

## A WALTZ OF CHOPIN'S.

Last night, at the ball, when the band began  
To play, in its perfect fashion,  
That brilliant, beautiful waltz of Chopin  
Filled full of fire and passion,  
I thought for a moment my heart would break  
With its sense of loss and its sweet ache.

I had heard it often when you and I  
Deemed life a gay waltz-measure;  
When we dreaded nothing—except to die—  
And love seemed a season's pleasure.  
When we played with our hearts, like boys with a  
ball,  
And laughed good-bye, and thought that was all.

If we had known on that parting day,  
As we learned too well on another,  
That we were carelessly tossing away  
The best of ourselves, and each other,  
I think we would not have said Adieu  
With quite that insouciant air—do you?

Had we known the rapture of life—its zest  
Was to go with no returning,  
That under the future a vague unrest  
Should alway and ever be burning;  
That nothing would seem as it seemed before—  
I wonder would we have closed the door?

Had we known that never again on earth  
Could we laugh as we laughed that season,  
That life's glad ripple and lift and mirth  
Were not to be held by reason—  
That the heart has needs, as well as the brain—  
Had we known all this, why then that strain,

So full of the passion and fire and glee,  
Of Chopin's own great spirit,  
Could never awaken the pain in me  
That it does whenever I hear it.  
Had we known then what now we know  
We would not have let each other go.

## SOME WESTERN EXPERIENCES.

We dropped down—perilously far down it seemed to me—from the last step of our carriage plump in virgin mud, full an eighth of a mile from the nearest building. The nearest building was a long, low shed, ostentatiously yellow with piney wood, perched upon crutches or stilts, and ascended, like the Capitoline Hill, by means of an immense inclined plane ridged with supports for the feet. It was piled high with stuffed grain sacks, as could be seen through its wide open door, and was spoken of with conscious pride by the villagers as "our noo deepo."

A few villagers were gathered about the train, its daily arrival being the diurnal and never waning sensation of the hamlet. The most of them, hands in pockets, were idly looking on, while one caught the slim mail bag, throwing another into the car in its stead; one exchanged packages with the elegantly mustached, bediamonded, and jaunty express manager; one or two others climbed into the train which would carry them to their mighty metropolis of twenty thousand souls some fifty miles away.

To my indignant disappointment not one of these villagers was extravagant in hat-brim or boot-leg. Not one of them was red-belted or pistol-environed. Neither fringe, feathers, nor buckskin loomed upon my expectant vision. I smarted under a sense of wrong that picturesque fancy was not cajoled even with rainbow-hued or blood-red flannel, and that every man wore a shirt more or less white, and "store clothes" in which could be traced generic likenesses to the masculine raiment of that effete civilization which had just cast me out.

Had we indeed come so far, braved danger on heaving water and death on shuddering rail, only to find the Joaquin Millerised westerner on his native prairie but a sallow and looser-jointed Yankee than those we had left by the far eastern sea?

"I'll wager that they have literary conversations and sketch from Nature," growled S.

"There's plenty of clay modelling about their legs," I snifted, nose in air, and determined not to be propitiated that cowhide, thick with mud, replaced the romantic leggings I had set my heart upon.

The station was evidently in a depression between two undulations of the prairie. From where we stood, a miry road, with fat alluvial soil, strong in potentiality of opulent harvests, although now ploughed only by hoofs and wheels, stretched before and behind us up two long gentle slopes, over the tops of which the road disappeared. In the whole length of the road before and behind us only two pedestrians (saving dogs, pigs, hens, and such small deer) were to be seen, picking slow way across that sticky chasm. One waggon—a long unpainted box affair without springs—stood in front of a small building half-way up the rise or "prairie roll" before us. Before one or two doors, presumably of "stores" from the flannel shirts, overalls, and festoons of gingham and muslin hanging before them, two or three stalwart westerners were tilted back in chairs. A sun-bonnet of two was wavering back and forth in gardens. An open space, dusky and lurid as mouth of Plutonian cavern, with silhouette demon hammering before dancing flames, was two-thirds up the road, and these were all the signs of life we saw beyond the little group at the deepo.

The village consisted of this one long street; the houses and shops, or "stores," ranged along it with the regularity of figures in the Parthenon frieze. Scarcely a tree was to be seen, not a hedge or shrub, not a blooming flower or swelling bud, not a single decorative branch or vine, in a land where Nature responds so readily to the idliest asking, that vines and plants grow, like Jonah's gourd, almost in a night.

The dwellings were usually enclosed by two rows of boards nailed to an occasional post, to which the bark still adhered.

Each side of the miry road was a narrow border, a sort of Pompeian arrangement of gold against black, just wide enough for two persons to walk abreast. This Pompeian decoration was scarcely regarded by the villagers as having decorative value or aesthetic significance. To them it was, instead, cap-stone and key-stone of the village's sumptuous civilization—its new sidewalk.

The houses, mostly unpainted, stood somewhat widely apart, and were built after the Italianized Gothic of certain Tuscan cathedrals. That is, each had a frontispiece magnificently out of proportion to the edifice behind it, pyramidal facade, lacking cusped niche, imaged bracket, sculptured cornice, and saint-crowned apex to be equally impressive, yet giving as vital impression of aspiration as ever spiritualized Gothic lines, even if of aspiration not spiritual, but mundane. There were no porticoes, porches, piazzas, not a flying gable or round arch—nothing but Doric simplicity of ten-foot eaves, fronted with Tuscan façades at least twenty feet high.

We walked up the Pompeian decoration, through the cracks of which ribbon-grass grew and fluttered. Half-way up a woman stood aside to let us pass, in a bright red sun-bonnet stiffened with pasteboard, and long calico train stiffened with mud.

"Marm," she said, "who be you a-lookun fer? I ken put you stret" (straight). We were looking for the "hotel" two steps away. We stepped directly from the sidewalk into a narrow entry, hung with straw hats, bits of harness, slimpsey linen garments that somehow reminded one of drowned corpses of masculine raiment, to find ourselves in the parlor. It was a lead-colored room newly painted. A rag carpet covered the floor, and a profusion of braided mats covered the carpet. The sofa was hair-dots, the chairs of cane; cotton curtains at the windows were edged with coarse hand-knit trimming. George Washington in one of pop-corn and family ambrytypes in frame of wood hung over a decoration of pine. This decoration was supported on turned brackets, and was called a chimney or mantelpiece, although not a chimney was in the hamlet. Such are sometimes the feeble forms in which majestic ideas expire; the glorious gods of old Greece dying in agonies of grotesqueness as Christian saints on Lombardic sarcophagi, the monumental chimney-piece of the Renaissance expiring on western prairies as a strip of painted pine.

The sheet-iron stove stood in the center of the room upon a zinc-covered dais, its pipes soaring away through ceiling and upper chambers out through the roof. Harps and cornucopias of varnished acorns and leather leaves decorated the walls, and the room in its ensemble was the most elegant within fifty miles. The manner of our life at the inn did not lack novelty. My little room was the prophet's or prince's chamber, according to the character of the guest. Its one window looked over a collection of pig-pens, an expanse of ploughed ground, then a monotony of green billows rising behind one another, so near the sky that I was shut away as by a solid wall of emerald from the marvellous sunsets that had been one of the promised delights of my western life.

But although Nature's splendours were shut away from me, I had those of art. My imposing-looking bed, which ignominiously "caved" upon the slightest excuse, was covered with one of those triumphs of human genius called "album quilts." Every white square was inscribed in marking-ink with an appropriate sentiment and the name of the donor. The one which oftentimes greeted my waking eyes moved my soul with stately cadences.

"When this you see,  
Remember me;  
For as this I do  
I think of you.

MOLLIE SANDERS."

The first day of the second week, going to my room after breakfast, I was startled to find my pillows, erst clad in white, dressed in chocolate print, exactly like the dress in which Sis had waited upon table. I found later that in full half of these cathedral-facaded houses the "fore-room" was *salle à manger*, *chambre à coucher*, and *salon* in one; and the bed was always dressed, save on such ceremonious occasions as a sewing-bee or tea party, in the darkest and most serviceable prints that could be found.

I could exist with pig-pens usurping the place of sunsets, but with coloured pillow-slips—perish the thought! I dived among my own effects, and soon those pillows suggested the thinnest of hand-spikes in the white raiment of the most opulently contoured of pursers.

"Sis" was sixteen, freckled, with white eye-lashes, a long calico train, and red "waterfall," second only to Niagara. She was daughter of the innkeeper, with a lark's voice and motion, and was "hail fellow well met" with the boarders, whom she bullied and quizzed. Woe to the luckless wight who tried to bandy witticisms with her! More than once have I seen the head of some such foolish one an unwilling pedestal, for the immense platter from which Sis served the *pièce de résistance* of the meal, the miserable gargoyle not daring even to wink lest floods of gray descend upon it. It was Sis who always rang the dinner-bell, standing in the middle of the road before the house, and swinging the boisterous thing till its brazen voice echoed far out over the billowy prairie. Then from bench and forge, from office and counter, from gossiping coterie at the post-office (which

was also drapery, mercery, stationer's, chemist's, grocery, and fancy establishment all in one), from washing-bench at the back-door, where tin basin and crash roller were free to every comer, from garden, prairie, and "noo deepo" rushed the bachelor boarders, who met three times a day around that neatly-served table. They took their repast invariably in linen coats, said coats always remaining between meals suspended from nails in the front entry. So obtuse had my perceptions become amid the rotten civilization of cities that I failed to discover a compliment to myself in this uniformity of linen, till, after leaving the inn for our own house, I chanced one day to peep into the dining-room where twelve celibates sat at meat with not a coat among them.

One noon the dinner-bell was laggingly answered by blacksmith, carpenter, dapper young clerk, and district judge from the metropolis.

"Now jest look ahere, you uns!" exclaimed Sis indignantly; "ef you've one gone, shut yer cabbage-heads onter the notion that I'll stand sech conducts as these, you're jest sucked in. You, Judge Brown, you'll jest have to eat your pork done gone cold."

The boyish "Judge" laughed, and answered Sis somewhat after the same republican simplicity of manner.

That same afternoon, fleeing my shutterless western window, I was reading in the dining-room. I was surprised to see Sis lay the table for six o'clock supper, while yet the sun was so high, and still more surprised when I heard the bell making frenzied uproar in the street. I obeyed an eloquent convulsion of white eyelashes, and remained in my seat by the window, when judge, carpenter, and others came rushing in, chorusing with wonder that the afternoon had seemed so short. The hands of the clock told six.

"Laws!" exclaimed Sis, glancing up at it, "Reckon I mought as well turn that there clock's snoot back agin, now I'm done gone sure you-uns won't be late for supper."

And she turned it back, just the sixty minutes that must elapse before those deluded souls could eat.

Strangers were not unknown in our inn. One day a dashing individual, perfume and jewelled, addressed me at the dinner-table:

"Marm, I calculate that that there's a real diamond in your ring."

Sis was not there to answer for me, so I was obliged to calculate that "that there" was no sham.

"Would you like to swop it, marm, for dry goods, millinery, pins, needles, embroidery, gaiter boots, Cologne water, hair-oil, face-powder, pills?"

Another day a voice addressed me from vague regions remote:

"Marm, jest tell yer ole man that them air harness need a right smart o' grease."

My "ole man," aged twenty-four, was again absent, but intuition told me that the speaker was he who had borrowed his sulkey and belongings a few hours before.

Once I failed to appear at table during several meals. When I came down at last to supper (in a print peignoir) ample proof awaited me that slimpsey linen can cover gentle hearts. Almost every one of my fellow boarders had greeted my reappearance with some little-token of kindness—a saucer of rare berries, a pile of early green corn, two blooming plants in pots from the metropolis, a lovely new kitten in a bran new tin basin, kitten and basin presented by my nearest neighbour at table, the village tinker. A each boarder finished his swift repast he widened his passage door-wards so as to include my chair, and said kindly, with deference evidently paid to my sex and not to any difference of social position, "How'dy (*Anglice*, how do you do), marm? Hope you're done gone shet o' that there misery in your side."

But it came to pass that we wearied of our inn. We had eaten so many chickens fried in pork fat and soured with cream, that we shuddered at every cock-crow. We were exhausted with struggles that our bread be cold at least once a day, and that our lettuce be not always dressed with ham gravy. We yearned for coffee unmedicated with scorched barley, and for other than the dampest of brown sugar in our tea. So, when a cot of three rooms, shutterless, cellarless, chimneyless, porchless, treeless, vineless, and well-less, but with soaring Gothic-Italian facade, was offered us for \$2. a year, we gladly removed thither. The proprietor added a kitchen, into which one dived down from the main house by means of an immense step; and then, pointing out the town well to the braceleted and ear-ringed maid in calico train and bare feet, who had agreed to serve us for a dollar a week, left us to make or mar our domestic peace as we would. Fortunately we had brought with us various modest elegancies in the way of muslin curtains and pretty table-covers. We bought the cheapest of pine furniture, and I covered as much of it as I could in soft draperies. One of our boxes also held a cheap carpet, large enough to cover all our floors; but whose ingrain glory I am afraid set in neighbouring hearts thrifty shoots of the plant which Casimo de Medici said no man should water. Then we unpacked our books, hung our few pictures, and made believe to be exuberantly happy. Nevertheless there were drawbacks to that exuberance, even although in a month after taking possession I had adorned our Tuscan-Gothic facade with a Renaissance portico of pine scantling and wire, covered thickly with wild cucumber and morning glory vines, under which I could sit in the gloaming and forget my chagrin that heaving

billows of emerald shut me away from the walls of rose-tinted pearl, the jewelled domes and sparkling spires of a still more western city than ours, in the vigour with which I must defend myself against the mosquitoes. Even though tremulous veils of feathery cypress, and swinging bells of morning glory screened our windows, and the little plot of ground before the front door flamed with honest verbenas, grown valiantly from a single bouquet, though oyster-cans hung from every *coigne d'avantage*, looking like sculptured globes of malachite, with lustrous thick leaves of pendent vines, and though weird, dreamlike music wavered through our rooms with every breath of hot air passing over the æolian harp which I had fastened in one of the windows, there were yet drawbacks besides the worms that devoured our melons and the mosquitoes that devoured us.

One burning midnight every door in the village yawaed widely open as usual to entice some possible breath of air to enter. The slaps, bangs, and angry murmurs of the customary warfare had for some time been hushed in our cot, and the field was left clear for our trumpeting foes to glut their bloodthirst upon our exhausted frames. Suddenly, with a shuddering sense of something horrible in the air, I started broad awake. I had heard nothing, seen nothing, felt nothing, yet I was numb with terror. It was one of those swift spiritual awakenings in which the soul seems to outrun the body in the race towards consciousness, and to be quivering with keen vivid sensation while yet the body is arousing its senses one by one. Whether such awakening is beneath the warning sweep of guardian angel pinion, or from cry of some consciousness left watching while the soul sleeps, let wiser than I say, I only know that I was awake, cold and trembling in the grasp of an unrecognisable horror, some minutes before I was conscious of the outer world. Then I heard a sound, another, and another, each more awful than the last. They were sighs, long, deep, agonised sighs, like dying ones, broken by intricate moans, and came from directly under my bed.

My first thought was that S. was dying. But no, from the adjoining room I could hear his calm unconscious breathing. Even as I listened the dreadful moans continued, and I was too paralysed to raise my voice. But—there came a sudden convulsion beneath that shook my bed, a heavy sound as if some large body struggled and gasped in death. I shrieked—wildly, agonisedly—and in an instant S. was beside me. It was not necessary to explain my cries, for he could hear the sounds as well as I. He stooped and looked under the bed. Then with a sudden exclamation he reached under. Another moment and the night air was thrust through and through with wild unearthly clamour, as S. flew frantically across the house in pursuit of the squealing porker, who had broken down our fence in pursuit of a night's lodging.

One torrid afternoon I was sitting upon the floor of our "fore-room," packing away the week's table-linen in the seat of the chintz covered barrel, which was at once linen-press and armchair. From my position I could see nothing out of doors but a vivid crimson spot just beyond my vine-covered portico, where my adored verbenas waxed strong and blood-hued in the dazzling sunshine. The house was perfectly still, for Amanda had gone for water, and the day itself was as undisturbed in its molten glare as if I were the only living soul in all the broad universe. Not even a dreamlike breath of music came from my æolian harp, and only the soulless locusts whirred their melancholy and eternal wh-r-r-r-r in the heavy-headed prairie-grass. My thoughts were far away in a better land, although an earthly one, and my eyes were dim with tears as I saw the name by which I had once been known, but by which I should be known again never more.

Suddenly, right in the heart of this great, hot, sad silence, I became conscious that all the malachite globes of my oyster-cans were swaying violently to and fro. I could hear the dishes rattling in the china closet (a packing-box on end curtained with muslin) and could feel the floor beneath me heaving like the billows of an angry sea.

"Heavens!" I cried, springing to my feet. "Have I left home and friends to die like this in a western earthquake?"

The rocking increased, till now our cot seemed almost lifted from the earth and poised upon the brink of an abyss mercifully hidden from my shuddering sight. Just as my terror was at its height, I heard Amanda's voice in fluent yells at the gate. An instant more and the earthquake drifted away in confused uproar out upon the prairie.

"Twan't nothin' but Briggses hogs, marm, a-scrapin' ther dod-rotted hides agin the under-pinnin'!" screamed Amanda reassuringly in at the door.

Our diet in that prairie village was naturally limited. Fish was, of course, unknown, but chickens figured with satiating frequency upon our table. Everything that could be made with milk, eggs, and sugar was at our command, and we had such vegetables and small fruits as the worms, insects, and chickens left us, which was not much. "Side-meat," i.e. fat pork preserved in brine, was the staple food, one so unacceptable to us that a "killing day" was a red letter one in our calendar. On such a day I would see an unusual commotion up the hill beyond our "noo deepo." Our fellow citizens would be rushing excitedly about, each with a lump in his hand, which my practised sight recognized as just-killed veal, occasionally beef,