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THE LINE OF LEAST RESISTANCE.

BY GRACE ELLERY CHANNING.



REALLY don't know which is the more charming of the two," said Aunt Myra, as her nieces hurried up the path.

"They are certainly creditable types of young America," assented Uncle Charlie, in a tone of much satisfaction.

All unconscious of this critical survey, the two girls hurried forward. It was not every day that one had an uncle and aunt come home from Europe. Aunt Myra, in particular, represented to their untraveled eyes something foreign and marvelous. Rodney and the younger children, their first curiosity satiated, had returned to their usual pursuits, but the elder girls could with difficulty keep their eyes from their aunt, or themselves from her side.

"O aunt," said Myra, seizing one arm while Susie possessed herself of the other, "do come and see our gardens!" and they led her away between them, while Uncle Charlie sauntered behind, mentally trying to decide between Myra's blonde prettiness and Susie's rosy charm.

"Mine isn't much to see," observed Susie, ruefully, "but Myra's garden is lovely."

"Now, what makes the difference. I wonder?" thought Aunt Myra, looking keenly down on the two little plots, while Myra, from her flowery one, gathered a handful of roses and heliotrope while Susie hunted vainly among the leaves of hers for violets.

"I'm afraid they are all gone," she announced, regretfully, rising. "Father likes to take a few into the office every day. I guess he took the last. And I did have some lovely carnations, but Rod must have picked them for the dance last night, so there's nothing but mignonette left. I always plant a lot of that; mother's so fond of it." She offered a cluster of the green and brown heads apologetically.

"Mignonette is quite good enough for any one," said Aunt Myra.

"Including me," said Uncle Charlie, helping himself to a spray.

"And me!" broke in Rodney's voice, laughingly, while without ceremony he stopped and plucked several bits from his sister's garden. "By the way, Susie, I rifled your plot of some superfine carnations last night."

"I judged you did," she replied. "You took all there were, mad boy!"

"If you had asked me, I would have given you some roses," said Myra.

"It was easier helping myself to Susie's. I knew she wouldn't mind," answered Rodney; and again Aunt Myra glanced inquiringly from one to the other.

"I'll take these to your room now, aunt," Myra continued, "and then we'd like to show you ours; that is, if you're not too tired or busy?"

"My present business is to make acquaintance with my nieces, and I think rooms tell a great deal about the people who live in them," said Aunt Myra, mischievously.

"Oh dear me!" thought Susie. "We'd better show you Myra's first, then," she said, aloud.

"Come along, Uncle Charlie," said Rodney, promptly slipping an arm through his uncle's and walking him off behind the ladies till they halted on the threshold of Myra's room.

"This is a charming room!" exclaimed Aunt Myra, glancing with pleased eyes from the dainty bed and toilet-table to the spotless muslin curtains, the divan with its neatly piled cushions, the bookcase with its orderly editions, and last, the carefully appointed writing-table, with its fresh sheet of blotting paper and pretty silver "fixings."

"Just the kind of nest I like to see a young girl in," commented Aunt Myra, approvingly, "and I see you take care of your things, too."

Myra flushed with pleasure. "O dear me!" Susie exclaimed involuntarily, so that every one looked at her in astonishment, and she laughed aloud.

"I'm afraid you won't approve of my room at all, Aunt Myra," she said, as she led the way across the hall, adding

heroically, "Come in, please" as she flung open the door.

"Why, I call this a charming room, too," began Aunt Myra, and stopped, vaguely puzzled.

"The children will make book-houses," said Susie, dolefully, glancing at the shelves, where big and little books alternated without regard to sets. "And the baby will leave his blocks here"—she swept a pile hastily from the sofa and began "plumping" up the disordered cushions—"and these cushions ought to have been recovered long ago, I know, but—"

"But she has a big brother who comes in and makes hay of them daily, and who is responsible for a goodly portion of the wear," put in Rodney, coming to the rescue with an affectionate pat on Susie's shoulder.

"I don't much blame him," said Uncle Charlie. "That's an awfully tempting corner. I shall be caught sinning myself some day."

"Oh, please do!" said Susie. "That writing-table looks dreadfully, aunt. Don writes all his exercises there; and the children do get at things," she added, fitting the pieces of a broken candlestick together.

Aunt Myra made the circuit of the room, noting silently as she did so that the writing-table had seen many deluges of ink, the chairs much service, and the carpet and books hard wear. She kept these observations to herself, however, only praising the cheerful and homelike feeling, "which is the greatest charm of any room," she said, smiling at her dejected niece. The three went down stairs arm in arm, whither Uncle Charlie and Rodney had already preceded them, intent on tennis.

"Somebody will have to lend me a racket," Uncle Charlie was saying, eyeing the rack.

"Oh, there's Susie's," returned Rodney. "Or wait, you'd better have mine, and I'll use Susie's." He took down two battered specimens. "The fact is, Don has played so many matches with this that it's more or less invalidated; but I know its weaknesses."

"What's the matter with this?" said his uncle, reaching for a third, and swinging it scientifically. "Seems to be all right. New, too."

"Oh, that's Myra's," began Rodney, when Myra's voice cut him short. "You are more than welcome to use it, Uncle. Please do."

Uncle Charlie hesitated a moment, then laid the racket aside with an odd expression.

"Thank you, but I think I'd better stick to the family one. My rackets have a way of coming to grief."

The puzzled look on Aunt Myra's face deepened as the day wore on, but she devoted herself to drawing out her young relatives on the subjects of their tastes, occupations and diversions. After dinner they all gathered about the library-table, looking over the handsome editions of their favorite authors, which the girls had received the previous Christmas.

In the midst of the admiration and discussion, Mr. Chauncey entered. Taking up a volume of Myra's beloved Hawthorne, he began to turn the pages, and becoming interested, sat down and was soon absorbed. Bedtime found him still reading, and Myra, after bidding the others good night, gathered up the rest of the set carefully and approached her father.

"Good night, father!"

"Good night, child!" he answered, absently kissing the offered cheek without removing his eyes from the page. Myra hesitated a moment.

"Did you want anything, child?" he asked, innocently looking up.

"No, nothing," said Myra, hurriedly. She stooped and kissed him again.

"Good night! Oh, and by the way, father, when you have finished with that volume, will you please bring it upstairs? I like to keep them together."

"What? Oh!" Mr. Chauncey woke up suddenly with a startled air. "Take it with you now, my dear. I was merely glancing at it."

Uncle Charlie and Aunt Myra stooped simultaneously to pick up a newspaper.

"Oh, no, keep it as long as you like," said Myra, graciously.

"No, no!" Her father shut the book. "I have plenty else to do," and with a sigh as of one brought sharply back to realities, he pulled out a budget of business papers and fell to work. After a moment of hesitation, Myra walked away with the book.

Uncle Charlie and Aunt Myra greeted her with the usual smiles the next morning, and the former announced that unpacking their trunks would engage them that day.

"Only I shall have to borrow somebody's table and ink first to write a business note," he added.

"Go right up and use mine, uncle," said Susie. "You will be perfectly quiet there."

"Or mine," said Myra.

"Much obliged to you both," replied their uncle, gathering up his papers. Half an hour later he rejoined them, saying casually:

"You'll find a few extra ink spots on your blotter, Susie. Being a careless fellow, I didn't risk inking Myra's. And now," he added, "your aunt and I will just spin down and gather in those trunks if one of you will lend her a wheel. I've already requisitioned Rodney's."

"Take mine, of course, aunt," said Susie. "That is, if you don't mind a dreadfully shabby one. Mother and Don, and I all use it, so somehow it is never clean."

"I was going to offer aunt mine," began Myra, in a tone of vexation.

"Oh, then you had better take Myra's, aunt," said Susie.

"Thank you both," Aunt Myra responded, slipping away to dress.

When she emerged, a very elegant figure in her handsome suit, she found both wheels drawn up for inspection. Myra's shone like new, while Susie's scarred handle-bar, tarnished spokes and worn tires bore marks of hard usage.

"Do take Myra's, aunt!" said Susie. "You see mine does look like destruction."

"They are honorable scars," said Aunt Myra. She hesitated, looking from one to the other.

"Do be careful, Don!" said Myra, sharply, as her small brother gave the pedal a whirl. "You scratch the enamel all up."

Aunt Myra laid her hand suddenly upon Susie's handle-bar.

"Thank you both," she said, quietly, "but I will take this. I am rather out of practice and might scratch the enamel myself."

"Just as you please, of course," said Myra, coldly. She put her wheel in the rack and walked away without another look.

Late that afternoon a knock at the door of Aunt Myra's room summoned that lady. Myra stood on the threshold.

"May I speak to you a moment?" she inquired, with an air of injured dignity.

"Why, certainly. Come in, dear," replied her aunt, hospitably.

Myra, however, declined the proffered chair, and remained standing stiffly.

"I only wanted to ask what I have done to offend you and uncle?"

"What makes you think we are offended?"

"Neither you nor uncle will let me do the slightest thing for you. You refuse everything of mine for Susie's. You wouldn't ride my wheel, or play with my racket, or write at my table, and just now, when uncle wanted a dictionary and I offered mine, he said, 'Perhaps Susie has one.'"

In spite of herself, Aunt Myra's lips twitched, but glancing at the tragic figure before her, she controlled herself and answered soberly:

"When one is in Rome, one does as the Romans do. Whose wheel does your mother ride?"

"Susie's generally, but—"

"Whose racket does everybody play with?"

"Susie's, but—"

"If there is a letter to write, or a book to read, or a flower to gather, whose room or whose garden does every one turn to?"

"I know," began Myra, flushing.

"Where do the babies go if they want a playground?"

"They prefer to—"

"Why do they prefer to?"

"I don't know."

"Ah," said her aunt, "I do."

"But," protested Myra, "I have offered both you and Uncle Charlie—"

"Oh, you have been most polite, my child; but do you think any one could be in this house a day and not see that things are your treasures, and where our treasure is, there will our hearts

be every time. The responsibility for your things is too heavy, my dear."

"You mean because I am particular? But you said yourself you liked to see things taken care of."

"I did; I do. I even think it is rather hard on Susie that her things are borrowed so much; but all the world can't have a bicycle and a tennis racket, and to give and take is about the best of life, in families or out of them. You can't lend your possessions now, you see, and that's a dreadful poverty."

"Aunt Myra!"

"Well," said her aunt, rising, "try and see. You'll have an excellent opportunity ready to your hand, for your uncle is taking your father, your mother and Rodney to the opera. Somebody is sure to want something before they get started."

Aunt Myra proved a true prophet. "Susie, dear," exclaimed Mrs. Chauncey, at the last moment, "where are your opera-glasses?"

"All ready and waiting, mother. Only do remember to keep the shabby case hidden," Susie added, with a laugh, tucking it into her mother's hand.

"Take mine, mother," said Myra, with a little defiant glance at her aunt.

"I'll run and get them."

"Thank you, dear." There was a note of surprise in her mother's voice. "But I don't mind the case, and I am used to these. Something might happen to yours."

"It looks threatening in the west!" called Uncle Charlie, from the door. "Better take umbrellas."

"Dear me, and I left mine at the office!" said Mr. Chauncey. "Rodney—but you will need your own. Susie, my child, lend me yours, will you?"

"Let me lend you mine, father," persisted Myra, but without meeting her aunt's eyes this time. "Mine is larger."

"No, no; this one of Susie's will do very well," said Mr. Chauncey, good-naturedly. "And besides, I might forget again and leave it in town."

And at that moment Rodney capped the climax by hurrying up with an impetuous:

"I say, Susie, just let me have your watch this evening, there's a good fellow. I left mine to be mended."

"You can have mine," faltered Myra, with a movement to unpin it; but her brother merely stared, and answered with fraternal candor:

"No, thanks! This is a pleasure-party. I shouldn't have a moment's peace of mind."

"Here's mine," said Susie, slipping it into her brother's hand. "While you are about it," she added slyly, "you can just have your watch put in a new crystal when you get yours."

"Now that Susie has equipped the expedition, suppose we start," observed Uncle Charlie.

Aunt Myra had disappeared; but fifteen minutes later she opened her door for the second time to her namesake, who burst out despairingly:

"O Aunt Myra, do you think it is all my fault?"

Myra shut the little case with a heroic gulp.

"I understand. Give it to Susie, Aunt Myra; she deserves it."

"Yes, I think she does. But this—" She laid a finger on the camera.

"I don't deserve that or anything else," said Myra.

"It might, however, be made a means of grace, not to say discipline," and for the first time Aunt Myra's eyes twinkled a little. "Every one will want to borrow it. Its nickel will be scratched and its leather rubbed. I can't think of a more poignant trial for—"

But at this point her words were smothered by two young arms thrown about her neck, while a voice between laughter and tears pleaded:

"Don't, Aunt Myra! Don't say another word, please. If you are good enough to give me that camera—and I'd truly almost as soon have it as the ring—I'll make it the most popular thing in the family. You'll see! Susie won't be in demand, after this, at all."

"Well, I think it is high time that she was out of demand for a little," replied Aunt Myra, with emphasis, "and that the poor child had something—besides her soul—to call her own. She shall have the ring; and you, my dear, enter without delay upon your course of martyrdom." With a merry laugh, but a glance of deep meaning, she laid the camera in her niece's arms. "Youth's Companion."

Mails in 1747.

The change in postal arrangements in New York since "the good old times" may be seen by the following advertisement, copied by the Troy Times from Bradford's New York Gazette of December 6, 1747:

"Cornelius van Denburg as Albany Post designs to set out for the first time this winter on Thursday next. All letters to go by him are desired to be sent to the postoffice of his house near the Spring Garden."

During Hudson River navigation the Albany mail was transmitted by sloops, but in the winter a messenger, as above mentioned, was required, and it is probable that he traveled on foot. The winter average of the Eastern and Southern mails is given in the same paper and same date, as follows:

"On Tuesday, the Tenth Instant at 9 o'clock in the Forenoon the Boston and Philadelphia Posts set out from New York to perform their stages once a Fortnight during the Winter months and are to set out at 9 o'clock Tuesday morning. Gentlemen and merchants are desired to bring their letters in this N. B. This Gazette will also come forth on Tuesday Mornings during that time."

Had Feathered His Nest.

The gage by which worldly prosperity is measured is not always the same. But it does not so much matter what standard is used, so long as it shows accurately the amount of gain or loss.

"I remember Bill Gassett as a shiftless young ne'er-do-well," said a former neighbor of Mr. Sands, residing his old home after many years' absence, "but I hear he left his widow quite a substantial property. How did he manage it?"

"He made choice of an excellent wife and she took him as the smartest woman often take the poorest specimens of the 'meh-folks,'" said Mr. Sands, thoughtfully, "and what's more, she made something of him, put some gimp into him, and what all—Why, sir, when he married her all he had for a mattress was an old hakeshiff stuffed with dried leaves; and when he died he had no less than three mattresses stuffed with live-geese feathers. I guess that tells the story."—Youth's Companion.

Quintillies.

The mind reader had to quit practicing his art. He said so much light reading was really injuring his taste.

The enthusiastic nihilist of moderate means comes nearer having "all kinds of money" than the billionaire.

What infinite courtesy and consideration may lurk in a lie! What malice in a truth!

I have never been able to find the view confirmed by any grammar, but I still maintain that the past participle of the verb "lend" is frequently "lost."

—New Orleans Times-Democrat.

Heavy haulage work, such as that of stores, munitions and even heavy guns, is already done by motor in the Austrian army. Now the Austrians are going to have armored motor cars, each carrying a quick-firing gun.