

A Remarkable Coincidence

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HE house was one of a brick row in an unpretentious street of a manufacturing city—a street given to clouds of dust in drought and to amazing depths of mud in times of rain. Outwardly, the house was like any one of its half-dozen neighbors.

Within, there was little enough of originality displayed to make one doubt that its furnishings suggested those of its counterparts to right or left. It was only when one passed through the kitchen and emerged on the steps that led to the region known as the back yard that the note of distinction was sounded.

As far, indeed, as dimensions and clothes-poles were concerned the yard was precisely and mathematically like any one of the row, but where the others were given over chiefly to straggling growths of vine and weed, with here and there a neglected plant, this one boasted of a well tended border circling three sides of the minute grass plot wherein bloomed a charming if miscellaneous collection of hardy roses, old-fashioned blue bells, phlox and ragged-sailor, that stood side by side in almost military precision like a corporal's guard on dress parade.

The high board fence that separated the little garden from the grounds of the big factory in the rear was glorious with a single of honey-suckle and up

about them flowers of his every year of his life. For my part I wouldn't miss 'em. They're a perfect nuisance on wash days."

"He does seem to take a sight of comfort in 'em," said Mrs. Deming placidly. Minnie's mother was a large woman, ample of heart and body, with a face that some thirty years ago must have been like her daughter's. She bore no more resemblance to Mrs. Hewlett than a full-leaved oak does to a telegraph pole.

This was the first visit she had paid her sister in some years, although their homes were less than a day's journey apart. She had come now more from a sense of duty than from any pleasure she might derive, leaving her comfortable home in a cool Connecticut town for a two-weeks' stay in a dusty city.

"I wouldn't think of it if she could come here," she had explained to her daughter, "but, what with George's father to look after and those young men from the mill coming in for table board, she's bound hand and foot. She's had a pretty hard time of it since George died, poor Em! and it's a pity if I can't make a visit to the only sister I've got in the world once in five years!"

Mrs. Deming was a widow. Minnie was her only child, and the affection between them would never have permitted a two-weeks' separation that could be avoided by the simple expedient of two being un-

She resumed her seat in the window with her palm-leaf fan and promptly dismissed the subject of Mr. Elton from her mind. She was quite sincere in the opinion she had expressed to her sister, and she was even amused at Mrs. Hewlett's speculations. "If I was to tell Minnie that, wouldn't she be mad!" she thought.

Presently she heard Minnie and the old man come in from the garden, and soon after the three young men from the mill came in awkwardly and took their places at the table, their hair damp from recent brushing and their faces shiny from conscientious ablutions. They shot an occasional awed glance at Minnie as they ate, but they never addressed her. In fact, she embarrassed them terribly, much in the way an affable angel might amuse a family by suddenly appearing at their board, and by his very radiance confirming the immeasurable distance between himself and them.

Minnie and her mother sat at the end of the table with Mrs. Hewlett. Besides Mrs. Hewlett was Elton's empty chair. "He must be working late to-night. It's funny what's keeping him," she complained to Mrs. Deming and Minnie. "I never knew him to be late as this."

"Oh, I guess he'll be along presently," said Mrs. Deming.

Minnie offered neither consolation nor comment. She went on steadily with her supper, though she was aware of a certain anxious bewilderment that surprised her. "It does seem strange, and our last night here, too," she told herself in excuse of it.

Presently she went out and joined Father Hewlett on the narrow porch at the front of the house. The old man had had his supper at the kitchen table and had come out here with his pipe. The girl sat beside him and he admired the touch of crimson at her throat.

"Guess the garden'll miss ye to-morrow," he ventured.

She smiled absently at him—in truth she was occupied in endeavoring to explain her own unwonted emotions concerning Elton, and she was annoyed with herself to find it necessary.

She had no idea that she had become so interested in the young man. She liked him—his kindness, his strength, his evident desire to please her. They had become good comrades in the little while she had known him, but nothing of a sentimental nature had ever occurred between them, even of the slightest, even though for the last week she had been subtly aware of a vague, intangible undercurrent in their companionship that fascinated while it startled her.

When they had parted the night before, his hand-clasp, the last look he had given her, seemed to convey more than mere friendliness, and despite herself her heart had leaped to answer it.

"Well, I must have been mistaken," she told herself mercilessly. "Mr. Elton was good to me and took me around just as he would have taken any other girl that happened to be here. I've been a fool to think anything about him at all, or to flatter myself that he would rush home to-night because he wanted to be with me. He probably don't know or care whether we're going home to-morrow or not, and it serves me right. I shan't think of him again, if I live to be a hundred."

One of the table-boarders who lodged in the next house, where Mr. Elton also had a room, appeared on his own steps with a banjo and without warning burst into melody. Mrs. Hewlett and Mrs. Deming, stopped behind the mosquito-nettings in the little parlor, stopped the swaying of their rocking-chairs to listen. Presently Mrs. Hewlett appeared at the door.

"Ed," she said to the young man, "Jim Elton hasn't come in yet—there's nothing wrong at the works, is there?"

"Nothing as far as I know," he replied and resumed his interrupted melody.

A sudden thought made the girl start to her feet with the very hideousness of it.

No, there was nothing wrong at the works; Jim Elton was staying away purposely! No doubt she had shown too plainly her joy at his attentions and had (horrible thought!) pursued him. This prearranged absence was simply to give her wains a lesson.

For a moment she steeled with humiliation; then she took hold of her fine courage with both hands, though the idea with every moment's passing seemed to grow more probable. "I've had about enough of this nonsense," she told herself. "He can come or stay as he likes—it's nothing to me, one way or the other."

She went into the parlor in a few minutes with her head high. "I guess I'll go up and finish packing," she said to Mrs. Deming, "and then go to bed—we have to start early for the eight-o'clock train, you know."

Mrs. Deming came panting up the stairs and sat heavily on the side of the bed as her daughter pecked. "In the land's name, don't work so hard!" she said finally. "You're going at that trunk as though you hated it—real vicious!"

The girl flushed hotly; then she laughed. "Perhaps I do," she said.

"Well, there'll be one person here that's going to miss you, if I know it," resumed her mother, "and that's Father Hewlett. It's tickled him to death to have you fussing around those flowers of his as though you'd never seen one before. Em don't seem to have much sympathy with him."

"Sympathy!" her daughter repeated. "If you ask me, mother, I think she's downright mean to him, poor old man! I only wish he was coming home with us."

Suddenly her face worked and she burst into stormy tears above the skirt she was folding. "She's downright mean to him!" she sobbed passionately.

"Why, what on earth is the matter with you?" said Mrs. Deming. She drew Minnie close in her motherly arms—half-anxious—half-amused. "Why, the idea of talking on so about Father Hewlett! Em looks after him as though he was a baby. You needn't worry that he isn't comfortable. Why, she idea!"

Her daughter averted her face.

"I guess this heat has made you nervous. I'll be glad when we're home," said Mrs. Deming.

For some time after she was in bed Minnie heard the young man with the banjo straining tunelessly to himself. Presently she heard him go in and shut the door.

Early as it was when her mother and herself came down the next morning, the young men from the mill had eaten and gone their way.

Mrs. Deming and Minnie ate breakfast with their hats on. They were to leave in a few minutes. If Mrs. Hewlett had received any word from the absent Elton she had no chance to impart it.

Father Hewlett came into the room as they rose from the table, a huge bunch of crimson ramblers in his trembling old hands. He had carefully planned to appear at the last moment and surprise and delight Minnie with a bouquet of his favorite bloom as a parting gift. He had risen almost at dawn to have plenty of time for this labor of love.

Though he realized the magnitude of his gift, he tried to present it lightly. "Here's just a little posy picked to go home with you," he said as he put it into the girl's arms.

Mrs. Deming regarded the huge bunch with some concern as well as amusement. "Goodness!" she said to her sister, "Just listen to the fuss Minnie's making over them! She's got a good heart, if I do say it. Why, to bear her you'd think they was made of gold! Well, it's about time to start, I guess. If that's the trolley at the bottom of the hill, we'll have to run for it as it is."

There was a moment of leave-taking, followed by one of intense excitement as Mrs. Deming suddenly discovered that her pocket-book was not in her hand or her pocket. Minnie laid the valise and the crimson ramblers on the table.

"You left 'em on the dressing-case this morning! I remember I meant to bring it down," she said. "I'll get it, mother, and you take these and go on ahead. They'll hold the car."

The old man hobbled excitedly to the front door as Mrs. Hewlett and her sister embraced for the last time. Father Hewlett and his daughter-in-law heard presently the clang of the departing trolley and Mrs. Hewlett betook herself promptly to the kitchen and the unwashed dishes. It was only a moment or so before she heard the old man calling her and something in his voice prompted her to drop her towel and run to the dining-room.

"Why see here, Emmie," he quavered. "Minnie's forgot her posy. Don't seem as if she could of—I'm going right down to the station after 'em; maybe the train'll be late and I can catch 'em. You get me my hat."

Mrs. Hewlett barred his way to the door.

"Now, father," she screamed at him, "you ain't going to do anything of the kind. You couldn't catch 'em if you did. I don't believe they forgot 'em at all. They probably had so much to carry that they were sensible enough to leave that great bunch behind 'em."

Father Hewlett's bewilderment deepened. "Minnie didn't want 'em—didn't want her posy I cut for her? Why she was just set on that rambler. I don't know what you mean," he said, but his mouth worked pitifully.

Mrs. Hewlett did not mean to be unkind—she was only in a hurry and young Elton's absence was worrying her.

"Now don't be foolish, father. I guess she was just carrying on over that rambler to please you. Now don't you fuss any more about it."

She said her last words from the kitchen to a noisy accompaniment of rattling plates. Left alone, the old man stared down at the flowers in silence. "She didn't want 'em!" he said. "Why I thought she's tickled to death with 'em and I got up early to pick 'em for her—and she didn't want 'em!"

The train that Minnie and her mother were to take was one that carried them only as far as New York. From there they were to go to another line.

They made the eight o'clock train with time to spare, and having settled Mrs. Deming in comfort Minnie dropped into the seat beside her and watched listlessly from the car window the receding town. Against one of the houses a hardy crimson rambler caught the girl's eye as the train flashed past, and a sudden dismay dawned vividly on her face. "Mother," she said, "what did you do with Father Hewlett's bouquet? I left it on the table when I ran up-stairs for your pocket-book. Mother, you didn't forget it?"

"Well, I declare!" said the contrite Mrs. Deming, "but that's just what I did, Minnie, and I wouldn't have done it for anything, and he so pleased with it and all. Why, child, it's nothing to look so about. You've turned real white—you write Father Hewlett a nice letter when you get home and tell him how it happened."

The conductor put his head in the door and the train began to slow. "Bridge Street," he called.

Mrs. Deming turned her wondering eyes on her

Mrs. Deming's arguments broke at her daughter's determined face. "Well, if you're as set on it as all that—go!" she said. "But I shan't draw an easy-breath until I see you."

When the train stopped at Bridge Street she eyed her daughter appealingly, but the girl never looked at her.

The obliging policeman who put her on the right trolley gave her valuable directions as well, and it was less than an hour before Minnie ran breathlessly up the steps that led to Mrs. Hewlett's door. She opened the screen door without the formality of ringing the bell.

She went directly to Father Hewlett, who sat in his chair by the window in the dining-room, the fading bunch of crimson ramblers still held in his tremulous old hands.

"I've come back for my flowers, Father Hewlett," she said, in her high, young voice. "I didn't miss them until we'd taken the train, and I came straight back for them."

The old man regarded her with a look that turned from bewilderment to rapture. "You come back for your posy?" he quavered.

"Yes, I did," she said, "and I left mother on the way to New York and I've got to hurry back. I couldn't go without my flowers, Father Hewlett, and that's all." He shot a look of triumph and delight over her head at his daughter-in-law.

"Left your ma on the car and come all the way back for your posy?" he repeated.

"I never heard of such a thing!" said Mrs. Hewlett. "Why, you'll be all tired out. Sit down a minute anyway, can't you?"

"I promised mother I'd come right back," said Minnie with the red roses in her arms.

Minnie walked toward the corner where she was to meet the trolley. For the second time that morning she had escaped from her aunt before Jim Elton's name had been spoken though even now every impulse urged her back into the house she had just quitted to ask for news from him.

It was at this moment that the god of coincidence prompted Jim Elton to open his lodging-house door and come into the street. He came toward her with such delight that it overshadowed his amazement.

"Mrs. Hewlett told me you had gone!" he said, beaming at her. "I got in ten minutes after you left this morning and raced down to the station just as your train was going."

"I forgot something," she said lamely. "I'm on my way back. Good-morning, Mr. Elton. I'm in a hurry."

"Mrs. Hewlett didn't tell you what kept me away last night, did she? Well, I don't like to talk about it, but just before we closed last night, there was an accident, a girder fell, and Cassidy—poor fellow—he was right under it, Minnie. I went to the hospital with him and then—somebody had to tell his folks. He lives out in Wayne. There's just his mother—that's all. I stayed with her until some of the neighbors came in this morning. She was nearly crazy, poor soul!"

"Oh!" said the girl.

The trolley that went to the station clanged past them and she looked at it smiling.

"I declare, I've missed my car!" she said. "Walk to the station, won't you?" he urged. "There's plenty of time. I felt pretty sore about not seeing you last night, Minnie. I can hardly realize it's you with me now. How did it happen?"

She told him about Father Hewlett and the crimson ramblers, and he looked at her adoringly as they stood on the platform of the station waiting for the train.

"Will you give me a flower?" he said.

She broke a bit of crimson from her bouquet and he caught the hand that gave it to him in his as the train came thundering in.

"Minnie," he said, "I get a vacation next week, if I come to Connecticut will you be glad to see me? There's something I had to say to you last night that's got to be said. Will you let me come, Minnie?"

It was not in the girl's nature to coquette.

"Yes, I will," she said clearly.

They looked at each other for a moment with that look in which the man claims the woman that God meant for him and the woman that God meant for him.

Mrs. Deming, having placidly read and fanned herself some two hours in the New York station, greeted her daughter with an attempt at severity.



HE BROKE OFF A SPRAY OF THE RAMBLER AND SHE TUCKED IT COQUETISHLY IN THE OPEN NECK OF HER WHITE BLOSSOM.

the side of the house itself a superb crimson Rambler seemed to flaunt amid its own delicious perfume of colorless town. Before this, apparently wrapped in contemplation of its splendor, stood this sultry Summer afternoon, a little old man and a girl.

"'Twasn't no more than a little give me," Father Hewlett's voice, cracked but triumphant, rose as he approached the clump of his story. "Nothin' more than a slip. And look at it ma!"

He waved a tremendous hand at the flaunting Rambler.

The girl drew a long, appreciative breath. One could never have told from the flustering interest with which she followed Father Hewlett's story that this was far from her first hearing of the apotheosis of the Crimson Rambler.

"Well, you ought to be proud!" she assured him loudly.

"Eh!" said Father Hewlett; he was very deaf.

She raised her voice and repeated the compliment, her face flushing with the exertion. She was a radiant young creature, a ruddy blonde, warm as to tints and generous as to proportions and buoyant with health; the type of girl who, come might fancy could stand to symbolize the embryonic mother of a race. There was a look of motherhood now in the young eyes that looked at the bent old man whose head scarcely reached her shoulder.

"Well," she called at him, "aren't you going to give me one?"

"Dunno as I can spare one," he said begrudgingly, and they both laughed.

This was the invariable game that followed the inspection of the garden, and the old man delighted in it. He broke off a spray of the Rambler and she tucked it coquettishly in the open neck of her white blouse. "There!" she shrieked at him.

"Becomes ye," he chuckled gallantly.

Inside the kitchen window her aunt, Mrs. Hewlett, who was also the old man's daughter-in-law, looked out at them disapprovingly above the pan of unshelled peas in her lap. She was a little woman with a personality that suggested worn-out machinery still kept revolving by sheer power of insistent nerves. Her expression seemed to belong to one who was constantly affronted and resented it.

"There's Minnie pottering around the yard with father again," she said to her sister. "I should think she'd be eat alive with mosquitoes. It's all I can do to keep 'em out of the house with his coming in and going back there every few minutes. He gets crazier

and a little, instead of one. As a matter of course, Minnie had come with her mother.

Presently a factory whistle somewhere blew raucously and Mrs. Hewlett wrang her feet as at an order. "Get to hurry. The boys will be here in a few minutes," she said. "Jim Elton's usually home by this time, anyway. Since you and Minnie have been here he seems to beat the sound of the whistle. I don't know what he'll do when to-morrow comes and you're gone."

Mrs. Deming laughed unconcernedly. That a young man should be attentive to a pretty girl was a fact so accustomed to her way of thinking as to be unnoticeable.

Minnie was nineteen, and since her earliest school-days had never failed to have a certain number of callow admirers at her heels, with all of whom she had laughed and chummed as unconsciously as if each had been her own sister. If romance had ever touched her with a very finger tip, she had given no evidence of it.

Mrs. Deming pursued the subject, however, as she and Mrs. Deming laid the long table in the gloomy dining room.

"Well, he's a real nice fellow and he's got nice parents, too. His father was a friend of George's in Chicago—that's how he happened to come to me for board when they sent him here to take charge of the new steel works. He's awful handy around the house, too—does lots of little things that a woman can't manage and father's no more use than an old tomcat."

"Yes, I guess he's real pleasant," agreed Mrs. Deming. "I must say he seems as far above those young men from the mill as a church spire from a fence, though I don't doubt they're good, honest boys. It's been real nice for Minnie to have somebody to take her around a little,—that trolley ride to Electric Grove last night and going to Luna Park Saturday. I was glad she had the chance—but, land! I guess he won't miss us much as you think. Why, they haven't known each other two weeks until to-morrow! I guess there's nothing to worry about."

"You'd know Wilbur Deming one month to the day you ran off with him!" Mrs. Hewlett retorted.

Mrs. Deming's face grew rose as youth itself and she laughed. "Those were different times," she said. "People are more calculating these days. I'm not afraid of Minnie doin' anything like that—she's a funny girl—I never dared tease her about the boys—for all her laughing, she can flare up like lightning."



SHE SMILED BACK AT HIM OVER HER ARMFUL OF ROSES.

daughter who had risen from her seat and was hurriedly putting on her gloves. The girl's mouth was determined—her eyes were very bright.

"I am going to get off this train the minute it stops, and I am going back for that bouquet," said Minnie. "I'd rather die than have that poor old man think I didn't appreciate his flowers."

"Why, you must be crazy!" grasped Mrs. Deming, her large face crimson. "What an I going to do?"

"You stay on the train, that's all," said her daughter; "and when you get to New York, just sit in the waiting-room until I come—I'll be as quick as I can. We're not out of the city yet, I'll take a car back and catch the first train I can to New York. You just wait for me, mother, that's all."

"Well, miss the Shore train!"

"Then we'll take the next one. Now don't say another word, mother. You just get a magazine and read it in the station till I come!"

"The man says we can't get a Shore train before two o'clock," she announced with an offended air. "Well, I declare! You look as happy as though you hadn't been racing all over creation since breakfast."

Minnie smiled vaguely; her mother seemed to be talking to her through a very mist of happiness that made her voice seem far away. "I've been thinking while I sat here—and land knows I've had time enough!" continued Mrs. Deming, "about Father Hewlett; and seeing that you're so crazy about him, suppose we take him with us for a while—the rest of the Summer, at any rate. But how can he get to Connecticut?"

Minnie lifted her eyes wherein love and gratitude shone like stars. "He can come out with Jim next week," she said. She lifted the crimson ramblers between her radiant face and her mother's bewildered eyes.