

Sally's Rocking-chair.



WHAT could it mean? What is a valentine anyhow? Could Silas have made a mistake? She thought she had heard once of a *Saint* Valentine; and she remembered a little girl friend of her childhood by that name, whom everybody called Val. for short. Yes, Silas must have made a mistake in leaving it at her house—and yet—she did not like to think that he had meant his gift for another. A sudden expression as of a daring thought flooded her features till her faded cheeks looked like the withered petal of a pink rose; yet, in spite of this gentle glow, she was a trifle shocked. Silas was always doing ridiculous things, but she never thought he'd get as blasphemous as that! Comparing her to a saint! Just *think* of it! However, she could not help hoping that Saint Valentine was a little extra nice, even for a saint.

What could it mean? Yet here was this beautiful glossy stuff, falling in shimmering folds from her loving arms to the little rag carpet at her feet; and here was a long envelope, of coarse grainy paper, bearing in Silas' cramped hand the words, "A Valentine to my Valentine."

Then she remembered. Long ago she had heard of sending little cards on St. Valentine's day, but she thought they were always love messages from lads to their sweethearts. She had only heard of such things—a valentine in person was an unknown object to her.

Sally Holden sat down in her little plush rocker to think. This ugly little chair was the pride of Sally's life, and she sat in it only on great occasions. It resembled Sally, this little chair; for though to all appearances the worse for wear, yet it opened its arms kindly to all who approached it, and the song it sang on its squeaky old rockers was "Wel—come, wel—come." Though Sally seldom sat in this chair because, through such dear associations of childhood and the beloved mother, long since gone to rest, she had come to regard it as almost human, yet she always had it ready for Silas when he made his Sunday evening call, in his "meetin'" clothes and glossy plug. But on week days it was her company, her friend—in short, her *family*, to whom she talked and gossiped as much as she would to a flesh-and-blood sister.

Sally was dreaming, dreaming in her little plush chair. Her new treasure, her glorious satin, had fallen unheeded to the floor, and lay there at her feet in a black shining mass. She was thinking of her girlhood, of her dead sister, who, when they were girls together, had often rallied her laughingly on the probability of her winning their mother's lovely satin gown by being the first to wed. Sally had always answered gravely that she should never marry. What a *happy* girlhood these two spent together! Then John came and carried Pen away, and soon sickness came to her, then shortly death.

Ever since her sister had been married in their mother's wedding dress, Sally had firmly believed that married women only might be the proud possessors of such riches.

She started, and as her thoughts rushed back to the present she rose, wiping the tears away with her apron. Laying the unopened letter aside, she picked up the satin and folded it gently, stopping now and then to give it a pat or to look at it