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DEFENCELESS.

THEY had been married five years and love had lasted—as it generally does last if the first critical six months of matrimony can be tided over without disaster. He, Jack Alston, was a fortunate young man who stepped into his father's business shoes shortly after being wedded to Clara Fayworthy, the girl of his choice. Prosperity and happiness had waited on them from the commencement of their married life. There were no children; but Jack did not want any to divide his wife's attention, and he scarcely noticed her deep disappointment as each succeeding year brought no change.

Clara adored him, and he was one of those men who like to be worshipped. Her negative qualities suited him exactly. He played upon her sympathies and mental susceptibilities as upon the responsive vibrations of a musical instrument. If he were glad, she must share his gladness; if things had gone wrong with him—from the loss of a collar-stud to a depression in the money market—his gloom humor must affect her also. If it pleased him to discourse intellectually, his wife sat at his feet, as was expected of her, and listened with proper reverence to the words of wisdom.

As for Jack, he was just the sort of man to inspire a delicious kind of idolatry in one of those simple, trusting natures that can only be found among women. He was tall, gaunt, unapproachable things out of a pair of limped brown eyes, and concealed the weakness of his mouth and chin by a heavy drooping mustache. These outward charms were considerably heightened by a leaning toward art in general.

Jack sang sentimental songs in an untrained tenor voice, leaving out, with nervous reserve, only the superfluous harmonies of the accompaniment. He reached from nature in water colors, putting in the sky with a circular movement of the forefinger, and bestowing a painful attention on unnecessary detail. He wrote obscure poetry than Browning, and was much addicted to finding meanings in unintelligible passages of minor poets that nobody else was able to understand.

Can any person wonder that Jack's wife looked upon him as a genius, and felt every day more grateful to the fate that had linked her to the destiny of so noble a specimen of mankind?

Of Clara little need be said, except that she was pretty when he married her, and her informed character was captivatingly feminine and moldable. Such traits are the paradise of the selfish man, and Jack was no exception. He had secured a treasure. Everything that could make home life attractive was combined in Clara's lovable qualities and quiet domesticity. In the winter, when Jack came home cold and tired from the city routine, a chair by the fire was waiting for him by the tea table, the kettle humming on the hob, ready to make tea to the minute he should appear, and down beside the fire a warm pair of slippers rested against the fender.

Then—! blush to write it—Jack would fling himself down into the armchair that had been drawn up for him close to the blaze, while the adoring little woman went down on her knees and undid the laces of his boots. If he was in good temper he patted her fluffy head with amiable condescension, but if he happened to be out of humor he swung his foot at her in early silence, or growled at the world in general, and her clumsiness in particular, all the time that she was performing that humble office for him.

Jack belonged, in fact, to the type that men of finer material long to kick, but which, for some inexplicable reason, possesses an enduring fascination for the class of women who are least capable of defending themselves against masculine mastery.

Judging by appearances, five years of wedded bliss had not treated Clara so well as her husband. Her face had lost much of its girlish roundness, and the deep blue eyes that were her chief beauty burned feverishly, rather than brightly, within the dark rings that encircled them. Her chest had become delicate ever since the day Jack had kept her waiting in the cold outside his office for half an hour (he did not like receiving ladies within the sacred precincts) on the occasion of her keeping an appointment to meet him there at a fixed time, in order that they might proceed to some social function together.

The result was a chronic cough that irritated Jack a good deal at night, and a heavy doctor's bill, at which he swore so tremendously that she swore the money out of her household allowance, and began to pay off the debt by installments. Later on, however, Jack found it out, and nearly frightened the poor little woman out of her wits by the wretched manner in which he scribbled the check for the balance, and threw it at her with some ungracious remarks about her intelligence.

One evening the Alstons went to an "at home." Social obligations were parted husband and wife in the crowded drawing-room, but the latter's affectionate eyes caught many glimpses of Jack as he passed to and fro, greeting new friends and making new acquaintances.

It saved his leg P. A. Danforth of LaGrange, Ga., suffered for six months with a frightful running sore on his leg; but writes that Bucklen's Arnica Salve wholly cured it in five years. For ulcers, wounds, piles, it's the best salve in the world. Cure guaranteed—Only 25 cents. Sold by all druggists.

"Who was that woman, Jack?" she asked later on, when they got a chance to exchange a few words. "With whom you seemed to be having such an animated conversation?" "Which woman?" was his rejoinder. "I talked to several."

"I didn't see her face," replied Clara, "as she had her back to me the whole time, but she was dressed in mauve, with pink bows and had light, fluffy hair."

"Yes, I know whom you mean," said Jack, slowly, as if with an effort of memory. "Her name is Miss Oxford. I think our hostess introduced me."

"Was she nice?" "There was no jealousy on Clara's part. She was simply interested in everything connected with her husband—nothing more."

"Very, on first acquaintance," he answered, "and by the way," he went on, "she bears a very remarkable resemblance to you."

"Does she?" exclaimed Clara, with animation. "Oh, do take me and introduce me to her, Jack! It will be so interesting to meet my double."

To this request Jack assented willingly, and the two women became acquainted. Clara acknowledged to herself that there was a striking likeness, but she could not help seeing that Miss Oxford had the advantage of being younger and fresher. She was a very lively girl, and Clara thought that she flirted decidedly too much, but the objection was not so much on her husband's account as on general principles of feminine propriety.

On the way home Jack spoke very enthusiastically about Miss Oxford, and, of course, Clara, to please him, chimed in. He remarked casually that he had promised to drop in to see her one afternoon at the house of that lady's parents.

"Isn't it rather odd not to invite me, too?" suggested his wife, timidly. "Oh, no. You see she couldn't very well do that under the circumstances," returned Jack in an airy tone. "But I dare say Miss Oxford will call upon you when I have been there."

As the matter was dropped, a few days later Jack did not arrive home until dinner time, and during the operation of having his boots unlaced he talked enthusiastically about Miss Oxford, on whom he had just been calling.

"She is a lovely girl," he said in tones of warmest admiration. "Just what you were like five years ago." It was a factless speech, and Clara's fingers trembled as she struggled to unravel a tight knot.

"Really now, taking her feature by feature," he went on, oblivious of the pain he was inflicting, and too absorbed in his own interests to notice his wife's agitation, "there is an astounding resemblance between you both. But the expression is different. She seems much brighter and more girlish than I am."

He stopped short, suddenly aware that his tongue was running too fast, and glanced at the kneeling figure in front of him. Clara's head was bent low over her task and she did not speak.

He stooped forward good-naturedly and lifted her face up by the chin. She was flushed, and tears glistened in her eyes.

"Why, you foolish little woman, what are you crying about?" he asked.

Clara burst into tears—partly because of her own over-wrought feelings, and partly on account of the unusual kindness of her husband's interrogation. Tears generally had the effect of making him angry and impatient.

"I am losing my good looks, and you don't care about me any longer," she sobbed.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Jack, who began to see the clumsiness of his remarks. "You think Miss Oxford much prettier than I am, and I dare say you find her far more lively and entertaining." Clara went on in a broken voice.

"Her sole attraction for me is her likeness to you," returned her husband, soothingly. "Is that really so, Jack?" she asked, smiling through her tears.

"Of course, you goose! Have you ever known me to take a fancy to any other woman before?"

"No." "Well, then, I think you ought to feel flattered at my going out of my way to be civil to a girl simply because she is the living image of yourself."

"I did not see it in that light before," said Clara, drying her eyes and looking cheerful again. "But I was afraid you were beginning to get tired of me, because—"

"Because of my stupid way of objecting to you?" interrupted Jack, who could rise to delicacy when it suited his purpose.

After this episode Jack paid frequent visits to the Oxford's house, even staying to dinner sometimes in an impromptu fashion, that left his wife waiting for him an hour in vain before she dared sit down to the spoiled meal at home.

But if these absences were never objected to, and if Clara suffered on account of them, she never reproached her husband. On the contrary she encouraged his friendship with Miss Oxford, and resolutely struggled against any feelings of jealousy, trusting implicitly in his honor.

Jack was careful not to repeat the blunder that had once led to an unpleasant scene, but he often talked about the great resemblance of Miss Oxford and Clara.

"It is delightful," he would say to the latter, after one of the expeditions that took him home long after business hours were over, "it is delightful to bear different thoughts

and different expressions coming out of pretty lips just like yours." Thus, perhaps he kissed his wife in a gallant fashion that was quite new to him, and innocent Clara blushed with pleasure, and never wondered whether the other lips were sometimes requisitioned to remind him of her kisses also.

Meanwhile Clara's health was rapidly giving way. Her cough grew more troublesome than ever, and exacerbated Jack, who was a light sleeper, so much that he had his bed made in the spare room on the floor above. Clara said nothing to this arrangement as she always studied her husband's comfort, but she often wept silently to herself during the lonely, wakeful nights.

She now saw very little of Jack, as he was not only away during business hours, but spent most of his spare time at Oxford's. It interested him he said, to watch the development of a nature that should by all physiological appearances be akin to her own, and he persuaded her that the growing intimacy between Mabel (the now called Miss Oxford by her Christian name) and himself was a kind of beautiful reflection—an aesthetic platonic line—of their own love.

And the poor little woman smiled to all, and even felt a sense of gratitude for this double manifestation of her husband's devotion.

One day the doctor broke the news to Mrs. Alston that the condition of her health gave cause for great anxiety, and he advised her to consult a specialist on diseases of the lungs without delay. Jack, on talking it over afterward, said that all physicians were fools, and the biggest fool charged the biggest price to make up for other deficiencies. However, although he was inclined to scoff at the whole affair, he consented to his wife seeing a specialist, and a consultation was accordingly arranged.

Clara, who was nervous and terribly afraid of stethoscopes and tapping, would have liked Jack to accompany her to the eminent physician's house. But on the morning of the appointment he came downstairs with a neatly-packed traveling bag and announced that if a certain letter were waiting for him at the office he would be obliged to undertake a journey on business and would not return before the following day.

If it had not been on account of urgent business, Clara would have thought her husband's absence at this critical juncture very unkind. For the specialist would pronounce on her that afternoon, sentence of life or death. But the journey, if undertaken, was clearly unavoidable, and she could only reproach fate for having chosen that day of all others to separate them.

Still, it would have been kinder, Clara thought, if Jack had asked her to telegraph the result of her interview to him, and to write off in a hurry after the briefest of farewells, and she was obliged to console herself with the reflection that pressure of time had hurried him into forgetfulness.

"He will think of it as soon as he has a moment's leisure," she repeated to herself over and over again, "and then he will feel miserable about it, poor fellow, and send me a telegram asking to have the verdict withheld in his office."

The physician shook his head as he examined her chest, tapped each rib, and listened to the labored breathing. It was not his custom to conceal the truth from his patients, but he regarded Clara's pale, anxious face and frail form with intense pity when it was all over.

The poor creature read her fate in the glance of sympathy.

"My case is hopeless, is it not?" she asked, in a low tremulous voice. "I fear so," replied the doctor gently.

"Shall I live long?" "She awaited his answer in petulant suspense.

"One lung is gone," said the great man laying a kindly hand on her arm, and the other is going. The end of the disease will depend much upon climatic conditions. I fear, unless you can manage to go south at once—"

"That I may not last through this cold weather," put in Clara, to help him out.

He nodded with a serious air, and a few minutes later the unhappy patient, her dress ringing in her ears, was speeding home.

A letter in Jack's handwriting lay upon the hall table. It had been delivered by special messenger, the servant said, shortly after her departure.

"Dear old Jack!" she cried, forgetting the terrible blow that had just been dealt her in the joy of the moment. "I know he would remember me and send some message!"

She tore open the envelope and taking out the letter kissed it rapturously. Then she hurried into the drawing-room to read it there alone and undisturbed.

"Dear Clara," it ran. "By the time this reaches you I shall be on my way to Europe. What is going with me. My subject in writing is to wish you goodbye forever, and to assure you that on my return some arrangements will be made with regard to your future welfare. You can, if you like, get a separation—possibly even a divorce (the latter would enable me to marry Mabel); but, although the world invariably says nasty things of people in our predicament, I am, in giving to the trustees the management of a woman whose charm lies in the fact that she is your counterpart, paying you the highest compliment. Yours, Jack Alston."

—Pittsburg Dispatch.

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