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JOHN ENDICOTT'S COIUSN

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HE was a gentleman and I am a plain Scotch maiden—a girl of the people, speaking broad Scotch, which I shall not endeavor here to transcribe.

How was it possible that I should dream that he would ever think of me except as his landlady's daughter? He came from London for a month's holiday—he had overworked himself and needed fresh air, with change of scene and occupation. So he repaired to St. Andrews and found occupation at least; for never before nor since have I seen a stranger take more readily to our national game of golf or find greater pleasure in it. He played early and late, his pale face soon assumed a ruddy brown tint, his ready laugh rang out, and in a fortnight he was a changed man.

My mother and I watched him with interest, but it was a far-off kind of interest. We did not deem of entering into closer relationship with him. He was a doctor by profession and belonged to a high family. This we had gathered from his frank talk, for he spoke of himself and his own concerns readily, and was utterly devoid of our national reticence. Not that he wore his heart on his sleeve; he could keep a secret if need be, but in his happy, healthy life there appeared as yet to be but few secrets.

He was our lodger—that and nothing more—until my mother fell ill and lay at death's door. Night after night I sat at her bedside fighting the enemy with all the simple contrivances of an inexperienced nurse.

Our other lodgers left us. I could give them but scant attention, and a gloom, from which they longed to escape, hung over the house. But Doctor Endicott remained. Shall I ever forget his kindness and devotion? No, never—never!

The whole man was changed; the hearty, rollicking voice was heard no longer. I listened instead to tones gentle as a woman's tones that went to my heart; the strong hands that had wielded the golf-club from early morning until the shades of evening were employed in delicate services which my inexperienced fingers were unable to perform. He set rest and pleasure on one side. No son could have effaced himself more utterly, and it is probable that few sons would have done half that which our lodger did.

For a month my dear mother hovered over the brink of the precipice; then came the crisis, and we two knew that she was safe. I looked into the Doctor's eyes and read there the assurance for which I craved. My feelings were too intense to control. I rushed from the room, and, for the first time since I had undertaken the duties of nurse, gave way to a paroxysm of tears. I did not weep because of grief. Joy overwhelmed me, joy and another and even deeper feeling, one of infinite gratitude—a gratitude too great for words. The Doctor came to me. He took my hand in his and uttered low words of comfort. I could have fallen on his neck, but I did not love him—no such thought had entered my

mind. He was to me the noble, self-sacrificing doctor, the skilled physician who had saved my mother's life and refused to take payment, because, as he said in his simple way, we could not afford it. He spoke truly. At that moment we were well-nigh penniless, and perhaps he knew it. In any case, he dismissed the subject with a wave of the hand. He was always masterful in his ways.

I shall never forget the evening when we had our last conversation on the subject. I had been pressing him to accept a small sum in part payment of the debt we owed him, and he had assured me that it had been a real pleasure to him to help us, and that he would not, on any account, listen to my proposition. He concluded by telling me that he was leaving for Australia in a few weeks.

I listened with a feeling of regret, but it was neither deep nor poignant. I had expected that he would pass out of my life thus; he was above me in position.

We had been for a walk together—we two who had watched so many hours in the darkened sick-room—the sun had set, and the players from the links were wending their way homewards. The tower of St. Regulus stood out, solid and square; at the east rose the two lofty turrets with their small, round windows, three in number, and above was a larger one. The scene was so familiar that it failed to charm me, but with my companion it was otherwise. I noted his keenly appreciative glance and wondered that it should be touched by sadness. He was going abroad to a good appointment; he was full of youth, vigor and enthusiasm. Why should he sigh? Whence his regrets? I learnt their cause later—learnt it with a surprise so intense that I can recall it even yet.

The knowledge came to me unexpectedly—there was nothing to lead up to it.

"Look, Miss Rentoul!" he said, pointing to the west doorway of the cathedral. "Did you ever see a finer piece of architecture that?"

I laughed lightly, amused that he should consult me on such a point.

"I am no judge, Doctor Endicott," I replied. "I know little of architecture and care still less. I am just a country girl with scant education."

It pleased me that he should now, as indeed always, treat me as his equal, but I was too honest to lay claim to attainments which I did not possess. He ignored my disclaimer.

"You don't really love St. Andrews," he said; "the place has not the hold on you that it has on me. I believe you could leave it more easily."

"No, no," I cried, in swift resentment; "not I! I do not love it for its architecture perhaps, but I love the dear old city because it is my mother's home, because she was born here. On that account I should greatly regret to leave it."

"How dearly you love your mother!" He spoke very wistfully, and his eyes were filled with a great yearning

expression.

"Indeed yes. She is all the world to me."

I spoke the sober truth, but with more of intensity than I should perhaps have shown had she not just been rescued from the brink of the grave. My feelings were stronger at that moment than my self-control. I glanced from the sky, still bright with a lingering glory of crimson and gold, to Doctor Endicott's face; it was strangely moved, and his agitation infected me. I turned towards him in a transport of gratitude.

"You saved her life," I said. "How shall I ever repay you?"

He set his face firm, as though he would restrain an emotion which he felt I might not understand.

"Agnes," he said, in even tones that grated oddly on my ear, "do you ask that question in sober earnest?"

"Yes," I replied in a puzzled way. "Indeed I do! Do you not realize how grateful I am? I would do anything in the world to convince you of it."

"I am glad of that—it makes my request easier. Agnes, I think you must already have guessed how dearly I love you! Will you promise to be my wife?"

His wife! Was he joking? Alas, no! It would have been better so. But he was in earnest—I read it in his eyes, in his voice, in his eager gesture as he laid his hand on mine.

"You said you longed to show your gratitude," he said. "Speak then, love! Give me your promise. I am going away in a few weeks, as I have already told you. In a year or so you will come to me."

"I cannot leave my mother, Doctor Endicott."

He paused. Perhaps he was thinking of my mother's advanced age. Perhaps it occurred to him that, in the natural course of events, I could not expect to keep her long with me. But of this he did not speak—he was too sensitive. He only said, simply and gravely—

"I can serve for seven years, if need be, as Jacob did for Rachel."

Again I marvelled. I looked at him fixedly. I did not understand. I saw that the old boyish light-heartedness had forsaken him. He was a man with a purpose before him—a purpose he would never relinquish. I wanted to show my gratitude, and the opportunity had now arrived. This fancy of his was no idle one that time would banish. I gazed at the set face and knew otherwise.

So I gave my consent, making no protestation of love. I could not belie myself, yet I was really in earnest. I was not elated—far from it—but I plighted my troth unhesitatingly, resolving that I would be faithful to this man who was so far above me and to whom I owed a debt of everlasting gratitude.