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PURE GOLD

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PURE GOLD
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Tales and Sketches.
HOME.
More than building showy mansions,
More than dress or fine array,
More than domes and lofty steeples,
More than station, power, and sway;
Make our home both neat and tasteful,
Bright and pleasant, always fair,
Where each heart shall rest contented,
Grateful for each beauty there.
Seek to make your home most lovely,
Let it be a smiling spot,
Where, in sweet contentment resting,
Care and sorrow are forgot.
Where the flowers and trees are waving,
Birds will sing their sweetest songs;
Where the purest thoughts will linger,
Confidence and love belong.
There each heart will rest contented,
Seldom wishing for to roam;
Or, if roaming, still will ever
Cherish happy thoughts of home.
Such a home makes man the better,
Sure and lasting the control;
Home with pure and bright surroundings
Leaves its impress on the soul.

JOE AND I.
IN the first place, the biscuits were spoiling, and Joe knew I was making biscuit, too, for he saw me moulding them when the train went by, and I looked up to catch the familiar salute from the engine. You see I used to time my work more by the trains than by the clock, for five o'clock was our tea hour, there was not much use in getting it ready, when Joe might be fifty miles up the road "in the ditch," as he used to say when he went off the track.
So I used to put on the tea kettle when the up train went past at four o'clock, and then when Joe began to ring, coming into the yard, I knew it was time to set the table. As I said, tea was ready, and the biscuits were spoiling; so I vibrated between the oven and the window which looked toward the engine house, to catch the first glimpse of Joe's blue overalls and glazed cap.
I knew as well as I wanted to know that he was chatting comfortably away with Tom or Dick, about the new style of smoke stacks, or the merits of pump inspectors. That was always his way; once get him started on the subject of steam, and he never knew when to come home. But at last he came swinging up the track, stepping from tie to tie with the long stride and slight stoop usually characteristic of a railroad man as dinner pail and lantern.
He came in, set down his pail, and when Eddie ran to be taken up, displayed a pair of hands which would have done honor to coal heaver, and which effectually frightened the child away.
"What in the world made you so late, Joe?" said I, transferring the biscuit to the table, and pouring the boiling water upon the tea in the tin teapot.
"A hot journal," said Joe, laconically turning to the sink.
I was about as wise as before, but I was used to hearing about broken rocker arms and crank-pins, slipped eccentrics, or valve stems and throttles that needed packing, but I could not have told one from the other if I had seen them.

"Well, hurry up. Your supper is spoiling now from waiting, and if we are going to mother's to-night we must make haste," and I bustled about, putting Eddie up in his high chair, and pouring out the tea.
"I'll risk the supper," said Joe, turning around from the sink, and holding out his arm that I might unbutton his wristband, a thing he always forgot to do. "We can't go to-night, as I see," he went on in his moderate way, holding up the other wrist.
That was the climax. I sat down in a chair and stared at him, while he went on wiping his hands and brushing his hair, and I never said a word when he gave the towel a toss on the nail, instead of hanging it up properly by the loop.
Not to go to mother's when I had been waiting until to-night to install Eddie in his first knickerbocker and belted blouse and had gored my black alpaca dress, trimming the remnants into ruffles to trim the skirt, and converted my old plaid bonnet strings into a stylish bow to wear with it. Joe drew up a chair to the table, buttered a biscuit, stirred his tea, and proceeded to explain.
"You see, Mattie, Henderson's wife is sick, and I promised I would go up for him to-night. We are rather short of spare engineers since Elliot got hurt, and Marshall went on the branch. He got leave to stay down if any one would go up for him, so I said I would go just for accommodation's sake," and Joe passed his cup to be replenished.
That was a little too much to be borne patiently. If it had been an extra I should have resigned myself to the inevitable, and wasted few regrets upon it. But to think he could disappoint me to accommodate Jack Henderson, who laid off oftener than any other man on the line, and whose wife for every little ailment, real or fancied, must needs keep him at home to pet and coddle her. And going up for Henderson involved leaving me alone all night, and "doubling the road."
I settled back in my chair, disappointed and provoked. Little Eddie began to perceive that we were not going to Grandma's, and set up a childish wail which I silenced with sharp, stern words, causing Joe to look up with astonishment.
I replied to his unspoken accusation by saying the child was quite old enough to learn he could not have everything he wanted. Joe did not answer, but finished his supper in silence, pushed back his chair, and began to make ready for his trip.
I did not offer as usual to help him, but he did not appear to mind. He whispered softly to himself while he changed the boots he had worn all day for an easier pair, hunted up a coat from the depths of a closet, found a clean collar and handkerchief, and supplied his vest pocket with matches enough to start a respectable conflagration.
Then he came and stood by the stove while he filled his pipe (how I do wish he would leave off smoking) and I verily believe it just dawned upon the man, as his new position gave him a view of my face, that I was taking my disappointment to heart, and indulging in a fit of the sulks.
"Don't look so blue, Mattie," said he. "We can go to mother's to-morrow night, perhaps; there is time enough. She will stay several weeks, I presume, and you will see enough of her before she goes away."
By this time he had succeeded in making his pipe draw to his satisfaction, and, shouldering his coat, was ready for a start. He kissed Eddie and bent his lips to my face as usual. I began to clear up the table in a very dignified fashion.
Joe did not appear to notice, and I let him depart, hardly vouchsafing a reply to the good-bye without which he never left the house. I did not run out to the gate as I did sometimes, to see what weather he was going to have for his trip, or to watch him by the moonlight on his way to the engine house.
But I rattled the dishes and shook out the table cloth in angry mood, that did not soften as I proceeded to undress Eddie and put him to bed. I did not linger as usual over the task, nor yield to his en-

treates to be cuddled for a few moments in my arms before I laid him down, but hurried him into his crib, with no fond words to send him happy to his childish slumbers.
Joe's train went whizzing by just then. The sound of the wheels, and the knowledge that he was really gone, increased my bitter mood, and I sat down to my sewing—that never ending patching that wives of mechanics and mothers of small children know all about, feeling as if about the most ill-used woman in the whole world. As I darned Joe's stockings, and patched the elbow of Eddie's apron, my thoughts went back over the whole five years I had been Joe's wife.
You see I might have done better, as far as money was concerned, than to marry Joe. We were not rich at home, but we managed to live comfortably, and Sue and I contrived to get a pretty, new suit in the prevailing new style, often enough to keep up appearances. I earned mine by teaching in one of the public schools, for I had a fair education, and was fond of children; while Sue got hers, well, I hardly know how.
Sue staid at home to help mother about the house—fancy Sue keeping school! But she always got what she wanted, by hook or by crook; coaxed it out of the boys, generally. For we had a couple of older brothers, and when Sue declared she would have a thing they used to laugh deftly her to get it, but she always did. She was a little younger than I, but considerably taller—for I was a little thing, and she used to take the lead in everything at home. If only one could have a new dress, Sue had it; if the two new dresses differed at all, she took the one she liked best; and if they were alike, hers was always made first. If only one could go, Sue always went—helping herself to what she wanted from my small stock of finery, unless she took a fancy to drag me after her.
She was married more than two years before I was. Her pretty face, with its brown eyes and braids, pink cheeks and dimples, brought her a lover soon enough, and she was married at eighteen.
I never could see what Sue fancied in Will Lindley. In the first place, he was so short—hardly as tall as Sue herself—and I always did despise short men. Then he was not very intellectual. She did not mind that, but I used to fancy that if I ever had a lover, I should want him to be wise and learned—a maker of books or a professor in a college.
There was not much danger that a lover would ever come to such a plain little body as I was. Sue told me a dozen times a day that I was predestined for an old maid; with my dumpy stature, gray eyes, and freckles. But even Sue herself could say nothing against my hair—it reached to my knees, was straight and fine and stayed where I placed it. Sue's own brown braids could not surpass that; it was my one glory.
She married Will Lindley at last. I will give the man credit for one thing; he loved her honestly and fairly, and her whims and caprices made no difference with his devotion.
How hard we worked to get her a suitable outfit—or one that she considered suitable. Will made her beautiful presents, and would have bought her everything she needed, if mother would have allowed him. The boys—who were married and prospering now, gave her some things; but the brunt of the expense, and all the labor, fell on mother and I.
Sue would have everything of the daintiest and nicest; so, out of the school hours, I stitched and embroidered, ruffled and tucked for her, as I would never have done for myself, while she walked, rode, or sang with Will. But she was so pretty and radiant when she stood up to be married, that I forgave and forgot it all; and mother declared to Will, between her sobs, that he had taken the flower of the family.
After a while, Will moved away to one of those little towns, depending upon its water privileges, where they make chairs, and pails, and baskets, and all of those things. Sue cried and stormed, and declared she would never go—but she did. Will brought her to his way of thinking

somehow; we always wondered how, for we really thought at first that she would make him give up his plans.
But he was well established in business now, and Sue queened it royally in the country village. She was secretary of the sewing circle, and chief orator of the levees and fairs rife in such places. They had no children. Will was indulgent; kept her beautifully dressed, and so Sue was happy in her way.
Then Joe came. He was not at all my idea of a lover. He was neither learned nor handsome; he was only Joe. I think I liked him first because they all laughed at me about my bashful lover. Bashful he was to be sure, and rather disposed to be awkward—especially if he chanced to call when my brothers were there; I believe he felt they were inclined to laugh at him.
They were rather displeased at me, just then, because I had rejected a very good offer—that is, the man had money enough, and it would have taken me out of the school room, where I was just losing the small modicum of decent looks I had ever possessed. But I thought I would rather teach Teddy Flynn and Bobby Jones their primers all the days of my life than to marry disagreeable, stingy Ned Morrison, even if he threw a wedge of gold in my lap every day.
So I began to favor Joe, principally to show my independence; for when Sue was not by to put me down, I had a spicy little temper of my own.
We were married at home in the little parlor, and they all came to the wedding. I had none of the floating white draperies that had enveloped Sue and eclipsed Will on their bridal day; I only had a plain brown silk—the first silk dress I ever had—my own earning and making. I had a white rose off mother's bush in my hair, and as I could easily stand under Joe's outstretched arm, there was no danger that he would look dwarfed beside me.
It was not much of a place where we commenced housekeeping; the rooms were small and not a great many of them. I did all my own work, washing included, and we ate in the kitchen; so you see we were very humble folk indeed. Sue used to rather scorn my furniture and surroundings when she sailed in upon us, as she did at least once a year, for a good long visit. I always pretended I wanted nothing better, but in my heart of hearts I knew I did.
I possessed one treasure Sue did not—my fair-faced boy, whom strangers stopped to admire for his pearly skin and blue eyes—"Too lovely for a boy," as every one said. But to-night I think I was hardly glad even for Eddie; for Sue had come again for one of her lengthy visits, dashing in upon me that morning when I was in the midst of my baking.
She rehearsed all the new things Will had bought her lately, ending with his promise, if his venture proved successful, to buy her a diamond ring, and bring it when he came to-morrow night.
I owned just one ring that Joe had given me; but it was only an onyx with a dark background, the white upper layer being cut into a forget-me-not. Sue always called it contemptuously an "old maid's pink." Then she gave Eddie a handful of candy and a new picture book; informed me that my eyes were as red as a ferret's with stooping over the oven; asked me why in the world I didn't buy a sitting-room carpet, and then departed.
I had known she was coming to be sure, and it had been settled long before, that we were to spend that evening at mother's, but nevertheless her visit had somewhat disturbed me, and I had felt vexed and worried all day over it. I suppose that was one reason I had broken down so easily to-night.
The carpet was certainly old and faded; for we had lived on it ever since we were married, and it had not been anything to boast of in the first place. The alpaca I had worked over so long would cut a sorry figure by the side of Sue's brown poplin walking suit and velvet paletot of the same color, surmounted by a pretty turban with a pheasant's wing. My solitary wrap was a plaid shawl, decidedly more useful

than ornamental, and my hat was a fabrication of my own. Anybody must have guessed that by looking at it; and the leather was so small and "scrimpy," that I could not give it a stylish twist, turn it as I might. I had liked it well enough at first, and Joe thought it a marvel, but I hated it now.
I had finished my mending, and as I laid Eddie's striped stockings on top of the pile, I thought now Susie could come and go as she liked, with no little toddler to hinder her footsteps. I had nothing to sit up for, after my mending was done, so I went to bed and fell in an easy slumber.
Some time in the night I was awakened by hoarse shouting, mingled with the sound of running to and fro. I listened a moment and knew what it was—something had happened up the road, and, of course, to Joe's train.
I sprang out of bed, into slippers and wrapper, and ran to the back door. I threw it wide open, ran down the walk a little way, and listened. I could hear the rumble of the derrick car, the setting of switches and catch an occasional word, but no connected sentence. It was "smash"—"Joe Thompson," and that was all, I knew it all, then; Joe was killed.
I went back into the house, never even closing the door. I caught Eddie out of his crib, and crouched down in a corner of the room with him in my arms, as if I was afraid some one would take him away. I wondered why they did not come to tell me—perhaps they dared not.
I had a dim vision that when they came in the morning I would be stark mad or dead. Would they ever guess how cruel I had been to Joe—kind, faithful Joe?—He had never given me a cross word in the world, but had lavished upon me all his heart. Why could I not have seen it before?
It was growing light now, and I heard a step; they were coming to tell me Joe was dead. I looked up—a tall figure with a pale face stood in the doorway; it was Joe's wraith come back to haunt me.
Dear old Joe! When I opened my eyes I was lying on a lounge dripping with water, and Eddie was screaming at the top of his voice.
I never understood it very well, but there had been an obstruction on the track, which Joe had seen in time to apply some kind of patent contrivance for stopping the cars, which had lately been put upon the engine.
Jack Henderson, the regular engineer, understood its working, and he explained the principles to Joe, who was greatly interested in such things—and he had run the risk of his life by stopping to work this when he might have leaped off safely. The engine was nearly a wreck, but the cars stopped all right, and Joe's courage and presence of mind had saved a fearful loss of life. What had I done to deserve such a husband.
He had some cuts and bruises, but nothing serious; they did not prevent us going to mother's to meet Sue. The boys were coming also with their wives. On the way we met a stout stern looking old man, stumping along with a gold headed cane, who stopped in front of Joe and ejaculated:
'Well done, young man, I shall keep an eye on you.'
He vouchsafed me a keen look from his bushy eye brows, and passed along. It was the President of the road. I walked on air the rest of the way, even although I wore the old alpaca and plaid shawl. Only mother need not have peered at me through her spectacles and said:
'How nicely you have altered your dress, Mattie; one can hardly see the piecings.'
And Edward's stately wife added in a way she meant to be kind—
'You have quite a genius for that sort of thing child.'
'A poor man's wife needs to have,' I said a little hotly.
I suppose they saw I did not like it. For they changed the conversation, and began to talk about Eddie. Mrs. Edward, whose four perfectly trained children were the wonder of all beholders, was pleased to admire his pretty ways; and when Christie's