

A Country Wedding.

BY YESTER.

"Come with me, girls," she said, mysteriously. We followed, wondering what was coming now, as she led the way to the front of the house, and there on the verandah, before the hall door, with no softer pillow than the door-mat, lay the bridegroom, fast asleep. The morning sun was shining warm upon him, and the faithful Tim was stretched at his side. He had begun to smoke, for a half-smoked cigarette had fallen from his mouth.

Aunt woke him with tears in her eyes, and we asked him to explain his conduct. It seems that he could not sleep after the pillow fight, and so went for a walk with Tom to get Annie's daisies as soon as the sun began to rise; after which he sat and smoked on the verandah, when sleep at last overtook him. Tom, he thought, had gone for a swim.

He would not hear of resting again, so we took him to the breakfast-room and fed him on rolls and coffee and strawberries and cream, and lionized him to the utmost of our ability.

At length all the breakfasts were over, and the toilets made, and the time actually arrived when we were to go to the church. Annie had taken her breakfast in her room, and Arthur and Tom had gone before to the church. Annie looked her very best in her soft white summer dress, with quantities of daisies and a very becoming white bonnet. She had begged to be let off wearing a veil, as it made her nervous; so there was not much difference between her and her bridesmaids, except that our dresses are plainer and we wore hats instead of bonnets. Little Elsie looked lovely. She had a face like a peach, lit up by a pair of beautiful dark eyes. Her rich brown hair was "put up" in honour of the occasion, and, though it gave her a too grown-up appearance, was exceedingly becoming, and she looked as charming as only a country maiden of sixteen can look. She and little Dick were the handsomest of the party. The latter spoilt boy insisted in driving with the bride and her father, so we expected that Annie would be given away by her two male relatives.

As we left the house nothing happened to disturb our peace of mind but the howls of poor Tom, who had been locked in his prison again after his morning walk.

We reached the church, and soon the solemn beautiful words of the marriage service quieted our ruffled spirits. The bride was all she ought to be, and made her responses in a firm, sweet voice, and Arthur looked handsomer than I had ever seen him, in spite of his strange vigil. The little church was filled with the country people of the neighborhood, and had a very bright, cheerful appearance, with the sun streaming in through the open windows, through which also a gentle breeze came, laden with the matchless scent of the woods and clover fields.

It had been the wish of the friendly neighbours to decorate the church for the occasion, but Mr. Radford had disapproved of it, so nothing had been put up but a very pretty arch at the gate outside. The children of the Sunday-school, in which Annie had been a teacher, were provided with flowers to throw before her as she walked down the path.

Instead of the homily in the prayer book Mr. Radford spoke a few well chosen and more suitable words from a text taken from the Psalms.

The last word in the homily is "amazement," and as far as that one word goes, it would have been more appropriate than the sermon, for just as Mr. Radford was drawing to a close there was a rush and a scamper, and Tim dashed up the aisle and crouched at Arthur's feet. He seemed to feel the solemnity of the occasion, for, once in the church, he looked rather ashamed of himself, and made no sound, except the nervous whacking of his tail against the floor. The other best man spoilt things a little by saying, in an audible whisper: "Down, sir, down!" And that *enfant terrible*, Dick, who had held his father's hand during the ceremony, released himself and rolled over the animal with a little chuckle.

When the move was made towards the vestry, Tim's spirits revived, and he bounded and jumped, fawning upon the happy pair in a most riotous manner all the way down the aisle. Afterwards, in the open air, he relieved his feelings by a series of short barks, and rather spoilt the effect of the children's flowers by catching them on his back or in his mouth. It seems he had forced a board out from his prison wall and squeezed through, and so joined the wedding party.

The breakfast seemed to pass off nicely, and no further attempt was made to banish Tim, so he lay by Arthur's chair. Annie's famous jelly was a failure and would not come out of the moulds properly, and my ice cream was in a liquid state; but there were other things to eat, and as far as appetite went none of us were deficient.

The only interruption we had during the important meal was caused by the turkeys, at whose ominous pipings Belle and I exchanged anxious glances some minutes before their owner heard them. We hoped he might be too much occupied with his duties as host to notice them, but our hopes were vain, for he suddenly let fall his carving knife and fork, although Mrs. Cumberland was waiting for a helping of tongue, and started up. "Dash those turkeys!" he exclaimed, "they're in the peas. Excuse me!" and he shot through the door into the garden, where we heard him loudly scolding John for leaving the gate open.

Towards the end of the meal Mr. Radford got up and managed to say a few polite things about the young couple, to which Arthur replied gracefully enough. I don't know how it came about in my nervousness, but in a few minutes Tom was on his feet and began, in his cracked voice:

"It's rather hard on a fellow to have to say civil things about his sisters (laughter) just because they are bridesmaids, but there is another bridesmaid that I *can* say something about," and he cast a benign look of approval on Elsie. "In all the fuss we've been having (titter from the Englishmen) Elsie is the only one who has kept her temper as a lady ought to." Elsie blushed and everyone else laughed merrily. "It was all very fine for some people to say things wouldn't go nicely, but I always said—if Mr. Radford did his part well, it didn't much matter about the rest of us, as long as we kept cool and good tempered. I'm sure Mr. Radford has done things up so nicely for our cousins, and—and—there's nothing to be regretted." "Hear, hear!" interrupted uncle, who was enjoying the result of his joke immensely. "I forgot to mention," continued Tom in an official tone, "in speaking of good temper (laughter) that I think Tim—" Here the table was suddenly jerked up so as to shake the glass and china, and our female nerves, and Tim bounded out and fawned upon the orator. "Now, quiet, sir," said Tom, putting his arm round the dog and holding him in a standing position, while the creature tried to lick his face. "I was going to say that I think Tim here was as good tempered as the best of us, and I'm sure I wish he'd been the best man instead of me, for he would have made a much better one, as he's not half so shy."

As soon as Tom sat down, amid roars of laughter, I forgave him from the bottom of my heart for talking such rubbish, as I saw from everybody's ready enjoyment that the pain of Annie's departure would be lessened in the excitement. Mrs. Cumberland, especially, was delighted with the very raw, well-meaning boy, and while Annie was preparing for her drive to the station tried to get him to promise to spend his next bank holidays with her in New York.

John drove the happy pair, accompanied by Tim, to the train, the carriage filled with rice and old slippers.

V.

Arthur and Annie were to have the use of our Quebec house, while they got their necessary provisions for camping out, and Aunt Sue, Belle, Tom and I remained two days longer at Springfield to help the Denhams to get settled again and cheer them after the separation.

Uncle seemed to forget his promised revenge on Tom and was in high good humour, now all was over, though he still seemed to consider it was all a fuss about nothing.

"I think our plan was the best, after all, Kate," he said to aunt, as we were all sitting on the verandah the evening of the wedding day.

"What was that?" asked I, wondering why Aunt Kate blushed so and Aunt Sue looked so nervous.

"We ran away!" laughed he, not heeding Aunt Sue's awful look of warning, and the presence of Elsie and the younger children.

Elsie perched herself on his knee, crying "Oh, daddy, tell us all about it."

Aunt Kate looked ready to sink into the earth, and Aunt Sue came to the rescue.

"Why do you talk such nonsense, Harry?" she said. "Elsie would believe any of your romances."

"Dear me! She can believe it. It was the wisest thing I ever did in my life."

"It must have happened just about the time when you were young, Aunt Sue," said Belle, mischievously.

"I'm sure," continued the reckless man, "if Elsie can find as nice a fellow to run away with as her mother did, she's welcome to go."

Here Tom with a sagacity beyond his years, or at any rate out of keeping with his usual conduct, came to the rescue by introducing another subject. His silence during the conversation, so painful to his beloved Aunt Kate had surprised me, till I saw that he noticed her distress, and I was delighted to see that this unformed lad was not without sense and feeling.

"Uncle, did you hear about Belle's new beau in Quebec?" he asked; "brother of a fellow I used to lick like anything when I went to school."

Uncle was always ready to listen to Tom's accounts of his deeds of valour, so the two chatted away while we got up a game of tennis.

As we left the verandah uncle was saying: "Now you'll have to lick the elder brother, Tom, for I thought Belle seemed to hit it off nicely with young Ingram" (one of the English guests at the wedding) "and he's just the man for her."

Tom remarked that he seemed to be "a good solid chap," and we heard no more.

Mrs. Cumberland was still at Springfield when we came away. She seemed so pleased with the country and her hospitable host and hostess that she readily accepted the invitation to remain till Mrs. Weston returned to Montreal to welcome Annie and Arthur home.

A day or two after we got home to Quebec we received a piece of birch bark with a one cent stamp on it, on which was written a pencil scrawl from Arthur. "Expect us on the fourteenth." That was all; there was no word of explanation as to their change of plans, for they were to have stayed a fortnight.

We thought it only polite for Tom to go and meet them, so he went down to the Palais Station in time to see the evening train come in from Lake St. John. He told us afterwards how he was received by our guests, and vowed he would never go to welcome another newly-married pair; and indeed their appearance was enough to frighten anybody. Their faces were swollen and disfigured almost beyond recognition; the skin had peeled from their noses, which were a painfully brilliant red, and their clothes smelt strongly of balsam and smoke. But we took them in and were kind to them, for, having had some experience of the havoc which flies, mosquitoes and a bright summer sun can work, we put a charitable construction on their dilapidated appearance. Tim was quite himself, though, and, as usual, a model of good humour.

Tom's polite attention in going to meet them was not appreciated, as I said before, for when he went into the crowded car and greeted them cheerfully at the top of his peculiar voice with—

"Hullo! so you're turned up before the time. What an object you are, old fellow! You look as if you'd been on the spree. What have you got your veil down for, Annie? Why, Tim, you're the only one who has a smile for a fellow," the only answer he got was a growl from Arthur.

"Why in the world did you come to meet us? You're making all those folks stare."

For there was a gay picnic party on board from Lake St. Joseph, and some Americans who had looked rather curiously at the sensitive couple. So poor Tom complained that they had scolded him