

the room; and she was clothed in deepest mourning, and her cheek looked so pale, and her hand was so white and thin, and she gazed so sorrowfully through the window, and then, sinking down on a chair, wept so long and so bitterly, that we knew her mother was dead, and we feared lest she too should leave this world of mourning. But youth triumphed, and Caroline gradually recovered her blooming health and some portion of her cheerfulness.

When I looked at those bright, sunny, laughing eyes, and those luxuriantly clustering brown ringlets, and the fair cheek just beginning to resume its rosy blush, and those cherry-ripe lips, and the arch smile that sometimes played over her features, I suspected that Caroline was thinking of somebody else than her father; and, in truth, she was.

When Alderman May received Edward Wilson in the large room one evening, and a tankard of ale was set down, and Caroline blushed as she left the room, and both the old man and the young one seemed to be long-tied, or to think that blessed were the silent, I listened very eagerly for important announcements. And when at last the truth came out, and I found that they were agreed upon essentials—to wit, that Caroline was pre-eminent among women, and that she would make young Wilson the most excellent wife conceivable—and when I perceived that the alderman approved of the match, only postponing it for two years, which, after much demur, Edward agreed would be a necessary delay, as he had not yet fairly established himself in business, and as the old gentleman gave him a most cordial invitation to visit her in the meantime as often as he chose, I made up my mind that Caroline was to leave her home. I was not sorry for it, for, of course, it was in proper order for her thus to settle in life, and was a stage in the journey through life, which, as the result of the experience of an old chair, I have since learned, and now state for the benefit of society, I believe it advisable for every young woman to travel—if she can.

Ah! what disclosures I have heard and overheard. Many and many a time after this did Edward and Caroline, seated side by side, pour into each other's ears such effusion of nonsensical sentiment, such rubbish, sheer rubbish, vows, promises, fancies, presentiments, fears, hopes, and such like, that, if ever I was in danger of losing my good opinion of my pet Caroline, it was then. And while I did manage to overlook it, though by no means excusing, far less justifying it, in a girl, I candidly acknowledge that, making the fullest allowance for a temporary aberration of intellect on the part of Edward, I never could quite get over his folly in uttering such luxuriously soft, such ridiculously silly, things, or rather nothings. I am inclined to fear, indeed, that I did not hear the wildest ravings of these lovers' fancies, but that the garden proved more favourable to the poetic development than even the window-recess of an old room; for one evening, when they were walking there by moonlight, I overheard them in conversation (interspersed with other sounds, somewhat similar to the crackling of nuts or small whips,) of which the words spoken, just as they passed under the open window, sounded so like "thrice angelic Caroline,"

that, taking them as a sample of their evening's discourse, I was glad when they advanced beyond my hearing. It may be that Edward was merely reading to her out of an old romance the fulsome flatteries of some venerably servile dotard, but then the "Caroline" sounded suspicious; and, even straining our charity to put this construction on the words, what becomes of that peculiar, oft-repeated, and unmistakable smacking sound? Was this merely an appropriate illustration of the tale? The most that my charity can do in the case is to adopt the kiss, and believe that it was simply the "kiss of charity;" or, better, that *they* were the kisses of charity, which I do very readily believe. No; taking all the circumstances into consideration, I give them up on this occasion as a pair of moon-struck lovers, and, if my reader be able, either by charity or aught else, to rescue them from this character, he or she is at liberty to exercise the requisite ingenuity, and I wish it may prove successful.

But if the communications of young lovers proved rather distasteful to a third party, even though but an arm-chair, judge how intolerable must the ludicrously endearing expressions of an old couple have proved; and yet I was compelled to listen to these. The smooth course of Edward and Caroline's true love was interrupted by a most extraordinary and unaccountable freak on the part of the alderman. He made demonstrations of an intention to enter again into that holy state from which the death of Caroline's mother had released him. For my part, I can scarcely preserve any equanimity, even after this interval of time had elapsed, while stating the fact. As soon as I discovered it, and heard my Caroline crying as she told Edward about it, I could have broken down beneath the old fellow with pure contempt and indignation. He couldn't see his daughter get married, but he must do so too, forsooth! Pshaw! I am a chair of placid, almost stoical temperament, but still I *am* a chair, and possessed of the feelings of my kind, and this quite banished my indifference, fairly overcame all my philosophy. I was roused. I longed to get the alderman's toe under one of my feet, and the late Mrs. May seated on me. Wouldn't we have forcibly reminded him of those infirmities of age, which he appeared to have so completely forgotten! Of course, my rage was impotent. I hoped that the catastrophe might be averted. I should have been glad to have heard of the burial rather than the marriage service being read over him. But no, he was not going to die just then. That his marriage proved his death, indeed, I firmly believe; but it did so not prospectively, but retrospectively—not by anticipation, but by recollection. I found there was no possibility of its being averted by human agency. A widow had fixed on him, and while Caroline was immersed in the pleasures of courtship, she had courted the old alderman, flattered him, amused him, teased him, diddled—yes, diddled him. Henceforth, it was no uncommon thing for the old lady and gentleman to seat themselves in the two arm-chairs, and there she courted him with coarse, monstrous, palpably false and absurd compliments, which the alderman gulped down very graciously, though I observed she had to do nearly all the courting herself.