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**THE LITTLE LADY.**

KATHARINE MELICK.  
 (For The Courier.)

"Why yes," said the Little Lady to the Cynical School ma'am, "you may come in and talk it over. I don't know whether you will be pleased."

The school ma'am was just enough unaccustomed to having her pleasure consulted, in the matter of board, to feel something like a tingle of her jaded nerves. She entered a small gate in an arbor vitae hedge, and trod a narrow walk, so narrow that she wondered whether she should step on the heart-ease, alongside. That would have been ruthless, with the mistress of the flowers following, her broom still brushing a just fallen October leaf.

"That step is all right if you keep in the middle"—it didn't look a step at all, but a simple soap box, twelve inches square, beyond which peril, a purple cat rolled worsted eyes at you from a door mat about as large as a plate.

"There, the screen is caught inside. I just came out by the kitchen door. Excuse me a minute, if you please."

The lavender gown and the lavender bonnet fitted round the wisp of a walk, and the school ma'am studied the structure of a pyramid of stones by the "step," long crystal spar and green copper formations and slabs of rock crusted over with shining nuggets, until the latch clicked.

"Come in and take this chair, please. That one is a little shshy. They were part of my wedding furniture, so they're pretty old."

What a pink flush rises to the cheeks of the tiny dame. And what a veritable curiosity shop of a house. What-nots filled with coral, shells, sea-weed. Glass cases with wax work. Hair wreaths in frames. Stuffed ducks and wax fishes, and feather flowers. "I know there'll be a looking glass with peacock plumes out here in the next room," said the school ma'am in her mind. Aloud she remarked:

"They are not as old as those brass candle sticks, I think. You have a perfect treasure house."

"It's all old, like myself. But those candle sticks are relics. We can trace them back for nearly two hundred years, and they're older than that. Let me show you. There, I've knocked down that piece of lava. Never mind. I'll get it. A friend of mine took that red hot, out of the crater of Vesuvius."

Half an hour later the school ma'am emerged from the little front door and walked, oblivious, over the purple cat and the soap box.

"I'll come tomorrow morning for breakfast," had been her parting, and she felt that her fairy god mother was to brew chocolate, and crisp toast for her.

In the morning, the peacock plumes became a reality. They framed a dress

ser glass, over which a wax hen presided, fluffing very yellow feathers over a prodigious setting of eggs.

"I've made a good deal of wax work in my time," said the little lady, following her boarder's glance. "Of course it was for my grand-children. Shall I pour your chocolate now, or wait till you finish your biscuit?"

A composite picture of all her former landladies rose before the school ma'am's eyes. It accompanied every motion of the old tortoise shell comb, set in the white waves of the little lady's hair. Every lock in the phantom picture stood grimly erect when for the eleventh time the gray head rose solicitously from a plate yet untouched.

It was not to bring fresh toast nor to pour fresh chocolate. It was not to take away a superfluous dish, nor to bring one, not even to stir the coals in the tiny doll's stove that made faces at cooking, from five lunettes of isinglass, set in a row across its black face. It was as difficult to take that stove seriously, as it is to consider with gravity the countenance of a nodding toy mandarin. In consequence of all which, even the iron mask of the school ma'am's features relaxed when the miniature dame, standing beside her miniature fire, and looking with anxiety from table to hearth, and from chocolate pot to silver caster, at last urged:

"Isn't there anything else you want?"  
 "Only to have you sit down please," and the boarder choked a little over the smile she was swallowing.

She lived to be ashamed of the smile. It was not when the conversation slipped easily from the quaint Japanese butter plates to the Washington where they were found, the Washington of forty years ago, to which a young doctor brought a young bride. It was not when the thin silver recalled the Canton home, and the listner put in:

"You were born in Canton, then? And have known the president's family, and his wife's?"

Nor when the tiny dame's head poised a trifle more stately, as she recalled a dance with the father of Mrs. McKinley, "He was a graceful dancer, Mr. Saxton, and I can remember how pleased I was to be talking with the editor of the Republican. I wore my first party gown; it was a large wedding; but we talked mostly about the underground railway."

"Was the editor tall?"  
 "Yes. He bent his head to listen to little me, in a linen lawn dress with shoulder puffs and lace undersleeves."

It was then, indeed, that the corner whatnot, with its grottoes of crystal, holding starfish and metal buttons, pink coral and dolls' heads, sea urchins and wax strawberries, began to seem like the wreck of worlds. It was longer before they told their story of the weary guest of the young doctor for his own relief from a nerve racking torture, a quest that dragged over range after range of giant hills, and ended where all quests end at last.

Then, with a lurch in the adjustment of the "me" and the "not me," as when a mirror into which you gaze, tilts abruptly, the cynical school ma'am regarded her land lady. All those anxious worries—

"I'm afraid your soup is cold. Let me give you some hot."

In a flash they became eloquent of the anxious watches and the petulant reproaches of seven sorrowful years.

"He never was unkind, doctor wasn't. He often worried because he couldn't help being impatient when he suffered most. But he never was unkind. Let me pour you some more coffee. Just a little. Won't you?"

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**Slip of the Tongue.**

Jones (looking at four queens dealt him by Smith)—Pass.  
 Smith—What! with such a hand?—Town Topics.

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 "Why, that's my sister!"

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