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Tangled Threads: A Summer Resort Story.

By AGNES LOUISE PROVOST.

Helen paused for a final consultation with her mirror before going down stairs. She touched her flowers with dainty finger tips to make them fall into softer lines, and gave her hair a scientific pat or two, smiling as she liberated a certain tendlir just over one ear. It was foolish, of course, but Dick was ridiculously fond of that curl.

The little humorous smile at her own foibles still lingered as she went down. There was to be a dance at the Highland Inn that night and two gaily lanterned launches were moored to the wharf at the foot of the Wintons' lawn, ready to take their guests up the river to the Inn. Mrs. Winton, most amiable of chaperons, was waiting for them to assemble, and her daughter Cecily was just fluttering in from the veranda, a girl about nineteen, with a delicate little face, starlike in its eager brightness, and a slim figure, which reminded Helen irresistibly of a swaying flower. She was very fond of Cecily, and so was Dick.

Out on the veranda a chattering group of Cecily's friends waited impatiently for the moment of departure. They swarmed around Helen as she appeared. They frankly adored her, calling her "the handsome Miss Meredith," and taking certain proprietary satisfaction in every move that she made.

"Now we're all here but Walworth," announced Perry Knowlton, a big, refreshing boy just out of his Sophomore year. "He must be prinking a lot. A-a-a-h! There he is! Hurry, snail!"

Helen smiled as she watched Dick coming down stairs with all the unspent energy of any of these boys. Some years ago Miss Helen Meredith had thought it would be folly to marry a man less than ten years her senior, and a calamity to remain unmarried after twenty-five, but Dick was only thirty-four, and a boy at that, while she admitted thirty with a good grace, looked twenty-six, and felt—just at this moment—a scant sixteen.

Dick paused in the doorway and surveyed them with a friendly smile. "Everybody else here?"

"Hours ago," said Knowlton, sweepingly. "Waiting for you. Come on."

Walworth, taking possession of Helen's wraps, smiled understandingly down at her at the boy's impatience, and held out an obliging arm for Cecily's as she came past.

"Make use of me," he suggested, holding the pretty fluffy things well out of harm's way as they started toward the wharf. "There's no hurry. Knowlton is saving our places in his launch."

It was the accepted custom for the cottagers along the river to come in gay launch parties to the dances at the Inn and the Winton house, brimming with guests and overflowing with hospitality, always furnished its share. Tonight, as they came up the long terraced steps from the wharf to the hotel, the orchestra was playing a Strauss waltz, and its pulsating rhythm beat down to them in delicious waves of sound. When they reached the hotel, Helen excused herself and left them to see an elderly friend who was sick there.

"Don't be long!" they called after her warningly, and "don't be long!" Dick echoed, but nevertheless nearly half an hour elapsed before she came down. The music from below had sounded enticing, but it had not been easy to leave the sick woman, just ill enough to be restless and despondent.

"Poor Dick!" she thought contritely. "I wonder where—Oh, that is his voice!"

Without any formulated intention of listening, Helen paused to locate it. Oh yes, he must be in that pretty nook of a room beyond, where they sat out the Lancers the last time they had been here.

"Let me tell Miss Meredith!" Dick was begging earnestly. "Why not make a clean breast of it right away? She's generous enough to understand—and to forgive."

Helen's eyes widened in astonishment. Her impulse was to announce

her presence immediately by passing the door, but the answering voice made her shrink back. It belonged to Cecily Winton, and there was fluttering alarm in it, and a hint of tears.

"Oh no, I can't bear it! What will she think of us? She is so strong and—and lovely and,—you know how it will hurt her!"

"Yes," Dick hesitated. "I fear it will, but this can't go on forever."

Helen turned back by the way she had come, fleeing softly down the hall. Her cheeks were ablaze, her mind a chaos of amazement and misgiving. What was it that he must not tell her, because it would hurt? Dick—why was Dick saying these things to Cecily Winton?

A dance was in progress, nearly everyone was in or near the ball-room, and she slipped to a shadowy corner of the veranda to think it out, to steady the hot whirl in her head. What did it mean? What could it mean except—

Ten minutes later Perry Knowlton found her there, still blindly trying to



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straighten out the tangle, still fighting against a conviction which would not be pushed back into the darkness from which it had sprung.

"All alone?" he asked, much concerned at this unwonted symptom. "You are not ill, are you?"

Helen grasped eagerly at the excuse. "I did feel rather badly when I came down. It was very stupid for me to misbehave so."

"Oh no, not a bit!" The boy was all sympathy and consternation. "I'm tremendously sorry. Can't I do something? Won't you let me take you home now? I can easily get back in time for the others."

There were tonic properties in his energy and eagerness to serve. Helen gathered her forces together with firm hand and arose.

"Not for worlds!" she expostulated. "I feel much better. In fact, what I most need at present is a delightful waltz."

"Then it is mine!" he said, jubilantly. "You know you promised me one. We've missed you a lot, and the other fellows are in a fume about it. They expect three dances a piece."

Gliding rhythmically down the ball-room with this cheerful boy she caught sight of Walworth, standing alone in a doorway. A moment later she had a glimpse of Cecily, waltzing with one of her guests. The girl's face seemed to have lost some of its