

represented his own plan for securing certain advantages for his daughter. And so it came about that in two weeks from the time it was first mooted Mr Chubb's point was carried. Lucy was engaged, not to her 'dearest John,' as she had often pictured to herself; John, whose photograph she put under her pillow every night, and of whom her heart and thoughts were full, but to Mr Samuel Lathrop, of Midford. Miss Harriet was aghast; Mr Chubb, openly jubilant; Mr Lathrop fishily gratified and satisfied; John Deering in despair.

Matters were at this stage, and all was brisk preparation for the wedding when one evening Lucy went to her room. Her *fiancé* had spent the whole afternoon with her, and she had been only too thankful to see him drive off and to go to her room, where she cried and bathed her face, and cried again, and took off her hateful engagement ring and felt again comparatively free and happy, or at least less miserable. She was sitting there thinking of the same thing, or rather person, that always filled her mind, when Miss Harriet came in, looking excited.

'My dear,' she said, 'he's downstairs, and says he must see you.'

'He' was John Deering to Miss Harriet, and Lucy, of course, knew who 'he' was, and never confounded him for one moment with the late-departed Samuel.

'I can't see him. I can't see him. You must go down and tell him so. After the way I've treated him—' began Lucy, getting very pale, and bursting again into the ever-at-hand sobs.

'He says he will see you,' replied Miss Harriet. 'Poor fellow! You'd better go down. He may do something desperate.'

A fear of John's doing something 'desperate' was one of Lucy's haunting terrors, but then to see him as Mr Samuel Lathrop's *fiancé*!

'What does he want, auntie?' she asked. 'Oh, I can't, I can't!'

'You can't help yourself. If you don't go down, child, you may regret it,' said Miss Harriet. 'What are you afraid of? He knows you're engaged, for he told me so. Go along downstairs.'

Thus urged, Lucy went down, and John turned as pale as she was when he saw her. He was sitting on the horse-hair sofa, where she never sat now, partly because it reminded her of the days when she and John had spent so many happy hours side by side on its slippery, uncompromisingly hard surface, but chiefly because she could not so well regulate the exact and respectful distance that she wished observed between herself and her *fiance* there as when she took a chair. There were no demonstrations to fear from John. He did not so much as offer to shake hands. He had come to tell her something. And this was it, briefly told without the clauses and pauses of the agitated speaker, the interruptions and comments of the listener. Mr Chubb, a few days before, had sold his large crop to a firm in Fenton, a hundred miles away. It had been shipped and had got safely as far as a town midway between Midford and Fenton—Fairfield. A strike was imminent, and all traffic about to be stopped. John was at Fairfield; had found it out; knew that Mr Chubb's crop was on the track, and, for love of Lucy, had at the very last moment contrived to get 'every blessed car' sent off safely to Fenton just before the storm came that had ruined many shippers and done great injury even to such a powerful corporation as the Southern and Central.

This was the gist of the interview. But a good deal beside crept into it. John learned that Lucy still loved him, and was sacrificing herself to her father's 'notions.' Lucy was humiliated and delighted at once by this fresh proof that John was 'the noblest creature in the world.' They parted with love and hope both revived. Lucy thought that her father would be so touched by John's 'splendid conduct' that he would relent and repay him the only coin he would take. John determined that he 'would make a fight for it,' as he put it in his own thoughts.

But alas! it was Miss Harriet who was melted, and sang John's praises, and cried on Lucy's neck, and declared that Lucy and John were 'made for each other,' and that it was 'monstrous to part them.' Mr Chubb was vastly pleased, delighted, indeed, but he had no idea of doing anything more than *thanking* John, which he did that very night in cordial terms, and with a feeling that he was behaving handsomely, for he had a pen-and-ink-phobia, and never wrote a letter if he could possibly get out of it.

Perhaps he preferred that way of expressing his sense of the obligation for other reasons. He knew very well, now, from both Lucy and Miss Harriet, what John's feelings toward Lucy was, and of her affection for him. For one moment he even thought of 'settling' the matter all over again, and very differently. He had but a contemptuous opinion of women, however—their love, their hate, their intellect, their influence and character generally; and he soon convinced himself that it was too late, and that one man was not only as good as another, but better too, in this case. So nothing was changed. The wedding was to be, or he would know why, he said angrily.

Miss Harriet and Lucy were bidden to get ready for it and say no more. Miss Harriet and Lucy being what the French call perfect 'muttons,' looked unutterable appeals, wept, said a great deal behind Mr Chubb's back, obeyed. And John Deering raged inwardly, protested on paper, tried to get another interview with Lucy, failed, and was checkmated all around for the time being.

On the day before the one fixed for the wedding he made his last attempt, and it was as he was riding slowly back to Midford with the heaviest heart in the world that Mr Lathrop's new buggy, resplendent with paint and varnish, and drawn by a fast trotter, came bowling along *en route* to Clover Farm. Mr Lathrop was dressed in his best, and felt at his best. Recognizing John as he passed by him, he very kindly and delicately pulled a paper from his pocket and flourished it at him, calling out:

'See here! License! You can come to the wedding if you like. Do!'

Mr Lathrop was not a man of many impulses, but he could not resist the temptation to taunt his rival. And John would have liked nothing better than to have

dragged him out of the buggy and laid his own whip over his shoulders. All the natural savage in him was aroused. He was not in a state of nature, though, in Africa or Ceylon or the Sioux country, where men may savagely resent barbarous treatment, and though by no means in a state of grace, he was presently joggling again toward Midford, and again in these civilised United States of the nineteenth century, with nothing but a red flush on his face to tell of his range and grief.

The day came. The wedding was to be at the farm. It was to be a quiet affair, only a few neighbours and friends being invited. It was to be at eleven o'clock sharp. The knot indissoluble was to be tied by the Methodist minister of Midford, Mr Caruthers.

Early as were the hours usually kept at Clover Farm, every member of the family for various reasons was awake on that particular morning long before the usual time, perhaps because none of them had slept well and some of them had not closed an eye at all.

Miss Harriet, who as housekeeper had 'the repast' (as she elegantly termed the wedding collation) very much on her mind, rose and dressed by lamp-light, peeped into Lucy's room, and found the poor girl a very spectacle for pallor and swollen eyes, and general dishevelled despair, had a final cry with her, returned to her own room and went downstairs with her mother's manuscript cookbook under her arm, and her hands full of silverware.

Lucy got up, and by way of preparing herself to become the wife of Mr Lathrop, got out a villainous and most unflattering photograph of John, and all the letters and presents, pressed flowers and other sentimental souvenirs that had come from or were associated with him, and spent two hours looking at them as well as she could for her tears.

Mr Chubb, the originator and promoter of this successful matrimonial scheme, was by no means as happy as might have been expected. He, too, had had a bad night of it. For one thing, only the evening before he had been informed by a neighbour that Mr Lathrop had been made the attorney of the Southern and Central by its astute president.

There could not have been unpleasant news communicated. His son-in-law the representative of that road! The thought was intolerable, and worse still he couldn't help it, couldn't help anything; for, angry as he was, he felt that it was too late to break off the engagement he had made, though he thought of it for the first five minutes. He was afraid of public opinion; he was ashamed to ask of Lucy after his high-handed course in the matter. And then, for another thing, he had been assailed by a whole host of doubts and fears now that his point was carried. Lucy had been a good daughter to him always—kind, affectionate, obedient. Had he as he phrased and summed up the account between them 'acted square and fair?' Perhaps he was a little hipped, for as a general thing he was firmly convinced of his own wisdom and was not given to admitting as a mere possibility even that he could be wrong.

It is certain that he was out of sorts, and was up and dressed before the first auroral flush in the east above the elms opposite his window announced that the day was at hand.

Some uneasy influence from the farm must have penetrated as far as Midford, for John Deering also had tumbled and tossed away the night on the creaking and shacking structure that did duty for a bed at his boarding-house. What should he do? What could he do to prevent Lucy, his Lucy whom he loved, and who loved him, from being sacrificed by 'a brutal father' to a 'beast' of a lover. John thought in strong language,

and even so his feelings were so inadequately expressed that he got up and walked the floor still thinking, thinking, and groaning aloud, and clinching his fist and biting his lips like the heaviest of stage villains instead of the worthiest and most simple hearted of men. At last he came to a conclusion, a conclusion so bold and startling that it almost stunned even him just at first. He would see Lucy again. He would get her to elope with him, if there was anything in love or a lover's eloquence, appeals, commands, despair. This decided upon, he too arrayed himself and rushed out of the house, stumbling over the milkman and his cans at the door in his eagerness to secure a license (with which he means to begin the work of spiking the enemy's guns), utterly unmindful of the fact that it would be at least two hours before any office would be open, any official at his post.

It was only Mr Lathrop who slept the placid sleep of the victor untroubled by any doubts, fears, or alarms.

When Miss Harriet had 'seen to' a dozen things that were down in her mental memorandum, she gave herself up to ten minutes' intense study of her Virginian mother's receipt for 'Bermondsey punch,' chin in hand, seated on the back verandah. She then rose, and with a purposeful air took her way to the pantry to put into instant execution the instructions so clearly given. Bermondsey punch had always been in her family. It was a thing that no one who had once tasted ever forgot. It was natural that she should have thought of it at once when there was a wedding in question, even a wedding that she disliked and would have given a great deal to avert. She had a duty to society to perform and she meant to do that duty; but her soft heart and head were full of troubled, unhappy thoughts of Lucy and John, and unavailing regrets and wishes—so full indeed, that she was completely unconscious when the time came to do as she was bidden and 'stir in slowly one pint of old Bourbon previously mull'd' that she had exactly doubled the quantity of spirit and halved the quantity of water ordered, by her absent-minded use of the pint and quart pots at hand. Quite satisfied with her work, on the contrary, she carefully covered the bowl when she had done, set in on the second shelf, and went off to attend to other matters.

Breakfast that morning was a mere mockery of a meal, and was over in ten minutes, Mr Chubb and Miss Harriet being alike eager to get over it, and Lucy still in her room.

It was about an hour after this that Mr Chubb, who had been prowling over the house restlessly ever since he had come downstairs, wandered aimlessly into the pantry. He stood there for a moment, looking idly at the cakes and cream and other toothsome dishes about him, with the interest that such dainties always arouse in a breast that is honest, and conscious of a capacity to enjoy and digest them at the proper time, and all at once he spied the punch-bowl above his head. Now it is a generally conceded and perfectly indisputable fact, that men have absolutely no curiosity; so it must have been that Mr Chubb felt it to be his duty to inform himself at once as to what that bowl contained. At any rate, he got it down, uncovered it, and examined it attentively. Some light was thrown on the subject by another organ than his eyes, namely, his nose. The little rings of lemon-peel that floated temptingly on the surface were agreeably corroborative of the theory suggested by the second sense, and a third was called to Mr Chubb's aid. He tasted it. It was all that Bermondsey punch was famous for, and more, as we know. He tasted it again and again. It improved on acquaint-



AT THE VERY DOOR HE MET JOHN DEERING.