

MY VALENTINE.

He came one blustering, snowy day in February weather; He carried on his dimpled arm A portmanteau of leather. He tapped against my window-pane; He said: "You silly old fellow, Come, tell me of that little maid With curly head and yellow, "The music of those broken speech A happy home rejoices; Whose prattle has a sweeter sound Than other people's voices."

MISS MAYBRICK'S PARLOR.

An orchard, the branches heavy with golden apples, here and there a ruddy "windfall," half-hidden in the long grass, and at the foot of one of the most richly-laden trees a young girl, half asleep, with an ill-used book flung carelessly down, and indolent white arms thrown above her pretty dark head.

"Jessie!" She made a sleepy little movement, indicative of annoyance at being interrupted in the middle of her siesta. "Jessie, I say!" Miss Jessie rose slowly and picked up her book. She was a tall, slight girl, of about eighteen years of age, with a rather pale face and gray eyes, fringed with long black lashes. These eyes were her greatest charm. A little white gate divided the orchard from the garden, and Jessie passed through it with exasperating slowness.

"Was there ever such a girl!" thought her sister, her elder by twenty years at least—the daughter of her father's first wife.

Caroline had loved her young stepmother, and when she died had tried to take a mother's place to the tiny, dark-eyed baby she left behind; but Jessie had proved a very troublesome charge.

"Well," said Jessie, interrogatively, looking at Caroline standing in the doorway, with her sleeves tucked up and her stout arms covered with flour.

"What is it, Caroline?" "Come and move your rubbish out of the front room."

"What for?" asked Jessie, in undisguised astonishment. "Because father's going to let it to a young fellow from London."

Jessie looked indignant. Her parlor, with the piano in it, to be let to some horrid man, and all her pretty belongings to be banished to her little bedroom. Oh! it was too bad.

"Carrie," she said, "how could you advise father to do such a thing? I never thought we should have to take in lodgers; I would rather run away."

"Where to?" asked the rather matter-of-fact Caroline.

Jessie bit her lips and went indoors to remove her books and needlework from the little parlor that had been regarded as her especial sanctuary ever since she had entered her teens. It never occurred to Miss Jessie that money was rather scarce with her father just now, and that the lodger would bring grist to the mill. She regarded the whole thing as a conspiracy to make her uncomfortable.

They might have consulted her, she thought, forgetting that she never troubled herself in any way with the affairs of the household. How she wished she could have had her piano carried upstairs; but that was impossible. It was the chief ornament of that room, and her father, she knew, would not allow her to take it away.

"I shall hate him, I know I shall," she told herself, thinking of the lodger.

And for the first two or three days she kept carefully out of his way, and Mr. Leith remained unconscious of the fact that he was under the same roof with a pretty girl. But he made the discovery one afternoon. When wandering through the orchard, with his hands behind his back, he came suddenly upon a slight, girlish figure in brown holland, a wide hat shading her eyes from the sun. Wonderful eyes they were—so large and dark, and utterly bewitching. She was gone like a flash; but her image lingered in Mr. Leith's memory. He was not a very talkative man; but he began to cultivate Caroline Maybrick's acquaintance, and soon found that the girl in the brown holland dress was her sister. He grew so friendly that Caroline ventured to ask him to take tea with them in the kitchen one afternoon. The farmer was quite willing, but Jessie objected very strongly, and threatened not to come in to eat at all.

"Beside," she said, "what does a gentleman want in a farmhouse kitchen?"

However, Mr. Leith seemed very much at home there, and delighted Caroline and her father by his bright flashes of wit. He did his best to please that afternoon; but it was only for the benefit of the farmer and his elder daughter, or did his eyes wander in the direction of Jessie's slim figure? He could not understand why it was that the girl always avoided him. If she had wished to arouse his interest she could not have devised a better way. Her reserve piqued his curiosity, and he found her pretty face coming between him and the dusty old pages of his books.

Once he went for a long walk, and returning home in the twilight, heard her at the piano, and paused to listen; but she caught sight of his figure outside of the window, and the music ceased in an instant. When he entered the room he found it empty; but a little box of books lay on the carpet. Mr. Leith whistled, walked to the door, closed it with a shame-faced look, and actually kissed it. Then, with fingers that trembled in a most unaccountable way, he placed it in his pocket book.

"Your sister is shy," he observed to Caroline, later on.

"It isn't that," responded Caroline, with a laugh; "but she hasn't got over being turned out of her room. It was hers, you know, before you came, and she hated the idea of father taking a lodger."

"Oh," said Mr. Leith, considerably enlightened, and next evening, as Jessie was eating an apple in the orchard,

the enemy bore down on her before she could beat a retreat. "Miss Jessie," he said, taking off his hat, "you must not run away. I want to speak to you."

"What is it?" asked Jessie, coldly, throwing her apple over the hedge. She had no longer an appetite for it. "I want to apologize for having unconsciously taken possession of your little parlor. It makes me feel like an interloper."

"Who told you it was my parlor?" asked Jessie, trying to steel her heart against him; but thinking all the same, what a handsome man he was, with his blue eyes, and tawny beard.

"Never mind who told me," said George Leith, with a smile. "I know I have unconsciously deprived you of your piano ever since I have been here, and I want you to forgive me."

"It is I who ought to ask your forgiveness," returned Jessie. "I have often stolen in to have an hour with my piano when you have been out."

She smiled and colored as she spoke, unable to resist the winning sweetness of his voice and manner.

They stood watching the moon above the tree tops, talking pleasantly, until Caroline came to the door, and called her sister.

"Where on earth have you been, Jessie?" she asked.

"Talking to Mr. Leith," returned Jessie, as she followed her into the room.

"Wonders will never cease," exclaimed Caroline. "I thought you hated him; but there; I think he would talk anyone over with that pleasant voice of his."

Jessie thought so too; but she did not give vent to her opinion in words. She was looking unusually well; a color came her, but it was not the rose flush upon her cheeks that made her look so lovely. There was a change in her to-night, and her sister was vaguely conscious of it, as the girl stood looking down into the glowing fire in the kitchen grate.

"Our Jessie is growing a regular beauty," observed Caroline to her father, when her sister had gone up to bed.

"Handsome is as handsome does," returned Mr. Maybrick, puffing away at his pipe. Jessie's education had cost him no end of money, while the more homely Caroline had put pounds in his pocket.

But Mr. Maybrick had no eye for beauty. He was not like his lodger, who could get very little sleep for thinking of a pair of bright eyes and a slim girlish figure.

Next morning, as Mr. Leith sat at breakfast, he caught sight of Jessie talking to a stoutly built, curly-headed young fellow, and his heart gave a jealous throb.

Who was that rustic she seemed so interested in? He could not be her sweetheart—surely a girl like Jessie would not throw herself away on such an awkward cub.

Mr. Leith tried to read his newspaper, and forget the happy-looking couple in the garden; but it was of no use.

There they were, parading up and down in the full view of his window, and now and then their voices were wafted to him on the breeze.

He felt he could stand it no longer, and slammed down the window in a rage. What was the use of coming to the country for quiet, if people would persist in making such a racket?

He took his hat and went for a walk, and when he returned home, had the pleasure of seeing that rustic through the kitchen window, dining with the family.

Mr. Leith closed the door of his room; but he could not shut out the sound of that fellow's noisy laughter.

"If he is a frequent guest, my stay here will not be of very long duration," he thought.

Presently, to his intense annoyance, he saw Jessie and the stranger out in the garden again, and after his own dinner had been served, he heard Miss Caroline calling them in to tea, and found that the young man's name was Bob—detestable name! Mr. Leith had never felt more miserable than he did that evening, and his life had not been devoid of trouble.

Mr. Leith was sitting in the dark, and presently heard voices outside the door.

"I am sure he is out, child," said Caroline. "The lamp is not lit—you can go in and play for a little while, and Mr. Leith will never be a bit the wiser."

He did not hear Jessie answer—her voice was not so loud, but the door opened, and she came into the room, going straight over to the piano.

Mr. Leith held his breath, lying back in the arm chair, while Jessie played softly in the darkness.

He could see the dim outline of her form, as she sat at the piano for what little light there was fell upon her. He was angry with her—most unreasonably angry, but he could not lose the chance of speaking to her alone.

"Miss Jessie," he said quietly. Jessie gave a faint scream. He had frightened her so much that she trembled like a leaf. She was going to run out of the room, when his voice arrested her movement.

"I shall be sorry that I revealed myself if you are going to run away," he went on. "It is not often I have the chance of hearing you playing, Miss Jessie."

Jessie sat down at the piano, but she did not play. Her little brown hands were trembling too much. Mr. Leith rose, and stood by her side. "I shall be going back to London, soon," he said, "and it will be pleasant to think of these few moments spent with you at the piano."

"You are going away soon," faltered Jessie, and something in her voice made George Leith's heart beat more quickly.

"I saw you with that young fellow to-day," he said abruptly. "You seemed very happy."

"Bob and I are always like that," observed Jessie, her eyes beginning to sparkle, and a little smile quivering on her sweet lips. But George Leith could not see these signs of merriment.

"I hope you always will be," he said. "May I wish you every happiness?"

"You may if you like," said Jessie with an odd little break in her voice, for she was trying hard to smother her laughter.

"When is it to be?" asked Mr. Leith, trying to speak lightly, but not succeeding very well.

"When is what to be?" asked Jessie with a little gasp.

"Your marriage, of course," returned Mr. Leith, rather coldly, for he knew now that she was laughing at him.

"I think you are putting the cart before the horse," observed Jessie, demurely.

"What do you mean?" he asked impatiently.

"I mean," said Jessie, growing suddenly dignified, "that I have no lover, so it is rather premature to talk of my marriage."

"Then that young man?" began Mr. Leith.

"Is the affianced husband of my dearest friend," as she uttered these words Jessie rose from the piano to find herself clasped in the arms of her father's lodger.

"And to think," said Miss Maybrick afterward, "that you should make all that fuss about Mr. Leith coming, and then marry him after all! I was never so surprised in my life!"

"It is the best thing that could have happened to her," observed her father. "She never would have been worth anything as a farmer's wife," and indeed this is true, for Jessie never wanted to be a farmer's wife, and is quite content with the destiny that had made her Mrs. George Leith.

Why "Thon?" The attempt to introduce a neuter pronoun into the language for the purpose of doing away with the awkward phrases "he or she," "him or her," and "hers or his," is not meeting with any marked success. The word "thon" has been suggested as an escape from the difficulty; but, after all, is such a pronoun necessary? Objection is made that there is much clumsiness in such a sentence as, "Mr. A. and Mrs. B. having agreed to separate, divided their goods, and each took his or her share and went his or her way."

We concede the clumsiness of this construction, but we do not concede the advisability of overcoming the perplexity by saying, "Mr. A. and Mrs. B. having agreed to separate, divided their goods, and went their respective ways."

We are told with much force that there is great awkwardness in writing, "If any boy or girl will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for him or her, he or she will surely reach the goal of his or her ambition."

Of course there is awkwardness in it, but why should we write it, "If any boy or girl will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for them, they will surely reach the goal of their ambition," or, "If any boy or girl will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for them, they will surely reach the goal of their ambition," when the trouble may be met by writing, "If boys and girls will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for them, they will surely reach the goal of their ambition," or, "If any boy or girl will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for them, they will surely reach the goal of their ambition," when the trouble may be met by writing, "If boys and girls will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for them, they will surely reach the goal of their ambition," or, "If any boy or girl will diligently pursue the course I have marked out for them, they will surely reach the goal of their ambition," when the trouble may be met by writing, 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