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A SHATTERED IDEAL

By EDITH EAMES

"No," said Rachel, decisively, "there is nothing savoring the faintest degree of romance in receiving a large cardboard box of apoplectic-faced peonies marked \$1.00 per dozen. I had a hope that there might be a delicately worded sentiment therein. I have looked for such and found a card on which is written 'Compliments of John Westlake. Hope you'll like 'em.' Thwarted again.

The mother laughed quietly and remarked that if she had fifty cents every time Rachel had used the word "romantic" since she had attained years of discretion, she would be able to erect a mansion of astounding size and equipments. Rachel sighed and thrusting the unoffending flowers in a vase, resumed; "It is all very well for you to heap your sarcasm upon your dutiful daughter, mother, but it depends upon which side of the fence you're on. I am a creature of romance. I wander in the days of chivalry; when knights protected 'my lady's' dainty shoon from mud and dirt by spreading before her a velvet doublet. I long for a tender youth to languish and pine for love of me. I long for some one to send me a lily of the valley and write poetry for me. You know, you've told me that father proposed romantically in grandma's summer-house. Now I am not going to accept anyone who does not propose romantically; mark you my vow. I pine for romance. I will have it. It is part of my existence."

Rachel assumed a dejected air and shook her brown head sadly when her mother hazarded that she would not be so particular about romance if she really loved a man. "I am going down town to get some cheese. John is going to call this evening, and he is very fond of rarebit—now, mother, I know well enough that you are going to say that rarebit is not romantic. Your mocking smile betrays you. I agree with you; rarebit is not romantic. That is one of my troubles. I dwell in an unromantic atmosphere and must conform to its customs. I hope some day to educate John up to enjoying ethereal food. I am not heartless enough to try it now when I think of the dumb reproach with which he looked at me when I served my beautiful, dainty, little billows of frappe the other night." So saying she departed with a step which betokened the fact that her diet was far from ethereal.

"The dear girl," laughed her mother, as she left. "Think of five feet eight of sturdy American womanhood seeking for story-book romance in connection with John Westlake. I think he loves Rachel; in fact, I am sure he does, and John is a good boy, but romance—I know she does not mean half she says. Now if—"Schall ai put opp de card for d'iceman, Mas' Ward," quavered Swedish Huldah, thrusting her flaxen poll in at the door. "Please, Huldah, and Huldah, you may have din-

ner half an hour earlier than usual since you are going out this evening." Huldah blushed and pipped nervously, "Almer, hae com' bo't eight o'clock ai tank, Mas' Ward." "I think," mused Mrs. Ward as Huldah, shuffling kitchenward, gave vent to a strain of "Annie Rooney," "I think Huldah is happier than Rachel is."

She bent over her work and was not again disturbed until the poetic young life of the house burst in with rosy cheeks and sundry bundles. "I forgot to tell you it is John's birthday, today, mother. Really felt as if I must get him something, but I had such a time deciding on what to get." Mrs. Ward turned over the pages of a little book, bound in blue and white, entitled, "Poems on Spring." "Yes," she said, "I should have thought a long time before I decided on that for John."

"Oh, I am quite satisfied with it. It is part of my course—well, you know. I couldn't have desired anything more suitable to my purpose," she finished, replacing it in its case.

John Westlake, at half past eight that evening, was the recipient of the little blue and white creation with a poetic good wish on its fly-leaf.

"Why, bless my soul, Ray" he said in what she termed his "basso by thundero" voice. "How'd you happen to do it? Thanks, awfully. Swell cover, isn't it? Lou Baxter gave me a dandy book today—Mr. Dooley on many topics. Lou's a trump card, isn't she?"

Rachel stiffened visibly, and inwardly her thermometer of hopes for John's successful graduation from her course in romanticism fell to zero. Miss Baxter was very kind; but her choice was somewhat common, it seems to me. The poems in my little book are jewels, each one to set your heart with."

"Yes Ma'am," said John, with provoking meekness. "But, say, speaking of jewels, don't you think that diamonds are pretty good to look at?" John's brown eyes looked very hard at Rachel.

"A coarse hint," thought she, "nothing refined about it," and, with increasing coolness, she said, "I don't believe I ever gave the subject much thought."

"I have," said John, and moved closer to her.

"This will never do," thought the object of his approach. "A common couch, was going full blast, a hand-organ playing 'Sweet Annie Moore' 'Under the Window.' Aloud, she said, "John, isn't this couch big enough so that I need not be crowded in this manner? What shall I play? She seated herself at the piano, and began to finger over Mendelssohn's 'Spring Song.'"

"Don't play that thing" said John crossly. He had a reason to be cross; his courage had been up to the sticking point. "Play 'No One to Love, None to Caress' and then come back here and sit down."

"I see nothing but a rarebit will fix you," sputtered Rachel, petulantly. Entering with the chafing-dish, she said, "light the grate fire, it is all laid—and then we can turn out the gas."

"Why do you want a grate fire? I'm too hot now," and John thrust his hands into his pockets preparatory to sulking. Rachel said nothing but, "Oh dear!" she thought, "I want to be romantic. It's just going to be an ordinary one and he is so nice and good-looking. I know I shall be a sacrifice to my convictions."

At sight of Rachel's big apron and bustling preparations John fell quickly to helping her and, much to Rachel's dismay, seemed to forget what the trend of his previous remarks had been.

"Beautiful glistening ice" said Rachel, looking musingly out of the window, "All those thousands of crystals look like so many diamonds, don't they John?" "I don't believe I ever gave the subject a thought," said John. Rachel was vexed just as much at herself for wanting to laugh, as at John's remark.

"I want a drink" said she, "Come John, you might as well make yourself useful and help me carry these things to the kitchen." "Not through yet" said the individual, calmly devouring another piece of toast, at the same time taking possession of the hand which Rachel stretched out for the plate. "May I hold it till I am through, Ray?" "Oh—Oh, no, John, Oh, no really—" she said, and thought "what if it should happen now, while he is eating cheese! Perish the thought! He is certainly going to, though how I long for different surroundings." The toast and cheese had disappeared and as Rachel gathered the things up John said "what a crackin' old house-wife you'd make, Ray." "We're having such a long, cold winter this year, don't you think so John? Yes, you take the chafing-dish; don't shake the crumbs on the floor; now come on, no, we won't wash them together how silly you are; right here on the table; there, now do you want a drink?" "A drink from your fair hand, my queen, would indeed refresh" bowed he. "Language good" soliloquized Rachel, "but sitting on the edge of the sink! It must not be." Aloud "Oh John! I hear Huldah and Elmer coming in." The devil of mischief gleamed in John's eye. "Too much fun to miss" he said, and quickly seizing her he pushed her through the door leading up the back stairs, and whisking in himself, drew it almost shut, just as Huldah and her heart's delight entered her domain. "Ya'as, Mas' Ward she told me all de stylish people, dey hear de show we hear dis evening. Ai tank you very good Elmer."