

I feel as if I knew each one personally," she said to Hoffman, with whom she was soon on terms of intimacy. "I've counted them so often, I know them now by their numbers. No. 12 is the fattest, juiciest rascal you ever saw. He is round and green, without a speck of any kind, and this morning, I'm sure he was ashamed of getting so far of the others, for I found he was blushing. And No. 24 is so tiny! I fear she'll never grow up to be a dignified lady tomato."

Hoffman laughed. "The romance of a tomato patch! Well, I have no scruples so when No. 12 reaches the right shade of red and is ready to pick, bring him to me and I'll prepare a well-seasoned dressing and eat him with a relish."

"Cannibal! Haven't even the green things life?"

"Yes, but we need their life to sustain our own."

Frances dropped her work in her lap; she was hemming dish towels, and gazed into space. "Just as some human beings exist through the vitality of others. I've seen that in my own family; we all lean on my mother. She has a wonderful force; she is not a large woman, yet she impresses you as such. Even father asks her advice and abides by her decisions. When I came away, they were talking over father's new position. The company wanted—to send him to Washington, but he would not accept unless mother approved of the change."

"How do you feel about it?"

"I am glad. Washington must be the nearest approach to an ideal city that we have."

Loring, entering at the moment, caught her cousin's phrase. "I should like to live in Washington," she said.

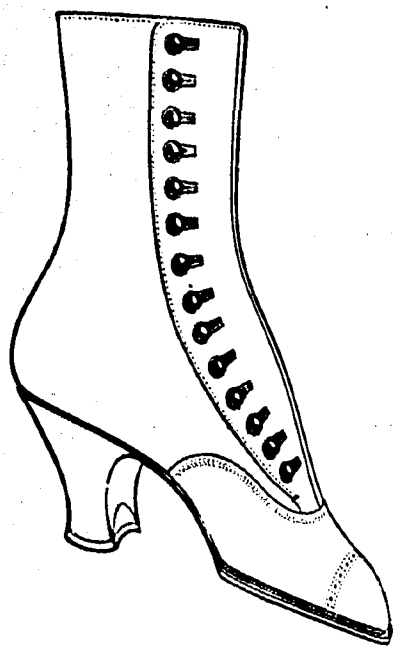
"Then why not come with us?"

"I'll think about it. I've been there only on flying visits, but I have a memory of cool, shaded streets, many parks and a well dressed, leisure class of people who stopped to admire as they journeyed on."

Hoffman glanced at her. "You are planning to leave Woodsmere?" There was deep regret in his voice. For years he had schooled himself to bear the loneliness of his lot, to seek mental companionship in books, forgetfulness of self in work and relief from tedium in interesting himself in the lives of the poor; but for nearly a year he had enjoyed the intellectual society of a well-bred woman who had a keen mind and a vivid mentality, and he would feel his isolation more than ever when she went away.

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g's heart throbbed gratefully as he recognized what her departure would mean to him. "I shall not go until winter," he said. "I shall keep my little house and go back to it often. I have learned to be content, and I must return in spring to my intercourse with nature. But I want Royall to love it as I love it, and I shall come back for his sake as well as my own." Her voice brimmed over with tenderness as she mentioned her son. She had given him her mother's maiden name. She cared for him herself, almost to the point of Anne's interference, and the thought of all when he slept in her arms could feast her eyes for hours on his face.

In the service journals she learned that wedding was still in the East. She knew his name and that of Agnes among the guests at various functions in Melbourne, so that she knew he was well, and, at least, resigned to his fate. To picture his emotion should he meet Royall, but, though she dwelt sometimes on the joy of laying the child in her father's arms, she had no intention of departing from her original purpose. There was no need of turning the knife in his wound. It would never heal in her heart, but it might in his; and she told herself she had no need of Paul now when he was again, more her own than ever, the person of his son.

Frances stayed throughout the summer, but it was not until the night before she went home that her lips were unsealed. She told the story of her lover's perfidy. He had liked him from the beginning of their acquaintance, and he was a young man with a good future, her parents put no obstacle in the way of his wooing. She was an ardent suitor, and it was not long before he had won her promise. He was lax in his attentions, and she heard rumors of his devotion to a stage favorite. She did not believe it 'till one evening, when he had gone to the theatre with her parents. She saw him coming out of a restaurant with the woman. He had turned and looked at her eye, but she stared at him as if she were seeing a stranger. He made an attempt to explain later, but she asked him to assure her on one point. Did he consider what he offered was the love that would make for a happy marriage? And, on his credit, he could not brazen it out.

She did right to send him away, Cousin Loring. I've seen too much misery follow

when girls insist upon marrying men who want only heads for their households, not wives. You see, father and mother are so companionable that I've grown up to believe that the true foundation for married happiness. I don't want to marry a man, and after a month or two seek my own interest while he seeks his. I want a husband's way to be my way; I want to care for the things he cares for. Spencer liked books and pictures and motor cars. I liked him also, and I thought we had many tastes in common; but I could not share him with other women, and I did not wish to marry a man who was willing to leave my entertainment to other men. You understand, don't you?" Frances asked the question abruptly. Loring was so silent that the girl feared she had gone too much in detail, but Loring promptly reassured her.

"You are quite right, Frances. Wait until the man you love wants a wife in every meaning of the word; then accept him—but not till then, for a woman who belies her nature will pay for it with tears and misery, with rebellion and perhaps sin." Frances shuddered and crept into Loring's arms.

When Frances had gone, Loring missed her more than she cared to admit. Her



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