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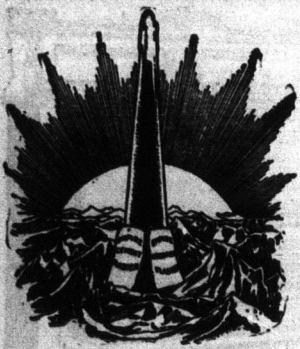
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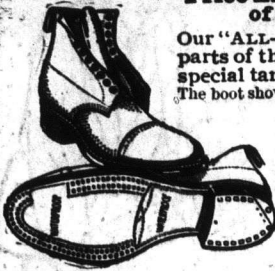
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In the Heart of a Rose.

By Mrs. R. W. Lacy, Tyvan, Sask.

A great vase of red roses stood on the table near her. The woman threw out her arms and, with one impulsive movement, drew them to her. She buried her face in their fragrant depths and breathed in intoxicating draughts of their odor. She was thirsty for the scent of the roses. Presently, she raised her head and settled back into her chair with a sigh. She was tired—oh, so tired.

Before her lay the scattered pages of a manuscript; and her books—well, they were everywhere. She did not go on with her work. The spell of the roses was on her, and she yielded herself to the witchery of the hour.

Outside, in the hushed twilight of an early winter evening, the first snowflakes of the season were drifting silently down. The air was biting cold. Shoppers, merchants and laborers were already by their own firesides and the streets were almost deserted.

Inside the woman's cozy sitting-room, a bright fire danced and sang in the grate. There was warmth and cheerfulness everywhere. Love of the beautiful and exquisite taste was reflected in everything about her—expensive simplicity.

Clare St. Claire was one of the few women the world calls successful. Money and fame had come to her. Yet in the woman's soul there was still a strange longing that kept her from happiness and, at times, made her almost miserable. To-night she was living over again those happy poverty-stricken days of her struggle for a place in the world. And how far back in the dreamy past seemed her girlhood days.

And there was Jack—ah, yes, there was Jack. To her he was inseparable from the scent of the roses. Her girlhood days had begun and ended with Jack. She was only in her early teens when he came to her. How sweet was her life during that long bright summer. Each day had been a perfect gem linked to her chain of happiness by love and pleasure. And then, she remembered with the same vexing hurt that Jack had never spoken the few words she had so longed to hear.

"Well, it was I, not Jack that cared," she said to herself, as she gathered up the scattered leaves of her manuscript and placed them together. Mechanically, she closed her ink well, and arranged the books on her desk. Then she left the room for a moment. When she returned, she drew her chair nearer the fire and shivered as if she were very cold. In her hand, she held a pretty little gold casket. She touched the case with loving fingers, here and there, and murmured softly to herself, "The resting place of a dead love."

Should she open it? She held it to her heart and hesitated. Within it was all that was left to her of the cruel past she had tried so relentlessly to shut out of her thoughts. Long years full of bitter struggles and privations had gone since she put it there.

What effect could it have on her now? Had she not changed too?

Tenderly, she lifted the lid and gazed down upon a withered rose and a card on which were the lines she knew so well:

"Sweet mysteries oft repose
Deep in the heart of a rose.—Jack."

For the hundredth time she puzzled over these words. Yet, in her mind there was no more of a solution than on the day when she held the lovely half-blown beauty for the first time. Strange, she had thought then, that Jack should send only his one red rose, but, hers was not the nature that delves in mysteries. How could she dream that her happiness rested upon so frail a thing as a rose?

Over the sun of her young life a cloud had drifted. Jack ceased to be her lover. Broken-hearted and miserable, yet, brave and proud, she turned her face away from her girlhood home

with its painful associations to follow ambition through the intricate maze of a great city. With the memory of it all tears gathered in the woman's eyes, and scarcely conscious of the act, she lifted the rose from its resting place. The dry, brown petals fell in a shower at her feet, leaving only the withered stem in her hand.

With a little cry of surprise, she slipped down upon the rug. As she did so, she noticed a tiny bit of folded yellow paper. She picked it up and unfolded it carefully, and holding it to the light read:

"Dear Clare, may I come to-night? I have something I must tell you.—Jack."

The paper dropped from her trembling hands, and she sat gazing at the fire, tense and silent, with a queer ache in her heart. The mystery of the rose was solved. Its withered heart had opened to the touch of time. Love had been dull and blind. She could see it all clearly now. Of course, it was just like Jack to do this, for, she remembered him as shy and bashful and full of poetic sentiment. Naturally, she fell to wondering what had become of him, and if he were not already married and happy. Then suddenly, a feeling of disgust for her life and her work surged over her. What did her career amount to, after all?

She must always be lonely. Her arms must always ache from their very emptiness. She had lost her crown of womanhood.

A gentle tap at the door aroused her from her reverie.

"Well?" she asked, with just a trace of impatience in her tone.

"A gentleman to see you, madam," announced the maid.

"Very well. Say I'll be down in a short time."

"A gentleman!" she repeated to herself, "What can be his errand to have brought him out in such weather?"

She bathed her face and then let down the rich coils of brown hair. Something prompted her to arrange it low upon her neck in the old girlish way and to slip on one of her simplest dresses. The passing years had been kind to Clare St. Claire. They had scarcely left a trace upon her pretty face. She was turning into her thirtieth year, yet, few younger women could boast of a fairer face or of a better form than hers.

When Jack Lyon's eyes (for it was Jack that waited for her) fell upon her as she entered the door, the years slipped away and he saw only his sweetheart of old and sprang to meet her with a glad light in his eyes. We shall not stop to describe their meeting farther, only to say we are sure the misunderstandings were explained, for after a time Clare led him into her sitting room up to the rug before the fire and pointed to the little crumpled note lying among the withered rose petals.

With the light of understanding, the man reached out his strong arms and drew the woman to him and whispered tenderly, "The heart of my rose was false but the heart of my Clare was true. Is it not so, dearest?"

The folk of Forbar are at least musical! On a recent evening this spring, no fewer than seven distinct companies left the town for places around to entertain the people there.

Oh! why left I my home?
Why did I cross the deep?
Oh! why left I the land
Where my forefathers sleep?
I sigh for Scotia's shore,
And I gaze across the sea;
But I canna get a blink
O' my ain Countree!

Robert Gilfillan.