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HIS MOTHER.

BY AMY RANDOLPH.

The cold gray shadows of the wintry twilight had enveloped tree and meadow and sluggish forest streams in their uncertain mist, the factory chimneys flung their fiery banners of smoke against the leaden sky, a basso relieve that would have made Rembrandt himself rejoice, and the hum of never-ceasing machinery in the little town rose above the rush of the river, like the buzz of a gigantic insect.

Charles Emery, the day foreman in the rolling mills, was just retiring to his home, having been relieved by John Elter, the night official, and as he walked along, his feet sounding crisply on the hard frozen earth, he whistled softly to himself, as light-hearted as a bird.

"You're going with us to-night, Charley?" cried a gay voice, and two or three young men came by.

"Do you mean—"

"I mean to the opera!"

For upon that especial evening there was to be an opera in the little town of Crystalton, a genuine New York company with a chorus, a full orchestra and all the paraphernalia of scenery and costume which provincial residents so seldom enjoy, and the younger population were on the qui-vive of delighted expectation.

"I am going," said Mr. Emery, slowly;

"but not with you!"

"But you will change your mind, though," said Harrison Vail, "when you hear that Kate Marcy is to be of the party. Kate Marcy and the Miss Hallows and Fanny Hewit. There are eight of us going. We've kept a seat on purpose for you."

"I have engaged myself to another lady," Emery replied, after a second or so of hesitation.

Vail laughed.

"Well, I'm sorry for it," said he, "but Miss Marcy is not a girl who need pine for a cavalier. We'll keep the seat for you until a quarter of eight, in case you should see fit to change your mind. Only let me give you a word of warning, old fellow! Kate Marcy is a high spirited girl—it won't do to trifle too much with her!"

Charles Emery went on his way father graver and more self absorbed. He had asked his mother the day before to go to see "The Mascot," and his mother's eyes had brightened with genuine delight.

"Your father often used to take me, Charley," she said, "when we were young people and lived in New York. But it's twenty years and more since I have been to an opera. And if you're quite sure, dear, that there is no young girl whom you would rather take—"

"As if any young girl in the world could be to me what my own darling little mother is!" replied Emery, smiling across the table to her.

"Then I shall be so delighted to go," said Mrs. Emery.

And her voice and eye bore happy witness to the truth of her words.

But now that a regular party had been organized, and Kate Marcy had promised to join it, things looked very different to the young man. For a moment he almost regretted that he had engaged himself to take his mother.

"She would be as well pleased with any concert," he said to himself, "and I should have the opportunity of sitting all the evening next to Kate Marcy. I'll ask her to let me off this time. She won't care."

But when he went into the little room in their humble domain, and saw his mother, with the silver gray hair rolled into puffs on each side of her almost un wrinkled brow, her best black silk donned, and the one opal brooch which she owned pinned into the white lace folds at her bosom, his heart misgave him.

"I have been trimming my bonnet over with some violet velvet flowers," said she, smiling, "so as to do you no discredit, Charley; and I have a new pair of violet kid gloves. And now you must drink your tea. I've made some of your favorite cream biscuit, and the kettle is nearly at the boil. Oh, Charley, you'll laugh at me, I'm afraid, but I feel exactly like a little girl going to her first children's party. It's so seldom, you know, that a bit of pleasure comes in my way."

And then Charles Emery made up his mind that his mother was more to him, in her old age and sweet, affectionate dependence, than any blooming damsel whose eyes shone like stars and whose cheeks rivaled the September peach.

"Going with someone else?" said Kate Marcy, rather surprised and not exactly pleased.

She was a tall, beautiful maiden, the

belle of Crystalton, and rather an heiress in her own right, with all the rest. She certainly liked Charles Emery, and she rather surmised that he liked her also. And when she had been studying up her toilet for the opera, she had selected a blue dress, with blue corn flowers for her hair and ornaments of turquoise, because she had once heard Mr. Emery say that blue was his favorite color.

"Going with someone else?" she repeated. "Well, of course he has a right to suit himself."

And she kept within her own soul the fevered fire of girlish resentment, the growing pangs of jealousy that disturbed her all the while that she was sitting waiting for the great green curtain to be drawn up.

Until, of a sudden, there was a slight bustle on the row of seats beyond, and Mr. Emery entered with his mother.

And then Kate's overgloomed face grew bright again. She drew a long breath of relief and turned to the stage; it was as if the myriad gas lights had all of a sudden been turned up, as if all the mimic world of the opera house had grown radiant.

Never was voice sweeter in her ears than the somewhat thin and exhausted warble of Mademoiselle Rosalie de Vigue, the prima donna; never did scenery glow with such natural tints or footlights shine more softly. Kate Marcy declared that the opera was perfection!

"Yes, but," said pert little Nina Cummings, "do look at Charley Emery, with that little old woman! Why couldn't he have come to sit with us?"

Kate bit her lip. In the crowd now surging out of the little opera house she could scarcely venture to express her entire opinion; but she said in a low, earnest tone:

"I don't know what you think of it, Nina, but I, for my part, respect Mr. Emery a thousand times more for his politeness to his mother."

And, almost at the same second, she found herself looking directly into Charles Emery's eyes.

For a moment only. The crowd separated them almost ere they could recognize one another, but Kate felt sure—and her cheek glowed vivid scarlet at the certainty—that he had heard her words.

"Charley," said little Mrs. Emery, looking into her son's face, as they emerged into the veil of softly falling snow, which seemed to enwrap the whole outer world in dim, dazzling mystery, "who was that girl?"

"What girl, mother?" with a little pardonable hypocrisy.

"The one, Charley, with the big blue eyes, and the sweet face wrapped in a white, fleecy sort of hood—the one who said she respected you?"

"It was Kate Marcy, mother."

"She has a face like an angel," said Mrs. Emery softly.

The next day the foreman of the rolling mills went boldly to the old Marcy homestead, whose red-brick gables, sheathed over with ivy, rose up out of the leafless elms and beeches, just beyond the noise and stir of busy Crystalton.

"Miss Marcy," he declared, "without intending to be an eaves-dropper I heard what you said last night."

"It was not intended for your ears, Mr. Emery," said Kate, coloring in a soft, rosy pink.

"But," he pursued, looking her full in the face, "I cannot be satisfied with mere cold respect, Miss Marcy; I want a warmer, tenderer feeling toward myself. If you could teach yourself to love me—"

The dimples came out around Kate Marcy's coral-red lips, wreathing her smile in wondrous beauty.

"The lesson is already learned, Mr. Emery," said she. "I do love you, I have loved you for a long time."

And the foreman of the rolling mills went home, envying neither king nor prince that day.

"But I never should have loved you so dearly," his young wife told him afterward, "if you hadn't been so good to that dear little mother of yours. In my eyes you never looked half so handsome as when you stood bending over her gray head in the crowded hall of the opera house that night."

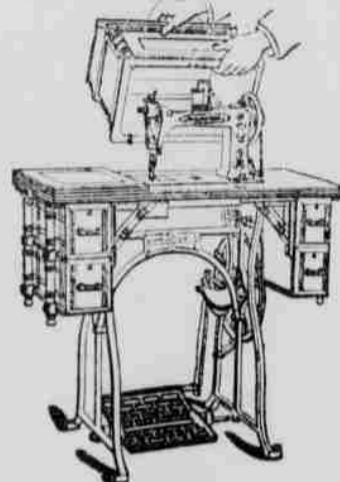
"You see," said Emery, laughing at her enthusiasm, "I agreed with the hero of the old Scotch ballad:

"Sweethearts I may get many a one, But of mothers ne'er another."

Julia E. Johnson, Stafford's P. O., S. C., writes: "I had suffered 13 years with eczema and was at times confined to my bed. The itching was terrible. My son in law got me one half dozen bottles of Botanic Blood Balm, which entirely cured me, and I ask you to publish this for the benefit of others suffering in like manner."

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