

The stove was filled and lighted and the baskets unpacked, to the delight of the almost famished children. Handing the surprised mother a banknote, Mr. Durant told her to purchase what they needed, and that he would see her the next day to arrange for her to move into a small house which he would furnish as a Christmas gift for the children. To her torrent of tearful thanks he replied with a motion of silence. As he was about to leave she asked:

'Have you any special favor you would wish us to pray for, as long as you will not accept our thanks?'

'Yes, my good woman,' Durant quickly replied; 'please pray and have the little ones pray for the recovery of one at the point of death.'

'We will pray, good sir,' answered the happy mother, 'and my two eldest children and myself will offer our Holy Communion for this intention tomorrow.'

'You could not do more had you millions,' he replied.

Never had the altar been so bright, the flowers so fragrant, the music so sweet as on that Christmas morning, or at least not to Durant, who, for the first time in twenty-five years, knelt to receive the Bread of Life. The dark clouds of despondency rolled away, and all nature seemed joyous to him, as it did in his childhood. After breakfast he called at the home of the widow he had befriended the previous evening, and gave her the key to a small house he had recently purchased and an order for the necessary furniture. Then he went to late Mass. In the evening, his heart now chilled by dread fear, and again beating wildly with strange hope, in which the prayers and Communion of the widow and her children figured as a foundation, he called at the Deberg residence. There his cup of happiness was filled. The patient had rallied, quite unexpectedly the physician said, and it was even thought she had passed the crisis and was permanently on the road to recovery.

Durant did not see her that day, nor for many days, but at their next meeting it was decided that the old engagement should be renewed, and that his lonely house should have what it long had needed—a mistress.—Catholic Standard and Times.

NEEDED IN THE FAMILY

It was a remarkably cool and pleasant room. A gentle breeze fluttered the white muslin curtains, and the roses on their tall bushes nodded across the window-sills at the caller. The caller smiled back at them and drew a long breath of the delicately perfumed air.

He was a young man who liked roses and green fields and the charm of the countryside. And he liked the restful quiet of the little sitting-room.

He arose quickly as a lady entered the room.

'Good morning, madam.'

'Good morning.'

She was a slender lady of perhaps sixty, a gray-haired lady of an old-fashioned type, a lady of much dignity of movement, and yet with a quick manner that at times suggested the sprightliness of a bird.

She pressed her gold-rimmed glasses a little closer to her nose and carefully surveyed the young man.

'I trust you are quite well, madam?'

'Quite well.'

She drew her thin lips together.

'If it's books,' she said, 'there isn't any use of your staying a minute longer.'

The caller smiled.

'I'm not a book agent,' he told her.

'Is it apple corers?'

'I'm not a pedlar.'

'I bought an apple corer of a young man who was something of your build most three years ago. It broke on the second greening. He was a mite stouter, perhaps.' She paused and again regarded him attentively.

'If you are neither a book agent nor an apple corer,' she said, 'you may take a chair.'

'Thank you, madam.'

He seated himself in the straight-backed chair she pointed out, and then the lady took the rocker, placing herself where she could study the young man's face.

'Is this a business call?'

'Yes, madam.'

He had been instructed how to meet the lady's advances. He was to remain strictly on the defensive and let her cross-examine at her leisure.

'Wait. It isn't lightning rods?'

'No, madam.'

'Nor windmills?'

He suddenly smiled, and there was no doubt his smile added to his agreeable appearance.

'That's a little nearer the truth, madam.'

She looked at him sharply, with her gray head on one side.

'What do you mean by that?'

'I only mean that I am a lawyer, madam.'

He was glad to see that she caught the point of the mild witticism at once. She even laughed softly.

'A lawyer?' she echoed. 'Then I scent trouble.'

'I assure you I am quite harmless, madam.'

She smiled a little grimly.

'Well,' she said, with a slight asperity, 'you have been here now quite a spell and haven't told me a word about the business that brought you here, and really nothing worth knowing about yourself.'

'Pardon me, madam,' he said; 'my name is Richard Barclay, and my home is in New York. I am in the law office of Renfrew, Keene, and Darnley, and will be admitted to a partnership in the firm the first of January.'

'There is nothing very startling about that,' said the lady. 'Perhaps in time you will get around to the business that brought you here.'

'Yes, madam. You have a niece.'

'Oh, it's my niece you want to see?'

'No, madam; my business is with you.'

'You are the strangest young man for beating around the bush I ever met. Why don't you say what you want and be done with it?'

'Madam, I want your permission to marry your niece.'

There was a little silence, during which the lady regarded the young man with a steady gaze.

'I knew,' she presently said, 'that I was taking great chances when Clare made that visit in New York with Louise Humphrey.'

The young man wisely waited, but the lady relapsed into silence.

'I haven't much to offer her,' he said; 'at least at present. I'm young and I'm making my way, and my chances seem good. I can give Clare a modest home in a nice neighborhood, a home in which there will always be room for you, dear madam.'

The lady slightly sniffed.

'You are getting ahead a little too fast, young man. I've no thought of moving just at present. Does Clare know about this—this delightful arrangement?'

'Yes, madam.'

'It's all settled, then?'

'No, madam. It all depends on you.'

Again the lady slightly sniffed.

'My niece was in New York just a month. During that month you contrived to persuade yourself that she was the only girl in all the world you could ever care for. Did you, or did you not?'

'I did, madam.'

'Seems nonsensical, doesn't it?'

'No, madam.'

She shook her head at him reprovingly.

'You look like a fairly sensible young man. Does my niece reciprocate this—this fanciful attachment?'

'Yes, madam.'

'And she sent you to me?'

'Yes, madam.'

'But why come to me if you are both agreed?'

'Clare owes you too much, madam, to do anything contrary to your approval.'

'Hoity-toity! And suppose I refuse?'

'We can wait, madam.'

'That's just what you should do. How silly this seems. You have met my niece twenty times, we'll say, and no doubt think her the one perfect flower of all girlhood. Do I use the right expression?'

'Yes, madam.'

She drew the gray shawl a little closer.

'Do you appreciate what you are asking of me?' she suddenly flamed out. 'What do we know about you?'

'Very little, madam. I can only tell you that I am clean and honest, and have a good profession.'

'That is what you say.' Then her eyes suddenly twinkled behind her glasses. 'I'll admit that I'm a little prejudiced in your favor, although you certainly are not as good-looking as Clare would have me believe. And I like your letters.'

'Did Clare show them to you?'

'How else could I have seen them? They were not nearly as slushy as might have been expected.'

'Thank you.'

'That one that told about the Italian child in the police-court was as good as a book. I'll admit that Clare and I both cried over it.' She paused and drew a long breath. 'It's very silly of me, I