

Written for the Canadian Illustrated News.

MY VISIT TO FAIRVIEW VILLA.

BY MRS. LEPROHON.

Whether owing to the struggle going on within me, my voice had assumed a degree of coldness I had not intended it should, or that the words in themselves, containing a sort of implied wish to rid myself of the duty of supporting her, incensed her proud spirit, she instantly raised her head from my arm, and with the look and bearing of an offended queen, flung my coat from her and walked forth in the midst of the deluge coming down still with undiminished violence.

"Miss Otway," I besought, I urged, "for heaven's sake wait a few moments longer. This heavy rain will soon be over!"

She made no reply beyond slightly contracting her dark eyebrows, and pursued her course. It was distressing beyond measure to see that delicate frail creature exposed to such a storm, and I renewed my entreaties for her to return to the shelter of the wood, but received no reply, nothing but contemptuous silence. Again a vivid flash of lightning, a crashing peal of thunder overhead. "Ah, poor girl, she will stop now," thought I. But I was mistaken. Her indomitable pride triumphed over every feeling, and though her cheek became if possible of a still more deathly whiteness, she steadily kept on her way. I came closer to her, proffering my arm, my coat, which were both mutely but disdainfully rejected. Thus, I following her in an ignominious, valet style of companionship, we plashed on through rain and mire till we at length reached our party, the men of which had constructed a temporary shelter for the ladies by drawing the carriages together.

"Why, you are in a shocking plight, Miss Otway. I hope friend Saville has taken good care of you," said Mr. Merton.

"Oh yes," she rejoined with stinging sarcasm; "he is such a very prudent young gentleman."

"Come, Geraldine, don't be cross because your pretty bonnet is among the things that were," interrupted Miss Merton, who always kindly came to my rescue.

"But did you not meet Willy and the shawls?" questioned our host. "He set off some time ago with a sufficient quantity to construct a wigwam if you had desired it, not to mention two umbrellas and a parasol."

"We did not meet him, Mr. Merton. I suppose he has been seeking for a short cut through the wood, which instead has proved a long one."

"Geraldine, quick, step into the carriage. We have plenty of place for you," called out Miss Gray.

"Yes, if you are not afraid of getting your dresses wet or spoiled, or of my fatiguing you otherwise," she replied, darting another withering look towards my hapless self.

"What an unlucky fellow I am," I mournfully thought when, fairly started some time later on our homeward route, I wondered over the events of the day. "I have made myself fairly odious to her; and heavens! what a fire-brand she is!" But, alas, I vainly sought to fortify myself by the latter uncharitable reflection, and I was no sooner in my own room, whither I had instantly retired on arriving at the house, to change my wet clothes, than I found myself kissing like a verdant school boy the silk lining of my coat collar against which her soft cheek had so prettily nestled a short while ago.

"Fool! idiot! mad-man!" I groaned, as the full meaning of this act of folly rose suddenly upon me, revealing that love for this peerless creature had indeed, spite of all my resolutions and efforts, crept into my heart. "All I can do now is to hide my madness from every eye, but from hers above all others. She hates, scorns me now, but, so help me heaven, she shall never laugh at me!"

On entering the drawing-room, there was Miss Otway in a fresh, delicate tinted robe, showing no signs of the late great fatigue and exposure she had undergone beyond a brighter flush on her cheek and a greater brilliancy in her dark eyes. She never noticed me all the evening beyond launching at my devoted head, on one or two occasions, some sarcasms as cutting as they were wholly unprovoked, and from which I sought refuge in the society of Miss Merton. The companionship of the latter really pretty, amiable girl was always agreeable to me, principally for two reasons. First, she was quite in love, I well knew, with the gallant Captain Graham, of the —th, a handsome young officer who had lately joined our party, (and who by the way was hopelessly in love himself with Miss Otway) so I saw no risk of my attentions being misinterpreted; secondly, she was an intimate, or as young ladies call it, a bosom friend of the wilful mistress of my heart, and often chose her for the theme of our long chats together, recounting so many instances of the generosity, kindness and better nature of the latter that my chains after each such dangerous dialogue were more closely riveted than if I had been in company with Miss Otway herself. The conduct of that young lady continued the same for a few days as it had been on the

evening of the luckless pic-nic, I, all the time, even whilst smarting under her petulant injustice, finding a gloomy satisfaction in the thought that my secret was safe. Then again her mood changed, and she became friendly and conciliating even to the point of making advances which I certainly did not meet more than half way, even if I went that far.

One beautiful afternoon that several of us had gone on an exploring expedition on horse-back to some fine view in the neighbourhood, I found myself by her side with Capt. Graham as we were turning our horse's heads homewards. Suddenly she discovered that "she had forgotten her lace handkerchief, and hoped that Captain Graham would have gallantry enough to go for it." The directions, to say the least, were rather vague, and the accomplished son of Mars departed on his mission, smiles on his lips and weary disgust in his heart. Turning towards me she said with her softest smile:

"Spur up, Mr. Saville. We can ride two abreast here."

Ah! merciless coquette! arch traitress! she was determined on leading me into a confession. How could I resist her? Would that she had been a serf—a peasant girl, anything that I might have hoped to have room for my own, but instead she was the petted heiress, the merciless flirt, and I a miserable captive with nothing to console me under the weight of my chains save the certainty that none knew I wore them. Very calmly I accepted her invitation to ride beside her, and we journeyed on, the golden sunlight quivering through the green branches overhead, the soft summer winds caressing our foreheads, and yet our talk was as dull and prosaic as if we had been a couple of elderly respectable people with the cares of the state, or of a family, on our shoulders. Suddenly she turned full towards me, saying with a charming smile:

"Now for a race, Mr. Saville. If you win, you may name your reward."

With a look of laughing defiance that wonderfully heightened her exquisite beauty, she glanced archly at me and then set off at full speed. Easily I could have overtaken her and she must have known that well, for few horses excelled in speed my own good steed kindly accommodated with a comfortable stall in the stables at Fairview Villa, but I had no intention of jeopardizing my secret which this girl seemed bent on wringing from me, and at a very moderate rate of speed I followed in her wake. After a time she looked sharply round, and either angered by the slowness of my pace, or by my preoccupied look, she struck her spirited little mare angrily across the ears, and the latter catching the fiery mood of her mistress, gave a bound forward and set off at break-neck speed. Anxious beyond measure, I spurred forward, dreading every moment some accident to the frail girlish creature I saw flying before me through the interstices of the wood with such reckless disregard of caution. Now, had I not firmly determined when commencing this humble recital, that it should possess the merit of being at least veracious, even at the expense of dullness, I should here enliven it by a rapid, brilliant account of some deadly peril which would suddenly menace Miss Otway, say for instance, her horse rearing on the brink of a precipice, from which strait she would be delivered entirely by my strength of arm and presence of mind; but resisting manfully the temptation, doubly strong in the present case, as I feel convinced I could make a graphic, indeed splendid sketch of the thing, I will honestly confess that she at length drew rein, safe though flushed and panting, at Fairview Villa.

I hastily dismounted so as to assist her to alight, but without waiting for my help, she sprang to the ground at the risk of a sprained ankle if not of more serious injury, and as I pressed towards her, uttered the one word, "Laggard!" with a look and voice of indignant contempt, striking at the same time her horse another light but angry blow over its neck. From her expression as she swept by me, I knew she would much rather have applied the whip to my own shoulders, but had she done so, I would not only have borne it, but spaniel-like have caressed the hand that struck me, for alas! my desperate struggles were but riveting my chains the more securely, and I felt I was beginning to love Geraldine Otway with a love almost terrible in its intensity. Surely, surely, I was foolish—mad—to remain longer exposed to the fascinations of this temptress. I must leave without delay, leave before yielding to the impulse of some moment of passion, I should utter words of love which would be answered by smiles of ridicule; before laying bare feelings too sacred and secret to be made the jest of a hollow-hearted coquette and her friends.

How she persecuted, lashed, taunted me that evening! More than once I retorted, sharply if not rudely, for my own character was beginning to suffer from the peculiar irritation engendered by mental suffering. Really this girl was trying me in every way beyond my strength! On my pillow, that night, I made up my mind that the next day should be my last at Fairview Villa and that I should tear myself away from the fascinations of this

Eden, the memories of which would embitter many a long hour in the dreary future.

With the sunshine of the following morning, Miss Otway's smiles had returned, and as the day was bright but pleasantly cool, Miss Gray proposed a botanizing excursion to the woods, indignantly protesting against baskets of refreshments which would give our expedition the air of a vulgar, every day pic-nic, instead of a scientific exploration. "Papa" Merton quietly smiled at this, and in despite of the warning, some hampers containing the material of a very dainty lunch, were slipped into the carriage, proving I may as well say before hand, as welcome to Miss Gray as to the rest of our hungry party when luncheon hour came round.

The members of the coming expedition were already standing in groups on the verandah when I joined them, and Miss Otway, radiant in fresh loveliness, and in the coolest and most becoming of morning toilettes, was standing chatting to Miss Gray who, armed with a basket and some tiny garden implement for transplanting, looked as if she intended business.

"Who knows anything about plants, their classes, orders and genera?" inquired Miss Otway.

As she fixed her eyes on me at the conclusion of the sentence, I muttered something about having forgotten Botany since I had left college. The other gentlemen of the party murmured a similar confession.

"Well, as I do not intend that Miss Gray, who is really well versed in it, shall have all the glory of the expedition to herself, I propose we make it a sort of generally scientific thing. Each member shall pursue the study for which he or she has most aptitude, be it geology, mineralogy, botany, so that all may return learned-looking and triumphant. What do you think Mr. Saville?"

"I have forgotten them all," I pleaded. A general and significant cough of acquiescence, each on his own count, again ran round the gentleman of the circle, when Miss Otway reported:

"I see Mr. Saville is bent on demoralizing our scientific forces, so to punish his indolence and keep him out of mischief, I shall condemn him to hold my specimens. He will at least be able to do that."

Thus enlisted in her train, and only too happy, if the truth be told, for the circumstance, I approached her side, inwardly thinking that as it was my last day (for her smiles and charms had but strengthened my resolve of leaving her) I might take one more sip of the intoxicating happiness I found in her society ere I renounced it for ever.

Started on our way, she turned to me, saying, "Now, every little weed or wild flower you see, gather it so that in such a number we may chance on getting some verdant treasure with which to astonish and delight the real botanists of the party."

Oh, what a walk that was! Loitering among sunshine and flowers—stooping sometimes to gather some plant or fern.

"It is fortunate for me," thought I, "that this is the last day of temptation, or otherwise I should surely make a fool of myself."

"Come, show me the fruits or rather flowers of your industry, Mr. Saville. What! common clover—dandelion—catnip—why, what are you thinking of? If this is a specimen of your abilities, I fear I will never be able to teach you even the little botany I know myself."

I looked steadily, earnestly at her as she stood beside me, smiling up in my face, and then suddenly said, it seemed in spite of myself:

"You have taught me one lesson too many already—one which I only hope I may be able to speedily forget."

To be continued.

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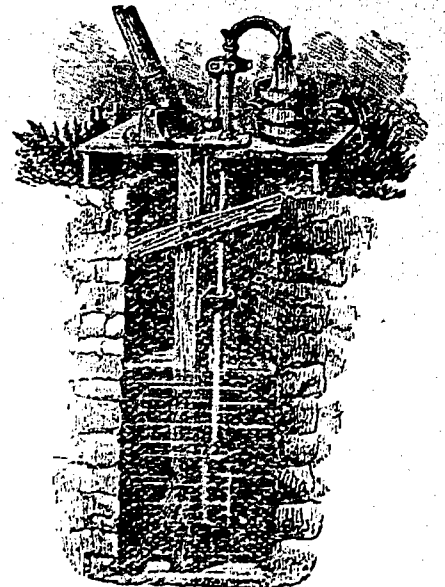
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By order,

F. BRAUN,
Secretary.DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS,
Ottawa, 17th May 1870.

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P. MITCHELL.

Minister of Marine and Fisheries.

Department of Marine and Fisheries,
Ottawa, 12th May, 1870.

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