

WHAT CAN SHE DO?

By E. P. Roe.

Moreover, the presence of this flesh and blood woman at his side gave him different sensations from the stately dainties, or even the most piquant maidens that had smiled upon him in the shadowy scenes of his imagination; and when at times, as the wagon jolted heavily, she grasped his arm for a second to steady herself, it seemed as if the dusky little figure at his side was a sort of human electric battery charged with the subtle fluid which some believe the material life of the universe. Every now and then as they bounced over a stone, the lantern would bob up and throw a ray on a face like those that had looked out upon him from the plays of Shakespeare whose scenes are laid in Italy.

Thus the dark, chilly, rainy night, was becoming the most luminous period of his life. Reason and judgment came slowly, but imagination came fast.

But to poor Edith, all was real and dismal enough, and she sighed heavily. To Arden each sight was an appeal for sympathy. He had driven as rapidly as he dared in the darkness to get her out of the rain, but at last she had clung to his arm.

"Won't you drive slowly, the jolting has given me a pain in my side," she said.

He was conscious of a new and pleasant sensation there also, though not from jolting. He had been used to that in many ways his life, but he never felt so good forward on a walk through the drizzling rain, and Edith, recovering her breath, and a sense of security, began to ask the questions.

"Do you know where the cottage is that was formerly owned by Mr. Jenks?"

"Oh yes, it's not far from here, between our house and the village."

Then as if a sudden thought struck him he added quickly, "I heard it was sold, are you the owner?"

"Yes," said Edith a little coolly, she had expected to question and not be questioned. And yet she was glad she had met one who knew about her place. But she resolved to be non-committal till she knew more about him.

"What sort of a house is it?" she asked after a moment. "I have never seen it."

"Well, it's not very large and I fear it is somewhat out of repair, at least it looks so, and I should think a new roof was needed."

Edith could not help saying pathetically, "Oh, dear, I'm so sorry!"

Arden then added hastily, "But it's a kind of a pretty place too—a great many fruit trees and grape vines, and a garden."

"So I've been told," said Edith. "And that will be its chief attraction to me."

"Then you are going to live there?"

"Yes."

Arden's heart gave a sudden throb. Then he would see this mysterious stranger home. But he smiled rather listlessly in the darkness as he queried, "What will she appear like in the daylight?"

Her next question broke the spell he was under. They were passing through the village and the little hotel was near, and she naturally asked, "To whom am I indebted for all this kindness? I am glad to know so much as that you are my neighbor."

Suddenly and painfully conscious of his outward life and surroundings, he answered briefly,

"My name is Arden Lacey. We have a small farm a little beyond your cottage."

Wondering at the change of tone and manner, Edith still ventured to ask, "And do you know of anyone who could bring my furniture and things up to-morrow?"

As he sometimes did that kind of work, an impulse to see more of her impelled him to say,

"I suppose I can do it. I work for a living."

"I am sure that is nothing at all," said Edith kindly.

"You will not live long in Puckton before learning that there is something at stake," was the bitter reply. "But I need not prevent my working for you, as I do for others. If you wish, I will make a fire in your house early, to take off the chill and dampness, and then go to your furniture. The people here will send you out in a carriage."

"I will be greatly obliged if you will do so and let me pay you."

"Oh certainly, I will," he said.

"Well, then, how much for to-night?" said Edith as she stood in the hotel door.

"To-night is another affair," and he jumped into his wagon and rattled away in the darkness, his lantern looking like a "will-o'-the-wisp" that might vanish altogether.

The landlord received Edith and her attendant with a good civility, and gave her in charge of his wife, who was a bustling red-faced woman with a sort of motherly kindness about her.

"Why you poor child," she said to Edith, turning her round before the light, "you're half-drowned. You must have something hot right away, or you'll take your death of cold, and with something of her kind, and a faithfuller, she soon brought Edith a hot punch that for a few moments seemed to make the girl's head spin, but as it was followed by strong tea and toast, she felt none the worse, and danger from the chill and wet was effectually disposed of.

As she sat sipping her tea before a red-hot stove, she told, in answer to the landlady's questions, what she had got up from the boat.

"Who is this Lacey, and what is he against them?" she asked suddenly.

The hostess went across the hall, opened the bar-room door, and beckoned Edith to follow her.

In a chair by the stove sat a miserable wreck of a man, drivelling and mumbling in a drunken lethargy.

"That's his father," said the woman in a whisper. "When he gets as bad as that he comes here because he feels none the worse, and danger from the chill and wet was effectually disposed of."

An expression of intense disgust flitted across Edith's face and by the time the landlady had finished her story, her law of association, poor Arden sank in her estimation through the foulness of his father's voice.

"Is there anything against the man?" asked Edith in some alarm. "I've engaged him to bring up my furniture and trunks. I hope he's honest."

"Oh, yes, he's honest enough, and he'd be mighty mad if anybody questioned that, but he's kind of sour and ugly, and I don't think nobody nor nothing. The son and Mrs. Lacey kept to themselves; the man does as you see, but the daughter, who's a smart pretty girl, tries to rise above it all, and make her way among the rest of the girls; but she has a hard time of it, I guess, poor child."

"I don't wonder," said Edith, "with such a father."

Between the punch and fatigue he was glad to take refuge from the landlady's garrulousness, and all her troubles, in quiet sleep.

The next morning the storm was passing away in broken masses of clouds, through which the sun occasionally shone in April-like uncertainty.

After an early breakfast she and Edith were driven in an open wagon to what was to be her future home—the scene of unknown joys and sorrows.

The most memorable places, where the mightiest events of the world have transpired, can never have for us the interest of that humble spot, where the little drama of our own life, will pass from start to rest.

Most eagerly did Edith note everything as revealed by the broad light of day.

The village, though irregular, had a general air of thriftiness and respectability. The street, though irregular, was a gently graded, fringed off from stores and offices, into neat houses, farm houses, and here and there the abodes of the poor till at last three-quarters of a mile out, she saw a rather quaint little cottage with a roof steeply sloping and a long, low porch.

"That's your place, Miss," said the driver.

Edith's intent eyes took in the general effect with something of the practiced rapidity with which she mastered a lady's toilet on the Avenue.

In spite of her predisposition to be pleased, the prospect was depressing. The season was late and patches of colored snow lay here and there, and were piled up along the fences. The garden and trees had a neglected look.

The vines that clambered up the porch had been untended of the last year's growth, and sprawled in every direction. The gate hung from one hinge, and many palings were of the fence, and all had a sullen, dingy appearance from the soot and dirt. The house itself looked so dilapidated and small in contrast with their stately mansion on Fifth Avenue, that irrepressible tears came into her eyes, as she gazed upon it.

"It will kill mother just to see it," said Edith, and in a low, encouraging tone, "I'll be a heap better next June, Miss Edith."

But Edith dropped her veil to hide her feelings, and spoke no more.

They got down before the shabby gate, took out the basket of provisions which Hannibal had secured, paid the driver, and then, after a brief look at the boat which had landed and left two people on a desert island. They walked up the steep path with hearts as cold as the stones, and the unfurnished cottage before them.

But their repugnance had been taken away by a bright fire that Arden had kindled on the hearth of the largest room; and when lighting it he had been told that he should not dream of the possibility of kindling a fire so early in the season that he knew now to be as cold to him as the chilly room in which he shivered.

Arden, if he could have seen the expression on Edith's face the night previous, as she looked on his bearded father, he would have cursed that light which he had brought to him, more bitterly than ever.

CHAPTER X.

EDITH BECOMES A "DIVINITY."

As the wrecked wagon hastened up the street and explored eagerly in various directions in order to gain some idea of the nature and resources of the place where they might spend months and years, Edith, with her eyes fixed on the house over first at its place of refuge, and then at the house, and then at a spot from whence she could obtain a view of the garden, the little orchard, and pasture field.

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The muggy garden, with its patches of snow, its frozen and neglected air, its spreading vines and thickly settled stalks of last year's weeds, was even less inviting. Edith never saw the country in winter, and the gardens of her experience were full of green, beautiful life. The orchard not only looked gay and bright, but it was full of fruit. The year had been most abundant in fruit, and the trees were left to bear at will. Therefore many of the limbs were wholly broken off, and lay scattered where they fell, or still hung by a little of the woody fibre and bark.

Edith came back to the fire from the survey of her future home, not only chilled in body by the raw April winds, but more chilled in spirit. Though she had not expected summer greenness and a sweet inviting home, yet the reality was so dreary and forbidding from its necessary contrast with the past, that she sank down on the floor and buried her head in her lap in an uncontrollable passion of grief.

Edith was not alone, and looking up, saw Arden in the door, with a grave, troubled face. Hastily turning from him, and whispering away her tears, she said rather coldly,

"You should have knocked. The house is my home, it is empty."

His face changed instantly to its usual hard sullen aspect, and he said briefly,

"The landlady has told her all about us."

But Edith's feelings had only been annoyed that a stranger had seen her emotion, so she said quickly, "I beg your pardon. We have had trouble, but I don't give you in this manner often. Have you brought a load?"

"Yes, if your servant will help me I will bring the things in."

As he and Hannibal carried in heavy loads of carpet and other articles, Edith removed as far as possible the traces of her grief, and soon began to scan by the light of day with some curiosity her acquaintance of the previous evening. He was the very opposite to herself in appearance. Her eyes were large and dark, his were small and light. Her hair was brown and straight, his was fair and wavy. He was of medium height, and yet Edith was not a brunette, but possessed a complexion of a delicate pinkish white, which, when removed as far as possible the traces of her grief, and soon began to scan by the light of day with some curiosity her acquaintance of the previous evening. He was the very opposite to herself in appearance. Her eyes were large and dark, his were small and light. Her hair was brown and straight, his was fair and wavy. 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