

our eyes, which had they met would have been inevitable.

At first Sylvia only saw Miss Lavinia, and gathered her into her arms spontaneously, as if she were the elder, as she was by far the bigger of the two. Then seeing me, the cards not having been sent up, she hesitated a moment, coloring shyly, as girl of sixteen might, and then straightway greeted me without embarrassment. As we laid aside our wraps and seated ourselves in a sort of cosy corner nook deep with pillows, and fur rugs nestling about the feet, I drew my first comfortable breath since entering, and as Miss Lavinia naturally took the lead in the conversation, giving her invitation for the next night, I had ample time to study Sylvia. She was fine looking rather than handsome, a warm brunette with copper glints threading her brown hair, thick curved lashes, big brown eyes, a good straight nose, and a decidedly humorous, but not small mouth, with lips that curled back from even teeth, while her whole face was punctuated and made winningly feminine by a deep dimple in the chin and a couple of vagrant ones that played about her mouth corners when she spoke, as she always did, looking directly at one.

Her hands were long and well shaped, not small, but competent looking, a great contrast to her mother's, as well as to Miss Lavinia's, that could slip easily into a five-and-a-half glove. She wore a graceful afternoon gown of pale blue with lace butterflies on the blouse and skirt, held in at waist and neck by enamelled butterfly buckles. She moved gracefully, and had a strong individuality, a warmth of nature that contrasted keenly with the statuesque perfection of her mother, and I fell to wondering what her father was like, and if she resembled him.

"Not yet, not until late spring," I heard her say in answer to Miss Lavinia's question as to whether her father had returned from his Japan tour.

"He is detained by railway business in San Francisco, and cannot go farther north to settle it until winter breaks. I've written him to ask leave to join him and perhaps stop awhile at Los Angeles and go up to see my brother on his Wyoming ranch in May. I do so hope he will let me. I've tried to coax mamma to go too, she has had such a wearing life this winter in trying to make it pleasant for me and introduce me to her friends. I wish I could tell her exactly how much I should prefer to be more alone with her. I do not want her to think me ungrateful, but to go out with her to father and pay dear old Carthy a visit would be simply splendid."

Then turning to me she said I thought with a little quiver in her voice, "They tell me you live with your father, Mrs. Evan—even though you are married—and I have not seen mine for more than two years. only think of it!"

Whereat my heart went out to her, and I prayed mentally that her father might have a broad, warm shoulder to pillow her head and a ready ear to hear her confidences, for the perfectly rounded neck and shell ear of the mother playing cards in the next room would never give harbor or heed, I knew.

Sylvia was as pleased as a child at the idea of coming down to spend the night, stipulating that if it was still cold she should be allowed to make taffy and put it on the shed to harden, saying, with a pout: "At school and college there was always somewhere that I could mess with sticky things and cook, but here it is impossible, though mamma says I shall have an outdoor tea-room at the Oaklands all to myself, and give chafing-dish parties, for they are quite the thing. 'The thing' is my booby man, I'm afraid. If what you wish to do, no matter how silly, agrees with it, it's all right, but if it doesn't, all the wisdom of Solomon won't prevail against those two words."

Man No. 2 at this juncture came in and presented a florist's box and envelope in a tray, saying, sotto voce, as he did so, "Shall I open it and arrange them, miss, or will you wear them?" for, as the result of lavish entertaining and many hothouses as well as friends, flowers showered upon the Latham house at all hours, and both library and hall were almost too fragrant.



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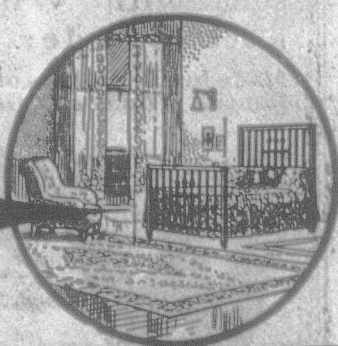
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