

The Story Page.

"Six, and Half a Dozen."

They had been speaking of a married couple who were notoriously unhappy.

"Well," said cousin Octavia in her positive way, "I have visited around a great deal in my life, and I have come to the conclusion that 'incompatibility' is only a polite name for selfishness."

Humphrey Copeland and his wife Clarissa gave each other a glance that said, "If that is so, you are the selfish one in our case." It was not a pleasant glance to see, but cousin Octavia was too intent on her subject to notice it, even if she had not been very near-sighted.

"Yes," she continued energetically, "and ninety-nine times in a hundred the selfishness is not confined to one side of the house; for then the unselfish one always yields to the other, and there is no friction. It is when both husband and wife are selfish that there is trouble and incompatibility, depend upon it."

Humphrey and Clarissa did not glance at each other this time, but the expression of their faces showed that they dissented entirely from this last assertion.

Cousin Octavia had not the slightest suspicion that what she said could have a personal application, for she cherished the belief that no two people could be more perfectly satisfied with each other than Humphrey and Clarissa.

They themselves were wiser. In public they still kept up a semblance of mutual regard, for pride's sake, but in their secret hearts they bitterly regretted their marriage; and when no one was by they had for each other only cold looks and unkind speeches.

Octavia's words set them thinking, and lingered in their minds after she had ended her call. They brooded over them, indeed long after they had retired for the night.

Clarissa at first insisted to herself that she was not in the least selfish, but on further reflection was forced to admit a few exceptions to this rule. She determined that in the future there should be no exceptions. Not that she thought it would make any perceptible difference, but because it was annoying to feel that she was ever so little in fault. She would treat Humphrey very nicely besides, so that he would have absolutely nothing to complain of. Then he would see that he was the only one to blame.

Humphrey convinced himself that he was in the main one of the most unselfish of men, but that Clarissa cared for nobody in the world but herself. Nevertheless, he decided to watch himself very carefully for awhile, and prove to his own satisfaction, if to no one's else, that his cousin was wholly mistaken in her conclusions.

Having thus settled their doubts and questionings, their minds were at rest and they fell asleep.

Humphrey was awakened in the morning by Clarissa's calling him to breakfast. Usually he disregarded this summons until there was barely time for him to dress, snatch a few mouthfuls of food and get his car. This morning he recalled his new resolution and sprang out of bed at once, remembering that Clarissa liked to have him come when her carefully-prepared breakfast was at its best, and was exceedingly annoyed when he didn't.

"Perhaps there is no more to this than I supposed," he meditated. "In order to make thorough work of it I have got to put myself entirely aside, and make it my business to please her in everything—to please the unpleasant," he added sarcastically.

When he went downstairs he found that Clarissa was going to have buckwheat cakes, and as soon as he appeared she began to cook them. Humphrey was very fond of buckwheats, but Clarissa hated to make them. She would scold about the smoke, and he would object to her opening the windows because it let in so much cold air.

This time it was different.

"Shan't I open the window and let out the smoke?" Humphrey asked politely.

"If you will not feel the cold," she answered with equal politeness.

Then he opened the windows.

"Hadin't you better begin now?" said Clarissa sweetly. "This cake will never be quite so good again."

"I will wait for you, if you don't mind," replied Humphrey. "It will be pleasant, eating together."

After they had breakfasted, Clarissa remembered that she wanted Humphrey to order a piece of meat. "I suppose you'd make a point of forgetting, if I should ask you to do an errand," would very likely have been her resentful way of speaking twenty-four hours previously. "Would it be too much trouble for you to stop at the market as you go along?" she said now.

It rose to Humphrey's lips to answer shortly, "Yes, it would," but he checked himself just in time. "No

bother at all," he said cheerfully. "What shall I order?" and when she told him, "Is there nothing else?" Then he took particular pains to remember.

Humphrey always ate dinner at a restaurant, so Clarissa had the whole day to herself. "Now what can I do to please him?" she asked with a sigh, when the work was done and she had made herself and the house immaculately nice. Immediately there came to mind a family record that Humphrey wanted copied. He had asked her to do it because her handwriting was so plain. She had put off doing it, perversely, for nearly a year, and he had upbraided her more than once for the delay.

She went and got the record. She knew then but for her resolve of the night before she would have put off the copying still longer, and done it carelessly at last. Neither her pens nor her ink seemed quite good enough, now, and she went to a nearby druggist's to get new. Then she did the work in the very best style.

Meantime, at his place of business, Humphrey was thinking of a concert there was to be that evening. He blushed to find that he was really gloating over the pleasure he would have in refusing to take Clarissa, who was intensely fond of music, for he was sure she would say something about it, and say it spitefully. Clarissa had been thinking of the concert, also, and feeling injured beforehand because she knew he would not take her.

Almost the first thing he said on entering the house was: "Don't you want to go to the concert, Clarissa?" To tell the truth, she was a bit disappointed at the loss of her grievance, and was on the point of answering sourly, "Of course, I do, but I know well enough you won't take me."

"I've been wishing I could go, all the afternoon," she said pleasantly.

"Well, I have the tickets, so you will have your wish." So they went, and Humphrey did not grumble when Clarissa was two minutes behind him in getting ready, and Clarissa assured him there was no harm done when he stepped on the skirt of her dress in coming out of the concert hall.

When they got home, Clarissa brought out her copy of the family record.

"Why, that is beautifully done," he exclaimed, looking at it admiringly. "I am very much obliged."

So the day passed, and in a similar way the next, and the next, till a week had gone by, and in all that time there had been no cross words or unkind acts. Still, all this politeness was on the outside merely; Humphrey and Clarissa continued to wish that fate had never brought them together. If the truth were told, they were really disappointed that everything had gone so smoothly. They decided all the more to go on with the experiment, each with the unacknowledged hope that the other would relapse into the old way, and thus prove cousin Octavia in the wrong.

So the next week was one of thoughtful courtesy, also. But now there was a difference; Humphrey and Clarissa began to feel more kindly toward each other, and each was surprised, near the end of the week, to find that the reunion after the day's work was done was looked forward to with pleasure.

In the third week Humphrey and Clarissa made a rather remarkable discovery; that the love with which they had begun their married life was not dead, as they had supposed. Each longed to know if the other had discovered the same thing, yet shrank from speaking it; their dimensions were still too recent.

The third week passed, and then came a catastrophe. It was Sunday, and they were preparing for church. Humphrey was ready first, and waited downstairs for Clarissa. At last she entered the room where he was. He glanced at her approvingly, till his eyes rested on her head, and then he forgot himself.

"Is that the new bonnet you have said so much about?" he demanded, in a tone of scornful wonder.

"Yes, it is," she answered snappishly, forgetting herself in her irritation at his tone.

"Humph!" he said. It was only a word, but it expressed paragraphs.

"I suppose that means you don't like it," she returned spitefully; "but I don't care for that. I shall continue to wear it just the same."

Humphrey remembered himself and was silent. Then suddenly Clarissa snatched the bonnet from her head, flung it on a chair, and hurried out of the room.

Humphrey stood still for an instant, then followed her. He found her just the other side of the door, crying into her handkerchief.

"Don't!" he pleaded, putting his arm around her. "I take it all back, about the bonnet."

"It isn't the old bonnet," she sobbed. "It is because I am so hateful, and so selfish."

"Well, I am abominably selfish."

"But I try so hard not to be, and it seems to do no good at all."

"I try, too. That is all we can do, keep on trying. Rome wasn't built in a day."

"But I'm afraid you will get to hating me again. I was the one to blame."

"No," he interrupted her, "I was the one."

Clarissa laughed.

"I don't see but what we shall have to compromise, and let it go that we were both to blame."

"And that cousin Octavia was right," said Humphrey, finishing the sentence.

The church bell began to ring, and Clarissa dried her eyes. Then Humphrey brought her bonnet from the chair and helped her put it on. After which they went to church, happier than they had been for many months.—Elizabeth Robbins, in N. Y. Observer.

The Story of a Heliotrope.

BY J. L. H.

How would any little girl who reads this like to be the only little girl in a whole town? To be sure, Timberline wasn't a very large town; there were but three or four hundred people in it; but Maida Haven was the only little girl in the place.

Timberline was the name of a mining town, or camp, away up near the top of one of the most dreary and desolate of the Rocky Mountains. It was on the slope of the mountain just at the point where it was too rocky and barren even for trees to grow, and that was why they called it Timberline.

The houses were all of rough logs, and few of them had more than one room, with one door and one window. Mr. Haven, Maida's father, had built a rough little log cabin about like the others, and had sent back to Ohio for his wife and little girl to come and live in it with him. Few of the miners and prospectors living in the new mining town of Timberline had sent for their families. They said that Timberline "wasn't no fit place for wimmen an' children;" but Mrs. Haven insisted on being with her husband, and, as she was not very strong, the doctor said the bracing air of the mountains would do her good.

So one June day when the rumbling old stage slowly made its way up to Timberline, Mrs. Haven and Maida, then ten years old, and you may be sure they were warmly welcomed, and the novelty of their surroundings, and their joy at meeting Mr. Haven, made them think that Timberline was quite a pleasant little town, dreary as its every aspect was.

"What have you wrapped up so carefully in that paper?" asked Mr. Haven of Maida, soon after they arrived at the little cabin.

"That," said Mrs. Haven in reply, "is a little slip of heliotrope that the child just would bring with her all the way from home; she had a large, beautiful plant of it all in full bloom, and it was the only thing she cried about leaving. She teased so to bring a little slip of it, that I put one in a little pot for her, and she has watched it all the way as if it were a baby. I told her I didn't think it would live in this climate."

"I don't know why not," said Mr. Haven. "We have sunshine here almost every day in the year, and the window of our cabin is on the sunny side. I'm glad my little girl brought it. A bit of something green growing in the window will brighten the old cabin up wonderfully, and it reminds me of the old home more than anything else could."

So Maida was very glad she had brought the bit of heliotrope with her, and it was wonderful how the little slip grew; for the sun came in, warm and bright, through the little window, almost every day, and the plant grew steadily.

It was never very warm away up there on the mountain tops, but on the warmest days Maida set the little pot out on a flat rock before the door, where it grew and swayed gently in the soft mountain air. But it had to be taken in every night, for a heavy frost in midsummer was not an uncommon thing up there at Timberline.

Mrs. Haven hung a pair of snowy white curtains at the little window, and put the thrifty little plant between them, its dark, pretty leaves showing effectively against the white background.

It was the only plant there was in the town. The few women there were in the little dreary camp would go out of their way, as they went to and from "the store," to see the plant. It had "such a homely look," one of them said; and the miners going by the cabin noticed the flower, and some of them said to Maida:

"Where'd you git yer possey, little gal?"

One of them offered her ten dollars for it; but she said "no" very soberly, for Mr. Haven was a poor man, and ten dollars was a little fortune in Maida's eyes. The first bunch of delicate feathery blossoms that came on the plant was cut off very carefully and tenderly by Maida, and carried to a neighboring cabin to lay in the tiny waxen hand of a little boy baby who had lived but a week.

When the next blossoms came, a minister going over the mountains in a missionary spirit came to Timberline and began preaching in a deserted cabin. His pulpit stand was an inverted dry-goods box with a colored tablecloth over it; and every Sunday Maida's heliotrope, with its bunches of feathery flowers, added its charm and gracefulness to the little pulpit.

When October came the plant now tall and thrifty, was one mass of exquisitely beautiful and fragrant flowers.

One day the owner of the only valuable mine at Timberline came to the little camp. He brought with him his young wife, a handsome lady, who had begged to come to a real mining camp; and her husband had laughingly consented to bring her, warning her beforehand that she would have to "rough it" for the few days they were to stay in the place.

The day after their arrival she was taken dangerously ill. They sent twenty miles for a doctor, and did all they could for the suffering woman, but for several days her life was despaired of, and, when she was at last pronounced out of danger, the doctors said it would be several weeks before she could be moved.

"She'll have a pretty dreary time of it down there in that little old hotel," said a woman to Mrs. Haven.

"It is indeed a poor place for any one to be sick in," said Mrs. Haven, "but I don't see how it could be fixed up much now. Her husband has sent to Denver for everything he could think of, but it'll be some time before they get here. I've been down and fixed things up the best I could."

It was an unusually warm day for October, and Maida's heliotrope was out on the flat bowlder in the bright sunshine; she went slowly out to it, and said softly and earnestly:

"Yes, you'll have to go. I don't know how I'm ever

to give you up, you mor'n I do. There were tears were still minutes later, softly, and Maida's hands.

"Here," she said there was wasn't it? So I ain't it? "O John!"

it lovely? Where did she suppose the beautiful girl to think

"What is you?" Maida Haven

"Oh! you're at the mine, and your father's day and good little

"You can't t up," said the lady already. You a good, and you n

"A little Sam going home. Si old, but could n least like him.

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The heliotrope weeks, when Mrs next wealth of bl first bride ever m

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men are far awa things that bring good and helpfu think myself that slonary."—Sunda

Rev. J.

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