

## AT CHESS.

Above a checkered table they bent—  
A man in his prime and a maiden fair,  
Over whose polished and blue-veined brow  
Resting no shadowy tinge of care.  
Her eyes were fountains of sapphire light;  
Her lips wore the curves of cheerful thought;  
And into her gestures, and into her smile,  
Grace and beauty their spell had wrought.

Above the checkered table they bent,  
Watching the pieces, red and white,  
As each moved on in appointed course,  
Through the mimic battle's steady fight—  
The queen, in her stately, regal power;  
The king, to her person friendly shield;  
The mitred bishop, with his support,  
And the massive castle across the field;

The pawn, in his slow and cautious pace,  
A step at a time; and the mounted knight,  
Vaulting, as gallant horseman of old,  
To the right and left, and left and right.  
But a single word the silence broke,  
As they cleared aside the ruin and wreck  
Of the battle's havoc; and that word  
Was the little monosyllable "check!"

Pawns, and bishops, and castles, and knights,  
Trembled together in sad dismay,  
While a pair of hearts were pulsing beside  
To a deeper, wilder, sweeter play.  
Yet the gaze of each—the man and the maid—  
On the board was fastened for turn of fate,  
When she archly whispered, with radiant glance,  
And a sparkling smile, "If you please, sir, mate!"

And gently her fluttering triumph-band,  
As white as a flake of purest pearl,  
She laid on the crown of her victor king,  
While the other toyed with a wanton curl.  
He lifted the first to his smiling lips,  
And on it imprinted a trembling kiss;  
And he murmured softly, "I should not care  
For losing the game, could I win but this!"

What the maiden answered 'twere treason to tell,  
As her blushes deepened to crimson glow  
Mounting like lightning-flashes quick,  
Till they burned on cheeks, and ears, and brow.  
And in three months' time the church-bells rang  
And the parson finished the game begun,  
When both wore the conqueror's triumph-smile,  
And both were happy, for both had won.

SALLIE A. BROCK.

## GERTRUDE ERLE.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER FRASER.

## PART II.

"My darling!"  
Claud's voice had gained considerably in fervour since his last *à-la-tête* with Gertrude Erle.

His darling raised shy eyes to his face, and then flung white arms round his neck.  
"O Claud, how good of you to come again so soon!"

"If I am good, why am I not rewarded?", he whispered.

A pair of sweet red lips were lifted up, and he bent and kissed them fondly.

In the lonely lane there was a rustic seat, almost hidden by drooping larch-boughs. Claud drew the girl to it, and she nestled quietly into his arms like a little child.

The two were first cousins, as well as lovers; and this, united to the fact that they had known each other for years, made her more demonstrative, perhaps, than she might have been otherwise.

"And what have you been doing with yourself since I was here, Alice?" he asked, stroking her hair softly, as it streamed over his breast in long golden waves.

"Thinking of you, Claud," she told him artlessly and frankly.

"Is that anything new, pet?"  
She blushed a faint pink blush that tinted her cheek into the colour of a sea-shell.

"It seems as if I remembered nothing that existed before we loved one another; and since, I only remember you."

Claud answered her, and satisfied himself by drawing her closer to him, and resting her face against his own.

"Were your mother and Ralph surprised to see me last evening?"

"A little. Ralph said he could not understand what attraction a man so essentially town-bred as yourself could find in such an out-of-the-way place as this."

"Ah, he doesn't know!" and Claud's violet eyes looked down straight into the light-blue ones of Alice with an expression that said plainly, "If he *did* know, he would not wonder if I went to the world's end."

"No, he doesn't know," Alice replied gently and a little sorrowfully; then she plucked up courage: "Claud, it would make me so much happier if I could tell him."

"Not for the world!" he answered quickly; visions of Miss Erle and her thousands vanishing in the distance, and the gigantic armies of Israel advancing to the fore, made him shudder at the very notion.

"I have not the means to marry at present; and Ralph would object to a long engagement, and probably prevent our meeting."

This was enough to silence her. Anything would be preferable to the change of being debarred seeing him.

"We cannot be too careful, in fact, of our secret; all our future happiness depends on it," he went on persuasively.

So Alice smothered the good impulse that prompted her to be open and truthful to the mother and brother who loved her, and consented to hold her love-trysts with Claud in secret.

"Do you ever see Gertrude Erle?" she asked.

"Occasionally."

"Does she seem to like you?"

"So-so."

And as Claud recollected whose head had so

often rested lovingly on the shoulder that was dedicated now to the peculiar benefit of Alice, he could not help experiencing a species of self-scorn at his deceptive answer.

"And do you like her?" persisted Alice.

"As a cousin."

"Is Gertrude very beautiful?" and the girl felt a painful thrill at the thought that Claud liked a lovely woman at all, even as a cousin.

"Not half so beautiful as you, my darling," he said earnestly and truthfully enough, gathering up the slight figure with a fervency that would have given Gertrude a new lease of life and joy and hope.

"Claud, I believe I am of a jealous temper; I feel as if I could hate you if I ever found out that you liked or admired any one else."

And Alice drew herself away from with flushed cheeks and glittering eyes.

He laughed.

"And if you hated me, what would you do—kill me?"

"No, die myself!" she whispered piteously, turning pale at the terrible picture of her soul in revolt against Claud.

"I have eyes for none but you, love."

"And your heart?"

"Is all your own."

"Swear it, Claud; swear on your bended knees that you will always love me, and me only!"  
He flung himself on his knees before her.

"I swear it."

And he was Gertrude Erle's future husband!

"Ralph thinks Gertrude perfection," Alice said when the two were seated again side by side.

"Does he?" and Claud was inconsistent enough to feel angry that any one should dare to admire or comment on his property.

"She would be such an excellent catch for him," he sneered.

"Ralph would not marry any one for money. Her fortune would always prevent him from asking Gertrude to be his wife; he is too noble to be mercenary," Alice exclaimed in her brother's defence.

"He is a nonpareil, no doubt," he mocked; Alice had hit him so hard while she spoke.

"Not a nonpareil, only an honest-hearted man, Claud. It must be dreadful to marry one for the sake of money; I think I should pine away under a weight of shame and obligation."

"You see, men are made of sterner stuff than you are, child; and money is such an excellent thing that it makes up for so many deficiencies."

"Claud!"

"Well, is your romantic little soul above such material things as pounds, shillings, and pence?"

"No; but, Claud, I have no money, and you have none; and if you cling to it so much, how is it going to end for us?" she asked in an anxious voice that went straight to his heart. Gertrude's words flashed across him.

"I may have money some day, Alice; then I shall be Lord of Burleigh, and you my bride," he said, kissing her ardently.

She lifted up a radiant face.

"O Claud, it would kill me to lose you!" and she wound her arms round him, and held him passionately to her, as if nothing should divide them.

Claud looked at her; then he remembered Gertrude and he was silent.

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Mr. Erle died, and quiet suddenly, after all; and Gertrude, in the first days of her bitter loss, had no heart to think of any one but him who had been the best of fathers. But when he was taken away and she grew calmer, a sense of rectitude would not allow her to keep silent any longer on the matter of the will. She did not even shrink from the task, strong in her faith in her lover; desperately reliant on the love and truth that were but broken reeds after all. Robbed in heavy black, and the sunny beauty of her face dimmed by tears, Gertrude looked ten years older when she walked slowly into the room where Claud awaited her. She did not approach him, but sank down into the first chair near, and closed her lips for a moment. Then she plunged into her subject at once.

"Claud, I have something to say to you—something that ought to have been said long ago."

He looked at her anxiously. Her tone was ominous. Was she going to throw him over now, at the last moment, when he had made up his mind to sacrifice himself without a murmur at the shrine of Plutus? Her manner was strange and her words a little incoherent. He was just making up his mind to a melodramatic scene of reproaches, protestations, and even entreaties, if necessary, when she went up to him; a bright crimson spot burned on her cheeks, and her large liquid eyes looked larger and softer for the dark bistre shades that underlined them.

"Claud, I asked you once if you would care for me the same whether I was rich or poor."

He thought she was putting him through his paces, and he determined to come out faultless from the trial.

"Yes, and I answered that rich or poor I would love you all the same, Gertrude dearest."

"Claud, I am poor in purse, but my heart is rich in love for you."

He stared at her almost rudely. An instinct seemed to tell him that she was speaking the truth.

"Are you joking or are you mad, Gertrude?" he questioned sternly.

"Neither joking nor mad, Claud. My fortune was a fraud, and I am no heiress; but if you

love me, I shall be as happy as the day is long," she cried joyfully.

He turned as white as a sheet. The last straw had floated away from his grasp, and he was a drowning man. But he had the presence of mind to conceal within himself his woful disappointment, his bitter regret.

"If you speak the truth, Gertrude, I fear we two must part. Much as I care for you I can never marry you."

"Much as you care for me? Is that true, Claud?" she asked him eagerly. "If you had money we should not part?"

"Of course not, Gertrude. How could you think it?"

She took both his hands and held them firmly. Looking him steadily in the face, she said solemnly.

"Then I shall be your wife, Claud—your loving faithful wife; for you have not only money, but you are passing rich."

"Gertrude!"

She let go his hands and took a paper from her bosom, and opening it out, she held it before his eyes.

"This gives you the money that I have lost, Claud."

He seized the document roughly and perused it eagerly, his face hotly flushed, his eyes kindling.

"All mine!" he gasped.

"He would sell his soul for gold, and, when he got it, gloat over it!" Her dead father's words came back to her as she watched the effect of the will.

"All your's, Claud; and I am your's too," she said quietly and distinctly.

He had the grace to turn his face away before he answered.

"No, Gertrude, it is impossible, for my heart has long belonged to another!"

She sat down, never so much as lifting up her eyes, while he prepared to leave the room; but when he was fairly gone and she was alone—alone in the world—great passionate sobs rang out from Gertrude's breast—sobs for the love that had lived for Claud and had died so cruel a death by his hand.

## PART III.

"You ought not to make Ralph unhappy, for he loves you so dearly, Gertrude," Alice pleaded with tears in her eyes. Her brother's low spirits had infected her own.

"Ralph knows that I love him, though I refuse to be his wife. I cannot consent to be a drag on him, Alice."

It was six months since Gertrude had come to Wales. When she was left homeless and friendless, the Dammers had come forward and offered her shelter and affection. They were her nearest relatives, and she accepted the offer at once. Only just enough money was secured to her to render her independent to a certain extent, as far as personal wants were concerned; and under these wretched auspices—for they were wretched to one who from her birth had been accustomed to unlimited expenditure—she had entered her new home.

But the six months had worked a marvellous change in her feelings. Ralph Damer loved her, and she had learnt to love him with a deeper and more enduring love than she had ever lavished on Claud, for with the affection was united trust perfect and infinite.

"If I had money I would marry Ralph to-morrow—that is, if it pleased him to take me," she said shyly. "Yet I do not care for money, Alice. It is a curse and a blessing very often."

"A curse, Gertrude?" And Alice opened her blue eyes in surprise.

"Yes; it was money that nearly broke my heart, and killed my faith in the goodness of human nature."

"But Ralph has brought back that faith?"

"Dear Ralph!" Gertrude murmured very low, with a light blush on her face and a soft light in her brown eyes.

"Have you ever been engaged, Gertrude?" Alice asked.

She wanted to find out if all girls who were engaged felt the misery and anxiety that had been her lot for the last six months, during which she had neither seen Claud, nor heard from him.

Gertrude did not even change colour as she replied. Claud's influence over her feelings was a thing of the past completely, and she could speak his name calmly and coolly, with only just a little scorn cropping up in her mind.

"Yes, Alice, I was engaged for some months to a man who swore he loved me for myself; but when I lost my fortune he cast me aside like a worthless glove. Is it any wonder that money is a horrible thing in my eyes, since it opened them to an amount of deceit and falsity that I never imagined existed?"

"Perhaps he could not help himself. He might have been too poor to marry," suggested Alice, in the hope of salving down the bitterness of spirit that Gertrude evidently felt.

"Oh, no," she cried scornfully. "There was no such excuse for his conduct. My poverty had made him rich."

"It was not Claud Wilton?"

And at the tone Gertrude turned hastily, to see that Alice was as pale as ashes.

"Yes. Is he anything to you?"

"We have been engaged two whole years. And this is the end!" the girl said, in a dreary piteous voice that told of the desolation in her heart.

"O Alice, Alice!" And Gertrude took her cousin's slight figure in her arms, and caressed her just as she would have comforted a child.

"He has broken his oath: he can never be anything to me again!" Alice cried.

"What oath?"

"He swore upon his knees that he would never love any one but me."

"Be satisfied, dear child; he has kept his oath as far as I am concerned. Claud Wilton worshipped my money, but he never loved me."

"He must be so mercenary, so unworthy!"

Gertrude had a good dash of nobility in her nature, and she forgot her own aggrieved feelings to try and and sooth those of the poor little heart that beat audibly near her.

"You may prove him neither mercenary nor unworthy. If Claud really cares for you he will be sure to marry you by and by."

"By and by!" It was an indefinite period to look forward to; but in spite of her jealous fears, her wounded love, Alice knew she would not be able to utter "nay" if her Lord of Burleigh came and said to her.

"All this is mine and thine!"

"Don't close your heart against me, Gertrude! Think how long I have loved you." And Ralph's eyes, beseeching and sorrowful, met hers. They were not beautiful eyes, with their iris deeply violet, and neither was the mouth that spoke so perfect in shape as that other mouth that had not scrupled to breathe falsehoods even while she she gazed upon it in a foolish idolatry of its beauty.

But Ralph, with his manly face, his tender smile that was almost womanly in its sweetness, and his strong muscular figure, was everything to her now. Antinous in propriâ personâ would have been powerless to tempt her allegiance from him.

"I don't close my heart, Ralph. You may read it like an open book, and you will see your own name inscribed on every page," she said softly.

"Then marry me, Gertrude, and make me happy."

She looked at him, and she saw that he was thoroughly in earnest. Now she could not doubt that she was loved for herself, and loved with all Ralph's honest soul.

"Will you take me poverty-stricken as I am, and never regret it, Ralph?"

"Gertrude!"

Only her own name in response; but she knew that it meant that Ralph would take her for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, with a willing heart.

"Take me then," she said frankly, putting her hand into his. But Ralph was not content. In another moment she was clasped in his arms, and a kiss, pure yet passionate, lay on her lips.

"I must tell you something, Ralph—something about an episode in my life."

"Not that you have ever loved before, Gertrude!" he cried jealously.

"Yes, but I have Ralph," she said quietly. "I loved Claud Wilton!"

"And are you sure that that love is quite dead, Gertrude," he asked gravely.

"Trust me."

"I do; but oh, my darling, you must never see him again!"

Ralph was human, and on the earth perfect love does not cast out fear.

"Why not? Claud is nothing to me, and you are"—she hesitated.

"What, Gertrude?"

"Everything."

"My own!"

"It seems to me as if a blessing rested on our marriage. Papa said he would die easy if you and I cared for one another."

Her listener's face lit up with a pleased smile.

"I should like to have seen him before the last. Was he much changed?"

The tears rushed to her eyes, but he kissed them away.

"I have a picture of him; I will show you."

And she rose and fetched the little Japanese cabinet, and tried to unlock it; but the lock was obdurate, and she gave up her efforts at length.

"Take it, Ralph, and these keys. All my secrets belong to you now," she said with a beaming smile.

A little later she walked into the library. Ralph's face was buried on his folded arms, and he did not look up as she entered. Thinking he was asleep, she bent over him and lightly pressed her lips to his hair. He lifted up a countenance towards her that shocked her by its exceeding pallor and the woful expression it wore. The cabinet stood on the table before him, and its innumerable small drawers and letters and papers were scattered carelessly about, as if he had pushed them violently aside.

"Ralph, what ails you?" she asked tenderly, and glancing at the confusion, she added playfully:

"I could almost believe that some terrible secret must have met your eyes!"

"It is a terrible secret to me, Gertrude. Something that will part us two for ever."

She sank down in a heap by his side, her face as pale and as wo-begone as his.

"O Ralph, surely nothing can part us now!"

It seemed to her that if she lost this man, to whom her real love was given with all the might and strength of her nature that she could not bear to live.

"Ralph, my Ralph, speak to me!"

"Could nothing part us now, Gertrude? Suppose you were once more the heiress of broad acres, the possessor of thousands, would you still care to marry me—poor, obscure as I am?" he questioned eagerly.

Her face brightened up beneath his words, "acres and thousands." What were they in comparison to his great honest heart—to the love that