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It starts without cranking

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both—"What should they do next? How could they part, and yet how stay together?" Horace, with man's barbarian directness, would have liked to bear her home to safety and his mother; but the shadow of usage and her mother stood between, for in spite of the hollow mockery of it all, Sylvia was still of her household.

"I must take you home," he said at last, "and to-morrow I will come—all shall be arranged."

"To-night," she whispered, clasping his arm in nervous terror. "Come back with me and tell her to-night; then I shall feel sure, and not as if it was not real. And when you have told her,—before whoever may be there, remember,—go home; do not stop to listen to anything she may say."

They drove slowly back, and went up the steps to the house, from which voices and laughter came, hand in hand, like two children; but they were children no longer when they crossed the threshold and saw Monty Bell in the group that loitered with Mrs. Latham in the reception hall, waiting for dinner to be announced.

Sylvia's thin gown was wet with dew, her hair was tossed about, her eyes oiled with excitement, and a red spot burned in each cheek in startling contrast to her pallor—all of which gave her a wild and unusual beauty that absolutely startled as well as shocked her mother, letting her think for a second that Sylvia was going to make a scene, had gone mad, perhaps, and run away, and that the tall man holding her by the hand had found her and brought her home.

Taking a few hasty steps forward, and dreading anything disagreeably tragic, she said: "Mr. Bradford, I believe. What is it? What has happened?"

"Only this, that Miss Sylvia has promised to be my wife, and that, as her mother, we have come to tell you of it before I go home to tell my own." Horace Bradford drew himself up to every inch of his full height as he spoke, bowed to Mrs. Latham, then led Sylvia to the foot of the stairs, saying, "Until to-morrow," and walked quietly out of the house.

No one spoke. Then Mrs. Latham, choking with rage, feeling herself helplessly at bay (Sylvia was of age, and she could not even assume authority under the circumstances), collapsed on a divan in modified hysterics, and Monty Bell, completely thunderstruck, finally broke the silence by his characteristic exclamation, "I'll be damned!"

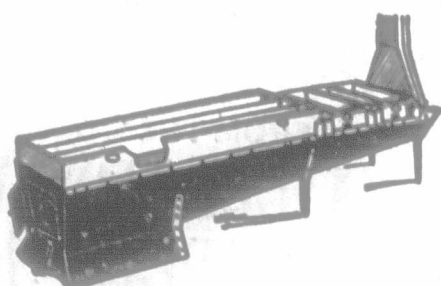
After their belated supper, when Esther Nichols had gone over to a neighbor's, Horace, sitting by his mother's side, out in the honeysuckle porch, where the sphinx moths whirled like humming-birds of night, holding her hands in his, told her all. And she, stifling the mother pain that, like a birth pang, expected yet dreaded, must come at first when the other woman, no matter how welcome, steps between, folded his hands close, as if she held him again a baby in her arms, and said, smiling through vague tears, "To-morrow we will go together to her, my blessed son."

"I cannot ask you to do that; there are reasons—I will bring Sylvia to you later, when her mother has gone," he answered hastily, resolving that he would do anything to shield her self-respect from the possible shock of meeting that other mother.

"Horace, you forget yourself, and your father too," she said almost sternly. "I am country bred, but still I know the world's ways. Your father's wife will go first to greet her who will be yours; you need not fear for me," and he sat silent.

That next afternoon, when Horace's first and last love met, they looked into each other's hearts and saw the same image therein, while Mrs. Latham lay on the lounge in her room, raging within, that again her tongue had failed her in her own house, and realizing that woman of the world as she aimed to be, the "egg woman" had rendered her helpless by mere force of homely courtesy. Presently she rose, and packing and sending the bewildered maid, sent a message to New York to transfer her passage, if possible, to an earlier steamer.

(To be continued.)



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