

The storm is over, the wind is fair,
The pilot is watching the channel with care,
The waves are still and the water is white—
Oh, my ladie she'll meet her lover to-night!

I kissed my bonnie ladie's hand,
I clasped her wrist with a golden band,
I gathered rosebuds, fresh and white—
Her own true love she'll see to-night!

I had smuggled my dress downstairs at a time when I knew the family were all in the parlor. My bed stood in an alcove, which was hidden from the room by curtains of silk and lace. There I had hidden the costly thing. I knew Bessie was wondering what I was going to wear, but I did not enlighten her till the last moment. I knew she was wishing I had something richer than the dress that was spread out on the lounge, and thinking how Bessie would contrast it with Mary's satin. "But the pearls make up," she'd mutter between the verses, and then she'd dart off away and look at me.

"Not that, Bessie," I said, as she took up the mull—"I'm not going to wear that. You'll find my dress on the bed."

What a scream she gave! I thought she would surely arouse the house.

"Oh, Miss Ellen, where do you get it—such a splendid silk and such laces?"

And all the while she was putting it on she chanted the old ballad in a spirit that fairly thrilled me with a prophecy, a wild, wondrous one, which almost snatched the color from my cheeks and the pulses from my heart.

"There, now you make look, Miss Ellen."

And she turned on every burner and dropped the glass so that I could see myself from head to foot. I did look and—was satisfied.

I had brought down a very deep and broad circular cloak that had belonged to my grandmother, and this I made Bessie wrap about me so secretly as not to conceal my dress, and yet so loosely as not to tumble it, while upon my head I wore an old-fashioned calash.

"Your pardon, Miss Ellen, but I must say it—you look like an old witch. It'll be just like a fairy story when you drop off those things. How I wish I could go with you and see them stare!"

"The carriage is waiting, Ellen, and we are going down. Are you ready?" said Mrs. Hastings.

I answered by opening the door. She gave a scream of horror.

"You're not going in that garb?"

"I must guard against taking cold, ma'am. I'm not as used to the night air as you and May."

She muttered something which I could not hear, and we went down. "Steevie" met us in the hall. He was my stepmother's nephew, a young fellow whom I could have liked if I had not felt intuitively that she meant to make a match between him and me, and thus keep the money in the family.

"I'm glad to see grandmother able to be out again," he said, gayly, as he seated me in the carriage.

I retorted. I was good at repartee when I was in the vein, as I was then. He followed me up, and between us two we made the ride seem brief. My stepmother was in the best of spirits, and so was May, when we alighted. They fancied that I was at last succumbing to their manoeuvres. How little they knew me!

The dressing-room was a perfect jam. I stood on the threshold and watched my companions elbow their way through, and made up my mind I would wait till it thinned out a little. It suited my plans too. After a while they reappeared, May radiant in her blue satin, Mrs. Hastings regal in purple velvet.

"Why! aren't you ready yet?" they both exclaimed. "We thought you must be somewhere waiting."

"I should have fainted in that crowd. Besides Steevie has only two arms. You go first; send him back for me when you can spare him."

They smiled at each other, and I heard the elder whisper:

"The reason an engagement shall be understood."

I must have my own way, and I did. They went down, and by-and-by I followed, perfectly satisfied with my escort, for the nephew was really a fine specimen of manhood. It was only unfortunate for him that he was related to my stepmother.

As Bessie had predicted, they stared at me—stared at me when I entered the room—stared at me as I promenaded its entire length—stared at me as I paid my compliments to our hostess, and stared at me as I mingled with the crowd. I played my part well so well that Mrs. Morgan stole up to me and whispered:

"I'm so glad you came, Ellen; you're the belle of the rooms—everybody is dying to know you. Where did you get your laces? I'm afraid you will ruin your father."

Half an hour afterwards she stole up again.

"Do you remember Ed Somers?"

Remember him! Didn't my heart leap into my throat at the very mention of his name? Of course, though I did not say this to her. I answered, simply:

"Yes, perfectly well."

"You know he and his mother and Allie left London suddenly two years ago, it was said because he was sent for to unravel a quari lawsuit for one of his friends? Well, it turns out it was for themselves he went. His father's old uncle had died, and they were his heirs. He gets the money, no telling how much, and houses and lands, and the title too. He is now Lord Somers—think of it—our once poor, penniless Ed. But I must hurry and tell you the best of

my story. He arrived here yesterday; and I fastened upon him at once. He couldn't resist me. It was like the vulture and the dove. But I was always his friend, and it is no more than right that I should have the écart of presenting him under his title to the fashionable world here. Watch the door closely. They'll come soon—he and Allie; Mrs. Somers is too worn."

Watch the door! I did, with eagle eyes, while my heart was all impatience. Yet none about me guessed the wild emotions that were surging in my veins. I never once ceased my chatting with the fops about me. Wit, humor, raillery, sarcasm, each as it was needed fell from my lips in a rapid, unbroken jet, sparkling too as a water-crest in sunshine. I played my part well, so well that my stepmother and her daughter looked on in mute amazement. I was certainly developing a new phase of character to them, and I knew by the sinister glances that shot from their eyes that it was the last time they would ever coax me to attend a ball.

They came soon, and I was thankful, for my impatience was fast unbinding me. I could not have kept up the play much longer. I did not see them when they were announced, but soon afterwards I saw him talking with two gentlemen and looking as I thought curiously in my direction. I involuntarily sprang forward and my eyes caught his. There was a look of recognition, instantaneous and earnest, and then his whole face lighted up with joy.

I forgave Mrs. Hastings and May many a grievance when I saw the blank wonder of their faces as Lord Somers drew my arm within his own and with Allie on the other wandered off quite at his ease! Ah, I had my triumph then.

But I was generous; I could afford to be. I took an early opportunity to introduce them both to the mother and daughter who had been watching me so closely, and I even had forbearance enough to say "mamma" and "Sister May," endearing epithets I had never used before. And I did more. After I had opened the ball with Lord Somers I persuaded him to lance the next set with May, and I paired off "Steevie" and Allie together.

"Shall you be visible to-morrow morning?" he asked as we were making our adieux.

I answered in the affirmative, though I believe it is not orthodox for belles to be out of bed before noon after such a night of dissipation.

"Then I will call and take you to see my mother."

The ride home was a tiresome one to me. I did not feel like talking, and my three companions were determined I should, and in spite of myself I was obliged to confess that I had known the strangers years before. I was glad when we reached our own house.

I had not expected any one to sit up for me, but as I opened my room door I heard the wild chanting tune of the old ballad stealing up from the depths of my easy-chair, and in another minute little Bessie was flying to the burners and turning on a full stream of gas.

How pleasant it seemed to come back and find everything so cheerful—a bright fire in the grate, my double gown spread out before it, and a little kettle humming on the hearth.

"I must have one good look at you, Miss Ellen, before I take off your things," she said, merrily, yet respectfully. "I must see whether you have enjoyed yourself. Yes, yes." And she clasped her hands. "The roses are redder and wider on your cheeks. Do please tell me, Miss Ellen, weren't you the belle of the ball?"

"Mrs. Morgan said I was," I answered, quietly, yet conscious that the roses deepened in hue. Then seeing her eager look added: "And will you believe, Bessie, there was Lord Somers there, and I opened the ball with him, and he took me in to supper, and is going to call to-morrow morning to take me to see his mother. What do you think of that?"

And I sat down and motioned her to undo my hair.

She did not answer, the little sprite, but sang, softly:

"I combed my bonnie ladie's hair,
I fastened it with jewels rare,
I dressed her in a robe of white—
Her own true love she'll see to-night."

It was understood in our household that after a ball Mrs. Hastings and May were not to be disturbed till noon. And it was equally well understood that Ellen would do the honors of the breakfast table. Unused to dissipation, I think I should have rebelled the next morning and yielded to my drowsy feelings had it not been for that whisper at parting. So eight o'clock found me pouring out coffee for my father, and disconcerting to him of the incidents of the previous night, dwelling particularly on the advent of our friend Ed, and the change in his fortunes.

"Glad of it," said he, "right glad. He was a fine fellow. I've wished many a time I had been blessed with such a boy."

"Instead of me," said I, pouting.

"No, you elf; but along with you, or 'ster you, or before you—any time, so that he'd only come."

Then, resuming his thread, he added:

"But I'm heartily glad of Ed's luck, both for his sake and his mother's and sister's. She was a fine woman, fine as ever lived. Do you know," and he lowered his voice, watching too to see that the servant was not at the door, "I came pretty near asking her to be your mother?"

"I wish you had," I came near saying, and perhaps should if John had not come in.

"But I did pretty well as it was," said he, nodding mysteriously. "Don't you think so?"

I bowed, but I would not let my lips speak the falsehood.

What a delicious morning I spent with Mrs. Somers and Allie—alone with them, for Edward had tiresome work that kept him till dinner was announced.

"Your mother tells me she has returned to remain permanently," I said, as we were going down.

"Yes, she would not be satisfied with a home elsewhere."

"And you?" And I lifted my eyes to his—lifted them, but dropped them as instantaneously, reading something in that glance that sent my blood on a mad gallop through my veins.

"It depends upon circumstances whether I stay or go."

That was all he said. What the circumstances were I was left to guess. I ascertained though before the day was gone.

"You will excuse me, I know, pet, if I lie down a little while," said Mrs. Somers to me, as we returned to the parlour. "My head aches. Allie and Ed will keep you company."

Of course I begged of her to retire at once, and then seated myself on a sofa between the two. We were deep in the intricacies of the old castle that had fallen to them when Allie's maid appeared with word that the trunks had come, and forthwith the impulsive girl darted out with her, exclaiming:

"I can't wait for ceremony, Ellen; I must see how my things have stood the journey."

The little fairy! She knew her brother was aching to be rid of her, and she gladly embraced the first opportunity to go.

Somehow I felt embarrassed after she left, and the longer I sat there trying to think of something to say the farther off seemed any conversational topic.

Suddenly I found my right hand clasped, then an arm glided around my waist, and a voice whispered:

"Shall it be Lord and Lady Somers, Ellen?"

What answer I gave may be inferred from the fact that when Edward's mother returned to the parlour he led me up to her and said:

"Mother, this lady has promised to be my wife. Will you receive her as a daughter?"

His voice quivered somewhat, in spite of its earnest, manly tone.

She folded me in her arms and kissed me tenderly, saying:

"It is my choice as well as his, darling. Two daughters! Surely I am blessed."

Bessie was unclasping the bracelets from my wrists that night when suddenly I saw the color deepen in her cheeks, and a moment later she looked up with an arch glance in her blue eyes. She had noticed the new ring, not new either, for many a finger had worn it in the "long ago," and the diamond flashing in toat antique setting had been part of the court costume of many a fair lady.

"What do you think of it, Bessie?"

And I straightened the finger and laid it in her palm.

"It is splendid, Miss Ellen—fit for a queen."

And she looked up wistfully.

I was never in the habit of making a confidant of servants. I was naturally too reticent; and then it always seemed to be beneath a lady's dignity. But that night it seemed to me my heart would burst if it did not share its joy with somebody. I could not waken my old father, and I had no wish to call Mrs. Hastings and May up from the gay crowd about them in the parlour. So I told Bessie—no, not told her, but I said what I knew would be enough for her fine instincts to divine the whole story.

"That ring has been an heirloom in the Somers family for two centuries, Bessie—handed down from father to son, and when there was no son to the next nearest male heir. Lord Edward Somers, the gentleman who took me to see his mother to-day, received it as a part of his legacy. There, please now don't talk any more to me to-night."

The next morning as my father was dozing in the library, and I sitting curled up in my little nook behind the curtains, the next morning I saw Lord Somers. I did not see him, but I gave a bound that drove the blood to my cheeks in torrents.

"I am glad to see you, Edward," said my father, frankly and cordially.

"I don't know whether you will be, sir, when you learn my errand. I have come to ask you for the most precious gift one man can bestow upon another. I want Ellen, sir."

How like Ed that declaration! He always came to the point at once. No equivocation with him.

"Ellen," said my father, with a tremor in his voice that he could not hide entirely. "Here, Ellen, come and tell me what answer to give this young man. He says he wants you. Will you have him?"

"Yes, father."

Just then the door opened and my stepmother crossed the threshold. How wide she opened her eyes as she caught sight of the tableau.

"Just in time to congratulate me," said my father. "I've been wishing these thirty years that I might have a son, and now, just when hope had died out, up comes Ellen this morning and makes me a present of one. What do you think of him, Mrs. Hastings?"

She was an adept at self-control, and so, mastering her emotions—and, oh, they were bitter as wormwood—she said, graciously:

"I think any father might be proud to own Lord Somers as a son. Ellen, I wish you joy." And she touched her lips to my cheeks. "Lord Somers, you will be a happy man."

And she shook his hand and left us. But she never forgave that scene, and I do not think she ever quite forgave either of the three the part they played.

Three months after this Lord and Lady Somers and servants (Bessie was my maid) spent six months on the Continent, and then went to their old ancestral castle, where they have lived three years.

"Three years, wife." And I feel a hand resting my pen. "Are you not mistaken?"

"Why, no, Edward." And I turn and look my husband full in the face—a handsome face it is, too. I have never seen one I like so well. "You know we were home a year before Hastings was born, and he was two years old last week—"

"And a fine fellow he is too. I've just come from a frolic with him. Bessie had to coax hard to get him away. What a treasure of a nurse she is. Listen to her. She is singing that old ballad to him. What a quaint chant there is to the tune."

I leaned my head against him and listened, and as the words stole on my ear I remembered the night when she sang them as she was dressing me for the ball, and how they thrilled me, and I whispered, more to myself than to him:

"The prophecy has been fulfilled."

"Hush, darling!" and he put his finger on my lips. "She has picked up more of it. Listen!"

"I combed my bonnie ladie's hair,
I clasped his neck with corals rare,
I dressed him in a robe of white—
His own true name he'll have to-night!"

There were tears in his eyes as well as mine as the refrain died away, for we could neither of us ever forget that in one week the same church was opened for us twice, first to christen our baby boy, and afterwards for the funeral of my father. Yet our sorrow was mingled with joy for he had prayed that he might be spared to see his grandchild christened and Heaven had granted his petition.

LOVE-LETTERS.

In every year will be written and mailed just about so many letters of this kind, whether people continue to call them silly or sensible. It makes but little difference what outsiders believe, so the parties interested are suited with the contents. There may be times when we would ridicule these little missives; but, if we confess our true convictions, love-letters, even years after they are written reach the tenderest affections of our nature.

We have seen them in various forms, written with black ink and with blue, underscored, and dotted with many marks and unknown signals, of interest only to the owner; but we always felt that at best only half of their contents were known. The best part of a love-letter is unwritten; the purest thoughts of our nature are seldom uttered. Pride has prevented one from owning her true life-thoughts till it is too late. Modesty kept the burning words of another; while with another, love so overcame the emotions as to break forth in tears to choke the utterance.

Take the first letter in reply to a broken engagement; the heart is full to overflowing; a sting of pride rankles beneath the blighted hopes of a lifetime. Listen to the words:

"I did not think it would come to this; but you are so noble—so good—I cannot forget you. I know she will be happy in my place; but it breaks my heart to say that for your sake you are free."

Another, with only the hope of engagement, has judged too hastily him whom she found was promised ere they met.

"I will indeed be your friend," she writes: "but my life looks so dark and changed; would that I had never lived! No, I do not mean that, for all my life that I care to remember has been lived since I knew you. I would not blot it out for all the rest. How I envy her of whom you speak! But my loss is her gain. Tell her not of me—it is enough that one should bear it—the other should be happy."

And still another writes in derision:

"You were easily caught; I never loved you; but I thought the man who played the shallow part of a male flirt deserved a lesson. I shall be married in a week to a true man; will you come to the wedding?"

These letters are but samples of one style. There is another and a brighter side. Many and many a little letter is carried (like a jewel) next to the heart, and valued a thousand times more than a jewel to its owner.

Ah! if we could read the hidden history of all the unmarried women in the land, there would be sisters who had yielded their places to younger sisters; there would be one that sacrificed life and hope for the love of another dearer than both—a mother she could never leave. Can we say that to such lives love-letters have no meaning? No, never!

"Man's love is of his life a part,
'Tis woman's whole existence."

Oberish, then, the little missives of love and affection, for they keep the heart open and hopeful; and remember that in the little space of your acquaintance may be living those who have had parer thoughts, and more of them, in a few brief weeks and more real enjoyment from their worn-out love-letters, that give out sweet memories of the past than is enjoyed by many in a lifetime. So such,

"'Tis better to have loved and lost,
Than never to have loved at all."