

VARIOUS



***QUAINT
COURTSHIPS***

Various

Quaint Courtships

EAN 8596547215417

DigiCat, 2022

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INTRODUCTION

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To the perverse all courtships probably are quaint; but if ever human nature may be allowed the full range of originality, it may very well be in the exciting and very personal moments of making love. Our own peculiar social structure, in which the sexes have so much innocent freedom, and youth is left almost entirely to its own devices in the arrangement of double happiness, is so favorable to the expression of character at these supreme moments, that it is wonderful there is so little which is idiosyncratic in our wooings. They tend rather to a type, very simple, very normal, and most people get married for the reason that they are in love, as if it were the most matter-of-course affair of life. They find the fact of being in love so entirely satisfying to the ideal, that they seek nothing adventitious from circumstance to heighten their tremendous consciousness.

Yet, here and there people, even American people, are so placed that they take from the situation a color of

eccentricity, if they impart none to it, and the old, old story, which we all wish to have end well, zigzags to a fortunate close past juts and angles of individuality which the heroes and heroines have not willingly or wittingly thrown out. They would have chosen to arrive smoothly and uneventfully at the goal, as by far the greater majority do; and probably if they are aware of looking quaint to others in their progress, they do not like it. But it is this peculiar difference which renders them interesting and charming to the spectator. If we all love a lover, as Emerson says, it is not because of his selfish happiness, but because of the odd and unexpected chances which for the time exalt him above our experience, and endear him to our eager sympathies. In life one cannot perhaps have too little romance in affairs of the heart, or in literature too much; and in either one may be as quaint as one pleases in such affairs without being ridiculous.

W.D.H.

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AN ENCORE

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BY MARGARET DELAND

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According to Old Chester, to be romantic was just one shade less reprehensible than to put on airs. Captain Alfred Price, in all his seventy years, had never been guilty of airs, but certainly he had something to answer for in the way of romance.

However, in the days when we children used to see him pounding up the street from the post-office, reading, as he walked, a newspaper held at arm's length in front of him, he was far enough from romance. He was seventy years old, he weighed over two hundred pounds, his big head was covered with a shock of grizzled red hair; his pleasures consisted in polishing his old sextant and playing on a small mouth-harmonicon. As to his vices, it was no secret that he kept a fat black bottle in the chimney-closet in his own room; added to this, he swore strange oaths about his grandmother's nightcap. "He used to blaspheme," his daughter-in-law said, "but I said, 'Not in my presence, if you please!' So now he just says this foolish thing about a nightcap." Mrs. Drayton said that this reform would be one of the jewels in Mrs. Cyrus Price's crown; and added that she prayed that some day the Captain would give up tobacco and *rum*. "I am a poor, feeble creature," said Mrs. Drayton; "I cannot do much for my fellow men in active mission-work. But I give my prayers." However, neither Mrs. Drayton's prayers nor Mrs. Cyrus's active mission-work had done more than mitigate the blasphemy; the "rum" (which was good Monongahela whiskey) was still on hand; and as for tobacco, except when sleeping, eating, playing on his harmonicon, or dozing through one of Dr. Lavendar's sermons, the Captain

smoked every moment, the ashes of his pipe or cigar falling unheeded on a vast and wrinkled expanse of waistcoat.

No; he was not a romantic object. But we girls, watching him stump past the schoolroom window to the post-office, used to whisper to each other, "Just think! *he eloped.*"

There was romance for you!

To be sure, the elopement had not quite come off, but, except for the very end, it was all as perfect as a story. Indeed, the failure at the end made it all the better: angry parents, broken hearts,—only, the worst of it was, the hearts did not stay broken! He went and married somebody else; and so did she. You would have supposed she would have died. I am sure, in her place, any one of us would have died. And yet, as Lydia Wright said, "How could a young lady die for a young gentleman with ashes all over his waistcoat?"

However, when Alfred Price fell in love with Miss Letty Morris, he was not indifferent to his waistcoat, nor did he weigh two hundred pounds. He was slender and ruddy-cheeked, with tossing red-brown curls. If he swore, it was not by his grandmother nor her nightcap; if he drank, it was hard cider (which can often accomplish as much as "rum"); if he smoked, it was in secret, behind the stable. He wore a stock, and (on Sunday) a ruffled shirt; a high-waisted coat with two brass buttons behind, and very tight pantaloons. At that time he attended the Seminary for Youths in Upper Chester. Upper Chester was then, as in our time, the seat of learning in the township, the Female Academy being there, too. Both were boarding-schools, but the young people came home to spend Sunday; and their weekly returns, all

together in the stage, were responsible for more than one Old Chester match....

"The air," says Miss, sniffing genteelly as the coach jolts past the blossoming May orchards, "is most agreeably perfumed. And how fair is the prospect from this hilltop!"

"Fair indeed!" responded her companion, staring boldly.

Miss bridles and bites her lip.

"I was not observing the landscape," the other explains, carefully.

In those days (Miss Letty was born in 1804, and was eighteen when she and the ruddy Alfred sat on the back seat of the coach)—in those days the conversation of Old Chester youth was more elegant than in our time. We, who went to Miss Bailey's school, were sad degenerates in the way of manners and language; at least so our elders told us. When Lydia Wright said, "Oh my, what an awful snow-storm!" dear Miss Ellen was displeased. "Lydia," said she, "is there anything 'awe'-inspiring in this display of the elements?"

"No, 'm," faltered poor Lydia.

"Then," said Miss Bailey, gravely, "your statement that the storm is 'awful' is a falsehood. I do not suppose, my dear, that you intentionally told an untruth; it was an exaggeration. But an exaggeration, though not perhaps a falsehood, is unladylike, and should be avoided by persons of refinement." Just here the question arises: what would Miss Ellen (now in heaven) say if she could hear Lydia's Lydia, just home from college, remark—But no: Miss Ellen's precepts shall protect these pages.

But in the days when Letty Morris looked out of the coach window, and young Alfred murmured that the prospect was fair indeed, conversation was perfectly correct. And it was still decorous even when it got beyond the coach period and reached a point where Old Chester began to take notice. At first it was young Old Chester which giggled. Later old Old Chester made some comments; it was then that Alfred's mother mentioned the matter to Alfred's father. "He is young, and, of course, foolish," Mrs. Price explained. And Mr. Price said that though folly was incidental to Alfred's years, it must be checked.

"Just check it," said Mr. Price.

Then Miss Letty's mother awoke to the situation, and said, "Fy, fy, Letitia."

So it was that these two young persons were plunged in grief. Oh, glorious grief of thwarted love! When they met now, they did not talk of the landscape. Their conversation, though no doubt as genteel as before, was all of broken hearts. But again Letty's mother found out, and went in wrath to call on Alfred's family. It was decided between them that the young man should be sent away from home. "To save him," says the father. "To protect my daughter," says Mrs. Morris.

But Alfred and Letty had something to say.... It was in December; there was a snow-storm—a storm which Lydia Wright would certainly have called "awful"; but it did not interfere with true love; these two children met in the graveyard to swear undying constancy. Alfred's lantern came twinkling through the flakes, as he threaded his way across the hillside among the tombstones, and found Letty

just inside the entrance, standing with her black serving-woman under a tulip-tree. The negress, chattering with cold and fright, kept plucking at the girl's pelisse; but once Alfred was at her side, Letty was indifferent to storm and ghosts. As for Alfred, he was too cast down to think of them.

"Letty, they will part us."

"No, my dear Alfred, no!"

"Yes. Yes, they will. Oh, if you were only mine!"

Miss Letty sighed.

"Will you be true to me, Letty? I am to go on a sailing-vessel to China, to be gone two years. Will you wait for me?"

Letty gave a little cry; two years! Her black woman twitched her sleeve.

"Miss Let, it's gittin' cole, honey."

"(Don't, Flora.)—Alfred, *two years!* Oh, Alfred, that is an eternity. Why, I should be—I should be twenty!"

The lantern, set on a tombstone beside them, blinked in a snowy gust. Alfred covered his face with his hands, he was shaken to his soul; the little, gay creature beside him thrilled at a sound from behind those hands.

"Alfred,"—she said, faintly; then she hid her face against his arm; "my dear Alfred, I will, if you desire it—fly with you!"

Alfred, with a gasp, lifted his head and stared at her. His slower mind had seen nothing but separation and despair; but the moment the word was said he was aflame. What! Would she? Could she? Adorable creature!

"Miss Let, my feet done get cole—"

("Flora, be still!)"—Yes, Alfred, yes. I am thine."

The boy caught her in his arms. "But I am to be sent away on Monday! My angel, could you—fly, *to-morrow?*"

And Letty, her face still hidden against his shoulder, nodded.

Then, while the shivering Flora stamped, and beat her arms, and the lantern flared and sizzled, Alfred made their plans, which were simple to the point of childishness. "My own!" he said, when it was all arranged; then he held the lantern up and looked into her face, blushing and determined, with snowflakes gleaming on the curls that pushed out from under her big hood. "You will meet me at the minister's?" he said, passionately. "You will not fail me?"

"I will not fail you!" she said; and laughed joyously; but the young man's face was white.

She kept her word; and with the assistance of Flora, romantic again when her feet were warm, all went as they planned. Clothes were packed, savings-banks opened, and a chaise abstracted from the Price stable.

"It is my intention," said the youth, "to return to my father the value of the vehicle and nag, as soon as I can secure a position which will enable me to support my Lefty in comfort and fashion."

On the night of the elopement the two children met at the minister's house. (Yes, the very old Rectory to which we Old Chester children went every Saturday afternoon to Dr. Lavendar's Collect class. But of course there was no Dr. Lavendar there in those days.)

Well; Alfred requested this minister to pronounce them man and wife; but he coughed and poked the fire. "I am of age," Alfred insisted; "I am twenty-two." Then Mr. Smith said

he must go and put on his bands and surplice first; and Alfred said, "If you please, sir." And off went Mr. Smith—*and sent a note to Alfred's father and Letty's mother!*

We girls used to wonder what the lovers talked about while they waited for the traitor. Ellen Dale always said they were foolish to wait. "Why didn't they go right off?" said Ellen. "If I were going to elope, I shouldn't bother to get married. But, oh, think of how they felt when in walked those cruel parents!"

The story was that they were torn weeping from each other's arms; that Letty was sent to bed for two days on bread and water; that Alfred was packed off to Philadelphia the very next morning, and sailed in less than a week. They did not see each other again.

But the end of the story was not romantic at all. Letty, although she crept about for a while in deep disgrace, and brooded upon death—that interesting impossibility, so dear to youth,—*married*, if you please! when she was twenty, and went away to live. When Alfred came back, seven years later, he got married, too. He married a Miss Barkley. He used to go away on long voyages, so perhaps he wasn't really fond of her. We tried to think so, for we liked Captain Price.

In our day Captain Price was a widower. He had given up the sea, and settled down to live in Old Chester; his son, Cyrus, lived with him, and his languid daughter-in-law—a young lady of dominant feebleness, who ruled the two men with that most powerful domestic rod—foolish weakness. This combination in a woman will cause a mountain (a masculine mountain) to fly from its firm base; while

kindness, justice, and good sense leave it upon unshaken foundations of selfishness. Mrs. Cyrus was a Goliath of silliness; when billowing black clouds heaped themselves in the west on a hot afternoon, she turned pale with apprehension, and the Captain and Cyrus ran for four tumblers, into which they put the legs of her bed, where, cowering among the feathers, she lay cold with fear and perspiration. Every night the Captain screwed down all the windows on the lower floor; in the morning Cyrus pulled the screws out. Cyrus had a pretty taste in horseflesh, but Gussie cried so when he once bought a trotter that he had long ago resigned himself to a friendly beast of twenty-seven years, who could not go much out of a walk because he had string-halt in both hind legs.

But one must not be too hard on Mrs. Cyrus. In the first place, she was not born in Old Chester. But, added to that, just think of her name! The effect of names upon character is not considered as it should be. If one is called Gussie for thirty years, it is almost impossible not to become gussie after a while. Mrs. Cyrus could not be Augusta; few women can; but it was easy to be gussie—irresponsible, silly, selfish. She had a vague, flat laugh, she ate a great deal of candy, and she was afraid of—But one cannot catalogue Mrs. Cyrus's fears. They were as the sands of the sea for number. And these two men were governed by them. Only when the secrets of all hearts shall be revealed will it be understood why a man loves a fool; but why he obeys her is obvious enough: Fear is the greatest power in the world; Gussie was afraid of thunder-storms, or what not; but the Captain and Cyrus were afraid of Gussie! A hint of tears in

her pale eyes, and her husband would sigh with anxiety and Captain Price slip his pipe in his pocket and sneak out of the room. Doubtless Cyrus would often have been glad to follow him, but the old gentleman glared when his son showed a desire for his company.

“Want to come and smoke with me? 'Your granny was Murray!'—you're sojering. You're first mate; you belong on the bridge in storms. I'm before the mast. Tend to your business!”

It was forty-eight years before Letty and Alfred saw each other again—or at least before persons calling themselves by those old names saw each other. Were they Letty and Alfred—this tousled, tangled, good-humored old man, ruddy and cowed, and this small, bright-eyed old lady, led about by a devoted daughter? Certainly these two persons bore no resemblance to the boy and girl torn from each other's arms that cold December night. Alfred had been mild and slow; Captain Price (except when his daughter-in-law raised her finger) was a pleasant old roaring lion. Letty had been a gay, high-spirited little creature, not as retiring, perhaps, as a young female should be, and certainly self-willed; Mrs. North was completely under the thumb of her daughter Mary. Not that “under the thumb” means unhappiness; Mary North desired only her mother's welfare, and lived fiercely for that single purpose. From morning until night (and, indeed, until morning again, for she rose often from her bed to see that there was no draught from the crack of the open window), all through the twenty-four hours she was on duty.

When this excellent daughter appeared in Old Chester and said she was going to hire a house, and bring her

mother back to end her days in the home of her girlhood, Old Chester displayed a friendly interest; when she decided upon a house on Main Street, directly opposite Captain Price's, it began to recall the romance of that thwarted elopement.

“Do you suppose she knows that story about old Alfred Price and her mother?” said Old Chester; and it looked sidewise at Miss North with polite curiosity. This was not altogether because of her mother's romantic past, but because of her own manners and clothes. With painful exactness, Miss North endeavored to follow the fashion; but she looked as if articles of clothing had been thrown at her and some had stuck. As to her manners, Old Chester was divided. Mrs. Barkley said she hadn't any. Dr. Lavendar said she was shy. But, as Mrs. Drayton said, that was just like Dr. Lavendar, always making excuses for wrong-doing! —“Which,” said Mrs. Drayton, “is a strange thing for a minister to do. For my part, I cannot understand impoliteness in a *Christian* female. But we must not judge,” Mrs. Drayton ended, with what Willy King called her “holy look.” Without wishing to “judge,” it may be said that, in the matter of manners, Miss Mary North, palpitatingly anxious to be polite, told the truth. She said things that other people only thought. When Mrs. Willy King remarked that, though she did not pretend to be a good housekeeper, she had the backs of her pictures dusted every other day, Miss North, her chin trembling with shyness, said, with a panting smile:

“That's not good for housekeeping; it's foolish waste of time.” Which was very rude, of course—though Old Chester was not as displeased as you might have supposed.

While Miss North, timorous and truthful (and determined to be polite), was putting the house in order before sending for her mother, Old Chester invited her to tea, and asked her many questions about Letty and the late Mr. North. But nobody asked whether she knew that her opposite neighbor, Captain Price, might have been her father;—at least that was the way Miss Ellen's girls expressed it. Captain Price himself did not enlighten the daughter he did not have; but he went rolling across the street, and pulling off his big shabby felt hat, stood at the foot of the steps, and roared out: “Morning! Anything I can do for you?” Miss North, indoors, hanging window-curtains, her mouth full of tacks, shook her head. Then she removed the tacks and came to the front door.

“Do you smoke, sir?”

Captain Price removed his pipe from his mouth and looked at it. “Why! I believe I do, sometimes,” he said.

“I inquired,” said Miss North, smiling tremulously, her hands gripped hard together, “because, if you do, I will ask you to desist when passing our windows.”

Captain Price was so dumbfounded that for a moment words failed him. Then he said, meekly, “Does your mother object to tobacco smoke, ma'am?”

“It is injurious to all ladies' throats,” said Miss North, her voice quivering and determined.

“Does your mother resemble you, madam?” said Captain Price, slowly.

“Oh no! my mother is pretty. She has my eyes, but that's all.”

"I didn't mean in looks," said the old man; "she did not look in the least like you; not in the least! I mean in her views?"

"Her views? I don't think my mother has any particular views," Miss North answered, hesitatingly; "I spare her all thought," she ended, and her thin face bloomed suddenly with love.

Old Chester rocked with the Captain's report of his call; and Mrs. Cyrus told her husband that she only wished this lady would stop his father's smoking.

"Just look at his ashes," said Gussie; "I put saucers round everywhere to catch 'em, but he shakes 'em off anywhere—right on the carpet! And if you say anything, he just says, 'Oh, they'll keep the moths away!' I worry so for fear he'll set the house on fire."

Mrs. Cyrus was so moved by Miss North's active mission-work that the very next day she wandered across the street to call. "I hope I'm not interrupting you," she began, "but I thought I'd just—"

"Yes; you are," said Miss North; "but never mind; stay, if you want to." She tried to smile, but she looked at the duster which she had put down upon Mrs. Cyrus's entrance.

Gussie wavered as to whether to take offence, but decided not to;—at least not until she could make the remark which was buzzing in her small mind. It seemed strange, she said, that Mrs. North should come, not only to Old Chester, but right across the street from Captain Price!

"Why?" said Mary North, briefly.

"*Why?*" said Mrs. Cyrus, with faint animation. "Why, don't you know about your mother and my father-in-law?"

"Your father-in-law?—my mother?"

"Why, you know," said Mrs. Cyrus, with her light cackle, "your mother was a little romantic when she was young. No doubt she has conquered it now. But she tried to elope with my father-in-law."

"What!"

"Oh, bygones should be bygones," Mrs. Cyrus said, soothingly; "forgive and forget, you know. If there's anything I can do to assist you, ma'am, I'll send my husband over;" and then she lounged away, leaving poor Mary North silent with indignation. But that night at tea Gussie said that she thought strong-minded ladies were very unladylike; "they say she's strong-minded," she added, languidly.

"Lady!" said the Captain. "She's a man-o'-war's man in petticoats."

Gussie giggled.

"She's as thin as a lath," the Captain declared; "if it hadn't been for her face, I wouldn't have known whether she was coming bow or stern on."

"I think," said Mrs. Cyrus, "that that woman has some motive in bringing her mother back here; and *right across the street*, too!"

"What motive?" said Cyrus.

But Augusta waited for conjugal privacy to explain herself: "Cyrus, I worry so, because I'm sure that woman thinks she can catch your father again.—Oh, just listen to that harmonicon downstairs! It sets my teeth on edge!"

Then Cyrus, the silent, servile first mate, broke out: "Gussie, you're a fool!"

And Augusta cried all night, and showed herself at the breakfast-table lantern-jawed and sunken-eyed; and her father-in-law judged it wise to sprinkle his cigar ashes behind the stable.

The day that Mrs. North arrived in Old Chester, Mrs. Cyrus commanded the situation; she saw the daughter get out of the stage, and hurry into the house for a chair so that the mother might descend more easily. She also saw a little, white-haired old lady take that opportunity to leap nimbly, and quite unaided, from the swinging step.

"Now, mother!" expostulated Mary North, chair in hand, and breathless, "you might have broken your limb! Here, take my arm."

Meekly, after her moment of freedom, the little lady put her hand on that gaunt arm, and tripped up the path and into the house, where, alas! Augusta Price lost sight of them. Yet even she, with all her disapproval of strong-minded ladies, must have admired the tenderness of the man-o'-war's man. Miss North put her mother into a big chair, and hurried to bring a dish of curds.

"I'm not hungry," protested Mrs. North.

"Never mind. It will do you good."

With a sigh the little old lady ate the curds, looking about her with curious eyes. "Why, we're right across the street from the old Price house!" she said.

"Did you know them, mother?" demanded Miss North.

"Dear me, yes," said Mrs. North, twinkling; "why, I'd forgotten all about it, but the eldest boy—Now, what was his name? Al—something. Alfred,—Albert; no, Alfred. He was a beau of mine."