



(CONTINUED FROM NO. 75.)

About a week after my visit, Helen came in one day greatly excited.

"What do you think has happened, grandma?"

"Cook has gone," I answered.

"Why, yes. How did you know? Did Charlie mention it?"

"No; but I thought as much."

"Well, I must tell you how it occurred. Yesterday Charlie and I were invited out to tea, but at the last moment I had to let Charlie go alone, as I felt one of my bad headaches coming on. The door had scarcely closed behind him when a terrible hubbub was heard down stairs, and presently the sound of a wild Irish jig, played on a fiddle, was added to the noise. I telephoned to our friend's house and asked them to send Charlie home as soon as he arrived. In the meantime the uproar increased—chairs, tables and dishes seemed to be flying hither and thither. As soon as I heard Charlie's latch-key in the door I ran down stairs and met him in the hall. You should have seen his face when he heard the noise.

"What is it?" he asked, breathless with the haste he had made.

"Oh, it's that dreadful cook," I answered. "She has some people in who have been dancing and making a terrible noise ever since you left."

"He waited to hear no more, but went down stairs. I stayed at the hall door ready to call for assistance. As he opened the kitchen door a terrific crash was heard, which so frightened me that I opened the door and screamed out 'Fire!' 'Murder!' 'Thieves!' thinking that Charlie had been set upon, but I found him standing by the kitchen door laughing. Wonderingly I joined him, and oh! such a scene. The kitchen was in the wildest confusion—chairs, tables and dishes overturned. Black Tom, our cat, was perched on a shelf, with his eyes starting from his head and his tail erect. In the middle of the floor lay the cook, whom Norah and two wild-looking Irishmen were vainly endeavouring to raise. Cook talking all the time at the top of her voice.

"Shure, Pat, be aisy now, a nice partner ye be to let me fall like this."

"Arrah, Bridget, me darlint, shure it was the joy of seeing ye again that made me kind of light-headed."

"Just then the cook saw us and gave a scream, which made the others look round."

"Shure it's the master himself, and didn't I think that you and the Missus was out totay."

"So saying, she scrambled up. Charlie demanded who the men were, and what she meant by making such a noise. They in the meantime had quickly departed.

"It was just a little fun we were having with me two cousins, Pat and Tom," she answered.

"But I thought you said you knew nobody here," said Charlie.

"Shure neither I do. They just arrived from the old country yesterday."

"Charlie gave her notice to leave the next day. As we came upstairs we were met by a policeman, who had come in by the hall door, which I had left open."

"What do you want?" asked Charlie.

"Your neighbours telephoned to the station that somebody had better come up and look in here as there were queer goings on, judging from the noises they had heard."

"Charlie was dreadfully annoyed and said the whole thing would be in the papers, and then scolded me for taking a girl without recommendations. I can assure you, grandma, the next one will have to have good references."

Shortly after I left home to pay a long-promised visit. Several months passed, during which I heard only twice from Charlie. I wondered at this, as he was usually a good correspondent. I, therefore, decided to hasten my return, as I began to feel anxious about the two and their trial at housekeeping. I determined to say nothing about my arrival, but surprise them with a visit. As I set off the next afternoon of my return I could not but wonder how I should find things. I was shown into the drawing-room, which was so dark that the first thing I did was to stumble over a stool. My next achievement was to knock over a vase filled with artificial flowers, not that I could make out what it was till afterwards. Dear me, I thought, I do not remember all these things around the last time I was here. At last I reached a chair and sank gladly into it.

"Why, grandma, is it really you? When did you return?"

"If you will open the blinds so we may see one another I will tell you, and at the same time find out what damage I have done."

Great was my astonishment when she did so to see the change that had taken place in her pretty drawing-room. No wonder I had knocked over the things. There was scarcely room to walk because of the various articles scattered around. Helen laughed as she noticed my surprised look.

"The fact is, grandma, Mrs. Ross, a friend of mind, was always telling me of the great bargains she made at sales, so I thought I would go with her to see what I could do. Just look at all these lovely things, perfectly good and just about half price."

"Well, Helen," I said, as I looked at the heterogeneous collection, "from the appearance of things, I should say you had been at a good many sales with your friend, Mrs. Ross."

"Now confess, grandma, that you think my drawing-room looks much nicer than when you saw it last?"

"Candid opinion, Helen?"

"Yes, candid opinion."

"Then I think you have destroyed the prettiness of your room by crowding so much furniture into it. Besides, bargains or no bargains, you really did not require the things, and might have made other use of your money."

"Just what Charlie said; but, then, men never do understand these things, and seem to think women go to sales simply from the love of spending money. No matter how beautiful the article may be you bring home, ask them to guess what you have paid for it, and they are sure to say some ridiculously low sum, and when you tell them the price, they declare, in a most provoking way, that you have been 'taken in.' But come up stairs, I have more things to show you. Now look at this handsome wardrobe. You could not get it under \$75, and I paid a mere trifle for it. There were some other things I wanted, but Charlie refused to let me attend any more sales. Mrs. Ross said 'it was too bad,' just as I was getting into the way of buying."

"But, Helen, I thought Mr. Ross failed some time ago?"

"Oh, yes! In fact, I believe he has failed several times, but it doesn't seem to make any difference. I must tell you some of my experience at sales. At first it seemed strange to see so many women bidding, and the scant courtesy they showed to one another. I thought I would never be able to call out as they did. But you soon get accustomed to it, and you get so excited that you bid higher than perhaps you intended. However, that is only sometimes. We had quite a scene once. A lady had been bidding on a very handsome bedroom set, and when at last it was knocked down to her after a close contest, she went into hysterics and said she dare not take it for her husband would be so angry. The auctioneer, however, insisted upon her having it. But she begged so hard that he would help her out of her difficulty, that he consented to put the article up again, 'though,' said he, 'if it goes for less than it went before, you must make up the difference.' To this she agreed, and her purse was much the lighter for the transaction. When I told Charlie about it, he very unfeelingly said, 'It serves her right? The chair you are sitting on I got at a sale. Do you see anything remarkable about it?'"

"No," I answered. "It is a comfortable chair, but quite an ordinary one."

"And yet," continued Helen, "after I had bought it, a lady came up and begged me very hard to sell it to her. She not only came once, but four times. Of course it made me think all the more of the chair. Finally, she got angry and said she had a right to it, as she had sat on it the whole time thinking to secure it. But here comes Charlie, I will tell you more some other time, for he cannot bear the name of sales."

(To be continued.)

DESDEMONA DARE.

A SKETCH.

"I wonder the waters don't weary," said the girl. She and her companion, a tall, fair-haired man in flannels, had been watching the flow of the rapids in silence for the space of a moment or so, at least her gaze had been on the seething waters, while his eyes were feasting on the fresh beauty of her fair face. She was decidedly "petite," and so well proportioned as to appear even smaller than she was in reality; her hair that pale golden brown so seldom seen; it grew in quantities, too, and was braided into innumerable tight plaits closely coiled round her head.

"So much has been and gone since then, and it all ends in—dust."

She pointed with her long parasol to the date cut in the stone above the entrance of the old Fort, "1711."

To this charming little French village, Chambly, Desdemona Dare had been brought by her aunt, her mother's sister, a vigorous minded American, who, having no husband and children to bestow her energies upon, passed different periods of her life in following different hobbies. This was an Indian epoch, and so in this place, so full of historical reminiscences of her present favourite, Mrs. Smart had determined to spend some weeks of the summer. Desdemona had rebelled at first; she did not look forward with any hilarity to passing the gayest time of the seaside season in a paltry village amongst live Frenchmen and dead Indians! But when her aunt had won her way and metaphorically carried her off, and established themselves in the smallest of small white cottages on the lake shore, Desdemona had to own it was not at all what she had expected, it was—perfect!

She could not do anything but cry, "lovely! lovely!" when after disembarking from the train and walking a short distance down a narrow street, the lake burst upon her view in all its beauty.

It was a July evening, and the water was calm and clear as a mirror, while the air was full of the delicious sound of distant rushing waters—the Richelieu surges!—the dark blue mountains in the background break what would otherwise be a level, low country; a row of tall dark pine trees at the point where the lake once more becomes the Richelieu river, stand like a line of soldiers, sentinels over Belœil! So Desdemona in that first moment thought. Her aunt was standing in evident admiration before a bronze, life-sized statue of Colonel de Salaberry, 'the hero of Chateauguay,' which occupied the centre of a very diminutive and newly-made park.

"Such a brave man, my dear! such a brave man!" putting on her gold-rimmed spectacles the better to view him.

"Can't you imagine, Desdemona, how, on a holiday, the people flock here to do homage to the image of one who did so much for them and their country, and such a handsome man, too."

"The grass does not give evidence of any homage; it is quite undisturbed; and I—if I came here, it would be to gather daisies."

As Desdemona spoke, she stooped and broke off some of the slender-stalked, yellow-edged things, and slipped them through her belt.

"You have no soul, Desdemona, no soul."

"Soul is merely cultivation, Aunty; consider me an Indian and admire me in my uncultured state."

Miss Stuart smiled grimly. She was very fond of her niece. Desdemona always gave her a keen sense of her own superiority; some women can only care for those whom they consider their inferiors in mind. While her aunt hunted about for historical facts, finding, in truth, only one man who knew anything of the interesting past, and he knew so much as to give even Miss Stuart a turn of mental asphyxia, Desdemona enjoyed herself in a very different way. The interior of the Fort held no fascination for her, she said; nothing remained but the walls; these had been recently repaired, as the inscription at the entrance testified. There was in the interior a miscellaneous collection of curiosities, Indian and otherwise; over these Miss Stuart posed with unfeigned delight, while Desdemona would betake herself to the water's edge and sit on one of the lowest stones and dream the sweet dreams of girlhood.

One morning these dreamings were interrupted: a young man in white flannels stepped down over the stones to her side, hat in hand, and addressed her.

"I have just left your aunt, Miss Stuart; she gave me permission to present myself to you; I suppose I should have waited for a formal opportunity, but I don't believe in ever losing time."

Desdemona smiled brightly up at him; his hat was still in his hand, and the sun shone on his golden hair and made it a glory; she noticed him in a vague sort of way, and that his eyes were dark blue and merry, but what struck her forcibly was the expression about his mouth.

"I can't make it out," she thought to herself, "but I don't like it." Then she spoke:

"I assure you Aunty is generally very strict; you must not judge her by this concession; probably, you must not mind, but probably she wanted to get rid of you, so sent you on to me."

"And I suppose you want to get rid of me and will send me on too; but if I go further it will be to the fishes."

"You may be some Triton, for all I know."

"I may stay?"

"Oh! yes; I am glad you came just when the atmosphere of ages was pressing upon me, and I was beginning to believe him! Everything! even I! mere unreality! it is rather a pleasant sensation when one can master it, but when it masters you—"

She paused and shivered.

"Anyhow, I am real."

He slipped down on to the stone beside her, and in doing so his hand came in contact with hers; a sense of delirious joy shot through her being; she had never felt so before and it had silenced her.