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A Story of "Down East."

BY SARAH McLEAN GREENE.

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CHAPTER XVI.—Continued.

"Bad as that is," said Caroline, surveying the rigid expression of Mrs. Prouty's features without dismay, and folding her own gloved hands elegantly; "the's somethin' cuter about it, after all, than the' is in the sample we've gone out by."

"How long ye goin' to stay to Virginny's?" Mrs. Prouty inquired of Doctor Margate, in her severely inquisitorial tone, turning to him without other warning.

Doctor Margate, quite unacquainted with the first name of his hostess—Mrs. Byjo—was at a loss for an instant, but made answer:

"Only a very short time, I regret to say, madam."

"Maybe it's as well," said Mrs. Prouty, without further explanation, but Caroline knew that she referred in this discreet way to the potency of her (Caroline's) own charms amongst the male sex; and she was neither vexed thereby nor did she preen herself with vanity, but remained as ever the serene queen of her own drawing-room.

"Mary Stingaree's a girl," she murmured opportunely, "that, ef you can't respect her, then who can you respect?"

The company turned their thought of one accord into the trend of Caroline's leading, save Mrs. Prouty, who leaped regardless to a conclusion out of sight:

"You done mighty poorly, Robert Hilton," she said, fixing her inflexible gaze on poor Rob. "From all we hear to Prouty's Neck, ye've let them Tee-bos scoop ye in. Ye're a shapeless, pleasin' young man, an' ye ought ter done better."

This challenge lying by way of severe reproach untinged by condolence, Rob, having no defence prepared, was about to let the case go by default, when Dr. Margate fixed the redoubtable Mrs. Prouty with an unflinching eye of his own; so great was the kindness of his expression, however, she forbore, for the moment, to exercise her own tremendous and daring habit of speech.

"Madam," he said, "pardon me for regarding you with so persistent a look. I am trying to place you among some members of royalty whom it was my good fortune to see when I was last abroad. It is a resemblance more than striking, it is phenomenal."

"You're gittin' 'em mixed up, Doctor Maggut," interposed the indissolubly tranquil and sweet tones of Caroline Treet; "that's Virginny Stafford you're thinkin' of, not Mis' Prouty. Mis' Prouty's folks wa'n't descended from nothin' as was ever heered tell on."

"The most that can be said for 'em, on the Prouty side, anyway," assented Mrs. Prouty, in full confirmation of Caroline's words. "Is, that they was a vary triffin' lot. My mother's folks was, a considerable number of 'em, law-abidin' stay-at-home people; but the Proutys has got weak spots, which, why should I conceal, when all the world knows? It use' to be said o' Lob Prouty, my husband's father, and Biltmurt Treet, Car'line's husband's father, that ef there'd been any science known in them days—as the' is now—they might 'a' been smart men, pokin' into some kind o' science 't 'ud interested 'em maybe an' kep' 'em out o' mischief, like new-fangled doctorin' an' universal preachin' an' goin' up in a balloon an' these machines that run without no horses, an' what-not; but as it was they hadn't no outlet, an' gophered around here an' thar' over the 'arth that they was a cuss to, tell they dropped off o' old age, a mercy to themselves an' them t' had to put up with their everlastin' pryin' an' peevishness."

"We that have an outlet ought to be thankful, indeed," replied the doctor, and made no further effort to compel or hypnotize the astounding force of Mrs. Prouty, of Prouty's Neck.

"Mis' Prouty's kind o' abrupt," Caroline explained, "but her heart's in the right place, ef we only know whar' to look for it."

"Wal', I shan't deny you that, Car'line; it's along o' my husban' an' children an' the old home to Prouty's Neck; it ain't watchin' out f'r to make a second ch'ice; not even ef Prouty was gone, men might hang around me as thick as blueberries an' ask me on their knees, they wouldn't git no 'ncouragement from me."

While Rob and the doctor realized the hopelessness of the situation, Caroline remained blandly impervious to the plain reprimand which had been hurled at her.

"I believe you, Mis' Prouty," she rejoined; "the wonder was that you married at all, considerin' the smartness an' independence o' your ways, an' men bein' o' that kind that likes to keep the upper hand an' do the bossin' their own selves. All women air not like you, Mis' Prouty," said Caroline, with a look of the beautiful clinging-vine sort toward the admiring doctor—"but some enjoys themselves better to lean onto than to order an' direct. I say it freely, I'm one o' that kind that, ef I take up with a man, I'd rather lean onto him than be forever bossin' of him 'round; an', so long as my man was above ground—or out o' water, perhaps I ought to say, for bein' seafarin' he went by way o' water; but, afore God in his wisdom took him, I leaned onto him—whenever he was in port, that is."

"Git out o' here," Mrs. Prouty suddenly commanded her two boys gravely, "an' see ef there's an air o' wind stirrin'." But she spoke to empty places; the boys had slipped out some time before without either her knowledge or approval.

"In my humble judgment," said Caroline, who had taken an occasional outlook through the shutters, "they've made tracks for home along shore. I've raised boys, and I know their ways. They didn't set contented one minute whilst they was in the Room."

"It's eight miles 'round the shore," exclaimed Mrs. Prouty, and then sighed heavily, "Wal', I don't know's I blame 'em."

"And thar's Dan Prouty, now," said Caroline, in a discerning voice, "sailing straight into the Basin."

Mrs. Prouty rose promptly. "I'll be down thar', time he lands," she said. "All of present company, and none excepted, I shall be glad to see you over to Prouty's Neck." She shook hands all 'round, as if a solemn commitment of fate hung over every individual there present.

"I feel pleased to think ye clum' the hill to see me," Caroline assured her; "ye're allus welcome, and the sooner the better."

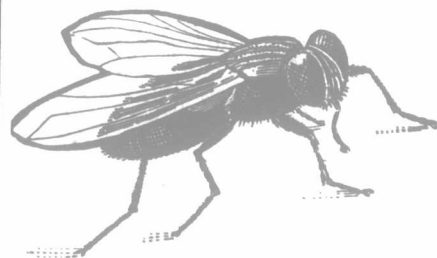
"You was allus my favorite among the girls, Car'line," said Mrs. Prouty, surveying her as though she would recall that lost soul from its flirtatious designs to better things.

Rob and the doctor also made their exit from the Room.

"I am going back to the safe charms of Mary Stingaree and Mrs. Stafford," said the Doctor to Rob at the gate. "Mary has refused me, and Mrs. Stafford would not want me, anyway; but Mrs. Prouty and Caroline Treet are dangerous in the way they interest a man."

Rob giggled.

"I don't know," continued the doctor gravely, whether I wanted most to subjugate Mrs. Prouty or stand as the oak for Caroline Treet to lean upon, but these are unbecoming thoughts. I little knew what was impending when you called my attention to the beckoning of those black kid gloves. And the Room, too. The salons of old and luxurious civilizations have not so absorbing an atmosphere. I am going back to sit with Mary and Mrs. Stafford on the porch, and gaze off on



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