

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1875) – Kissing with Becky [Chap. VII]

[...]

When school broke up at noon, Tom flew to Becky Thatcher, and whispered in her ear:

‘Put on your bonnet and let on you’re going home; and when you get to the corner, give the rest of ‘em the slip, and turn down through the lane and come back. I’ll go the other way and come it over ‘em the same way.

So the one went off with one group of scholars, and the other with another. In a little while the two met at the bottom of the lane, and when they reached the school they had it all to themselves. Then they sat together, with a slate before them, and Tom gave Becky the pencil and held her hand in his, guiding it, and so created another surprising house. When the interest in art began to wane, the two fell to talking. Tom was swimming in bliss. He said:

‘Do you love rats?’

‘No! I hate them!’

‘Well, I do, too—LIVE ones. But I mean dead ones, to swing round your head with a string.’

‘No, I don’t care for rats much, anyway. What I like is chewing-gum.’

‘Oh, I should say so! I wish I had some now.’

‘Do you? I’ve got some. I’ll let you chew it awhile, but you must give it back to me.

That was agreeable, so they chewed it turn about, and dangled their legs against the bench in excess of contentment.’

‘Was you ever at a circus?’ said Tom.’

‘Yes, and my pa’s going to take me again some time, if I’m good.’

‘I been to the circus three or four times—lots of times.

Church ain’t shucks to a circus. There’s things going on at a circus all the time. I’m going to be a clown in a circus when I grow up.’

‘Oh, are you! That will be nice. They’re so lovely, all spotted up.’

‘Yes, that’s so. And they get slathers of money—most a dollar a day, Ben Rogers says. Say, Becky, was you ever engaged?’

‘What’s that?’

‘Why, engaged to be married.’

‘No.’

‘Would you like to?’

‘I reckon so. I don’t know. What is it like?’

‘Like? Why it ain’t like anything. You only just tell a boy you won’t ever have anybody but him, ever ever ever, and then you kiss and that’s all. Anybody can do it.’

‘Kiss? What do you kiss for?’

‘Why, that, you know, is to—well, they always do that.’

‘Everybody?’

‘Why, yes, everybody that’s in love with each other. Do you remember what I wrote on the slate?’

‘Ye—yes.’

‘What was it?’

‘I sha’n’t tell you.’

‘Shall I tell YOU?’

‘Ye—yes—but some other time.’

‘No, now.’

‘No, not now—to-morrow.’

‘Oh, no, NOW. Please, Becky—I’ll whisper it, I’ll whisper it ever so easy.’

Becky hesitating, Tom took silence for consent, and passed his arm about her waist and whispered the tale ever so softly, with his mouth close to her ear. And then he added:

‘Now you whisper it to me—just the same.’

She resisted, for a while, and then said:

‘You turn your face away so you can’t see, and then I will.’

But you mustn’t ever tell anybody—WILL you, Tom? Now you won’t, WILL you?’ ‘No, indeed, indeed I won’t. Now, Becky.’

He turned his face away. She bent timidly around till her breath stirred his curls and whispered, ‘I—love—you!’ Then she sprang away and ran around and around the desks and benches, with Tom after her, and took refuge in a corner at last, with her little white apron to her face. Tom clasped her about her neck and pleaded:

‘Now, Becky, it’s all done—all over but the kiss. Don’t you be afraid of that—it ain’t anything at all. Please, Becky.’

And he tugged at her apron and the hands.

By and by she gave up, and let her hands drop; her face, all glowing with the struggle, came up and submitted. Tom kissed the red lips and said:

‘Now it’s all done, Becky. And always after this, you know, you ain’t ever to love anybody but me, and you ain’t ever to marry anybody but me, ever never and forever. Will you?’

‘No, I’ll never love anybody but you, Tom, and I’ll never marry anybody but you—and you ain’t to ever marry anybody but me, either.’

‘Certainly. Of course. That’s PART of it. And always coming to school or when we’re going home, you’re to walk with me, when there ain’t anybody looking—and you choose me and I choose you at parties, because that’s the way you do when you’re engaged.’

‘It’s so nice. I never heard of it before.’

‘Oh, it’s ever so gay! Why, me and Amy Lawrence —’ The big eyes told Tom his blunder and he stopped, confused.’

‘Oh, Tom! Then I ain’t the first you’ve ever been engaged to!’ The child began to cry. Tom said:

‘Oh, don’t cry, Becky, I don’t care for her any more.’

‘Yes, you do, Tom—you know you do.’

Tom tried to put his arm about her neck, but she pushed him away and turned her face to the wall, and went on crying.

Tom tried again, with soothing words in his mouth, and was repulsed again. Then his pride was up, and he strode away and went outside. He stood about, restless and uneasy, for a while, glancing at the door, every now and then, hoping she would repent and come to find him. But she did not. Then he began to feel badly and fear that he was in the wrong. It was a hard struggle with him to make new advances, now, but he nerved himself to it and entered. She was still standing back there in the corner, sobbing, with her face to the wall. Tom’s heart smote him. He went to her and stood a moment, not knowing exactly how to proceed.

Then he said hesitatingly:

‘Becky, I—I don’t care for anybody but you.’

No reply—but sobs.

‘Becky’—pleadingly. ‘Becky, won’t you say something?’ More sobs.

Tom got out his chiefest jewel, a brass knob from the top of an andiron, and passed it around her so that she could see it, and said:

‘Please, Becky, won’t you take it?’ She struck it to the floor. Then Tom marched out of the house and over the hills and far away, to return to school no more that day. Presently Becky began to suspect. She ran to the door; he was not in sight; she flew around to the playyard; he was not there. Then she called:

‘Tom! Come back, Tom!’ She listened intently, but there was no answer. She had no companions but silence and loneliness. So she sat down to cry again and upbraid herself; and by this time the scholars began to gather again, and she had to hide her griefs and still her broken heart and take up the cross of a long, dreary, aching afternoon, with none among the strangers about her to exchange sorrows with.