

# GYPSY.

By MISS F. M. MUSGRAVE.

(Continued.)

"No," answered Bertrand almost fiercely, his feeling almost getting the better of him here. "No, there is no one whom you will have to fight against for the possession of my niece's love. For I think I am quite safe in saying that my niece's heart is quite free—as fresh as any child's heart."

"Ah," said young Sylvestre, in a tone of weariness, "it is refreshing to meet a woman with a fresh young heart. Even young women now-a-days seem to have such old hearts, such calculating heads."

"I don't know," said Bertrand shortly, longing to bring the conversation to a close, "you may be right. Men are so calculating I suppose women must become so too, specially women much accustomed to be in the society of men."

"Well, but it is a man's duty to be calculating."

"My niece has seen very little of men," continued Bertrand."

"So much the better" said young Sylvestre approvingly, revealing a host in that decided expression.

Bertrand began to feel his visitor more and more objectionable and unbearable. A man invariably does feel another man unbearable who has dared to love the one woman dearest to him. He could with difficulty restrain himself from picking up this young Sylvestre and ejecting him from his house.

"I thank you, Mr. Germaine," began young Sylvestre, rising for a second time, "for all that you have had the goodness to communicate to me." He put out his hand to Bertrand quite condescendingly. Bertrand took it rather simply. He was only human. As the door at last closed on his visitor he gave vent to a groan, and then began pacing the room with quick steps. He wondered if any man had had as much to bear as he had; if any man had ever been situated just as he was situated. He had not only to bear his hopeless love, but now he was to feel it his duty to give another man permission to come and take from him the one thing precious to him in this life—his ray of light. He felt he was very selfish but his feeling himself selfish did not lessen the pain. He asked himself bitterly what he had done that he should thus be tried. It was all very hard. He had only guarded his little Gypsy then, he had only brought her up beautiful and fresh in heart as in form only—only to give her to this man, this young Sylvestre with his world worn heart. Quite ready though was this man to appropriate to himself all this pure freshness, with no thought of the utter injustice of the whole bargain. Bertrand's man's heart rebelled at the idea of the inequality of this partnership in mind and heart as no woman's heart would have rebelled probably about it. A woman of the world would have smiled at Bertrand's idea of inequality as romantic nonsense. But to his generous and just heart it did not seem a fair thing—hardly a right thing to do to give this innocent young creature to a man like Sylvestre. Then he found himself comparing his heart to that which offered itself for Gypsy's acceptance, and he told himself decidedly that although older in years than young Sylvestre, in heart and experience he was younger. Then he became afraid and asked himself bitterly what right he had to compare an old man to a handsome man like Sylvestre. Now he would take no thought for himself; he would be quite merciless. He rang the bell and ordered that a message should be sent to Miss Melville that he wished to see her instantly. He was growing afraid of himself; he might waver, and then—well, he must just not think of himself now, and above all, he must not think of Gypsy. He sat down to his writing table while waiting for Gypsy and began to pour out his feelings on paper. He found himself writing these words:—

"He who puts confidence in any earthly love is a fool; and he who trusts to the comfort of some earthly love is only so many degrees short of an absolute idiot."

## CHAPTER IX.

Bertrand went on writing, although he knew Gypsy had entered and was standing at his side. He was almost afraid to look at this girl whom as a child he had so often held in his arms. At last he threw down his pen and pushed away from him what he had been writing.

"Gypsy," he began rather abruptly, "I have sent for you to tell you what I think it is but fair to you that you should be told at once."

On this point perhaps a woman would not have agreed with Bertrand. But to his man's mind it would have seemed very much like settling about the disposal of Gypsy, if he had not instantly told her.

A woman would probably have decided that it was better the girl should not know what had taken place. But Bertrand with his man's directness and his woman's tender thoughtfulness did as he would have been done by. He sent for Gypsy on purpose that she might be instantly told about what most nearly concerned herself.

But only too often a woman in a matter of that kind treats her daughter, or sister or niece, as the case may be, as if she were some piece of goods, which had no voice in the bargain.

"Gypsy" he went on, "I feel very incompetent to advise or help you about what I wish you to know at once. I only wish I knew some lady friend to whom I could send you for advice." Mr. Sylvestre asked my permission to win your love this morning. Bertrand spoke very simply as a man would speak in an affair of that kind, only anxious for the well-being of his charge,

Sharply Bertrand noted the flush of evident pleasure which swept over Gypsy's face.

"And what did you say, Uncle Bertrand?" Very softly, almost wistfully, that question was put.

"What did I say? Why, I gave him my permission to try to win your love, Gypsy."

The expression which now came into Gypsy's face was quite incomprehensible to Bertrand. It was almost as if something had hurt her.

"But my permission has nothing whatever to do with it. With you alone must rest the decision of what will be for your own happiness. You are no longer a child, Gypsy. Mr. Sylvestre says he cares for you, and if you care for him—why, you see, I am only anxious for your happiness."

Gypsy's brown eyes were earnestly fixed on Bertrand.

"Uncle Bertrand," she said very slowly, "would you like me to—to marry Mr. Sylvestre?"

"My child, what I like has nothing to do with it. It all rests with you. Whether you—you like him." Almost breathlessly Bertrand waited for an answer to the question. He could not even sit still but rose and walked up and down the room hurriedly.

"Oh, I don't know!" burst from Gypsy, "I don't feel as if I know anything;" and her beautiful brown eyes filled with tears and overflowed.

"Oh, I am so miserable. Oh! papa, papa, why did you ever leave me?" And Gypsy threw herself on the sofa and covered her face with her hands.

Now, nothing could have wounded Bertrand so deeply as this appeal to her father; he took it as a sort of indirect reproach to himself. Gypsy must think him unkind in some way or she never would have appealed to her father in that manner. As he stood by the sofa he wondered which at that moment was the most miserable—Gypsy or himself.

"My darling," he began very gently, "why are you so miserable? I wish you would tell me. You know without my saying it that I am only anxious for your happiness. Tell me just what you want. Gypsy, my child, don't cry so."

Poor Bertrand felt almost desperate. He longed to take that little sobbing figure in his arms but he felt he dare not.

"Gypsy," he said almost solemnly, very softly placing his hands on her head in a way that he meant to be purely paternal, and God and his own heart alone knew how hard it was to be only paternal with that little figure sobbing beside him. "My child, tell me what it is. God who looks into my heart and sees all, sees that I would do anything on earth that would make you happy. You do believe this, Gypsy. I am sure you do. If you love Mr. Sylvestre, then all will be right, darling. He is a very good young man I believe, and a great many women like him very much." Here Gypsy gave rather an impatient movement but as she made no negative reply Bertrand took her silence for a girl's bashful and tacit way of assenting.

"I only wish you to consider what I have told you, Gypsy; don't be in any hurry to decide what is a life-long matter. You are very young. But if you do love Mr. Sylvestre you can tell me all about it later on when you have grown more accustomed to the thought."

Gypsy rose quietly from the sofa and moved towards the door without a word, with something almost like a dazed look in her face. How she longed then for a woman's sympathy. "Lætitia E. Landon" is right when she says that "a woman only can understand a woman." None but themselves can fully enter into their hopes, fears and plans. No husband even—however tenderly loving he may be—can give that perfect sympathy which one woman can give another—the sweet pure sympathy it may be of a sister. Or it may be the sympathy of a friend dear to you as your own soul.

As the door closed on Gypsy Bertrand felt altogether puzzled. He wondered wearily if all women were as uncommunicative and as incomprehensible as Gypsy had been, and he gave deep pity to all fathers and brothers who stood in a position of the same responsibility.

The next day Gypsy put this question in a matter-of-fact tone: "Uncle Bertrand, you do wish me to get married and settled in life as people say?" "My dear child, of course as your natural protector I wish to see you settled in life—provided you are happy." Gypsy nodded reflectively, but she said nothing for a moment or two. Then, "Uncle Bertrand, before you marry me off and settle me in life I want you to do something for me."

"What is it, dear? I am afraid you know you have only to ask for me to promise."

"I want you to take me away from here for a little while and travel about with me, and show me a little of the world, and be very good to me before I leave you. Gypsy's eyes were fixed earnestly on Uncle Bertrand's face. That face lighted up with a glow of pleasure, then he said half slyly:

"Am I not always good to you child?" He called her child very often now.

"Yes, I know you mean to be very good, but sometimes we mean to be very good, and yet we make great mistakes. "Uncle Bertrand"—not Gypsy's tone was one of wistful sweetness—"would you not like me to stay with you always, and take care of you?"

Hastily Bertrand arose—the longing was so great to take her in his arms as he used to do when she was a child and cover her with kisses.

"My dear child, what I would like has nothing to do with the question. In all human probability I shall die many years before you"—he was standing where he could not see Gypsy's face—"so that I feel it my duty to settle you in life—that is if I can feel that you are happy. Do you understand me, Gypsy?" "Yes," she answered quietly. "I understand and you will take me away soon from here, Uncle Bertrand?"

As Bertrand said yes, his heart was lighter than it had been for some time. Once again he would have Gypsy all to himself. He could not think of the future—he could only greedily grasp at this last drop of happiness which Gypsy was unconsciously holding out to him. Once again they would