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From Thanksgiving to Thanksgiving.

[A story in four chapters. By Anison North.]

CHAPTER II.

The situation which Helena had snatched at so eagerly was a position as salesgirl in a millinery shop. She had met Miss Giles, the proprietor of the establishment, somewhere during the summer, and had expressed to her a wish that she could take a situation in the city. Miss Giles had not been slow to recognize the advantage to herself that it would be to have a girl of such fine presence in her shop, and in her mind's eye was soon picturing how this hat would look, or that, poised above those classic features and that mass of fluffy chestnut hair.

"You would make a perfectly exquisite model, my dear," she said. "Why, with a shrewd laugh, the ladies simply couldn't resist the hats if they saw them on you. You would smile, my dear, if you saw how many fat and ugly women imagine themselves Psyches in a certain hat if they see it on a Psyche's head."

Helena was young, and was flattered, and Miss Giles followed up the point of vantage by putting her arm around her caressingly. "I have really taken quite a fancy to you, child," she said, dropping her voice confidentially, "and I should like very much to have you in my millinery parlors when the Autumn season begins in September."

Helena had not been permitted to go in September, as has been seen, but the illness of a "saleslady" had left a place open again, hence Miss Giles' letter to Mrs. Wayne, hence the fact that Helena was at last in the city.

She had not had time to write to her aunt or Honore, but telephoned directly on her arrival at the station.

"So glad to have you, my dear," came over the wires in her aunt's deep and rather pompous tones. "You will stay with us for a few days. Just wait where you are for a little, and I will send James down with the motor car. Honore and I may not be at home when you arrive,—so sorry, my dear, but we are all ready to go to an afternoon reception,—you see how it is,—but just make yourself at home. James will go down for you just as soon as he has taken us over to Mrs. Mortimer-Smith's."

It was with a sinking—just a little sinking—at her heart, that Helena turned from the "phone and went into the ladies' waiting room. She had been hoping a bit, secretly, that Aunt Helen would ask her to stay altogether at her beautiful home, but evidently that was not to be. Aunt Helen would be kind, but she evidently intended to let it be known from the outset that she wanted no outsider in her home. "After all," thought Helena, presently, "one can't blame her. I am sure I shouldn't want a stranger, all the time, in my home," and then, rather oddly, she began to think of Fred Marsh. She had been almost vexed with him last night. He had spoiled everything. Now she smiled a little over it all. "I suppose it's always the way," she reflected. "I might have expected it. And I shouldn't have been vexed with Fred. After all, it was the greatest compliment he could pay me,—with a sad mixing of the indefinite pronoun."

She felt a bit lonely as she sat all alone in the back of the big motor-car, as it whizzed through avenue after avenue on the way to "Elmhurst," and more lonely still as she was ushered by a discreetly silent, white-capped maid, through the hall, with its polished floor, up the long stairs and into the room which was to be hers during her stay. It was a very pretty room, with walls of soft gray, the prettiest old rose and gray rug, and dainty curtains all flecked with tiny roses, but she sat in it quite alone a long, long time, until the fire that Aunt Helen had ordered to be kindled in the grate burned low, so that she had to replenish it again and again.

She looked out across the lawn at the people passing in the street, she thought of home and wondered what they were all doing; she lay on the couch, she sat in the rocker and looked into the grate, then after what seemed hours and hours a maid tapped at the door to say that she was wanted at the telephone.

"Are you quite comfortable, my dear?" asked her aunt.

"Quite," replied Helena, feeling that she was telling a half untruth as she said so.

"And you'll not mind if we don't come home to dinner, will you?"

"No," said Helena a little savagely, then, "No, aunt."

"You see we have an invitation to dinner,—a quite impromptu invitation, but it's to the Marvyns, and we couldn't think of refusing. It's quite a privilege to be put on such an unceremonious footing with them, you know. Indeed, Mrs. Marvyn quite insisted. So you'll not mind, will you? I have told Martha to get you just the nicest kind of a dinner all for your own little self. Now, Honore wants to talk to you."

So Honore came and chattered for a while, and Helena went back to her room. "Well, if it's like this all the time I'm glad I'm not going to be here," she said to herself, pounding the sofa pillow into little downy mountains. She tried not to be unreasonable, but in spite of herself, could not but compare the different reception Honore had got, when she had gone up to the farm for the summer,—the planning and preparation, the making of pies and cakes, and salads by Helena's own hands and her mother's, every dainty a testimony to the personal esteem in which they held their guest. "Why, mother and I could not have thought of being away when Honore arrived," she said to herself. "Well,—the humor of the situation striking her,—"I guess I'd better dress for dinner, since I'm to dine in state. I'll not have any company that I object to at any rate. What shall I wear?—Oh, my white dress, just for to-night."

It was her play of the night before, but she was scarcely so jubilant a Helena as she pinned the white fichu into place. There was no golden chrysanthemum to-night, and, indeed, she felt as though just a few of the flowers of her life had, somehow, drifted off. "I—I believe I'm a bit homesick," she ventured, to herself. "Wonder where uncle is to dine. Perhaps at his club."

The dinner was all that could be desired, also the silver, also the fine Limoges china, but nothing seemed the same, somehow, when one ate alone, and presently Helena found herself wishing that she were at home in the little dining-room, eating from the old stone-china dishes that she so despised, the pancakes with syrup, that were so good, and the staunch slices of homemade bread, and Jersey butter, with the apple sauce and cream that her father always insisted on having for supper. Father would be talking away, as he always made a point of doing, cheerfully, at meal times, and mother would be laughing in her low quiet way, from time to time. Were they a little lonely, she wondered, this evening. After tea, perhaps Fred would drop in. Was he a little lonely?—After all, poor old Fred!

Helena had decided that she would stay up until Honore and her mother came home, so she went to the library and buried herself in a book. The evening passed more satisfactorily than the afternoon, but it was quite twelve o'clock when the wandering family returned, Honore and her mother sweeping in with rustle of silk, and sweep of fur, and glimmer of jewelry. They were very warm in their greeting to this bit of the country who had strayed into their beautiful home, and it was long past midnight before all the questions had been asked and answered.

"I am sorry we can't keep you, Helena," said her aunt, "but some of Honore's school friends are coming to stay for a month or two,—in fact, we shall have a continuous house-party during the winter, and all the rooms will be filled. Have you any place in mind where you could stay?"

"I should like to stay in this part of the city, near you and Honore," replied Helena, warmed by the cordiality of the atmosphere.

"It would indeed be delightful," said Mrs. Gregory, then paused as though considering. "Do you mind telling me what your salary will be, dear?"

"Why, eight dollars a week," replied Helena, brightly,—eight dollars a week seemed quite a princely sum to her,—"Miss Giles does not usually pay so much to beginners, but she said she thought I would be worth it."

A dead silence succeeded, in which

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