

LOST FOR A WOMAN.

PART FIRST.

'In mine eyes she is the sweetest lady that I ever looked on.'—*Much Ado About Nothing*.

CHAPTER I.

WHICH PRESENTS JEMIMA ANN.

It is a dreary prospect. All day long it has rained; as the short afternoon wears apace, it pours. Mrs. Hopkins' niece, laying down the novel over which for the past hour she has been absorbed, regards the weather through the grated kitchen window with a gentle melancholy upon her, begotten of its gloom, and returns despondently to her novel. A soft step stealing down the back stairs, a soft, deprecating voice, breaks in upon the narrative and her solitude.

'If you please, Miss Jim?'

'On!' says Jemima Ann, 'is that you? Come in, Mr. Doolittle. Dreadful nasty evening, now, ain't it?'

'Well it ain't nice,' says Mr. Doolittle, apologetically: 'and I guess I won't muss your clean floor by coming in. What I've looked in for Miss Jim, is a pair o' rubbers. Mrs. Hopkins she don't like gum shoes left clutterin' about the bedrooms, so she says, and totes 'em all down here. Number nines, Miss Jemima, and with a hole in one of the heels. Thanky; them's them.'

Jemima Ann produces the rubbers, and Mr. Doolittle meekly departs. He is a soft-spoken little man with weak eyes, a bald spot, and a hen-pecked and depressed manner. Jemima Ann wishes all the boarders were like him—thankful for small mercies, and never finding fault with the victuals, or swearing at her down the back stairs. The boarders do swear at Jemima Ann sometimes, curses both loud and deep, and hurl boots, and brushes, and maledictions down the area, when absorbed in the æsthetic woes of her heroine she forgets the

gross material needs of these sinful young men. But long habit, seven years of boarding-house drudgery, has inured her to all this; and imprecations and bootjacks alike rain unheeded on her frowzy head. A sensible head, too, in the main, and with an ugly, good-humoured face looking out of it, and at boarding-house life in general, through two round, bright black eyes.

It is a rainy evening in early October, the dismal twilight of a 'wet and dismal day. Mrs. Hopkins' basement kitchen is lit by four greenish panes of muc-bespattered glass, six inches higher than the pavement. Through these six inches of green crystal Jemima Ann sees all she ever sees of the outdoor world on its winding way. Hundreds of ankles, male and female, thick and thin, clean and dirty, according to the state of the atmosphere, pass those four squares of dull light every day, and all day long, far into the night, too; for Mrs. Hopkins' boarding-house is in a populous street, handy for the workingmen—artisans in iron, mostly, who frequent it. A great foundry is near, where stoves and ranges, and heaters and grates are manufactured, with noise and grim, and clanking of great hammers, and clouds of blackest coal smoke, until that way madness lies; and the 'hands' emerge in scores, black as demons, and go home to wash and dine at Mrs. Hopkins' boarding-house. Limitless is the demand for water, great and mighty the cry for yellow soap, of these horny handed Vulcans, who, like lobsters, go into these steaming cauldrons very black and come out very red. For seven long years Jemima Ann has waited on these children of the forge, and been anathematized in the strongest vernacular for slowness and 'muddle-headedness,' and got dinners and teas, and washed dishes, and swept bedrooms, and made beds, and went errands, and read novels and story-papers, and watched the never-ending stream of boot-heels passing and repassing the dingy panes of glass, and waxed, from a country lass of seventeen, to a strong-armed, sallow-faced young woman of twenty-four; and all the

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