

Kate was playing a soft, dreamy air, and as I sat, watching Phyllidia's half-averted face, a bitter feeling took possession of me. Why should I do this thing? I asked myself. Why should I trample thus on my own heart? What right had the Cherub? My hand closed suddenly over hers, I felt her start, and for one delicious moment I looked into her eyes, and read there,—what? Then her lashes drooped, her fingers slipped from mine, and the knowledge of my presumptuous folly overwhelmed me.

"I once saw a fire," I began, desperately, "such a fire as few have ever witnessed. Standing in the pale-faced crowd, I watched the vain endeavors of the firemen. Suddenly, high up at one of the windows, I saw something that turned me faint and sick. It was a child. I closed my eyes. When I looked again, a fire escape had been run up and a fireman was trying to fight his way to that blazing window—but without success. A great mumbling sigh went up to the blood red heavens, for that little helpless child. Suddenly, a tall figure, conspicuous in the fire-glow, began to ascend, climbing with strong, firm steps. A great silence fell upon all, broken only by the roar of the flames. Nearer he got and nearer, once his sleeve puffed out in flame, but still he climbed, while—er—strong men held their breath. Then came a wild roar of exultation; he had reached the window, snatched the trembling

having packed up, slipped from my room, and opening a side door, stepped out into the cool freshness of the morning.

At the edge of the grove I came upon a fallen tree and sitting down I lighted my pipe, and listened to the merry carols of the birds about me.

And as the smoke rose in the still air I seemed to see the face of Phyllidia peeping at me through the blue wreaths full of mischief and laughter as I had seen at first.

A bush rustled beside, and glancing up I beheld, no dream-face this time, but Phyllidia herself standing before me fresh as the morning; she carried her hat in her hand, and her lustrous hair was braided low on her temples.

"Phyllidia," I said, using the name unconsciously.

She greeted me with a studied ease. "You are down very early," I said, wondering why she did not always dress her hair so.

"Oh, I'm fond of the early morning; but you—what brings you down at such an unusual hour?"

"Well, you see," I answered, "I'm going back to town by the early train."

She evinced no emotion at my sudden departure.

"Then I'm glad I happened to find you," she said lightly, "because I want to ask you why you told me all that about Mr. Dymott last night, about the fire and the little child. You must



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child, and as I watched a thousand arms were stretched to welcome him, unharmed, save for his hands, and—I ended, turning to my companion who had listened with bent head, "the marks are there to this day?—it was the Cherub." When I told her all this— heaven knows, no one could have been more surprised than myself at my imaginative powers; perhaps the music inspired it, perhaps the sense of the wrong I had so nearly committed.

The music stopped, and seeing the Cherub approaching, I rose and slipping out upon the lawn, leaned there, staring up at the moon with a sense of duty nobly done. Yet it had been a near thing, the touch of her fingers thrilled me even then.

Despite my philosophy, my heart was strangely heavy as I shut myself into my room that night.

Anyhow, I had kept my word, I told myself, but at what a cost. Looking at the matter in a colder light, I began to wish I had not made him quite so heroic,—true it was cheap melodrama,—but then women like that sort of thing, I told myself, with a cynical laugh. Of course, the Cherub was not worthy of her, but I shrugged my shoulders, she might think so, and after all how could it affect me?

So I went to bed, but not to sleep, and dawn found me tossing restlessly. I heard the first sleepy notes of a bird beneath my window, and presently up came the sun, and with it the determination came to me that I would not stop to see their happiness. I rose, and

have known it was totally untrue."

"Untrue?" I repeated, trying to look hurt, "you surely don't think—"

"His hands are quite unmarked, except for one small scar, and that he told me he did years ago with a gingerale bottle, and he told me, besides, that he had never seen a big fire in his life."

I could joyfully have kicked the Cherub at that moment.

"Let me explain," I began, "but first please sit down."

"Well?" she said, seeing that I yet hesitated.

"Well, you see, I came down to help the Cherub with the—ah—with the— the affair," I stammered.

"The affair!" she repeated, with raised brows. "What affair?"

"Oh, the affair, to—er—to propose, you know."

"To propose?" she echoed.

"Yes; you see, fact is, he's got no idea how to manage these things, and so—er—so he got me to—to promise to lend him a hand, you know."

"And, of course, you succeeded?" she asked, after a pause.

"I'm afraid so," I said bitterly—that's why I'm going. I can't stop to see your happiness."

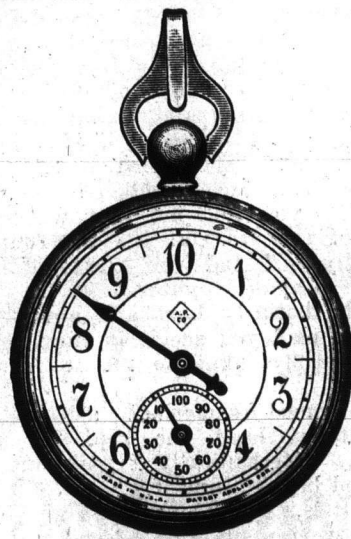
She glanced swiftly up. "My happiness?" she exclaimed.

"Yours, and his," I added. "I couldn't bear it—just at present—so I'm going."

For a moment she looked at me as if scarcely comprehending, then turned suddenly away, and I saw her shoulders

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