

The Reporter.

G. W. FOOTE, Editor and Publisher.

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Christmas at Maplewood.

BY EMMA GARRISON JONES.

It was mid-winter down at Maplewood Farm; the hills white with snow, and the branches of the giant elms, that stood guard round the old farm house, brown and bare.

Squire Marvin and his boys were down in the hollow gathering up pine-faggots; the old roan mare standing meditatively in the sunshine, while they heaped the wagon with the rich resinous wood.

But just as Lizzie was going out to do her errand, she was stopped in the doorway by a visitor. Cousin Simon from Sleepy Hollow, a young giant standing six feet in his boots.

'You'll not fail to come over now,' the young man urged at parting. 'Father's set his heart on having you all together—'twill be the last time he says; and the old lady's making wonderful preparations, I tell you.

Lizzie overturned the spices she was pounding, and grew rosy red to the very roots of her pretty brown hair; then bridling and shaking down that same pretty hair with a coquettish toss of the head.

'Well, what if he is?' she responded. Cousin Simon winked knowingly as he pinched her cheek.

'Nothing at all, little coz,' he replied, teasingly, 'only I thought you might care to know. If you don't, however, I think Susie Hastings will. I must drive by and drop her the news. Good by.'

Lizzie compressed her lips, and went on pounding her spices. What did she care? Cousin John and she had been play-fellows, and school-mates, and fast friends in years gone by. John always made a pet out of her; he brought her the reddest apples, and the largest nuts; and drew her on his sled in winter; and swam the lake to get her water-lilies in summer when he was a boy; and in ripier years they attended the same singing school and sat in the same pew at Church.

of it wrangled in her heart like a thorn. But she made up her mind to go to Sleepy Hollow with the rest, and in the excitement of getting up appropriate apparel she half forgot her vexation. Her dress was exquisite—an all wool merino of the richest and warmest crimson, trimmed with sparkling bugles and dainty lace, and a comb set with pearls to keep back her silken tresses.

Christmas-eve came at last. The great double-horse sleigh was drawn up before the door, ready to make a sharp start for Sleepy Hollow on the morrow. Just before the clear, wintry sunset, Miss Pamela dropped in.

'I've been running round all the afternoon,' she said, seating herself in the best arm-chair, and putting on her heavy shoes before the fire, 'wishing my neighbors a merry Christmas; and couldn't think of slighting you, Miss Marvin, thought I shouldn't wonder if the tramp don't give me my death o' cold. The snow's as slick as butter, and the wind cuts like a knife.

'They never was much, them Herkamps; they're a tight-fisted, stingy set; and many be the mouthful they've eat in our house when my poor father was alive. Ah, me! Christmas was Christmas then. Why, Miss Marvin if you'll believe me, my father had more for one night's handlings round than some folks have for their whole Christmas; but I s'pose you'll have a grand time down at Sleepy Hollow? You're all going?'

'Yes, we intend to go—uncle wishes all his relatives to be there. 'What for. Is he going to make his will?' By-the-by, Lizzie, John's come home—I saw him up at Miss Hastings' this morning.

Lizzie was figning up doughnuts from a seething cauldron before the fire; but as Miss Pamela delivered this piece of intelligence, she let the ladle fall, scattering the brown doughnuts over the carpet, and scalding her hands with the hot lard.

'Lizzie,' said the mother, gently, coming to her relief, 'let me finish these and do you go and bind up your hand; and then bring a glass of wine and a bit of cake for Miss Pamela.'

'Yes,' she continued, meditatively, 'John was over at Squire Hastings' this morning, and it's beginning to be buzzed about that he's sparking Susie. If it's true, I think it's a rare mean in him after keepin' company with Lizzie so long—I know it makes her feel bad.

'Don't worry yourself, Miss Pamela,' said Mrs. Marvin, smilingly, 'John will be sure to do right—he and Lizzie are cousins, and will always be good friends. I don't think Lizzie's much troubled about his attentions to Susie.'

She spoke, the last sentence in rather a loud tone, that it might reach Lizzie's ear. She was just returning with the cake and wine; but she did not need her mother's warning. Her brown eyes were bright and tearless, and her lip wore a scornful curl, which said plainer than words, that she was utterly indifferent to cousin John.

But that night, in her own room, with her face buried in the pillow, she gave way to her grief, and wept and sobbed like a child. 'Mother!' 'Well, dear?'

The sleigh was at the door, the horses champing at their bits, and sending out little rills of tinkling melody, in the early Christmas light. The boys were already seated, and Squire Marvin was impatiently awaiting his wife.

she fell to sewing, singing all the while as blithe as a bird. Never did the Maplewood hills listen to sweeter melody. Of course it was a little dull to spend her Christmas all alone, and she cheated out of her visit; but she did not care a straw about John—not she.

But when the day began to wane, and the bright, Christmas sun hung low above the gloomy pine-ridge; when the shadows gathered in the old sitting-room, and the crickets began to chirp beneath the hearth, poor little Lizzie grew terribly lonely. Her work was all done; she had put up the chickens and fed her pigeons; and now she could do nothing but sit before the great log fire and think. For a few moments she struggled against these thoughts, but they would come. She could see the great hall at Sleepy Hollow, the roaring fires, and the long Christmas table, with its brown turkeys and huge plum-puddings; and all her young cousins, so gay and happy. Would they miss her? Would any one call her name? Of course not. John had Susie Hastings to care for. He had forgotten the days when he used to call her his 'darling.'

The retrospect was too trying, the brave little heart gave way, and sliding down to the floor, she buried her face in the cushions of the old arm-chair, and let the tears, that had been making her poor head ache and throb all day, flow like April rain. The yellow Christmas sun dropped lower and lower; the little brown birds went twittering home to the hedges; it would soon be night—and then, what a jolly time at Sleepy Hollow! How gaily Susie would dance, in her handsome blue silk, costlier and prettier by far than her poor little merino lying up in the great oak chest.

There came a merry burst of sleigh-bells on the frosty air—But Lizzie did not hearken. Soon after a step upon the porch—Dick's, of course; he was bringing in the morning wood, but presently a strong arm raised the drooping little figure, and, sobbing and startled, Lizzie looked up into a smiling, bearded face, and felt herself clasped irresistibly to somebody's bosom.

'Oh! cousin John!' 'My darling! My little pet-bird crying and sobbing this way all by yourself! Did you think I had forgotten you? Did you think I could ever love any one but yourself, Lizzie?'

Lizzie straightened herself, cheeks and eyes blazing—her heart as proud as it was tender. 'But you didn't—' she began. 'No buts in the question,' he continued; not a word until you hear me. I did not write to you because I wished to leave you entirely free, to see if you would stand the test of absence and not forget me. I wrote Susie Hastings because, her father being old and infirm, she attends to his business matters. I was there yesterday morning, to close a bargain with him for the snugest, loveliest little nest of a cottage in the State. I should have been at Maplewood today, but I had pressing matters to look after. And now, you precious, mistrusting, jealous little darling, if I had time, I'd kiss every brown curl on your head. There, not a word, you are mine; I wouldn't hear 'No,' if you were to say it. So hurry, now, they are waiting for us at Sleepy Hollow. Run, and dress as fast as you can, but nicely, too, dear—for you are to be a bride to-night.'

Lizzie turned back in wide-eyed wonder. 'Yes, a bride, darling; your father and mother are willing, and mine are anxious, and the parson is in readiness—you will not object?'

Her cheeks bloomed like blush-roses; but she ran up into her room, and diving into the great chest, brought out the red merino, with its sparkling bugles and dainty laces, and the little pearl comb that was to hold back the tresses from the fair, sweet face. She was not a fashionable woman, and John did not have to wait long. In a very few moments she was at his side, tucked away in the buffalo robes, and the horses were going like the wind.

'You little silly, you,' whispered Susie Hastings, as she conducted her up-stairs. 'You wanted to make a bride of me, did you—you and Miss Pamela together? Bridemaid, that's my place, little one.'

And that night, in the light of the blazing wood fire, in the sight of hoary grandsires and blooming cousins, cousin John received his bride—and Christmas stars never looked down upon a fairer one.

A family passing through Detroit lost their tom cat. 'Come, children,' said the father, huskily, as he turned to the wagon, 'Johnny died of scarlet fever, little Mary went with the whooping cough, and now we've lost Sardimus! I shouldn't wonder if mother or I'd be the next to go.'

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