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JOSEPH HANNAFORD'S WIFE

RESPONSIBILITY had come to Joseph Hannaford early in life, for he was not more than sixteen when his father died, and left his mother and his young sister to his keeping. There was property enough for them all, to be sure; but it was chiefly in land and stock, and needed Joseph's vigilant superintendence to make it profitable. This superintendence he gave faithfully and willingly, and never once complained that to do so forced him to resign sundry secretly cherished personal ambitions of his own. But all this responsibility wrought its own work upon his nature—made him provident, thoughtful, calculating, thrifty—precisely an old young man.

This state of things continued for ten years. Then his sister married, and removed to the next town. His mother desired to accompany her, and was only prevented by the difficulty which attended obtaining a suitable housekeeper for Joseph.

You perceive, therefore, that at twenty-six Mr. Joseph Hannaford was just in a position where marriage became convenient and desirable. Otherwise, I rather think, he was quite too well disciplined to have cherished any idle fancies or importunate longings.

Whether, before this epoch, he had ever suffered any transient thoughts to wander in the direction of Miss Carrie Fay, who had been growing towards her sweet womanhood not very far away from his door, I cannot conjecture. I only know that about this time he began to discover that her eyes were blue, and her hair golden, her cheeks were flower of the peach, and her lips blossomed with a sweetness which he longed to taste. He told her these things in some discreet fashion of his own, and she—he was her first lover, and the right of discovery has gone for a good deal in all ages.

Every one said he was making a great mistake. The neighbors thought they knew what he wanted a great deal better than he himself did; and were sure that a good, strong, thrifty girl, used to working and saving, would be just the one for him. Carrie was pretty, and fanciful, and dainty. She was an orphan; but an uncle, who had no children of his own, had kept her feeling from any sense of loneliness or desolation by his constant and fatherly kindness. Under his roof she had grown up to seventeen years, and at that period the old young man came along, and wooed and won her.

Her uncle felt secretly uncomfortable, for he understood just what Carrie was better than any one else did; and he knew that it would be no easy matter to make a working-bee out of a golden-winged butterfly. But, on the other hand, Carrie was evidently in love with her suitor; and Mr. Hannaford was certainly well-to-do—quite able to marry to please himself, and make his wife comfortable in her own way afterwards.

So, in due time, the wedding took place, and Carrie Hannaford went away to her new home, where, before very long, a change came over the spirit of her dream.

She had begun by first idealizing, and then adoring her lord and master. He was, certainly, well-looking, in a kind of regular massive way. His face had in it not much suggestion of sentiment. His eyes were clear and shrewd, though kind; and his lips were firm and rather thin. He knew beauty when he saw it, but he would never be ruled through his senses. His features were well-shaped. There was power in his face. He was a man who knew how to say no to himself and to others. There was a manly vigor and symmetry in his well-knit frame; and, in short, he possessed a good many of the attributes which go to the making up of a

girl's hero. But Mistress Carrie reckoned without her host when she proposed to make a post-matrimonial lover of him.

He evidently did not believe in connubial love-making. Philandering, as he called it, was not to his taste. Courting was very well in its way. It had not been without its shy delights, even for him. But they were married now, and it was time to settle down, and begin life as they could hold out. Their wedding-day was in September; and when the late October winds blew away the sapless, withered leaves, Carrie felt as if her hopes, which had blossomed so fairly, were blowing with the leaves, and withered as they, down the wind.

She was a conscientious, well-intentioned little creature, and she tried her best to put aside all these feelings, which she taught herself to believe were morbid and ungrateful. She was constantly striving to justify Joseph, making little pleas for him at the bar of her heart. He was nine years older than she; it would not be natural for him to have so much romance. Of course he loved her; why also would he have married her? What a goose she was to expect of a big, strong, busy man the little softnesses which belong to and delight women. Then she would try to be brave; make a pretty little toilet, perhaps; wear the dress and the ribbons he had praised six months ago; and meet him, her eyes bright with hope, her cheeks pink with expectation. Was he blind to all this—such an old young man that the sweet devices of youth had no longer for him any language? At any rate, he made no sign.

How dull, and proxy, and commonplace were the long winter evenings which they passed together. They got through supper and were seated before the Franklin stove in their little sitting-room, at six o'clock, punctually; and there for three mortal hours they sat in unbroken quiet, he reading his newspapers through and through, and she watching him, and wondering, wondering whether life was to go on at this dead level forever. Punctually as the clock struck nine, he would get up, light his lantern, and go his nightly rounds among cows, and oxen, and horses. Then he would come in, take off his boots, leisurely warm his feet at the open fire, and go to bed. She grew to hate the precise epoch at which he pulled off his boots. It seemed to her that just up to that pass she could bear on silently, but as if then she must utter some outcry, or silence and constraint would choke her.

Once or twice she made some few forlorn attempts to better the condition of things—brighten them up, if possible. Once she planned the beguilement of a little supper. Having made all ready beforehand, while he was out upon his evening round she stewed some oysters and brewed some coffee, fondly fancying her small feast would be a success; but the wise old young man would not see the fun. He did not believe in oysters at bedtime; they would disagree with him, he knew. As for coffee, he was sure a single cup would keep him awake all night; but if Carrie could take such things at nine o'clock, and not have them hurt her, he had not the slightest objection. So, with no heart to taste it herself, she carried away her little treat; and if a few tears cooled the coffee she had poured for him in vain, he, at least, was none the wiser.

Slowly the winter wore away—the long, sad season of snows and rains. Birds came back from overseas, and began to sing. Violets opened shy blossoms. Grass-blades sprang up greenly; and even Carrie Hannaford brightened with the brightening of nature, and began to remember that she herself was young.

One day in May, her husband came to her with the proposal that they should take a summer boarder. He put the matter in the most ungracious way, as is the matrimonial wont of precisely this class of men. As she would be having a hired girl any way, he said—and he used, in saying it, a tone which made her feel herself a monster of extravagance—they might just as well have something to keep her busy; and this boarder who wanted to come, this Mr. Hugh Waring, would pay well, and make very little trouble. He knew this, because three years ago, in his mother's time, Waring had boarded with them for some months.

Of course, Mistress Carrie consented—for what could she do else?—and kept secret her own dissatisfaction with the prospect before her.

It only took Mr. Waring's arrival, however, to reconcile her to his presence. With his first deferential bow over her hand, she

became his willing hostess. He was a person of such type as the wife had never before, in her short, quiet life, encountered—a man of wealth and of leisure, high-bred, scholarly, and belonging to the ancient Order of Gentlemen. He was a handsomer man, too, than one often meets, with his clearly-cut features, his warm coloring, and the chestnut hair and flowing beard, which the eyes matched.

He was not an old young man. Impulse was strong within him; discipline had not yet taught him discretion. When he felt strongly, he would speak strongly, and, perhaps, act recklessly; but, under ordinary circumstances, he had the aplomb and the cool self-possession of a man of the world.

Very soon he began to perceive that to board with the Hannafords now was a slightly different thing from what it had been in the administration of Joseph Hannaford's self-contained mother and staid sister. Joseph Hannaford's wife was of altogether another order of women. It may be questioned whether she would have made any serious impression on him had he met her as Miss Carrie Fay. But, since her marriage, a soul-subduing pathos had grown into her look which somehow went to his heart. Perhaps, too, the strongest appeal which can be made to a man's chivalry, is the sight of a sad and disappointed woman, who neither parades nor confesses her misery.

Hugh Waring was not a bad man. In some respects, indeed, his heart and his life were purer and fresher than those of most men. He certainly meant no harm to his fair young hostess. He would not have added a feather's weight to the burden which had already borne so hard upon her life. But he commenced by pitying her; and Love has been Pity's neighbor ever since the world began.

He was tender and gentle to her as no one had ever been before. He was not too busy to notice the blush roses in her hair, or the blushes on her cheeks. If she liked a wild flower he had brought home, he made light of a long tramp to fetch her its kindred. While she sewed, he read to her, and taught her to love Keats and Shelley, and Browning. At nightfall he used to sing to her—while her husband was busy about the late "chores" with which a New England farmer fills up the summer twilight—sweet, suggestive love-songs, and old ballads which have filtered down through the centuries their tearful music.

All this time I doubt if he had thought of danger for himself or her. She, certainly never had. Her delight was pure and sweet. She would have said, if any one had questioned her, that Mr. Waring was her friend, the best friend she ever had; but, unquestioned, she did not say even so much as that to herself. She scarcely knew that it was summer with her heart, as well as with the year; or that the summer days were flying fast.

Nor did anything in the aspect of affairs make her husband uneasy. To do this young man whom perhaps circumstances, rather than nature, had made old, justice, he was neither mean nor ungenerous. His confidence in this young wife of his was perfect. She loved him; she was his to have and to hold; why should he grudge her a few hours which some one else made pleasant after a fashion not his own? I do not think he was likely to lose anything by this generosity, or that any amount of suspicious espionage on his part would have served his own cause better.

There came, at last, an evening of revelation to the two who were going on so blindly; or perhaps it had come to Waring before. He had been sitting silently through the sunset, watching the play of the warm light of Mrs. Hannaford's fair face and golden hair. She looked wonderfully young and helpless, with her extreme delicacy, her appealing eyes, and her soft white dress, made as simply as a babe's, and girdled with a blue ribbon. A languor, born perhaps of the summer heats, oppressed her. She drooped towards him, leaning her head upon her hand, and looking frail as a snow-wreath which a wind might blow away. Waring sat silently, as I said, and watched her, until the sunset lights had gone out of her, and a curious awe began to steal over him, as he saw her through the gathering shadows, white, and still, and unearthly as a spirit. Then, out of the semi-darkness, his voice came to her in a sort of chant, too low and even to be a song. The first line was as follows:

"Sweet is true love, though given in vain,
In vain."

Her tears were falling fast before he had finished. A spell was upon her which she

did not understand, and could not evade. Still, she kept silence, and waited for his words—words which, when they came, pierced her like a sword.

"Mrs. Hannaford, I think I must go away to-morrow. It is midsummer, and all the hay is down."

"But I thought," she faltered, timidly, "you were to stay the summer through."

"So I should, if all things had been as of old. It is not good for me to be here under the new regime."

"I have tried," she began; and then she stopped. Her tears choked her. She could not go on, and tell him, in simple commonplace, that she had tried to make him comfortable.

"If you had done no more than you tried to do, all would have been well," he cried, his tones fervent with sudden passion. "I saw you just what you were, and your husband just what he was. I saw how much it was in you to give to some man; how little you were even asked to give to him. God help us both, for I have learned to love you. I covet my neighbor's wife—I dare not stay here."

She said nothing; but he heard through the stillness the bitter sobbing which she strove to smother. It was more than he could bear. He crossed over to her, but he did not take her in his arms. Some shield of purity was about her which still held him away from her, though he was close at her side.

"Carrie," he said, calling her for the first time by her name, "I must go away to-morrow; but you shall go, too, if you will. Your love would be worth to me any sacrifice. What would mine be worth to you? You know just how much your husband cares for you. You have seen what life with him is. Do you think it would break his heart to lose you? I tell you, no. He would very composedly get a divorce from you, and marry more wisely next time. You would be free in a few months, and the moment you were free, you should be my wife. So help me God, I would deal honorably with you. Don't you believe me?"

He caught a low "Yes," murmured under her breath. "Then will you come? I think I can make life a different thing for you from what it ever has been. You shall know what it is to be loved by a man with a man's heart in him. Will you come, or will you settle back on the old life, and send me away alone to curse the fate that ever brought me to the knowledge of you?"

He stopped, and then she could hear his heart beat in the silence. Temptation beset her sorely. How sweet this love would be of which he spoke—this love for which she had so hungered—this passionate, lover's love, which Joseph Hannaford would never give her. She had a temperament to which love was the supreme thing. It was her one idea of Heaven. But she had not gone for enough away from the innocence of childhood for her guardian-angel to have forsaken her. Clearly, as if some human voice had spoken it, she heard a whisper, which came again and again, and would be obeyed—"Pray!" She got up at last, and saying to Hugh Waring nothing but "Wait," went away to her own room.

In the darkness she did not see her husband, who sat there in an arm-chair, too tired to care for a light, and waiting for her. He would have spoken, but somehow he felt the excitement of her mood, and silenced by it. She knelt down, and tried to obey the voice. But she could not collect her thoughts, and only two words would come, over and over again—"Help, Lord, help!"

Vaguely Joseph Hannaford comprehended that she was passing through the crisis of an agony such as he, in all his placid life, had never experienced or witnessed.—Some intuition withheld him from trying to comfort her—made him feel how idle would be any consolation which he could offer; but when at last she left the room, he arose and stole softly after her. A deep, yearning tenderness for her filled his soul full. He thought he had never loved her half so well in his life; and what this trouble was which was breaking her heart he must know.

Down-stairs she went, and into the dim room where Hugh Waring waited for her; and her husband stood just outside the open door, and listened breathlessly for her words. She spoke at first with a certain feverish eagerness, as if she doubted her own strength, and must hurry through with what she had to say before it failed her; but, as she went on, a deeper and calmer earnestness grew into her words.

"Your tenderness," she said, "has

made life very sweet to me. I never knew what it was before to have a friend who cared for the same things I cared for; and no one else was ever so gentle to me as you have been. I did not know how much you were to me until you spoke of going away. I want love more than I want any other earthly thing; but I do not think this is love which we feel for each other.—You pitied me because you saw that my life was a disappointment—that I was lovely, and unreconciled to my fate; but I do not believe you would have chosen me out of a world full of women, if you had found me free and happy. As for what I feel for you—but I will not talk about that—I have my duty to do. And then I did love my husband first. If he had loved me in the way I once fancied that he did, I should have gone on feeling the same for him forever. And I know I could love him even now, if he cared to be again my lover. In any case, I will be true to him. I will not make myself unfit to meet my dear father and mother again in Heaven. I do believe that you would be faithful and tender, but your best tenderness could not console me if I had lost for your sake my own soul; and I should grow old, and sad, and be a burden to you presently."

"I think not—I think never!" Waring cried, passionately. "O, Carrie! I could make you happy."

"Not in despite of God," she said, slowly, and then she turned away.

Standing still in the shadow, her husband watched her go up-stairs, and then he stole noiselessly out-of-doors, for he was wise enough not to go to her.

What in him was really true, and noble, and worthy of a woman's loving, came out now, as never before. He looked straight into his own heart, with eyes which tried to be as just as the justice of Heaven.

He did not stop to blame Hugh Waring, as a hotter-tempered man might have done. He understood just how Carrie's sad, sweet face, and lonely seeming life, had touched the man's heart, and so forgave him, even for the rashness which would have made bad worse.

As for Carrie herself, she seemed to have only now begun to love her at all. He opened his eyes and saw what he had been doing when he took into his keeping this mere girl, this young creature whose natural ailment was love, and then deliberately starved her—expected her to be as self-contained and independent as his mother had been. How reckless he had been in throwing away his pearl of great price!—But what if it were not altogether too late for him to recover it? She had loved him once—she had said that she could love him, even now, if he cared again to be her lover. Did he not care? His pulses began to throb, very much as if he were not an old young man. If love, tender and patient, could win her back, she should yet be more his own than ever, please Heaven.

He would never pain her; he resolved, by telling her what he had heard. If ever she felt near enough to him again to confide in him, her confidence should come unforced and unthought. But he would use every power which God had given him to make her happy. He would not be too proud to knock again at her heart's door; would any tender voice ever bid him enter?"

At last he saw from the covert where he stood, with eyes grown used to the darkness, Hugh Waring come out and walk rapidly down the path, as if trying to escape from himself. Then he went into the house, lit a light, and looked at the clock. It was midnight; now, at last, he would go up-stairs to his wife. He found her lying, with white, still face, upon the scarcely whiter pillow. He knew that she was not asleep; but he saw that she wished him to think her so, and respecting her wish, he got into bed silently.

The next day, making some excuse of just receiving letters, Hugh went away.—For one moment, just before he left, he managed to see Mrs. Hannaford alone, though she had carefully avoided him all the morning.

"Do I bid you good-by forever?" he asked, looking into those sad, entreating eyes of hers which had wrought his woe.

"I think that is best," she said, gently, "unless you can come back as much my husband's friend as mine."

He bent over her hand, and left on it the kiss he had never dared to press upon her lips.

"I want to tell you that you have done right. You have refused me the only thing I cared for in life. You have sent me out into the world a wayfarer, without a hope or an interest, but you have done right. We shall be thankful, both of us,

[CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.]