

AN AWAKENING.

By NORA VYNNE,
(Author of "The Blind Artist's Pictures," "Honey of Aloes," etc.)

The landlady showed Clement and his mother upstairs with grudging civility, and left them on the landing with an apologetic gesture towards a half-open door.

"That's 'er room. She's in—or if she ain't, she will be in a moment. When she leaves the door open, it means people 'as comes is to go in and wait. When she's not coming back she locks the door. She's only at the post—most likely—she told me she expected visitors." And the landlady disappeared abruptly downstairs without waiting to see if her lodger were at home or not.

Clement knocked softly—there was no answer, so he opened the door wider for his mother to enter.

"We will wait, of course—" he said in his pleasant measured tones—"I fancy we are before our time."

But a clock striking the quarter outside proclaimed them a little after it. Mrs Hearne's prosperous suburban propriety had already been a little ruffled by the cockney accent and undeferential carelessness of the landlady; she shut her lips lightly as she entered and looked around the room.

"How shockingly untidy," she said. The room certainly was very untidy—scattered and torn papers lay around the high-backed chintz-covered chair at the writing table, books and newspapers had been flung down at random on other chairs, a hat, coat,

and gloves, with one or two paper parcels, disfigured the sofa. The fire was half out, and the hearth littered with cinders—worst of all, a meagre luncheon array remained on the table, a cat had pulled a chop bone down from the plate, and left it on the carpet, as it ran out at the door, spitting defiance at the visitors.

Clement's glance followed his mother's round the room. "It is untidy," he said, "I have never seen it so before. She has always had it in perfect order when I have called upon her."

Perhaps he, too, would have found the disorder shocking, if his mother had not, but in protest against her tone, something in him called the disorder pathetic. He felt flattered that the girl should have taken so much trouble on his account as, it seemed to him, must have been needed to regularly prepare her room for his visits, and yet rebuked that she had not cared to take him in her confidence in this small matter.

"There's not a chair to sit down upon," said his mother.

"Sit here," Clement said—lifting the parcels and noticing the lettering on the covers, "Stott, Confectioner—," she remembered to get us some cakes for tea, however."

"And carried her own parcels home like a shopgirl," said his mother.

Clement had a healthy fondness for cakes—he and his betrothed had always eaten a great many when he

came to tea; had she always snatched a frantic five minutes to rush out and buy them between her work and his visits? Had the room always been as squalid as this ten minutes before he arrived—and found her prettily dressed and light-hearted—so delicately a lady—so well read—so refined?

The many torn sheets of manuscript that were scattered on the floor, showed how hard she had been working that morning. "He wondered if she had ever had to work extra hard to make up for those pleasant hours spent with him.

"And her lunch not cleared away a quarter past four," Mrs Hearne said. "Her dinner—probably," corrected Clement. "Stale bread, ginger beer, a very meagre chop, and no table-cloth. But I assure you, mother, if she had been here, our tea would have been served most elegantly—I have no doubt that there are some very nice cakes in that parcel.

He stood a moment musing over the contrast, and then moved suddenly between his mother and the fireplace.

"Does she always leave her slippers on the hearthrug?"

"I wondered if you would notice that," he said with a pleasant laugh, "I was trying to hide them, because I knew you would be so shocked. No, I have never seen her shoes so distinctly before." He stopped—and picked one up, handling it with certain respect. "See, mother, isn't it hard just a girl who can wear such small shoes should have to wear such shabby ones."

"You never told me she was so—so uncomfortably poor."

Mrs Hearne was the widow of a wealthy merchant, and had all the bourgeois contempt for poverty.

"I never knew, I never knew—that is, I knew, but did not realise. Of course, I knew she was a journalist, and had to work—but she has always kept all this from me."

He gave another pained glance at

the discomfort of the room, and his tone was that keen self-reproach.

"I should call that hypocrisy," Mrs Hearne said coldly.

He considered a moment, and felt his mother's charge unjust.

"Why not courage?" he said.

Mrs Hearne was not altogether hard, or unsympathetic, but this untidy journalist girl had known that her lover's mother was coming to call upon her; if she had not been as much impressed by the honour that was to be done her as Mrs Hearne had expected she would be, at least she need not have been rudely negligent. Mrs Hearne considered she had a fair grievance.

"I do not want to be hard on the girl of your choice, Clement. I came here, as you know, with the kindest of intentions towards her. Though I considered you were most unwise in your choice, I was prepared to receive Miss Trent as my daughter-in-law. But it is exceedingly rude of her not to be here to receive me," she said.

"Exceedingly rude—worse than rude—in hospitable—so I am quite sure she has not done it on purpose. There must have been some accident. She has been detained against her will. She will be very much more worried than you are by the mishap. Don't be cross, mother. I'm sure Nan is not to blame. Take off your gloves, and set your bonnet straight; I'm sure she'll be here in a minute."

Clement spoke with emphasis. Yesterday, he too might have doubted whether his charming fiancée would pay as much deference to his mother as she—or as he himself would have wished. Now, he was quite sure that the girl who had so bravely hidden her struggles, lest the sight of them should pain him, would grudge no effort to spare the susceptibilities of his mother. Only he felt that he had been to blame, or it would not have occurred to her that such concealment or any effort was necessary.

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