

### The New Girl.

THE APRIL sun was pouring in through the half open window and a gentle breeze from the south swayed the long curtains. But there was very little sunshine in Annabel Maitland's heart, and the south wind brought no soothing relief to her flushed brow.

She had just cleared away the breakfast things and the library and hall, and now she was standing at the window of the little reception room, looking anxiously out on the street.

Presently there were two sharp whirrs at the telephone. Annabel ran back to the instrument. It was a call from George. His Aunt Mary hadn't come. She must have missed the train somewhere. The next train wouldn't be in until 5 o'clock. He would meet it then and bring his aunt home with him.

"Any girl yet?" he called.

"No," replied Annabel, with a little catch in her voice.

"That's tough," said George. "But we'll get along some way. Good-bye."

Annabel hung up the receiver with a reluctant little jerk.

"It's all very well to say we'll get along some way," she grumbled, "but what good does that do? George can't lift his finger to do a thing about the house. Poor, old dear. And I did want to have everything so nice when his aunt came. Well, I'm to get a few hours' respite, anyway. I'd better be studying the cook book some more, or shall I dust?"

And then the telephone bell gave its double whirr again.

"This is the Unique Employment Agency," said a voice. "We have a girl that we think would suit you. She has an excellent recommendation. And she says she can take the place at once."

"Send her right up, please," said Annabel.

"She will be up after luncheon," said the voice.

This time when Annabel hung up the receiver she smiled. Then she stepped into the library and, packing up the cook book, threw it back on the highest book shelf.

"I'll take that girl, no matter what she's like," she murmured.

Then she hung up the feather duster on its hook in the closet under the front stairway, and after inspecting the kitchen to see that everything was neat and clean and shining—for Annabel was an excellent housekeeper, despite her culinary limitations—she sought the upper part of the house and bustled herself tidying up the room that was set aside as the "girl's room."

Annabel felt relieved, so very much relieved that she broke forth in song. It was a song that George had liked before they were married. How the time had flown. It seemed but yesterday that he was leaning over the piano and hearing her for another verse. And now they were staid old married people. Married two years last October. She stopped her song just long enough to interpolate a little sigh and then went on.

Probably it was the song that prevented her from hearing the doorbell. It rang, and several times, too. And then Annabel was startled by a loud rap at the kitchen door. She hurried down stairs and hastily turned the key and the knob.

There stood a neatly garbed woman, a woman of middle age, with a pleasant smile on her motherly face.

Annabel smiled, too, when she caught sight of the stranger.

"Come right in," she said. "I'm so glad you didn't disappoint me. The telephone that you wouldn't be up until after luncheon."

"Who telephoned?" inquired the stranger, and she still smiled.

"Why, the agency people," replied Annabel. "Won't you sit down?"

The stranger accepted the invitation and Annabel seated herself before her.

"Of course you cook?" she said.

The stranger smiled again.

"I've had twenty years' experience at it, ma'am," she said, with a queer little twitch to her mouth.

"Plain or fancy?"

"I think I may say both, ma'am."

"I like the modest way you say it," said Annabel. "They must always boast so. Do you make good bread?"

"I have been told so, ma'am."

"And pies and cakes?"

"Yes, ma'am, and cookies."

"George likes cookies. Yes, and he likes fried cakes. Do you make fried cakes?"

"Yes, ma'am, and Johnnycake, too."

"He loves Johnnycake, but he never had a girl who could make it to suit him. What afternoon would you like out?"

"I'm not very particular, ma'am," said the stranger. "Perhaps we can arrange that later."

"I'm sure we can," said Annabel. "I pay four dollars and have a laundress two days in the week."

"That is satisfactory. I think," said the stranger. "Have you much company?"

"Very little," said Annabel, "and I always help with the work, too. You wouldn't mind my coming into the kitchen, would you?"

"Not in the least," said the stranger. "I think I'd rather like it."

"Thank you," said Annabel. "And I hope you find the kitchen suits you."

The stranger looked about her with a critical eye.

"It seems very convenient—and very clean," she said, with an approving nod.

"I think you will find the place a comparatively easy one," said Annabel. "There will be no children to bother you."

"I am sorry for that," said the stranger.

Annabel gave her a quick glance.

"I think I am going to like you very much," she said. "Will you look at your room now?"

So she took the stranger up the back stairs to the airy and sweet smelling chamber, with its snowy bed and curtains, and the stranger, as she laid aside her hat and cape, said the room quite suited her. Then she asked Annabel to lend her a common frock that she could wear until her frock came. And Annabel hurried about and decked her in an ancient summer gown and a white apron and a white cap, and then stood back and contemplated her work with great satisfaction.

"Why, you're a picture," she said.

"But you are not thinking of making an art gallery of your kitchen," laughed the maid.

And somehow Annabel failed to see any incongruity in this remark.

She escorted the new help back to the kitchen and then hastily slipped into the dining room and telephoned to George.

"I can imagine it," said the new maid, "I've been lonesome myself a good many times." And she quickly and deftly cleared away the remains of the simple meal. "You said your husband's aunt was coming today?"

"So she telegraphed," said Annabel. "But she wasn't on the train. George says she must have been delayed somewhere, but he expects she'll surely be here on the late afternoon express. And I want to have a real nice little dinner for her, you know."

"Of course," said the new maid, with a sympathetic nod.

"And you must let me help you get it," said Annabel.

"You have my most gracious permission," she said.

"Oh, I'm not as useless as I look," protested Annabel.

"And I'm quite sure there is nothing useless about your looks," said the new maid, as she put her head a little on one side and glanced admiringly at the pretty face with its flushed cheeks and its bright eyes.

"Oh, thank you," cried Annabel, and the flush grew deeper. "That's what George would call a barefaced jolly."

When Annabel's sharp ears heard George on the porch she was waiting in the library, and ran to throw the door open. George was alone.

"Why, where's Aunt Mary?" she cried.

"Not on the train," said George. "I was much disappointed. And I don't know where to telegraph. Of course it's barely possible she got off at the upper station by mistake. But she's too old a traveler to get lost or into trouble."

"Of course, dear," said Annabel. "And I'm dreadfully disappointed, too. I've got such a nice little dinner waiting for her. Then she dropped her voice. 'We've got a jewel in the kitchen, George.'"

"So you telephoned," said George. "Hope you won't find she's paste."

"I only hope she'll stick," laughed Annabel.

And just then the dining room bell tinkled.

It was a dainty little dinner, the joint production of Annabel and the maid, and there was nothing George could criticize. And how Annabel laughed when George sampled the golden Johnnycake.

"And how does that compare with Aunt Mary's?" she asked.

"It's all right," said George, whose mouth was too well filled to permit of any further eulogy.

"The new maid made it," cried Annabel.

The new maid did not appear in the dining room. Once or twice Annabel flitted out after some necessity for the feast, but George caught no glimpse of the accomplished stranger.

After they had returned to the library and George had again studied the table of train arrivals in the evening paper, he looked up suddenly and said: "Did you get a reference with this new girl?"

Annabel started.

"Bless me," she cried. "I forgot all about it!"

George shook his head.

"That's bad," he said. "We can't be too careful about these strangers. Biscom told me today about a girl they took without a reference. She stayed one night and disappeared with his wife's best frock. I'll see this girl and find out about her."

"Don't say anything that will hurt her feelings, dear. Perhaps I'd better go with you."

"You stay here," said George. "I'll be right back."

The new maid was standing by the kitchen table washing dishes, and beside her stood George. He had taken

off his coat and there was a big blue apron tied about his neck, and he was wiping the dishes as fast as the new maid washed them.

And they both were merrily laughing.

Annabel softly retreated back to the library, wondering what it meant. And after a while George returned.

"The reference seems to be all right," he said. "I know some of the people she mentioned, and I'll look the matter up more fully tomorrow."

"I thought I heard you laughing out there," said Annabel.

"Perhaps you did," said George. "She needed a little cheering up. It seems that she's seen better days, or something like that, and comes of a pretty good family, and we've got to try to please her. I found that out right away. She's no ordinary woman, and we must expect to humor her."

"Then she thinks she'll stay with us?" said Annabel.

"Yes," said George. "She likes you and she likes the house, and I think she's going to like me. Anyway, she said she meant to stay just as long as we'd make her welcome."

"I'm very glad," said Annabel. "I never was so much taken with a stranger before."

"Yes," said George, "but don't forget that we have to treat her well. We must let her sleep in the front chamber tonight."

"Why, George, that's the guest chamber."

"Yes, I know."

"And it's all ready for Aunt Mary."

"That can't be helped," said George. "We'll let the maid sleep there tonight, and then we can make other arrangements. Sort of let her down easy, you know."

"Why, George, I never heard of such a thing! You'll spoil her."

"Very well," said George. "I'll take the responsibility. We've got to humor her. I'll go up now and light the gas. The maid is tired and wants to retire early—and she had to arise early, too, you know."

He paused in the hall doorway and looked at Annabel and the maid.

"Annabel," he softly said.

"Well, dear."

"You're a little goose."

And he went up the stairs chucking.

"Annabel, Annabel, come down. You lazybones. Aunt Mary is here and breakfast is waiting."

Aunt Mary came! And the hostess not up to welcome her. Oh, what a shame!

How she hustled on her garment and twisted up her pretty hair.

When she tripped into the library she looked about her eagerly. George was standing by the mantel, and in the dining room doorway the new maid looked at her with a smiling face.

"Where is Aunt Mary?" she cried.

"The reference proves to be all right, my dear," he said, with a comical quiver in his voice.

Annabel looked from George to the new maid, and the new maid's smile slowly deepened.

"You—you are Aunt Mary?" she cried.

"Oh, oh, how stupid I am!" and two big tears suddenly trembled on her long lashes.

"It wasn't a very nice piece of deception, my dear," she said. "But you know how I drifted into it. Besides, it gave me such a nice chance to make your acquaintance. And then I know this wicked boy would appreciate the little joke so much. You must forgive me, dear."

"Your jewel stands the test, my love," laughed George.

"Annabel couldn't help smiling.

"Breakfast is waiting," said Aunt Mary.—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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