

The Other Side of the Fence

By Kathryn Green

Nothing of the house could be seen from the street. This was not all due to the height of the wall, but to the trees and sloping land as well. Still it was a very high wall and a solemn one, so forbidding that it demanded conjecture.

To the youths, reclining on the opposite lawn, it afforded outlet for all that the spirit had awakened in them. There was already a pronounced difference in their types, although their bond of youth and imagination had developed and likened them.

Tom and David were strongly contrasted, the former a sturdy, wholesome youth, big and blond, with love of action twinkling from his light blue eyes and the latter a pale and dreamy lad with thoughtful, dark eyes and a slim form. Dick, the third, was a remarkable mixture of his two friends. He combined David's mind with Tom's action, and so, unconsciously ruled the other two. It was a wonderful friendship—a triple alliance. Even their day dream was the same; the girl whose name they knew and nothing else except that she lived in the dim house beyond the wall.

"Of course I know just what she's like," David, the dreamer, was saying in his dreamiest tone, "she doesn't want to go—she's afraid of it. She's lived there so long that she's part of it."

"You're mad!" cried Tom; his blue eyes stormed as he turned them in appeal to Dick. "Can you imagine her wanting to stay there Dick?"

Of course some one keeps her there and I'm going to get her away."

"Why yes, Tom," Dick answered slowly, "I can imagine that she might want to remain. Dave usually has some good ideas but never makes anything out of them. She might want to stay, Dave. I agree with you Tom, though, that someone ought to get her out, only that someone isn't going to be you or Dave for that matter."

Tom and David looked scornfully at each other.

"That's a good compromise, Dick," agreed David, "you see the trouble with Tom is that he can't think of fighting such an abstract thing as a girl's character and inclinations. He wants to have an irate father or something like that to overcome."

"And the trouble with you, Dave," Dick defended the wrathful Tom, "is that you don't think of overcoming anything. I suppose you think you aren't worthy and couldn't make her happy."

And then as Tom's clear laugh rang out Dick added—"and above all, you're the best sport about kidding I've ever seen."

"I suppose that's why you both do it so much," laughed Tom.

"Of course, Tommie, or we wouldn't want to," agreed David.

"Or dare to," Dick chimed in.

Then with peace restored, they returned to their favorite subject.

"If we can't decide whether she wants to stay there or not, let's discuss why she ever went there in the first place," suggested David.

"Why, of course, her crabbed old father is keeping her away from the world because he hates it."

"I know it was an irate father you wanted, Tom. When will the elopement come off?"

"Well, before you pick on mine, Dave, let's hear your idea."

"Why she comes of a wonderful family who have lost all their money and they don't want her to associate with the people she would have—"

"And how can they afford the house, then?"

"You're too practical for Dave, Tommie. Don't you see, her name is Miss King which, I suppose, is short for princess. Is it, Dave?"

"Well, what's your idea, Dick," laughed David.

"Why 'Princess' Lydia is probably sacrificing her life there for someone she loves r—"

"And what good could it do anyone to have her hide away?"

"Oh, Tom, you're so frightfully exact. Why bother with a little detail like that?"

"Well, in any case, none of us would be worthy of her, especially if she were so noble," declared David, the idealist.

"That wouldn't make any difference," Dick cried excitedly. "It's cruel to let her sacrifice herself

there—she's too beautiful to be allowed to suffer."

"Oh yes, what does she look like? Don't you think she's a little blond and darling?"

"Oh Tommie!"

Dick and David both smothered the protesting sufferer.

"No, she's slim and dark, with great black eyes and she fits in the gloomy old house with the long, narrow windows and dark, winding halls."

"Oh no," gasped poor Tom. "Say fellows, wouldn't you be afraid of her then? I want her to be real and lovable. No mysterious person for me."

"If she isn't exquisite and safely, I don't want her at all," cried Dave. "I suppose you'd like her to be spending her time at tennis, wouldn't you, Tom? Instead of reading in the dim, old library or walking in the gardens, reveling, but a little awed by their bright beauty. Of course, she's glorious but calm and deep in her glory. Imagine a boisterous Lydia, Dick!"

"I didn't say she was boisterous," roared Tom. "She's just little and dear and fresh and real. You want a slim airy creature that slinks away in the shadows and hardly dares to smile for fear of ruffling her calm and grace. I say, Dick, isn't Dave the greatest ass in America?"

Dick smiled.

"I agree," he answered, "Dave is an ass. What's the use of making something seem unattainable if it isn't to make you live to attain."

Yes Dave, she must be delicately graceful and composed. Of course, she has to be imperious and shy at the same time, but she's all that just to make her more delightfully dear when she comes to you."

"Well, I bet I know her first!" cried Tommie.

"I guess you will, Tom," replied Dick, with unexpected meekness.

"I'm going away first to make something of myself. Do you think she'd leave there for me now? Do you think I'd even ask her?"

Tom's honest face saddened but suddenly his smile beamed forth.

"Gee! You're great, Dick! Let's both go away and leave Dave to dream of her and when we come back—"

"Find me married to her," finished Dave. "No, Tommie," he added, "you don't need to be afraid of that. But I bet you'll never marry her—there are such piles of 'real, fresh, little, blond, darling, lovable'—let me see, what's else?"

"Shut up," came a growl, but then, "Dick," added the easily convinced Tom, "are you going away and not notice any other girl and just work for her, when you've never even seen her or heard anything except her name?"

"No," said Dick slowly. "No—I'm going to see her—I've thought of a way."

"Are you going to climb the wall?" from Tommie.

"Will you write to her," came from Dave.

"No," laughed Dick, "I don't want her to think me a burglar or a fool. I'll be a book agent with a wonderful bargain. She has ordered loads of books in town so that will interest her. I'll just push by the butler in book agents' accustomed manner."

"What a romantic and inspiring introduction," and Dave rocked with laughter.

"Do you really think you can get away with it?" asked awestruck Tom.

"I'm going to do it," Dick answered slowly. "It isn't a question of whether I can or not—it's just going to be done."

"Tom and Dave tried to answer, but they found there was nothing to say. Finally Tom asked softly:

"When?"

"Now!"

And Dick walked away.

After a few paces he turned and added, "Wait here—it won't take very long."

For two weary hours Tom and Dave strained their eyes for his return. With a mixture of longing and dread they finally were rewarded by the sight of his rapidly nearing figure. When he finally stood before them, neither could ask the big question, but only stared as he stood silently a second. Then a smile spread over Dick's features.

"She's wonderful," he gasped. "She's lovely. But—she's sixty-three."

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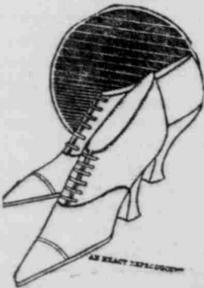
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