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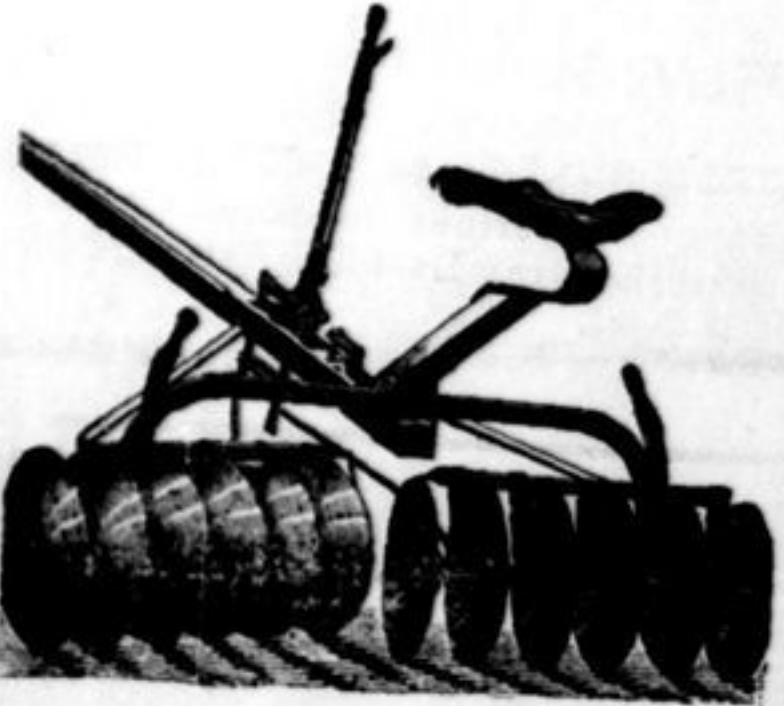
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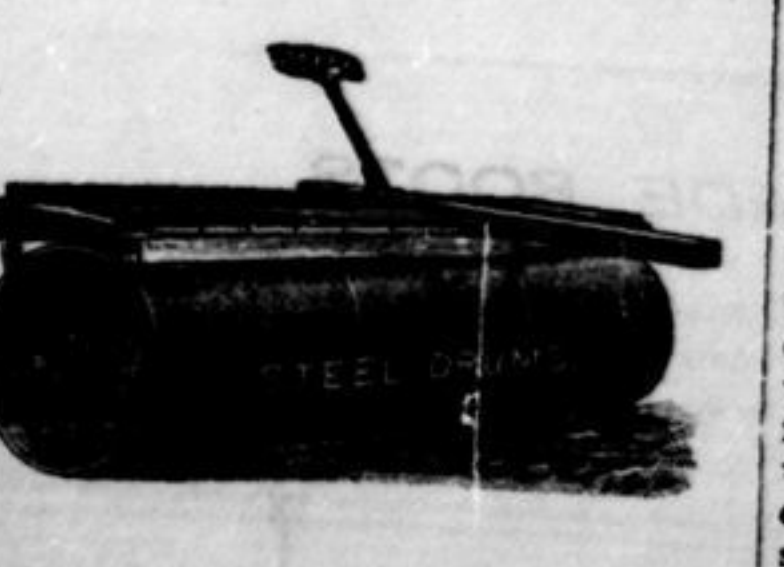
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"Your wife looks tired, Will. Let her sit down." Bell said, herself wheeling the easy-chair nearer to the fire, while Wilford placed Katy in it; then, thinking she would get on better if he were not there, he left the room and Katy was alone with her new sisters.

June had examined her dress and found no fault with it, simply because it was Parisian make; while Bell had examined her head, deciding that there might be something in it, though she doubted it, but at all events short hair was very becoming to it, showing all its fine proportions, and half deciding to have her own locks cut away. June had a similar thought, wondering if it were the Paris fashion, and if she would look so young in proportion as Katy did when her hair worn on her neck.

With their brother's departure, the tongues of both the girls were loosened, and standing near to Katy they began to question her of what she had seen, June asking her if she did not hate to leave Italy, and did not wish herself back again. Wholly truthful, Katy answered, "Oh, yes; I would rather be there than home."

"Complimentary to us, very," Bell murmured audibly in French, blushing as Katy's eyes were lifted quickly to hers, and she knew she was understood.

If there was anything which Katy liked more than another in the way of study, it was French. She had excelled in it at Canadaigua, and while abroad had taken great pains to acquire a pure pronunciation, so that she spoke it with a good deal of fluency, and readily comprehended Bell.

"I did not mean to be rude," she said, earnestly. "I liked Italy so much, and we expected to stay longer, but that does not hinder my liking to be here. I hope I did not offend you."

"Certainly not; you are an honest little puss," Bell replied placing her hand caressingly upon the curly head laying back so wearily on the chair. "Here in New York we have a bad way of not telling the whole truth, but you will soon be used to it."

"Used to not telling the truth! Oh, I hope not!" and this time the blue eyes lifted so wonderingly to Bell's face, had in them a startled look.

"Simpleton!" was June's mental comment, while Bell's was, "I like the child," as she continued to smooth the golden curls and wind them round her finger, wondering if Katy had a taste for metaphysics, that being the last branch of science which she had taken up.

"I suppose you find Will a pattern husband?" June said after a moment's pause, and Katy replied: "There never could be a better. I am sure, and I have been very happy."

"Has he never said one cross word to you all these six months?" was June's next question, to which Katy answered truthfully, "Never."

"And lets you do as you please?" "Yes, just as I please," Katy replied, while June continued, "He must have changed greatly then, from what he used to be; but marriage has probably improved him. He tells you all his secrets, too. I presume?"

Anxious that Wilford should appear well in every light, Katy replied at random, "Yes, if he has any."

"Well, then," and in June's black eyes there was a wicked look, "perhaps you will tell me who was or who is the original of that picture he guards so carefully?"

"What picture?" and Katy looked up inquiringly, while June, with a little sarcastic laugh, continued: "Oh, he has not told you then. I thought he would not, he was so angry when he saw me with it three or four years ago. I found it in his room where he had accidentally left it, and was looking at it when he came in. It was the picture of a young girl who must have been very beautiful, and I did not blame Will for loving her if he ever did, but he must not have been so indignant at me for wishing to know who it was. I never saw him so angry or so much disturbed. I hope you will ferret the secret out and tell me for I have a great deal of curiosity, fancying that picture had something to do with his remaining so long a bachelor. I do not mean that he does not love you," she added, as she saw how white Katy grew. "It is not to be expected that a man can live to be thirty without loving more than one. There was Sybil Grey, a famous belle, whom I thought at one time he would marry; but when Judge Grandon offered she accepted, and Will was left in the lurch. I do not really believe he cared though, for Sybil was too lordship of a flirt to suit his jealous lordship, and I will do him the justice to say that however many fancies he may have had, he likes you the best of all," and this June felt constrained to say because of the look in Katy's face, which warned her that in her thoughtlessness she had gone too far and pierced the young wife's heart with a pang as cruel as it was necessary.

Bell had tried to stop her, but she had rattled on, until now it was too late, and she could not recall her words, however much she might wish to do so. "Don't tell Will," she was about to say when Will himself appeared to take Katy out to dinner. Very beautiful and sad were the blue eyes which looked up at you, thus showing which I preferred.

Few men live to be thirty without more or less fancies, which under some circumstances might ripen into something stronger, and I am not an exception. I never loved Sybil Grey, as you wished to make my wife. I admired her very much. I admire her yet, and among all my acquaintances there is not one upon whom I would care to have you make so good an impression as upon her, nor one whose manner you could better imitate."

"Oh, will she call? Shall I see her?" Katy asked, beginning to feel alarmed at the very thought of Sybil Grey with all her polish and manner.

"She is spending the winter in New Orleans with her late husband's relatives. She will not return till spring," Wilford replied. "But do not look so distressed, for you solemnly that I never loved another as I love you. Do you believe me?"

"Yes," and Katy's head dropped upon his shoulder.

She was satisfied with regard to Sybil Grandon, only hoping that she would not have to meet her when she came home. But the picture, whose name was that? Not Sybil's certainly, else June would have known. The picture troubled her, but she dare not speak of it, Wilford had seemed so angry at June. Still she would probe him a little further, and so she continued:

"I do believe you, and if I ever see this Sybil I will try to imitate her; but tell me, if after her, there was among your friends one better than the rest, one almost as dear as I am, one whom you sometimes remember even now—is she living, or is she dead?"

Wilford thought of that humble grave far off in St. Mary's churchyard, and he answered quickly: "If there ever was such a one, she certainly is not living. Are you satisfied?"

Katy answered that she was, but perfect confidence in her husband's affection had been terribly shaken, and Katy's heart was too full to sleep even after she had retired. Visions of Sybil Grey, blended with visions of another whom she called the "dead one" flitted before her mind, as she lay awake, while hour after hour went by, until tired nature could endure no longer, and just as the rattling of wheels was beginning to be heard upon the pavements, she fell away to sleep.

CHAPTER XIV.

New York, December.

After German Philosophy and Hamilton's Metaphysics, it is a great relief to have introduced into the family an entirely new element—a character the dissection of which is at once a novelty and a recreation. It is absolutely refreshing, and I find myself returning to my books with increased vigor after an encounter with that unsophisticated, innocent-minded creature, our sister-in-law, Mrs. Wilford Cameron. So pictures as June and I used to draw of the stately personage who was one day coming to us as Wilford's wife, and of whom even mother was to stand in awe. Alas! how hath our idol fallen! And still I rather like the little creature, who, the very first night, nearly choked mother to death, giving her lace streamers a most uncomfortable twitch, and actually kissing father—a thing I have not done since I can remember. But then the Camerons are all a set of jades, encased in a refrigerator at that. If it were not, we should thaw out, when Katy leans on us so affectionately, and looks up at us so wistfully, as if pleading for our love. Wilford does wonders; he used to be so grave, so dignified and so bent, that I never supposed he would bear having a wife meet him at the door with cooing and kisses, and all. June says it makes her sick, climbing into his lap right before us, and even Will sometimes seems annoyed, gently showing her aside and telling her he is tired.

After all, it is a query in my mind whether it is not grand, to be like Katy than like Sybil Grandon, about whom June was mean enough to tell her the first day of her arrival.

"Very pretty, but shockingly dissipated," is June's verdict upon Mrs. Wilford, while mother says less, but looks a great deal more, especially when she talks about "my folks," as she did to Mrs. Gen. Reynolds the first time she called. Mother and June were so annoyed, while Will looked like a thundercloud, when she spoke of Uncle Ephraim saying so and so. He was better satisfied with Katy in Europe, where he was not known, than he was here, where he sees her with other people's eyes. One of his weaknesses is a too great reverence for the world's opinion, and he expounded by our very fashionable mother, and as in a quiet kind of way she has arrayed herself against poor Katy, while June says, "I predict that it will not be many months before he comes to the conclusion that he has made a mesalliance, a thing of which no Cameron was ever guilty."

I wonder if there is any truth in the rumor that Mrs. Gen. Reynolds taught a district school, and if she did, how much would that detract from the merits of her son, Lieutenant Bob. What nonsense to be writing about him. Let me go back to Katy, to whom Mrs. Gen. Reynolds took at once, laughing merrily at her naive speeches, as she called them—speeches which made Wilford turn black in the face, they bred so much of rustic life and on Katy a few hints, and that she began to be afraid of him, for she is talking, and she does not now when guests are leaving and she stands at his side, neither is she so demonstrative when he comes up from the office at night, and there is a look upon her face which was not there when she came. They are "toning her down," mother and June

CHAPTER XV.

Such fun as it was to see mother and June training Katy, showing her how to enter the parlor, how to arrange her dress, how to carry her chair, and how to sit in a performance first, and then requiring Katy to imitate her. Had I been far too sweet-tempered and anxious to please, while I suspect that fear of my lord Wilford had something to do with it, for when the drill was over, she asked so earnestly if we thought he would be ashamed of her, and there were tears in her great blue eyes as she said it. Hang Wilford! Hang the whole of them; I am not sure I shall not yet esteem her cause myself, or else tell her, who will do it so much better.

Dec.—Another drill, with June poor little private seemed completely worried out. This time there were open doors, but so absorbed were mother and June as not to hear the bell, and just as Mrs. Gen. Reynolds, to whom you are being presented," while Katy was being almost to the floor, who should appear but Mark Ray, stumbling square upon the ludicrous rehearsal, and of course, bringing it to an end. No explanation was made, nor was any understood it, and it was as much as he could do to keep from roaring with merriment; I am sure he pitted Katy, for his manner to kind, and when she left the room he complimented her highly, repeating many things he had heard in her praise from those who had seen her both in the street and here at home. June's face was like a thundercloud, for she is as much in love with Mark Ray as she was once with Dr. Grant, and is even jealous of his praise of Katy. Glad and I that I never yet saw the man who could make me jealous, or for whom I cared a pin. There's Bob Reynolds on at West Point. I suppose I do think his epaulettes very becoming to him, but his hair is too light, and he cannot raise whiskers big enough to cast a shadow on the wall while I know he looks with contempt upon females who write, even though their writings never see the light of day; thinks them strong-minded, self-willed and all that. He is expected to be present at the party, but I shall not go. I prefer to stay at home and finish that article entitled "Women of the Present Century," presented to my mind by my sister Katy, who stands for the picture I am drawing of a pretty woman, with more heart than brains.

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