

A HUMBLE ROMANCE.

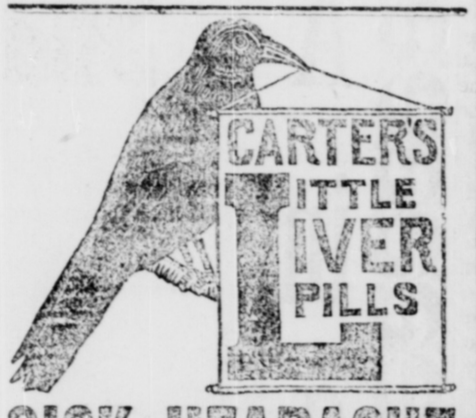
MARY E. WILKINS.

She was stooping over the great kitchen sink, washing the breakfast dishes. Under fostering circumstances, her slender form might have resulted in delicacy or daintiness; now the harmony between strength and task had been repeatedly broken, and the result was ugliness. Her finger joints and wrist bones were knobby and out of proportion, her elbows, which her rolled-up sleeves displayed, were pointed and knobby, her shoulders bent, her feet spread beyond their natural bounds— from head to foot she was a little discordant note. She had a pale, peaked face, her sandy fair hair was strained tightly back, and twisted into a tiny knot, and her expression was at once passive and eager.

"I guess I've got some brothers and sisters somewhere. I don't know just what. Two of 'em went West, an' one is married somewhere in York State. We was scattered when father died. Thar was ten of us, an' we was awful poor. Mis' King took me. I was the youngest; 'bout four, they said, I was. I ain't never known any folks but Mis' King." The peddler walked up and down the kitchen floor twice; Sally kept on with her dishes; then he came back to her. "Look a-here," he said; "leave your dish washin' alone a minute. I want you to give me a good look in the face, an' tell me what you think of me." She looked up shyly in his florid, freckled face, with its high cheek-bones and scraggy sandy moustache; then she plunged her hands into the dish-tub again. "I don't know," she said bashfully. "Well, maybe you do know, only you can't put it into words. Now just take a look out the window at my tin-cart thar. That's all my own, a private concern. I ain't runnin' for no company. I owns the cart an' horse, an' I disposes of the rags, an' sells the tin, all on my own hook. An' I'm a-doin' pretty well at it; I'm a-layin' up a little money. I ain't got no family. Now this was what I was a-comin' at; s'pose you should just leave the dishes, an' the scoldin' woman, an' the butter, an' everything, an' go a-ridin' off with me on my tin cart. I wouldn't know you, an' she wouldn't know you, an' you wouldn't know yourself, in a week. You wouldn't hev a bit of work to do, but just set up thar like a queen, a-ridin' and seein' the country. For that's the way we'd live, you know. I wouldn't hev you keepin' house an' slavin'. We'd stop along the roads for vittles, and bring up at taverns nights. What d'ye say to it?" She stopped her dish-washing now, and stood staring at him, her lips slightly parted and her cheeks flushed. "I know I ain't much in the way of looks," the peddler went on, "an' I'm older than you—I'm near forty—an' I've been married afore. I don't s'pose you kin take a likin' to me right off, but you might arter a while. An' I'd take keer of you, you poor little thing. An' I don't b'lieve you know anything about how nice it is to be taken keer of, an' hev the hard, rough things kep' off by somebody that likes yer." Still she said nothing, but stood staring at him. "You ain't got no beau, hev you?" asked the peddler, as a sudden thought struck him. "No," she shook her head, an' her cheeks flushed redder. "Well, what do you say to goin' with me? You'll hev to hurry up an' make up your mind, or the old lady'll be back."

in a bit, or she'd ha been back afore now. Come now, dear, be spy!" "Now?" said Sally, in turn. "Now! why, of course now; what's the use of waitin'! Maybe you want to make some weddin' cake, but I reckon we'd better buy some over in Derby, or it might put the old lady out;" and the peddler chuckled. "Why, 'm just a-goin' to stow you away in that 'ere tin-art o' mine—there's plenty of room, for I've been on the road a-sellin' nigh a week. An' then I'm a-goin' to drive out of this yard, arter I've traded with your missis, as innocent as the very innocentest lamb you ever see, an' I'm a-goin' to drive along a piece till it's safe; an' then you're a-goin' to git out an' set up on the seat alongside of me, an' we're goin' to keep on till we git to Derby, an' then we'll git married, just as soon as we ain find a minister as wants to airn a ten-dollar bill!" "But," gasped Sally, "she'll ask whar I am." "I'll fix that. You lay here in the cart an' hear what I say. Lor', I'd jest as soon tell her to her face, mysself, what we was a-goin' to do, an' set you right up on the seat beside of me, afore her eyes; but she'd talk hard, most likely an' you'd look scared enough now an' you'd cry an' your eyes would git redder; an' she might say you so you'd be ready to back out now. Women kin say hard things to other women, an' they ain't likely to understand any woman but themselves trustin' a man overmuch. I reckon this is the best way." He went towards the door and motioned her to come. "But I want my bonnet!" "Never mind the bonnet; I'll buy you one in Derby." "But I don't want to ride into Derby bareheaded," said Sally, almost crying. "Well, I don't know as you do, little un, that's a fact; but hurry an' git the bonnet, or she will be here. I thought I heard her a minute ago." "Thar's a little money I've saved, too." "Well, git that; we don't want to make the old lady vallyble presents, an' you kin buy yourself sugar-plums with it. But be spy."

(To be Continued.)



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