

BUTTERCUPS.

(Concluded.)

Oh, the mournful sweetness of her voice! There were tears in many eyes. Madam threw down her cards, and pattered across to her darling.

"Come, you ungrateful girl! What I specially detest is sentiment—you know it. It's too moist around here for me. A parcel of old rags—heads by—hooping over a mess of trash like that! Thank Heaven! I never did enjoy being unhappy. What I do like is to see the Albany night-boat pass. There's her whistle. Let's go out on the piazza and salute. Of course I mean all that haven't rheumatism."

The apartment was emptied at once.

It was a pretty sight. The great, brilliantly lighted steamer moving so majestically over the dark water, safely carrying her human freight to "the haven where it would be."

She touched at the little landing below, exchanged a passenger or two, and swung gayly off, with band playing, headed duly up-stream.

"Which way did our water-party go?" asked someone—"up or down?"

Marian was wondering, too. Surely it was time they were coming back, though it was foolish in her to become uneasy—the launch was so simply managed, and Douglas used to be careful. She wished she had been let to go with them. It was all the more necessary if, as her aunt maintained, the boy had lost his head.

But what mean those hurried whistles? And why does the great ship stop again so soon?

There seems to be some confusion—more whistles—people crowding the docks—surely, something wrong has happened.

"If it should be the *Psyche*! Come!" The girl half lifts, half drags Aunt Norris down the steps. "Hurry! hurry!—I can't wait!"

"Don't, child. Go on and find out. I'll go back and rouse the doctor."

Down the steep hill flew Marian, and from the extreme end of the wharf peered into the darkness. Small boats shot out and went swiftly darting here and there. The steamer was coming back, but oh! so slowly. Almost before the gang-plank was out she was over it.

"What is it?—tell me?" she demanded of the first she met.

"Collided with a pleasure-boat."

She pressed toward the cabin, the crowd giving way at sight of her pale face and uncovered head.

Ah! there they were, the gay party whose mirth had made her mournful—drenched, terrified, bewildered, all but dead.

"Are all saved?"

"We hope so. Were they friends of yours?—how many?"

"Friends—all. There were seven."

Her eye runs rapidly over the group.

One young fellow—"Dude" Drummell, they called him—seems staring mad.

"Where is Douglas?—where, Lucia?" Her teeth chatters as she puts the question.

"Do you know them? Were there any more?" asks Captain Salter, gravely.

"One woman and one man."

"The boats will probably pick them up."

The sorrowful procession moves to the hotel; but Marian does not follow. She waits—for what? God knows!

Ah! poor *Psyche*! flitting away so gayly such a brief space ago! They are tugging you slowly home again, with your wings all daggled and broken, and a ghastly wound in your side.

The crowd on the wharf has dispersed; only one or two, besides a few boatmen, remain with the motionless girl, watching for "news." It comes. A row-boat approaches. With a great rush of joy she sees in it Douglas—haggard and drenched, but alive.

"Thank God!"

She clasps the numb hands that return her pressure feebly.

"Lucia?"

He looks into her eyes, and she shudders. God forgive her. She almost hated her—it—an hour ago.

"We have rowed everywhere. There is no sign."

"You?—in those wet garments?"

He had not felt them so before.

"Come home, and tell me how it was."

"God knows!—I don't! She, Lucia, was with Dude Drummell. I suppose I did not understand the signals, or the steamer did not see us. It was too horribly sudden to comprehend. They had just told me of their engagement—happened yesterday. I had congratulated them—and had my own eyes opened. I was looking into the river—and *thinking of you!*"

"She used to laugh at him so."

"Yes; but he has money—lots of it. Poor girl! I feel her—murderer."

"Hush! She proposed the outing."

"That doesn't help."

"Only to please her and her *clique*, you bought the wretched thing."

"I suppose so. Oh! it's awful."

"Yes, yes; but you must be just, not morbid. If you were careless—"

"No; before Heaven I swear it. When I saw the steamer coming, I signaled and headed for the shore. When she turned that way also, I knew we were doomed. I stopped the engine. I did what I could. In an instant she struck us, our boat was bottom-side up, and we in the water. I tried to keep them cool, to help them with the ropes that were promptly thrown to us. All got safely on board our destroyer but—*her.*" He shuddered.

All night there are men out searching. Humanity urges some, large rewards urge the others. The doctor compels exhausted Douglas to remain in his room. All the sufferers are well attended.

Poor Drummell is so violent his physicians never leave him. He raves and weeps, calling out piteously for "Help! help!" and crying for Lucia to "cling to the rope." His agony is fearful, and his watchers shake their heads ominously.

But the beginning and the end of all his complaint is, "Lucia! Lucia!" She would have married him for his money, but he loved only her.

Marian cannot sleep, and, despite Aunt Norris' protest, watches at her window. As daylight comes, she sees a little bustle among the boatmen on the quay. She slips quietly out and joins them.

A fisherman is coming in, and he is towing—something. A strange something, which sends a shiver through every watcher. Face downward it floats, and Marian notes the blue garments moving horribly to and fro in the stroke of the waters.

Not a word is spoken—only the fisherman sighs his relief that his task is over.

Strong and reverent hands work swiftly as they draw from the cruel waves this beautiful, dreadful something, and lay it upon the blanket Marian spreads.

The sun rises above the eastern hills. Its rays stream over the river and touch the golden locks that are gleaming still.

But the beautiful eyes are closed, and the mocking lips are silent.

There is no sign of life about her who, yesterday, was the life of all.

Save there, upon her bosom, opening brightly to the sunbeams, refreshed by the waves that were ruin to her, blooms Douglas' last offering—a cluster of buttercups.

JOSEPHINE'S MOTHER.

"Taint a speck of use to talk, Aunt Elviry. I wouldn't marry Mr. Newman if there warn't another man made. An' I'm goin' to marry Charley Dane whenever I git ready."

"You be!"

"We've kep' company since the year one"—and here a sense of shame flushed the bright face, and she turned it quickly away. But the color mounted and mounted till it became a pain, and suddenly she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears. "I—I do'no' what the world would be to me without Charley Dane in it!" said she.

"Wal, I never!" exclaimed Miss Elviry, sitting very straight and snapping her eyes over her knitting as if she would strike sparks with them. "Charley Dane! Your father'd turn over in his grave. Why, he'll never earn his salt!"

"You ain't no right to speak so!" said her niece, flashing an angry glance at her from the looking-glass to which she had returned, braiding her long hair. She was a pretty girl, with her fair skin and soft brown eyes; but her hair was beautiful—of an uncommon golden shade, fine and immensely thick, and so long when it was not plaited that, by throwing her head in a little gesture natural with her, she could step upon it.

"I do'no' who's a right ef I ain't," said her aunt. "I'm all the folks you got. Ef you'd a mother—but you'll be miserable; you'll be—"

Aunt Elviry, I know you mean well enough. But you can't make the world roll backward. The mischief's done, ef it is mischief. I should be miserable ef I don't marry him, so! An' I may as well be miserable one way as the other. Now you needn't say another word, for I'm jest as fixed as Elsy Crag. I've give up my place in the shop over to Farley, an' we shall be married Thursday."

"Wall, I hope you won't live ter repent it."

"Aunt Elviry, if 'twas anybody else I'd never speak to 'em agin. Relations can take a sight of liberty—but there's bounds. Isn't Charley Dane young and strong and well, and hasn't he as good a trade as"—

"When he works to it."

"He works reg'lar. He's laid by more'n a hundred dollars a'ready. An' he's got all he wants to do."

"I'll be bound he has."

"You're real unfair, Aunt Elviry."

"Wall, p'raps I be. But I never see no good come out'n those Danes down to the holler yet, an' I never shall."

"There's folks that don't agree with you, that set a sight by Charley, the'd be as pleased as ninety ef 'twas one of their girls."

"Somebody 'th a hull slew of 'em, and all hum. Wall now, Priscy, I wash my hands of the hull cousarn. I've spoke my mind. I've done my duty. You needn't ast me to your weddin',—fer I shant come. I shant never set foot in your house agin."

And with a rush of her own tears that contradicted all she said, Miss Elviry tried to control her countenance, folded her knitting with a jerk, and catching up her wraps took herself out of the house and down the road to her home across the border three miles away.

Priscilla looked after her, half angry and half fond, but let her go. And when Miss Elviry saw her niece again it was on the return from the brief wedding journey.

It had been taken for granted that they should come to Priscilla's house; and it was with a sweet, shy graciousness that she turned to Charley as he crossed the threshold, and said, the blush reddening her forehead, "It is your house now, Charley."

"Why, of course 'it is," he said. "Don't the lor say so! I suppose you think you're givin' it to me. That's a good joke!" he said with a short laugh. "P'raps you don't know that as long as I live this house is mine now—that is, practically it is—jest as much as ef I'd bought it! Wal,