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7



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"A question of identity is disturbing me. I'm still hearing a certain song—I think I can never forget it. Are you by any chance the singer?"

"As it happens, I sang a little this afternoon."

"Then the finest thing in the world has happened."

"Did I do pretty well?"

"Pretty well? H-m-m!" he considered the matter judiciously. "Yes, I think I may safely say that."

She laughed as though he had been very witty, then quickly became grave.

"Were you thinking hard for me at the first, when I almost fished?"

"The hardest I knew how. I was afraid you were losing your nerve."

"I was. I never was so scared in my life. It came over me all at once that the next few minutes would probably decide everything for me, and I could see only strangers—critical strangers who wouldn't care. Then I saw you sitting back there and—and then I could sing. Thank you for coming!"

"It is to my happiness if I have been able to help you."

"You're quite welcome, I'm sure. I think for a minute that I could stay away? And are you aware that we have never shaken hands? It is really high time. Would you mind?"

Her smile was sunshine itself. "With all my heart." She put out her hand. He took it and held it.

And he dropped it and stood looking strangely at his own hand. For it was tingling deliciously. And at her touch and the look that went with it his heart had burst into a sudden mad singing—a song not of exile or thanksgiving, but of a longing to which he might never give tongue.

The hand fell slowly to his side. With an effort he lifted his glance to her questioning, startled eyes. He tried to make his voice easy and natural, but it was heavy and stiff.

"I—I congratulate you. I hope—I know—today is only the beginning of many fine things for you."

Then he turned quickly and left her. In his room, when the first daze had cleared a little, he set himself sternly to face this new thing, for he knew now why the old sense of loss—the dream woman shrunk to a wife to whom love was only a bubble to be worn in fair weather—and why the failure of love had ceased to trouble.

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why Shirley had drifted so quickly, so easily into the shadowy background of his life. He saw what had helped him to win his new brave philosophy, had bulled the walls of his sanctuary. His poor sanctuary! What refuge could it offer now? Another house of his building lay about him, a grim, hopeless ruin.

"Oh, Esther!" he whispered to the girl he might not have. "Oh, Esther!"

He sat there trying to see what he must do. Darkness fell, but he wanted no light. He did not stir until late in the evening chords from the piano reached him.

He rose and opened the door, and a voice athrob with pain floated up to him.

By the waters of Babylon we sat down and wept.

CHAPTER XIII.

At the Door.

BUT Shirley was a fact. By morning—no sleep came to him that night—he had decided what he must do about that fact. It was then not a very complex problem.

He took a lightly packed bag with him to the office and at the first opportunity presented himself to Jonathan.

"May I take tomorrow off? There's a matter I must attend to at once. I can be back by day after tomorrow."

"Certainly," said Jonathan, without looking up.

"Thank you," David hesitated. "Mr. Radbourne, do you know anything definite of the situation at St. Mark's?"

"The committee will decide this week. There's a man named Holden."

"I know him."

"He seems to have influence and not much else. But Mr. Blaisdell is trying to see that you get fair play."

"Is it necessary for Mr. Blaisdell to use his influence very actively in my favor?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"I'm very sorry. I appreciate my friends' willingness to help, but I'd hoped to be able to win solely on my merits in this thing."

"Do you wish us—Mr. Blaisdell to refrain?"

"No. I need to get back into my profession. It means so much to me—in a new way—that I'll be glad to have it on any terms. That doesn't mean that I'm not grateful for the kindness I've had here—but I'm interrupting. And David went back to his drawing. All that day he avoided Esther, sticking close to his table. Not until she was leaving at the end of the afternoon did he seek her.

"Miss Summers, I forgot to tell your aunt that I shan't be back until day after tomorrow. Will you please tell her for me?"

"You are going away?"

"Yes," he made no explanation.

"I will tell her."

"Thank you." And because he was holding himself sternly rigid, lest eyes or tone cry out what must not be said, he spoke almost curtly.

She moved quietly away from him and did not once look back, though she knew he was watching her. But when a door was between them she stopped for a moment, quivering lips pressed hard, both hands tightly clinched. Then she, too, sought Jonathan.

"Mr. Radbourne, the church people telephoned today that I can have the position."

"I am very glad. When shall you be leaving the office?"

"At the end of the week if you can get some one for my place."

"So soon! I—"

"I will stay as long as I'm needed, of course."

"Oh, no! You're quite right to go at once. I can get some one to do your work. But not to take your place. I shall—"

Jonathan seemed deeply interested in the crystal paperweight on his desk. "We shall miss you very much."

"I haven't thanked you—"

"Please don't thank me for anything. I have done nothing any one could not have done. It is," he said huskily—"it is to my happiness, my great happiness, if I have been able to help you a very little."

Then he looked up and saw her face. "Miss Summers! You look overtired, and I have kept you standing. You must sit down, and let me get you—"

"It is nothing at all." She forced a smile to her lips. "It is only the reaction from yesterday. The ride home in the car is all I need. Good night, Mr. Radbourne."

And when she was gone he sat down and took a small mirror from a drawer and looked long and sadly at what it recorded. Suddenly he dropped the mirror and bowed his head on the desk.

"Esther!" It was almost a sob. "If only I could help you now!"

David walked the next morning from the station to Aunt Clara's house. She greeted him in astonishment and offered her cheek for a kiss.

"This is a surprise. Shirley's out too. They've gone for a picnic and won't be back until dark."

"Yes; I saw them start out. How is she?"

"Shirley's quite well and seemingly enjoying herself."

"I suppose so," he said.

"And the boy too."

"He didn't know me. I came to get Shirley to come back."

"Are you out of debt then?"

"Not quite."

"You've had a raise, or has something better turned up?"

"I've had one little raise. Nothing else has happened that I can count on. But we can get along nicely now, thanks to your help."

"For which you're not thankful at all," she smiled grimly.

"It was a mistake."

"Humph!" she sniffed. "Have you lived with Shirley four years without learning that she can't stand?"

"You must help to convince her it is best. She must come before it is too late."

"What do you mean by that—before it is too late?"

"I mean while I still want her to come."

"Eh?" Aunt Clara stared sharply at him. She put on her spectacles that she might stare more effectively.

Then a light broke in on her, a light too incredible, too dazzling, even for Aunt Clara's confident mind. "Eh? David! What do you mean to tell me—do you mean there is another woman? Who is she?"

Aunt Clara took off her spectacles, rubbed them mechanically and donned them again. Her hands felt nerveless to her lap.

"I don't know what to do," she repeated. "For the first time in all my existence I—I have no precedents. You must leave me for awhile until I can think this out."

He rose. "You can't think it out. I have tried."

"You'd better lie down and get some sleep. You're looking quite bad."

"No. I'll go out and find David Junior."

"Perhaps that would be better."

He went. For an hour Aunt Clara sat alone, trying to work out the hardest problem of life—how to raise a love from the dead—and all she achieved was a bitter self reproach for the first time in all her existence.

A ripple of childish laughter came to her through an opened window. She rose and looked out. She saw the Davids, little and big, sitting chummi-ly on the lawn. Then Aunt Clara thanked God that David and Shirley had been given a son.

"We have that much to start with, though it seems little enough just now."

When it was time for David Junior's dinner and nap she summoned David to her sitting room again.

"David," she began very meekly for Aunt Clara, "I've been thinking it over. I ought to blame you, but I can't. I've had all I could do blaming myself. Are you thinking I am a selfish, meddlesome old fool?"

David shook his head wearily.

"But I am. I was lonesome alone here in this big house, and I really thought—but never mind that now. Does she—that other woman know?"

"I think not."

"Is she—in love with you?"

"Oh, no! That is impossible. Oh, no!" he repeated. "That couldn't be. It would be too terrible."

"It's terrible enough as it is. Are you going to tell Shirley?"

"That wouldn't help matters, would it?"

"I suppose not," she sighed. "David, you must be very gentle with her. It isn't her fault she wanted to run away from hard times. All her life we have spoiled her, her father and mother and Mabel and I. I did it worst of all, as I never spoiled my own child. David, come over here."

He went to the chair beside her, and she reached for his hand very awkwardly.

"Oh, David, it's going to be very hard for you—all because an old fool!"

Aunt Clara was crying now noisily and unaccountably because she had had little practice. "And I'm afraid that when you see Shirley you'll find it even harder than you thought."

(To be continued.)

Wood as Fuel.

Experiments on wood as part substitute for coal in gas making have been carried out in France. The wood used was saw-pine in the form of billets cut from the middle of the trunk. The charge of the wood was about half the weight of that of coal, and carbonization occupied half the usual time. When running one retort with wood to every two with coal, no appreciable difference in the calorific power of the gas was noted. Of the two by-products—small coke and tar—the former amounted to 5 to 10 per cent.

Trimming and Staking Tomatoes.

This method of handling tomatoes has come into very extensive use in the past few years among the commercial market gardeners, owing to the high price of land and backyard gardens. The plants as a rule are set two feet apart each way and after planting are given one cultivation. The sticks are then set; driving them down about a foot into the ground, and leaving from five to five and a half above the ground. These sticks may be made from mill edgings, saplings or anything else of a similar nature about one and a half inches square and strong enough to hold the plants when the fruit is fully grown. After driving the sticks and tying the plants to them the ground should be covered from four to six inches thick with very strawy manure, as a mulch. This mulch will keep the moisture in the ground and, at the same time, remove any necessity for cultivation and other disturbance of the roots. In growing tomatoes on the commercial stem, such as is used in this method, all side branches which appear where leaf stems join the main stem of the plant are removed as quickly as possible. If they are allowed to grow it will take away very valuable plant food from the growing plant. The plant should be tied every eight or twelve inches to the stake and when they have reached the top are cut off.—A. H. MacLennan, Ontario Vegetable Specialist.

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