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Song of the Season.

Come meditative muse—fantastic fay!
Come, rack your sconce and rake your tunes together,
Get up and stir yourself without delay,
Let's slug the weather!

Hail, snow flakes, snow storm, snow drift, heap on heap,
These are delightful where the mud was odious;
Tender thy strain in midst of winter sleep,
Thou snower melodious!

Now blithe lads pelt each other with the snow,
Now roses deck the cheek and noses tingle
And warm hearts hide beneath the buffalo,
And sleigh-bells jingle.

The jolly wind a serenading goes;
To show each lovely damsel what he kin do;
He plays on his catarrh and blows his snows
Beneath her window.

The rural locomotive plies the plow;
The festive farmer flourishes the shovel;
The snow--(eight feet)--drowns and disguises now
Palace and hovel.

Three feet of ice upon the rivers freeze.
And Billy bellows like a bull of Bashan
When he falls down and bumps his head and sees
A constellation.

The pipes freeze up. No Croton, cold or hot:
And once more, as you do in summer,
You seek the sultan of the soldering-pot,
The opulent plumber.

This is the golden leisure-hour for sport;
The hour to play upon a flute, or go forth
And call at Deacon Stebbins', to court
Your girl, &c.

—*W. A. Croffut.*

ESTRANGED.

A MATRIMONIAL EPISODE.

As the horn sounded the call to breakfast Caleb Sterling came down the path which led from the barn to the kitchen door, a foaming pail of milk in each hand. The kitchen looked pleasant and cozy. A cheerful fire burned in the brightly-polished stove, by the side of which, in a soap box, a Maltese cat was contentedly purring to four small kittens. Geraniums bloomed on the window-sills, and the row of tins hanging above the long dresser shone as brightly as soap and sand could make them.

The breakfast was hot and savory, and the small, delicate-looking woman sitting behind the big coffee pot was very fair to the sight, with her large, dark blue eyes, curly hair, low, broad forehead and regular features. She was neatly dressed in dark blue flannel, made simply, and relieved at the neck and wrists by linen collar and cuffs, and protected in front by a large white apron.

Pleasant as was this picture of home comfort, the stern, angry look which Caleb Sterling's face had worn for several days past did not relax. He set the pails on a bench, washed his hands in a tin basin at the sink, and without a word took his seat at the table.

Neither did the wife speak. She poured out her husband's coffee and handed it to him without remark, and in utter silence accepted the broiled steak and fried potatoes he offered her.

The hired man had taken his breakfast an hour previously, in order that he might go to the village on an errand, and the husband and wife were free to exchange the sweetest confidences unheard. But apparently they had none to exchange. It was not until the meal was ended that the strange, oppressive silence was broken, save by the clatter of knives and forks.

Then, as he pushed back his chair with a great deal of unnecessary noise, and rose from the table, Caleb said, without looking at his wife:

"I'm going over to Squire Bligh's to see him about that corn he wants me to let him have. I'll be back before noon, and then I'll harness up and we'll go to Freestone to see Lawyer Kane. I sent him a note yesterday, making an engagement for this afternoon; so we won't miss seeing him."

And without waiting for a reply he put on his hat and overcoat and went out.

Rebecca Sterling did not rise as her husband left the room. She sat motionless, staring down at the breakfast tray before her with eyes that slowly filled with tears, and a hard and bitter expression on her youthful face.

It was about to end, then, this wrangling between Caleb and herself. They were to secure peace at the price of a separation. In a few hours they would be discussing the matter with a lawyer, laying bare to him the domestic infelicities which had brought them to such a pass and deciding on the division of the property.

Caleb was generous—she would not deny that—and he was sure to give her even more than was her just due; so no fear of future pecuniary distress troubled her.

But she knew the separation would cause a great deal of gossip. People were always so ready to discuss the private affairs of their friends and neighbors.

And then there were mother and Jane to be told. Rebecca felt sure they would be justly indignant, and would espouse her cause warmly when they learned all she had suffered at Caleb's hands.

And yet, now that she thought it all over, what had been Caleb's exact offense?

Their estrangement had begun with the employment of Jonas Stultz as man-of-all-work. Rebecca had taken a violent dislike to him, and had thought him too coarse and common to be admitted into the family circle. It would have been quite as easy to hire some one not so distasteful to her, she thought. She had no patience with the vulgarity of Jonas, and resented being brought into association with him.

But Caleb had a great regard for Jonas' working qualities, and treated Rebecca's request for his discharge as an absurd whim not worth even a moment's consideration.

This had angered Rebecca, and she had expressed herself very sharply and freely on what she termed her husband's "outrageous tyranny."

Mutual recriminations and reproaches had followed; old scores, trifling enough, and almost forgotten in the happiness and peace which had followed them, were recalled, expatiated upon and made much of. Time and reflection did not mend matters. The wrongs each cherished seemed to increase rather than diminish as they were brooded over; and finally a separation was decided upon.

The moment the decision was made the husband and wife would have rushed to the lawyer's office had it been possible.

But there was a storm raging without as well as within the old farmhouse, and the interview with Mr. Kane had been necessarily postponed until the following day.

"How glad I shall be to get back to mother and Jane," mused Rebecca, continuing to sit before the breakfast-table, heedless of the crying of the cat for her morning's meal or the fact that the cream was rising on the unstrained milk in the pails. "My dear, beautiful old home! How foolish I was to leave it and to imagine I would be happy with such a man as Caleb Sterling. But he was pleasant enough before we were married. He was careful to give me no chance to find out his real character until he had me bound to him. If I'd known what he really was, I'd sooner have gone to my grave than married him!"

Then her memory reverted to Seth Talbott, who had been her lover before Caleb appeared on the scene. Handsome Seth! How devotedly he had loved her! How considerate and gentle were his manners to women! Had she only been wise enough to accept him she would never have known such misery and regret as she was suffering now. And mother and Jane had thought her so fortunate in her marriage! They had admired Caleb, little dreaming what a cold, cruel heart he really possessed. They had no doubt of her future happiness when they intrusted her to his keeping. How blind they had been! In days gone by there had been a rumor that pretty Meg Darrow had rejected Caleb.

"She showed her good sense," muttered Rebecca now, as memory recalled the rumor.

The opening of the door roused her from her painful reverie. She looked up to see Jonas, the original bone of contention. He stamped the snow from his feet, pulled off his big woolen mittens and approached the fire, while Rebecca started up, covertly dashed the tears from her eyes, and began to clear off the table with an energy that made up for lost time.

"Where's the boss?" asked Jonas, regarding her flushed face and wet lashes with considerable curiosity.

He had not been unaware of the cloud which had risen on the domestic horizon, but did not imagine that he was at all to blame for it.

"Gone to Squire Bligh's," answered Rebecca, shortly; and Jonas gave a low whistle, mentally comparing her to a "snapdragon."

"Left any word for me?" he asked.

"No."

"Old Boswell give me a tellygram for you," said Jonas, after a pause. "I guessed I mought just as well save him the trouble o' sending Jake out with it"—producing a yellow envelope from his pocket.

"Why didn't you give it to me the instant you came in?" cried Rebecca, snatching it from him and tearing it open.

She had grown pale with apprehension of evil, and her pallor increased as she read:

"Come at once. Mother is very ill."

It was signed by her sister Jane.

"Jonas," said Rebecca, trying to speak calmly, "my mother is sick, and I must go to her without delay. You will have to take me into Freestone in time to catch the 2 o'clock train. Hitch up Brown Sally at once."

Jonas grumbled a little at the order, not liking the idea of going into town again so soon; but he obeyed it, and an hour later Rebecca was on the train, speeding away to her old home, some fifty miles distant from the one to which young Caleb Sterling had carried her five years before.

"Tell my husband that I will return as soon as possible," she said to Jonas, as he left her at the station.

And she did not think until she was nearly at the end of her journey of her engagement to go with Caleb to the lawyer's.

"But nothing will be lost by waiting a week or two," she decided.

She did not imagine that anything would be gained. The future is very wisely hidden from us.

"How is mother?" was the first question she asked of Jane, who met her on the arrival of the train at Edgeport.

"Decidedly better," answered her sister. "She has not been dangerously ill at any time, but she wanted to have you here. She was afraid she might take a sudden turn and die without seeing you again."

But no such catastrophe as Mrs. Moore's death occurred. She improved steadily under Rebecca's nursing, and in the course of a few days was able to sit up in an easy-chair.

And then Rebecca had time to think of something else than medicines, chicken-broth and gruel.

It seemed to her as if her old home was greatly changed—as if the rooms had grown smaller, the furniture less than of yore. There was a stiffness and chilliness about the house which had been unfelt in her girlhood, and was due, perhaps, to Janet's rigid management.

Rebecca could not but compare the home to which she had so longed to return with the one she had left, much to the disadvantage of the former.

And Jane had changed, too. She had grown sallow, thin and was particular to a fault; had merged from the kindly elder sister into the prim spinster of "uncertain age," to whom a tablecloth awry, or a spot of grease on the floor, seemed grievous sins against order and cleanliness.

Even the village was changed. Five years had made sad havoc in Rebecca's girlish friendships. Old friends had died, married and moved away to new homes, leaving few in whom she took any interest.

"It's well you didn't marry Seth Talbott," said Jane one day as she sat talking with her sister. "Folks say he treats his wife abominably—even beats her sometimes—and never gives her a cent. He's taken to drink, too. You made a fortunate selection in Caleb Sterling."

"Did I?" said Rebecca, quietly. "And yet I don't believe the married life of any one is all sunshine and love, Jane, as you would find out if you ever tried it."

"I wish some one as good as Caleb would give me the chance," said Jane, frankly. "The life of a single woman isn't all sunshine and love, either. And there's the loneliness. If mother should die there wouldn't be an excuse for my existence."

"You would find something to do, Jane."

"What? Every avenue open to women is already overcrowded, and I might take a place that was needed by some one on the verge of starvation or suicide. And then, unskilled labor isn't worth anything. I never learned a trade, and the only thing I can do is to take care of mother."

As the days went by, and Mrs. Moore was pronounced on the fair road to recovery, Rebecca began to grow homesick. She would not admit it to herself at first; but it was quite true, nevertheless, and was patent to her mother and Jane, who knew nothing of the proposed separation. Her mind dwelt continually on Caleb and the farm. She wondered how he had managed about the milk, the churning and his meals, if he had remembered to feed the cat and put corn out for the pigeons and wind the kitchen clock. She imagined the kitchen floor muddy and wet, and felt sure the dust was lying thick on everything from garret to cellar. She wondered, too, if Caleb had missed her absence. But she had been gone only a week. A week! It seemed six months.

That night she cried herself to sleep and her last waking thought was of Caleb and the unkindness with which she had treated him. Strange to say the wrongs which she herself had suffered were forgotten.

"I must go home, mother," she said, the next morning. "You don't need me any longer, and I ought not to stay."

"It is only natural you should want to go," said the old lady. "I don't blame you. Caleb is more to you now than mother and sister put together. I'm glad you are so happy in your marriage, dear. But I felt sure from the first that you would be. Try to keep the love you have won, daughter. Life isn't worth much if there is no love to help us bear its burdens."

A burning flush suffused Rebecca's face.

"How could I ever have told her?" she thought. "How she would feel if she knew that only her illness saved Caleb and me from a separation."

It was dusk when Rebecca reached Freestone, and as she had not written to Caleb that she was coming there was no one there to meet her.

But she persuaded Mr. Boswell's son to drive her out to the farm for a "consideration."

He took the road which led past the office of Lawyer Kane, and Rebecca could not repress a shudder as she saw it. Her heart turned sick within her, as for the first time the thought came to her that perhaps Caleb would not forgive her—would rigidly insist upon the separation agreed upon ten days before.

She dismissed the buggy at the gate and went on foot up the side road which led to the kitchen door.

The house was quite dark. She wondered if by any cruel chance Caleb was away. But no; the knob of the door turned in her hand and she entered.

Caleb had not lighted a lamp, but the lids of the stove were off, and the bright firelight showed him sitting in a large chair, his head sunk on his breast and one hand over his eyes.

He was so deeply buried in thought, and Rebecca came in so softly, that he did not hear her.

She stood for a full moment looking at him, marking the wan look on his face, the weary, dejected attitude.

A terrible pang struck her heart. This was her doing. She it was who had brought those sad lines to the handsome, manly countenance of the man she had never loved so well as now. No doubt it was of her unkindness he was thinking as he sighed heavily

With a hoarse sob she threw herself on her knees beside him, and winding her arms about his neck, cried, wildly:

"Caleb! Caleb! can you ever forgive me?"

He did not answer for a moment, but held her close, pressing his face lovingly to hers. Then he raised her gently to her feet and drew her to a seat on his knee, as he said, in a low, broken voice:

"It is I who should ask for pardon, Beckie. All this long week I've been aching to tell you how sorry I feel for all I said. I sent Jonas away the day after you left me, and I've been all alone with my misery and repentance. Did you want to come back? Tell me?"

But there was something in Rebecca's throat which choked her, and she could only answer with a sob as she hid her face on her husband's breast.

* * * *

"Hello, Sterling," said Mr. Kane, meeting Caleb in the village street a few days later, "why didn't you fulfill that engagement that you made with me two weeks ago."

"Oh, I settled the business very unexpectedly, and didn't need any legal aid," answered Caleb.

And the lawyer, shrewd as he was, never suspected what the trouble had been at Clover Top farm.

What with the inventive attractions and the growth of the United States, the annual income of the furniture manufacturers of the country is not less than $120,000,000.

Ambergris.

Ambergris is a fatty, disagreeable smelling substance, and is only found in the intestines of a dead sperm whale—one that has suffered with some peculiar disease before being killed by the harpoons and lances of the intrepid whalemen. Fifty years ago seekers for the leviathan did not realize that in the body of the whale lying alongside were 100 or 200 pounds of an article worth from $10 to $20 an ounce, according to its purity, but after the valuable discovery was made that some whales contained this fatty dark green substance, no whale's carcass was cut adrift from the ship's side until a thorough examination had been made for this hidden treasure.

Ambergris is the basis for all of the best of perfumery. It has the property of retaining the scent of cologne and other choice extracts, which would speedily evaporate unless ambergris was a very small part. When cologne or any other cheap perfume does not contain this ill-smelling substance, you may know that ambergris is not one of its ingredients, and so reject it as worthless, for it will evaporate as soon as applied, and leave an unpleasant smell. Although ambergris is not pleasant to inhale in its crude state, yet if it is heated it will please the olfactory nerves as much as manufactured perfumery, while counterfeit ambergris smells badly, hot or cold.

The largest quantity of ambergris ever taken from a diseased sperm whale (except in the case we are about to relate) weighed 182 pounds, and some lumps have been found that did not weigh more than one pound, the last the lowest on record. Some twenty years ago or more there arrived in Boston an old whaling captain from the cape with a cask of ambergris that contained over 500 pounds. He had taken the whole of it from a diseased whale that he had killed in the Atlantic ocean. This was the largest quantity that was ever known before or since, and while the captain knew that ambergris was valuable he did not realize its worth, and thought that he could work it off in small lots to the apothecaries, but while some agreed to take an ounce, others refused to buy at any price, and so the skipper wandered around the city utterly discouraged. One evening, adds the New Bedford *Mercury*, a member of the large firm of Months & Pestle, wholesale druggists (the names are fictitious), heard of the captain and his cask of ambergris. He did not lose a moment in hunting up the captain, but took a carriage and drove all over the north end, from one boarding house to another, and ran down his man at 1 o'clock in the morning. The skipper was routed out of bed, and then Mr. Months made an offer for the precious ambergris. He ventured on $5,000, but the captain thought he would not have been called upon at 1 o'clock in the morning unless ambergris was on the rise, and he declined the offer. Then came offers of $6,000, $7,000, $8,000, $9,000, and last a bid of $10,000 closed the bargain., and papers were drawn up and signed, and that forenoon the precious cask and its contents were rolled into Months & Pestle's cellar, and the skipper received a check for $10,000 and a few dollars over for his expenses at the boarding-house. The transaction was kept secret, and the next steamer that left Boston contained Mr. Months, who hurried to London, Paris and Vienna, sold ambergris at each place, and made the handsome sum of $30,000 net out of that one cask of ill-smelling substance. From that day to this Messrs. Months & Pestle have controlled the trade of the country, and now ambergris of the best quality is worth from $25 to $30 per ounce, with but little on the market.

Nutmegs.

Nutmegs grow upon a tree from twenty-five to thirty feet high, which bears a fruit resembling in form and size the Seckle pear. When ripe the outer shell of this fruit breaks, revealing an inner case of bright red, known to commerce as mace. This in its turn is removed, and the nutmeg is found inclosed in a third shell harder than either of the others.

The 415 street railways in the United States and Canada run 18,000 cars and more than 100,000 horses are in daily use. Calculating that the average life of a horse in street-railway service is four years, it makes the consumption of horses 25,000 per year. To feed this vast number of horses requires annually 150,000 tons of hay and 11,000,000 bushels of grain.