

"I will be a little better, General," said she, laughing. "Such a funny letter! I don't quite know what to make of it."

"A funny letter! And his heart had beat, his eyes had shined, his highest, noblest feelings had been stirred with every line!"

He was conscious that his bow seemed stern, even pompous, while he answered with exceeding gravity—

"Surely I am in my morning clear enough. Surely, Miss Douglas, Blanche; may I not call you Blanche?"

"Yes, if you like," said she impatiently. "It's a hateful name, I think. That's not my fault. Well, General, what were you going to say?"

He looked a little perplexed. "I was going to observe," said he, "that as my question was very straightforward, and very much in earnest, so all my future happiness depends on your reply."

"I wonder what there is you can see in me to like!" she retorted, with an impatient movement of her whole body, as if she was in fetters, and felt the restraint. "I'm not good enough for anybody to care for, that's the truth, General. There's hardly a girl in London who wouldn't suit you better than me."

He was looking in her face with sincere admiration. "That is not the question," he replied. "Surely I am old enough to know my own mind. Besides, you do not seem conscious of your power. You could make a bishop fall in love with you in ten minutes, if you chose!"

There came a depth of tenderness in her eyes, a smile, half sad, half sweet, about her lips, which he interpreted in his own way.

"Do you think so?" said she. "I wish I could believe you. I've not had a happy youth, and I've not been brought up in a very good school. I often tell myself I could, and ought to have been better, but somehow one's whole life seems to be a mistake!"

"A mistake I could rectify, if you would give me the right," answered St. Joseph, disheartened, but not despairing. "I only ask you to judge me fairly, to trust me honestly, and to love me some day, if you can."

She gave him her hand. He drew her towards him, and pressed his lips to her cold smooth brow. No more, and yet he fancied she was his own at last. Already half pledged, already half an affianced wife. She released herself quickly, and sat down on the further side of her work-table.

"You are very generous," she said, "and every good. I still maintain you deserve somebody far superior to me. How odd these sort of things are and why do they never turn out as one expects."

She was going to say "wishes," but stopped herself in time.

He would not understand.

"Life is made up of hopes and disappointments," he observed. "You do not seem to hope much, Blanche. I trust, therefore, you will have less cause for disappointment. I will do all in my power. And now, dearest, do not call me impatient, fidgetty; but, when do you think I may look forward to making arrangements in which we are to be equally interested?"

"Oh! I don't know!" she exclaimed, with considerable emphasis. "Not yet, of course; there's plenty of time. And I'm so hurried and worried, I can hardly speak! Besides, it's very late. I promised to dine with Mrs. Lushington, and it's nearly eight o'clock now."

Even from a future help-meet, so broad a hint could not be disregarded. The General was forced to put on his gloves and prepare for departure. "But I shall see you again soon," he pleaded. "Shall you be at the opera—at Mrs. Cramwell's—at Belgrave House?"

"Certainly not at Belgrave House!" she answered impatiently. "I hate a crush; and that woman asks all the casuals in London. It's a regular refuge for the destitute. I'm not going there yet. I may, perhaps, when I'm destitute!"

There was a hard ring in her voice that distressed him, and she perceived it.

"Don't look so wretched," she added kindly. "There are places in the world besides Belgrave Square and Covent Garden.

chairs. Had he been mature in wisdom in years, he ought never to have thought of marrying a woman who could influence him so easily.

"I shall count the days till then," he replied gallantly. "They will pass very slowly, but, as the turnspit says in the Spanish proverb, 'the largest leg of mutton must get done in time!' Good-bye, Miss Douglas. Good luck to you; and I hope Satanella will win!"

He bowed over the hand she gave him, but did not attempt to kiss it, taking his leave with a mingled deference and interest she could not but appreciate and admire. "Why can't I care for him?" she murmured, passionately, as the street-door closed with a bang. "He's good, he's generous, he's a gentleman! Poor fellow, he loves me devotedly; he's by no means ugly, and he's not so very old! Yet I can't, I can't! And I've promised him, almost promised him! Well, come what may, I've got a clear week of freedom still. But what a fool I've been, and oh! what a fool I am!"

Then she sent her excuse to Mrs. Lushington, declined dinner at home, ordered tea, didn't drink any, and so crept sorrowful and supperless to bed.

CHAPTER X.

AT SEA.

In the British army, notwithstanding the phases and vicissitudes to which it is subjected, discipline still remains a paramount consideration—the keystone of its whole fabric. Come what may, the duty must be done. This is the great principle of action; and, in obedience to its law, young officers, who combine pleasure with military avocations, are continually on the move to and from headquarters, by road, railway, or steam-boat—here to-day, gone to-morrow; proposing for themselves, indeed, many schemes of sport and pastime, but disposed of, morally and physically, by the regimental orders and the colonel's will.

Daisy, buried in Kildare, rising at day-break, going to bed at nine, looking sharply after the preparation of Satanella, could not avoid crossing the channel for "muster," to re-cross it within twenty-four hours, that he might take part in the great race on which his fortunes now depended—to use his own expression, which was to "make him a man or a mouse."

Thus it fell out that he found himself embarking at Holyhead amongst a stream of passengers in the mid-day boat for Dublin, having caught the mail-train at Chester by a series of intricate combinations, and an implicit reliance on the veracity of Bradshaw. It rained a little, of course—it always does rain at Holyhead—and was blowing fresh from the south-west. The sea "danced," as the French say; ladies expressed a fear "it would be very rough;" their maids prepared for the worst; and a nautical-looking personage in a pea-coat with anchor buttons, who disappeared at once, to be seen no more till he landed, pale and dishevelled, in Kingston harbour, opined first that "there was a capful of wind," secondly, that "it was a ten-knot breeze," and would hold till they made the land."

With loud throbs and pantings of her mighty heart, with a plunge, a hiss, a shower of heavy spray-drops, the magnificent steamer got under way, lurching and rolling but little, considering the weather, yet enough to render landsmen somewhat unsteady on their legs, and to exhibit the skill with which a curly-haired steward balanced himself basin in hand, on his errands of benevolence and consolation.

Two ladies who had travelled together in a through carriage from Euston Square, might have been seen to part company the moment they set foot on board. One of them established herself on deck, with a multiplicity of cushions, cloaks, and wrappings, to the manifest admiration of a raw youth in drab trowsers and highlows, smoking a damp cigar against the wind; while the other vanished into the ladies'-cabin, there to lay her head on a horse-hair pillow, to sigh, and moan, and shut her eyes, and long for land, perhaps to gulp, with watering

"What a question!" she laughed. "I suppose you think I'm old enough and ugly enough to take care of myself? No, I'm not absolutely 'on my own hook,' as you call it. I've given Frank a holiday—goodness knows what mischief he won't get into—but I've got a companion, and a very nice one, though perhaps not quite so nice as usual just at this moment."

"Then it's a lady," said Daisy, apparently but little interested in the intelligence.

"A lady," she repeated, with a searching look in his face; "and a very charming lady too, though a bad sailor. Do you mean to say you can't guess who it is?"

"Miss Douglas, for a pony!" was his answer; and the loud, frank tones, the joyous smile, the utter absence of self-consciousness or after-thought, seemed to afford Mrs. Lushington no slight gratification.

"You would win your pony," she replied gently. "Yes, Blanche and I are going over to Ireland, partly to stay with some very pleasant people near Dublin, partly—I don't want to make you conceited—partly because she has set her heart on seeing you ride; and so have I."

Practice, no doubt, makes perfect. With this flattering acknowledgment, she put just the right amount of interest into her glance, let it dwell on him the right time, and averted it at the right moment.

"She's a deuced pretty woman!" thought Daisy. "How well she looks with her hair blown all about her face, and her cloak gathered up under her dear little chin." He felt quite sorry that the Wicklow range was already looming through its rain-charged atmosphere as they neared the Irish coast.

"I should like to win," said he, after a pause, "particularly if you're looking on!" "Don't say me," she murmured, adding in a louder and merrier voice, "You cannot deny you're devoted to Blanche; and I dare say, if the truth were known, she has made you a jacket and cap of her own colors, worked with her own hands."

"I like her very much," he answered frankly. "It's partly on her account I want to land this race. She's so fond of the mare, you know. Not but what I've gone a cracker on it myself; and if it don't come off, there'll be a general break-up! But I beg your pardon, I don't see why that should interest you."

"Don't you?" said she earnestly. "Then you're as blind as a bat. Everything interests me that concerns people I like."

"Does that mean you like me?" asked Daisy with a saucy smile, enhanced by a prolonged lurch of the steamer, and the blow of a wave on her quarter, that drenched them both in a shower of spray.

She was silent while he wrung the wet from her cloak and hood, but when he had wrapped her up once more, and re-adjusted her cushions, she looked gravely in his face.

"It's an odd question, Mr. Walters," said she, "but I'm not afraid to answer it, and I always speak the truth. Yes, I do like you—on Blanche's account. I think you've a pretty good head, and a very good heart, with many other qualities I admire, all of which seem rather thrown away."

Daisy was the least conceited of men, but who could resist such subtle flattery as this? For a moment he wished the Emerald Isle sunk in the sea, and no nearer termination to their voyage than the coast of Anticosti, or Newfoundland. Alas! the Hill of Howth stood high on the starboard quarter, the Wicklow mountains had risen in all their beauty of color and majesty of outline, grand, soft, seductive, robed in russet and purple, here veiled in mist, there golden in sunshine and streaked at intervals with faint white lines of smoke.

"I'm glad you like me," said he simply. "But how do you mean you think I'm thrown away?"

"By your leave!" growled a hoarse voice at his elbow, for at this interesting juncture the conversation was interrupted by three or four able seamen coiling a gigantic cable about the lady's feet. She was forced to abandon her position, and leave to her companion's fancy the nature of her reply. No doubt it would have been guarded, appropriate, and to the point. Daisy had nothing for it, however, but to collect her different effects, and strap them together in proper

Moving listlessly and languidly into upper air, the figure of a lady preceded him by a few steps. All he saw was the corner of a shawl, the skirt of a dress, and a foot and ankle; but that foot and ankle could only belong to Blanche Douglas, and in three bounds he was at her side. A moment before, she had been pale, languid, dejected. Now, she brightened up into all the flush and brilliancy of her usual beauty, like a fair landscape when the sun shines out from behind a cloud. Mrs. Lushington, standing opposite the companion-way, noted the change. Daisy, in nappy ignorance, expressed the pleasure, which no doubt he felt, at a meeting with his handsome friend on the Irish shore.

No woman, probably, likes anything she does like, one whit the worse because deprived of it by force of circumstances. The fox in the fable that protested the grapes were sour, depend upon it, was not a vixen. Satanella thoroughly appreciated her friend's kindness and consideration, when Mrs. Lushington consoled with her on her past sufferings, and rejoiced in her recovery, informing her at the same time that Daisy was a capital travelling companion.

"He takes such care of one, my dear." (She spoke in a very audible aside.) "So gentle and thoughtful; it's like having one's own maid. I enjoyed the crossing thoroughly. Poor dear! I wish you could have been on deck to enjoy it too."

Done into plain English, the above really meant—"I have been having great fun flirt with your admirer. He's very nice, and perhaps I shall take him away from you some day when I have a chance."

By certain twinges that shot through every nerve and fibre, Blanche Douglas knew she had let her foolish heart go out of her own keeping. If she doubted previously whether or not she had fallen in love with Daisy, she was sure of it now, while wrung by these pangs of an unreasoning jealousy, that grudged his society for an hour, even to her dearest friend.

There was but little time, however, for indulgence of the emotions. Mrs. Lushington's footman, imposing, broad-breasted, and buttoned to the chin, touched his hat as a signal that he had all his paraphernalia ready for departure. Two ladies'-maids, limp and dragged, trotted helplessly in his footsteps. The steward, who knew everybody, had taken a respectful farewell of his most distinguished passengers, the captain had done shouting from his perch behind the funnel, and the raw youth in high-lows, casting one despairing look at Mrs. Lushington, had disappeared in the embrace of a voluminous matron the moment he set foot on shore. There was nothing left but to say good-bye.

Satanella's voice faltered, and her hand shook. How she had wasted the preceding three hours that she might have spent on deck with Daisy! and how mean of Clara to take advantage of her friend's indisposition by making up to him, as she did to every man she came near!

"I hadn't an idea you were going to cross with us," said she in mournful accents, while he took his leave. "Why didn't you tell me? And when shall I see you again?"

"At Punchestown," replied Daisy cheerfully. "Wish me good luck!"

"Not till then!" said Miss Douglas. And having so said in Mrs. Lushington's hearing, wished she had held her tongue.

CHAPTER XI.

CORMAC'S-TOWN.

If a man has reason to feel aggrieved with the conduct of his dearest friend, he avoids him persistently and sulks by himself. Should circumstances compel the unwilling pair to be together, they smoke and sulk in company. At all events, each lets the other see pretty plainly that he is disgusted and bored. Women are not so sincere. To use a naval metaphor, they hoist friendly colors when they run their guns out for action, and are never so dangerous or so determined, as while manoeuvring under a flag of truce.

Mrs. Lushington and Miss Douglas could no more part company than they could smoke. Till they should arrive at their joint

than three miles off. "You must be tired, dear," said Mrs. Lushington, sinking back among the cushions of an easy London-built brougham. "But, thank goodness, here we are at last. Three miles will soon be over on so good a road as this."

But three Irish miles, after a long journey, are not so quickly accomplished on a dark night in a carriage with one of its lamps gone out. It seemed to the ladies they had been driven at least six, when they arrived at a park wall, some ten feet high, which they skirted for a considerable distance ere they entered the demesne through a stately gateway, flanked by imposing castellated lodges on either side.

Here a pair of white breeches, and the indistinct figure of a horseman, passed the carriage-window, flitting noiselessly over the mossy sward.

"Did you see it, Blanche?" asked Mrs. Lushington, who had been in Ireland before. "It's a banshee!"

"Or a Whiteboy!" said Miss Douglas laughing. "Only I didn't know they wore even boots, to say nothing of the other things!"

But the London footman, balancing himself with difficulty amongst his luggage on the outside car, was more curious, or less courageous.

"What's that?" he exclaimed, in the disturbed accents of one who fears a ghost only less than a highwayman.

"Which?" said the driver, tugging and flogging with all his might to raise a gallop for the avenue.

"That—that object!" answered the other. "Ah! that's the masther. More power to him!" replied the carman. "It's foxin' he'll have been likely, on the mountain, an' him nivir off the point o' the hunt. Divil thank him with the cattle he rides! Begorra! ye nivir see the masther, but ye see a great baste!"

All this was Greek to his listener, whose mind however, became easier, with the crunching of gravel under their wheels, and the looming of a large, irregular mass of building, about which lights were flashing in all directions, showing not only that they were expected and welcome.

As Blanche Douglas stepped out of the brougham, she found her hand resting in that of the supposed banshee, who had dismounted not a minute before to receive his guests. He was a tall, handsome old gentleman, fresh-colored and grey-haired, with that happy mixture of cordiality and good-breeding in his manner, to be found in the Emerald Isle alone; yet was there but the slightest touch of brogue on the deep mellow accents that proffered their hospitable greeting.

"You've had a long journey, Miss Douglas and a dark drive, but glad I am to see you, and welcome you are to the castle at Cormac's-town."

Then he conducted the ladies across a fine old hall, furnished with antlers, skins, ancient weapons, and strange implements of chase, through a spacious library and drawing-room, to a snug little chamber, where a wood-fire blazed, not without smoke, and a tea-table was drawn to the hearth. Here, excusing himself on the score of dirty boots and disordered apparel, he left the new arrivals to the care of his wife.

Lady Mary Macormac had once been as fresh and hearty an Irish lass as ever rode a four-foot wall, or danced her partners down interminable jigs that lasted till daylight. An earl's daughter, she could bud roses, set fruit trees, milk a cow, or throw a salmon-fly with any peasant, man or woman, on her father's estate. She slept sound, woke early, took entire charge of the household, the children, the garden, the farm, everything but the stables, was as healthy as a ploughman as brisk as a milk-maid. Now, with grown-up daughters, and sons of all ages, down to a mischievous urchin home from school, her eyes were blue, her cheeks rosy as at nineteen. Only her hair had turned perfectly white, a distinction of which she seemed rather proud, curling and crimping it with some ostentation and no little skill over her calm unwrinkled brow.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)