

HOW MOLLIE SAVED THE TRAIN.

BY ELLA WHEELER WILCOX.

There was a tap at my door, and Miss Trimmings entered.

She was beautifully attired for the street, and carried a dainty silk portemonnaie hung by a gold ring upon one finger.

"I am going out. Is there anything I can do for you in the line of shopping?" she asked, at the same time turning gracefully about, that I might see the jaunty tilt of the left side of her hat, while ostensibly she sought for a better light on a refractory glove button.

"No, I thank you," I said. "You know my wants are few; but you were kind to come in, and you are looking like a fashion-plate in the latest magazine. That is a costume which I have never seen before. Is it new?"

"Oh dear, no! I have worn it two or three times at least; but never here. I don't like the front darts—they run too high and give me a bad figure, I think. But I may as well wear it in this dull place. I do hope papa will tire of it and take me away—I don't suppose he will, though, for he seems delighted with the scenery, and imagines the waters help his rheumatism. Well, good bye. I am glad you like my dress."

And Miss Trimmings went out.

Now her name was not Miss Trimmings at all, but Agnes Curshaw; but I may as well tell you at once that I am a queer old woman, with old-fashioned notions about some things, a great many aches and pains, and numerous disagreeable qualities.

I am a childless widow, with a competence and rheumatism; and from dwelling much alone within myself at innumerable health-resorts and watering-places, where I sought cures for my pains, I fell into the habit of discovering the peculiarities of people, and nicknaming them accordingly, to amuse myself.

As I made no confidants and these matters, I entertained myself and harmed no one.

When I came to "Sulphur Lake"—one of those mineral spring resorts so numerous in Wisconsin and Minnesota, springing up along the two lines of railroad like mushrooms in the night—when I came there, I say, lured by wonderful stories of miraculous curative properties found in the waters, the summer hotel, which was no more than a private residence enlarged by the addition of a wing and a veranda, contained but two regular guests. These were Miss Curshaw and her father. The latter, owing to our respective rheumatisms, which kept us much in our rooms, I seldom saw.

Miss Agnes sought me out in my retirement and declared herself fairly dying for want of companionship. I endeavored to entertain her to the best of my ability, but for a time I seemed to make poor progress.

I was unable to find any subject of conversation congenial to her taste.

I spoke of her father's physical ailments, but she declared herself worn to a skeleton listening to and talking of his aches and pains.

"Pray let us speak of something else," she said. "I am sure I am sympathetic, but I am so much with papa that when I get with other people I want a change of mental diet, you see."

Then I broached books, but Miss Agnes yawned, and when I asked her who were her favorite authors she said she really did not know. That she believed Howells and James were very popular just now, though she had never read their books. She recalled a charming story called "The Hidden Hand," which she once read, but she had forgotten the author's name.

"Perhaps your taste runs more to poetry," I suggested.

"Yes, I think it does," she answered. "I have a young gentleman friend—Mr. Archer—Hugh Archer—who writes beautiful verses. He wrote a rondeau (he called it by that name, though I am sure I don't know what it means) upon a new walking hat I once had. Every verse ended with 'That jaunty hat.' It was a lovely hat—I was so sorry when it went out of style. I never have been able to find another shape so becoming."

"Aha!" I ejaculated mentally. "I have found her vulnerable heel."

And I proceeded to draw out her hidden powers of conversation upon the subject of the fashions.

She was voluble, as I expected. Thereafter I was never unable to interest her. I had only to admire her numerous costumes, to discuss those of the "transients," who came and went as the season progressed, to question her upon the newest freaks of fashion, and Miss Agnes was at ease, highly entertained, and entertaining.

And so I called her Miss Trimmings.

As I turned to the window to watch her go down the street—for I enjoyed the picturesque effect of her soft gray draperies and her scarlet parasol against the rugged green bluffs that surrounded Sulphur Lake—I saw Miss Folly standing on the veranda, giving arch glances to two or three young men who were smoking and lounging in the July sunshine.

Miss Folly was the name I had given to Mollie Sawyer, our landlord's daughter.

She was not more than sixteen, but voluptuously developed in figure, and with a face full of a rich animal beauty. She helped about the house, sometimes assisting in the dining-room when the tables were crowded, and seemed a willing, capable girl. Her father and mother were inordinately proud of her.

"Moll can turn her hand to most anything," Mr. Sawyer had been heard to remark in the office to a bevy of his guests. "She can cook, and wait on table, and make a shirt, and play a pianer and sing with the best of our fine ladies; and she can ride a horse like a circus performer, and dance like anything, and she's as good as she is handsome."

"All the young fellows about here are quite crazy over Mollie," Mrs. Sawyer, a thin, weak voiced little woman said to me one day, as Miss Mollie was called for by two rival admirers at one time; "but Mollie just laughs and jokes with all of them, and that's the end of it. They call her a great flirt, but she's set her mind on something higher than the fellows around these parts."

"She is rather young to be thinking of such things, isn't she?" I queried cautiously.

"Oh, I don't know, Mollie is sixteen and large for her age. It's natural she should attract attention, and natural she should like it, too. I want her to have a good time while she can, care will come soon enough."

"Yes, but I should think you would feel like guarding her rather carefully," I ventured, "she is so young, and so exposed here in the hotel. There are so many dangers surrounding a handsome, inexperienced girl of Mollie's age."

Mrs. Sawyer laughed carelessly. "I'll risk Mollie," she said; "she'll always look out for herself. She isn't one of the kind to get fooled easily, Mollie isn't; she's too smart."

I could say no more. When father and mother were so full of confidence and security regarding their daughter's welfare, it ill becomes me to be solicitous.

Yet, as I watched Mollie from my window that July afternoon, I felt like snatching her away from that bevy of loungers, and shutting her handsome,

foolish face in my clothes-press for twenty-four hours.

There she was, all smartly dressed in a freshly laundered blue cambric—a great bunch of red roses at her belt, her short skirts displaying her rounded ankles, as she whisked up and down the length of the veranda, exchanging saucy sallies and arch glances with the young men whom she had not known twenty-four hours. They were only transient guests, like most of the young men who came to Sulphur Lake, stopping over a train, or for a day, to fish, or hunt, or merely to see what the place was like, and then journeying on to more attractive or more fashionable resorts.

I heard Mrs. Sawyer's thin treble voice calling, "Mollie, come here a moment," just then, and Mollie dashed away, like a young doe. And I heard the young men comment on her shape, and laugh in a way that made my blood run cold, as she disappeared.

When Miss Trimmings returned from her walk to the post-office, and about the little town, there was quite an unusual glow upon her somewhat sallow face. She came direct to my room, and after walking before the mirror and pulling down the basque of her dress in the back, she set a paper of caramels and gum-drops on my table, and sank into a chair.

"Well," she said, "the monotony is going to be broken somewhat for me. I have a friend coming!"

"Indeed," I answered, thinking she looked almost pretty with that flush on her cheek, and sparkle in her eye, "I am glad for you. Is it a dear friend?"

Miss Trimmings turned a solitaire ring on her left hand in an absent-minded manner.

"Why, yes," she said; "it is a very dear friend of papa's and mine. It is the young man I mentioned who wrote the verses about my hat—Mr. Archer."

"Oho! then we are to have a poet here, are we?" I responded laughingly. "Well, now I suppose the beauty and wonders of Sulphur Lake resort will be sung for all the world to hear."

"Oh, he's not a real poet—I mean he doesn't make it a business, or a profession, or whatever you may call it. He is an attorney-at-law; and a very eloquent pleader, papa says. I never heard him plead, myself."

"What! never?" I repeated, and Miss Trimmings burst out laughing, and blushed very prettily.

"Oh, Mrs. Dillingham," she said, "I never thought you would be guilty of quoting 'Pinafore,' and in such a way. Well, then, I never heard Mr. Archer plead in public. Dear me, how this basque does hunch up in the back; I will never trust that modiste again—never. She was highly recommended to me but she just ruined this dress. And now I want to show you such lovely samples of wash-goods. I sent to Chicago for them, and they came in to-day's mail. Wouldn't this be just too sweet for anything made up with torchon lace, or embroidery in colors?" And for a full half hour I worshipped with Miss Trimmings over her samples. And Mr. Archer, pleader and poet, seemed entirely forgotten.

When we went into supper that evening, I sat near Miss Trimmings and her father, who was enthusiastic over the benefits he received from the mineral waters, and I confessed myself much better than when I came.

"I shall stay the season out," he said, "and give the place a fair trial."

"I fear your daughter will die of ennui," I answered.

"Oh what, ma'am? is she ailing?" asked the old gentleman with sudden solicitude. Mr. Curshaw, who had passed twenty years of his life in the mining region, was possessed of more money than education.

"Of weariness—dullness," I explained.

"Oh!" said Mr. Curshaw, with a relieved laugh. "Well, he'll get over

that when to-morrow afternoon arrives, or rather to-morrow evening, about 11 P.M. We have a friend coming to amuse her."

"I shouldn't think Mrs. Sawyer would allow her little girl to wait on the tables," said Miss Trimmings, suddenly changing the conversation.

"She is scarcely a little girl any longer," I responded. "She is a young lady in stature, and altogether too handsome to live the unguarded life she does in this hotel."

Miss Trimmings surveyed Mollie as she flitted about the tables, with that coldly critical look which only one woman can give another.

"Do you think her handsome?" she asked, "I don't, she is too fat."

Miss Trimmings was of the Burne-Jones style of damsel in form.

"But she seems to have quite an idea of getting herself up effectively," she continued. "And in this benighted region, where there are no ideas of fashion and no dressmakers, she makes a very presentable appearance. Too bad she can't live where she can learn how to dress stylishly. Her figure could be wonderfully improved in a well-fitted dress."

"Too bad she can't be chaperoned," I responded rather tartly. "She needs a careful adviser more than she needs a dressmaker."

"Oh, I don't know," Miss Trimmings mused. "I am rather in favor of the American freedom for girls. I was never chaperoned, and papa always lets me look after myself, and I never get into any trouble through it. I think a modest girl naturally knows what is proper, and though she may sometimes be imprudent in an excess of spirits, people understand it and excuse her. And it is so much better than the old country surveillance, which is an absolute insult to any pure-minded girl."

"They may carry it to an extreme in foreign countries," I replied; "in fact, I think they do. But I confess I would like to see a little more of it here. And it is creeping into our most careful circles, just as our broader liberality of thought and life is creeping into foreign society. It would be no insult to Miss Mollie if her mother restricted her absolute freedom of action here, and taught her the dangers of too great familiarity with strangers. It would be a kindness. She is as full of bounding life as a young doe, and as ignorant of the world as a baby, and as vain as a peacock. I tremble for her good name; for talk as much as we will about the respect the American gentleman shows womankind, I hear men every day of my life, wherever I go, comment on the forms, faces, conduct, and demeanor of innocent women, in a way that fairly makes my old blood boil and congeal alternately. Of course you do not hear these things as I do, Miss Agnes; if you did, you would feel that a woman could not be too careful, even in this land of the brave and the home of the free."

"Well, we all judge the world more or less from our own experiences," Miss Agnes replied, as we rose from the table, "and as mine have been pleasant, and, so far as I know, have never caused me to be severely scandalized, I naturally take a liberal view of these matters, and I am sure I could never abide a chaperon."

"But you must remember many young girls are endowed with less prudence, and more weaknesses than you," I said; and as I moved off to my room, I added mentally, "with more beauty and vitality. I would as soon think of a dressmaker's model being imprudent as you Miss Trimmings." I fear that was a disagreeable appendix to my remarks, but I confess I often quite lose my patience with women who pride themselves on their own blameless, immaculate lives, and shew no pity and no charity for those who are imprudent or unwise; forgetting that