

Buying a Spring Bonnet

They were at breakfast at the little round table on their little side porch. The sun was shining; the morning-glories, so carefully trained by Lilia herself, were waving their bright, rainbow-tinted cups; the wrens, who had a nest under the eaves, were chirping. George was softly whistling for sheer lightness of heart, but Lilia was wrapped in silence. She gazed meditatively and silently into space.

George began to take alarm. Silence, especially at breakfast, was not Lilia's normal state. Unless she went into town to shop, she did not see George from breakfast until evening. As she had been married but four months one week and two days,—to be as accurate as she,—she did not often go into town to shop; and she always had so much to say to George!

"What are you thinking about, my dear?" he asked, finally. He was fond of calling her "my dear"; it made them both seem so much older.

"Hats," was Lilia's reply. "I must get one," she continued, "and I was wondering what kind. What would you advise?"

"Me?" exclaimed George, in ungrammatical dismay. "I don't know anything about girls' hats!"

"You are an artist," said Lilia, "and besides, you've always admired mine."

"Yes," said George. "Why don't you get another one like them?" he suggested, eagerly.

Lilia laughed merrily. "What a sight it would be! They've all been different. Imagine—a composite hat!" She laughed again, and then she said, soberly, "But the fact remains that I must get a hat. I really must, and I wish you would come with me and help me select it."

"By all means, my dear," George cheerfully replied. "Any time you like; but you see how little I really know about even your hats."

"Well, you can tell me how I look in the ones I try on."

George laughed, and he laughed again as Lilia, before leaving him at the front steps, said, "Then you will meet me at noon today, and allow at least an hour."

"At least an hour? My dear girl, does it take you an hour to buy a hat?"

"It takes me two!" said Lilia, impressively. "What are you laughing at?"

"Hats!" retorted George, mirthfully; but he met Lilia punctually at noon.

"Have you allowed an hour?" she asked, as they went together to what she gravely told him was the only possible place to buy a proper hat.

"An hour and a half," he replied, as they went into the only possible place. He wondered why it was the only possible place; he had seen hats, presumably proper, exhibited in many other windows. He followed Lilia in silence; he was suddenly curious as to the cost of girls' hats. Lilia's father was rich. George knew that until her marriage she had not been in the habit of giving the cost of her hats, or, indeed, the cost of anything, very serious attention.

He was very far from rich, and as he looked at Lilia, accustomed all her life to all the things that money can buy, a fear seized him. He had told Lilia once that he was a poor man, and she had smiled a slow, wise smile, and said, "Oh, are you?" He had been so happily sure that she had understood him, and that she had been willing to forgo some of the things that money can buy for the sake of those things that money cannot buy. He had been so certain—until he followed Lilia into the only possible place to buy a proper hat.

She smiled at his grave face. "Don't look so solemn, my dear," she whispered. "The safety of the commonwealth isn't at stake."

She was so like her usual self now that he could not be very solemn, and her all too obvious lack of logic in the buying of a hat interested him deeply. "Don't you know what you want?" he inquired, during the absence of the attendant, as Lilia tried on a black hat, and then a white one, and then a brown one.

"Oh dear, yes!" she said.

"Then why don't you ask for it?" he said.

Lilia laughed softly. "I can't, I never know just what it is until I see it."

George stared at her in comic astonishment. "My dear girl—"

"It's madness—but it has some method," said the dear girl, with laughing eyes. "It is so delightfully domestic—and funny—to have my husband come with me to buy a hat!" she added in a whisper, as the attendant returned with still a different hat.

"That is very pretty—and artistic," said George, judicially, as Lilia gazed in the glass at its gray

and black effect against her golden hair.

"It is a dream!" said Lilia, conclusively, as the attendant again left them. "It is exactly what I want. Do you really like it?" she added, with delightful anxiety and deference.

"Perfectly charming—and very simple," said George, critically.

"Yes, it is simple," Lilia said. She glanced again at the hat, then a queer, half-tender, half-amused expression crept into her laughing eyes, and she looked closely at George. She suddenly remembered how serious his face had been as they entered the shop.

"How hopelessly stupid of me to come here!" she thought, in dismay. "I actually forgot that I can't just get things now and send papa the bills! Still George doesn't know anything about hats. I just won't get one now, and the dear boy need never know. I forgot that I can't send big bills to him! He is such a sensitive goose about money!" She smiled at her husband, described with such indignant affection, and said to the attendant:

"Thank you for showing them to me. I'm sorry, but none of them are quite what I want."

"But, my dear," George began, "you said—"

"None of them are quite what I want," repeated George's wife, decisively.

"We expect some others next week," said the attendant, who had often served Lilia. "Don't you like this gray one?" she added, indicating the one which George had been under the strongest impression that Lilia did like.

"It isn't quite what I want," replied Lilia.

"I thought you said it was exactly what you wanted," George remarked, as they went into the street.

Lilia laughed. "I changed my mind," she said. "A woman always may, you know," she further explained.

"Shall we go to some other place?" said George, still mystified.

"What do you want, my dear?"

"Something to eat—I'm positively famished!" said Lilia.

"But aren't you going to buy a hat?" asked George, in surprise.

"I think I'll wait until next week," she looked up at him and added, gently, "Don't talk to me any more about hats; you said yourself that you knew nothing about them."

He did not talk to her about them as she sat opposite him at the restaurant table, and she talked very little to him about anything. She was almost as silent as she had been at breakfast; but she smiled at him in a way that reminded him of the time he had told her that he was poor, and she had said, "Oh, are you?"

After luncheon he took her to her car, and waited until it bore her from his sight. As he started to return to his studio he said to himself, "I wonder why she changed her mind about that hat. She certainly said it was exactly what she wanted." Then all at once he understood. "Could it have been possible?" he thought, remembering her added tenderness. "The dear girl!"

For a moment he hesitated; then quickly he returned to the only possible place to buy a proper hat. The proper hat in question was in the show-window. It was, as he had said, very simple. He went into the shop, and to another attendant than the one who had so recently shown Lilia the hat. "How much is that gray hat in the window?" he asked.

The attendant looked at the hat. "Twenty-eight dollars," she said.

"It is a new hat from Paris," Lilia did know! George said to himself.

"It is very simple!" he gasped to the attendant.

"Yes," said the attendant, "but it is from Paris."

"What is it made of?" George asked, blankly, wondering how a coil of something gray and soft, combined with one strange black flower, could possibly cost twenty-eight dollars.

"Illusion," said the attendant.

"Illusion? What a name! Is illusion so expensive?"

"Oh, no; quite the contrary."

"Is it the flower, then; that is so expensive?"

"Oh, no," said the attendant, pitying his ignorance. "It is the style."

"The art in the making of it, I mean."

"It is artistic," said the artist, as he once more left the shop.

The price of the style fascinated him to such an extent that he lingered at the window and stared at the gray illusion and the black flower.

"Twenty-eight dollars! Upon my word! It's so simple I could draw

it with four lines," he thought, in his mystification. Then a new and remarkable idea came to him; an inspired idea! He snatched out his pencil and a card and made a rapid sketch of the Parisian hat. Then he went with hasty strides from the only possible place to another place, some distance removed. He apparently desired to leave far behind him the atmosphere of Parisian style and its seeming value.

With the sketch in his hand he approached an attendant in this second shop. "Can you make a hat like that?" he inquired.

"Oh yes," she said, easily. "It is very simple. What color is it? What is it made of?"

"It is gray illusion and a black flower. Where does one get gray illusion and black flowers?"

"We can supply them," said the attendant. "Shall I show them to you?"

"How much will it cost to make it?" George asked.

The attendant told him; he thought it very little indeed, and his bewilderment increased.

The illusion and the flowers were produced. The attendant's curiosity was violently aroused, but she was properly businesslike. George actually began to look upon the buying of a girl's hat as his distinct vocation. He selected a black flower with the air of a connoisseur, and with his artist's eye chose the exact shade of gray illusion.

"How long will it take to make it?" he inquired.

"I could do it before tonight," the attendant replied. "Will you call for it, or shall I send it?"

"I'll call for it," George said. He did call for it, and he examined it with an elaborate care that would have convulsed a less well-poised attendant. To his inexperienced eyes it was exactly like the original hat of the only possible place—save in price.

He bore it proudly home, and not until he reached the front gate and heard Lilia playing the piano in the little drawing-room did he wonder what Lilia would say. He had been so borne along on the waves of inspiration that, like many inspired persons, he had not stopped to determine his exact route. Actually he flattered. He was overwhelmed by a sense of his own appalling audacity! What would Lilia say? He felt shy of approaching her with the hat, and was indeed meditating upon the feasibility of concealing the box in the shrubbery, when Lilia herself, hearing his steps, came out into the fading light to meet him.

She had never more eagerly awaited him than on that day, never than on that day more happily wandered about the little house, which altogether was scarcely larger than her father's drawing-room, and which yet held a glory that all the money in the world could never have bought. Lilia had never until that day so keenly realized the brightness of that glory.

She came smiling into the twilight looking like a lily in her white gown.

"Oh, my dear—" she began; then, seeing the hapless hat-box, stopped. Hat-boxes have never been recommended for unobtrusiveness. She could hardly have avoided seeing it. "My dear boy, what in the world is that?" she demanded.

Haltingly, George told her. He told her more than he realized, and she laughed until her eyes were wet and shining. She insisted upon seeing the sketch, and took immediate possession of it.

"You are a goose!" she told and retold George. "A perfect goose! Do you suppose I care how much money you have? Do you suppose I care whether my hats come from Paris or not—under the circumstances? Really, you are a goose—but I am very proud of you. To think I missed seeing you get that hat! What fun it must have been!"

She tried on the hat, and she explained to him so fully and so warmly that she did not care whether she had any hats at all, or he had any money at all, that he could not understand—and she admired the hat profusely.

"It is a perfect dream!" she said, and certainly she looked far more charming, all flushed and bright-eyed, in it than she had looked in the Parisian original.

Lilia keeps it very carefully and she never tires of relating its history.

"No," she always concluded, "I don't think George will ever again have the courage to select a hat for me, even though I positively loved the one he did select. Oh, I have had a great many other hats—naturally—and some of them were from Paris, but no other hat that I have had ever gave me such complete and happy and unusual satisfaction as that absurd Paris hat that was really not Parisian at all."

A Fearful Joy.

Lord Russell of Killowen, the late lord chief justice of England, was

very brusque in manner, and to call upon him was sometimes "a fearful joy." A visitor, a Mr. Wilkins, once appeared in Lord Russell's office to ask a favor. The conversation which ensued would be regarded anywhere as sufficient evidence of Lord Russell's eccentricity, to use a mild term.

"How do you do, Sir Charles?" said Wilkins. "I think I had the honor of meeting you with Lord—"

"What do you want?" interrupted Lord Russell.

"Well, Sir Charles, I have endeavored to state in my letter—"

"Yes, I have your letter," said Lord Russell, brusquely, "and you write a very slovenly hand."

"The fact is, Sir Charles, I wrote that letter in a hurry in your waiting-room."

"Not at all, not at all. You had plenty of time to write a legible note. No, you are careless. Go on!"

"Well, a vacancy has occurred in—"

"You are very untidy in your appearance," broke in Sir Charles.

"I was travelling all night. I only—"

"Nonsense!" again interrupted Lord Russell. "You had plenty of time to make yourself tidy. No; you are naturally careless about your appearance. Go on!"

"Well, Sir Charles, this vacancy has occurred in—"

"And you are very fat!" interrupted the chief justice irritably.

"That is hereditary, I am afraid," said the visitor, not a little disconcerted by the criticisms of Sir Charles. "My father was very fat."

"Not at all," said the chief justice. "I knew your father well. He wasn't fat. It's laziness."

But Lord Russell helped the man to the position he desired. His bark was often worse than his bite.

Not Unreasonable.

They were sitting in the corner grocery store, exchanging the confidences of the fishing season, and as the conversation progressed the stories steadily increased in size. At last, says the New York Times, the tall, lank man on the cracker-barrel pulled himself together and began:

"I went down to the river this morning, and although the water was high almost to a flood, I took a ten-foot pike—"

"Stop there," exclaimed the fat man with the corn-cob pipe. "Tell us you took an eight-pound trout and I'll sit idly by. But a ten-foot pike, never!"

"I took a ten-foot pike-pole," continued the unruffled man on the cracker barrel, "and in less than five minutes I hooked out a fifteen-foot bass—"

"See here! See here!" shouted the owner of the grocery. "You'll have to go away from here to spin that story. I haven't any lightning-rods on this store yet."

"I hooked out a fifteen-foot bass-wood log," persisted the tall man, "and I was going to ask how much you think I can get for it."

A Desert of Salt.

One of the most remarkable geographical districts in the United States is the great Colorado Desert in southeastern California. It covers a territory about one hundred and forty miles long and seventy miles wide, and is absolutely bare of vegetation. The traveler to whom it is known never ventures to cross it, as the attempt means almost certain death. It is even difficult to get the Indians, who are perfectly familiar with it, to enter it during the summer. The dried bodies of horses and human beings have often been found as well preserved from decay as ancient mummies.

And yet at one point in this vast expanse of barrenness there is a crystal lake as pure and white as driven snow. In the center of a wide valley, two hundred and eighty feet below the level of the Gulf of California, there lies a sea of solid salt. During the day this vast deposit, stretching away for miles, gleams in dazzling whiteness; its scintillating crystals reflecting the rays of the sun like virgin snow. As the sun goes down it takes on hues of crimson and gold of marvelous beauty. To those approaching it at night, it seems as if a miracle had been wrought. The spotless whiteness extends to the horizon, and in places the salt is piled up in great heaps like veritable snowdrifts.

Agas ago this entire desert was part of the Gulf of California, but the salt is not that left by the ancient sea. It is the deposit of springs that are ever running down from the distant mountains. The salt is spread over a great area, and to make it merchantable it is only necessary to collect and dry it. Usually artificial heat is necessary to dry the product of salt mines, as it contains a large amount of moisture; but the intense heat of this desert is all that is required.

The method of collecting the salt is to plow it up by steam, each plow cutting a furrow eight feet wide and six inches deep. One plow will cut and gather seven hundred tons per day, which gives some adequate idea of the immensity of the deposit. A railroad has been built out into the lake, and the salt is loaded directly on the cars. Thousands of tons are piled up here and there in little mountains.

The temperature of the lake in summer is one hundred and fifty degrees, and it would be impossible for white men to work in it and live, but the Coahuila Indians endure it without apparent ill effects.—Ex.

Impossible—"Of all the clumsy brutes," cried Mrs. Pettish at the crowded reception, "that man's the worst." "Sh!" said her husband, "that man's a detective." "I don't care. He stepped on my trail and—" "Nonsense! He never got on anybody's trail in his life."—Philadelphia Press.

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