

EDUCATION versus THE HOME



"MOTHER!" Cornelia stopped short at the door of her room, stunned by its transformation. With a shout of joy she dropped her toilet case on the floor and threw her slim body across the bed.

Helen, her mother, gasped and then laughed. "Why, you terrible child: It took me weeks to quilt that spread, and just look at you. Do you like the curtains?"

"Oh, yes, yes. And the cute cushions." Cornelia picked up one of the tiny puffs from the bed and smelled it. "Um. Now won't I have something to show Mell Ashby when she comes. I nearly died of envy when I saw her room. Their house is colossal."

"Mell Ashby," repeated Helen, puzzled. "Oh, yes. You wrote about her. But there are so many girls. I lose track. Is she coming?"

"Tomorrow morning, darling. It's all right, isn't it? You'll love her. She's staying till we go back to school."

The next day, with Mell's arrival, the house began to move. And Lance on Saturday created a stir.

Like his sister, he was full of his world, only instead of spilling it out to his family, he called up an old chum who was home too. Helen got almost her only news of him these last few months by overhearing telephone conversations.

Something had gone wrong with the picture she had drawn of this homecoming. It was all right to have Amelia Ashby, but Amelia was always preening, late for meals and overfond of talking family tree and heirlooms. And instead of her patterning herself to the house and its customs, the family was trying to pattern after her. Helen discovered to her intense disgust that she herself was bragging too. She felt quite definitely that her daughter was allied with an outsider, not against herself, but not with her, at least.

She gave a party for the young people that nearly finished her, and the house.

Otherwise they never seemed to be at home. There were constant telephone calls, dates to be arranged for, late hours, breakfasts in bed, silent, sleepy lunches, and then the squabble over the car. Lance wanted a car of his own, and said so. He seldom went where the girls were bound and was tired of playing chauffeur and keeping his own engagements, too. Mell said, "Really, Mrs. Calfax, it is more economical to keep a chauffeur than to have two or three cars."

HELEN had talked with Jack, but Jack was busy, got kisses, or hearty thumps, for the \$10 bills he handed out, or the corsages he sent home to the girls for a dance, and he was a man, of course, susceptible. Jack was playing the part of heavy father with a ven-

geance, showing off before this snip of a stranger. Helen could have shaken him. Under it all she wondered what he really felt.

After Cornelia and Lance had gone, with promises to write often, which they would not keep, Helen and Jack sat looking into the glowing logs, that first evening, for the season was cool.

"They are grand kids," said Jack. "It will be lonely without them."

"They weren't here much."

"Expensive," went on Jack.

"I know. But go ahead and order your suit anyway. I'll get Bender to alter my tweed."

"They don't realize, do they?" This rather surprised her. Jack wasn't quite as blind as she had thought.

They began to talk of the old times and the funny, lovable things Connie and Lance did as children. And then suddenly Helen said, "Why, we are going back years and years. What happened after that, Jack?"

"In what way?"

"We always think of them as they were when they were little. I do, anyway. Before they went to summer camps and preparatory schools and college. They're strangers to us now, almost. There is something not quite right about the whole thing."

"They've been away most of the time."

"IT'S our fault, Jack, not theirs. We were ambitious for them, wanted them to make friends everywhere, and good ones. We wanted to broaden and strengthen them, wished them to be happy, to develop and to grow into big people. We seem to have lost them somewhere on the road."

Jack was silent. He puffed at his pipe and turned his bad arm more directly to the fire. Not once had either Connie or Lance asked him how his arm was.

"The thing that worries me," said Jack, "is that they aren't taking their education as seriously as I'd hoped. Spreading themselves too thin. They expect rewards if they pass."

"Next summer," said Helen, "we're taking them back to ourselves and I'm going to try to retrieve some remnants of affection and responsibility they used to have as children."

But her husband got back to cases. "What is wrong with the system?"

"Well, education is vital, that's sure," mused Helen. "No one but a moron could argue the point. But I think two things are bad. One is that this country has such enormous distances, children far away at school don't see their parents often enough, as they do in other lands. On the other hand, nothing is done to fill this lack, by the schools themselves."

"But one thing they could do, instead of talking careers and teaching girls how to be secretaries, and teachers



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and scientists and what not. They could teach 'home.' It's hardly ever accented.

"It seems as though two forces were directly opposed, you see. Moralists and economists preaching on the 'unity of the home' and the grand influence of family life on the future of the country. Then up steps education and forgets there is such a thing. No wonder that the mothers of girls get confused."

"Home when they're little. Hand 'em over to the wolves when they are big," said Jack succinctly.

"It still doesn't fit. I get furious at being thrown into the discard so early in Connie's life, and so early in my own, too. And I'm hurt that Lance doesn't seem to need you any more than he does me. We're as important as the world, surely."

Jack reached over and took her hand. "Yes, we are," he said. "All parents are. We want the children to be happy, but—"

Helen finished it wistfully. "We want to be happy, too."

