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A Dozen Ways Of Love

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TO

M. S. E.

**WITHOUT WHOSE AID, I THINK, MY BOOKS
WOULD NEVER HAVE BEEN WRITTEN**

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I

YOUNG LOVE

It was after dark on a November evening. A young woman came down the main street of a small town in the south of Scotland. She was a maid-servant, about thirty years old; she had a pretty, though rather strong-featured, face, and yellow silken hair. When she came toward the end of the street she turned into a small draper's shop. A middle-aged woman stood behind the counter folding her wares.

'Can ye tell me the way to Mistress Macdonald's?' asked the maid.

'Ye'll be a stranger.' It was evident that every one in those parts knew the house inquired for.

The maid had a somewhat forward, familiar manner; she sat down to rest. 'What like is she?'

The shopkeeper bridled. 'Is it Mistress Macdonald?' There was reproof in the voice. 'She is much respectet – none more so. It would be before[Pg 4] you were born that every one about here knew Mistress Macdonald.'

'Well, what family is there?' The maid had a sweet smile; her voice fell into a cheerful coaxing tone, which had its effect.

'Ye'll be the new servant they'll be looking for. Is it walking ye are from the station? Well, she had six children, had Mistress Macdonald.'

'What ages will they be?'

The woman knit her brows; the problem set her was too difficult. 'I couldna tell ye just exactly. There's Miss Macdonald – she that's at home yet; she'll be over fifty.'

'Oh!' The maid gave a cheerful note of interested understanding. 'It'll be her perhaps that wrote to me; the mistress'll be an old lady.'

'She'll be nearer ninety than eighty, I'm thinking.' There was a moment's pause, which the shop-woman filled with sighs. 'Ye'll be aware that it's a sad house ye're going to. She's verra ill is Mistress Macdonald. It's sorrow for us all, for she's been hale and had her faculties. She'll no' be lasting long now, I'm thinking.'

'No,' said the maid, with good-hearted pensiveness; 'it's not in the course of nature that she should.' She rose as she spoke, as if it behoved her to begin her new duties with alacrity, as there might not long be occasion for them. She put another question [Pg 5] before she went. 'And who will there be living in the house now?'

'There's just Miss Macdonald that lives with her mother; and there's Mistress Brown—she'll be coming up most of the days now, but she dinna live there; and there's Ann Johnston, that's helping Miss Macdonald with the nursing—she's been staying at the house for a year back. That's all that there'll be of them besides the servants, except that there's Dr. Robert. His name is Macdonald, too, ye know; he's a nephew, and he's the minister o' the kirk here. He goes up every day to see how his aunt's getting on. I'm thinking he'll be up there now; it's about his time for going.'

The maid took the way pointed out to her. Soon she was walking up a gravel path, between trim, old-fashioned laurel hedges. She stood at the door of a detached house. It was an ordinary middle-class dwelling—comfortable, commodious, ugly enough, except that stolidity and age did much to soften its ugliness. It had, above all, the air of being a home—a hospitable open-armed look, as if children had run in and out of it for years, as if young men had gone out from it to see the world and come back again to rest, as if young girls had fluttered about it, confiding their sports and their loves to its ivy-clad walls. Now there hung about it a silence and sobriety that were like the shadows of coming oblivion. [Pg 6] The gas was turned low in the hall. The old-fashioned omnibus that came lumbering from the railway with a box for the new maid seemed to startle the place with its noise.

In the large dining-room four people were sitting in dreary discussion. The gas-light flared upon heavy mahogany furniture, upon red moreen curtains and big silver trays and dishes. By the fire sat the two daughters of the aged woman. They both had grey hair and wrinkled faces. The married daughter was stout and energetic; the spinster was thin, careworn and nervous. Two middle-aged men were listening to a complaint she made; the one was Robert Macdonald the minister, the other was the family doctor.

'It's no use Robina's telling me that I must coax my mother to eat, as if I hadn't tried that'—the voice became shrill—'I've begged her, and prayed her, and reasoned with her.'

'No, no, Miss Macdonald—no, no,' said the doctor soothingly. 'You've done your best, we all understand that; it's Mistress Brown that's thinking of the situation in a wrong light; it's needful to be plain and to say that Mistress Macdonald's mind is affected.'

Robina Brown interposed with indignation and authority.

'My mother has always had her right mind; she's been losing her memory. All aged people lose their memories.' [Pg 7]

The minister spoke with a meditative interest in a psychological phenomenon. 'Ay, she's been losing it backwards; she forgot who we were first, and remembered us all as little children; then she forgot us and your father altogether. Latterly she's been living back in the days when her father and mother were living at Kelsey Farm. It's strange to hear her talk. There's not, as far as I know, another being on this wide earth of all those that came and went to Kelsey Farm that is alive now.'

Miss Macdonald wiped her eyes; her voice shook as she spoke; the nervousness of fatigue and anxiety accentuated her grief. 'She was asking me how much butter we made in the dairy to-day, and asking if the curly cow had her calf, and what Jeanie Trim was doing.'

'Who was Jeanie Trim?' asked the minister.

'How should I know? I suppose she was one of the Kelsey servants.'

'Curious,' ejaculated the minister. 'This Jeanie will have grown old and died, perhaps, forty years ago, and my aunt's speaking of her as if she was a young thing at work in the next room!'

'And what did you say to Mistress Macdonald?' the doctor asked, with a cheerful purpose in his tone.

'I explained to her that her poor head was wandering.'

'Nay, now, but, Miss Macdonald, I'm thinking if [Pg 8] I were you I would tell her that the curly cow had her calf.'

'I never'—tearfully—'told my mother a falsehood in my life, except when I was a very little girl, and then'—Miss Macdonald paused to wipe her eyes—'she spoke to me so beautifully out of the Bible about it.'

The married sister chimed in mournfully, 'How often have I heard my mother say that not one of her children had ever told her a lie!'

'Yes, yes, but— —' There was a tone in the doctor's voice as if he would like to have used a strong word, but he schooled himself.

'It's curious the notion she has got of not eating,' broke in the minister. 'I held the broth myself, but she would have none of it.'

In the next room the flames of a large fire were sending reflections over the polished surfaces of massive bedroom furniture. The wind blew against this side of the house and rattled the windows, as if angry to see the picture of luxury and warmth within. It was a handsome stately room, and all that was in it dated back many a year. In a chintz arm-chair by the fireside its mistress sat—a very old lady, but there was still dignity in her pose. Her hair, perfectly white, was still plentiful; her eye had still something of brightness, and there was upon the aged features the cast of thought and the [Pg 9] habitual look of intelligence. Beside her upon a small table were such accompaniments of age as daughter and nurse deemed suitable—the large print Bible, the big spectacles and caudle cup. The lady sat looking about her with a quick restless expression, like a prisoner alert to escape; she was tied to her chair—not by cords—by the failure of muscular strength; but perhaps she did not know that. She eyed her attendant with bright furtive glances, as if the meek sombre woman who sat sewing beside her were her jailer.

The party in the dining-room broke up their vain discussion, and came for another visit of personal inspection.

'Mother, this is the doctor come to see you. Do you not remember the doctor?'

The old lady looked at all four of them brightly enough. 'I haena the pleasure of remembering who ye are, but perhaps it will return to me.' There was restrained politeness in her manner.

The doctor spoke. 'It's a very bad tale I'm hearing about you to-day, that you've begun to refuse your meat. A person of your experience, Mistress Macdonald, ought to know that we must eat to live.' He had a basin of food in his hand. 'Now just to please me, Mistress Macdonald.'

The old dame answered with the air that a [Pg 10] naughty child or a pouting maiden might have had. 'I'll no eat it—tak' it away! I'll no eat it. Not for you, no—nor for my mither there'—she looked defiantly at her grey-haired daughter—'no, nor for my father himself!'

'Not a mouthful has passed her lips to-day,' moaned Miss Macdonald. She wrung excited hands and stepped back a pace into the shadow; she felt too modest to pose as her mother's mother before the curious eyes of the two men.

The old lady appeared relieved when the spinster was out of her sight. 'I don't know ye, gentlemen, but perhaps now my mither's not here, ye'll tell me who it was that rang the door-bell a while since.'

The men hesitated. They were neither of them ready with inventions.

She leaned towards the doctor, strangely excited. 'Was it Mr. Kinnaird?' she whispered.

The doctor supposed her to be frightened. 'No, no,' he said in cheerful tones; 'you're mistaken—it wasn't Kinnaird.'

She leaned back pettishly. 'Tak' away the broth; I'll no' tak' it!'

The discomfited four passed out of the room again. The women were weeping; the men were shaking their heads.

It was just then that the new servant passed into the sick-room, bearing candles in her hands. [Pg 11]

'Jeanie, Jeanie Trim,' whispered the old lady. The whisper had a sprightly yet mysterious tone in it; the withered fingers were put out as if to twitch the passing skirt as the housemaid went by.

The girl turned and bent a look—strong, helpful, and kindly—upon this fine ruin of womanhood. The girl had wit 'Yes, ma'am?' she answered blithely.

'I'll speak with ye, Jeanie, when this woman goes away; it's her that my mither's put to spy on me.'

The nurse retired into the shadow of the wardrobe.

'She's away now,' said the maid.

'Jeanie, is it Mr. Kinnaird?'

'Well, now, would you like it to be Mr. Kinnaird?' The maid spoke as we speak to a familiar friend when we have joyful news.

'Oh, Jeanie Trim, ye know well that I've longed sair for him to come again!'

The maid set down her candles, and knelt down by the old dame's knee, looking up with playful face.

'Well, now, I'll tell ye something. He came to see ye this afternoon.'

'Did he, Jeanie?' The withered face became all wreathed with smiles; the old eyes danced with joy. 'What did ye say to him?'

'Oh, well, I just said'—hesitation—'I said he was to come back again to-morrow.' [Pg 12]

'My father doesn't know that he's been here?' There was apprehension in the whisper.

'Not a soul knows but meself.'

'Ye didna tell him I'd been looking for him, Jeanie Trim?'

'Na, na, I made out that ye didna care whether he came or not.'

'But he wouldna be hurt in his mind, would he? I'd no like him to be affronted.'

'It's no likely he was affronted when he said he'd come back to-morrow.'

The smile of satisfaction came again.

'Did he carry his silver-knobbed cane and wear his green coat, Jeanie?'

'Ay, he wore his green coat, and he looked as handsome a man as ever I saw in my life.'

The coals in the grate shot up a sudden brilliant flame that eclipsed the soft light of the candles and set strange shadows quivering about the huge bed and wardrobe and the dark rosewood tables. The winsome young woman at her play, and the old dame living back in a tale that was long since told, exchanged nods and smiles at the thought of the handsome visitor in his green coat. The whisper of the aged voice came blithely –

'Ay, he is that, Jeanie Trim; as handsome a man as ever trod!'[Pg 13]

The maid rose, and passing out observed the discarded basin of broth.

'What's this?' she said. 'Ye'll no be able to see Mr. Kinnaird tomorrow if ye don't take yer soup the night.'

'Gie it to me, Jeanie Trim; I thought he wasna coming again when I said I wouldna.'

The nurse slipped out of the shadow of the wardrobe and went out to tell that the soup was being eaten.

'Kinnaird,' repeated the minister meditatively. 'I never heard my aunt speak the name.'

'Kinnaird,' repeated the daughters; and they too searched in their memories.

'I can remember my grandfather and my grandmother – the married daughter spoke incredulously – 'there was never a gentleman called Kinnaird that any of the family had to do with. I'm sure of that, or I'd have as much as heard the name.'

The minister shook his head, discounting the certainty.

'Maybe John will remember the name; your father, and your grandfather too, had great talks with him when he was a lad. I'll write a line and ask him. Poor William or Thomas might have known, if they had lived.'

William and Thomas, grey-haired men, respected fathers of families, had already been laid by the side[Pg 14] of their father in the burying-ground. John lived in a distant country, counting himself too feeble now to cross the seas. The daughters, the younger mem-

bers of this flock, were passing into advanced years. The mother sat by her fireside, and smiled softly to herself as she watched the dancing flame, and thought that her young lover would return on the morrow.

The days went on.

'I cannot think it right to tamper with my mother in this false way.' The spinster daughter spoke tearfully.

'Would you rather see Mistress Macdonald die of starvation?' The doctor spoke sharply; he was tired of the protest. The doctor approved of the new maid. 'She's a wise-like body,' he said; 'let her have her way.'

'Don't you know us, mother?' the daughters would ask patiently, sadly, day by day. But she never knew them; she only mistook one or the other of them at times for her own mother, of whom she stood in some awe.

'Surely ye've not forgotten Ann Johnston, ma'am?' the nurse would ask, carefully tending her old mistress.

The force of long habit had made the old lady patient and courteous, but no answering gleam came in her face.[Pg 15]

'Ye know who I am?' the new maid would cry in kindly triumph.

'Oh, ay, I know you, Jeanie Trim.'

'And now, look, I brought you a fine cup of milk, warm from the byre.'

'Oh, I canna tak' it; I'm no thinking that I care about eating the day.'

'Well, but I want to tell ye'—with an air of mystery. 'Who d'ye think's downstairs? It's Mr. Kinnaird himself.'

'Did he come round by the yard to the dairy door?'

'That he did; and all to ask how ye were the day.'

The sparkle of the eye returned, and the smile that almost seemed to dimple the wrinkled cheek.

'And I hope ye offered him something to eat, Jeanie; it's a long ride he takes.'

'Bread and cheese, and a cup of milk just like this.'

'What did he say? Did he like what ye gave him?'

'He said a sup of milk sudna cross his lips till you'd had a cupful the like of his; so I brought it in to ye. You'd better make haste and take it up.'

'Did he send ye wi' the cup, Jeanie Trim?'

'Ay, he did that; and not a bit nor sup will he tak till ye've drunk it all, every drop.' [Pg 16]

With evident delight the cup was drained.

'Ye told him I was ailing and couldna see him the day, Jeanie?'

'Maybe ye'll see him to-morrow.' The maid stooped and folded the white shawl more carefully over the dame's breast, and smiled in protective kindly fashion. She had a good heart and a womanly, motherly touch, although many a mistress had called her wilful and pert.

There were times when the minister came and sat himself behind his aunt's chair to watch and to listen. He was a meditative man, and wrote many an essay upon modern theology, but here he found food for meditation of another sort.

There was no being in the world that he revered as he had revered this aged lady. In his childhood she had taught him to lisp the measures of psalm and paraphrase; in his youth she had advised him with shrewdest wisdom; in his ministerial life she had been to him a friend, always holding before him a greater spiritual height to be attained, and now — — He thought upon his uncle as he had known him, a very reverent elder of the kirk, a man who had led a long and useful life, and to whom this woman had rendered wifely devotion. He thought upon his cousins, in whose lives their mother's life had seemed unalterably bound up. He would at times emerge from his corner, and, sitting [Pg 17] down beside the lady, would take her well-worn Bible and read to her such passages as he knew were graven deep upon her heart by scenes of joy or sorrow, parting or meeting, or the very hours of birth or death, in the lives that had been dearer to her than her own. He was not an emotional man, but yet there was a ringing pathos in his voice as he read the

rhythmic words. At such times she would sit as if voice and rhythm soothed her, or she would bow her head solemnly at certain pauses, as if accustomed to agree to the sentiment expressed. Heart and thought were not awake to him, nor to the book he read, nor to the memories he tried to arouse. The fire of the lady's heart sprang up only for one word, that word a name, the name of a man of whose very existence, it seemed, no trace was left in all that country-side.

The minister would retreat out of the lady's range of vision; and so great did his curiosity grow that he instigated the maid to ask certain questions as she played at the game of the old love-story in her sprightly, pitying way.

'Now I'll tell ye a thing that I want to know,' said the maid, pouring tea in a cup. 'What's his given name? Will ye tell me that?'

'Is it Mr. Kinnaird ye mean?'

'It's Mr. Kinnaird's christened name that I'm speering for.' [Pg 18]

'An' I canna tell ye that, for he never told it to me. It'd be no place of mine to ask him before he chose to speak o' it himsel'.'

'Did ye never see a piece of paper that had his name on it, or a card, maybe?'

'I dinna mind that I have, Jeanie. He's a verra fine gentleman; it's just Mr. Kinnaird that he's called.'

'What for will ye no let me tell the master that he comes every day?'

'Ye must no tell my father, Jeanie Trim'—querulously. 'No, no; nor my mither. They'll maybe be telling him to bide away.'

'Why would they be telling him to bide away?'

'Tuts! How can I tell ye why, when I dinna ken mysel'? Why will ye fret me? I'll tak' no more tea. Tak' it away!'

'I tell ye he'll ask me if ye took it up. He's waiting now to hear that ye took a great big piece of bread tae it. He'll no eat the bread and cheese I've set before him till ye've eaten this every crumb.'

'Is that sae? Well, I maun eat it, for I wouldna have him wanting his meat.'

The meal finished, the maid put on her most winsome smile.

'Now and I'll tell ye what I'll do; I'll go back to Mr. Kinnaird, and I'll tell him ye sent yer *love* tae him.'[Pg 19]

'Ye'll no do sic a thing as that, Jeanie Trim!' All the dignity and authority of her long womanhood returned in the impressive air with which she spoke. 'Ye'll no do sic a thing as that, Jeanie Trim! It's no for young ladies to be sending sic messages to a gentleman, when he hasna so much as said the word "love."'

Had he ever said the word 'love,' this Kinnaird, whose memory was a living presence in the chamber of slow death? The minister believed that he had not. There was no annal in the family letters of his name, although other rejected suitors were mentioned freely. Had he told his love by look or gesture, and left it unspoken, or had look and gesture been misunderstood, and the whole slight love-story been born where it had died, in the heart of the maiden? 'Where it had died!' — it had not died. Seventy years had passed, and the love-story was presently enacting itself, as all past and all future must for ever be enacting to beings for whom time is not. Then, too, where was he who, by some means, whether of his own volition or not, had become so much a part of the pulsing life of a young girl that, when all else of life passed from her with the weight of years, her heart still remained obedient to him? Where was he? Had his life gone out like the flame of a candle when it is blown? Or, if he was anywhere in the universe of living spirits, was he conscious of[Pg 20] the power which he was wielding? Was it a triumph to him to know that he had come, gay and debonair, in the bloom of his youth, into this long-existing sanctuary of home, and set aside, with a wave of his hand, husband, children, and friends, dead and living?

Whatever might be the psychical aspects of the case, one thing was certain, that the influence of Kinnaird — Kinnaird alone of all those who had entered into relations with the lady — was useful at this time to come between her and the distressing symptoms that would have resulted from the mania of self-starvation. For some months longer she lived in comfort and good cheer. This clear memory of her youth was oddly interwoven with the forgetful dulness of old age, like a golden thread in a black web, like a tiny flame

on the hearth that shoots with intermittent brilliancy into darkness. She was always to see her lover upon the morrow; she never woke to the fact that 'to-day' lasted too long, that a winter of morrows had slipped fruitless by.

The interviews between Jeanie Trim and Kinnaird were not monotonous. All else was monotonous. December, January, February passed away. The mornings and the evenings brought no change outwardly in the sick-room, no change to the appearance of the fine old face and still stately figure, suggested [Pg 21] no variety of thought or emotion to the lady's decaying faculties; but at the hours when she sat and contentedly ate the food that the maid brought her, her mental vision cleared as it focused upon the thought of her heart's darling. It was she whose questions suggested nearly all the variations in the game of imagination which the young woman so aptly played.

'Was he riding his black mare, Jeanie Trim?'

'I didna see the beast. He stood on his feet when he was tapping at the door.'

'Whisht! Ye could tell if he wore his boots and spurs, an' his drab waistcoat, buttoned high?'

'Now that ye speak of it, those were the very things he wore.'

'It'd be the black mare he was riding, nae doubt; he'll have tied her to the gate in the lane.' Or again: 'Was it in the best parlour that ye saw him the day? He'd be drinking tea wi' my mither.'

'That he was; and she smiling tae him over the dish of tea.'

'Ay, he looks fine and handsome, bowing to my mither in the best parlour, Jeanie Trim. Did ye notice if he wore silk stockings?'

'Fine silk stockings he wore.'

'And his green coat?'

'As green and smart as a bottle when ye polish, it with a cloth.' [Pg 22]

'Did ye notice the fine frills that he has to his shirt? I've tried to make my father's shirts look as fine, but they never have the same look.' The hands of the old dame would work nervously, as if eager