

A WIRELESS VALENTINE

Outcome of Miss Heckscher's Experiment in Thought Transference

By MIRIAM CRUIKSHANK

"It is absurd!" said Miss Heckscher, moving her thin shoulders impatiently. "Of course I don't mean that I doubt your story, madam. It was perfectly possible for the two friends, thousands of miles apart, to think of each other at the same moment and write letters after years of silence so that they crossed on the way. I only contend that the happening was a mere coincidence—there might have been a dozen occasions when there was no sympathetic wave, or whatever you please to call it. This theory of thought transference, telepathy, whatever the name may be, is, as I said before, absurd."

Madam Dupré smiled whimsically, thus deepening the multitude of tiny wrinkles that covered her small parchmenty face like a network. "Eet ees the custom of many people to term the thing that they do not understand absurd," she observed shrewdly. "I, for one, condemn not a theory until I have proved it wrong."

There was a ripple of approval around the long dinner-table, approval that was tinged with amusement and interest. When Madam Dupré showed an inclination to talk, the other guests at Mrs. Lester's shabby "home boarding-house" seldom failed to listen, and madam was in a talkative humor to-night.

"My interest in what you call the unknown has been of long standing," the little Frenchwoman continued presently, her bright black eyes watching Miss Heckscher's face through their narrowed lids with a look that was half pitying, half amused. "Back in my convent days I had my little reputation among my class-mates as seeress, and even you, my practical young American friends, have come to me to reveal *la bonne fortune* in the coffee-grounds or to shuffle the cards of fate. Nonsense of course, but fascinating nonsense for most of us apparently, and this—this little story I have told, it has a deeper meaning, a wider interest. Ees eet so wonderful that the mind of one shall call to the mind of another over many miles and across long years? *Ma foi!* Not many hundred years back our good friend Marconi would have been burnt as having dealings with the Evil One—to-day we hail him as a maker of history, a builder of progress. If by gaining control of certain electric currents we contrive to send the words of men over the big round world, who shall say that one human heart charged with the electricity of love shall not be capable of sending its message without wires, without pen or ink, straight to another?" Madam stopped breathlessly; a faint pink glow had crept into her withered yellow cheeks; her eyes were shining.

"I cannot believe it," said Miss Heckscher doggedly; "my common-sense—" She paused, for no one was listening. All the younger members of the party had left their seats and were eagerly crowding about madam's chair, begging her to go on; even Mrs. Lester's broad commonplace face was suffused with a flush of interest, and overcome by a sense of remoteness from that merry throng, she hurriedly pushed back her plate and left the room.

Once in her own bare little room on the fourth floor, she locked the door and vigorously set to work on a pile of exercises waiting for correction. It was so foolish, that talk in the dining-room! she said to herself as she industriously plied her pruning-pencil. Life contained no such mysteries, such heart-throbs, such possibilities for happiness, as madam tried to make those foolish young girls down-stairs believe. Life was full of drudgery, pin-pricks, ugly sordidness, and the necessity for earning one's daily bread. A favored few might find it different; but for the vast majority—



"It's All Right—Madam Is the Whole Thing."



"I Can Sympathize, Because I Had a Valentine."

She paused, and with her pencil-point pressed against her lips ran rapidly over the past ten years of her life. For that length of time she had taught Latin and English in Mrs. Roland's fashionable school for young women, from nine to two, and had spent most of the time out of school hours getting ready for the next day's work. She had lived in cheap boarding-houses during the greater part of the year, and varied the monotony by occasional uneventful trips to cheap country or mountain hotels during vacation-time. She had made few friends, for she was naturally reticent and not of the type, she thought rather bitterly, to draw others to her. Little by little she had come to live in her work, planning only from day to day, growing constantly more plodding and unimaginative.

Two months ago the breaking up of the house which had sheltered her—she could scarcely say it did more—had obliged her to seek a new abiding place, and after a wearied search through numberless dingy refuges for the itinerants of the earth, she had found her way to Mrs. Lester's. It was clean if shabby, the meals were comfortable, and once or twice it had crossed her jaded consciousness that the atmosphere was different. Perhaps it was because the boarders were for the most part young: cheerful young bank-clerks not yet dulled by the treadmill of business, fresh-faced stenographers still possessed of the notion that Romance with her hands outstretched welcomingly stood in the corridors of the tall office buildings; institute girls who fancied that they longed for careers. The only member of the household besides Mrs. Lester herself who had passed many mile-stones along life's road was Madam Dupré, and madam, despite her wrinkles and her faded false front and her shabby silk gowns with memories of *la belle France* in their crackling folds, had a heart that was perennially young.

More than once Miss Heckscher had felt out of place in her new surroundings. At thirty she was uncompromisingly middle-aged: not old, for to the old are given memories—memories so sweet that they can live again their own youth in that of the young about them. It is far harder to be middle-aged than to be really old. Madam Dupré at seventy

believed in happiness, in romance, in mystery, in the impossible, in youth itself; Mary Heckscher at thirty had forgotten what it meant to be young.

The clock-hands pointed to eight, and she turned back to the neglected exercises with the same impatient movement of her shoulders she had made at the dinner-table. If she worked industriously she would be through by half-past nine, and then she would brush out her hair before she went to bed. She had been in the habit of brushing her hair carefully the nights when she finished early, and she caught herself wondering why. She had been proud of her hair once, she remembered vaguely—she hardly knew what made her, for such things did not count, and for years she had not really cared about it, except to see that it was neat and so would set a good example to the pupils.

Little Emily Stannard had pretty hair—she had noticed it to-night when the girls were crowding about madam. It was bright and soft and curled prettily about her temples. She remembered that Emily, who was a stenographer in a broker's office down town, was usually just going out to her work when she came down to the second breakfast at eight o'clock, and always took time to stop in the hall long enough to say good-morning. She hadn't thought much about it before; but now it occurred to her that something would

be gone out of her day if Emily should happen to forget to say good-morning when she went out to-morrow.

"I believe," said Miss Heckscher half aloud, as she stooped to pick up the pencil she had dropped without realizing it, "that if I live much longer in this house I shall develop an imagination, and then, please, who will correct the Latin exercises?"

By quarter of ten she had finished, the papers were in a neat pile on her table, and just as she shook her mass of long smooth hair loose from its pins there was a faint rap at the door. "Now, who on earth—" said Miss Heckscher, for visitors were an event in her life, and huddling her dressing-gown about her she turned the key and opened the door an inch or so.

"It's only me," said Emily Stannard's voice apologetically, and Emily squeezed through the inhospitable aperture into the room.

"I, child," corrected Miss Heckscher abstractedly, and then suddenly remembering she was not in the school-room, she blushed in confusion.

Emily apparently did not notice, however, and as she came nearer to the light Miss Heckscher saw that she was pale, and that her eyes looked as if she had been crying. "The rest are all down-stairs talking to madam," Emily explained; "but I had the blues and didn't want to stay, so I came up to visit with you for awhile. Do you mind having me? Have you got the blues too?"

"The blues?" Miss Heckscher repeated the words as though puzzled. "I don't think I have," she said. "I don't believe I ever have them."

Emily stared. "You must be very happy then," she said. "Are you always happy, Miss Heckscher? You don't always look so," bluntly.

Mary Heckscher laid the brush down on the dressing-table and looked at her visitor with bewildered eyes. "Must one either have the blues or be happy?" she queried slowly. "I never thought about it that way."

"Why, I suppose so," said Emily vaguely—"at least that's the way I am. What pretty hair you have, Miss Heckscher! I never dreamed it was so long. It would be simply great puffed on the sides and worn in a bun. I'd love to fix it for you—say