

Cynthia's Lost Illusion

"I cannot see what all the fuss is about," said Cynthia.

"You are perfectly insane," retorted her mother with asperity, "it's a terrible affair."

"Because he happens to be a groom and I the daughter of a peer, you say we are unsuitable. Why was I then brought up to admire the very things he excels in?"

"You are incorrigible, Cynthia," said Lady Pomeroy. "I can do nothing with you. I shall ask Sir Peter, as your trustee, to speak to you. Meantime, Slaney"—her ladyship pronounced the name with disgust—"has been dismissed with a month's wages in lieu of notice."

"Very well, mother," replied Cynthia, imperturbably. "I have plenty of money for the pair of us. As for Sir Peter, he is a modern Falstaff, and it won't make the slightest difference to me what he chooses to think or say."

Lady Pomeroy felt it was hopeless to argue further with her misguided young daughter. She fired, however, one final Partisan shot.

"The man is a common groom. Handsome, I do not deny, but he is not a gentleman and never can be."

"What constitutes a gentleman?" said Cynthia loftily.

"A gentleman!" Her ladyship rose from the chair and made her way to the door. "A gentleman," she repeated, pausing at the threshold, "is everything the groom is not!"

Cynthia watched her mother's departure with an amused smile.

"Everything he is not! Yet he is manly, courageous and gentle. He has no airs and affectations, and does not pretend to be other than he is. If a gentleman is the reverse of this I'd rather not marry a gentleman."

Cynthia's brother, now a noble lord who is related to half the peerage, and rejoices in holding a minor position in the Ministry, was next sent to convert her from the error of her ways.

"If you really mean to marry the man," he said, "of course we can't stop you. You're of age and all that. But it's perfectly scandalous."

"My dear Louis," said Cynthia, "let's talk about something else, for I've quite made up my mind to marry Fred Slaney. You aren't looking well—I suppose Fanny is leading you a dog's life as usual."

"I should be obliged if you would not make unadvisable allusions to my wife," retorted Lord Pomeroy furiously. "I have not come here to discuss my domestic affairs with you."

"But if you've come to discuss my domestic arrangements, it's quite fair I should also discuss yours. I've heard—"

"I do not care what you have heard," interrupted his lordship with avowed annoyance. "I came as your brother, to inform you that, of course, if you insist on marrying this groom, you cannot expect my wife to know you."

"That would be a loss," agreed Cynthia, "especially since we hit it off so well together. Yes, I must think over that point."

"You will be ostracized from all decent society," continued her brother, "though I have no doubt you'll be a shining light in the refined companionship of coachmen and stable boys' wives."

"It is useful to know that," retorted Cynthia, "for, after all, I cannot conceive that their society can be so utterly bore one as the people and their small talk I have had to meet hitherto."

Lord Pomeroy shrugged his shoulders and rose.

"Well, Cynthia," he said, "I am extremely sorry to see you so wrong and misguided. As an older and more experienced I say you will live to regret it. You are ruining your life and bringing a scandal on the family. I know you are wilful and obstinate, but I did not think, in spite of the fact that you are known to be eccentric, you would marry a man—be paused to think how the sentence could best be rounded off. 'a man—abem—who is not merely beneath you by birth and education, but who is not even remotely approaching to a gentleman.'" Cynthia put in promptly.

"A gentleman? A gentle—"

"Yes. Are you a gentleman?" Lord Pomeroy faced his sister with a frown of indignation.

"People would, I presume, consider me to answer to the term," he said coldly, "though I dare say I compare unfavorably with your groom."

Cynthia laughed outright.

"It is the most sensible remark you have made yet, Louis," she said, "though it was intended for a sneer. You do not compare unfavorably with Fred Slaney. He is a sportsman; you are not. He is gentle and yet most manly. You are neither. You might be a small tradesman, or anything insignificant, to look at you. My man is debonaire, tall, handsome and honorable. He is one of Nature's gentlemen."

But Cynthia stopped; it was useless to proceed. Lord Pomeroy, rendered speechless by disgust for what distrust can equal that of wounded pride—had taken his departure.

Cynthia picked up the volume of Byron she had laid down when her brother appeared. "I hope Fred Slaney will appreciate what I am undergoing for him," she thought.

You cannot defy the conventionalities, however, with impunity, and, before long, Cynthia began to feel the strain of it. Her interview with Sir Peter Cranborne was a somewhat nervous undertaking. Sir Peter is renowned on the Bench as one of the sharpest and most subtle wits, and Cynthia wondered if she would prove a match for him. "My dear Lady Pomeroy," he said to Cynthia's mother, "I don't look forward to the task you set me. I've set right trueliculent boys before this, who have wanted to make fools of themselves in matrimonial experiments, but it is my first experience with a girl in the principal part. You never know where to have 'em. Now a boy always has some idea of logic, and you therefore have groundwork to commence on, but a girl's mind has no foundations that I can see."

"But you will try, Sir Peter?"

"Certainly I'll try," said the old cynic, and donning his best war paint for the occasion, he set forth.

Cynthia's description of Sir Peter was decidedly a libellous one. Stout he is to be sure, but he has not that Bacchanalian appearance one associates with Falstaff. His cheeks are red and pimply, but he is not pouty, and, instead of a shining bald pate, he boasts his honorable gray hairs.

"My dear Miss Cynthia," he ejaculated, bowing as low as his waistband would permit, "what a delightful boudoir! Excellent taste—in small matters. What?"

"I'm glad you think so, Sir Peter," said Cynthia, in her most simple manner.

"After all, it doesn't matter much what I think, eh?" resumed the famous judge, fixing his monocle in his eye and regarding the defiant young beauty with a roguish air. "It's the young ruffians whose compliments please, eh? I'm not too old to remember my young days yet."

"I don't know, Sir Peter. But may I ask," proceeded Cynthia, with sweet ingenueness, "why you want to tell me how bad you were as a boy? It's very interesting, but I don't see what it has to do with me."

"Your blushing youth recalls my early days, that is all," replied Sir Peter, unabashed, "and when I think of you, so fair a dream of beauty, with a solid income to boot, egad! I can't think what the young men of the day are up to not to lay siege to you. If only I were forty years younger!"

"The young men have laid siege to me, but they are so tiresome. I've never met a young man yet who didn't either want to marry me for my money, or was a perfect dolt—all except the man I do intend to become the wife of."

Sir Peter bowed and preserved a discreet silence as Cynthia uttered the words with quiet determination.

"The young men of the present day are effeminate, or if they are not effeminate, they are coarse," pursued the girl.

"I see," remarked the judge, "there is no mediocrity, so to speak?"

"No," continued Cynthia, gravely, "and because I adore horses and animals, and because I love poetry and—philosophy, they find me a bore. I cry ditto. That's the whole history."

"That is why you intend to marry Mr. —er—Slaney, then?" said Sir Peter, artlessly; "just to show your male acquaintances your contempt for them?"

"Not at all," exclaimed Cynthia, indignantly. "I shouldn't marry a man to show my contempt for others. That would be Quixotic! I love Mr. Slaney."

"Just so, just so. And he? Does he love you?"

"Of course he does!"

"He is very handsome, I understand."

"Sir Peter," said Cynthia, solemnly, "he is a perfect Apollo."

The judge preserved the gravity of his features; he even sighed sympathetically, only the effect was a trifle lost, for Sir Peter is, as the world knows, somewhat asthmatic.

"Well, my dear young lady, for my part I say marry the man you love if he loves you, even if he be a chimney sweep."

Cynthia's expression underwent a marvellous change. Her war manner—if one may so term the frigid attitude she assumed when being baited for standing by her choice—was at once discarded. In other words, her guard was broken.

"Sir Peter, you are the first person who has shown me an ounce of sympathy," she cried excitedly, "you seem to understand. And you mean it, too, don't you?"

"Of course I do. I say let young people marry who they like if they have set their minds on it. I was best man to Buckhurst, the K. C., when he insisted on marrying his cook. Every one abused me naturally. 'Why did you let him?' they cried. 'It was his affair, not mine,' I explained. 'But you encouraged him by being his best man,' they persisted. 'Do you think a man who has the courage to marry his cook would be dissuaded because he could not get a friend to be his best man?' That was what I told them."

"It was heroic of him!" exclaimed Cynthia, "and was he happy? But I need not ask. When two people marry absolutely for love they are bound to be."

"That is just the puzzle," said Sir Peter, "the marriage is happy in a way. Buckhurst shows every outward indication of having indulged his epicurean tastes, but they say he only married his cook so as not to lose her services. I don't see what she gained."

"If she was fond of him—"

"Fond? I believe she thought it would be a great mistake. She had so hard a time and not even wages, that she ran away from him at last. However, that is neither here nor there."

"Mr. Buckhurst could not have loved her then," said Cynthia disappointedly. "Why should a girl only be supposed to marry in her own sphere? Love is not an artificial growth; it is natural."

"Exactly. I quite agree with all you say. Now, as regards this Mr. Slaney. He is young, very handsome, a man, I have no doubt, of great charm. I can understand you may have lost your heart to him when you compare him with the noodies you have had the fortune to meet. But why does he love you?"

Cynthia was clearly embarrassed.

"I suppose," she said, "he finds me—"

"Well!" said Sir Peter encouragingly. "I don't really know," confessed Cynthia.

"Nor do I. For your beauty alone? Intellectually you must soar miles above his head, and no man likes that. I suppose your conversation generally has been about horses?"

"Yes, generally."

"Well, no one can continually discuss even horses. If so, what an appalling prospect for you. Horses, mares, foals—horses again and again. My dear Miss Cynthia, what a life to look forward to! Take my advice, and before you decide your fate, try Mr. Slaney with some other subject. Er—by the way—the marriage does come off, I'll willingly give you away as your trustee—but try my little idea first."

Sir Peter Cranborne left his young protegee somewhat abashed and descended the broad staircase with almost youthful agility. The footman who helped him into his coat heard him mumbling, and thought he was addressing some remarks to him.

"Did you speak, sir?" he asked. "A hansom?"

"Only a few lines from Swain," Sir Peter replied absently, and then, recovering himself, added sharply, "No, I'll walk."

He tottered airily down Belgrave Square, his hat perched on one side, a merry old judge. And the lines he recalled were these:

In her heart forever flowing,
Like the stream of Inner Life
Coming without thought and going,
There were pictures ever rife.
Paintings of imagination,
In which earth could take no part,
All the soaring aspiration
Of a spiritual heart.

When next Cynthia beheld the man of her choice he was sitting disconsolately in the harness room, dressed in multi, his corded box alongside him. A wrinkle on his clear brow betokened not unalloyed thoughts of pleasure. He had a handsome face and blue eyes with a frank expression and he was chewing the end of a piece of straw. On seeing Cynthia he stood up; his manner was respectful, though he was obviously ill at ease in her presence.

"I have good news for you, Fred," cried Cynthia. "Sir Peter Cranborne, unlike the members of my prejudiced family, quite approves of my marrying you."

"Does he?" said Slaney, wonderingly.

"Yes; he offers to give me away, what's more."

"Sir Peter Cranborne, the judge?"

Cynthia winced at the word; somehow her talk with Sir Peter had made her more critical. She noticed lines on her Apollo's countenance that led her to think of him some ten years hence. His clothes, too, were ill-fitting, and his collar and tie almost made her shudder. But she threw aside her doubts valiantly.

"Yes, Sir Peter. He says if there is love on both sides, marry, no matter what one's situation in the world. He says if you love me and I love you that's all that is wanted."

Slaney scratched his head in a puzzled manner.

"I wonder what he's a-drivin' at," he said slowly.

"Look at the people in history," continued Cynthia loftily, "who have married others in different situations and been ideally happy. A king of Sweden married a girl who kept an apple stall. Peter the Great chose the daughter of a peasant. Lots of noble ladies have married quite ordinary people and been happy."

"You don't know any young lady what was an honorable marryin' her groom, do you?" interrupted Slaney.

"I am sure there must have been some, if I don't know about them," replied Cynthia, desperately.

You said just now if I loved you and you loved me it was bound to turn out happily," pursued Slaney relentlessly.

"Yes—"

"Suppose I was to say as how I'd made a mistake and found I didn't love you?"

Cynthia began to tremble.

"No, miss, I'm very sorry for what has happened. It's cost me my place and I own I richly deserve it should. My mates, even, won't hold me out as averse with me thinkin' I've aspired to be too big for my shoes—"

"But it is preposterous!" exclaimed Cynthia, "there's no law in heaven or on earth to force a man or a woman to remain in the position they were born in. You are a groom, but you are far more of a gentleman in your ideas than many who suppose themselves to be gentlemen. Why," she added, indignantly and beginning to weep, "no one can even tell me what a gentleman is!"

Slaney waited patiently till Cynthia had finished.

"If they can't tell you what a gentleman is," he said, "I can tell you of one who isn't. I ain't and I don't pretend to be. I've had no schoolin' or upbringin' except in the stable yard. The fact is, miss, I got beyond myself, and it serves me right I've got the sack."

Cynthia was weeping copiously now.

"I was flattered," proceeded Slaney, "at a young lady of your looks and position takin' notice of me. As for you, I don't blame you, at all. You've a generous heart and a romantic disposition, and I ought not to have taken any notice."

"Some one has put you up to this," sobbed Cynthia.

"No, a soul, miss, pardon me. I've been thinkin' it over seriously, and in any case I'd made up my mind to let you straight. I couldn't be no more happy with you than you could be with me. We don't think along the same lines, and that's the simple truth. Why... with your poems and your books, which you're always spoutin'—you drive me crazy inside of a week. Goody, miss, and I'm humbly sorry for the trouble I've brought you into."

For some time Cynthia, her face buried in her handkerchief, remained there sobbing. When she looked up she was alone. Even the corded box was gone.

Cynthia realizes now that illusions are very charming in their way, but they cannot be brought to a practical conclusion—John Adair in The By-stander.



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THE NEW SALESMAN

"Bishop is on the sick list again—no one to send to Paxton!" It was the greeting of the junior member of the firm of Noble, Hayes & Co., as Mr. Noble entered the office Thursday morning.

"Stick—you say! H'm!" He walked to his desk and took up a handful of letters. "Isn't there any one on the road who could take in Bailey's house?"

"No; I have been scheming to see if it is possible," and Mr. Wilson slowly laid down his pen. "As far as I can see we have got to lose his trade. It is unfortunate, but he said when Bishop failed to show up last month—and it was no fault of his—if it happened again he would buy of Barrows & Cook. Bailey is too good a customer to lose."

"And we must not," said Mr. Noble. "When will Rollins be back?"

"Monday."

"Tuesday morning. If we send a man he has got to go to-morrow and a day later."

Eben Wilson looked perplexed. Suddenly he turned to Wilson.

"How about Newcomb—can we trust him?"

"Who—Tom?" and a quizzical expression settled on the younger man's countenance. "I suppose we can trust him; but is he not too young for such an important commission? He is only a boy—and Bishop has always made such big sales."

"I would not think of it under ordinary circumstances, of course," replied Mr. Noble, "but we have got to send a man with our goods; Newcomb seems to be the only available one. Sorry now we let him have to-day off. When he comes to-morrow, send him immediately. I will write out his instructions—you may hand them to him."

Tom Newcomb had been in the employ of the large wholesale house of Noble, Hayes & Co. for over two years. His promotion had not been as rapid as he hoped, yet that fact did not imply lack of merit on Tom's part, for the firm had the reputation of being one of the most conservative in the city.

But while the employees were not advanced as rapidly as was the custom in many establishments of a similar kind, when once a man had proven his worth he was retained, regardless of offers made by other firms. Noble, Hayes & Co., could afford to pay reliable help—if a man was valuable to another company, he was doubly so to a house whose business and methods he thoroughly understood.

It had been Tom's ambition to become a travelling salesman, and while he neglected no duty in the work assigned him, he often felt dissatisfied with his position as general office and errand boy.

"I've done this kind of work long enough," he chafed. "It is time I were given more responsibility—I am old enough."

Once he had approached Mr. Hayes on "stion of salesman."

"It is the custom of the firm, my boy," gently but firmly, "to select each man for the position we feel he is competent to fill—with satisfaction to himself and to us. When we find our men are able to serve us more advantageously in some other department of our business, we are always quick to recognize the fact. Will you please carry this package," handed Tom a brown parcel, "to the Clifford House, and report to Mr. Noble as soon as possible!"

Tom had not again mentioned the question of his advancement to any member of the firm. He went about his work more mechanically, perhaps, but not the slightest trifle was neglected.

"I hope Newcomb will be here on time to-morrow," said Mr. Noble, anxiously; that afternoon, as he laid on Mr. Wilson's desk Tom's instructions.

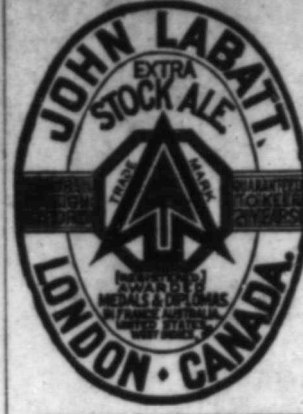
"Oh, he will—he is prompt as a die. I have never known him to fail. Newcomb has the making of a strong business man—prompt, quick, accurate, truthful; he is a man to keep with us."

"I do not believe there is any need of hurrying back this morning," meditated Tom, as soon as he was awake on Friday. "Yesterday is the first day I have had off in three months, and I have always been there on time before. They could not say anything if I stayed away a little longer—just this once!"

"Going to take the 7.05 car, Tom?" called his mother, cheerily, from the hall below. "You will have to hurry; you must not be late."

"I can—just once," and Tom still lay in bed a few moments longer, but it was not half as pleasant as he imagined it would be. Restless, he looked at his watch. It was 6.40.

"Not!" determinedly. "I will not break my record," and with a bound



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Tom was on the floor. Having hurriedly dressed he ran down to the dining-room.

"I have not time to sit down," at his mother's look of inquiry. "I must hurry—not a moment to lose! I will take a doughnut and roll in my hands."

It was later than he thought. The car he had usually taken had gone. "I—I can make the belt line if I hurry," and he started on a run toward the park. "It is coming," as he turned the corner at Madison.

The motorman saw him and stopped the car. Tom sank down in a seat completely out of breath.

"I shall be hungry, I guess, before noon—but perhaps it serves me right. I ought not to have thought of such a thing. I wonder what father would have."

The car turned the corner with a lurch, preventing Tom's finishing his sentence. But he was thinking of his father's business principles, of which promptness was one he had held most sacred.

"I will make it," and Tom looked up at the clock, as he hurried rapidly past. Its hands pointed to 7.25. Five minutes more before he was expected to be on duty.

Mr. Wilson was already in the office.

"You are wanted by Mr. Wilson at once," announced an employee as Tom entered the building. "I do not know what he wants—something important, I judge."

"You wish to see me, sir?" and Tom stood, hat in hand, before Mr. Wilson.

"I knew I could rely on his being here," he seemed to be speaking to himself. "Yes," turning abruptly, "you are to take Bishop's place this morning—go on his trip to Paxton," and the shrewd business man concisely stated the commission, giving Tom Mr. Noble's instructions. "You have just time to catch the 8.10 train," looking at his watch.

Tom returned from his trip jubilant and happy. Bailey had taken a larger order of goods than Bishop's "crack" salesman of the company, had ever been able to sell him.

"We have decided to give you Bishop's place while he is off duty," announced Mr. Noble Monday morning, having summoned Tom to his private office. "We may let you retain it, he is a valuable man for our branch store. It depends."

"If I—I had not been prompt—no, if I had not done my duty—well, I would not now be Tom Newcomb, salesman for Noble, Hayes & Co.," thought Tom, exultantly, that night, as he took the car on his way home. "It pays to be there," meaningly.

And it was a lesson he never forgot.

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Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes, on the occasion of a call upon his friend, Dr. Metcalf, was interrupted by the entrance of a young man, who had some words with Metcalf and hurriedly retired. His words, which were distinctly audible and related to some message from a priest, arrested Dr. Holmes' attention, and when they were alone he said in a startled manner: "Metcalf, you are not a Catholic?" "Oh, yes," replied Dr. Metcalf, "and have been in the Church for two years."

Dr. Holmes, astonished, looked at his friend during a long pause, and then leaning forward placed his right hand upon his knee, saying: "And you are right, Metcalf, you are safely on the other side. The old hulk is covered with barnacles, but 'twill take you safe into port—I'm on the high seas."

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