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## The Blue Thing.

[An Adventure in Aestheticism.]

The Fraud had never seen the Other Fraud. There were times when he wished he had never heard of her, or of her poems—which happened to strike a chord. (He was a literary editor.) But until she inveigled him into buying the Blue Thing he had never actually sworn at her, boldly, above his breath, and 3,000 miles away.

It was her Blue Thing that she raved of first in one of those letters of friendship wherewith she basely reweave her spell at least once every six weeks. As he read, the scene she suggested became finished as a cameo to his inward eye. The long-raftered, weaving room in the old eastern Virginia farm-house—the antique, hand-made wooden loom, the shapeless, talkative woman in homespun, shutting her threads of blue and white in the country sunshine, and—but here the Other Fraud came in and blurred things. He had her picture, it is true, yet he had not the slightest idea what she looked like. The picture looked serene and somewhat saintly. But she couldn't be the other Fraud if she looked that way, and she was undoubtedly the Other Fraud; and never more so than when she unconsciously beguiled him into imagining that he wanted a Blue Thing, too.

"A genuine, hand-woven, old, old-fashioned 'Ring and Snowball Kiverlid,' she hastened to write. "It is adorable, my dear Fraud, and it is mine. Can you conceive of the old-fashionedness, the quaintness, the sincerity of this bit of weaving? It is as genuine as a wall hanging of William Morris's, a book-cover of Cobden Sanderson's. The blue-black indigo designs wander over the creamy background as imaginatively as Moorish arabesques. Since yesterday it has been the delight of my room and the curtain of my bookcase. And all this charm, all this gratification of the eyes and the intellect for only some half-score coin of the realm." This was her way of referring to money, it will be understood. She meant to convey, subtly, that the Blue Thing had cost her \$10.

This letter, of course, inspired the Fraud with an unquenchable desire to possess a Blue Thing of his own. He ought to have looked at the complete set of Carlyle on his top book-shelf, which he had bought because of her Carlyle letters, and whose beautiful, raggedy-edged pages he had never had the moral energy to cut. He should certainly have given a thought to the drunken-legged spinet in the corner, which was always staggering under its burden of magazines. He had purchased this once, fancying it must be like the one in her den, on which her stately great-grandmothers had tinkled in other centuries. But he neither looked nor thought. The Other Fraud could make even life desirable with the magical tip of that golden pen of hers. He answered the letter, invoking her in the name of their four years' com-

radship to find him a Blue Thing, too. She failed to reply for a month—a month filled with indigo arabesques, and spectral women weaving fatalities of the Ring and Snowball pattern. When she did write she forgot to mention the Blue Thing. Other things had become of importance. She had just discovered the first arbutus. Her letters told of the discovery at picturesque length. This was obviously the method to render the Fraud frantic with longing. His next, beseeching, brought recognition. She had been hunting Blue Things, she wrote, and had discovered some, but none to be mentioned with her own, and she could not make up her mind to send him one less perfect. Before he could answer this considerate letter, there came a second, brief and rapturous. "I have found it," she wrote; "it is even better than mine, and if I were not so poverty stricken just now I should be tempted to keep it myself. But as it is, I will be generous. It is yours."

The Fraud received this communication at the office. He was as happy as a lover with his first hope of Her. In an hour a grateful epistle, enclosing the necessary coin of the realm, thundered southward. The Other Fraud always left hurry to slaves. It was another six weeks before she managed to get the Blue Thing expressed West. The sun of May strove to enter the Fraud's dark den as he hastily cut the strings and stood at last on the threshold of possession.

Yes, it was a delightful Blue Thing. There were the indigo arabesques, and there were the sincerity and the creamy background. The Fraud draped it over the foot of his bed and contemplated it, leaning back luxuriously in his big old chair. He was thinking of how certain men of his acquaintance were going to envy him his bookcase curtain. He had quite finished his pipe before a terrible suspicion intruded. He started up and looked around at his shelves—dear, shabby, overflowing. Then he critically considered the Blue Thing. After five minutes or so, he carried it, trailing across the floor, and tossed it over the bookcase. If the bookcase had been three times as large it would have made a very satisfactory curtain. The Fraud draped the foot board with it again.

As a bookcase curtain it was largely out of the question. And he had never thought of it as anything else. It is difficult for men to readjust intentions. During the ensuing weeks his official absentmindedness increased. He could not discover poets and read proofs with the Blue Thing a wanderer in the desert of his den. He spent the day devising new uses for it. In the evenings he experimented. There was either too much of the Thing or there was not enough of it. He festooned it over his mantel-shelf, but it swept to the coal bucket and kept the late fire to itself. He cleared his table of its ungodly accumulated treasures and flung the Blue Thing over it. It lay in folds on the floor. It hid the waste basket. It wound itself around his feet, and entangled the legs of his chair. The next evening he removed it and tossed it carelessly over

his big chair. Then he put on his dressing-gown and occupied the chair. The effect in the mirror opposite was that of the magician in Frank Stockton's fairy tales. Now, the Fraud had a certain aspect of dignity to maintain. He thought about it at the office next day and concluded that, while the Thing might make a good rug, as a chair-cover it robbed him of self-respect. That evening was devoted to converting it into a thing to walk on. But at midnight it again decorated the foot of his couch. It was too big for a rug and not big enough for a carpet. By this time it had worn him out. He wrote to the Other Fraud confessing the situation, and asking her how big the bookcases usually were down South. She was bewildered. She said her Blue Thing had made a quaint little curtain, and she very much wished to know how small they made bookcases out West. She also said that he might throw it carelessly over a divan. Now, the Fraud had not a divan in the world. Nay, more, he had not even room for the beginnings of a divan in that den of his. This also he wrote.

"Why not," she answered sweetly, "make a window curtain of it, and put a band of solid blue top and bottom?" Arranged in this way it would be even more delightful than ever, she thought. This was the moment when the Fraud swore. He forgot that she could not know how he had but the one window by the desk, and that was not of much use to him, owing to the architectural peculiarities of the adjoining buildings. He threw her pleasant little note of suggestions into the waste basket, and, carefully averting his eyes from the cause of his trouble, rushed from the room. He came home that evening, his soul filled with the peace of resignation. He had resolved to struggle with the Thing no more. Perhaps, in the dim days to come, it would find a reason for itself. In the mean time, it could drape the footboard of his bed, uncoerced. He concluded to read "The Melancholy of Stephen Allard." Its calm despair seemed suitable. Perhaps Stephen Allard also had uncut Carlyles, and staggering spinets, and impishly arabesqued Blue Things. True to his conclusions, he settled down with this volume for comrade; but its dark blue cover unsettled his mind. It was not long before he retired in the hope of sleep and forgetting. During the night it became colder, and he drowsily reached down for his overcoat, which had frequently served such temporary emergencies. In the darkness he drew up the Blue Thing instead and slept beneath it unconsciously. An early message from the office, in the morning, hurried him away, and he did not notice this. But the housemaid, who came in to clean up as soon as the street door closed on him, noticed it immediately.

For weeks her fingers had been itching to put the Blue Thing to its legitimate use. And now, for the first time, she had an excuse. She was an English girl, and her old grandmother at home, in Hertfordshire, covered her bed with Blue Things like that. She pulled and patted and coaxed the

Fraud's couch into a thing of comfort. Then she crowned it with the "Kiverlid" and made it also a thing of beauty. When she stood the great white pillows against the headboard, it was the picture of what a bed should be. The Hertfordshire girl backed to the door admiringly. It seemed to her as if she had created this work of art. Several times during the day she stole to the door to feast her eyes on it.

It made her homesick.

When the Fraud came in the solution of the problem dawned on him like a daybreak of the soul. It had never entered his head to put the Blue Thing to so unique a use, any more than it had occurred to the Other Fraud. Upon recovering his presence of mind, and emerging from his trance of admiration, the Fraud rang for the English housemaid. When she timidly entered, with a sidelong glance at the beautiful bed, he gave her a coin of the realm, but he did not see fit to break his impressive silence. Therefore, to this day she does not know what merit the coin awarded. And she has not the remotest idea that he considers her by far the cleverest woman in America.

The Other Fraud does not know of all this. She is raving over an old pink delf teapot at present, and the Fraud is making the effort of his life not to buy a pink teapot, too. But he knows that it is useless, and that he is really saving coin of the realm for this, and not for a new top-coat, as he touchingly imagines during his intervals of sanity.—The Collector.

Jones—Failed? Why, I understood that Snooks was a very wealthy man.

Brown—He was; but he undertook to keep a yacht.

Jones—Ah, yes; his floating debt was too much for him.

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