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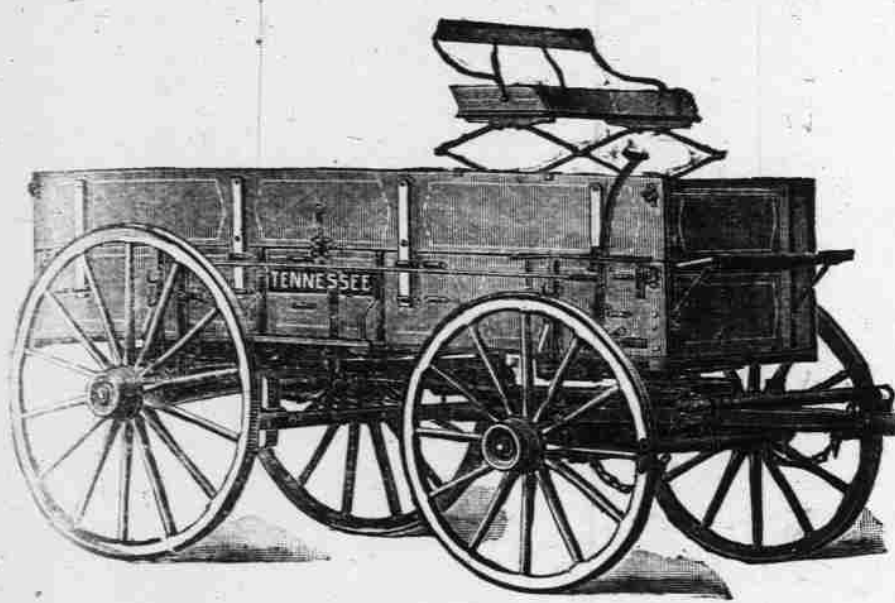
THE ASHEVILLE REGISTER.

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ASHEVILLE, N. C., SATURDAY MORNING, NOVEMBER 29, 1902.

PRICE 5 CENTS

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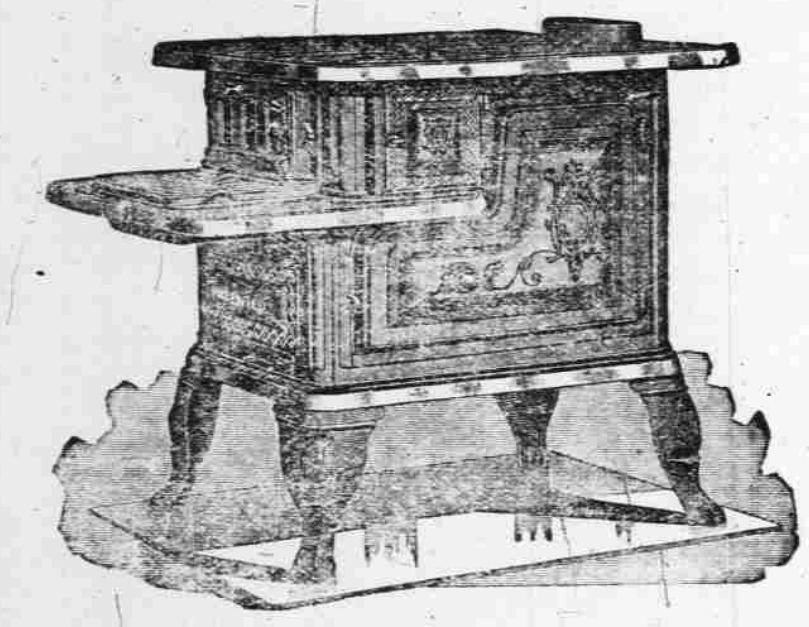
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ON THE SQUARE

MISS RHODA'S VIS-A-VIS

.. A Thanksgiving Story
By JEANNETTE H. WALWORTH

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PASTOR BAILEY looked across the breakfast table toward his pretty old wife with a wrinkle of dissatisfaction puckering his benevolent forehead. A glimmer of amusement in his clear blue eyes, however, had the effect of a contradiction. "Minerva, she is going to do it again."

Mrs. Bailey suspended the silver strainer over his second cup of tea to ask: "Who is going to do what again, Mr. Bailey?" "Rhoda Crafts. What day of the month is this?"

"Oh, Rhoda Crafts, is it? This is the 14th, I knew she would."

"Well, now, there, my love, that just shows where your superior knowledge of your own sex comes in. Before getting this"—with one fat, white finger he patted a letter which lay open beside his plate—"I should have said just as positively that I knew she would not. I trusted that the experience of last year would make her let up on her Quixotic nonsense."

"There isn't much 'let up' in Rhoda Crafts, and she wouldn't know what you meant by 'Quixotic nonsense.' She calls it her 'cup of cold water' in his same' day."

"She might let up a little on the name at least." The pastor laughed indulgently. "I am afraid our dear Rhoda is a trifle obstinate."

"Frightfully. She comes of obstinate stock. She has started in for this annual foolishness, and she is going to keep it up until something comes of it."

The dissatisfaction in the pastor's face entirely eclipsed the gleam of fun in his eyes as he asked: "But what can possibly come of it, my dear?"

"Oh, don't ask me, Mr. Bailey! Either peace of mind from giving so many cups of cold water in his name, which is her name for a first class Thanksgiving day dinner, or John Graham must come of it."

"It will not be John Graham." There was a note of angry conviction in the pastor's mild voice. "He is not a man to be put on or cast off like an old shoe by any woman. And you will admit that Rhoda did not act badly, my dear?"

"I am not going to thrash that old straw over again," said Mrs. Bailey, with sex loyalty, "but it is a pity."

"It is half a dozen pities. She is too going and too handsome to be living alone in alliance. She ought to have some duties to occupy her mind and time."

"Yes, there is a possibility of her doing so," said the pastor, with an apologetic laugh. "Well, I have ten days to go on."

"Which is time enough to sift Limesport from center to circumference in search of a vis-a-vis. That last one, the fellow that walked off with the silver she fed him with, ought to make her cautious. Does she allude to that?"

The pastor picked up the open letter by his plate. "Oh, yes, quite frankly, I'll read you her note. She says:

"My Dear Mr. Bailey—I am going to depend upon you this year to select and give me my Thanksgiving day gift. Since my experience of last year I mistrust my own judgment. I trust you and dear Mrs. Bailey won't side with my good Margaret in trying to stop what she calls my 'pun-

ishment.' I have registered a vow to sit at table on every Thanksgiving day, and one who is poor and friendless and homeless. I am foolish enough to hope that the bread I thus throw upon the waters may be somehow, somewhere, returned to me. The ordeal seems more trying each year. But it is a fitting penance for my arrogance and injustice. I am going to have the selection of my vis-a-vis to you this year."

"Well she may mistrust her own judgment," Mrs. Bailey commented. "If she was older and ugly instead of being only twenty-five and the handsomest woman in Limesport, I would not fret so over her nonsense."

"There is always Margaret Kempe," said the pastor, with the effect of offering comfort. "Yes, there is always Margaret, and she's worth a whole battalion of ordinary men. Well, my dear, I wish you joy of your task. You've got ten days to find your man in."

Considering himself dismissed, the pastor gathered up his mail matter and retreated to the section of a vis-a-vis to be on his Thanksgiving day sermon, as conscience dictated, but to ponder Rhoda Crafts' strange request. He would rather, if she were bent upon keeping her strange vow, that she should have the selection of a vis-a-vis to him. He had performed the marriage ceremony for Rhoda's father and mother; he had baptized her, and to whom should she turn in any emergency if not to him? Also he had hoped to unite her to John Graham—John Graham, whom he ever loved. John Graham, whom all Limesport knew and loved for a high spirited, clean souled man, with the "makings of much" in him, as Margaret Kempe had herself quaintly put it when upbraiding her mistress for not knowing her own mind.

But John was gone, and Rhoda was here, an ever present problem with the old pastor and his wife. The matter of this vis-a-vis weighed heavily on both of them.

And there the matter stopped until the day and the hour arrived when Margaret Kempe, tall, muscular, potential, stood before her mistress and announced ardently:

"Miss Rhoda, standing before her looking glass putting the last finishing touches to her dinner toilet. On Thanksgiving day, the last five of them at least, she always arrayed herself in black silk, with lavender ribbons. To Margaret, who objected on the score of monotony, she explained: "It looks staid and dignified, Marger. It is well to impress my strange vis-a-vis with an idea of age. This costume is subdued."

"Half way mourning, I call it," Marger had scornfully commented on other days. But she had finally accepted the stiff black garb as a factor in the "foolishness" of all the year.

The annual ordeal was imminent. Miss Crafts as her potential maid had been to church, there to leave their thank offerings. Miss Rhoda had almost hoped the Rev. Mr. Bailey would report a failure in his search for a vis-a-vis, but Mrs. Bailey would have her in the aisle to whisper in her ear: "Mr. Bailey says he hopes you will find him inoffensive in every particular, my dear."

And Miss Rhoda, walking homeward under the bright November skies, meeting family groups all hurrying toward some common center of clan rallying, nodding to the one and that, who all knew her for a solitary, swallowed a great lump in her throat and reminded herself that it was in his name that she was about to receive this unseen guest into her dainty home.

And when, a little later on, Margaret presented with that curt announcement she had to acknowledge to herself that her self inflicted penance was getting upon her nerves. She faced toward Margaret in visible trepidation.

"What does he look like, Marger?" "I've seen worse looking men. If he was to shave off a foot or two of beard and have his hair shingled and look at you through his own eyes instead of blue glass goggles, it might be easier to say what he does look like. I don't like his color much."

Miss Rhoda recoiled. "You don't mean?" "Oh, he's white, or he was originally. Looks more like a very old tallow candle than anything I can think of just now."

"Is he a foreigner?" "I can't say. You can trust him to understand English enough to know what you mean when you top your cup of cold water foolishness with that envelope holding a ten dollar bill."

"Is he—does he look neat, Marger?" "Well, for a charity guest I should say yes. He's clean, which the last one wasn't."

"Oh, don't speak of the last one! The wretch! The ingrate!" "And he don't smell of tobacco, like the one before that did."

Miss Rhoda exhaled a soft sigh of thankfulness and delicately cologned the handkerchief she had just taken from her bureau drawer. "And he does look like he used a comb and brush once in awhile, which was more than the one before the other one did."

"Oh, I hope he will eat with his fork!" Marger Kemp fairly snorted with scorn. "Well, then, I just hope he won't. I hope this one will do something so outrageously bad that you will never have another cup of cold water idiot sitting opposite you at your own table and me washing up dishes after him as long as you and me live."

"Oh, Marger, you know it is part of my penance!" "I know it! Part of your fudge! But for all his gentleman gone to seed looks he may this very minute be filling his pockets with something that he likes better than cold water. I'll go down. You can ring for dinner when you're ready."

"Where did you leave him, Marger?" "In the back parlor. I took the liberty of turning the key on the outside too. He never heard me, though."

"How do you know he did not? It would be cruel to put any indignity on him, Marger."

"I ain't likely to put any on him that'll remember after his first slice of turkey. I left him standing stock still before your picture, the one taken when you was fresh from school. I know he can't walk off with that. It's nailed to the wall."

"How exceedingly impudent!" said Miss Rhoda, growing pink in her resentment.

Margaret Kempe thumped her way down the carpeted steps in the rebellious frame of mind which had become common to her Thanksgiving days. Her left foot, which by reason of an ancient ankle sprain seemed to act quite independently of the right, beat an angry accompaniment to her perturbed reflections.

This was the fifth time she had been called upon to minister to the comfort of a "picked up" guest. She supposed Miss Rhoda had Scripture warrant for going out into the highways and byways for the eaters of her feast, but it was not her (Margaret's) notions of a Thanksgiving gathering. It was a "first class mortification" to her to be passing dishes to a cup of cold water tramps, but what could she do in face of Miss Rhoda's hard bedsteadness.

Then Marger's reflections took on a softer tinge. How pretty "the child" looked, with her wavy brown hair piled high over her smooth, forehead and her eyes that sparkled like diamonds in the sky, and with nobly but an unknown tramp for a vis-a-vis. Very likely, thought Marger, was the "going to seed gentleman" whom she had locked in downstairs to await the emancipation of dinner hour.

Upstairs Miss Rhoda was going through a little formula of her own. There was a picture of John Graham tucked away in the top drawer of her writing desk. She always appealed to him before going to meet her unseen vis-a-vis to bear in mind that what she was doing was done for his sake, almost at his command.

Margaret's handsome face that confronted her in the hour of her tearful appeal, but as she had last seen it it was stormy with indignation over what he had called her unwomanly injustice.

"Half way mourning, I call it," Marger had been unjust; she had been passionate and silly, and he had not been patient. It required all her determination to hold fast to the obligation which in her remorse she fancifully declared he had laid upon her.

It was on a Thanksgiving day, one which they had expected to spend joyously together, that their quarrel had come about, stormingly, fustianously and unreasonably. She had told him she never wanted to look upon his face again. He had asked her twice—nay, three times—slowly, almost solemnly, if she had meant it. Three times, without a quaver in her voice, but with the coldness of death clasping her, sinking her teeth, she had said she did. And then he had turned away from her with the words that she had laughed to scorn then, but had writhed under afterward and never forgotten.

"There will be a vacant chair at your table, my dear, and I believe, an aching spot in your heart. As you have driven me into exile, I go. When this day rolls round again, perhaps the ache in your heart may be eased by filling the chair I was to fill with some one who, like myself, shall be a stranger, homeless and poor. I shall never see you for pardon until my conscience joins you in accusing me."

And then he had gone away from her, out of her home, out of the town, out of her ken, leaving her half dazed over the suddenness of it all.

This was how it came about that Miss Rhoda came to ask old Professor Simmons to dine with her on the next Thanksgiving day. He was a "stranger and poor and homeless." And when the professor left Limesport because there was no one there who wanted to be coached in Greek and Hebrew she cast about for some one else to do penance with. Always she solemnized the feast with the quaint greeting:

"In Christ's name, friend, I make you welcome. If I can add one ray of brightness to your day, I shall have that much more to return thanks for."

Margaret Kempe was always close behind the portieres that divided the back parlor from Miss Rhoda's pretty dining room, on hand, as she expressed it, "to sail in if needs be."

But up to the coming of the gone to seed man there had been no call for her to "sail in." The strangely professed feast was accepted with shame-faced gratitude. As their colloquial efforts were generally explicated to kindly impertinences on Miss Rhoda's part, who sowed much good seed of an advisory sort while feeding her vis-a-vis, conversation did not thrive.

Margaret Kempe's military tramp, as the dinner progressed from eyes to coffee, was the most conspicuous sound apparent. The end of the meal was a release for all concerned. But an element of the unusual seemed to have crept into Miss Rhoda's cup of cold water day this year. Even while she was murmuring her silent grace, "As I do unto this man, O Lord, do thou unto my beloved exile," she had decided this was no ordinary eater of charity feasts.

The man was thin to gauntness, and a beard that Aaron or Moses might have worn gracefully covered his sal-low face. Glasses hid his eyes, so that, even if Miss Crafts ever experienced any feminine curiosity touching the looks of her vis-a-vis, which she did not, it would have remained unsatisfied this time.

She was sure he was out of hearing; also that he had seen better days. Evidently he had seen better days. She should like to know what had brought him to Limesport.

Margaret Kempe also found her mind running speculatively beyond the region of the viands.

A man who knew enough to use his fork instead of his knife and who handled his napkin as if it were a familiar necessity rather than a luxurious novelty seemed out of place at a charity dinner. He had primarily worn her good graces by using the front doornat and hanging his shabby hat on the hall rack.

She stamped to and from the pantry with a growing sense of the unusual besetting her. He seemed to find more to talk about than the other vis-a-vis, and Miss Rhoda seemed quite willing that he should do his share of the entertaining.

Margaret Kempe coughed. Whenever Margaret coughed it meant either that Miss Rhoda had forgotten something or that the traditions of the day were being trifled with. Always it was a call to attention.

On this occasion it meant that the prescribed routine was not being observed. By rights Miss Rhoda should have risen from the table at the precise moment of the vis-a-vis swallowing his last drop of coffee, and in her staid manner—her "stand off manner," Marger called it—she should have handed her Thanksgiving guest the envelope containing her "small contribution to his comfort," the giving of an envelope containing a ten dollar bill. The giving of the envelope was usually accompanied by a murmured bit or two of advice which Marger (again) called the doxology.

But today Miss Rhoda tarried strangely. The gaunt man had even folded up his napkin. Miss Rhoda dallied with her teaspoon. The doxology and the envelope lagged. Marger Kempe coughed, so violently this time that it was useless to assume ignorance. Miss Rhoda lifted her soft eyes pleadingly to the stern ones which from the vantage ground of the gaunt man's back were indelibly fixed upon her in a stare of stony surprise.

"Oh, Marger, this gentleman knows my—our friend, Mr. John Graham. Met him in Siberia. I was just going to—"

Evidently Marger Kempe considered that the long deferred moment for her to "sail in" had arrived. No such confidence game as that should be played out under her very nose. "Siberia, did I understand you, ma'am, the place which I have always heard was inhabited by nothing but snow and icebergs? Is it likely that our Mr. John Graham would go to a place of that sort of his own free will? He used to be some choice about who he went with." This with a glance of disapprobation cast at the gaunt man which made Miss Rhoda blush for the manners of her dragon. The vis-a-vis adjusted his steel bonnet spectacles with a nervous hand. An inarticulate

good maid distrusts my statement. Will you be so kind?"

He glanced at Marger. She extended her tray at arm's length. Such social interchanges were a violent infraction of the cold courtesies of the preceding cup of cold water days. The package dropped upon the tray with a metallic click.

"Kindly pass that to Miss Crafts. It will vouch for the fact that Mr. John Graham and I have met. He was very ill before I left Siberia. It was my good fortune to be with him at the time. When he was at his worst, he made me take from this chain a small locket and destroy it. He said he wanted no one staring at the picture it contained after he was gone. The chain he begged me to keep as a small souvenir of friendship."

Margaret stood close behind her mistress' chair. Her strong, faithful hand lay along its back. She could see the gray pallor spread over the sweet, patient face as, loosening the silk wrappings, she brought to view a little chain of gold and onyx links. She could feel the tremor that ran along Rhoda's frame.

"Did it belong to him, ma'am—our Mr. John?" "Yes," said Rhoda scarcely above a whisper. "Then with a sudden revulsion to the haughty manner which belonged to the day's traditions she stood up and cast about for her envelope. It was not in her pocket. She turned toward Marger with an air of command which seemed a reversal of attitudes:

"You will be late getting to your sister, Marger, with your thank offerings. You can go at once. I know where it is now. I left it in the back parlor when I went to summon my guest. You will step this way, please."

To the gaunt man, who had risen when she did.

The chain Marger had passed back to its owner without comment from Miss Crafts. She was glad to perceive that Miss Rhoda was reverting to an attitude of safe aloofness. Her own snub had silenced the legions of vis-a-vis. No harm could come now of her looking after things in the pantry while the envelope and the doxology were in progress. She was free to fill her basket with the fragments of the feast and transport them to the edge of town, where they would find eager consumers in a regiment of "brats" who called her aunt.

Quite half an hour had expired when, bonneted and assisted, she passed through the front hall on her way seaward. She gave a start of surprise at sight of the shabby hat still hanging on the hall rack.

Then a shudder of horror ran down her substantial spine. Her refractory left foot consented to act with her right in carrying her with incredible rapidity toward the back parlor. Surely the giving of the envelope and its supplemental advice could not take that long. Voices subdued, but amiable, reassured her. Men did not murder their

a rich man. He has been engaged as civil engineer in the laying out of a railroad through Siberia. The pay is good, but the work hard and the climate trying. I doubt whether any of his friends would recognize him, he has changed so since I first saw him."

Then Miss Rhoda said (Marger ground her teeth in rage), "He could never change so that some of his friends would not recognize him."

The idea of her mistress allowing herself to entertain a tramp in that purely social manner! No visiting of sisters for her that day. Marger stamped back to the pantry and deposited her basket. This thing had gone as far as it must go.

She Could Feel the Tremor That Ran Along Rhoda's Frame.



sound disturbed his heavily bearded lips. It might have been a discolored laugh or an angry protest. He felt for pockets and produced a small package wrapped in a bit of old silk.

"It is well to have so vigilant a guardian, dear lady. Evidently your

and rings, which she always begged Miss Rhoda to send to bank, and then stop to converse with their victims. At least she had a right to hear what confidence game he was putting up on her mistress this time. It was his voice.

"You see, Graham ought to come back

thority, told her he guessed she could. Happiness and the loving ministrations of a devoted wife soon restored John Graham's youth and good looks. But he has inflicted one great disappointment upon Margaret Kempe. He

(Continued on fourth page.)



and shoes must be sturdy to stand the racket—the romping play incident to the trips to and from school.

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are made to withstand the hardest knocks. Strong and staunch, full of wear and yet not clumsy. Goodness—they have more than others, but the price is no higher. See them before you fit the boy out.

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