

NO. 10 BLANK STREET.

A GENTLEMAN CAN BE ACCOMMODATED with a pleasant suite of rooms, at No. 10 Blank Street. The house contains all the modern improvements, references required.

The advertisement seemed to me to promise well. I was tired of my present home. I was thirty-five, alone in the world, very well off, and doing a business which promised a speedy fortune. It was time I should begin to take life a little more on the sunny side.

I went to No. 10 Blank street on my way down town. The landlady Mrs. Lee, was a widow; handsome, stylish, apparently not more than thirty. I heard afterward, that she would never see forty again. I rented the room, and I went there, bag and baggage, the next morning. I moved my pictures; I loved Art in a modest, half-diffident fashion, and I had some fine prints and a few choice oils. When I had hung them to my satisfaction, and put the best of Clytie, the dreamy fairy I loved so well, on my mantel, I looked about my parlor with self-satisfaction.

Mrs. Lee did the honors of her establishment, so gracefully that I was more charmed than ever. She presented the dead Thaddeus—I had seen his name in the family Bible—because he had been obliged to resign so much youth and beauty, for she was but a young thing, she told me, when she was left to depend upon herself. The very words, she said, had never been allowed to touch her roughly.

'What a happy man your husband should have been!' I said to Mrs. Lee, one evening as I watched, admiringly, her nimble fingers—she had just been mending my gloves. I was but expressing a frequent thought of mine. I saw no call for my landlady to blush, though it was not unbecoming. I had surely meant nothing sentimental, but she received my remark with a flutter of pretty, playful emotion.

'I hope he was,' she sighed, 'I trust I made him so, and yet I did not love him as he loved me. He was a great deal older than I, and I think I was too young then to know what love was. I believe our affection was true and fonder when we have seen more of life, and learned what a precious thing it really is to have some one to care for and protect us. But what am I saying! My gloves are done.'

'She hurried out of the room. It was my turn to be embarrassed. Had I said anything to move Mrs. Lee's sensibilities in so remarkable a manner? I thought not. Perhaps the memory of the dead Thaddeus, and his love, had been too much for her. I felt uncomfortable, and I betook myself to my own room. I always left my door open; it was one of my old bachelor ways, it seemed more social. As I went upstairs I saw a girl standing before the looking glass, apparently with absorbed attention, at my Clytie. Her form was slight and girlish. I could not see her face, but her dress was of a cheap material, and simply fashioned.

'One of the attic boarders, I thought; or perhaps a seamstress bringing home some work.'

When I approached her she turned and glanced at me with a confused and distressed air.

'Forgive me, Sir,' she faltered. 'I was taking a liberty, I know; but that face is so beautiful, apparently with absorbed attention, at my Clytie. Her form was slight and girlish. I could not see her face, but her dress was of a cheap material, and simply fashioned.'

'So are you,' I longed to retort, but I did not. I had had enough of complimenting for one day. Her face was singularly lovely.

'Not at all a liberty! I am rewarded for leaving my door open if it has afforded you any pleasure. You would step in a moment, and look at my pictures. If you fancy the Clytie, I am sure you would like some of them.'

There was a singular absence of all prudery or affectation about the child. Suppose she came—for so it turned out—a middle-aged man—for so it turned out—seemed to her youth—of honest face; and she bestowed on me at once a trust that was the most delicate of flattery. She came in, unhesitatingly, and lingered for a few moments, while I told her about the pictures. When she had seen them all, she thanked me in that simple, child-like way of hers.

'You have given me a great pleasure, Sir. I must go now; but I shall have something to think of which will make many a day's work easier.'

'Do you live here, Miss—?'

'Hastings,' she replied. 'My name is Nora Hastings. Yes, sir, I live here—up stairs. I breakfast and dine earlier than you do, and I sit at the corner table; so it is not strange you have not seen me, though of course I have seen Mr. Prescott, the new boarder. Good-evening, Sir.'

From the servant I found out that Miss Hastings finished off dresses, and trimmed them, and made mantillas. And she had the ready art of mending the worn-out stuff, in a gush of irrepressible panegyric. 'She's so afraid of making any trouble, though sure I'd work my fingers to the bone to spare those white hands of hers. When she was sick, and like to die with the fever, who but she took me into her room and nursed me and sat up with me nights, after working hard all day; and when she thought I was asleep I heard her pray for me! Her prayers wasn't out of the prayer book, but I know the saints heard.'

She stopped and wiped her eyes on the corner of her calico apron. Man though I was I could have wept with her easily. It went to my very heart to think of the poor young thing doing patiently and severely such works of mercy. But I was not surprised, I had had the true, earnest nature, the power of self-sacrifice, in her eyes. God bless and God keep her! I said to myself every time I thought of her, and those times were not few.

have a friend; and I look on you as one, though I have no claim on you.'

'Would to Heaven you had a claim on me! I thought, as I watched her going up stairs. You, who were my sister, my niece, anything that would give me a right to take her work out of her hands, and prescribe for her change of air and scene, and rest, and a little pleasure! Then I felt the thought, as I sat strolling through the moonlight, and strange tyrant, Oustard, that I desired would let me do what I pleased for my second cousins—would smile on me if I sent clothes to the Sandwich Islanders, or arithmetics to the Hottentots—but would by no means let me lift the burden of her poor girl, who was my neighbor, with one of my fingers! I cried out against the absurdity of such a decree. Why must I pile up useless wealth and she suffer? But for her sake I must submit to laws I could not change, for her own sake I must not seek to help her.

I asked her if she would find time, the next afternoon, to go and see some pictures with me. It was then the English collection was at the Athenaeum, and I had seen a painting of "Hindoo," which I longed to have her see. It was the face of one who waited and watched, and somehow I had associated it with hers. She could not refuse, she said; it would be such a rare pleasure she must make time somehow. While we were talking Mrs. Lee came through the hall. She nodded to me, but she cast on my companion a look of singular distrust and dislike. I noticed it then, and remembered it afterward.

She spoke to me that evening about Nora Hastings. She had observed me talking with her, she said, and would I tell her if I was going to marry her? I might think it a very strange question, one which she had no right to ask, but I chose to answer it, she would convince me that she had good reasons.

I had no cause for hesitation. The thought of marrying Nora Hastings had never occurred to me, and I told her so frankly. I related to her the beginning of our acquaintance, and its slight progress, including my rejection for the next day. Then I waited for her reply.

'I hardly know what to say, Mr. Prescott,' she began, in her soft, insinuating voice, she shaking gently her head, with its fair curls. 'I am sure it would be kind to say you no, and it's not at all necessary, since you do not think of making her Mrs. Prescott.'

'But what if I had been intending to marry her, madame? I spoke a little sternly perhaps, for I had satisfied her curiosity, and I was determined she should make the explanation at which she had hinted. I think she was unwilling to refuse me, still she spoke with hesitation.

'It is nothing; at least if any other gentleman in my family had been going to marry her, I should have said it was nothing and kept silence, but I have looked on you as my personal friend, and I should have told you that I considered her an artful designing girl, who had tried to entrap several of my best boarders into marrying her, and had failed miserably.'

'I am sure, Mrs. Lee, that you must be mistaken. As little as I know Miss Hastings, I would be ready to answer for every act of her life; though she has a frankness and simplicity of manner which might possibly mislead some. I am certain that you do her injustice.'

'Let us hope that I do,' she said, with a smile. 'It has ceased to be of interest to me, now that I know she is not likely to affect the happiness of one whom I consider my friend.'

'I consider the conversation into other channels; but I believe I had been a little vexed by her pertinacity in reminding me that I had assured her I was not going to marry Nora Hastings. I told her the simple truth when I said that the idea of such a marriage had never occurred to me. But now that she put it into my head, it did occur to me again and again. I took such an interest in Nora as I had never taken in any one before. Perhaps I could not win her; but if I could—I paused, and strange, sweet thoughts drifted through my mind, of what it would be to love and watched and waited for by such youth and beauty; to have her sit together on my own. How she would love her husband, I mused—she would no other life in the world! My dreams that night were rozier than any of the hopes of my by-gone youth.'

We had a couple of pleasant hours the next afternoon, looking together at the pictures. Now that I had begun to think of Nora as one who might some day make my wife, I saw new charms in every hour. It was a pleasure to show her works of art. She had seen so few, and she enjoyed them so intensely, and appreciated them with such a fine, inborn taste.

I went home one evening when I had known her two months. I had intended to send for her, as I did sometimes, and ask her to join me in a little walk. I went into my room, and presently Ellen tapped on the door. I opened it, and she placed a little note in my hand. She had been crying, and she said, as she gave me the paper, 'That'll tell you about it, I suppose, sir. Miss Nora's an angel and nothing else, and I've given the mistress notice. I'm going next week. I won't stay where they've treated her so, poor darling!'

I tore open the note, and bade Ellen wait for a moment while I read it. The handwriting was hurried and irregular; the words went to my heart:

'Mrs. Lee tells me she has let my room to a person who will pay her more. I am obliged to her to-day. She intimates that I have lowered myself in your estimation by my forwardness, and that I have lost the respect of the boarders. This may be so, alas! I fear it is. I could bear all else, but to have lost your respect is terrible. You were very kind to me, and I was so sweet to have a friend. Do not think any worse of me than you can help. If I have been forward and presuming, it was because I knew so little of life. I shall remember your goodness, and be grateful to you for ever.'

'NORA HASTINGS.'

My poor, wronged, innocent darling! If I had never loved her before I should have loved her then, and longed to shelter her from a cold world in my heart.

'Where has she gone? I asked turning to Ellen. 'She does not tell me.' 'She has gone to Mrs. Miles,' on Derne street. The lady has given her a great deal of work, and been very kind to her, and when Miss Nora found she couldn't stay here she went to her with her trouble, and Mrs. Miles said she should stay there till she could look about for a new place.'

So there were still some kind hearts in the world, I thought grateful who could show pity to the orphan and friendless. God bless them all! But she, my poor little life, should never need to seek another boarding-house if she could only love me, and let me care for her.'

to come to us. I recognized in her a lady whom I had sometimes met in society, and for whom I entertained a sincere admiration. I told her, in brief the history of my acquaintance with Miss Hastings, and that I desired to make her my wife with as little delay as possible. Did she think the needful arrangements could be effected in a week? They should be, she said. Nora should be married from her house, and a week would be time enough in which to provide all that was immediately necessary. So it was settled.

The next day I gave Mrs. Lee notice that I should vacate my rooms at the end of the month. I never exchanged one word with her on the subject of Nora's sudden departure from her house. She had an undoubted right to let her rooms as she pleased. I sent her my wedding cards—it was my only revenge. Three years have passed since, and Nora, as bride and wife, has been to me all that I hoped, and more.

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Sheriff's Sale.

Notice of Sale.

Notice of Sale.

Notice of Sale.

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