

April Fools

piece, the gentlest, tenderest maid. Sorrow has laid his grey fingers upon her heart and, though she may grow old and wise and wed a squire with well-tilled acres and spacious hall, to the end of her life a poignant experience, on which you have been the privileged intruder, will modulate her lightest laugh with a deeper harmony.

At the *Basket of Roses* there were April fools that day.

"Charles made up his mind and did no good," said Mr. Ripple. "I hesitated, and was in no better case. What is one to do?"

Sir George Repington was quite broken up by the affair. Years ago he had built a bower in April which was destroyed in a morning. In old age, Spring fooled him again.

Like the heavy footnote of a tragedy, Mr. Moon, lately arrived by the Wells waggon, employed himself with practical suggestions. Mr. Lovely must retire over the water for a while, the sooner the better. Mrs. Courteen and Miss Phyllida must return to Hampshire. He would make posting arrangements; their baggage must be sent after them. Tarry must be buried in the parish church at home; he could not allow a neighbour to lie in a strange churchyard. For once in his life, Mr. Moon was of real use to a situation and, in the protracted discussions of expedients for hushing the matter up and conveying the principals safely into seclusion, the grief of many hearts was temporarily allayed.

"You must come back with me to Curtain Wells, George," decided Mr. Ripple, "we must not allow the world to invent any more explanations of the affair. I doubt the wildest rumours are flying round. In a month or two, Charles can return if he will; meanwhile you and I, George, will give ourselves the pleasure of paying his debts."

In the dusk of to-morrow's dawn, the vivid yellow chaise of Beau Ripple rattled over the cobbles of Curtain Wells, and drew up before the Great House. A dexterous and hurried toilet was performed with Mr. Mink's assistance and the watchers from the windows, ignorant whether the Great little Man was returned, were immensely gratified to see him emerge from his front door, goblet in hand, and wearing a