ALPHONSE AND GASTON HAVE SOME ELECTION-DAY TROUBLE WITH RED RAFFERTY AND UGLY MIKE.

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King Cophetva and the Serving Maid.

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The garden stretched from the strip of lawn in front of the house to the dancing waters of the sound.

There were beds of chrysanthemums in glorious autumn bloom, and banks of hydrangeas, as yet untouched by frost, and over all the pale, pure sunlight of early morning.

The dew was still heavy, and a girl, who was busy cutting flowers and dropping them into her basket, gathered up her white skirts from the wet path with thrifty care.

A charming picture this young woman made; her hair rippled back from her forehead in a golden halo; her eyes were set wide and had a Madonna-like sweetness, which was again contradicted by the sauciness of her little nose; the outline of the face was delicately lovely.

The white cotton frock, with its turned-over collar and cuffs and a white apron, stamped her as a servant.

Down the walk, with a pair of clipping scissors, came the under gardener, a fine broth of a boy, with a complexion to rival his own lilies and roses, partly from a fresh application of soap and water, partly from the purity of healthy living, and, seeing the object of his long-pent passion so seductively unconscious behind the beech tree, he took fate around the waist and gave her a hearty kiss.

Never was retribution more swift and final. The girl slapped "the bold cheek on him," and, seizing her basket, she ran like Atalanta toward the house.

But the adventure was not to end so quickly, and it may be remarked in passing that young serving maids should keep to their end of the house. Pretty Rose fled up the front steps to the piazza and ran almost into the arms of a dignified elderly gentleman with a crop of gray hair, a brown paper-colored complexion and eyes that visualized as well as saw. It required little imagination to guess that he was the distinguished foreign artist, who had arrived the night before to visit her employers.

"My dear," he said, as she drew back with an apology, "you are very pretty. I shall paint your portrait. I feel as if I had seen you before."

Now, Rose had been much perturbed by the encounter with the gardener and felt distrust of mankind.

"I beg your pardon, sir," she said, "but I am only a servant. Mrs. Starr pays for my face as well as my services. I am sorry I cannot oblige you."

"She pays for a shrewd tongue as well," he answered. "I think there is some mystery here."

Rose retrieved her manners by picking up a pencil he had dropped, and disappeared around the corner of the house.

Corielli stood amazed that mortal woman could refuse the compliment of his genius, and then he shrugged his shoulders.

"She has saved me good money," he soliloquized. "Why should I waste my time putting her handsome face on canvas and calling it Guinevere or some betise, when twenty rich Americans are clamoring to have their ugly portraits painted at fifty thousand francs apiece?" Here he flung himself into a chair and let his eyes wander over the garden and broad expanse of water beyond.

Nine o'clock found him seated at the table with his host and hostess, ready to do justice to the bountiful abundance of an American breakfast. Corielli was truly cosmopolitan. All pleasant customs were his by adoption, whether gathered from the Italy of his youth or the England of his later life. He had an appetite on tap and a curiosity that never failed to probe a sensation.

Rose had provided him with a sensation that morning, and he was only waiting for a pause in the conversation to ply his friend John Starr with questions, pertinent or impertinent, to satisfy his curiosity.

Mr. Starr was aquiline in features and sandy in complexion. He belonged to the parrot type of humans. His opinions were stiff and when opposed became obstinate. His wife dominated him by pure kindly common sense, but he didn't know it.

The postman's whistle sounded outside, and Rose entered the breakfast-room with the letters, placing them silently beside Mrs. Starr's plate.

Here was Corielli's chance. He looked approvingly after her as she went out, so free from self-consciousness, so gracefully dignified, and turned to his hostess.

"You will pardon the artist in me for remarking upon the singular beauty of that young woman," he said.

Mrs. Starr's brow contracted. She considered the comment a breach of good manners, but Mr. Starr responded with interest.

"She has a strange history," he said. "We found her in the slums, and yet she may be—anybody—the highest or the lowest."

Corielli bent forward.

"Tell me her story," he begged.

Now, John Starr loved the sound of his own voice, and he was not boring if you happened to have time to listen to him.

"My wife," he began, "was shopping for Christmas one December afternoon—about fifteen years ago, wasn't it, my dear?—when, as she came out of one of our great bazaars she heard shrill screams from a child and saw a half-tipsy woman striking a little girl with the handle of a heavy umbrella. Mrs. Starr is a courageous woman. She was soon the center of an admiring throng as she stood between the child and her tormentor and held her at bay. Fortunately a policeman was near and arrested the woman at my wife's behest. The child was handed over to the matron of the police station and the virago locked up for the night, and the next day my wife appeared against her in court."

"A brave lady," said Corielli, bowing; "and you took the child from her drunken mother, madam?"

"Ah! there is just the point," said John Starr. "It wasn't her mother. The woman told the magistrate that the girl belonged to a lodger who had died the week before, leaving no provision for her little daughter, no address of friends—nothing but a few clothes and personal effects, which, while they indicated better circumstances, were of little intrinsic value. As her lodger owed her money she had sold the clothes to repay herself. She had kept the little one a few days, out of charity, but meant to hand her over to the authorities. She had no money to waste on other people's brats, she said. She admitted having been tipsy the night before, and confessed the child had angered her by breaking away from her to look at the toys in the shop window."

"I trust she got a heavy sentence," said Corielli, with spirit.

John Starr laughed.

"Only a fine, which she"—nodding across the table at his wife—"paid. So like a woman, to invoke the terrors of the law and then cry mercy! The truth was my wife was so entranced with the little girl's beauty that her only thought was to get possession of her and save her from a life of vice. I arranged to have her legally given over to us, and here she has lived ever since—give me another cup of coffee, Sophia," all in a breath.

The foreign gentleman was getting a little bored with so much eulogy of "my wife," but he managed one more question.

"You decided to bring her up as a house servant?" he said.

John Starr looked the modern Solomon.

"Sophia would have adopted her," he said, shaking his head, "but I was firm. 'Sense, rather than sentiment,' was my motto; but I sent the child to the public school, and at home she has had reading enough to turn her head, and now she is my wife's maid, and a good one, too."

Mrs. Starr gathered up her letters and rose from the table.

"We must not weary Mr. Corielli with Rosie's virtues," she said, and then, selecting a letter, added: "Here is a communication from Jack. Did you know, Mr. Corielli, that the boy had gone with his regiment to Chickamauga? When you have only one child it is hard to lend him to your country."

"Tut, tut!" said Starr. "It has made a man of him, and now the war is virtually over and he will be home in the spring."

He carried off Corielli to his studio, and Mrs. Starr, with a sigh for her absent son, went to her dressing-room to read his letter in peace.

"Send me some warmer clothes," the letter said, "for the nights are beginning to be cold, and tell the cook to make me one of her almond cakes and any other good thing her fancy suggests.

"I see no signs of our getting away from here, though the report is we are going to Matanzas for the winter. In the meanwhile Dick Oliphant and I want to do a bit of the aesthetic in our quarters. You see, we know a lot of girls in the town, and parties are always coming down to the camp. Couldn't you send us a rug and a few cushions and some cheap photographs, just to make the place look habitable?"

Mrs. Starr finished her letters and rang the bell for Rose. There could be no doubt of the affection between the lady and her attendant, for they greeted one another with a smile that was tender on the part of the girl and indulgent on the part of the mistress.

"Rosie," said Mrs. Starr, "Mr. Jack wants more things sent to him; take your pencil and make a list," and she dictated rapidly from the letter.

The girl's handwriting was good, her spelling excellent.

"We must send some books," she said, as she put down the last item.

"Decidedly," answered her mistress. "What should you recommend?"

The singularity of the question struck neither of them, and an animated discussion followed. Indeed, Rosie's reading had been Mrs. Starr's care for years. She never dreaded developing her intelligence at the expense of her contentment. The girl seemed too healthy minded for that.

When all was settled, Mrs. Starr's thoughts turned to her garden.

"Get me my boots and hat, Rosie," she said, and in a moment the maid was on her knees buttoning her lady's boots.

She held the door open for Mrs. Starr and then betook herself to her task. She made her selection among the boxes of the trunkroom for one suitable to send to the young master.

Outside, in the garden, Mrs. Starr had been joined by the foreign gentleman, and they were walking toward the little summer house, where Rose remembered she and Master Jack used to have their lessons in nursery days—her superior quickness being used as a fillip to his boyish laziness in the democratic companionship of childhood.

Dear Mrs. Starr had always been kind, and so had old Ellen, Mrs. Starr's maid, who kept her little bed beside her own at night and always held her hand when she dreamed of robbers and Indians or wicked people coming to steal her away.

The servants were already seated when she slipped into her place, on the left of Mr. Thomason, the butler. Mr. Thomason was tall and thin, with black hair, which he wore in a gracious wave on his forehead. A pronounced taste for music on the concertina and skill in table decorations made his opinion much valued among the women servants. He was in the act of admonishing one of the footmen as Rose entered.

Before the meal was over Rose's bell rang, an occurrence which drew forth the sting of Mr. Thomason's sarcasm.

"Servants 'asn't no stummicks, I take it," he remarked grimly. "They don't like their meals in peace! Oh, no! Good time to ring 'em hup when you know they'reittin' idle, eatin'."

Rose found Mr. Starr in the studio, where Mr. Corielli's wish was explained and granted. It was as a study for some future work he wanted the girl's face, and a simple arrangement of statuelike drapery was all that would be necessary in costume.

That afternoon preliminary work began.

"You will photograph her for the pose, Corielli?" asked John Starr, wheeling the great camera into position, and they amused themselves with this toy till the carriage came to take them for a drive.

"This photographing saves a man a lot of false starts," said John Starr, and then, turning to dismiss Rose, he added: "We will print these to-morrow if the sun shines, and by the afternoon Mr. Corielli will begin painting you. You may go."

So the next afternoon the great work began. The best of the photographs, after serving its momentary purpose in the studio, was packed in Jack's box and sent to Chickamauga, just to show him the honor done to his old playfellow, Rosie, by the great Corielli, and no one thought of it again in the interest of the growing portrait that seemed to glow with life under that inspired brush.

At the last sitting, when Rose's expressive face seemed ready to speak to you from the canvas, Corielli turned to Mrs. Starr (always present on these occasions) and repeated an intimation he had given before of his interest in the young woman.

"Of course," he said, "you have experienced that queer feeling of having seen or done a thing before, and knowing just what will happen next, that almost borders on the supernatural. This impression has haunted me while I have been painting your maid's portrait, and yet she tells me she has never been out of this country, and as certainly I have never before been in it. Shall we explain such phenomena on the theory of a pre-existence?" and the talk wandered to subjects psychological.

At the end of a fortnight, when Corielli and his portrait had departed, and life had resumed its humdrum routine for Rose, a letter came from Chickamauga which gave Mrs. Starr the worst twenty-four hours of her life.

"My Dear Mother" (Jack wrote): "It was a malicious fate that prompted you to send Rosie's photograph. There's the devil to pay and no pitch hot!"

"That sublime ass Dick Olyphant has fallen in love with it and has kicked over all bounds. He was with me when the box came and helped me to open it, and the photograph was the first thing on top. He stood staring like a crazy man, and then he broke out with: "It's the most beautiful face on earth, and I shall marry her if she will have me!' Off-hand—like that, you know. I just grinned, enjoying the joke, till I thought I ought to tell him, and then I said:

"'You great goat! That's a servant of my mother's!'

"'Thank heaven!' he said, piously. 'It gives me a better chance.'

"'Wouldn't you like a line of introduction to our cook?' I asked, trying a bit of sarcasm. 'She has her good points as well as Rosie.'

"If his eyes had been bayonets I should have been spiked and he never spoke to me again until to-day, when he informed me he had got leave to go home and asked a letter to you. I declined upon the ground that I should not assist him to commit suicide, but he'll turn up at the house, all the same.

"If any one can save him it will be you, my dear mother, and he is worth your interest—the best fellow in the world, desperately unconventional, with no family to keep him in order, rich and independent. Do your best—no offense to Rosie, who is a worthy soul. Your affectionate son, J. STARR, JR."

A woman's mind is often a sealed book to the other sex, even to the men who know her best. Jack Starr little imagined that his letter, instead of shocking his mother's class prejudices, would open up a realm of romance that excited her to fever point. She loved the girl she had brought up and secretly believed her of gentle parentage, whereas this friend of Jack's—this Dick Olyphant—was but a name to her. If his love and money could assure Rosie's future happiness, was it for her, as guardian, to set up barriers of caste distinction? Here was a high-minded, chivalrous young fellow with no family to consult determined to play Cophetua; where could he find a beggar maid like her Rosie? Beautiful, good, well brought up—almost too well for her class—and young enough to be molded to any position.

That evening, when dressing for dinner, Mrs. Starr noticed that the girl's eyes were red from tears. She seldom invited confidences which were likely to concern the young woman's relations with her fellow-servants, but to-day Rosie occupied a very prominent position in her thoughts, so she laid her hand on her shoulder and asked what was wrong.

A flood of tears was the answer, and then, little by little, the story came out how the under gardener wanted to marry her and she couldn't endure his lovemaking, and he was angry and was going to leave, and all the servants said it was her fault and that she was so proud that no one was good enough for her, and that she wanted a prince for a husband.

"Do you, Rosie?" asked Mrs. Starr, quizzically.

The girl looked hurt, then thoughtful, and then a deep blush dyed her cheeks.

"You will think me worse than foolish," she said, "but I shrink from the men of my own class of life. I get on with the women, but the men make me feel——" a gesture of repulsion finished the sentence.

"Keep them at arm's length, my child," said Mrs. Starr, heartily, "and as for the gardener, he is easily replaced; don't break your heart over that."

The following day the comedy began—Mr. Richard Olyphant's card was brought to Mrs. Starr, and she went to the drawing-room to receive him with a fluttering heart. Not even to her husband had she confided the strange story.

The visitor, who had been looking out of the window, turned sharply round as she entered; a broad-shouldered, soldierly figure, with upward-curling mustaches, steady gray eyes and a firm chin.

"Not to be bamboozled—knows his own mind," was Mrs. Starr's inward comment.

She welcomed him warmly, asked for news of her son, spoke with effusion of Jack's affection for Mr. Olyphant, and then waited for him to make the next move.

It came with a rush.

"Mrs. Starr," he said, "I know Jack has told you of my infatuation. I have fallen in love with your maid's picture and mean to marry her if she will have me."

The lady's answer was distinctly disingenuous.

"Then let us hope she won't. Such a marriage would mean social death to you."

"Let it!" he retorted. "I am responsible to no one, without family ties, rich enough to make my own life. If you want to know more about me I can refer you to mutual friends. Your protege will be safe with me."

"I am not thinking of Rose just now," she answered. "I am distressed at being the involuntary agent in what must be considered a great folly."

She was making a better resistance than she had deemed possible, but the young man set aside argument by asking:

"May I see Rose, Mrs. Starr?"

"How can you see her?" she asked, impatiently. "Do you expect me to summon my servants to receive their guests here?"

"I can go to your kitchen with your permission," he answered.

Mrs. Starr was secretly elated. She yielded a point.

"I will give you the opportunity of seeing what she looks like, but that is all; do not stare, if you please."

She rang the bell and a servant appeared.

"Tell my maid to bring me some pins. I have torn my dress."

In very truth she had stepped on the lace of her flounce, which lay in a loop on the carpet.

In a few minutes the portiere was pushed aside and a girl came quietly into the room. Olyphant flushed to the roots of his hair and would have sprung to his feet had not a look from Mrs. Starr restrained him. Rose was so infinitely lovelier than her photograph that his romantic fancy became a headlong passion. From the crown of her golden head to the hem of her white dress she seemed to him the embodiment of womanly perfection.

Mrs. Starr murmured a few words about the repairing of her gown, and the girl knelt at her side, gathering the lace into folds and placing her pins with feminine art. The hands were slim and shapely and she used them with exceeding grace.

Her task finished, she prepared to leave the room, when Olyphant made a dash for the door, and, before Mrs. Starr could stop him, held aside the portiere for her to pass. It embarrassed the poor child terribly. A deep blush made her even more divinely lovely, and when she raised her eyes to acknowledge the courtesy Olyphant could have made himself a doormat for her to walk over.

Mrs. Starr was exasperated.

"How can you be so foolish!" she exclaimed when the girl had gone. "To treat a servant like a lady is no compliment; it is unseemly. You make my task doubly hard."

The young man's thoughts were forging ahead. He seemed hardly to hear the reproaches of his hostess, but with an effort he came back to the present.

"The situation is indeed intolerable," he agreed, "so let us end it at once. Would you of your kindness present the case to Rose? Tell her I am a soldier in your son's regiment—sink the fact that I am a gentleman if you think it would startle her—say that I have fallen in love with her and am here to ask her hand of you. If she is not too much shocked may I see her again?"

"What would you do," she asked, "if I refused to help you?"

"I should effect an interview through the back door instead of the front," he said daringly.

She laughed and left the room.

There is nothing in domestic furniture so riotous and untamed as a woman's upper bureau drawer. Seven times a day it can be reduced to apple-pie order, and in a twinkling gloves and veils and handkerchiefs have twisted themselves into higgiety-piggiety confusion.

Rose was tidying this receptacle of the minutiae of her lady's toilet when Mrs. Starr came into the room seeking an interview in the interest of King Cophetua, who was cooling his heels in the parlor.

There was a portentous rustle in the lady's skirts and a solemn expression in her handsome middle-aged face that suggested a crisis.

"Rose," she said, shutting the door behind her, "we were talking yesterday of the gardener's attentions to you and your dislike to men in your own class. Tell me, what would be the chances of happiness if a girl like you—pretty and educated beyond her position—should marry a gentleman?"

Astonishment was the sole expression on the young woman's face. Mrs. Starr, while willing to discuss books with her, never invited intimate conversation.

After a moment's hesitation, she answered: "They might be happy till the gentleman began to feel the poor wife's shortcomings, and then he would cease to love her and she would want to die."

"But she might be clever and adaptable, and have friends who could teach her many things," said Mrs. Starr.

Rose began to feel uncomfortable in this strange conversation.

"Those things only happen in stories, Mrs. Starr," she said, with a worried look.

"And yet," the lady went on, "at this moment there is a young gentleman downstairs who asks for no greater happiness than to lay his heart and his fortune at the feet of my maid. What shall I say to him, Rosie?"

"Oh!" she said, flushing painfully, "you are making fun of me, ma'am. You are showing me the absurdity of what I said to you yesterday. And yet I thought I might confide in you."

Mrs. Starr laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"For shame, Rosie," she said, "to doubt my affection. I tell you the simple truth. A gentleman who has fallen in love with your beauty believes your nature to be as lovely as your face, and wishes to marry you. Will you see him for yourself?"

"Is it——?" began Rose, and then lost courage.

Mrs. Starr finished the sentence.

"The young gentleman who held the portiere for you to pass. It is he, and no one else—Mr. Richard Olyphant, my son's friend, and he has come all the way from Chickamauga to find the original of the photograph we packed in the box, and he is waiting for his answer. What shall I say?"

"Oh, tell him to go without seeing me, dear Mrs. Starr," cried poor Rosie, in distress. "I should be a drag upon him all his life. Don't let him think of me again."

"Rosie," said her friend, "if there were no such thing as social distinctions, if we were all as equal in men's sight as we are in God's, could you love such a man?"

"How can I tell?" answered the girl, and then the ghost of a mischievous smile trembled on her lips. "He is very handsome," she said, blushing.

"You had better tell him so yourself," said the lady, leaving the room as abruptly as she had entered it.

In the meanwhile Olyphant had been pacing the drawing-room like a caged tiger. His hostess was gone so long that he began to suspect her of using this as a silent means of getting rid of him—except that he knew Jack's mother could never be discourteous.

Finally a servant invited him to follow, and they mounted the stairs to a small morning room overlooking the drive, and almost before he could take in his surroundings the door opened and closed, and there stood Rosa, looking at him like some beautiful statue—a Galatea in her marble whiteness. Her lips were parted, as if she had tried to speak and failed; her eyes looked imploring.

"Don't look like that," the young man pleaded. "Do you think I want to frighten you, you whom I adore? It is my anxiety to do what is most straightforward that makes me so brusque, that makes me afraid to delay my avowal. First I fell in love with your picture, and now that I have seen you I feel that I must win you or die. Will you give me a chance?"

His words were warm, but he kept his position in the window.

A little color crept into Rose's cheek.

"If I felt sure you appreciated all it means for a gentleman like you——" she began, and hesitated.

"Who told you I was a gentleman?" he asked.

She gave a little impatient smile.

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