

A MAID'S MOON.

Rose Dare was the petted darling of a large circle of friends, both male and female, for, strange to say, she was greatly admired by both sexes. She was not rich, but that did not prevent many lovers of all sorts and conditions coming to woo, but to Rose they were all the same, and she gave them very little encouragement except a smile at odd times, for which they were evidently thankful. But it was not intended by her poor but fond parents to allow her to lose the freshness of youth without in some way settling her future. She was to marry money—that had been decided long ago. She had rare beauty, and while she maintained that anything was possible.

"This is the last time I shall aid you in any way to obtain a suitable husband," said Mr. Dare one day angrily. "All my efforts in the past have been useless, but you ought not, in fairness to your mother and myself, to go on for ever like this. I cannot afford to keep you in dress and falls such as you like much longer, for year by year, as you know, the value of our property is decreasing, and what the end of it will be heaven only knows."

"But, dad, I do not want a husband. I do not want to marry yet," answered Rose, her pretty lips pouting.

"But you have said that for the last three years. Now, my dear child, do listen to reason."

"But, dad, I do not love Harold Rodney."

"Do you love any one else?"

"No."

"Then, my child, love will come. Now do not let this excellent chance go by. You know how hard your mother has worked to entertain him and what an expense his visit has been. Now run away, child, and no more nonsense." Mr. Dare waved his hand toward the door with an air of a pasha and a look on his face that forbade further conversation.

Rose wandered out into the sunshine, her white dress and childish pink sash looking fresh as the morning itself.

She sighed as she went nevertheless. The sun had no charm for her that day, and, strange to say, her dress gave her no delight either, although it was new, and a very pretty one, too, donned with much pleasure and pride an hour before.

"I wish I was like Alice in Wonderland," she thought, "so that I could change my appearance by growing too big or too small for my dresses, so that I should look a sight; for then perhaps Mr. Rodney would not propose. That would serve dad right."

A sudden thought seemed to enter her head at that moment, and with a merry twinkle in her eye and mischief lurking in the dimple in her cheeks she hurriedly entered the house again, and ascended to her room, from which she came forth half an hour later looking a different Rose altogether.

"Let him propose now if he can," she murmured. "As he spoke to dad last night, I suppose he means to do it today."

She smiled a satisfied smile as she turned her head to view the hang of the back of her skirt. Presently from amid the trees she smelled the perfume of a cigar and made straight for the place whence she guessed the aroma came.

She walked very strangely too. Perhaps something hurt her foot, and her boots

looked extremely large for such a small, dainty body to wear.

"Good morning," she said, with a drawl. "Doesn't the weather make one lazy? Too lazy to wash oneself even."

"Good morning," answered Harold Rodney, allowing his eyes to wander from her head to her heels with widest astonishment and pain mingled. "It is rather warm," he continued as he threw his cigar into the hedge and proceeded to seat himself upon a fallen tree, looking the picture of a healthy, handsome English gentleman.

"You are out early, are you not?" she asked, seating herself beside him and thrusting into sight a boot with half the buttons undone.

An amused smile rested on his face, but he did not let her see it, and, indeed, it was hard not to laugh, for Rose had on an old gray dress too small for her, a dirty ribbon tied around her neck, and another of a different color around her hair. Her hat was a green one which had seen some hard winter weather, and her boots were her mother's.

"What in the world does it mean?" thought Harold, for he had seen her go out before in her fresh white gown and had followed her, hoping to speak of his heart's desire. But he could not find her.

This Rose was not the dainty maiden he had seen there.

"Yes," he answered, "I was restless and unsettled, so I came here to look for you."

"For me!" Rose exclaimed, looking rather frightened, clutching at the brim of her hat with hands covered with white cotton gloves which had, by the look of them, been used for fruit picking.

"Yes," he answered, "I wanted you to talk me into a better frame of mind. I—I can't talk. I never do. At least I am generally considered rather silly at conversation of any sort."

"Indeed! Since when, Miss Rose?" he inquired.

"Oh, always," she answered, moving her arm so that a hole in the sleeve could be seen.

"I think I must differ with you, for ever since I have been here your conversation has been charming."

"Ah, I expect that was after dinner," she said.

"After dinner!" he exclaimed in a surprised tone.

"Yes, I generally wake up a bit then, you know."

He gazed at her for a moment trying to grasp her meaning. Her whole behavior was strange, but even this did not dispel the vision of the other Rose—the Rose he loved and hoped to make his wife. So, glancing away from her so as not to be disturbed by her appearance, he said slowly:

"I spoke to your father last night upon a subject that has given me a good deal of food for reflection lately."

"Yes, he told—no, I mean—did you?" she stammered.

He turned suddenly toward her and tried to see her face, which she turned away.

"This explains it," he thought. "It is evidently my ladylove's intention to shock me—to keep me from declaring my love. It is a good hint, but faint heart never won fair lady, and if she does not love any one else I will win her." So he drew a little nearer and said in low and tender tones, "Rose, do you guess the subject on which we spoke?"

"No; haven't the least idea," she answered.

"May I tell you?" bending forward.

"Oh, no, no!" she cried, springing to her feet hurriedly.

"Why not, dear?" he said. "Erosio, darling, I must tell you."

He arose and stood before her, and certainly the mischief in his eyes equalled hers as he continued, "For you look so very sweet today."

"I—look sweet?" she cried in a dazed sort of way.

"Yes, Rosie—always sweet to me. Won't you marry me, dear, and make my happiness perfect?"

"No, no, I cannot! What must I say?"

"Say 'Yes, Harold, I will marry you.'"

"But I do not love you."

"Do you love any one else?"

"No, of course not."

"Then why not give yourself to me, dear, for I love you dearly?"

"I cannot," she commenced; then, suddenly remembering the conversation with her father, she continued, "I suppose I must say 'Yes,' with a frown."

"But that, Rosie, will not do. I want your love."

"Why do you worry me? You know I don't love you."

"My dear, what has your father said? Did he tell you I had spoken to him about you, and that I wished to make you my wife?"

"Yes."

"And what else, dear?"

"He said I ought to marry you, for you are rich, and he—"

Rose got no further; but, hiding her face with her hands, began to cry pitifully.

"Did he want you to marry me even if you did not love me?"

"Yes." Her lips were trembling, and the efforts she made to control the sobs were almost more than the man could bear.

How he longed to take her in his arms and comfort her.

He looked quiteazed and worn as he

stood there battling with himself and thinking, "Shall I marry her and chance gaining her love or go away and try and forget her?"

The hungry, sorrowful pain would be as bad for him either way, and if he thought of her happiness he must leave her.

The victory soon came; the better part of his love rose uppermost. Just then he thought only of what would be the best for her, so, taking her hand in his and gently stroking her dainty fingers, he said in tender tones:

"And this is why you dressed so strangely. If you only knew how much I loved you, you would know that whatever you wore you would still be dear to me, still my little rosebud."

Rose hung her head. How awfully silly she must be to be found out so easily!

"There, dear," he said presently. "Forget all this and be your own light hearted pretty self again. I shall not offend any more."

"But dad?" Rose exclaimed.

"He need never know. I will go away tomorrow morning on most important business. You understand, dear?"

"Oh, thank you, thank you!" she said, and she pressed his hand for a moment to her breast in sheer thankfulness.

She did not know how hard it was for Harold Rodney not to take her in his arms there and then and say he could not give her up, come what would.

He went, as he promised, next day, much to Mr. Dare's disgust, for he felt sure he had not spoken to Rose. She would not be so silly as to send him away after what he had said to her.

Only two or three days passed before Rose found that she missed her gray eyed, tender lover, missed his care and attention, and the place seemed very lonely. Before a month had passed she wished him back again, but the knowledge that she loved him did not fully develop until she heard one day that he was married. Then it came suddenly to her with overwhelming force. Then she cried and called herself naughty names and longed and longed that she could live the past year over again.

How many of us, I wonder, have done that? But it was no good. The love of her life had come and gone so quickly that she had hardly time to recognize the fact.

She was sitting one day on the same tree where he had told his love, trying to recall every look and word he had uttered to her there, and unbidden the tears gathered in her eyes and presently overflowed and fell one by one on to her clasped hands.

"Oh, I wish—I wish he were here!" she murmured sorrowfully.

"Who?" inquired a voice she knew so well.

"Someone who is not worth a thought."

"Rose, it was not I?"

"You—a married man?" with horror.

"You have been misinformed," he said. "I am not married, nor am I likely to be, unless—"

He paused, putting forth his hand yearningly.

"Not married?" she cried. "Unless—"

"Unless you love me and will marry me, dear. I was going away tomorrow—far, far away—to try and forget, and came down today to get a last glimpse of you to carry away with me; something for my heart to feed on, but now!"

"Now?" she echoed.

"Will you, dear?"

"Yes."—Princess.

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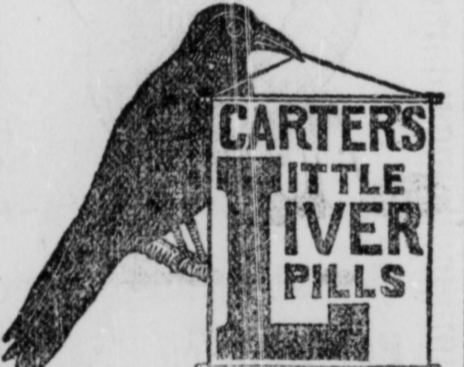
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