

(For the Canadian Illustrated News.)
CARPE DIEM.

'Tis not our deeds which give us when reviewed
Cause for repentance
When, on ourselves, we pass in solitude
Judgment and sentence.

'Tis not the memory of things done which stings
And makes us moan
Our idle cowardice, but of the things
We left undone
Which makes us cry "thou fool!" the openings missed.
The chances thrown away—
And yet we add omissions to the list
Of our sins, day by day.

To all men there are open roads to fortune.
And avenues to fame;
Yet we live lives of failure and abortion
And die without a name.

Learn we the lesson which our past should teach—
To seize the passing hour
Gathering all fate places in our reach,
Nettle or flower.

Among our maxims let us keep in view
This above all.
TO DO WELL, ALL THAT WE FIND WORTH TO DO
Or great or small!

NED P. MAH.

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LAURA NELSON'S STORY.

BY NED P. MAH.

"Die Eifersucht ist eine Leidenschaft, die mit Eifer sucht und Leiden schafft."

I.

Rich, young, robust and handsome, beloved by two women at once, both charming and beautiful, Eric Talbotson was surely to be envied. If he had an annoyance surely it could only arise from an *embarras de richesses*, from the difficulty of choosing between two gems so equally fair. Was it this, I wonder, that caused him to pace rapidly up and down the hotel sitting-room, biting his moustache in seeming perturbation of spirit? or was it something in that letter which he draws from his pocket and re-peruses, and finally sits down to dash off a reply to, at the table in the centre of the room.

He writes quickly and with energy, commencing on a sheet of note paper with the crease towards his right hand, turning it over on the blotting pad when he reaches the bottom of the page, filling a second, and finishing with a postscript low down on the first page of the inside of the sheet.

Then he directs an envelope, blots it likewise, extracts the necessary stamps from his pocket-book, and goes out to post himself this momentous epistle.

Raven-haired, jet-eyed, Juno-like, Laura looks in from the ladies' sitting-room presently where she had been jingling the keys of the piano and wondering that Eric did not appear at the magic signal, and perceiving that there is no one in the room, advances to the table. There she catches sight of Eric's well-known, black, crabbled characters upon the pad, and with the curiosity of a woman in love, and jealous to boot—she rips with a tiny penknife the sheet from the pad. There is an old superstition about knives; some old adage about cutting love in two. Take care, Laura, who knows what may happen in your case.

Holding to the light the severed sheet, she turns pale as she reads through it the few words she can make out.

There are three several places where words are legible: first, where the first page was blotted, the two or three last lines upon that page, the same in the second, and the signature and postscript on the third; besides these there is the address upon the envelope.

These are the words that make her flush, and pant, and turn deadly pale:

"Since she's false I'm well rid of her. Send me news of the marriage as soon as you like, it will assure me that I have escaped a great"—"the bye, since I saw you, I have grown a great, tawny beard, you—no, Mary herself could scarcely recognize me"

"—— Id brick,

Eric.

P. S. Do all you can to facilitate the marriage. Spread a report of my death if that would put a spoke in the wheel. E."

It was Laura's turn now to walk up and down the room in perturbation of spirit.

"The villain!" she cried, clenching her fist, "so he's married already, is he? And he presents himself here under the guise of a single man. Why, he might have married me if fortune hadn't thrown his secret in my way, and he may marry Nettie yet if I don't choose to prevent it. Well, he's in my power, any way, now, and if I cannot be happy myself I can make him as miserable as I like," and her face hardened as she thought of revenge.

II.

It was twilight; the twilight of a beautiful summer's evening.

Eric was losing a game of billiards to Mr. Trevalyan—he always managed to lose when he played with a possible papa-in-law. Mr. Trevalyan had retired complaining of head-ache. Nettie Trevalyan and her cousin Laura were sitting on the steps of the summer-house on the brink of the stream that meandered through the grounds of the rustic inn above the falls.

"Laura," said Nettie, caressing her cousin's hand nervously between her own, and looking up timidly in her cousin's face, "Laura, I have something to say to you. I shouldn't have dared to say it a month ago, but lately you have been so kind and tender and affectionate again—so much more like you were before we—I mean so much more like you used to be at home, that now when I want somebody to confide in and to advise with, it seems that I must talk to you about it even before I tell it to mamma.

Laura knew what was coming, she only said, however:

"Well, darling; what is it? Go on."

Nettie nestled closer to Laura till her flushed face was nearly touching Laura's cold, pale cheek, and whispered, "Eric—Mr. Talbotson, has proposed to me."

Laura grew even paler as she moved a little away and coldly asked:

"And you have accepted him?"

There was a change in Nettie's voice as she answered, half timidly, half defiantly, for she had noticed Laura seemed to shrink from her—"Yes."

"Then it is a little late in the day to ask my advice, isn't it?"

Nettie fired up. "I know of only one reason that could have induced you to advise me to do otherwise than I have done, for you cannot have a word to say against my Eric who is everything that is good, and noble, and handsome, and manly, and true; and that reason is that you wanted him for yourself."

This stung Laura as Nettie had intended. She sprang up, but controlling herself by an effort, she advanced to Nettie who had also risen and said:

"Dear Nettie, I see it would be worse than useless now to offer you advice or to tell you what my advice should have been or what reasons I had to give; only remember, that if any trouble should come to you, you have in me, though you may not believe it now, your truest friend. But I would ask you to believe, though I am afraid that is equally useless, that I am not jealous."

She had taken Nettie's hand, as she spoke, lowly and sadly. It remained passively in hers, and dropped to Nettie's side when she ceased to hold it. She turned silently away and went slowly into the house.

Laura locked herself into her own room and rested her head upon her two hands at the open window and looked out into the still night and thought.

There was a sound of approaching footsteps and low voices in the grounds beneath, and the white moon came out from behind a cloud and showed her Eric and Nettie walking together as only lovers can walk; Eric with his arm round the tiny waist of Nettie who clung to him as the parasite clings to the oak. A month ago what would Laura have given to have occupied the place she occupied, to have felt his strong arm circling her waist, to have lent her weary head on that strong breast, to have heard him tell her that he loved her. She drew back even now and hid her head, and sighed, and refused to look upon their happiness. Ah! Laura, can you say you are not jealous now?

They passed into the house, and she was left again to her thoughts.

What should she do? Should she let his wickedness go unpunished and leave him to enjoy his ill-deserved happiness? For Nettie's sake she felt almost tempted to do this. Yet, could she, conscientiously? Would it not be very wrong to do so knowing what she knew? Yet, how disclose her knowledge? Would not the means by which she had arrived at that knowledge seem a little mean? She lit her lamp, she held the paper again to the light, she read again the accusing words. She read; too, the name and address of the friend to whom they were written—"Gerald Danvers, Esq., Hotel Bellevue, Schonbock, Germany," and as she read a thought struck her. She had money, she was her own mistress, she was not well; a journey with a definite object to occupy her thoughts and rouse her energies was the very thing she needed. What if she were to go and sift this matter on the spot? The idea had its fascination, and was it not almost her duty?

Laura was a strong-minded, "to dare, to suffer, or to do" sort of girl; before another hour had passed her resolution was taken. By twelve o'clock she had arrayed herself in a plain, dark travelling dress, and collected her money and a few necessities in a little travelling bag which she could carry easily; ten minutes later she had crept noiselessly down the hotel stair-case and along the corridor past the door of the billiard room—where a couple of belated towns-folk were playing a last game before facing the curtain lectures which awaited them at home—into the dark and empty dining saloon and so through the glass doors out into the grounds and through a little white wicket into the ill-paved street. At a quarter to one she sat with shrinking form, bowed head, and veiled face, almost trembling at her own boldness and in abject fear of recognition in the darkest corner of the waiting-room at the railway-station, listening for the shrill whistle of the night express. At one she was seated in the corner of a first-class carriage fairly launched on the first stage of her voyage of discovery.

III.

Laura learned many things before she reached Schonbock; chiefly, however, that a young woman simply clad, travelling alone and without baggage is looked upon by hotel keepers with suspicion. She had taken an early opportunity, therefore, of remedying the defects of her equipment; and when she made her appearance at the hotel Bellevue it was in the guise of a fashionable and well appointed lady. But she found a great drawback still in her want of escort; she was no longer looked on suspiciously or slighted it is true; on the contrary, she received so much attention and such marked gallantry that the change threatened to be equally embarrassing. But Laura was a bold girl and knew how to take care of herself, and was not less vain of the admiration which she could keep within proper limits as well as any woman living, than were others of her sex. There was a kind of intoxication about the absolute freedom which she now enjoyed, which exhilarated her spirits wonderfully, and never in her life had she looked more beautiful than now.

She was the cynosure of all eyes when she took her seat at the Bellevue table d'hôte. She was a little late and took the seat assigned her below the other guests on the right of the table. Opposite her were two chairs evidently reserved for guests who had not yet made their appearance, for their backs rested against the edge of the table. After a few minutes two young, well dressed, handsome men entered gaily, appropriated these seats, called for their soup and a bottle of claret and commenced their repast. Their conversation soon attracted her attention.

"Where is our Venus, to-day, Gerald," said the younger of the two, after some inaudible remarks—of which she herself had, to judge by the glances which she could feel were directed

at her, been the topic—had passed between them, "is she not going to grace the banquet with her presence?"

"I do not know," replied Gerald, "she has had a retiring fit lately and often dines in her own room."

"Sulky, eh? or is she mourning for her Eric's death. I suppose you have broken the news to her?"

"Oh, yes."

"And how did she bear it; did she take it much to heart?" with an absurd mockery of condolence in his tone which made his companion smile.

"Not at all as regarded his personal loss, but a good deal as losing all possibility of revenge. But the coast is clear and you can woo and win as hard as you like now."

"Ha, ha! Well I might have gone further and fared worse, Danvers. But talk of the —angels and you hear their wings rustle," he continued, as the door opened and admitted a pretty girl apparently of some fourteen years, but dressed in an absurdly childish style that made a rather precocious development the more noticeable, followed by an extremely beautiful and ravishingly-shaped woman of probably some thirty summers, though she might have passed for less, and only owned to twenty-five. She advanced to the table, bowing graciously to the gentlemen opposite, and took the seats designated by the obsequious waiter for herself and the child next below Laura.

Laura recoiled at the self-possessed beauty, redolent of subtle essences, settled her voluminous muslins to her satisfaction by her side.

"His wife," she muttered, and commenced a depreciating catalogue of her charms.

The lady thus honoured lent over and bestowed some affectingly solicitous caresses upon the girl.

"His child," she mentally exclaimed, "but she isn't the least bit like him!"

IV.

Gerald Danvers was leaning over the rail which surmounted the cliff overlooking the harbour, and formed the boundary of the Bellevue grounds, smoking lazily and watching the boating parties setting sail from the beach below, when his ear caught the rustle of a lady's dress. As Gerald was not yet of an age when a petticoat ceases to be an attraction, it was the most natural thing in the world that he should turn his head to see who the wearer might be. He could not see her face, for she had already passed him, but he recognized at once by the colour of the hair and the graceful contour of the slowly-receding figure the beautiful stranger who had been seated opposite him at dinner, and midway between him and her he espied upon the grass a little square of lace-edged cambric, which was doubtless property of hers. Always ready for anything in the shape of an adventure, he lost no time in picking it up and hastening to restore it to the owner. She received it with a gracious smile and a becoming blush, and apologizing for giving him trouble on the ground of the incomplete information furnished by her guide-book, requested that he would instruct her as to the exact whereabouts and best mode of conveyance to a certain ruined fortress in the neighbourhood. He pointed it out to her in the blue distance at the mouth of the estuary, and begged she would command his services to procure her a boat and a trustworthy boatman.

Laura thought the afternoon too warm to be suitable for a voyage to the fortress, "yet," said she, subsiding into the never-failing topic which fills so conveniently the vacant places in all conversations, "it is a beautiful day, isn't it?"

"I thought so," he replied, "till you appeared upon the scene."

There was something in his tone and the broad look of admiration that accompanied it that reminded Laura that she was a pretty woman travelling without escort, and that he knew it.

"I abhor compliments, and will thank you never to address another to me," she said, "just as I was going to accept your offer of services, too," she added, with an air of coquetry.

"I am sincerely sorry to have offended you. Shall I then make arrangements for the boat?"

"No, it is not in that way that you could do me a favour."

"Then you must enlighten me as to the way in which I can serve you. Rest assured you may command me."

"I want you, when I have told you who I am, to give me an introduction to the lady who sat next me at dinner."

"What, to Mrs. Christianstjerne?"

"So," thought Laura, "Eric presented himself to us not only under a false character but under a false name."

"Yes," she replied aloud, "I am an American, my name is Laura Nelson, and while travelling in America I made the acquaintance of a person who once knew this Mrs. Christianstjerne intimately. It is important, for the interest of those who are very dear to me, that I should hear from the lady in question particulars concerning this person's earlier history which she alone can furnish. Will you, on these grounds, when I assure you of the honesty of my motives, grant me the introduction?"

"Most assuredly."

"Perhaps it would be best," continued Laura, with heightened colour and a charming embarrassment of manner, "that you introduce me as an old friend of your own. Have you sufficient faith in me to do this?"

"Certainly. But you must make up your mind to visit the fortress despite the heat of the afternoon. My friend Jacobsen and Mrs. Christianstjerne are going to sail there this afternoon. If you do not object, we can form a *partie courée*."

"With pleasure!"

"Then the matter is easily arranged. Will you please walk this way?"

The introduction was effected. Mrs. Christianstjerne looked a little surprised, but a whispered communication from Danvers made all right, and she became immediately very gracious.

The breeze freshened when they had proceeded a little way from land, and the sail to the ruined fortress was a very pleasant one.

After surveying the ruins, the gentlemen, picking out a romantic, shady spot as a rendezvous, went in search of fruit and refreshment to some pleasure gardens in the neighbourhood, and the ladies were left alone.

"Curious you should meet your friend Mr. Danvers here," remarked Mrs. Christianstjerne; "where did you make his acquaintance? Are you an English lady?"

"No, I am an American. A little strong-minded of me to be travelling alone, isn't it? But I have an object in view. I am making inquiries, in fact, as to the antecedents of a gentleman who is affianced to a very dear friend of mine."