

WOMAN'S PART.

Surprising Interruption in a Life of Monotony.

BY OCTAVE THANET.

CHAPTER I.

Never had there been a September like that in all the autumns of Judith Crest's life. The last day she went out to a little knoll in the garden, only to gaze about the farm for the sheer joy of possession. Yet she was not used to love the farm; born a timid and gregarious soul, she was oppressed by solitude. For twenty-two years that long hedge of poplars had stood to her right and the fruitful orchard, stocked like a convict, to her left. Her eyes wandered of the billowy levels, tossing like an ocean about the trim four-roomed house and huge, unpainted barns, they wandered of the dusty carriage-lanes and the unfruitful orchard. Most of all they wandered of the one everlasting, relentless face of nature.

Therefore she spent hours daily nursing a pitiful little show of flowers such as had grown in the moist seashore gardens of her youth, and waited under the ferns Iowa summers. Indoors, she cut out pictures from the one everlasting, relentless face of nature. There she spent hours daily nursing a pitiful little show of flowers such as had grown in the moist seashore gardens of her youth, and waited under the ferns Iowa summers. Indoors, she cut out pictures from the one everlasting, relentless face of nature.

Occasionally in that off-studied column, would appear a paragraph like this: "I would like to ask the sister from Marr if she makes her chocolate frosting with the whites of eggs or boils it, and please send a receipt for preventing rabbits gnawing the rosebushes."

"I dearly love to get the Homestead's enjoyable western stories. Please write again, Erminie, and let us know how to bear our crosses in the right spirit. I would be obliged, also, for a remedy how to prevent hair falling out."

When she read these Mrs. Crest would blush with pleasure at the interesting details of fame, for she was Lucretia. But for most of the time there was only work to break the loneliness. To be sure, there was plenty of work and had been all through the twenty-two years. Joshua, her husband, was a good farmer, but for a long while "numerical dissipation" followed fast and followed faster; once, he had been swept clean of all save hope by a cyclone; once, he had escaped only by a hairbreadth losing his farm through the fraud of a friend.

Twenty-two years ago he had said: "Never mind, Judy, just let me make a few thousand dollars and you shan't have to work on the farm. I'll sell out and buy a life in town and be postmaster."

And his life Joshua had craved the leisurely honors of office. He, too, was social; he liked to talk, and he had a gift for telling stories. How many times in the years those two simple creatures had stood at that store I will not try to count. At first every Sunday night, they bought a book on bookkeeping and an arithmetic, and it was (but practice would not allow anything so like a game on Sunday) an exciting diversion to practice making change with numbers on the counters. By consequence, Mrs. Crest's extraordinary swiftness and accuracy in changing a dollar for, say, three dozen eggs at 17 1/2 cents a dozen, or three pounds of butter at 25 cents a pound, were the marvel of the Delmar household. By consequence, Mrs. Crest's extraordinary swiftness and accuracy in changing a dollar for, say, three dozen eggs at 17 1/2 cents a dozen, or three pounds of butter at 25 cents a pound, were the marvel of the Delmar household.

lent lot, Delmar being a flatland Iowa town, but beside the lonely farm life, a town with two churches, a bank and shops looked like a populous paradise. In Delmar one could see people every day, just by looking out of the window.

"Seems like I couldn't wait to get to Delmar," said Judith, "but I can't feel to be quite happy till after the 3d."

Myron looks at her kindly from the height of his six feet two inches. She is such a wee creature in a black frock made (but he does not know it) after a pattern from the Homestead, with her little peaked, wistful, timid face; her mild blue eyes and forehead wrinkled by the constant lifting of her eyebrows, peering out to see distant objects on those wide and lonely plains. Her eyebrows are thin and gray, and so is her hair, which she curls on a slate pencil to resemble the hair of the ladies of Delmar.

"Joshua didn't hear anything about this," says Myron, "Lorillard is a hard man to deal with, but you have the money in the Delmar bank all right."

"It ain't in the Delmar bank; it is in the other bank, Mr. Starling's bank at Ranford."

Myron's black brows met. "Why, Uncle Joshua certainly must have been going to Delmar," he said.

"Well, he did start to put it there, but he happened to hear Mr. Maxwell was a drinking man."

"Maxwell! Why, he never was drunk in his life. He is as temperate a man as ever lived and as honest."

money will be here all right next month, and he can pay \$1,200 down and the rest on two, three and four years' time."

"That's good," said Mrs. Crest; "but why didn't Myron come back with you, father?"

"He said he guessed he'd better hurry home." The old man did not look at her; he walked across the floor to the sink and began pumping; all the while he was conscious of his wife's eyes on his back.

"Father, did Myron tell you anything about that bank?"

Joshua's face was over the tin basin; a great splash of noise came to her, mingled with a grunt that the bank was all right; but Joshua's neck, fair where the sun had not touched it, grew red and redder.

"Father, I jest know he did!" she cried, "he thinks Starling's bank ain't safe; that's why Myron wouldn't stop to inquire; he didn't want to be questioned."

"Mother, you're the scariest critter alive! Starling is a good boy; he is the superintendent—no, that's his brother, but he is a professor, and he's a straight temperance man and ain't going to believe a word agin him."

Judith was trying to fry her cakes; the grease spluttered and hissed on the sizzle and splattered on her bare wrist; she did not even know that it had burned her. Her mild eyes were glowing, she trembled, and her gentle voice was sharpened by pain as she answered:

"Then he did talk to you. Oh, father, don't—don't hide anything from me!"

"I ain't hiding nothing, mother, Myron, he thought you'd worry so, that's all; and tain't much he said. He's young and thinks he knows it all. Jest because some Chicago feller with his boots blacked has been stullin' Myron, he thinks Steve Starling, we've all known from a boy, is going to bust up."

"Father, for heaven's sake, what did Myron say?"

"Well, if you'll be any wiser for hearin', he heard Steve had been speculating in buckets in Chicago," said the old man, with a visible pride over his fluency with the terms of finance. "He has been going long, or else he has been going short, on wheat, and kiting away with notes and lost money, but I don't believe a word of it myself."

Judith took up the cakes with shaking hands; she laid the plates on the table and put the griddle further back on the stove in order to approach Joshua.

"Joshua," she said, "if we lose that money it means we'll have to spend all the money we've got in a mortgage farm. If we can't pay up the third he can foreclose on us; and you know he's mean enough to do it; and if we borrow money to pay him we shall have to work it out! That's the best can happen to us; the worst we'll be turned out on the prairie—noways at all can we go to town, and for how many years—oh, father—"

"Hush, hush, Judy!"—he tried to soothe her, stroking her withered hand and patting it "come now, it will be all right, we'll go fast enough. I didn't know you wanted it so awful much!"

"Wanted it!" she screamed, while the patience of years seemed to break down, and her words rushed as a prairie fire spreads; "wanted it, Father, you ain't got no idea what it means to me to get out of this loneliness and be with God's folks again! I ain't had a peaceful day since the children died. I couldn't work hard enough to stop my thinking! I was scared all the while. I never said nothing 'bout it for what good would it do? We'd get to live out on the farm; it would only pester you, and you had enough to stand, but all day I'd be thinking, what about the horses? what about the reaper? when it was going, and I'd see you brought home all bloody. If I'd a spoke to it it wouldn't have been so bad, but I knew we couldn't afford a girl, and how'd we get one if we could? And every time the wind blowed I was expecting a cyclone!"

"He saw himself die." The following story is about Dr. Wiley, who saw himself die out West and came back to life again. The doctor told how he saw his body lying on the bed, with his wife and sister kneeling by his side and weeping.

He hadn't gone far when a voice warned him that if he got beyond a certain point he couldn't get back. But the sensation of being free from his body was so delightful and the landscape was so inviting that he felt no doubt of returning. All the while, however, he seemed to be attached to his physical body by a fine, almost invisible thread, which kept drawing him back. He lost consciousness, and when he revived he was again lying on his bed with his family around him.

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