

shadows about the nooks and corners, throwing into bold relief the white statuary on their massive pedestals of burnished bronze. The slim form of a girlish looking girl was half buried in the luxurious depths of a big armchair, which was pulled up close to the grate, so close that the toe of her little gray suede shoe rested on the wrought iron fender. Her gown was gray, soft, and clinging, and her eyes were gray; even her hair, which by day was a decided hazel, seemed to have caught the dusky atmosphere, and lay coiled about the shapely head in wavy braids of uncertain twilight sheen.

Footsteps sounded in the hall, and the low murmur of voices in earnest conversation was heard. Some one entered the room from the rear. Evidently they were under the impression that the apartment was unoccupied; for, without turning on the lights, they seated themselves near the doorway and continued their talk.

The girl in the armchair recognized, by the voices, the Hon. Ralph Cheston and his nephew, Leigh Dalhearth. She had always greatly admired Judge Cheston. He was a frequent visitor at the Dalhearth home; and the nephew was her fiancé.

"It is one part of the will," the Judge was saying, "which is couched in such language as to leave no doubt regarding the intention of the testator. It is, so to speak, ironclad; and, although the provision may seem absurd, now is the time to make the test."

Leigh Dalhearth laughed, that happy, careless, manly laugh she loved so to hear. "All right, Uncle mine, so be it!" he said gaily. "The idea, though, is just a trifle medieval for the twentieth century, don't you think? However, I'm not afraid. Money cannot affect our love."

"No, money may not; but the lack of it may. Ah, Leigh, my boy, you laugh and ridicule the very thought of such a thing! So did I, years ago. I should have wagered my soul on her affections for me; but when weighed in the balance, with poverty on one side, her love was found wanting, and I lost."

"Mind, I do not tell you this for the purpose of shaking your faith in the woman you love; far from it. Perhaps my own experience has made me cynical. My past is as a sealed book; sentiment in me is dead. It died the night she became the wife of another. Such men as I love but once. Since then I have lived only for you and Clarice. Before this time to-morrow we shall know. The intervening hours had better be spent at my home. You must not see her until then. No, not even to say goodby. They have not as yet returned from Mrs. Carlisle's tea. When she comes, I shall acquaint her

with the facts. The test may seem cruel; but it is just. Go, now; it is best. Goodnight."

They quitted the room together. The little figure in the great armchair remained motionless and silent, until the last echo of their retreating footsteps had died away. Then she rose, shivering, and crept like a frightened mouse to the doorway.

The log in the fireplace settled on its andirons with a sharp snap. She gave a frightened glance over her shoulder. At that moment a small blaze darted out and lighted up the little scared white face, revealing the features of Gwenith Lacy. The same transitory gleam caused the big solitaire on the third finger of her left hand to sparkle. The scintillation caught her eye, and she hurried out into the dimly lighted hall, unconsciously pressing the ring to her heart and covering it with her right hand.

"They shall never take you from me, Dearest!" she whispered, with a ghostly little smile. "I should marry him if he was a beggar. But Auntie must never know; she hates mystery."

Then the little phantom of twilight scampered up the broad stairway and scurried away in the darkness.

AN hour later, the Hon. Ralph Cheston entered the library of the Dalhearth mansion and awaited the coming of Gwenith Lacy. He did not sit down; but, with arms folded across his chest, paced the floor slowly and mechanically, lost in thought. He was a singularly handsome man, tall and erect. His dark hair, with its even sprinkle of gray, crowned a splendidly shaped head. His countenance was firm, and the olive complexion intensified the brilliance of the clear blue eyes, eyes which had in them a wonderfully attractive look of mingled mirth and pain.

There was a rustle of silk, a faint, subtle odor of violets, and the object of his thoughts stood before him, not in the robes of twilight gray, but a veritable mermaid in a bewitching gown of palest sea foam green.

"Good evening, Judge Cheston," she said, smiling sweetly as she placed her little hand in his outstretched palm, the color deepening in her cheeks as his own firm fingers closed over it. "Mrs. Dalhearth says you wish to talk with me on some matters pertaining to Leigh's future. Anything that concerns him is of much interest to me. I hope you will not find me stupid."

The Judge smiled curiously and led her to the same big chair she had occupied early in the evening. "Be seated, Miss Lacy," he said pleasantly. "I have no ap-

prehension of stupidity on your part; but what I have to say is of great importance to you both. If you will pardon me, I shall remain standing and endeavor to be brief." He went over and stood by the mantel, where he could command a better view of her face.

"There is a secret in our family, Miss Lacy," he said slowly, and pausing to note the effect of his words, "a secret many years old. It has always been customary, when the eldest son is at the point of marrying, to inform the bride elect of its existence and the conditions upon which she is to become his wife and a member of the family. This we deem best to do before the betrothal has been publicly announced. And it was primarily for this purpose that you were invited to the Dalhearth home, as a guest of Leigh's sister Clarice."

Gwenith nodded without raising her eyes. "The general supposition is that my nephew—who, at present, is without means—will, on the eve of his marriage, become the possessor of many millions. This supposition is true; but only on certain conditions imposed in a will left by his great-grandfather, Sir Arthur Cheston."

"Sir Arthur Cheston, the legator, was a man of broad knowledge, a philosopher and traveler, whose life was devoted to scientific research. During a stay in the East Indies, whither he had gone for the purpose of delving into the mystic lore of the yoga, and while engaged in excavating some ancient ruins, he unearthed a treasure trove, embracing a collection of rare gems, and representing a large fortune. At his death, this fortune, including a certain jeweled charm, was to pass, according to the terms of his will, into the possession of the next male descendant, on the eve of his marriage, providing the prospective bride could wear the trinket twelve hours without its changing color."

"And supposing it should change?" Gwenith interrupted breathlessly.

"Then he loses the inheritance, and the lady is at liberty either to break the engagement, or to have the marriage consummated as her heart and judgment dictate." Judge Cheston fixed his keen blue eyes on her face. "That is all," he said, "at least for the present. The charm I have with me. May I fasten it on for you?"

HE came forward as he spoke and gently took her left hand, on which sparkled Leigh's engagement ring. "We will place it here for good luck, Miss Lacy—the one may influence the other." There was a flash of translucent green, something cold encircled her arm, and, as he stepped aside, she glanced down half fearfully, and there, clasped about her wrist, its color accentuated by the smooth, white flesh, was a beautiful and curiously wrought bracelet of jade.

For some seconds the girl sat motionless, gazing at it as one entranced, then she rose and, walking to the center of the room, stood beneath the light of the great chandelier, still looking down at her new acquisition.

"What an odd, exquisite thing!" she said at length, turning her face, which had grown pale, toward Judge Cheston. "You have no idea how pleased I am to wear it. I must show it to Leigh—or has he seen it?"

"No; that is one of the rules concerning it. The armlet is never exhibited, save when in use, and then only to her whose interest it holds at stake. I am sorry to deny you the pleasure of showing it to him. I have sent Leigh away until to-morrow, when he will return for your decision."

"He knows about it, then," she exclaimed; "as much as you have told me?"

Judge Cheston nodded assent. "But he certainly knows what my decision will be, regardless?" and Gwenith came to his side, unconsciously laying her hand upon his arm. "He surely cannot think that money, or the lack of it," she said, "has special stress upon the last words, 'could possibly have any influence upon my love for him?'"

"You forget, Miss Lacy," the Judge said gently, "that the prize is a princely fortune—if you win. If you lose, Leigh will be comparatively a beggar, dependent for a livelihood upon his profession; and the position of a struggling young lawyer's wife is not the most enviable one. You remember the old adage, 'When poverty comes in at the door, etc.'"

The girl's gray eyes flashed and she drew back her hand with a proud little gesture. "The fact that I had won Leigh Dalhearth, even minus the inheritance, would make my position an enviable one," she replied; "at least in my own estimation."

Judge Cheston caught the hand she had just withdrawn and held it tightly between his own. "My dear little girl," he said, his voice resonant with suppressed feeling, "if your love is strong enough to maintain that sentiment, I shall always be your debtor. If at any time in the future you or yours should stand in need of a friend, the greatest honor you can bestow upon Ralph Cheston is to consider him at your service. Leigh is the son of my only sister. It has been my dearest wish to see him happily married to a woman he loves, one who would love him for himself alone. Such love, I am sorry to say, is rare, Miss Lacy, very rare. Your youth has doubtless kept you in ignorance of the fact. But twenty odd years' apprenticeship as barrister and jurist has taught me this harsh lesson."

While he was speaking, Gwenith was intently watching the kindly countenance. "May I ask a question?" she said anxiously, turning her eyes from his and looking down into the fire.

"Certainly, as many as you wish," he replied, apparently not ill pleased.

"Has this test been made before, or am I the first victim?" she asked, with a little forced laugh.

The fine dark face grew suddenly grave, and he dropped her hand quickly. "No, you are the



A Prayer.

By Ethel Colson

Grant these gifts, O powers that be:
Lips that smile, and eyes that see;
Heart too brave and soul too wise
To choose wrong in pleasure's guise;
Hands and feet that patient strive
To keep right and joy alive;
Sense to share a brother's grief,
Wit to bring him swift relief;
Love that never faints nor fears,
Courage to bring joy or tears;
Spirit of eternal youth,
Pure devotion to all truth;
Gentleness that sweetens sorrow,
Faith to face the dim to-morrow;
Strength to let the small self die,
Unregretted, joyously;
And, for crowning grace to lend,
Let me never fail a friend!