

He dared not touch her hand with the tip of his finger—if his eyes grew ardent he must avert them!

He knew, and felt the irony of it, that even to the old people's undemonstrative notions his decorous courtship seemed a little less than normal. In so small a household he was often left alone with her. Her fearlessness at these times was the reward of his self-government.

ONE clear August evening Grace sat on the porch steps reading aloud to Vinnie Holderman's little brother. Lewis was pottering about the morning-glory vines.

"In this hall the princess saw a 'strange sight,' Grace read from the fairy book. 'Twelve pieces of cheese were nailed to the floor, and just out of reach of each a mouse was placed with its tail fastened to the floor so that it was unable to advance. These mice were pursued by twelve cats whose tails were likewise fastened to the floor. Behind each cat was a dog secured by its tail in the same manner and just out of reach. All of these wretched animals were starving.'"

A laugh interrupted the reader. She looked up inquiringly.

"Just wondering whether I was the dog or the cat or the rat," explained Lewis. "Never mind. Go on!"

Her eyebrows took an angle of disturbance. She noticed that Lewis was thinner than he had been, and also much better-looking. With an unconscious, cold, aesthetic eye she appraised the refining touches of some living chisel about his mouth and brow and nostril. It occurred to her for the first time that perhaps she ought to be sorry for Lewis. She was not sorry; he had caused her too much pain; but she thought if she were a better girl perhaps she might have been.

An evening some weeks later they chanced to be alone in the living room. Lewis pushed aside his paper and began in as matter-of-fact a tone as he could manage:

"Well, it's pretty near fall now. Hadn't we better set the day?"

He had not looked at her, but when her silence drew his gaze she was wringing her hands unconsciously, whitely wretched.

"We got to think about it, Grace," he urged, gently.

"Oh, Lewis, oh, Lewis," she whispered. "Can't we wait?"

She meant to pay her debt, but her dread cried out to the friend in him.

"What's the use of waiting? What'll folks think about us?"

He had touched unwittingly the argument that most moved her. She did not know, but she cared intensely what folks would think. Tears filled her eyes.

"There, there!" Lewis yielded. "Well—you say when."

"Oh, Lewis, can't we wait till spring?"

"Well, when is spring?"

"Oh, not till the flowers come."

HE assented. He had looked rather for a complete rupture than a favourable issue.

"Now I gave in to you about that don't you think you ought to—give me a kiss?"

She clinched her hands and put her face, strained and set, a little forward. With the same look she might have waited a red-hot branding iron on her lips.

The young man who loved her stared a moment.

"God!" he exclaimed, and went violently out of the house.

It was a windy March day that Lewis came into the kitchen, where Grace was at work with her mother, and when Mrs. Elliston had stepped into the pantry, held up before the girl a pale purple wind flower on its hairy stem. She glanced from the pallid blossom to his glittering eyes, and into her own came terror. She knew the token of her pledge.

She went into the best room. Lewis, following, found her in that chilly, fireless place, on the floor beside the sofa, sobbing with her head upon it.

"Look here, Grace! We've got to get this settled. If you're ever going to marry me—"

"Oh, Lewis," she wept, "please wait! I don't want to—yet! Not now!"

"It's got to be now or never!" His lips formed the words, but he had no voice.

Her tears were anguish to him. He had come to force the issue, to end the situation at any cost. And it was like tearing the heart out of his breast.

He yielded at length to the tears of her desperation, to the sweat of his agony. He wrung her hands and let her go unknissed.

Four days later they brought him in, bloody and unconscious, from an accident with team and plowshare. In the dreadful hours she watched beside him and tried to stanch the blood, Grace made her resolve.

At last his eyes opened and smiled to see her. They were alone together. The doctor had gone, leaving assurance of his recovery. She bent to him.

"Lewis, I am willing to be married as soon as



"He Set the Lantern Down and Knelt Beside Her."

you get well."

She let the one weak arm he might use draw her down till his lips rested on her hair.

Their wedding day was set for the late summer. Lewis had a slow recovery; and when he was himself again, the season's work must be overtaken. Grace rejected his suggestion to "just get married"; she seemed to crave all the bridal pomp and circumstance. She had been a tireless nurse; as he grew well, she absorbed herself in preparations. Her sewing machine whirled, her needle flew, late and early. She manifested an intense, uncharacteristic zeal for the wedding clothes, the wedding invitations, the wedding supper.

All weddings are home weddings in the Elliston's neighbourhood. The lower rooms of the little house were set in order and opened to receive the guests. One corner of the chilly best room, as warm now as summer could make it, was festooned with plummy asparagus and white phlox. Here the bride and bridegroom were to stand while they took the marriage vows.

This room overflowed with guests, some seated, many standing, others thronging the doorways, except for a narrow path between the stairway door and the bowery corner. Along this path the bridal party were to advance in the preferred order; first the minister, next the bride and groom, then the bridesmaid with the best man.

Mrs. Elliston was seated near the bridal corner.

To her, as to many another in like case, the day had become a dream of confusion and haste, a mere tension of spirit to have it over and all the proprieties observed. Her mind divided itself between anxiety for the "lap supper" she was to serve after the ceremony and the fear that Vinnie had forgotten to pin Grace's dress behind. It was too late now to go and see, for all was ready. The stair door opened and the minister entered.

THE girl at the cottage organ, taking this for her signal, struck up the wedding march. She played on until some one touched her arm. The minister had closed the door and crossed the room to Mrs. Elliston. As the bewildered woman rose to follow him, they all heard in the sudden silence a hoarse cry from the room above.

Mrs. Elliston's eyes, as she entered that room, fell first on Lewis. He leaned upon the table with one hand, his wedding garments torn open at the throat, his head thrown back. Carl Schultz, the best man, laid a hand upon his arm. Vinnie in her bridesmaid's dress wrung her hands, talking volubly.

"She was all dressed. And she said something about getting something, flowers, I think it was. She said it kinda low, and I was fixing my hair, and she slipped down the back stairs. So I went on and got all ready, and she hadn't come back, and I waited and waited till I got scared. Then I went downstairs real soft, and went around to all the flower beds, and every place I thought she'd be, and she wasn't there. So I thought she'd got back without me seeing her, but she wasn't there! I was 'most crazy. Then Preacher knocked and asked if we wasn't 'most ready, for everybody was waitin'. So I told him, an' then I thought she might 'a' come in here. But she hadn't. Oh, what'll we do? What'll folks think?"

With his heavy tread and knotted face Mr. Elliston shuffled in at the door. Carl Schultz, embarrassed and sympathetic, patted the bridegroom's arm.

Lewis started.

"Where's them lanterns? We got to look around through the bushes. Come along, Carl!" He paused, looking at the minister. "Preacher, better tell the folks to go home."

Vinnie took one look into his face and began to cry. Mr. Elliston grasped his hand. "She's done you a dirty trick, Lewis. I wouldn't 'a' thought Grace would 'a' done it!"

But the mother cried: "Find her, Lewis! Find my girl!"

"All right, ma," he answered. He had called her so perhaps three

times before.

He led the way down the stair. When the guests drove away, hushed, embarrassed, wildly curious, lanterns were winking through the shrubbery.

Lewis found her at last in the middle of the cornfield. She crouched in the path of diminishing light his lantern threw between the rows, a little white heap that shuddered and moaned. The tassels were above his head, the green stalks succeeding each other endlessly on either hand closed up their ranks with shadow, except where the lantern stabbed them with light. He set the lantern down and knelt beside her. The light fell on her hair, her huddled shoulders, her filmy white dress crushed against the crumbling black earth. And she preferred this bridal bed to the arms of her young lover!

HE went quite mad. He gathered her in his arms, straining her to his breast, hailing kisses upon her as if they had been blows. She lay as one unconscious or dead. He thought she was dead. He thought he had always loved a dead girl, or one not yet alive. At last he laid the sweet body down between the corn rows. He wondered the pallbearers did not come to take her away.

She stirred, moaning. Realization came dully back to him. He got up, seizing the lantern, saying, "Come on! Come back home." He did not offer to help her as she staggered to her feet, nor did he touch her again. Once on the way home he set down the