

A LADY OF THEORIES.

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In Athenetown the towers of the State university buildings and the chimneys of the great leather factories are equally prominent in the landscape in like manner, the wealthy manufacturers and the dignified professors are equally prominent in the social life of the city.

Mrs. Wilson—whose husband is the professor of political economy and sociology at the college—is a lady of theories. One of her theories touches upon the brotherhood of man and the just division of property.

"Besides," she argued, "should I not strive to make those who labor for me comfortable, rather than stray visitors who are not half so tired at the end of the day as my Jenny is?"

Both of these statements were true. Before very long, Jenny, neat, deft and always amiable, made a reputation in the housekeeping circles of Athenetown, where everybody knows everybody else's affairs.

When housekeepers, far-sighted and fortunate, were hard put for the services of a waitress, Mrs. Wilson very amiably lent her treasure.

Soon Jenny was playing maid in the dressing room of Mrs. Leading Manufacturer Hardy—when that lady gave a reception; she had waited on the table at Mrs. German Professor von Schmitt's first big dinner; and had gained a familiar knowledge of various other leading houses.

It was in the early part of November that Athenetown began to enjoy its annual riot of initiations and hazing.

But, strange to say, the annual orgy of silliness provoked comparatively little comment in faculty circles. There were a few perfunctory warnings against rowdiness, a few routine reminders of the purpose of college life, but nothing more.

The truth was that Athenetown, at this time, was too much excited over a series of skillful robberies to bother much about the inevitable autumn outbreak of ruffianism.

Mrs. Letheridge had lost a pearl collar; Mrs. Hardy a set of diamond ornaments; Mrs. von Schmitt, some rare sapphires collected by her mother-in-law. Silver safes had been rifled of their contents in half a dozen houses before Thanksgiving day.

The police in all the surrounding cities were notified to be on the lookout for the stolen property.

"You've escaped entirely, haven't you?" said Mrs. Webster (the "faculty bride" of the year) to Mrs. Wilson, as the two ladies sat at their luncheon in the latter's sunny dining room.

"I haven't anything worth taking," laughed Mrs. Wilson. "It's one of the advantages of poverty. But neither have you lost anything, have you?"

The faculty bride nodded. "Yes, I have. Our house was entered last night—please don't say anything about it, for I have more hope of an arrest if the news is not bruited abroad. They—or he—took a lot of trinkets. We hope to trace them, however, by means of a set of old-fashioned topazes which were stolen. They are unmistakable, it happens, and their description was telegraphed all over the country this morning."

"But the thief will not try to dispose of them in their settings, will he? And when they are removed—"

"It's the stones themselves that are unmistakable," answered the bride, as Jenny came in to remove the salad plates. "They are very remarkable. In the heart of each there is a defect that makes, if you examine it under the microscope, a tiny, starry radiation. Every leading jeweler and pawnshop keeper in the neighborhood has been informed. They were stolen once before from my mother—they were hers—and we recovered them just because of these defects. In fact, a gentleman is now serving a sentence in Joliet for failing to know this little secret."

Mrs. Wilson looked half-reproachfully at her guest. "Ah," she said, "dishonesty is, of course, dreadful, but do you ever stop to think of the injustice that are the parents of it; the inequalities of property, of hap—"

Mrs. Webster interrupted her hostess with a good-natured laugh as Jenny brought in the coffee.

"I have heard about your theories," she said, "but I confess I'm a bit old-fashioned on this subject of property. By the way, what a perfect waitress you have! Wherever did you find such a treasure in Athenetown?"

Mrs. Wilson proudly proclaimed that Jenny was the result of her belief in her fellow beings.

The bride looked thoughtfully at the waitress when she next glided into the room.

"I've seen her somewhere," she said; "I wonder where? Oh, I remember. Out beyond the town, on the edge of the oak woods. I was coming in from a ride and she was kneeling, digging at something in the ground."

"Very likely," answered Jenny's employer indifferently. "She goes for a walk every afternoon if she has leisure, and she sometimes does a little botanizing. She's a very superior girl and a good deal of a student. I have never seen any one who glorified manual labor as she does."

Then the ladies wandered into the library, and Jenny cleared off the table. She did not go out botanizing that afternoon. She sat in her room sewing, instead.

The linings of a neat waist were ripped, a thin layer of cotton batting was laid against the dress material, and to this were neatly secured, with a few invisible stitches, many tiny packages covered with oiled silk. Then another layer of cotton batting covered these and the lining was again adjusted.

When she had finished her sewing (in which she exhibited the same neatness and dispatch that she displayed in her household duties), she passed her hand caressingly over her bodice and smoothed out and arranged another one in her bureau drawer. She then took out a clean cap, collar, and cuffs, to brighten her black gown.

That night, before she went to bed, Jenny carefully examined a leather case which was none the worse for having been buried.

She pressed the spring and looked earnestly at the shining yellow stones in their old-fashioned settings.

"Lucky I heard about that star-shaped defect," she said to herself. "Guess I'll send them back—it would be a joke." She looked carefully at the stones, but could not see, with her naked eyes, the telltale marks. Then she yawned, locked the door, opened the window, and crept into bed, leaving the leather case upon her bureau. She was awakened from a light sleep by the sound of a creaking board and a gently raised window.

She knew that there was some one in the room. She held her breath for a while and heard in the stillness the sound of some one breathing.

A button near the head of the bed controlled the electric light, and her hand slid gently and cautiously toward it. As it moved she heard the clock on the old meeting-house chime two.

There was nothing cowardly about Jenny. She snapped the button and sat up straight in bed.

As the burglar swung around—a tall fellow, with his mouth and chin covered by a black muffer, and a soft hat pulled low over his forehead—she again slid her hand under the pillow. In an instant a revolver confronted him. Jenny looked toward the bureau; the jewel case had vanished.

"Stay where you are," she said in a low, cautious voice, keeping him covered with her pistol as she slipped out of bed and made a few steps toward the door.

"I beg your pardon, madam," the burglar whispered. "I assure you that I am not what I seem. You'll regret it if you alarm the household. Surely you cannot have lived here long and failed to hear that initiations are sometimes very—er—peculiar?—"

"Oh!" said Jenny. She favored him with a long stare and weighed his words carefully. "What initiation is taking place tonight?"

"Lady," said the burglar pleadingly—and the dissyllable and the whine with which it was uttered destroyed Jenny's shortlived tendency toward credulity—"I'm sworn not to tell and not to let any one know that I am not a regular thief. My stunt is to rob some one of something, to get away with the goods, and to show them to the initiators as proof."

His eyes, quick and furtive under his soft hat, measured the distance to the window. Jenny smiled and shook her head. But the hand that held the weapon did not shake.

"Don't move, or I'll shoot," she said calmly—"I mean it. I'm not bluffing. You can explain all about the initiation to Professor Wilson."

And, with eyes and pistol still pointed unflinching at him, she backed toward the door, opened it with her free hand, and filled the hall with a loud call for help.

The burglar sprang toward the window. A bullet struck his arm.

The next one will not be in your sleeve," said Jenny tartly. Then, as the room filled with people and the professor of political economy grappled with the intruder, she added modestly:

"Well, I hope that this ends the Athenetown burglaries. Though this man declares that this is only an initiation trick."

It was quite clear to the community that the intrepid little waitress' captive was indeed the skillful burglar who had kept them all on the anxious seat for two months. For they found, concealed upon his person, the very set of topazes which had been stolen from Mrs. Webster the night before. The burglar's stream of profane abuse of women, his wild denunciation of his captor, his crazy asseveration that he had found the jewels in the treasure room, only injured his cause and made his hasty conviction more certain.

"It's a wonder you don't say that you found them in Professor Wilson's safe, you impudent creature," said Jenny with great warmth.

When, a month of two later, Jenny left Mrs. Wilson's employ and went home to Canada to recover from the effects of the shock, a band of grateful souls of College Hill presented her with a silver toilet set in recognition of her plucky capture of the thief.

Making It Personal. It is sad to see family relics sold at auction, but the most painful thing under the hammer is generally your thumbnail.

Curious Tolerance. It's a funny thing, though, that no one ever seems to be bored when money does talk, no matter how long it talks.

Taking No Chances. At a Scotch watering place one summer, Macpherson was found stretched in a contented mood on the sands, puffing his old pipe. "Come on, Mac," said his companion, who had just come from town, "let's go for a sail." "Na, na," replied Macpherson, slowly shaking his head, "I hae had a guid dinner at the cost 'o three and saxpence, an' I'm takin' no risks."

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