THE MATINEE

(By Zona Gale.)

In the late spring Peleas was obliged to spend one whole day out of town. He was vastly important over the circumstance, and packed his bag two days before, which alone proved his advancing years; for formerly his aim seemed to be to complete his packing in the cab on his way to the train at that moment pulling out of the station. Now he gave himself an hour to get to the ferry to allow for being blocked!

"Yes, that alone would prove that we are seventy," I said sadly, as I stood before the window watching him drive away.

Yet, if ever a good fairy grants you one wish, I advise your wishing that when you are seventy your heart and someone else's will be as heavy over one day's separation as were ours.

"Peleas," I had said to him that morning, "I wish that everyone in the world could love someone as much as I love you."

And Peleas had answered seriously: "Remember that everyone in the world who is worth anything either loves as we do, or else is unhappy because he doesn't."

"Not everyone," I remonstrated.

"Everyone," repeated Peleas, firmly.

I wondered about that after he went away. Not everyone surely! There was, for exception, Nichola, our old servant. She was worth a very great deal, but she loved nobody—not even us—and I was sure that she prided herself upon it. And there were ever so many others whom I could name at once who never even thought of love. I could not argue with Peleas on the eve of a journey, but I harbored the matter against his return.

I was desperately lonely when Peleas was gone. I was sitting by the fire with Semiramis on my knee—a cat cannot sympathize with you but her aloofness can scorn you into peace of mind—when the telephone rang. We are so seldom wanted that the mere ringing of the bell is an event, even if, as usually happens, we are called in mistake. This time, however, old Nichola, whose tone over the telephone is like that of all three voices of Cerberus saying "No admission," came in to announce that I was wanted by Miss "Willie" Lillieblade. I hurried excitedly out, for when Miss Wilhelmina Lillieblade telephones she has usually either heard some interesting news or longs to invent some. She is almost seventy as well as I, but as a girl she was not very interesting, and I sometimes think that, like many other inanimate objects, she has improved with age until now she is delightful, and reminds me of spiced cordials. I never see a stupid young person without applying the inanimate object rule, and longing to comfort him with it.

"Ettare," said Miss Willie, "you and Peleas come over for tea this afternoon. I am alone, and I have a lame shoulder."

"I'll come," said I, readily, "but Peleas is away."

"Oh," said Miss Willie, without proper regret, "Peleas is away."

For a moment she thought.

"Ettare!" she cried, "let's lunch down town together and go to a matinee!"

I could hardly believe my old ears. "W—we two?" I quavered.

"Certainly!" she cried. "I'll come in the coupe at noon."

I made a faint show of resistence. "What about your lame shoulder?" I wanted to know.

"Pooh!" said Miss Willie. "That'll be dead in a minute, and then I won't know whether it's lame or not."

The next moment she had left the telephone and I had promised.

I went upstairs in a delicious flutter of excitement. When our niece, Enid, is with us I watch her go breezing off to matinees with her young friends, but "matinee" is to me one of the words that one says very often and that means very little, like "Antarctic". I declare that I felt myself to be as intimate with the appearance of the New Hebrides as with the ways of a matinee. I fancy that it was twenty years since I had been to one. Say what you will, evening theatre-going is far more common-place, for in the evening one is frivolous by profession, but afternoon frivolity is stolen fruit. And, being a very frivolous old woman, I find that a nibble or so of stolen fruit leavens the toast and tea—innocent stolen fruit, mind you, for Heaven forbid that I should prescribe a diet of dust and ashes!

I had taken from its tissues my lace waist, and was making it splendid with a scrap of lavender velvet, when our old servant brought in fresh candles. She looked with suspicion upon the garment.

"Nichola," said I, guiltily, "I am going to a matinee. And you'll need get no luncheon," I hastened to add, "because I am lunching with Miss Lillieblade."

"Yah!" said Nichola, "goin' to a matinee?"

Nichola says "matinee," and she regards a theatre-box as among all self-indulgences the unpardonable sin.

"You'll have no luncheon to get, Nichola," I persuasively reminded her.

Old Nichola clicked the wax candles.

"Me, I'd rather get up lunch for a fambly o' six-footers," she grimly assured me, "than to hev' you lose your immortal soul at this late day."

She went back to the kitchen, and I was minded to take off the lavender velvet; but I did not, my religion being independent of the spectrum.

At noon old Nichola was in the drawing room fastening my gaiters, when Miss Lillieblade came in, looking like a little brown nut with bead eyes and a lace hood.

"I've telephoned for the tickets," said Miss Willie, blithely. "We are going to see 'The End of The World'—I knew that you haven't been, Ettare."

Old Nichola, who is so privileged that she will expect polite attention even upon her death-bed, listened eagerly.

"Is it somethin' of a religious play, ma'am?" she hopefully inquired

"I dare say, Nichola," replied Miss Willie, kindly, and afterwards to me: "But I hope not. Religious plays are so ungodly.

Her footman helped us down the steps—not that we required it by any means; but what does one pay a footman for, I would like to ask And we drove away to a little place which I refuse to call a cafe. I would as soon eat at a ribbon counter as in a cafe. But this was a little place where Peleas and I often had our tea—a place that was all of old rugs and old brasses in front and in secret was set with little tables having each one rose and one shaded candle. The linen was what a cafe would call lace, and the china may have been china or it may have been garlands and love-knots. From where I sat I could see shelves full of home-made jam, labelled, like library books, and looking far more attractive than some people's libraries. We ordered tea and chicken broth and toast and a salad, and—because we had both been forbidden—a sweet. I am bound to say that neither of us ate the sweet, but we pretended not to notice.

We talked about the old days—this is no sign of old age, but rather of a good memory!—and presently I was reminded of what Peleas has assured me that morning about love.

"Where did you go to school?" asked Miss Willie.

"At Miss Mink's and Miss Burdick's," I answered, "and I was counting up the other day that if either of them is alive now she is about one hundred and five years old and in the newspapers on her birthday."

"Miss Mink and Miss Burdick alive now!" exclaimed Miss Willie. "Nonsense! They would rather die than be. They would call it a proof of ill-breeding not to die at threescore and ten each, according to rule. I went to Miss Trelawney. I had an old aunt who had brought me up to say, 'Ma'am?' when I failed to understand; but if I said 'Ma'am' in school Miss Trelawney made me learn twenty lines of Dante; and if I didn't say it at home, I was not allowed to have dessert. Between the two I loved poetry and had a good digestion, and my education extended no further.."

"That is quite far enough," said I. "I don't know a better preparation for life than love of poetry and a good digestion."

If I could have but one—and yet why should I take sides and prejudice anybody? Still, Peleas had a frightful dyspepsia one winter, and it would have taken forty poets, armed to the teeth—but I really refuse to prejudice anybody!

Then I told Miss Willie how at Miss Mink's and Miss Burdick's I had had my first note from a boy; I slept with it under my pillow and I forgot it and the maid carried it to Miss Mink, and I straightway appeared before that lady and most impertinently told her that according to no less an authority than Robert Browning that note was worth more than her entire curriculum, and triumphantly read her "Summum Bonum." She sent me home, I recall, and quite right, too. And then Miss Willie told how, having successfully evaded chapel one winter evening at Miss Trelawney's, she had waked in the night with the certainty that she had lost her soul in consequence, and, unable to rid herself of the conviction, she had risen and gone barefoot through the icy halls to the chapel, and there had been horrified to find old Miss Trelawney kneeling with a man's photograph in her hands.

"Isn't it strange, Ettare," said Miss Willie, "how the little mysteries and surprises of loving some one are everywhere, from one's first note from a boy to the Miss Trelawneys, whom every one knows?"

Sometimes I think that it is almost impudent to wonder about one's friends when one is certain beyond all wondering that they all have secret places in their hearts filled with old delights and old tears. But, remembering suddenly what Peleas had said that morning, I did wonder about Miss Willie, for I knew that she was lonely for all her air of spiced cordial; and yet mentally I placed Miss Willie beside old Nichola, intending to use them both as instances to crush the argument of Peleas. Surely, of all the world, I decided, those two loved nobody.

At last we left the pleasant table nodding good-afternoon to the capped and ribboned toy who had been cut out of a colored print to serve us. We lingered among the brasses and the casts, feeling very humble before the proprietress, who looked like a duchess cut from another colored print, I envied her that library of jelly.

On the street Miss Willie bought us each a rose for company, and then bade the coachman drive slowly, so that we entered the theatre with the orchestra, which is the only proper moment. If one is earlier, one feels as if one looked ridiculously expectant; if one is later, one misses the pleasure of being expectant at all. We were in a lower stage box, and all the other boxes were filled with bouquets of young people, with a dry stalk or two, magnificently boneted, set stiffly among them. I hope that we did not seem too absurd—Miss Willie and I—in our bobbing white curls, all alone in that fat crimson box!

"The End of the World" proved to be a fresh, happy play, smelling of lavender and sweet air. The play was about a man and a woman who loved each other very much, with no analyses or confessions to disturb any one. The blinds were open and the sun streamed in through three acts of pleasant humor and quick action among well-bred people who manifestly had been brought up to marry and give in marriage without trying to compete with a state where neither is done. In the fourth act the moon shone upon a little chalet in the leaves, and one saw that there are love and sacrifice and good-will enough to carry on the world in spite of its other connections. It was a play that made me thankful that Peleas and I have clung to each other through society and poverty and dyspepsia, and never have allied ourselves with the other side. And if any one thinks that there is a middle ground, I, who am seventy, know far better.

Now in the third act it happened that the mother of the play, so to speak, at the height of her ambition that her daughter marry a fortune, as she had done, opened an old desk and came upon a photograph of the love of her own youth, whom she had not married. That was a sufficiently hackneyed situation, and the question that smote the mother must be one that is beating in very many hearts that give no sign; for she had truly loved this boy and he had died constant to her.

"When I die," prayed the woman, "let me go back—oh, let me go back and be with him!"

Personally, being a very hard and unforgiving woman, I had little patience with her; and, besides, I think better of heaven than to believe any such nonsense. Peleas and I are certain that we will belong to each other when we die. Perhaps if I had not married him—but I did and so there's an end to it.

Hardly had the curtain fallen when, to my utter amazement, Miss Willie Lillieblade suddenly leaned forward with this:

"Ettare," she said, earnestly, "do you believe that the people who truly love each other here are going to know each other when they die?"

"Certainly!" I cried, fearing that the very box would crumble beneath the heresy of that doubt.

"No matter how long after ....." she said, wistfully.

"Not a bit of difference," said I positively. ...

"You and Peleas can be surer than most." said Miss Willie, reflectively "But suppose one of you had died thirty years ago or so. Would you be so sure?"

"Why, of course!" I cried. "Peleas is Peleas!"

"So he is," assented Miss Willie, and was silent for a time, and then said suddenly:

"Ettare! I mean this: When I was twenty,' she went on, speaking very rapidly and not meeting my eyes, 'I met a boy a little older than I, and I had known him only a few months when he went abroad to join his father. Before he went—he told me that he loved me"—It was like seeing the jonquils bloom in

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