

A HOMELY ROMANCE.

It was Christmas eve and a holiday air reigned over the old seaport New England town. It had rained the night before but the weather was now clear and crisp and doing its best to sparkle and shine as Christmas weather should. The sea broke against the sandy beach with a melody which though hoarse with winter was not without joyousness, and the breeze found music in the few bare tree-boughs which lined the street and tinkled the icicles, and blew all sorts of pipes hidden under the empty old wharves. There was a light film of snow over the ground, for the rain storm had ended in a little white flurry and the wooden sidewalks of the chief street which ran through the populous little town were so slippery that pedestrians were obliged to step with the utmost caution.

Princeport is a social and jolly place, as nearly without cliques and sectarian prejudices as a Puritan New England town could well be, and though there were three other churches in the village the Methodist church was the only one which was open for a festival that night, and all the other folks, as well as the Methodist folk themselves, were wending their way thither at an early hour, even many of the Roman Catholics, for there was to be a fair with no end of pretty things for Christmas presents on sale, and a supper, such as only the wholesome Princeport matrons could conjure up to tempt holiday appetites.

The wintry air, if not musical with bells, resounded with peals of laughter and merry chatter as the holiday people sped along, sometimes in groups, sometimes in more silent and apparently blissful twos, and occasionally a solitary figure moved swiftly along toward the old white church. A full moon was rising serenely over the harbor, and lent its own romance to the floods of lamp light which streamed from the windows of both dwelling and shop along the way, and also made more distant the towering masts of a noble brig which had anchored in the harbor late in the afternoon.

"Seen that new brig that came in an hour or two ago?" was the question on all sides. "Beauty, isn't she? Came in for water or some other kind of supplies, I suppose."

"Dick Jones rowed over to her and the cap'n asked him aboard and he said 'twas fitted up splendid,'" remarked Mrs. Levi Shedd to her neighbor the widow Herbert, with whom she was walking.

"I always did love a brig," sighed her companion looking wistfully toward the rather ghastly-looking mass of rigging, which blossomed with lantern midway, and seemed to hold the stars in its meshes at the top.

"Well, I don't like anything that belongs to the sea," said Mrs. Shedd, "so many of my folks have been drowned in it. They were all sea-faring folks. Your husband was a sailor, wasn't he, though he died ashore?"

"Yes," Mrs. Herbert answered briefly, her eyes still fixed on the strange vessel.

"I can't say that I don't like to look at a handsome craft like that from a distance, but I don't want to get much nearer to it than I am now," pursued Mrs. Shedd.

"I do," replied Mrs. Herbert. "I'd like to be going away on it. It looks as if it were going to some nice place."

Her companion laughed. "It will have to go through some pretty bad places to get to it, anyway. You don't mean that you'd like to set off to sea in this Christmas weather, really? To be sure, it's mild for Christmas, but we shall catch it by to-morrow or next day, most likely."

"Yes, I really mean it. I'm tired of the work-a-day, hum-drum life I lead. I'm tired of poverty and loneliness, and it seems if I could get aboard some craft like this I could sail away from it. But there, I didn't mean to complain, and it's Christmas eve, too. I'm real ungrateful. Princeport folks have been so good to me in the seven years I've lived here, and I do like the place, but I can't help feeling a little blue, sometimes."

"Why, Mary Herbert, I don't know what to make of you. You always look and seem so jolly. Why, you're the very jolliest woman in the neighborhood, I've always said, always ready with a joke, and if you ain't laughing, there's a laugh tucked into the corner of your mouth, all ready to come out. I didn't think you ever had a blue minute."

Mrs. Herbert laughed outright now. "Appearances are often deceitful," she said, and then made haste to change the conversation into another channel.

"I don't know what has set me into such a sorry, sentimental mood today," she thought, hardly being her companion who was making some laughing prediction that she would marry a sailor for the second time and sail away as far as she wished. "It wasn't all the sight of the old-fashioned cookies that mother used to make so many years ago. I felt it when I got up in the morning, and it was the old recollections thronging into my mind, that induced me to make them and to run up that old glass daisy plate to stamp them with. He used to say that they tasted twice as good for being so pretty. The cookies will take with the children at the fair. I'm sure, everybody said that mother's receipt was splendid and he—but there, what right have I to be thinking of him. He was probably married long ago, and I am a widow of thirty-five. I won't be so silly." And she pulled herself together and turned towards Mrs. Shedd who was looking rather amazed, as well as displeased, that her remarks were so entirely unheeded.

"I declare, it's growing even more slippery as we get down along," said that lady. "I never was any hand to keep my feet under me on glare ice. I came just as near going then as could be. I should be sorry to spill everything out of my basket, to say nothing of breaking my limbs. I think we ought to send out an express wagon to collect the supper contributions as the Universalists did last year."

"My basket is not very heavy, but I don't like walking on ice," replied Mrs. Herbert absentmindedly, looking over her shoulder at the strange vessel as they passed a little alley-way which led down to the wharf, where an unobstructed view of her could be obtained. Scarcely were the words out of her mouth, when her feet flew from under her, and she was flat on the sidewalk.

"Oh, dear, I hope you haven't hurt yourself!" exclaimed Mrs. Shedd, anxiously reaching a helping hand.

But Mrs. Herbert was already on her feet, laughing but breathless. "I shouldn't care if I hadn't spilled everything out of

the basket. The frosting will all be cracked and crumbled off my cake and—"

Her sentence ended in a shrill scream, in which her companion joined her with a good-will, for a huge dog had appeared upon the scene at the most unfavorable moment, and seizing a large paper bag which had fallen from the basket, rushed down the street with it in his mouth.

"My cookies! my cookies!" cried Mrs. Herbert, attempting to give chase. But it was of no use, for the animal was going at lightning speed and the sidewalk was so slippery.

Some small boys about tried to stop him and rescue the spoil, but the dog, who was evidently little more than a puppy, though of such immense size, playfully eluded them, and in another moment had disappeared from sight down one of the numerous alley-ways.

"I shouldn't have cared so much if it had been the cake that was lost," mused Mrs. Herbert. "I didn't have very good luck with that, but the cookies were nice, real crisp, and they were stamped with a flower, and I'm sure would have attracted the young folks, at least."

"Well, it is too bad. I know they were nice, but I guess there'll be enough on the refreshment table without them. We Methodists always have loads left after every supper. The Baptists never have anything but maybe a few oyster crackers or a twenty piece of pie and a bit of bread."

"Well, it's no use crying for spilt milk, anyway, and as we are late already, we must hurry along as fast as we can," said Mrs. Herbert.

When the ladies reached the church the large vestry-room was full to overflowing, and the entertainment which was to precede the fair and supper had commenced. They were obliged to push their way up the aisle to get to the places behind the tables which were already partly spread at the back of the hall, where they proceeded to work as noiselessly as possible, while the audience enjoyed the vocal efforts of the minister's daughter. She was singing with a great deal of spring-like bubble and trill, "Robins Here," which though not at all appropriate to the season, was received with enthusiasm. The next on the program was a recitation by Miss Ida Maud Higgins, "The Polish Boy," in the midst of which a stranger entered the house, whose appearance created quite a sensation. He was a tall, broad-shouldered, breezy-looking man, in an elegant fur coat, and a half dozen or more people hastened to offer their seats to him at once. He preferred to stand, however, leaning his broad shoulders against one of the pillars at the back of the hall, while he rather eagerly surveyed the throng before him, as if he were looking for someone he knew.

"The captain of the strange brig," was the whisper which ran about the house, and Miss Ida Maud Higgins's effort was not attended to as it should have been considering its merits, especially by the feminine portion of the audience, for the stranger was a handsome man and his manner was somewhat peculiar, too. Even the busy ladies behind the tables arose from their seats to get a glimpse of him, all, with the exception of Mrs. Herbert, whose mood was still of a too sentimental, half-tearful sort, to admit of curiosity, and though there was, as usual, a smile tucked into the corner of her rosy mouth, her eyes were softer and less bright than usual, and her round and dimpled cheeks were quite pale. As she afterward confessed, her memory was resisting scenes of long ago during the whole evening.

The strange captain did not seem to appreciate the efforts of the Princeport Methodist society at entertainment. He looked dreadfully bored, even when the minister's daughter, who looked somehow all white gloves and spectacles, warbled "All in a Garden Fair," with much expression, and a quartet of young men declared to a forceful accompaniment on the piano, that they could not leave her, though he was moved to smile when an old fisherman by his side remarked in a loud whisper that how they was to settle it was a puzzle, seeing they all felt equally bad about her. And when the minister's daughter again appeared and engaged in a duet on the piano with a small girl who kept losing her place, he sighed wearily, and asked the old fisherman how much longer the entertainment was going to last. But the old man did not know, but he hoped it would soon be over, if they were going to fight the pianist like that. He liked good stirring tunes, but he wanted 'em barser, for at length the last selection was recited, the last warbler retired from the stage, the seats were quickly disposed of and the sale and supper commenced in good earnest.

The tall stranger elbowed his way through the crowd to the supper-table, and was immediately accosted by a half dozen or more blushing damsels, who invited him to be seated at the table, mentioning hot oyster stew, ice cream, roast turkey and plum pudding, with holiday smiles and most seductive accents.

"Well, not now, not now," said the captain, rather impatiently, as he turned away, "I've got other things in my mind—that is, I'm looking for somebody. I—hang it, there," (the minister's daughter, who thought he looked very distinguished, whispered to her bosom friend who stood beside her, that she was disappointed to hear talk like that) "but can you tell me who made these cookies and where I can find her," and he produced the paper bag which Mrs. Herbert had lost on her way to church, and displayed its contents.

"Why, yes, yes indeed," said Mrs. Shedd, who was presiding over the coffee urn, "it was Mrs. Herbert. She's in the kitchen cooking the oysters. I don't think she could leave very well, now, but you can go in there and speak to her, if you like." And she opened the door of the small ante-room, wondering, as she expressed it afterwards, "why he was so awfully struck on those cookies."

"I hope you'll excuse it, if everything is at sixes and sevens in there," said the good-natured, motherly minister's wife rather doubtfully, "we've been so busy." But the captain did not heed her. He was already in the room, and was gazing eagerly at the stooping form of Mrs. Herbert, who was trying to mend the not very satisfactory fire. She lifted her face, flushed with the heat, the dimples in her cheeks showing in a merry smile called forth by some remark of jolly Mrs. Deacon Smith, who was also working about the stove. He strode forward with a beaming face. She turned her startled gaze upon him. Their eyes met.

"Mary," he exclaimed, reaching both arms toward her.

The roses died in her cheeks, leaving them pale as ashes, and if it had not been for the support of his arm, she would have fallen. But it was only a momentary weakness. The blood came back to her face in a surging flood. She lifted her head, and tried to push away his supporting arm.

"No, no, that won't do, Mary," he said. "I've found you, at last, and you won't get away from me so easily again. Didn't you, yourself, confess after it was too late, that it was only a mistake that had separated us, and that you should always care for me more than for anybody else. I lost sight of you for awhile, but I heard that poor Tom Herbert was dead, and went back to the old place in search of you, but all the old folks had gone away, and no one knew where you were. Ever since that time I have been searching for you, but now, thanks to those cookies, your mother's old cookies—I knew no one else but you and she ever made them just like that—and that mischievous puppy of mine, who never did a good deed before, I've found you at last. Mary, I've got to sail as soon as the wind springs up; perhaps not until early in the morning, and I want you to marry me before I go. I must take you with me."

"John, John what are you thinking of?" she exclaimed with a startled face. But neither of them heeded that there were edited hearers and spectators about them. "There isn't anyone else, Mary," he said, falteringly.

"Oh, no, no, but it is so sudden, I couldn't."

The small boy who was employed as an assistant to the supper committee, retired for a moment to a corner where he turned a silent somersault to give vent to his pent up feelings. The fourteen-year-old girl who was acting in the same capacity, stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth to suppress a giggle. The deacon's wife had turned away for politeness sake, but was hearing every word for all that, and there was the minister's daughter, shorn of her white gloves and wearing a white apron, taking it all in with wonderful astuteness and deepest sympathy.

"What on earth's the reason you can't? Of course you mean to marry me sometime, don't you? Come, there's no time to be lost; say yes or no."

"Yes," faltered Mrs. Herbert, casting down her eyes, and blushing like a girl.

"Of course, I knew you did. Then why not now. I shan't be back for a year. 'T would be a pretty state of things to leave you here pining ashore while I sailed off and got drowned, may be, or blown off to the North Pole, and—"

"Mrs. Herbert gave a little gasp and grasped him by the arm. "Well, now, why can't we sit down, somewhere, and talk it over?" said the captain. "My arguments, I'm sure, won't be so convincing with such a smell of burnt oysters puffing into my face."

"Dear, dear," said the minister's daughter. "Yes, go right and sit down with the captain, dear Mrs. Herbert, and I'll attend to the cooking."

She was just eighteen, and was inclined to be indulgent to young love.

"I should have to see to my things at home, first, and then—"

"Oh, I'll see to everything, Mary. Can't you trust me?" said Mrs. Shedd, who had appeared on the scene, eager with curiosity as well as sympathy. "You know I always wanted your pussy, and I'll take the best of care of him, and take care that everything is right about the house, too."

"There, do you hear that?" cried the captain. "There's evidently nothing to hinder. The minister's right here and your friends all around you, and—time is flying."

"It seems to me like a beautiful providence," said the deacon's wife, who knew of Mrs. Herbert's struggles to earn her living by her needle, and her lonely condition.

"It does, indeed," said the minister's wife, "but wouldn't you better ask my husband's advice, Mary? He always knows just the best thing to do."

"Beg your pardon, madam, but I think under the circumstances, she would better take mine, though I've no doubt his would be the same."

"I haven't even my best dress on," faltered Mrs. Herbert, looking down at her gray woollen dress, which was brightened by cherry ribbons at the throat and belt.

"Neither have I," said the captain, "and it would take too long to send over to the shop for a dress suit. I was just thinking that I ought to, however, you look so awfully swell. In fact, I never saw you looking better; not even when you wore white with those red ribbons."

"But where are you going to get your license?" inquired the minister a few moments afterwards.

"Why should there be any trouble about that?" Where's the town clerk?"

"Oh, he's gone courting way over to South Harbor. Goes regularly every Wednesday and Saturday night, they say."

"Yes, I saw him driving over about half-past five, to-night," said a deacon. "But he comes home pretty early. His girl's mother's an invalid, and too nervous to have folks settin' up in the house."

"Well, if you'll go with me, cap'n, I guess I can fix that for you," said the minister, and the two gentlemen hurriedly left the house, leaving Mrs. Herbert in the care of the ladies, who immediately fell upon her and commenced to arrange her hair, the minister's daughter sacrificing a red rose which she had worn at her own throat.

"You have all been so good to me here in Princeport," sobbed the bride. "I never shall forget your kindness." And a good many of the warm-hearted matrons began to cry, too, but they made their charge look beautiful, for all that.

In an incredibly short space of time, or so it seemed, the minister and the captain were back again, having been successful as to the license, and in the meantime the heat had been turned on to the church overhead, and everything was ready. The young lady organist, so entirely in spirit with the occasion, played as she had never played before. The bride was tearful, but delightfully rosy, and all the ladies declared that no one ever looked so noble and handsome or so proud and happy as the groom. When the ceremony was over, the groom slipped up to the minister and inquired, "Are there any sick or poor in the parish who need help, and any debt on the church that ought to be lifted? I'm not a rich man, but I have my

share of this world's goods, and I'd like to do something to express my thankfulness to the town where I found my old sweetheart, and especially to this society, it—"

"Well, we take pretty good care of our poor here in Princeport, but there is a poor widow only a few doors from here who is much in need of charity. Her only son is very ill, and she is unable to work, herself, having been crippled for years. The son was her only support, and now—"

The captain silently placed a bank note in the clerk's hand.

"As for the church, there is a debt upon it, which we are trying to wipe out as we can. It is very little, now. We count on this fair to pay all but about one hundred dollars."

He placed another bank note in the clerk's hand. And then, after mutual thanks and blessings, the company separated, the bride and groom going toward the ship which was at anchor in the harbor, the people to their various homes. It was twelve o'clock, and the usually sleep-sounding Princeport bells were all clanging merrily in the starlight. The Christmas morn looked down into the thronged street with tender meaning. The dark sea sent forth glints of joyous light.

A throng of the bride's friends escorted her to the tender which was to take her to the ship, and as it moved away from the shore, rowed by two stout sailors, with a "God bless old Princeport," from the captain, a salute was fired from the ship in honor of the bride, for its officers and crew had all got wind of the wedding. The ship sailed away before daylight, but the rosy impression of the romance will live all through the gray, wintry days that benumb the old town, and nearly every girl and matron of the first Methodist society who could possibly obtain it, has at least a piece of one of those fatal Christmas cookies.—Susan Hartley Swett.

A CASE OF NERVOUS PROSTRATION RESULTING FROM INDIGESTION.

They say that misery loves company, and they have had it so often it has passed into a proverb. Yet it isn't an all-round truth. Some kinds of misery detest company. They want to be left alone. They hate to be elbowed and questioned and talked to. A wounded dog will always crawl into some retired place by itself. The instinct of badly injured men, after a battle, is the same. Aliments that are mostly fancy, tend to set tongues wagging. But real, genuine and dangerous diseases don't incite to speech. Crises which are big with fate usually come and go in quiet.

It is why Mrs. Scuffham had no desire for the society of even her best friends at a certain time she is going to tell us about.

"Up to April, 1881," she writes, "I never knew what it was to be ill. At that time I began to feel that something was amiss with me. I had no relish for my meals, and after eating my chest felt heavy and painful, and my heart would beat and thump as though it meant to leap out of its place. Presently I became so swollen round the waist that I was obliged to unloose my clothing, as I could not bear anything to touch that part of my body."

"Even the slightest food gave me pain; a little fish setting my heart to beating at a great rate. My feet were cold, and cold, clammy sweats would break out all over me, leaving me exhausted and worn out. At night I got no sleep to speak of, and in the morning I felt worse tired than when I went to bed. I also suffered a great deal from my feet being puffed up and sore. I could scarcely get about the house. When I went shopping I had to trudge to the town and back as I could only walk a few yards."

"As time went on I lost my flesh and strength more and more, and gave up hope of ever recovering the precious health I had so sadly lost. I took medicines, and consulted a clever doctor at Derby who examined me and said my heart was weak. He also gave me medicines, but I got only temporary ease from them, and in a short time was as bad as before. All this time I was so nervous and depressed that I had no desire for company. On the contrary, I seemed to want to be alone with my misery. Even a knock at the door frightened me, as though I expected bad news, yet I did not really. My nerves and lankies ran away with my knowledge and judgement. Thousands of women who have suffered in this way will understand what I mean."

"Year after year I remained in this condition and what I went through I cannot put in words, nor do I wish to try. It will answer the purpose to say that I existed thus for eleven and a half years, as much dead as alive. I spent pounds on pounds in physic, but was not a whit the better for any of it."

"In October, 1892, a book was left at our house, and I read in it of cases like mine being cured by Mother Seigel's Syrup. I got a bottle from Mr. Bardel, the chemist, in Normanton Street, Derby, and when I had taken this medicine for a few days, my appetite was better and I had less pain. I kept on taking it, and soon my food agreed with me and I gained strength."

"After this I never looked behind me, but steadily got stronger and stronger. When I had taken three bottles I was quiet like a new woman. All the nervousness had left me, and my heart was sound as a bell. Since then I have enjoyed good health, and all who know me say my recovery is remarkable. I am confident that Mother Seigel's Syrup was the means, in the hands of Providence, of saving my life; and out of gratitude, and in hope of doing good, I freely consent to the publication of this statement. (Signed) (Mrs.) Ann Scuffham, Cooper Lane, Looe by, Grimsby, May 1st, 1895."

This letter is endorsed by Mr. William J. Tollerton, of the same town, who vouches for the truth of what Mrs. Scuffham has said, as he personally knew of the circumstances of her illness at the time they occurred. No comment can add a jot to the force of this open, candid, and sincere communication. Whosoever reads it must needs be moved and convinced by it. The disease which filled this woman's life with pain and misery for nearly twelve years was indigestion or dyspepsia, an ailment sly and cunning as a snake in the grass—and as dangerous. Send for the book of which Mrs. Scuffham speaks, and read the symptoms in order that you may know what it is, and how to deal with it. The book costs you nothing, yet it would be worth buying as if every leaf were hampered gold.

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