

in the one he was talking to. standing at the far end of the room, one of my friends, Anne, a very pretty girl, and he was looking at us at the same time. He addressed me once or twice as "John," using my name in speaking. I thought nothing of the introduction and dismissed the matter from my mind. A few days later I received a note from the gentleman if he might call. I was in a fever of pleasure. His person attracted me strangely, what I did not dare to think. It was all so improbable. I had this note and set a time for the evening. I had taken a dress with my gown, and used the art I knew in an endeavor to be attractive and, as is the case in such cases, I suppose I more dowdy and unattractive

entered the room and held out to greet him, an expression on his face that carried to my an electric shock the full significance of the situation. He had come with Anne Carroll!

splendidly, bravely carried through to the finish, for he gentleman, but I knew his even- ing. If his evening was mine was one of bitter. Needless to say he never

gent sent me into a period of vision and reserve, from which I fully emerged. No one but a really woman can realize what to go through an experience of a small village where every sentiment is public

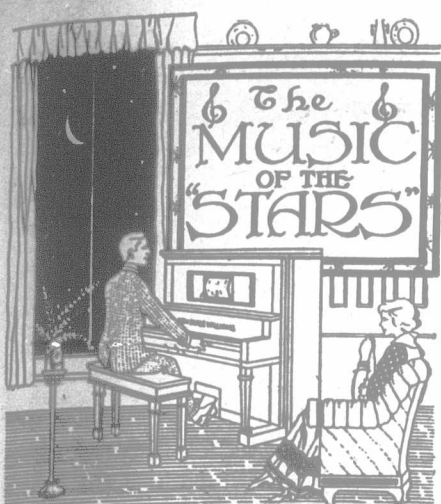
ers after this Father died expectedly and left me not less incapable of earning a deprived even of the substance that would permit me so. There was but one. It was what all unmarried were expected to do who bers of these very gentle come the dependent in the male relative.

my only brother's wife, had children, and since Brother will far from the summit on achievement in his profession not be expected to welcome me as a guest, especially when, in her I was destined to be a life her family. I give her ver, for acting very well un- der circumstances.

youngsters were my saving and an infinitesimal income, and I had to provide for my necessities; and after a few years' conscience no longer in the matter of being a I knew that I was render- ing to Fred and Martha far in value of my board.

tled down into a monoton- ous relieved only by my joy in their great love for me, consciousness that I was an in- volved in their young lives. hour of my day was when the three little night-robed my knees for their even- ing and then tucked them away perhaps a song or a happy them off to sleep. After plunge into the mending with even with my almost tion seemed to be always indeed a sorry outlook for an of twenty-six, a woman a heart full of ideals, woman's desire for a wo- man a sphere of her own

ars I plodded along, ac- cidental trend of my life. Often in my twilight sang or read the children I would let my imagina- tion have a possible emancipation. I could dream into home all my own, which at least with a love so overwhelming, that it would thing about it. all homely women have I think they do, for love for admiration, the



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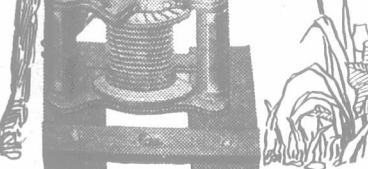
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woman's hunger for love and sympathy, are not wiped out of her heart by the color of her hair or the shape of her nose. No woman can find her highest happiness in mothering another woman's babies, even though they are near and dear, as Fred's children were to me. I had the whole care and responsibility without the rare joy of shaping their young lives entirely as I would wish.

Sometimes the two older children as they kissed me good night would say:

"Aunt Jane, you won't ever get married and leave us, will you?"

I could never answer except with a kiss, for I was always foolish enough to feel a sudden choking lump in my throat, partly gratitude for the affection they displayed and partly self-pity for the improbability of such a happening. Bless their hearts, they, at least, were unconscious of my physical imperfections, and, like David, in his admiration, for Peggotty, could see only beauty in the face they had learned to love.

One day the clouds broke; and I was sent suddenly into a whirl of genuine excitement. I was preparing peaches for the summer canning when Martha came excitedly into the kitchen waving a letter:

"Jane, what do you think? Elsie wants you to come to South Africa!"

For a moment I could not speak. Elsie, my older sister, who had been married for fifteen years, who was always too busy or too happy to keep in close touch with her family, wanted me to come to her. My senses could not take in the situation all at once. I took the letter Martha handed me and tried to read it, though the words seemed to blur before my eyes.

Yes, it was true; she had written to ask Martha to approach me on the subject and see if I would be willing to go. I suppose she had an idea that in some way I was indebted to Martha and she must in a measure gain her consent to ask me. I felt no such indebtedness. Somehow the tone of Elsie's letter sent a sudden resolve to my heart. A strong inner feeling stirred me to the point of definite action.

"I think I will go, Martha."

For a moment Martha was dumbfounded. I knew what was passing in her mind. I was child's nurse, seamstress, housekeeper and chambermaid. It would mean a great difference in her duties as well as increased expense. The children were uppermost in my mind; it would be hard to leave them—but a new life, a broader life in Johannesburg was calling to me, a long ocean voyage change and excitement. The sister I had not seen for fifteen years wanted me—yes, I would go.

That night I wrote Elsie and asked her to give me full details, and I frankly and plainly stated the condition of my finances, for I knew that Elsie's husband was well-to-do and that there would be a certain appearance to be maintained. Her return letter brought joyful news. She wanted me to share the life out there. She knew I was capable of development in city life, and now that the children required less of her attention she wanted me. Her letter enclosed a draft for five hundred dollars for clothes and expenses. I immediately deposited fifty dollars for each of the three children as a parting gift, and with part of the remainder set out to buy an outfit for the trip.

No bride was ever gayer or happier in the purchase of her trousseau. I went straight to New York and revelled in the joy of purchasing a simple but pretty outfit. Another week was spent at home preparing for departure. Away back in my heart was a feeling that I scarcely dared to frame into anything definite. Some force was actuating me that I could not understand. Every act connected with my prospective journey seemed to be perfectly natural. Things moved along as though I had planned them years ahead, and always in my heart was the thought—I am going home. Somehow Martha's house had never seemed home to me. I was in the family but not one of them. Martha and Fred had their own friends, and I was rarely included in their social life.

It was not until the vessel was well on its way that I fully realized the great break I had made in my life. The voyage, though long, proved pleasant,

but I had to keep ever before me Elsie's merry, smiling face as it showed in her last photograph, to fight off the homesickness that would sweep over me.

I was a happy woman when Elsie at the end of the trip folded me in an impetuous embrace; and when John, whom I scarcely knew, acted as though I was the one event in his life for which he had been waiting for years, I felt that the cordiality of their welcome was all my homesick heart could ask.

We went at once to their home and I was taken to a lovely room all my own. My feeling that I was going to a real home was fully realized. I felt it that first day, and it grew stronger and stronger in all the days thereafter. As was natural, I was tired from my trip, and for a little while we did not see any guests or go about very much, but after that began days of the most delightful social life among the kindest-hearted, most hospitable people in the world, who did not stop to think, apparently, of my extreme homeliness. Since everyone else forgot it, I, too, managed to forget it.

At the first little dinner party that Elsie gave for me, John, my brother-in-law, came up, bringing with him a tall Englishman, whom he introduced to me as his dear friend, Richard Nevill. As I shook hands with him I felt the blood rush to my cheeks as though I were a girl of sixteen. Elsie said afterward that I looked like a woman transformed in that moment, and indeed I felt it. I soon learned that Dick Nevill was almost a constant visitor at my sister's home, and with Elsie's two boys we formed a jolly sextette. Sometimes, indeed very often, Dick and I were felt to our own devices, and we did not miss the others. He taught me to ride, read with me, talked with me and was always a kind and thoughtful friend. I may confess without blushing that I was never so happy as when he was with me, and I found in his companionship a pleasure so deep, so vital, that it sometimes almost frightened me.

One day when we were alone together he drew from his pocket an old faded photograph.

"Do you recognize this?" he asked.

It was a picture I had had taken about six years before with Martha's children about me. There they were, the three little darlings, Ted, the youngest, with his chubby arms about my neck.

"I came by this quite accidentally," he went on. "John, one day, while pulling an old letter out of his pocket, dropped this photograph. I picked it up, and liking the womanly face it portrayed, thrust it in my pocket for closer scrutiny in private. I could never come to the point of returning it to its owner. That face has been dear to me now for many months, for in it I caught a glimpse of the soul-light that I need in my life. Perhaps you cannot understand this, but my life has been very unhappy. I have never seemed to belong to anyone—to have anyone really interested in whether I succeeded or failed. Of course I know it will be difficult for you to realize what this pictured face has been to me, how I have learned to look upon it as belonging to me. For a long while I thought it was the face of the children's mother, and then one day the story of your life came out. Elsie told it so naturally, so sweetly, that I could see you living quietly in that little village, giving up your life for these children, and then a selfish feeling took possession of me. I—wanted you."

I had turned partly away from him as the full significance of his words came to me. That picture did not show my red hair, my freckles, even my ugly nose was softened into a respectable shape. The whole miserable scheme seemed to open up before me. He had fallen in love with the pictured face, as he imagined it was, had persuaded Elsie to invite me to Johannesburg—and now—he was sorry for me, was going to make a sacrifice. I must ask the question that was stifling me.

"You—you—can't think I am anything like that picture? I—oh, it is only your pity for me!"

The next few moments are too precious to recount. I suppose when a homely woman has a great love in her life, when all the months and years prior to this awakening have been a

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