

"Do you think that all those weary years you speak of would compensate you for—some other things?" Miss Dabney asked.

"Yes—oh, yes! Do you think there is any chance for me? Tell me, and I will abide by your decision."

Miss Dabney smiled sadly. "I am not infallible," she said. "But you are so clever," answered the girl. "As soon as you mentioned your name, I remembered your stories and sketches."

Miss Dabney leaned forward a little with the manuscript still in her hand. "Judging from this, I really don't believe writing is your forte," she said.

The girl flinched, but she said never a word. Miss Dabney liked that. She admired "grit."

"My child," Miss Dabney went on, "don't waste your time on writing. There is so much more and better work you can do in the world—work that will yield a better harvest. The road to fame in any profession is long and very hard. Of the many who traverse it, but few are chosen." She paused a moment, and then went on rapidly: "There is so much that is dearer in life. The glamor of success soon wears off, but friendship, love, are lasting."

The girl glanced at the speaker curiously. Was this seemingly cold editor a woman after all? What was she saying? Her family and her lover had said the same thing many times before but she had told herself they could not understand; but this woman was different—she knew.

"I had a friend once," Miss Dabney said, "who was young and very ambitious—like you." She smiled. "She sacrificed her heart's happiness for this dream. She worked and worked for years, while her first youth melted away, and she attained a little success—as the world judges it. But now, when it is too late, she realizes that Stevensons and Kiplings are not born every day, and, after all, she has missed the best in a woman's life. I tell you this, because I feel sorry for her—because it may help you."

In the girl's face was a strange, new light.

"Jerome was right, after all," she said.

"Jerome?" Miss Dabney repeated, eagerly.

The girl flushed.

"I beg your pardon—yes, Jerome Whiting—he—he's the one."

The objects in the room swam before Miss Dabney's eyes, and her visitor's voice sounded far off and indistinct. Then she had saved this girl for him! Her long, hard years of business training now stood her in good stead, and she recovered herself immediately.

"I should not have questioned you," she explained apologetically, "except that the sound of the rather unusual name attracted my attention. A very long while ago I knew a Jerome Whiting. Tell me, is this—this friend of yours from Mobile, and the son of Governor Whiting?"

"Why, to be sure he is. What a small place this world is, after all! But I can't recall his ever having men-

tioned your name. Did you know him very well?"

"We knew each other as children," Miss Dabney answered. "We used to be very intimate before—before I came North. Then we lost track of each other." Miss Dabney did not add, "after I refused him."

There was a pause. "I have never seen him since. Till to-day I have scarcely heard of him. He is well?"

"Very well," said the girl, adding shyly, "and he says very happy."

"I am glad," Miss Dabney said.

"His father died recently, and that was a great grief to Jerome," the girl went on, not noticing how Miss Dabney winced at her familiar mention of the name. "The old place has gone to him, and he is getting it ready for me. You must come and visit us."

"Thank you," said Miss Dabney, "but I am such a busy woman, I have little leisure for long journeys. I wonder if the great magnolia by the gate is standing still. Dear me, when I remember the mud pies we used to make in its shade, and—and—" Miss Dabney had forgotten her companion.

"I do not know," said the girl, laughing happily. "I have never been there. I might have known," she added irrelevantly, "that there was some bond between us. I felt it as soon as I saw you to-day and heard your voice."

Miss Dabney did not seem to hear.

"Will you take him a message from me?" she asked; then not waiting for a reply, she went on hurriedly. "Tell him who it was who persuaded you to do this, who it was who thought less of literature than of love, and ask him if he remembers Helen Dabney. Will you do this?"

"Indeed I will," answered the girl heartily, "and he will thank you then, as I thank you now. Good-bye."

After she had left the dingy little room for the glory of the noontide sun, Miss Dabney stood still for a moment where they had parted. Then she went back to her desk, but she did not work. She picked up the rejected story the girl had forgotten, and laid her flushed cheek against it, while she turned dim, unseeing eyes toward the window. Old Trinity's clock rang out the hour. It was noon and the time for rest—and day dreams.

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Powell—Well, I should say not! I've got a twenty-year endowment policy maturing next month.

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"How strange! Girls seldom think that until after the ceremony."

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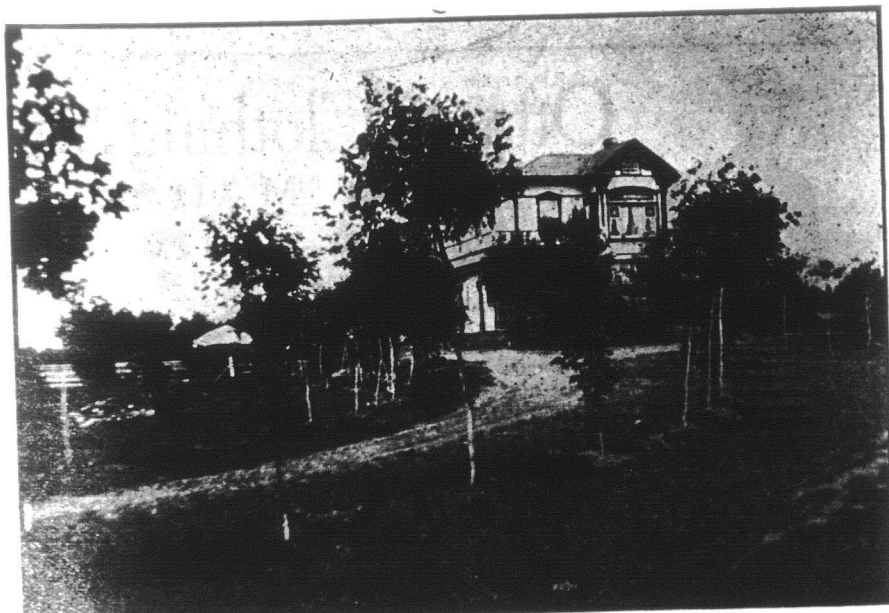
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