

SELECTED LITERATURE

Milly's Marriage Contract.

WELL, for my part, I don't see why folks call Milly Morrison a strong-minded girl," quoth to himself the stalwart young farmer, John Armstrong, as he strode homeward in the sunset glory after a charming summer afternoon with the said Milly on the river. "It appears to me a good deal like jealousy, because there ain't a girl in these parts that can hold a candle to her. The little daisy! She knows well enough how much I think of her, and if I'm not mightily mistaken, she likes me very well, too. And, confound it all, I'm not going to take anybody's word for it. I'm just a-going to go in and win, and let her strong-mindedness go to the dekens. I guess it will never hurt me." And whistling blithely, "Ye Banks and Braes o' Bonnie Doon," valiant John cleared the fence at a bound and disappeared in the gloom of the woods beyond.

Yes, everybody said Milly Morrison was strong-minded; but however it got about or who first said it, Mrs. Grundy didn't know. Pretty Milly, with her rose-leaf cheek and her tender brown eyes and her golden braids, strong-minded! Preposterous! Surely no girl in the country or town of Glenville had half as many beaux nor half as many offers, as every one knew. But certain it was that, no matter how bold and confident the swain, might be who tried his fate with Milly, he was always known to come away wonderfully disconcerted, with not a word as to why and wherefore.

"What could it mean?" wagged the gossip tongues. "Why, maybe she's strong-minded; yes, to be sure, Milly must be strong-minded; else why did she let so many good chances slip?"

And thus it came to the ear of John Armstrong, the most energetic, the most enterprising young farmer in Glenville, as was commonly agreed. At first he gave credence to the story and cultivated her acquaintance out of curiosity, merely to see what manner of human kind a strong-minded woman might be, but Milly put forth no startling ideas in his presence; and finally when he found himself subdued by her maidenly charms after sitting opposite those innocent brown eyes and watching the fluttering bloom of that lovely face for one long, delicious summer afternoon, he settled in his mind that it was a malicious falsehood about her. And now the die was cast. He, John Armstrong, would ask Milly for her love, and in his heart of hearts he had no doubt that he should win the prize.

"Just to think of her going around the country speechifying and proclaiming woman's rights!" he exclaimed to himself, as he drove home the cows. "Why—ha! ha!—she's as innocent as a gentle lamb. And as for having a will of her own—stuff and nonsense! I'd as soon expect Brindle to kick over the milk pail. Nobody need talk to me about Milly Morrison being a woman's righter. I never see anything of it."

Time sped, as time has a way of doing, until nearly a week had elapsed. It was a summer night, and John and Milly stood by the river bank. All things were propitious. The wind sighed softly through the tree tops. The young moon gazed at her image in the sparkling water. John felt that the time had come for him to unburden his heart.

"Milly," he said, softly, as he caught her hand, "I have something to tell you to-night. I think you have guessed how much I love you, Milly, darling, because it was something I couldn't conceal. But I want to know—do you think—I mean, do you love me a little, Milly?"

"Yes, John," faltered she of the down-cast eyes and rosy cheeks.

"My little Mayflower! And (ecstatically) will you marry me dear, and help me make a home—a little home to ourselves?"

A pause, then slowly, "I don't know, John. I love you dearly, but—but—it seems like a great undertaking—a great responsibility. I don't believe I am fitted for it."

"Fitted for it!" he laughed gleefully; "why, Milly you know as well as I do that there isn't a smarter girl in the whole country than you are," and he helped himself to a kiss from the rosy lips.

"You said help to make a home. I don't think I quite understand. Won't you explain, John, what you expect of me—that is, what would I have to do?" she said hesitatingly.

"Why," a little impatiently, "strange you don't understand, Milly. Make a home as other people do who get married and live together. You run the house and I run the farm. Of course you would be willing to do your share of the work, wouldn't you? You know I am not rich."



MILLY.

"Oh, I see," answered Milly; "you would raise the crops and sell them, and take care of the stock."

"And," put in John, "You would do the cooking, the dairy work and the laundry work, and the rest."

"Yes, to be sure; I quite understand you now," she replied.

"Well, then," he said fondly, "will you marry me, Milly? You haven't said yet that you would."

The long lashes drooped upon the rose-leaf cheeks for an instant, and then a pair of innocent eyes were raised to his face, and she asked timidly:

"But you haven't said yet what you would give me for doing my share of the work, John."

"Give you!" he cried in amazement; "why, Milly Morrison, what do you mean?"

"Why just this. Don't you see, John, that your work brings you in a fair profit; so much money every year? But mine would bring me in nothing."

"Why, Milly," he answered reproachfully, "you would have a home and enough for your needs."

"That is," she replied with dignity, "I should have my board and clothes! But hear in mind, John, I can earn more than that any day. Deacon Jones has wanted me to keep house for him ever since his wife died, and I could have my board and clothes there and money in the bank every month."

"But, darling," protested John, "do you think I would be so mean as to ever deny you money when you asked me for it?"

"But that's just what I would not do," she answered. "If I do half the work, why shouldn't I have half the profits?"

Half the profits! John was lazed at her audacity.

"I should do the work that you would have to pay some one else to do," she continued, "and if I work as many hours a day

as you do, and do my work as faithfully as you do yours, why should you have all the profits and I nothing?"

John's amazement culminated in a white heat of passion.

"Well, Miss Morrison," he said with superb scorn, "if you are not willing to marry me as other folks marry and do as other folks do, you can wait till some fellow comes along who is willing to take you on your terms."

"I suppose you think me very mercenary, John," said Milly, gently; "but truly I don't care half so much for the money as I do for the principle of the thing."

Seething with rage and disappointment, he led her home across the dewy meadows. At the gate she held out her hand and said, sadly: "Good-bye, John. Remember I still love you dearly, and if you had been disposed to treat me justly, you would have found in me a good wife."

John muttered something between his teeth, jammed his hat down over his eyes and strode off in the darkness. But he said to himself when he had stilled the tumult in his soul, that after all, folks were right. Milly Morrison was most decidedly strong-minded.

Somehow it got noised about that Milly had refused John, and all Glenville was agog as to the reason for it. Many a professional gossip declared that "sure as she lives, Milly Morrison will report the day she ever gave such a proper young man as John Armstrong the go-by." But through it all, though perfectly aware that she was the theme of every tongue, Milly bore herself with suiling unconsciousness. Not so John. In a moody and unhappy frame of mind, he shunned his young friends, and carried about an expression so severe that there were none so brave as to test his good humor with a jest.

On a large farm on the outskirts of Glenville lived Milly Mor-