

THE STREETS OF LIFE

By HAZEL DEVO BATCHELOR

An Unexpected Guest

Cherry's childhood is shadowed by her mother's suicide and the fact that it was done because Alice Carter could not bear to see her father whip her for a trivial thing.

She felt shy about meeting John Porterfield again; shy because of the things she had thought about him, the dreams she had woven about him.

It was with a curious little sense of shock that she heard of his having left town to take a position for the summer. In no time he was going to college and so she was left alone.

Cherry said, putting in a row of fine, even stitches in a piece of underwear that she was making and holding her handwork up to admire it.

"Like to?" Anne's tone was breathless. "You know how I'd love it."

"Well, why don't you try?" Anne shook her head slowly. She knew how impossible it was if Cherry didn't.

When Anne got home from Cherry's that evening, she found the house in a pleasant bustle of excitement. Aunt Martha's face was not so grim as usual, and there was a smell of spice cake in the air, and of steaming chicken.

Aunt Martha was beating biscuits at the kitchen table by the window when Anne came in and she looked up and said almost agreeably:

"Hurry upstairs, Anne, and put your white dress on."

Anne stared. Through the kitchen door she could see the dining-room table set with a blue willow ware. Some yellow asters in an old luster vase were in the middle of the table, which was set for four.

"Who is coming?" she asked breathlessly. "Your father is bringing home a guest," her aunt returned. "Hurry, now, and get ready."

And Anne went slowly upstairs, a pleasant sense of something about to happen giving her an unusual thrill of excitement.

She took the white dress out of the closet and spread it reverently over the bed. It was a very plain, white dress, untruffled, and made with a high neck and long sleeves.

But it gave Anne a sun-like appearance that was wonderfully becoming, although she did not know it. She brushed out her thick brown hair and pulled it out around her face.

Ordinarily she would not have dared to do this. Tonight the excitement of anything out of the general routine urged her on.

Her hair curled in fascinating little brown ringlets about her throat and temples. It turned her from a rather serious-faced young girl to a ravishing little witch, with big gray eyes that were dark with mystery and unawakened youth.

The white dress fell about her in soft folds. The material was good, Aunt Martha believed in buying the best for economy's sake, and under the sheer material crossed like a surprise over the breast Anne's heart beat quickly with excited anticipation.

Tomorrow, Anne meets the stranger.

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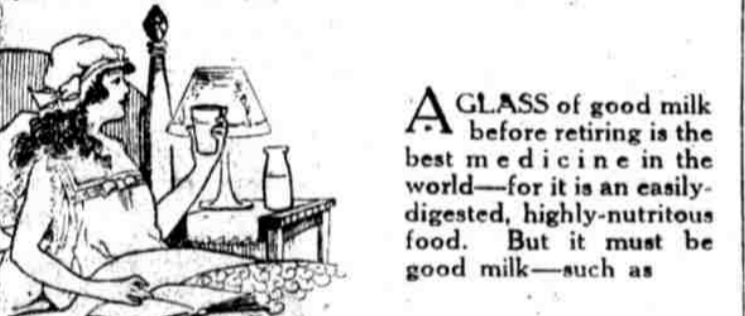
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