

maiden brought up to be seen rather than heard.

Neither Reuben nor Dorcas could tell just how it came about. There had been no long sleigh rides through wintry snowdrifts or lingering strolls through summer's shady lanes; but all at once Reuben found himself shut away from the cheerful fireside of the Colby kitchen and occupying a haircloth rocking-chair in the chilly best room, while Dorcas sat opposite with primly folded hands, looking regretfully at her completed work, which adorned the mantelpiece and swayed in the waves of heat from the air-tight stove.

Reuben hardly knew what to talk about after they had looked through the photograph album. His eyes wandered about the room, encountered the parlor organ and he suggested music. Conversation was unnecessary while he sat at ease listening to Dorcas' rendering of 'The maiden's prayer' or 'Home, sweet home,' with variations. After that he never failed to ask for music, and sometimes he joined Dorcas in a vocal duet. Then the interested trio on the other side of the kitchen door nodded approvingly and commented in low tones on the successful outcome of their plans.

So the winter passed away, and one spring evening, when Reuben had been sent over by his mother to obtain Mrs. Colby's recipe for soft soap, he found Dorcas raking her flower bed, and could do no less than offer to 'spade it up.' And under the influence of the spring air and mountain sunset his courage rose with the vigorous use of the spade, and he suddenly remembered the second half of his mother's errand.

'Mother wants we should get married the second of June,' he said, upturning a huge shovelful of moist brown earth. 'It's my birthday.'

Dorcas might well have felt this an abrupt termination to the mild siege which had been laid to her affections, but she betrayed no surprise, only explaining that her parents preferred June tenth as the anniversary of their own wedding day. There bade fair to be difficulty here, for meek Mrs. Colby, with whom sentiment was strong, declined to yield. An appeal to the two supposed to be most interested failed to settle the matter. Dorcas was sure she didn't care, and Reuben only wished the matter settled without a fuss.

Having thus far accepted their future ready-made, the young couple showed small wish to plan for themselves, although Reuben had confided to Dorcas his desire to go lumbering the next winter, and Dorcas, commending his plan, had suggested that she spend the time of his absence down-river learning the milliner's trade.

'I always took to that kind of work,' she said wistfully.

A few days before the wedding, when all Mrs. Penny's arrangements were completed and even her new gray cashmere lay ready on the spare room bed, Freeman Briggs, passing the open window of the Penny kitchen, heard sounds of grief within. Mrs. Penny sat swaying back and forth in the wooden rocking-chair, dropping tears upon the pile of mending in her lap.

'There ain't anything happened to break it off, has there?' inquired Freeman, anxiously, leaning his folded arms on the window-sill.

Mrs. Penny shook her head. 'I almost wish there had,' she answered, brokenly. 'How would you feel to be the mother of the best son in the world twenty-one years and then have to give him up to another woman? I've been crying all the afternoon, thinking this was the last time I should ever do Reuben's mending.' Mrs. Penny wiped her eyes drearily.

'I reckon I wouldn't shed any more tears over that,' Freeman said. 'Dorcas is a mighty nice girl. She can work prettier flowers on a tidy than ever grew in a flower-gar-

den, and fix up a lace collar that'll look just like soap-suds. But I never heard darnin' was one of her strong points, and you can take my word for it, she won't take away none of your privileges in that line. I guess if Reub's mending gets done, you'll have to do it.'

Mrs. Penny dried her eyes and went vigorously on with her work, her lips twitching.

'Married women have something else to do than work tidies!' she said with spirit.

It was that very day that Reuben, going out to the Corners to purchase a necktie for his wedding day, found a letter waiting for him on the revolving rack. It had been there for some time and bore the marks of curious fingers. Reuben delayed opening it until he reached the foot of a long hill on his homeward way. Then, leaving his trusty horse to his own devices, he carefully cut the envelope and drew forth the closely-written sheet within. A slip of paper fluttered down between his feet. It was a cheque on the county bank. And to Reuben's intense surprise the letter was written in his father's hand and signed by his father's name. He lifted it carefully. Was it a message from another world?

Dear Son (the letter ran).—This will reach you just as you are 21, if it don't get overlooked. I've thought a good deal on the time you'd be a man and we could talk over things together. But it's come to me now that I sha'n't live to see that day, and fearing you might miss some of the things I want you to have, I'm writing to you now. Squire Benson at the county seat will mail the letter when it's time. By this time you're a man. And knowing you and your mother, I can tell about how things have gone. You've stayed at home and done just as she said, which was right and proper, and I wouldn't have allowed you to do otherwise if I'd been living. But you ain't got to 21 without finding out that your mother, though she's the best woman in the world, is a terrible manager. Probably you've thought you'd like to do certain things. Most likely she's thought different and you ain't done them. Which hasn't hurt you any. Obeying is one of the first things a man has to learn, and your bringing up is just as it should be—up to now. Your mother's judgment is pretty near perfect. I never went against it but once, but I always calculated to do it a second time if I'd lived till you was grown. I want you to take the money the squire'll send in this letter and go away. Anywhere you have a hankering to go. I always favored west myself, but I married young and lost my chance of travel. Maybe you'd better slip off kind of quiet. Not dishonorable, but without saying anything about it. Your mother's one of the kind that will take it better if she don't find out you're going till after you're gone. Go where you like, and come back in a year or so. You always was a boy that could be trusted. When you get home you may hear from me again. So no more at present from your affect' father,

P PENNY.

Reuben folded the letter and placed it reverently in his pocketbook. Then, turning his horse about, he drove rapidly toward the Colby farm. Dorcas, in the front yard, was working over her flowers with a shadow on her face. 'Reuben,' she had suggested a few days before, 'do you suppose your mother will be willing for me to have a flower bed?' And Reuben had hesitated a little as he answered 'Maybe so. But she thinks green grass looks neater.'

Reuben left his horse at the fence and went toward her, wondering how he was to harmonise his father's wishes with the present state of affairs. But Dorcas, it appears, had also received a letter

which had wrought no small havoc in her hitherto submissive brain.

'Reuben,' she began, anxiously, before he had time to speak, 'can't you get them to put it off a year? My cousin has opened a milliner's store in the city and wants me to come and work for her. It's just what I always wanted to do. I'm tired of the woods, and, oh, I don't want to be married.'

Reuben looked grave. A fear lest he should take undue advantage of her rebellious mood troubled him.

'Are you sure, Dorcas,' he questioned, anxiously. 'Not at all?'

'No, never,' answered Dorcas, vehemently, without a glance at the tall figure beside her. 'Do you mind?' she asked, with a little compunction, as he stood silent.

For answer he gave her the letter he had received. Dorcas read it with a look of awe.

'Your father was a good man,' she said, gently.

There was another silence. Dorcas fixed her eyes upon the tiny shoots of green peeping through the brown earth at her feet.

'Couldn't you slip off just as he says?' she suggested presently. 'Then I couldn't be married alone, and they'd let me go away.'

But Reuben shook his head. 'I couldn't have it said I left you that way, Dorcas,' he said. But when Dorcas, who had no such scruples, proposed going first herself, Reuben was no better pleased.

'Things like that help make a reputation for life,' he said gravely. 'I would give folks a wrong idea of you to have it said you ran away from the man you were going to marry. I think we'll have to elope—not together—for Dorcas looked dissatisfied—but at the same time. You take the stage down-river and I'll row across to Flagtown and get someone to carry me the other way. I might go west by the Canadian-Pacific. It seems kind of under-handed, but my father wouldn't advise what wasn't right. Anyway, we'd better make a mistake this way than the other. Marrying is solemn business.'

Two days later Mrs. Penny, driving swiftly toward the Colby farm, met Deacon and Mrs. Colby coming as rapidly in her direction. Mrs. Colby was in tears and the deacon's cheery face looked stern.

'Then you heard?' faltered Mrs. Penny, as the two horses came to a standstill. The deacon replied dejectedly:

'Not a word but the note she left behind her. I wouldn't have believed a daughter of mine could have done it!'

Mrs. Penny looked bewildered. 'But at's Reuben that's gone!' she said.

Mrs. Colby dried her eyes and the stern expression on her husband's face gave way to one of deep thought.

'Seems as if there'd been a mistake, and I don't know but what we old folks made it, Mrs. Penny,' he said, standing bareheaded in the shady road. 'We want to do our best for our children, but we ain't apt to notice when we pass the point where their rights begin.'

Mrs. Penny would not listen. 'I've always had to plan for Reuben,' she said. 'He'd no head to do it for himself any more than his father before him.'

Reuben's western trip lasted more than a year. It was a week before his return that Freeman brought a letter from the post office addressed to Reuben in a legal hand.

'Just as I expected!' announced Mrs. Penny, with satisfaction, tearing open the long envelope. 'I knew he'd get into trouble somewhere!'

'It's Reub's letter,' suggested the hired man, with all the privileged candor of his class. But Mrs. Penny replied with dignity that the letter was important and needed immediate attention. She tosses aside