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PATRICIA'S GIFT

(Continued from page 8.)

demanding. "I might as well dine with a mute."

"Oh, Hugh," the girl answered, with tears in her eyes, "why are you so cross this evening? You're so unlike yourself. If I talk you snub me, and now you swear at me for saying nothing. What am I to do?"

Hugh looked at her with a puzzled air. "I never swore at a lady in my life," he protested. "I feel out of sorts, I admit, and if I was rude I'm sorry, Julie, but what has come over you to-night? You're not yourself."

"It's you who are not yourself," Julie might well have retorted, but she only said, humbly, "What is wrong with me, Hugh?"

What indeed! Hugh could not understand it. The girl's delicate beauty had seemingly vanished, her voice grated on his ear, her personality had become unattractive, even distasteful to him; all the pleasure had gone out of the evening; he found himself counting the courses which brought him nearer release; no sooner was desert served than he suggested departure. He put her into a cab.

"Aren't you coming back with me?" she said, with an appealing look.

But he pleaded a club engagement, bade her a brief good-night, and turned away with a sigh of relief. Julie cried all the way home.

He came next day, and she greeted him with a smiling face and gave him her lips as though nothing had happened, and waited for the apology to which she was entitled; but it remained unuttered, Hugh was morose and silent, and made but a short stay.

A week passed. A week to Julie of long-drawn misery. She adored Hugh so much that love made her blind. She told herself he was unwell, that he had private worries, that she had unconsciously offended him, but at last she guessed the truth. He no longer loved her, and wanted to be released from his engagement.

She cried herself half blind when she realized he had tired of her. But she had her pride, and wrote him a brief note asking him to call the next afternoon, and met him, pale and heavy eyed, but with a dignity of which he was uncomfortably aware.

"Hugh," she said, "I owe you an apology. I've been rather stupid these last few days. You've changed; you've tired of me; you want to be free. Why didn't you say so?"

The man looked and felt thoroughly ashamed of himself. "You must think me a weather-cock," he said, "but I must confess since that evening at the Carlton I don't love you as I did. It's not your fault. You're the same girl, but I—well, something has come over me. But I feel a cad! Julie, you must let me make it up to you. You shall have a settlement—"

"Stop!" cried the girl, and, despite her self-control, a sob broke from her. "Oh! Hugh, you might have spared me that. Take money from you! Don't you know me better than that?"

"Don't flare up so," grumbled Hugh; "I mean no offence. It would have eased my mind. Let's part friends, anyhow," and he held out his hand.

Julie took it, and as their fingers touched, her eyes, downcast, fell on the two rings he had given her, the only presents she had accepted from him.

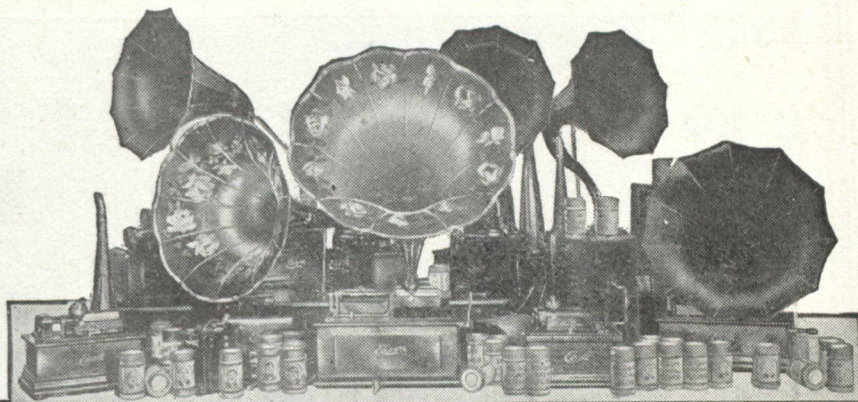
"Your rings," she cried, and began to take them off.

"Keep them," he begged; and then, as she shook her head, "At least keep one, Julie, in memory of me. Come, I beg."

Julie drew off the engagement ring and hesitated. "Very well," she said, "I will keep the other. I confess I've taken an odd liking to it. Good-bye, Sir Hugh."

The door closed behind him and she was alone—love's dream over.

"What a cad I feel," muttered Hugh as he walked away; yet the sense of relief at being free was so great that it dulled the pricks of conscience, and by the time he had reached Oxford Street he had walked himself into a state of content with the whole world. He was passing Lewis's when he heard



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