

The Dancing Master

By RUBY M. AYRES.
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Elizabeth Stacey, a country girl, is visiting her cousin, who takes her to a ball. She feels the contrast between her dress, homemade frock and the smart clothes the other women wear. The only person in the gathering who takes pity upon her is Pat Royston, who dances with her. Elizabeth's relatives tell her that he is a dancing teacher that he is married, and that she is not to meet him again. Elizabeth's uncle, with whom she made her home, dies. On her way home she meets her cousin, who does not recognize her. Waiting outside, she sees only the cousin. She goes to the city and, unexpectedly, meets Royston. She becomes acquainted with Fred, Sammie, a musician, and then her cousin, Royston, who is her husband, takes Elizabeth to his home. Her aunt obtains employment for her as a maid. Elizabeth runs away. Now she is with the story:

(Continued from Yesterday.)

Elizabeth could not trust herself to speak, and they went downstairs to the waiting room together.

For a little while neither of them spoke, then Elizabeth broke out tragically, "I suppose you think it's awful me coming to Mr. Royston like this."

The dark-haired girl shook her head. "No," she said. "He told me something about you. He's one of the best, you know."

Elizabeth's eyes brightened. "Is he?" Do you know him very well, then?"

The girl flushed a little. "I'm his dancing partner," she said. "We give professional shows together; he taught me all I know."

"Oh!" Elizabeth felt a little chilled; after a moment she said rather formally, "It's very good of you to let me come with you."

"Not at all; it's better than for you to go off some place alone, and it's difficult to get nice rooms in London now. I've had mine for some time and the landlady is very kind. The bedroom you will have is next to mine."

She looked at Elizabeth and smiled. "I hope we shall be good friends."

"We never had a girl friend," Elizabeth said, painfully, "but I hope we shall, too."

There was another little silence. "What will your people say?" Miss Stacey asked, interestedly.

"I haven't any people, only an aunt, and she will be glad to be rid of me."

"And you really want to learn to dance? It's hard work, to do the thing properly, I mean. There are so many of us at the game now, and it's no use unless you make up your mind to do no end of practice and make yourself something extra—very extra—you know."

"I am not afraid of work and I know I can dance."

"Yes—Pat said he was sure you could, too."

Elizabeth drew back a little. "Do you call him by his Christian name?" she asked.

"Yes—every one calls every one by their Christian name in our little lot," the dark-haired girl said, easily. "My name is Netta—I hope you will call me Netta—what's your name?"

"Elizabeth."

"What a nice, old-fashioned name! I think it suits you."

Elizabeth flushed. "Because I am old-fashioned, too, do you mean?" she asked.

"Of course not, and, besides, if you are, it's only your clothes, and they can be altered."

She spoke so kindly that Elizabeth's heart warmed toward her.

"I think you're a dear," she said, with shy impulse. Netta blushed.

"Oh, well, it never does anyone any harm to give people a helping hand, when they're down on their luck," she said, carelessly. "I know what it is to have a rotten time. I

pleased when Mrs. Silcum came tapping at the door.

Elizabeth was too shy to be confidential, but Mrs. Silcum was not in the least nonplussed.

"Maybe you know his wife?" she hazarded.

"Yes, I know her a little," Mrs. Silcum sniffed indignantly. "The ruin of him, that's what she's

been," she said. "It was one of those war weddings the papers are so full of. No sooner done than regretted, as you might say; and what he could even see in her, beats me! She paints her face something cruel, and every farthing she can get hold of she spends on dress. Nasty, cheap finery

"Oh, please," said Elizabeth. She felt somehow a traitor; listening to this gratuitous information about Pat Royston's wife.

Mrs. Silcum bridled. "No offense meant," she said, with dignity. "If I'd have known she was a friend of yours, now miss * * *

"She isn't," said Elizabeth, desperately. "but I don't think we ought to talk about her like that—do you? Mr. Royston is * * * my friend, you know."

"And mine, too, as I've said," Mrs. Silcum declared. "Poor dear gentleman! Well, well, one never knows what will turn up, but it's to be hoped something good will turn

up for him." She took up Elizabeth's empty teacup and walked to the door. "And you lie down and get a good sleep," she commanded. "I'll call you when Miss Stacey comes home."

(Continued in The Bee Tomorrow.)

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owe all the happiness I've ever had to Pat Royston. Here we are; this is where I live."

Elizabeth followed her into the house silently, and Netta called to the landlady and introduced Elizabeth. Mrs. Silcum welcomed Elizabeth enthusiastically; she bustled about preparing the extra lunch, deeply concerned that she had not known of her new lodger's advent beforehand.

"It's a lot of trouble for you, I'm afraid," Elizabeth said, shyly. The house was poorly furnished, but scrupulously clean, and she felt far more at home in it than she had ever felt at Mrs. Mason's.

"No trouble at all," Mrs. Silcum objected. "What am I here for? Work is pleasure."

She showed Elizabeth her bedroom with great pride.

"I only cleaned it out yesterday," she informed her, "so it's just right for you, miss, and a door leading into Miss Stacey's, so you won't feel lonely."

"We'll have lunch and then I shall have to get back and you can unpack and have a rest," Netta said. "You look as if you could do with a good sleep."

"I shall be away long?" Elizabeth asked. She would like to have gone back to the Primus school with Netta.

"I shall be in at 6 today," Netta answered. "We're not so busy as usual. Sometimes I'm there till 10 o'clock."

She looked at Elizabeth quizzically. "I dare say Mr. Royston will come round this evening and make arrangements about you," she added.

Elizabeth flushed. "Will he? I should like to begin my lessons at once."

She was sorry when Netta had gone. She spent as long as possible unpacking her clothes and arranging them in the cupboard and drawers in her room. She wondered if the afternoon would ever pass. She was

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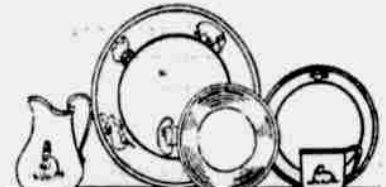
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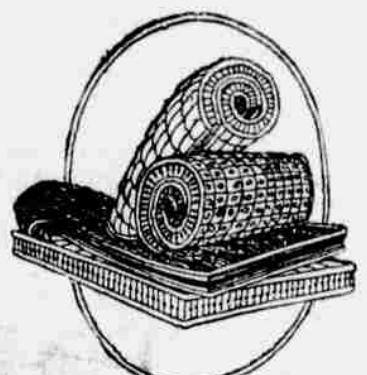
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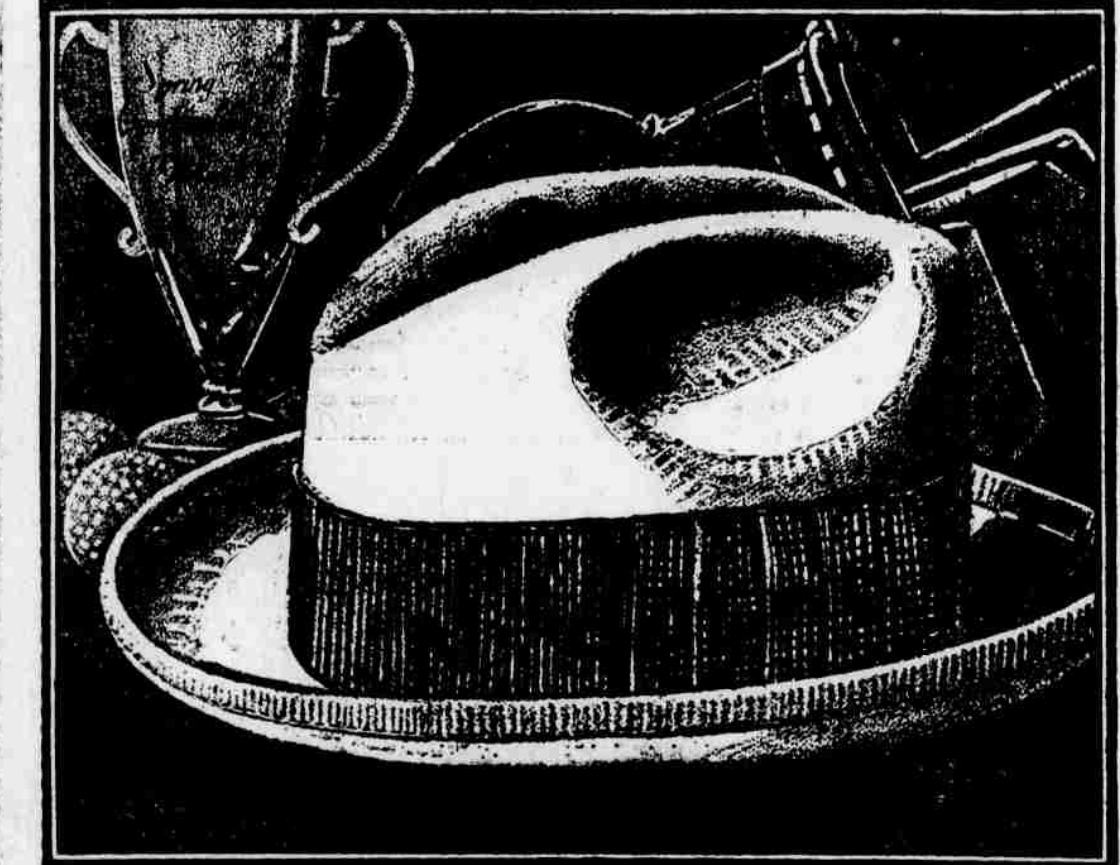
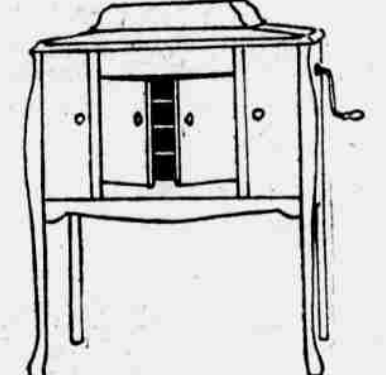
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