

Wells Carolyn

The Eternal Feminine



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AT THE LOST-AND-FOUND DESK

Yes, that's my bag. I left it at the lace counter. Thank you. Please give it to me. What? I must prove property? Why, don't you see it's mine? That twisty silver monogram on the side is really E. C. S. That's my name, Ella C. Saunders. I told Jim I thought the letters were too wiggly to be easily read, but I never thought anybody'd want to read it but me. Describe contents? Why, of course I can describe the contents! In one pocket is a sample of lace, just Platte Val, you know, not an expensive lace, and with it – I think it's with it – is a sample of rose-colored crêpe de Chine – that is, not exactly rose-colored – sort of crushed plummish or burnt magenta – but no – come to think, I left those samples with my dressmaker. Well, anyway, there's a Subway ticket – or let me see, did I use that coming down? I believe I did! Well, there's a little memorandum card that slips in – the celluloid sort, you know. No, there's nothing written on it. I don't use it because, though they pretend you can wash them like a slate, you can't. They just smudge. What do you mean by saying I haven't told a definite thing yet? I've told you lots! Well, there's some money – I don't know how much; some chicken feed, as Jim calls it – and a five-dollar bill, I think – oh no – I paid that to the butcher. Well, there must be a one-dollar bill – two, maybe. Oh, and there's a little pencil, a goldy-looking one; it came with the bag. And some powder-papers – those leaves, you know; but I believe I did use the last one yesterday at the matinée. Oh, dear, how fussy you are! I tell you it's my bag; I recognize it myself. Can't I tell you of some personal belongings in it so you'll be sure? Why, yes, of course I can. My visiting-card, Mrs. James L. Saunders, is in that small inside pocket.

“Why didn't I tell you that in the first place? Why, you rattled me so; and besides, I thought I had to tell of my own little individual properties, like samples and tickets and things. Anybody might have her visiting-card in her bag!”

TOOTIE AT THE BANK

“Oh, how do you do? Are you the Paying Teller? Well, – that is, – could I please see somebody else? You see, I’ve just opened an account, and I want to get some of my money out. There’s the loveliest hat in Featherton’s window, marked down to – but, that’s just it! If I get my money from a Professional Teller, he’ll tell all about my private affairs, and how much I pay for my hats, and everything!”

“Not at all, Miss. We are called Tellers because we never tell anything about our depositors’ affairs. We’re not allowed to.”

“Oh, how lovely! Well, then, – if you won’t tell – I’ve never drawn a check before, and I don’t know how! Will you help me?”

“Certainly; but I must ask you to make haste. Have you a check-book?”

“How curt you are! I thought you’d like to help me. Men ‘most always do. Yes, I have a check-book, – that other clerk gave it to me. But I don’t like it, and I want to exchange it. See, – it has a horrid, plain black muslin cover! Don’t you have any bound in gray suède, with gilt edges. I’m willing to pay extra.”

“We have no other kind, Miss. How much money do you want?”

“Why, I don’t know. You see, Daddy put a thousand dollars in this bank for me. I suppose I may as well take it all at once. What do you think?”

“I think probably your father meant for you to take only a part of it at a time.”

“Yes; I think so, too. He said it would teach me business habits. He chose this bank because you have a special department for ladies. But if this is it, I don’t think much of it. To be sure the plate glass and mahogany are all right, – but it looks like ‘put up complete for \$74.99.’ Don’t you think Mission furniture and Chintz would be cozier? Yes, yes, I’ll draw my check! Do give me a moment to draw my breath first. You see I’m not used to these things. Why, with a real bank account of my own, I feel like an Organized Charity! I suppose I ought to hunt up some Worthy Poor! Well, I’ll just get that hat first. Now, let me see. Oh, yes, of course you may help me, but I want to do the actual drawing myself. It’s the only way to learn. Why, when I took Art lessons, I made a burnt-wood sofa pillow all myself! The teacher just stood and looked at me. He said I had Fate-sealing eyes. Why, you’re looking at my eyes just the way he did! You seem so rattled, – why do you? Don’t you know how to draw a check, either?”

“Oh, yes, indeed; I have drawn millions of checks.”

“Millions of checks! How exciting! What do you do with all your money?”

“Oh, it isn’t my money, you know.”

“Aren’t you ashamed to be drawing millions and billions of other people’s money! I have a friend who is engaged to a bank president who got caught drawing checks.”

“Excuse me, but how much money do you want to draw?”

“How much is it customary for ladies to draw?”

“Well, that depends upon how much they need.”

“Oh, I see. People in need draw more than those in comfortable circumstances, I suppose. I am not exactly what would be called ‘a needy person.’ Since I left school, of course, I have my own allowance. Do you approve of girls being put on an allowance, or do you think it is nicer for them to have accounts with the trades-people, and not be treated like children?”

“I should think that would depend. Would a check for \$100.00 be enough for to-day? What did you have in mind to use it for?”

“I think you are very impertinent. I am surprised that people in banks are allowed to ask such questions. Why should you concern yourself with how much money I want?”

“I was endeavoring to help you about your check.”

“Oh, yes, certainly. How could you possibly draw checks if you didn’t know how much the checks were to be! I like checks much better than stripes or plaids. Lucille is making me a beautiful walking suit that is the loveliest imported check that you ever saw. And checks are nice for men, don’t you think?”

“Is it for the hat or for the suit that you want to draw a check?”

“Yes, of course, it is for the hat at Featherton’s that I want the check. I am afraid you will think I am silly, but really I have so many things to think about that it is hard to keep my mind on just one thing. You must make allowances for girls who have so many things to think about. Of course, with a man like you, who only has checks and money to think about all day long, it is so easy – I’d be bored if I had nothing but money and checks all day. I should think it would be diverting to have somebody call and talk about something else.”

“It is. Come, now, let us make out this check. You must write the number first.”

“Oh, isn’t it exciting! Now, wait, let me do it. You just watch out that it’s all right. But are you sure you know how yourself? I’d rather have an Expert to teach me. You know, nowadays, skilled labor counts in everything.”

“I assure you I’m competent in this matter, but I must beg you to make haste. Write the number in this blank.”

“What number?”

“Number one, of course. It’s your first check.”

“There! I knew you were ready to tell everything! Suppose it is my first check, I don’t want everybody to know it. Can’t I begin with a larger number, and then go right on?”

“Why, yes, I suppose you can, if you like. Begin with 100.”

“Oh, I don’t know. I guess I’ll begin with 4887. I can make lovely 7’s. Don’t you think 4887 is a pretty number?”

“Very pretty, but – ”

“Now *you’re* wasting time. There, I’ve written the number. What next?”

“The date, please. And the year.”

“Well, I’ve written the date, but it spilled all over the year space. It doesn’t matter, though, ’cause it’ll be this year for a long while yet, and this check will be vouched, or whatever you call it, before the year is out.”

“But you must write the year.”

“But how can I, when there isn’t room?”

“Tear that up, and begin a new check.”

“And waste all that money! Oh, I didn’t want an account, anyway! I told Daddy it would make me more extravagant! And you’re so cross to me. And here, I’ve spoiled a lot of my money the first thing!”

“Oh, no, Miss Young, you haven’t! There, there, don’t look so distressed! I’ll make it all right for you.”

“You’ll make it all right! How dare you, sir? Do you dream for a moment I’d take your money to replace my own losses?”

“Now, wait, you don’t understand. This check is worthless until it’s signed. Now, we’ll tear it out, so, and begin again. Make smaller letters and figures, can’t you?”

“Oh, how cute that check comes out! You just tear it by the little perforated dots, don’t you? Let me tear one out!”

“Write it first; you’ll probably spoil it, and have to tear it out.”

“How unkind you are! And I’m doing my very best. Don’t find fault with me, – please, don’t!”

“Well, don’t wrinkle up your nose like that, – it looks like a crumpled rose petal! And don’t write your name there! That’s the place for the amount!”

“Oh, what a fuss! What does it matter, so long as all the spaces are filled? My goodness, the check’s all done, isn’t it? And it’s quite entirely all right, isn’t it?”

“Yes, it’s irreproachable. How will you have the money?”

“If I take the money, do I have to give you this check?”

“Certainly.”

“Then I won’t take any money, thank you. I want to take this check home and show it to Daddy. He’ll be so pleased and proud! I know he’ll keep it as a souvenir, and then he’ll give me some of his money for the hat!”

THE DRESSMAKER IN THE HOUSE

SCENE. – A sewing-room, with the usual piles of unfinished or unmended clothing heaped on tables and chairs. Mrs. Lester, a pretty, fussy little woman, is trying on her own gowns and then tossing them aside, one after another.

Enter Miss Cotton, a visiting dressmaker.

Mrs. Lester: Oh, Miss Cotton, I'm so glad you've come! I'm nearly frantic. Excuse the looks of this sewing-room. I don't see why a sewing-room never can keep itself cleared up! I suppose it's because they never have any closets in them; or if they do, you have to hang your best dresses there – there's no other place. And so this room gets simply jammed with white work and mending and hats, and I don't know what all! My husband says it's like the Roman Forum done in dry-goods. But he's a regular Miss Nancy about neatness and order. Now, to-day, Miss Cotton, we're going to do sleeves. See? Sleeves! And nothing else. I'm simply driven crazy by them.

Oh, don't look as if you didn't know what I meant! You know, all my gowns have elbow sleeves, and I must either have long ones put in or throw the whole dress away.

Yes, I know I said I'd wear the short sleeves, if other people did insist on having long ones. I know I said I'd be independent, and at least wear out the ones I have. But I'm conquered! I admit it! It isn't any fun to go to a luncheon and be the only woman at the table with elbow sleeves!

Yesterday I went to Mrs. Ritchie's Bridge, and my partner, that big Mrs. Van Winkle, with chains of scarabs all over her chest till she looked like the British Museum, kept pulling her long sleeves down farther over her knuckles just to annoy me.

Yes, I know it, my forearm is white and round, but I declare it makes me feel positively indecent to go with it bared nowadays. If those suffrage people would only get for women the right to bare arms, they'd do something worth while.

No, indeed, I can't afford to get new gowns. These are too good to throw away.

Well, they may not be the latest style, but I don't want those bolster-slip arrangements for mine.

Mrs. Van Bumpus, now – you know her, don't you? Well, it would take two kimonos to go round her, I'm sure; and I saw her the other day in one of those clinging satin rigs. My! she looked exactly like a gypsy-wagon, the kind that has canvas stretched over its ribs.

No, it's sleeves, sleeves, I'm after to-day – and that's why I sent for you.

I'm going to superintend them, you understand, but I want you to help, and to do the plain sewing.

Well, to begin on this mauve crépon. I want to wear it this afternoon, and I think we can easily get it done, between us.

I've bought a paper pattern – I bought three – for I mean to spare no expense in getting my sleeves right.

So I bought three different makes, and think this one is best. It was a sort of bargain, too, for they sold the sleeve pattern and a pattern for little boys' pajamas, all for ten cents. I don't know what to do with the pajamas pattern – so that does seem a waste. I've no little boy, and I shouldn't make pajamas for him if I had. I think the one-piece nighties far more sensible. If you know of any one who has a little boy, I'll sell that pattern for half price. Still, ten cents wasn't much to pay for this sleeve pattern. You see, it's really three sleeve patterns. One plain, with dart; one plain, without dart; and one tucked. I'll use them all, in different waists, but for this mauve crépon, I think, we'll try the tucked one. It would be sweet in net or chiffon. Yes, I bought both materials, for I didn't know which you'd think prettier; I trust a great deal to your judgment and experience, though I always rely on my own taste.

Now, here's the tucked sleeve. Merciful powers! Look at the length of it! Oh, it's to be tucked all the way up, you see, and that brings it the right length. Wouldn't it be easier to cut the sleeve from net already tucked? No, that's so – I couldn't match the shade in tucked stuff of any sort. I tried in seven shops. Well, let's see. These rows of perforations match these rows. No – that isn't right. That would make the tucks wider than the spaces. Why, I never saw such millions of perforations in one piece of paper before! Look here, this isn't a sleeve pattern at all! It's a Pianola roll! I'm going to put through and see if it isn't that old thing in F, or something classic. Cut out the tucked sleeve, Miss Cotton. Oh, wait, I didn't mean that literally! My husband reproves me so often for using slang. I mean, I won't have my arms done up in Bach's fugues; I should feel like a hand-organ.

Let's try this plain sleeve with dart. H'm – "lay the line of large perforations lengthwise of the material." And here are large perforations sprinkled all over the thing! Oh, no, that isn't the way! Yes, I'm quite willing you should show me, if you know yourself – but I see these directions confuse you as much as they do me; and if there's to be a mistake made in cutting this expensive material, I'd rather make it myself. This says, "developed in piqué it will produce satisfactory results." Well, I can't wear piqué sleeves in a crépon gown! Can I? There – I've cut it! Now, "close seam, gather between double crosses, make no seam where there are three crosses, bring together corresponding lines of perforations – and finish free edges!" Well! I rather guess those free edges will finish me! However, baste it up, Miss Cotton, and I'll try it on. It's easy to make sleeves, after all, isn't it?

Why! I can't begin to get my arm into that pipe-stem! What? I should have allowed seams? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, no, I didn't scorn your advice! Why, that's what I have you here for! Well, those sleeves are ruined. A living skeleton couldn't get into those. It's most confusing, the way some patterns allow seams and some don't. I was going to get one with "all seams allowed," but it had another part to it – a "brassière." I don't know what that is, but probably some sort of a brass pot or other bric-à-brac junk, and I don't want any more of that. The den is full now. Well, I'm tired of making sleeves. What do you think, Miss Cotton, of just adding lace lower halves? I bought a lovely pair, in case the sleeves didn't turn out well. Now, I'll put on the bodice, and you pin them on, and we'll see how they look.

Oh, they're not nearly long enough! They ought to come well below my wrists. And such beautiful lace – it's a shame not to use them. Yes, perhaps a band of lace at the elbow might help. No, that looks awfully patchy – take it away. A ruching at the wrist? No, nobody wears that. Oh, dear, what can we do? I must have this gown for this afternoon!

Here's a pair of long lace sleeves, whole ones, I bought in case I needed them. Would they do? No – the lace doesn't match that on the bodice. Dye them? No, thank you! I bought some dye once, and the package said on the outside in big letters: "Dyeing at Home! No trouble at all!" and it gave me such a turn, I never could think of wearing a dyed sleeve! What can I do? I believe I'll wear them as they are. I hate long sleeves anyway. They get so soiled, and they bag at the elbows, and they're terribly unbecoming. Oh, I've a whole black net guimpe! I bought it, thinking it might be useful for something. Suppose we rip out these sleeves, and the lace neck, and just wear the bodice over this guimpe!

Oh! oh! it looks horrid! just like an old-fashioned "jumper" suit! You'll have to put the neck back as it was.

But then what can we do with the sleeves?

Nothing! Just nothing! I shall have to stay at home until I can get some entirely new gowns made. It's a sin and shame, the way we poor women have to be slaves to Fashion! And I know, just as soon as I am fitted out with long sleeves, the pretty, short ones will come in style again!

THE NIGHT BEFORE CHRISTMAS

SCENE. – The Pelhams' living room. It is decorated for Christmas, and on tables are displayed many beautiful gifts that have been sent to Mr. and Mrs. Pelham.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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