

LOVE IS BEST.

It was growing dusk in the drawing room but the lamps were not yet lighted, and the young women in the picturesque hats clustered around the little tea table as closely as their huge sleeves and illimitable Pekoe allowed, and sipped their Asam-

"I can't picture it," said Silly Littlejohn balancing her little gold spoon. "What will become of him? The spoiled darling. Why, he will have to go to work!"

"Work!" said Julia Montresor. "With those aristocratic hands! What sort of work?"

"Poor Jack!" said Arabella. "He wouldn't know himself out of his habits. How is he to go without his horses, his club, his opera, his London tailor?"

"I don't believe he will try to," said Felicia. "Why, what will he do?"

"Such a shame! And he has lent and given away a fortune to other people. He never seemed to care about money."

"No, indeed; I suppose he has dropped a modest fortune in cards before this."

"Why, Bab, with the poor fellow in such a strait. He only does what all other men do."

"And he does a great deal that they don't do," said Arabella. "Every one else was letting Will de Luys reap what he sowed, but Jack made good all the misappropriation—"

"Well, just one cup—lemon—yes," as Felicia's jeweled hand suspended the sugar. "What a perfectly lovely cup! Did you know that one of Dolly Van Ven's engagement cups was a tiny thing of gold, crusted with peridots?"

"No!"

"And who do you think gave it to her? Well, Jack Rodney, and she cut him dead last week."

"She ought to," said Felicia, "for doing such an utterly silly thing."

"I suppose he paid for it?" said Bab. "Well, deliver me from my friends?" said Arabella.

And that reminds me," said Silly, "I declare it does put the spirit in you," said Julia. "Well, just one cup—lemon—yes," as Felicia's jeweled hand suspended the sugar.

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And then she saw in the glass, and pressed her hand quickly over shining olive eyes that glittered there for half a moment like points of steel.

Years afterward Felicia had only to make that motion with her hand across her eyes to call up the whole scene—the lovely, lofty room, with its old Gobelins hangings, the great mirrors framed in alabaster, the moony lamps, the high vases heaped with red roses, the lounges heaped with silken cushions, Dresden and silver, the beautiful girls getting into their princely furs, talking scandal like dowagers, her sister Bab's face with the scarlet on both cheeks, and her own, white and angry, in the glass, as the marble Diana behind her.

It was while the last dinner guests that night were still saying tender nothings to Bab as she leaned against the mantel and the low freight played on the satin sheen of her white gown until she looked as if taking life from a flame-tinted jewel, that a slender shape slipped swiftly down the steps and passed along in the shadow of the houses like a shadow herself. The girl had never been in the street at night before without attendance; every sound affrighted her; she shrank even behind her veil from every passerby. As soon as she had turned the corner she brought into plainer sight the large parcel she carried, that she might pass the more readily as a maid. A half-hour's rapid walk and she ran up some steps to make sure of a number, rang the doorbell, said something explanatory to the man that answered it, passed in and followed him to the door of a room up one flight of the broad, low stairway there.

The room was in confusion. A leather box and a portmanteau lay packed and strapped by the door. There were empty and discolored spaces on the walls where pictures had hung, brackets had held their busts and great cases and cabinets had stood. It was plain to see in its dis-

ordered state that it had lately been a place of luxury. A man sat there, with his head bowed upon his arms as they lay along the table, in an attitude of utter despondence. He did not look up when the door opened and closed. But the girl crossed the room quickly and, standing behind him, stooped with her arm laid across his shoulder. He lifted his head, looking straight before him.

"I suppose it is a dream," he said half to himself. "I am not a dream, Jack," she said, bending lower, her soft, cool cheek touching his. "I am Felicia!"

There was silence in heaven for the space of half an hour. For one moment there was silence and rapture here. And then the transfer men came for the luggage.

"And this parcel, too," said Felicia. "Felicia!" he exclaimed. "You know I cannot go back after coming here. I have burned my ships behind me."

"Do you mean it?" he exclaimed, joyously. And then his tone fell. "I thought—oh, yes; certainly, I must take you home before my train leaves."

"You will take me home? My home is with you, Jack."

"You don't know what you say!" he answered her. "Oh, no; I cannot accept the sacrifice!" the eager gleam of his eyes believing his words.

"Jack," she murmured, "the sacrifice was in my coming here unasked."

"You knew I loved you, you knew I loved you! And then this crash came—and there was nothing for me to say—to you, who have lain in the lilies and fed on the roses of life. I, whose part was the husk!"

"Yes, I know it, or could not have come," he replied, and she moved away from him, going about the room, and pausing in the curtainless window place, where the moonlight lay upon her, pale and impassioned.

"Don't make it so hard for me!" he exclaimed. "An hour ago it was the blackness of despair. I was going to bury myself in that ranch with its bunch of cattle, the one thing left me, as if it were a grave. Now I shall go out into that new life radiant with this happy knowledge and my hope. And even if I should never prosper enough to come for you," he said, after a moment, taking a step toward her, "if you should weary in the long waiting and give some other fellow the love I have won—well, I could bear it, perhaps, remembering and living again in this night's joy."

"Some other man!" she exclaimed, uncapping his arms and looking for the hat and jacket that had been thrown aside. "I am going with you, Jack. If you can live summer and winter in a tent in Texas, I can, too. I have the fit clothes in that parcel. I have my jewels here. They were my mother's, and are mine, and I have the right to take them, and their price will hinder my being a burden."

"A burden! Oh, Felicia, if I might, if I dared—"

"You will have to," said Felicia, calmly. "The Church of Blessing is around the corner, and the rector is my friend. Jack, you made me propose to you. I shouldn't think you would make me ask you to marry me!"

Standing there in the moonlight, adjusting her disordered hair, she was too beautiful, too sweet and tender for mortal man to resist. "The train leaves at midnight," he said, controlling his voice as he could. "There is scant time—Oh, my darling, if you should regret—I you should regret—I!"

"Oh, you mean, you will!"

"Never!" said Felicia. And then, lip to lip, and heart to heart, they lingered one moment before they went out together.

It was a year afterward that Felicia sat on a night in the reticent moonlight of a high prairie, after a day of heat, "scattered by the great gull breeze blowing over three hundred miles of flowers."

"Are you sorry I came?" she said. "Are you?"

"Do you know, it seems to me precisely as if we were living on an outskirts of the Holy Land, and with figs and herbs, and the fig and the pomegranate and the tender grape giving a good smell!" she said.

"Precisely. And the flocks and herds are prospering so that we shall have to take counsel of the prophet. Wasn't it Isaiah that said, 'Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thy habitation; spare not, lengthen thy cords, strengthen thy stakes?'"

"Colonel Uphur lived in a tent over the range yonder for a dozen years. But we may build our house next year, I fancy."

"With roses lying on the roof and a night-blooming cerise clambering across the gallery, like some of the houses in the old Spanish town there. I don't know, but I like this better, though—the lovely freedom of it. Oh, we never lived before!"

"Are you sure you never regret?" he asked.

"Regret! Well, I confess I should like to have heard Bab read out our marriage notice at breakfast—and Bab so bitter the day before for fear of it! But regret those days of littleness and idleness and gossip, the confining clothes, the cramping life!"

And the large, white lamp-lit room, sumptuous with mirrors and marbles and carving and gilding, with brocades and paintings, with priceless rugs and lounges, with its voluptuous roses and great vases hung for a moment before her like the room you see painted through a window in the dark. She saw the young and lovely women heard the sweet high-bred voices, heard her step-mother's low laugh and Bab's shriller tone. And then she looked around her at the sky, flooded with splendor, at the vast softly dark slumbering land below, felt the perfumed wind fan her forehead, felt the preciousness of the love that was hers, and it seemed to her that a return to that other life would be like a butterfly creeping back into its chrysalis. "I—I miss my father," she said, and her lip quivered. But her husband's arms clasped her, and the pressure of his own lips quieted the sob. "But even," she said, presently, "if he never gives us, or comes to see us, and it poor Bab should never come down here and learn what it is to live, I shall be sure, I shall be sure, my dear, that love is best!" Harriet Prescott Spofford.

JUST TAKE THE CAKE

of SURPRISE SOAP and use it, or have it used on wash day without boiling or scalding the clothes. Mark how white and clean it makes them. How little hard work there is about the wash. How white and smooth it leaves the hands.

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Illustration of a man and a woman at a desk. The man is writing, and the woman is looking at a document. There are books and papers on the desk. The scene is set in a study or office.

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