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fended Middleton's fastidiousness. Her

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Harvey Middleton's Proposal. OR Love in a Stage Coach.

TT WAS a cold spring day, nearly ten years ago. The snows were melting, and the frost just beginning to come out of the ground; consequently the hilly roads of Maine were in a perilous state-deep mudholes alternating with old snow-drifts, and treacherous spots which seemed frozen, but were merely a crust covering the porous mass below. It was nine o'clock in the morning when the stage-coach which connects the little village of B----, on the Kennebec River, with the railroad terminus some twenty-five miles below, drew up before the door of the public-house, where Harvey Middleton stood waiting. That gentleman watched its approach with some doubts concerning his own chances of a seat. It was not a coach, but a thirg called a "mud-cart"-a kind of wide open w.gon set on strong elastic springs, and having several low-backed seats, which extended over the wheels to afford more room. Every seat was full except one on the elevated perch of the driver, and thither Middleton clambered with some difficulty, and wrapped himself as well as he could from the cold. He was just recovering from rather a severe illness, which had detained him a fortnight in that out-of-the-way place. A busy Boston lawyer, with an office full of cases calling him home, he had not borne the confinement very patiently; and not feeling really well enough yet to bear a tiresome stage drive, was just in that state of nervous irritability to be annoyed at every thing. As he mounted to his place his ears were greeted by a woman's laugh-a hearty, ringing laugh, too loud to be exactly ladylike, but with a pleasant sound in it for all that. At least he might have thought so in a more amiable moment; now, however, he turned, a little disgusted at the boisterous outbreak, and, while settling himself on the fur robes, took a rapid survey of his fellowtravellers. They were none of them of a class likely to please his fastidious taste. On the back seat were a sharp-visaged Shaker, who had pestered him to buy a washing-machine at the public house that morning, a sleepylooking elderly farmer, and his wife. The latter was a nervous, restless woman, who had in charge three baskets, a bundle, a shawl, an umbrella, and her husband, and seemed equally anxious about them all. Four red-shirted log-drivers, on their way down the river to start a big "jam" at Carratunk Falls, filled the front seat. They were decent men, though rough, and rather disposed to treat the other passengers to a good deal of chaff. On the middle seat were three persons. The first was a country youth of the hobble-dehoy age, but with a pleasant, intelligent face, interesting in spite of immaturity and freckles. Next him sat a pale, tired-looking woman, with a sad, girlish face, who carried in her arms an enormously fat and incredibly lively baby. The other occupant of the seat was a young woman of certainly striking appearance. She seemed about twentyfour or five had a tall, showy figure and a handsome face-very handsome. Middle. ton admitted to himself, after several surveys. A brilliant complexion, an abundance of black hair in shining, satiny hands -it was before the advent of "frizzles"clear, strong gray oyes, a well-cut nose, and ne though somewhat large mouth a har filled with dazaling white teeth. Plainly it

The Bloomfield Cimes. attire was remarkable. She wore a hand- ily. some blue silk dress, a velvet cloak richly fringed and braided, a light silk hat with feathers, and a lace collar fastened with a showy brooch. Gold bracelets on her wrists, and lemon-colored kid gloves, completed a costume which, though certainly becoming, could hardly be called appropriate for a stage-coach ride in a muddy 'spring day. Middleton's taste instantly pronounced it and its wearer hopelessly vulgar. She talked constantly, not only with the youth at her side, who seemed to belong to her in some way, but with all the other passengers. Her voice was a pleasant one, though its tones, like her laugh, were so loud as to jar disagreeably on Middleton's ear. Ordinarily it would not have occurred to him to be thus annoved; indeed, his sense of humor might have been pleased by the young woman's shrewd and often witty comments on the incidents of their ride; but to-day he was ill and nervous, and her loud tone, her unpolished and occasionally ungramatical speech and vulgarly showy dress displeased and disgusted him. He bore it as long as he could, and then his impatience broke out. Not loud enough, however, to be audible to the object of it. It was to his companion, the driver, that he exclaimed, "Confound that woman's tongue! Is

> there no end to its infernal clatter?" The driver looked at our friend with a surprised and half-offended glance; but in a moment he answered, in a tone rather patronizing and tolerant, as though the person he addressed could really not be supposed to know any better.

"Well, stranger, I guess you feel kind o' out o' sorts this morning. You don't look well, I snum. Been sick, ain't ye?" "Yes."

"Well, it beats all, how 'most anything will kind o' hector a fellow when he don't feel just right. Now, for my part, I'd rather hear Lymp Tucker laugh than to hear preachin'; there's something heartenen' in it; would cheer a fellow up if he was blue as Moxey's Mountain."

"I beg your pardon," said Middleton. "I did not know she was a friend of yours; and I meant no harm any way."

"Oh, well, there's no offense. Lymp ain't anything to me in particular; but she's a girl I always like to have behind my horses."

"What did you call her ?"

"Lymp Tucker-short for Olympia-Deacon Ben Tucker's daughter; oldest of six."

"Are they all like her ?"

If there was any hidden sneer in his ords the driver did not perceive it. much," was his emphatic reply. "The're as pindlin' set. She's as strong as a threshing machine, and as smart as chain lightning'."

"Didn't I tell you?" asked the other, triumphantly. "And that ain't half. She hires a girl to wait on her mother, and she sent the younger children to school-she never had a chance for schoolin' herselfand then-You see that boy back there with her ?"

"Yes, I noticed him."

"Well, that's her brother John; all the boy the deacon ever had. He's seventeen, and smart. Lymp's putting him through college, going to make a doctor of him, she says."

"She is a noble girl."

"Well, she's got the grit. You can't discourage her. She's bound to laugh right through things; and that kind always have good luck. Not proud neither, though she's got money in the bank, and can afford to have nice things now. Some difference," he continued proudly, with a backward gesture, "between that velvet cloak and the day I took her to the Falls with only one dress. All bought with her own earnings too."

Middleton did not smile; he felt rebuked. Even the velvet cloak and dress hat in the stage-coach became respectable to him in connection with that cheerful, courageous, unselfish spirit. If the girl had pleasure in these things, why should she not enjoy them? The driver went on, lowering his his voice to a tone still more confidential :

"They say-I don't know how true 'tisthat Squire Danvers is kind o' hankerin' round Lymp. He's a widower, well off, and got a nice place. But Lymp don't take a shine to him. She told my wife she didn't fancy second-hand goods no way. She reckoned matrimony was best fresh; she'd rather not take her'n warmed over."

Middleton's laugh was almost as hearty as that which had so annoyed him. But the driver's gossip was here interrupted. The coach stopped to let off the four logdrivers, and Middleton gladly availed himself of the seat they vacated, it being more sheltered from the cold wind than the high one he had been occupying. This movement brought him face to face with the owner of had given him a distaste for their society. the langh, and he could not help surveying her with a glance of curiosity. He had heard of the genius factory-girl, but perhaps had never before been knowingly in company with a specimen. There was nothing rude in his look; and the girl observing, returned it with a steady, unabashed gaze in amiable fool. So, on in the whole, Harvey which there was no shadow of boldness, It was more as one man regards another; and miliar with woman, he was, as a rule, Harvey's eye was the first to fall. The road was in a frightful condition. Sometimes the wheels on one side sank to the hubs in soft mud, while those on the other were tilted up on a snow-drift. The jolts and lurches were as painful as alarming, and Harvey in his weak state could hardly endure them. He leaned back and closed his eyes, but the deadly pallor of his face betrayed his suffering. In a moment a pleasant voice addressed him. It was the factory-girl, who said,

"He ought to be," said Middleton heart- her way to Lowell in the hope of finding employment.

"Have you any friends in the city ?" she presently asked. "No."

"But what will you do with your baby if you work in the mills ?"

"I thought perhaps I could get some one to look after him, if I had the luck to find work."

"Haven't you any friends where you come from that would take him-your own folks ?"

"No"-rather hesitatingly. "I haven't any folks-at least they don't care for me now."

"Where is your husband ?" was the next abrupt question.

A fiery blush spread over the woman's face, and her lips contracted as if with a sharp spasm of pain, but she made no answer. Miss Tucker regarded her for an instant with surprise; then a sudden, swift lifting of the eyebrows showed that she comprehended the case. She leaned forward and said in a low tone, "I understand: your husband is not living. I am sorry I spoke of it. What a fine healthy baby yours is !"

There was a gentle, womanly accent in her voice, which did not escape Harvey's ear; and the ready tact with which she had covered the poor creature's embarrassment, turning instantly from the painful theme to that which would naturally be most consoling, pleased and touched him. He looked at the over-dress, loud-voiced fac-tory-girl with more of genuine admiration than he had often bestowed on any woman. Indeed, he was not an admirer of woman in general. A bachelor of forty, well born, good-looking, and rich, he might well have been a mark for managing mammas and designing daughters, had he chosen to put himself in their way. But he was not partial to female society. The truth was he had in his youth, when not so prosperous as now, been rather badly treated by a beautiful but worldly girl, who, after encouraging his suit, suddenly jilted him for a wealthier rival. The experience had possibly somewhat shaken his faith in woman in general; at least it He had two married brothers, but their matrimonial luck was not of a kind to make him envious. The wife of one was a very high bred woman, a model of elegance and propriety in externals, but with the temper of a demon; the other was an was content to remain as he was. Unfa-

rather unobservant of those with whom he might be accidently thrown, and indifferent to what they chose to say or do. So it was, in fact, an unusual thing that he should be listening now with interest to the talk of these two, one of whom was evidently no better than a social pariah and the other of a standing and culture so inferior to his own. He observed how the latter, though evidently comprehending the truth with regard to her new acquaintance, showed no shrinking or hesitation. She saw only her need, not her fault, and gave her all the advice in her power in a tone of grave but respectful compassion. They rumbled and jolted along, the road growing more difficult with every mile, till, indeed, it was nearly impassible. The old lady with the basket grew crosser and more frightened with every fresh jolt. She scolded the driver incessantly, as if he were somehow responsible for the state of the roads, and seemed out of patience with all the rest for not being as much terrified as herself. Her wretched husband slept continually, but managed to lurch forward every moment against the youth in front of him, till the latter very nearly lost his temper under the infliction. The baby fretted and cried ; and as for Harvey, he grew so tired that he began to think he could go no further. But discomfort and annoyance only seemed to bring out Lymp Tucker in greater strength. She laughed merrily at each fresh mishap, rallied the old lady out of her fears, and helped her to straighten her mashed bonnet, which had come to grief from the jolting stage ; and joked away her brother's ill-humor, and produced from her sachel an orange which quieted the crying baby, and gave its weary mother a brief rest. Her unfailing good humor and cheerner, and spoke softly, as if frightened at fulness had an effect upon all ; oven Harvey partly forgot his weariness in the lively talk in which she engaged him. She chat-ted with perfect frankness and some disresympathies. Miss Tucker answered her gared to grammar rules ; but the quick wit questions with ready good nature, soon and the shrewd commonsense she displayed

At last, going down a long hill, the catastrophy which the old lady had been looking for came; the stage sank with a sudden lurch into a deep rut, and one of the wheels snapped like a reed. Forunately the vehicle was not upset, and only stuck fast ; but they could go no farther. Here was a cheerful state of things ! The nearest house was half a mile away, and they had the alternative of walking to it through the mud or of waiting there in the bleak March wind for an indefinite time till another conveyance was found. The former course was plainly the wise one, and all scrambled out accordingly. Lymp Tucker drew up the skirt of her gay silk dress, thereby making a liberal display of ankles and under-garments, but the comely shape of the one and the spotless neatness of the other made it excusable. Then, taking possession of the kicking baby, and bidding her brother give his assistance to Middleton, she led the way across the field, the whole company taken up their line of march behind her.

Arrived, after considerable difficulty, at the farm-house, they had the satisfaction of learning that they must wait at least two hours for the repair of the broken wheel, and that they were still five miles short of the half-way house where they had expected to take dinner. Of course they were all nearly famished after riding so long in the cold. The good woman of the house seemed well disposed to supply their wants, but she was alone and her larder somewhat lean. "I don't suppose you'd want fried pork," said she, dubiously. "I might kill a couple of pullets."

"That would take too long altogether," said Lymp Tucke. "We should eat the baby before they would be ready."

"Well, I guess Jones' wife, down at the corner would let me have some ham ; but I hain't got no bread baked then."

"Oh, never mind that. Give me the things to do it with, and I'll have the bread made by the time you are back from Jones'."

"La, now," said the hostess, looking doubtfully at the fine apparel of her guest, "do you suppose you could ?"

"You bring me the things and see," replied the other, laying aside the velvet cloak and light kid gloves. The woman obeyed at once. Miss Tucker turned up the silken sleeves, from a pair of large and handsome white arms and tied on a big check apron, while the hostess flung a shawl around her head and took her way across the field to "the corner."

The only fire in the house was in the kitchen, so all the passengers sat around it

"Indeed !" what can she do?" "Well, I should like to have you men-

tion any thing she can't do." Middleton's good breeding constrained

him to express an interest in the driver's theme which, perhaps, he did not wholly feel. The latter went on confidentially.

Their seat being higher than the others, the loud rattle of the wheels kept their words within bounds.

"You see, sir, Deacon Tucker he hain't never been a strong man, and was always rather behind hand with his farming.

Then they've had a sight of sickness. Two of the girls died with consumption. and Miss Tucker she fell down stairs and hurt the spine of her back, so she has scarcely done a day's work since. One year the deacon's crops failed, and the next he had bad luck with his cattle dying; and so, what with sickness and all, he'd had to mortgage his farm, and it had only three years more to run, and everybody reckoned he'd have to lose it. Then Lymp she said that never should be, for she should earn the money to pay off the mortgage. She was eighteen then, and had done all the work at home pretty near since she could run alone. She went out spinning till she got money enough to pay her fare to Lowell, and then she started for the factory, I carried her down to the cars in my stage, and I happen to know that she hadn't but one gown to her back when she went away.

"Well, she got a good place, and she worked straight along, and sent home money-seven hundred dollars-and cleared off the mortgage, and took a deed of the place in her own name to make sure against ocidents. That was six years ago or more, and to-day you would never know 'twas the same place. The house is all fixed up, and thers's new furniture in it, and the deacon's was that mouth from which had issued the as chirp as a cricket, and proud of Lymp, ringing, boistorous laugh which had so of- you'd better believe."

"You do not seem well, Sir. Perhaps it is disagreeable to you to ride backward. You are welcome to my seat, if you like to change."

"You are very kind," said Middleton, surprised. "The seat is very well, I believe; only I have been ill, and the road is rough."

"Why, it is dreadful for a sick person. Pray take this thick shawl of mine. I am sure you could make yourself more comfortable with it."

"Thank you very much; but I would rather not deprive you of it."

"I do not need it, Sir; my cloak is very warm; and you can make yourself a pillow of it. Please take it;" and she leaned forward and arranged the shawl herself in a manner so comfortable as to be its own recommendation. He had not energy to remonstrate further, but leaned back and again closed his eyes, thinking the while how very handsome hers were, and what a gentle touch she had.

He lay thus for some time, paying little heed to anything; but after a while his attention was attracted by those in front of him. The woman with the baby was questioning Miss Tucker concerning Lowell and its factories. She had a timid, nervous manthe sound of her own voice. She had been pretty once, but now her face had a weary, hopeless look, which touched Middleton's drawing from her the fact that she was on made amends for much. and watched the preparation of their repast. The impromptu bread-baker flirted a floursifter, twirled a spoon in a pan, made several rapid passes over a board, and in an incredibly short time had produced a large panful of biscuits, which she set in a tin baker before the open fire. The hostess soon returned, and presently had ready a smoking dish of hot ham and eggs, which, with biscuits like snow-flakes, made a very inviting repast.

By the time the meal was well over the driver returned with his wheel mended. and they took the road again. Harvey, who had paid the entertainer liberally for his own dinner, noticed the pale young woman approach and offer to do the same.

"That is all settled," said the hostess, and motioned with her hand toward Miss Tucker.

Harvey felt mortified that he should not have thought to do that kindness himself. He overheard the poor woman's grateful murmur of thanks to her new friend and the light laugh with which they were turned aside. He had come to like the sound of that laugh quite as well as the driver. He was not sorry when, on resuming their places, he found Miss Tucker seated beside himself. He could no longer bear to be only the recipient of kindness, and he exerted himself to show to his companion all those small courtesies of the road which occasion allowed. He talked very little, however, though he talked his very best; and his grave, respectful demeanor offered no index of the feeling, as new as it was delightful, which really thrilled through all the pulses of his being. It was not merely respect for the fine qualities he had discoved in her, nor wholly his kindling admiration for her rich and glowing beauty, but an emotion commingled with and, far transcending both-a delicate and subtle pleasure in the presence of a large and gracious woman which his whole man's nature acknowledged and bowed down to.

CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.