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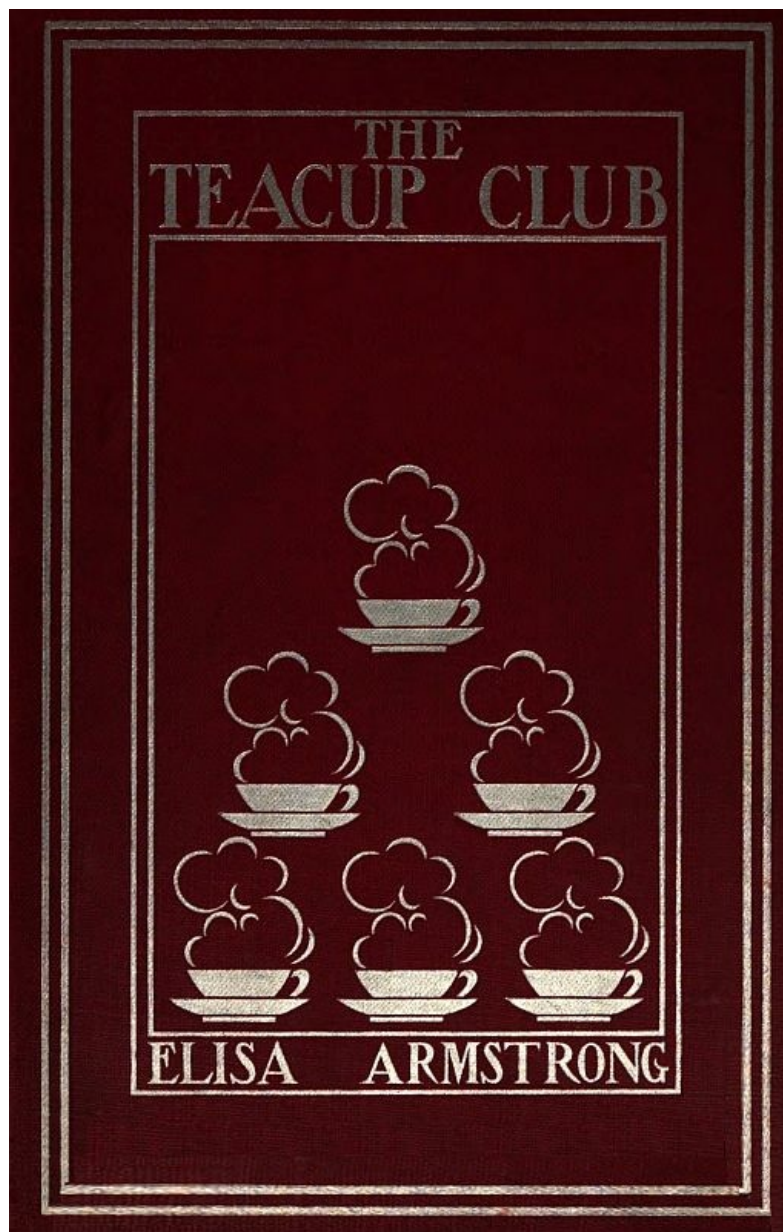
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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TEACUP CLUB ***



The **Teacup Club**

BY
ELIZA ARMSTRONG



CHICAGO
WAY AND WILLIAMS
1897

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Chapter I

The Teacup Club is Formed

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"You can never be sure of pleasing a man," sighed the blue-eyed girl, who was calling on her dearest friend; "that is, if you try to please him," she added reflectively.

"I suppose not," replied the girl with the dimple in her chin, "unless you succeed in concealing from him the fact that you are trying to please him."

"H'm; yes, I suppose there is something in that. However, we ought not to be hard on the poor things. The whole truth with the sterner sex is that they are never really practical. They—"

"How clever you are!" cried the girl with the dimple in her chin, admiringly. "Sometimes it does seem a pity that you are to marry Jack, instead of studying law, or—theosophy or something like that. Really, a very little study would fit you for the bar, but of course Jack—" [10]

"I don't intend to marry Jack," said the blue-eyed girl, calmly.

"O, my goodness, does he know that?"

"I don't know whether he knows that or not; but he does know that I've broken my engagement with him. I sent back his ring, and—"

"Dear, dear; that ring must have already cost its real value in messenger fees alone. Let me see, how many times have you sent—"

"And you may know that I am in earnest when I tell you that I am to pour tea for Nell tomorrow, and everybody will comment on its absence."

"Do you want me to come over and stay with you to-night, dear?" queried the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"No, thank you, dear. I can just as well talk it over with you now. Of course it was Jack's fault."

The girl with the dimple in her chin was silent. [11]

"Well, Emily Marshmallow, I did think that you, of all people, would sympathize with me, and —"

"Look here, Dorothy; of course I sympathize with you, but you remember when you quarreled with Jack the last time I—"

"I remember the last time that Jack quarreled with me," replied the blue-eyed girl, with dignity.

"Well, I sympathized violently with you, and the consequence was that you wouldn't speak to me for a month after you made up with him!"

"O, of course, if you really do sympathize with me, I—"

"You might know that. But tell me all about it. Is it that you want a new ring which is too expensive for anything save a peace offering? Or is Edwin coming home on a visit? Or has—"

"Nothing so frivolous, my dear; this is a serious matter. Jack—that is, Mr. Bittersweet, joined a new club without even letting me know that he meant to do it. I shouldn't have minded if he had only told of it beforehand—" [12]

"Of course not, dear; for then you could have made him give it up!"

"Exactly. Well, when I did find it out, I told him that I plainly saw he did not really love me, and that it was lucky I had discovered the fact before it was too late!"

"How very original you are!" murmured the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Go on, dear."

"Yes, it is all over and I never was so hap—happy in my life! Where is my hand—handkerchief? I—I got s—something in my eye on the way here, and—"

"Here it is, dear, and let me draw down the window shade, so the light will not hurt your poor eye."

"You needn't, dear. I saw them coming up the street a minute or two ago and all I've got to say is, that if Jack Bittersweet thinks he can make me jealous by parading up and down with a made-up thing like Frances, he is very much mistaken!" [13]

"I suppose you have coaxed Edwin's sister to write and tell him that you have broken with Jack?" queried the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"No, I haven't. I did that last time and he was so unpleasant after we made up!"

"Who was unpleasant? Jack?"

"Of course not, goosie. A man is always nicer than usual just after making up. No, it was Edwin; he—men are so awfully selfish, you know! Just because I was nice to him while I was angry with Jack, he imagined I had treated him badly—did you ever hear of such a thing? How

did he ever expect me to bring Jack to his senses in time for the opera season, without a little jealousy as an incentive?"

"Well, you know, men are so awfully vain that he probably thought—"

"That I really liked him? Perhaps he did. I never thought of that. Still, badly as he has behaved, I can't help a kindly feeling for him. You see, I had such a lovely new gown for the opera and everybody knew that I expected to go often, so—" [14]

"You might even have had to give in and acknowledge that you were wrong, but for Edwin!"

"No, dear," replied the blue-eyed girl, with great dignity. "Never that. I really expected to marry Jack, you know, and it would never have done to establish such a precedent. How could I ever expect a happy married life, if I began it by acknowledging that I could ever be in the wrong?"

"Very true, dear. By the way, do you think a peep at my lovely new waist would do you any good?"

"You seem to have misunderstood me entirely," retorted the blue-eyed girl, severely, "I am feeling quite happy. Indeed, I don't know that I ever felt happier in my life, unless it was the day upon which I was mistaken for my younger sister!"

"But what are you going to do in regard to Jack?"

"Why, Emily Marshmallow, how stupid you are to-day! You seem to imagine that I want to be flattered, like a man, by being asked to explain things. I told you, didn't I? that Jack and I quarreled about his membership in a new club. Very well, I too, have decided to join a club!" [15]

"Humph, that isn't a bad idea. But what kind of a club? An Ibsen or a Browning one, I suppose. I notice that men dislike particularly to have us members of really intellectual clubs."

"Well, I did think of either an Ibsen or a Symphony club, but neither of them just seemed to suit me, so—well, the fact is that I've decided to found a club of my own."

"But even then you can't always have it to suit you, because the other members—"

"Oh, yes, I shall dear. You see, I'll make all the—the by-laws and resolutions just as I want them, before I invite any one to join the club. I think I shall ask Evelyn to be the president, because she is married and accustomed already to making somebody do as she wishes." [16]

"Dear, dear, I'm only afraid that you are too clever to—"

"Succeed? Not quite so bad as that, I hope. Now, you see, the chief objection to Jack's new club was that he wouldn't tell me anything about it. Said he didn't know just what its purpose was. As if a man would join a club without knowing—"

"I begin to see now. You mean to keep the purpose of your own club a secret, too?"

"That's just it, and when Jack hears how nice it is, he'll find out that we are a great deal cleverer than he thinks. I shall make the membership for life too, so—"

"But you haven't even told me the purpose of the club yet."

"The Advancement of Woman, dear. Jack hates advanced women and when I make up with him —"

"But you said a moment ago that you would never—"

"Good gracious, Emily," cried the blue-eyed girl, hastily, "do stop talking a moment and let me get in a word edgewise: I've been trying for half an hour to get a chance to ask you where the new waist you offered to show me, is, and I can't—" [17]

"Here it is in my wardrobe and isn't it a dream? You may try it on, if you like."

"Thank you, dear; but no. I care so little for such frivolities, now that I have come to enjoy the real intellectual life. Did you ever see such darling sleeves? It does seem that a girl who could not be happy in them must—"

"Have at least a boil on her chin! Yes, doesn't it? But really, Dorothy, you make me ashamed of caring so much for such vanities. Why, those very sleeves cost me two whole nights' rest!"

"Never mind about that, dear; we can't all be intellectual. Look here, Emily Marshmallow, if you'll promise never to breathe it as long as you live, I'll tell you the last mean thing that Frances —"

"Oh, do! She has a new gown that would arouse the envy of Dr. Mary Walker. All chiffon, spangles, embroidery and—" [18]

"I know. My story has reference to that very gown. You know how very mysterious she always is about her new things!"

"M'hm. As if anybody cared to know about them! Do tell me if her waist is made—"

"Well, I—you see, it was this way: I knew she was having her new gown made at Madame's,

and I accidentally discovered that she was to be fitted on Friday at two."

"Oh, I see. Then, you called upon Frances at one o'clock, thinking that she'd take you along, rather than risk offending Madame by being late?"

"No; Frances isn't afraid of Madame—she doesn't owe her anything. I just happened in at Madame's at half-past two. They told me she was busy, but I said I knew she wouldn't mind if I stepped into the fitting-room for a minute, as I had a letter from Paris and wanted to tell her all about the new skirts."

"Oh, you clever thing!"

"Yes. So in I bounced, and there stood Frances, all in billowy waves of turquoise blue and—" [19]

"But I thought her new gown was green and white, with—"

"And you should have seen how sweetly she smiled. So sweetly that I knew she was wild with rage!"

"But did you make it right with the Madame? Did—"

"Pretended that I must have left the Paris letter at home, and told her I'd fetch it the next day. Then, after a good, long look at Frances, I came away and—"

"And ran in to tell all the other girls how her new gown was made?"

"M'hm. Annie first: you know, she hasn't a bit of originality and she said, at once, that she'd have her new one just like it. Then, I dropped in at Evelyn's tea and—"

"Told all the others, too. M'hm."

"Yes. But what do you think that cat, Frances, had done? She'd been there before me and told them all that I had come into the fitting-room out of sheer curiosity—I curious, the idea! And the gown she was trying on was not her own, after all, she said, but one about which Madame had asked her opinion and—" [20]

"Gracious, do you suppose that was the truth?"

"Alas, I know it;" groaned the blue-eyed girl, "it belonged to Jack's sister, Effie! Now, Effie detests Annie and when she sees her in a gown which is an exact reproduction of her own, she will—"

"Won't she, though? Well, my dear, Effie was an unknown quantity before, but now you may depend upon one thing—she will use any influence she may have with Jack against you."

"True. And all because of such a silly thing, too! But, then, people are so frivolous. Well, you will join my new club, won't you?"

"Mercy, yes. You had better invite Frances, too; she will tell Effie all about it, and the first time Effie is offended with Jack, she will tell him, thinking to annoy you both—"

"I shall, though it is hardly necessary, either, for, once started, everybody will talk of nothing else. But, whatever you do, don't tell Dick a word about it. Evelyn's husband is sure to tell him, anyhow, and then he can't say that women never keep secrets." [21]

"What utter nonsense. Of course women can keep secrets! Why, I once knew a girl intimately for two whole years and in all that time she never told me that her curls were false. I wouldn't have known it to this day, if I hadn't walked into her room one day when she had washed them and hung them up to dry. I've told that story to a dozen men, and I've never yet found one of them magnanimous enough to acknowledge that it proved my point!"

"You can't prove anything to a man, dear, unless he wants it proved. Well, I must go. You'll not fail me at the first meeting of the Teacup club, then?"

"The Teacup club," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, disappointedly, "Why I thought it was to be a really intellectual club, and—" [22]

"So it is. But, you know, real merit is always modest. If a lot of men get up such a thing, they give it a six-syllabled name; but we wish to evade, rather than seek, notoriety and, besides, as I said before, once we get it started, the whole town will talk of nothing else!"

It fell upon a bright sunshiny day, and the meeting for the organization of the Teacup club was well attended.

"And all the girls are wearing their newest gowns, too," whispered the blue-eyed girl to the girl with the dimple in her chin, "that shows that they appreciate the importance of the undertaking."

"And what an awfully becoming hat you are wearing," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "If I owned such a milliner's dream I should not mind anything that could happen to me."

"Which means that you have something unpleasant to tell me," said the blue-eyed girl. "You need not be uneasy," she added, "I'll not move a muscle, for Frances is looking this way." [23]

"Well, then, I heard her tell Nell that Jack comes to her almost every day for sympathy and—"

"Humph. When a man says 'sympathy' he means flattery! Is that all?"

"All? Why I thought—"

"Yes, dear. You see, I thought perhaps you had stronger proof than her own assertion. Why, Frances, dear, how well you are looking to-day! I have not seen you for such an age that I thought you must be out of town."

"Has it seemed so long to you, dear?" returned the brown-eyed blonde. "Now, to me the days go so swiftly that, as I sometimes tell Ja—Mr. Bittersweet, I mean—I often forget whether it is Saturday or Monday!"

"So you have seen the poor fellow, have you?" returned the blue-eyed girl, with an angelic smile; "it is so good of you to console him. But, indeed, you are always good about such things and so modest about it, too, that but for the men themselves, we should never know how hard you work just to induce them to come and be comforted!"

[24]

"I—why,—I—" stammered the brown-eyed blonde.

"Yes, indeed, I was defending you only the other day. I was quite angry with Marion for saying that your house should be called 'An Asylum for the Rejected.' I was so indignant that I just told her that, for my part, I thought we all ought to be grateful to you for consoling the poor fellows and helping to keep them out of mischief when they are feeling so badly. I reminded her, too, that you must do it out of pure philanthropy—for you never seem to get anything out of it. Really, I never saw you looking quite so well; you have such a fine color and—oh, here is Evelyn, at last, and we can call the meeting to order!"

"Why, Evelyn is wearing her old gown," cried the girl with the classic profile, "I call that downright mean! I had thought I could get such a good chance to study the draping of it while she was on the platform."

[25]

"Perhaps, that is why she didn't wear it," returned the girl with the eyeglasses. "Mercy, is it me they are calling to order? Why, didn't you tell me before; I—"

"Dear me, girls," the little woman on the platform was saying, "I don't know that I ought to be president. It seems to me that we should have an election or something."

"That is not necessary," said the blue-eyed girl, "don't you remember? I asked you to be president, in the first place. But if you'd rather, I'll move that you are to be the chief officer, and Emily, here, will second the motion, won't you Emily?"

"Why, yes of course," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"That does seem more regular," said the little woman on the platform, in a relieved tone. "I wonder if I ought to make a speech of acceptance?"

"Not unless you choose," said the blue-eyed girl, "harmony is the chief study of this club, and —"

[26]

"Oh, if it is to be a club for the study of harmony, I can't join," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "I don't know a thing about music and—"

"I'm afraid you have not been paying attention," said the blue-eyed girl, severely. "The club is organized for the advancement of woman and I don't know a girl anywhere who would be more benefited by it than yourself. By the way, Evelyn, I suppose we ought to assess dues, or something. I know that Ja—I mean a man I know—is always talking about dues at his clubs."

"Oh, but this is to be entirely different from a man's club," said the president, "and, then, what is the use of assessing dues, anyhow?"

"We might give the money to charity," suggested the girl with the classic profile.

"Oh, well, if we did that, why not let each of us give what she wants to charity and be done with it?" said the girl with the eyeglasses.

[27]

"Yes, of course," said the president; "dear me, I had no idea that it was so easy to organize a club, or I'd have done it long ago. It isn't half as much trouble as giving a tea and you don't run any risk of offending people by forgetting to invite them and then having to convince them that the card was lost in the mails."

"Talking of teas," said the girl with the Roman nose, "I—"

"Pardon me," said the president, gently, "but if this is a club for the advancement of woman, ought we to talk about teas?"

"But you began it, yourself," said the girl with the Roman nose, "I only—"

"I think I said merely that the club is ever so much nicer than a tea," said the president.

"And so it is," said the blue-eyed girl, "though, by the way, Nell's last one was lovely—there were enough men present to amuse us, whereas—"

"There are usually so few that they have to be amused, lest they get lonesome," broke in the brown-eyed blonde. "Oh, girls, have you heard that Clarissa—"

[28]

"Oughtn't we to be attending to business," said the girl with the Roman nose, "instead of talking about Clarissa? I saw her myself only an hour ago and if there was anything exciting to tell, she would have—"

"But this *has* a connection with the club," insisted the brown-eyed blonde. "She wants to become a member!"

"She just can't be anything of the kind," said the blue-eyed girl, "the idea! A girl whose reputation for intellectuality rests upon the careless combing of her hair and a habit of wearing hats six months behind the mode."

"But how can we get out of it, if she says she wants to join?" said the president, with an anxious air.

"Tell her that one of the rules of the club is that no person over the age of twenty-two years can become a member," suggested the girl with the dimple in her chin; "she celebrated her twenty-third birthday about a week ago, you remember."

[29]

"But it isn't one of the rules," objected the brown-eyed blonde.

"Then, we can make it a rule, right now," said the blue-eyed girl, calmly. "I know just how it would be if we let Clarissa into the club—she'd insist upon having everything her own way right along. I hate such selfishness myself, and—"

"So do I," said the president; "by the way, oughtn't we to make a note of that rule, at once?"

"What would be the use of that?" said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "we have all heard it. Oh, girls, I already see the benefit we are to derive from the influence of this club! Not a single soul has said a word in regard to Clarissa's pretensions to being only twenty-three!"

"Why, that's true," cried the president, "and very considerate of us it was, too, when we all know how ridiculous it is!"

"Oh, girls, I must tell you something," cried the girl with the eyeglasses. "I went with Clarissa to a reception given by her literary club the other evening and it was simply awful!"

[30]

"Not a decent toilet in the room, of course," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Oh, I didn't expect that—I knew it was a culture club. It seems that there had been an awful time over the programme. Some of the members wanted to have an Ibsen evening, while others declared for Browning. Finally, they decided upon a mixed programme, selections from them both, you know. I did not know that when I went."

"I should think not," said the girl with the Roman nose, "otherwise, you—"

"Would gladly have accepted the invitation—and been suddenly taken ill on the appointed day, of course. Well, when the papers and selections were being read, I studied my programme to keep my eyes from those appalling coiffures, and when I saw the word 'Music' on it, I felt like a person who has found an oasis in a desert!"

"And had you?" queried the president, who had left the platform and joined the group about the narrator.

[31]

"No. They played something from Wagner!"

"And you?" said the girl with the classic profile.

"Oh, I was in a comatose condition by that time. Nothing mattered. After the interminable programme they served refreshments."

"You felt better then?" said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"No, I didn't. They had tea and wafers! Tea and wafers after Ibsen, Browning and Wagner! And then Clarissa vanished and I couldn't get away. The people present were all very distinguished; one of the members had written an epic poem which would have appeared in Harper's if it had not been lost in the mails; one of them had invented a rational dress for men and another had once been asked to deliver a lecture upon 'Thought Transference' before a mothers' meeting at an orphan asylum!"

[32]

"My goodness, no wonder you wanted to go home!" cried the brown-eyed blonde.

"I did—badly. By and by, while I was wandering about the rooms in search of Clarissa, I found a woman who looked as unhappy as I felt. I was afraid to speak to her, lest she be somebody very remarkable, but she asked me, timidly, if I was the lady who had actually worn a rainy day dress, in public. I assured her that I was not, and after that we got on famously."

"But who was she?" the president asked.

"I don't know her name, but after we had discussed Ibsen and Browning a little, I asked what she had done. She replied, modestly: 'Oh, I am the person who always read the Woman's page in the daily papers!' After that, we talked just like ordinary people, and I didn't see Clarissa when she came to look for me!"

"My goodness, girls, we really ought not to laugh so," said the girl with the Roman nose,

"because this club is devoted to the advancement of woman, and—"

"That is entirely different," said the president. "Did Ibsen, Browning or Wagner ever do anything for the advancement of woman, I'd like to know?" [33]

"Of course not," said the blue-eyed girl, promptly. "How very absurd!"

"Besides, our club is laid out on entirely new lines," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Yes, isn't it?" returned the president; "Oh, girls, I quite forgot to tell you that we shall have to pay rent for this room if we hold our meetings here, and we haven't made any provision for paying it."

"But what is the use of making provision, when it isn't due yet?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"Why—er, that is very true," said the president; "I only wish I was as good a business woman as you!"

"Oh, I often feel that I have a great deal to learn yet," said the blue-eyed girl, modestly. "By the way, Evelyn, what did your husband say when you told him that you had decided to join a club?"

"He said—Oh, girls, I'm almost ashamed to tell you, but then Tom is only a man, after all. He said: 'Then, may the Lord have mercy upon my wretched digestion!'" [34]

"As if women had nothing to do but cook and keep house! when lots of us know nothing about either of them," said the girl with the classic profile, indignantly. "Girls, I wonder why it is that if a woman studies law or anything like that, somebody is sure to say that she is going outside of her sphere, while nobody thinks anything of the kind if a man becomes a chef or invents a food for infants?"

"Oh, if you expect logic from a man!" said the president, shrugging her shoulders; "however, I expected it, too, before I was married. I know better now."

"Dear, dear, isn't the Advancement of Woman delightful?" cried the girl with the eyeglasses. "After this, when we want to know anything, we needn't go to the trouble of looking it up in the dictionary or the encyclopædia; we can just discuss it at the club, and—" [35]

"Why do you bother with those horrid books? I never do," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "They are so heavy and always dusty, too. Now, I just ask the nearest man what I want to know. If he happens to be wrong, I can always cite my authority and it gives the next man a double pleasure in setting me right."

"What a clever thing you are," said the girl with the eyeglasses; "you always make me think of what somebody said about er—Juliet, I think: 'To know her is a liberal education.'"

"Oh, that is nothing. Why, I know a Vassar girl who has studied Greek and all that sort of thing and she invariably misspells several simple words whenever she writes to a man, so he may think himself so much cleverer than her and—"

"And I know a girl who asks every man, the first time she meets him, to explain the Australian ballot system. You see, it is a thing they all have to know, so they—"

"Goodness me, I should think she would get awfully tired of the answer," said the president. [36]

"She does. She told me not long ago that she really must invent a new stock question, for she could hardly keep from yawning now, while—"

"Speaking of yawning," broke in the brown-eyed blonde, "Teddy Cræsus doesn't send Molly flowers or bonbons any more!"

"I don't see what that has to do with yawning," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"More than you may think, dear. You know Molly always asks a man if a premonition of danger has ever been the means of saving his life. She doesn't ask it the first time they meet, but saves it for some special occasion. Well, one evening at a reception, Teddy seemed disposed to talk to Florence too much, and Molly asked him the question then, because she knew—"

"That he would stay with her as long as she allowed him to talk about himself! Yes, of course," said the blue-eyed girl. [37]

"M'hm. Well, he was in the midst of a long story about how he once escaped from being in a railroad wreck by missing his train. Molly was listening with breathless interest when she saw Florence stop within two feet of her. She couldn't resist one glance of triumph and that glance was her ruin."

"It was? Did he look up just then and remember Flo—"

"No, dear. But just as Molly looked at her, she gave a mighty yawn. Well, you know, yawning is contagious and Molly had been at a ball the night before, so she yawned, too. Teddy's eyes were on her and—"

"And now Florence gets his violets and bonbons! Well, isn't that a story without a moral?" cried the girl with the eyeglasses.

"It certainly is," groaned the president. "Well, girls, I fear we must adjourn, though it is hard to break up such an intellectual talk. For my part, I shall go back to the petty cares of life with renewed energy after a breath of air from a higher plane."

[38]

"I, too," said the girl with the Roman nose, "I feel now as if petty gossip and scandal could never interest me again."

The president and the blue-eyed girl had walked four blocks, when the former suddenly stopped.

"There, I knew I had forgotten something," she cried; "at first, I thought it was only to order dinner, but now I remember that I did not suggest a topic for discussion at our next meeting!"

"Oh, pshaw, that makes no difference," said the blue-eyed girl, "nobody would have had time to prepare anything for it, if you had; there is so much going on in our set this week, and—"

"Very true," replied the president, "and all the members are so much interested in intellectual topics, anyhow, that they are quite prepared to discuss them extemporaneously as we did today."

The Club Discusses Woman in Politics

The Teacup club was called to order fifteen minutes before the appointed time at its second meeting. "We are all here, you know, and there is no use in waiting," observed the president, as she rapped for order with a jeweled hatpin.

"Hear, hear," said the girl with the Roman nose, who had been reading up in parliamentary usage.

"I am so glad to see you all here," said the president, "I was afraid that Effie's luncheon might —"

"Keep some of us away? Not from this club," said the girl with the classic profile. "I believe she chose the day just on purpose to break up the meeting, so I declined her invitation."

"Did you?" said the girl with the Roman nose, "I didn't. Effie is not popular enough to offer her guests badly cooked food, so I went and excused myself as soon as we rose from the table on the plea that I should be late for the club if I remained longer." [40]

"I wish I might have seen Effie when you said that," remarked the girl with the eyeglasses. "However, your turn came when the door closed after you."

"I think not, dear," said the girl with the Roman nose, calmly, "Effie is not yet distinctly engaged to my cousin Clarence, so—"

"She has to be on decent terms with his family! I might have thought of that," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"If they had been married, now of course I shouldn't have dared to do it, but—"

"I should think not. Oh, girls, speaking of what happens after the door closes, makes me think of what happened to Effie herself once. It was just after the affair with Teddy Cræsus, you know."

"The time she thought to make people believe she was engaged to him, and took him to dine with her grandmother—" [41]

"And her grandmother failed to understand the situation and congratulated them! Indeed, I do," cried the girl with the Roman nose, "although, on account of being her dearest friend, I failed to hear it until two days after everybody else had."

"Well, you know she went to a breakfast at Nell's a few days after that," went on the girl with the eyeglasses, "and left early. As she reached the corner, she remembered a message for Nell and went back to deliver it. She burst into the room unannounced and found all the girls talking at once."

"About her, of course! What did—"

"Yes. Any other girl would have known that, but Effie said: 'Oh, girls, do tell me all about it; what has happened?'"

"Well?"

"And it was so sudden that not one of them could think of a thing to say until she had flounced out in a rage!" [42]

"The moral is: Never go back after once saying good-by," said the president.

"True," said the brown-eyed blonde, "by the way, Dorothy, why weren't you at Effie's to-day?"

"I fancy my invitation was lost in the mail," replied the blue-eyed girl. "I shall mention it to Effie as soon as I see her, so she will not feel that I've slighted her intentionally. Why, Frances, dear, did those mean things let you sit all through luncheon with the end of your, ah—detachable hair showing and a dab of powder on your nose? How mean and envious some people are!"

"I—I think it is cooler over on the other side," panted the brown-eyed blonde, "and besides I must see Emily a minute."

"Why, Dorothy, you must have just heard something awfully nice, you look so happy and smiling," said the girl with the classic profile, "but really this delightful club is making us all amiable."

"Yes, isn't it?" said the blue-eyed girl, "I couldn't be really mean to anybody now, if I tried." [43]

"Excuse me for interrupting you, girls," said the president, "but I want to announce our topic for discussion, and if I don't do it at once I may forget it. Suppose we choose "Woman as a Political Factor?" That is a broad enough field even for us, and—"

"So it is," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Well, I know one thing—whenever a woman really knows what she wants in a political line, she gets it."

"She does—and has ever since Eve held that first caucus with the serpent in the garden," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Hear, hear!" cried the girl with the Roman nose, who had been furtively consulting her book on parliamentary usage. "Oh, girls, have you heard that the man Nell expects to marry is a politician?"

"No; but it seems a very suitable match," said the president, "for I don't know a girl anywhere who can shake hands as gracefully as she does."

"Dear me, Evelyn, how generous you are," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I believe you could find something nice to say about everybody." [44]

"I really believe I could," said the president, modestly, "and, after all, it is easy enough, for if you don't like the subject of your remarks, you can always say it in such a tone that it does more harm than good."

"You are so just," sighed the girl with the classic profile, "and yet, men always declare there is no real fellowship among women!"

"They confuse their own wish with the true state of affairs," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "They know that one woman is often more than a match for the whole male sex and when a number of women band together they—"

"Usually get more than they want," said the president. "I often wonder, though, why it is always so much easier to convince other men that you are in the right than it is to persuade the men of your own family?"

"Perhaps we put it in a more flattering way to strangers," suggested the girl with the dimple in her chin, "we just can't help it, though, for we can't always be—" [45]

"Looking up?" said the girl with the Roman nose. "Of course not—if we were our necks would grow so stiff that—"

"We could never see our own boots; besides, we would be such frights that no man would look at us and so—"

"It would do no good in the end," finished the blue-eyed girl. "Still, I sometimes fancy, after all, that it might be well to be as nice to papa and the boys as I am to the men I dance with!"

"My goodness," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "we must be getting into metaphysics now! I'm not quite sure as to what metaphysics may be, so I always conclude that everything I don't understand must—"

"Be metaphysics? Do you? For my part, I always confuse metaphysics with hydraulics, though there is some difference between them I know," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Let us ask Evelyn to explain them right now. She—" [46]

"Some other time, dear;" said the president, hastily. "You know we are discussing Woman in Politics to-day and—"

"It would be unparliamentary to discuss anything else," said the girl with the Roman nose.

The president looked at her gratefully.

"What a logical mind you have, dear," she said. "I only wish you could be with me sometimes when Tom comes home late from his club. I know that there are all sorts of flaws in the stories he tells me, but somehow I never find them until after he has given me money and I've kissed him and made up."

"What a pity," sighed the girl with the Roman nose, "for if you found out the real flimsiness of his stories sooner, you could get more money."

"Oh, dear, so I could," wailed the president, "it is an awful thing to have a husband and not a logical mind!"

"So it is," said the girl with the Roman nose, "but, Evelyn, don't tell anybody your opinion of me, for if you do, it may end in my having a logical mind and no husband, which is worse!" [47]

"Oh, isn't this beautiful!" cried the girl with the eyeglasses, suddenly. "Really, girls, I am so stupid—that is not stupid as compared to a man, of course, but to the rest of you—that I wonder you allow me to belong to the club!" and there were tears in her eyes as she spoke.

The president came down from the platform and kissed her.

"Stupid! the idea of a girl with such a genius for hairdressing being stupid," she cried.

"And that girl a chafing-dish cook whose Welsh rarebits are sometimes successful, too!" cried the brown-eyed blonde.

"Oh! speaking of chafing-dish cookery," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "You know that Annie used to be engaged to Eustace, don't you?"

"Yes. But what has that to do with chafing-dish cookery?" said the girl with the Roman nose. "Girls, I have the loveliest recipe for making—" [48]

"It has a great deal to do with it. When he married Claire, Annie just smiled and selected a

chafing-dish as a wedding present. She knew that Eustace was a confirmed dyspeptic and that Claire's hands are so pretty that she could not possibly resist an opportunity to display them, so she would cook all sorts of dishes and—"

"By the way, I hear that they have agreed to separate," said the president. "I met Claire on the way to the manicure the other day. I wonder where Eustace is?"

"He is in a sanitarium," replied the girl with the dimple in her chin, "the doctor thinks he will have to be taken into court on a stretcher when the divorce proceedings come up!"

"And yet you told me the other day that Annie had no originality; I've learned this since then," whispered the girl with the dimple in her chin to the blue-eyed girl.

"I only meant in the matter of gowns, dear," was the apologetic reply. "By the way, Frances [49] seems not quite herself, to-day."

"I've noticed that. I fancied you might have said something to her which—"

"Oh, never; why, I consider Frances one of my dearest friends—"

"I know that, dear. But what is the use of a friend, if you can't be disagreeable to her sometimes?"

"True. I sometimes think it is one reason that married women keep their friends longer. They have husbands to—"

"Act as lightning rods and carry off their displeasure! Yes; it must really be quite a convenience."

"Very likely. Don't you feel, after all, that Jack—"

"Jack? Oh, I suppose you mean Mr. Bittersweet! No, I don't feel any such thing, Emily Marshmallow, and you are no friend of mine if you champion him after the way he has behaved to me!"

"I—I was only going to mention that he had resigned from that new club. He told me so himself." [50]

"Oh, he has, has he? Well, isn't that just like a man? And after he had paid all his dues for a year in advance, too, and gotten nothing out of it!"

"Perhaps he—he did it hoping to please you, dear."

"His actions are perfectly indifferent to me, I assure you. Besides, if I made up with him tomorrow, Frances would always think I was jealous. I jealous of her—the idea! And, oh, Emily, the way he—he flirts with that girl is enough to b—break my heart!"

"If you two girls have anything interesting to say, I wish you would say it aloud," broke in the president. "Of course I am not curious, but some of the others may—"

"Nothing at all interesting," said the blue-eyed girl, promptly; "I—I was just telling Emily that this club seems the one thing needed to fill my cup of happiness to overflowing!"

"And mine!" said the girl with the Roman nose. "By the way, isn't it too provoking that curls [51] are coming in again, just as veils are going out!"

"And just at the windiest season of the year, too," wailed the brown-eyed blonde. "Really, I often think that the fashions are invented by men—they are so contrary!"

"Pardon me," said the president, "I did not quite catch what you were saying, because Emily and Marion were both talking at the same time. It seems to me that since I have been married, I can't follow even two conversations simultaneously, as I used."

"Speaking of that," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "who do you tell your secrets to now that you are married?"

"Why, I've hit on a splendid plan," cried the president, "when I feel that I must just tell a secret or die—and I often feel that way—I wait until Tom is asleep and repeat the whole story in his ear. It relieves my mind and does no harm."

"Don't be too sure of that," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "My sister Helen doesn't agree with you at all. You mentioned it to her the other day and she thought it clever, and [52] resolved to emulate your wisdom, so she tried it on her husband, and he wasn't asleep, only pretending."

"But I always test my husband with a question or two, first," said the president.

"So did Helen. She asked him if he could fail to see how much she needed a new bonnet and wanted to know how much his share of the alumni banquet amounted to. He only snored in reply, and of course she thought she was safe and repeated the secret."

"With the result?" queried the blue-eyed girl, who was listening, breathless.

"That it was all over his club the next day," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "It would not have made any difference," she added, soberly, "only the secret was a rather clever trick I

had played on Dick a few days before—and he belongs to the same club!”

“And yet they say a man can keep a secret!” said the girl with the Roman nose.

[53]

“Who says so?” queried the girl with the eyeglasses. “Other men? Oh! I didn’t know but that you had heard some woman say so.”

“Not unless a man was listening, dear, and that man a person whom—”

“She wished to flatter immensely!”

“Yes. Or who happened to know some of her own secrets! Girls, I’ve been wondering what on earth Annie sees in that horrid Fred Van Stupid? Now, I can understand the interest a girl takes in a brainless man who has a great deal of money, because then—”

“He is exposed to so many temptations and her influence is sure to do him good,” finished the girl with the dimple in her chin, “for my part, I always let Ned Goldie come to see me oftener than usual during Lent. I feel that I am really doing some good and—”

“Violets are an absolute necessity then and they are so dear that very few men can afford to present them in quantities.”

“Oh, of course I let him bring me flowers if he wants to—it is so much better for him to spend his money in that way than to lose it at poker, that I feel quite a missionary.”

[54]

“H’m; I don’t know about that, dear, though it’s very lovely of you to feel so,” sighed the president, “the fact is, that you are actually encroaching on what is really my violet money. Ned will play poker with my husband at the club at other seasons of the year, when he is not allowed to see much of you. He always loses and I make Tom divide his winnings with me, so—”

There was a look of high resolve upon the face of the girl with the dimple in her chin.

“After this, I shall make him bring me twice as many, so I can divide with you,” she said, sweetly. “Oh, no, don’t thank me; I do so love to feel that I am doing some good in the world and I do so disapprove of games of chance!”

“You haven’t made up your mind as to whether you will accept him or not, have you?” queried the brown-eyed blonde.

[55]

“Not yet, dear. His chances and Dick’s are about even, at present. Of course he doesn’t know that, though; I couldn’t exert such a good influence over him, if he was sure one way or the other.”

“True,” sighed the president. “Oh, girls, I don’t know why men are so much more willing to be influenced for good before they are married than after. You may be sure of one thing though, Emily; he will say horrid things about you, if you finally do refuse him.”

“No doubt,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “but when one tries to do good in this world, one can not begin to count the cost.”

“Oh, Emily Marshmallow, what an angel you are!” cried the blue-eyed girl, kissing her. “You are always so busy doing good to others, that you never seem to give yourself a thought!”

The brown-eyed blonde had by this time quite recovered her equanimity and was chatting, in low tones, with the girl who wore the eyeglasses.

[56]

“Poor, dear Dorothy is looking rather ill, isn’t she?” she remarked, after a while.

“Why, I hadn’t noticed it before, but now that you speak of it, she does. However, she can’t expect to look young always. By the way, I hear that she has quarreled with Jack Bittersweet again.”

“Has she seen him lately? I didn’t know that she had,” returned the brown-eyed blonde, smiling affectionately into the mirror.

“Your hair is looking lovely to-day,” returned the girl with the eyeglasses. “Look here, Frances, do, like a dear, tell me all about the quarrel. You know all about it, of course, and I’ll not tell a soul. You know how well I can keep a secret and, besides, you owe it to me, for you wouldn’t have known a thing about Fred and Clarissa but for me!”

“But I hadn’t a thing to do about the quarrel, oh, really now I hadn’t. Of course, people think it was all on my account but—why, I was in Omaha when I heard of it.”

[57]

“By the way you came back from Omaha earlier than you expected, didn’t you?”

“I—no; that is only a week earlier. How well Jack looks, doesn’t he? And what a flow of spirits he has.”

“Is it possible? Now, Effie says that he is as cross as a bear. But, then, Effie is his sister, so—”

“What she says is of no consequence. Well, since you know so much already, I may as well tell you the rest. I fear that it is Dorothy’s insane jealousy of me which made the trouble. Of course I have not a spark of vanity, but I can’t help seeing—”

“But I heard that the quarrel was over Jack’s membership in a new club.”

"That might have been, dear, but people that are engaged don't always quarrel over the real bone of contention. Of course, I only hope I really had nothing to do with it; I have so many such things on my conscience already that I don't want any more," and she sighed softly.

"Yes, but tell me about the quarrel, do."

"Well—er—the fact is that Jack hasn't said a word to me about it, which makes me quite sure that I am the cause of it, unwilling as I am to think it." [58]

"Then, you really don't know any of the facts?" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Excuse me now, dear, I see Emily beckoning me; she wants to ask me about a new seamstress I've discovered. Frances doesn't know a bit more than we do," she whispered to the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Jack hasn't told her a thing, so he evidently still cares for Dorothy, and she —"

"That's just it," wailed the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I'd have succeeded in making it up long ago, if they didn't care quite so much!"

"Oh, dear," said the president, "I am afraid that I am awfully stupid to-day, but the fact is that —"

"By the way, I heard that you slept at a hotel last night, Evelyn," said the girl with the Roman nose, "how on earth did that happen?"

"It was all Tom's fault," returned the president, in an aggrieved tone, "only he, being a man, will not admit the fact. You see, he didn't want to go to the reception at all, so he—" [59]

"But, Nell said she met him in the street and gave him a verbal invitation, which he accepted with effusion."

"Pshaw, if Nell knew my husband as well as I do, she'd be aware that the more affably he accepts an invitation, the more determined he is to escape by some plausible excuse at the last moment. He says that people always accept your regrets as genuine under such circumstances."

"Thank you for telling me that," said the girl with the classic profile. "My great aunt gives whist parties sometimes and, as she has a lot of lovely old lace and china and nobody in particular to leave it to, I don't like to hurt her feelings by refusing her invitations outright. On the other hand, if I accept and happen to be placed at the table with her, I know I shall not receive so much as a cracked saucer in her will!"

"But you and Tom did go to the reception, I know, for I saw you there," said the girl with the Roman nose, "how did you manage it?" [60]

"To make him go? Oh, that was easy enough. I merely said that he wasn't very well and as I did not like to go out and leave him alone, I would ask mamma to come and stay with him."

"Oh, then he agreed to go, did he?"

"Yes, dear—said he had meant to go all along. But after that everything went wrong: his razor refused to do its work and he actually pretended that it was all because I had sharpened a lead pencil with it the other day, as if that could have—"

"But why did you tell him that you had sharpened your pencil with it?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"Because I cut my finger on the old thing and thoughtfully warned him that it was too sharp. Then, I—well my own wardrobe was full and I had hung up a few things in his, and the skirt of my new tailor-made gown was hanging over his dress coat. He pretended that it was all wrinkled and creased by that. Then, I had borrowed his box of neckties and neglected to return them, and he made such a fuss over my forgetfulness that I determined to give him a lesson. I saw him lay his latch key on the chiffonier ready to put in his other pocket and I didn't say a word when he turned out the gas and went off without it." [61]

"But how did you expect to get into the house when you returned?"

"Oh! I slipped back into the room in the dark after he had gone down, and put it in my own pocket."

"As an object lesson in remembering. Good, I'm glad you did it," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"M'hm. I told the maid not to sit up for us, and I saw for myself that every door and window was fastened tight—for once Tom climbed in at the pantry window when he had forgotten his key and didn't want me to know how late he stayed at the club."

"I suppose he complained next day because the window was open, too," murmured the girl with the dimple in her chin, "men are so illogical!" [62]

"Well, no, dear; but he would have done so, only the clock happened to strike three as he came upstairs, and I counted the strokes aloud. Well Tom was cross at being kept waiting, but my gown fits so well that I felt at peace with all mankind."

"Even your own husband!" said the brown-eyed blonde. "It must indeed fit well."

"Yes. And I enjoyed the evening immensely, for I knew I had such a good joke on Tom when we got home."

"Yes, and what happened then?" asked the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Oh, it was great fun. He searched in all his pockets twice, rang the bell until he was tired, though the maids asleep in the third story might as well have been in Greenland for all the good that did. Then, he tried to force each door and window before he came back to the carriage to tell me that we were locked out!"

"And then you—"

"I said: 'Why didn't you tell me before, dear? Luckily, there is one of us who remembers things.' If you could only have seen his face as he took the key I gave him!" [63]

"Then why on earth did you sleep at the hotel?" queried the girl with the Roman nose, in a bewildered tone.

"I—well, the fact is that I—in the dark, I had mistaken the key to his desk for the latch-key! And, oh, girls, if you had seen me driving home from the hotel at ten o'clock in the morning, in the gown I had worn at the reception!"

"You poor, dear thing!" cried the blue-eyed girl, "no wonder you chose 'Woman in Politics' for to-day's discussion! If men are such tyrants as that, our only refuge will be equality in suffrage and—"

"Latchkeys," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "though to be sure, we'd need pockets to keep them in, if we carried them. Sometimes, I suspect that the dressmakers are in league with the men to keep us from gaining our rights," she added. [64]

"Perhaps they are," said the blue-eyed girl, with a startled air, "the men pay the bills and so the dressmakers may be in league with them!"

"You forget one thing, dear," said the president, with a superior air. "It is the women who make the bills. You never heard of a man who ordered a dress for his wife did you?"

"I hope not," replied the girl with the Roman nose, "at least, if she was obliged to wear it."

"Well, dears," said the president, "we really must adjourn, it is awfully late, but of course such a serious discussion could not be hurried. I think I must go and have a cup of bouillon to refresh me after making such serious demands upon the gray matter of my brain."

Man's Real Attitude Toward the Progress of Woman

The Teacup club came to order with more than its usual reluctance at its next meeting and the president looked severe. "I wish you girls would stop talking about Helena and her affairs," she said. "I detest gossip, and, besides, I want to hear all about her, too, and we can talk better after the meeting is over. The topic for to-day's discussion will be, 'Man's Real Attitude Toward the Progress of Woman.'"

"I'm glad to hear it," said the girl with the Roman nose. "Men are such queer creatures that by the time a girl gets to understand them really she is too old to attract their attention. Now, if we all put our heads together—"

"We may attain wisdom without its accompanying wrinkles," broke in the girl with the dimple in her chin; "that is a good idea, for—" [66]

"It is no real gain to know how to make them bring the proper kind of flowers and confectionery, if you have to spend the money thus saved on the beauty doctor; yes, that is true," sighed the brown-eyed blonde.

"Widowers, or men who have been engaged several times, are often nice," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Thank you," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I like to do my own training, if it is troublesome. You can't persuade a widower that his late wife was not a type of all womanhood, and that is horrid, especially if she happens to have had a taste for domestic magazines and molasses candy! That is why a widower is so much less attractive than a widow; she—"

"Has learned that men, save for a few leading traits, are all different," said the girl with the classic profile. "Yes, matrimony always widens a woman's views of the opposite sex, while it narrows those of a man." [67]

"Oh, dear," said the girl with the Roman nose; "I do wish men would not do one thing and say another. Now, they are always praising domesticity in women, as well as shrinking modesty, and yet—"

"They always overlook the domestic kind of a girl when she does venture among people," broke in the brown-eyed blonde. "I know it, and as for shyness and modesty, it is only the girl who is bold enough to call attention to those qualities in herself who receives a social reward for them."

"Oh, well," said the president, "a man with a couple of sisters learns a great deal about the sex."

"Humph!" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I don't know why it is, but the more sisters a man has, the slower he is to enter into matrimony."

"I've noticed that myself," said the girl with the classic profile; "while girls who have plenty of brothers usually marry before they are twenty." [68]

"Pshaw! That is because the friends of their brothers get a chance to see them sew on buttons and make caramels," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"No, it isn't," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "it is because such a girl has more than one person to oppose the man who wants to marry her. But talk about masculine inconsistency! It sets me wild to hear men talk about domesticity and modesty and all that, and then hang about Kate, a girl who doesn't know a frying pan from a—a camera, and who had as lief ask for a thing she wants as to hint for it—so unfeminine!"

"I know it," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Why, she never has to buy a flower, and as for candy, she has so much that she actually shares it with the other girls! I go to see her more frequently in Lent, because my conscience will not allow me to buy any then, and—"

"And Kate has been engaged six times; she told me so herself," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I declare, it is enough to make a girl—" [69]

"H'm!" said the president. "Don't forget, my dears, that while she has been engaged six times, she has not been married once!"

"Why—er—that is true," cried the blue-eyed girl. "You dear, delightful, clever thing! I am so glad that I just made you be our president."

"Oh, well, of course I like it dear; still, as somebody once said, I'd rather be right than president."

"Hear, hear!" cried the girl with the Roman nose.

"Yes. But, oh, girls, Tom says that all the men in our set are talking about this club. He says that Jack Bittersweet asked him confidentially the other day if being intellectual made a woman less loveable. Luckily, I had just agreed to let him have a masculine dinner party and he assured Jack that it did not."

The blue-eyed girl arose softly from her seat and going over to where the brown-eyed blonde was sitting, kissed her. "You dear thing," she said. "Come over any day you like and you shall see the new sleeve design I got from Paris yesterday." [70]

The girl with the dimple in her chin exchanged glances with the girl with the eyeglasses.

"What time in the year do you prefer for a wedding?" asked the latter, apropos of nothing.

"Oh, speaking of weddings, that reminds me," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I'd have prepared a paper on to-day's topic, as you suggested, Evelyn, but Elizabeth asked me to help select her wedding dress and—well, you know, Elizabeth. It has taken her two days already and I don't see any prospect yet of her making up her mind."

"And yet she required only five minutes in which to decide to accept Fred, when he asked her to marry him," said the president, thoughtfully.

"I know, dear, but then in this matter of selecting her dress, she had a choice," said the brown-eyed blonde. [71]

"And I'm sure that Elizabeth's father is delighted to buy her a wedding dress," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Oh, Emily, pardon me—I quite forgot that Elizabeth is your cousin!"

"Never mind, dear, though I rather like her, in spite of the relationship. Oh, girls, you have no idea of what an effect this club is having upon me. Why, I've turned my den into a library, cut all the leaves of my Carlisle and coaxed papa to buy me a handsome writing desk and do up the walls in forest greens because pink and blue seemed so frivolous. Now, I can sit in that room and write papers for the club in real comfort."

"You don't know how pleased I am to hear it," cried the president, warmly. "It is quite worth all the labor of selecting topics and leading the discussion, I assure you. Why, Marion, how late you are! Don't you know that the really advanced woman is even ahead of the clock?" [72]

"Yes, I do," panted the girl with the classic profile, "but, really, I've had the most awful time getting here at all! You know I'm always in trouble, but really this is the worst that—I'll never go anywhere with Nell again, unless it's to my own funeral, and I can't help myself, then."

"What on earth has Nell done now?" queried the girl with the dimple in her chin, "don't you know that you must not expect absolute sanity from an engaged girl? You said you were going with her to the south side to call upon some of the relatives of her affianced. Did she take you over there, and then discover that she didn't know their exact address? Or did—"

"The address was not forgotten. We hadn't meant to do any shopping to-day, but we stopped in to buy some thread, and really the new silks were so cheap that—"

"You arrived an hour late, and penniless! I know," said the blue-eyed girl.

"N—ot quite. I had ten cents left when we started for home, and we had to take two lines of cars. Nell and I couldn't get seats together—in fact, we were at opposite ends of the car. However, I paid her fare and signaled the fact to her, receiving a nod in reply." [73]

"Well?" said the president, "didn't she want to pay your fare on the other line?"

"She—well, the fact is that she had misunderstood the signal, and paid our fare again with her own last dime. And there we were three miles from home, without a penny in our pockets—and the street car company had a dime it hadn't earned. But then Nell never had a grain of sense—I should think by this time she knew that herself."

"If she doesn't, I'm sure you are not to blame, dear," said the girl with the Roman nose. "However, for my part, I shall not blame you, even if you are as cross as a man who is wearing a frayed collar, for the rest of the afternoon."

"But, don't let us interrupt the proceedings," said the girl with the classic profile, "just tell me what to-day's topic is, and I—" [74]

"Oh, it is a perfectly delightful one!" said the blue-eyed girl. "Man's real attitude toward the Progress of Woman, and—"

"His real attitude is that of flight," said the girl with the Roman nose, "he—"

"Don't be flippant, dear, whatever you are," said the president, gravely, "we have enough of that to endure from our masculine acquaintances. It seems to me that a man laughs at whatever he fails to understand, and then feels that he has replied to the argument."

"Perhaps that is the reason that men laugh at so many jokes in which I can see nothing funny," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"No doubt of it," said the brown-eyed blonde, "but, girls, never attempt to imitate them. I did once, and Annie—you know how obtuse she is—kept asking loudly what I was laughing at, and I couldn't tell her. When a man had just made the remark that he was glad to find a girl with a keen sense of the ridiculous, too!" [75]

"Just like Annie," said the blue-eyed girl. "I sometimes wonder whether she is really obtuse or only malicious. You know how devoted Tommy Bonds is to music, don't you? Well, Annie and I

once accompanied him to a Thomas concert, and I wanted to make myself agreeable—”

“I hope you didn’t do it by conversing while the orchestra was playing,” said the president.

“Of course not, goosie. But I remembered that he always says a woman should be two things—sincere and fond of music. The soloist was a pianist, I can’t remember his name, but his hair was not at all remarkable. When he played an encore, Tommy leaned over to me, and said: ‘Isn’t it charming?’ and I replied, ‘Yes, I like it better every time I hear it; in fact, I often ask people to play it for me.’ I wish now that I hadn’t said that.”

“Why so?” asked the president, “it seems to me just the right thing to say.”

“But Annie leaned over asking, loudly, ‘What is the name of it?’ and, to my horror, Mr. Bonds said he didn’t know, and it was all so sudden that, to save my life, I couldn’t make up a name! In the silence which followed, some one in front of us was heard remarking that the encore was a composition by the pianist himself, and now played for the first time in public!” [76]

“And it was all Annie’s fault, too,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “By the way, did I ever tell you how it happened that Mr. Bonds gave up calling me a delightful conversationalist? No? Well, you see, he lived almost opposite to us, and he practiced on the ‘cello until papa, who is very fond of De Quincey, said he no longer dared to read ‘Murder considered as one of the Fine Arts.’ Suddenly he stopped practicing, and—”

“Mercy on us, had anything happened to him?” gasped the president, turning pale.

“Nothing ever happens to people who deserve it. As it happened, however, we were no better off, for some one, a new resident of the street, we supposed, began to practice on the violin seven hours a day!” [77]

“It may not have been a newcomer,” observed the girl with the eyeglasses. “It is a fact that one vigorous soprano is enough to demoralize a whole neighborhood, and I suppose—”

“The ‘cello is quite as bad? Possibly so, at any rate rents went down in the neighborhood and placards went up. One day I happened to meet Mr. Bonds, and as long as my father was not within hearing distance, I said: ‘Oh, I’m sorry that you have given up your delightful ‘cello.’ If you could have seen the rapture on his face.”

“I’d rather have seen his face than that of your guardian angel,” remarked the girl with the classic profile; “but go on; don’t stop.”

“I wish I had stopped then, but I didn’t. I said, ‘By the way, who is it that scrapes the violin all day long? I never heard anything so awful in my life!’ Oh, girls, I—” [78]

“But I don’t see anything wrong in that,” said the president.

“He did. You see, he had given up the ‘cello and taken to the violin with the idea of astonishing the world with his genius!”

“And you live to tell it,” said the girl with the Roman nose.

“M—yes—you see, everything has its compensation. When papa heard what I had done, he gave me a hundred dollars and his blessing.”

“What luck some people have,” said the brown-eyed blonde, “while others—oh, girls, I know something perfectly lovely, but I don’t know whether I ought to tell it to you or not. My conscience—”

“Why, Frances,” said the president, “I shall be awfully hurt if you don’t tell us now. When a girl speaks of her conscience in that way, it simply means that she distrusts her audience. You might know by this time, that we never tell anything which transpires at a meeting of this club.”

“Of course not,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “Why, Dick teased me vainly a whole evening to find out the line of argument advanced in favor of equal suffrage when we discussed ‘Woman in Politics’ the other day. The janitor must have told him the topic under discussion,” she added hastily. [79]

“Very likely,” said the president. “What was that you wished to tell us, Frances, dear?”

“It was something that happened to Nell,” said the brown-eyed blonde. “Her fiancé had told her a great deal of his friend, Mr. Thynker, of Boston, who is to be his best man, and whom she had never seen. He appeared suddenly at Mr. Dickenharry’s office the other day, just as the latter was starting for Milwaukee, and there was barely time for him to make arrangements with Mr. Thynker to call on Nell the following afternoon. As it happened, he knew the Vansmiths, and was asked to the luncheon they gave that day, and seated immediately opposite to Nell. Of course he didn’t catch her name when they were introduced, and there was no chance for explanations. Oh, girls, I wonder if I really ought to finish this?” [80]

“If you don’t, I shall ask Nell why you didn’t,” said the president.

“Well, during a lull in the conversation, he leaned forward and, in loud, clear tones, asked Nell what kind of a girl his friend Tom Dickenharry had got himself engaged to *this* time!”

“M’hm,” said the president, after the laughter had subsided a little, “that settles one matter in

advance, anyhow. It is easy to know upon whose side the victory will rest when they have their first quarrel after marriage."

"There is one question I would like to ask the members of this club," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "and it is one which nearly disrupted our little Shakespeare club: If you really want to please a man—any man—what is the best way to go about it?"

"That is really such a simple question that there is only one answer possible," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. [81]

"And that is—"

"Be born rich."

"But, suppose you have neglected that qualification," persisted the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Learn to cook; but never let him taste the result of your cookery," said the blue-eyed girl.

"Yes—or wear his college colors," said the girl with the classic profile.

"Let him do all the talking," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Praise the shape of his head—no matter what it may be," said the president. "I wouldn't tell anybody that," she added, reflectively, "only that two fortune tellers and a palmist have assured me that my husband will outlive me."

"Mr. Bonds has a very well-shaped head," observed the girl with the eyeglasses, "a little long perhaps, but—"

"The rotundity of his pocketbook over-balances that," broke in the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Clarissa says he is generous, too—a rare quality in a really wealthy man," said the blue-eyed girl. [82]

"M—I don't know about his generosity," said the president. "A marriage license is about as inexpensive a thing as a man can buy, and yet he has displayed no desire to invest in one."

"Oh, pshaw, that makes no difference," said the girl with the Roman nose, "lots of girls nowadays don't intend to marry, anyhow, so—"

"I wonder why they never think to mention the fact publicly until after they are thirty," mused the girl with the dimple in her chin; "oh, girls, shouldn't you like really to do something wonderful?"

"I once wore a pair of common-sense shoes a whole month," said the blue-eyed girl, modestly.

"H'm; who was the Englishman?" asked the brown-eyed blonde, "the one with whom you used to walk at that time, I mean," she added, pleasantly.

"It was the spring that Mr. Penny-Lesse was here, but I don't see what that had to do with it," said the blue-eyed girl, with great dignity. [83]

"Nothing at all of course," said the brown-eyed blonde, "I only—"

"You did not meet him, I believe; he was very particular about the people to whom he was introduced," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, sweetly. "I did rather an unusual thing myself once—I had five dollars in my pocketbook when my allowance came due!"

"Yes, but you had left the pocketbook at my house ten days before, and thought it was lost," said the girl with the classic profile, "don't you remember, I only brought it over after the shops were closed the evening before?"

"Oh, girls," said the president, "I've recently met a woman who has traveled all through Asia, and—"

"I suppose she did it in bloomers and one of those horrid, unbecoming, stiff caps, too," broke in the brown-eyed blonde. "Well, all I've got to say is that a woman who has the courage to make such a guy of herself, is brave enough to face all the tigers and mountain lions, and—er—boa constrictors in Asia." [84]

"I don't believe there are any boa constrictors and mountain lions in Asia," said the girl with the Roman nose. "As for tigers—"

"Mercy, how literal you are!" pettishly replied the brown-eyed blonde. "Well, buffalos then; how will that suit you? I'm equally afraid of all of them, myself."

"Oh, girls," cried the girl with the dimple in her chin, "Marion and I have just had such fun. We have been telling each other the most awful things that ever happened to us in our lives."

"Perhaps that is what made you late, too," remarked the president, in a severe tone.

"N-not exactly. You see, I knew there was something wrong about my watch, and I could not remember whether it was thirteen minutes fast or thirteen minutes slow, so—" [85]

"But do tell us what was the most awful thing that ever happened to you, Evelyn," cried the girl with the classic profile. "The very worst thing that ever befell me was connected with a timepiece. It was last summer, and a man who—who had been very nice to me was going away early the next morning. Men were scarce at the seashore, as you know, and when a lot of the girls saw us sitting on the porch they came over and spent the evening with us. We just could not get a chance for a word alone."

"I know—I know," groaned the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Yes. Well, his train was to go at 5:16 A.M., and he asked me in the most meaning tone if I cared sufficiently to hear something he had to say to get up early enough to see him off. I—I said I did."

"Well?" said the girl with the Roman nose.

"I set my watch by the hall clock in order to be sure of getting up in time; then I lay awake nearly all night so I would not oversleep myself. When I reached the station it was five minutes past six." [86]

"Watch stopped?" asked the girl with the eyeglasses.

"No; Harry had run down to spend that evening with Kate, and she had set the clock back. The man was married in October to one of the girls who had risen in time to see him off."

"Of course," said the president. "Speaking of awful things—you all know how afraid I am of fire."

"We do," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I believe you could smell a burning match a block away."

"Well, the other day our fire insurance ran out, and Tom handed me the money and asked me to go down and renew it, as he was very busy. I forgot all about it until night; then I lay awake sniffing smoke until Tom thought I had influenza again. Next morning I got ready to go and attend to it at once. I wanted to look nice, too, because one of the men in that office once told Tom that he had an awfully pretty wife." [87]

"How much money did he borrow from Tom that time?" asked the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"I was curling my hair," went on the president, unheeding, "when I smelled fire. I ran wildly all through the house, with a curl still wrapped about the iron, trying to locate it!"

"And did you find any?" asked the brown-eyed blonde.

"Yes; my own hair was burning," said the president, with a groan.

"How awful!" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "That reminds me of what once happened to me. It was when I was wearing a single curl in the middle of my forehead. One day Frank was there, and he—he would twist it over his finger and quote poetry about it until he took all the curl out of it. Of course I discovered that I had no handkerchief and went up to get one." [88]

"I don't see anything so awful in that," said the girl with the classic profile.

"No, dear; but while I was curling it I dropped the hot iron down my back, and dared not even scream lest he find out what I was doing."

"The worst thing that ever happened to me," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "was in connection with Lewis. As soon as it was settled, I went to tell Emmeline, so she would give up trying to get him. I said I was his first love, and she couldn't imagine how jealous he was. 'Oh, yes, dear, I can,' said she; 'he was always so when he was engaged to me!'"

"I wondered why you broke with him," said the president. "Well, we must adjourn now, and I must say that I have never heard a subject more logically discussed than the one to-day!"

Chapter IV

Concerning the Heroine of To-day

[89]

"Are you ready to go to the meeting of the club?" asked the blue-eyed girl, as she bounced into the room. "Why, Dorothy, dear, what is the matter? has your father gotten himself a new bicycle instead of one for you, or—"

The blue-eyed girl sat up on the couch. "I don't care if I never ride a bicycle again as long as I live," she replied, deliberately.

The girl with the dimple in her chin turned pale. "I knew it was something awful when I saw you crying with the blinds all rolled up; but I hardly thought it was so bad as that. You—you haven't any fever or queer feelings in your head, have you?"

"If I had, it would not make any difference," she sobbed. "I—oh, I'll get even with Effie Bittersweet if it ruins my complexion and takes me all the rest of my natural life to do it!" [90]

"Oho, it's Effie, is it? Well, you'll have plenty of chances to get even with her, once you are her sister-in-law!"

"I wouldn't marry Jack now, to—to spite Effie, and I—I doubt if I shall have the chance, anyhow. And as for Frances, I—"

"Never mind, dear; I know she has behaved abominably, but she is punished already. Her aunt has brought her a new hat from Paris, and it is geranium pink—fancy Frances in geranium, can you? She promised it to Frances when she went abroad last fall, and Frances has been talking about it ever since. She will have to wear it, too, because her aunt is to make them a long visit, and she is too wealthy to have her feelings hurt."

The blue-eyed girl shook her head, sadly. "It is very kind of you to try to cheer me," she said, "but I am beyond rejoicing. I only hope it is a very deep geranium pink, that's all. Oh, Emily, what a desert waste this life is! No, don't put another cushion back of me—I want to be just as uncomfortable as possible. You know Effie was here this morning, don't you?" [91]

"I suppose so—I noticed that you have two portraits of Edwin on the table."

"Yes. Well, she asked me to go shopping with her, and I must say I was pleased, because she hasn't been here since—since—"

"Not since you quar—pardon me, I mean since her brother quarreled with you."

"She said she'd ask me to lunch with her down-town, but she had spent almost all her allowance."

"The idea of hinting to you in that bare-faced way! Now, if you had been a man it—"

"Would have been all right, of course. However, I know how confidential Effie always grows over a cup of tea, so I promptly invited her to lunch with me. After she had accepted, I found that I had only fifty cents to my name. Papa had gone down-town and, mamma had just borrowed a quarter from me!" [92]

"My goodness, did you tell Effie that your head ached so badly that you couldn't go?"

"And have her say that I was fretting myself ill over Jack? No, thank you. I excused myself a moment and went downstairs, for I had just remembered a habit Papa has of leaving money lying about on his desk. To my joy, I found a five-dollar bill in one of the drawers, and I took that, because I—"

"But weren't you afraid to take it?"

"M—yes, but then one's own people have to make up with one sometime or other. Well, we had a lovely time shopping, and I took Effie off to luncheon before she had had time to get cross matching samples. It was a lovely luncheon, and before we had finished Effie said she hoped I would visit her at Delavan in August!"

"H'm; I suppose she didn't mention the fact that Jack expects to be in Canada from the last week in July to the first one in September, did she?" [93]

"No; she didn't. Oh, what a cat she is—and I asked her to take another ice on the strength of it! Well I paid the bill, tipped the waiter, and was just going out when the cashier came running after me, and oh, Emily, what do you think?"

"You had left your umbrella, of course."

"No, I hadn't. I—I, that five-dollar bill was a counterfeit which papa was keeping as an object lesson to mamma, who had gotten it in change!"

"You might have known that no man with a wife and grown daughter would leave five good dollars in an unlocked drawer, dear. Did Effie—"

"Loan it to me? She hadn't quite enough, and I don't know what I should have done if Frances had not happened to come in. Effie said that she did not mind borrowing from Frances, because

she—she was quite like a sister to her! And now I shall have to make Papa angry by coaxing for money to pay for all those ices Effie ate on false pretenses, and w—worse yet, she and Frances will have the pleasure of laughing over it together!” [94]

“And telling Jack about it, too,” gasped the girl with the dimple in her chin, helplessly.

“Of course I know they will do that,” sobbed the victim. “But I hardly thought that even an intimate friend would be unpleasant enough to remind me of it!” And she buried her face in the cushions and wept.

“Then you are not going to the club this afternoon? Shall I tell them that you are busy with the dressmaker, or the dentist? They know that you can make everybody else wait.”

“Tell them nothing. I shall go—and complain of a cold in the head, which will explain the pinkness of my nose and eyes.”

“But will any of them believe you?”

“All of them. You know those horrid quinine tablets Evelyn is always wanting people to try—well, I shall take one of them publicly. You don’t suppose that any one will suspect me of doing it unnecessarily, do you?” [95]

The girl with the dimple in her chin shuddered. “Impossible,” she said.

The blue-eyed girl suddenly stopped curling her hair, and, facing her friend, remarked: “I can tell you one thing though—Jack Bittersweet shall pay dearly for this!”

The president of the Teacup club rapped for order with the handle of her umbrella. “I am glad to see you all here to-day, in spite of the weather,” she remarked. “We have a very interesting topic for discussion. It is, ‘Woman in Her Character of Heroine.’”

“Indeed, it is interesting,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “I only wish you had thought to mention it to me and I should have prepared a paper on it. No, I couldn’t have done it, either, for my aunt from New Jersey was in town, and I had to take her sight-seeing. Oh, dear, aren’t people who live in the country painfully active? And what ideas they have! They seem to think Lincoln Park is in the back yard and the Statue of Columbus across the street.” [96]

“I know a girl who has had a much worse time than that,” said the brown-eyed blonde. “She had to take her future mother-in-law to see the sights. The old lady had read up in preparation for her visit, and knew more about the city than Marie herself. Now, while the poor girl is being massaged with arnica and things to get over the effects of her exertion, the old lady is busy telling her son that such an ignorant girl can never make a good wife!”

“Speaking of the bravery of women,” said the girl with the classic profile, “I know a girl who early one morning heard a noise in a large closet next her room, in which she kept her furs and cloth gowns. She slipped out of bed and into the hall, and turned the key, which was fortunately on the outside, and there she had the burglar safe in that stifling atmosphere. Then she fainted.”

“And no wonder,” said the girl with the eyeglasses. “I should have fainted first.” [97]

“It took them three-quarters of an hour to restore her and find out what was the matter, then they sent for the police, and what do you think they found?”

“That the burglar was dead,” breathed the girl with the Roman nose.

“No. It wasn’t a burglar at all; it was her own father, who had risen early and gone into the closet to look for a file of papers which had been kept in the attic for twenty years. Oh, he said perfectly awful things when he got breath enough to speak! Unluckily, too, it happened just at the time when she needed a lot of new things. She said that nobody appreciated her bravery except a man who was paying her attention at the time, and he didn’t dare say a word before her father for fear of losing his good-will.”

“Humph!” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “it only goes to show that women are really more courageous than men.”

“Of course they are,” said the girl with the eyeglasses. “Why, only the other day I read of a girl who had a hole bored in one of her front teeth and a diamond inserted. Did you ever hear of a man who was brave enough to go to the dentist unless he really had to?” [98]

“No,” said the president. “Oh, girls, I once had my pocketbook snatched from me by a boy, and I just ran after him until he dropped it. I don’t know that I should have been so brave,” she added, “but for the fact that, beside my card, it contained several unpaid bills of which my husband knew nothing. If the police had caught the boy with it, they would have communicated the fact to him, and I never should have heard the last of those bills.”

“I hope he appreciated your bravery, anyhow,” said the girl with the eyeglasses.

“Of course not,” said the president; “his only comment was that it served me right for carrying my pocketbook in my hand. Oh, you can’t make a man understand that a woman fears nothing. By the way, I wish several of you would come home to dinner with me. I broke Tom’s lovely bit of old Venetian glass to-day, and I had rather not be alone with him when he finds it out.” [99]

"I'll go with pleasure," said the girl with the Roman nose, "is anybody else coming?"

"Nobody but Mr. Troolygood," said the president. "I always ask him in such an emergency, because he prophesied that Tom would break my heart within two years of our marriage. Tom knows that, and—well, I could dance on the graves of his ancestors if Mr. Troolygood was present, and Tom would encourage my efforts."

"Then, I don't see why you ask us to-day," said the girl with the Roman nose, "he ought to be —"

"Sufficient? Yes, I suppose so; but—well, the truth is that he is rather hard to entertain, and Tom is so busy in his presence, being nice to me, that he is no help at all."

"I should be delighted to dine with you, also," said the blue-eyed girl, "but really I have such a cold that I don't dare to be out at all after nightfall."

[100]

"Have you a cold?" said the brown-eyed blonde, "why, I didn't notice it when I met you in the restaurant this morning."

"Didn't you, dear? But then you are not very observant. You had not even noticed that there was a wrinkle in the waist of your new gown, until I pointed it out to you. Evelyn, dear, mightn't I take another of your quinine tablets now? I really think that I am feeling better already."

"Do not take too much of it, dear, if you value your peace of mind," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I've had such an awful cold this week. I don't know how I ever caught it, unless it was sitting in that hot church on Sunday. Mamma would have me go, and I—"

"Perhaps you caught it standing on your front steps Monday evening," suggested the girl with the classic profile. "I saw you, as I passed, and wondered how long—"

"Oh, it was only a moment. The parlor was full of people, and I just stepped out with Frank a moment to—to ask him how he expects to vote at the coming election."

[101]

"I thought you both looked as if you were discussing politics. Of course, he had to think well on the merits of the opposing candidates before he gave an opinion and—"

"Oh, pshaw, it is impossible to know how one catches cold, and it does one no good to know, anyhow," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"Unless it is some one else's fault," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I have a cold myself, and I don't dare to mention the fact to my family. They are so unsympathetic that they—"

"Would want you to wrap up and wear overshoes if it was July," said the president.

"They would, they would," wailed the girl with the eyeglasses, "well, I just knew that I had to be well in time to go to Mrs. Brownsmith's card party. The way that Marie tries to attract Frank's attention is too dreadful, and I knew she would be there."

"If she had to unscrew her coffin lid to get out," said the blue-eyed girl.

[102]

"M'hm. They wanted me to take all sorts of horrid remedies at home. I wouldn't do it, though; the very idea made me cross. Finally, on Wednesday, Frank dropped in to see if I was better and said I must take some quinine. Of course, I couldn't refuse and hurt his feelings, especially as he remained all the afternoon and watched me take it. By his advice, I took a large dose of it that night, and when I woke up in the morning my cold was almost gone, but oh, I had the queerest buzzing in my ears!"

"Oh, well, nobody could see that," said the president, "so you—"

"Kept on taking it all day, and was able to go to the card party, after all; though the quinine had made me as deaf as a statue. It made little difference at first, because Marie kept close at my elbow, and Frank and I were not alone a moment. I couldn't get rid of her at all until, just as mamma said she would not wait another second Mrs. Brownsmith called Marie to her, and Frank —"

[103]

"Improved the moment," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "What did he say?"

"I—I don't know," sobbed the girl with the eyeglasses. "He whispered, and I couldn't hear. And before I could ask him to repeat, Marie was at my side. As he put me into the carriage, he said: 'You will let me have my answer by messenger to-morrow, won't you?' And I—I don't know whether he ask-asked me to marry him, or only to go to the m-matinee!"

"You poor, dear martyr," cried the president. "Dorothy, dear, you had better not take any more of those tablets, because—"

"But dear, Dorothy is in no danger of having to answer such an important question," said the brown-eyed blonde, sweetly.

"Very true, dear; I have answered it already—in the negative," said the blue-eyed girl. "Ah, you can never know, Frances, how painful it is to be obliged to tell a man who loves you that there is no hope."

[104]

"Dear, dear," said the president, hurriedly, "I'm afraid that, in spite of all my efforts, we have

not discussed to-day's topic as consistently as usual. It does seem to me sometimes that you girls talk as much as men. Of course you do not expect to be listened to as they do, still—"

"I should think not," said the girl with the Roman nose; "did I ever tell you of the time I went to make a round of calls with Ethel, and—"

"Found she was leaving her sister's cards by mistake?" said the girl with the classic profile. "Indeed you did. And wasn't it funny that she left one for Maria, to whom her sister hadn't spoken for a year? Just like Ethel, too."

"This was another time," said the girl with the Roman nose. "You know how much Ethel talks? Well, we called on one woman I had never met before, and she asked Ethel subsequently if I was not deaf and dumb!"

"Never mind, she knew better when she met you next time," said the girl with the eyeglasses; [105] "but what is the topic for discussion to-day?"

"The Heroine of To-day," said the president, "and I think—"

"I suppose that is the bachelor girl," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Or the one who marries a foreigner," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Talk about bravery! Why, I knew a girl who became engaged to a Russian before she could pronounce his name."

"Speaking of that," said the girl with the classic profile, "isn't it horrid of Elizabeth to send out her wedding cards so long ahead. No chance this time to say that we didn't know it in time to select a present."

"I shall pretend that I never received my invitation at all," said the president; "one must protect one's self somehow."

"I do hate to go shopping with her nowadays," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "if I don't buy a lot of things myself I am miserable, and if I do her reproachful gaze seems to say, 'I know the cost of this will come out of my present.'" [106]

"As if you wouldn't ask your father for the money for that, anyhow!" said the girl with the classic profile.

"I shall do nothing of the kind, dear; it would make too much trouble. I don't know why a man will cheerfully give a wedding present himself, but let—"

"One of the women of the family ask for money for the same purpose and he feels that he is being robbed," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"I suppose it is on the same principle that makes a man insist upon treating every other man he meets and then grumble because his wife wants oysters after the play," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Just as he feeds a girl on candy before he marries her and then complains of dentists' bills afterward," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "men are so illogical!"

"Indeed they are," said the girl with the Roman nose; "one of them will keep on telling a girl that she has a swan-like carriage, and then think her vain if he catches her watching her own movements in the glass." [107]

"Why does she let him catch her at it?" queried the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Oh, girls, you know that awful, dark green necktie that Dick has been wearing! Well, I endured it until I felt as if I should scream if I saw him wear it again, so I begged it from him; told him that I wanted it as a souvenir to hang beside his college cap and his football colors. As soon as he sent it to me I threw it into the fire."

"And he came in before it was reduced to ashes?" asked the president, in sympathetic tones.

"No. He appeared with another just like it, the very next day—said he didn't like it himself, but since I had admired it and he wanted to please me, he had matched it before he sent it to me!"

"And that was your only reward for trying to save his feelings," sighed the blue-eyed girl. "Really, Emily, I often think you are too good for this world."

"At any rate, I shall soon be out of it if so many sorrows are heaped upon my head. By the way, [108] girls, I've been learning to ride my bicycle, and talking of heroism, I—"

"How many times have you fallen?" exclaimed the girl with the classic profile. "I heard the other day of a girl who learned to ride in a single lesson, without falling once, and—"

"Humph. I've often heard of that girl myself—but I've never seen her. I've fallen nineteen times; that is, not counting the time mamma called after me to be careful, and the time that Dick said I had ridden almost a half block since he let go of my belt—because you know, it was not my fault that I fell upon either of those occasions!"

"Of course not," said the president, "but, girls, we really must not talk about bicycling, because if we do we shall drift away from our discussion, and I can't bear to depart, even momentarily,

from the high standard of the club. We were speaking of Elizabeth a moment ago; has any one seen her lately?"

[109]

"Not I," said the blue-eyed girl. "I make a point of avoiding the girl who is about to be married, the mother of the cleverest baby in the world, and the woman who is designing her own house. Really, you know, I don't mind letting someone else do all the talking, but I *do* like a change of topic once in a while."

"I know I was just as sensible as any one could be while Tom and I were engaged," said the president, "and yet, people did act so oddly. Why, they would go right away if I began to talk of him at all; they didn't even stay long enough to see how sensible I was."

"By the way, I believe that Jane and Mr. Sooter are engaged," said the girl with the classic profile; "Jane denies it but—"

"Then I think you are mistaken," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I know Jane, and she seldom understates a case. Why do you think they are engaged?"

"He has given up sending her flowers and candy, and begun presenting bric-a-brac instead."

[110]

"Pshaw, that is nothing; he may once have been engaged to a girl who was a china maniac, and these may be the presents she returned."

"Possibly. By the way, Kate has grown so wary now that she only gives the man to whom she happens to be engaged presents which she can use after she breaks with him; never pipes and—"

"Oh, by the way, I know how her last engagement came to be broken in so many pieces that it could never be mended," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Do tell us all about it; we are all so intimate with Kate that we wouldn't dare to tell anybody, because it would seem that we were betraying a confidence," said the girl with the classic profile.

"Well, when she was engaged to Mr. Yaleblue, she gave him a lovely meerchaum pipe, which of course came back with her other presents when the engagement was broken. By the next Christmas she was engaged to Dan, and it seemed such a waste to let it lie in the case, and she gave it to him, telling him a pretty little story of how she bought it when she was in Paris, and kept it hanging in her den ready for Prince Charming when he appeared. You wouldn't think a little thing like that would have broken the engagement, would you?"

[111]

"Why, of course not," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "how on earth did—"

"Oh, he just asked how it came that it was so strong of tobacco!"

"Dear me, girls," said the president, "I am afraid that we really must adjourn, though there is still a great deal more to say on both sides of the discussion. But I have just remembered that I have invited a whole party of you to dinner, and neglected to mention the fact to the cook!"

The Club Settles Some Currency Problems

"The topic for to-day's discussion will be 'Currency Problems of the Present Day,'" observed the president, after the club had come to order, "and I hope you are all prepared—"

"There is only one currency problem in the present day—to my knowledge, at least," broke in the girl with the classic profile, "and that is: how to make two dollars do the work of ten."

"Dear me, there is something actually masculine in your flippancy," said the president, with ferocious gentleness. "The question before us is one of the deepest gravity, and—"

"Nobody knows that better than myself," said the girl with the classic profile, "don't I lie awake night after night, wondering how to get my new things out of the money my father has allowed me for the purpose, or, better yet, how to coax more out of him without letting him realize the fact." [113]

"Don't talk about money, please; it makes me blue," wailed the girl with the dimple in her chin. "What with never having enough for myself and constantly seeing other people with more than I like them to have, I—"

"What I want to know is—and you ought to be able to tell me, girls—why a woman who looks all sweetness and gentleness should suddenly develop into a raging lioness, just because her own son wants to marry some nice girl," sighed the girl with the eyeglasses, waking suddenly out of a reverie.

"Humph," returned the blue-eyed girl, "there are some things I don't quite understand myself—such as the banking system, and the reason why your dressmaker tells you calmly that she must have two yards and a half more of your dress material, when you have plainly informed her that you bought a remnant. But as for your question, it is so simple that a man could answer it. No woman ever did, or ever will, like to play second fiddle to another one, and—" [114]

"Oh, nonsense," said the girl with the Roman nose, "it is just a question of tact. Let a man make his mother believe that she has chosen his wife and she—"

"Yes, and wouldn't it be pleasant to have your mother-in-law tell you, every time she wanted you to discharge the cook or do without a new gown, that her son would never have married you but for her!" cried the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Speaking of mothers-in-law," said the girl with the classic profile, "Nell is to have a new woman in that capacity. I found her crying the other day because she had heard that Madame considered her too domestic to make her son a good wife!"

"Yes, I know," said the blue-eyed girl, "and did you hear of Alice's woes? No? Well, you know, she and Morton fell in love at first sight, and became engaged two weeks later. After the engagement was announced, she was invited to visit his people in Iowa, and went in fear and trembling, for she did not know much about them, and Morton could not be there at the time." [115]

"Hadn't the courage, you mean," murmured the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Very likely, dear. Well, his mother was as bad as Alice had feared. Her ideas were all in direct opposition to Morton's, and the poor girl almost fretted herself into nervous prostration trying to please them both. After all, when she got home, she found—"

"That she had been mistaken in her feelings for Morton, and it didn't make any difference whether they were pleased or not!" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I knew how it would end when you began."

"No. She discovered that Madame was only his stepmother, after all! Imagine trying to please a mother-in-law and a stepmother combined!" [116]

"I'd rather not fancy it," said the president, with a shudder. "Girls, I only hope you will be as lucky when you are married as I am, for—"

"You aren't going to tell us all of Tom's virtues again, are you?" said the girl with the dimple in her chin, uneasily.

"When my mother-in-law becomes unpleasant, I just ask her to go with me to spend the day with Tom's grandmother," went on the president, affecting not to hear the last remark, "she doesn't dare to refuse, because the old lady has some china which we both want, and she's afraid I may succeed in wheedling it out of her! It is great fun to hear my own mother-in-law lectured by *her* mother-in-law on the sins which the former thinks I have appropriated entirely to my own use."

"But, ah—doesn't Tom's mother take it out of you on the way back?" queried the blue-eyed girl.

"No, dear. You see, I am careful not to sit with her in the train, and Tom always meets us at the station; besides, she's hardly in her usual form, and I could be a match for her," she added, modestly. [117]

"Oh, girls," said the brown-eyed blonde, "speaking of mothers-in-law makes me think of

wedding presents. Did you—oh, did you hear about the plates I gave Elizabeth?”

“Yes, I did,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “and a girl who gives away old Crown Derby like that is either an angel, or not quite sane—I don’t know which!”

“Say anything you like; I haven’t the spirit to reply. And after you’ve heard the story—well, it was this way: I ran across the dozen of them in a little second-hand shop, and the proprietor didn’t seem to know their value and asked a very moderate price.”

“I beg your pardon, dear,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “I take back all that I said before!”

“You needn’t. I saw that I could beat him down, so I didn’t take them then, but went in a day or two later, taking Elizabeth along to make sure they were genuine. Really, she does know something about china, though—” [118]

“She doesn’t know anything else,” finished the president. “Well, they were genuine, weren’t they?”

“They were, Elizabeth became so affectionate on the spot that I saw she knew what I wanted them for. I didn’t take them then, but went back the next day to find that the man had raised his price; he said another person wanted them—as if I’d believe that. Well, it went on for a week, until the price demanded was so outrageous that I should never have paid it, but for the fact that Elizabeth had told everybody what lovely Crown Derby plates she was to have, and I wasn’t going to have her say that I couldn’t afford them!”

“I should think not,” said the girl with the eyeglasses; “besides, it is necessary to give Elizabeth a handsome present, since she is marrying a wealthy man.”

“Of course; if he was poor, a very simple thing would—ah, be in better taste, so that the contrast would not be so great.” [119]

“M’hm. Well, I bought the plates, and took them to her myself, because I wanted to see her face when she opened the package.”

“But she wasn’t surprised, was she?” asked the blue-eyed girl.

“Yes, she was. She—well, she was the other person who wanted to buy them, and whose inquiries had trebled the price I had to pay for them!”

“In the face of a tragedy like that, it seems hopeless to offer consolation,” said the girl with the classic profile. “Still, Elizabeth will be obliged to give you a handsome present when you are married.”

“Let us hope that she will not have had time to forget her obligations,” said the blue-eyed girl, sweetly. “Of course, she has a good memory, but—”

“I only hope somebody will give her two chafing-dishes,” broke in the president. “I only have one, and if I was not the sweetest tempered mortal in the world Tom and I would quarrel seriously over it. Perhaps, I ought not to speak of myself in that way, but—” [120]

“You surely ought to know your good points better than anybody else does,” said the girl with the Roman nose.

“Very true, dear. You see, Tom thinks he is a chafing-dish cook, and really he *can* cook; but the last time he made a rarebit my waitress gave warning, because of the state in which she found the dining-room—which was very mean of her, because we had waited on ourselves to save trouble.”

“Partly for that, and partly because you wanted to talk about Coralie, and her sister is her cook, I remember—I was there,” said the blue-eyed girl.

“Yes, but she didn’t know that we wanted to talk about Coralie, and I told her that it was to save her trouble.”

“Wasn’t that the time that the rarebit made you ill, and the doctor couldn’t come because he, too, had eaten some of it?” asked the girl with the dimple in her chin.

“It was. I told Tom, then, that he must leave out either the doctor or me when he made rarebit again!” [121]

“With the result?” queried the girl with the classic profile.

“That we didn’t speak for three days, dear. It was during that time, that I went to Annie’s chafing-dish party. She wanted me to make a cheese omelette, and I sent over for the dish. My messenger found Tom in the dining-room with a whole party of men—”

“Cooking on your chafing-dish?”

“No. Trying to entertain them while the new waitress hunted for it.”

“But, where was it? You hadn’t taken it?”

“No, dear. The cook had borrowed it for a chafing-dish party of her own, and neglected to

mention the fact to either Tom or me!"

"Then, I suppose really that each family should possess two chafing-dishes," said the brown-eyed blonde, thoughtfully.

"Yes—or none at all," said the president, sighing.

"Of course I am very much interested in this discussion," said the girl with the Roman nose; [122]
"but I wonder if a thorough knowledge of currency problems will do us any practical good. None of us are earning our own living, and when papa talks about currency problems at home it is only to point the moral that times are hard, so—"

"There is where your knowledge will be most useful," broke in the girl with the dimple in her chin; "you can bring it out to prove that times are *not* hard, and run off a lot of statistics to prove your point."

"But I don't know any statistics," wailed the girl with the Roman nose.

"I'm afraid you have not been paying strict attention to-day," said the president, gravely. "However, if you are in danger of losing in an argument, be sure to say, with a smile of superiority, 'I suppose you know what the statistics are?' Now, people are not in the habit of carrying statistics around, like cough-drops, and they will simply give up the battle on the spot. If they don't, rattle off a lot of figures; they can't refute them immediately, and if they attempt to do it afterward, you can just say, in a supercilious tone, 'I thought we settled that matter yesterday.'" [123]

"Well, I declare," said the girl with the Roman nose, "that is just my own father's line of argument, and yet it never occurred to me that I could imitate it. I do hope you will take very good care of your health, Evelyn," she added. "People who are very intellectual are *so* apt to die young."

"I shall," said the president. "I've no notion of dying and having Tom a widower while he is still young enough to be attractive. It would not make so much difference after that, for I shall take care that he does not accumulate enough money to make him fascinating at seventy-five!"

"Dear, dear," sighed the blue-eyed girl, "I wonder why so few men have money until their hair is only a memory!"

"Case of the wind being tempered to the shorn lamb," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "after all, a man must sacrifice something on the altar of success."

"Humph; isn't it usually his wife?" said the girl with the classic profile. [124]

"Not if she is clever," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Girls, I once knew a woman whose husband made a fortune in two years, and he wouldn't give her more than the merest pittance for dress and entertaining. In fact, the only bills he would pay, without grumbling, were those of the doctor. And what do you think she did? She selected the doctor whose bills were the most outrageous, and settled herself to be a chronic invalid. She said she was determined to get something out of her husband's fortune."

"Good," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "I do hope she really enjoyed herself after that."

"I'm afraid not. You see, the doctor seemed anxious to earn his money, and insisted that she had some desperate disease. I doubt if she really enjoyed his subsequent visits."

"All her husband's fault, too," sighed the brown-eyed blonde, "and yet, I doubt if she reproached him for it. It seems to be a woman's province to suffer in silence." [125]

"Yes, I've often heard my mother make that very remark to my father," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I had rather not quote his reply. Girls, I heard the funniest story yesterday; Annie wouldn't tell me who was the heroine of it, really, sometimes she is as provoking as a man. I'll be even with her, however, for I'll never rest until I find out who it was, then I shall tell everybody, and Annie will never be able to convince her that she didn't tell the whole. It seems that this girl had quarreled with the man to whom she was engaged, and a week later she received a letter addressed in his handwriting. She did think of taking it to a mind reader, but it was near the end of the month, and she hadn't the money, so—"

"By the way, Emily, dear, when can you come to lunch with me?" broke in the girl with the eyeglasses. "I don't see half as much of you as I'd like to, and—"

"Any day you like, dear. Where was I? Oh! She hadn't the money, and the tea kettle happened to be handy, so she—" [126]

"But, why not open it with a hair-pin, like any other letter?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"She wanted to return it unopened if she didn't like its contents. It proved to be perfectly horrid; he not only didn't acknowledge that he was in the wrong, but he actually brought forward facts to prove that she was! Of course, no girl would endure that, so—"

"Do you mean to say that Annie told you that?" asked the girl with the eyeglasses. "I didn't think it possible that any girl—"

"Oh, I don't see any harm in that; of course every girl wants her own way. Well, she sealed up the letter again, wrote on it, 'Returned unopened' and sent it back."

"H'm," said the girl with the Roman nose, "I was thinking that might have been Clarissa, but she is too intellectual to do anything so clever. Anyhow, I'm glad she got the better of him."

"But she didn't, dear. She discovered, after the messenger had been gone an hour, that she had sealed up the envelope without replacing the letter in it! Can any of you guess who it was that—" [127]

"Not I," said the blue-eyed girl, "but if I had done such a thing, I should never have trusted Annie with it. Why, are you going, dear?"

"I'm going over to Annie's this very minute," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I—I have something to say to her that will touch even *her* hardened conscience!"

"So it was Marion, after all," mused the girl with the dimple in her chin, after the door had closed behind her friend; "well, at any rate, after this Annie will tell me the whole of a story when she begins it."

"I must say, though, that if I was in her place it would be a long time before I began one," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"So you, too, have been confiding in Annie?" said the blue-eyed girl, sweetly. "By the way, I am to stay over night with her, but I promise you that whatever she may repeat will be safe with me." [128]

"While we are discussing currency problems, I want to say what a nuisance the check system is," said the girl with the classic profile. "I always did hate to get my money in that way, and I had an experience the other day which surely ought to cure my father of giving them to me."

"Mercy, you weren't suspected of being a forger, were you?" asked the president, turning pale.

"N—no, I believe not, but—it happened that my father gave me a check when I was going shopping, and I found before I cashed it that I must have five dollars more. Father had gone to Indianapolis, and mother, well—the fact is, that she will not loan me money any more, because I sometimes forget to return it. I didn't know what to do until I suddenly remembered that Ned Goldie was the person who had to cash the check for me at the bank; then I knew I was safe. Pshaw, it just shows that you can never depend on a man!"

"He surely did not refuse to cash it?" asked the president. [129]

"N—no, but he—girls, I'll tell you just what I did. I said, 'By the way, Mr. Goldie, just give me five dollars more, will you? Father can make it right next time he comes in.' And, if you will credit the fact, he actually said he couldn't do it. A man with whom I had danced the german the evening before!"

"I never believed Ned Goldie would be so stingy," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "What excuse did he make?"

"Said it was against the rules of the bank, but he would be delighted to *lend* me the extra five dollars. Did you ever hear of such impertinence in your life? As soon as my father comes home, I shall tell him that he must transfer his account to another bank, for after this I feel that Mr. Goldie is not a person to be trusted with money!"

"Dear, dear," said the president, gravely, "that is very bad. Don't mention it outside of the club, girls; for if the bank directors found that he was being rude to the daughter of one of their customers he would lose his position at once. And there may be some apology or explanation he can make to your father, too, dear; though I confess I don't see what it can be. Well, girls, I'm afraid we must adjourn, and I must say frankly that I am pleased with the work we have done to-day. The only reason that I suggested such a weighty topic for discussion was, that Tom had declared that the club was unable to grapple with it. After that, of course the only thing possible was to show him that he was wrong." [130]

"Which you can now do conclusively," said the girl with the Roman nose, "and I am quite sure he will be surprised at the novelty of some of the arguments advanced this afternoon!"

"What is it, dear?" asked the girl with the dimple in her chin, as she and the blue-eyed girl turned the corner. "You have been so bright and cheerful to-day, that I am sure something is seriously wrong."

"Indeed there is. Jack has behaved abominably! It was enough when he told Effie that Frances is the most amiable girl he ever knew; but—" [131]

"That proves conclusively that he is not engaged to her, dear. No man ever knows anything about a girl's temper until he *is* engaged to her."

"Oh, if you want to defend him, I shall say no more; but I did think—"

"But, I don't want to defend him. I only—"

"Then, all I've got to say, Emily Marshmallow, is that you are prejudiced against the poor fellow. I might have known that from the start. I only wish I had not taken your advice and broken my engagement."

"But, you didn't do it on my advice," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "it was all done before you said a word to me about it."

"Well, anyhow, I knew you would advise me to do it; and now you are not satisfied with what I've done. But go on, don't spare me—I am too miserable to care to defend myself! I—I don't believe I shall live very long, anyhow. I shall tell them to give you my marquise ring, as a token of forgiveness, when I'm gone. I hope you will remember me when you look at it—and be sure to notice if the stones are quite secure in their setting." [132]

"I w—will; I promise you," sobbed the girl with the dimple in her chin; "but don't you think a trip—well a trip to Old Point Comfort might save your life. They tell me it is very gay there now!"

The blue-eyed girl shook her head. "Nothing can save me now, dear; why I can hook all my gowns now without holding my breath, and yesterday I ate no luncheon at all—took nothing between breakfast and dinner but a couple of cream sodas, a box of caramels, and a cup or two of afternoon tea. You know nobody can live long at that rate. Well, I am sorry for Jack Bittersweet when I am gone; a lifetime of remorse and—and Frances is not a pleasant thing to look forward to!"

"You haven't told me yet about Jack, dear, so—"

"True; and some one should know the true story when I am no more. Here is the place where they make such nice chocolate; let us stop in and drink a cup while I tell you. You take the chair facing the mirror, dear," she said, as they selected a table, "my personal appearance is no longer a matter of importance to me." [133]

"You said that Jack—"

"Has behaved abominably. It is a long story, but I—I shall probably never tell you another long story, so you can afford to listen to this one. You know the little beggar boy with the beautiful brown eyes that I told you about a week or two ago?"

"Yes; but about Jack. I—"

"This is about Jack. I told you how I sympathized with that boy's sad story, and went with him to investigate it, didn't I?"

"Yes, but you never told me whether his home was—"

"I didn't get there. He led me through the most awful slums, telling me all the time how his father would beat him, when he failed to bring money home, and how he knew I was the beautiful lady he had dreamed of, as soon as he saw me." [134]

"Well? Go on, dear."

"Oh, nothing; only the horrid little wretch suddenly dived down an alley and disappeared; and, oh, Emily, I—I believe he made a face at me as he went! Worse yet, when I felt for my pocketbook it was gone, and I had to walk all the way home!"

"Oh, my goodness, had he taken it?"

"I surely had not given it to him. I had almost forgotten the affair, when the cook came up yesterday to tell me that he was in the kitchen, and had brought my pocketbook back, with a long story about having seen another boy take it. Said he had followed him, when he left me, and taken it away from him, in turn."

"Well, I declare; and there was all your money intact after you had doubted his honesty!"

"Not a cent of it, dear; and the cook said he was wearing a nice new suit. I told her she had better go back to the kitchen, and count the spoons, and I called loudly after her, 'Tell him I never want to see his deceitful face again!' The housemaid had come to the door of my room, too, and was trying to put in a word, but I wouldn't listen to her." [135]

"Trying to excuse the little wretch; the idea!"

"That was what I thought. But, oh, Emily, just then the front door closed with a bang which shook the house to its foundations, and then I noticed for the first time that the housemaid was trying to give me a card!"

"Good gracious, Dorothy, you never mean to say—"

"That it was Jack's! Indeed I do. He had heard me scream over the bannister 'Tell him to go away; I never want to see his deceitful face again.' And he—he must have thought I meant it for him. Oh, Emily, was there ever such a miserable girl as I!"

Chapter VI

The Pioneer New Woman

[136]

"I think the topic for to-day's discussion should be 'The Pioneer New Woman,'" observed the president of the Teacup Club. "Have you all got that down in your note-books? You don't know how it pleases me to see your methodical ways; it shows the real intellectual advancement of our club. Why, for my part, I have gained so much that I am not afraid to discuss any subject with any one."

"We have advanced," said the brown-eyed blonde. "I feel it, too. By the way, has any one seen my note-book? I haven't had it for three weeks—are you sure that none of you have gotten it by mistake? I forgot to put my name in it, and—"

"I know where it is," said the girl with the classic profile. "You loaned it to Kate—she told me so herself,—in order that she might read up on some of the topics we have already discussed, and so qualify for admission to the club." [137]

"I shall blackball her, for my part," spoke up the girl with the dimple in her chin. "She is so frivolous that she would drag down our high standard. Besides, she once left me out when she gave a luncheon, and told people that it was because she had all the decorations in yellow, and feared they would not shade with my complexion."

"Oh, well, Kate is color blind, any way," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Yes, and she is a little deaf, too," remarked the president, "and really does not know just how sharp her own speeches sound."

"Perhaps not," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "but I shall blackball her just the same. By the way, Alice is giving a birthday dinner party next week—twenty-six covers, one for each year. Clever idea, isn't it?"

"For whose birthday?" asked the girl with the classic profile. "Her own? Ah, really, I knew she was forgetful, but this is carrying it too far." [138]

"I wonder why otherwise sensible people will tell such stories about their ages," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"I'm sure I don't know," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Neither do I," said the girl with the classic profile.

"Of course, it doesn't matter who knows my age, as yet," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Nor mine," remarked the girl with the classic profile.

"Nor mine, either," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"No, indeed," said the brown-eyed blonde; "I got twenty-two birthday gifts the other day on my twenty-second birthday."

"Are you twenty-two? Why, so am I!" cried the girl with the classic profile.

"Just my own age, too," said the girl with the eyeglasses. [139]

"And mine; how odd!" cried the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"That is one of the advantages of the new womanhood," said the president; "its beautiful candor. Now, I tell everybody that I am twenty-two years old."

"I wish you would tell Mrs. Van Tompkins," said the girl with the classic profile. "She wouldn't take my word for it the other day, though I told her that I couldn't be mistaken, as you had told me so at least six times in the last eighteen months."

"Cora asked me the other day if there was any age qualification for membership in this club," remarked the girl with the eyeglasses, during the slight pause which followed the last speech. "She says she has not yet celebrated her twenty-first birthday."

"Born on the 29th of February, then, wasn't she?" asked the brown-eyed blonde. "Yes, it is true that the new womanhood is breaking down old traditions. We are not at all jealous of each other now."

"Of course not," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "we have learned to value our own attractions properly. Why, the other day I stopped Amy and Fred to tell her there was a dab of powder on her nose. Formerly another girl would have been jealous of her dazzling complexion, and let her go on as she was." [140]

"How sweet of you," murmured the girl with the eyeglasses; "and yet, I doubt if she was really grateful."

"That was not the question, dear; I—"

"Oh, dear," broke in the president, "if my watch is right it is time to adjourn, and yet. Why, here is Elise! What has made you late to-day?"

"A discussion with a stupid man," cried the girl with the Roman nose. "Only think, he actually said that no woman was mathematician enough to count up her own birthdays correctly. I was so enraged—why, he said that 'I am twenty-two' is the same thing to a girl as 'Polly wants a cracker' is to a parrot, or the Spanish fandango to a guitar player—but what on earth is wrong? You all look so queer."

[141]

"It's nothing at all, dear," said the blue-eyed girl. "We were just looking at your new hat, that is all. I think your watch must have stopped, Evelyn dear, for mine is only—"

"Perhaps it has," said the president. "Tom talks so much, sometimes, that I quite forget to wind it."

"Oh, well, it needs a rest sometimes," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I know that mine—"

"Oh, dear!" said the president, "I know I am a fright to-day, and nothing but a sense of duty has brought me here. Why, I actually have not had a chance to curl my hair properly for six days, and—"

"Been getting ready your new gown, have you?" said the girl with the classic profile. "I only wish I had mine off my mind."

"It wasn't my new gown," said the president. "It was Tom. He has had a heavy cold, and the house smells so strong of camphor that there will not be a moth within a block of it this year. I don't mind being bidden a tragic farewell at mid-day, but I do mind being waked up at midnight for that purpose."

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"But it was nothing serious, was it?" asked the brown-eyed blonde. "I thought the other day, when he came to the top of the stairs and called to you that he was dying, that a man who was breathing his last would manage to do it with less noise."

"Oh, pshaw!" said the president. "That was nothing to the time he waked me up at one o'clock in the morning to tell me that he was dying, but if I let that mug-faced young preacher who used to come to see me, officiate at his funeral he would come back and haunt me. It took a hot-water bottle, a mustard plaster, two hot toddies, and the camphor to quiet him that time."

"Humph!" said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "I wonder why a man always thinks a cold or a boil fatal—when he has it?"

"Perhaps he doesn't himself," said the girl with the Roman nose; "but he always wants the women of the family to act as if they did."

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"Very true," said the girl with the eyeglasses; "but do you know what Dolly does? As soon as her husband complains of being ill she begins to weep and tear her hair and lament that he will die, she knows he will. That frightens him, and when she insists upon putting him to bed, and giving him a bowl of hot ginger tea (which he detests), he pretends that he was only joking, and flees to the office, when she calls him up every half-hour to ask how he is. She says he seldom complains of his health nowadays."

"You know my sister Amelia, don't you?" said the girl with the classic profile. "Well, her husband had a heavy cold last week. He waked her up at two o'clock to tell her that he was dying, and that he knew he had not been a good husband to her, and could not go without her forgiveness. She wept, and said that he had not been very nice to her, and had never given her half enough money. Upon this, the dying man sat up, and began to argue the case. From argument they passed to something warmer. He went down to the office next day, and hasn't said a word about dying since."

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"I wouldn't mind Tom thinking he was dying once in awhile," said the president, "if he'd only allow me the same privilege occasionally. He won't, though; he comes in and says, cheerfully, 'Oh, you'll soon be all right. You should have seen how much worse I was once when I had it, and never missed a day at the office, either!' The last time he did that my throat was too sore for me to reply properly, and I really thought I should die of rage."

"And no wonder," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "As if a woman couldn't always stand more than a man, anyhow! For instance, I wonder how many of them could go out in thin shoes, and without overshoes, as we do. And yet you never hear a girl say that she has caught cold in that way."

"Never," said the blue-eyed girl; "we have too much fortitude. My cousin Edith's husband used to be always complaining of his health, until this last winter, I wondered what had caused his miraculous recovery, until she told me a few days ago. She was away from home, and received a telegram, saying that she must come at once if she wanted to see him alive. The message was delayed, being improperly addressed, and when she reached home, expecting to find him dead, he met her at the door. It seems that he had called in a new doctor, who was the cause of his miraculous recovery. He said he would never have another physician to prescribe for him as long as he lived."

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"Completely cured, eh?" said the president.

"Not that time. Next time he was ill, and the new doctor appeared, he turned out to be an old admirer of Edith's. Her husband is frightfully jealous, and Edith's potential second husband is a

very real person to him. Edith, as nurse, always went out into the hall to talk with the doctor after his call. She says she is sure that she did not remain away so *very* long; but when she came back, after the first visit, her husband sulked; after the second, he raved; and after the third, he got up, declaring he'd live, if only to spite them both. And now, the doctor points to him as an example of his remarkable healing powers," she added. [146]

"Speaking of old sweethearts," said the president, "what do you think happened to me the other day? I was calling on Mrs. Vansmith and her guest, as she had requested. Both of them happened to be out, and, to my annoyance, I found I had no cards with me. At last I found one of Tom's in my card-case, and I left that, knowing that Mrs. Vansmith would understand."

"Well, and didn't she?" asked the girl with the Roman nose.

"Perhaps. But the visitors didn't. It turned out that she used to be engaged to Tom; while I was in the kindergarten, I suppose. It seems that his card was handed to her; and you should have seen the unbelieving smile with which she listened to my explanation of the matter!" [147]

"You poor, dear," said the blue-eyed girl, "you must have been as angry as if somebody had trodden on your gown. A rather unpleasant thing happened to Florence the other day, too; Molly was calling on her, and a note was handed in. She thought it was from Teddy Cræsus, and pretending that she had ink on her fingers, asked Molly to open it for her, which she did."

"How stupid of Molly; she might have known that it was some trick of Florence's," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Was it a proposal from Teddy?"

"It wasn't from Teddy at all; handwritings are so much alike nowadays. It was a bill from the hairdresser, of whom Florence had bought those lovely little curls which cluster around her brow—and Molly read it aloud, as she had requested."

"But who told you about it?" said the girl with the classic profile.

"Molly. You didn't suppose it was Florence, did you? I declare, it made me feel like trying to persuade both of them to join our club. There isn't a girl in it that would do such a mean thing, and the example might—" [148]

"No, it wouldn't; they are too frivolous," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Oh, girls, I sometimes wish that the men who dance with us could hear the serious discussions which go on in this club,—so harmoniously, too."

"True," said the president, "not one unkind word has been spoken, even of the absent, since we organized. I wonder if as much can be said of any other club."

"I doubt it," said the blue-eyed girl; "and it isn't as if we couldn't think of clever things to say about people, either."

"Of course not," returned the girl with the Roman nose; "why, I know some things, even about the other members, which—"

"So do I," said the girl with the classic profile. "Why, I heard the other day that you—"

"Of course I wouldn't mention, for the world," finished the girl with the Roman nose, in some agitation. [149]

"I thought not, dear; it would hardly be wise," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "for you, especially."

"I'm sure, I don't see why I, es—"

"Don't you, dear? But, then, you never were clever," said the president. "Yes, I am very proud of the amiability we have all displayed since joining the club. I must say that I didn't expect—"

"I don't see why not," said the blue-eyed girl. "As for me, I can get along with anybody, so I was not at all afraid."

"Yes, dear," said the brown-eyed blonde, "your tongue would be a protection, even if—"

"Other people were even *more* envious of me? That is hardly possible, dear; but I thank you for your good opinion of me."

"Don't overwhelm me with gratitude, dearest; I really do not deserve it."

"But, luckily for you, love, people seldom get their deserts."

"Oh, girls, don't quarrel," said the president, wringing her hands; "I've always wanted this to be different from a man's club, and now—" [150]

"Really, Evelyn, you seem to be the one who is doing the quarreling," said the brown-eyed blonde, tartly. "As for me, I am naturally amiable, and—"

"It is not your fault if your temper *is* a bit soured by repeated disappointments," broke in the blue-eyed girl; "of course not. Everybody says it is no wonder."

"I—I resign from this club," sobbed the brown-eyed blonde. "I'll not stay here another minute to be insulted!"

"Girls, girls," said the president, "do be reasonable. I—"

"This is the first time *I* was ever accused of being unreasonable," said the girl with the Roman nose; "and all I've got to say is, that I pity Tom from the bottom of my heart, and—"

"I don't doubt but that you'd be glad to comfort him—if I was dead," sobbed the president. "If this is all I am to get for keeping you at peace during the meetings, I'll just resign, and let you run the club to suit yourselves. And a p-pretty mess you-you'll make of it!" And she retired behind her handkerchief. [151]

"I'll resign, too, this very minute," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I knew just how it would be when Dorothy asked me to join the club, but—"

"You were afraid to refuse, lest something happen, and you didn't know all about it," finished the blue-eyed girl. "Well, I wish to tender *my* resignation from the club, to take effect at once."

"And so do I," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"And I," said the girl with the classic profile.

"I, too," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"W—why, then, there's nobody left!" exclaimed the blue-eyed girl, gazing about the room in astonishment. "Oh, w—what will all the men of our set say when they hear of this!" she wailed.

"I never thought of that!" said the girl with the Roman nose. "I know well enough, though, without thinking," she added. [152]

"They will say that women never *can* agree among themselves," sobbed the girl with the dimple in her chin, "and they will keep on saying it, in spite of the fact that it is a baseless libel!"

"Of—of course, I am not an—angry, only hurt," sobbed the president.

"I am not angry at all," said the blue-eyed girl, "only distressed that the others—"

"I'm sure I—I haven't a hard feeling against any—anybody," wailed the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Nor I," said the girl with the classic profile.

"Mercy, no," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"If anybody is sorry for having hurt my feelings, I am quite ready to forgive it," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"And so am I," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Then, I don't see that any of us need resign," said the president. "Does anybody remember the topic under discussion?" [153]

"The Pioneer New Woman," said the blue-eyed girl, "and a very interesting topic it is, I'm sure."

"Hear, hear," said the girl with the Roman nose, as she tucked her handkerchief into her belt.

"One thing is always a mystery to me," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "why does no female creature ever acknowledge that she is a new woman until she is quite an old one?"

"Oh, well, by that time her years will entitle her to a seat in a street car, even if she wears bloomers," thoughtfully replied the president.

"Who really *was* the pioneer new woman?" asked the girl with the classic profile.

"Eve; although, she did not call herself by that name, I believe," returned the blue-eyed girl. "So far as I can see, the new woman is just like all the rest of us—she wants to get everything she can out of the world, and give as little as possible in return." [154]

"And it is perfectly natural that she should," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "The only way we can make the men give us what we really want, is by asking for a great deal more, so that they will think themselves lucky if we compromise on what we originally decided to have."

"Hear! hear!" said the girl with the Roman nose, making an entry into her note-book, "I've been acting on that theory all my life, but I never thought to formulate it."

"Pardon me for the suggestion," said the president, "but I hope you are not in the habit of leaving that note-book around where any man can see it."

"It wouldn't make any difference if I did, dear. I went to such a fashionable school that no one but myself can ever read my chirography—I can't myself, if it was written long enough ago for me to have quite forgotten what I said."

"Then, you needn't be uneasy about any old love letters which have not been returned," said the brown-eyed blonde. [155]

"Not at all. Nobody could tell whether I had written a promise of undying affection or a recipe for hair tonic."

"I do wish my father had sent me to the same school," said the brown-eyed blonde, sorrowfully.

"Pshaw, old letters don't tell half as many tales as old photographs," said the girl with the eyeglasses, sighing. "I know a girl who had been engaged to a man who returned everything she had given him except one photograph. She couldn't refuse to let him keep it when he begged so hard."

"He had probably lost it, and didn't know how to account for its absence," said the president.

"No, he hadn't. Well, six years later, she became engaged to another man. I fancy she must have told him some stories about her age."

"It's always better to understate rather than overstate a case," said the blue-eyed girl. [156]

"So my old nurse used to say. Well, when she was about to be married, her old lover sent her a beautiful present, and with it an envelope addressed to her fiancé."

"Which she should have opened herself," said the president, promptly.

"He happened to be present when the box was opened, dear. The envelope contained the photograph taken seven years before—"

"Why didn't she say that—"

"It was a picture of her elder sister? She did, dear. What really caused the trouble was her own name, and the date on the back of it, coupled with the statement that it was taken on her twenty-second birthday!"

"Oh, my goodness, how sly men are?" said the president. "And to think that never, as long as she lived, could that girl tell him what she really thought of him!"

"I know. She used to say that she sometimes regretted that she *hadn't* married him."

"Oh, well, he is probably married to somebody else, by this time, anyhow," said the president, [157] "though I doubt if his wife would fully appreciate the enormity of his behavior, since it was toward another woman."

"Never mind," said the brown-eyed blonde, "people are sure to be punished in some way or another. I wouldn't get up early on Sunday morning, and go to church if I did not firmly believe that."

"Goodness me," said the president, "it must be awfully late, girls, and I promised Tom to adjourn early and meet him down town. I do wonder if he has been waiting for me all this time!"

"I've seen Jack," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, as the friends went down the stairs; "met him on the street this morning."

"And, I suppose you hurried right on, and never said a civil word to him," returned the blue-eyed girl.

"Indeed I didn't. I called after him to wait for me, and—"

"And I suppose he thought that I had told you to talk to him, since you were so eager. You needn't tell me a word that you said—I don't want to hear anything about it. Did—did he look sort of hollow-eyed and worn?" [158]

"M—I can't say that he did. But he said that he thought he must give up chafing-dish suppers."

"I should think he must have had bad dreams," said the blue-eyed girl, viciously.

"He—he told me that he had called at your house the other day, and—"

"I suppose you let him go on thinking that I meant that message for him. A nice friend you are, Emily Marshmallow!"

"Why, Dorothy, I—"

"You don't surely mean that you explained it all, and actually let him think that I wanted to apologize! Well, if anybody had told me such a thing of you, I never would have believed it."

"No, I didn't," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "I didn't say a word, for just then Frances joined us; and if *you* are clever enough to get a private word with any man, after Frances sees him, I am not!"

Chapter VII

Woman in Legislation

[159]

"Let us discuss 'Woman in Legislation,' to-day," said the president. "I had written you a note, Marion, to prepare a paper on it, but I found it in my desk this morning."

"Too bad," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I should have been delighted to do it."

"Why, Marion," cried the girl with the Roman nose, "have you forgotten? You said you were too busy painting dinner cards to touch it. That was when I told you that Evelyn wanted you to do it, you remember."

"No, I don't," snapped the girl with the eyeglasses. "Of course I shan't have a minute to prepare a paper for next week; but I should have been delighted to—" [160]

"Girls," said the president, "only think! Tom says this club is actually making me masculine."

"Mercy, you must have convinced him that you had the better of him in an argument," cried the girl with the Roman nose.

"No—but I forgot to mail some letters he intrusted to me the other day when he was going out of town. By the way, it seems to me that when legislation is in the hands of women. What are you girls whispering about over there in the corner?"

"We are only comparing samples of bicycle suitings," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Dorothy has a larger selection than I, and—"

"Why, I have a lot of them, myself," said the president. "Has anybody seen my hand-bag since I came in?"

"Here it is," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I've just been comparing your samples with mine, and I find—"

"Goodness me, I'm late," said the brown-eyed blonde, as she bounced into the room. "I just stopped on my way here to look at a new design for bicycle suits, and—" [161]

"I've been trying for half a block to catch you, Frances," said the girl with the classic profile, as she opened the door, in turn; "I've been looking at the new bicycles, and was detained longer than I expected."

"Oh, shall you get a new wheel this year?" asked the president.

"No, dear," returned the girl with the classic profile; "but, of course, I wanted to see what they are like."

"Naturally," said the girl with the Roman nose. "My dears, you never heard of such luck as mine. You know papa said I shouldn't have a new bicycle this year, if I had to walk—"

"Oh, if you call that luck," said the blue-eyed girl, "my father said the same thing."

"So did mine," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Wait until you hear the rest," said the girl with the Roman nose, "I had my old machine set in order, and expected to have to do with it all this season. The other day, I went into the store-room to have a look at it, and, to my surprise, found it all splashed with mud, the enamel scratched, and—" [162]

"The cook had been riding it, of course," broke in the president.

"I knew that at once, and I went to tell mamma she must discharge her on the spot. However, mamma was lying down with a headache, and as I had some shopping, a luncheon, two teas and a dinner on hand that day, I had no chance to speak to her. Two days later, I remembered it, and went in to look at it—I knew that mamma was so prejudiced against bicycling that I must make the case very bad to excite her sympathy. It was bad enough, by this time, too; one pedal was all bent, the handle-bar was broken, and the enamel was a sight!"

"I hope you made your mother discharge that cook on the spot!" said the blue-eyed girl.

"I rushed right up to mamma's room to do it. I opened the door, and a familiar odor greeted me—a combination of arnica and witch hazel, and—" [163]

"You forgot all about the cook. Had your mother fallen downstairs?"

"No; she hadn't. The cook had been trying to teach her to ride my bicycle; she had a black eye, a sprained shoulder, and a skinned face. The cook had gone home with a dislocated collar-bone, and I had to wait on mamma, and do all the cooking for two days!"

"And you call that luck!" groaned the president.

"Not that, dear. But mamma gave me a beautiful new wheel for keeping the whole thing from papa's ears. And I sold the old one for enough to buy me a lovely new suit," she added, triumphantly.

"I am glad *somebody* has had a stroke of luck," said the brown-eyed blonde. "As for me, I've just had an object-lesson in the selfishness of this world, which is enough to make a misanthrope of me for life."

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"Mercy, has your grandmother decided to buy a wheel for herself instead of for you?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"No. But you see it scratches the enamel to learn on a wheel—not to mention the other accidents which may befall it. Now, Nell's bicycle is old, and I sent to borrow it to ride while I was taking my lessons. She actually refused it, unless I would lend her my new one while I had hers. Did you ever hear of such selfishness in your life?"

"Never," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "By the way, I suppose Jack Bittersweet will teach you to ride?"

"Why, yes; but how did you guess it?" There was a note of triumph in her voice.

"Oh, that was easy enough. He is always teaching somebody, you know. I told him the other day that I was afraid people would soon think him a professional."

"B—but he told me that he only teaches people whom he—likes," said the brown-eyed blonde, faintly.

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"Why, of course, dear. But, Jack hasn't a bit of discretion; he likes everything that wears petticoats, I verily believe."

"Oh—I— By the way, Evelyn, dear, what is to-day's topic? You had started the discussion when I came, and I didn't like to interrupt you to ask."

"It is 'Woman in Legislation,'" said the president, after a peep at her note-book, "By the way, Frances, I know the cheapest place in town for arnica, if you want—"

"Mine doesn't cost anything, dear. Papa always has a bill at the drug store. I know the clerk, and he has promised if I use a very large quantity to put it down as toilet soap and postage stamps. Papa has never ridden you know, and he might not understand."

"Very true," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "What a comfort bicycling is, anyhow. For instance, if you meet a strange man, and the conversation lags—"

"Get it on bicycles, and it runs smoothly enough," said the president.

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"I wish *I* could do the same," wailed the brown-eyed blonde. "Well it is lucky for me that the dancing season is over, for my arms are a perfect sight."

"Oh, if it is only your arms!" said the girl with the Roman nose, cheerfully. "*I* always fell on my face when I was learning. The only comforting thing about that was, that I soon became unrecognizable, and could fall right up and down my own street without a soul knowing who I was. It was very convenient, too, for they hadn't far to take me when I had a really bad accident."

"How long did you have to wait to sit for your photograph?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"Six weeks, dear—and then it had to be a profile."

"Elizabeth had rather a hard time of it, too," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "she would learn in her lovely new suit, and by the time she could ride, she hadn't enough of it left to make a bathing costume."

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"Tom tells a rather good bicycle story," observed the president. "He met a member of his club, who is a noted scorcher, the other day. He was wheeling along a very disreputable specimen of a woman's machine. 'Hello,' said Tom, 'got yourself into trouble?' 'Yes,' was the reply, 'I ran into a woman up yonder, and I'm afraid it will be cheaper to buy her a new wheel than to have the old one repaired.' 'Humph,' said Tom, who knows him pretty well, 'it's a wonder you didn't just ride away and leave her, when you found what you had done.' 'I did,' said the scorcher, 'but it didn't do me any good.' 'Policeman saw you, eh?' 'No. The woman turned out to be my wife!'"

"Good!" said the blue-eyed girl. "I came very near not getting my bicycle last year. Papa said I should have one if I learned to make a good pie. I agreed to do it, but I had reckoned without the cook. She said flatly that she wouldn't have me messing up her kitchen. Finally, I compromised by agreeing to trim her a hat, if she would make the pie. It was really quite the same you know."

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"Quite," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"And did it turn out all right?" asked the president.

"The hat did; but the pie—well, the cook had lived with us for three years, and that was the first time she had turned out an uneatable pie!"

"But, why didn't you ask your father to let you try again?" asked the girl with the Roman nose.

"I did, dear; but I took no chances that time; I bought the pie from the Woman's Exchange. And I must say that I think I quite deserved the bicycle after all I had been through to earn it."

"Indeed you did," said the girl with the classic profile. "By the way, Emily, I hear that you and Dick had an almost fatal quarrel while you were both learning."

"We did," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "It happened this way: I was able to ride at least two blocks without assistance, so I got up very early, and went to the park alone to practice. I was getting along very well until I heard somebody coming up behind me at a terrible pace. That made me so nervous that I fell right off. The cyclist who had frightened me was Dick, and he actually kept right on without offering to help me!" [169]

"Perhaps he didn't know it was you," suggested the girl with the Roman nose.

"Yes, he did; but he kept right on, and a perfect stranger had to take me and my bicycle home. Two hours later he appeared with his arm in a sling, and explained. He said it was first time he had ridden outside of the riding school, and he had gotten a terrific pace which he couldn't have stopped if a rich uncle had been in his way. He said that if something in his machine hadn't broken, he verily believed he'd have circled the globe without stopping!"

"So you forgave him, didn't you? You always were amiable," said the girl with the eyeglasses. [170]

"Ye—es. Especially as he offered to have my bicycle repaired; papa having declared the last time that he wouldn't pay another cent for repairs, if it stood in the attic all summer!"

"That was good of you. Some girls would not have been so just," said the president.

"Oh, don't praise me too much," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, modestly. "Nobody who knew me happened to be in sight when it occurred—else I might not have let him off so easily."

"Dear me, how modest you are," said the blue-eyed girl. "I never knew a human being with so little vanity in my life."

"Nor I," said the girl with the classic profile. "Did I tell you about Florence's latest trouble? No? Well, you know that horrid Mr. Brownsmith, who rides beautifully, begged to be allowed to teach her. She accepted, and as soon as she had learned to ride well, she wondered how to get rid of him."

"Why didn't she ask her father to—" [171]

"Forbid him to the house? That's just what she did. I believe you have heard this story before."

"Yes. And her father?" queried the girl with the Roman nose.

"Absolutely refused to do it. Said he was the finest young man he knew, and only wondered that he cared for her society."

"Well, I declare! And Florence?"

"Would have had to treat him just like anybody else, if he hadn't heard all about it, and stopped calling of his own accord. Now, every time her father sees him, he asks why he hasn't been to the house for so long!"

"How unreasonable men are to be sure—Florence's father, in particular. Why, he actually refuses to speak to Dickey Doolittle, whose third cousin married a British baronet, and who has all his garments made in London!" said the president.

"I know—he says it makes no difference to him *where* Dickey gets his clothes; so long as he pays for them promptly," said the blue-eyed girl. [172]

"Which is the last thing Dickey would even think of doing," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"Oh, well, he may *think* of it," said the girl with the classic profile. "I suppose that even Dickey thinks sometimes."

"You have been reading the comic papers again," said the president, severely. "Whenever I hear old jokes I—"

"No, dear," said the girl with the classic profile, sweetly, "but I had a long talk with your husband only yesterday."

"Dear me," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, rousing herself from a reverie, "I'm afraid I've not been paying attention to the discussion. I can't even remember whether we decided that women should be legislators or not."

"I'm sorry to hear that," said the president. "I fear it is too late to go over the discussion again for your benefit. I thought you were taking notes of it as we went along—I saw you jotting something down in your note-book."

"That was only my calculations for a bicycle suit. There must be something wrong about them, too, for I make it twenty-seven dollars, and I only have twenty-one dollars and thirty-eight cents to my name, even if somebody pays my car-fare home." [173]

"I only make it twenty-six dollars and two cents," said the blue-eyed girl, "and I have allowed for everything just the same as you have."

"But then you are so economical that your sums in addition always come out less than mine, dear. I think you had better go over it again; or let Evelyn do it for you."

"I make it twenty-eight dollars and sixty cents," said the president. "Try it Frances, and see if I am right."

"Oh, don't," said the blue-eyed girl, "if anybody else adds it up, it may come out thirty dollars, and then I can't afford it at all. Well, I do hope one thing,—that when women are legislators they will arrange that we all have more money to spend."

"Of course they will," said the president, "else why should they bother to be legislators at all?" [174]

"Hear! hear!" said the girl with the Roman nose.

"What a comfort you are with your knowledge of parliamentary usage," said the president.

"Yes, I have gained that by joining this club, if I have gained nothing else," replied the girl with the Roman nose. "I observe, too, that papa and the boys are less inclined to engage in argument with me than they were before they knew the kind of topics we discuss here. Not that I give myself any airs over it, of course," she added.

"Oh, none of us do that," said the brown-eyed blonde. "But there is another benefit which I derive from the club. Mamma allows me to spend a good deal more money on my wardrobe, now that she is afraid that I may begin to look intellectual if I'm not well dressed."

"Oh, speaking of bicycle suits; did you ever hear what happened to Molly's old one?" asked the blue-eyed girl. "No? Well, she was determined to have a new one this year, so she put the old one away without any moth-balls, and—" [175]

"It was completely ruined by the moths, so that she had to get a new one?" asked the president.

"No, it was comparatively uninjured; but the moths from it had got into all her brother's spring garments, which were hanging up near it. Molly is thinking of going away on a nice long visit about the time that he discovers it."

"H'm; if I know anything about men, she had better," said the president. "Poor Molly, I suppose she had meant to coax him for another suit. How unlucky that girl is, and she doesn't in the least deserve her ill-luck, either."

"No. She often says it would be easier to bear if she did. Now, last year that very same brother was always coaxing her to ask Ida to pay her a visit. Finally, he said he'd give her fifty dollars if she would do it, and she thought she might as well be good-natured and oblige him. However, she was busy, and put it off a week or two, and when Ida's letter of acceptance actually came he had fallen in love with another girl, and let Molly do all the entertaining!" [176]

"Just like a man. Did he give her the money?" asked the president.

"No. He compromised on half, because Molly had put off asking her. And Ida stayed two weeks longer than she had been asked for, and made eyes all the time at the man Molly really liked herself."

"Yes, poor Molly," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "she says the next time her brother offers to pay her for having a girl to visit her, she will send the invitation by telegraph!"

"And demand payment in advance," said the brown-eyed blonde; "of course he would be willing to pay for the telegram, anyhow."

"Yes, and take it to the office, too," said the president, with a sigh. "Tom used to send off all my telegrams before we were married—he always said it was too far to the office for me to go myself. Now, he says that the exercise will do me good." [177]

"I suppose he doesn't want to pay for the message," said the blue-eyed girl.

"Oh, I never pay for my telegrams, I always send them at receiver's cost. People are so curious to know what is in a telegram that they pay without a murmur."

"H'm, I shall have to try that," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"But not on me," cried the president. "I'll never forgive you if you do. Oh, girls, did you hear the awful thing that happened to Milly when she sold her bicycle? No? Well, she only got ten dollars for it, because the man said it was in such an awful condition that he only took it to oblige her, and it would be a dead loss on his hands. He told her to come in in about ten days, and he'd have some second hand ones in such good condition that they would be the best bargains in town."

"That was very nice of him, since he made nothing on the transaction," said the brown-eyed blonde. [178]

"So Milly thought. At the end of that time she went back, and found one that she liked very much, it being the same make as her old one. He wanted sixty dollars for it, but she beat him down to fifty, and took it home with her at once for fear he would change his mind. What do you think she found when she got home? That she had bought her own old machine back again!"

"But how did she know that?" asked the girl with the Roman nose.

"By the number on the plate, goosie. He had put on new pedals, raised the seat a bit and given it a new coat of enamel—making forty dollars on the transaction! And when Milly wanted her husband to punish him for his rascality, he only laughed until she actually thought seriously of applying for a divorce!"

"And no wonder," said the blue-eyed girl. "One man will do a mean thing and another will uphold him. You don't find women doing such things for each other!"

"No, indeed," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "our own standard of feminine behavior is so high, that we hardly even give each other credit for the good things we do!" [179]

"I've often noticed that," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "and I regret to see that men are unable to appreciate our lofty motives, and often set it down to envy."

"My goodness," cried the president, with a guilty start, "it must be long past time to adjourn, and I don't want the janitor to look at me as he did last time we were late. Why, he couldn't have been more unpleasant if I had been his own wife! And the look which always reduces Tom to instant submission hadn't the least effect upon him!"

"I've been dying for an opportunity to speak to you all afternoon," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, to the blue-eyed girl, as they turned the corner, "I met Effie Bittersweet to-day, and she spoke so nicely of you that I am sure she thinks you and her brother are about to become reconciled." [180]

"It isn't Jack this time, dear," was the calm reply. "The fact is, that Clarence Lighthed has been paying me a good deal of attention lately, and she was afraid you would think her jealous."

"Clarence! Well, I never—how on earth did you manage it, Dorothy?"

"Strange as it may appear, I didn't manage it at all; he did it entirely of his own accord. But though that is the honest truth, there isn't another girl of my acquaintance who would even *pretend* to believe it if I told her."

"I suppose not, dear; and yet men must sometimes admire girls of their own free will. Well, Effie must be feeling very badly, then, for she said that of course she knew I would laugh at her for saying it, but for her part, she considered Dorothy Darling the prettiest girl in our set."

"Humph, I'll remember that when Clarence calls to-morrow afternoon. You couldn't persuade Effie to drop in with you for a cup of tea, could you?"

"Ye—es, I suppose I could, if you will promise to put enough rum in my cup to fortify me for the walk home. And I have always wanted to own a hand mirror like that silver one of yours. Do you suppose anybody will ever give me one?" [181]

"You may have mine, if you will promise to bring Effie in at precisely half-past four; Clarence will be reading poetry aloud by that time."

"I promise; and I might just as well stop in and get the hand mirror now. You won't want me to leave you a moment to-morrow."

"Indeed, I shall not. By the way, of course I told you that I cracked the mirror breaking taffy the other afternoon! No? Why, I wonder how I could have overlooked the fact."

"Never mind, dear, Ned Cræsus will have it mended for me—and thank me for letting him do it, instead of Dick. By the way, how can you endure so much of Clarence's society? You always said he was so stupid."

"That was when he used to talk of nothing but Effie. Any man would be stupid, if his only theme was another girl. You—you couldn't let Jack know about Clarence, could you? If it was any one else Effie would tell him the first time she was provoked with him. Frances will be careful not to let him know, and men have such silly ideas about interfering with other peoples' affairs, that I doubt if any of them say a word to him about the matter." [182]

"I might. Yes, I know I could, if only I was sure that you would not blame me if it turned out badly."

"Well, Emily Marshmallow, to think of refusing to do a little thing like that for me—when I've just given you that lovely hand mirror, which I like better than anything I own. I just believe you want Jack Bittersweet yourself, and I'm sure you are welcome to him, for aught I care!"

"Look here, Dorothy, I think you forget that Jack is two whole inches shorter than I; and if you think I am capable of caring enough for *any* man to make myself look like a—a bean pole for the rest of my natural life, you are very much mistaken!" [183]

"Oh, well, if you are sorry to have hurt my feelings, of course I shall overlook it. I only hope, however, that you will not rely too much on my natural amiability and push me too far. If you should see Jack in the near future you might, as you suggested,—"

"But, I didn't suggest at all. You must just tell me what you want me to say to Jack and, if I get a chance, I—"

"You are entirely mistaken. I don't want you to say anything to Jack; after the way he has treated me, I have too much pride to raise a finger to bring him back. I only thought that, as you

are a friend of his, you might like to warn him that there are others who appreciate me, if he does not."

"B—but I rather fancy that he will expect—er some kind of an explanation of the—the occurrence at your house last week. Suppose I just say—"

"Well, then, all I've got to say is, that if Jack Bittersweet is too stupid to understand a simple accident, I don't care if he never speaks to me again. Clarence Lighthed is one of the very nicest fellows I ever knew, and I am one of the hap—happiest girls in the world. Don't look at me as if you thought I was crying! I am not—and if I was, it would be out of p—pure joy!" [184]

Chapter VIII

An Executive Meeting

[185]

"Why, Frances, is that you? And on your way to the Club, too," cried the blue-eyed girl, as she caught up with the brown-eyed blonde, "how lucky I am; I shall have a nice long talk with you as we go along! How well you are looking to-day, quite fresh, I declare! Dear me, I should have put on my gloves before I left home, but I was in such haste that—"

"By the way, Dorothy, it seems to me that you are not wearing as many rings as usual this winter. Surely, I miss the diamond you used to wear!"

"Why, no I'm not; so much jewelry is always vulgar, and rings are *so* hard on one's gloves. Mercy, we have walked a whole block, and you haven't told me a bit of news!"

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"Haven't I? By the way, I heard Ja—a man I know, say something about you yesterday which was quite a surprise. I don't really know whether I ought to repeat it, or not."

"Oh, he wouldn't have said it before you unless he expected you to repeat it, dear. You must tell me what it is, or I shall fancy it was not really unpleasant, and, really I've had so many compliments of late that it will be quite a change. I am actually afraid that Cla—a friend who thinks too well of me—will make me vain, and that—"

"Impossible, dear. By the way, I hear that Clarence Lighthed comes to see you occasionally now, and—"

"Not oftener than once in twenty-four hours, dear."

"Yes. And really he has been so devoted to so many girls that—"

"It is a wonder that he has never thought of *you*! Why so it is, now that I think of it. But never mind, there may be a chance for you yet. Pardon me, you were about to repeat something you had heard about me, and I'm afraid I interrupted you."

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"Was I? Dear me, I have quite forgotten what it was; nothing very important, I'm sure."

"Very true. By the way, I heard something about *you* the other day, too. It was extremely complimentary—so much so indeed, that you will think I am trying to flatter you, if I repeat it."

"Indeed? Oh, I remember now what I was about to tell you. It was—so you really heard something nice about poor little me?"

"Yes, I really did. I'll tell you after you have finished your story. I really must not interrupt you again."

"Yes, Ja—I mean the man I know—said the other day that he thought you—now you mustn't mind this, at all, Dorothy; I told him at once that nobody else had ever said such a thing of you."

"How kind of you to champion me, dear; I really did not expect it."

"Oh, yes; I often do it. He said—I wouldn't repeat it to you, but the absurdity of the charge takes all the sting out of it. He said, 'I consider Dorothy Darling the most heartless flirt I ever knew!' Isn't it too funny!" and she burst into a peal of laughter.

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The blue-eyed girl paused to pat a little dog before she replied: "How well you do tell a story, Frances, dear. Look at that poor, old blind man over yonder; let us cross over and give him some pennies," and she was almost dancing as she crossed the street.

"Perhaps he is an impostor, after all," said the brown-eyed blonde. "By the way, you said somebody paid me a nice compliment the other day. Do tell me what it was, and if I ever get the chance—be it twenty years from now—I'll do the same for you."

"Oh, yes, indeed. Old Miss Lucy Brownsmith said to me, only the other day, 'Really, Frances is quite a nice-looking girl now that she has given up lacing so tightly.' I knew you would be so pleased. Well, here we are at the Club; I am afraid that I must have walked too fast for you, dear; you look quite flushed."

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"Oh, Emily, dear," she whispered, as she embraced her friend in the cloak room, "Jack is wild with jealousy! He told Frances the other day that I was the most heartless flirt he ever knew!"

"Then, he is ready to go half-way toward making up! Oh, I am so glad that I—"

"Half-way? Do you suppose, Emily Marshmallow, that after allowing Clarence Lighthed to bore me almost to death for two weeks, I shall be willing to go half-way to make up with Jack?"

"But you said the other day that unless you *did* make up with him, you would learn to be a trained nurse and devote your life to others, and I thought—"

"Never mind what I said the other day—that was before I knew how jealous Jack was. And all I've got to say, is this: if you expect me to make a fright of myself in a gray cloak and bonnet and cotton gown just to please *you*, you are very much mistaken!"

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The girl with the eyeglasses put her head in at the door, "Come into the club-room right away,

girls," she said. "Evelyn is here, and she has something of the greatest importance to tell us."

The president was evidently excited as she called the meeting to order. "I am just as angry as I can be," she said. "What do you think I found in my mail to-day? A letter from a man who is old enough to know better, suggesting a topic for discussion by this club. That topic was, 'The Best Method of Keeping the Hat on Straight.'"

"You don't say so!" said the girl with the Roman nose. "Well, it only shows that our mental advancement has made him uneasy."

"Of course," said the president. "Then, as if that was not enough, he suggests a small mirror fastened to the inside of an umbrella or parasol as—"

"Pshaw!" said the brown-eyed blonde, "a highly polished silver handle answers the same purpose and attracts less attention." [191]

"Talk about hats," said the girl with the classic profile, "men are just as fussy about their own. Did you ever see anybody put on a man's hat to suit him?"

"Never," said the president. "I had an awful time when Tom's arm was broken. I would put on his hat as carefully as I could—he always would tip it too far back himself—and yet, each time he would remove it, look suspiciously into the crown, and put it on again himself."

"As if it makes any difference how a man looks, anyhow," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "So long as they are nice and generous, no girl cares—"

"Very true," broke in the girl with the dimple in her chin, "and it is frequently the pocket of a last year's overcoat which harbors the largest box of candy."

"I should like to know how a man manages to keep his hat on without veil or pins," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"He doesn't always do it in a high wind," said the girl with the classic profile. [192]

"And yet he always wonders why a woman holds her hat on when she is driving," remarked the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"You know what a fuss men always make about big theater hats," said the president. "Well, thinking to please Tom, I got a tiny bonnet, which was so becoming that it attracted as much attention as a regular mountain of feathers and velvet."

"And wasn't he pleased?" asked the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Not when the bill came in, and he found that it cost rather more than a large hat. I said that he ought to be content to pay for the principle of a thing. He replied that it looked as if the interest was all about all he could afford. I suppose he thought that was sarcastic."

"Men have such queer ideas of humor, anyhow," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "why, I know a man who once laughed heartily at a joke on himself." [193]

"Perhaps he owed money to the man who made it, or wanted his vote for something," said the girl with the classic profile.

"Well, I'd like to know who first invented hat-pins," said the brown-eyed blonde. "I am sure it was not a woman, because—"

"It was a man, and he was either an old bachelor or a bigamist," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I had two pins running straight into my scalp all during service on Sunday. Dick was with me, too, and it was so hard to look saintly when—"

"Men always ask why we don't tie our hats on, when we complain of pins," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Wouldn't we look nice with our jaws tied up like those of a small boy with the toothache?"

"To say nothing of having our hearing so impaired that we couldn't be sure whether compliments whispered into our ears were intended for us or were merely remarks made about other girls," said the brown-eyed blonde. [194]

"Well, girls," said the president, "I see you all resent it, as I do; and I'm just going to write that horrid man a letter telling him that the Teacup Club has too many serious topics to discuss to waste time upon anything relating to millinery."

"Speaking of millinery," said the blue-eyed girl, "did you ever see anything as sweet as the new hats! I went with Elizabeth to select the ones for her trousseau the other day, and it did seem hard to me that a girl only has a chance *once* in her life to buy as many hats as she really wants, and—"

"Not to mention the fact that it is just at the time when she is so much interested in her future husband that she can't give her whole mind to the subject," broke in the girl with the eyeglasses. "Now, if she could only choose her trousseau a year after her marriage, instead of before."

"Yes; or even six months," said the president. "Well, my new hat must cost five dollars less than I had hoped. I borrowed that amount from Tom last month; and—will you believe it?—he [195]

took it out of my allowance for this month, in spite of the fact that I told him I had spent it for his birthday present."

"But why didn't you take it out of your housekeeping allowance? You usually do," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"Because I had already taken enough for a half-dozen pairs of gloves out of that. It happened that he had not given a single stag dinner during the month, so I could not filch too much without discovery. When he gives a dinner, I can always pay myself well for the trouble of it. If he complains of the bills, I just say, 'Yes, dear, I see that we cannot afford any more stag dinners,' and that settles it at once," she added.

"I should think it would," said the blue-eyed girl, thoughtfully. "Did you tell Tom how mean you thought it of him to expect you to pay back money that you had borrowed?"

"I did. I said, 'I wouldn't be as selfish as you are for anything!'"

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"And did that make him feel badly? I should think so."

"Not a bit. You don't know Tom; he just laughed as if it was funny. Luckily, I had given him a silk umbrella for his birthday, and as he has two already, and this one is—er rather small, I shall get a good deal of use out of it myself."

"And you hadn't one at all, had you?" said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I remember the day you lost yours."

"Yes. Wasn't it nice of me to buy one for him when I really needed it for myself? But one can't expect a man to appreciate generosity."

"Oh, girls," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "what do you think I heard to-day?"

"I don't know what *you* heard," said the girl with the Roman nose, "but I heard that Clarence Lighthed has just inherited a fortune from an uncle whom he had never seen! You know he is my cousin, and—"

"Have you just heard that," said the blue-eyed girl, "He told *me* about it a week ago—the day you said he was stupid, Emily. I knew at the time that you would feel badly when you discovered that it was only—er—grief for the death of his uncle, which made him so quiet and thoughtful. Poor fellow, it must have been *such* a shock to him!"

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"How kind of you to comfort him in his sorrow," said the brown-eyed blonde, in sarcastic tones.

"Yes, dear—especially as he could have his choice of comforters. I think you said that you, too, have a piece of news, Emily."

"Why—er—yes, I heard that Effie Bittersweet is on the verge of nervous prostration."

The blue-eyed girl said never a word; she looked out of the window opposite her, and there was a soft, sweet smile on her face. Perhaps she failed to see the glances that were exchanged by the others.

"Oh, girls, have you heard the awful thing that happened to me yesterday?" asked the girl with the eyeglasses. "No? Then, I had better tell you all about it myself. I had an engagement with Harry; we were to call on his aunt who lives in Rogers Park—nothing very exciting, you know. Well, Mr. Doolittle came in early to ask me if I wouldn't go to the *matinée* with him. Now, I knew Harry would take me to see his aunt any day, and Mr. Doolittle might never ask me to go to the *matinée* again, so I accepted his invitation at once."

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"You would have been very stupid if you hadn't," said the president.

"So I thought. Then, I told him that I must stop in at the drug store and send off a telephone message. You see, I didn't want to give Harry all the trouble of coming up in vain."

"You are always so thoughtful," said the blue-eyed girl.

"I try to be. I called Harry up, but he was not in, and I told the office-boy to tell him that I was ill, and could not go with him to Rogers Park, but hoped to be out in a day or two. The boy was as stupid as he could be; I had to repeat the message twice, and even spell my name. Oh, it was awful!"

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"What? his stupidity?" asked the girl with the Roman nose.

"No; my own. As I was going out, the clerk stopped me, and said, 'You needn't have taken all that trouble, Miss Marion; you were telephoning to Mr. Vansmith, weren't you? Well, that was he that just went out; he was standing about three feet away from you all the time you were trying to make the person at the other end of the line understand!'"

"Well, I hope your father is satisfied *now*," said the president. "You have been trying to get him to put in a telephone all winter."

"Humph; you don't know my father very well, dear. When I told him about it, he only said that he was more fully satisfied than ever that women were not to be trusted with telephones!"

"Then there was that horrid drug clerk," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "why didn't

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he stop you when Harry came in, instead of letting you—”

“The fact is, that I knew he was trying to attract my attention all the time, but I thought that it was only somebody else who wanted to use the telephone in a hurry, and I took my own good time.”

“He might have known you would have done that,” said the girl with the classic profile. “Girls, I often wonder why drug clerks are such gloomy, misanthropic creatures?”

“Dear knows,” said the president; “I’ve often noticed it, though. And how cross a clerk in a shoe store always is! Strange, too, when they have such light, easy work. I tried on seventeen pairs of boots only yesterday, and I never was so tired in all my life; yet I was as amiable as possible, and the clerk, who had nothing to do but wait on me, was so rude that I thought seriously of having the proprietor in to hear of it. However, I compromised by going out without buying anything.”

“It was very good of you, I’m sure,” said the blue-eyed girl. “You know Marie sends to Paris for all her shoes. I never saw such beauties in all my life as she wears.” [201]

“H’m. I know she says so,” returned the girl with the Roman nose, “but—look here, if I tell you something, will you promise never to tell it as long as you live? Well, then, I spent the day with Marie last week. She had a lovely new pair of shoes, and I tried my best, without asking directly, you know, to find the name of the Parisian boot-maker, and how much she paid for them.”

“Of course you didn’t find out,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “Marie can be as impervious to a hint as a man.”

“M’hm. Well, she got ready to go out with me, and just as we were ready to start she was called out of the room. Her boots were all in the closet, and I—well, somehow I just happened to be near the door, it was ajar, and I stooped down to look at the maker’s name on them, when—oh, girls, the door behind me suddenly flew open!” [202]

“Oh, my goodness, it was Marie herself! What did—”

“No, it was the maid. She said: ‘Will you please tell Miss Marie, when she comes in, that Cashly has sent up for the pair of boots she didn’t take. The boy is waiting in the hall.’”

“Well, I never,” said the blue-eyed girl. “But I’ve always said that if I sent to Paris for my boots I’d have better looking ones than *she* gets!”

“But then Marie gets a great deal for her money, dear, even if the boots themselves are not of a superior quality,” said the girl with the eyeglasses.

“Very true. By the way, who went to Marie’s tea yesterday?” said the girl with the dimple in her chin; “I did not. Since the founding of this club I have cared less and less for gossip and society, and—”

“Then you didn’t mind not receiving an invitation to Marie’s after all!” said the brown-eyed blonde. “I must tell her that. She said yesterday that she didn’t expect you to speak to her for a month.” [203]

“By the way,” said the girl with the Roman nose, hastily, “Dick made rather a good suggestion yesterday. He said why not have a phonograph, or even a stenographer, in the room while we are discussing a topic; then we could have copies made, and—”

“That reminds me,” said the president, and she rapped loudly for order. “Girls, do be quiet. We have a very important question to decide to-day. A number of men have expressed a desire to become members of this club, and—”

“I vote against it,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “We can all express our real opinions now, knowing they will go no further, whereas—”

“No club man can ever keep a secret,” broke in the girl with the dimple in her chin. “As for us, we would die rather than divulge—”

“They are so curious, too,” broke in the girl with the classic profile. “We have all talked so much about our meetings that they want to know how they are conducted, that is all.” [204]

“Yes, that is just it,” said the brown-eyed blonde, “and once in they would spoil all the originality of it by having rules and all that. Then they’d go away and say that we couldn’t get along without them.”

“The idea!” said the president, “when that’s the very reason I set our time of meeting in the afternoon!”

“Look here,” said the girl with the eyeglasses, “of course we don’t want to offend them. Why not have a ‘man’s day’ once in a while?”

“So we might,” said the president; “but we had better wait until we get all our new things. Well, I suppose, since we are all agreed, that we had better not waste time in voting on it. I’m awfully glad to see you here, Elise; I was afraid you would not be able to come.”

“Oh, I was determined not to miss it,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “I left word for them

to tell the doctor I was asleep if he called in my absence. I have been troubled with insomnia, you know, and he would tell them not to disturb me. Of course, he gave me strict orders not to go out, but he—” [205]

“Will never know that,” said the brown-eyed blonde. “Oh, such a time as I had last fall when I was ill! You see, papa was going to make me go to Philadelphia to stay with old Aunt Borely. I—I was not very well, anyhow, so I took to my bed.”

“Yes, and you had that nice young doctor, too,” said the girl with the eyeglasses. “Oh, why am I so brutally healthy!”

“I did, and he cured me of my particular ailment,” went on the brown-eyed blonde. “I had a most becoming light in the room the first time he called, and what do you think he did? Pulled every window-shade up to the top, until I looked a perfect fright—and he young enough to know better!”

“Pshaw!” said the girl with the classic profile. “All doctors are horrid. Why, I once had such a handsome one that he sent my pulse away up every time he felt it. I did look so horrid that one day I—I put on a little rouge just before he came. In consequence he said I had a high fever, and put me on a milk-and-water diet for three days, besides giving me—” [206]

“Like the mean thing I had last year,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “I had a cough, and wanted a trip to Florida; instead, I got a pair of overshoes, a lot of flannels, and a mackintosh.”

“Of course,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “Well, I don’t believe my doctor is a good one; he—”

“Is too ugly to be a really good one, anyhow,” broke in the blue-eyed girl. “Fancy being delirious, and seeing that creature enter the room!”

“By the way,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “I wonder why ugly men are always having their photographs taken and expecting one to keep them hanging up where one can see them constantly!”

“Perhaps,” said the brown-eyed blonde, “they hope it may be a case of

“But seen too oft, familiar with its face,
We first endure, then pity, then”—

No, I don’t mean that,” she broke off, blushing. [207]

“I should hope not,” said the blue-eyed girl, in shocked tones. “I should be sorry to think that any member of this club—”

“The very queen of clubs,” broke in the president; “that is what Tom calls it—when he is in a particularly good humor, I mean. I think we had better adjourn now,” she added; “Elise really ought not to be out late, and I am wild to tell Tom that men will not be admitted to membership. Doesn’t the doctor do that pain in your chest any good, Elise?”

“You don’t suppose that I told him anything about that, do you?” cried the girl with the Roman nose. “I hope I am not so silly as that—with Elizabeth’s wedding coming off in a week, and my lovely low-cut gown all ready to wear to it!”

“Just wait one moment,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “I haven’t got to-day’s topic down in my note-book. What did you say it was, Evelyn?”

“Oh, my goodness!” cried the president, turning pale, “here we have had a meeting, and I have forgotten to suggest any topic—and not one of you thought to remind me of it! Oh, I am afraid that all my efforts to advance you intellectually are wasted, after all!” [208]

“Never mind,” said the girl with the eyeglasses, “this has been an executive meeting, anyhow.”

“Why, so it has,” said the president, kissing her; “what a comfort you are, Marion dear. Tom’s handsome cousin is coming home from Montana next week with a lot of money, and you shall be the very first girl to have an introduction to him!”

“Have you seen Jack Bittersweet lately?” asked the girl with the eyeglasses, as she linked her arm in that of the girl with the dimple in her chin, after the meeting had dissolved.

“Yes, he came to see me yesterday. I was in agony all the time he was there, lest Dorothy come in. I knew she would never believe that it was the first time he had done it since they quarreled!” [209]

“Of course she wouldn’t. Did he ask your advice?”

“Yes. So does she—but neither of them take it.”

“You don’t expect that, I hope. Well, did you find out if he still cares for her?”

“He does. I sat on the sofa, in my prettiest house-gown, and he took a chair six feet away. He didn’t even tell me that fewer men would go to the dogs if there were more women like me in the world!”

“Well, I only hope that they will soon come to their senses, that’s all. Dorothy looks like a

ghost, and as for Jack—”

“If they don’t,” cried the girl with the dimple in her chin, savagely, “I shall just have to spend a month or two in a sanatorium. And I’m not sure that that will save my life,” she added.

Chapter IX

On the Use and Abuse of Political Power

[210]

"The absurdity of some people!" said the president, pausing as she was about to call the meeting to order. "What excuse do you suppose Elizabeth gave for not asking me to look at her pretty things? She said she fancied I had grown too intellectual to care for gowns and hats!"

"How ridiculous! She had probably heard that you do not intend to send her a wedding present," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"I haven't told a soul but the members of this club that I shouldn't give her one," said the president.

"Then she couldn't possibly know it," said the blue-eyed girl, hastily.

"What enrages *me*, is the insinuation that I have ceased to care for pretty things, just because I study politics, and—er—other things. I don't see why intellectuality has anything to do with doing up one's hair with three hairpins, or—" [211]

"Wearing gowns which are frayed around the bottom," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "neither do I. And, yet they seem to be somehow connected in people's minds."

"Very true," said the president. "Girls, the editor of a literary journal has asked for some of the papers which have been read before this club. He says—"

"Mercy, what answer shall you make?" cried the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"I told him that I could not think of such a thing. I always disliked notoriety. It was very kind of him, though, and he even offered to let the authors of the papers have copies of their effusions at reduced rates, provided they took over a hundred."

"Which, of course, they would," said the blue-eyed girl. "Well, you were quite right to refuse, Evelyn. I, for one, have such a horror of publicity, and, besides, it would be quite expensive sending copies to all one's acquaintances." [212]

"True," said the president; "we are all in accord, as usual. Let us discuss, 'The Use and Abuse of Political Power,' to-day. It is a subject which is of the greatest importance to all of us, and—"

"How do you spell 'political?' With one *t* or two?" asked the girl with the eyeglasses, as she opened her note-book.

"With one—no, two. Pshaw, I can't remember. Just write it indistinctly."

"Oh, Dorothy," whispered the girl with the dimple in her chin, "I saw Dick this morning, and he says Jack told him yesterday that he didn't really know what your quarrel was about, but he meant to go and see you to-day, and ask you to forgive him!"

"I shall," said the blue-eyed girl; "and I don't mind confessing to you, Emily, that I, too, may have been just the merest possible bit in the wrong. I've felt it right along, but I couldn't admit it, until he— What shall I wear when he comes to see me?" [213]

"You might wear the blue gown he always admires so much."

"So I might. You know I wore a blue gown the day he asked me to marry him, and he said I must keep it always. Of course, this isn't the same one, but I am careful to have each succeeding one the same color, and he doesn't know the difference. Perhaps I have told you this before."

"I think you have, dear—once or twice," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, demurely.

"Yes. I don't mind letting you know, Emily, that I have missed him a good deal. Why, I had his photograph—the one I pretended to have lost, so I needn't send it back—out when you knocked at my door to-day. You couldn't have helped seeing me thrust it under Clover's cushion, if you hadn't thought something was wrong with your boot heel, and stooped down to see." [214]

"You don't say so. Well, all I've got to say is, I wish I might see Frances' face at the wedding!"

"You shall, dear. I'll ask her to be bridesmaid, and you, as maid of honor, can have a good chance to watch her. You have been such a faithful friend to both Jack and myself that you deserve at least that much satisfaction."

"Look here, Emily and Dorothy, I am afraid you are not attending strictly to the discussion," said the president. "The topic is— Frances, what on earth has made you so late?"

"It was all an accident," said the brown-eyed blonde; "I stopped for you, Dorothy, on my way to the club. The maid said you had gone already, and I was just coming away when I noticed that your little dog—what is his name? Rover? Ah, Clover! I knew it was something like that—was chewing something at the back of the hall! I went to see what it was, and—"

"Oh, my goodness gracious! Not my new sixteen-button gloves," wailed the blue-eyed girl. "I'll give that dog away to-morrow!" [215]

"No, dear, not your gloves. It was a photograph. Just as I was trying to get the pieces away

from him, Ja—I mean Mr. Bittersweet—came up the steps with a huge bunch of violets. He must have seen me standing in the hall; you know the door was open.”

“Yes, dear,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “that checked gown of yours speaks for itself!”

“I—ah, where was I? Oh—he succeeded in getting the fragments away and—really, it was too funny! It turned out to be a photograph of himself! I told him that I was almost sure that you didn’t give it to the dog purposely, Dorothy; but I am afraid I didn’t quite convince him.”

“Indeed; and where are the violets?” asked the girl with the dimple in her chin; “you don’t seem to be wearing them!”

“Why, er—no. Ja—I mean Mr. Bittersweet—threw them at the dog. You will find them right by the stairway, Dorothy, dear; but I’m afraid they are not in very good condition. What is to-day’s topic, Evelyn?” [216]

““The Use and Abuse of Political Power,”” said the president, in a faint voice. “Will somebody open the window, please; I need air!”

“Oh, Evelyn,” said the girl with the Roman nose, after the president had announced that she felt better, “I do hope you are not sitting up at night studying, and that sort of thing.”

“Why, er—no, I believe not. The fact is I’ve been going to a good many dances of late on Tom’s account.”

“But Tom doesn’t go, does he?”

“No. B—but everybody knows how fond of dancing I am; and if I didn’t go they would say he kept me at home. I don’t want Tom to pose as a tyrant, you know!”

“Of course not. You—”

“Yes. The only thing which makes me feel uncomfortable is the angelic way in which he bears my absence. It isn’t like Tom, and—” [217]

“Clarence—my cousin you know—was saying only the other day, that he thought you an angel to allow Tom and his friends to smoke in the drawing-room, just because you happened to be out,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “I wonder if that—”

“To smoke in the drawing-room!” shrieked the president, turning pale. “I’ll go home this minute, and tell him what I think of such a proceeding. No, I won’t, either; he is at the office, and it would not do any good! I never suspected such a thing and—”

“Oh, well, then the smoke couldn’t have done the rugs and curtains much harm, after all, if you never noticed the odor.”

“It’s the principle of the thing, my dear. What hurts me, is the fact that my husband respects my wishes so little, when I only go to dances to keep people from thinking ill of him, too! Well, one thing sure, I’ll have all new curtains and carpets—since mine are ruined with smoke—if he keeps on talking about hard times until he is black in the face!” [218]

“I wonder why men are always talking about hard times,” said the girl with the classic profile; “women never say anything about them.”

“Unless they are driven to it,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “My sister’s husband wanted to have his mother come for a nice, long visit, but she told him that she hardly thought they could afford it in such hard times. You see he had just made that excuse for not doing up the house.”

“With the result?” queried the girl with the eyeglasses.

“That he decided to have the house done up at once! And, after all, the old lady only stayed about a week. Helen says she can’t imagine why she went, unless, she was offended at her suggestion that she might like to take a course at the cooking-school while she was here.”

“Well, I don’t blame Helen, at all,” said the blue-eyed girl. “No man has a right to be dyspeptic before he is married, and her husband was. Everybody ought to have a fair chance, and Helen’s cooking might not have given it to him for years.” [219]

“At any rate, he can’t blame *her* for his dyspepsia—and that is something,” said the president. “Girls, does any one know why Josephine has given up her lessons at the cooking school?”

“I suppose she has made one really good loaf of bread, and doesn’t want to tempt fate again,” said the blue-eyed girl.

“That is not the reason,” said the girl with the eyeglasses, “she is engaged to a man who knows how to cook, so there is no use for her to waste any more time over it. She is studying political economy now.”

“And a very good thing, too,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “for the way money is wasted on elections, is really shocking!”

“Hear! hear!” cried the girl with the Roman nose. “Of course I don’t want to have men as

members of this club, but I can't help wishing sometimes that a few of them might hear Emily and Evelyn when they are attacking political abuses and monopolies." [220]

"For my part, I don't see why they haven't thrust the privilege of suffrage upon us long ago," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Then they would have somebody to blame, when civic and national affairs go wrong!"

"Pshaw," said the president, "that isn't necessary at all. They can come home and scold because dinner is late, or the hall gas is unlit, and so relieve their feelings just the same."

"I'm sure I don't want to vote," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "It is ever so much nicer to do as the men do with our housekeeping—just criticise that which we can never display our ignorance by attempting to do ourselves."

"That is only your sweet modesty, dear," said the girl with the classic profile. "What do you think Mr. Bonds said the other day! Ah, I was so indignant! He said it was a mistake to say that women could not throw stones." [221]

"I don't see why you were indignant at that," said the brown-eyed blonde. "It seems to me—"

"It wasn't that. It was what came afterward. He said he knew it was a libel for they could—at each other! And every man in the room laughed as if he had said something clever!"

"I declare," said the brown-eyed blonde, "it is enough to make a man-hater of me. If only people would not say that it was because of some particular man who failed to admire me—"

"There is no danger of it being laid to the door of any *one* man in your case, dear," said the blue-eyed girl. "Is that your new gown that you are wearing to-day, Frances, dear?"

"Why, yes. Quite a novelty, isn't it. How do you like it?"

"Very much indeed, dear. I stopped and looked at it hanging in the cleaner's window the other day, and thought how well it looked. You remember, don't you, Dorothy, my calling your attention to it?" said the girl with the dimple in her chin. [222]

"Quite well. I thought at the time that it was well she had not attempted to clean it herself. By the way, Helen's little boy said such a clever thing the other day. We were speaking of favorite perfumes, and how nice it was to always use the same one, and he said: 'I know what is Miss Frances' favorite perfume. Her gloves always smell of it.' 'And what is it?' Helen asked. 'Gasoline,' said the dear little fellow. Did you ever hear anything so clever in your life?"

"Oh, girls," said the president, hastily, "speaking of gloves: I had a letter from Pauline the other day, and such a heart-rending thing had occurred to her. A nice man was buttoning her gloves one day, and he said she had the hand of a fairy—Pauline seemed to think that an original remark."

"Perhaps it was the first time she had ever had it said to her," replied the blue-eyed girl. [223]

"Um—perhaps it was. She said carelessly, 'Do you think so? Why, I consider it quite large. I wear a number six.' She was sorry for that afterward."

"I suppose he looked in the other glove, and—saw that she had made a mistake," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"No, dear. But, shortly after that, they made a bet of a dozen pairs of gloves, and Pauline won. Oddly enough, she didn't know it until the gloves arrived. They were number six, and—"

"Pshaw, she could exchange them for a larger size; he would never know the difference," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Not in this case, dear. He had had her monogram embroidered on the top of each pair. And now he is offended that she does not wear them!"

"How exactly like a man," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Now, I have too high a regard for truth to—"

"Waste it on such a little thing as that? I know," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Well, I hope Pauline's mishap will be a warning to you." [224]

"She might say that she could not accept such a gift from a masculine friend," thoughtfully suggested the girl with the classic profile.

"But she had thanked him very prettily, and said they were just her size, and how did he know it? before she discovered that she could not exchange them! Oh, I just don't see any way out of it. I told Tom about it, and he said, 'Pshaw, let her tell him the truth, and be done with it.' And yet Tom is very clever—for a man."

"Indeed he is," said the blue-eyed girl, warmly, "he is one of the few people who always understands a joke when I tell it. Just because I leave out a little bit of it, some people—"

"Oh, girls," cried the girl with the classic profile, "I've been waiting for a good chance to tell you that Eunice is married!"

"Is it possible?" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I remember that she always said people [225]

ought to know each other very well before they *were* married. That was why she went for a long visit to that Kansas girl whose brother was so much in love with her. She married *him*, I suppose."

"Why—er—no. You see, he asked her, and she said she could not give him an answer until she concluded her visit. They would know each other much better then."

"And she refused him, after all?" said the girl with the Roman nose.

"Well, no. For some reason he failed to renew his offer, after her visit was over. She had known the man she married exactly three weeks when they became engaged."

"And the engagement lasted?"

"Just a month, dear. And she was so busy all the time with the trousseau that she hardly had time for a word with him."

"Perhaps it was just as well," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Has the man she married any money?"

"I suppose so. He was thirty-four, and a bachelor. A very poor man would have married long before he was as old as that. By the way, speaking of the abuse of political power, Mr. Dickenharry tells Nell that if he is really elected to the office he hopes for, she will have to ask all sorts of people to her receptions, in order that—" [226]

"And what did Nell reply to that?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"Oh, she just smiled and let it go. It will be much easier to manage all that after they are married. She says he is so busy now that she doesn't like to thwart him unnecessarily. Nell is always so thoughtful of the feelings of others."

"Indeed she is," said the president. "Anyhow if she is obliged to ask all those awful people to her receptions, she can snub them thoroughly if they accept. Oh, she is just the ideal wife for a politician; how she will help him!"

"That is just what she says herself," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, "and she also says that she wants to join this club as soon as her trousseau is off her mind. She thinks our debates on political subjects will be of great benefit to her. In the meantime, she wants me to make notes of the discussions, and let her have them." [227]

"Yes, and let Mr. Dickenharry make use of all our original ideas in his speeches!" cried the president, hotly. "I am surprised at you, Emily, for—"

"Oh, I didn't say I meant to do it, dear; I only said she wanted me to. It is so much easier to promise a thing, and then forget it, you know. Girls, I went to see dear old Mrs. Pepperly yesterday, and—"

"What, that cross, disagreeable woman!" cried the brown-eyed blonde. "What on earth made you do such a thing?"

"Oh, I always liked her, dear. When I got there, I was *so* surprised. Her son is home from Mexico on a visit, and—"

"Why, don't you remember, Emily, I told you that on Sunday?" said the president. "I mentioned that he had made a lot of money there, and—"

"How strange of me to forget it; I believe I do remember it now. We used to be quite friends before he went away, too; which makes it all the stranger. Do you know, I'm afraid I shall have to accept one of those lovely Mexican opals he brought with him, or hurt his feelings! I'd hate to do that, too, when I haven't seen him for so long." [228]

"By the way, what is Mrs. Pepperly's number?" asked the brown-eyed blonde. "I—I have been meaning to call on her for ever so long. What a clever, original woman she is!"

"Yes, do go. She said she expected you would come to see her now. I'm afraid you will not have an opportunity to see the opals though. Her son has given all the rest of them to her, and they are at the jeweler's being set. And, by the way, he insisted so that I had to let him have mine set for me. I don't know what Dick will say, but really I could not hurt the feelings of such an old friend by refusing—and of course he knows nothing of Dick!"

"For my part, I consider opals unlucky," said the brown-eyed blonde. "I wouldn't wear one for anything!" [229]

"I've heard others say the same thing, dear," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "but luckily they were people who were not likely to have the chance! So far as I am concerned, the good luck of receiving such a handsome present will quite overbalance anything unpleasant which might follow!"

"Nobody ever had such ill luck as I have, and I never owned an opal in my life," wailed the girl with the classic profile. "You know how unpleasant my Aunt Clara is, don't you? Well, the poor old soul seemed so lonely in that great big house that I asked her to make me a nice long visit, knowing that she intended to go abroad soon, and—"

"She might take you along. Good!" said the girl with the Roman nose. "Did she accept?"

"She did. Said she would stay three whole months. At the end of that time, she expects to marry a delicate clergyman with three grown daughters, and take the whole party to Europe." [230]

"And that is all the compensation you receive for thinking of others!" cried the girl with the Roman nose. "Shall you let her come?"

"I shall not. I shall tell her that unless she hears from me within two weeks, she may know that I am down with a threatened attack of scarlet fever. She has a horror of illness, and wild horses couldn't drag her here after that. But I shall have an exciting time with my sire, if he ever finds it out!"

"Humph, your father may never find it out," said the girl with the eyeglasses; "and if he did, you could simply say that you really thought you were getting scarlet fever, and only concealed the fact from him to save him anxiety."

"Pardon me, but you forget that I am a younger daughter. Papa has already had so much experience with my sisters that I have to be very careful in my explanations. This thing of being the third daughter is as bad as marrying a widower—worse, for that is voluntary." [231]

"Not always—on the part of the widower," said the blue-eyed girl. "Dear, dear, how queer some things are! I know a pair of twins, and one of them is called an old maid, the other a young widow. If anybody can explain—"

"Pshaw, I know a brother and sister who have hair of the same identical shade. He is called red-headed while she is a Titian blonde," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"And I went to school with a girl who was always called snub-nosed by everybody but the man she married," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "he said her nose was 'tip-tilted, like the petal of a flower.' Can you explain that?"

"Yes," said the president, shortly, "she has money. Oh, girls, I went to the photographer's last week, and I haven't had the courage even to snub my sister-in-law since I got the proofs. Indeed, sometimes I almost feel grateful to Tom for marrying me—though of course I don't let him know that. You have no idea how I felt when—" [232]

"Oh, yes, I have," said the blue-eyed girl, with a shudder. "I once knew an awfully nice man, who turned out to be an amateur photographer. He took two hundred and seventy-five pictures of me one summer, and I used to know just who my enemies were. They would pretend that they recognized me in them all!"

"That's nothing," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I once appeared as Cinderella at a charity entertainment, and an amateur photographer took a picture of me in costume. My foot was thrust forward, and oh, girls, it looked the size of a pumpkin. And the photographer actually took credit to himself because the face was an excellent likeness!"

"I was once photographed by an amateur," said the brown-eyed blonde; "he said my picture was his masterpiece. I always keep it on my dressing table during Lent," she added.

"I once knew an amateur photographer quite well," said the girl with classic profile, "but for each photograph he took of me I made one of him!" [233]

"With the result—" said the president.

"That he gladly bartered his collection for mine. Somehow, we haven't been very good friends since. I often think things might have turned out very differently if he hadn't bought that camera;" and she sighed, softly.

"Well, girls," said the president, "I am afraid that we must adjourn, though I had hoped we might find time for a social session after the day's work was concluded. However, I promised both Tom and the dressmaker that I'd meet them at five o'clock. She won't wait, and he will; so I —"

"But why not make him go to the dressmaker's with you," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Because I want to tell him just what I think of his behavior—smoking in the drawing-room, just because I happened to be out. If he once heard Madame contradict me in the way she does, I could never hope to produce any impression on him again." [234]

Emily and Dorothy walked home in silence, and the former noticed, with alarm, that Dorothy did not attempt to protect her skirts from the mud. When they reached her door, she turned and said:

"If I am not here when you come to-morrow, you may know that I have gone to take up social settlement work, and devote my time to the poor. If you never see me again, you may know that I forgive all my enemies. It may make Frances feel better, though I must say that she does not deserve it."

"And Jack, dear; what shall I say to him?"

"If it is any comfort to him, you might say that I do not regret my fruitless efforts to make peace with him. I hope you will think of me sometimes at work among the poor and the afflicted.

And now, good-bye—perhaps forever!”

Emily had walked perhaps a block, when she heard her name called once more.

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“Yes, what is it,” she said.

“If you know any one who wants a nice little dog, send him to me. I—”

“What! You surely don’t mean Clover?”

“I just do. After what has happened to-day, I never want to see the little beast again! And, Emily—!”

“Yes, dear.”

“If you were in my place, would you wear the blue or the geranium pink gown at the dance to-night?”

Woman as a Parliamentarian

"Oh, dear me," said the president, "I don't see why men can never understand things."

"H'm," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Are we to understand that you have just discovered that fact?"

"Of course not," said the president, "but I've just had an argument with my husband—that's why I am late to-day, girls. He will insist that this club ought to have a constitution and by-laws, and a lot of other unnecessary things, in spite of the fact that we get along nicely just as well without them."

"I suppose he would like to draft them for us," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "That is always the way with men. When they see women doing anything well they always want to come in, and take the credit of it." [237]

"So they do," said the girl with the classic profile. "I suppose he would want us to have parliamentary rules, too—as if anybody would obey them! Anyhow, it is only a man who can do but one thing at a time. I suppose it is necessary in a club of men that only one person have the floor at a time, and all that sort of thing."

"I suppose it is," said the president, "no man that ever lived could tell what anybody else was saying while he was talking himself. Well, I only wish they could see how orderly our meetings are, and how well we keep to the subject in hand, without any rules or regulations. By the way, let us discuss 'Woman as a Parliamentarian' to-day. What do you say?"

"Oh, pshaw," said the girl with the Roman nose, "you said the subject was to be 'Woman as a Factor in the Business World,' and I was to speak on it."

"Oh, well, you can use the same line of argument, anyhow; I forgot to tell you that I had changed my mind. Girls, do be quiet while she reads her paper on—" [238]

"Oh, but I am not prepared, anyhow," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I was obliged to stop in the midst of it to write the invitations for my five o'clock tea. A nice job it was, too, for I just couldn't get all I wanted to say on a card!"

"Why, I heard a man saying only the other day, that you write the most charming notes he ever read," said the girl with the classic profile.

"Thank you for telling me, dear. I shall use the telephone exclusively after this—the idea of living to know that everybody says when you are spoken of, 'Yes, what charming notes she does write.' Think of knowing that you are expected to be brilliant when you write to say you can't come to dinner because your face is swollen, or to ask how to take coffee stains out of your new evening gown."

"I know all about that," groaned the brown-eyed blonde; "once in an evil hour somebody called me 'vivacious,' and I've cultivated three wrinkles in trying to live up to it. Think of having to be vivacious at a church sociable, or when the man to whom you have just been revealing your views on the subject of friendship turns out to be engaged!" [239]

"Awful!" shuddered the girl with the eyeglasses, "but pity me, all of you. People who like me always say that I am a delightful conversationalist; those who do not, simply remark that I talk all the time. Sometimes, when I am low-spirited, it seems to me that there is not much difference between the two."

"Yes, but think of me!" moaned the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Somebody once discovered that I had a 'little head running over with curls,' I calculate that I have spent a fortune in patent curlers and alcohol lamps since then!"

"I suppose that is why you wouldn't go to the seashore with me last summer," remarked the president. "Well, for my part, I only wish I knew who it was that first called me a 'nice little woman'—it's as bad as being named Smith or living in a row!" [240]

"Pshaw, I wouldn't mind that a bit," said the girl with the Roman nose, "there's nothing like a reputation for amiability—you can be as ill-natured as you please, once it is gained."

"Humph, you seem to forget that I have a husband to remind me of things," said the president. "Well, there is one person I don't envy, and that is Barbara."

"Humph, I don't think she is so beautiful," said the girl with the Roman nose; "for my part, I think her nose might be called a snub."

"Neither do I," said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "the lower part of her face is actually coarse."

"Say what you please," said the president, "she has the reputation of being a beauty, and if she doesn't look as well as usual she just has to stay at home. She has a cold now, and her complexion is awful."

"Is it?" said the girl with the Roman nose, "I must certainly stop in to see her to-day. I never [241]

saw her when she had a really bad cold.”

“And so shall I,” said the brown-eyed blonde, “she really ought not to be neglected when she is ill.”

“I shall go, too,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “And by the way, Dick has been teasing for an introduction to her for ever so long. This will be the very time to take him to call on her—when she is certain to be at home, I mean.”

“I understand,” said the president; “it is very thoughtful of you to want to cheer up the poor thing. Girls, shouldn’t you love to see her face when she finds that Emily has brought a strange man to call when her complexion is in such a condition.”

“Oh, I don’t suppose that she will mind Dick,” said the brown-eyed blonde; “nobody else does, you know.”

“Very true,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, sweetly. “Of course he has eyes for nobody else when I am in the room; but I did not expect you, Frances, to acknowledge as much.” [242]

“Why, Dorothy,” cried the president, “here you are, at last! It isn’t like you to keep anybody waiting—that is, of course, except a man; they are accustomed to it, and—”

“Why, does Dorothy ever keep a man waiting?” said the brown-eyed blonde, elevating her eyebrows. “I had understood that she usually met them in the front hall when—”

“Yes, dear, but then I am always dressed to see masculine callers. I have so many, you know. Why, Evelyn, I would not have been late for the world, but my new gown—”

“I’m sure I don’t blame you for it, dear. I couldn’t have helped making a dramatic entry in such a poem myself.”

“But it wasn’t that which made me late, dear. I fancied there was a tiny wrinkle in the back of the waist. After examining it in every mirror in the house, I discovered that it was only the way I twisted my shoulders to look at it, which made the wrinkle.” [243]

“Well, I am glad that your mind is at rest about it, anyhow,” said the girl with the eyeglasses, “one’s back is so defenseless. Annie once sat behind me at the theater, and I endured agonies lest the bow at the back of my collar was crooked. When we came away, I found that she had actually been so absorbed in the people on the stage that she didn’t know I was there. I had been wanting to see that play for months, and, to save my life, I couldn’t have told you a thing in it after I saw it.”

“I know just how you felt,” said the president, “I once went to a *matinée* with Eustace just before Tom and I were married, and I expected to have great fun, because there was so much danger of being found out. Toward the end of the first act, I heard that horrid Miss Blanque in the seat back of me, saying, ‘Oh, Tom, what would she say if she knew!’ I can tell you that my blood boiled when I thought of such duplicity, and I was tempted to turn and wither them on the spot with a single glance!” [244]

“And did you?” eagerly asked the girl with the classic profile.

“Why—er, no. I thought Tom might ask why I had come with Eustace, though that was very different.”

“Very different, indeed,” said the blue-eyed girl. “And did you—”

“Oh, I didn’t enjoy that play a bit. I told Eustace I had a headache at the end of the second act, and—”

“No doubt by that time it was true enough. Such duplicity in one whom you trusted was—”

“Yes. And he had always said he did not admire Miss Blanque at all. Well, I went home and wrote him a scorching note. I said that but for Eustace, I should never have discovered that he was flirting with another girl while pretending to think of nobody but me!”

“That was quite right. I hope he was ashamed of himself!”

“Well, no; he wasn’t. He had been at a stockholder’s meeting all that afternoon. My own father was there, and he called him as a witness! And I actually had to explain why I had gone to the *matinée* with Eustace!” [245]

“Oh, my goodness, how awful!” cried the girl with the Roman nose. “But you said you heard Miss Blanque call him Tom!”

“So I did. It was Tom Dashaway who was engaged to Elaine. And wasn’t it a joke? She never found him out at all!”

“It is awfully hard to get ahead of a man,” sighed the girl with the classic profile; “and it is the irony of fate that when one *does* succeed in doing it, the victory is usually of such a character that, in order to retain it, one must say nothing at all about it!”

“Very true,” said the girl with the eyeglasses. “Oh, I am so enraged with Harold that I feel ready to die! I had an engagement with him on Saturday afternoon, and I forgot all about it and

went out with Marie. I never thought of him at all until I saw him coming up the street, and then I dragged Marie into a shop. I was so excited that she thought a mad dog was coming, and almost created a scene!"

"And did he recognize you?" asked the blue-eyed girl.

"I'm afraid so. He didn't come, as usual, on Sunday; and I took the dilemma by the horns, and wrote him a note, saying that I remained at home all Saturday afternoon expecting him; and why didn't he come, as he had promised?"

"Good idea!" said the girl with the dimple in her chin; "then, he would think he had mistaken some one else for you. You could pretend to be very much offended at that, and so snatch victory from the very jaws of defeat."

"So I thought. But his reply—oh, I knew I should die of rage! It said: 'My dear Miss Marion: Pray pardon me for quite overlooking my engagement with you on Saturday afternoon. Yes, I know you were at home—for I saw you at the window as I passed!' And as long as I live, I shall never be able to tell that man what I really think of him!" [247]

"Never mind, you can tell everybody else—and that is almost as satisfying," said the president; "more so, perhaps; for then you need not hear what he has to say in reply."

"I am so glad to see you looking so well to-day, Dorothy, dear," whispered the girl with the dimple in her chin; "it pleases me to see that you still take an interest in dress, and—"

"Pray, why shouldn't I take an interest in dress? Really, Emily Marshmallow, you are the queerest girl I ever did see! Here, you see me trying to conceal my poor broken heart with smiles, and then you begrudge me the slight pleasure I take in appearing decently clad. And when I mean to go and teach in a free kindergarten—well, next week, and wear a black gown with white collar and cuffs for the rest of my natural life!"

"I'm sure I don't mean to begrudge you anything, dear. And Jack says that he is sure that if you would just see him, he could explain the whole thing—" [248]

"Of course, you have been on his side all along. That is the way of the world; everybody sympathizes with the one who is in fault, and—"

"He said that he was hurrying to catch up with you on the street yesterday, and that Frances—this is what he says, dear—not knowing what he was doing, called him to rescue her hat, which had blown away. By the time he had done it, you were out of sight. You see, Dorothy, he seems to fancy that you are—well, rather nice to Clarence, and—"

"Oh, I thought Clarence was coming. So I am rather nice to the one human being who really understands me, am I? Well, you may just tell Jack Bittersweet that I shall keep on being nice to him as long as I choose—and he might know me well enough by this time to be sure that I shall keep my word!"

"Dear me, Dorothy, you surely are not crying, are you?" cried the brown-eyed blonde. "Do tell me what is wrong; perhaps I can help you." [249]

"I am afraid not, dear. I was just telling Emily that there is so much trouble in the world that I sometimes feel actually guilty when I think of my own absolutely cloudless existence! By the way, have you heard that Clarence Lighthed has just bought that pretty place in Astor Street, which was for sale? He must think that my knowledge of architecture is valuable, for he told his agent to make an offer for it just because I admired it so much!"

"Poor Effie Bittersweet," said the president. "I—ah, I don't know what has made me think of *her* just at this time, but Madame told me yesterday that she had been obliged to alter all her gowns for her. They are a full half-inch too loose, she says!"

"Really? Is Effie ill?" cried the blue-eyed girl, in surprise. "How odd that you never thought to mention it, Frances! I should have gone to see her immediately, had I known it. Pray, tell her so when you see her next." [250]

"If you are so anxious to see her, why not go with me, and tell her so, yourself," said the brown-eyed blonde, dryly.

"In this gown? and when all of hers are at the dressmaker's! I couldn't think of doing such a mean thing. I only thought that as you are always at her house, you could take a message for me; that is all."

"Tom says Clarence asked him the other day, if he didn't consider that the best thing a fellow could do was to marry some nice girl, and settle down," said the president, suddenly.

"Yes? And what did Tom say?" asked the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"He must have said 'yes,' dear; otherwise he wouldn't have dared to mention the occurrence to me at all."

"What I am wondering," said the blue-eyed girl, innocently, "is: what on earth made Clarence ask him such a question?"

"Sheer curiosity, dear," said the brown-eyed blonde, sweetly; "what other reason could he

possibly have had? By the way, girls, have you noticed that Marie is showing great strength of character lately? She has broken with Mr. Mushley, and actually refused to send back any of his presents. She says the sight of them could not fail to remind him of his loss, and she would rather have people speak unkindly of her than cause him unnecessary pain!" [251]

"How sweet of her," said the girl with the Roman nose. "I only hope he will appreciate her consideration. Girls, what do you think Elizabeth told me the other day? Why, that all the photographs of girls my brother saw when he called on Fred belonged to a man with whom he used to room, and he was only keeping them until he happened to run across him again."

"And she believed him?" said the girl with the dimple in her chin, scornfully. "How silly some girls are, to be sure! They believe anything a man tells them. To be sure, Dick was telling me the truth when he said that he only wrote all those sonnets to Clara as a joke; but that was very different."

"Very different," said the girl with the classic profile. "Girls, I heard to-day that Jack Bittersweet is thinking of throwing up his partnership, and emigrating to Australia. I beg your pardon, Dorothy, did you speak?" [252]

"Yes, dear, I was about to say that I think 'Woman as a Parliamentarian' is the most interesting topic we have ever discussed. By the way, I wonder if the climate of Australia is as unhealthy as some people think! I—I am so fond of Effie that I should hate to have anything happen to her brother."

"I think Effie could bear it, dear," said the president, "even in her present state of health. She says Jack is so cross that a hyena would be amiable by comparison."

"Jack Bittersweet cross!" cried the brown-eyed blonde. "Why, he is one of the nicest fellows I ever knew, and—"

"But after all, you are hardly a judge of masculine dispositions, dear," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Your acquaintance with the sex has been so limited, you know. Oh, Evelyn, I've been intending to ask you if we can't take up theosophy, and discuss it thoroughly at one of our meetings in the near future. I am so anxious for a thorough knowledge of it." [253]

"Indeed we can," cried the president, heartily. "You don't know how pleased I am to hear you say that, Emily,—well, if there is one thing this club can safely pride itself upon it is its thoroughness; and I am sure that is more than most organizations can do—!"

"I know it," said the blue-eyed girl; "why, my father belongs to a club which has taken six months to study the financial problems of Europe and the United States. They are not yet through discussing the subject—and yet they have the temerity to call themselves students!"

"I hope you have pointed out to them the superiority of our system over—"

"Well, no, dear; somehow it does not seem wise to discuss such a subject with one's father. Dear, dear, do you suppose that girls were so very different in the days when our fathers were young?" [254]

"Humph, no," said the girl with the Roman nose, "but they were much more afraid of remaining single. Besides, our fathers were young, too, in those days, and ever so much easier to please. Still," she added, thoughtfully, "I don't know that it is altogether that. No one is so easily subjugated as an elderly man who has become a widower. It is so long since girls have really tried to make themselves agreeable to him, that all their little ways are new to him."

"H'm, yes—unless he has grown daughters of his own," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"I don't see what difference that makes. They don't try their little ways of—of being nice on *him*; and seeing them tried on some one else is very different."

"Isn't it?" said the girl with the classic profile. "Now, for instance, it is very interesting to have a man pay one compliments; but how it does bore one to hear him say the very same things about another girl!" [255]

"Doesn't it? and yet, such is the selfishness of man, that he expects one to be as much interested," said the girl with the eyeglasses.

"Oh, girls," cried the girl with the dimple in her chin, "you know that old Mrs. Myllons is always making presents to Barbara and me! Well, one day in the beginning of the season she called for me to go shopping with her. Of course, I went. Now, it was not long after Barbara had encouraged her to give me that awful picture of Burns, and I was as eager for her to select a present for Barbara as for me. I knew I could direct her choice in either case. To my joy, she stopped to look at silks, and her choice fell upon a hideous piece of green which would demolish Barbara's complexion completely—and I really think that girl would sooner part with her life than her complexion. I managed to convey to Mrs. Myllons my personal preference for a lovely pink which cost a dollar less a yard, while encouraging her to buy the green. You see she was planning her reception, and Barbara and I were to assist her on that occasion." [256]

"So she took it, did she?" said the president. "I only hope I may see Barbara in the green!"

"You never will," wailed the girl with the dimple in her chin—"it was for me! Mrs. Myllons sent it with a lovely note complimenting me on my unselfishness in wishing Barbara to have the

handsomer piece. I dare not refuse to wear it at the reception; and my own father actually says it serves me right for trying to play a joke on Barbara!"

"You must not expect sympathy from your father, dear," said the girl with the Roman nose; "he will expect you to wear that gown all season, to save buying another. And nothing will ever happen to it, either," she added. "It is only the gown that is dearer to you than life itself which has a fatal attraction for cups of coffee or fowls carved by inexperienced hosts!"

"Did I ever tell you of the awful thing which happened to me last winter?" said the girl with the classic profile. "I believe not, though; we hadn't started our club then. Well, I just had to have a new gown, and I was so afraid that my father wouldn't give it to me that I got it without saying a word to him. I knew that even if there was a cyclone over the bill I'd have the gown anyhow. That being the case, I got a much handsomer one than I would have chosen under other circumstances." [257]

"Quite right," said the president; "if there must be an unpleasant scene, better have it over something which will fully repay one."

"So I thought. Well, the gown only came home the evening of my sister's dance; and I really wanted to enjoy that, so I decided not to give papa the bill until the next day, though the dressmaker was in a great hurry for her money."

"They always are," sighed the president.

"Yes. I was having a lovely time until supper was served, and then Mr. Rocksby emptied a plate of lobster salad over the whole front of my new gown! Florence was near; she never got farther away from him than—than she could help; and—well, you all know how he admires amiability! He apologized profusely, and I, smilingly, said, 'Oh, it doesn't make the least difference. The gown is of no value at all, and I should probably never have worn it again, anyhow.'" [258]

"How lovely of you!" said the blue-eyed girl. "It must have made a deep impression upon him."

"H'm, I don't know about that; but it did upon me. I happened to turn my head just then, and papa was at my elbow! I'd rather not tell you the things he said when I gave him the bill for that gown the next morning!"

"We can all guess," said the blue-eyed girl, with a shudder. "But wasn't Mr. Rocksby awfully nice to you after that?"

"No, he wasn't. He said that the girl who cared nothing for the destruction of such a handsome gown was too extravagant to make a good wife for a poor man! And the hardest part of it all was the fact that he must have lots of money, else he never on earth would speak of himself as 'a poor man!'" [259]

"Let us hope your father never found that out," said the president, in devout tones.

"But he did. He overheard Mr. Rocksby saying it to Florence; and that was one of the things he mentioned when I gave him the bill."

"You poor dear!" said the president. "I declare it really depresses me to hear of such persistent ill-luck. Well, girls, since we have thoroughly exhausted our subject, I think we may just as well adjourn."

The blue-eyed girl went home with the girl with the dimple in her chin, and after they had begun to sip their tea, she said:

"Is it true that Jack intends to go to Australia unless our quarrel is made up?"

"He—he *says* he will," was the cautious reply.

"Then, I want to know what you intend to do in the matter?" [260]

"What I—intend to do in the matter?" she gasped.

"Yes. Of course it is thoroughly in your hands. I have not made a single move without consulting you, and being guided by your advice. And if the quarrel is never made up, and I die of a broken heart, it will be entirely your fault!"

Chapter XII

The Club Investigates Theosophy

[261]

"We will discuss to-day: 'What Theosophy Really Teaches,'" said the president, as soon as she could make herself heard. "You expressed an earnest wish to study it,' Emily, and—"

"Did I?" asked the girl with the dimple in her chin, looking surprised. "I had quite forgotten it. However, I have been so busy with my new hats and the chairmanship of a committee appointed to instruct tenement house mothers as to the best method of bringing up children, that I have had no time for anything else."

"And no wonder," said the girl with the classic profile. "How grateful those poor ignorant people must be for your instruction!"

"M—I don't know about that. At times, I am very much discouraged. One woman said she would gladly allow her children to wear two fresh aprons a day, if I would pay for the washing of them. Another said that she had already raised six children without my assistance, and she believed she could worry on without it a bit longer. Still another was so stupid that she couldn't be made to understand how I, who had never had any children, was able to offer her such valuable suggestions." [262]

"As if it depended on experience," said the president. "The theory is ever so much more important."

"That was what I said to the woman who— You knew that I had resigned from that same committee, didn't you?" said the girl with the Roman nose.

"Why, no; this is the first I have heard of it. And you were so enthusiastic, too! What on earth has made you change your mind?"

"A woman. She—"

"Oh! I thought, perhaps, it was a man," said the brown-eyed blonde. [263]

"No. I am not as easily influenced as you are, dear. This woman lived up six flights of the dirtiest stairs I ever saw. I wondered at the time why she didn't ask the landlord to have an elevator put in; probably she hadn't thought of it. She lived in two rooms, and you never saw such awful poverty in your life. I thought, as she was so awfully poor, she couldn't have much feeling, so I told her plainly that she could never expect her children to love and honor her if she did not at once give them each a hot bath, and put up fresh curtains and a pot or two of flowers in the windows. Everybody knows how cheap curtains are nowadays—not the real lace ones, of course, but—"

"Tamboured muslin and all that," said the president. "Was she grateful for your interest in her?"

"I fear not. She looked at me, earnestly, and said: 'You've been to one of them, haven't you? I've always wanted to see somebody that had!'"

"Was the woman mad?" [264]

"I was afraid so, and I began to back out of the door, when she called, 'Mary Ellen! oh, Mary Ellen! come right in here this minute! Here is a lady who has been to one of them there beauty doctors we was talking about yesterday! She must be awful old, for she's brought up a lot of children; and come here to teach me how to raise mine; and if that beauty doctor ain't fixed her up so she looks real young!'"

"And did Mary Ellen come?" asked the girl with the dimple in her chin, sympathetically.

"I don't know. I didn't wait; but I am almost sure I heard several people laughing as I came down-stairs. After this, I shall devote my energies to foreign missions or something like that. If the heathens are not grateful for my efforts in their behalf, they at least express themselves in a tongue I don't understand; and they are too far away for me to hear them, even if I *could* understand!"

"Their ingratitude is awful," wailed the president. "Well, I'm glad you have told me all this. Otherwise, I never could have had courage to tell you my last experience with visiting the dwellers in the slums as a member of the 'Society for Procuring Better Ventilation in Other People's Bedrooms!' I called on one woman, who really seemed impressed by my arguments; she was quite polite, and never took her eyes off my bonnet all the time I was talking to her. I was so pleased with her that I gave her my address, and told her I would let her have a lot of pamphlets on the subject, if she would send for them. I knew I could not get one of my maids to carry them into that district, and besides her husband could easily come for them. He was a street paver, and no doubt would be glad to get the exercise." [265]

"Of course," said the blue-eyed girl. "Did he come?"

"No. But she herself walked in on my reception day a few weeks later. She wore a bonnet which was a perfect caricature of mine. She said she hoped I would forgive her for delaying the returning of my call so long; and didn't I think my reception-room was too warm to be quite [266]

healthy?"

"Did you ever hear of such impertinence! and in your own house, too!" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "What did the other members of the society say?"

"I don't know. I resigned, by telephone, as soon as Tom and the doctor succeeded in bringing me out of my fainting fit."

"And no wonder," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, sympathetically. "And yet, people complain that we take so little interest in the poor! Only a real philanthropist can appreciate the rebuffs we receive. The only thing which helps us to bear them, is the knowledge that we are doing such incalculable good."

"It is very sweet and good of you to feel so," sighed the girl with the eyeglasses. "I don't know that I am quite so magnanimous, myself. Oh, Catharine, dear; you were speaking of Mr. Rocksby the other day. Did you ever hear the end of his affair with Florence?" [267]

"Why, no," said the girl with the classic profile. "I only knew that it *had* an end. How on earth did you find out about it?"

"I heard that she and Effie had fallen out, and I asked Effie all about it. Of course she was glad enough to tell. It seems that there was a dance at the club in Arcadia, and Florence went out to stay with the Brownstones and attend it. Mr. Rocksby happened to meet her at the station, and went out with her, intending to return by the next train. It turned out that there was no train back until midnight, so the Brownstones invited him to dine and go to the dance with them. They even brought out a dress coat of Mr. Brownstone's for him to wear, and Florence told Effie that he looked as if he weighed twenty pounds less when he put it on."

"It's really wonderful the way people always help Florence along," sighed the girl with the classic profile. "Nobody ever does such things for *me*."

"I fancy Florence wishes they hadn't for *her*, dear. Well, he was lovely to her at the dance, and after a while he coaxed her out on the balcony for a quiet talk. Before she fairly knew what he was about, he had fallen heavily on his knees and said, 'Florence, I—' when she heard the queerest sound, and he sprang to his feet, with his hand on his back!" [268]

"Good gracious, I hope the poor old soul hadn't hurt himself?"

"No; I believe not. But he had split Mr. Brownstone's dress coat from top to bottom. And though Florence tried her very best, she never could coax him to finish the sentence he had just begun!"

"Poor Florence! No wonder she says now she thinks a man looks better in cycling garb than anything else. The sight of a dress coat must be enough to make her ill."

"I should think so," said the president. "By the way, speaking of theosophy, I wonder why its stout and elderly devotees wear such flowing white robes? The younger ones seem content with short hair and general dowdiness."

"Good gracious, you will be wondering next why politicians always wear diamonds or why dressmakers invariably appear in old-fashioned gowns," said the girl with the Roman nose; "and I must say, frankly, that I can't answer either of those questions. By the way, Evelyn, I suppose I am to congratulate you. I hear that Tom has just inherited ten thousand dollars." [269]

"I don't know whether you may congratulate me, or not," said the president. "Sometimes, I—"

"Oh! Then, there is no truth in the report?"

"Yes, it is true enough, but I don't know whether I am to be congratulated or not. You see, I was getting along very well as we were, and now I see that I need a lot of things I never thought of before—more than the extra income could possibly cover—and I shall be absolutely wretched unless I can have them."

"But you will have some of them, anyhow, won't you?"

"I'm not sure. Tom talks now of putting all the money into his business. In that case he will be obliged to work harder, because he will have more at stake; he says, also, that I shall have to be more economical than ever because every cent will be needed to extend his operations. On the whole," she added, thoughtfully, "I am rather sorry his aunt is dead. It was ever so much nicer when she was living, and I could spend the expected legacy royally, in imagination, at least." [270]

"You poor dear; to think of having cause to regret the death of a wealthy relative," said the blue-eyed girl, "but—er—couldn't Tom put you on the pay-roll as a clerk, or something?"

"I did suggest that; but he said he'd rather pay me a salary to stay out of the office. I haven't spoken to him since."

"Do you know, I always think it a mistake to stop speaking to any one," said the blue-eyed girl; "it seems unkind, and then one loses the opportunity to say unpleasant things to them, too." [271]

"I believe you are right," said the president. "No married man seems to appreciate speechless indignation, anyhow."

"I must see you alone a moment, Emily, dear," whispered the blue-eyed girl. "Can't you come with me down to the other end of the room, and let me pretend to straighten your hair?"

"With pleasure, dear," replied Emily, but there was no alacrity in her voice; "only we must not stay too long lest Frances suspect something."

"What if she does? She would only think we are talking about her—and I doubt if that would make her particularly comfortable. It is about Jack. Perhaps, you can pardon his behavior, but for me the last link which bound us is broken, and I feel now that I can start for India as a missionary without a pang!"

"My goodness, what has he done now? I've been afraid all along, Dorothy, that you would put off the reconciliation too long. While he confines his attentions to Frances, it is all right; but some time he will find out that there are a number of nice girls in the world, and—" [272]

"Frances has nothing to do with it," she replied, with great dignity. "It happened this way: I was coming home about dusk yesterday—you remember how it rained, don't you? Well, I was so miserable that I didn't even attempt to hold up my skirts—it was a kind of a comfort to let them get thoroughly draggled. A gust of wind blew my umbrella to one side, and I saw Jack and Mr. Bonds just ahead of me. By the way, did you ever notice that—er—there is a certain likeness between those two?"

"I've always said they looked enough alike to be brothers. Don't you remember, dear, when you were first engaged to Jack, you wouldn't speak to me for two weeks because I mentioned the fact?"

"No, I don't remember. Well, all of a sudden, I felt that I could forgive Jack all if I could just lay my head on his shoulder, and hear him say that he was sorry."

"Oh, Dorothy, dear, I am so glad! He told me this morning that he—" [273]

"If you will kindly allow me to proceed, without interruption, I will explain how that is now impossible. I was wondering how Mr. Bonds could be gotten rid of, so that Jack could go home with me and apologize comfortably before dinner; when he suddenly left him and ran up the Vansmith's steps. Jack was walking slowly, and I just shut my eyes, and made a dash to catch up with him. My own voice sounded like a fog whistle, as I said: 'W—wait a moment; I—I wish to speak to you.' And, oh, Emily—"

"You surely never mean to say that Jack wouldn't stop when you called?"

"It wasn't Jack. It was Mr. Bonds; Jack had gone into the Vansmith house! But, oh, Emily, if he really loved me, he would have known that I was right behind him, ready to forgive and forget. I shall sail for India some time next week, and if I never return, you—"

"But, Dorothy, Jack is only too anxious to make up. He says that a lover's quarrel is worse than a Welsh rarebit for keeping a fellow awake at night. And he told me to tell you—" [274]

"Well, Emily Marshmallow, if this is all the interest you take in our discussion of theosophy, we might as well adjourn, and go to a millinery shop or an afternoon tea," said the president, with some asperity; "and, after all the trouble I've taken in reading everything the dictionary and the encyclopædia have to say on the subject, I think you might at least pay attention to my remarks!"

"Dear me, Evelyn, I really beg your pardon. I shall borrow Elise's note-book, and study it all out before I sleep. There is nothing so productive of a good night's rest as half an hour's solid reading after one is in bed. Why, the other night, I took a book on philosophy to bed with me, and before I had read six sentences I was asleep. I never woke till nine o'clock in the morning, and the gas was blazing all that time. I doubt if I'd have waked then if somebody hadn't knocked at my door."

"It was the sweet consciousness of duty well performed," said the girl with the Roman nose. "Now, if your book had been a really interesting novel, you would have been awake half the night." [275]

"True," said the girl with the classic profile, "and been as yellow as a primrose in the morning. I often say that a few pages of really good literature just before retiring is the best thing in the world for the complexion. One girl I know says she always reads her Bible then; but I don't approve of that—if one falls asleep suddenly, allowing it to drop heavily upon the floor, it is sure to awaken the other members of the family. If I do that, my father—"

"I know," said the girl with the dimple in her chin, plaintively. "Mamma says that if I take any more solid reading to bed I may confront papa with this month's gas bill, when it comes in, for she absolutely refuses to do it!"

"Pshaw, men are all alike; though I didn't use to think so," said the president. "Now, I always forget all about the topic for discussion until half an hour before it is time to start for the club. A man would say that he hadn't time to prepare for it, but a woman's courage never deserts her. I am all ready at the appointed time, even if I have to tell the cook to have anything she chooses for dinner. Now, Tom thinks I ought to be ready by the day before, even if I have to give up a tea or a luncheon to do it." [276]

"The idea!" said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Really, women have so many things to do

nowadays that is a wonder they find time for them all; and yet, men seem to expect them to be just as good housekeepers as they were when they had nothing else to do. I regret to see that the sexes have not progressed equally."

"Indeed they have not," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Who ever heard of the new man? And if there *was* such a creature he would no doubt be so effeminate that nobody would care anything for him."

"True," said the girl with the classic profile, "sometimes, I fear that Helen's husband will develop such proclivities. Of course it is only a harmless eccentricity which makes him sew on his own buttons—I can overlook that. But the other day he was getting ready to go down town while she was out on her bicycle. Just because she was wearing one of his shirts and a collar and tie of his, he dressed up in that lovely lace collarette of hers, and was actually going out with it on! What would people have said of a man who appeared in such feminine attire!" [277]

"Goodness me, I hope he is not losing his mind," said the president. "However, if he is, Helen is always ready to supply him with a piece of hers. By the way, girls, what queer questions men do ask! Several of Tom's friends dined with us last evening, and they actually wanted to know why a stout woman always selects a tiny dog for a pet, while a wisp of a woman will be tugging at the chain of an enormous mastiff. I simply told them that they must not be so curious, for, though I would not confess it to *them*, I really could not answer the question." [278]

"And you were quite right," said the blue-eyed girl, indignantly; "by and by, they will actually expect us to give a reason for everything we do! Which is palpably absurd, since we so often do things without any reason at all!"

"Well, luckily, we are not responsible for anybody," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "Oh! I just wouldn't be a man for anything in the world."

"Would anybody, if he could help it?" queried the brown-eyed blonde. "Of course, they all pretend to like it, but one can easily see the hollowness of the pretense. Why, they would not be half so anxious to criticise our actions if they didn't feel that we have the best of things. Of course, I would not be a man for anything—"

"Nor I," said the president, "and have to give up my comfortable seat in a street car every time a woman entered." [279]

"But of course it is only right for them to give up their seats to us," said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

"Certainly, it's right. Only I shouldn't like to have to do it myself."

"Of course not. Or to have to pay for pretty things for somebody else to wear. Or to have to drop a nice book, and go out in the rain to escort home a girl who had been calling on some one else," said the girl with the Roman nose.

"Yes. Or to have to buy candy for somebody else to eat," said the girl with the classic profile.

"M'hm. Or to have the nearest woman manage one, without one being aware of the fact," said the girl with the eyeglasses. "I know! Or to have to fall in love with a girl, and marry her, just because she had made up her mind that one should," said the blue-eyed girl.

"Yes. Well, really the poor things have a great deal to endure, though many of their sufferings are mercifully hidden from them," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "But, after all, we are very nice to them, you know." [280]

"Of course we are," said the president; "we wouldn't get nearly so many things out of them, if we were not. Girls, I hear that Annie has finally decided to marry Nelson."

"I thought she had done that long ago," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Talk of a woman not knowing her own mind. That man never—"

"He knew his own mind well enough, dear. It was only about Annie's that he was doubtful," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Annie told me herself how it came to be settled. She said that she couldn't decide whether to accept him or not—"

"Which means that she had done all she could, and was doubtful whether he would do the rest," said the brown-eyed blonde.

"Perhaps so. At any rate it was still uncertain until last Tuesday. He had been out of town for several days, and returned unexpectedly. Annie had gone out to mail a letter, and just as she raised the lid of the letter-box she saw him coming up the street toward her. As they walked away together, she glanced down and saw that she still held her letter in her hand, but her pocket-book was gone!" [281]

"Goodness, you don't mean to say that she—"

"I do. She said she knew at once that she must care a good deal for a man whose sudden appearance was enough to make her post her pocketbook instead of a letter—so she said 'Yes.'"

"As soon as he asked her," said the brown-eyed blonde. "Well, what he can see in *her*, I'm sure I don't know!"

"What *she* can see in *him* puzzles me," said the blue-eyed girl, thoughtfully. "I don't see how any girl can really love and honor a man who wears red neckties; do you?"

"For *my* part, I can't see what they see in each other," said the president, thoughtfully. "Well, I really think Annie ought to give me a handsome present, for it was I who brought it all about." [282]

"Mercy, did you speak ill of her to Nelson?"

"No; but I told Tom the other day that I didn't believe that girl would ever get married. And when I make a remark like that about any girl, she may as well set about selecting her trousseau, for somebody is sure to propose to her at once."

"And yet, I doubt if Annie would be grateful to you, if you told her," said the blue-eyed girl, thoughtfully.

"One must not expect gratitude in this world, dear. The consciousness of having done one's duty is reward enough for a right-minded person. By the way, Emily dear, I hear that Dick says he will positively wait no longer. You must give him a decisive answer one way or the other, or he—"

"Yes; but he hasn't yet screwed up the courage to tell *me* so, dear. When he *does*, it will be time for me to make up my mind. I do wonder," she added, thoughtfully, "why a girl who has one lover already, is sure to win the affections of another man?" [283]

"Cause and effect," said the president, gloomily. "I never thought of buying that new hat until I heard Helen tell the milliner it was too expensive for her. After I got it home, I found it didn't match a thing I possessed. I just believe Helen said that before me for meanness, knowing I would be compelled to buy it, then. And now the milliner absolutely refuses to take it off my hands. I threatened to withdraw my trade if she didn't; but it had no effect. She knows I have more hats already than I need for this season, and by the time they are all worn out—and paid for—I shall have forgotten all about it."

"But why not pay your bill at once, and open another with somebody else? That—"

"I don't care to let Tom see the old bill just now, dear. It wouldn't matter ordinarily, but since he inherited that money from his aunt he is feeling unusually poor, and it might cause a family unpleasantness." [284]

"How thoughtful you always are, Evelyn! Really, the study of theosophy seems to have developed your character wonderfully. I do hope you will explain it all thoroughly to me," said the girl with the Roman nose; "I am really so stupid that even after to-day's discussion, I feel that I do not fully understand it."

"Perhaps at some future time," said the president, hastily. "I am sorry to say that we really must adjourn now. My mother-in-law is coming to dine with us, and I don't want her poking about the house in my absence."

Chapter XII

A Discussion and a Surprise

[285]

“‘Civic Organizations Among the Ancient Greeks,’ will be our topic for to-day,” said the president. “And, oh, girls, I am so angry with Tom that I would go right home to mamma, but for the fact that she always agrees with him. Papa invariably thinks *I* am in the right; but he would say unpleasant things about Tom, and I shouldn’t like that, either. The consequence is that I must just endure my martyrdom in silence.”

“But, what is wrong? Is it about that legacy from Tom’s aunt?” queried the girl with the Roman nose. “Dear me, I often think it’s so hard that really poor men are usually nicer than those that have money.”

“I don’t see why you always think of money in connection with me,” said the president. “Heaven knows, I am not mercenary, and I only want to live well and dress properly, in order that people may see Tom is not stingy. No, this is quite another matter. It all came from the topic I selected for to-day. I was talking, rather learnedly, about ‘Civic Organizations Among the Ancient Greeks,’ when Tom asked me suddenly what ward I live in! Of course, I didn’t know—” [286]

“Why, neither do I,” said the brown-eyed blonde, “but it must be the same one, for we both live on the north side!”

“I really don’t know, either,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “I don’t see what difference it makes though, for I could ask the clerk at the corner drug store if I needed particularly to know.”

“Of course you could,” said the president, “and so could I. But, Tom was awfully unpleasant—he couldn’t have been more so if we had been married twenty years instead of two. He said he didn’t see any use in my poking about among the civic organizations of ancient Greece, when I did not know what ward I lived in.” [287]

“Humph! I suppose next thing he will be saying that he doesn’t see any use in the Teacup Club,” said the girl with the classic profile, in sarcastic tones. “A man will say anything when he is angry.”

“Humph! I fancy he will hardly say anything like that, dear. He knows it has its use, if it is only to make me look more leniently on his own club. When we first organized it he complained a good deal about the demands it made on my time and attention, and I just said: ‘Oh, very well, dear, let us both give up our clubs, and spend all our spare time at home together.’ After that, he held his peace on the subject.”

“But you wouldn’t have given it up, would you?” asked the brown-eyed blonde, anxiously.

“Of course not—but Tom didn’t know that. By the way, Emily, what is making Dorothy so late to-day?”

“I fancy she is engaged,” replied the girl with the dimple in her chin, demurely; “at least Jack Bittersweet was on his way to call on her a couple of hours ago, and I suppose—Pardon me, Frances, did you speak?” [288]

“I—I was about to say, ‘how nice’—for Dorothy, I mean. By the way, girls, I—I am thinking of going to Omaha for a nice, long visit as soon as I can get ready.”

“But I thought you had already refused Lola’s invitation,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin.

“I—I had. But, really I have bought so many pretty things of late that I can get ready for my visit without the slightest trouble, and as my last visit was cut short, I—”

“Yes, I remember that quite well, dear. I remember that you came home a few days after Dorothy broke with poor Jack. But I don’t understand why you have been embroidering so much table linen lately. You surely will not need that for a visit to Omaha.”

“Why, er—no. I—I shall take it as a present to Lola’s mother, I think. You have no idea of how fond she is of me.” [289]

“Indeed, I have, dear,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, warmly. “I’ve often noticed that married women who have no grown sons *are* fond of you. It is rather a pity, as things turned out, that you cut your last visit short; I am really afraid, if you go now, that you will miss Dorothy’s wedding.”

“At any rate, dear, she will not miss it herself. Really, I think the poor girl would have lost her mind if she had lost Jack. These disappointments are so hard to bear that—”

“I shall tell her that you said so, dear. I am sure she and Jack will both—”

“Oh, girls,” said the president, hastily, “do you suppose that Greek women used actually to wear those dowdy gowns on the street? Of course they would do very well for tea gowns, but—”

“I don’t suppose anything of the kind,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “It was chiefly the men who made the antique statues, wasn’t it? Very well, then, the poor creatures had no idea of [290]

style, and just reproduced the gowns they happened to admire themselves.”

“True,” said the girl with the classic profile; “men always detest the ruling fashion of the hour. And yet, they seem to think we dress to please them,” she added, derisively.

“I know it. And the women of ancient Greece were just like anybody else, I suppose,” replied the girl with the eyeglasses. “However, if they really wore white as frequently as they seem to, they must have had more money than I have to pay the laundress.”

“Yes, or the principal street of Athens—I forget the name of it, must have been a good deal cleaner than State street,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “I don’t suppose, however, that the carving of statues could have made much dirt, and really the ancient Greeks seem to have done little else.”

“At any rate their system of civic organization was—dear me, what was it? I had it all written down on the back of an invitation to dinner, and I must have lost it as I came along,” wailed the president. [291] “Oh, dear, what shall I do?”

“Never mind, you can tell us what you remember,” said the girl with the Roman nose, soothingly. “None of us know enough about it to detect the fact if you *are* wrong.”

“It isn’t that; I’ve got it all at home in the old school book I copied it from. But, as I say, it was on the back of an invitation to dinner, and I can’t remember whether it was for next Tuesday or Thursday!”

“Goodness me, that is really serious,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin; “but perhaps Tom will remember.”

“Tom remember the date of an invitation to dinner! How little you know about men. Why, he would tell me the wrong day, if he did remember, just to escape putting on his dress coat and going with me.”

“Humph! from what Helen says, you may be thankful that he goes at all. Her husband does not. She says—” [292]

“Helen didn’t manage him properly at first, that’s all. When Tom first began to declare he wouldn’t go to dinners, I would just say, ‘Very well, dear, we’ll both remain at home, and tell our would-be hostess the true reason why we didn’t come. And now, I often reap the benefit of that Spartan policy. Of course, he is sometimes detained at the office by important business, or even called off by a telegram just as we are about to start. However, I always remember that he is only human after all, and seldom revenge myself in any other way than by telling him that Mr. Troolygood sat next me at table. Life will be a much more complicated affair for me if that dear fellow ever takes it into his head to marry.’”

“I think you are perfectly safe for some time to come, dear,” said the girl with the classic profile, “his married sister, with whom he lives, is anxious for him to marry. She has the habit of inviting any girl he seems to admire, so constantly to the house that she soon loses all her charm for him.” [293]

“No man likes courtship made easy,” said the girl with the Roman nose. “Mr. Troolygood will surely die a bachelor unless he succeeds some day in unearthing a girl whom his sister dislikes. That is hardly probable, either, since he invariably admires a girl with money—a habit, by the way, which I have also noticed in other young clergymen.”

“It is not confined to young clergymen, dear,” remarked the girl with the eyeglasses. “Talk about women being mercenary, I have often noticed that men think much more of money than we do. We know that they must provide for us somehow, and the doing of it is their affair.”

“Oh, girls,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin, “what excellent mental training we do receive at this club! Dorothy was wondering the other day how we ever got along without it; and, indeed, so was I. A reputation for being intellectual is the nicest thing in the world; once you have it, you can be as silly as you choose, and people will feel actually grateful to you for unbending. It has its drawbacks, though. I find one must be more careful than ever to have cuffs and gloves immaculate.” [294]

“True,” said the girl with the classic profile. “Girls, a college professor asked me the other day why we always wear veils on the street!”

“And what did you reply?” queried the girl with the Roman nose.

“To keep our faces clean! What did you suppose?”

“Oh! I thought you told him the truth. However, the more intellectual a man is the less he understands women. One of his students would—”

“Know better than to expect the truth in reply to such a question? Of course he would,” said the president; “but oh, girls, if an octogenarian knew as much about us as a sophomore *thinks* he does, what a queer world this would be!”

“Unpleasant rather than queer,” said the girl with the dimple in her chin. “Of course we understand men thoroughly; but that is a very different matter.” [295]

"Oh, very different," said the girl with the Roman nose. "But aren't they queer? Why, I once knew a man who called a girl a 'most adorable little flirt,' and then felt very much aggrieved when she kept on flirting after they became engaged!"

"Lots of girls never have an opportunity to flirt until they *are* engaged," remarked the girl with the dimple in her chin. "To some men, an engagement ring on a girl's hand has the same effect that a 'Keep off the grass' sign has on children."

"True," said the girl with the Roman nose. "Oh, Marion, shall you also visit Lola this year?"

"Not this century," replied the girl with the eyeglasses. "Didn't you hear what happened the last time she was here?"

"Why, no; except that she was to dine with you. What happened? Did she discuss art in a monologue from soup to coffee? or, did—"

"Yes, she did that; but it wouldn't have really mattered, except for—you see it was this way: when she was here last summer, she gave me one of her, well, *she* calls them paintings. I accepted it with profuse thanks; and hung it in the darkest corner of the attic as soon as her train was well out of Chicago. When I heard that she was coming back, I fished the picture out of its corner, and gave it a prominent place in the parlor, telling her it had been there all the time." [296]

"Well, I'm sure she ought to be satisfied with that," said the president; "not many people care enough for Lola to hang her pictures even temporarily on the parlor walls. The one she gave me is in the cook's bedroom—the poor woman has been complaining of insomnia lately."

"No wonder. Unluckily I forgot to coach my family, and when we came in from the dinner table, my brother Frank joined us. You know Lola *is* pretty when she remembers to comb her hair and remove her painting apron."

"Mercy on us! did he criticise her painting while she was present?" [297]

"No. He only said, 'Hello, where did you get this new picture? I never saw it before. Looks like the one that has been vegetating in the attic!'"

"You needn't tell us the rest, dear; we all know Lola. It was too bad, when you had only done it to spare her feelings, too!"

"Dear! dear!" said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "I wonder why the most hopeless artists are ever the most generous with their productions? They seem to wish to give them away, whereas—"

"Self-preservation, dear. When one has done something dreadful, one dislikes to be constantly reminded of the fact!" said the girl with the classic profile. "You know my eldest sister, don't you? Well, her husband has an awful temper, but he seldom gives Sophie any trouble. Whenever he begins to be unpleasant, she says: 'Isn't it fortunate, dear; if you should die, or we should ever separate, I could have a good income, anyhow—I could just publish in book form the poems you wrote to me before we were married!'" [298]

"And what then?" asked the president, breathlessly.

"Oh, he kicks the dog or snubs his typewriter; but he never says another word to Sophie."

"And yet, Sophie used to be considered dull at school," said the president, thoughtfully. "Well, that's only another proof that even genius needs a special opportunity."

"Speaking of opportunities," said the girl with the eyeglasses, "have you heard of Marie's last mishap? No? I thought not. You know that delightful young physician who cares nothing for society, and declines all non-professional invitations, and never calls on a woman under seventy. Well, Marie has developed neuralgia, grip, and nervous prostration in swift succession, and he has been called in to attend her. You see, it is this way: it gives her an opportunity to see him in bewitching tea-gowns, and she studies new poses on the sofa when she is not taking powders."

"Oh! And when are they to be married?" asked the president. [299]

"Never, dear. He says he had long loved her silently, and was trying to summon up enough courage to tell her so. Now, however, he sees that she is too delicate to make a good wife for a hardworking professional man!"

"Humph! No wonder Marie's little brother told mine he wants to go away to boarding-school," said the girl with the Roman nose. "Well, I always did hate deceit. I never—"

"By the way," said the president, "I thought you had such a bad headache that you could not go out to-day."

"That was when mamma wanted me to accompany her to a meeting at the orphan asylum, dear. I felt ever so much better after she was gone."

"I am so glad you care so much for the club," said the president. "I gave up a luncheon at my mother-in-law's, in order to come, myself. I wanted awfully to go—all the other guests were lovely old ladies—perfect walking encyclopædias on the subject of servants, and the proper time to hunt moths or cut first teeth." [300]

"Oh, I forgot to tell you, dear," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "Tom's mother sent you a message by me that she had put the luncheon off until Friday because you were so disappointed at your inability to be present."

"Well, if she expects me to waste a whole morning on those old frumps, she is very much mistaken, that is all. And you are no true friend of mine, or you would have told her I had an engagement for that day, too!"

"Humph! You seem to forget that I am afraid of her, too. She was my old Sunday-school teacher, and she would as lief be disagreeable to me as to you. Besides, it is not as if Tom had no unmarried brothers. One has to consider her feelings, you know, and—"

"Very true, dear. You always were charitable, Emily—I can just as well go to bed with a cold on Friday. Well, I fear we must adjourn now. What a profitable meeting we have had! I only wish Dorothy could have heard some of the arguments that—" [301]

"Yes, indeed, Dorothy needs all of the good sense she can possibly obtain in any form," murmured the brown-eyed blonde.

"Not now that she is about to be married, dear," said the girl with the dimple in her chin. "However, I am sure that nothing save death or a boil on her chin will ever keep her away from another meeting. She says she considers the founding of this club her life work."

"And a noble one, too," said the president, warmly. "Well, if ever a girl entered upon matrimony with bright prospects, *she* is that one. I verily believe she could make Jack Bittersweet do anything she wanted, whether he liked or not!"

"At any rate, she has begun well," said the brown-eyed blonde, sweetly.

When the girl with the dimple in her chin reached the blue-eyed girl's home, she ran up the stairs to her friend's room, two steps at a time, and burst open the door. That young person was discovered, radiant with smiles in spite of the traces of recent tears; she was seated at her desk, and the waste basket was overflowing with crumpled sheets of her best note paper. [302]

"Oh, you dear, Dorothy," said the visitor, "tell me all about it, do! I was dying to come earlier, but I wanted to see what Frances would do when she heard that Jack was coming here, so I had to stay all through the meeting. Evelyn says that no girl ever had brighter prospects in marrying than you, and—"

"Oh! then, they all know I am to be married, do they? Did Jack tell? I thought he would hold his peace, because—"

"Well, not exactly; but he told me that he was on his way here to ask you to forgive him for everything he ever did! And he said he just wouldn't come away until you set your wedding-day, and so—"

"Oh! he told you that, did he? Well, it is set, and—" [303]

"Dear old Jack, he must be the happiest fellow in the world, for he—"

"M—I can't say that he looked it when he went away; however, some people have such a way of concealing their emotions. I never had myself; I am as open as the day—anybody could know just what I intended to do all the time."

"Of course; I told Jack how it would be from the start. But I don't see why he looked so melancholy when he came away. Didn't you set the wedding day early enough to please him?"

"He said he didn't want to know the day, and—"

"Didn't want to know the day of his own wedding! Why, the poor boy must be crazy; he—"

"The date of his *own* wedding! Emily Marshmallow, are you out of your mind? I said the date of *my* wedding, and—"

"Would you mind feeling my pulse, dear, or examining my eye to see if there is a look of insanity in it! For really, I don't see how you and Jack can be married to each other on different days, unless you are thinking of matrimony on the instalment plan; and that—" [304]

"Married to each other? Jack Bittersweet and I? Why, Emily Marshmallow, you haven't listened to a word I have been saying, when I have been telling you for the last half hour I am to marry Clarence Lighthed, the only man I ever loved, next month, and—"

"Oh, Dorothy, don't! If Jack did not ask you to marry him to-day, it was only that he hadn't the courage, and—"

"He did, dear—twice. But you see, I had accepted Clarence an hour before he came. Well, it is a great comfort to know that I never encouraged poor Jack! You will bear me out in that, I know. And oh, Emily, Clarence is the dearest person in the world! You can't imagine how happy first love makes one! I—I wouldn't say a word to Frances now if I saw her with one eyebrow a full half inch higher than the other. But, what is the matter? You—" [305]

"I—I feel a little faint, dear; that is all. Did you—er, try to soften the blow to Jack?"

"I did. I advised him to marry Frances; said that I knew she would make him happier than I could ever have done, and their marriage was the one thing needed to complete my own happiness."

"Well, he wouldn't marry her now if—not if she was a wealthy young widow. Did—did Jack say anything about me?"

"Why, er—yes; he seemed sort of offended with you for something. I don't know what it was. The only reference I made to you in our whole conversation, was to tell him that you had seen all along that I intended to marry Clarence. Of course if you had not been able to make him understand that fact, it was his own stupidity, and not your fault. Oh, I tell you, I always defend my friends—even before they are attacked! But what is the matter? You look sort of queer?"

"I—I was only wondering what they would say at the club! They—they seemed to have an idea that you would marry Jack, and—" [306]

"Marry Jack Bittersweet! What on earth could have put such an idea into their heads? I only hope, Emily, that you—"

"Oh, no, dear; nothing of the kind. I—I merely told them that he was on his way to ask you to marry him, and—"

"Very thoughtful it was of you, dear. I only wish I could ask you to be bridesmaid for your pains; but Clarence has somehow gotten an idea that you are not a friend of his. There was no one else to oppose the match, and I—I doubt if he'd have asked me quite as soon if you hadn't; so I shall try to forgive you, in time, for the things you have said about him."

The girl with the dimple in her chin gasped, but her only reply, was: "I really don't know what the other members of the club will say. They—"

"The club. I am so glad you mentioned it. There was a meeting to-day, was there not? I was just writing Evelyn a letter when you came in, saying—" [307]

"That you want us to meet twice a week after this! How nice; that is just—"

"No, dear; it was a letter of resignation I was writing. Dear Clarence has such a horror of intellectual women, that I—"

"But, Dorothy, you know when you founded the club, you said the membership would be for life, and—"

"Emily Marshmallow, I never said anything of the kind! And, if I *did*, only a person of your colossal selfishness would expect me to waste my time on a mere club when I want to devote eighteen hours a day to the selection of my trousseau, and the other six to Clarence! And, if you want to know my real opinion of the club, I consider it the greatest bore among my social duties!" [308]
[309]

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Transcriber's Notes:

Obvious punctuation errors repaired. This text uses both single quotation marks and double quotation marks within dialogue. This was retained as printed.

Page 82, "nowaday" changed to "nowadays" (nowadays don't intend)

Page 216, "absense" changed to "absence" (bears my absence)

Page 245, removed repeated word "heard" (you heard Miss Blanque)

Page 296, "he" changed to "her" (criticise her painting)

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE TEACUP CLUB ***

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