

In a comic opera, once much appreciated by soldiers of the French nation, there occurs a quaint refrain, to the effect that the gathering of strawberries in a certain wood at Malicieux is a delightful pastime,

"Quand on est deux,
Quand on est deux—"

and the sentiment, thus expressed, seems applicable to all solitudes, suburban or otherwise, where winding paths and rustic scenery admit of two abreast. But however favorable by nature, the very smoothest of lawns and leafiest of glades surely lose more than half their beauty, if we must traverse them unaccompanied by somebody who makes all the sunshine, and perhaps all the shade, of our daily life.

To wait for such a companion, is nevertheless an irritating ordeal, even amidst the fairest scenery, trying both to temper the nerves. It has been said that none realizes the pace at which time gallops, till they have a bill coming due. On the other hand none knows how slow he can crawl, who has not kept an uncertain tryst with over-punctuality "under the greenwood tree!"

General St. Josephs was not a man to be late for any preconcerted meeting, either with friend or foe. It is a long way from Mayfair to Kensington Gardens; it seemed none the shorter for an impatient spirit and a heart beating with anxiety and hope. Yet the old soldier arrived at the appointed spot twenty minutes too soon, there to suffer torments from a truly British malady called "the fidgets," while diligently consulting his watch and reconnoitering his ground.

How many turns he made, pacing to and fro between the round pond and the grove there, while he longed to behold his goddess standing in a halo of light and beauty, he never had been ashamed to calculate. He could never be in time for any man's party for a lover; and after half an hour's waiting, that seemed a week, he drew a card from his breast-pocket, kissed it with his lips, and read it once more from end to end.

A quarter twelve o'clock, no doubt, and certainly was a very short epistle to be esteemed so sweet. This is what, through many perusals, he had literally learned by heart—

"MY DEAR GENERAL,

"I want a long talk. Shall I find you in Kensington Gardens, where you say it's so pretty, twelve o'clock?"

"Ever yours,
"BLANCHE."

Now, in the composition, there appeared one or two peculiarities that especially delighted its recipient.

She had hitherto signed herself B. Douglas, never so much as writing her Christian name at length; and here she jumped boldly to "Blanche," the prettiest word, to his mind, in the English language, when standing thus, like Falstaff's sack, "simple of itself." Also, he had not forgotten the practice adopted by ladies in general by crossing a page on which there is plenty of space, to enhance its value, as you cross a cheque on your banker, that it may be honored in the right quarter. One line had Satanelle scrawled transversely over her note to this effect, "Don't be late; there is nothing I hate so much as waiting."

Altogether the general would not have parted with it for untold gold.

But why didn't she come? Looking round in every direction but the right, she burst upon him, like a vision, before he was aware. If he started, and turned a little pale, she marked it, we may be sure, and not with displeasure.

It was but the middle of May, yet the sky smiled bright and clear, the grass was growing, butterflies were already on the wing, birds were singing, and the trees had dressed themselves in their fairest garments of tender, early green. She too was in some light muslin robe, appropriate to the weather, with a transparent bonnet on her head, and a pink-tinted parasol in her hand. He thought and she knew, she had never looked more beautiful in her life.

She began with a very unnecessary question. "Did you get my note?" said she. "Of course you did, or you wouldn't be here. I don't suppose you come into Kensington Gardens so early to meet anybody else!"

"Never did such a thing in my life!" exclaimed the General, quite frightened at the idea—but added, after a moment's thought—"It was very good of you to write, and better still to come."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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"How!" demanded his lordship, while the eye-glass bounced into his plate. "Take the man who won a shilling and lost eight shillings," she answered, laughing. "Why?" he asked, yet more earnestly, screwing the instrument into position the while with a defiant scowl.

She was out of patience—no wonder. "Good gracious, Lord St. Abbs!" said she "Haven't we all been on the wrong horse? Haven't we all been backing Daisy?"

She spoke rather loud, and was amused to observe the effect of her observation. It was like dropping a squib in a boy's school during lessons. Everybody must needs join in the excitement. "A bad job indeed!" said one. "A great race entirely!" added another. "Run fairly out from end to end, and only a neck between first and second at the finish!"

"I wish I'd taken old Sullivan's advice," moaned a third; or backed the mare for a place, anyhow.

"Ye might have been wrong even then, my boy," interrupted a jolly, red-faced gentleman, unless ye squared the odd woman! I wonder would she take three half crowns a day to come with me twice a year to the Curragh?"

"I knew of the mare's trial," drawled one of the London dandies, "and backed her to win me a monkey. Daisy put me on at once, like a trump. It was a real good thing—and it has boiled over. (Champagne, please.) Such is life Miss Douglas. We have no hope of getting home now till Epson Spring."

Miss Douglas, not the least to his discomfort, stared him scornfully in the face without reply.

"I'm afraid it's a severe blow to young Walters," observed the General. "They tell me he has lost a good deal more than he can afford."

"Got it, I fancy, very hot!" said the dandy. "Gad, he rode as if he'd backed his mount. He ought to have lost the best I ever saw."

Norah Macormac threw him the sweetest of glances, and wondered why she had considered him so very uninteresting till now. "They say he hasn't a shilling left," continued the General, but stopped short when he caught the flash of Satanelle's eye, under its dark, frowning brow.

"I dare say he'll pull through," said she bitterly, "and disappoint his dearest friends, after all."

"I'll engage he will, Miss Douglas!" exclaimed Macormac's hearty voice from the end of the table. "It's yourself wouldn't turn your back on a friend, lose or win. Take a glass of that claret, now. It'll not hurt ye. Here's the boy's health, and good luck to him! A pleasanter fellow, to my mind, never emptied a bottle, and a better rider never sat in a saddle, than he's proved himself this day!"

Norah would have liked to jump up and hug papa's white head in her embrace on the spot, but Lady Mary had been watching the girl to-night with a mother's anxiety, and fearful lest her daughter should betray herself if subjected to further trial, gave the signal rather prematurely for the ladies to withdraw.

While they trooped gracefully out, the gentlemen were still discussing Daisy's defeat, and the catastrophe of the Great United Service Handicap.

Everybody knows what men talk about when left alone after dinner; but none, at least of the rougher sex, can venture to guess the topics with which ladies beguile their seclusion in the drawing-room. Whatever these might be, it seems they had little interest for Mrs. Lushington, whose habit it was to retire for ten minutes or so to her own chamber, there, perhaps, to revise and refresh her charms ere she descended once more upon a world of victims.

Her bedroom was gorgeously furnished, supplied with all the luxuries to which she was accustomed, but the windows did not shut close, and a draught beneath the door lifted the hearth-rug at her fire-place; therefore she made but a short stay in her apartment, stealing softly down-stairs again, so as to be well settled in the drawing-room before the gentlemen came in.

Traversing the library, she heard Lady Mary's voice carrying on, as it seemed, a subdued, yet sustained conversation, in a little recess adjoining, which could hardly be called a boudoir, but was so far habitable, that in it there usually stood a lamp, a chess-board, and a card-table. Mrs. Lushington would not have listened, be sure, to save her

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and you'd be kind to her for her own sake?

She seemed to waver a moment, as if she weighed some doubtful matter in her mind. Presently with cleared brow, and frank, open looks, she caught his hand.

"And for yours!" said she. "I'll never part with her. So long as we three are above ground, Satanelle—my name sake—will be a remembrance between you and me!"

Then she beckoned the General, who was talking to some ladies behind her, and asked for information about the next race, with a kindness of tone and manner that elevated the old soldier to the seventh heaven.

Meanwhile, Miss Macormac had found time to recover her composure. Turning to Mr. Walters she showed him a bright and pretty face, with just such traces of the vexation that had clouded it as are left by passing showers on an April sky. Her eyes looked deeper and darker for their late moisture, her little nose all the damtier that its transparent nostrils were tinged with pink.

She gave him her hand frankly, as though to express silent sympathy and friendship. Sinking into a seat by her side, Daisy embarked on a long and detailed account of the race, the way he had ridden it, the performances of St. George, Leprauchan, Shaneeen, and his own black mare.

Though he seldom got excited, he could not but break into a glowing description, as he warmed with his narrative. "When I came to the wall," he declared, "I was as sure of winning as I am of sitting by you now. St. George had been disposed of, and he was the only horse in the race whose form I did not know to a pound. Leprauchan, I felt satisfied, could never live the pace, or I made it hot enough. And as for little Shaneeen, the mare's stride would be safe to beat him, if we finished with a set-to, in the run-in. Everything had come off exactly to suit me, and when we rounded the last turn but one I caught hold of Satanelle, and set her going down the hill like an express-train!"

"Did ye now?" she murmured, her deep grey eyes looking earnestly into his, her sweet lips parted as though with a breathless interest that drank in every syllable he spoke.

"Did ye now?" Only three words, yet carrying with them a charm to convince the most practical of men that the days of spells and witchcraft are not yet gone by. An Englishwoman would have observed, "Really!" "Oh, indeed!" "You don't say so!" or made use of some such cold conventional expression to denote languid attention, not thoroughly aroused; but the Irish girl's "Did ye now?" identified her at once with her companion and his doings, started them both incontinently on that path of congenial partnership, which is so seductive to the traveller, smooth, pleasant all down hill, and leading—who knows where?

Perhaps neither deep liquid eyes, nor dark lashes, nor arched brows, nor even smiles and blushes, and shapely graceful forms, would arm these Irish ladies with such unequalled and irresistible powers, were it not for their kindly womanly nature that adapts itself so graciously to those with whom it comes in contact—their encouraging "Did ye now?" that despises no trifle, is wearied with no details, and asks only for his confidence whom they honor with their regard. Perhaps, also, this faculty of sympathy and assimilation, abundant in both sexes, that makes the most pleasant in the world.

When, as she had done, she went off again at the next race, each fence to his eager listening, she observed, in a philosophy all his own, that things to be done just at the last moment had better be done just at the last moment.

"Did ye make any money?" she asked in a tone of interest, and then—

"I don't know," he answered. "I think I had made some money, but I don't know."

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CHAPTER XV.

WINNERS AND LOSEES.

Dinner that day at the castle seemed less lively than usual. Macormac, indeed, whose joviality was invincible, ate, drank, laughed, and talked for a dozen; but Lady Mary's spirits were obviously depressed; and the guests, perhaps not without private vexation of their own, took their cue rather from hostess than host. An unaccountable sense of gloom and disappointment pervaded the whole party. The General having come down early, in hopes of a few minutes with Miss Douglas in the drawing-room before the others were dressed, had been disappointed by the protracted toilette and tardy appearance of that provoking young lady, with whom he parted an hour before on terms of mutual sympathy and tenderness, but who now sat pale and silent, while the thunder clouds he knew and dreaded gathered ominously on her brow. His preoccupation necessarily affected his neighbor—a budding beauty fresh from the school-room, full of fun and good humor, that her sense of propriety kept down, unless judiciously encouraged and drawn out. Most of the gentlemen had been wet to the skin, many had lost money, all were tired, and Norah Macormac's eyes filled every now and then with tears. These discoveries Mrs. Lushington imparted in a whisper to Lord St. Abbs as he sat between herself and her hostess, whom he had taken in to dinner, pausing thereafter to mark the effect of her condescension on this raw youth, lately launched into the great world. The young nobleman, however, betrayed no symptoms of emotion beyond screwing his eye-glass tighter in its place, and turning round to look straight in her face, while it dropped out with a jump. Even Mrs. Lushington felt at a disadvantage, and took counsel with her own heart whether she should accost him again.

Why Lord St. Abbs went about at all, or what pleasure he derived from the society of his fellow-creatures, was a puzzle nobody had yet been able to find out. Pale, thin, and puny in person, freckled, sandy haired, bearing all outward characteristics of Scottish extraction, except the Caledonian's gaunt and stalwart frame, he neither rode, shot, fished, sang, made jokes, nor played whist. He drank very little, conversed not at all, and was voted by nearly all who had the advantage of his acquaintance "the dulllest young man out!"

Yet was he to be seen everywhere, from Buckingham Palace or Holland House to Hampton races and the fireworks at Cremorne; always alone, always silent, with

I'll send in little Ella to keep ye company. The child won't take notice, and ye can both come back together into the drawing-room, and no more said."

But long ere Lady Mary could finish her caresses, and get her motherly person under weigh, Mrs. Lushington had slipped into the billiard-room, where she was found by the gentlemen practising winning hazards in solitude, and where, challenging Lord St. Abbs to a game, she was left discomfited by his very uncivil rejoinder—

"I don't play billiards," said his lordship, and turned on his heel without further comment or excuse.

It was a new sensation for Mrs. Lushington to find herself thus thrown on general society, without at least one particular admirer on whose devotion she could rely. She didn't like it. She longed to have a finger in that mischief which is proverbially ready for "idle hands to do." On three people she now resolved to keep close and vigilant watch. These were Norah, St. Josephs, and Satanelle.

The conduct of this last seemed baffling in the extreme. She had scarce vouchsafed a word to the General during dinner, had scowled at him more than once with the blackest of her black looks, and comported herself altogether like the handsome vixen she could be when she chose. Now, under pretence of setting down her coffee-cup, she had brought him to her side, and was whispering confidences in his ear, with a tenderness of tone and bearing he accepted gratefully, and repaid a hundred-fold.

"How tolerant are these old men!" thought Mrs. Lushington, "and how kind! What lovers they make, if only one can bring oneself not to mind wrinkles, and rheumatism, and grey hair! How gentle and how chivalrous! What patience and consideration! They don't expect a woman to be an angel, because they do know a little about us; and perhaps because it is only a little, they believe there is more than one degree between absolute perfection and utter depravity. If jealous, they have the grace to hide it; if encouraged, they do not presume. They know when and where to speak, and to act, and to refrain. Besides, if one wants to make them unhappy, they are so sensitive, yet so quiet. A word or a look stings them to the quick, but they take their punishment with dignity; and though the blow be sharp and unprovoked, they never strike again. Let me see. I don't think I've had an admirer above forty—not one who owned to it, at least. It's a new experience. I declare, I'll try! This romantic old General would suit the place exactly, and I couldn't do a kinder thing for both, than to detach him from Blanche. The man is regularly wasted and thrown away. My gracious! isn't it ridiculous? If he could see us as we really are! If he only knew how much more willing a woman is to be controlled than a violent horse; how much easier to capture than a Sepoy column or a Russian gun. And there he sits, a man who has ridden fearlessly against both, shrinking, hesitating, before a gal who might be his daughter—afraid, absolutely afraid, the gallant, heroic coward, to look her in the face! Is she blind? Is she a fool, not knowing what she throws away? or is she really over head and ears in love with somebody else? She can't be breaking her heart for Daisy, surely, or why has she taken the General up again, and put herself so much in evidence with him to-night? I'm puzzled, I own, but I'm not going to be beat. I'll watch her narrowly. I've nothing else to do. And it's an awful temptation, even when people are great friends. Wouldn't it be fun to cut her out with both?"

Thus reasoned Mrs. Lushington, according to her lights, scrutinizing the couple she had set herself to study, while languidly listening to Lady Mary's conversation, which consisted, indeed, of speculations on the weather in the Channel, mingled with hospitable regrets for the departure of her guest, and the break-up of the party, which was to take place on the morrow.

"But ye'll come again next year," said this kind and courteous lady, who, anywhere but in her own house, would have disliked Mrs. Lushington from her heart. "And ye'll bring Miss Douglas with ye. If Miss Douglas she continues to be (with a significant glance at the General, holding, clumsily enough, a skein of much tangled silk). But, anyhow, I'll be lookin' for ye both Panchestown week, if not before, to give us a good long visit, and we'll teach ye to like Ireland, that we will, if kaud wishes and a warm welcome can do it."

But even while she spoke, Lady Mary looked anxiously towards the door. Little