

DEATH OR MARRIAGE.
"Isn't it on the shelf, father?" asked Mary, guiltily, conscious that it was surely peeping in the pocket of her dress.
"No, nor 'taint in my pocket, neither," and down went the deacon, stilly enough, on his knees, to examine the shoe, but perchance the missing key might have fallen there. "Well, I never knowed anything so strange in all my life," said the deacon.
"It is really very strange," faltered hypocritical Mary.
"I'll have a regular search to-morrow," said Deacon Sherman. "It must be somewhere around."
"Yes, it must," said Mary, tremulously.
"Only," the deacon went on, slowly, "recounting his place before the fire. 'I kind of don't like to have the old clock stand still a single night. When I wake up, you know, it seems like it was sort of talking to me in the stillness.' The deacon looked thoughtfully at the fiery black log. Mary fidgeted uneasily about the room, straightening table covers, setting back chairs and thinking—oh, if he would only go to bed! As he sat there his eyes began to droop and his head to nod solemnly. Mary's eyes brightened up with a spark resembling hope.
"Child," he said, suddenly straightening up in the seat, "I'll sit up a while longer till the logs burn out!"
"But, father, I'm not sleepy."
"Go to bed, my child," reiterated the deacon, with a good-humored authority to brook no opposition; and Mary crept out of the room ready to cry with anxiety and mortification.
"I'll only keep quiet a little while longer," she thought, sitting on the stairs while the moon streamed in brightly. "Father sleeps so soundly—and he is sure to go asleep in his chair—I could just steal in and release him as quietly as possible."
She sat there, her plump fingers interlaced, and her eyes fixed steadily on the floor, while all the time her ears were strained to the utmost capacity to catch every sound in the kitchen beyond.
"Hark! Was that the wall of the wind, or was it something to her heavenly 'rearer and dearer?' Yes, she could not be mistaken; it was actually a snore.
Mary rose softly to her feet with renewed hope. Surely now was the accepted time. "Notably as the floating shadow she crossed the hall opened the kitchen door and stole across the creaking boards, she was startled to see the light of the fire with closed eyes, and hands hanging at its sides.
"He's certainly asleep," thought Mary. With a heart that beat quick and fast, she drew the key from her pocket and proceeded, in spite of the nervous trembling of her fingers, to lift the door lock. So absorbed was she that she never noticed the cessation of the heavy breathing—never saw the deacon start suddenly into wakefulness and look around him. Love is blind, and it is equally true that it is deaf. The deacon rose quickly up with a shrewd twinkling eye, and Mary gave a frightened shriek, as a hand fell softly on her arm, possessing itself quickly of the key.
"Let me help you," said the deacon.
"Father, I—I have found the key," faltered Mary, trembling all over.
"Found the key?" returned the surprised deacon. "Well, that's lucky; and now we can find out what's the matter with the clock."
Mary's heart, throbbing so wildly a moment ago, seemed to stand still as her father turned the key and the door of the clock-case.
"Hello!" exclaimed the deacon, as Mr. Timothy Marshall tumbled into the room. "So you was the master with the clock, eh?"
"Yes, sir," said Tim composedly. "I haven't seriously interfered with me."
"You've seriously interfered with me," said the deacon, waxing indignant. "What do you mean, sir, by hiding in my house like a thief?"
"Indeed, indeed, father!" cried Mary, bursting into tears. "It wasn't his fault. He did not want to hide, but I put him there."
"You did, eh? and may I ask what for?"
"Father," faltered Mary, rather irresolutely, "I love him, and—and he loves me!"
"Is that any reason he should hide in the clock case, miss?"
"No—but—father! Oh, father! I can never marry Mr. Stanley. He is so hot, and—"
Mary's tears finished the sentence for her. The deacon looked down (not unkindly) on her bowed head and the tender arm that supported it. Apparently, "the course of true love," roughly though it ran, was overcoming all his worldly-wise arrangements in its tide.
"And so you two young folks really think you love each other," said the deacon, meditatively.
"I love her with all my heart and soul, sir," said Tim earnestly. "I'm not rich, I know, but I can work for her."
"And I can work for myself, too, father," interposed Mary, with eyes that shone like softened stars.
"And you said yourself, sir," went on Tim, "that the stopping of the clock meant either a death or a marriage. Of course we don't want any death; but don't you think the most sensible thing we can do is to help on a marriage as soon as possible?"
The deacon looked in spite of himself. "It is late," he said. "Come around to-morrow morning and we'll talk about it. No, Mary, I am not angry with you, child. I hope young folks will be young folks, and there's no use in tryin' to stop them."
As the deacon rebung the pendulum and set the iron tongue on the old clock talking, Tim Marshall passed on the doorstep to whisper to Mary.
"What shall it be, Mary, a death or a marriage?"
And she in turn whispered—"a marriage, I hope."
"My darling!" said Tim, "it's worth passing a lifetime behind the clock-case to feel as I do now."
"I hadn't the chance like some boys," remarked a man in the street car the other day, as he sipped tobacco juice over the straw: "my father was too poor to give me an education." "But if I had been," replied a lady, as she gathered up her skirts, "I'd have given you manners or broken my neck trying to."

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