

"Well," said Katherine, thoughtfully, "I think you had better. The consequences are so much less likely to be dangerous for a man."

"Here, I don't know about that. Suppose I were really to fall in love and get married?"

"Just so. What of it? You must get married some time."

"But marriage is a thing a fellow don't want to jump into out of hand, in the manner you suggest."

"You goose! You need not fall head over ears in love; a mild case of imaginary love will answer the purpose."

"Suppose it should cause our friendship to break up?"

"Oh, Consistency, thou art a jewel. Then how about our theory of platonic affection?" said Katherine with a twinkle of her blue eyes.

"True enough!" I replied. "I'll try it. I'll fall in love with Miss Harwood immediately."

"Oh, no, not with her, surely. She is so insipid and foolish."

Now I did not think Miss Harwood insipid or foolish at all, and Katherine's criticisms nettled me somewhat, so that I answered rather stiffly, that I supposed a fellow might choose for himself whom he was to fall in love with.

"Certainly," said Katherine, "you are free to fall in love with a wooden Indian if you wish."

Whereupon we walked in silence for some time while the plot of our story made very little progress.

Insipid and foolish indeed! I tried to recall any instance of these qualities to Miss Harwood, but could not. I only remembered that she had very large eyes, and a very pretty mouth, with the whitest of teeth. She was rather petite and a clinging sort of a girl. At least that was my manish definition of a woman who drew forth the chivalric instincts of a man. I thought of the long drives we had had together during the summer, and how much I had enjoyed talking to her. Although she seldom said much, she seemed to grasp my ideas, looking up to me the while with her big eyes in a confiding and trustful manner. "Oh, no," I thought, "she is anything but insipid." Whereupon Katherine, who must have guessed my thoughts, said—

"When you have finished thinking of Elsie, perhaps you will condescend to return to our story."

"Of course, my dear Katherine, you must really pardon the absent-mindedness of one who is so deeply in love."

We both laughed at this, and the laugh made things a little better between us. We agreed that our plot must form itself naturally, and the chief incident must be the falling in love of the hero with another girl. As for the sacrifice we had determined must play an important part in the story, we could not very well determine what it should be.

Miss Merry suggested that the hero should give up his sweetheart so as to prolong his friendship with his platonic friend. I reminded her that she had just expressed the idea that love or marriage would not interfere with such a friendship.

"But then his wife would probably be jealous," said Katherine. "The chances are ten to one that she would be an ignorant, empty-headed little fool."

This reply of Katherine's angered me, I scarcely knew why. I felt in her description of our hero's imaginary mistress she had a certain person in mind, and that person, Miss Harwood. It was the first time I had ever known Katherine to be spiteful, or anything resembling it, and it annoyed me, particularly as I knew that Miss Harwood was not at all a fool, although she was not what one would call an intellectual girl.

We walked in silence for some time and finally I gave utterance to the opinion that I did not think a man would give up his mistress under the circumstances.

"If there is such a thing as a friendship such as we have in mind, it must survive all barriers. It must be far above any such petty considerations as jealousy."

"I am sure no one said anything about jealousy," Katherine said rather pettishly. "I am afraid that you flatter yourself."

"Oh, no! I don't mean anything like that," I answered hastily. "But here we are at your door and we have made very little progress. When shall we have our next seance?"

"Can you come to-morrow evening?"

"Yes, and we will begin the story then."

But the next evening came and the story was not begun. I called and found Williams, a man I never cared for, talking to Katherine. Williams was determined to stay as long as I, and as our story was of course not mentioned, I had to leave without making another engagement.

I went away in a rather angry mood, disgusted with Williams who had always seemed to me too familiar with Katherine, and annoyed because I fancied that Katherine herself had treated me somewhat coldly. Williams had called on Katherine pretty frequently of late. Suppose she were to marry him. Why not? I disliked him personally, but I found upon sober reflection that I knew of absolutely nothing against the man. Other people liked him, men as well as women. He was of good family, well off, and, I remembered with distinct dissatisfaction, that he was remarkably good looking. There was no reason in the world why Katherine should not marry him if she choose, even though I did not like him. At all events, I thought I would speak to her about him and see what she thought of him.

I never doubted but she would tell me her sentiments in regard to him, so great had our confidence in each been ever since childhood.

(To be Continued.)

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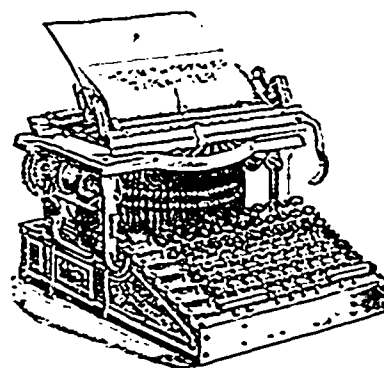
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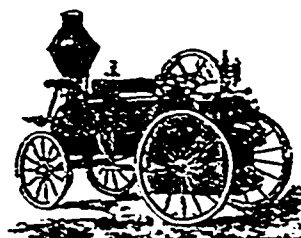


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