

"ONLY A SLEIGH-RIDE."

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Serial Stories "An Elapsed Engagement,"
"The Court of Wast and the Palace of
Plenty," "A Happy Week," etc., and
Poems "The Dying Leaf," "Angelus,"
"The Cataract and the Mountain," "The
Old Year," etc

CHAPTER I.

"How happy some o'er other some can be."

The scene of my story lies in a small country village, consisting of one long street. At right angles with this street flows a lovely river, which at a distance of about a mile from the village, joins another stream; and seemingly well content with having company, ripples speedily and joyfully on its way to the ocean. Past caves it glides, with only a curious wave dancing in, to take a rapid survey of the interior, leaving helpless fishes behind in its hurry to keep up with its fellows; whirls around the roots of trees, carrying with its restless sweep the loose earth that surrounds them. Still on; under bridges, over stones and boulders, jumping, leaping, tumbling from height to depth. On again, in its mad ambition to reach its fate, and be swallowed up in ocean.

Just at the junction of these rivers stands a large, three-storied stone house, which in summer is completely covered with clinging vines. It is mid-winter now, and the vines hang lifeless; the fact of their hanging at all being the only sign of their revival to renewed beauty. The branches of the trees which surround the house bear up gracefully under their heart chilling burden. Though it means death to the leaves, yet the scene lacks nothing in beauty, being a veritable crystal palace for genii to live in, who are warm hearted enough to repel the cold.

The house itself in its ample proportions, suggests comfort and plenty. The handsomely furnished rooms show the most exquisite taste in their arrangement. The bountifully furnished library is a source of pleasure to all who visit it.

Those who dwell in this comfortable home, are Mr. Campbell, a very wealthy retired merchant, a tall, handsome man, who well merits the name of "Mercantile Prince." Mrs. Campbell, a pretty motherly woman, who looks as though she had never insisted on having her own way in her life, and their beloved daughter Helen, a tall, sparkling brunette, full of life and motion, whom everyone calls Lady Nell. This Lady Nell is expecting a number of friends this very evening. Let us peep at these friends as they near their destination. Belle

Barber is seated beside Lottie Moore in the coach; and forms a great contrast to her. Lottie is a blonde of the purest style, and has a winning, you'll like me, kind of air, which makes everyone love her. Belle is neither blonde nor brunette, but a happy combination of both, with a decided will of her own, which gives a firm look to her small mouth and a slightly haughty lift to her head; a very pleasant face, one which inspires trust. Aggie Barber resembles her sister very much in form and feature, but the expression of her face is as one who has known trouble and learned how to bear it.

"That peaceful face, wherein all past distress,
 Has melted into perfect loveliness."

Everyone trusts good little Saint Agness, as they call her. She has soul beauty.

The gentlemen in various attitudes of elegance and inelegance around them are Dr. Gregory, a noble-faced, honest gentleman, Wilfrid Winters, a society man, who has not lost his individuality in the artificial atmosphere of this base world. Angus Grout, a fair type of a medium lawyer, who is far too honest to be altogether successful in his chosen profession. John McGrath, a divinity student, an enthusiast in the field, and at the same time not without physical advantages.

But now they are at the station, and Mr. Campbell greets them; glad as he always is to see bright, happy faces. They are snugly tucked in his sleigh and whirled through the crisp air—with the sweet toned bells dancing out a challenge to the world in general, and to all other conveyances in particular—to the bright, happy home of their hostess.

Helen is standing by the tea table giving the last touches to the fragrant flowers, which are lavishly bestowed on the board. In the centre of the table is a square mirror, on which is placed a silver candelabra, whose many branching lights dazzle the sweet flowers, that hide their shyness under the protecting ivy and myrtle which twines caressingly around them. So they lie, fragrantly giving out their life on the borders of the mirror, and reflecting their sacrifice again and again within it. How sweetly they are dying; softly, stealthily creeping to shadows as they near the foot of the candelabra and recede from the light. As they waste their lives they will give sweet thoughts, noble fancies, high hopes and blissful dreams, to those who gaze on them. Their short lives will not be like

"A broken purpose, waste in air."

The remaining space is covered by all the good things hungry people delight in.

As the laggard hands of the clock creep near the longed for hour of seven, Helen is standing by the window in her "one straight gown of red, against the cold," looking the true goddess of hospitality.

Welcome, welcome, she says, amidst the ardent embraces of her girl friends. In they all come—a regular breeze of gaiety. But, there is one belated guest comes springing up the steps, as Helen in her anxiety for his coming has gone to the door. What a radiant vision she is, as she stands there in her brilliant dress; her sparkling eyes speaking a gladder welcome than she knows. Dropping the bundles he is carrying, with a half smothered exclamation of tenderness, he holds out both hands for hers, which are given impulsively, with a shy glance, which ought to make any man happy. I think by the pleased expression on this man's face that he is supremely so. True love must find expression in meeting or parting.

What a happy care free band they are, as they gather around. Bright, happy faces, graceful figures, fluttering like humming birds before the grate fires. Is it any wonder that the coals burn brighter at the sight, and sent up a steady flame, in which those romance loving girls picture a glorious future, and are already in elysium at the mere anticipation.

What better happiness is there than the pleasure which a well trained imagination can give? Life is full of disappointments. Why think of them until they are upon us? How we can cheat them of their sting, by not anticipating them. Planning happiness will go a long way towards making our nature's hopeful, and always anticipating luck will help to bring it. Is not hope itself happiness? And hope springs eternal in the human breast," providing one does not choke up its source, with a debris of complaining and weeping, by which no mortal may thrive, and through which no spring may send up pure crystal hope, but needs must send up gloomy despair. Let us encourage the rippling, tinkling laughing songs, of which hope is the mother. Let us keep the sources of our springs pure, that they may offer up their incense spray to the author of hope, and fall in dewy benediction on hearts and homes.

As these merry ones sit, weaving their webs of fancy, their profiles are delineated on the wall in fitful phantoms. There again are their lives portrayed. At first the bright light of youth falls on their sun-kissed locks, and they dance along in airy fancies, gliding over and above the surrounding