

THE GHOST OF THE LABURNUMS.

"Why do you not invite me to the Laburnums, Fan?"

"Because it is so lonely there, Rae."

"For that reason I shall come," said pretty Raphaela Fairlie. "I shall come and keep you company for a whole week, just as soon as I can get away from the city. I knew you and Phil were moping," nodding her curly head sagaciously.

A sudden gravity went over Fannie Brudenel's gentle countenance, yet her eyes brightened expectantly.

"I should love to have you there, of course," was all she said.

When train time came and Fannie had left Rae's pretty studio and the city, the little artist still sat daintily touching the photograph she was colouring, and evidently closely thinking of something else. She was not sure that Doctor Philip Brudenel would exactly approve of her going to the Laburnums, but she meant to go for all that, for she loved him, and she could plainly see that he had cares and perplexities of which she knew nothing. And though they had been engaged over a year, he made no proposal of marrying soon, only looked moody when the subject was approached. Rae so enjoyed his company that she could live with him in the black hole of Calcutta, she declared to herself, but probably Philip did not think so. Anyway, she was going to the Laburnums, his home at Lowshore, because she felt that her love gave her a right to know what was troubling him.

Ten days later she locked her studio door and steamed away to Lowshore, and soon the depot carriage had set her down at the door of a tiny cottage hid in laburnum trees.

Fannie kissed her affectionately.

"What a delightful apparition you are, Rae," she said, and led her into a little sitting-room.

Everything was very plain, and very, very tiny. Rae thought, accustomed to spacious city apartments; and when Fannie had taken her hat and travelling-satchel, and gone to spread a lunch for her, Rae looked around and saw that the carpet was threadbare and the furniture extremely old-fashioned.

Suddenly a door opened, and an old lady, leaning on a cane, tottered into the room. Her face, bordered by a snowy cap, had a strange, white, puffy look, but she yet showed signs of having been very pretty in youth.

"What are you?" she asked Rae. "A fairy? Do you think you can better our fallen fortunes? No, no! that can never be."

Rae's cheek burned under the strangely significant words, but she guessed immediately that the old lady's mind was wandering; then Fannie entered the room.

"Come, mother, come and rest now," she said, gently, and drew her from the room. She came back, saying to Rae: "My mother is demented. Do not be troubled by anything she says."

It was evening when Doctor Philip brought his fine presence into the tiny home. His start of delight on beholding Rae was succeeded by a rather sad smile.

"What pleasure did you expect to find here, child?" he asked, holding her hand.

"Perhaps I did not come for pleasure, Philip."

"For what then?"

"Profit."

"I find very little of that here."

Two days passed. Rae saw plainly what the life was at the Laburnums—monotonous, meagre; but ever since Philip had first brought his sister to her studio, Rae had loved Fannie, who was older than herself, and patiently becoming one of the sweetest of old maids. So she enjoyed sisterly talks with Fannie. Philip was absent most of the time.

In one of these confidential chats Fannie said:

"You ought to have come in the early autumn, Rae—it is prettier here then. In November we have nothing attractive—literally nothing. I have often expressed the wish to Philip to have you visit us; but he always speaks of the contrast between your life and ours—you in the city, with access to so much that is entertaining, and we so shut out from the world. But because it is you, I think, Rae, that I will show you the house in the Hollow."

"The house in the Hollow, Fan?"

"Yes, our ancestral home; for Philip and I came of a prosperous race, poor as we now are, and the old house is full of what is beautiful and rare. Get your hat and we will go now."

Through long lines of laburnums, across a tiny kitchen-garden, along a decaying orchard into a slope still green in the November sunshine. At one end of the valley which opened towards the sea, where white sails were noiselessly flitting, stood a large and handsome house of painted brick, with oval windows and other picturesque effects.

"It is not an old house," said Fannie. "It was built by my grandfather, in his last days, as a wedding present to my mother. The old house which had formerly stood here he had pulled down and this built. He intended to reside with his only daughter when she married Israel Beauclair, a French Jew, whom he had chosen for her. But my mother fell in love with her music-teacher, Ross Brudenel, and eloped with him, and grandfather wrote and bade her never to come back. But when Philip and I were fatherless, my mother came, in her great extremity, and begged her father's assist-

ance. Grandfather gave her the cottage we now have, and allowed her a small income with which to bring us up, but never forgive her. At last he died, willing all his property to a distant cousin in India, who has never come for it. The house stands empty, with all its beautiful furniture, and the rich fields lie fallow, while Philip barely supports us with his small practice. Lowshore is a distressingly healthy place," with a faint smile.

The interior of the house was finished in rich foreign woods, the floor, polished like glass and laid with costly rugs and tapestries. The furniture was of mahogany and velvet, long mirrors and dark paintings adorned the walls. It was indeed a handsome house, speaking of almost limitless wealth.

"There are thousands of dollars' worth of silver in the bank at Shoreborough," said Fannie, "and rents accumulating there which will be a small fortune in itself. But we have nothing."

"How hard! how cruel!" cried Rae. "I should not think your grandfather could rest in his grave to have you and Philip with all your refinement and culture, spending your lives in a hand-to-hand scramble for bread."

"They say he does come back and wander uneasily about here," said Fannie, carefully closing shutters and doors and coming out into the sunshine. "But, of course, such stories are told of all such places. Philip says he does not believe a word of it," with marked emphasis which made Rae turn and look at her.

"But you do, Fan."

"Twice people have tried to sleep there and declared that grandfather appeared to them. I should not dare to try it, for I am a timorous thing at best, and—"

The intensity of Rae's thoughts made her quite deaf to what further her companion was saying. This fortune was Philip's right. No wonder he was sad, moody and hopeless of their marriage as he was situated and seemed fated to continue to be.

"The will was made immediately after mamma's marriage," said Fannie, standing under the laburnums and looking up at the great house. "Poor mother says that he told her on his deathbed that he made another will—perhaps in her favour. But what she says goes for little. Her state is very strange since a fever she had just after Philip came of age—her talk so wild and foolish—and yet she seems to understand some things in our affairs that we do not see till afterwards. It is almost uneasy to think over the strange knowledge she has had during these past years," and Fannie fell into a fit of musing.

They walked back to the tiny cottage. Rae's veins thrilled with excitement, but Fannie went soberly about getting tea. They kept no maid, this poor disinherited family, and Rae learned that Philip's own hands tilled the little kitchen-garden, while every labour of the household was performed by Fannie.

She could not sleep that night after she had gone to her tiny bedroom. The moonlight seemed to disturb her and make her brain wildly active. What influence strung her nerves!—for when all was still and the night far advanced she rose, and, dressing, donned her warm sealskin sacque and cap, and came out into the hall. She took a bunch of keys from their nail there, and, selecting one which she had seen Fannie take, held it tightly in her slim, white fingers as she went out into the night.

In the moon's white light she went steadily through the long lines of laburnums, across the tiny kitchen garden, along the decaying orchard, into the Hollow. She stood a moment before the great still house, listening to the roar of the sea. Strangely enough, she did not feel afraid. If she thought of the presence of an unseen spirit, it was to appeal to it prayerfully for help.

Another will. It must be. At least it would do no harm to search, and that is what she had come for.

She left the hall-door wide open and let the moonlight flood the tiled hall. It streamed through the chinks of the shutters, which she opened, one by one, as she fitted keys to drawers of all kinds. The task was no light one, for in every niche was cabinet or escritoire. But there were no papers anywhere. Many things which must have been the personal property of old Squire Brudenel she found, but nowhere his will.

"Oh, if I only could—if I only could!" she said, sadly, "and it would restore Philip to his rights!"

Rat, tat, tat—the sound of a cane on the tiled floor. Rae turned for the first time, her eyes wide with fright. The enthusiasm with which she had entertained her generous purpose had made her utterly forgetful of herself. Now some one was coming.

The door swung slowly on its tarnished silver hinges. A quaint, bent little figure, leaning on a cane, advanced into the room and paused beside a handsome carved armchair which stood before a table. Lifting the cane, the bent little old woman knocked smartly thrice on the seat of this chair, filling the room with a hollow sound, then, resuming her feeble walk, she passed out of the apartment by another door.

Tremblingly, doubtfully, Rae curiously approached the chair. The blows of the cane seemed to have disturbed or broken the seat, for it was awry, plainly revealing a cavity beneath. Turning the chair to the light, Rae looked within and saw distinctly a folded paper.

It was a large sheet, yellow and thick as vellum. Her hands trembled as she unfolded it and read, "My last will and testament, Paul Brudenel," and it dropped to the floor.

Snatching it up she ran—ran swiftly out of the house, and flew noiselessly and shaking to Fannie's door.

"I have found it—I have found it!" she cried, flinging her arms around the amazed, white-robed figure who admitted her to Fannie's chamber.

"Found what? Are you sick? Are you crazy?" asked gentle Fannie Brudenel.

"The other will—within a chair—an old armchair in the house in the Hollow. A ghost showed it to me!" answered Rae, holding the paper aloft.

"There was a knock at the chamber-door."

"Sister, what is the matter? What disturbs the house?"

It was Philip's voice.

"I have found the will! Come in and read it!" cried Rae, dragging him in.

She gave him the paper; she lighted a lamp. He was forced to read. Struggling for calmness as he proceeded, he read to the end. Yes, late, but not too late, the precious document was found—the second will of Paul Brudenel, unconditionally bequeathing all he possessed to these two, his grandchildren.

In the exciting talk which followed, no one heard a slender cane go rat-tat-tat past the door but when the blue morning light dawned and Fannie bestirred herself to get breakfast, she went first to her mother's room.

"Philip," she said, coming back, "mother has had one of her bad nights again. She has been up and away. I must have slept very much more soundly than usual; she never eluded me before. She is very much exhausted."

Philip went instantly to attend to his mother. When, the next day, she seemed restored to her wonted condition, and Rae had minutely told her story, they closely questioned Mrs. Brudenel as to her visit to the house in the Hollow, and tried to discover if she had any knowledge of the hiding-place of the will. But nothing could be gained from her disordered mind. She would only shake her head and smile.

"How dared you go on such an expedition to that lonely place at such an uncanny hour, Rae?" asked Philip, the next evening, when embraced by his arm, they had talked over the happy prospect of their immediate union.

"I was inspired," she answered, laughing, but with a look of awe creeping into her beautiful eyes. Then, as she reconsidered that strange night, she gently embraced him.

"All for love, Philip. It was done all for love."

WOMAN IN THE WORKING WORLD.

I confess that I am not at all sure that if certain rosewood doors were flung wide open to certain of our working women that they would at all be inclined to enter. Still it would be hard to make any autocrat believe that, wouldn't it? To illustrate: I know a certain recognized leader of fashion and society, a cultivated, elegant woman, who can entertain a whole roomful of company, whose word and whose opinions are laws in the circle in which she moves. This lady will not only owe her milliner for six months at a time, will not only bargain and bargain with her seamstress, and finally tell the overworked sewing-woman to come again for one, two and three months at a time when she asks for money, will let them both see the hard, selfish, contemptible side of her nature, and which she keeps covered up from her own friends, but will furthermore pass her debtors on her way to church with a haughty stare as if she saw them not. To be sure to the finer quality of woman such snobbish treatment acts rather as a tonic, but to the timid, shrinking working-girl, who has started out in the world full of pride at her importance as a bread-winner and a helper, glad in a shy way of her high rank in nature's aristocracy, such a sneer comes like a wet blanket. This last spring a certain very nice club of young gentlemen proposed giving a reception to their young lady friends. A certain young gentleman whom I know sent in the name of a very charming and lovely young lady for an invitation to the reception. Her name was refused and the mortified applicant demanded the reason. The committee was very sorry and as far as they were concerned there was no reason at all; but the other young ladies, who were all high toned, would be sure to object, because she worked in a store! And I do believe if those young lady guests had been told the estimation that was placed upon their ideas of the nobility of work by the gentlemen of the club, that to the last woman of them the lesson would have been one life-lasting in its value, and they each would have recognized their duties to each other as women as perhaps they had never done before.

VARIETIES.

BAVARIANS AT HOME.—The Bavarians are great hands at festivities, and lose no possible opportunity of indulging in dancing, which is their favourite amusement. A wedding-dance that lasts only an entire day and night is looked upon as a very poor affair, and sometimes as much as six days and nights are devoted to such festivities. Their mode of dancing, although not wanting in energy, must be a far from graceful performance. After commencing with what

a recent traveller says resembles an Irish jig, the favourite and crowning feat of the Bavarian dancer is to raise himself on the shoulders of his fair partner, resting his head there while his feet perform a tattoo, fly-fashion, on the low ceiling of the dancing-room. It is certainly as well, as the writer from whom this information is derived remarks, that Bavarian women's backs are strong and their hips broad.

SPECULATING IN POSTAGE-STAMPS.—A prospect of the introduction of the penny-post, a story is told by a commercial traveller who was at that time doing business in the Channel Islands. An English shilling brought thirteen Jersey pennies in exchange, so, when the penny stamp came into the island, they were sold for a Jersey penny. Thirteen were sold for an English shilling, and our friend was not long in finding this out. So he bought up all the local stock of stamps—some four hundred pounds worth—and sold them when he crossed the water, realizing about eight per cent on his bargain. Other commercials followed suit, and the officials at the General Post-Office were astonished at the number of stamps which were required for insignificant little Jersey. Settling-day came—and with it the explanation. The enterprise was speedily stopped.

FADING IN CHURCH.—It seems strange at first sight, but not at all wonderful when we come to look closely into the conditions and circumstance of the case, that fainting in church should be a frequent occurrence, and in some congregations even reach the proportions of an epidemic. There can be no question that the ventilation of many churches and places of worship, which are wont to be crowded, is radically defective, and the vitiated atmosphere inevitably affects the weakly as a powerful depressant. This is a matter which requires attention. Medical officers of districts might bring more influence to bear on churchwardens and the wardens of chapels, that measures may be taken to receive the ingress of pure air without draught and the escape of foul vapours. Meanwhile it cannot be doubted that there is room for a little serious argument on this subject, and ministers might do well to remonstrate from the pulpit with congregations in which the "halo" of fainting is prevalent. In some of the chapels attached to lunatic asylums there are special apartments for the accommodation of epileptics who have "fits." It would almost seem that in some churches and chapels there should be rooms set apart for the retirement of those who contemplate fainting.

FERN WINDOWS.—Let us see how the shady windows of a dwelling-house may be made beautiful by the presence of ferns. We will begin at the basement. Here we shall find, as in thousands of London and other city houses, a window or windows looking out upon what is popularly called the area. Such windows are invariably immersed in shadow, and, given up as they are to the domestics of the household, one may perhaps not infrequently see, as one passes, the window-sills adorned by modest pots containing geraniums, calceolarias, fuchsias, or the golden-green leaf and golden flowers of the sweet but modest musk-plant. Rarely do we see ferns in such windows. But why should they not be there? Let them by all means be mixed with such flowers as will thrive in these windows. But, when flowers need to be excluded, by reason of the unreasonableness of the situation, let the ferns at least remain. By the tasteful arrangement around and about such windows of virgin cork, with provision of "pockets" for ferns, or by the skillful use of cement and pieces of stone, or brick disguised as stone by a sprinkling of the dry powder of cement—like provision being made for drainage—an "area" light may be made really charming. Or suppose the basement windows of a house are half below the garden or area level. In such cases there will be a space commonly called a "well" outside such windows, having usually three bricked sides in addition to the window side. By putting a glass top or frame to such a space an admirable little fern-house will be created, in which ferns will thrive, and find excellent protection against winter frosts. With trowel and cement it will be easy, in a "well" like this, to establish a miniature "Fern Paradise."

MALARIAL FEVER.

Malarial Fevers, constipation, torpidity of the liver and kidneys, general debility, nervousness and neuralgic ailments yield readily to this great disease conqueror, Hop Bitters. It repairs the ravages of disease by converting the food into rich blood, and it gives new life and vigour to the aged and infirm always. See "Proverbs" in other column.

OUR CHESS COLUMN.

Solutions to Problems sent in by Correspondents will be duly acknowledged.

TO CORRESPONDENTS.

J. W. S., Montreal.—Paper to hand. Thanks.
H., Ottawa.—We have sent a letter to your address. Please answer.

E. D. W., Sherbrooke, P. Q.—Solution received of Problem No. 285. Correct.

Now that the match between Zukertort and Rosenthal is finished, there will be a lull in chess matters, but it is very important for the maintenance of public interest in the game to keep up the excitement among amateurs and others, both at home and abroad, and, therefore, it is very likely that we shall soon hear of another encounter between two or more of the professionals of the day, which we trust may be of a more attractive nature than the one just concluded. In speaking in this way, we do not refer to the skill of the combatants, as that, in previous contests, has given to each a standing in chess which few