THE EASTON GAZETTE.

VOL. 82, NO. 6 * * EASTON, MD., SATURDAY, JANUARY 1, 1898 * * PAGE THREE

CUPID'S COUP D'ETAT.

Written by Miss Willie May Valliant.

This Story Won First Prize in the Gazette Amateur Contest.

ONE clear, crisp morning in December, I drove over the smooth, white roads, "level as the sea," that form so attractive a part of Talbot County, Maryland. On one side, lay the splendid, well-kept farms; on the other, stretched a forest of tall, dark pines, dotted here and there with holly trees with their bright red berries. A hint of snow was in the air which was further prognosticated by the light, low clouds lying white as curds against the blue line of the eastern horizon, portending all sorts of good things to come. In fancy, I pictured myself in a sleigh tucked up snug and warm close to Cousin Peggy. And so wending my way to the Peninsula, as usual, to see her with the December air filling my lungs like wine and all the world golden in the December sunshine, I could not help but be happy notwithstanding the fact that I had asked her to marry me for the twentieth time yesterday, and for the twentieth time she had shrugged her pretty shoulders and said neither "yes" nor "no." How long a fellow could stand this sort of thing, I did not know, but I knew I was going to ask her for the twenty-first time time to-day, although I had no reason to hope that her answer would be the desired one.

Peggy's father was my cousin-german, and since his death, as I was the oldest "lineal male descendant," they choose to consider me, in the good old English fashion, as the head of the House of Ridgley, and somehow Cousin Mary, Peggy's mother, and the boys had settled it that Peggy and I would marry some day, and I had made up my mind to it too; only Peggy, dear, sweet, charming, captivating Peggy herself was the all-important and only opposing party. So I was sure of a welcome at the Peninsula, no matter how Cousin Peggy might treat me.

The Peninsula was one of the finest old estates in the County. The old-fashioned farm-house of colonial days had been remodeled since Miss Peggy had made her debut, and now it presented a very pretty, though somewhat incongruous, appearance with its modern villa front, swell verandah and plate-glass windows, while the back still retained its slooping roof and dormer windows. The great, wide beautiful blue River swept it on one side, while a creek which ran inland lay on the other, to-gether forming one of the most charming views in the country. The light winter wind had blown the water into blue, white-crested heaps; sea gulls fluttered like bits of white cloud above.

As I drove up the long lane, I saw a trim, white-sailed canoe just leaving the shore in which I rejoiced to see the boys were sailing away with dogs and guns. Now perhaps, I might catch that wilful Miss Peggy alone. She usually sat in the sitting-room in the morning, either holding her embroidery in her hands (Peggy never sewed), painting on some roses which I told her she kept in "stock," or burried deep in a book. I fancied her sitting in her deep-cushioned chair before the log fire, her light brown hair curling back from her low, white brow, and her soft gray eyes with their pensive droop, half wistful, half coquettish, wholly bewitching. Ah yes, there she was. I could see her through the long French windows.

"Good morning, Margaerite!" (She liked to be called Marguerite).

She was reading a letter.

"Ah, Cousin Stanley, how glad I am to see you."

Oh how my feathers fell when I found why she was glad.

"Do take this chair," motioning to the one beside her. "I have a little favor to ask of you. *Would* you mind going to the station to meet Mr. Caruth—"

"What!"

"Yes, Mr. Charles Caruthers is coming down from Baltimore to spend the holidays with us, and don't you see the boys have all gone. Do you mind taking black Bess and the dog cart?"

Great Caesar! Here I was about to propose again, and she was asking me to meet that dude of a Charley Caruthers who had the impudence to come to Talbot County. Well, I would try not to appear jealous for I had heard her express a great contempt for jealousy.

"Do you know, Marguerite," I began, "you are the——"

"Oh yes, I know how lovely and all that I am; you must think me dreadfully dull that you tell me so often"

Then changing my tactics, "Peggy, will you marry me?"

"There is is the dog cart," answered Peggy.

And so instead of sitting in that cosy room and making love to the belle of the county, I was to go and fetch my hated rival.

That I felt more inclined to pitch him out of the dog cart than carrying him safely to the Peninsula, goes without saying. That the fellow is deucedly good-looking, I have to confess, but how on earth the girls can see so much in him to admire, is more than I can tell. But just let a fellow come down from the city with fine clothes, a gold-headed cane, his hair parted in the middle, and talking a lot of twadle, and the girls all go wild over him.

I was thinking of all this as we jogged along from the station when he had the impudence to offer me a cigarette. But I curtly refused. The meerschaum which Peggy had given me years ago and which she sometimes filled was good enough for me. I did not want any of his cigarettes.

If my jealousy needed a culminating point, it was reached when we drove up the lawn and Peggy, usually so stately and dignified, almost ran across the verandah to meet him, and when he bowed over her hand holding it an unnecessarily long time, saying, "Delighted, Miss Marguerite!"

Then, she turned to me saying sweetly "Aren't you coming in Cousin Stanley?"

But Charlie Caruthers and I could not breathe the same air just then. With a stiff bow, I left them, and unhitching my own nag, I started home, not, however, without looking back in time to see them standing by the sitting-room window, he still holding Peggy's hand. Confound his impudence. Surely Cousin Mary would come in and put a stop to such dreadful conduct. I drove down the road at a furious rate lashing my mare as if I had been driving that Charles Street swell.

I felt that things were taking a desperate turn and that I must use desperate means to win the game with Cousin Peggy or it would be lost. Dear girl. Sometimes, she was so sweet and kind, I half believed she loved me; then, she would be so cruel as to almost drove me to despair. And she posing as the new woman! But the new is not different from the old so far as plaguing a man's life out of him is concerned that I can see.

They were to have a house-party and be very gay for a week, so Peggy informed me.

I had rosolved upon a coup d'etat, since all is fair in love. I felt quite elated with the gigantic plan I had made, for now or never I meant to get ahead of Miss Peggy. Dear girl; little did she think how I was plotting against her.

When to-morrow dawned, the cloulds of yesterday had fulfilled their promise, and it was a lovely, silent white world I looked upon. It was Christmas eve, and it looked as if the angels might have been beautifying the world for the holy season. I was not long in getting in my sleigh and starting for the Peninsula. Just as I was about to turn in the gate, I was greeted by the sound of silvery bells and gay laughter, and a sleigh dashed past me. Of course that incorrigible Charlie Caruthers had had the daring impudence—but it was no use wasting time in invectives. I knew that pretty Miss Malcolm that I had occasion to think once that Peggy was half jealous of, was there, so I drove up to the house and found that lady ready for a sleigh-ride. I proposed Easton, to which she readily consented.

Wretched as I was, I could not resist my environment. The lovely pastoral land-scape was one mass of shining white; the boughs of the pine trees bent low neath their white burden; the holly berries lay like drops of blood upon the sparkling crystals that covered their leaves; the River ran like a belt of sapphire through its snow-covered flats. A long bridge spanned the River; on either side were superb old mansions telling of the glory of old colony days; to the left, stood a little ivy-grown church past which the tide had ebbed and flowed for a hundred years, a faint touch of green peeping through its white cover. Add to this that Miss Malcoln is a piquant, charming girl, and a charming girl is a charming girl even if she is not one's best girl. But best of all as we drove on the bridge, that other sleigh was just driving off, and Bellerophon (bless her forever) never travelled better, and we passed them. A quick burst of sunshine, a sudden brightness, a smile, a wave of the hand, and Peggy was left behind.

Our quarette got together in Easton, and the morning passed as pleasantly as possible to a man consumed with jealousy and plotting darkly against two members of the party. With an effort that I considered noble, I treated my rival, for Peggy's sake, with civility, and as there was a Christmas present involved in my scheme, with tact that required genius (and which I myself must laud since there is no one else to laud it) I worked Miss Malcoln off on Caruthers while I went to make the purchase.

Nihilists, when plotting dynamite, form a circle; there was also a circle connected with my plot, only this was a golden circle, a ring in fact and a diamond of the very first water. It must be a very tiny circlet, for it was for a very slender, delicate, white hand. By the way, Miss Malcolm's hand is very small and white and pretty. I walked into a jewelry store and selected a ring, not of course worthy that "hand fit a a fay's wand to weave," but it was the best the poor mines of the earth could yield and the gold-smith's art could devise.

That night there was a Christmas party at the Peninsula. Peggy in her ball-dress was slightly lovelier than Peggy in her taylor-made frock and picture hat, and she was so sweet to me all the earlier part of the evening, I half believed the plot would fall through, but after supper, she began the German with that——(I will have to quit speaking of that man all-to-gether or I will get to swearing like a trooper.)

Miss Malcoln was pretty, too, in her ball-room bravery, and I had to content myself with her, but it was hard lines to see my sweetheart whirling around in the arms of that accursed—but there I will refrain—I mean Mr. Charles Caruthers. That sounds quite decent, and I am proud of my forbearance. I was further consoled by the hope of the successful working of my scheme which was to be disclosed in the morning.

Christmas morning dawned glorious in its white beauty. I took an early start for the Peninsula with the Christmas present sparkling in its tiny bed of white cotton safe in my vest pocket.

As I walked in, I found the family assembled with their guests in the typical Eastern dining-room with its old-time corner cupboard filled with fine old china, cut-glass and silver, and the portraits of the departed Ridgleys gazing down upon them from the walls. Cousin Mary was dispensing egg nogg from a rare old Sevre punch bowl. Peggy, of course, posing as the new woman, did not drink (for the sake of her young brothers perhaps), and wore a knot of white ribbon showing conspicuously against the dainty blue of her morning gown.

"A merry Christmas, Cousin Stanley! will you accept?" and she handed me one of those feminine contrivances for masculine convenience so simple, yet expensive, all embroidered and smelling of violets.

I do not know what reply I made, but I walked up to her and took her hand and slipped the sparkling circlet on her finger. Then turning to the others, "Friends, will you congratulate us and Cousin Mary will you give us your blessing?"

Of course, every body was astounded, but they were all very nice and came forward and congratulated us. The boys rallied around Peggy and gave her so many hugs that I really feared for her safety.

I half feared to look into her eyes, yet could not refrain from one glance. What I saw there made me so happy I began to pity Caruthers with all my heart. As he came forward to offer his congratulations, I noticed that his cheek was pale, although his voice was steady and his manner cheerful. I wondered why Miss Malcolm, too, looked pale, and her hand trembled as she held it out to me.

Cousin Mary looked pleased as she gave us her blessing, and then with the most wonderful tact (I know she will be great as a mother-in-law) she dispersed her guests and left Peggy and I alone in the big old dining-room with the portraits, but we did not care how much they stared down at us.

Of course, you know what I did and you can guess that Peggy, being a girl, hid her face on my shoulder and burst into tears.

After a half hour or so had passed, I said "Are you angry, darling?"

"Yes," she answered, laughing and crying at once.

"Will you forgive me, sweet?"

"I—I reckon so," sobbed Peggy.

"Do you love me, Peggy?"

"I—I reckon so."

After a while, this sweet, unselfish girl said, "Stanley, I do wish Mr. Caruthers would fall in love with Miss Malcolm."



Big Cut in Our Prices.

The season on the year has arrived when we must reduce stock, and to do so first we must reduce prices on all goods we want to dispose of. We now wish to sell all our



Ladies' Coats, Capes, ∴ and Millinery at a Great Sacrifice.

We mean business and if its money you want to save then we are the ones to help you. We also want to reduce our stock of

Dress Goods, Millinery and Domestics,

in fact everything in our house will be sold very cheap, and a call will convince you.

Your friends,

T. H. HOLLINGSWORTH & COMPANY.

Highest marked prices paid for eggs in trade.



Wilson's Improved Air-Tight Heater

Has Sliding Cast Top, Improved Detachable Smoke Doors. Made of best Russia Iron. Notice the draft and how it is protected—there is where the secret is

We have them and at the Right Prices.

Best Salt $1.15 Sack.

Enterprise Stuffers and Cutters at Right Prices.

NEVIUS & FRAMPTON.

Morris.

Photographer, Art Studio,

Dover St., Easton, Maryland.

THE NEW MEZZO TINTS ARE STILL VERY POPULAR. MANY PREFER THE GLOSS PICTURES; WE MAKE BOTH, AND GUARANTEE PERFECT SATISFACTION.