LOVE IS BLIND

By Martha McCulloch-Williams

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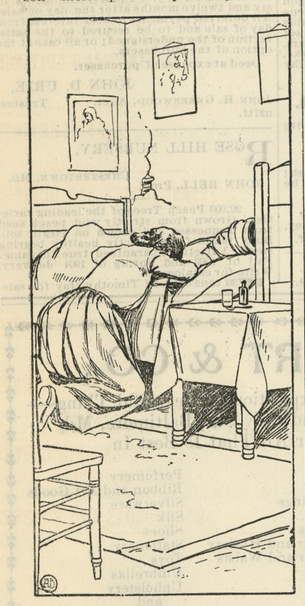
John Haley came down the back steps, the model and pattern of angry dejection. At sight of him Mrs. Corson frowned. She did not need to be told her daughter Helen had refused Johnny's hand for the eleventh time.

Mrs. Corson wanted Johnny in the family. He was such an all round good fellow and well to do, to say nothing of how beautifully his farm dovetailed with the Corson acres. When he came abreast of her she could not help saying, "Well, of all idiots in the world you and Helen are certainly the most idiotic."

"I have been a fool," Johnny admitted savagely, "letting a girl keep me dangling after her five years. Helen wasn't fifteen"—

"She has less than the sense of fifteen now, and so have you," Mrs. Corson interrupted impatiently. "You



SOBBING OUT HER LOVE AND PENITENCE.

have stuffed her head so full of novels and poetry she's clean beyond plain, everyday common sense."

"How can I help it?" Johnny said in a voice of deep injury. "I didn't know. I wanted only to show her I was liberal."

"Oh, you are imbecile!" Mrs. Corson broke in. "As if that would go with a high strung girl. Of course Helen wants her own way—and gets it most of the time. But she thinks she wants to make great and solemn sacrifices for the man she loves. If she can't do that she can't love him. If you were to have smallpox or lose your farm or break your back—anything, indeed, but break your neck—she'd want to marry you out of hand."

"Think so?" Johnny asked, grinning faintly.

"I don't think—I know!" Mrs. Corson retorted confidently.

"I reckon I am stupid; seems like I ain't had my right senses except in horse trading never since I've been courting Helen," Johnny said, the grin deepening.

"Oh, go along home!" Mrs. Corson retorted. Johnny stood for a minute like one lost in thought, then squared his shoulders, brought his heels well together, said in a loud, strained voice: "Goodby, ma'am. I'll write. You're mighty near all the mother I've ever known. I'll never forget your goodness whether I fetch up in South Africa or the Klondike. No, I shan't come over again. The sooner I'm off the better." Then in a quick, husky whisper, as he bent to kiss her cheek, "You listen out for accidents about day after tomorrow."

Perhaps Johnny did not know the obdurate Miss Helen was standing at the window, well screened by the venetian blinds. He mounted his horse and rode off furiously. As the noise of hoofs died away Mrs. Corson sighed deeply, saying as though to herself: "Poor boy! It hurts me to think of him wandering all over the face of the earth."

"Don't worry, ma," Helen said, flinging open the blinds. "Johnny is not the stuff that makes heroes or martyrs or even travelers. Poor Johnny! If only he was not so hopelessly commonplace I'd marry him—to please you and pa."

"You've thrown away the chance and a mighty good chance," Mrs. Corson said, sighing and shaking her head. Helen laughed merrily. "Why, I can marry him when I please."

She spoke with the conscious power of youth and beauty. Judge then her state of astonishment and despair a week later when she found herself beseeching Johnny to make her his wife and meeting with refusals as steadfast as they were quiet. There had been a serious accident. Johnny was home again, in a darkened room, with his eyes bandaged and the doctor coming every day.

As to what had happened, Johnny would not say a word. The doctor looked grave and hinted obscurely at damage to the optic nerve that might mean total blindness. But plenty of other folk were ready to swear the accident had been no accident, but rather a deed of daring on Johnny's part. He had come upon two rough fellows robbing an inoffensive peddler and had put the robbers to rout, but not before one of them had fired directly across his eyes. He was powder burned on cheeks and forehead—so much was certain.

Johnny, suppliant or angry, to be twisted around her little finger, was one person; Johnny, stern and resolved, putting her away in spite of pleading, very much another. All at once Helen awoke to the knowledge that she loved him. She had rushed to him at the first word of trouble, meaning only to sympathize and console. It was his voice, pathetically brave, still more pathetically full of renunciation, which had shown her what was in her own heart. "No; I can't let you stay, Helen," he had said, letting her hand fall. "I know you too well. You are so sorry for me you might come to love me. Why, I've seen you often and over get fond of a lame dog. Ever since this"—a sort of gulp at the word—"happened I have been so glad you didn't care for me, because I love you so well I won't let you ruin your future. I'm a common, crossroads sort—nothing like your fine gentlemen, but at least I can play you fair."

Then Helen, by turns hot and cold, had knelt and laid her head on his shoulder, sobbing out her love and penitence. She could feel Johnny swallowing hard. But he held obstinately by what he had said. It was the same the next day, the next and the next.

At the end of a week Papa Corson took a hand. "You are trying hard to tie a millstone around your neck," he said unfeelingly. "I might not object to that so very much if only the millstone was willing. Johnny Haley has got enough to keep two people out of the poorhouse. But I've a mighty strong notion he don't want you. Unless you want to make yourself a laughingstock you'll keep out of his way."

Helen had not been spoiled all her twenty years for nothing. She listened, growing angrier and angrier all the time. But she turned away without a word and ten minutes later had bundled her mother into the phaeton and was driving like mad toward the country town. The business that took her there was soon transacted, and then the horses found their heads turned toward the Haley farm. There Helen burst in upon Johnny, locked her hand in his and said tremulously over her shoulder to a man who followed in her wake with Mrs. Corson on his arm: "We are ready, Dr. Lansing. Please marry us quickly, no matter what Johnny says. He—he may not be quite right in his mind."

Johnny almost sprang up. Helen's hand shook so he knew she needed support. His eyes were still bandaged, but the curls on top of his head seemed to wink at the minister, who stood twiddling the license uncertainly.

"Let her go, parson!" Johnny called out joyously, drawing Helen a little closer. He made the responses in a suspiciously strong voice and at the end tossed his blinders to the other side of the room.

"Helen! Sweetheart! Wife!" he cried. "I'd have to see you right now, even if it cost me my eyes. But I'm not blind nor going to be, even though that cannon cracker did singe my eyebrows"—

"It is I who have been blind all these years," Helen interrupted. Then catching the twinkle in her mother's eyes: "I understand now. You two conspired to make me see."

The Kaffirs Thought It a Joke.

I once took some Kaffirs from their desolate homes in the more desolate gorges beyond the mountain ranges to the more civilized south. Like most savages, they looked with stupid indifference at the marvels about them, and once only were they excited by an incident which opened their eyes to what they considered a most extraordinary and unnatural state of things.

They were descending a road when one of them chanced to remark that he was hungry, and the English "sahib" bought him some food at a wayside shop. The Kaffir saw the money change hands.

"How is this?" he inquired in surprise. "Do you have to pay for food in this country?"

"Certainly."

"What a country!" cried the man in amazement. Then, after pondering awhile, he continued doubtfully: "Suppose e maa had no money in this country. He might starve."

"It is quite possible."

The Kaffir shook with uncontrollable laughter. It was the best joke he had ever heard. He then explained the ridiculous system to his companions, and they roared in chorus.—"Where Three Empires Meet."

A One Volume Man.

A curious example of generous obstinacy was a stout English countryman who inquired for a nice book to read, "one with a story in." On several being placed before him, he examined them attentively and picked out the middle volume of a "three decker" with the remark: "This 'ere's my sort. What's the price?"

"Oh," was the reply, "this is only the second volume. The story goes through three. The set is half a crown."

"Hauve a crown! Well, I'll gie ye that for that one book. It's a pretty one enough."

"But won't you have the other two as well? You'd better."

"Naw. I don't like th' beginnin' of a story. I can't get forrud wi' it. An' I don't like th' endin'. I don't know as 'ow it's comed about. But in th' middle un I'm into th' thick of it right off. No, I'll only tak' th' middle un. It'll set me up for a month." And, cramming the book into his pocket he put down his half crown and disappeared with a "Good night" before the other volumes could be given to him.—Chambers' Journal.

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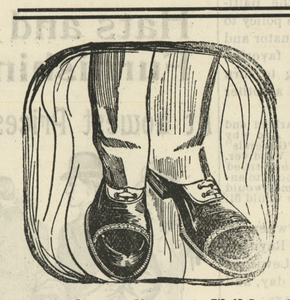

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