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The Discordant Note

By TEMPLE BAILEY
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Dushane lying lazily on the marble bench by the fountain could see Julia as she swept down the long shaded walk with the vista of the terraced gardens at the end. She was in shimmering green with a necklace and belt of turquoise. Behind her strutted a peacock with outspread tail. Dushane's artistic eye gazed over the perfection of the picture. "You beauties," he murmured under his breath.

Julia, coming nearer, said, "I know I should find you here. You are always lazy in the afternoons. Other men play tennis—but you—"

"Would you like to have me play tennis—now?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"No, you may talk to me."

"What shall I talk about?"

She gave him a swift glance. "As if you didn't know," she murmured.

He knew what she wanted. He had always paid homage to her beauty, and she liked to bask in the sunshine of his compliments.

Somehow he felt not in the mood to give her what she desired. A weariness had come over him, a sense of incompleteness. He had planned today to ask Julia to marry him, and now that the moment had arrived, he had no desire to speak.

Even as he hesitated the peacock raised his head and gave a harsh cry. Julia put her hands over her ears. "He is such a beauty," she said, "who would have dreamed that he could give forth such an evil sound?"

It flashed through Dushane's mind, as she sat there, touching her shining hair, setting the blue stones at



The Peacock Spread His Plumage and Gave Forth His Cries.

her neck, making a thousand little ineffective feminine movements, that she was not unlike the peacock preening itself in the sunshine. At his silence she pouted. "You're not interesting," she said. "I am going to leave you and find somebody who can talk."

He let her go, wondering why he did so, yet held from the declaration of his feelings by some intuition. When he was again alone he became conscious of a little sound in the stillness; a soft song sung in a quivering voice. He rose, followed the sound, and came upon a little summer house set at the foot of the vegetable garden. In it a little old lady sat with a big pan in her lap into which she was shelling peas. Dushane laughed delightedly. "Why, Mrs. Worthington—" he said. "Who would have believed it?"

The little old lady rose hurriedly, and the peas flew in all directions. "Oh, what would Julia say if she knew you saw me?" she gasped.

She was a quaint little figure. Her modest black chiffon gown was covered with a big, white apron; her hair, dressed with jeweled combs, was perched on her head, and she had leaned on it an old straw hat to shade her eyes.

"Julia doesn't like to have me do anything in the kitchen," she faltered. "You know Julia has been away to school, and since we got the big house she wants us all to live like people in the city; but I—she drew a quick breath—"I have always shelled peas, and done such things, and I cannot get used to idleness."

"I know," he added, "my mother loves housewifely things. In our place in Virginia she is out in the garden half the time."

"Oh, is she?" The little lady's tone was eager. "I wish you would tell Julia, she thinks ladies—like your mother—do not do such things."

Dushane knew now the cause of his instinctive suspicion of Julia's beauty. He had felt behind it there was a lack of character and a snobbishness that was unbecoming. His own lineage was unquestioned, but the women of his family had been proud of their gardens, their kitchens and of their housewifely domain.

"Now Nell is different," the old lady was saying. "Sometimes she comes out and helps me. The other day we ran away and had a picnic. We bought a loaf of bread and a bottle of milk, and made milk toast over a little fire we built in the woods, and you cannot imagine how good it tasted."

"Indeed I can," Dushane said heartily. "The next time you run away you must tell me and I will go too, and I will catch some fish, and we will broil them over the coals."

She clasped her hands eagerly. "There comes Nell now," she said. "We've planned to go tomorrow, and I am going to tell her you want to accompany us."

Nell had none of Julia's haughty pride, but she was very fresh, and sweet, and enthusiastic as she talked to Dushane.

"Do not tell Julia," she insisted, "she hates to have mother and me do such things, but tomorrow there will be a lot of people for tennis and tea, and we thought we could run away, and not have to meet them."

"I will run away too," Dushane said. "I will meet you at the second bridge. They will never miss me in the crowd."

But Julia did miss this wealthy and important guest. It was because of him that she had invited her neighbors for tea and tennis. She was proud of her conquest, and wished to show him off.

Dushane appeared among them for a moment, and then he could not be found, and little did Julia guess that he was on the road to a tryst with her mother and schoolgirl sister.

Dushane caught a half dozen trout, and broiled them with bits of bacon. The little old lady made coffee, and Nell stirred up a cornbread and baked it over the coals. In the midst of the feast came Julia, flaming.

"What are you doing?" she demanded, sweeping in upon them, all in pale pink, with rosy plumes in her wide hat. "I missed you, and the servants said you had come this way. I thought something must have happened, and I ran away from my guests long enough to find you here. I cannot understand it. Why has mother come out here in that old lawn dress and wide hat? Nell, what if some one had seen you?"

In her anger she had forgotten that Dushane might sit in judgment. Her voice, usually low and well modulated, was harsh and rough. Dushane thought of the cry of the peacock. This was the discordant note!

"Yes, we ran away," he said, and his glance met Julia's steadily. "Your mother does not enjoy tennis and tea and crowds of people, and she enjoys this, why should not she have it?"

The direct question brought Julia to her senses.

"Why, of course," she faltered, "only nice people don't do such things."

"My mother does them," Dushane stated. "I have been with her in the woods many a day, and we have roasted potatoes, and boiled corn, and had all sorts of feasts."

Julia saw that she had made a mistake, and attempted to retrieve it. But Dushane had no eyes for her; he was watching Nell whose crimson cheeks and tear wet eyes showed her distress. He was watching, too, the old lady's trembling lip and nervous hands. His heart went out in sympathy and tenderness. These two women needed him; more than that, Nell was a girl to love.

They went home a dejected group. The little mother and Nell entered by the back door. Julia rejoined her guests, and Dushane drifted down the shady walk to the marble bench by the fountain. On the terrace the peacock spread his plumage and gave forth his cries.

At dusk a little figure crept like a shadow to the fountain. It was Nell in filmy white and pearls.

"Are we such sinners?" she whispered. "Wasn't it dreadful?"

Dushane rose and took her hands in his.

"No," he said, "but I am afraid Julia will never forgive me, and I'm not sure, Nell, that I want her forgiveness. But there is something that I do want, and I am not going to ask it now. You are the sweetest woman in the world, and your mother is just a little faded edition of you. Some day, and I hope it will not be long, I want to take care of you both; but this is not the time to ask it. Will you wait a little and then let me come back to you, Nell?"

"Oh!" she whispered, "but Julia?"

"Julia will find many others," he said, "who will adore her beauty. She doesn't need me any more than I need her, but you will fill my heart. May I come back?"

And the fountain heard her as she answered "Yes."

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"Have you anything to chauffeur it?" inquired the professor.

She Was Careful.
"But daughter, why didn't you tell him to stop kissing you?"
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