

THE BROWN, BLUE AND GREY.

The watches were weary, and train time was nigh,
There was protest and pleading, and tearful good-by.
We laid the three gently upon the white bed,
And tenderly pillowed each sorrowful head.
The lips were all silent, and soft were the sighs:
The lashes were hiding the beautiful eyes:
On the right lay the dark waves that rippled with gold,
On the left flowed the silver that never was told,
And the wing of the raven between.

The brown eyes said, closing, "I hope you'll be late;"
The blue eyes yet trembled, "How long can you wait?"
The grey, dark with pleading, were closing in prayer:
The hush of his angel was still in the air.
The brown hands lay crossed and pressed in their place:
The white hands lay lost in the fold of the lace:
In velvet and dimples, the hand that was stirred,
The breath of the sleepers was all that I heard,
And the shriek of the incoming train.

I twice kissed the proud lips—the ruby lips twice.
The lips that were pouting I turned to them thrice.
Then hurried forth blind in the pitiless rain
And into the night on the outgoing train—
But I think while I bent over tresses and bands
All my heart-strings were caught by the motionless hands.
For whenever I wait, and wherever I roam,
They are driving me on, they are drawing me home,
While I dream of the brown, blue and grey.

A VICTIM OF FOLLY.

(Concluded from our last.)

It was a thousand years to the little girl as she arrived at the artist's house in Kensington; the distance seemed interminable; and she was so tired and listless when she joined her friend that it needed all the admiring badinage of Giorgia to make her feel that the time she had eagerly looked forward to was come, and that she was going to spend an entrancingly happy evening.

"I've been here some time, and had two dances," said Madame Bertani, as she took Rita's hand to lead her up-stairs and present her to their hostess, "but I came down again three times to see if you were come. The Captain's here. You're sure to see him, though the room is very full; his is quite the most striking dress here."

Margherita soon perceived him, and with a thrill of horror: a devil with horrible horns and along tail; no scarlet Mephisto of the opera, scarcely any more dreadful to behold than the hero himself, but a hideous "Old Nick," the nursery bugbear with whom naughty children are threatened.

He was talking with a buxom water nymph, and Margherita not knowing any one sat down by Mr. Moreton, who was very glad to meet his pretty little model again, and talk to her about the blithe old days in Italy. But she was far too noticeable and captivating in appearance to remain quiet very long; partners were quickly introduced, and she was dancing away unceasingly. Somehow it was not as pleasant as she had anticipated. She had nothing to talk about beyond the costumes, for she had no topics of conversation in common with those of the men she danced with; she had been nowhere, and knew less than nothing of what was going on in London; and an hour's dancing in that crowded gas-lighted room made her feel more weary than a whole evening had often done in Italy.

Her jingling dress attracted Captain Tomlinson's notice immediately, and as soon as he was free from the plump Undine, he hastened to engage her. In spite of her first shock at his appearance, Rita imagined that she would enjoy the dances with the enamoured Captain more than those with strangers; yet somehow, the compliments he paid her, though all that the vainest could have wished, did not quite stifle a feeling that she would fain be away from all this, at home comfortably in bed.

I fear she did not exactly wish she had not come at all, and if she had been feeling quite herself the gay scene would have been more delightful than any previous dissipation she had experienced. But her head ached, her limbs felt heavy, and the dryness of her throat increased till it was positively painful.

"You are tired; let us miss this vase," suggested Captain Tomlinson, after he had given her an ice; and he led her into an artistic little nook on the staircase, where blue china lined the walls, and a single *cassuse* for two occupants indicated plainly that only one couple at a time was intended to rest there and admire the Danish crockery.

Madame Giorgia on her way down to supper perceived them, and hoped secretly that the Captain was "about it." She lingered some time over her chicken and champagne, rather expecting that her little friend would come tinking after her to confide the happy fact that she was Captain Tomlinson's *fiancée*. When tired of waiting, she returned to the ball-room. She was both surprised and disappointed at seeing the satanic Captain waltzing again with Undine, whilst Margherita was neither visible nor audible.

Giorgia, in her capacity of chaperon, was asked on all sides "what had become of Miss Courtland?" and at last she began to say "that the devil had made away with her." This was after she had asked Captain Tomlinson where she was, and noted a certain confusion in his manner when he replied "that really he couldn't say—dancing with some other fellow, most likely."

But Margherita had danced enough that evening, and for many evenings to come, she thought, as she was being jolted along the Kensington road on her way home.

A feeling of dislike, of horror almost, had seized her while her admirer bent over her,

speaking words which were no more than she had been expecting. She did not quite know what he said; but her cheeks burnt as she remembered how very near his face had been to hers when she snatched her hand away from him and dashed down-stairs. The room where supper was going on was quite away from the entrance to the house, the servants were all occupied, and the hall, where impulse had guided her, was quite deserted. She had opened the door, and closed it silently and swiftly after her, before she remembered that she had not got her cloak. But she was far too anxious to make her escape to return for it, or feel any apprehension lest her stepmother should be disturbed by her bells as she stole up-stairs on her return.

"Carriage, miss?" inquired that blot in the constitution of entertainment which the growing wisdom and refinement of the age has not yet abolished—the noisy, officious, semi-insolent, wholly intoxicated linkman.

"I came in a cab; can I not get a cab?" fluttered Margherita, appealing to a policeman. "Four-wheeled cab; four-wheeler!" bawled the linkman. "Or a 'ansom, miss! Hope you've enjoyed yourself, miss! Remember the linkman, please!"

But the policeman protected her, and put her into the cab, which was close at hand, took the direction from her to tell the driver; and she curled up in the dingy corner of the rumbling vehicle, and burst into a comfortable-relieving fit of weeping.

But she had not cried long, not enough to ease the burning weight of her poor giddy head, before the tears were arrested by a sudden concussion, as her charioteer bumped up against a lamp-post, and rolling unsteadily down from his box, staggered up to the cab-window to ask what street he had been told to go to. With a scream, being under the conviction that the driver's intention was to rob and murder her, Margherita turned the handle of the opposite door, jumped out into the road, and, not knowing which way to fly, ran into the arms of her supposed assassin, who, although not perfectly sober, was not sufficiently far gone to allow himself to be cheated of his fare.

"How dare you stop! I'll have you sent to prison. Help, help!" she called wildly, hearing footsteps approaching along the quiet street; and with a sensation that she must inevitably fall down in a dead faint, she sank upon the kerbstone, and for a minute became unconscious.

Two friends were walking down Queen's gate, having quitted the same party in each other's society. It was a lovely night, and after the heat of the rooms they came from it was no hardship that they were not overtaken or met by an empty hansom immediately.

"I'd rather walk if you'll give me a weed," said the younger of the two. "Thanks," as Alfred Standish provided him with what he desired. "Hullo! that gentleman has had his supper," he added, as a cab passed them, making rather serpentine progress.

"Drunk as a fiddler. I say, look out!" ejaculated Alfred, as the vehicle pulled up as we have described; and the two friends had already hastened their pace just as Rita's appeal summoned to her aid.

"What a lark! a lovely female in distress!" cried the other young man. "And dove! what have we here?" he added, as the distressed damsel, recovering herself, rose tinkling to her feet ere the knight-errant could lift her up.

"O, thank you for coming; but I think he is only tipsy. I will give him some money, and let him go away."

The beautiful troubled countenance, with the tears still wet on the long eyelashes, was lifted towards Alfred, whose companion, meanwhile, took upon himself to reprimand and dismiss the cabman.

"Do be quiet, Percy. I tell you I know her. At least—" this was a rapid aside, cutting short Lord Percy Trevor's somewhat free-and-easy manner of addressing Rita, whom he not unnaturally took for some burlesque actress who had not changed her dress before leaving the theatre.

"Will you wait here till one of us brings another cab?" Alfred continued, ardently hoping that Percy would behave properly, and like a friend allow him the privilege of staying to guard this realization of his dream. In springing from the cab, Rita had given a little twist to one of her ankles, and it was the pain of this, almost as much as her agony of terror, that had caused her to turn sick and faint. She had confided to Alfred her fear that she could not walk, but after a few moments the pain subsided and she felt able to proceed.

"Only I don't know the way," she said. "I have no idea where this is, or how far from my home. But, gentlemen, I shall walk so slowly. Pray, pray do not wait for me. I am not frightened. If you will tell me if Welbeck street is near—"

"It is more than two miles, and you are going away from it!" exclaimed Percy; "but we can find a cab of course." Then he whistled shrilly and, as it proved successfully, for a few minutes the rumble of wheels was heard, and a hansom was within hail.

"I'll look you up to-morrow about twelve, shall I?" Percy asked, taking it as a matter of course that Alfred would escort this extraordinary young lady of his acquaintance to her destination. As for Alfred, the line his friend adopted assured him that his first impulse was not a wrong one, namely, to see her safely home. But Rita was urgent in protesting that

she had received quite enough assistance from them, and would far, far rather that they let her go alone; and it would only have been impertinent and intrusive not to have yielded to her desire.

So Percy comported himself, as he afterwards declared, like a respectable father of a dozen wild daughters, took the number of the cab, and impressed steadiness and civility upon the driver, informing him of the accident which had just occurred.

"O sir, I fear the other gentleman is paying him money!" cried Rita, in a half-offended agony, her quick ears catching an intonation of gratitude in the cabman's voice as he swore to obey the young man's behests.

"No, indeed, madam! Really, I wouldn't take such a liberty," said Percy. "Only you know unfortunately by your recent experience that his species are not always very civil, and I have merely told him to behave himself, and hinted that, if he did so, you might possibly tell your servant to give him an extra sixpence when you get home."

"How much ought I to give him?" asked Rita, looking with her baby blue eyes into Alfred's face as he lent upon the wheel of the cab. "I paid three shillings to the man who drove me there; the maid where I am lodging told me that was the right sum. But I have more than that—at least I hope I have;" and she felt in the pocket of her little rainbow skirt. "O, yes!" and a look of relief took the place of a momentary shade of anxiety. "I have not lost my purse or the latch-key."

"You are not being sat up for, then?" said Percy thinking to himself that it was a most extraordinary want of gallantry, and more than slow of his friend not to insist upon taking a romantic moonlight drive with this lovely little mountebank.

"No," said Rita, feeling herself blush, "I am not. So," she added with a little laugh, to pass off her embarrassment, "it is a good thing I have not lost my key, or I should have had to wait on the doorstep till the milk arrived."

"No, the best plan would be to ring and call out 'Sweet!' " said Percy. "This is the earliest morning sound where I live."

"But in this dress," said Rita very seriously, "I should be afraid to call out. Any one passing, or looking out of window, might think—I don't know what. London knows nothing of carnival. But is three shillings money enough, or should I pay him more as it is so late?"

"The man will be perfectly satisfied if you give him that," said Alfred, taking her last words as a dismissal, and closing the cab-doors.

"I thank both of you, gentlemen, a thousand times," said Margherita, bowing gravely, while the little bells on her head-dress jingled.

"We are honoured at having been able to serve you, though only in this slight manner," replied Alfred, drawing his friend away.

"Good-night, sir."

"Good-night, madam. Good-night;" and the cab drove off, leaving the two young men to stare after it for a few moments before they put on their hats again, ejaculating simultaneously,

"Well!"

"Well!"

Percy's was the interrogative. "Have the goodness to explain," he continued, taking his friend's arm as they walked on.

"I can explain nothing," said Alfred.

"Nothing! Why? O, but hang it all, you said you knew her!"

"I have seen her, that is all. I saw her on the street one day, and have not got her face out of my mind ever since. I am sure I have seen it before—in a picture, or a dream—"

"How very romantic, to be sure!" laughed Percy. "But what a blessing old St. Kevin or Senanus you were to resist a *little à l'alle drive*! But, poor little sinner, I don't believe she meant you to go with her, though in general a woman's *don't* is *do*."

"I'm glad you think that, Percy, very glad; and although appearances—"

"O bother appearances! Mrs. Grundy is in her dotage in this advanced latter half of an enlightened century. Girls do go about unchaperoned occasionally, and this one is all right—a lady I mean, don't you know. Where was the ball?"

For, during the minute or two that Percy had been calling a cab, Rita had hurriedly explained the reason of her strange attire.

"O, don't, please!" cried Margherita, as the exemplary driver, after having actually got down from his seat, prepared to ring a lusty peal at the door-bell, while the numerous little emblems on Folly's head continued quivering after the cab was still.

"Not ring! Very good, miss. Thanks, the gentleman has paid me," he said, assisting her to alight.

"Then I shall pay you also," said Rita, with dignity, though she could have shed tears of mortification. As if the whole evening had not been failure enough, without the additional humiliation of being under a pecuniary obligation to a total stranger!

She opened the door and entered, creeping cautiously up to her own room. The gray dawn peered coldly in through the window-blind, there was no need of a light to undress by. In a few moments the gay costume lay in a tumbled heap upon the bed, and its shivering, heavy-limbed, unhappy little wearer was sobbing herself into a slumber of exhaustion.

The next few weeks passed like some confused dream with Rita. A time came when she

seemed to lose the consciousness of suffering, and felt as if she were being wafted off into a vast infinity far away from those faces that had bent over her in her sickness. Those were familiar faces that had tenderly watched at her bedside—Giorgia's, Mrs. Courtland's Jane's; but there had been others besides, phantom figures that she raved of in her delirium, sometimes with a shrinking kind of loathing, while now and again little expressions of courteous gratitude would come from the fevered lips, and her eyes would smile and glisten, as though with pleasure.

"Have I been dangerously ill?" she asked at length, when she woke up, and realised to her astonishment that her stepmother was standing by her side.

"Yes, darling," was the reply; "but, thank God you are out of danger now."

She had no strength to ask any more just then; but by degrees, and from different people, she learnt how Jane, coming to her with a cup of tea on the morning after that terrible night, had found her moaning, and only half-conscious, had undressed and put her properly to bed, and gone off for a doctor. Then how Giorgia had called to find out what was the reason of Rita's sudden disappearance, and, being allowed to go into the sick-room, had been alarmed by her friend's illness to confessing what happened—that is as far as she was able, for only Rita's rambling words could give the real clue to her old behaviour in leaving the hall, or hint at the greatest adventure of that eventful evening.

Margherita, in deep contrition, spoke of her wrongdoing and all its consequences, whilst she was still too weak to be treated other than gently and indulgently; and then she was told that during her fever her relations had come to town, and held communication with Mrs. Courtland. They seemed to be a very kindly sort of people, and not ill-disposed towards the poor little upstart, and Lady Courtland had expressed a gracious desire that, as soon as she was sufficiently convalescent, Rita should migrate from Welbeck street to Grosvenor place, in order to become acquainted with her cousins.

"I feel so thankful about this," said Rita's stepmother, with tears in her eyes. "Now, when I am taken, I shall die in peace, thinking that you will be properly cared for. It rests with yourself to win your relations' hearts, and you are always loved. Then, under Lady Courtland's charge, you will be sure to make a good marriage."

Margherita, lying feeble and listless on her pillows, could not refrain from shuddering as she recalled her recent views respecting a marriage. Captain Tomlinson's gaze of bold admiration seemed again to be bringing the hot blushes to her cheeks, and in fancy she once more enacted that wild escape from his embrace, her dangerous spring from the cab; and then her two preservers seemed before her, and she allowed her vivid imagination to stray off into surmises whether she would ever meet them again, and if they would recognize her, should they see her in rational costume.

She so often let her thoughts rest upon this question that it betokens no mesmeric affinity of souls that, at the very time when she was thus musing, a plan for making her acquaintance was being laid before Alfred Standish, which accorded with his ideas of chivalry and decorum. Percy had suggested many wild and romantic schemes from the very first, but each had been scouted in turn; so that at length he declared "it was no use trying to help a fellow on, and that he should leave his friend to his own unassisted devices."

Had he fulfilled his threat, it is probable that Alfred would not have seen his beautiful ideal for many months, and it is also likely that, if chance threw her again in his way, she might have been married, or at least engaged to another man. However, Percy was too much in the habit of interesting himself in his friends' concerns to let the matter drop, as he believed to be Alfred's intention.

It would take too long to enter into details, and I must pass over many things, only briefly glancing at a few of the measures that were adopted.

Rita had no opportunity of speaking confidentially with her faithful accomplice Jane until her escapade was a thing of a month ago, and half forgotten by the others, who thought that the terrors and annoyances of that night must have existed to some extent only in her fevered imagination. But one day, when Mrs. Courtland was quite worn out with nursing, and had gone down to her own room, Jane sat in charge of the invalid, and Rita went over the whole story. The maid looked all excitement during the narration, and at the close exclaimed, with wide-open eyes,

"Well, I never! And to think that missus should just have happened to answer the bell instead of me!"

Rita asked what she meant, and the girl proceeded to relate how that, on the day after the ball (some time in the afternoon it was, when she, Jane, had been despatched by the doctor to get a prescription made up in a great hurry), two gentlemen on horseback had called, and asked if the lady was quite well after her accident in the cab.

The excellent Mrs. Jones, having heard nothing of any accident, and being ignorant of the fact that her front door had been left on the latch all night, informed the gentlemen "that they must have made a mistake in the house—that no one had been at a fancy ball from that—that her only lodgers were two ladies, both invalids now, poor dears, and neither of them