

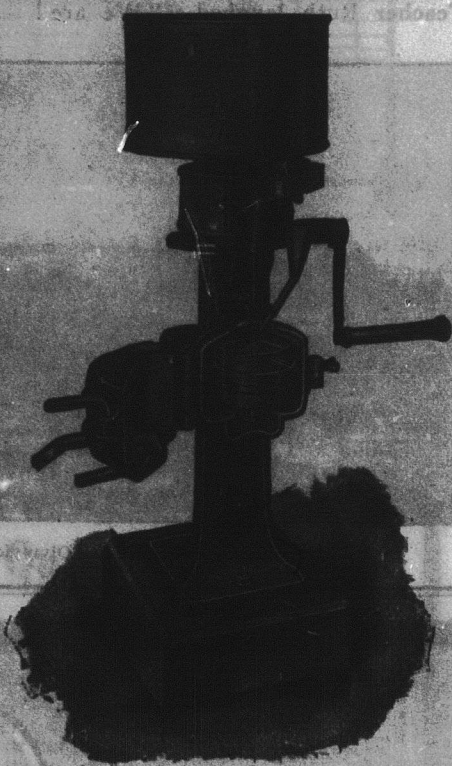
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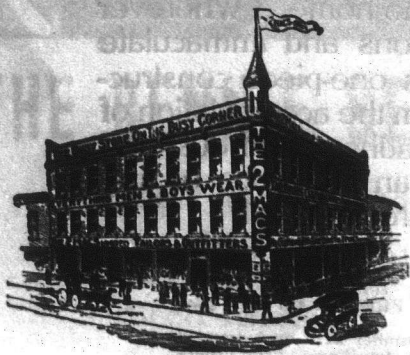
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lips in response to all this earnestness.

"Of course I have had a thrill, as thee calls it. Does thee think me a stone, dear friend?"

Mrs. Marston gave a sigh of relief as she sank back in her chair. "Tell me about it," she demanded.

"Well," said Teacher Ruth, "I remember being thrilled once when I was among the mountains. We had climbed to the summit of a great hill near our hotel, and it was toward sunset. A wide circle of purple giants stretched about us, and the quiet valley lay at our feet. Suddenly I felt the sublimity of it all as I had never felt it before. I seemed fairly lifted out of myself, I—"

"But the man," interrupted Mrs. Marston, impatiently.

Teacher Ruth turned a pair of puzzled eyes toward her. "The man? There was no man. I was with Mary Hapgood and—"

Mrs. Marston burst out laughing. "Oh, Ruth, Ruth, you unsophisticated little girl! Do you suppose I was talking about such 'thrills' as that? We all know what it is to fall down and adore Nature. I was merely talking about men."

A soft blush crept into Teacher Ruth's cheeks. "I know very little about men," she said.

"And yet you have been to college?"

"A girl's college," and the young woman smiled.

"That is so," sighed Mrs. Marston, "and a girl's college in a country town is not a promising field. I suppose you saw a specimen now and then?"

"Occasionally," replied the teacher, dryly.

"And you never have known what it was to feel a flutter, even as some interesting lord of creation gazed into your eyes, or handed you a flower, or came across the hall to dance with you just as you thought he had forgotten, or—held your hand a wee minute longer than need be in saying good-bye?"

The girl shook her head with another smile of amusement. "I'm afraid I don't know what thee means," she said frankly.

Mrs. Marston laughed. "I've been talking a shocking lot of nonsense to you," she declared, "but I'm sure it can never injure such a staid young person as yourself. To think of living to the venerable age of twenty-three and never knowing a thrill!"

Mrs. Marston inwardly vowed then and there that this lack in Teacher Ruth's girlhood experiences should be made up to her. Accordingly she began to open her house again in a quiet way to the young people of the town, who were, however, neither numerous nor especially attractive. Teacher Ruth evidently enjoyed the festivities in her accustomed quiet way, but her watchful elder friend could detect no unwonted enthusiasm in the soft, gray eyes.

"Such beautiful eyes!" ejaculated Mrs. Marston. "They were made for something better than forever bending over school books. I believe—yes, I will!"

Having decided to play her leading card, the good lady hurried to her writing desk, and Harold was speedily dispatched to the post-office.

The following Saturday morning Mrs. Marston looked solemnly at Teacher Ruth as she sipped her chocolate.

"Ruth," she said gravely, "prepare yourself for a new experience. You are going to meet a man!"

Teacher Ruth looked up with an amused smile in her eyes. "Indeed!" she observed. "And what may the creature be like?"

"He is all that a man should be," replied Mrs. Marston, proudly. "Tall, strong, handsome and good; a Princeton senior and the apple of my eye. In short, he is my youngest brother—Ned Gordon—and he is coming up to spend Sunday with us."

At this piece of information a war-whoop of joy arose from the young man of the family, and Mary clapped her hands with delight. "Is Uncle Ned really coming?" she cried, while

Harold and Jack immediately fell to planning the best methods of employing their jolly young uncle's vacation hours.

"Now look here, you madcaps," their mother remonstrated, "I may as well tell you that you are not going to monopolize your Uncle Ned every minute. I have other uses for his time. He is going to sing to Teacher Ruth and me; and he is going to climb Fort Hill with us, and—lots of things!"

"We won't monopolize him," Harold replied cheerfully, "we just want him to tell us stories and show us all his tricks, and it'll be great larks to climb Fort Hill, won't it, Jack? We can take him. You and Teacher Ruth needn't bother to go if you don't want to."

"How very kind of you," laughed his mother, "but I think we can dispense with your services. Besides, it will give Teacher Ruth a good opportunity to study 'the creature'—I think that is what she calls a Princeton senior."

"I knew a Harvard senior once," remarked Teacher Ruth, dryly.

"Did you?" and Mrs. Marston looked up suspiciously.

"Yes, he taught me the words of 'Fair Harvard' and invited me to his Class Day—spread, I think he called it. He was my cousin, Reuben Matthews," she added after a pause.

"Oh," murmured Mrs. Marston.

"And I saw a Yale man once," went on Teacher Ruth, gazing demurely at the muffin she was buttering. "He was the brother of a college friend. I remember now that he sent me a bunch of violets by her."

"When he had seen you once? How very romantic! Who was he, Ruth?"

The little teacher ruffled her brow in anxious thought for a moment.

"Really, I cannot remember his name," she said at last.

Mrs. Marston sighed. She had hoped great things from brother Ned; he was really a "thrilling" young man; but what was to be done with a girl of twenty-three who could entirely forget the name of a man who had sent her violets!

Teacher Ruth had just started down the broad stairway in response to the dinner gong when the front door banged vigorously and a shout from the boys announced "Uncle Ned's" arrival. She paused on the landing, not knowing whether to retreat to her own room again or to boldly face the lion; and as she debated her eyes took in the scene below with amused interest. A tall, broad-shouldered young man in irreproachable attire was embracing his sister with one arm and vainly struggling to keep off the onslaught of devoted nephews with the other. Mary was clinging to his knees while Jack's terrier jumped in an excited circle about the group.

"Down, you rascals! Jack, make that puppy shut up. Look out Harold, I'd just as soon you didn't step through my guitar. Yes, Mary, it's in my coat pocket. Well, Nan, where is your—"

Ned Gordon looked up and saw the slender gray figure on the landing. It was too late to retreat, and being a girl after all, as well as a demure little Quaker school-ma'am, Teacher Ruth gave one hurried glance in the oval mirror that hung on the landing before she descended to meet "the creature."

With a gigantic effort Uncle Ned extricated himself from his too demonstrative relatives and was ready with his most engaging obeisance to meet this "new girl."

Mrs. Marston felt a tremor of anxiety as she led the way to the dining-room, but her fears were groundless.

Teacher Ruth did not stand in awe of the gallant senior as a more self-conscious damsel might have done, and very soon they were discussing books and college life and the hundred and one serious subjects that young people alone can touch upon in the enthusiasm of an hour's conversation.