

Dr. Maria Montessori

know that I won't ask your cousin Minnie if you don't want her, but—" Mrs. Fairlie's eyes moistened; they were very young eyes, for all her forty-odd years; her sensitive mouth trembled—"when I think of any one being left out and lonely at Christmas—it must be so dreadful to be without your child—and I have so many blessings—and when we really have room enough to spare—"

"But you've never even seen her; you don't know what she's like!"

"No, but I ought to have seen her, Katherine, before this. Ever since your cousin Arthur's death—the only relative your father had in the world—" Mrs. Fairlie was embarked on a favorite subject. "I'm sure I've never forgotten how lovely he was to us when we were on our wedding trip, and he was hardly more than a boy himself—hiring a carriage and taking us around Niagara Falls (and carriages were so expensive there, he must have spent a week's salary), and giving me that bouquet of pheasant-eye pinks at the train—"

"Mother always speaks of her wedding trip as if it happened yesterday," interrupted Katherine, impatiently.

"And ever since your cousin Arthur's death Minnie has taken care of herself and the boy; of course your father has sent money when he could, but she has never asked for a thing. And now, when she is living so much nearer to us, and without her child—" Mrs. Fairlie's voice broke.

"Oh, well, mother, don't feel like that about it! Have her if you want to." Katherine's voice was affectionately resigned. "Only"—how Mrs. Fairlie dreaded that "only"—"Jean and I had wanted to ask Mr. Leiter here. Mrs. Fenton said she hoped we'd be nice to him; she knew his mother; and now, of course, we can't do anything, with the house all filled up, and Jack's chum coming home with him, too! But really we don't mind—only"—another only—"you give me that check! You're not to spend it sending for Cousin Minnie's boy, if that's what you're planning to do. You are going to have that rug."

"Maybe she won't accept," suggested Jean, hopefully, to be met by Katherine's ruthless, "That kind always accepts."

Events justified her prophecy. Cousin Minnie accepted, indeed, but whether with joy or reluctance it were hard to tell.

"Your letter arrived last evening," she wrote, "and I would have answered it at once, but I was asked to watch by the bedside of a lady who is suffering with nerve trouble; I fear she will never recover from it."

"It is very kind of you to ask me to spend the holidays with you. I will leave here on the eighteenth, although I am afraid that I will be sadly out of place in your gay household; I have had no new clothes for several years. It seems impossible that I shall not see my dear Evan at Christmas; he says that he is well, but I often fear that he is keeping his real state of health from me. What a blessing it must be to have money! I hope that my presence will not be a damper on your festivities. Hoping to see you soon, I am,

Your affectionate cousin,

Minnie Fairlie."

"Well!" said Katherine, emphatically, as she threw the letter down on the table. "We're in for it! When I think of all the people we might have had, who would have liked to come—"

The mother herself began to wonder, with a sinking of the heart, whether she had been quite wise or quite fair to her own in following out her first intention so single-mindedly. Was she preferring a stranger's fancied happiness to that of her children? The home was theirs as well as hers; the season belonged peculiarly to them—it was their especial time, even if they were grown up. Even her easy-going husband had been a little doubtful when she had told him of her intention of inviting his cousin's widow to stay with them now. "Won't she be a little in the way?" he had asked.

Mrs. Fairlie had certain instincts that had impelled her, visions denied to the more practical minds of those she loved—but it was sometimes very hard to keep that vision quality luminous. With her husband's words she foresaw instead a tall, thin, depressed woman, to whom no one would wish to talk; she foresaw her own fate, tied to a stranger forlorn-

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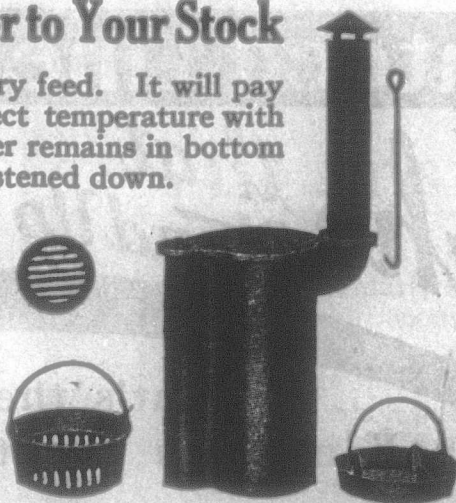
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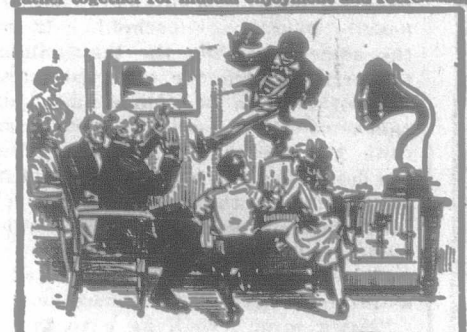
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