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## The Western Home Monthly

pretty, youthful vivacity, and she looked tired.

When Walworth finally made his way to her, Helen was in the centre of a tiny court, and apparently in her blithest mood. The others sauntered away, one by one, before Walworth's prior claim.

"I am sorry I missed you when you came down," he said, apologetically. "It was very stupid of me, and bars me out from growling because I lost my first waltz."

"I was a little late myself."

She was glad to hear the orchestra start again, and they went in. Not for worlds must Dick know that anything troubled her-at least not yet. brilliant color was in her cheeks as she danced, her eyes were bright with excitement, and as they passed a door-way she heard someone murmur, "handsome couple," quite audibly. She was divided between two foolishly hysterical desires, one to stop right there in the ball-room and demand what he meant, and the other to drop her head miserably on his big shoulder, and cry.

It seemed an interminable time before they were once more in the launches and speeding down the quiet river toward home. Fortunately they were not so voluble as on the upward trip, and contented themselves with singing song after song, so that her abstraction was not noticed. A golden August moon glorified the river and the silent stretches of woods and meadow on its banks, diversified here and there by Jarkened summer homes whose inmates were already asleep. It seemed strange that the world could be so peaceful. Cecily Winton had nestled beside her, and presently laid her hand half shyly on Helen's for a moment. The turmoil of misgiving was settling into the grinding ache of conviction, and it took all Helen's control not to draw the hand away. Cecily was looking up at her, rather wistfully, she realized with quick pain, as though asking for something she would not say. Her pretty, rounded cheek had all the delicate charm of girlhood, she was sweet and fresh and winning, and what man was there that did not look with pleasure on youth and its dainty prettiness? This child was nineteen, while she-she was thirty, and felt it, and tomorrow would look it also.

When Helen came down to breakfast the next morning the light shadows of sleeplessness lay around her eyes. Cecily did not appear, begging to be excused on the ground of a headache, and Dick was pre-occupied and quiet. All around her was a chatter of gaiety, and she alone felt

ion, and she must have it over before her courage failed. On her way she passed Cecily's door, and by one of those impulses which make us drive the knife a little

deeper into our own wounds, and give it an extra twist or two, she stopped and rapped lightly. Cecily opened it, a dejected little figure in a charming negligee. "Oh!" she said in a little startled

gasp, and turned suddenly pink. "I thought you were mother," she added lamely. "Please come in." lamely. "Please come in." Cecily's evident confusion and her

own hurt chilled Helen into unwonted formality. 'No, I thank you. I merely stopped

to see if you were better." "Oh, yes. I shall be down presently.

It's very kind of you." The bend of Miss Meredith's head

was at once an adieu and a polite disclaimer of any obligations. She hated herself that she could be hard against such a child, and as she went she carried with her a teasing recollec-tion of a flushed and wistful face, watching her departure from the open door.

During the ramble with Walworth she touched lightly on fifty topics, flitting from one to another with mystifying swiftness, to keep away from the borderland of the personal. Dick was quiet, but out of his pre-occupation he looked surprised, now and then, at her bright restlessness of mind. It was not until they were homeward bound, and almost there, that she dared begin. "Dick, do you remember our com-

pact?"

"What compact?" Dick was taken unawares.

"About our engagement. That if either of us ever tired, we would be honest about it and ask to be re-leased?"

"Yes, I remember." Dick laughed a little. "I seem to recollect getting into disgrace by making fun of it." "But don't you think it is right?" she insisted. Her parasol hid her face, but the hand that held it was cold.

Dick seemed inclined to dimiss the question. "Oh yes, but like most theories, it is a little over-developed on one side.

It does very well for a woman. It is her eternal privilege to dismiss a man if she wants to, but no man who is a man can tell a woman a thing like that without feeling like a very small, yellow pup.'

"Is it better for them to marry, one deceived and the other unsatisfied?" "Isn't this a bit weighty for a warm day?" Dick laughed again, but drop-ped quickly back to seriousness. "I'm afraid it isn't so much what it is better to do as what we have the do. Don't you think we might talk about the weather, Nell?" Helen stripped a spray from a bush in passing, and crushed it absently in her fingers. She had given him his chance, and he had not taken it. He had practically admitted that it was because he could not bring himself to it. Her face was still obscured by the parasol. When she spoke her voice



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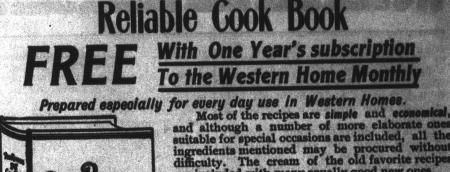
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old and out of tune with it.

As they left the table, scattering in a half dozen directions, Helen would have slipped away, but Walworth followed her to the foot of the stairs. "Will you be ready pretty soon?"

It was their custom to start off for a ramble each morning, and it was too well understood to need any preliminary invitation. Helen was tempted to beg off, but after all, what good would it do?

"In about half an hour, I think."

"Thanks. Don't be too long. It's my last morning, you know, and I am privileged to be selfish."

He patted her arm lightly, it seemed to her sympathetically, and certainly he was very serious for Dick. She excused herself quickly, went to her room and propped his picture in front

of her, staring at it miserably. "Do you love her, Dick? might have told me before this. You is a poor sort of loyalty, to blindfold those who love you. Better hurt once and have it over with."

She turned away toward the window, looking listlessly out at the wide, fowing river, bright in the sunshine, and the cool stretches of woods. Laughing voices floated up from the veranda, and she winced.

"She won't let him tell me, and the burden of it lies with me,-unless-unless I want to hold him, against his will. Do I love him well enough to give him up?"

She put the picture away, covering it from sight, and put on her hat. In the sleepless watches of the night she she could not have brought herself to had reached a decision, a hard decis- explain. There was something humili-

was not entirley steady. "Don't you understand, Dick?" "Don't I understand what? Look

here, Nell, what do you mean? She turned slowly and faced him, flushing and paling again, but the rebellious voice was under control.

"I mean that I have made a mis-take. Recently-I have found it out. take. Recently—1 have found it out. I ask you to give me my freedom." They were in full sight of the house, and Perry Knowlton was swinging down the path to meet them. Dick flushed dully. He was struggling to comprehend it, and drew in his breath shortly as he realized that she meant shortly as he realized that she meant all that her words signified. "Will you tell me why?" he began

constrainedly. "I cannot. Please do not ask me." Down the path Knowlton's voice came cherrily.

"It's time you came nome! Everybody has run off and left me, and there isn't a blessed thing to do." The ordeal of lunch was more than

Helen could stand. She shut herselt in her room and lay with throbbing head, trying to decide whether she had been rash, or cruel, or kind. She knew her words had been curt, but

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