

making a picture of our house—come this way and see it."

Then to Oliver,
"That is a pretty faithful picture."
"Do you think so, Miss?" said Oliver, with a smile.

"Yes, indeed. There is the house and the door—the three windows, the roof, the chimney and all—the rosebushes, and the poultry. But say, sir, why didn't you draw Miss Norah also, since she is looking at you?"

"I had not the time," replied Oliver, "but if the young lady will remain at the window for a few minutes longer, I will sketch her outlines."

The girl called out to her mistress to stand still a moment.

The latter consented with a winning smile. The sketch was soon drawn and then Jocelyne—that was the name of the peasant girl—asked to be drawn also, with her basket of eggs and pail of foaming milk.

In the meantime Norah had left her station at the window and came down to inspect the drawing of the young stranger. She was delighted with it, and he was more and more delighted with her.

"Miss," said he, "this little sketch does not displease you then?"

"I have already said that I regard it as very beautiful."

"Then it depends on you, Miss, to give it a real value."

"How so, sir?"

"By allowing me to offer it to you."

The girl blushed deeply.

"I entreat you, Miss, not to refuse it."

"But sir, I fear I cannot....."

"Why not?"

She kept silence.

Oliver reflected a moment.

"Of course, I am unknown to you," he said,

"and you hesitate to accept anything from a stranger. In that case I will modify my offer. Take this sketch, not as a gift, but as an exchange."

"An exchange?" repeated the girl, with a smile.

"Yes; for my drawing, give me three things."

"Three things?"

"A bouquet of your roses, a cup of milk and the permission to return to-morrow to renew my sketch."

The young girl held her peace for a few minutes. Then she turned her great blue eyes fall on Oliver and replied:

"I accept."

Oliver returned hearty thanks.

"But sir," continued the girl, "we have detained you very long. Answer my question frankly. Have you breakfasted?"

"O, Miss."

"Have you breakfasted?"

"Well, honestly—I have not."

"Then you will breakfast with me."

"Really, Miss, I dare not accept."

"If you refuse, our bargain is broken."

"I am resigned in that case," said Oliver gaily.

"Very well. Come into the house. Jocelyne will set the table in a moment."

And they all moved towards the cottage.

As in all Breton farm-houses, the principal apartment comprised the kitchen and hall and over the chimney-piece the pots and pans were set.

Three objects were worthy of attention in this room.

In the first place a large portrait suspended from the wainscot in a splendid frame, from which the gilt was fading. This portrait represented the handsome features of a sea captain, wearing the order of the King, auburn-haired, blue-eyed, with left arm in sling.

In the upper left angle of the canvas, there was a shield surmounted by a knight's helmet and banneret; on a field gules, three bezants argent.

The second object was a magnificent clock of the Louis XIV style.

In the third place, there was an immense arm-chair of carved oak, near the chimney corner. On the back was a medallion bearing the same arms as the portrait.

Oliver observed these things at a glance, and was puzzled by them.

They sat down to a table charged with milk, bread, and fruit. (While waiting for Jocelyne to prepare the omelette in the great fire-place, Oliver said to his hostess:

"Allow me, miss, to put you a question?"

"As many as you like, sir,"

"Miss Jocelyne calls you Norah. Is that your name? I find it so singular."

"Not exactly my name. Jocelyne is fond of abbreviations and I let her do. My real name is Dinorah."

"Dinora!" repeated Oliver.

"The name is rather odd, is it not?"

"Odd, perhaps, but charming. It reminds one of ancient Brittany, of Teutaes, and the druidesses."

"Do you think the sacred mistletoe would become my blond hair?" said Dinorah, laughing, and without waiting for answer, called for his cup to pour him some milk.

The repast went on. Jocelyne's omelette was superb and Oliver enjoyed it. The eggs were succeeded by fruit. They too were perfect.

"I gathered them myself," said Dinorah.

The repast was ended. They retired from the table.

"I am exacting, miss," said Oliver, "but I now demand my roses."

"You shall have them," replied the young girl.

And in a few moments she returned from the garden laden with beautiful flowers.

"Do I owe you anything else now?"

"Yes, Miss, you do."

"What is it?"

"Leave to return to-morrow."

"It is granted."

They conversed a little longer, and then Oliver took his leave.

As he made his way to the inn, he inhaled the perfume of the flowers and repeated a thousand times the sweet name of Dinorah.

XXXII.

LOVE.

The tavern-keeper was standing at his door when Oliver returned. As he drew his portly form aside to allow his guest to pass, he asked:

"Will you have your breakfast now, sir?"

"No mine host," replied the young man.

"Are you doing penance to-day? Yet it is neither Ember Day nor vigil, so there is no need for either fasting or abstinence."

"I am not by any means doing penance," returned Oliver smiling, "but being very hungry I broke my fast on bread and milk at a small farm a couple of leagues from here."

"No nourishment in it, sir. It does not support the stomach."

"Certainly not, but it fills it sufficiently well."

"Hm! So so. Upon that you should take something comfortable. Say a bottle of Canary, I have some that is excellent—imported direct. It has been ten years in my cellar."

"Well, you may bring me up a bottle on condition that you will keep me company."

"With great pleasure, sir! with the greatest pleasure! I know only too well what is due to my guests!"—"and my cellar," he added to himself.

In a few minutes Oliver and his host were sitting opposite each other, with a flask of golden wine and a couple of tulip-shaped glasses between them.

"What do you think of it?" asked the tavern keeper as he turned the first mouthful over on his tongue.

"Delicious!"

"Yes, I would venture to say that the intendant of the province himself has not better on his table." And a self-satisfied smile illuminated the worthy man's jolly countenance.

"My good host," asked Oliver after a brief silence, "you ought to know the neighborhood. Can you tell me who lives in that pretty cottage surrounded by great trees, which stands at the head of a blind alley about a quarter of a league from St. Nazaire? Passing by the house I caught a glimpse of a pale golden-haired girl who seemed anything but a farmer's daughter."

"Miss Norah," said the inn-keeper. "The house and garden belong to her."

"And who may Miss Norah be?"

"She belongs to a good family and is the last descendant of a long race. Her name is Miss Dinorah de Kerven," said Boniface respectfully.

"These de Kervens were true gentlemen, brave sailors, and noblemen who held their own in the province. At one time they were the proprietors of a fine estate which bore their name, but which no longer exists. What would you have? some families are unfortunate. This is such a one. While others were growing richer it became poorer, and it is not difficult to understand how. These Kervens passed their lives in the service of the country without ever asking for reward, just in the opposite system to those who get so well paid for services they never render."

"Then Miss Dinorah's father is poor?"

"He is dead. The mother died first. The young lady is an orphan. She was four years old when she lost her father, who was a sea-captain and decorated. Her education was given her at a convent, and she returned here three years ago. She now lives alone with her servant Jocelyne (a good girl) in the cottage you remarked. It is a little bit of property that brings her on an average eight or nine thousand livres a year. It is all she has."

"But that is absolute misery!"

"No, my good sir, not at all. And the proof is that Miss Norah, poor as she is, finds means to do more good than most rich people. She is the providence of all who are unhappy. She is satisfied with almost nothing and gives the rest away. She visits the sick, gives them medicine and watches by them. For three leagues around she is known, respected and loved. People call her the good angel."

Oliver was much affected by his host's story.

"She is happy then, this kind-hearted and beautiful girl?"

"Happy, sir? Yes. I think so at present at least. But will it last long? I am afraid not."

"What do you mean?"

"Mere common sense, sir, as you will see if you follow me. In this world a daughter of the nobility has only two chances: marriage or the convent. Is it not so?"

"Quite true."

"Miss Dinorah de Kerven, it is evident, has not the slightest vocation for convent life and the veil. She is too pious, too charitable and too good to be shut up behind the cloister grating, like a prisoner in his cell, praying selfishly from morning to night, without getting any good from it. She would die of consumption and ennui. I know full well, if she were suddenly deprived of the rays of the sun, the sea-breeze, and the perfumes of her roses. After what I have told you of her character and habits, you agree with me?"

"I do, I confess."

"So there is an end to the convent. Miss Norah would not go into it; and if she did the poor of the country would take her out by force. Marriage is then the only alternative."

"Certainly."

"That is where I was waiting for you. At present she is a mere child and hardly thinks of marriage. But later on, in one two or three years, she will begin to think of it. It can hardly be otherwise, for God created women to marry and rear children. Well, when that time comes what will happen?"

"Miss de Kerven will marry."

"No, sir, she will not marry."

"And why not?"

"Because she can't marry the first man that turns up. With the name she bears she must become the wife of a gentleman or a very rich man or else remain single. Unfortunately neither the gentleman nor the rich man will understand that Miss Norah's beauty, goodness and virtue are a more precious dowry than all the money in the world. Do you still agree with me?"

"No."

"Ha! and why not?"

"Because I am firmly convinced that there are still noble and rich people on this earth who possess heart and understanding enough to comprehend the true value of the treasures of which you speak."

"Where are they to be found, these people?"

"That I cannot say, but there are much people."

"Well, sir, when you have shown them to me, I shall say you are right, but not before. I have not always kept the arms of Brittany on the market square at St. Nazaire. I have been a sailor and traveled. I have seen many countries, and I declare to you on the word of an honest Breton that I never came across anything but selfishness and love of money—and I am an old man whose hair is gray, not to say white."

"I am young," cried Oliver, "and I am more fortunate than you. I have witnessed cases of unlimited devotion and absolute disinterestedness." The young man was thinking of his father and Don José Rovero.

The tavern-keeper made a low bow.

"Devotion and disinterestedness, two rare birds indeed! two white blackbirds! However I am willing to believe you, and I grant that there are some sensible people under the sun who could make their life happy by marrying Miss de Kerven. But what then?"

"One of these sensible persons will fall in love with her, will win her love, marry her and be perfectly happy."

"Happy! By St. Malo, I should think so! Or rather he would be; for unhappily you forget one thing. How is this noble and rich person of yours, who is generous enough to prefer happiness to a few bags of money, going to fall in love with Miss de Kerven?"

"That is a strange question you are asking me. Of course he would fall in love with her at first sight."

"Maybe. But where is he to see her. Miss Norah never leaves the house, she never shows herself and sees no one. You must confess that it would have to be by the merest accident that the person in question should just follow the path that leads to the farm, see the young lady, fall in love with her and then marry her."

"And yet, though I had no business over there, I happened to pass and saw the young lady."

"So be it; but what does that prove? You saw Miss Norah but you didn't fall in love with her, and you are not going to marry her—"

Just at this interesting juncture the tavern-keeper was called down-stairs to keep in order some half-dozen drunken sailors who were tipping and quarrelling in the bar below.

The following day Oliver was on foot before the sun's rays had broken over the horizon. As it was too early for him to make his appearance at the farm, he spent some time in wandering about, instinctively choosing the higher ground from whence he could obtain a glimpse of the trees that embowered Miss Dinorah's cottage.

Towards eight o'clock he began to persuade himself that as one of the objects of his visit was to recommence the sketch of the house, there was nothing to prevent him beginning his work without intruding on the fair mistress.

This idea firmly fixed in his mind he started at a round pace for the farm.

On opening the garden gate Dinorah stood before him. In the same dress as she had worn the day before, surrounded by her poultry to which she was throwing handfuls of grain from a little bag that hung on her left arm.

"Good-morning!" she cried gaily to Oliver.

"You see I am in the midst of my feathered family. But you must come and see how pretty your drawing looks in its old carved wood frame. The other is quite ready for the bell-tower of St. Nazaire, since you insist upon filling my poor house with master-pieces. Let me finish feeding my chickens and we will go in."

The feeding operation concluded Dinorah led the way into a little salon on the ground floor.

Oliver was enthusiastic in his admiration of the charming seventeenth century frame, and then spread out the table the sketch he had brought with him. Dinorah clapped her hands, and Jocelyne, who had followed them in, vowed that she had never seen a bell-tower look so much like itself.

"Say then, sir," she asked, "could you draw a body's portrait on paper, as big as natural? It must be pretty hard."

"I dare say I could manage to do it," replied Oliver good-humoredly. "But why do you ask, Miss Jocelyne?"

"Because if you were good enough to draw my likeness I would send it to my old grandmother. She'd go foolish with joy, the old woman."

"Jocelyn! Jocelyn!" cried Dinorah, "what are you asking?"

"Ah, let me be, Miss Norah. If the gentleman don't want to do it, he's only got to say so, and there's an end to it. But he's so kind-looking, and that's a fact, that I'm sure he won't refuse."

"And you are quite right, my good Jocelyn," said the young man. "We are at your service, pencil and all. Only," he added hesitatingly, "I hope that if Miss Dinorah is satisfied with your portrait she will not refuse me the permission to draw her own."

The young girl's face fell.

"I have no one to send it to," she said sadly.

"I have no relations, no one to whom my portrait could give any pleasure. Still, if you care to reproduce my features as a study I shall be happy to be your model."

"And never," thought Oliver "was artist vouchsafed one more divine."

After breakfast, the young man set to work on the servant's portrait and after some hours' painting produced a sketch which, though not exactly a masterpiece, was received with loud praises by the original and her mistress.

The next day Oliver returned to work on Miss de Kerven's portrait. He worked the whole day and in the evening declared that he was but poorly satisfied with his work and would be obliged to begin anew.

"But it is charming," cried the young girl.

"Only it makes me prettier than I am."

"Heresy!" cried Oliver. "I have made a school-boy's daub of it. However I do not despair of succeeding better to-morrow."

The next day there was another sitting, the same work with the same unsatisfactory result.

The third day no better. Dinorah was never tired of sitting, Oliver never wearied of sketching. And so the days passed on and the time of his departure drew nigh.

The young man had come to consider himself the accepted lover of Miss de Kerven, although not a word of love had been spoken on either side.

At last the declaration was made. Strange to say it came from the lady.

One day on reaching the farm Oliver found Dinorah seated in a pensive attitude on a hillock at one end of the garden, under a magnificent cluster of oaks. The thick turf muffled the sound of his footsteps and he was at her side before she perceived him. Miss de Kerven raised her head, saw the young man, and without betokening the slightest surprise, held out her hand.

"Dinorah, you did not know I was here?"

"No."

"Of what were you thinking?"

"Of you."

"And what about me?"

"Nothing about you; of you."

For a moment Oliver was silent. Then dropping on one knee he drew from his little finger a chased ring, which he offered to the young girl.

"Dinorah," he said in a broken voice, "this is my mother's wedding ring. If you believe, as I think you do, that I love you, and if you will consent to be my wife, accept this ring. That will tell me that you give me your heart, and that you will never belong to any but me."

Glancing with a look full of tenderness at the young man at her feet, Dinorah took the ring and passed it on her finger, saying:

"I have given you my heart and I swear to belong to none but you."

Intoxicated with happiness Oliver passed his arm round Dinorah's waist and pressed his lips to her forehead.

In this manner Oliver Le Vaillant and Dinorah de Kerven declared their love and plighted their troth.

The next day Oliver returned to Havre. His last words to Dinorah had been:

"I do not depend on myself alone, but no obstacle can arise between happiness and ourselves. Love me, wait for me, and trust me."

To which Miss de Kerven had replied:

"I love you, I trust you, and I will wait for you."

Oliver had no doubt that he would easily obtain the consent of his father to his marriage. Philippe Le Vaillant was no tyrant, and if Dinorah de Kerven was not their equal in wealth she was far their superior in birth. So the young man whiled his tedious journey away with rosy anticipations of his future happiness.

On the fifth day after his departure from St. Nazaire, he drew up his horse before the gate of his father's house. Handing the bridle to the serving man who had accompanied him he rushed through the garden into the house.

Zephyr, the old servant whose acquaintance we have already made, started back in alarm, and then rushed off to acquaint his master with the son's arrival.

After the first tender greetings Oliver retired to change his dress.

"In an hour," he thought, "I shall have told my father, and he will have bid me be happy."

When the father and son met downstairs the latter opened the conversation.

"Before asking you about your trip, my boy, I must tell you some news."

"Good news, I hope."

"At once good and bad. You have often heard me speak of Don José Rovero?"

"Your best friend! He who at the time of a dreadful crisis interposed to save you! Do you not remember that as a child I used to pray God