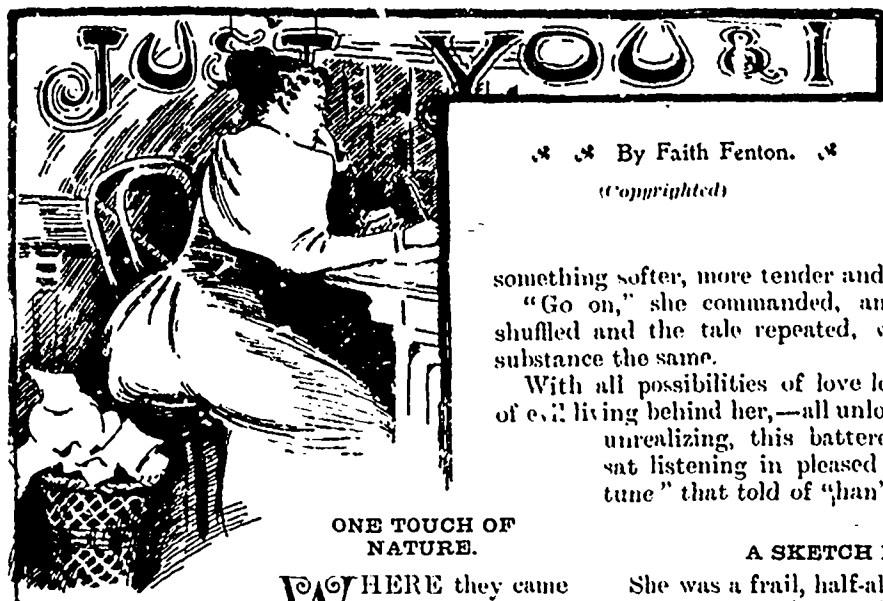




ONE TOUCH OF NATURE.

WHERE they came from I cannot tell—perhaps it is as well not to know; nor yet what brought them into this quiet residential portion of the city, so removed from their customary haunts. The hour also was not theirs, anymore than flickering gaslight belongs to the fresh pure sweetness of an October morning. These two women were of the night and of darkness; yet in some manner they had strayed from their environment and at ten o'clock in the morning were wandering up a lane that ran at the base of a score of broad, tree-shaded lawns belonging to Toronto's best homes.

They were not ill-assorted, except in age. One was a veritable hag, long past life's prime, with face grievously lined, and leering. Her gown was frayed and soiled, and hung about her like a sack, her bonnet dusty and battered, her shapeless shoes down trodden. A greasy old cape gave glimpses of a torn bodice beneath. Hands and face were dirty, and rough wisps of hair straggled over the forehead. She was truly a sorry and repellent old creature.

The second was a young woman whose age it was difficult to tell—in years; yet she could not have reached twenty-five. She had fresh complexion, blue eyes and a plenitude of brown hair. She might have been pretty, were it not for the fatal marks of dissipation and recklessness in her face. She was dressed with greater decency than her companion, with certain attempts at gayety in color and style: her hat flaunted a few cheap roses; her shoes were over-run, but they had patent toes.

Yet a glance was sufficient to tell that what the first was, the second would become. There was no difference save in the work wrought by years that lay between.

The older woman sat upon an upturned ash barrel, the younger one stood beside her shuffling a pack of greasy cards and laying them out upon her companion's lap. Then with pointed finger she began to tell a fortune—not her own, but that of the older woman, who listened with eager interest and approval.

"There's a dark man that's yer friend, an' a fair one tha' ain't."

The old hag nodded.

"Yer goin' to get some money, Liz, an' hev a big time, an' its comin' purty soon."

Her companion nodded again, and waited expectantly.

"Here's the king of di'mons: he's comin', but there's a dark woman 'tween,—that's that Nance, I guess. She got ahead of yer with the di'mon's last night, Liz."

The older woman uttered an unwholesome word, yet still remained expectant.

"There's a house, a prime 'un, with a swell winder, an' here's the Jack of hearts, he's a lover sure. The dark fren' wants yer; but Jack's goin' to get in. Here's more hearts: its a han'some

By Faith Fenton.

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something softer, more tender and womanly?

"Go on," she commanded, and again the cards were shuffled and the tale repeated, varied in phrases, but in substance the same.

With all possibilities of love long departed, with years of evil living behind her,—all unlovely, all repellent, yet all unrealizing, this battered wreck of womanhood sat listening in pleased expectancy to the "fortune" that told of "han'some lover" and "home."

A SKETCH FROM LIFE.

She was a frail, half-alive little woman, flat and formless, yet with a tendency to shoulder blades. Her somber gowns hung shapelessly upon her. They were always severely, rustily black, and emphasized the shrunkenness of the little figure.

She had black eyes, a trifle dim and lack-lustred, and she wore spectacles that were usually pushed up upon her forehead. The sallow face was full of lines, and with every turn of her head, the cords of the thin neck showed themselves.

Her hair harmonized with the rest of her. It was thin, wiry and of the pepper-and-salt blend, and she wore it always drawn tightly back from the narrow forehead and hidden behind a shabby, dull "switch" at the back of her head.

Altogether she gave one the impression of being a dull monotone in the chord of life a bit of rusty, gray background in the picture of humanity.

I found her one day in her usual place seated in a big rocker by the window, looking out upon the street. Her thimble, thread and needle stood upon the sill, but she rarely made use of them. She sat always rocking, with ceaseless push of the low-heeled shoes upon the floor—rocking and reading patent medicine advertisements.

She liked readin' 'em, she said. She'd got into the way of noticin' of 'em when her First and Second was sick. She tried a good many of 'em on 'em but she supposed they wuz called of the Lord, for the medicin' didn't heal 'em any.

An' when they wuz took, she felt kind of lone some an' went on with the tryin' of 'em herself.

She'd tried a good many of 'em too. She didn't generally give up with the first bottle: she allers gave 'em two trials sune as she did the Mayor. She changed 'em about once a fortnit. There wuz some new kind of cure comin' out about every other week, an' she liked to keep up with 'em.

Oh, no, there wasn't anything special the matter with her, savin' that she wuz kind of run down like; didn't seem to sleep well at nights; hadn't much appetite: sort of depression too, and general goneness of feelin', otherwise than these she felt purty well.

She'd been takin' some of Hartley's Instant Heart Cure lately. 'Twas about the newest thing she'd noticed in the papers, an' it tasted purty well, an' chirked her up quite a little. She didn't know but it minded her of sassafras tea.

And I'd never been married, hadn't I! What a pity. She'd been married and widdered twice, an' she'd marry again if the Lord so pervided. Mebbe I'd like to see the relics of her husbands. She kep' 'em just across there in the best room.

I signified my assent and we crossed the hall to the room in question—a chill and darkened place, kept sacred from all familiar uses.

To the little woman it was her parlor—the place of her household gods—but to an unsympathetic outsider it seemed rather a mausoleum sacred to the memory of the dear departed, who were evidently given equal honor in the loyal affections of their one time spouse.

The carpet was dun color, the furniture was of

lover, he's goin' to be, an' he'll merry yer; an' there's the house all ready. Yer in luck, Liz."

The grimy old creature chuckled; and—was it fancy—or did that leer change for an instant into

horsehair, plentifully bestrewn with antique antimacassars. But it was the portraits and minor furnishings that gave the room its funereal character.

The little woman pointed out each object with evident pride.

"Them's my marriage certificates to my First and Second. I had 'em framed and hung up. That picture between is the 'Condolence on the Death of My Second,' sent by his lodge—he was an awful pop'lar man. Them two photographs I had taken at his funeral; one is his coffin, you see, and the other is the funeral procession; he had an awful large funeral. Do you see this under the glass case?"

"Yes, it looks like a wedding-cake," I answered.

"That's just what it is," said the little woman. "It's the top storey and silver ornaments of my First's weddin'-cake; I've kep' it right along. This picture over it is my First an' me, when we wuz married; and of these on either side of the cake, one is my Second and the other is me when I got my mournin' for my Second. I ain't namin' 'em too fast, am I?"

"Oh, no, no, not at all," I murmured faintly.

"These cards that you see on the piano are funeral cards, with verses writ on the deaths of both my First and Second; I put 'em, first one, then the other, you see, turn about. Some of 'em are purty nice verses; they wuz both real nice men."

Presently we came to what the little woman regarded as the crowning glory of her decorations, an enlarged portrait standing on an easel, and draped with a scarf caught with purple ribbon and immortelles.

"Ain't it nice?" she said, stepping back to survey it. "That's the picture of my First, an' that black scarf was across his coffin; while them purple bands an' white flowers is off the pall bearers' sleeves of my Second; I thought it would be nice to mix 'em."

"Yes, they wuz both likable," she repeated, leaning her arm on the piano and looking across with pride at the "First's weddin' cake." "My Second was the han'somest mebbe, an' the most pop'lar, but a little unreliable. He wuz run over by a street car, an' I couldn't sue the Comp'ny; but they sent a beautiful wreath with 'Rip' on it; which wuz very nice of 'em."

"My First wuz more of a worker, an' didn't show up so much in words; but he left me a decent insurance; which is a good set off against mere looks, as I always say, when thinkin' of my Second."

"But any way it ain't fair to show favor where dead folks is concerned; so when I go to the cimi'try, which I do once a week reg'lar, weather so permittin', I always visit both graves, an' stay as long at one as the other. It takes a while, but feel I'm doin' right."

"It's a real nice room, ain't it?" she asked again, and again I murmured a bewildered assent.

As she pulled down the window shades and closed the door her brief animation died away, and she became again the little dun-colored, anaemic creature that I knew, seated always at the window reading patent medicine advertisements, and rocking—rocking.

WHAT THEY DO IN GERMANY.

Dutch peasants are proverbially stolid and slow, but they are quick enough to grasp new ideas for increasing their comfort. For years they have used wooden sabots for footwear on account of their lightness and warmth; and now they have stockings made of a yarn which is spun out of pure wood fibre; and their coats and vests are interlined with Fibre Chamois, which is nothing more or less than a wooden cloth, made as it is entirely from Spruce Fibre. These same stolid peasants realize thoroughly the non-conducting properties of the wood, and avail themselves of the inexpensive warmth it provides. Fibre Chamois has a world wide reputation as a warmth-giving incriming, for it is so light that its presence is hardly felt in a garment, and yet it gives an absolute healthful protection from the coldest blasts of a long stormy winter.