

A POET'S EMERGENCY.

(COLUMBIAN'S STORY.)

It was a happy moment for Abner Bassett when the committee asked him to write a poem for the dedication of the new schoolhouse.

That's all right, he said, confidently. "I'll be on hand."

He hastened away from the post office as soon as the arrangements were completed, his dreamy face radiant with delight.

There were now only these two in the home nest now, and they held staunchly to each other.

It seemed an interminable time to him before he reached the little, weather-beaten old house at the foot of the hill.

Martha was in the kitchen getting supper, but she paused in her work as he entered temptuously, and then she listened to his rapid sentences.

"O Abner!" she interposed, breathlessly, "what is the poetry to be about?"

"About the children and school and life generally. They left it to me."

"Do you think you can do it?"

"Think! I know I can."

Martha turned back to her cake, all her doubts swept aside by that cheery assertion.

Porterville, on the whole, shared these feelings; it was a special glory to the little village to have so wonderful a being as a poet.

"What's the matter with you?"

"At least that was Porterville's verdict, and best of all Abner was her very own—simple and country-bred, like his fellows."

A few of his neighbors, however, did not fall under his spell; they disapproved strongly of his aimless wanderings in woods and fields.

He represented the prose of life; an every-day little sentence, devoid of ornament, that stood as a humble foot-note to her brother's more splendid page.

"Abner's always had this gift," she would say, "though no one knew it for years."

She could comprehend that at such a time the voice of nature would be most in tune with his mood.

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She stood for a while where he had left her, thinking proudly of his achievement, her whole being aglow with thankfulness.

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Deep in her honest heart she meant what she said, but she was only human, and many times she rebelled against the dreamy, idle ways which irritated her quicker nature.

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appetite, and kept every annoyance at bay. But her efforts were unavailing; a dark convulsion rattled gradually upon her—the poet was congealed!

Each morning she studied his face for some encouragement, and she lay awake through the long hours of the night listening to him as he moved about his room.

"I'll make you sick, Abner. Please give it up."

He flashed an angry glance in her direction.

"I wish you'd be more considerate, and leave me alone," he exclaimed, petulantly; "you've frightened away two rhymes."

Martha choked down the lump in her throat and returned to the kitchen.

"It's hardest for him, poor boy!" she murmured. "Suppose the committee had asked me to make a now-fangled cake, and hadn't given any rhyme, and I only knew I must use butter and sugar and eggs, and so on. I guess the mixing would have bothered me, and after all it mightn't have turned out to their taste! It's pretty much the same with this poetry, and yet people think it just bubbles right up."

She paused in dismay; her figure of speech had suggested an idea that filled her with nervous dread.

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methods did not seem ridiculous to the eyes of affection.

Martha arranged everything with deft fingers, humming gaily as she moved about.

On one side was some shipping intelligence, on the other a little poem. She looked at the verses carelessly at first, but something familiar in the lines riveted her glance in spite of herself.

Everything was wrapped in a mist—the sweet, damp air from the sleeping garden chilled her.

By degrees she realized what had happened. Abner, her brother, was a thief! He had stolen another's work and called it his own!

It was hard to believe, and yet the little poem in her hand was a silent witness of his guilt.

Then her mood changed, and in her great love for him she began to make excuses.

She leaned forward and extinguished the light, then she groped her way to her own room.

The schoolhouse was crowded to overflowing the next day; all Porterville was there to honor the dedication.

He looked down at the upturned faces with a faint smile, and his eyes wandered momentarily to the corner where he caught a glimpse of Martha's face.

"I'd like to say a few words," he began, in a voice which was oddly broken; "I won't keep you very long."

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the poetry you had asked for, you would turn from me in contempt, and never care for my little verses again, and I wasn't strong enough to bear that thought.

"There's been a continual struggle going on within me, one minute I felt I'd do anything rather than have your scorn; the next minute that scorn seemed nothing compared to the loss of my own self respect and honesty."

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