

THE METAMORPHOSIS OF CAROL

Christopher, Chris for short, looked eagerly out as the speeding train passed familiar places. It was not the fresh beauty of early summer in its multitudinous greens that chiefly held his eager attention...

"Yes," Chris said to himself, and smiled, "there is Martin's old, tumble-down barn, not a whit changed."

He thought of that summer day when he took Carol Linton to drive. He remembered the least detail. It began to rain and Martin's old barn that day proved a haven to her and a heaven to him.

From that day each had understood. And although Chris had not told her she was the very nicest girl in the world, and he wanted her to promise to wait for him...

Then he had left for England to live with his uncle, and go to classic Oxford, expecting to spend his long vacations on this side. Instead, either mother or sister came to him, or his uncle took him on the continent...

He wondered—his thoughts swift as the flying train—if Carol had changed much. She had been such a pretty, timid little thing. "Just the kind," he thought, "that needs a man to take care of her, and that a man loves to care for."

As he came nearer and nearer to her, he began to recognize that Carol's personality, after the lapse of five years, was over-velled defined to him. At first they had written frequently—not love letters, rather boy-and-girl epistles. Carol had gone to boarding-school, and he had plunged into athletics.

Then, in spite of his protest, Carol also had entered college. It was to her graduation that Chris, cutting short his post-graduate travel, was now speeding. And it was with some dismay that now in the clear recognition of familiar objects he recognized that she was largely impersonal.

"I beg your pardon?" Chris started on. "Why, Chris Van Neal, aren't you going to speak to me—Carol?"

Chris turned, and looked at the speaker in surprise. Then with glowing face, "This is awfully good of you, Carol!" and he grasped her proffered hand.

"You are the same old Chris who used to play with Carol?"

"Yes, in every way." But he felt like adding that he was not sure if in all ways for the better. He felt somehow as if he had received a blow. In far-off England he had chafed at the fact that circumstances were keeping him from caring for her. But this woman needed no man to look

after her. Self-confidence she had in plenty, and self-confidence is a sharp weapon to carry in the battle with the world; it is a necessary weapon.

The dinner talk, and the talk in the drawing-room was desultory,—incidents of college life, numerous and revealing, chat about friends, but never an indication that these two stood in relation other than the mother supposed. The good-bye at the door was friendly only.

Alone in his hotel, he felt as if in a dream. Carol Linton was a mystery. She had discussed with him, in almost the same breath, ethics and golf; she had met him with an air of comradeship; she was poised in manner.

Going to his trunk he took out a small packet of her letters, the earliest:—"My dear Chris,—

"How lonesome I feel without you, so far away. I just sat down and cried the other night. There was a fierce thunderstorm, and it made me think of you."

"I know you will be pleased that I won the prize for the best sewing at the sewing class."

Chris contemplated the two letters,—the girlish handwriting of the former with its girlish interests, and the dashing script of the latter with its college interests. Fool! why had he not been prepared for the change.

Her escort during part of the commencement festivities, with only opportunity for snatches of conversation, they came no nearer an understanding. Strong in the independent spirit that had come to her from her college training, Carol would not show toward him a warmth of feeling she was not sure he felt for her.

With mingled feelings of regret and pride, Chris saw her receive her degree. The roll of parchment seemed like a huge rock between them, which he could never roll away. Her trained power and what it represented of knowledge and resources told him plainly that he was not a necessity in her life.

As time went on, Chris could trace more and more the elements of character he had once known. His own training had made him fair minded,—granted time to adjust himself, so far from starting Carol's womanly qualities, had developed them.

He reflected that a man's college training really changes him little except to strengthen him intellectually, give him resources, makes him more manly. But in the world, you can not surely tell a college-bred man from many men who have achieved success without that training.

Meanwhile, Carol, disappointed and failing to realize the change in herself, was at a loss to understand Chris. Her environment had not changed her loyalty to him. Her hero when a child, he was still her hero. He it was who had inspired her college course. In spite of his protest, she had grown to realize that by higher training for herself she would become a better companion for him.

After the excitement of commencement, Carol fell into the home groove of an only daughter, tender and loving to her mother, companionable to her father, satisfied to fill the home niche. Young people gathered around her, and Chris saw with alarm that young men sought her company. Competition invigorates in all things. Chris came out of his dreaming.

Carol turned to him—her face open so yielding, now marked with lines of character. With sudden resolutions she spoke in a steady tone:

"A boy once said to himself, 'I hear them say I have a weak face. I will make it strong.' And he did, using for tools, high thought, lofty motives, hard study, just as a sculptor takes soft clay, and molds it according to his ideal."

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"All I could," answered dear grandma, cheerily, "I have read a little, and prayed a good deal, and then looked at the people. There's one little girl, Arthur, that I have learned to watch for. She has sunny brown hair, her brown eyes have the same sunny look in them; and I wonder every day what makes her look so bright. Ah, here she comes now."

"That girl with the brown apron?" he cried. "Why, I know that girl. That's Susie Moore, and she has a dreadful hard time, grandma."

"Yes, yes, I see," said dear old grandma, putting her arm around this little streak of sunshine. "That's the reason for things; they are, because somebody needs them. Shine on, little sun; there couldn't be a better reason for shining than because it is dark at home."

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