

WIGGIN KATE SMITH

LADIES-IN-WAITING

Kate Wiggin

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FOREWORD

It may be urged that all proper heroines go through a period of uncertainty before giving their hands and hearts in marriage. Occasionally, however, there are longer seasons of indecision, incident to pride, high temper, or misunderstanding on the lady's side, or to poverty, undue timidity, or lack of high pressure on the part of the gentleman. I have christened the heroines of this volume "Ladies-in-Waiting," and that no mental picture may be formed of Queen and Court and Maids of Honor I have asked the artist to portray for the frontispiece a marriageable maiden seated pensively upon a hillside. Her attitude is plainly one of suspended animation while the new moon above her shoulders suggests to the reader that she will not wait in vain.

Kate Douglas Wiggin

August 11, 1919

MISS THOMASINA TUCKER

I

“Good-bye, Miss Tucker!”

“Good luck, Miss Tommy!”

“Bye, bye, Tomsie!”

“Don’t stay away too long!”

These sentiments were being called from the Hoboken dock to the deck of an ocean steamer, while a young lady, buried in bouquets and bonbons, leaned over the rail, sparkling, inciting, compelling, responding.

“Take care of yourself, Tommy!”

“I don’t see but that I must! Nobody else to do it!” she responded saucily.

“You wouldn’t let ’em if they tried!” This from a rosy-cheeked youngster who was as close to the water’s edge as safety permitted. “Say, did you guess what my floral offering was to be when you trimmed your hat? I *am* flattered!”

“Sorry! The hat was trimmed weeks ago, and I’m wearing your bouquet because it matches.”

“Thanks, awfully,” replied the crestfallen youth. “Plans for reduction of head-size constantly on file in Miss Tucker’s office.”

“Just Carl’s luck to hit on a match.”

“Don’t see any particular luck in being accessory to a hat trimming,” grumbled Carl.

“Write now and then, Miss Tommy, won’t you?” said a fellow with eyeglasses and an air of fashion.

“Won’t promise! I’ll wait till I’m rich enough to cable!”

“Shilling a word’s expensive, but you can send ’em to me collect. My word is ‘Hopeful,’”—at which the little party laughed.

“Register another, and make it ‘Uncertain,’” called the girl roguishly, seeing that no one was paying any attention to her friends and their nonsense.

“London first, is it?” asked the rosy youth. “Decided on your hotel?”

“Hotel? It’s going to be my share of a modest Bloomsbury lodging,” she answered. “Got to sing my way from a third-floor-back in a side street to a gorgeous suite at the Ritz!”

“We’ll watch you!” cried three in chorus.

“But we’d rather hear you, darling,” said a nice, tailor-made girl, whose puffy eyelids looked as if she had been crying.

“Blessed lamb! I hope I’ll be better worth hearing! Oh, do go home, all of you; especially you, Jessie! My courage is oozing out at the heels of my shoes. Disappear! I’ve been farewelling actively for an hour and casually for a week. If they don’t take off the gangplank in a minute or two I shan’t have pluck enough to stick to the ship.”

“You can’t expect us to brace you up, Tommy,” said the rosy youth. “We’re losing too much by it. Come along back! What’s the matter with America?”

“Don’t talk to her that way, Carl,”—and the tailor-made girl looked at him reproachfully. “You know she’s got nobody and nothing to come back to. She’s given up her room. She’s quarreled with her beastly uncle at last; all her belongings are in the hold of the steamer, and she’s made up her mind.”

“All ashore that’s going ashore!” The clarion tones of the steward rang through the air for the third time, and the loud beating of the ship’s gong showed that the last moment had come. The gangplank was removed and the great liner pushed off and slowly wended her way down-river, some of the more faithful ones in the crowd waving handkerchiefs until she was a blur in the distance.

“Well, there’s no truer way of showing loyalty than by going to Hoboken to see a friend off,” said the eyeglassed chap as he walked beside Jessie Macleod to the ferry. “I wouldn’t do it for anybody but Tommy.”

“Nor I!” exclaimed the rosy youth. “Good old Tommy! I wonder whether she’ll sing and have a career, or fall in love over there?”

“She might do both, I should think; at least it has been done, though not, perhaps, with conspicuous success,” was Carl’s reply.

“Whatever she does, we’ve lost her,” sighed the girl; “and our little set will be so dull without Tommy!”

Fergus Appleton had leaned over the deck rail for a few moments before the ship started on her voyage; leaned there idly and indifferently, as he did most things, smoking his cigarette with an air of complete detachment from the world. He was going to no one, and leaving no one behind. He had money enough to live on, but life had always been something of a bore to him and he could not have endured it without regular occupation. His occasional essays on subjects connected with architecture, his critical articles in similar fields, his travels in search of wider information, the book on which he was working at the moment,—these kept him busy and gave him a sense of being tolerably useful in his generation. The particular group of juveniles shouting more or less intimate remarks to a girl passenger on board the steamer attracted his attention for a moment.

“They are very young,” he thought, “or they would realize that they are all revealing themselves with considerable frankness, although nobody seems to be listening but me!”

He would not have listened, as a matter of fact, had it not been for the voice of the girl they called Tommy. It was not loud, but it had the quality of a golden bell, and Fergus was susceptible to a beautiful voice. One other thing—the slightest possible thing—enlisted his notice. She wore a great bunch of mignonette stuck in the waistband of her green cloth dress, and her small hat had a flat wreath of the same flower. Mignonette was, perhaps, the only growing thing of which Fergus Appleton ever took note, and its perfume was the only one that particularly appealed to his rather dull sense of smell; the reason being that in the old garden of the house in which he was born there was always a huge straggling patch of mignonette. His mother used to sit there on summer mornings and read to him, and when he lay on his back in the sunshine he used to watch the butterflies and humming-birds and trees, and sniff the fragrance that filled the air. When his mother died, he wandered into the garden, sought the familiar corner, and flung himself on the bed of mignonette to cry his heart out—the lonely heart of an eight-year-old boy. That was five and twenty years ago, but he never passed a florist’s open door in summer-time without remembering that despairing hour and the fragrance of the flowers, bruised with his weight and moist with his tears.

The girl vanished the moment the steamer was out of sight of the dock, and Fergus did not give her another thought for a day or two. He had liked her green cloth dress and the hat that framed her young, laughing, plucky face. He had thought her name suited her, and wondered what dignified appellation had been edited, cut, and metamorphosed to make “Tommy,” deciding after a look at the passenger list that it was Thomasina, and that the girl must be Miss Thomasina Tucker, an alliterative combination which did not appeal to his literary taste.

The voyage was a rough one, and he saw her only now and then, always alone, and generally standing on the end of the ship, her green cape blowing in a gale of wind and showing a scarlet lining, her mignonette hat exchanged for a soft green thing with an upstanding scarlet quill. She was the only companionable person on board, but he did not know her and sat nowhere near her at table, an assemblage of facts that seemed to settle the matter, considering the sort of man he was and the sort of girl she was.

“She’s too pretty and too young to be gallivanting about ‘on her own,’” he said to himself one morning, when Tommy stood on the upper deck looking out to sea and, as far as he could judge, singing, though there was such a gale blowing that he could not hear her voice. “But all the girls are

the same nowadays,”—and he puffed his pipe disconsolately; “all the same; brisk, self-supporting, good fellows. If I ever met a nice, unsuccessful-but-not-depressed sort of girl, soft but not silly, mild but not tame, flexible but not docile, spirited but not domineering, I think I should capitulate; but they’re all dead. The type has changed, and I haven’t changed with it.”

Fergus Appleton did not make acquaintances easily; no man does who has had a lonely, neglected boyhood, his only companion a father who seldom remembered his existence, and, when he did, apparently regretted it. He had known girls, but he was a shy, silent, ugly boy, and appealed as little to them as they to him. He did not live through the twenties without discovering that a fine crop of sentiment was growing in his heart; he also discovered that he didn’t know in the least what to do with it. George Meredith, speaking of Romance, says: “The young who avoid that region escape the title of Fool at the cost of a Celestial crown.” Fergus Appleton wouldn’t have minded being called a fool if only he could have contrived to deserve the title, and the glimmer of the crown celestial had been in his imagination more than once until he turned thirty and decided it was not for his head. Guileless school-girls did not appeal to him, and elderly sirens certainly had no power to charm; he was even widow-proof, so he became a thoroughfare for sisterly affection. Girls suffocated him with friendliness, which was not the stuff of which his dreams were made.

However, he had nothing to complain of, for he got as good as he gave, and it occurred to him that he could not expect to start a disastrous conflagration in any maiden bosom so long as he had no brimstone, nor any substitute for it, on his own premises.

“Anyway,” he reflected (though perhaps not oftener than once a year), “if I haven’t a tie in the world, I have complete freedom to do as I like!” And if the said freedom palled upon him occasionally, nobody was the wiser, for Fergus Appleton did not wear his heart on his sleeve.

As for Tommy, there had been several Thomas Tuckers in genealogical line, and the father of Thomasina was already Thomas Tucker the third. Mr. and Mrs. Tucker, the parents of the first Thomas, must have been somewhat lacking in humor, and somewhat ignorant of the classics, for although they could not, perhaps, help being Tuckers, they needn’t have saddled their offspring with a Christian name which would suggest Mother Goose to every properly educated person. However, the first Thomas grew into a great man, healthy, wealthy, and wise, and his descendants could hardly do less than keep his name alive. Thomas the third was disappointed, not to say mortified, when his only child, born in his old age, turned out to be a girl, but he bravely did the best he could and named her Thomasina. Mrs. Tucker did not like the name, but she died before the baby was three days old. The baby hated it herself when she reached years of discretion, and when she found that she possessed a voice and had a possible career before her, she saw plainly that something more mellifluous must be substituted if programmes should ever be in question. Meantime she was Tommy to her friends, and the gay little name suited her to a T. The gay little rhyme suited her, too, for like the Tommy Tucker in Mother Goose, she had to “sing for her supper”; for her breakfast, and her dinner, and her tea also, for that matter, if any were to be eaten.

Her only relation, a disagreeable bachelor uncle, had given her a home during her orphaned girlhood, and her first idea on growing up was to get out of it. This she did promptly when she secured a place in a Brooklyn choir. The salary was modest, but it provided a room and at least one meal a day, not, of course, a Roman banquet, but something to satisfy a youthful appetite. It seemed to the intrepid possessor of a charming voice, an equally charming face, and a positive gift for playing accompaniments, that the other two meals, and a few clothes and sundries, might be forthcoming. As a matter of fact, they were, although the uncle said that Tommy would starve, and he almost hoped that she would, just to break the back of her obstinate independence.

II

Tommy had none too much to eat, and, according to her own æsthetic ambitions, nothing at all to wear; but she was busy all day long and absurdly happy. Her income was uncertain, but that was amusing and thrilling rather than pitiful or tragic. She had two or three “steadies” among singers, who gave her engagements as accompanist at small drawing-room recitals or charitable entertainments. There was a stout prima donna whose arias for dramatic soprano kept her practicing until midnight, and a rich young lady amateur who needed a very friendly and careful accompaniment because she sang flat and always lost her breath before the end of a long phrase. The manner in which Tommy concealed these defects was thoroughly ingenious and sympathetic. When Miss Guggenheim paused for breath, Tommy filled the gap with instrumental arabesques; when she was about to flat, Tommy gave her the note suggestively. If she was too dreadfully below pitch, and had breath enough to hang on to the note so long that the audience (always composed of invited guests) writhed obviously, Tommy would sometimes drop a sheet of music on the floor and create a diversion, always apologizing profusely for her clumsiness. The third patron was a young baritone, who liked Miss Tucker’s appearance on the platform and had her whenever he didn’t sing Schubert’s “Erl König,” which Tommy couldn’t play. This was her most profitable engagement, but it continued alas! for only three months, for the baritone wanted to marry her, and she didn’t like him because he was bald and his neck was too fat. Also, she was afraid she would have to learn to play the “Erl König” properly.

All this time Tommy was longing to sing in public herself, and trying to save money enough to take more lessons by way of preparation.

When she lost the baritone, who was really peevish at being rejected after suiting his programmes to her capacities for a whole season, Tommy conceived a new idea. She influenced Jessie Macleod, who had a fine contralto, and two other girls with well-trained voices, to form a quartette.

“We can’t get anything to do separately; perhaps we can make a pittance together,” she said. “We’ll do good simple things; our voices blend well, and if we practice enough there’s no reason why we shouldn’t sing beautifully.”

“Singing beautifully is one thing and getting engagements is another,” sighed Jessie Macleod.

“As if I didn’t know that! We can’t hope to be superior to other quartettes, so we must be different—unusual, unique—I can’t think just how at the moment, but I will before we make our début.”

And she did, for Tommy was nothing if not fertile in ideas.

Every hour that the girls could spare in the month of October was given to rehearsal, till the four fresh young voices were like one. They had decided to give nothing but English songs, to sing entirely from memory, and to make a specialty of good words well spoken. All the selections but one or two were to be without accompaniment, and in these Tommy would sit at the piano surrounded by the other three in a little group.

Miss Guggenheim was to give them their first appearance, invite fifty or sixty people, and serve tea. She kindly offered to sing some solos herself, but Tommy, shuddering inwardly, said she thought it was better that the quartette should test its own strength unaided.

Miss Guggenheim couldn’t sing, but she could dress, and she had an inspiration a week before the concert.

“What are you going to wear, girls?” she asked.

“Anything we have, is the general idea,” said Tommy. “Mine is black.”

“Mine’s blue”—“White”—“Pink!” came from the other three.

“But must you wear those particular dresses? Can’t you each compromise a little so as to look better together?”

“So hard to compromise when each of us has one dress hanging on one nail; one neck and sleeves filled up for afternoons and ripped out for evenings!”

“I should get four simple dresses just alike,” said Miss Guggenheim, who had a dozen.

“What if they should hang in our closets unworn and unpaid for?” asked Jessie Macleod.

“We’re sure to get at least one engagement some time or other. Nothing ventured, nothing have. We ought to earn enough to pay for the dresses, if we do nothing more,”—and Tommy’s vote settled it.

Miss Guggenheim knew people, if she did sing flat, and her drawing-room was full on the occasion of the début. Carl Bothwick, a friend of Tommy’s, was in a publishing office, and nobly presented programmes for the occasion. The quartette had not thought of naming itself, but Carl had grouped the songs under the heading, “The Singing Girls,” and luckily they liked the idea.

At four o’clock the hum of conversation ceased at the sound of singing voices in the distance. A sort of processional effect had been Tommy’s suggestion, and the quartette formed in the dressing-room and sang its way to the audience.

“Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven’s gate sings,
And Phœbus ’gins to rise.”

The voices rang high and clear, coming nearer and nearer. All the words could be heard and understood. The hall portières divided, and the girls entered, all in soft gray crêpe, gardenias at the belt, little brimmed hats of black velvet with a single gardenia on the side, the flowers being the offering of the dramatic soprano, who loved Tommy. They were young, they were pretty, they sang delightfully in tune, and with quite bewitching effect. Several ladies fell in love with them at first sight, and hoped that they would sing for nothing a few times, “just to get themselves known.” They had done nothing else for two years, so that Tommy said they must be acquainted with the entire State of New York, though nothing ever came of it. It was a joyous surprise, then, when an old gentleman in the company (who was seen to wipe tears away when the girls sang “Darby and Joan”) engaged them to sing at his golden wedding the next night. That was the beginning of a season of modest prosperity. Tommy’s baritone had married his new accompanist (he seemed determined to have a piano-playing wife), and wishing to show Miss Tucker that his heart was not broken by her rejection, he gave a handsome party and engaged the quartette, paying for their services in real coin of the realm. Other appearances followed in and out of town, and Tommy paid for her gray dress, spent a goodly sum for an attack of tonsillitis, the result of overwork, and still saved two hundred dollars. The season was over. She was fagged, but not disheartened. Who is at twenty-two? But it was late April, and drawing-room entertainments were no more. The two hundred dollars when augmented by the church salary would barely take her through till October.

“It is very annoying,” thought Tommy, “when you have to eat, drink, sleep, and dress twelve months in the year, that the income by which you do these things should cease abruptly for four months. Still, furriers can’t sell furs in hot weather, and summer boarders can’t board in winter, so I suppose other people have to make enough money in eight months to spend in twelve.”

““Hark, hark, the lark at Heaven’s gate sings,
And Phœbus ’gins to rise!””

she caroled, splashing about in her morning tub as she finished making these reflections, the tub being an excellent place for trills and scales.

Proceeding from tub to her sitting-room to make things ready for toilet and breakfast, her mind ran on her little problems.

“I want to learn more, see more, hear more,” she thought. “I have one of those nasty, unserviceable, betwixt-and-between talents: voice not high enough for ‘Robert, toi que j’aime,’ nor

low enough for 'Ständchen'; not flexible enough for 'Caro Nome,' nor big enough for 'Ocean, Thou Mighty Monster'; poor French accent, worse German; awfully good English, but that doesn't count. Can sing old ballads, folk-songs, and nice, forgotten things that make dear old gentlemen and ladies cry—but not pay. If I were billed at all, it ought to be

“First Appearance in Public

of

Behind-the-Times Tommy”

This appellation so tickled her fancy that she nearly upset the coffee-pot, and she continued to laugh at her own wit until a fat letter was pushed under her door from the hall outside. She picked it up. It had an English postmark.

“Helena Markham!” she cried, joyously.

Dear Tommy: [the letter read]

Don't you want to come over to London for the season? You never make any money at home from June to October, and if by chance you have a penny in the bank (I don't know why I say “if” when none of us ever had such a thing!) I think I can put enough in your way to pay part of your expenses. I am really beginning to get on!—three engagements in the provincial towns all arranged. My accompanist plays lots better than you do, but I don't sing half so well with him as I used to with you. You somehow infuse the spirit into me that I lack. I incline to be lumpy and heavy. They may not notice it in the provinces, for I dare say they are lumpy and heavy there, too. However, though I shall have to have somebody well known over here for concerts of any great pretensions, I could work you into smaller ones, and coach with you, too, since I must have somebody. And you are so good-looking, Tommy dear, and have such a winning profile! I am plainer than ever, but no plainer than Madame Titiens, so the papers say. I never saw or heard her, of course, but the critics say I have the same large, “massive” style of voice and person. My present accompanist would take first prize for ugliness in any competition; he is more like a syndicate of plainness than one single exemplification of it! I must have a noble nature to think more of my audiences than of myself, but I should like to give them something to please their eyes—I flatter myself I can take care of their ears!

Oh, do come, Tommy! Say you will!

Helena.

Tommy pirouetted about the room like an intoxicated bird, waving the letter, and trilling and running joyful chromatic scales, for the most part badly done.

“Will I go to London?” she warbled in a sort of improvised recitative. “Will I take two or two and a half lessons of Georg Henschel? Will I grace platforms in the English provinces? Will I take my two hundred dollars out of the bank and risk it royally? Perhaps the bystanders will glance in at my windows and observe me giving the landlady notice, and packing my trunk, both of which delightful tasks I shall be engaged in before the hour strikes.”

III

Fergus Appleton thought he saw “the singing girl” of his voyage from New York one May day in Wells, where he went to study the cathedral. He noticed a hansom with a pink-clad figure in the opening, looking like a rosebud of a new and odd sort on wheels. At least, it looked like a rosebud at the moment the doors rolled back like the leaves of a calyx, and the flower issued, triumphant and beautiful. She was greeted by a tall, stout young lady, who climbed into the hansom, and the two settled themselves quickly and drove off.

Appleton’s hansom followed on its own course, which chanced to be in the same direction, and he saw the slim and the stout disappear up a hilly street, at the top of which was a famous old house. He walked that way in the afternoon, having nothing better to do, but could observe no dwelling at which the two ladies might be staying. There was a pretty cottage with a long, graveled pathway leading to it, and a little sign on the locked gate reading: “Spring Cleaning. Please do not knock or ring.” Farther along was a more pretentious house, so attractive that he was sorry he had never noticed it before, for the sign “Apartments to Let” was in one of the front windows. He heard a piano in the rear somewhere, but on reaching the front door another sign confronted him: “The parlor maid is slightly deaf. If doorbell is not answered at once, please step inside and ring the dinner bell on the hall table.”

This somehow required more courage than Appleton possessed, though he determined to look at the rooms on his next visit, so he stole down the path and went about his business, wondering why in the world he had done such a besotted thing as to take a walk among the furnished lodgings of the cathedral town of Wells.

The summer waxed. He had nearly finished his book, and feeling the need of some peaceful retreat where he could do the last chapters and work up his sketches, he took the advice of an English friend and went down to Devonshire, intending to go from place to place until he found a hotel and surroundings to his mind.

The very first one pleased his exacting taste, and he felt that the Bexley Sands Inn would be the very spot in which to write; comfortable within, a trifle too large, perhaps, and at week-ends too full of people, but clean, well-kept, and sunny.

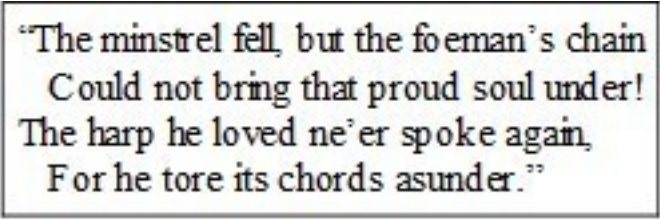
It was a Friday evening, and the number of guests who arrived on the last train from Torquay was rather disturbing. The dining-room service was not interfered with, but Appleton made up his mind to smoke his pipe in his own sitting-room and go down to the lounge later to read the papers, when the crowd might have dispersed. At nine o’clock, accordingly, he descended, and was preparing to settle himself with the last “Spectator” when the young lady in the office observed: “There’s a very good concert going on in the drawing-room, sir, if you enjoy music. No admittance, you know; just a plate at the door as you leave—quite optional.”

Appleton bowed his thanks, filled his pipe, and taking up his newspaper with a sensation of comfortable idleness, was beginning an article on the situation in the Balkans, when a voice floated out from the distant drawing-room, down the long corridor, through the writing-room into the lounge. It was not a little voice nor a big voice, it seemed to have no extraordinarily high notes and no low ones, it did not arrest attention by the agility of its use; but it was as fresh and young as a bird’s and sweeter than honey in the comb. It began by caroling “My Love’s an Arbutus,” went on to “The Little Red Lark” and “The Low-Backed Car,” so that Appleton, his head thrown back in the easy-chair, the smoke wreaths from his pipe circling in the air, the Balkans forgotten, decided that the singer was Irish.

“A pretty voice, sir,” remarked the goddess of the hotel office. “I’m sorry so many of our guests are playing bowls this evening, and there’s a bridge party of three tables in our first-floor private sitting-room, or the young lady would have had an audience. She seems a nice little thing, quite a stranger, with no experience.”

If the singer had even a small group of hearers, they were apparently delighted with “The Low-Backed Car,” for with only a second’s pause she gave “The Minstrel Boy.” A certain individual quality of tone and spirit managed to bridge the distance between the drawing-room and lounge; or perhaps it was the piano accompaniment, so beautifully played that one could almost imagine it a harp; or was it that the words were so familiar to Appleton that every syllable was understood, so that the passion and fire of the old song suffered no loss?

“The minstrel fell, but the foeman’s chain
Could not bring that proud soul under!
The harp he loved ne’er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder.”



“The minstrel fell, but the foeman’s chain
Could not bring that proud soul under!
The harp he loved ne’er spoke again,
For he tore its chords asunder.”

“It’s a pity her programme is so old-fashioned,” said the young lady of the office, passing his chair to give an order to the page. “It’s true only the elderly people went in, but our week-enders are very up-to-date in everything. There’s a lot of Londoners here, and those from Torquay are frightfully musical. If they don’t get Debewssy, it seems they think nothing of the programme.”

“Well, I confess that Debussy seems a trifle alien to this time and place,” said Appleton, “and these old ballads suit my taste much better. I think I’ll take a nearer view.”

He shoved his pipe into its case and strolled down the corridor, pausing behind the heavy velvet portières that shut off the drawing-room. There was no buzz of conversation going on, because there was not a sufficient number of persons to buzz. A very quiet, stodgy audience it was, with no friendly grouping; just a few old gentlemen here and a few old ladies there, sometimes with their prematurely aged and chastened paid companions by their sides. There were some girls of fifteen or sixteen, too, scattered about, a few of them accompanied by prim governesses.

Appleton heard the entrance of some one from the anteroom beyond the grand piano, then a few chords, struck by hands that loved the ivory keys and evoked a reciprocal tenderness every time they touched them; then:

“Near Woodstock Town in Oxfordshire
As I walked forth to take the air,
To view the fields and meadows round,
Methought I heard a mournful sound.”

So the chronicle ran on until the crisis came:

“The lady round the meadow ran,
And gathered flowers as they sprang.
Of every sort she there did pull
Until she got her apron full.”

The history of the distracted lady’s unhappy passion persevered:

“The green ground served her as a bed,
The flowers a pillow for her head.
She laid her down and nothing spoke.
Alas! for love her heart was broke.”

Appleton was at first too enchanted with the mischievous yet sympathetic rendition of this tragedy to do anything but listen. The voice, the speech, were so full of color and personality he forgot for the moment that there would be a face behind them; but there was an irresistible something in the line, “Until she got her apron full,” that forced him to peep behind the curtain just in time to catch the singer’s smile.

As this is not a story of plot, suspense, or mystery, there is no earthly use in denying that the lady in question was Miss Thomasina Tucker, nor any sense in affirming that her appearance in Fergus Appleton’s hotel was in the nature of a dramatic coincidence, since Americans crossing the Atlantic on the same steamer are continually meeting in the British Isles and on the Continent.

Appleton was pleased to see the girl again because he had always liked her face, and he was delighted to find that her voice not only harmonized with it, but increased its charm a hundredfold. Miss Tommy had several rather uncommon qualities in her equipment. One was that when she sang a high note she did it without exposing any of the avenues which led to her singing apparatus. She achieved her effects without pain to herself or to the observer, just flinging them off as gayly and irresponsibly as a bird on a bough, without showing any *modus operandi*. She had tenderness also, and fire, and a sense of humor which, while she never essayed a “comic” song, served her in good stead in certain old ballads with an irresistibly quaint twist in them. She made it perfectly clear that she was sorry for the poor lady who was running around the meadow preparing her flowery bier, but the conviction crept over you that she was secretly amused at the same time. Appleton heard the smile in her voice before he pulled aside the curtain and saw its counterpart on her face; heard and responded, for when Tommy tossed a smile at you, you caught it gratefully and tossed it back in the hope of getting a second and a third.

Another arrow in Tommy’s modest quiver was the establishment of an instantaneous intimacy between herself and her audience. The singing of her songs was precisely like the narration of so many stories, told so simply and directly that the most hardened critic would have his sting removed without being aware of it. He would know that Tommy hadn’t a remarkable voice, but he would forget to mention it because space was limited. Sometimes he would say that she was an interpreter rather than a singer, and Tommy, for her part, was glad to be called anything, and grateful when she wasn’t brutally arraigned for the microscopic size of her talent.

It was Tommy’s captivating friendliness and the quality of her smile that “did” for the shyest and stiffest of men, for by the time she had finished her programme the thunderbolt, the classic, the eternal thunderbolt, had fallen, and Fergus Appleton was in love. Tommy began her unconscious depredations with “Near Woodstock Town” and “Phillida Flouts Me,” added fuel to the flames with “My Heart’s in the Highlands” and “Charlie Is My Darling,” and reduced his heart to ashes with “Allan Water” and “Has Sorrow Thy Young Days Shaded?” The smile began it, but it was tears that worked the final miracle, though moisture very rarely has this effect on fires of any sort.

Tommy was tired and a bit disheartened; Appleton, the only responsive person in the audience, was seated in a far corner of the room, completely hidden behind a lady of formidable width and thickness, so the singer could not be expected to feel the tidal waves of appreciation he was sending toward her, although they ran so high at one moment that he could have risen to his feet and begged her to elope with him. The rest of her hearers sat heavily, stodgily in their seats without moving a muscle, mental, emotional, or physical. They had no private sitting-rooms, and they might as well be where they were as anywhere else; that was the idea they conveyed in every feature of their expressionless

faces. An old gentleman in the front row left the room during the last song on the programme, and Appleton was beset by, and resisted, a vulgar temptation to put out his foot and trip him up in the doorway. When Tommy sang:

“Has hope, like the bird in the story,
That flitted from tree to tree
With the talisman’s glitt’ring glory,
Has hope been that bird to thee?
On branch after branch alighting,
The gem did she still display,
And when nearest and most inviting,
Then waft the fair gem away.”

“Yes, yes, a thousand times yes,” answered Fergus Appleton’s heart, for the first time in his life conscious of loneliness, lack of purpose, lack of anchorage, lack of responsibilities, lack of everything he had never wanted before, but wanted desperately all at once, and quite independent of logic.

He slipped out of the door and let the scattered units in the audience assemble, pass him, and drift down the corridor toward the office and lounge. To his astonishment and anger they dropped shillings on the plate, and the young people sixpences and, great Heavens! even pennies; one half-crown, the tacit apology of the old gentleman who had left early, was the only respectable offering. Appleton took out a sovereign, and then was afraid to put it in the collection for fear of exciting the singer’s curiosity, so he rummaged his pockets for half-crowns and two-shilling pieces. Finding only two or three, he changed his mind and put back the gold-piece just in time to avoid the eye of the page, who came to take the offering back to Miss Tucker. Appleton twisted his mustache nervously, and walked slowly toward the anteroom with no definite idea in mind, save perhaps that she might issue from her retreat and recognize him as she passed. (As a matter of fact she had never once noticed him on the steamer, but the poor wretch was unconscious of that misfortune!) The page came out, putting something in his pocket, and left the door half open behind him. Appleton wheeled swiftly, feeling like a spy, but not until he had seen Miss Thomasina Tucker take a large copper coin from the plate, fling it across the room, bury the plate of silver upside down in a sofa cushion, and precipitate herself upon it with a little quivering wail of shame, or disappointment, or rage, he could hardly determine which.

Appleton followed the unfeeling, unmusical, penurious old ladies and gentlemen back into the lounge, glaring at them as belligerently and offensively as a gentleman could and maintain his self-respect. Then he went into the waiting-room and embarked upon a positive orgy of letter-writing. Looking up from the last of his pile a half-hour later, he observed the young lady who was unconsciously preventing a proper flow of epistolary inspiration on his part, seated at a desk in the opposite corner. A pen was in her right hand, and in her left she held a tiny embroidered handkerchief, rather creased. Sometimes she bit the corner of it, sometimes she leaned her cheek upon it, sometimes she tapped the blotting-pad with the pen-handle, very much as if she had no particular interest in what she was doing, or else she was very doubtful about the wisdom of it.

Presently she took some pennies from a small purse, and rising, took her letters with her with the evident intention of posting them. Appleton rose too, lifting his pile of correspondence, and followed close at her heels. She went to the office, laid down threepence, with her letters, turned, saw Fergus Appleton with the physical eye, but looked directly through him as if he were a man of glass and poor quality of glass at that, and sauntered upstairs as if she were greatly bored with life.

However, the top letter of her three was addressed very plainly to the “Bishop of Bath and Wells,” and Fergus Appleton had known the bishop, and the bishop’s wife, for several years.

Accordingly, the post-bag that night held two letters addressed to the Bishop's Palace, and there was every prospect of an immediate answer to one of them.

IV

As for the country roundabout the Bexley Sands Inn, it is one of the loveliest in Devonshire. It does not waste a moment, but, realizing the brevity of week-end visits and the anxiety of tourists to see the greatest amount of scenery in the shortest space, it begins its duty at the very door of the inn and goes straight on from one stretch of loveliness to another.

If you have been there, you remember that if you turn to the right and go over the stone bridge that crosses the sleepy river, you are in the very heart of beauty. You pick your way daintily along the edge of the road, for it is carpeted so thickly with sea-pinks and yellow and crimson crow's-foot that you scarcely know where to step. Sea-poppies there are, too, groves of them, growing in the sandy stretches that lie close to and border the wide, shingly beach. In summer the long, low, narrow stone bridge crosses no water, but just here is an acre or two of tall green rushes. You walk down the bank a few steps and sit under the shadow of a wall. The green garden of rushes stretches in front of you, with a still, shallow pool between you and it, a pool floating with blossoming water-weeds. On the edge of the rushes grow tall yellow irises in great profusion; the cuckoo's note sounds in the distance; the sun, the warmth, the intoxication of color, make you drowsy, and you lean back among the green things, close your eyes, and then begin listening to the wonderful music of the rushes. A million million reeds stirred by the breeze bend to and fro, making a faint silken sound like that of a summer wave lapping the shore, but far more ethereal.

Thomasina Tucker went down the road, laden with books, soon after breakfast Monday morning. Appleton waited until after the post came in, and having received much-desired letters and observed with joy the week-enders setting forth, hither and thither on their return journeys, followed what he supposed to be Miss Tucker's route; at least, it was her route on Saturday and Sunday, and he could not suppose her to harbor caprice or any other feminine weakness.

Yes, there she was, in the very loveliest nook, the stone wall at her back, and in front nice sandy levels for books and papers and writing-pad.

"Miss Tucker, may I invade your solitude for a moment? Our mutual friend, the Bishop of Bath and Wells, has written asking me to look you up as a fellow countryman and see if I can be of any service to you so far away from home."

Tommy looked up, observed a good-looking American holding a letter in one hand and lifting a hat with the other, and bade him welcome.

"How kind of the bishop! But he is always doing kind things; his wife, too. I have seen much of them since I came to England."

"My name is Appleton, Fergus Appleton, at your service."

"Won't you take a stone, or make yourself a hollow in the sand?" asked Tommy hospitably. "I came out here to read and study, and get rid of the week-enders. Isn't Bexley Sands a lovely spot, and do you ever get tired of the bacon and the kippered herring, and the fruit tarts with Devonshire cream?"

"I can't bear to begin an acquaintance with a lady by differing on such vital points, but I do get tired of these Bexley delicacies."

"Perhaps you have been here too long—or have you just come this morning?"

Appleton swallowed his disappointment and hurt vanity, and remarked: "No, I came on Friday." (He laid some emphasis on Friday.)

"The evening train is so incorrigibly slow! I only reached the hotel at ten o'clock when I arrived on Thursday night." Miss Tucker shot a rapid glance at the young man as she made this remark.

"I came by the morning express and arrived here at three on Friday," said Appleton.

Miss Tucker, with a slight display of perhaps legitimate temper, turned suddenly upon him. "There! I have been trying for two minutes to find out when you came, and now I know you were at my beastly concert on Friday evening!"

"I certainly was, and very grateful I am, too."

"I suppose all through my life people will be turning up who were in that room!" said Miss Tucker ungraciously. "I must tell somebody what I feel about that concert! I should prefer some one who wasn't a stranger, but you are a great deal better than nobody. Do you mind?"

Appleton laughed like a boy, and flung his hat a little distance into a patch of sea-pinks.

"Not a bit. Use me, or abuse me, as you like, so long as you don't send me away, for this was my favorite spot before you chose it for yours."

"I live in New York, and I came abroad early in the summer," began Tommy.

"I know that already!" interrupted Appleton.

"Oh, I suppose the bishop told you."

"No, I came with you; that is, I was your fellow passenger."

"Did you? Why, I never saw you on the boat."

"My charms are not so dazzling that I expect them to be noted and remembered," laughed Appleton.

"It is true I was very tired, and excited, and full of anxieties," said Tommy meekly.

"Don't apologize! If you tried for an hour, you couldn't guess just why I noticed and remembered *you*!"

"I conclude then it was not for *my* dazzling charms," Tommy answered saucily.

"It was because you wore the only flower I ever notice, one that is associated with my earliest childhood. I never knew a woman to wear a bunch of mignonette before."

"Some one sent it to me, I remember, and it had some hideous scarlet pinks in the middle. I put the pinks in my room and pinned on the mignonette because it matched my dress. I am very fond of green."

"My mother loved mignonette. We always had beds of it in our garden and pots of it growing in the house in winter. I can smell it whenever I close my eyes."

Tommy glanced at him. She felt something in his voice that she liked, something that attracted her and wakened an instantaneous response.

"But go on," he said. "I only know as yet that you sailed from New York in the early summer, as I did."

"Well, I went to London to join a great friend, a singer, Helena Markham. Have you heard of her?"

"No; is she an American?"

"Yes, a Western girl, from Montana, with oh! such a magnificent voice and such a big talent!" (The outward sweep of Tommy's hands took in the universe.) "We've had some heavenly weeks together. I play accompaniments, and—"

"I know you do!"

"I forgot for the moment how much too much you know! I went with her to Birmingham, and Manchester, and Leeds, and Liverpool. I wasn't really grand enough for her, but the audiences didn't notice me, Helena was so superb. In between I took some lessons of Henschel. He told me I hadn't much voice, but very nice brains. I am always called 'intelligent,' and no one can imagine how I hate the word!"

"It is offensive, but not so bad as some others. I, for example, have been called a 'conscientious writer'!"

"Oh, are you a writer?"

"Of a sort, yes. But, as you were saying—"

“As I was saying, everything was going so beautifully until ten days ago, when Helena’s people cabled her to come home. Her mother is seriously ill and cannot live more than a few months. She went at once, but I couldn’t go with her—not very well, in midsummer—and so here I am, all alone, high and dry.”

She leaned her chin in the cup of her hand and, looking absent-mindedly at the shimmering rushes, fell into a spell of silence that took no account of Appleton.

To tell the truth, he didn’t mind looking at her unobserved for a moment or two. He had almost complete control of his senses, and he didn’t believe she could be as pretty as he thought she was. There was no reason to think that she was better to look at than an out-and-out beauty. Her nose wasn’t Greek. It was just a trifle faulty, but it was piquant and full of mischief. There was nothing to be said against her mouth or her eyelashes, which were beyond criticism, and he particularly liked the way her dark-brown hair grew round her temples and her ears—but the quality in her face that appealed most to Appleton was a soft and touching youthfulness.

Suddenly she remembered herself, and began again:

“Miss Markham and I had twice gone to large seaside hotels with great success, but, of course, she had a manager and a reputation. I thought I would try the same thing alone in some very quiet retreat, and see if it would do. Oh! wasn’t it funny!” (Here she broke into a perfectly childlike fit of laughter.) “It was such a well-behaved, solemn little audience, that never gave me an inkling of its liking or its loathing.”

“Oh, yes, it did!” remonstrated Appleton. “They loved your Scotch songs.”

“Silently!” cried Tommy. “I had dozens and dozens of other things upstairs to sing to them, but I thought I was suiting my programme to the place and the people. I looked at them during luncheon and made my selections.”

“You are flattering the week-enders.”

“I believe you are musical,” she ventured, looking up at him as she played with a tuft of sea-pinks.

“I am passionately fond of singing, so I seldom go to concerts,” he answered, somewhat enigmatically. “Your programme was an enchanting one to me.”

“It was good of its kind, if the audience would have helped me,”—and Tommy’s lip trembled a little; “but perhaps I could have borne that, if it hadn’t been for the—plate.”

“Not a pleasant custom, and a new one to me,” said Appleton.

“And to me!” (Here she made a little grimace of disgust.) “I knew beforehand I had to face the plate—but the contents! Where did you sit?”

“I was forced to stay a trifle in the background, I entered so late. It was your ‘Minstrel Boy’ that dragged me out of my armchair in the lounge.”

“Then perhaps you saw the plate? I know by your face that you did! You saw the sixpences, which I shall never forget, and the pennies, which I will never forgive! I thirst for the blood of those who put in pennies!”

“They would all have been sitting in boiling oil since Friday if I had had my way,” responded Appleton.

Tommy laughed delightedly. “I know now who put in the sovereign! I knew every face in that audience—that wasn’t difficult in so small a one—and I tried and tried to fix the sovereign on any one of them, and couldn’t. At last I determined that it was the old gentleman who went out in the middle of ‘Allan Water,’ feeling that he would rather pay anything than stay any longer. Confess! it *was* you!”

Appleton felt very sheepish as he met Tommy’s dancing eyes and heightened color.

“I couldn’t bear to let you see those pennies,” he stammered, “but I couldn’t get them out before the page came to take the plate.”

"Perhaps you were 'pound foolish,' and the others were 'penny wise,' but it was awfully nice of you. If I can pay my bill here without spending that sovereign, I believe I'll keep it for a lucky piece. I shall be very rich by Saturday night, anyway."

"A legacy due?"

"Goodness, no! I haven't a relation in the world except one, who disapproves of me; not so much as I disapprove of him, however. No, Albert Spalding and Donald Tovey have engaged me for a concert in Torquay."

"I have some business in Torquay which will keep me there for a few days on my way back to Wells," said Appleton nonchalantly. (The bishop's letter had been a pure and undefiled source of information on all points.)

"Why, how funny! I hope you'll be there on Saturday. There'll be no plate! Tickets two and six to seven and six, but you shall be my guest, my sovereign guest. I am going to Wells myself to stay till—till I make up my mind about a few things."

"America next?" inquired Appleton, keeping his voice as colorless as possible.

"I don't know. Helena made me resign my church position in Brooklyn, and for the moment my 'career' is undecided."

She laughed, but her eyes denied the mirth that her lips affirmed, and Appleton had such a sudden, illogical desire to meddle with her career, to help or hinder it, to have a hand in it at any rate, that he could hardly hold his tongue.

"The Torquay concert will be charming, I hope. You know what Spalding's violin-playing is, and Donald Tovey is a young genius at piano-playing and composing. He is going to accompany me in some of his own songs, and he wants me to sing a group of American ones—Macdowell, Chadwick, Nevin, Mrs. Beach, and Margaret Lang."

"I hope you'll accompany yourself in some of your own ballads!"

"No, the occasion is too grand; unless they should happen to like me very much. Then I could play for myself, and sing 'Allan Water,' or 'Believe Me,' or 'Early One Morning,' or 'Barbara Allen.'"

(Appleton wondered if a claue of sizable, trustworthy boys could be secured in Torquay, and under his intelligent and inspired leadership carry Miss Thomasina Tucker like a cork on the wave of success.)

"Wouldn't it be lunch-time?" asked Miss Tucker, after a slight pause.

"It is always time for something when I'm particularly enjoying myself," grumbled Appleton, looking at his watch. "It's not quite one o'clock. Must we go in?"

"Oh, yes; we've ten minutes' walk,"—and Tommy scrambled up and began to brush sand from her skirts.

"Couldn't I sit at your table—under the chaperonage of the Bishop of Bath and Wells?" And Appleton got on his feet and collected Tommy's books.

The girl's laugh was full-hearted this time. "Certainly not," she said. "What does Bexley Sands know of the bishop and his interest in us? But if you can find the drawing-room utterly deserted at any time, I'll sing for you."

"How about a tea-basket and a walk to Gray Rocks at four o'clock?" asked Appleton as they strolled toward the hotel.

"Charming! And I love singing out of doors without accompaniment. I'm determined to earn that sovereign in course of time! Are you from New England?"

"Yes; and you?"

"Oh, I'm from New York. I was born in a row of brown-stone fronts, in a numbered street, twenty-five or thirty houses to a block, all exactly alike. I wonder how I've outlived my start. And you?"

"In the country, bless it,—in the eastern part of Massachusetts. We had a garden and my mother and I lived in it during all the months of my life that matter. That's where the mignonette grew."

“And He planted a garden eastward in Eden,” quoted Tommy, half to herself.

“It’s the only Eden I ever knew! Do you like it over here, Miss Tucker, or are you homesick now that your friend is in America?”

“Oh, I’m never homesick; for the reason that I have never had any home since I was ten years old, when I was left an orphan. I haven’t any deep roots in New York; it’s like the ocean, too big to love. I respect and admire the ocean, but I love a little river. You know the made-over aphorism: ‘The home is where the hat is’? For ‘hat’ read ‘trunk,’ and you have my case, precisely.”

“That’s because you are absurdly, riotously young! It won’t suit you forever.”

“Does anything suit one forever?” asked Tommy frivolously, not cynically, but making Appleton a trifle uncomfortable nevertheless. “Anything except singing, I mean? Perhaps you feel the same way about writing? You haven’t told me anything about your work, and I’ve confided my past history, present prospects, and future aspirations to you!”

“There’s not so much to say. It is good work, and it is growing better. I studied architecture at the Beaux-Arts. I do art-criticism, and I write about buildings chiefly. That would seem rather dull to a warbler like you.”

“Not a bit. Doesn’t somebody say that architecture is frozen music?”

“I don’t get as immediate response to my work as you do to yours.”

“No, but you never had sixpences and pennies put into your plate! Now give me my books, please. I’ll go in at the upper gate alone, and run upstairs to my room. You enter by the lower one and go through the lounge, where the guests chiefly congregate waiting for the opening of the dining-room. Au revoir!”

When Tommy opened her bedroom door she elevated her pretty, impertinent little nose and sniffed the air. It was laden with a delicate perfume that came from a huge bunch of mignonette on the table. It was long-stemmed, fresh, and moist, loosely bound together, and every one of its tiny brown blossoms was sending out fragrance into the room. It did not need Fergus Appleton’s card to identify the giver, but there it was.

“What a nice, kind, understanding person he is! And how cheerful it makes life to have somebody from your own country taking an interest in you, and liking your singing, and hating those beastly pennies!” And Tommy, quickly merging artist in woman, slipped on a coatee of dull-green crêpe over her old black taffeta, and taking down her hat with the garland of mignonette from the shelf in her closet, tucked some of the green sprays in her belt, and went down to luncheon. She didn’t know where Fergus Appleton’s table was, but she would make her seat face his. Then she could smile thanks at him over the mulligatawny soup, or the filet of sole, or the boiled mutton, or the apple tart. Even the Bishop of Bath and Wells couldn’t object to that!

V

Their friendship grew perceptibly during the next two days, though constantly under the espionage of the permanent guests of the Bexley Sands Inn, but on Wednesday night Miss Tucker left for Torquay, according to schedule. Fergus Appleton remained behind, partly to make up arrears in his literary work, and partly as a sop to decency and common sense. He did not deem it either proper or dignified to escort the young lady on her journey (particularly as he had not been asked to do so), so he pined in solitary confinement at Bexley until Saturday morning, when he followed her to the scene of her labors.

After due reflection he gave up the idea of the claque, and rested Tommy's case on the knees of the gods, where it transpired that it was much safer, for Torquay liked Tommy, and the concert went off with enormous *éclat*. From the moment that Miss Thomasina Tucker appeared on the platform the audience looked pleased. She wore a quaint dress of white flounced chiffon, with a girdle of green, and a broad white hat with her old mignonette garland made into two little nosegays perched on either side of the transparent brim. She could not wear the mignonette that Appleton had sent to her dressing-room, because she would have been obscured by the size of the offering, but she carried as much of it as her strength permitted, and laid the fragrant bouquet on the piano as she passed it. (A poem had come with it, but Tommy did not dare read it until the ordeal was over, for no one had ever written her a poem before. It had three long verses, and was signed "F.A."—that was all she had time to note.)

A long-haired gentleman sitting beside Appleton remarked to his neighbor: "The girl looks like a flower; it's a pity she has such a heathenish name! Why didn't they call her Hope, or Flora, or Egeria, or Cecilia?"

When the audience found that Miss Tucker's singing did not belie her charming appearance, they cast discretion to the winds and loved her. Appleton himself marveled at the beauty of her performance as it budded and bloomed under the inspiration of her fellow artists and the favor of the audience, and the more he admired the more depressed he became.

"She may be on the threshold of a modest 'career,' of a sort, after all," he thought, "and she will never give it up for me. Would she be willing to combine me with the career, and how would it work? I shouldn't be churl enough to mind her singing now and then, but it seems to me I couldn't stand 'tours.' Besides, hers is such a childlike, winsome, fragrant little gift it ought not to be exploited like a great, booming talent!"

The audience went wild over Donald Tovey's songs. He played, and Tommy sang them from memory, and it seemed as if they had been written then and there, struck off at white heat; as if the composer happened to be at the piano, and the singer chanced with his help to be interpreting those particular verses for that particular moment.

His setting of "Jock o'Hazeldean" proved irresistible:

"They sought her baith by bower an ha';
The ladie was not seen."

And then with a swirl and a torrent of sound, a clangor of sword and a clatter of hoofs:

"She's o'er the Border and awa'
Wi' Jock o' Hazeldean."

Appleton didn't see any valid reason why Tovey should kiss Tommy's hand in responding to the third recall, but supposed it must be a composer's privilege, and wished that he were one.

Then the crowd made its way into the brilliant Torquay sunshine, and Appleton lingered in the streets until the time came for the tea-party arranged for the artists at the hotel.

It was a gay little gathering, assisted by a charming lady of the town, who always knew the celebrated people who flock there in all seasons. Spalding and Tovey were the lions, but Miss Thomasina Tucker did not lack for compliments. Her cheeks glowed and her eyes sparkled under the white tulle brim of her hat. Her neck looked deliciously white and young, rising from its transparent chiffons, and her bunch of mignonette gave a note of delicate distinction. The long-haired gentleman was present, and turned out to be a local poet. He told Miss Tucker that she ought never to wear or to carry another flower. "Not, at all events, till you pass thirty!" he said. "You belong together—you, your songs, and the mignonette!"—at which she flung a shy upward glance at Appleton, saying: "It is this American friend who has really established the connection, though I have always worn green and white and always loved the flower."

"You sent me some verses, Mr. Appleton," she said, as the poet moved away. "I have them safe" (and she touched her bodice), "but I haven't had a quiet moment to read them."

"Just a little tribute," Appleton answered carelessly. "Are you leaving? If so, I'll get your flowers into a cab and drive you on."

"No. I am going, quite unexpectedly, to Exeter to-night. Let us sit down in this corner a moment and I'll tell you. Mr. Tovey has asked me to substitute for a singer who is ill. The performance is on Monday and I chance to know the cantata. I shall not be paid, but it will be a fine audience and it may lead to something; after all, it's not out of my way in going to Wells."

"Aren't you overtired to travel any more to-night?"

"No, I am treading air! I have no sense of being in the body at all. Mrs. Cholmondeley, that dark-haired lady you were talking with a moment ago, lives in Exeter and will take me to her house. And how nice that I don't have to say good-bye, for you still mean to go to Wells?"

"Oh, yes! I haven't nearly finished with the cathedral—I shall be there before you. Can I look up lodgings or do anything for you?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I shall go to the old place where Miss Markham and I lived before. The bishop and Mrs. Kennion sent us there because there is a piano, and the old ladies, being deaf, don't mind musical lodgers. Didn't the concert go off beautifully! Such artists, those two men; so easy to do one's best in such company."

"It was a triumph! Doesn't it completely efface the memory of the plate and the pennies?"

"Yes," Tommy answered. "I bear no ill-will to any living creature. The only flaw is my horrid name. Can't you think of another for me? I've just had an anonymous note. Hear it!" (taking it from her glove):

Dear Madam:

The name of Thomasina Tucker is one of those bizarre Americanisms that pain us so frequently in England. I fancy you must have assumed it for public use, and if so, I beg you will change it now, before you become too famous. The grotesque name of Thomasina Tucker belittles your exquisite art.

Very truly yours,

A Well Wisher.

"What do you think of that?"

Appleton laughed heartily and scanned the note. "It is from some doddering old woman," he said. "The name given you by your sponsors in baptism to be condemned as a 'bizarre Americanism'!"

"I cannot think why the loyalty of my dear mother and father to Tucker, and to Thomas, should have made them saddle me with such a handicap! They might have known I was going to sing, for I bawled incessantly from birth to the age of twelve months. I shall have to change my name, and you

must help me to choose. Au revoir!”—and she darted away with a handshake and a friendly backward glance from the door.

“Can I think of another name for her?” apostrophized Appleton to himself. “Can feminine unconsciousness and cruelty go farther than that? Another name for her shrieks from the very housetops, and I agree with ‘Well Wisher’ that she ought to take it before she becomes too famous; before it would be necessary, for instance, to describe her as Madame Tucker-Appleton!”

VI

These are the verses:

To Miss Tommy Tucker

(with a bunch of mignonette)

A garden and a yellow wedge
Of sunshine slipping through,
And there, beside a bit of hedge,
Forget-me-nots so blue,
Bright four-o'clocks and spicy pinks,
And sweet, old-fashioned roses,
With daffodils and crocuses,
And other fragrant posies,
And in a corner, 'neath the shade
By flowering apple branches made,
Grew mignonette.

I do not know, I cannot say,
Why, when I hear you sing,
Those by-gone days come back to me,
And in their long train bring
To mind that dear old garden, with
Its hovering honey-bees,
And liquid-throated songsters on
The blossom-laden trees;
Nor why a fragrance, fresh and rare,
Should on a sudden fill the air,
Of mignonette!

Your mem'ry seems a garden fair
Of old-time flowers of song.
There Annie Laurie lives and loves,
And Mary Morison,
And Black-eyed Susan, Alice Grey,
Phillida, with her frown—
And Barbara Allen, false and fair,
From famous Scarlet Town.
What marvel such a garland rare
Should breathe sweet odors on the air,
Like mignonette?

F. A.

VII

There was never such a summer of enchanting weather as that particular summer in Wells. The whole population of Somersetshire, save those who had crops requiring rain, were in a heaven of delight from morning till night. Miss Tommy Tucker was very busy with some girl pupils, and as accompanist for oratorio practice; but there were blissful hours when she “studied” the cathedral with Fergus Appleton, watching him sketch the stately Central Tower, or the Lady Chapel, or the Chain Gate. There were afternoon walks to Tor Hill, winding up almost daily with tea at the palace, for the bishop and his wife were miracles of hospitality to the two Americans.

Fergus Appleton had declared the state of his mind and heart to Mrs. Kennion a few days after his arrival, though after his confidence had been received she said that it was quite unnecessary, as she had guessed the entire situation the moment she saw them together.

“If you do, it is more than Miss Tucker does,” said Appleton, “for I can’t flatter myself that she suspects in the least what I am about.”

“You haven’t said anything yet?”

“My dear Mrs. Kennion, I’ve known her less than a fortnight! It’s bad enough for a man to fall in love in that absurd length of time, but I wouldn’t ask a girl to marry me on two weeks’ acquaintance. It would simply be courting refusal.”

“I am glad you feel that way about it, for we have grown greatly attached to Miss Tucker,” said the bishop’s wife. “She is so simple and unaffected, so lovable, and such good company! So alone in the world, yet so courageous and independent. I hope it will come out all right for your dear mother’s son,” she added affectionately, with a squeeze of her kind hand. “Miss Tucker is dining here tomorrow, and you must come, too, for she has offered to sing for our friends.”

Everybody agreed that Mrs. Kennion’s party for the young American singer was a delightful and memorable occasion. She gave them song after song, accompanying herself on the Erard grand piano, at which she always made such a pretty picture. It drifted into a request programme, and Tommy, whose memory was inexhaustible, seemed always to have the wished-for song at the tip of her tongue, were it English, Scotch, Irish, or Welsh. There was general laughter and surprise when Madame Eriksson, a Norwegian lady who was among the guests, asked her for a certain song of Halfdan Kjerulf’s.

“I only know it in its English translation,” Tommy said, “and I haven’t sung it for a year, but I think I remember it. Forgive me if I halt in the words:

“I hardly know, my darling,
What mostly took my heart,
Unless perhaps your singing
Has done the greater part.
I’ve thrilled to many voices,
The passionate, the strong,
But I forgot the singer,
And I forgot the song.
But there’s one song, my darling,
That I can ne’er forget.
I listened and I trembled,
And felt my cheek was wet;
It seemed my heart within me
Gave answer clear and low
When first I heard you sing, dear,

Then first I loved you so!”

Tommy had sung the song hundreds of times in earlier years, and she had not the slightest self-consciousness when she began it; but just as she reached the last four lines her eyes met Fergus Appleton's. He was seated in a far corner of the room, leaning eagerly forward, with one arm on the back of a chair in front of him. She was singing the words to the company, but if ever a man was uttering and confirming them it was Fergus Appleton at that moment. The blindest woman could see, the deafest could hear, the avowal.

Tommy caught her breath quickly, looked away, braced her memory, and finished, to the keen delight of old Madame Eriksson, who rose and kissed her on both cheeks.

Tommy was glad that her part of the evening was over, and to cover her confusion offered to sing something of her own composing, the Mother Goose rhyme of “Little Tommy Tucker Sings for His Supper,” arranged as an operatic recitative and aria. The humor of this performance penetrated even to the remotest fastnesses of the staid cathedral circle, and the palace party ended in something that positively resembled merriment, a consummation not always to be reached in gatherings exclusively clerical in character.

The bishop's coachman always drove Miss Tucker home, and Appleton always walked to his lodgings, which were in the opposite direction, so nothing could be done that night, but he determined that another sun should not go down before he put his fate to the touch.

How could he foresee what the morning post would bring and deposit, like an unwelcome bomb, upon his breakfast tray?

His London publishers wanted to see him at once, not only on a multitude of details concerning his forthcoming book, but on a subject, as they hoped, of great interest and importance to him.

Thinking it a matter of a day or so, Appleton scribbled notes to Mrs. Kennion and Miss Tucker, with whom he was to go on an excursion, and departed forthwith to London.

Everything happened in London. The American publishers wanted a different title for the book and four more chapters to lengthen it to a size selling (at a profit) for two dollars and a half. The English publishers thought he had dealt rather slightly with a certain very interesting period, and he remembered, guiltily, that he had been at Bexley Sands when he wrote the chapters in question. It would take three days' labor to fill up these gaps, he calculated, and how fortunate that Miss Thomasina Tucker was safely entrenched in the heart of an ecclesiastical stronghold for the next month or two; a town where he had not, so far as he knew, a single formidable rival. He wrote her regarding his unexpected engagements, adding with legitimate pride that one of England's foremost critics had offered to write a preface for his book; then he settled to his desk and slaved at his task until it was accomplished, when he departed with a beating heart for the town and county that held Miss Thomasina Tucker in their keeping.

Alighting at the familiar railway station, he took a hansom, intending to drop his portmanteau at his lodgings and go on to the palace for news, but as he was driving by the deanery on the north side of Cathedral Green, he encountered Mrs. Kennion in her victoria. She signaled him with her hand and spoke to her coachman, who drew up his horses. Alighting from his hansom, he strode forward to take her welcoming hand, his face radiating the pleasure of a home-coming traveler.

“If you'll let the cabman take your luggage, I'd like to drive you home myself. I have something to tell you,” said Mrs. Kennion, making room for him by her side.

“Nothing has happened, I hope?” he asked anxiously.

“Miss Tucker is leaving for America to-morrow morning.”

“Going away?” Appleton's tone was one of positive dismay.

“Yes. It is all very sudden and unexpected.”

“Sailing to-morrow?” exclaimed Appleton, taking out his watch. “From where? How can I get there?”

“Not sailing to-morrow—leaving Wells to-morrow on an early train and sailing Saturday from Southampton.”

“Oh, the world is not lost entirely, then!”—and Appleton leaned back and wiped his forehead. “What has happened? I ought never to have gone to London.”

“She had a cable yesterday from her Brooklyn church, offering her a better position in the choir, but saying that they could hold it only ten days. By post on the same day she received a letter from a New York friend—”

“Was it a Carl Bothwick?”

“No; a Miss Macleod, who said that a much better position was in the market in a church where Miss Tucker had influential friends. She was sure that if Miss Tucker returned immediately to sing for the committee she could secure a thousand-dollar salary. We could do nothing but advise her to make the effort, you see.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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