

CHAPTER XXIV

A CHEERFUL BLUNDER

"We would like to ask your advice about one thing, sir," said Thursday Smith to Mr. Merrick, a little later that same evening. "Would it be legal for me to marry under the name of Thursday Smith, or must I use my real name--Harold Melville?"

Uncle John could not answer this question, nor could the major or Arthur. Hetty and her fiancé had both decided to cling to the name of Thursday Smith thereafter, and they disliked to be married under any other--especially the detestable one of Harold Melville.

"An act of legislature would render your new name legal, I believe," said Mr. Merrick; "but such an act could not be passed until after the date you have planned to be married."

"But if it was made legal afterward it wouldn't matter greatly," suggested the major.

"I do not think it matters at all," asserted Hetty. "It's the man I'm marrying, not his name. I don't much care what he calls himself."

"Oh, but it must be legal, you know!" exclaimed Patsy. "You don't care

now, perhaps, but you might in the future. We cannot be certain, you know, that Thursday is entirely free from his former connection with Harold Melville."

"Quite true," agreed the major.

"Then," said Smith, with evident disappointment, "I must use the hateful name of Melville for the wedding, and afterward abandon it for as long as possible."

The nieces were greatly pleased with Uncle John's arrangement, which relieved them of the newspaper and also furnished Thursday and Hetty, of whom they had grown really fond, with a means of gaining a livelihood.

Millville accepted the new arrangement with little adverse comment, the villagers being quite satisfied with a weekly paper, which would cost them far less than the daily had done. Everyone was pleased to know Thursday Smith had acquired the business, for both he and Hetty had won the cordial friendship of the simple-hearted people and were a little nearer to them than "the nabob's girls" could ever be.

Preparations were speedily pushed forward for the wedding, which the nieces undertook to manage themselves, the prospective bride and groom being too busy at the newspaper office to devote much attention to the preliminaries of the great event.

The ceremony was to take place at the farmhouse of Mr. Merrick, and every inhabitant of Millville was invited to be present. The minister would drive over from Hooker's Falls, and the ceremony was to be followed by a grand feast, for which delicacies were to be imported from New York.

The girls provided a complete trousseau for Hetty, as their wedding present, while Arthur and the major undertook to furnish the new apartments, which were already under construction. Uncle John's gift was a substantial check that would furnish the newly married couple with modest capital to promote their business or which they could use in case of emergencies.

It was the very day before the wedding that Fogerty gave them so great and agreeable a surprise that Uncle John called it "Fogerty's Wedding Present" ever afterward. In its physical form it was merely a telegram, but in its spiritual and moral aspect it proved the greatest gift Thursday and Hetty were destined to receive. The telegram was dated from New York and read as follows:

"Harold Melville just arrested here for passing a bogus check under an assumed name. Have interviewed him and find he is really Melville, so Thursday Smith must be some one else, and doubtless a more respectable character. Shall I undertake to discover his real identity?"

Uncle John let Thursday and Hetty answer this question, and their reply

was a positive "no!"

"The great Fogerty made such a blunder the first time," said Hetty, who was overjoyed at the glorious news, "that he might give poor Thursday another dreadful scare if he tackled the job again. Let the mystery remain unfathomable."

"But, on the contrary, my dear, Fogerty might discover that Thursday was some eminent and good man--as I am firmly convinced is the truth," suggested Mr. Merrick.

"He's that right now," asserted Hetty. "For my part, I prefer to know nothing of his former history, and Thursday says the present situation thoroughly contents him."

"I am more than contented," said Thursday, with a happy smile. "Hetty has cured me of my desire to wander, and no matter what I might have been in the past I am satisfied to remain hereafter a country editor."