

The Good Time Coming.

There's a good time coming, When men shall ever try To do unto their fellow-men As they would be done by;

There's a good time coming— Let us haste the glorious day— When the world, from sleep awaking, Shall cast error's chains away;

There's a good time coming, And the time is drawing near, When the night of wrong and error From the world shall disappear.

Let each friend of truth and justice With courage labor on, For the shades of night are fleeting Before the coming morn.

SELECT STORY.

The Sceptic in Love.

Chapter I.

At length, thank Fortune, we are alone, Josephine.

And why do you thank Fortune for that, Mr. Smith?

Because it gives me the opportunity that I have long coveted, and yet hesitated to embrace—the opportunity of declaring—that is, of—

Of what, sir? Pray speak out. You know how fond I am of candor.

In one word, then, Josephine, I—I love you!

And is that all? How provoking! I presumed you had something interesting to say—something piquant—something new.

Ah! you are jesting, Josephine. I pray you be serious.

Then you must change the subject; for it is one that will not admit of gravity.

The season is hastening to its close. Josephine, summer is near; and I must soon rejoin my family in the North. I may not have, before my departure, another opportunity of speaking to you. In friendship's name, if by no tenderer appeal, I beseech you to give me a moment's earnest attention.

Will, sir, proceed.

That coldness is assumed—I see it is. Ah, Josephine, your heart can surely distinguish the tones of true affection. It is not the gallantry of the ball room that I proffer you now, but the homage of my fervent, my unspeakable love, Vouchsafe to me the hope that I may love you hereafter—not merely as the most beautiful of your sex, but as a wife. And with these words Mr. Smith knelt at the lady's feet; but she, with a disdainful gesture, rose, and exclaimed, What and how, sir, have I given you authority, by my conduct, to address language of this import to me.

When and how, Josephine? returned the young man, rising, and riveting a gaze of intense earnestness upon her, as if doubting whether or not she was making sport of him by the inquiry. Is not the report of our engagement current in all the circles wherein you visit? At every ball during the season have I not neglected all others, present to bestow upon you my undivided attentions? And have not those attentions been received, ay, not only been received, but encouraged? Have I not a thousand times protested, more eloquently than words could do it, by looks and actions, that I was deeply, passionately enamored? And have you not suffered me to repeat, again and again, those protestations, without intimating, either to the world or to myself, that they were unacceptable! Ah! Josephine, do not trifle with a heart over which you have such absolute sway. Let your lips tell me what your eyes have so often affirmed—tell me that mine is not a hopeless passion.

Josephine moved with the step of a tragedy queen towards the door; and placing her hand upon the knob, turned and said, When Mr. Smith has cured himself of the folly which has led him to the declaration he has done me the honor to make, I shall be happy to receive him once more as a friend. And Josephine quitted the room.

It was true, as Smith had asserted, that she had given him abundant encouragement to make the offer into which we have seen him betrayed. Josephine de Valville was the only daughter of one of the wealthiest planters in Louisiana. Few observers were so candid as not to admit that she was peculiarly beautiful. In stature she was somewhat "petite," but the symmetry of her figure was such, that nothing seemed wanting to its perfection. Her

features were just the features to catch the gazer's attention, even among a crowd of beautiful women. Her eyes were of a dark rich slate color, 'riante,' sparkling, and animated in their expression; her mouth as delicately curved and tinted as the daintiest sea-shell; her exquisitely moulded forehead, over which fell curls so fine and thick, that they felt like down to the touch—imparted a combination of traits to her countenance which extorted ejaculations of admiration from the most obtuse judges of the beautiful.

Josephine was in the habit of passing her winters in New Orleans. Deprived of her mother while yet an infant, she had entered society at an age when many young ladies have hardly left the nursery. The consequence was, that long before her heart could learn to distinguish between real and fictitious affection—between the common-places of flattery and the utterance of true feeling—she had become so accustomed to the adulation of ball-room dandlers and men of the world, that what an unsophisticated girl would regard as a formal offer on the part of an admirer, Josephine would laugh at as the rodomontade of a half-jesting spirit. Often, when a mere child, with pantalettes and braided hair, her father's friend would make love to the little lady in sport, until Josephine came to look on love, which is a very serious matter to some people, a joke rather the worse for wear. Ah! her heart had never been touched.

But who is Smith? asks the reader. All that I know of Smith is, that he came to New Orleans from one of the great northern cities as the agent of a mercantile house. Combining with the vocation of the man of business the habits, tastes, and appearance of the gentleman, he easily found access to the choicest of society. It was at her father's own house that he first met Josephine; and thenceforth he embraced all opportunities (and they were numerous) of enlarging the acquaintance. There were few young men who could more fluently discourse on topics grateful to a lady's ear; and Josephine encouraged his attentions, without troubling herself to inquire into his motives. But what was amusement to her was death to her victim. He was all the time adding fuel to the flame he had kindled; but Josephine's heart was as innocent of love as an iceberg is of vegetation.

After the interview of which the reader has already been informed, Smith resolved to seek a final understanding. He made an early morning call, expecting to find her alone; but one Mr. Fitzfool, an opulent dangler, was present in the drawing-room; and Josephine was apparently listening to a pleased attention to his innocent babble about the newest flirtations, the latest ball, and the merits of the waltzers. She bowed carelessly to Smith as he entered, and addressed to him a commonplace observation of ordinary courtesy, and then resumed her conversation with Fitzfool, who had raised his eye-glass upon the entrance of the intruder. Smith took up a French copy of Pistolet, and tried to read it; but his brain was in a whirl, and his thoughts were all with Josephine. Every time she laughed the sound chilled his heart, as if an ice-cold hand had been placed upon it. Is it not appalling, he murmured to himself, the extent to which I love this woman? And as the interrogation passed through his mind another laugh from her was the response.

At length Fitzfool took his leave. Smith threw down the book he had been holding, and drew near to Josephine, and looked her in the face. Josephine, he said, may I ask it of your friendship to answer me one question with the most perfect frankness and sincerity?

Do not doubt, Mr. Smith, was the reply, that if I give you any answer, it will be a true and candid one. If you knew how much rested upon your answer, Josephine, I am sure it would be an honest one. Do not suppose that I am uttering the rant of an ordinary lover. As heaven is above us, I speak no idle or unmeaning words. This is the most critical moment of my life. Nay, my life hangs upon it. Really, Mr. Smith, I am growing quite curious. Pray, what is your question?

Do you, Josephine, positively forbid my entreating even the distant hope of ever winning your consent to be my wife?

Yes, Mr. Smith, most positively, most conclusively, most irrevocably. Be guarded, I beseech you, Josephine, in your language, and understand well the spirit of my inquiry. I do not ask if you love me now; but I would know—with all respect, believe me—whether your indifference springs from perfect freedom and vacuity of heart, or whether you prefer any other suitor to myself?

Now, thought Josephine, by an innocent fib I can put a stop to his plaguing me in this way. She paused; and then hanging her head, as if half-ashamed of the falsehood, she replied, Mr. Smith, pray regard the confession as confidential—yes, I do prefer another.

Smith seemed confounded for some moments, as if he had received a stunning blow. He looked in her face without speaking, then turned, took up his hat from the floor, where he had dropped it; and, with one mighty effort stifling his emotion, said, in firm tones, do not fear, Miss de Valville, that I shall ever again molest you upon this subject. Forget my presumption in mistaking what was mere friendly partiality on your part for an indication of your heart's preference. I am amply punished for my folly. Farewell.

You will be at Mrs. Dazzie's ball to-morrow night, of course? said Josephine, carelessly.

It is a question whether I shall have it in my power, replied Smith, with a strange smile. Good morning!

The ball took place next night, and all the fashion of New Orleans was assembled on the occasion. Josephine was present; and never had she seemed in such exulting spirits, or looked more radiantly beautiful. During a pause between one of the dances, while the musicians were re-tuning their instruments, she saw a knot of young men collect about one of their number, who had apparently been communicating the news of some occurrence which created a profound sensation. Josephine's curiosity was excited, and she determined to find out what was the matter. Backing one of the group to her side, she asked, what is it, Mr. B.—? I am dying to know.

You will know it in the morning, replied Mr. B.—. It is not appropriate news for a ball-room.

Leave me to be the judge of that. Come, tell me; and, by way of reward, you will dance the next waltz with me.

Since you insist, this is it, replied the youth thus importuned. Your friend Smith was found shot through the heart, this evening, in the public street. He undoubtedly committed suicide.

Josephine turned pale, and seemed to shudder for a moment; and then the exclamations from her lips flowed in this wise:—How very shocking! What a foolish fellow! I really think he did it out of spite. Well, he has spoiled our amusement for the rest of the evening. Of course, you don't expect me to waltz with you now, Mr. B.—.

I do not desire to waltz with you ever again, Miss de Valville, said B.—, turning on his heels; for he had heart enough to feel chilled and repelled by the cold-blooded indifference with which she had received the news of the death of one whom her own frigidity had driven to despair.

But Josephine was not passionless. The master-spirit of her destiny had not yet crossed her path, that was all.

Chapter II.

The calamitous circumstances of poor Smith's death were soon forgotten in the fashionable world, to which they had communicated a momentary shock. Two years rolled away; and the season of 184—commenced in all its gaiety and glory. Josephine had now reached the plenitude of her fascinations and power as a belle. She was more beautiful than ever; and, apparently, more indomitable. Of the many suitors that sighed at her feet it was evident that she cared just about as much for one as the other.

The dancing at one of Mrs. R.—'s brilliant assemblages was beginning to flag. Josephine, wearied and oppressed by a slight headache, had retired to one of the embrasures of the windows and seated herself upon an ottoman. Two or three new-fledged dandies were bending over her, making tender inquiries after her health, and striving to engage her attention; while she, with a sort of forward indifference, was motioning them away, when suddenly some object in the adjoining room appeared to engage her attention.

Tell me, Flutterwell, who is that gentleman, who seems but to have just arrived, in which our lossess greets him? asked Josephine.

Flutterwell detached his quizzing-glass from his white vest, rubbed it with his handkerchief; and deliberately adjusting it to his eyes, after a pause, replied, never saw him before in my born days—'pos my word can't inform you—but if you have any particular object in knowing, I'll inquire, shall I?

Do just as you please, said Josephine, impatiently.

Now, really, Miss de Valville—'pon my word—you cut me to the heart when you—aw—look at me in that killing—may I say killing?—manner. But just to show you how much I am your slave, I'll go and make inquiries into the biography of the individual who seems to have attracted your notice, happy dog! And so saying, Mr. Flutterwell walked out of the room as if he were picking his way over egg-shells, which he was reluctant to break. In five minutes he returned. But, in the meantime, the object of his inquiries had entered the room where Josephine was seated. She seemed to be regarding him with an earnestness of admiration which drew upon her the remarks of several of her own sex; but on seeing Flutterwell returning, she withdrew her glasse, and

seemed to relapse into her former mood of indifference.

He is unmarried, to begin with, said Flutterwell. His name is Smith—he is from the North—and a lieutenant in the army—served with renown in the Florida war—was accounted the bravest man in the ranks—escaped from a fight with half-a-dozen Indians, in which he killed them all with his own hand—in short, he comes here on some Government mission, to inquire into the state of our frontier fortifications. There! I've told you the best I know of the man; and now I'll tell you the worst. He is a Yankee—he doesn't play billiards—he is shy of the ladies—he reads books—and what is most disgusting of all, he doesn't know how to waltz.

Josephine rose; and, taking Flutterwell's arm, sauntered into the adjoining apartment. The lieutenant had preceded her there.

At the dozen balls which succeeded Mrs. R.—'s in rapid succession Josephine invariably met the lieutenant. He seemed to have made the acquaintance of all the principal ladies in society, but as yet had not sought an introduction to her, who had fondly regarded herself as deserving to be the paramount object of attraction. She was piqued and mortified at his apparent indifference; and when finally he made her acquaintance, it seemed more the result of accident than of inclination on his part. They met at the house of a mutual friend during a morning call; and without consulting either party, the lady of the house introduced the lieutenant. Another ball took place that night; and he could not do less than ask the honour of Josephine's hand in the dance.

We will not describe in detail the progress of that acquaintance, which was destined to have so powerful a bearing upon the happiness of our heroine. We need only remark, that the lieutenant was always respectful, though cold; and, that in proportion to his frigidity, the enamoured Josephine appeared to betray more and more the depth and fervour of an attachment which began now to be a matter of public observation and comment. It is said that love cannot exist without hope. Josephine proved that there could be an exception to the rule. A word of common-place courtesy, a distant bow, or an icy melancholy smile from the lieutenant, were enough to feed the fatal passion, on which she now brooded with an intensity of which no one had believed her nature capable. She lost all taste for society and amusement, except so far as it might afford her the means of being in the society of the man for whom she was ready to make any sacrifice.

The spring was drawing near; and the lieutenant, having brought to a satisfactory conclusion the public business on which he had been engaged, was making preparations to leave New Orleans, to join his friends in the North. A letter, announcing the illness of a favourite sister, suddenly determined him to quit the city the next morning. Ordering his attendant at the hotel to see that all his trunks were packed, he took a carriage, and drove round to bid farewell to the many acquaintances from whom he had received attentions. He hesitated as he entered the street where Josephine resided; but suddenly recollecting that an unanswered note of invitation from her to a small family party lay upon his mantelpiece, he resolved to call, and decline it in person. It was the hour of morning calls; and several ladies and gentlemen were assembled in her spacious and richly-furnished drawing-room. As Josephine caught sight of the noble figure of the lieutenant as he was ushered by the servant into the apartment she stopped short in the midst of a conversation in which she was engaged, and, with sparkling eyes, and a smile of triumph lighting up all her features, rose, and hastily advanced to greet him.

The lieutenant received her proffered hand with that frigid politeness which was habitual in his manner towards her. How different was the cordiality of look and tone with which he turned to greet Miss H.—, one of the ladies present! But if others noticed the change, Josephine was blind to it.

After interchanging a few of those conventional common-places which the lieutenant could utter as gracefully as any one, he rose, and approached Josephine, who was vainly trying to appear to be listening to the fulsome flattery of a newly imported exquisite, whom one of the ladies had brought to see her for the first time. I am sorry I shall not be able to be present at your little gathering to-morrow evening, said the lieutenant. Why so? I leave New Orleans for New York to-morrow morning.

At this announcement, sudden and unexpected, Josephine's perturbation was strikingly apparent. The colour fled from her cheeks. Her heart beat and rose so as to choke her utterance. It was some moments before she could regain her composure sufficiently to say, with an unsuccessful attempt to disguise her emotion, But one day's delay can

make no difference to you. Indeed, you must attend my party. I shall not let you off.

News I have just received of the illness of one of my sisters will compel me to deny myself the pleasure of remaining on any pretext. Indeed, Miss de Valville and ladies, I must bid you good-bye.

But—but you will return next winter, said Josephine, with an attempt to command her voice and to force a smile, the sound and sight of which was almost painful to the spectators.

I see no present prospect of returning for many years, if ever; but need I say, that if duty shall ever lead me back, inclination will most heartily welcome its guidance. Good morning ladies!

The lieutenant bowed and withdrew. Josephine made a movement towards the bell-rope, that she might give her customary signal to the servant to open the street door for the departing guest; but her strength failed her; and, swinging round, she sank into the arm-chair, upon the back of which she had been leaning.

The evening had sat in before the lieutenant found himself in his own apartment at the hotel. He had still many preparations to make, and some important letters to write; and it was with the determination of completing his arrangements with all possible dispatch that he took his seat at his writing-table. He had hardly dipped his pen into the ink, when a note was brought to him. The superscription was in a delicate female hand. It was a message from Josephine, requesting him to let her see him that evening, if it was only for five minutes. The lieutenant bit his lips. Tell the bearer of this note to wait for my reply, said he to the negro in attendance. He then expeditiously penned a reply, in which he briefly stated, that it would be impossible for him to comply with Miss de Valville's summons; but that he would be very happy to fulfil any commission she might honor him with. Having dismissed his attendant with this reply, he applied himself to the epistolary task before him; but he had not been engaged long in writing when a knock at his door gave signal of another interruption. Well, what is it, Horace? he asked, somewhat retulantly.

Two women want to see you, massa, replied Horace. One is a white lady, and the other a colored lady. Whence!

It must be some mistake. However, show them in, said the lieutenant. And the females were ushered in by Horace, who seemed disposed to tarry to see the result of the interview. The taller of the females, however, who was veiled, pointed to the door, until he took the hint, and quitted the room. Then throwing back her veil, she disclosed the features of Josephine de Valville. The lieutenant rose, and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

And can you not divine the motive that has brought me here? asked Josephine, in a tone at once of humiliation and tenderness. The lieutenant looked inquiringly at the colored girl by whom she was accompanied. She is a deaf-mute, said Josephine; and so devoted to me, that I fear not to trust her with the dearest secrets of my heart. I pray you be seated Miss de Valville, said the lieutenant. Josephine complied; and then placing both hands before her eyes, she remained silent, and, with a hearing bosom, seemed to be struggling with an agony of tears. The colored girl knelt by her side, and affectionately tried to look her in the face; but, on a wave of her mistress's hand, she betook herself to a distant corner of the room, and stood there immovable as a statue.

Sir, you need no explanation of this visit, at length Josephine faltered forth—my tears, my anguish proclaim all.

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