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MEN'S AND BOYS' WEAR.

noon that—it was understood—settled, that is—you understand?"

"Not the least bit in the world!"

"Why, that you and Jack were—"

"Ah! To be married, Hugh?"

"Yes."

"So mother said that, did she?" She glanced toward where the two older ladies, hidden from her sight, were still talking sibilantly at their window. She smiled, but the smile was a trifle hard.

"I don't think she quite told me," he answered judicially, "but she gave me to understand it."

"I see." She turned back to the window and lantern-gemmed twilight without. "Well, she was—premature, Hugh."

"I shouldn't have mentioned it, anyhow," he answered slowly.

"I'd rather you didn't—yet," she said. Then, after a moment during which the hand started full swing into a two-step, "I don't quite see, however, why that should make you jealous," she continued.

"Don't you?" he asked in tones that sounded tired and discouraged. "Well, ever since you were two or three months old, and I used to carry you in my arms and pretend I didn't like it, I've always felt—a sort of proprietorship, considered myself a kind of self-appointed guardian. No one likes to have his occupation taken away, of course, and after you are married, why, then I shan't have any purpose in life, you see. I suppose that's why I can't help feeling a little jealous."

"Is that all?" she asked.

"All?" he faltered. "Why, I think so."

"Oh," she said. She was looking out of the window. He watched her a moment in silence, then stirred uneasily and turned a troubled gaze to the green-banked stand whereon the band was still sending forth the rollicking two-step. A minute passed. Someone lighted red-fire below them on the gravelled path, and the light flooded up through the casement, dyeing her face and neck and arm with tints of rose. He drew a deep breath such as a swimmer draws before the plunge into the water.

"No," he said gravely, "not all, Grace. I lied there. I—love you."

He thought there was a tremor of her shoulders, but his sight for the moment was untrustworthy. At all events she didn't turn, but only asked, after an instant and very quietly:

"Much, Hugh?"

"Very much, little girl." His voice trembled. "Perhaps I shouldn't have told you, but it can't matter, can it? You won't let it trouble you, will you? I think the lights—and the music—and your beauty, dear, are to blame. Heaven knows I tried hard enough to keep still, just as I have for three years past, but it would out. Well—my dear, I want you to be happy; that's all I ask. And—don't mind what I've said; try to forget it, Grace."

"I'm afraid I can't," she answered softly.

"But you must," he cried, genuinely distressed. "It's all my fault, you know. And, besides, after a while perhaps I shan't mind—very much. And, anyhow, I'm old enough—"

"Oh, stop!" she cried in a sudden passion of anger. "If you say 'old' to me again I'll—I'll—" His look of amazement and dismay turned her anger to soft laughter. She clasped her hands in her lap and leaned toward him. "Cousin Hugh," she said severely, "you've dinned your age into my ears until sometimes I wanted to scream—or pull your hair! 'Old, old, old!' You're not old! And if you were, do you suppose I'd care for a moment if—if I loved you? You're forty-three and I'm twenty-one—almost, but if you were eighty and I loved you and you asked me to marry you I'd say yes! Do you understand? Yes—yes—YES."

"Thank you," he said simply. "I think now I'm glad I told you."

"So am I," she answered. There was something in her eyes, a look that was almost a challenge, that sent the blood rushing to his heart. He seized her hands.

"Grace," he stammered hoarsely, "if it wasn't for Jack—!"

The door opened noisily. He drew back with a sigh. The rosy glow faded from the room. Jack was beside them, leaning over her.

"It's all right!" He laughed exultantly. "I've been and gone and done it, Grace, and—and it's all right!"

"Oh, Jack," she cried. "I'm so glad! When? Where? How?"

"Ten minutes ago, between the Yard and the Gym! Hooray!" He wrung her hand, seized Hugh's, squeezed it madly and hurried across to where Billy had joined the ladies at the other window. Hugh turned a bewildered gaze upon Grace.

"I—I don't understand!" he said. "Don't you?" she asked, with elaborate carelessness. "Jack's proposed to Madge Hilliard and she's accepted him." She turned her eyes away.

"Then—then—!" He seized her hands again. "Grace, did you mean what you said, dear? Did you? That you were glad I told you?"

She nodded her head, her hands trembling in his.

"I can't believe it!" he whispered. "Are you sure, dear? If you are only sorry for me—if it's only that—"

She turned her face to him, and the soft glow of the lantern made her eyes wonderful. With a little gasp he leaned toward her and their lips met.

"If I were only younger, dear—for you—only a little younger!" he murmured incoherently.

"Hugh! Hugh!" She laughed softly, happily. "Don't you understand that if you were younger you wouldn't be the man I—love?"

"God bless you, dear!" he whispered.

With clasped hands, silently, they sat looking through the window into Paradise.



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