OUR SHORT STORY PAGE

LIZABETH laughed at her uncle's re-iterated cautions and directions-Elizabeth always saw the funny side of things-but there was an undernote of real irritation in her voice as she answered, following him out upon the platform, "Good gracious, Uncle Henry, anybody'd think I never taken a railway trip alone before. I hope I've got sense enough to travel forty

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miles without getting lost!" "But you change cars at Hoosac Junction!" he called anxiously from the station platform as her train began to move. It was the seventh time he had told her that. "Well, what if I do!" she shouted with some heat. As she turned back she thought resentfully, "As if I were a child or a half-

Before she could finish the exclamation it had summened suddenly to her mind the recollection of that talk with her sister. She hurried to her seat and as the train rattled and jolted its way out of the Albany yards she composed herself to think things

It was literally the first quiet moment she had had to recall that talk, as unexpected and extraordinary on her part as on Dolly's. How could she have brought herself to speak so openly of what she had only allowed herself to half-guess as the cause of her uneasy discontent of the last year! She still heard, as though it were something wholly disassoclated from her, her own voice saying, "For mercy's sake. Dolly, don't torment me, as everybody else in the family does, trying to persuade me I ought to marry. I'm single, not in the least because I object to matrimony, but simply because nobody-nobody, do you hear--has ever proposed to me!"

She had begun the sentence with her usual laughing briskness, and it was with amazed shame that she heard a quaver in her voice at the end and felt the tears stinging her eyelids. It had been a relief to say it out, but she had never been so grateful to Dolly's matter-of-fact coolness as when that young matron had answered calmly, "I thought so all the time. It comes of your having had no mother to tell you things. The rest of the family think you must have had a dozen offers from some of the men who spend so much time calling on you and taking you out, but any woman with an eye in her head could see that not one of them was in love with you. Now you listen to me and learn some-

In the swaying train Elizabeth sat suddenly upright, as startled now as she had been at the time by the revelation of cynical philosophy underlying the smiling serenity of their rosy little Dolly. She exclaimed to herself again as she had to her mentor, "But that's all out of fashion now-a-days. Men don't like clinging, helpless women any more. Why, everybody says so!"

She saw again Dolly's knowing little smile as she pooh-poohed this naivete. "Don't you believe a word of it! Its like a change of fashion in hats! Men may look different but they're just the same underneath. They can't abide a capable woman. She makes them seem less superior. Why I thought every woman knew that!" "But that's despicable, if its true of them!" Elizabeth had cried hotly. "You can't believe such a low-down thing of Horace, when he's so devoted!"

Horace's wife laid down her embroidery and laughed outright. "Are you really twenty-five, or are you seventeen? Why do you suppose Horace is so devoted to me? Simply because he thinks I'm a pretty little silly who couldn't draw the breath of life if he didn't show me how. As for its being despicable, what's the use of calling names? You've got to take things as they are, and if you want to like men, don't expect too much of them."

She embroidered for a moment in silence, and then earnestly and unemotionally summed up her doctrine, "When men take for granted women are idiots and don't know enough to come in when it rains, don't resent it. Leagn to like it!" At this point one of the babies had cried and

Dolly's words of wisdom had stopped. But they had gone on resounding portentously in her sister's ears. Even now the rumbling of the train made an accompaniment to the refrain, 'Don't resent itlearn to like it!" and Elizabeth reviewed her life under the new light of this sphorism. It certainly explained a great number of things she had not understood before. One incident after another came to her as illustrating the truth of what she had denied so hotly to Dolly. She thought of the women her platonic men-friends (she had never known any other variety) had married, and of their attitude towards their husbands; she thought of girls who had been debutantes when she was and who were still spinsters, and recognized in them the same qualities of competent, business-like capacity to take care of themselves and run their own lives of which she was so proud in herself; and finally she thought of the very last incident that had happened. How exasperating she had found Uncle's Henry's belittling care of her, and yet how hurt he had looked when she resented it! She supposed Dolly would have looked pathetically anxious, would have hung on his words, made him repeat his directions and sent him away full of happy importance; and then would promptly have forgotten all about him, and asked the trainman if she had needed any in-

A rustic bride and groom occupied the seat in front of her, but she had hardly taken in the significance of their self-conscious laughter and whispered remarks, before the train began to slow jerkily down. The man asked the conductor if they were approaching Hoosac Junction and if they needed to change cars there. 'Upon receiving the answer he turned to his wife and said, quite as if she were deaf and had not heard a remark addressed to them both, "We're almost at Hoosac Junction and we have to change cars there, so get on your wraps." In spite of her depression Elizabeth smiled at the importance of his manner. She noticed that he guided his bride down the aisle as though she were blind, cautioning her volubly against obstacles that she could not but see as well as he. As he ran down the steps ahead of her, he stumbled and fell headlong, his cheap coat splitting up the back and showing a bright pink shirt. Without noticing this he scrambled to his feet and called. Don't try to come down till I'm there to help you,

At this Elizabeth laughed aloud. "The eternal masculine!" she said to herself. "He made such a good job of getting down himself he's sure he can help somebody else." Through her laughter, however, she noticed with what an instinctive art the raw country-girl adapted herself to the man's point of view, allowed her vigorous young body to be guided cautiously down the steps, and up on the station platform as though she were an infirm old woman, and how she smiled gratefully at the man who had piloted her so safely through this danger-

Elizabeth labeled the man's answering adoring gaze "offensively patronizing," but there was something else in it which had never been in any gaze directed on her, and her smile died away. It occurred to her uncomfortably that she might really know less about the problems as being those of mean and petty artifices, and of life itself as an ignoble affair; and reflected with some bitterness that undoubtedly Dolly would call that "looking at things as they really were."

Afterwards, in meditating on the matter, she concluded that this was the turning point; that, overcome as by a last straw by the unspeakable dreariness of Hoosac Junction, she then and there came to her momentous decision; but at the time she was aware only of a general sinking of the heart and a forlorn desolation. She wished heartily that her visit in the mountains were over and she were on her way back to Albany. When the train to Manchester appeared she climbed wearily in, dropped into the first seat, and took a perverse pleasure in not looking out at the mountains as they began to shoulder themselves up above the horizon. Dolly had once said of her that for sudden pitchblack fits of melancholy nobody could equal a person like Elizabeth who laughed a great deal.

The moody traveller ignored the people in the car as she ignored the lovely summer landscape, so that she was quite surprised that evening when her neighbor at dinner began the conversation by saying, "You may think I'm a stranger to you, but I'm not. I sat across the aisle from you and stared at you all the way from Hoosac Junction up here." He spoke with a gay effrontery which carried no offence, and waited for her answer to strike the keynote of their acquaintance.

"I'm afraid I wasn't a cheerful object for contemplation," began Elizabeth with her pleasant impersonal laugh, "I was feeling horribly blue and depressed, and wondering if-" She was again startled to hear a quaver in her voice, and stopped, flushing at the idea of telling a stranger what had been depressing her on that journey.

The young man evidently considered that the keynote of sentimentality had been struck and joined the harmony at once by leaning towards her impulsively and saying in a low, intimate tone, "I saw you looked unhappy and frightened. It made me want to take care of you."

These last words resounded loudly in Elizabeth's ears. Perhaps Dolly was right. She glanced up and down the table. Nobody knew her except her hostess, who was desperately pre-occupied with the cares of a large house-party. Her visit in Manchester opened before her like a clean white sheet on which she could write herself down as any character she chose without fear of detection. She looked again at her companion, who, preserving the most discreet of expectant silences persuaded her dumbly to confidence, with softly inviting dark eyes.

She drew a long breath and made the plunge. As she brushed her hair before her mirror that night, she laughed inextinguishably at the recollection of the rest of the evening, but she was halffrightened, nevertheless, at the ease with which, the plunge once taken, she had sailed away upon unknown and, to her, wholly uncharted seas. She tried to imagine Uncle Henry's face if he had heard her dilating upon the terrors of a solitary journey, and ending with a pathetic, "I know it's foolish to be so sensitive, but I can't help it. I'm so dependent upon others' care!"

The impetus of her start had carried them both along to an intimate discussion of the real nature of women, in which Elizabeth, summoning Dolly's mocking spirit to her aid, had proclaimed the sex as universally a clinging vine, and herself the frailest of its tendrils. She woke up in the night and even while she shivered nervously at the thought of where she might end if she continued to joke, she laughed aloud at the vision of herself masquerading in that guise. She put her fear resolutely out of her mind. The irresponsibility of transient relationships both dazzled and reassured her. She would never meet any of these people again she told herself, and never in the world would she have such an opportunity to see if Dolly was right.

Morning light brought no reaction from her resolution and after breakfast she sat in the library, with Paul Mortimer, her last night's dinner partner, leaning over her shoulder, instructing her how to use a check-book. (She had brought a new one down stairs for the purpose).

"Do I sign here?" she asked, "or is it the date that goes on that line? I never can remember!" Here she sighed prettily over the complications of business life, and, "Oh, my goodness! Do I have to do it all over again on the 'stub' as you call it; what a funny name! And now, which do I get the money from, the check or the stub?"

At the end of this extraordinary speech she joined Mortimer's pitying laugh at her impracticality with a wild whoop of merriment whose almost hysterical genuineness she feared would betray her. She, who had run her widowed father's household ever since she was a little girl, to be asking where to sign a

After this important business transaction was completed, Mortimer proposed showing her around the golf-course. As long as she lives Elizabeth will never forget that morning of instruction in the art of golf. Burying deep in oblivion the three silver cups she had won, she gave herself wholly over to Dolly's inspiration, and under the joyous sun of July "she played the fool," as she told herself complacently, "like a born clown." She exclaimed over the cunning little holes in the putting greens; she invariably tried to drive off with her putting iron, alleging that all those sticks looked just alike to her; she forgot all about the game at a crucial moment in her delight over some ducklings paddling in a pond; and she ended her performance by picking up the ball and throwing it with a charming petulance and a highly inaccurate aim in the general direction of the club-house, observing with a laugh that she had had enough for the morning and that that was a much more sensible way to get the ball over the

They raced each other home, and arrived flushed and laughing. "I haven't had such a jolly time in years!" Mortimer told her at luncheon.

ground than to poke at it with sticks!

"Nor I," she assured him. "I didn't know golf could be so much fun. It is all because you're so patient with stupid me!"

"Its all because you're so sunny and inspiriting. Its a revelation of temperament," he answered with an accent which was new in Elizabeth's experience of masculine conversation.

After luncheon their hostess sent them to drive to the next village on an errand, and here Elizabeth's courage failed a little. She had enjoyed the morning as she would have enjoyed a rattling farce at a theatre, but she had no such passion for golf as for horses, and besides, Mortimer played excellent golf and he did not drive well. He said frankly that he didn't know much about it, but he undertook with ready confidence to teach her-her! Elizabeth Fortescue, the only one in the family who could subdue Black Lightning when he grew fractious. Mortimer showed her how to hold the reins and showed her wrong. He handled the big high stepping bay in just the worst way to get speed out of him, and he all but took a piece out of the hub as they turned up the driveway on their way home.

At dinner Elizabeth was tired out with repression and inclined to throw up her whole campaign, but the irresistibly comic delights of being instructed an entire evening in the very elementary elements of bridge sent her to bed flushed with inward laughter and vaguely soothed by an emotion she did not recognize. She wondered if her hostess had noticed with disapproval that she had spent the entire day with the same man.

The next morning that care-worn lady relieved the girl's mind on the subject. "I am so glad you are

was incapable of conducting the smallest operation in life that she found herself hesitating in genuine doubt before processes that were as familiar to her as eating her dinner. She stepped back and watched him tear down a rail fence for her to pass, with as complete a momentary unconsciousness of her capacity to swing herself lightly over it as though her former self were that of a previous existence. She accepted without even repressed resentment his anxious comfortings during a thunder-storm, she listened docilely to a, b, c, explanations of political matters, she let-herself be helped over tiny brooks. calmly she heard him explain quite incorrectly the workings of their host's automobile, she drank in elementary lectures on history; all with an ease which made her say to herself vaguely, "If he should -if I did-why, perhaps I might be able to keep it up the way Dolly does."

In general, however, she was incapable of making even so rudimentary a reflection on her situation. She had told herself at first, that just for once she would let herself go; and now she realized with a startled quickening of her blood that she had gone far beyond her own control. She still laughed a great deal, but it was generally an excited, unsteady mirth. Once in a while it seemed to her that Mortimer's answering laugh had something of the same agitation in it, and as the time for his departure drew near, she grew more and more sure of it. It comforted her own scared confusion to know that he was perturbed, and on his last afternoon, as they were driving together, it steadied her newes to feel. ry-I can't be! It has saved me-it has saved you! his so electrically throbbing.

She filled in the long silences by saying to herself, "Its coming-its coming," and when Paul began to speak, she knew by the sound of his voice before she understood a word, that it had come. He said, halting and hesitating, "I can't think of anything else but that I'm going away to-morrow. I don't know when I'll ever see you again, if I don't say now-" and then with a rush, "Oh, Betty, do I need to say it-don't you know without my-" His voice failed him and there was another silence.

Elizabeth looked down, watching the road stream past under the rapid wheels. Deep somewhere in her body a little pulse began to tick as if presaging a faster beating of her heart at his next words. She glanced up quickly, struck by his silence, and was moved to pity by the acutely miserable look on his face. She wished she could reassure him, let him know that he need not fear a repulse; perhaps she should answer now and not wait for-

The big bay snorted and shied at a piece of paper in the road. Before Paul could shift the reins for a closer hold, a gust of wind flapped the paper across the horse's knees and he reared suddenly with a wild snort of terror. The check-line broke, snapped forward and struck him a sharp blow across the nose. Elizabeth had just time to grasp one side of the dog-cart as the frightened animal came down from his plunge and leaped forward in great bounds which flung the cart furiously from side to side.

He took for granted so unquestioningly that she

the horse's head, with every skilful turn to avoid an obstacle in their headlong career, she could have shouted in exultation. "Give me those reins!" She did not recognize the voice at all, so fiercely resentful was it, nor the angry eyes into which she looked. For an instant she had forgotten that she was not alone with the horse. The bay was still bounding and quivering, but unmistakeably vanquish.

ed, and Elizabeth handed the reins over to Paul without a word. Indeed, she could not think of a word to say, It the affair had been complicated before, where were they now she asked hersif. Paul breathed heavily for a time, evidently not trusting himself to speak Then he began severely, "If you-of course you don't realize what a very, very foolish thing that was to do, but if you knew a very little more about horses.

and strength. With every adroit swing she gave

you'd---" Elizabeth fairly bounded in her seat! "If I knew a little more about horses! When I know a thonsand times more than-"

A sudden realization that the incident meant more than a dispute over driving, came upon her startling. ly. It flashed through her mind that it meant every. thing-meant that she physically couldn't "keep it up"; and that vision almost drove out of her memory the affair of the run-away. All that she had been suppressing the last fortnight boiled over in incoherent words.

"Oh, I know it was awful manners, but I'm not sor-It has opened my eyes! I can't keep it up-nothing in the world is worth having to pretend all your life! I'm not helpless and dependent-I hate ft! I'd rather do anything than pretend to be-even to please you. If you can't like me the way I am-if men are such-"

She was so excited that she did not know what she was saying. The man cut her short with "In Heaven's name what are you talking about?" The anger in his face was erased by a blankness that amounted to stupefaction. Before this entirely impersonal and stern visage, Elizabeth was suddenly aware of the immense distance which separated them from the sentimental crisis of a few moments before. Her overstrained nerves gave way as never before in her life. She began to cry very violently. like a frightened child.

But even through her sobs she began bravely to explain. The big bay, tired and broken, had settled down to a sleepy walk before she had faltered through her miserable and endless story. She did not spare herself, she did not try to appeal to his pity, and she ended, "Oh, I've been horrible all through! I've deceived you with every word I've said till now. There isn't a thing I've pretended I couldn't 'do and you've helped me with, that I can't do well-and like to, and like to!" Her last words were spoken defiantly, and she faced him with a flash of spirit in her unhappy eyes.

It was the first time she had looked at him since she began to talk, and her heart sank to see how white and severe he looked. "Good Heavens!" he exclaimed as she paused, and after a moment, "Good Heavens!" It seemed to her that he was moved to an emotion she did not understand, as though her confession had had some singular effect on him quite different from what she imagined.

"Well, now at least you know the worst of me!" she said, desperately, to break the silence.

He roused himself from his stupor of amazement "Yes, I know the worst of you," he said uncomprom isingly; "but you don't begin to know the worst of me, nor what might have been the horrible worst of the whole thing. Lord Almighty!" he fell again into ejaculations, "Lord Almighty! What an escape we've had! It makes me sick to think of it! Look hereits the last thing a man would usually tell a woman and its awfully discreditable to me-but you've been honest-we're striking bed rock-you ought to know. Just before the horse ran away-you remember, had said--"

He hesitated, flushed and ashamed.

"Yes, I remember," the girl prompted him softly "Well, the only possible excuse I have is that I've been fighting with all my might to keep from falling in love with you-with the girl I thought you were." He drew a long breath and summoned all his resolution to go on, "Oh you can't understand what a ter ror I've always had of losing my head over a brain less, pretty, childish, helpless girl, and having her bang like a mill-stone on me all my life. I've seed so much of that sort of inferno in the life of my friends. Well, I thought this time I had done it. couldn't stop myself before I had said-but I-after I'd said that much, I felt it would mean life-long mis

ery if I went on." Elizabeth heard a loud roaring in her ears and looked so blank that Paul hurried on to have the wretched thing over, "I was going to back out!" He brought it out finally with the honest bluntness of despair. "I was going to sneak out by the low, meant pretext that I hadn't really proposed. Can you ever respect a man who had meant to do such

a thing?" The two faced each other, tragic in the deathly seriousness with which youth takes itself. The girl spoke first. "You say you don't like that

kind of a girl?" 'Good Lord, no! No sane man does. What under the sun is there to like about having to prevent a woman from making a fool of herself every time she tries to do any---'

She flared up at him in an unreason, hie anget. Her heat showed the immensity of her relief. "Then, why in Heaven's name did you pretend you did?" He answered quite simply, "Why, because that

was the kind of girl you seemed to be!" Elizabeth cried out upon him, "But I was only trying to please you!"

For a moment neither of them took in the extreme significance of these confessions. They looked speechless into each other's bewildered eyes. Then, "Oh, my dear," cried the man, "don't you see what has happened? It means we've fallen in love with each other as never two people before, that we care for each other as we really are, not, not as we've

"How do we know what we really are, if we're done nothing but lie to each other!" asked the girl with an impatient self-scorn,

He was unshaken in his joyous and triumphant interpretationof it all. "As if it made any difference what people do! Its what they are-underneath "But you haven't any idea what I am, underneath."

She appealed desperately to be contradicted. "Haven't I! he reassured her tenderly; and the "Well, I mean to find out! I'll telegraph the office that I'm not going back to-morrow. I'm going start my vacation—and everything else—all of



"DO I SIGN HERE?" SHE ASKED.

taking care of Paul Mortimer so beautifully for me," The shock drove everything out of her mind but doesn't like most girls, you know. And yet such a splendid catch? But he is so hard to entertain and its such a comfort to have him off my mind." And with these words she dismissed not only Mortimer but Elizabeth from the number of her responsibilities. The two were left to a tete-a-tete almost as uninterrupted as if they had been on shipboard.

Elizabeth's self-possession and clear purpose lasted about five days and then she was obliged to admit that she had lost her head completely. She did not know what she was doing or what was happening to her, except that her brain whirled when she tried to think and that all she could see in her few moments of solitude was Paul Mortimer's ardent face turned towards her. She sometimes looked at herself in the mirror with a startled excitement as though she expected to face an entire stranger, so impossible were her doings of each day; but at other times the role she was playing seemed almost her. own character, so hypnotically reflextive an influ-

she said, gratefully; "he's so difficult as a rule- her trained instinct for horsemanship, and as she looked quickly at her companion it was with an impersonal resentment for incompetence that she saw in her face that he was not master of the situation. He was very pale, his jaw set determinedly. but it was evident that he felt how hopelessly ineffectual was his steady, unskillful pull on the reins. He was using only his brute strength against the horse and the big animal had more brute strength than he.

A turn in the road was almost upon them, and as they reached it, Elizabeth felt something inside hen give way with a snap. A dizzy frenzy whirled upon her, and when she realized again what she was doing, the reins were in her hands, she was using the quick, sidelong jerks with which she had conquered Black Lightning so many times, and the big bay was under control. Even before she noted these material facts she was aware of a strange wave of emotion which surged up, hammering, into her brain. It was joy, clear, primitive, unregretting joy, to be herself again, to be using freely her own resourcefulness