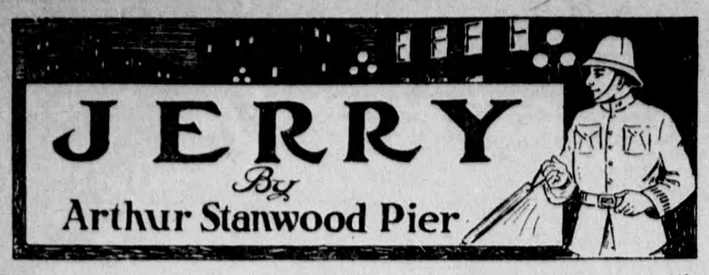

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CHAPTER III.—(Cont'd.)

Corcoran turned his back and walked away. The next moment he was dancing with a young woman conspicuous for her unnaturally yellow hair, vermilion cheeks, and generally meretricious effect.

"I didn't want him to get mad," Nora confided plaintively to Jerry. "I don't see why he had to go and get mad."

"I don't see why you care if he did."

"Oh, I don't care very much. For, after all, he'll soon be all right again."

Jerry thought it curious and trying that she should derive satisfaction from that prospect. He suggested that if she was ready to go home, he was.

"Well, I suppose so." She seemed now more than half reluctant.

"It's not a very good crowd for you to be mixed up in," Jerry said apologetically. "That was why I was thinking—"

"Oh, Jerry, I'm glad you're taking me home."

The little speech, the slender, gentle, clinging creature made Jerry's heart thump excitedly. "I'm glad too," he said, and stopped there, throbbing, inarticulate.

"I didn't like it in there. I didn't like Charley Corcoran as well in there."

"How about me?"

"Oh, you, I liked you just as well. Better." She glanced at him and seemed to cling a little closer. "Yes. It was so good to see you."

He turned with her from the main street into one that was more quiet, less brightly lighted.

"Why, Jerry, where are you going? This isn't the way home."

"Don't you want to walk for a little while? I'll take you home after I've talked with you."

She did not reply, and he knew then that she was ready for what he had to say. It made the saying of it easier.

"Nora, I love you. I want to marry you, Nora I'll work for you and love you as long as I live."

The words flowed from him in a tremulous undertone, the more appealing, the more convincing, perhaps, for their quivering, breathless eagerness. She did not withdraw her hand from his arm; she murmured, "Oh, Jerry!"

"Oh, Nora, don't you love me?"

She was not disposed to answer that question. Still she did not withdraw her hand; intent upon exacting all the perquisites of a young woman in her situation, she said:—

"Why do you love me, Jerry?"

Why shouldn't he? When she was the prettiest, the smartest, the best? Didn't the sound of her voice hang in his ears and make its own soft music there all day long while the hammers were pounding and the blasts were being blown off? Wasn't she just a darling through and through? Wasn't she, though?—and suddenly aware that the street was as deserted as it was dark, and that she had not withdrawn her hand, Jerry seized her in his arms with a wild and joyous courage, and kissed her, kissed her, kissed her. She stopped him at last with a gentle reproof:—

"Why, Jerry, I didn't say you could do that."

"Yes, but you didn't mind it, really? You—you liked it a little?"

"Why, I don't know. It was such a strange thing for you to do, Jerry."

"Yes, but you liked it?"

"Well,"—she hesitated,—"I suppose I sort of liked it—a little."

And now that need for courage was all past, it was with a wild and joyous confidence that Jerry seized her in his arms.

"I almost feel sorry for Corcoran," Jerry cried triumphantly. "And how I hated him a few moments ago!"

"I wonder if I'm being mean to him."

Jerry, in some alarm, assured her that she was not. "I think maybe I am. It was just because he liked me so that he kissed me. The same reason that you did."

"Yes, but you didn't like it from him and you did from me," said Jerry jealously. "So don't be thinking of him any more, Nora darling."

"I won't be thinking of him the way I do of you, Jerry."

That qualification pleased him better even than an obedient promise of full renunciation could have done; his soaring spirits had to find expression in another rapturous hug and kiss.

"Oh, Nora! I didn't dare hope—I was afraid you with your talent and all—"

"I haven't any talent—that's all dad's and mother's foolishness."

"They think you have—and anyway they count on your marrying something more than a mill-hand. This will be an awful blow to them—but you don't care—not too much, do you, Nora?"

"I could never have married some swell, the kind they wanted me to." The calm crudity of the statement grated a little on Jerry, even in the extremity of his adoration. "How was I to get the chance? It wasn't as if I could ever be a great artist and have society men always at my feet."

"But even if you could, you wouldn't want to—not now, would you, Nora?"

She laughed and pushed him away. "You mustn't be expecting me to be too crazy about you all at once."

"Yes, but I do. I want you to marry me all at once."

"Oh, my goodness, no Such a time as I'd have with the family! I don't dare."

"Waiting won't make it any easier."

"Maybe it will. When they see that nothing else is likely to happen. Besides, I couldn't tell them now, Jerry. Dad's paid for a full term for me at the Conservatory, and I've got to go ahead just as if I meant it. I wouldn't dare not to."

"Anyway we can give them fair warning what to expect."

"Indeed we'll not, Jerry dear. It's me that has to live in that house, not you. We'll give them no warning at all, not until the time comes."

"When will the time come, Nora?"

"Ah, now, Jerry, how can I settle a thing like that at the moment? It's got to be thought over."

"All right, let's begin to think about it. Here it is, the end of October; what do you say to next spring? Your music term will be over, and maybe I'll have a raise by then, and—anyway I can't wait any longer, Nora darling."

"Well, maybe by the time it gets to be June."

"It's a month in midsummer. Spring, I said."

"I'll see how I'm feeling, perhaps, when it gets along towards April."

So they walked and talked in whispers, all up and down the quiet streets, and up and down again. He couldn't take her home, for there they couldn't talk; and she wouldn't consent to come with him to his house and confide to his mother the happy news. No, she was quite firm on that point; no one should even suspect it until she announced it to her own family. For you couldn't trust anybody with a secret like that; if you did, it would be sure to get round. And though it disappointed him that his mother was not to be enlightened and share in his happiness, he was still too happy to argue about that; he was still happy enough just to walk and talk in whispers, and over and over again, when no one could see, to kiss her and feel her sweet, warm kisses on his lips.

And she must have liked it too; that was the exhilarating and exciting thought that he finally bore home with him; for it was late, quite late, when she bade him good-night at her door.

CHAPTER IV.

Jerry felt that it was very hard to be as happy as he was and not let people know about it. There was no satisfaction in having people see you were happy unless you told them why.

Besides, the world began to go wrong in various ways. In the first place, Maxwell was elected to Congress; even in his radiant condition Jerry took this incident deeply to heart. To him a Congressman had seemed of necessity a man who towered above other men in character and intellect and virtue; he had believed that the men who sat in Congress were all patriotic, earnest students of public questions, high-minded and sincere. That his district should choose as it representative a shallow charlatan chagrined him, made him feel humiliated; the district was guilty of profaning and polluting the Capitol. It was no mere personal resentment in Jerry that cried out at the news of the honor conferred on Maxwell; it was the inborn sense of respect for law and lawmarkers, and of reverence for the institutions of liberty.

Then there was the renewal of relations between Nora and Charley Corcoran—a renewal indicating to any casual observer that Corcoran was again a suitor, and that Nora was again willing to be wooed. Of course, as she explained to Jerry, she wasn't, and it wasn't serious, and there was no need for him to get jealous; she just had to keep her family from suspecting that she was engaged, and she couldn't do it unless she saw something of other men.

Every Wednesday night while Jerry was drilling in the Y.M.C.A. Hall, she and Corcoran went into the city to some play or other. Jerry remonstrated with her, told her it was unfair to Corcoran and very disturbing to himself; but she only laughed and said that he needn't have Corcoran on his mind. She was going to have what fun she could while she was still unmarried, and as for Charley Corcoran, he was perfectly well able to take care of himself.

To Jerry all this was perplexing—the more so when, in a further endeavor to elucidate and justify her behavior, Nora explained to him that they weren't really engaged yet, were just expecting to be. Such a distinction was too fine for him to grasp, especially as he was permitted the endearments that he had always supposed existed legitimately only between those whose intentions were quite definite. He concluded that girls had different ideas from men about things, that was all; and so, when he caught himself, as he sometimes did, questioning or criticizing in his own mind Nora's course, he hastily erected over her that large, vague sheltering excuse.

(To be continued.)

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The Apple Tree.

On summer days a coaxing hand
Keeps luring me to blossom land;
It leads on through a dreamy maze
Back to the Witching childhood ways—
Along the barefoot-beaten lane,
Around the field of swishing grain,
Past bush and flower and shady nook,
Across the flower-tufted brook.

And then I see through misty eyes
The orchard old before me rise
And while the boughs in welcome bend,
I follow on down to the end.
Yes, yes, it lives—my apple tree,
And all the orchard laughs with me!
My tree! Ah, now I understand
The magic of that coaxing hand!

If We Return.

If we return, will England be
Just England still to you and me?
The place where we must earn our bread?
We who have walked among the dead,
And watched the smile of agony,
And seen the price of Liberty,
Which we have taken carelessly
From other hands. Nay, we shall dread,
If we return,
Dread lest we hold blood-guiltily
The things that men have died to free.
Oh, English fields shall blossom red
For all the blood that has been shed
By men whose guardians are we,
If we return.

A good scraple is made of oatmeal and inexpensive beef.

"Think all you speak, but speak not all you think. Thoughts are your own; your words are so no more."—Delaune.

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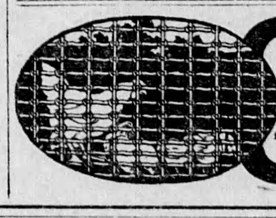

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Mrs. Brown Makes a Clean Sweep.

"What are you doing, Mrs. Brown; are you moving, or what?" Mrs. Simmons had stopped at the little front gate, her curiosity attracted by the sight of all the belongings of the Brown family scattered about the yard in the bright spring sunshine.

"Do you remember the lecture we heard on home-making last winter? I wrote down the little text and it has haunted me ever since: 'Have nothing in your home that you do not know to be useful and believe to be beautiful.' Most people might suppose that I was just doing an extra house cleaning, but I am really having it out with my own character. I say to something, "Are you useful?' and then I say to myself, 'Have you enough strength of mind to get rid of it?'"

"I had to be feeling pretty firm before I could do it, but you know as well as I do that there is no sense in keeping a lot of stuff no one ever uses," Mrs. Brown continued. "I dust that chair, and we all stumble over it but no one ever sits in it. The old what-not is just a catch-all and is only in the way when we want to get near the window." Mrs. Brown was going critically from one article to another. "Now this little table with the drawers can be painted and will make a convenient place for my sewing things, but that rickety old stand is of no earthly use."

"But why did you bring everything out here?" asked Mrs. Simmons.

"It was easier to begin with a clean slate. Goodness knows, I'm tired of dusting all the little gimcracks, and I'm tired of seeing all the confusion. I took seventeen silly things off the mantel-piece. I am going to put back the clock and an old pair of candlesticks that look lovely, now that they are polished. It rests me just to think about it. Then I've taken down all the mussy old calendars and such things that were tacked up on the wall. The hardest thing for me to know is what pictures I ought to keep, but I am sure the plain wall is better than the trash that was stuck around."

"Have you had the sitting-room papered, Mrs. Brown?"

"Yes, with one of those lovely, almost plain papers the lecturer showed us. I've had it put right up to the ceiling, without any border. You can't imagine what a relief it is to be rid of that ugly, dark, big-figured paper. The room is so much more cheerful, and it looks larger, for some reason. Come in and see it."

The empty room certainly offered an inviting beginning.

"Take off your hat, Mrs. Simmons, and let us see what we can do with the furniture. Don't you think this blue Scotch rug is pretty with the tan wall? I am so glad I got it, instead of that red Axminster Jones tried to sell me. The floor looks pretty bad, doesn't it? I'd like to have a hardwood border outside the rug now, so I have sent for some of that patent floor covering and will have it fitted all around the edges, coming well under the rug, which lies in the centre. I chose a good wood color to look well with the blue rug and harmonize with the paper."

They went back into the yard and Mrs. Brown stopped before a shabby, comfortable old sofa. "Are you useful? Yes. Are you beautiful? No-o, except that there is something beautiful in being so 'comfy.' I know—a fresh-looking slip cover will fix you. If I can fit covers to the whole family I guess I can do it for a piece of furniture. I'm just crazy to show what I can do with slip covers and fresh paint!"

The two women carried the sofa inside. "Now that old what-not is out of the way we can have the sofa before the big window, with my little sewing-table at this end. Next winter we'll have it face the fireplace, with its back against the big table, so it will be convenient to the lamp and magazines."

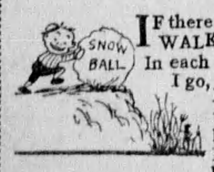
Every piece of furniture was challenged in turn. Many were found wanting. Those that were saved were carried in and thoughtfully placed. Some were set aside for renewal by means of paint, but others were heroically discarded.

"What are you going to do with them?" said Mrs Simmons. To her frugal mind Mrs. Brown's wholesale elimination looked almost wasteful.

"I am going to send them to the Salvation Army. A lot of the stuff we don't need can be fixed up so it will be useful for some one."

Finally the two women sat down to survey the result. "I'd never know it was the same room," frankly admitted Mrs. Simmons. "But doesn't it look comfortable and restful?"

Mrs. Brown sighed contentedly. "It certainly does, and before long the whole house is going to show the effect of the same kind of treatment."



IF there was just one WALKER HOUSE
In each town where I go,
My troubles then would last like that Proverbial ball of snow.
Of which I have no doubt at all
But you have oft' heard tell.
I mean the one which people say
Was located down in—well!

It doesn't matter 'bout that snow ball,
Which could never last,
What int'rests you and me is
Having comforts to us passed.
And I know PEACE and JOY and HAPPINESS
To me would flow,
If there was just one WALKER HOUSE
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