

KATHERINE'S FATE.

Three years after the close of the war the Pingres found themselves almost at the end of their resources. They owned a plantation near Marion, a small village in Union Parish, Louisiana, and lived upon it, because it could not be sold and they were too poor to go away and leave it unsold, as so many of their neighbors did when the slaves were freed. Mr. Pingre was an intelligent, easy going gentleman with very few practical ideas and no business capability to get on in the world than her husband. She could not adjust herself to changes of fortune with cheerfulness, but grieved plaintively every time she attempted to do her hair or darn Mr. Pingre's clothes. She thought of Victor roughing it in the far West instead of being at home with plenty of money and a servant to wait upon him; she looked at her lovely daughters, Marie and Katherine, and wondered where and how they were to get husbands. She moved over the pathetic cruelty of life, read Miss Braddon's novels, much in the mood in the South at that time, and left the entire management of the house to Mammy Eloise, the one faithful, loving old creature who preferred serving them to taking her freedom.

The Pingres lived in a big two-story log house with an open entry between the main lower rooms and a back and front gallery. The grounds were ample and well shaded, with roses, grape, myrtle, and other blooming shrubs growing in the open space between the trees and along the walks. A fruit hedge bordered the garden fence, and sweet pink flowers along the vegetable beds. But an air of neglect seemed to hang over the whole place, and Katherine decided in her mood one day that something must be done or the house itself would tumble down.

She possessed more energy than all the other members of the family put together. She managed to startle them quite often with the bold flight of her youthful fancy, but still they regarded her with a temperate degree of admiration. Mrs. Pingre regretted that she was not as pretty as Marie, but Mr. Pingre considered her even more attractive than her sister.

"She lacks flesh," objected Mrs. Pingre. "But she makes it up in spirit," said Mr. Pingre. "Spirit is not the substance most admired in this world, my dear. Men always like—admire—plump women."

"Well, well, Katherine is only a child."

"She is eighteen, just two years younger than Marie, and quite old enough to marry, if there were some one to marry her."

Mr. Pingre slipped softly away. He didn't care whether the girls married or not, so they were happy and the problem of a livelihood for them could be solved. He often vexed his head in a positive ache over that thought, and then he would take down his gun, call the dogs and go for a tramp over the hedge grown fields, or find refuge in a shady corner of the gallery with an old book or the weekly papers from the "city," as New Orleans was called in that part of the State.

Katherine's thoughts were more to the purpose than her father's, for they took definite shape one day while she lay on the grass by the private hedge. No one could have admired Marie more fondly and proudly than Katherine—Marie with the golden hair and white skin of a pure blonde, and such ravishing arms and shoulders. But it was against Marie's peace that the young schemer plotted, and she determined that her sister should marry for the benefit of the family. What if she did not like John Barnard, who kept a store in Marion? Could he add to the family fortune? No; John Barnard would never do. She must marry Prosper Devereaux, who possessed money as well as youth and good looks. He lived in New Orleans, but he owned a plantation in Morton and he had attended the same country school with the Pingres girls. Katherine detested him heartily in those days because he teased and frightened her with dreadful ghost stories. But now they were grown, and he had come to Marion for the first time since the war, and in all the country there was no beau so handsome, so daring and gallant as Prosper Devereaux.

"Yes, she must marry him," said Katherine to herself very firmly. "It is her duty to make a good match. Look! I would if I could. Yes, I'm sure that I would marry an ogre if he could give papa and mamma comfort again."

But she had too much discretion to plainly show the path of duty to her sister. She must be guided gently into its, clear, smooth way.

It was Sunday afternoon, Katherine took a book and a chair and went out under the big cotton wood tree in the front yard. She pretended to read, but in reality watching the public highway with fluttering pulse and anxious eye. At last Prosper Devereaux appeared in the distance, riding a handsome high-stepping bay horse. The blood flew to Katherine's face, light to her eyes. Did man ever before sit his horse with such ease and grace? Could any girl be so blind as not to prefer him to John Barnard? He rode up to the gate, dismounted and entered. Katherine went to the edge of the walk to greet him, for it was her plan to meet Marie's lovers and give them welcome first.

"Why, Katherine, are you really glad to see me?" the young man exclaimed, divided between surprise and pleasure at the sweetness of her greeting.

"I am, indeed," she said, and blushed a deeper red than ever.

"I can remember the time when you scowled if I came near you, and your eyes were quite wicked with anger. Now they are—let me see them, Katherine. I want to make sure that they are kind and soft."

"You must not tease me now, Mr. Devereaux."

"Mr. Devereaux! How can you? Did we not once recite our lessons together, write our problems on the same blackboard and share our lunches?"

"You are thinking of Marie. Oh, yes, I know you are years younger than I, but you were a smart little thing."

"Please go in," she said, interrupting him eagerly. Somehow his persistent eyes confused and troubled her.

"You are coming with me?"

"No, Marie—you will find her in the parlor."

He accepted his dismissal gayly, and Katherine went back to her seat, cooling her scarlet cheeks against her palms.

Presently another young man rode into view on the dusty highway, but no admiring brightened Katherine's eyes this time. No racing color warmed her cheeks. She merely watched him out of the corner of her eye while he dismounted, fastened his horse to the gate post and came in. No smiles or flitting welcome for him.

"Good evening, Katherine."

"Good evening, John."

"Whose horse is that?"

"Mr. Devereaux's."

"Oh, is he here?"

"Yes."

"Is Marie at home?"

"Certainly. Why should Mr. Devereaux call if she—"

"He could come to see you, I suppose."

"No," she cried scornfully, then fell back and laughed. "Why, don't you know he used to call Marie his sweetheart?"

"I know he always made a fool of himself."

"Oh, not more than some people I know."

Barnard drew a little nearer to her.

"Katherine, do you think—does she like him?" and conscienceless Katherine said:

"I think she does, John—in fact—but I'd rather not."

"I understand," he cried, growing so pale that she felt sorry for the wrong impression she had given him. "Girls are all vile coquettes."

Katherine watched him ride dejectedly down the road, and wondered that the late of Anastasia and Sapphira did not overtake her for her duplicity.

D vereaux made only a brief call.

"Going so early," said Katherine, regretful and surprised, when he came out.

"Yes, I could not keep Marie all the afternoon. Ah, I think that you are still reading the same page. How rapidly you progress."

Katherine blushed and closed the book.

"I have been entertaining a visitor."

"So that was the reason you wished to get rid of me?"

"No, no."

But he merely lifted his hat and went away. It was altogether a most trying afternoon for the young schemer, for presently Marie came out, and looked pensively toward the village.

"I wonder John didn't come."

Katherine trembled guiltily. "He did, but went away again."

"Why?"

"I told him you were entertaining Prosper Devereaux."

"You made him angry, Katherine. I know you did."

"Yes," said Katherine, finally, "Prosper Devereaux—"

"Is not worth as much to me as one of John's little fingers."

"But Marie—"

"I wish you would attend to your own affairs," and then she walked away into the dusky garden, crying softly.

Katherine longed to run after her, for those tears were like so many scalding drops on her conscience, but she hardened her heart for the sake of the family.

It was the night of the monthly dance at the village academy. The old house was in that condition when it was almost ready to tumble down, and the few people in the community who disapproved of dancing declared that it would be a just punishment on the frivolous life of it. It stood within a stone's throw of the church and graveyard.

The Pingres rarely missed one of these parties, and Marie had a new dress for that occasion. It was Katherine's turn, but she insisted upon sacrificing herself to her sister, wearing an old gown made out of two silk skirts, the gay plaids of one swarming furiously at the gray stripes of the other, but as the ball room usually presented a kaleidoscope combination of make-dresses, she waited no regret on her appearance. Still, with all Marie's beauty and the beguilement of white swiss and laven-der ribbon, Prosper Devereaux devoted himself to Katherine, while John Barnard hung aloof from Marie also, glancing jealously at every man who approached her. It was a wretched evening altogether, and the moment they were at home and shut into their own room Katherine cast herself down at Marie's feet with her head in Marie's lap, tears spilling the new swiss forever.

"I am so wicked and miserable."

"What have you done now," questioned Marie sadly.

"Do forgive me, Marie. I did it all to make a match between you and Prosper Devereaux."

"Katherine!"

"And I have been such a liar, such an awful liar. I told John that you loved Prosper."

"Katherine!"

"And he called you a vile flirt, and I didn't defend you."

Poor Marie looked pale as a ghost in the flickering candle light.

"You've spoiled my life, Katherine."

"Yes, but I have spoiled mine also. Prosper asked me to marry him and I refused."

"Refused?"

"Yes, and he will go away to New Orleans where I shall never see him again; he said so."

Marie took her by the shoulder, giving her a gentle shake.

"You love him."

"With all my heart."

They looked at each other, both fair faces flushed and tender, then lip met lip in a forgiving kiss.

"Why did you refuse Prosper?"

"As a just punishment to myself."

"Katherine, you are a goose."

"Marie, my heart is broken."

It is hardly necessary to say that Marie and John made it up and were married, and Katherine was left alone to go to parties with her mother, who knew nothing about her love affair and was still seeking a husband for her. It was quite a year later that they went one night. Katherine protested, declared that she hated parties, but her mother insisted. Lightening played along the horizon as drove through the country, and distant thunder rumbled and died away.

An hour, two hours, had passed before

the revelers were aware that the storm had stolen upon them. A lurid blaze of lightning, a roar of thunder, and every one paused.

"We'd better get out of here while we can and run over to the church. This building is too unsafe in a storm," cried an old man, calling his granddaughters.

In the rush for the stairs Katherine was separated from her parents, but she had an umbrella and darted into the open air. The ominous stillness had broken. Tree tops were bending, a swirl of dust rose from the village street. Rain and wind came together. Katherine's umbrella was snatched from her hand and she caught one fleeting glimpse of it as it careered away on the black wings of the gale. Then some one seized her, drew her back within the shelter of the academy.

"It's too late to hunt any other shelter, Katherine," said a voice in her ear.

She lay panting, breathless, against the arm holding her.

"I didn't know that you were here."

"I came to-day and supped with Marie and John."

A vivid flash of lightning passed into the murky room, then out again, leaving dense shadows. Devereaux held his companion with a firmer grasp when she attempted to move away.

"I've given you a year to change your mind, Katherine. You see, it is difficult for me to realize that the woman I love does not love me? Does she love me, dear; does she?"

"Marie has been talking," she exclaimed, then paused, self-betrayed.

The old academy creaked and trembled, but not a board fell or was riven apart. Many an other gay, innocent party might gather within its walls and dance away the night.

When Mrs. Pingre missed her daughter she instantly went into hysterics and could not be brought out of them until she saw Katherine entering the church leaning on Prosper Devereaux's arm. Then it was truly wonderful the way she recovered and beamed gently upon the company.

TWO PHANTOMS.

David Groff was the hardest fibered man I ever saw. He was a well educated, brainy and a gentleman, but was nevertheless hard, cold and cynical. Sentiment he scorned, noble, unselfish impulses he did not believe in, and his attitude toward his fellow beings was one of uniform suspicion. Association with him always made the world seem more ignoble and life meaner.

One evening when he had been visiting me, after he was gone, to throw off the saturnal influence he always unconsciously exercised upon me, I applied myself to a peculiar line of psychological experiment.

I was a student of the occult, and I found it true—that, by a certain method of mental concentration, it was practicable to convert subjective consciousness into seeming objective perception, and I was assured that a still further effort might follow of actual perception of the entities of the semi-material world, though at this time I had no verification.

Hardly had I sat down myself, fixed my attention upon a selected object and willed mental passivity, when I saw before me, very plainly, an elderly man, but his face was so haggard with anxiety and full of despairing appeal that it made an exceedingly painful impression upon me. Almost instantaneously it vanished, giving place to a young girl, in whose features I saw a strong family resemblance to those of the man, but more delicate and refined. Indeed, I have never seen a female face more spirituelle and at the same time more sad than hers. That expression was rather a thrill of consciousness than sight, for the actual presence of the phantasm was a mere flash. Yet, brief as it was, it was a flash of the face of a man, but more delicate and refined. Indeed, I have never seen a female face more spirituelle and at the same time more sad than hers. That expression was rather a thrill of consciousness than sight, for the actual presence of the phantasm was a mere flash. 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