



THE EDITOR'S WOOING.

We love thee, Ann Maria Smith,
And in thy dearest name
We see a future full of joys
Too numerous to mention.

MONKSHOLM.

A Love Story.

BY S. BECKETT.

CHAPTER I.

Eve Winter would never get the holly-wreath round the reading-desk finished, some one declared, if she did not stop talking to Graham Moore, and show a little interest in what she was about; and young Mr. Chorlako—the Squire, as he was called—who had been looking exceedingly fidgetty while the conversation alluded to had been going on, seemed to agree with the opinion thus expressed, and went over hastily to the offending couple, with some trivial question about their work.

Any one who was not in love with Eve Winter, would, at that moment, unhesitatingly have pronounced her a dangerous young coquette; and it was such good fun to see the disgusted faces of the other young ladies of Monksholm, who had been working hard and pricking their fingers all day, without arriving at any such agreeable result as Eve's idleness had brought about, in the shape of so much assistance and attention from Mr. Chorlako.

It was a shame for her to go on so with him, they decided amongst themselves. What on earth could he see in her? What, indeed! Only a charming, intelligent face, and a little figure of infinite gracefulness—only a curly mass of shining hair, and a pair of little, white, sensitive hands, that were rarely quiet.

Idle hands they were, too, the ladies of Monksholm knew very well; capable of playing a "Song without Words," no doubt, or of making the most of those glittering locks; but were those the qualifications the young Squire would need in a wife? Where were the dignity and calm self-possession which ought to distinguish the lady of The Beeches?—where the energy and active usefulness which a position like hers would demand? Contrast that fair-headed Eve Winter with the three Miss Massingberds, for instance: amiable and excellently brought up girls, with three Roman noses, and one idea divided amongst them—that idea being propriety, as connected with possible matrimonial chances.

Or, if Mr. Chorlako were absurd enough to wish for mere beauty in a wife, look at Laura Beresford, the acknowledged belle of the town; a girl educated at the most expensive boarding-schools, who would do him some credit; but that little flirting Eve Winter!—It was a pity the poor young man had not some one to advise him!

And, meanwhile, the "poor young man" was looking, with serious anxiety, at one of Miss Winter's little hands, on which a ring would have been inflicted, in spite of the responsible-looking gloves she had worn—a scratch at least an eighth of an inch long—so that Mr. Chorlako felt called upon to sympathize with the sufferer in a few low words, which did not reach Graham Moore's ears,—though, no doubt, his quietly observant eyes were not unconscious of the answering expression they called up in the young lady's mobile face.

Eve Winter was one of those very tantalizing and fascinating women, whom few men can help getting on the smallest provocation. She even liked to be spoken to, occasionally, as they would speak to a rather spoiled child; and was, in consequence, declared silly and affected by her lady friends.

But, under that laughing, pouting, wilful face, lay something which redeemed her from that charge, with those that knew her; a latent capacity for deep and true emotion, which no man, who had himself any depth of character, failed to discover, running through all the graceful trifling of her arch, coquetical manner, like a still stream, hidden by flower-blossoms from careless eyes.

Eve might be made a good, as she was already



GRAHAM MOORE AND HIS PUPILS.

a loveable and utterly charming, little woman, in strong and tender hands—but the poor child was certainly, very much spoiled,—her aunt, who had given her a home when she was left alone in the world, being very proud of this graceful girl, in her own placid way; so that Eve, encouraged in her little vanities, and herself of a decidedly pleasure-loving nature, revelled in the consciousness of her fresh young beauty, which she chose, occasionally, to set off with the most audacious toilettes, taking a mischievous delight in "cutting out" the mortified belles of the country town, attracting the best men to her side, and keeping them there, too—thus making herself an object of dislike and envy to her fair friends, who had not even the poor consolation of copying her dresses, as they never looked the same on any one else.

And yet, the greatest joy of all, Eve was beginning to think, would be denied to her smooth-flowing life. For sometimes she would, contrary, as it may appear to the usual wont of maidenhood, dream of love, and all she had read about it, wondering if it would ever dawn upon her careless heart, and flush all her days with rosy light, such as coloured the pages of Tennyson, and Owen Meredith, and Coventry Patmore, whose poetry she feasted on whenever she could escape from her monotonous little round of galateas and triumphs.

And now, during these delicious musings, Eve had wondered whether it was really true what people said about Mr. Moore, the master of the Monksholm School of Art—that he had been engaged, and that the lady of his love had died; and that he would never, never marry as long as he lived? And having wondered, Eve dashed as readily as her own dreamings.

I think most of us have read stories enough to enable us to translate the pretty language of that blush for ourselves; and we will agree that if the young lady's deepening cheek and disturbed heart told the truth, and Graham Moore's voice or step had such wonderful power over both, it was time for Eve to cease all those saucy little wiles that were, day by day, tugging poor Hal Chorlako's honest heart in a golden web, and to let one or other of these gentlemen go free.

But, all this time, we have left the young Squire inspecting that terrible scratch on Miss Winter's hand, and Graham Moore watching quietly for the pleasure of seeing her safe into the little pony-carriage which was waiting at the church-gate in the early December twilight.

At the same moment, the three Miss Massingberds made a simultaneous swoop on the shining-haired coquette, who was awaking the most intense anxiety in their correct bosoms, and expressed their intention of taking her home with them.

Eve smiled her very prettiest smile, whether for the gratification of the ladies or the gentleman, I cannot determine, but—Poor Aunt Lucy was not very well; she must not be left alone.

Then there was a moment's pause—a stolen glance at the dark face near the reading-desk—an arch peep into Mr. Chorlako's beaming, impatient, urgent blue eyes, and a quickly smothered sigh as Miss Winter said good-bye to Mr. Graham Moore, and the three Roman-nosed sisters, and allowed Mr. Chorlako to take her to the little carriage—giving him permission, moreover, as he attended anxiously to the disposal of her many furs and wraps, to call that evening, and ask after Aunt Lucy's cold.

Mr. Graham Moore went home alone. His home, to him, meant an old-fashioned and rather gloomy-looking house, in which he had taken lodgings, principally for the sake of an antiquated, straggling garden attached to it, which brightened up the dull street, and reminded him of the days when he had really had a home, and those who cared to watch for his return.

I don't think there had been any such love-passages in his life as had been ascribed to the fair gossip of Monksholm. He had once been his amusement; and while he was still trifling with it, and dreaming of what he would one day achieve, came the reverse of fortune which left him without a home, and with only one means of gaining a livelihood—the art which he had filled up his idle time, and which, henceforth, was to earn for him his bread-and-butter. So, in course of time, he came to be master of the Monksholm School of Art, and to live in the old-fashioned house of which he was so proud, and where he was waited on and taken care of by a kind-hearted woman, who was a martyr to low spirits—melancholy having marked her for its own.

Mr. Moore found a cheerful fire awaiting him on this particular evening; the table, with the tea-things, had been brought close to it, and his arm-chair and slippers had been put in their proper places by the Martyr's own hand. The curtains were drawn; an appetizing odour of hot cakes was wafted from the kitchen; the kettle was singing industriously; but the master was ungrateful enough to consider the comfortable room lonely and cheerless, and waiting in something which he did not dare to define.

But he went and looked up at a smiling face, wreathed about with ivy, that hung above the mantelpiece, in the flaming firelight; and as he looked, he sighed.

It was a little crayon head of a girl, with shining hair and tormenting eyes; a portrait, in fact, of that young beauty, Miss Winter, in a slouched riding-hat, with dark, falling plumes, as the artist had seen her once at a picnic in the autumn gone by, and when, in a gracious mood, she had let him draw her picture. And the lonely man stood and looked till the tantalizing face seemed to grow into life, till he almost felt the breath from those bright lips on his cheek—those lips! He sank back into his chair, and covered his eager eyes with trembling hands. "Ah, child, child!" he thought. "If it were to make me love you more madly, more ardently, no need for all this doubt—this daily torture and suspense! Eve! with your sweet, wayward temper, your intense nature, dare I ask you to give up ease and wealth for love, to come and bless my poor home, and take my body and soul for yours in return? Eve! little Eve! little darling of my heart!"

And in the meantime, Eve was sitting with Aunt Lucy and Mr. Chorlako in the pretty drawing-room of Lea, singing ballads in the subdued light, with her radiant violet dress displaying her milk white shoulders, and her golden hair knotted up in a curly mass, and all her infinite grace and beauty deepening under the excitement of the Squire's whispered compliments; while Graham Moore dreamed of her, and longed for her, by his solitary fire in the old-fashioned lodgings.

CHAPTER II.

Monksholm was a very sleepy little town. Beyond few dinner parties, somewhat ponderous in style and a bazaar once a year, in aid of the church schools, the inhabitants were not given to much excitement.

The young ladies, however, did not complain of the sameness of their existence. All who could sing were members of the choir of St. Mark's; those who could not, devoted their energies to the schools I have spoken of; and in both cases Mr. Augustus Maunsell, the pale curate, was the centre of attraction.

For eligible men were painfully scarce in Monksholm; and, in consequence, this slightly consumptive young divine had a very pleasant time of it, having amassed more black currant jelly and embroidered slippers than he could wear out in a lifetime. One or two of the more aspiring female minds

had, it is true, reflected that The Beeches was a very pretty place, and that Mr. Chorlako must, sooner or later, desire to retire; but the young Squire was so often away—filling the house dull, no doubt, since the death of his mother, who had been his last surviving relative—that the idea had hitherto been a very vague one, until the appearance of a possible rival in the quiet little town forced the young ladyhood of Monksholm to look to its interests; foreseeing, as it did, a total eclipse of all its laborious little fascinations at the careless hands of this girl with the arch, blonde hair, who was so different to anything it had seen before.

Eve, by no means unconscious of her victory, used to laugh over the discomfiture of her former enemies in a most charming manner, and to amuse Mrs. Erroll with some capital imitations of their harmless little peculiarities as soon as her victims were fairly out of hearing.

"Poor Mr. Chorlako!" she would say, with a shrug of her white shoulders. "No wonder he shuns these dreadful bores, and finds a long stay at The Beeches—or has, till now, found it, as you say, quite insupportable."

From which it would appear that Miss Winter had already met the young Squire, which was, indeed, the case. And a very pleasant, kind-hearted fellow he was, she assured her aunt, on being questioned; awfully fond of dancing, and not a bit like that "Squire" who is popularly supposed to be his immortal burlesque, wanting in no essential respect to fun and grammar.

"But he is very good-natured!" Miss Winter would add, relenting; "and we have always been very good friends."

The judicious reader will not be surprised—though the young ladies of Monksholm were, and uneasy too—to hear that Mr. Chorlako made his appearance in the town two days after Miss Winter's arrival, taking up his quarters at the lonely Manor House, with an evident intention of making himself as comfortable as possible during a long stay.

And being, in truth, what Miss Winter had represented him—a cheery young fellow, with a large, warm heart—he set about trying to make every one else pleased with the world and everything in it as he was himself. He organized pic-nics and grand balls at The Beeches, at which Mrs. Erroll did the honours, and her golden-haired niece dazzled the eyes of the little town with her brilliant beauty, and her white tulle ball-dress, fresh from Paris.

In fact, never had Monksholm been so gay, and never before had Mr. Chorlako made so long a stay.

It was he, good-natured fellow, who told Miss Winter that the Master of the School of Art, who had once taught his, Mr. Chorlako's, cousins in London, was a "capital sort," and ought to be taken some notice of.

"People down here are too snobbish to look at him, you know," the young Squire asserted, "just because he's down on his luck, and all that sort of thing; but he's a gentleman, and he's painting a picture, by Jove, that would astonish you, Miss Winter, I mean to buy it. 'Savourneen Deelish!' he's called it. You can count every blade of grass on the girl's grave, and you feel obliged to guess how much a yard the fringe cost that the Irish lover's coat is made of! Wonderful, give you my word!"

"I daresay; but you are so easily astonished, Mr. Chorlako," Miss Winter had answered, lazily taking her cup of tea from the Squire. "However, Aunt Lucy will think about it; won't you, Auntie?"

Mrs. Erroll smiled, and said she would. So, from that time forth, Mr. Graham Moore enjoyed the inestimable privilege of being admitted into the select society of the little town—a privilege which I am afraid he did not sufficiently value, except in so far as those happy five o'clock cups of tea, drank in the pretty drawing-room of Lea, gave him an excuse, ra-

ther too often, for wasting a few hours at Eve Winter's side. Eve had brought this fashion of tea-drinking from London with her, and, of course, it was eagerly followed by her fair friends, who at once detected its peculiar adaptability to the interests of that matrimonial struggle which made up their life.

But, as a rule, they drank their tea by themselves, unless they were so fortunate as to make one of the party at tea by chance; for the young men found the drawing-room there so pleasant, and so cool, in those hot, dreary July days, and Mrs. Erroll and her pretty niece such charming company, that it became a regular thing with them to drop in during the afternoon, especially with Mr. Chorlako, whom you might have been sure of seeing any day between five and six, lounging in Mrs. Erroll's easiest chair—and they were all easy—and enjoying Miss Winter's graceful impertinence, which she displayed in full force for his benefit, he declared, than for any other fellow's, and which he took accordingly in the soothing light of a compliment, finding it an agreeable contrast to the insipid amiability which most ladies thought it prudent to evince towards the master of The Beeches.

As often as he could spare time, and oftener, I am afraid, Mr. Moore, too, joined Eve's little court, remembering to the day of his death the fleeting many-coloured hours he spent in that study room, whose windows opened on the lawn, where the roses were radiating in the July sun, and the evening light shone greenly through a tangled tangle of leaves, on Eve in her white misty dress—irresistibly pretty and bewitching, no matter what her mood might be—and she had many; singing to them sometimes, sometimes teasing them, charming them always. And about this time it was Miss Winter's particular caprice to resolve on attending the morning-class at the School of Art, of which Mr. Moore was master, as we know. Miss Winter's caprices were invariably indulged, and the young lady persevered as earnestly as if she had had a real talent for drawing, which she certainly had not.

Of all Mr. Moore's pupils, she was the least satisfactory, the most troublesome, the latest; and, perhaps, it was for this reason that the young master lingered longest at her side,—finding, doubtless, a great deal to correct in the work which got on so slowly.

So the roses reddened and withered, and the trees at Lea began to change colour, and the leaves to fall on the lawn, and in the garden walks; and, at last, Christmas drew near, and the snow was on the ground.

And still Miss Winter was impertinent to the Squire, who was more flattered than ever; still Graham Moore was wasting his time; and the young ladies of Monksholm cultivated the pale curate with renewed energy—the despairing energy of a forlorn hope.

CHAPTER III.

On the morning after Mr. Moore had dreamed such sweet dreams about a certain wilful young lady, he awoke early.

Solaced by the linden greenness of a snowy sky—by the chill whiteness upon which he looked out—his visions of the past night, being recalled, filled him with anger at himself—with a hopeless sense of his own folly.

When did such dreams as his ever bear the strong glare of daylight, and not shrink back, frightened at their own shadows?

"She will not come to me to-day, through all this snow," he thought; and he tried to feel doubtful as he remembered her dimly little feet, her delicate ways; but instead, a strange yearning filled his heart. He pictured her, and she shone on him, like some radiant flower that had outlived the frost, and involuntarily he stretched his strong limbs towards the road by which she would come, drawing them back the next moment, with an impatient shrug of the shoulders. "I am easily fooled!" he said to himself bitterly, as he went down stairs.

The dingy parlour was filled with the blazing of a cheery fire, that shone so good-humouredly on the shabby room and the simple appointments of his breakfast-table, that it would have been ungracious not to have brightened up in his company; and so truth compels me to state that Graham rang the bell, and ordered breakfast, and seemed, in spite of the little sentimental disturbance he was suffering, to enjoy the clear brown smoking-hot coffee which the Martyr presently brought in, and, worse still, a very black-looking pipe with which he supplemented the roasting, sitting luxuriously with his slippers basking in the warmth, and indulging in an occasional comfortable shudder at the dreary prospect out of doors.

If there had not chanced to be in the garden a sturdy holly-tree that grew close to the windows, and was all aflame with red berries, he might have enjoyed this morning pipe the more; for, somehow, when his eyes fell on it, the scene of last night came back with painful distinctness, and the Squire's handsome young head, bending over two little busy hands with a green prickly wreath, came between him and the blinding fire, so that all the room seemed chill and dark.

I don't see why he should have suddenly started up at that moment, and begun to fling some drawing materials on the table, with angry energy; but, for the next two hours, pipe in mouth, he worked with them, until the clock said ten minutes to ten, and then it was time to think of the class which awaited him at the School of Art.

There was a smile, and not altogether an amiable one, on Mr. Moore's dark face, as he walked quickly along the snowy streets; and in the portfolio, which he carried, was the sketch in water-colours on which he had spent his morning hours of leisure.

It was such a severe day, that he was not surprised to find only a very few of his pupils at work in the cheerless room, looking particularly bare and cold that morning, with their white coat