

summer collation. Her creams, her French pastry, her fruit of different varieties received due attention and praise, as they merited, for her dairy, her kitchen, and her orchard were unsurpassed in those days. No wines or liquors were served, owing to the heat, but instead there was a delicious species of drink called *bière d'épinette*, for the brewing of which Madame Varny had a particular receipt. Several healths were pledged in this delicious beverage, and the last moments of the little feast—usually so irksome, because the guests do not know what to do next—were spent in exchanging philopœnas by the aid of almonds. Of course, Celestine had a philopœna with Edgar to be decided that day month.

"It is rather long to wait," said the young man.

"Not too long for my purpose," replied the girl with a bright smile.

"Humph!" thought Edgar, "she has a purpose in it. Well, so have I. I must win that pledge, by all means, and ask a mighty boon for its redemption."

Saying which, he thrust the kern into his waistcoat pocket for a remembrance.

The rest of the evening was spent on the gallery fronting the river. The summer air was deliciously cool, and a faint moonlight vaguely revealed the most prominent features of the landscape. Rosalba and Edgar sat a little apart from the rest, half hidden among the convolvuli that clambered up to the roof. Though they took part in the general conversation, yet the young lawyer found ample opportunities to press his suit with the girl, who fought shy indeed, and never departed even once from the instinctive modesty of her nature, but was unable, in spite of herself, to dissimulate her pleasure at the attention she received. Martin, too, was highly satisfied with the progress which he fancied his courtship was making.

The tall French clock on the first stair-landing struck eleven.

"Eleven!" exclaimed Edgar. "I must be off."

"I did not imagine it was so late. We did not feel the time passing," murmured Rosalba.

"Stay over night, Edgar, stay over night," said the host. "We shall light another cigar."

"Thank you, Mr. Varny. It is impossible. I have far to go and must be at my office early in the forenoon."

Edgar remained sitting while he spoke, for Agnes was fast asleep on his knees. One arm was thrown around his neck, another lay hanging by her side, and her white baby face was shielded from the moonlight by the folded calyx of a morning-glory. Mother Varny had tried once or twice to ease Martin of his little burden, but he would not consent. Now, however, when Rosalba bent over the child to receive her from her lover, he whispered in her ear.

"May I meet you one moment, before I go?"

Rosalba held back, a little surprised. The young man understood her hesitation, and immediately added:

"Not alone, Miss Varny. In presence of your father."

"In that case, yes," was the timid reply. She then snatched up her little sister and retreated into the interior of the house.

It is wonderful what changes the soul can go through in a trifling space of time. The feminine heart especially, so sensitive, delicate and impressionable, often runs through a scale of transitions, with every beat of an excited pulse. These changes, too, frequently affect character and mark the most important crises of life.

When Rosalba appeared again at the threshold of the hall, her features betrayed a transformation of the kind. She looked serious, anxious, and almost frightened. There was the same sweet smile as ever, but her mouth was slightly compressed and the corners of her lips were indented, a clear sign that she was endeavouring to master her emotion.

As soon as he saw her, Edgar bade good-night to the family and turned to the front walk in her company and that of her father. The old man took the lead, pretending to be very anxious about his young friend's horse. The groom was just coming out of the stable with the animal, and he went forward to meet them, keeping in sight, but out of hearing of the two lovers.

Edgar understood that now was his chance. "Miss Varny," said he, "this is altogether a day of happiness for me. Yet, I have one difficulty, which you only can remove."

"How so?"

"I would wish to speak to you unreservedly and yet hardly dare to ask your permission to do it."

Rosalba expected this, but was not yet thoroughly prepared for it. She answered not a word, for she was too violently agitated, and looked at the young man with an expression of utter sadness.

"May I speak?" he resumed boldly.

"You may," she whispered, almost inaudibly, her eyes fixed on the gravelled walk, and her cheek pale as death.

"My words will be few. I have them graven in my heart and have no others to say. I loved you from the moment I first saw you. I love you still with adoration, and no one can love you as much."

No lawyer's tricks about that. A plain, blunt, point-blank declaration of love. Yes! too plain; almost cruel in its bluntness, for the frail form of the girl swayed like a broken lily stalk in the moonshine, her eyes streamed with tears, her lovely head drooped, and she had to lean against a maple for support in her faintness. Let not cynics scoff, nor rigid moralists cry fie. God made the girlish heart and it is well. The love-arrow is planted in it now and it bleeds. No foolery in that, O wise philosopher, no, nor sin either, but one of the purest, the most exquisite, the most ecstatic torments of life. That one moment in woman's history compensates for all future disappointments, sanctifies the joys and sorrows of maturity, and sheds a halo even on the grim approaches of premature death.