

# HEARTS & MASKS

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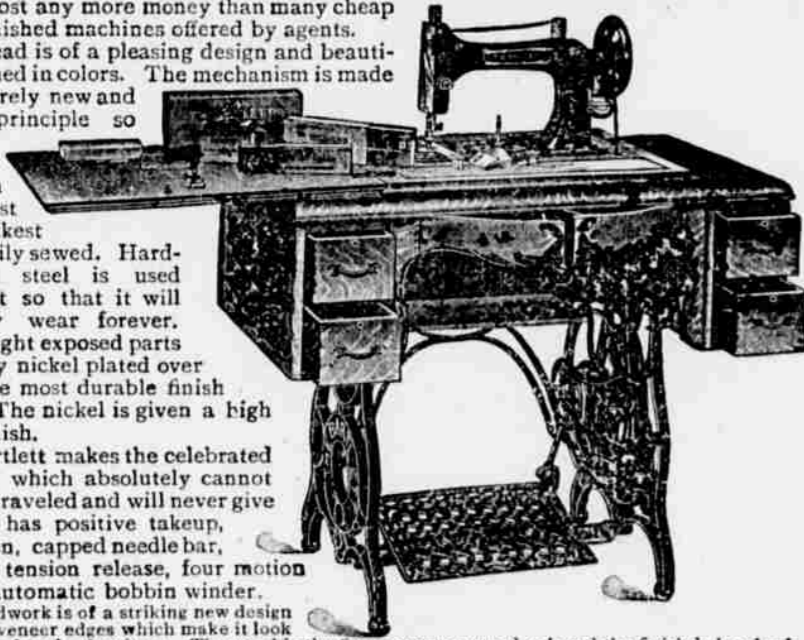
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### "FRETTY"

BY NANCY HAZLITT.

Alfretta ran about the garden singing shrilly: "Dear, dear, what can the matter be? Dear, dear, what can the matter be? Dear, dear, what can the matter be? Johnny so long at the fair? He promised to bring me a bunch of blue ribbon, He promised to bring me a bunch of blue ribbon, He promised to bring me a bunch of blue ribbon, To tie up my bonny brown hair."

"Fretty I really wouldn't call him out of his name—you know it isn't Johnny," Cousin Langley said provokingly from the leafy depths of the grape arbor. "Besides, your hair isn't brown, not in the least. Instead, it's pure carrot color, also mighty pretty. If I were a painter person I might call it something else, but being what I am, a stickler for truth—"

"Would you know the truth if you met it in the road?" Alfretta flung at him. "I don't believe so," she went on disdainfully, shaking her glowing waves at him.

She was bareheaded, and the sun struck out high lights from the Titian mass above her white forehead, then fell down to waken green gleams in her long lashed eyes. Slim as became seventeen, tallish, light on little arched feet, with a long neck upbearing her face, she was distractingly pretty, especially to eyes jaded with artifice and sick of fashion—more specifically, Langley Madden's eyes.

Langley was only a third cousin, but assumed that the tie of blood entitled him to take an attitude so critical it was more than brotherly in its candor.

He had come to Alderbrook farm for six blessed, idle weeks after the stress of a long fight and the triumph of a big legal victory. He had not been there in years, although the place belonged to him. Its present occupants, the Lanes, had lived in it to oblige him. Therefore he had but a faint memory of Alfretta as a solemn young person who had disdained to be friends with him, choosing rather to make companions of the dogs, the kitten and her pony, Snap.

He recalled that she had barely tolerated Susette Barlow, who, in spite of being bigger, came sometime to play with her. Susette had been a famous comrade. He had kissed her often, called her little sweetheart and actually gone the length of sending down to her from the city after he was back there a birthday ring. Notwithstanding, he had found her married and happy, with a baby as round, rosy and dimpled as he remembered her. Ten years, he had reflected, made big changes every way. Still he was not quite prepared for the changes they had wrought in Fretty.

The name was of his own coinage; in all other mouths the girl was Alfa. He had been quite taken aback to find that she did not resent his version of the baptismal mouthful. Indeed, she had said, with a little hovering smile.

"The one comfort about my name is, no matter what people call me, they can't possibly make it worse than it is."

The saying had in a way startled him; he had not thought to find philosophy at seventeen in the rural regions. But as time went on he discovered that the philosophy was the least of Fretty's surprises. Young as she was, unformed and inexperienced she had a way with her, also a poise quite wonderful to see. He did not wonder that she had taken captive his artist friend Vernon; it was Vernon's habit to fall fitfully in love with every girl who was in the least out of the common. Fretty had not a single usual fiber in her. In proof, take the

fact that Vernon's adoration had not in the slightest degree turned her head.

"What have we to say to the painter person, Fretty?" Cousin Langley asked, coming out and laying hold of her hands. "Are we going to tell him to go about his business or are we going to say, 'Yes, and thank you, sir,' when he asks?"

"He won't ask," Fretty said, not trying to take away her hands. "You see, I told him at the very first I regarded it as my duty to marry you. Otherwise you would waste all your money—besides, it was the only way to keep Alderbrook in the family. He agreed with me, although I think he was sorry; it must have seemed a shame to him to miss such an opportunity. He admitted that flirting was a necessity to him. That is why, I think, he is away just now."

"Indeed?" Langley said, his tone an interrogation.

Fretty nodded, echoing: "Indeed! Yes: Mrs. Wortham—your divinity—has opened Grasmere—came herself the day before yesterday. So Mr. Vernon couldn't stay away longer."

"Who says she is my divinity? And how do you like it, seeing you have appropriated me?" Langley asked, coloring in spite of himself. He felt all at once young and raw and ridiculous and was in a temper over it. He wanted to shake Fretty—shake her hard. She was jesting, of course, but how beautifully she had turned the tables on him. Quite unaccountably he found himself trembling, his hands moist, his face, he knew, high colored, and all without any reason.

It could not be that the bare suggestion of Fretty—the child, the plaything, the creature he loved to tease—as his wife, the mistress of his home and five years at least he had thought of Georgina Wortham in that position. She fitted it so beautifully and was quite evidently ready to accept it.

"I always answer mother's letters for her. Remember you wrote her about Georgina two years back at least," Fretty said, smiling sweetly, with the faintest touch of malice. "As to my liking her, what does that matter? I have nothing to do with her only with you."

"You are quite resolved—to take me, I mean?" Langley asked, his eyes downcast. Fretty looked pensive. "It seems—one must do one's duty however disagreeable," she said with a little sigh.

Langley erected himself. "In that case, suppose you kiss your crown of martyrdom," he said, putting his face close to her lips.

Fretty sprang back as far as their clasped hands permitted and said, with dancing eyes; "Next year will be quite time enough for that. You see, I am going away in the fall to be finished at the Winslow school. Mother insists upon it, and I myself think it best. I shall come back a fine lady—fine enough, I hope to do the family credit. May I trust you not to marry Georgina in all that time?"

"Certainly not," Langley said promptly. "You will have to take me now or risk losing me altogether. And I hate finishing schools and all their works. If you go through the mill I won't have you—that's flat!"

Fretty snatched away her hands, laughing heartily. "What an actor was lost in you, Cousin Langley!" she said. "I wish Tommy Hartwell had been within hearing."

"So! You want the heathen to rage, you minx!" Langley said, again imprisoning her hands, then the ring coming back to his voice stronger than ever: "Fretty, I know you were in fun, but, please, dear, let's

make it earnest, I want you—nobody else. I have been wanting ever since I came, without having sense enough to know it."

"How about Georgina?" Fretty murmured, turning away her head so Langley might not see the mounting color in her cheeks.

Langley laughed triumphantly. "May I be vain enough to speak the frozen truth?" he asked, his lip very close to Fretty's ear. She turned a little more away from him, saying very low:

"No! I can guess it. Georgina won't have you; therefore you want me to save your broken broken heart."

"Of course. But how did you guess it?" Langley asked, his heart thrilling at thought of her care to save another woman from slurring. He had meant to tell her what he knew for truth—that while Georgina would have accepted him for his position and potentialities and given him comradeship help throughout their joint career her heart was by no means engaged, she being of the equable temperament that spends its wildest devotion upon itself. Moreover, there was Vernon. All along he had suspected some kindness, even more, between the pair. They might have each and welcome, Fretty sweet, slim, red haired Fretty, was the one wife in the world for him.

Impulsively he caught her to him and said between kisses: "I see it all now. You're a witch. You saw how I needed comforting and proposed to me right off the reel. Henceforth I shall live to keep you from being sorry for it."

"And I'll make you sorry for it as long as you live if ever you dare say that again," Fretty interrupted.

Again Langley laughed. He could afford to. Fretty, in spite of her brave words, was nestling to him like a happy child.

### Saves Trouble.

A farmer over in Indiana is returning home from hunting the other day found the neighbor just leaving the house, and being of a jealous nature, drew his gun and filled the man's legs with fine shot. A lawsuit followed and it was learned that the man was there to borrow the local newspaper. The lawsuit cost \$75 and the doctor bill was \$25 and \$1 would have saved the trouble.—*Western Publisher.*

### Water Famine at Nebraska City.

Owing to the fact that the river has suddenly fallen two feet at that point within the past three days the water company at Nebraska City is experiencing considerable trouble in getting water with which to supply the city. They have a suction pipe which runs 1,700 feet out across sand bars to the main channel of the river, and if there is a drop of another six inches in the water of the river it will require the water company to run 500 feet more suction pipe, thus making the pumps draw water with which to supply the city through 2,200 feet of suction pipe.

The company is alarmed over the condition of things and they fear the suction pipe will soon freeze up if the weather becomes very cold, as it is on top of the ground the entire distance. Two years ago the company experienced considerable trouble on account of pumping water through 1,500 feet of suction pipe and they do not know just what they will do when they have to use 2,200 feet and keep it from freezing. This trouble has been caused by the shifting of the main channel of the river and the forming of sand bars between the pumping station and the main channel.

Mrs. Sam Ablutz living north of here is staying in town and is taking treatments from Dr. A.E. Wolfe.

### PLAINT OF THE MAIL MAN.

Taking Letters from Chute No Fun If Package from Twentieth Floor Hits Hand.

Skyscrapers have added to the trials and tribulations of the mail men, according to the Philadelphia Record, which tells this story: The letter carrier was gingerly fishing out mail from the box at the bottom of the office building mail chute. "You handle it as if it was dynamite," commented the elevator starter, who was overlooking the proceeding. "Ain't afraid it will go off, are you?" "No, but I don't want to get hurt," responded the postman. "There isn't any dynamite to be feared, but it's no joke to have a letter drop two or three hundred feet onto your hand. Look at that one," he continued, holding up a bulky missive bearing four two-cent stamps; "that letter weighs two ounces, judging by the stamps. It may have been dropped into the chute at the twentieth floor. Just consider what kind of a sensation you would experience if a two-ounce weight fell 250 feet and landed on your knuckles, and you will get some idea of the thud that would have been coming to me if my hand had been in the way when that letter sailed down. Even the ordinary letter inside the two-cent weight limit will make you wince if it soaks you after a descent of 20 stories. The blow is delivered by the edge of the envelope, and sometimes it will draw blood. This job of collecting mail from office buildings may not be as dangerous as working in a powder mill, but when a fellow has been swatted two or three times by heavy letters traveling at cannon-ball speed he begins to think about taking out an accident insurance policy."

### HIS STRONG LANGUAGE.

Bolling with Rage, When Able to Speak, Jarred Man Utters Single Word, "Idiot."

"While passing along Regent street, in London, one day not long since," said a well-known New Yorker, "I saw a cab horse knock down a dignified, well-dressed man as he attempted to cross the crowded thoroughfare. The horse was moving slowly at the time, and the man was more jarred than hurt. But when he regained his feet he was simply boiling over with rage. He dashed madly after his silk hat, which was in imminent danger of being crushed by the wheels of aansom, and then rushed in another direction for his cane. The street was jammed and the driver had not been able to move more than a few feet from the spot where he had run down the foot passenger. After securing his hat and cane the man jumped on the sidewalk, glared up at the driver, and tried to speak, but was actually rendered temporarily inarticulate by his anger. I lingered to see the finish of the incident, as I expected, as soon as his feelings had subsided sufficiently to permit him to speak, to hear an eruption of abuse, thickly intermingled with strong words, such as would be likely to come from the average American placed under similar circumstances.

"Finally, fairly quivering with rage, and all the while shaking both fists at the cabby, he succeeded in uttering the single word: "Idiot!" "And then indignantly strode away."

### Canary Farm.

The village of Scofield, Wis., boasts of a canary farm operated by Mr. and Mrs. Herbert Neupert. They are now raising about 1,000 birds yearly, and are doing a profitable business. It is a unique occupation, requiring considerable skill, judgment and patience. The Neuperters have been engaged in the business for 40 years.

### Costly Target.

Probably the most elaborate and costly target in the world has just been launched in the New York navy yard. The target is almost an exact duplicate of a section from the hull of a battleship, and is estimated to have cost \$50,000.

### She Knew Him.

Wright—Have any stories accepted nowadays? Penman—Have some accepted by editors, but none by my wife.—*Yonkers Statesman.*