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AT HIGH NOON.

Written specially for The Western Home Monthly

MISS DABNEY sat in her sanctum, looking wearily at the huge pile of unread manuscripts before her on the desk—stories rolled, stories tied with a blue ribbon, stories written in pencil—nearly all of them without one redeeming feature. She was so tired of it all. Only a busy editor could know how wearing were even the trivial details on nerves and temper.

Had Miss Dabney been a man, she would probably have lighted a cigar and consigned the accumulated work to an unmentionable locality; but, being a woman, she pressed one hand against her hot head and, closing her eyes, longed for rest. Yet she had been glad to obtain a position on the staff of The Times, because the small salary she received helped a younger sister, who was an invalid; glad, too, because it was an opening in her chosen field, and she had sacrificed so much for it. But to-day the hours dragged. The clock in old Trinity's steeple had just tolled the half hour of eleven. Could it be that less than half the day had gone?

She picked up a manuscript lying near, and glanced at the title—"Love and Honor; a Tale of Cuban Bloodshed," and smiled a little even while she sighed. It was signed Eleanor Musgrave, and the letter that accompanied it stated that the author would call on the seventeenth for a reply—she did hope it would be a favorable one.

"She has rather a pretty name, poor child," thought Miss Dabney, looking at her calendar, half unconsciously. "Why, to-day is the seventeenth."

forgotten dream. She was not very old now—only six and twenty—but sometimes she felt old—so old.

There was a knock on the door, and Jim, the office factotum, poked in his head.

"Copy, Miss Dabney?" he asked, laconically.

"Not just yet, Jim," Miss Dabney replied, looking up. "Tell Mr. Davis I've been too busy this morning to finish the Hungarian article. He shall have it by to-night."

"All right, Miss." Then Jim moved nearer and spoke in a mysterious whisper, while he nodded significantly toward the door. "There's a young lady out there that wants to see you."

"I'm too busy to be bothered. Who is she, and what does she want?" Miss Dabney replied brusquely.

"She says she wants to see the gentleman who reads the stories," and Jim grinned.

Miss Dabney smiled in spite of herself.

"Find out," she told him, turning in her revolving chair to her desk. Jim departed.

"It's Eleanor Musgrave," Jim announced in a disrespectful whisper a moment later.

Miss Dabney started, then did a very remarkable thing. Instead of handing Jim the manuscript to take to the author, she said briefly:

"Show her in."

A slender, sweet faced girl entered and looked about the room. Seeing no one but Miss Dabney she went up to her and asked:

"Will you tell me where I can find the gentleman who reads the stories?"

"Well, no; I'm afraid I cannot, un-

"I am afraid it's unavailable," said Miss Dabney.

"I am so sorry," said the girl.

"I am sorry, too," Miss Dabney said, pushing back her chair, as if to signify that the interview was over. But the girl leaned forward eagerly.

"I know it's unusual, but—but won't you kindly tell me what the trouble is? I'll be so grateful. 'Unavailable' is a very convenient word for you editors, but it's very hard and vague to us." She laughed mirthlessly.

Miss Dabney toyed with her paper-weight.

"It is unusual," she admitted.

"I know I've no claim on you for this, but if you would only be quite candid—"

"Do you really mean that?" Miss Dabney questioned sharply. "People sometimes say that and then resent the criticism that follows. It is almost always harsh."

"But I do, I do. This means so much to me—more than you can know. My family laugh at me, and—and—my friends. She paused a moment. "Some such dear friends," she added, in a whisper.

Miss Dabney turned her eyes toward the window and looked out across the house tops, gleaming in the sun. The light must have hurt her eyes, for she winked hard. Then she rose and picked up the manuscript.

"This story," she said, looking at the girl, "is irrational and utterly devoid of point. Shall I go on?"

The girl nodded. She could not speak. She had asked for this; but did the cold woman who sat before her, passing judgment, realize that every word was a knife thrust to her life's ambition?

"It is sentimental, the incidents are irrelevant and inconsequential," Miss Dabney went on; then paused.

The girl's tense voice broke the stillness. "Tell me, do you think I could ever write? Of course, I don't mean right away," she added hastily,



A Bit of Rural Scenery near Emerson, Man.

This must have been here three weeks. Well, I might as well save her another trip," and Miss Dabney settled herself more comfortably and opened the manuscript. She read attentively for a few minutes; then laid the story down with a gesture full of pity.

"Utterly hopeless," she said, half aloud.

Why she did not toss the story into the great rejection drawer near by, why the letter that accompanied this particular manuscript appealed to her so strangely, she never could tell. Thousands of a like nature passed through her hands every month; yet this tiny, violet-scented note contained so much longing, was so fraught with hope and suspense, that it seemed to recall to her her own youthful struggles, like the memory of a half-

less you care to call me a 'gentleman.' I am the manuscript editor—Miss Dabney," and she smiled kindly.

The girl flushed a little.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

There was a pause.

"Might I steal a few minutes of your time?" she said timidly. "I know it's a great deal to ask, but—"

Miss Dabney drew up a chair with a strange throbbing at her heart. This girl was so like what she was once, before she had tried her wings to fly alone.

"I left a story here a few weeks ago," the girl went on. It was called 'Love and Honor.' Have you found time to read it yet?"

"Yes," Miss Dabney answered briefly.

"And—"

The girl paused.

"but perhaps after years and years of work. Oh, I would work so hard!"

Miss Dabney hesitated. The girl was so pitifully young and inexperienced. If she did not disillusion her, perhaps no one would. The surgeon's task always seems cruel, and yet how merciful to the needy sufferer! Then, too, she recalled the girl's flushed face when she had half whispered, "Some such dear friends." The years rolled back. Perhaps if she had had some one to point out to her the way, to help her to listen and to heed her woman's heart cry, which she had in her blind ignorance stifled, she might have been far happier—who knows? She had a certain amount of talent, at least, to compensate her for her sacrifice; but this girl might go on striving vainly all her life, and miss both success and love.

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