

leaving him upon the bank in a very dazed condition. Feeling, perhaps, vaguely, as he stands there alone, that St. Pierre has been too much for him. Feeling perhaps, vaguely, that a possible life, outside, and beyond, and quite different from his own, is typified in its waters, and which he can no more fashion to his liking than he can turn their turbulence to calm.

ESPIÈGLE.

### MR. THOMPSON'S UMBRELLA.

**A**UGUSTA, I wish you would practise Chopin's march. Mr. Thompson likes music."

Oh! how sick I was of hearing about Mr. Thompson! My poor aunt, she meant it very kindly, of course, but she little knew how she made me hate those single gentlemen whom she so wished me to please. I was an orphan, and had forty pounds a year, and my aunt's annuity died with her, so I suppose her anxiety to see me married was both commendable and natural, but to me it was dreadful. Moreover, perhaps because I was a proud girl, and perhaps, too, because I was a foolish one, the mere fact of a man, young or middle-aged—for only the old and wedded were excluded—coming to the house on my account, made him detestable in my eyes. I should not wonder if that were not the reason why I pleased none. I was said to be pretty—I may say that now, alas! it is so long ago—but plainer girls, with no greater advantages than I had, went off at a premium in the marriage market, and I remained Augusta Raymond, uncared and unsought for. I did not care, not I. I only lamented that aunt would worry both these unfortunate gentlemen and me with vain efforts to make them admire me, and make me like them. She was my best friend, however, and I loved her dearly. So I now sat down to the piano and played Chopin's march, and practised for the benefit of the devoted Mr. Thompson, who was to come this evening, and who little knew, poor fellow, he had been invited to spend a week with us for the express purpose of falling in love with his second cousin's niece. I had not seen him since I was a child. He was a young man then, tall, dark, and grave, and already on the road to prosperity. He was a rich man now—at least, rich for such a poor girl as I was, but he was Mr. Thompson, and I hated him, besides, he must be old, quite old.

I thought of all these things whilst I was playing, and then I forgot them, for the divine music bore me away, and music was a passion to me then.

We lived in the country, and a small but beautiful garden enclosed by aunt's cottage. It was a low one, with broad rooms, a little dark, perhaps, yet strangely pleasant. At least, they seemed so to me. I dearly liked the room in which I now sat playing. It was our best room, but it was also our sitting-room. A central table was strewn with books, some of which were dear old friends, and others were pleasant and new acquaintances. Flower-stands, work-baskets, and delightful chairs, chairs made to read or dream in, added to the attractions of this apartment. I enjoyed it even as I played, but then, to be sure, the windows were all open, and every one gave me a glimpse of the green garden with a patch of blue sky above its nodding trees, and the sweet scent of the magnonette came in with every breath of air. Where are you now, pleasant room and green garden? The ruthless hand of man has laid you waste, and my eyes can see you no more. Is there no home for lost places, no dream-land like the Indian's hunting-ground, where the things that have once been may enjoy a shadowy existence? Are you really for ever gone and lost, save when you come back every time a woman, whose hair is turning grey, hears that grand mournful music to which your pleasant loneliness would seem so little akin?

"My dear! Mr. Thompson!" said my aunt's voice, as I closed the instrument. I turned round and saw him; tall, dark, grave, very little altered, and not at all old. We had expected him for dinner, and he had come for luncheon. I forget how the mistake arose. As he opened the garden gate, he met my aunt. They heard me playing, and

stood by one of the windows to listen. When I ceased, they entered the room, and it was then that, as I said, I saw him.

I did not know it at the time, but I knew it later, I liked him from that very moment. I am not sure that every girl would have liked Mr. Thompson. He was decidedly good looking, and he was both shrewd and pleasant; but he had a quaint and abrupt manner, which was apt to startle strangers. I liked it well, however. I liked that eccentricity which never took him too far, and that slight want of polish which gave flavour to everything he said or did. I liked all, excepting his umbrella. That I detested. It was large, solid, massive, and dreadfully obtrusive. He had it in his hand on that bright warm day, and long as our acquaintance lasted I never saw Mr. Thompson without it. Later, when our intimacy had progressed, I taxed him with this. "Yes," he said, good humouredly, "I confess it is my hobby. My earliest ambition as a boy was to possess an umbrella, and my greatest happiness as a man is to go about with one."

Of course we did not speak about his umbrella on this the first morning we spent together. Mr. Thompson praised my music, and, looking me full in the face, told me I played divinely. He said it without preamble, and I saw he meant it. My aunt was delighted, and I felt pleased, but, somehow or other, I also felt that Mr. Thompson treated me like a little girl; and so he did—not merely then, but ever afterwards. "Tiresome man!" I had thought him old before I saw him, and I could not make him think me old now that he saw me.

Mr. Thompson did not stay a week with us, but a month. Oh, that happy month, with long golden days and delicious evenings, and music and sweet converse! shall I ever forget it? If the waking was bitter, let me remember that the dream was very sweet.

Mr. Thompson was to leave us next morning, and we were in the garden together. I knew by this time how I felt towards him, and, kind though he was, I doubted if he cared much for me. And when he said, "Augusta, I have something to say to you," my heart began to beat. He used to call me Augusta now and then, having known me as a child, but never had he said it so kindly as this evening.

Alh, well! I suppose many women have to go through the bitterness which came to me then. Mr. Thompson had met my cousin Jessie at Mrs. Gray's, proposed to her, and been accepted. From the moment he mentioned Jessie's name, I knew my fate. Without seeking it, I suppose, she had ever stood between me and every good. She had had taken the friendship of my best friend, the liking of my nearest relative—I was not really my aunt's niece, only her late husband's—and now she had forestalled me in the love of the only man I had ever cared for. Surely she was not to blame in that, but, oh, how hard, how very hard, it seemed to me! The nightingale sang in the trees above us, pure brilliant stars burned in the sky, the garden was full of fragrance, and Mr. Thompson went on pouring Jessie's praises in my ear. She was so handsome, so bright, so genial, and so delightfully innocent! And what do you suppose he told me all this for? Why, because he wanted me to go and live with them. My aunt's health had been failing of late, and he was aware that I knew the worst might soon come, so he wanted me to be sure of a home. I burst into tears.

"My dear good child," he cried, warmly, "if I were not going away, I would not have grieved you so. You have, I know, a true warm heart. Your dear aunt may live for years, only, if she should not, Jessie and I—"

"Pray don't!" I interrupted. I could not bear it. The more he praised me, the kinder he was, the more I wept and felt miserable. At length, at my request, he left me. I grew calmer after a while, and went in.

"Do play Chopin's march for us, my dear," said my aunt. Poor dear aunt! she wanted me to fascinate him to the last. She little knew that Jessie, whom she disliked so, had been beforehand with me there.

I played it again. It was the knell of all my hopes. A grey twilight filled the room, and they

could not see the tears which flowed down my cheeks. I played well, they said, and I believe I did. Something from myself was in the music that evening, and that something was very sorrowful. Mr. Thompson came and sat by me when I had done. The servant brought in the light, and a letter for my aunt. Whilst she was reading it, he said, softly:

"You will think over it."

"Pray don't," I entreated.

"But you do not know how much I like you," he insisted: "and then you will do my little heedless Jessie good—poor childish darling! Besides, I have set my heart on something."

This crowned all. I guessed his meaning, he had a younger brother for whom he meant me. He had all but said so this evening in the garden. "It would do John, who was rather light, all the good in the world." I could not bear it. I rose and went up to aunt.

"What news, aunt?" I asked.

"News, indeed!" she replied, amazed "There's Jessie going to marry my cousin, Mr. Norris, old enough to be her father. I wonder what he will do with the little flirt?"

There was a pause.

Mr. Thompson came forward. I did not dare to look at him.

"What Jessie is that?" he asked. "Surely not Miss Raymond's cousin?"

"Yes; the same. Do you know her?"

"I have seen her at Mrs. Gray's."

He spoke very calmly. I suppose he did not believe it. I pitied him: from my heart I pitied him.

"Perhaps it is not true, aunt?" I said.

"Not true! why she writes it to me herself—there's her letter."

I looked at him now. He was pale as death, but very firm. Neither troubled look nor quivering lip gave token of the cruel storm within. Something now called my aunt out of the room.

"Augusta, may I look at it?" he asked, glancing towards the letter, which my aunt had handed to me.

I could not refuse him. I gave him the letter. He read it through with the same composure, then looking for his umbrella, which he would always keep in a corner of the sitting-room, he said, very calmly:

"I think I shall go and take a walk."

And he went out, and we saw him no more till the next morning, when he left us.

My aunt was disappointed to find that Mr. Thompson had not proposed to me after all, and I was hurt to the heart's core by the coldness of his adieu. My value had gone down with my cousin's faithlessness; mine had been at the best but a reflected light. I was liked because Jessie was loved.

She became Mrs. Norris soon after this. She was married from my aunt's house, out of regard to Mr. Norris, who was related to her, and who disliked Mrs. Gray. "That busybody," he called her, and I am afraid she was a busybody. Jessie was very bright, and seemed very happy. She teased me unmercifully about Mr. Thompson. She was sure, she said, he had made love to me, and she looked at me with cruel significance as she spoke. But I betrayed neither his secret nor mine; and though she vexed me when she quizzed him to Mr. Norris, especially about his umbrella, I did keep silent.

"I am sure he will be married with his umbrella under his arm," she said, the evening before her own wedding. "Don't you think so?"

I did not answer her, I went out into the garden, and wondered how she had charmed him. Alas! I might have wondered how, without seeking it, he had charmed me.

Jessie's marriage was a blow to my aunt. She had always thought I should go off first. She was also cruelly disappointed by Mr. Thompson's difference, and perhaps she guessed the meaning of my altered looks. I believe I got pale and thin just then. And I was always playing Chopin's march.

"My dear," said my aunt to me one evening, "is not that very mournful?"

"I like it, aunt," I replied, but I resolved to play it no more.