

THE PAYING GUEST

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The paying guest by George Gissing

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GEORGE GISSING

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BY
GEORGE GISSING



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CHAPTER I.

It was Mumford who saw the advertisement, and made the suggestion. His wife gave him a startled look.

“But—you don’t mean that it’s necessary? Have we been extra——”

“No, no! Nothing of the kind. It just occurred to me that some such arrangement might be pleasant for you. You must feel lonely, now and then, darling, during the day. And as we have plenty of room——”

Emmeline took the matter seriously, but, being a young woman of some discretion, did not voice all

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her thoughts. The rent was heavy; so was the cost of Clarence's season ticket. Against this they had set the advantage of the fine air of Sutton, so good for the child and for the mother, both vastly better in health since they quitted London. Moreover, the remoteness of their friends favoured economy; they could easily decline invitations, and need not often issue them. They had a valid excuse for avoiding public entertainments—an expense so often imposed by mere fashion. The house was roomy, the garden delightful. Clarence, good fellow, might be sincere in his wish for her to have companionship; at the same time, this advertisement had probably appealed to him in another way.

“A YOUNG LADY desires to find a home with respectable, well-connected family, in a suburb of London, or not more than 15 miles from Charing X. Can give excellent references. Terms not so much a con-

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sideration as comfort and pleasant society. No boarding house. Address, Louise, Messrs. Higgins & Co., Fenchurch St., E. C."

She read it again and again.

"It wouldn't be nice if people said that we were taking lodgers."

"No fear of that. This is evidently some well-to-do person. It's a very common arrangement nowadays, you know; they are called 'paying guests.' Of course I shouldn't dream of having any one you didn't thoroughly like the look of."

"Do you think," asked Emmeline, doubtfully, "that we should quite *do*? 'Well-connected family——'"

"My dear girl! Surely we have nothing to be ashamed of."

"Of course not, Clarence. But—and pleasant society? What of that?"

"Your society is pleasant enough, I hope," answered Mumford, gracefully. "And the Fentimans——"

This was the only family with

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whom they were intimate at Sutton; a trifle sober, perhaps, and not in conspicuously flourishing circumstances; but perfectly presentable.

"I'm afraid," murmured Emmeline, and stopped short. "As you say," she added presently, "this is some one very well off. 'Terms not so much a consideration——'"

"Well, I tell you what. There can be no harm in dropping a note. The kind of note that commits one to nothing, you know. Shall I write it? Or would you?"

They concocted it together, and the rough draught was copied by Emmeline. She wrote a very pretty hand, and had no difficulty whatever about punctuation. A careful letter, calculated for the eye of refinement; it supplied only the indispensable details of the writer's position, and left terms for future adjustment.

"It's so easy to explain to people," said Mumford, with an air of satisfaction, when he came back from the