

VAN DORN'S HOME

By Elizabeth Jordan

THE slim Indian youth whom Mrs. Crosby had brought from Bombay with a characteristically vague impression that he would be a picturesque feature of her new London home, received Van Dorn with a winning smile but with startlingly little English. His notions of his duties, too, were quite as nebulous as those of the lady who had employed him. It was fully ten minutes before he grasped the fact that the gentleman desired to see his mistress, and that he further sought speech with the young lady who had accompanied Mrs. Crosby back to her native land. The interview, troubled from the start, gained in annoyance and devices as it proceeded, these attested by dignified gesticulation on the part of the Indian, and by ill-screened irritation and an overt flush on the part of the handsome, high-bred caller; but all was finally made clear, Van Dorn himself descending to the sign language and using it with the freedom and vigor the occasion seemed to demand. His reward came swiftly. There was a slow dawning of intelligence on the serene, dark countenance before him, then the light of a great illumination, followed by a scene of mutual felicitation between servant and visitor, after which the beaming Hindu left the room with the swift, glad steps of certainty.

Van Dorn sank into a chair with a sigh of relief. The whole thing was so like Mrs. Crosby, he reflected, with quiet amusement. Evidently eight years of Indian life had made her more impractical than ever, though certainly development along such lines

would have seemed impossible to one who knew her well in the old days. He recalled her tendency to misread time-tables, to misunderstand the most lucid directions, to get into the wrong trains and boats when it required almost fiendish ingenuity to go wrong at all; and he wondered for the hundredth time how she had managed to reach England.

"They probably tagged her," he decided, without disrespect, but with a simple understanding of what the journey must have been to a traveler of her well-known characteristics. He reproached himself again for having failed to meet her, and then remembered that it would have taken deep insight into the occult to connect with her at any point. Indeed, it was only by the happiest chance that he now knew her whereabouts. A common friend had met Mrs. Crosby on the street the day of her arrival in London, had secured her address with the avowed purpose of calling, and had then, fortunately but quite casually, mentioned the incident to Van Dorn, whose ward, Naomi Churchill, born in India, was making her first journey home to England under Mrs. Crosby's distinctly erratic guidance. Here they were at last, and here, therefore, thanks to this happy encounter, was Van Dorn himself.

At the thought his reviving spirits flagged suddenly. Yes, here was his ward, aged sixteen, Indian born, Indian bred, newly orphaned, subjected for months past to the meteoric variations of Mrs. Crosby's influence, and now, henceforth, wholly on his hands. At the moment the responsibility

seemed an appalling one. Van Dorn winced as it loomed coldly before him. He, forty, unmarried, unfettered, inexperienced in vagaries of the girlish temperament, a wanderer over the earth, had been brought face to face, for the first time in his untroubled existence, with a care—a very large, vital care, full of possibilities of anxiety, as he now realized.

It was fortunate in a way, he reflected gloomily, that he had had time to get used to the idea. Mrs. Crosby's generous offer to "bring the child home," after her father's death, was fully six months old. The journey had been postponed, as only that airily irresponsible lady could postpone. There had been starts, and delays, and little side excursions, and inevitable returns, and slight illnesses, and excuses, and vague letters, and cables, until Van Dorn, exasperated out of his usual courteous acquiescence, had finally announced that he himself was coming to India for his charge. Then there had been a hurried effort, a definite promise, several false starts, many unprecedented detours, but finally—as might have been hoped, granted that the original purpose was not forgotten—arrival! They were here, and, in another moment or two, if the Hindu had really grasped the fact that Van Dorn's penciled cards were to be given to them and not to the cook, they—she—would be in the room.

She! For quite naturally there was only one in Van Dorn's chaotic thoughts. Naomi was a responsibility, but she was also an interest, and, thus far, a fascinating one. What she might present at such close range he could only surmise, but her girlish letters had been charming.

He wondered what Mrs. Crosby's influence had done for her. He liked Mrs. Crosby and had liked her for years, passing over her inconsequences with the ease of the friendly indifference which had developed from a slight, a very slight, flirtation. He was vaguely grateful for her well-meaning interest in his ward since the death

of Colonel Churchill, which had left Naomi alone in the world. But he could have waited very patiently to see Mrs. Crosby, and the expectation of her coming would not have set him to pacing the floor with the mingled feelings of impatience and dread which moved him now.

It was natural that he should feel somewhat nervous, he told himself. He wanted the child to like him. He already liked her—or, at least, he liked the Naomi he had found in her letters—those infrequent but wholly friendly letters, so artless, so sincere. And he liked—he excessively liked—the face that smiled on him from the miniature Mrs. Crosby had sent him—a lovely face, with exquisite freshness and innocence in its lines and with possibilities in the dark eyes that moved him strangely. He was not in the least sentimental, nor had he a susceptible nature; but he was glad, even during these new-born doubts, that she was his ward, and he hoped for a pleasant camaraderie; nay, even more than that, for a frank and real affection in his lonely life.

She was only sixteen. She had several years of school life before her yet. Then, he had reflected, if the child was a nice girl, if they became good friends in the interval, he would find some excellent companion for her—a gentlewoman in reduced circumstances—and they three would travel. He looked forward to that with an interest surprising in one for whom this little world held few secrets. He had spent his life studying it, but this, he reflected, was all the better. He knew so well where to take her. They would travel for a year or two after Naomi left school, and then—And then? Why, if all had gone well and his ward was what he hoped, some eligible young man might figure in the further solution.

Van Dorn turned from the thought hastily, almost with irritation. The thing must come, of course, but somehow it was not, for him, one of the alluring aspects the years held. However—his brow cleared and his fine head, whose fair hair was already

touched with gray, raised itself in alert listening. She was coming! That quick, light step across the hall was not the step of Mrs. Crosby. He went to meet her as the door opened, and the next moment he stood before her holding both the hands she had impetuously extended. Even in that instant he noted her perfect ease of manner and the maturity that sat upon her so strongly for her years. Yet her greeting was girlish enough.

"I could not wait," she told him, smiling. "Mrs. Crosby has disappeared. I think she has lost herself somewhere in the new house; so I came alone."

"That was right," he said heartily. "We will organize a relief expedition later. But first let me look at you and learn to know my ward."

She smiled back at him, her really beautiful young face raised to his with frank pleasure.

"You have been so good to me," she said simply. "It has made such a difference—in the coming to England, you know. If I had not liked you it would have seemed very hard; for of course I left all—my—friends——"

Her voice dragged a little on the last words, and her face clouded, but she led the way to a broad window-seat, where she sat down and made a place for him by her side with perfect self-possession. As he followed her, Van Dorn realized how small and slight she seemed in her black gown, which, simple though it was, showed the unmistakable finish of knowing French hands. He felt at once an odd sense of having known the child for years. The last vestige of doubt, self-consciousness or restraint slipped from him as he sat down beside her.

"I know," he said quietly in answer to her words. "I know. And you are a little lonely here at first, but we must change all that. I have friends ready for you, who will like you and whom you will like. I have been feverishly cultivating all my old friends who have young daughters—so feverishly that they would have been much impressed if they had not seen through it all so

easily. But they are good-natured and they have forgiven me a lot of carelessness in the past. We will look them over soon, and you shall select any you like," he added modestly.

She kept her eyes fixed on him as he talked with a quiet intentness which took in, he knew, everything about him, yet which was, somehow, almost as impersonal as a baby's steady gaze.

"Tell me something about them," she urged.

"Well, there is Lady Graydon, who knew your father when he and I were at college. Her son was in our class, and we used to spend our vacations at Graydon Towers. He died two years ago, and left a daughter a year older than you. She is a nice girl, Cecilia Graydon. She may be your very special friend. Lady Graydon wishes us to go there for a visit next week.

"Then there are Flossie and Flicker Nesbit, the twin daughters of another old friend of ours; idiotic names, but nice girls. And there are Dorothy Bliss and Kate Eversham—she's a little older, but a good sort; and Sir Philip Merville's two daughters and Joe Lamberton's girl—he was another pal of mine at Oxford—oh, and hosts of others. They have nice mothers, too, and they will 'mother' you and 'sister' you to your heart's content—if you like that kind of thing."

"I do like it," she said slowly; "at least, I think I do. How should I know? I have never had it."

The pathos of the words rolled over Van Dorn in a quick wave, but he said nothing.

"You know," she added simply, "mama died when I was two, and after that papa and I traveled around from place to place. We never had a home, and we never stayed anywhere more than a year or two. We met a great many nice people, but of course when one doesn't really belong anywhere—that seemed the worst of all—not to have a home. I always wanted one, and I used to dream that I had one. But perhaps I never shall."

"Of course you will," Van Dorn assured her quickly. "You will have a

beautiful one—just the kind you like; and you will make it for yourself, which is the very best way. Oddly enough, I've never had one, either, since I was ten. My father and mother died then, you know, within a week, and I went to Eton and was kicked around a good deal, naturally, and spent my vacations with some of the fellows. Then when I was old enough I traveled, and—er—I've kept it up ever since," he ended a little lamely.

Her soft brown eyes never left his face.

"But you've wanted one, haven't you?—a home, I mean," she asked, curiously. "Still, I suppose a man would not care the way a girl does."

He nodded. "Oh, yes; I've wanted one," he remarked tersely, "but not merely a home alone, with a pack of servants to manage. I've wanted the real thing."

"Let's have it!" she begged impulsively. "Let us make one, all by ourselves, and live in it. Can't we?"

Van Dorn looked at her closely. Her eyes met his with the innocent wistfulness of a child's. Her lips were parted in eager appeal. The feeling that swelled in his heart was an outgush of paternal love for the daughter he had never had. He took her hand and pressed it kindly, then dropped it.

"We will try to manage it some day," he promised. "But I'm afraid you must spend two or three years in school first."

Her face fell. "Yes," she said sadly, "I was afraid so."

The little disappointed droop of her lips hurt him. Already he could not bear to refuse her anything.

"But we will have it," he repeated, "if that is what you want." He saw his dream of foreign travel fade away, but immediately another began to take its place. "We will have it, and"—this with an eager desire to bring back the missing brightness—"we will begin to plan for it now."

The brightness returned as a radiance.

"We will talk about it," she cried, "and we will write each other letters

about it; and we will plan just what it will be. Let us name it, too. Then it will seem like a real place."

He entered easily into her mood.

"Very well," he laughed. "You shall name it and you shall plan it. I will tell you how I would like my part of it, and we will advise each other."

She drew a long breath. "It's going to be such fun," she trilled, "*such* fun. We shall have to plan the place where it is to be—then the building and the grounds; and then the rooms and the furniture. I have some lovely old Indian things," she added, with sudden recollection. "I'd like one Indian room, for memories."

There was a languid step in the hall, followed by an uncertain fumbling at the knob, and the door opened. Mrs. Crosby trailed in, her eyeglass up to a near-sighted eye, her gown dragging limply behind her. She extended her hand to Van Dorn as casually as if their last parting had been twenty-four hours before instead of eight years.

"So very extraordinary, Bertie," she drawled. "Sida neglected to tell me you were here. He declares he could not find me, but that is quite absurd."

Van Dorn laughed. "I'm not so sure, Louise," he said, "recalling my own experience in trying to find you at times."

Naomi's light laugh chimed in with his. "I think she has fairy seeds," she declared, "the kind one puts in one's shoes to make one invisible."

Mrs. Crosby sighed uncomprehendingly.

"I'm sure I've not the slightest idea what you mean—either of you," she assured them; "but possibly"—with a sudden hope—"we'll all be brighter when we've tea. Doesn't Naomi look well, Bertie, and isn't her gown pretty? I selected it myself. And I've persuaded her to wear her hair as she has it, in that nice old-fashioned snood. It suits the shape of her head so well. You should have seen the perfectly absurd little braids the poor child wore in Bombay. The moment

my eye beheld them I realized that I had a mission."

She sighed again over the recollection, and rang the bell a second time, succeeding in luring Sida into the room and confiding to him, in a mixture of English and Hindustanee, the recital of her immediate needs.

During this brief interval Van Dorn and his ward seized the opportunity for closer mutual study of each other's appearance. He noted in detail the child's exquisite, high-bred features, the short upper lip of her lovely mouth, the curl of her long brown lashes—even the black velvet band which so alluringly caught up her wavy, golden brown hair. She was burned by wind and sun, but the climate of India had wrought no harm, for she seemed radiantly well. The brown of her eyes, the soft brown of her skin, the golden brown of her hair, and the brilliant flash of her little white teeth, all held a charm great for him. She was all right. She was everything he had hoped; in fancy he detected some flavor of the sensation his ward would make several years hence.

In him she found a handsome, dignified man of forty—very old indeed, from her girlish point of view—dressed with the quiet perfection of an English gentleman and radiating the immaculate neatness of his race. His close-clipped hair was crisp and fair, his eyes were wide open, clear gray, sheltered by eyeglasses, and his smooth-shaven, handsome face was more deeply tanned than her own. Two personal peculiarities of his she had noticed as they shook hands. One lock of his hair, on the left side above the ear, was snow-white, and on his cheek, just below it, showed a small white scar.

When Sida returned with the tea Mrs. Crosby gave herself up to apparently aimless ministrations, and eventually handed Van Dorn a cup of the familiar, almost colorless beverage he recalled having received at her hands in earlier days. As she drank her own and ate a muffin with a healthy English appetite, her manner changed and for the first time she seemed really con-

scious of the presence of her friends. She turned upon them both a buttered smile.

"Really, do you know, I've been dreading this horribly," she drawled; "getting home, I mean. But if there are still tea and muffins it can't be all grim horror, can it? It seemed to me on the boat that I had undertaken too much. The men all had livers, and exercised every day; and the women did crochet work. I counted seventeen little white worsted shawls they were making—to introduce into their homes. And I seemed to see them—these shawls—don't you know, as domestic high-lights all over England. Then some were seasick—some women, I mean, and some were in love. They were the worst—the lovelorn men and women. They sat in deck-chairs near our stateroom windows, and told each other about the very moment when they first realized all it meant. Naomi here drank it in. I wish you might have seen her."

The girl flushed crimson.

"I tried not to listen," she said, "but they would talk."

Mrs. Crosby absently buttered another muffin.

"They always will," she murmured; "that is one of life's supremest trials. And, speaking of trials, dear Bertie," she added, turning to Van Dorn, "do you know I've a notion we are in the wrong house? The servants act so queer, and they did not expect us, they said; and I lost some of my lists, and quite possibly this house is the one I intended to take and did not. And now a very impertinent cook downstairs says she is sending for an officer."

Van Dorn sprang to his feet with a suppressed exclamation. He saw before him busy hours and numerous explanations; but it is well that he did not grasp in all their details the painful experiences which were to fill the twenty-four hours intervening before he finally left Mrs. Crosby settled in the furnished home she had actually engaged in quite another part of London.

This was, however, as he subsequently told himself, merely a prelim-

inary canter before the actual races of the season, for Mrs. Crosby and his ward kept him increasingly and most happily busy as the weeks passed.

His life, in fact, became a singularly full one, for he had not only to establish his ward and her temporary chaperon in a fitting home, but he must also look up a suitable school for Naomi, have his friends call on her, and incidentally see to it that she had the simple outings and diversions suited to her age and her condition of recent bereavement. Then, too, she must learn London, and Van Dorn marveled a little and prided himself a great deal over the cheerful willingness with which he did the honors of the Tower, of Westminster Abbey, of the National Gallery, the Waxworks and the other institutions to which each loyal young Englishwoman should be introduced at the first possible moment. Best of all, he liked their long walks among the Dickens haunts and their chats under the trees in Kensington Gardens, when she compared the old life with this new and interesting one and painted for him unconsciously pictures of the past, full of the vivid color of their Indian setting. Then there were flying weeks in country houses, when his women friends took the child at once to their motherly bosoms, and where she, on her part, reveled in the beauty and "homeyness" of English country life, under which she expanded as a plant in the sun; and after all this came the autumn and the gray day, when she went to school.

When he left her there and returned to town, Van Dorn was conscious of a depression which he in vain assured himself was wholly out of reason. He was free to do many things he had really missed during the past two months, but there was singularly little zest in the prospect. To one whose personal freedom all through life had been absolute and zealously guarded, it had not always been easy, of late, to consider another in making engagements and to turn up at certain places on the stroke of the clock, regardless of his own friends or plans. But some-

how the return now to entire freedom was not exhilarating. Van Dorn dined at his favorite club, ordered and gloomily ate an admirable dinner and deeply grieved his devoted waiter by the grumpiness with which he scorned that youth's disinterested suggestions.

There was no getting away from the fact that he missed the child—he missed her horribly. Things failed to interest him and his friends bored him. Naturally, however, this condition could not last, and as the days went on it must be admitted that he cheered perceptibly and took a more than languid interest in the material joys of life. But it was surprising how he thought of her—how her light words returned to him—how associated with her London itself had become.

It was almost a week before her first letter reached him. She had been very busy, she told him, getting settled and meeting the girls and trying to adjust herself to the wholly new conditions of English school life. She had discovered, too, she said, that her governess in India had cherished ideas as to education which differed radically from those prevailing in the institution Naomi now adorned.

"I'm away ahead of the other girls in some studies," she wrote, "but away, 'way behind in a great many others. I shall have to take private lessons and study hard."

Van Dorn liked this, but he liked still better the lines which followed. The little unconscious revelation of loneliness moved him, but his man's vanity bloomed sturdily, while his heart was touched by the childishly frank confession of her liking for him.

"I think of you so much," she wrote, "and of the good times we had. We *did* have *such* good times, didn't we? You were *so* good to me? How dreadful it would be if I did not like you, or if you did not like me! But we *do* like each other, don't we, and we are going to live together in our home? Have you thought of a name yet? I think of it so much, but the very right name has not come. But it must be a house something like Cicely Lamberton's—

red brick, and big and rambling and covered with roses and with sun-dials and peacocks and Jersey cows and things, and a little river with a rustic bridge, and brooks besides, and a red-brick dairy with dairymaids. I don't want a great big cold, formal place like Graydon Towers. Our home must be *homey*, and you must have your guns and fishing-rods and things in the halls, and there must be big open fire-places everywhere with enormous logs in them. And I'd like to see your gloves lying around on tables. Have we got plenty of money? Perhaps all this will cost a great deal, but papa said I have more than a reasonable girl needed. If we haven't enough, a *little* red-brick place will do. And I'm not a bit homesick for India any more. I think England is the very nicest place in the world to have a home in."

Van Dorn laid down the closely written pages with a chuckle. She *had* plenty of money. So had he. He almost regretted her fortune. Later it would bring undesirable persons around her. But she could have anything she wanted, and it warmed his heart to know how wholly he was included in this dream home of hers. She would like to see his gloves lying around on tables! He grinned affectionately. In his heart he had not a doubt that she would thus see them often enough. He was immaculate personally, but appallingly careless as to his belongings. She must have noticed the heaped-up aspect of his tables when she and Mrs. Crosby had dined at his rooms. This memory and the home-like informality of life at the Lambertons' had made their impression on her susceptible mind, so quick to notice everything in this new strange land that was yet her own.

"Yes, we have plenty," he told her in his reply. "So go on planning, and when the time comes we will turn this pleasant dream of ours into very real red-brick houses and red-checked dairymaids and peacocks and cows. And you may be sure that my gloves will be on the tables, and probably most of my other things as well, unless you train

me properly. About the guns in the halls, I may have a gun-room, may I not? But of course we can spare a few guns for the halls, too!"

It was almost a fortnight before her reply came, and Van Dorn began to fear that he had treated too flippantly her pretty dream of home. But her first words reassured him.

"I have found a name," she began without further preface. "I like it. I hope you will. It is to be Vanaomi. It is made up of the beginning of your name and all of mine. Two friends of papa's in India named their house that way, using both their names, and it was so nice. For of course nobody else can name their home like ours. We will have the only Vanaomi in the world! Do like it. I shall be dreadfully unhappy if you don't. And *of course* you may have a gun-room! You may have anything. That is why *our* home is going to be so nice—because we are *both* going to have everything just the way we want it!"

"By Jove!" said Van Dorn to himself as he read this letter. "I'm actually beginning to take it seriously. I believe it would be a good thing to do. Of course," he reflected comfortably, "if it gets monotonous at any time, one can always cut away for a year or two. But it sounds like a mighty comfy place to come back to!"

He replied with fitting enthusiasm, and the dream structure rose higher as the months passed. Vanaomi, it was decided, should be in a certain part of Kent—to which Naomi had taken a great fancy during several visits to the Lambertons. And now, as time went on, the child began to furnish it, in fancy, and her letters were largely given up to matters of decoration, hangings, furniture and the beautifying of grounds. Many of her ideas were, of course, impossible. A few of them, possibly the results of her Indian training, were distinctly bizarre. But on the whole her taste was good, and Van Dorn followed with growing interest and amazement the steady perfecting of Vanaomi. Her interest in it never relaxed. It is true she wrote of school

affairs, of school friends, of outings, of teachers she liked and—with gentle reserve—of one or two she did not like. But all these were incidental features of her letters.

The real object, for her, was the home—their home, Vanaomi; and within a year she had built it, furnished it completely, and added even the actual details, in their proper setting, of sun-dials, peacocks and dairymaids—all on paper. For her the home existed, and Van Dorn himself had often a surprisingly vivid sense of actuality in connection with it. He knew exactly the spot where the sun-dial stood, for she had told him. He saw the small herd of Jersey cows in the precise meadow where they belonged. He stood in fancy on the rustic bridge spanning the little river, looking down at its rushing tide. She had clipped from some magazine a picture of a bridge she liked and had marked on it certain changes to be made in their bridge. Van Dorn carefully laid away the crude little plan. He knew now that some day he would build that bridge and stand on it, as in their dream.

They spent their Christmas holidays at the Lambertons', he and Naomi, and she went to the same ideal home for the long summer leave. Van Dorn was there frequently, and again the second summer. For the Lambertons' place was more like Vanaomi than any other, and even after two years Naomi's interest in that dream home was still fresh, still growing.

She was eighteen then, and Van Dorn looked fearfully for some sign of self-consciousness, some dimming of the exquisite innocence of her attitude toward him. But there was no change. It was wholly evident that she thought of him as a father, or at best as an elder brother. She was beginning to talk of the brothers of her friends, of young Frank Lamberton, and Philip Nesbit, and of a certain handsome tutor at school, but her interest in them seemed largely impersonal. Van Dorn recognized this with a long breath of relief. He told himself that he could well be patient. He could wait. He

must not speak too soon. When the fitting time came he could, he believed, change that frank camaraderie of hers into something better. For he had long ceased to disguise from himself the nature of his feelings and his hopes. Waking and sleeping they were the same. He lived them, he dreamed them—Naomi and Vanaomi, always those two—the girl and the home she was planning. In the meantime, he was very busy down in Kent, for Naomi was to graduate in three months more and he had much to do in the interval.

His friends recognized the rejuvenation in him, and possibly suspected the cause. He was very happy, and very manly and mellow and fine in his happiness. For was he not receiving every week Naomi's letters, full of Vanaomi, now so near realization, and of him, and of their life together? He had promised her that after her graduation they would seek and find their home. He had told her nothing of the surprise he was preparing.

She was to graduate in June. It was in March that an almost imperceptible change crept into her letters. Van Dorn, now used to all her moods and fancies, detected it at once and was not displeased. There was a little restraint, a little dawning of self-consciousness, less taking of things for granted. He interpreted it all in his own way.

"Someone has said something," he told himself. "Someone has pointed out to her that her idyllic plan is not quite possible. So much the better, for the time is ripe. Let her think it over. Then when I tell her what she is to me—good God, how *much* she is to me!—she may be ready to respond!"

The mere thought made his head swim. His wife, Naomi! The one woman in the world, as she had come to be, and needing him so greatly! There could be no question of the desirability of her marrying him, even looking at it from a purely worldly standpoint. Her father would have rejoiced. Quite possibly he had cherished some such plan. But Van Dorn told himself again that now he must

not wait too long. He would run over to Paris, join some friends for a little journey to the South of France, and immediately on his return go to Naomi and open his heart.

He went; and for years afterward he shunned France and turned with sick distaste from soft moonlight nights and views of straight dark poplars outlined stiffly against deep blue skies. These were associated with Naomi, with his dreams of her and home; and from these dreams there had come a rude awakening.

When he returned to London he found in his rooms the accumulated mail of his absence. There were several letters from her, and he opened first the one bearing the latest postmark. It was very short.

"I have been so disappointed not to hear from you," it ran; "so disappointed, and, yes, *hurt*, too. For surely you approve. You like Frank so much, and he likes and admires you. We've both been watching every mail. Possibly you are away. You have such a fashion of going off and leaving no address. It makes me unhappy not to hear—but, oh, Guardy, dear, *dear* Guardy, I'm so, so happy otherwise."

The big world reeled drunkenly as Van Dorn read the lines. For a moment he sat absolutely motionless. Then, with cold fingers, he opened another of her letters—a very long one—and found there the explanation he sought. It was dated three weeks back, and from the Lambertons', where she had spent a week-end.

"I have something very, very special to tell you, dearest and best of guardians," it began. Naomi always went straight to the point. Van Dorn found himself remembering this dizzily as the letters wavered before his eyes.

"Happy as I am, it makes me happier to know you will approve. For tonight—only tonight, though it seems so long ago—Frank asked me to marry him, and I said 'yes.' I think you have known; you have always known everything almost before I did. And you will be glad that I am happy, and that I will have a home when I

leave school. For Frank wants me to marry him as soon as I graduate. He says it is necessary, situated as I am, and he wants me to have a home to go to. You know how I have always longed for that. And you have been so good-natured and so kind in letting me talk *home, home, home*, as I have always done. I know you've never taken it seriously, and I'm sure I've bored you often. But it has meant so much to me. And now to know that I am really to have it and Frank both—it seems as if I cannot bear the happiness. What have I done that God should be so good? . . . Frank is writing you by this post. He says our new home shall be called Vanaomi. And you, dear, dear old Guardy, must live there with us when you are in England."

Van Dorn laid down the letter, and for an awful moment faced the future. All the loneliness of the years to come seemed to concentrate and settle upon him as he bowed his head to Fate. He thought of her—of Vanaomi. Vanaomi—no longer a dream, but a substantial structure down there in Kent: buildings, sun-dials, peacocks, bridge and all—the Vanaomi he had prepared during this past year, and the deed for which, made out in her name, was even now in his desk. It was to have been her graduation gift. Well, it should be her wedding gift instead. Frank was not the oldest son. He would not have Lamberton Hall.

Van Dorn rose stiffly, like an old man. Going slowly to his desk, he drew out a telegraph form and wrote a message:

MISS NAOMI CHURCHILL,
Care Sir Joseph Lamberton,
Lamberton Hall, Eltham, Kent.

Letters only just received. Back from the continent today. Highly approve. God bless you both. Am writing.

HERBERT VAN DORN.

He summoned his servant and sent the message. Then he walked to the window and stared unseeingly out into the mocking brilliance of a perfect April day.

"And we Van Dorns live to be eighty," he said slowly. "God!—how can I go through it all alone?"

A WOMAN

THE great Love that was not for her
 Passed on, nor paused to see
 The wistful eyes, the hands' vague stir,
 The mouth's mute misery.

The little Love she recked not of
 Crept closer bit by bit,
 Until for very lack of love
 She smiled and welcomed it.

Not hers to choose, to weigh and part
 The greater from the less;
 She only strove to fill a heart
 That ached with emptiness.

THEODOSIA GARRISON.



OF SOME BENEFIT

HOBBS—It's of no use to tell a man that he's a fool.
 BOBBS—No, but it's a lot of satisfaction sometimes.



SELF-CONTROL

CLARA—How prettily you blush!
 MAUD—Really?
 “Oh, yes, indeed. I wish I could control myself like that.”



NODD—Didn't you tell your wife you'd meet her at one o'clock?
 TODD—Yes, but it's only one now; I've got an hour or so yet.