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Selected Story.

HER ONLY LOVE

Miss Mary Ann Thompson was the youngest of six sisters, none of whom had exchanged her family patronymic for a more distinguished hyphenated one. And being the youngest among so many she naturally enjoyed, by virtue of comparison, a degree of perpetual youth to which she might not have been otherwise entitled.

She had always been the "girl" of the family, and this girlishness she never outgrew. She was girlish in manner, girlish in speech, and especially girlish in the matter of dress and adornment. Her curls were the longest, her cheeks the roiest, her teeth the whitest, and her dress the shortest and the lowest, and the most youthful of all the "young ladies" of the little town of her nativity. And yet, in the very face of a manifest improvement in the quantity of hair, and the quality of teeth, there were certain ill-disposed persons who were given to whispering of other things not so compatible with the idea of youth and loveliness.

Indeed, one "young lady" (not quite so youthful as Miss Mary Ann) was distinctly overheard by some gentlemen to articulate the words "wrinkles" and "crow's feet," in connection with the name of her former school-mate and present "dear friend."

Whatever might be the justice of the insinuation, it was certain that Miss Mary Ann was very careful not to expose her charms to the full glare of any illumination that might "cast a cruel light" upon them. A dimly-curtailed lamp by day—(she was so subject to headaches?)—and a carefully shaded lamp by night ("her eyes were so weak")—these were the half-lights and shadows in which the youngest Miss Thompson chose to exhibit, or rather to veil, her beauties.

And it was her firm belief that she appeared in the eyes of others as she designed to appear, the conviction gave her confidence, and added yet more to her general girlishness. It was one of these, her favorite half-lights—the half-mooned, half-veiled by a delicate mist—that Miss Mary Ann Thompson first met Mr. Smith.

It was at Ocean House, and on a rather damp August evening, when the glare of the light being too strong for the lady's weak eyes, she had echedered that false glitter of art, and betaken herself to the contemplation of the beauties of nature, as seen from the balcony opening from the dining-room.

He looked very young—certainly not more than two and twenty; and as Miss Thompson, very near whom he happened to be standing, gazed askance at him, she saw that he was handsome—with a straight nose, a white forehead, a delicate moustache, and a lovely curl in his hair. He was leaning against a pillar, with folded arms—at most graceful and striking of manly attitudes—gazing into the misty moonlight with a look of dreamy sadness which touched at once the tender heart of Mary Ann Thompson.

So lonely and so sad! A stranger also—for she did not remember having before seen him, though she had now been three weeks at Ocean House. No wonder that her sympathies were aroused, and that she stood gazing on the melancholy stranger with a furtive look of interest.

"Good gracious, Mary Ann Thompson! Why, you'll catch your death of cold, standing here in the damp night air. Do, pray, come in, or at least put a shawl or something around you."

It was the unsympathetic voice of Miss Pinkerton (the candid "dear friend" before alluded to) which broke thus harshly upon the ears of Miss Thompson. She started—and so did Mr. Smith. Indeed, the gentleman's start was so very marked as to attract the attention of Miss Pinkerton, who cast an inquiring and suspicious glance from him to her friend.

"Such a lovely moonlight!" sighed Mary Ann; "and you know, Lydia Jane, how fond I am of moonlight."

"Pooh! You'd better think of your health."

"It is true," she sweetly admitted, with a delicate cough, "I was never very strong and robust, like you, for instance, Lydia Jane; I wish there was somebody here good enough to bring me my shawl. I left it lying over a chair by the window there, and now I see that horrid old Colonel Bullington has seated himself upon it. I don't know him, so I don't like to ask him for it."

"Very well; if you choose to catch your death of cold, it's your own fault!" observed Miss Pinkerton.

And that lady who had come out merely to see what on earth Mary Ann Thompson could be about tossed her front row of frizz-curls, and passed in. At the same instant the interesting stranger stepped modestly forward.

"If you will pardon the liberty, madam," he said, in a tone in which there was a little diffidence and a great deal of respect, "I shall be happy to do you this slight service."

"Oh, I'm sure," said Miss Thompson, blushing, "I had no idea—I mean—yes, thank you, though I'm very sorry to trouble you."

And she stopped short in pretty confusion. The young gentleman brought the shawl, demanding it of ponderous Colonel Bullington with a chivalric firmness which somewhat startled that innocent gentleman; and then, with an air of knightly courtesy, delivered the same to its fair owner.

Miss Thompson gave a dainty little shiver, as she wrapped it gracefully about her fair shoulders, and made some remark relative to the dampness of the weather.

This being responded to by the gentleman with some allusion to the moonlight, Miss Thompson, with girlish simplicity and enthusiasm, entirely forgot, as she afterward declared, that she was speaking to a stranger, announced her fondness for that "serene effulgence," and remarked pensively that she had often wished that this could be a moonlight worth altogether.

This encouraged Mr. Smith, who acquired confidence, and the two walked and talked until the eldest Miss Thompson came out to look after Mary Ann, addressing her as a "headless girl" and an "impudent child," for exposing herself to the night air.

Mary Ann went away, with a sweet adieu to her new acquaintance, observing that she must not sit up too late, as she intended to take a sunrise ramble on the beach in the morning.

How it came about it is a mystery, but Miss Thompson returned from that walk accompanied by Mr. Smith. She did not appear at lunch; it was not her habit so to do, on account, as she declared, of her weak eyes, which could not bear the glare from the long line of windows; but with the evening twilight she beamed out with the stars, and shed the light of her more than usually radiant countenance upon devoted Mr. Smith—for devoted he certainly was, losing no opportunity of paying her attention.

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ing her every delicate and respectful attention.

Mary Ann was flattered, she fluttered triumphantly, rejoicing with trembling lips this dawning dream of bliss should prove evanescent, as had been the case with so many previous ones. Yet on this evening a simple circumstance encouraged her.

The two were seated on the beach, and Miss Thompson, in the interval of a momentary silence, pensively traced her name on the sand with the end of her parasol. Then, observing that her escort was earnestly gazing upon the characters, she impatiently erased the Thompson.

"Such an ugly, common name!" she said, with girlish petulance, "I never could endure it; and the Mary Ann is even worse."

"Mary Ann!" repeated Mr. Smith, dreamily and with a sort of low, tender lingering upon the words—"Mary Ann! It is the sweetest name in the world to me!"

Miss Thompson started and blushed, she was so surprised, so pleased.

Yet her color was a faint rose tint compared with the deep peony of Mr. Smith's face. He looked as frightened and embarrassed as though he had been surprised in a guilty act.

"You don't really think so?" said she, tenderly, and in encouraging pity of his embarrassment.

"Yes, I—I meant to say that—I do rather like the name!" he stammered.

And for an hour after he manifested a nervous disquiet, which surprised while it rejoiced the young lady.

The following morning the drawing-room of Ocean House was deserted. Most of the visitors had departed on a "grand excursion," and the few that remained—principally elderly persons and invalids—were in their private apartments.

Miss Mary Thompson—still on account of her weak eyes, which could not bear the out-of-door sunshine—was one of those who remained. She was busy "doing up" some becoming bit of fancy, when informed by her servant and sympathizing maid that Mr. Smith was "in the blue-room," a writing of letters. Whereupon she suddenly remembered that she had, perhaps, left a volume of a novel in that very apartment, and must instantaneously search for it. She hated to trouble the maid.

Mr. Smith was seated upon a lounge in a recess, as had been reported, writing a letter. He closed his portfolio hastily as Miss Thompson, with a start of surprise, on finding him there, stood before him.

She had really thought that he had accompanied the excursionists. She wouldn't have interrupted him for the world, but had he seen a book—a volume of—well! which she must certainly have left there, she would have been obliged to him.

So they searched, and in the search upset the gentleman's portfolio, and a sheet of paper half-full of writing fluttered down and drifted to Miss Thompson's feet. A quick glance, as its owner stopped to recover it, revealed to her eyes her own name.

"My Own Darling Mary Ann—" Miss Thompson gave a gasp and sank on the lounge.

Mr. Smith stood before her, blushing and embarrassed, yet with a certain firmness and dignity of manner.

"I had not intended, my dear Miss Thompson," he said, "so soon to reveal my secret. Excuse me if I confess that I feared your displeasure."

"Displeasure!" said Mary Ann, tenderly and respectfully, "why should I be displeased?"

The young man's cheeks flushed and his eyes brightened. He caught her hand in both of his.

"Dear, dearest Miss Thompson!" he exclaimed, joyfully. "If indeed you know my secret, do not discourage, do not refuse."

"Refuse!" and she gently pressed his hand.

"How kind, how good you are!" responded he, enthusiastically. "I had not dared hope for so much kindness. Indeed I had feared—"

"Fear no longer," murmured Mary Ann, in her softest accents and with her most melting glance. "Let us henceforth trust each other."

"You have made me so happy," said he.

"As you have made me," she responded, and she let her long ringlets droop on his shoulder.

"Are you ill?" he asked, nervously. "No, I am only too happy! It has quite overcome me. Dear, hear Mr. Smith!"

A sniff close by caused them both to start. There stood Miss Pinkerton in the doorway, gazing upon them with a frowning-like gaze of disdain. Mr. Smith immediately rose to his feet, and so did Mary Ann.

"Adieu! We shall meet again!" she whispered, with a melting glance, as they separated at the door.

That afternoon, as Mary Ann was brushing out her "evening curls," carefully pinned to a pillow, there was a tap at the door, and the waiter of that particular part of the establishment presented himself, with a letter in his hand.

"Please, miss," he announced, "this here letter was left at the office by the young gentleman, Mr. Smith, as has

just gone away."

"Gone away!" cried Mary Ann, faintly, letting her curls fall, and herself dropping into a chair.

"Left in the 'bus half an hour ago," said the waiter, heartily, "and apparently in a hurry. Said something about givin' this here letter to a lady who would be here in a day or two. But clerk thinks it must be you, miss, as it's your address, and seein' you were great friends."

She glanced at the direction.

"Miss Mary Ann Thompson." "Ocean House."

"Yes, certainly, it is for me," she said. And as the waiter vanished, she eagerly broke the seal and read:

"My Own Darling Mary Ann—" "The very letter he was writing this morning," she sighed; and her fingers trembled as she held the precious sheet.

"A cruel fate compels me to leave just as I was expecting and most desirous of your sweet presence. Business peremptorily demands my return to London for a day or two; but then, love, I shall hasten back on the wings of love and hope to find you at Ocean House."

"Darling, our prospects of happiness are much brighter than I had dared to hope after all you had told me; and now I trust that there will be no obstacle to our union."

Miss Thompson gasped hysterically. A little obscure that word "obstacle"; but about the next, "our union," there could be no mistake. She was really to be married at last, and to that dear, charming Mr. Smith! The thought quite overpowered her.

"Why, in the name of goodness, Mary Ann Thompson, what's the matter with you—rolling your eyes, and gasping and gulping that way? Are you in a fit?"

It is hardly necessary to say that her candid way—just to see who that letter could be from, which was just now handed in for "Miss Mary Ann Thompson."

The young lady was not reluctant to answer. Indeed, she was rather glad to do so. She therefore assumed an air of dignity, bethinking her state of fiancée, and pointing to the last line, said with a little air of triumph not to be suppressed:

"Since you seem so determined to know all about it, Lydia Jane, it's useless attempting to conceal anything. It is only a note from Mr. Smith."

Miss Pinkerton stared at the letter, and the line pointed out, sniffed, and said, with unspeakable disdain:

"What!—that boy?"

Miss Thompson colored, but she was too happy to be angry.

"I pardon and overlook your rude, unbecoming, and unbecoming, and quiet dignity."

"Pooh," said Miss Pinkerton. "And," resumed her friend, a little more aroused now, "I can make allowances for a little envy. We all have our weaknesses."

Miss Pinkerton laughed, a short, dry laugh, while Mary Ann turned her back, and resumed her reading.

"Dearest, I have followed your directions most assiduously, and, as I think I can assure you, most successfully. I have followed you to the letter, and for on the very evening of my arrival, the casual mention of her name in my hearing made her known to me, and things turned out most auspiciously for my plan. She wasn't so formidable as you had pictured her, and even seemed to take an instantaneous fancy to me. Yet I never imagined that she suspected my identity with the 'scapegrace,' Harry Smith, on whose account she had taken her journey away from boarding school, until this very day she let me know as much, and was so kind and encouraging to the dear old soul!"

Here Miss Thompson ceased reading, shrieked out: "The wretch! The low, miserable villain!" and, throwing herself on the sofa, straightway went off into strong hysterics.

Miss Pinkerton—pausing only to read the whole of the letter—snatched up a glass of water and thereafter lavishly bathed Mr. Thompson's countenance, unspinned all the braids and ringlets from her head, and administered sal volatile, and burned feathers and matches. Under the combined influences of these restoratives the patient slowly recovered.

"I declare, Mary Ann, you actually frightened me, going off so!" said Miss Pinkerton, with energy. "Why, you gritted and ground your teeth as though you would have broken the plate, and are as pale as a corpse! Look at yourself!"

"You'd better be careful of your letters, added her candid friend, picking up Mr. Smith's epistle and rereading it, "or they'll chance to fall into the hands of some other person with the same name as yourself. There's one now—a Miss Mary Ann Thompson, I saw the name set down on the register on the first floor of this very house (a cracked old maid, past fifty, to judge from her appearance)—paints, wears a curled wig, takes snuff, and dresses in the most ridiculous manner. I wonder she didn't get your letter—by mistake. And she's expecting a pretty young niece of precisely the same name—Mary Ann Thompson. Only think of three persons in the house with the same name! Why, no end of unfortunate mistakes and misunderstandings might occur through it! That's the disadvantage of having

the same name."

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