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The Kiss

By EVELYN MAY

If her husband had struck her in the face Margaret Blake could not have been more startled, amazed and spellbound. For a moment she fairly crumbled back. Then it seemed as if a sudden glory pervaded the little narrow hallway. For the first time in thirty years John Blake had kissed her.

"Oh, John!" she fluttered and the faded cheeks, yet soft as velvet, flushed pink and the lips quivered, and she felt as if she could die content, and then she seemed to grope her way blindly into the little parlor and sank to her knees, collapsing beside a chair and burst into tears.

"What a fuss a woman makes," she caught the tones of her husband outside, and then, soft and tenderlike—"All the same, Margaret, you're the best wife a man ever had. Hello! I forgot my cane."

He turned back into the hall and secured the article required. For a moment he halted. His glance was fixed upon the half-prostrate woman. Her hands were clasped above her head, the tears were raining down her cheeks, her soul seemed soaring heavenwards as she uttered the words:

"It is worth all the longing and waiting of thirty years—oh! my one only love. Oh! life is sweet."

"Erm!" John Blake tried to mutter in his practical phlegmatic way, but the strong man was shaken. It was the first day in two weeks that John had been out of the house. He had recently overdone himself, was laid up with a bad attack of rheumatism and Margaret had nursed him.

A sense of her tireless attention, sleepless nights, poignant anxieties had overcome him as he left the house. A flash of the true worth of this deserving woman had caused that erratic impulse of sentiment.

How glorious it was to again bathe in the joyous sunlight, free from pain! How lost and prosperous the farm looked. Margaret had done double service as nurse, housekeeper and out-door manager.

Margaret won a furtive, but half-gratified glance from John as he noted at supper time that she wore one of the tidy white aprons that had seemed so dainty and becoming in the earlier days of their married career.

"You mustn't overdo yourself, John, remember," she said the next morning, and accompanied him again to the door. There was something longed and wistful in her eyes.

"You aren't thinking of yesterday's nonsense, are you, Margaret?" he half-laughed.

"Yesterday's nonsense kept me happy all day long, John," she said, her lips trembling.

"It's cheap and handy, anyway," said he, and went over and gave her a hearty smack.

"Haw, haw!" greeted John outside, in the yard, in his gig, was his portly neighbor Joshua Griggs. He waved his whip boisterously.

"I say Blake," he hailed, "what's the occasion? Old sparking days over again?"

John was deeply chagrined. A frown came to his face.

"No harm done, is there?" he challenged angrily.

"What's the good, though? Why, I haven't kissed my wife in ten years. That soon wears out with the sex, Blake. Women get a man and forget everything except that he is a provider. Your wife drudges, mine galls—change, change, change. Never satisfied. Bah! the honeymoon over and they're practical critics."

"Perhaps if you kissed your wife once in a while she would drop so much gallivanting."

"Don't you criticize my wife!" blurted Griggs.

"I ain't. You did. Yes, I've made Margaret a drudge."

"And she's happy in it. Don't disturb her way."

"But I'm going to mend things, Joshua. I'm beginning to wonder if the humdrum way we sink into mere providers doesn't chill all that is lovely and natural in women folks."

"Margaret," said John the next day, "you're going to make a two-weeks' visit to your sister and her two little kids. You're going to bring them back here, for good. Miranda is having a hard time of it, and I see my duty plain to make it easier for the poor widow. With her help you won't be dragging your life out."

"Oh, John! the added burden for you, their care."

"A blessing, girl," declared John. "Those two little ones will make music in the house. There's going to be a change in affairs around here—phonograph, movies, new furniture, maybe an automobile. You're going to get something out of life, if it takes all I've got. Good-by. Two weeks, take a good rest and come back ready to enjoy the new life." Was what John said when the next day Margaret was seated in the wagon bound for the depot.

He waved his hand airily, Margaret with beaming eyes leaned forward toward him. How enticing, how girlish, she looked!

"Finding Himself"

By WARREN DALE

"Whatever has come over you, Lillian?" Lillian Warde, lost in meditation, looked up with a slight start and a conscious flush on her charming face.

"You will have to explain, Netta, dear," she said smilingly.

"Why are you so different this visit from last year? Then you were all animation and sunshine. Now, except when some girl tries to outdo you and you are your old daring, reckless self, you are either off alone sketching, or mooning."

"The exaggeration is far-fetched," declared Lillian. "However, I am going to make a confession. It is camouflage."

"Camouflage? I am hiding behind a mask and repenting of my sins. Truth is, Netta, I fear I thought more of a certain individual back home than I fancied. This is for you only. Mr. Roland Barnes, young, inexperienced, shy, but oh, such a perfect gentleman! I encouraged him and his state of perfect bliss was a study. Then one day in the garden, my cousin Roy coming home greeted me with the usual kiss of relationship. I saw Mr. Barnes in the distance. Wicked me! Some spirit of cruel mischief influenced me to gush over Roy. Mr. Barnes did not know that he was a relative. He at once jumped to the conclusion that Roy was a lover and—disappeared."

"Disappeared?" "Actually and absolutely."

"And now?" "I am sorry I did it," said Lillian in a subdued tone.

For several years Lillian and other girl friends of Netta Lee had come to Silver Lake to enjoy a month's vacation.

"Wake up, Lillian!" rallied May Rolfe the day ensuing. "There's a mystery about, at least a rare novelty. They say a genuine, dyed-in-the-wool old hermit, long, white hair, Robinson Crusoe cap, tottering staff and all that, has taken possession of the old deserted hut on Bear Island."

"How picturesque!" commented Lillian. "I would like to sketch this new character on the scene."

"You won't dare to," dared May. "They say he is furtive, quite wild, maybe a woman hater."

"You dare me, do you?" said Lillian, some of the old fire of adventure and daring in her eyes.

"Call it a dare," retorted May. "What then?"

"Why," replied Lillian, "I will not only hunt down this romantic nomad of the lake, but I will bring back a faithful sketch of him."

"Suppose he should carry off one of us off like a knight of old to his baronial hall?" suggested May.

"Baronial nonsense!" cried Lillian. "Where's Lillian?" inquired Netta the next morning.

"I saw her put off down the lake in the canoe with her sketching outfit," said May.

Lillian had, indeed, taken the "dare." She reached Bear Island, and resolutely and unafraid made her way through the brambly bushes towards the old dismantled hut that had been a familiar landmark for years. Its door stood open, Lillian peered in. There were signs of recent occupancy, but no one was just now in sight. Lillian looked around curiously. She was surprised to observe a white wig and a great pair of whiskers, a bear coat and the conventional hermit hat on a table.

"Our hermit is a sham," decided Lillian. "Oh, my!"

She might well start and thrill. Set over the rude fireplace was a card photograph of herself. Lillian retreated, fluttering over a tangible mystery. She passed through the doorway to come face to face with the hermit!

He was bringing in some wood. At the sight of Lillian dawn went the animal in a blundering way, and there stared up at the unexpected Lillian—Roland Barnes! It was almost comical, only Roland looked so distressed. Lillian figured out the complication readily. She adopted her most soothing and charming smile.

"So you are the mysterious hermit?" she said.

"I—I—yes, that is—"

"And why did you leave us all so strangely that day at Brighton when my cousin came?"

"Your cousin?" wildly shouted Roland—with hope.

"And why did you come here?" asked Lillian.

"To feast my eyes on a sight of—why, you, of course—before I went away."

"Are you going away now?" "Not—not if you say not. You don't say not, though, do you?" concluded Roland dismally.

"I do, and I hope you will abandon your foolish role and help my friends enjoy themselves for a week or two."

"A week or two?" gasped Roland in quivering delight.

"Yes," nodded Lillian, at the end of that delightful, never-to-be-forgotten vacation, "I will marry you next June—provided."

"Yes, yes?" murmured Roland rapturously.

"Provided we make a honeymoon visit to the hermit island, where you found yourself."

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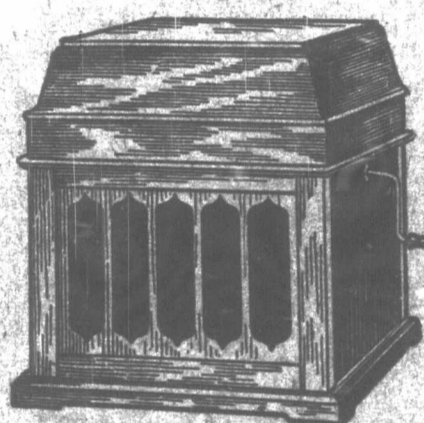
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Notice of Election

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