

**Virginia De Forrest, "Mrs. Daffodil's Shopping Expedition," May 1857**

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MRS. DAFFODIL'S SHOPPING EXPEDITION.

BY VIRGINIA DE FORREST.

"HOME at last," said Mrs. S——, as, with a long-drawn sigh, she threw herself upon the parlor sofa.

"Only for a time, mother," said George. "We must show Mrs. Daffodil the Philadelphia lions, and then for a trip somewhere—Niagara, perhaps."

"You are a perfect bird of passage," said his father, laughing; "while we *old* people—eh, mother?—think there is no place like home."

There was an ominous sound in the entry, a very decided footfall; the door was thrown open with an energetic push, and Mrs. Daffodil came in, holding in her hand a cap which had the appearance of having been crushed by a heavy weight placed upon it.

"Mrs. S——," said the old lady, "jest look a here. My best cap," she said, pathetically, "scrunched all out of shape, looks like an old dish-cloth. Ninnie put something right a top of it in the trunk."

"It has a kind of collapsed look," said Pete, from the corner, where, behind the piano, he was making mysterious figures on George's music.

"Heigh-ho!" sighed the old lady; "this is the *last* thing that is ruinationed! but there's lots more. My brown silk has a great place where the mocolotif burnt a spark hole in it; and I've travelled in my green bonnet until it is black with dust and wear; and my new shawl is all shabbied with the rain I was caught in in New York, and now this—"

"Caps the climax," cried Pete.

"Pete," said George, severely, "I shall be obliged to shave your head, and put a blister on, to keep down the brilliancy of your wit."

"You would all go to sleep if I was not here," was the reply. "*Some* people, I could mention, will never suffer from a surplus of wit."

An active chase ensued; and Pete, being caught by George, was placed on the top of the bookcase until his wits could cool, George said.

"Miss Annie," he said, as I sat down near the bookcase, "I have a fine view of the surrounding scenery from my elevated position. Mother looks like a good statue of despair with that unfortunate cap. Euphrosine acts sentiment to the life. You are lovely, of course. Indeed, with you and George, I think 'distance lends enchantment to the view.'"

"It is only your elevated position that saves your ears from boxing," I answered.

“Won’t you take me down, Mr. George?” said Pete, pathetically, after he had been on the bookcase some minutes.

“No, sir! You are out of mischief, now, and you must stay.”

“What a penance!” said poor Pete, in a forlorn manner. “I shall have a fit of sickness if I am too good.”

“Don’t be troubled,” said his mother. “If you ain’t sick till then, you’ll do very well.”

“Miss Annie,” said Pete, striking an attitude, “don’t I look like Mercury ‘new lighted on a heaven-kissing hill,’ as George said at the museum the other day?”

“Very like,” said George; “but, if you execute so many *pas* and graces up there, the bookcase will tip over, and then—”

“Pop goes the weasel,” cried Pete, as, with a spring, he left the bookcase, and alighted safely in front of George.

“Fallen from his high estate,” said George, laughing.

“Mrs. S——, said Mrs. Daffodil, “I had a letter from my cousin Martha, this morning, and she wants me to get her a lot of things in the city. She wants a bonnet for Jane, and a dress for Eliza, and a shawl for Mary, and some gloves for John, and some worsted-work for Sue, and a neck-handkerchief for Joe, and two yards of narrow pink ribbon and a skein of pink silk for Sarah, and some toys for the children, and some other things that I disremember. How’ll I get ’em all?”

“We must go shopping,” said I, “to B——’s, L——’s, Madam La Modes, W——’s, and all the other places, where you can select anything you wish. Shall we go to-day?”

“I shall be very glad to have them all off my mind,” said the old lady. “Mrs. S——, my Ninny has been teasing me for a *more antic*; what is it?”

“A *moire antique* is a very rich kind of silk,” said Mrs. S——.

“Lors! I thought it was some kind of a jumping-jack she wanted to take to the children.”

“We must go now, if we are to execute all your commissions to-day, Mrs. Daffodil,” I said. “I will escort you. I want to purchase a veil.”

“I want some gloves,” said George, “if I may join you.”

“I am going to keep Mr. George in order,” said Pete, following his mother; “besides, I want a ball.”

A few moments were given to dressing; and then Mrs. Daffodil, George, Pete, and I sallied forth. We went first to M——’s to choose some worsted work. A variety of beautiful patterns were placed before us to choose from.

George, who has taste in the selection of groups and colors, held up one after another, and commented on their various merits.

“Ah!” he said, “here is a beautiful group! very gracefully arranged for polyanthus.”

“Tain’t for Polly Ann, Mr. George. It’s for Sue.”

“Oh! Well, here are some moss-roses, which are—”

“*Su-perb*,” said Pete.

George did not faint; but he fanned Pete gently with the pattern in his hand.

“Now, let me choose,” said Pete. “Ma, here is a stool with two little puppies sitting upon it. This is lovely. Don’t you like puppies, Mr. George?”

“Yes,” said George; “but they are a shamefully abused race.”

“A fellow-feeling makes us wondrous kind,” muttered Pete.

George pulled his ears, and whispered some threat with a wonderfully savage countenance.

“Miss Annie,” said Mrs. Daffodil, “there are such lots, I can’t pick one out; won’t you help me? Them boys ain’t no good; they train so.”

George and Pete put on such airs of injured innocence that the old lady’s heart was softened, and they were restored to favor.

“Find me a pattern for a pair of Nottermans,” said she. “That’s what Sue’s going to work, whatever it is.”

“Companion to a Mussulman,” said Pete.

A large and handsome pattern being chosen, the young lady in the store undertook to find the worsted to match it; and we went on our way. Eliza’s dress was to be the next purchased; and we went into B——’s to choose one. The variety puzzled Mrs. Daffodil here as much as the choice in patterns had before. She turned over lawns, chintzes, muslins, cambrics, tissues, and barèges in despair of being able to find any *one* to please her.

“Couldn’t she give me a pattern of all she has to send to Martha to choose herself, Miss Annie?” she asked; “there’s sich pretty ones. See, ain’t this sweet?” And she held up a chintz with a bright pink ground, and orange, green, and blue flowers scattered over it.

George made a grimace, and selected a lawn which combined many gay colors so beautifully arranged over the surface that the effect was very tasteful and bright.

“There, Mrs. Daffodil, I think this is very pretty,” he said.

“Jolly,” said Pete. “It looks good enough to eat.”

“It’s too thin,” said Mrs. Daffodil, decidedly. “Eliza only wears white and calicers. Lors, Mr. George, if them ain’t silks! Wouldn’t Eliza be tickled if I took her a real silk dress?”

A very astonishing plaid of dazzlingly brilliant colors and immense pattern was the old lady’s choice. No persuasion would induce her to take a less gaudy dress. “Eliza was furiously fine when she was dressed up,” she said.

“She will be fine enough when she has that on,” said Pete. “I think, with a blue shawl, yellow bonnet, and red scarf, the effect would be perfectly dazzling.”

Our next stopping-place was at Madam——’s, the milliner’s establishment. Would I could make the reader see the old lady as I saw her then! Her profound contempt for the tiny bonnets shown her was most amusing; and the ludicrous expression of her countenance, as she twisted them on her hand, was almost too much for my gravity. George urged her to try one on; and, “just to keep him quiet,” she said, she complied with the request. Her green spectacles, honest old face, flaunting cap border, and gray hair, with a background of delicate white lace, exquisite flowers, and bows of light ribbon formed rather a singular contrast; but the milliner persisted in exclaiming: “C’est magnifique, charmant! Zis does shoot your steele exactly, madam.”

“Shoot my steel?” cried Mrs. Daffodil, tearing off the bonnet hastily; “shoot!” And, unable to discover any explosive properties in the fabric in her hand, she turned to me for an explanation.

“Madam veel understand; I means she will become a bonnet like this,” said the milliner.

“Become a bonnet like this? You must be a magicianer to make me a bonnet like this,” said the old lady, rather uneasy.

“Yes, madam; I will make you the bonnet like thees; and veel make you ze envy of all ze ladies what shall see you. Vous avez la figure pour les chapeaux Française.”

“Please ask her about Jane’s bonnet, Miss Annie,” said Mrs. Daffodil; “and tell her I want a bonnet that will come over her face.”

Madam lifted her hands in fashionable horror when this countryfied idea was proposed to her, but consented to do her best.

“Mrs. Daffodil, I must have your daguerreotype,” said George, as we left Madam’s. “Will you sit for it now?”

“Sit now? What on?” said the old lady, looking round for a convenient resting-place.

“At Mr. Root’s. I want you to go with me this morning, and let him take your daguerreotype.”

“I haven’t got any for him to take.”

“Mr. George wants you to sit for your picture, ma,” said Pete. “Don’t *you* want mine, Miss Annie? It will console you for my absence when I return to my native hills. It will comfort me too to think I have left you something to make you feel less miserable when you miss the music of my voice.

“Pete,” said George, “where did you learn sentiment and love-making?”

“That’s telling,” said Pete, looking quizzically at me.

“This is Root’s gallery,” said George.

“Root’s what?” cried the old lady; “*gal-lery*.”

“Similar to a Turkish harem, said Pete, gravely. “Walk up, ladies and gentlemen. Here you will see the only living specimen of—”

“Little Pickle,” said George.

Mrs. Daffodil took up one of the pictures lying on the table in the show-room, and tried in vain to see what was on the plate. She turned it upside down, sideways, crosswise, every way but inside out, and could only see it when George held it for her in the proper position. It was some time before she would promise to have her face pictured in that way. She “wasn’t dressed up enough, for one thing; and, besides, she knew she would be nothing but an ugly old woman after all.” At length, after much discussion, she consented to sit if we would all sit first, and let her take George and me home with her in a morocco case. George sat first to show Pete how, he said; and the old lady was in ecstasies over the plate.

“Lors, Mr. George! wasn’t it done quick? How on airth did he do it? And it looks nateral enough to speak. May I go up when Pete does?”

Permission being given, we went to the room where the impression is taken. Pete sat down opposite the instrument where the plate is placed.

“Lors, Pete! Pete! get up! it’ll go off!” cried his mother.

“What?”

“The little cannon. I see how they do it so quick. They shoot the piece of tin at you; and, when it hits you in the face, it rubs off a picture. My Pete sha’n’t sit there.”

George and the operator were in such convulsions of laughter that it was some time before any one contradicted this original idea. It was useless to endeavor to persuade her to let Pete sit; and, when I proposed to go next, she pathetically entreated me not to do so.

“It might explode, or something, Miss Annie; and then, if it don’t, the tin might not come straight; and, if a corner went into your eye, it will blind you for life. Please don’t go.”

While I was sitting, she watched me with nervous apprehension, and stood ready to rush to the rescue in case of an explosion. Her amazement, when the picture was shown to her, was most amazing; and she consented to let Pete sit down opposite the fearful engine, first carefully inspecting it through her glasses.

“Look through here, Mrs. Daffodil,” said George, taking her behind it, and showing her the reversing glass.

“Lors!” she cried; “Pete’s standing on his head! Pete!”

“Yes, ma.”

“Get down off your head. You’ll be having conflagration of the brain, if you do so.”

The operator, coming with the plate, interrupted her survey.

Pete sat down. “You are sure it won’t go off?” he said, with a good imitation of his mother’s frightened voice.

“Yes, sir, it’s perfectly safe. Will you sit down?”

“No; I thank you; I prefer standing. Mother, will you please stand out of my sight, and you, too, Miss Annie? I’m bashful; and it discomposes my nerves to have ladies looking at me.”

We all left him, and saw no more of Pete until he came with the operator to show the picture.

Such a complete caricature I never saw. He had struck an attitude of extreme fear; and, with a most ludicrous expression of exaggerated fright, his eyes open to their full extent, his mouth partly so, his hands raised, and his hair pushed up so as to stand on end, he made the best comic picture I have seen for a long time. George insisted upon its being preserved, though his mother said he was just “discouraging Pete’s tantrums.”

“Tain’t a tantrum, ma. I was afraid it would go off.”

It was now the old lady’s turn; and she sat down.

“You must keep perfectly still, madam,” said the operator, noticing that she kept shifting her position.

“Miss Annie,” said the old lady, “how would you be taken? Seraphina Maria Jenks has her picture taken so.” And she leaned her head upon her hand, and looked up with the most lackadaisical expression imaginable.

“Sit as you always do at home,” said George—“naturally.”

It was some time before she had her position as she wanted it; but at length she succeeded, and promised to keep perfectly still. The first picture was a failure. As the old lady alternately raised and cast down her eyes, opened and shut her mouth, the impression of these features was somewhat indistinct.

“You must keep your features perfectly still,” said George. “Don’t move your eyes or mouth at all.”

After many efforts, a good impression was secured, and we left the gallery. As it was then dinner-time, we concluded to postpone our further shopping until the next day; and we returned home, the old lady declaring she was “tired to death, and e’en-a’most starved.”

**[End of text.]**

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**EDITOR’S NOTES:**

Other “Mrs. Daffodil” tales (published in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*) by De Forrest include “Mrs. Daffodil at the Crystal Palace” (Vol. 50; Feb. 1855), “Mrs. Daffodil at a Fancy Ball” (Vol. 51, Aug. 1855), “Mrs. Daffodil at an Evening Party” (Vol. 55, Nov. 1857), “Mrs. Daffodil’s Interview with a Count” (Vol. 56, Apr. 1858), “Mrs. Daffodil Visits the Academy of Natural Sciences” (Vol. 57, Jul. 1858), “Mrs. Daffodil’s Second Expedition in Search of Mrs. Smith” (Vol. 58, Jun. 1859), “Mrs. Daffodil at Mrs. Smith’s Party” (Vol. 59, Aug. 1859), “Mrs. Daffodil at the Academy of Fine Arts” (Vol. 59, Dec. 1859).

The Library of Congress catalogue includes one title by this author: Virginia De Forrest, *The Young Lady's Cabinet of Gems; a Choice Collection of Pieces in Poetry and Prose* (Boston: Kelley & Brother, 1854.)

The “complete caricature” of Pete, as described in the tale, is not unlike a daguerreotype (*Young Man on a Chair Back*) reproduced in Keith F. Davis, *The Origins of American Photography, From Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate, 1839-1885* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007): 150.

The tale names the daguerreotype gallery as “Root’s gallery.” Although the tale is fictional, this refers to the Philadelphia gallery of Marcus A. Root. The exterior of Root’s Philadelphia gallery is depicted in the 1856 lithograph by Collins & Autenrieth, “Panorama of Philadelphia: Chesnut Street, East of Fifth.”<sup>1</sup> An earlier view of the building exterior is depicted in Julio H Rae, *Rae’s Philadelphia Pictorial Directory and Panoramic Advertiser* (Philadelphia: J.H. Rae, 1851)<sup>2</sup> The building in which Root operated is still standing.

1. [http://www.daguerre.org/resource/texts/phila\\_slices.html](http://www.daguerre.org/resource/texts/phila_slices.html)

2. <http://www.brynmawr.edu/iconog/panos/panotab2.html>. (400 block Chestnut Street, south side, western portion, pl. 7, top)

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