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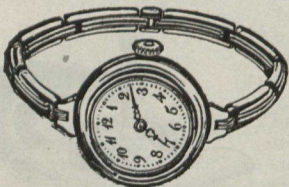
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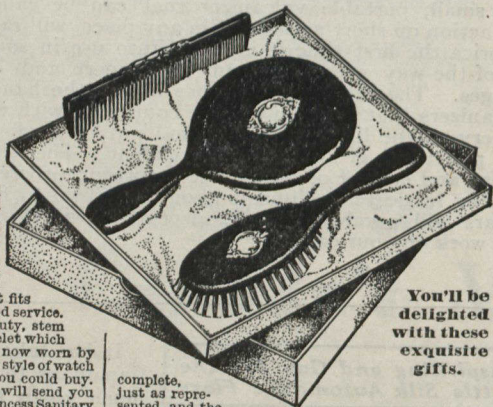
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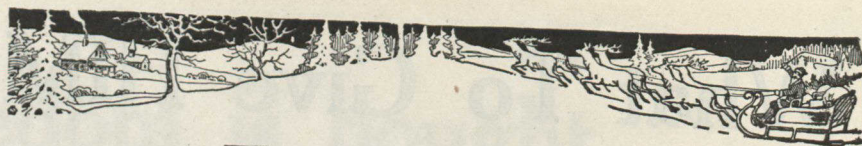


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The Magpie's Nest

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12)

"Thank you," said Miss Curtis, obviously surprised, and perhaps a little grateful. "I'm free lancing; I don't have to rush off anywhere. Do you live here? You must be a millionaire." They were approaching the hotel.

"Indeed I'm not. It's astonishingly cheap here—but of course I must move. Tell me where I ought to look for a room. I haven't the least idea. Where do you live?"

"You wouldn't care for it," said Miss Curtis. "I pay two dollars for my room—downtown. I have no heat, and the window looks on a blank wall."

"Ugh!" Hope shivered frankly, and unlocked her door. Her own room looked very comfortable, after that. "I can't stand cold—I've had too much of it. Wait till I tell them to send up food." She telephoned, and resumed the conversation. "I suppose you live in Bohemia. I'm not Bohemian; I'm a bourgeois to my marrow."

"No," said Miss Curtis simply, "I'm not Bohemian; I'm just poor," and she smiled again. "Newspapers are useful to keep off the cold; I wear them under my blouse." She put her hand to her meagre breast, and Hope heard a slight rustling to the pressure.

"But—but—oh, no," she stammered. "Not really! I've been poor too, but—" "Ah, well, I'm one of the unsuccessful ones. But I'd rather starve here than go back—I used to be a schoolteacher," she said.

"But so was I, in a way; it wasn't as bad as that," protested Hope. She did not quite realize that she was, after all, one of the capable ones, born to survive, intellectually independent but economically adaptable, ready to use either her head or her hands, and to make the best of what she had no matter how much she might protest and demand more. She was romantic, indeed; but Evelyn Curtis was a visionary. The story of her life, as she told it in a dozen sentences, was a better thing than she would ever write; it touched the depths of simple tragedy. Materially she had been very comfortable as a schoolteacher, but the mental drudgery of it had grown more than she could bear; and the Philistinism of her native city was equally intolerable. She loved books, and failed to grasp the fact that an appreciation of literature by no means predicates an ability to write.

IN fact, she could not write. Authors were her demi-gods; she was a hero-worshipper.

So, with all her savings in hand, Evelyn had set out on a pilgrimage. She had sat at the feet of most of the prominent living authors, but even that failed to cure her. And after travelling all over the Old World as cheaply as possible, she had come back content in her own way and hungry in the natural order of things.

"My goodness," said Hope, overcome when the recital closed, "what does anyone want to meet an author for? Or a painter, either, or any famous person? You've got all the best of them, in whatever they create; I'd as soon want to meet the cook because I liked the meal. This is rather good cold beef, isn't it? Of course the cook might be interesting—" Miss Curtis was laughing heartily, rather as if unused to the exercise.

"But isn't it true?" insisted Hope. "The interesting people are quite often just interesting; more likely to be critical than creative. And I am fond of books, but I don't see what one can get out of them without actual experience as a key. Of course I understand you wanting to see the world. But you really went to see certain people whose lives and gifts you envied? Wanted to stand around and live their lives with them, through them. It cannot be done."

"Perhaps," said Evelyn. "You are very clever and cruel. Why are you here?"

"To discipline my soul, I suppose," said Hope, grinning. "I could feel the dry rot creeping over me, doing the little easy things that were nearest. There must be some meaning in those queer old religious terms, don't you think? I came on instinct, hoping to find a fight, I believe. Something in me was trying to turn over in its sleep, having a nightmare. Maybe there is something here for me . . . do you get any meaning at all out of what I'm saying?" Evelyn nodded, her liquid, bright, over-intelligent eyes answering. "If there isn't—I'll go on. I may stub my toe over it—the whatever it is—

some day while I'm rushing madly along. Or I may never find it—but not because I didn't try. Or—quien sabe? I've come to the end of my poor imagination."

"You are one of the interesting ones," said Evelyn, musingly.

BOOK TWO. CHAPTER XIX.

HOPE wrinkled her nose. "That's what one says of a woman who is neither rich nor beautiful," she said. "But it's better than calling me clever. Thanks. But I warn you, to-morrow I may bore you to death. I do myself, quite often."

"No," insisted Evelyn, laughing, "you are. I can read other people's fortunes because I have none of my own. Now you—you'll marry again—I hope your husband is dead—" She paused, rather overcome by her gaucherie.

"I hope so too," said Hope piously, "but you're talking nonsense. Why should I marry again? Enough is sufficient but too much is plenty. It sounds posed, but I'm tired of men. I have met millions of them. Since I left home I have walked a long, long road, like a Devonshire lane, between solid hedges and banks of men. Making one's own living means entering a world of men. It was my sad mistake to take them seriously. Since we've followed the men to their lairs, we ought to be good sports and let 'em alone. I intend to. I am an adventurer—no, I am not contradicting myself. I belong to the new order of honorable adventures. Unknown continents in life—Madam Columbus looking for the New World—gold and treasure, and much fame, you know, like the Raleighs and the Drakes went after, not a blackbird out for slaves. There, I'm out of breath. But don't talk husbands to me; I intend to cultivate women only. Tell me instead that I am a great genius and will be hung by the Academy and bought by the Metropolitan Museum."

"Columbus was looking for the Indies," Evelyn reminded her. "But show me your work and I will prophesy." Hope, with good-natured lamentations, dived headforemost into her trunk and emerged with a portfolio of remnants.

Evelyn pored over them attentively for a long time, and Hope suddenly a little tired, took up a book and forgot about her. A quick exclamation roused her.

"What are these?" Evelyn was asking.

"Which!" Hope tumbled off the bed lazily and went to look. "Why—my Moon babies—I had forgotten them. Mary Dar! and I did them, like Alice in Wonderland, to amuse our landlady's kiddies. They're nothing. Throw them away—no, they were Mary's too." She was suddenly homesick, and wondered when she should see Mary again.

"Let me have one story," said Evelyn, with a rather sly manner.

"Certainly; take what you like. Wait, that one's all torn; I'll make you a new heading." Hope took up her sketching block and busied herself for fifteen minutes. "There, these are your godchildren, 'specially made for you. They're so easy to do! I wish I could say the same of my other work." She yawned, looking suddenly older with the ashen tint of fatigue. Evelyn rose, reluctant, and surveyed the room with a wistful air as she buttoned her shabby jacket.

"You're tired," apologetically. "I shouldn't have stayed so long."

"I wanted you," said Hope. "Don't mind my looks; that's New York. There's something about the air here—it's harsh, like hard water; makes my bones feel old. Will you dine with me to-morrow—no, the next day? To-morrow I have to go out to the races—fashions and society. But please come the next day." She turned her head away suddenly, for there were tears in Evelyn's eyes. It made her feel rather ashamed that she should have thought herself so forlorn. After Evelyn had gone she examined her own case as disinterestedly as she could. After all, life had given her something, and if she had been able to keep but little, what did that matter? At the end, no one could keep anything, save memories. Perhaps even those went also, at the last. And hers were amus-

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 54)