

In the Spring a Woman's Fancy

By Mary Van Brunt Hunter

I'VE a lovely scheme for doing over Juliet, as she poured John's second cup of coffee. "I read a description in the last *House Charming*. Flemish oak and old blue, with old blue window-hangings of raw silk—"

"Doing over the dining-room?" John looked up from his muffin uneasily. "Does it need doing over?" He glanced about. "Looks all right to me as it is."

Juliet shook her head. "This golden oak and the red in the rug and curtains are—ordinary. Ethel, don't put so much sugar on your orange—it's bad for your stomach. Well, the sour is what we eat them for—acid is good for us in the spring."

"We get a whole lot of acid in the spring," observed John, his intonation suggesting dark and hidden meanings. "Yes, a lot of acid—taxes to pay, and life-insurance, and bills for Easter clothes. But this house-cleaning and renovating is the worst dose of all. Why, it's only a year or so since we had the dining-room done!"

"John Carlton! It was the year before Billy was born, and he's in the third grade! Billy, don't take such great mouthfuls—there, half of that. Yes, that's better. You know yourself, John, the paper is frightfully shabby. I never liked it anyway; and I shall have to give a luncheon or something for Louise, when she comes on in June. Old blue, with panels, and a wide plate-rail."

"It doesn't sound attractive," protested John helplessly. "Dark woodwork and paper. Why, you said the other day light colors were the thing."

"Oh, that is for bedrooms—light, dainty effects there, and the solid, more somber colors in living-rooms."

"Cheerful on a dark morning!"

"Well, as the *House Charming* article said, electric lights are most effective on dark backgrounds. And an open fire. I'm so glad we have an open fireplace in our dining-room!"

"I suppose the *House Charming* will pay the electric light bills for the sake of artistic effects," grumbled John. "What about the table and chairs?"

"Of course we'll have to change them. And I'll have a low, broad buffet instead of that hideous old sideboard."

"And what do you propose to do with this furniture?"

"Well, you know, I've been thinking about that. Mrs. Butler sold a lot of her things to Loewenstein when she broke up housekeeping. She got enough for them to pay for her beautiful new tailor suit."

"That second-hand man! Juliet, you're crazy! Those fellows make their money off people like you and Mrs. Butler. It's the wise ones who pick up bargains in their shops. Same thing with collectors of antiques—that Sheffield-plate tray you're so proud of—some foolish person sold that for a tithe of its real value."

"What's a shuffled plate?" Billy, who had been clamoring to be heard, at last succeeded, with unhappy results.

"It's time for you and Ethel to go," was his mother's unsatisfactory response. "Run up-stairs and brush your teeth—thoroughly, now, Billy—inside as well as out. Ethel, see that he does it properly; and bring down a fresh hair-ribbon and I'll tie it for you. That one is mussed. Hurry, for I'm very busy this morning."

"What's doing to-day?" John asked from the hall, struggling into his light overcoat. "The attic, or closets, or—"

"I did those weeks ago," Juliet followed him, answering abstractedly. "To-day we're going to begin down-stairs; the living-room comes first."

She glanced in as she spoke, and John, his eyes following hers, sighed.

"What in the world you want to clean that room for I can't imagine. It looks in perfect order. It's a strange thing how this microbe of cleaning and changing about infects women. You're in now. I can see, for a regular jag of it—an orgy, a saturnalia of tearing things up and putting them back again. What possible pleasure you can find in it—"

"Pleasure!" exclaimed Juliet, and then paused, restraining herself heroically. "Now, go on, John." She opened

the door as she spoke. "You talk just like all men—you don't know anything about it. It has to be done. You'd hate a dirty house as much as any one."

"Of course I'd hate a dirty house, but it never is dirty. That's why it's so absurd—"

"And why isn't it dirty? Oh, John! It is you who are absurd—you're talking in paradoxes, like the 'Alice in Wonderland' people. Go on, now, do—it's late, and I must get to work. The children are coming down-stairs. Don't let us wrangle before them. Good-by." Her voice fell to a soothing cadence. "When you come home to-night it will all be in order—you wouldn't know anything had been done if I hadn't told you."

"Now, that's exactly what I said—" Juliet closed the door on his insistence, somewhat forcibly. She tied Ethel's hair-ribbon, inspected Billy's teeth, kissed the children good-by, then donned her dusting-cap and apron as she instructed the maid:

"Get the dishes out of the way as soon as you can, Anna. James is here already for the rugs. Never mind about luncheon. There's that cold roast left from yesterday; we'll make that do for dinner, with—oh, baked potatoes, and sliced oranges for dessert. I'll get at the books directly. We must get the living-room and den both done to-day—Mr. Carlton does hate it so!"

The living-room, a picture of comfort with its soft, deep-colored rugs and mahogany furniture, was Juliet's joy. It was the one room in her house whose contents, with a sole exception, perfectly satisfied her esthetic longings. Book-cases in mahogany matching the wood-work filled corners and spaces beneath windows; but at one side of the mantel towered a tall black-walnut case, whose old-fashioned outline and inharmonious coloring vexed her soul.

"So out of keeping with the rest," she often sighed to John.

His reply was always the same—that it was perfectly good, that the glass doors protected the books from dust, and finally that he had used it in college. To Juliet the last statement was good and sufficient proof that the case had outlived its usefulness. John, who, with all cats and some people, inclined tenderly toward furnishings, no matter how shabby, to which he was comfortably wonted, regarded this as the best of reasons why his bookcase should continue to do service where it stood, so long as it held together.

Juliet surveyed it now with a pang. They certainly needed more book-room. The table and desk in John's den were heaped with homeless volumes, and the children, too, were accumulating so many. If John would only be reasonable and

do away with this horror, she would replace it with two low cases of mahogany, one on either side of the fireplace. She would hang the Shakespeare portrait and inscription over one, and the Aurora over the other—and upon the one at the left the bronze Cossack should stand against the gray-green burlap wall. But there—what was the use?

So Juliet pondered as she dusted books, wiped glass, and washed bric-a-brac throughout the morning.

After luncheon, when James came in to wax the floors, an inspiration seized her.

"I'm going to try that bookcase in the den," she told him. "We can move it, I'm sure, now the books are all out. Anna and I will take this end and you the other."

"I'll scratch the floor something awful," he objected.

"We'll put down some old rugs to run it on." Small obstacles did not hinder Juliet when her course was decided.

"My, but ain't the wall faded terrible!" cried Anna, when they had succeeded in launching the unwieldy craft upon its voyage.

"An' I don't believe it'll go through the door, it's that tall," contributed James.

Juliet looked at wall and at door, while her face assumed the expression well known to Billy when he too long persisted in a contrary course. It couldn't be the inscription and the portrait, but there was that tapestry she had been hoarding for an age. And really, she liked the burlap better in its faded state.

"That carved top will come off," she said. "Take the step-ladder, James—just pull that top piece up. It hasn't been off in years, but it will come if you pry it. Wait, I'll find something."

She was out of the room only a moment, but when she returned the deed was done. The top was off and in three pieces.

"I don't know how it ever happened, ma'am," said James contritely. "But it can be mended."

Mended? Never! Suddenly Juliet saw her opportunity. It was an accident, of course; but a broken bookcase is quite different from one in good order—even John would admit that. Blithely she went toward the telephone.

Some hours later the despised bookcase left the house in the second-hand man's wagon. Juliet gazed speculatively at its outline on the wall, while in her hand she clutched the result of an hour's haggling with the buyer—a ragged two-dollar bill.

At six o'clock she listened with some apprehension for John's footstep. He was late. This was fortunate, as it gave her time to make his favorite pudding. Ethel joyfully relinquished her half-hour's practise for the privilege of running to the market, whence she returned

with a thick and tender porterhouse—no cold roast and makeshift dinner would do to-night.

Save for the piles of books on the floor, the room was in its accustomed order, as Juliet had predicted. She had made an attractive toilet, and a sacrificial fire was laid on the immaculate hearth, ready to be touched into a blaze. John liked open fires.

"What is that noise?" asked Juliet, bending stiffly, match in hand. After her strenuous day she longed to throw herself on the davenport, letting dinner and the situation take care of themselves. "Is it father? Look quick, Billy, and see."

Billy clambered upon the window-seat. "Yes, it's father!" The match scratched, and kindling flames brightened the room. "There's some men with him—there's a wagon—they're bringing something to the house," came successive bulletins from the lookout.

"Well, you look cheerful here!" cried John from the hall. "Look out there, men—careful, going through the doorway—yes, right in here. Juliet, I'm going to prove to you that I knew what I was talking about this morning. On my way home, going by Loewenstein's I struck the greatest bargain! There on the sidewalk I happened to see this bookcase, exactly like mine—yes, the one I had in college. Nothing the matter with it, except the carved top is broken in two places. A little glue will fix that in no time. I've heard you say we needed more book-room, and must have a case on the other side of the mantel. What luck, wasn't it, to find one exactly like—what on earth's the matter with you, Juliet?"

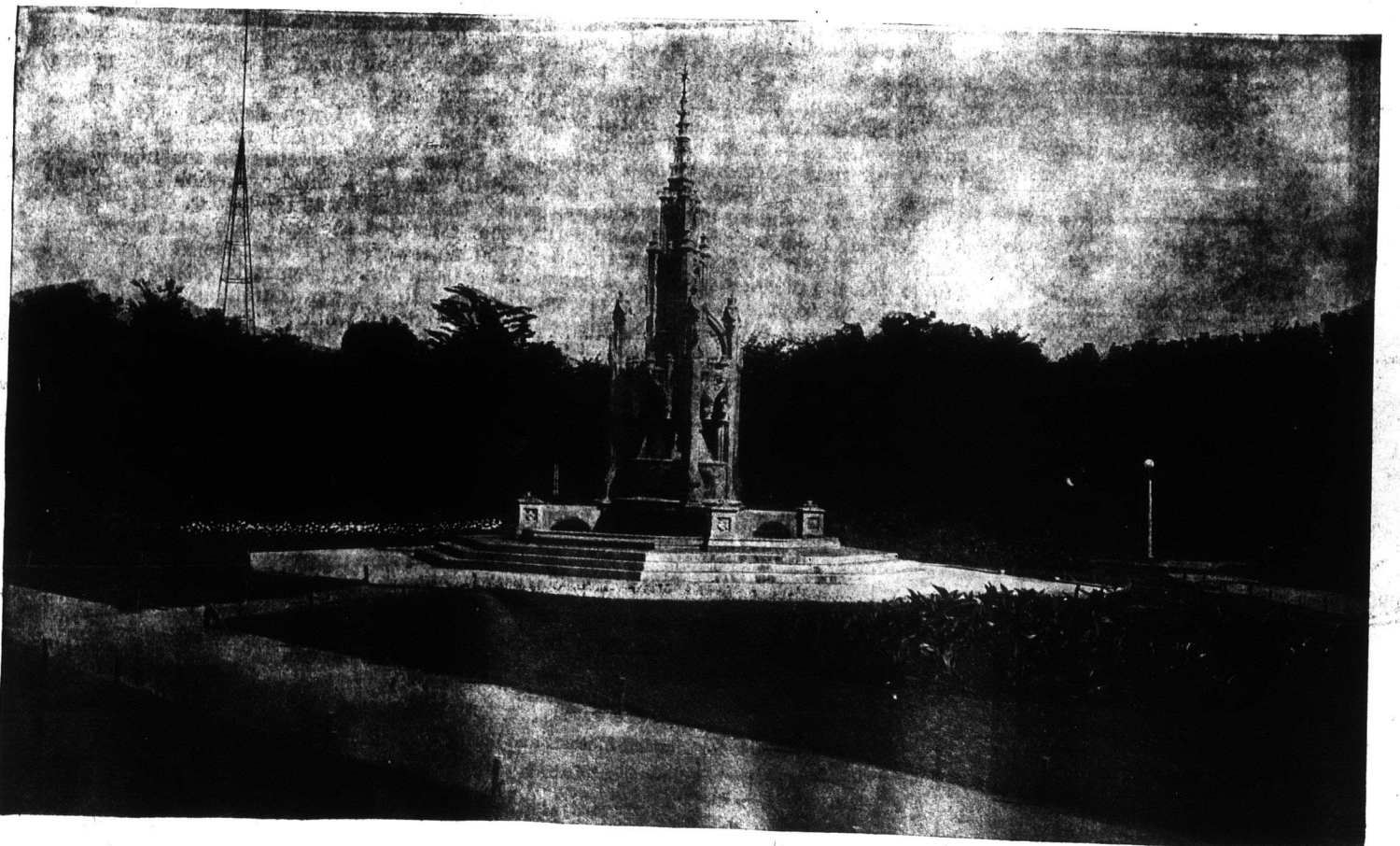
"John Carlton, how—much—did—you—pay—for—that—bookcase?"

"A trifle compared with its real value—it's worth every cent of twenty-five dollars—it's a good old piece, in fine order—exactly like the one I had in college, I tell you. And I got it for seven and a half!"

Juliet fell over on the davenport, her face buried in the pillows, shrieking with hysterical laughter. John's eye, as he advanced in alarm, lighted on the orderly pile of books, the vacant space, the bright, unfaded spot upon the wall. For an instant he stared, bewildered; then as Juliet's laughter redoubled, a sickly smile of comprehension spread itself over his countenance.

"Well, I'll be—blowed!" he substituted, remembering Billy.

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Popular corner in Central Park, Winnipeg—Wadell Fountain in the foreground