

"No, Theodore," he interposed. "The lovers are in perfect accord. Only they have conscientious scruples against marriage. They are simply going to set up housekeeping without the formality of a wedding ceremony."

Theodore dropped Helen's hands as if they burned him. Before he could ask an explanation, however, Helen interrupted:

"We are going to do nothing of the sort, Uncle Everett."

Theodore gratefully took Helen's hands again, darting an accusatory glance at the judge.

Helen continued:

"We are not going to set up housekeeping at all. He will keep his present quarters and I shall keep mine. But just the same we will belong to each other quite as fully and completely as if Theodore here had murmured his conventional incantations over us."

Again Theodore dropped Helen's hands—so abruptly the judge laughed aloud.

Theodore turned upon him aghast. "This is outrageous," he said. "I, representing the church, am horrified. You, representing the state, should be just as much alarmed. We should do something, you and I, to turn this poor child's mind in the right direction."

"It has been turned in the right direction, Theodore," said Helen; "the surprising thing is that the church and the state does not admit it. Why, think what would happen to an eager intellect like Ernest Hamilton's if he had to come back to a narrow apartment, or a dreary suburb, each evening and eat morbid

meals opposite a housewife regaling him with the social ambitions of the other commuters? Ugh! It has ruined enough brilliant men already. Do you want me to destroy a great career, Theodore?"

"You will be a blot upon that career—as surely a blot as is the stain on a priceless manuscript left by an overturned ink bottle," Theodore returned. "And you will be disgraced, despised, ostracized by all good society," added Lucy.

Helen smiled.

"Only a choice of evils, my dear," she said quietly. "Of course, none of those costly, well-kept wives who are on your visiting list will call upon me. But instead of having him merely one day at home, instead of making a tired husband work for me day in and day out, sacrificing everything to the necessity of clothing, feeding and humoring me, I'll have all my days free to work for him and with him, like the old-fashioned woman you admire, Lucy. Instead of being an expense, I'll be a help to him."

"This is all damned nonsense!" exclaimed John, unable to longer control his outraged feelings. "Now look here, you've either got to marry this fellow, if you want him, or else go away and never see him again. Never, I say. That's final."

"That's what I thought," returned Helen suavely, "when I ran away to Paris. I thought I'd go away and never see him again. But I'll never try again. I can't live without him, and I know he cannot live without me. If I didn't love him so much and want to help him so much, I'd marry him and have done with it. But I love him too well. Marriage is

just divorce—it's the end of romance, happiness and every sentiment that makes for love.

John, even more infuriated, if possible, by Helen's calm assumption that her logic was unimpeachable, would have turned more of his wrath upon her had not the judge, realizing that John might get beyond himself, intervened. Taking Helen in his arms soothingly, he said to John:

"Now don't be overwrought. Helen is all right—she's merely excited and a bit stubbornly anxious over the fate of her ideas. I still believe in her, and I still believe in Hamilton. It's simply that he's so absorbed in his work he doesn't realize what he's asking her to do."

Helen freed herself from the judge's paternal embrace and said, quietly still:

"That's just what I told him—he was too absorbed in his work when he asked me to marry him."

"What?" they all gasped. "He asked you to marry him—to really marry him?"

"Of course—implored me to marry him. Swore he'd not have me under any other conditions."

Lucy was the most amazed. She forgot all else except that here was the case of a young woman refusing the hand in marriage of an eligible young man.

"And you refused him?" she exclaimed. "Refused a man who loves you honorably?"

"Of course. You don't suppose I'd take advantage of the poor fellow's weakness? Women often do, I have to admit—even when they're not in love sometimes. It's the habit of the sex—to feather their nests at any needed sacrifice.

They're so dependent, you know. You see, he really doesn't know yet that I have decided not to marry him; but to love him and allow him to love me just the same."

John saw a gleam of hope. He immediately drew the judge aside and proposed that by some plan they get the doctor off to Paris.

Thus, the judge counseled, would be unwise.

"You can't stop her from following," he said. "She is at the edge of the precipice now, and the slightest mistaken move will push her over. We are dealing with big people and a big passion—a bigger passion than I have ever witnessed, even with all my experience on the bench, where most of the passions of marriage usually come to be adjusted."

Before John could reply the butler appeared to announce Dr. Hamilton.

"Tell him to come out here," the judge advised.

When John demurred, the judge and Theodore united in the opinion—discussed in low tones that Helen, of whom Lucy had taken possession, could not overhear—that it would be wise to allow Helen and Dr. Hamilton to meet alone; both the judge and Theodore, knowing now that Dr. Hamilton had not already consented to such a mating as Helen proposed, firmly believed that he would, as they expressed it, "bring her to her senses." The butler was told to show Dr. Hamilton into the garden, and the three men motioned Lucy to leave with them.

Lucy could not forbear a parting admonition as she turned from Helen.

"If you offer yourself on any such

terms to the man who loves you honorably, he'll never look at you again!"

When Ernest saw that only Helen was waiting for him he rushed to her and folded her in his arms with a long, impassioned embrace.

"Your brother told me you were ill, or I would have seen you before. I hope you are better again," he exclaimed.

"If I was ill, it was only for the need of you," Helen said with abandonment to the ecstasy of the moment. "I want you never to leave me again, Ernest—never!"

"Now that I have you, and am sure of you, and realize how badly I do need you, I will never let you get away from me," Ernest assured her. "And now you will apologize, I am sure, for what you said—it seems worlds and worlds ago that you didn't think you'd marry me, after all. You did not really mean that, did you, dear?" There was a pleading in his voice that pained her. She trembled and quivered like a wind-blown leaf. Ernest was afraid she still was ill.

"No, dear—it is just because your arms are around me, and I am so afraid you do not understand what that means to me. You think my prejudices were foolish, and it makes me tremble when I think that, perhaps, I still have to persuade you that I am right. I have made up my mind, for your sake and mine. Our love is too holy, too real, too magnificent to be debased by that monster—marriage."

"But you know we cannot have each other without it—we really can't. And I need you. You know that. We are helpless without each other. It is too late to

think of aught else. Whether you will or not the beautiful power of love is sweeping us together, and we must yield, not only to it but to the thing that love means, and that is the wedded bond. I used to look upon marriage as a mere contract—now I know, as I look into your eyes and feel you against me, and realize what it will mean to protect and care for you, that marriage is more than a contract. It is a religious sacrament."

"But can marriage, dear," pleaded Helen, "make love any more binding—our love—than it is now? Does it need the wedding ceremony to make it sacred?"

"No; it does not need an incantation to make love, given by God, righteous, but—"

"I knew you would acknowledge it—that you would see it," Helen interrupted eagerly. "It is the mistake of all the ages—marriage. They've tried to make love fit it, but it can't be done. Marriage must be changed to fit love. I'm going to Paris with you, Ernest, but not as your wife!"

Ernest held her from him for one long minute. His eyes tried to pierce her soul. He quivered in the repression of his emotion. Then slowly, almost dramatically, he dropped her arms and stepped back.

"You mean—that you must go—without marriage?"

"I mean—without marriage—just as you and I, loving each other, devoted to each other, joined, but not tied to each other!"

(To be continued next week)
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The Call of the City

By MAUDE NEWBEGIN



HE WENT up the stairs with eager quickness and lightness of step, despite his seventy years, inserted a key in the lock and entered the little apartment. He paused just a moment to listen, and then called:

"Mother!"

"Yes, dear!"

She came pattering to meet him, and she stooped to kiss her—a tender kiss which he never forgot under any circumstances.

"See what I have for you, mother!"

He held up a small bunch of flowers wrapped in purple glazed paper.

"Violets! Oh, William!"

Her old eyes sparkled with pleasure as she buried her delicate little nose in the fragrant purple depths.

"Thought you'd like 'em," he answered with conscious pride. "Come, get your bonnet on, and we'll go into the park. It's spring today, real spring. Wait till you feel in your old bones!"

She trotted back into the bedroom—a little box of a room full of heavy, old-fashioned furniture. She was small and plump and placid; her face was like an exquisite piece of old ivory, and her faded blue eyes were serenely happy. She had looked steadfastly upon life and had found it good.

She adjusted her neat little hat, picked up the coat of her "suit"—the skirt of which she already had on, for of course she had been sure that William would want her to go somewhere with him on Saturday afternoon—and took her gloves out of the bureau drawer.

"Ready so soon, mother? Well, it does beat all how spry you are! You could give your daughters some good pointers—I've seen 'em keep their husbands waiting everlastingly!"

A faint pink crept into her softly wrinkled old cheeks at his words of praise. She slipped into her coat as he held it for her and started to draw on her gloves.

"And now the violets!"

He brandished a long pin preparatory to fastening them on.

"But they'll wither if I wear them," she objected faintly.

"Nonsense, mother! Of course you'll wear 'em. This is spring, and what did I get 'em for, Mrs. like to know?"

"All right, William," she submitted, secretly pleased.

She went to the windows, from which could be seen the tops of the trees of Central Park and the waters of the lake—the "view" was quite like the country, the agent had said—and drew down the shades to shut out the spring sunlight. She liked the sunshine, but she could not let it fade the blue upholstery of another collection of heavy, old-fashioned furniture which filled the living-room—furniture from the good-sized house that they had given up after the last one of the "children" had married and gone.

Down the stairs and down the street they went, very happy, very contented, sniffing the spring air, which was exceedingly soft and sweet, even as it stole into the canyons of city streets.

Mr. and Mrs. Hathaway, they were—William Prentiss Hathaway was the name on the little card behind the glass in the apartment-house vestibule. Her first name, Margaret, had long ago been lost in the mystic maze of years that had made her "mother" to husband and children alike.

He was trim and well-groomed—neatly dressed from the crown of his carefully brushed stiff hat to the gleaming toes of his spat-topped shoes. His white mustache was closely clipped and his white hair smoothly brushed. He wore gloves and carried a slender cane. He radiated the spirit of unforgetting youth and seventy years of the joy of living. He guided the little old lady solicitously over street crossings with a tenderly protective air that was as beautiful as it was natural to him.

As they entered the park he stopped to buy a bag of peanuts from an Italian vendor.

"Nice—a day, John," he said as he threw him a coin.

There was a jolly twinkle in the old gentleman's eyes. The Italian showed all

his teeth in an energetic nod of affirmation.

Mr. and Mrs. Hathaway sat down on a bench. Their eyes were kindly and inviting as they watched the joyous young things all about them. Presently he took a peanut from the bag and tapped coaxingly on the cement walk. Two bright eyes appeared in the bushes, a little gray body whisked up to his hand, a pointed nose nuzzled—the peanut was gone, and, with a flirt of a gray-plumed tail, the squirrel darted away.

This performance was enacted over and over again, until one squirrel grew bold enough to seek the nuts in the old gentleman's pocket, much to the delight of an audience of wee citizens. Many a shy youngster approached, retreated, and, completely won, returned to stay.

But at last the peanuts were gone; the children had reluctantly scampered off one by one. The nursemaids were wheeling sleepy-eyed charges home to bed.

"Mother, it's time to be moving," said William Hathaway.

"I suppose it is, dear," she answered. They rose and strolled out to the entrance of the park. There they boarded a car and rode to where the white lights of Broadway were struggling against the spring twilight.

"It's a great town, mother," he observed proudly, looking about him almost with the zest of one who sees it for the first time.

"Indeed it is, William!" she agreed.

They made their leisurely way to a jolly Italian restaurant, where they had a pleasant little table d'hôte dinner, with plenty of spaghetti and rather a scarcity of everything else. After they had finished, and he had lighted a cigar, he turned his chair around beside hers, and they sat watching the dancing in a cleared floor space in the middle of the room.

"It's great, isn't it, mother, this dancing craze?" he remarked. "Makes me feel young again, almost as if I could do it myself. Do you remember how we used to dance?"

She nodded placidly, gently smiling at his enthusiasm. His eyes beamed with kindly indulgence upon the dancers. He had a beautiful charity which accepted all things as good. He had nothing of the narrowness of old age, which condemns because "it wasn't done in my young days."

"Well," he exclaimed finally, "they're pretty good at tripping the light fantastic, but I've yet to see one who can beat what you used to do!"

"Oh, William!" she deprecated.

He left her for a moment. When he returned he said with a show of elaborate carelessness:

"Mother, I told the proprietor that you were a regular Irene Castle once upon a time, and asked him if he wouldn't like to have us do an old-fashioned exhibition dance for him. He said he thought it might make quite a hit. What do you say if we try it?"

She shrank back timidly, as if she were afraid he would insist, and then blushed in confusion as she met the twinkle in his eyes. He enjoyed his little joke the more because she had taken him seriously.

Shortly after 9 o'clock they left the restaurant, and made their way home. Before turning into bed she put the slightly withered bunch of violets into a glass of water on her bureau. There was a faint little smile on her delicate face as she fell asleep.

II.

WELL, mother, where shall it be today?"

The sun streamed in at the dining-room window, and a little bird hopped busily about on the sill.

Mrs. Hathaway cracked open an egg, dropped it into a cup and seasoned it carefully.

"There you are, William," she said, handing it to him, as she had done so many mornings for more than forty years. "Why, I suppose we'd better go out to Cora's, seeing it's such a nice day. She's been at us to come for some time."

He looked over the Sunday newspapers while she washed the "sav breakfast dishes. In due time they started out, taking a train from the Pennsylvania station to Oceanshore, Long Island.

"Mother, father!" Cora greeted them.

"Why didn't you let me know you were coming? I'd have had the car meet you at the station."

She was a stronger, more energetic edition of her placid-faced mother, blonde and pretty, a little past 30—the youngest and most prosperous of their three married daughters. She began now on the subject that was nearest her heart in regard to her parents.

"You poor dears, it must be so warm in town today! Why don't you come out here with us until fall? I know nothing could tempt you away from the city in the winter, but I wish you'd close up that stuffy little flat for the present, anyway."

"My dear Cora, I assure you it isn't stuffy," returned her father. "The sun was almost too bright this morning. A bird was making himself quite at home on our window sill—the crumbs your mother strews around are some inducement; and since the trees have budded in the park the view is really magnificent."

"It's so much pleasanter and healthier here," protested his daughter.

"But rather inconvenient for me to get in to business in the morning," he added.

"Oh, father, business—why don't you give it up? But if you won't, you could go in with John every morning."

William Hathaway shook his head.

"We shall do very well as we are, my dear. We'll run off on lots of little trips this summer, won't we, mother?"

The house at Oceanshore was spacious and beautiful. It had been "done" by a noted interior decorator, with every plan for comfort as well as artistic effect. Small wonder that Cora Marston could not understand why her misguided parents preferred their city flat!

As they stood on the wide veranda

overlooking the sea they heard a babble of children's voices, and two rosy youngsters, a boy and a girl, came tumbling out of the house with delighted shrieks of "Grandfather! Grandmother!"

William Hathaway immediately commenced to romp, which lasted until the children bore him off to show him a new pony. After that he was in the midst of an absorbing fairy story when they were all summoned to dinner. At the table his grandchildren began, in their high-pitched little voices, to coax him to stay with them "a long, long time, grandfather!"

"If anything could bring us to Oceanshore it would be you, my dears," he merrily told them; "but the trouble is, grandmother and I are not young enough to live in the country."

As they entered the apartment that evening he said:

"Home's the best place, after all, isn't it, mother? This suits me first rate."

"I'm sure I like it best, William," she replied. "We should be so shut up out there in the country." Which sounded a bit paradoxical, but he understood her perfectly.

"Well, Cora hasn't lived in the city as many years as we have."

III.

SPRING blossomed into opulent summer. The park put forth all its splendor. On some streets the houses presented blank, boarded fronts; on others the children swarmed, and the stone stoops held laughing, chattering groups. On still others, downtown, the fire escapes were choked with bedding, and worn mothers strove to find a breath of air for puny, whimpering babies.

Maid With a Blind Spot

(Continued from Page Two)

room, suffered the usual terrible pangs preceding first appearance in public. But she remembered Malcolm. And she recalled that there was to be present a well-known manager. She must do her best!

So when the curtain rose and revealed Selina standing at the foot of a hill and gazing up into its purple mists, a young, rather pathetic little figure in white, seeking its vision, that same well-known manager stirred a bit in his seat. She hadn't spoken a word; a trying situation for any actress to magnetize by silence. But it was good work, rare work, that bit of symbolizing coming at the beginning of a play, a bit of symbolizing to put the audience in touch with the underlying thought.

Selina had two purposes within her heart this night; the one gleaming star-purport to make Malcolm's play a success through the medium of her talents, and the next to make those white faces shining out in the dark cavity before her look a bit interested and believe that life is beautiful and has wings to flight one up.

So she dominated, she controlled, she evaded and she frolicked, sometimes with the sure touch of genius, other times with the wavering of the amateur, but always that something that was like a light in her face shone out, captivated and held.

"The girl can act," said Mrs. Randall to her son; "you were right in your selection."

Malcolm was watching his sweetheart. What wonder this, that the woman he loved was there interpreting what no written word could have conveyed to her senses! How had she looked into his soul and gathered all its desires, its beauties, its little sly wickednesses, its noble understandings!

Mrs. Randall met her dearest enemy in the foyer when the play was ended. The dearest enemy, attired in dull gold

velvet, was awaiting her car, but she pressed forward to congratulate Mrs. Randall.

"Your son is made!" she said extravagantly. "And the girl, Selina Densmore!" A pause, and then: "When will the engagement be announced?"

Mrs. Randall did not answer.

"Such an idyllic love story," the other continued sweetly. "I've seen Malcolm and this young lady go often together in the park."

Mrs. Randall found her tongue.

"The exigencies of art, my dear Mrs. James, are quite beyond your comprehension," she said superbly.

The next night Selina went, despite her triumph, to her duties at Mrs. Randall's. But as she entered the door of the great house Mrs. Randall emerged like a gray Nemesis from the drawing-room and stood awaiting the disappearance of the man who had admitted Selina. Mrs. Randall then spoke crisply.

"Here is a month's salary, Miss Densmore," she said. "I shall no longer require your services."

Selina stood frozen, and at the moment, quite timely, like an actor in one of his own plays taking a cue, Malcolm Randall issued from somewhere. He went straight to Selina and lifted her cold little hand.

"My leading lady, mother," he said with precious meaning.

Well, the end of the story is that the girl with the blind spot (which after all was not a blind spot, but a dazzlingly clear spot) married a governor's only son, who in time became a great playwright, in whose plays Selina appeared, to the joy even of the critics. And bewildered Alden, on receipt of the news, sat up amazed, but recovered sufficiently to say that in this strange world one never can tell!

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But far up in the little apartment overlooking the park Mr. and Mrs. Hathaway lived their quiet, contented lives.

At length, in August, they planned to go away for the month. With much care Mrs. Hathaway covered the furniture, and Mr. Hathaway took the silver—what was left of it after generous distribution among the children—to the bank. They packed and started off together, in a pleasant little flutter of anticipation, for a lake resort in New Hampshire.

On the next Sunday but one Cora Marston viewed their arrival at Oceanshore with boundless astonishment.

"But I thought you were in New Hampshire!" she gasped, after she had greeted them.

"We were, dear," answered her mother, with a little glance of appeal toward her husband, who stood talking with big, jovial John Marston; "but we decided to come down on Thursday."

"You were gone just one week!" cried Mrs. Marston. "Didn't you like it?"

"Ye-es," hesitated Mrs. Hathaway. "The country was lovely, the table was nice, and the people were pleasant. I met a Mrs. Jones, who was charming. She showed me a new crochet stitch for that lace I'm—"

"Then why did you come home in this heat?"

"Well, you see, dear, the bed was hard; and—and—her daughter's accusing eyes rendered the old lady a bit uncomfortable—"your father had such a time getting the New York newspapers."

William Hathaway turned around at this and burst out laughing.

"And tell 'em the first remark you made, mother, when we reached town on Thursday night." As his wife did not seem disposed to tell them, he chuckled: "She said, 'Don't the city streets smell good, William?'"

Cora Marston shook her head helplessly and contented herself with:

"Well, I give you two up!"

IV.

BUT there came a time when fate took the disposal of their lives out of their gentle, capable hands. Early in the following spring Mrs. Hathaway contracted pneumonia. It was a very restful, sad-eyed old gentleman who tiptoed around the tiny apartment and ventured into his wife's room only after obtaining permission from a low-voiced, pleasant-faced nurse.

The country-seekers had started on their summer exodus before mother was able to be about again. She was very frail and weak. The doctor's verdict was that she must leave the city, so no objection was made when Cora Marston came and in her bustling, energetic way closed up the flat and carried her mother and father off to Oceanshore.

But the placid little old lady did not regain her strength. She sat on the veranda most of the day—sometimes crocheting, but usually with quiet hands folded in her lap—gazing out over the sea, and there was a wistful expression in her tired, gentle old eyes.

William Hathaway gradually gave up "business"—the work that he had puttered at for several years after it was no longer necessary—so that he could spend the days by his wife's side.

One day, shortly after they arrived at Oceanshore, he came back from town and dropped a bunch of violets into her lap. She looked up at him and smiled her faint, pleased smile.

"Aren't they lovely, William?" she said, sniffing their fragrance.

In a few moments she let them fall listlessly into her lap. He sat down beside her and picked up the flowers.

"Don't seem as keen about 'em as you once were," he remarked sadly.

"I—I was just thinking how we went into the park that day last spring, when you brought me the first bunch of the season. I—I wonder if the squirrels miss us, William!"

"Now, mother, we'll be back there next spring, never you fear," he promised hopefully. In an effort to cheer her he hummed the old song that he had quoted to her so often: "We've been together forty year, an' it don't seem a day too much."

She hummed it, too, as she softly stroked his hand. After a moment she murmured:

"It's been lonely without you today, William!"

And he determined that he could not allow her to be lonely again.

But she never saw another spring. During the long summer she faded quietly, gently; and in the fall, when the first chill breath blew, she slipped away, despite their efforts to hold her.

William Hathaway's sorrow was silent, dazed—he felt as if he had lost some vital part of himself. His daughter and son-in-law were kind, too kind—he vaguely wished now and then that they would not "fuss" over him so much—but he turned to the little people for comfort. After a time he romped with the children once more, built card houses and told them fairy stories; but he did everything in a sort of detachment from his surroundings—almost as if he were dreaming and expected some day to waken.

He did not return to business. When he made a tentative suggestion to do so his daughter opposed him with affectionate determination. Later, when he proposed living in town for a couple of months of midwinter, she was horrified.

"Goodness, no, father!" she exclaimed. "You can go in to spend the day as often as you like; but live there alone! What are you thinking of?"

He said no more. He did not go in to spend the day; he shrank from the long, tiresome trip back and forth.

V.

AT LAST spring came round again—a very beautiful spring on Long Island, but its beauty was lost on William Hathaway. He was visualizing spring in the city—the smell of the streets; the flower vendors; the park in tender green, with romping children and frisking squirrels; the young girls in gay clothes—all of it, he yearned to see all of it!

One day he stole away to the train. He wanted to escape. Cora's solicitous questions as to whether he was not well, or contented, or—many things.

When he reached the city he left the crowded station and made for the park. Many people turned to look after the well-groomed, faultlessly dressed old gentleman, with his trim, white mustache, his spats, his slender cane. He was bought peanuts and fed the squirrels and chatted with the merry, friendly children. Into his heart flowed joy and peace such as he had not experienced since mother died.

He ate a simple luncheon and wandered about the familiar, busy streets. He stopped to buy a bunch of violets. "Nice old gent," he thought, as he wrapped the bunch in purple glazed paper and handed it over.

William Hathaway held the flowers very carefully as he walked along. They evoked many happy memories. There was a little ache in his throat as he thought how pleased mother had always been when he brought them to her.

Presently, at a corner on Fifth avenue, he spied a clock. Four o'clock! He was astonished beyond measure. Where had the day gone? The train John Mar