

Almost a Catastrophe.

On a Sunday afternoon in late September, two people on the piazza of Mr. Reed's cottage at Atlantic City were sitting in the waning hours of the day. Mrs. Reed, lying back in her invalid's chair, looking seaward and listening to the fragments of gossip that were drifting about her, was suddenly startled by a sudden knock at the door. She started up, and looking at the clock, saw that it was half past five. She looked at the door, and saw that it was open. She looked at the clock, and saw that it was half past five. She looked at the door, and saw that it was open.

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Mr. Reed put his arm around the traveler as she paused to hear him: "Mamma thinks you lose a great deal by hurrying off to-night, Nan. Must you go? You won't get a singing lesson before ten o'clock in the morning, surely, and Peyton can get to business as early from here as he will from up-town."

"Don't mention my staying, papa, when I'm so unhappy at having to go. I really must. Peyton could stay, of course, as usual, but I don't want mamma would like me to go up alone in the evening."

"Certainly I should not, Nan; but constant little happenings like this don't make me feel more amiable about my daughter's persisting in going out as a music teacher when her mother wants her at home."

"With her for her, mamma, but doesn't need her more than a coach or fifth wheel," returned Nan. "And I had to be sure I was not a slave, and that I could at least earn my bread and butter, after the piles of money papa has spent on me. But Peyton ought to be here now. He said he was going to start, for I promised to stop a little while at the Bodine's. Rebe is suffering even more than usual, can't be moved without falling into convulsions. Our invalid has gained every day since June; hasn't she, papa? And Nan went to her mother's chair and knelt beside it to kiss her."

"My willful, headstrong Nan!" her mother said, keeping her daughter's hand. "Aren't we rather fine for that dusty train? she added, glancing at the pretty gown of some silken stuff tapping the dog collar of silver filigree that clasped the round throat."

"I'm taking my duster," Nan answered meekly. "But not meaning to wear it," put in Alice, coming up beside her. "Consider the circumstances, mamma, and remember how you would not have her going somewhere with your young man. We don't believe you tied yourself up in a bag to save your gown."

Nan rose to her feet. "Peyton's making his friends a real visitation," she said. "I shall have to go. I'm to have a moment for Rebe, if he remembers it to him."

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Rolfe waved his hand to the young men and sprang into the car. Nan did not look at him as he disappeared, and when he had gone she lifted her bag and wraps from the seat beside her, she stretched her arm over them, still so intent upon interrupting her chat or giving him glance or smile to soften her action.

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"The train's not crowded to-night, and it is so comfortable to have my bag and wraps where I can get them easily," Nan answered, evasively. "A seat to one's self on an Atlantic City train is a luxury to make the most of."

"I'm sorry you think so just now," Rolfe said, patiently. "But, Nan, I must beg your pardon for being detained. I am going to see a friend who is ill, and I have to go before it is too late."

"What is it, Nan?" Rolfe asked. "You seem so strange and cold. Is anything happening at home? Are you seriously vexed about what I have hindered from walking up with you? Won't you tell me just what the matter is?"

"Is anything the matter?" Nan answered in a clear, hard tone. "You need not apologize for being detained. It is hard to go away when one wishes about all things to stay. We won't have it happen again, to keep an engagement with me."

"Mr. Rolfe?" "Nan?" "Nan!" "Are you trying to hurt me? Of course you are, calling me 'Mr. Rolfe.' What has come over you? You were as sweet as possible all the morning and at dinner. What has happened? Do I do anything to you twice for anything? Tell me, Nan!"

"Silence." "Nan, may I come and sit beside you?" "No." "But, Nan, this is unreasonable. We give the vilest wretch a chance to defend himself, if he's able. What is my crime? Three years ago we knew each other, and for two of them we've belonged to each other, and I never in all that time have seen you in the mood of to-night. Try to make me some explanation."

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"How can you pretend such ignorance?" the girl burst out, indignantly. "Suppose I had acted for three or four weeks as you have done in that time, do you think you would not have minded it? And if I attempted to feign unconsciousness of anything amiss, so as to leave it out with you, do you think you would not resent that as an additional indignity?"

"I am unconscious, Nan, that any real thing is, or can be, amiss with us; but I own that I wanted to avoid, for the present, any reference to the Burleighs; and you force me to believe that my devotion there to-day and evening neglect of you caused all this trouble."

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"Mr. Rolfe?" "Nan?" "Nan!" "Are you trying to hurt me? Of course you are, calling me 'Mr. Rolfe.' What has come over you? You were as sweet as possible all the morning and at dinner. What has happened? Do I do anything to you twice for anything? Tell me, Nan!"

"Silence." "Nan, may I come and sit beside you?" "No." "But, Nan, this is unreasonable. We give the vilest wretch a chance to defend himself, if he's able. What is my crime? Three years ago we knew each other, and for two of them we've belonged to each other, and I never in all that time have seen you in the mood of to-night. Try to make me some explanation."

"I've nothing to explain," flashed Nan. "There's nothing mysterious in my doing." "That means there's something in mine. What, Nan? I have I ever kept a concern of mine from you since I