

them, and borne off the glorious shepherd (who by the way was a prince in disguise) leaving the astonished maiden to cry out in a melody of tears and lamentations against the bitterness of fate.

She was thus tunelessly bewailing her disaster when Tom's eyes chanced to wander from the stage to the floor of the house. Their only reason for doing so was that Mrs. Woodruff's had suddenly gone in the same direction. A lady and gentleman were seating themselves in the third row of the orchestra chairs. The lady was stooping as Tom's glance fell upon her. When she raised her head he recognized Olive Kingston. He turned to his companion.

"Why, she is here," he whispered.

Mrs. Woodruff fanned herself and smiled sweetly.

His gaze reverted to the pit. He had not met Mr. Kingston, but he knew the gentleman by her side was Olive's father. This gentleman was going West on an official journey, and had stayed over in the city for a day to see his daughter and some friends. This was very well, but why should he be here, or rather why should his daughter be here with him? Why should Olive be unable to accompany her lover to the theatre, and yet afterwards appear escorted thither by her father?

To these questions, which rapidly became insistent, Tom could find no answer. Olive did not now seem ill. She had an unwonted, though perfectly healthy, colour in her cheek. He observed that she did not look at him. Her eyes had that cold light he had already become acquainted with; though they ranged above and around his box they did not rest upon it.

With the going down of the curtain his emotion found restrained expression.

"She seems to have recovered," he remarked to Mrs. Woodruff.

"Yes," said the lady, still fanning herself and nodding brightly to some one in the opposite box, "I hope poor Olive's head is better."

"Isn't it a little surprising that she should have recovered so soon?" said Tom. "Perhaps we should have waited."

"Yes, Mr. Weatherley, I suggested it, you know, but you were so anxious not to be late that you would not delay a moment."

"Was I anxious?" Tom did not think he had been. "I wonder where she was," he added.

"Yes, indeed!"—a gentleman, another occupant of the box opposite, received an enchanting smile—"I wonder where she could have been."

Tom's eyes here wandered again to Olive. She was now looking into their box, but at Mrs. Woodruff rather than at himself. Then without seeing him they passed to another part of the house. Tom felt a trifle chilled. There was a suggestion of the street air in her glance. He saw that something was wrong, but it was no fault of his. He began talking to Mrs. Woodruff.

"How jolly it would be," he said, covering a yawn, "if life were a sort of comic opera; if one could go singing through it, I piping and announcing to you my disappointments, say, and you carolling away to me of your successes—all in a sort of make-believe, done for the fun and fancy of the thing."

"I dare say you could sing without any make-believe of a disappointment to-night," replied Mrs. Woodruff, smiling at him.

"I," said Tom starting, "not at all—no indeed. It has been altogether a success. Have you not enjoyed the singing?"

"O yes, I have enjoyed it well enough, but that is another matter. You might have enjoyed it more if Olive had come with us."

"Nonsense!" said Tom—but he believed that he was blushing. Then he wondered Mrs. Woodruff could say such a thing.

There was a moment's cessation of talk, during which the lady gazed serenely out over the rows of heads.

"How pleasant it would be now," said Tom, recurring to his operative scheme of life, "if I could be a picturesque shepherd and you could be a charming—I may say a radiant shepherdess—but should you like to be a radiant shepherdess?"

"If I were I dare say you would not make such violent love to me as our young friend with the flaxen curls and the azure vest offers to his maiden."

"O I say now," cried Tom, feeling foolish, "why do you say that? How do you know that I shouldn't? I dare say I should."

"O I dare say," Mrs. Woodruff laughed a little. Tom began to suspect a complication somewhere. But luckily

here the curtain rose, and life, for the nonce, was again an agreeable make-believe.

When the play was over it occurred to Tom that they might find Olive and her father and be driven home together. He thought they might thus reach an explanation of the mistake of the evening, for that there had been a blunder somewhere he was convinced. When he had assisted Mrs. Woodruff into the sleigh, he stood for some minutes examining the crowds that streamed from the gaping doors of the opera house. As they did not appear he then got into the sleigh and peered through its square opening for a minute longer, till Mrs. Woodruff complained with a slight shiver of the cold. Deciding that the Kingstons must have already gone, he reluctantly put up the window, and they were driven off at a brisk pace.

They had gone but a short distance when Mrs. Woodruff, who had been staring into the snowy street, turned to Tom and murmured gently, almost inaudibly:

"You must forget what I said to-night, Mr. Weatherley. I spoke thoughtlessly. Indeed I did not mean anything. I was only jesting."

"Which—of course Mrs. Woodruff—but what was it you said?"

"O you know well enough." She was staring into the street again.

"Upon my honour, Mrs. Woodruff, it may be unpardonable, but I am unable to recall the particular thing to which you refer."

"O well, since you have forgotten it already, I need not refresh your memory." Her voice was more than gentle now; it had a tender sadness.

"Ah, now you are unkind. I am sure I remember every word that fell from your lips, though I may not have noted this particular remark." Tom was not in the midnight darkness he pretended. A sort of morning twilight had been breaking upon him.

"O you know—that about your enjoying the play more if Olive had been with us."

"Oh!" said Tom.

"And about—about your making love to—to the shepherdess. I thought you were in jest, and so I took it up in the same spirit."

"Why, of course, of course Mrs. Woodruff, it was a joke. I—really—of course I understand you were jesting. Did you think—"

"And I suppose you were hating to have me here all the time, and really wishing it was Olive. And I'm sure I did not want in the least to go—only I hated that you should be disappointed—and how could I tell where Olive was?"

Poor Tom! he had not bargained for this. What could the lady mean?

"Why, Mrs. Woodruff, you are mistaken. I am not at all disappointed. In fact I have been very much delighted. And I should have been disappointed, quite disappointed, if you had not come. And it was very kind of you—why, what a strange idea!" To re-assure the sensitive lady he drew near her and bent forward, but she refused to look at him.

"And I dare say," she went on, in a tone of sweet, though sorrowful, resignation, "that Olive will be very angry with you, and then you will be angry with me—that is if you care so much for Olive, and I dare say you do."

"I care for Miss Kingston very much," said Tom, with a warmth that was inexcusable. "But why should she be angry with me, and why should I be angry with you? We were not to blame; and she was enabled to go after all."

Tom had not uttered these words when the young widow sat bolt upright, and he involuntarily became also erect. Her pensive languor was gone. She looked straight at the velvet darkness before her.

"O, of course it does not matter at all," she said, with frigid politeness. "And besides, as you are leaving town to-morrow, I may not see you again for some time. I intend going away myself in a few days on a long visit to my aunt in New Orleans."

Tom expressed his regret, and an awkward silence succeeded. This was not broken until they reached the house. As they ascended the steps Mrs. Woodruff asked him if he would not come in and say good-bye to the others. She added that she could not see any light. Tom did not know whether to take this for an intimation, for he wished to see Olive. He replied, however, that he guessed he would come round in the morning, before the train started, to make his adieux. When the door had opened and closed on the young widow he ran down the steps and flung himself into his sleigh. As he was borne homewards, to the sound of the jingling bells and the thud of the horse's feet, he told himself

that there really was a complication. Then he thought with a dubious satisfaction that he was not in it, or, if he had been in it, that he had come out of it safely.

## II.

He kept his promise to call at the Woodruffs' next morning before leaving town. When at a short distance from the house, he observed an elderly gentleman mounting the steps, in whom he recognized Olive's father. He had not met Mr. Kingston before, as I have said, and the thought of becoming acquainted with this important personage, though pleasant, gave him some little perturbation. To-day he wanted to see Olive alone, to express his deep regret that she had not been with him the night before; to learn whether she had suffered much from head-ache, and whether it was this alone that had kept her from accompanying them. He gave the bell a considerate, an almost respectful pull. The maid who responded knew him, and opened the door very wide, as if she expected him to walk in as usual without question. He wavered on the sill, however, and asked, a trifle nervously, if Miss Kingston were within. He was informed, to his surprise, that Miss Kingston had gone out half an hour before. Would she soon return, he enquired. To this question his informant could give no positive answer. Miss Kingston might be gone an hour and she might be gone half an hour. More than this his scrupulously veracious interlocutor would not say. But would not Mr. Weatherley come in and wait. Tom replied, glancing first at his watch and then into the street, that he had not time. Might he see Mrs. Woodruff for a moment? To his increased astonishment the maiden answered him, this time with the confidence of perfect knowledge, that Miss Kingston and Mrs. Woodruff had gone out together. They must not have expected Mr. Weatherley, she supposed. Tom thanked her and went slowly down the steps. He thought of Mr. Kingston, but he had no wish to see him. He could not postpone his departure, and now he should not see Olive for two weeks. They had not even arranged as to correspondence. He had left that for the last meeting.

He thought he might run across the young ladies in the street, but this hope also was doomed to disappointment. He even stared into some shops on his way, till at last, on appealing again to his chronometer, he discovered that he had not a moment to spare. He made haste to reach the station, and arrived in time to hurry into his train, which was already moving.

As he was carried out of the city, over the rattling, swaying bridge and across the whitened fields, he mentally declared himself to be the sport of some malignant fate. He should not write to Olive; he would wait till he could see her. Meanwhile he must endure this short separation as best he could.

He endured it with sufficient fortitude, and on the day of his return to town lost no time in presenting himself at the Woodruffs'. It was a bright January afternoon. The sun was shining with an April forecast; the snow was melting from the eaves, and the pendant icicles were diminishing in liquid drops. He rang the bell, this time with decision, and turned for a look at the blue, benignant sky. The door opened, his friend, the maid-servant, regarded him pleasantly, and he walked lightly in.

"Miss Kingston?" he enquired, but before the girl could answer he heard a stir in the drawing-room and glanced in. He was in time to see a well-known figure passing rapidly toward a door in the rear.

"Olive!" he called, half in delight, half in consternation.

The young lady turned and came towards him. He had extended his hand, but, as she did not smile and made no movement of acceptance, it dropped to his side.

"What is the matter, Olive?" he demanded.

"I am not aware that there is anything the matter, Mr. Weatherley."

"Why, what is the matter?" he repeated. "What have I done?"

"It is not for me to say what you have or have not done, Mr. Weatherley."

"Olive—Miss Kingston. Surely I do not deserve this. At least you owe me an explanation."

"I owe you no explanation, Mr. Weatherley. You need no explanation."

"But, my dearest, I assure you I do! I am altogether in the dark. Will you not tell me what it is?" In his amazement Tom dropped into a chair, but, as Miss Kingston remained standing, he was obliged to get up again.

"You must not speak so to me, Mr. Weatherley, and I have nothing to tell you."