

TOLD IN THE TWILIGHT.

A BICYCLING INCIDENT.

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THE latter part of October and early November have features much alike. The cool winds come gently and much of the summer's sweetness yet breathes through their invisible ripples. Nature is still awake, but she is getting sleepy.

As I wheeled beneath the maples one early November evening the moonlight trembled through the leaves and fell in sparkles on the sidewalk, with here and there broad splashes and long bars of silvery radiance that danced and leaped as the branches swayed in the cool breeze. It was early evening; the suburban street was silent except for the delicious crunching of the gravel under the tire, or for the sharp snap of a spring. It was empty except for the moonlight, the bicycle and its rider. I leaned the bicycle against Polly's fence. Polly was sitting on the porch. The gate clicked behind me.

The sweet coolness touched us gently. The racemes of Canterbury bells in Polly's garden had lost much of their grace, but the moonbeams cast shadows over their imperfections. The tall spikes of tuberose trembled in the breeze, their blossoms gleaming like white wax and submerging us beneath delicious waves of perfume. Lilies rang unheard peals at the steps. The moonbeams glinted from the

maple leaves; the silent street was dark and still. Crickets creaked in the grass; a katydid quarreled with an unseen foe in the honeysuckle; a tree toad preached his hopeless theories from a distant branch. The moonlight glorified the garden. Polly sat on the porch, an empty chair at her side.

She rocked herself gently and looked into the garden. I sat still and looked at Polly. She is pleasant to look at. I have sometimes thought that perhaps she thought — but that is riot interesting. The honeysuckle rustled in the breeze. The katydid was silent. Then Polly said:

"You were going to remark——?"

"Yes, Polly dear, I was going to say that at last I am in love."

Her chair stood still. She was looking into the garden.

"It happened in this way, Polly, and last evening. A blessed wind from Manitoba at last came along and put some life into the bicycle and into me, so that toward sunset we started for a spin. I gave the machine its liberty and went wherever it chose to take me. If it swerved around a corner or turned suddenly in mid-road and went the other way or cut a bee line into the blue distance, it was all the same to me. The sweetness of the cool wind, the tenderness of the sunset were delightful, and for a while we wandered on an aimless journey. Laboring through the sand to a hard path beneath the lindens and the ashes that bordered and shaded it, we glided down a gentle slope with many a bump and shock as we bounced over exposed roots and water-washed depressions. A gate stood open across the path. With some trepidation we got around it, making sharp angles and queer curves that no mathematician has ever dreamed of. I thought that we were going onward farther into the country, but my pleasant companion preferred to pass through the opening."

"What companion?" asked Polly. "I thought you were alone?"

"I had never been here, but I trusted the intelligence of my steed, who was my

only companion, and in the end, Polly, I lost my heart."

She said nothing. The Canterbury bells swung in the evening air. A sparrows chirped. The tuberoses seemed fainting in a perfumed ecstasy. The moonlight flooded the garden.

"It was a garden that we had run into; not like this flowery one of yours, Polly, but a garden of trees—squares, patches, clusters, acres of trees. Isolated beauties that shook their weeping branches in what seemed an access of sorrow; clusters of dark-green growths that frowned and sighed; dainty shrubs that lifted their delicate spray and showed a silvery lining.

"The path advanced through hedges whose bloom had almost fallen, but the setting sun touched their tips with fire. The road led to an old house literally buried beneath its load of ivy and of Japanese creeper. A hedge of rhododendrons encircled it; greenhouses extended along one side; venerable cherry trees shaded it, till it seemed like a picture of rural England."

"You must have been dreaming," said Polly. "It seems more like that than like rural England."

"Oh, no, no! For a girl sat on the doorstep. She was writing.

Polly moved restlessly in her chair. Then she said:

"I suppose she had eyes as blue as violets, a fluffy mass of yellow hair in which threads of gold glinted in the sunlight."

"She had, she had! Polly, you are a witch, or you must have seen her?"

"Not I, indeed. I don't admire that style."

"I leaned the bicycle against a great cherry tree. The girl looked up and smiled. 'Wouldn't you like to sit down by me and rest?' she said. 'I am writing a letter; perhaps you can help me. I have thoughts, but I do not write well.'

"I shall be happy to do anything you may ask," I said. "But what do you expect to pay for the work?"

"Writing is pretty hard, I know. Would you want much pay? S'pose—s'pose I kiss you?"

Polly's chair stood still. She drew her shawl around her.

"The brazen hussy!" she said.

The crickets screamed in the grass; the katydid made a long cry and was still; the honeysuckle swished against the post; the tuberoses and the Canter-

bury bells seemed to laugh; but the moonlight still lay soft and white over all the garden.

"I took the pencil and the paper and intimated that I was ready. 'I will be as slow as I can,' she said, 'so that you can keep up with me. When I write I must be very slow. Now begin. "Dearest— You will be glad to know that I am well and that I have been working a good deal at the weeds. Some of them came up hard, but now they are up I must confess that things look better without them." 'I hate to work in the weeds,' she said to me, 'but it is often necessary that I should do so.' "You will see, dearest, that this is not my writing. A bicyclist came in the garden and he is writing for me. He does it very fast. I would rather pull weeds than write. He says he would rather write than pull weeds, Isn't that queer? I hope you are having a nice time. This is all to-day. Your loving daughter." There! she said, 'I am glad it's done.' And after a pause, 'Oh, dear! What makes your mustache so scratchy?'"

"You don't mean to tell me——" said Polly.

"That she kissed me? Of course. She was a real nice girl, Polly. I know, because I kissed her."

"The wheel and I glided from under the trees and toward the sunset. The sky was aflame. The maples stood darkly green against the gold. The weeping birches were shivering a little along the path. The cut-leaved alder seemed on fire. Near the gate the bicycle suddenly turned and we went back over the path by the hedge. The little maid was still on the doorstep, looking at her letter.

"I have returned," I said, 'because I am so fond of you. And I should like to ask how old you are, if you are willing to tell me.'

"I like you pretty well, too," she said 'I am seven, going on eight.'"

"Oh!" said Polly.

The breeze swept across the flower garden. The crickets were still. The katydid was silent. The tree toad had ceased his complaining. The moonlight lay still and soft over all the earth.

"Polly," I said, as I held my hand toward her, "I am sorry to have plagued you so; I suppose you will never forgive me? Good-bye."

She put her hand in mine.

"It is early yet," she said.