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An Heirloom

By Martha McCulloch-Williams

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"Blessed be hobbie skirts," Alison ejaculated, surveying her slim lithe-ness in the long mirror.

Rose, her sister, laughed softly, as she returned: "Better say blessed be flesh! If grandad hadn't weighed near three hundred, you'd never get a skirt out of his Sunday best black broadcloth trousers."

"Don't you dare! If one breathes real loud in this village folk are sure to hear," Alison adjured turning to look at herself over her own shoulder. "And the gossips would say sacrilege rather than thrift. 'Tm sure grandad himself would approve—dead this ten years, what harm can it do to have his left-over clothes help us round a hard corner?"

"None in the world," Rose assented merrily, adding with a touch of wistfulness: "It is so hard—our stock passing dividends, just at this special time. We could do so much with that five hundred we haven't got."

"And other people doing all sorts of things. This town is going to be real giddy," Alison answered, sighing at the end of a giggle. "Three weddings already announced—that means at least a dozen parties of sorts—luncheons not counted."

"And tableaux for the Missionary society, and two Germans if no more," Rose chanted.

Alison took up the chant with, "And three strange—very strange—young men a-coming to the weddings—and likely to stay on awhile with their kin. Rosy-posy, I tell you, it's distinctly hard lines. A new party frock apiece is the most we dare hope for—and even they spell a month without butter. Praise be, you didn't make that new melton last fall—you would hardly have put it on, with Aunt Anne so ill. But whatever we would do if you hadn't thought of grandad, I surely don't know. Really, I believe, though it sounds like magic, I'll get a swaggar outfit from his suk."

"He wore it only once—poor dear," Rose sighed. "And he was always particular as to his clothing. I wish we dared spend a little for touches of color—though you can stand all



"Blessed Be Hobbie Skirts."

black with your yellow hair and blue eyes, I hate to see you nun-like."

"O! if I only dare!" Alison exclaimed. "Dare what?" Rose asked.

Alison answered with a breathless giggle: "Sacrifice our best heirloom—but Aunt Anne will never agree—"

"You mean the waistcoat!" Rose cried, catching her breath.

Alison nodded. Rose darted away—up the stairs, to the garret where the waistcoat which had come down from a beau of colonial times, lay, linen-wrapped, in lavender. In a wink she was back with it, unwrapping the swappings. They fell apart, revealing a fabric of degree. Brocade whose satin ground, once a royal scarlet powdered with rosebuds yellow, white and pink, had faded to a soft delicate Indian red. Time had likewise improved the rose hues—they seemed to melt one into another. Alison gasped at the sight of the rich blendings. "It—it seems wicked—even to think of cutting it up," she said. "But O!—wouldn't it set off my black?"

"It shall set it off," Rose said stoutly. "Aunt Anne would never agree—her conscience wouldn't let her. But once the thing is done she'll be glad. I found her crying yesterday, over her bank account—she seems to feel it's her fault that things are as they

are! I do believe there's enough in a narrow panel besides revers and cuffs," Alison answered eagerly—she had been measuring the waistcoat while her sister spoke.

It was very long, and had been built for a man over six feet. It was neither frayed nor spotted and had still its full complement of carved rock-crystal buttons. No wonder Aunt Anne cherished it—it was all that had come down to her, in the division of ancestral treasures, from the most distinguished of her great-grandfathers.

Fate ordered it that she came through the door from the living

room just as Alison, scissors in hand, made to begin snipping the fine hand-set stitches. She had slipped a kimono over the unfinished frock she had contrived—the short coat, which would be new and jaunty by and by, hung raw and limp over the back of a chair at her side. All about was the litter and disorder inevitable to close contriving. Rose stood gazing at her sister—both were too intent to note the opening door. Suddenly Alison's hand fell—she held the waistcoat away from her, saying in a choked voice: "Rose—take it—back—I—I—somehow I can't spoil it—it feels as though it would be spiritual murder."

A hand fell upon Aunt Anne's shoulder—a soft hand, heavy with rings and only faintly wrinkled. It drew her back, leaving the door a little ajar. Very shortly the owner of it was saying, hushing Aunt Anne's sobs the while:

"To think you wouldn't come to me, your oldest friend. Anne dear, I'm ashamed of you—you know your girls feel almost as though they were mine. But your pride has had its reward. Not many girls under the conditions would forego as nobly as our Alison. Don't tell her and Rose we overheard—not yet, at least. It would hurt them to know we knew. But you are going to be sensible, and let me advance you those delayed dividends. Also, you are to remember, cabs are a wicked extravagance when one has friends with cars, and next to nobody to fill them."

At that Aunt Anne cried harder than ever, but after a little agreed meekly to do as her friend bade. The friend, Mrs. Norris Lane, a rich widow, childless, with two adored and adoring nephews, was unobtrusively the great lady of Charlotte town.

Perhaps there was no direct sequence of events—but people began to notice early in the season that Lane Norris and Howard Lane, the great lady's nephews, were mighty attentive to the Agnew girls. Rose and Alison felt as if they had found a fairy godmother—all at once, Aunt Anne had ceased worrying—she had only smiled mysteriously, and told them things were not so bad as they had threatened to be. Then at Christmas she surprised each of them with a dainty new gown—to which Mrs. Lane had added all the other things—gloves, fan, slippers, silk stockings, and cobweb kerchief. Alison was not able to say thank you, for the lump in her throat. Even Rose had to turn away her eyes. And that night, hand in hand, they told Aunt Anne of their plotting—and what had withheld them from carrying it out. She patted their bent heads, saying as tears dropped upon Alison's bright hair:

"It would have been murder, dear children—murder of something in yourselves—reverence for family ties and traditions. I am glad indeed you made the blank frock—much better use the cloth than let moth ruin it in the end. But the waistcoat means something—it is a sort of patent of nobility. Only fine gentlemen wore such garments—"

"I know!" Rose broke in. "And we came near showing we didn't deserve to belong to him." Then the two ran away to make ready for a very late party. Aunt went, too. And as she came away she had the happiness of sealing with her approval a double betrothal.

REMAINS TRUE TO INSTINCT

True it is That a Sheep May Become a Wolf, but Never a Wolf Becomes Sheep.

One Sunday at the house of Anatole France, they were talking of the admirable romance he had just published. "The Gods are Thirsty," M. Paul Souday expressed in the warmest terms the enthusiasm with which this work had inspired him. Above all he vaunted the character of "Evariste Gamdin," whom a false revolutionary philanthropy had transformed from a bleating sheep to a devouring wolf.

A Russian lady, who was present, said she knew of wolves that had become sheep. "The Prince Troubetzkoi," she said, "has two of them. He brought them from Russia. They had been tamed and he led them in a leash like greyhounds. You know that he is a vegetarian. He has imposed this diet upon his beasts. He feeds them vegetables and salads."

"In fact," then said Anatole France, "I met him the other day with his wolves of which you speak, in the street. He had stopped before a fruit stand and he was plundering a basket of carrots to regale his beasts."

"That is an excellent example for vegetarianism," said the lady. "Seduced by such an example, I acquired a wolf and fed him myself. But I feared that he would fade away. But as I did not intend to renounce my vegetarian ideas I continued to make him nibble fruits and roots in public while at home, secretly I gave him fresh meat. In this way I was able to keep him for some time. He died a while ago. I do not understand how Prince Troubetzkoi succeeds in keeping his wolves. I suspect he employed the same method as myself."

"In short," said Anatole France, "one often finds sheep that become wolves, but never wolves that become sheep."

—Le Cri de Paris.

In Dreams.

"I know Charley enjoyed being a delegate at the convention," said young Mrs. Torkins.

"How?"

"I heard him talking in his sleep and some of the language he used was exactly the same as that which he employs at a baseball game."

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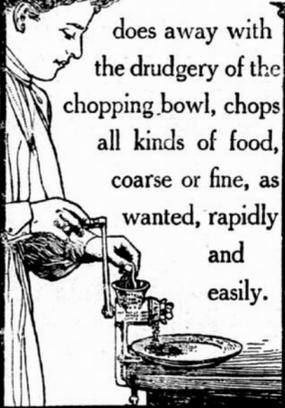
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