

The Doctor's Joke.

THE OLD DOCTOR was what they called him. His mustache was gray, he was past forty-five, and not being married, was considered solitary. It mattered little to him. The care of his patients made him bright and active. His profession was sufficient for his wants. He was the loved and respected physician for half the families in the place, and he never wanted for company and friendship. Why he never married had been the speculation of the village. The subject was now threadbare, and they had ceased to talk of it. He saw much of female society, for he was one of those fine rare natures that make "brothers to girls."

Goodness! what a scattering there would be, and how all the old ladies would talk. "You need not care. It would be easy to act your part, and in a few weeks all would be comfortably over and everything would be serene again." "I declare, doctor, the more I think of it, the more amusing it seems. It is very wicked, no doubt, but then the case is a hard one—" "And demands heroic remedies." "Precisely. Now the next step is to get up a good lover. I shall not expect much. Any straw man that's convenient will answer. Do you know of one, doctor—a good one? He must be nice, and all that, or I couldn't endure it."

back until Monday. Of course she must wear the ring one more Sunday; and she did, in spite of cousin Mary Depford's remonstrance. On Monday she carried the ring still on her finger to the doctor. He was just starting off on a professional tour when she came, and was so merry, and there was so many things to talk about, that she quite forgot the ring. Besides, there stood the widow Bigelow, in the next yard, pretending to hang out her clean clothes on the line, and watching with both eyes. Cousin Mary Depford was harassing. They had a little 'spat,' after the manner of girls, and made it up on the strength of a promise from Sally that she would certainly return the ring to-morrow. On the morning she started, ring on finger, to duly return it. He was not at home. She went again, just before tea-time. He was at tea, and pressed her to take supper with his good old housekeeper and himself. She hesitated a moment, then accepted. She could quietly hand him the ring after supper, and in the meantime she might as well have a 'good time.'

"No—I—thank you. Not now." She put out her hand to sustain herself, and laid her unglowed fingers on the top of the gate post. She felt ready to faint with mortification, shame and disappointment. This was the end. It was only a joke—a pretence—and—"Miss Depford," said the doctor, in a low voice, "where is my ring?" She snatched her hand away, and, hiding it in her dress, turned away to hide her face. "Pardon me, doctor, pardon me; I am much to blame. I didn't mean any harm, and I hated—hated—" "Hated whom?" "That—Sam Barrett; and I was so glad to escape from him, that I am afraid I've done very wrong—very wrong indeed."

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