

DEATH OF MARRIAGE.
The ancient clock in Deacon Sherman's old-fashioned kitchen was slowly chiming the hour of nine. It was no smart toy, no rife of bronze or silver, but a tall, square, solid relic of the last century, looking not unlike a coffin case set on legs, in the corner—a clock that had lasted through four generations, and judging from appearance, was quite as likely to last several more. Deacon Sherman cherished the old heir-loom with a sort of pride, and would almost surely have confessed to it.

There was a great ruddy fire of chestnut logs in the red-tiled parlor fireplace, and the candles in the highly-polished brass sickles were twinkling merrily from the high wooden mantle, where they shared the post of honor with a curious sea shell and a couple of vases, each containing a fresh orange, from the hedge that skirted the clover field behind the barn.

At the window, a curtain of gaudy chintz shut out the tens of thousands of stars that were shining so brightly on that frosty autumn night, and on the cozy rug of parti-colored tape a contented tortoise-shell cat purred away the slowly passing minutes. But the tortoise-shell cat was not the only inhabitant of the snug kitchen.

"Timothy, if you don't behave yourself, I'll—"
The sentence was terminated by a laugh that set dimples round her mouth in motion, just as a beam of sunshine plays across a cluster of red ripe cherries.

Mary Sherman was just seventeen, a plump, rosy girl, with jet hair brushed back from a low forehead, and perfectly arched eyebrows, that gave a bewitching expression of surprise to a pair of melting hazel eyes. She was rather dark, but the severe cast would not have been faulted with the peach-like bloom upon her cheeks, and the dewy red of her full, daintily curved lips. Evidently Timothy Marshall was quite satisfied with Mary's style of hair.

"Come, Mary, let me move my chair where he could best watch the flush of the fire light upon her cheeks, and listening up the thread of the conversation where he had dropped it when it became necessary for Mary to bid him 'behave himself'—you might promise. 'Tis nine o'clock, and your father will soon be home."

"What, Tim?" said Mary, demurely, fitting a square of red in her patch work, and intently observing the effect.

"Nonsense, Mary! You know what very well. Prudence to marry me before Christmas. I tell you what, Mary, it is all very well for you to keep putting it off, but I can't stand it. What with your father's forbidding me the house, and that rascal Stanley's coming here every Sunday night—"

Mary gave her pretty head a toss.
"As if Mr. Stanley's coming here makes any difference in my feelings, Tim!"

"So, but, Mary, it is a pleasant thing to know if I don't own railroad shares and keep an account at the Hamiltonville bank, and I love you, Mary, from the very bottom of my heart! Now this matter lies between you and me, and no other person in the world has a right to interfere between us. Come, promise to me. He held her both hands in his and looked earnestly into the liquid, hazel eyes.

"Do you love me, Mary?"
"Then we may just as well—hush! what's that noise?"

There was a portentous sound of drawing bolts and rattling latches in the porch room beyond—a scraping of heavy boots along the floor. Mary rose to her feet with sudden scared confusion on her brow and cheek.

"'Tis Tim, is it father?"
"Suppose it is!"
"But he hasn't had you here, Tim! Hide yourself somewhere!"

"What nonsense, Mary! said the young man, resolutely standing his ground. "I haven't come to steal his spoons. Why should I creep away like a detected burglar?"

"For my sake, Tim! O Tim, if you ever loved me, do as I say! Not in that closet, it is close to his bedroom; not through that window, it's nailed down tight; he's coming! Here, Tim, quick!"

In the drawing of a breath she had pushed Timothy Marshall into the square parlour case of the clock, and turned the key on him. It was not a pleasant place of refuge, inasmuch as his shoulders were squeezed on either side, and his head flattened against springs and wheels above, and the air was unrespired and close, but Tim made the best of matters, and shook with suppressed laughter in the solitary prison cell.

"Well, a jolly scrape to be in," thought Tim, "and no knowing when I'll be out of it. Mary's a shrewd little puss, however, and I can't do better than to wait matters in her hands."

"So you haven't gone to bed yet, Mary?" said Deacon Sherman, slowly unfastening the two yards of wooden scarf with which he generally encased his throat on a evening.

"Not yet, father," said Mary, picking up her scattered bits of patchwork with a glowing cheek. "Did you have a pleasant meeting?"

"Well, yes, quoth the deacon, reflectively, sitting down before the fire, greatly to Mary's consternation—she had hoped he would have gone to bed at once, according to his usual custom—"It was to-day pleasant. Elder Husker was there, and Elder Hopkins, and—well, all the church folks, pretty much. Why, how red your cheeks are, Mary! 'Tis, ain't you? Well, you needn't set up for me, my dear; it must be getting late."

The deacon glanced mechanically up at the clock. Mary hid the blood glowing cold on her cheeks.

"Twenty minutes past nine—why, it must be later than that! Why, land o' Canaan, the old clock has stopped!" The old clock had stopped; not that it was at all wonderful under the circumstances. "I wonder up this morning, I've said," said the deacon, very much disturbed. "It never struck me such a trick above, all the years it stood there. Now am I here used to say it was a sign of death or marriage in the family before the year was out?"

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