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## LILACS AND A LADY.

By CRAWFORD LUTTRELL.

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She had loved Gordon Wilson ever since she could remember, but his attitude toward her was the same big brother interest that he showed his own sister, Anne. He tweaked her ear and made fun of the little line of freckles that dusted her aristocratic-looking nose. He told her about his intermittent spasms of love for various girls, most of whom were visiting favorites. In other words, Gordon loved so many that Peggy felt there was some balm for her own heartache in that very symptom. No affair had ever lasted long enough to cause her any real anxiety.

She was having a cup of tea with Anne late one spring afternoon, both of them seated on a big tufted day-enport that was drawn up hospitably before a cheery little blaze that seemed to take the chill out of the wide living room, when Gordon came in.

"Hello, girls! I'm just in time for some jam cake, huh? Say, Peg, I sure did like that new hat I saw you wearing on F street today. Sorry I couldn't stop and take you for a spin, but I had a rich old prospect from Podunk or some other equally famous place, and I knew if he got out of the car without buying it some other enterprising automobile salesman might beat me to it. I put the deal over and sold a roadster besides. Hence my ability to leave the shop early and play the role of gentleman of leisure."

He sat down between the two girls and helped himself generously to cake that was piled in thick, luscious slices on the tea cart. He pushed the cart

toward Peggy. "Pour me some tea, child! I need refreshment. How did you like that girl I had at the dance last night? She's a regular girl, believe me! She's as bright as a dollar and she has good looks, too. Did you ever see such eyes and such wonderful hair?"

"Pshaw, Gordon, you've heard that she is worth a cool million," said Anne laughingly. "That accounts for your ideas of the golden tint in her hair and the sparkle in her eyes. You're thinking what that cash will do to help out in these days of the H. C. L."

The young fellow set down his empty cup and looked around quizzically at his sister. "Well, being rich won't keep me from loving her, of course, Miss Romantic. I am going to take her to the theater tonight and then supper at the club. What are you folks doing?"

"Peg's going to the Winters' big dance with Jim Winter himself. Do you know, Peg, Jim's quite mad about you? I'll bet he proposes tonight!"

Gordon turned suddenly. "Jim Winter! Gosh, he's got all the money there is, girls. And that home! It's a palace!"

"Peg has a wonderful frock to wear, orchid with touches of turquoise about it and a huge ostrich fan, turquoise, too," Anne told him. "You know Jim confided to me last night, Peg, that he thought you were the prettiest girl in this town. I'd like to hear what he will have to say about you tonight in that creation."

Gordon cupped the girl's chin in his hand and turned her face to the light. "I'll swear, Peg, you are pretty, freckles and all! Look at me! Let's see your eyes!" he demanded.

Peggy felt the red creeping up from her beating throat. She put her little teeth together in an effort to keep her chin from quivering. He was so casual about it; she must never by any chance let him know that those level gray eyes of his shook her heart as the wild March wind outside tossed the burgeoning boughs of trees.

Suddenly there was a strange, dawning light in those same gray eyes that were so close to her own.

"Well, they are pretty, aren't they?" asked Anne, watching the two with a little knowing smile on her lips.

Almost instantly, before he could frame a reply, Peggy stood up. "I'll have to run along now," she said breathlessly. She reached down for her big silver gray fox scarf that she had tossed on a chair nearby.

All at once, courage born of that strange look that had lighted Gordon's eyes for one brief second, possessed her. "If I decide to be Mrs. Winter, Anne, shall I call you, tonight, even if it is late?"

"I want to be the very first to know, you dear," Anne acknowledged. "You're silly if you don't marry Jim, with his good looks and all that money. You'll be a real princess out of a fairy tale!"

"I'll take you home," said Gordon. "My car is on the drive."

"Won't it make you late for your engagement?" suggested Peggy. "It's nearly seven now," glancing at her wrist watch.

"That won't matter," exclaimed Gordon mechanically.

"I'll run her home in your car, bud," offered Anne maliciously. "You can be dressing while I am gone. You'll have to have dinner, too, you know."

Gordon was struggling into a light topcoat. "Ready, Peg?" he questioned eagerly.

They breathed the heavy fragrance of purple lilacs as they rode slowly down the long driveway before the house. Stars glimmered brightly overhead. A little silver sickle of a moon quivered in the west. All the faint, sweet music of springtime saturated the soft night air.

"Lilacs make me think of you," said Gordon quietly in a voice that not even Peggy could mistake for a brotherly tone.

She clasped her gloved hands tightly in her lap and looked away where swiftly moving clouds seemed to be rocking the little silver cradle of a moon in the sky.

"We've known each other ever since we could walk, haven't we, Peg?" asked Gordon in a voice that was still subdued.

She answered in a monosyllable, not daring to trust her own voice.

"We've been great old pals, haven't we?" he continued.

Peggy did not answer, and presently the machine slid noiselessly to a stop before the shabby old brick that had always been home to her. Boxwood shielded the driveway from the street. Gordon groped for and found one of her cold little hands. It trembled in his as he lifted it gently and held it above his heart.

"Feel anything wrong there?" and then, at her eloquent silence, he pressed her hand still closer. "The darned thing is nearly beating out of me," he laughed shakily.

Still Peggy could not find her voice. There seemed to be something thick, binding, in her throat. It contracted painfully when she tried to swallow.

"If you can't feel it, perhaps you can hear it," he argued, and gently, ever so

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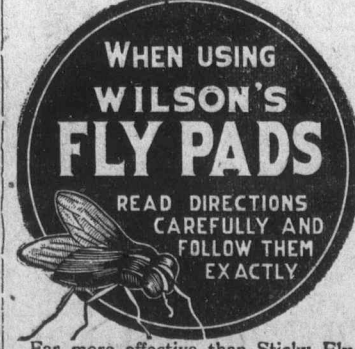
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