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## "IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN."

Out in the November twilight, with the elms and oaks making a crimson canopy of autumnal foliage above her fair young forehead, Gerty Deano would have made a pretty subject for an artist's sketch as she stood, her jetty, silken hair all blown about in the riotous autumn breeze.

"Oh, Robert!" she cried, her dimpled face brightening as a tall figure strode up over the slope of the hill, "I thought you would never come!"

Mr. Clare surveyed his pretty *fiancé* critically.

"Don't do that, little one," said he, as she tried to relieve him of one of his travelling wraps. "How you are sunburned! And I think you stoop a little. I wish they would look after you a little more."

The sunshine faded out of Gerty's face in a second. It was hard that he should begin to find fault with her in this first moment of their reunion.

"I'm sorry I don't suit you," said she, in a trembling voice. "You used to like me before you got that horrid office in the Custom House."

"A man is not a fossil, child," said Mr. Clare, carelessly. "We grow mentally as well as physically. And no one can help his tastes changing."

Gerty Deano stopped short at the gate.

"Robert," said she, "your letters have puzzled me of late, and your words and manner now puzzle me still more. Do you mean that you—are tired of me?"

"How you do catechise one!" said Clare, impatiently. "Did I say that I was tired of you? You are a dear, sweet-natured little puss, and, of course, a man can't expect to have everything at once. But the truth is that I have been mixing in rather intellectual society of late, and after a taste of champagne it's hard to come down to cold water again."

Gerty looked wistfully at him.

"I don't venture to call myself intellectual," she said. "But I read a great deal, and I try to keep up with the age, Robert—I do, indeed, for your sake."

"My darling," said he, "you are perfect as you are. A man doesn't expect a canary to ape the liquid notes of the nightingale. Now run in out of the dew, and tell them to get me a cup of tea."

Gerty obeyed, docile, but still unconceived. What right had Robert Clare to treat her like a child? She was almost sorry, for a moment—almost, but not quite—that she was engaged to him.

And the more she thought of it, the more she was determined to free him from bonds which she instinctively felt were becoming burdensome.

"No!" with the bright tears sparkling into her eyes, "I love him dearly, but I will not ruin his future and mine to avoid being an old maid."

And so that very day, when Robert Clare was dreaming over a book, Gerty came resolutely to him holding a little turquoise ring in her hand.

"Robert," said she, "I have been thinking the matter over, and I have come to the conclusion that we shall both be happier if our futures separate from this point."

"Gerty!" he exclaimed, in amazement.

"Here's the engagement ring, Robert," said she, speaking calmly in spite of the lump in her poor little throat. "Please don't attempt to argue the point, for nothing will induce me to change my mind."

He accepted the tiny blue token reluctantly.

"You will remember, Gerty," said he, "that this is your own doing."

"I shall not forget it," said she.

"Seen her! No, of course I haven't seen her," said Mr. Clare. "That's the very spice and sparkle of the thing. We have corresponded for three years, and I've never so much as looked at her photograph!"

"Incoffite, eh!" said Philip Wayne carelessly.

"Something of that sort. And I've read her book. Really, I think it's the most talented thing of the day. Every one is reading it. And you really know her?"

"I have the pleasure of knowing her most intimately," returned Wayne.

"She is beautiful, of course?"

"Very."

"And her manner?"

"She is very quiet and retiring."

Clare sprang up from his chair with a burst of enthusiasm.

"So much the better," said he. "I hate your blue stockings who go about in tattered frocks and inky fingers!"

"But you haven't told me," interposed Wayne, "how you commenced to correspond with a person whom you confess you never saw."

"Oh, that is plain enough. I had been reading her book, and, in the magnetic spell of the moment, sat down and wrote to the authoress—directing, of course, to the care of her publishers. She answered my letter in the same spirit—and, by Jove, old fellow, this correspondence has been a treat all along. Her letters are charming."

Mr. Wayne smiled.

"I see I shall have to introduce you," said he.

"I shall be your debtor all my lifetime if you will," cried Clare.

"I am going down to see her this afternoon," said Wayne; "and if you will meet me at the three o'clock train, I will venture to secure you a welcome."

"I'll be punctual as a clock," said Robert Clare.

And he kept his word.

"Midborough, eh?" said he, glancing at the railway tickets in his friend's hand. "Why! it can't be possible! I was a boy there. I know every one in Midborough."

"Then perhaps you know this lady?"

Clare shook his head.

"All the men at Midborough are humdrum, money-making machines,"