

literary too, for those days women were not allowed any higher advantages and especially to dabble in literary work, it was most unseemly and unladylike, and all young girls were to be ladies well-bred to the tips of their fingers, even though they had to do their own household drudgery, and help keep their husband's accounts, and such other little things of this sort as were needed after marriage. No one presumed to question George as to where he had been, though it was easy to perceive the girls were desirous of knowing. Finally the demure little Mercy spoke out. "Where have you been this evening, brother; we wanted you at home to talk about Christmas and what is to be done, boys have some of the work to do, hanging things up and driving nails, and making room in the stables for the horses and all the out door work and Jake can't do anything without he's shown just how," she rattled on child-like. "Well my little sister, since you call me to account, I'll tell you where I've been, and satisfy your curiosity. I've been to see Lawyer Williams about fixing up my affairs so I can leave home all right, and now tell me what's to be done with you, are you all going West with me?"

Ruth, who was generally the spokesman, seeing her mother did not answer, replied, "I am not going for one and I think all of us old maids will stay here on the farm, and do what we can, and wait for you to come back to New York. You'll be glad to, when you've been out there a while and had the ague, till you look like a shadow, like Nat Jones, you remember his trip west some years ago. You don't then. Well I do, he looked like a ghost, he couldn't live out there the water was so bad."

Ignoring the ague question George asked cheerily what was to be got for Christmas, he was going into town in the morning and wanted his orders for Christmas things. "It's according to who is coming, I suppose," said Ruth and Sarah in a breath. "If the folks from Newburgh come we shall have to be extra fine, besides we don't know them very well, they're cousins three or four times removed, and as proud as Lucifer, you remember when mother went there on a visit she was glad to come away and marry a poor minister."

"I've noticed Ruth, you're not afraid of people," said her brother, "because they are either rich or proud or both, 'to your credit, be it said,' and perhaps there may be a smart chap among them for one of you girls, you'll need a man in the house for protection. If I go away." "Protection" two or three exclaimed at once. "We'll have Jake and his wife to protect us, and good bolts and locks, and we'll not be uneasy on that score, and if we get frightened or have any difficulty we'll rent the farm and go and live in Utica."

"That's the most sensible arrangement yet," said George, but the mother looked very serious and the suggestion dropped there, for it was easy to see that the mother was grieved over it.

Finally after some consultation the hill of goods from town was made up and some more talk about the company expected, then the usual good nights were said, and though there was a kind of restraint in their feelings, the household routine was much the same as at other Christmas home festivals.

The guests came in troops almost, Rachel's cousin's children from Newburgh among the number, and the snow was so deep that the fences were not visible for days, but indoors all was warm and glowing with color, which invariably adds to the cheerfulness of winter days. Imagine a house with six young women who knew how to decorate, even if it is in the country, and these fair maidens had been away to school in Utica and Albany, and

had seen a little outside of their own town; and the visitors had brought elaborate presents of gay materials, and the cooking was nearly finished before the company came, all except the turkeys that were roasted before the great fireplaces (more as a sort of pastime and a curiosity) and turned round and round with skewers and browned to perfection. All the pastry and puddings and meats were cooked in the great brick oven in the immense kitchen and Jake and his wife Mandy helped tend to the baking, and everything was done to perfection, as even the city guests admitted.

And while the feasting and merriment was going on, there was also love making sub rosa, for the parlors were only partially lighted, and there were nooks and corners, and little Mercy was being unmercifully teased with admirers for whom she didn't care a straw, while all the time she pined for a look or smile from one, who stood apart and frowned, as quiet men do when in love instead of "making hay while the sun shines." There were beaux enough to go round among the visitors, but for their sisters and cousins there was only George, and the young fellows bantered him about looking up some partners for the odd girls, as there was to be some dancing during the week. "Your sisters and cousins wouldn't look at the country bumpkins about here," said George. "I don't like to try the experiment of introducing the boys; they won't see at what disadvantage they are, and it will be decidedly awkward for me to stand the brunt of it."

"We'll stand by you if you'll try it," they responded. George acquiesced, and selected among his companions a few of the most presentable and invited them to the house for the following evening, so the acquaintance might begin before the night of the dancing. The scheme worked well: the boys were shy but the young ladies were sensible enough to appreciate the respect they showed in their manner, and were willing to dance with them and found them very agreeable partners. They had good music, too; George had been very particular to secure that, and nothing could have been more delightful than the party on that Christmas night in the long ago—in that large dining room profusely decorated with evergreens and scarlet berries intertwined and winter flowers gathered weeks before and kept in a dark cellar. The mistletoe had been brought from New York City by one of the young ladies, and was hung in the center of the parlor.

Music and dancing are fascinations in themselves and often lead to love-making unwittingly, and this party was no exception to the rule. George made love effusively before the night was over to one of the young girls from Newburgh and proud as she was he didn't seem to heed it at all, and though she was retiringly modest he succeeded in getting her under the mistletoe, though she sarcastically resented his maneuvering, and scolded her cousin for smuggling the mistletoe up there in her trunk.

Mercy's would-be lover was not so successful at that time, but Sarah, whom all the family thought doomed to single blessedness, was ardently wooed that night by one of the visitors from Albany, William Van Luven; afterwards love letters were interchanged, and the marriage followed in the early spring.

George and Wealthy sparred a great deal during the few days that remained of the holiday weeks, but he was so masterful with her, that she finally consented almost under protest, however, to correspond with him, if her parents were willing on her return home, and to

consider the proposition of going with him to the far West sometime in the future if he should return after a few years. This was not very satisfactory to George, who had given his whole heart and affections unreservedly and received no loving response, only cold formality. For some days after the company had left he was moody and taciturn and made the home more gloomy still by his very evident unsatisfactory love-affair, with a beautiful girl, who rather haughtily accepted his protestations.

Mercy was as sweet and amiable as ever though she had not even known whether this young Apollo, Paul Symonds, cared for her as she sometimes had suspected. Sarah was so joyous at the prospect of her own marriage that she heeded little the affairs going on in the family around her. Ruth in a motherly way was delighted that there was to be one wedding, and thought it a good omen for the rest, and had she been informed of Mercy's little secret, she would have passed it over gaily, and told her there was plenty of time for youngsters of her age.

Time passed and George, who had completed necessary arrangements, but was still very much in doubt about his sweetheart, started off to Newburgh, determined to face the situation, as usual after mail brought him no letter. Mrs. Fleming was anxious, the girls resented it, for their brother was good enough for any girl, no matter how rich or proud she might be. Of course, Mrs. Fleming felt all that, but she had gone through an experience in her young days that made her feel tenderly for her boy. He came back triumphant, his mother knew it the moment he came in and now there was a different atmosphere about the place.

Sarah's wedding was to come off first and Mr. Van Luven and his friends would come up to the home-stand, and it would be very quiet, only the few friends with whom they were on intimate terms were to be invited. Mandy with Ruth's help was to do all the cooking for the occasion, and Sarah would remain at home for the present, as Mrs. Fleming would go to Newburgh with George when the wedding ceremony was to take place. She had never visited Newburgh since her marriage and she rather dreaded the ordeal; she had not kept up any relations with them whatever because of their insufferable pride, she thoroughly despised it—but the girls had been at school in Albany with her own girls and had made the acquaintance of each other, and she was powerless to prevent the visiting backwards and forwards ever after; and now they were to be more closely connected—she rather disliked the idea, but there was no avoiding it and she knew she must make the best of it.

Paul Symonds came up to Sarah's wedding as best man for Mr. Van Luven, glad of any excuse to get to see sweet Mercy Gilman, and as Sarah's sisters were her bridesmaids, it was easy for Paul to make himself agreeable, and from that time his wooing prospered, for he was in earnest, and the girl was sweetly responsive. They were a charming couple, happily mated, and Mrs. Fleming would have been proud of the match if she had not been so intent upon seeing George satisfied and happy which seemed uncertain though he didn't seem to realize it, the fact was he was desperately in love and things looked as he wanted them to be, the glamour closed all his vision. Wealthy was the apple of his eye, the idol of his heart, without her life would be a barren wilderness, and with her a desert would seem a palace; these were his daily thoughts, and his mother seemed to comprehend and trembled for the results.

Mrs. Fleming left home with gloomy