

Mrs. Morrison read it, and was astonished at the kindling words, the love-fraught sentences; there was no coarseness, not even gross flattery; but it was such a letter as the loveliest woman might have been proud to inspire. Intended as an accompaniment to the myrtle were the following lines:

Sweet be thy slumber, lady, and thy dream
Of pleasant images the picturing!
Moving within thy spirit thoughts that seem
Lovely as visions, leaving not that sting
Which 'mid our gayest waking moments, still
The soul with sad and bitter grief must fill.

And, lady, it is said that should'st thou lay
Beneath thy ringlets, this sweet verdant flower,
Visions of tenderer cast will o'er thee play,
Making the longest night seem scarce an hour;
Oh! then, if thoughts of love should dare to spring
And move thy young heart in its wandering—

Then, lady, in thy fancy's visions fair
When clust'ring hopes, and fairy fabrics rise
And pleasant things—thy friend perchance may share,
And win in dreams, at least, the long sought prize.
Then take my gift, Love's favorite flower—
I've traced these lines to wile a lingering hour.

And who were they addressed to? Why, a poor mulatto girl; surely some mischievous Puck must have been squeezing

"The juice, which on sleeping eyelids laid,
Will make man or woman madly doat
Upon the next live creature that it sees,"

on the writer of this epistle, and some mysterious chance must have cast his waking eyes upon the humble girl who seemed the object of such deep devotion. It was the embodiment, only reversed, of the time-honoured story of Desdemona and Othello.

As Mrs. Morrison finished reading the letter, Marah clapped her hands in an excitement of pleasure she could not control, and burst forth into a merry ringing laugh. "To think of me, poor Marah, having such a letter from a white gentleman."

"Then, Marah," said Mrs. Morrison, firmly but gently, "you know who writes these letters, and sends those flowers to you, and if so why are you not willing to tell me? I am your true friend, and should advise you only for your good."

"I should like to tell you very much, Madam, for I am very proud of it; but I have promised not to, at least yet awhile. I must wait till—I get permission."

"Then, Marah, let it be soon, for if it is not explained to my satisfaction, I shall think it my duty to send you back to Philadelphia immediately. I will not take the responsibility of your course upon myself—you shall go home to your parents, and then this person, whoever he is,

may follow you, and obtain their sanction, if he really wishes to marry you."

"Oh! don't do that, don't think of it!" said Marah. "I will do right, and you will not be angry with me when you know all."

"Go away now, silly girl, and don't let this turn your head."

Marah disappeared, leaving Mrs. Morrison to ponder upon this new development; she had closely observed the signature to the note, but could make nothing of the one initial, a peculiar H. Her husband's step roused her from a reverie; she looked up as he entered, and his light playful smile assured her, he was full of something that amused him mightily.

"More wonders, Annie," said he; "our little Marah is growing quite a *belle*,—what do you think of it? Ha! ha! ha! A bronze *belle*, sure enough! Francisco came to me to-day to ask permission to pay his addresses, as he termed it, to her; he said she was a nice tidy girl; he had always liked her, and he should rather have her for a wife than any of the wild creoles,—so if we were willing, he would try and win her; no difficult task he fancied."

No wonder Mrs. Morrison held up both her little hands, and laughed out, right merrily, for Francisco was Mr. Morrison's head clerk; he had been educated in France, could speak several languages; he was a Quadroon, but was most gentlemanly and refined in manners and appearance, and Mrs. Morrison had felt so much interested in him that, in her own mind, though she had never dared to whisper it even to her husband, she had thought of sending for her own pretty sister Grace, to pass the winter with her, in the hope that a mutual attachment might spring up between them; and now she held her hands to her ears, she rubbed her eyes, stretched them to their utmost width, and then after having assured herself that her senses were all in their usual condition, she said:

"Are you telling me true? Oh no, I do believe you are quizzing me. What can there be in Marah to fascinate any one so?—the simple child has no attractions."

"No, Annie, I am quite serious; Francisco is really in earnest; it seems like throwing himself away, but we have no right to oppose it. I have told him she was uneducated; though good, she had none of the refinement or delicacy which his wife should have; by and bye he will take rank with the first of our merchants; but he would return me no answer, only that he loved, and wished to marry her."

"Then he sent her these flowers and the letter