

DEVOTION OF SISTER MADGE

To Her Lazy Brother Who Thought Himself an Artist

Old Lintell Told the Plain Blunt Truth Which Hurt But Was Very Effective.

"Many happy returns of the day, Phil, dear!" she called out. "It's a lovely morning. Goodby!"

She ran down the stairs lightly. In the hall she was met by an elderly looking man in a velvet coat. She nodded brightly to him, and he opened the door for her.

"Your brother's birthday?" he asked, with a smile.

"Yes. We must do something tonight in honor of it, and you must help us, Mr. Lintell. Goodby. I shall be late for my bus!"

About an hour later Phil Halstan emerged from his room. He was tall, well built young fellow, with a somewhat heavy, indolent looking face. He ate a leisurely breakfast, then, lighting a cigarette, dropped into an armchair by the fire and let his eyes travel slowly round the dull room. A look of disgust crept to his face.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed. "How horribly mean and sordid it all looks! Shall I ever get out of it!"

Presently he rises and, going to a corner by the window, drew forward an easel. He sat himself before it and gazed at the blank canvas. Then he felt for his box of brushes and fingered them meditatively. Finally he laid them down and looked out of the window.

There was a tap at the door, and the next moment old Mr. Lintell entered. He lived on the upper floor and had got to be very friendly with Madge and her brother.

"I won't interrupt you," he began with a glance at the easel. "I only came to offer you my best wishes."

"Thanks! Please don't go," cried Phil as the old man moved toward the door. "Fact is, I don't think I shall do much more work now. Rather thought of giving myself a holiday. My birthday, you know!" he added, half jocularly.

Old Lintell came forward slowly. He looked at the blank canvas.

"It's going to be a great thing," explained Phil. "I'm working out the idea now—it takes time, you know."

The old man nodded and looked out of the window. He had been thinking a good deal of Phil lately—this boy who got up late, sat dreaming half the day and loafed the other, who had never earned a penny in his life, kept in idleness by a devoted sister who as typist in a solicitor's office worked hard from morn to night, believing in him heart and soul.

He glanced up sharply at Phil. "Might I see your portfolio?" he said. "I used to know something about art."

Phil pulled it out with alacrity and opened it for the old man's inspection. Mr. Lintell turned them over one by one. They were crude and badly done, with no sign of distinctive ability whatever.

"Well?" asked Phil eagerly. He shared his sister's belief in himself. "Give me your candid opinion."

Mr. Lintell wiped his glasses and proceeded to oblige him. He told him the truth—the unpleasant, naked truth—and a wave of color swept over young Phil's cheek. Then he laughed.

"It's too ridiculous!" he cried. "Old Mr. Lintell rose from his chair and made his way to the door. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I thought you ought to know."

loafs while a woman works for him is a hound and deserves to be kicked! Why, I'd sooner sweep the roadway!" Phil, with a red face, rose and hurriedly left the place.

It was halfpast 2 the same afternoon when Madge ran lightly up the staircase of the house in Bloomsbury and burst into the sitting room. Her face was flushed, and her eyes sparkled. She saw a young man standing by the window. His back was turned to her.

"Phil," she cried joyously, "I have a half holiday!"

The figure in the window turned, and she gave a little cry of surprise. "Dick!" she gasped in astonishment. Dick Evington came toward her, holding out his hand.

"Just Dick," he answered, with a smile. He caught her hand and stood looking into her face. "Something has happened, Madge, and I've come up at once from Arington to tell you about it."

There was a dainty flush on her cheeks. He thought he had never seen her look so beautiful. "I hope it is something good for you, Dick," she said. "Is it?"

"I don't know—yet," he said slowly—"that is, until I've heard what you have to say."

Now, it happened at this moment Phil Halstan was wending his way homeward. He let himself in with his latchkey and went up to their room. The door was not quite shut, and he heard voices—Madge's and another's. He recognized it after a moment. Then he caught a few words. He glanced around. The landing was dark. Hardly knowing what he did, he sank down on the first stair and listened.

"I knew things would come right at last, Madge, dear," Evington's voice was saying. "But I didn't think it would be as splendid as this. A good post abroad—only open to a married man too!"

There was a pause. Outside Phil grasped the banister. There was a slight movement by him, and turning his head he found Lintell had crept to his side.

Then they heard Madge's voice. It was low and tremulous. "I'm so sorry, Dick, but—" "Why, Madge, you love me?"

"Yes, love you, Dick—always have loved you—always shall! But—" There was a pause, then a whisper, "There's Phil!"

Old Lintell laid a hand on the young man's shoulder.

"But surely Phil won't mind," cried Evington. "He is a man and can earn his own living. He would not wish you to give up this."

"You don't understand, Dick." There were tears in Madge's eyes this time. "Some day Phil will be a great artist, be famous, but just now—he wants my help. Oh, Dick, I'm so sorry, but I can't leave him—can't go with you—though I love you so!"

Phil Halstan shook old Lintell's hand from his shoulder and rose suddenly to his feet. He stood for a moment undecided, then crept away on tiptoe down the stairs. Old Lintell followed.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

Phil made no reply. He crammed his hat on his head, opened the door and stepped into the street. Old Lintell went with him and they walked away together.

"Are you going to let her lose her one big chance of happiness?" said old Lintell in a low voice, "or going to continue to idle your life away—she keeping you?"

Phil hardly seemed to hear him. He was striding along with his hands thrust deep in his pockets, his eyes staring straight ahead of him. Suddenly he threw his head back.

to her eyes as she read the last few sentences: "For three years I have played it as low down as a fellow can. But I'm going to be a man at last, Madge. If you want to make me happy, dear, make me feel I haven't quite spoiled your life. Go with Dick."

The letter dropped from her hand. "Go with Dick," she repeated in a low tone.

There was a tap at the door; then a man was shown in—a young man with a pale and anxious face.

"Madge, I couldn't leave without asking you once again. Is it quite hopeless?" he began.

"She raised her eyes to his, and he saw her lips tremble. "Not quite hopeless, Dick, dear," she whispered. "Mainly About People."

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Phil pulled it out with alacrity and opened it for the old man's inspection. Mr. Lintell turned them over one by one. They were crude and badly done, with no sign of distinctive ability whatever. "Well?" asked Phil eagerly. He shared his sister's belief in himself. "Give me your candid opinion." Mr. Lintell wiped his glasses and proceeded to oblige him. He told him the truth—the unpleasant, naked truth—and a wave of color swept over young Phil's cheek. Then he laughed. "It's too ridiculous!" he cried. "Old Mr. Lintell rose from his chair and made his way to the door. "I'm sorry," he said, "but I thought you ought to know." Phil laughed again as the door closed on the old man, but it was an uncomfortable sort of laugh—the laugh of a man whose mind has been suddenly confronted with a new aspect of the case. He strode up and down the room. "Of course I shall be famous some day—shall pay little Madge back a thousandfold—and she doesn't mind working at present," he reflected. "And he said I hadn't a particle of ability, that I was wasting my time, that I ought to be earning my living, keeping Madge, instead of letting her—" He glanced toward the widow. The sun was shining temptingly. He walked to the mantelpiece and found two half crowns which Madge had left there. Unthinkingly he slipped these into his pocket, then, taking his hat and stick, made his way out of the house. He meant to go for a walk, to think out his great idea. But he found he could think of nothing but old Lintell's words. The idiotic sentences kept running through his head. He, Phil Halstan, a mere loafer! The thing was absurd. Madge herself would be the first to say so. He walked for some time and made an effort to think of something else. Presently he dropped into a cheap restaurant to have lunch. He sat down at a table. Next to him two men were talking rather excitedly. "I don't care who it is," one was declaring emphatically, "the chap who