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DR. SLOPER. I'm resigned to her thinking me a tyrant for a few months.

MORRIS. *(Rising.)* For a few months!

DR. SLOPER. For a lifetime, then. She may as well be miserable that way, as with you.

MORRIS. Ah, you are not polite, sir!

DR. SLOPER. You push me to it, you argue too much.

MORRIS. *(Comes closer to DR. SLOPER, who is now near window wall.)* Dr. Sloper, I have fallen in love with your daughter. I am not the kind of man you would choose for her . . . and for good reasons . . . I have committed every folly, every indiscretion a young man can find to commit . . . I have squandered an inheritance . . . I have gambled . . . I have drunk unwisely . . . I admit, I confess all these things . . .

DR. SLOPER. I am acting in the capacity of a judge, Mr. Townsend, not your confessor!

MORRIS. I tell you these things myself, Doctor, because I love Catherine, and because I have a great deal at stake.

DR. SLOPER. Then you have lost it. *(Moves toward archway.)*

MORRIS. No, sir.

DR. SLOPER. Just as surely as if you placed your pittance on the losing number. . . . It is over. You have lost. *(He stands at archway, waits for MORRIS to leave.)*

MORRIS. Don't be too sure of that, sir. I believe if I say the word she will walk out of this house and follow me.

DR. SLOPER. You are impertinent!

MORRIS. *(Half in archway.)* And may I add, Dr. Sloper, if I did not love your daughter as much as I do, I should not have put up with the indignities you have offered me today.

DR. SLOPER. You have only to leave my house to escape them. Good day, Mr. Townsend.

MORRIS. Good day, sir. *(MORRIS has put on his hat, and turns to door. Before he reaches it to open it and leave, CATHERINE calls from top of stairs.)*

CATHERINE. *(Unseen.)* Wait, Morris, wait! *(She runs downstairs and goes to MORRIS.)*

DR. SLOPER. Catherine!

CATHERINE. You promised me, Morris, you promised you would be respectful when you saw my father!

DR. SLOPER. Catherine!

man . . . I miss him so . . . performed the ceremony without a moment's hesitation. . . . *(With romantic remembrance.)* I was one of the witnesses. . . . The Reverend's assistant, a nice young man, was the other.

MORRIS. *(Who has thrown dice.)* Oh, this isn't fair . . . ! This just about puts me out! *(He manipulates checkers.)*

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Looking at them.)* Why, so it does! *(Then back to her story.)* You know, we heard later that the father was reconciled to the young man, and thought the world of him.

MORRIS. And you think the Doctor will be reconciled, too?

MRS. PENNIMAN. I'm sure of it. Will you let me see that letter again?

MORRIS. *(Getting letter out of his pocket.)* But when I let her go off with him, I thought we would have his consent by now. *(Hands letter to her.)*

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Reading.)* "February the 14th" . . . ummh . . . almost a month and a half ago. Well, maybe since she wrote that he has given his consent.

MORRIS. Maybe. But I cannot take the chance. *(Indicates place in letter.)* You see, she says—*(Reads.)* "I dare not mention your name to Father. He has not been well, and I fear to anger him."

MRS. PENNIMAN. You see, she still loves you, Morris.

MORRIS. Yes. *(Takes letter and puts it back in his pocket.)*

MRS. PENNIMAN. Then you have nothing to worry about

MORRIS. No . . . if she will really run off with me, I think we can make things come right.

MRS. PENNIMAN. *(Laughs.)* I've never kept a secret this long in my entire life.

MORRIS. You must keep it a little while longer, Mrs. Penniman. *(Looks at mantel clock.)* My gracious, it's almost nine-thirty. That's the latest we've played all winter.

MRS. PENNIMAN. The time passes so quickly.

MORRIS. It does indeed.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Can I offer you a tidbit—a sandwich?

MORRIS. *(Rises.)* No, thank you. I am still savoring that excellent dinner.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Would you like to smoke?

MORRIS. May I?

MRS. PENNIMAN. Pray do.

MORRIS. *(Selects cigar from DR. SLOPER'S humidor. He takes band*

off and tosses it into fireplace.) Mrs. Penniman, you will have to tell Catherine all the details tomorrow. The moment you are alone with her, as soon after the boat docks as possible, you must tell her everything about our plans. And it would be well if she did not unpack.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Morris, I shall be at the slip at ten o'clock tomorrow morning.

MORRIS. Ten o'clock? What if the ship docks earlier?

MRS. PENNIMAN. I shall be there at seven—at break of day, if it makes you less nervous.

MORRIS. I wish I could have written about this to Catherine . . .

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Reassuring.*) I shall tell her all the details the moment I see her.

MORRIS. Yes—but it is not quite the same! Planning an elopement by messenger . . . it's . . . it's rather cold . . .

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Smiling.*) It will be the happiest news she has ever heard! Leave it to me. Morris, I wish I could go with you tomorrow night . . . ?

MORRIS. You must stay behind to pacify the Doctor.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Yes, I know—but I would so enjoy it! Think of it, a private marriage! In the dead of night! Catherine is a lucky girl!

MORRIS. (*Thoughtfully.*) I hope we shall both be lucky.

MRS. PENNIMAN. Of course you will be! Austin will be furious for a few weeks, or a few months, but then he will come around.

MORRIS. (*Unpleasantly reminded.*) He told my sister he'd disinherit her. Do you think that's possible?

MRS. PENNIMAN. That was a threat, Morris, and a very foolish one. He can't take away the ten thousand a year she already has.

MORRIS. (*Musingly.*) That would be small comfort.

MRS. PENNIMAN. (*Surprised.*) Ten thousand a year . . . small . . . ?

MORRIS. On ten, ma'am, you live like your neighbor. Even Arthur and Marian will have ten. But thirty is something to look forward to. On thirty you live—(*His hand takes in the room.*) like this.

MRS. PENNIMAN. You like this house, don't you, Morris?

MORRIS. Yes, ma'am, I do. From the first evening that I was brought here, I have admired it, and all the things in it. The Doctor is a man of fine taste. It is strange that although we do not like each other, we seem to like the same things.

CATHERINE. I can do anything, my dearest!

MORRIS. Now! We must think carefully of how we shall word your letter.

CATHERINE. What letter?

MORRIS. The letter you leave for your father. Shall I write it for you? *(He goes toward c. table.)*

CATHERINE. No.

MORRIS. You must be very clever in it. You must melt his heart. You must make him feel your love and affection! *(Looks for some note paper in drawer.)*

CATHERINE. I will not write him.

MORRIS. Why, of course, we will write him! We want him to forgive us!

CATHERINE. Please don't, Morris, please don't. He won't forgive us, ever. I know it now. I have good reason to.

MORRIS. *(Startled.)* What reason?

CATHERINE. *(Hesitates a moment.)* My father doesn't—like me.

MORRIS. *(Coming to her.)* My, what an unhappy thing to say! You must not think such things!

CATHERINE. It is true.

MORRIS. No, Catherine, your father is disappointed that his plans for you have not turned out as he wanted. He is perhaps hurt, and angry at us both. But that will pass.

CATHERINE. It won't pass.

MORRIS. My dear, if I am to be your husband you must begin to trust my judgment, to rely on me.

CATHERINE. I do, Morris.

MORRIS. That's right. How many times do you think fathers have spoken angrily to the daughters they love, particularly when marriage is the question?

CATHERINE. He does not love me.

MORRIS. Of course he does! Indeed he must love you very much, or he would not be trying so hard to protect you. It is only your future happiness he is thinking of.

CATHERINE. No, Morris. In this one thing I know I am right. I could not say it unless I were sure. I understood it tonight for the first time in my life. You can tell when a person speaks to you as if—as if——

MORRIS. As if what?

CATHERINE. As if they despised you!

MORRIS. *Despised!*

CATHERINE. We must be very happy together . . . and you must never despise me, Morris. *(She puts her arms around him.)*

MORRIS. Oh, Catherine, of course not!

CATHERINE. I will never ask him for anything again or expect anything from him. We must be very happy and we must depend on him for nothing!

MORRIS. No . . . No . . .

CATHERINE. I will try to be the best wife in the world.

MORRIS. I know you will. I know you will. *(He is restless.)* Was that a noise?

CATHERINE. Perhaps it was my aunt? *(She releases him.)*

MORRIS. I think I'd better go.

CATHERINE. I will get ready immediately.

MORRIS. Yes, you had better.

CATHERINE. I'll try to be punctual, Morris. I know you like that.

MORRIS. Till twelve-thirty, then — *(He starts for hall.)*

CATHERINE. *(Stopping him.)* Morris, aren't you going to embrace me?

MORRIS. *(Smiles and takes her in his arms. They embrace warmly.)* Oh, Catherine dear. He can't dislike you that much! He's bound to come round.

CATHERINE. *(Holding him at arm's length.)* No, Morris, even if he would, I would not.

MORRIS. I see. *(He prepares to leave.)* Until later, dear. *(He goes out quickly to back of house. CATHERINE is in a state of exaltation. Her arms reach out to him after he has left, then she recovers herself. She goes to mirror over the mantel and is pleased and even a little vain at what she sees. Then, remembering all she has to do, she picks up her skirts and runs upstairs as—)*

THE CURTAIN FALLS

(To indicate a passage of time.)