

Yellow Dick then related the freak of Mad Tom and the finding of the ear-ring.

"And you concluded from the vagaries of that poor idiot I had come to France?"

"I did."

"Why should you?"

"Lisette, how often must I tell you that my affections embrace you? From childhood my aim has been to serve you and to make you happy."

"What has this to do with coming to a conclusion that I was in France?"

"Strange as it may appear to you; taking the statement of the mad boy, I weighed it in my mind, and instinct, guided by affection rather than reason, told me that, from cause secret unto yourself, you had fled hither."

"And you became determined to search me out?"

"I did; and had it been necessary I would have travelled this continent throughout to have found you."

"For what purpose?"

"Two reasons have been my prompter to this act. That I might find out if you were alive and happy, and that if you were not, I might execute vengeance on such as had injured you."

This declaration, made in such honesty, touched the heart of Lisette and aroused the slumbering affection she had indulged toward the play-fellow of her childhood, until the tears stood in her eyes and she replied,

"It was good of you."

"Thanks, for this expression of feeling."

"Do our friends know whither you have come?"

"No."

"It is strange!"

"What is strange?"

"That you should have come so opportunely."

"Do you require my services?"

"Would you serve me at a risk?"

"Why ask me this question? Is not my presence in France a risk? You can speak the language fluently, but I speak as an idiot. See the shift I was compelled to resort to in bandaging my mouth that I may conceal my ineffectual speech. What is there I would not risk to serve you? Only say that you love me and there shall be no venture too daring, no undertaking too hazardous that I will not engage in to serve you. It would be enough for me to die beneath your smile."

"I do love you; I have ever loved you; but I have a secret to conceal."

"You love another better?"

"That is not the secret. My heart is not another's, neither have I the wish that it should be."

"Good; then conceal the secret until I am able to render you assistance in revealing it."

"My demand on you may be immediate."

"With pleasure I will welcome it; but what brings you to France?"

"Were I to tell you, would your affection for me constrain you to secrecy; and would you assist me in my plan?"

"Do you still doubt me?"

"I do not, but extreme caution is required."

Raising his hand in the fervor of honesty, the gypsy swore the most solemn oath of his tribe to keep the secret and to serve the command of Lisette even at the risk of his life. Being assured of the purpose which had brought her to France, and of her determination, the two entered into an earnest deliberation on the subject. Lisette was now no longer alone in her endeavor to release the prisoner, and the feeling that such was the case took a heavy burden from her mind and dispelled the last shade of apprehension which had lingered over her spirit. To her his release and restoration to his friends now appeared certain, and it was only to wait until the plan became perfected to ensure complete success.

The intercourse between Lisette and the young gypsy became protracted long after their future conduct was mapped out. To the latter that meeting was the moment of his happiness, the time for which he had long sighed, and now it had come to him in a manner he least expected; but the hour had arrived when they must part.

On returning to the chateau, Lisette found the door partly open. This fact filled her mind with alarm, and she hesitated whether to enter or to flee. "Who could have opened it?" she whispered, and her heart returned the answer that it was Monsieur.

Moving her foot at the door, Lisette struck it against an object on the floor, which, being touched made a slight rolling noise. Instantly her attention became attracted by the sound, and stooping in the darkness to ascertain what it might be, her hand came into contact with a piece of metal, the fastening which should have held the latch of the door. The chateau was dropping into decay from neglect; therefore, when Lisette on passing out had closed the door by simply latching it, a sudden breeze from without setting against it had forced it open, wresting the fastening from its place. This discovery reassured Lisette, who noiselessly securing the door crept unheard to her apartment.

(To be continued.)

Shrewdness and Ability.

Hop Bitters, so freely advertised in all the papers, secular and religious, are having a large sale, and are supplanting all other medicines. There is no denying the virtues of the Hop plant, and the proprietors of these Bitters have shown great shrewdness and ability in compounding a Bitters, whose virtues are so palpable to every one's observation.—*Exchange.*

AN OLD MAID'S CONFESSION.

By "ISIDORE."

Author of "Voices from the Hearth," "An Emigrant's Story," "An Old Miser's Story," etc., etc.

CHAPTER III.

A RECITATION.

The presence of guests in a house unaccustomed to entertain visitors for any length of time naturally altered the tenor of our lives. Our home-world was not so "cribbed, cabined, and confined," and if we did not breathe a "diviner air," at all events we revelled in an "amplified ether" of pleasant companionship. That repression, modified though it may be by temperament, which is in the nature of all women, was mine no more. My reserve seemed swept away. The exuberant spontaneity of thought and expression which characterised Frank now characterised myself. He possessed the wonderful power, rare in any human being, of being able, without conscious effort, to evoke the best of every one's thoughts that came in contact with his own. He thus aroused all that was brightest in mine, which even to myself seemed to acquire breadth and importance. Attracted thus subtly by his mind, I often found myself lingering in his society, when the other members of our party had scattered themselves elsewhere. And so by degrees there crept over me a constant desire to be in his company. What was this feeling that drew me so willingly to his side, that made me seek the paths he frequented, that held me spell-bound, a rapturous listener to his converse, that set me forever thinking of him when absent? Without trying to analyse this feeling, I presume it must have been that over-mastering passion of our nature which either makes or mars existence. Unconsciously then, and as imperceptibly to myself as the rosebuds unfold their beauty and fragrance to the daylight, my heart was expanding with that ineffable feeling which has formed the crowning theme of every poem since the creation. In plain prose, I was gradually falling in love with Frank Dufresne. I do not think that any one in our house guessed my secret. How could they have done so? We all accompanied one another in our rambles, and if I took the lead sometimes with Frank at the head of the party, when my grandmother was too tired to stir out, had I not the right to do so by virtue of being the elder? And if Mrs. Dufresne, preferring Flora's society to my own, lagged behind with her, was I to blame for this? Besides, this lady was the incarnate personification of a fidget. Her days were tuned to a series of incessant complaints; she was either complaining of the weather or of the world; she was either railing against draughts or railing against mankind. In short, a sort of chronic distress affected her movements, voice, manner, and speech. In my capacity of hostess I certainly endeavoured to be agreeable to her. Unfortunately, I never succeeded, while, strange to say, Flora always was more successful in this respect. I can only account for this by the fact that either my sister was not so alive to her peculiarities as I was, or else that my darling's capacious, loving heart found room for even such an uncomfortable creature as Mrs. Dufresne. I think this must have been the case, and I like to please myself with the thought that it was so.

Thus, during our walks, it always happened that Mrs. Dufresne and my sister walked together, so that it was my good fortune often to be in Frank's company. As I write this faint record of "the days that are no more," how pleasantly bright they seem! Time, that robs everything of its pristine glory, has so mellowed them that they are a possession forever. Yes, those evanescent hours, lit with gleams of happiness which his society shed around me, even now seem glorified through the mist of the changeful years. As I proceed with my narrative there steals between my thoughts and this page a shadow, the first shadow that rested upon my happy horizon. I have said that Flora's temperament was particularly joyous. There was a sportive brightness about her which made her presence irresistibly fascinating to all those who love blithesome innocence for its own sake. I imagined that our guests would, if possible, affect her as they did me, so that my darling would be merrier than ever. Strange to relate, since their arrival there was a visible alteration in her moods. Instead of being lively and buoyant, she suddenly grew staid and sad. The merry prattle of her voice was no longer heard, and she was not only reticent, but even absent-minded at times. I wondered at this change, and could not account for it. For some reason or other, which I cannot explain, I became more than concerned—I grew anxious about her. Here, then, I mark the beginning of the first slight shadow that fell on my life. One evening my anxiety concerning her became intensified, and it happened in this wise. We had all assembled in the drawing-room after tea, and each of us was doing his and her best to entertain one another. By turns the younger members of the family circle sang, played, read aloud, or related some anecdote, while the two old friends, ensconced in opposite arm-chairs, composed the attentive and happy audience. I remember the evening well. A cheerful content pervaded us all, produced by the desire to amuse one another, a desire which animated all of us. Even Mrs. Dufresne, evidently touched by the surrounding pleasant influences, forgot "to tune her distresses and record her woes," so that for once in a way she behaved herself like a human being,

unused to imaginary ills and unmeaning complaints. Flora had been playing some of the choicest of Mendelssohn's *Lieder ohne Worte*, giving expression to those delicious tone poems with that mastery of touch which made their rendering perfect, when Frank suddenly said, "What do you say now to a reading? I know a poem that expresses the music of love in the same way as music may interpret its thoughts." We all signified our assent to this proposal. Flora said nothing, but quietly hastening to where I was seated, rested herself upon a footstool at my feet. Frank began. The poem chosen was Coleridge's exquisite lyric, "Love," perhaps one of the finest in the language. The rare accomplishment of being able to read well had been granted to Frank. Familiar as the verses were to me, his matchless rendering of them invested them with a new grace and beauty. All the sweetness of the music which Flora had played seemed to be imbued in the lyric. We heard it again translated into spoken thought. It impressed and thrilled us. My grandmother grew radiant with emotion, and wiped her spectacles very suspiciously more than once. Something like a faint animation spread itself upon the face of Mrs. Dufresne. He read on with a rare and musical accent, until he reached the gradual climax of the exquisite poem:

"His dying words; but when I reached
That tenderest strain of all the ditty,
My faltering voice and pausing harp
Disturbed her soul with pity!"

"All impulses of soul and sense
Had thrilled my guileless Genevieve;
The music and the doleful tale,
The rich and balmy eve;

"And hopes, and fears that kindle hope,
An undistinguishable throng;
And gentle wishes long subdued,
Subdued and cherished long."

"She wept with pity and delight,
She blush'd with love and virgin shame;
And, like the murmur of a dream,
I heard her breathe my name."

"Her bosom heaved, she stepp'd aside,
As conscious of my look she stept;
Then suddenly, with timorous eye,
She fled to me and wept."

"She half enclosed me with her arms,
She press'd me with a meek embrace;
And, bending back her head, look'd up,
And gazed upon my face."

"'Twas partly love and partly fear,
And partly 'twas a bashful art,
That I might rather feel than see
The swelling of her heart."

"I calm'd her fears, and she was calm,
And told her love with virgin pride;
And so I won my Genevieve,
My bright and beautiful bride."

My darling sister never looked up during the recitation, but I could feel her frame was quivering, and I could see her face was blanching with emotion. I silently placed her hand in mine, and I felt it turning cold; and the end of the poem had hardly been reached when a sound like a sob suddenly burst on me, and at that moment I caught my fainting darling in my arms. A sudden alarm fell upon all of us; every one officiously wished to be of service. Silently waving my hands to them to keep away, I quickly hurried from the room with her, and soon restored her to her usual composure; and before I closed my eyes in slumber that night, I saw the usual wakeful smile of my darling, when awake, alighting on her peaceful face in her sleep. No trace of any influence, except the influence of happy dreams, crept over her slumbers. And yet I wondered how so slight a cause as the good recitation of a beautiful poem could have so shaken her nerves, and I went to sleep myself, still wondering; and across my thoughts fell a slight shadow, which I could neither dispel nor explain.

CHAPTER IV.

A CONSULTATION.

"Good morning, Doctor."

"Good morning, my dear."

Whereupon Dr. Joshua Ponder, having cordially shaken hands with me, at my bidding noiselessly entered the drawing-room.

The Doctor was a short man, of a lightly-built frame. He possessed clear-cut and rather sharp features; his face was adorned with an apology for a whisker, and in the depths of his brilliant black eyes there seemed to lurk a spirit of suppressed merriment. There was an air of dignity and suavity in his presence and demeanour. He always spoke in very slow, deliberate, measured tones, as if he were ruminating on what he had to say—a kind of speech which often distresses a listener. All the lady patients of our village affected a fondness for the Doctor; the men, on the other hand, called him a humbug. He had been our family physician for years, and was on terms of familiarity and friendship with us all. His regard for me, I knew, was tinged with a warmer sentiment, which he had never avowed because I had never encouraged him. I liked him as a friend; I never could have loved him as a husband. Being cognisant of this, he kept a wise reticence on the forbidden theme, and perhaps on this account there was always a concord of pleasant friendliness between us. Whether the Doctor was quietly biding his time to press his suit I cannot say. Some men will not be discouraged when they have set their will upon anything. Was the Doctor one of these men? Events will show.

"So one of your new friends has need of my services already?" said the Doctor, in his usual measured accents.

"Yes," I replied, "but I must warn you that the lady is a hypochondriac."

"So is everybody, in a greater or less degree; very few people really require me."

"Then why do they send for you?"

"Because people fancy they need the admonishingunction of my advice, and my nostrums. Bodily ills, like mental ones, often proceed from discontent. If mankind were happier, doctors would not flourish."

"Who talks of being ill?" said Mrs. Dufresne, who at this moment majestically sailed into the room, covered with a plenitude of wraps. "Sit still, child," continued this lady, addressing me. Accordingly, I did not carry out my intention of departing. Then she poured out a long disquisition of her various ills—aches here, pains there, rushings of blood upward, rushings of cold downward, endless lassitude, constant weariness. "Was it the change, or the climate, or what?" she demanded of the Doctor.

This gentleman listened calmly, and humoured her benignly, with an extra humorous twinkle in his black eyes. Of course, it was no wonder she felt ill, the terrible climate was enough to shake any one's nerves—the change was too sudden. "Composure, my dear madam, gentle exercise, strict attention to diet, and—and—I will send you a little something to do you good." Such was the Doctor's advice.

Mrs. Dufresne, who was as free from illness as I was, smiled pleasantly on the sympathetic Doctor as she bade him good-morning, and left us.

"I like your doctor," she said to me later in the day. "He quite understands my complaint."

I did not make any allusion to the state of Mrs. Dufresne's health to my friend after she had departed, but I consulted with him about one who gave me a real cause for anxiety. When I had completely finished narrating the occurrence of the preceding evening, I gazed at him steadfastly, as if to read his opinion in his eyes. Was it my fancy, or had the humorous light departed from them?

"My dear, do not alarm yourself. Some subtle cause, which neither you nor I can guess, may have brought about that sudden faintness. There is no occasion for me to see her. Prescribe what you think fit. No medicine like love, my dear; no medicine like love."

I certainly thought then that the Doctor, having prescribed for his patients, would at once take his leave, but, to my great astonishment, he did nothing of the kind.

During the conversation I was seated at my work-table, which was made of wicker, rather fantastic in its shape, and altogether a graceful and pretty bit of furniture. It was covered with a woman's usual work implements; generally these were stowed away in some of its receptacles, but to-day I had them all in use. I watched the Doctor, from where I sat, rise as if about to depart. He stood up, directed his steps with his usual retrogressive movement towards the door, then, having forgotten his hat, retraced them, nervously clutched it, and actually took a seat again. I watched him in smiling amazement. "I was remarking, Miss Agnes, that the very best medicine in the world was love."

"And I certainly agree with you," I replied.

"It is an elixir sometimes very difficult to obtain in this world," said the Doctor, as he again rose, and moved a few paces in my direction.

"No, it is not labelled and sold in phials at a chemist's shop," I hazarded, rather puzzled at the direction the Doctor's conversation and steps were taking.

"And it is even more difficult to find out the secret of being able to win this inestimable boon." And the Doctor advanced a few steps still further.

When would he stop? and how far did he intend to go? I inwardly asked myself. "Some people," continued the Doctor, warming with his subject and still approaching the table, "don't know how to keep the prize; others—and the majority of mankind may be included amongst the others—can only at odd times and during rare moments catch a glimpse of it."

"Which, of course, is not as satisfactory as it might be," I said, wishing in some fashion to assure the Doctor of my accordance with his ideas, and at the same time perceiving that the distance between him and myself was growing every moment more dangerous.

"Yes, Miss Agnes, not satisfactory to the feeling of one," and here my friend's utterance grew rather husky, as he again moved stealthily onwards, and to this day I do not know what violent rhapsody of love-making he might not have been guilty of, had he not by this time arrived at the table, and, placing his hand nervously upon it to support himself in his sudden trepidation, so nearly knocked it over as to upset all my work implements. The shock so interfered with his thoughts as to altogether silence them. He helped me to pick everything up, said good-morning—as was his custom, and slid off with his usual back movement towards the door.

And thus ended this rather ludicrous consultation.

Perhaps it would have been better for him had I allowed him to complete his evidently coming declaration, and, maybe, it was hardly kind of me not at once to shatter his illusion. I even felt somewhat guilty in the conviction of my being assured that I held the first place in his thoughts all the day during his round of visits; and yet, estimable man as he was, there was not the slightest chance of his ever rising from the vantage ground of my esteem, to those imperial heights where love sits crowned! No, Dr. Joshua Ponder could never live in my heart, except as an agreeable friend.

(To be continued.)