



Alicia lowered her book and surveyed me intently.

CENSOR

By George Buchanan Fife

ILLUSTRATIONS BY WALTER APPLETON CLARK

ALICIA lowered her book and surveyed me intently. I put down my pen and reached for my pipe, because I knew this to be a premonitory signal.

"I don't wish to know to whom you're writing," she said, as I puffed slowly, "but I would like to know what it is." There was decided accentuation of "whom" and "what."

"Note," I replied, still puffing. It was just the sort of reply Alicia would have made, and she is inordinately fond of referring to her diplomacy and my woful lack of it.

"You don't seem to have got very far," Alicia's tone was almost exultant, "and you've been at it five—ten—fifteen—eighteen minutes. That's a long time to

spend over a date-line—and then get it wrong.”

“I dated it to-morrow because I intend posting it in the morning.” I knew this to be one of Alicia’s stratagems.

“If you date it the day after to-morrow you’ll have that much more time on it.”

I elected to ignore this observation, to Alicia’s evident disappointment, as she immediately added: “Then, perhaps, you might think of something really clever to say.”

The book went up and I was left once more alone with my dated sheet of note-paper. As I glanced across the table at Alicia I encountered her eyes over her book. She was laughing at me.

“You seem to be taking an unusual amount of interest in me this evening,” I said, striving to maintain an irritating smile with a pipe in my mouth.

“Oh, not at all,” this with delicious carelessness. “I’m simply amused at your denseness.” She rested her elbows upon the table, tucked her hands under her chin, and regarded me merrily. Alicia, always pretty, looked irresistible. “I wonder whether you used to take all this time over the notes you sent me,” she said, pursing her lips.

“If I did you eminently deserved it, my dear,” I replied, again adopting Alicia’s methods and adding a gracious little bow of my own.

“Then Miss Carmichael is being flattered indeed. Let me see what she wrote you.”

Alicia was still smiling as I handed the note to her. “Mercy me,” she said, “how well a woman learns a man after she’s married to him!” As this bit of wisdom was addressed to the note, certainly not to me, I did not deem it incumbent upon me to make answer. I felt that honors were easy; a man learns a few odds and ends about women after marriage.

Alicia read in silence with eyebrows slightly raised, and I waited, realizing that the end was not yet.

Without comment of any kind upon the handwriting, which I considered an amazing relinquishment of feminine prerogative, Alicia returned the note.

“Well?” I said, determined to spur her on.

“Well, it’s no affair of mine,” she replied, and I could not refrain from sniffing; Alicia is so transparent. “But I fail to see why that note cannot be answered in five minutes. I’m sure she didn’t spend more than three in writing it. But, of course, *you* must be very clever and interesting. I’d be careful not to surprise her if I were you.”

“Um—hm,” I said, because Alicia stood revealed. “Let’s hope, at any rate,” I continued, “that it does not affect Miss Carmichael as it seems to have affected you, brief as it is.” I relighted my pipe with pointed deliberation. It is exhilarating to break a lance with Alicia.

“Affected me?” she exclaimed, and anyone else would have believed her genuinely surprised. “I’m just ashamed to see what a goose you are. I knew perfectly well that you were going to write to Miss Carmichael when you sat down. I asked you merely to hear what you’d say. You’re like all the rest of them, flattered to death whenever a woman takes any notice of you.” I retaliated in defence of my sex with a particularly derisive laugh. “Here’s a girl who has written to congratulate you on your book, and you’re more pleased than Punch; indeed, you’re so overcome you can’t think what to say in reply.”

“When it’s a fault to feel pleased, dearest Alicia—” I had hoped to deliver something epigrammatic, but Alicia came flying down the lists.

“Be pleased, certainly,” she said, “but for Heaven’s sake don’t let the woman see that she’s upset you so. Why, I’d be mortified beyond words if she ever found out you’d set aside an entire evening to write to her; mortified for your sake. And you’d be in a perfect ferment if I took half this time writing to a *man*.” The last word fairly rang.

“Eh? What, dear?” I asked, with malicious innocence of mien, looking up from my page.

“I know you heard me.” Again the book went up.

“Perhaps you’d like to write it for me,” I hastened to suggest.

No answer, save the careful turning of a leaf, and then silence. I watched Alicia

narrowly for a few moments to make sure she had retired from the field, because she has a way of galloping back and sometimes almost unhorsing me. But, apparently she was unaware of my presence. She was deep in her big chair and, so far as I was concerned, deep in her book. I decided not to glance at her again and returned to my note.

At the end of fifteen minutes I made a great business of putting down my pen, but Alicia's attention was not thus to be attracted. She simply raised her book slightly, as if to mark a barrier between us, and went on with her reading.

"Would you like to read this, Alicia?" I asked, after a dignified delay. "Just to see that I've not—er—disclosed my upset condition."

"Not if it's clever. You say I never understand clever things." The book came down slowly, but I noted that she thrust a marker between the leaves. Alicia had dropped her lance to rest.

"You might read it to me if you wish," she said, with an excess of indifference. "I'd really like to see the product of such arduous labor." She inclined her head and ran her hand deftly over her coiled hair. A man, I imagine, would have rolled up his sleeves. I waited until Alicia looked at me and then began.

"Dear Miss Car—"

"Why not '*My* dear'? You're writing formally, aren't you?"

I admitted that I was and wrote a prefatory "my," reading the corrected line in indisputable token of my obedience.

"MY DEAR MISS CARMICHAEL:

"Your praise of 'Castleton' is indeed oil and wine in my wounds. You must



I waited, realizing that the end was not yet.—Page 151.

have seen how mercilessly the critics fell upon me and been moved to compassion. So many have passed by on the other side that I had begun to despair, but your gracious note bids me take heart. I thank you most sincerely for it.

"I shall be delighted to talk over the book with you and take full heed of your criticism. I well know your generous skill in this.

"Mrs. Rushton desires to be remembered to you most kindly.

"Cordially yours,

"HERBERT RUSHTON."

"Will that do?" I asked, and I confess I was taken somewhat aback by the look with which Alicia transfixed me.

"Do?" she cried. "Of all the gushy notes I've ever heard that is *the* gushiest. You certainly cannot mean to send it." Alicia's tone implied that I was either fool or knave, the choice being left to me.

"Certainly I intend to send it, my dear," I said, cheerfully. "Why do you suppose I wrote it? As for its being 'gushy,' as you call it, I don't know what you mean."



Alicia read in silence with eyebrows slightly raised.—Page 151.

Alicia took the note from me and read it, not deigning an answer until she had finished.

"Well, I think it—simply disgusting," she said. "Gush, gush, gush from beginning to end."

Now, I respect Alicia's opinion in many things, many more than she claims, but this stirred the spirit of rebellion within me. I fancied the note rather well turned—not that I had a thought of intimating this to Alicia—and failed utterly to discern the justice of her censure. I was resolved to rest the burden of proof upon her, so I said:

"I wish you'd point out the gush, the

disgusting gush. I fancied—", but I checked my words too late.

"Yes, you fancied it rather daintily done, didn't you?" This was no time for me to answer. "I imagined as much," Alicia added, with two or three quick nods, scrutinizing the note through half-closed eyes. "'Oil and wine in my wounds'—Hmm—'moved to compassion'—of course—'gracious note'—'bids me take heart'—Oh, to be sure—Goodness, Herbert, I don't see what possessed you to write such things."

"These are more or less glittering generalities, my dear. Be specific; show me where I have gushed." I indicated the note somewhat loftily, I hoped.

"Do you mean to say you don't see it?" Alicia looked at me pityingly and I made a noise in my throat and shook my head. This, apparently, was too much for her. With the manner of a hopelessly tried teacher toward a stupid urchin Alicia turned to me. "Look and I'll show you. The gush begins here"—a finger on the date-line, "and ends here,"—my signature.

I smiled, nodded encouragement, and said, "Go on."

"In the first place," Alicia is exasperatingly methodical about unnecessary things, "you tell the girl that she alone has come to your aid with—er—'oil and wine,' yes, that's it, 'oil and wine,' and taken compassion on you. Now that's gushy-gush, can't you see it?"

"I think it's a very nice thing to say," I replied, stoutly.

"Yes, that's what she'll think, too." This triumphantly. "And how do you know she's read all of the criticisms of your book? 'You must have seen how mercilessly the critics fell upon me.' Do you suppose for one instant that she's so much interested in you? I don't. Her note is simply a formal congratulation, very brief and very pleasant, but certainly not requiring such an answer as you've written. I *know* she'll be surprised."

I am not much of a success at sarcasm, but I said, jauntily:

"Perhaps you'd like me to write, 'Miss Elizabeth Carmichael, Dear Miss: Yours of the 20th instant received. Many thanks——'"

"If you're going to be silly I'll not talk to you."



"Perhaps you'd like to write it for me," I hastened to suggest.—Page 151.

"My dear, I never was more serious in my life," I replied, and I know I looked serious enough.

"I am doing this only to save you from appearing ridiculous, Herbert. Now listen to this: 'Your gracious note bids me take heart.' If that isn't gush, pray what do you call it?"

"Why, it's just a little pleasantry; one of those things not meant to be taken literally. For mercy's sake, Alicia, permit me some latitude. I can't imagine that Miss Carmichael will subject my note to such critical analysis."

I momentarily regretted my words as suggesting a petulant comparison which I had not intended, but Alicia's parry was a thrust.

"No?" she said, with arched brows. "I see you refer here particularly to your knowledge of her skill in criticism."

"Yes, but you will note my use of the adjective 'generous,' my dear." I scored myself one.

"I note it simply as an admonition to her. You proffer her the gloves with which to handle you; that's quite obvi-



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ous." Alicia made it "one all" without even glancing up. "And when in this instance did Mrs. Rushton desire to be remembered to her most kindly?"

"You do, don't you?" I asked, evasively.

"Of course I do, but that's not the point. The point is that you thought to make it seem a bit less personal by putting on the domestic finish."

"I rather think that you've put on the finish," I said, turning to my pipe for consolation. "I don't see that you've left much of my note."

"I've let you know what I think of it," Alicia said, tossing it toward me in elo-

quent announcement that she had done with it. "What any woman would think," she added by way of strengthening her opinion.

"It's a good thing a man hasn't two wives," I said, contemplating my effort regretfully. "He'd never by the slightest chance succeed in getting any note past them. I wish you'd see what you've left me. 'I thank you most sincerely for it. I shall be delighted to talk over the book with you—Cordially yours.'"

"And that's all I think you should say," Alicia declared. "It need not be so abrupt as that, of course, and you might add that I wish to be remem-

bered to her. You certainly can do that without all these—embellishments, can't you ? ”

“ I suppose I can, although it isn't the way I write notes. I——”

“ Yes, I know, you want to take rhetorical flights whenever you put pen to paper. Now, do be sensible and write a formal, pleasant note ; tell her you appreciate her praise of your book, but don't attempt to make her think she's the only person who thinks it good. I told you that long before she did.”

“ I know you did, dear,” I replied, and my hand instantly sought the slender white one which rested so near it. “ But you have entirely misunderstood the spirit of my note.” I was not to be so easily mollified with my carefully reared structure lying in ruins before me. “ It was not my intention to have Miss Carmichael think herself my only champion, and I cannot see that my note admits of such an inference.”

“ Silly, of course I know you didn't intend that she should think that. I just didn't want you to think that she thought, I mean I didn't want her to think that you thought she—well, that she could flatter you so—you know what I mean.”

“ No, I'm blest if I do,” I said, stub-

bornly, and I threw myself back and thrust both hands deep in my pockets for emphasis.

“ Then it's because you don't wish to.” Again I was the backward urchin and Alicia the wearied teacher. She gave me up as hopeless and directed much attention upon smoothing a bit of lace on her sleeve. I felt like a convicted innocent who realizes the futility of protest. “ I've said all I can say,” Alicia continued—the lace required an extraordinary amount of smoothing—“ and I'm amazed that you don't understand. I beg, however, you will *not* send that ”—she undoubtedly restrained some stronger adjective—“ high-flown note.”

As the lace had been smoothed to her entire satisfaction Alicia looked up at me.

“ And next time,” she said, and in a moment the clouds parted and the sunshine of a smile gleamed through. “ And next time,” she repeated, “ I hope you won't rob me of a whole evening——”

Then I understood.

“ Oh, jealousy, jealousy ! ” I cried, as I caught Alicia's hand. She tried to draw it away, the sun still shining, but I held fast and kissed it—and I wonder what Miss Carmichael will think of the note I write her.

TO JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY, GARDENER

By Henry van Dyke

YOURS is a garden of old-fashioned flowers ;

Joyous children delight to play there ;

Weary men find rest in its bowers,

Watching the lingering light of day there.

Old-time tunes and young love's laughter

Ripple and run among the roses ;

Memory's echoes come murmuring after,

Filling the dusk when the long day closes.

Simple songs with a cadence olden—

These you learned in the Forest of Arden :

Friendly flowers with hearts all golden—

These you borrowed from Eden's garden.

This is the reason why all men love you,

Remember your songs and forget your art :

Other poets may soar above you—

You keep close to the human heart.