

One Week an Editor

Rebecca Harding Davis

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One Week an Editor

I.

TO preach a sermon or edit a newspaper were the two things in life which I always felt I could do with credit to myself and benefit to the world, if I only had the chance. As a lawyer I knew I had not been a success; as a member of society I weighed little weight; as librarian for the Antiquarian Society I was but a drudge, earning bread and meat; my one chance, I was assured, lay in the pulpit or editor's desk. The chance was slow in coming. Clergymen in even the broadest of churches are not apt to open their pulpits to lay old bachelors. Years ago I lobbied in one newspaper office and another through New York to get a footing as manager, city or financial editor, or even reporter; my friends pushed me as a young man of "fine literary tastes," but all to no purpose.

"We don't want fine literary tastes," growled one chief after another. "We want a man who knows the business. Mr. Cibber may have fine taste for his dinner, but it does not follow that he can cook it until he has learned how to roast and boil."

"Journalism, I perceive," I said to my friend Craik one day, in talking over my old rebuffs, "must be studied as an art; as one would study medicine, law, cabinet-making."

"So far as newspapers are concerned, probably you are right; but — " he paused, nibbling the ends of his moustache and eyeing me thoughtfully. Now, Craik was the editor of the New York "Northern Light"; and Craik, I saw, felt for my disappointment.

"But — " he said dubiously again. My heart or my windpipe swelled in my throat. "I don't know that a particular training would be needed for a monthly magazine like ours. Good common sense, and business tact, and a — your literary taste is fine, eh, Cibber? Well, now," recklessly hitching his chair closer, "what do you say to running the 'Northern Light' for a month? One number, you see? It's too bad you should be cheated always of your whim." Craik was a sanguine fellow; nothing could be heartier than the laugh on his fat cheeks, but there was an uneasy gravity already in his black eyes above them. His generosity had taken the bit in its mouth, but his judgment was in hot pursuit after it. I ought to have come to his help. But the chance — the chance! Had I not been waiting for it all my life? Besides, I knew I could do better with the magazine than Craik, who accepted half the trash that came to him because he never had learned to say no.

"Much obliged," I said as coolly as was possible; "I'll do what I can for you. When did you — "

"Well, it was a hasty idea. We'll talk it over. But I really think it might answer. I want to take my wife for a run over the Pacific road in August, and that's the time to get up the November number. I might trust it to you, Cibber — with instructions. That number is of little importance at any rate," half to himself. "The first months decided the race for the year, against our rival magazines."

This was not flattering, to be sure. But what did Craik know of my editorial ability? When he saw the November number he would tune his pipes to a different key. The matter was decided then and there. Craik went off with a droop in his back and a sagging of his heavy cheeks, and his cigar quite gone out in his mouth, precisely as though a weight had been laid on his shoulders. For me, I walked up Broadway as though I had Mercury's wings on my boot-heels. I am not what is called a leaky fellow about my personal affairs, yet when I was seated at Mrs. Butterworth's well-lighted, genial board that evening, I could not help dropping a hint of my good fortune, in a careless way, to my next neighbor. There being a pause, the information was heard by every one at the table. Mrs. Butterworth's house is in one of the most exclusive of neighborhoods, and her boarders are all, according to her showing, of blue blood in the world of society or literature; I was assured, therefore, that my confidence was not misplaced.

My next neighbor happened to be little Susan Fleming. When she heard the news she laid down her fork and turned to me:

"But now I am glad! Glad for thee and for the magazine!" holding out her hand.

A hearty, frank manner draws me to man or woman as no beauty or intellect can do; but now, in this fair, fine little creature just out of childhood, it somehow suddenly set me and my task apart from common work, and ennobled us both. I had been amused all winter by watching how Miss Fleming mistook every one who came near her for better men and women than they were, and how they invariably tried for the time to make real her fancy of them. She was a very young girl, the orphan daughter of Isaac Fleming of Philadelphia, long known as a notable

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preacher among the Friends. The child, after she was left alone in the world, fancied she had a vocation for art, and had come to New York to learn modelling in clay. Everybody in the house knew her Quaker origin, and accounted by it for her manner, which was innocent and fearless as a child's. But I happened to have been an old friend of Isaac Fleming's, and to know one or two other facts about his daughter, which for the present I kept carefully to myself. There were two or three rare and precious specimens of young ladyhood in the house; with manners ruled to order; stately, or brilliant, or gracious at the proper seasons and to the proper people — just as they dressed with fine simplicity for breakfast and lavish display for dinner. They were guarded and duennaed at every step by mothers and governesses and maids; but poor little Susy, with her fair curly hair and night-blue eyes, went in and out alone, shut in from us all by a certain unmistakable royalty of youth and innocence.

She was waiting for me when I came out. "The 'Northern Light's' is the office where Hugh Blake is employed as book-keeper?" she asked.

I said yes, sorry that she had asked the question. A month or two ago she would not have asked it. The mere mention of Blake's name would have paralyzed her tongue and dyed her pretty pale cheeks red. Now the pink on them was faint as a plum blossom, and her voice was quite steady.

Yes, I repeated with emphasis, and that I was quite sure the office had no man in its employ so patient or thorough, or sure to rise in the long run. Scotch blood told there.

She agreed with me; was very cordial and frank about it; altogether too cordial and frank. Mr. Digby, she said — and then the maidenly pink fled and the hot blood rushed up — Mr. Digby was warm in his commendation of Hugh Blake. He had met few young men in this country with such plain, practical force or good working qualities.

Now Digby was the soul of generosity. I should have suspected any other man of damning her lover with faint praise for a purpose to Susy Fleming — it somehow placed poor Hugh, who was a trifle dull, in such forcible contrast to Digby himself, with his broad cosmopolitan habit of thought and brilliant heats and fervors.

"Digby means well, no doubt," I replied testily. "But he need not have limited Blake's good points to those of a Norman draught-horse."

Just then we heard Digby coming up from dinner trolling out "The Fair Land of Poland." His magnificent tenor filled the house. Miss Fleming forgot to answer me; she busied herself over her crochet, but in ten minutes I saw did not take a stitch.

So that was the end of Hugh Blake's plans! Hugh was dull in manners, as I said; an insignificant-looking fellow too, beside Digby — short and stout, with light hair and eyes, and usually dressed in cheap shop-clothes. Nobody but his old mother, who was dead now, and myself, probably, knew the tenderness and stern integrity hidden under the cheap clothes and commonplace face. He never gave me his confidence in words; but I knew how he had been doing night-work for a year or two past to buy the flowers and concert tickets with which he paid his quiet suit to Susy. I understood perfectly well what those anxious queries meant with which he persecuted me as to the rent of dwelling-houses in Flushing or Newark, the cost of marketing, servants' wages, etc. Poor Hugh was solving the problem of how he could ask the woman he loved to share his fifteen hundred dollars per annum. A knight in old time won his mistress by carrying her colors on his victorious lance against swart Turk or turbaned Moor, but now he has to face a legion indomitable of butchers, bakers, and milkmen, without even war-cry or bit of scarf to hearten him.

After Digby came to board at the house, Hugh's quiet visits grew more quiet; he was content apparently to sit and listen to his rival, laughing good-humoredly at his jokes, and giving keen attention to his recollections. No wonder the book-keeper with his pittance, whose mother was a milliner and who had never been out of New York, should fade into obscurity beside this Englishman, with his background of noble family, university education, and a life of strange adventure in all parts of the world. Added to this, and crowning all in Susy's eyes, Digby was a clergyman, though without a charge in the Church of England.

"It was a mistake in me ever to put on the cloth," he used to say in his dashing, frank way — "almost as fatal a mistake as Swift's. I have been too much one of Fortune's spoiled children. But I try not to disgrace it."

"What does it matter," Susy said warmly, "that he has no church to preach in? The whole world can then be his parish. He teaches courage and cheerfulness wherever he goes."

Digby, coming into the room, was as cordial and eager about my good luck as though I had fallen heir to a million. He shook both my hands, looking down on me radiantly from his brawny six-feet-two. "I know it's but

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for a month," when I tried to explain. "But it's the opportunity you've waited for all your life! It's the opening crack for the wedge! Use it as you can, Cibber, and you will become a power in the world of literature."

"I'm quite new to the business," I stammered awkwardly. Digby's breadth and height and heat always took the breath out of my mouth and made me feel dry and dull.

"Very likely. What of that? I know absolutely nothing of literary work or workers, or I should be glad to give you any help possible. At home, I met Thackeray and Jerrold occasionally at the club, but I know no authors here. But think of the chances for good to be done! Think of preaching to an audience of fifty or a hundred thousand people! Why, you will want to distil the wisdom of your whole life into that one sermon!"

He looked so noble and enthusiastic, with the gray eyes beaming and the gas-light touching the masses of his red hair, that I was ashamed of the sordid view I had hitherto taken of my chance.

"If you would preach the sermon, Mr. Digby!" said good Mrs. Chandler, who sat tatting in her regulation black seeded silk and rows of white curls.

"I shall be glad to share my desk with you," I said with a feeble laugh.

"I? I write for the press!" He laughed, but neither accepted nor declined the offer. The truth was I began already to be perplexed to despair about that very editorial which I had been waiting all my life to write. I felt like Phaëton when he had Apollo's reins at last in his grip. I had a complete creed of my own on the speculative and positive philosophies, and another, quite original, on the religion of Buddha, of all of which the world ought to have the benefit. But how condense them into a page of brevity? Besides, were editorials usually of that profound and heavy character? Might not Digby help to popularize my wisdom? to give sauce, piquancy, flavor, to my ragout?

One after another of the boarders had joined the group about him, but he remained close to Susy's chair.

"Cibber, I see, hesitates about mounting the editorial tripod because it is not his work," he said. "Now my rule is, let a man be himself always, simply and solely, in spite of circumstances, and circumstances will accommodate themselves to him. After I returned from Polynesia (I was missionary at Tahiti for several years, Miss Fleming, and of course dressed to suit the climate), I found it impossible to sleep in-doors, or to wear shoes and stockings — utterly impossible! I shall never forget the astonishment and horror of the rector of one of the largest churches in London when I insisted on preaching barefooted. I could not have preached otherwise. Shoes cramped not only my feet, but my brain and tongue. I had my own way at last, and the effect upon the audience was tremendous! They comprehended the situation at once. That stroke of nature made the West End men and women and the poor Tahitians kin, eh? Now, Cibber, do you go into your pulpit as I did into mine; be yourself — throw off conventionality, old rules, shoes, stockings, whatever impedimenta hamper you. Success is sure!" clapping me on the shoulder.

Digby's hearers looked and smiled applause as usual. Unconventionality was always a favorite enthusiasm with our fashionable party, especially when preached by Digby. His suit of white linen this evening, lightened by rare and unobtrusive antique jewelry, was immaculate in cut and fit; and no man in New York was better posted in the by-laws of etiquette wherein their souls delighted.

I could not decide whether the Polynesian story was eloquence or claptrap. I did decide, however, that Digby's help would be essential in my undertaking, and taking him aside that evening asked him to write one or two short articles descriptive of life in the South seas, and an essay on the condition of the English church. "You may send a poem if you will, too," I added, "and I will consult you on the editorial pages."

"But, Cibber — really — I am absolutely ignorant as to authorship," he stammered. "You overwhelm me with your confidence." He could not see, as I did, that he had precisely the culture, the aplomb that I lacked, besides entire freshness in the literary work; and so modest was he that it was a long time before I could secure his promise of aid.

II.

On going down for the first time to the office of the "Northern Light," I was joined by an old gentleman, Sturgeon by name, who had only been an inmate of the house for a fortnight. He was a Bostonian, a man of about sixty, shrewd, kindly, reticent; he had, he said, come to New York on business, but as yet had given no hint of its purport.

He came down the steps with me on this morning, however, touching my arm as I beckoned to a car. "Walk down the Avenue with me, Mr. Cibber. I wish to consult you," he said; and proceeded to tell me that his errand in New York was to discover a niece, a young girl who had several years before had married a scoundrel by the name of Whyte, who had deserted her and left her to struggle along as best she could. "I could find no clue of her whereabouts until lately," he said. "Then I heard she had work in some of the newspaper offices here. Poor Hetty! A mere child, sir, a soft little dumpling of a thing! What does she know of type-setting or presses? It occurred to me that you would now have the entrance to this sort of life, and be apt to hear of her if she is still in the city."

It did not seem likely to me at all, but I promised the old doctor to do what I could.

"I'll take her home with me at once. I have plenty to keep her and her children in comfort for the rest of her life. As for her husband, I never have seen him and I never wish to see him!" striking his cane vehemently against the brown stone steps as we passed.

"I do not wonder at your anger," said Digby gravely, who had joined us. "Nothing has surprised me more since I came to America, I acknowledge, gentlemen, than the number of women thrown on their own resources for support by husbands and fathers. It is infamous! It is an ineffaceable stigma on the boasted chivalry of your men! There must be widows and single women in every society forced to support themselves; but how any able-bodied man can leave his wife to fight her way alone — I can find no words to express my surprise, my scorn!"

I looked up at his large superb figure, swelling with lofty indignation, and thought what a tower of strength he would be for any woman. No wonder Susy had turned from Hugh Blake to this man.

At the corner of Broadway and Fifth avenue the doctor left me. "You'll look out for Hetty?" he said, pressing my hand.

Digby looked after him attentively. I fancied there were tears in his fine eyes. "What a scoundrel that man Whyte must be!" he said indignantly. "A man's injustice to men I can forgive; but to a woman! However, we cannot help the matter. You are going to remain at the 'Northern Light' office all day?"

"Only until noon."

"That fellow Blake is clerk or porter down there?" Now I did not like the tone in which this was said, so answered him, curtly enough, that Hugh was a book-keeper.

"At a salary of a few hundreds, I suppose! Yet the idiot hopes to marry Miss Fleming! I'll wager you a five-pound note, Cibber, that she knows to a penny what his income is. A Quaker draws in the love of money with the mother's milk."

I stammered out some feeble defence of Susy and left him abruptly. Once or twice before a certain coarse vulgarity had come to light under his courtesy and warmth, just as the pewter betrays itself, gray and cold, beneath the plating on sham silver.

The cheerful sunlight and the busy, animated crowds that passed me by, however, soon caused my ugly suspicions to fade away. We all have our moments of spleen and weakness. This generous, brilliant fellow, I should remember, was a lover and talking of his rival. I tried to put the matter from me by thoughts of the work waiting for me. What a chance these editors had to penetrate all the secrets of human nature! There was I, by virtue of my office on which I had not entered, interested in behalf of old Dr. Sturgeon, ready to find in his lovely niece a woman for whom every man should do his devoir, and in her husband a villain worthy of punishment instant and signal. I was quite sure I could recognize either if they came in my way. If I had any power of intellect, it was my keen skill in reading character. There, as I said before, was the advantage which these editors possessed over all other men. The history of the world, in toto, was not only brought to them hour by hour by post or telegraph, but individuals unveiled themselves to them, came to them for aid, counsel; their words reached and

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were responded to by innumerable hearts! The editor of the "Northern Light," for example? To think of the timid young tyros that came blushing to him with their first song; the lovers that brought him their secret story, smothered in rhyme, which they had not yet found courage to whisper in the ear of the beloved one; the starving intellectual giants to whom he gave new lease of life by accepting a ten-page article! I should have regarded Craik with more interest if I had thought of these things before. I wondered that he was such a brisk, money-making fellow, giving so much of his thoughts to the quality of his cigars or proper sauce for his fish. His occupation would tend to make him contemplative, philosophic, grave, as that of the hidden oracles of old to whom men carried the riddles of their lives for solution. His office, no doubt (I was in Murray street by this time), would give an index to this mood. I fancied a quiet, sombre apartment, lined with books and pictures, the fit retreat of a scholar and a literary tribune.

I had never been in Craik's office.

I went up the dirty stairs of it now, flight after flight. Every door I passed was covered with dingy, fly-blown signs. "N. Y. and London Assurance Journal"; "Swift's Fashion Bazar"; "E. P. Lewis, Adm'r of Beck. Estate," etc., etc. Dust, clippings, envelopes, cigar ends were ground under my feet. At last, on one door more hacked and blacker than the others, among a line of other gilt letterings, "Methodist Monthly," "Banker's News Digest," etc., I found "NORTHERN LIGHT."

I pushed open the door, and entered with a certain elation and lightness of step. For a month at least I was the scholar, one of the tribunes in the literary world.

The room, in fact, the whole sixth floor of the building, was fenced off into squares by partitions reaching half-way to the ceiling. Desks, pigeonholes, shelves, waste-baskets, were the principal furniture, while the hemp carpet was trodden into holes; the files of newspapers, old maps, and one or two photographs of Lincoln and John Bright that decorated the walls hung askew, and were ridged inch deep with dust. A tray of lunch dishes from a restaurant filled the corner, and a big sleepy cat lay purring beside it. As to the men who sat writing, or hurried to and fro, my first feeling was disappointment. Here were no scholarly sages, but the young dapper fellows in cheviot office clothes, with a bud in the button-hole, whom I met by the score on Broadway. I pulled involuntarily at my grizzled beard, which was so out of place. I had heard some old cronies of my own age bewailing the fact that boys were dictators nowadays in politics, art, and literature. Now I realized the truth of it. I ventured to stop one of these lads.

"I am the editor, in Mr. Craik's absence, of the 'Northern Light.'"

"Northern Light"? North — ? Oh, yes, certainly. I had forgotten that Faddinks had that affair in hand. These are all Mr. Faddinks's publications on this floor. Joe, take this gentleman to the office of the 'Northern Light.'" And raising his hat he was gone.

Certainly, the celerity, courtesy, and directness of these young fellows was an improvement on the manner of my youth, when frogged and furred overcoats, heavy jewelled seals, and suave and wordy circumlocution were in vogue.

I followed Joe to one of the square pens, at the door of which I met Hugh Blake. His sallow face reddened with alarm. "Is anything wrong at home? What brings you here, Mr. Cibber? She is not — "

"She is quite well, I hope, whoever she may be, Hugh," calmly. "I am here in Craik's place." It vexed me to see how the boy's heart was still set on Susy, when I knew that Digby had won her.

He sank back on the instant into his quiet, grave self again. "The office is not what you anticipated, I suspect," with a quizzical laugh on his face. For I had expressed to him some of my pre-conceived notions of the place. He introduced me to Mr. Boggs. Mr. Boggs was a little man, dark, thin, and spare, seated in front of a painfully neat desk with full pigeonholes. So thin and spare was the material of which nature and art had made up Mr. Boggs, that there was not a redundant grain of flesh on his body or loose thread in his tight-fitting clothes. His face was clean shaven, his black hair clung as if wetted to his head; in the high cheek-bones only, which were those of an Indian, was matter wasted, but that evidently had been robbed from the sharp nose.

"Mr. Boggs, Mr. Cibber, of whom Mr. Craik spoke to you," said Hugh.

"Ah, M — Cibber?" Mr. Boggs grudged even the syllables of his words. "Said you would look in. Very happy — 'm sure; but November mag-zine's most ready to get out," tying some manuscripts in a shopkeeping way with red tape, and depositing his pen in the inkstand as who should say, "Thirty seconds allowed for conversation; no more."

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"I understood that — that I was to prepare the November number?" I stammered.

Mr. Boggs smiled a scant, measured smile from far-off heights of business experience. "A — can't say. Copy's all on hand, two serials, one short story, essay, poem, editorial table, amusing column complete," ticking it off with his fingers. "If you wish a revise of proof, certainly," as though called on to humor a child with unnecessary candy.

I stared down at Boggs. Boggs took up his pen, nodded politely, and began to glance over strips of paper printed on one side. My revise! The editorial article that should have contained my views on the Positive Philosophy and the creed of Buddha! It did contain views on the culture of early vegetables, including spinach! Had I wasted all my life for this chance to be defeated by Boggs and spinach at last?

"Mr. Craik requested me to edit the November number," I said, "and I do not limit my duty to reading proof. I have prepared — that is, I have engaged matter which will very nearly fill the magazine."

Mr. Boggs did not waste words nor temper. He looked at me, nodded, tied up the remaining manuscripts, clapped them into their pigeonhole and surrendered his chair with a curt "Very well, sir, I am not responsible." When he reached the next partition I heard him say something about "one of Craik's Delmonico arrangements made after the third bottle," at which the other men laughed.

There I was, monarch of chair, inkstand, and manuscripts. The sudden weight overpowered me. I spent a couple of hours in study of the situation, and then helplessly summoned a mild-eyed young man in spectacles from a near desk.

"These serials would fill the whole number?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Boggs usually divided them for Mr. Craik."

"And this poetry? It is wretched stuff! Atrocious!"

"Mr. Craik usually gave the poems to Mr. Boggs to condense and polish."

"And — just wait a minute, will you?" as he was going back to his desk. "What the deuce am I to do with this manuscript? I can't read it. Not three words in four."

"That's Mrs. Smith's, sir, I presume. Mr. Boggs can make it out. Only man in the office that can make out Mrs. Smith's manuscript. There is the morning's mail," pointing to a wheelbarrow full of huge yellow envelopes. "Mr. Boggs read all the manuscripts for Mr. Craik, and only submitted the best."

"Confound it! Did Mr. Boggs edit this magazine, or Craik?"

"Mr. Craik," urbanely straightening his dove-colored neck-tie, "is a good figurehead, sir. Literary man. Name looks well for the magazine. But every office has its Boggs."

I at least would do without Boggs. I turned to the poems again. The mild young man hesitated and then came closer. "There is only one great mistake you can make, and that is to admit anything of Cheney's."

"Who is Cheney?"

"Oh, I was just coming to warn you against Cheney," said Blake, opening the door. "I have never seen him, but he is the bête noire of all magazine editors. A thorough literary sharper, who will palm off an essay or poem or two or three offices in the same month, take his checks, and have them cashed before it is discovered that the article is translated from the French or stolen verbatim from some obscure English magazine. Curiously enough, he has been playing that game for ten years in New York, and lives by it still, though he is as well known in the profession as the signs in Printing House Square."

"Gentlemanly beggar, Cheney!" said the mild young man, taking off his spectacles and brightening into a man and a gossip. "Played a good trick on Craik. Introduced himself as a fellow of property — Hon. John Cheney of Suffolk. Saw a letter on the desk addressed to one of the Lees of Virginia. 'Kinsman of the Confederate general?' he asks carelessly. Craik tells him yes, a schoolfellow of his own; a Virginian not impoverished by the war. Cheney goes home, reads up the Lee genealogy, writes to this Virginian as a relative from England desirous of purchasing an estate in the South, and giving Craik's name as that of a mutual friend. Eighteen months afterward Craik received one of his manuscripts, with directions to forward a check to him in care of Colonel Richard Henry Lee. He had been living off of and on his "cousins" in Virginia for a year and a half, on the strength of that address on the letter."

"There's a certain admirable genius, after all, in developing such tall oaks from acorns so small," said Blake.

"The very mention of his name to Craik is enough to make him ill-tempered for a day. I feared Cheney, if he found out Mr. Cibber was in charge, would try to run in some of his frauds in the November number, so thought I

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had better warn him."

"Thank you," I said. "But I have learned to know a swindler by sight. Besides, I have secured valuable assistance as to that number. Digby — you know him, Blake?"

"Yes, I know Digby," said Hugh. If he had been a woman, he would have sighed.

One of the other men (they seemed a genial, social set of fellows) took up the burden of Cheney. "But Cheney is a more genteel literary scoundrel than Hodson," he said. "You must keep a sharp look-out for Hodson, Mr. Cibber. I warned Mr. Craik about him when he took charge of the magazine. Hodson's rule, I told him, was to bring a bundle of manuscripts and when they were returned as rejected, to bring suit for one or two which he would declare had been stolen. By George, sir! before the words were out of my mouth, in came the very man disguised with red whiskers and wig, bustles up, deposits his bundle on the desk. 'I'm in haste, Mr. Craik; will call to-morrow for your decision.' 'Stay' (for I gave him the wink), says Craik, 'we'll look over these together.' Hodson took off his overcoat and sat down, but the operation proving tedious, Craik counted them carefully and gave him a receipt. Off goes Hodson. 'I think we pinned him there,' said Craik triumphantly, turning to put on his new London-made overcoat, and taking hold of Hodson's greasy sack, fresh from the pawnbroker's. Those manuscripts were never called for, you may be sure."

"By the way," I said, perceiving that the men knew so many of the "hangers-on" of literature, "is there a Mrs. Whyte — Hetty Whyte — employed on any press-work, in your knowledge? A young, pretty woman?"

"There's Mrs. Whyte who assists Boggs," hesitated Blake. "Here she comes now. But she is neither young nor pretty, as you see." A pale, insignificant little woman, in rusty black, came through the offices, holding a satchel in one hand and leading a little boy by the other. The child looked jaded and thin. She spoke to him every moment, when he brightened into a smile.

"She takes Bobby with her as protection," said Blake. "Night or day you meet the two tired, half-starved looking creatures, going to and from her work."

"I thought women could make a nice income with work of this sort?"

"Not such women as this. She's a dull little soul. It's only Boggs's kindness that gives her a chance to earn a trifle. Good morning, Mrs. Whyte!" going forward to take her package. I saw that she had a gentle, patient face, with eyes full of mother love, if she were not young nor pretty. I hoped sincerely that she might prove to be the old doctor's niece; doubtless in his memory she was still only the little Hetty he knew long ago. Blake, at my request, introduced me.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Whyte, but — you are a widow? I ask for business reasons."

"No. My husband is living. I have not seen him for several years. He has been — unfortunate" — her face flushing a little.

"You have kinsfolk in New Hampshire?"

"Yes. But they have lost sight of me for — oh, a very long time. Did you know Colonel Whyte, sir? My boy Bob is very like his father."

"No, I did not know him. When will you be at the office again?"

"In a week from to-day."

"Very well!" I retreated hastily, afraid of committing myself. My plan was laid. I would bring the old doctor down, and let him see her from behind one of the partitions. If she were not his Hetty, he only would be disappointed. I should not add to her trouble and care by any disturbance of questions which might only distress her at the thought of a home and ease waiting for some other woman's children, which hers could never share.

III.

A WEEK from that day my arrangements were complete. The magazine for November was in type. Of the reading matter Digby had furnished me with one short story, an essay, a couple of sonnets, and some contributions to the amusing column. My editorials, too, he had revised and lightened in style and effect. I felt so grateful to Digby that I urged him to come down to the office and be introduced to his (for that month at least) collaborators. But he laughed gayly and declined.

"No, no, Cibber. These fellows are professionals. I am only an amateur. Never took pen in hand before to indite more than a few notes. I preach always impromptu. No, no; they'd treat me as the barnyard fowls would a wild bird if it came to peck at their corn."

Which reminded me delicately enough that I had made no provision for paying Digby. I gave him a check (Craik had left some blanks signed for me to fill up) for what I afterward discovered was double the usual rate of payment. But you could not have the wild bird's song at the same rate as barnyard cluckings.

"But you must let me at least introduce you to Craik when he returns," I urged.

Digby nodded with an indifferent good humor. Evidently he rated the literary guild low. "Come down at four o'clock to-morrow afternoon," I said after a pause. "The office will be vacant then, and there is a little domestic drama which I wish you to witness. Miss Fleming has promised to come."

On hearing that, he consented eagerly. I had told Susy the story of poor little Mrs. Whyte, and she was sanguine as to the sequel.

"Thee may be quite certain she is 'Hetty,'" she said, her fair face in a heat. "But thee must be cautious — cautious. Do not tell the old doctor of the chance that she is found. Ask him to bring me down to look at thy new office, and let him meet her by accident."

So it was arranged; Susy making cunning provision for herself as a spectator. The bell rang for dinner just as I finished my colloquy with Digby, and the ladies passed us through the wide hall, appearing, in its bright light and dark walnut walls, like a flock of delicately plumaged birds fluttering from light into shadow. Digby hurried forward to offer his arm to Susy. She was dressed in some pearl-colored gauzy stuff, with the transparent Quaker lawn over her white neck, and the fair hair crept out over it in curly rings. She looked beyond me into the darkness eagerly, and then passed on with sudden discontent in her face. Could it have been Hugh Blake she hoped to see? He had often accompanied me home to dinner before he ceased coming to the house altogether. Was it possible that she had had the sense, and real refinement of feeling enough to prefer Hugh to the man on whose arm she leaned? What woman would rank the homely, dull clerk with Digby? He glanced up at me as he went down the stairs, and waved his hand significantly, as though he read my thoughts. I never had seen a more brilliant, triumphant figure.

Hugh Blake met me when I entered the office. "A day later with the November number, and you would have had to abdicate before your reign was begun," he said. "Craik is back again. Wife taken sick at Chicago, so they were forced to give up the Pacific trip."

"Sorry for his wife. But the November number cannot be altered now. Plates are cast." I was very well satisfied that they were cast. My work had been capitally done, I fancied. Boggs, an intolerable incubus, had been dislodged, and a connection made for the magazine with Digby, who was, in my opinion, a most valuable acquisition.

Craik came in a moment after with the mild young clerk, bustling, eager as usual, but, I saw, a little uneasy.

"Gone to the foundry, eh? I thought I'd look it over. But no matter. No doubt it will be the most capital number yet issued. A thousand thanks, Cibber, for your aid!"

I told him of Doctor Sturgeon and the hope for the poor little Whyte woman.

Craik was interested in a moment. "I know her a hard-working creature, with her poor little champion, Bobby. Boggs has kept her in work. By the way, where is my factotum?"

"Boggs? Oh, I discharged Boggs."

"Dis — charged Boggs!" Craik's face grew red, then he laughed. "No matter, I can bring him back. You might as well have discharged the subscribers, Cibber. However, here comes your heroine," as Mrs. Whyte with Bobby

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entered. She was agitated, I saw, and opened and shut her satchel without any purpose. The poor creature had fancied, it appeared, that I proposed to give her more work. Beyond work she had no idea of good fortune.

The next moment Hugh started forward to the door, his sallow face kindling into such life as no one could have believed possible for it, and brought in Susy, sweet and pink as an arbutus blossom, in her grave Quaker dress. Behind her a few steps followed the old doctor, staring and stumbling gawkily around. Susy, after a word to me, hurried up to Mrs. Whyte, to be near her if good fortune came to her. "She looked," Susy said afterward, "too weak to bear even happiness."

"Well, here we are, Mr. Cibber," said the old man. "We had a curiosity to see the place where the thunder is made. But it is not at all — what!" He stopped short in front of the little woman in black, who for the last two minutes had been crying quietly to herself, twisting her thin, freckled hands together over the handle of her satchel.

"Quiet, Bobby! Quiet, dear!" she said over and over again.

The old man put his hand on her shoulder — took it off hastily. "I beg pardon, ma'am. But you looked for a minute so like a friend I lost — my niece, Hetty — Good God! are you Hetty?"

"Yes, Uncle John," crying so hard that we all felt like crying with her, but laughed instead, while the old doctor hugged her and hugged Bobby, and then hugged them both together. "Why, how you've changed, child!" lifting her face up by the chin, and turning to us as if to explain why his rosebud of a girl was a cadaverous, middle-aged woman. "You've had hard furrows to hoe, Hetty. But it's all over now."

The woman, as usual, was the one to regain her self-control. "You must excuse us, sir," she said to Craik, who stood smiling red and benign down on them. "I have not seen my uncle for many years, and he thinks they have not been easy years."

"Think? I know what they've been! It is all owing to that scoundrel — "

But the little woman laid her hand on his arm, still turning to Craik with a certain dignity. "My husband, Colonel Whyte, was unfortunate — "

The situation was embarrassing, and I for one was glad that the door was flung open just then, and Digby, gallant and bold, and gayly dressed, entered.

"Why, Cibber, you roost as high as the bald eagle, whose flight — " He stopped, startled apparently at the crowd of faces about him.

"Mr. Craik," I said, "this is Mr. Digby, to whom I and the November number of the 'Northern Light' are largely indebted."

"Mr. Cibber," said Craik, drawing himself up, with his hands still clasped behind him, "this is Mr. Cheney, with whom I and the 'Northern Light' have had dealings before."

"By George!" cried the mild-eyed clerk. "Cheney, indeed! With red whiskers and wig it would be Hodson!"

But at that dramatic moment — "It is my husband, Uncle John!" cried Hetty, running to Digby and throwing her arms about him, defiant as a hen ruffling up her feathers for fight.

The old doctor stepped forward, trembling with rage from his wig to his shoes. "It is no Cheney, nor Hodson. It is that scoundrel Jem Whyte."

"Her husband!" said Susy, with white lips. Digby's first movement was to push the little woman from him gently but decidedly. "You had better go to Uncle John, Hester, my dear, and you, too, Bob, my boy. He's a better standby than your worthless dog of a father. As for you, gentlemen," smiling and with a sweeping bow, which included us all, "when you have determined whether Jem Whyte is Cheney, Hodson, or Digby, you can decide in which role he best played his part."

With an air of gracious condescension he left us.

"He has won the game," said Craik laughing.

Hugh Blake escorted Susy home that evening.

"When Blake is able to marry, that will be a match, I suspect?" Craik asked of me.

"Yes; and when he has married her he will find Susy has one of the snuggest fortunes in the Quaker City," I said. "But that is her secret, not mine."

REBECCA HARDING DAVIS.