

me, dear," said Minna. "It's that funny speckled strawberry, isn't it? I noticed it this morning."

"Yes, my dear," answered John in a choking voice. "And please remember that it is to be preserved very carefully." But though he seemed calm enough he was angry with Price. What right had the old fogey insinuating that Minna was—

He knew why he was angry. Price had suggested that Minna was mentally slow. And John knew it was true. Pretty Minna Hilton was not an intellectual woman, though she made none the worse wife for that.

"All right, Johnny," answered Minna. "But I really think you might have waited till after dinner. However, I know how interested you are in the garden."

She turned on her heel a little huffily and John surmised that she had seen Price's nudge. Minna was not very fond of Henry Price; she tolerated him for her husband's sake.

"John," said Price, as he stood at the door, saying good-by. "I'm sorry if I accidentally—"

"Oh, that's all right, old man," answered John. His good humor was completely restored by that time; he never bore grudges very long.

"But, John," persisted Price, "for heaven's sake don't say a word about it to anybody. You understand, don't you? If the story got about, what with the interest in Bergback's experiments, our garden would be racked fine as a toothcomb on the first dark night. John, you have a fortune in that single plant."

Certainly it did seem as though the only safety lay in absolute silence. The single fruit was invaluable. Bergback's experiments had shown conclusively that the blended strawberry would produce fruit only from the seed, not from the runners. And there had been only one fruit thus grown. The fruit was to be plucked as carefully as though it were the last hair from the Buddha's head, and placed

in a pot, and Price was to convey it to a greenhouse, and—

It was, in short, a remarkable conspiracy against one poor strawberry.

Thursday was the day set for the experiment, and on that afternoon Price came to tea. Minna made them have tea before going into the garden. But both men were too much absorbed in thought to eat much. In vain Minna tempted them with her scones and cakes.

"Won't you try a little more of my jam?" she asked Price coaxingly. "You know, it was you and Johnny who are responsible for it."

"How is that, my dear?" John asked.

"Why, I've made it from the best fruit in the garden," she answered, "and I put the blended strawberry in, just as you told me—"

"What?" yelled both men in chorus.

"Dear me, how excited you both are," said Minna loftily. "Didn't you tell me, Johnny, that it was to be preserved carefully?"

"You—you put the strawberry—the strawberry in that jam?" inquired John Hilton, gazing at his wife stonily.

"Yes, Johnny. Wasn't that right?"

"Oh, yes, it was right enough," replied her husband. "Only—well, you have lost us a fortune, Minna, that's all."

Henry Price glared at the poor woman and then, without a word, dashed out into the hall and thrust on his hat. A moment later the garden gate slammed to behind him.

This sound, indicative of his final departure, relieved the tension of the situation. Minna put her head down upon her folded arms. John rose up awkwardly and came behind her and put his arms about her.

"Never mind, dear," he said. "It was my fault, and you couldn't have known. I'll try again, Minna. Don't cry!"

The tears were streaming down