MISTRESS OF TWO HEARTS

Dr. Hooper returned sadly to his home. He had been trying to persuade Judge Harrison to receive his granddaughter, the child of a union that had set the father against the son, who had married a German singer.

A dark-eyed girl met the kind old doctor as he was entering his own door.

"No use," he said, shaking his head sadly. "He has a heart of granite and your cousin likewise."

"He will not take me?"

"No."

Hilda Harrison shut her teeth tightly together. "Then I must make my own way."

He looked at her curiously. "Well, any way you shall come in while my wife gets you a cup of coffee."

"Now, then, what are you going to do?"

"I don't quite know."

"Can you teach?"

"Oh, dear, no," she replied, shaking her head decidedly. "I never had a chance to study much."

"Then there's nothing left for you to do but to go into domestic service."

"I would take a place to-morrow, doctor, if I could get a good home and decent wages," said Hilda quickly.

"Good," said Dr. Hooper. "That is the right spirit, child. I don't fear but you'll make your way. But I think I can see something a little more promising ahead for you than that."

"What is it, doctor?"

"I noticed the way you took care of your poor father, Hilda, in his last illness. I thought then that you would make a good nurse—I think so now. There is an opening in St. Francesca's hospital. A good home and a dollar a day."

"As nurse, doctor?"

"As nurse."

"And I should see you sometimes?"

"Frequently—twice a week at least."

Hilda pondered a second or two, and then came forward with glistening eyes and red lips apart.

"Doctor," said she, "I will try it."

A year had passed, and Dr. Wallace sent word that a nurse was wanted for a small-pox patient in the city. The Sister Superior of the St. Francescans looked dubiously at her women.

"Who will go?" said she—and Hilda Harrison stepped forward.

"I will," said she. "I have no fear of the contagion, and I want to add to my experience."

So little Hilda packed her bag and went.

The housekeeper of the great Fifth avenue palace was wringing her hands, half-terrified out of her senses; the other servants had taken precipitate flight.

"And Miss Lenox went this morning," said she. "I think she might have stayed!"

"Who is Miss Lenox?" questioned innocent Hilda.

"The old gentleman's granddaughter that he has brought up and petted like a cosset lamb," said Mrs. Hurst. "Oh, the ingratitude of some folks. And if Judge Harrison dies——"

Hilda looked up quickly from the bottles of carbolic acid she was unpacking.

"Is this Judge Harrison's house?" said she.

"Why, of course it is," answered Mrs. Hurst. "Didn't you know?"

"No, I did not know," Hilda said. "But of course it makes no difference whose house it is."

"Who are you?" Judge Harrison asked hoarsely, as a light foot crossed the threshold.

"I am the nurse from St. Francesca's. They call me Hilda."

"Hilda what?"

"Never mind my other name," said the young girl. "They call me Hilda—and you are not to talk and excite yourself."

"Do you know you are running a great risk?"

"It is my business to run risks."

Three weeks elapsed. The crisis of the disease was past. The old man weakened indeed, and sadly disfigured, was able once more to sit up in his easy-chair, and Hilda, who had watched over him with a vigilance and tenderness which he fully appreciated, was arranging fresh flowers in a vase on the table.

"Hilda," said he, slowly, "where has my granddaughter Marian been all this time?"

"She went away; sir, when you were first taken ill. She was afraid of the disease."

"And left me?"

"And left you, sir."

"There was gratitude!" he muttered hoarsely, "and when is she coming back?"

Hilda laid down her roses and looked with pathetic, feeling eyes at him.

"She will not come back at all, sir," she answered. "We dared not tell you before, but—her flight was in vain. She died of small-pox last week."

The old man turned away with a smothered groan.

"Hilda," said he, "you will stay with me? You will not leave me alone? I know who you are. I recognized your name when you first came, and you have looked at me with your father's eyes many a time since. Hilda, I think God has sent you to me."

"Oh, grandpapa!" And Hilda knelt weeping, beside his chair, scarcely able to believe that his loving arms were around her neck, his tears dropping on her brow. "Oh, dear, dear grandpapa! I have so longed for some one to love me, for some one to love me!"

Thus Judge Harrison received his granddaughter, and when, four months later, she became Mrs. George West, the old lawyer, blessed the union by giving them a handsome dowry.

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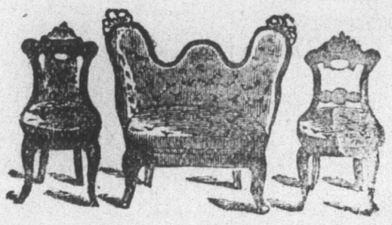

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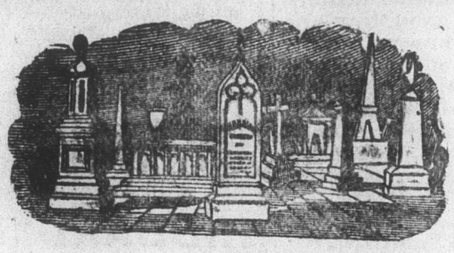

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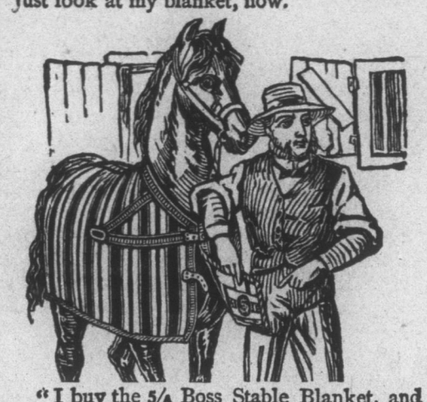

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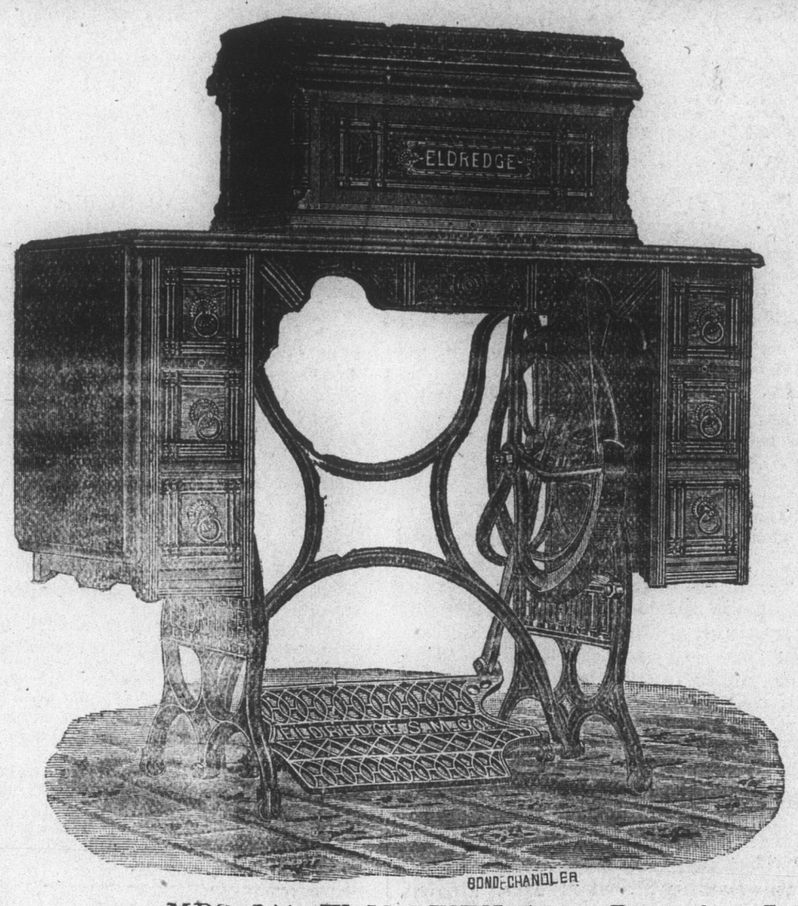

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