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PETERS BLOSSOM AND MARTHA GO TO A PARTY.

(From Putman's Magazine, June 1868.)

Being at the breezy and very quiet village of Sudbury a part of a summer, I had the pleasure of knowing Mr. Peter Blossom; and I must say I enjoyed his conversation.

T. W.

You see, Marthy had a cousin Jimmy, who was married to a smartish young fellow, who went from Rutland and got a place in a store in New York.

Laws, Marthy, there ain't a hill worth talkin' about in the country 'round there; and as for water to drink, it has to be brought miles through nasty pipes, and tastes fishy then; and the milk they have is jest swill stirred up inside a cow, and drained off with a machine; and there ain't a garden in the whole town that will fetch a bill of beans; and as for a slay-ride, you can't have one less than four dollars; while here you can go for two and six as far as you like.

When I said this, and more on top on't, she said 'she didn't care—she was going; she'd got a new frock, and she was going somewhere to wear it.'

'Bless me,' says I, 'ain't there meeting twice a Sunday? and what's the good of paying for a pew if you can't wear your new clothes into it twice a Sunday?'

But it didn't do no good; she had something on her mind, and so she persuaded me to go.

Well, we went; and Jimmy was glad enough to see us; and I guess she bankered after Sudberry as much as Marthy bankered after York. At any rate, she was glad to see us. But bless us all, up three pair of steep stairs she had her rooms—nobody has a whole house in York—and up them stairs Marthy and I had to pull, and I had to carry Marthy's trunk. What made it so awful heavy I can't see; but I found afterwards she had all her clothes, and all mine, and then she'd chock'd 'em 'round with maple sugar—and that's as heavy as the ten commandments to a hostess. But the last pair of stairs Marthy giv' me a lift, and so we got up. I wasn't sorry afterwards, because Jimmy's children did enjoy those cakes of sugar. Dear me, it made me feel young again, and kind o' lonesome too, because, you see, Marthy and me we'd got no children of our own; and it made me feel kind o' lonesome to see the little creatures having such a good time over it. If I'd had eight or nine children, I could ha' made a barrel a-piece for them as well as out; but now Marthy and me, we didn't want more'n a barrel between us; so what was the use tappin' for more?

You must know that Jimmy had married Plunkitt, of Rutland. Reubin was a smartish, good-looking fellow, and that went a good ways with Jimmy, for she was always kind o' loving. But she was a good girl; and now Marthy had come to see her, she determined she should have a good time. Reubin had got into Stark & Piller's store, with a salary of three hundred and fifty; but they'd ha' found it rubbin' the skin nigh off, if there hadn't been some 'sweepings.' Sweepings, they tell me, is quite a circumstance in New York. The sweepings of the post office is about three thousand a year; and they do say that the sweepings of the custom house keeps eighty-nine 2.40 horses a-go'in' night and day. I don't know just what shape sweepings comes in, but we had a box of figs and bottled cider the first night.

Reubin was telling us how Stark & Piller was sending round oranges, and sweetmeats, and old sherry, and champagne, here and there; and then he said how Old Pickles was going to have a party, and had ordered everything—Injy sweetmeats, and barrels of oranges, and champagne, and curesoe (a kind of corjil), and everything.—Then it popped into Jimmy's head, and she cried out,

'How should you like to go to old Pickles's party, Marthy?'

As quick as flash Marthy answered,

'Go? I guess so—quick enough!'

Now Reubin didn't like to have it seem that he couldn't do anything, or go anywhere, so he joined in:—

'Yes, by all means, let's go. I know the cook well enough, and she'd be glad to do any thing I wanted her to do. Let's go.'

I didn't see just what the cook had to do with at; but I had learnt when to follow and when to

lead in this world, so I said nothing. It was decided that we would go.

Well, the evening came, and as Reubin was blacking up his boots, I giv' mine a shiny rub; and when I went into Marthy's room ('wa'n't bigger than a cartridge-box), she put on my neck a white han'kercher.

'Lord, Marthy,' says I, 'do you want 'em to s'pose I'm a Sudberry nason?'

'Now you jest keep still, Peter,' says she; 'I know.'

I went into the sittin'-room to wait, for Marthy hadn't begun. Well, I waited, and they didn't come—nobody came—and I waited till I got sleepy. Then I called:

'Marthy!'

'You jest keep still,' she said; 'I'll come when I'm reddey.'

Thinks I to myself, 'it'll all be over before we get there; but I sot down to wait. It was eight o'clock at night if it was a minute; and I begun to wish I could go to bed. Well, I sot there by the fire, and jest dropped off. Something woke me, and there was two wimmin in the room, strangers to me. I rose up, and bowed for I was kind of dreamy, and thought mebbe I was in heaven. But they laughed out, and then I see it was my wife and Reubin's wife.

But 'Lord-a-massy!' says I; 'you ain't going that way, Marthy!' She was stark naked all over her neck and arms.

'Now, Peter,' says she, 'don't you go to being a fool.'

I shut my mouth right up. When Marthy spoke that way, I knew twa'n't no use. I must say I wondered where she got that frock; and it wa'n't till after we got home that I found out she and Betsy Foot had shaped it out of one of the Lady's Books. It was an awful sight.—In a minute I see that her face and arms was streaked all over with white flour, and I got out my pocket han'kercher to rub it off, when Marthy pushed me away in a kind of huff—

'Do let me be, Peter. I never see a man act so ridiculous in all my life.'

Says I, 'Marthy,' says I, 'twon't wash.—(That was a way I had of saying things wasn't A 1—first chon—you know.) Says I, 'Marthy, 'twon't wash.'

Marthy was good natured enough when she had on her best clothes, and afore folks; so she only said—

'Now, Mr. Blossom, it'll wash well enough for me; and you haven't got to wash it.'

'Why,' says Jimmy, not knowing jest what I meant, 'why, Mr. Blossom, that blue'll stand—real ultrymoreen.'

But that wasn't what I meant. I was thinking of the flour on her arms and bosom.

Says I, 'Jimmy, we shan't have to stay long, for it's past nine, if it's a minute.'

She and Marthy looked at one another, as if they thought they knew more'n I did. Perhaps they did.

The wimmin put most of their clothes over their heads, and we tracked through the dirty streets till we got to the house. It was jest one blaze of light from top to bottom. There was carpets on the front steps, but we went into the lower door, and in the kitchen we found Reubin's friend, the cook. She had on ribbons, but nothing so fine as my wife and Jimmy. You ought to have seen the three wimmin kurchy to one another. Lord! I'd a'most thought they was going to set down on the floor. But they rose up after settling down, as proud as the Queen of Sheby. Reubin took the orders for groceries from the cook, and so he was quite pleasant with her. Says he,

'You're lookin' first rate, Miss MacBride.—I hone that last corjil set you up?'

'Yes, Mr. Plunkitt, it went right to the spot; but, somehow, it didn't last long—eh?'

Reubin spoke right up; 'Oh, I'll see to that.'

I didn't see how he could see to it, after she'd drunk it all up; but that's what he said. I've a notion that corjil was one of the sweepings.—But I know when to shut my mouth, and when to open it.

Marthy and Jimmy kept some little shawls on their naked shoulders. I was glad on't, for it reely seemed to me more decent. If they was going to wear the shawls, I didn't see what they had their frocks all cut off for, that way.—But bless you, I hadn't lived for forty-odd year not to know that wimmin wasn't reasoning creatures. I never said a word, but I was glad they'd covered themselves up at the top.

I heard the band of music going on up stairs, and I wondered why the cook didn't take us up; but she didn't. Reubin said:

'It's going to be a first class bust, I suppose?'

'Oh, of course,' said Miss MacBride. 'All our fust families—the Jones's and the Brown's—is coming, and the Seedy's and the Wildy's, and all that set. Divil a bit of vulgarity 'll you see, anyhow.'

'But why don't we go up?' I asked; 'we

may as well see them before they begun to go home, eh?'

They all laughed at that.

'Going!' said Miss MacBride, 'going!—They won't half 'em get here 'fore eleven, and the supper won't be till one; and then they 'll dance the German and the whirly dances till two or three. Going! Divil a bit of going will they be after afore morning brakes over the say. And divil a wunk of sleep will I get this blessed night of Saint Patrick.'

'Why,' says I, 'why dont they put it off to the next day? That's the sense on't.'

They laughed again, but I didn't see what there was to laugh at, and I dont now. If I wanted to dance and work hard, I'd do it in the daytime, and not steal it from my nateral rest. That'll wash, that will.

'When do they sleep?' says I.

'Oh,' says Miss MacBride, 'the missus and the young ladies they never gets up till twelve or one; and they dawdles round, and never dresses themselves till most dinner time.'

'Lord a massy!' says I, 'do they go round without clothes on?'

'No, no; but they doesn't put on their trimmings, and their waterfalls, and their paddins, and their hoopskirts, and their earrings, and their furbelows, till it's about time for the gentlemen to come into their dinner. Not never, unless they're going to receptions or the like of that.'

'But,' says I—'you see, I wanted to draw her out, so says I—but who does the work?'

'Oh, Lordy, ladies doesn't do no work, ladies doesn't. What should they work for?' (Says I to Marthy, softly, 'They wouldn't wash, up to Sudberry; they wouldn't. But Marthy didn't say a word; she was listening.) 'What should they work for? We does the work—the chambermaids and me; and the master, he makes the money to pay for it. What should they work for, eh?'

I didn't know what to say; but somehow I thought it must be kind of pleasant to have something to do every day. Why, now, in winter, I like to take care of my cows, I do, and get fences mended up; and Marthy, she's fond of making butter, and cooking up some nice things for breakfast—rice cakes, or waffles, or something like that. But dawdling round all day long—laws!

'No,' says the cook, 'they has as much as they're fit for to get their clothes on and off, and their hair done up, and patching and pottering round to keep themselves good-looking. You see, it's awful hard on 'em to be up nights so, and eating everthing cold and hot, and pattys and sallids, and every kind of nonsense such as they think they must eat to partys. Oh, its dreadful hard on wimmin; and we has the doctor here 'tween three times a week right along. Bedad, its all very well for me, but if I was the master, I'd give them a taste of my mind—that's what I'd do. And I'd button up my puss in my pocket.'

I was rather curious, so I asked, 'What does old Pickles do about himself?'

'Oh, he stays round, and gets his breakfast when he can. I try to see that the poor little man has something warm in the morning; but, bedad, mighty little breakfast he'll get from me the morrow, for I'll stay in bed meself, and that's the thruth of it.'

It it hadn't been for the cook's talking, I should have gone fast to sleep, for it was ten o'clock now if it was a minute; and I see Marthy and Jimmy was beginning to fidget; and then Jimmy whispered to Reubin, and he said,

'Well, Miss MacBride, we may as well go up.'

And then we did. We got in through the entry, and if you'll believe it, there it was full of bushes, and all along the stairs they stood, and some of them had flowers on them, though it was dead winter. I never see such a sight. But we got into a sort of back room, and the door was open so that we could see in.

Laws, such a curious sight! In the middle of one of the rooms was three wimmin—an old one and two young ones—and they was full as naked as my wife; but you see, what was took off the top of their frocks was put on to the bottom; and it was jest as much as they could do to keep from tripping up. 'The old one—that was Pickles's wife—she was kind of haggard, but she was streaked all over with flour, like Marthy, and her cheeks, I thought, was too red for a good old creature like that. Then she had diamonds or something sparkling in her ears; and her hair was tousled about so that it looked more like a mare's nest than anything. The young ones was pretty much like the old one, though one of them was haggard, and the other rather fat, and pimply in the face; but she had covered 'em up pretty well with flour, so that she looked tolerable.

Well, these three wimmin stood there in the middle of the room, and when I once set my eyes on 'em, I couldn't take 'em off. There they stood, for about two hours steady, receiving.

It was a curious piece of work. A kind of young minister or parson, in black clothes and white cravat, would bring in two wimmin on his arms: he'd make a kind of low bow, and let his arms swing out stiff in front, and his two wimmin would kurchy down jest about to touch the floor, and then old Pickles's wimmin would kurchy down jest about to the floor; then they'd all rise up proud, like the Queen of Sheby; then all three of Pickles's wimmin would say,

'How-de-do? So glad.'

And then the other three would say,

'How-de-do? So sweet!'—all jest alike every time.

Doing this, they'd get tangled-up with their clothes, and then they'd all of 'em take hold behind and pull 'em out, and untangle 'em, and get ready for the next little minister and his wimmin.

Now Pickles's wimmin did that a hundred times if they did it once. I never see anything so supple; and I say, if the truth was known, they had Injy-rubber springs on their joints, or they couldn't have kurchy'd down so, and up again. They did it every time jest the same, and they said every time, all three of 'em,

'How-de-do? So glad!'

Old Pickles wasn't anywhere about, not as I see. Now, if it was his party, I didn't understand it why he wasn't there. But maybe he was gettin' 'em into the front door.

By this time the rooms was swarmin', and there was a whole band of music playin' away as if they was crazy. I couldn't hear much of anything; but Miss Mac Bride would p'int her finger, and say,

'There! that's Miss Brown.'

'That's Miss Peters—that old one with the ringlets, grinnin' so.'

'There comes old Parker's daughter—that fat one, with the diamonds on her bosom—she's a ketch!—worth a million!'

Bless you! I'd rather had forty of Marthy than one like her. No catch for me—no, no!

'There! there comes Miss Raymond; and they say she's the lovin'est woman in the upper classes.'

What did she mean by that? I meant to ask her when we got home. I said to her now.

'Is that han'some young fellow with her, her husband?'

She laughed at that, and didn't say much.

'I guess she sees enough of him to home.—He never goes 'round with her—he! he! he!'

I couldn't see anything to laugh at in that.

The rooms was swarmin' with wimmin, and a whole bevy of 'em was as pretty creatures as ever I see—young and lithe and pretty. Dear me, I begun to think old Pickles's party was a sight to see. To be sure, they was all streaked with flour, like Marthy, and they was all naked along their bosoms and backs and arms; but somehow I was gettin' used to that. At first I trembled, for it seemed as though their frocks would jest drop off; and then, said I to myself, 'What on earth will they do?'

But they was smart, them girls was—I could see that. They knew what they was about, every one of 'em. They wasn't afraid, not a bit.

The band now stopped a little while, and then you never heard anything like it; every man and woman was hollerin' at one another as loud as they could; and if I was to bet, I'd bet they couldn't one of 'em hear a word any body said. But they kept at it, talkin' as though they was paid by the job, and meant to get through soon and get their monee. It beat all natur'. I've heard turkeys and chickens go on so when they was frightened; but nobody seemed to be frightened here,—not a mite. They just kept at it, nip-an'-tuck, until the band began to play another tune, and then, quicker'n lightning, every one of the little ministers slipped his arm softly round one of the pretty girls, and squeezein' her up pretty tight, went whirling her round the room so fast that I got dizzy.

'Laws!' says I to Marthy, 'they can't do that more'n once.'

'Don't be ridic'ulous Peter!' says she.

Now, if you'll believe me—I I don't ask you to—when one of these ministers had whirled his girl 'round this wild way five minutes or so, he'd just fling her one side, and another minister would grab hold of her and go whirlin' her 'round the same way. It was about the queerest thing I ever did see. They didn't mind where they went; they jest bumped the girls up against every body, and nobody seemed to mind; and they twisted the long frocks 'round one another's legs. I thought every minit they'd fall down flat; but they didn't. You never see any thing like it; it beat any thing I ever see at the circus. Those tumbin' clowns wasn't a circumstance to these ministers and their girls. They kept this up steady two hours and more, and nobody died of it, not as I could hear of. It beat all natur', for these girls was, on the whole, weak-lookin'—didn't begin to be as strong as Marthy.

I was completely puzzled, and was wonderin' what they did it for; for Miss Mac Bride said ladies didn't do no work, and I never see harder work than that.

My mind's kind of active, and then I remembered readin' in the Penny Magazine about Dervishes, who went whirlin' 'round this way when they felt uncommon pious. 'That's it,' says I to myself, 'that's it; these ministers have got their girls in, and are teachin' 'em—practisin'.' It's a kind of wor-ship.'

'Laws!' says I to Marthy, 'that beats all the sacraments I ever see. That wouldn't wash among our church members.'

'Beautiful!' she answered. It had affected her head too.

The band stopped now for a few minits, but they all went to hollerin' at one another again, jest as before, and all the wimmin whipped out their fans, and went to fannin' themselves;—I thought myself they must be hot, for the gas was hot, and they was crowded in putty close, and such steamy work would make any body hot.

Now Marthy wanted to see all she could; it was nateral. Well, she had gradually edged along through the door into the room, and was standin' there, and Miss Pickles, the old man's wife, come 'round bow'n' and smilin', so that you could see her back teeth easy. She see Marthy, and come right up as though she hadn't seen her afore. 'How-de-do?' So glad!' she said, as sweet as surrup, and put out her fingers. Marthy kurchy'd down as supple as any of 'em; for if any woman could do a thing, Marthy could; and then I see that, somehow, she'd got on a pair of white gloves, too. She kurchy'd down so that she most touched, and Miss Pickles she kurchy'd down, too, and then she said so softly,

'What name did you say?'

'Miss Blossom,' says Marthy, 'from Vermont.'

'Oh!' said Miss Pickles. 'Sorry I didn't see you before. A s'ranger, eh? Take my arm; let me introduce you 'round.' In said Marthy, as bold as any of 'em. I didn't wonder Miss Pickles wanted to show Marthy 'round, for I'll say this, she was han'somer than any of 'em; and with her naked bosom, and the flour on her, she looked enough like the rest to be a 'member.'

But I was frightened. Says I to myself, 'She'll get in, but she'll never get out whole—never.' But Marthy went in like the Queen of Sheby, and I could see her kurchy'n' to them, and they kurchy'n' to her; and then I see her hangin' on the arm of one of the young ministers, and walkin' up and down, and he hollerin' into her ear.

'Bless us!' says I, 'if he goes to convertin' her, what'll Par-on Ruskin say? We shall have an awful time of it up to Sudberry, getting her cured.'

But Marthy she took to it as a duck does to water. She learnt quick, for she was a real woman. So in a few minits I got easy. Then the band played a lively tune, and the services began again. The young ministers and the wimmin went to whirlin' 'round, as though they hadn't done a stroke of work that night at all; they was as lively as the music. I couldn't have believed it, but they did.

Now come a kind of thunder-clap. I wasn't watching, but suddenly, right before my eyes, come Marthy in her minister's arms, a whirlin' 'round like the rest, and bumping any body who was in the way. 'Lord-a-massy!' said I, out loud, 'she'll go down; she can't do it—never!'

'Yes she do,' says Jimmy; don't you see does? All a woman wants is a chance. She can do any thing she's a mind-to!'

There was no denyin' it—she did it. She did it as if she was brought up to it, and had served her time.

'She'll be dizzy,' says I.

'No she won't,' said Jimmy, 'if she don't want to.'

'She'll catch on somebody and go down,' says I. 'Take care!' out loud.

'Hush,' said Jimmy; 'let her be. She'll do it well enough if you don't fluster her.'

She did do it, and I begun to feel kind of proud of Marthy. Not that I thought this whirlin' much of a thing to do; but it is kind of pleasant to know that your wife's as good as any body's wife. I knew Marthy was; but that she could cut right in among these tippy-hob-royals of New Yorkers, and beat them, kind of sot her up.

'But,' says I, 'Jimmy'—it kind of come over me—'it's ridic'ulous—quite ridic'ulous.'

'I know that as well as any body; but, cousin Peter, when you're among the Turks, do as the Turks do—eh? You've heard that?'

From our door we could only see into the back room, and all at once we heard a little scream, and a sort of fuss.

'There,' says I, 'some of them's down, I told you so.'

Right away Marthy come running into our door—holding on to her clothes very curious.