

TOLD ON CHRISTMAS EVE.

CHAPTER I.

VIOLLET SILVER.

It had commenced like a romance of Fairy Land, among the roses and in the moonlight.

A great emerald bank overlooking a vast lake, fringed at its foot with a golden beach, and crowned with great pines,

From this wide lawn a maze of winding paths led in and out through glowing alleys of roses.

A ledge of dwarf myrtle inclosed this radiant spot; and for artistic contrast with the masses of bloom within,

Far out on the lake a boat glided phantom like across the diamond track of the moonlight.

A fountain opposite the drawing-room window threw a column of water upward, its spray, as it fell again, flashing like diamonds in the moonlight.

Two young girls, who, as the fairy tale says, "might have eaten gold every day,"

The violet looked in the moonlight what the "charming day" would still behold her, a beautiful girl of winning loveliness,

As she stood there, as if a statue under the moon, the two dumb companions at her feet, they looked like some group of enchanted creatures suddenly turned to forms of pearl by the stroke of a god's hand.

Heaven alone knows what sublime thoughts made the girl's countenance so angelic, as her shining eyes went from star to star, her lips parted with breathless thought.

"Fairly," she said, coming out of her reverie, and patting the velvet skin of the snowy doe with her hand, "we like the moonlight sometimes, don't we?"

"It is just about that," replied Charles Silver, ruefully. "The two have been at it, hammer and tongs, ever since you left the table! For my benefit, of course."

"And Mr. Charles Silver groaned, and his fingers desperately through his crisp brown hair.

"What?" demanded Violet. "I suppose I am to be consulted in the affair. I wonder at papa's and a great flash sweep over her face and neck, and staid the pretty head lying on Fairy's collar.

"You'd wonder more had you been there," remarked Charlie, gloomily. "We are to be married on Christmas Day, my young lady."

"What?" demanded Violet. "I shall then be of age, you know."

"What?" repeated Violet, her bosom heaving, her eyes flashing, her cheeks flaming like scarlet roses.

"It is perfectly true," said Charles. "In a sure I am as sorry for the worry as you can be, Violet."

"You don't think I am going to marry you, do you, Sir?"

"They don't want either of us to think at all, as it seems to me, 'was his answer. 'It is awfully hard on us both, and on Daisy too, you know."

"What did papa say?" demanded Violet, impatiently. "I thought you were my cousin, I think you are a coward, Charles Silver."

"Do you? Sorry for that Uncle Arnold held out a little; he thought we might be allowed a voice in the matter, you and I. But you know my father, Violet! He put on one of those iron looks, and you needn't call a fellow names. I'd like very much to see your father in his face that you'd not do as he wished."

"Oh!" said Violet, stretching out her round white arm like a young alibi, her nostrils dilating as though there were the breath of coming war in the air, "I am not his daughter, and I am not afraid. If you promise faithfully to be as brave as I am, why—why you will marry Daisy Leighton in time!"

"I'll promise anything you like," said Charles. "As to Daisy, I intend to marry her. But for her I should only have been too glad to take you, Violet. A fellow can't help these things, you know."

"Thank you!" said Violet, with superb disdain, elevating her pretty nose towards the stars. "You need not apologise."

"The worst of it is, I dare not say a word to Daisy while things are in this state," grumbled he. "It might lead to a kind of complication."

"As to me," said Violet rhetorically, "I shall go into a convent or something, as soon as you are married, and with my hand on my bosom, my head on my Siap's wing, willow, willow!"

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