

## MARCIA'S MADONNA.

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"'Twould be enough to know you loved me, Alfred Walton. Did you never think of it in all the days—the days—I—I want I think I want—you—?" She passed one hand confusedly across her brow, and by some dexterous movement he did not believe himself capable of, he slipped behind her and out of the room, in a perfect transport of preternatural joy. He screened himself under the old rep hangings of the doorway and waited with breathless anxiety for what might follow. He could not see her now, but he heard her move about and presently draw a long breath and say to herself in a half whisper: "Dear me, what am I doing here? I went to sleep in the library, could I have come this far without waking up?" The eavesdropper could hear his own heart beat, but to his relief she seemed suddenly to realize the situation, and that she had no time to lose if she was going to midnight mass.

She came to the door within an inch of where he stood and peered anxiously around. But the coast was safe and clear, so she sped along towards the library, and Alfred Walton breathed again. He had crossed the Rubicon of his doubt in a few brief moments, and he was the happiest man in all the world that Christmas Eve.

The missing element for the double elective affinity was not long forthcoming. Scarcely had the trio emerged from the old stone gateway than a neighbor fell in with Marcia's father and gave Mr. Walton his coveted opportunity.

Marcia walked beside him silent and pale and strange in the hallowed moonlight. The bells were pealing out their tidings of great joy; the air was crisp and stimulating; the sweet spell of reverent association touched the white roofs and the naked branches. It might have been a street in Bethlehem in the days of king Herod, so

vivid to the fancy of the midnight worshippers was the storied coming of the Infant Saviour.

"The way is not smooth, Miss Marcia, will you lean upon my arm?" Mr. Walton said when they had turned into the open road. She was going to demur, as he half expected she would, but after a moment's hesitation she changed her mind.

"I am feeling only pretty well," she said a little gaily, "so I will take your help."

Then they walked on in silence for a while, Mr. Walton wondering, probably, if the earth thrilled all the way to the centre when the apple it had attracted touched its surface, and if the heart of the apple thumped in responsive perturbation. All at once he began to think about his projected speech, but the road was shortening and he could not quite remember how he was to attack it. Then it occurred to him that the silence was very sweet and suggestive and he doubted if he could improve on it by talking. Still there was something waiting to be said to make it less embarrassing. He looked down at the gentle, sorrowful face beside him.

"Marcia"—of course she raised her eyes to his—"do you know this is the first glad Christmas I have ever had?"

The girl's white lids drooped at once, and she turned her head away.

"Oh, if I might say more, Marcia!"—he pleaded without restraint now. "Will you let me tell it all, dear? I can be brief and put it in a word. Marcia?"

"What is it, Mr. Walton?"

"Were we not made to love each other, you and I? Are we not needful to each other's peace and joy? Tell me; what do you think?"

"I think we were made so, Mr. Walton. I think we could give each other joy."

"Marcia," he said, "I thank God for this night and these words."

"And His mother," the girl put in devoutly. "Ah yes, the dear Madonna," Mr. Walton answered, "I thank her too."

[THE END.]