

By...  
**ELLA HIGGINSON**

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large, blue eyes, looking at the foot and eyeing her anxiously for a moment, then she turned her head on one side and a little startled squint in her eyes.

Then she reached a needle and dropped a glass of water over which she always darned, into the stocking.

The doorbell rang. "Oh, mercy on us!" said Mrs. Frazer. She jumped up stiffly, but so suddenly that the darned things rolled all over the floor.

"I could embroider on them pillowshams a month and not a soul would set foot in this house. I wonder who it is!"

She lifted one edge of the shade and peered out cautiously. "Oh, my! It's Mrs. Dean. I'd almost rather it had been the minister."

She gathered up the darning implements and the red cotton flannel stocking bag and hurried into the bedroom. She returned in a moment, and with a triumphant air laid a partly embroidered pillowsham carelessly on the table, thrust a needle into it, and set her thumb beside it. Then she opened the door.

"Why, Mrs. Dean! You don't mean it! Really, now! Well, I'm amazed. I thought you never were coming. Come right in. Don't mind your rubbers. My carpet ain't so much worned. I never take my rubbers off anywhere. It's so much trouble. If folks don't like my rubbers, they needn't like me; that's all. Love me, love my rubbers," she added, with a comfortable laugh, preceding her guest into the sitting room.

Mrs. Dean sank into a low chair. She was a small, colorless woman, with cold eyes and a stubborn mouth. "Such a hill as you live on!" she said in an injured tone. "What possessed you to buy way up here?"

"Oh, just to give folks something to wonder about," replied Mrs. Frazer, with her mellow, expiring laugh. "Folks are bound to ask questions, you know. If they don't ask what made us build way up here, they ask why we didn't put a porch clear round or a bay window in the bathroom or why we didn't run our pipes on the outside instead of the inside."

"Well, I don't neither. But I just want to tell you what Mrs. Graham says when I told her. She waited till I got all through, and then she up and says she didn't think it could be true. After my a-tallin' her? So I just told her it was true."

"What'd she say then?"

"What do you suppose she said? She just looked me in the eye and says 'only that if it was true she was sorry he'd done wrong, but that she didn't consider one person had ought to judge another; says she thought it was human nature to do wrong and that we'd ought to be sorry for each other and help each other up.'"

"Why, the idea! What'd you say? I hope you give her a good one."

"Well, I did." Mrs. Hostetter spoke with triumph. "I told her I was a Christian and belonged to church and she wouldn't ketch me upholding a man that'd turned himself out to be what Mr. Davenport had. I asked her how you could pick out respectable folks if they was on a speckin' terms with that kind. Then she said something real profane. She guessed that God could put his finger on 'em; Oh, that made me awful mad! I said, well, I wouldn't speak to Mr. Davenport and I didn't reckon Mrs. Dean and Mrs. Frazer would neither, and that we was the lendin' ones in the church."

"Good for you! I guess she didn't have anything furdur to say to that, did she?"

"Yes, she did. That's what makes me so awful mad. She up and says then, still calmlike, that she didn't consider it would hurt any good woman to be told to Mr. Davenport, even so he had done what was claimed ag'in him, which she didn't believe—the brazen thing says that ag'in—and it might do him some good."

The door opened suddenly, and a slatternly girl burst into the room. She stopped and stared at the guests. Then she threw her hand over her face, gazed bashfully and exclaiming "Oh, now!" retired sulkily.

"What do you think of that?" exclaimed Mrs. Frazer in a tone of exasperation. "After all I've talked to her, a trounce in here that way before people! A woman might as well be crazy at once as to keep a hired girl. They're that mortifyin'!"

"Now, that makes me think," said Mrs. Hostetter. "I was sayin' the same thing to Mrs. Graham the other day, and what do you s'pose she says? She says she thinks hired girls have an awful hard life. She feels sorry fer 'em. She keeps a rockin chair in the kitchen fer her'n and lets her go out ten times a week if she wants; says she thinks it's awful hard for a girl to have to ask every time she wants to go anywhere. She says she gets cross sometimes and lets her temper go at her girl, and then she always goes back and apologizes. She ain't got any sech word as servant in her vocabulary."

"Such silliness," said Mrs. Frazer scornfully—"a ruinin' hired girls that way!"

"Well, I must say," admitted Mrs. Dean reluctantly, "that Mrs. Graham's hired girl is an exception to the general rule of 'em. She worships the ground Mrs. Graham sets foot on and would run her legs off fer her."

"The worst thing she said," put in Mrs. Hostetter, "was that she didn't think women had ought to get together and talk over girls' faults; says she'd just as soon anybody would ask her how she liked her hired girl; says she's been guilty of such things herself, but she ain't goin' to ag'in. Oh, I never heard such good ones!"

"I guess she is. She says if we caught girls a-criticizin our faults we'd have a conpition fit."

"There goes that express wagon back ag'in empty," interrupted Mrs. Frazer in a perplexed tone. "I can't imagine where that trunk went to. Mr. Brown told me yeste'day that Mrs. Brown wa'n't comin' home for a week, but maybe she's just telegraphed and come right on."

"But when you want scandal," said Mrs. Hostetter in a low tone, "you have to go on a piece furdur than Mr. Davenport."

"Why, you'd think sugar wouldn't melt in her mouth," said Mrs. Dean. "She sings in the choir."

"And she's on the executive committee of the co-operative society."

"She's the treasurer of the Red Cross."

"And secretary of the 'Socialist Club.'"

"Used to be," put in Mrs. Hostetter, amiably triumphant. "Ain't you noticed she dropped everything about three months ago?"

"As I live and breathe," said Mrs. Frazer, "so she did!"

"It hadn't made an impression on me," said Mrs. Dean.

"Well, when you see a woman that's been a rumble everything in town," said Mrs. Hostetter, "set up and drop it all of a sudden you just look round you and keep still. There never's a very much smoke without a fire."



He approached the dove-colored door, have suspected a scandal behind a door of such a color—the one door of the whole street to suggest innocence and reticence.

Mrs. Hostetter broke in on their thoughts. "Maybe you have seen a birdcage hung out on her front porch frequent if you hadn't seen anything else."

They drew shivering breaths. They had seen the birdcage. "Well, when you see a woman that's been a rumble everything in town," said Mrs. Hostetter, "set up and drop it all of a sudden you just look round you and keep still. There never's a very much smoke without a fire."

"I have seen that she's looked mighty plimpy when she did go out," said Mrs. Dean, recovering slightly.

"And it's been long spells between her girl goes out," said Mrs. Frazer, with her eyes twinkling.

"She's had a pale, scared look. I have seen that she was a-concealin' something."

"She ain't hardly made a call. She ain't never called on the minister's wife, and her with a teethin baby! She's made some kind of an excuse every time I've asked her to run in and fetch her work. She's got a maw, excuse when I've offered to take mine in and set a spell."

"She don't want company," said Mrs. Hostetter. "I'm glad you've seen something, if only that much. If you had watched that dove-colored door a little closer, you'd 'a' seen that when the birdcage was hung out on the—"

"Oh, my land!" cried out Mrs. Dean in a great voice for so thin a lady. She started forward in her chair. Her face was as gray as ashes. Her eyes had a wild, strained look.

"Why, forever!" gasped Mrs. Frazer, terrified.

"What's got into you?" demanded Mrs. Hostetter, unmoved.

"Oh, my land!"

"Mrs. Hostetter! She's a-goin' into some kind of a fit. Get a doctor!"

"Some kind of a fit!" said Mrs. Hostetter, who's got into you?"

"Oh, don't you see her eyes all set out the window? She can't speak. She can't even utter."

Mrs. Hostetter turned and looked out the window. She threw back her head and burst out laughing. "Oh, that's what's got into you!" she said and went on laughing as if she couldn't stop.

Mrs. Frazer's eyes followed hers. The three women sat staring at the dove-colored door. Mrs. Mayhew had come out on her front porch. She had a birdcage in her hand. She stood looking off toward a fir grove that approached the house closely on one side. While they still watched she turned slowly and hung the cage up on the right side of the door. Then she went into the house and closed the door behind her, the most innocent looking door in that western town.

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there once or twice a week. It's been a pain on for three months. Ever since she let off church and choir and library board and everything else. That don't all. I've seen for a long time that there's some cool feelin's between her and Mr. Mayhew."

"And Mr. Mayhew such a nice man!" "I never heard a word ag'in him yet."

"And it seems to be on his side. My money," she set to come to the door with him every time he went down town, and last thing he'd do he'd up and kiss her, like a pair of fool lovers. They'd been married a long time too. He spent all his evenin's at home with her unless there was something to go to, and then he'd always take her. And if she sung a piece or played on the piano or declaimed, my mercy, he'd just set and wouldn't take his eyes off of her. I never see his heart for admirin a woman and lettin his admire stick out all over him, see everybody with half a eye could see it. He fairly carried his admire round on his sleeve! And when he come home to dinner she'd run out to the gate, and first thing he'd do he'd up and kiss her. Well, it's all changed now. He never goes a step with her anywheres, he never spends an evenin' at home, and if she comes to the door with him he just walks off with his head down, kind of slow and thinkin and never so much as looks back once."

"Maybe somebody's give him a hint," breathed Mrs. Frazer.

Mrs. Hostetter smiled and cleared her throat.

"Maybe somebody has," she said mysteriously.

"Maybe somebody's sent him an anonymous letter."

Mrs. Hostetter fixed her unexpectedly with a stern gaze. "Maybe somebody has."

"Well, my land! Don't eat a body up with your eyes no! I wa'n't accusin you."

"Well, you can if you want," said Mrs. Hostetter, undaunted.

"Why, you never did you?" exclaimed her old man in a breath.

"Yes, I did," said Mrs. Hostetter, proud as a peacock with an unfurled tail. "I give him a hint in an anonymous letter, just the mildest kind of an intimation."

"Oh, what did you say? Tell us what you said."

"They were a-quiver with excitement."

"Well, I just said"—she leaned back and laid closed her eyes—"that when the birdcage hung out on the right side of the door a young man went there early and staid all the afternoon. I told him—"

"Oh, good for you!"

"I glory in your speak. You are quit."

"Good for you! Nerve-until!"

"I told him"—Mrs. Hostetter swelled out her bust superbly—"that he didn't need to take any anonymous letter's word for it. All he had to do was to watch for himself any Tuesday or Friday."

"And did he?"

Her countenance fell. "Well, no, he didn't. I must say."

"What! Didn't he never?"

"No, not a once."

"Why, how do you know?"

"I've set here at my window every Tuesday and Friday night. I've set a little back, so's I couldn't be seen, but I've never took my eyes off of that house. It's strained my eyes so, a-keepin 'em set right on one spot, almost without winker for fear I'd miss something in aroang salt water. It's terrible good for the eyes. Well, if her husband had 'a' watched he'd been able to see the man, and then, of course, he'd 'a' gone straight to the house to—well, to—er—h—m—heard him," she added in a deep voice, "in his—er—h—m—den. But he never went there a-once. But I see him the day after he got the letter," she continued, with a return to triumph, "and he looked as gray as an ash pan. I bid him the time of day, and he roared hard by speak. Oh, he felt it deep. It was difficult to see him try to smile and all the gray wrinkles a-tremblin round his mouth," she added cheerfully.

"I don't see what ailed him, not to watch," said Mrs. Dean helplessly, not knowing the meaning of the word honor.

"I don't see, neither."

"Well, watch or no watch, he's been a mighty seck lookin man ever since. He looks as if he'd been pulled through a knothole. A man with a cancer or a case of appendicitis couldn't look much worse."

"That's so," said Mrs. Dean.

"Oh, mercy, my bread!" exclaimed Mrs. Hostetter, getting up excitedly. "I must run or I'll be spilt."

"We'll have to take this here dove color door in hand," called Mrs. Dean after her. "If he can't put a stop to it, I guess we can. We can't have any such goin ons in this neighborhood."

Mrs. Frazer closed the door carefully after Mrs. Hostetter and returned to the sitting room. She sat down and looked at Mrs. Dean. Mrs. Dean looked at her. Both smiled.

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She peered out cautiously, mightily scarce in her hall at our house, I notice. Why, I wonder where the trunk's a-goin' in that express wagon!"

The other two women came to the window at once.

"I wonder!" said Mrs. Frazer, rubbing her chin. "There ain't a soul movin in round here anywhere that I know of. I can't think where it can be a-goin' to. Bartie's house is right in the way, so's we can't see, even if we go outside."

"Like as not some of your neighbors has had company come," suggested Mrs. Hostetter.

"Well, I'll run in and ask Mrs. Bartie tomorrow if she see where it went to," Mrs. Frazer sighed as she spoke and turned reluctantly from the window.

"Well," said Mrs. Hostetter, drawing a long breath, "I just run in to see if you'd heard the latest. I can't say, I've got my week's bake getting ready to go in the oven."

"If you mean about the way Mr. Davenport's been a-actin up," said Mrs. Frazer, closing her lips grimly, "I've heard."

"So've I," said Mrs. Dean. "I think that's just horrible. I don't mean to bid him the time of day if I die fer it."