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EASY TO BE MISTAKEN.

"Will you let me have it, John?"

"No, Georgie, I can't."

John Randall uttered his refusal of his wife's request very decidedly, as if he felt that the request was unreasonable; and yet there was an undercurrent of grieved impatience in his voice, and a look of perplexity and self-dissatisfaction in his eyes. He wanted to see his wife rise from the breakfast-table, and thereby signify her acquiescence in his decision, before he went off for his morning walk to the mill.

Georgie, however, did not rise. Her looks did not express acquiescence. She was a very pretty woman—very pretty; tall, slight, very fair, with large, clear, steady eyes, and profuse brown hair. Besides her beauty, she had an air of delicate, graceful composure rather peculiar, and a voice that suggested alto flute notes. For all this she was simply the wife of a master machinist in the great Haliburton Print Works of Millville, and mistress of one of the small, white factory tenements, whose orderly rows constituted Millville proper.

But Georgie did not belong to the factory element, although she had married into it. She had been brought up by a relative, upon whom she had been left dependent, and whom she called Aunt Appleton.

Aunt Appleton lived at the other end of Appleton—the west end—among the Haliburtons, the Dilloways, and the Verses.

Perhaps, under the circumstances, Georgie might have looked a little higher than John Randall. But then John was as good as gold—strong, steady, manly, true.

Aunt Appleton had the sense to rejoice at the perception of her pretty protegee, and the generosity to give her a liberal outfit—her furniture, a complete wardrobe, a nice wedding.

It had been very agreeable to Georgie to have these things. She was fastidious to the core. She enjoyed advantages of his position—her good clothes, her prestige among the wives of the other officials in the print works. She was fastidious—perhaps a little too fastidious for her place.

John Randall had reached his last button—a somewhat shiny button on a somewhat shabby coat. He had neither time nor pretext for fidgeting. At this last moment his wife raised her eyes, clearly, unflinchingly, to his face.

"Why not?" she asked, in her own sweet voice.

It is never pleasant for a man to be called to an account—to an account about money (and of course it was money Georgie wanted) by a woman, and that woman his wife. John's face flushed a little; a hot retort pricked the very tip of his tongue, but he did not utter it. He was a very patient man, naturally; and then he had that deep, pure love for his pretty wife which overreaches all slight shocks.

"I have exceeded my salary every month since we were married, Georgie," he said. "The first of January will be here in a few weeks, and I shall not be able to meet all the bills that are due. I don't feel that we ought to trifle away a penny of money. I don't believe you do, either."

"I shall say no more about it," she returned. "I ought to wear a new pair of gloves to call on Paul's bride, but if you can't give them to me I must do without them."

John Randall's brain was fine enough to understand that this was not the acquiescence he wanted. He would like to indulge her, but there was the fact that if he began it, he should be always behind hand, always poor.

This was his fact. Georgie had hers, also—that she was always to be denied and disappointed. She didn't mind so much wearing the old gloves, on this occasion; that which was wedging itself painfully into her convictions, was that she would have to give up all the little luxuries and elegancies that she so craved; that her future was to be a plain matter-of-fact routine, deprived of those gratifications in whose absence she felt a sort of moral starvation.

"It don't seem as if you ought to be disappointed, Georgie," said the husband, finally. "You know just what my salary is, and know just how far it will go. We used to talk about saving something every year, so that I might better myself one of these days. I don't like to deny you."

"Never mind," she said rising. She was one of those women who say too little rather than too much.

John went off to his work. Bridget, the girl-of-all-work, came in to clear the table. Georgie dusted the parlor, and made the pudding, fed the canary, and then paced the sewing machine in the window, facing the dull, leaden light of the November day, and sat down to stitch wrist-bands. She had been married more than a year, and was making her first shirt for John. She was very thoughtful—a dogged pain on her face all the while.

"Perhaps I shall stay to Aunt Appleton's tea," she said to her husband at the dinner-table. "If I do you will come for me, won't you?"

He reflected a moment. "I told you last night, Georgie, that I should have to be from home an hour or two this evening. There is to be a meeting of the officials of the mill at half-past seven. I should be too tired to dress and go up to your aunt's afterwards."

"I had forgotten," she said quietly; so quietly that he thought she did not care.

When he was gone she went to her bedroom to arrange her toilet for the call. She put on the best she had, of course. She had a genius for dress; and, despite the mended gloves, she looked as stylish as she did pretty.

Just as she approached her aunt's gate, old Mrs. Haliburton, in her velvets and steel-colored silks, was being handed from her carriage by her son. The Haliburtons were the owners of the mill in which John Randall was employed. Stephen, the only son, had just returned from a five years' residence abroad. These two facts caused Georgie to scrutinize the mother and son somewhat closely; and, doing so, Stephen Haliburton raised his hat to her.

"A pretty face," he remarked, carelessly, to his mother. "I suppose it is some one I have known or should know."

Old Mrs. Haliburton, with her keen eyes and beak nose glanced sharply back toward Georgie, whom she had not perceived, and nodded.

"It is that young person whom Jane Appleton brought up. She is married now to one of our men, I believe."

Georgie found Paul Appleton and his bride holding a sort of formal reception. The rooms—where her own wedding had been solemnized a year before—were quite filled with guests. A very dainty and graceful bride was the new Mrs. Paul, in her lavender train and point-lace shawl. Georgie tried not to feel the least tinge of envy as she looked at her.

Aunt Appleton had always a sense of gratitude towards her protegee for having forborne to fascinate

either of her own marriageable boys, and this gratitude cropped out in active kindness under the exultation she felt over Paul's match.

Georgie moved easily about the well-furnished rooms; somehow she seemed just fitted for such surroundings. The subdued, well-bred manners, the faint perfumes, the refined faces, and the rich dresses, were like a stimulant to her. She needed such quickening to be fully herself. Her composed, delicate beauty unfolded to perfection in this atmosphere.

She had been talking to one and another, taking in shapes and trimmings with her quick artist's eye, and in a pause was just reflecting on the hang of the new curtains, when a voice said near her:

"I seem not to be able to recall you at all, Mrs. Randall. Yet I must have known you before I went away. My mother has just told me your name, and I have come to reclaim acquaintance if you will permit me."

"I remember you perfectly, Mr. Haliburton," Georgie returned quietly. "I was hardly grown up when you left us, five years ago."

"Five years? Ah, true enough! Won't you take this chair? What a lovely lily! Why, it is not real?"

"No; these wax flowers are very like nature, though—almost a plagiarism; don't you think so, Mr. Haliburton?"

"Why, yes. It must be quite difficult to make them. I dare say they bring a good price."

Under her serene smile a thought came into Georgie Randall's mind. She began to examine the gentleman before her with interest.

Stephen Haliburton was a gentleman by habit and a man of the world by force of circumstances. But nature intended him for a diligent, painstaking, persevering man of business.

If he was not a great or a very good man, it was because he had so much time, so much money, so much flattery. He was spoiled by his opportunities, yet he needed only the right influence to elevate him beyond himself. He was thirty years old now—he was past the age when a man disdains to be led by a woman. But Stephen Haliburton had never disdained it. He had always been led by the keen-eyed, beak-nosed woman in steel silk, who as Georgie talked with the heir, sat holding her wine-cup up to the firelight not far off.

The heir seemed to like Mrs. Randall's talk; perhaps because there was so little of it. In return he was rather unreserved—gossiping about his plans and his prospects. He said that he was glad to get home. He meant to settle down at Millville now; look after his factories and his operatives, and introduce some improvements. He wanted a better class of work—more tasteful designs; he hadn't seen a pretty print from the factory. Didn't Mrs. Randall agree with him?

Yes; she agreed with him. It was a strange basis for parlor gossip—oils, chemicals, designs for calicoes. He was surprised to find how much she knew about it; and she—she was a little surprised herself. The most delicate pink began to flush her cheeks, the irises of her eyes grew into great black flakes full of luster. All at once, at last, she turned a casual glance without the window.

"Why," she said, with a slight start, "it is almost dark. And I believe it is raining. I must go at once."

She stepped towards the window. Great flashing drops were falling upon the flagstones. The dull November daylight was almost gone. Mr. Haliburton rose also.

"Did you walk?" he inquired.

Let us take you home. My mother will be going soon."

The little stir attracted Mrs. Appleton, who—most of the guests having gone—was devoting herself to Mrs. Haliburton.

"Stay to tea, Georgie," she suggested. "John knows you are here—does he not?"

"Yes; but it is raining. I think I had better not stop."

"I have been asking Mrs. Randall to take a seat with us, mother," interposed Stephen Haliburton.

"Ah, yes!" said the lady, with contracted nostrils and prolonged lip again. "I shall be happy."

And then the keen eye overlooked Georgie, as if to ask if there were any just cause why the Haliburton carriage, the Haliburton horses, and it might be the Haliburton heir, should travel the length of Millville to take home this young person, who had married one of the Haliburton employes.

Georgie stood unmoved, a little concerned as to whether her last dress and bonnet should walk or ride, not at all concerned as to her own disposal.

The factory bell had done ringing, and John Randall was in sight of home just as the carriage of his employer stopped at the door, and his wife stepped from it. He did not, however, overhear her say to Stephen Haliburton, "If you will call to-morrow afternoon, I will show you what I mean."

"Had you a pleasant afternoon?" her husband asked, by-and-by, as they sat at the tea-table.

"Very pleasant," she said, thoughtfully.

"It was very polite in Mrs. Haliburton to bring you home."

"Yes, I should have spoiled my dress."

It was always with a little effort that John Randall could get his wife to talk, and she seemed peculiarly silent to-night, and absent as well as silent.

Her eyes were brighter, too, than common—her face a little flushed. He was too generous, too unselfish a man to begrudge her even a happiness in which he had no part; but something in her abstraction filled him with uneasiness. The uneasiness was not decreased when, reaching home a little before the usual hour the following afternoon, he met Stephen Haliburton just leaving the house, nor when he found Georgie with the same brightened eyes and heightened color as the night before.

That was the beginning of John Randall's trouble.

It was not so much common jealousy—a man's instinct of revolt at another man's admiration of his handsome wife—as it was a fear—a desperate, death-like fear—that Georgie needed something he could not give to make her happy. He could never give her luxuries. He could never say such things as he fancied Stephen Haliburton must be able to say to women. But he loved her so! O, heavens! he loved her so! How could he endure that anything should come between them?

"I won't wrong her and tease her with suspicions," he said to himself, in the depth of the night. "I'll just fight my way the best I can against it. I'll keep on steady. Perhaps she'll see it right by-and-by."

Poor fellow! he did not realize how his own determination implied the dreary thought that her heart was turned from him. He raised himself on his arms to look at her as she slept; and all through what followed he retained the pure, calm face, as it pressed the pillow, whitened by the moonlight that glinted the frost on the window-panes and flooded the room.

She seemed colder to him after this, and he kept silent.

He knew that she met Haliburton at her aunt's; he knew that she went to the seaside the ensuing Summer, for a week's visit to Mrs. Paul Appleton—there he was also. He knew that she seemed to be living a life apart from him; and once—that was when the iron entered his soul, when he went to her little desk, a present he had made her during their engagement—for a sheet of note paper, and found it locked, and asked her carelessly enough for the key, she flushed and said she would get the paper for him.

But he kept true to the promise he made himself. He kept on "fighting his way against it as best he could," hoping, with a sick heart, that "she might see it right by-and-by."

The months wore away. The second year of their marriage was nearly completed. John had been very careful—as careful as Georgie herself—that there should be no outward and visible sign of misunderstanding or coldness between them. No suspicion had come to any that the second year of their married life had been less happy than the first. Nor had he ever omitted to give her any little indulgence within his power. He had prepared a surprise for her on the coming anniversary of their wedding during the year.

The anniversary fell upon Sunday; and so their little commemoration of the day must come the preceding evening. No allusion had been made to any celebration by either of them; but John felt sure, some way, that she could not let the time pass without some sign. For his own part, he had half resolved to attempt some explanation of their estrangement. Anything, he thought, would be better than this chilling reserve. With his mind divided between the anticipation of relief and jealous dread, he went to the counting house that Saturday night to receive his money. The cashier looked up with a certain embarrassment at his approach.

"Ah, Mr. Randall—the accumulation you have left in my hands? To be sure! And, by the way, Mr. Haliburton spoke to me that there were to be some changes made, and—and—but there he is himself, sir."

John Randall turned, with a feeling akin to desperation, to meet his employer. It had gone through him like a thunderbolt, as the cashier spoke, that he was to be displaced. Stephen Haliburton simply said as John faced him: "I'll not detain you now, Mr. Randall. I shall call this evening to let you know of the changes I feel obliged to make."

And the owner bowed and left him.

With the money in his nerveless hands, John Randall walked homeward like a man dazed. He was to lose his place. For what reason, he could not conjecture. But to lose it, was to lose reputation, courage—everything. He had never imagined such a possibility as that. The money that he carried—he should not dare to make a present of it to Georgie now. He might have to wait for other employment. It might be needed for their bare every-day need, before he got work again. A chill like death struck to his soul.

Georgie, evidently, had not overlooked the recurrence of their wedding day. The cosy rooms of the cottage all wore a little air of festivity. Some slender vases held the gleanings of the flower-beds; chrysanthemums—blood-red, white and purple—verbenas, and scarlet geraniums.

She came to the door that night