



FAR  
FROM THE  
MADDENING  
GIRLS  
GUY WETMORE CARRYL



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**FAR FROM THE  
MADDENING GIRLS**







AT THIS POINT GALVIN ABRUPTLY DISSOLVED IN TEARS



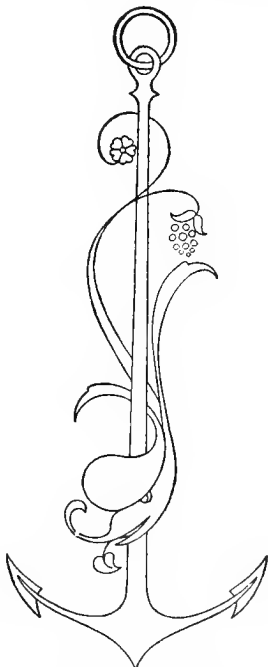




# FAR FROM THE MADDENING GIRLS

BY GUY WETMORE CARRYL

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*In furtherance of an unfulfilled  
intention, this book is dedicated to  
the author's dear friend and com-  
rade, Henry Davis Sleeper.*



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## CHAPTER ONE

I was on the threshold, so to speak, of thirty when my Uncle Ezra gave his first evidence of being aware of my existence by leaving me a competency. He had never seen me, nor I him, and he mis-spelled my very name several times in the course of his will; but, nevertheless, he contrived, in this manner, to awaken in me what I may call a posthumous affection for him, which I have carefully cherished ever since. The justice of this sentiment will be clear when I say that by this fortuitous turn of his pen the estimable old gentleman had made practicable the most ardent desire of my heart.

I was utterly and consumedly weary of being a single man. I aspired to enter a more admired and more admirable estate; to have

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done with landladies and *table d'hote* dinners; to be sure, under all conditions, of finding a button where a button ought to be; to know the unspeakable wealth of comfort and seclusion which is miraculously packed into the limited compass of that little word "Home!" In short, I yearned to become a bachelor, and this was precisely what the benignant performance of my Uncle Ezra enabled me to do.

Perhaps it is necessary to explain that one cannot be a thoroughly authentic bachelor under five thousand a year. Short of that income, one may, of course, remain unmarried; but to remain unmarried means nothing more than to be a single man — a creature, that is, commonly supposed to be conditioned not so much by his inclinations as by material circumstance. Who, pray, is going to believe that he is single because he chooses to be, instead of because he must? He may have all the courage of his conviction, but he can

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never hope to impress others with the conviction of his courage. Possessing the keenest distaste for a life in the stocks or under the bonds of matrimony, he is yet as helpless to prove this aversion as would be a fresh egg to substantiate its very possible disinclination for becoming a chick.

“A single man, indeed!” says the world. “And why not, so long as his salary, as every one knows, is but thirty-five dollars a week? Humph! Just give him the means to marry upon, and let us see how soon our misogynist will change his mind!”

That is it. Give the egg an incubator, and see how long we shall have to wait before it turns into a chick, and begins to peep, and peck, and preen, in a manner identical with that of all chicks that have gone before! They have no one to believe in their claim to originality, the unhatched egg and the unmarried man! The world has the unique distinction of being too much with them and

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too much against them at one and the same time.

But the single man of means—whom I have chosen to distinguish as the bachelor proper—that is a very different story! Even the most skeptical must allow that he is the product of his inclinations, not of his restrictions. He is magnificent in his isolation, in his independence of that preposterous, corpulent little boy, with the wings and the bow and arrows, who sets half of the trouble in the world afoot. He knows what is best for him—yes, indeed! And, if he ever feels that it is necessary to his peace of mind to cumber himself with something which is, at once, exorbitantly costly and readily deranged, then I warrant you he will have the good sense to see that what he wants is an automobile, and not a wife. An automobile keeps up a continual clamour whenever you take it out: an automobile gets into the habit of blowing you up at regular intervals, and of running down your neighbours

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whenever opportunity offers: an automobile is forever in need of new and expensive trimmings and fittings — but then, you can always exchange an automobile for something useful. I can say all the rest of a wife—but I can't say *that!*

A man once delivered me a homily on wedded bliss, taking as his text a bird's nest which he had discovered in some shrubbery. He would have drawn tears from a stone with his picture of the fond couple building their little home, rearing the tender brood, and giving them lessons in singing and aerial navigation; and, finally, parting the shrubbery, he bade me look within.

“*There's* a lesson for you!” he exclaimed triumphantly.

I told him he was quite right. Indeed, I never remember having been brought in contact with a more eloquent parable. The parent birds were from home, and the young ones were eagerly expecting their return. *There*

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*was nothing in sight but bills!* Forthwith, I determined to become a bachelor.

Now a bachelor, like all superior beings, has his responsibilities. Your mere single man may be content with a furnished room and a continual round of the restaurants; but it is incumbent upon the bachelor to make a more conspicuous success of the life to which he thus stands pledged. He must justify himself in the eyes of society. He must meet the boasted superiority of existence *a deux* on its own ground, and put it to rout with irrefutable demonstration. He must have a house, and equip and order this in such a fashion that the married couples for ten miles around will fall down with one accord and grovel. His peace and prosperity must be so evident and so eloquent as to cause the Green-eyed Monster to harry and lay waste that entire countryside. In short, he must preach with irresistible finality the fact that a man is happier without a wife than with one; and if

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so be that he arrives at the point of causing married women to sniff and married men to sigh, then he may know that his demonstration is a success and the lesson to be drawn therefrom unanswerable.

So, at the outset, I was confronted with the palpable necessity of building a house. Distinctly, there was no time to be lost, now that Uncle Ezra's means were mine, for so long as a bachelor is not fairly and firmly entrenched in his stronghold there is a peril as inimical to his security as is the soft-spoken songbird to the unwary worm's. I refer, of course, to the matchmaker — an affliction against which there is no law, no protection, and no remedy. She — I think the species boasts no male — resents the unmarried man as if he were a personal insult. From the moment when he crosses her path he is marked for the slaughter, and she begins to shuffle her kinsfolk and acquaintances as one shuffles the cards in the intellectual game of Old Maid, desperately

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endeavouring to find him a mate. She cannot, as the phrase aptly puts it, leave him "alone."

In my own case, I protest there had been more matchmakers concerned than Briareus could have counted upon his fingers, and I was barely out of my 'teens when I learned to appreciate the force of the saying that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. And if this had been so when I was practically penniless, what had I not to fear now that I had a competency?

A surprising number of natural phenomena are enlisted in the matchmaker's service. Moonlight, flowers, darkness, the woods, the sea, spring, music, poetry — all these, and many others, are her aids and accomplices. Her house is full of cushioned corners, and it is surrounded by piazzas, with vines and hammocks and I know not what other snares; and invariably there are girls visiting her with whom one is left alone at frequent intervals in the most surprising and disconcerting man-



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ner. Pitfalls are as thick as bones in a shad. You wouldn't suspect a mandolin of designs upon your celibacy, would you? — or a philopena, or a piece of embroidery, or a fan, or a box of candies? Poor innocent! Put a girl behind it, and a matchmaker standing close-hauled in the offing, and each and every one of them has an awful, a fatal significance. There are strings to the mandolin: wretched man, there will soon be one to you. What is the philopena but a symbol of matrimony? The girl never pays. And the embroidery: look how the poor thing is stretched and pulled and held in absolute bondage — *with a ring!* And the fan is shut up twenty times of an evening, and seen through the rest of the time. And the box of candies disagrees with you. So there! There is something that suggests a wife or a husband in every one of them. And when a man begins to dally with them, the first thing he knows the charm has worked, and he has popped, and been gobbled up, for

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all the world like an overheated kernel of corn! His only safety, I repeat, is to escape visiting the matchmakers by building a house of his own, in which, perceptibly, there is no room for a wife. It is an expression of conviction, this, and shows him to be so firm in his resolution that there is small hope of dislodging him.

The admirable conduct of Uncle Ezra, then, made it possible for me thus to entrench myself in a dwelling, the atmosphere of which I proposed should resemble that of the Garden of Eden before the appearance of Eve; and, to this intent, I perceived that it must be one in which it would be manifestly impossible for a married couple to exist in anything akin to comfort. In this way only could I expect to make it plain that I was not in the matrimonial market, or likely ever to be.

Now there are two things about a house which are as necessary to a woman as light or air. One is commodious closet-room and

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the other is a bath-tub. A man can stow his apparel in the veriest cupboard, and a shower-bath will give him more solid satisfaction than all the tubs in Christendom; but a woman must have as many hooks as Argus had eyes, and as for a shower-bath, there is nothing in the world over which she makes a greater to-do than wetting her hair. I determined, as the initial specification of my house, that there should not be a place to hang so much as a single skirt, and that the bathing arrangements should be limited to a shower and a slatted floor. A woman would think twice, I reasoned, before setting her cap at a man with a domicile so curiously limited.

It may appear to have been an extravagant precaution, and I might be asked why I could not rely upon the strength of my resolution; but, where matrimony is the peril to be avoided, there is no such thing as a superfluous safeguard. The most cautious of us have our moments of carelessness or abstraction, and,

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more than once, one of the afore-described combinations of a maiden, moonlight, and midsummer madness, had affected me with a horrid dizziness, a feeling, too distressing for utterance, that I was upon the point of proposing. It is a kind of emotional vertigo, this, a rush of romance to the head, and, once experienced, the very thought of its possible recurrence is indescribably alarming. I was like a man who has been threatened with smallpox: I felt that I could not get my fill of vaccination. The only adequate measure was to make myself as ineligible as possible; and I knew that I had taken a long stride in this direction when I eliminated the bath-tub.

Behold me, then, fairly launched upon my plans. I drew them with the utmost care, upon a fair sheet of paper, and, on a morning to be marked with a white stone, proceeded with my design in my pocket to the office of an architect of my acquaintance.

One of the most surprising things about an

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architect is the number of houses upon which he is engaged. I had always looked upon houses as something which one would be apt to build one at a time, like a cup challenger or a soldier's monument, and, in consequence of this impression, I was prepared to find the architect in question highly gratified at the receipt of my order. It certainly never occurred to me, considering the number of architects, that there were enough houses to go round; but I found him already committed to no less than nine, of which an amazing number of young men in shirt-sleeves were drawing the details in white ink on sheets of blue paper.

Arbuthnot — such was his name — was inclined to be sniffy, as he looked over my plan. It was extraordinary, after all my thought, what a lot of things I had done wrong, I only remember one, at the moment, but that was serious. There was no visible means of getting into the kitchen from the exterior of the house, so that, as Arbuthnot slightly remarked,

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it would be necessary to build the cook into the dwelling, and admit the butcher and the baker by way of the chimney. It occurred to me that the problem of keeping a cook in the country would thus be very happily solved, but I contented myself with asking him to correct my errors, and let me have the plans at the earliest possible moment. The earliest possible moment, it appeared, was two weeks distant.

I was exceedingly annoyed at this, for I wanted the plans immediately, as one always wants what one is only recently able to afford, but my exasperation was as nothing compared with my dismay at Arbuthnot's next remark.

“Where is the house to be?”

Will it be believed that this question had never entered my mind? It had been a veritable *château en Espagne*, a castle in the air. I stared at him blankly, and had not a word to say.

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As being immaterial to the present simple narrative, I will not dwell upon the perplexity incidental to the problem thus presented, further than to say that the ensuing fortnight was spent in a desperate search for a suitable location. At one time it seemed more than probable that the house would be entirely completed before I should have found a place to put it; and I fancy there could be nothing more embarrassing than to have an adult, able-bodied house on one's hands, without so much as a square foot of *terra firma* where-upon to place it. One might as well live in a balloon.

But, finally, the proper situation was discovered, and after the title had been searched — whether for smuggled goods or concealed weapons I have not the most remote idea — I found myself in a position to become proprietor of three acres of land, of which, to my thinking, the most dazzling attraction was the fact that the nearest neighbour was a mile

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away. However, I may make a note, in passing, of a paradox which I was very shortly to discover. It is this. A mile is the most elastic measurement in existence. If the person at the other end of it is one whom you dislike, it is no more protection against his company than if it were a hundred-yard dash; if, on the contrary, you like him, and wish to see him at frequent intervals, that mile which separates you from him might as well be the diameter of the earth. It is only the most disagreeable persons who are always within reach.

My first glimpse of the land which was now at my disposal was on one of those April days which summer seems to send out in the manner of tradesmen's samples—"If you like this style of weather, we are now prepared to supply it in any quantity," etc. I *did* like the style enormously. As I passed up the quiet country road to which I had been directed by the agent, I observed with pleasurable emotion that everything in sight was touched with



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fresh green, and that the air was full of the twitter of birds. Spring in the country, I said to myself, is a very different thing from spring in the city. It is the trees that leave, instead of the people; the birds' eggs that are laid, instead of the evil-smelling asphalt pavements; and the lawn-sprinklers that play, instead of the hand-organs. I felt that I had made a wise decision, as I turned a corner and came in sight of what I was sure was the land I contemplated buying. It formed a slight rise from the level of the road—and at the summit of the rise was perched a rock—and on the summit of the rock was perched—a girl!

I felt precisely as if I had found a fly in the cream-jug. If there is a place of all places where a fly's presence is bound to be unappreciated, it is in the cream; and if there was a place of all places where a girl's was inappropriate, it was in the geometrical centre of the three acres upon which I purposed to build "Sans Souci." I had already chosen

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this as the name of my prospective temple to celibacy. "Sans Souci" — Without Disquiet! It seemed to me to express admirably the spirit of existence without hairpins and without "in-laws."

The girl and I surveyed each other for an instant in silence. She was one of those girls who prove, if they prove anything, that clothes do not make the man. With the sole exception of her shortish walking-skirt, there was no visible article of her apparel which had not been plagiarised from something distinctly masculine. She wore a broad-brimmed felt hat, and a stock, and a man's belt, and a Norfolk jacket, and dogskin walking-gloves turned back at the wrists, and heavy shoes with the soles protruding all around like little piazzas. She was what sensible people call bold-looking, and poets call debonair; and, altogether, she was a type to which I had a violent objection. At that first glimpse of her I thought she was one of the best reasons for

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not getting married which had ever come under my attention. I bowed stiffly, and inquired where I could find Mr. Berrith's property.

"You can find some of it on top of this rock," she retorted. "I'm his daughter."

I explained with dignity that the particular property to which I referred consisted of three acres which were for sale for building purposes, and, in reply, she indicated her immediate surroundings with a little wave of her hand.

"Father was to have been here to show you the place," she said, "but he was unexpectedly detained in town. I'm Miss Berrith. I came over in his stead to save you the annoyance of walking a mile to the house."

"Thank you," I answered, smothering my desire to say that, in respect to annoyance, a miss is as bad as a mile.

There was something in her presence which robbed the occasion of half the pleasure I had

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expected to derive therefrom. I had been looking forward to rambling about at will, and ruminating upon the improvements I would make, and the probable aspect of the completed house. I had not even looked for Mr. Berrith's company. And now—a girl was added, my solitude divided, my perplexity multiplied, and my enjoyment subtracted, in this, my first problem in Berrithmetic. It was only natural, perhaps, that my next remark should have verged upon the idiotic.

“I am a single man, Miss Berrith.”

“I assure you, I didn't take you for twins,” she replied with what I thought most uncalled for levity. “You needn't explain, Mr. Sands; we've heard all about you from the agent. You seem to have been very frank with him.”

I had. I realized it with a qualm of uneasiness, and found myself wondering how much of my conversation the imbecile had seen fit to repeat.

“You are a confirmed bachelor?” con-

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tinued Miss Berrith. "Don't be alarmed. It's a complaint which can be remedied."

"It's not a complaint at all!" I exclaimed indignantly. "It's a heartfelt thanksgiving. So this is the land?"

"From the big fir tree on the left," she explained, "to the clump of white birches on the right, and as far back as the little stream."

It was a delicious prospect, wholly uncultivated, and instinct with charming possibilities. In my delight I permitted myself a most injudicious burst of enthusiasm.

"Here is where I can raise the house!" I cried, pointing to the knoll.

"Here," she said gravely, "is where you certainly can't raise anything else. It's all ledge."

I made the fatal mistake of attempting to be facetious.

"How about self-raising flowers?"

Fatal, I say, because she promptly adopted my weak-kneed little joke, gave it a pat on

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the back to stiffen its limpness, washed its face, tidied its hair, retied its cravat, brushed its boots, and, in general, furbished it up into something really worth while. This is what it was at the end of the operation:

“You can only raise flowers with an exposure to the west, just as you can only raise flour with an exposure to the yeast. So you see it is principally a question of what kind of house you propose to build, in what position you intend to build it, and how much land it is designed to cover.”

Here I made another error, more fatal than the last. The subject so interested and absorbed me that at the slightest reference to my house I gave forth confidences as freely as a sugar-maple gives forth sap. The young person on the rock having, as I may say, thus driven in the spigot, I bled views on single blessedness unreservedly, confiding in her as I had confided in Uncle Ezra's solicitor, in my architect, in the real estate agent — as I am

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confiding, gentle and tactful reader, in you! I said to her all that is hereinbefore set down, and, further, with broad and comprehensive sweeps of my walking-stick, I sketched "Sans Souci" for her, as I proposed to place it, upon the swell of ground. Meanwhile, I forgot that I was talking to a girl.

"And so," I concluded, "I shall be as safe in the midst of these charming woods as ever was Professor Garnier in his cage in the African jungle. I shall not even be forced, as he was, to listen to the daily chatter of inferior beings, and I can defy the most enterprising of man-eating spinsters to lay her claws upon me!"

As I paused I felt that, perhaps, I had been too emphatic. A woman always takes general theories as immediately applicable to herself. Hers has none of that broad, liberal view of the abstract which distinguishes the masculine mind. I was not wrong. Miss Berrith's reply bordered on the contemptuous.

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“Then there is no chance at all for me?”

“My dear young lady!” I said generously, “present company, you know—”

“Is always *accepted*? Thank you. How unfortunate for me that present company does not always propose!”

“With me,” I said, “all this is a matter of principle.”

“Your principal,” she answered, “is likely to draw liberal interest from those to whom you confide it. Society, hereabouts, has not much in the way of diversion. We shall all, I am sure, watch with curiosity the progress of your experiment. Already, I find myself advantageously enlightened. I’ve always heard a wife referred to as the better half.”

“Please remember,” said I, “that we have not been talking of a married man’s better half, but of a bachelor’s better quarters.”

“True,” said Miss Berrith, dryly. “What a future is yours! It reminds me of what Tennyson says: ‘Ah, what shall I be at fifty



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should Nature keep me alive, if I find the world so bitter when I am but twenty-five?"

"Irrelevant," I retorted. "We were speaking of the change I propose to make."

"Precisely," remarked Miss Berrith. "What is change if not halves and quarters and fifties and twenty-fives?"

Once more I felt that she had the best of me, and I was correspondingly relieved when she took her departure, promising to acquaint her father with my desire to meet him at the agent's on the following day to conclude our bargain. I was gratified to note that, five minutes later, I preserved no recollection of her face beyond the fact that she had good teeth and freckles on her nose.

Sometimes, in the course of an uncommonly good dinner, you may have added to your enjoyment of its delicacies by an endeavour to realize how differently you would feel as a pauper, munching on a crust. It was in somewhat the same spirit that I seated my-

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self upon the rock which she had left, looked about at the land upon which "Sans Souci" was soon to stand, and strove to appreciate what would have been my sensations had I been doomed to share it with a wife.

Primarily, as a bachelor, I was able to indulge in many little luxuries which would have been manifestly impossible if I had been under the necessity of supplying some one with pin-money; and I felt that these I should enjoy the more for thinking to what uses married men are compelled to apply their cost. Never, I thought, would I use my telephone, for example, without a sense of exultation in the knowledge that its annual rental only approximated the cost of an Easter bonnet.

A wife! I saw myself paying for Parisian dresses, loaded with flounces, and gores, and chiffon, and selvages, and passementerie—whatever that may be!—and such-like frippery. I saw myself listening to curtain-lectures. In accuracy's name, why "curtain"?

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—since they are opened instead of closed just as you want to go to sleep. I saw myself wearing the ties of marriage — those unspeakable ties which women buy at bargain-sales! In short, I saw myself a slave, shuddered, and shook myself into the magnificent realization that it wasn't true!

Oh, “Sans Souci!” No hairpins, no curl-papers, no piano practice, no hysterics, no jealousies, tantrums, amateur cooking, threats (always unmercifully unfulfilled) of Going Back to Mother! No tea-parties, no sewing-machines, no tears, sick headaches, cheap novels, smelling salts! No misapplication of the nail-scissors to the sharpening of pencils, no undue expenditure of money which I could not spare for Christmas presents which I did not want! Oh, “Sans Souci!” — emblem of prosperity, peace, and placidity—a change for the better, and let who would make the awful other change, for better for worse. Oh, “Sans Souci!” — “Sans Souci!” — “Sans Souci!”

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My little rhapsody over, I prepared to leave my imminent domain. As I rose from my seat upon the rock, something small and white at my feet attracted my attention, and I picked it up. It was a handkerchief—the most preposterously inadequate handkerchief I had ever seen, or hoped not to see. For a postage-stamp, or even a baggage tag, its proportions might not have been absurd. As a handkerchief, it was a distinct farce, folly, and fiasco. In the corner of this ridiculous article, elaborately embroidered, was one word—“Susie.”

As a matter of curiosity, I would like to know whether there is authentic record of a single instance in which a man has left his handkerchief on top of a rock, a mile from the nearest neighbour.

## CHAPTER TWO

In the course of the following fortnight I received, with what emotions I shall not attempt to say, the plan for my bungalow. At that moment it was precisely as if the house was in actual existence. I think the feeling was not unnatural. Of course, a plan is no more a house than a heifer is a tub of butter; but in either case the mere fact that you have acquired the former perceptibly increases your chance of one day getting the latter.

My plan, like those I had already seen in Arbuthnot's office, was executed in white ink on blue paper, with its name and dimensions neatly lettered in the centre of each room, the doors all invitingly ajar, and the beds indicated by little devices which looked like the first stage of cat's cradle. The chimneys were

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cunningly inserted in red, which subtlety lent a singular air of reality to the whole. It was nothing short of sublime!

You may smile, and I have no doubt you do, at my enthusiasm. You may say (what is undeniable) that its cause was nothing more than a sheet of blue paper, upon which a young man in shirt-sleeves, personally unknown to me, had exercised his craft with a ruling-pen. You will be quite right; but I shall retort that a plan's a plan for a' that, and that if you have never had the pleasure of gloating over one of your own you are as much to be pitied as the boy who has never filched a watermelon.

Arbuthnot had asked for the prompt return of the plan, with my indorsement, but I kept it by me for a full week before I could bring myself to part with it; and when I realized that the delay was becoming ridiculous, and that I should presently have to let it go, I was in what I conceive to be a father's state

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of mind when the day comes for his boy to return to boarding-school. I made, as well as I was able, a tracing of it — which was equivalent to having the aforesaid boy's tintype taken — and trimmed it, where the edges were frayed with much fondling, and pressed out the wrinkles — which corresponded to a haircut and a new suit of clothes. It was too large to kiss, so I contented myself with patting it on the back, and we went round to Arbuthnot's together. When I left the plan in his hands once more I think I was upon the point of asking him to be particular that it did not change its winter flannels too soon. At all events, I know my attitude was distinctly paternal.

They broke ground for "Sans Souci" on the first of May. The morning newspaper remarked, I remember, that another moving day had come, and, in looking back that evening upon this observation, it impressed me as having been peculiarly appropriate. It was,

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by all odds, the most moving day in my experience. I went down from town, of course, to see the work begun, and at the first fall of the pick such a thrill ran through me as I am sure must have coursed through the system of De Lesseps when the initial spadeful of earth was stirred on the Isthmus of Panama. I looked, almost with affection, upon the sturdy labourer who was responsible for this first pick-nick in the vicinity of my future home, and, when I had an opportunity, addressed him in a friendly manner.

“Fine day, my man.”

He looked at me with the peculiar vacuity observable in the eye of a dried mackerel, and answered:

“*Non capisco.*”

The conversation had been neither prolonged nor, in any sense, spirited, but it was, nevertheless, at an end, for his remark not only acquainted me with his inability to comprehend the English language, but it



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happened to be the extent of my knowledge of Italian. It was evident that there were not enough words to go round, to say nothing of a second helping.

The work went forward famously. Only a week later the cellar walls were standing, and I was able to step inside and look out of a window. The entire aspect of the world undergoes some subtle, psychological transformation from the moment when first you survey it out of your own window. You are no longer a supernumerary in the second row of the Soldiers' Chorus, but the occupant of a grand tier box, and of station somewhat more exalted than that of Faust himself. I could fancy with what contentment, with what calm philosophy, I would look through that window, after the trim, green blinds, and the glass, and the dimity curtains should be in place; and said as much to the head-mason. He reminded me, with unnecessary particularity, that I would not be apt to spend much

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of my time at a cellar window, especially as the one in question was designed to light the coal-bin; but I felt that the moral held good, even when applied to another story.

Then the carpenters came, and sawed, and conquered.

I soon perceived that the construction of "Sans Souci" was to be an experience in progressive emotion. I had already looked out of my own window: now I was able to walk up my own cellar stairs and watch the carpenters laying the floor. This part of the work was accomplished with the most amazing celerity, and, as I saw the progress made from day to day, I could almost believe that the obliging brownies had returned to earth, and were helping things along in the middle of the night. In reality, three weeks elapsed before the framework was boarded in; but the time seemed shorter because so many things were happening at once. Carpenters were swarming all over the house, inside and out, like

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flies on a cantaloupe rind; and the sound of their hammers, heard from a distance as I approached, suggested that *Senorita Goliath* was engaged in doing a castanet dance. The rooms were partitioned off by timbers, in readiness for lathing. Gradually the roof spread over me the protection of shingle blessedness. It was a scene of magnificent industry and diligence, upon which I was content to gaze for hours, as if I had been one entranced. There was but one small cloud upon the firmament of my satisfaction.

Although she lived a mile away, I soon found that *Miss Susie Berrith* was as prone to running over as a drinking-trough. She was constantly on the scene, leaning against a red cedar which stood near to the piazza, and observing operations with an attentive eye. No doubt she was a very nice girl in her way, but she was also in mine, and I resented it. After all, a promising house is not a performing bear. I am afraid I was not overcordial

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on these occasions; indeed, I was more than apt to sniff. But she had an innocent way of turning up her eyes which, in a manner, disarmed me. For I have noticed that when a man turns up his nose at a woman, and a woman turns up her eyes at a man — well, it is like a vote to increase the pension list: the eyes have it, every time! So I came to tolerate her presence, and even to engage her in polite, if somewhat uneasy, conversation.

“I wonder,” I said on one occasion, “whether you have any conception of what all this means to me. Think of it! From now on I shall have everything my own way!”

“And you think you will enjoy that?” asked Miss Berrith.

“Why not?” I demanded.

“Why not, indeed?” she assented. “But has it never occurred to you that there is really more pleasure in having things another person’s way?”

It never *had* occurred to me, and I said so

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quite frankly, but without adding what I thought — that it was by all odds the silliest theory I had ever heard in my life.

“The mere fact that tastes differ,” said I, “seems to me to prove the contrary. Just by way of example, and with all the respect in the world for your taste, which I have no doubt is most excellent, I don’t suppose that you will endeavour to persuade me that I should actually prefer a wall-paper, or an ornament, of your choosing to one of my own.”

“No,” said Miss Berrith, with the oddest little smile imaginable, “that isn’t what I meant.”

“It is what you said,” I protested, somewhat peevishly.

She made no reply — which, of course, showed I had the best of it.

I am bound, however, to confess that, to a certain extent, I was afraid of her. There is something about a girl — even about a girl in whom one has no particular interest — which is profoundly disconcerting. If you have ever

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passed much time in the company of an Angora cat you have probably experienced much the same sensations which are wont to affect me in the society of a girl. There is the same impenetrable calm, the same simultaneous purring and sharpening of claws, the same abrupt transition from an attitude of the utmost friendliness to one of the most humiliating disdain. I beg to be understood as speaking exclusively in metaphor when I say that both jump into my lap when I don't want them, and persist in jumping down when I do. Above all, with neither do I feel wholly assured as to what is going to happen next.

No conversation can be entirely free from embarrassment in which you are uncertain of your companion's point of view. As regards Miss Berrith, I found that I was constantly making remarks which appeared to me to be as clear as a mirror when they left my lips. A breath from her, and — well, you know the effect of a breath upon a mirror. I was for-

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ever falling back upon some rag of an apology with which to make things clear.

But her silence at this moment rather impelled me to pity her. When one admiral sinks another's flagship, he immediately orders his boats lowered away to pick up the survivors, and I have a very similar method of procedure as toward those whom I have worsted in an argument. So now I kindly came back to the original topic.

“The common, or garden, hen,” I said, “which lays in a soap-box filled with straw, of the farmer's providing, is surely a creature less enviable than the oriole, which constructs its own nest with infinite taste and ingenuity. And so I contend that the man who builds his own house according to his own ideas is more admirable than the man who simply accepts another's ideas of what a house ought to be. I am building my bungalow around me, as it were, and it is going to fit me to a nicety. To employ a metaphor, I shall be in no fear of

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dashing out my brains on the lintels because a five-foot man has seen fit to make the doorways five feet one."

"Are there no tucks or hems in your house?" asked Miss Berrith.

I looked at her inquiringly.

"Nothing to let out," she explained, "in case—in case you should happen to grow, Mr. Sands?"

"I am building my bungalow to live in, not to let out," I replied, with some humour, I fancy. "And I shall be thirty on my next birthday, Miss Berrith. Do you think there is much chance of my growing?"

"Let us hope for the best," she answered quietly.

Now *that* is what I mean by blowing on the mirror.

It was when the plasterers came upon the scene that the interior of my bungalow began to assume a certain dignity. A plasterer, it appears, is nothing more than a mason in



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white overalls. They slathered. The word is not elegant, but there is no other which fitly describes their operations. What had been lath was lather. The whole house looked as if it was about to be shaved.

This was the most tantalizing stage of the proceedings. Plaster is a substance which has adopted as its motto "Never say dry!" and day after day went by, on each of which it seemed only to grow softer. Arbuthnot had said that what was wanted was hot, dry air; but the weather had changed, and we had rains as long as Queen Victoria's, with never a chance for the air apparent.

Nevertheless, little by little the house was approaching completion. The window-frames were in, the hardwood floors were down, and there were doors to open and shut. The painter was at work, as well: a charming person, who whistled as he worked, quoted Whittier to me, and produced the most astounding effects, the most pleasing transformations, in

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the aspect of everything upon which he laid his brush. I have travelled not inconsiderably: I have seen much: I have experienced many emotions: but I contend, and shall always contend, that the thing that contributes most largely to human comfort and to human self-respect is fresh paint. It is soul-satisfying. It is eminently respectable. It remedies past errors: it challenges future indiscretions. It is the hall-mark of cleanliness, the guarantee of gentility, the stamp of self-respect.

In course of time the plaster dried, and, in a high state of exhilaration, I went to choose my wall-papers. I give you my word that never before had I so much as imagined that so many varieties of wall-paper existed. I despaired, at first, of making a choice. They all *seemed* born to be hung, and I found myself in a kind of embarrassment as to which *was*. The one which appealed to me most strongly was a daring arrangement of scarlet poppies on a yellow background. But then, poppies

are such sleepy, dead-and-alive things, to have about one. You might as well surround yourself with mummies as with poppies. So I rejected this design, and, in the end, came down to plain, cool colours. For this inspiration I was indebted to one of those freaks of memory whereby a trivial incident pops out of the past like a cork from a soda-bottle — when you're not looking. A gaudy scheme of large, and what I should call floppy, roses against a green trellis suddenly caused me to remember the mumps. There had been roses on the wall opposite my infantile pallet — thirty-two roses across and seventeen roses up and down — and when you squinted your eyes, every second rose had the face of an old lady in a turban and a tippet. The mumps is a tedious disease and aggravated, rather than in the least degree ameliorated, by a continuous process of counting seventeen up and down and thirty-two across. As Mr. Swinburne says, "*I shall never be friends again with roses.*"

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But, what was more to the point, I also remembered that I had been thus direfully afflicted on one side only. I reflected that somewhere that other mump might be lurking in ambush, awaiting its chance to spring at my throat. And should I, then, fall once more to computing the insensate figures on a bedroom wall? A thousand times no! Solid colours, or nothing, for me!

So I made my bedroom a cool blue, my den a tranquil green, my library a rich yellow, and my dining-room a glowing red. It was a rainbow on the instalment plan. Only in my guest-room did I permit myself a deviation from the severity of my scheme. There was no such thing as resisting a certain design in pansies, and I determined that such of my guests as might be so ill-advised as to come down with the mumps over-night would do so entirely at their own risk, and must pay the penalty of their indiscretion.

If the painter had produced transforma-

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tions in the aspect of the bungalow's interior, what shall be said of the paper-hanger? I had always had a shamefaced and unconfessed admiration for a dressmaker who could make stripes come together correctly down a seam; but after I had seen that master of precision fitting the two halves of a pansy together down ten feet of wall space, so that you couldn't for the life of you tell where the "pan" ended and the "sy" began, I perceived that the other was only a weak imitation of this superior being. Have you ever tried to paste on a flat surface a piece of paper the size of this page? If you have, you will not need to be told that, short of putting up a stovepipe, it is the most maddening feat attempted by civilized man. You will remember how it curls up and sticks to the other side of itself: how you get it off one finger only to have it cling to another: how, when you spread it out flat, at last, the air bubbles get under it, as if they heard a burglar in the house, and pull the blankets over

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their heads, and refuse to come out or be interviewed on any terms whatever. And you will agree with me, I think, when I submit that the eighth wonder of the world is a man who can take two sheets of limp, wet paper, eighteen inches wide by ten feet long, and paste them side by side and edge to edge with such astounding ingenuity that you can have no more hope of perceiving the line of division at a distance of five feet than of discovering the boundary between New York and New Jersey by paddling about in the middle of the Hudson River.

In this philosophical attitude of mind, then, I emerged at length from the maelstrom of plastering, carpentry, painting and paper-hanging, and found myself in a position to furnish. As I look back upon this stage it seems to me to have been characterized by a vast superfluity of what Mr. Longfellow very truthfully called "the strange device, excelsior." Excelsior is to shavings what spaghetti

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is to macaroni—smaller, that is, and infinitely more difficult to manipulate. As everything breakable came down from town packed in it, life became a mere struggle to keep it from going up my sleeves and down my neck, and I grew to fear and hate it, to tremble at sight of it, to flee from it when possible, as if it were a pest. I am convinced that hope was the only thing in Pandora's box — but the hope was packed in excelsior.

Before now I had an offset to Miss Berrith in the person of Mrs. Sarah Galvin, a widow on the perfectly safe side of fifty, who was to serve me thenceforward in the combined capacities of housekeeper, cook, and Sally-de-chambre. She had already taken up her abode in my bungalow, where she was existing, in some precarious fashion of her own, on tea and chronic melancholy until such time as things should be in running order. She was the sort of woman you would not know a second time if you met her in a pint-pot. She had

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no perceptible features. Her face took no more hold upon one's attention or memory than a Chinaman's. I do not remember ever to have looked at her squarely, and I was always curiously surprised when the fact was brought to my attention that such a person existed at all. She was like the new moon: whenever she made her appearance it seemed to me that I had last seen her at least three years back. When, by chance, I encountered her in the house, she melted through a doorway like an alarmed crab in soft sand. She was a woman after my own heart—needless to say, with no chance of getting it—and, in brief, the person of all persons for “Sans Souci.”

It was with something very nearly akin to triumph that I directed Miss Berrith's attention to her. Miss Berrith “happened to be passing”—that was her euphonious way of explaining her almost daily fit of curiosity—and stopped a moment to watch me unpacking



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china on the front piazza. I had been handing plates to Galvin over my left shoulder, and my first intimation of my young neighbour's presence came in the form of what I may describe as the evaporation of my faithful attendant into thin air.

"Excuse me," I said, looking up. "I did not see you." I was covered from top to toe with the ubiquitous excelsior, warm, tired, and rather cross.

"You will end by marrying your cook," observed Miss Berrith with extreme irrelevancy.

"Nothing of the sort!" I exclaimed indignantly. "Whatever put that idea into your head?"

"I'm not sure," said she. "Just seeing you working there together, all so comfy, I suppose. Propinquity—association—kindred interests—they accomplish wonders, you know."

"Did you get a good look at her?" I demanded.

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“Fleeting,” answered my tormentor, “but fairly comprehensive.”

“And you actually think there is a possibility of my marrying *that*.”

Miss Berrith shrugged her shoulders.

“Who knows?” she answered flippantly. “There is nothing more illogical than the persons other persons marry.”

“I think I am quite safe, so far as Galvin is concerned,” I said haughtily, “and it is a mile to another woman.”

“Is it?” asked Miss Berrith with a pretense at innocence. “I should not have thought the distance more than five yards.”

I considered this to be the extreme of audacity, and very properly ignored it.

“And in any event—a cook!” I protested.

She appeared to reflect. Little did I foresee the bomb which she was preparing to explode at my devoted feet.

“Why,” she asked slowly, “is a girl like a cook?”



I WAS COVERED FROM TOP TO TOE WITH EXCELSIOR



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“I can’t imagine,” says I.

“Because,” said Miss Berrith, “she’s a ready maid before she’s engaged and a maid to order afterward.”

“Aha!” I cried triumphantly, “you admit the inferiority of the wife!”

“I haven’t said whom she is made to order,” said Miss Berrith.

For a moment I felt as I do after trying to recover a wet cake of soap before it reaches the carpet.

“Of course,” I ventured, “our ideas upon marriage are bound to be very dissimilar. I have the masculine point of view.”

Miss Berrith looked at me curiously.

“A friend of my father,” she observed slowly, “once referred to the violet as a ‘thundering pretty flower.’”

“I’m afraid that I don’t see the connection,” said I uneasily.

“Only,” answered Miss Berrith, “that in relation to at least one very sweet and tender

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and beautiful thing the masculine point of view would seem to border upon the inadequate.”

“I should be the last man in the world,” I exclaimed resentfully, “to call the violet ‘a thundering pretty flower.’”

“Oh, we all have our virtues,” said Miss Berrith airily. “The gentleman in question, for instance, has been married thirty years.”

If a ruler of Para rubber has ever been applied to your knuckles you will recall the effect produced as a particularity of sensation as distressing as it is abrupt. I had not experienced it since I was a child.

A week later I assembled in a valise the remainder of my belongings in town, squared accounts with my landlady, cast one brief unregretful look at the wicker furniture, the dispirited curtains, and the lamentable plush table-cover of my late apartment, and took final flight for “Sans Souci.”

What a night it was, to be sure, that first

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one under the shelter of my own roof-tree! Galvin prepared me a delicious little dinner, and afterwards I installed myself in my largest and most comfortable chair, with a favourite book and a pipeful of mild tobacco.

For a time I read steadily. It was Mr. Kipling's "Story of the Gadsbys," which ends with that marvellous "Envoi," which I have always thought the final words on the advantages of celibacy :

*One may fall but he falls by himself—  
Falls by himself with himself to blame;  
One may attain and to him is the pelf,  
Loot of the city in Gold or Fame:  
Plunder of earth shall be all his own  
Who travels the fastest and travels alone.*

I looked up and about my pleasant library, and I think my eyes were a little moist as I dwelt affectionately upon the memory of excellent Uncle Ezra and all he had thus made

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possible. I was a bachelor at last! Everything had turned out exactly as I had planned it. Celibacy lay upon that scene like a caress. Suppose — suppose I had been married!

*Married!*

I spoke the word half-aloud, and somehow, in these surroundings, it was as incongruous as an icicle in June!

*Married!*

I put my feet upon the chair which faced me — not that I approve this practice, but simply to show my independence. A married man's chairs are like the man himself—made only to be sat upon.

*Married!*

I re-lit my pipe. Should I have had to smoke it out on the front steps had things been otherwise? Ah, there are worse matches than the one I used!

*Married!*

I switched off all the incandescent bulbs—reflecting that married men are even more



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frequently made light of and put out — and sought the piazza.

The night was perfection, soft and still, save for a tiny lisp of leaves, the high whine of insects, and the distant murmur of the sea. Out of the fullness of my content I spoke aloud to the surrounding woodland:

“Hail, ‘Sans Souci!’”

If there is one thing I abominate it is an echo. It is so essentially feminine. It always has to have the last word.

There was an echo in those woods, and when I made the above innocent observation of course it had to up and answer back. And what, pray, was the form of remark, it saw fit to make? Nothing less than:

“*Su-sie!*”

I felt that I was getting a little too much of the Berrith girl.

### CHAPTER THREE

With the express design of familiarizing myself with my new mode of life, I had no guests, and went but once or twice to town, during the first month of "Sans Souci." I wished to get upon terms of intimacy with my rooms, to tame my chairs, to have my wall-papers come to me when I called them and feed out of my hand. As it was, everything in the place seemed to be standing at attention, prepared to salute me when I should pass. All my cushions behaved like *débutantes*: not one had the easy air of repose which comes with a second season or a third. The furniture, without exception, was formal in manner, and almost disapproving. I could not even fall back with confidence upon my bed, which as yet received me with a certain discouraging rig-

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idity. I felt that each of the rooms was deliberately taking stock of me, and that from no one of them was I by any means sure of a favourable opinion.

Fortunately, this uncomfortable formality passed off, like the appalling embarrassment which characterizes the first half-hour of a children's party, and before the month was up my rooms had decided that I was not an undesirable playmate; had formed, as it were, a circle around me, holding hands; and we were all on the best possible terms with each other and ourselves. But I think it was Galvin, rather than I, who caused "Sans Souci" to assume the reposeful appearance of an establishment long maintained.

Her methods of operation were those of the lowly but effectual mole; continuous and conscientious, that is to say, but invisible to the naked eye in all save results. From a distance I could hear her whirling through space, hot on the heels of some unapparent speck of dust,

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and ere I had summoned the courage to open my eyes of a morning, her broom was lispng along the base-board of my hall. I knew when she was at the wash-tub, too, because, when thus employed, she invariably raised her voice in what I at first mistook for a dirge, but mentally unmasked, at length, as "Bonnie Dundee" in adagio time. If you have never heard it thus rendered, a simple experiment will enable you to bear me out in the assertion that of all airs it is the most lamentable.

But never, up to that time, had I realized how much cleaner than merely clean it is possible for a window, or a floor, or a tablecloth to be. Never had I known what it was to have whatever I might chance to mislay or disarrange restored to its proper position, the instant my back was turned, as unerringly and inevitably as those cheerful, weighted dolls which spring upright, no matter how or where you happen to hurl them. My somewhat meagre supply of silver was, fortunately,

sterling, for assuredly no plate could ever have survived the polishings it received; and as for my feather dusters, they must have been made from the plumage of Mother Carey's chickens, so incessantly were they on the wing. I said to myself, with vast satisfaction, that Galvin was a paragon. When I discovered — by degrees, as shall you — how many sides she had, I perceived that "octagon" was the word I should have used.

Thus far, I had experienced none of the actual cares of housekeeping — nor, to be frank, did I wish or expect to. I had no desire, for example, to have a hand in the marketing. I am as quick as another to take a hint. It was not for nothing that I had read innumerable paragraphs in the humourous weeklies, having to do with the inexperienced one who orders two yards of French chops or a pound of eggs, and I had no mind to present myself as a figure of fun to my grocer and my butcher. Not for three weeks was I even

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consulted as to my preferences in the matter of food, and I am frank to say I never fared better. But this was the calm before the storm. I had retired to my den, one morning, determined to commence the novel which I had long had in mind, and was scrupulously pointing a half-dozen pencils, when I was interrupted by the sound of some one knocking. It was Galvin.

I should no more have suspected Galvin of venturing to knock at a door than of presuming to discharge a howitzer; but Galvin it was, and, it required but a glance to show me, a very different Galvin from that to which I had become accustomed. She was the picture of chastened resignation. Submission to unmerited adversity shone meekly in her eyes. The humility of the early martyrs was in the droop of her lips.

“Well, Galvin?” said I.

At once the flood-gates of her speech were opened.

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“If I make bold to disturb you, sir,” she said, in a tone wherein was not perceptible the most remote trace of cheerfulness, or even hope, “it is because I *cannot* — *no* one could — you might ask an angel and they wouldn’t — not in houses where there are four and five in help — much less only — and there are many and many and *many* houses — and of course when things are not properly done — not that any one has *ever* said of me — I’ve a very sensitive character, Mr. Sands — even my own sister used to say — not that I want to boast — but to feel that, hard as I may try — and when I saw that you didn’t eat — and the disappointment — my life has not been an easy one — I often feel as if — as if — I feel as if — ”

At this point Galvin abruptly dissolved in tears.

This whole matter, so unspeakably tragic in seeming, consisted in the fact that I had eaten so lightly of the meals which she provided that she felt I must disapprove of her

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selection. Protests were without avail. She proposed to have me arrange a schedule of my fare, whereby the burden of responsibility should be shifted from her shoulders to mine. This, to assuage her desperation, I agreed to do, and having my pencils fortuitously pointed, forthwith set to work to map out meals for a fortnight ahead. Thus to provide for forty-two meals would seem to be simplicity itself, said my mind to me.

First in order, I set down the meats: roast beef, beefsteak . . . chops . . . lamb . . . . mutton—

As I live, I could think of no more!

I did better with the vegetables, which mounted up to twelve; but that was not even one a day for my fortnight, and, what was worse, at least four out of the dozen were excessively distasteful to me.

I was most unfortunate of all in regard to the desserts. I thought of pie — which, on one occasion in early life, saluted my confiding



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indulgence with such unexampled harshness that any sympathy between us has been out of the question ever since—and of Charlotte Russe, which, from its striking resemblance to a shaving-mug in full blast, has never seemed to me inviting—and of something called Sally Lunn, upon which I did not care to venture, because I could not in the least remember what manner of thing it was. Then and there I came to a full halt, and, by way of finale to the first dinner on my schedule, feebly wrote “Assorted Fruit.” I may add at once that I never succeeded in getting beyond the second day’s luncheon, and that Galvin, duly reassured as to my appreciation, continued to do the ordering, after all. The sole virtue of the episode was in showing me that she had another side in addition to the vanishing and the melodious. I was yet in blissful ignorance of the remaining five which cropped up later to complete my human octagon. In justice to myself, however, I am bound to

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say that, after I had definitely abandoned my attempt to make a schedule, I thought of a considerable number of other meats, such as Irish stew, and hash, and minced beef. But there are fewer vegetables in the world than I had supposed.

There was but one incident in connection with the earlier stages of my bachelor house-keeping which I found more humiliating to my self-esteem than this. I have in mind my visit, at the instance of Galvin, to the notion counter of Messrs. Wimple, Gabardine & Vale, who keep the largest department store in town. Galvin handed me a list of her wants in this particular, as I was leaving "Sans Souci" that morning, and this I perused with interest on my way up in the train. It ran as follows:

White spool cotton (80)

Black spool cotton (80)

Needles (8)

Tape (1 inch)

Shoe buttons (3)



I WILL NOT DWELL UPON THAT MOST PAINFUL FIFTEEN  
MINUTES AT THE NOTION COUNTER



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That was all. Could anything have been more simple in appearance? Well, I solemnly avow that the most intricate cryptogram was the veriest child's play in comparison!

I will not dwell upon that most painful fifteen minutes at the notion counter. (They call it that because the girls behind it have more notion than you of what you want.) I knew what *I* wanted — though, to be sure, it did not turn out to be what Galvin wanted — and, after a brief but severe struggle, I obtained it. It was a shocking experience. Homer speaks of the “ever-laughing sea,” but I am in a position to show that, in the matter of laughter, the sea is a poor performer beside the girl at the notion counter. It was all very unjust, very unreasonable. How was I to know that all these commodities are numbered and measured in direct opposition to every law of logic?—needles and spool cotton by quality instead of quantity, tape by width instead of length, buttons by cards instead

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of individuals! Suffice it to say that I returned to “Sans Souci” with one hundred and sixty spools of cotton, eight needles of the largest size, one inch of tape, and three shoe buttons, and that I could not bring myself to tolerate the presence of Galvin for a full week thereafter.

The first full month of my new existence had elapsed when I suddenly found myself confronted with the necessity of engaging Darius. He arrived as I was finishing breakfast one morning, bearing a note from Miss Berrith, the most expansive smile I have ever seen, and the greatest number of freckles which it was possible to accommodate within the limited compass of his countenance. This was Miss Berrith’s note, which I read at the front door, while he waited:

“DEAR MR. SANDS:

“I do not know if you have any need of a boy about the place, but, if you have, I hope you will give one of my Sunday-school scholars,



THE MOST EXPANSIVE SMILE I HAVE EVER SEEN





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Darius Doane, a trial. He is very willing and anxious to please, and besides finding him useful, you will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are enabling him to aid his mother in supporting an invalid husband.

“Sincerely yours,

“SUSIE BERRITH.”

As I finished this epistle I was conscious of a swishing sound, and looked up to find Darius sweeping the piazza. To this day I cannot imagine where he found the broom. He replied to my questioning glance with what I should have supposed an impossible enlargement of his former grin.

“I t’ought I might uz well git roight ter woik,” he observed, and forthwith I perceived that there was no way out of it but to give Darius Doane a trial. At the moment, I had no suspicion of how many trials Darius Doane was destined to give me.

How Darius did not perform his duties there is not space to tell. His age was twelve,

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his height inconsiderable, and his principal employments were polishing my boots, sauntering on errands, and endeavouring, with the utmost assiduity, to ascertain the greatest amount of sound and the least amount of melody which it is possible to extract from a mouth-organ at one and the self-same time. The result of his activities on an open fire would have done credit to a chemical engine. The arabesques of soap upon a window which he had "washed" would have put the artistic labours of Jack Frost to shame. He was able to drench himself more thoroughly by manipulating a garden hose than the average person could do by standing in front of the nozzle. He could lose more things in a given space of time than Robert Houdin. He could forget more messages, make more mistakes, come later of a morning and take his departure earlier—but why multiply examples? These were not the tenth part of his accomplishments.

Twenty times in the course of the first week I essayed to discharge the boy, but on each occasion he missed firing. He was so cheerful, so beamingly unconscious of his own shortcomings, that it was impossible to get beyond a certain point of severity. He reminded me of a fox-terrier pup, once of my acquaintance, who always imagined that an infuriated attempt to get at him with a stick and beat him to a pulp was part of some new game. After a short detour he would come romping back in an ecstasy, smiling and wagging his rudiment of a tail, and the man who could have found it in his heart to strike him thus I should have suspected of being able to parboil a babe-in-arms without a qualm. So with Darius. I felt that if ever, when maddened by the mouth-organ, I could creep upon him from behind, I might discharge him. But if he turned upon me, before the odious deed was done, all smiles, all eagerness to please, I knew that I was lost.

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It was not until Darius had been a fortnight in my employ that I saw Miss Berrith again. The occasion was a dinner—the first at “Sans Souci.” Arbuthnot came down from town to spend the night, and I invited Mr. Berrith and his daughter over to make up a four. I particularly desired to show Miss Berrith the manner in which I had worked out the sublime conception of celibate domesticity at which she had seen fit to tilt her nose. I wished her to know that when she had said “Then there is no chance for me,” it was one of the many true words spoken in jest. I intended to have her understand that, among all the rooms in my bungalow, there was no room for a wife. I was prepared deliberately to direct her attention to the absence of closet space and a bath-tub. In short, I designed this dinner as a “house-warning.”

Mr. Berrith was the kind of man into whom one can stick an infinite number of in-

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teresting remarks without securing any return whatever—as if one were filling a pin-cushion, which you may have remarked is a very one-sided operation. At an early stage of the dinner I turned him over to Arbuthnot, who, with a faculty which I do not possess, immediately discovered him to be an enthusiast on military history, and set him chattering like a jackdaw. There are many people who thus resemble one-half of a Seidlitz powder. So long as you don't know what particular topic to mix with their intelligence, it remains flat and lifeless; but once stir it up with the proper ingredient and it promptly begins to effervesce. The other half of the Berrith powder was Napoleon, and as Arbuthnot is something of a Bonapartisan himself, the two of them got on famously — and left Miss Berrith to me.

“And how do you manage to get along with Darius?” said she.

“I'm sure I can't imagine,” I answered

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doubtfully. "He has many accomplishments, but I am not sure that they are precisely applicable to the situation. He is very expert upon the mouth-organ."

"That is hardly in the line of your needs, I suppose," said Miss Berrith gravely, "but I am very glad you could give him the place. It is always a satisfaction to feel that one is helping another to earn a livelihood."

"His is the liveliesthood," said I, "that ever a boy earned yet."

"Still, it is steady work," observed Miss Berrith.

"If only you could see it!" I exclaimed.

"I mean," she answered, with a little smile, "that he was only doing odd jobs before he came to you."

"He has been doing odder ones ever since," said I. "But I must thank you for thinking of me."

"That reminds me that I owe you an apology," said Miss Berrith. "I met Galvin

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one day not long ago, as she was taking an airing, and had a little chat with her. She—she complained about your appetite, Mr. Sands. She said you ate so little that she felt you were not satisfied with what she provided, and so I asked her why she didn't get you to do the ordering. Later, I was sorry that I had interfered. After all, it was none of my business, was it?"

"No," said I. (After all, it wasn't.)

"I am very sorry," said Miss Berrith, quietly.

We were finishing the cheese course and I was eating my last biscuit—one of the soda kind that is so dry and hard to swallow. It was that which made me choke a little.

"That was rude of me," I added presently, "but I didn't mean it to be. Of course it was very nice of you to take an interest."

Then, on an impulse which I should have found it hard to explain, I gave her the details of my misadventures with the bill-of-

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fare and at the notion counter. It was another mark of feminine inconsistency that she manifested no evidence of being amused. Even I, victim of the untoward circumstances as I was, could perceive in these episodes elements distinctly humorous, but Miss Berrith appeared to be less enlivened than depressed by my recital. At the end, she looked up at me in a curious manner which was almost compassionate.

“I am very sorry,” she said, again.

“Oh, it was nothing,” I answered cheerfully. “They were only little things.”

“But, in a man’s home-life.” said she, “it is the little things that count—both ways.”

Then Arbuthnot engaged her attention, and, as Mr. Berrith was gobbling the remainder of his cheese and biscuit at a rate which suggested coaling a ship at sea, I had a moment in which to reflect upon her words. It was with considerable reluctance that I allowed my candour to carry me to the point



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of acknowledging to myself that there were drawbacks to life as I had planned it at "Sans Souci." For one thing, the leisure which I had contemplated as likely to prove its chief advantage was not only less ample than I had pictured it but was daily more curtailed. And, as Miss Berrith had said, it was the little things which were responsible.

"Yes," I agreed, as she turned to me again, "it is the little things which count—the grains of sand which make the mighty land where the mighty least expected to. To the making of a house there is no end. Somebody seems to have been dropping stitches all along, and I am constantly forced to go labouriously back and pick them up."

"Can't Galvin attend to the little details?" asked Miss Berrith.

"Galvin," said I, "is a very competent first mate, but you must know that there are occasions when it is imperative that the captain should be on deck. Galvin, for example,

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could hardly be expected to issue instructions to the carpenter.”

“The carpenter?” repeated Miss Berrith. “But I thought you were through with carpenters long ago.”

“I am convinced,” I replied, “that just as spirits are supposed to frequent the scenes which were most familiar to them in life, so the unhappy householder will find his premises haunted more or less regularly by the masons, plumbers and painters who made the dwelling what it is, and have to be constantly recalled to make it what it ought to be. When it rains, Miss Berrith, the water comes down through my roof and up through my cellar floor—thereby proving its ability to flow in two directions at once. The water in my bathroom escapes from the faucet which is designed to keep it from flowing, and keeps from flowing down the exhaust pipe which is designed to let it escape. My doors have warped. I can’t shut those which I can open,

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and I can't open those which I can shut. These, and many others of the kind, are things which not only call for the services of the mason, the plumber and the carpenter, but for my personal supervision, as well."

"I see," said Miss Berrith. "All the petty annoyances which a wife takes off her husband's hands."

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that, in all probability, the least petty annoyance on a husband's hands would be the wife herself, but, somehow — I didn't. My principal mistake in regard to Miss Berrith had lain in attaching a hidden significance to everything she said. I think we men are too apt to overestimate the subtlety of women. In the present instance, her remark was undoubtedly quite without mental reservation.

But, though I spoke jestingly of them, these self-same little things were far from contributing to my comfort. The name, too, was legion of the things which I found I had

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to buy. On one occasion Galvin put in a plea for a colander, and whether a colander was animal, mineral or vegetable, animate or inanimate, I had less idea than a babe unborn, although it was manifestly impossible to confess so much to Galvin. It was only by the merest good fortune that I happened to ask for it in the hardware department of Messrs. Wimple, Gabardine & Vale, instead of at the notion counter.

Again, Galvin was hemming napkins and asked if I desired to have her "turn in the selvage." A selvage? A selvage? I remember answering weakly:

"We are too hospitable, Galvin, to turn out even a selvage."

This seemed to satisfy her, but I realized that it was by sheer luck. Which reminds me that I have never remembered from that hour to consult the dictionary upon a selvage.

In fine, I was daily pestered with numberless details which it was impossible to resent

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and still more impossible to avoid. I was forced to make an acquaintance with a whole new vocabulary, wherein such mysteries as "bias," "hemstitching," "crocking," and "second raising," were constantly looming up, clamorous for elucidation. I began to think that I should be obliged to engage an interpreter, and was of a mind to formulate an appeal to Mistress S. T. Rorer.

It is an ill thing to be forced to confess oneself at fault, and yet to this admission was I constrained by the candour which is my most admirable quality. There was something amiss about life at "Sans Souci!" There was a curious stillness in the house, which, to be sure, I had hoped to find, but wherein I was disappointed. There was lacking an element of liveliness, and I said as much to Miss Berith the next time we met.

"But doesn't Darius supply that?" she inquired.

"You may be sure it is not the noise of

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children I am after," said I. "If that were the case, Miss Berrith, I should not be living in a marriage-proof Paradise."

"What *is* it, then?" she asked.

"I'm not sure that I know," I answered, somewhat lamely, as I was aware.

Miss Berrith looked at me suddenly, as she had done on the night of my "house-warning."

"When you talk of Paradise," she said, a little unevenly, "you remind me of Milton."

"Why Milton?" I asked.

"By reason of a pitiful infirmity," said she, and that was all I could get out of her. I suppose I had hurt her feelings by the energy of my expressions. There, again, you have an instance of the personal note in a woman. She has no conception of generalities.

"Sometimes I may seem a little bitter," I ventured, "but, believe me, I'm not. Marriage is like a cold bath — beneficial to some men and fatal to others. I am one of the latter

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class, that's all. I am far from denying a woman's utility in the household — mind you, I say a woman, not a wife! Why, the episode of Galvin and the bill-of-fare taught me that much. I am not so prejudiced or dogged as you think, Miss Berrith. I can learn a lesson as well as the next man."

"Can you?" said she. "If you will allow me to say so, Mr. Sands, I think your capacity in that line is likely to be severely taxed. So far as the scope of a woman's utility is concerned, there is only one individual who knows less about it than a bachelor."

"And that is?" I asked.

"A married man," said Miss Berrith.

Arbuthnot came again, two Sundays later, but I was not so pleased to see him as I had been on the first occasion. It is to be presumed that a man would always be gratified to act as host to angels; but as for ordinary mortals, if their visits are to be really desirable, they must be —

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“Like those of angels, *short* and far between.”

As a rule, the man whom you invite with pleasure, because he appreciates your wit, you dismiss with pleasure, because he takes exception to your politics. There is not one in a hundred who leaves your house as admirable in your eyes as when he entered it. Little eccentricities crop out to annoy you, little tricks of manner or of speech manifest themselves, and, in general, you are disappointed in him. You can't resent them — that's the worst of it. There is only one situation more trying than entertaining, and that is being entertained.

Yes, although it is said that to be an ideal host is hard, I think that to be an ideal guest is harder. The host end of the problem is comparatively simple, after all. You have only to find out what your guest wants to do, and let him do it. But as a guest you must first find out what your host is accustomed to



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do, and then do it yourself. Let me not be thought pedantic if I here set down ten rules for guests. The knowledge was painfully attained, and so is worthy of respect.

1. Make clear the date of your departure, diplomatically, but with promptitude. The most generous host would fain be sure his note has not been misunderstood.

2. Order the room assigned to you as if it were your own — or even more so. The servants have several other things to do.

3. Rise when you are called. Time waits for no man, and there is less reason why a hot oven should.

4. If you don't see what you want, ask for it, for nothing flatters more the vanity of a host. *But first be sure he has it in the house.*

5. Laugh unaffectedly at his jokes. He does not tell them for the pleasure of perceiving that you have heard them before.

6. Praise the cooking while the waitress is in the room. Compared to her, Marconi is a novice in the transmission of news, and every cook is a friend worth having.

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7. Always allege that you have never slept better in your life. Your host did not stuff the pillows, nor is he responsible for your conscience.

8. Tip the servants liberally. If necessary, remember that you did not have to pay for your room.

9. Do not fail, before leaving, to remark upon the beauty of the surroundings. They may be the most odious in the world, but your host would not be living there if he thought so.

10. Write a civil note to say you enjoyed yourself — even if that was all you did enjoy.

While I am about it, I see no reason why I should not set down ten rules for hosts. Equally with the foregoing, were they born out of bitter experience: hence, equally with the foregoing, are they entitled to respect.

1. Meet your guest at the station. It is charity, not hospitality, that begins at home.

2. Don't force second helpings upon him. It is easier to propose food than to dispose of it.

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3. Don't discuss the shortcomings of your neighbours. It was probably to escape neighbours that he accepted your invitation.

4. Don't dispose of every moment of his time before he arrives. Too many visits resemble three days in Rome on a Cook ticket.

5. Beware of showing him collections of photographs of your relations. It is an attack on an unarmed man.

6. Talk less than you listen. He does his listening at home.

7. Remember *you* invited him. Blame yourself if a visit which augured well at the beginning bores badly at the end.

8. Don't make excuses. He can see without a magnifying glass, and you won't have time to get them all in, anyhow.

9. Make it as easy for him to go as it was to come. Fly-paper is not hospitality.

10. Ask him to come again. It is a perfectly safe risk so long as you don't put it in writing.

It is proper, at this point, to speak briefly of my garden. I felt it to be appropriate to my condition of country gentleman that I

should have a garden, though from the first I very sensibly decided to limit it to flowers, being aware that it is harder to raise vegetables than the money to buy them. To this intent, I had a florist down from town, and we went around the place together and selected the most favourable spots for beds. He dealt with the question from a purely technical standpoint, and, as I had very foolishly intimated at the outset that I was more or less of an expert on horticulture, it was impossible for me to confess to him that I understood nothing whatever of the uncouth jargon in which he saw fit to express himself. There was some talk of perennial and deciduous, and a string of Latin similar to that in which one's physician is accustomed to issue instructions to a druggist over one's head, and I assented, with the sudden inspiration that nothing could be more diverting than not to know what manner of flowers you were to have until they made their appearance.

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Four days later arrived a number of pansy and heliotrope plants, which were duly bedded, and passed into a long and painful decline on the following afternoon. The rest was a matter of seeds, which I am constrained to believe were inadvertently planted upside down, and will some day make beautiful the gardens of Hong Kong. Certain it is that they never came my way.

A more bitter disappointment I have never experienced. Having no idea of the length of time necessary for germination I did not cease to expect the arrival of my unknown flowers until late in the following autumn. It was not until the first snow fell that I forever lost my faith in florists.

This fiasco also I reported to Miss Berrith.

“And so,” I said, “it seems I am to have no flowers, after all.”

“It is the first, and, let us hope, not the greatest of the disappointments of ‘Sans Souci,’” she answered.

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There was in her voice that little note of compassion which I had had occasion to remark before, and which irritated me immeasurably, although I could not have said why.

“You have a curious air of pitying me, at times,” I said, “which I am at a loss to understand. Was ever a man less pitiable than I? I have everything I want, and not a tie nor a responsibility in the world. I have found for myself what I conceive to be as close to perfect happiness as is humbly attainable. I am perfectly satisfied. And yet, once or twice, you have looked at me, spoken to me, as if — as if —”

“As if?” she repeated.

“As if I were a cripple!” I burst out, in a sudden excess of annoyance.

“Oh, Mr. Sands,” she exclaimed impulsively, “I think you are the most pathetic figure I have ever seen!”

## CHAPTER FOUR

At the end of six months, life at “Sans Souci” had developed from a novelty into a habit. It was hard for me to appreciate that I had ever known any form of existence other than this, in which hour followed hour, and day succeeded day, with a kind of pleasurable monotony. The city might have been a thousand miles away instead of barely thirty. I can find no better way of describing the singular change which had come over my life than by recording the fact that my watch ran down at frequent intervals, and that, at intervals almost as frequent, I would forget to wind it up again. This, all said and done, would seem to be the essential difference between town and country life—I mean, the vast significance of time in relation to the one, as compared with its

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utter unimportance in connection with the other. It is a contrast in which town life comes out a shabby second-best. There we are no more than the slaves of a precedent which we carry in our waistcoat pockets and frequently consult with feverish anxiety. The hands of our watch are but two tyrants, who make life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, a mockery and a sham. We rise, not by any means because we are through with sleeping, but because the shorter of these tyrants points to VII; and retire, not because we have not been ready for bed three full hours before, but because precedent whispers that it is a childish thing to make the most sensible of all moves before eleven o'clock. We eat, not because we are hungry, but because it is half after seven or twelve or six. In short, there is not a metropolitan of us all, who, when he winds his watch at night, is not slavishly committing himself to a definite course of action for twenty-four hours to come.



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At "Sans Souci," on the contrary, I was not ashamed to be up with the first chirp of a robin, or to lie abed till ten: to make a hearty luncheon, or skip that interesting function altogether, as fancy prompted: to doze over a book till midnight, or to be hand and glove with Morpheus before the light was fairly out of the west. I knew what the weather was, but never the precise time of day. I felt that I was hungry, or not hungry, but never that I should not eat or should. I slept at noonday as shamelessly as at midnight. If there was any convention about my life at all, it was a convention to which there was only one delegate, and every motion I made was secure from opposition. In this enlightened republic there are eighty-five millions of inhabitants, and of these, perhaps eighty-five are absolutely free. I was a member of the glorious minority—and *the most pathetic figure Miss Susie Berrith had ever seen!* From the moment of its utterance, I have never been able to con-

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sider that remark with the faintest sensation of patience.

It is only fair to admit that it was Galvin who oiled the wheels which ran thus smoothly, though I was far from suspecting to what an extent my comfort was dependent upon her exertions until I was abruptly deprived of her services — fortunately, for a few hours only. The occasion was the marriage of a cousin of hers in town, and I readily granted the request for a brief leave of absence which she made with some show of hesitation.

“It’s only for the day,” she said, “but, then, there’s your luncheon, Mr. Sands.”

I remembered with a smile the meals I had prepared at the age of thirteen, in a cave of my own finding, over the rudest of fires, and with sticks and flat stones for my only utensils, instead of forks and pans. Never, I think, were catfish more palatably fried, never were sweet potatoes baked to such a turn. I reflected that it would be surprising indeed, if

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I could not contrive to equal, or even to excel, these early exploits, with all the culinary equipment of "Sans Souci" at my command.

"Leave that to me, Galvin," said I. "I shall manage very well."

Galvin only paused to post me upon the whereabouts of the tea, the milk, the eggs, the coal and the kindling-wood, and then departed. From a window I beheld her, hastening down the path, arrayed like a lily of the field (somewhat advanced in years) and, five minutes later, I was pottering about my kitchen like a kitten in a work-basket. From the child with the jam-pot to the usurper of a throne, I suppose there is no one of us who does not exult in the sensation of being temporary monarch of what he has only a questionable right to survey.

I am confident to this instant that all would have been well with me and with my luncheon if Arbuthnot had not come down from town, and dropped in upon me, most inopportunately,

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just as I was about to begin operations. I explained the situation, with a word of decent apology.

“Hum,” said Arbuthnot. “If I had known that, I would have lunched in town.”

“You might go further and fare worse than here,” I retorted, a trifle tartly.

“That remains to be seen,” he answered dryly. “Are there any sardines?”

“There are,” said I, “but I think you will not need them. I was just about to fry some eggs, and bake some potatoes.”

“By all means,” said Arbuthnot. “I will hold the sardines in reserve. The best laid eggs of hens and men gang aft a-gley.”

“That is a long way from Burns,” I remarked.

“Let us hope,” said he, “that we shall be able to say the same of the eggs.”

His implied distrust awakened in me a vexed ambition, and, hastily summoning all my knowledge of the subject, I resolved upon

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a little cake. Flour, two eggs, baking-powder, milk, vanilla extract—I had accomplished the thing a hundred times in my mother's kitchen, as a boy, with the cook confining herself to looking on. This, with fried eggs, potatoes, tea, and, if Arbuthnot insisted, the sardines, would be ample, and forthwith I girded myself to the task. I observed with satisfaction that the confidence of my demeanour silenced Arbuthnot at once.

I suppose it was the baking-powder, although I managed to rescue all but a very little after I had upset it in the dough. Or else there was'nt enough room in the oven for the confection to rise. Whatever the reason, the thing I made was a conspicuous failure as a cake, albeit it might have passed muster as a balloon. Arbuthnot merely snorted when I took it out, prying the crust off the roof of the oven with a carving-knife. It was quite black, and smelt abominably. It would never have done for me to leave it where it could

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have fallen under Galvin's eyes, but I was obliged to keep it concealed under a pile of shirts in my clothes-press for a full week, before I was able to catch the ashman when she was not by.

The time absorbed in separating the cake from the oven was responsible for the fiasco of the eggs — that, and the fact that I forgot to put a lump of butter in the pan. They adhered, all six of them, to the latter, with the utmost promptitude, and a tenacity worthy of a like number of leeches or English bulldogs, and by the time I had persuaded them to loosen their grip upon it, they were quite unfit for publication. I have never discovered what it was I did to hurt the feelings of the potatoes, but they sulked from the outset, and obstinately refused to be baked. The edible part of them, after a solid hour in the oven, was, like beauty, skin-deep and no more.

Arbuthnot made the tea. It was excellent,



IT MIGHT HAVE PASSED MUSTER AS A BALLOON





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not at all because of any ability on his part, but because it is of all things the easiest to prepare. I will not consume space with a verbatim transcription of his comments upon the other dishes. They were nothing more than a collision between the multiplication table and the phrase "I told you so," and wholly uncalled-for, in view of the fact that he had the sardines — which were all he asked for in the beginning.

That evening, much to my relief, Galvin came again into her own. I had no further craving for the kitchen. It is a bourne in which no caviler re-burns, and I felt that I could never forget those eggs. Newton deduced the force of gravitation from the fall of an apple, and James Watt the principles of steam locomotion from observation of a tea-kettle. In like manner, I am persuaded, did Master Peter Cooper evolve from an attempt to fry eggs without a lump of butter the possibilities of glue. Not the ultimate pos-

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sibilities, however. That discovery is mine, and dates from the disastrous day in question.

For a time life resumed the even tenor of its way.

Withal—since candour is the keynote of these pages—there were times when I was lonely. One's power of conversation is like a bottle of choice perfumery. The glass stopper of disuse has a distressful way of sticking, when left too long in place, and one must resort to sweet oil and glycerine and hot water to make the contents available again. Day after day of self-communion was having something of this effect on me. I was in need of a companion with whom to talk, and, for lack of a better, I turned to Darius Doane. Galvin was out of the question. Hers was the only case I have ever known in which it did not take two to make a conversation. On the rare occasions when she talked at all, it would have required two wedges and a sledge-hammer to force the briefest of replies in edge-

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wise. Moreover, the manner of her discourse was disjointed to the last degree. Sequence of thought with her went round and round like a squirrel in a wheel and with about as definite results. She started, she continued, but she never arrived.

“I once had a niece, Mr. Sands,” she would say, for example, “that is, she wasn’t exactly my niece — or, yes, you might call her a niece, I suppose. She was my brother-in-law’s child by his first wife — a very intelligent girl, she was — that is, she was hardly a *girl* — she was twenty — well, you might *say* a girl — she wasn’t *quite* twenty — but she was a very intelligent girl — girl is hardly the word, because she seemed older — at all events, I always thought of her as my niece — in fact, she might just as well *have* been — though calling her my niece didn’t make her so — but if she *had* been I couldn’t have thought more of her — I *had* a niece who didn’t seem half so much so as she did — though *she* was very intelligent, too —

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but the one I'm speaking of — though she was really no relation at all — used to say herself that it seemed as if — which shows *my* feelings wasn't unnatural — not that I mean to say but what — but then, she *wasn't*, except by marriage, which can't be called a relation — though I felt as if — and seeing that she was so intelligent — I couldn't be blamed for feeling — not that I ever *claimed* — but if she *had* been my niece —”

As the butcher called regularly once in every twenty-four hours, it will readily be seen that Galvin was more than apt to be interrupted by his coming before she had made much progress along these lines. As for my part in the conversation, if I was to come in at all, it could only be after she had gone out. The sixth side of the Galvin octagon was anecdotal.

So I came to having a daily chat with Darius, and almost the first thing I discovered was that what the pole-star is to the mariner,

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or the semaphore to the locomotive engineer, Miss Susie Berrith was to my youthful retain-er. He candidly stated that she had taught him all he knew, and, I suspected from the amount and diversity of his information, close to the measure of all she knew herself. She had referred to him as her Sunday-school scholar, but it seemed, what I had not known before, that he was her every-day pupil, as well. The nearest school-house was four miles distant—a bitter matter in snow-time—and so Darius and four of his similarly situated fellows went regularly to the Berrith residence for their schooling. I felt that it was very singular that Miss Berrith had never mentioned this to me.

“Dere’s all kines er people,” said Darius Doane, “an’ den, der’s Miss Berrit’. She’d oughter git marrit.”

“In the name of mercy, why?” I demanded. The times were certainly piteously askew when babes of twelve thus took the marriage question on their tongues!

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*Far From The Maddening Girls*

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“She cud make some ’un more happier’n wot he is,” said Darius. “An’ *you’d* oughter git marrit, Mist’ San’s, ’cause some ’un cud make yer more happier’n wot y’are.”

I looked at him aghast, an axiom from my half-forgotten “Euclid’s Elements” buzzing in my brain:—“Things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other.” Miss Berrith was equal to matrimony, *I* was equal to matrimony. Were Miss Berrith and I—

*Good* gracious! what an infant terrible he was, that boy, Darius Doane!

“Darius,” said I severely, “the path needs raking.”

“I’ll comb ut fer yer in er jiff, Mist’ San’s,” said he, and, five minutes later, through the window of my den, my ears were saluted by the commingled sounds of a rake on gravel and Darius on the mouth-organ. He was committing melodicide upon the undeservedly popular air of “A Hot Time in the Old Town To-night,” and as the mouth-organ wheezed

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into the measure of the chorus, new undreamt-of and torturing words seemed to sear themselves upon my mind:—

“She cud make—some’un—more happier’n wot he is!

“Some’un — cud make — yer more happier’n wot y’are!

“Dere’s all — kines er people — an’ den dere is Miss Berrit’!

“An’ you’d *oughter* — git *marrit* — Mist’ San’s!”

Was it any wonder that I felt that the moon of my intelligence was in its last quarter?

Presently, I had an opportunity of taxing Miss Berrith with what I felt to be her undue reticence. I had been thrashing through the woods for a half-hour with no particular aim but exercise in view, when I came abruptly into a little clearing, where the level pitched sharply down in a kind of rocky terrace, and, pausing, to take breath and survey the vista thus opened to me, I was suddenly aware of a

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familiar sound, which I was able to identify almost instantly as the voice of Darius Doane. But what were those singular sentiments to which, in that peaceful corner of woodland, it was giving utterance?

*“An’ as ter ketch de gale  
Roun’ weered de flappin’ sail,  
‘Deat’!’ was de helmsman’s hail,  
‘Deat’ widout kerworter!’  
Midships wid irn keel  
Steruck we her ribs er steel ;  
Down her berlack huck did reel  
T’rough de berlack worter !”*

My experience of Darius had taught me to expect many things of him, but not this—not “The Skeleton in Armor,” declaimed, with something of rude eloquence, at high noon in the heart of the forest primeval! I stood as if chained to the spot, while the poem went on and on, until the concluding lines were reached:



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*“Dere f’om de flowin’ bowl  
Deep derinks de worrior’s soul,  
Skool —”*

“No,” said another voice—Miss Berrith’s!

“Skull,” ventured Darius, after a pause.

“No,” said Miss Berrith again. “Say the whole line. What rhymes with ‘soul’?”

“Skoal!” exclaimed Darius triumphantly.

*“Skoal to de Nort’lan’! Skoal!  
Duss de tale entit.”*

“I can’t never remember dat woid, Miss Berrit’.”

“You did very well,” said Miss Berrith’s voice, “but it is time you were off for dinner. Don’t be late for work this afternoon. Good-bye, Darius.”

“Gubbye, Miss Berrit’,” answered Darius, with very evident regret, and, shortly, there followed the crackle of trampled twigs, and then, from a greater distance the sound of

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“Marching Through Georgia,” egregiously distorted upon the mouth-organ. Peering down from my coign of vantage, I espied Miss Berrith seated upon a fallen tree, her fingers busy with some intricacy of fancy-work, and what I soon learned was a volume of Longfellow perched, tent-like, upon her knee.

“How do you do?” I called.

She looked about her, with a little start of surprise. “Is that you, Mr. Sands?” she answered. “Wherever are you?”

“Up here, behind the barberry-bush,” said I. “I’ve been leaves-dropping.” And I scrambled rapidly down, to find her blushing not unattractively.

I think that at this point it is appropriate to mention a certain alteration in Miss Berrith which I had begun to notice, and which, if I may be permitted the expression, friendlied my feeling for her to a very marked degree. It may have been due to a simple regard for comfort as the weather had grown warmer,

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or to a mere caprice, or, what is more likely than either, certain skillful hints which I had dropped from time to time: but she appeared no more in the distorted semblances of masculine attire which had impressed me so unfavourably in the first days of our acquaintance. Instead, she was now arrayed in the simple, white variety of material which some women use to clothe their daughters withal, and others for their spare-room curtains: or else it was a silk-shirt effect, and a trim, shortish walking-skirt. In either, she was far from plain, although at first I had thought her distinctly so. She had her share of freckles; but, with them, good eyes and teeth, and a kind of clear under-complexion which was very pleasing. I think, not only that I showed some appreciation of the change in her attire, but that my approbation gratified her. All women are on the outlook for that kind of thing, and, of course, the approval of a man of my own experience was flattering to

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a girl so young and so unfamiliar with life as she.

As I took my seat beside her, on the trunk of the fallen tree, she seemed to feel that an explanation was in order.

“Darius has a very pleasant knack of memorizing good poetry,” she began. “I wish you could have heard him reciting ‘You know, we French stormed Ratisbon,’ a moment ago. But perhaps you did?”

“No,” said I.

“It is rather nice, I think,” continued Miss Berrith, “that a boy in his position should be good at Browning.”

“It is rather lamentable,” I retorted, with a rueful glance at my rusty boots, “that he is not equally good at blacking.”

“He has a soul above blacking,” said Miss Berrith lightly.

“Whereas blacking above a sole,” said I, “would be very much more to the point. Seriously, Miss Berrith, I hope you are not spoil-

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ing Darius. He shouldn't get a false idea of life, you know. There is not likely to be much poetry, either good or bad, in the existence which he is destined to lead."

"The more reason for making hay while the sun shines," said Miss Berrith—very illogically, as I thought.

"There are ways and ways of learning to make hay," I objected.

"Only one, however," said she, "of learning that the sun shines. The pity of it is that a boy should need to have such things pointed out to him; but, since he must, I am very glad that I am the one to do it."

"Yes, I know the feeling," I agreed, "but in a sense somewhat less sentimental. I, too, have been a factor in the education of Darius. Teaching him to polish shoes is, perhaps, not a great thing on the face of it, but remember that he has been learning to understand the pleasures of industry, from the moment when I first pointed out the brush."

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Miss Berrith put down her fancy-work with a little laugh.

“Each to his trade, Mr. Sands,” said she. “Remember that Darius has been learning to appreciate the honey of poetry, from the moment when I first pointed out the comb.”

“Oh, be reasonable!” I protested, smiling, nevertheless, at her sally. “It isn’t a question of sentiment, is all this, but of what is best for the boy. We have been talking of shoes and of poetry. Well, suppose that I were a cobbler, and you a poet, and both of us offering to teach Darius our trades. Which of us would common-sense suggest that he should stick to?”

“He would probably act the part of cobbler —” began Miss Berrith.

“Exactly!” I was interrupting her, triumphantly, when —

“By sticking to the last,” said she.

There is never much use in an endeavour to combat this kind of frivolity, and so I went upon another tack.

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“Was it modesty,” I asked, “which has thus far deterred you from mentioning the identity of his teacher?”

“I could not suppose you would be interested,” said Miss Berrith.

“On the contrary,” I replied, “I have a very sincere admiration for those who are engaged in doing good, of one kind or another, and according to their lights. I am only afraid that you are too gentle with him.”

“*Can* one be too gentle?” she asked ingenuously.

“Oh, yes,” I assured her. “‘Spare the rod and spoil the child,’ you know. Darius has his part cut out for him, and the best one could do would be to teach him to play it properly. He should be taught, first of all, a due respect for his superiors: then, devotion to his work: and, finally, that those in a subordinate position should not expect too much in the way of luxury or liberty. One is never too young to learn such lessons.”

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“It is a dull creed enough,” observed Miss Berrith.

“I might readily challenge you to find one more illumined by common-sense,” I replied, “but we have discussed that, and I suppose we must agree to disagree. What I wanted to say was that, when you refrained from telling me of the work you are doing for Darius and the others, you did me an injustice, and yourself a greater one. I will not deny that my opinion of you would have been very considerably modified by the knowledge that you were giving a portion of your time to the education of five boys. It is not surprising that we should differ in our views of what the nature of such an education should be, but I am sure that, while mine may be more practical, yours are productive of good.”

“In that case,” said Miss Berrith reflectively, “it is plain that I did do myself a great injustice, for I am aware that to have your good opinion is a very desirable thing. Indeed, the



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only person who, to my certain knowledge, possesses it is the most eminently satisfied individual I have ever seen.”

I thought of her father, and then of Arbuthnot, without seeming to find a clue, and I suppose I looked at her perplexedly, for suddenly she laughed outright.

“I think I am at a loss to know to whom you refer,” I remarked a trifle stiffly.

“If there are no mirrors in your bungalow,” said she, “I will give you one for Christmas, Mr. Sands.”

I was downright angry — so angry, indeed, that I felt that if I did not immediately take my leave of her, I should say something rude. I did so, therefore, with a self-restraint which did me credit, and a courtesy which was far from her deserts. I had been absolutely squandering my time. The advice which I had proffered in all kindness had been practically flung back in my face, and, at the end, I had been made the victim of unjust and capricious

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ridicule. And here I may be permitted a digression, to the intent of setting forth the sum and substance of my reflections of the ensuing half-hour, during which I tramped the woods in vain endeavour to assuage my irritation.

As between men, the laws of honourable combat demand that when you have disarmed your adversary, you shall return him his rapier, with a smile, a bow, and a courteous word. Not so in a duel with a woman. It is the business of her tongue—that, which, of all weapons, slips most readily from its sheath—first to disarm you, and then thrust home. But this ignorance of, or indifference to, the whole duty of the generous antagonist is not the least of the perils which you brave. The feminine brain is a thing of such excessive eccentricity that, without resource to the hackneyed simile of the kaleidoscope, I find myself wholly destitute of an adequate comparison. To follow, even approximately, a woman's

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train of thought would be possible only to a water-spider, which has a similar faculty for skidding at unheard-of angles. Where a man proceeds over the landscape of logic like a trained hound, scenting his way unerringly from a definite hypothesis to a definite conclusion, a woman's argument reappears at intervals, like a porpoise, at points to which there has been no such thing as the possibility of tracing her progress. Her reason does not go from step to step, but falls down-stairs headlong, touching only the high places: and always, as I have had occasion to remark before, the validity of her deductions is materially impaired by the intrusion of the purely personal. You may say to a man, for example, that all men are liars, and it is probable that he will view you in the light of a philosopher: but venture to observe to one of the opposite sex that the name of frailty is woman, and the chances are in favour of her regarding you as a boor. A man, in

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short, has an eye for generalities; while a woman will pounce upon your most abstract remark, try it on before the nearest mirror, and, finding it unbecoming, will lay the blame on you!

I returned to "Sans Souci," after the brief interview recorded above, more than ever out of humour with the unfair sex. I was excessively annoyed — ten per cent. by the recollection of Miss Berrith's remarks, and ninety per cent. by the knowledge that it was in her power to annoy me. The persons with this power are the most dangerous enemies to one's peace of mind. I can view with composure the existence of incendiaries, train-robbers and assassins: but I am unable to tolerate the thought of scandal-mongers, bores, and pert young women. You never find anyone with sufficient grounds of complaint against basilisks, werwolves, or the sea-serpent: but there is a deal of legitimate objection to the domesticated mosquito.

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There was no getting around it. With the best will in the world to make allowance for the infirmities of her sex, I was painfully and resentfully aware that Miss Berrith was not merely a disturbing influence in my life, but the only disturbing influence: and not the least exasperating element of the situation lay in the fact that it was none of my making. If, knowing the feminine faculty for creating a disturbance—“*le mal que peut faire une femme,*” as De Musset deftly puts it—I had nevertheless seen fit to marry, it would have been a different thing. If you play with matches, and set yourself ablaze, you have no one but yourself to blame, and it is unreasonable and childish to squeal at Destiny: but if some one discharges Roman-candle balls in at your front windows, there is every warrant for your regarding it as a liberty and an imposition. I conceive that I had the best of reasons for considering my treatment at Miss Berrith’s hands as saliently unhandsome.

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When the wave flings itself pettishly against the shore which opposes its views of progress, it does not reflect that thereby is created an undertow which will sweep from their comfortable resting-places any number of innocent little pebbles which had no share whatever in defeating its purpose — the which is a lack of forethought reasonable enough in a wave, but wholly unpardonable in a girl. It showed, as much as anything could, Miss Berrith's utter want of consideration, that she ignored what I may call the reflex action of perversity. She had been thoughtlessly petulant with me, and it was wholly due to this that I, who am usually of the most equable and tolerant temper in the world, discharged Darius on the following day. It was unjust on my part; if you will; but she had moiled the spring of my customary serenity. I had exhausted my store of patience upon her former humours, and with this last strain upon its resources the reservoir went completely dry.

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The rake was passive in the left hand of Darius, and the mouth-organ somewhat more than active in his right, while, by way of adding dissonance to discord, the air upon which he was engaged was Galvin's adagio rendering of "Bonnie Dundee." Thenceforward I numbered this among the most malignant of the contagious diseases.

"Darius," said I.

The marshalled host of freckles made way obsequiously, and from their ranks emerged his familiar and disarming smile. But this time I was like adamant.

"Yessir?" he answered.

"You play a good deal upon the mouth-organ," I observed.

"I'll perlay more w'en I git de reel hang uvvit," said Darius.

"Now, Heaven forbend!" I ejaculated inwardly; adding, aloud:

"And Miss Berrith tells me you learn considerable poetry by heart."

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“I’m er-goin’ t’ give more ’n’ more time t’ pomes f’m now on,” was his reply. “I bin er-doin’ pieces outer Longfeller ’n’ Berownin’, but nex’ week Miss Berrit’ is er-goin’ t’ learn me Shakesper.”

“Then, Darius,” said I, “I clearly perceive that these increasing demands upon your time make it inadvisable for you to remain longer in my employ. After to-day I shall have no further need of your services.”

“D’yer mean I’m fy-ud?” asked Darius.

“That,” I answered, “is the substance of my meaning. Here are your wages for the coming week. You need not come here any more.”

And I wheeled, and walked into the house.

I am perplexed to account for the singular circumstance that there are days when everything, from the attempt to part your hair in the morning to the position of your pet pillow at night, is an unequivocal failure. The day in question was such a one. The luncheon



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which Galvin elected to serve me was not fit for a fretful child, and I could not eat it. When I set myself to write, my pencil points made more breaks than the Messrs. Westinghouse. A collar which had never irked me might as well have been a circular saw, for all the comfort I derived from its contact with my neck. It was a general half-holiday for the horse-hairs which formed the stuffing of my chair cushions. Where it was their custom to attend strictly to business, now they all had their heads out of the windows of their dwellings, taking the air. The house was full of flies. A dog, with whom I was not even on speaking terms, went round and round the bungalow, yapping for a wager. Dolorously-warbled reminiscences of a supposititious life in marble halls, in the company of vassals and serfs, came to my ears from Galvin at the wash-tub. At length, in a pure white passion, I strode off through the woods, turned my ankle, was caught in a drenching thunder-

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shower, and said two or seven things which have no place in these innocent pages. It was a day which caused me to look upon time as a soporific snail, a day to be remembered with awe and loathing, a day at which to hurl a black, black stone, with careful aim. Above all, it was a day to prove how much a man may suffer through no fault of his own.

On the morning following, however, Darius reappeared, the bearer of a note from Miss Berrith. This curiosity of literature ran after this manner:

“MY DEAR MR. SANDS:

“You will have had a night to think over your action of yesterday, whereof Darius has given me an account, and to remember several things: first, that you were once a boy yourself, and that at twelve you did not possess all the sobriety which is yours at thirty; then, that you have vented your irritation against one person upon the entirely guiltless shoulders of another; and, finally, that your action

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passes over his head and does grievous harm to his mother and the invalid he was aiding her to support. Of course you are in a position to do as you please, and I in that of a meddler in venturing to interfere: but not only is it merely a kind of weakness to exercise one's strength upon an inferior, it is the noblest kind of strength to own up to that weakness and repair the evil before it is too late. I am giving you that chance, for Darius will wait for an answer.

“SUSIE BERRITH.”

Galvin had brought in the note, and now stood waiting with folded hands.

“Did Darius bring this?” I asked.

I was not so much disconcerted by the words of Galvin's reply, as by the manner in which she kept her upper lip perfectly rigid, for all the world as if it had been starched and ironed. The Sunday-school superintendent of my early childhood had a similar trick of intimating disapproval, and as I looked away from Galvin and down at the note again, it

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was with a curious and most uncomfortable sense of having forgotten to learn the collect for the day.

“He did,” Galvin was saying, “and if I do make the remark — and of course I know I have no right — but I cannot, I *cannot* see injustice done — the way you have treated him is a crying shame — we all have our faults — but he was working for his bread and butter — indeed, it is few enough of us ever sees the butter — but that’s always the way — the rich against the poor — and if I *do* say it —”

“No, don’t say it, Galvin,” I interrupted. “I have no doubt but what you are quite right. You needn’t wait. I will give Darius the answer myself.”

Galvin had showed her seventh side. It was the chivalric, with a touch of the socialistic.

Darius was at the door. When he saw me his inevitable smile broke forth. I think he had more freckles than on the preceding day.

## THE LITTLE GREY HOUSE

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brings misfortune. The youngsters nobly stand by "Patergrey," and buckle down to making the best of a bad thing. In the end the resourceful "Rob" proves that she has a man's business capacity as well as a man's name and brings fortune out of the wreck. There are a lot of good wholesome boys in the story, and just a spice of boy and girl romance to savor the tale. It is told sweetly, and is quite comparable to Louisa M. Alcott's best.

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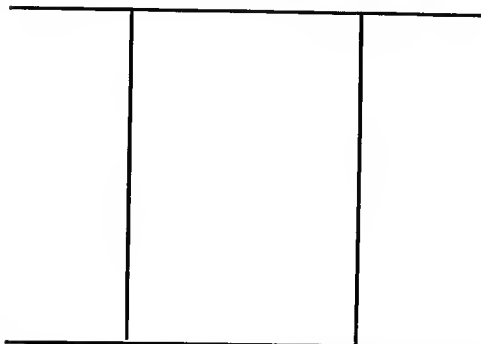
NEW

YORK

# The Little Grey House

MARION AMES TAGGART

*Author of The Wyndham Girls, etc.*



*Frontispiece in color by Ethel Franklin Betts*

Roberta Prue and Oswyth, the youthful heroines of THE LITTLE GREY HOUSE, are just the cheerful, courageous, resourceful kind of girls it is a pleasure for anyone to meet. They take life in a sunshiny manner and their brightness shines through all the unhappiness that besets the little grey cottage and conquers all its misfortunes. These little girls have for a father a visionary inventor, whose devotion to his new machine for making bricquettes consumes the family resources and

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“There is no answer to Miss Berrith’s note,” I said as formally as I could, “but I have changed my mind about discharging you, Darius. You may come to-morrow, as usual.”

Then I shut the door abruptly upon him and his smile. If he had thanked me! . . .

Into such a coil of discomfort was I come by reason of my ill-advised condescension to an immature girl. I am broad-minded enough to admit that the fault was not wholly hers. Had I been true to my avowed principles from the very first, “Sans Souci” had never been invaded by those petty annoyances against which it was expressly designed to secure me. The whole difficulty lay in the fact that a man is never entirely selfish, however he may strive to steel himself against generous impulses. I had gone back upon my tenets because I could not help perceiving that Miss Berrith would derive satisfaction from my company, and because I could not

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find it in my heart to treat one so inexperienced with indifference or contempt. Well, fortunately it was not too late to repair my fault, and I determined that, when an opportunity should offer, I would politely but firmly put out of the question her further interference in my affairs. Thenceforward all between us should be of the most strictly formal nature. It might make a great difference to her, but after all, she had brought the rebuke upon herself. The result of my noticing her had been exactly what I might have foreseen. She had been carried away by it, and now—well, she was flinging herself at my head. In the privacy of these memoirs I can make this admission, which otherwise, while undeniably true, would not be kind or manly.

*The privacy of these memoirs.* The phrase reminds me that there are a few words of explanation which should have been written some distance back.

When you desire to see yourself as others



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see you, you rush off to the photographer's; and, similarly, there is no better method of ascertaining the exact quality of your intellectual appearance in the eyes of the world than to set down your opinions in black and white. When Miss Berrith made the remark that I was the most pathetic figure she had ever seen, and supplemented it later with the observation that I was the most self-satisfied, I perceived that there was something radically wrong with either one or the other of us, and determined to find out what and which it was. Due reflection presently satisfied me that the remarks in question must have been based upon an imperfect conception of my ideas of life in general and matrimony in particular. A glance in my mirror was all that was necessary to convince me that my personal appearance had nothing whatever to do with it. Perhaps I am not striking, but still less am I pathetic. Nor was there a better reason for suspecting a reference to my pecuniary cir-

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cumstances. Decidedly there can be nothing pathetic about a house of one's own and five thousand a year. No, positively it must be my opinions; not only because it is in these alone that I differ from the general run of men, but by reason of my having, at one time or another, expounded them to Miss Berrith with a considerable degree of candour. Clearly, it was my duty to analyze them carefully; and, quite as clearly, there could be no more effective means of so doing than to write out in order the details of life at "Sans Souci." Forthwith, I set to work upon these notes.

I think that I have been eminently frank, unprejudiced, and accurate, but I am not content with that. It is not enough to put down existing facts fully and fairly: what is necessary is the attainment of a proper perspective. One must put the narrative aside, and then re-read it, after a year or two, in the light of subsequent experience. That is precisely what I propose to do with this simple story,

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so soon as I shall have brought it to the point, now near at hand, when Miss Berrith disappears out of my life as surely as she entered it. That point attained, I shall have done all that the most broad-minded of criticized men could do in the line of endeavouring to ascertain the cause of complaint; and I can lay my manuscript aside with the serene conviction that, in common with a vast majority of the remarks made by her sex, those of Miss Berrith on the subject of my pathos and self-esteem had no absolute meaning at all.

Before resuming the main thread of my chronicle, I have only to add that although, from time to time, I have directly addressed the gentle reader of these pages, the apostrophe has been the merest matter of form, and any gentle reader, apart from the present gentle writer, a person purely supposititious. The artifice is designed simply to lend an air of disinterestedness and impersonality to this record, when I shall come to read it over. It

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is certain that I have not the most remote intention of allowing reflections so intimate (and very particularly in respect to what is now to follow) to come under any eye but mine.

## CHAPTER FIVE

“We are none of us infallible,” says a certain gentle cynic, “not even the youngest,” and I am not minded to impair the validity of this narrative by an attempt to prove that there were no weak spots in the armour of my bachelor philosophy. I am only a man. It is better than being a woman, but it does not put one on a par with the Delphic oracle. I have reserved my reference to these weaknesses until now, but with no intention of disguising or evading them.

No bird ever wove a nest so cunningly, or of materials so uniformly soft, that there was nowhere a stick or straw which came into uneasy contact with its tender ribs; and, carefully planned and sedulously supervised as had been the details of my life at “Sans

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Souci," there were yet causes of friction and sharp angles which even usage did not turn smooth. For the moment, I am not speaking of Miss Berrith, nor of anything for which she was responsible. Nor have I reference to what might have been avoided by preliminary carefulness. There is a limit to the possibilities of forethought. Before you start upon a railway journey you will see men with hand-lamps, creeping under the coaches, and hear the sound of their test-hammers upon the axles, wheels, and springs. That means that minds trained to the work are applying the most approved precautionary measures, but it is no guarantee that unforeseen defects will not crop out before the train has proceeded many miles. To sharpen the analogy, it was the flat wheels, hot boxes, and sprung axles of housekeeping, which taught me that the domesticity of "Sans Souci" was a qualified blessing.

The first of these thorns in the flesh to make its existence manifest came when I discovered

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that Galvin possessed nothing with even a family resemblance to a bump of locality. Her capacity for dusting was inexhaustible; but when it came to replacing the articles thus treated she was something less systematic than a magpie. For one thing, she manœuvred my books in the same manner as my mattress and my pillows, with the evident impression that, like the former, they were reversible, and, like the latter, interchangeable at will. The effect of this inspiration was volume five where volume two should be, volume one in the place of volume six, and volumes three and four standing, with an air of extreme dissatisfaction, on their heads. The same rule applied to my pictures, each of which, after the morning's dusting was completed, had a pronounced list, like a ship with her port coal-bins full and her starboard bunkers empty. So, too, I would find all the objects on my sideboard crowded desperately to one side, as if they had been the passengers on an

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excursion steamer in the act of passing a battleship or a boat-race. It would be impossible for me to compute the amount of time which I expended daily in restoring the laws of proportion and equilibrium which Galvin had knocked into a cocked hat.

Then there were rats in the cellar; and if a rat, either alive or dead, had been a dynamite bomb on the point of exploding, Galvin could not have displayed less eagerness to deal with it upon terms of intimacy. Therefore, if Darius did not happen to be at hand, it fell to me to rebait the trap and make decent disposal of the remains—a pretty occupation for a single gentleman not minded to be troubled with sordid details!

I am fond of flowers, and, since my garden had proved as unproductive as the Phoenix, the local florist delivered semi-weekly a generous assortment at my door. But there is an art in arranging flowers, an art in which I was imperfect and Galvin utterly deficient. My





HER CAPACITY FOR DUSTING WAS INEXHAUSTIBLE



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method was to put them together loosely, so they should loll negligently from the vase. This, as I found, causes the whole affair to fall prone upon the table the moment you loose your hold of it. Galvin's system, on the contrary, was that more commonly employed in baling cotton or tying up asparagus. When she had finished, the flowers were so inseparably welded together, and so firmly wedged into the vase, that it seemed incredible that the result could have been arrived at without the aid of a hydraulic press.

Then there was always the eternal question of the culinary operations. I was asked, for example, if I would have noodles in my *consommé*. A noodle, to the best of my knowledge and belief, is a kind of silly, half-witted fellow, and by what process of reasoning it should appear appropriate to serve him in a soup it was beyond my power to understand. I agreed to the suggestion; but Galvin evidently changed her mind, because nothing

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unusual appeared in the *consommé* thereafter, if I except some little fragments of macaroni, which I found very palatable.

Again, it would come to a discussion of the relative merits of sirloin and porter-house steaks — a distinction which is as clear in my mind as that between Gog and Magog. I was so puzzled in this matter that I determined to consult a reliable informant, and — on the memorable day when Galvin's cousin was married — I looked up the question of steaks in a cook-book which I found in the drawer of the kitchen table. As a fair sample of the chaos which reigns in the departments of science regulated by the feminine intelligence, I will submit three fragments of the information which I thus gleaned from an eminent authority.

“Every part of the sirloin . . . is named porter-house steak.

“The rump steak . . . is also called porter-house steak.

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“Rump steaks are also known as sirloin.”

And there you are! A sirloin is a porter-house, and a porter-house is a rump steak, and a rump steak is a sirloin. If the title-page of that book had not borne the name of another author, I should infallibly have taken it to be the work of Mr. Edward Lear.

When I wearied, as I soon did, of these vexations, for which Galvin was principally responsible, I turned, for distraction, to Darius Doane, with an amused recollection of his diverting personality.

But Darius, although restored to favour, was a changed being. The mouth-organ, once the bane of my existence, was as mute as the harp that once through Tara's halls. The smile which so often had disarmed me was lost to sight, to memory dear. And the breeziness of speech which had been his most salient characteristic had folded its tent like the Arabs. I was disappointed in Darius. Of course, the peculiarities I have mentioned

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were, in a sense, his faults; but then an individual has no more right to discard his faults without due notice to his kinsfolk and acquaintance than to have his hair dyed or the conformation of his nose altered by a facial specialist. There are more than a few people whom it would be impossible to recognize without their faults.

The decorum which had replaced the former insouciance of Darius impressed me with a vague uneasiness. I seemed to detect, behind it, the omnipresent and all-powerful influence of Miss Berrith, that influence of which I had determined to rid myself and my surroundings. I know of nothing more disconcerting than the feeling that a person who is materially dependent upon you is really governed in the details of his conduct by the judgment of some one else. The implication that what you say or do is accepted, not as of necessity final, or even important, but simply as something to be referred to a superior in-

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telligence for estimate and criticism, is humiliating to the last degree. In the nature of things I should have been the mentor, exemplar, and Admirable Crichton of Darius. As it was, not I, but Miss Susie Berrith, was the power behind the Doane. I was convinced that they discussed me, and that I made a poor showing upon the dissecting table. I detested the idea. I had no chance of justifying myself, of disarming criticism, of throwing a favourable light upon my character and actions. If there had been any basis for the hypothesis, I should have thought myself the prey of a guilty conscience.

I was in a miserable quandary. It would have been a simple thing enough to have put a stop to that tendency to open interference in my affairs which Miss Berrith had at first displayed; but of this her letter in regard to my dismissal of Darius was the final instance. The thing with which I now had to deal was totally intangible. I felt rather than perceived

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it. So I could only possess my soul in patience, in the hope that some overt act of meddling, or some flagrant offer of gratuitous and unsolicited advice, would enable me to resent her behaviour in a firm and final manner.

It would be an easy matter to follow out a premeditated course of action if only the party of the second part would remain passive, or, better yet, make the moves which one expects. But that is exactly what never happens — otherwise I should have won many a game of checkers, both actual and metaphorical, in which I have come out second-best. Now, for example, just as I was preparing to administer a deserved rebuke to Miss Berrith, she jumped three of my men, as it were, by inviting me to tea. I accepted and went, with a dim idea that this would afford me the opening I had been seeking. I was never more mistaken in my life.

Afternoon tea is a thing of which, in ordinary, I have a profound distrust. Applied



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to a healthy appetite for dinner, it has much the same effect as does kerosene oil when administered to an able-bodied mosquito. The insidiously appealing draught itself, the seemingly innocuous slices of buttered toast and little cakes which are wont to accompany it, homœopathic as are their proportions, undermine and corrode a system accustomed to soups and rare beef as infallibly as the imported luxuries of Greece sapped the stamina of the Roman Empire. What is more, the whole manner of conducting this function is invested with a factitious suggestion of coziness highly inimical to the equipoise of a bachelor's philosophy. He will be seen to prosper amazingly in his solitude at all hours save this of the transitory tryst of day and darkness; but there is something malignantly hypnotic about the tinkle of little spoons on porcelain saucers, the contented purr of a brass kettle, and the subdued hum of conversation, all of which are to the tea-table what the somnolent

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murmur of bees is to a lazy, hazy, summer afternoon. The physicians will tell you that human vitality is at its lowest in the small hours of the morning, but it has been my experience that the principle of celibacy reaches its ebb about five in the afternoon.

The sensation was no novelty to me, and I was on my guard against it as Miss Berrith touched a match to the wick of the alcohol lamp. I had taken the most uncomfortable chair in the room, and was resolved to limit myself to one cup of tea. I was finishing my second when the conversation shifted suddenly from the forest fires in the North and the floods in the West to the subject of Darius Doane.

“Don’t you find him improved?” inquired Miss Berrith.

Here was the very chance for which I had been angling, but somehow it slipped off my hook before I could get it into the boat.

“I suspect,” I said with miserable weak-

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ness, "that at present I am better satisfied with him than he with me. It wasn't a very admirable performance on my part to discharge him, I'm afraid; and, while he has probably forgiven it, the chances are against his having forgotten. In some ways I'm rather a despicable character, Miss Berrith."

Now, that was about as insensate a remark as I could possibly have made, and I cannot imagine what led me to say anything so idiotic unless it was the second cup of tea. The words had no sooner left my lips than I was seized with a profound sense of disgust. Here it was, the same old story — an autumn afternoon, drawing on to twilight; such a "cozy corner" as now comes, complete and ready-made, in any department store, at a maximum cost of thirteen dollars and a half; tea; a girl; a ridiculous appearance of intimacy which did not exist—and I was beginning to maunder like a Sophomore in a hammock.

*Bah!*

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“You see, I’ve never had a girl friend,” I added, by way of topping the obelisk of silliness with the capstone of fatuity. It was only a step now to something about the refining influence of woman, the pitiable loneliness of the bachelor, affinity, platonic affection, and the rest of it. I felt that I could have bitten off my tongue-tip. Instead, I ate a sweet cake, which went promptly to my head, and there installed itself in the vacuum which I had fondly imagined was occupied by something remotely resembling a brain.

It was curious that Miss Berrith made no reply. She was bending solicitously over the flame of the alcohol lamp (there was nothing whatever the matter with it) and her hair looked uncommonly fluffy. The sweet cake which was performing the process of cerebration for me suggested that I rather liked it that way. After all, there was something about her . . .

I looked down at my teacup. It was full for

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the third time. I have not the faintest remembrance of how it came to be so.

“Sometimes,” I continued, heavily, “I feel that I have made a mistake. Perhaps I should have been more of a success as a married man.”

Miss Berrith looked up with a little laugh.

“Oh, no!” she exclaimed. “Oh *dear*, no, Mr. Sands!”

I put my teacup on the table. It was empty again—for all the world like something out of “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”—but I was too much irritated to give it more than passing notice. It was not that I had any desire to test my fitness for the part I had suggested—nothing was further from my thoughts—but it is not flattering to have one’s incapacity in any direction taken as a matter of course.

“I don’t see why you should say that so positively,” I replied. “I have the ordinary degree of intelligence, somewhat more than my

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share of health, sufficient means, and a not unamiable disposition. I don't know how we happened to enter upon this discussion, which, in view of my opinions, is certainly somewhat purposeless; but, since you have raised the question, Miss Berrith, I am bound to say that I see no reason why I should not make a very tolerable kind of husband."

Miss Berrith coolly looked me over, as I was speaking, with the most exasperating little smile, and then slowly shook her head.

"There are insuperable objections," said she.

"What, for example?" I demanded.

"We won't discuss them," replied Miss Berrith easily. "As you say, this line of conversation is somewhat purposeless."

I have already explained that the object of these notes is, for my future reference, to summarize the details of my conduct as fully and fairly as in me lies, and therefore I shall make no effort at this point to gloss over the

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astounding precipitancy of my next move. I have dwelt enough upon the demoralizing effect of afternoon tea to establish the hypothesis that I could not have been wholly, or even in part, responsible.

In secondary parenthesis, I may say that I was from infancy a child who would never take a dare. On more occasions than I could now enumerate I have wet my feet, or rent my clothes asunder, or barked my shins against an insurmountable precipice, in the unique attempt to cram an imputation of my cowardice down the throat of a companion. This spirit survived my arrival at maturity. For example, I no more had a reasonable cause for plunging into the morass or up the steeps of matrimony than I had had for braving the infinitely less perilous swamps and precipices of my boyhood, but the suggestion that it was beyond my power to do so was enough.

“Miss Berrith,” said I, “there is a side to my character which you have never seen — a

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tender side, a considerate side, a side which is calculated to insure any woman's happiness. I have not the ardour of a youthful lover, but I have something better—the sobriety of common-sense and the experience of a man of the world. I have a home to offer, and an affection which, if not impetuous, is stable and enduring. I am persuaded that my life is incomplete, and I make bold to suggest that yours is, also. I am not a vain man, but I think I can promise to make you happy. I have the honour and the pleasure” — and I bowed — “of asking you to become my wife.”

With incredible promptitude Miss Berrith replied:

“And I, Mr. Sands, have the honour and the regret of declining your very flattering offer.”

“*You refuse me!*” I exclaimed.

“Unqualifiedly!” said she, and — for no reason whatever — stamped with her foot upon the polished floor.





"YOU REFUSE ME?" I EXCLAIMED



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A moment later I was in the open air with two perceptions, distinct and yet related, dominating all others in my mind. I had been rejected—that was the lesser of them. *I had escaped!*—that was the greater.

With what depth of gratitude I returned to “Sans Souci” I shall not attempt to say. Around me the autumn day was luxuriously yawning and preparing to retire. A great peace and sense of sanity pervaded all the woodland, through which the road wound for a level mile toward my home. After the warm, close air of the Berrith’s tea-room, that which now struck against my face was incomparably fresh and invigorating. It spoke with an appealing eloquence of a wide and wind-swept liberty of the birds and forest beasts; the liberty of the sea and the western breeze; deliberately which I had striven for, had gained, had wantonly imperilled, and which was still mine—though I had not myself to thank for that. I felt like a man—as in-

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deed I was — who has been for a moment in mortal peril and finds himself miraculously saved.

I fancy that I am not unique in my familiarity with a curious but not infrequent experience. I mean that of falling at night into a tranquil slumber, at peace with myself and the world and with a conscience like a glass of distilled water, only to awaken, two or three hours later, to the pitch blackness of a room unearthly still, and a painful impression that the total value of life would be amply represented by a three-cent piece. As Master Morpheus took his seat upon my bedside that night our talk was all of the happy escape I had had; but when, close upon midnight, his place was taken by Mistress Insomnia, I opened my eyes upon a very different set of sensations. Of course it was the tea; but if it had been, instead, the knowledge that I had lost my uttermost farthing in the stock market, I could not have

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been more lamentably depressed. The thought of Miss Berrith hung upon the outskirts of this desert of dejection like the mirage of some fair oasis, and the whole history of "Sans Souci," as I looked back upon it, seemed an arid waste, in which my hopes, my plans, my opinions, and my performances, stood out as grotesquely as forms of cacti against a stretch of sand. Then a line from Hamlet incongruously popped out of nothingness into my mind:

*"This is the very ecstasy of love."*

Love, indeed! As if I did not know the symptoms of an indigestion!

If Galvin had made my bed with the express intention of rendering me as uncomfortable as possible, the result of her endeavours could not have been a more unqualified success. I tossed restlessly for a small eternity, and, with every movement, the memory of the previous afternoon turned over in my mind,

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kicked, as I did, furiously at its bedclothes, sought a cool place on its pillow, twitched, turned again, dozed for a moment, and awoke with a start, more desperately uneasy than before.

I rose as the first gray of dawn touched my window and groped about for the matches. As I did so, something slipped off my table to the floor, and, upon striking a light, I found it was a dinner-card, preserved as a memento of a recent festivity in town. It was a ridiculous affair, designed by the youngest daughter of the hostess, and represented an anatomically impossible gentleman in the act of bounding nimbly into something which resembled an ill-constructed bird's nest. Below, in gilt paint, were my name and these lines:

*“There was a man in our town  
And he was wondrous wise;  
He jumped into a bramble-bush  
And scratched out both his eyes:*

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*And when he found his eyes were out,  
With all his might and main  
He jumped into that bramble-bush  
And scratched them in again."*

I remembered that, when I had found this beside my place at table, I thought it the most meaningless thing in the world; but, for that matter, there is no record of King Belshazzar having immediately seen the point of the writing on the wall. Now the significance of the doggerel was as clear as crystal. I was the man. The confirmed estate of bachelorhood was the bramble-bush. My unpractised manner of jumping into the latter, at first, had naturally led me to scratch my eyes out over a silly semblance of a love-affair. Well, I was the wiser for the experience, and the same thing would not be apt to happen a second time. I could jump back into my bramble-bush with the certainty of recovering my former point of view. I replaced the prophetic

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card upon my table, turned in, and slept like a top till noon.

My first act, on arising, was to write a handsome note of apology to Miss Berrith. I did not preserve a copy, but it was something like this:

“MY DEAR MISS BERRITH:

“I shall not attempt to explain the access of folly which prompted me to the extravagant exhibition of yesterday afternoon. It was like a baby crying for the moon, for which, even in the event of his obtaining it, he could have no possible use. I think you will be glad to know that I have learned a very salutary lesson, for which I thank you. You will, I am sure, agree with me in thinking that any but the most formal relations between us in future could only prove embarrassing to both. I beg that you will forgive and forget. Pray have no regret for your action. If you have trampled upon me it was for my good.

“Very truly yours,

“JOHN ENDICOTT SANDS.”



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This I dispatched by the hand of Darius, and in the course of half an hour he returned with Miss Berrith's answer.

“DEAR MR. SANDS:

“Yes, let bygones be bygones. Your simile of the baby and the moon seems to fit the case to a nicety, and suggests to me that the luminary in question, having as much as she can attend to with the tide, had best leave the untied alone in the solitude which he craves. Did I ‘trample’ on you? I’m sorry, but I’m glad it did you good.

“*Lives of great men all remind us  
We can make our lives sublime,  
And, departing, leave behind us  
Footprints in the Sands!*”

“And so, good-bye.      “SUSIE BERRITH.”

It was a bright note enough, but I thought it heartless.

So I am ready to conclude. My absurd proposal for the hand of Miss Berrith is not

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two weeks old, but she has passed out of my life completely. Since our interchange of letters we have met but once, and then only to pass each other with a formal bow. As I review the foregoing pages, there is only one thing which I should like to change. Coming to think of it, I imagine it is unlikely that she has ever deliberately thrown herself at my head.

As I close, the rake of Darius is rasping on the gravel outside, and in the distance, at the wash-tub, Galvin is wailing "Bonnie Dundee" in adagio time. But these are trifles, and "Sans Souci" was never more deserving of the name.

The chronicle is complete. It only remains to seal up these pages for future reperusal. But, as a last word, I will venture a prophecy. It is that, at whatever date I shall read this record through once more, it will only be to lay it aside, finally and forever, with the identical conviction which is at present in my

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mind — that, far from being in any sense a pathetic figure, I am by all odds the most fortunate person of my acquaintance. For I have found the secret of a peaceful and contented life in divining the sole condition under which such a thing is humanly obtainable. Need I say that this is to be far from the maddening girls?

## CHAPTER SIX

“At length, after many unsuccessful efforts to surmount the wall, Master Reynard turned away.

“‘I had never much of a fancy for grapes,’ said he, ‘and, moreover, these grapes are far from ripe.’”

He was several kinds of a humbug, was the fabulist’s fox, but not, among them, of that most unconscionable variety which puts down such remarks as the above in writing. The distinction is one, which, however reluctantly I say it, I cannot claim for myself. For the entire history of “Sans Souci,” as it appears in the foregoing pages, seems to me to be nothing more than an elaboration of Master Reynard’s casuistry.

There will have been, incidental to the

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childhood of us all, certain odds and ends of costume which lent a vivid colour to such rôles of our assumption as Kidd or Crusoe. We will not have seen these properties for years; but in our memories they stand out, against the background of the merely commonplace, as the insignia of a pomp and circumstance which has retained something of its ingenuous splendour through all the sordid course of later experience. In them arrayed, we paced the decks of pirate ships, were cast ashore on cannibal-infested isles, and trod in battle, blood, and booty, beyond the imaginings of a Stevenson or a Poe. Surely, it is not strange that, in our fancy, the accessories to these enchantments should be as eloquent to-day as in our first decade.

But there comes the day when the fond delusion crumbles about our ears to piteous ruin. We have found, in some long-closed chest, these props to infant imagery, and, with that sudden contraction of heart which

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is peculiar to unexpected contact with the past, recognize them for what they are—some yards of scarlet cloth, scraps of tinsel and gold embroidery, a pair or two of tarnished epaulets, a sword without a scabbard, a dozen mock orders from some cotillon long since danced and done with—the playthings of the dwarfs we were. Ah me, how potent once they were! Now, all the most fanciful of us can do is pay them that trifling tribute. Their usefulness, even their charm, is gone forever. They are such stuff as dreams are made of, invalid, tawdry, and small, small, small, incomparably small!

But this is the work of years. It is only the children of our brains—ideas, ideals, opinions—which change so pitifully in a few short weeks that we may not even regard them with that tender regret wherewith we view the panoply of infancy, but instinctively draw back, and, if conscience did not stand sternly sponsor for them, would deny them for our own.

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*Far From The Maddening Girls*

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*Far from the maddening girls!*

Six weeks have passed since, with easy complacency, I closed the foregoing pages with those words, and to-day, for all the pride I have in them, they might be only hideous changelings in the cradle of my manuscript. But let them lie. Poor things, it is all they can *do now!*

In what manner the scales fell from my eyes I cannot pretend to say. It was a miracle like a bird's first flight, sunrise, or the opening of a rose. The soul of me drew away, and stared with amazed contempt at the little shell of sophistry in which it had been imprisoned. The flimsy edifice of bachelor philosophy came toppling down like any house of cards: and all I have here written of "Sans Souci" turned in a moment to the veriest trash. It was the work of a night; of the night, indeed, which followed the day on which I closed these notes.

But from the day, almost from the hour,

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when I received Miss Berrith's letter of farewell, I took no further pleasure in my celibacy or my home. Any attempt to do so, even in my own mind, I knew to be pure bravado. In the first place, "Sans Souci" was ridiculously large. As I sat in a corner of my den, occupying some twelve cubic feet of space, the long corridor and the other rooms reproached me with their superfluity of accommodation. As a boy, it had been my opinion that I could never have a sufficiency of watermelon. I still remember, with a sense of loathing, the occasion when I matched my appetite against a whole one. To this day, I view that fruit with an emotion akin to that which the sight of his monster must have inspired in the breast of Frankenstein, an emotion which now returned to me as I contemplated the too ample proportions of "Sans Souci." In the homely phrase, I had bitten off more than I could chew.

Again, I saw in my position an analogy to



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that of the despicable drone in the busy hive. Darius, with his shoe-brushes and his rake, Galvin at her wash-tub, the tradesmen who came and went—these were the workers. All I was good for was to eat and buzz complacently over the advantages of celibacy. But, at a certain point in the history of the hive, the exasperated workers fall upon the drones and hustle them unceremoniously out of doors. Did I deserve a better fate ?

Most of all, I was lonely; with such a loneliness as I cannot endeavour to describe. Struggle as I would against it, the remembrance forced itself upon me of the hours I had spent in Miss Berrith's company, of her quick wit, of her breezy candour, of the cheerful love of life and the gentle womanly sympathy which I now saw only too clearly had illumined all her moods, and which I had so pitifully failed to understand. Little by little, a realization of what this mental attitude must signify forced itself upon my comprehension.

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I shied at the word itself like a horse at something seen dimly in the dark, but it was not to be denied. Letter by letter, it mastered me, as if I had been a child playing with alphabetical blocks, until I came to know its form and meaning in something after the following manner:

*L is for Loneliness, bitter and blue;*

*That, sir, is what is the matter with you.*

*O is for One, and, experience taught of,*

*Now you can see that is all you have thought of.*

*V is for Vanity. You have your share:*

*Yes, and a generous portion to spare.*

*E is for Egotist. Proof there is ample*

*That you needn't look far if you're seeking a sample.*

Each letter thus taught me a humiliating lesson, but when I came to string them together I learned the greatest lesson of all.

Yes, I was in love. I had as soon looked to

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find that confession in these pages as to receive Leviathan in the living-room of "Sans Souci"; but once the fact had established itself in my conviction, it remained there, as immovable as Plymouth Rock.

It was as if some one — Dan Cupid, for preference — had dropped a bomb into the peaceful hamlet of my philosophy. The roofs which sheltered my pet notions flew in flinders, and the notions themselves rushed screaming into the streets, rending their garments and calling upon Heaven to pardon them their sins. The municipal authorities, Messrs. Obstinacy, Selfishness, Conceit, and Company, resigned their offices upon the spot, and Major-General Humility put the town under martial law.

This matter of love is a singular thing enough, as experienced by a man. First of all, it bowls over his confidence, the very quality of which he would seem to be in the most urgent need; and then, in a manner nothing short of gross, turns its attention to demoral-

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izing his purely material faculties. My appetite vanished like the flame of a candle under a wet sponge; and as for any desire for sleep, I would have made the most efficient night-watchman in existence. I did not fall into the dismal custom of writing verse; and the isolation of my life secured me against the crowning folly of discoursing to my friends on the key of tit-willow and alackaday; but in all other respects I suppose mine was as typical a case of love-sickness as you would be apt to find.

Your practised poultryman will tell you which eggs will hatch and which will not, and it is probably by some such occult faculty as this that the average woman is able to detect the incubation of the tender passion. As I look back, I perceive that Galvin must have been fully aware of my condition, and that she encouraged it to the full extent of her ability, though at the time I could think of no reason for the persistent manner in which she forced the subject of matrimony upon my at-

tention. Almost daily now, she brought up for my consideration some domestic problem which clearly called for the exercise of feminine judgment, and then, after watching me with a kind of pity as I wrestled with it, she would retire, with a hint, more or less gentle, as to the ease with which such reefs and shallows were passed around or over, when a mistress held the domestic helm. I was called upon for an opinion as to the advisability of using kerosene upon the dining-table; I was expected to give a verdict in favour of one or another of a dozen washing preparations; I had to sit in judgment upon the respective merits of tar-paper and camphor as a preservative of winter clothes; I was asked to determine whether or not the washerwoman had employed an acid on my shirts, whether chamois-skin or cheese-cloth was best for the piano, whether an egg-shell improved the coffee, and a host of similar whethers-or-not, which might as readily have been rebuses in

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Sanskrit for all the impression they conveyed to my mind.

“I can’t abide to trouble you,” the Machiavellian Galvin would observe. “If you was a married man, Mr. Sands, there’d be no need — but of course —”

And the door would close upon this incomplete, yet eloquent, remark, leaving me, each time, moreshaken in my resolution than before. The Galvin octagon was complete at last, and its eighth side was match-manufactural!

Thus beset, exteriorly by a subtle system of suggestion ever crescent in its effect, and interiorly by an obsession which I had even less will than power to control, I saw, more and more clearly, what the inevitable outcome of my plight must be. Already the currents had swept my bark into the rapids. The roar of the cataract was in my ears. It remained to be seen in what manner I should contrive to pass it; whether triumphantly, to emerge presently upon the serener waters of married life, or

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disastrously, and, as on the former occasion, swamped by pitiless waves of rejection and contempt.

At this point the main thread of my reflections was snapped by the inopportune defection of Darius. At first I did not realize the extent of my catastrophe, but viewed his failure to appear, not only on one morning, but on three mornings following, in the light of an opportunity. The weather had been wet, and I know not which was most in need, my shoes of blacking, or my grass of mowing. Plainly, it was my duty to undertake both tasks, and I girded myself for the dual ordeal with an idea that I was about to establish a precedent of efficiency by which it should be the difficult duty of Darius to shape his subsequent performances.

I had never tried a lawn-mower before. I think I never shall again. There is something in one of our minor poets about "the drops of dew which cling, imperaled, tenacious, to the

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grass." I am like Lady Teazle, in a position to show that "there is not one syllable of truth in what the gentleman has told you." Drops of dew *do not cling*, tenacious, to the grass. On the contrary, they vanish, surreptitiously, between the clippers of the lawn-mower, abide briefly in the mechanism thereof, climb unknowably up the handle, percolate with incredible celerity through the human system, and presently emerge, as large as life and twice as significant, upon the human brow. I had not mowed twenty square feet of lawn before I was filled with a vast sense of respect for the prowess of Darius Doane. Nothing could have induced me to drive that Juggernaut another foot.

But if this was the lesson taught me by the lawn-mower, how much greater was the moral imparted by the shoe-brushes and the blacking. I do not remember ever having tested my ability in this direction before. A vague impression of the tactics employed by certain



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Tuscan gentlemen on city street-corners was all I had to go by. Their first act is to knock the backs of the brushes together. I did that. The crowning feature of the ceremony is to lean over, with your mouth wide open, an inch from the shoe, and then say "Ha-a-a-a-a!" as you do when the doctor has the handle of the teaspoon down your throat, looking for tonsilitis. I did that. Between the two, I brushed with unexampled energy, and for one brief moment saw my efforts crowned with triumph. A tiny spot of brilliance appeared on the extreme tip of one shoe, and then abruptly vanished. That was the sole symptom of success. I laboured for full an hour longer, without inducing anything more than a sulky dullness, and then I gave it up. Not that I was to blame. If the stove-polish had been kept in a proper place, there would have been no chance of my confusing it with the blacking.

If it was with an added respect for the ser-

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vices of Darius that I emerged from this experience, it was, as well, with a multiplied need of them. But nearly a week elapsed before his absence was explained by the following letter from his mother:

“DEAR SIR:

“Darius is layed up with a Decease which is Information of the Longs is very woorit for fear you will not kep his Job for him tole him You would Doctor says not in danjer and will be able to resum Work in abt ten Days.

“Respetfully yours

“AGATHA DOANE.”

That afternoon I set off to make a call upon Darius.

We were well into November, but something remained of the warm languor of Indian summer which was in alluring contrast to the wonted bleakness of the month. The leaves had clung to their places with a singular tenacity, and, perhaps for this very cause, were more vividly and variably coloured than I had

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ever seen them. A blue haze from brush-fires somewhere in the distance filtered through the woods, blurring the vistas to an appearance of being slightly out of focus which charmed the eye with an incomparable softness, and stinging the nostrils not unpleasantly with its acrid pungency. Spring is the season of silence. She stands tip-toed and finger on lip, breathlessly awaiting the miracle of resurrection. But autumn is all haste and anxious preparation against the threatening peril of the snows. This floor of dry leaves, levelly laid, and polished, each of them, as if their surfaces had been of fawn lacquer, was the canopy over an infinity of unseen and intermingling thoroughfares, through which the tiny denizens of the world of under-foot scuttled nimbly about their affairs, unapparent to my coarser perception, save in that, as I stood still, news of their activities came to me in the form of the faintest imaginable rustle. Larger, though no less timid, creatures

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sped away at my approach, across this crackling carpet—squirrels, sitting up at a safe distance to survey me, with their forepaws held coquettishly against their breasts: rabbits, pausing for a single glance at the intruder, and then whipping out of sight among the brush: partridges, rushing for a few paces over the leaves, and then whirring upward like rising rockets.

I have said intruder, for such, as I walked, I felt myself to be. I cannot particularize the sense of isolation which touched me, further than to say that in a world of activity and varied interest I alone was idle and ill-content. I can only hope that the feeling is one which others have shared, for there is no describing or explaining it. It comes upon you out of nothingness, and presently is gone again, unsatisfied. For the life of you you cannot tell what thing it is you crave, but more than life you crave it!

Albeit I had started with a definite end in

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view, this so alluring afternoon had tempted me more than once from the direct way, so that I had taken small notice of my actual progress, until, coming suddenly out upon the road again after my fourth or fifth deflection, I found myself almost opposite the Berrith house. Miss Susie Berrith, in a smart little walking costume, indescribably taking by reason of its brisk masculine note, was coming down the path. We were face to face before either could catch a breath. She would have passed me with a bow, but I stopped her.

“We seem to be going the same way,” said I, and after she had given me some little formal expression of acquiescence we fell in step.

“I don’t know what you will have been thinking of me,” I ventured to observe, and vastly envied the ease of her laugh as she replied:

“Are you sure I have been thinking of you at all?”

“Oh, Miss Berrith,” I exclaimed, “I think

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I am the most blundering, the most inept, the most selfish, and the most inconsiderate of men! I wish I could convey to you an adequate sense of the humiliation with which I look back upon almost every detail of our acquaintance. If I had seen a man treating a dog with the brutality of which I have been guilty to you, I think I should have sailed in and thrashed him, if only to satisfy my sense of decency.”

“Please don’t, Mr. Sands,” said she. “I— I think I understand.”

“It isn’t only that,” I continued obstinately. “It’s the knowledge that my lamentable blindness, my crass ignorance, and my utter stupidity, have put forever out of my reach the only thing in the world which —”

I might have expected the result. Miss Berrith drew away, crossing to the other side of the road.

“Please, Mr. Sands!” she repeated. “There can be no use in this, no use at all, and such a

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discussion must be as painful to you as it surely is to me.”

“Then I am right?” I persisted. “I *have* thrown away my chance?”

Miss Berrith made no reply.

“Isn’t that the plain truth of it?” I asked.

“You force me into being so unpleasant as to say it is,” she answered. “I am sorry to hurt your feelings, but—but women are not won that way, Mr. Sands. You did not like it when I once said I thought you were pathetic, but that is how you seemed to me. You have been doing your best all along to rub the bloom off life for yourself, and turn your back upon the essence of it, and in the attempt it would be strange if you did not rush in to some places where angels fear to tread. That you were all alone, and endeavouring to make a few cut-and-dried opinions on the advantages of celibacy take the place of all the greatest and most beautiful realities of life—wasn’t that pathetic? I was very far from

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wanting to marry you, Mr. Sands, but had I been ever so anxious, the manner of your offer would have cured me. What was it you brought to me? Was it a poor, weak-kneed imitation of a manly avowal, or was it the strong, unselfish love of a good man for a good woman? Oh, you have yet to learn that in all the world there is nothing greater than that—”

“Except,” I interposed, “the love of a woman for a man. That is infinitely greater, so much greater, indeed, that, where the other is only a miracle, this is a worker of miracles. It pardons him his faults and, in pardoning, often cures them.”

Then there was silence between us, until we came to the first houses of the town. Here Miss Berrith paused upon a corner.

“Now I must leave you,” she said. “I am going to see Darius.”

“Why, bless my soul!” I exclaimed, “so am I! I had forgotten all about it. Do you mind if I come with you?”



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“I shall be glad,” she answered simply, and we went on again.

Mrs. Doane met us at the door. She was a stout, shapeless woman, who would have been ridiculous if she had not been crying. The most singular little pang I have ever experienced went through me at sight of her strained, blue eyes, even now shining full of tears.

“Oh, dear heart, Miss Berrith,” she began at once, after a little bow to me, “the boy’s that sick! The doctor says — oh, Miss Berrith, dear —”

Miss Berrith seemed to understand the whole matter from these few words. She went directly to Mrs. Doane, and put her arms around her, and her lips against her cheek, and spoke to her as if the poor creature had been a frightened child.

“There — there — there — there.”

It was the most gentle, the most tactful, and the most touching thing, that ever even a

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woman did, and the beauty of it swelled in my throat like a sob.

“Last night he turned worse,” said Mrs. Doane, “and talked that wild! It was all about you, Miss Berrith, dear—about you and Mr. Sands—gettin’ married. Ain’t it funny he should have his heart set on a thing like that? But he has.”

I caught my breath, looking for a protest from Miss Berrith, but, to my amazement, she did not seem to have heard the words at all. She only held Mrs. Doane closer, and continued her little soothing murmur.

Then I found myself mechanically following them to the sick-room, and, a moment later, at the bedside of Darius, with the solemnity upon me that even a hint of death inspires.

In the midst of the large, old-fashioned four-poster, the boy looked as little as a baby. His face was very white and drawn, and his eyes were closed. On a low chair at his side was seated the village doctor, with his fingers



**SHE WENT DIRECTLY TO MRS. DOANE, AND PUT HER  
ARMS AROUND HER**



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on the thin wrist which lay outside the coverlet. He looked up as we entered, nodded to Miss Berrith, and at once turned his eyes back to Darius. This suggestion of acute attention was, to my way of thinking, more eloquent than any form of words.

And Darius — oh, Darius!

Every act and every word of his flashed back upon me, as I saw him lying there, so thin and small—the unspeakable mouth-organ, the disarming smile, the lines of “The Skeleton in Armor,” the sound of his rake upon the gravel and of his briskly-plied brushes in the cellar underneath my den, the morning of his coming, that of his dismissal, that of his return. Oh, happy, chattering, rattle-pated, little, dear Darius! Was this, indeed, the Valley of the Shadow?

Slowly his eyes unclosed, and then, as they rested on the face of Susie Berrith, the ghost of his old smile woke upon his lips, and he sighed, with the essence of content.

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“Miss Berrit’,” he said in a whisper like an elf’s, “an’ Mist’ San’s. Den I wasn’t deream-in’. Y’ *are* a-goin’ to git marrit, after orl?”

As the words left his lips, the doctor looked straight across at Susie Berrith, and sharply nodded!

There was the briefest imaginable pause, and then the girl bent down and kissed Darius on the lips.

“Yes, Darius,” she answered steadily. “Yes, dear, I am going to marry Mr. Sands!”

“God bless you!” said the doctor softly.

*He knew it was a lie!*

As we waited outside the house for his verdict, I could no more have spoken to her than to the Madonna upon an altar. When, at last, he came to us with word that the boy would live, we turned home together, still in silence.

The air had gone suddenly chill and supremely clear. The gold of the declining sun splashed through the openings between the

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trees, and fell in a marvellous mosaic on the windings of the familiar road. The world was as still as some vast chapel.

“I love you more than the very breath of life itself,” said I, as steadily as I could for the beating of my heart. “Will you marry me?”

She turned sharply at the words, with her head thrown back and her cheeks blazing.

“Oh, is that kind?” she cried. “Is it *fair*? Is it possible you didn’t understand what it might have meant to have given him a different answer? And you would take advantage — oh, *shame!* You would take advantage of — of my lie!”

“Oh, my dearest,” I broke in, “it was too beautiful to be a lie. It was truth for Darius. Will you not make it truth for me?”

And I held out my arms to her.

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A hundred and ninety years later, or seven minutes — I forget which — I made a confession.

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“I should tell you,” said I, “that I have been so silly as to write down all my idiotic ideas on housekeeping, celibacy, matrimony, and the like, in the form of a sort of story. I shall add one more chapter—*this* chapter, dearest—just by way of salving my conscience, and then commit the whole rigmarole to the flames which it deserves.”

She could not forget to contradict me—the witch!

“On the contrary,” said she, “you will add your one more chapter, and then get the editor of a discriminating periodical to publish the whole affair for you. Don’t you see, John? It may be the means of showing other confirmed bachelors the perils of darkest celibacy.”

“And the way out!” said I.

I wonder if it will.

THE END







