

ure as he emerged from the parsonage porch, stepped briskly over the walk between the box borders and disappeared down the dusky lane and ran past Dr. Farrell's house.

Everybody foretold a wedding. However, one morning in early autumn Mr. Took turned the last leaf of theological research, and, obedient to a relative, from whom he had expectations, left New Market.

Affection for Anna Farrell was the one firm point in his variable mind—the strength of which his rather paltry nature was capable. There was much said about a stern determination to live faithful to each other, though fate, in the guise of a rich uncle, should separate them for fifty years.

Thus disappeared from New Market, Mr. Ivan Took, in the twenty-fifth year of his age and the fifth month of his courtship.

For a long time the good people were accurately enabled to follow him through the politeness of the postmistress. One month found him in New York, the next in St. Augustine, Chicago, San Francisco, after a while in London, Paris, Vienna. After four years the letters ceased, and not even the postmistress could explain, though she advanced many theories. Anna's one romance ended, as far as her friends were concerned.

Six years longer she wore at the annual festival her wreath of snowballs and roses, but the following May the pompous old doctor was found dead in his chair; her place was filled by a younger maiden and passed forever out of her keeping.

After their father's departure a death in the village, the birth of a child, the farewell of one minister or the advent of another were all that varied their days. Summer mornings she tended the plants, the same flowers that had bloomed for years in the same places within the box-edged borders, and she and Mary practiced their old-fashioned music. Afternoons they read and wrought divers kinds of fancy work, such as had been taught them in their school days. May found them under the tree by the office window in sight of the gate. When October came they worked and read within doors. They scarcely appreciated the flight of time. Once Mary, in speaking on the subject which never lost interest, had said, "If he comes." Anna with mild indignation had repeated:

"If he comes? Surely you do not doubt? I have never had reason to question him."

"But have you ever thought of it? It has been so long; thirty-two years the twenty-seventh of this September since he went away and twenty-eight years the twenty-sixth of this September since you had his last letter."

"It has not seemed so long," said the younger woman. This was the first time that either had referred practically to Mr. Ivan Took's absence. "And today is the twenty-seventh."

They were sitting upon the same little rustic bench upon which they had sat every fair summer afternoon during all these years. The soft swift breeze shook the leaves from a pear tree near by and drove them in tawny showers whirling to the ground.

Anna cut a strand of crimson wool, carefully fastened the end and glanced toward the hedge.

There was the sound of light and rapid footsteps drawing near—nearer—the click of the latch, and Mr. Took stood before them. Anyone who had seen him thirty-two years ago must have recognized him. The face which had looked old on a young man had now an absurdly youthful appearance. He said as if he had only parted from his friends in the morning:

"He is dead, died in Egypt—nearly a hundred; buried in sight of the Pyramids by particular request. I traveled night and day to reach here on the twenty-seventh." Then remembering his customary salutation of years ago:

"I hope I find you quite well, ladies, this afternoon."

"Quite well, I thank you," replied Mary. She answered from force of habit. "Please to be seated."

She looked at her sister and back again at Mr. Took, who stood twirling his hat on one finger—just such a hat as he wore years ago when he came courting to the same spot, except that the brim was not so broad. This helped to impress the reality of his appearance upon her. She laid her hand upon her sister's arm.

"We have not given Mr. Took welcome. We are most happy to see you again."

He turned to Anna: "May I hope—dare I ask the same kind assurance from—"

He paused and they stood looking at each other, their hands ex-

tended.

In that moment the conviction came home to each that thirty-two years taken irrevocably from the fullest period of life left little for the glamour of romance. They had not missed their youth from themselves—they missed it from each other. They had lived unconscious of the lapse of time; its marks on other faces had not appealed to them. As each looked into the other's eyes and scanned the other's features, for the first time they recognized the reality of middle age. They had cherished an illusion, kept alive by a constancy almost supernatural; its vanishing left them dazed.

They shook hands and sat down, but there was nothing to say. All the fine things of which they had dreamed summer and winter suddenly forsook them:

"The weather has been fine; an unusually pleasant season."

The voice seemed to come from beyond the world, although they knew it was Mary who spoke. She had been in the habit of making the same observation thirty-some years ago. "The garden is looking well. I hope you enjoyed your travels," etc., etc.

She left them finally with the ancient excuse of household affairs. Mr. Took shook off the bewilderment which possessed him; he rose with a curious air of hesitation and decision. Anna rose also.

"I have come to offer you—to beg of you—long ago I told you you were the only woman in the world for me. I would have offered you my heart, but what value has a heart without a home? I am a moderately rich man now, and I beg you to share all I possess."

"I think I understand all you would have given me had it been in your power," said Anna when he paused, "and I think—I am sure I know what we both would say now. Perhaps it will be easier for me than for you. It is too late. We never thought it would be, but it is. We have made a mistake not in the affection we had for each other—O, how can I say it!—but it seems as if love had suddenly grown old or slipped away, or we—"

She strove to close her long speech with a dignity appropriate to the occasion but broke down ignominiously: "Somehow, these feelings do not fit, but we did not know it until just now. There, I am glad I have said it."

They sat down on opposite ends of the rustic bench and looked each other clearly in the eyes.

"I shall never marry anyone else," he said, with an air of relief, "and we shall always be friends—good friends."

When Mary reappeared, they told her—at least Anna, whose courage had not deserted her, told her of the proposed arrangement. She was disappointed, having always regarded Anna as the central point of a romance whose culmination must be marriage. She had thought of her as quite a young person. She had a suggestion to offer:

"Old Mr. Sype's place will be sold next week. It would suit a gentleman of means and we have been anxious over the prospect of undesirable neighbors. Why not buy Pilgrim's Rest?"

The idea impressed Mr. Took favorably. He had been a wanderer on the face of the earth; this dignified retirement was attractive.

"I might," he said, "resume my theological studies, which have been somewhat interrupted since I left here. My uncle, unfortunately, did not approve of theology."

He became the owner of Pilgrim's Rest. The villagers renewed their belief in his matrimonial intentions and lived in constant expectation of a wedding. He devoted his mornings to the cultivation of cabbage and to theology; his afternoons and evenings were spent in the society of the Misses Farrell; they were attentive listeners while he recounted scenes of travel, gave his views on matters of churchmanship and the like. In course of time he became a local preacher and occasionally delivered harmless sermons in the absence of the regular incumbent. His manner of giving out the hymn was much admired; so respected and a power in New Market, he passed his life in peaceful seclusion.

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