

CALEB WARE'S HEIRESS.

BY ETTA W. PIERCE.

I was minding the children in the Merrybone nursery the day the letter came—in fact, my sole occupation from month's end to month's end was to mind them, mend their pinafores and the broken noses of their dolls, teach their young ideas how to shoot, and dance attendance upon them generally, as became a poor dependent with a clever head but an altogether empty purse.

I was called a governess. Had I been a stranger, the Merrybones would have paid me a salary. As a relative of the family I received nothing but my board and clothes. There were five children—ugly little thorns in the flesh, who gave me no rest by day or night. On this particular morning they had, I remember, harassed me with unusual zeal. Fagged, dispirited, desperate, I dropped blocks and pinafores, and dog-eared primers on their vicious little heads, and, leaning my aching temples against the cold glass of the window, I looked off with unspeakable yearning from the tall city roofs to the misty, mysterious horizon far away.

Charles River glistened gaily in the sun. Birds—fat, red-breasted robins, and others like flakes of living sapphire—flashed past on their way to the sprouting elm trees of the common. Pleasant earthy scents from the public garden near sweetened the wind at intervals.

"Oh, for the wings of a dove," I sighed to myself, "to carry me anywhere, anywhere away from this miserable drudging life, away from this weary, wearing pandemonium!"

Then little Tom began to bang me with his books, and Edith brought me out of my reverie by the hair of the head, and there came a tap at the

door, and John, the Merrybone lackey, appeared on the threshold with a letter in his hand.

"For you, miss," he said to me. I took it amazed. Who was there to write to me? I had no correspondents, no friends. I broke the seal and read:

"What the deuce are you going to do about it, Esther?" sulked George Merrybone, the eldest son of the family, who had fallen into a habit of invading the nursery at all hours.

"Do!" I echoed, spreading out the letter with increasing astonishment. "Why, give thanks to Providence and start immediately for Black Brook, of course."

"Hang it! You don't mean it?"

"Don't I? I'm not dreaming, though I feel as if I were. It was immensely kind of Uncle Caleb to remember me like this—I never saw the man in my life. Forty acres of land, George! How very rich I must be!"

George screwed his eyeglasses deeper yet into his weak, yellow eyes, and burst into a guffaw.

"Yes, by Jove! that you are, in beauty and youth, and all that sort of thing. But old Ware's Black Brook property—haw! haw! The more you have of it the poorer you are. I've seen it. Going into the farming line, eh, Esther? A girl of twenty, with hands like rose-leaves! Better stick to governessing. No, not that; better marry me!"

I looked at him as he stood, narrow-chested, slim waisted—George, as little Tom told me in confidence, wore corsets—with his flaxen hair parted down the middle of his forehead, and shook my head.

"Thank you," I answered, curtly. "I prefer the farm."

"Confound the farm!" said George, politely. "Antony flung the world away for a woman, and if she was half as pretty as you he wasn't so much to blame. I can do the same—my world, that is. Just say the word."

"You are too good," I replied. "I could not think of it. I am sick of all the Merrybones, small and great. Caleb Ware's legacy is simply a godsend. I shall go take possession of it this very day; yea, as soon as I can pack my trunks."

From no other quarter did I encounter opposition. Mrs. Merrybone sent her own maid to help me make ready, and also money enough to defray the expenses of the journey and other incidentals.

"It is really a most fortunate thing for you, Esther," she said, with a cold smile. "We are going abroad this summer, and I had made up my mind to tell you that you must look for another home. You have done your best to entrap my son George into a messalliance. You are a dangerous, designing young creature, and I am very glad to be rid of you."

I shook the dust of the Merrybone mansion off my feet, and as the clocks of the dear old city were striking four on this May afternoon, clambered into a train at the Old Colony Depot, and started as fast as steam could bear me to Black Brook.

Of the place I knew nothing, save that it was an insignificant station on the Old Colony Road. I had never been there in my life—had never, as I have before said, seen old Caleb Ware or his forty acres. My dead father, whose uncle he was, had always spoken of him as a drinking, disreputable man, living a forlorn bachelor life, with only a housekeeper to minister to his wants.

It was twilight when the train stopped at the lonely little station. I alighted alone, saw my trunks put off on the platform, saw the train move on without me, and asked of an old man who came hobbling out on a crutch, and who seemed to be the presiding diety of the place, the way to Caleb Ware's farm.

"Caleb Ware?" His ferret eyes went over me from head to foot; he curled one knotted hand around his ear, after the manner of deaf people. "Hey? Two miles away on the west road. Old man's dead and buried. Going there?"

"Yes," I answered. "Can I get a conveyance of any kind?"

"Hey? None that I knows of. Why didn't Joe come for ye? Are ye expected?"

"No," I replied, looking around the steadily darkening landscape in some dismay. "Who is Joe? Is it a straight road? Shall I be likely to miss it if I set out alone at this hour?"

"Hey? That depends on how cute you be. Joe is Joe—lives at the farm with the old woman—a nice pair. Road's straight enough—over the hill and past the sand-pits, and through the pines till ye come to the bridge, and there ye are."

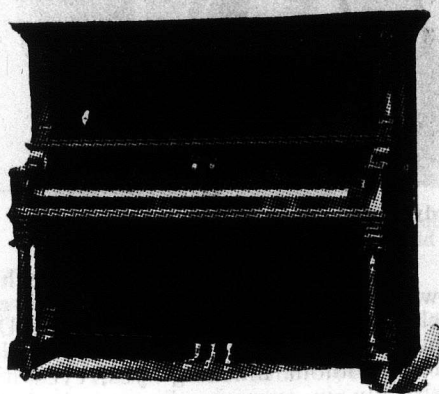
I left my baggage in his care, and was just turning from the platform, when he cried after me:

"Hey? Be ye the gal old Caleb left the property to? I am blessed if you don't have a time of it with Joe and the old woman! Haw! Haw!"

And, with his wheezy laugh ringing in my ears, I started in the deepening twilight, a stranger in a very strange and uninviting place, to find my way to my Black Brook possessions.

I hurried along the sandy pine-

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