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THE KNITTERS.

BY CURTIS MAY.

All hail to the little brown fingers
That pull the first blossoms of life,
And hail to the strong hand that lingers
To calm the hot pulses of strife!
But where, with the light caressing
Their thin silver tresses, they sit,
Our hearts call down favor and blessing
Upon the old ladies that knit.

Their hands have long since dropped the burden
That age made too heavy to bear,
And peace and repose are the guerdon
That follows long labor and care.
Ambition has burned down to embers;
Hopes outgrow the old nest and flit.
Alone with the love that remembers
They all sit by the fireside and knit.

Where now is the full mending-basket,
Not empty one day in the year?
Speak gently and low as you ask it,
Lest the dulled ear bent near you should hear.
For the children have grown and departed,
The work of the daylight is gone;
In the twilight of life, tender-hearted,
The knitters are waiting for dawn.

Full soon shall the light break above them,
That shines from the City of Rest.
Full soon shall we gather who love them,
To fold their frail hands on the breast.
Oh, evening of life, slow descending,
Rest gently upon each white head,
Till these fingers, the last stitches ending,
Shall touch the first harp-strings instead.

—Youth's Companion.

THE OLD MAID'S BALLOON ASCENSION

IT was some time in June that Miss Denby began to "make a show" of herself. From the modest responsibility of neutral tints, cotton gowns and a sailor hat she suddenly burgeoned forth into such a splendid radiance of millinery and mode that all her neighbors wondered. For Miss Denby was an old maid. She had accumulated a modest fortune making dresses and, being fifty-two years old, as she admitted with a weazen smile, she had retired permanently from business and settled down to a routine of tea drinking and novel reading relieved, if not illuminated, by daily strolls in the park and a Sunday visit to church.

Homely? Not exactly, for she had bright, busy little eyes, a straight nose that had not always been so red as now, and a cute mouth that puckered up at the corner when she smiled. Her form was of the "ironing-board" style—that is, neither plump nor angular, but her hands and feet were the chief pride of her romantic little heart, for they were as small as a child's. Indeed, what most astounded the neighbors when they first began to "notice" the old maid's transformation was the marvelous shoes, slippers and gloves she wore. For instance, the day Mrs. Gallegher followed her over to the park Miss Denby's little tootsies were incased in gray, undressed kids, with — oh, shocking! French heels. But that was not what finally set the venomous tongue of gossip to wagging.

Mrs. Gallegher had actually caught the old maid keeping tryst with A MAN!

From that day the poor old dressmaker's suddenly glorified wardrobe was explained. Mrs. Gallegher had watched her foregather with a handsome, dark-haired stranger, and, leaning on his stalwart arm, stroll away among the trees. It was evident that Miss Denby was in love and that her suitor was a young and dashing fellow.

"After her money, I guess," said Mrs. Jenkins to Mrs. Jones over the back fence.

"No fool like an old fool," winked Mrs. Jones.

Some said it was "disgraceful;" others suspected that Miss Denby was a "little cracked," but they all became very friendly with her, drank her tea, admired her gowns and put themselves in the way of becoming her confidants. The good women even began to take morning tramps in the park, and the queer little dressmaker, walking with her young suitor, was mortified and puzzled at the frequency of these accidental meetings.

Finally Miss Denby decided to open her heart to Mrs. Gallegher, and she did it like this:

"Have another cup of tea before you go, Mrs. Gallegher."

"Sure I've had seven."

"Just one more," then whispering, "I've got a secret for you."

Miss Denby blushed and simpered demurely as she poured the tea, and her fat guest could hardly wait to come at the long-deferred mystery.

STROLLED AWAY AMONG THE TREES.

"What's your secret, Sophronia? Sure you ain't going to move?"

"Guess again!" giggled the old maid.

"Not another new dress?"

"Not that."

"I'll give it up," admitted the other, who enjoyed the deception.

"A wedding!" gurgled Miss Denby. "But, mind, now, it's a secret yet. I'm going to invite him up, hee-hee, hee-hee—e, and I want you to come and chaperon me——"

Mrs. Gallegher was staring open-mouthed.

"Sophronia Denby!" she gasped. "Married! You going to be married?"

"To the finest, handsomest, noblest, richest—he's a prince——"

"Ah, bother!"

"A Greek nobleman, Count Sardanapalus."

"And what business is he in?"

"Business! Oh, dear, none! He's a nobleman, owns an island and all that sort of thing."

The old maid seemed almost transfigured with enthusiasm. She said she had met her noble lover quite by accident while strolling near the beach. He had found and restored to her a novel which she had left on a bench. The casual acquaintance thus begun had flourished by reason of his wondrous ardor and the fact that she walked daily in the park. The count had wooed and won her "with the fierce and swift gallantry of the Old World," Miss Denby said, and she had resisted him as long as her sympathetic heart could withstand his eloquence.

"He's in Chicago to float a loan for the Greek Government," she explained. "As soon as Crete is annexed the count, my count" (a smile and a blush) "is to be absolute ruler of the island. But he is very anxious to depart, and the wedding day must be fixed to-morrow night. Turkish spies are constantly at his heels. There is hardly a day that he does not point one out to me. I have seen them lurking behind the bushes, and every time we part I am in agony of fear lest something should befall him."

Mrs. Gallegher was staring now like a big bullfrog watching a red flannel bait.

"Will you come up to-morrow night and meet him?" she hears Miss Denby say.

"I will," murmured the dumfounded Mrs. Gallegher, backing toward the door. It was midnight when she had finished her rounds of the flats, and at the hour appointed for the count's arrival the population of the building was on the front steps.

Sure enough, at 8 o'clock, the handsome foreigner came striding along. He paused a moment in front of Miss Denby's entrance, looked up and down the street and then sprang nimbly up the stairway.

The fluttering old maid, "assisted" by Mrs. Phelim Gallegher, received him. To the latter he bowed with the punctilious grace of a cavalier of France.

"With your permission, madame," he said, taking a parcel from his pocket, "I have brought mademoiselle a little gift. It is an heirloom in our family; my ancestors captured it from King Priam in the Trojan war."

He handed the package to the blushing Miss Denby and kissed her tiny hand as he bowed over it.

"It is one of the gold shoes from the Trojan horse," he resumed with rare dignity. "Each nail is set with a priceless diamond, and——"

He was interrupted by a little scream from Sophronia, who had unwrapped the parcel and found an old, rusty horse shoe, very dirty, twisted and worn. But the next moment she had tapped his wrist with her fan and laughed:

"What a wag you are, count! Forever cracking jokes."

Mrs. Gallegher didn't know what to say or do. She stood there staring at Count Sardanapalus as if in doubt whether to hit him with the horse shoe or run away. Indeed she was sliding toward the door when the bell rang. She opened it in time to hear the strange guest shout:

"Bar the door or we are lost!"

But Mrs. Gallegher opened it. A sandy-haired, heavy set man brushed rudely in, laid a hand on the count's shoulder and said:

"Come, your grace, the balloon is ready."

"Aha," said the dramatic Greek, "my country first! Forward, gentlemen! To the balloon!"

With a grand bow he stalked out of the room like a monarch going to the block. Miss Denby collapsed into a chair. The sandy courier followed his master. Mrs. Gallegher followed the courier.

"Who is he?" whispered the fat woman to the count's attendant.

"He's a bug," growled the man, "went nutty on balloons. Acts all right till you mention his balloon. Then he goes home and gets into a swing. He thinks it's a war balloon, and he sails all over the world in it. Good night!"

Miss Denby did move on the first of September. — John H. Raftery, in the Chicago Record-Herald.

High Note of a Prima Donna.

Mme. Nordica has put in a claim against Uncle Sam for $3,000,000. That seems a pretty high note, even for a soprano.—New York World.

Experience is usually worth all you pay for it.

Half-Hour with the Children

Milkweed.

Master Milkweed keeps a dairy
By the river-side,
And above project his airy
Storerooms, arched and wide.

Here he stores his creamy cheeses—
Soft and smooth as silk.
Thinks he'll find them when he pleases—
But this magic milk

Some fine day will change to fairies
Who, on gauzy wing
Flying far, will start new dairies
For another spring.

—The Christian Register.

A Neat Trick With Matches.

Put some matches on the surface of water in a basin. So place them that they will form a star, with their heads near each other. Into the water at the centre of this star thrust a piece of soap pointed at the end. Behold all your matches begin to move off; they depart suddenly, as if they had a horror of soap. Now, if you wish to coax them back offer them a piece of sugar by placing or dipping it in the water, and you will see all your matches rapidly moving toward it.

Thrift of Country Boys.

As a rule boys who live on a farm or in a country town are much more thrifty and economical than city reared boys. Much of this is due to the fact that, in the city, there are hundreds of devices to catch the pennies of boys. There are nickel-in-the-slot machines, fruit and candy stands, and all sorts of contrivances to induce a boy to part with his small coins, says Success. These temptations do not exist to any great extent in the country. There is a great difference in the way the country boy and the city boy look at a nickel. The country boy sees much more in the coin than the city boy; he sees greater possibilities—the nickel is possessed of a charm. He carries his change in his pocket, counts it over and wonders what he will do with it when he gets his first dollar. His parents instill into him, from babyhood, the importance of saving his money and putting it in a bank. The city boy, as a rule, gets his money easier and parts with it as easily.

An Infuriated Whale.

The gray whale, a huge mammal which inhabits the North Pacific Ocean, and is most often found along the American coast, particularly in the Gulf of California, makes so vigorous a fight when attacked, and is so terrible an adversary that it is known among sailors as the devil-fish. Mr. Frank Bullen gives in the Cornhill Magazine a vivid picture of the destruction wrought by one of these whales when infuriated.

It is a standing order among the whalers never to injure a calf when the mother is near. Neglect of this order was the cause of the catastrophe. A fleet of thirteen American whaleships was off the coast of Lower California, and fifty-two boats, four from each ship, were out. In some way, in striking a large cow whale, a harpoon transfixed her calf, which was at her side, and killed it instantly.

The mother quickly satisfied herself that the calf was dead, and then turned upon her aggressors like a veritable demon of destruction.

While carefully avoiding the exposure of her body to attack, she spread devastation among the flotilla. When she rose to the surface it was but for a second, to emit an expiration like the hiss of a lifting safety valve, and at the same moment to destroy a boat or complete the destruction of one already hopelessly damaged. Every blow was dealt with accuracy and an appearance of premeditation. The speed of the monster was so great that she appeared almost simultaneously at widely separated points. Not content with dealing one tremendous blow at a boat, and reducing it to a bundle of loose boards, she attacked the wreckage again and again.

Out of the fifty-two boats, only two escaped undamaged. More than fifty men were badly injured, and six, one of whom was the unfortunate originator of the mischief, were killed outright.

"This," said Miss Ritchenold, "is a portrait of me painted when I was a little girl." "My!" exclaimed Miss Kostique, "and were you painted even then?"

'T WAS EVER THUS.

Fair Ethel is in great dismay,
At least, so she avers,
Because she must decide to-day
Upon her winter furs;
How many dozen tails and claws?
How many heads with toothful jaws?

She frowns. "I wish I'd been alive
Five hundred years ago,
When life was not a dreadful drive,
But stately, sweet and slow.
The women of that day were blest:
It did not matter how they dressed."

Ah! Ethel, if you could behold
Those simple days of yore,
You'd find this fact (that was of old
And shall be evermore):
The damsels, garbed in latest style,
Protesting vainly, all the while!

Like you, the prehistoric maid—
Who caused her rivals grief
By coming from her cave, arrayed
In one more shell, or leaf—
Has paused on fashion's giddy brink,
To wish she'd staid a Missing Link!

—Anna Mathewson, in Puck.

IN A FACETIOUS VEIN

Sillicus — "No man is too old to learn." Cynicus—"And no man is too young to think he's too old to learn."

Tommy (looking up from his book)—"Say, what's 'above par,' anyway?" Elsie—"Why, ma, of course. She's boss."

Blobbs — "You can say what you please about Miss Antique, but she has a fine set of teeth." Slobbs—"In her comb?"

"When a man reaches the door of adversity," says the Manayunk Philosopher, "some kind friend is always ready to do the knocking."

Rymer—"I believe he said he never read verses like mine; they were 'so limpid.'" Clymer—"That's not it exactly. He said they 'limped so.'"

I wrote a poem years ago,
Its meaning is obscure.
It isn't interesting, so
I guess it's literature.

—Washington Star.

Nell—"Maude has married an oculist." Belle—"Yes, and they went to Niagara Falls on their wedding trip in order that he might examine the cataract."

Chollie—"I told her I would die for her, don't you know." Willie—"What did she say, old chap?" Chollie—"She said she had too many dead ones on her string, already."

Mr. Newlywed—"Isn't there any ice water, dear?" Mrs. Newlywed—"I know it's silly of me, George, but you know the danger there is in germs, so I got cook to boil the ice."

"Poor Muchmore is looking sad these days." "Yes—the poor old chump." "Well, no wonder he's sad. It's pretty tough to lose one's wife." "O! that isn't it; he's married another one."

Behold the little busy bee;
Note well and ponder on it.
He's not so busy when he's free
As when he's in a bonnet.

—Philadelphia Record.

"Truthfully speaking, sir," began the poor young man, "I think your daughter is without a peer." "So do I," snapped the multi-millionaire, "and I shall find one for her at once. You may go, sir."

The clock struck midnight. "'Tis now the witching hour when churchyards yawn," quoted Mr. Staylate. "Can you blame them?" murmured Miss Caustique behind her fan. He took the hint.

Merchant—"Have you had any experience in chinaware?" Applicant—"Years of it, sir." Merchant—"What do you do when you break a valuable piece?" Applicant—"Well—er—I usually put it together again, and place it where some customer will knock it over." Merchant—"You'll do."

Methods of an English Cartoonist.

F. Carruthers Gould, the celebrated cartoonist of the Westminster Gazette, has been giving some particulars regarding his work. "As a rule," he says, "when Parliament is sitting, I get to the House of Commons at 3.30 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon, and take up a position either in the gallery or the lobby—according to what is going on. I would go to the lobby if I wanted special details of an incident or portrait from a particular member. At about 7 o'clock I make my way out of the House with notes and rough outlines, and proceed to the National Liberal Club, when I prepare my drawings. An ordinary sketch takes me about twenty minutes."