

known his hopes somebody else would. Indeed, there were already others in the field, for Hermione was a general favourite. But she had always appeared to like him, he reminded himself with a blush, though he had not gone far enough to put her preference to the test. Indeed, he had been made to appear to pay more attention to Minerva than to her friend, for Minerva had an unscrupulous frankness which, when she wished, appropriated to herself the apparent admiration of the other sex without regard to their inclination. Yet he thought he had contrived to let Hermione know that she was dear to him. Yes, surely she must know this. And now the time had come for him to speak decidedly.

He sat down to compose a letter which should accompany the photograph of himself that he was about to send her. It cost him far more trouble than the prize thesis or the most abstruse of his examination papers, and he wrote several copies before he could satisfy himself.

No. 1 (after numerous erasures and corrections):

MY DEAR MISS SWEET,—I cannot describe my emotions on receiving your lovely photograph, nor how grateful I am to you for sending it to me. It shall always remain among my most cherished possessions.

How delightful to me was that last year at college. Study, always agreeable, possessed, especially towards the last, a new charm, for I had then an additional and most powerful incentive to work. May I be permitted to tell you what it was? Or can you guess? But, no; you could not imagine that I had even then the temerity to aspire to stand well in your eyes. Yet it was.

And now, my dear Miss Sweet, in sending you my photograph, as agreed, I am presumptuous enough to offer with it, for your acceptance, my heart and hand.

Although not in a position to marry immediately, to which, I need not say, all my desires incline, the promise which I have just received of an honorable and fairly remunerative temporary position, and the prospect of a still better one at no very distant date, embolden me to make you acquainted with my hopes, and to beg that you will permit me to call upon you to express them at greater length in a personal interview.

Drop me but a line if what I have said does not displease you, and say if I may come and when.

I am, my dear Miss Sweet, yours faithfully,

D. PEVERLY DART.

No. 2.

“MY DEAR MISS SWEET,—I am almost crazy. I cannot write coherently. You must understand what I mean.

Pity and forgive, yours distractedly,

P. DART.

P.S. No. 1.—Tell me when I may come and see you.

P.S. No. 2.—Thanks for your too lovely photograph. I send mine, which is even more frightful than the original.

P. D.

No. 3.

“MY DEAR MISS SWEET,—Very many thanks for your photograph. I hope I need scarcely say how highly I prize the gift. I am leaving town in a few days, and there is something I earnestly wish to say to you before I go. May I call to-morrow evening, or any time that will suit you? I enclose my own photograph, which you were good enough to promise to accept.

Faithfully yours,

PEVERLY DART.”

You will observe that in all these letters the writer appeals for a personal interview, and that in the last, which, though it by no means satisfied him, was the one which he ultimately sent, he emphasizes his request by stating that he is about to leave town.

When he had written the letter and slipped it into the case containing his photograph, he carefully mailed the little package with his own hand. He sent the letter thus, rather than separately, as a compliment to Miss Sweet's excessive modesty, and one which he felt sure she would appreciate. At the same time he mailed a separate note and photograph to Minerva.

He had no difficulty in writing to Minerva. He addressed her with perfect frankness; complimented her on her attainments and the honours she had won, and assured her that the result was only what had been expected by all her friends. And then, with Hermione all the time in his mind, he indulged in a little sentiment. Not much, but it read very prettily, and might be taken to mean a great deal more than it really did, and it would be sure to please Minerva, who loved flattery. Then he went for a walk with his friend, Mr. Dipsey, and hoped that they should meet Miss Sweet, for the day was lovely.

They did not meet her, but Mr. Dipsey was not averse to having her included in the conversation, though in a subordinate way to Minerva, or Miss Battle, for such was her suggestive cognomen, whom he appropriated to himself, and of whom, in conjunction with himself, he talked a great deal. He also had sent his photograph to the two girls, and had received theirs, and had written them each a very pretty note.

Mr. Dipsey's infantile face, with his guileless expression, had made quite a charming picture, and, although Mr. Peverly Dart and others of Mr. Dipsey's male friends to whom he had shown it, pronounced it effeminate, the young ladies were very much pleased with it.

Mr. Peverly Dart did not care what Minerva or the girls generally thought of it, but he hoped that Hermione had not gone into any absurd raptures over it. He set out the next evening at eight o'clock to make his call, hoping that he should find Hermione alone. She had not answered his note or said that he might come, but all the same she would surely be prepared for his visit. To his intense chagrin the

maid who opened the door informed him that Miss Sweet was not at home. He ventured to ask if it would be long before she returned, and was told that she had gone out for the evening. So there was nothing for him to do but to retrace his steps homewards, or go in some other direction, whithersoever fancy might lead him.

The following day he waited impatiently the arrival of every mail—the first delivery, the second and third, hoping that one or the other would bring him some word of explanation; and so on to the next day, and the next, and the last. But he was disappointed. He knew not what to make of it. At first he was filled with indignation; then alarm; then frenzy; then despair. He called on Miss Battle, hoping to hear something through her; but she was laid up with an attack of rose rash. He dared not venture to repeat his visit to Hermione, or to write to her again, under the discouraging circumstances of her silence. A fact that increased his discomfiture and irritated him greatly was that Mr. Dipsey had met and conversed with her.

“I had no idea that little Hermione was half so charming,” said that fickle graduate, after he had moped for the greater part of a day over Minerva's illness. “Those dimples of hers and her laughing eyes are quite irresistible, and,” with a little complacent smile, for which Mr. Peverly Dart would have liked to kick him down stairs, “she says she has fallen in love with my photograph. Absurd! Isn't it?”

It was absurd, quite absurd, Mr. Peverly Dart told himself. Nevertheless, it added another sting to his already lacerated feelings. Hermione had not said that she had fallen in love with his photograph. In fact she had said nothing at all about it. She had treated both it and him with silent contempt.

There was to be a concert that evening in the Academy of Music, and Mr. Dart decided to go, in the secret hope that Hermione might be there. To his great delight, Mr. Dipsey had another engagement and could not accompany him. Yes, there she was, not half a dozen yards off, in a front row, looking bewitching in a white opera cloak and smiling sweetly on the old dowager who was acting chaperon.

He coughed slightly to attract her attention, and she turned round, but did not seem to see him. Then he cleared his throat, and finally sneezed three times, and at the third sneeze Hermione looked at him and bowed slightly. Mr. Dart's hopes rose with even this little recognition, and he began to devise plans for disposing of the dowager and escorting Hermione home.

The room was very warm, and, perhaps, the old lady would faint, and he should rush to her assistance and procure a cab, in which she and a doctor, who was present, would drive to her residence, and lest she should be crowded, Hermione would walk and accept the protection of Mr. Dart's arm. Or a message would arrive suddenly to take the dowager away to a sick grandchild, and she would look around for some one to whose care she could confide Hermione, who, she would insist, should stay to the end of the performance, and would see Mr. Peverly Dart and summon him by a glance to her side.

It was very delightful. These castles in the air were beautiful structures, and Mr. Peverly Dart enjoyed the concert immensely while they lasted. When it was over he made his way to Hermione at once and accosted her with a conventional “Good evening!”

She did not offer him her hand, and her face was graver than usual when she replied, and he felt abashed and taken down. But he was to leave the next morning, and this fact made him desperate.

The dowager was talking to some one else at the moment, and Mr. Dart half lowered his voice and said to Hermione, watching her face all the while:

“I must say good-bye. I am going, way to-morrow morning. Are you sorry? Do you care?” he was about to add, but the dowager turned round before the words had left his lips.

“Are you indeed?” said Hermione with vivacity. “Where are you going, may I ask? Mrs. Maladroit, Mr. Dart is going to leave us.”

And the dowager expressed polite surprise.

He told Hermione where he was going—his hands turning cold and his legs trembling with the effort to speak indifferently. He felt himself growing very pale, and was conscious of looking ridiculous. Hermione watched him now with an arch smile that brought out all her dimples.

“I hope you will like the North-West and be successful,” she said pleasantly. “But we must go now. Good night and good-bye!” and she placed her hand in his for a single moment, as she turned away with the dowager.

After that Mr. Peverly Dart went home supremely wretched, and feeling so very small in his own eyes that Mr. Dipsey, who looked in upon him in his lodgings afterwards, at once concluded that Hermione had either snubbed or rejected him, for Mr. Dart admitted having seen her at the concert.

Mr. Dipsey was noted, amongst his other qualities, for a faculty of extracting information from his friends when he so desired it, however reluctant they might be to give it. “Dipsey,” or Alf, or Dolly, as he was indifferently called, “will worm it out of you if he wants to,” was a common saying of those who knew the young gentleman. But on this occasion, beyond the mere fact of his having seen and spoken to her, the most persistent cross-questioning on Mr. Dipsey's part failed to elicit confidence from Mr. Peverly Dart in regard to his relations with Hermione.

He went away next morning without having told his secret to Mr. Dipsey, or to any one.

It was December. Seven months had passed since Mr. Peverly Dart had left Modernville, and Miss Minerva Battle was entertaining some of her college friends on Christmas Eve, when Mr. Dipsey, who was present, look-

ing sweeter and more infantile than ever, with a pink rose-bud in his button-hole and the tiniest of shoes on his tiny feet, announced that he had heard on his way up that Mr. Dart had returned.

“Is he at the old address, do you know?” asked Minerva, catching instantly at the news. “What fun it would be to telephone and have him join us if he can. It would make one more of our old class.”

All present thought the idea a “splendid” one, and Minerva proceeded to carry it out at once, her guests accompanying her, amid much merriment, to the room where the telephone was kept.

“O, I could hear him perfectly. It was such fun,” said Miss Battle, when the conversation was ended and she had rung off. “He says he will be delighted, and he will come just as soon as he can make himself presentable. He arrived by the 8 o'clock train and his voice is just as squeaky as ever. I wish you could have heard it, it was so comical.”

“I daresay yours was comical too,” said Hermione, and there was a little laugh, for Minerva had raised her voice to its highest pitch.

Mr. Dart arrived in due time and was complimented by Minerva on his robust appearance.

Hermione greeted him cordially, but he did not speak to her after the first few words.

He noticed that she was wearing a dress of a colour which he remembered having once admired and having ventured to tell her so—a combination of velvet and some soft material in crushed strawberry.

The idea flashed across his mind—could it be that she had remembered his preference and had consulted it in his absence, although she had trampled on his feelings, or was it her vanity, because she looked well in it?

The evening came to a close, and when Mr. Dipsey, who had just received a snub from the latest object of his affections, a Juno-like cousin of his former flame, Minerva, was about to offer himself as an escort to Hermione, Mr. Peverly Dart stepped up and forestalled him.

He could not account for the impulse which made him run counter to the rules he had laid down when he had thought that he should meet her, but so it was.

The night was full of stars, and clear and cold. The snow lay white upon the streets.

Hermione shivered slightly as they stepped from the warm room into the frosty air, and Mr. Dart, with another impulse of inconsistency, drew her arm a little closer within his own. They walked on in silence for a little way, then Hermione spoke.

“I wanted to tell you why I never answered your note,” she said, hesitating over the words. “The note you sent me with your photograph I never got it until a day or two ago. I was clearing out a drawer and came upon a lot of old photograph cases. They were no use and I thought I would destroy them. One of them was addressed in your handwriting, and I threw it with the others into the waste-paper basket. As I did so your note fell out, and I read it then for the first time.”

Mr. Peverly Dart's heart seemed to stand still while she spoke, and he listened with breathless eagerness, and, when she paused, he broke out in a quick rapture of delight:

“Is this true? Can it be possible? And you would have answered it had you got it? And what would you have said? O, tell me, Hermione—tell me quickly, what would you have said?”

“I should have told you to come, of course,” said Hermione, in a voice so low that Mr. Dart had to bend his head close to hers to catch the words, “though I could not have known what you had to say. I cannot know now.”

They were approaching Hermione's home, but, by tacit consent, they turned into another street, which would prolong the walk.

“Then I may tell you,” said Mr. Peverly Dart with eagerness. “It was to say I loved you and to ask if you could love me enough in return to promise to be my wife.”

“Ah,” said Hermione, with a laugh and a little tremble in her voice. “Then why did you write so affectionately to Minerva? You could not have—loved—us both.”

“Loved you both,” Mr. Dart interrupted. “Certainly not. I never cared in the least for Miss Battle. She is not my style. If I wrote affectionately to her—I do not remember that I did—but if I did, it was that I was thinking of you.”

“But,” persisted Hermione, her voice still trembling, “you praised her talents and spoke of her high destiny, and you said nothing of that kind to me.”

“O, you know why it was,” returned Mr. Dart, laughing now, for he saw that he was gaining the advantage. “I was not thinking about your talents. I was thinking only of yourself. I wanted you alone; just as I want you now. Will you be mine?”

The last words had rather a commonplace ring, and under some circumstances Hermione might have felt amused, but there was no mistaking their sincerity in the present instance, and they answered their purpose, as also did Hermione's reply.

The Christmas bells were ringing when the lovers reluctantly parted on the steps of Miss Sweet's residence, agreeing to meet each other a few hours later at the morning service in the church which Hermione attended.

The engagement was soon known, and created a pleasing flutter amongst the college friends of the two young people, all agreeing that it was only what might have been expected. But Mr. Dipsey feared Miss Sweet might suffer from Peverly's uneven temper, and Miss Battle was just a little anxious over the possible inconstancy of the same individual.

Hermione had no such fears.

EROL GERVAISE.