



"IT'S such a waste of time, I haven't any patience with it!"

Jean Marshall, the speaker, was vigorously prodding her sailor hat in a fresh place to keep it from tilting to one side. But it was not the hat she had lost patience with. The subject of the petulant words was a pale little woman who sat on the hotel piazza just behind Jean and her companion, with a piece of dainty needlework in her hands. Jean had asked her to come for a row on the lake. The white-faced woman had thanked her and refused. She wanted to finish her work, she said.

"She might as well have come as sit there blinding herself over that trash. She's awkward at it, too—holds it so queerly with her left hand, and—"

"What was it?" queried George. She was his fiancée, and he recognized a right to interrupt her sometimes.

"Doylies or something. It doesn't make any difference what the work is—it's the principle that's wrong," said Jean with spirit.

"Here's a canoe—let's get in," suggested the young man.

It was a glorious evening on Lake Ontario, just there off the shore at High Branch. The summer hotel gleamed white among the young trees grouped about it. The branches filtered the sunset light till it was the softest of tints that lay upon the scarcely moving water. There were masses of fluffy clouds edging the horizon, and a coil of cobwebby ones at the zenith. The lessening throb of a steamer came down the lake, and off to the east black trails of smoke showed that the evening boats were journeying toward Toronto. There was little said for a time. The glory and the calm of the evening had entered the heart of the girl, and the pale-faced woman and her needlework were forgotten.

"Has she been here long?" asked George.

"Who? Miss Prouse? Oh yes, just about a week, and she hasn't done a thing except sit out on that piazza, at her fancy-work. I'd like to know what good their summer outing will do such women?"

"Well, they're pretty, aren't they?—I mean the doylies, or whatever you call them," continued the young man.

"Y-e-s, I suppose so. Men like that kind of thing. It's a pity they don't have to work at them," said Jean savagely.

There was no answer, and presently she went on: "I often wonder what women are thinking of when they waste so much good time puttering in and out of holes with a needle and thread."

"Yet you waste a good deal of time on your books and your outdoor pleasures."

George's voice was very mellow and the tone was a reflective one.

"Me? I do not, George Black!"

Then there was a deep silence, in which the drip of the paddle and the splash of the little prow could plainly be heard.

It was a curious relationship these lovers bore to each other. George had no idea that the woman who was to be his wife was perfect. He was, at the same time, quite sure he was not, and, consequently, did not consider perfection indis-

pensable. He did not pretend he had mortgaged his brain to her, so ventured to differ from her opinions occasionally. He even lectured her sometimes. No one had ever undertaken to lecture Jean before. The novelty of it made this departure rather interesting. She bore it very patiently, as a rule, differing from him, it must be admitted, nearly always; sometimes after a spirited argument, sometimes point blank with no alternatives considered.

"You get a great deal of pleasure from your reading; but isn't it mostly a selfish pleasure? You take a great deal of enjoyment from your outdoor exercise; isn't it principally a selfish enjoyment?" was the young man's question.

"The first is educating my mind; the second my body. I don't consider it wasted time," Jean rejoined tersely. Presently she went on lightly: "I do believe you want me to do fancy-work too, and I will; I'll make mats—rag mats for the floors. You like to see women at needlework, don't you now own up?"

"Not if they don't want to do it. If they do, they ought to be let," was the quaint reply.

"I'll let Miss Prouse," said Jean with a mock-penitent air, and they both laughed.

The next morning Jean and George came down the piazza steps again. Miss Prouse was sitting in her accustomed place, her accustomed work in her hand.

"If she'd only do something else for a change," grumbled Jean, too loudly, "china painting, or elocution, or piano music, no matter how badly. I'm so tired of that sham-rock pattern in white linen and—"

"Sh-h," whispered George warningly; "she heard you." He had turned half round, and saw Miss Prouse's pale face grow suffused with a torrent of red, and her eyes fill with glistening tears.

That night at dinner the little needle worker's place was empty. Jean met her in the hall after it was quite dark outside, and noticed with a sting in her conscience that her eyes were rimmed with red, and that they avoided hers.

The next morning Jean's mother was called to town in connection with some house repairs. In the evening Jean and her little sisters and brothers were sent for. George returned also.

It was Christmas-time Jean, looking very win-

some in her dark gown and rich furs, was chatting gaily in a friend's drawing-room.

"There, I must be off," she cried, "I am so very busy."

"Wait a moment, I want to show you a pretty little gift that came to-day. Isn't it lovely?" Mrs. Barton went on, for Jean was fingering the dainty bit of embroidery, and then raised surprised enquiring eyes to her friend's face.

"Who made it?" she asked at length.

"A poor little woman who has a sad history. Shall I tell you? Have you time?"

"Go on!" said Jean.

"She was a musician—so clever, passionately devoted to her art. It was her ambition to make sufficient money to go abroad and continue her musical studies under some great master. She was sure she would succeed and return a famous musician. So she taught by day, and studied and practised far into the night—until her health gave out. At first it was her spine, but she kept on playing for concerts and dances, and teaching. But after a little, two of her fingers were paralyzed. Poor girl, she loved her music so, and it was all she had to depend on. Of course she had to give it up, so she began art needlework. Her friends found all the work they could, and took orders besides, and she manages to live. It's a hard way to make a living, isn't it?"

"Yes, indeed," assented Jean, but her voice seemed a long way off, for she was thinking very earnestly.

"She was out at High Branch this summer," Mrs. Morton continued, "and the change did her so much good; but I daresay she worked all day and most of the night to pay for her outing. Poor little soul, it was so good of her to send me this for Christmas. I feel as if it was almost too much. Must you go, Jean? Well, good-bye and a merry Christmas, dear."

"Do you know, George," said Jean the same evening, "that poor little Miss Prouse, out at High Branch, had to do that embroidery for a living?"

"I knew it," said George.

"Knew it!—Oh, George, why didn't you tell me?" Jean was half-crying as she spoke.

"Well, not for certain, you know, but I didn't believe she'd do it from choice."

That was clearly an acceptance of Jean's attitude on the fancy-work question. She raised one finger in mischievous enquiry and disbelief.

"Oh, come now, George," she said. He took her literally and—came.

ELLIS S. ATKINSON

("Madge Merton.")

