

TWO TO ONE.

(A Villanelle.)

Love, you are Utter, I'm Too-too,
Yet we are one in some things. Say
Am I not therefore dear to you?

You love the green that shades to blue;
I like the blue that's somewhat grey—
Love, you are Utter, I'm Too-too!

You, o the sunflower are true;
I love the lily, loved of May—
Am I not therefore dear to you?

And I can place myself askew,
And you are plastic-dilly-splay—
Love, you are Utter, I'm Too-too!

And you delight in bought that's new,
And I like nothing like decay—
Am I not therefore dear to you?

And dearer yet that I can woo
In metres of an ancient lay—
Love, you are Utter, I'm Too-too!
Am I not therefore dear to you?

MAJOR ASHTON'S MISTAKE.

(Concluded.)

A very lovely little lady looked Mrs. Roland Ashton, as she stood in the ancient ball-room, gay with lights and colours. She wore a trailing robe of white silk; round her neck pearls glistened, and in the sunny brown hair. The deep gray eyes shone out from beneath their heavy lashes, the pink of the sea-shell glowed on her cheek, and at her breast nestled great sweet white roses. Major Ashton felt proud of his young bride as he noted the looks of admiration cast upon her by many a well-known connoisseur of female beauty, perfectly aware that Sep had eyes and ears but for himself alone, and that only his hand and voice could waken the love-light on her face.

It all came to an end at last; and Sep was stepping into the heavy carriage waiting at the portal, when a shabby-looking young man of twenty-five, or thereabouts, apparently standing on the look-out for a job, seized the girl's hand eagerly, crying—

"Good Heavens, Sep, can it be you?"

Sep, turning, a deadly fear and terror overshadowing her face, would have spoken but for her husband's eyes, which were fixed upon her with an expression of anger she had never seen in them before.

She entered the cumbersome vehicle, and not a word escaped the lips of either on the homeward drive. Roland's face was very dark and stern. Who was this man? Why should blithe-hearted Sep look suddenly so scared and pale and terror-stricken? Why should she not at once tell him the truth about the matter, the truth which he should exact from her?

Major Ashton was not one who gave way to passion headlong, or there would have been very hard words for the girl-wife; his way was to brood over a subject which annoyed him, turn it, twist it, place it before him in all possible shades of light and darkness; and, having given to the matter all his powers of thought and reasoning, and arrived at a fixed conclusion thereon, no earthly force could wring him from the way in which he had determined to travel.

Poor little Sep sat trembling and sick at heart. Here was trouble; her idol was angry with her, and how might his wrath be appeased? What should she say? What should she do? Roland would be satisfied, she knew, with nothing but the truth; and that truth she might not utter. She was gentle, timid, loving; but she would not betray a trust, break a promise solemnly given, even though it might cost her all. The first tears of her married life glittered on the dark lashes; but it was not till her chattering maid had left her that Sep gave way to the sobs which were choking her. Then she laid herself wearily down on the lace-curtained bed and cried herself to sleep like a child who had been naughty.

An hour afterwards Roland stood at the bedside of his sleeping wife. The soft pale cheek rested on one rosy palm, a look of sadness shadowed the sweet face even in slumber; the rich waving hair was all tumbled on the pillow; pearly drops still glistened around the closed eyes, and the simple embroidery nestling at the white throat rose and fell with the gentle breathing of the sleeper. Bending over her he heard her murmur his name in her troubled dream.

He felt angry with himself as he looked on his young bride thus. Why should he be so confoundingly jealous and foolish? After all, the fellow was probably some old acquaintance of the Damer's, and he had been making loving little Sep miserable for nothing. Tenderly he took her in his strong arms, and Persephone woke from a troubled vision of Roland's angry eye to find her head resting on the beloved breast.

"He—he was only a friend of Martha's," said she, as Roland demanded explanation.

Then the Major reproached himself more deeply, and Sep took heart of grace, and was joyous again. For all that, she started up in the blackness of the night with a cry, and a vague horror clinging round her, which even the clasp of Roland's hand and the sound of Roland's voice could not dispel. Major Ashton was very careful of Sep during the few remaining days of their stay in the little German town.

The sun shone out, birds sang; and Sep was happy again. But there was between the husband and wife just the "little rift within the

lute" that neither could forget, though both strove to bury out of sight.

Then they left the fair little foreign city, and in the sweet Rhineland the much-admired little lady was seen no more.

Sep sat with an open letter in her hand, looking out upon white-crested waves tumbling in from the blue Atlantic. Plymouth town, where Major Ashton's regiment was stationed, lay across the rippling bay, and a tall white lighthouse towered afar off. Roland had found a delicious dreamy village crowning a cluster of rugged rocks, whose green garments trailed into the restless water at their feet, and had taken possession of a fairy-like cottage on the summit of a beetling crag. The Nest this bower was named. A very pearl of housekeepers had the lithe-fingered Sep proved, though the ancient lady presiding over the culinary arrangements of the Nest did take to herself the credit of these little dinners which Roland praised so much. Still it was not the widow Penmaur who danced perpetual attendance upon the lazy young soldier, who poured out his tea, and carried it to him as he lay upon the sofa, who greeted him with eager delight, who was always ready to walk, or ride, or drive, or sail, or sit quietly at home at his bidding, who made his life all sunshine, and who invariably considered whatever he did, or said, or desired the height of perfection. The widow Penmaur did none of these things. "The King can do no wrong!" and Roland was wholly sovereign and lord in his wife's heart.

Sep woke from a reverie of her husband, absent for a few hours, and read her letter.

"My very dear Child," wrote Aunt Martha in her old-fashioned hand—and the sad blue eyes came before the young wife as she read—"It gave us much pleasure to hear from you. We received your beautiful present quite safely. Dear Bell desires me to give you her fond love, and presents her best thanks and respects to Major Ashton; and I am to tell you it is the most handsome present she has had. Blue is her favorite color, and Mr. Fidler thinks the coral brooch suits the beautiful dress exactly. The wedding will take place on Thursday. Bell will wear white tulle, and Sophie and Miss Fidler pink grenadines. We shall all think much of you, and I know you will think of us. Your uncle has composed a new sonnet for the occasion. He thinks it his finest effort. Old Mrs. Fidler particularly admires the last two lines—

"When bounding time all rocks hath overleaped,
May heauteous blessings on this pair be grandly heaped."

She says they overcame her with a sense of majesty. Your uncle is not very well, and the scholars have fallen off of late. I am so thankful, dear, for your happiness. How rejoiced your poor mother would have been to know it! Do not say a word about not writing oftener. I know you are quite in a different world now, and have much to think of; but, remember, dear, we always love to hear of you; and, if ever sickness or sorrow should come—which Heaven keep from you, dear child—your old auntie is always ready to do her best for you, though that is but little, for I have been but sadly of late.

"With our united love,

"Your affectionate aunt,

"M. DAMER."

Sep sat thinking a while of the day when Roland had said, "We must make Bell a present," and had taken her to Plymouth and selected the gift himself, insisting on the purchase of the very brightest blue silk that money could buy, adorned with wide yellow stripes, adding thereto a massive brooch of red coral; and when Sep had faintly opposed his choice, he had made answer, "I know Miss Bell Damer's tastes," proving himself right then, as ever.

Here firm footfalls sounded on the garden path. Sep left her seat and flew to meet her husband.

"I'm awfully done up," said he. "Had to walk all the way from the Mount; and I've promised to go over again this evening to dine with Carlton. He sails to-morrow. It's rather hard lines to leave you all alone, pet, but it's the very first time. Ring for lunch, and get me something drinkable." He went on, flinging himself upon the sofa; whilst Sep obeyed her lord's behests, bringing him sherry in a crystalline goblet and a glass pitcher of iced water, together with great golden plums.

Enma Mary entering with her tray of good things, Sep ministered yet further to the Major's wants; and then, being desired to come and sit by him, she seated herself on a low stool at his side, and, with her hand in his, he presently fell asleep.

Afternoon shadows lay athwart the grass-plot in the rocky garden ere Roland started up, exclaiming—

"By Jove, I told old Jeffers to have the boat at the foot of the rock at four o'clock, and it's nearly five now!"

So saying, he ran up stairs, and Sep followed him, laying out for him the pretty silver-backed brushes, finding cambric handkerchiefs and cigar-cases, tidily collecting and putting away the numerous articles scattered in his rapid dressing, finally pinning in his button-hole the last sweet white rosebud from the bush under the low stone wall—how often was the poor frail little bud remembered in the days to come! Then she went with her head down the rocky steps leading to the little creek, where the old boatman awaited the coming of the Major; and, with Roland's kiss on lip and brow the girl

stood in her simple white dress watching the boat go gliding, gliding over the shimmering water with its precious freight to the town across the bay, where lights were already beginning to tremble in the early October twilight.

Darkness came on apace. The autumn wind came sobbing up the bay, and Sep, retracing her steps, prepared to spend the first lonely evening of her married life. She did not dress for dinner, as was her wont—indeed she did not care to partake of that meal at all, preferring tea, with some of widow Penmaur's far-famed cake.

The housekeeper came and chatted to her a while, after that, of her boy at sea and her drowned "good man." Then Sep wrote her letter to aunt Martha, filled with all her happy simple news.

Then the girl fell to reading of the loves of a certain Viola and Algernon, but soon began to think and to wonder how soon the tide would admit of Roland's home coming, and, summing, she fell fast asleep.

A low tap at the French window opening upon the lawn awakened her, and she hastened joyously to unfasten it for Roland her husband. Stepping out on to the grass in the clear moonlight, Sep found herself face to face with the young man who had so disturbed Major Ashton's peace on that summer night in the far-off foreign city.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear! How could you come here, Dick?" cried Sep.

"Hush!" he said, with a frightened look. "Come here; I must see you;" and he drew Sep into the shadow of the elm-tree. "You're all alone, or I shouldn't have ventured—no fear! The dogs are on my track. I watched the Major out and the maid go down to the village, and the old girl is dead-a-deep over the kitchen-fire."

"You shouldn't, Dick—oh, you shouldn't! Do go away," she urged. "My husband would—"

"Look precious black if he caught me; but he won't. I say, Sep, I'm in awful trouble; I'm hunted about like any wild beast. I got a message to-morrow for I'm bound to leave the country—and she hadn't a penny, and sent me word to find you, and you'd help me for her sake, she said, and never peach. For Heaven's sake, Sep, give me some money. There's a vessel goes out with the tide in the morning, bound for New Zealand; help me, Sep, for mother's sake—for the sake of the sons that may stand at your side! If I'm taken, they'll hang me, and mother will die."

"Dick," gasped the girl, "I've only two sovereigns of my own in the world."

"Fetch them then," said Dick; "and give me these"—eagerly snatching the brooch from her neck, the watch from her side, and the gems from the shell-like ears, and thrusting them hastily within the breast-pocket of his ragged coat.

"Oh, Dick, what shall I say?"

"Say? Say you've lost 'em, had 'em stolen—anything. Sep, it's life to me and mother too."

He looked wan and famished in the moonlight, and despite the false hair and red whiskers, Sep saw aunt Martha's eyes in those of her boy.

Unhesitatingly she ran and brought him the money, and such small trinkets as she thought Roland might not miss, and, as she did so, her heart was sick and sore. How could she meet Roland's eyes and tell him a deliberate lie for the first time?

"Suppose—suppose," she thought, "I tell Roland?" But Major Ashton had stern notions as to dealing with evil-doers; he might think it right to deliver aunt Martha's boy into the hands of justice.

So Sep brought the outcast what she dared, stepping stealthily past sleeping Penmaur, and bringing bread, meat, and wine, which Dick devoured as one starving.

"Heaven bless you, Sep," cried poor Dick, drawing her close to him. "I haven't had a kind look or word for months. I'd like mother to know I didn't do it; I swear I didn't! We'd been drinking, and he stabbed himself; but my tale won't hold water, and I shall be hunted about all my days, lucky if I escape the end I fear."

Then the wanderer caught Sep yet closer, folded her in his arms, and kissed her hungrily.

"I've only mother and you. Tell her I'm gone to-morrow. Good-bye, and Heaven bless you again, Sep!" sobbed Dick; and he went away silently over the stone wall, creeping noiselessly down the rock.

A moment later a grip of iron seized Sep's fragile wrists, bruising the tender flesh and causing her to cry out with pain. Roland, her husband, towered above her in the October moonlight, his features livid with rage and his blue eyes aflame with wrath, while a voice sadly unlike his usual clear tones spoke with the dangerous quietude of suppressed anger.

"So you have deceived me all this time with your false love and your lying heart! I leave you with your deceitful kisses on my lip, and I return to find you in the embrace of another man about whom you had already lied to me! Fool that I have been! Never, never shall you look upon my face again! Go—you are no longer wife of mine!"

In his ungovernable rage he struck speechless and terrified Sep, flinging her from him with all his strength. At that instant he had it in his heart to slay the woman he had loved so dearly. He felt maddened by his fury, rushing away and closing the iron gates with a clang that awoke the widow Penmaur from her slumbers, leaving

Persephone prone and senseless beneath the silver moon.

"Well I never! Good gracious! Well to be sure! And the wedding over yesterday! How foolish of me to make such a mistake! To think of your taking such a journey to come and see Bell married! I declare!" gasped Sophie all in one breath, as she discovered her greatly-envied cousin, Mrs. Roland Ashton, standing at the door, which she had opened in answer to a timid knock. "Ma will be vexed!" cried Sophie, as she vehemently embraced wan-eyed Sep, at the same time rapidly considering the value of her cousin's walskin hat and jacket. "Ma, pa," she screamed, "here's a visitor!"

Like one in some hideous nightmare, Sep walked into the tiny back-parlor. Faded pink paper roses were festooned above the fireplace, and the glasses and cups set out cleanly washed on the table, waiting to be fetched away by the pastrycook's boy, gave token of the recent rejoicings.

"My dear, dear child," said aunt Martha, coming in, wearing the old familiar brown dress, "how kind and sweet of you to come! How I have missed you!" And fondly did Mrs. Damer welcome her pale niece.

"I've been telling her," said Sophie, "our happy couple are at Dover. Bell will be vexed. She looked splendid, my dear. We'd such fun; and young Mr. Wilkes was so pleased with my dress—mauve Japanese, with white lace, it was; and Bell—Mrs. 'Arry Fidler—went off in your silk, a velvet jacket, and a fizzly hat with a scarlet plume. For my part, I'd rather have had a bonnet. Bless me! Ma, Mrs. Ashton—"

Sep had stood looking at her aunt and cousin, trying to make sense of what they were saying. A noise as of rushing waters came into her ears, and she fell fainting upon the old couch.

"How strange of the Major to let her travel so far alone just now!" said aunt Martha. "But young men are so thoughtless. Your father—"

"What a foolish young woman!" growled uncle Damer, entering the room. "Get her to bed, Martha—get her to bed." And, with the old man's help, they carried Sep up stairs and laid her upon the bed in the "best" bed-room, where the two women tenderly undressed her.

After a while the weary eyes unclosed, and Sep threw her white arms round aunt Martha's neck, sobbing hysterically on the breast that had pillowed the head of her dying mother.

"There, there—you'll be better now, dear," said aunt Martha, soothingly. "I'm always better myself after a good cry."

Then she motioned to her daughter to leave the room, which command that young lady reluctantly obeyed, thinking she should find little cause for weeping had she a rich husband and heaps of money.

"Shall we send for Major Ashton, my child?" asked aunt Martha.

"Oh, no, no, auntie! He has gone away, and I shall never see him again!" and Sep told her brief story.

"And all this evil has fallen upon you from helping and being true to me and mine!" said Mrs. Damer. "Child, can you ever forgive me? How could I have been so wrong, so selfish, as to ask you to keep a secret from your husband? But Dick was my first baby, and I loved him so."

Tears did not fall from the sad eyes; but there came into them just such a look as may be seen in the great dick or is of some hunted beast brought to bay.

"And he kissed me—and Roland thought—"

"Oh, aunt Martha, what shall I do?"

"We must pray for help, dear, and I think what is best to be done."

The worn-out girl fell asleep presently; and, while she slept, aunt Martha wrote two letters to Major Ashton, one addressed to Ashton's Manor, the other to his club in London, beseeching him to come to Beckley without delay. But to these tear-stained epistles no replies were sent.

Autumn deepened into winter; and all the tidings that reached the sad heart-broken young wife were contained in a short note from widow Penmaur, who forwarded Mrs. Ashton's boxes, and mentioned that the Nest was let again, and Major Ashton gone abroad—whither she could not tell—and, though Mrs. Damer wrote again to the good woman three several times, the widow chose to make no further communication.

Damer was unbounded in his devotion to his niece when he learned how Sep was suffering from her fidelity and loyalty to those who had been to her as father and mother. Mrs. 'Arry Fidler too was very gracious to her stricken cousin.

"I may have boys of my own some day," she was heard to observe; "and when it is all right again between Major and Mrs. Ashton—which it's sure to be—who can tell what he may do for them?"

Weeks grew into months. Sep became too weak to leave her room. Mr. Black, the young doctor, spoke of great prostration of strength. The April days floated tenderly in upon the land; soft clouds sailed across the sky, and the earth was sweet with the fragrance of blossoms struggling to greet the sun. Sep lay hour after hour very silent on the little blue couch which uncle Damer had bought on purpose for her, looking out over the change-ful sea, with a glass of golden daffodils at her side; and aunt Mart a grew more and more sad.

There succeeded a night to one of these balmy spring days when the west wind shrieked discordantly, thunder pealed, and the waves arose and did battle also. The grave quiet-eyed young