

The Gold Gown

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Grandmamma's sniff signified that Elaine's father had been shabby since before she was born, that her mother was a fright, and that she, Madame Bushnell, disapproved of everything and everybody in the vicinity.

"And a decent dressmaker to make it," pursued Elaine, sitting cavalierly on the edge of grandmamma's bed. "I just got after father myself, and told him he had to find the money somewhere. I can't disgrace the Marshalls, even if I do have to be a reproach to my eminent relatives."

She blew a kiss toward her wan mother, and looked so exquisitely pretty that grandmamma could have bitten her. Elaine was a rosy blond, slim, long, with wide brown eyes, and an air of delicate distinction that would set off very good frocks indeed.

"I'm having just what I want, too, grandmamma. Would you like to see it?" It appeared that Elaine could produce a parcel from below stairs if desired. Grandmamma vouchsafed that she supposed she would have to see it in the end, whether she approved of it or not.

Elaine explained the beauties of her material to a silent audience. Hetty blinked behind her glasses, and set her pale lips in an intensity of interest. Grandmamma folded her hands in her lap, and observed acutely. Elaine held up the golden shimmer of her silk, to catch the right light on its folds.

"You see," she showed vividly, "it has just the lights of my hair. And this net"—she flung out a mesh over the shining surface—"I shall embroider with gold thread. I have the pattern. And I have some new gold slippers, and yellow silk stockings, and mother will let me have her funny gold chain for my neck. I will have it very severely made—just wrinkled across, so." She held a sheaf of the radiant stuff across her bosom. "Then it will follow the lines of the figure right down. Oh-h-h!" She gave a heart-brimming, ecstatic sigh. "I never had just what I wanted before."

Grandmamma removed her glasses, and wiped them carefully. What was this poor, pretty granchild of hers but an embodiment of hunger? The lean, professorial life she had shared, the painful consideration of pennies she had witnessed all her life, had not drained her as it had drained anxious Hetty. She had been the beautiful, fungous growth on the whole situation, sending avid little rootlets down, she neither knew nor cared how far, into her shriveling host. All the caustic things grandmamma had perpetually on her tongue's end died within her at that long-drawn sigh.

Nor did she look at the blinking Hetty, with lean uncertain fingers on her white lips, to demand where Waldo meant to find the money for all this. She removed her glasses, wiped them and put them on, as Elaine, with the reverence of a high priestess, performed the rite of gathering up her sheaves. The old lady surveyed the process grimly before she said:

"You had better have Miss Bemis come down here to make it. Your mother has enough to bother her. And you had better stay until it is all over."

It did not modify her grimness that even Hetty showed a kind of joy at this. Nor did she unbend for Elaine, who rapturously acceded.

"Oh, dear grandmamma!" the girl cried. "How I shall love it! You know how I hate things at home. There are always pots to wash, and a twin to look after, and there's no room for anything. And I do so love a fire in my room!"

What seemed to grandmamma the unnaturalness of this outburst, was lost on both Elaine and Hetty.

"Poor child!" said the mother. "What a scramble it all is at home! I should think you would like it better here. You must be very sweet to grandmamma."

Elaine replied with impatience to the admonitions of her flat-bosomed little parent standing with appealing gaze, a nervous hand on the door knob. Hetty never seemed to her other than absurd.

Why couldn't she stand up straight, and do her hair better and get over that way of winking? Other girl's mothers did not permit themselves these habits.

"Of course I shall be sweet to grandmamma. I'm never horrid except at home. Send Miss Bemis right down. We can begin this afternoon. Oh!" as the door closed upon the obedient Hetty, "you've no idea what it means to me to know that the twins won't burst in at any moment!"

"Do the twins annoy you?" asked grandmamma, watchful from her corner. Elaine made a frantic gesture.

"Annoy me? Annoy me, grandmamma? Why, I positively hate the twins. They use my things. They paw me. They make noises when I am trying to sleep late in the morning. They come into my room when I want to be alone. Or, if I lock my door, they cry so that I can hear them even when mother calls them away downstairs. You know you can hear everything in our house. Now, here," the girl shut her eyes and pressed her little fingers over them. "Oh, I wish you would adopt me! It's so quiet here, and you always have a cook. Mother is going to send away Jane, just because I am having this dress. And Jane is the first decent cook we have ever had."

Grandmamma pressed her lips tightly. This was horrible frankness. Yet, she wondered, was not frankness Elaine's redeeming characteristic? At least, one felt sure that there could be little worse in the girl's nature, when so much that was shocking displayed itself on the surface. And grandmamma believed that at the root of what, in some of her rhetorical flights, she termed the upstart tree of Elaine's egotism, there must be a soil that could give some other growth nourishment, if only the right instincts could once be planted. Hetty and



"I can't marry a poor man. I can't endure it, grandmamma!"

Waldo had compelled, she believed, Elaine's egotism to take root and flourish.

To the doctrine that she had no right to interfere, even though its poisonous growth should mean destruction to her own child, grandmamma had tried to adhere at whatever cost of wrath or anguish. Yet, now, as Elaine bloomed, and Hetty faded, the heavy-hearted old woman felt herself preparing to lay aside all her principles. She was about, she admitted, to interfere. The days of Elaine's stay she meant to spend in planning how she might strike.

Those were absorbed, blissful days for that young lady. Her slender fingers flew as she made her mesh of net blossom into a golden fairyland. Miss Bemis, from the hauteur of the expensive seamstress, descended eventually to admiring pupilage. Miss Elaine's ideas, she confessed, were wonderful. However radical her innovations and however the seamstress shook her head in the beginning, the end was always Elaine's end, and the result triumphant.

"And so pretty herself," Miss Bemis assured grandmamma, "that she looks charming where another girl would be extinguished. And how she does love beautiful things!"

"She has a strong decorative instinct," grandmamma commented. To her, Elaine's decorative instinct was not a pretty quality. Grandmamma had a poor opinion of people who decked their bodies too thoughtfully. To her, they were not far from savages, and their preening she regarded as highly undeveloped. Yet, she watched appreciatively Elaine's unaffected happiness as

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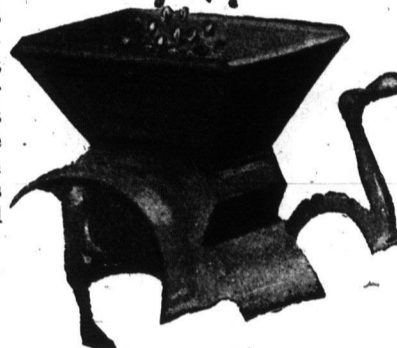
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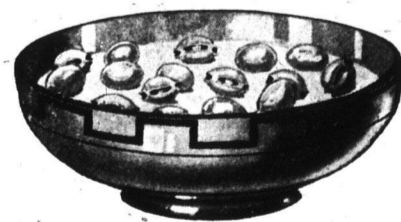
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