

until his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkened room.

A figure advanced to meet him with outstretched hands.

"Ralph, Ralph! oh, how I have longed for a home face."

"And I for yours, Madge dear," he answered gently as he took her hands and led her, half-crying, half-laughing, to a horsehair sofa near the window.

"You must think me a goose," said Mrs. Tremaine, wiping her eyes; "but oh! how I have waited for this hour—waited to see someone who knows my dear old home, I long for England, and I shall never see it. But I am selfish—I mustn't sadden your welcome. You've not changed a bit, Ralph," she went on more cheerfully, "except that your hair is grey, while I—confess you would not have known me."

Ralph searched the lined, thin face, the hollow temples, from which the grey hair was receding so pitifully fast; then he raised her hands to his lips without speaking.

"You're just the same, old friend, Ralph."

"I hope so; but were you treating me as such when you never wrote of your need, or of your life? You should have let me help you—your oldest friend."

"I did think of writing to you for help once or twice, but Arthur said nothing would come right. So they have; we're really getting on well now, though I expect we strike you as being in pretty poor circumstances. Edmund is his father's right hand and a splendid farmer; and Len and Horace are almost as good. They're such good boys, Ralph, they work early and late. As for Biddy, she's our sun-shine, the brightest and prettiest girl that ever lived, her father says."

"She's the image of you at her age." "Oh, Ralph, you flatterer. Oh, my dear, how good it is to see you sitting here and hear your voice. I do hope you will not be too uncomfortable and stay with us some time."

"I shall be very happy, Madge; don't worry. Remember I came out on purpose to see you and yours."

"Dear Ralph," said Madge affectionately, as she rose, "you are just to me as you were twenty years ago. Now I'll call the Dad in, and I must go and help Biddy with the tea."

When Ralph went to bed that night he surveyed himself steadfastly in the tiny mirror that hung upon the wooden wall. "No, I suppose I have not changed much," he said to himself, "certainly not as much as Madge and Arthur. They have aged years, while I feel immeasurably their junior. I suppose, though," he continued as he turned from the glass, "that penny and hard-hips do not tend to prolong one's youth and gaiety."

Weeks passed and found Ralph Murray still an inmate of the house. He entered into the life with a zest that amused his friends and surprised himself; never had he anticipated finding so much pleasure on a farm, above all on a farm where luxury and repose were practically unknown. He rose early to help the boys milk, he helped the children with their lessons, played with the twins, read to Biddy and her mother as they sewed, and was always ready to lend a hand whenever Arthur or Edmund asked his help.

Day by day he watched the war these hard-working, patient people waged against the ghostly forest, and day by day he realised the fascination of the pioneer's life. He felt this fascination even while he saw the havoc the life had wrought in the woman he had loved (for, unconsciously, he had begun to think thus in the past tense), even while he saw the strenuous life of the young people, the lack of education, culture and pleasures. Oftentimes he would picture to himself this farm cleared and sown in grass, sheep and cattle dotted through the paddocks, shady trees breaking up the landscape and flowers in profusion round a house that bore no resemblance to the present one.

He would talk of his visions to Madge, and she would smile and shake her head. "That will not come in my time. I, too, see it in my dreams, but I'll never see it in reality."

Hourly Ralph watched and studied Bridget. He learned to understand her every look and gesture, to anticipate the delicious murmur of laughter that greeted the smallest joke. He watched her sparkling eyes and glowing face as he told her of his travels, of his encounters with famous men, or described the aspect of historic places.

"How is it," he asked Madge one day, "that Bridget alone of all your children has a love for reading and self-improvement?"

"I don't know," returned the mother; "it isn't because she has more time—she works as hard as the boys. It may be, I fancy, that the girls out here have naturally more ambition than the boys, more desire for knowledge—the boys lack ambition horribly as a rule. Of course, as far as our boys are concerned, there is nothing for them—they are better without ambition—at present," she added as an afterthought.

More and more Ralph drew away from Madge and unconsciously sought Bridget's companionship. Of his exact feelings for her he was unaware until, one day, as he was working in the garden, he overheard a couple of sentences interchanged between husband and wife. These two sentences changed for him the whole tenor of his existence. It was Madge's voice that first caught his ear—"Well, at all events, twenty years or not, I'm sure she cares for him."

"I hope she does," answered her husband; "for I swear, though he doesn't know it, that he's at last replaced that early love."

Ralph moved from the window, with steps that almost reeled. What was this ball that had reached him out of the blue? Was this the real reason for his new-found joy in farm life? Was Madge supplanted in his heart and by her daughter?

With senses almost dazed he put on his coat and made his way to the little limpid creek. These questions must be faced and answered before he could rejoin the family circle. He walked for an hour or more revolving things in his mind. Could he, a man of forty, win the love of a girl of nineteen? Did he wish to do so? Was his love for Madge absolutely a thing of the past? These and similar questions tore at his heart and besieged his brain. He could find no answer, no peace, and unwillingly he turned his steps homeward. About a mile above the house he stopped to pick a bunch of ribbonwood, for he knew both Biddy and her mother loved this flower. To get it he had to turn from the creek-side, and as he rejoined the track near the bathing hole, a sound of sobbing reached his ears. He peered in all directions, and finally, under the shelter of a big manuka he found Bridget, face downwards, on the grass.

"Biddy, Biddy!" he called.

At the sound of his voice she sat up

startled, and seeing him gazing at her she covered her face with her hands angrily bidding him to go away.

He did not do so, but dropped on the grass beside her, and, laying his hand on hers, said quietly:

"I'm not going, little girl. I'm going to stay and you shall tell me why you cry."

"I can't, no I can't," gasped the girl, as she yielded her hands to Ralph's arm grasp. "I wish you'd go away," she added.

"Is that really true? Do you want me to leave Hillrise and you, do you dear?" Ralph bent his head to watch the girl's face.

A crimson tide flushed up from neck to hair and sank slowly back, leaving her white and trembling.

"What do you mean?" she whispered, "you must go. I—I cannot slip you."

At the sight of the wistful, tear-dimmed eyes, at the tone of the pleading voice, Ralph Murray felt all his doubts fall from him as a leaf from a tree. What matter the difference in their ages? here was the mate his soul yearned to. This flood of joy that filled him was indeed love—love afresh, invigorating and inspiring.

"Dear," he murmured, as he laid the fragrant bunch of ribbonwood on her knee, "there is my heart hidden in that flower; will you take it and keep it?" Gently his arm stole round her as she raised a blushing, rapturous face to his.

### Wanted, An Ideal Servant.

A Chicago banker is in search of a paragon in the way of a servant. She must wait at table ideally, and read from her eyes what the guests require. She must never show ill-temper nor wear any expression of levity. Further, she must be a good cook, and make her own costumes; she must have no acquaintances, never gossip, be correct in all her dealings, and keep her place. The lady possessing all these qualifications will have to remain with the banker during his lifetime, and at his death she will receive 100,000dol., or £20,000. The question suggests itself, if such a help can be found, is it likely that she will survive the banker? Won't the strain of remaining a paragon prove too much for her!

### The "Idle Rich."

There is a popular notion that the social routine of the West End of London is incapable of being disturbed by anything short of a royal mandate or an earthquake. The average working man probably gathers his ideas on the subject from diatribes against the "idle rich," from fantastic cartoons representing club loungers and haughty dowagers, and from reports of such cases as that of Sir Julius Wernher's son and heir, who wasted £25,000 while "studying" at Oxford (horse racing and cards, apparently), and who before reaching his twenty-third year has figured in the Bankruptcy Court with liabilities declared at £85,000 and assets at £8. But society contains, after all, only a small proportion of freaks as of millionaires. The ordinary member of the upper class is less heavily burdened with spare cash than is generally supposed, and however "idle" he may be he is not altogether immune from such worries or fits of pessimism as afflict other classes of the community. The susceptibility of Mayfair was indeed promptly discovered to a very interesting extent during the short duration of the coal strike. Caterers, clothiers, florists, jewellers, and other tradesmen, who usually make large profits between the early part of each year and the close of the London season, all declare that the majority of their regular clients cut down their expenditures with a quick sense of the economies which will probably be forced upon them a little later through losses on their industrial investments. Society, in short, proved that it has nerves, and is much more reliable to depression than its critics generally assume it to be.

### Votes for Swedish Women.

News from Sweden this week will soften a little the bitterness of the rebuff given English suffragists last week in the failure of the Conciliation Bill, for a Government Bill was introduced in the Swedish Parliament yesterday extending to women the parliamentary franchise, and the right to stand for election upon the conditions now enforced in the case of men.

The bill contains a curious provision that married women whose husbands have paid no taxes for three years shall not be entitled to vote.

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