

PLAYING THE GYPSY.

[CONCLUDED.]

Lily took what was left, and looked nicely, but more like a country lass, on her way to market, with a pot of butter or a basket of eggs, than a wild, untaught gypsy maiden.

They began to think they had been too hasty in their arrangements, as day after day passed and no further news of Gerald's movements reached them; but at length, after a week of tiresome waiting, a note arrived, stating that he and his friend were at Lawton, and would be with them the next afternoon.

Early the following morning, the young women, like the novelist's "solitary horse-man," might have been seen quietly and decorously wending their way to the forest path, which led by a short cut to the end of the one street of the little village, where they expected to meet the down train. Two covered hand-baskets they carried, which contained, besides some nice ham sandwiches and the breast of a fat chicken, a slim bottle and a silver cup. Lest some well-meaning but slightly obtuse person may infer that the bottle contained some fiery liquid, I will state explicitly that it was currant wine, clear and rosy, and, as Kate emphatically declared, "smacking good."

Mrs. Smith, who was rather peculiar in some of her ways, cast a gloom over their spirits by appearing at the door as they were about starting, and announcing, with some impressive gestures, that two strange things had happened. She dreamed of a white horse the night before, and that very morning, when she was feeding her fowls, a white hen so far forgot the rules by which all well-regulated henneries are governed, as to crow. Now Mrs. Smith felt perfectly sure that something was about to happen which would involve one or more of her boarders in serious trouble, if not resulting in death. Her dream and the crowing made it almost certain to her active imagination, and as she slowly washed up the breakfast dishes, she mentally made arrangements for a first-class funeral. However, as she shook out the dish-cloth, a happy thought struck her, and she remained holding that important accessory to cleanliness aloft for a full minute, as the idea slowly revolving in her mind became fully developed. Behold her, then, at the front door, with a shoe in her hand, that bore evident marks of faithful service, which, after telling them her gloomy forebodings and fearful presentiments, she intended to throw after them. It was the flinging of this very old shoe that was to ward off the impending evil. The sequel will prove the success of her well-meant attempt to furnish her guests with a general life preserver.

The walk through the cool morning air revived their spirits, and they enjoyed their ride, also, the inquisitive glances which they received on every hand. A merry day was passed in the woods, although they began to feel rather chilly before the watch, which for convenience sake, Kate had concealed about her person, denoted that the three o'clock train would soon pass. Placing their trophies from the forest in their empty baskets, they walked out to the crossing, where there were three houses and a grocery, and was called, with an extravagant attempt at style, "The Corners," and, with no slight trepidation, awaited the train.

The signal was seen, and the rapidly approaching train stopped, while out of nearly every window was thrust a head, its owner staring around, with persistent energy, as they reached the platform. They found the car pretty full, but fortunately two seats, facing each other, had each a vacant place, in which Bell and Kate dropped, while Minna and Lily passed farther on.

Kate's companion was an old lady, and Bell's an old gentleman. Almost any body could have guessed that they were man and wife, and if from New England, would have recognized, in the spare face of the old gentleman, and the plumpness, and sharp, yet good-natured expression of the old lady's face, some of the best types of the New England character.

I have always maintained, from observation, that Yankees are no more inquisitive a class than other people, but this old couple chanced to be very curious; and, indeed, I think they were quite excusable for looking pretty sharply at the singularly arrayed figures beside them. After properly clearing his throat, and flourishing a red and yellow silk handkerchief, the old man ventured to address his companion in a wonderful sharp voice.

H'm! Going far, miss?

No sir, replied Bell, respectfully. Yes. Live around here?

No sir, she replied, noticing that nearly all the passengers in their vicinity were looking at her.

Kate raised her handkerchief to her lips to conceal a smile. Nothing daunted, the old gentleman continued:

H'm, don't live around here, hey? Then where do you stop when you're home?

Bell blushed, and muttered,— At different places.

At this innocent reply the lady took alarm. She had heard of gay women who changed their place of abode often, and were not considered very good company for virtuous old men. So she pulled his sleeve, and, in an audible whisper, gave advice:—

Asa—better keep still. No knowin' who yer a talkin' to.

That's so, said the husband, and 'pears like she don't want to tell. Suthin' ruther wrong, I guess. See here, young woman, he continued, a new thought striking him, I've a word for you. No good ever comes of sich doins'. I knew a girl once in New Jersey who ran away, and—

I am not running away, interrupted Bell, flashing her eyes at him till she looked beautiful in her indignation.

Ain't! Well, I didn't know what you was.

A low, rippling laugh, full of merriment, thrilled out from some one on the opposite seat, and Asa began to suspect that he had said something very funny.

Two young men, who sat just across the aisle, lowered their papers, and looked at Bell. Both girls saw at a glance that it was Gerald and his friend.

Well! said Asa, determined to satisfy his curiosity, perhaps you are a dressmaker, or a milliner.

No, sir, I am a fortune-teller.

A what? ejaculated the old lady recoiling. The young men across the way exchanged glances, which Kate's sharp eyes detected. The spirit of fun held her completely by this time, and she came gracefully to Bell's assistance.

A fortune-teller, ma'am, she said. Shall I tell your fortune, or yours, sir?

Wall, I dunno, he replied: does it cost much?

Only a dollar, sir; tell you all the events of your past life, and much of the future, sir. There are many things you would like to know, sir.

Wall, guess likely I hadn't better spend the money. Thank you all the same, though. And the old gentleman seemed quite glad to find that, dubious as their claims to respectability might be, they were not of the class he had begun to fear.

True to their plans, they stepped off the cars at the depot on the side opposite the waiting-room, and were off like deer. They rushed, almost breathless, into Mrs. Smith's house, and the good dame, somewhat alarmed, with sleeves rolled up to her shoulders, and a rolling-pin in her hands, followed them up stairs.

Land! Has anything dreadful happened? Why, what a hurly burly you're in! she continued, apprehensively, a faint suspicion creeping into her mind that they were all crazy.

And, indeed, they appeared quite like it, for they had thrown aside their hats, and were assisting Bell to array her elegant figure in a beautiful white pique, cut with a long train, and trimmed with several rows of blue ribbon passed through loops of rich lace. Her hair was hastily coiled, and then she fastened over it a beautiful waterfall of curls, held in place by a handsome comb. Kate was fastening a gold bracelet on her arm, Lily held a blue bow in her hand, which she had made several attempts to place in her hair; but Bell's quick motions and superior height had so far prevented her.

O Mrs. Smith! exclaimed Kate, I do believe I heard the gate! When her brother comes, will you please tell him that Miss Bell has been out walking, but you will see if she is sufficiently rested to come down?

Of course I will, responded Mrs. Smith, good-naturedly, and failing to discover the delicate hint in the request; but if they have come, they must have rid or run. Maybe some one gave 'em a lift in their wagon.

Please, Kate, my embroidered handkerchief, that I laid out, and, Lily, the satin bow that matches my belt for my neck. If they will only stay away five minutes longer, I'll ask no more. gasped Bell.

Well, they've come now, and no mistake, soon exclaimed Mrs. Smith, darting with much more speed than grace from the apartment.

Bell soon disappeared, and the other three girls hastened to don their most becoming clothes, to meet the gentlemen at tea.

After spending an hour very pleasantly around the well-spread table, they adjourned to the piazza. It was rather cool there, but the moon was shining brightly, and they shivered in silence for the sake of the romance. Gerald's friend, Mr. Larrimer, seemed much pleased with Kate, and kept quite close beside her the entire evening. She appeared satisfied with his devotion, and was as piquant and vivacious in her remarks as usual.

By the way, Gerald, said he, breaking a pause, did those handsome gypsies leave the cars at this station? I thought I caught a glimpse of one as I stepped off the train.

I really couldn't tell, replied Gerald, languidly threading his white fingers through his hair; possibly they did. Have you seen any such pass here, sister mine? he added carelessly.

I have not seen any such pass, she replied with a very slight accent on the last word.

Were they so very handsome, then? inquired Kate, innocently. If they were, perhaps you gentlemen would like to go and dream of them.

I fully expect to dream of one, replied Gerald, quietly casting an admiring glance at Lily as he spoke.

Lily blushed scarlet; but Kate and Bell, who seldom lost their self-possession, changed the conversation, and hoped that the confusion of Lily passed unnoticed by the two who were not in the secret.

Time, as usual, passed on. They walked, flirted, sang and rode together, and matters progressed rapidly. It must be confessed that Bell felt almost chagrined that her brother, who was so accomplished, and had been abroad, and seen so much of the world, should so quietly succumb to the fascinations of her friend Lily, whose heavenly blue eyes and golden curls made an early impression on his hitherto unimpressible heart.

After about ten days' enjoyment, Mr. Larrimer received a letter, stating that his presence was greatly desired in Lawton, to attend to some business affairs. Gerald concluded to accompany him. They left the morning after the reception of the summons, intending to return the following afternoon. No sooner were they fairly away than the girls brought out their gypsy finery, and prepared for another trip to meet them. Lily took more pains than before to make the disguise complete. She had a faint suspicion that Gerald was in love with her, and in her heart she didn't believe the little god Cupid half as blind as the poets represent him. Fearful of detection, she mustered up sufficient courage to borrow of Mrs. Smith a false front, made of very coarse black hair, and which was worn by that good lady's mother when an inhabitant of this mundane sphere and in full dress.

After some demurring it was loaned her, and Bell's long waterfall of curls, came into waves, and pinned on, completely concealed the golden hair. By means of a dark stain for her face and hands, and a charred clove rubbed over her eyebrows and eyelashes, I doubt whether her own mother would not have disowned her. The others were dressed exactly as before, and in high spirits they started.

As it was rather too cool to remain in the woods while waiting for the afternoon train, they went to a log house, and honored a poor widow and her children with a visit. Their hostess arranged the contents of their lunch baskets on the little pine table, adding some baked potatoes, hot corn-cakes and butter, besides a plate of rosy-cheeked apples. Lily left a bank note in the covered sugar bowl, to reward the poor woman for entertaining belles unawares.

They carried out their plan as far as to get aboard the train, and succeeded in finding seats near Gerald and Mr. Larrimer, but they had not planned a railroad accident, and consequently were thrown into confusion when the engine, refusing to glide along gracefully over the rails, on finding a broken one, reared to the right, and went over an embankment of earth a few feet in height.

In some way Gerald's ankle became dislocated, and a sudden faintness seizing him, he lay quite still, looking very white and handsome. The other passengers roused themselves, found that no one was killed, only a few bruised, but a large number badly frightened. Among the latter class were our gypsy friends. Lily was the first to get to her feet and look around. Spying Gerald, she forth-with gave a wild shriek, rushing to him, and, taking his head in her arms,

wept frantically, kissed him, and bade him farewell. Perfectly sure that the vital spark had fled, she gave no heed to the coldly critical glances that the fast recovering crowd were bestowing upon her until Bell came up.

Lily she exclaimed. Why, it's Gerald, and he has fainted. Get some water, some one—he's hurt.

At this moment Gerald opened his eyes, and Miss Lily dropped his head as if it had been a scorpion, and sprang back, quite as though stung by that reptile. Finding that he was not dangerously injured, they could not forbear laughing at little Miss Lily, whose golden hair having escaped from its fastenings, was mingling itself in bright streaks in the jetty locks she had borrowed. Her hat was lost, her wig awry, and she forgave them the expression of mirth, which they indulged in most heartily.

When Mr. Larrimer, reticent and unassuming as he was; met Kate, he held her hand a full minute as he fervently said,—

If you are safe, I am happy!

A week after the ridiculous ending to their gay freak, Gerald was sitting on a sofa in Mrs. Smith's best parlor. His ankle was doubtless weak, and his foot lame, for it was resting on a cushion encased in a beautifully embroidered slipper; but his arm seemed in no wise injured, for he used it, just then, in drawing his companion, Miss Lily, close to his side, while he teasingly said,—

I understand, Miss Lily, from an eye-witness of the scene, that you took advantage of my helpless condition, last week, and stole several kisses. I always take my property wherever I find it, and, to punish you for your audacity, I shall take them back.

Notwithstanding her blushes he was as good as his word, and Mrs. Landon says that after that of course she was obliged to accept him, and subsequent events prove that she did.

VARIETIES.

A CERTAIN clergyman was not over fastidious about his wardrobe. One day, meeting his brother, who was also a divine, he was censured by him for being so careless about his dress, and especially reprimanded for wearing striped trousers, it being altogether unclerical. Whereupon, the humorous preacher retorted, by saying, "Brother, my religion does not lie in my breeches."

ONCE on a time, says history, a Scotch pedestrian was attacked by three thieves. He defended himself well, but was overcome, when the thieves, much to their astonishment, found that he owned only the small sum of sixpence. "The devil's in the fellow," said one, "to fight thus for sixpence. Why, if he'd a shilling, he'd ha' killed us all."

A LITTLE girl had a beautiful head of hair, which hung in "clustering curls" down her neck. One hot summer day she went upstairs and cut all the curls off. Coming down she met her mother, who exclaimed with surprise:—"Why, Mary! what have you been doing to your hair?" To which she responded that "she had cut it off and laid it away in her box, but that she intended to put it on again to-morrow, as aunt Nancy did!"

"My son, know thyself!" solemnly said, a father to one of his offspring.

"Thank you, sir," replied the son, "but my list of acquaintances is sufficiently large already."

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