

**A WOMAN'S
WORD; AND HOW
SHE KEPT IT**

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A Woman's Word; And How She Kept it by Virginia F. Townsend

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VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND

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BY

VIRGINIA F. TOWNSEND,

AUTHOR OF "ONLY GIRLS," "THAT QUEER GIRL," ETC.

"What think ye of the comedy, my friends? Have I fairly played my part in it? If so, applaud!" — OCTAVIUS CAESAR, *dying*, *A.D. 14*.

"Lockhart, I may have but a moment to speak to you. My dear, be a good man, — be virtuous, be religious, be a good man! Nothing else will give you any comfort when you come to lie here." — WALTER SCOTT *on his death-bed*, 1832.



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A WOMAN'S WORD;

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CHAPTER I.

Remember your own youth!—*Taine.*

Q 9-27-44 R.G.F.

"ONE—two—three—four!"
Genevieve Weir counted each stroke of the French clock as it fell musically into the silence. It was curious, too, that the soft, silvery tones seemed to strike on some secret place in her heart, and leave an ache there—yes, a very decided ache.

She was all alone that afternoon, walking up and down the great drawing-room of her uncle's grand house on Madison Avenue. That was rather curious, too; but admitted of a very simple explanation. Her aunt had gone to drive, and her cousins—gay, dashing girls—were at a matinee. They would have swept off in their train the "little country cousin," as they half-affectionately, half-patronizingly called Genevieve, if she had not plead very earnestly to be left behind that afternoon. So they had gone off, leaving her for a few hours as absolute mistress of the elegant home as though she had been born into its gold and purple,

instead of being only its wondering, half-dazed guest for the last two months.

The sunlight finds its way through lace and silken draperies, and seems to follow the slender figure caressingly as it moves up and down the great room; and groups of gleaming marble and dark bronzes gaze on her in still, immortal loveliness from their pedestals.

On the walls, too, the pictures watch silently. What colors burn, what visions glow on those charmed canvasses! They have stories to tell of all lands, of all time, from gray desert and lonely pyramids to green meadows gay with sunlight, to the homely interior of some old New England farm-house.

But the lovely marbles gaze, and the wonderful pictures glow in vain for Genevieve Weir this afternoon. Yet the solitary figure moving to and fro has a grace which holds its own amid this beauty. It seems a fitting presence there, as though even statues and pictures would miss something if that young girl's figure vanished from among them.

Dear me! It is no new story that hearts can ache under lofty roofs as under lowly ones. How many thousands in the huge, moiling city would have envied Genevieve Weir if they could have glanced inside the window and seen her the sole mistress of all that splendor!

Oh, miracle and mystery of art! Oh, light and glory of color that shone down upon her! Oh, divine grace of marbles and bronzes that gleamed about her! All these were hers for that hour—they would be an uplifting and idealizing memory for all her future. Yet if any, envying her, could have looked down into her soul, could have seen what fate lay behind, what

giants rose before, they would not have grudged Genevieve Weir her fair fortunes as she walked up and down the room when the clock struck four—oh, no!

Two months ago—it seemed two years to her—she had come for the first time in her life to the city. Her father's half-brother, on the mother's side, had made a large fortune years ago—made it partly on Wall Street, partly in speculations outside. He had the business gift. He was one of the few men who seem, Midas-like, to turn everything they touch to gold.

Genevieve had not seen him since she was a child. After her father's death there had been almost no intercourse between the two families. She had never even met her aunt or her cousins until she came to New York. Her visit seemed to have fallen out by the purest accident. Some people from the city came down to pass the summer at the quiet little seaside town where Genevieve lived. They boarded within half a mile of her home—a little gray nest of a cottage, with great shadowy pine-woods behind, and the sounding sea in front. People in that retired place were neighborly, and before the summer was over the young folks in the party from the city had met Genevieve and taken a decided liking to her. They must have carried back some glowing reports of the girl, for these had come to the ears of Genevieve's relatives. The result was, that she received a very kind letter, urging her to come to them for a couple of months.

Danaë herself could not have been more amazed when the golden shower flashed in the sky above her and fell in shining heaps around her couch, than was Genevieve Weir when that small missive floated into the gray nest of her home. It opened to her the golden

gates of that great world about which she had been wondering and dreaming all her life, but which seemed as impassable to her as the gates of bright, many-peaked Olympus once seemed to mortals.

You see now how it happened that Genevieve Weir came to the city. It was like being suddenly swept off with a magic wand into fairy-land. For two months she had lived in a world of magnificence and luxury. It was one whirl of delightful novelty and excitement from morning to midnight. She had come at the height of the season, and she had been carried about to grand parties and picture-galleries, to matinees and operas, to choice little lunches and fashionable receptions. She had had drives in Central Park and on the stately avenues. And she had enjoyed all these things with the keen delight of youth and novelty.

At first, it must be owned, she had been a good deal oppressed by the unaccustomed splendor. She had stood more or less in awe of the stately aunt and the stylish cousins. But this wore off as she grew to know them better. It was a little wonder to herself—it was a great deal more to her kinsfolk—that this girl, brought up in that quiet, homely fashion, in an out-of-the-way little nook between woods and waters, should fall as naturally into the new ways and habits as though she were to the manner born.

Genevieve's relatives had been very kind to her in their thoughtless, good-natured way. They had given her some handsome dresses and soft laces, in which she felt gorgeous as a princess; and some lovely sets of jewelry—sapphires, and pearls, and trinkets of various sorts—which they could well spare from their crowded jewel-caskets. They had taken a real pleas-

ure, too, in seeing their dainty little kinswoman look pretty, and in showing her with every advantage of surroundings to their own gay world. The truth was, she had been a surprise to them. She was like a bird of lovely plumage, straight from the green woods, where it has built its nest and welcomed the sunrise with its song; she was like a flower that in deep woods has opened its heart only to the dews and the sunlight, but whose wild, native loveliness rivals the choicest bloom of garden or greenhouse.

So poor Genevieve had her cup filled to the brim. She was getting to the last of her sparkling drops now. Her uncle had suddenly decided to go abroad on business, and to take his family with him. They would make the "Grand Tour" before they returned. The great house would be left to silence and the servants; and Genevieve would go back to her old gray home by the sea; and her beautiful life in the city must seem like a dream, or as that wonderful evening at the palace seemed to Cinderella, when she stood among the pots and brooms the next morning—only, after that night, the world could never have seemed the same to poor Cinderella, any more than her old home could seem the same to Genevieve Weir.

I wish I could make you see her just as the sunshine, and the statues, and the pictures saw her that afternoon, moving up and down the drawing-room. She was a pretty creature, just on the edge of twenty-one. Her skin was of the clearest olive-brown; and her eyes, too, were brown like nuts, and bright as waves touched by summer sunsets. Her mouth was red as the reddest of June roses, and there were pretty dimples at the corners. The features were finely and