

"No, my dear madam, but the man to whom she was engaged is here in the city with me, as is also her twin sister—my wife."

Mrs. Lane was delighted. "Indeed," she said, "I have grown to love the girl as my own, and nothing could please me more than to see her rosy and happy again."

"Where shall we find her?" Lute asked.

"She rooms on Sutter street—but stay! I will invite her here this evening, and you bring your wife and friend."

Reece Rodgers could scarcely restrain himself and wait for the long afternoon to pass. Annie was nervous and timid.

"Maybe she will scorn to own me because I have not had the advantages she had," said Annie. Lute patted her head reassuringly, and Reece hastened to say that was not Rose's way.

"And maybe she will hate us for living at the Villa," the young wife went on.

"Don't borrow trouble,"

Lute laughed. "She'll likely be happy to find a sister."

Evening came at last, and found Mrs. Lane's music teacher seated in that lady's cosy boudoir. She wore a simple black dress. Not a bit of white relieved it, save the handkerchief in her lap; but the dainty frill of black lace only made the snowy throat gleam whiter, and lent an added charm to the pale, delicate face. The queenly head, with its coil of golden hair, reclined wearily on the crimson head rest of the chair. The hostess was so full of excitement she feared she would betray her secret. Presently the door bell rang, and a moment later the servant handed Mrs. Lane a card

"Only a mutual friend or two; you won't mind if I receive them here? Show them in, Jane."

Rose Wilton was feeling unusually homesick and weary, so she barely roused herself to smooth out a plait or two and settled back. She had been a society belle too long to fear any of the people she was likely to meet among Mrs. Lane's intimates. The door opened and Jane ushered in a gentleman. Rose raised her eyes, gave a little hysterical scream, and the next moment was sobbing in Reece Rodgers' arms.

"I have found you, at last, my darling; how could you doubt me so? Do you know it came near killing me?"

Mrs. Lane waited to hear no more, but slipped out to entertain her other guests in the parlor.

"Oh, Reece, I did not care for anything so much as the loss of your love. I knew you ought not to marry a nameless, penniless girl, and it was for love of you, partly, that I ran away, and partly to escape the insults of that dreadful woman. She did not seem to care at all that mother (I shall always call her mother, for she was true to me) was gone; and her son followed me here. Wasn't it dreadful?" the trembling girl sobbed.

"Well, darling, there has been a good deal of mystery, but everything is clear, now," and briefly he explained matters.

"My sister in this house!" she cried, in astonishment, "and he thought he was marrying me?"

"Yes, love; but he seems quite content with his wife as Annie, now."

Presently they remembered the others were awaiting them, and sacrificed the joy of being alone to the rightful demands of others; besides, Rose was anxious to see her sister, the woman, too, who had been instrumental in bringing all this joy to her. The meeting in the parlor can better be imagined than described. Annie's doubts and fears fled at the first kiss

from her sister's lips, and the tie between them from that moment was one of great tenderness. Their likeness to each other was so great that but for Rose's pallor and the difference in their costumes, Lute could not have told which was his wife.

It was a very thankful, happy party that took its way back to Oakland the day following. Reece urged an immediate marriage, but the girls opposed it, and Rose availed herself of the lady's right to "set the day."

"All the great events of my life came on Christmas," she said.

Very strange must have been her emotions as she once more set foot in the Villa. She laughed and cried, and Annie did whatever she did.

"Wasn't this room yours?" Mrs. Gaylord asked, leading the way to a sunny room with a bay window.

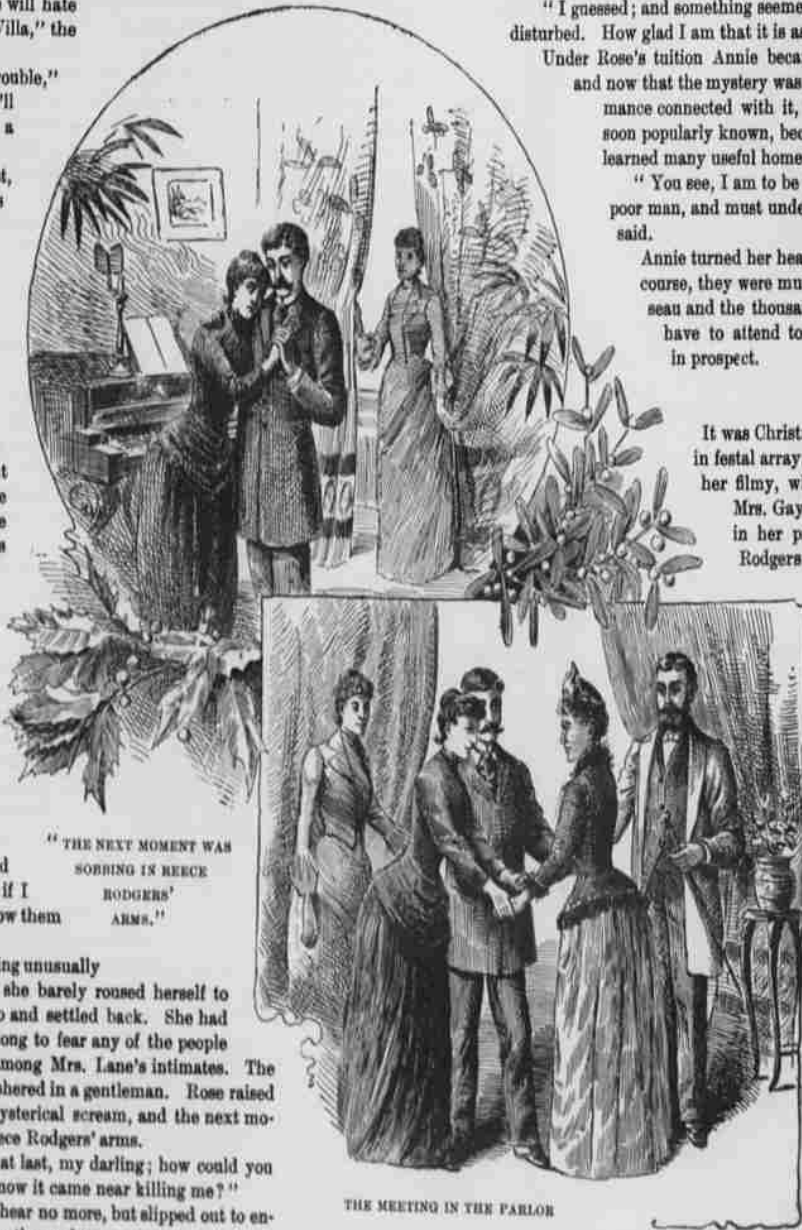
"Of course it was; how came you to know?"

"I guessed; and something seemed to tell me not to let it be disturbed. How glad I am that it is as you left it."

Under Rose's tuition Annie became quite a society woman, and now that the mystery was explained and so much romance connected with it, "the twins," as they were soon popularly known, became quite the rage. Rose learned many useful home arts from Annie.

"You see, I am to be the wife of a comparatively poor man, and must understand housekeeping," she said.

Annie turned her head away to hide a smile. Of course, they were much occupied over the trousseau and the thousand and one things women have to attend to when there is a wedding in prospect.



THE MEETING IN THE PARLOR

It was Christmas again. The Villa was in festal array. The bride was lovely in her filmy, white robes, and people said Mrs. Gaylord looked almost as well in her pale pink costume. Reece Rodgers was a happy man—so was

Lute Gaylord. The latter's sister Ellice was present, notwithstanding her mother's indignation. Mrs. Lane was, as she termed herself, "mistress of ceremonies." Lawyer Rodgers, senior, hid his chagrin that his son should marry poor.

Among the wedding gifts was a long, narrow box, and opening it, Rose read: "From Annie," on a slip of paper. Beneath lay a worn yellow document. In surprise Rose opened it and read, with wild, incredulous eyes, the words:

"Last Will and Testament of Florence T. Wilton."

Her surprise was no greater than was that of Reece and Lute; but

of them all, the latter and his wife were the most genuinely glad. When he came to think of it, Lawyer Rodgers remembered that the deceased had never said she had not made a will, but had said she ought to, as she wanted Rose to have everything.

The Villa was ample enough for both couples, and the sisters begged to remain together, so it was settled that they all live there.

"My Christmas gift," the fond bridegroom whispered, the evening after the wedding.

"Why, that is what mamma always called me."

VELMA CALDWELL MELVILLE.

DOMESTIC ECONOMY.

TEACHER—Well, Johnny, what do you expect to get for Christmas?
JOHNNY—Expect 't git a lickin'. Dad allers licks me on Christmas so he won't hev 't buy no presents. Sex bad boys don't git no presents.