

***LOVE'S BITTEREST
CUP***

A Sequel to "Her Mother's Secret"

By

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LOVE'S BITTEREST CUP

CHAPTER I

A WEDDING FROLIC AT FOREST REST

The good folk of our county always seized with gladness any fair excuse for merry-making, especially in the dead of winter, when farm work was slack.

Now the marriage of the popular young doctor with the well-liked young teacher was one of the best of excuses for general outbreak into gayety.

True, the newly married pair wished to settle down at once in their pretty cottage home, and be quiet.

But they were not to be permitted to do so.

Every family to whom the young doctor stood in the relation of attendant physician gave either a dinner or a dancing party.

Judge Paul McCann, an old bachelor, who was one of his most valuable patients—a chronic patient dying of good living, and taking a long, long time to do it in—gave a heavy dinner party, to which he invited only married or middle-aged people—such as the elder Forces, Grandieres, Elks, and—Miss Bayard, who did not attend.

This dinner came off on the Monday after the marriage, and was a great success.

Every one was pleased, except the young people who had nothing to do with it.

“Selfish old rhinoceros! Wouldn’t give a dancing party because he’s got the gout! And Natty so fond of dancing, too!” growled Wynnette, over her disappointment on that occasion.

But the Grandieres consoled her and all the young people by giving a dancing party at Oldfields on the following Wednesday, and inviting all the members, young and old, of every family in the neighborhood.

This party was but a repetition, with improvements, on the New Year’s Eve party, just four weeks previous; for again there was a full moon, a deep, level snow, frozen over, and fine sleighing, and all circumstances combined to make the entertainment a most enjoyable one.

This frolic was followed on Friday with a dancing party given by the Elks at Grove Hill, to which the same people were invited, and where they talked, laughed and danced as merrily as before.

And do you think that the descendant of the “Dook of England” was one to neglect her social duties, or to be left behind in the competition of hospitable attentions to the bride and groom because her house was small and her means were even smaller?

Not at all! So she determined to give a dancing party on the next Tuesday evening, and invite all the neighborhood with his wife and children, and “his sisters, aunts and cousins.”

“But, great Jehosophat, Aunt Sibby, if you ask all these people, what are you going to do with them? They can’t all get into the house, you know!” exclaimed Roland Bayard, while his aunt and himself were forming a committee of ways and means.

“That’s *their* business! *My* business is to invite them to a party, and to open the door. *Their* business is to get in the house—if they can. Do your duty, sez I! Without fear or favor, sez I! Do the proper thing, sez I! unregardless of consequences, sez I! *My* duty is to give a party to the bride and groom, and I’m a-going to do it! Take your own share of the world’s play, sez I, as well as the world’s work, sez I! We can’t live our lives over again, sez I!

“Live while you live, the sacred preachers say,
And seize the pleasures of the passing day.”

“I think you have got that quotation wrong, auntie,” said Roland.

“Tain’t quotation, you ignomanners! It’s verses out of the ‘English Reader’ as I used to study when I went to school to young Luke Barriere, when he was young Luke, and before he left off teaching and divested all his yearnings into a grocery.”

“Well, you have got the lines wrong, anyway, Aunt Sibby.”

“I tell you I ain’t! What do you know about it? I’ve read more verse books than ever you knew the names of! But that ain’t nothing to the point! What I want you to do is to take the mule cart and drive round the neighborhood, and invite all the company—everybody that we saw at all the other parties! Every one of ’em—childun and all! When you do a thing, sez I, do it well, sez I! What’s worth a-doing of at all, sez I, is worth doing well, sez I!”

“I might as well start at once, as it will take me all day to go the rounds. I’ll go harness up the mule now.”

“Yes, go; and wherever you happen to be at dinner time there you stop and get your dinner. I shan’t expect you home till night, because after you have given out all the invitations, you know, I

want you to call at old Luke Barriere's grocery store and fetch me——Stop! have you got a pencil in your pocket?"

"Yes, Aunt Sibby."

"Well, then, put down——Lord! where shall I get a piece of writing paper? Hindrances, the first thing! It's always the way, sez I!"

"It need not be writing paper. This will do," said Roland, tearing off a scrap of brown wrapper from a parcel that lay on the table.

"Now, then, write," said Miss Sibby.

And she gave him a list for sugar, spices, candies, "reesins" and "ammuns," "orringes" and "lemmuns."

"Is this all?" inquired Roland.

"Yes, and tell Luke Barriere he must charge it to me, and tell him I'll pay him as soon as I get paid for that last hogshead of tobacco I shipped to Barker's."

"All right, auntie."

"And, mind, as I told you before, I shan't expect you home to dinner. You won't have time to come. And I shan't get no dinner, neither, 'cause all the fireplace will be took up baking cakes. Soon's ever you're gone, me and Mocka is a-going right at making of 'em. Thanks be to goodness as we have got a-plenty of our own flour, and eggs, and milk, and butter! And when you have got plenty of flour, and eggs, and milk, and butter, sez I, you'll get along, sez I!"

"Very well, Aunt Sibby."

“And don’t you forget to invite Luke Barriere to the party, mind you! You mustn’t forget old friends, sez I!”

“Oh! And must I invite Judge Paul McCann?” inquired the sailor, with a twinkle in his eye, for you see

“They had been friends in youth.”

“No!” emphatically replied the old lady. “No! Them as has the least to do with old Polly McCann, sez I, comes the best off, sez I! There! Now go! You ain’t got a minute more to lose!”

The young man went out to the little stable behind the house, and put the mule to the cart, and drove around to the front door, to come in and get his overcoat and cap.

“Oh! I forgot to tell you, Roland! Hire the nigger fiddlers while you are out,” said Miss Sibby.

“I’ll remember, aunt,” replied the young man, drawing on his “surtout,” and, with cap and gloves in hand, hurrying out to the cart.

In another moment Miss Sibby heard the mule cart rattle away on its rounds.

She then tied on a large apron, rolled up her sleeves, washed her hands, and went into the kitchen to make cakes.

And all that day her two servants, Mocka and Gad, had a time of it!

Late in the evening Roland came back with a cargo of groceries, and the report that all the neighborhood had been invited to her party, and had accepted the invitation.

“And now, Aunt Sibby, it is getting awfully serious! If they all come—and they will all come—where are you going to put them? Here are only three rooms on this floor—the kitchen, the parlor and the parlor bedroom,” said Roland, in real concern.

“Le’s see,” mused the old lady, looking around. “‘Where there’s a will there’s a way,’ sez I! And, Lord knows, as I have got the will, I must find the way! The party is given to the young bride and groom, and for the sake of the dancers, and they must have the preference. Le’s see, now: The bed must be took out’n the parlor bedroom and put upstairs. The folks as don’t dance must sit in the parlor bedroom, with the door open, so as they may see the dancing and hear the music. Then the dancers must dance in this parlor, and the nigger fiddlers can play in the kitchen, with the door open, so the music can be heard all over the house. The two rooms upstairs can be used for the ladies’ and gentlemen’s dressing rooms. Oh, there’s ample space! ample! And we shall have a grand time, Roland!” said the old lady of sixty-one with the heart of sixteen.

And her words came true. Everything was propitious. To be sure, the moonlight was gone; but the sky was clear and cold, and the stars sparkling with the brilliancy that is only to be seen in just such winter weather, and the snow was deep and frozen hard, and the sleighing was “hevvingly,” as the lady from Wild Cats’ described it.

And when all the company were assembled in Miss Sibby’s little, hospitable house, and divided into rooms according to her plan, there was really no uncomfortable crowd at all.

Roland Bayard received all the guests at the door.

Gad showed the gentlemen upstairs into the little north bedroom, and Mocka conducted the ladies up into the little south bedroom.

Both these small attic chambers had been neatly prepared as dressing rooms.

As the guests came down, Miss Sibby, in her only black silk dress and Irish gauze cap, received them at the foot of the stairs, and took them in turn to their appointed places.

The negro fiddlers were seated in the kitchen near the door, which was opened into the parlor.

The young people formed a double set on the parlor floor.

The elders sat on comfortable seats in the parlor bedroom, with the door open, so that they could see the dancers and hear the music, while gossiping with each other.

“The fun grew fast and furious”

as the witches’ dance at Kirk Alloway.

“Miss Sibby!” cried Wynnette, in one of the breathless pauses of the whirling reel—“Miss Sibby, for downright roaring fun and jollification your party does whip the shirt off the back of every party given this winter.”

“I’m proud you like it; but, oh, my dear Miss Wynnette Force, do not put it that there way! Wherever did you pick up sich expressions? It must a been from them niggers,” said Miss Sibby, deprecatingly.

“I reckon it was from the niggers I ‘picked up sich expressions,’ Miss Sibby, for the words and phrases they let fall are often very

expressive—and I take to them so naturally that I sometimes think I must have been a nigger myself in some stage of pre-existence,” laughed Wynnette.

“I don’t know what you are talking about, child; but I do know as you sartainly ought to break yourself of that there habit of speaking.”

“I do try to, Miss Sibby! I correct myself almost every time,” said Wynnette, and then craning her neck with dignity, she added—“What I meant to say about your entertainment, Miss Bayard, was that it is far the most enjoyable I have attended this season.”

“Thank y’, honey, that’s better! A young lady can’t be too particular, sez I!” concluded Miss Sibby. But before she finished speaking the whirl of the reel had carried Wynnette off to the other end of the room.

The dancing continued until ten o’clock.

The fiddlers rested from their labors and took their grog.

The dancers sat down to recover their breath and to partake of refreshments in the form of every sort of cake, candy, nut and raisin, to say nothing of apple toddy, lemon punch and eggnog.

When all had been refreshed the music and dancing recommenced and continued until midnight, when they wound up the ball with the giddy Virginia reel.

The hot mulled port wine was handed round and drunk amid much laughing, talking and jesting.

Then the company put on their wraps, took leave of their happy hostess, re-entered their sleighs and started merrily for their homes.

The lady from the gold diggings had partaken so heartily of all the good things provided by Miss Sibby, and had tested so conscientiously the rival merits of apple toddy, lemon punch, eggnogg and mulled port, that she went sound asleep in the sleigh and slept all the way to Mondreer and on being roused up to enter the house she addressed the dignified squire as Joe Mullins, and remarked that she thought the lead was running out at Wild Cats', and they had better vamose the gulch and go prospecting some'eres else.

However, she slept off the effects of the party and was her own happy and hearty self at breakfast the next morning.

CHAPTER II

ODALITE

Among all the merry-makers there was one sad face—Odalite's—which no effort of self-control could make otherwise than sad.

Odalite, for the sake of her young sisters, had joined every party, but she took no pleasure in them.

Now that all the distracting excitement was over, and she could think calmly of the circumstances, they all combined to distress, mortify and humiliate her. The remembrance of that scene in the church, of which at the time it transpired she was but half conscious, was to her so shameful and degrading that she secretly shrank from the eyes of friends and neighbors whom she was obliged to meet at the various gatherings in the neighborhood.

Then the doubt of her real relations to the Satan who had entered her Eden, the uncertainty of her true position, and the instability of her circumstances, all gathered around her like heavy clouds and darkened, saddened and oppressed her spirits.

That Anglesea had no moral claim on her she was perfectly well assured. That her father would protect her against him she felt equally certain. But that the man might have a legal claim upon her—supposing his marriage with the Widow Wright to have been an irregular one—and that he might give her dear mother and herself trouble through that claim, she was sorely afraid.

And then there was Le—her dear, noble, generous Le—who had pardoned her apparent defection and had sworn to be faithful to her

and share her fate to the end of life, even though that fate should oblige them to live apart in celibacy forever. Her heart ached for Le. She had had but one letter from him since he left the house, a month before. In it he told her that he had reached his ship only six hours before she was to sail, and that he had only time to write a few farewell lines on the eve of departure. But these lines were, indeed, full of love, faith and hope. He told her that he should keep a diary for her, and send it in sections by every opportunity. And he renewed all his vows of fidelity to her through life.

That was his first and last letter up to this time. But now she was looking for another.

This daily expectation and the weekly visits to Greenbushes helped to occupy her mind, and enabled her to endure life.

Old Molly, the housekeeper there, who did not understand, and could not appreciate, the comfort and consolation that Odalite derived from these weekly inspections, remonstrated on the subject, saying:

“Deed, Miss Odalite, ’tain’t no use for you to take all dis yere trouble for to come ober yere ebery week to see as de rooms is all opened and aired and dried—’deed it ain’t. You can trust me—’deed you can. Now did you eber come ober yere on a Wednesday morning, and not find a fire kindled into ebery room in de house, and de windows all opened, ef it was clear? And likewise, if you war to come at night, you’d find the fires all out, and the windows all shut, and the rooms all dry as a toast.”

“I know I can trust you thoroughly, Molly, but you see I like to come. It seems to bring me nearer Le, you know,” Odalite replied, in her gentle and confiding way.

“Yes, honey, so it do, indeed. Well, it was a awful set-down to us w’en dat forriner come yere an’ cut Marse Le out, an’ him a married man, too, Lord save us!”

“Hush, Molly. You must not speak of that person to me,” said Odalite, sternly.

“Lord, honey, I ain’t a-blamin’ of you. Well I knows as you couldn’t help it. Well I knows as he give you witch powders, or summut, to make you like him whedder or no. W’ite people don’t believe nuffin ’bout dese witch powders, but we dem colored people we knows, honey. But now he is foun’ out an’ druv away, we dem all sees as you is a fo’gettin’ de nonsense, honey, ’cause he can’t give you no mo’ witch powders. Lor’! why, if it had been true love you feeled for him, you couldn’t a got ober it as soon as you has, eben if yer had foun’ him out to be de gran’ vilyun as he is, ’cause it would a took time. But as it war not true love, but only witch powders, you see you got ober it eber since he went away. Lor’! I knows about witch powders.”

“Please, Mollie,” pleaded Odalite.

But the negro woman, having mounted her hobby, rocked on:

“Neber mind, honey. You and Marse Le is young ’nough to spare t’ree years, an’ next time he come home, please de Lord, we’ll all ’joy a merry marridge, an’ you an’ him to come to housekeeping ’long of us.”

Odalite took leave, and went home. That was the only way in which she could escape the painful subject.

She found a letter from Le on her return. It was dated last from Rio de Janeiro. It contained the daily record of the young

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