

## OUR SHORT STORY

## "A Tender Ideal."

"Who in the world are the Holmes?" said I, letting fall on my lap the note I had just opened.

"The Holmeses?" queried my husband sleepily from the hammock. "Have you found acquaintances away off here?"

"Not at all," replied I, "that is the mystery. I never heard of them." And I read the note aloud:

"Dr and Mrs. Holmes would be pleased to have Professor and Mrs. White take supper with them on Wednesday next, at 6."

"Mrs. Mackenzie will tell us," said my husband, as our landlady appeared, and again I inquired, "Who are the Holmeses?"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Mackenzie, smiling, "are you invited there?"

"We are invited, and I am sure they are perfect strangers to me. Do you know them? Do they live here, or are they coming?"

"I know them well," said my landlady, "and when I tell you about them you will want to accept their invitation. I am certain they are Virginians," she continued, settling herself comfortably in a rocker.

"He is a doctor, and a first-class one, too. He had a splendid practice and lots of friends and a lovely home—some people who knew them in the South told me so—and were as happy as two people could be, when all at once his wife's mind began to wander. He traveled with her and doctored her and did everything for her, but she grew worse and worse. She isn't violent, you see; she is as quiet and gentle as can be, only she gets things mixed; she seems to think backward. So her husband says, 'Then she loves to rectify. She wants to speak pieces all the time. Things she learned in school, you know, when she was a girl, and the doctor, he just humors her in everything. He brought her here to Mackinaw to be quiet, thinking she might get well where the air is so good and nothing excites or worries her. And here they live all alone, he helps her cook and sweep, and she drives a wheel with him on his calls, and I guess, after all, they are pretty happy.'"

"But," ejaculated I, in amazement, "all this makes this invitation the stranger! Surely he does not want outsiders to see his poor wife and know of her condition, and she cannot want to meet anyone if she at all repulses her state."

"That's the queer part," continued my landlady. "When summer comes she gets so uneasy, she can't do anything with her, she wants to invite everybody she sees. In the south she loved to entertain, and she thinks she must do it still. So her husband finds out quiet people like you and the professor here, and he just asks them, and that makes her feel satisfied. He can't deny her anything. He is just bound up in her."

"But," objected I still, "why could not Dr. White call on us and tell us this and then invite us? I hate to go there without even seeing him first."

"Because he knows I'd explain it for him," said Mrs. Mackenzie, gently. "He can't bear to speak of it. He just acts as if he didn't see anything wrong with her; and he loves her so, and is so proud of her! But you'll see."

"How dreadful it is," said I. "What a sorrow to bear! What a tragedy their lives must be!"

"Well," said my husband, thoughtfully, "I am not so sure about that. It is a great grief, of course. But it is better than some troubles they might have had. They love each other, and are in some sense happy together. He undoubtedly hopes for her restoration, and that brightens her life. No, Alice, I don't agree with you. Let's not be tragically at all."

"Well," said I, "it seems a good deal like one to me, but we can't tell better when we have been there. I suppose we must go."

"Of course, we must," said the professor, in his mild and even tones. "And we went, but, oh, how I dreaded it!"

Mrs. Mackenzie directed us to their cottage at the farthest end of the village, on the cliff looking out over the magnificent sweep of water where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron mingle. In the front yard were masses of nasturtiums in red, yellow and bronze, and beds of geraniums, and dahlias, and all the sturdy flowers which flourish in that short cool summer. On the porch stood Dr. Holmes, a tall broad-shouldered man, with iron-gray hair. He came to meet us as we paused at the gate, and with a courtly gesture, he was over.

"Professor and Mrs. White, I am

pleased to meet you. I have been expecting you. I am sure you will find everything just as we have arranged it."

"The young mother's delight and joy in her beautiful baby is always accompanied by more or less care and solicitude, and a certain degree of strain on her physical resources. She needs all the strengthening and sustaining help which is possible to be obtained, in order not to fall a victim to the organic weakness incident to maternity."

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sure. Let me thank you for accepting my invitation. It is pleasant to meet those of the outer world, and I am honored in your coming."

After a little talk about Mackinaw and the summer visitors, and the glorious view, we went indoors, and he introduced us to his wife. She was a gentle, brown-haired woman, with a timid manner and delicate features. My fears vanished; I felt as in the presence of a shy child.

Down by the river, with her. But in a moment she slipped from the room. My host had found a congenial spirit in my husband, and both were deep in the books which filled two sides of the room. I listened, amused at their common chatter, and as Mrs. Holmes came back, and said shyly, as a child might say it, "Please come to supper."

The table was daintily laid, with flowers upon it, and looked as any supper table might, except for one thing. Over it, from the hanging lamp, hung a coiled brass wire, such as bird cages are suspended from, and attached to it was a note I had written accepting the invitation. The breeze blew in at the window and caught it, and as the spring danced up and down, my note fluttered about in each gyration. I dared not look at my husband, but I saw just one gleam of distress cross Mrs. Holmes's face. Evidently the note had been hung up after his inspection of the table was over.

I shall never forget that meal. The little wife served it herself, passing quietly about from table to kitchen. Everything was delicious, and as Southern as could be, but it was served backward.

First came waffles, crisp and brown, and with them delicious maple syrup. "How fragrant this is," I exclaimed as I tasted it. "It is so woody. That we have in the city is made of brown sugar."

"How strange," replied Mrs. Holmes, "the bees make it here. They fill the little tin buckets on the trees, and they fill them. Do you remember how the Bible says, 'My son, eat this honey, for it is good?' I always recall that verse when we have waffles."

"The bees have a short summer with you," I replied. "Don't you find the winters very long and cold?"

"Oh, no," smiled she. "You see, I tend my flowers and vegetables in the garden, and feed the chickens, and gather wild strawberries, and the day seems short."

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"Shakespeare loved nature, too," murmured Mrs. Holmes.

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But won't you have a beaten biscuit, Mrs. White?" she added abruptly. "Beaten biscuit!" I echoed. "Indeed I will. I have never eaten them in the north. You are a Southerner, Mrs. Holmes. Do you remember anything of the war, or were you too young?"

"I can't remember the last of it perfectly," she answered. "I can never forget how my mother cried when Grant surrendered to Lee at Gettysburg."

"Are you fond of fishing, Mrs. White?" interrupted our host. "I caught these lake trout this morning. We think our ice-cold water makes them firmer and sweeter than those elsewhere."

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"The crowded lines of moccasins with trowels in their right hands," quoted Mrs. Holmes, but her husband rose from the table and went to the door. As we entered the parlor our hostess came to her husband's side and whispered to him. Instantly he turned to us and said:

"My wife used to rectify years ago very beautifully. Would it give you pleasure to have her do so now?"

"Indeed," I said, "it would be delightful. And with a pleased smile she left the room, and returned with a large tray filled with small glass kerosene lamps. Those she placed on the door in a row for foot-lights, and when her husband sighted them she slipped out, and reappeared in a few moments transformed. Her hair was braided down her back and tied with a blue ribbon. She had on a white tulle dress, with an over-skirt looped up with artificial rose-buds. Her pink Pills cure was possible to be obtained, in order not to fall a victim to the organic weakness incident to maternity."

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our hearts full. "It is a tragedy," said my husband at last. "How much better it would have been had she died young ago."

"No," I replied, "I have changed my mind. It is not a tragedy. It is an idyl, the sweetest, the tenderest I know. He has his love for her, the deepest one could imagine, because it is full of pity for her loss, and yet as full of admiration and devotion as when they were lovers. He may shield her and help her and care for her as no one else could or would, and he finds his reward in her childlike happiness and devotion."

There they live on that desolate island today. The flowers bloom and the water sparkles. The strangers come and are entertained and go away. Winter comes and heaps the snow around their cottage, and they pile the fires high and open their Shakespeare. And when the wind howls and the husband says, "Put on your beautiful white dress, your slippers and rose-buds, and rectify for me," and she becomes again the happy girl, sweeter than poet ever sung—Harpers Bazar.

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she whispered to the bantam rooster. "It seems to me that the flock is not nearly so large as it used to be."

The bantam rooster perked his head on one