

to another young lady, to whom he was shortly after united; probably he had wished to enjoy one more bachelor escapade before he sunk down into a sober married man.

Tom Scott was avenged, though happily the flirtation was too fleeting to allow Mary's affections to become engaged: it was only her pride that was wounded; she was quite able to laugh off the whole story with whomsoever chose to mention it. But she was deeply mortified, as any woman in like circumstances is, though braving with smiling lip the laughter or pity of her acquaintances, and the caustic remarks of Mr. Orr. Yes, Mary was bitterly mortified, and most of all things by the unconcealed disappointment of her mother.

I always respected Mary afterwards for having borne it so bravely; it certainly was of service to her too; it carried off a great part of her vanity and her affectation, but that had been gradually wearing off for a long time. The affectation of a girl, if not rooted very deep, often disappears before she has reached one-and-twenty. Be that as it may, certain it is, after Mary's desertion by the handsome young barrister, I never remarked one single trait that was not quite natural in her speech or actions.

Another three years, and Mary Johnston, at twenty-six, was considered by all her acquaintances a confirmed old maid. She might well now—

*'Sit on her creepy and sigh heigh he,
'A' body's like to be married but me.'*

Even Mr. Orr, feeling that a joke, when it begins to be a reality, is no joke, was less constant to the subject than of yore. Mary's beauty had not faded; it was only more matured. To my taste, Mary Johnston, with the composure and sedateness of twenty-six summers, was infinitely more attractive than Mary Johnston with the giddiness and vanity of eighteen. But it was neither Mary's age nor appearance that made her so soon to be considered an old maid; for her sister Anne was twenty-seven before she was married, yet she had never been reckoned an old maid. The truth is, age is judged by very different criterions as circumstances differ. Mary had come out a belle and a beauty a great deal too soon, and it is a well known fact, that those envied personages pay the penalty for their popularity by growing much sooner old than more private individuals; and that, with the Johnston's house probably being less attractive than formerly, when there were three agreeable girls in place of a solitary one, might be the reason Mary remained unsought, while her sisters and a whole host of friends and acquaintances, both mentally and personally inferior, became matrons before her.

One day, about this time, Mary Johnston was telling me of some improbable marriage which she heard was about to take place with regard to two of our mutual acquaintances, and finished by observing, 'If Mr. Orr were here, you know what he would say, 'A' body's like to be married but me; don't you think so, Miss Mary?' 'Well, I believe he will be right,' she added laughing. 'Who knows,' I replied thoughtlessly; 'for I have just heard Tom Scott is on his way home to pay us all a few months' visit, and we may expect him in Edinburgh some of these days.' The moment I said these words I regretted having done so, for although Mary tried to laugh the matter off, I saw by the rapid and painful flush on her cheek, that she considered what I had said to imply that she would be very glad to take Tom Scott now.

The next time I met Mary was at a great dinner at Claremont Crescent, given by an old friend of Tom Scott's in honor of his return, and to which the Johnstons happened to be invited. Tom Scott acted well towards Mary, although he had provocation to do otherwise, but at the same time his conduct was calculated to show the fallacy of any expectation of his old penchant being revived. Poor Mary, if Tom could have triumphed over her, he would have done so in her quiet sobered down manners; in the attention which she received being bestowed almost solely by the married men of the party; in the sudden and unnoticed paleness of her cheek when he advanced towards her; in the momentary glance at him, as dinner was announced, and he advanced as if to offer her his arm, but in fact to do so to a really beautiful girl, at the age Mary was when he left Edinburgh, and her cousin, being the eldest daughter of one of the solicitors.

During the evening, at least one half of the company being young people, dancing was proposed. Mary, I saw, would fain have been the musician all the time, but was not permitted, and she was condemned to dance exactly opposite her well meaning but rather

manœuvring aunt, and be a witness how well pleased she seemed with Tom Scott for a partner to her fair and well portioned daughter, Tom now being considered in a fair way of becoming a very extensive and wealthy merchant.

When the dancing was almost concluded, their host tapped Tom Scott on the back, and asked him, laughing, if he had danced with every young lady in the room, an old amiable habit of Tom's.

Tom, who delighted to see all his old friends again, was the very picture of enjoyment, answered merrily that he thought he had, but corrected himself immediately, 'No, I have forgotten Miss Mary Johnston.'

Poor Mary, eight years ago how proud Tom was to get her for a partner, and even when dancing with any one else, he had no eyes but for Mary. She heard it all now. Tom, in his perfect innocence of all intention to hurt her feelings, could not, although he had tried it, have fixed on a better plan of humiliation. I also overheard Tom's *mal apropos* speech, and glancing at Mary to see its effect, saw for an instant the convulsive quiver of the lips, which is often the only symptom of mental suffering. My readers may consider the occasion did not call forth such distress, but Mary was thinking how foolishly she had dashed the cup of happiness from her lips; how she was reaping the harvest her own hands had sown; was thinking how different she would have been as Tom Scott's wife, supported by his kind arm, and cherished by his affectionate heart. Her vanity was sorely punished.

Next day I called at Claremont Crescent for a shawl I had forgotten the previous evening. 'See, Mary Johnston has as short a memory as you,' said the lady of the house, laughing, holding up Mary's gloves, which she, like me, had left behind her, 'I said; 'I half intended calling for her to-day at any rate.'

'Will you take me with you?' asked Tom Scott, who was present. 'I ought to call on my old friend, Mrs. Johnston, before of these days.'

I accepted Tom's escort, and in a short time we were at our destination. As we ascended the stairs, and after we entered the sitting-room, Tom looked round about him on all the old familiar objects with an odd sort of expression, as if he recollected for the first time that eight years ago he had really sought to make Mary Johnston his wife. 'Everything quite the same,' he half soliloquised, half observed to me, before Mrs. Johnston and Mary joined us.

Mrs. Johnston received Tom in a kind but rather flattered manner, and seemed to be completely absorbed in the effort to give him the Mr. Scott of the merchant, while the more familiar Mr. Tom of the clerk was ever coming out. Mary was perfectly composed but looking pale and ill.

'You have been very fortunate since you went away from us, Mr. Tom,' (Mr. Scott being dropped at his own request,) said Mrs. Johnston, after a pause, and unconsciously sighing.

Tom assented.

'You will find a great many changes, I dare say; you would hear of all their marriages; poor things, they have been very fortunate. Agnes has got four children, she would have had five, but her youngest, a nice boy, died of croup three months ago.'

'Indeed,' observed Tom, 'very distressing.' And Anne has three, the youngest twins. Well, these are alterations,' continued Mrs. Johnston, in a moralising tone; 'what thoughtless young creatures they were when you were with us; if you had seen poor Agnes when she came here for change of scene after the death of her baby—'

'But all of you are not changed,' observed Tom, cheerfully; 'there is yourself, Mrs. Johnston, and my cousin Charlotte here, and Miss Mary.' He added in a lower tone, feeling that he was getting on uncertain ground.

'Oh, I have rheumatism, Mr. Tom, very bad every spring; now, you remember, I had it only once all the time you were here; now I am confined to bed with it a week or two every spring. Mrs. Orr, to be sure, does not look a bit different; only her eldest son, what a great big lad you must have found him, Mr. Tom. As for Mary, poor thing, she has a great deal to do now; no practising whole mornings nor walking whole evenings for her now; there is nobody left to do all the sewing, and look after every thing but her now; she is no more the laughing light-hearted creature she was eight years ago than I am.'

'But, mamma, you could not expect me but to get older in eight years,' said Mary, trying to laugh, as she interrupted her mother's reflections; 'and, as you have said, I have all the dignity and thought of being house-keeper now.'

When we left, Mrs. Johnston asked Tom to come back and see her.

'Oh, yes, he would be very glad to do so,' Tom said, rather carelessly.

Next month, I took lodgings for a few weeks at Lasswade for change of air for the children, and being in Edinburgh one day I called on Mary Johnston, who had been suffering from a bad cold, and invited her to spend a short time with us in the country. Although I ultimately prevailed, Mary was by no means willing to be of my party, bringing forward every possible reason against going except the true one, that she should necessarily be brought much beside Tom Scott, whose younger sister was then also with us, and Tom being in Edinburgh and having nothing to do, and being, besides an affectionate brother, might be expected to be often at Lasswade.

Tom entertained no malice, however, and Mary and he got rather good friends, although no lovers; and from at least one of them once being so, never likely, I feared, to get over a certain awkwardness in every thing relating to each other. At the same time I was much gratified by the frequent visits Tom Scott paid us; there never was such an obliging brother and cousin; he was constantly at our command.

One evening, it happened that Mr. Orr and Catharine Scott and the children, were all in town, when Tom Scott dropped in to take tea with Mary and I. He was in particularly high spirits, and after tea began insisting, with considerable animation, that Mary should sing. Not singing songs off, I had no vocal music with me, except one or two stray songs which had introduced themselves into the package I had sent out for our use, and for which Tom immediately began hunting. Only one he could find, and that the very touching though now sadly hackneyed one of Haynes Bayley, 'Long, long ago.' Mary, from obvious reasons, decidedly declined singing it; but Tom, I concluded, had never heard it, as he kept pressing and insisting, considerably to my amusement, and much to Mary's confusion. Just then I remembered that I had neglected to write a letter in answer to one sent me from a country friend, full of sundry inquires and commissions, the receipt of a reply to which would no doubt be impatiently desired.

Conscientiously shocked at my want of memory, I hurried out of the room, in order to remedy the fault, as well as possible, by writing, and leaving Tom and Mary to settle the affair of the song as pleased them.—When I had done, I went back to the parties I had left. I saw the room still remained unlighted; Tom Scott must have gone, for he and Mary are much too sensible folks to be sitting together in the last remains of twilight. As I entered the lobby, I fancied I heard Tom's voice in the distance; Mary must have got unwell, and retired for the night. I hurried up stairs to ascertain it.—Now, before I proceed farther, I must explain two things. I call all my friends and acquaintances to witness, whether I was ever considered guilty of being that contemptible character an eaves-dropper: and I must state, that Tom Scott was by no means a forward individual, at least I never was aware of any circumstance in which he acted in such a manner as to be deemed so.

Well then, when I reached the door of the drawing-room, my readers will not consider me guilty of any sinister intention in yielding to an involuntary impulse; and, instead of walking at once into the room, pausing first, and popping in my head, to scrutinise what was going on there, before I made myself personally visible. I do not know what had induced me to do so; I am not aware of once having adopted such a practice before or since; but this I do know, I suspected nothing to occasion such a movement of that nature; and therefore was more taken aback by what occurred. There was Tom and Mary, whom I had left scarcely half an hour before, such matter-of-fact rational people, and who, to my belief, were guiltless at that moment of any one return, by word or action, to the half-forgotten story of years ago. There they were, their figures thrown out in a strong relief, by their being seated on a sofa by the side of a blazing fire, the rest of the room remaining in a shadow; and, in short, Tom's arm was where it had no earthly business to be, and Mary's head was behaving no better.

I was petrified, and drew back, scarcely aware whether I was in the room or out. I retreated to my own room, and I believe I must have stayed there fully a quarter of an hour before I recovered from the shock. Then I returned, taking good care to be seized with a bad cough on my way to the drawing-room, and not recovering from it till I entered the room, had the satisfaction of finding every thing quite satisfactory.

On my re-entrance, Tom was lighting the gas in a very animated manner, and Mary was reading the newspapers, a study that did not appear to be favorable to her eyes, which were very red and swollen. I certainly rejoiced most heartily in the fact; I had begun to suspect, that although Tom Scott had returned home, apparently entirely cured of his unfortunate attachment, the distemper had returned upon him more violently than ever. It was the natural consequence in him of circumstances acting on his position, and what I had always considered likely, without going to a French proverb, or to any other precedent whatever on the subject. He had seen her last, in the full triumph of a girl's gratified pride and vanity—self-willed, unreasonable, unjust; he met her again—subdued, sobered, thrown aside. On other men all this might have had little effect; but it would have melted Tom to one in other respects a total stranger, and completely indifferent to him; how much more so when it applied to Mary Johnston; and however he might overlook her at first, it failed not to recall old wishes, old hopes, to revive old strong manly affections, long struggled with, long repressed, never wholly forgotten. I was perfectly acquainted with all this, only I by no means expected such a rapid termination to the affair; that song to which Mary refused to sing to him, that 'Long, long ago,' must, without doubt, have somehow brought it about.

I need not say how highly gratified was Mrs. Johnston and the whole of Mary's remaining kith and kin; Tom Scott's friends, too; every one, in short, who had a real interest in the parties.

I pass over to a call which I received immediately before Mary's marriage from Mrs. Kerr, the lady of the young barrister before mentioned, and with whom, although on my visiting list, I had no particular intimacy. Mrs. Kerr, who by some means was cognizant of the whole story of her husband's flirtation with Mary Johnston, with an entire want of good feeling, good taste, and common sense, had taken the opportunity whenever she chanced to meet her, of triumphing over and slighting her in every possible way.

'So Mary Johnston is to be married at last,' she said to me with affected suavity, then with no little malice proceeded to remark on the uncommon generosity of my relation, Mr. Scott, who, refused when poor, returned with the prospect of wealth to marry the very lady, grown old and faded, who formerly rejected him.

'I have heard instances of far surpassing magnanimity,' drily observed Mr. Orr, who chanced to be present. 'I have heard of ladies who overlooked in their intended husbands conduct so contemptible to themselves as men, so grossly insulting to these same ladies, to their affection and their influence that I have marvelled at their forbearance and charity.'

At Mary's wedding, her cousin, the eldest daughter of one of the solicitors (and, by the way, both Mary's uncles had fulfilled their former promises), sung at the bridegroom's previous request, 'A' body's like to be married but me,' much to the mirth of the guests, few of whom, however, comprehended its late connexion with the bride.

Mrs. Tom Scott is still with her husband at Lyons, but every thing is arranged for their return in the course of the present summer; a house is already taken for them in Doune Terrace, so that Mrs. Johnston, who, I am nappy to say, is a hale, hearty, old lady, bids fair to see her daughter Mary re-established beside her.

Mary has been twice home on a visit since her marriage, and a fair, comely, smiling, sensible young matron she is, very much taken up with a host of children, and the comforts and convenience of their worthy papa, grown fat and jocular. Oh yes! who to read Mary's letters, so very domestic and matronly, so very full of little Bessy, little Mary, little Tom, and that important personage who figures in all families, and is ever changing name and being *baby*—especially so full of old Tom—would not laugh as they compared the wife with the maiden; the good sense, sober happy real life interests and entire home pre-occupations of Mrs. Tom Scott, with the gay, wayward, coquetish Mary Johnston. In Mrs. Tom Scott's last letter I actually caught her boasting of Tom's early hours and taste for home—his never being out of doors without her after nine, at which time he put on dressing-gown and slippers, in short, those very qualifications which Mrs. Johnston had cited in his praise eight years ago, and Mary had so scoffed at. Mr. Orr, as I read it to him, groaned over the domestic subjugation of Tom Scott, as he called it, and the inconsistencies human beings can be guilty of.