

The Lady in Muslin.

Margaret confined herself entirely to the sick-room: she never repeated her visits to ask for books; and even when we occasionally went to see the little invalid, the hostess was always present, and on no pretence did Margaret allow her to quit the room at such times. Still, the position was queer.

The day passed anxiously. Cecile continued ill. The doctor spoke hopefully; but nevertheless, the wonderful changes he was always predicting were very long in making their appearance; and at length, on the evening of the second day, in spite of my usual principle of non-interference in all that concerned the child, I could not help asking Gaunt if he had no female relation for whom he could send. Gaunt pish'd and pshaw'd, and said she could not be in better hands than she was; and he showed all his usual signs of disagreeableness and ill-humour when anything was mentioned that touched upon Cecile's relations or history; but I noticed, with silent satisfaction, that the next evening he sat down and wrote a letter which he took care to post himself.

Who the letter was to, I know not; whether he asked any one to come to his assistance, I know not; he certainly did not seem to expect any one, for he engaged a young person as nurse to Cecile, and sent up for assistance from London.

Still, I was not surprised, on the evening of the fourth day, when, just as we were sitting down to dinner, to hear the landlady announce that a lady wished to speak to Mr. Gaunt. Dick got up with a bound from his chair, and I never knew him make a quicker exit from the room. Now, thought I, surely this must be "the sister" that visited him so unexpectedly in London; surely the mystery is about to be explained. Outside I heard them speaking in low tones; still I could distinguish that the lady's voice was soft and pleasant, and I turned with some curiosity as Gaunt pushed open the door and invited her to enter.

"Mr. Mark Owen—Mrs. Marsh," Dick said, solemnly, and the little old lady put out her hand, exclaiming "Oh! the 'Mark' Cecile has told me so much about in her letters."

I tried to look pleased and flattered at this friendly address and the warm shake of the hand that accompanied it, but my inward feelings were decidedly those of disapprobation. To confess the truth, I had had some dim expectation of the original of that beautiful picture making her appearance in reply to Gaunt's letter, and the soft voice had heightened very much such expectation.

The yellow old lady did not stay long with us; with a maternal smile to us both, she told us to sit down again to our dinner, and not to be anxious; then laying her hand familiarly on Dick's arm, she added, "It's my turn again, now, you know; cheer up." Gaunt looked up at her far from cheerfully; but he only shrugged his great shoulders in reply; at which Mrs. Marsh nodded back, and then disappeared with a queer whisking kind of way through the door into the next room.

Dick slowly rubbed his hands—"She's no beauty, Mark," he said, in an apologetic tone; "but that little woman's a jewel!—a rare creature!"

"I've no doubt of it," I replied, obeying her injunction to go on dining. "Shall I help you to some of this?"

"A little gravy," Dick answered. We ate silently for some minutes.

"I feel intensely relieved," Dick said, presently; "and yet I could not have expected her to come. Another pupil of hers is in the last stages of consumption; I scarcely expected she would leave her."

"Another pupil?—then Cecile was her pupil?" I said.

"Of course she was—why, you don't think I've had the child always with me," Dick exclaimed, testily; "besides—" he stopped short.

At that moment a shadow came falling across the lawn; a light foot mounted the steps of the verandah, and then Margaret Owenson stood

before the window. She was not smiling. Since the day of Cecile's accident, a shade had gathered over her face—a shade of anxiety—that recalled so much the expression of the lady at the railway station, with whom, however, she denied identity.

"May I come in?" she said. "Don't disturb yourselves; I only come to see how little Cecile is, and also to inquire how the nurse goes on?"

She took a chair, with her usual ease, at a little distance from the table, and sat down. We had no objection to her company, and we were so accustomed to her free ways that they in no way affected its charm.

Of course Gaunt told of the new arrival; an old friend of his, he said, who had consented to come and nurse the child; probably they would be able to make some arrangement to have her removed. The place was so inconvenient for invalids, on account of the distance from all medical aid.

I was a little surprised Dick had never mentioned the idea to me, though certainly Mrs. Marsh had only arrived half an hour ago.

Miss Owenson listened anxiously. "I suppose, then," she said, quickly, "you will also be on the move?"

Dick hesitated and looked at her. "I was not thinking of that just yet," he said.

Women are quick guessers.

Margaret understood the hesitation and the look. She flushed in a manner that ought to have been very gratifying to Mr. Gaunt, and then rising suddenly and as if embarrassed, she said, "I'll go now and have a peep at Cecile."

Opening the door gently, she was just about to enter, when some one or something startled her; as if she had suddenly set her foot on a dangerous path, she recoiled, and I saw it was with difficulty she repressed the exclamation that her lips were already open to make. Very quietly, scarcely making a sound, she closed the door again.

"Cecile is sleeping," she said, in a hurried voice, "so I must wait." In spite of her endeavours to appear calm, I saw how agitated she was.

"You did not expect to see a stranger?" I said; "it startled you."

"A little. I didn't understand that Mr. Gaunt's friends had arrived," she answered.

Gaunt was occupied in selecting some cherries for our guest, and I suppose had not observed her agitation. He only said:

"There, Miss Owenson, they are not very fine, but I believe the rain has damaged the fruit-trees considerably."

The interest with which Margaret examined the cherries, and the animated remarks she made on the disagreeableness of rain, storm, and wind, &c., convinced me that there was something wrong. Miss Owenson was not usually eloquent on small matters. Gaunt—the stupid fellow—in spite of his lover's eyes, apparently saw nothing strange. He talked and laughed, and picked out fruit for her, and I think she was as grateful to him for his blindness as for his attentions.

Those cherries were very slow in disappearing though; and she rose before they were half finished, saying she must go, as she intended driving to—that evening. "Don't offer to come with me, though," she added laughing as we both exclaimed, "Oh!" "I am going on very particular business."

Gaunt and I sat some time talking after she left us; but it was only towards the end of our conversation, just as, with his cigar in his mouth, he was standing half in and half out of the window on his way to the garden, that Dick took courage to say:

"If you don't find it unbearable, Mark, I should like to stay here another week, even supposing we do dispose of Cecile."

"On account of the lady at the cottage, I suppose, now," I said sarcastically.

"A little, perhaps," he answered, drily.

After he had disappeared I indulged in a long soliloquy on the folly of the human race, and of Richard Gaunt in particular. I felt irritated. Did he think it was amusement to a man of my stamp and education to stand by and do nothing but watch his foolish love-making? Or did he think that that weighty purse of his, and that

great Goth-like figure, made rivalry between us a mere farce? Another week! And yet I was not sorry to think I had still seven days to wonder at, to quarrel with, and admire Margaret Owenson.

The night was very still and close—unusually close, it seemed, following those days of rain and chilly winds. I could not sleep—I was not feverish or restless—merely disinclined to sleep. I rose quietly and, throwing open the window, sat down beside it and lighted a cigar.

The night was moonless and dark; heavy clouds shut out the stars, but constant flashes of summer lightning supplied their place, and I sat watching the bright blue illuminations, smoking my cigar, and quietly enjoying the little air there was.

The night was so quiet, that the gurgling of the stream at the bottom of the garden was to be heard distinctly; and that, indeed, was the only sound, except the faintest occasional rustling of the leaves, that broke the stillness.

Suddenly I fancied I heard the breaking of branches, and a quick rustling as of some agitation among the shrubs. Not a breath of air was stirring the leaves of the climbing roses by the window—it could not be the wind. The sound came from the direction of the planks crossing the boundary stream; and thither I turned my eyes. I was the more on the *qui vive* for midnight sounds by having heard our host complain of the depredations constantly committed on his poultry-yard; and, knowing there were gipsies in the neighbourhood, I watched curiously, and was quite anxious to do him a good turn by finding out, and, if I could, securing the thief.

(To be continued.)

IN THE PINES.

When the snow is drifting, tossing,
On Mount Royal's rugged breast,
And the trees' gaunt arms are crossing,
With a vain and fierce unrest;

When the stars are twinkling, gleaming,
Through the keen and frosty air,
And the moon's rare radiance streaming
Finds frost jewels everywhere;

Where the pines' dark crests are soaring,
On the mountain's western side,
Hearken to the muffled roaring,
Like a distant surging tide;

'Tis the winter wind that strayeth
Through the pine trees' depths profound,
Like a saddened Voice that prayeth
For some hope and rest, unfound.

Listen! just above the roaring,
Faintly breathing, faintly heard,
Comes a high sweet strain that soaring
Like the matins of a bird,

Fades away in frosty distance,
Vague, unfinished as a dream!
Ere the straining ear that listens
Knows the beauty of its theme.

What is this song spirit hov'ring,
Where the old, wide-branching pines,
Wondrous forest secrets cov'ring,
Only speak in mystic signs?

'Tis the echo of a story,
Told in song long months ago,
When the flood of springtide glory
Filled the fields with vernal glow.

'Twas the rossignol that, singing,
In the pine trees' branches high,
Set the woods vibrating, ringing,
With his sweet, rejoicing cry.

"Sweet, sweet, sweet!" he cried, repeating,
In a reckless flood of song,
"Sweet Canadian bird!" his greeting
Trilled the woodland paths along.

Soon the pine trees caught the burden
Of his rippling clear refrain,
Held it prisoned as a guerdon,—
Still he sang it o'er again.

Now, when summer days are over,
Sings the rossignol no more;
Sparkling, stainless snow drifts cover
All the mountain pathways o'er;

But, from out the Pine's recesses,
Faintly breathing, faintly heard,
Comes a high sweet strain that blesses
Like the vespers of a bird!

Montreal.

HELEN FAIRBAIRN.