

"Indeed it is not. It is very nice, and so useful. If I had a million," meditatively, "I could travel, I could have a maid and a new piano and a hundred-and-fifty dollar kodak."

"Do you really think you could do all that with a paltry million?" asked Peter in amazement.

"Yes, and get a new dress every time I wanted one," Margaret laughed, "only I expect I should call them 'gowns.'"

"I expect you would and be heartily sick of them. At least I know some ladies who consider the getting of gowns one of their trials."

"They just say so," said Margaret wisely. "Don't you believe it. How could a new gown possibly be a trial?"

"Search me," said Peter fervently. "And then there would be the travelling—to go everywhere and see things. Why," Margaret's face was full of rebellion, "I have never seen anything. I wouldn't know an old master from a chromo."

"That's nothing. Others have made the same mistake. I don't believe you would like old masters. They are educative, but tiring."

"Then you have travelled, Mr. Rutherford?"

"I have. Travelling is also educative—but tiring."

"Give me the chance," said Margaret. "I need the education and I'll risk the getting tired. I don't believe you could tire me."

Peter watched her eager face amusedly.

"Perhaps not," he admitted. "And then there are the other ambitions you mentioned, the piano and the camera and the maid, you could get lots of fun and education out of them."

Miss Manners sighed.

"Don't let's talk about it. When I begin to picture things like that I am as discontented as possible and feel as if I'd marry a rich man myself just to get them."

She paused and her eager face took on a different look. An uneasy, almost frightened expression shone in her eyes.

"I did not mean that," she said abruptly.

"Not if you like him very much?"

"But I don't like him at all." The girl's tone was quick and sharp. Then realising what she had said she blushed with annoyance and bit her lip.

Rutherford, however, had apparently noticed nothing unusual in her remark and Margaret drew a breath of relief.

"In fairy-tales," said Peter, sipping his tea tranquilly, "the Prince was always very rich and very nice and the Princess loved him dreadfully."

But to himself he said, "Who in thunder is the rich man that she doesn't like at all. I didn't know there were any rich men in Banbridge."

"I suppose," answered Margaret, "that that is why they were called fairy-tales."

Peter laughed. "Probably," he assented, "though I have met some rich fellows who weren't half bad. Are there many wealthy folk in Banbridge, Miss Manners?"

"No. Our wealthiest citizen is Thomas Malby, he lives in a big red brick house with two towers and a stone verandah. They say that the door knobs are real gold plate."

"Gracious, what wealth! But you don't believe it do you?"

Margaret's eyes twinkled.

"I have never seen them but it may be true for Mrs. Malby keeps them done up in chamois leather bags."

"Well, personally I would not believe a thing like that from hearsay. This Croesus is married, you say?"

"Yes. Have some more tea? I am just beginning to feel warm myself."

Peter obediently passed his cup. Why, he wondered, had she seen fit to change the subject? Had she seen the drift of his questioning and

stopped him purposely. Looking at her frank eyes smiling over the tea cups, he decided that she had not. Still, he had no right to question her, her private affairs were none of his business and he felt vexed with himself for a curiosity which he knew was indefensible.

"I suppose," he ventured carelessly, "that this rich man is properly supplied with sons?"

He had blundered now! She saw the direction of his enquiry at once and flashed him a quick glance, half resentful, half amused.

"No," she said demurely. "It is sad, isn't it?"

Then, seeing his discomfited face, she laughed.

"I am sorry I cannot further supply your appetite for information," she said, "but I think I hear Tom on the verandah."

"It will take him at least five minutes to stamp the snow off," said Peter with an audacity for which he was somewhat noted. "In that time—"

Margaret sprang up.

"That reminds me. It would be cruel to let him take all that trouble for nothing. If you will excuse me I will tell him that he is expected to escort you home."

Rutherford was beaten, but at least he had sufficient sense to know it so he rose briskly.

"Just give me time to fix that handkerchief artistically and I am ready."

"Wouldn't you rather wear a cap?"

"No thanks—oh yes, I would. Borrowed things have to be returned."

"Tom might bring it back in his pocket."

"Oh, no, it would crush it. I couldn't think of allowing it to be crushed."

Margaret laughed.

"You may have the last word if you like," she said graciously. "Good-night."

"Good-night," said Peter, "and thank you—thank you for understanding me—it was a thought beautiful."

"Oh," cried the girl, "you've read 'Tole!' Isn't it just too dinky—I —"

But just then the wind slammed the door, leaving her standing alone in the hall.

The girl glanced around and gave a little laugh, "I had the last word, after all," she murmured, "I wonder —"

A letter was lying on the carpet by the hall-rack and Margaret stooped to pick it up. "It must have fallen from Mr. Rutherford's overcoat," she thought, and placed it on the table carefully. As she did so the address in plain, clear writing stared her in the face and she read:

Miss Mabel Sayles,
2012 Clybourn Ave.,
Montreal,
Que.

Amazement, perplexity, anger wrote themselves upon her expressive face followed quickly by amused and somewhat horrified understanding.

"I've done it now," she said aloud, "Mabel will never forgive me—if she ever knows. How could I guess? He said he wasn't that Mr. Rutherford, how mean of him—and he didn't look rich I'm sure—oh dear!"

She sank upon the nearest chair and tried as far as possible to review the banter of the evening.

"I told him she had 'made up her mind,'" she murmured, "and he said he 'didn't know she was engaged'—how awful!"

For a moment tears of genuine regret and vexation stood in her eyes, then she dashed them away.

"It's her own fault," she said decisively. "She shouldn't have boasted if it wasn't so!"

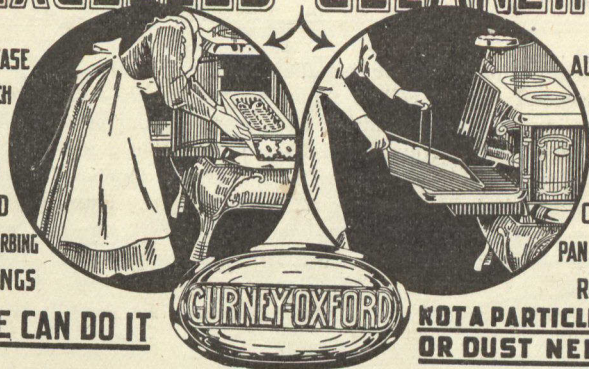
And shrugging her shoulders Miss Manners went upstairs to bed.

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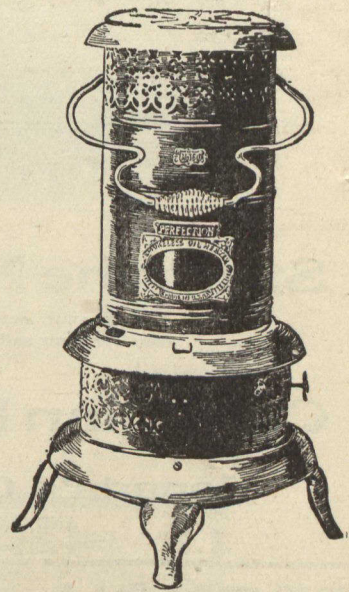
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