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The Old Order
Changeth

By JANE OSBORN

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"You may be only a poor typlst," smug little Aunt Caroline had told her niece Babette, "but don't forget that you are a lady—or are entitled to call yourself one so long as you don't do any things that are unworthy of a real lady."

Aunt Caroline had never done any of those things; in fact, she had worked at rather trying odds for the last ten years in the uptown flat where she kept house for her own four sons and daughters and her niece Babette.

And they had all remained ladies—she and her daughter and the niece, and the three boys had, so far as the mother knew, remained "perfect gentlemen"—in spite of the three flights up and the dingy, bare, painted walls of the kitchen where Caroline's work never seemed to be done, and in spite of the debts there had been to pay after the husband's long illness.

On the parlor table there was a copy of a well-known book on so-called social usage, and although the chapter on candle parties and the advice the writer of the book gave on "how to act when meeting the English royal family," and how to write to the archbishop of Canterbury had been of little real use to Caroline, she found much of it immensely helpful to her in her task.

The fact was that Caroline had, as she said, seen very much better days in the years when she and her cousin, Babette's mother—for Babette was not a real niece—had, for one brief season mingled in a society that never found its way to Caroline's poor little widow's flat.

Then came the marriages of Caroline and Babette's mother and the death of both Babette's parents, the death of Caroline's husband, the bringing up of the five children in the ways of genteel folk, and then, a year ago, Babette's engagement to Caroline's eldest son—who, to be sure, was only a sort of third cousin.

The courtship was conducted along lines that would have been approved by even the author of that book on social decorum on Caroline's parlor table. The young people, reminded that it was not well-bred to go to the theater unchaperoned, never went to the movies on a Saturday night without Caroline in tow, though poor Caroline sometimes endured all kinds of torment fearing that she was a hindrance to their good time. And Caroline remembered that when Babette's mother and she had been engaged they had not permitted their lovers more than the meagerst kisses, and those on the cheek.

Engagements are sometimes broken, they had been told, and a "real lady" would never cease regretting the fact if she had ever allowed any more passionate salute from a man who did not become her husband. So Caroline had told Babette and her son and, though they had been engaged a year, there was but one salute a day, and that very decorously upon the cheek.

When the first Christmas of their engagement came about Caroline had reminded her children that "well-bred engaged people did not give personal presents." The young man, besides the engagement ring, should give nothing but flowers, books and candy. Her own husband had given her a copy of Tennyson's poems on the Christmas they were engaged, and the Tennyson now reposed beneath the book on good form on the parlor table.

He had given her roses on all holidays and candles every week-end. There was no reason, Caroline said, why her son should not do so much for Babette. He could afford it, for he was now getting a generous salary.

Babette didn't often protest, but she was a practical bit of a girl, and when she might have been making a collection of useful household things given her by her husband-to-be—as other girls she knew did—she took small pleasure in the little bunch of roses that faded on her bureau after every holiday nor in the candles that she shared with her cousins every week-end.

From her own slender earnings she might have bought things that would eventually have helped feather the nest, too, but Caroline assured her that would not have been in good form. The great authority especially cautioned young women against giving anything of a personal nature to their fiancés.

Books, desk accessories, accessories of sport—a riding crop, or something of that sort—were the things suggested. And as Caroline's eldest son, Stephen, had no desk save the office one he toiled at eight hours a day, and knew no sports save struggling with the crowds on his daily trip to and from that office, Babette's choice was limited to books.

He liked the Stevenson and the Kipling she had given him, but how much sooner they could have been married if instead of those books she could have given him something that would do for the little flat—chairs and tables, or a rug, perhaps!

It was three weeks before Christmas and Babette and Stephen had each secretly decided to linger after office hours to make the Christmas purchases. Unknown to each other they were both part of the great throng that swarmed one of the department

message—*"I'm at your home."* "I did. You don't seem overjoyed to see me yourself—don't let me keep you. What have I done to you, Billy, that you should be so horrid to me? Don't you dare say you're not—you are!"

"I'm sorry, Amy—I told you I wasn't cut out for society in the first place, and I always make a mess of things."

Gardner came back from New York the next morning and in the afternoon he took Amy to tea at the most fashionable hotel in town. Gardner liked to be seen at smart places—especially in company with a good-looking girl.

"Billy's sailing tomorrow," he said, casually, in the course of conversation. "Where to?" asked Amy, with apparent indifference.

"France. He's going in aviation over there. That's really why he came east, you know. I've got to go down town and fix up some things for him as soon as we leave here—you won't mind if I send you home in the car alone, will you?"

"Of course not, Gardner." Amy was trying hard not to choke on the delicious piece of French pastry which she was doing her best to swallow. Then she received another shock. Gardner leaned over the table and began to speak in a lowered voice.

"Amy—will you marry me?" "Is this a surprise party?" gasped Amy.

"I shouldn't think you would be surprised—I made up my mind some time ago."

"But I didn't know that, and as much as I've seen of you lately, I never entered my head that you loved me. I like you, but I don't love you any more than you honestly love me. And I want to be friends—you're a better friend than you would be a husband—don't you truly think, Gardner?"

Gardner smiled in spite of himself. "Where did you learn so much about being in love, little Amy?"

"I learned the little I know from a very poor teacher who didn't even want me for a pupil. I'm sorry, Gardner, but I do care for someone else. He doesn't even know I exist—hardly. Forgive me, but it's the truth. And you'll still be my friend, won't you?" "You can be perfectly sure about that," returned the rejected suitor promptly.

Amy waved her hand to him and then turned and walked rapidly in the opposite direction from her own house. Her head was dizzy and her feet seemed to travel too slowly. She dragged herself wearily up the steps of a familiar house and rang the bell.

"Is Mr. William Lane in?" she asked the man who answered her ring. "In the library, miss."

"Don't announce me, then—I'll go right in."

Billy was sitting with his back to the door writing. Amy walked across the room before he saw her. Then he dropped his pen and sprang to his feet in amazement.

"Amy!" he cried. "Has something happened? You want Gardner?"

"No, I don't want Gardner—I've just refused to marry him. I just want to know why you are going away without saying good-by to me. It's unbelievable."

"Do you mean to tell me you're not going to marry Gardner? Why not?"

"It's really none of your business, but I'll tell you. For the simple reason that I don't happen to care for him—not in the marrying way of caring, I mean."

"What way is that?"

"I didn't come here to talk to you about marriage, Mr. William Lane. I only came to tell you how horrid I think you are—I think I almost hate you."

Billy covered the distance between them in less time than it takes to mention it. Then he caught Amy in his arms and held her till she had ceased to struggle.

"And I love you, love you, love you," he told her for about fifty times in as many different ways. "Look me in the eyes and tell me you hate me."

But Amy was too comfortable to look up, so she didn't even answer him.

After a little while Billy looked at his watch and found it was a quarter to eight.

"Will you go to dinner with me this time, Amy darling?" he asked her.

"It looks as if I'd have to. You don't know how much I'd love to go with you to-day, Billy. Let's get out of the house before Gardner comes. I think it would be better to break it to him after you've been gone a few days, even though he didn't really love me at all. Oh, I wish you didn't have to go, Billy—I can't bear to think of it."

"Would you marry me tomorrow if I could get a special license?"

"Yes, any time at all."

"Then we'll go and see about it—will you come with me?"

"Anywhere. You won't be able to lose me now. And Billy, my husband and I will be glad to come and visit, you on your wild and woolly farm as soon as you come back to us."

"Then, I'll have something worth fighting for now—that's what helps a man to do his duty even if it is hard work, too. I'm the luckiest person in the world today, Amy dearest."

"With the exception of one other," corrected Amy, and was immediately deprived of the power of speech again.

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