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PLAYTIME

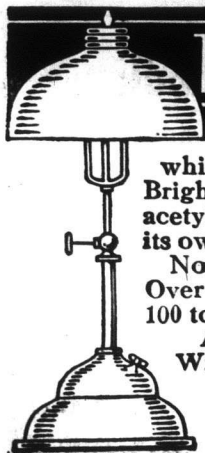
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"Stop a minute, lass! I've something to tell you," he said heavily. "I'd sooner tell it you first. The mistress will know it soon enough. You'll have noticed I wasn't keen on reading the paper this while back. I made out it was the bad print, but well enough I knew it was mine eyes that was shirking work. I went to the eye doctor in town to-day. He says it cataract, and I'll have to give in to an operation as soon as they're ripe for it. Eh, my lass, it was sore hearing, that was!"

With a groan his head sank on his clenched hands.

Comfort laid a soft hand on the grizzled head.

"I am so sorry," she said gently. "But the operation will make them all right."

"No! no! they'll put none of their knives into me. If it's the Lord's will I must bend to it. A blind farmer, and the men shirking their work, with no master's eye on them. It's a bad job, lass!"

The quick red flew to Comfort's cheeks, her heart seemed to rise to her throat. But her voice was calm and clear.

With the late summer Mrs. Osborne's strength ebbed away. There was nothing the matter, the doctor said—nothing but lack of desire to live.

"Why can't the fool bring her round?" Osborne growled. "I'm not stinting fees. I've a good mind to kick him out, and send for a city man."

"You may send for fifty doctors, but they'll never cure her," said Comfort, steadily. "It's neither drugs nor doctors she needs."

The anger flew to Seth's brow. For a moment Comfort thought he meant to strike her. But instead he brought his first down on the table, and glared at her in silence.

One night when Comfort laid down the paper Seth Osborne broke the spell of brooding silence that had held him.

"Comfort"—the voice was harsh, as if the words were forced out of him—"you can tell the mistress I'm fetching Arnold home!"

Her pulses bounded, glad color flooded her cheeks, but she did not venture to speak.

"You were saying he'd save doctor's stuff. I got his address out of a letter



A delightful pillow

"Why not bring home your son?" she asked. He started as if she had struck him.

"What son? I have no son!" he blustered. "The mistress has been putting you up to this!"

"She has never named him to me" she said, quietly. "What did he do that you sent him away?"

"Mind your own concerns, wench!" he stormed. "How dare you take me to task."

In the days that followed Seth Osborne fought with all his iron will against his growing blindness. He was like a lion chafing in his cage as he lurched over his fields. It was only in the evening that Comfort could wile him into forgetfulness of his loss by reading the bits of news out of the local paper.

It had been the Osborne custom, father to son, to read from the Bible of a Sunday night. Going through the Gospels Comfort came to the story of the Prodigal Son. Seth Osborne leant forward in his chair, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his clasped hands.

He raised his head as she finished, and crashed one mighty fist on the table, making the lamp jump.

"Don't you be thinking you're getting at me and my boy Arnold, when you're reading that, girl!" he cried angrily. "He was a decent lad, was Arnold. He wasn't a prodigal."

Mrs. Osborne started off, flinging out appealing hands.

"Father, oh, father," she cried.

"Hold your tongue, woman." He rose and groped his way out of the kitchen. "I'm not talking to you."

in her desk, and I have bidden him home. But it's on my own terms."

The news of the young master's home coming was a fresh lease of life for Maggie Osborne. Buoyed up by hope she came back to her round of duties. She was very pitiful over her giant shorn of his strength.

"Arnold will soon be home, Seth?" she ventured.

"Ay, ay," he said, dryly. "Comfort was saying it would save me doctor's and drugs. But I let him know he should wed the wife I've picked for him, or he'll hide no more under my roof. He needn't fancy that because I'm a blind man that I'll not be master in my own house."

"He'll never wed Nancy Nicholson," she sighed.

"Will he not?" Seth's lips twisted in an odd smile.

Comfort stood at the garden in the silver haze of an autumn evening, listening. The fresh clean smell of ripening fruit was in the air.

Someone was coming up the hill—a tall, young fellow, with striding steps.

Comfort whistled a clear blackbird call. It was a signal of the old love trysts. Arnold Osborne stopped short, gazing around him, and up into the boughs of an overhanging tree.

Comfort swung the gate open. He passed through, raising his cap. Her brown eyes followed him with a smile of love and mischief.

"Arnie," she said.

He wheeled round, staring at her. The next moment she was in his arms, his lips on hers.



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