

A Country Wedding.

BY YESTER.

II.

"She has hardly looked at Arthur since he came."

"Why should she? She'll have him all to herself at Lake Edward. You might say he has hardly looked at her."

"I couldn't tell such a story. Didn't you see the furtive glances he gave her while she was with Aunt? I didn't know he could look so benevolent. He was positively paternal, and he is only ten years older than she."

"Dear old fellow!" I said, impulsively.

"Who? Me?" asked Tom, who appeared just then at the window with the subject of our conversation.

No; 'Tim," I answered, deceitfully. "Where is he?"

"Locked up," said Arthur, as he vaulted into the room and began to play with the wild daisies we were to wear the next day. "What about flowers for Annie? You told me not to order them for any of you."

"No; we think these wild daisies so much nicer for a country wedding. And you wished to set aside conventionalities."

"Yes, by all means. I don't think anything could be prettier or more suitable than these; but I'll get Annie's myself."

"Very well," I said; "but you'll have to be bright and early."

"You know you are not to see Annie till you meet in church," said Belle. "It is a most unheard-of thing for the bridegroom to be on the premises."

"When are you going to let us go to bed?" gaped Tom.

Aunt came in just then. "Your uncle has gone to bed, and there is nothing to keep you two up. I have just arranged your sofa. Tell me if you have blankets enough," she said.

"Arthur and I are starving, Aunt Kitty. We'll go as soon as we've had some grub."

So we all repaired to the cool dairy, where we made merry on bread and maple sugar and cream till Tom pronounced himself satisfied.

We then separated for the night, feeling thankful that the day was really at an end at last.

III.

Belle and I, who slept together in a little room above the dining-room, were soon in a deep sleep, which, however, was not destined to remain undisturbed. We were both heavy sleepers, and I was surprised to find myself awake to hear the clock strike two, while Belle was tossing restlessly by my side. I seemed oppressed with the vague memory of a dream, in which earthquakes, thunder, weddings and turkeys were strangely mixed, and, as dreaming was a folly I seldom indulged in at night, I was at a loss to account for it. As I lay trying to untangle this nightmare, the bed under me shook, and I heard a terrible thud on the floor somewhere near, and dreadful sounds of choking, which seemed to come from under the bed. The dream was an awful reality, then, and I grasped Belle's arm in terror. She had just awakened.

"Oh! Janie, what can it be? Did you hear that awful sound?"

"Yes," I said, hoarsely, but our voices sounded so uncanny that for a moment or two we lay in silence, while the accounts I had read in the newspapers of horrible murders perpetrated not very far from uncle's home came to my mind, and I wondered if the "epidemic of murder," to quote the newspapers, had reached this peaceful part of the country.

"Can it be the dogs, Belle?" I ventured, tremulously.

"No, no!" was her answer, in an agonized whisper. "It was too awfully human."

The same thoughts had crossed her mind then. Again came the terrible gasping and struggling, and for a moment a light flashed through a chink somewhere in the room, but in my fright I had forgotten

which way the bed was turned, and could not place myself at all. I should have fainted if Belle had not caught my arm, as she sat up in bed, saying, firmly:

"Janie, we musn't be cowards. Perhaps somebody is being murdered while we be here."

Before I could answer she was out of bed and groping for the matches, and her courage was sufficiently contagious to enable me to crawl out too and feel for my slippers. In a moment she had the candle lighted and her dressing-gown on.

"You be ready when I come back. I'm going to wake Uncle," and she disappeared before I had discovered where the sleeves of my wrapper were.

The few minutes she was away seemed an eternity to me, and my ear caught fainter sounds of heavy breathing, and what seemed the rustle of a garment.

Belle returned. "Uncle is going to wake John," she said. "I had a dreadful time getting him to understand."

Master and serving-man soon joined us in the passage, the former armed with his revolver and the latter with a crowbar. Aunt followed, "to see that nothing happened to Harry," wrapped in an old shawl, and we three women followed the two men downstairs. A crash sounded as we reached the bottom stairs.

"They're in the dining-room! They're murdered, Tom and Arthur!" I almost screamed.

The candle which uncle carried was blown out by a gust of wind as we reached the dining-room door, and to our surprise we found a light in there.

Our feelings can better be imagined than described at the sight which met our eyes.

Arthur was on the floor—not dead nor insensible, but struggling to free himself from the grasp of Tom, who was holding him down while he tried to stuff the sheet into his mouth to prevent him calling out. The bedding was scattered about the room and the pillows were everywhere; the chairs were knocked over, and fragments of glass lay at the side of the table where the wedding breakfast was laid. Both the young men were in the light attire suitable to the hour, and it was evidently the wind-up of a pillow fight.

The reaction brought on by this strange sight almost gave me a fit of hysterics, and I sank into the only chair that stood upon its legs.

Tom started up when he found there were spectators, and Arthur slowly got to a sitting posture. At last, as no one else spoke, the latters aid, in a sheepish way, while he wrapped himself in the counterpane, "That fool wouldn't let me sleep."

Tom began to laugh and uncle turned in a fury, not on the real culprit, but, to our unspeakable dismay, on his most highly eligible future son-in-law, guest in his own house.

John was grinning from ear to ear in the doorway, and I laughed till I ached, though on the verge of despair at the serious turn things had taken.

"Fool yourself!" he shouted, "not to have more sense than to play schoolboy's pranks at your age. And a married man, too! You're not content with having my house turned inside out and upside down to suit your convenience, but you must wake me out of my first sleep for nothing by your tom-foolery. A nice sort of man to get my Annie!"

In this outburst poor uncle vented not only his disappointment in not having had to tackle a murderer, or at least a burglar, after being disturbed, but all the mixed and pent-up feelings of the last two weeks, occasioned by having had his house managed by two wilful nieces, while the wife of his bosom had other interests, together with the vague and undefined feeling of sadness caused by the near departure of his little daughter.

The bridegroom elect, naturally enough, perhaps, failed to enter into the feelings of his proposed relative, and his reply showed a decided want of sympathy with the aggrieved captain.

"I'm not a married man yet," he said, getting off the floor and gathering the counterpane round him in graceful folds, "and I shall not be one as soon as I expected. When I do marry Annie, and I'll do it yet, it will not be from this house, so you will be put to no further inconvenience." Then,

turning to aunt, he said, "Mrs. Denham, you'll explain it to her, won't you?—and take care of her"—his voice was a little husky here—"I'll write to her as soon as possible."

Uncle was silenced, and Tom and Belle both began to hold forth.

"What a dreadful man you are, uncle," cried the audacious Belle, "to speak to Arthur that way. Can't you see it was all that idiot Tom! Nothing in the world will ever make him act like a rational being."

"Why, uncle, it was nothing but a pillow fight, and I began it. Arthur was fast asleep, but a brute of an old mosquito got at me, and I didn't see why I should be awake all alone, so I woke him up and we had a little lark; but we were as quiet as possible, eh, Arthur?"

Arthur took no notice of Tom's eloquence, but said, with great politeness, to us: "If you will kindly withdraw I'll dress myself."

"Nonsense, you silly boy, you must try and get a little rest first, any way, and we'll leave you for that," said aunt, diplomatically, as she began to collect the bedclothes together. "You've no idea how dreadful the commotion sounded. It woke these girls, and we all thought you were being murdered; so you musn't be offended with my husband for being a little put out, because"—pointing to the revolver—"he meant to avenge your death."

"Why don't you scold the right person, uncle?" said Belle again.

"Scold Tom!" The captain looked at him as he capered round the room, helping aunt with the bedclothes, and then burst into a roar of laughter, in which we all joined, even Arthur, to whom uncle turned once more.

"So you won't marry Annie from this house, eh! young man, but you're bound to have her. It seems only fair that she should know something of what is taking place while she is sleeping innocently. I'll just run up and wake her and see what she thinks of it."

He turned with a twinkle in his eye, and stumbled against the grinning John, with the crowbar in his hand.

"Who told you to stand gazing there?" he roared. "Be off with you!"

John disappeared, and Arthur gasped:

"Captain Denham! I beg of you say nothing to Annie."

"Well, then, shake hands with an old fool and get to bed. I'll be even with that young rascal after you get away to-morrow," and he shook the butt end of his revolver at Tom. "Now, girls, off with you to bed, and next time you wake me up I'll know the reason why."

As we took our departure, aunt said:

"Now, Arthur, let me have the counterpane."

IV.

There was a death-like stillness after that, and we soon dropped off to sleep and did not wake till about seven. We got up then and dressed hastily, for there was much to be done before ten o'clock, the hour for the wedding. We met Aunt Kate on the stairs and she undertook to wake the pair in the dining-room, while we went to see about breakfast, so that the girl might get her milking done.

Imagine our feelings when aunt joined us in the kitchen, with wild eyes and pale face.

"They're gone! The room is empty! Oh! poor Annie!"

I had nothing to say. These perpetual frights were stupefying me, but Belle's presence of mind never left her, though she looked uneasy.

"They can't have gone far, auntie dear. Let us see where Tim is."

We both ran to Tim's place of imprisonment, but it, too, was empty.

Belle looked positively frightened.

"Can he have been so base?" I whispered.

"No, you silly. They must have gone for a walk." But in spite of her brave words she seemed to dread facing Aunt.

However, that lady met us at the back door, looking radiant.

(To be continued.)