

# THE VARSITY.

one of the city ways of the young Messieurs to bring me flowers. They can understand that a girl likes to get pretty things now and then, even if she is only their friend. When she is more than that—*ma foi!* Listen, that is Mr. Hughes singing now. He got up with the sun this morning and went ever so far to get fresh lilies and now he is putting them in a box to send to his young lady in the city. He does it every morning and he always sings that when he is tying them up."

Marie paused and held up her hand for Jacques to listen. The strong tenor echoed through the little kitchen: "For she's all the world to me, and for bonnie Annie Laurie, I would lay me down and dee." "That's how *he* loves *her*," sighed Marie. "It is worth while to have a lover, when he gets out of his bed every morning to get fresh flowers for you. And oh, you should see the things he buys and sends her—Indian things and all kinds. Oh, he is a lover to have."

Jacques felt that this was becoming rather personal. "Dost thou think he loves her the more for what he sends her, Marie?" he asked a little unsteadily. "Or she, him? If I thought the love of my little one depended on what I gave her, it would make me very sad, Marie."

Marie grew a trifle red. "It doesn't depend on it," she answered hotly. "But, *ma foi*, once telling is not enough, and if one is not reminded all the time one is apt to forget that she has a lover."

"But why should I tell thee all the time that I love thee? Thou knowst it," said Jacques earnestly.

"And there's another thing," Marie went on, "it shows that he thinks of her when he gets things for her. How do I know that you remember me when you go the city if you bring me no sign?"

A look of pain had stolen into Jacques's honest eyes. Was this really his loving little Marie? Something had surely turned her head.

"Thou knowst I am not a rich man, Marie," he began, and his strong voice shook, "but I do not think I could love thee more if I were king of England. And it seems to make thee all the dearer that I have to work the harder to make a little home to bring my wife to. I thought it better to save all I can instead of buying presents, so that I can the sooner call thee mine. Was I wrong Marie—*my* Marie?"

Marie did not answer. Truth to tell she was beginning to feel very uncomfortable, but, in her perversity, she would not acknowledge it, so she stood with lowered eyes, cutting cookies with sharp, quick strokes.

Suddenly "Bonnie Annie Laurie" died away in a long drawn "dee-e-e." A door opened and a moment later the singer stood on the threshold of the kitchen. "Can you let me have a little more string, Marie?" Then catching sight of Jacques, "Oh, never mind if you're busy."

Marie left the board with a sigh of relief. "I'm not busy at all, M'sieu, its only Jacques. You know him." The young man looked pleasantly at Jacques. "Good morning," he said. "Fine day, isn't it? Did you come by the river road? I think you get the finest view there in Canada."

"Its very well," said Jacques, stupidly. He was looking at Marie's face all bright and smiling now, and suddenly a great hatred filled his heart towards the innocent young gentleman who was leaning gracefully against the door, his thoughts far away. What business had he to come here—the hot question surged through Jacques' heart—to rob him of his little Marie? He had a young lady in the city, why did he not stay with her and leave other girls to their own lovers?

Marie had brought the string and Mr. Hughes held the box while she tied it up. He said something—Jacques could not hear what—and they both laughed. It was the last straw. With a half-smothered "Sacrebleu!" Jacques turned abruptly and went quickly past the nodding roses, down the green road, which had lost all its beauty and was only hot and dark and dusty to him.

The August days passed slowly away and the spirit of September touched the woods with her magic wand. The two boarders had returned to the city, and Marie and Mère Martineau were alone.

There was little to do, and in the long evenings while her mother nodded drowsily over her knitting, Marie would creep out of the house and steal down to the old oak tree where one balmy spring evening she had plighted her troth with Jacques. And here she would weep and wonder, kissing over and over again the little half sixpence which hung from a ribbon around her neck. For since Jacques had gone off that morning he had never come back and no one could tell what had become of him. And so Marie wept and waited for, surely, her heart told her he would come again. But, when September was succeeded by October and October gave place to November, and still Jacques came not, the girl's spirit failed. Day by day she seemed to grow more pale and wan, until the kindly neighbors began to sigh and shake their heads, pointing to the little churchyard where Marie's father and brother were sleeping.

Christmas time drew near and the villagers were making elaborate preparations for the merry Christmas eve dance which had been held in the village from time immemorial. The lads and lasses came begging Marie to help them, but she only answered sadly, "I cannot go, and I am not able to help, for I would be out of place among you." And after they had gone she would slip away to the tiny clothespress and bury her face in the folds of the white dress she had worn last Christmas eve when *he* was with her.

She remembered every dance they had had; every word he had spoken; every change of his expression; and her hungry heart treasured up all the little whispered speeches—not delicate compliments, but blunt outspoken avowals of admiration and affection.

The day before Christmas Marie was sitting listlessly before the hearth, watching the firelight dancing on the wall and throwing queer shadows in the corner where Mère Martineau sat knitting.

All at once there was a great stamping on the steps, the door flew open, and a great, snowy figure entered. It stood a moment on the threshold, then a familiar voice cried: "Am I welcome to-day, Marie?"

Marie sprang up and I think the man must have been welcome, for she threw herself into his arms and clung and sobbed there with never a thought of the cold, wet snow which covered him.

Bye and bye she released him, and he got his great coat off and hung up by the fire to dry. Then he delved into its capacious pockets and brought forth sundry little parcels.

"I have got good work, Marie, petite," he said, "and I have been thinking of thee always, for see, always every week I bought thee a little present." And Jacques, his honest face beaming with satisfaction and love, proceeded to untie the little bundles and spread forth their contents. It was a varied assortment; a little rose, a piece of bright ribbon, a little pin set with stones, that, whatever they were, sparkled most alluringly; a gay handkerchief, and so on, one by one, they emerged from their wrappings, while Marie's heart was almost bursting and all the cruel things she had said that dreadful morning were burning like so many hot coals. When at last he opened a little square box and disclosed a tiny, silver watch, saying: "And this is for thy Christmas, Marie," the girl could stand it no longer. Bursting into a flood of tears, she cried between her sobs: "O Jacques, it was all a mistake—I was an animal—I did not mean a word of it—I don't want any presents!" "Don't want them, Marie?" Jacques face fell. Oh, strange are the ways of women! Had he made another mistake? Marie caught the note of disappointment in his voice. She took his hand. "No, I do want them and they are beautiful, dear," she said, "What I mean is, that