

that Love might not be an absent guest, but that, sitting at one board, they all might be of one heart and of one mind.

"Now, Mr. Bliss, I know you're hankering after one of Hebe's jumbles," said Mrs. Biddle when the meal reached a stage that justified an attack on the cake.

"Thank you; remembering past famine, I'll take two," said the minister, beaming on Hebe over Deacon Biddle's shoulder.

That little speech created a demand for jumbles that stooped only with the supply. But alas for Hebe! her eager eyes fastened on the minister, caught him in the act of making up the wryset of faces. At the same instant Deacon Biddle, who had taken at a bite two thirds of a cake, turned purple, gurgling and sputtering alarmingly: "Bless the man!" cried his wife, promptly doubling him over one stout arm and thumping his back with all the strength of the other. A small boy between the Deacon's legs, concluding that boys were fallen on evil times when vengeance was overtaking deacons, took a lightning review of his sins, gave himself up for lost, and set up a lamentable wail.

"It's that horrid stuff!" cried several candid spirits, and fragments of the cake were dropped on the floor and table with small ceremony.

"Who would have thought the young heart could be so despit'ly wicked as to salt donation jumbles!" sighed an old lady.

"It's worthy of a sheep in wolf's clothing, that it is," said Crinthy Crane, too righteously indignant to mind her metaphors.

Blind with shame and burning tears, Hebe slipped unnoticed through the door, picking up on the way a bit of the discarded cake,—it was as salt as Lot's wife! Hardly knowing where she went, she ran down the garden walk and flung herself into an old rustic seat.

"I see it all," she sobbed; "the hateful thing! she found them out when I was asleep, and made another batch just like excepting salt for sugar. And now she's eating up my cakes and crowing over me; and then to put such an insult on the minister," and Hebe, frightened at the violence of her sobs and the catching pain at her heart, tried to still herself.

"Why, Hebe—my child—" and the minister laid a tender hand on her heaving shoulder. With a sense of disappointment in the girl and pity for the silly joke, as he thought it, he had searched the room for her, and as he stepped to the door for a moment's respite from the clamor of the supper room, her sobs betrayed her refuge to him.

"O sir, I will go home,—I ought to have gone at once," and Hebe sprang up and ran to the gate. But the minister was at her side before she touched the latch: "Not till you have told me your trouble, dear child. I have a right to your confidence, as you have a right at all times to my love and sympathy."

"And you—hate me?" faltered Hebe, yielding a little cold palm into the minister's hand.

"Not altogether," he laughed. He led her back to the seat, the great syringa bush over it was in its sweet white prime of flowering. There, nestling up to him like a grieving child, she told him the true story of the jumbles, omitting only the sacrifice of the fourteen cents.

"But to have everybody think that I meant to vex you,—with a little catch in the breath—when I love you better than any of them—even old Deacon Biddle."

"Oh, ever so much! I have wished," said Hebe laughing softly in the fullness of her happy confidence, "fifty times, that I was your little daughter to dust your books, and pray for you all day long,—but I can do that, now."

"And do you, Hebe?" the minister's voice was broken.

"Yes, sir," said Hebe. "If there ain't the minister settin' under the syringa-bush with Hebe Gladney," exclaimed Miss Crane, making a double-barreled spy-glass of her hands, and gazing out of the window as if the sight had a horrible fascination for her.

"Can't somethin' be done, Deacon Biddle?"

"Wa'al, yes," said the Deacon, squaring his elbows and indulging in that peculiarly mellow gurgle of his; "sposin' you take my arm, Miss Crinthy, and we'll walk down and take a swing on the gate to show them how ketchin' is a bad example. Shall we, ma?"

Whereat Mother Biddle laughed—a mellow laugh in its way, to—and said "Don't mind his chaff, Crinthy," but Miss Crane had frownced away to sow the seeds of scandal in more congenial soil.

"And you will not go in with me, Hebe, and let me explain it to the people? I will shield your aunt as much as possible," urged Mr. Bliss.

But Hebe shrank from facing them again that night; and if he would be so good as to tell them, she would run home alone.

At the gate—he followed her so far,—she said timidly, "I don't know how I dared to tell you all my heart, sir; but it was so full, and you were so kind—so kind"—the happy tears were glistening in Hebe's eyes.

"I understand you, little daughter." As he stooped, the moonlight showed him a tremulous sweet mouth held innocently up to him, but he only kissed her forehead. "Good-night, little daughter," and he laid his hand in blessing on her head.

As she sped away down the narrow path—so narrow that her dress wiped the dew from the faces of daisies and dandelions—she watched her with a new warmth at his heart, and a sense of purity, as if the earth had taken a baptismal vow of holiness upon its lips, and the stars were registering it.

As for Hebe, she fairly flew homeward, too light-hearted to walk. The door was open. Miss Stebbins was wraddled in invisibility, if not in slumber, and the child crept to her room and to bed, like a bird with a new song in its throat, which it

must wait till morning to practice. She felt to measure this new happiness, to assure herself of its reality, to feel again each thrill of utter comfort and content, from the first touch of his hand upon her shoulder—such a strong and gentle hand—to his fatherly kiss. And she was to be his little daughter, always! But suddenly her new happiness crumbled in her hands to dust,—the change came in a breath;—Hebe was only fifteen, but she blushed the blushes and wept the tears of twenty-one, as she hid her face in the pillow from the moon light.

The next day Mr. Bliss and Miss Crane met upon Miss Stebbin's door-step; not by design,—far from it. However prone the minister might be to clandestine meetings under syringa bushes, Miss Crane could not accuse him of seeking *tete-a-tetes* with herself. It would be uncharitable to suspect that this made her a keener moral detective or sharpened her sense of virtue.

Hebe ushered them into Miss Stebbin's parlor, to which shortly descended that lady with an enigmatical expression on her face. She bowed frigidly to Mr. Bliss, who said with perfect cordiality:

"We missed you from our party last night, Miss Stebbins."

"I was cleaning the communion silver, Mr. Bliss. I may be unworthy of communion myself, but I hope I do my duty by the silver," replied the lady, severely.

The silver, which at Miss Stebbin's own request had been confided to her care for the year, was in danger of being refined quite away, for, according to her own account, its cleaning was the business and pleasure of her life.

"I thank you, on behalf of the church," said Mr. Bliss, and then conversation languished.

Miss Crane had come expressly to tell Miss Stebbins of the minister's "goings on" with Hebe. Miss Stebbins was burning to hear the results of her malice, for Hebe's lips had been sealed on the subject all day.

"Hebe," said the minister abruptly, "get your hat, please; I want your opinion about the parsonage flower-beds."

"Hebe's got an afternoon's ironing to do," said Miss Stebbins, sharply.

"Very well; my housekeeper will gladly come over and help you. I cannot wait, Hebe," turning to the girl, who stood in an agony of hope and fear in the doorway. That shade of authority gave wings to her feet as she mounted the stairs, and nerved her to walk off with the minister under the indignant noses of the two maiden ladies.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Miss Stebbins, peering through the blinds at the pair, and trembling with rage; "Of all owlacious men, a minister is the owlaciousest,—the minx! walkin' off under my very eyes."

"Ah, if you knew *all*, Lizzie," said Miss Crane, mournfully.

"All! If there's anything worse, I'd like to know it," exclaimed the other, with unconscious sincerity.

"Don't ask me; if it was anybody but your own niece I might have the heart to tell."

"O, I can bear it. I'm prepared for the worst."

"Well, what does Hebe do, when we was all at table, but sneak out o' doors, winking of course to Mr. Bliss on the way, and what does he do, in the middle of one of Deacon Biddle's stories, but foller her on; and *where*, do you suppose? To the *Syringia bush*! I never should have suspected such a thing myself, but when I see them setting there together it told the whole story. And there they set and they set, till folks were enquiring after the minister. I told all I could, as was my Christian duty, but not a sinner of 'em went out to put a stop it. Bimeby they walked off down the walk, and stood mooning at the gate I s'pose, for of all shining faces that ever you saw, his was the shiniest when he come in. She went home, of course, being ashamed to show her face after such goings on."

Miss Stebbins's cup of bitterness was not quite brimmed,—she had yet to learn, as soon as Miss Crane recovered breath, that the cake plot was an utter failure, since Mr. Bliss had made a neat apology for the absent Hebe, which had called forth a hearty cheer from the company, led by the Deacon himself and effectively sustained by the small boy, who had recovered his spirits.

"The next time Hebe Gladney goes a-walkin' with Minister Bliss, she leaves my roof," said Miss Stebbins, with deadly emphasis.

Meantime the minister and Hebe had strolled to the parsonage gate—were passing it, indeed,—when she said, timidly, "Your flower-beds, sir."

"Why, certainly," he answered; "we need not go in,—leaning over the fence abstractedly."

"What is your idea of a bed in the middle of that grass-plot?"

"Why, sir, you told me you had planted cypress-vine seeds there."

"So I did!" said the minister; and after a pause "How would verbenas look climbing up the sides of the stoop?"

"O dear, very nice if they could, but they only *creep*," laughed Hebe.

"Well, well, I see I am not fit even to make suggestions. Just draw a little plan of two or three beds, with the varieties of flowers suited to them, and I will work it out. Now I want to walk you across the fields to the bend in the brook where there are more violets than you could press in my library."

It was a strange walk. Hebe thought of the times she had walked from Sunday-school with him, talking of the lesson and the little duties to which it pointed, and wondered why that should be so different from going to look at violets. The

very grass had a strange feeling under her feet and what a monstrous thing seemed a stile to get over, when the minister, of whom one stands in so much awe for all his kindness, is holding out a helpful hand! At the second stile he stopped, enconced Hebe in a sunny angle of the rail-fence, and said, in answer to her questioning look, "Hebe, I must take it back—the name I gave you last night."

"Yes," said Hebe, "I know it."

"An assent so ready, and given in a tone of such quiet, sad conviction, took him quite aback. Nature had stolen a march on the minister, and revealed this thing to the girl by one of those flashes of perception that reveal new truths so absolutely in all their bearings and sequences to the soul, that it accepts them without surprise.

"You know it, Hebe—how?"

"I feel it; I can't—tell—!" said the girl, quivering, and peeling the lichens from the fence.

It was infinitely worse than saying the catechism to him—only the catechist himself seemed strangely at a loss for the next question.

"Shall I answer for you?—O child! if the little daughter of last night might some time—in years to come—be happy as my little wife—"

I think Hebe will never forget just how, when one is half blind with joy, the yellow disc of a dandelion swells into a golden mushroom, and how a lark lifts the happy heart to heaven on a thread of song.

For Spring was everywhere,—a tiny cupful of Spring in every buttercup,—a nestful of it wherever married birds were beginning life; but nowhere such radiant, perfect Spring as in Hebe's eyes.

"It is only a relic of college vanity, and has no associations but those we give it now," said the minister, slipping a thin gold ring from his finger to Hebe's; "large, isn't it? Well, it will stand the better for two things: that you can never get outside the circle of my love, and yet—you see how easily it slips off—it must never bind you to a mistake."

The small finger has been growing since then,—growing quite to the measure of the circle; and it has found out no mistake as yet. Only lately, walking through the same fields, Hebe said,

"See what a good fit it is!"

"Perfect," said the minister; "and this is a good-quiet place to practice in. Let me see,—"

"With all my worldly goods I thee endow!"

"I'm glad I shall not have to promise that," broke in Hebe, with a mischievous twinkle.

"And why so, pray, Hebe Bliss?"

"Because I couldn't; didn't I put my last cent into those jumbles, sir?"

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