

## Choice Literature.

## JOSEPHINE FOUGERE.

AN ALPINE STORY.

## CHAPTER VI. (Continued) - THE FAIRY.

"My friend," said the doctor, "I see but one chance for the child. The thing may seem hard, but do you know what I would advise for her? I would take her away from here; I would give her a change of scene."

"Take her away from here to make her well?" cried Scolastique, astonished. "If you understand the country, sir, you would know that there is not as fine a house as mine in the country."

"I don't doubt it, madame," replied the doctor, "but in this case the house makes little difference. A change of air and food and scenes and sounds may do what medicine will not do; and we must begin at once, we have put it off too long."

"It will be hard to send you away from me," said the father with an effort, his eyes fixed upon Benedicte. "But nothing would be too hard if I could save her, not even to send her away."

"That's well," said the doctor; "I see that you are sensible."

"But, really," answered James, "I don't know where I could send her where she would not be worse off than here."

"Understand me, my friend, it is pure air, more bracing air, that I want for her, and a complete change of scene. If you were to place her in the street, she would have a better chance of getting well than in staying there behind those curtains. Your child is weak. I wish she could have a change, and at the same time could have the mineral water fresh from the spring that rises beside the castle of Fierbois. Your little girl is nervous; besides the change of air and food she must have some gentle, quiet amusement, such as she can enjoy. In some way we must quiet the nervous excitement which comes from the accident. Why do you not place her in the tower of Fierbois near the spring? The air is much more bracing than in the village; it is the air of the mountains and the woods just what the child needs. In the ruin is a little hut, falling to pieces on the outside, but very clean within. A good girl lives there; she has a true heart, I can tell you, and a good head too. As far as she is concerned, there will be no trouble. She is intelligent that is necessary and careful also. I have seen her taking care of her dying mother. My advice for your child is that, if possible, you send her up there to board," and the doctor pointed to the old tower.

Scolastique had opened her mouth wide with astonishment, but not a word fell from her lips; her hands dropped upon her silk apron.

James was thoughtful. Without saying anything, he stroked his sandy beard, and looked out upon the mountains.

"A vagabond, a poacher, who steals the game from my woods every month in the year," were the first words which Scolastique could utter when she found speech again.

"Who is that?" said the doctor.

"René Fougère, Josephine's father, the good-for-nothing who has made his nest in the tower of Fierbois. Hunger and thirst live together between those four tumbling walls."

"Listen," said the doctor: "I know nothing about her father, but I knew her mother. She was one of the best women I ever saw; I should be very much surprised if her daughter were not like her."

"I will try anything to save my child's life," said James. "I know the red spring; I have drunk there more than once."

"What do you know against the young girl?"

"Nothing," answered the farmer, "but her father is a good-for-nothing; he is always roaming about the woods, and never stops except at the tavern."

"He is not often at home, then?"

"He would rather live in the woods than under a roof." "It is not to him, but to his daughter, that I wish you to confide your child."

"But I don't know, really, where Josephine gets her bread. Surely she cannot live on dew like a grasshopper. The house is poverty itself."

"Send some food and a good milch-goat with the child. Your daughter is failing; nothing but a change of air can save her. If you add to this the water that I speak of, you will see her grow strong again, I hope. It is understood, then, is it not? You will follow my advice without losing a day?"

Scolastique stood behind the doctor shrugging her shoulders and pouting angrily.

"I will follow your advice to the letter, sir," said James. "I thank you very much for it. If by it my daughter is saved, I shall feel so grateful to you that I can never forget it."

Scolastique bit her lips with rage.

As to Benedicte, she listened, hoping every moment to hear a voice which did not come. Her long eyelashes trembled on her cheeks, and from time to time she repeated, "They do not bring her to me; I wish I could die."

"You will not die," said the doctor, firmly. "We are going to take you to the house of a good girl who lives near here. Her house is in the bright sunshine and very healthy. Your father will take you there and go often to see you. What do you say to that, my little friend? Do you want to go?"

The child's face flushed, her blue eyes opened wide, her delicate hands rose from under the spread and stretched themselves with an entreating gesture. She saw that her wish was realized; the doctor's offer seemed to answer to her most ardent longing. "Oh yes, I want to go," she said in a clear and distinct voice, which awakened hope in her father's heart.

"Indeed, she could not say more if she were unhappy here," said Scolastique in a sharp voice.

"Did you see how much she wants to follow my advice?"

said the doctor, turning toward her father. "The mere thought of change has done her good already. But she is very weak," said he, putting his hand on her pale brow, where the blue veins showed so plainly. The doctor felt the arteries beat fast; the lashes trembled violently, and two tears flowed from under the closed lids.

"See I see how acutely she feels," said the doctor to James. "She is a child who thinks too much; she must be diverted.—Are you not glad, my little one?" he added, bending over her.

"Oh yes, I am very glad," said she, flushing with pleasure. "But I thought Dennis would come back first, and that she would come to get me."

James grew sober again.

"She must be diverted," said the doctor; "she must get rid of this one idea. I expect much from a change of scene."

In vexation Scolastique turned her back to the little bed and began to knit with angry energy.

"Will you take some refreshment, sir?" said James, as the doctor passed the table.

"No, I thank you—much obliged," said he, bowing to Scolastique. "I am in a hurry. I did not count upon making this visit, but it will not be useless, be sure of that," said he, turning toward the father. "I have great hope that if you do everything as I advise your child will be saved." A minute later Scolastique, left alone, gave herself up to the most bitter thoughts. "Must he," she cried, striking her forehead "must James Tristan, who has given me his name, humble himself to ask shelter for his child from that vagabond, that miserable vagabond, whom the police have arrested three times by my order? James has no spirit; I have always said that. For that puny child he would put everybody under his feet—me first of all. But he sha'n't do it, since I have a mind of my own; as surely as I am Scolastique, James Tristan's wife, he shall not. And to think that it is I who am the cause of all this! Without me my husband would be crying yet in the hayloft. Without me that fool of a doctor would not have come to take our money, without even writing a prescription in black and white. And people pretend that he knows how to read! And he calls himself the doctor! And he wants pay for having sent the daughter of the richest farmer in Fierbois to a beggar's house! Ah, Scolastique Tristan, bad luck follows you. First your waggon was broken, then comes this greatest insult you have ever borne. What will happen next?" said Scolastique as she took off her cap with the three rows of pleating and the fine cloth which she had spread in honour of the doctor's coming. She walked quickly across the room, her new shoes squeaking.

"Is she coming?" asked Benedicte in a low tone.

"Go to the gypsies, if that pleases your father!" muttered Scolastique between her teeth.

And what was James Tristan doing at this time? He was climbing up to the tower. Many years had passed since he had followed that path. Since Fougère had made his home in the old castle the children came no longer to play in the ancient ruin and to gather the holly under its old walls. The poacher frightened them; even men shunned him.

In the meantime, James mounted steadily, and soon found himself beside the spring flowing from the rock on which the old castle was built. True to its name, the water dyed the earth red before losing itself in the green valley. "Ah, here I am," thought the farmer; "I have often drunk of this strange spring. It has the colour and taste of iron-rust. I used to play here when I was a child with the little shepherds, and I used to say then, 'When I am a man.' I was happy then. Alas! children are foolish when they long to grow up. The meadows grow green, spring-time comes again, but happiness and youth never return when they have once left the heart. I am not old, but I am, and always shall be, the sad James Tristan. Benedicte too, if she lives, will never be happy; she will never see the light nor know a mother's love."

While he was thinking thus sadly James had reached the hut: "The roof is falling in and the walls are full of crevices. Must I really put her here?"

A large dog with rough grey hair rushed up barking, and put an end to his thoughts. The dog stood to guard the door, which was now half open, and a comely face, rather serious, although so young, peeped out. Two sweet brown eyes, wide open in astonishment, gazed from the aperture upon the unexpected visitor.

"Silence, Faro! be still," said the mistress of the house to her dog, who showed two rows of white, sharp teeth and ran around the stranger growling.

"The dog is fierce," said James, coming in.

"Don't be afraid; he does not often see people coming to our house. Come in, Mr. Tristan; my father is in the woods, but he must come soon."

"Excuse me for disturbing you," said James, seeing Josephine leaning against the trough where the bread was kneaded. Her rosy arms, powdered with flour, had been plunged to the elbow in the dough.

"It is I who ought to ask you to excuse me, since I cannot give you a chair; but you see I cannot leave the bread. They tell me that your little girl is very sick. Is that true?" said Josephine with a look of anxiety.

"Yes," replied Tristan, "and it is that which brings me here. The doctor tells me that if she is to get well she must have a change of scene and must drink the water from the red spring. He tells me that here she can regain strength and health. You would do me a great favour, Josephine Fougère, if you would take my child—so great that I would do anything to return and would never forget the kindness."

Josephine's heart beat so fast, these words sounded so strangely in her ears, that she thought she had been dreaming, and caught the edge of the trough to keep herself from falling. She flushed with happiness, then grew pale, then became as white as her flour. She could not speak a word.

James was looking on the ground, and did not see her change of colour. "You must have heard," he said with a sigh, "how almost lost her a few days ago. Since then she has had a high fever. She talks in her dreams, and evidently suffers so much that it is pitiable to see her. I am

a man, to be sure, yet I cannot endure it; it is too much for me. I go away to the hayloft that I may not hear her moan and cry. Ah, Josephine Fougère, I see that you have a tender heart."

Josephine wept, and her tears fell upon the dough, and, forgetting everything, she wiped them away with her floury hands. "I am ashamed of myself, Mr. Tristan; I don't know what I am doing."

James was surprised at the effect which his words had produced. Never in his own house had he been so kindly heard. "The doctor was right," he added; "you have a good heart, and your house is clean, as he told me. Besides the wheat and milk and food that I shall bring, I will pay you well for her little expenses, no fear of that, if you are kind to her."

Josephine could listen no longer. She dropped down on a chair and covered her head with her apron to hide her tears, her great joy, her confusion and the flour that covered her face. Then she said to James, "Go and find my father, Mr. Tristan; he is in the thorn-woods. You will hear him a long way off, for he is cutting oaks. Tell him the same things you have told me, nothing more. You know he is peculiar; he might be angry if he thought you had spoken to me before going to him. If he says 'Yes,' oh, Mr. Tristan, I shall be so happy!"

"You will be so happy?" Ah, you have a good heart. I will go," said he, then looking at her with emotion and bowing at the little baker's apron, since he could not see her face, he went out. Yes, Josephine was happy; her soul was full of joy—a joy so great and unexpected! God had remembered her and given her her desire. But a sudden thought disturbed her: "What if my father should not be willing?" Josephine knelt down and prayed until she thought the interview with her father was over.

René Fougère from his nature disliked society. He tried to avoid James when he saw him coming toward him in the brush. He turned to attack from the other side of the tree which he was chopping. In the meantime, James came near, and, walking around the tree, stood opposite to the woodcutter. When Fougère saw that he must meet him, he rose to his full height, and, with his hand on his axe, waited with gloomy defiance for the farmer to speak.

"Good-day, René Fougère," said James, without losing any time. "I come to ask a favour of you, a great favour. My child is very sick, in mind as well as in body. The doctor has just told me that to save her I must take her from my house and give her a change of air, and he says that in the tower she can find life and health. I come to ask you, Fougère, if you will let Benedicte, my blind child, stay with your daughter."

The poacher did not speak for a moment; he waited an instant before yielding. He looked in surprise at the rich man who did not fear to ask that he might place his most precious treasure with him. He had new emotions. "I thank you," he said, laying down his axe at the foot of the tree and offering his hand in a dignified manner to the young farmer. Tristan's honest, trusting look had conquered and won him. "You know who I am," said the poacher slowly, "and you do not fear to place your child in my house? You are the first man who has so trusted me, and you shall not be sorry for it. Your daughter shall be like my own daughter to me. If I do any harm, it shall not be to her; and if any one else tries to hurt her, I can protect her."

"My friend, we are both fathers; I cannot tell you how much you oblige me in receiving my little girl. No one wishes evil to my little Benedicte, and I am sure that in your house no one will do her any harm. 'She will perhaps grow stronger there,' the doctor said. If not, she will surely die of weakness in my house. But it is very strange, and a good omen too, that Benedicte stretched out her hands and cried 'Oh yes,' when the doctor spoke of her coming to Josephine. Tell me, would you be willing to send your daughter to the farm to prepare the child a little before I come to bring her to your house?"

"James Tristan," answered Fougère, raising his head proudly, "I have nothing against you, but as for your wife, it is another thing. Never shall my daughter pass the threshold of her door. Scolastique has injured me; I shall have a grudge against her all my life. But, tell me truly, is it to please her that you take your child away?" The keen glance of the poacher met the farmer's honest blue eyes.

"No," said Tristan, "no, René Fougère; the good your Josephine can do my little girl is not to rejoice Scolastique's heart. The doctor's order and my love as a father have alone led me to you. I and my child are one; it is only me whom you will oblige in taking her."

After having shaken hands the two men separated, each surprised to find the other better than he had supposed. Again the woodcutter's axe made the forest resound, and James Tristan went thoughtfully to his home.

"Who would have believed," he said to himself, "that there was any good in that poacher? But I will be careful not to say a word about it to Scolastique. I might as well insult her to her face. How could anyone wish evil to a girl like Josephine? My Benedicte will be happy in her house, I am sure of that now. Cheer up, Tristan; your misfortunes are almost over."

Josephine, excited, impatient and happy, at the threshold awaited her father's return. "What will he say? Will he be willing, or will he not? He is not looking on the ground; that is a good sign," she said as she saw him coming with his axe over his shoulder. "He doesn't seem at all angry. Oh, Josephine, that would be too much happiness for you if he should consent." Her heart beat fast with anxiety and hope as she saw her father coming.

"Josephine, my daughter," said he to her when he came near, "you will no longer be alone in the house; James Tristan came to ask me if we would take his little girl, the one you saved from the river, to our house; you shall take care of her."

Josephine looked at her father, her eyes beaming with happiness. He never had seen so joyous a glance turned toward him; then Josephine, growing bold, did a thing which she had never done since she came to years of discretion. She threw her arms around her father's neck and kissed him as a child might have done.