

MRS. LOVING

Good morning, dearie. How's my little girl, this morning?

(*Looks around the room*).

Why, where's Tom? I was certain I heard him running the water in the tub, sometime ago.

(*Limps into the room*).

RACHEL

(*Laughing*).

Tom isn't up yet. Have you seen Jimmy?

MRS. LOVING

Jimmy? No. I didn't know he was awake, even.

RACHEL

(*Going to her mother and kissing her*).

Well! What do you think of that! I sent the young gentleman to you, a few minutes ago, for help with his nails. He is very much grown up this morning, so I suppose that explains why he didn't come to you.

Yesterday, all day, you know, he was a puppy. No one knows what he will be by tomorrow. All of this, Ma dear, is preliminary to telling you that Jimmy boy has stolen a march on you, this morning.

MRS. LOVING

Stolen a march! How?

RACHEL

It appears that he took his bath all by himself and, as a result, he is so conceited, peacocks aren't in it with him.

MRS. LOVING

I heard the water running and thought, of course, it was Tom. Why, the little rascal! I must go and see how he has left things. I was just about to wake him up.

RACHEL

Rheumatism's not much better this morning, Ma dear.

(*Confronting her mother*).

Tell me the truth, now, did you or did you not try that liniment I bought you yesterday?

MRS. LOVING

(*Guiltily*).

Well, Rachel, you see — it was this way, I was — I was so tired, last night, — I — I really forgot it.

RACHEL

I thought as much. Shame on you!

MRS. LOVING

As soon as I walk around a bit it will be all right. It always is. It's bad, when I first get up — that's all. I'll be spry enough in a few minutes.

(*Limps to the door; pauses*)

Rachel, I don't know why the thought should strike me, but how very strangely things turn out. If any one had told me four years ago that Jimmy would be living with us, I should have laughed at him. Then it hurt to see him; now it would hurt not to.

(*Softly*)

Rachel, sometimes — I wonder — if, perhaps, God — hasn't relented a little — and given me back my boy, — my George.

RACHEL

The whole thing was strange, wasn't it?

MRS. LOVING

Yes, God's ways are strange and often very beautiful; perhaps all would be beautiful — if we only understood.

RACHEL

God's ways are certainly very mysterious. Why, of all the people in this apartment-house, should Jimmy's father and mother be the only two to take the smallpox, and the only two to die. It's queer!

MRS. LOVING

It doesn't seem like two years ago, does it?

RACHEL

Two years, Ma dear! Why it's three the third of January.

MRS. LOVING

Are you sure, Rachel?

RACHEL

(*Gently*):

I don't believe I could ever forget that, Ma dear.

MRS. LOVING

No, I suppose not. That is one of the differences between youth and old age — youth attaches tremendous importance to dates, — old age does not.

RACHEL

(*Quickly*):

Ma dear, don't talk like that. You're not old.

MRS. LOVING

Oh! yes, I am, dearie. It's sixty long years since I was born; and I am much older than that, much older.

RACHEL

Please, Ma dear, please!

MRS. LOVING

(*Smiling*):

Very well, dearie, I won't say it any more.

(*A pause*).

By the way, — how — does Tom strike you, these days?

RACHEL

(*Avoiding her mother's eye*):

The same old, bantering, cheerful Tom. Why?

MRS. LOVING

I know he's all that, dearie, but it isn't possible for him to be really cheerful.

(*Pauses; goes on wistfully*)

When you are little, we mothers can kiss away all the trouble, but when you grow up — and go out — into the world — and get hurt — we are helpless. There is nothing we can do.

RACHEL

Don't worry about Tom, Ma dear, he's game. He doesn't show the white feather.

MRS. LOVING

Did you see him, when he came in, last night?

RACHEL

Yes.

MRS. LOVING

Had he had — any luck?

RACHEL

No.

(*Firmly*)

Ma dear, we may as well face it — it's hopeless, I'm afraid.

MRS. LOVING

I' m afraid — you are right.