

GYPSY.

By MISS F. M. MUSGRAVE.

(Continued.)

"Where is Miss Gypsy?" Bertrand asked, as he entered the drawing-room and found it deserted.

"In the garden, I believe, Sir."

It was a glorious moonlight night. He knew how much Gypsy loved a moonlight night. So straight to the garden he went. He lighted his cigar, and puffed it almost tenderly; it certainly was a great consolation to him. Perhaps soon it would be the only consolation left to him in this world, he thought sadly. Disraeli says, "Tobacco is the tomb of love." I don't agree with him altogether; but certainly a man has the advantage over a woman in that respect; he can puff away many a pain in tobacco smoke.

The very sight of Gypsy must now always be almost a pain to him.

If Bertrand Germaine had been a conceited man, he would have been quite aware of the fact that he was still what the world called a fine looking man. But he was as far from being conceited as it is possible for any man in this world to be. He was thoughtful and kind to every human creature that came in his way. Others might forget if the cat had had her breakfast; but Bertrand never forgot that animal. To all women he was not only chivalrous but genuinely reverential. It was no veneering of character—which so many men have—but it was a true reverence which came straight from the heart. He was a man that all children loved.

Softly puffing his cigar, he wandered about the garden. A voice from the ummerhouse called to him presently.

"Uncle Bertrand, is that you? Come here *instantly*. You know I am going to scold you, so that is the reason you are afraid to meet my displeasure. Come now, at once, like a good boy, and perhaps I will forgive you. It is so lovely here."

And most lovely, he thought, she looked perched there in the window of the summer house, gazing up at the moon. A moonlight sprite she seemed, bathed in moonlight. He perched himself in the other window, he could see no moon from that window; but he could watch Gypsy better where he was—in the gloom.

Silently he went on puffing and watching the little face raised to the moon. A feeling almost of peace stole over him as he sat there gazing at his darling. He had been away from her all day, and had grown very hungry for a glimpse of her sweetness. He thought then that he would be quite contented if he could only feel sure that he would not lose her out of the remaining years of his life. But the mere thought of someone's wanting his Gypsy, of someone's asking him to give her away—that thought almost maddened him.

Presently Gypsy, who never could remain silent long, broke the stillness.

"Why don't you talk, uncle mine! How could you leave me so cruelly this morning without a word as to where you were going; or that you were going from me all day. You have become very wicked lately. And I mean to punish you for all your sins of omission and commission. Where have you been all day? Now, confess instantly."

"I had to go away on business, dear. You were not up when I left, I did not like to disturb you."

"All excuses! but I will forgive you, if you will talk nicely to me now, and make yourself agreeable. You know people say you are a very agreeable man, but I can't see it. You are always cross and disagreeable to me! And Gypsy laughed a peal of silvery laughter. Such an agreeable man as your Uncle Bertrand is—Mrs. Simpson says—I don't understand why he never got married. Why did you never get married Bertrand dear?" Gypsy says with pert familiarity.

Bertrand moved quickly further into the gloom and puffed away in moody silence. Yes, why had he never got married before, then he would not have been suffering as he was now?

"Don't you like me to call you 'Bertrand,' without the old 'uncle' to it?"

"Gypsy," he began a little hurriedly, I wish to tell you something that perhaps I should have told you long ago; but it was not with any intention to deceive you that I have withheld the knowledge from you; but rather from a desire not to hurt you, dear. From a fear of wounding you, Gypsy."

"My darling old Bertrand, how mysterious you are! Why, you are making me quite excited! Now, what is it? You are not going to get married? You need not tell me that, because I won't allow it."

"No," he answered, calmly, "I shall never get married."

"That's well!" she retorted; "A sensible conclusion. No, you are too old now to give up your freedom to any woman."

Bertrand winced at this allusion to his age. Of course, he thought it was but natural that he should seem to her an old man.

"Besides," continued Gypsy, "I wish to keep you all to myself; how I should hate Mrs. Bertrand! Eh?"

"Listen to me Gypsy! and don't be absurd."

Now Gypsy, who was totally unaccustomed to be told not to be absurd, here tried to penetrate the gloom in which Uncle Bertrand sat.

"I absurd! Uncle Bertrand! Alas and alas, could you ever say with truth that I was absurd?"

"Perhaps I have been wrong; but at any rate it is better that you should know it at once."

"Sir! you were *never* wrong! no one shall dare to say that Bertrand ever did wrong, but Gypsy. Sometimes I am obliged to scold you when

you are *very* naughty, you know, my dear child; but no one else shall ever scold you. Now you darling, what is it? I had better know at once."

"That what you have been brought up to believe is a mistake; that you are my niece."

"What can you mean!"

"Simply this, that we are no relation to each other whatever."

"No relation to each other!" echoed Gypsy. "No relation to you, Uncle Bertrand?" There was strange grief in every tone of the girl's voice—grief in every line of her face on which the moonlight shone softly.

For some time she remained silent, as if trying to take in the meaning of what she had just heard.

"Oh Uncle Bertrand!" she began, then stopped. "Not my uncle," she repeated, I cannot understand it. I feel as if as I was dreaming. Why have I been brought to believe you my own relation, my *own* Uncle Bertrand?" was murmured with almost caressing tenderness. "Oh, it was cruel to teach me to believe that only—"

"I did not mean to be cruel!" very humbly Bertrand spoke. "It can make no difference between us, little Gypsy. I am just as much your uncle as if God had made me so."

"No, but God did not make you my uncle. Oh, I wonder why he did not," said Gypsy with her characteristic directness.

"When I went to you, at your father's death, I meant to be an uncle to you. Your father was as dear to me as a brother would have been. So, when as a little thing you looked at me and asked who I was—with an idea of comforting you, I answered, your Uncle Bertrand; and you have been as dear to me as a niece; and you are—"

He stopped. No longer with truth could he say that she was as dear to him as a niece.

"Yes," she went on—"as a niece. And you have indeed been far better to me than uncles generally are. You have been more like a father to me, and yet"—mournfully the words were spoken. "I have no right to you. I don't belong to you and *you* don't belong to me; that does seem so hard Uncle Bertrand."

"My dear child," he said gently, "I do belong to you." Sadly he noticed her give a little dissenting shake of the head. Very earnestly he went on, feeling he could not afford to lose even the *nice* love she gave him.

"After all mere relationship is very little—absolutely nothing, if there is not the bond of true affection. Your father and I were much dearer to each other than many brothers are to each other. Don't say that I don't belong to you, Gypsy," he almost pleaded. Those words had wrung his heart; and the thought would come in spite of himself; she could only think of him then in the light of an uncle. It was quite evident no other thought could even cross her innocent mind. And could it be otherwise? No, he could not understand her there. His man's mind could not follow the utter simplicity of her pure, girlish heart. And yet, how was it possible for him to fancy otherwise.

If he had told Gypsy this with any lurking hope of getting comfort for himself, he was utterly mistaken in Gypsy, and did not know her. If he had hoped that Gypsy might see this *non-relationship* in any other light than the light of a loss—then he was indeed ignorant about his little Gypsy.

She had just lost an uncle—that was the only thought in her heart. Quite still she sat there, bathed in the beautiful moonlight. She looked almost unearthly in the moon's silver blue light. Bertrand longed for her to speak. With a wistful timidity, at last she spoke.

"I shall never be able to help calling you Uncle Bertrand."

"Have I ever given you any reason to suppose that I would like you to call me anything else, Gypsy?" Very reproachfully he spoke.

"Why have you told me this now? Were you growing tired of your relationship as uncle?" There was an indescribable pathos in those words which made him start forth from his gloomy retreat.

"No!" broke from him, "before Heaven; no, my child; don't think that! You little know—" he paused and went back to his seat in the dark. He could hardly contain himself. But it was hard she should think this of him, when he would give his very life for her and had already given her all he possessed in this life.

"Uncle Bertrand, why did papa leave me to you?"

"Because I believe your father trusted me as he trusted no one else in the world. He knew I would do anything on earth for him."

"But you must have been very young when you took me?" Gypsy had something in her mind which she was trying to find out; but Bertrand, who was the most unsuspecting man in this world, never for a moment imagined for a moment what she was at.

"I was nearly forty then," Bertrand answered quietly.

"You have had me for ten years, haven't you Uncle Bertrand?"

"Yes," he said slowly; "So you see I am nearly fifty now. Quite an old man!"

He laughed; but perhaps no woman ever confessed her age more reluctantly than Bertrand confessed his. He understood then that it was not always vanity on the part of a woman; that disliking to confess her age, but a like fear perhaps of losing love. For he knew his sex did value youth at a high price.

"I am just sixteen," Gypsy said this with youthful pride. "But I feel now," she added, "very much older and almost lonely."

"Oh! Gypsy, little Gypsy, don't say that, you must know you will always be my dear niece; it cannot be otherwise. I promised your dear father to shield and keep you from all that might hurt you for all my life. And, God helping me—I ever will."

"That was a great deal to promise Uncle Bertrand. Have you not been sorry very often since, that you made that promise?"

"Never," was all he said.

"How papa must have loved and trusted you. It was such a funny