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THE OTHER GENERATION

What Happened at a Halloween Party

By CLARISSA MACKIE

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The windows of Emily Paine's little shop looked very inviting to the passerby. In one were neatly arranged boxes of stationery, pens, pencils, schoolbooks, inks and nuclage.

The south window was without doubt the most attractive. Snowy paper formed a background for toothsome homemade pies, flaky and tender.

The school bell clanged its last summons, and scurrying feet carried the tardy ones past the little shop. An hour afterward the door opened and a girl came in. She was tall and fair and pretty, with a pink and white beauty, deepened by the fluffy masses of a rose colored shawl thrown about her.

She sank down in a convenient rocking chair and tossed aside her shawl.

"Good morning, Em!" she said in careless response to Miss Emily's greeting. "Got any yellow crape paper?"

"I believe so, Flora," replied Miss Emily, rising and laying aside her work. "I had a box of assorted colors come in yesterday. I haven't unpacked it yet."

Miss Emily's brown head was bent over the open box, and she was laying rolls of colored papers on the counter. "Here's green and pale blue and pink, red, white, purple. Here's some yellow, Flora; two shades, lemon color and a real pumpkin yellow."

"That's what I want—pumpkin color and black. Got any black?"

"Two rolls."

"I'll take that and all the yellow you've got. I'm going to have a Halloween party, and I want the paper to decorate with. How much is it, Em?" Flora pulled out a beaded bag and counted out the money.

"Heard the news?" asked Flora as she drew on her rose colored shawl with assumed carelessness.

"I don't know as it's much news, only I thought perhaps you hadn't heard," went on Flora rather awkwardly, her blue eyes searching Emily's sweet face with strange intentness. "I didn't know till I met him at the postoffice last night, but he says he's been expecting to come back for some time."

"You haven't told me who you're talking about," laughed Emily.

"Why, Anson Cook, of course! He's come back to live at Little River. That makes it pleasant for us girls," continued Flora. "There's mighty few men in Little River. Seems as if they all went to the city, just as Anson did, and most of 'em never come back. He had such a fine position there I told him I thought it was funny he'd come back to a poky little place like Little River. He said he'd lost something in Little River a good many years ago and he'd come back after it. Wasn't that silly?"

"Sounds so," agreed Emily, her head bent low above the collar she was embroidering.

"I've got to hurry; there'll be a lot to do before Tuesday night."

She closed the shop door and ran lightly down the steps.

Miss Emily watched her straight young figure pass through the gate and cross to the opposite side of the street just in time to meet a man walking slowly toward her.

The man was Anson Cook, ten years older, but grown more handsome, more mature, with stronger purpose in his face and in his stride than when Emily had last seen him. He lifted his hat and walked on beside Flora, smiling at some remark the girl had made. Emily saw him look back toward the little white house with its wing shop, and then the two turned the corner by the hotel. Flora Lee lived in quite the opposite direction.

Emily drew back with quivering lips, and for the first time since she had opened the little shop she was ashamed of this humble means of livelihood. Years before when she had known Anson Cook her father had been alive and the little white house had been an abode of comfort and plenty. Now after long years of illness that had depleted the savings in the bank old Captain Paine and his wife were dead, and Emily had been left to confront the world with no resources save a skillful knowledge of cookery and the ownership of the little home. Hence the shop.

In between waiting on customers Emily scanned her little bank book and studied a letter she had received from a cousin in the city.

"You better sell the place, Em, and come here. You could get a few rooms and keep house."

A new light came into Emily's eyes as she reread the letter, and all at once she seemed to arrive at a decision, for she went to the telephone and called up a number. The dry voice of Mr. Silas Smith rasped back in reply.

"This is Emily Paine, Mr. Smith. You've been at me to sell my place. Have you got a customer in view?"

"Nobody special, Emily, till yesterday. Now, er—somebody was asking for a small house like yours on the main street. I think I can make a sale for you. What's your price?"

Emily told him.

After dinner while she was arranging the rolls of crape paper in the

empty south window of the shop Flora Lee's slender form appeared once more.

"Here I am again," she cried breathlessly. "I've got so much to do I don't know which way to turn. Em, I'm going to have a masquerade. It'll be lots of fun. We won't unmask until midnight. I'm going as a witch, and I've got to make the dress. I thought maybe you'd have some red cotton stuff that might do."

When she had made her purchases under Emily's careful advice, Flora turned to go. "I hope you won't mind if I don't ask you, Em," she apologized. "You see, it's for us young folks, and our house is so small. Mother's going to have a party in November when her sister comes. You'll be there, you know."

The days flew by, and Emily did not leave the house save to walk in her back garden. She sent a neighbor's boy after her mail, and she wrote several letters to her cousin in the city. Once Mr. Silas Smith called about the sale of the house.

"There's somebody considering the offer," he said brusquely. "I can't get anything decided out of him yet. I'll know next week. You seem in a hurry to get away, Emily."

"I want to get settled before winter comes on," murmured Emily.

The evening of the party came, and she sat there in her shop lonely, unhappy. Of course she knew why Flora did not want her at the party. It would be embarrassing indeed for Anson Cook to meet this faded little woman who once had been engaged to marry him. If Emily had married it would have been different; unmarried she was still a reproach to Anson. It was not the party itself that caused bitter tears to rise to Emily's eyes; it was the thought that she would not be permitted to move with freedom here and there among the social affairs of the village because of this old affair with Anson Cook. If people would only forget all about the miserable affair.

Eight, nine, ten, the courthouse clock rang the hours. Now and then music drifted up the street, setting her all a-tugle. Her little slippered feet beat softly to the dance tunes, and she was lost in dreamy retrospection of another Halloween party years before, when the shop door opened suddenly and somebody entered.

"Anson Cook!" breathed Emily sharply. She arose and stood poised as if for flight.

He took off his soft hat and, leaning against the closed door, looked down at her from his six feet of muscular manhood with such a smile in his gray eyes that Emily's heart fluttered in her breast.

"Emily Paine," he said softly, "why aren't you at the party?"

"I wasn't invited. I belong to an older generation," she laughed, with a little catch in the breath.

"Ah, you belong to my generation, Emily. I was afraid you might not be there, and yet I hardly dared ask Flora Lee. I thought I might come upon you all of a sudden there, but I heard some one say you did not come."

He moved away from the door and sat down near Emily.

"I'm a fool, Emily, but not such a one as left you in anger ten years ago when you postponed our wedding because of your duty to your father. I wish I could tell you how bitterly I have repented of it—how I've tried to make myself better, stronger, so that some day I might come back to try to win you once more if you were still free. I've only been here a week, and I've been hungry for a sight of you. I'm not worthy of you now, Emily, but I will try to be. Is it too late? Is there anybody else?"

"There never has been anybody else," sobbed Emily into his convenient shoulder.

A half hour before midnight the Halloween party was at the height of its merriment. When the grandfather's clock in the hall should strike 12 then Flora Lee, bewitching indeed in her red cloak with pointed black hat atop her sunny hair, would command the dancers to unmask.

She was watching a couple who had recently arrived and of whose identity she was quite ignorant.

Flora watched the newly arrived couple dancing toward her. The man, unusually tall, wore a dark suit of clothes, a gray wig, and his face was quite hidden behind a black mask. His companion was small and slight, gowned in bridal robes, faded and yellowed china silk, creased as if long laid aside. A veil of white illusion floated all about her, and her face was also concealed behind a mask of white.

The clock struck 12, and the music stopped.

"Unmask!" cried Flora sharply. And there was a rustle and then universal laughter as they recognized one another. Flora's eyes were on the bridal couple.

The man tossed aside his mask and wig and became—Anson Cook. He assisted the little bride to remove her mask and then led her to Flora Lee, blushing like a rose.

"Emily Paine!" laughed Flora rather loudly. "That is a disguise, Emily! No one would have expected to see you in bridal robes!"

Anson Cook stiffened a little and drew Emily's hand within his arm. He turned to the company, with his old familiar smile. They had all known him from a boy.

"Friends and neighbors," he said proudly. "This is not a disguise. You see, Emily and I were married at 11 o'clock. Halloween is the night to peer into the future and see what it holds for you. You see, I've gone so far as to make sure of my future happiness!"

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