

ceived lover's honest avowal of affection cut her to the heart. She felt in that moment some of the worst pangs a human being can endure. She knew how wholly and lovingly that rugged nature had been bound up in her; she knew that its passion, however dimmed by fitful gusts of ill-temper, was changeless and deep as any earthly sentiment could be. That man had loved her and cared for her when she was a helpless child; he had stood between her and many a hard storm, and had ever tried to smooth, as well as he knew how, the rough life they were accustomed to lead.

No wonder that her soul smote her when she reflected on the wrong she had wrought him; but the error was irreparable. Bitter thought! She might weep till her sight grew dim, and her senses reeled; but no tears could ever efface in this world the blot upon her soul—no repentance ever atone for the misery she knew would come upon the being who had loved her.

'Don't cry, Eola,' he said, at length, and gently drawing her to his side. 'Come, wipe away your tears. I will believe your word.'

His kindness was only an additional sting to the unhappy heart of the weeping girl.—She knew how undeserving she was of his confidence.

'Let us go home, Ralph, please,' she said, falteringly.

'Yes, darling,'
And he bent down and kissed her cheek.

An involuntary shudder convulsed her frame.

'It is cold,' she exclaimed, quickly. 'I am very cold.'

'Let me wrap this round you,' said the gipsy, kindly, taking from his shoulders a warm overcoat, and placing it carefully round the slight figure of the girl.

She could not thank him; her heart seemed bursting; and silently putting her hand through his arm, she allowed him to lead her away.

CHAPTER II.

They emerged from the ruins, and after traversing the pathway through a small dell adjoining, came to a long, dismal-looking lane, occupied by a few small cottages and some ruinous barns. About half way down the lane were drawn up at the side two perambulatory gipsy houses. Into one of these the man and girl entered.

An elderly female was sitting on a stool before a wood fire, smoking a pipe. Her appearance was unprepossessing in the extreme. An old red handkerchief tied round her head gave her a savage, weird-like aspect. Her face was shrunken and yellow, and the small but piercing black eyes that gleamed from under her shaggy brows wore an expression of cruelty and cunning equally repulsive. Her lips were thin and white, and her sharp hooked nose and projecting chin were in rather close proximity to each other. Altogether, her appearance, as displayed by the dim light of the smouldering fire, was harsh and revolting. Near her, suckling a child, sat a young woman about twenty, who, from her resemblance to Ralph, appeared to be his sister. And such, in fact, was their relationship.

Like her brother, she was tall, finely formed, and handsome; but her beauty was of the true gipsy cast; darker eyes and hair, or browner skin, could hardly have been found. 'So you've found the wanderer, Ralph,' she said, as her brother entered with his trembling companion.

'The cold has not improved her pale complexion,' she added, sarcastically, and raising her dark eyes inquisitively to Eola's face.

'Come, come, Linda, be a little civil, can't you?' expostulated Ralph. 'Eola shall not be always jeered at by you. Make room there, and let her warm herself.'

So saying, he led the young girl to the fire, where she seated herself on the ground between the two women. The elder one eyed her from time to time with a cunning leer, that bespoke some secret feeling of uncharitable satisfaction, while the younger regarded her drooping figure with a glance of mingled envy and contempt.

The fair girl had thrown off her hood and cloak, and her crimson dress lay in graceful folds upon the floor, as with her hands clasped on her knees, and her feet stretched out towards the fire, she sat bending forward, with her long dark hair falling over her face, and her eyes fixed on the glowing ashes, in listless sorrow.

'You look very well in that fancy dress, little un,' said the envious Linda, at last; 'but I should advise you to put it away for next Croydon fair, and put something on more suitable for your present life. The winter is coming on, and dancing girls will be out of fashion. How much have you earned to-day by those dainty feet and legs? Not a paltry sixpence, I'll warrant.'

'I've not been dancing at all,' returned Eola, timidly.

'No! Then what have you been doing? I expected you to return with a pocketful of money after being away so long. I suppose you expect a supper, but those who don't work can't feast on other people's gettings.'

'I am not hungry,' faintly responded the poor child, while the crystal tears began to drop silently on her folded hands.

'Linda, this treatment is shameful!' remonstrated Ralph, indignantly. 'I wonder how you would like to go supperless to bed! And do you work? Doesn't your husband once leave you here for weeks a burden on our hands, while he's scouring the country on his own selfish games?'

'Now do leave off your grumbling,' croaked the old woman, speaking for the first time.

'Eola, child,' she continued, addressing the young girl, 'get yourself something to eat, and go to bed.'

The girl rose obediently, helped herself to a piece of bread and cheese from a small cupboard, and with a half-audible 'good night,' escaped behind the coarse curtain, which was drawn across a corner of the hut, forming the women's bed-chamber.

Ralph soon after quitted the hut, leaving his mother and sister alone.

'Linda,' whispered the old woman, as soon as he had closed the door, bending forward and pointing to the curtain; 'Linda, don't you think that she has appeared very strange of late?'

'Yes, returned the other female in a low tone of voice; 'and I can guess the cause. I told that foolhardy Ralph all along that the baby-faced flirt didn't care a straw for him.—Oh, no! my delicate lady is too much a chip of the old block to care for anything less than a lord or a sir. What's bred in the bone, you know—'

The speaker finished the well-known aphorism, with a wink and a sneering laugh.

'And do you really think it is so?' asked the old woman, ambiguously.

'Do I think so? Of course I do; my eyesight is as good as most people's, was the haughty answer.

'Have you seen her with him?'

'Not lately. I saw them together in the wood beside the abbey one day, and my precious beauty was better engaged than in dancing for him. They were sitting on the trunk of an old tree, my lady's head leaning on his shoulder, and my lord's arm around her waist as lovingly as you please. No wonder she always would wear her fine crimson frock—Dancing! Yes that was a good excuse.'

'But you should have told us of this, Linda.'

'Not I, indeed. Why would I have spoilt their game? Ralph should have taken care of his beauty himself. I have something else to think of besides keeping guard over that piece of frippery.'

'It seems to me, Linda, as if you delighted in the girl's disgrace.'

A disdainful smile curled the handsome woman's lip. Did she triumph in that poor friendless one's shame? Too likely; for she hated her with all the intensity of a jealous, discontented heart.

'What if I do? It is because I don't want Ralph to have her. I never did want him to.'

'But she is a wonderful help to us.'

'Yes; that's all you think of—the money she earns. And you would have your son marry that scapegrace's cast-off doll, for the sake of a few paltry pounds a year.'

'No no, Linda; I would not have him marry her now, for love or money; but if this hadn't happened, I should have liked him to have had her very well. And you are really sure about what you say?'

'Sure? Yes. She fancies she's very clever; but she couldn't throw dust in my eyes.'

'Then Ralph must be told of it, Linda, at once.'

'What need? He'll soon be able to judge for himself.'

'Yes; and in the meantime go and marry her, perhaps. Oh no, Ralph shan't run his head into the fire now his mother knows about it; so I shall tell him as soon as I see him.'

'And knock up a jolly row this time of night! You know what a dence of a temper he's got. He's very likely to go and cut her throat, in his rage.'

'Not he. I know how to manage him, Linda.'

'Yes; you're mighty clever; or think you are.'

And with this dutiful response, the daughter rose to get some food ready for her infant, and the discussion was suspended.

This colloquy was carried on in so low a tone that it did not reach the ears of its unhappy object, who, weary and heart-sick, lay shivering on her comfortless bed.

Eola's history, as far as she herself was concerned, was enveloped in mystery. She had never heard how, when, or under what circumstances she had been born. She had lived with her present protectors as long as she could remember, and she knew no others.

Still she was aware that no ties of relationship existed between them and herself; they had told her this much, but vainly had she attempted to elicit from them further information. From childhood she had been accustomed to obey the elder female, and to add her help, which was not inconsiderable, to the avocations which generally filled the pockets of the tribe. The young girl was universally liked by all their people except Linda and her mother. The former, either from jealousy or some other unknown cause ever treated her with scorn and harshness.—The latter was kinder, but merely from mercenary motives; for Eola's earnings were too

acceptable for the old gipsy to risk their loss, by driving the pretty dancer from among them through actual ill-treatment. Thus when Linda wounded the poor Orphan's feelings by a harsh word, the mother applied a kind one; so that, between the two, Eola was kept in a continual state of perplexity and irresolution.

And even Ralph's behaviour though just and sometimes tender, was of a nature which rather frightened than soothed her; for though he was always her champion in the disputes between herself and his relatives, his temper was so violent and so easily provoked, that the young creature felt his presence generally irksome to her, and experienced in it a sensation very like that of a kitten in the arms of a child, who, while being caressed, dreads lest the next moment it may receive a kick or a blow.

Notwithstanding this, she had suffered herself to be drawn into an engagement with him, and was looked upon by all the tribe as his affianced wife.

A day was even fixed for their wedding, and for months Eola had dreaded that day; now she dreaded it no longer, for she well knew that it could never arrive.

But a deeper shadow hung over her path; a darker event held up its prospective horrors to her shrinking imagination an event the very thought of which caused all other feelings and ideas to shrink into insignificance.

The unhappy girl had scarcely fallen asleep when she was aroused to consciousness by a heavy groan, proceeding from behind the curtain, which caused her to raise her head and listen, when the voice of the aged woman struck her ear, saying—

'Hush, Ralph! don't be a fool; you will wake her.'

The only response to this injunction was another groan, louder and deeper than the first.

Eola listened in breathless silence.

At length she heard the deep tone of Ralph Leighton's voice.

'It cannot be true!' he said; 'mother, I can't and won't believe it.'

'I told you long ago that the girl cared nothing for you. She takes after her mother in more ways than one. But if you don't choose to believe me, you can wait and prove for yourself.'

'Linda, Linda, this is terrible! You have no feeling; you cannot understand my love for her.'

'No, nor any body else—such a vain thing as that. I said before what it would all come to. Dancing, forsooth, in short petticoats, before every rich rascal who came across her path! Those things may do in Spain, but they won't do here. And what did her fine mother come to, with her castanets and her crimson skirts?'

'It's no reason because her mother did wrong that she should, Linda. You hate the girl, and you are bitter against her.'

'Just as you like. But have your own way; marry the little wretch by all means, and help her out of the scrape she's got into.'

'Linda, this is no time for jesting. Tell me truly what you suspect.'

'Mother's told you. It's quite true; I could swear to it. I saw in his eye the first time the little fool capered for his amusement in the old ruin, that he marked her for his next toy.'

'Then why did you not prevent it, Linda?'

'I am not Eola's keeper,' was the heartless rejoinder.

'Oh, Linda! Linda!' cried the brother, reproachfully.

'What's the use of 'oh Linda'ing me?' said the cold-hearted creature, contemptuously.

Then followed a long pause, during which the terrified listener distinctly heard the half-suppressed groans that burst forth from her injured lover's burdened breast.

At length he started up; the vehemence of his temper was fast getting the better of his grief, and rage, jealousy, and wounded pride were rapidly effacing all tenderer emotions from his heart.

'Oh! I will have my fill of revenge for this!' he cried, and was making across the floor with hasty strides, bent, in his anger, upon immediate and desperate measures, when Eola heard a movement as if one of the women had thrown herself in his path; and then followed a series of expostulations, threats, and entreaties, mingling with which rose the wail of the little child, awakened from its innocent slumber by the unwonted noise.

Eola shivered, and her teeth rattled with fear. Each word of their conversation had fallen like ice upon her soul, yet she must be still and calm, as if no sound had reached her, or expose herself to the furious passion of Ralph Leighton by proclaiming her wakefulness.

Silence at last succeeded the tumult and confusion, the babe was lulled to its repose, and the excited Ralph calmed into temporary peace by the united efforts of his mother and sister.

'The girl must be one of the seven sleepers to be fast asleep through a row like this,' said the latter, suddenly. 'I expect she's only shamming.'

The mother rose as if to put this supposi-

tion to the test, and as her hobbling footsteps crossed the floor, Eola buried her head in the bed-clothes, and with a powerful effort stilled her agitated frame, while the old woman bent down to listen to her breathing.

'She is sleeping,' muttered the crone, returning to her seat by the fire.

'Her exertions to-day have tired her,' said Linda, with a sneer.

The mother gave her a warning look, motioning to Ralph, who was sitting on a stool near the hearth, with his face hidden in his hands.

'Let's get rid of him,' whispered Linda.

'I'm tired, Ralph,' said the old gipsy, laying her head on her son's shoulder; 'it's getting late. Linda and her little Zerneen are sleepy; won't you go to your bed?'

He looked up.

'You have given me such a good sleeping draught,' he muttered, ironically. 'But I'll not disturb you. To-morrow, I'll wring the truth from Eola. Good night.'

Upon which he quitted the hut and its inmates, and retired to rest. His mother and sister proceeded to do the same, Linda and the infant sharing Eola's couch, and the old woman occupying a mattress on the floor.

In the dead of night, when her companions were buried in profound slumber, the youthful victim of Eswald's passion arose, and after silently attiring herself, emerged from the hut, and walked rapidly away down the long bleak lane, without casting one backward glance to the gipsy-home, whose inhabitants had so long sheltered her, and which she was now quitting, without knowing whether she was going, or how to procure another refuge.

CHAPTER III.

Great was the surprise and dismay of Linda and her mother when, on awaking the following morning, they found that the young Eola had disappeared. Both drew the same conclusion from this startling event, namely, that she had heard the preceding night's conversation, and had fled from their roof, in order to escape the anger of her incensed lover.

It was long before the two women could make up their minds which should be the bearer of the sad news to the much-dreaded Ralph.

At length, Linda, bolder than her mother, undertook the disagreeable task, and executed it after her own customary abrupt, unfeeling manner.

For a minute the gipsy-lover reeled powerlessly under the blow; then, with compressed lip and flashing eyes, started up the lane in the direction of the mansion, making certain that the girl had fled for protection there.

But on arriving at Lord Eswald's stately residence, he was peremptorily refused admittance; the footman, with an admirable air of second-hand insolence, informing him 'that his master was as yet only in his first sleep, and could not be disturbed by an idle vagabond, such as him,' for which piece of information the magnificent creature received a swinging box on the ears, while the intruder walked boldly through the entry, and collar-necking another unfortunate individual, who was in the discreet act of disappearing up an adjacent staircase, demanded to be shown to his lord's apartment.

'Good heavens!' ejaculated the unlucky footman, endeavoring to twist his neck out of its uncomfortable bondage; 'I say, young fellow, do you mean to strangle me? Ho! ho! down there!' he continued, to some invisible allies of the lower region. 'Here's thieves in the house. Thieves! Fire! Mur—'

A vigorous tightening of the collar brought his exclamations to a premature close.

'You bellowing fool!' cried the gipsy, 'I'm neither a thief nor a murderer; I'm merely asking to see your master.'

'What's the row down there?' now inquired a soft and youthful voice from a corridor above.

And the next minute a slight and elegant but, for his age, manly-looking youth, of about fifteen, habited in a rich and elegant dressing-gown, appeared upon the staircase.

The two lackeys apparently considerably reassured by this expected reinforcement, now commenced an exaggerated account of what had occurred, and before finishing had almost proved Ralph to be a very prince of burglars and murderers, and themselves the most courageous champions extant. But the youth who was doubtless aware from experience of their inventive capabilities, did not seem to place much reliance upon the veracity of their statements.

'Let me hear for myself, if you please, my good fellows,' he said, authoritatively.

It was curious to witness how the two shrank back before the gentle wave of that small delicate hand, and the calm, dignified bending of the noble-featured stripling to whom it belonged, as he turned his bright, blue eyes to the gipsy's face in mute command.

'I have business with Lord Eswald,' said the latter, in reply to the interrogative glance.

'His lordship is sleeping at present, my good man. You may communicate your business to me,' returned the youth.

'I may, but I won't,' was the reply, in a surly tone,

[TO BE CONTINUED.]