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Miss Delamar's Understudy

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MISS DELAMAR'S UNDERSTUDY

A YOUNG man runs two chances of marrying the wrong woman. He marries her because she is beautiful, and because he persuades himself that every other lovable attribute must be associated with such beauty, or because she is in love with him. If this latter is the case, she gives certain values to what he thinks and to what he says which no other woman gives, and so he observes to himself, "This is the woman who best understands *me*."

You can reverse this and say that young women run the same risks, but as men are seldom beautiful, the first danger is eliminated. Women still marry men, however, because they are loved by them, and in time the woman grows to depend upon this love and to need it, and is not content without it, and so she consents to marry the man for no other reason than because he cares for her.

For if a dog, even, runs up to you wagging his tail and acting as though he were glad to see you, you pat him on the head and say, "What a nice dog." You like him because he likes you, and not because he belongs to a fine breed of animal and could take blue ribbons at bench shows.

This is the story of a young man who was in love with a beautiful woman, and who allowed her beauty to compensate him for many other things. When she failed to understand what he said to her he smiled and looked at her and forgave her at once, and when she began to grow uninteresting, he would take up his hat and go away, and so he never knew how very uninteresting she might possibly be if she were given time enough in which to demonstrate the fact. He never considered that, were he married to her, he could not take up his hat and go away when she became uninteresting, and that her remarks, which were not brilliant, could not be smiled away either. They would rise up and greet him every morning, and would be the last thing he would hear at night.

Miss Delamar's beauty was so conspicuous

that to pretend not to notice it was more foolish than well-bred. You got along more easily and simply by accepting it at once, and referring to it, and enjoying its effect upon other people. To go out of one's way to talk of other things when every one, even Miss Delamar herself, knew what must be uppermost in your mind, always seemed as absurd as to strain a point in politeness, and to pretend not to notice that a guest had upset his claret, or any other embarrassing fact. For Miss Delamar's beauty was so distinctly embarrassing that this was the only way to meet it, — to smile and pass it over and to try, if possible, to get on to something else. It was on account of this extraordinary quality in her appearance that every one considered her beauty as something which transcended her private ownership, and which belonged by right to the polite world at large, to any one who could appreciate it properly, just as though it were a sunset or a great work of art or of nature. And so, when she gave away her photographs no one thought it meant anything more serious than a recognition on her part of the fact that it would have been unkind and

selfish in her not to have shared the enjoyment of so much loveliness with others.

Consequently, when she sent one of her largest and most aggravatingly beautiful photographs to young Stuart, it was no sign that she cared especially for him.

How much young Stuart cared for Miss Delamar, however, was an open question, and a condition yet to be discovered. That he cared for some one, and cared so much that his imagination had begun to picture the awful joys and responsibilities of marriage, was only too well known to himself, and was a state of mind already suspected by his friends.

Stuart was a member of the New York bar, and the distinguished law firm to which he belonged was very proud of its junior member, and treated him with indulgence and affection, which was not unmixed with amusement. For Stuart's legal knowledge had been gathered in many odd corners of the globe, and was various and peculiar. It had been his pleasure to study the laws by which men ruled other men in every condition of life, and under every sun. The regulations of a new mining camp were fraught

with as great interest to him as the accumulated precedents of the English Constitution, and he had investigated the rulings of the mixed courts of Egypt and of the government of the little Dutch republic near the Cape with as keen an effort to comprehend, as he had shown in studying the laws of the American colonies and of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

But he was not always serious, and it sometimes happened that after he had arrived at some queer little island where the native prince and the English governor sat in judgment together, his interest in the intricacies of their laws would give way to the more absorbing occupation of chasing wild boar or shooting at tigers from the top of an elephant. And so he was not only regarded as an authority on many forms of government and of law, into which no one else had ever taken the trouble to look, but his books on big game were eagerly read and his articles in the magazines were earnestly discussed, whether they told of the divorce laws of Dakota, and the legal rights of widows in Cambodia, or the habits of the Mexican lion.

Stuart loved his work better than he knew, but how well he loved Miss Delamar neither he nor his friends could tell. She was the most beautiful and lovely creature that he had ever seen, and of that only was he certain.

Stuart was sitting in the club one day when the conversation turned to matrimony. He was among his own particular friends, the men before whom he could speak seriously or foolishly without fear of being misunderstood or of having what he said retold and spoiled in the telling. There was Seldon, the actor, and Rives who painted pictures, and young Sloane, who travelled for pleasure and adventure, and Weimer who stayed at home and wrote for the reviews. They were all bachelors, and very good friends, and jealously guarded their little circle from the intrusion of either men or women.

"Of course the chief objection to marriage," Stuart said — it was the very day in which the picture had been sent to his rooms — "is the old one that you can't tell anything about it until you are committed to it forever. It is a very silly thing to discuss even, because there is no way of bringing it

about, but there really should be some sort of a preliminary trial. As the man says in the play, 'you wouldn't buy a watch without testing it first.' You don't buy a hat even without putting it on, and finding out whether it is becoming or not, or whether your peculiar style of ugliness can stand it. And yet men go gayly off and get married, and make the most awful promises, and alter their whole order of life and risk the happiness of some lovely creature on trust, as it were, knowing absolutely nothing of the new conditions and responsibilities of the life before them. Even a river pilot has to serve an apprenticeship before he gets a license, and yet we are allowed to take just as great risks, and only because we *want* to take them. It's awful, and it's all wrong."

"Well, I don't see what one is going to do about it," commented young Sloane, lightly, "except to get divorced. That road is always open."

Sloane was starting the next morning for the Somali Country, in Abyssinia, to shoot rhinoceros, and his interest in matrimony was in consequence somewhat slight.

"It is n't the fear of the responsibilities

that keeps Stuart, nor any one of us back," said Weimer, contemptuously. "It's because we're selfish. That's the whole truth of the matter. We love our work, or our pleasure, or to knock about the world, better than we do any particular woman. When one of us comes to love the woman best, his conscience won't trouble him long about the responsibilities of marrying her."

"Not at all," said Stuart, "I am quite sincere; I maintain that there should be a preliminary stage. Of course there can't be, and it's absurd to think of it, but it would save a lot of unhappiness."

"Well," said Seldon, dryly, "when you've invented a way to prevent marriage from being a lottery, let me know, will you?" He stood up and smiled nervously. "Any of you coming to see us to-night?" he asked.

"That's so," exclaimed Weimer, "I forgot. It's the first night of 'A Fool and His Money,' isn't it? Of course we're coming."

"I told them to put a box away for you in case you wanted it," Seldon continued. "Don't expect much. It's a silly piece, and I've a silly part, and I'm very bad in it."

You must come around to supper, and tell me where I'm bad in it, and we will talk it over. You coming, Stuart?"

"My dear old man," said Stuart, reproachfully. "Of course I am. I've had my seats for the last three weeks. Do you suppose I could miss hearing you mispronounce all the Hindostanee I've taught you?"

"Well, good-night then," said the actor, waving his hand to his friends as he moved away. "'We, who are about to die, salute you!'"

"Good luck to you," said Sloane, holding up his glass. "To the Fool and His Money," he laughed. He turned to the table again, and sounded the bell for the waiter. "Now let's send him a telegram and wish him success, and all sign it," he said, "and don't you fellows tell him that I was n't in front to-night. I've got to go to a dinner the Travellers' Club are giving me." There was a protesting chorus of remonstrance. "Oh, I don't like it any better than you do," said Sloane, "but I'll get away early and join you before the play's over. No one in the Travellers' Club, you see, has ever travelled farther from New York than London or the

Riviera, and so when a member starts for Abyssinia they give him a dinner, and he has to take himself very seriously indeed, and cry with Seldon, 'I who am about to die, salute you.' If that man there was any use," he added, interrupting himself and pointing with his glass at Stuart, "he'd pack up his things to-night and come with me."

"Oh, don't urge him," remonstrated Weimer, who had travelled all over the world in imagination, with the aid of globes and maps, but never had got any farther from home than Montreal. "We can't spare Stuart. He has to stop here and invent a preliminary marriage state, so that if he finds he does n't like a girl, he can leave her before it is too late."

"You sail at seven, I believe, and from Hoboken, don't you?" asked Stuart undisturbed. "If you'll start at eleven from the New York side, I think I'll go with you, but I hate getting up early; and then you see—I know what dangers lurk in Abyssinia, but who could tell what might not happen to him in Hoboken?"

When Stuart returned to his room, he

found a large package set upright in an armchair and enveloped by many wrappings; but the handwriting on the outside told him at once from whom it came and what it might be, and he pounced upon it eagerly and tore it from its covers. The photograph was a very large one, and the likeness to the original so admirable that the face seemed to smile and radiate with all the loveliness and beauty of Miss Delamar herself. Stuart beamed upon it with genuine surprise and pleasure, and exclaimed delightedly to himself. There was a living quality about the picture which made him almost speak to it, and thank Miss Delamar through it for the pleasure she had given him and the honor she had bestowed. He was proud, flattered, and triumphant, and while he walked about the room deciding where he would place it, and holding the picture respectfully before him, he smiled upon it with grateful satisfaction.

He decided against his dressing-table as being too intimate a place for it, and so carried the picture on from his bedroom to the dining-room beyond, where he set it among his silver on the sideboard. But so

little of his time was spent in this room that he concluded he would derive but little pleasure from it there, and so bore it back again into his library, where there were many other photographs and portraits, and where to other eyes than his own it would be less conspicuous.

He tried it first in one place and then in another; but in each position the picture predominated and asserted itself so markedly, that Stuart gave up the idea of keeping it inconspicuous, and placed it prominently over the fire-place, where it reigned supreme above every other object in the room. It was not only the most conspicuous object there, but the living quality which it possessed in so marked a degree, and which was due to its naturalness of pose and the excellence of the likeness, made it permeate the place like a presence and with the individuality of a real person. Stuart observed this effect with amused interest, and noted also that the photographs of other women had become commonplace in comparison like lithographs in a shop window, and that the more masculine accessories of a bachelor's apartment had grown suddenly aggressive

and out of keeping. The liquor case and the racks of arms and of barbarous weapons which he had collected with such pride seemed to have lost their former value and meaning, and he instinctively began to gather up the mass of books and maps and photographs and pipes and gloves which lay scattered upon the table, and to put them in their proper place, or to shove them out of sight altogether. "If I'm to live up to that picture," he thought, "I must see that George keeps this room in better order — and I must stop wandering round here in my bath-robe."

His mind continued on the picture while he was dressing, and he was so absorbed in it and in analyzing the effect it had had upon him, that his servant spoke twice before he heard him.

"No," he answered, "I shall not dine here to-night." Dining at home was with him a very simple affair, and a somewhat lonely one, and he avoided it almost nightly by indulging himself in a more expensive fashion.

But even as he spoke an idea came to Stuart which made him reconsider his determination, and which struck him as so amus-

ing, that he stopped pulling at his tie and smiled delightedly at himself in the glass before him.

"Yes," he said, still smiling, "I will dine here to-night. Get me anything in a hurry. You need not wait now; go get the dinner up as soon as possible."

The effect which the photograph of Miss Delamar had upon him, and the transformation it had accomplished in his room, had been as great as would have marked the presence there of the girl herself. While considering this it had come to Stuart, like a flash of inspiration, that here was a way by which he could test the responsibilities and conditions of married life without compromising either himself, or the girl to whom he would suppose himself to be married.

"I will put that picture at the head of the table," he said, "and I will play that it is she herself, her own, beautiful, lovely self, and I will talk to her and exchange views with her, and make her answer me just as she would were we actually married and settled." He looked at his watch and found it was just seven o'clock. "I will begin

now," he said, "and I will keep up the delusion until midnight. To-night is the best time to try the experiment because the picture is new now, and its influence will be all the more real. In a few weeks it may have lost some of its freshness and reality and will have become one of the fixtures in the room."

Stuart decided that under these new conditions it would be more pleasant to dine at Delmonico's, and he was on the point of asking the Picture what she thought of it, when he remembered that while it had been possible for him to make a practice of dining at that place as a bachelor, he could not now afford so expensive a luxury, and he decided that he had better economize in that particular and go instead to one of the table d'hôte restaurants in the neighborhood. He regretted not having thought of this sooner, for he did not care to dine at a table d'hôte in evening dress, as in some places it rendered him conspicuous. So, sooner than have this happen he decided to dine at home, as he had originally intended when he first thought of attempting this experiment, and then conducted the picture into dinner and placed

her in an armchair facing him, with the candles full upon the face.

"Now this is something like," he exclaimed, joyously. "I can't imagine anything better than this. Here we are all to ourselves with no one to bother us, with no chaperone, or chaperone's husband either, which is generally worse. Why is it, my dear," he asked gayly, in a tone that he considered affectionate and husbandly, "that the attractive chaperones are always handicapped by such stupid husbands, and vice versa?"

"If that is true," replied the Picture, or replied Stuart, rather, for the picture, "I cannot be a very attractive chaperone." Stuart bowed politely at this, and then considered the point it had raised as to whether he had, in assuming both characters, the right to pay himself compliments. He decided against himself in this particular instance, but agreed that he was not responsible for anything the Picture might say, so long as he sincerely and fairly tried to make it answer him as he thought the original would do under like circumstances. From what he knew of the original under other

conditions, he decided that he could give a very close imitation of her point of view.

Stuart's interest in his dinner was so real that he found himself neglecting his wife, and he had to pull himself up to his duty with a sharp reproof. After smiling back at her for a moment or two until his servant had again left them alone, he asked her to tell him what she had been doing during the day.

"Oh, nothing very important," said the Picture. "I went shopping in the morning and —"

Stuart stopped himself and considered this last remark doubtfully. "Now, how do I know she would go shopping?" he asked himself. "People from Harlem and women who like bargain counters, and who eat chocolate meringue for lunch, and then stop in at a continuous performance, go shopping. It must be the comic paper sort of wives who go about matching shades and buying hooks and eyes. Yes, I must have made Miss Delamar's understudy misrepresent her. I beg your pardon, my dear," he said aloud to the Picture. "You did *not* go shopping this morning. You

probably went to a woman's luncheon somewhere. Tell me about that."

"Oh, yes, I went to lunch with the Antwerps," said the Picture, "and they had that Russian woman there who is getting up subscriptions for the Siberian prisoners. It's rather fine of her because it exiles her from Russia. And she is a princess."

"That's nothing," Stuart interrupted, "they're all princesses when you see them on Broadway."

"I beg your pardon," said the Picture.

"It's of no consequence," said Stuart, apologetically, "it's a comic song. I forgot you didn't like comic songs. Well — go on."

"Oh, then I went to a tea, and then I stopped in to hear Madame Ruvier read a paper on the Ethics of Ibsen, and she —"

Stuart's voice had died away gradually, and he caught himself wondering whether he had told George to lay in a fresh supply of cigars. "I beg your pardon," he said, briskly, "I was listening, but I was just wondering whether I had any cigars left. You were saying that you had been at Madame Ruvier's, and —"

"I am afraid that you were not interested," said the Picture. "Never mind, it's my fault. Sometimes I think I ought to do things of more interest, so that I should have something to talk to you about when you come home."

Stuart wondered at what hour he would come home now that he was married. As a bachelor he had been in the habit of stopping on his way up town from the law office at the club, or to take tea at the houses of the different girls he liked. Of course he could not do that now as a married man. He would instead have to limit his calls to married women, as all the other married men of his acquaintance did. But at the moment he could not think of any attractive married women who would like his dropping in on them in such a familiar manner, and the other sort did not as yet appeal to him.

He seated himself in front of the coal-fire in the library, with the Picture in a chair close beside him, and as he puffed pleasantly on his cigar he thought how well this suited him, and how delightful it was to find content in so simple and continuing a pleasure. He could almost feel the pressure of his

wife's hand as it lay in his own, as they sat in silent sympathy looking into the friendly glow of the fire.

There was a long pleasant pause.

"They 're giving Sloane a dinner to-night at the 'Travellers'," Stuart said at last, "in honor of his going to Abyssinia."

Stuart pondered for some short time as to what sort of a reply Miss Delamar's understudy ought to make to this innocent remark. He recalled the fact that on numerous occasions the original had shown not only a lack of knowledge in far-away places, but what was more trying, a lack of interest as well. For the moment he could not see her robbed of her pretty environment and tramping through undiscovered countries at his side. So the Picture's reply, when it came, was strictly in keeping with several remarks which Miss Delamar herself had made to him in the past.

"Yes," said the Picture, politely, "and where is Abyssinia — in India, is n't it?"

"No, not exactly," corrected Stuart, mildly; "you pass it on your way to India, though, as you go through the Red Sea. Sloane is taking Winchesters with him and a double

express and a 'five fifty.' He wants to test their penetration. I think myself that the express is the best, but he says Selous and Chanler think very highly of the Winchester. I don't know, I never shot a rhinoceros. The time I killed that elephant," he went on, pointing at two tusks that stood with some assegais in a corner, "I used an express, and I had to let go with both barrels. I suppose, though, if I'd needed a third shot I'd have wished it was a Winchester. He was charging the smoke, you see, and I could n't get away because I'd caught my foot — but I told you about that, did n't I?" Stuart interrupted himself to ask politely.

"Yes," said the Picture, cheerfully, "I remember it very well; it was very foolish of you."

Stuart straightened himself with a slightly injured air and avoided the Picture's eye. He had been stopped midway in what was one of his favorite stories, and it took a brief space of time for him to recover himself, and to sink back again into the pleasant lethargy in which he had been basking.

"Still," he said, "I think the express is the better gun."

"Oh, is an 'express' a gun?" exclaimed the Picture, with sudden interest. "Of course, I might have known."

Stuart turned in his chair and surveyed the Picture in some surprise. "But, my dear girl," he remonstrated kindly, "why didn't you ask, if you didn't know what I was talking about. What did you suppose it was?"

"I didn't know," said the Picture, "I thought it was something to do with his luggage. Abyssinia sounds so far away," she explained, smiling sweetly. "You can't expect one to be interested in such queer places, can you?"

"No," Stuart answered, reluctantly, and looking steadily at the fire, "I suppose not. But you see, my dear," he said, "I'd have gone with him, if I hadn't married you, and so I am naturally interested in his outfit. They wanted me to make a comparative study of the little semi-independent states down there, and of how far the Italian government allows them to rule themselves. That's what I was to have done."

But the Picture hastened to reassure him. "Oh, you mustn't think," she exclaimed, quickly, "that I mean to keep you at home. I love to travel, too. I want you to go on exploring places just as you've always done, only now I will go with you. We might do the Cathedral towns, for instance."

"The what!" gasped Stuart, raising his head. "Oh, yes, of course," he added, hurriedly, sinking back into his chair with a slightly bewildered expression. "That would be very nice. Perhaps your mother would like to go too; it's not a dangerous expedition, is it? I *was* thinking of taking you on a trip through the South Seas — but I suppose the Cathedral towns are just as exciting. Or we might even penetrate as far into the interior as the English lakes and read Wordsworth and Coleridge as we go."

Miss Delamar's understudy observed him closely for a moment, but he made no sign, and so she turned her eyes again to the fire with a slightly troubled look. She had not a strong sense of humor, but she was very beautiful.

Stuart's conscience troubled him for the next few moments, and he endeavored to

make up for his impatience of the moment before, by telling the Picture how particularly well she was looking.

"It seems almost selfish to keep it all to myself," he mused.

"You don't mean," inquired the Picture, with tender anxiety, "that you want any one else here, do you? I'm sure I could be content to spend every evening like this. I've had enough of going out and talking to people I don't care about. Two seasons," she added, with the superior air of one who has put away childish things, "was quite enough of it for me."

"Well, I never took it as seriously as that," said Stuart, "but, of course, I don't want any one else here to spoil our evening. It is perfect."

He assured himself that it *was* perfect, but he wondered what was the loyal thing for a married couple to do when the conversation came to a dead stop. And did the conversation come to a stop because they preferred to sit in silent sympathy and communion, or because they had nothing interesting to talk about? Stuart doubted if silence was the truest expression of the most perfect confi-

dence and sympathy. He generally found when he was interested, that either he or his companion talked all the time. It was when he was bored that he sat silent. But it was probably different with married people. Possibly they thought of each other during these pauses, and of their own affairs and interests, and then he asked himself how many interests could one fairly retain with which the other had nothing to do?

"I suppose," thought Stuart, "that I had better compromise and read aloud. Should you like me to read aloud?" he asked, doubtfully.

The Picture brightened perceptibly at this, and said that she thought that would be charming. "We might make it quite instructive," she suggested, entering eagerly into the idea. "We ought to agree to read so many pages every night. Suppose we begin with Guizot's 'History of France.' I have always meant to read that, the illustrations look so interesting."

"Yes, we might do that," assented Stuart, doubtfully. "It is in six volumes, isn't it? Suppose now, instead," he suggested, with an impartial air, "we begin that to-morrow

night, and go this evening to see Seldon's new play, 'The Fool and His Money.' It's not too late, and he has saved a box for us, and Weimer and Rives and Sloane will be there, and —"

The Picture's beautiful face settled for just an instant in an expression of disappointment. "Of course," she replied slowly, "if you wish it. But I thought you said," she went on with a sweet smile, "that this was perfect. Now you want to go out again. Is n't this better than a hot theatre? You might put up with it for one evening, don't you think?"

"Put up with it!" exclaimed Stuart, enthusiastically; "I could spend every evening so. It was only a suggestion. It was n't that I wanted to go so much as that I thought Seldon might be a little hurt if I did n't. But I can tell him you were not feeling very well, and that we will come some other evening. He generally likes to have us there on the first night, that's all. But he'll understand."

"Oh," said the Picture, "if you put it in the light of a duty to your friend, of course we will go."

"Not at all," replied Stuart, heartily; "I will read something. I should really prefer it. How would you like something of Browning's?"

"Oh, I read all of Browning once," said the Picture, "I think I should like something new."

Stuart gasped at this, but said nothing, and began turning over the books on the centre table. He selected one of the monthly magazines, and choosing a story which neither of them had read, sat down comfortably in front of the fire, and finished it without interruption and to the satisfaction of the Picture and himself. The story had made the half hour pass very pleasantly, and they both commented on it with interest.

"I had an experience once myself something like that," said Stuart, with a pleased smile of recollection; "it happened in Paris" — he began with the deliberation of a man who is sure of his story — "and it turned out in much the same way. It didn't begin in Paris; it really began while we were crossing the English Channel to —"

"Oh, you mean about the Russian who took you for some one else and had you fol-

lowed," said the Picture. "Yes, that was like it, except that in your case nothing happened."

Stuart took his cigar from between his lips and frowned severely at the lighted end for some little time before he spoke.

"My dear," he remonstrated, gently, "you mustn't tell me I've told you all my old stories before. It is n't fair. Now that I'm married, you see, I can't go about and have new experiences, and I've got to make use of the old ones."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," exclaimed the Picture, remorsefully. "I did n't mean to be rude. Please tell me about it. I should like to hear it again, ever so much. I *should* like to hear it again, really."

"Nonsense," said Stuart, laughing and shaking his head. "I was only joking; personally I hate people who tell long stories. That does n't matter. I was thinking of something else."

He continued thinking of something else, which was, that though he had been in jest when he spoke of having given up the chance of meeting fresh experiences, he had nevertheless described a condition, and a painfully

true one. His real life seemed to have stopped, and he saw himself in the future looking back and referring to it, as though it were the career of an entirely different person, of a young man, with quick sympathies which required satisfying, as any appetite requires food. And he had an uncomfortable doubt that these many ever-ready sympathies would rebel if fed on only one diet.

The Picture did not interrupt him in his thoughts, and he let his mind follow his eyes as they wandered over the objects above him on the mantle-shelf. They all meant something from the past, — a busy, wholesome past which had formed habits of thought and action, habits he could no longer enjoy alone, and which, on the other hand, it was quite impossible for him to share with any one else. He was no longer to be alone.

Stuart stirred uneasily in his chair and poked at the fire before him.

“Do you remember the day you came to see me,” said the Picture, sentimentally, “and built the fire yourself and lighted some girl’s letters to make it burn?”

“Yes,” said Stuart, “that is, I *said* that

they were some girl's letters. It made it more picturesque. I am afraid they were bills. I should say I did remember it," he continued, enthusiastically. "You wore a black dress and little red slippers with big black rosettes, and you looked as beautiful as — as night — as a moonlight night."

The Picture frowned slightly.

"You are always telling me about how I looked," she complained; "can't you remember any time when we were together without remembering what I had on and how I appeared?"

"I cannot," said Stuart, promptly. "I can recall lots of other things besides, but I can't forget how you looked. You have a fashion of emphasizing episodes in that way which is entirely your own. But, as I say, I can remember something else. Do you remember, for instance, when we went up to West Point on that yacht? Wasn't it a grand day, with the autumn leaves on both sides of the Hudson, and the dress parade, and the dance afterward at the hotel?"

"Yes, I should think I did," said the Picture, smiling. "You spent all your time examining cannon, and talking to the men

about 'firing in open order,' and left me all alone."

"Left you all alone! I like that," laughed Stuart; "all alone with about eighteen officers."

"Well, but that was natural," returned the Picture. "They were men. It's natural for a girl to talk to men, but why should a man want to talk to men?"

"Well, I know better than that now," said Stuart.

He proceeded to show that he knew better by remaining silent for the next half hour, during which time he continued to wonder whether this effort to keep up a conversation was not radically wrong. He thought of several things he might say, but he argued that it was an impossible situation where a man had to make conversation with his own wife.

The clock struck ten as he sat waiting, and he moved uneasily in his chair.

"What is it?" asked the Picture; "what makes you so restless?"

Stuart regarded the Picture timidly for a moment before he spoke. "I was just thinking," he said, doubtfully, "that we

might run down after all, and take a look in at the last act; it's not too late even now. They're sure to run behind on the first night. And then," he urged, "we can go around and see Seldon. You have never been behind the scenes, have you? It's very interesting."

"No, I have not, but if we do," remonstrated the Picture, pathetically, "you *know* all those men will come trooping home with us. You know they will."

"But that's very complimentary," said Stuart. "Why, I like my friends to like my wife."

"Yes, but you know how they stay when they get here," she answered; "I don't believe they ever sleep. Don't you remember the last supper you gave me before we were married, when Mrs. Starr and you all were discussing Mr. Seldon's play? She didn't make a move to go until half past two, and I was *that* sleepy, I couldn't keep my eyes open."

"Yes," said Stuart, "I remember. I'm sorry. I thought it was very interesting. Seldon changed the whole second act on account of what she said. Well, after this,"

he laughed with cheerful desperation, "I think I shall make up for the part of a married man in a pair of slippers and a dressing-gown, and then perhaps I won't be tempted to roam abroad at night."

"You must wear the gown they are going to give you at Oxford," said the Picture, smiling placidly. "The one Aunt Lucy was telling me about. Why do they give you a gown?" she asked. "It seems such an odd thing to do."

"The gown comes with the degree, I believe," said Stuart.

"But why do they give *you* a degree?" persisted the Picture; "you never studied at Oxford, did you?"

Stuart moved slightly in his chair and shook his head. "I thought I told you," he said, gently. "No, I never studied there. I wrote some books on — things, and they liked them."

"Oh, yes, I remember now, you did tell me," said the Picture; "and I told Aunt Lucy about it, and said we would be in England during the season, when you got your degree, and she said you must be awfully clever to get it. You see — she does

appreciate you, and you always treat her so distantly."

"Do I?" said Stuart, quietly; "I'm sorry."

"Will you have your portrait painted in it?" asked the Picture.

"In what?"

"In the gown. You are not listening," said the Picture, reproachfully. "You ought to. Aunt Lucy says it's a beautiful shade of red silk, and very long. Is it?"

"I don't know," said Stuart. He shook his head, and dropping his chin into his hands, stared coldly down into the fire. He tried to persuade himself that he had been vainglorious, and that he had given too much weight to the honor which the University of Oxford would bestow upon him; that he had taken the degree too seriously, and that the Picture's view of it was the view of the rest of the world. But he could not convince himself that he was entirely at fault.

"Is it too late to begin on Guizot?" suggested his Picture, as an alternative to his plan. "It sounds so improving."

"Yes, it is much too late," answered Stuart, decidedly. "Besides, I don't want

to be improved. I want to be amused, or inspired, or scolded. The chief good of friends is that they do one of these three things, and a wife should do all three."

"Which shall I do?" asked the Picture, smiling good-humoredly.

Stuart looked at the beautiful face and at the reclining figure of the woman to whom he was to turn for sympathy for the rest of his life, and felt a cold shiver of terror, that passed as quickly as it came. He reached out his hand and placed it on the arm of the chair where his wife's hand should have been, and patted the place kindly. He would shut his eyes to everything but that she was good and sweet and his wife. Whatever else she lacked that her beauty had covered up and hidden, and the want of which had lain unsuspected in their previous formal intercourse, could not be mended now. He would settle his step to hers, and eliminate all those interests from his life which were not hers as well. He had chosen a beautiful idol, and not a companion, for a wife. He had tried to warm his hands at the fire of a diamond.

Stuart's eyes closed wearily as though to

shut out the memories of the past, or the foreknowledge of what the future was sure to be. His head sank forward on his breast, and with his hand shading his eyes, he looked beyond, through the dying fire, into the succeeding years.

The gay little French clock on the table sounded the hour of midnight briskly, with a pert insistent clamor, and at the same instant a boisterous and unruly knocking answered it from outside the library door.

Stuart rose uncertainly from his chair and surveyed the tiny clock face with a startled expression of bewilderment and relief.

"Stuart!" his friends called impatiently from the hall. "Stuart, let us in!" and without waiting further for recognition a merry company of gentlemen pushed their way noisily into the room.

"Where the devil have you been?" demanded Weimer. "You don't deserve to be spoken to at all after quitting us like that. But Seldon is so good-natured," he went on, "that he sent us after you. It was a great success, and he made a rattling good speech, and you missed the whole thing; and you

ought to be ashamed of yourself. We've asked half the people in front to supper — two stray Englishmen, all the Wilton girls and their governor, and the chap that wrote the play. And Seldon and his brother Sam are coming as soon as they get their make-up off. Don't stand there like that, but hurry. What have you been doing?"

Stuart gave a nervous, anxious laugh. "Oh, don't ask me," he cried. "It was awful. I've been trying an experiment, and I had to keep it up until midnight, and — I'm so glad you fellows have come," he continued, halting midway in his explanation. "I *was* blue."

"You've been asleep in front of the fire," said young Sloane, "and you've been dreaming."

"Perhaps," laughed Stuart, gayly, "perhaps. But I'm awake now in any event. Sloane, old man," he cried, dropping both hands on the youngster's shoulders. "How much money have you? Enough to take me to Gibraltar? They can cable me the rest."

"Hoorah!" shouted Sloane, waltzing from one end of the room to the other. "And

we 're off to Ab-yss-in-ia in the morn-ing," he sang. "There's plenty in my money belt," he cried, slapping his sides, "you can hear the ten-pound notes crackle whenever I breathe, and it's all yours, my dear boy, and welcome. And I'll prove to you that the Winchester is the better gun."

"All right," returned Stuart, gayly, "and I'll try to prove that the Italians don't know how to govern a native state. But who is giving this supper, anyway?" he demanded. "That is the main thing — that's what I want to know."

"You've got to pack, have n't you?" suggested Rives.

"I'll pack when I get back," said Stuart, struggling into his greatcoat, and searching in his pockets for his gloves. "Besides, my things are always ready and there's plenty of time, the boat does n't leave for six hours yet."

"We'll all come back and help," said Weimer.

"Then I'll never get away," laughed Stuart. He was radiant, happy, and excited, like a boy back from school for the holidays. But when they had reached the pavement, he halted and

ran his hand down into his pocket, as though feeling for his latch-key, and stood looking doubtfully at his friends.

"What is it now?" asked Rives, impatiently. "Have you forgotten something?"

Stuart looked back at the front door in momentary indecision.

"Y-es," he answered. "I did forget something. But it does n't matter," he added, cheerfully, taking Sloane's arm.

"Come on," he said, "and so Seldon made a hit, did he? I am glad — and tell me, old man, how long will we have to wait at Gib for the P. & O.?"

Stuart's servant had heard the men trooping down the stairs, laughing and calling to one another as they went, and judging from this that they had departed for the night, he put out all the lights in the library and closed the piano, and lifted the windows to clear the room of the tobacco-smoke. He did not notice the beautiful photograph sitting upright in the armchair before the fireplace, and so left it alone in the deserted library.

The cold night-air swept in through the open window and chilled the silent room, and the dead coals in the grate dropped one by

one into the fender with a dismal echoing clatter; but the Picture still sat in the arm-chair with the same graceful pose and the same lovely expression, and smiled sweetly at the encircling darkness.