

AUNT CORNELIA'S PLAN.

A COSIER place than the big sitting room at Hill-crest would have been had to find, if one had traveled from Land's End to Joan O'Grout's; and this eventful evening, when the destinies of two worthy people were about taking definite form—two people who had never seen each other, and who had heard of each other so often that each were curiously eager to meet—on this important evening the sitting room at Hill-crest had never looked pleasanter or cosier.

A huge pile of logs glowed like molten carbuncles in the open fireplace; on the table in the centre of the floor, whose color matched the glowing crimson of the carpet, was a silver stand that held a dozen snowy wax tapers, whose beaming light contrasted exquisitely with the ruddy glow of the fire.

Beside the table, in a big cushioned chair, with his feet thrust towards the genial warmth on the hearth, his gray dressing-gown sitting comfortably on his portly form, his gold rimmed glasses on his nose, sat the owner and master of Hillcrest, Mr. Abiah Cressington, rich, good natured, and fond of his own way. Opposite him was the mistress of the little place—little, shrewd faced, sharp nosed, merry Aunt Cornelia, his sister, who, since her widowhood, had come to Hillcrest to make her bachelor brother's home as pleasant as she could.

That she had succeeded was very evident by the way now in which he looked up from a letter he had been reading—the confidential, kindly way in which he did it.

"Walter writes a curious letter in response to my invitation to come and spend a few weeks at Hillcrest as soon as he gets over his fatigue from his ocean voyage home, after his five years absence. I'll read it to you."

He leaned near the softly glowing lights, and began the short, concise reply that Walter Austin had written from his chamber in the Temple:

"You are very kind indeed, Uncle Abiah, to ask me down to Hillcrest for as long as I wish to stay, and I can assure you that I have been so long a wanderer that the idea of home is very pleasant to me. But when I take into consideration the peculiar importance you propose attaching to my visit, I am unwilling to accept the invitation. To me, the idea of having my fancies and inclinations put into harness, and to feel that I am on continual duty to win my way into the good graces of my second cousin, Mabel, whom you are good enough to wish me to marry—"

Mrs. Cornelia interrupted sharply: "Abiah, you never surely went and told our grandnephew that you had in view his marriage with Mabel?"

Her tone was energetic, almost reprehensive.

"Why not? I certainly did. I told him in my letter that it was a chance for him he'd never get again, and that he needn't feel under such terrible obligations to take a fancy to Phil's little Mabel, but to come down and be cozily, and if anything should happen, it'd be right all round."

Mrs. Cornelia knitted vigorously, her lavender cap-ribbons quivering in the mellow taper glow.

"All I have to say is, you're — a fool, Abiah! Walter is right. A young man doesn't like to have his fancies under rein and whip and the very fact that we want him to marry will make him indisposed to do it. You've made a very great mistake in the beginning."

Mr. Cressington looked aghast at his sister's determined face.

"Why, I really didn't suppose—" "Of course you didn't. It's only your natural stupidity, you dear old fellow! Men are all alike. Don't I know them like a book? And you've ruined your hopes for Mabel and Walter at the very outset."

Mr. Cressington stared discomfitedly. "I am sure I meant it all right enough; Cornelia. I certainly wanted Walter to know what a little darling our Mabel is, and what a nice little wife she would make for any man."

"Very commendable, indeed; only, if you had consulted me upon the letter you sent, I should have advised you to say nothing about Mabel, or her charms, or her expectations. I should have simply asked him to come and see us, and have left the rest to Mabel's blue eyes. You see, Abiah?"

His lips compressed slowly. "I think I see; and my hopes in that direction are all ruined!"

The silver needles clicked rapidly, and the snow white yarn came reeling merrily off the ball under her arm.

"Not at all. Leave that to me, and I'll see what can be done. Trust a woman's wit to get even a blundering old fellow like you out of a scrape."

She smiled and nodded, and looked altogether so mischievous that Mr. Cressington became quite excited over her little mystery.

"Do explain, Cornelia."

And when she explained he leaned back in his chair with an expression of

positive awe and admiration on his face.

"What a woman you are, Cornelia—I declare, it beats anything I ever heard in the whole course of my life."

After dusk a glorious winter day, with here and there a star twinkling in the pale gray sky, and the lights and fires in the Hillcrest sitting-room making an eloquent welcome to Walter Austin, as he stood in the midst of the home circle, tall, gentlemanly, handsome and self-possessed.

Old Mr. Cressington was in his richest humor as he led forward two young girls.

"Come, don't be shy now. Walter, this is your cousin, Mabel Cressington, and this is her good friend and inseparable companion, Irene Vance, come to help entertain you. My nephew, Walter Austin, girls. And this is Aunt Cornelia—you remember her well enough, hey?"

And so the presentation was merrily gotten over, and Walter found himself at home in the most pleasant family he had ever known.

They were remarkably pretty girls, with blue eyes—although Miss Vance's were decidedly the deeper blue and more bewitching—and lovely yellow gold hair. Walter found himself admiring the style of Miss Vance's coiffure before he had known her an hour; and when he went up to his room that night he felt as if between the two, roguish Mabel and sweet little Irene, he never would come out heart whole.

"For Mabel is a good little darling," thought he, "and I will take great-uncle Abiah's advice and fall in love with her, and thereby secure a generous slice of the Cressington estates. Egad! that's a happy thought."

But the handsome young gentleman went to sleep and dreamed, instead of Mabel's laughing eyes, of Irene's gentle, tender ones, and awoke somewhere in the middle of the night, unable to get to sleep again for thinking of her.

And the after days were not much better. Despite the golden value of Mabel, there was something about Irene Vance that made this headstrong fellow very indifferent to the advice he had sworn to follow.

"Because, by Jove! a fellow would have to be made out of granite to resist the sweet, shy ways of such a little darling as Irene. And I'll marry her if she'll have me, and the money and property may go to the—dogs. I've a head and a pair of hands, and blue-eyed Irene shall not suffer."

It was an hour later that he met her in the hall, carrying great bows of holly, with which to festoon down the walnut staircase.

"Give me your burden Irene," said he. "Why did you not tell me you were going to gather it, and let me go with you? It is altogether too heavy a burden for your arms to bear."

He managed to get the lovely sprays from her arms, but it required an immense amount of tardy effort on his part, and shy, sweet blushing on hers.

"Answer me, Irene. Why didn't you let me go with you? Wouldn't you have liked it?"

He demanded her answer in the most captivating, lordly way, and she dropped her eyes in great confusion.

"Yes."

"Then why were you so cruel to me?"

"I am not cruel to anybody. Indeed I must go now."

Walter placed himself squarely in the way, and was looking down on her rosetinted face.

"No, you can't go yet. Irene, you are cruel, or you wouldn't never deprive one of the opportunity to enjoy the blessedness of your society." His voice lowered tenderly, and he dropped his head nearer her golden curls. "You know I think it cruel in you to be so distant and shy and reserved with me—don't you, Irene?"

She shrank away, her lovely form drooping like a lily, her cheeks hanging out their signals of distress and confusion.

"Oh, please don't talk so to me. Indeed I must go! Mabel is waiting for the holly, and she—they won't like it if—"

But she was a prisoner in his tight clasp.

"If what? If they find you and me talking so confidentially together?"

"No, I mean if I don't take the holly at once."

Walter put his arm around her waist before she knew what he was doing.

"Irene, look up. You shall not go until you let me see in your eyes if you love me as well as I love you! Irene, my dear little girl, I love you very dearly."

She was silent for one second, and he saw the quiver of her lips. Then she raised her head slowly, shyly.

"You love me? Oh, Walter, what will they all say? Don't you know it is Mabel you should say that to? I am nobody, Walter, and Mabel is an heiress."

Walter had both arms around her by this time, and was looking ardently in her glowing face.

"I know Mabel is an heiress, and a nice little girl, and I also know you are a darling—my darling—and the only girl I ever asked to be my wife, or ever shall ask! Say yes, pet."

His tones were low and tender, but triumphant.

"And you can deliberately give up so much for only just me?"

Her wondrous eyes met his bravely now, and thrilled him with the love light in them.

"Only just you, my darling! Why, you are more than all the world to me! Come, we will go tell Uncle Abiah at once. Just one kiss first—you must."

And he had more than one or two before he led her, blushing, with tears trembling on her lashes, like diamonds on a golden thread, to Uncle Abiah, who sat in his library with Cornelia, industriously looking over a receipt book.—They looked up in surprise as Walter marched in, Irene on his arm, a picture of confusion.

"If you please, Uncle Abiah, I want your blessing and cordial consent to receive this little girl for your niece. I love her and she loves me."

Uncle Abiah looked shrewdly over his glasses at Mrs. Cornelia.

"Well, sister, what shall we say to this youth's demand?"

A broad smile of perfect delight was on her merry face.

"Say? Why, tell them yes, and welcome; and let them know their Aunt Cornelia isn't a fool if their Uncle Abiah is."

Walter looked astonished, and felt Irene's hand tremble on his arm.

"What is it, dear?"

She smiled through her tears as she looked into his inquiring eyes.

"Oh, Walter, I am afraid you will be angry. I am Mabel, after all, and—"

"And you have made love to your cousin, the heiress, in spite of yourself, my boy! So Hillcrest is a foregone fate, after all, eh?"

"Don't scold, please, Walter?" Mabel pleaded, in a low voice, with her blue eyes looking into his.

"As if I could scold you, my love!—Since I have you, what need I care?"

And Mrs. Cornelia turned over the leaves of the receipt book until she came to "wedding cake," and avers that she made the match herself.

He "Squeeze" Her Hand.

AN OHIO merchant tells the following old story about himself.—Where he lives is a secret, except that it is not a mile and a half from the Xenia court-house:

"When I was about seventeen years old I made a trip to Cleveland in the old fashioned stage coach, with its spanking four horses. At Mount Vernon, about 4 P. M., a pretty girl came aboard. She sat on the back seat, next to an elderly farmer-like looking man. I was on the middle seat immediately in front of her. I soon struck up a pleasant chat with her. She was a charming talker, and almost as brilliant as she was pretty.

"It looked as if we were mutually pleased. When dark came I concluded there would be no harm in giving her hand a gentle squeeze by way of a feeler. I reached behind and got hold of the hand.

"I was a little startled at the hardness, but it returned a vice-like pressure. I squeeze again and it squeeze back. A sense of disappointment would steal over me when in my mind I would contrast the seeming toughness of her hand with the tenderness and sweetness of her voice. The contrast did not seem to arterialize my blood quite up to the point of exhilaration.

"At last she reached her destination and left the coach. After we had started again that old rooster who sat beside her addressed me thusly:

"Young man, do you feel all right? You had a nice time tugging at my old paw for the last five miles; hope you've enjoyed it."

"The young ladies in the front seat giggled all the way to the next station, and the gentlemen passengers didn't forget to smile when I looked up. I have been more successful since in that line."

A Mystery of the Great Lake.

There is a mystery about the American lakes. Lake Erie is only from sixty to seventy feet deep. But lake Ontario is 592 feet deep, 230 below the level of the ocean, or as low as most parts of the Gulf of St. Lawrence; and the bottom of lakes Huron, Michigan, and Superior, although the surface is much higher, are all from the vast depths on a level with the bottom of Ontario. Now, as the discharge through the river Detroit, after allowing for the probable portion carried off by evaporation, does not appear by any means equal to the quantity of water which the three upper lakes receive, it has been conjectured

that a subterranean river may run from lake Superior, by Huron, to lake Ontario. This conjecture is not impossible and accounts for the singular fact that herring are caught in all the lakes communicating with the St. Lawrence, but no others. As the falls of Niagara must have always existed, it would puzzle the naturalist to say how these fish got into the upper lakes without some subterranean river; moreover, and periodical obstruction of the river would furnish a not improbable solution of the mysterious flux and reflux of the lakes.

Juvenile Smoking.

Among the smokers in general it rarely happens that the habit is commenced at a middle or late period of life. Most men who smoke at all have contracted the habit between their fifteenth and twentieth year; and like all other habits, good or bad, contracted at such a time it is one which is difficult to eradicate. There is no valid excuse for juvenile smoking. A man pleads habit, the soothing effect of tobacco, and so on. But a boy smokes because he sees others do so, and because he looks upon smoking as a manly practice. He knows that it does him no good; indeed, in the majority of cases, boys know that their first attempts at smoking made them very ill, and the tolerance of the effects of the tobacco was obtained only after long practice and many disagreeable sensations. The mental power of many a boy is certainly weakened by tobacco smoking. The brain under its influence can do less work, and the dreamy feeling which is produced tends directly to idleness. For all reasons it is desirable that our rising generation should be abstainers from tobacco.

Soon Satisfied.

They were an Eastern couple. They had strolled in the moonlight, and swung on the gate, and stood at the front door, and sat on the sofa, and—and, &c., for many months. They had dreamed the old dream of love together; they had also munched numerous pints of peanuts and eaten considerable ice cream. The fact is they had been lovers. But when they went and married—or rather they thought they did; for after two weeks of this suppositious life, it was discovered that, through a technical mistake, the nuptial knot had never been really tied, and the marriage was therefore void.

Of course this created considerable consternation and horror in the new household. The young man wanted to hurry off without an instant's delay and have the ceremony legally performed, but the maiden, upon consideration, concluded that the denouement was not so unfortunate after all. Two weeks of married life had cured her, and thanks, she believed she would go back to her mother. And she went.—Louisville "Courier Journal."

How He Knew Him.

Dr. M——, an eminent divine of the Church of Scotland, lately visited the Paris exhibition. Shortly after his arrival in the gay metropolis, an Irishman came running up to him on the street, crying out:

"Och, blessings on ye, Dr. M——. How are yez?"

"I am very well," replied the doctor, rather dryly.

"And when did yez come to Paris?"

"Last week. But how did you come to know me?"

"Give me a shilling, and I'll tell yez."

The doctor, curious to know how the fellow found his name out, gave him a shilling, and was answered by the Irishman:

"Sure, then, I saw your name on your umbrella."

A Novel Cure.

Tom Johnson, of the poor house, has a faculty of getting considerable work out of the inmates under his charge. There was one who made up his mind not to work at all, although he was capable of doing considerable. To avoid it he kept in bed and made out to be ill, demanding the attention of the physician. That gentleman stated there was nothing the matter with him. Tom thought he could cure him and the other night placed a coffin in his room. When the old man awoke the first thing that met his gaze was the "wooden overcoat" which stood at the foot of his bed. This seemed to animate him. He arose early, dressed himself and informed Tom that he thought he was better and asked the steward if there wasn't something he could do around the house. He has been busy ever since.—Dubuque Herald.

Be Wise and Happy.

If you stop all your extravagant and wrong notions in doctoring yourself and families with expensive doctors or humbug cure-alls, that do harm always, and use only nature's simple remedies for all your ailments—you will be wise, well and happy, and save great expense. The greatest remedy for this, the great, wise and good will tell you, is Hop Bitters—rely on it. See another column.

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