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ONLY A MATCH.

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.

"WHAT'S this? Oh, only a match!" And somebody had lifted it from the floor and dropped it into a great, empty match-safe that hung gloomily by the hearth-side; and there it had stood on tip-toe ever since till its poor foot ached, trying vainly to peep out over its prison wall.

"What on earth were you made for, I wonder!" grumbled the match-safe one day, tottering back and forth as a great duster went flying past and hit it a sharp blow on the side. "I was made to hold you, and a mighty hard thing it is to do, too, through these daily whirlwinds and tornadoes; so that's what I was made for. But what in the world you were made for unless to be the bane of my life, passes my comprehension."

"I don't know, I'm sure," answered the match, humbly. "I did not ask to be made, but since I was made, it must have been for some purpose, of course."

"I was made to soften life," said the rug that lay cosily before the hearth. "I quiet the rudest footfall. You can't do that. You are in the way under a foot. You are only a match!"

"I was made to give ease," said the sofa, stretching its wide arms out in a comfortable yawn. "I soothe the weariest to rest. You can't do that. You would break into splinters if any one touched you roughly, you good-for-nothing, thin-legged, ugly little lazy-bone. You are only a match."

"I was made to give air and light to benighted souls," said the window, swelling with conceit till it creaked again. "It's transparent enough what I was made for. But as to that hideous, thick-headed, dull little stick, it's neither useful nor ornamental. Put it out at once. It's just an eyesore. Here, shove me up, some one, and pitch it away!"

But some one being always no one, the window remained shut, for like all close natures it never opened of itself; and so the poor little match kept its place.

"I'm very much in the way, of course," it said, sadly. "There certainly doesn't

seem to be any use for just me. And yet I have the strangest feeling in my heart; it burns and glows as if there were something fiery hidden there, eating my soul away with an ecstasy that is almost pain. If only I could show you, if only I could tell you, perhaps then you would know some reason why I too should have been made."

The match-safe gave it a contemptuous little shake. "What's the good of feeling? You should be doing, not feeling. Feeling isn't of any use to anybody. It doesn't do anybody else any good. I don't feel. I just hold you tight and put all my energy into that."

"Oh, I don't want to feel, but I can't help it," sighed the poor little match. "I would, indeed, a great deal rather be of use if I could. I just long and long to do somebody some good. I would give all my life to brighten another life if only for a passing moment. But how can I? I am only a match, and I know I am very, very small and ugly. But I did not make myself. Forgive my being here in your way. I cannot help that either. I didn't put myself here or anywhere. I just was put. And yet, oh, if I could but show you all that is in my heart! How shall I put it into words. How can I share it with you?"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said the rug, thickly (it always spoke thickly, the syllable turning into fur in its mouth), "such a little insignificant thing as you can't have any feelings worth feeling. What are you, pray? Only a match."

"Only a match," echoed the sofa, and yawned. It was always stretching out its arms and yawning.

"Only a match," repeated the window, staring blankly inward, as if it couldn't condescend to see such a tiny, dull little thing.

"Only a match; yes, only a match!" assented the poor victim." And yet—oh, indeed, I feel, I know, I feel there is something, something. But there! I am feeling again; and I mustn't. For what good is it to others that my heart is breaking with this smothered pain? Oh, what doom is laid upon me, that I can only feel

where others act? Is there nothing that can break the spell, or turn even this to good, and make the world more glad for knowledge of the strange rapture and the mad, bright, beautiful thoughts that are surging and surging through my head? No, I am only a match. I was made ugly and useless from the start, and put where nobody wanted me, where I am only in the way. Of what use is this burning love that can find no outlet but speech? these dreams of a glory that none cares to see? these nameless, wordless feelings that none tasks to share? What weary soul finds rest in me? Who treads more lightly because I am here? Who breathes more freely, who sees clearer and more far, who is happier because of me? No, no, I am only a match, I know; and yet, since I was made there must be some purpose, however little, however fleeting, which I only can fulfill."

"You were made to make a great fuss out of nothing," said the match-safe, crossly. "You are just what men call a poet: a dawdling, useless something, that has no hands to work with, and nothing but a great, clumsy, unnecessary heart to feel with—and feel with till its feelings get too many for it, and burn it to ashes; and a good riddance, too, to the world when the day comes!"

"Ah, if but my ashes might help warm some living soul, then, after all, I should not have lived in vain!" sighed the match. "But of course that is too much to hope for. As you say, feeling is not doing, and I am very worthless."

It was grown dark in the room by this time. The night was come.

"Where's my light gone?" rumbled the window, shaking with a passing chill. "Where's my light gone? Mercy me, I can scarcely see where I am! I feel as if I were put out myself."

"It's cold, c-o-l-d!" drawled the sofa, hugging itself in its big arms, with a stuffy sneeze that jarred it on its rollers. "It's bitter cold."

"It's dark," mumbled the rug. "It's very dark and miserable. Oh, for fire and light and heat!"

"Oh! the fire, the light and the heat in my heart," moaned the match. "Alas for the power to aid! Alas for the knowledge and strength and skill that should make me, too, of use! But I am only a match. I can do nothing. What are all my glowing dreams to a cold and weary world? Only dreams. Only dreams. Vainest, idlest of earthly shadows!"

The night grew darker and colder. The

room was very chill.

Just then some one came in with a light, swift step, and pausing, shivered.

"Very dark, very cold, very cheerless," murmured a voice—a soft, low voice that belonged to the light, swift step (all voices and steps agree). "Very dark, very cheerless. The fire has not been lighted."

And then the steps came near; a slim, lithe figure that belonged to the voice and the step knelt down by the hearth, and a smooth, fine hand, that fitted with the figure, the step, and the voice, reached up and took the match, held it a second, and then—

What had happened?

A sharp, quick, single cry broke from the match as it struck against something hard and pitiless. Was it a knife that had cut through to its heart, and was it bleeding liquid fire? Oh, the anguish! oh, the pain! Was this death, or was this first truly life? It leaped up in one agonizing burst of flame; with one supreme effort it flung out all its burning, impassioned soul into the dark—threw out all its golden life of dreams into a vast, cold space that seemed to close in upon it and swallow it mercilessly up; and then—lo! all the room was filled with warmth and life. It blazed with light. It was radiant with a sudden glory that shot out from the hearth in long, wide, spreading rays and penetrated into the remotest corners, leaving no space for cold.

"O warmth! O light! O beauty!" murmured the soft, low voice, softer now and lower, as if too glad to speak aloud. "How it floods all my being with delight!"

And, with the words, the smooth, fine hand dropped the burnt match upon the hearth. The fire blazed and leaped and glowed above it.

The match-safe leaned back gloomily against the wall.

"Now, who could have guessed there was so much hidden in a little insignificant poet-heart!" it grumbled to itself. "Only a match, and such a blaze! What a great, great fuss out of nothing!"

Poor little match! It had nothing but that tiny, fiery soul to give to the great, hungry world in which it found itself, and it had given it all away with its dying breath. Now it lay scarred and broken and spoiled upon the hearth.

But did it guess of all the joy and good its little life had wrought? Ah! who knows? Yet its brightest vision was its last.

MENTONE, FRANCE.