

MISTAKES

(Catherine Casar in Donohoe's.)

Madge had come in exhausted and had fallen asleep in her chair. So her husband found her. He sat watching her, with many thoughts busy in his mind. A more than usually full day found him, at its close, in a mood to resent the picture of repose before him. In the morning he had addressed the "Woman's Home Political Club" and had, metaphorically, so laurel-crowned and jewel-bedecked the essentially modern woman, as to leave her righteous indeed in her own conceit. Meanwhile, his wife had not been of his hearers.

"Roger," she had explained, "I'd disgrace you. I'd be sure to yawn when I should applaud. I could hear you talk for hours if it wasn't politics. I've read your speech, of course. It's fine, I'm sure, though I don't know a thing about it. But you understand, and I'll go instead on a charity visit to the Children's Hospital. That will do, won't it?" He had said "yes." How could he say "no?" But he had found an unexpected refuge in her laudable excuse when he was later besieged with questions as well as covered with congratulations. He was of a community where woman's power in politics is established and he had learned that day that he would have to count upon it toward his own success. And his wife would fail him! So he decided, while she dozed peacefully on, unconscious that in the first demand his opening career would make upon her, she would be found wanting. But he was conscious, not only of her real delinquency, but of more which his aggrieved imagination visited upon her.

It had not mattered in the first flush of a young unanalyzing love that she was not more pretty, dainty, irresistible and vain. It had been a boy-and-girl marriage, and he had not anticipated the time when he would wish for the nobler attributes of womanhood. He wished for them now—now that he had become an ambitious man and she was as yet a happy-hearted girl. Had he made a mistake? The question had haunted him more than once, but he had never before submitted to it. He asked it now, boldly, deliberately and pondered it. Had he made a mistake? Was she to be a stumbling block in the path to a success which he coveted? He remembered that she had once been a woman, once while the child lived. She had given herself so nobly to it and all the womanhood in her young being had responded to the little charge. But it had been taken from them, seven years ago, and when the mother had come again to think of other things, she had gone back to her vain girlhood. And there she remained, so he told himself as he followed the train of his disaffected thoughts and, almost unconsciously, noted every detail of the perfect costume, from the plumed hat to the white glove which encased the small hand, hanging imply over the arm of her chair.

She moved, opened her eyes, and smiled at him. "The Prince!" she cried gaily. "It is worth while playing the Sleeping Beauty. But when did you come, Roger? And have I ever before slept in my chair? I must be getting old." She laughed and the sound jarred upon his ears. "You must be very tired," he said, not revealing his mood. "How many times are the calls to-day?" "Not so many, but I stood more than two hours at Mrs. Blake's tea. The way she looks would appear to be a celebrity. I shall have a headache for sleeping with my hat on."

The irrelevance of the last remark to the matter which he thought, should elicit her greatest interest, added to his latent displeasure, but he said quietly: "You will have to rest to-night. Judge Morrow's dinner to-night will be tiresome, of course, but there will be people there that I should meet." "Of course. It won't be so tiresome, after all. People are usually interesting in some way. What shall I wear?" "Always so," he thought, "vain, unthinking, unsympathetic." He was angry, but he smiled as he answered, "Whatever you please. You are always well dressed and every woman was not born, as you were, just for pretty clothes." The bitterness of his feelings spoke in his last words.

"Just for pretty clothes," she echoed the words but he had left the room, and did not see the pained reproach in her eyes. The dinner was brilliant. It was a large company and before it disappeared Roger found himself talking with Miss Lucretia Lockett, who had carried the promise of girlhood into a gifted enthusiastic womanhood which she was zealously devoting to the demands made in these latter days upon a woman. She made a strong plea in favor of such a man as her hearer was, of wealth, ability and integrity, giving of their large gifts to the cause of the public welfare. Roger knew that her flattering advice was directed to him personally and he did not resent it, not being proof against the genuine admiration of a beautiful, genuine woman. It was a matter for complacency to have secured her admiration. He recalled his very tender youth, when Lucretia Lockett had seemed a being much to be revered, but not to be approached.

And he remembered that after she had gone to college, he had put more zest into his own studies. But a little later she had only a dim part in his remembrance, for his whole being had been filled with his first real love, love for his girl-wife. He wondered now, had it been otherwise, would he achieve more with such a woman to inspire, to encourage and to assist him? The very thought was unfaithful and he put it away from him—just as Miss Lockett observed, "How perfectly lovely your wife is. She will grace whatever you will attain." "Thank you, a double compliment. Had yet, she will not interest herself in anything even remotely political."

He saw the disapproval in Miss Lockett's eyes. "That might easily count against you here," she said. "Perhaps I might help to point out to her woman's part in politics."

Roger knew any such effort would be useless. He remembered when he would have been glad of that, too, but at present he was glad that Miss Lockett was called away from him. He looked for his wife, who was the centre of a laughing, admiring group. He had still the bitterness in his heart for her. Was she really any more to him than to this brilliant, idolizing company? Beauty, graciousness and smiles she had for everyone. But he well knew that as her beauty was admired, even more so was the spotless name she bore. And it was his.

"I'm a brute," he told himself. "She is more to me than to all the world beside, as much as she can be to anyone." But she was to disappoint him, farther, nevertheless. He asked her, smilingly, the next morning at breakfast, if she would like to be a mayor's wife.

"Oh, Roger," she answered with a pretty pout, "not if I'd have to be like some of the estimable women who do think you worthy," and she went over and put her hand caressingly on his arm. "I know I'm old-fashioned," she said, "but I just can't help it. I'd have to be made over again to be one of the new kind of women, and I can't preside at this political something or other that they've asked me to lead. I've declined the honor. Do you mind?"

He did, so much so that he had difficulty to control his anger. Her acceptance would have been a card for him. But he merely said: "Miss Lockett managed that, I am sure. Now, she is not old-fashioned, is she? But she advocates a woman's assisting her husband."

"So do I—assisting his heart. Miss Lockett believes in politics; she is trying to convert me, but it is all in vain. She hasn't a husband yet to assist, and then, her beauty saves her. Else she'd be called a crank." It was hopeless. How could he bring her to see when she had eyes and would not?

"You see, Roger," she said, returning to her place at the coffee urn, "you wouldn't be a thing more to me if you were mayor, or governor, or even president!"

Here she again! She could not go far enough out of herself to consider what a man's career might mean to him and his kind. So he thought, harshly, as he watched her pouring the coffee. How daintily her small fingers handled everything. She was suited to all of that, to all the prettiness of life, not to its deep demands. She chatted on and he answered, as agreeably as possible.

When he was going out he said to her: "Malcolm Marks will be here to-night. You know he is my right-hand man, and I should like you to meet him." "And impress him? All right, I'll try, since you're bound to let a public servant despise your little wife's preference. But, Roger, do keep him from getting too heavy for me. I've met him many times and he's dreadfully solid."

"He will not keep you long. We are due at a committee meeting to-night." He left her, feeling discomfited by the bright smile which followed him. Later in the day she spoke to him over the telephone. "I did want to help to entertain that bore for you, but Mrs. Green is making up a box party and I simply can't resist, if you do not forbid. I shall go, and return in her carriage. There will be a supper and I shall be late, if I go. May I?" "Yes," he answered, and she did not discern the suppressed anger in his voice. When he reached home she was gone, but she had forgotten nothing for his comfort. His easy chair was drawn up before the library fire, his paper was at hand, and everything was in readiness for his smoke. But all the signs of her thoughtfulness seemed to but make more aggravating the consciousness of the selfishness with which his mind was upbraiding her. He was full of anger towards her, but he sat looking moodily into the fire while he awaited the man who was his chosen friend, adviser, and the manager of his affairs towards a public prominence. After he came, they talked earnestly for a while, and the older man said: "You'll almost certainly win, Roger, if you avoid mistakes. Most men make them at just such telling times. You've made some, too. By the way, this woman's convention, if you could induce your wife to attend, would be a success. But that mistake is made. My wife is my mistake." The words were hardly out before he realized the enormity of them. But he did not know that his wife had returned, had paused on the very threshold of the open door, only to hear that condemnation and to see facelessly, her face whiter than the soft wrap which enveloped her. He paled, too, guilty, frightened. "Marks," he asked hoarsely, "what have I said? What have I said?" "An unfortunate thing. Something you would never have said had you paused one moment. But only I heard it and no harm is done." "No harm done! My God, can I ever look in her eyes again?" "Come now," said his friend, "it was a slip. Let it pass and brace up. You've got to meet this committee to-night and you haven't quite murdered your wife."



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stre, conscious that she should be when she had heard the words that were blown into her heart. "His mistake! Perhaps it is so," she told herself, trembling in the agony of the admission, "but when I can forget"—she smiled at the very foolishness of the words—"when I go back, I shall be no longer his mistake." That night he got her message, which told him that she was safe. Her aunt thought her ill and she said she was, and that a rest would do her good. "You have been too gay," suggested the elderly woman, looking searchingly at her. "Yes," she admitted, wearily, "I have really been too gay."

Then she wrote to Roger, without realizing the violence to the truth, that her aunt was doing splendidly and that, after a while, she would take her back with her. "Good-bye for a while. YOUR LITTLE WIFE. Tell Ada to be good to the canary."

"There, that sounds natural enough," she told herself, as she read over the note. Then she called the man. "Brown," she said, "I must catch the eleven o'clock train. Get the carriage ready. My husband will not return until I am gone, and you must be able to tell him that I got off safely."

"I hope it's not bad news, since it's so sudden," said Brown, with respectful sympathy, as he glanced at the note in her hand. "Yes," she said quietly, "I have just heard bad news."

Her gown was changed and her trunk ready in little space. She was in a fever of excitement to be gone. She had laid the note where Roger would see it, and everything seemed ready, but when she was half-way down the stairs she ran back catching up a picture of a smiling child she put it in her bag, then hastened away.

When Roger came in—hoping that she had not waited up for him—her note immediately caught his attention and startled him until he read it; when he experienced a great sense of relief. He could not have met her eyes that night, he told himself. He felt unworthy even to pick up the white evening cloak which fell in soft folds over a chair where she had thrown it. But he picked it up and put it to his lips. She seemed very sacred to him since he had sinned against her. But she need never know and he—ah, he would know always. Remorse is not a good bed fellow. After a restless night, Roger called to her, "Did you hear madam come in last night?" "No, sir; but she must have come just before she called me. That was ten o'clock, and she hadn't changed her gown yet. But she did mighty quick, and caught the eleven train."

He missed her—how much he did miss her, every day more. But the heat of the battle was on, and he had to give himself up to it. When it was over and his success won, he found the reaction of it all merged into an uncontrollable yearning for her. He wondered if he could have done so long without her had it not been for the feeling that made him recoil at the thought of meeting her trustful eyes with those treacherous words on his conscience. A committee awaiting his pleasure did not know that as he paced the floor above he was saying: "I shall tell her. I cannot rest until I tell her."

That night he wrote that he was going to bring her home, and he followed his letter in person next day. But she had already started back, not able to forget nor able longer to try. She was very ill and her aunt could not understand. "It is just that naughty heart!" "It is just that naughty heart!" Madge explained lightly. "It acted so for a while after the baby died."

But the excitement of the trip and of the first time since that dreadful night was too great for her. When she reached home she did not know that he was not there to meet her, and that her maid was weeping over her. Later her aunt watched beside her and tried to answer some of the many inquiries that came concerning her. "I would have known, had he seen the stream of callers, from fashion to poverty, that if she had loved the beauty and joy of life she had loved also to give of it where it was not.

"The children have missed her so. She came every Monday morning," said the matron from the Children's Hospital. "She helped dress the tree for our orphans last Christmas," said a sweet-faced Sister of Charity. "The man, shivering on the box while he awaited the noted specialist who was his master, was accosted by a ragged specimen of a newsboy. "Is the beautiful lady sick last year?"

And so it went, for she had done much without counting it anything. When Roger reached her, she was unconscious and the doctor answered his mute appeal as kindly as was possible, but he did not give him hope. The last interval of consciousness had been when the priest had been summoned and when he was leaving her she had said: "A little longer, Father. I have prayed to see him again."

He was beside her now, holding her hand and praying that he might yet make his confession to her, that those cruel words might not outlive her, unpardoned by her lips. And he was answered. She opened her eyes, smiled as she had once before, and said, weakly: "The Prince again!" "Oh, darling!" he cried, "forgive me. It was—" "A mistake," she whispered; "yes, that was the dreadful word. But it's all right now, Roger. I understand now, and I have been a mistake. He bent over her, calling her back

to him, for he thought she was leaving him alone. Some weeks after, the noted specialist said to him: "A shock must have brought on the attack. If she is saved all shock, there is no reason that she may not live long." When she was strong again she told him she wanted to help him, to do things that he approved in other women. He took her face in his hands and kissed her. Then he said: "Darling, we sometimes learn by mistakes. Mine was in dreaming that I would have you otherwise. I want you as you are, as you have always been." "Even as your mistake, Roger?" she asked, smiling. "Then I'll just go on being that. It's awfully natural." "And altogether perfect," said the forgiven Roger, happily.

SUCH IS FAME.

The unknown man walked down the aisle of the smoking car and stopped before a seat where another unknown man sat reading voraciously. "May I sit by you?" he asked meekly. "Certainly," replied the occupant without looking up. "May as well be sociable. Rice is my name."

"And Freeman is mine. May I ask what you are reading?" "Certainly." "Well, what are you reading?" "Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch." "Pure trash; I have my wife's word for it." "Who's your wife?" inquired the original occupant, beginning to betray signs of interest. "My wife is Mrs. Freeman," with some signs of pique.

"Never heard of her. Literary shark, is she? My wife's strong for Mrs. Wiggs. You see—er, why, she wrote it." "My dear sir," shouted the quondam critic, "there seems to be a fatal misunderstanding somewhere. Let me introduce myself again as Mr. Mary E. Wilkins Freeman."

"And I," grinned the man with the book, "am Mr. Alice Caldwell Hegan Rice, of course. Why didn't we do this before? Happy to know you." Princeton Tiger.

A RAINY DAY RACE.

"So you lost again." "Of course." "Couldn't the horse you bet on run?" "Yes; he could run very well. But he couldn't swim."—Washington Star.

AN ADAGE AFFIRMED.

Judge Alfred C. Cox, of the United States Circuit Court is sponsor for this story: A young lawyer came before the Supreme Court to argue a case in which he was both counsellor and defendant. "I once heard an old French adage," said he, "which said that he who argues his own case has a fool for a client. Despite this, however, I propose to present the defendant's side in this case, as I know more of it than any one else."

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