

ROGER JAMESON'S MOTHER

'I am perfectly willing to be just—only too willing,' said the girl.

'Yes,' said Roger, 'I understand all that. Justice is a mighty cold substitute sometimes, for—'

'Go on, please,' in a dangerously quiet tone.

'For—or, for other things!' he concluded lamely. 'That is all I can say, Adele. You know just what I mean.'

'You cannot expect me to throw myself against a blind wall of positive, unreasonable, unsurmountable dislike! Roger, I didn't ask you to fall in love with me.'

'No, dear, you didn't.'

'I never sought you—you sought me. I never showed the slightest preference—until—well, until—'

'Yes,' smiling at her. She frowned.

'I mean this, Roger. Until the whole thing was laid before me.'

'And then—' with a humorous twinkle in his eyes. But her head went up with a dignity that was discouraging.

such a pleasant time of the year to begin being happy. Our next Christmas—why, our next Christmas we shall spend together.'

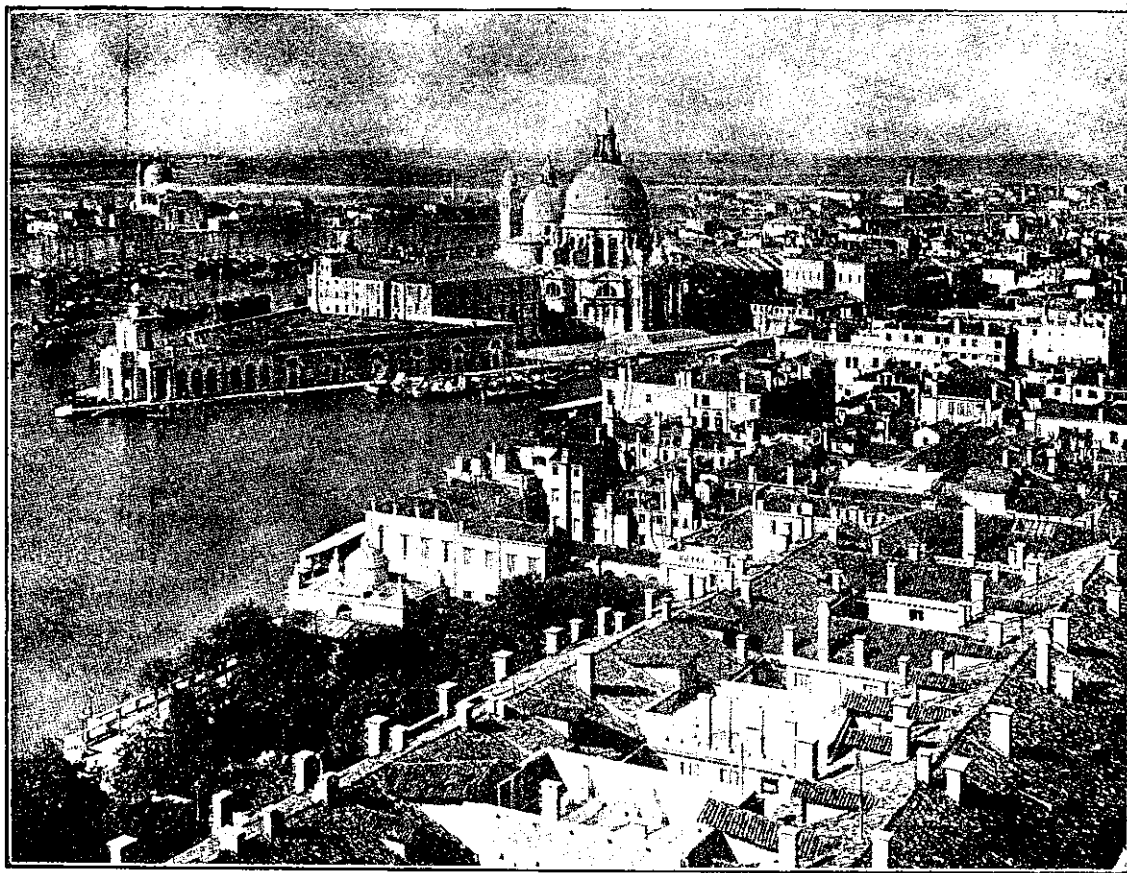
The girl lifted her shoulders with the impatient gesture he knew so well.

'Her dislike of me is unaccountable,' she said hotly, fighting the gentleness in his voice. 'Just unaccountable. I think I am as good as you are. I *don't* imagine you are bending from any lofty height to me!' scornfully. 'This is not a case of King Cophetua and the beggar maid, Roger!'

'Oh, don't talk like that, Adele! It grates on my nerves. For heaven's sake, help me to keep a rein on my temper, since yours has run away with you.'

Adele threw her head back and her face grew white. But she said nothing. The man was plainly hurt. The girl did not dare to open her lips, for the hot anger that quivered through every vein. At last, with the change of attitude that is so characteristic of a woman, she leaned toward him.

'Let us talk of something more interesting,' she said. 'We have had enough unpleasantness now—and I don't want to quarrel. Don't let us quarrel, Roger. And—it is nearly time you went home.'



VIEW OF VENICE.

'And then—I considered it. Which I am still doing,' looking at him coldly. 'Which—I—am—still doing. Tell your mother that, Roger.'

'No, Adele, I won't tell her that because I don't believe it, and I will not listen to you saying it. Come now, you know you love me.'

'Um-m-m.'

'You know we are going to be married.'

'Maybe we are, since the ways of fate are strange. I *know* nothing.'

'You are delightfully clear.'

'A talent which I share with my sex in general.'

Silence. Adele smoothed her handkerchief across her knee, and Roger, for want of something better to do, watched her. Also, for want of something better to say, continued after a few moments:

'You know that we—you and I—intend to marry.'

'Well if we do—at some distant day—'

'In the very near future, Adele.'

The girl did not care to argue. But her face was thoughtful.

'The least little exercise of tact, darling—and you are so tactful,' he said in a gentle tone. 'It is the hardest thing in the world not to see you friends—you two whom I love best. And the Christmas season is

'Can't we come to some different arrangement before we drop it?' he asked. 'Adele, I do want you to meet her—I want her to meet you. Let me call for you to-morrow evening. You need stay but a few minutes.'

Adele straightened up.

'No,' she said, and her face was hard as iron. 'I am surprised that you ask it. It is her place to come here. I shall not go. I shall not seek to force myself on any one. I am unwelcome. She does not want me. She has said so. She has said . . . actually wondered what her boy could see in me. Oh, I heard. She has not been any too careful—or perhaps she meant me to hear! Let it go, let it go. I can assure you she is not essential to my happiness.'

'But she is my mother,' said Roger Jameson.

'Oh, yes,' said Adele. 'You won't, by any possible chance, let me forget—that.' She looked at her watch. 'It is late. She will be wondering what has detained you. Go home, Roger.'

He rose to his feet.

'Adele, I cannot understand you in this biting mood—it is so unlike you. I am coming for you to-morrow evening.'