

CONTINUED FROM TENTH PAGE.

ing at her small efforts at benevolence. He could not know the many hours she gave to schemes by which to aid her less lucky brethren with some of her own wealth or how much she had her welfare at heart and for a moment she was hurt.

Then the look on his face reassured her. She took out her car case and held up a slip of paper, keeping back a similar one in her own hand.

'This will leave St. George's tomorrow—'convalescent, but too weak to work; plumber; five children and delicate wife; poor home and unhealthy neighborhood.' She had been reading off from the slip; now she gave it into his hand. 'A nurse gave me that today; you can see into the case if you really wish,' she said, quietly. 'If not, please send it back to me. And now, once more, good-bye.'

'Thank you,' said Saxon. 'You are very good and you shall not have it back I promise you.'

He was as good as his word. He took the case thoroughly in hand, and the unfortunate plumber and his family had good cause to bless the day that brought them under the notice of Saxon March.

Nor was he satisfied with befriending them alone.

He insisted upon sharing all the good work undertaken by Joan.

She saw, too, that he was thoroughly in earnest about it.

No doubt a desire to stand well in her estimation was one thing which influenced him in his active philanthropy, and Joan was by no means blind to the fact.

But, apart from that, it was easy to see he took a genuine interest in this new phase of his life.

It was not without its effect on Joan. She had always admired him, had always felt sure that there were grand possibilities in his nature, and now that he was proving the truth of her conviction, her heart warmed towards him more and more.

He was not slow to see all this, and his own heart glowed with a warmth which was not that of satisfaction alone.

He had not begun to dream day-dreams, and to picture a future of happiness in which this queenly woman held no unimportant place.

But would the dreams be realized? Would the pictured happiness after all be his?

Who should say?

CHAPTER V.

Joan stood looking into a book-shop in the Strand, while Mrs. Nelson was in a box-office securing tickets for a new opera about to be brought out, and the sound of her own name at her elbow made her turn round.

'You, Miss Gower!' she said, quickly. 'I heard down at Ayleswood that you were in London. I almost wonder we have not met before.'

'Still busy with the music, I suppose?' she added, as she shook hands with the girl, a little amused at the smartness of the hat Lillias was wearing, and her self-possessed air.

'Music? No, thank goodness! Don't you know that I am engaged at one of the theatres? Oh, yes; I have been at the Regina a year now. Don't you ever go? I wonder you have not seen me!'

'I go very often, but not so much to the Regina. I am glad you are so fortunate, and I hope you like the life—you do not find it too trying?'

Lillias looked more fragile than in the old days, though she bore herself more proudly.

There was a much deeper tint of gold, now, in her flaxen hair, of which Joan, glancing down from her own superb height entertained suspicions, and her face was thinner and bore signs of hard work or late nights, or probably both.

'Oh, no, said Lillias.'

She did not tell her companion that she was only in the chorus of a musical comedy that had been running some months, and that she found the constant singing every night, and the two matinees every week—when she had barely time to rush back to her rooms and swallow some tea before returning to the theatre to begin all over again for the evening's performance—harder work even than the trying lessons to her pupils at Ayleswood.

She led her to believe she was on the highway to make a name upon the stage, and found the life an Elysium.

'And you play in your own name?' asked Joan. 'So many change it. I am sure I cannot see why.'

'Oh, yes, in my own. Gower is quite aristocratic enough, so I have kept it. Gower is quite a good old name, you know,' she said, seriously, and Joan checked an incipient smile, then, with another handshake, went off to rejoin Mrs. Nelson down the street.

'I met an old Ayleswood acquaintance by chance some days ago,' Joan said to Saxon March, when he called one day, as he did not infrequently in the pleasant May afternoons, or met Joan and her chaperon in the park during their morning walk. 'It was Lillias Gower.'

'I, too, have met her,' he said. 'I had not been in London three days before I—I ran against Miss Gower. Now, tell me if you really thought the new tenor as good as people try to make out? Weren't you the least bit disappointed in his singing?'

And the conversation drifted suddenly away from Lillias, and settled upon the opera instead.

As the summer wore on, it became plain to kindly little Mrs. Nelson where Saxon March was drifting to; and she wondered sometimes if her favourite, Joan, had not at last found her heart only to lose it as soon as found.

There was certainly a glance of keen, if quiet, interest in Joan's expressive face while she talked to him—a little softening sometimes in her eyes when he entered unexpectedly, that Mrs. Nelson had never noticed before in her young friend; and

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CURE SICK HEADACHE.

she was not so very surprised when, entering the drawing room quickly one hot day, she saw Saxon spring from a low seat by Joan's side, with evident traces of excitement of his face, and, truth to tell, a good deal of vexation, too, which he strove manfully to hide as he greeted her.

Joan was strangely silent, and a little pale and distrustful, all the evening after his departure, and went off early to her room, where a note, that came by the last post that night, was brought to her.

It was only a few words, in a man's firm clear writing.

'My dear Miss Armitage,—Much as I regret the interruption to our interview to-day, and anxious as I am to know my fate from your lips, I cannot but think, in fairness to yourself, that I ought to allow you a little time for reflection before asking asking my question again. I know that I took you by surprise to-day, therefore I shall say no word of my love until a week has passed; then I shall come again and seek your answer.'

Ever yours,
'Saxon March.'

Several days passed without his calling and Joan fancied he was keeping away that she might come to a decision, unbiased by his presence, and she thought it manly and honorable in him, and thanked him in her own mind for it.

Mrs. Nelson's entrance had certainly come at a most inopportune moment, for he had just imprisoned both her hands in his own sunburnt ones, and was striving to learn from her eyes the answer her lips seemed loth or unable to give, when his hostess' voice aroused them both, and brought Saxon, at least, down to the level of earth once more.

Joan had a great many engagements just then, and her time was well filled up. The week seemed slipping by rapidly to that eventful Monday, which would bring him back to ask his question anew.

On the Saturday, Joan and Mrs. Nelson went to the Lyceum in the evening, and it was like entering a new world to come back to the crowded street after being enthralled for three hours with the tragic fate of Marguerite in the quaint old-world German city.

Crowds were pouring out of every theatre into the hot July night as Joan came out of the entrance.

'I don't see our hansom near; suppose we wait a little way down instead of waiting,' she said, giving her arm to her smaller friend, and pulling her lace scarf lightly over her dark hair.

There was a little block of people opposite the Regina Theatre, crowding to the waiting carriages, and Joan drew back a step, just as a couple she knew came out from the Regina stage door, and crossed the pavement in front of her and Mrs. Nelson.

A glance showed her they were Saxon and Lillias Gower—Lillias leaning upon his arm, with a cloak thrown lightly round her shoulders, and her face still rouged and powdered as she had left the stage, and her blue eyes raised smilingly to his. 'Let us make haste home,' Joan heard her say; and then she saw Saxon give a commissionaire a shilling to secure a hansom, put Lillias carefully in, spring in himself, and give an address which the listener could not catch.

As the cab drove off, Joan turned quietly to her companion, who had noticed nothing of the incident, and who wondered a little at the chill that had settled down on the girl's face of a sudden.

'Let us bribe this man to get us a cab quick,' Joan said, opening her purse. 'It is so unpleasant in this crush, and I want to get home.'

The hours lagged all through the following day, although Joan had much to think about, and a very momentous decision to come to before to-morrow's interview.

Until last night that decision seemed settled, and Joan had felt herself drifting gently on, on quiet waters, with no sign or hint of breakers and rocks ahead; now she was upon them, and she felt that one false step might wreck her happiness for ever and not hers alone, but Saxon's also.

Perhaps it was a woman's natural jealousy that made her think far less in this crisis of Lillias Gower than of him.

Whatever it was, she found it very hard to think quietly, and with unprejudiced

mind, of a possible union between them, and the studied self-composure she had been striving hard all the morning to attain, lent her a very cold and formal air when she arose to greet Saxon March at last.

Mrs. Nelson, having some faint perception that something unusual was about to occur, directly went down to the dining room to arrange the vases on the table, and left Joan and the visitor undisturbed in the shady little drawing room.

Joan, with a great white Persian cat upon her knee, and had been sitting on a cushion on the balcony, an unopened book beside her; but she came in and stood by the mantel shelf now, one hand toying with a carving on it.

Saxon, a little nervous and his bronzed face perceptibly paler tried some conventional conversation at first, then suddenly found it impossible, and plunged into his real subject all at once.

He came beside her and touched her fingers lightly.

'Joan,' he said quickly; then, as she turned her pale face aside, he drew nearer still. 'Joan, dearest, you know all I would say, and words are difficult to find when I want to express so much—you know that I love you, and however, unworthy I am, have dared to hope. Joan will you marry me?'

There was dead silence for a moment, and Joan's white fingers slipped from his; then she turned gently towards him, and said, steadily—

'Forgive me if I hurt you, Mr. March, but it cannot be.'

'You do not love me?'

'There was keen disappointment in the tone, but she scarcely heard it.

'Perhaps I am too late dear. You will tell me if there is someone else more fortunate than I, will you not?'

'No,' said Joan, in a calm voice, and she stooped to caress the Persian's silky fur, as he stood rubbing against his mistress' white gown. 'No; there is no one else. And now, had we not better say "Good-bye"? You must pardon me, but I have an engagement I am obliged to keep. And we shall always be friends, I trust, shall we not?'

Saxon made no reply; what was stirring within him at that moment made words impossible, but it brought a hot flush into his face for a second or two, then left it very pallid, and his lips a little set.

'I will not detain you,' he said, in a low tone. 'I think I understand, and I will say "Good-bye." There is only one thing more I wish to say—to thank you sincerely for all your kindness to me during these weeks of our friendship. Believe me, I shall never, for one moment, forget your goodness, or cease to be grateful for it.'

And so Saxon went out, and Joan, forgetting the important engagement, was left alone to her own reflections.

December, and a deep snow without, but cheery voices and blazing wood fires in the big rooms of the Manor Farm; for Joan and Mrs. Nelson were once more installed there for Christmas.

Saxon had not been seen in the village since the summer, when he had come down and carried off his father suddenly, and together they had gone for a tour abroad. But during the last fortnight Joan had 'taken her courage in both hands,' and pocketing a good deal of pride, had sent off a letter to him through his London club.

Something about the atmosphere of the old house when she had re-entered it—some subtle softening as old memories stole over her, and stirred at her heartstrings that first night of her return—had changed many things to Joan, and brought a revelation with them.

Only then it occurred to her that Saxon might have misunderstood her refusal, and have put it down to the wrong cause—a misconception that it pained and humiliated her to think of.

'It is possible, as I gave you no reason at all for my decision, that you may impute to me one I had not dreamed of,' she wrote. 'If you should wish to know the real one, in justice to yourself, I feel bound to give it, and will now do so freely.'

She carefully abstained from village gossip, but it got somehow, to her ears that the rich Mr. March was still abroad, and there were no signs of his settling down with a wife, as they hoped he would soon see fit to do, and as his family so ungenially advocated for him.

But, on Christmas Eve, the village was surprised by his sudden return home to his father's house.

It was dusk in the low-ceiled room at the Manor Farm when he was announced, and Joan, with a throb of surprise, rose to meet him.

'I have come to thank you for your note, and to ask for what you offer me,' he said, as he released her hand. 'But I do not think I made any mistake—I think it was all clear enough to me.'

'And what was that?' asked Joan, gently.

'That you could not accept my love because of—of what?—what you saved me from so long ago. I do not blame you, dear, and I was too presumptuous. Heaven knows, I have tried hard to atone—'

The tears blurred Joan's eyes as she held out one hand quickly.

'Hush! It was not that—indeed it was not! I will keep my promise and tell you now. I thought you and Lillias Gower had some understanding or engagement between you, and it was only since I came back here that I fancied you might think I had that other thing in my mind—and I—I could not bear that you should imagine that.'

'You are very generous, Joan—but you always were, dear. But Lillias? What made you think of her? I assure you there is nothing between us, except that we were playmates once at the old school here, and she asked me to look her up in London for the sake of old days.' I only saw her three or four times—the last was when I went to see the piece at the Regina, and she saw me in the stalls. She

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was tired out and faint after singing, and begged me to see her home to her lodgings or she would have to go alone; since then I have not met her.'

'She had two of your photos years ago,' murmured Joan.

'Had she? Then Ralph gave her them, I've no doubt—they were always great chums; and I left lots of the photographs for him to distribute when I left more. But Joan, there was a reason why I could never give a second thought to Lillias. Can't you guess it? Try, dear one!'

'When I left you that night, so long ago, in a very agony of shame and remorse, I made a resolve, and I vowed that I would win back some, at least, of the esteem I had lost—that I would never come back and face you, Joan, unless I could say that one fall had been my only one, and that my life since then had been an atonement for that moment's madness. 'And I loved you even then, my darling—half-child half woman as you were, with your great sad eyes reproving me—I loved you, and vowed I would try and be worthy one day, even of you.'

Joan was a tall girl almost as tall, even as Saxon March, but somehow her dark head found an easy resting place upon his shoulder, and he had to stoop his face over hers, when he found it pleasant to whisper his next half dozen words very low and softly.

Add there was no need for Joan even to whisper back her reply at this 'second time of asking,' for her eyes and her rose-flushed face had confessed it already.

'Do you know what came into my mind that night when you let me go, Joan? I was saying to myself these words, and they are very beautiful, I think—

'I hold it true, with him who sings,
'To one clear harp, in divers tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things.'

THE JOKE WAS ON HERMANN.

How Bill Nye Turned the Tables on the Great Magician.

When Bill Nye, in collaboration with James Whitcomb Riley, was touring the country as a lecturer writes Perriton Maxwell in the June 'Success,' he stopped at a well known Chicago hostelry, one evening, and was escorted to a place in the big dining room directly across the table from a dark gentleman with a heavy, black mustachios, and a Mephistophelian goatee. Nye recognized his vis-a-vis as Hermann, the magician, but beyond a quizzical stare gave no sign that he knew the eminent prestidigitator. Hermann was very well aware that the bald man opposite him was Bill Nye, but did not indicate his recognition by word or manner. Hermann had, in fact, prepared a little surprise for the humorist, and several others seated at the table were in the secret.

Nye was about to lance a leaf from his salad, when he espied, lying beneath it, a superb and scintillant diamond, set in a very fine gold ring. Without showing the least surprise, he lifted the ring from the salad bowl, slipped it on his finger, conscious all the while that every eye was upon him, and, turning to Riley, who sat next to him, remarked, with his dry inimicable drawl:—

'Strange, how careless I am [getting to be in my old age James. I am forever leaving my jewels in unlikely places.'

Hermann was dumfounded at the sudden manner in which his trick had miscarried, but he was destined for a still greater shock; for, when the dark waiter who presided over the table brought on the next course, Nye turned to him and, sobriety handing him the gem-set ring, said:—

'You are a very good waiter, Joe?'

'Yes, sah. I guess I is, sah.'

'And you always will be a real good waiter, Joe?'

'Yes, sah. I'm bound ter do ma best, sah.'

'I believe you, Joe. I believe you; and as an evidence of my faith in you, I want you to accept this little trifle. Wear it, and always remember the man who most appreciated your services.'

The darky's eyes bulged. Hermann's fork rattled to the floor, and he tugged at his great mustachios, but was far too clever to cut in with an explanation at such an inopportune moment. There were half suppressed titters all around the board during the rest of the meal, which the professor of occult art did not appear to enjoy. At a late hour that night, Her-

mann was heard in loud argument with the dusky recipient of the diamond ring, trying, in two languages, to convince him that it was all a joke on the part of Mr. Nye. Finally after discharging a tip of more than customary liberality, Hermann got back his ring. He afterwards avowed the stone alone was worth two thousand dollars, and that Bill Nye's nonchalant presentation of it to a grinning manial had spoiled a whole evening's performance in legerdemain.

Reed Would Have Quit Congress.

'How do you feel,' Theodore Dreiser asked Thomas B. Reed in the June 'Success,' 'when the entire Democratic press of the country had pounced upon you for what it called your tyrannical [method of interpreting the rules of the] house of representatives?'

'Oh,' replied the ex-speaker, promptly, 'you mean, whether I was disturbed by the uproar? Well, I had no feeling, except one of entire serenity, and the reason was simple. I knew just what I was going to do if the house did not sustain me.'

Then he raised his eyes, and, with a characteristic twist of the mouth [which those who have once seen do not soon forget, added: 'When a man has decided upon a plan of action for either contingency there is no need for him to be disturbed, you know.'

'And may I ask what you had determined to do, if the house did not sustain you?'

'I should simply have left the chair, resigned the speakership, withdrawn from the house, and given up my seat in congress. There were things that could be done, you know, outside of political life. For my part, I had made up my mind that, if political life consisted in sitting helplessly in the speaker's chair, and seeing the majority powerless to pass legislation, I had had enough of it.'

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It's a good thing to have an extensive vocabulary, but it is not good to use it all in one advertisement.—New England Grocer.