

Silk Stockings and Suedes

(Continued from page 22)

"Oh, dear!" she murmured, and again, "Oh, dear!" She felt that her confusion was very badly done.

The young man thought it very pretty. Also he knew who Hilda was, and he said pleasantly, "It will be all right, miss; any time you're passing will do nicely."

"I—I'm so sorry," she stammered, now pale, "I've only a shilling with me; but please take it."

"Oh, it isn't worth while. You can settle the account another time."

But she left the shilling on the counter and, taking up her purchase, hastened, with burning cheeks, from the shop. The young man's "good-afternoon" fell on deaf ears.

How glad she was that it was raining heavily, so that she had her waterproof to conceal the parcel—so that few people were abroad. Presently her nervousness gave place to a certain reckless excitement. She could have skipped along the wet pavement. How clever she had been. How happy she felt. Something was sure to happen so that she should be able to put everything all right. Oh, yes, something was sure to happen. And how she was going to enjoy the dance! Only a week now till the glorious evening!

As the days passed she lost color. William was the first to notice this. She came to him one afternoon when the others were out and begged him to take charge of a parcel for her until she asked for it. The parcel was tied with string, worsted and thread. He agreed without questionings, but remarked on her pale cheeks. She said she was all right, and ran away. He did not pursue. He was as used to "the ways o' petticoats" as he was convinced of the futility of trying to understand them. "Tis, maybe, the excitement, poor little maid," he reflected, as he locked the parcel in a drawer.

The day of the party saw her in changeable color and mood, but as the afternoon waned, sheer excitement took possession of her. She relinquished her weary secret prayers for the sum of eight shillings. A girlish equivalent of "Eat, drink and be merry" would have expressed her then.

The dance was at seven, and she went up to dress, declaring that she didn't want any tea at four. Uncle Bill never took afternoon tea, so she was able to secure her parcel from his keeping.

About six o'clock her aunt came to her room with a glass of milk. Perhaps the woman's eyes softened a little at the sight of sweet, fresh, restless beauty, but her lips kept firm.

"Your frock is quite long enough," she remarked, as she fastened it behind.

"Oh, yes, Aunt Frances."

"Your left stocking is twisted."

"Oh! I—I'll put it straight." Hot all over, Hilda adjusted the cashmere which concealed the silk.

"Have you tried your gloves on?"

"Yes—yes, thank you. They're all right. Everything's all right," the girl said hurriedly, with a curious hatred of herself.

"I do not greatly care for the way you have arranged your hair," Mrs. Brash said. "If you would learn to wear it the way Martha Small wears hers—but never mind now."

"It is a fine, clear night, so you do not need a cab going," she said. "Your Uncle William shall see you to the Bensons' door. Now drink your milk, and come downstairs when you are ready. I must see that your Uncle Robert gets his dinner properly."

Hilda, though fully prepared, delayed her descent until the last minute, cloaked and clutching the velvet bag containing her slippers and gloves (suedes). She was feeling reckless and elated again. Uncle Bill was waiting for her in the hall, and as she reached his side her aunt came out of the dining-room. There were some awkward moments until William opened the door. He and the girl were at the bottom of the steps when Mrs. Brash did a strange and perhaps rather a difficult thing.

She said slowly and distinctly, "Your Uncle Robert and I hope you will enjoy yourself to-night," and shut the door.

"That's better!" muttered Uncle Bill, with a laugh.

"Oh!" murmured Hilda, without a laugh.

Beyond the garden the road was dark. "Honey!" said William in sudden consternation, "what's the matter?"

With another sob Hilda caught his arm.

"Tell me," he said, with exceeding tenderness.

At last, somehow, she managed to tell him. "And oh, Uncle Bill, what am I to do?" she ended.

He did not answer her all at once, and before he did so he drew her hand close to his side.

"What are you to do, Honey? Why, you're to enjoy your dancin' party and your silk stockin's and your—your pretty gloves. They're as good as paid for, because, you see, I've been wonderin' what I could give you for your Christmas present, and now I'll just give you

the price of your fal-lals, and the fal-lals 'll be my present to you, and I'll explain to the folks at home. And now you're not to weep a tear, Honey, nor say a single word. But if you like to give me a kiss when I give you the pennies tomorrow—well, I'll not say no. For 'twas a shame that you shouldn't have silks and so on if your heart was set on them. But now you've got them for your very own—and that's the end of the story. Aren't we lucky to get such a fine night, too? And don't you hurry away if they keep up the fun. I'll see that the cab waits for you."

She could do nothing but squeeze his weak arm till they came to their destination, and when the door of delight had closed behind her, William strolled homewards, his hand in his pocket, fingering his total assets—fourpence!

IV.

Mr. and Mrs. Brash retired to their chamber at the usual hour, though Mrs. Brash intended to come downstairs to greet Hilda on her return. Mr. Brash, fearing that he would not be able to sleep, came down to the parlor for a book. He had not troubled to put on his slippers. As he crossed the hall a slight rattling noise struck upon his ear. It was followed by the unmistakable chink of cash. The sounds came from the parlor, the door of which was open an inch or so. Mr. Brash came to a standstill, but the next moment he heard a cough which he recognized as his brother's. He went silently to the door and peeped through the narrow opening.

William was sitting at the table with a knife in one hand and the mission-box in the other. On the cloth lay a few pieces of silver and some coppers. William, who was perspiring, inserted the blade in the slit of the box and cautiously manipulated the former. At the end of a minute a coin slipped out. It was a halfpenny. "Ah!" grunted William, "tis one o' my own."

He was luckier next time, for a half-crown flopped on the table.

"Old Small's! He put it in last Saturday night, takin' care to let us see it first. Now, how much have I got?" Adding fourpence from his pocket to the little cluster, he reckoned it up. "Seven-and-six and a ha'penny—darn it. All right little maid, your fal-lals 'll soon be paid for. Here's luck!" and in went the knife.

Out came a shilling.

"Good!" said William, and he proceeded to return sixpence halfpenny to the box.

Robert, very pale, entered.

"William, what is this? What are you doing?" he said hoarsely.

The grizzled man was taken aback, but quickly recovered himself. He looked his brother straight in the eyes.

"I was borrowin' eight shillings, to be paid back at the rate o' a shillin' a week," he said quietly. "You don't suppose I would steal, Robert?"

Mr. Brash leant against the mahogany sideboard and put his hand to his head. "You don't suppose I would steal, Robert?" William repeated. "My sins are many, as you know, but you're not to include stealin'. Don't you hear me, Robert?"

Robert wet his lips. "Why," he said with an effort, "why do you wish to borrow the money? Could you not have trusted me so far as to ask me for it?"

"Could you have trusted me so far as to lend it?" William spoke softly.

After a pause. "For what do you want the money?" said Robert in a voice that was new to his brother, for it held no superiority, no hardness nor bitterness, no contempt; only a half-stifled agony of appeal, the utterance of a man who feels a poignancy he cannot name or even understand. William was not to know how his brother's mind had been troubled since that night, a fortnight ago, when his sovereign had gone into the box; but instinctively he felt that a crisis had come.

"I'll tell you all about it," he said abruptly. "Yes—if you'll sit down, Robert, and promise not to think ill of the little maid—I'll tell you."

"What has Hilda to do with it?" Robert asked, though somehow he had thought of Hilda the instant he looked upon the little scene at the table.

"Hilda has more to do wi' things than we thought. She still belongs to you—to us—but 'tis easy to lose her. Robert, I can't tell you if you don't sit down."

Robert hesitated, then took the nearest chair. "Go on," he whispered.

He did not interrupt while William told the brief story, and when it was ended he made no comment. After a long silence he said: "It's time you were going to fetch her home," and got up to leave the room.

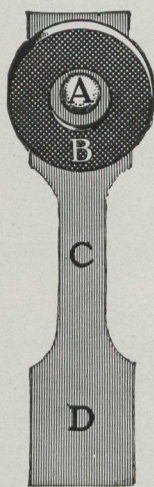
"You'll not be hard on her, Robert?" said William. "She's had a bad week—a cruel bad week. Can't you believe that?" He was about to plead further, but he caught a glimpse of the other's face, and lo! it was enough. He nodded to the departing Robert, and returned the money to the box. Thereafter, with a new warmth in his heart, he set out to meet Hilda.

It was Uncle Bill who was silent on the drive home, for the girl was athrill

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with the delights of the evening, and conscience was still stupefied and inert. But at last he got saying that which was on his soul to say.

"Honey," he whispered, "do you trust me? You do? Sure? Then slip off your outside stockin's and put on your best gloves. Quick. Your Uncle Robert knows all about it. Don't be frightened: he's not angry wi' you. Somehow I think he's sort o' angry wi' himself—but everything's all right at home—only I think 'twould hurt him sore if you tried to deceive him to his very face. Honey, to please your old Uncle Bill, do what I ask you. I know 'tis cruel to startle you so, but you'll be a happy girl in five minutes. I believe we're all goin' to be happy. There now, don't worry yourself; just do it, Honey."

Hilda had great faith in Uncle Bill, but dismay overwhelmed her. Nevertheless she acceded to his request without waiting for answers to her questions. She had only one glove on when the cab stopped.

Mr. Brash opened the door and awaited them in the hall.

"I hope you have had a pleasant time, Hilda," he said, as if repeating a lesson. Then, as she halted, trembling and fearful, before him, he added: "We must try to—to understand each other better, Hilda. Now, go to your aunt, my dear." Bending stiffly, timidly, he touched his lips on her forehead.

Hilda, her young heart overflowing, ran upstairs.

"Yes," said Mr. Brash, as though speaking to himself, "we must try to understand each other better." And he laid his hand on his brother's arm—just as he might have done thirty years before.

THE END.

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The Sheriff of Kona

(Continued from page 26)

we took out Landhouse's sloop for a cruise. She was only a five-ton yacht, but we slammed her fifty miles to windward into the northeast trade. Seasick? I never suffered so in my life. Out of sight of land we picked up the *Halcyon*, and Burnley and I went aboard.

"We ran down to Molokai, arriving about eleven at night. The schooner hove to and we landed through the surf in a whale-boat at Kalawao—the place, you know, where Father Damien died. That square-head was game. With a couple of revolvers strapped on him he came right along. The three of us crossed the peninsula to Kalaupapa, something like two miles. Just imagine hunting in the dead of night for a man in a settlement of over a thousand lepers.

"The square-head solved it. He led the way into the first detached house. We shut the door after us and struck a light. There were six lepers. We routed them up, and I talked in native. What I wanted was a kokua. A kokua is, literally, a helper, a native who is clean, that lives in the settlement and is paid by the Board of Health to nurse the lepers, alleviate their sufferings, and such things. We stayed in the house to keep track of the inmates, while the square-head led one of

them off to find a kokua. He got him. And he brought him along at the point of his revolver. But the kokua was all right. While the square-head guarded the house, Burnley and I were guided by the kokua to Lyte's house. He was all alone.

"I thought you fellows would come," Lyte said. "Don't touch me, John. How's Ned, and Charley, and all the crowd? Never mind, tell me afterwards. I am ready to go now. I've had nine months of it. Where's the boat?"

"We started back for the other house to pick up the square-head. But the alarm had got out. Lights were showing in the houses, and doors were slamming. We had agreed that there was to be no shooting unless absolutely necessary, and when we were halted we went at it with our fists and the butts of our revolvers. I found myself tangled up with a big man. I couldn't keep him off, though twice I smashed him fairly in the face with my fist. He grappled with me, and we went down, rolling and scrambling and struggling for grips. He was getting away with me, when some one came running up with a lantern. Then I saw his face. I was frantic. In a clinch he hugged me close to him. Then I guess I went insane. It was too terrible. I began striking him with my revolver. How it happened I don't know, but just as I was getting clear he fastened upon me with his teeth. The whole side of my hand was in that mouth. Then I struck him with the revolver butt squarely between the eyes, and his teeth relaxed."

Cudworth held his hand to me in the moonlight, and I could see the scars. It looked as if it had been mangled by a dog.

"Weren't you afraid?" I asked.

"I was. Seven years I waited. You know, it takes that long for the disease to incubate. Here in Kona I waited, and it did not come. But there was never a day of those seven years, and never a night, that I did not look out on—on all this . . ." His voice broke as he swept his eyes from the moon-bathed sea beneath to the snowy summits above. "I could not bear to think of losing it, of never again beholding Kona. Seven years! I stayed clean. But that is why I am single. I was engaged. I could not dare to marry while I was in doubt. She did not understand. She went away to the States and married. I have not seen her since."

"You're going to Shanghai. You look Lyte Gregory up. He is employed in a German firm there. Take him out to dinner. Give him everything of the best. But don't let him pay for anything. Send the bill to me. His wife and the kids are in Honolulu, and he needs the money for them. I know. He sends most of his salary, and lives like an anchorite. And tell him about Kona. That's where his heart is. Tell him all you can about Kona."

THE END.

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WHAT IT REALLY WAS.

Wife—"Wretch, show me that letter." Husband—"What letter?" Wife—"That one in your hand. It's from a woman. I can see by the writing, and you turned pale when you saw it." Husband—"Yes. Here it is. It's your dressmaker's bill."