

down for a single meal, The reason she gives—sickness—is not the cause, of course, for I see her every afternoon, when she always avoids the point if I broach the subject. I have set myself to fathom the mystery, and hope, by ‘tipping’ the meek-countenanced damsel who waits on our table, to learn why Miss Rose takes her meals in her room, for, as you know yourself, my love of the antique doesn’t extend so far as finding enjoyment over my cup o’ tea in the contemplation of the faded charms of a lace-capped, sixty-year-old female. There is, notwithstanding, lots of amusement for me in the way Mrs. Smythe takes her meals. She must be a considerable bother to the *chef de cuisine*, as nearly every day she returns by the waitress some dish or other for addition or alteration. Not that she has an abnormal appetite either, but she evidently likes her food done to her taste.

“Talking of the kitchen reminds me of your expressed interest in my surroundings. The kitchen is quite the most curious apartment I have seen in the country; it’s a quaint mixture of an old-time farm house and a modernized kitchen of the cities. Imagine, if you can, a square wainscotted room—the largest in the house—with walls all white-washed, and whose ceiling, unpainted and unplastered, shows the rafters with their homely garniture of dried apples, red-peppers, corn-ears, and sage, hung festoon fashion. Then there is a cherry-wood dresser, broad and ceiling high, on which are displayed the usual army of dishes in mathematically arranged rows. The deep, small-paned, windows with sills broad enough for one to sit upon, form cozy receptacles for books and papers by the score, an almanac or two, and a few boxes of scented geraniums in all the glory of their pink flowering. In between the cupboards and against the wainscoting, prim, high-backed, cushioned benches impart an air of comfort to the room, and show that, at one time, it was indeed the sitting-room of the house. In the centre, blocked high above the floor, stands the big cooking range—about the only really modern-looking article to be seen.

“Last night being colder than usual I got mine host to light a fire in the big brick fire-place and enjoyed the evening in the company of Mrs. Smythe and Rose, sitting together in the shadows of the fitful light given out by the cedar knots that crackled and sputtered cheerfully on the dog-irons.

“With comforts like these, I really begin to think, Walters, that I could manage to put in a few months here in first-rate style. I believe also—in all due modesty—that my conversational powers are not thrown away upon Rose, for her hand-shake last evening was quite as warm as I could wish, after a week’s acquaintance.

“You might forward any letters of mine, in return for which I shall endeavour to keep you possessed of the latest news from ‘the seat of war.’ I was just going to add, I didn’t mind your telling Emily of my newly-found happiness, my treasure-trove of manna in the wilderness, but, on second thoughts, deem it better that the facts remain between you and myself—at least, for the present. If you have nothing else to do you can occupy yourself in spreading a report among her friends that I have suicided.”

### III.

#### *The Same to the Same.*

“The post-mark on the envelope has doubtless acquainted you of my arrival at Bracebridge. You owe the confession—here written—to the result of ponderings, long and deep, as to the advisability of letting you know of the *denouement* of my stay at P—.

“The evening before my departure was one of exceeding happiness; Rose was all graciousness and kindness, but, alas, for me, the joy I had been learning to look forward to was not to be. My misfortunes began as soon as I got to sleep; dreams of the most horrible nature disturbed me night-long. Near morning I woke with a start, conscious of having seen Rose in a coffin, stark and stiff; and after that, didn’t get to sleep again. Although not of that uncomfortable class of people who believe in dreams, I was greatly relieved when the breakfast-bell summoned the small household downstairs.

“My fears were dispelled before I reached the dining-room. The door from the kitchen was open as I came down the hall. I wish I were possessed of some of your ability for portraying dramatic situations, for then I could tell you properly of the sense of ease felt at seeing the servant, just as usual—her back to me—with disarranged head-dress, arms all unencumbered of drapery, and, judging by unmistakable movements, engaged in that pleasant domestic operation of peeling potatoes.

“I’ll satisfy myself now,” thought I instantly, when, hearing the footsteps, she turned her face full upon me, and the face—alas! that I am alive to pen it—was that of—Rose.”

I add, as briefly as possible, that is the reason I came north for the shooting.

“While I write, the stage from Gravenhurst has brought me a letter from Emily, forwarded from P—. Did you leave any of my foolish letters about? I ask this, as she seems to know all about my escapade with that hoydenish country vixen and the ancient female boarder. Oh, how she does make fun of me! I shall never have the courage to come to Toronto again—a laughing-stock for her. What would you do under the circumstances? I think I had better write and do the ‘indignant denial’ act about the whole business. Let me hear from you soon.”

### IV.

#### *Mr. Walters to Mr. Murchison.*

“The sound of successive fits of tumultuous laughter and wrathful groans have, all day long, been disturbing the usual calm of such of my neighbours as have had their offices within hearing distance of my little studio in Wellington street. Although I had some inkling of the state of affairs in connection with your P— acquaintance, I didn’t know the whole truth till last night. I think it proper, *pro tem*, to put my righteous wrath in my pocket, and tell you how, and what, I know of it.

“In the first place, your Miss Emily (who, by the bye, tells me she wants to make it up with you, and says she has herself to blame for the past) has all along been aware of your whereabouts and doings, through a certain friend of the Mrs. Smythe—your ‘lace-capped, sixty-year-old female,’—who is the lady I remember telling you of as having a weakness for cheap rural living. In the second place, the ‘certain friend’ mentioned is really the old lady’s niece, and, besides—which is far more to the point—is the girl I intend to marry next month, if the last batch of pictures pan out as expected. My! but the missus would rage if she could see your vituperative attack on herself. I promise, however, never to produce it if you behave in the future.

“Perhaps you are wondering how the old lady’s voice got hold of her information about Rose’s doings; but the mystery is cleared when I tell you that Rose and ‘the niece’ are one and the same ‘fair blue-eyed creature’—to wit—your ‘rustic charmer.’ Oh, you villain, how my fives ache to grasp your throat! But Rose declares she’ll quarrel with me if I attempt to vent my rage upon you. She says she ‘led you on’ (‘led’—think of that, my young Englishman!) to prove to Emily’s complete satisfaction that she could estrange your heart from its allegiance.

“The mystery,—which, you informed me, was solved so suddenly and so unsatisfactorily for yourself—also disappears into sky-blue smoke under the light of further information. Mrs. Smythe found the cooking at the P— hotel too execrably ‘rural’ even for her taste, and as a last resort permitted her niece, Rose, to take charge of the arrangements for her meals. It was in the performance of one of her less attractive self-imposed duties that you discovered her, and, as she avers, just when she was tolerably certain of her conquest.

“All this to the contrary, Emily still believes in you and says it happened because of her ill-treatment. Come home, friend Murchison, by all means, and soon; and as for me, when I shortly link myself for life to a certain ‘hoydenish vixen’ that you know of, I will permit her to say nothing that will interfere in the slightest with your equanimity of temper.”

T. M.