

HOW CHERRY THOUGHT OF IT.

She was thinking so intently, this little brown-eyed, brown-haired teacher, that she scarcely noticed the group of girls on the steps until, as they moved aside to let her pass, she caught a fragment of their conversation.

"Melted lead is lots of fun—runs into such queer shapes, you know, and tells what his occupation is going to be—"

"Oh, apple parings are better! They almost tell the name," interrupted another. "Throw 'em over your shoulder and they'll fall on the floor all curled up, and make the initials as plain as can be. Why, I saw— Hush!"

The last word was due to her own near approach, and she walked on, smiling faintly at the idea of consulting the oracle to decide her future and settle the question that vexed her.

She had promised rather wearily, when John Alston asked her the night before, that she would think of it. She might have thought with rosy blushes and swift, glad heart-throbs if it had happened in a different way—if he had come as a stranger to Glenville, and there had been the romance of a first meeting, the sweet surprise of acquaintanceship growing gradually warmer and dearer, until there came the sudden knowledge that, though "two to the world for the world's work's sake," they were "each to each, as in God's sight, one."

For Cherry acknowledged to herself she "did like John, of course." That was the trouble—there was so much of course about it. Why, she had known him ever since she could remember. They had built mud ovens and hunted winter-green together, and he had whittled horrid wooden dolls for her with his first jackknife. And now he had asked her to be his wife—asked her in just one of their familiar, commonplace chats by the little back gate, without even the glamour of moonlight over them.

She was keeping her promise most thoroughly. Aunt Barbara helped her to begin its fulfillment at the breakfast table.

"Heard some one come home with you last night, Charity. Was it John Alston?"

"Yes'm," said Cherry, meditatively.

"Most folks think you two are keeping company."

"Most folks certainly thought correctly—last night."

"You ain't dumb when you don't want to be, Charity. You know what I mean well enough," said Aunt Barbara, with a sagacious nod of her head. "You two don't go together so much for nothing."

"No'm, it's for company generally," answered Cherry, serenely.

"Yes; and you've learned pretty well how many it takes to make company. Well, I don't know but you might do worse."

Cherry's worn kid boot began to tap uneasily on the carpet under the table.

"To be sure he's not as rich as some, but no more are you," continued Aunt Barbara, considering the matter in its pros and cons. "You'd have to begin plain, but that wouldn't hurt you—you're both common folks. You could easy make a rag carpet of evenings between this and Christmas; and unbleached muslin has come down three cents a—"

"Aunt Barbara?" interposed Cherry.

"Well, what now?" demanded Aunt Barbara, with an injured air. "I don't know as it was any great crime to be planning what's best for you."

"My whole life has been nothing but rag carpet and unbleached muslin. I'd like a change!" burst forth Cherry, stormily. "And there's no use in planning what never will come."

"Bear me, what a flare up! Many better folks than you, haven't fared as well all their lives, Charity Holmes."

That was true enough, but Cherry was in no mood to hear it just then. Besides, she couldn't endure her full name; it always made her "feel like an orphan-asylum," she said; and she made no answer, but began gathering up her school books and papers in silence. Our thoughts are very like our bodies in this, that if they start off on a wrong train in the morning they are scarcely likely to have arrived at a proper destination by night. Cherry's wandered to the ends of the earth that day.

She knew what John's proposition of a "little home" meant—a quiet wedding in that quiet little village, the settling gravely in some plain little house, and then a monotonous round of homely cares and duties, year after year, for a lifetime. Just the rag carpet and unbleached muslin that Aunt Barbara had begun to enumerate in her distressingly practical way—the way that often made Cherry rebelliously remark to herself that she did not believe she should ever want to see Paradise itself if once Aunt Barbara had described it to her. What other life did Cherry expect? She could not have answered; only there arose bright dreams of far-off lands—of grand old mountains under the glow of foreign skies; days of wandering amid rare old paintings and marvelous sculpture, and glorious nights filled with music, the tinkling of the fountains and the odors of flowers unknown.

There was one narrow door of possibility opening from Cherry's life toward these "kingdoms of the world and the glory of them"—a door to which Miss Fossilby's hand, yellow, withered and glittering with diamonds, held the key. Miss Fossilby, or at least her house and grounds, were the pride of Glenville. Stiff, stately, and bristling with ostentatious costliness, they were complacently pointed out to every new comer. And Miss Fossilby had met and talked with Cherry, and, attracted by the bright young face, had graciously intimated that she had sometimes thought that she would like a companion, and how would Cherry like to live with her, and travel with her?

That last was the charm, for Miss Fossilby visited mountains or lakes or falls every year, and sometimes strayed even to those older glory-haunted lands which Cherry saw only in dreams. Should she try to make the dreams come true? John loved her, and Miss Fossilby would only—hire her, to put it plainly; but then? And so the plain little home and the Alhambra by moonlight jostled each other oddly in the dingy old school-room that day.

Decide? How could one know what one did think in such a babel of sounds? she questioned, leaning her head upon her hand, while a boy in a ragged jacket recounted listlessly, as if he were

used to such invasions and they had grown a trifle monotonous, how "a band of fierce barbarians came down from the North," and a little tow-headed girl, with her mouth half-filled with the apple she was surreptitiously munching, remarked behind her book—supposed to contain Pitt's celebrated speech—"If I worry 'merican Simon Englishman I'd never laden my arms—never!"

The straggling lines of figures on the dingy blackboard looked like some intricate puzzle to Cherry's eyes that day, and the old clock above her desk ticked "Well? well?" with a marked and querulous interrogation that was aggravating. She was glad when the slow hands crept round to the hour of release; and when the darkening room had lost its noisy occupants, and the last whoop had died away from the school-yard, she donned her wrappings with a sigh of relief and hurried into the open air. It was not a cheering atmosphere. A cold gray mist enfolded her at once; dark clouds hung low, with no hint of a sun behind them, and up from the river swept a chill, fitful wind, whispering and complaining like an uneasy conscience.

By-and-by the general gloom found vent in a fit of weeping. Raindrops fell slowly at first and then in a rapid pelting shower that aroused Cherry from her dreaming, and compelled her to quicken her lagging steps into the ungraceful little trot that women call running. Up the street a blacksmith's shop stood invitingly open, with its fiery glowing heat showing warmly within; and there she sought shelter, dropping upon a rude seat to rest.

"Eh? Is it you, Miss Cherry?" smiled the old man at the anvil, as the head of the small water-proof figure emerged far enough from its hood to become recognizable. "Got caught, didn't you?"

"As usual, Uncle Nat; out of one place I belong to and not able to reach the other," said Cherry, dependently, inclined to class all circumstances under one head, and give them a general label.

"You seem to fit in right well where you are," said the old man, with a kindly glance at the pretty flushed face. "We mostly belong where we happen to be, I take it."

"No—oh, no!" protested Cherry, vigorously. "I'm sure we do not. I have heard it said that nearly all the trouble and unrest of the world is because we are all out of our own right places, and are cramping and stretching to fit somebody else's. I believe it, too."

"Think we are all shook down here like the pieces of a dissected map, eh, and Providence can't put us together straight? That's peculiar, now!" commented Uncle Nat, with an odd twinkle in his eyes. "Well, if I'm in some other man's smithy I'll try and turn out good honest work for him; and I hope he won't be too hard with my tenants if he's running any great estate of mine. Maybe it's Miss Fossilby that's in my shoes! I might sit in her carriage a bit and see whether it seems natural. 'Twas left here this afternoon to have a wheel fixed, and I suppose they haven't come for it on account of the rain. We don't have such finery often."

Cherry, half vexed at his reception of her theory, glanced at the corner toward which he pointed. Unusual finery, indeed, with its rich velvet and silver mountings, was that luxurious carriage. She walked over and examined it more closely; and presently, when some men from the back part of the shop came forward to talk with Uncle Nat, she entered it—partly to be secure from observation and undisturbed in her thoughts, partly also with a half-acknowledged desire to see if it would "seem natural" to her. What a sense of wealth and comfort there was in the very nestling down among the cushions.

She pillowed her head on the velvet, and looked at the blackened walls of the old shop, lit up by the fire gleams here and there—the glowing furnace, the red-hot iron, and the sparks flying from the anvil like spray from some fountain of fire. The place looked like some dark cavern in that half light, and the two or three figures, with bare brawny arms and grimy faces, grew shadowy and weird as they moved to and fro. The gray daylight must be fading fast, but she could not go; the rain was still falling steadily, and even while she wished for its cessation its sound lulled her into pleasant fancies.

With her eyes fixed on the fiery bed of the furnace there came visions of far-off volcanoes and lakes gleaming in lurid light. Then, in strange contrast, arose snow-tipped peaks, and beautiful cities, with the Old World sunlight upon them. The hammering of the sledges grew faint and low—so low and distant that she could hear the music from the grand old cathedral organs. After that she became a very Wandering Jew, traveling across dreary deserts, and through valleys like the garden of Eden; over continents and oceans, on and still on for lifetimes. The fairest scenes grew old, and her eager feet weary, but they had no power to pause. At last prison walls shut her in, and stayed her wanderings for a while. It would be but a little time she knew; they would begin again with her release, and even now the bolts and bars were sliding.

With the sound of opening doors Cherry started up and looked around her—or tried to look, for she was in darkness. She felt cautiously for the stone walls of her cell, and touched only velvet. Slowly she comprehended. She was still in Miss Fossilby's carriage; she must have fallen asleep there. No one had known it, and they had gone away and left her locked in the blacksmith's shop for the night. How late was it? It had seemed a long time in her dreaming. But had it been all a dream? for there came again the sound of an opening door.

Could anyone be coming for her? Uncle Nat had surely not known where she was, or he would not have left her; and Aunt Barbara would think of her as having sought shelter from the rain in the house of some friend. But the sound of footsteps near the door was unmistakable, and she heard voices in whispered consultation. Then the steps drew cautiously nearer and paused beside the carriage.

"This is it," affirmed an unfamiliar voice.

"Make sure," was answered in a low tone.

There was a moment's pause, then a match was struck, flamed up for an instant, and was quickly extinguished. By its brief light Cherry caught only a glimpse of several heads; she discovered no one clearly. But the strangers were apparently satisfied that they had found the object of their search. There was a muttered "all right," and the carriage was slowly turned round.

"Steady now I make no noise!" was whispered warningly, and the carriage was drawn carefully forward out of the shop and into the road.

Another momentary pause occurred, as if some of the party had gone back to close the door. Cherry, still crouched low on the seat, discovered that the rain had ceased, and through the window caught a gleam of stars. She feared to raise her head for any further observations lest she should

be discovered, as, frightened and bewildered, she tried to comprehend her situation. It was a particularly unpleasant one. The carriage had evidently been stolen, and she was being borne away in it, she knew not whither or by whom. These persons, aware of its unwonted presence in Uncle Nat's shop, and coveting its silver trappings perhaps, had seized the opportunity to steal it, never dreaming that it had an occupant. If they should find her there—

Cherry shuddered at the thought of it. Those who could commit such a crime would scarcely hesitate to conceal it at the cost of one frail life wholly at their mercy. How utterly in their power she was she realized more fully as the carriage rolled on again—Miss Fossilby's luxurious carriage—but it could scarcely have seemed more terrible had it been a hangman's cart bearing her to certain execution. She leaned forward with a thought of calling for help; but who would hear her except those whom she most dreaded? Then came a wild impulse to spring from the moving vehicle and attempt to escape; but that also was abandoned as futile, and she sank back to await the issue in trembling suspense.

It might be miles before they reached their destination, but, if nothing betrayed her presence before, daylight must surely reveal it. How many hours would there be first? Oh, if they only knew!—Aunt Barbara, Uncle Nat or John—poor John! How he would wonder and search. Would he ever know? she wondered. She half forgot herself in a strange pity for him. That "little home" she had spoken of only last night could never be now. And she could have made it such a bright little nook. Life was very sweet—even the old homely work and ways that she viewed so scornfully that day; and if hers were to end now—so fearfully—the gift and glamour it had missed mattered little, but the truth and love it might have held were priceless.

It seemed an interminable time that passed in that strange journeying before there came another halt, and a slight sound of taking down bars and unfastening a gate. Then, by the uneven motion, she could tell that the wheels had passed from the beaten road to the rougher ground; and at last they stood still. It had come now—the supreme moment. There was a breath of prayer, a wild longing to look into John's eyes once more, and then she collected all forces of mind and body to do or bear as she might.

Again she heard a whispered colloquy, a low, triumphant laugh, and then all noise died away. The carriage door remained closed, but a dim light shone upon her, and she saw that she was opposite the window of a house—a curtained window, across which shadows flitted as of persons moving within. A sudden hope arose in Cherry's heart. It was possible that her captors had all entered the house, and there might be a chance for escape. She could scarcely increase her peril by the attempt, and hurriedly and silently she sprang to the ground. No one was near her, and she flew with such speed as only desperation could lend back in the direction from which she fancied she had come. As she reached the gateway and passed out upon the road, another figure unexpectedly confronted her, and she drew back in breathless terror.

"Hello!" exclaimed a startled but cheery voice. With that word she threw herself into his arms.

"Oh, John! John!"

"Why, Cherry! did I frighten you so? I was only walking up street in a woful hurry, with no thought of meeting anybody, least of all you, until I nearly ran over you. Have you been spending the evening with Mrs. Murray?"

"Mrs. Murray?" Cherry looked back at the house she had left, and its outlines slowly grew familiar. It certainly was the parsonage. "Oh, I don't know! I thought it must be some dreadful place. I've been stolen and—not quite murdered!" she cried, hysterically. And John, listening to her story, grew as bewildered as she.

"I should have thought no one would be so insane as to steal that carriage with a hope of selling it; and to select Rev. Mr. Murray's as a place to bestow their booty—"

He paused, then laughed, as a sudden light burst upon him.

"Cherry, it's All-Halloween!"

All-Halloween! And the village boys always celebrated the occasion by stealing gates, carrying off signs, and working all manner of mischief. Cherry understood it all at once. They had doubtless considered it a magnificent joke to leave Miss Fossilby's carriage in the minister's yard.

"And isn't it nearly morning, John?"

"It is only nine o'clock; I was just going home from the office."

"Oh!" said Cherry, with a long breath, and a tone that said unutterable things.

"Cherry," said John, as they paused at Aunt Barbara's gate, "this is the night to try fortunes with hot lead or—"

"Ugh! I thought I was about to try mine with cold steel!" interposed Cherry, shuddering.

"But Cherry—"

"Yes, I know. It come out all right, John—formed the initials 'J. A.' as plainly as possible," she added, shyly.

John informed Uncle Nat of the whereabouts of the missing carriage, and the next day Miss Fossilby called upon Cherry in that same resplendent equipage.

"The blacksmith informed me that you first learned where my stolen property had been bestowed; I did not quite understand how, but I am greatly obliged to you," she said, graciously. "And about that other matter we talked of one day—I have quite decided that I should like you for a companion."

"Thank you," said Cherry, demurely; "but I have accepted that situation with another person, ma'am."

Miss Fossilby's uplifted eyebrows seemed to ask who else in the sphere of Cherry's knowledge could offer such a position, but her lips were too polite to put the question.

"Well," said Aunt Barbara, as the carriage rolled away, "I guess we'd better build a fire in the back yard and make soap to-morrow. Plenty of soap is a good thing for a young housekeeper to begin with."

Boston is declared by Max Strakosch the most profitable town for theaters in this country, because the women there come to the play in waterproofs and plain woolen dresses, and, as they have not put their money into silks or carriages, can afford to buy theater tickets once a week the year round. In Louisville, on the contrary, where fashionable audiences always appear "in full dress paint and war feathers," they go to the theater but once a year.

A convict was released from an Iowa penitentiary on a pardon forged by himself, which he sent to his wife for presentation to the warden.

THE DEADLY LINDEN.

A St. Louis physician says that the linden tree is dangerous to health, being like the deadly yew tree of the East. The St. Louis doctor has been making investigations, and he says:

Just in the Spring, when the sap was about to rise, I wounded my trees in several places and carefully collected the exuding gum. I found in it a new and singular alkaloid, to which we gave the name of "lindoline," and which fully justified my fears. It is a most deadly poison—something akin to the curare or woorall poison of South Africa. A very small inoculation upon the skin of a cat, made with a needle simply dipped in the lindoline, killed the animal in eighteen seconds. It acts as a nerve excitant of great power, and has a real value in the materia medica as an antidote to morphia poisoning and other cases of that kind; but it must be greatly diluted in order to do anything of this kind, as it is intensely virulent. I am quite sure that a pin scratch touched with lindoline would kill a man in a couple of minutes. Of course, like all poisons of this kind, it is not one-tenth as effective in the stomach as when inoculated; still it is, of course, deadly."

"FASHIONABLE HUGGING."—A supper and concert were given during commencement week at the Illinois State University, at Bloomington. Waltz music was played, and the young couples danced to it. On the following Sunday the Rev. J. W. Webb preached in the Methodist Church of the place on the sinfulness of round dancing, as he had observed it on that occasion. He characterized it as "wicked, fashionable hugging," and said: "After 2 o'clock at night, I saw parties, male and female, under one shawl, promenading the streets locked in each other's arms and going into alleys." The dancers could have borne all but this remark with equanimity, but as to it they publish the retort that the preacher spoke in a "foul, false, and unchristian manner."

It is stated in London that two of Lord Beaconsfield's manuscript novels were purchased for the Queen.

The man who had an elephant on his hands has had them amputated.—Lowell Citizen.

Don't judge of a man's character by the umbrella he carries. It may not be his.

The New York Commercial Advertiser wisely calls them "aesthetes."

A barber shop at Jackson, Mich., has four girl apprentices.

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