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1886.

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DENTON, MARYLAND: SATURDAY MORNING, JANUARY 2, 1886.

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AFTER FIVE YEARS.

"It is too bad!" pouted pretty Mrs. Benton. "Amy made such a sweet Columbine. The pantomime will be nothing without her."

"But Miss Amy couldn't help getting sick, I suppose," said her elder brother dolefully, for Columbine had always been very sweet to him, and the farce seemed a farce indeed without her.

"But we'll have to get along somehow. Teddy says he is going to hire someone from the theatre."

"I don't like the idea of a professional actress," objected Mrs. Benton. "But I suppose we can't do any better."

"She's a downstair. Shall I bring her up?"

"Why, Teddy?" Mrs. Benton began, "what made you—"

"We must see whether she will do," interposed Dick. "Bring her up, Teddy. I hope you chose a pretty girl."

"She's a good deal prettier than Amy Lowe," Teddy declared.

"But Dick regarded him with derision. "You never had good taste, Teddy," he observed in a superior tone. "It wasn't born in you."

Teddy made no reply, but started to bring his Columbine and proved his point by evidence. She was a pretty girl of a very striking type, she had a fair delicate face, whose flowing lines were thrown into clear relief by a framework of soft wavy brown hair; her hazel eyes had in them the sweet coyness of a fawn, and her slender figure had a childish suppleness that quite belied her 16 years. "This is Miss Violet Glenn, Blanche," Teddy said, by way of presentation.

"Have you ever played Columbine before?" Mrs. Benton began somewhat awkwardly, with the odd feeling that she was asking the girl to do something beneath her.

"Oh, yes! I used always to be cast for that role when I was a little girl. I know the part very well."

"Teddy is to be Harlequin," Mrs. Benton went on; "I mean my brother, Mr. Terry."

Violet raised her eyes to Teddy's face and met a look that made her cast them down again.

"Do you think you could play with me?" he queried.

"Oh, yes!"

"So it came about. The pantomime was a grand success, and by courtesy the little actress was asked to the collation which Mrs. Benton gave afterwards to the participants. Under the Queen Anne stairs that angled up to the roof of the house was a cosy corner, where Teddy seated Violet and brought her refreshments.

"I suppose I shall never see you again after to-night," he said, gloomily.

"You can see me any night that I play," said the young coquette.

"Not you," Teddy answered with a sigh. "Columbine—"

"I am not a Columbine, but a Violet," she said saucily.

"May I call you that?" was his eager query. "Oh, Violet, I don't know what I am going to do without you."

"What did you do before?"

"I don't know. It nearly kills me when I think of your going away with that traveling troupe. I saw you, Violet, do you think I could play Harlequin well enough to go on the stage?"

"I don't know," she answered doubtfully. "You don't play it very well. But I wouldn't go on the stage if I were you, Mr. Teddy. It isn't very nice."

"Then why do you stay?"

"I have to; I'm poor. But if I had a father and mother like you—"

The sweet voice choked.

"Aren't they good to you?" asked Teddy, clenching his fists fiercely.

"Sometimes," Violet answered, "but it isn't like having somebody of your own to take care of you."

Teddy put out his hands and took hers with an awkward tenderness.

"I'll take care of you, Violet," he said soberly. "If you will wait for me I will marry you when I come of age and get my fortune."

"I couldn't promise that," Violet answered, brushing away her tears. "No, don't ask me, Mr. Teddy. I am never going to marry till I find my father. I have got one somewhere, and—"

"Oh, is this where you are, Teddy?" cried Mrs. Benton, as she descended on the tableau. "They are getting up a dance in the parlor, and they want you to join them."

"Will you favor me?" Teddy whispered, and Mrs. Benton gasped as she saw him walk off with the little actress on his arm.

Dick burst out laughing.

"The young scamp!" he cried. "If he isn't flirting with her?"

It was five years afterwards that Teddy graduated from Oxford, and the following spring he went on his travels. There seemed to be nothing more for him to do. He was rich enough, had seen enough of society, had had enough of everything.

The happiest man is he who has something to do," he reflected, as he lay under the shadow of a great rock, looking up at the cloud-patched heavens.

Above his head, in a mossy cleft, grew a bunch of wild columbine, nodding gayly in the mountain breeze, like a little witch flower. He was watching it idly, when a white hand fluttered over the cliff and began to pluck the nodding flowers. Presently there came a figure half-way over the cliff, and then a face, shaded by a little peaked straw hat, "tip-tilted like a flower," and twisted round with a scart of red crape.

"A very pretty girl," mused Teddy. "She looks like a columbine herself in that red dress, with those cream-colored frills about her. Oh, it is Miss de Lancy, the new belle."

He was watching her, and caught a passing glimpse of a shape of a shapely foot, as with a sudden movement, she swung herself over the rock to gain access to another clump of columbine.

But her foot had touched some loose gravel which afforded no secure foundation; the earth slipped, and she was left swinging in mid-air. Teddy was strong and prompt. He clambered up over the rocks till he stood about six feet beneath her, shouting his instructions in a clear, firm voice. "Now let yourself go," he called. And the little pendant figure dropped into his arms.

"You ought not to have attempted that," he said, as he put her on the ground safely.

"I know," she answered, lifting her pale but lovely face to his. "But I am so fond of wild flowers—especially columbine."