

**CAROLYN
WELLS**

PRILLILGIRL

Carolyn Wells

Prillilgirl

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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CHAPTER I

SOME PROPOSITION

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Guy Thorndike was the owner of a rather beautiful house in a correct section of New York City, that no stretch of imagination could call a home.

Aristocratic and conventional of outward appearance and decorated interiorly by a professional, it was harmonious in atmosphere, but pretty unlivable.

Wherefore, Thorndike, being a bachelor, spent much of his time at his club.

But one day in June he sat under his own roof, giving an excellent imitation of a popular society man making his summer plans. It was only an imitation, though, and from the pile of letters before him he ran over and threw aside one cream-laid offer of hospitality after another, with smiles or frowns of dissent. He hated country house parties and week-end junketings, except among a very small and well chosen few.

In fact, he hated most things in this world that were not directly conducive to his own physical comfort or mental entertainment.

Though not a collector, Thorndike possessed three fine and valuable pieces of antique furniture—a highboy, a lowboy and a butler.

The last named and most valuable now stood in the doorway, and gave voice to a well modulated, “Mr. Thorndike,” which he followed up with a less confident, “a young lady to see you, sir.”

“What?—Oh, I beg your pardon—pray come in.”

The butler faded, and in the doorway stood a girl—a very young girl—whose beauty was of the sort that makes you believe in fairies.

Moreover, she was frightened out of her wits and trying hard not to show it.

Now, Guy Thorndike was a petted and pampered darling of Fortune, but among the fine traits and lavish gifts with which the goddess had endowed him, was not included *savoir faire*.

In fact, to be frank, Thorndike was shy—fearfully, painfully shy—especially in the presence of strange ladies. This was one reason, though unadmitted to himself, that he couldn’t achieve any enthusiasm over those cream-laid invitations. This was why he avoided, evaded and eluded hopeful Mammias with tentative daughters.

And so, when he saw this exquisite and terror-shaken young thing, right in his own library, he was seized with a frantic desire to run away.

But of course he couldn’t do that.

“W-won’t you sit down?” he said, and she did. Timidly, fearfully, even tremblingly, she sat on the edge of a small chair.

She wore the daintiest sort of gown, of soft, drapy white, fashioned with a filmy *berthé* of lace over her soft little shoulders. A modish white hat had its brim lined with a faint shell pink, which haloed the lovely flower face.

“Did you want to see me?” and Thorndike’s voice shook a little, by reason of his absurd but uncontrollable shyness.

“Yes—oh—yes!” and as the voice trembled breathlessly, two little hands fluttered to her breast like homing doves.

And then he knew! This was someone who adored him as a *Matinée Idol*. There were so many of them, though they seldom had the nerve to invade his dwelling. For Thorndike was an actor, one of the big, worth while actors, with a goodly line of successes in the past, and vague dreams of playing Shakespeare in the future.

So he knew. This was a hero worshipper, than which, in his bashful opinion, there was no more fearful wildfowl. You’d think experience would have blunted the edge of his shyness, but the contrary was true. The longer he lived the more he found it impossible to conquer his fear of the Eternal Feminine.

He didn’t mind actresses. They were not real people. But society ladies, young, old or middle-aged, always and completely flabbergasted him.

The vision looked at him earnestly—not staring—simply gazing. She was little and slim and lithe, yet softly rounded as a baby.

She had enormous brown eyes, with heavy, curling dark lashes, and, surprisingly, hair of true gold color. This hair rippled curlingly round her bonny face and shone out from under the pink lined hat.

Her nose was bewitching and her mouth was a quivering scarlet blossom.

But all of these definite beauties were blended into something finer and sweeter by a gentle charm that was simply that of youth and innocence.

Spring, April, dawn, dew, lark's notes, crocuses, pussy-willows—all such thoughts as these raced through Thorndike's brain at the sight of her exquisite youthfulness.

Her whole face was vibrant, as with some great excitement, and her smile was the kind that came off, and, after an exasperating delay, came on again.

"What do you want?" and Thorndike picked up a fountain pen, "my autograph?"

"No," the tone was quietly amused, but still frightened.

"Oh, my photograph," with a sigh. The more daring always asked for that and it included the autograph. He hated to spread his likeness broadcast, but he was always too shy to refuse; and so, many complacent maidens boasted possession of a signed portrait of the great actor.

The girl's glance was taking in the room. The only intrusion on its really good taste was the presence of many beautiful photographs of apparently beautiful actresses. They hung on the walls, they stood on tables and bookcases, and even congregated on Thorndike's big desk.

But, as has been said, his shyness did not include the ladies of his own profession and he had become able to accept these proffered favors with almost no embarrassment.

The girl visitor drew a little sigh. "Don't you get tired of looking at beautiful women?" she said.

"Not when they aren't alive," he returned.

Her flashing smile of appreciation brought him back to the realization that he was still in the presence of a very gentle specimen of the gentle sex, and he nervously opened the drawer where his photographs were kept.

"Is this what you want?" he asked, drawing one from its tissue sheath.

"N-no, sir. Mr. Thorndike, I—I—" she surveyed him with an appraising glance, and cast another quickly about the room—"I've decided to marry you."

"Beg pardon?"

"I s-said, I've quite decided to marry you."

"Bless my soul! There—there, now. Run home, little girl. Where did you come from?"

"I ran away from home. I can't run back, can I? Did you ever run away from home?"

"That's exactly what I did do—many years ago."

"And did you run back again?"

"I did not!"

"Well," and she folded her hands. A dimple appeared for a fleeting instant and then vanished, leaving the flower face a little sad. "I've run away. I can't run back. I can't face the world alone, and so somebody must marry me. Will you, please? Oh, *please!*"

"Are you crazy?"

"No, sir," and a flash of dignity straightened up the drooping little figure. "I'm not crazy. Oh, Mr. Thorndike, please! can't you understand? You haven't any wife, have you?"

"No."

"Then, don't you see? I might as well be it. I don't mean a real wife, who would be your helpmeet and your soulmate, and your equal. Not a regular wife, you know, just a near-wife. I just want to be Mrs. Guy Thorndike and have a

wedding ring and a home. You needn't even speak to me after we're married, if you don't want to."

"Where are your people?"

"I haven't any. You see, I've lived all my life with my uncle and aunt in Spriggville."

"Spriggville?"

"Yes; it's a very small place, oh, very small. Just a post-office and two shops and a church and schoolhouse. Then a few houses at the four corners and a few farms out around."

"How attractive it sounds. And you live in one of the houses?"

"On one of the farms. My uncle, Mr. Sprigg, was quite rich, though a farmer. Well, you see, a few months ago, he died, and my aunt has all his money. Well, she's going to be—what *do* you think? You'd *never* guess! A missionary to China! And she says I must go with her and be a missionary, too. A girl of my type a missionary!"

"Yes, very nice, very nice. And when do you start?"

"I'm not going to start at all." The dark eyes looked straight into his. "But you see, I have no money, and if I don't go with Aunt Maria, she won't give me any. And I won't go with her, I just simply won't. So, of course, I can't stay here all alone. So, of course, I must marry somebody. Please, Mr. Thorndike."

The girl could not have been more pleasantly pleading if she had been asking for a photograph instead of the original. And as there is a certain kind of coward who is brave in the face of a great danger, so Guy Thorndike's bashfulness faded before this astonishing situation.

"And you have no other people, no relatives, beside this missionary aunt?"

"None."

"And you have no money?"

"My face is my fortune."

Though the words might seem pert, the serious tone and the pathetic little sigh that accompanied them gave only the effect of a simple truth.

"And so you propose to marry to avoid being a missionary to China?"

"Yes, sir. However hard married life may be, it can't be as hard as missionarying in China."

"What do you know of married life?"

"Nothing, except as I have observed my aunt and uncle. They lived in a rut—I know that, because auntie has said so since uncle died. But surely, a rut in this country would be better than any of those Chinese places."

"And may I ask why you singled me out for this honor?"

The gentle brown eyes looked at him reproachfully. "You may ask me anything you like, if you won't be sarcastic. I never could stand sarcasm. I'm perfectly serious. I came to you first, but I have two other men in view."

"You have? Who are they?"

"They're good enough men, but they are not like you. You see, I know a great deal about you from reading the papers. I know you are noble and upright in all your ways. I know you don't like ladies, and so I thought, perhaps, if you married me, you needn't be bothered by any more seekers."

"Seekers?"

"Yes; society girls who want to marry you."

"You flatter me."

"No, you know it's true. But I wouldn't trouble you at all. This house is so big, you could have a few rooms, and I could have the rest."

"And what would you contribute toward the general welfare of our household? Are you a capable housekeeper?"

"I'm a very good housekeeper of the old-fashioned sort. Aunt Maria brought me up to her own manners and customs. But I learn very quickly and I can soon adapt myself to your ways."

"Can you cook?"

"Oh, yes, sir; but I didn't suppose you'd want me to do that. I thought you were rich. But I can cook, if you desire it."

"And might I inquire your name?"

"I am called Prillilgirl."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said, Prillilgirl. My uncle always called me that."

"It is descriptive. But you have another name?"

"Yes; Uncle used to call me, 'Sweet o' the Year.' He also called me 'The Person of Moonshine.'"

"Your uncle was poetic."

"He read a great deal and he was very fond of me."

"He had a fine taste in names. Well, Miss Prillilgirl, I'm afraid you won't do. I'm sorry to disappoint you, but, quite aside from your proposition being a little unusual, I may say I don't need a wife at present. In fact, I'm quite positive I don't need a wife at all."

"Oh, yes, you do. You need the kind of wife I'd be. Why, I'd keep all to myself, in two or three rooms, if you want me

to. And I'd keep as still as a mouse—why, I wouldn't even sing while you're in the house, if you prefer that I shouldn't."

"But, my dear child, what you suggest is wrong."

The little creature sighed. Then she lifted very serious eyes to his. "If anything is pleasant, it is likely to be wrong," she said. "But this isn't, Mr. Thorndike. What could be wrong about your marrying me? And I am very amiable."

"H'm. And suppose I require other traits in a wife. Can you preside at a table properly?"

"Oh, yes, of course. But please decide, Mr. Thorndike, because if you really say no, I want to go on to Mr. Balcom's."

"What!"

"Yes, Mr. Balcom is my second choice. Of course, he isn't the same kind of actor you are—his line is broad comedy. According to the papers he makes people laugh like everything. But I've read that he's very rich and kind-hearted."

"He is, indeed! Now look here, Miss —, tell me your name."

"Deane—Corinne Deane."

"Well, Miss Deane, you are fortunate in coming to me first. You're an ignorant, foolish baby and you might easily have met with great misfortune in this quest of yours. Now, you're not going to Jo Balcom's at all, do you hear that? You're going straight home—"

"Then you refuse to marry me?" and she rose to go, with the air of a disappointed but resigned book agent.

"I do. And I also refuse to let you go to see Balcom or any other man on this errand of yours. What is the matter with you? Don't you know anything? I forbid you to go to Balcom's."

"Mr. Thorndike, you have no right to forbid me to do anything. I asked you to marry me, and you refused. Therefore, I go away, and it is absolutely none of your concern what I do next. I have a perfect right to refuse to go to China if I can arrange to stay in America. And I have a perfect right to manage these matters as I see fit."

There was no flippancy, no boldness in her manner. The big, soft eyes looked earnest and sincere, the sweet flower face was profoundly innocent and the red mouth quivered, not with embarrassment, but with disappointment at this first failure.

With a gentle dignity she moved toward the door, and Thorndike thundered, "Stop! Come back here!"

She half turned, and as hope dawned in her eyes, a wonderful radiance lighted her whole face.

"I will marry you," he cried; "I will marry you to save you from yourself. As you suggest, it will not be real marriage, but I offer you the protection of my name and my home that you may not fall into Balcom's clutches. I don't want you, Lord knows! but I can't see an exquisite child like you set adrift on the world. We will go through the ceremony—you shall have a ring and a certificate. You can have this house, the whole house—I hate it, anyway—and you can amuse yourself as you like. I know you are good and sweet and dear, but I can't be encumbered with a wife—it would bore me to death. And I know, too," he looked straight in her

eyes, "that you are good and true, and will never do anything to make me ashamed of you."

"Oh, indeed I wouldn't, when you are so kind as to marry me! Today, Mr. Thorndike? Right now?"

"Yes, as soon as we can put it across. I'll do some necessary telephoning, and then we'll have to go together to get a license. I think we'll be in time."

"And will this frock do? It's white."

"Wear what you choose," he returned, a little absently and thinking hard.

"Remember," he said, "you not only asked me to marry you, but you persuaded me against my will and against my judgment. There is to be no romance between us, but, of course, it precludes any romance for either of us. I shall not mind this—for I want no romance; but—will you never regret?"

Miss Deane looked at him. "Maybe you'll die," she said, simply.

"Maybe I shall," Thorndike returned, grimly. "Well, since you are to be my wife, I must tell you of my past romance. Some years ago I fancied myself in love with a lady, and bought this ring, hoping I could persuade her to wear it."

Prillilgirl gave a rippling laugh. "I know," and she clapped her hands in glee, "you were too shy to ask her!"

"Yes," and Thorndike showed a little chagrin. "How did you know that, witch?"

"I've read about your shyness—and, I can see it for myself. That's one reason I like you. But you didn't have to ask me, did you? It would have been nice to be asked—" the brown eyes looked wistful.

“Well, you never will be, now,” Thorndike spoke almost roughly; “you’ve lost your last chance. But this ring must be for you, now.”

She held out her hand with a gesture of confidence and content.

Bashful Guy Thorndike trembled as he took it, and he nearly fell in a blue funk as he pushed the ring on her finger.

Corinne Deane looked at the gleaming diamond. Thorndike watched her, waiting for her comment. Surely she had never before owned such a magnificent possession.

“I feel like a Great Jewel Robbery,” she said, at last, and added, smiling, “but it’s a very nice feeling.”

“What will your aunt say to all this?” he inquired, curiously.

The lovely shoulders shrugged a little. “It doesn’t matter what she says. Shall I tell her about it?”

“I think it would be rather decent, don’t you?”

“As you like. I’ll write her tonight.”

As Guy Thorndike was not only an actor, but an actor-manager, he went about his present undertaking with the efficiency that characterized all his work. He telephoned to several people, he gave some directions to his servants, and then he whisked Prillilgirl into his car, and down to the Marriage License Bureau, in time to get there just before that important institution closed.

He said little, making only casual and necessary observations.

Prillilgirl was passive. She merely sat pretty and watched him with the mild gaze of her big brown eyes, her face now and then lighting up, as with some thought of happiness.

He took her to the house of a friend, there was a wedding ceremony, witnesses and good wishes, but nothing of a social or festive nature.

Prillilgirl seemed not to care, and smiled prettily on the small group of people as she left them to go away with Thorndike.

He put her in the car, followed and sat beside her, and then they started home.

And then, for the first time, he realized what he had done. A wave of shy embarrassment engulfed him and he shrank back into his corner as if he had committed a crime, and he was not sure he hadn't. He stole a glance at the girl beside him. Her beauty was so perfect that not even the sharp rays of the afternoon sun could expose a flaw.

But it was not this beauty that had caused Thorndike to take the step he had. He had done it purely and simply to protect this lovely and innocent child from a wicked world. He did not know whether he regretted it or not, and that did not matter. He simply had to do it. He was appalled at the situation and the very enormity of the case gave him a sort of artificial bravado, which, though difficult to achieve, he sometimes found useful.

Thorndike was, in common with most of his fellow creatures, a mixture of good and bad. Thirty-six years old, he had the wisdom of his years combined with a certain childlike simplicity of spirit that was in part the result of his unconquerable shyness.

As an actor he was among the best; as a manager he was equally successful; but his ambitions were high, and he still had worlds to conquer.

His chief desire was to play a certain sort of character that he had in mind, and which, only recently, he had so described to a playwright that he had at last a hope of securing the play he was looking for.

Mallory Vane was eccentric almost to the verge of madness, but he could write, and he seemed to be the only man who could comprehend the intricate details of the character Thorndike wanted to portray. This was the actor-manager's life work at present, and had been, in contemplation, for years. His mind and soul were full of it, and he spent hours with Vane going over the hints and shades of meaning in lines, and suggesting changes and improvements in the author's work.

Though generous in all material things, Thorndike was exceedingly selfish in his ambitions. Self-centered, rather, and ready to bend all to his own histrionic successes.

But he had always a ready and overflowing sympathy for those in distress or trouble, and helped them with unstinted assistance of money, influence or friendship, as might be required.

And now, the most exigent case of need he had ever known had been brought to his attention, and with characteristic readiness, he had given what seemed to him at the moment, the only possible response.

CHAPTER II

MRS. GUY THORNDIKE

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Thorndike felt perplexed as he gazed at the girl beside him. It didn't occur to him that he was a bridegroom, he felt more like a man who had impulsively bought a piece of bric-a-brac that didn't harmonize with his other furnishings.

Summoning his courage to the point of speaking aloud, he said:

"Now, Prillilgirl—I shall call you that, I think, because it suits you so well—though Sweet o' the Year is pretty for you, too—you are now Mrs. Thorndike, and you must behave accordingly."

"Yes, sir;" the lady addressed looked at the gold circlet on her finger and smiled pleasantly.

"First, you mustn't say 'sir' to me."

"No, sir."

"Are you listening?"

"Oh, yes, sir. But you see I'm so busy being married that I've not much time for anything else."

"Pshaw, you're a baby and a simpleton."

"Yes, sir."

Thorndike sulked. But Prillilgirl paid no attention and it was quite evident that she was really oblivious of his presence. She sat up very straight and looked every inch a thoroughbred. Her white frock and pink lined hat were entirely correct and very becoming and her exquisite face beamed with radiant joy.

Though they spoke no word she was all unconscious of any awkwardness between them.

At last she said; "if I can't call you sir, then what shall I call you? Mr. Thorndike?"

"No, not Mr. Thorndike! Heavens, what a little fool you are!"

"Yes, sir," but a dimple flashed into sight and out again.

"Call me Guy," he muttered, in a voice constrained by shyness.

"Guy! It doesn't suit you a bit," and the little head cocked on one side like a doubtful bird while the brown eyes regarded him seriously. "I think you're a 'Man of Wax'."

"Meaning you so easily molded me to your wishes?"

"Oh, no, that isn't what I mean at all! Don't you know, in Romeo and Juliet, where they call Paris a Man of Wax?

'A man of all the world, a Man of Wax.

Verona's summer hath not such a flower.'

Fie, don't you know your Shakespeare? You who want to play it!"

"How do you know I want to play Shakespeare?"

"I know everything about you."

"Well, keep your knowledge to yourself!"

"Yes, sir. Oh, Guy, I'm so glad I have a home of my own! You can't imagine how lonesome and friendless I felt when I rang your doorbell."

"I should think you would!"

"Yes, I did. Oh, this is heaps better than going to China. Isn't China an awful place?"

"So I'm told."

"What do you like to do best? Recreation, I mean."

“Golf and bridge. Do you play them?”

“No, but I can learn. However, there’s no occasion, as I’m not going to bother you with my presence. That’s understood.”

“See that you remember that.”

“Yes, sir. Oh, I’m so crazy to get home, I can’t seem to wait. Have you picked out my rooms for me?”

“The housekeeper, Mrs. Lamb, will look after that. You can have the most attractive suite, of course, and you can refurnish it to suit your own taste. You can take the summer for it, if you choose—I shall be away at various places until fall. Or, if you care to go away this summer, leave your redecorations until you return.”

“Oh, I don’t want to go away—I’ve just got here. I’ll see to it all.” She nodded her lovely head with evident satisfaction at the prospect. “Will the servants stay in town all summer?”

“If I tell them to.”

“Lovely! When do you go? Tomorrow?”

“Are you so anxious to be rid of me?”

“You know it isn’t that, my Man of Wax.” The flower face turned toward him and the eloquent brown eyes spoke mute reproach. “But I don’t want to bother you.”

“Very well, then keep to your own rooms.”

“Yes, sir—I mean yes, Guy.”

But her speech was perfunctory and unheeding and her gaze wandered as she hummed a little tune.

“Don’t hum! It annoys me.”

She stopped humming but she kept smiling and her eyes danced as they drove past attractive shop windows.

She turned to him like a happy child. "Tomorrow I'm going shopping—to buy frocks—ooh!—and negligees, crowded with lace—oo! oo!—and HATS! Oh, Guy, won't it be heavenly!"

Thorndike looked at her coldly.

His natural kindness would have been glad to sympathize with her overflowing joy at the thought of buying finery, but the very idea embarrassed him and the sight of the raptured little face fairly paralyzed his mind. Moreover, he was thinking over a new scene for his play, and he preserved a self-absorbed silence.

Suddenly she turned toward him with a little puzzled look. "Guy, am I completely married?"

"Why not?"

"You didn't kiss me."

He flushed and dropped his eyes in an agony of shyness. But the situation had to be met.

"Look here," he said, sternly, "we're not going to have any kissing or any of that foolishness."

"No, sir—oh, no! But that's a different sort of kiss. Guy, why do women want to be Suffragettes?"

"Most women don't. Do you?"

"Mercy, no! I'm happily married! Guy, shall I have an allowance or bills?"

"Both, if you like."

"Oh!" with a rapturous clasp of her hands. "But aren't you afraid I'll be extravagant?"

"You may, if you choose. You may as well understand, Prillilgirl—I don't care what you do. I will give you an allowance, and you may charge things at certain shops, but

don't bother me with details. If you are too extravagant, I shall tell you so. Until I do, buy what you like. I'm not too much alarmed on that score."

"Yes, sir."

"You shall have a little motor of your own, electric, if you prefer, and you can have the big car whenever you want it. But you're not to be eternally running to me for this or that. Your rooms are on the third floor. I'm on the fourth. Don't ever come up there."

The brown eyes opened wide at him. "What would I want to go up there for?"

"Well, I thought you might be one of those women who are all over the place."

"Oh, no, I promised not to bother you, and I always keep my promise. This is our 'Last Ride Together,' as Mr. Browning has it. But you'll be away all summer."

"Yes, off and on. How do you come to know so much poetry?"

"Uncle read it to me a great deal. We were both fond of it."

"And your aunt?"

"Oh, no, she didn't like it a bit. That's why I couldn't go to China with her. May I buy lots of poetry books?"

"I told you to buy what you like and not refer such matters to me. I'm not interested."

A pleasant smile greeted the speech and then Prillilgirl again became absorbed in her own thoughts.

Thorndike pondered. Clearly, she was not to be affronted or insulted by his indifference and even rudeness, but he could see plainly that this was not because of a

determination not to be, but because of her own sublime indifference and demeanor.

He had plunged into this mad experiment, and he was neither glad nor sorry. She meant nothing to him, but as he had not wanted to marry any one else, it was little for him to do to give his name and protection to this lovely child.

When they reached the house, he handed her out of the car with punctilious courtesy, and as they entered, he said simply, to the valuable butler, "Webb, this is Mrs. Thorndike. Her word is law in the house. Inform the other servants and send Lamb to me."

The smile that Prillilgirl gave the butler completed his bewilderment and almost jarred his conventional calm.

Appeared then Mrs. Lamb, housekeeper and general manager of the whole establishment.

Hers was one of those rarely found natures that follow literally the Scriptural injunction to be wise as a serpent and harmless as a dove.

Fair, fat and forty, Mrs. Lamb was a retired actress, having at one time played in Thorndike's company, and even then marked out by him as a wonderful woman in her way.

For she was capable of running the actor's home as he wanted it run; she attended to everything, in her own province or out of it; she settled all questions, quelled all insurrections, smoothed out any possible roughness that came in the path of her adored master, and was in every way the keystone of the whole edifice.

Moreover, she was comely to look upon, and was most pleasant spoken.

It was, then, with a feeling of relief that Thorndike shifted his newly acquired responsibility on to the shoulders of his First Goldstick-in-waiting.

“Lamb,” he said, quietly, “this is Mrs. Thorndike. Please look after her. She will have the pink and gray suite and you will cherish her as the apple of your eye.”

There was about as much sentiment in his tone as if he had been reciting the catechism, but the housekeeper took his words at their face value, and laying a motherly hand on Prillilgirl’s arm she said, “Come with me, my dear.”

Smiling into Mrs. Lamb’s pleasant face, the girl started to go, but Thorndike, struggling with something that he felt he must say, blurted out;

“Do you—do you care to dine with me?”

“Oh, no,” returned his happy bride. “I don’t want to bother you. And, beside, I’d ever so much rather have a tray brought to my room. I’ve always wanted to do that. Get into a kimono, you know, and sit around and just gloat over my beautiful, heavenly new home.”

“Very well, then, I think I’ll dine at the Club.”

“Yes, sir. Oh, everything is so lovely. Good bye, and thank you so much for marrying me.”

She went off with Mrs. Lamb, and Thorndike stood a moment alone, with a mental picture of that radiant, smiling face with its wonderful eyes and the golden curls clustering under the pink lined hat.

“Gee!” he remarked to himself; “Gee!”

Then he went to his Club for dinner and the story having spread like wildfire, he was greeted by his comrades with shouts and hails of varying tenor.

“Shut up!” said Thorndike, pleasantly, and they did.

“Bless me!” said Mrs. Lamb, fervently, as she led her charge up the broad stairway, “I’m free to confess I don’t often get such a come-at as this! It’s all right—Guy Thorndike never did anything that wasn’t all right, but I was as surprised as a shot partridge when he said you were his wife. His wife! and you a mere Kindergarten Kid!”

“Well, you see,” Prillilgirl smiled engagingly, “he doesn’t exactly want a wife—he says wives bother him—and I’m determined not to bother him. You may not think it, Lamb, but I’m a person of great determination. When I make up my mind to do a thing I never stop till it’s done. Why, when I am really determined, I’m terrible as an army with banners! Truly I am.”

“You don’t look it,” Lamb commented quietly. “But, now, Mrs. Thorndike, here’s your suite. And pretty enough for anybody, I’ll say.”

“It’s perfectly lovely! I’ll rearrange the furniture some, and maybe have another mirror door put in there—”

“Are you vain, then?”

“Yes, I think I am. But not always. Not when I have something better than myself to think about. And now, you see, I have! This beautiful new home and—oh, a whole new life to arrange and play with! And you, Lamb, dear—I’m so happy to have you.”

The words were sincere, for the attitude of the housekeeper was sympathetic and congenial.

Lora Lamb had been a good reliable actress in her insignificant rôles but she had been glad to give up her

stage life to keep house for Thorndike, whom she adored in a motherly way.

Though only a few years older than the actor, she was possessed of the maternal instinct and she looked after his welfare and comfort as few paid servants could have done.

And now, that he had brought home a wife, and had put her in her care, Lamb willingly accepted the new responsibility, and prepared to look after two instead of one.

She didn't understand it all, but Lamb was wise in her own conceit and she had long ago discovered that to keep her mouth shut and her eyes open was the straight and narrow path to knowledge of most sorts.

So she accepted Prillilgirl as she would have done a more inanimate innovation, and soon became a devoted slave as well as guardian.

The days went by and Mr. Guy Thorndike was in no way bothered by his recent acquisition. He never saw Prillilgirl. He learned that she had adapted for her dining room a small unused room on the first floor, but quite often had her meals served in her own boudoir.

Whether by accident or design, her goings and comings never coincided with his own, and so far as he was concerned, Thorndike's home was in no way changed.

He scorned to question Mrs. Lamb, or Webb, the butler, but he learned a little from them unasked.

One day Webb appeared, and said, a little hesitatingly, "Beg pardon, sir, Mrs. Thorndike's compliments, sir, and she would like to know when you are going away."

"I don't know when I shall go. Why?"