

sition before me, the shrill trilling sound of the whistle upstairs burst on the stillness. For the moment, my nerves were so completely upset, that I started with a cry of alarm. I felt a momentary impulse to open the door, and run out. The idea of trusting myself alone with the man who had painted those frightful pictures, actually terrified me; I was obliged to sit down on one of the hall chairs. Some minutes passed before my mind recovered its balance, and I began to feel like my own ordinary self again. The whistle sounded impatiently for the second time. I rose, and ascended the broad flight of stairs which led to the first story. To draw back at the point which I had now reached would have utterly degraded me in my own estimation. Still, my heart did certainly beat faster than usual, as I approached the door of the circular ante-room, and I honestly acknowledge that I saw my own imprudence, just then, in a singularly vivid light.

There was a glass over the mantel-piece in the ante-room. I lingered for a moment (nervous as I was) to see how I looked in the glass.

The hanging tapestry over the inner door had been left partially drawn aside. Softly as I moved, the dog's ear of Miserrimus Dexter caught the sound of my dress on the floor. The fine tenor voice, which I had last heard singing, called to me softly.

"Is that Mrs. Valeria? Please don't wait there. Come in!"

I entered the inner room.

The wheeled chair advanced to meet me, so slowly and so softly that I hardly knew it again. Miserrimus Dexter languidly held out his hand. His head inclined pensively to one side; his large blue eyes looked at me piteously. Not a vestige seemed to be left of the raging, shouting creature of my first visit, who was Napoleon at one moment and Shakspeare at another. Mr. Dexter of the morning was a mild, thoughtful melancholy man, who only recalled Mr. Dexter of the night by the inveterate oddity of his dress. His jacket, on this occasion, was of pink quilted silk. The coverlid which hid his deformity matched the jacket in pale sea-green satin; and, to complete these strange vagaries of costume, his wrists were actually adorned with massive bracelets of gold formed on the severely simple models which have descended to us from ancient times!

"How good of you to cheer and charm me by coming here!" he said, in his most mournful and most musical tones. "I have dressed, expressly to receive you, in the prettiest clothes I have. Don't be surprised. Except in this ignoble and material nineteenth century, men have always worn precious stuffs and beautiful colours as well as women. A hundred years ago, a gentleman in pink silk was a gentleman properly dressed. Fifteen hundred years ago, the patricians of the classic times wore bracelets exactly like mine. I despise the brutish contempt for beauty and the mean dread of expense which degrade a gentleman's costume to black cloth, and limit a gentleman's ornaments to a finger ring, in the age I live in. I like to be bright and beautiful especially when brightness and beauty come to see me. You don't know how precious your society is to me. This is one of my melancholy days. Tears rise unbidden to my eyes. I sigh and sorrow over myself; I languish for pity. Just think of what I am! A poor solitary creature, cursed with a frightful deformity. How pitiable! how dreadful! My affectionate heart—wasted. My extraordinary talents—useless or misapplied. Sad! sad! sad! Please pity me."

"His eyes were positively filled with tears—tears of compassion for himself! He looked at me and spoke to me with the wailing querulous entreaty of a sick child wanting to be nursed. I was utterly at a loss what to do. It was perfectly ridiculous—but I was never more embarrassed in my life."

"Please pity me!" he repeated. "Don't be cruel. I only ask a little thing. Pretty Mrs. Valeria, say you pity me!"

I said I pitied him—and I felt that I blushed as I did it.

"Thank you said Miserrimus Dexter humbly. "It does me good. Go a little farther. Pat my hand."

I tried to restrain myself; but the sense of the absurdity of this last petition (quite gravely addressed to me, remember!) was too strong to be controlled. I burst out laughing.

Miserrimus Dexter looked at me with a blank astonishment which only increased my merriment. Had I offended him? Apparently not. Recovering his astonishment, he laid his head luxuriously on the back of his chair, with the expression of a man who was listening critically to a performance of some sort. When I had quite exhausted myself, he raised his head, and clapped his shapely white hands, and honoured me with an "encore."

"Do it again," he said, still in the same childish way. "Merry Mrs. Valeria, you have a musical laugh—I have a musical ear. Do it again."

I was serious enough by this time. "I am ashamed of myself, Mr. Dexter," I said. "Pray forgive me."

He made no answer to this; I doubt if he heard me. His variable temper appeared to be in course of undergoing some new change. He sat looking at my dress (as I supposed) with a steady and anxious attention, gravely forming his own conclusions, steadfastly pursuing his own train of thought.

"Mrs. Valeria," he burst out suddenly, "you are not comfortable in that chair."

"Pardon me," I replied; "I am quite comfortable."

"Pardon me," he rejoined. "There is a chair of Indian basket-work, at that end of the room, which is much better suited to you. Will you accept my apologies, if I am rude enough to allow you to fetch it for yourself? I have a reason."

He had a reason! What new piece of eccentricity was he about to exhibit? I rose, and fetched the chair: it was light enough to be

quite easily carried. As I returned to him, I noticed that his eyes were still strangely employed in what seemed to be the closest scrutiny of my dress. And stranger still, the result of this appeared to be, partly to interest and partly to distress him.

I placed the chair near him, and was about to take my seat in it, when he sent me back again on another errand, to the end of the room.

"Oblige me indescribably," he said. "There is a handscreen hanging on the wall, which matches the chair. We are rather near the fire here. You may find the screen useful. Once more forgive me for letting you fetch it for yourself. Once more, let me assure you that I have a reason."

Here was his "reason," reiterated, emphatically reiterated, for the second time. Curiosity made me as completely the obedient servant of his caprices as Ariel herself. I fetched the hand-screen. Returning with it, I met his eyes still fixed with the same incomprehensible attention on my perfectly plain and unpretending dress, and still expressing the same curious mixture of interest and regret.

"Thank you a thousand times," he said. "You have (quite innocently) wrung my heart. But you have not the less done me an inestimable kindness. Will you promise not to be offended with me, if I confess the truth?"

He was approaching his explanation! I never gave a promise more readily in my life.

"I have rudely allowed you to fetch your chair and your screen for yourself," he went on. "My motive will seem a very strange one, I am afraid. Did you observe that I noticed you very attentively—too attentively, perhaps?"

"Yes," I said. "I thought you were noticing my dress."

He shook his head, and sighed bitterly. "Not your dress," he said. "And not your face. Your dress is dark. Your face is still strange to me. Dear Mrs. Valeria, I wanted to see you walk."

To see me walk! What did he mean? Where was that erratic mind of his wandering to now?

"You have a rare accomplishment for an Englishwoman," he resumed—"you walk well. She walked well. I couldn't resist the temptation of seeing her again, in seeing you. It was her movement, her sweet simple unsouthern grace (not yours) when you walked to the end of the room and returned to me. You raised her from the dead when you fetched the chair and the screen. Pardon me for making use of you; the idea was innocent, the motive was sacred. You have distressed, and delighted me. My heart bleeds—and thanks you."

He paused for a moment: he let his head droop on his breast—then suddenly raised it again.

"Surely we were talking about her last night?" he said. "What did I say? what did you say? My memory is confused; I half remember, half forget. Please remind me. You're not offended with me—are you?"

I might have been offended with another man. Not with him. I was far too anxious to find my way into his confidence—now that he had touched of his own accord on the subject of Eustace's first wife—to be offended with Miserrimus Dexter.

"We were speaking," I answered, "of Mrs. Eustace Macellan's death; and we were saying to one another—"

He interrupted me, leaning forward eagerly in his chair.

"Yes! yes!" he exclaimed. "And I was wondering what interest you could have in penetrating the mystery of her death. Tell me! Confide in me! I am dying to know!"

"Not even you have a stronger interest in that subject than the interest that I feel," I said. "The happiness of my whole life to come depends on my clearing up the mystery of her death."

"Good God!—why?" he cried. "Stop! I am exciting myself. I mustn't do that. I must have all my wits about me; I mustn't wander. The thing is too serious. Wait a minute!"

An elegant little basket was hooked on to one of the arms of his chair. He opened it, and drew out a strip of embroidery partially finished with the necessary materials for working, all complete. We looked at each other across the embroidery. He noticed my surprise.

"Women," he said, "wisely compose their minds, and help themselves to think quietly, by doing needlework. Why are men such fools as to deny themselves the same admirable resource—the simple soothing occupation which keeps the nerves steady and leaves the mind calm and free? As a man, I follow the women's wise example. Mrs. Valeria, permit me to compose myself."

Gravely arranging his embroidery, this extraordinary being began to work with the patient and nimble dexterity of an accomplished needlewoman.

"Now," said Miserrimus Dexter, "if you are ready, I am. You talk—I work. Please begin."

I obeyed him, and began.

#### CHAPTER XXVIII.

##### IN THE DARK.

With such a man as Miserrimus Dexter, and with such a purpose as I had in view, no self-confidences were possible. I must either risk the most unreserved acknowledgment of the interests that I really had at stake, or I must make the best excuse that occurred to me for abandoning my contemplated experiment at the last moment. In my present critical situation no such refuge as a middle course lay before me, even if I had been inclined to take it. As things were I ran all risks, and plunged headlong into my own affairs at starting.

"Thus far you know little or nothing about me, Mr. Dexter," I said. "You are, as I believe, quite unaware that my husband and I are not living together at the present time?"

"Is it necessary to mention your husband?"

he asked coldly, without looking up from his embroidery, and without pausing in his work.

"It is absolutely necessary," I answered.

"I can explain myself to you in no other way."

He bent his head, and sighed resignedly. "You and your husband are not living together at the present time," he resumed. "Does that mean that Eustace has left you?"

"He has left me, and has gone abroad."

"Without any necessity for it?"

"Without the least necessity."

"Has he appointed no time for his return to you?"

"If he perseveres in his present resolution, Mr. Dexter, Eustace will never return to me."

For the first time he raised his head from his embroidery, with a sudden appearance of interest.

"Is the quarrel so serious as that?" he asked. "Are you free of each other, pretty Mrs. Valeria, by common consent of both parties?"

The tone in which he put the question was not at all to my liking. The look he fixed on me was a look which unpleasantly suggested that I had trusted myself alone with him, and that he might end in taking advantage of it. I reminded him quietly, by my manner more than by my words, of the respect which he owed to me.

"You are entirely mistaken," I said. "There is no anger—there is not even a misunderstanding between us. Our parting has cost bitter sorrow, Mr. Dexter, to him and to me."

He submitted to be set right with ironical resignation. "I am all attention," he said, threading his needle. "Pray go on; I won't interrupt you again." Acting on this invitation, I told him the truth about my husband and myself quite unreservedly, taking care, however, at the same time to put Eustace's motives in the best light that they would bear. Miserrimus Dexter dropped his embroidery on his lap, and laughed softly to himself, with an implied enjoyment of my poor little narrative, which set every nerve in me on edge as I looked at him.

"I see nothing to laugh at," I said, sharply.

His beautiful blue eyes rested on me with a look of innocent surprise.

"Nothing to laugh at," he repeated, "in such an exhibition of human folly as you have just described!" His expression suddenly changed, his face darkened and hardened very strangely. "Stop!" he cried, before I could answer him. "There can be only one reason for your taking it as seriously as you do. Mrs. Valeria, you are fond of your husband."

"Fond of him isn't strong enough to express it," I retorted. "I love him with my whole heart."

Miserrimus Dexter stroked his magnificent beard, and contemptively repeated my words. "You love him with your whole heart—do you know why?"

"Because I can't help it," I answered doggedly.

He smiled satirically, and went on with his embroidery. "Curious," he said to himself, "Eustace's first wife loved him, too. There are some men whom the women all like, and there are other men whom the women never care for. Without the least reason for it in either case. The one man is just as good as the other; just as handsome, as agreeable, as honourable, and as high in rank as the other. And yet, for Number One they will go through fire and water, and for Number Two they won't so much as turn their heads to look at him. Why? They don't know themselves, as Mrs. Valeria has just said. Is there a physical reason for it? Is there some potent magnetic emanation from Number one which Number Two doesn't possess? I must investigate this when I have the time, and I find myself in the humour." Having so far settled the question to his own entire satisfaction he looked up at me again. "I am still in the dark about you and your motives," he said. "I am still as far as ever from understanding what your interest is in investigating that hideous tragedy at Glenloch. Clever Mrs. Valeria, please take me by the hand, and lead me into the light. You're not offended with me, are you? Make it up, and I will give you this pretty piece of embroidery when I have done it. I am only a poor solitary deformed wretch, with a quaint turn of mind—I mean no harm. Forgive me—indulge me—enlighten me!"

(To be continued.)

#### LOST IN THE BUSH.

A NARRATIVE FOR CHILDREN.

A story comes to us by the Australian mail which will fill many mother's eyes with tears, and touch the sterner hearts of all those true men who love little children and are tender to them. The colony was ringing with it when the steamer came away, to the temporary forgetfulness of gold fields and railways, of general elections, and the fight between Victoria and New South Wales about the River Murray. Years hence, probably, it will get into a ballad, and be "sung or said" to the tiny Australians generations to come, like the "Children in the Wood" to their small cousins at home. Antiquaries are afraid to pronounce how old that famous nursery story is; but what do the little ones care about antiquity and dates? Haven't they Robin Redbreast hopping about the garden and the window-sill all the winter—a palpable witness to the narrative? Doesn't he chirp out, as plainly as a bird can, that "it's all true, every word of it?" and isn't he plainly of opinion, by his bold black eye and the saucy cock of his brown tail, that "it's murder to kill a robin," and that nobody with a conscience will touch him ever since he chanted, with his musical throat, that funeral service over the little

people in the wood, and "covered them with leaves?" The wicked uncle, and the brother and sister, and the ruffians, and the kind birds have become part of the pretty religion of the nurseries which "loves man, and bird, and beast," and only through much tribulation with grammars, and many disillusiones, enter into the reluctant belief that there are bad people in the world besides "giants." Our Australian story has indeed no "Robin Redbreast." If birds bore any part in it, they must have been the grass parakeet, or blue bird, or the "settler's clock," or the "bell bird"—something outlandish to our own nurseries. But it is the old, old pathos of children's suffering, and children's tender truth and courage towards each other; with a happier ending, too, than the English ballad, which is a capital thing; for, although the conduct of Robin Redbreast was highly laudable, we never yet met the audience of wet faces that was consoled by that "respectable funeral." They can't see why "the one that was of milder mood" didn't go through with his penitence, and, after "slaying the other there," bring the twins out of the blackberry-bushes, and then everybody, except the "wicked uncle," would have "lived happily ever after." Well, that's exactly how the Australian story does end, and so we tell it with the greater pleasure.

Its heroes are three little people—two brothers and a sister—of whom the eldest boy was nine, and the youngest five, the girl being seven years of age. They were the children of a carpenter named Duff, who worked at a sheep station near a place called Horsham. In Australia small hands can help; so these three babes used to be sent after brushwood for brooms and fires. They had gone dozens of times, and had come back safely; but this once, when their mother sent them, they wandered into the bush, and missed their way, and at night there were their little cots empty, and their little plates of supper getting cold, but no children. "Lost in the bush!" Think what that means for an Australian mother—when vigorous men have sometimes wandered but a hundred yards from the track in those labyrinths of gum-trees and wattles, and gone hopelessly forward and backward, and backward and forward, till they have laid themselves down to die. Of course there was a search for them, all night, all day, all the next night and day, many nights and many days and every hour of the weary time stealing the hope slowly out of the poor hearts of the father and mother. At last they did what ought to have been done before—they called the instinct of the savage to help them find at least the corpses of the wanderers. Nobody can explain that instinct; everybody who has hunted or travelled with wild tribes has witnessed it. The face of the ground to them, is like the leaf of a book to us—they read it. One of these Australian blacks will tell you if a kangaroo has crossed a creek, by the displacement of a pebble: blind-fold him, and bring him into the thick of the eucalyptuses, he will point to his "gunya" miles away; it is the sixth sense of races brought up in a life that could not exist on five. The blacks soon found the trail of the poor little three; and to find one end, for them, was to be sure of the other. "They would be dead, alas!" but it was something to have their pretty bodies away from the grey crows, the buzzards, and the dingoes. So father, and mother and friends, on the eighth day after the loss, followed the native trackers step by step. "Here little one tired—look, sit down!" says one black bloodhound; and presently another grunts, "Big one carry—see, travel in dark—tumble into this bush." Farther on still, the keenest of the pack finds the mark where "little one put down, too tired"—and thus they search every nook, corner, bush, and thicket, until at last they are rewarded. The little one's are found, not laying asleep in each others arms and the robbers covering them with leaves, but in the hut of a bushman, who had kindly cared for them.

#### HISTORY OF THE WEEK.

Sir John Macdonald has been re-elected for Kingston by a majority of seventeen.

Lieut.-General Sheridan and staff has left Chicago for New Orleans.

The annual convention of the Teachers' Association of Nova Scotia is now being held at Halifax.

An important Postal Convention has been agreed to between the United States and Canada, under which correspondence from one country to the other will pass at the ordinary rate fixed for domestic letters.

A London despatch says the proposed reduction of wages of the miners in the collieries in South Wales and Monmouthshire, went into effect on January 1st, the employers having declined to submit the question to arbitration. A strike is anticipated. Over 8,000 men are employed in the mines.

The Duke of Montrose is dead.

The Spanish Ambassador at Paris has resigned.

M. Ledru Rollin, a distinguished French politician, is dead.

The announcement of the death of Marshal Espartero was premature.

The Carlist leaders, Dorregary, Alvarez, and others, have entered Catalonia.

An ice bridge formed again at Cape Rouge on Wednesday night, and still holds.

The Grand Jury to-day declined to find a true bill against ex-Governor Warmouth.

18,359 tons of shipping has been added during the past year to the vessels registered at Halifax.

Sixty thousand colliers in South Wales have struck work in consequence of a reduction in their wages.