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COPHETVA TO DATE

By Kate M. Cleary
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Every one in town knew that Gordon Ellis had made a fortune in the Klondike and was coming back to his native town. And the general supposition existed that he was returning in quest of a wife. There were those who, recalling the boy and girl love affair between him and Lesda Revere, smiled significantly. But there were others who averred that both had been too young and inexperienced at the time of their parting to attach importance to the youthful romance.

Ferguson, the town banker, portly and prosperous, striding down the main street one delicious summer morning, met his niece on her way to give a music lesson and stopped to tease her a trifle over the situation.

"Lesda, Gordon Ellis is expected back next week?"

"So I've heard, Uncle Bruce."

The tone was nonchalant, but she had colored rosily up to the crisp, reddish gold curls around her white forehead.

"It will be a great thing for Lindenville if he decides to settle down here. I hope," with ponderous archness, "that you will try to persuade him!"

The flush faded, leaving her looking pale—and very proud.

"I shall have nothing to say in the matter," she answered coldly. "It is unlikely that I shall even meet him."

"Nonsense!" Ferguson cried, dropping his rallying air. "Of course you will! We'll all have a chance to renew our old acquaintance with as fine a fellow as ever struck out to make his fortune. Marian is to give a big welcoming dance for him. Hortense is eager for pleasure, you know," he added leniently, "and we like to indulge her."

Lesda nodded, evincing polite interest. Until the mother of Hortense had married her uncle twelve months previous she and her aunt had lived with Bruce Ferguson, directing his household. But with the coming of a bride possessed of a grown daughter all this was changed. So Lucinda Ferguson, having got together her few heirlooms and some furniture, had moved into a little house she owned on the outskirts of the rich, bustling manufacturing town.

The new mistress and her daughter were left in victorious possession, and Bruce Ferguson, with a man's obtuseness, did not realize what the inevitable change in their manner of living must mean to such fastidious women as his sister and niece. He had settled an income on Lucinda, but Lesda declared that her music teaching would bring her in all the money she would require. Of the deprivations and makeshifts necessary to present a serene front to a critical world neither spoke.

"So you'll surely come," Ferguson went on breezily. "I'm going to do the thing in fine style—have music and caterers down from Chicago and all that sort of thing."

The expression of proud reserve deepened on the countenance of Lesda Revere. She had an odd, exquisite style of beauty, foreign to her class and nationality. While her features were not classically perfect, there was about her face a look of spirituality, of distinction, that attracted and held attention.

"I hope you'll have a beautiful time," she said courteously. "But I shan't go, Uncle Bruce."

He stared at her a moment in puzzled surprise. Then he laughed heartily and brought his clinched fist down in the palm of the other hand.

"Nothing to wear, I'll bet a nickel! Poor Miss Flora McPimsey!" For he saw by her quick, irrepressible smile that he had guessed right. "Well, you will have a dress, and one sent to you ready made from the city at that! Why, Hortense won't wear a thing that's made in Lindenville! Now, you'll promise to come? Well, what is it?"

She had been about to speak—to ask him to permit her to choose the gown herself. But, after all, what right had she to make suggestions to him? Was he not exceedingly generous to promise her a costume at all?

"Nothing, except that you are mighty good to think of such a thing! Yes—I'll come."

"That's right!" he commented cordially and passed on.

Not until the very morning of the day set for the important function did the expected box arrive. Hortense and her mother had been up in the metropolis ordering their own attire. They had doubtless bought this at the same time. But, although she had read in grateful amazement the sum mentioned on the receipted bill that had been forwarded to her by mail, it was with a heart prophetically filled with doubt that Lesda opened the box, while her aunt looked over her shoulder. Layer after layer of tissue paper was laid aside. Lesda shrank back with a little cry of dismay as the gleaming, lustrous, costly fabric was revealed.

"What have I done to make Uncle Bruce's wife and daughter dislike me so?" she whispered. "They know—you know, Aunt Lucinda—that I can never wear such a shade!"

Lucinda Ferguson shook her head. Tears of disappointment came into her gentle old eyes as she gazed down on the expensive robe. It was of raw, crude, brickish pink—the very last hue that a girl with hair the copper color of Lesda's dare wear.

The girl laid back the layers of tissue paper with fingers that trembled. "I'm sorry, because Uncle Bruce

meant so well. And then," with lips that would quiver, "I get a chance to go to a dance so seldom!"

The long, hot, golden day lagged by. Never had the giving of music lessons seemed so tedious nor had the pupils ever appeared so tiresome. Coming home just as the relentless sun was dropping down the west, the girl brightened with wan pleasure at sight of the little old gray cottage she called home. In the house she knew would be balm—the balm of sympathy, of rest, of love.

"I'll have a bath and a fresh gown," she told herself, "and get out here in the silence and the sweetness and read until I forget there are gay people dancing the night away—and I not one of them!"

Not for worlds would she have admitted even to her own heart that it was less the social exhilaration she missed than the wee, hidden hope she had harbored of seeing once more a well remembered dark head, of feeling the warm clasp of a strong, firm hand and of meeting the half tender, half quizzical glance of expressive blue eyes.

She was very resolute in reading the tiny volume of Tennyson she had brought when after supper she came out into the fragrant solitude. Her gown was of simple lawn that trailed about her feet in a sweep as of broken waves. Her arms shone pearl fair through its transparency.

The afterglow faded. Shadows crept stealthily up the garden ways. It was not possible to read longer. Anyhow she had hardly been aware of that which she was reading. Now the guests were gathering at her uncle's imposing home. Lights were blazing and the gay music from the city resounding. And now she closed her eyes, drifting away into a reverie, varnished, melodious, kaleidoscopic, so absorbing that she did not notice the stopping of a carriage at the gate nor the heavy footstep muffled by the thick grass.

"I wonder if a kiss would waken her?" meditated a quizzical voice.

"I'm not!" She started to her feet, the flooding light of the warm, young midsummer moon full on her face.

"Gordon!" she murmured.

Older, heavier, manlier than the young fellow who had gone away, there was still the admiration in his eager eyes, the smile of tenderness about the square cut lips.

"You're a nice girl," he cried, holding her cold, slight hands in his warm, heavy pressure, "never to come to a party given in the honor of your old friend! I looked for you everywhere. Your uncle said you had promised him you would come. So he sent me to bring you, or, rather," he laughed, "I asked him if I might not come for you. Come—Leslie!"

It was the old childish name that no one else had called her.

"But I can't, Gordon!" She was blushing like a rose. "Not in this old gown!"

He glanced over her critically in bewilderment.

"Isn't that—the right thing? It's just—stunning. You look like an Undine—a silver birch incarnated! All pale green and white—except for a crown of gold!" And this audacious young man stooped to touch the shining coronet with reverent lips.

"Leslie, you must know why I've come back!" His voice dropped to a coaxing cadence. "I've come—for you! Dear, have I startled you? Well, come up to the dance, and I'll promise to be dumb until the last waltz."

"In a dress that cost a quarter a yard—and that I made myself!" she queried, her voice tremulous with excitement.

"Come for your uncle's sake!" he begged. "Every one here in Lindenville knows you. It will be great fun! And then, Leslie, come for my sake!"

It was great fun. The verdict that the girl in the sea green gown, with cheeks like wild roses, was the belle of the ball was practically unanimous. Only Hortense and her mother exchanged a glance of dark and significant disappointment when Bruce Ferguson, smiling indulgently if obtusely, whispered: "Cophetua up to date! Not such a bad match for a little music teacher!"

An Unpromising Field.

Mr. Yipsley was just on the point of leaving his house for his place of business downtown when there came a ring at the front door bell. He opened the door. A canvasser stood outside.

"I beg your pardon," said the canvasser, "but I'd like to show you a sample of our improved talking machine."

"I think I don't care to see it," replied Mr. Yipsley.

"You are not interested in talking machines perhaps?" ventured the other.

"I can't say that, either; but I have one already. Talks all day long. Never needs winding up. Never runs down."

At this moment a high pitched voice from somebody at the top of the stairway broke into the conversation.

"It isn't so!" exclaimed the person with the high pitched voice. "It isn't so! But I've got a growing machine that runs whenever it's in the house!"

Willing to Compromise.

First Farmer—Will you take £10 for that cow?

Second Farmer—Can't do it.

"But yesterday you told me you'd sell her for £10."

"I know I did, but I'll have to back out."

"What's the matter?"

"You see, the cow belongs to my eldest daughter, and she says she will sob herself into hysterics if I sell her. It would break her heart."

"All right. It's no sale, then."

"I say."

"Well, what is it?"

"Make it £12 and we'll let her sob."—*Liverpool Mercury.*

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