

"First of All" BY CHARLOTTE M. STANLEY. "I've quarrelled with my father on your account," said Joe Liston, standing with his young sweetheart's hands in his, and looking down somewhat gloomily into her uplifted, anxious blue eyes. "He wants me to marry old Setton's girl; she'll have a fortune, he says, that'll match the one he means to give me if I do his will. I shan't do it, though. I love you, my own little Rose, and only you will I have for a wife. So the upshot of it is that father showed me the door this morning, and told me I'd better go and set about making a home for you at once, for you should never have a share of his. Not that I care," he added, scornfully. "I'm only telling you that so that you may see what a sacrifice I've made, willingly, for your sake." Then, his face and tone softening as he stooped suddenly and kissed the two little hands he held—"not that it's so much, after all. I'd do far more than that for you, my darling!" She clung to him, softly and tenderly. "And I for you?" she murmured. "Oh, and I for you, dear. But I am sorry you should anger your father, Joe; and because of me,—why is he so set against me? He used"—with a wistful look and tone—"he used to seem to rather like me once."

Heaven knew of that thought, and that it gave her the keenest pang of all. Meantime the foremost engagement had been made by the two fathers, without much reference to the feelings and wishes of the young people concerned. "Joe Liston wants to marry you," old Setton told his only child, "and I've said yes." Meg listened, stared, pouted, laughed, frowned, and then cried out, pettishly: "Ridiculous! I know he likes another girl better than he likes me, and I—well"—she checked herself suddenly—"I'll have nothing to do with another woman's sweetheart!" And she avoided further controversy by running out of the room. Her father judged best not to follow her. "Opposition will only make her obstinate," he thought. "I'll let her alone. She'll come round. Joe's the best looking fellow in the place, and the richest, and she has no other sweetheart—unless it's some 'them fine city sparks she met in town last winter, and she knows I won't give my consent to that!" And it never occurred to the self-willed old farmer that his handsome, motherless and equally self-willed girl (whom he had spoiled and humored from her birth) might possibly care so little for his consent that she might even make shift to do without it. "Handing me over to Joe Liston just as he might give away a sheep or a cow!" muttered Meg to herself, indignantly, as she ran down to the post-office at sunset that evening. "If Joe really wants me at all (which I don't believe), it's only for my money; and I know some one who'll take me without one cent!" And probably it was to that "some one" that the letter went which she entrusted to the mail that evening. Certainly a most contradictory girl,—never for two hours together in the same mind. She was going to be married, and she was not; no one got the same answer from her on the subject twice. Congratulations on her approaching marriage were just as likely to call forth frowns as smiles, and questions were met somewhat in this fashion—"So you're going to be married, Meg?" "Oh, I suppose so—some of these days." "But your father says you are to marry Joe in three weeks?" "Yes. That's what father says. Father loves to hear himself talk, you know." "But are you going to be married, Meg?" "Ah! that would be telling secrets. Wait awhile—three weeks is not such a very long time—wait, and you shall see what you shall see." "What they did see—before the three weeks were quite over—was Farmer Setton running over to Mr. Liston's store in a furious rage, and with an open letter in his hand. What they heard—within an hour afterward, was that Meg had run away the previous evening, and was now married to her city lover. "A worthy, honest fellow, her aunt writes me"—he was fain to confess to the neighbors, who came condoling and inquiring. "Confound her aunt! she's more to blame than the girl! They shall never have a penny of my money, though!" A statement which nobody believed, and which, when Meg and her husband came home soon afterward, the old man falsified by giving her a handsome portion "to start housekeeping on." Meantime, what of Joe? His surprise was less than any one else's, because he had never believed that Meg meant to marry him. "You know very well that you love Rose Lee," she had often said to him. "And that you only ask me out of spite, because you've quarrelled with her?" and he, heartily repenting of the folly which had induced him to ask her at all, never attempted to contradict her. Ten minutes after he had heard of the elopement, he was at Rose Lee's cottage. He had to wait before he could talk with her, however, for, lo! there was a visitor there before him; a gentleman, well-dressed and important looking, whose well-groomed horse was waiting at the gate, and who seemed to have been transacting business in which papers had had to be signed. Joe's heart sickened with jealousy as he waited, and saw Rose bid her visitor a kindly adieu at the gate. Then she turned to him, very quiet and pale—"Do you want to speak to me, Joe?" she asked, simply. He burst out at the sound of his own name—"I wanted to ask you to forgive me, and take me back!" he cried; "but I doubt I've come too late. That gentleman—"

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