

How Deacon Grover Proposed.

NOW see here Jacob, I come home when Mary Ann died so sudden, and left you with them three motherless children, and took right hold and looked after things same as if they was my own. I don't know as you hev much reason to complain, you hev had your clothes, and the children's seen to; you hev had good victuals, and han't ben nothin' wasted. The milk's ben took good care of, well you know you get more for your butter than any one round here. I don't see no call for you to go and get married, at your time of life, too, and you a deacon in the church."

"I don't see what you are talking so, Jerusha, I haven't found eny fault have I? I guess I shan't get married to-night."

"Wall, I ain't a fool, Jacob, you didn't used to stan' before the glass, brushin' your hair a half an hour, je t u go tu evenin' meetin', and I ain't the only one that has noticed how you air sprucing up lately. Mrs. Green was in here this afternoon, and she spoke 'bout it. She said, 'she shouldn't wonder a mite of you was married before winter.'"

"Mrs. Green is a good hand to mind other folk's business. She had better stay at home and take care of her family."

"Wall, all I hev tu say is, ef you must get married don't for massy sake hev that Clarissa Howe, what'll she know."

The Deacon, who had finished his toilet, did not wait to hear the rest of Aunt Jerusha's remarks, but went out of the room, closing the door with just a little slam, and walked rather faster than usual toward the little church, to take part in the Tuesday evening prayer meeting. Deacon Grover was not, by any means an old man, as his half-sister Jerusha had hinted; only forty. Tall, and as erect as if he were a soldier instead of a farmer, with hardly a silver thread among his glossy black hair.

It is now three years since Mrs. Grover, the Deacon's wife, died, leaving three children, two boys, and a little daughter only three years old. The Deacon had been very fond of his wife, and had sincerely mourned her loss. She was sadly missed in her home, for she had been one "who looked well to the ways of her household, and ate not the bread of idleness."

Deacon Grover had been glad to accept the services of his sister, to look after his house and children, especially little Mary, who was a delicate child and needed constant attention, and had got along very well with Jerusha, accounting for her eccentric ways by remembering a disappointment in love, which had made her the old maid she was.

As Jerusha was several years older than her brother, she did not hesitate to express her opinion at the way he managed his affairs, and give him plenty of advice. "She had done her duty by Jacob, and the children, and took right hold and looked after things same as if they's my own," so she told Mrs. Green, but the children wanted something besides wholesome food and clean clothes, and doses of herb tea; they missed a mother's love. Little Mary had found out it was no use to ask aunt Jerusha "to sing to her, or tell her a story, as mamma used to," the answer was sure to be, "I hain't got time; go and set down in your little chair and be a good girl." So when papa was not about she lavished her affection on her kitten or doll.

So the months and years had passed, and the deacon had

never given any indication that he intended to change his lonely condition. In vain had sister Babbitt, a buxom widow, expressed her sympathy for him, and was evidently willing to "unite her fortune with his in the tenderest of ties."

About six months before the date I am writing, Clarissa Howe had come to this little village among the Vermont hills, to try and earn her living by dressmaking. A cousin who was married to a farmer, had written her, that the only dressmaker in the place had been obliged to give up work on account of her health, so Clarissa, whose early home had been in the country, gladly left her little room in the top of a cheap city boarding house, and went to Harland, where she made her home with her cousin, going about from house to house cutting and making dresses for seventy-five cents a day. Although she worked hard, for everyone was anxious to have the city dressmaker, and June country air, fresh milk, and home made bread, and perhaps a lighter heart, brought back the color to her cheeks, and sparkle to her eyes. Her cousin told her that she was getting young. Clarissa was not twenty-eight. Her parents had died when she was sixteen, leaving her almost entirely dependent upon her own support. When she was about twenty, she became engaged to a young man she had long known, and was looking forward to a home of her own, if only a humble one, when a dreadful accident occurred on the railroad, where John Porter, her lover, a brakeman, was instantly killed. Since that time Clarissa had worked on, taking but little interest in anything, and only caring to earn enough to keep out of debt. This change from the city to the country had been just what she had needed. She arrived in Harland in April, when all nature was awakening to new life. The meadows and hillsides were beautiful with the fresh grass of spring. On every tree and bush the brown buds were bursting, and the tiny green leaf peeping out. Robins were singing blithely, as they slyly watched the ploughman turn over the brown furrows, knowing they would not have to go far for their dinner.

So with the sweet spring-time new hope and courage sprung up in Clarissa's heart. Life had a good deal of brightness in it, for her, after all.

As Deacon Grover walked toward the church, with Jerusha's remarks ringing in his ear, he was obliged to admit that the dearest wish of his heart was to make Clarissa Howe his wife. The first time he saw her at church, and heard her sweet voice singing the familiar hymns, he had almost fallen in love with her, and afterward seeing her at the evening meeting, with her cousin, who had given him an introduction, he was still more pleased with her. Never, in his young days when he was paying attention to Mary Ann, had he been so much in love. When he was about his work he found himself thinking of Clarissa. His field of ripening wheat, reminded him of her golden brown hair, and the blue violets, that little Mary picked down by the brook, and brought to him to put in water for her, just matched her eyes.

He had never paid any particular attention to Clarissa but somehow it had begun to be whispered around "that Deacon Grover was all took up with the new dressmaker."

Mrs. Green had been the first to carry the news to Aunt Jerusha, who was very indignant. Although she had a little home of her own, she liked her position as mistress of her brother's house, and the rent of her place could be all put in the bank.

"The idee," she said, "of Jacob marryin' that air city dressmaker, what'll she know 'bout takin' care of milk, and