

A VILLAGE ROMANCE.

There could be no doubt about it. Molly had been a different girl since she and John Lock had been "keeping company." At least this was what the village gossips declared, and surely no one would have the temerity to contradict authorities so well informed. And the village gossips had spoken truth this time. Molly, the pride of all Longville, the pretty country girl whom nature had endowed with a superabundance of animal spirits, the fascinating coquette, had been subdued, and John Lock, the village paragon's son, had conquered. At least that was what all Longville thought.

John in himself, although boasting of ancient lineage, was, as the laborers termed him, "a cut above the ordinary run." Somehow without having had any educational advantages he had developed a strong love for books, and when the day's work in the little carpenter's shop was done he would go out into the soft summer eve, and a brisk walk over the hills would bring him to the rugged cliffs by the sea. Here he would throw himself down, and as long as the red shoots of the setting sun gave light over the land he would read with rapturous intent, and when at last it had disappeared in a blaze of color in an opalescent sea he would watch the stars and talk learnedly of their distances and of what constellations they formed part.

The good people of Longville could never quite understand John. He would astonish them with his enthusiastic descriptions of floating clouds, would bid them hear a poem in the constant roaring of the sea, and tell them that there were new worlds, of which they knew nothing, in pictures and books. But John was genial and kind hearted, and so, although his personality eluded definite analysis by them, they yet recognized him as the village favorite for the humbler and maybe more useful qualities of good fellowship and unselfish courage.

It was little wonder that when Molly and John commenced "keeping company" that Longville should talk. Never two persons had less in common, so far as temperament and tastes were concerned, and yet somehow, for a reason which even old Mrs. Knight, who had seen two generations of village courtships, could not explain, these two people of opposite dispositions were destined to share life's storm and sunshine together.

How they came to be engaged I cannot say. There was a meeting of the two, when the usual "Good night, John," and "Good night, Molly," ceased to have the old prosaic significance. The untamed, restless little heart of Molly beat convulsively, and the roses on her cheeks burned a deeper hue when that evening John stopped her and insisted on her talking with him. I was not there, so that of what was said I am unaware.

This much, however, all Longville soon knew—that John Lock and Molly Lane had become sweethearts. How the good wives enjoyed standing at the doorway of their cottages and discussing the probabilities of a village wedding and what it involved! These good souls would have made the devious, sinuous track of these two lives much straighter and more direct than it was fated to be.

No event is too wonderful to become familiarized with, and so it was that the wonder ceased, and Molly and John for months pursued their pleasant way, dreaming the old love dreams common to youth since the world began. It was true that sometimes John imagined "his Molly" was restless and scarcely contented. She seemed to sigh for new opportunities of conquest. The old spirit which he thought dead, reared its head again and gave warning of, although it never actually broke out in open rebellion. Then John would be troubled and would search his generous, simple heart in the hope of discovering some excuse for the discontent which only too obviously was smoldering in his sweetheart's mind.

One week in the midsummer of the following year Squire Hurst's only son came of age, and the event was celebrated with great eclat by the whole of the inhabitants of the village. The lovely old park surrounding the hall was thronged on, and numerous were the alfresco attractions provided to amuse the assembled guests. The sports of the day terminated with a grand village ball, at which the heir to Longville Hall himself was present.

There had been many a rumor that Harry Hurst had taken "a gay young spark" in his time, but to-night all ugly memories were lost in the pleasure and excitement of his presence among the common folk at the ball.

All seemed happy save one, and that was John. In spite of his best attempts to suppress it a great pain was at his heart—almost as severe as a physical one—as he saw his Molly being claimed for dance after dance by the squire's son. How she seemed to enjoy the distinction, too, as with flushed cheeks she was waltzed around in a whirl of excitement!

And when the evening's amusements had ended Molly seemed cross when John pushed his way to the front and claimed his right of seeing her from the park to her father's cottage gate. She was irritable and moody. John had never known her so before, and it was with a heavy, aching heart that he kissed her good night. Now was the unhappiness of his mind diminished when for several nights after she refused to take her customary walk with him.

At length the climax came, and one evening, after he had succeeded in inducing her to come with him over the hills, he received the dread ultimatum which he had almost expected would fall. Molly was frank. She avowed shyly that she did not and could not love him and then, with a pretty, disdainful toss of the head, declared that she would be glad if he did not worry her any more. John took the blow quietly, but the agony of soul he suffered no one but himself knew.

Then grave whispers and nods and winks passed around from house to house in the village. There were talks in bated breath of secret meetings at night, and of Molly and the young squire being seen together. And John would be questioned, but never answered. His sorrow was for himself alone—so he would tell himself—it could not be shared by the curious. It was his wont to go and sit by the sea, and there find a sort of melancholy satisfaction in the low wail of the billows as they broke in at the foot of the cliffs. As for Molly, after one final attempt to reclaim her, John avoided her. To have met her would have increased the inconvenience of both, and in his case would have opened afresh the wounds but hardly healed. In the months that followed the whisper took an uglier form, and Longville delighted its soul at last in a village scandal.

And so Molly went away and left her poor old father sorrowing. There was only one who ever defended the fair name of Molly when it was made a byword with the young roughs of the place, who looked outside the village inn or at the roadside. John was never known to have become so incensed as when one evening in his hearing one of these thoughtless youths mentioned inappropriately Molly's name and coupled it with a foul epithet. Then he thrashed the young lout within an inch of his life.

After awhile the sad incident was forgotten—at least until Molly's return to her home again. Then trouble began anew. She was very much altered, and the roses had faded from her cheeks. In fearful sorrow she would sit and nurse her baby all day long. The last act in the tragedy came when one day Molly's father received a note from the hall.

The steward brought it round, and as Molly's father was growing old and feeble and his sight waning the steward read the note aloud. It was a formally worded epistle giving the poor, old, sorrow-stricken parent a month's notice because the squire felt that it was "not conducive to the morals of the village that people of Molly's stamp should be harbored" in the midst of his cottagers. Needless to say Molly's father was almost broken hearted at the thought of leaving the house he had occupied for so long, while as for Molly herself her distress was too piteous for words.

One morning not long after John stepped down the old roadway, his face haggard, but the expression firm, resolute and determined. He presented himself at the door of Molly's cottage and was admitted. It was only a look they exchanged, and the floodgates were opened again, and, having sobbed on his shoulder for awhile, Molly gradually recovered herself, while John, with a choking sensation in the throat which he tried in vain to keep down, avowed "I have always waited for you, Molly. I knew you would come back to me."

"But I can't. You forget that his," and she pointed in her anguish to the cot wherein the babe was slumbering peacefully. John didn't turn his head, to look, but he took Molly in his arms again.

And love was consummated in service.—London Sun.

A TUG ELOPEMENT.

It is only after much consideration and weighing of the matter that I am able to force myself to the point of telling the truth about the marriage and attempt at elopement which preceded the ceremony. And the determination to explain the matter briefly but fully is made simply in justice to Patience and her father, Samuel F. Yelnik, Esq., president of the Mogul mines and half a dozen other great financial concerns, for now I can afford both to pity him and laugh at him.

Furthermore, the newspapers published such ridiculous stories at the time that they really made us all ashamed, telling, as they did, how I chartered a steam yacht and snatched Patience from her father's arms and carried her away to sea on the palatial craft on which a clergyman was awaiting us, and of the demands Mr. Yelnik made upon the navy department to send a warship after us, and how he nearly succeeded because of immense contributions to the presidential campaign fund.

Of course only the anti-administration papers printed this last stuff, for it was pure stuff and nonsense. Nevertheless the wild stories were sent all over the country, and I have even seen cabled dispatches which were printed about them in one or two journals of London and Paris. And naturally, as you can understand, all this was very disagreeable.

Well, to begin with, I did think a great deal of Patience—there's no use in denying facts—and I had been half in love with her from boyhood. During the last year I had been with her more than usual, seeing her at home or on the links of the country club and at various teas and club fetes.

And by sheer accident, I assure you, I spent the summer on the shores of Lake Champlain, making studies for two or three rather ambitious paintings, to be finished when cold weather came, and Patience was there, too, with her deep brown eyes and wavy hair and superb presence. I know this sounds like extravagant description but it is accurate, for Patience is one of the finest specimens of young womanhood I have ever seen, thanks to inheritance and wheeling and tennis and golf and boating. She was visiting a cousin at Port Kent—a brunette with red lips and white teeth and the very mischief dancing in her eyes—and naturally Miss Elaine was interested in helping along a love affair—

for where is the girl who wouldn't be? I don't know how it happened, but in some way old Moneybags Yelnik heard of the situation and appeared suddenly one evening at the residence of Miss Elaine's parents. At the time his train from New York arrived Patience and I were strolling along the shore of Champlain in the moonlight, I'll be questioned, and when we returned to the Elaine home, some time after ten o'clock, we found the callous hearted old fellow tramping up and down the veranda, smoking furiously and stroking his white whiskers in a manner that boded no good for us.

He never spoke to me, never acknowledged my presence by so much as a stare. Fact is, he utterly ignored me, and I'll admit that hurt my pride, confound him! He simply took Patience by the arm and marched her indoors, and next morning they went to New York before I had a chance to say farewell. But I was at the station, and as the train pulled out the dear girl called:

"Goodby, Fred! Don't worry. It's all right."

And then her father slammed the window and scowled as if he would like to bite me in half. During the ensuing six months I worked as hard as I could, but never did I write to Patience, although I sent messages to her in Marion Elaine's letters and heard from her now and then through the same medium. I wasn't really cut off, you see. I came back to town about the middle of September, and a week later Miss Elaine arrived at the Yelnik home in New Jersey to make a visit. But of course old Moneybags wouldn't allow me to see Patience, and naturally I had too much sense to call, but the deprivation was hard in more ways than one, as you will understand presently.

A month dragged by, and the time was approaching for Marion's visit to be concluded, when one Saturday afternoon I went aboard a ferryboat bound for Jersey City, whither I was to take a train for the town where Patience lived, and on the boat, for the first time in three months, I met Mr. Yelnik. He was feeling particularly amiable probably because he had managed to "freeze out" some business rival in one of his great schemes, and he approached me, saying with a grim smile:

"How do you do, sir?"

"I'm well."

"Haven't seen you lately out at the house," he continued sarcastically.

"No, and you're not likely to," I replied, with emphasis. How long this conversation might have continued I don't know, but at that moment we passed in midstream close by a ferryboat steaming from Jersey City to New York, and one of the passengers on it, a girl we both knew, waved her hand to me, and I called out:

"Wait there! I'll be over at once."

Then the boats had swept by each other, and I turned to look at Mr. Yelnik. He was almost livid with rage, and he trembled as with a chill.

"You villain," he said threateningly. "So this is how you see each other. By heavens, I'll make you pay for this. I suppose you had arranged an elopement," he exclaimed, getting more and more excited. And he didn't become calm when I told him his sunrise was true.

There were few passengers aboard, and Patience's father had the sense to speak in low tones to avoid a scene, but it was awful the way he swore he would put me in prison for life and shoot me dead if I ever so much as dared to look at his daughter again. Of course he didn't get off the boat at Jersey City. He staid close to me, and of course I came back to New York to meet the dear girl. But alas and alack! When we reached the middle of the river again and met the other boat, beyond this time for Jersey City, old Yelnik fairly trembled for joy and shouted:

"There she is! I could recognize that hat and coat anywhere. So, you see, she won't elope with you, you miserable, sneaking hound, you young villain, you abductor!"

My heart sank within me as he spoke, for, looking quickly at the passing craft, I saw her frightened half to death as she realized our plot had been discovered, but in desperation I shouted:

"Wait for me in Jersey City!"

She nodded, and then we were gone again. Fifteen minutes elapsed before our boat left the New York ferry slip, and during that time Mr. Yelnik chuckled and slapped his knees and acted like a wild lunatic, he was so overjoyed.

"Yes, wait for me in Jersey City!" he mimicked. "Oh, she'll wait, don't you be afraid; she'll wait, but for me and not for you, and let me tell you one thing, sir—as soon as I can get a warrant you'll be locked up, and, by heavens, I'll see you in Sing Sing before I'm done with you!"

He went on in this fashion till we crossed the North river again and had come to a dead stop about 100 feet from the Jersey City ferry slip, blocked by a fleet of canalboats that were lazily crawling up the stream against the tide. I looked across them to the boat she had come over on. It was blocked inside of the slip, and, horror of horrors, there she stood on the deck ready to cross the river once more, having totally misunderstood the message I shouted.

A tugboat, awaiting to get down stream, slowly approached our craft and came to a dead stop so close that I could have stepped aboard her. Mr. Yelnik had walked to the other side of our deck, feeling safe so long as I was there and aloft. Like a flash I saw a chance to escape and called to the pilot of the tug:

"Want a job?"

"Sheer off, quick! Sheer off!" The pilot rang his bells, the propeller whirled viciously, and we shot backward from the ferryboat as Mr. Yelnik rushed to its rail and swore at us.

"Skim around that fleet, quick," I called, hurrying up to the pilot house and pulling a \$20 bill out of my pocket. "Now make for that boat in the slip and stand by till I get the young lady there, waiting for me."

"You bet I will," the pilot responded heartily. "Bully for you, young fellow. I ain't been married long myself."

In less time almost than it takes to tell it we had come alongside the other ferryboat, and the dear girl was aboard with me, and we were speeding down toward the beach. When we were quite out of reach, the pilot asked:

"Now where do you want to go?"

"Oh, anywhere in New Jersey, so we can be married without stopping for a license—say to Atlantic Highlands or Long Branch or anywhere."

"You dear old goose!" exclaimed my betrothed. "Why, we can't get there under two hours, and by that time he will have telegraphed all over the coast to arrest us on sight."

"Good Lord!" I groaned. "What'll we do? I haven't thought of that!"

"Why, just let's sail up the Kill von Kull here to Bayonne and land in 15 minutes," she replied in a businesslike way. "He never would dream of our going ashore so close, but it's all New Jersey, and in ten minutes more we can find a minister and be m-m-married," she concluded, whispering and blushing.

And we did so and took the first train back to New York and telegraphed from our hotel to Mr. Yelnik that we would be glad to have him call on us with his wife that evening.

Since then we have been told that when the old gentlemen reached home that afternoon he almost had an attack of apoplexy, for when he went up the veranda steps the front door was opened by his daughter Patience, who confessed everything—how she and I had never been really in love, but how Marion had become engaged to me that summer, and we simply had to be married clandestinely because Mr. Yelnik finally succeeded in prejudicing Mr. and Mrs. Elaine against me so that they refused to sanction a wedding.—Coffin Moody in Chicago Record.

Race for a Wife.

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I ever manifested any affection for one that I have not as freely accorded to the other?

The flush which gradually suffused her face displayed the excitement her candor had provoked, and she drew a deep breath of relief as both men simultaneously answered:

"Never!"

"Thanks. Now, listen to my frank admission. As far as I have been able to analyse my feelings, I am sure I love you both equally. As I can accept but one, the question must be decided for me; hence the condition. If either or both refuse to accept it, I must stipulate that our past harmonious relations be sustained without any future reference to the possibility of marriage with either. And now the condition?"

"The condition?" both men quickly repeated.

"I propose a bicycle race between us three. I am to have the precedence of one block in starting. It is to be a three mile race upon the macadamized road between this house and Crystal spring. The one who overtakes me before or as we reach the spring will not only be the winner of the race, but also of a wife. If you overtake me at the same time, you will draw lots to see who is the victor."

The faces of the men wore an odd expression, but they promptly exclaimed:

"We agree."

It was a beautiful May morning, and the picturesque road leading to Crystal spring was an appropriate one for a race which must, in any case afford a romantic ending. It was bordered with hedges and stately trees odoriferous with tender buds and leaves, from among which busy little builders caroled merry accompaniments to their unceasing labor.

The novelty of this race for a wife excited much pleasant comment from the group of friends and cyclists who had gathered in Mrs. Preston's front yard, responsive to her invitation to watch the start of the trio and accompany them upon the race.

It was just 10 o'clock when Meta Randall, neatly attired in a cycling suit of olive green with glinting silver trimmings, passed out of the house and greeted her friends with a pleasant good morning.

A murmur of admiration rose from the feminine portion of the company as she stood for a brief second beside her wheel. Self possessed but modest, in the cool green of her costume she appeared a part of the natural picture which surrounded her. A bed of daffodils grew close to her feet, and she stooped and gathered a bunch of the brave yellow blossoms and fastened them securely at her belt.

Then, with a merry laugh and a graceful toss of the head toward Davis and Stanton, at the quick ring of a bicycle bell, the signal for starting, declining the proffered assistance of the competitors, she mounted her wheel and sped quickly down the road. She had nearly reached the first corner when, at a second signal, the two men were away. A third ring, and the merry company mounted, following as rapidly as possible the two flying contestants.

"What a glorious spin!" thought Meta, as the swift motion sent the

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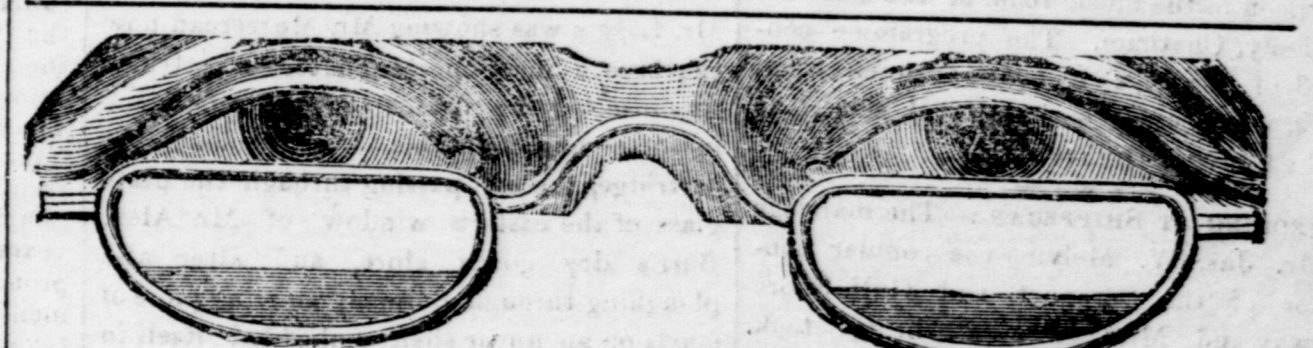
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