



[Written for the Home Journal.]

Down on the Beach:

A STORY OF THE SOUTH.

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(CONTINUED FROM OUR LAST.)

III.

MR. MENTOR.

THE "gentleman from New Orleans," who was waiting to see Mr. Dacre, was fifty years of age, and no stranger to Lansing. The welcome between the youth and his old friend was warm, though but few words were said, as supper was waiting their appearance.

One feature of Southern life is particularly charming: an extra guest never causes either host or hostess "to make a fuss;" and although the Hazletons were Northern people, they were wonderful adepts at learning "the ways of the country."

Introductions over, the party seated themselves at the table, Mrs. Hazleton doing the honors of the coffee urn, the rest of the waiting being done by the slaves. Emily and Schrieff were placed side by side, opposite Dacre and his friend, so that Mr. Mentor had an excellent opportunity to study the countenance of the German, and observe Miss Hazleton's features at that point where profile and full face merged, and what was thus indicated, the reader of the preceding chapter will readily remember.

I do verily believe that the Creator makes every face so sensitive to the internal operations of the mind, that, day by day, the man or woman's character is written thereon so truly, that "he who runs may read;" and if you argue that some of the worst crimes have been perpetrated in Italian history by beautiful women, I shall ask you if you have ever studied the profile of a Lucretia or a Catherine de Medicis?

The windows looked out on the bay. The lighted candles, in silver sconces, were placed inside of tall, quaintly-shaded glass cylinders, to protect the flame from the strong but grateful sea breeze. The floor of the tea room was bare, but the morticed planks were smoothed and oiled, as you often see in cathedrals in small Mexican towns, where stone is costly. The windows were curtained with white dimity, fastened with blue cords, and ornamented with fringe of an ultra-marine color.

To do Mrs. Hazleton justice, she did love society, and invariably treated her guests with the best that she had. It was with her, like many other women, who reach, late in life, social positions above their early education, she could never be entirely at her ease. A man like Dacre or Mentor made her a trifle nervous. Mr. Schrieff was a favorite. He never seemed to know if she tripped in her grammar, which she would do, sometimes, in her earnest efforts to be very precise. The mother loved her daughter—her only child—and I do not believe begrudged her anything, either of the time, pain, care or money she had ever given her; but I have had my doubts if Mrs. Hazleton did not sometimes wish Emily spoke English less

perfectly, or that she herself had taken larger doses of Lindley Murray in her youth.

Then the poor woman did have so many little harmless and transparent deceits. It was really laughable. She wanted Emily to marry well, and knew Dacre was a desirable match in a worldly point of view, and that his social position was many degrees higher than their own, but then he would remove Emily to Maryland, and what was she to do without her darling?

And yet, gentle reader, do you know I think that in heart Mrs. Hazleton, with all her little weaknesses and some few *gaucheries* of language and manner, was a truer woman than her daughter. She was a good wife, and a firm friend. I do not believe she knew how many nights she had, in years gone by, when no gray hair streaked her dark brown tresses, walked the floor with baby Emily, who did not exactly know what she wanted, but instinctively realized if she screamed that mamma would give her safe into the arms of Morpheus to the tune of "Hush-a-bye-baby," or "Bobby Shafter," or some other of those blessed melodies, handed down from generation to generation by that greatest of all lyrical poets Mother Goose.

Mr. Mentor may have had some such thoughts in his head as he partook of the oysters and warm biscuit. I am inclined to think, as he looked on his young friend, and saw the tenderness flashing from the violet-gray eyes, that the face of the man of fifty wore a compassionate expression, for he could read faces clearly enough to know that Lansing Dacre was building altars of gold, and burning precious incense upon them to a goddess of marble—to an idol that could not realize the worth of the heart she might break if it were weaker, but which she would turn to stone, because it was strong. Perhaps Mr. Mentor knew a charm that might yet soften his young friend's heart, if what he so much feared really came to pass. Possibly, in his soul he saw a spiritual presence—the likeness of a fair Creole girl, that he recognized as the other half of Lansing Dacre. Perhaps—but he was aroused from his momentary reverie by the deep voice of Carl Schrieff, who enquired if he would journey far into the interior of Texas?

"Not at present, sir. I shall go to Brownsville, and return by the Vera Cruz steamer to New Orleans."

"By the way, Lansing," said Schrieff, and he looked him full in the face to feel his way, "you seem to be fond of the poetical side of existence: I think Brownsville and Matamoros would please your fancy."

"Yes," said Emily, "and the place is replete with historical associations. If I were a man, and could take so long a horse-back journey, I should delight to go for a few days."

Mr. Mentor's suspicions were confirmed. Lifting his dark, deep-set eyes up into the young lady's face, he said, in a voice as bland as a courtier to a queen:

"I quite agree with you. Nothing would give me more pleasure than to accompany Mr. Dacre. Cannot you go for a few days, Lansing?"

"Really," said Mrs. Hazleton "I must protest against your taking our guests away.

Why he has only been in Corpus Christi four days, and we had him only one. The first day he came my husband lugged him off to San Patricio; the day after, Mr. Schrieff took him to Padre Island. The next day we had him in-doors for one day—"

("Victim to the mosquitoes,") said Dacre, *par parenthese*, laughing in his simple trust and guilelessness of suspicion."

"And," she went on to say, "To-day Mr. Schrieff carries him away on one of those abominable Mexican ponies. Now you propose to take him away to Fort Brown for a week at least. I am afraid our young guest will return to Maryland with a poor opinion of Texan hospitality."

"My dear mother, I am sure," said Emily, "Mr. Dacre appreciates your regard for him and your endeavors to save him from fatigue, but do you consider *he is a man, and must have a taste for manly sports?* Would it not be selfish in us, when his friend has come to see him and ask his company, for us to interfere with the arrangement? Do you not agree with me, Mr. Schrieff, that hospitality really requires that we allow Mr. Dacre a furlough for a few days, and that we take Mr. Mentor's pledge that he sees no harm come to him?"

"Why," said Schrieff, and you have no idea how innocent the schemer looked, for a few days would be a god-send to him in his intrigue, and further his plans materially, "I had intended inviting Mr. Dacre and yourself to take a sail with me to the bluff of Magoon, but suppose we must postpone it until he returns. However, a week soon passes, and, to tell the truth, my dear Mr. Dacre, I expect certain little feminine preparations will go on faster in our absence; so, perhaps, instead of delaying it, Miss Emily really thinks it will hasten the event."

Emily "took," and blushed purposely to her temples (*as well she might*) and gave Dacre a tender glance, which of course decided him, as, recovering his calmness, he said, "Really, Mrs. Hazleton, I think you must withdraw your protest, for I should enjoy a great pleasure in journeying with my own and my father's dearest friend."

Schrieff and Emily were really overjoyed. But they concealed the feeling. Emily sought Dacre, and walked with him in the moonlight on the gallery. Should she pack his portmanteau? Would he write her while he was away? Did he like Schrieff?—"he is a good soul, Lansing? I don't know what mother and I would have done without him when father was away up country."

You say, reader, Emily Hazleton is a demon, or that Dacre are no women so treacherous. Prythee, stay your indignation. None of us become saints or devils in a day. When he came to Corpus Christi to marry her, although they had long been betrothed, it had been over two years since they had seen each other. She lived, originally, in New Jersey; Dacre on the eastern shore of Maryland. Schrieff was so superior in intelligence to the men in Corpus Christi, that she saw him in an exaggerated light. He was older than herself—Dacre was younger. She was a mature woman—Lansing was only in the first flush of manhood.

Schrieff had not declared himself until

Dacre reached Corpus. The German was too good a tactician not to first measure his enemy. He knew it was easier to wean Emily's heart from a living than an imaginative suitor. He did not rashly declare himself the young man's rival, nor did he fail to treat him with unusual deference. Schrieff knew too much to arouse the chivalry which exists in every woman's heart. In a frontier town, Carl made Lansing seem, by contrast, even more youthful than he was. In a strife like this between the two gentlemen, when Carl had thirty-five years on his side against two-and-twenty on the part of his antagonist, any player at the Hazard Table of Matrimony will agree, that with Emily two years the senior of Lansing Dacre, the German must win the rubber.

Late in the evening, Schrieff and Mentor bade good night to the Hazletons, the latter to go to his boarding-house, the former to his usual abode. Mentor and his young friend were to start for Brownsville on horseback the following day after breakfast, Mr. Schrieff kindly undertaking to procure them good horses for the journey.

When about leaving, Schrieff, unperceived by any one, save the lady, said to Miss Emily, "I wish you would make it convenient to take an early walk to the Artesian Well tomorrow morning. You better take Dacre with you, as it is the last time. There will be a note in the usual place."

"I shall follow so good a general, Carl," and she hurriedly pressed his hand. Then, as she turned towards Lansing, she put her arm in his, and pointed up to the stars in the midnight sky, saying, with a momentary tenderness, flickering like their light, "I wonder if they read hearts truly, Dacre?"

IV.

THE MORNING WALK.

The sun was scarcely awakening in the east when Emily Hazleton and her betrothed husband were, arm in arm, wending their way to the Artesian Well. It will be remembered that she had invited him to take this walk with her, and that Mr. Schrieff had advised her that in the usual secret place she would find a line from him.

Shall I tell you what the young man said in the ear of the woman he so soon dreamed of making all his own? Would you have me trace on this cold paper those burning, tender words which he poured in her ear? She was the first love of his young life, and if he were, like most all young men of passion and cultivation, less pure in deed than herself, he was infinitely holier and truer in his heart. Men of the world know what I mean, and I have no wish to tear away the bandages which we wrap around the unsightly sores in our social superstructure, but which will, one day, when men and women both become civilized, cease to corrupt the body of the age.

No: it is not for you to listen to the soft, sweet strains of love that he poured within her ear. The waters in the dawning day were placid, and no breeze had yet arisen to ruffle their smooth surface. Few persons were stirring in the city, and the young pair wandered on, and Lansing, at least, was happy.