

How well he succeeded the future alone will show!

The youthful pair, all unconscious of these plots against their peace, and also of the very queer act in life's drama which they were to play that bright June day, were riding briskly along the smooth, wide road that led into the country, enjoying to the uttermost the green fields, sparkling brooks and gay flowers, with faces as bright and smiling as their own happy, joyous hearts could make them.

"Where are we going, Robbie?" asked Dora, suddenly remembering that she did not know.

"I thought we'd ride out to N—and look at Squire Moulton's new statuary. I heard he had just received some, and that it's the finest collection in the country. I have a nice little lunch in a basket here, and after we've seen all we want to, we'll go down by the lake and eat it.

"Oh, how nice!" said Dora, clapping her hands. "Is it that great big house with the beautiful grounds, where we went to the picnic last summer?"

"Yes; only you remember I didn't go. Father doesn't like the squire very much," his face clouding for an instant.

"What is the reason he does not like him?" asked Dora, inquisitively.

"I don't know, I'm sure, only he was very cross last year when I asked if I might go to the squire's picnic, and I thought he swore about him."

"I don't care," said Dora hotly. "I think he's a real nice man to give all the children a picnic, and we had a splendid time. I shouldn't think he'd let you go to-day, if he wouldn't then."

"He didn't know where I was going to-day. I asked if I might take old Prince, and he said yes; but I don't think there would be any harm in going to see the statuary," replied Robert, though the hot blood rushed to his face, as if he felt half guilty.

"I don't think there is any harm, either; but, oh, Robbie, look at that squirrel there!—there he goes, right through the wall."

"Yes, and there goes its mate. Now they've both gone into that hole in that tree."

"Yes; how cunning they were! I wish you and I were squirrels, with nothing else to do but run around in the sunshine all day, and eat nuts; it must be real fun, glancing back wistfully toward the place where the squirrels had disappeared."

"Oh, no, Dora, you don't either; you forget that if we were squirrels we could not be married, and you know that some day you are to be my little wife," replied Robert, looking roguishly at her.

"Yes, I could be your wife just the same; for don't you suppose one of those squirrels was the other's wife? And then we shouldn't have to work. I hate to wash dishes, and dust, and —"

"Well, Dora," interrupted Robert, "you won't have to work when you marry me, for I shall have plenty of money, and you can have servants to do the work, and all you'll have to do will be to dress up in pretty clothes and trinkets, and play all the time, if you want to."

"Oh, that will be so nice, Robbie!" exclaiming Dora, heaving a sigh of relief at the pleasing prospect of not having to work. "I wish I were your little wife now."

"Do you?" he asked, a bright look coming into his face. "Well, I'll tell you what we will do. We will go and be married before we go home, then I can take you to mother, for she will be my mother too, then. Will you, Brightie?"

"Yes, indeed, we will," replied Dora. "Then my name will be Dora Ellerton, won't it? I think it's a real pretty name, too. But who will marry us, Robbie?"

"I don't know. I guess Squire Moulton will; he's justice, or something. Anyway, I'll ask him. Come, get up, old Prince, for we are going to be married."

He touched the horse lightly with the whip, and these two children so full of their fun and mischief, laughed, chatted, and planned for the future, little dreaming of the sorrow and misery they were about to entail upon themselves.

At length they rode up the broad driveway, and stopped before the squire's elegant country seat.

He was not in, the man said, who opened the door for them, but guessed they would find him somewhere about the grounds.

"Well, no matter," said Robert, who was beginning to feel a little embarrassed with this strange errand. "We will go and find him."

And taking Dora by the hand, they strolled down one of the beautiful walks until they came to a rustic arbor.

On looking within they discovered a little bent man of about fifty, with sharp black eyes and grizzly hair.

He looked up crossly as they entered, and demanded what they wanted, in a tone that made Dora shrink closer to Robert's side.

"Are you Squire Moulton, sir?" asked Robert, respectfully.

"Yes, I'm Squire Moulton. What is it?" he replied sarcastically mimicking the boy's manner.

"We've come to be married; that's what we want," said Dora, smartly, at the same time snapping her large eyes angrily at him.

"Come to be married, indeed! Ha! ha! ha!"

The little gray-headed old man went off into a paroxysm of laughter that made the echoes ring all over the grounds, while his evil black eyes glowed with the intensity of his merriment.

"And pray," he continued, when he could find breath to speak, and looking amusedly at the youthful pair before him, "who are you, and what may be the names of the parties who wish to assume the hymeneal yoke?"

And he laughed again.

"My name is Dora Dupont, and Robbie's is Robert Ellerton, and you needn't laugh, either, for we've been engaged this long time."

There was a sudden change in the man's manner, and he repeated, with a dark scowl, looking first at one, then the other.

"Been engaged this long time, have you?"

"Yes, we have, and if you won't marry us, we can go to some one else. Robbie is rich, and I guess he can pay for it, so you needn't be afraid about that."

The indignant little lady's face was of a crimson hue, and her blue eyes snapped fire, while she enforced her speech with a stamp of her tiny foot, as she stood erect and defiant before him.

They made a strange picture, and one that each remembered in the long, dreary years that followed. That gray old man, with his evil face, and wicked eyes, sitting there, looking so intently at the two children before him. Robert with his fine, manly face, glowing with excitement and exercise, a smile wreathing his full lips at Dora's anger, while at the same time there was a half perplexed look in his eyes at the old man's words and manner. He was holding Dora's hand in a protecting sort of way, while she stood all flushed and indignant, and half ready to cry at the bare idea of being made fun of, her hair tossed and flying with every motion of her quivering little form.

Yes, it was an interesting and striking picture beneath the rustic arbor, with the waving trees, the bright sunshine, and beautiful flowers, for a back-ground, interspersed here and there with the gleaming white figures of statuary, and an occasional glimpse of the silvery waters of a miniature lake, as the waving branches of the trees were parted by a gentle breeze.

As Dora mentioned the name of Robert Ellerton, a sudden change came over the squire's wrinkled face.

He became ashy pale, his lips were clenched beneath his teeth until they sank deep into the flesh, and his coal-black eyes became almost red with the fierce blaze of passion that seemed to stir him.

His frame quivered, and he glanced at the youthful lovers in a way that frightened Dora, who pulled Robert by the sleeve, and whispered that she was afraid, and wanted to go home.

Robert stood silent and spell-bound at the sudden and almost terrifying change in the squire's manner, staring at him with wonder-wide eyes and gaping mouth.

"Robert Ellerton!" at length almost gasped the man. "And is your father's name Robert Ellerton, too, young man?"

"Yes, sir," replied the boy, still regarding him with surprise.

"And your mother—tell me quick," he continued, hastily, and almost sternly.

"My mother is dead, sir. She died when I was born, and Aunt Nannie has always taken care of me."

"Dead! Oh, Heaven, dead! Jessie dead!" muttered the old man, pressing his hand to his side, and staggering back upon the seat from which he had just arisen.

Great beads of perspiration stood upon his brow, and his hands shook as if with palsy, as he took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped them off.

"Oh, Jessie," he wailed, "thou wert lost to me before, but I did not think that thou hadst gone so long to the regions of the unknown."

"Say, boy," he added, and he clutched Robert almost fiercely by the arm, "was your father kind to her? Did she love him?"

"Of course he was kind to her—of course she loved him," replied Robert, indignantly, but wondering still more at the man's strange behavior.

"Come, Dora," he added, "we will go home; we won't stay here any longer."

He again took Dora's hand, which he had dropped in his astonishment, and started to leave the place.

"Stay," said Squire Moulton, quickly and a wicked expression swept away the