

Mother's Choice.

A Story With A Moral.

I had adjusted my tie, taken up my hat, and was preparing to leave, when the door slowly opened and my mother came in.

"Going out, are you, Tom?" said she.

"Yes."

"Where? To another party?"

"That makes three this week, doesn't it, Tom?"

"Yes. We're hurrying to get through. Going to take Miss Beaufort to-night, and then I'm done with the Jolly Club's parties."

Mother, somehow or other, did not seem to think very much of what I said.

"Tom, I wish you would get married," she said, with a troubled face.

"I believe you would stay at home more."

"Well, I am awful tired, mother, and completely worn out."

"Then why don't you quit it?"

"The best reason in the world, mother. I am neither engaged nor in love; but I am willing to be both."

It was getting late, so I started after this, but the sad look on my mother's face set me thinking.

My mother is the best woman in the world, even if I do say it myself, and I felt worried about her. She was right. I was out nearly every evening. This evening at a reception, next time at a ball, then a theatre party, and so on.

Of course I could well afford it, my salary as cashier at Harri's was a liberal one. But I was not saving a penny, and my home folks never saw me except at the table. Even poor old patient mother was complaining.

But I was having lots of fun. There was that Beaufort girl. She was a fine one. Could dance any dance, talk about anything, and make you have the finest time in the world.

Then there was Vene Wright. She would play a game with a fellow, go rowing, skating, anything for fun. Then Vene had money. That was an important item. Why shouldn't I tackle Miss Vene on the subject of matrimony?

"Thomas, old son," said I to myself, "Vene is the one."

But Vene, somehow or other, did not exactly suit the case, and my mind reverted to Miss Beaufort.

Miss Beaufort was smart, pretty, stylish, and suited better; but I knew nothing about her financial standing. This was an important matter to me in those days.

Meanwhile the carriage had approached Miss Beaufort's. I had never been there before, and to my surprise, found it to be a very unpretentious house. I confess I was disappointed. I expected to drive up to an elegant mansion, be ushered into a fine reception-room by a servant in livery, and there await the coming of Miss Beaufort. Then I expected to make a bold dash for her heart—propose, and possibly be accepted or declined by the time the party was over.

But no so. A little lady with grey hair opened the door, and she was introduced to me by Miss Beaufort as "mamma." Miss Beaufort was ready and waiting, so we walked out to the carriage.

"Mr. Silver," said she, after we had seated ourselves, "don't you think there is a great amount of snobbery in society, and lots of downright foolishness?"

"Suppose," said I, "that you pretend for a week or so that you are married, and see how it goes?"

"An imitation wife," said I.

"Why not?" said she. "I will write the name of a young lady on a card, seal it in an envelope, and you can lock it in your desk. Then let us suppose you are married to her for, say, two weeks. During that time I want you to act as if the lady were here in person and your lawfully-wedded wife."

"Whose name are you going to write on the card?" said I.

"Never mind," said she. "I will write my preference, and neither of us will breathe a word to a living soul."

We agreed on this. Mother wrote the name on the card and sealed it in the envelope. I knew it was Vene Wright's name, so I decided to imagine that Vene was there in person, and so we commenced the week.

Monday night came. That was the night of the German Club ball, but I stayed at home and talked to mother. Then I played draughts with her for awhile, and we managed to have a very enjoyable evening.

Next morning mother met me at the table with smiles, and about the best breakfast I had eaten for a long while.

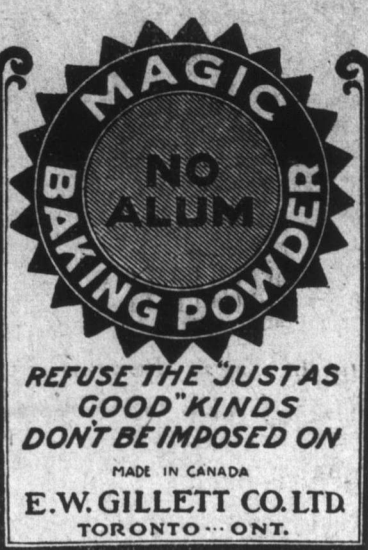
"You must imagine that your wife saw this breakfast," she whispered.

Going to the city that morning who should get into the 'bus but Miss Beaufort. I bowed to her gracefully, passed her fare to the conductor, and was about to sit down by her side when I happened to think of my imitation wife at home, and kept my seat by the door.

"Married men have no business talking to the young ladies," said I to myself.

Miss Beaufort looked at me rather queerly, but said nothing, and I thought the 'bus would never get to the city.

Thursday was the evening I was to call on Vene, and I forgot to send her an excuse. On Friday a note came from her, which mother took



"Well, yes," said I.

"For instance," said she, "here is an elegant carriage that you have brought for me, and yet the party is not half a mile away."

This certainly was very refreshing. I had actually squandered £1 to take this carriage for the evening, and she was not pleased with it. I know Vene would have enjoyed a ride in it.

"Mr. Silver," she remarked again, "this is the last party I am going to this winter."

"Well, why?" said I. "Aren't you going to take in the German Club ball and others?"

"No," said she. "Mamma hasn't the money; she can't afford it. Besides, Mr. Silver," she continued, "can you really afford to spend so much money on society?"

I looked at her. There was honesty fairly shining out of her pretty black eyes, even if she wasn't very polite. So I answered her honestly:

"No, Miss Beaufort. I cannot! I haven't saved a penny this winter and I get a big salary, too. It seems idiotic."

"Well," said she, "I have met you often, I feel quite well acquainted with you, though I expect I have been a little impolite."

"No, said I. 'I am glad that you talk that much interest in me.'"

Then we changed the subject. I had a splendid time at the party, and enjoyed Miss Beaufort's company very much. I found her level-headed and bright, if she was too frank.

The next day I told mother about it. She said that she admired Miss Beaufort for her common sense, though she had never seen her. Then she referred again to my getting married.

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