

M'lindy Ann hastily set a dish down on the table.

"I see how it is," she said. "You've been run over by one o' them street cars, eh. Which one o' your bones is broke?"

Eli burst into futile tears, and sank into a chair.

"It's worse'n that, M'lindy Ann!" he sobbed, with his arms on the table among the dishes and his head on his arms. "I've been robbed and drugged. I've lost the whole pile—an' it's my own tarnation fault! I was to' pesky int'mate with a stranger—but he said he was a member of the Missouri Legislature, an' how was I to s'pose he was lyin'? An' the game they showed me—I could 'a' beat it with one han' tied behin' me. I seen my way clear to makin' another thousand or so, to put in the bank along with the other; but they must 'a' put some-thin' in the beer—I didn't drink more'n half a teacupful, M'lindy Ann—an' I couldn't move hand or foot when they went into the satchel an' took the whole pile. An' then they come back an' kicked me all around, an' tramped on my hat; an' when I woke up I was jes' in time to ketch the train back. I'm ruined, M'lindy Ann! The money I've worked so hard fur all my life—"

"I've worked pretty hard for it myself," said M'lindy Ann dryly.

She had made the same remark the morning before, but now there was a new quality in it. Eli groaned.

"If I had it back ag'in I'd give ye half of it, M'lindy," he said sadly. "Ye ain't worked as hard as what I have, but maybe you're entitled to half—fur ye've kep' the house mighty nice; but it's all gone! What's the matter, M'lindy Ann? Where ye goin'? What ye all dressed up fur at this time o' day?"

"As soon as breakfast's over, I'm goin' to start for the city," said M'lindy Ann, who was quietly drinking her coffee. She had laid her bonnet on a chair with the cape; and beside it was a bundle wrapped in paper.

"Goin' to the city?" gasped Eli in deep amazement.

"Yes—I'm goin' to the city to put some money in the bank," said M'lindy Ann, eating serenely, the while she kept a pair of dark eyes fastened on Eli's astounded visage. "I'm goin' to take three thousand dollars with me—the three thousand that I saved by takin' it out of your grip when you was goin' off, so bumptious and so pleased with yourself!"

Eli's jaws dropped apart, and his hands hung limp at his sides. When he recovered himself, a small, iron-gray woman was tying her bonnet strings in a neat bow under a determined chin, looking him calmly in the eyes the while.

"M'lindy Ann, you've got that money?" he cried in broken speech. "You'd taken it out before I lef' home? The man—the man from Missouri didn't get it?"

"Eli Barrows, you went up to the city with a piece of wood in your satchel, wrapped up in newspaper," said M'lindy, hooking the old black cape under her chin. "I hope the man from Missouri felt that it done him good. Take keer of the place, Eli. See that the chickens has fresh water, an' don't forgit to wind the clock, an' be shore to put the cat out of the house every night. I'd tell you to wash the dishes every day, but I know good an' well you won't do it. This day week you can meet me at the train. You might as well drive down to the depot now, so's you can bring the team back."

Eli's jaws made connection slowly. "M'lindy Ann," he said meekly, "hadn't I better go along with ye? We could get 'Liza Briggs to mind the place; an' now that I know the ropes—"

"You stay right here," said M'lindy Ann composedly. "I don't want nothin' to do with none o' the ropes you learned while you was in the city!"

And with this parting thrust a very small and very erect woman walked out to the buggy, followed by a tall and abject-looking man.

"Tain't right for a lone woman to go off on the train with all that money," he said as they drove up beside the little red station. "No tellin' what'll become of ye, M'lindy Ann."

"There won't nothin' become of me," said M'lindy Ann composedly. "You have the buggy here to meet the evenin' train one week from today—an' you look after the house. There ain't much to do, you know. You tol' me yestidday that my work didn't amount to nothin'."

After which M'lindy Ann, the hec-tored and brow-beaten, disappeared into an unknown world.

III.

Perhaps there may have been years that were as long as the week of M'lindy's absence, but Eli had never experienced them. The work put new cricks into his back and unexpected blisters on his hands; and he had no sooner completed a meal and got things "straightened up" that he had to begin on another, and get 'them un-straightened again.

The same thing was to do over and over and over, not only every day, but three times a day. He looked at the soiled dishes with loathing, and swept in the middle of the floor, shunning the corners faithfully. He milked and churned the first day, but after that he merely milked, considering that butter was too dearly bought. After all, it did seem that M'lindy Ann's work was not the easiest in the world, though it had this saving grace—she was used to it. No doubt when one got used to it everything was very smooth sailing.

At last he sat in the old buggy, and saw M'lindy Ann step from the train and walk toward him with the light step of a girl.

"Well, how's everything?" she asked in a clear voice that he did not know. "The whole house is in a mess, I s'pose? Well, never mind—I'll soon get everything cleaned up!"

And he drove briskly home, waiting for her to begin until she was seated in the kitchen, with the lamp-light showing a new expression in her eyes.

"Well, M'lindy Ann," said Eli, mildly, "how'd ye come on in the city?"

He had purposely made the speech noncommittal. He was ready, if she acknowledged defeat, to jeer at her and sneer at her forever and a day; but he would not begin until he had heard her story. He was not quite sure of M'lindy Ann. He had lived with her twenty years, but it took more than that to learn all about M'lindy Ann.

She turned up her dress skirt so that the fire would not "draw" it, and began taking things out of her satchel—the same satchel which had journeyed with Eli while he was learning the ropes.

"Well," she said deliberately, "the money's in bank—half in the First National an' half in the Germania. I divided it, so's in case one o' 'em broke. I've got two bank-books and two check-books—there they are. Every check of that money'll have to be signed by me—but, of course, I won't be mean about it, Eli. I consider that half of it's yours, anyhow."

Eli winced and smiled in sickly fashion, but M'lindy Ann only cast a fleeting glance at him.

"I made another deposit of four hundred and fifty dollars in the People's Bank," she went on calmly. "That's the money I raised for the new church while I was in the city."

"M'lindy Ann!" gasped the astounded Eli.

"Yes," she answered, as if he had asked a question. "I thought I might as well make use of my time while I was there—so I went aroun' among the big men an' tol' 'em who I was, an' what we needed—an' I got the money without any trouble. One o' the big lumber men there has promised two hundred dollars' worth o' lumber, an' another is goin' to give the seats for the church—them patent things, fine as a fiddle. I made 'em put it down in black an' white, for I didn't want 'em crawlin' out of it when I'd got away. With what we've

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