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MARY CLAYTON.

NEAR the close of a sultry afternoon in August, two young men might have been seen emerging from a narrow path that led through the woods upon an unfrequented road. As they seated themselves to rest beneath an overspreading elm, and raised their coarse, broad-brimmed hats to wipe the drops of perspiration from their brows, we can see they are unaccustomed to such hard tramps, whilst the guns leaning against a tree, and the well-filled game-bag by their side, tell the story of their wanderings.

Soon one, who had been for some time whistling, sang in a loud, clear voice, the first stanza of "The Old Oaken Bucket," and was commencing the second:

"The moss-covered bucket I halted as a treasure,
when he was interrupted by his companion, with the words:

"Fred, do stop that; it is hard enough for a fellow to be tired out, and choking, without you tantalizing him."

"Well, it is too bad, Hal. But, I say, would you feel very badly to see one of the aforesaid buckets? I am sure I should not."

"No, Fred; but that is a view to which distance lends added enchantment. There is not the least sign of a habitation. To tell the truth, I think we have lost our bearings."

"Perhaps so. At any rate we must be moving on, or night will overtake us.—This is only a lumber road, but it must join the main road somewhere."

"Yes, provided we are going toward that somewhere. We will hope for the best."

Plodding wearily on, they reached at last a road that appeared more traveled. Here they came to a stand-still, not knowing the best direction to go. On either side were high hills, and up these they toil. As they gain the summit and look around, expecting to see the same uninhabited waste, what was their astonishment to see, snugly nestled in the valley beneath, a small white cottage, with its numerous outbuildings, whilst near the door stood, if not the identical well of the song, another similar.

With quickened steps they hasten up. Opening the small lattice-work gate, up the customary narrow path, they reach the front door, where, in their eagerness, they gave a rap with the knocker that must have awakened the seven sleepers, if that was the place of their repose.

It was answered by an elderly colored woman, who started with surprise at seeing strangers. Fred, raising his hat, said:

"Would you please give us a drink of cold water?"

"Certainly," she replied, and went to procure a glass. Soon, not a woman, but a beautiful maiden, appeared at the door. She invited them to enter and rest. This they were only too happy to comply with.

Opening a door into the room at the right of the entry, she ushered them into a small, but handsomely furnished parlor. A gentleman of noble and commanding mien approached to greet the strangers. Extending his hand most cordially, he invited them to be seated. The house and surroundings, also the inhabitants, denoted more refinement than is usually met in such sparsely settled localities.

The young gentlemen introduced themselves, and explained the object of their being in the neighborhood. Mr. Clayton (as the host informed them was his name) entered into an animated conversation, evidently much pleased to hear so directly from their city home. Again the door was opened, and the young lady came in, carrying, not a silver salver with the ice

pitcher and goblet—no, it was before their day; and, if not, we doubt if our rustic beauty had ever seen such articles.

Upon the small waiter in her hands was a pitcher of clear, cold water, drawn, as her father laughingly explained, from the northeast corner of the well. Besides the china plates and heavy glass tumblers, there was a dish of real country doughnuts, that made the eyes of our tired and hungry guests glisten with pleasure.

Did you ever eat any of these cakes? We do not mean the tough, grease-soaked articles called by that name, but light tender balls, whose exterior is of a delicate brown, and in whose heart you will find encased some favorite jelly, and wonder how it could have got there. Then you know the enjoyment of Fred and Hal, when taste was added to sight.

Feeling greatly refreshed, with many thanks, and leaving part of the contents of their game-bag behind, they bade adieu to their entertainers, and started for Farmer Williams', where they were boarding. Leaving them for awhile, we will give a short sketch of Mr. Clayton.

Born in the country, he had left it when a lad to seek his fortune in the city. There, entering a law office as a boy, he had by hard study and perseverance, fitted himself for the practice of that profession, and was admitted to the bar. By his strict integrity and attention to business, he had been called to occupy many positions of trust and honor. Married late in life to one whom he almost idolized, on his wife's death, which took place when Mary was about five years old, he determined to give up his busy life, and devote his time to the education of his daughter. He had come to Glenwood and purchased the retired spot where he is first introduced to the reader. Mary's old nurse remained with them as housekeeper. Mr. Clayton occupied his time in cultivating his farm, and instructing his child. He had brought from the city his large library, and on his yearly visit to the metropolis, added to the number of books. Mary was a loving child. Her mind, of a high order, eagerly drank in the instructions of her father. Could you have watched them in their rides and rambles, you would have deemed them more like brother and sister, for with his daughter Mr. Clayton made himself a companion.

At the time our story opens, we find Mary possessing a highly cultivated mind, and endowed with uncommon beauty. Do you ask if she was contented with her secluded life? Often she would have longings for the gay world, but they soon passed away. Although mingling somewhat with the villagers, she had no congenial companions. She was considered proud and haughty, and at few places was Mary so well known and loved as at Farmer Williams'.

Days passed. The young men found it a very pleasant route by the white cottage. Fred seemed to have some excuse always ready for stopping, very important to himself, but very transparent to his friend. After a vacation of two weeks, Hal was obliged to return to the city, whilst Fred determined to remain for another week.

We will briefly relate a conversation which took place between the friends the night before Hal's departure:

"Fred, you must be careful of your attentions to Mary Clayton, unless you mean to marry her, and you know that is out of the question."

"Fudge! Can't a man look at a girl without being engaged? I am sure I have no such intentions."

"Then do not give her reason to suppose so."

"Dear me! Just as though I would take a wild flower like her. What would my lady mother and stylish sister say? But then, she is a good girl, and has helped to pass away many hours that otherwise would have been very tedious. Marry her, indeed! what an idea!"

Yet why did the hot blood flush his cheek? Or why did he dream of Mary all night? But such is the human heart.

Passing over the intervening time, we come to the evening preceding Fred's departure. As usual, he is wending his way toward Mr. Clayton's. Seated upon the porch is Mary. Her eyes anxiously scan the road. When she sees the well-known form, they sparkle with a happy light. As Fred approaches nearer, she lets her gaze fall upon the book in her hand. We do not know how much she read, for Fred, coming up behind her, says:

"That must be a very interesting book, Miss Clayton."

Then, for the first time, she perceived the volume was upside down. As Fred's

merry laugh pealed out in the air, her face became crimson with blushes. Noticing her embarrassment, he said:

"It is a splendid evening. Will you not take a walk with me?"

They passed through the garden and down a well-trodden path, to a grove of trees, where a little brook tossed and foamed over the rocks, forming many a miniature cataract, then glided silently through the neighboring valley. It was a beautiful evening. The moon, queen of night, with her star-bespangled train, rode far above their heads, casting weird shadows from the old trees along their pathway. Neither seemed to notice the beauty of the scene, for they passed silently along until they reached a rustic seat beneath an old oak.

"Mary, let us sit here awhile. I have much to tell you, and I wish to bid you good-bye."

"Why, you are not going?"

"Yes. To-morrow my time is up, and I must return to the city. Before I go I wish to tell you that which I never uttered before. I love you! Can you love me?"

In his earnestness Fred saw not the flushed face and downcast eyes. Taking her hand, he urged:

"Will you not say one word?"

Only a lover's ears could have heard the whispered, "Yes, I do love you."

His arm stole around her waist, and a happy kiss sealed their betrothal vows. Such scenes are private, and we will no longer intrude. They sat there exchanging confidences, until the falling dew warned Fred that he must guard his newly-won treasure. Passing her arm in his, he conducted her to the house, and into the presence of her father.

"Mr. Clayton," he said, "I have a great boon to ask before I go. I love Mary, and she has promised, with your consent, to be mine."

Mr. Clayton, although very much surprised, replied:

"Mr. Brainard, I have made inquiries about you amongst my city friends, and find that you bear an excellent character. If it had not been so, I should not have allowed Mary to be so much in your company. This I will say: If you love Mary, and she feels the same toward you, I will not refuse my consent. I only make one request. She is young, has seen little of the world, and is in many ways unfitted to adorn the society in which your family move. It has been my intention to travel with her. Now, what I ask is, that you will let the matter rest where it is. If at the end of the year you both feel the same, I will not withhold my blessing. It will be better to prove your love before rather than after marriage."

"But we may correspond?"

"No, it will not be best. Now, good-bye. I shall be happy to call you son if in the future you both wish it."

Mr. Clayton passed from the room, leaving the lovers alone. For a few moments neither spoke. The silence was broken by Fred:

"Well, perhaps your father is right; you may love me less in a year, but I shall never change. If at the end of the time you write to me to come to you, I shall most gladly comply."

Mary assured him of her unchanging love, and with faith in each other they parted.

Soon after Fred's departure, Mr. Clayton and his daughter left Glenwood for Europe.

A year had nearly passed bringing with it many changes. Hal Graham was married, and he often rallied Fred Brainard upon his flirtation (as he called it) with the country girl. Fred had been admitted as partner with his father in his large wholesale establishment. The son of a wealthy man himself, possessing good business qualities, of high moral standing, handsome in face, with commanding form, what wonder many a mamma deemed him a great matrimonial prize? But he passed coldly by all. He had heard only indirectly from Mary. He wondered if she had changed. But he would not doubt her love.

Again it was August. The city was almost deserted. Fred's parents and sisters were spending the summer at one of the fashionable watering places. His sister's letters contained glowing accounts of a Miss Layton, a great belle, rich and accomplished. She was quoted in everything, until he was really interested.

As the time drew near when Mary, if still the same, should call him to her, he was anxious and restless, and thought the company of Miss Layton might help to pass away the interval.

On his arrival at the Springs, he was disappointed when his sisters informed him

that Miss L. was obliged to leave the previous day, but she had promised to visit them soon. Everywhere he heard the praises of Miss L. her playing and singing, her horsemanship, her beauty and dignity, until he was quite anxious to see the queen of hearts. Fred was about to return home, when he received a note, mailed at Glenwood, containing only these words:

"Mr. Brainard: If still the same, meet me at the little cottage on the fifth."

MARY.
How joyfully he read the words, saying to himself: "Then she is unchanged, and I may claim her." Telling his friends that he was called away on business, he hastily packed his traveling bag and left the hotel. Journeying as quickly as possible, he reached Glenwood on the morning of the fifth. After changing his dusty clothing, he sought the house of Mary.

As he trod the well-remembered path, how many pleasant fancies filled his mind of their meeting. On reaching the door it was opened by Mr. Clayton, who warmly welcomed Fred. Ushering him into the little room, he went to call his daughter. Again the door opens, but this time it is Mary who enters. She is the same, and yet not the same. Time has only heightened her beauty, whilst contact with so many different persons had added new dignity to her bearing. Fred felt that time had only made her the more worthy of his love. He approached to meet her, saying:

"Mary—my Mary—is it not so? for your note gave me to hope."

"Yes, Fred, I am yours."

After many loving words and brief notes of the past year, Mary went to find her father. Mr. Clayton coming forward, placed Mary's hand in that of Fred's with these words:

"My son, she is yours. You are worthy of her. May God bless you both."

That evening Fred wrote to his parents, telling them the story of the past, telling them that it was his intention to fulfill his promises at once by making Mary his wife. He trusted that she would be kindly received.

We will not intrude on the privacy of that family council, held on receipt of that letter. They were surprised, yet felt that he had gone too far to retreat with honor. They wrote in reply that it would not be convenient for any of the family to be present at the wedding; but they would prepare for a reception at home, and inviting them to their house until they could find a house for themselves, also extending an invitation to Mr. Clayton to accompany his daughter.

The weeks passed swiftly away at the cottage. Fred had made a short visit to New York, but he now returned to claim his bride.

It was a lovely day in October when the happy couple stood before the altar in the village church and plighted their vows, leaving the village immediately after the ceremony for the city. Mr. Clayton informed Fred during the journey that Mary was not a penniless bride, giving him at the same time a check for ten thousand dollars as a gift towards purchasing a house.

As they neared the city Fred became very anxious as to the reception Mary would meet with from his friends. But she seemed not in the least to doubt her power to please. As the carriage drew up before the door of the elegant mansion, obsequious servants opened the doors, showing the bridal party into the drawing-room, where the family were assembled to welcome them home. Mary had dropped a thick veil over her face, and as she leaned on Fred's arm he could feel her tremble—he thought with fear. His mother stepped forward to welcome her new daughter, when, Mary, throwing back her veil, turned her laughing face to them all.

"Why, Minnie Clayton, where did you come from?"

"Mary (or Minnie, if you prefer) Brainard if you please. I said I would come to see you soon. I hope you are glad to see me."

Fred stood by in utter astonishment at this scene, hardly knowing the meaning. His wife's welcome was so hearty that they seemed for a time to forget him. But turning to him they said:

"We did not dream that you knew Miss Layton."

"Neither did I, for Mary's name was Clayton, and this is her father, Judge Clayton," introducing the latter who had just entered the room, having waited behind lest his sudden appearance might hasten the denouement of the plot.

"Yes," explained Mary, "when I learned

Fred's sisters were at the Springs, and not wishing him to know of my whereabouts, I took advantage of a mistake in my name. But when I heard Fred was coming I fled with the promise to visit you soon, and I have done so."

There was an elegant reception at the Brainard mansion. On every side were heard the beauty of the bride, whilst the sisters never seemed to tire of her praises.

When spring came Fred bought and furnished a house near his father's. There we leave him enjoying much happiness. Mr. Clayton makes his home with his daughter, and as Mary's character develops day by day, her proud and loving husband never regrets that he gathered the hillside flower.

A MYSTERY.

A QUAIN looking woman, apparently about 50 years of age, took possession about five years ago, of the two-story and basement brick house, No. 135 East Eighty-seventh street, New York city, which constitutes one of a row of neat and comfortable structures between Third and Lexington avenues. She was oddly attired in clothing of a rather antiquated pattern, but of costly material. She was unknown and her deportment was mysterious enough to excite the curiosity and wonder of her neighbors. She was closely followed by a half dozen or more of large wagons filled with furniture, old in style, though expensive and substantial. After the strangely modeled furniture had been transferred to the dwelling, the drivers were paid and dismissed, and the doors and shutters of the house were instantly closed. For a day or two no sound from within was heard, except what might have been caused by the distribution and arrangement of the household goods, which included many queer looking trunks, boxes and barrels.

Peculiar as was the coming of the mysterious woman to those who watched, her habits of life were afterward found to be still more singular and incomprehensible. She seemed to live entirely alone in the formerly cheerful home, which was transformed into a silent, gloomy place, almost from the very moment of her arrival. Visitors during the day were unknown, but after dark there often came a young man of about 25 years of age, of whom she spoke, during her rare intercourse with her neighbors, as "my nephew, Byron." Her visitor was occasionally accompanied by older, sometimes gray-headed men, and all, as was his own invariable habit, were accustomed to remain until late in the night.

About six weeks ago, the eccentric occupant of the house suddenly ceased her evening walks, and her dwelling seemed utterly deserted. One evening about the time of her disappearance, the young man "Byron" called at his usual hour and rang the door-bell. His summons being unanswered, he repeated it, and again received no response. After repeated attempts to attract the attention of his so-called aunt, and receiving no reply, he applied to James M. Sheenan, a lawyer, who resides next door, for permission to pass through his house in order to gain an entrance from the rear. Mr. Sheenan having, however, like other residents of the vicinity, become suspicious of the occupant of the house and her visitors, denied the application. The young man vainly urged the possibility of his aunt's sickness, and finally left Mr. Sheenan's but loitered near the house until two hours or more past midnight, when he left, and has never since been seen in the vicinity.

About two weeks ago the family of Mr. Sheenan began to be annoyed by an unpleasant odor of unaccountable origin.—Day by day it became more perceptible, until at last it was sickening and extremely offensive. It was finally traced to the house occupied by the strange woman, and on Sunday morning the lawyer sought the Eighty-sixth street Station-house and made complaint to Police-Captain Cherry. Detective Hughes was promptly detailed to make an investigation. Gaining entrance to the suspicious house by a rear window, he was almost stifled by a deadly smell; but passing hastily through the deserted rooms, on the lower floors, which seemed to have been undisturbed for years, he was met at the stairs by an overpowering odor, which increased as he walked up, and was his guide to a horrible sight. In the rear room of the second floor, in a cramped position on the floor, lay the decomposed body of the reclusive, robed in a shabby calico wrapper, the sleeves of which were partly rolled back upon the putrid arms of the corpse as if the last act of its wearer was one of manual labor. As the detective entered the room a swarm of large rats scampered away in all directions. After a hasty survey of the room the detective returned to the station-house, and reported the discovery to Capt. Cherry.