

THE MAGPIE'S NEST

New Readers Begin Here

DREAMY, and living much in the dreams she fashioned from the old romances she read, Hope Fielding lived in a world unreal, but real to her.

To her father's lonely ranch in Alberta came three strangers talking of the railroad which was coming through; one of these, Conroy Edgerton, who had a daughter about Hope's age, sent her a box of chocolates. When the railroad did come, Mr. Fielding, who was a path maker, and not a money maker, moved back farther north.

Hope was ambitious and needed money to pay her way through the Normal School. She went to the city and engaged as housemaid in a hotel where Evan Hardy—one of the men—was boarding. Here Conroy Edgerton came and she recognized him instantly. He was interested and they met a few times.

Jim Sanderson—boarder—had been pursuing Hope for months, and finding her alone, made himself so objectionable that she knocked him down with the butt end of a revolver. Then she left the hotel.

Hope taught school and found life flat and unprofitable; she made friends with Mary Dark and Mrs. Patten, and with Allen Kirby who happened to be Edgerton's chauffeur. He took her motoring until Edgerton came—then Edgerton took her. He wanted to send her to college, but she would not decide without time to think it over.

CHAPTER VII.

HOPE was dressing for the Tennis dance. She had been out half the night before, and had just wakened from a cat nap meant to atone for it. Now she

brushed her hair and read at the same time. Her ears did not burn, though they should have. They were only pleasantly pink.

Mary Dark and Mrs. Patten were discussing her. Rather, Mrs. Patten talked and Mary listened, her sorrowful grey eyes veiled, her mouth curled at the corner.

"You should have some influence with her," mourned Mrs. Patten. "She's getting herself talked about."

"Yes, we're proving that," remarked Mary, in a detached manner. "What do you want me to do?"

"Give her a hint," said Mrs. Patten, distinctly irritated. "Eleanor Travers asked me about it only to-day. She was seen in Mr. Edgerton's automobile last week."

"She shouldn't have been seen," agreed Mary, gravely. "I'll tell her so." Mrs. Patten opened her mouth to speak, then stopped, and a tide of painful colour flowed into her face. Mary saw it, through her eyelashes, and dropped them lower.

"I will really try to," said Mary, her tones subtly altered. "Of course she's a little fool. That's why we like her—"

"Oh, yes, I know," said Mrs. Patten, thoughtfully. She was not a fool, though she might act like one on occasion. "You mean she's herself; she's different. But one has to pretend." She flushed again. "Of course I told Eleanor it was all a mistake."

"She's known Edgerton since she was a baby, almost," said Mary, twisting the truth to the comforting effect of a lie.

"Yes, we understand," said Mrs. Patten.

"Perfectly," said Mary, who did.

"It would be such a pity," went on Mrs. Patten. "People would like her, if she'd give them a chance. But she can't afford to do that sort of thing."

"That's it," agreed Mary again, with unperceived irony.

"Mr. Edgerton is so conspicuous. What is he like?" Mrs. Shane told me—

"He snubbed Cora Shane. She tried to add him to her collection. I can fancy what she told you. He's—not bad. An overgrown boy; shrewd, kind, selfish, simple, very simple. He doesn't like women who swear, and tell smoking-room stories. So Cora—"

"Of course," interrupted Mrs. Patten, with an inflection of malice. "Is it true that he doesn't live with his wife?"

"Not quite, yet," said Mary, allowing that to be interpreted as it might chance. The possible, though remote, significance of the remark in that context did not escape her. She laughed quietly. "Oh, yes, it might happen. In that case—Hope could afford to."

Mrs. Patten was silent, thoughtful.

By ISABEL PATTERSON

Illustrated by MARY ESSEX

"But," added Mary, meanly, "it's really the chauffeur Hope is flirting with," again making a half truth serve. It served. Mrs. Patten almost turned pale.

"Oh, that's impossible," she gasped. "Or the automobile," said Mary, dreamily. "Getting down to essentials, Hope is rather direct, you know."

"It was Ned who mentioned it to me," said Mrs. Patten, distinctly distressed. "He wouldn't believe it, of course."

"She must have snubbed Ned," said Mary profoundly, forgetting her audience. Mrs. Patten winced. They sat awhile in silence. Mary was thinking of the friendship between Hope and Edgerton.

It had all been under her eyes; she had watched it with a certain pity, but no desire to interfere. She knew the uselessness of attempting to deflect from any course such a secretive, yet straightforward nature as Hope's. Somewhere the girl would find an outlet. She would go through, under, or over an obstacle, softly and silently and as though unaware of opposition. There was nothing meanly obstinate about her, but in certain ways there was no approach to her, either. She would do no harm, probably; but certainly, having been born, not under a star that danced, but under a little, faint, wondering comet, she would never fall in tune with the world to the extent of establishing a fixed orbit. One must take or leave her. Which of

monster with Allen Kirby gravely at the wheel and Edgerton tangling himself up in meaningless words, trying to explain to Hope things about them both which neither understood. In reality, that young lady was curled up cross-legged on the deep-red carpeted floor of Edgerton's rooms, beside an open suit case, neatly folding an assortment of cheerful neckties and carrying on a desultory conversation with the owner of them.

"Did any one see you coming?" had been his first apprehensive question, as he closed the door sharply behind her. "No, I guess not," she replied, carelessly. "Do you mind?"

"I?" he said, and stared at her. But he was aware of the extraordinary recklessness of women. "I don't think I should have let you come here."

"But it's cold out," she argued. "And I can't have any one where I live. Besides, I wanted to see. Your room looks like you." It did, being large and substantially comfortable, but without originality. There were no books; she commented on that, roaming about and tossing aside a newspaper or so disdainfully. She tried the big leather chairs, and presently insisted on helping him pack. He was going on the midnight train, to be absent a month or more.

IT was characteristic of him to have these expensive rooms, across the hall from his offices, in the one really large and modern office building in town. He had furnished them himself; the small, rather shabby hotel annoyed him, and the expense was a matter of indifference to him. But he did think he should

not have let her come. He had not known where to see her; had asked her to appoint a place. Allen told him the car was out of order. She had suggested his office; mere hospitality had prompted this alternative. He felt rather strange when she assented immediately; he didn't know what he felt, until she entered, and then he had expressed everything in that apprehensive question. He thought of his own daughter, and he made a vow that if ever she needed him, he would stand back of her. What else could you do for a girl?

It gave him a wistful delight to see her stroll about, half tiptoe, touching this and that. When she came near him once, he put his arms about her timidly, and gave her a clumsy kiss. She squirmed away, laughed, and prodded his broad chest with a slim finger. "Aren't you fat?" she teased irrelevantly. "I dare say you wouldn't feel it if I tried to beat you." But he did feel it. Good heavens, to be over forty, and have sweet-and-twenty laugh at you! Then she folded his expensive silk shirts, and socks, his innumerable ties, his fine linen handkerchiefs, with the care of a child keeping house, and made herself very busy, and said she was sorry he was going.

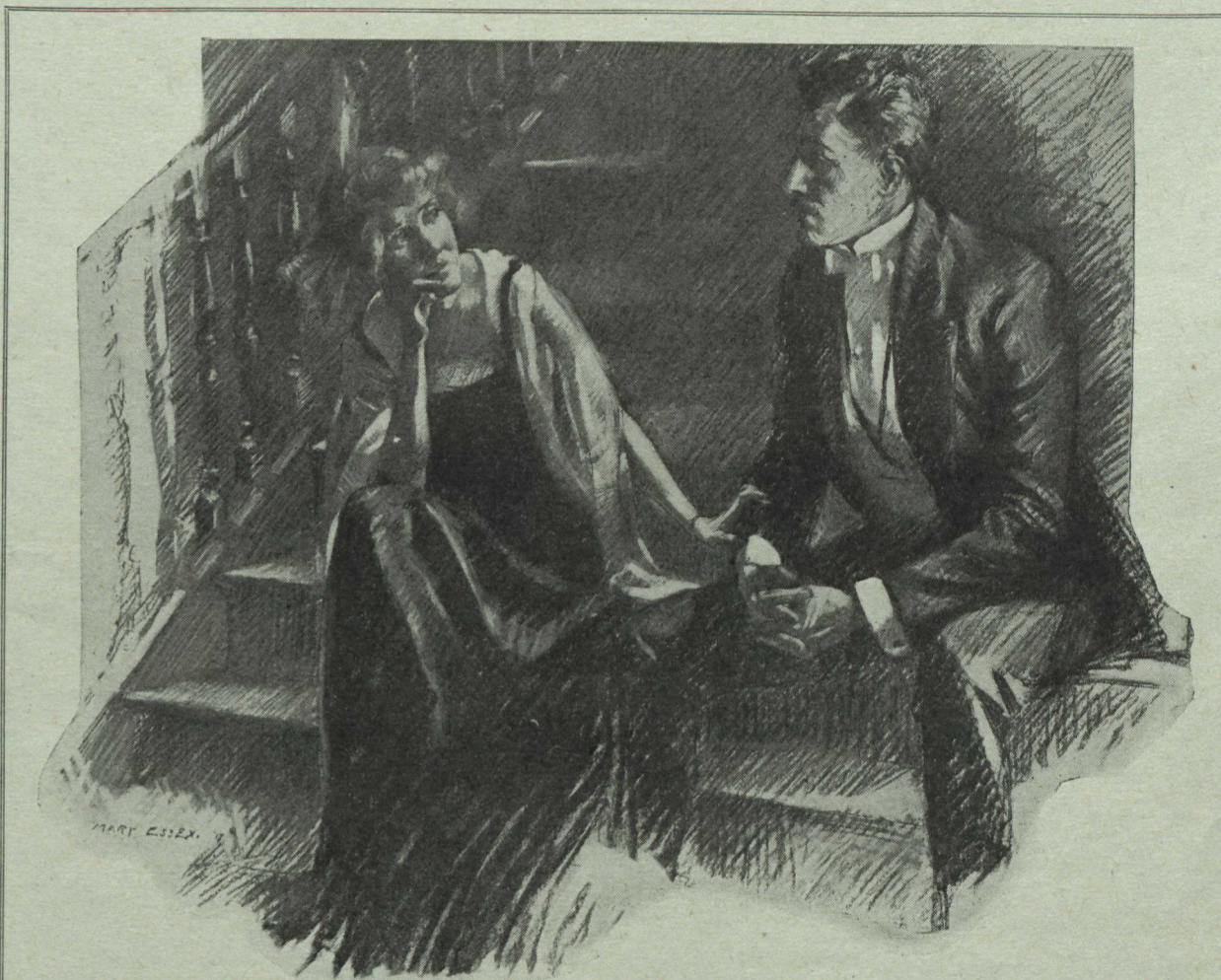
His trunk was enormous; she said she could get into it, and proved the fact. The extent of his wardrobe filled her with frank amazement. People, she reflected, were very interesting, when one saw them thus at first hand, surrounded by the evidences of their own taste and personality. This was so unlike her own room, which was a bare little cell, with queer sketches of her own on the walls, one small battered trunk, a highly uncomfortable chair, an imitation couch covered with real cushions, and a pair of Japanese clogs pathetically toeing toward each other in the centre of the room. They were always in the centre of the place, never neatly ranged against the wall. How out of place he would be there! It made her laugh. But he broke in on her thoughts. He had been pacing up and down, lighting and throwing away cigarettes, watching her.

"Are you going to college?" he asked at last, abruptly. Her own answer surprised her a little, for she said involuntarily: "No." And she was sorry she felt forced to say it, for he looked generously disappointed.

"Then, what can I do for you?" he asked finally.

To that she had no answer.

This refusal had crystallized suddenly in her mind, as the result of long, rather inchoate reflections on it. Dimly she perceived that college would not give her what she wanted. The end of college would be simply the end of college, not the beginning of anything else. She was seeking her youth, not trying to give it up, to college or anything. What had college given to Mary? She would have read more books. She could read them anyway. She would still have her part to (Continued on page 34)



She loved the gay and gallant spirit she read into him, and it seemed, absurdly, to have something to do with the way his hair grew off his temples and with the wrinkles that came across his nose when he laughed.

these the world would do depended, Mary justly reflected, largely on her luck.

Mary had come to know Edgerton well. To him she was only a quizzical smile, a clever brain, deft hands. He trusted her. Sometimes he sent word to Hope through her—little notes, punctiliously unsealed. She had been unwilling, at first, but he could easily reach Hope, and it was better this way than through another, less her friend. Mary, sitting at her desk in his own office, fancied she could tell when he was thinking of Hope, and at such times, when he caught her eyes on him, he would redden slightly and pore over his letters and estimates again. Squared up to his big mahogany desk, which failed to dwarf his solid proportions, absorbed in files and legal papers, he would look the very embodiment of sanity and well-rewarded shrewdness. And presently he would give her a small, white envelope, addressed to Hope, and, putting on his hat, go out suddenly, without looking at her.

LATER, Hope would take the note, read it with quick carelessness, nod, and chatter of other things. Or she might telephone to Allen Kirby, and tell him she could not see him that evening. Then Mary would laugh, and Hope would join her very gaily. Sometimes she merely tore up the missive and said, "Oh, bother!"

The day before, she had said, as though to herself, "All right," and sat awhile thinking. Mary went away. She was not a mind-reader, or she might have remained to remonstrate. Later, she imagined Hope tearing through the night in the black and brassy eighty-horse power