

### Miss Martha

Douglas Maine sat in the University library digging into French idioms with the true zeal of a first semester Freshman, when a hand ruthlessly rumbled his smooth hair and he was greeted with:

"Hello! Old Man!" in a stage whisper.

"Get out of here, you young high school guy; you'll have me canned the first thing you know," said Douglas, craning his neck to see where the librarian's eyes might be.

"Well, come on our into the hall," replied the new comer, cocking his black with the yellow "B," over one ear.

"What's doing, Peg? Classes out at the H. S.?"

"Yep, for me. Say, Doug., there's fudge on tonight out at Miss Martha's, got a date?"

"Not much, when there are doin's out there. Girls?"

"Of course," was the scornful reply. "Doug., your innocence is only equaled by your good looks."

"Never mind, sonny. I'll be there; must dig now," and another of Miss Martha's informals was arranged by the self-invited guests.

Miss Martha Hall was, outside the school room, Miss Martha to all. Her many years in the high school had brought her a most exception reputation, and an unlimited host of friends. She had kept her influence over her pupils by her kind, but firm ruling in school hours, and by entering into the other side of her pupils' lives. Her charming little cottage was the rendezvous for people of all kinds and descriptions, but especially welcome were the school boys and girls. To them the house was open at all times, and no less this year than before, although Miss Martha was taking a year of rest. To here they came to celebrate the football victory, or to hold an indignation meeting over a curtailed holiday, and because they respected as well as loved this woman, she was the confidant of many.

Young Mrs. Merrill said of her: "Miss Martha lets herself be imposed upon, but I guess I would hate to have her different. Why, she was the one that made things right when Charlie and I had that silly fuss."

"Oh, well," said another, "she says it's her life. Have you noticed how pretty she is, now that she is getting rested a little. One would never think she was thirty-seven. Strange, such a woman never married."

"O, but," said Mrs. Merrill, "she probably has had chances enough."

"Yes, and Phil just said this morning that if any one man ever dared to try to get a monopoly on Miss Martha there was a method by which he might be assisted out of town. She has such a hold on the boys, especially."

The last of the merry crowd of boys and girls had left the cottage that night, and Miss Martha stood at her open window toward the street, the lights turned out—thinking, a trifle wearily of the many things which had demanded her attention that day. She caught the voice of two of the boys, returning to their homes, and she smiled—involuntarily listening as they slowly passed.

"Wonder how many fellows Miss Martha ever turned down?"

"Oh, I bet none of 'em ever dared speak up. Never was any fellow I ever saw good enough for her. Bet there were plenty standing round."

"Well, if I were —" and the voices became inaudible.

Unconsciously these boys had stirred up a hidden feeling which was the saddest now, as it had been at one time the bitterest, in Miss Martha's life. Always accustomed to being loved as a friend and confidant, from her girlhood, there never had come that one who had demanded both her confidence and her love, of which she had so much in her warm generous nature.

When a young girl in college she had taken so much pleasure in all her friends, and did not "specialize" in any one girl, or boy, for which all were thankful, and they never knew why. Only once had she allowed her deeper feelings to overwhelm all else.

It all came about through a chance friendship which became one of those close pleasant friendships. The boy was a Junior in college, as was Miss Martha, and in every way he was her ideal. Tall, athletic, good looking be-

cause he was so good and strong, jolly and with irreproachable principles.

He had a sweetheart, a gay butterfly of a society girl, who had wound her way into his big warm heart, to stay. To Martha came the boy with all his affairs, his talk about "her." Martha loved this girl, too, and did not envy her the place she had won, until suddenly the truth was forced upon her that, in spite of her boasting of her true Platonic friendship she had allowed it to go much farther, too far for that. Thoroughly ashamed of what she insisted was all her fault, that she had, as she looked at it, been faithless to the truth both had put in her, she shut up this love in her heart, and resolved never to let it master her again, lest she be a traitor to her friends and her principles.

"Oh, Pharaoh," spoke Miss Martha to the old fluffy Angora which had jumped to her shoulder, "we are too old to be thinking of such foolishness. Come, it's time you and I were asleep, and dreaming how to get these worthless boys of mine out of this last scrape."

One morning Miss Martha was walking slowly toward the flat-iron district to see how her sick babies were. "These Russians," she sighed, "ought to have more constitutions."

"My!" she exclaimed, "another small cyclone?" as the slam of a door and click of a gate was followed by the appearance at her side of a tall, jolly looking lad, books in hand.

"Say," said he, "Miss Martha, I'm in for some jolly good times this winter. My uncle from Washington is going to do forestry work over on the reservation, and going to stay here most of the time. Won't that be fine? He's a dandy fellow, I tell you. He ain't married—glad to say—though I guess he was going to be one. Mother says the girl threw him over, but well, she couldn't have been much account, anyway."

"Why Phil, that will be just splendid. I won't have to keep an eye on you then for a while, if you are to be in such good hands."

"Mercy, Miss Martha," said the boy, with a mock seriousness, "why I'm an awful bad fellow, and you mustn't dare let me go—or I don't know what will become of me. Oh, say! I can bring him over, too, can't I, when I come? He's just as much fun as—as—a box of monkeys."

"Well, goodbye. I hear the bell," and with a pull at his cap he was off.

For a week or two the Hall cottage was closed to all, for Miss Martha was working among the poor Russians, who were suffering from a run of scarlet fever.

"It's a true angel she be," said one of the weary mothers, and the same sentiment prevailed all over the settlement.

After the siege was over she was allowed to rest a few days, then: "O, Miss Martha, we just must see you," came from two of her girls.

So this evening she was sitting in her big sleepy hollow chair before a bright open fire, the only light in the room. Her brown hair with its scattered threads of gray was waved softly back from her fine face, and the light glowed red and pink upon her face and soft pink dress. She liked gray—and her sister protested, calling it an old woman's color. "Well, Helen, you can scarcely call me young," she reflected.

As she sat there the bell rang, and she called, "Come in girls!" But as the door slowly opened, she rose hastily—confronted not by the girls, but Phil, and back of him a tall bronzed young man, who at second sight might be anywhere from thirty to forty-five.

"Pardon me," said Miss Martha, "I thought it was Leta and Grace."

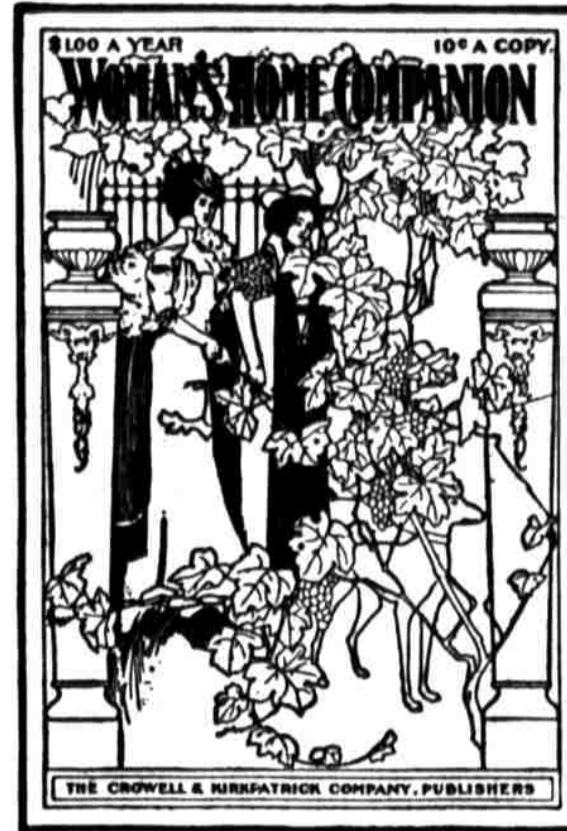
"Miss Martha, this is my uncle," said Phil, proudly, and as Miss Martha looked up at the grave face, yet with its merry eyes, she was rather taken back at this unexpected addition to her "boys."

The arrival of the girls broke up the slight confusion of both, and when they, with Phil went to the kitchen to make a "mess," Miss Martha and Felton Fliske became acquainted.

"Phil tells me you are his best friend," said his uncle.

"Oh, he is apt to make such rash remarks, but I certainly like my boys, and they are certainly welcome to all I can do, though it is very little. Boys are so good hearted, but so easily misled."

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