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In a Parlor Car

(By M. Louise Cummins.)

"Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

"Win the polo match?"

"Sure."

Hallett raised himself lazily in his chair as the above conversation struck his ears, and, turning slowly, looked across the aisle of the parlor car.

At the open window opposite a girl was bending forward. The knot of dark hair under her wide hat and the graceful shoulders in their silk shirt waist suit were sufficiently attractive to make him rise farther to see whom she thus urged to victory.

Scarcely had he done so when he sprang across the moving car and waved his hand frantically to the young man who stood, hat in hand, seeing the girl off.

"Why, hello, Hall!" the latter shouted surprisedly. Then he ran beside the train.

"Grace, allow me to introduce my chum, Hallet—there behind you. Hallet—Miss Kennard."

The two people thus hastily thurst into acquaintanceship looked at each other for a moment in a rather constrained silence. Then the girl laughed.

"Why you must be the the Mr. Hallet," she said frankly.

"Why that distinguishing 'the?'"

"Oh, hasn't any man who was once stroke of the Harvard eight a claim to distinction?"

"But that was in the remote past, quite three years ago. I presume I am talking to 'the' Miss Kennard?"

The girl looked at him sharply.

"Jack wrote me of his engagement two weeks ago," he explained. "It is beginning to dawn upon me that my letter of congratulation was tame."

Her glance drooped. A demure smile lifted the corners of her lip. It might mean assent or denial. Hallett glanced in quick encertainty at her left hand, but it was covered by a taucolored travelling glove. Underneath, he supposed, blazed her engagement diamond.

"I think," she said, looking up and surprising his inspection of her, "that my stay in New York is to be with a friend of yours as well as mine, Miss Gierhart."

"Oh, Dorothy; yes, indeed," he said heartily.

"We nearly feil out for life when Yale won, she was so anxious you should come out victorious."

"And you were not?"

"Well, you see, I did not know you then."

She gave him a sly glance.

"I wonder if she is a flirt." Hallett speculated and almost felt sorry for his friend, in spite of the girl's unusual beauty. Presently he rose.

"I am afraid I shall have to leave you for a moment," he apologized. "My fox terrier, Clip, is in the baggage car, and I have to let him have a sniff of me once in a while to keep him from tearing things to pieces generally."

"Oh, let me go too!" The girl jumped up. "I love fox terriers."

Hallett's brows drew together slightly. He had his own ideas about girls, and this rather too free young woman did not altogether fit in with them. Nevertheless he helped her through the swaying train.

She went into ecstacies over Clip stroking his velvet brown head while he frantically licked his master's hand.

"I think his collar is much too tight," she said authoritatively.

Hallett smiled.

"I took it in a notch on purpose to prevent him pulling his head through," he replied quietly.

She looked the dog over with the eye of a connoisseur, and Hallett watched her narrowly. By the time they left the baggage car he had about concluded that Miss Kennard belonged to that objectionable class of young women who could tell the good points of a horse or dog, but was decidedly lacking in the more tender and womanly qualities.

In their zigzag way through the day coach she paused suddenly. the car was crowded almost to the point of suffocation. In one seat a fragile looking woman with a boy of four on her lap sat wedged close to the window by a stout man with a handkerchief tucked round his collar, who fanned himself vigorously with a large hat.

"That woman will faint if she remains here," Grace Kennard said decidedly. "She is almost gone now."

"What can we do?" Hallett asked with a hopeless glance around them at the crowded seats.

"I will give her my place in the parlor car."

"You?" His surprise was hardly complimentary.

"Yes, I, Mr. Hallett." Her eyes chalenged his for an instant. "If you will help the mother I will take the child," she added coldly.

"Then I insist on your having my chair," he temporized.

"And I will take it—for the boy! Don't you see that he is too heavy for that woman to hold? Oh, what does it matter about me?" she went on patiently. "I am strong. Let me get them out of this while the mother is able to walk."

While the woman lay gasping her relief in a comfortable armchair and purer air, Grace Kennard retired to the narrow seat at the rear of the car usually used by the conductor when sorting his tickets. Hallett went off to arrange things with that worthy, and, returning successful, stood beside her.

"Do you know, I think I owe you an apology?" he said slowly.

Her eyebrows and shoulders raised themselves imperceptibly, as though the subject was not worth pursuing.

"Perhaps you could find a seat in the smoking-car," she suggested coldly.

"Does that mean that I am dismissed?"

"No."

He watched the soft flushed face. How tender, how beautiful it had looked as the older and weaker woman leaned upon Miss Kennard's young strength. Hallett looked away from her quickly. Was he forgetting his friend, he who had always prided himself upon being the soul of honor?

Again his glance traveled to her hands.

"Do you always wear gloves when travelling," he said abruptly.

"What a question!"

"But do you?"

"Of course. Every well bred woman does."

"Would you think it very impertinent if I asked you to remove them?"

"Mr. Hallett, she said hurriedly, "will you kindly bring me my travelling bag? I want to get some violet water for that poor woman. I'm sure her head aches."

With a baffled sigh he started to obey. As he returned she slowly and deliberately withdrew her gloves.

Hallet watched the white, ringless hands like one fascinated, while she fumbled among the dainty contents of the bag.

"I thought"—he stammered. "Surely"—

"Please take this to our friend." She held out a filigree silver bottle.

He took both hand and ornament in a steady grasp.

"Not until you tell me," he said firmly.

"Mr. Hallett!" But something else struggles with the displeasure in her eyes.

"Please tell me!"

"Well, if you must know, I am not the Miss Kennard. Jack in the hurry of his introduction failed to make that clear. It is my older sister, Margaret, to whom he is engaged."

"Whew! Then I may"— Hallet wanted to fling his hat to the roof of the car.

"You do not deserve to be told," she pouted resentfully. "During the first half hour of our acquaintance your opinion of me was anything but flattering."

He bent over her, turning suddenly grave.

"Some day I hope to know you well enough to tell you my opinion," he said earnestly.

She rose hurriedly, for the train was pulling into the Grand Central.

"Goodby," she said, holding out her hand. "Dorothy will be here to meet me."

"Then I shall see you safely into her keeping, and?"—he still held the ringless hand in his—"I shall begin to-night to pay my large debt of calls to Dorothy. Will you forgive my saying that life for me has only begun to day?"

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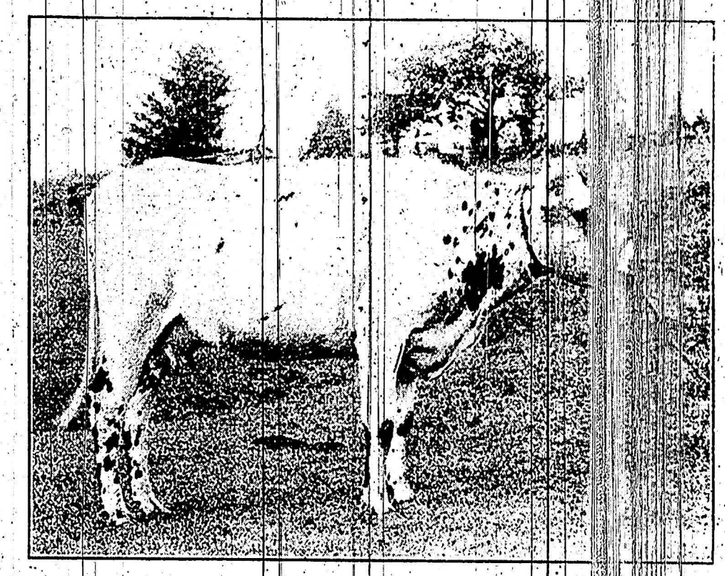

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