

have yielded to father in choosing and business instead of a profession. In this I cannot yield." "He will be disappointed," the moth-Gordon laughed shortly at this mild "I am a man now, mother, and this. is a matter in which one man may not command another. I love Alle." "We've played together summers

down at Wheatfield ever since we were kids, and I always liked ber best," he finished, boyishly. His voice changed to a harsher tone,

"Father is ruining his life and ours." he said, sternly. "Everything that is prehis is touched by the blight of his mp overbearing temper. It is wearing you out. I can see it. Marjorie's happiness was sacrificed to his ambition. Dick was forced into uncongenial employment. We've all kept in for your sake, but some day there'll be a mighty smash. There never was a man who thought himself omnipotent, since the days of Nebuchadnezzar, that the Almighty didn't humble

At the look on his mother's face, he added, contritely:

"Forgive me, mother. I shouldn't

They moved away.

Ashley sat motionless. That merciless indictment from Gordon, his hope and pride! It was a full half-hour before he arose, closed the door and locked it. He dropped into his chair and laid his head upon his folded

"Allie Betty Kent down in Wheat-

That must be Alice Elizabeth's daughter. In the days when Wheatfield had been his home, Alice Elizabeth's name had not been Kent, but

After a few moments, he raised his head, unlocked a drawer and took out a box. From the box he drew a shabby pocketbook, and from this, in turn, ed with women. There was nothing a tiny, yellowed silk bag. He untied strange in that, for it was usually a its string and shook the contents out



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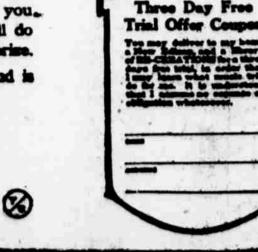
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"I hall not need or larse a



favorite resort between dances. But there was something strange in the way they were standing around whispering. Something in the atmosphere suggested panic. As Jean entered she heard a whisper.

"She's been sick for a week and no one has been near her but the doctor. and he can't even get a nurse to take the case. My dear, she's got-"

The speaker saw Jean and turned her back quickly, so the last word was lost. Jean walked into the room and saw a girl sitting in a huge chair. Her pretty face was ghastly and she was talking hysterically to the women near her.

"I rode out from town with her the day she was taken ill," she was saying. "My God, if I get it my face will be marked."

Her voice rose in a trembling crescendo and broke. Jean stared at her, a look of horror slowly dawning in her eyes. She turned and walked quietly from the room and stood for a moment on the veranda, contemplating a search for Tom. She decided against it because she knew he would try to prevent what she intended to do. She hurried home and changed quickly into more serviceable clothes. She packed a bag and, leaving a note on the table for Tom, she stole out a side door and across the field to the doctor's. She found him preparing to go out and his face was white and tired.

"I am going out on an important case," he said, "so if you're not terribly ill I can't stop now."

Jean explained her errand and overcame the doctor's resistance. He expected the crisis that night and he was greatly in need of help, even as inexperienced as Jean's would be.

So the one-time cabaret performer did what none of the "virtuous wives" had the courage to do. There is no need to tell of the terrible battle Jean and the doctor waged against death. They conquered and Jean stayed with the woman until she was able to care for herself again. Of course, Tom had tried to get Jean home again, but she was in quarantine, so his efforts were useless, even if she herself would have consented to go.

When she finally did go back home there was a look about her that frightened Tom. Her old ready smile seldom lit up her face and there was a serenity in her bearing that nothing could disturb. After seeing what that other woman had suffered, her own troubles seemed petty. As is the way of the world, the women whose friendship Jean had once longed for flocked sround har when she no longer cared. She was guite a heroine for a time. but all the praise she received did no! mean half as much to her as the love and approval she saw in Tona's eyes

upon the blotter-a circlet of braided sweet grass, dry and brittle, and a gold ring set with a small diamond. He remembered the day he had braided the grass and measured Alice Elizabeth's finger.

They sat under the maples on the river bank. The sun sent golden shafts of light through the trees to fall upon her yellow hair. She had insisted upon having the braided ring to keep and had made the little silk bag for it, the very evening he had placed the diamond on her finger.

He remembered, too, the evening nearly two years later, when she had given them back. He recalled fragments of the conversation.

"You have grown so hard."

"Nothing matters except having your own way, and it does not matter that your way is not always right."

"I do not dare to risk life with you." "Please try to change, or I fear you will some day be a lonely, wretched old man."

His hurt had been deep. He could not destroy the rings, but had hidden them.

Thirty-five years, and he had not changed. If tonight were any criterion, he was on his way to the lonely. wretched old age she had prophesied. A rap sounded at the door. With the pitiful diamond still clasped in his hand, Ashley unlocked it.

Gordon came in, his shoulders squared. "I wasn't sure you had come home," he said. "Are you too busy to listen to me for a few moments?"

Ashley pushed back his papers.

"Go ahead," he said, gruffy. Gordon came straight to the point. "I'm engaged to be married, father. thought it best to tell you."

Ashley was silent. Gordon stumbled on. "It is Allie Betty Kent. She lives in Wheatfield, where we used to go summers." He walted, tense, for the expected outburst.

"In Wheatfield," mused his father. "Must be Alice Courtney's daughter."

"She is," answered the young man. Relieved, he sat on the corner of the deak and picked up a circlet of dried grass that lay there, nervously breaking it to bits and laying the bits upon the platter. Ashley winced.

"Probably better than you deserve," he growled. "See that you treat her well. Now clear out." Gordon went.

"Dismissed with a blessing," he remarked in helpless astonishment.

Left alone, Ashley swept the bits of dried grass into the waste basket. He put the diamond away, closing the deor with a bass. "As The four "Perhaps." By said to the four ils. "I shall not need so large