

"And I have found a store quite willing to exhibit your paintings, and also know a newspaper man who'll give you a good write-up in the local papers. Can you have your sketches ready by noon to-morrow?"

They chatted over her work till Ralph rose to go.

"You are very, very good to me," she said simply as he took her hand.

"I wish you'd let me be," he said, unexpectedly. Then his courage failed him, and he could not trust himself to say more.

A few days later she met him with his father. The old man was unmistakably proud of his son, and it was good to see the look of affection pass between them.

"At home he'd be just middle class," the girl reflected, then, ashamed of her snobbishness, "but a gentleman by nature."

After three weeks advertising, only two pupils were forthcoming, and Sylvia Norton's spirits were sinking. Winnipeg repelled her. The rush, the hard noises, the strangeness of the people's ways and their abruptness of manner, jarred her artistic senses—and the dollar-making life confronting her made her despair of reaching their sympathies. As was to be expected, at first, she could not see below the surface. The wet days, especially, made her homesick, and it was only her little son who kept her from despair. Though she had only taken two rooms the rent was quite high, and her expenses seemed enormous.

"At this rate I'll be a pauper in six months' time," she confided to Ralph Carew, who tried to cheer her.

"I hope you'll be—" he began, flushing to the roots of his dark hair. Again the big man became a coward before this frail, almost helpless woman.

The next morning Sylvia gave a startled exclamation as she took up the morning paper. Ralph's father was dead! He had died at his club, suddenly, of heart disease. Her own worries were forgotten in the sympathy felt for her friend. She sat down at once and wrote him a brief, but sympathetic note. It

was three days before she heard from him. Then he wrote a few hasty lines saying he had been called to Vancouver, where his only sister lived, as she was quite prostrated by the news of her father's death. He hoped to be back in two weeks' time, and meanwhile would she write and tell him how she was getting along?

Two weeks lengthened into a month, and no sight of Ralph's tall figure. Mrs. Norton's pupils still continued to number only two, and her little savings diminished. She decided she must try some other means of supporting herself and the boy. The poor baby, whose little life hitherto had been spent in a comfortable English nursery, with a nurse to care for him, was feeling the crampedness of two rooms, and his face was losing its chubbiness. That was the finishing touch to her worries.

"We'll go away from this horrid town, darling!" she cried, snatching him up in her arms. "We'll try again, won't we? I will do anything,—any kind of work,—but my little Cherub shall not suffer."

Two days later she and the Cherub vanished.

It was June. The long cold winter was over at last and once more the brown earth was visible, and green leaves adorned the trees.

Ralph Carew stood at the window of his den, looking out into the garden, where a gardener was at work on the lawn. He was depressed and lonely. Not only did he still miss his kind, genial old father, but he had never recovered from the shock of losing trace of the woman he loved. He had searched high and low for her. Sylvia Norton and her little son had disappeared. He would not believe her heartless. But why had she never written? Why had she not let him know where she had gone? Surely she was not blind? She must have known that he cared.

A rap at the door roused him. His housekeeper entered with a letter in her hand.

"We were spring-cleaning in the dining room, Mr. Ralph, and found this letter fallen down behind the sideboard. It must have been put on the top, and dropped down some way. It looks as if it had been there for some time."

Ralph took it, and his face paled. "I guess the sideboard's not been moved since last fall," the woman added. He broke the seal.

"This was dated the 26th of October, and—" but he said no more, the letter told its own pathetic story.

"My dear Mr. Carew," Sylvia Norton wrote, "I had hoped you would be back before I left Winnipeg, but I promised to let you know my plans. I find I cannot afford to remain here, and it seems pupils are not forthcoming, at any rate for some time. I have seen many advertisements for lady housekeepers, in the country, and I believe it will be healthier life for my boy, though perhaps not so pleasant for myself. I enclose the address. It is a farmhouse only twenty miles out. You have been so good to us and I shall never forget your kindness.

Very sincerely yours,  
Sylvia Norton."

"Over seven months ago," he groaned, "what will she think?"

With impetuous haste he ordered his car, and motored away into the country that same afternoon. He could not picture his dainty, refined little lady a housekeeper on a farm! He knew too well all that it would imply.

As he reached the farmhouse a burly man appeared.

"Is Mrs. Norton living here?" Ralph asked, briskly.

"Do you mean that there English-woman, an' her kid, what came last fall?"

"I mean an English lady, called Norton, and her little boy," Ralph answered, with growing impatience.

"Oh! well she ain't here. She only stayed a week or two. She was too fine for us, I can tell you,—and no use neither!"

"Where did she go?"

"Search me? I drove her to the depot, along with all the truck she brought, and that's all I know, or anyone else either. Them sort of ladies is best back in their own country, where they ain't afraid of soilin' their pretty hands."

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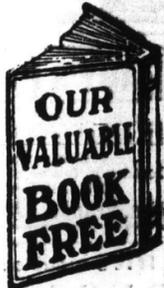
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