

THIRTEEN AT TABLE

By MRS. BURTON HARRISON.

SYNOPSIS.

Felicia Charlton, a beautiful and spirited girl belonging to an old but impoverished Virginia family, has accepted a position as private secretary to Mrs. Caldwell, a wealthy society leader at Newport. She has formed a pleasant acquaintance with a young man named Duncan Moore—a guest in the house of her employer—who at first did not understand Felicia's position. The young lady has just been notified by the distant manner of her patroness.

The incident, occurring upon the threshold of her new experience, struck her unpleasantly. With her simple, hearty, southern ideas, she could not imagine arrival in a strange house without some sort of a personal welcome from the hostess; and the quality of that investigating gaze was to her totally unknown. But, taking heart, she noted with delight the exquisite beauty of the verdant lawns and radiant flower beds on either side the well-kept driveway leading up to such a house as surpassed her fondest dream of imposing completeness. The striped yellow awnings over all the windows on the front, shading flower boxes that overhung with bloom; the verandas yielding glimpses of chairs and couches and tall palms; and above all the flow-



"I beg your pardon," he said.

ers and plants massed in every angle where they could be placed in exterior decoration—seemed to Felicia incredibly enchanting. As she sprang out of the trap and looked around her, catching a distant vista of blue sea at the end of a reach of velvet sward, she was dazzled with excitement. She forgot that she had been left standing there alone; and her first thought from the doorway, caused by the too easy manner and language of a lady's maid who came to escort her to her room.

Felicia had nothing to complain of in externals, certainly. The room that was assigned to her, all white and rose and green-stained furniture, with a window looking upon the sea, was delightfully cool and tempting. Tea was served to her there, her little trunk was brought in and untrapped, and upon the table she found a book or two, should she wish to pass her time otherwise than by looking out of the flower-framed shaded window. But by and by a sense of loneliness set in, and to banish it she stole out for a walk about the grounds.

Gazing from a shaded bench upon the cliff over the sea an infinite peace fell upon her spirit. How long she had sat there she did not know, until she became conscious that a young man in summer flannels had come along the path leading to her eyrie, and was searching for something he had lost.

"I beg your pardon," he said, taking off his hat; "I did not know you were here. You are looking for this?" he said, holding out a little compass of gold and crystal she had picked up, then forgotten.

"Yes, thank you. It represents the economist of my small sister who sent it to me for a birthday gift to-day," he said, taking the trifle from her finger tips. "I suppose you have just come, and have not yet seen our hostess."

Cheered by his cordial tone, Felicia answered as the girls of her race and bringing up was wont to do, easily, fearlessly smiling, playing around her rosy lips and in her friendly eyes; and at once they were launched upon a conversation that involved apparently, an satisfactory to Duncan Moore as it certainly was to her poor little confiding Felicia, tongue-tied for so many hours and aching to communicate her sensations to somebody.

She at once discovered that Mr. Moore was like herself, an inmate of the house; was spending a fortnight with the Caldwell's, and was already almost "done to death" with the insistence of Newport hospitality. He, of course, took his artistic and refreshing little person, whose good looks charmed his eye, to be a guest upon his own plane. Even if Felicia had suspected his mistake, it would not have occurred to her to do more than laugh at it. "Doesn't the young lady engaged to be governess or companion or secretary in all things a member of the family; and when, as usual, she is well born and well bred, the child of poverty is the merest bagatelle, so far as social consideration is concerned. How could it enter into Felicia's head that she was henceforth to be a taboo to the familiar associates of her employer?"

Luckily, upon this occasion, she was spared finding it out. The markedly reserved that in her underlain a manner almost coquettish in its directness, prompted her to withdraw from the interview. As she arose, and Moore offered to walk to the house with her, with the prettiest gesture of a small

white hand she motioned him to remain. "Why?" he said. "or, at least, when shall I talk with you again?" "When you shall have been properly introduced," she exclaimed, vanishing from his sight.

Moore sat for a while upon the forsaken bench, till shadows lengthened upon the lawn, and the purple light of evening on the sea, sent him within doors to dress for dinner. When he came down into the library where the house-party met before dinner was announced, he looked eagerly about him, but in the various groups saw no sign of the fairy of the cliff. As look would have it, his seat at table that night was far away from Mrs. Caldwell's and, until just after the men came in from the smoke-room, he had no opportunity to make inquiries of his hostess.

"The young lady who arrived this afternoon?" repeated Mrs. Caldwell, in bewilderment. "You are dreaming. Nobody new is here. You know they say I am faithful to the same old gang, and you are all present, I believe."

Moore shrank a little from her as he went on in his dogged way: "Miss Charlton, I mean. The young lady from Virginia, who came while you were driving."

Mrs. Caldwell threw back her dark, well-coiffed head, with a peal of laughter. "I see what you mean now. It's my new secretary, who's come to replace that dreadful, pushing creature I told you of; and, if you believe me, I got in so late to dress, I have not seen her yet. How could you make such a mistake?"

"What mistake?" "To—suppose that she was one of my guests."

Moore, angered by her sunken-drawn, felt his color rise. Then, restraining himself, he turned on his heel and left her, inwardly resolved not to spend another day under the roof of this pretentious dwelling.

But when the next day came he did not go away. "Poor Felicia!" it was such a sad awakening! Twenty-four hours spent in her new capacity were quite sufficient to show her that business, not friendship, was the platform on which she stood. Mrs. Caldwell, when, on the morning following her arrival, she summoned her latest employe into the parlour, where Felicia's duties were to be performed, had received her with the most perfunctory of handshakes and without a smile. The girl, unaccustomed to this consist of social courtesies, fancied herself an offender, and for a moment stood sick at heart with wondering what she had done. In a short time, however, Mrs. Caldwell made it perfectly clear that Miss Charlton had in no wise transgressed, and was even welcome in the stress of her employers' arrears of correspondence.

Leaning back in a deep wicker chair with fantastic frilled cushions of China silk, beside a table covered with specimen vases of emerald glass each containing a perfect rose, the great lady dictated a dozen little notes of courtesy, conventionally or charily, which Felicia fleetly scribbled upon sheets from a silver-mounted paper-case upon a table littered with every contrivance for elegant dalliance with letters. This done, and evidently done to Mrs. Caldwell's satisfaction, Felicia received instructions to fill up a series of dinner invitations, with names and dates for a banquet to be given three weeks off, and to address envelopes from a list furnished her for a mission.

It was a great relief to have been called to come up from New York. "This will give you enough for to-day," said Mrs. Caldwell, rising to go. "You will consider this room your own as long as you like, but your meals will be taken in what we call the school-room, which is more convenient for the servants to carry the trays into. I—think you probably dined there last night. It is a nice little room, and I hope you will take care that they give you everything nicely. The housekeeper has the strictest orders about my secretary's room, and you must immediately report to her if anything is omitted. At any time when you want to drive out, one of the groomers can take you in the basket phaeton; and, as you

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