

WHAT THE VIOLINS SAID.

"We're all for love," the violins said.—*Sidney Lanier*

Do I love you? Do I love you?
Ask the heavens that bend above you
To find a language and to prove you
If they love the living sun.
Ask the burning blinding meadows
What they think about the shadows,
If they love the falling shadows,
When the fervid day is done.

Ask the bluebells and the daisies,
Lost amid the hot field mazes,
Lifting up their thirsty faces,
If they love the summer rains.
Ask the linnets and the plovers,
In the nest-life made for lovers,
Ask the bees and ask the clovers—
Will they tell you for your pains!

Do I, darling, do I love you?
What, I pray, can that behoove you?
How in Love's name can I move you?
When for Love's sake I am dumb!
If I told you, if I told you,
Would that keep you, would that hold you
Here at last where I enfold you?
If it would—Hush! Darling, come!
—ELIZABETH STUART PHELPS.

ZARA'S LOVER.

A TALE OF HALLOWEEN.

It was winter time. Zara and I were staying with an aunt of our deceased father, who for the first time since his death, five years before, had made cordial advances to our mother, and invited us for two or three months to her pleasant so-called country house.

She was very charming, yet peculiar, that dear old aunt; and when we arrived at the Dower House her reception would have made it impossible to say what her impression of us girls of eighteen and twenty might be.

Zara was very beautiful. There was never any question as to her loveliness, even if it might not be the peculiar style of the observer.

And Mrs. Forbes looked at her with an expression of unfeigned pleasure in her glowing charms.

But when she turned to me, she took my face, as it were, in her hands, gazed steadfastly at my features for some moments, and then stooped down and again kissed me.

"You are strangely like your father, Beatrix," she said. "Pity you are not a boy."

And, with this lament, I was dismissed.

We had been there nearly a month, and were to stay over Christmas.

The house was full of visitors, some of whom were changing from time to time; but two or three were remaining in the house for an unusually prolonged visit.

One was a nephew of Mrs. Forbes's late husband, Cuthwin Stewart; the others were less entitled to the hospitality of their hostess. Leon St. Barbe, a French Count, reared in Italy and England, had brought letters of introduction from the former sunny land, and completed them by his own charm of manner and person.

The third was an embryo barrister, Fergus Brooke, a college friend of Cuthwin's, and too witty, and reckless, and good-humoured to do any useful thing on earth except making himself agreeable, and saving at least a dozen people from the blues in the gloomiest day of dark November.

Such was our party. Of course, Zara was the belle, and the Count soon became her scarcely concealed admirer.

And I—well, every one was good, and kind, and attentive to me; and if I would have liked anyone to be more demonstrative in that respect, it was Cuthwin Stewart.

But then he was always rather grave and self-possessed; and of course I had no especial attraction for such a clever and thoughtful man as Mrs. Forbes's heir.

And so we went on dancing, billiard playing, singing, walking, riding, and charade acting till Halloween was at hand. Of course there were all kinds of sportive plans for its due honouring.

And Mrs. Forbes had enough of the Scottish blood in her to enter into the jesting talk.

"I am but an 'old wife,'" she said, smilingly, as we sat round the fire before dressing for the late dinner on that day; "but I confess I did, and I do, believe in some of the legendary tests on this mystic night. And were I a man, I believe I should be more won by a girl who displayed a little youthful folly and credulity, to say nothing of a brave spirit, in a harmless sport like the mummings of old time, than the conventional young lady of modern days."

Zara lifted up her beautiful eyes in silent astonishment at the proposition, and the other girls laughed gaily.

"Really, Auntie Jessie," I exclaimed, "you are a most delightful adviser to hold such doctrines! I expect you were a fearless damsel enough in your youth—a most daring leader of the revels."

"Well, Beatrix, you may perhaps be right," said the old lady, with an amused, conscious smile. "But I do believe there was a great deal more fun and less flirting than there is now-a-days," she went on. "Girls are more occupied now in catching husbands than testing lovers. But I suppose we old folk always talk in that way when we remember our youth, and so will you girls when you are grandmothers. However, you have my sanction to any of the harmless follies of the season, always supposing they are consistent with the modesty of well-born maidens."

The dressing bell rang at the moment, and I and Zara, and the two other girls staying at the

house, went off to our rooms in haste, for Mrs. Forbes was a model of punctuality in her arrangements.

"Really," said Zara when we were alone, "I am astonished at Aunt Jessie talking such vulgar nonsense. I am sure Leon would be shocked at the very idea of such dairy-maids' follies."

"Leon!" I repeated in some surprise. "Then it is so, Zara. The Count is your open lover!"

Zara blushed most beautifully.

How lovely she looked in her confusion, her silky hair half veiling the crimson cheeks!

"Well, I perhaps ought not to say that before he has spoken to mamma," she said, hesitatingly. "And you will not say anything, I hope, Beatrix, or I shall be very much annoyed. But Leon spoke to me two or three days ago, and, of course, I accepted him; and he is so noble and handsome, I think I am very lucky girl—do you not, Beatrix?"

"Does he know you have any fortune, Zara?" I asked suddenly.

I scarcely know what possessed me to put such a question. It was almost as if an impulse out of myself urged me.

"Really, Beatrix, you are flattering, I must say!" she replied angrily. "I suppose you are jealous that he chose me from the rest; but of one thing I am certain—that Cuthwin Stewart has no thought of love; and whenever he chooses a girl, it will be just for convenience and propriety. Your five thousand will not tempt him, I'm certain!" she added rather spitefully.

I did not reply; though the shaft was not altogether pointless, I scarcely believed in its truth.

Cuthwin might not care for me. Why should he? But that he had deep feelings, and a generous heart, I knew full well, and an intellect that few men could boast. But as to Leon de St. Barbe, that was a far more vexed problem.

I distrusted and disliked him; not because he was so exclusively devoted to Zara; that would have been a most unworthy jealousy, of which I certainly had no symptoms.

But I shrank from this foreign Count as from a snake; and now Zara was in his toils, I was powerless to save her, even had I been free to act.

If I spoke to our aunt, or wrote to our mother, then all would be over. Zara would never forgive me. I believed it might, after all, be an idle fancy of my own, that would cover me with shame and disgrace were it to prove false and unfounded.

These reflections kept me silent and thoughtful during our dinner toilette; and, perhaps, Zara thought me unkind to remain so taciturn; but, before we left the room, I gave her a pretty kiss of reconciliation, and we descended in perfect amity, though my mind was heavy and sad even yet.

"Are you well?" said Cuthwin's deep, low voice, once when dinner was nearly over, and the rest engaged in eager chat.

"Oh, yes, quite," I said, crimsoning. "Why should you doubt it?"

"Because your sunny gaiety is clouded, and I know you are never capricious," he said quietly.

It was almost the first compliment he had paid me, and it made my foolish heart beat.

"Thank you," I said, "for such a trust. I am a little anxious, I believe. I have not heard from mamma for some days, and she is such an invalid."

"Your sister looks perfectly content," he remarked, glancing at Zara, who was the very picture of radiant triumph as she sat by her lover.

"Perhaps," I said, jestingly, "we have changed characters on this mystic night. I will try and regain mine to-morrow."

And, in a few minutes more, Aunt Jessie rose, and we all sailed off to the drawing-room, except Mrs. Forbes, who always took an half an hour's rest in her private sitting-room during the gentlemen's absence.

"Now, what shall we do, girls?" exclaimed Flora McIntyre, gaily. "Suppose some of us go out to sow hemp-seed in the churchyard? It is close to the grounds, you know; and, if there were any danger, the gardener would hear one scream. Yes; that's settled, and we'll draw lots to see who shall go first."

"I decline altogether!" said Zara, coldly; and then went off to a distant piano, and began to sing.

"Then it must be we three," observed Flora. "Come, Beatrix, Blanche, we'll soon settle the business. There, make haste, before the gentlemen come in."

The lot fell on me.

I certainly felt a very ignominious panic come over me at the coming ordeal. But then Aunt Jessie's words, and the idea that she should, perhaps, think me not altogether degenerate if I did not confess it to myself; but I believe now that the concealed love I was learning to feel for Cuthwin Stewart had something to do with my enforced bravery as head of the party.

"Then, when you come back, Beatrix, we'll follow the example!" said Flora, gaily. "Blanche shall go next, and I'll bring up the rear. As to Zara, I suppose she's too certain of her future to care for such follies! Dear me, how stupid one is when one's in love!" she went on in her girlish joyousness, clapping her hands as Zara ceased the song.

The evening soon flew away. The ladies retired as usual, and when the "witching hour" came I, wrapped in a warm, thick, plaid cloak, and a hat tightly tied over my head, stole out of the morning-room French window, which was still

unfastened, and which was at the end of the house nearest to the shrubbery, that led to the small church, which had once been a sort of private chapel to the Dower House, and which was now enlarged for the villager's accommodation.

I was, perhaps, less frightened than I expected. The night was clear and beautiful, and if the moon was not full, it gave, at least, quite enough light to prevent any alarm as to finding the way, or being seized unexpectedly by any unlawful hands.

And, besides, what danger could there be in that quiet country place, and near the abode of the lady of the manor, for many a mile around? I was light of foot, and certainly not hampered with any terrors for the moment.

And I hastened on in the direction of the church-yard with the fleetness of a gazelle, waiting till the orthodox moment for the old formula of

"Hemp-seed, I sow thee!" &c.

till I reached the magic churchyard.

The spot was gained.

I was just drawing a long breath, to prepare for the incantation, when a voice came on my ear.

A voice I knew, and which had never brought pleasant visions to my senses.

What was Leon de St. Barbe doing there? He was supposed to be with his friends in the smoking-room at the Dower House, or else safely in his bed.

And to whom could he be talking at that hour? What friend or acquaintance could he possibly be encountering on a November midnight in that miserable solitude?

I crouched beneath the hedge, over which some few trees grew, and strained my ears to listen.

It was the Count who spoke first.

"Well, Nat, what is it you require? It's an immensely inconvenient thing of you to be always so in want of cash. Can't you wait till my plans are matured, and I'm ready to arrange and settle with you?"

"Hum! that's all very well, Count, as you call yourself," returned a rough voice—far gruffer than any that had ever before reached my ears—"but then, you see, it may be moonshine, and where am I then? You wrote me a fine sheet of promises, but I would rather have the money than all that rigmorole of talk!"

"You're an unreasonable fellow!" replied the Count, with a forced laugh; "but since it's your pleasure, I suppose I must take you into my confidence. You see, there's an uncommon pretty girl stopping in the house yonder. She's got a few hard thousands—more when the mother dies—and she would fly to me if I held up my finger! All's smooth as oil—except a little vixen of a sister, who, I can see, suspects me. If I could get her out of the way, Zara would be mine in a trice!"

"Humph! And the old lady—what of her? Ain't she got something worth having?" asked the other. "She little knows who she's got in her house as a visitor!" he chuckled. "The Count! yes, it's a sounding title; but among our pals, you see, it rather puts you at a discount, because you're only fit for one kind of business. But to the point. What's portable at the widow's, eh?—plate, jewels handy? If you want me to stand by you, I shall expect something from the treasure-house. Why, by this time you ought to know all the secrets, and manage to get a fellow in without being caught. Will to-night serve for our purpose, do you think, Count?"

"Leon," as he must be called for distinction, seemed to hesitate.

"Suppose it should be found out?—it would spoil all," he observed, doubtfully.

"Pooh, pooh!—you're not so clumsy, old pal. Why, if you have a grain of wit left, you'll manage it all. Such a night as this, what's more natural than that some stray laddie should be inclined for a lark—or, maybe, a taste of the old lady's ale—or her silver tankard—or massive salvers? You understand? Come, no time like the present. Pluck up heart, and let's be off."

Leon held him back.

I could half see, half hear what took place from my hiding-place. I felt certain he was striving to restrain him from the desperate deed.

"Nat, I tell you what—the thing is impossible! How can I know what may come of it? Violence and death, if it's found out. And I tell you, that lynx-eyed little Beatrix has a strange, sharp brain. I'd like to give her a dose of something that would stop her tongue. I can tell you she gives me some hard hits now and then, with her sharp wit."

Nat, as he called him, laughed scornfully.

"So you've come to be afraid of a girl, have you?" he sneered; "but, anyhow, I'm not so easily cowed; and we'll see which is the stronger, if needs be. Where does she sleep?"

"Oh, with her sister—at least close by. There's no chance in that quarter," observed the Count. "Hush! I thought I heard a sound!" he added, suddenly stopping his words to listen.

I suppose he had heard the involuntary shudder that seized me on his wretched threat.

I knew that he would at once institute a search, and that nothing remained but to seek safety in flight.

I moved stealthily, slowly at first, till I had cleared the thicket where I was hidden.

Then I began to move more rapidly, especially when I caught the dreadful words, "Stop!—by Jove, I'll kill you if you don't! It's a woman; and she's been listening, I do believe! She shall pay dear for it!"

It was a race between life and death. I flew

on like the wind; but there was, as it were, a weight gradually increasing on my limbs. A mist came over my eyes. I could scarcely see the path before me. The buzzing sounds of steps seemed to deafen my ears. I fancied the house was further and further as I went on.

Could I muster strength to reach it? Should I fall a victim on the road, and never see a loved face more? "Oh, mercy, mercy!" I gasped.

"Mother! Zara! help!"

Perhaps the very thought gave me new strength. I was within reach of the light that still burned in the butler's pantry and the morning-room. A scream could have been heard. But my tongue seemed to cleave to my mouth. I made one desperate bound. I reached the butler's pantry window. I called at last wildly, for "Help! help!"

And Blanche and Zara, who had been waiting anxiously for my return, flew from the room along the terrace to the spot, even before Tomline came up, gun in hand, a weapon he always kept to guard the valuables under his charge.

I rushed into the open door, almost before the man appeared, and seized his arm as if I was pleading for life. "Keep guard!—keep guard! There are thieves coming! Call the men! Help! help!" And without waiting for a reply, with a strange, fevered frenzy, I rushed through the passages, up the staircases, to my aunt's room, waving back the terrified girls, who fancied I had suddenly lost my senses. "Aunt—aunt!" I gasped; "it is I—Beatrix! Listen!"

I never knew more.

But I was told afterwards that I poured out an incoherent tale of what I had heard and implored Mrs. Forbes to guard Zara from her terrible lover, with an agony that she could not soothe by any assurance of hers.

Then I faltered, staggered, and sank on the floor, in utter insensibility and exhaustion. I have been told since that the alarm I gave was scrupulously obeyed; and that Tomline and his underlings remained on guard the whole night, while the truth of my statement was confirmed by the non-appearance of the Count for the remainder of the night.

But Mrs. Forbes and her other young guests were too much occupied with my state, to concern themselves much about affairs that were better left to Cuthwin Stewart.

I was rapidly drifting into a brain fever, and, a day or so afterwards, my mother was summoned by the following letter from Aunt Jessie:—

"Dower House, December 3.

"MY DEAR MRS. ST. CLAIRE,—

"I regret to tell you that your youngest daughter, whose grace and gaiety have won all hearts here, is seriously ill. She has had a shock, that will no doubt affect her for some little time, but her youth and strength will carry her through; and I have every reason to think that the suffering she endures, poor dear! will save your family from a great and irrecoverable grief. We shall hope to have you here as soon as possible, and my nephew, Cuthwin Stewart, will be at your house within a very few hours after your receipt of this, to escort you to us.

"Yours affectionately,

"JESSIE FORBES."

My mother told me afterwards that nothing could equal Cuthwin's kindness to her during that anxious journey.

"She is an angel, Mrs. St. Clair!" he said quietly.

And my mother coolly let the exaggeration pass by, unnoticed and unreprieved.

It was at least a fortnight before I rallied sufficiently to know who it was that sat by my sick-bed.

But when I did at last open my eyes as it were from that hideous dream, the dear, gentle face of my fond mother was before me, bending over my pillow in anxious love and alarm.

"My own brave child," she said, "how can I ever be sufficiently thankful for your recovery?"

"But Zara, mamma—Zara!" I gasped, as a sudden terror seized on me.

"Dear child, she is saved, thanks to your noble courage," was the hesitating reply. "But it was a severe trial to her, and she cannot yet see full extent of her deliverance."

"But it was true it was—he?" I faltered, thinking, perhaps, that I had been hasty, and brought a needless sorrow on my beautiful sister.

"Yes, Beatrix, yes. The man who stole into my house and into your sister's love was an accomplished swindler," interposed Mrs. Forbes, appearing from behind the curtains of the bed. "He had carried on the system so long as to deceive even men of the world and an old woman like myself; and it is owing to your pure, fresh young nature's recoil, and the bravery of your true heart, that he failed in his design, and has fled the country in well-merited terror and shame."

"Thank Heaven for that!" I murmured, as the vague alarm of courts of justice and public scandal was hushed at the words.

And then I was ordered to lie still, and not speak.

It was pleasant to yield to that gentle tyranny, and to taste the exquisite repose of being at rest and free from pain, while tended by those who loved me, and whom I loved best.

It was well worth all I had suffered; but, in spite of the good nursing and the peaceful repose, I still progressed but slowly towards convalescence.

My vivacity of heart seemed gone for ever. I was quiet, subdued—the very reverse of my gay, light spirit of former days.