

New Year's Chimes.

The New Year's chimes rang forth upon the midnight air in all their mel- low sweetness, and many a heart beat quicker as this fresh page of life was turned, and the fair young year came laden with fresh gifts of love and glad- ness.

In the spacious apartments of Laurel House a numerous and joyous party had assembled to dismiss the old year and to welcome the new. Many were the peals of laughter that resounded from youthful hearts, upon which the hand of care had not yet rested.

Withdrawn from the merry throng, and standing together in the embrace of one of the deep windows, stood a young man and an exceedingly lovely girl.

In the dark eyes of the former there beamed that tender light which the magic fire of love can alone enkindle.

For some time the pair stood in silence, but at length the young man spoke thus:

"Oh! Rose, do you not love to hear the joyous chiming of the New Year's bells? They wake an echo in my heart; but oh! I long for still sweeter music, and the power to yield it lies in your own dear voice. I cannot leave you to-night until I have spoken of the love which is burning within my heart! My life has long owed its all of sun- shine to you. Oh! tell me that yours, in turn, has received some brightness from me!"

"George," replied the young girl, "I have long been aware of your devo- tion, and I have suffered your attentions because I have hitherto met with no suitor whom I could prefer to yourself. Still, I am very young, and I cannot as yet read my own heart. The lapse of time alone will show whether or not it has been yours to pluck the blossoms of my heart."

"Ah! dearest!" was the reply. "I would be content with a small share of affection at present, and trust to gain- ing more in the future, if you would but pledge yourself to me now."

"It cannot be," was the reply. "It is better to make no vows, rather than to breathe those which may hereafter be broken."

"I will urge you no further," was the young man's rejoinder. "But if you cannot give yourself to me now, will you not promise that you will not pledge yourself to another before the New Year's chimes shall ring out at the expiration of another year? Believe me, mine is indeed a devoted love; do not cast it lightly away!"

"I am in no hurry to marry," was the laughing reply, "and I will not hesitate to give the promise, for I should be desirous of applying the test of a longer period than the time you name to any man before I promised to link my fate with his. But now, you must detain me no longer. I must hasten to apologize for having been so long absent from my father's guests."

"Stay!" cried the young man, "make me a more solemn promise than the one you have just given. Listen: the New Year's bells still ring forth—promise me by those dear—those sacred chimes—that you will hold yourself free for another year!"

"I promise, by the New Year's chimes!" said the young girl, with far more than her usual seriousness of manner, and Lionel Langford was con- tent.

Rose Summers was the only daughter of a gentleman of considerable fortune, while Lionel Langford was a young man whose high natural gifts bade fair to secure him a position of some emi- nence in the legal profession, which he had but just entered.

As the young girl laid her head upon the pillow that night, she thought of the young lawyer with more tenderness than she had ever before felt. It was sweet to be beloved, although she knew not yet whether she should ever return his affection.

The time passed on, and the young people often met; but very seldom did Lionel refer to his love. His sense of honor was too keen. Rose had given him her promise to remain free, and he would not again urge his suit until the year of probation had expired.

Three months had passed from the period of the commencement of our story, and circumstances had transpired which caused Lionel Langford to med- itate leaving the quiet town of S—, to take up his residence in the metropo- lis.

The night previous to the young man's departure he again sought Rose's side. They stood together as of old, and Lionel spoke thus:

"Rose, there is a great hunger in my heart to-night. I go forth into the busy world, to work with hand and brain, sup- ported only by the hope that I may one day call you mine. Weep not that I am thus leaving you, I would not allude to what passed between us last New Year's-eve. But now, let me im- plore you to remember your promise when I am far away."

There is no fear that I shall forget it, Lionel," was the rejoinder. "To sat- isfy you, I will repeat it again to-night. I promise, by the memory of the New Year's chimes, to hold myself free un- til the year is ended."

"Heaven bless you, Rose!" cried her lover. "You have lifted a load from my heart! Heaven grant that your lips may give me a still sweeter promise when next we listen to the New Year's chimes!"

Many were the suitors for the smiles of Rose Summers. Her beautiful face and winning manners could not fail to attract all with whom she was thrown in contact.

But in vain; she had but one answer for all. Separated from Lionel, with- out receiving any of those tender mis- sives which are generally supposed to be the food of love (for Lionel Langford denied himself the luxury of writing, in order that Rose's own heart alone might plead his cause), the young girl found at length that her rejection of all others was owing to a new and strange feeling which was springing up within her heart. At first this feeling was faint, and well-nigh indelible; but as the first streak of morning is the herald of the rising sun, so—through Rose Summers knew it not—a fire was kindled in her young heart, which, feeble at first, would grow into a strong and living flame.

And thus, ere half the year of proba- tion had expired, she found herself looking forward to the end, that she might give to Lionel Langford that sweeter promise which his fond heart craved.

And as regarded Lionel himself, his love for Rose did but strengthen, if that could be, with the flight of time. In the busy whirl of life his thoughts would continually turn to her; she was the golden thread running through life's tissue.

The yellow fog of a cold November morning lay over the great city, as Lionel Langford perused his solitary breakfast. His thoughts were of a pen- sive, yet somewhat hopeful character.

"My short life in London," he solilo- quized, "has been sufficient to show me, that with perseverance I shall eventual- ly make a name. O! if I but knew that Rose would share it! But I will not be cast down, she knows that she is all the world to me; and surely she cannot always remain indifferent to that knowledge. Of her faithfully ob- serving her promise to me I have not the slightest doubt. The tone in which she repeated it the night before I quit- ted S—convinced me that she held it sacred."

Having taken off the edge of his appetite the young man addressed him- self for a brief space to the morning papers. As his eyes rapidly scanned the columns, it fell upon a familiar name, and in the record of marriages he read the following announcement:

"November 1st, at the Parish Church of S—, by the Rev. E. Wil- ton, Herbert Lawton, to Rose, only daughter of J. Summers, Esq."

The paper fell from his hand, and his features were convulsed with emo- tion.

"Fool that I was," he muttered, "to be beguiled by a beautiful face and a soft manner. I have heard that all women are alike, and that they cannot be trusted; but I had hoped that she, at least, would prove an exception! Her promise! Bah! it was but an idle breath; worse, she must have meant to deceive me when she gave it! I have often noticed Herbert Lawton's atten- tions to her; their little doubt that she had promised, or at least resolved to be his bride, on the night when she renewed her promise to me."

Who can paint the wretchedness of the young man's mind! Life had lost all its brightness! At first he was tempted to relinquish the pursuits which had hitherto engrossed him, but soon he turned to them with renewed zeal, in order to distract his mind from the great sorrow which was oppressing it.

"I will spend my New Year in soli- tude here," he thought. "I will not revisit scenes the sight of which would only augment my woe."

But as the weeks passed on, and the festive season grew yet more near, he changed his purpose, and resolved that on New Year's-eve he would take train for S—.

"I may have been too harsh in my judgment!" he soliloquized. "Who knows what influences may have been brought to bear upon Rose in my ab- sence? I will see her, and from her own lips hear the story. She shall also learn that mine was no fleeting passion, but a love which still endures, even after desertion!"

Laurel House was again lighted up gaily, and once more a merry New Year's party was assembled within it. Within sight of the window at which he had spoken of love to Rose Summers a year ago walked Lionel Langford. Heedless of the biting cold, he still paced the gravel walk unnoticed by any. Somethin' seemed to whisper to his heart that if he waited he should see the young girl at that very window; if that were so, he would hesitate no longer. He knew the way by which to reach the apartment, and, unknown to any, he would seek it, and there alone he would seek Rose Summers—or rather Rose Lawton.

The midnight hour tolled forth, and then the New Year's chimes rang out sweet and clear. How they smote upon Lionel's heart! And now a sweet face—fair as of old, but inexpressibly sad—appeared at the window on which the young man's gaze had so long been riveted.

Noislessly Lionel Langford sought the apartment; but on the threshold he paused, for unconsciously the fair Rose was breathing her thoughts aloud. "Would that Lionel were here!" she soliloquized. "What can keep him from me? I had thought to give him the still sweeter promise of which he spoke while the New Year's chimes were ringing!"

"Rose," cried a deep, sad voice, "you must be dreaming! How could you—the wife of another—give your- self to me?"

"Lionel," replied the well-nigh faint- ing girl, "what means this sudden and stealthy appearance? And those words 'the wife of another'? Surely it is you yourself who are dreaming!"

"Would that the anguish of the last two months were but a dream, Mrs. Lawton!" cried her visitor. "Would that you had not broken the vow you made to me!"

"Mrs. Lawton" was the rejoinder. "There must be some mistake here—my name is still Rose Summers."

"What means this, then?" cried Lionel, as he drew the paper containing the fatal announcement from his pocket, and directed Rose's attention to it.

"Suffer me to explain," rejoined the young girl. "This is the record of the marriage of a cousin of mine. I have an uncle—my father's only brother—whose only daughter was, like myself, named Rose, after my grandmother. My uncle's wife died about three years ago; and after that event, my uncle, whose spirits were entirely broken (he having most tenderly loved my aunt), went abroad, leaving my cousin Rose in England to complete her education. Last spring, Rose, whose education was then completed, came to live with us until her father's return, which will not take place for some months yet. Here she and Herbert Lawton met, and he, struck, as he said, by her resemblance to myself, soon after made her an offer of marriage. She returned his affection, and Herbert, being desirous of a speedy union, that he might take Rose, not only to his heart but to his home during her father's absence, the marriage was solemnized at S—. My

father's name is John, and my uncle's James; that will account for the initial 'J,' used in the announcement, being applicable to either."

"Oh, Rose!" cried Lionel Langford, "how grievously I have been deceived! But the mistake was natural, and you do not know what I have suffered. But oh! what joy it is to find that you have not proved faithless! And now tell me, can you give me the priceless treasure of your love?"

"I can, Lionel," replied the young girl. "I have learned to love you more than I had believed possible. I cannot tell you what I have suffered in your absence. When the bells began to ring, and you were not by my side, they seemed to sound the death knell of my fairest hopes. But now all is gladness. Hark! the bells are ringing still! Oh! Lionel, I give myself to you now and forever; and if you would have my vows yet more sacred, I make this promise, as I did the other, which I have so faithfully kept, by the New Year's chimes."

Lionel Langford was more than con- tent with his beloved one's promise, and ere the New Year's glory again rested upon the earth, the happy lovers had knelt in marriage vows. Fair and gentle children have since been given to them, and their lot is bright with all domestic joys. But though their lives are blissful and serene throughout the whole year, there is no season when they raise their hearts with such adoring gratitude to Heaven as when they stand together and listen to the music of the "New Year's Chimes!"

S. A. S.

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