

"But she will ask me, and I have got to say something. Come,—out with it." Her eyes were still on his face; not a beat of his wings or a squirm of his body had she missed.

"Well just say how glad I am she is at home again and that her father is getting on so well, and tell her that I will be up and around in a day or two, and that I am not a bit worse off for going to the station yesterday."

"Anything else?"

"No,—unless you can think of something."

"And if I do shall I add it?"

"Yes."

"Oh,—then I know exactly what to do,—it will be something like this: 'Please, Ruth, take care of your precious self, and don't be worried about me or anything else, and remember that every minute I am away from you is misery, for I love you to distraction—'"

"Oh, Miss Felicia!"

"No—none of your protests, sir!" she laughed. "That is just what I am going to tell her. And now don't you dare to move till Peter comes back," and with a toss of her aristocratic head the dear lady left the room, closing the door behind her.

And so our poor butterfly was left flat against the wall—all his flights ended. No more roaming over honeysuckles, drinking in the honey of Ruth's talk; no more soaring up into the blue, the sunshine of hope dazzling his wings. It made no difference what Miss Felicia might say to Ruth. It was what she said to him which made him realize the absurdity of all his hopes. Everything that he had longed for, worked for, dreamed about, was over now—the long walks in the garden, her dear hand in his, even the song of the choir boys, and the burst of joyous music as they passed out of the church door only to enter their own for life. All this was gone—never to return—never had existed, in fact, except in his own wild imagination. And once more the disheartened boy turned his tired, pain-racked face toward the bare wall.

Miss Felicia tripped downstairs with an untroubled air, extended two fingers to Mrs. Hicks, and without more ado passed out into the morning air. No thought of the torment she had inflicted affected the dear woman. What were pins made for except to curb the ambitious wings of flighty young men who were soaring higher than was good for them. She would let him know that Ruth was a prize not to be too easily won, especially by penniless young gentlemen, however, brave and heroic they might be.

Hardly had she crossed the dreary village street encumbered with piles of half-melted snow and mud, than she spied Peter picking his way toward her, his silk hat brushed to a turn, his gray surcoat buttoned close, showing but the edge of his white silk muffler, his carefully rolled umbrella serving as a divining rod the better to detect the water holes. No one who met him and looked into his fresh, rosy face, or caught the merry twinkle of his eyes, would ever have supposed he had been pouring liniment over broken arms and bandaged fingers until two o'clock in the morning of the night before. It had only been when Bolton's sister had discovered an empty "cell," as Jack called the bedroom next to his, that he had abandoned his intention of camping out on Jack's disheartened lounge, and had retired like a gentleman carrying with him all his toilet articles, ready to be set out in the morning.

Long before that time he had captured everybody in the place: from Mrs. Hicks, who never dreamed that such a well of tenderness over suffering could exist in an old fellow's heart, down to the freckled-faced boy who came for his muddy shoes and who, after a moment's talk with Peter as to how they should be polished, retired later in the firm belief that they belonged to "a gent way up in G.," as he expressed it, he never having waited on "the likes of him before." As to Bolton, he thought he was the "best ever," and as to his prim, patient sister who had closed her school to be near her brother—she declared to Mrs. Hicks five minutes after she laid her eyes on him, that Mr. Breen's uncle was "just too dear for anything," to which the lady with the movable hair and mob-cap not only agreed, but added the remark of her

own, "that folks like him was a sight better than the kind she was a-gettin'."

All these happenings of the night and early hours of this bright, beautiful morning—and it was bright and sunny overhead despite the old fellow's precautionary umbrella—had helped turn out the spick and span gentleman who was now making his way carefully over the unpaved road which stood for Corklesville's principal street.

Miss Felicia saw him first.

"Oh! there you are!" she cried before he could raise his eyes. "Did you ever see anything so disgraceful as this crossing—not a plank—nothing. No—get out of my way, Peter; you will upset me, and I would rather help myself."

In reply Peter, promptly ignoring her protest, stepped in front of her, poked into several fraudulent solidities covering unfathomable depths, found one hard enough to bear the weight of Miss Felicia's dainty shoe—it was about as long as a baby's hand—and holding out his own said, in his most courtly manner:

"Be very careful now, my dear: put your foot on mine; so! now give me your hand and jump. There—that's it." To see Peter help a lady across a muddy street, Holker Morris always said, was a lesson in all the finer virtues. Sir Walter was a bungler beside him. But then Miss Felicia could also have passed muster as the gay gallant's companion.

And just here the Scribe remarks, parenthetically, that there is nothing that shows a woman's refinement more clearly than the way she crosses a street.

Miss Felicia, for instance, would no more have soiled the toes of her shoes in a puddle than a milk-white pussy would have dampened its feet in the splash of an overturned bowl: a calm survey up and down; a taking in of the dry and wet spots; a careful gathering up of her skirts, and over skimmed the slender, willowy old lady with a one-two—and three—followed by a stamp of her absurd feet and the shaking out of ruffle and pleat. When a woman strides through mud without a shiver because she has plenty of dry shoes and good ones at home, there are other parts of her make-up, inside and out, that may want a looking after.

Miss Felicia safely landed on the dry and comparatively clean sidewalk, Peter put the question he had been framing in his mind since he first caught sight of that lady picking her way among the puddles.

"Well, how is he now?"

"His head, or his heart?" she asked with a knowing smile, dropping her still spotless skirts. "Both are broken; the last into smithereens. It is hopeless. He will never be any better. Oh, Peter, what a mess you have made of things!"

"What have I done?" he laughed.

"Got these two people dead in love with each other,—both of them—Ruth is just as bad—and no more chance of their ever being married than you or I. Perfectly silly, Peter, and I have always told you so—and now you will have to take the consequences."

"Beautiful—beautiful!" chuckled Peter; "everything is coming my way. I was sure of Jack, for he told me so, but Ruth puzzled me. Did she tell you she loved him?"

"No, stupid, of course she did not. But have I not a pair of eyes in my head? What do you suppose I got up for this morning at such an unearthly hour and went over to—Oh, such an awful place!—to see that idiot? Just to tell him I was so sorry? Not a bit of it! I went to find out what was going on, and now I know; and what is to become of it all nobody can tell. Here is her father with every penny he has in the world in this work—so Holker tells me—and here are a lot of damages for dead men and Heaven knows what else; and there is Jack Breen with not a penny to his name except his month's wages; and here is Ruth who can marry anybody she chooses, bewitched by that boy—and I grant you she has every reason for he is as brave as he can be, and what is better he is a gentleman. And there lies Henry MacFarlane blind as a bat as to what is going on! Oh!—really, Peter, there cannot be anything more absurd."

During the outbreak Peter stood leaning on his umbrella, a smile playing over his smooth-shaven face, his eyes snapping as if at some inwardly sup-

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