

"Did you like my verses?" he inquired, glancing at her furtively from under the fringe of hair.

"O yes, I never had verses addressed to me before. That is," with a furious blush, "if they were intended to be addressed to me."

"O sure," replied their author, complacently. "Who else could be described by these lines? Listen:

"A fairly fashioned flower
Of tender hue,
Was sown 'neath Eastern skies,
And there it grew."

"But I don't quite see what made you think you found me withering in the street, and took me home to bloom at your hearth."

"That's to come," he said, mysteriously. "I'm afraid you are not poetic, or you would know the value of being in touch with a truly imaginative mind. By blooming at my hearthstone, dear little flower, you would know the true joys of imagination and prophecy. I do not offer you sordid silver and gold, to satisfy the base desires of the body. I offer you joys ethereal, spiritual."

"I fear this is an honour unto which I was not born," cried she, mimicking his mood of poesy.

"You will grow into it," he said, catching her hands, and cornering her in the window-seat. "Do you promise?"

"What does he mean? Promise? I promise nothing," she cried hotly, wrenching herself free.

He glared at her stupidly.

"She doesn't understand," he said, excusing her to himself.

"It is you who do not understand," she retorted, regaining her composure. "Understand women, I mean. If I were you I would study them more before I prophesied about what they would do."

"You reject me!" he muttered, as if his mouth had been paralyzed by a slap.

"I didn't say so."

"What then?"

"Give me time."

"Time? Hasn't the girl had a day?"

"I want a week."

"Very well—if we are alive then. A week it is."

As he walked away, nursing his wounded pride, she fancied he was a sadder and a wiser man.

"Episode number one. Not much fun. Hardly worth telling Jack, for it wouldn't make him jealous. I want some startling romance. And yet I like the poet—I think I do. I never knew a real live one before. O dear, I'm perplexed. Maybe by the end of the week, I'll be glad to have him pick me up and bid me bloom for him alone."

That afternoon, as she was doing Winnipeg in the automobile, Clubs put the question abruptly to her: "Has the poet sent you any verses yet?" She admitted that he had.

"He tells me that, at different times, he has composed twelve impassioned poems to women."

"Why twelve?"

"Allowing for different types, I presume. One will delineate the virtues of a fair maid, another of a dark. One praises the tall, another the small. In that way he hoped to secure one."

"Humph."

"You mock I see. Girls don't go much on imaginative and ethereal treats," said the worldly man complacently. "They like more tangible pleasures. Now I have never made love, but it seems to me when I do I will take the lady this way. Please let me try on you. You don't mind me holding your hand. No. All right, I'll commence. Miss Hilda Hurd, I am a bachelor of forty and unattached. I make more money in a night by my brains, than a common business drudge earns in a month. Therefore I spend lavishly. I have horses, yachts, autos. I am well-fed, well-dressed, well-read, well-travelled. My wife shall be the same. Now, dear girl, listen. I am at your feet. Lo, all that I have is yours." He released her hand, and inflated his baggy cheeks. "What do you think of that?"

"It is a very good offer," she replied.

He leaned toward her, not passionately, but with quite a show of interest.

"What if I should put it seriously?"

She caught her breath. "I should still say it was a very good offer."

"One that you would accept?"

"Ah, no; at least not without thought."

"Why, you have known me at least thirty-six hours. Do you mean to say you don't know whether you like me or not?"

"I'm just thinking."

"You come from a country of thought," he mocked. "I am the product of action. Ah, well, I don't want to hurry you in such an important matter. I am a busy man and probably shall not think of this for a week. If you make up your mind by Sunday, remind me of it. Believe me, I shall be pleased."

A great weight rolled from her breast as she reflected that he would only be displeased if she rejected him. She hated to hurt his feelings; he had so many nice things.

Little Pork Sausage was not a man of words. He had never addressed a remark to the lady of his dreams, and yet there were those who thought his dreams contained a feminine element. Like all Westerners, he believed in action, and cast about for a way to show his feelings more potently than by empty words.

One day, when the lady boarder was rushing upstairs to make her toilet, she stumbled upon a huge box of violets, at the season when violets were the impossible flower in Winnipeg. "So kind of you," she smiled to Clubs, when he admired a few of them in her dress. Clubs looked blank, but little Pork Sausage looked radiant; so by swift intuition she rushed to a conclusion. The little meat man's heart was afire! How the dollars that that box of violets represented, must have squealed, as he pulled them through the narrow neck of his wallet, which never before had opened to such trifles.

"You know what violets mean?" he inquired, when she found a chance to thank him.

She shook her head.

He whisked a little memorandum out of his pocket, one page of which was devoted to the language of flowers. He pointed and she read: "Violets—true love."

"Now would you think he was that—that—that mushy?" she said, in retelling the story to Auntie Perkins and the landlady.

Such a feeling of exultation had taken possession of Hilda Hurd that she began to set an exceedingly high price upon her charms, as prices run up when a formerly useless article comes into demand. It piqued her therefore, somewhat, that the telegraph-pole remained stolidly indifferent. She had even condescended to coquette with him, but no ray of meaning gleamed from his deep eyes. He was very nice; in fact, she imagined from his meek and quiet spirit that he had not been long from the East. When he mentioned a business difficulty, she simply could not resist the desire to help him out.

"Won't the books balance?" she inquired respectfully, one night, as he leaned dejectedly against the mantel. He raised his lids slowly, with a look that said more plainly than words, "How can shallow woman comprehend?"

"But I can help you," she persisted. "I am quick at figures."

He smiled superciliously. "I've got a hard nut to crack."

"Well," she said turning slowly, "I suppose it's nothing to me."

His burning eyes detained her. "My problem is simply this: How can two persons be kept on an income that barely suffices for one?"

"Oh!" she cried, with a look of infinite comprehension. "There's a woman in it. Won't she have you because you are not—not rich? The monkey. I hate her."

"I have not asked her," he said, trembling violently, "and never will until I have solved my problem."

"So she will never know how much you love her," said Hilda sadly.

What was she doing? That night in the black silence of her unlighted room, she flung herself on the bed and asked herself the question. It was the first time she had stopped for reflection during the week, for she was fast becoming Westernized. "I'm in Winnipeg," was her excuse, whenever the old nature threatened to make her uncomfortable. But her reflecting apparatus, after a week of dormant repose, was alive, uneasy, persistent. "What are you doing?" it persisted.

"My feelings can best be expressed in poetry," she exclaimed, recalling the Mad Galloway's favourite phrase. "Let me see—

"On Sunday 'twas investigation,
On Monday it was observation,
On Tuesday 'twas intoxication,
On Wednesday it was glorification,
On Thursday 'twas procrastination,
On Friday it was consternation,
On Saturday—'twill be abdication."

Not soothed by her poetical effort, she got up and paced the room.