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Broken Links

By A. W. PEACH

Miss Copeland paused on her way down the dusky corridor and listened -there was no doubt in her mind that her suspicions of the past week were well founded. Thirteen years of city life-most of it spent in the boarding house which had been her only home -had not hardened nor driven away the deep, maternal tenderness which had gone out to many a waif who had

drifted into the house.

She knew that in that room a girl was crying-weeping in the low, subdued, silent way that is ever significant of a breaking or homesick heart.

She went on to the door of her room, and then paused again. remembered the shy, refined, girlish woman, who with her young husband had come to the room early in the week. Something was wrong, greatly wrong; and quietly Miss Copeland turned back, ready to meet the insolent word, the dumb, impassive face of one who welcomes no kindly interfer-

She knocked softly, but heard no answer; then she opened the door. She saw the slight form of a girl stretched on the bed, her dark hair in disarray, her eyes covered with slim hands, her shoulders heaving.

"My dear, may I help you in some way?" Miss Copeland asked gently. "I am simply an old maid living in the house when I am not a business woman. I wish I could help you," the older woman said, a bit eagerly, for the beauty of the girl, her evident refinement, and her grief, appealed to

"Thank you-but you cannot help me. I am afraid—and I must be brave." The girl sat up suddenly, brushing her dark hair into place. "But when Norman-he is my husband-is away, I have my blues out. He is trying so hard, and father has been so—so terribly unusua. tears seemed again to be coming.

suppose you tell me about it. I am in charge of a number of girls in a sor. See if I can't help in some way, will you?"

The dark eyes were wistful. have no mother I can remember-and I have wanted one so much-to talk

"Then make believe I am your mother; you see, I am an old maidbut I love children. You see-I have suffered a little. I understand. So tell me. My name is Della Copeland."

The girl clasped her hands tensely for a moment, then the tight fingers relaxed. "It's simple—it seems so, You see Norman and I anyway. learned to-to love each other. Father was angry. You see Norman worked in one of father's mills. He said I was too young—I know I am, but we loved each other, and the years don't count, do they?"

"No, my dear, love knows no years," Miss Copeland answered

faintly. "I told father I would have more years to be happy with Norman. But he—he was stern, and harsh, and unkind. Then we learned he was planning to send Norman away-to South Africa. We—we simply couldn't stand that. I wanted Norman to marry me, right away; he wouldn't without father's consent, but father wouldn't even see him. Then he told me he was going to send me away. I told him I would not go"-the dark eyes began to gleam, and the listener guessed that the father's spirit was in his child—"that I would marry Nor-man. He told me I did not dare. I

. The girl looked wearily toward the window. She went on, a bit more

quietly: "We were married. Norman discharged. He refused to

see me. I did not beg, nor shall I, though I know he loves me. The worst is, everywhere Norman goes for work in his special line father's influence stops him from securing it. Norman-oh, he has been so brave, so kind and so uncomplaining. He is trained in one kind of work, but he's trying to do what he can, and it's hard now."

"Have you asked your father to forgive you?" Miss Copeland asked hesitatingly.

The girl's slight form stiffened and the watcher saw the pride of race stern on her features. "Never! I shall never do that! He must ask us to return!"

Miss Copeland pondered a minute, her hopes sinking as she thought. "Will you tell me your name" she

"Why, I should have told you. I'm

proud of it, Miss Copeland-Mrs. Norman Barker. My own name is Laurel Jeffery—father owns the Wellston mills.

A long silence fell between them. It was broken by steps that, approaching slowly, quickened as they neared the door. In came a tall, good-looking young man, whose gray eyes could not brighten the shadows beneath them.

He was introduced to Miss Copeland by a proud wife. Taking advantage of her first opportunity, Miss Copeland slipped out and hurried to her own room. There she stood in its silence and dusk, thinking. Finally she reached a decision.

"It is very foolish, very, very; but I shall go and see her father. Those brave, courageous young hearts must

With her decision made, she sat in the dusk near the window of her room, dreaming-dreaming of a lost girlhood, an empty womanhood, and brooding on the gray and quiet years that lay before her—lonely paths for the walking of lonely feet.

The maid at the door softened her "Mr. Jeffrey says that you voice. must give your name and state your errand, please."

Miss Copeland smiled. "Tell him I have come over two hundred miles for five minutes of his time." The maid hesitated, but went in.

A moment later she returned smiling. "He is in the library, where you may see him." Through the great hall she walked

to the door where the maid stood and quietly entered the room. A man of powerful build rose heavily from a chair, laid down his paper and lifted a strong, stern face. With lips parted he stood as if hypnotized

his gray eyes staring; then the harsh lines seemed swept from his face, a sudden overwhelming wonder and joy took their place. He stepped forward outstretched hands. "Dell! Della! It is you-it is you

"Yes, Stephen, it is I-but you must

not hold my hand," she said, smiling faintly. "I shall hold it until I am sure I

have you here! Della, where have you been? Why have you come? Do "Stephen, are you so glad to see

me?"

"Glad to see you! I have been hungry for the sight of your face for fifteen years! Why didn't you answer my letters? Why—" He stopped, making an effort to calm himself.

"Let's sit down," she suggested "Ah, Stephen, why quietly. bring back the old years and the old re grets? I was willing to marry you, you remember, but you didn't have courage to go against your fa ther's will. You remember, he would have nothing to do with me, you-

His voice was hoarse. "My God! If I only had had the courage! These years, Della, these years—years—of memories—" His head dropped. "I was a coward-but it's not too late, Della. You-why, the years have been

kind to you—are you—"
"Married? No!" She shook her "I couldn't-with my head sadly. memories.'

"Wait, Stephen. I came to see you. You say you wish you had opposed your father. Let me tell you some thing-

She leaned over, and tenderly she told him of the young couple in the dingy boarding-house room, of the slight, brave young girl, of the young husband covering a dread of the fu ture with a present smile. Then she told him their names.

He started to his feet. "My little girl-there! I wanted to teach them a lesson—I forgot my—lesson. I was a coward and—my God! I have paid for it." He turned to her. "I am going to put a call straight to your

house—where is it?"

Her heart throbbed at his words. "Stephen, they will be wild with joy!" She gave him the call as she imagined the scene to be enacted in that far away room of despair.

He shouted the call into the telephone, brushing aside some remon-strance with an abrupt word. He clung to the receiver while he waited -a picture of eagerness.

Then-"Hello! Laurel"-"Father"-"Yes, father"—"I want you to come home! You and—and Norman!"— "There—there—there—little girl!"—"Yes, pack up, and come"—"I've been a pig-headed ass"-"Yes, you bet we will"-"Come right away!"

He turned from the telephone. His eyes were quiet, his face calm. She thought as she watched him that the years had been kind, indeed, to him. She rose, feeling as if into her heart had entered again the silence and the emptiness, while soon for him the last shadows would pass. "Now, I must

He sprang up and laid his hands gently yet firmly upon her shoulders. His voice was vibrant, yet tender. "You are never going—never, Della, if I can keep you. Now that chance has brought you no one lives who can

take you from me. I was too much of a coward once to take you, and you had too much pride to come to me; we simply must save but, my dear, comething out of the years—they must not all be lost years. Don't you love me even a little?"

Her head sank. "Stephen, I have always loved you and always shall; -very softly and very quietly-"youth is past-and the dreams of

Putting his arm about her, he drew her to him. "I know, oh, I know, my dear, but youth is not all." His voice was shaking. "The springtime and summer have gone-but the Indian summer-let's enjoy it together!"

She looked up with tears in her eyes. "Yes, I forgot-there is Indian summer—Stephen—Stephen!"

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