



CR—R—ASH! Through the quiet house, the familiar sound reverberated. It smote the ears of Miss Lu Ashton and her dainty little step-mother, engaged in similar, yet diverse, occupations. For Mrs. Ashton was tacking some loosened spangles on a white filmy cloud of lace, while her step-daughter was darning long black hose.

At the ominous sound, she sprang up, dropped the heap of undarned stockings into her mother's lap, regardless of the spangled cloud, and started for the hall. She stopped in the door-way, for she heard her twin step-sisters, Nip and Tuck, racing up the back stairs.

Simultaneously they dashed along the hall, exclaiming in one voice:

"Did you hear the 'Fall of China'?" for they were at the punning age of thirteen.

"Did I hear it? I felt it!" answered Lu.

"What has she smashed now?" called out a despairing voice. Reaching their mother's side at the same instant, the twins explained, antiphonally:

"The last covered vegetable-dish!" and

"Da kitten—she have broken it—it were crack!" in exact imitation of the "Hungry Hun," so christened by the twins.

Mrs. Ashton handed the spangled cloud to her step-daughter, smoothed over the heap of stockings, and as she selected a "holy" one to mend, gave a groan. But Lu Ashton laughed.

"I suppose the kitten struck it a cruel blow with her big, hard paw to crack it, before swishing the heavy dish off the table with her mighty tail," she said, placing the filmy cloud on a hanger and suspending it in the closet. Her irony elicited a twin-concert of giggles. Nip sprang up and clapping her arms about Lu's neck, exclaimed:

"O Cin! How perfectly splendid and beautiful and funny and original you are! Aren't you glad, mother, she's home from college for good?"

"How do you know it is for good? You never can guess what mischief I am meditating, this very minute," laughed Lu, while her step-mother held distended the long black stocking she was darning for either Nip or Tuck, and those two demanded in unison:

"What?"

"I'm going to earn some money—right away!"

"How?" "By writing stories!" antiphonal again.

"No—that will come later—takes time to turn literary ideas into cash, and I want cash 'immediately if not sooner.'"

Nip and Tuck spread their long slim legs on the floor, propped up their chins on their palms, elbows planted firmly, and looked with eager, adoring eyes at their intensely interesting sister.

"Every cent of the two thousand dollars my two grand-mothers gave me so that I wouldn't be taking their names in vain, is gone—spent for my college course," she sighed. "I've often thought it was not enough to repay me for those awful names—'Lucinda' and 'Ellen'—when father had already bestowed 'Ashton'!"

Tuck broke in disdainfully:

"Schucks! What's a name? I'd take the worst two names in the Bible for a thousand dollars apiece. There's Ginger Nutley. Her name's 'Louise,' but she's never been called anything but 'Ginger' because she was 'spunky.' My name's 'Rosalie' and Nip's is 'Madelon,' but 'Nip and Tuck' is all we ever hear!"

"Because you think and speak and act almost as one," said Mrs. Ashton.

"Why, no, we don't," said the twins in one voice, and then giggled sheepishly.

"Thank goodness, we don't look alike," said Nip.

"No, my hair's curly," said Tuck.

"Sure sign of a tepid temperament," thus Nip, who dearly loved a bit of alliteration.

"Tepid temperament? Curly hair is a sure sign of artistic temperament," snapped Tuck.

A difference of opinion between the twins was something to be discouraged in its incipency—the interference of sound waves so perfectly similar, resulting in a silence that neither would break for fear of speaking in unison. So Lu hastened to distract their attention.

"Mother, how much does this 'Hungry Hun' cost you per month?" she asked.

"Oh, I pay her twenty-five dollars, and she eats, wastes and smashes another twenty-five. That's why we have the 'paying guest'—that, and for company, your father being away months at a time on business," sighed weak little Mrs. Ashton.

"If Dad were only rich, we could afford a good servant," said Nip.

"Dad's much too nice to get rich—the highest, finest type of men never make much money," said Lu. Then to her mother:

"How much does it cost you, sending the laundry out, mother?"

"Two dollars a week."

"Hm! About ten a month. Now, look at me, all of you." She stood erect, her head thrown back, chest expanded, dark eyes radiant, cheeks glowing. "Here am I, college graduate, strong, healthy, vigorous—no position in sight till September, and it's now February. I have specialized in Domestic Science—expect to teach it. But in the meantime I intend to practise it in this house—

and without the 'Hun' under foot! Mother, you give me thirty dollars a month, and I'll do every scrap of work in this house, except the laundress's! It will be Domestic Science and Physical Culture all in one!"

The twins looked aghast at the idea of this beautiful, elegant sister doing household drudgery, and Mrs. Ashton said:

"Lu, dear, you don't know what you are talking about. Why, that 'Hun' is working every minute of the time, every day in the week. She is never through. You'd have no time for your writing, or reading, or social engagements."

"I'd have time for everything—because I would carry scientific management to the highest degree of efficiency—no wasted motions. It can be done by system—method, but not by an untrained, untrainable servant. There's the rub—it is impossible to teach that girl of ours the first principles. I shall send her flying—she'll fly for once and I shall myself personally conduct and perform all the cooking, sweeping, etc., of this establishment. I will do it by a subversion of the maxim, 'one thing at a time,' for I shall always do two or three things at once. While preparing breakfast I shall begin the on dinner."

"I'm sure you can cook finely, Lu, but the sweeping in this big house is awful," expostulated Mrs. Ashton.

"Mother, don't you remember the time I was showing my physical culture pole exercise, and Dad said in his humorous style: 'Now, Lu, if there'd been a broom at the end of that stick, you'd have actually swept this room?' Mother, sweeping is a fine exercise!"

"Then there's the furnace work—ash-work, Lu. Mercy! You'll be called 'Cinderella' in earnest, and I'll be called the cruel step-mother!" wailed Mrs. Ashton.

"Well, that's my nick-name. When I went to college, I religiously wrote my absurd name, 'Lucy E. Ashton.' But in less than a month the 'Lucinda Ellen' was extorted from me, and 'Cinderella' or 'Cin' for short, I became. I didn't mind it—you know there's always the possible prince in the background. I took the part of 'Cinderella' in moving pictures at college only a month ago, and I'm going as 'Cinderella' to Mrs. Weston's Martha Washington dance on the twenty-second, chiefly because I have the costume, though I have no Cinderella foot. Look at that!" and she displayed a foot, well-shaped and daintily shod, but of a generous size, quite in keeping with the splendid form it supported.

"Thou wearest a number nine, love," sang the twins in harmony, though not in unison, for Nip sang in G minor and Tuck in B flat major.

"Not quite as bad as that," laughed Lu, "but five and a half's bad enough—it calls for a number six rubber. I always am ashamed of my rubbers, and I have to manage

very cleverly so that no young man ever puts them on or off for me. My prince, who, you may be interested to learn, has not visualized himself to me as yet, would be in danger of losing himself in one of my rubbers if I dropped it in his vicinity."

"He'd have a job putting it in his pocket," snickered Nip, and Tuck said:

"Well, our toes are safe, Nip. I could get both my feet in one of your rubbers, Cin."

"Now, don't rub it in, Tuck—be thankful I have a good 'understanding,' a broad base. It won't be easy to disturb my equilibrium when domestic disasters occur."

Cr—r—ash!!! Tinkle—inkle—zip! from the kitchen.

"Mercy!" cried Cin, and

"What has that reckless kitten smashed now?" from Nip.

"Kitten?" indignantly from Mrs. Ashton. "Look!" And lifting the heap of stockings, she exposed the reckless kitten, curled up, sound asleep in her lap, where it had been all the time.

"That settles it," said Cin. "Here's where I jump in, seize the steering wheel, and run this auto so smoothly by my scientific management that you'll never feel a jar."

"Not even a Mason jar," punned the twins, running after Lu as she started energetically kitchenward. But placing a hand on the shoulder of each, she shoved them back into the room, saying, with decision:

"Now, positively, you 'sin-twisters' have got to keep from under my feet—I make this one condition. I intend to put ninety-nine per cent. of my brain and one per cent. of my muscle into this scheme, at the beginning, and I must have perfect freedom of motion. Mother, won't you lay your commands on these two? I'll figure out presently just what they can do to help without hindering."

"But, Lu, dear, hadn't you better wait till after the twenty-second before you do anything rash?" said Mrs. Ashton. "You must be in good trim for Mrs. Weston's dance."

"I can't wait, mother—I shall begin my kitchen career right now."

"Much chance you'll have of finding a prince, in your kitchen career," jeered Tuck, but Nip, who was ever an optimist, called after Lu's disappearing form:

"You never can tell—you may find a perfectly good prince in the ash-barrel, where we found this kitten, you precious darling!" This last to the little furry ball she held to her cheek. Lu put her head through the doorway to say:

"Don't you people imagine that I shall spend much time in the kitchen—my system makes it unnecessary. I shall keep house wisely, but not too well," and she vanished.

"You two go study your algebra, and keep out of Lu's way," said Mrs. Ashton. As the twins slowly left the room, quite without enthusiasm, Nip said:

"Algebra's not nearly as interesting—O, Tuck! did you hear that one? A—C—interesting?" But Tuck was racing down the front stairs, and she called back:

"Come on to the library—we can hear what's doing in the kitchen." And they got their ears to the door just in time to hear in tones of infinite contempt from the "Hungry Hun":

"Who cook? You cook?"

A little more than twenty-four hours later, Mrs. Ashton disobeyed orders to the extent of putting her head into the kitchen to see if there were any signs of an incoming dinner, the bell having just tinkled invitingly.

She saw a plumber in the usual picturesque costume, standing by the outer door, tools in hand. He was saying, in the tones of superior knowledge employed by his kind with such convincing effect:

"I tell you, lady, there ain't no more smell than's natural to a gas-meter!"

"And I tell you that it isn't natural for me to pay for gas that leaks out without being turned into light," retorted Lu with decision. To which the man:

"I can't find no leak—I've tested everywhere with a match."

"And I've tested with my nose—which is more than a match for escaping gas! Why don't you use your nose, man? You're about the eleventh person the Public Service Corporation has sent up here to stop that leak, and there isn't one of you that has a nose worth a cent," laughing a little, "either literally or figuratively. You ought all to be operated on for adenoids! I shall telephone to the office and tell those people exactly what I think of them and their unscientific methods!" Then, evidently fearing she had spoken too severely, she added more mildly: "You mustn't let your feelings be hurt by what I have said—but it does put me out to find such incompetence—"

"Oh, you can't hurt my feelings, lady—we meet all kinds of people! Good night!" and out he went, leaving Lu with her mouth still open, but speechless. Then she sat down weakly in the one chair and laughed till she had to wipe her eyes. Spying her mother's head at the door, she cried:

"Oh, mother! Did you hear that plumber set me down? 'All kinds of people!' I suppose he'll report me at the office as a perfect vixen! How funny! How funny!" And she went off into another gale of laughter. Mrs. Ashton said, timidly:

(Continued on Page 10)



"I tell you, lady, there ain't no more smell than's natural to a gas-meter."