

### THE MINOR POET.

For rather be a simple bard and sing a homely song,  
The annals of plain common folk, their humdrum rights are wrong,  
Than stand upon Parnassus with a scroll of flame unfurled  
And invest my tongue with eloquence to thrill a waiting world.

I'd sing of sturdy farmer lads about their daily toil,  
The brightly gleaming plowshare as it turns the mellow soil.

The wealth of golden harvests that in barns and stacks is stored,  
And the fruitage of the orchard, brown October's precious hoard.

I'd sing the fall of twilight as the sun sinks in the west,  
The howl when tired mothers lull their sleepy babes to rest.  
The bliss of fond young lovers under evening skies in June,  
And the sweet and foolish nothings said beneath the yellow moon.

The joys of careless childhood and the pains and griefs of age,  
The histories and mysteries that fill life's storied page,  
The days all glad with sunshine and the hours of dark and gloom  
Through which we all must journey from the cradle to the tomb.

Let others sing of chivalry and deeds of days of old,  
Of battles grand by sea and land, of knights and warriors bold;  
The lowly rhymes of present times are dearer far to me,  
And I hold these songs are sweeter for their simple melody.

—Myles P. Fristie, in *Ladies' Home Journal*.



### CHAPTER VIII.—CONTINUED.

"To find Miss Patten, of course."

"Oh, goodness! I wish we could!" giggled Mrs. Minny.

"What?" cried Oliver.

"It's her turn, Mr. Oliver. She has run away."

"Not with you? You are not alone?"

"Why, of course. Who was there? I think it is mean of you to look cross, when I came to keep your name out of my troubles, because the doctor wrote it would ruin all your political prospects. You helped me once, and I am coming back to a man I—hate—yes, I do—and am afraid of, so no one will say a word about you." She looked at him with triumphant virtue so satisfied and sweet he hung his head, the words of reproach dying on his lips.

"Well, there's the baby and nurse-girl," he said, hopefully.

"Why, no," she laughed. "Didn't I tell you? Aunt Hannah stole the baby. She ran away herself this time. Oh, do hire one of those cunning cabs, and we'll go for a drive, and I'll tell you all about it."

"The hansom would be too cold, Mrs. Minny. We will take this carriage," he said, calling one; and she, very well pleased, got in with the dog while he deposited her luggage on the front seat.

"You see," she said, leaning back on the cushioned seat as the carriage left the noisy stone pavement and talking was possible. "Aunt Hannah got it into her head that I did not love Francois—the baby—enough. He really did seem to fuss the moment I took him; and Aunt Hannah knows so many rules for bringing up children that I was nowhere with my own child. Old maids do, you know. Then he got to look more like Hen—M. de Restaud—every day; and that was a trial. Aunt Hannah said he was just pretty, but I thought him de Restaudy. I suppose I am awfully wicked, but I was glad Aunt Hannah wanted him. Then there was—"

Mrs. Minny hesitated and looked away; a faint blush colored her round cheek—"a red-headed young man who took me riding—horseback riding. I am sure there is no harm in that. A homely young man," she added, seeing the shadow on Oliver's face, "not nice at all; but one must have some friends. And then one



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morning when she was making the bed Aunt Hannah found your letter under the pillow—your first one, not the ugly one telling me it was my duty to come back to my husband. Funny business letters those, not like you or that lovely ride we had. I was desperate at having to come back; so maybe I was mean to Aunt Hannah. One day she and the baby and its clothes disappeared, and she left a note telling me that I was not to search for her, for she was going to put Franckie—that's what she calls him—in safe keeping."

"I am sure there was no harm in that letter," he said, stiffly.

"Oh, she wouldn't read it; I couldn't get her to; and just to tease because she said my behavior was scandalous, I kissed the letter and hid it away."

"Well, this is a nice affair," said Oliver, smiling a little because Mrs. Minny was so gayly happy. "I don't see what we are going to do. I thought your aunt would be with you, so I hurried on to prevent your coming. It would not be safe. Your—Mr. de Restaud has grown worse—I think is losing his mind. I came to send you to France, to the old general, where probably Miss Patten has gone. Now we are alone. De Restaud has a spy

following me. I am sure; he had in Denver, and—" Oliver could not say his worst suspicions.

"It will be brought out in the court, this nice little ride and everything," chirped Mrs. Minny, "like the chops and tomato sauce in Dickens, and everybody will think me dreadful."

"You are very thoughtless," he said, coldly.

"Now, please don't be cross," her pretty mouth quivered and her eyes filled, "just as we were having such a lovely time. I can't help being jolly because I don't have to go back to him. You know I thought how sorry you'd be if I died of a broken heart and his meanness and you'd come to see me in my coffin. The Troublesome little lady would be troublesome no more, but still and quiet as you'd like her to be, and old and sorrowful, for one day of my old life with him would take all the youngness out of me. Perhaps your conscience would hurt you a little because you had driven me back for I would not have come but for you. The thought that your kindness to me would injure your good name made me miserable. Dr. John wrote how your political prospects would be ruined—political prospects is right, is it not?—and you couldn't be governor or anything."

"Minny, say no more," cried Oliver, his voice trembling, "my dear little girl. It breaks my heart. Dr. John was cruel to write such nonsense; he was too eager to serve me. I don't want office; and I would face the slander of the world to spare you a moment's pain."

She trembled so at his words he stopped in the midst of a sentence, reproaching himself for his lack of self control. They were silent a few moments; then she said, with her old smile:

"Now we've made up—haven't we?—and you are just as nice as you were that night, so please may my dog run a little on the snow?"

"Of course," he said, and set free the small animal, who darted after birds, barking joyously. Among the discomforts of having an erratic mistress were long confinement in cold dark cars and surreptitious journeys under shawls and in baskets; so in these latter days of sudden journeys and imprisonment Skye had grown to prize his hours of freedom. Perhaps in his heart, though, he willingly endured nights in the baggage-car for the joy of being rid of that red-faced, black-eyed something who slept so much and whom he must never waken with a happy bark or jump. How many times on account of that red-faced thing who cried him his darling's aunt scouted him out of doors with a broom, saying: "Scat, you dog! there, you've wakened the baby again." Now his dear mistress was like her old self, and he, Skye, though he never would tell, had seen Miss Hannah and that baby slinking away from the house in Maine like criminals, and he had never noticed their departure by one small bark, for fear they might return.

"I am very hungry," said Mrs. Minny as the carriage turned back to the city, "and, as my dog is hungry too, it would be a good idea for you to take us to a private room in some restaurant, where we can feed Skye on the carpet when the waiter is out."

There was nothing to do, of course, but to accede to this demand; the very fact that she was hungry appealed to Oliver's generous heart. He thought, however, as they went up the stairs to a cozy private supper-room, this would sound unpleasantly to a jury. He could even fancy the attorney for the prosecution's question: "Did you, Mr. Oliver, think this proceeding a proper one? Does society consider it discreet for an unmarried man to take a young married lady to such a place in the absence of her husband?" etc. Still, Mrs. Minny enjoyed everything so much, Oliver forgot his fears, and was merry enough in his way. The dog, gorged with food, showed off his most amusing tricks, which Mrs. Minny admitted he never would do before when strangers were present.

"I think he is really getting fond of you," she said, tenderly.

Oliver, aware of the silliness of it, but pleased at that trustful glance, said he hoped so.

He left Mrs. Minny at a hotel, registering her name and ordering a good room for her, then with almost a sense of relief walked to another hotel, a long distance away. He hoped the spy might be following; once or twice he looked behind, but there seemed no one. At his hotel a telegram awaited him. It was from a clerk in his office:

"Dr. Achorn telegraphed from Pueblo to you in Denver. Henri de Restaud died this morning at the insane asylum. Funeral in Denver. I telegraphed him you were in Chicago."

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"John Achorn."

Death had released the suit for divorce; it would never be brought, and the vengeance of a crazed brain was over. With a quick beat of his heart Oliver realized Mrs. Minny was free at last; perhaps she could learn to care for him some day—with a swift repulsion as he thought of the dead far across the plains. Yet for once death had been kind to the living, and who was there to mourn Henri de Restaud? His mother died in his boyhood, his father drove him from France, his wife hated and feared him, his child would never see his face, and his servants were only kept by lavish promises. Some men may make a mockery of living, a shame of days, may be blots on this fair earth, useless in a useful world, and go into eternity more friendless, more wretched in their self-inflicted degradation, than the outcast dog slinking through the alleys of a city.

CHAPTER IX.

Mrs. Minny was oddly pale and quiet when Oliver met her in the hotel parlor. She looked as if she had not slept; and his heart throbbed at the pain he had caused her. Of course she had worried about her strange position and the trouble in Denver on account of it.

"I think you are cruel to my poor rose," he said, softly.

"You are cruel to me."

"Minny," he drew nearer and took in his firm warm grasp her little hand, "I must tell you something—something that will shock and grieve you. Try and be brave."

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