

## HE AND SHE.

He lived at No. 12 Woodman street, Chelsea. She lived at No. 13. For ten years they had been opposite neighbors, each occupying the drawing-room apartments. She had taken up her abode there six weeks after he was installed, and in a dull uninteresting way he had watched the unloading of the cab, the taking in of the baggage, the bustling to and fro of the small slim woman whose face he got a very imperfect glance at. She looked about twenty, not that he cared she was twenty or seventy. His heart just then was heavy and sore; he had lost the one relation he had left, the only being in the world he cared for—his old mother—and in place of home and her he was a simply now the drawing-room lodger.

For some time after her arrival, she rather annoyed him by standing at her window, looking straight in front of her, which meant looking into his room, and he got into the habit of calling her Miss Pry, and it quite amused him to devise plans for baffling her curiosity. When, as he supposed she found it impossible to see him, he turned away, he would seek a position where he could get sight of her, and it was thus he discovered that she was sitting at her window, looking straight in front of her, which meant looking into his room, and he got into the habit of calling her Miss Pry, and it quite amused him to devise plans for baffling her curiosity.

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He left his lodgings to go to the city, where the insurance office was in which he was a clerk, every morning at twenty minutes to walk to the office, and he took an omnibus for the rest of the way, and she after some months noting this fact, began to say to her cat, "It's time you had a walk to the office, and I got ready. There goes Mr. Punctual over the way."

She never saw his return, because the hours at her situation were longer than his. She was typist to a wholesale firm in Bedford street, and it was generally five, often six o'clock, before she had finished her pile of letters. But she was in no hurry to get back—she did not say "to get home," for the sound of that word still choked her—and when he had noticed her looking through the window-panes, playing as he thought, the spy on him, her blurred eyes saw nothing but a picture, from memory, of a cosy room in a country rectory, with father and mother, and Tom and Anne, all now dead and gone, and she left alone to struggle as best she could to get her own living.

And so years went on, with all the joys and sorrows and changes they bring; but chance, opportunity, and fortune, whether good or bad, seemed to have forgotten and passed over the two occupants of 12 and 13 Woodman street; the dull routine of their daily lives went on exactly the same. Stay, though; there was one small difference. Although they had never exchanged a word, or given a look without the window of the road between them, they took a kindlier interest, and in a way occupied themselves with one another in a far more friendly manner than they either had the slightest suspicion of.

They still kept for each other the names of Mr. Punctual and Miss Pry, and gradually he kept count of the hour at which she returned by watching for her gas to be lighted. "There take advantage of her being a woman and keep her too late," he would say; and this leading him to wonder what her occupation could be, he one day ventured to put the question to the landlady, Miss Bates, when she brought up his tea.

Now, standing Miss Bates' firmly grounded prejudice against female lodgers, who don't have their proper dinners out, and so wanted all sorts of fiddle-faddies cooked with their tea, she showed her sense of justice by opining that the young person was respectably conducted, inasmuch as she never saw nothing blame-worthy in her; but so far as she could make out, her occupation wasn't millinery, or music lessons, or anything of that sort—gentle, and, in fact, the same as the Jenkins's, for anybody particular would be very out of place in that house.

She, too, had made her effort at discovery, and had said casually to the domestic drudge, "do you know the name of the gentleman in the drawing-room opposite, Lizzie?"

"What! he as lives with the old cat, Bates? No, no, I don't want to bother. He ain't no gentleman—he never gives the postman a brass farthing at Christmas." The postman was reckoned by Lizzie among her followers, one whom any stroke of fortune might turn into "my young man who has offered to treat me to the pantomime."

"Perhaps he cannot afford to give." Lizzie gave a contemptuous toss of her head. "Can she afford it?" she said. "Why, you give him expence and have to work hard and stint, and he has in wine and spirits and beer; I watched 'em deliver' it there. I see him come home this afternoon with a bird; that shows him for a regular old bachelor."

A bird! She made no more enquiries from Lizzie, but several times she found herself wondering whether it was a linnets or a canary. Annie had been so fond of birds and so clever with them, she hoped he could manage it properly.

As soon as the weather grew warm she saw that the bird was a canary. He meant her to notice it, for he displayed it rather ostentatiously in front of the open window, looking out of the corner of his eye to see if she was taking notice, and saying to himself the while, "Come, come, Miss Pry, I have a pet now as well as you."

Perhaps six or seven years went by, in exactly the same fashion, when a most exciting event took place. A school chum and friend of former days, happening to hear something about the old rectory and remembering how much kindness she had been shown there, sent an invitation to the poor London worker to come down to Weatherdale and spend Christmas there, and it was by reason of that that he, startled by the unusual sound of a cab being whistled for, got up from his breakfast to see if it was driven up to No. 13. Why, no—yes, actually it was for Miss Pry; the servant girl was hoisting up her box to

the cabman, and there at the door she was standing with a basket—evidently the cat in it—on her arm.

Where could she be going? He forgot that she could see him, and when she looked up he could almost fancy she smiled, her face wore such a beaming expression. At that moment there was a great flurry and bustle to get in, the cabman bent down to get his directions, and away he drove, with such a show of haste that the watcher from the window, returning to his breakfast, found himself saying, "Put everything off to the very last minute; that's just like a woman."

As he waited for his omnibus at Charing Cross he looked at the station and wondered was it there that Miss Pry had been going, and then he forgot all about her until at the usual hour, drawing aside the blind to look out, he saw the dark window, and he felt as if a friend had gone from him.

The following Sunday was a very dull day. Usually he looked out at the hour when he knew she was going to church, saying, "You're very foolish to go without an umbrella; it's almost certain to rain before you get home," and when his foreboding proved false, he said, "She'll get wet and spoil all her best things."

Perhaps it was that going away at Christmas that made him think of a holiday; at all events, he took the summer holiday, he took, and then it was his turn to say to her cat, "Oh, Totty, I hope Mr. Punctual will soon come back, for without him I never knew the time." And missing the canary, she hoped the landlady was looking after it, and then she wondered where he had gone—perhaps to the country, perhaps to the seaside; and memory taking her back to loved spots of days long ago, she forced back some tears as she said: "Ah, Totty, life is very hard, my cat."

And thus ten years stole by, each reflecting the other so exactly that, on the summer holiday, there were no landmarks to point the course of time to Nos. 12 and 13, and then the fate, fortune, or whatever name we give to the good Providence who disposes those trivial circumstances that lead to great events in our lives, arranged that on a certain afternoon in May, there were so few letters to write that the typist could leave her Bedford street office at a much earlier hour, and, full of anticipation, that she would be able to put the finishing touches to a gown she was renovating, she tripped into the Strand, and, in a country rectory, with father and mother, and Tom and Anne, all now dead and gone, and she left alone to struggle as best she could to get her own living.

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"I can quite believe it; I felt very odd when you were absent."

"You gone," she said, "and I had nothing to go by, because you are my timepiece in the morning. Mr. Punctual I call you to Totty; we established that and almost directly after we settled there."

And he called her Miss Pry! Ah, well, he would give her that name no longer. I felt my ask what was her name? He thought he. Suddenly the horses stopped.

"Why, here we are!" he said, looking at her amazed.

It was the corner leading to the street in which they lived.

"The way has seemed very short," she said, preparing to get down. "Usually I think our omnibuses go so slowly."

"Do they? I always walk from Charing Cross. I was just going to get down today when you got up and sat down next me."

"I shall be very glad," she said cordially; "it seems so much nicer to have exchanged a few words with one another."

"I think I must be careful now, and not let him fancy I want to court notice."

And so it happened that a week passed without either getting a legitimate glimpse of the other. They both began to grow quite moped, and a little disposed to feel the least bit disappointed.

He did not expect to see her, but he had the smallest intention of taking advantage of a little exchange of conversation together," he said humbly, while she recalled every word she had spoken to him, and he was sure that she had not allowed her tongue to run away with her.

On the very evening of the day week on which they had met, drawing aside the blind to look at the opposite window—why, there was no light there. How very odd! She must be out, and out she seemed to remain all the evening.

A very unusual thing for her. But still more unusual was the next morning her blind was not drawn up. She must be away! He really felt injured. His feelings were as ruffled as the feathers of his bird. Not that it mattered to him in any way.

Only when a person made a fuss and pretended to be so glad that they had spoken to one another, you hardly expected that they'd take care never to speak to you again.

No sooner was he at home than he buzzed in his head like a bee, and thinking he might get a Miss Bates whether she had noticed any departure, he said, "Lovely weather for the time of year."

Miss Bates was in a lugubrious frame of mind, and she spoke of it in a tone of gloom. "I hear," she said, "the children's dying like sheep with measles, and in some parts whole houses are down with influenza. I don't know what we shall be spared, but I doubt it, for there's one of 'em ill opposite—I saw the doctor today going in there."

The sudden change in his face assured her that he was thoroughly drenched his vivacity, and following the axiom that having made an impression you should go, Miss Bates left the room. He brushed his coat and looked at his watch, and he shall be spared, but I doubt it, for there's one of 'em ill opposite—I saw the doctor today going in there."

Men such as he are seldom spontaneously sentimental or sympathetic, and he had not the least intention of being so. Years of loneliness cramped and narrow his emotions and turned them towards self, and it was the knowledge of this that made him surprised at the quiet interest he took in this woman whom, although he had for years seen, he had never but once spoken to. He took up a book, but he couldn't read. He walked about the room, and he shall be spared, but I doubt it, for there's one of 'em ill opposite—I saw the doctor today going in there."

"I am so glad," he said, taking her hand and giving it a hearty shake. "I thought you were ill."

"And you came over to see? Oh, how good and kind. That anybody should care cheers me more than I can say."

"There was no light in your window last night, and this morning the blind was down, and while I was wondering what had become of you, my landlady told me she had seen the doctor here."

her, and this morning I got the milk boy to go for the doctor, and take a telegram to tell me I could not go to Bedford street. It was impossible to leave her alone; but now her sister has come, and Mrs. Jenkins will soon be here, so I am free again. Won't you come up to my room?"

She did not wait for a reply, but led the way, saying, as she ushered him in: "What a pity it is not light; then you could see my view of your window."

"Oh, but what a cosy room!" He had halted just inside the door and was looking round.

"Does it look so? I tried as much as I could to make it like my old home. A few friends brought in some of the furniture for me, and when I was really settled it was sent up. Lodging house rooms are dreary."

His answer was a self-satisfied sigh. In that moment he had compared the black horsehair-covered chairs and sofa of Miss Bates' drawing-room—the right back of each one protected by a wool antimacassar—with the homely snugness which reigned here.

"As you see," she said, pointing to the table, "I was just making myself a cup of tea. Now won't you sit down and join me? That would be showing yourself neighborly."

"I think I have had my tea."

"Well, I know my landlady brought it to me when she was here, and I at once jumped at the conclusion that you were ill, because for a week past I have never caught sight of you at the window."

"And I have never seen you."

"No; we don't see unless we look."

"But I have looked."

"Not for long. You usually stand, or I must have seen you. I began to feel a little huffy. I thought, 'She never fancies I mean to presume on her little chat we had together.'"

"I was only afraid I might have let my tongue run too quickly."

"Come, come," said he, smiling. "It has taken us ten years to break this ice. It must not take us ten more before we thaw."

While he spoke his eyes were following her—watching her measure out the tea, pour the water from the kettle. He did not expect to see her, but he had the smallest intention of taking advantage of a little exchange of conversation together," he said humbly, while she recalled every word she had spoken to him, and he was sure that she had not allowed her tongue to run away with her.

"You are looking very tired," he said, as she sat down waiting for the tea to draw and push back her hair. "That is partly because I was up all night, and then during the day I have felt rather anxious about being away from the office."

"I know they will; but I don't want them to find that out. There are so many women wanting employment, and some know French and German, which I don't, and others have a home with their parents and could take a smaller salary. Oh, it does not do to stop away! When I found that poor thing lying helpless on the mat, I thought—supposing this was my case, what would become of me? It isn't death I fear—sooner or later that comes to us all—but old age, sickness, and some know French and German, which I don't, and others have a home with their parents and could take a smaller salary. Oh, it does not do to stop away! When I found that poor thing lying helpless on the mat, I thought—supposing this was my case, what would become of me? It isn't death I fear—sooner or later that comes to us all—but old age, sickness, and some know French and German, which I don't, and others have a home with their parents and could take a smaller salary. Oh, it does not do to stop away! 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