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DOUBLE CONSPIRACY

By CATHERINE COOPE.

Jean Caldwell's love of empty houses had assumed the proportions of a mania. She could no more pass a vacant house three times without trying to see inside it than she could turn down the adorable tilt of her retousse nose.

"You will be arrested as a suspicious character for hanging about strange persons' houses," her brother had often warned her.

"Everyone should have a hobby," Jean always responded with a laugh. "Mine is houses. I should really have been a house hunter's guide."

"Yes, you have certainly missed your calling," her brother had grunted; "you remind me of a lost soul prowling about for a habitation."

Jean felt very little like a lost soul as she wended her way through the woods on a clear October day. The trees were glorious in their autumn garments of brown and gold and Jean rejoiced in her power to enjoy it all.

"I am healthy and strong and—I am on my way to inspect an old Tudor house," she spoke aloud to the birds and the trees.

And within her Cavalier bag was the advertisement for an old historic house.

"It has gabled roofs with red tiling and stained glass windows and oak panels," she told herself in joyful anticipation. Jean quickened her pace and arrived presently at the edge of the woods where an unexplored village nestled. She stopped and took the advertisement from her bag in order to refresh her memory as to the location of the house.

"Eight, Clavering road," she read and continued her walk.

Had Jean been a prospective bride looking for a dove-cot she could not have been more elated over the sight of the old Tudor house when it came into view above the low-hung beech trees in the garden.

For a second her heart suffered a quake. There was a thin line of smoke issuing from the chimney.

"Of course it will be the caretaker," she told herself.

But upon arriving at the gate which inclosed the garden Jean knew her first disappointment. The house was occupied. There was no "To Let" sign or any indication that the house was on the market. The agent must have neglected to take it off the list.

"I have walked three miles just to see that perfectly adorable house," she commented petulantly and gazed at the two red-tiled gables with wistful eyes.

Suddenly she caught sight of the small brass plate on the gate post. "Dr. Bruce," she read. Jean peered through the heavy vines into the garden and her desire to get inside grew tenfold.

"I simply will go through that house," she decided, and a brilliant idea swept over her mind.

Jean was healthy and vigorous, and the rich blood flowed evenly through her system. There was no pallor, no weakness for which she might consult Dr. Bruce. Her cheeks were vividly crimson from the brisk walk through the woods, and her eyes sparkled with health, yet Jean made straightway toward that office with the stained glass window.

"I can at least get a glimpse of the inside," she said while she surreptitiously dabbed her crimson cheeks with the small powder puff she carried.

When Jean was admitted into the consulting room of Dr. Bruce there was no one to challenge her right to be there. For a few moments she had the pleasure of scanning the details of carving and the outer stairway.

So interested did she become that she failed to hear the light footfall behind her.

When a masculine voice which Jean supposed to be that of Dr. Bruce addressed her she very promptly placed both hands over the region of her heart and fainted into the man's arms.

Jean prided herself on doing the thing very nicely. She remembered the many times she had to faint in amateur theatricals.

As for the young man who had caught her—Jean felt his surprise. From beneath her dropped lashes she found him young and good to look upon. He seemed too stunned by his sudden good fortune to do more than hold her with unnecessary fondness. Jean felt the color coming into her cheeks in spite of the coat of powder.

When the man had sufficiently recovered from the shock of having a beautiful girl flung into his arms he began to realize the needs of the moment. He put his precious burden tenderly down on the couch and Jean knew that he stood helplessly looking down at her.

"He must be a splendid doctor," was her inward comment; "I hope he won't dash cold water all over me."

Suddenly he seemed to have an idea. He went down on his knees beside the couch and put his ear close to the lace above Jean's head.

Naturally the girl's heart began a mad beating. Evidently this rapid thumping had not been expected. Jean opened her eyes slowly and met the anxious ones above her own.

"I do not like the way your heart is beating," the young man informed her.

"Nor do I," Jean told him and sat bolt upright. Her lashes dropped. "It is more quiet—now."

"Do you do that often?" was the man's startling question.

"Do what?" Jean asked not without a blush.

"Piling yourself into strangers' arms in that sudden fashion." There was something quizzical behind the man's eyes that irritated Jean.

"I don't care," she flashed back at him, "this house is advertised for rent and I just had to get inside of it. My heart is absolutely perfect and I did not faint at all."

"Even a lawyer would have known that," laughed Jimmy Bruce.

"Are you not the doctor?" exclaimed Jean.

"I am only the doctor's son," Jimmy told her, "and I wish you would take that powder off your cheeks," he suggested frankly.

"You are an exceptionally odious person," Jean informed him with her nose well in the air. She turned toward the door.

"No—I am not," Jimmy returned with a laugh. "I am really very nice. Your brother Ted thinks so or he would not have told me his sister was going house hunting today."

Jean cast a startled glance at Jimmy Bruce and the color mounted high in her cheeks.

"You and Ted are conspirators," she put in quickly.

"Admitted," agreed Jimmy, "but we do not go about throwing ourselves into strange girls' arms. Come—I am going to walk back through the woods with you. Ted has invited me to dinner because my family is away. Otherwise I would take you over the house."

Jean had nothing to say for the moment, yet she realized that the word odious had been charmed out of her thoughts.

"I am glad you enjoy looking at houses," Jimmy Bruce said while they walked through the woods, "because I have never cared much for it."

Again Jean was silent.

"Your color is much better now," Jimmy told her.

CORN HUSK SIGN.

I had always heard of the "old Indian sign" of thick corn husks meant a cold winter, but I had never thought to notice it until about a year ago; as I was husking some corn I thought one of the ears had a thick husk, so I counted the layers and found there were seven of them, which was a good husk. So this year, noticing the husks seemed thick, I went out a week or two ago and pulled an ear off that looked as if it had a thick husk on it, and cut across it at the stem end and counted eighteen layers. So if the corn husks know more about the coming winter than a man does, and such a winter as last followed a seven-layer husk, what will follow an eighteen-layer husk?—Letter to Indiana Farmer.

SHORTENING OF THE DAY.

For a long time it has been known that the tides act as a brake on the rotating earth and that they tend to lengthen the day. The effect is, however, so slight that it cannot be measured in any length of time at man's disposal. MacMillan has estimated, with the aid of certain assumptions and upon the data available, that the increase of the length of the day is one second in 460,000 years.—Harper's Weekly.

JUST SO.

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