

PROSE AND POETRY.

A STORY OF CANADIAN LIFE IN FIVE CHAPTERS.

By the author of "Lazy Dick."

CHAPTER II—(Continued.)

"Girls, girls, come down here; I've some news for you," shouted the big voice of the Lieutenant from below.

At the word *news* Sylvia threw down her writing fast enough and darted down the stairs. Millie followed. Their father was walking about in the parlour with an open letter in his hand.

"What's it all about, papa?" cried Sylvia eagerly, but the younger girl sat down, a little wearily in truth, though the others were always too self-occupied to notice it. Her face looked pale and rather worn in contrast with that of the blooming Sylvia.

"It's a letter from Newfoundland, my dear, from your Aunt Mildred, and she wants one of you to pay her a visit. She says she thinks she can offer plenty of amusement, since she has a houseful of friends—'young men and maidens, old men and children'—that she has brought down with her from the city. 'Then before the child returns she must stay a week with us at Halifax,'" the Lieutenant concluded, reading aloud.

"Splendid! splendid!" and Sylvia clapped her hands. "When am I to go, papa?"

A smile, not bitter, but exceedingly sarcastic, was lurking about that quiet little mouth of Millie's; but she let her sister monopolize the invitation and remained silent.

Their father looked rather taken aback, however.

"Not so fast, Syl," he began; "it has only been made to one of you, and that one is Millie. Your aunt says she has never yet seen her little namesake, and she must come; she really will take no refusal this time."

Sylvia's countenance fell, and then changed to that expression Millie hated so—the shocking creature.

"Oh, well, I console myself by remembering Aunt has never seen either of us, or it's plain you'd have no chance, Millie, my dear," she said with an affection of mirth. It was not often that she my-deared Millie, and when she did give some expression to her sisterly affection Millie always felt it was done with a view to irritate her. With an effort she overcame the inner woman and turned to her father quickly.

"Papa, let Sylvia go; I don't care about it a bit."

Oh, what a sweet, low, persuasive voice! At least Tom Graham thought so, as he was coming through the gate up to the open window.

"If Millie doesn't really care then," began Sylvia with becoming hesitation, but her father shook his head.

"Your aunt has a will of her own," he said; "I've felt it before now. If she wants Millie, Millie she'll have, or no one; and as it wouldn't do to offend her, my girl, you must go."

"Oh, yes! by all means, if that's the view you take of the matter," cried the elder girl with a toss of her head; "I should never stoop to curry favour with a rich relation, but Millie will fit the position admirably."

Millie looked up with a blaze in her beautiful eyes; her voice wasn't sweet, and low, and persuasive this time.

"How dare you say that to me! You know it's utterly untrue!" she cried.

"Only such a natural mistake," sneered Sylvia.

Tom Graham was a gentleman, so, seeing he was about to interrupt a family quarrel, he would have gone back the way he came without entering the house, but Sylvia saw him and went out into the garden.

"Oh, do come and talk to me, Mr. Graham!" she cried, "and then I shall forget disagreeables for a time. Poor Millie!" and she sighed pensively, "her temper is so trying at times."

"And so I should imagine are your speeches," thought shrewd Master Tom, though, of course, he didn't say it.

The end of it was that Millie accepted the invitation, although had there been any doubt of her acting otherwise, Mrs. St. James, to use that lady's forcible phraseology, would have pranced in and put her foot down upon such folly then and there. The Rector was no less pleased than his wife, though he told his favourite she must not remain too long away, but consider the deplorable loss sustained by the parish during the absence of its curate, for so he was fond of styling Millie. Meanwhile Millie herself was very busy, for her wardrobe needed a good deal of alteration, and time was short and her means scanty. Sylvia had many pretty things, which, however, she did not offer to lend her, and Millie, in her sinful pride, would have died rather than ask her for one of them. We must not be too hard upon Sylvia—poor girl! for very properly she grasped at all the outward adornment she could get, to make up for the inward deficiency, I suppose. Millie was to go by water, and the Lieutenant was anxious to put her on board the vessel himself, since he had just ascertained that the captain on board one of the Gulf-port steamers (the one by which Millie was going) was an old camp comrade. But the day before Millie was to leave she caught a severe cold; was obliged to take to her bed, and so did not leave till a week later. She looked so white and weak on the morning of her departure that good Mrs. St. James was full of misgivings.

"Do take care of yourself, my pet," said the

kind woman, as she kissed and wrapped up the delicate little thing.

"Oh, she'll do finely," said the Lieutenant, jovial and careless as ever; while Sylvia fussed about her sister (Tom was there), making Millie in her nervous state feel that she was almost as bad as a mosquito.

"I hope you'll have fine weather," said Tom Graham.

"I shall be all right if we do," replied Millie, smiling her thanks.

"There's a dead swell on the sea," remarked the Lieutenant cheerfully; "but come along if you're ready, my dear; the ferry's waiting."

"Don't look so horrified," said Sylvia laughing.

She was a good sailor herself.

"I never can stand a dead swell," groaned poor Millie.

In another minute the good-byes were said and she and her father were off. It was a good way out to the steamer, however, and before they reached it Millie was as white as a sheet. There were a great many other passengers going down the gulf, and, as they were rather late, her father had not time to find his friend, the Captain, and introduce her; so Millie, as soon as she got on board, found her way to her berth, and lay down too miserable to move or speak. Nobody took any notice of her. The stewardess indeed came to her once or twice through the day, but there were plenty of others clamorous in their demands, inasmuch that quieter sufferers were overlooked. The next day she was no better, and had eaten nothing. The water was quite smooth now, the wind having fallen. All through the long hours she lay—poor, small maiden, suffering intensely. "It must be late in the afternoon now," she thought, by the sunlight on her cabin wall. Her head was aching with a fiery pain. At last she could bear it no longer, and with difficulty she sat up, arranged her hair and dress, wrapped herself in a great mantle and staggered out of the state-room. How she got upon deck she hardly knew, but she was obliged to sit down on the top-step to rest a moment, or she would have fallen down, the companion-ladder. Just opposite her, leaning over the deck railing, was a very tall man, clad in blue serge, with a bright, young face and fine, dark eyes. He looked like one who had encountered many perils, and was not likely to be taken by surprise, but when he caught sight of our woeful little heroine his face assumed an expression that was startled, to say the least of it.

"Good Heavens!" he exclaimed under his breath, and started forward. "Allow me," he said, in a cheery, kind voice, and with one strong arm he lifted her up and assisted her to a quiet corner, where there was a quantity of cushions lying about. These he piled up in the cosiest fashion, and when she was seated thereon he put one behind her, advised her to lean back, and then wrapped a great travelling rug about her.

"Thank you," said Millie, very timidly; but as she spoke she lifted to his face for a moment her beautiful grateful eyes. But the expression of those eyes made our friend look more serious still, and he noticed the great black rings round them.

"It is a very bad thing to remain below, even if you don't feel well. I don't remember seeing you since we started. I hope you've been properly looked after," he said gravely.

"I don't know any one on board," said Millie innocently.

"Dear, dear!" and he looked graver still, then broke off into a bright laugh—no other word will describe it. "Never mind," he cried gayly, "you know some one now; you mustn't think me presuming now, but it's my duty to keep people from killing themselves."

Through his light raillery there ran an air of gentle deference that Millie, with her quick perception, could not fail to recognize. She knew a gentleman was addressing her, and this, far more than his ease of manner, conquered her shyness. He went away for a few moments and returned with a tray of cold chicken, fruit, and coffee. He would not heed her motion of dissent, but placed it before her.

"You needn't be afraid of eating it all," he said pleasantly, "for there's enough in the locker for breakfast to-morrow." Then he left her to herself for a while.

"You are looking better already," he said, with a satisfied smile, when he took away the tray and gave it to a waiter; and then he would have left her for good, too well-bred to be intrusive, but Millie could not bear to take all his kindness as her due, and she began a timid conversation. Not long very timid though, for by-and-by he was seated opposite her, and they were both conversing in a most friendly manner, whilst Millie's pretty, rare laugh rang out now and again at his odd speeches. He seemed to know every body on board, and was often called away from the quiet nook where she was seated, but he always came back again.

"Have you any wishes still ungratified?" he inquired, as he saw her looking at the passengers rather keenly.

"Yes, I want so much to see the Captain," she answered frankly.

"I'm sure he'll feel very much flattered. I didn't know he was considered worth looking at; indeed, I've told him more than once that his beauty consists in his ugliness," said her companion, with a sparkle of fun in his dark eyes.

"Do you know him?" asked Millie, slightly puzzled.

"Rather, and like him better than any other fellow I know," he answered promptly.

"I'm so glad," cried the girl.

"Why?" said her friend curiously.

"Oh, because he's an old friend of papa's."

He looked rather surprised, she fancied, and after a moment exclaimed:

"May I ask your father's name? Perhaps I have heard Captain Morton speak of him."

"Lieutenant Leslie," Millie replied; "but papa's friend is named Holland, not Morton."

"Morton is the captain of this vessel," he said smiling. "I suspect you've taken the wrong vessel. However, Morton will not regret the mistake. Before you leave I'll introduce him, if you'll allow me. It is always a good thing to know the captain, they say, because the people he takes a fancy to he can make very comfortable."

"Of course you speak from experience," said Millie mischievously; whereupon he laughed, seeming intensely amused, but assured her on his honour he did.

Very speedily Millie became acquainted with a good many of the other passengers, and every one was very fond of the small maiden, and petted her whenever they got the opportunity; but her first friend did not relinquish his charge of her, at which no one seemed at all surprised. She was so weakened by her illness that, the weather being fine, she remained most of the time on deck, not going down to the dining saloon with the others, which accounted for her not yet having seen the Captain.

Once Mildred had been alone for some time reading, and by-and-by, getting tired, she slipped the book among the cushions. There were purple, green and golden lights on the sea that afternoon, and leaning back she watched them a long time in silence.

"Poetizing!" inquired a voice well-known by this time, and the speaker came and sat down beside her.

"I should think not, indeed!" said Millie, indignantly.

The young man laughed.

"Don't you like poetry?" he asked.

"I hate it," she replied shortly.

"Do you know," he went on, greatly amused, "you are the most interesting person I ever met; you are always surprising me by your mixture of queer contradictions. Just now, for instance, you seemed altogether lost to this trifling existence. I said to myself, 'Meditation in her bower,' and dared not intrude my profane presence. It's no use pretending to be prosaic now."

"Why, at home they always call me Prose," said Millie, laughing.

He shook his head unconvinced. "Don't look it," he answered. "What *are* you thinking of if it wasn't poetry, then?"

"I was thinking of the sea, of course."

"Well!" still inquiringly.

"It looked so beautiful and bright, and yet almost sad, too, I fancied, as if the smile were all upon its surface, and a great, throbbing, suffering heart beneath." She spoke with unconscious pathos, lifting her eyes to his with an expression of intense struggling thought, and he answered the look with one large and comprehensive.

"That's just it," he said, after a pause. "Sometimes when the sea is calm I can't bear it. I like it in a storm best. Oh! it's glorious then!" and his eyes flashed. "But to-day one feels inclined to think too much."

"Isn't that a good thing to do?" asked Millie.

"Not always, or you'll grow morbid. As long as I'm busy I'm happy enough, but directly I begin to think I get discontented."

Millie looked at that bright face, and she shook her head this time.

"You don't believe me, I see," he exclaimed.

"No," Millie answered simply.

"Well, I'm grateful to you for your good opinion of me," and he looked quite in earnest.

"Oh, there's plenty of room for improvement," she cried saucily.

"Any one could see that with half an eye," he retorted; "so you needn't plume yourself upon being so very keen-sighted. I'm the most grumbling—"

At this moment he pulled himself up suddenly, and Millie looked surprised.

"What can you have to grumble about?" he asked.

"Trust a man for finding something—shine the sun ever so brightly. Isn't it enough to make a man wretched to be tossed about as I am—a homeless waif, without a relation in the world?"

"Haven't you, really?" said little Millie, so pitifully, that I, for one, can't help pardoning the fellow for looking miserable, though I beg leave to doubt that the expression was genuine. Last you should be inclined to despise him, however, I will say that there wasn't a finer fellow breathing.

"I believe I've a great uncle somewhere in this country, though I've never had time to hunt him up since I came out," he went on pensively; "but where's the use! After all he mightn't be delighted by the apparition of a nephew."

"Not if he knew him as well as I do," said that teasing little Millie. Our small maiden seemed to be transformed; the reserve that in general wrapped her in had disappeared, and sometimes she was as bright and saucy as you please.

But at this unlucky moment her companion discovered her book among the cushions; it was no other than the *Morte D'Arthur*, and he pounced upon it with ungenerous triumph.

"Ho! ho!" he cried, with his bright laugh,

"this is the young lady who hates poetry, and who sleeps with a volume of it under her pillow. And *writes* it, too," he added. For on the fly-leaf were some lines inscribed in a neat, lady-like hand, and signed, Sylvia Leslie. To tease her he began to read it aloud, and then immediately regretted his rash conduct, for, being a lover of poetry himself, he could not be blind to the fact that the verses were very trashy.

"I should not have expected such stuff from her," he thought, and experienced a certain sense of disappointment; but, looking up, he saw that Mildred appeared quite unmoved.

"That's my sister's not mine; surely one poet in the family is enough!" she remarked, not without asperity, thinking of the pages and pages of Sylvia's agonies, to which she had been an unwilling listener.

"That doesn't account for your reading the *Morte D'Arthur* though," he said, feeling relieved, and bent an teasing her. "I rather suspect that you do *not* hate poetry, but are too much of a coward to own it; for my part I'm not ashamed to say that I love all poetry; and," he added, reverently, "bless God for every poet that he has created."

The breeze had freshened, and the sky was clouding now rather suddenly.

"We are going to have a storm," he cried, springing up. "You must go below."

"Not yet, not just yet," said Millie, rather obstinately; for his sudden air of authority she was at a loss to understand, and therefore rebelled against it.

"I insist upon it," he said, quickly; and in a few moments, to her astonishment, she found herself below, where also all the rest of the passengers were crowded. Sure enough he was right. The storm came down upon them with frightful rapidity, and for over an hour raged with pitiless violence. How nearly the ship was lost few of them knew till it was all over. The last Millie saw of her friend was a blue serge coat flying up the companion ladder. Thereafter she trembled at every lurch of the ship, though not for herself, and wished she had said good-bye to him kindly instead of turning so angrily away. In little more than an hour, however, she saw him again. She heard somebody say: "Here comes the captain," and in he came. Bunched to the skin, his dark curls glistening with water, his face hardly so bright as usual, but calm and brave, his eyes keen and kind as ever.

"These white squalls are very sudden, but we've weathered the gale this time, thank God!"

That was all the captain said to improve the occasion, being a man who loved his religion, but seldom talked it. Then he went about among them with cheery words, soothing some frightened ladies and crying children, but at the same time keeping a sharp lookout for Millie.

"Are you all right?" he asked, anxiously, when he discovered her in a retired corner.

"Yes, thank you," she answered, looking up with a blush on her face and tears in her eyes; "please forgive me for being so unreasonable about coming down, but I thought I knew when a storm was coming as well as you. I didn't know you were the captain."

The captain was weary, wet, and weather-beaten, but never laughed he a merrier laugh than that.

"Good gracious! the conceit of you small women!" he cried. "Thought you knew a storm better than an old salt like me! I must take care that you never get the command of a ship, Miss Leslie, though," he added in a lower tone, "you may always command its captain."

As for Millie, she had shrunk back into her old reserve, and was thinking with shame and sometimes absolute terror of her conduct during the last few days. How blind and stupid she must have been not to have discovered who he was before. What had she been about, laughing and teasing him, uttering the most absurd nonsense about navigation with a superior little air of giving information, as though she supposed it was? And how deferentially he had always listened, no doubt thinking her an idiot the whole time. And yet how kind he had been notwithstanding, looking after her comfort in the smallest particular, and bearing with good humoured raillery her intolerable assumption. You may smile at our small maiden's qualms, perhaps, but recollect that she had never been away from the quietest of homes in her life before, and had no knowledge of the world whatever, except what she had gained from books, which commodity is weaker than the weakest poetry even, to accompany us through our life-journeys.

The morning after the storm was fine and calm, and the captain appeared, looking brighter than ever after his ducking. He soon went over to Millie.

"Miss Leslie," he said, with his most winning manner, which it was safest to yield to at once, for you always had to in the long run, "allow me to present to you Captain Morton, he has been dying to know you all along, and entreat your pardon for the pious fraud practiced upon you." And he held out his hand.

Just the same honest, manly fellow that she had known all along! Millie was disarmed and stepped down from her dignity not a bit sorry to do so, I suspect.

"It was too bad, it was horrid duplicity Captain Morton," she said, laughing; but she put her small snowflake of a hand into his big, brown palm.

"Generous soul, say you forgive me!" but between you and me and the gate-post, friend reader, that tragical air was put on that he might have a pretext for retaining her hand.

"I will, as I'm to say good-bye so soon," said