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The Taking of Laurella.

Written specially for the Western Home Monthly.

"Please leave them thar dishes alone, Laurelly, and come and set down."

"Did you want to talk to me?" The girl turned a face of lovely surprise over her shoulder as she gave a great yellow bowl an extra vigorous shove back upon the high shelf.

Did he want to talk to her? Her lover looked at her in helpless irritation. This was the history of their courtship; when he met her at quarterly or grove meetings he fancied that if he were alone with her he might make headway. When they had the great kitchen all to themselves, as to-night, with the firelight making gusty shadow and shine upon its crannied walls, he found that she slipped through his fingers like a mist-wreath or a moonbeam, and evaded his ardor by not recognizing it.

"Course I want to talk to you. What do you reckon I come all the way over from the Fur Cove fer?" "I didn't know. I was a wonder-in'. I thought maybe you wanted to see pappy or the boys."

The attitude of the mountain girl toward men and matrimony is primitive. She is not seeking the one nor admiring the other. She animadverts upon characteristics purely masculine as defects. Masculine size she professes to consider clumsiness; a bass voice is a "great coarse, rough voice." When she is finally wed, the countryside is to understand that it is an event which never entered into her calculations, which has been accomplished only by surprise and superior force.

Jason Bushares sat, hypnotized, watching how the firelight ran up Laurella's white throat, lingering in her eyelashes, throwing their shadow upward, adding an extra touch of surprised enquiry to her countenance, as she faced him and professed herself ready to hear the business upon which he had come. But was she? Would she listen?

"Don't you remember, Laurelly, when you an' me used to go to the hollerin' school together, an' I was always a writin' notes to you, just as soon as I learned how to write—or print, ruther?"

"Aw, law! Them days!" laughed Laurella with heightened color, ignoring the significance of his speech. "Didn't the teacher have big feet? I've studied about his feet many a time since, when I ought to have been thinkin' of somethin' sensible. Has your ma put in any of them dice pattern counterpanes for to weave, Jason?"

The fate of nations might have hung upon Mother Bushares' weaving, if one could judge by the girl's face; but Jason ignored the question.

"Don't you remember, when I went down to Garyville and got me a job on the railroad, how I sent you a vollenline?" he pursued.

"No!" the girl cried, with sparkling eyes. "Was it a comic?"

"You know hit wasn't. My name was on it, an' it said—it said—"

Jason floundered helplessly before those laughing eyes. He sought desperately in his mind for the exact words that had been in the valentine—they would have served his purpose well.

"Seems to me I do mind about a right pretty vollenline that had a name wrote so scratchy on it I couldn't tell who 'twas sent it. I jes' made it up in my own mind it was Bob Provine—he's always up to such foolishness—an' let it go at that. Did your folks put up as much meat as usual this fall? Looks like our hogs never would fatten, an' pappy won't kill till they're jes' so."

"Yes," choked Jason, "we killed last week. I guess we've got ruther more than usual—er perhaps considerable less."

The girl giggled. "You ain't thinkin' a word about what you're sayin'," she commented softly.

"I'm a thinkin' about somethin' I want to say," Jason burst out, and would have gone further; but the girl rose hastily.

"Well, this'll never do me," she began. "Ef you don't mind, I guess I'll weave a spell. I promised mammy I'd finish the jeans for Homer's coat."

Cruel Laurella! Tall and fresh and fair, pink and white as the mountain laurel for which she was named, she had already woven a spell; and Jason could not utter the rebellion that was in him, as she seated herself at the loom whose whirr and bang would be a ready reason for failing to hear anything that she chose not to recognize.

And so for half an hour the tormented swain stood at her shoulder. "Laurelly, I jes' want you to listen a minute."

"All right, Jason, you holler right good an' loud an' I can hear you even when the loom's a goin'."

But what man ever desired to "hol-ler" such speeches right good and loud? Besides, if he did so his shouts would be audible in the loft above, where the boys slept, and in the room across the open porch, where the parents and the younger children were.

Finally Laurella's weaving came to an end, because she lacked a darning-needle to pull out an unwelcome knot. Jason was standing threateningly close.

"You jest get me that there poke off of the high shelf, will you?" she asked, turning coquettishly over her shoulder.

"Tain't here." "Oh, yes, 'tis—all eyes an' no eyes—hit's right beside the yaller bowl. No—no! Don't take the yaller bowl down! You, Jake Bushares—I'll never speak to you again!"

But she was too late. She sprang up and ran across the room to where Jason Bushares set the yellow bowl upon the table, tilted it over, and emptied out all her girlish treasures: the little smudgy printed letter he had first written to her, on a dog-eared fly-leaf of his second reader; the "vollenline" she had laughed about and denied knowledge of; a tintype taken at Garyville, and pencilled across in her handwriting, "My own true love."

This last item settled it. "Ye said ye wouldn't have that picture," Jason murmured, as he caught her in his arms and held her fast. "Ye said it was too ugly. Ye said ye was jes' carryin' it home to give it to your brother."

Laurella looked up with blue eyes drowned in tears, thus permitting the enemy an advantage which he was not slow in taking.

"What do you expect a girl to do?" she finally murmured gently. "Why, jest like you did," answered her lover happily. "I wouldn't have a single hair o' your head changed—now I've got ye at last!"

"How is Professor Bobolink coming on with his investigations of the poison of the rattlesnake?" "No results. He had a fine specimen of rattler; drank a quart of whisky—" "And then?" "The snake wouldn't bite him."

"Who is that insignificant looking individual over there?" "My brother." "Wh-wh-what! Well, you can't always tell by appearances. I—I-I dare say, foolish as he looks, he's probably the most intelligent one in the family."

"There's mighty few people," said Farmer Cornrossel, "that knows what to do with a farm after they get one." "I have noticed that," answered the girl with frizzes. "They always insist on filling the whole place up with corn and oats and things, when they might have such lovely courts and golf links."



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