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THE LOST DAHLIA.

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If to have "had losses" be, as affirmed by Dogberry in one of Shakspeare's most charming plays and corroborated by Sir Walter Scott in one of his most charming romances (those two names do well in juxtaposition, the great Englishman! the great Scotsman!)—If to have "had losses" be a main proof of credit and respectability, then am I one of the most responsible persons in the whole county of Berks. To say nothing of the graver matters which figure in a banker's book, and make in these days of pounds, shillings, and pence, so large a part of the domestic tragedy of life—putting wholly aside all the grander transitions of property in house and land, of money on mortgage, and money in the funds (and yet I might put in my claim to no trifling amount of ill luck in that way also, if I had a mind to try my hand at a dismal story)—counting for nought all weightier grievances, there is not a lady within twenty miles who can produce so large a list of small losses as my unfortunate self.

From the day when, a tiny damsel of some four years old, I first had a pocket handkerchief to lose, down to this very night—I will not say how many years after—when, as I have just discovered, I have most certainly lost from my pocket the new cambric kerchief which I deposited therein a little before dinner, scarcely a week has passed without some part of my goods and chattles being returned missing. Gloves, muffs, parasols, reticules, have each of them a provoking knack of falling from my hands, boas glide from my neck, rings slip from my fingers, the bow has vanished from my cap, the veil from my bonnet, the sandal from my foot, the brooch from my collar, and the collar from my brooch. The trinket which I liked best, a jewelled pin, the first gift of a dear friend (luckily the friendship is not necessarily appended to the token), dropped from my shawl in the midst of the high road; and of shawls themselves, there is no end to the loss. The two prettiest that ever I had in my life, one a splendid specimen of Glasgow manufacture—a scarlet hardly to be distinguished from Cashmere—the other a lighter and cheaper fabric, white in the centre, with a delicate sprig, and a border harmoniously compounded of the deepest blue, the brightest orange, and the richest brown, disappeared in two successive summers and winters, in the very bloom of their novelty, from the folds of the phaeton, in which they had been deposited for safety—fairly blown overboard! If I left things about, they were lost. If I put them away, they were lost. They were lost in the drawers—they were lost out. And if for a miracle I had them safe under lock and key, why, then, I lost my keys! I was certainly the most unlucky person under the sun. If there was nothing else to lose, I was fain to lose myself—I mean my way; bewildered in these Aberleigh lanes of ours, or in the woodland recesses of the Penge, as if haunted by that fairy, Robin Goodfellow, who led Herminia and Helena such a dance in the Midsummer Night's Dream. Alas! that there should be no Fairies now-a-days, or rather no true believers in Fairies, to help us to bear the burthen of our own mortal carelessness.

It was not quite all carelessness, though! Some ill luck did mingle with a great deal of mismanagement, as the "one poor happ'orth of bread" with a huge gallon of sack in the bill of which Poins picked Falstaff's pocket when he was asleep behind the arras. Things belonging to me, or things that I cared for, did contrive to get lost, without my having any hand in the matter. For instance, if out of the variety of "talking birds," starlings, jacksnaws, magpies, which my father delights to entertain, any one particularly diverting or accomplished, more than usu-

ally coaxing and mischievous, happened to attract my attention, and pay me the compliment of following at my heels, or perching upon my shoulder, the gentleman was sure to hop off. My favourite mare, Pearl, the pretty docile creature which draws my little phaeton, has such a talent for leaping, that she is no sooner turned out in either of our meadows, than she disappears. And Dash himself, paragon of spaniels, pet of pets, beauty of beauties, has only one shade of imperfection—would be thoroughly faultless, if it were not for a slight tendency to run away. He is regularly lost four or five times every winter, and has been oftener cried through the streets of Belford, and advertised in the county newspapers, than comports with a dog of his dignity. Now, these mischances clearly belong to the class of accidents commonly called casualties, and are quite unconnected with any infirmity of temperament on my part. I cannot help Pearl's proficiency in jumping, nor Dash's propensity to wander through the country; neither had I any hand in the loss which has given its title to this paper, and which, after so much previous dallying, I am at length about to narrate.

The autumn before last, that is to say, above a year ago, the boast and glory of my little garden was a dahlia called the Phœbus. How it came there, nobody very distinctly knew, nor where it came from, nor how we came by it, nor how it came by its own most appropriate name. Neither the lad who tends our flowers, nor my father, the person chiefly concerned in procuring them, nor I myself, who more even than my father or John take delight and pride in their beauty, could recollect who gave us this most splendid plant, or who first instructed us as to the style and title by which it was known. Certes never was blossom-fancier named. Regular as the sun's face in an almanack, it had a tint of golden scarlet, of ruddy yellow, which realised Shakspeare's gorgeous expression of "flame-coloured." The sky at sunset sometimes puts on such a hue, or a fire at Christmas when it burns red as well as bright. The blossom was dazzling to look upon. It seemed as if there were a light in the leaves, like that coloured lamp of a flower, the Oriental Poppy. Phœbus was not too glorious a name for that dahlia. The Golden-haired Apollo might be proud of such an emblem. It was worthy of the god of day; a very Phœnix of floral beauty.

Every dahlia fancier who came into our garden, or who had had an opportunity of seeing a bloom elsewhere (and, sooth to say, we were rather ostentatious in our display; John put it into stands, and jars, and baskets, and dishes; Ben stuck it into Dash's collar, his own button-hole, and Pearl's bridle; my father presented it to such lady visitors as he delighted to honour; and I, who have the habit of dangling a flower, generally a sweet one, caught myself more than once rejecting the spice clover and the starry jessamine, the blossomed myrtle and the tube-rose, my old fragrant favourites, for this scentless but triumphant beauty); every body who beheld the Phœbus begged for a plant or a cutting; and we, generous in our ostentation, willing to redeem the vice by the virtue, promised as many plants and cuttings as we could reasonably imagine the root might be made to produce—perhaps rather more; and half the dahlia growers round rejoiced over the glories of the gorgeous flower, and speculated, as the wont is now, upon seedling after seedling to the twentieth generation.

Alas for the vanity of human expectations! February came, the twenty-second of February, the very St Valentine of dahlias, when the roots which have been buried in the ground during the winter are disinterred, and placed in a hotbed to put forth their first shoots previous to the grand operations of potting and dividing them. Of course

the first object of search in the choicest corner of the nicely labelled hoard was the Phœbus; but no Phœbus was forthcoming; root and label had vanished bodily! There was to be sure, a dahlia without a label, which we would gladly have transformed into the missing treasure; but as we speedily discovered a label without a dahlia, it was but too obvious that they belonged to each other. Until last year we might have had plenty of the consolation which results from such divorces of the name from the thing; for our labels, sometimes written upon parchment, sometimes upon leather, sometimes upon wood, as each material happened to be recommended by gardening authorities, and fastened on with pack-thread, whip-cord, or silk twist, had generally parted company from the roots, and frequently become utterly illegible, producing a state of confusion which most undoubtedly we never expected to regret: but this year we had followed the one perfect system of labels of unglazed china, highly varnished after writing on them, and fastened on by wire; and it had answered so completely, that one, and one only, had broken from its moorings. No hope could be gathered from that quarter. The Phœbus was gone. So much was clear; and our loss being fully ascertained, we all began, as the custom is, to divert our grief and exercise our ingenuity by different guesses as to the fate of the vanished treasure.

My father, although certain that he had written the label, and wired the root, had his misgivings about the place in which it had been deposited, and half suspected that it had slipped in amongst a basket which we had sent as a present to Ireland; I myself, judging from a similar accident which had once happened to a choice hyacinth bulb, partly thought that one or other of us might have put it for care and safety in some such very snug corner, that it would be six months or more before it turned up; John, impressed with a high notion of the money-value of the property, and estimating it something as a keeper of the regalia might estimate the most precious of the crown jewels, boldly affirmed that it was stolen; and Ben, who had just a demele with the cook, upon the score of her refusal to dress a beef-steak for a sick greyhound, asserted, between jest and earnest, that that hard-hearted official had either ignorantly or maliciously boiled the root for a Jerusalem artichoke, and that we, who stood lamenting over our regretted Phœbus, had actually eaten it, dished up with white sauce. John turned pale at the thought. The beautiful story of the Falcon, in Boccaccio, which the young knight killed to regale his mistress, or the still more tragical history of Couci, who minced his rival's heart, and served it up to his wife, could not have affected him more deeply. We grieved over our lost dahlia, as if it had been a thing of life.

Grieving, however, would not repair our loss; and we determined, as the only chance of becoming again possessed of this beautiful flower, to visit, as soon as the dahlia season began, all the celebrated collections in the neighbourhood, especially all those from which there was any chance of our having procured the root which had so mysteriously vanished.

Early in September, I set forth on my voyage of discovery—my voyages, I ought to say; for every day I and my pony-phaeton made our way to whatever garden within our reach bore a sufficiently high character to be suspected of harbouring the good Dahlia Phœbus.

Monday we called at Lady A.'s; Tuesday at General B.'s; Wednesday at Sir John C.'s; Thursday at Mrs. D.'s; Friday at Lord E.'s; and Saturday at Mr. F.'s. We might as well have staid at home; not a Phœbus had they, or any thing like one.

We then visited the nurseries, from Brown's, at Slough