

Our Home

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JUMPING AT A CONCLUSION.

LOUISE ALEXANDER.

"I SAY, my good girl, just let me have some water out of that pail, will you?"

And the speaker stooped from his horse to reach for the silently offered beverage.

"Surely you are not a native?" interrogated the young man, with an easy nonchalance of manner, as he slowly sipped the cold, spring water. For he had caught a brief glimpse, beneath the girl's huge sun-bonnet, of abnormally long lashes, sweeping shyly a pair of carnation flushed cheeks.

"I am staying at Miss Gangewer's, sir," was the demure reply.

"Fortunate woman," said the young man, gayly. "My mother will die of envy when she hears of it. You must know there is a general dearth of intelligent help—a very perceptible pause of hesitation, before these two words—" in this forsaken part of the universe. There is a sort of amiable rivalry between Miss Gangewer and my mother on the servant-girl question. You don't happen to have a twin sister who would like a place—only two in the family—and one of them a handsome and perfectly harmless young man?"

"No, sir," uplifting a pair of innocent-looking gray eyes to the gentleman's ingenuous and laughing face.

"Well, a thousand thanks for the water," with an airy wave of his straw hat. "And very truly 'a sweeter draught from a fairer hand was never quaffed,'" and the horse and rider went off at a mad pace, and left the sun-bonneted damsel to gaze after him in mute but obvious amusement.

"Oh! Miss Mary," cried the girl, rushing breathlessly into the cool, dark room, where sat the lady of the small domain.

"I have already had a thrilling adventure," and then the girl gleefully related the encounter at the spring.

"I felt quite like a Maud Muller, particularly when he quoted the Judge," she added, merrily inspecting herself with a droll expression, in the tall mirror at the end of the room. "You see, god-mamma, after all, clothes make the woman. And what a fright I must have looked, to be sure," with a comical grimace at her own reflection.

A plain, straight-cut calico dress, of no particular pattern and no particular hue, enveloped the girl's erect, vigorous figure, while the costume was completed by a sun-bonnet of telescopic aspect, from the depths of which peeped out a pair of saucy gray eyes fringed with black lashes, a delicious little tip-tilted nose, a mouth like a rose-bud, and a chin that was cleft at its base by a dimple.

"You really do look a little ridiculous, Rosie," smiled Miss Gangewer, by way of consolation, from where she sat capping strawberries.

"It must have been Charley Raymond you met out there; he is one of those harum-scarum fellows, always making mistakes and getting himself into scrapes; but a good boy—his mother's idol. You can see their house from this window, Primrose. They have just bought it, and already Mrs. Raymond is in the same predicament that I am—not a servant can she get to stay here for love nor money."

"Say the predicament you were in, god-mamma," said the girl gayly.

"Do you think I have quartered myself on you for a whole summer, without meaning to work for my board? Not I. Besides, fancy a girl with resthetic

tendencies, weighing a hundred and thirty pounds! No, I mean to go into training—to grow long and lank, so that next winter I can appear in sage-green with a lily in my hand, and the proper accessories. So, I don't care a fig, now, Miss Mary, how long it takes my luggage to find its way up here. I shall wear this gown of ascetic simplicity. God-mamma, where did you get the pattern? And we will discover how many of the inhabitants will take me for your servant-girl."

The summer days went calmly by, diversified only, in the little country house among the mountains, by the arrival of a rather uncertain mail, the vexed question of what they should have for dinner, and to the younger lady the probability of a chance encounter with a certain frank-eyed young man, mounted upon an iron-gray steed.

Nearly every day now this same young gentleman drew rein before Miss Gangewer's cottage door; for quite suddenly he had evinced an absorbing interest and anxiety concerning that gentle spinster's welfare.

Numerous, though rather vague, were the messages and inquiries from Mrs. Raymond, through the medium of her son; and kindly-natured Miss Mary was placidly amused at the young man's absent-minded answers to her remarks, while she noted the perplexed interest of his eyes as they followed Primrose West's movements about the room, while she dusted the furniture with a strictly professional air, or appeared to be engrossingly occupied with some other manual labor during his stay.

Occasionally, likewise, these two young people came across each other in their out-of-doors rambles. Indeed, there appeared to be some mysterious quality by which Charley Raymond discovered and followed up the paths by which the sun-bonneted maiden took her afternoon strolls; and in these encounters the young man betrayed an earnest and even eager desire to elicit all the conversation and attention possible from Miss Gangewer's "servant-girl." It was quite evident, even to himself, that he was daily yielding to a deeper infatuation for this shy, lovely-eyed girl, who was at least educated, if she did serve in a menial capacity; and from some few casual remarks he had gathered the rather vague idea that this girl, Rose West, was from Boston—one of those women of whom he had read, who went out in service during the summer in order to earn money for their studies in the winter.

One sultry July afternoon, while Miss Gangewer sat languidly embroidering by the open window, Miss West ran singing into the room.

"Oh! Primrose," said the elder woman, looking up with her usual smile of welcome into the girl's bright face, "I have been thinking about you. Has it ever occurred to you that you are responsible for Charley Raymond's peace of mind?" He was in here a while ago, gazed searchingly around—for you I am sure—and then said his mother would like to borrow the pattern of my—sun-bonnet. I suppose he saw I looked astonished, for he was dreadfully confused and stammered out, of course he meant the lambrequin, in my best bed-room.

Miss West gave utterance to a merry ripple of amusement.

"I will reflect at leisure, on the hollow state of affairs you have developed," she said, tying the strings of the telescopic sun-bonnet under her pretty chin.

"In the meantime, my dear Miss Mary, I am going to hunt up some huckleberries for your supper."

Saying which, with a gay flourish of farewell, the girl ran lightly down the steep garden path—out of the hot sunshine—and plunged, with a relieved sigh of content, into the cool depth of the shady wood.

The huckleberries grew but sparsely around about, and unconsciously the girl went, step by step, until Miss Gangewer's house was left at least a mile behind her.

Suddenly, a low roll of thunder caused Miss Primrose to look up. The sky was black above the tops of the tall trees, and momentarily the wind grew stronger and the trees more noisy. With a quick terror, at the danger of the lightning among her present surroundings, poor Primrose felt suddenly panic-stricken.

Down went the basket of huckleberries, and away sped the girl, whither she scarcely knew, and what an immense relief it was to her to hear a familiar voice, even although the telescopic bonnet had caused her to rush wildly into Charles Raymond's arms.

"Methought I could not have mistaken that sun-bonnet," he shouted above the uproar of the elements, as he hurried her into the open meadow land, where perhaps the lightning had less chance, but decidedly the rain had more, for very soon the girl's calico dress was saturated, and the rain-weighted masses of her hair came tumbling down in picturesque confusion.

"This will never do," said the young man, frowning anxiously at the sullen sky and at the steady downpour of the summer rain.

"You will take cold standing here. Our house is nearer than yours; you must come home with me." "Whatever must I look like!" exclaimed the girl, with helpless attempt at coiling up her thoroughly drenched hair.

"Like an angel, or a mermaid," said the other in a tender whisper.

"Like a chambermaid, you mean," retorted the girl, with a highly practical air.

"Well, mermaid or chambermaid, you are the woman that I love. Darling, surely you must have guessed as much. Won't you promise that you will marry me?" Truly there was a beseeching tone of entreaty in this straightforward speech, that proved, at least, the young man was in earnest; but the matter-of-fact maiden answered with reproachful rebuke.

"Oh! Mr. Raymond, what would your mamma say?" So the discomfited Mr. Raymond was fain to lead the way, until presently they were standing, two dripping figures, before Charley's mother, Mrs. Raymond. The lady heard her son's story with great composure, and led Primrose up-stairs with a frigid politeness, that perhaps presaged a storm. But she insisted the girl should exchange her wet clothes for others she brought her in their stead.

While Primrose was making her toilet, a council of war was held below stairs by mother and son.

"You surely don't want me to ask that object to sit down at the table with us?" his mother inquired incredulously, for she had not been favorably impressed by poor Primrose's dragged and forlorn appearance.

"But she sits down at table with Miss Gangewer," remonstrated her son, eagerly. "I rode past there yesterday, and saw them taking tea together under the trees."

"Very well, then, as you please," replied his mother, stiffly, compressing her lips.

Upon which the young man began to whistle softly, and strolled over to the piano. While he was idly playing, with expectant eyes fixed impatiently upon the door, it opened suddenly, and before him stood a charming apparition—the figure of a girl clad all in white, with the shining masses of her red-brown hair piled into a sort of crown upon her lovely head.