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MISCELLANY.

From the Philadelphia Courier.

THE WHITE COTTAGE; OR THE GALLANT DEFENDER.

BY BESSIE BEECHWOOD.

One cold winter's evening there were three persons gathered round the centre-table in William Morton's little parlor, variously engaged, to pass the long evening. The first was the master of the house, a fine looking, good-humored old gentleman of sixty, who was almost universally called 'Uncle William' by his young friends. The second was 'Aunt Lucy' his wife, a sweet gentlewoman, somewhat younger than himself; and the third, your humble servant.

'Oh! I promise it is true, every word of it,' replied he; and, leaning his arms on the table, and glancing at his wife, he began.

'Many years ago, when this city was the village they sometimes call it now, there stood a little cottage on what was then the outskirts, but is now the heart of business. As this cottage lay directly in my road between my dwelling and place of business, naturally attracted my attention by its quiet beauty and rural situation;—the vines clambered over it in summer and almost hid its white wall, and an air of neatness pervaded the place, which showed that woman inhabited it; but of the inhabitants, except occasionally an elderly lady, I saw nothing for many months.

'However, at length that cottage became the object of my walks; it hurried my departure in the morning, and induced my earlier return in the evening. But, although the cottage itself was just as pretty as ever, I did not notice its beauties as formerly. A golden head at the window, or peeping among the vines, had now far more charms for me.'

'I glanced at Aunt Lucy—she was smiling; but the hair that could be seen beneath her cap was silver, not gold.

'Well,' continued the old gentleman; 'that bright head became most unaccountably mixed up with my accounts and calculations, and bales of cotton had the most surprising habit of changing into white cottages overgrown with vines. I found that these juggleries were seriously interfering with my business, and so I determined to obtain, at all hazards, an introduction to the fair unknown and thus lay the spirit if possible.

'This I found easier to resolve than to do, for no one of my associates seemed to know the occupants of the white cottage. But I was not to be so conquered. By dint of close watching I discovered that my charmer at certain times left her home to take her music lessons, judging from the roll of music she carried. But how to avail myself of the information I had obtained?

'Among my acquaintances there was a good-for-nothing young dog, called Jack, who was a good enough fellow in the main, but who was always in want of money, or in some scrape or other, in both of which dilemmas I had frequently assisted him; consequently he was always willing to do any little thing in return that did not require much exertion, for he was proverbially indolent. So, in my present necessity, I hunted up Jack to assist me.

'Jack,' said I, 'do you want to make a little something towards a new outfit? For he was lamentably seedy.

'I'm your man,' replied he, 'provided it's not too much trouble.'

'A little before five on the appointed day I was at my post, and keeping watch in the shadow of the prison wall, saw the young girl come quietly along Sixth street, and pass on towards Spruce, her usual destination. At the exact moment Jack joined me, his anxiety to know the nature of his 'secret service' making him unusually prompt. He looked eagerly round, but I laughed at his fears, and so reassured him, that we chatted pleasantly for the intervening half hour.

'As six struck from the neighboring bell I directed his attention to the house, the fair music-scholar would presently leave. In a few moments she appeared, and tripped quick and lightly along, little dreaming of the dark plot that was brewing within the shadow of the prison wall, of which she was to be the innocent victim.

'Jack,' said I, 'as we first caught sight of her, you see that young lady; as she crosses Spruce street, you must follow and speak to her—insist upon accompanying her—but mind what you are about, for at any rate, I shall rescue the lady, and see her home.'

'All right!' laughed Jack: 'depend on me.'

'By this time the lady was quite near, and instinctively quickened her pace as she reached the gloomy building. It was still quite light, but the neighborhood was lonely, and the Potter's Field, now Washington Square, still before her. Jack started on his errand, followed as closely as was prudent, by myself.—He did his work faithfully, and the young girl crossed and recrossed the street to escape his importunities. At first she had quickened her steps, but overcome with terror, they now began to flag, and fearing she would fall, I thought it the time to interfere. Quick as thought I sprang upon Jack, and dashing him aside, flung him upon the pavement; then, overtaking the young lady, who was walking tremblingly on, I drew her hand through my arm, saying—

'Pardon me, Miss; but will you not allow me to see you home? Your road is lonely, and night approaching, I think I have settled that fellow, but others may molest you.'

'She made no objection, for she was too terrified to speak, and I am sure felt grateful to me as her defender; so, unimpaired, I held my ground, talking resolutely and constantly to prevent her being obliged to reply, though my heart was in almost as great a flutter as her own.

'When we reached the cottage,—which I found without any direction in my head, of course,—the mother herself came to the door, and looked her astonishment to see a gentleman with her daughter. The young girl essayed to speak, but still nervous and frightened, she threw her arms around her mother's neck and burst into tears. Naturally the task of explanation devolved upon me; so with a bold face but a weak heart I told the tale, for the sight of those tears made me feel like a sad villain—and when the mother asked me, and the daughter seconded the invitation with a fearful blush, I could not resist, though I felt like a coward in thus taking advantage of trusting, unsuspecting innocence. However, my bashfulness did not last very long, for in six weeks we were betrothed;

'I had been too much interested to notice that Aunt Lucy's work had fallen from her hands, and that with wonder in her large eyes she was gazing at her husband; but as he finished, I glanced at her as she exclaimed—

'Why William!

'With a great burst of laughter, Uncle William leaned back in his chair—the expression of her astonishment added fuel to her mirth, and he laughed till the tears streamed down his rosy cheeks.

'And was it really you, Aunt Lucy?' asked I.

'Yes, indeed, but I never dreamed he was such a deceiver!'

'You could ask Jack, but that he has gone to Texas. He often wanted to know if I had any more such errands to do.'

'You ought to be indicted for obtaining goods under false pretences, exclaimed I, laughing.

'She came very near not getting me after all,' said he, drying his mirthful tears.

'Do let me hear the sequel of this wonderful history,' I said; but Aunt Lucy looked up deprecatingly, saying—

'Now, William, don't be so foolish!'

'But Uncle William, nothing daunted by his wife's objection, proceeded—

'Well, you see, about three months before we were married, I was engaged to take her to a party. There were several friends going together, and a lady who was staying with Lucy was to go with another gentleman. Eight o'clock was the time fixed upon for going, but some business prevented me from being there at the hour. The other gentleman came, and they waited till nine for me; then the gentleman, becoming impatient, proposed to go without me, and let me come after them. After much persuasion, backed by her mother's approbation, Lucy consented, leaving a message for me. In great haste, at half-past nine, I dashed up to the door only to find the bird flown. Disappointment and some little self-accusation contributed to put me in no very good humor, and I immediately set myself to invent excuses for myself, and laying all the blame upon Lucy, so that when I arrived at the party, I was in no very enviable mood of anger and jealousy.

'Lucy was looking charming, and was surrounded by a circle of gallants, which did not tend to pacify me. I read anxiety in her glance, but my humor distorted it to one of reproach. I did not approach her, or recognize her presence. I saw her strive to be gay, but failing in the attempt, seated herself in a corner; and refusing all attentions, sat quietly during the rest of the evening. I felt that she seemed to play the part, even to revenge herself, and remorse began to tug at my heart strings, but I was too proud to acknowledge her before that company my fault by going to her, and not thinking of the sacrifice of pride she was making by appearing neglected, rather than I should think her heart less and careless of my attentions. So throughout the evening I succeeded in making two people as miserable as usual be.'

'On returning, I accepted a seat in their carriage, to show her how careless I was, and laughed and chatted, though my heart was burning. Lucy did not speak.—When we reached the cottage, the two friends alighted and passed into the parlor. I assisted Lucy to descend, and attended her to the entry; then with a cold good night I was turning to go, when she laid her hand upon my arm, and said in a tremulous voice, while tears stood in those dear blue eyes—

'William, what are you doing?'

'Making a fool of myself!' I cried, fold-

ing her in my arms, and trying to break your heart too, I believe; for she was sobbing convulsively upon my breast. Oh! what a villain I felt like! Presently she grew calmer, and smiling through her tears, said—

'Let the suffering of this night teach us what life would be were we long estranged, that we may for the future avoid the rocks that have so nearly wrecked our happiness.'

'The dear girl was right. For thirty years have we sailed over life's ocean, and have always steered clear of the rocks.'

'How could we fail with such a captain?' said Aunt Lucy, smiling, while a tear of affection fell on her blue eyes.

'And such a pilot, darling!' said the old man, fondly kissing her.

'Why, Bess, tears will rust your needles,' said Uncle William, wishing to turn the attention from his own emotion.

'Tears, Uncle Will? Why it's beads!' I exclaimed; but with an incredulous laugh he patted my head, and in a few moments I bade good night to the hero and heroine of the WHITE COTTAGE.

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