

The Fisherman's Daughter.

By Mary N. Prescott.

Priscilla Farnham was the daughter of a fisherman who had lost his life at the Banks, leaving his children to the tender mercy of Uncle Eben, sail-maker, living on Tide Street, in the sea-port town of Shadville. But to Priscilla's sorrow, he it said, she understood the ancient pastime of coquetry as well as the most accomplished dames of society. "It was bred in the bone," averred her neighbors.

But Captain Jasper always frowned when these things were said of her in his presence. If he could have said, "It is false," but in his heart he knew it to be true, he would not have cared so much; and it vexed him to hear it repeated. He had loved Priscilla through thick and thin, and though he very well knew if she were kind to day it was because she meditated a relapse to-morrow, still he loved her as no mere words could depict, dreamed of her, plotted and worked for her. Perhaps it was because she meditated a relapse that he loved her; because she was so changeable and beautiful, never the same thing twice in her life. He did not often stay to consider the reason, but went his way guided in all things by this one flame, which never veered however the winds might blow or the storms beat. "We shall sail to-morrow," he said to her one evening, as the dusk was closing down, leaning in at the kitchen window, while Priscilla folded the clothes from the week's wash.

"Oh! did I sprinkle you?" she cried, as she let fall a douche from her rosy hand.

"It is not the first cold water you've thrown at me," he laughed. "I'd rather take it in this shape. I'll be worse sprinkled before you see me again, I reckon."

"Shall you be gone long?" she said.

"That depends. If I had anything to come home to—who knows? Do you know, Priscilla, a man with a wife or a sweetheart floats where another would sink?"

"Why don't you marry, then? It would be as good as taking a life preserver along."

"You laugh at me, Priscilla; but you don't comprehend. The first man has something to live for, something that makes life an elixir. In danger he thinks of the dear face watching at home, of the weary waiting, of the bitter blinding tears, and he makes up his mind to live—for her sake."

"But you will be home by Christmas?" she asked, leaving the point undisputed.

"If God wills it."

"Come, then, and pull a wish bone with me on Christmas Day, and praise my plum pudding."

"With all my heart; but Priscilla—"

"Well?"

"Think how long it will be without seeing you. Answer me one question before I go."

"It's impertinent to ask questions, sir."

"Not this one. Priscilla, may I come to your Christmas dinner as—as your sweetheart? I love you, dear."

"But come as ye were na courting o' me."

she sang, mockingly, in answer. "Consider, dear," he persisted, for he knew her ways, "not twice in a lifetime is such love offered to another as I offer to you."

"Oh thank you," she said, folding her clothes vigorously, "I'm sure I'm not worth such a prize. It would be wasted on me."

"Indeed, you are worth far better; but can I do more than give you my best? Of course I think it worth your taking or I shouldn't offer it. It would be folly to pretend I don't. But if I were a king you should be my queen—if you would."

"If I wouldn't?" she asked.

"Then good-bye."

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye."

Had he really gone? He would be back presently—no danger. He would get aground down at the gate; they always did. There, he was returning already.

"If you should change your mind," he said, coming to her side, "send me a line. Lewis will sail in a month; he will touch at our port before we leave on the return trip. If you send me a line by him it may be a life-line—if you should change your mind, Priscilla."

"I shall be hardly likely to change my mind," she answered, haughtily enough, with the inborn love of playing with fate, of finding out how near she might come to the edge of a precipice and yet preserve her balance in full possession; and then she heard the gate click after him, and watched his shadow vanish down the street. Oh, but he would come to-morrow—she was sure of that. Couldn't he see that she was used to being sued, that she never yielded at the first word? Couldn't he be certain that her reserve was all a make-believe; couldn't he see her heart beating through it all? Was he blind? Did love really make people blind to their own undoing, to lead them astray? She never once questioned if she were blind herself! He might have carried the day with another word, and she felt aggrieved that he had omitted it, and a little angry with him. Besides, she had not lied to him—she should not change; only just now she did not feel like binding herself, and so he left out of all the merry-makings between this and Christmas.

At any rate she would see him to-morrow, and perhaps—But when to-morrow came up out of the east the Heron was no longer in the stream, nor yet a phantom sheet lost in the fogs across the bar. She had weighed anchor during the night, and dropped down with the tide and a fair wind that was even now filling her canvas out on the Atlantic.

Plainly Captain Jasper would not press his suit to-morrow.

Priscilla was dishing the dinner when Uncle Eben came in.

"Heron's off," said he, "and Jasper with her."

"I thought," she said, smothering a sigh—"I thought they were not going till to-day," putting the potatoes into the butter-boat in her absent-mindedness.

"Wa'al, ye see, wind came up fair and tide served; and Jasper said he hadn't anything to wait for—how is that, Cilly?"

"What's that to me?" she answered, crossly; "what isn't worth waiting for isn't worth having."

"No, no, that ain't it; what ain't worth asking for ain't worth having. Captain Jasper was very sore about it. You treated him ill, Cilly. Fire and love are dangerous playmates."

"The burned child," she insinuated, saucily.

"The same. I don't mind owning to it. I shall carry the scars to my grave. But you'll send Jasper that line, Cilly?"

"It's a pity Jasper can't keep his own counsel!"

"He was that broken-hearted. It's nigh to killing a man to keep it all to himself. Don't I know it? But you will send him the line?"

"I don't know."

"You'll find out, I reckon."

And then they sat down to their boiled halibut, and the children came trooping in from school and play, and Uncle Eben had a dozen things to relate; all the gossip of the wharves and the fishermen; how a shark had been seen off Snarler's Point; what "Fetch and Carry" had netted from their last venture; what news from the mackerel fleet; how Job Knight's wherry had drifted out to sea; how fine the Heron had looked in her new rigging, and how his needle had

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