

Busy! She laughed—although the laugh was a sad one—at the bare suggestion. What occupation beyond her stupid little household duties had she to fill her empty days?

"No," she answered, a little tremulously; "No, I—I am not busy."

He sighed, and leaned his arm across the back of the sofa behind her. A thrill ran through her as she felt the contact of his arm. How big he was, this gay young soldier, how beautiful, and manly, and strong! And to think he should have fallen in love with her—her, the insignificant little spinster, whom those horrid, fast girls at the Rectory called a "dowdy trumpl!" But then, stranger things even than that sometimes happened in the novels.

"You've always been good to me," he said, gently. "Ever since we first met I—I've been fond of you. You remember our first meeting, don't you?"

"Yes." Of course she remembered it. It was not likely that she should forget the Rectory garden-party; it was the only social function, barring an occasional school-treat, that she was ever invited to. Insignificant old maids were not much sought after in Mudminster society. "Yes," she repeated, softly, "I—I remember."

He sighed again, and bent forward in his seat, with his eyes fixed rather moodily on the ground. Miss Priscilla thought he seemed depressed and worried; but, then, men always were depressed on these occasions—at least, so it said in the novels.

"We've—we've been good friends ever since, haven't we?" he continued.

Suddenly he put out his hand with an eager, boyish gesture, and laid it in her lap. Miss Priscilla stroked it gently with her own.

"Yes," she said, smiling, "we've—we've always been good friends."

"And I've always confided in you, haven't I? Told you all my troubles and my joys?"

"Yes, you've always told me everything."

She remembered the day when he had almost broken down in telling how he missed his dead father and mother, and how her heart—for she was an orphan herself—had sympathized with his loneliness. Poor boy! He was young to be an orphan; and he missed his mother dreadfully—she had always been his confidante in everything.

His eyes scanned her face anxiously. "And if I tell you something now, you won't laugh at me, will you? Or—or—"

Laugh at him! She looked at him with shining, tender eyes.

"I won't laugh," she answered gently.

"Or—or call me a fool, will you?" his ringing, boyish voice was full of a wistful anxiety.

Call him a fool! Was it foolish to be in love? She placed her hand on his arm.

"You can trust me," she said simply.

He gave her hand an affectionate squeeze. "Forgive me for doubting you, my best friend," he answered, repentantly.

Then, suddenly, he gave a nervous laugh. Her heart began to beat quickly; she knew, instinctively, what was coming.

"I wonder what you will say to me when I tell you that I have been silly enough to fall in love?" The words were jerked out awkwardly, his hands shook, his cheeks grew crimson. He was evidently boyishly ashamed of his confession.

And Miss Priscilla? The blood rushed up into her cheeks, her eyes grew dim, her head swam—she stretched out her other hand, and laid it on his knee.

"Tell me—tell me her name," she whispered. "Tell me—tell me what you call her!"

Her voice was so faint that he had to bend his head down to hear. He laughed again; he was very nervous.

"Her name? I think you know it," he answered, shyly.

Miss Priscilla's heart began to beat so quickly that she felt as if it would suffocate her, and there was a loud singing in her ears. Know it! Why, of course she did; had she not known it for thirty-seven years?

But she would not let him guess that

she knew beforehand what he was going to tell her soon. She must be bashful; she must be coy. That is what they always were in the novels.

"You must be more explicit," she said, with a faint, sweetly wistful smile. The boy drew a deep breath. He came a little closer to her side.

"It—it begins with a 'P,'" he said, in an awestruck whisper, as if mentioning something sacred, something to be spoken of with abated breath, "a 'P.'"

A 'P! Miss Priscilla's cheeks were burning with such a vivid crimson now that they harmonized but sadly with the pale blue chiffon round her neck. But, good gracious! what a long time the boy was in coming to the point! "Dear me, then it is sure to be something nice. Lots of pretty names begin with a 'P,' you know."

He looked delighted. "I'm glad to hear you say that. I think it's a pretty name myself, the prettiest in the world, though some people are stupid enough to think it is old-fashioned."

Yes, Priscilla was rather old-fashioned, now she came to think of it; but, oh, dear! what did that matter as long as he liked it, and he thought it was the prettiest name in the world.

"Where did you meet her first?" she ventured again, shyly, knowing perfectly well, little hypocrite, and yet longing for him to say the words.

"At the Rectory garden-party two months ago. I—I loved her the first moment I saw her. There is such a thing as love at first sight, although I know I used to laugh at it."

Yes, there was such a thing; she knew it herself, for had she not fallen a willing victim to Lieutenant Cayley-Clavering's charms the very first time that she had seen him? And to think that he had loved her at first sight, too!

But what a long time the dear fellow was in still coming to the point! It was absurd—to shilly-shally like this any longer; the moment had come for her to help him out with his confession at last.

"I was at the Rectory garden-party," she said, bravely. It was a bold stroke, and she was ready to sink into the ground with maidenly modesty and confusion the moment she had made it. But the bait had been taken; he drew nearer to her on the sofa—he spoke.

"Ah, yes, I remember now, of course you were there, too. Then you saw my Phyllis—"

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