THE DYING YEAR.

My door stands open wide tonight
In token of a parting guest,
Who twelve months since, with keen delight,
I welcomed to my homely nest.

He stands there now, wan, wasted, old,
His race quite run, his mission o'er,
And when the midnight hour is tolled,
We part, to meet on earth no more.

He came to me in merry guise,
With hopes and promises not few.
Ah, who could look within those eyes
And deem that they were all untrue!

But expectations all have fled,
The promises are broken, too,
The hopes lie withered, crushed and dead—
Not one of all but proved untrue.

And there he stands, decrepit, wan,
Who came to me a merry elf,
A few sands more he will be gone,
And with him gone part of myself.

So come and go the passing years
That bear us to the silent sea,
But bright with smiles or dim with tears,
They come in love, dear Lord, from thee.
—Christian Work.

A NEW YEAR ROMANCE

"You may talk as much as you please," said Muriel Vane, nodding her curly head, "but I'm going to receive company in the parlor on New Year's day. Why shouldn't I? Every other girl does."

"It's a sinful, wicked waste of time," said Mrs. Vane, "when the quilting is so behindhand and there's such a deal of sewing to be done."

"But life isn't all for work," pleaded Muriel. "And Mr. Clifton is coming all the way from the city in his sleigh to see me. Oh, mother, please let me have a loaf of homemade cake and some red apples and real cream for the coffee! Just for this once! It's only one day in the year. Do, mother!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Vane, who was one of those aggravating women who make up their minds on the least possible grounds and then pride themselves on adhering to their word. "I've said no, and I mean no. When I was a young girl I wasn't setting my cap at every fellow that came along."

"Mother," cried Muriel, in an agony of wounded pride, "do you mean to say that I do such a thing?"

"You think a deal too much of the beaus anyway," said old Mrs. Vane, screwing up her thin lips. "And I'm going to break up that sort of thing. See if I don't!"

It was with difficulty that Muriel Vane, naturally a high tempered girl, checked the indignant retort that rose to her lips. Surely, surely, it was not right that she, a girl of 18, who was earning her own living by teaching in the district school, should be treated like a child of 8; that her tyrannical old mother should place no confidence whatever in her sense of right and delicacy. Up to this time she had rendered the tribute of an unwilling obedience to Mrs. Vane's behests, and now she felt that the moment for just rebellion had come. She felt that she could not live any longer in this cramped, niggardly sort of way, with the very lumps of sugar for her tea meted out to her, one by one, and the pippin apples for her lunch dealt sparingly forth, as if each one were molded in gold. Mrs. Vane took her lamp away at 9 o'clock every night. She dictated to poor Muriel as to the very color of her dresses and the number of yards which she might purchase for them; in fact, the girl scarcely dared to think for herself. Could she live thus always? she asked herself. Was it right that she should?

"At all events, mother," said Muriel, speaking in a low, determined tone, "I shall receive my friends on New Year's day! It is my privilege, and I claim it!"

"Humph!" was the contemptuous rejoinder, but there was a world of meaning in it.

So Muriel retrimmed her one black silk dress and bought a new ribbon sash and baked a great, golden New Year's cake filled with plums and studded all through with translucent bars of citron and herself bargained with the grocer for two pounds of real Java coffee with as little adulteration of Rio, Maracaibo and chicory as he could bring himself to concoct.

"I can use the china that my grandmother Vane left me in her will," thought Muriel. "That, at least, is mine, although mother would never allow me to unpack it!"

She was busy decorating the walls of the little parlor with laurel leaves and long, dark green trails of prince's pine on New Year's eve, when her mother came into the room.

"Muriel," said she, "I want to send some dressed chickens and a peck of those golden pippins to your Aunt Dora at the lighthouse. Jenkins' boy is ready with the boat, but he's such a limb that I don't, for the life of me, dare to trust him with the apples and the bag of hickory nuts. I want you to go and ask Aunt Dora for the pattern of the new bedquilt—the 'Philadelphia pavement,' you know."

"Very well, mother," said Muriel in the old submissive way. "But isn't it rather late?"

"Pshaw!" said Mrs. Vane. "Why, the sun is an hour high yet. You'll be back long before dark if Jenkins' boy is spry with the oars."

Aunt Dora, Mrs. Vane's only sister, was a worthy scion of the family tree—tall, masculine and hard featured. She had always taken the entire charge of White Reefs lighthouse, even although the official appointment was conferred upon her husband, and when one day that public servant departed this life, things went on precisely the same. Muriel was not fond of her Aunt Dora, and her Aunt Dora regarded her as a "poor, chicken hearted creature—Vane all over." But Muriel did feel sorry for the lonely old woman, and she thought that even a pair of fowls and a few apples—this unwonted manifestation of sisterly feeling—were worth carrying to White Reefs. So she made haste to don her wadded cloak and little fur edged hood, and to draw on the scarlet woolen mittens, which she herself had knitted during those long, dreary winter evenings when she and her mother sat in silence opposite each other, for Mrs. Vane never invited any company, and gave her neighbors but scant welcome when they came of their own accord.

"Jenkins' boy" was ready with the boat, a small, ferret eyed youngster, with an intensely freckled face and a furtive, sidewise glance, which Muriel always distrusted; and as they glided out over the water, already dyed with the orange reflection of sunset, in the direction of White Reefs lighthouse, Muriel leaned her chin in her hands and thought of Mr. Clifton.

What would her mother say if she knew it all—that Paul Clifton loved her—that he was coming to ask for her at the maternal hands the very next day.

"It will be of no use," she thought sadly. "Mother will say no. She desires me to marry Squire Sedley, who is bald and deaf and twice my age, and who only wants me because his housekeeper has struck for higher wages and he thinks a wife would be better economy. But we can wait, Paul and I. We will wait."

And then they ran up alongside the tall, spectral cylinder of the lighthouse, for the tide was high and landing was comparatively easy, and Muriel sprang lightly out of the boat, looking up at the fiery eye in the lantern above.

"Give me the bag and the basket, Tommy," said she. "Steady with the boat now! I'll be back in one minute."

So the orange glow had burned down into a deep red radiance, and the dusk shadows off the New Year's eve were creeping over all the glassy surface of the sea.

Aunt Dora was at home. In fact, Aunt Dora never was anywhere else. Her own society, little as other people cared for it, was all sufficient for herself.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" said Aunt Dora, as unconcerned as if she lived on dry land and was in the habit of seeing company every hour in the day. She was darning stockings by her own especial little lamp, and the teapot already simmered on the hob for her tea. "Anything the matter? Because I couldn't leave the light if it was ever so"—

"No, nothing is the matter," said Muriel. "I have brought you a note from my mother. Something about the pattern of a bedquilt, I believe. And some chickens and apples and a bag of fresh hickory nuts."

Aunt Dora read the note once, twice, three times over. Then she regarded Muriel in a sinister fashion from under her thick, black brows, while the girl played unconsciously with the cat.

"Humph!" said she. "Yes, I'll go and get the pattern!"

She was gone some time—half an hour, at least, as it seemed to Muriel, and when she came back, the girl started up.

"It is nearly dark," she said. "I must make haste home."

"Well you needn't be in such a flurry" said Aunt Dora, with a grim chuckle. "I've sent the pattern by Tommy Jenkins. He's half way to shore by this time."

Muriel uttered a little shriek.

"And how am I to get home?" she cried.

"You ain't to get home at all," said Aunt Dora. "You're to stay and spend the New Year with me. That's what your mother said in her note."

"But I shall not!" exclaimed Muriel, stamping her foot vehemently. "I must go home! I expect company tomorrow."

"Sit down and be easy—do!" said Aunt Dora. "Must is for the king. I'd like to know how on earth you're to get home, with only one boat at the steps, and that padlocked tight, with the key snug at the bottom of my pocket!"

And Aunt Dora laughed a hard, dissonant laugh that was like the croak of a raven.

For a moment Muriel gazed wildly around like a newly caged bird, then she burst into tears and sobs.

"It is all a stratagem of mother's!" she cried, wringing her hands. "I might have known it! I might have known it!"

And that night at the White Reefs lighthouse, with the melancholy sea lapping the foot of the tower and the wind whistling around the steady glow of the beacon, was the dreariest that Muriel ever spent in her life.

"You ain't good company tonight," said Aunt Dora, glancing at her niece ever and anon between the stitches of her darning.

"Because you have deceived me!" cried Muriel. "You and mother!"

"Humph!" said Aunt Dora. "It's all for your own good. You'll thank us one of these days. Girls oughtn't to have their own way."

But Muriel only wept on and refused to be comforted.

She went down to the foot of the tower, the next day, and sat there, her cloak wrapped about her shoulders, listlessly gazing out on the sparkling floor of the deep.

"Is that a boat coming?" she asked herself. "With one man in it? Is it coming here, I wonder?"

Nearer and nearer came the boat, rocking lightly on the surface of the waves, and presently Muriel started up, with a cry of joy.

For it was Paul Clifton waving his hand to her, as he came ever nearer and nearer.

"A happy New Year, sweet Muriel!" he called out, as the boat touched the stone steps. "I am the enchanted knight come to rescue you from the prison tower!"

"How did you know I was here?" said Muriel, with sparkling eyes and velvety cheeks dyed with crimson.

"Your mother was entirely noncommittal," said Clifton gayly. "I could learn nothing whatsoever from her except that you were well and were not receiving company. But I was fortunate enough to meet Tommy Jenkins, who, for the consideration of a silver quarter, ignominiously turned state's evidence. And here I am, my sweetheart! Will you come with me?"

"Of course I will," said Muriel, springing lightly into the boat. "But where?"

"To be married," said Mr. Paul Clifton. "It is high time that this system of tyranny was broken up. My little Muriel must be mine and mine alone henceforward. Do you not agree with me?"

And Muriel answered:

"Yes."

Aunt Dora got to the window just in time to shriek an ineffectual summons to the pair in the fast receding boat.

"It's no use," said Aunt Dora, drawing a long breath. "When a girl is in love, she is neither to hold nor to bind. I've done the best I could. Mehitable can't blame me!"

Two hours later Muriel walked into the old brown roofed house on the shore, leaning on Paul Clifton's arm.

"Mother," said she to the amazed Mrs. Vane, who fully believed that she was "dreeing her weird" in the solitary lighthouse tower, "I am married! And this is my husband. Will you forgive us, please? For I am so very, very happy today that I do not want a living soul to be at variance with me!"

And so Muriel signed her declaration of independence, and became Paul Clifton's wife upon this glorious sunshiny New Year's day. And Mrs. Vane and Aunt Dora were compelled to confess themselves outwitted and to accept their defeat with as good grace as possible.

"Fate is fate," said Aunt Dora grimly.

"And I wash my hands of the whole concern," said Mrs. Vane.

But Paul and Muriel were serenely happy. And what mattered aught else? —New York Ledger.

Begging Bread and Cheese.

Scotch children of the poorer class in small towns still beg on New Year's eve from door to door at the houses of wealthier families for a dole of oat bread, calling out "Hogamanay" or some of the local rhymes which are given in Chambers' "Popular Rhymes of Scotland," such as:

Hogamanay,
Trollolay,
Give us of your white bread
And none of your gray!

They also beg for cheese, which they call "nog-money," and Brand's "Popular Antiquities" gives this begging rhyme used by Scotch children:

Get up, gude wife, and binno sweir;
Deal cakes and cheese while ye are here,
For the time will come when ye'll be dead
And neither need your cheese nor bread.

As the children on these forays are swathed in great sheets formed into a deep bag or pouch to carry the oatcake they form quite a mumming and fantastic appearance on the by streets and lanes.—Independent.

New Year's In 1790.

New Year's day, 1790, was one of special interest to those who delight in tracing facts concerning this method of celebration. President Washington, then in the first year of his first term, lived at the Franklin House, in Cherry street, New York.

The city was then a little Dutch town of cobblestones and gardens, containing about 1,400 houses and 20,000 people, most of whom were tradesmen and mechanics of very limited means.

The president had lived among them several months, but most of them had held aloof through the awe inspired by his great character and his high office. But on this New Year's day a great number of them put on their best cocked hats, their Sunday wigs and all their best clothes and called upon the president.—Philadelphia Times.

Some Good and Bad Omens.

To meet a red haired person on first getting up indicates a dull day in business, and if such a one cross your door on New Year's day you will have an unlucky year. While making a trade, if a cross eyed person looks at you, it indicates that the bargain will be unprofitable. To hear a cricket chirp is good luck, and it is always a welcome sound under the hearthstone of the farmer's house.—Exchange.

A New Epoch.

As the sun completes his annual revolution through the heavens by touching the southern solstice, and then commences his return to northern latitudes, man is compelled to recognize a new epoch in his own career and is reminded to pause a moment for earnest reflection in order to gather wisdom from vanished months and to forecast the signs of the future.—Christian Work.

Japan's Common Birthday.

The first of the year is really a sort of double festival in Japan, for the Japanese, like the Chinese, reckon their age from that date. A child born 24 hours before New Year's day is called 1 year old on that day, so that it is the birthday of all the Japanese people.—New York Advertiser.

Love and Charity.

If you can make love and charity in your heart chord with the last song the choir sings New Year's day, you can make up your mind that you are a pretty good man after all.—Kearney Journal.

A Song of the Season.

I love no rost but a nut browne toste
And a crab layde in the fyre;
A little bread shall do me stead—
Much breade I not desyre.
No froste nor snow, no winde, I trowe,
Can hurt mee if I wolde.
I am so wrapt and throwly lapt
Of jolly good ale and olde.

Back and syde go bare, go bare;
Both foote and hand, go colde;
But belly God send thee good ale inoughe,
Whether it be new or olde.

With sober cheerfulness the grandam eyes
Her offspring round her, all in health and peace,
And, thankful that she's spared to see this day
Return once more, breathes low a sacred prayer
That God would shed a blessing on their heads.
—Selected.

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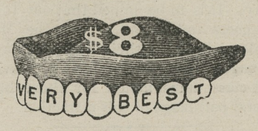

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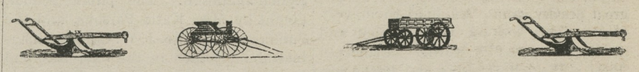

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