

A Corner In Valentines.

By CLARISSA MACKIE.

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"I'd like my New York paper," said Mr. Timothy Scott for the fourth time that morning.

"Just a moment, Mr. Scott," said the busy clerk apologetically. "You see we are very busy today," he continued, hastily making change for a small girl who had purchased a valentine. "Tomorrow's Valentine day, you know."

"I ought to know," growled Mr. Scott lasciviously. "You have informed me of that fact four distinct times this morning. Do you mean to say that all these people are buying idiotic pictures to send to their friends?"

"They are buying valentines—yes, sir," returned the clerk, with an apprehensive glance toward the several customers. "Your paper will be ready in a moment, sir. The package has not been opened yet."

"So busy selling valentines, of course. You needn't repeat the explanation," snapped Mr. Scott, turning toward the door. Pausing in the entrance, he looked back. The little stationer's was the only shop of its kind in the village. Here alone bloomed the flower garden of valentines. Here alone was the source of his annoyance. A diabolical plan entered Mr. Timothy Scott's clever head. A voice interrupted his musings.

"Here is your paper at last, Mr. Scott," said the clerk affably. The old gentleman looked about the store as he pocketed the paper. The other customers had departed; he was the only one there.

"Show me all the valentines you have in stock," he ordered sharply.

"Yes—yes, sir," gasped the perturbed clerk as he dived beneath the counter. Presently he emerged, dusty and breathless, bearing several large green pasteboard boxes.

"These in the store," he said, indicating the interior of the small room, "and these in the boxes are all we have."

Mr. Scott looked around at the rows of valentines. There were picture postals, lace paper missives, a few silk and satin beauties and an assortment of the coarse "come" valentines. All of them expressed varied degrees of sentiment, and they were all resplendent in cupids, intertwined hearts, flowers and tender verses.

"I will take them all," said Mr. Timothy Scott, reaching for his pocket book.

The agitated shopman stared vacuously until he caught the fierce gleam in the customer's eye; then, with trembling fingers, he collected the valentines and placed them in boxes. In ten minutes the store was denuded of its festive array, and Mr. Timothy Scott was the proud possessor of six huge boxes of valentines.

"Can you obtain any more for me?" he asked sharply.

"No, sir," said the clerk. "There isn't another one in the village, and I couldn't get any one to drive twenty miles to Millertown after some."

"Very good," said Mr. Timothy Scott as he paid his bill. "I will send my man after the boxes," he said as he left the store and entered the storm of flying flakes. There promised to be a heavy snowfall, and Mr. Scott tramped cheerfully toward his handsome home very well satisfied with the result of his morning's work.

Late that afternoon old Benjamin staggered into the house under the load of boxes from the stationer's, and his master ordered them placed in a corner of the library, where he sat toasting his feet before the pleasant blaze.

"Dis yer paper is all de mail dey was, sah," said the negro as he placed the evening newspaper at his master's elbow. "Somehow, Mr. Timothy, seems like dey's powerful lot o' excitement down to de postoffice, sah."

"What sort of excitement, Benjamin?" asked Mr. Scott absently.

"Why, I dunno 'sackly, sah. I heerd Mr. Downs say as how somebody had boughten ebery valentine dey was in Beecacove, and dey want one to be hed for love er money, nohow. Some aks like dey was put out about it. I 'spect some gemman has a lot o' lady frien's he's gwine to 'member dis yer day," he chuckled gleefully.

Timothy Scott's weazened little face flushed under its mat of snow white hair. "That will do, Benjamin," he said gravely, and the old servant retired.

"I dunno, Hetty," he confided to his better half, who was washing dishes in the kitchen, "seems like Mr. Timothy's growing pesky irritable lately."

"'Whar's he been sayin' now?" wheezed Hetty, lumbering across the room. "I don't set no store by ole back's. Dey's powerful peevish and hard to suit."

"I don't recomember what he sayed," returned Benjamin dubiously, "but he did look like he might be sayin' something befo' long."

Mr. Timothy Scott sat late before his cheerful fire that evening with a feeling of discomfort beneath his white waistcoat whenever his gaze encountered the pile of boxes in the corner of the room.

"What are you going to do with us?" they seemed to ask reproachfully. "Are you going to send us on our several ways to cheer sorrowful lovers and make little children smile?"

No, Mr. Timothy Scott was not going to help the valentines to fulfill their several missions. He frowned aggressively into the fire, and the glowing embers sent shafts of light up the chimney and framed pictures in which

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valentines played many a part, and that was very strange too.

There was a picture of a girl, such a pretty girl, small and dainty, with black hair and soft black eyes. She wore a white gown and a blue ribbon, and she was giving Mr. Timothy Scott a valentine, and Mr. Timothy Scott seemed to be very glad to get it. And there was another picture of the same girl, and a white gown and a blue ribbon, but her eyes were full of tears and pleading, while Mr. Timothy Scott was frowning at her with thick brows drawn closely together and a very angry countenance, and young Mr. Scott turned away and left the girl, and he never once looked back.

Thirty long years had he waited for her to send for him, but she had never evinced a sign that she knew Mr. Timothy Scott, save that she dipped a little old fashioned courtesy whenever they met. And that had all happened thirty years ago, and she had never married and neither had he. She lived in a big, lonely house at one end of the village and he at the other in a house just as large and as lonely.

Something rolled down Mr. Timothy's nose and splashed on the white waistcoat. He jumped up and blew his nose violently. He rang the bell for Benjamin.

"More wood, Benjamin," he ordered sharply. "My fire is going out, and I am taking a cold."

The next morning after breakfast Mr. Timothy locked himself in the library and went to his safe, where he unlocked a secret drawer and took out a yellowed envelope, from which he drew a faded little valentine, the self same valentine that the girl in the fire picture had given to young Timothy Scott. This he placed carefully in his letter case. Then he called Benjamin.

"Have the sleigh around at 10 o'clock," he said amiably, and the grinning old servant hobbled away with alacrity.

Down the village street gilded the great Russian sleigh, Benjamin guiding the handsome bays and Mr. Timothy Scott muffled to the ears in furs sitting in the back. People stared after the sleigh curiously, for the sight of the master of Scott house recalled to their minds that he was responsible for the fact that few people in Beecacove had received valentines that morning.

Through the great bronze gateway, which he had not passed since that other day so many years ago, they dashed up the broad avenue, sweeping in front of the colonial house, and he alighted with brisk agility. The long wait in the familiar drawing room, the parting of the velvet curtains, the coming of a diminutive figure with snowy hair piled high, soft black eyes and white dress, with knots of violet ribbon, and then, "Timothy," she said gently, "I knew you must come some day."

The minister married them that afternoon—Violet Allen and Timothy Scott. The newly wedded pair entered the sleigh and were sped down the avenue and up the street to the Scott house, where old Hetty baked and brewed in a whirl of mad excitement. Benjamin was sent on fifty errands about the village, and when evening came there was a merry gathering of people in the old house. Every man, woman and child who was able to be afoot was there. The walls of the fine rooms were hung with gay valentines. The tables were covered with them. They were pinned to the draperies and suspended from the chandeliers.

Timothy Scott and his beautiful bride received their neighbors cordially. There was a banquet in the huge dining room, music in the hall, and then the bride gave to each departing guest a valentine as souvenir of the occasion.

"Timothy," said the bride when they stood alone before the hearth fire, "we must repeat this every year when Valentine's day comes around—the reception, the supper, the music, the giving of valentines."

"We will," said Timothy solemnly.

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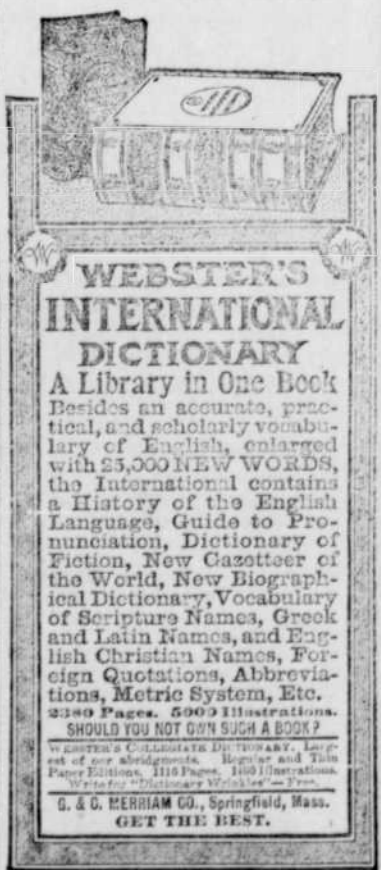
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