

THE FLIGHT OF BEAUTIFUL SNOW.

The hot glaring sun and the summer weather
Fell like a shock on the Beautiful Snow,
And the Beautiful Snow and the frost together
In terror decamped like a stricken foe.

But Beautiful Snow, as haughty as woman,
Was stirred by a wicked, revengeful hate,
And acted a way that was hardly human,
Before she had left with her white-haired mate.

The mountains and hills she had proudly terraced
With palace of crystal and lordly halls,
Where silvery vales and groves she had cherished
And loved to listen to the snow-bird calls.

She rased the white walls of her crystal palace,
And levelled the towers of her lordly halls,
Laid bare the bright groves, and with wicked malice
Destroyed all the snow-birds with twittering calls.

From lakes, and her wide castle moat the waters
Rushed down like an ocean, swamping our town,
And we fell as when an enemy slaughters
The helpless victim he has trodden down.

Our streets became flooded with streams and rivers,
And people were drifting along in shoals;
The icy cold water gave each the shivers,
Nor pitied the struggling and half-drowned souls.

Our cellars, where ruby wine should be flowing,
Were instantly turned into slushy tanks,
It ruined the reports of directors glowing,
By watering the stock in the vaults of the banks.

Our merchants, and brokers, and clerks went slipping,
And spluttering down on their backs on the hill;
And ladies old shopping were constantly tripping,
And showing pretty ankles with innocent skill.

And people were scared by runaway horses,
Set wild by the falling from houses of ice,
And ribbons went floating down water courses
Alongside of corpses of rats and of mice.

Now, Beautiful Snow and lover together,
You'll sorrow some day for this very crime,
When the glaring sun and the summer weather
In Autumn will pine for a Southern clime.

In vain you will strew your stars and your spangles,
Which you and your lover are wont to give;
We promise you now, as in childish wrangles,
To speak to you never more while we live.

Quebec, April, 1880.

AN OLD MAID'S CONFESSION.

By "ISIDORE."

Author of "Voices from the Hearth," "An
Emigrant's Story," "An Old Miser's
Story," etc., etc.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SHADOWS OF THE NIGHT.

The night that succeeded my interview with the Doctor found me perturbed and sleepless. Oblivion would not steal over me, and bring me "nature's sweet restorer." My mind was racked with uneasiness and doubt, and my body with feverish restlessness. The events of the last two days flitted before my mind, and took palpable and distorted semblances in my agitated slumbers. Flora, Frank, and the Doctor, all put on unreal shapes, and spoke unlikely speech, as they made their exits and entrances on the stage of dreamland. Everything connected with them became mixed in a jumble of wild, chaotic unpleasantness, until the very misery of my visions awoke me and kept me tossing about on my bed. At last I resolved to bestir myself, and so I gently rose and dressed. Better wakefulness, when I could banish regret, and summon my self-discipline to my aid, than the vague disquietude of inexorable dreams! Distinctly and vividly, now, as I write, the remembrance of that night comes before me. The door that separated my room from Flora's was left purposely open, in order that I might hear her call should she require me. Through the white curtains of my window, the stealthy moon-rays stole, and partially illumined my chamber with their lambent light. Over everything in the room hovered a pale splendour that seemed to chill one. Borne softly to my ears came the ceaseless splash and beat of the restless waves. I walked noiselessly into my sister's apartment. With one hand listlessly drooping on the white coverlet and the other quietly clasping the pillow, she lay in the warm embrace of mysterious sleep. The stealthy moonbeams had also fallen on the bed, and here and there had lit it with their pallid refulgence, bringing out in bold relief the shadows of the night. As I gazed lovingly on her, I prayed, oh, so fervently! to the Great Disposer of events to prevent those dark shadows, which already I knew had troubled my darling, from darkening her life. I looked at her, oh, so tenderly! in the silence of her pure repose, and touching her forehead with my lips I prayed to the All Supreme to bless her, and avert further trouble with her.

Why do I linger so minutely on every thought and action of mine on that peaceful moonlight night? You will soon know, O gentle reader!

Retracing my steps to my own room, the moonlight revealed something white on the floor; then, stooping to pick it up, I recognised Frank's letter, which I had accidentally dropped. I grasped it eagerly, angry with myself at my own carelessness. I had for days resolutely striven to discard all thoughts of it from my mind; now the fact of my having dropped it, forcibly recalled every word of it, and so I did what any woman in a thousand would have done under similar circumstances—I satisfied my yearning spirit with its perusal. Seated near the window, the pallid moonlight tremulously shining over the written characters, I accused

myself of cruelty for not having answered him. I wondered what had sustained him in his indomitable resolve to persevere. I recognized again and again the might of his overmastering love for me—I read once more, through blinding tears, his forcible and eloquent pleadings. What had I done to deserve such manly truth and trust? How could I make him undergo the cruel trial of my rejection a second time? With all my strength of purpose, I could not pen my unalterable decision; and yet, at any time, on any other day, he might fulfil the intention declared in his letter, and I should be forced to carry out my remorseless purpose, by rejecting him for ever! Irresolute how to act, I paused in my wretchedness, when the voice of my sister reaching my ears at once determined me what to do. The spell of the letter had fled—duty took its clear outline in my mind. As I rushed to my sister's room I mentally resolved on the morrow to abjure him—never to write or speak words of love to him again—and that my decision never to become his wife should be fixed and unalterable. The dismissal that he had received from my lips should be confirmed in my letter. Answering my darling's call, I stood at her bedside. The pallid moonbeams still shone round her, and the shadows of the night had deepened and darkened around the room; but the inconsistent light still revealed her, placidly sleeping. Was it then my fancy?—for had not her voice penetrated the stillness to reach my ears when harrowing doubt seemed to overwhelm me? Had not its soft accents recalled slumbering duty to help me in my certain decision—and yet she lay wrapped in slumber!

I sat by her bedside, and waited and listened. Then, in the hush of the solemn night, I heard my darling speaking in her sleep. "Agnes—Frank—I love him! Don't tell him, Agnes—he is here. Make him go; do, Agnes!" And then my sister, in the semi-conscious state between sleeping and waking, when the spirit seems to hover between the world of shadows and realities, softly turned towards where I was. "He is here again; he is near me—he must love me, Agnes! Yes, he loves me!" And my darling moved restlessly towards me.

I feared to wake her—I would not banish her dreaming fancies—and so I strove to comfort her with a dream of joy. I bent over her, and whispered "Yes." Did she hear my voice in the vision that was visiting her, amid the weird shadow of the moonlight? Who knows? Can sleep always silence the accents of love? I only know that after my whisper a smiling calm—pure and peaceful as we might fancy the light of an angel to be—rested on her wan face; and before I returned to my own apartment I had the satisfaction of knowing that she had fallen doubtless into a happy, dreamless slumber. Later on, the night resolved itself into the faint, smiling, luminous dawn, and the sleep which I had vainly courted, at last overcame me.

When I awoke, the placid trust of a happy, dreamless slumber, still softly lay on her dear features. I gazed upon them again lovingly and tenderly, and gently kissed her pure white forehead. Noiselessly and tearfully I left her, wondering to myself why I should have felt sad—again and again lovingly lingering near her, before I faced the remorseless day, reminding me of the one inevitable, stern duty of life!

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW OF THE DAY.

On the morrow succeeding this night we were all up betimes, and I persuaded the Doctor to take Flora for a walk. The summer's morning broke joyously on us, with its fresh warmth and sweet light, reminding me of those exquisite lines:—

"Sweet day, so pure, so calm and bright,
The bridal of the earth and sky.
The dew shall weep thy fall to-night
For thou must die!"

The front of our cottage was enclosed by a wall, festooned with ivy, and near this was an odd, old-fashioned summer-house overrun with climbing *Gloire de Dijon* roses, and honeysuckles. Inside was a rustic table and seats, affording us all a pleasant shelter from the sometimes too rough and rude sea-winds, or the dusty glare of the highway. Here, "housed in a dream at a distance from my kind," I often used to rest, and busy myself with that avocation which is a woman's best respite from care and trouble—namely, needlework.

During Flora's and the Doctor's absence this morning, in place of my work I took my writing-case, and resolved to pen my letter of final dismissal to Frank. I opened it, and took out my paper. I tried to pen and commenced—in vain; the pen was bad and the ink was thick. I opened a fresh bottle; I searched for another pen. I made another attempt. I got as far as "Dear Frank." "All beginnings are difficult," remarks a German author. Had the spirit of the German author observed me on this occasion, endeavouring to commence this letter, he might have chuckled with delight at the pugnacity of his own commonplace. Strive as I might, I could not form my first sentence, nor collect a floating thought to shape in a readable period. There, on the blank sheet of paper, were the words "Dear Frank"—oh, how dear! and here was I, stupid and helpless, gazing in blank vacancy on them. I left the summer-house, and walked toward the back of the cottage, from where I had a glimpse of the blue sea. No sound filled the sweet silence, except the mysterious murmurs of the far-off waves. I

listened, striving to collect my wandering ideas for the first sentence in my letter. I returned to my seat, caught my sentence before it slipped away from me, and allowed my pen to trace the first words. Suddenly I heard steps, and afterwards my name. Was I dreaming? Surely that voice and step were familiar. Hurriedly placing my letter out of reach, my heart beating wildly, I stood and faced—Frank!

It all took place in an instant. I had no time to compose my demeanour nor my thoughts, before he rushed towards me, removed his hat, kissed my hand, and sat down. "Everybody out!" he said. "The landlady did not know where you were; but I searched for the likeliest spot to find you, and here you are, looking as rosy as the dawn, the picture of all that is good and adorable. You did not think I should follow my letter so soon, did you?"

I had not yet recovered from my surprise, and I felt so dazed that I could hardly frame commonplace words of welcome to greet him. "It is indeed a pleasant surprise," I said, calmly, and I am afraid, rather coldly.

"I was somewhat precipitate in rushing down here, Agnes, without informing you first, but I only obeyed impulse, and there is always more rashness than calculation when the affections are concerned." And he said all this eagerly and hastily, apparently taking no notice of the calmness of my demeanour.

"I was on the point of answering your letter, Frank."

"And so I disturbed you. All the better," he continued. "I don't want it answered; there is always a chilling restraint about written words—give me spoken ones."

Was it better for him and for me that my tongue, and not my pen, should tell him his hard fate? Heaven only knows! My love for him, hovering over the thoughts that sought a written expression, might have softened them; as it was, there was no help for me—I had to be pointedly plain; I had to be severely merciless. Bestow your pity on me, O reader! for there was no one to pity me then, except the Invisible One, who searches human hearts. "Yes, Frank," I replied, "spoken words are the best. Had you waited, however, till to-morrow, you would have received my certain answer." Had my manner at last betrayed my decision? It may have partially done so, for his next words had an aggrieved, faltering tone about them.

"I could not wait, Agnes, I could not rest. You think me impatient and headstrong? I daresay I am, but my life's prospects and my life's happiness all depended on your answer; all my future now hangs on one little word."

"Don't say your future depends on a word, it must not do so, Frank." And I said this as resolutely as I could.

"Is it possible that you have still not understood me, despite all I have written and said, Agnes? With you as my wife, I can plan and succeed, I can dare and do; without your love my life will hold no promise and no joy."

"Frank, listen to me," I said, in measured, mournful tones, rising from my seat, and removing at a little distance from him, in order to steel my soul to pronounce my unflinching decision: "Do not ever again speak to me of love—I can never be your wife."

He rose then, and for the first time since our acquaintance the brightness on his face vanished, and in its place came a hard, cold expression. "So I have been a fool, and have been mistaken," he answered, sternly. "I have been cajoled, and allured, and encouraged, by that which was only a mocking semblance of affection. You never—never bestowed an affectionate thought on me; you never loved me. I have said my last words to you—I leave you, never again to cast my eyes on one who has treated me so falsely. Good-bye."

He turned from me without another word, and in that moment, dreadful moment, like one petrified, I saw him haste away, my life's happiness flying with him. Then a tender pity for him rushed to my heart, and with the sound of his words still in my ears, I quickly followed his retreating footsteps, exclaiming "Frank, Frank, you are wrong, I do love you, warmly and devotedly."

These words had hardly fallen from my lips when I heard footsteps—a fall, and a cry. I madly hastened towards the direction whence the sound proceeded, and oh, horror! I became dazed, and saw and heard nothing more!

When I recovered consciousness I found myself in my bed, the good Doctor and landlady in attendance on me. I struggled to free my senses from the nightmare of a terrible dream which clung to them, but my waking only revealed it more palpably. The horror of that moment, when my full and weary heart had betrayed its love to one who, in his sudden and hasty departure, could never have heard it, again and again stung my soul; and the more awful and terrible instant of all, as my agonising despair showed me, when I afterwards understood it, the mischief my words had caused, again and again seemed to consume my very being with torture.

Better, a thousand times better, that I had given up my own life, than to have lived, knowing that my darling, she for whom I could have sacrificed everything worth living for, would never more on this sad earth greet me again!

When they thought I was strong enough to bear the shock I was told all. There was not much to tell. It so happened that the Doctor and Flora, returning from their walk, had just espied Frank hastening away, and on entering the garden my words, "Frank, Frank, you are

wrong! I do love you, warmly and devotedly," reached her ears. As the utterance of them faded away my sister's spirit left its frail tenement. The shock of them struck her broken constitution, like a sharp sword might blight and destroy a flower. They killed her. I could hardly take cognizance of the dear, prostrate form when I fell speechless in the arms of the doctor.

During many weeks I was informed that my own life was despaired of, and when at last I grew convalescent I could only perform my daily duties like a sad, dull, mechanical exercise, only feeling the burden and pain of living—dreading even to face the memory of the one uncontrollable, agonising sorrow of my existence.

EPILOGUE.

Again I am seated under the oak-tree in the garden, which you remember. The passing years which change the face of nature, and alter human feeling, have left their marks upon the characters of this history. Unsparring and relentless Time, bringing in its wake its tribute of weal and woe, raptures and pains, has left its trace everywhere.

Once more it is summer-time, and the glow and beauty of the luxuriant season makes our weary natures glad. The old oak-tree, so rich in its past associations, is still in the prime of its glory and magnificence. The dark, cold winters have not stripped it of its pristine strength, nor lessened its umbrageous crown of superb foliage. It has defied the teeth of "devouring time," and though drawing its sustenance from earth, it looks as everlasting as our own immortal hopes.

I ply my needle, enjoying the warmth and sweetness of this summer's day.

The great calm which floats around me is like the spirit of Peace, and in the tender silence, regret and sorrow are stilled. The clouds that once troubled me are as far off from my soul as the tiny cloudlets that now sail in the azure deeps above me, which will soon melt and vanish altogether.

Before I close these pages for ever, let me recount the changes which have come on the wings of the fast-fleeting years, as far as they affect the personages of this narrative. My kind old protector, in the fulness of her age, with all her marvellous faculties keenly preserved to the last, has passed away.

"To where, beyond these voices, there is peace."

In these pages I have often descanted on my grandmother's character. If there is anything left untold, it is this—that no words of mine could ever do her full justice in her life, in the same way as now no after-thought can ever truly estimate her beautiful memory.

I have a few words to say about Doctor Ponder. As can well be imagined, this excellent type of humanity was all kindness and thoughtfulness to me during my great affliction. His kindly offices to me were always marked by a spirit of rare devotion. Without assuming then the character of a lover, he always proved himself a true and tried friend.

With an admirable perseverance, worthy of a better cause, after a while he again preferred his suit, and, in justice to him, I told him *when* my refusal was irrevocable—for the first time I trusted my secret to the keeping of any one. As the only one concerned in it had, let us hope, won a more beautiful heritage than any earth could have bestowed upon her, there could be no possible injustice done to her memory by imparting it to one who, for my sake and hers, would ever hold it sacred.

I must say that at last he bore his disappointment heroically, and, yielding to my earnest solicitations on the subject, took to his heart and home a younger and more blooming specimen of womanhood than the writer of these pages. It is pleasant for me to know that the exuberant love which filled his nature should not have consumed itself entirely away, so that, after all, it was destined to make another woman happy. Mrs. Ponder was a short, plump, buxum creature, with soft, blue eyes, and a ravishing smile. Always reticent when she could not say anything pleasant, gently sympathetic without parading her affections, full of care and troublous thought away by the more magical influence of her presence, she always seemed to me the embodiment of Wordsworth's heroine—

"A household spirit bright,
With something of an angel light."

No one will wonder that we became close and fast friends. There was nothing I looked forward to with so much pleasure as a visit from Mrs. and Dr. Ponder. Their companionship almost made my days gay again. Their girls, Flora and Agnes, bright darlings, though rather too full of a saucy spirit of mischief, generally accompanied their parents. Who could be sad in such an atmosphere of kindness and merriment! The evanescent laughter and bright prattle of children at any time must banish despondency. And the influence of my friends' children can divert memory, and once more rekindle happiness!

Mrs. Dufresne still holds herself out to the world as a martyr to a thousand and one ailments. And several London doctors, many of whom are of established *prestige*, are continually humouring this interesting lady, while they pleasantly boast that they make one hundred a year out of her. She has compiled her various prescriptions, received from time to time, into a volume. This relic of hypochondriacism—if it is still extant—will be bequeathed to the museum