

THE IDEAL LADY

(By Kathleen Gilbert.)

The station was crowded. The outgoing train had not a vacant seat; distracted ladies flew from door to door, tearing them open, and before even looking to see if the car contained an empty place they impatiently to the next. There were, of course, the usual number of people to whom it was necessary that this particular train should not be missed, and who preferred to stand to being left lamenting on the platform.

Among these the catching of this train meant much to a tall, slender, brown-eyed girl who jumped with agility upon the platform almost as the train started. Entering the car, she opened a book and stood with an expression of determination to stand or die.

She had not closed the door behind her before she had recognized in a seat near her a youth who had often given up his seat for her before. She had not read a word of her book before he had risen, with a cheerful smile, and pointed to his vacant place.

In course of time the other passengers alighted, one by one, and these two found themselves almost alone.

It was a glorious autumn evening, about 6 o'clock. She sat in her corner, her head bent over her book, the vivid colors of the setting sun turning her brown hair into red gold. He sat in the corner opposite, his eyes riveted on her. She had taken off her gloves and her slim white fingers clasped her book; she had so that her face was three-quarters toward him, her head bent, and her simple cotton gown falling gracefully about her.

Unaware of his intent scrutiny, she started in surprise when, suddenly moving to the seat opposite her, he spoke. "I beg your pardon—but if I asked you to think it very queer of me if I asked you to let me draw you? Just now, as you sit there?"

She raised her eyes and looked at him. She had considered him a mere everyday young man, but now she could see a sensitive, dreamy expression in his eyes and around his mouth that stamped him an artist. She was so surprised that she could say nothing, and he went on: "I really wouldn't be a bother to you, you see—and you don't know what it would mean to me."

He had already whipped out notebook and pencil and his long fingers switched as though anxious to begin. She looked at him with a chilly smile. "It's a very odd thing to ask," she began icily.

"You know I need not have said anything at all about it. But I did not like to do that—it would have seemed like stealing."

There was something so astonishing in this shy boy becoming bold that the girl laughed in spite of herself.

"Very well," she said, and dropping her eyes on her book, apparently gave up her whole attention to her book.

But the book might have been upside down for all she could make of it. The words danced about in front of her, and the sentences jumbled themselves together. It was with the greatest exertion of will power that she kept her eyes lowered, at all. She longed to see what those clever looking fingers would make of her.

At last her station was reached. "Oh—don't!" came in a voice of such heart-breaking appeal, as she prepared to depart.

"This is my station; I am going," she said, as the train began to slacken speed. "Oh, no. Not just yet," he cried, with a ring of despair in his voice.

Endeavoring to feel angry, the girl looked up at him once more. She would never have thought his face capable of such expression and power. While she looked she hesitated; the train had stopped. She still sat on.

They say that he—she—who hesitates is lost; the whistle shrieked, the train gave a jerk and began to glide away. She gave a sigh, a burning flush spread over her face and she sank back relaxed into her corner. He drew on almost savagely, covering page after page of the note book with the rough ideas.

It was not until the next station was reached and he opened the door and stepped out to assist her that he spoke. "I shall never forget what you have done for me today," he said. "I only hope you will forgive me."

When next he met, some long months after, they stood side by side before a picture—the picture. It was a soiree given at a private view of a certain art exhibition and the young artist from whom he stood hungrily watching the different of-

fects his work had on the more or less casual spectators, had suddenly turned his head to the door and seen her come in. She had walked straight to his end of the gallery, and stood motionless before the picture.

He came to her side and with something like an apology for speaking on his face, began: "Excuse me—but I knew, I felt you would come this evening."

She colored slightly, and gave him a little, distant bow.

Then she looked at the picture.

There was the flaming sunset, just as she remembered it, with its vivid reds lighting up the face of a girl sitting by a window, a book in her two white hands. There was a simplicity about the pose and dressing of the picture that might easily cause it to be passed by as a mere excellent piece of detail work, unless one looked long at the face of the girl. Then one could see she had just raised her eyes, with her lips parted to speak. She seemed to meet the gaze of each person with a wondering yet half-haughty expression. There was a mysterious, nameless fascination in the beautiful brown eyes, in which lay the reason for the whole picture.

"Do you like her?" asked the young artist, eagerly.

"No, as a portrait of myself," the girl answered.

"Oh, why not?"

"You have used too much of the ideal lady you were thinking of," she answered, "and too little of the flesh and blood me."

He looked from one to the other critically, then said, bluntly: "I see what you mean; all the same I don't think so. That is you to me."

They stood before the picture a few minutes longer, then he said: "There are some good miniatures in the little room over there; will you come and see them?"

She looked around; her family had wandered away, so she figuratively snatched her fingers at the prudent, prim self who wanted to make her listen to the voice of Mrs. Grundy, and took his proffered arm.

They went to this room, but they took very little notice of the "gems." He pushed a chair forward, and she obediently sat in it.

"I really feel I ought to say something about the very unusualness of my proceeding, that day last year," he said; "only I don't know where to begin."

"Oh, it's all done now," she said, hurriedly. "It cannot be helped."

"It was an irresistible impulse to draw you," he began.

"Oh! but that's not me," she said firmly. "I really make no pretensions of being that girl. She is far too beautiful, too weirdly beautiful," she finished, frankly.

"I don't quite understand it," she added, reflectively; "there is a mystery in that face, something that I believe will haunt me till I know the meaning. Will you explain it to me?"

"It is unexplainable," he answered, quietly.

"It was a great liberty to take with my face," she said, laughing rather hysterically, "putting riddles into my eyes, which generally I am afraid, speak things all too clearly."

Presently he looked up at her with something of the boyish expression once more on his face.

"It is a curious thing," he said musingly, "our being thrown together in this way. I suppose you would scout the idea of affinity of souls, and all that—bosh!"

"Oh, dear, yes," she said pushing her chair back quickly.

"You don't think, then, for instance," he went on solemnly, "that we two—might end in—"

She rose hurriedly, not trusting the expression on the earnest boyish face, nor indeed the somewhat rapid beating of her own heart.

"Good gracious no," she said sternly. "Why, we have never been introduced."

There was a second's pause. Then he held out his arm.

"Will you allow me to take you back to the other room, just while I go and fetch one of the reception committee?"

And before she realized what he was doing, he left her for a moment, returning with a hurried looking gentleman with a white badge on his coat, who, after audibly asking both their names, said politely:

"Miss Dennison—may I present Mr. Richard Orme to you?" and vanished.

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