

HOME CIRCLE.

A LOVE SONG TO A WIFE.

We have been lovers for forty years;
O, dear cheeks, faded and worn with tears,
What an eloquent story of love ye tell!
Your roses are dead, yet I love ye well!

O, pale brow, shrouded in soft, silvery hair;
Crowned with life's sorrow and lined with care,
Let me read by the light of the stars above
Those, dear, dear records of faithful love.

Ah, fond, fond eyes of my own true wife!
Ye have shone so clear through my checkered life!
Ye have shed such joy on its thorny way
That I cannot think ye are dim to-day.

Worn little hands that have toiled so long,
Patient and loving, and brave and strong;
Ye will never tire, ye will never rest,
Until you are crossed on my darling's breast.

O, warm heart, throbbings so close to mine!
Time only strengthens such love as thine.
And proves that the holiest love doth last
When summer and beauty and youth are past.

—Quiver.

ALMOST.

A little "sitting room," furnished as these rooms are in most American country places. In one rocking-chair sat a man of fifty, sawing himself backward and forward. In the other a woman, some five years younger, darning stockings on a mock orange.

Some one ran down the stairs, which led from the room above, and bursting open the door at their foot, launched herself into the room with a jump that made the floor shake. A bouncing girl, with high colour and a waist that told of good health—a pretty girl, full of life and meriment.

She wore a bright muslin dress and had plenty of ribbon at her waist, in her hair and about her throat, and she carried her hat in her hand and crossed the room without a pause until her hand was on the door-latch. Then:

"Hello, there, Sylvia," cried the man in the rocking-chair. "Where are you going to?"

"Yes, where be you flyin' this time o' night?" echoed the woman.

"Just a step," replied the girl.

"But where?" repeated the man, sternly.

"To Bessie Smith's, father," answered the girl, looking down at the floor.

"What for?" asked the woman.

"To practise for the choir next Sunday, mother," said the girl.

"Well," said the mother, "you kin go, then."

"Only be home by ten o'clock," said the father.

"Yes, sir, I will," replied Sylvia, and opened the door and sped away; but once out of reach of any eyes that might have followed her from the door, she turned back upon the path she had taken, crossed the road, and in the deep shadow of tree and rock and bush passed her own home again; the shadows of her parents in their rocking chairs waving to and fro upon the blinds giving her a little qualm of terror; and, turning into a green lane, which led churchward, heard a low whistle, gave a little chirp in answer, and in a moment more was clasped in some one's arms.

"You are here," said a voice in her ear. "I began to believe those two dragons at home had locked you up for the night. How late you are, dearest!"

"You must not speak so of my father and mother, Frank," said Sylvia; "and really I had so much to do I could not get off before—the dishes and—"

"Yes, I know, all sorts of household drudgery," said the young man whose whole dress and manners betokened him a man of fashionable habits and who wore diamonds which, if they were genuine, spoke of wealth besides. "Yes, I quite understand. Hasn't the old lady more sense of the fitting than to set you at such work? You!

Why you should never be set at housemaids' tasks. Let me see the little white hands, dear little hands, that might be a queen's. It's a burning shame."

"You see, all girls do housework out here in this country," said Sylvia, looking up into the eyes of the man beside her, whom, even in the starlight, one could see was handsome. "The richest girls do. Squire Cauliflower's daughter often washes, and Miss Cumbermede, the minister's sister, is always dusting, and—"

"But they are no example for you," said Frank Shaw. "Miss Cauliflower is a great, fat, coarse, young person, and Miss Cumbermede very excellent, no doubt, but only a prim old maid, and an ugly one. And you, Sylvia, might be a princess. You are no more like the other girls in Dingleberry than porcelain is like clay."

Sylvia blushed with pleasure and flattered vanity. She had always thought Miss Cauliflower a handsome, showy girl, and as "the Squire's daughter" a very handsome, aristocratic personage; while Miss Cumbermede, whose thick black silks rustled so grandly as she passed up the church aisle, if not so young as she had been, had always seemed to her remarkably ladylike and pleasant.

And now to be told that she excelled them both not only in beauty but gentility, was delightful.

"It's a shame," repeated the young man. "But you see your parents don't know your value. If I had not come here, I suppose they would have married you to that rustic with the ill-tempered countenance. What is his name, Silas Patch? And you would have washed dishes and milked cows for him for the rest of your life. A pretty fate that for you."

"I think you mean Silas Parish," said Sylvia. "And really he is not always so ill-tempered looking. You see, he didn't like—"

"Oh, jealous of me!" said the young man. "But he was to be your fate, I think. Patching his knees would have been part of your vocation. He had patches on both, if I'm not mistaken, when we met him in the woods that day."

"But those were working clothes," said Sylvia. "He does dress well on Sundays. And no wonder he was angry. He used to come and see me very often, and—"

"Just as I said, I see," said the young man. "Well, you've done with him, and you'll have done with all this soon, if you choose. You have only to say the word, and we are off for New York; after that for London, Paris, Vienna; and wherever you go you'll be the sweetest, and prettiest, and jolliest girl to be seen."

"O Frank," cried the girl, "how perfectly splendid! If only father and mother would consent—"

"That's not likely," answered the young man. "I think what your respected father told me when he last saw me was that he didn't want city chaps he knew nothing about hanging around his daughter. No, my love; you and I must run away. After that we'll talk to the old gentleman."

"But mother?" sighed Sylvia.

"Mothers always forgive," said her lover.

It yet seemed to her that even if she were forgiven afterwards, she could not take so terrible a step as to run away, and yet how could she give up her love? This wonderful creature who had seemed almost a visitor from another world when he first dawned upon her sight! He knew her heart and played his cards accordingly.

"Sylvia," he said, as the voice of a clock near by warned the girl that it was time to go home; "Sylvia, darling, the time has come when you must decide between two courses. We must part forever or you must be forever mine. I leave this place forever next Thursday night. Will you go with me?"

"Oh, Frank," panted Sylvia, "Oh, Frank, how can I go? Perhaps father would give me to you if you went and asked him, and people will talk so if I run away, and it would be so much nicer to have a wedding in church, and a bridesmaid. I promised Bessie she should stand up with me, and—"

"You see you don't love me. You care more for what people say," said Frank.

"Oh, Frank," cried Sylvia, bursting into tears, "Can't you see how dreadfully worried I am?"

And then came kisses and flattery, and the girl promised to leave home with Frank Shaw at nine o'clock on the next Thursday night.

It was the hour for the last train; there could be no effective pursuit until the next morning, and—

"Then you will be mine forever, Sylvia," said Frank.

So the girl left her lover and ran home, as yet not bold enough to brave a little scolding. But she was not scolded.

"You forgot we had prayers at ten, didn't you, Sylvia?" asked the father.

"Well, practising hymns does make the time fly," said the mother, and Sylvia's heart throbbed remorsefully.

Utterly under the power of her foolish fancy for this stranger, as he was, Sylvia was very unhappy as the days wore on. A decently brought-up girl of the old Puritan stock does not take kindly to the breaking of laws. It was delightful to think of being Frank Shaw's wife and living in elegance ever after; but she would greatly have preferred to enter that blissful state through the regular gateway of a marriage in church with a fine silk dress, her mother and father present and her friends looking on. Once or twice her heart almost failed her; but Thursday evening arrived, and the thought that her lover would be waiting in the lane for her had the old magnetic influence. She must go to him, and once with him she must do as he willed.

Love and inexperience blinded her eyes. She believed him a wonderful being and an elegant gentleman, when, in fact, he was a man of less than ordinary mind and vulgarly ostentatious manners. His big ring and pin, his dangling chain and seals, his strut, his brand-new clothes, all imposed upon her. The man was no more genuine than his diamonds, but she believed in both implicitly.

So Thursday night had come, and the little valise was packed. It lay hidden where she could lay her hand on it, and Sylvia's eyes watched the clock, the hands already pointed to eight. The next night she would not be there. Should she ever sit in that little room again, ever see her mother's good, faded face; hear her father, who, though stern at times, really loved her, as she knew, call her by the pet name he used to when he was best pleased. And to-night, in an unwonted moment of softness, he had taken her on his knee and said:

"Why, girlie, you are as pretty as your mother used to be when I first knew her."

Could she go? Yes, she must. Frank would wait for her. Frank who loved her so.

She had arisen and was about to make some excuse for slipping out of the house, lest if she tarried longer these faces should weaken her purpose, when there came a loud knock at the door.

"Come in," cried the farmer.

And in came a head—a shaggy head, and with wild red hair, and below a wilder red chin, beard.

"I'm in a pickle, mister," said the voice. "I'm a drivin' a lady up to Bunker's Tavern, and I've got a wheel off. My passenger is a mighty high striky critter anyway, and you orter hear her screech. That's her now."

"All right, stranger," said the farmer; "fetch