

## The Holly-berry Wedding

By Mrs. Findley Braden

IN ALL New York State there wasn't a handsomer girl of twenty, at the time, than Colonel Forbes' second daughter, Justine. And that is easily proved, too, by the old daguerreotype which has been hidden away in the secret drawer of my office desk for forty years and over. Why, didn't Justine's great dark eyes sparkle like the stars of midwinter? And who else had such silken, black curls combined with rose-pink cheeks, perfect teeth, cherry-red lips, and creamy throat and arms? A girl of a thousand, talented, merry-hearted, and a life-prize, surely, for any one of her many admirers, was sweet Justy Forbes. And at last Captain Kent Hermiston was the more than lucky winner. They made a splendid couple, and both were general favorites. Kent was a thoroughly good fellow, and he was as brave as the proverbial lion, for he had already won the Kearny Cross by a nifty battle deed.

Justine was gay and happy during the winter weeks of their short engagement and, like a snowbird, she flitted here and there, on a constant round of pleasure, that was still half marred by the captain's continued absence. And this brings me straight as a rule to what was long called the Holly-berry Wedding, because of the many branches of holly used in decorating the broad hall and long parlors of the old Forbes homestead. It was Justine's idea, and brothers, cousins, and friends helped her to carry it out by scouring the woods for holly with yellow berries. "No red berries, please," she said, with an imploring glance. "To me they seem like drops of blood, and you know that Kent has been wounded twice."

Yes, we all knew that; and I also knew that Erd Cleland's chances for winning Justine's warm, white hand would have been much greater if pity for a wounded soldier had not come at the right moment to weigh down the scales in Kent Hermiston's favor. For Erd had loved her from childhood, while the captain had never set eyes upon her beautiful face until the previous summer, when he had accompanied Colonel Forbes home on a brief furlough. But it had been love at sight on both sides, and so Erd didn't complain, as he might have done, if she was being married against her wish to one who was not worthy.

The wedding was set for Christmas Eve, and the invitations flew right and left, till everybody in the county who was anybody was all on the tip-toe of pleasant expectation. Even the children were interested, for Justine loved each one of them, and they, in turn, loved Justine. One little girl explained it by saying that she always saw kisses in Justy Forbes' eyes, and got them, too, without asking.

The family joy also extended to the servants. Justine's old nurse, black Aunt Diademy, who had long been chief cook, laughed and cried together over her preparation of the wedding dainties. And Ben Blackadder, the Colonel's coachman, who was a great banjoist, and something of a poet, composed a really good song, beginning:

It's comin' soon,  
Befo' full moon,  
Deah missy's weddin'-day,  
So git yo' banjos all in tune,  
An' plinkty-plink away.  
Plinkty-plink,  
Plinkty-plink,  
Plinkty-plink away.

When Christmas eve finally came, the roomy old house at Marshden was filled to overflowing with merry wedding-guests. Outside, there was a constant jingle of sleigh-bells, while within, all was light, warmth, and yellow holly-berries everywhere. And the effect was really wonderful. The wedding ceremony was to be at eight, and the captain had telegraphed from

New York that he would arrive at seven. Justine had obligingly promised the children a first private view of the bride, and so they trooped up to her room in happy pairs, with many "ohs!" and "ahs!" when they reached the open door, where pretty Myrtace Forbes, an older sister, was fastening the long wedding-veil. For Justine was radiant in ivory satin and real lace, and Kent's gift, a beautiful pearl necklace, was clasped about her round white throat. There were yellow holly-berries in her black braids and among the soft folds of lace on her bosom.

"You can look, but you must not touch," said matter-of-fact Myrtace to the eager children.

"But we want to kiss her!" pleaded one.

"And I shall kiss them all!" decided Justine.

So, quite regardless of wedding finery, ten happy minutes followed that actually ended with a romp, in which the six bridesmaids joined.

"Sister Justy," said little Linnie Forbes, at last, "what makes Captain Hermiston so late?"

Justine smiled. "He is to come at seven, dear."

"But it was seven by the hall clock when we came up the stair, and I've been listening to hear the door-bell ever since."

Justine sighed. "He has been detained somewhere, of course. And the journey has been long and tiring, for Kent is still but a convalescent."

"But he promised to eat philopena with me before the wedding, and now he may not come at all."

"Nonsense, child!" cried Myrtace, in dismay. "Captain Hermiston may be a few minutes late, but he always keeps his word, and never disappoints."

"Yes," added Justine; "Kent is a man of his word."

But the minutes flew by—ten, twenty, and even thirty of them. Colonel Forbes was impatiently pacing the long hall with Dr. Austin, the rector of St. Mark's. "Hermiston is late, for once," he said, simply. "But supper shall be served, and the ceremony can come after, so no time will be lost."

When the clock struck eight, Doris Crossmore, the prettiest of the bridesmaids, and Justine's closest friend, hastened to her side, in sympathy.

"Has Kent come? Is there any word, Doris?" she asked.

"No, Justy. But he will surely be here at last, so do not worry."

She had laid her wedding-veil aside, and was standing at the window, with bright, tearless eyes fixed on the snow-covered lawn. "Yes, Doris, Kent is bound to come sooner or later; I haven't a fear on that score. And I am going down to supper, too, because I want everyone to be glad and happy, and do full justice to Aunt Diademy's splendid cooking. Call mother and the girls. They have waited too long already."

So she had her way, and smilingly headed the wedding party that went in gay procession to the dining-room. Kent's vacant chair at the head of the long table spoke volumes, but his name was not mentioned, save when the Colonel announced that Captain Hermiston had been unavoidably detained.

Dancing followed supper, at Justine's request, and nine o'clock came with startling rapidity, for there was still no sign of the missing bridegroom. Anxiety was plainly written on the countenance of every guest.

Justine had stolen away to the library, and there Erd Cleland found her, white-faced and speechless. "Courage!" he whispered. "I shall bring Captain Hermiston back to you if I have to go clear to New York to find him. But I'll ride over to the station first. There is a late train, you know, and he may come on that."

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