

pray she heard thee not! 'twould be all over Shottery, an she had—she is a very tattling wench. I mislike her smile; 'tis too wise, by far. Come, come, let's go in. Pray God she heard thee not! Where's Hammet?"

"We left him playing at cherry-pits, but he was going to help Thomas fold the sheep."

"Then he's at the house before us," Mistress Shakespeare interposed with a laugh, "for I hear Thomas singing 'I mun be married o' Sunday!' Mercy on us! how long he hath sung that tune. When I had fewer years than thou, Judith, lass, I mind me hearing him draw it out in just the same fashion at harvest-time; ay, and indeed all through the years:

"I mun—I mun be married o' Sunday!"

"And was he married on that day?"

"Not so, duck; he's still a bachelor. Great talkers are little doers, saith the proverb. Marry, that's a true word."

TO BE CONTINUED.

THE CAPTURE OF MOLLY.

Captain reared back on his hind legs, his neck curved high as he floundered in the deep drift, and swerved sharply to one side, nearly overturning the cutter.

Wallace clambered down from his seat awkwardly and landed up to the waist in a snowbank, where the wind had swept it up high on the south side of the road. Catching hold of the bridle, he tried to lead the big bay back to the centre of the road, patting and cheering him. But Captain rebelled, and suddenly his master stumbled heavily over something that lay in a huddled heap at the horse's feet.

He drew off his heavy beaver mittens and knelt down, brushing the snow away. In the soft, gray gloom of the early winter twilight it was hard to discern even the outlines, but his hand touched another one, small and ice-cold, and he gathered the heap up in his arms and lifted it bodily into the cutter. As he laid it back on the seat, the heavy, snow-spangled shawl fell back, showing a woman's face.

Wallace stared at it in helpless indecision. It was eight miles back to town, and the snow had set in for a steady fall all night. Only a mile and a quarter more to the west and he would be home. He took a last look at the darkening clouds and climbed back into the cutter. The snowflakes fell on the upturned face. He replaced the shawl with clumsy solicitude and drew the buffalo robe up around her shoulders before he started Captain on the road homeward again.

He tried to think where he had seen the face before. Even in the dim light it looked vaguely familiar. Once or twice he raised the shawl and looked at it furtively. Once when the road was rough over a Connecticut "thank-yem-am," and the cutter rocked unsteadily, he slipped his arm back of the figure, and did not take it away until Captain turned of his own accord into a snow-banked lane and drew up at the kitchen door of the small, lonely farmhouse.

She was not easy to carry, or else Jim was unused to such burdens. He stumbled up the steps and into the kitchen bringing a shower of snow in with him. There was an old carpet covered lounge, between the stove and the kitchen door, and he laid her on it.

Captain whinnied wistfully at sight of the barn, but Jim was busy. There was a bottle of elder wine in the pantry. He had put it far back on the top shelf to keep it. It was the last his mother had made that last summer.

After he had knocked the syrup jug off the shelf, Jim found it. He dodged the golden rivulet that trickled between his feet and, pouring some of the wine into a tablespoon, tried to slip it between the woman's pale lips. She stirred and opened her eyes drowsily.

"You're all right, now," said Jim hastily. "Don't you cry. Wait till I build up a fire and get you warmed up a bit."

The wood-box back of the stove was piled high with logs. It was a capacious wood-box, the outside papered with the same kind of rose vine wall paper that was on the sitting room. After he had built a fire, Jim glanced out of the corner of his eye at the figure on the lounge. Her eyes were closed, and he tiptoed out without disturbing her.

It was snowing heavier. He had to shovel back the drifts before he could open the barn door, and it was half an hour before he had made Captain comfortable for the night and had taken a last look at the cows and a peep in the hen house. He paused an instant before returning to the house and stared at the lamplight shining from the kitchen window. It made a path on the new-fallen snow of soft, mellow-radiance, and looked cheery and home-like. It seemed good to know that there was some one there in the kitchen, and that the same one was a woman.

It was two years since his mother had died. The loneliness of her going had not left him yet. She had been a tender, gentle, loving woman who had found life's sweetness in his happiness and comfort. The house was dreary and cheerless without the touch of her hand and the sound of her voice and the mysterious charm of a woman's presence.

He had never thought of marrying. The years had slipped by so smoothly and contentedly that before he realized it, he was a man of middle age, with the mother to whom he had always been a boy gone.

He stopped at the kitchen door to wipe his feet. With a revived memory and reverence for the little laws of a woman's kingdom, and went in with his cap in his hand.

She was sitting up in a rocker, beside the stove, drying her shoes on the open hearth. As she rose when he opened the door, the shawl fell back from her shoulders, and he recognized her. She was Philemon Tilton's sister, Molly. He remembered having seen her working around among the flowers in the side garden when he had driven by the Tilton place in summer on his way to market. She had reddish hair. It had been distinctive to Jim because no other woman of his acquaintance had hair of that color.

Once he had spoken to his mother about her. She had said that red-

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haired women were pretty high-tempered, but Molly had been a right sweet child. He didn't like high tempers, but there had been a certain attractiveness about that gleam of red in the woman's hair which he had seen, among the tiger lilies and syringas in the garden.

She was not young—about thirty-five Jim judged. Her shoulders stooped a little, and her eyes looked tired. They were attractive eyes, soft and grave in expression, and hazel brown. Jim thought offhand, in that first moment of recognition, that she must have been as his mother had said, a right sweet child.

It was over six miles back to the Tilton place. She had probably tried to walk the two miles from town and been overtaken by the storm. She didn't look as if she could give a snow-storm a very good fight, anyway. He stood awkwardly by the door, waiting for her to speak first before he went to hustle Captain back into harness and take her home.

"Feeling any better, Miss Tilton?"

It was all that he could think to say, but she flushed and faltered in answering.

"Some better," she said. "I can't just place where I am."

"I'm Jim Wallace," replied Jim. "I know your brother, Philemon. We're both of us on the school committee. You didn't choose a very good day for travelling."

"Did you find me?"

Her eyes had a half-scared look, he thought.

"Well, no. Captain found you, I guess. All the same thing. You oughtn't to have started for home until it let up a bit."

"I wasn't going home." She sat down in the rocker again. The flush had faded, and her lips were pressed closely, as if in pain. "It ain't my home no more. Philemon's married."

"You don't tell me!" said Jim in mild amazement. "Why, he must be as old as I be."

"He's forty-seven last March," Molly's hands plaited the shawl fringed with nervous carelessness. "And he hadn't no call to get married, either. I've kept house for him ever since mother died, when I was seventeen. We had father for ten years afterwards just lingering around, and I took care of him until he went. Philemon got the farm, all except the quilts and feather beds and linen and such things. Mother said they were all mine, but it was understood that I was to stay home and keep house for Philemon, and it was my home, too. Once or twice I might have left and done real well for myself—She hesitated. Jim nodded understandingly. Of course she might. She must have been a very pretty girl. "But I wouldn't go and leave Philemon to do for himself. He was eleven years older than I, and I know all mother's ways that he liked. I knew he never could stand a housekeeper."

She stopped. Jim waited to hear more. Finally he asked:

"Who'd he marry?"

"Some girl from Pomfret Centre." Her tone was weary and disinterested. "She's a real nice little thing. They'll get on all right, but they do not want me, and they told me so."

Jim shifted his weight uneasily. He hoped she wasn't going to cry. There was a hidden depth of helpless trouble revealed in her words that made him anxious. He had never had to face any of life's little tragedies such as this. He took off his coat and began to stir up the fire to relieve her from any sense of scrutiny.

"I'll fix up a cup of tea before I take you back home," he said at last.

"I won't go back to them," she returned passionately. "I won't go back. I ain't going to stay where I ain't wanted."

Jim was silent. Red-haired women were kind of high tempered after all. He rather liked them for it. It showed spunk. He measured tea into the brown Rebecca teapot with clumsy deliberateness, poured boiling water on it and set it back on the stove to steep. There was not much to eat in the pantry. He set out half a loaf of bread and a pan of baked beans on the table and stood irresolute. His mother had always had pies and cookies and preserves on hand for company emergencies. And she did not look strong, either, Molly didn't. He wondered what they gave weak folks to eat, and suddenly he remembered the ministrations of his mother over him during a spell of measles long ago.

"I ain't got much of a spread," he said. "Want some toast?"

She smiled for the first time, perhaps with a little, swift, intuitive understanding of his embarrassment.

"Land, that's more than enough! I don't care for anything but a cup of tea. It's so good of you!"

"Is Philemon willing to provide for you?" he asked coloring at his praise.

"I don't want none of his providing after the way he's acted. I ain't a bit afraid. The two of them said things to me this afternoon that just made me want to walk out of the house and never go back and I did."

"I ain't a very good day to leave offhand," said Jim, fumbling over the cups and saucers in the pantry to find some that he had not nicked.

"I never thought of the snow. You feel so strong and able when your mind's made up that you don't care for anything. I thought I could get as far as Tozerville; I've got a second cousin over there, Lyddy Smith. She'd keep me until I could look around and find something to do."

Jim wiped the dust off the cover of the sugar bowl, with shy diffidence, on a corner of the tablecloth, but she was looking away from him at the fire.

"Was you figuring on doing anything special, Miss Tilton?"

"Nothing special, no; only house-keeping. If I could do it for Philemon for nineteen years for nothing, I guess I can do it for other folks for wages,"

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There was a plaintive earnestness in her voice.

Jim walked over to the stove. For the first time in his life he felt the thrill of a premonitory inspiration. His pulse beat faster, and his hands chilled slowly, but the words tumbled headlong from his lips without forethought as he stared down at the bowed head with its coil of red brown hair, redder still in the lamplight.

"Couldn't you housekeep for me, Miss Tilton? I need some one here terribly. Just can't seem to make things go at all since mother died. And it's awful lonesome, too. It's sudden, but I've known Philemon going on twenty-five years. He could tell you I'm all right. The house ain't big, but it's cozy, and there's a lot of fussy dingbats I've put away—tides and cushions and things that mother had around. They'd make it more homelike for you per-haps. And I wouldn't bother you much, just at meal time. There's only me and Fred Taylor, the hired boy—"

He stopped short. She was sipping slowly the hot tea he had poured for her, and he read refusal in her face.

"I kind of figured on housekeeping for a family," she said anxiously. She hesitated, and Jim walked up and down the floor, his hands behind him, his forehead set in deep lines of thought.

She was rocking gently. The easy, familiar squeak of the rocker was like favorite music in his ears, long unheard. He ran his fingers through his thick, iron-gray hair and stopped suddenly before the rocking figure.

"Molly," he said, "I can't put it into fetching words, but I like you mighty well. I've liked your hair for four or five years." He blundered and spoke jerkily, but there was a new, hungry, tenderness in his eyes. "If you're afraid, why can't you marry me? I ain't no prize, so to speak, but Philemon could tell you I'm steady going. Seems as if we both need each other. You'd have a good home of your own, and I'd appreciate you lots, Molly."

The perspiration shone on his forehead when he had finished. Molly sipped her tea and was silent.

"I'll hitch right up and drive you over to Tozerville," he went on. "You could stay at your cousin's until you said the word. I'll go over to Philemon's and get your things, and there's a church at Tozerville. Why, you'd be home for good before you knew it."

Home for good! Molly looked around the quiet kitchen. Everywhere was shown the need of a woman's care. Most of all in the lonely, slipshod figure before her, in the longing eager eyes, was there the need of a woman's sympathy. Something seemed to spring to life in

her heart as she looked at him. Not love, as love is known, but an answering wave of sympathy to fill the place he offered. After the words that had made her leave her brother's it was sweet to find a place where she was needed and wanted. From the man she glanced to the table.

"You do need some one pretty bad, Mr. Wallace," she said.

"First name's Jim, Molly."

He stood his ground. The clock on the shelf over the table struck 6 with shrill clarity. On the front stove-lid the teakettle huddled hysterically.

Her tired figure relaxed gratefully into the warm embrace of the rocker. She leaned her head back and looked up at him gravely and happily, without coquetry.

"It does seem most like home now, Jim," she said.

He drew a deep breath and reached for his coat and cap.

"I guess we can make Tozerville about 7.30," he said, cheerily. "I'll throw in an extra robe so you won't be cold."

She did not answer. At the door he hesitated and looked back. He wished he could have gone to her and kissed the red-brown hair. In the soft, yellow light her slim figure had almost a girlish gracefulness, and he was conscious of a sudden pride in the woman who was to be his wife.

"I'll hitch right up," he said, and went out, closing the door gently after him.

It was dark outdoors. The snow had drifted high on the stoop. He took an old broom and began to feel his way, sweeping before him as he went in the direction of the barn. All at once a glow of warm, bright light flashed before him, lighting the way. He turned and looked back at the house, and saw Molly standing at the kitchen window, holding up the lamp that he might see his way.

—Izola L. Forrester in Smith's Magazine.

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