

du Roi, and he was utterly at a loss to comprehend the overwhelming suspicions which flashed upon him. Was Ernest really the guilty man? In the midst of his reverie the gendarme he had despatched upon the trail of the female in the blue velvet bonnet, suddenly returned.

"Who is she, Colin?" asked the Procureur, in haste, as the spy re-entered the apartment.

"I could ascertain nothing, monsieur."

"No?" asked the officer, disappointed.

"No, monsieur. I proceeded instantly, agreeably to your orders, to the street; but no living object was in sight, save the night-patrol upon the corners, above and below the house. They had been there fifteen minutes, and no one had passed. I have searched in all directions, inside and outside, but no such person as you describe can be found."

"It is very singular; you may retire, Colin," said the procureur; and he turned again to the curious letters upon his table, which he perused once more, in deep thought. The name affixed to the first was that of his own son. He had been absent from home since the rendering of the verdict against Edmund Dufonte, and none knew where he had gone. The father's heart sank within him, as he contemplated the frightful peril of his child; but his sense of justice reminded him that efforts must be put forth at once to save the innocent.

The casket had evidently been opened by the original recipient of it, two days earlier than Edmund had intended. But the Procureur had not forgotten the words of his mysterious visitor who assured him that a failure with him would force an appeal to the King. In this contingency, the life of his own son would be perilled by the disclosure; as it was, he might save both Edmund and Ernest. The lady in the blue velvet bonnet would call at ten in the morning.

By direction of Monsieur Fugare, a watch had been posted at the entrance of his mansion, and full an hour before ten o'clock the doors of the residence of the Procureur were blocked by the forms of faithful spies, who were charged with the duty of observing whence the strange visitor came who had taken so deep an interest in the fate of Edmund Dufonte. The clock struck ten at last; no being was in sight of the guard; the door of the Procureur's study was secured as usual, and the nearest gendarme approached the latter for an instant, to be certain of the fact, when he most unexpectedly discovered the strange female standing before the entrance. Alarmed at the absence of Monsieur, and evidently fearing the result, she turned quickly to the guard, exclaiming, "I would see Monsieur le Procureur."

"Enter, madam," said the soldier, instantly opening the door with his private key. "Monsieur will soon return."

And five minutes afterwards the Procureur made his appearance, covered with dust. He had just returned from a private interview with his Majesty the King.

"Now, monsieur," exclaimed the lady, in an earnest, but trembling tone, "the hour has arrived! Tell me what is to be the fate of Edmund Dufonte?"

"No power, madam, short of the King's, can save the man condemned to death, by the laws of France, for the frightful crime with which Dufonte is now charged."

"He is innocent, monsieur," repeated the girl, firmly.

"How came you in possession of those letters, madam?"

"I have no time, monsieur, to waste in answering questions. His Majesty is at Versailles, and your answer decides my course. A carriage awaits me, even now, within a stone's throw of your door; and unless you bid me hope, within the next hour the case will be laid before the King. Speak, monsieur, and quickly!" continued the stranger, impetuously.

"You will at least inform me, madam, how you—"

"Suffice it, Monsieur Fugare, that the papers are genuine. I received from Edmund late last night the casket enclosing the originals, as a final memento of his devotedness to her he loves. The parting gift was accompanied by his most imperative request and injunction that its contents should not be exposed until after his execution to-day; and even then, that no eyes, save hers to whom it was addressed, should ever know what the box contained. Curiosity, despair—whatever you may deem it, monsieur—urged me at once to examine it. I did so; you know the result; you are aware, monsieur, how deeply you are concerned in this matter, and I would ask again, what am I to hope for?"

"Me?—I concerned, madam?" stammered the Procureur.

"Ernest, who signs the first letter, is your son, monsieur!" continued the mysterious female, in a subdued tone of voice. "You may save him—you must save Edmund Dufonte! Quick, monsieur! time presses!" added the female; and she moved to depart.

"Hope for the best, madam," said the Procureur du Roi; and the hand of the maiden stretched towards the door of the studio.

"We shall meet again at two o'clock, monsieur," added the stranger; and the blue bonnet disappeared.

The guard followed her to the street, around the corner. She sprang into a caleche, and dashed away, eluding pursuit—the gendarme not being prepared to follow the conveyance.

The Procureur du Roi had discovered the peril of his son; he was convinced, from these and other circumstances now within his knowledge, that the tale was no fiction; he felt that the guilt of Ernest might readily be made manifest, and he had suffered no unnecessary delay to elapse in the morning, after perusing the letter,

ere he communicated with his Sovereign, who confided in the Procureur most implicitly. Besides, the almost unparalleled generosity of Edmund towards his friend called loudly upon Monsieur to aid him in his present trying emergency. But who was the mysterious girl in the blue velvet bonnet?

In the meantime, Edmund had resigned himself to his fate. He knew his innocence, though he was found undoubtedly guilty by the law, which had condemned him upon circumstantial evidence; but the weapon was found in his hand the moment the victim fell: and he could not avoid the final crushing result. But his conscience was free from compunction—he had saved a fondly-beloved friend from death, and he was content. He bade adieu to his relatives at last—he was left alone with a priest, and a few minutes afterwards the final summons came.

The cheek of Edmund Dufonte was pale, but his step was comparatively firm, his head erect, as he passed along the gloomy corridor of his prison. He advanced to a court-yard—a file of gendarmes accompanied him in silent march, and turning an angle beyond his prison-house, he suddenly beheld the scaffold. For an instant, Edmund halted—faltered—for the terrible sight almost overpowered him.

"Forward!" said the executioner, firmly; and the prisoner walked on without further apparent emotion.

Five minutes before two o'clock, a carriage rolled up to the prison door, from which emerged the tall form of a gentleman, who instantly gained admittance to the scene within. The sentinels presented arms as he passed the portal. It was Monsieur Fugare, the Procureur du Roi. And following immediately, there came a caleche, from which there emerged a young female. She presented a signet ring to the guard, who quickly gave way, as she rushed by them. It was the stranger in the blue velvet bonnet.

Edmund Dufonte mounted the scaffold, the priest pronounced a final prayer, the lookers-on murmured an expression of pity for the handsome youth who was so soon to suffer for a supposed crime, and the hand upon the dial pointed to one minute of two o'clock.

The Procureur du Roi rushed along the avenue; he came in view of the scaffold; and he bore in his hand a white parchment.

"Quick!" screamed a voice behind him; and turning, he beheld the form of his midnight visitor, who hurried down the path.

"Hold!" shouted the Procureur du Roi, as he advanced rapidly to the foot of the platform, and beheld the headsman about to execute the duty of his office. The clock struck two.

"A reprieve! A pardon from the King!" exclaimed the officer in command, seizing the document from the hand of the Procureur du Roi; and a wild shout of congratulation arose from the sympathizing multitude.

The arms of the prisoner were quickly released—his pardon was pronounced—the crowd rent the air with their enthusiastic hurrahs—and Edmund Dufonte sprang from the scaffold to embrace the form of his deliverer—the mysterious visitor of Monsieur Fugare.

The Procureur du Roi insisted that the generous, innocent Dufonte should instantly enter his carriage, and proceed with him to his own dwelling, in company with her who had effected his escape (for purposes of mutual explanation); and in a few minutes the now happy lovers were seated before Monsieur, in his private studio.

"The details of this unfortunate affair are known, I believe," said the Procureur du Roi, "but to ourselves. My son has disappeared—none knows whither. This morning, before I left with your pardon, Monsieur Dufonte, I received a missive from him, without date, confessing his crime, and praying for my intervention to save you. That is accomplished; and I congratulate you upon your escape. And now, madam, allow me to know to whom we are all so deeply indebted for this well-timed delivery?" continued he, addressing the female stranger, earnestly.

With a trembling hand did his gentle visitor remove the thick veil which shadowed her fair features from view, and restless, indeed, was the anxious gaze of the Procureur du Roi, as he now sought the beautiful face which had hitherto been entirely excluded from his gaze beneath the blue velvet bonnet. But the blood rushed from his heart; he sat transfixed in his chair; he could not trust his sense as he listened to the now altered tones of the voice, hitherto so successfully disguised. Astonished, he gazed upon the fair face, and heard the words, "Father, forgive me!"

"Josephine! My daughter!" said the astonished Procureur du Roi.

"Monsieur, your pardon now!" continued Edmund Dufonte; and the two lovers knelt at his feet, hand in hand.

Monsieur Fugare saw it all. His own daughter it was who had gained entrance so mysteriously to his private chamber; it was his loved Josephine who had secretly favored the innocent and generous Edmund; it was his child who had saved her lover—who was alone the party (beyond those immediately concerned) who was conversant with the distressing fact relating to the fatal encounter. The papers were destroyed, Edmund was forgiven, and the father did not hesitate to bless them and countenance their intimacy.

Poor Ernest lived to repent of his rash crime, but he never returned to his native land. His absence was mourned some years, and his death was finally made known to his afflicted parents and relatives. The generosity of Edmund was never forgotten by the father of the really guilty

man, and he lived to see his Josephine happy in a union with him whose life she had so curiously saved. In her interview with her father, she had so disguised her voice and person that no suspicions were excited; and on her midnight visit, Josephine returned from her father's studio to her own chamber, near by, thus eluding pursuit on that occasion. The circumstances of the reprieve were never publicly alluded to in the family. Edmund made a faithful and affectionate husband—the father forgave the lover and the loved; but he never forgot the appearance and the ruse of the mysterious stranger, or the story of Josephine's Love.

AGNES LANE.

Agnes Lane was an orphan, dependent on the charity of a rich uncle. Poor, and withal very plain in face, she was neglected by the gay fashionables who frequented her uncle's house and paid obsequious attention to her fair cousin Gertrude.

But Agnes had a heart—a warm, true, womanly heart it was; but all its outgushing affection, was thrown back upon itself. There was within her a wild yearning to be loved, cherished and appreciated. However, as it was she had but little chance of being treated with even common politeness when her beautiful cousin was near.

Gertrude Arden was beautiful, and to do her justice she was naturally good-hearted, but flattery and fashion had conspired to make her vain and frivolous. Accustomed always to be first in all circles where the stronger sex pay homage to the weaker, she thought not of yielding to her humble cousin those little attentions which make a woman's life an earthly paradise. Gertrude never was unkind, but thoughtless often.

Among the visitors to Mr. Arden's splendid mansion none were nobler, handsomer or worthier than Eustace Clinton, the only child of a deceased millionaire. Every one prophesied that many moons would not wax and wane ere Eustace and Gertrude would call each other by a tenderer name than that of friend, and indeed circumstances seemed to justify the assertion, for Clinton and Miss Arden were constantly together, at the social party, the promenade and the opera.

Agnes saw much of Clinton, necessarily, and she thought him the noblest of all her cousin's admirers. Her enthusiastic soul saw in him one whom the earthly had left uncontaminated—one nearly allied to the heavenly. She felt happy in his presence; she was glad when he came; she sighed when he went away.

Gradually in her lone young heart there had grown a regard for Eustace Clinton, and that regard had deepened into an earnest, self-sacrificing love. It was a strong love, pent up close within her own bosom; it threw upon the remembrance of a tone, a look, a smile. But Agnes would not have confessed as much to herself; she guarded well her heart, and put a seal upon her lips.

The all-memorable day sacred to Saint Valentine was at hand.

Gertrude was wondering what would be decreed to her on that important day, and in her joyous anticipation she hinted to Agnes that it might be the betrothal ring from Eustace Clinton.

Agnes felt a sharp pain at her heart, as her cousin said this, but hers was a face that told no tales.

Painfully that night did the poor orphan feel her utter loneliness, when the gay, gilded miseries, filled with earnest protestations for her fair cousin, were brought in. Of course, there was none for Agnes. Who would notice a poor dependent like her?

Tears came up in Agnes's eyes. Not that she had expected any remembrance, not that she had cared for those simple little trifles called Valentines; but if there had been but one for her it would have shown that some one in the wide world thought of her and wished to make her happy on that festal day.

Gertrude tossed the shining tokens into a heap, declaring petulantly that it was too bad for Clinton to disappoint her so, when she had expected something exquisite from him.

Agnes sighed softly—'twas a habit she had when she did not choose to reply to a remark. Presently the door-bell rang. Gertrude sprang forward.

"It is Clinton's Valentine for me, I know," she said, triumphantly. "I thought it very strange that he should have forgotten me," and she met the servant, who had replied to the summons, in the middle of the hall. "Letters for me, John?" and she held out her hand.

"Miss Agnes Lane," said John, reading from the envelope.

"For Agnes?" ejaculated Gertrude, in surprise. "Let me have it—quick, quick, John! Who could have been sending a valentine to our Agnes?"

Agnes had risen at the sound of her name, and stood, crimson with emotion, just within the parlor door.

"Give it to me, Gertrude," she said, eagerly, approaching her cousin, "give it to me, if it is for me."

"Nay, my flattered little cousin," said the gay beauty, laughingly; "wait until I have inspected it, will you? Ah! that is no lover's writing—it is a lady's chirography, evidently, some of your delightful rustic acquaintances,

Agnes, so you need not blush about it," and she threw the letter contemptuously towards her.

Agnes picked it up, and hastened to her chamber. It was a delicately enamelled envelope, bore the post-mark of a neighboring town and directed to "Miss Agnes Lane," in a fair hand.

Agnes broke the pretty pink seal. There was a tiny sheet of delicate cream-colored lace-paper, with the simple words, "I love thee," in gilt letters on a pale satin scroll. That was all. Agnes turned it round and round, in search for some letter or word which might reveal to her its origin, but all was pure and stainless.

She sat down and thought. Who could have sent it to her? Who remembered her? Was it true that some one loved her? Did Valentine's always speak truly? And poor little Agnes was as happy as any titled countess of the imperial regime.

Laugh, if ye will, rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed maidens! who annually receive bushels of St. Valentine's mystic tokens, but when ye have been like Agnes, alone in the world, beloved, caressed, and smiled on by nobody, ye will rejoice even in the imagination that one cares for you.

Agnes's sleep that night was sweet and full of pleasant dreams. Of course we would not pretend to say for certain, but we presume that Eustace Clinton figured quite conspicuously in the rosy dream pictures.

Gertrude laughed at Agnes's Valentine, declaring, with a pitying toss of her pretty head, that somebody did it to impose on poor Agnes's credulity, and forthwith the remembrance of the Valentine went out of every heart but one.

Mr. Clinton came, as usual, quite often, taking Gertrude out for rides and to concerts.

The next week after the memorable fourteenth of February the public were thrown into a state of eager excitement by the announcement that the world-renowned nightingale, the fair Jenny, was coming to visit and sing to them.

The admission fees were enormous, and only the "upper tendom" could afford to gratify their sense of hearing by lightening so perceptibly their money receptacles.

Two days before the night fixed on for the concert Mr. Clinton called to solicit the pleasure of Gertrude's company on the occasion of the concert. Gertrude gladly consented and cast a look of triumph at poor Agnes, who was sewing at a window.

Clinton looked that way also.

"Have you a taste for music, Miss Lane?" said he, kindly passing to her side as he spoke. She raised her dark, melancholy eyes to his face and said, half sadly,

"Oh, yes, I love music very much."

A pleased expression passed over Clinton's fine face, as he said:

"Will you not favor us with your society to-morrow evening? It will increase my consequence," he added, laughingly, "to have two ladies under my care, and Miss Arden will undoubtedly enjoy the music better if her cousin listens also."

Agnes tried to answer negatively, but Mr. Clinton overruled her objections, and so it was arranged that Agnes was to go with Mr. Clinton and her cousin.

Mr. Clinton called the ensuing evening for the cousins, and they all went together in the carriage of the Clinton's.

Agnes was enraptured with the singing, and Clinton was very happy in seeing the happiness he had wrought.

The next morning after the concert Mr. Clinton called at Mr. Arden's. Gertrude was out on a shopping expedition, but it was just as well, for Mr. Clinton asked for Miss Lane, so the servant showed him into the parlor where Agnes was seated.

Agnes informed him of Miss Gertrude's absence, adding that she regretted it much, but that her cousin would return soon.

Mr. Clinton arose and took the vacant seat by Agnes on the sofa.

"I do not regret her absence," he said, earnestly. "It's only you I came to see—only you, Agnes," and he smiled upon her from his dark, thoughtful eyes. "Agnes," he said, again, taking her hands in his, "I have loved you a long time—the Valentine told you so, didn't it? Agnes, I have been getting deeper and deeper in love with your quiet goodness every day of my life. To me you are all that is beautiful and lovable in woman. You fill a void in my heart which has been a void since the days of my earliest boyhood."

Then he wound his arms around her and drew her very gently to his bosom, and Agnes, weary, lonely little Agnes, felt a great load of sorrow raised from her soul.

Very tenderly he kissed her, and smoothed back her dark hair caressingly, and Agnes closed her eyes in deep thankfulness.

And so it came out that Eustace Clinton sent the unpretending little Valentine, and Agnes Lane rejoiced in the true, earnest love of one noble and good.

Gertrude knew it all, after a while, and she pouted and wept after the manner of a spoiled beauty. But the arrival of a lover in the form of a rich gentleman, did much towards soothing her woe, and she even congratulated her cousin on her brilliant prospects.

When the autumn wind began to whirl the sere leaves relentlessly on its wings Eustace took Agnes to his splendid home—his wife.

And she lives, loving and beloved, the idol of her husband's heart, and the cherished one of his household—good and true, if not beautiful.