

selves, and the publishers wondered exactly what the public really wanted, anyhow. You couldn't tell, any more, they complained.

Just here began the little cloud on Mrs. Dickett's happiness. For two years the family were very proud of Molly, and Eleanor gave a tea for her on one of her infrequent visits to them, and got some people she could never have hoped for otherwise on the strength of her sister's celebrityship, for her Sunday morning column-and-a-half got to two-thirds of the town's breakfast tables, and her picture was at the head of it, now.

AT twenty-five she was called (and probably correctly) the second highest paid woman journalist in the country, and she spoke familiarly of names that are headlines to most of us, and bought evening gowns at "little shops" on Fifth Avenue. She lived with a red-haired friend, a clever illustrator of rising vogue, in a pretty little apartment, and Mrs. Dickett dined there one night with a really great novelist, a tenor from the Metropolitan Opera House, and a young Englishman whose brother was a baronet.

They had four glasses at their plates and the maid's cap and apron were tremendously interesting to Mrs. Dickett. But when she learned the rental of the apartment, the wages of the maid, the cost of Molly's black evening frock and the average monthly bill for Molly's hansom, she no longer wondered that her daughter was always poor. She had never spent seventy-five dollars for a single garment in her life, barring a fur-lined cloak, a Christmas gift from her husband, and to drink creme-de-menthe at a roof garden gave her a very odd sensation. However, there was the baronet's brother.

But at one of the songs at the roof garden Mrs. Dickett drew the line, and the entire British Peerage, embattled, could not have persuaded her that it could possibly be the duty—not to suggest the pleasure—of any respectable woman to listen to it. As she put it later to the red-haired girl and Molly, no unmarried woman could understand it and no married woman would want to, a simple statement which they persisted in treating as an epigram, to her annoyance.

"But nobody minded it but you, dear Mrs. Dickett," the red-haired girl soothed her, "and it's all in how you take those things, don't you think? Of course, if you find it wrong, why then it is wrong—for you. But really, I assure you, I simply paid no attention to it."

"Then you must allow me to say that I think you should have!" Mrs. Dickett snapped out.

"Oh, come, mother, a woman of twenty-five is to all intents and purposes as capable of hearing anything—as a married woman," said Molly, lazily. "I'm not a school girl, you know."

"I know that," her mother replied, shortly, and might have added that Molly looked Kathryn's age—which she did, and Kathryn was twenty-eight.

She was, however, if anything, handsomer than when her cheek had its fuller curve, for her eyes looked larger and her mouth had more mobility; there was a stimulation in her tenseness. Mrs. Dickett felt a little troubled.

ALTHOUGH, of course, Molly admitted that the creature had no character and sang those sort of songs purposely," she confided to her husband.

Imagine, then, her feeling when Molly's interview with the singer was printed! She began a severe letter to her—and ceased midway of the first paragraph. What possible hold had she over her daughter? What did she know of her friends and associates, and what, had she known and disapproved, would it have mattered to Molly? Since the day she won her college scholarship at eighteen she had been independent, financially speaking, and, though financial independence is not, of course, everything . . . but it would almost seem that it is! There must be some mistake here.

Mrs. Dickett chewed the end of her pen and thought as hard as she had ever thought in her life. Nonsense! What finally settles the thing is public opinion—Society. If one's world turns the cold

shoulder, one retracts, capitulates, acknowledges that the conventions are in the right of it. Well: but Molly's world was not the suburban circle of the Dicketts and her world applauded her; she stood high in it; her interview with the unspeakable one was "a great hit," in their jargon. Molly, in short, applied different standards, was in another class—was it, could it be, a Lower Class? And yet, the baronet!

Mrs. Dickett tore her letter through.

It is quite true that they didn't see her for a year after that—eighteen months, if you except Kathryn's flying luncheon with her at the time of the Convention of Associated Normal Schools. Kathryn then informed them that the red-haired girl had married her teacher and left the apartment and that Molly lived alone there.

"I'm very glad," said her mother. "I never liked that girl."

"She seems to have been a bad influence," Kathryn agreed conservatively and there, good, simple people as they were at heart, it would have ended.

But here comes Eleanor upon the scene, Eleanor, with two boys, a probable warden for husband, and a father-in-law who has become very respectably wealthy from long ago, almost forgotten investments



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in southern railroads. And George is the only son. Eleanor wonders that people can send their children to the public schools and wishes that Kathryn had married that college professor, even though his salary did barely equal hers.

"Every woman ought to settle, you know—it's nonsense to discuss it."

"But I am settled, my dear," said Kathryn, blandly, "and I'm not fond of house-keeping. You don't get any time for anything else."

"! ! !" said Eleanor.

Mrs. Dickett here intervened with news of Molly, and Eleanor's eyebrows lifted.

"You don't mean to say she's living alone there?"

Mrs. Dickett nodded uncertainly.

"Really, mother, I must say! She must be crazy. It's not right at all, and I'm sure George wouldn't like it."

"She's nearly twenty-seven," Kathryn put in coldly.

"As if that had anything to do with it! I'm going down to see her."

It was certainly unfortunate that she should have gone unheralded. The first wave of classical dancing had begun to lap the shores of New York

society, and Molly's paper had got the first amazing pictures, the first technical chit-chat of "plastique" and "masque" and "flowing line." Behold Mrs. Eleanor then, tired and mused with shopping, dyspeptic from unassimilated restaurant lunching (and a little nervous at her task, when actually confronted with it), staring petrified at Molly's darkened dining room, where, on a platform, against dull velvet backgrounds, an ivory, loose-haired, barely draped intaglio woman, swayed and whirled and beckoned. A slender spiral of smoke rose from the incense bowl before her; the odor hung heavily in the room. Three or four women (much better gowned than Eleanor) and a dozen men applauded from the drawing-room; a strange-looking youth with a shock of auburn hair drew from a violin sounds which one required no knowledge of technique to feel extraordinarily poignant and moving. All but the dancer were smoking, and Molly sat on the floor (in copper-colored chiffon, too!), her hands clasped about her knees, a cigarette in an amber holder between her lips, and enunciated clearly:

"Bully!"

In describing matters afterwards, Eleanor referred to Molly's reception of her as brazen. There is no reason to believe that this word has any relation to Molly's state of mind, she saw nothing to be brazen about. When she said, "How lucky you dropped in to-day, sis!" she unaffectedly meant it.

"Well, rather!" one of the young men replied. "Won't you have something, Mrs. er— Oh, yes, Farwell? Rhine wine cup, what?"

"No, I thank you," said Eleanor, frigidly. "May I have a few minutes' conversation with you, Mary?"

"Not just now, I hope," said some one, "for she's going to dance again."

"In that case I will not trouble you," said Eleanor, rather dramatically, one fears, and backed out to avoid the smoking violinist. It was a little trying, and Eleanor should have had tact enough to let the matter rest, but she was rather inelastic in her methods, and she had come to New York with a Purpose. So Molly disappeared with her into the bedroom, and they had it out, with what result it is unnecessary to say.

IT was from that moment that doubt as to whether Molly were an asset or a liability slipped into the Dickett family. It is improbable that knowledge of the fact that "the disgusting foreign dancing woman" was born and bred in Bangor, Maine, and had never been farther than a stage-length from a vigilant mother, would have greatly affected their judgment. And almost certainly the fact that the baronet's brother had asked her to marry him would only have irritated them the more—and perhaps with reason. Had he ever wanted to marry Molly? Maybe; she never said so.

And here one must pause to consider the interesting subject of Molly's relations with men. It proved singularly lacking in richness.

To state that she had lived four years (as she did, ultimately) on the staff of the largest New York daily newspaper, hanging personally over the "forms" many a time, among the printers, from 10 p.m. until 3 a.m., walking home with the milk carts in the lead-blue morning; sitting in the outer office of one of the greatest city editors for three of these years; studying every "first night," every picturesque slum, every visiting or indigenous notoriety at close range—to catalogue a life like this, add that it was the life of a handsome, well-dressed, high-spirited girl, and pretend that it was an existence unqualified by male adjectives, would be the merest absurdity.

I hear that from the tiniest, most impudent printer's devil up to the Dean of College Presidents, who became so interested in her during his famous interview of "After democracy—what?" that his wife asked her to luncheon and she spent the day with them, every man she encountered "swore by her," as they say. In a novel, the editor-in-chief would have married her and Eleanor would have been delighted; but in a novel the editors-in-chief are handsome, athletic young bachelors (which rarely occurs, as a matter of fact) or magnificent widowers whose