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Something Missing - By Sonia Deane

Miriam gazed on the assortment of cabin trunks, suit cases, and hat boxes. Each one seemed to represent her life and its various phases. The very large, dilapidated trunk was reminiscent of the trip to America with Lewis; the suit cases reminded her of week-ends spent at country houses doing the things one hated, and hating the people who insisted on their being done!

ful mother." Lewis's voice was grave, sincere. "There was a second of silence. Then: 'I'll fall in with your wishes,' he said quietly. 'Thank you for being honest with me.' 'I'm not blaming you, reproaching you for anything you have failed to do,' she said swiftly. 'If there is any blame it should fall on me.' He gave her a steady scrutiny. 'You're so terribly young,' he said irreverently. She stared at him aghast. 'What an extraordinary thing to say,' she said. 'I'm thirty-three and have a daughter of nearly 15!'

Miriam caught a glimpse of herself in the cheval glass. Thirty-six! With a daughter of eighteen, now married! Was it possible? She went close to the mirror and gazed critically into it. She knew that she didn't look much more than twenty-eight. Her hair was still the colour of beech leaves in the sun; her eyes were bright and glowing. She sighed. Like her daughter, she, too, had married at eighteen. That had been the tragedy—not that she had married Lewis Hamilton.

Now it was all over. Lewis, too, belonged to the past. That had been inevitable since she met Alec Steen. Again her gaze travelled to the luggage as though fascinated by it. That newest suit case had accompanied her on a holiday that was the greatest adventure of her life. An adventure that began gaily and ended seriously, almost with idyllic beauty. For then she had met Alec Steen and she had known instantly just what was missing from her life with Lewis—what had always been missing.

She told Lewis so when she returned from that holiday. His words came back to her as she stood there. "If your happiness lies away from me, Miriam, I will give you your freedom."

And she had answered: "Unai! Betty is settled. I couldn't leave her. I am a mother first, Lewis. She needs me more than I need happiness."

"And you are not happy here," he said. "No." The words had been difficult. "There's been something missing, Lewis; something I've dreamed about yet never found until I met Alec. Marriage means something so different to you—doesn't it. Our ideas are different."

"Marriage has meant simply you," he answered. She shook her head.

"I've been part of a scheme, Lewis—not the scheme itself. We were too young when we married to understand what we wanted of life. I've lived in your house, given you a child, but I've been detached, if you know what I mean—my real life has been lived away from here."

"Are you trying to tell me that I'm not romantic, or glamorous," he asked. "Isn't that always the plea, Miriam?"

"No," she said frankly. "It isn't that. It is just that the design of your life and the design of mine would never make a perfect pattern. It has been just as unsatisfactory to you as to me." There was a pause. "You need an entirely different type of woman."

"Perhaps," he replied. "And probably you will find her—later on." She turned away from him slightly, then looked back as if trying to find the right words. "I must be honest with you, Lewis. I shall stay here—if you want me—until Betty is away from school; until I know exactly what she is going to do with her life. Once she is settled, I shall ask you to give me my freedom."

"And Steen is willing to wait for you?"

"Yes. Betty comes first."

"You've always been a wonder-

fect service. The newest one caught the gleam of the sun, but it didn't glow—it sighed because of the unfamiliar surroundings.

She knew it was absurd. This was the new life she had dreamed about. She had escaped from the wearying routine of home as Lewis understood it. She was being given a chance to live as she had always thought she would like to live. And yet...

Dinner was gay. There was an atmosphere of celebration. Afterwards, Alec took her around the grounds, his arm through hers as though her belonging to him was the most natural thing in the world.

"In a little while," he whispered, "you'll belong to me. I love you, Miriam; I've wanted you so terribly all these years."

She tried desperately to feel all that she had dreamed of feeling when this moment should come—this re-union; she wanted to recapture the glamour of her first meeting with Alec. She looked up into his face. He was handsome in a dignified, impressive way; a man whom women would like instinctively.

He said gently: "Don't worry, Miriam," and patted her arm. "I can arrange everything so that there is nothing to trouble you. You trust me, darling?"

She looked at him gratefully. Words were unnecessary. Then she said, slowly: "Lewis wants me to divorce him; there's someone else in his life, too."

Alec's face betrayed instant relief. "I'm glad," he said with dignity. "I hated to think that you might still—love you, because separation would have meant such hell for him—I know."

Something about those words made Miriam shiver. She said appealingly: "I'm tired, Alec."

He took her to her room. Something missing! Yet, she had not found it here. Miriam undressed slowly. She was alone and the silence frightened her. It seemed that life had become suddenly empty, not because Alec was not all that she had dreamed about, but because those dreams had not accurately reflected the yearnings of her inmost heart.

It is so terribly easy to imagine a perfect existence. Imagination is the enemy of love. Miriam knew that she would never belong in that house; or in any other house except the one she had so recently left. Her luggage didn't belong either; it was out of place; it had on it the scars and ravages of use, but they meant something; they were a background a foundation. Here, everything was so new; and it wanted a new heart to go with it, a soul untouched by any other contact...

Alec was thirty-seven; but he was years younger than she by comparison. He was beginning the adventure of marriage, while she was seeking only to change its melody. But there are some melodies that neither time or circumstances can alter. They may seem to die, yet they can be revived by a single, haunting note. Miriam knew, in that second, that for years she had shut her ears to that melody, only to realize its beauty when another woman had begun to listen to it for her.

"It's all over, now," she glanced around. "Where are you taking me," she said fearfully. "I want you to meet my mother," he said gently. She knows all about you; I thought you might like to stay with her until everything is settled." He leaned towards her. "You're more beautiful than ever," he whispered.

It was all so unreal. She couldn't grasp its full significance even when she found herself alone in the massive room allotted to her in the Steen house. Alec's mother had greeted her warmly; she was understanding and sympathetic and intensely relieved when she saw the type of woman who was going to become her son's wife.

Miriam's luggage was brought up. A maid began to unpack. Somehow Miriam couldn't bear it and sent her away. Those cases looked out of place now; forlorn, dejected. Like a poor relative who has been discarded after having given per-

In the morning she told Alec the truth. He accepted it without question or recrimination; it was as though he, too, knew that something was missing and he was wise enough to realize that nothing could be done.

Miriam left the Steen house a day or two later. She left as a friend. From there she went to a hotel. For the first time in her life she knew the meaning of the word, loneliness—a loneliness that was an agony of mind and body.

She tried to write to Betty, but found it impossible to construct the right sentences. In a few days she felt as though she had ceased to be a mother; ceased to be anything but a hollow shell.

She went to see her solicitors and arranged for Lewis to have his freedom. She learned that he was in Italy and was not expected back until the divorce proceedings were over.

"Is he travelling—alone?" "No, Mrs. Hamilton," the solicitor answered. "Then our case will be simple," said Miriam, fighting for control. "Exceedingly simple."

That was all. She returned to the hotel. Her steps were heavy, her mind numb. A few papers signed and the last link with marriage was gone. She was free... free...

She laughed as she opened the door of her room, but there was no mirth in that laughter, only a great irony. She walked unseeing towards the dressing table, her eyes blinded with tears, her hands pressed against her forehead.

It was then that she heard her name called, softly, tenderly. "Lewis," she called, and again, "Lewis!"

He was beside her. "But what are you doing here," she asked, weakly, tremulously. "I thought that you were in Italy."

"That's where I thought of going," he said. "But I don't understand," she whispered. "What about—" she broke off abruptly.

"The right woman," he asked slowly. "Yes."

He looked into her eyes. "You are that woman, Miriam," he said, "you always have been—there has never been anyone else; there never will be." He took her hands. "I'd do you that to try to make you jealous... then when it seemed that I had really lost you, I decided to go away, anywhere to forget. I had your solicitor informed that I was not travelling alone—till hoping that you might change your mind—might care enough to be jealous."

"But you didn't go," she said. "No," he replied. "I owe that to Steen."

He handed her a letter which read: "Miriam loves you; if the knowledge interests you, her address is The Majestic Hotel, Warwick."

"Alec must be the nicest person in the world," she said softly. "Adventure a woman could want." She smiled reflectively as she uttered those words. Then went on: "Strange how it is possible to yearn all your life for something that wouldn't make you the least happy if you could attain it."

Lewis's face was grave as he said: "Somehow, Miriam, I never really believed that you had ceased to care for me. It was a conviction which prompted me to behave as I have done—to try to get you back—imply by letting you go!"

"Infatuation can so often seem far more real than love," she said thoughtfully. "Because love is deeper, quieter and less spectacular. It is so terribly easy to take it for granted after a while and then to tell yourself that it is dead." She looked up into her husband's face. "I used to say our lives." There was something missing in our lives," she whispered. "I believed it; but it was only when I lost you that I found out what it was."

He drew her into his arms as he said: "What was it darling?"



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Just that I didn't realise how deep my love for you was, she answered. "Or how truly I belonged to you... I allowed myself to forget so much that had once made me happy simply because I believed that a greater happiness was to be found elsewhere." She raised her lips to his. "I am your wife," she added simply. "Nothing in life can change that. And I've come home after a long journey..."

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