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[From the Sunny South.]
ROMANCE OF A 'LITTLE SHOP.'

BY ANNABELLE BARKER WHITE.

Whack! whack! whack! The ringing sound of a hammer fell on the pleasant coolness of the air with a distinctness that showed the strokes were given with a vigorous and practiced hand. Mr. Forrest Rutherford turned his head in the direction whence the sound proceeded, and saw a queer looking little house fronting the leafy lane up which he was slowly riding. "I must be near the place," he so-
liloquized. "I will enquire at this house, which seems to be a carpenter's or follower of Vulcan's. Hello!" and he reined in his steed before the open door. A slight contorted him which made him exclaim *sotto voce*: "Shades of Minerva! what do I see?"

What he saw was a young lady with a broad brimmed hat pushed off her brow and a pair of huge gloves on her hand, dutily wielding a heavy hammer. "I beg your pardon, miss," he said lifting his hat with a courtly grace. "but will you tell me if I am on the right road to Squire Snowdon's?" The young girl did not start or blush or let fall the hammer, as an ordinary girl would have done on being so suddenly and directly addressed by a handsome stranger. She turned her brown eyes upon him and quietly replied: "If you ride on a little further, you will see the house on the right of the lane."

Then she turned back to her work—for work it surely was, to judge by the nails, hammer, numerous small saws that lay on the bench before her, together with a pile of richly-colored red lumber in one corner of the room and a chest of carpenter's tools in another. This summarily dismissed, the young man perforce resumed his journey, not without many a backward, reluctant gaze.

"Talk about the curiosity of woman, but I don't believe the man lives that would not give any thing to know what that girl is doing. In the name of wonderful womanhood, what can she be up to?"

But further anxious musings were cut short by sight of the large, handsome white house that now came in view. It was a beautiful place, and eloquently testified to its owner's taste and opulence by the grand old trees, the beautiful and abundant flowers, the winding walks, the summer houses and the fountain that tinkled musically as its cooling spray fell into a marble basin upheld by snowy-limbed Tritons.

"I surely must congratulate myself on being so fortunate as to procure a retreat for the summer in this terrestrial Paradise." His approach had evidently been observed, for as he paused before a large white gate, it slowly swung open and discovered a small boy in waiting. "Please, sah, Mass Joe says ride up to the east piazza and go in. He in de lib'ry."

The young man did as directed, following the windings of the broad, gravelled drive which led up to the "east piazza."

"Ah! Mr. Rutherford, come in, come in," and a muffled and gentleman of stately presence came out with outstretched hands of welcome. "I am glad to know one young man of the nineteenth century can remember and fulfill a promise," and his cordial, mellow laugh filled the room as he drew forward an easy chair, then rang the bell.

"Thank you, sir; but not many young men have so pleasant a promise to fulfill." Refreshments were now brought in, and as Forrest slowly sipped his wine—the quonon of Southern hospitality in *ante-bellum* days—Mr. or Squire Snowdon, as he was more familiarly called, said:

"I hope you will enjoy the summer here, though if you depend on tennis society I fear you will have a dull time of it, for ladies, young and old, are like 'angel visitants.'"

Forrest thought of the young lady he had just seen, but said nothing. When he thought his guest sufficiently rested (though the latter declared he was not at all wearied by his fifty mile journey by rail and five of horseback exercise from the station), Squire Snowdon invited Forrest to stroll over the delightfully laid

our grounds. When they reached the house, they found they had barely time to dress for dinner. As he opened his room door, after making his toilet, Forrest saw the squire slowly advancing along the hall.

"I thought I would guide you to the dining room. Having no company, we do not dine *en regle*, but will proceed directly to the table."

They descended the stair, walked a little way down the hall, and the Squire opened a door on the right. The room was brilliantly lighted, and the china gleamed white, the cut glass and silver glittered. But it was not any of these that made Forrest start and with difficulty suppress a little ejaculation of surprise and admiration. A young lady in flowing white, with fresh pink roses trembling in her satiny braids and curls and nodding at her white, dainty throat, stood at one of the open windows. She slowly turned as the door un-
closed, and let her wonderful brown eyes rest on the amazed face of the visitor.

"My daughter Clare, Mr. Rutherford."

"But I thought you said there were no young ladies in the neighborhood," Forrest could not refrain from saying.

His host laughed easily. "I did not think of Clare. Besides she partakes too much of the Diana-Minerva character to be called a 'young lady.' Would you believe it? She shot and stuffed all those birds you were admiring in the library this evening."

"Papa, will you please give me some fish?" the young lady's rich voice interposed softly, and glancing at her, Forrest saw a faint flush staining her snowy brow.

The enigma was solved. By the aid of those large, calm eyes and her father's words, he recognized her as the girl carpenter he had accosted in her own shop! For before the evening was over, the Squire had pointed out various little-carved brackets, frames, selves, etc., fashioned by his daughter's deft fingers.

"I always end my evenings with music when the goddess is propitious," said the Squire, smiling on his daughter as he opened the piano and placed some sheets of music thereon.

Clare quietly glided forward and took the stool. Presently a wonderful voice rippled out, filling the room with its rich melody. As she sat there, Forrest had time to scan her critically.

"What a wondrously beautiful girl!" he thought. Hair of gold waved back from a sweet, womanly brow; brown eyes of marvellous depth and expression; a rare-ripe mouth; rounded cheeks flushed with delicate pink; graceful neck and snowy throat; faultlessly moulded arms and hands with taper fingers—these were her outward graces that took captive Forrest's by no means susceptible heart. He gazed in wonder at those dainty fingers, and could not believe they ever fashioned anything more cumbersome than the foamy lace that encircled her throat.

Forrest went to bed that night feeling as if a stream. When he closed his eyes, that lovely face floated over him, and he christened it "St. Cecilia," but when he thought of her wielding hammer and saw, they would open wide, and the sweet vision would leave him.

At an early hour the next morning he descended to the east piazza. A beautiful black pony accoutred for a lady stood before it, impatiently pawing and champing his bit.

"Is that horse safe for a lady?" he queried of the groom who held the bridle.

The fellow shook his woolly head slowly and doubtfully.

"Dunno 'bout dat, sah, but Miss Clare she ride 'im."

A soft rustle sounded behind Forrest, and he turned quickly. Miss Clare, in a perfectly-fitting dark blue habit, with a broad brimmed hat of a richer blue, caught up on one side with a silver buckle, from which floated a sable plume—Miss Clare stood before him. With a bow and a "Good morning," he stepped aside to let her pass, then followed her down the steps to assist her on her horse. With a little wave of her gantleted hand, she sprang into the saddle un-assisted, and the impatient pony dashed off. He grinning groom went off chuckling and wagging his head. For a stupefied moment Forrest stood

gazing after the fleeing vision, then turned and slowly walked away.

Two hours afterward, Clare was gracefully presiding at the breakfast table, looking, in her cool muslin, as innocent and calm as a dew-bathed rose. As she rose from her seat, Forrest sprang up to unclose the door.

"Now or never," he thought with palpitating heart. "Miss Clare, do you walk?"

She stood quietly before him. "Sometimes."

How that one word, uttered in her rich, sweet voice, thrilled him!

"Can I," said he, bending forward with ill-suppressed eagerness, "can I have the pleasure of your company for a walk to-day?"

She lifted her eyes to his. "Thank you; but I shall be otherwise engaged."

With a bow she passed on. He closed the door and re-entered the dining-room, where the Squire was still reading his paper. The latter looked up.

"Rutherford don't you shoot?"

"Sometimes," he answered; but how differently the word was spoken from the "sometimes" that was still thrilling on his ear.

The Squire laughed. "You don't speak very enthusiastically. However, when you feel like it, just help yourself to anything in this closet; and he rose and opened a door.

"What a deadly looking little room," said Forrest coming over to it.

It contained any and everything that would delight the heart of a hunter.

"This is Clare's," and the Squire took up an elegant shot gun.

Forrest reached out for it.

"How cruel it seems," he muttered, running his hand along the barrel, "for a lady to use this."

The Squire glanced up quickly.

"Do you think so? Don't dare to tell Clare that; and he laughed again as he took the gun and replaced it in the closet. "Poor child! she has never had a mother's care, for my wife died when she was a mere babe, and she has grown up at home. Never been to college, but was educated at home by masters. Didn't even have a governess; so if you see anything queer about the girl, excuse it. He hesitated, with the door in his hand.

"You won't take one of these?"

"Yes, I will; and entering the closet, Forrest fitted himself out with game-bags, powder shot and gun.

When outside of the house he stopped and laughed.

"I'll kill two birds with one shot," and he set off.

Down the leafy lane he went, past the little shop. But the door was fast shut. No glimmering curls or bright brown eyes met his sight. He went on a little further. A brawling brook stopped his course. He sat down on a mossy log and began to cast stones into it. A little impatient exclamation surprised him. Looking hastily up, he caught sight of a pink muslin and a "sundown."

"Miss Clare!" he cried, springing to his feet. But Miss Clare was slowly winding up her line.

"I am having no luck," she said "and shall fish no more to-day."

Taking her empty basket on her arm she rose.

"Pray do not go," he said, in a distressed voice. "I am angler enough to know I disturbed you by—"

"Pray do not apologise," she said with that little imperious wave of the hand that was peculiar to her. "I see you have your gun, so I shall not detain you. I wish you more success than ever I had." And she was gone.

He watched her out of sight, then threw himself down on the sedge-lined rock she had vacated. Just here the brook widened into a pool. Trees and trailing vines bent over it and mirrored themselves on its sad calm surface a mocking-bird perched itself on a woodbine treacherous with scarlet bloom, gazed at him awhile with its dainty neck cunningly aside, then broke into silver trills.

"Ah! sweetest songster of the woods, would that I could charm as wisely as you." Then he broke into a merry whistle, and the two had quite a concert. A bright face drew cautiously back from a huge tree, and a light form flitted away.

It was high noon, and Forrest Rutherford was just appearing on the edge of the woods that skirted the lane. He paused under a lofty tree and removed his Panama from his brown curls, resting his gun by his

side. His game bag looked woefully flat, and his duck pants were as spotless as when he left the house. Evidently his hunt had been as fruitless as Clare's piscatorial exercise. Perhaps the mocking-bird had charmed all evil intentions from his mind, and the feathered race had one more day of peace.

"Ah! the temple is open. Is it symbolical with the temple of Janus? Open in time of war, shut in peace," he mused as he sauntered along the lane, hat still in hand.

"Good morning, Miss Clare; may I enter?"

The girl at her bench turned and coolly replied:

"No admittance in business hours. Ah! I beg your pardon, Mr. Rutherford; I was so engaged I did not know it was you."

"Can I not give you some assistance?" and he walked up easily to her side.

She pushed back the hat that shaded her face and her clear gaze once more met his without faltering.

"Mr. Rutherford, if you please I prefer to be alone when here."

For a moment he looked embarrassed, then making a low bow, became gravely sedate.

"I cannot tell you how I regret this intrusion, and beg you will pardon me."

"On condition that it does not occur again," she coldly replied, turning to take up a curiously carved piece of walnut.

He went out biting his lips, resolved to go away to-morrow. But summer waned, and he still lingered. One morning he was pacing up and down before a summer-house, musing:

"For three months I have been trying to solve the enigma called Clare Snowdon, but am no nearer a solution than the first day I saw her in her shop." Will she come?" and he paused and glanced up the walk anxiously.

A figure that made his heart throb wildly met his gaze. Robed in a black spotted muslin, a drooping hat shading the delicate features, the golden ripples of hair confined but not concealed by a black, loosely-meshed silken net the hands covered with gannets, Clare came straight on to the summer-house.

"I received your note, Mr. Rutherford, and—am here."

The cool, rich voice fell on his heart like music.

"Clare," and he met her without formality as he took her hand and led her to a seat, "I go away to-morrow."

She looked up with expectant eyes and hands folded loosely in her lap. A little tremor broke up his voice as he went on:

"I asked you to come here, Clare, to tell you—I love you."

The eyes fell and the hands tightened their clasp.

"I love you and I ask you to be my wife. Will you?" and he took the clasped hands in his. There was the slightest trembling in them, but the voice did not falter.

"No, Mr. Rutherford, I cannot be your wife, for—I do not love you."

She went out of the summer-house but did not go to her work-room as she had intended. Instead she sought her own room, where she remained until dinner. He watched her vanish then sighed as if awakened from a pleasant dream.

"Is there a girl in the whole world like her? I think not."

"Come, Forrest, what is your ideal wife?"

"My ideal wife," he replied, dreamily, "is a woman with golden hair and dark eyes, skin of lily and roses, and figure of elegant grace; she must wear softly-flying white broad-brimmed hat, and her voice—ah! I wish you could hear her voice."

"By Jove! I believe you have seen her!" and the speaker's feet came down from their elevated position with a crash that startled the dreamer into wakefulness, but he quietly said:

"You are right; I have seen her."

"Come," said the other, as he balanced the cigar between his thumb and forefinger and dexterously knocked the ashes from the end with his little finger; "that's promising. Tell us about it."

Forrest looked him straight in the face.

"For two years I have carried that picture in my heart but I never give it

a name. You may call it St. Cecilia or Diana Vernon."

"The two combined might make a very passable wife, but," and the shoulders went up with a very successful Gallic shrug, "there is to be a dinner at Ball's to-day. I suppose you are going," and Guy Logan stretched his graceful figure and yawned preparatory to rising for his hat.

"No, it is so insufferably dull there with three old maid daughters. I prefer to remain at home and write letters."

"To the fair one with the golden hair," no doubt, and with a laugh Guy closed the door and ran lightly down the stairs, humming a fragmentary tune.

"Guy has given me a hint. Shall I act on it?"

He drew his handsome writing desk toward him, toyed with the golden pen a moment, then taking a sheet of paper, with firmly-compressed lips, began to write.

"You say that you still love me. Perhaps you mean you love my-
featured Clare Snowdon, you left two years ago. What will you say—what can you say—when I tell you—oh how I shudder to write it!—one year ago I became a victim of that odious disease, the small-pox. Need I write more? I think not. I think this answer will be sufficient to quell all love for Clare Snowdon, whom you love for her beauty only."

"This was the letter Forrest received in reply to the wildly-pleading, passionate one he had written two weeks ago."

"What must she think of me? My darling, to me you will always be beautiful; he murmured passionately kissing the delicate chirography. Then he once more drew his desk to him and framed the following:

"Clare, my Clare my darling, beautiful Clare no matter if your eyes are dim; no matter if your face is scarred with scars to me you be the same. Write me only one little word; tell me to 'Come.'"

"Come!"

That one "little word" in Clare's beloved chirography set his heart wildly thrilling.

"I think the mocking-bird might, make a heart-beats to day," he thought as he rapidly rode toward the leafy lane and little shop.

Again the sound of the hammer fell on the crisp October air; again the handsome horseman drew rein before the open door. Clare was unconscious of his approach till his strong arm held her to his heart and warm kisses fell on the rapturous lips.

"How can you love me after—after what I wrote you?" she murmured with her face hidden in his hands.

"Because I could not help it," he said drawing the hands down, "my beautiful Clare."

"But—how can you say I am beautiful?"

"Ah! you want me to flatter you which I shall not do. Clare—suddenly—"there is not a scar on your face, and your eyes are brighter than ever. How could you deceive me so?"

"I did not deceive you; I only told you I had small-pox, and you imagined the scars!"

Need I tell how the little shop was closed for many days after the blissful meeting, or of the happy wedding party that went forth from Squire Snowdon's Christmas day?

A lady in San Francisco recently had a visit from her sister, who was rich and wore diamonds. While the guest was preparing to go out one morning she laid on the bureau of her room a purse containing a splendid diamond pin and a good deal of gold, and when she had tied her bonnet string in an adjoining room, looked for the purse and could not find it. The two ladies, assisted by a servant made a thorough search, swept the house, moved the furniture, and ransacked in every direction, without avail. At midnight the lady of the house was awakened by the entrance of her sisters, who was acting in the most singular manner and was asking for writing materials. A pencil was given to her and she immediately covered a sheet of paper with scrawls, which were hardly decipherable. She soon lapsed into her normal condition, and two ladies set to work to decipher the writing. One sentence was repeated several times. It was this: "She had hid it under the stool." They decided that "she" meant the servant, and proceeded to her door they knocked for admittance. The girl unlocked the door and was told that she must dress and assist them in a further search for the pin. At the foot of the bed stood a covered stool, the cover reaching to the floor. Highly excited, the ladies rushed to it, tipped it over, and there lay the lost purse. The servant turned, ran down stairs, unlocked a door and rushed into the street. The lady who had the dream and wrote the blind hand is not a Spiritualist. She is a blue Presbyterian.