friend. “Mama and I haven't had a minute to ourselves lately. The house was done over while we were abroad, and we've been re-furnishing since we came home. Such work! I never was so tired in my life; in the midst of the season, too, with all one's engagements. I said yesterday that if I could ever get an hour to myself again — Why, I haven't even had time to get my gowns fitted.”

“That must be very trying,” said Margaret, with a whimsical thought of the office, and the presses that one could hear rumbling away for dear life, and the worn look of hurry on every human creature's face, and the pile of work under her desk lid, and on her table at home,

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and the page of the Saturday issue for which she was responsible.

“I’m so glad I saw you before I left. I’m going on to the Fosters’s ball in a minute. Odd idea, having this kind of a New Year’s reception, wasn’t it? So like Emma. Just look at John Sterns over there! Hasn’t *he* changed, my dear? You’d never know him. They say that his wife — That was Molly Robinson who bowed to you just now. She tells every one her husband is home with the grip, but it is really delirium tremens. He’s taken the Keely cure twice. You recognize Harry Tarleton, don’t you? The large man over there with the smile. He embezzled something last year, but it was hushed up, and your supposed not to know it. Don’t you think Alice Baltimore looks perfectly *disgraceful* in that gown? There’s mama beckoning to me. Good-bye! Now, do come and see us; we lunch at one.”

Before an hour was over Margaret had been welcomed, embraced, and treated to endless reminiscences between the lobster à la Newburg and the *biscuit glacé*. She wished people would stop commenting on her looks, and she listened longingly to the music in the next room, where there was dancing. The pulse of it stirred in her veins, but she tried to pay at-

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tention to Lizzie Sanderson, who used to be Lizzie Gordon.

"You haven't changed a bit, Margaret, and I want James to see you. He used to be awfully in love with you; he never would have married Clara if you would have had him. He's here to-night; you know he has just returned from the Philippines with the regiment. His wife died two years ago; she was an invalid for a long time. Perhaps it's just as well that you haven't married yet."

"Possibly," assented Margaret, with an irrepressible smile, she knew not at what.

"Do come and see me. Doesn't it seem odd to think of me with five children? My eldest, Darwin, is so like James? Have you good health, Margaret?"

"*Very,*" said Margaret, rising and looking wildly around the room, thronged with men and women gaily talking. Had she wasted money and aspirations for this? Oh, those violins in the next room! Unconsciously her feet kept time.

"Ah!" said her companion, rising also, "there is James. Margaret, he is coming straight to you. I think I'd better leave you two together." She gave a little laugh that brought a hot flush to Margaret's cheeks.

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Yes, it was James Gordon. Time, who had changed so many — what had it done to him?

Miracle of miracles! It was the same boyish figure that she remembered so well, with the same immature boyish face, in spite of the very slight tinge of grey in the locks that curled above it. It was even the same high, boyish voice that said:

“Miss Woodford — Margaret! This is indeed a pleasure.” He laughed a little spasmodically. She remembered the habit well. Heaven save the mark, she had used to think it engaging!

“I wonder if you’re as happy at this meeting as I am, Maggie?”

“How happy is that?” she asked, with perfunctory sprightliness.

He bent over her affectionately.

“Let us sit down here in this quiet corner. How well, how *very* well, you look!” He laughed again. It was the old manner — the manner for one, only.

“Have you forgotten that you were my sweetheart once, Maggie? We used to have a great deal to say to each other then. Do you remember the ball we drove to one New Year’s night?”

“Yes,” she said, scanning him wonder-

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ingly, for this was the worst thing that had happened to her that evening. Time had not changed him at all; it had passed him by, and that which is grace to a woman unaccountably belittles and cheapens a man. There was no dignity to him, no solidity. Margaret felt ashamed. Old friends with whom one is no longer in sympathy — what real pleasure is there in meeting them? There is only a heart-ache.

The way he was looking at her now — had he looked like that at his dead wife? She did not know what Captain Gordon said, or what she answered; he was talking, talking, talking —

She turned to meet Jack Austin's astonished and delighted gaze, and was amazed to feel the throb her heart gave. Ah! she was not only the relic of a dead past. The work at the office, the community of interest, the real every-day spirit of living—all seemed to come back to her with Jack Austin's face.

Almost without knowing it, her hand was on his arm, and they were walking off together into the ball-room.

She waltzed as a Southern girl can, but how had he divined it?

“This is what I call luck!” he murmured,

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as they threaded through the crowd again to a nook by the stairway, behind the palms. "I was getting absolutely *moony* for you this evening. Why didn't you let me know that you were coming here, of all places? We've lost two precious hours, and I've got something to tell you."

"You always have," she retorted, joyously, "and it never amounts to anything."

"It does this time." He looked at her with a cool intentness, under which her cheeks reddened. "I hope you've had enough of your old friends, if they're like the one I took you from. Idiot! Margaret, why have you tried to hide yourself all the time we've been together? I've had my glimpses, but now I've found you out for good. Underneath your demure business mask, Margaret, you're frivolously young!"

She laughed, and said, with a whimsical pathos:

"I know it, but I'm ashamed of it. And you mustn't call me Margaret — you are younger than I."

"Am I? I don't believe it. I have ten years the advantage in looks and experience. What difference does a year or two either way make? We're neither of us in our teens. But we suit

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each other." He drew a long breath. "*How* we suit each other!"

"That is just your fancy," she flashed back at him.

"Perhaps," he answered quietly. "I take very strong fancies sometimes. I have one now that I care for you, and that you care for me — whether you know it or not. I've a fancy to have a wife who is brave and sweet and beautiful, and named Margaret. I've a fancy that I should like to work for her, and 'scrimp and save' myself to buy her pretty things. I've a fancy that the dearest girl in the world is lonely, in spite of all her bravery." He stopped, and his quick hand pressed hers furtively as he turned with careless manner to defend her from the observation of the outer world. "Margaret — Margaret, darling! You *mustn't* cry — not till I can put my arms around you!"

In Regard to Josephine

In Regard to Josephine

A First Love Story

QUOTER — ”
“Yes, dear, what is it you want?”
“Hush, don’t speak so loud; father’s in there with Mr. Belmore, and its dreadful the way you can hear everything all over this house! I just want to ask you — ” Josephine Atwood’s voice was agitated and her tall young figure in the long, fluffy white gown expressed a childlike dependence on the little mother whom she bent over at the foot of the stairs. “I just want to ask you if you think you *could* keep the boys, or anybody from coming into the library for a while this evening? Mr. Martin is going to bring a book to read aloud to me — it’s called “Lalla Rookh” and it’s *so* distracting when people will come in and interrupt all the time, perhaps just when you’re in the most interesting part. It doesn’t make any difference if they do go right out again, it interrupts just the same. And it’s often really as bad when you’re only talking. Whenever father sees Mr. Martin he seems possessed to come and converse about the Stock

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Exchange! Mr. Martin has such a respect for father that he doesn't like not to seem interested, and I just sit there like a *stick*. But I only ask about the reading to-night because he is going away day after to-morrow, and there won't be any other chance."

"When does he come back again?"

"Not until *June!*" The girl paused impressively. "And oh, mother, *will* you tell Sam not to eat up all the candy Mr. Martin brings me? He ran off with the whole box last time and I got only two chocolates out of it. I really think he's too big to act that way."

"Yes, he is," said Mrs. Atwood decidedly. "Did you say you were reading 'Lalla Rookh?' How that *does* take me back! I remember your father brought me a copy when I was a girl, and we — Bend a little lower, dear, I want to straighten that lace around your neck. How sweet you look to-night, dear! You have such a becoming colour, and your throat is so long and white! You were such a little bit of a baby, it seems odd that you should grow up into such a tall girl. There — that will do. Are these the roses Herbert Jackson sent you? Oh, no, these pink ones were from Mr. Martin I recollect. Your Aunt Cynthia speaks very highly of him; of course, I

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haven't seen very much of him yet, but there is something about him that I like; he seems very genuine."

"Oh, I'm so glad to hear you say that!" breathed the girl. She threw her head back, with her arms still around the mother, and an ecstatic earnestness in her dark eyes. "That's exactly what he is, so genuine — I *wish* Aunt Cynthia wouldn't always say that she remembers him when he wore blue gingham aprons, and was all sticky with bread-and-molasses. I wonder why people *will* remember such horrid things about you when you were young! He's not a bit handsome, but he's so *clean* looking, and there's something in his eyes—He never makes silly, flattering speeches like the other fellows, but you feel that you can believe *anything* he says. Last night when we were coming home from the dance he was speaking about you, mother — of course, I know you're just as popular as you can be with the fellows, they all think you're lovely — but he says he thinks more of you than almost any one else he knows, and that everybody can see what a beautiful character you have; he just loves to hear you talk. He thinks you're simply ideal with father; I told him you were just as much loved now as you ever were. He thinks I'm ex-

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actly like you, but I told him I really wasn't a bit, that I was horribly selfish, and indolent and bad-tempered, and if he knew me well he wouldn't like me at all, and then *he* said — oh, goodness, is that the bell? And my hair all coming down again!"

"You are all right just as you are," said Mrs. Atwood fondly, although she knew that the assurance was futile. Josephine was never so ready to see any one but that she must plunge upward again at the last moment to make sure.

She went herself to greet the young man and bestow him with the others in the drawing-room, until the shy yet dignified entrance of Josephine, with her little, half-formal invitation into the library adjoining. That Josephine at nineteen was grown up was an accepted fact in the Atwood family, though it was still sort of queer and unhandy to get adapted to the altered conditions resulting therefrom. There was an unnatural haggardness about the elders consequent on eternally sitting up for Josephine or bringing her home. She had come out with simple observance, it is true, but with conventional recognition of the fact; she had invitations, and above all, she had "attention." Mrs. Atwood glowed with pride as

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she thought of the three boxes from the florist's that had come to the house that very week, and there had been bon-bons besides. The girl next door, older than Josephine, had no such gifts. Her child had a young delight in this pretty stage of life that unconsciously acted as a magnet. The mother's mind travelled along future years filled with Josephine's triumphs and her own enjoyment of them. Perhaps they might even take her to Europe after a while; Edward's business had been improving so much lately! Eventually, of course, Josephine would marry, but there was plenty of time for that; till now she had been merely a school-girl, with but spasmodic and guarded trips into the social world. Mrs. Atwood herself, as early as sixteen, though she had been a little, round, childish thing, very different from the stately Josephine, had not only had long-train dresses, but a train of boy lovers as well; she had even a guilty remembrance of having been temporarily engaged to one! She was very glad indeed that times had changed. Something in Mr. Martin's praise of her left an uncertain and half unpleasant feeling; she traced it back to an odd, far-away remembrance of a somewhat similar attitude on Mr. Atwood's part to her own mother, once upon a time —

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with that later remembrance that though he had been respectably fond of his mother-in-law there hadn't been any glamour about it. She was roused, however, from her musings as she went to and fro, as she came suddenly upon a small boy with a cat in his arms.

"Eddie, you ought to have been in bed long ago. I forgot all about you."

"I've been in the library getting my pussy," said the child. "She was under the sofa."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Atwood, with compunction at her neglect. "Well, don't go in there again. March straight up to bed, dearie. *Eddie!* Where are you going?"

"I want to kiss sister good-night."

"Did you hear me? I said not to go into the library."

"Mr. Martin gave me a quarter last time I kissed her good-night," demurred the child, lingering.

"Never mind, you run upstairs now; I'll be there as soon as I speak to papa."

She went to the doorway of the drawing-room in which her husband and Mr. Belmore were conversing. There was a clear view through the half-open portières into the crimson-recessed library beyond, where Josephine sat, leaning back, her beautiful profile turned

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upward and her eyes fastened on the face of the young man who bent deferentially toward her as he read from the book in his hand.

“Oh, Edward, don't you think we might sit in the dining-room to-night? I've had an open fire made in there, and your box of cigars is on the mantelpiece. Mr. and Mrs. Vail may be over after a while, and if we are all talking here and they're trying to read in *there* — ”

“Just as you say,” said her husband, rising. “Any place suits *me*. Go across the hall and draw up your chair by the fire, Belmore, while I get those papers.”

He followed his wife up the stairway, and she waited for him, to say:

“I hope you don't mind being in the other room?”

“Oh, it doesn't make any difference to me where I sit,” said Mr. Atwood. “Suit yourself. We never *have* sat in the dining-room, and it's always draughty there, and the light's bad — but it doesn't make any difference; you're running this. See here, Jo, how long is this sort of thing going to last?”

“What sort of thing?”

“Oh, you know what I mean!”

Mr. Atwood bent his grizzled brows with a

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look of whimsical discomfort as he put his arm around his wife with the unconsciousness of habit because she was near, and there was a dear, unconscious reinforcement of spirit that went with it.

“I don’t approve of it. I don’t approve of it at all. I don’t object to Josephine’s having ‘a good time,’ as you call it, but I think there’s such a thing as having too much of it. I think you allow her a great deal too much liberty. This every-night business is wearing me out—it’s either sitting up till she gets back from a party, or waiting around until twelve o’clock to lock the door after young cubs who don’t know enough to go home. I’m not referring to young Martin, he seems to be a decent sort of fellow as far as I can tell — though it seems to me, for a stranger, he’s coming here pretty often. Three times in one week is a good deal, isn’t it?”

“Your sister Cynthia speaks very highly of him,” murmured Mrs. Atwood, her cheek resting against her husband’s rough sleeve. “At any rate it will soon be over; he’s going away now until next summer.”

“I suppose, then, there’s nothing — serious.”

“Edward, how you talk! As if Josephine —

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No, indeed, there's nothing of the kind, not for years yet."

"All right. What I don't see is why they can't sit with the rest of the family. I think you ought to give Josephine a hint about taking up some sensible topic of conversation. I give you my word that the last time Martin was here — I sat there in plain sight where I couldn't help hearing every word in the library — I sat there for one hour by the clock, and more inane conversation I never listened to in my life. They didn't seem to have an idea between 'em; I was actually ashamed of Josephine. After a while I couldn't stand it any longer. I felt sorry for the fellow; I went in and talked to him myself. He's fairly intelligent, too; he seemed really impressed with my views on the market."

"Yes," said Mrs. Atwood, vaguely. "Don't you think, dear, that you'd better take those papers to Mr. Belmore? He'll think you're not coming. I'll be down as soon as I have put Eddie to bed."

But she did not come down. She lay instead beside the child — he was not so very little, yet he was the littlest one of the three, the baby boy still — and rested in the shaded

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room in that half drowsiness which seemed to lie ever in wait for her these days. She was incapable of not sympathizing with any one she loved; her heart had gone with her Edward's every step of the way, yet now she was not only the wife, she was not only the mother — she was something apart and different; in her were reincarnated the spirit of youth and love in a two-fold presentment. She had that strange and intoxicating pleasure of being "both maiden and lover, Moon and tide, bee and clover." She thrilled with Josephine's admirers at each beauty and grace of her child — so darling, so adorable — and triumphed with Josephine in each shy joy at their homage.

It seemed as if the development of her sense of this young happiness made her a necessary part of it, as if in the dim future of Josephine's ultimate marriage there could be neither loving nor being loved without her. Her cheek felt upon it the soft touch of the wing of romance, hovering near. Yet there was a momentary sharp twinge. Mr. Atwood had a cold and crude way of looking at things that cut across her warm, impulsive imaginativeness like a knife, and which subsequent events sometimes vindicated.

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“Are you looking for me?” She detected a hesitating footfall on the threshold. “I’m here, Mary.”

“Yes ma’am. Mr. Atwood sent me to see was there a box of cigars upstairs. He had me searchin’ in the library, after himself, but it’s missin’.”

“It’s on the mantelpiece in the dining-room,” announced Mrs. Atwood with exasperation. “I told him so,” she added to herself as the maid departed. “I never saw anything like it; the more you try to arrange things, the more contrary they are.”

“Say, mother, I wish you’d make Josephine stop acting as if I were a two-year old.”

This time it was her son Sam, who stood beside her with a highly injured expression.

Sam loomed up six feet in height though he was but fifteen years of age, a combination hard to treat consistently; even while his mother reproved him for childish naughtiness his protecting height and masculine swagger half bewitched her.

“Come in the other room. What have you been doing now?”

“I haven’t been doing a thing. I just went in to ask Martin about the Automobile Show and he gave me a ticket for Saturday. I tell

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you he's all right, *he* is. Then when I took in some catalogues to look over with him, she kept telling me to go to bed. She looks awful queer to-night, anyway, as if she was going to cry. Say, she hasn't any right to send me to bed. She can just understand — she hasn't any right! I'm no kid."

"It's your time anyway," said his mother decidedly.

"I only came up because — where's that five-pound box of Huyler's? She said I could have what was left. Martin didn't bring her any to-night."

"Don't eat too much," said Mrs. Atwood automatically, with a conscience-stricken sense of her failure in guarding poor, disappointed Josephine. She was hurriedly beginning to rearrange her toilet a little when her husband's voice called her from below.

"Jo! Jo! Aren't you *ever* coming down? Mrs. Vail has been waiting here for half an hour."

"Now you needn't mind in the least," said Mrs. Vail, after pacifically embracing her hostess as she sat down in her chair by the dining-table, on the other side of which the three men were grouped — Mr. Atwood, tall and spare, the younger Belmore, and Mr.

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Vail, a darkly bearded gentleman with piercing eyes that gleamed out as from behind a hedge. He looked like a pirate, but he was a kind, mild man. His wife was a large, elderly woman, with greyish hair and a fresh-coloured, pleasant face. She was a person of wealth and position, but she chose to pose rather as an exponent of homely comfort. She always carried around with her a work-bag, containing a large square of linen, on which she immediately embroidered cherries or strawberries or holly leaves in any spare moment, however fleeting. She was already thrusting her needle in and out as she went on talking, without looking up.

“You needn’t mind at all. I’ve been having a nice little talk with Josephine. I went in the library looking for a book — nobody told me there was a young man around.”

“Mr. Martin has been reading aloud to her,” stated Mrs. Atwood, with level eyes.

“Yes, so she said. I told her I was afraid I’d interrupted a very tender passage. I was going out again, but she insisted on my staying. What a nervous, fidgety fellow Mr. Martin is! I suppose he smokes too much — most of them do. He hardly said a word. I don’t think I ever saw Josephine with so much colour.

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How children do grow up, to be sure! I told Mr. Martin it really seemed no time at all since Josephine was ten years old, when we first came here, and she had the mumps. I *never* knew any one such a sight. Her face was so dreadfully swelled that her eyes looked just like slits, poor little soul! And she was all done up in cotton batting. I suppose there's nothing *serious* between her and Mr. Martin?"

"Oh, dear no!" asserted Mrs. Atwood hastily, "not the slightest. Of course, he's an exceedingly nice young fellow, Mr. Atwood thinks *very* highly of him, but there's nothing of *that* kind — oh, dear no! Josephine is much too young. Besides, he goes away on Saturday for the rest of the winter. Josephine has a great deal of attention."

"Yes, so Mary Graham was telling me," said Mrs. Vail, "Mary has given up going out almost entirely; she's devoting herself to her correspondence school; she says there really isn't a man she cares to invite to the house, but I think it's a mistake for girls to be too particular. Do let them have a good time when they're young, I say."

"Oh, but Josephine is very particular!" cried Mrs. Atwood eagerly. "She refused to

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have anything to do with Dick Evans because he helped her over the crossing and left me behind. And the other night as soon as she found that she was waltzing to "The Palms" with Henry Peters she made him bring her straight over to me. She actually had tears in her eyes when she said: 'The idea of dancing to that!' Mr. Martin thought that it showed such a beautiful spirit."

"Mary said the way they danced at that last club-meeting was perfectly disgraceful," continued Mrs. Vail with maddening obliviousness. "My dear, how tired you look! Why don't you make Josephine help you more? Though it *is* hard to tie them down when they're young and want to have a good time, *I know*; I felt just that way myself before Mildred and Dorothy married. You feel as if you'd rather slave yourself than have them miss anything."

"She does help me," said Mrs. Atwood, struggling frantically to make an obvious impression on the glazed surface presented to her, although she knew from experience that the effort was vain. Mrs. Vail had a rooted habit of ignoring the claims of the present converser in favour of the absent, but she was a good friend, who would infallibly sing the

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praises of Josephine to the next comer. She jabbed away at her crimson stitches now as Mrs. Atwood soared in monologue to the height of Josephine's perfections, and only came out of a non-committal abstraction to say:

"Yes, and just when one gets to depend on them most they marry and leave us."

"Oh, Josephine doesn't even *think* of such a thing yet. I hope she'll see much more of the world before she makes a choice," proclaimed Mrs. Atwood wisely. "In six or seven years perhaps — girls don't marry anything like as soon as they used to. I should be very particular about the man, I can tell you that. Of course, when the right person comes along —"

"The trouble is," broke in Mr. Vail from the other side of the table, taking his cigar out of his mouth, "you seldom find the right person — for *you*. Parents always act as if *they* were marrying the man. Now I said to my wife about Cumnor: 'If he's a decent fellow, and if he suits Dorothy, that's all there is to it. *She* has to live with him, we don't.' My wife didn't like the way he parted his hair; she's all for romance."

"Romance!" repeated Mrs. Vail contemptuously. "My experience is that they either

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marry on nothing, or if he does have something he loses it all the first year. They seem to have to go through just about so much anyway, as far as I can see. I don't congratulate couples any more; I just say: 'I *hope* he has enough to support her.'"

"You see what you're coming to, Belmore," suggested Mr. Atwood with grim facetiousness. "What will you do when your little girls are old enough to have the men coming to the house?"

"I'll take a shot-gun to 'em," said Mr. Belmore promptly. "Wouldn't have any of 'em around. Do you suppose I can go in the library for my gloves? Now, *don't* get up, Mrs. Atwood, I know just where I put them. Sit still. Well, if you *will* — Awful monotonous voice that fellow Martin has; I never could stand being read aloud to; my wife tries it on me sometimes and it puts me off sounder than a church. It's one of her afflictions; she says it seems so uneducated. Oh, thank you, Mrs. Atwood."

"Suppose we have something," hazarded Mr. Atwood as his wife re-entered the room. "Wait a minute, Jo, I'll open the lower side-board door for you; don't you get down on the floor." He came over to her.

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“Oh, Edward!” she caught the hand nearest her and kissed it in the shadow.

“What ails you?” he whispered, as the others were talking. “Have you hurt yourself?”

“No, oh, no! Oh, Edward, bend your head, I’m afraid it’s — serious; I’m afraid Josephine — cares for him! I’ve just been in there.”

“Cares for him!” The wife could feel his sudden tension, the pause in which the thought adjusted itself stiffly to his perception. He gave her a sort of queer, wide-eyed, half-foolish smile that made them partners in the shock of recognition of this new element. But he murmured comfortingly: “I think you’re mistaken,” and again as she shook her head: “You must be,” and then raised his voice to the others. “We’ll all go in the library now, it’s much more comfortable there. Belmore, you carry in these glasses; Vail — ”

“The laundry’s afire!” Mary the maid burst into the room, her face blackened, her hair streaming. In another instant the whole party had disappeared pell-mell down the narrow passage that led to the back premises.

“Well, it was a mercy that we found it out in time,” said Mr. Atwood, dropping onto a

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chair in the kitchen after a strenuous half hour spent in deluging smoking boards with water and mopping it up again. The kitchen floor was half covered with blackened débris, and the men, disheveled, sat around while the women were busy over the stove with hot refreshments for the workers.

“Give me some more of that coffee, Jo. Won’t you have another cup, Vail? Thank you, Mrs. Vail, I don’t take cream. I’m glad you packed Mary off to bed; the girl would have roused the neighbourhood.”

“If she had thrown those blazing curtains out of the window as she wanted to,” said Mr. Belmore, “you’d have had the whole fire brigade here soaking the house with water. Ginger, that would have been a picnic!”

“I should say so,” assented Mr. Atwood, with deep disrelish for publicity; to have a fire in your house seemed to lay the stigma of incapacity on the householder. “I’m sure I’m a thousand times obliged to you all,” he added gratefully.

“Don’t mention it,” said Mr. Belmore tranquilly, “it was more fun than a goat. Sorry I’ve got to leave you. All coming? Well!”

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There was a clatter of chairs on the kitchen floor as the party rose, and a clatter of voices, suddenly silenced as they made their way once more through the dark, carpeted passage to the main hall. As Mr. Atwood pulled aside the intervening curtain the little procession stopped short involuntarily.

Josephine and young Martin stood in the vestibule of the front door, down the hall. Ah, past the time for questioning! If it had taken a fire to give them that one uninterrupted half-hour, no need to ask of what the reading had been — for it could only be of love, and not alone in “Lalla Rookh,” though that had said indeed:

*“There’s a bliss beyond all that the minstrel has told
When two that are linked in one heavenly tie
With heart never changing, and brow never cold,
Love on through all ills — and love on till they
die!”*

They were parting. Her white arms were slipping from his shoulders, his were half around her still. The young face of Josephine was raised to the tender, protecting rapture of his. There was in it such a sweet and sacred joy of maiden-giving, such a deep and inno-

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cent trust, that tears sprung unbidden to the eyes of those unseen witnesses, themselves resolved instinctively into couples, in a quick partnership of knowledge — and of remembrance.

Ah, all beside the mark the mother's wise prefiguring, her developing providence! These two needed not her to make their happiness, they were sufficient for each other, it was their own life they were to live as she and her Edward had lived theirs. Nor was this all the pang. All dear beginnings must also mean the end of something that is dear. In this bright beginning of love it came home to the father and mother for the first time that their own youth had departed, that there remained now for them only the descending path, the beginning of age, that meant afterwards the beginning of — what? Was the thought only a pain, or was there in that very pain the glimpse of a strange, higher joy? Love means so much!

“Well, we've all of us been there,” said Mr. Belmore sentimentally, breaking the silence that still followed the closing of the front door and the disappearance of Josephine's long, trailing gown up the long stairway. His eyes roved restlessly; he alone had

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had no intimate share of the soft emotions going the rounds. "Help me on with my overcoat, will you, Vail? No, I won't stop any longer, thank you, I think I'll go home to my wife."

The Coupons of Fortune

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A Financial Love Story

“Do you see that man?” I heard one loungeer whisper to another, as they stood just outside of the Equivalent Building. “He must be worth millions. They say he spends hours every day shut up in a safe deposit vault cutting off coupons. There he goes, with a bundle of papers tucked under his arm.”

“He looks shabby enough,” said the second loungeer. “If I was worth millions I’d be toney, I can tell you.”

“Pooh!” returned the other. “He don’t have to dress. If you’ve only got the tin, dress ain’t nowhere. Now me and you, we have to keep in the style, Tom.” The speaker gave a pull to a dirty red worsted scarf tied around an equally dirty neck, and both men laughed.

I turned from them and looked after the millionaire, who had halted in the doorway. He was shabby enough, in all truth; his trousers were frayed at the bottom, and his coat was shiny at the seams; his linen was not over-clean, and his hat was a nondescript article

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hardly any better than that of the average tramp. But as he turned I saw a lean sallow face with hollow cheeks, a black moustache, and piercing black eyes, and I darted forward instantly.

“*You!*” I said.

He stopped, surveyed me from head to foot, and then broke into a broad smile and held out his hand.

“Put it there!” said he. “Well, I *am* glad. I just thought I was going to have good luck to-day! What are you doing here?”

“Oh, I’m only passing through the city,” I replied. “I’ve been South on business, and I’m now on my way back to Michigan. I don’t go till the twelve-o’clock train to-night, and am just killing time in the interval.”

“You’ll have to kill it with me, then,” said he. “No, I’ll take no denial. My time is at your disposal, my dear Cristopher, quite at your disposal, after I have taken a few papers to the bank. It is almost three o’clock now. Come!”

We stepped off together into the surging throng that sweeps up and down lower Broadway. The sun sparkled, but the air was keen, and I noticed that my companion shivered, although his overcoat was buttoned to the throat.

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"You feel the cold," said I, rather inanely.

"Yes," said he. "I suppose it is hard for me to overcome the fact that I was once from the South, though I have certainly lived in many climes since then — many climes. Suppose we sit down here in City Hall Park for a few minutes. I know a nice sunny spot sheltered from the wind. It is three o'clock already, so I will not go to the bank to-day. It is quite a study to sit here and see the people pass if you are not used to it. Well, Kit, I *am* glad to see you!"

He threw the bundle of papers down on the seat beside him, and turned to me.

"This isn't much like the old days in the mines, is it?" said I. "To think of you, Belmont Shand, a millionaire; it's wonderful!"

"Wonderful," assented he, gravely. "But what are you doing?"

"Oh, I'm in the lumber business," said I.

"Making anything?"

"Sometimes — just now, a little. Of course it's uncertain, and there's such an awful lot of sharks in the business up my way; they'll cheat you out of your eye-teeth. And now, Shand, tell me of yourself. It's like a fairy tale."

"Exactly what I think," said he.

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“Where do you live?” I asked.

He grinned enigmatically, and waved his hand with a sweeping gesture toward the City Hall. “‘The splendour falls from castle walls and snowy summits old in story,’” said he. “It’s what you have a right to expect. I’ll tell you the history of my life, old boy, but, first and foremost, have you any money with you?”

“Certainly,” I answered, with some little dignity.

“Then, for Heaven’s sake, take me to a restaurant and fill me up with something, for I’m empty clear down to my boot heels, and then I’ll tell you all you want to know. No, only a word now — how much are you good for?”

“Delmonico’s!” cried I, and thither against the wind we went.

We ordered a royal feast, and ate it with a will. It was not until the coffee and cigars were brought that Shand leaned back in his chair and began to really talk.

“Now I live!” said he. “I’ve been no better than a mummy for the last month or two. To start off, Kit, I’ll confess, what you are perhaps beginning to suspect, that I am no more a millionaire than you are, nor indeed

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a fiftieth part as much. People give me the title, and I accept it. Well, here goes.

“There’s no need to tell you of everything that’s happened since we left the mines. I’ve had my ups and downs, and a couple of years ago I went on the stage for a while. I nearly made a hit there, for when we were playing in Montreal a little French girl with a large fortune fell in love with me, and Barkis was willin’, as you may well believe; but her parents and guardians were not, and she wasn’t of age. They tucked her off to school in a convent, and the company I was with busted up, and we were left stranded in Canada without a cent. I worked my way down some way, and had the luck to be pushed off a car while in motion, and had two fingers cut off and my ankle broken. I was awarded damages against the company while I was in the hospital, and with five hundred dollars in my pocket came on here to New York. I got in with a fellow who had some cash and more experience, and we started a land improvement company.”

“The dickens you did!” said I, much astonished. “Where was the land?”

Shand grinned and waved his hand. “Don’t interrupt,” he said. “We called it the Græco-

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Northern Land Improvement Company. Special inducements for Greek colonists, you know. You'd be surprised to find how many Greeks there are in the city — you'd really be surprised — and there's no particular provision made for 'em anywhere. As for the land, that was in North Dakota; there's plenty of it there; I've seen it, and it needs improvement, if any spot on earth does! We had maps and prospectuses until you couldn't rest. We took an office just off Broadway — swellest thing you ever saw — and hired a box in the safe deposit in the Equivalent Building, to put our valuable papers in, for Jim was bound to do everything up in style. Jim and I rolled around in cabs, and treated all the Greeks we could get hold of, and made up to the consul, but the plan didn't work worth a cent. If you'll believe it, we didn't sell a single share — no, not one! And Jim got discouraged, and lit out — I don't blame him, because he *had* to — and the office and the cabs and the general richness were things of the past. Everything fleets, especially with me — you can just bet it fleets. The amount of past I've got behind me would make another man howl; but I ain't proud of it, not a bit. There's nothing mean about *me*."

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“Was the little French girl pretty?” said I, irrelevantly.

“No, she wasn’t much for looks,” said Shand, puffing meditatively at his cigar. “Rather small, and dark, and pimply; not much on looks, I should say. But she had soul, I’m blest if she hadn’t. She vowed to be true to me ever. But then I vowed to be true to her, for that matter.”

“Well, how do you live now?” I asked.

“There you come to the point. Among all the things that fledged there was one that remained — the box in the safe deposit. The rent was actually paid for that, for a year. I sort of forgot about it until cold weather set in, along about Christmas-time. Then one day I thought I’d go in and look at the papers; I’d never been there but once before. I tell you it felt good after what I’d been living through to get into a warm *rich* place, all soft carpets and sliding doors, and be bowed into a little room all by your lone self, and have your box of valuables set down on the table in front of you, as if you were a lord at least.

“When that little door was shut I sat down on the leather-covered chair, and leaned my arms on the blue blotting-pad on the table,

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and stretched my legs until they touched the wall, and I felt *good*.

“After a while I unlocked the box. It was full of all sorts of trash, worthless stocks and bonds; there wasn’t a thing could be made out of them. I took up the scissors that lay on the table and cut off a couple of coupons just to make it seem real.

“I didn’t know how long I could stay, but I came the next day and made inquiries. I said I had a great many coupons to cut off, and other business to transact, and asked that I should not be disturbed. I found that I could stay for any reasonable time, and that no one was ushered into the compartment while I was there. I have lengthened my time gradually, so that sometimes I am in it nearly the whole day. If it were not for that I am sure that I should have frozen, and died for want of sleep.”

“What!” cried I, in horror. “Have you no place to go to?”

“None that I am aware of,” said my friend, coolly. “There have been nights when I’ve found a warm corner in a doorway or a beer-saloon or a police station, and there have been nights that I have had a bed, when I had the price; but, as a rule, I train for a walking-

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match a good part of the night. It ain't till nine o'clock in the morning that I take my high-priced slumber in that blessed safe deposit vault, with the door locked, and the gas lighted, and the wagons rumbling overhead, and the heat melting into your bones, with just the least smell of sewer to remind you that you're mortal. I usually leave before the banks close, but I have been known to go back again, when business was urgent. And I had been twenty-four hours without food when I met you, old fellow, and *let's* have a drink on the strength of it."

We had the drink, and then another. I asked him about his plans. He confessed frankly that he had none, although he had tried more than once to get another place on the stage.

"Don't you want a trusty follower?" he asked. "Some one to take charge of your future for you? Or, if not as a protector, as a page?"

I laughed, and we both puffed at our cigars awhile in silence. Then he began talking again. I learned that his overcoat, which had not relaxed from its military strictness, covered nothing but a shirt collar and a neck-tie, "pin-

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ned on a piece of brown paper," as he condescended to explain.

I fitted him out with some clothing afterwards at a shop near by, and we went to the theatre in the evening. I finally parted from him on my way to the Grand Central Station, leaving ten dollars with him, a small sum, but all that I could spare. He promised to "sleep like a Christian that night," at any rate.

"But I shall not give up the safe deposit," he said, when I suggested his giving it a wide berth for the present. "Bless your soul, I couldn't afford to let my reputation rest, even for a day! I shall be there at my regular time to-morrow. I'm not afraid of too much rest."

Poor old Shand! His past life might not bear very close inspection, but he had done me many a good turn in days gone by. I wrung his hand at parting, and he promised to write to me.

As I was about to board my train I passed a stream of people just disembarked from one. A young lady and an elderly woman somehow arrested my attention. They had stopped, and were standing a little apart from the others. The woman was very large and

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stout, and seemed to be half crying; she was expostulating with the young lady, who was small, with a dark, homely little face. The latter gesticulated wildly, while her eyes roved around in anxious expectancy; she cast a backward glance over her shoulder, and wrung her hands. Her companion put a large portmanteau down on the pavement, and both stood waiting and irresolute, evidently not knowing where to proceed. They were plainly foreigners, and the young lady was handsomely dressed.

Obeying the impulse of the moment I took off my hat, and stepping up to the young lady, asked in French if I could be of any use.

She turned to me with a perfect torrent of thanks, and with a volubility which almost put me at fault. Could I direct her to a hotel suitable for ladies? A friend whom she had hoped to find awaiting her was, it appeared, not there; she had sent him word, but had addressed the letter to a number given her two years before.

I told her the name of a good hotel near by, finding that she could speak English enough to make herself understood, and then, moved by a sudden inexplicable impulse, I followed

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just as she was about to disappear through the doorway that led to the street.

“Pardon me, mademoiselle,” I said; “it is an impertinence, but was the name of the gentleman you expected here to meet you Belmont Shand?”

Mademoiselle burst into tears, and clasped her hands. “Monsieur is an angel of light!” she cried. “It is his name.”

“I have but a moment, mademoiselle,” said I. “My train starts immediately. I cannot give you Mr. Shand’s address, for unexplainable reasons. Mademoiselle can speak some English? Then if she will go down Broadway to-morrow morning before nine o’clock to the Equivalent Building (to which any one will be glad to direct mademoiselle), and will wait there for a short time, Mr. Belmont Shand will not fail to make his appearance. Adieu, mademoiselle, I am charmed to be of service, even so slight!” And with that I turned and rushed for my train, and in an instant was whirled away from the scene of this little drama.

I did not get any letters from Shand, in spite of his promise, and a month afterwards, passing through the city again, I could find no trace of my friend at the Equivalent Building

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nor anywhere else. My mind reverted to the incidents here recorded quite often for a while, and my wife, to whom I related the story, occasionally broke a silence by saying that she wished she could hear something further of Mr. Shand, and whether the young lady ever found him. Gradually, however, it all faded from our minds.

It was six or seven years afterwards that we went abroad. One day, in Paris, as we were walking in the Boulevard, my wife clutched my arm.

“There is a gentleman over there staring at you so, dear,” she said. “He is very distinguished-looking. Do you suppose he thinks that he knows you?”

I followed the glance of her eyes. A tall man, with black hair, moustache, and imperial, and very piercing black eyes, stood regarding me attentively. He was very handsomely dressed, with an order of some kind on his coat.

As I met his gaze he stepped forward and held out his hand; then he grinned, and I knew him.

“Belmont Shand!” said I, in wonder.

“Yes,” said he. “It’s paralysing, I know, but try and bear up under it.”

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I introduced him to my wife, and then we stood still, staring at each other.

“Are you —” I began, when he interrupted me with the well-remembered wave of his hand.

“I’m everything your fancy ever painted,” he said. “Wooed and married and all. Bless your soul, Kit, you can’t draw it too strong! Is this your wife’s first visit over here?”

“Yes,” I answered, “the first visit for both of us.”

“Well, I’ve hung up in gay Paree for the last six years and a half,” said he thoughtfully. “I reckon I’m the man *you* want. There isn’t much that’s escaped my eagle eye.”

We walked along together, he pointing out different objects of interest to my wife, while I was trying to take in the situation. I broke into one of his descriptions at last.

“Let all that go now, Shand, and tell us about yourself. I’m consumed with curiosity. Did you marry some one over here?”

“No, on the other side,” he replied promptly. “*You* ought to know.”

“Then mademoiselle found you?” I hazarded in some excitement.

“I should say she did,” he returned gravely. “She’s never lost me since. I’m hers for

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life." He jingled the coins in his pocket with a reflective air. "Well, if you want to hear about it —! It was a pretty close shave, for Marie's father had followed her from Canada, and tracked her to the Equivalent Building, where she was waiting for me with her maid, as you had instructed her. I tell you I grasped the situation for *all* it was worth when I saw her, and then caught sight of *him* moseying down the street. I didn't stop to change my collar or put in my diamond studs, you can bet your bottom dollar on that. I just pushed those two women in front of me as we entered the building. When he rushed after, we had already disappeared below. The iron doors were opened for me, and in a few seconds we three were safely locked in a compartment in the safe deposit vaults."

"Well?" said I, as he paused ruminatively.

"Oh, well, it was plain sailing after that. Marie was of age and had come into possession of her fortune. It didn't take *me* long to settle things. I had noticed in our hasty entrance a clergyman who spent a good part of his time in there, for he was a man of wealth. I believe he has since been made a bishop. I got the attendant to haul him out

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of his compartment, and he married us then and there.”

“And afterwards?” said I.

“Oh, afterwards we skipped by a side entrance and took the steamer for Havre, and — here we are! Well, Kit, I don’t yearn for home worth a cent. If you’re agreeable, we’ll let the dead past bury its dead, and as to anything else, you can just ask Marie!”

The Perfect Tale

The Perfect Tale

A Romantic Love Story

NOEL FARINGTON sat by his office desk, his long legs stretched out, and his lean, narrow, youthful face, with its dark-lashed eyes bent over his personal mail, which consisted that hot August morning of a returned manuscript, and a letter postmarked from the mountains. He opened the manuscript first and glanced it over, although he knew it by heart. If his spirit still remained buoyant after repeated failures, it was because he believed so firmly that he had it in him to write a story some day that would touch the highest mark of success. This aspiration was to Noël what love might be to another; every definite hope and aim was in some way interwoven with it. It kept him warm when he would otherwise have been very cold.

Even in those magazines where his articles were refused it was recognized that he had genius, though his efforts were still crude. He had that curious sub-popularity which obtains in editorial offices, unknown to the pub-

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lic — something was expected of young Farington. He clung the closer to his dear mistress, Inspiration, because he looked forward to no other companion. Marriage was a happiness meant for other people, not for him.

At the present ratio of his earnings, indeed, as he sometimes thought grimly, there could be no prospect of marrying any young woman of his own class before the age of fifty. During the latter half of his stay at college he had been attached to a girl older than himself, who had led him on and then thrown him over. The effect of this was to give him a painful inner distrust; he felt with sensitively shrinking, unvoiced humility that there must be some lack in himself, he didn't know what, that made it impossible for a woman to really care for him; he hadn't the power other men had to inspire affection, that was all. Naturally generous and of high ideals, he was growing self-centred from a life that was lonelier than any one knew.

He still liked the Bohemian existence well enough after three years of it, though he had his fill of cheap restaurants, and there was certainly no glitter of delight attending that hygienic bowl of milk and a cereal, price ten

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cents, which (by process of elimination) had come to be his chief standby this burning summer time, when the sun glared up from the sidewalks, and there was that nauseating, raw smell of wet dust where the watering-carts had just laid it. There had been the usual summer strain of overwork in the office, with men off on vacations and one, unscheduled, ill. Noël had been too tired to sleep these nights—suffocating nights spent between the two long narrow walls of his room, with heavy wagons hulking over the cobble-stones into the dawn. As he looked at the rejected manuscript on his desk he realized that he had come to the end of his tether for a while.

“Take your feet out of my way,” said a fellow clerk, stumbling over them purposely. He spoke irritatingly — tempers were going in the office.

“If you do that again, I’ll knock you down,” returned Noël with sudden, unexpected fury. He controlled himself by a great effort, and took up the letter — Lauter’s letter that he had left unopened. It was an invitation to spend the month with a party of friends in the Adirondacks. That night Noël packed his typewriter in his trunk with his other belongings, and went. . . .

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Noël felt in a dream-prelude to some wonderful, fairy-like transformation as he sat down to dinner that first evening in the long, low, pine-built dining-room of the bungalow, decked with cedar boughs, velvety dark in the gleams of the pink-shaded candles on the table; a delightful mingling of the sylvan and the luxurious. While the forest gloomed around, the noiseless waiters served delicious dishes and poured champagne into the long, bubble-topped glasses — a change indeed to one who had eaten no food lately that hadn't a price on it. The conversation was charmingly gay and intimate, but Noël could not talk, though his worn, thin, boyish face reflected the lights and shadows of discussion, and his eyes smiled a quick response to whomsoever questioned them. Most of the people he knew, more or less, but farther down the table beyond the pink glow of the candles the profile of a stranger occasionally gleamed into view — the delicate, spirited profile of a girl, her small head set on a long throat, that rose out of a gown cut slightly square at the neck. The outlines of her velvety black hair melted into the velvety black shadows beyond, but he could see the curve of the long lashes on her olive cheek, and the sweetly set, infantine

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corners of her mouth. She did not talk, she was as silent as he, though once or twice he heard her laugh at something that was said. He felt the subtle aroma of some unknown attraction.

“Who is the girl in white?” he asked afterward of his friend Lauter. “I was presented but I didn’t catch her name.”

“Which one? They’re most of ’em in white,” said Lauter, a jovial, youngish-elderly man, who took a semi-paternal interest in his younger guest. He laid a large, kind hand on Noël’s arm as he spoke. “Been working pretty hard, haven’t you? Well, you wait till you begin to feel the air — that’ll set you up. What girl did you say? Oh, that’s Genevieve Deering — she’s a nice child, but rather impulsive. Come outside with the rest and smoke.”

That evening, before the early bed-hour, they all sat grouped on the piled-up cushions in the veranda of the bungalow, with the moonlight streaming down across the mountain and the motionless forest upon the waters of the lake that lapped in silver on the ivory margin. It was a scene of almost impossible beauty, whose fibres caught at the heart in the exhilaration of the deep surrounding si-

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lence. Some of the men began to thrum hauntingly on guitars and mandolins at the feet of the women, whose soft cheeks had a magic sheen upon them. The air was full of the resinous perfume of the pines; Noël drew a long, long, long breath of it. Genevieve Deering's presence seemed to give an added touch to this night of enchantment, where she sat back against the heaped-up pine boughs at the other end of the group. As she glanced across the space that divided them, he saw what made the attraction he had felt — it was because she had such happy eyes.

When they were all parting for the night, he found himself unexpectedly standing alone near her. She hesitated as it seemed for a second, and then held out her slim brown hand to him.

“Good-night,” she said with a frank cordiality, as if they had been talking for a long time before.

“Why, good-night,” he answered, and added, with involuntary response, familiar words, long unsaid: “Sweet dreams.”

Noël went to his room, but he could not sleep. The enchantment was still upon him. After half an hour of closed eyelids he rose, lighted the candles, partially dressed himself,

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and sat down by the table, where he had placed his writing materials in first unpacking. He took up the pen now, and began to write haltingly at first, and then with a suddenly exultant power that carried him whither it would. The word and the thought became one. He hardly dared stop to think, lest the gift, so longed for, should leave him. He wrote and wrote, his mind growing wonderfully clearer and clearer in this high joy of accomplishment — wrote and wrote, while the clock ticked and the wind blew ghostily past his window — wrote and wrote, with burning eye and whitening cheek, pushing sheet after sheet of paper from him, until the last line was reached. Then he leaned back in his chair, throbbing with an exultant emotion he had never known before. Short, simple, almost childlike, as was the story he had finished, it held within it something indefinable — something that was divine — and true; the heart of man — the joy of life. In an overwhelming moment he realized that he had written the perfect tale!

If he couldn't sleep before, much less could he now, in the white heat of this master forging. He dragged the typewriter over to him, and set to work to copy the closely written

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pages, with the swiftness born of long practice, making corrections as he went along. When he finished the grey dawn was coming in at the window. A card tacked on his wall told him that the mail went out at five. He wrote a note to the editor of a famous magazine, sealed and stamped it, and then stepping out of the low window, walked around by the side of the lake to the inn post-office, pointed out to him the night before. Then he came home, and throwing himself down upon the bed, fell sound asleep at last.

It was late when he awoke, after repeated knockings at the door. The party had nearly finished breakfast as he entered, the men only waiting for him before starting off on a canoeing trip with the guides, planned last evening. The dark forest still glowed around, but the sunlight danced upon the lake, blue under a blue sky. Miss Deering was in a suit of hunter's green, with a scarlet cape hanging over her chair; her eyes were still happy. Noël felt with a thrill that the exhilaration of the night before was still his.

"Well, you look like a different person," said Lauter heartily. "We were all worried about you yesterday, but I said—All he

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wants is air, and he'll get it here. It's a glorious day."

"It was drizzling at four o'clock this morning," announced Birket, a squarely built young fellow, with a heavy chin and penetrating eyes.

"Was it?" asked Noël. "I didn't notice it, I was out at that time. That accounts, however, for the dampness of my coat," he added, feeling it with his hand.

"What were you doing out of doors so early?" asked Mrs. Lauter, who was a cheerful, stout lady, with beautifully tailored girth.

"I went to post a manuscript I was writing all night."

"Writing all night!" Every eye was turned on him.

"Writing what?"

"A story called 'The Perfect Tale,'" said Noël, in a tone that he tried to make light, as he gave a brief account of the night's performance. "It's by far the best thing I've ever done — something I've thought of always. I could hardly believe I had accomplished it — I wanted to make sure at once."

"That was quick work," said Birket, staring at him, "to write and typewrite it and post it all before morning."

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“It was,” assented Noël with a slight grandiloquence, and added with some stiffness, “But I can assure you that I did it.”

All day on the trip he could think of nothing else in his state of exaltation, and dreamed of the future it would open to him. He counted the days until a reply could come from the magazine. A golden haze encompassed forest and stream. All he wanted was to get back to the words he had written — to pore over them, to make them his once more. But when he went to his room the manuscript was not there. He applied to Mrs. Lauter, who came to him some moments later very much distressed.

“Oh, Mr. Farington,” she said, “I hardly know how to tell you. A new maid stupidly burned up the papers in your room; they must have been blown over the floor by the wind, but she thought you had thrown them away. I wouldn’t have had it happen for the world; I blame myself dreadfully! And we were all hoping so much that you would read ‘The Perfect Tale’ to us to-night!”

“Ah, don’t mind so much, dear lady,” said Noël. “It was all my fault. I should have been more careful. But it doesn’t really matter in the least, the copy is safe.” He hesitated;

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and then added doubtfully, "Perhaps I can manage to tell the story."

But when they were once sitting on the veranda, with no moon this time, but with a gypsy fire sending a redly flaring light and shadow over the group, Noël began and began again, in vain. He could not tell the story.

"It's all so elusive — indicated more than told; one word suggests another, and I can't seem to find the words now; I wrote so quickly that they've left no trace," he said earnestly. "It's the same as it would be with a long poem that you tried to remember — a bare outline would mean nothing, even if you could give an outline. I can feel the whole thing more and more — it's as real to me as your faces — but I can't formulate it, I can't reduce it to details. The only thing that stands out quite clear in my mind is the part — just before the wonderful climax — where the heroine reaches out her arms to Ralph as she stands in a shaft of sunlight, and says: 'I believe you!'"

"My word," said Birket in an undertone, after a pause, "he thinks no end of himself, doesn't he?"

"Hush," murmured Frances Remer, a light, white young woman, with a hard ex-

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pression, in spite of her dimples. "You've no romance in you."

"It's too, *too* bad you can't remember it," said Mrs. Lauter, settling herself back comfortably in her cushions.

There was a cheerful murmur of regret from every one. The conversation began again and the guitars and mandolins to thrum softly and hauntingly as on the night before. Only Genevieve Deering, her scarlet cape half over one shoulder, and half over the velvety blackness of her hair, leaned toward Noël across the ruddy, flickering shadows, with dark, pleading, heartfelt eyes.

"Oh, I *wish* you could have gone on!" she said.

"Haven't you heard from the *Idealist* yet, Mr. Farington? —" Mrs. Lauter spoke. It was three weeks later, and this time some of the party were stationed on a little cleared space on a mountain-top, with a higher blue mountain beyond; the tree-tops were at their feet — the sun shone through a white haze that thinly veiled the world below. Noël sat at the feet of Mrs. Lauter, his cap on the sward beside him, his thick hair back from his forehead. Two of their number had just

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strolled away, and Noël and Mrs. Lauter had smiled a mutual recognition of the unconscious coupling of some of the others — Birket and Miss Remer; pretty, sensible Ethel Gray and ardent young Porter. With the age of youth, which is far deeper than the age of the really old, he felt a high, protecting, unselfish, brotherly pleasure in the contemplation of those who were lovers; it seemed something right, and charming.

“Why, yes,” he said aloud in answer to her question. “It is time I heard from them. But August is a bad time to get a quick decision; so many men are off on vacations. I’m looking for an answer any day now.”

“Yes,” agreed Birket, “Allis says that Sanford — the editor — has been in Maine. Where has Allis gone to? He was here just now.”

“Oh, he and Emma have gone off together — to talk about furniture, I suppose,” said Ethel Gray. “If it’s as prosaic as *that* to be engaged, I never want to be.”

“There can be a good deal of romance in furniture when it’s for two,” stated Mrs. Lauter sagely.

“Well, you wouldn’t want to marry without it,” said Frances Remer, picking out

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wisps of grass from the short mountain sward. She looked at Birket with her ironic, dimpling smile. "Honestly, I never could see *why* it should be considered more interesting to go without things after you were married than before. I'd hate it. If I'm not comfortable I'm downright disagreeable, that's all — *most* people are."

"What do you say, Miss Gray?" asked young Porter anxiously.

"Well," said Miss Gray slowly — she leaned her sensible little square face on her hand — "I don't think I'd mind beginning plainly; I'd sort of like to keep a place in order, and make nice little dishes if I thought I didn't have to do it always. I wouldn't want to be really *poor* — would you, Genevieve?"

"Oh, I wouldn't care," said Genevieve.

She lay on the mountain-top facing the others, her chin propped up by her slim brown hand; her young, reclining figure, with its dark head and scarlet-draped shoulder, half outlined by the green sward, half by the blue sky. The corners of her infantine mouth smiled, but her eyes were serious. Noël watched her with the frank admiration a man may feel in the sight of a beautiful girl; there was a charm in her beyond the ostensi-

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ble charm, like that of a field of crimson clover with the wind blowing over it, or the reflection of green fluttering leaves in still water. "I wouldn't care how poor I was, if I was really fond of anybody," she said.

"My dear child, you'd care soon enough," said Mrs. Lauter compassionately.

"No I wouldn't!" said Genevieve, shaking her head. "Don't you see? — you can have chairs and tables and clothes and people to wait on you, with your sister, or your uncle, or your grandfather — but that isn't *love*! Love is when you *have* to be with a person, no matter what you go without. If I loved anybody very much, I could live anywhere and be glad, if there was anything to live on *at all*. I'd be happy to cook for him, happy to work for him."

"In two rooms over the elevated road," supplemented Birket.

"Yes, in two rooms over the elevated road," said Genevieve defiantly. "I'd have scarlet geraniums on the fire-escapes, and when he came home at night he'd forget it was a fire-escape over the elevated road, he'd only see over the tops of the houses to the cloud mountains beyond."

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"You are very romantic," said Mrs. Lauter indulgently.

"No," said Genevieve, "I'm quite practical." Her lips still smiled, but her eyes took sweet counsel from within. "Wasn't it Hawthorne's wife — and they were *very* poor! — who said that she passed her days in a 'dream of bliss'? Well, if I am married and haven't the outside things I'll just dream them into my life; I've always done it! There's only one thing you *can't* dream into it — you can't! And that's love."

She rose as she spoke, and stood, her arms hanging down, facing the little circle — then she turned, and disappeared through the trees, as an Indian maiden might. Noël hesitated for an instant, stooped to arrange Mrs. Lauter's cushions anew for her, and then jumping up, followed the glint of the scarlet cloak down the trail.

"That young man always makes me feel as if I were still young and beautiful," said Mrs. Lauter with a sigh, watching him out of sight.

"Do you know," said Noël, as they walked with light steps that swayed together in unison. "Do you know when you were speaking just now you touched on one theme of

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my story? It came before me for a moment with extraordinary vividness. I have so often tried to remember it as it was written, but all my life it has been this way with me: Very great events seem to blot out sensation — I can't go back and take off up the details. And it was such a strange power that came to me that night, such divination of life!"

*"If an angel spoke
In thunder, should we haply know much more
Than that it thundered?"*

quoted Genevieve softly.

"How you understand!" said Noël. "It is with you that the thought of 'The Perfect Tale' comes to me most clearly. I can almost see it all before me again, with that beautiful climax that I can never quite get. Sometimes I've wondered whether I really wrote as I thought, or whether my imagination has gilded it since. But there is one assurance I return to every time: Everything — the grass, the sky, the world itself — has been changed for me. I feel that I live now to accomplish great things, for there's a beauty in existence I never felt before."

"Oh," said Genevieve, her frank eyes

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alight, "I've felt that, too! Don't you think you can tell when beautiful thoughts are near you? When people are in a room with you you can know whether they're bothered or discontented or happy without their speaking. Why couldn't one feel something beautiful — like what you wrote? There's so *much* more to living than what we *see*!"

"Have you learned that too?" asked Noël.

"Yes," said Genevieve. She added in a shy voice: "I've had to dream things into my life, I've had to believe in what I don't see, because —" She stopped, and then went on resolutely. "You know I'm not a rich girl, like the others. When I finished school and my cousin told me I had to go back there and teach — I — *cried*. And the Principal of the school, who got me the place — I have never told anybody else before —"

"Is he unkind to you?" asked Noël in a voice that startled himself.

"Oh, no, no, he's very kind — *too* kind," said Genevieve. A crimson wave reached to her black hair; she looked at him with piteous eyes. "He has a mouth like a fish," she whispered painfully.

"He must be a villain," said Noël with a cold, unreasoning anger.

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She gave him a grateful glance. After a moment's silence she murmured: "Now you see why I've learned to dream into my life. Mrs. Lauter was telling me some things about you, and I thought I'd like you to know some things about myself."

"I thank you very, very much," said Noël gently. Yet his thoughts were not gentle; it came upon him with a strange unsettling force that while he had been wrapped in his own plans, she had been living somewhere near, and those soft hands that he had held in his were toiling — as they must toil still.

They walked on in another silence, as they neared the little cabin where the rest of the party awaited them with the guide.

"I am going away this afternoon to the Warrens's camp for a week's visit," said Genevieve suddenly.

"I did not know that! Why, you will come back then only just before I leave here myself," returned Noël. He was disgusted, annoyed, he knew not why. "At any rate, I will surely have news of 'The Perfect Tale' for you by that time!"

The next day a heavy rain settled down, and Noël felt a fathomless depression, and a sudden wild consuming anxiety to hear from

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his story. The day after, amid a wet, cold fog that clung to the ground, he wrote to the *Idealist*. The weather cleared afterward, but there was a chill in the air, and he was restless and solitary in the midst of this group, with their pleasant family ties, their pleasant sweet-hearts.

The week was not yet at an end when the longed-for letter arrived. No manuscript with it! That was as it should be. His heart beat with triumph. Another moment and he was standing before Lauter, deathly pale, in the long room where the men were sitting.

“Listen to this!” he said.

Dear Mr. Farington:

Your letter was received yesterday. In reply we would state that no such manuscript as you mention has been received here; there is no record of it, and a thorough search has failed to bring it to light. It must have been inadvertently sent to some other periodical, or lost in transmission. We regret very much not having had the opportunity to examine it.

Very truly yours,

GEORGE SANFORD.

“Well!” said Lauter.

“Well,” repeated Noël. The veins stood out on his forehead. “I *did* send it to the *Idealist*, and it was not lost in transmission.

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I put extra stamps on it to make sure, I posted it myself. *They've* lost it with their damned carelessness! dropped it behind a drawer, or sent it by mistake to Mexico, as they did once for me before. It's an outrage! I'll take the first train I can get this afternoon, I'll *make* them hunt it up!"

"It's too bad," said Lauter sympathetically, but Noël had gone off unheeding. He sat down on his bed with his head in his hands, trying to think. Then he got up and started out again. As he came around the corner near the window where the men were sitting, Birket's words caught his ear:

"I don't believe Farington ever wrote that story at all!"

"Oh, see here," expostulated Lauter.

"Well, consider the facts! He says he wrote it in a magically short time and there's not a vestige of it to show."

"The maid burned up the copy," said Lauter.

"She burned up some papers, but who knows what was on them? And he can't remember a word — is that rational? He *thinks* he wrote it, all square enough, I'll allow that, but the thing's absurd; it's tommy-rot. I've always known it."

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“His clothes were damp from going out to post it that morning,” argued Lauter, yet evidently wavering.

“Exactly, and he may have walked in his sleep or anything else; I don’t pretend to explain what. But you may be sure of one fact — there’ll never be any more of that impossibly perfect tale than there is now — and that’s nothing! Porter thinks so, too, and so does Frances Remer.”

“Well, perhaps not,” said Lauter with an easy laugh. “Poor Farington!”

Noël turned and went off into the forest, the enshrouding forest, dark with the weight of centuries, through whose branches the late afternoon sun could hardly penetrate to the thick carpet of pine needles below. Everything else had failed him — had this failed too? An awful, suffocating doubt clung to him, a devil-tentacled doubt, created by this deadening thought of others, from which his soul strove desperately to free itself. If they were right, why then —! There was no one to uphold him. To be true to the truth we know of ourselves, in spite of the judgment of the wise — that is a vital faith, though it may take the loneliest struggle of all to maintain it. The very crucial need of effort now weighted him

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in the endeavour to stand upright. There are some hurts that drown remembrance, and others that give fresh power to every other hurt that has ever been. He heard those carts hulking over the stones in the long, lonely, hot nights, into the fetid dawn. . . . He was a child again, who needed the comfort. . . . He saw the tears of that bright-winged creature, compelled to drudge unwillingly for hire. . . . Men with fish-mouths gaped at him from behind each tree.

He held on to the low branch of a cedar and rested his forehead against its trunk. As he lifted his eyes again, a slant of that late afternoon sunshine fell athwart the trail, through which came the figure of Genevieve Deering, her scarlet cloak over one shoulder, slipping between the tree trunks with the light, free step of an Indian maiden, her eager eyes searching into the gloom before them. As she saw him she ran forward.

“You!” he said, and taking the hand she held out to him, clasped it in both his own, with a miraculous lightening of the heart.

“Yes,” said Genevieve, a glow on her olive cheek below the curving lashes, “I came home a day too soon, I couldn’t wait. It has

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been such a strange, dreary week ; so different from the rest."

He made a quick movement of assent. "Yes! I was sure you would feel it, too. I could not think why it was, but now I know it was the presage of misfortune. Did you hear —"

"Yes," said Genevieve, forestalling him. "They told me at the house, and I ran to find you, to say —"

"No," he interrupted, "you haven't heard the rest." His face stiffened, his proud eyes questioned hers with a defiant hardness. "They say I'm a self-deluded fraud and that I never wrote that story at all — that I only dreamed that I did!"

"Oh!" she cried, "how could they hurt you so!" Her tone had a passionate, indignant, yearning sympathy in it. She moved instinctively toward him with a lovely, maternal gesture, as if she would thrust her body between him and the world. "How cruel, how cruel! You must never, never think that! Never!"

"Genevieve!" said Noël, "Genevieve!" He pressed the hand he still held, and the colour rushed back to his face. "How you divine me — how you divine! It's wonder-

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ful!" He stopped to control his trembling voice. "I want to tell you now that that story *was* sent — it was made from the fibres of my heart and of my brain; these fingers held the pen that wrote it, these eyes beheld the written words. It was as real as you and I!"

"Oh," said Genevieve, her beautiful, heartfelt eyes upraised to his, "why do you tell this to *me*? I would believe in you against the whole world — *I* would believe in you even against yourself."

She made a swift step nearer to him — he felt the warm comfort of her tender arms around him as he held her; his lips rested on the soft joy of hers.

"Ah," breathed Noël, lifting his head as one who awakens, with the thrill of an ecstasy far greater than that lost one in his voice. "I remember it all, now. *This* is the Perfect Tale!"

THE END



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