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SETH'S COURTSHIP.

YOU are the torment of my life, Seth Smith. What under the sun, moon and stars are you forever poking about my kitchen for?" and the speaker, a pleasant-faced serving-woman, looked up from the pumpkin she was sifting, with an expression of countenance which quite belied the severity of her words.

"You mean Miss Caroline's kitchen," said Seth with a grin, as he seated himself by the pine table, which he had been heard to say was whiter and shinier than Deacon Brown's bald head, and a considerable more wholesome looking.

"I rather think you know, Huldah, why I stick round in this ere way," he continued; "and if you really want me to tell you the story over again, I am just as ready now as I've been any time these last twenty years."

"Oh, get out!" replied Huldah, making an unnecessary racket with her sieve against the side of her milk pan. "Throw an armful of wood into that oven, if you want to do something. I ain't got no time to listen to stories."

Seth grinned again, and without stopping to reply, though his great mouth was eloquent with words, which Huldah might have seen, had she looked at him, were only postponed—arose and did as he was bid. Mechanically and abstractedly, he threw piece after piece of the dry, split wood into the oven, until Huldah, alarmed at the blaze which shot from its mouth, thrust him quickly to one side, and with a long poker, separated the burning mass.

"Well, I should like to know, Seth Smith," she exclaimed, as she finished, "what you wor doing? Ask a man to help you, and if he don't set the house a-fire, 'tain't his fault."

"You're more scared than hurt, Huldah," Seth replied coolly. "What shall I do now—stir the pumpkin for you?"

"No, you won't do anything of the sort," his companion answered. "If there's one thing that I hate above another, it's to have a man fussing about my cooking."

"I made my own pie last Thanksgiving," said Seth, with unintended pathos.

"More shame for you," replied Huldah. "There wasn't anybody to blame but yourself if you did, for you know that I'd come over and made 'em for you. All that I wanted was an invitation."

"Why, I've invited you hundreds of times to come and stay," said Seth, in that same pathetic manner.

"Well, suppose you have," was the irritated response. "I should like to know how you think Miss Caroline would get along without me? I've been in this kitchen a good many years, Seth Smith, and the folks that I served are all gone now, 'cept Miss Caroline, and I wouldn't give her the slip for a hundred men, no, not for a thousand! So you can put that in your pipe and smoke it quick as you're a mind to."

"That's the kind of tobacco I've been smoking ever since I can remember, Huldah," said Seth with a comical grin, but in a minor key for all that; "but I've kinder thought mebbe what you wouldn't do for a regiment, you might sometime see your way to do for the man you know you love. Huldah whenever you may say and—"

"Rake them coals again, Seth!" broke in Huldah, with a well-feigned interest in the oven. "At this rate I don't believe I shall get any baking done to day!"

"I tried, lately," Seth began again, quite ignoring the interruption, "to try

and put down this feeling that there couldn't nothing come on, but I might as well try to make myself over into a handsome man, Huldah, as to stop thinking of you."

"Well, there wor a time Seth," said Huldah, as she stirred the sugar and the spice into the golden pumpkin, and taking on a more confidential tone, "that I were willing to own up that I was tempted."

"When was that, Huldah?" inquired Seth, with a sigh, though his eyes were dancing with fun.

"When you got home from the war, and had to go on crutches then for a spell," cried Huldah. "Then it seemed to me it wor my duty to take care of you; and I remember well the day I'd made up my mind to say so. I was looking up the road expecting to see you come hippity-hopping down as you had been doing, when lo and behold! there you wor as fine as a fiddle, without any crutches at all, and walking almost as spry as you do this minute."

"I give 'em up before I really ought to, Huldah," said Seth, "because I thought you hated the sight of 'em; and now I find when it is too late, that they were my best friends. They're up in garret now, and I'll get 'em out if you say so."

"Don't be a fool!" said Huldah, with a snap. "I just wanted to get it into that thick head of yours, that if you needed me you'd have me in spite of anybody in the created world. Stir up them coals again!"

Once more Seth did as he was told, and as he raked the glowing embers, the door opened, and Miss Caroline, the mistress of this great house, and sole heiress of one of the richest estates in Massachusetts, walked into the kitchen. She might have been thirty and even more, but she looked about twenty-three or four with her fresh, almost childish complexion, light brown hair and beautiful gray eyes, with her long, dark, sweeping lashes. She was a little above medium height, and in face and figure was the very personification of grace and delicacy. Caroline Wyndham could never be called pretty, but she was as handsome and as proud a woman as ever walked the earth.

"So Seth is tormenting you again, is he Huldah?" the lady inquired laughingly. "You were so quiet down here, that I didn't know but that you had forgotten all about Thanksgiving preparations!"

"Now, Mis Caroline," said Huldah, annoyed as much as she could be with the mistress she was fond of.

"I've been talking kinder of serious to Huldah," Seth broke in. "But I can't see that it has amounted to anything."

"Keep it up," Miss Caroline replied. "There is nothing in this world tells like determination! It is very strange, that Huldah holds out so long against becoming Mrs. Smith;" and now the lady brought a spoon and tasted of the cook's pumpkin mixture, which was almost ready to be poured into the pie-plates. "A little more sugar, Huldah," she continued, and then, with another laughing glance at the awkward lover, who stood with his back against the kitchen door, added: "Why, Seth, I should have given in with half as much coaxing as Huldah has had."

"There are some folks you know, Miss Caroline, who are too proud to beg," said Seth, with a quick look at the lady; "but I'm glad I ain't ashamed to hang on to what I want. Huldah has been telling me that if I'd been obliged to go on crutches a little while longer, she'd had to give in." Miss Caroline turned away, and looked out of the window, but not before Seth had seen the color fade out of her face, and a little shiver creep over her supple figure. "I was down to Boston yesterday, Miss Caroline," Seth continued carelessly.

"Well, I suppose Boston is as well as usual," the lady replied, with a poor attempt at facetiousness.

"Lively as ever," Seth responded. "I run up to the West End to see how Colonel Lovell was getting along. I always like to call on him whenever I get a chance."

If Miss Caroline imagined that Seth was going to volunteer any more information she was certainly disappointed. After a pause of a few seconds, she re-

marked, with apparently very little interest in what she was talking about: "I suppose the Colonel is still improving? At least I've been told he was doing very well."

"Oh; they are all fools," Seth replied, angrily. "The Colonel can walk round the room a little on crutches, and that's something he never expected to do.—Just think, twelve years, Miss Caroline, without walking a step. I tell you that last Bull Run gave him a dose."

"Isn't that better?" the lady inquired crossly, the blood coming back to her face in a great surge. Some emotion must manifest itself, and, as sometimes happens, in cases where there has had to be a great repression, anger is the first to come forward.

"That's better as far as it goes," said Seth, "but the Colonel's health is very bad, and the doctor says if he don't have something to rouse him from the awful fix he's got into he's a goner. He looks fearful, Miss Caroline. His eyes are as big as saucers, and he's pale as a ghost."

"Well, we have all got to be ghosts some time," the young lady answered, after a pause, and with an assumption of heartlessness which was utterly foreign to her nature.

"I shall be obliged to you, Seth," she continued a moment after, "if you will ask John to saddle Nero. I will be ready in ten minutes."

"You've done it, Seth Smith," said Huldah, in rage, as her mistress walked out of the kitchen and closed the door. "Going to ride Nero. I don't believe the Old Harry himself has got a horse in his stable that'll come up to Nero for viciousness. If you'd only held your tongue she'd helped me to make some cake, and been as peaceable as you please. Now she's all worked up."

"I'm glad of it," said Seth. "It's time somebody was worked up, and if you could see the Colonel you'd think so too."

"Yes," said Seth, "of course he did.—'Tisn't likely an honest, square-minded man like Colonel Lovell would expect a woman to stick to an engagement with a cripple for life, is it? But I'm just as sure as if I'd heard him say so, that he never thought Miss Caroline would take him at his word. She thinks he wanted to get rid of her, so there's a pair of idiots together."

Seth went out to the stable saddled Nero, and brought him round to the front of the house. Miss Caroline had a spot on each cheek, as she walked down the hawthorn-hedged path to the gate where Seth waited.

"John wasn't anywhere round," said Seth, apologizing quite humbly, for doing the lady a kindness; "and so I brought the horse round myself. Shall I give you a mount, Miss Caroline?"

"Yes; thank you, Seth," she replied, springing at once to the saddle, and while her companion held the snorting and impatient Nero, Miss Caroline drew on and buttoned her gauntlet gloves.

"I don't know but this beast will be the death of you, sometime, Miss Caroline!" Seth remarked as he stepped out of the way of the dangerous hoofs.

"Oh, well," the lady replied, "if he is, there's one good thing, there won't be any one to care very much about it."

This was said with childish petulance, but the tender look in the deep gray eyes, and round the lips which would tremble in spite of all efforts, touched her companion to the heart.

"Seth," she broke out again, before he could collect his wits to reply, "you are always talking to me or at me, which means the same thing, only it is more disagreeable, about Colonel Lovell, and as if I were in some way responsible for all that has happened to him. Now, I want to tell you one thing, and I hope you will remember it sufficiently to spare me in the future, and it is this—I am no more to blame for Colonel Lovell's being alone and unhappy, either in the past or in the present time, than I am for the wounds which have made him an invalid all these years. If he had allowed me, I should have been with him, not as a duty, but because I couldn't be anywhere else, in comfort; but I could not force myself upon Colonel Lovell, Seth. You have heard of course that he broke the engagement. I have given everybody to understand this, because I could

not allow my friends to suppose that I would be mean enough to desert him in his great affliction. Since his cruel letter, Seth, by means of which he broke his promise, and mine, he has never sent me a message or written me a line. Now, do you think you understand the case enough, Seth, to stop speaking of Colonel Lovell to me?"

These last words rang out in such a wail of anguish, that Seth's eyes filled with tears. Miss Caroline gave him no time to reply, for she took up her reins, and Nero and his rider were off like the wind. It wasn't but a few minutes before she came galloping back over the meadows and through the orchard, and so on to the kitchen door.

"Where's Seth?" she asked of Huldah, reining in Nero with great difficulty.

"He didn't come in again after he took the horse round," Huldah replied, and before she could say any more, Nero was wheeled around and bounded off in the direction of Seth's cottage, a quarter of a mile up the hill.

All that day Miss Caroline was restless and nervous. She was obliged to return without finding Seth, and so she wandered up and down the great house without any apparent motive, except to kill time, and when Huldah asked her if she wouldn't help her with the cake, she replied that there was cake enough in the house, and half an hour afterwards she entered the kitchen, with her cooking apron on, to try a new rule.

That evening, when Seth came round, Miss Caroline sent for him to come to the library.

"I never thought this morning, Seth, to tell you," she began, with averted face, "that what I said at that time was in the strictest confidence. I rode back to try to find you, for I began to be worried five minutes after I left you."

"I hope you don't think I would do anything to hurt you Miss Caroline?" "I don't think you would intend to, Seth," the lady explained, "but I didn't know but your desire to do me a service might render you indiscreet. You understand now, Seth, that your lips are always to be sealed in regard to that foolishness?"

"Yes Miss Caroline," Seth responded. "I'll never speak another word about it as long as I live, unless you give me leave," and here the interview ended.

Seth made desperate love to Huldah, the remainder of the evening, every once in a while bursting out into the most unexpected fits of laughter, and these spasms were so contagious that Huldah found herself joining in, without any idea of what she was laughing about.

"Say, Huldah," Seth remarked, just as he was leaving, "I want you to promise me one thing."

"I'll see," said Huldah.

"I want you to give me your sacred word of honor that if Colonel Lovell and Miss Caroline ever get married, you'll marry me the same day."

"Lor yes!" Huldah laughed, "and I'll do better than that, Seth. I'll promise to be your wife the day Colonel Lovell steps his foot into this house, or the day Miss Caroline steps foot in his."

"All right," said Seth, "but suppose he's brought in, instead of stepping in?"

"I don't care a hang how he comes," Huldah replied, "but that day shall see you and me one, and I'm safe in promising it, too, Seth Smith."

Seth walked off still laughing, and Miss Caroline, as she sat before the library fire, felt more alone than ever.—Within the past five years, her father, mother and sister, had been taken away by death, and to-night, of all nights since these terrible events, she seemed to herself most wretched and lonely.

The next day but one was Thanksgiving, and Miss Caroline nerved herself to meet this holiday with all the courage and philosophy she could bring to her aid. There used to be great feasting and merriment in the Wyndham mansion on such occasions, but the mistress of this beautiful home could not bring herself yet to open its doors for the old-fashioned hospitalities.

"I was in hopes you wouldn't cry to-day," said Huldah, Thanksgiving morning, as her mistress entered the dining-room. "Goodness me! my muffins are as light as feathers, and the coffee is un-

usually good, and seems to me this last ham we cut beats the rest all holler!—Now I'm going to broil a nice bit of tenderloin. Say, don't cry—there's a dearie!" and Huldah patted Miss Caroline's shoulder, and wept herself as she tried to comfort her mistress. "You've got a heap to be thankful for, Miss Caroline, after all," Huldah said, with a little protest in her voice.

"Yes, I know it," said Miss Caroline, wiping her eyes. "I have muffins and ham, to be thankful for, and a little more money and land than my neighbors," she added bitterly, and then—"I don't mean that I haven't anything, Huldah; for as long as I have you, I can't be quite desolate."

"Good gracious!" exclaimed Huldah. "I've got a lump in my throat as big as a loaf of bread!" and, as she left the dining-room, "You know Miss Caroline, that when I get to sniffing there ain't no stopping me."

Miss Caroline went to church that morning, and as she walked up the aisle to the Wyndham pew, there were no traces of tears on her face, and her bearing was as queenly as if, as many thought, her wealth and position entirely satisfied her. After the service was over, she greeted her friends and acquaintances kindly, and then got into her carriage and was driven home.

"Perhaps it would have been better," she moaned to herself, in her great loneliness, "to have taken somebody home to dinner with me. But how could I make them happy, with this heavy heart of mine?"

When the carriage stopped at the front gate, Seth was on hand to open the door.

"Good sermon, Miss Caroline?" he asked.

"I don't know Seth," she answered, "for I believe I didn't hear a word of it."

"That's a pretty way to go to church!" her companion laughed and added carelessly, "Say, Miss Caroline, you've got company to dinner to-day."

"Only one," Seth continued "and he's making himself easy before the library fire. You needn't be in a hurry, if you've got any fixing up to do."

Just here, Seth dodged round the corner of the house, and when Miss Caroline called upon him to come back, he didn't reply and the lady walked into the house like one in a dream. Very slowly and deliberately she removed her things, and then stepped into the parlor, which room communicated with the library. The folding doors were partly opened, and the first thing that met the lady's longing eyes, were a pair of crutches, standing in an angle of the mantle. A little further, and there, in her favorite lolling chair, reclined the man whom all these long years she had so faithfully loved. Her step was as a fawn's, but Colonel Lovell heard it, and was prepared for her coming. Stepping behind his chair, Miss Caroline, placed a tender hand on each side of his cheeks and kissing his forehead, said, softly, between a sob and a laugh.

"My dear, I thank God you have come."

Kneeling beside him with her fair head on his breast, and his loving arms around her the Colonel said: "Seth brought me to dine with you. Did you know it, my darling?"

"And you shall never, never go away," Miss Caroline replied, "until you take me with you."

Just here, there was a knock on the door, and Seth and Huldah entered arm in arm.

"I'm just come up," said Seth with his usual promptitude, "to tell you that Huldah and me was going to be spliced this afternoon, and to ask you if the parson mightn't kill two birds with one stone?"

Miss Caroline lifted a blushing, laughing face to her lover's out replied quite clearly: "It seems to me that would be an excellent plan."

"Is it not a shame?" the Colonel began, but a little hand was placed over his mouth, and the sentence was never finished.

"Well, Seth has come it over me this time, awful," said Huldah; "but I gave my word, and I can't go back on it." "You were wiser than I Seth," said Miss Caroline; "I shall be grateful to you as long as I live." "And I," said the Colonel. That evening there were two weddings in the Wyndham mansion. Did the Colonel get well? Of course he did.