



The Family Circle. "Home, Sweet Home."

A Married Man.

"What shall I do?" said Ralph Willett, as he walked into the office of his friend, Robert Ayres, looking the picture of despair.

"Why, what's the trouble now?" and good natured Bob, a young lawyer who had just hung out his shingle, shut up the dusty volume of love over which he had been poring, and gave his attention to Ralph's grievance.

"It's just this," said Ralph, opening his clenched hand and disclosing a letter crushed into a thousand despairing wrinkles. "Here's my answer from the trustees of Monroe Academy; they're satisfied with my recommendations, and my references appear unexceptionable, but on one point they are strenuous—they will employ none but a married man."

"Pshaw!" blurted out Bob.

"Here they say, 'Only one question remains to be affirmatively answered by you before we close in with your terms. Are you a married man? You may think this question a strange one, but we have had so much trouble in the past with preceptors who, after a few weeks, devoted themselves mainly to flirting, that we have passed a resolution as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians, that we will employ none but married men. If you can suit us in this respect, our contract may be considered closed. Let us hear from you at once in regard to that particular, and we hope you are prepared to meet our requirements, as we confess ourselves strongly predisposed in your favor. Yours truly,

WILLIAM PETERS, Secretary of the Board of Trustees."

"Let 'em go," said Bob, as Ralph finished reading, and glanced up at him. "There are other academies in the world, and all are not blessed with such an old maid board of trustees."

"But it's getting late in the season, and will soon be impossible to engage a place for the coming year. The opening seems to be a fine one, and it's a hard case if one must be married in order to be a teacher."

"I don't suppose," mused Bob, "that it would be of any use for me to write them a voucher for your unexceptionable morals and anti-flirting principles?"

Ralph shook his head with a smile. There was a moment's silence.

"I'll tell you what," burst forth Bob, "here's my advice to you as a friend and a lawyer, and no fee wanted either: make them think you are a married man; you can convey impressions without saying it in so many words, if that will ease your conscience, Ralph."

"Bob Ayres, you're crazy."

"No—just look here," and Bob ran over a hasty plan of arrangements.

"Upon my word, it's easily done," said Ralph, as the idea struck him.

He was in a mood to clutch at anything just then, for teaching was his chosen vocation, and he felt in honor bound to support his widowed mother in easy comfort. Before half an hour he had so far fallen in with Bob's absurd proposition as to write, with his assistance, a letter to the board of trustees. Here is the clause which most interests us:—

"Fortunately for me your one important requirement is not an impossible one in my case. I shall not, however, bring Mrs. Willett to Monroe with me at present, as she does not like boarding, and it is hardly worth while to set up house-keeping there, when I am only engaged for a year, and we have a good home here. It seems best on the whole that she should remain here among her friends for the present, so you will please engage board for me alone in some quiet place near the academy."

"There," said Bob, triumphantly, "even Mrs. Opie might be satisfied with that, for there is a Mrs. Ralph Willett of whom all you say is true; but she is your mother and not your wife."

"It's a dangerous game, I fear," said Ralph, closing and sealing the letter, "but I believe my intentions are good. If they find me out I shall probably suffer."

"They will not be apt to find out the facts at this distance, but if they do they won't hang you, my boy. I should put in a plea of self defence if I had to defend the case."

"I shall saddle all the blame that occurs on you, for I should never have thought of such a thing myself."

"My shoulders are broad," laughed Bob, "and lawyers are generally supposed to be incorrigible sinners, you know. But never fear, the crime is not a great one. Going into a strange place and palming one's self off as a single man when one is married, has a suspicious look, but passing for a married man when one is single is quite another thing."

A month later Ralph Willett opened the fall term of Monroe Academy. At the close of the first day a trio of school girls walked down the shaded sidewalk. Rose Peters, a handsome, dressy belle; Kate Martin, the wise and witty; and Effie Broomfield, a sweet, gentle girl, and universal favorite, spite of her humble home and attire.

"Isn't he perfectly splendid!" exclaimed Rose, the pronoun referring to the new preceptor, our whilom acquaintance, Ralph Willett.

"What an intelligent, expressive eye he has," remarked Kate.

"Yes," assented Effie, "and such a finely-shaped head. One needn't be a phrenologist either to notice that."

"I do think," said Rose, candidly, "that he is really the most attractive preceptor that we ever had in our academy."

"Take care, Rose," laughed Kate, "no flirting now, you

know" for Rose was a first-class flirt, and her capabilities in that line had done more than all else to turn the heads of the two last preceptors and abate their usefulness in school. No wonder her father had introduced that remarkable resolution among the board of trustees.

Rose turned in at the crevice of her father's splendid residence, but paused for a few words.

"Just as if," she said, "a married man could not flirt! For my part, I think they're just the best men of all to flirt with."

"Rose Peters," said Effie, reprovingly, "it is well for your credit that only your friends hear that speech."

"I mean it," persisted Rose. "They are so safe, you know, not being on the lookout for a wife, and one can go to any length, without the least fear that they will spoil it all by popping the question."

"I supposed," remarked Kate, "that very question was just what you aimed at in your flirtations."

"It's no such thing; I always avoid it as long as possible, for it spoils all the fun. When I can avoid it no longer, and they will speak, I am as lamentable as possible with the poor fellows, and tell them I hope we shall be friends all the same, but we never are; somehow there always is a coolness after that."

"Rose," said Effie, seriously, "I must either change my definition of a flirt, or give up that you are not one."

"What is your definition?"

"I have always called a young lady a flirt who led on young men to declare themselves for the sake of refusing them."

"Then I'm not one according to your own definition."

"I must confess," said Kate, outspoken, as usual, "I don't see what better you are, save from selfish motives. The effect on them is the same."

"I can't help it if young men will be so foolish as to fall in love with me," persisted Rose. "All I want is a good time, and no vexatious questions about marriage. That's why I like married men the best, you see."

"Allow me to prophesy, Miss Rose," said Kate, "that you've found one married man who will not flirt with you, and that's Mr. Willett." And with this parting shot she and Effie walked on.

MONROE, Oct. 10th,

"DEAR BOB:—It is in the midst of the term, and—as said the lamented Daniel Webster—"I still live." Really and truly I am enjoying my school much, except for that one thing, which makes me feel guilty all the while. You and I alone know what that is. But I can see the wisdom of the trustees in their stipulation; for I never yet found a lot of school girls so harum scarum as they are here. This Miss Peters is an only child, a beauty, and an heiress, and very much spoiled; her whole mind, heart and soul seem to be absorbed in conjuring the verb to flirt, in all its moods and tenses. She even tried her arts upon me, but, laying aside my 'unmarried pretense,' I never fancied that style of a young lady. Falling in that, she took to putting and creating rebellion in school. I took a straight course, and sent her home to ponder on the error of her ways; she came back the next day, asked my forgiveness very sweetly, and has been good as a kitten ever since, though I look for the claws daily. There are other high spirits in school, but she is the belle and acknowledged leader. Then there are some quiet, orderly ones, just my idea of girls as they should be—but I must not forget that I am a married man.

"Bob, you remember I hold you responsible for all white lies this year. I am careful as possible, but fear Mrs. Opie might sometimes be shocked. Yours, RALPH WILLETT."

Thus Ralph went on, winning golden opinions from everybody, winning the love and respect of his scholars, and more than all, in the eyes of some, bringing back to Monroe Academy its former good reputation. The school bade fair to increase in size, thus adding to the material prosperity of the place, and we are all ready to love anybody who helps to fill our pockets.

At the close of the fall term he went home to spend a fortnight vacation. Bob Ayres and he had some quiet laughs over their secret. Bob prophesied great things as his result.

"I tell you, Ralph," he said, "I believe it's sometimes right to do evil that good may come."

"Don't let's crow till we get out of the woods," replied Ralph. "I've gained a good situation by the deception, but it remains to be seen how long I will keep it."

The winter school proved to be quite different from the fall term. Many new faces were among the pupils, and some of the old ones missing—among the latter, Effie Broomfield.

"She has taken a school away in the south part of the town," said Rose Peters to Mr. Willett, as she came to his desk after school was dismissed to consult him about her Latin.

"Isn't it funny to think of Effie teaching?"

"I have no doubt she will do well," was the answer. "Other things being equal, I have always noticed that the best behaved scholars make the best teachers."

"Oh, you don't think I'd make a very good teacher, then, do you? I was very naughty last term, you know, but I'm going to be good enough this term to make it all up." And Rose lisped off her little speech in such an innocent, childish manner, looking so charmingly pretty all the while, that a more impressive man than Ralph Willett might have been captivated, but he was not at all. "Of course Effie will do well," she continued. "I want to go out and see her school some Saturday, but father is always too busy to carry me."

Where was Ralph Willett's gallantry that he did not offer his services as escort on this plain hint? But he didn't; he only resolved that he would do by himself at the earliest possible opportunity. There was nothing out of character even for a married man to take an interest in his former pupil, and watch her success as a teacher.

He went, accordingly, the very next Saturday. How charmingly dignified the school ma'am was, and how her sunny presence lit up the dingy old school house. The school was a notoriously hard one, but she was beginning finely, as Ralph assured her, and added that he should come again by and by, to note her progress.

Somehow or other he did not enjoy the winter term as well as in the fall. His mother noticed the change in his letters, and spoke of it in hers.

"I do not think you are enjoying your school as well as you did in the fall. Your letters are not so cheery as then."

"Why don't I enjoy myself so well?" Ralph asked himself. "All is harmonious in the school."

Then he laid the blame upon the cold weather, and he had bad roads which hindered his long walks, but somehow his cogitations would come round at Effie Broomfield, and he would fall to wondering how she was getting on; if she had to burn wood in that rusty three-legged stove, and if she was contented boarding round. And in school hours, when some blundering pupil was mixing moods and tenses in a hopeless tangle, or standing at the blackboard, helpless in the mazes of geometrical problems, it was certainly curious how his thoughts always reverted to Effie, the musical way in which Latin verbs in all their forms came readily from her lips, and the clear-headed, neat-minded way in which she would elucidate a problem. Effie Broomfield! It was not the most harmonious name in the world, but he found himself often repeating it mentally, over and over, as if it were a strain of music.

Near the close of the term he went again to visit her school. Well might he feel pride in his pupil as he noticed the results of her winter's work. Rude, gawky boys were transformed into young gentlemen, and romping, hoydenish girls into young ladies. Their progress in learning had been rapid and thorough, and Ralph was not at all sparing of his encomiums. The little school ma'am took them as demurely as though they were a matter of course, seeming to feel in no wise flattered, and Ralph, somehow, felt himself her inferior.

"She's just the one for a teacher," he said to himself, as he pursued his solitary way homeward. "What a splendid wife she would make for some man who intended to make that his life work."

He did not go home at the winter vacation, it being only a week.

"It is almost too bad," Mrs. Watkins said to him consolingly. "I dare say it looks a long time ahead before you will see your wife."

"It does, really," replied Ralph, with a blush that sent Mrs. Watkins into silent admiration over his modesty.

Mrs. Elliott informed the curious that Mr. Willett sent a letter to his wife every day through vacation, and was obliging enough to show to several the white monogram envelopes whereon "Mrs. Ralph Willett," in writing almost as handsome as engraving, stood to their minds as evidence of high martial affection. The spring opened with a great increase of scholars, and Ralph needed an assistant. Effie Broomfield was among the pupils, but he was so impressed with her superiority as a teacher, that he offered her the post of assistant; she finally consented with reluctance to teach half the day, giving the other half to her studies. Kate Martin was engaged the other half of the day, and the school went bravely on.

It was a lovely spring. The snow went off in such good temper! no angry winds or dismal rains; the brooks burst into music as soon as they broke their icy bonds, and the birds sang sweetly as ever before—at least this was the way it seemed to Ralph Willett. Every night at the close of the school, he was wont to have a little conference at the desk with Miss Broomfield; somehow there was always something to inquire about or to suggest, and then they often walked down the street together as far as Mrs. Watkins' gate.

"I do think, Effie," said Rose Peters, enviously, one day, "that you are getting to be a real flirt. Mr. Willett is altogether too attentive for a married man."

Effie's eyes flashed indignantly.

"You have no occasion to make such a remark. Mr. Willett says nothing to me but what is proper and business-like, and anybody might hear."

"Oh, now, don't fly into a passion about it," laughed Rose, twirling the multitude of rings on her fingers, "I only meant to joke you a little; though, to tell the truth, if he wasn't a married man I should think he was dead in love with you; his eyes follow you everywhere, and when you speak he seems to devour every word you say."

"Hush!" said Effie, authoritatively, though not a soul was in hearing. "I will not listen to such nonsense."

"Oh, you innocent little darning!" laughed Rose. "I only wish I had your chance in Mr. Willett's eyes, and make that wife of his jealous."

"It's a pity that the devoted attention of all the unmarried men in town will not suffice you, but you must sigh after the married."

"Children are always crying for the moon, you know. Perhaps if Mr. Willett wasn't a married man he would be no better than the rest; but, as it is, there is not a young man in town worth mentioning the same day."

All pleasant things in this world must come to an end sooner or later, and this pleasant spring term was no exception to the rule. It closed in May with a grand exhibition. The night proved, as exhibition nights are prone to, dark and rainy. Dame nature, after being in good, smiling behaviour all the time, might be pardoned for making this closing night a time for her most copious tears.

Effie Broomfield wended her way to the exhibition under her father's escort, with the triple aid of his arm, lantern and umbrella.

"You make a splendid beau, father; you don't seem at all afraid of wetting your own boots and leaving the best walking."

"Thanks for the compliment, but I dare say you will be leaving me in the lurch and allowing one of those same glossy booted young men to walk home with you. It's the way of the ungrateful world, you know."

"But not my way," said Effie stoutly; "I'm engaged to you for to-night, so don't forget to wait for me; your lantern, umbrella and good care are altogether irresistible."

The hall was crowded to overflow in spite of the rain, and Effie, from her seat away in front, did not notice that her father was called out before the exhibition was half over. At its close she donned her wraps, and while she spoke the good byes to one and another of her schoolmates, waited and watched for her father.

He did not come, though the hall was fast emptying. Two or three offers of company home she declined, still thinking he must be there, when up came Fred Peters, a chum of her brother Jack's.

"Oh, Miss Effie! I've been hunting the hall over for you; your father was called out to serve on a jury, but he left his lantern and umbrella with Jack, and told him to see to you. But Jack, he'd been and offered his company home with Minnie Warner before that, so he asked me to tell you to wait till he came back."

Effie groaned in spirit, for Minnie Warner's home was away at the other end of the long street. Was there ever anything so inconsiderate as a younger brother of sixteen? She went up