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GIVING THE BEST THAT IS IN US

(Continued from page 8)

was some looker, and dresser, too, when you came to look. He would take her for a drive, out Apple Hill way. He had promised another girl, but that was nothing! Mr. Midge came back to earth to find the lady in black and white smiling over a crisp ten dollar bill which she was holding daintily toward him between the first and second fingers of a white kid gloved hand.

"Come out of it!" she murmured, in the low, rich voice that had charmed him. And Mr. Midge shot the money and his slip over the wire to the cashier, and exchanged glances with his classy customer as he put the little silver cross for the Reverend Francis Page into a dainty box.

"Au revoir, Herb!" murmured Mrs. Wall, just loud enough for only "Herb" to hear, as he bowed her out of the shop. And Mr. Midge returned to his case with his mind on anything but present business.

"I'll double-cross Mr. Frank!" muttered the lady in quite another tone, as she walked briskly toward the Commercial Hotel. "What luck! I'll make it 'A Merry Christmas', for him!"

Driving ahead of her by many minutes to the same destination, Little John puzzled over the woman's face. Where had he seen it? He was still trying to "place" her when he reached the hotel.

HE knew that Dorothy and the other girls wanted him at the church at Apple Hill. He was so handy, they said, to reach up and tie things without having to stand on a chair. But he was robustly hungry, and he knew his mare was, too, and that they would both enjoy the seven-mile drive, under the stars and moon and over a white, hard road, after dinner much more than before. So he stabled the mare, and went to the room which, as Mr. Midge had said, he retained, at the end of a quiet wing corridor in the old house. And on his way along the corridor, from his room to the dining room, he met the woman whose face had been bothering him ever since he had seen it in the jeweller's shop.

He gave her a civil but keen glance, which she returned with a cool stare and the faint flicker of a smile. He was a fine figure of a man, in his well fitting dark blue clothes. He did not know that she paused and looked back at him until he turned into the main corridor and out of sight.

John went to the office desk; but the name of Mrs. Julian Wall, Chicago, as explained by the old clerk, did not help him to remember. He was half through his dinner before Mrs. Wall appeared in the dining room, and took a seat at a table alone across the room from John, and wearing a black and white striped silk blouse, her street skirt, and the smart little toque. John knew something about clothes, and that this woman, whoever she might be, was dressed in good taste. But he was given little chance to try to recall the elusive "something" about her, through studying her profile, for the old clerk came hurriedly to his elbow and whispered that he was wanted urgently on the 'phone by Apple Hill. Mrs. Wall watched his tall figure as he strode from the room, the old clerk pattering after. Her colour rose a little under her make-up, but as the minutes went by and John did not return, she continued to eat her dinner with composure.

John went at once to the 'phone booth, where the wire was open for him to Apple Hill. As he had instinctively guessed, it was Dorothy. "Oh, John!" her sweet girlish voice breathed. "It was wonderfully sweet to Little John. There was anxiety but equally evident relief in its tone. "Something has happened to—the minister!"

"Happened, Dorothy? How?"
"We don't know! I don't know! We can't tell! But he got some message or news from the hotel where you are now, only a little while ago, and he was terribly upset. Central here says he looked awful when he came out of the booth where I am now. Are you listening, John? And he has driven off, without a word to any one of us, at a simply furious pace, over the road to town. John, you must do something! He is in trouble, can't you see?"

"It may be a call, some one very ill—"

"Oh, no, no! I'm sure it's some trouble of his own!"

"Well, well, little girl, I—"

"What will you do, John?"

"Can't you find out, where you are, who it was—the person who 'phoned him—and what it was about?"

"Yes, yes, I'll do all I can, you may be sure. You must not worry. It will be all right. All's well that ends well, and it may be nothing."

OH, but every one here is quite upset! It has changed everything! We were all at the church, decorating, and wondering when you were coming, when—he got the message to go to the 'phone. It must be something very serious, and mysterious, when he did not come back to tell us. John, what will you do now?"

"I'll drive out toward home so that I cannot miss him; and that will bring me nearer to you, little girl." John paused, but the word he hoped for was not spoken. "He might not come here to the hotel," he went on, evenly, "and in that case if I waited here I might not see him at all."

"Yes, yes, that is so! He might—oh, he could not be going away—like that!"

"Nonsense!"

"You must help him all you can, whatever it is that has upset him and made him rush away so madly without a word to—to any one of us. If there's need of money, John, remember I—"

"No need to talk of money, Dorothy."

"And 'phone me, John, if you meet him and"



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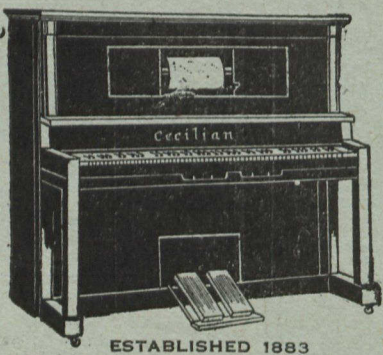
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