

AN ARTIST ...AND... HER AUNTY

BY HOWARD FIELDING.

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"Marion," gasped Miss Adams, leaning against the balusters at the head of the third flight, "do you mean to tell me that you came here alone at night? Why, I'd be scared out of my wits!"

"I don't come very often, aunty," replied the girl, "but tonight I had to finish some drawings, as I told you. There's nothing to be afraid of. The building seems quiet, but there are people in many of the studios. If anything should happen and you should scream—"

"I'm likely to do it any minute," interrupted Miss Adams.

"—You'd have assistance in no time," Marion continued. "There! Do you hear those voices?"

A door was opened in the far end of the hall above them, and a burst of uproarious song rang out:

"Jeffson Brown tried to steal her away. Coffin sent to his house yesterday. Now he's in it!"

The door closed again, and the details of Mr. Brown's obsequies were lost to the two ladies.

"Well, I suppose even such people as those are better than nobody," said Miss Adams, "but not much."

The gas flickered and strange, alarming shadows ran along the dingy walls of the old studio building, but Sarah Adams marched with head erect and face to the front. Marion unlocked a door near the end of the hall and entered her workroom. The gas flamed up as the elder lady crossed the threshold, revealing a small apartment full of artistic odds and ends, furniture of weird designs, tapstries aesthetically ugly, and in the midst of all a dummy model with draperies that were still fluttering in the draft from the door.

Marion had found a letter on the floor and was holding the envelope under the gaslight. It was decorated with a pen and ink sketch of a table bearing a punch bowl and numerous bottles, and Miss Adams viewed it with the strongest disapproval.

"An invitation to the ladies' night at the Paint Pot," said Marion. "It's a very swell artists' club."

"These artists are a disreputable lot," rejoined Miss Adams, "and the more I think of you in such surroundings the uneasier my conscience gets. I wish you'd come right back with me to Hatfield. Of course you're not going to that orgy."

"No," said Marion. "I haven't any thing to wear. And now, aunty, I want you to stay here and make your self comfortable for a few minutes while I hunt up the janitor. I must find out whether Phil Hobart has sent those things around."

"Who's Phil Hobart and what is he going to send?"

"He's an artist," replied Marion, "the most eccentric and at the same time the finest fellow in the world. He is going away for two or three months, and he has asked me to take care of a few little things for him. He has given up his studio and has no place for them."

"Doesn't he live anywhere?" inquired Miss Adams. "I suppose not, since he's an artist."

"He lives in that house that I pointed out to you on Eighteenth street—the one with the vines on the front—but it's a boarding house, and of course he will give up his room when he goes away. Now I'm going to find the janitor. If you get lonesome, ring for a messenger boy. There's the call box."

Marion hurried away, and Aunt Sarah hastily closed the door, supplementing the spring lock by pushing a bolt. No sooner had she done this than she became aware of a big bundle that had been concealed by the door when it was open. The bundle was done up in what seemed to be a sheet, the four corners being tied together.

As Aunt Sarah stooped to examine it she saw a card lying on the floor. She picked up the card and read the name, Philip Hobart.

"So these are Mr. Hobart's things," said Aunt Sarah, "and a nice way he has of sending them around. Tied up in a sheet! Well, for goodness' sake, what kind of society has poor Marion

got into, I should like to know? Let's see what Mr. Hobart has sent."

Aunt Sarah lifted the bundle up onto a table and untied the knots in the sheet. The contents then revealed themselves to be a considerable portion of a gentleman's wardrobe.

There were half a dozen shirts, a dress suit, two pairs of trousers, an overcoat and some shoes.

Aunt Sarah contemplated this assortment, and a red spot appeared in each of her cheeks. Any one who knew Aunt Sarah might have seen that she was angry. Presently she strode across the room and gave the messenger call a twitch that nearly dislocated its machinery.

"The idea of asking Marion to take care of this man's old clothes!" she exclaimed. "I never heard of anything so monstrous. It's time some of these crazy artists had a lesson in manners."

A boy appeared promptly in answer to the call. Aunt Sarah let him in after making him give his word of honor three times through the door that he was neither a burglar nor an artist.

"You take this bundle to Mr. Philip Hobart," said Aunt Sarah. "He lives—"

"I know where he lives," said the boy. "I've taken messages over there before."

"From here?"

"Sure!"

"Oh, you nave!" said Aunt Sarah.

"Well, I guess this will be the last one. You tell Mr. Hobart that Miss Marion Adams declines to be responsible for his old clothes and that her

him and say it was all my doing. Thank heaven, my shoulders are broad enough! Let him come and see me. I'll give him a piece of my mind."

Marion sat down by the table and began to struggle with a note to Mr. Hobart. She tore up half a dozen sheets of paper, but finally folded one and put it in an envelope.

"I've merely begged him to come and see me tomorrow," said she. "It was all I could do."

She rang the messenger call and then sank into a chair. Aunt and niece surveyed each other in silence. Neither could find words to express her feelings.

A loud knock startled them. Marion opened the door, and in strode a tall and dark young man whose appearance suggested slightly the handsome villain of society drama. His manner was appropriate to the scene where the villain begins to be foiled, but does not yet despair. He was pulling and biting his mustache in quite the conventional manner. Behind him came a messenger boy carrying a big white bundle.

"Mr. Hobart!" cried Marion, amazed, and Aunt Sarah sat up very straight in her chair and looked severe.

"Miss Adams," said the young man, "I have entirely failed to understand your message, and as for that of your aunt—"

He finished with a gesture of despair as he glanced at Aunt Sarah.

"Do you think it was quite proper, sir," said the maiden lady from Hatfield, "that you should consign your superfluous wardrobe to the care of a young lady?"



"Mr. Hobart," cried Marion.

aunt, Sarah Adams, from Hatfield, Vt., says he ought to have known better. The boy rubbed the side of his head thoughtfully.

"Let's see if I've got it straight," he said and repeated the message with great care.

"You're a bright boy," said Aunt Sarah, and she gave him half a dollar.

He had no sooner gone than Marion appeared. With the rapidity and directness of speech characteristic of the New Englander in earnest Aunt Sarah related what she had done. Marion was aghast.

"Oh, aunty," she cried, "how could you? He'll never forgive me. There must be some explanation. I told you he was eccentric, but—"

"Eccentric! I call it downright insulting. Where are you going?"

"To catch that boy and bring him back," answered Marion as she ran out of the room.

Aunt Sarah followed her down the three flights of stairs to the street, but the boy was beyond recall.

So they climbed the stairs again, Marion in tearful wrath, Aunt Sarah suffering in sympathy, but sustained by conscious rectitude.

"You shouldn't have done it without consulting me," sobbed Marion as she re-entered the studio. "He may be offended and go away without giving me a chance to explain. I may never see him again."

"Small loss, I should say," rejoined Aunt Sarah. "Still, if you feel so badly about it you can write a note to

"And may I ask, madam," said Hobart, "what led you to believe that it was mine?"

Then Aunt Sarah was what she would have called "flustered." The suspicion of an awful mistake began to dawn upon her.

I left my card for Miss Adams late this afternoon," said Mr. Hobart, with dignity, "but as for these garments I know nothing about them. They are not mine, and I shall ask Miss Marion Adams to explain how they came to be here. I should tell you, madam"—and he turned to Aunt Sarah—"that there is an engagement of marriage between your niece and myself, or at least there was."

At this last clause Marion burst into tears.

"I—I really beg your pardon," stammered a voice from a corner of the room.

Every one started, and the two ladies screamed. A bearded face appeared above a screen. Evidently its owner was standing on a chair in order to make himself visible.

"Why, it's Mr. Walling!" exclaimed Marion. "Well, I should like to know what he's doing there?"

"So should I!" cried Aunt Sarah and Mr. Hobart in one voice.

"I can explain in one moment," said Walling. "You will pardon my remaining here. I am somewhat imperfectly attired."

Aunt Sarah threw up both hands with the gesture of one who abandons a wicked world to its fate, and Hobart

looked like the villain just before he commits the murder in the last part of the first act.

"You see," said Walling, "my studio is next door. I live there. This evening after dinner I came home to dress and was astonished to find my dress suit and many other articles missing. The studio was upside down. In the middle of the floor was a sheetful of my bric-a-brac and other small belongings."

"Of course I saw at once that I had been visited by burglars and that they had been frightened away by some sudden alarm. How they had got in or out I could not understand, and I spent some time in wrestling with that problem and in discovering the extent of my loss."

"At last, in knocking about the studio I became aware that the door between it and this one was not fastened as usual."

"I nailed it up myself!" cried Marion.

"Evidently the burglars drew the nails and picked the lock," said Walling. "They doubtless knew the habits of the tenants and counted upon your being out, while I was a doubtful problem. So they planned to get my things together and carry them into this room, from which they would have more leisure to escape in case I interrupted them. But the interruption came unexpectedly from you, and they had no time even to collect their booty. They probably got away by means of the fire escape at your window."

"When I found that the door between the rooms was open, I came in here, because I saw through the thieves' game and supposed, from the fact of the light being here, that they had fled hastily. I hoped to find some of my property."

"While I was looking about you two ladies came in like a whirlwind. I had not time to reach the door, so I dodged in here, where I have been trying to concoct an apology that should fit the crime."

"Your apology is accepted, Mr. Walling," said Marion. "It comes in good time. Phil, will you accept mine and Aunt Sarah's?"

Then handsome Phil Hobart ceased to look like the villain at all. Instead he resembled the hero when he says in the last act that to, ether they will face the world. It was a pretty scene, and Aunt Sarah, in memory of her absurd mistake, could do no less than give her blessing.

"And now, good people," said Mr. Walling, "if you will be kind enough to step out into the hall I will go to my own place. You see, I discovered the loss of my dress suit last of all, and I had got ready to put it on when the discovery of the open door tempted me here."

When this maneuver had been successfully executed, Mr. Hobart sent over to his house for the few little things that he had wished Marion to keep for him, and they proved to be a half dozen small landscapes very nicely done in water colors.

SHE MEANT WELL,

But Put a Damper on the Young Man's Enthusiasm.

The young man who aspires to the intense was walking with the young woman who doesn't quite understand all he says, but nevertheless thinks it is simply grand.

"Look on the glories of the western sky!" he exclaimed.

She seemed puzzled for a minute and said: "Let me see, you face the north—that's the way our house fronts—and then on your right hand is east and on your left is west. Why, it's the direction we're walking in, isn't it?"

He looked a trifle gloomy, but resumed:

"How the great masses of color are piled one upon another in nature's lavish and transcendent art!"

"Yes," she sighed. "It makes me think of Neapolitan ice cream."

"And there, close and closer to the horizon, sinks a great crimson ball, the setting sun."

"Right over there?"

"Yes."

"Straight ahead of us?"

"To be sure."

"Well, I've been wondering about that for the last five minutes. You know, my little brother is so mischievous. He broke my glasses this afternoon, and I am so near sighted that I couldn't be sure whether that was the crimson setting sun or somebody playing golf."

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