

THE FOREST FIRE.

The night was grim and still with dread,
No star shone down from heaven's dome:
The ancient forest closed around,
The settler's lonely home.

There came a glare that lit the north;
There came a wind that roused the night;
But child and father slumbered on,
Nor felt the growing light.

There came a noise of flying feet,
With many a strange and dreadful cry;
And sharp flames crept and leapt along
The red verge of the sky.

There came a deep and gathering roar,
The father raised his anxious head;
He saw the light, like a dawn of blood,
That streamed across his bed.

It lit the old clock on the wall,
It lit the room with splendor wild,
It lit the fair and tumbled hair
Of the still sleeping child.

And zig-zag fence, and rude long barn,
And chip-strewn yard and cabin grey
Glowed crimson in the shuddering glare
Of the untimely day.

The boy was hurried from his sleep;
The horse was hurried from his stall;
Up from the pasture clearing came
The cattle's frightened call.

The boy was snatched to the saddle-bow.
Wildly, wildly, the father rode;
Behind them swooped the hordes of flame,
And harried their abode.

The scorching heat was at their heels;
The huge roar bounded them in their flight;
Red smoke and many a flying brand
Flew o'er them through the night.

And fast they fled the wildwood forms—
Far-striding moose and leaping deer,
And bounding panther, and coursing wolf
Terrible-eyed with fear.

And closer drew the fiery death;
Madly, madly the father rode;
The horse began to heave and fail
Beneath the double load.

The father's mouth was white and stern,
But his eyes grew tender with long farewell;
He said: "Hold fast to your seat, Sweetheart,
And ride old Jerry well!"

"I must go back. Ride on to the river;
Over the ford and the long marsh ride,
Straight on to the town. And I'll meet you,
Sweetheart, somewhere on the other side."

He slipped from the saddle. The boy rode on;
His hand clung fast in the horse's mane;
His hair blew over the horse's neck;
His small throat sobbed with pain.

"Father! Father!" he cried aloud.
The howl of the fire-wind answered him
With hiss of scaring flames; and crash
Of shattering limb on limb.

But still the good horse galloped on,
With sinew braced and strength renewed;
The boy came safe to the river ford,
And out of the deadly wood.

And now with his kinsfolk, fenced from fear,
At play in the heart of the city's hum,
He stops in his play to wonder why
His father does not come!

A HOLIDAY TRAGEDY.

All my life I had been—well, not exactly a woman hater, but a firm believer in the idea that man is the lord of creation, and that woman is not an absolute necessity. For many years it was my proud boast that I was able to dispense with feminine aid and yet live a very enjoyable life, as, with clockwork regularity, I went from my bachelor lodgings to business each morning, returning in the afternoon and spending the evening at the club or some place of amusement. The idea of having a lady companion in my rambles never entered my head.

True, my landlady (good old soul) prepared my meals and cleaned my rooms, but that was because I had not time to do it myself, and a man servant was beyond my means. But in all else I dispensed with woman's aid. Boot cleaning, sewing buttons on, lighting the fire, etc., were all done with my own hands—nay, at a pinch I have even washed a pocket handkerchief.

I desired to stand forth as a living example of the original Adam and a proof of the superfluity of the modern Eve. But my misguided companions refused to profit by my teachings or to follow my example. One by one they fell under female influences, one by one they married, and then—I cut them dead. Ah, me! Those free Bohemian days were happy ones, as year after year I pursued my adopted course, in spite of the continual falling off of my comrades. Then came a time when my circle of acquaintances had decreased so considerably that I began to feel lonely. Bachelor chums were more difficult to find than ever. To loneliness succeeded melancholy, and I grew miserable and pessimistic.

One friend to whom I laid bare my woes, said:

"You keep to yourself too much. What you ought to do is to lodge with some family where there are two or three grown up daughters. They would wake you up a bit."

This to me, the hitherto ideal advocate of an Eveless Eden! And yet, after the advice had been tendered, several times, I began to think that such a change might be beneficial. Such a course need not involve the rendering up of my tenets, but, as woman still formed a part of the world, she might at least contribute to my amusement. So, after very serious consideration, I decided to seek fresh apartments, with light society thrown in.

Now my trouble commenced, I could not make the direct inquiry, "Have you any grown up daughters?" So I generally viewed the rooms, listening to the landlady's verbiage, settled the rent and then casually asked, "Have you any children?" and the reply would be "Yes, four, five, or six," as the case might be; "the eldest is 10 years old and the youngest two months. But they are as good as gold, and never make a bit of noise."

The numberless journeys I made and the many desultory conversations I listened to were all to no purpose. No one appeared to possess grown up daughters—the eldest was always 10. Just when I was about to abandon my search, fortune—or was it fate?—led me to Myrtle Villa, Paradise Gardens, Upper Dulwich. The door was opened by a vision

of loveliness, faultlessly dressed, and with bright blue eyes and golden hair. "Newly married," thought I; "well, here at least the eldest won't be 10!" She invited me in, and then disappeared; a middle aged lady entering directly after, we proceeded to discuss terms. Then came the inevitable inquiry as to children.

"I have two grown up daughters, the younger of whom opened the door for you." At last! Need I say that within a week I was installed in Myrtle Villa? The landlady, a widow, was a genial, homely woman, and the youngest daughter, Annie, aged 25 I have already described, but the other daughter, Julia, did not impress me favorably. She was neither good looking nor pleasing, and, without being exactly bad tempered, always insisted upon having her own way.

I now seemed to be in a new world. My boots wore a brilliant lustre each morning without my aid, and my slippers were laid ready for me in the evening, and as for lending me a needle and cotton—the idea!—if I would only leave them outside they would be only too happy.

I no longer needed to seek relaxation at the club after the labors of the day. Julia played the piano well, her only accomplishment, while Annie sang divinely, and thus the evenings passed all too quickly. Male acquaintances they did not seem to possess—yet, stay, there was one—a Mr. Malcolm, whose name I frequently heard mentioned, but as his calls were always made in the daytime I never saw him. I had rapidly passed into that condition of mind which raised a feeling of jealousy of his account, so one day I questioned my landlady on the subject.

"Oh, he's a very old friend of ours. Once we thought he would have proposed to Julia, but nothing came of it."

What a relief. Only Julia! So time went pleasantly on, and then—how can I confess it?—my lifelong creed was thrown to the winds, my proud ambition humbled in the dust, and I became a willing slave to the sex I had so long despised and ignored. My only thought now was how, and in what words, I should beseech my darling Annie to become my wife. Time after time, I was on the point of speaking, but Julia always turned up at the critical moment.

One evening Julia announced that a week thence she had engagement to play at a concert. Then burst upon me a brilliant inspiration. I purchased two small tickets for the lyceum for that same evening, and, making pretence that I had them given to me, I persuaded Annie to promise to accompany me. This time Julia would not be able to intrude, and I should know my fate. In two months' time I should be taking my summer holiday, which would just fit in nicely for the honeymoon.

On the eventful day I hastened homeward with a queer fluttering in my heart and a flower spray for Annie in my hat. Julia opened the door and hardly permitted me to enter before she informed me that Annie had been out in the hot sun and been obliged to go to bed with a very sick headache. My fluttering heart gave one huge bound and then seemed to stand still. However, to disguise my feelings, I said:

"I am sorry: and you have to play at the concert."

"No," she replied, "the concert has been postponed."

"Then may I beg the pleasure of your company? I did not ask you before because of the concert engagement."

"Thanks, I shall enjoy it immensely." What a miserable failure that evening proved to be! I do not even know what the play was called. I was thinking all the time of my poor, sick darling, and not of the acting or the woman who sat by side, wearing the flower spray that was meant for Annie.

The words were still unspoken when my holidays arrived, and, tearing myself away from the two sisters, who stood at the gate and waved their handkerchiefs as long as I remained in sight, it was with no feelings of anticipation that I betook myself to Hastings for rest and recreation.

Rest! Where could I find it? Not on the parade or pier amidst hundreds of couples promenading, as I had pictured Annie and myself doing; not on the beach where Ethiopian musicians were eternally playing "Annie Laurie," "Sweet Annie Rooney," and "Annie Dear, I'm Called Away." For a whole week I wandered aimlessly hither and thither. Then I could stand it no longer. So I wrote a long letter commencing "Darling" and pouring out the impassioned, pent-up love that comes but once in a man's lifetime. I besought and beseeched her to take pity upon me or my lifeless body should surge in the billows that beat relentlessly upon the Rocks at Beachy Head.

When I had finished I happened to catch sight of a photograph which I had purchased the previous day, representing one of the yachts preparing to start on her morning trip, with my own figure in a prominent position in the bows.

"Ah," thought I, "I'll send that to Julia."

If it were possible, I had now less rest than before, night or day, while waiting for an answer. Rising in the morning with haggard looks and burning brow, the other boarders would remark that the sea air did not seem to agree with me, while under the mask of assumed indifference there raged within me the fiercest volcano that ever burned in the heart of man.

At last the reply came, and, bounding up to the privacy of my room, with trembling fingers I tore open the envelope which hid from me—life or death?

"Dearest, I am yours forever. I cannot say your proposal was unexpected, for I have felt that you could mean nothing less, ever since that evening when you so openly expressed your preference on taking me to the theatre—"

What! Whew! Where!!! I looked at the signature—"Julia." Oh, Heavens! I saw it all. I had placed them in the wrong envelopes, and sent the letter to Julia and the photograph to Annie! How I raged and fumed and tore my hair, until at last in sheer exhaustion, I sank into a chair and endeavored to finish reading the letter.

"Annie thanks you very much for the photo, and she desires me to tell you that yesterday Mr. Malcolm proposed to her and

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was accepted. We will have the two weddings on the same day. Won't that be nice dear?

Nice? This was the last straw. Nice, indeed for me to be married to a woman I did not care for, and at the same time to see the one I loved given to another man! I cannot remember what I did for the next hour or two beyond cursing my foolishness and swearing I wouldn't marry Julia. Then, when I became calmer, I saw an action for breach of promise looming. I thought of all my hard earned savings of years being swept away by a sympathetic jury to heal Julia's broken heart. There was no escape for me. She had my letter, which simply commenced "Darling," and as no name was mentioned in it from beginning to end, was it possible that any body of intelligent men could be brought to believe that I intended it for Annie, when I addressed the envelope to Julia? No, no. I must go through with it—I would marry Julia. Yes, and I would teach her that man is the lord of creation, and that woman is but a helpmate, and not an equal, and so in my married life triumphantly assert those principles which I had held so long.

Julia married me at the same time and place as Annie became Mrs. Malcolm. I now spend my evenings endeavoring to solve a difficult problem, and that is, why do they call woman the weaker sex?—Tid-Bits.

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China has a 50,000-pound bell.
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Flour is to be made of bananas.
A whale's skeleton weighs 50,000 pounds.
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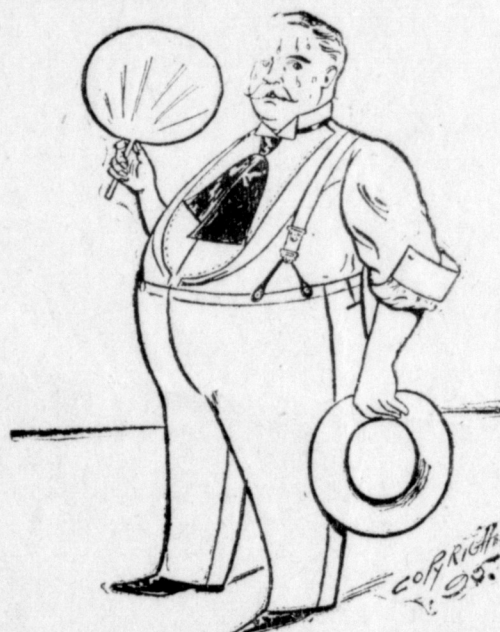
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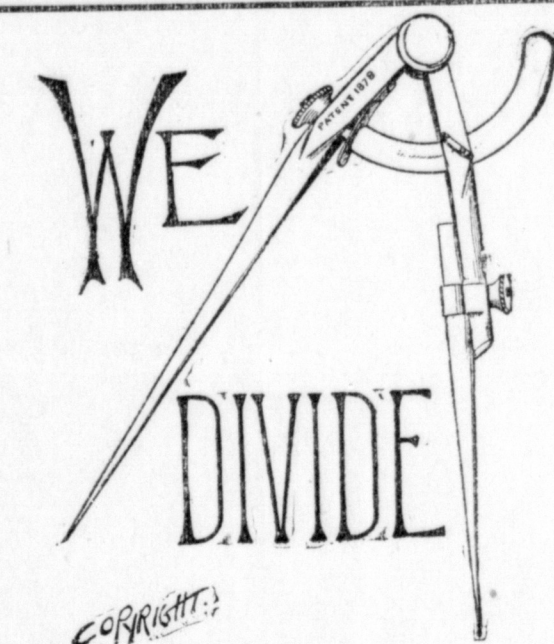
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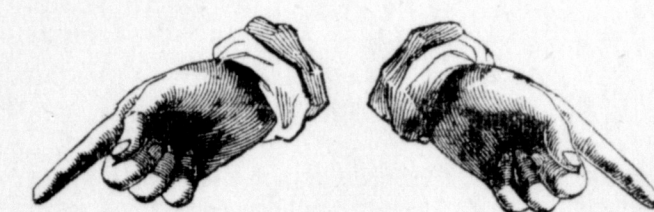
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