

SUSPIRIUM.

A Reverie on New Year's Eve.

BY JOHN LESPERANCE.

Like a wail on the desolate sea shore, that cold wild gust of December
 Makes moan round the gaibie at midnight—the last of the year—
 And like the grin of a ghost, the light of the smouldering ember
 Flits in my empty face and mocks me with visions of cheer.

O, where are the dreams that we dreamed, and where the delirious follies
 We loved when the insects fluttered in the warmth and the fragrance of May?
 And where are the vows that we vowed—those clusters of fiery hollies
 Brightest and fairest to see on the very eve of decay?

The young boy croons at his work, the maiden sings in the bower,
 And the air pulsates with the throbs of a cosmic, infinite love;
 But the feet are cold that have met in the sunset's sensuous hour,
 And the red leaves cover the trying seat in the grove.

The old man crosses his hands, and droops his head in the shadows,
 The good wife stops at her wheel, for her eyes are flimsy and dim;
 But O, on the fringe of the wood and out on the billowy meadows
 The great gold light is floating in a celestial stream.

The odour of lilacs still clings to the leaves of the family missal,
 And the date of our bridal is there—I remember 'twas writ in my blood—
 Ah me! yet 'tis only this morning that I heard the bob-link's whistle
 Up in the sunnch that shelters her grave and where the syringa stood.

Yes, and the rains of the autumn fall chill on the purple slope where together
 The bones of my babes are enlaced in the roots of that funeral tree,
 But still when I look out for them in the buoyant, crystalline weather,
 Their sweet white faces are radiant and smile upon me.

And such is the life of man—a shifting of scenes—with the ranges
 From one extreme to the next—the rise and ebb of the soul;
 And what is our bliss mid it all? Why, always to change with the changes,
 Though our single purpose is fixed on the one immutable goal.

Thus to-night I will chase my sorrow with that last wild gust of December,
 The gloom where I sit is gone and the gleams of the morning appear;
 The Past shall be buried anew in the dust of the smouldering ember,
 For the Future rises before me, in the flush of the dawning year.

[For the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.]

WHO STOLE THE DIAMONDS?

BY MRS. LEPROHON.

I was standing before my mirror giving the last touches to my elaborate evening costume without much cause to be satisfied with the result. True, the shimmering amber satin covered with clouds of delicate tulle and looped up with the daintiest French flowers was a triumph of millinery art, whilst the opals that shone on neck and arms, and gleamed from amid the heavy coils of my hair were gems of rare value; but the face and figure that they adorned, even with their combined aid, could not be considered as possessing any claims to beauty. Thin, sallow and sickly looking, the mirror, despite my eighteen years, reflected back no personal charms to gladden the natural love of beauty which I possessed in an almost exaggerated degree. And yet, strange to say, an untroubled calm lingered round my lips—looked out of my eyes as I whispered to myself: "I do indeed appear unusually ill to-night, but my late neuralgic agonies easily account for that." Ah! just as I mentally uttered the words, my late foe neuralgia—returned to the attack more fiercely than ever, and covering my face with my hands, I sank down on the sofa with a smothered groan. It was too bad! To me, all dressed as I was, and enjoying in anticipation the pleasant social Christmas gathering in which, as I well knew, I would only meet dear relatives and well known friends, this warning indication of a lonely evening at home proved a real trial.

Resolved not to yield without a struggle, I caught up a heavy shawl and throwing it over my shoulders, descended to the drawing room. All there was brightness and gaiety. Lights and fires shone with cheerful gleam; wreaths and festoons of evergreen, intermixed with crimson berries, decorated walls and picture frames; illuminated scrolls bearing pleasant words of welcome to Christmas, and gay in rich warm colouring and fanciful lettering, adorned every available spot. A happy looking elderly couple were seated in easy chairs near the grate fire, and the loving look they both bent on me as I entered, told at once I was their child. Yes, their only one, and I might almost add their earthly idol. Aunts, uncles, and cousins, to the third degree, all in handsome evening costume were standing or sitting around the room when I entered.

"Down-stairs, at last Miss Sommers!" said a fair-haired girl of sixteen, rising and making me a playful curtsy as she spoke. "Do you know that you have kept us waiting?"

"Not willingly, Cousin Carrie," I soberly

rejoined, "but neuralgia has me again in its merciless grasp."

Expressions of sympathy and regret now overwhelmed me, and whilst the younger members of the company pressingly advised me to brave the enemy and go, alleging that pleasure and excitement would drive it away, the elders recommended with equal earnestness that I should change tulle for woolen, and take up my quarters for the evening on a sofa near the fire. Indeed, some went the length of advising immediate retreat to bed. To all these counsellors I only replied by a faint smile and an occasional glance towards the door.

"Dutiful Alice is waiting to hear what her future lord and master, will say on the subject," suddenly interposed cousin Carrie.

A rush of scarlet to my cheek, a general titter from the company rewarded this sally, and flushed with success this pretty young cousin of mine, went on to say: "Ah, friend Alice, your choice has not been a wise one, I fear; for Mr. Severton is far too handsome to love anything else as well as that handsome face of his."

"The little chit is jealous because Harry Severton has never been won over by her sly wiles to bestow any notice on her," said a bachelor uncle, gallantly coming to the rescue.

"Nothing of the sort, Uncle Jeff! I am used to be slighted, so feel no malice thereat, but, a word in your ear, darling Alice, notwithstanding Mr. Severton's matchless face and figure, high character, &c., &c. I do not like him there!"

Again I smiled, despite a sudden neuralgic pang, for the gentleman thus condemned, had ignored so determinedly the pretty speaker, looked with so indifferent an eye on her charms, that the secret cause of her dislike was not one difficult to fathom. At this moment the door opened, and Henry Severton, a tall elegant looking man, with strikingly handsome features, entered. After a quick graceful bow that included each member of the company, he crossed to where I sat, and with looks and tones that told of the tenderest affection expressed his regret to see me again suffering.

I mentioned a little while since that despite the keen appreciation of the want of beauty in myself, that had so forcibly struck me that evening, as I studied face and form in the mirror, calm happiness had still rested on my features. The cause of this, was plain. I was loved truly, passionately by one whose own beauty was of the rarest, highest order—one whom no other woman however lovely had succeeded in drawing from my side, even for an hour after he had once turned his attentions towards myself. A distant connection of my father's, Mr. Severton, had taken up his abode with us, in Montreal, a few years earlier, on the death of his last surviving parent. Admitted first, as a clerk into my father's business, then as a junior partner, he had given satisfaction on every point; and when he had ventured to ask my hand, a short time previous, had been favorably received. How fair earth seemed to me since then! Sickly as I had been from my cradle, lonely at times, for brothers and sisters, had died in their infancy, I fairly revelled in the bright rose tints, the cloudless sunshine Harry Severton, had brought into my life.

On hearing the diversity of opinion that reigned in the family circle, as to the propriety of my going or remaining at home, he at once, threw his influence into the scale, favored by the junior members of the company, declaring it would be an impossible thing to leave me alone on a Christmas night to mope and suffer, when the whole world from the highest to the lowest, would be enjoying themselves. Earnestly, tenderly, he urged this view of the case, but I, suffering more than ever from my fell visitant, suddenly made up my mind on the subject, declaring I would follow the advice of the elders, wrap up and go to bed, sternly stipulating however that no one should even hint at remaining home on my account.

Harry looked grievously disappointed but knowing probably that my decision was really the wisest, offered no farther opposition to it. He suggested, however, that they all should remain with me, till the latest possible moment. This proposal was received with acclamation, and conversation again became animated and general leaving my lover free to whisper to me his regret that he could not have the proud pleasure of presenting his future bride to the friends he expected to meet that evening.

Suddenly, Carrie, who was glibly discussing the question of Christmas gifts, exclaimed: "I hear, Alice, that yours was splendid, gorgeous! Is it not so, Uncle Sommers?"

My father nodded affirmatively, and I, knowing well my young cousin would never rest till she had seen the object in question, told her to bring my jewel case from my room.

She soon danced back again with it, saying: "I know 'tis something stupendously nice, for I heard Uncle Sommers, telling Mamma, that as it was to be his last Christmas gift to Alice Sommers, she being doomed to be Mrs. Severton, before another Yuletide, he had determined it should prove worthy of the goodness and gentleness of his darling. There, scold now, but do not begin all at once, or I shall have to put my fingers in my ears, and lose the benefit of the lesson."

Amused in spite of myself, I drew forth a tiny key and opened the velvet lined case displaying to the gaze of my companions a diamond brooch and ear-rings of such rare value and beauty that I had shrunk from wearing them that evening, dreading the notice they would have drawn towards me. After a due amount of rapturous praise from the company I was preparing to re-

turn them to the case, when Aunt Willis—Carrie's mother—asked: "Do you not think it imprudent to leave such costly jewels in a simple box? especially as I see you have changed your butler," she hastily added, obtaining a sudden view of that functionary through the folding doors where he stood arranging the silver on the dining room side board.

"We have had the highest recommendations with him," replied my mother. "He lived five years in his last place, and—"

"And, my dear sister," interrupted Aunt Willis in the most dogmatic manner, "He is far too good-looking and young for my taste; and I would no more leave diamonds lying about in his neighbourhood than I would trust my canary within reach of the claws of yonder shy-looking Maltese."

The sleek occupant of the hearth rug thus alluded to, looked innocently up and softly mewed, as if in appeal against this uncalled for attack, whilst the previous speaker vehemently continued:

"Yes, that's the way! The more innocent looking, the craftier. I repeat, I hate handsome, elegant-looking butlers."

"We must not ask Mr. Severton's opinion this time, Mamma, for he will certainly give it dead against you;" interposed Carrie with a mischievous smile, "he is—hem—too good-looking himself to share your very original prejudice against good-looking people."

The gentleman thus referred to, looked earnestly a moment at Miss Carrie, and then without a word turned away his head, whilst a flush of annoyance or embarrassment overspread his features.

"To put an end to farther discussion," rejoined my father rising and turning to me, "you had better give me the diamonds, Alice, and I will lock them up in the safe in my office, where I keep some other little valuables, equally worth robbing."

"Hush!" interposed Aunt Willis with a warning frown and stage whisper, "I am convinced that butler has overheard you."

"What of that?" smilingly questioned my father. "He does not know where I keep the key; and none but an expert in the science of burglary could force that lock without gunpowder."

"Was there ever such a man!" gasped my Aunt, telegraphing frantically in the direction of the dining room. "Actually suggesting to the enemy the only efficient method of accomplishing his nefarious purpose! Shut that door Carrie."

"Too late now, Mamma," rejoined that young lady demurely. "All that we have to say has been said."

"And overheard" groaned Mrs. Willis.

Father soon returned and as he entered the room my Aunt put up her hands exclaiming in a deprecating whisper: "For Heaven's sake do not publish now where you have put the key?"

A general smile ran round the circle, and then mother rose expressing her fears that they would be fashionably late, a thing of which she had a thoroughly old fashioned dislike.

During the flutter of approaching departure, Mr. Severton remained at my side, but suddenly starting up he said: "I must get you a sprig of your favourite mignonette, Alice, to recall me to your compassionate remembrance when I shall be on fatigue duty at Mrs. ——— to-night."

We had not been a moment in the conservatory when Carrie Willis bent her steps thither, whether with the knowledge that he had preceded her or not, it was impossible to divine. After a longer delay than I had expected, the door was impetuously flung back, and Carrie flushed and vexed-looking, came forth. She glanced quickly round as if fearful of being observed, and on meeting my eyes coloured still more deeply—hesitated a moment, and then with a mere "Good-night cousin," passed from the room. Shortly after, my lover, calm and stately, left the conservatory with a bunch of rare exotics, and as he placed them in my hand, lightly kissing the latter while doing so, I felt inexpressibly grateful that his loyal generous character prevented him ever indulging in the pastime of flirting. Painfully conscious as I was of my own plain unattractive appearance, I was one of those whom jealousy would have tortured most fiercely had there been aught in Mr. Severton's conduct to excite it.

"Have you been quarrelling with Carrie?" I asked, moved by a slight feeling of feminine curiosity.

He smiled compassionately as he carelessly rejoined: "She is but a child yet."

I easily divined the truth without farther explanation. My fair young cousin finding attempts at drawing Severton into a flirtation, foiled by his own unwavering devotion to myself, had grown angry over her discomfiture and avenged it by an outbreak of girlish temper. I could afford to be generous and gently answered: "She is indeed but a child and an innocent loving one too."

A general leave taking—a whispered—"Darling, go to rest at once," from my lover—a flutter of skirts in the hall—the closing of the outer door and they were gone. Well, though the fires burned brightly as ever, the room did look very lonely after their departure; and I hesitated between going to my apartment at once, and drawing up my chair still nearer to the grate to indulge awhile in the golden waking dreams which like most of my age and sex I found extremely pleasant. The latter alternative seemed the most tempting, and by the aid of cushion and footstool, I soon made myself exceedingly comfortable, a thing all the more easy as the pain of my face had greatly subsided.

Lulled by the heat and perfect stillness reigning around me, I fell into a light sleep from which I awoke with a violent start, and an impression that I had heard a strange unaccountable noise, whether overhead or nearer to me, I could not determine. My heart was beating with suffocating rapidity—the result perhaps of the uneasy position into which my head had fallen on the back of my chair—worse still, my nervous fears and fancies were thoroughly aroused, and like most invalids I was fanciful and fearful to a distressing degree. Whilst endeavouring to account for the sound that had startled me, seeking to persuade myself it was the sudden closing of a door or the fall of some object overthrown by the much suspected cat, either of which causes it certainly must have been, a new fear suddenly flashed across my mind, thenceforth taking absolute possession of it. This was the fear of the new butler. Still I had hope to support me, for on Christmas nights when the family dined from home, my mother with kindly consideration for her servants allowed them all save one old tried domestic to go out also. Consequently the butler must have availed himself of the permission an hour previous, and from my experience of men-servants would not be back for hours to come. But I would ring and make supposition certainty. The light tinkle of my bell brought a footstep to the door with wonderful celerity, and on looking up I recognized with a thrill of horror—the butler.

"Where is Janet?" (the parlor maid) I asked.

"Gone out Mem. They've all gone out, Mem, but me and Martha who is lying down bad with the rheumatism. She asked me to stay in to answer the bell. Shall I stir the fire Mem? 'Tis burning low."

Whilst he slowly and artistically drew the glowing embers together, piling them up in the shape of a lurid fort, I sat gazing at him in a sort of torpid terror. Handsome he certainly was as far as mere regularity of feature went, but the stolid heavy expression that distinguished him, instead of the ruffianly scowl I half expected to see, was in some degree re-assuring. Still his head was ill shaped, such as a phrenologist would have condemned, and, when his task completed he suddenly said: "'Tis a wild night, Mem." He startled me from a calculation as to how many burglaries he had already been engaged in, and whether he had ever committed murder to shield himself from discovery.

"It is," I curtly replied, looking full into his eyes, which avoided mine whether from loutish bashfulness or conscious guilt it was difficult to say.

"There's not many abroad, Mem," he resumed, as if wishing to give me a hidden intimation of the extent to which I was in his power.

"Except the police," I meaningly rejoined in the sternest feminine tones.

"Would Miss Sommers like anything for supper? I can bring her up something nice in a short time."

"Ah! he wants an excuse for hanging round these rooms," I thought, with an inward tremor; "an excuse for coming back again to carry out his plans and perhaps murder me." "I never eat supper," I answered, with a reckless disregard of truth which showed how complete was the demoralization of my character under the pressure of overwhelming terror.

The man after a parting poke at the lurid fortress now rapidly changing into a glowing volcano, cast a lingering look round the room and departed, whilst I rose to my feet resolved to grapple with and overthrow the childish fears oppressing me. I walked to the window but the tempest of sleet which had just set in and was now beating fiercely against the panes, suggesting the loneliness of the streets as well as the ease with which deeds of darkness could be done, was not of a re-assuring nature. Ah, how short a distance could a shriek, however agonized, pierce through that thick snow-laden atmosphere! We were living then on Dorchester street, with gardens extending to the right and left of us, whilst a high close fence bounded our prospect in front. Whilst I stood pressing my face against the glass endeavouring to peer through the outside gloom, I suddenly discovered a tall slouching figure standing under the scanty shelter of a gateway near. This was probably a confederate. What other man in his senses would stand idling there on such a night? Perspiration bedewed my forehead at the thought. Two midnight robbers pitted against two weak women, one old and feeble—the other young and cowardly. The chances were fearfully uneven. What weapons had I? None save the scissors and knife in my work basket, but it was just as well, for I knew anything in the shape of arms could speedily be wrested from my trembling hands to be used perhaps against me. Would I go to my room and barricade myself there? No, for the butler might be lurking at that moment on the stairs leading to it. Should I fly down to old Martha for refuge? Alas! I might meet the ruffians creeping stealthily up the back stairs and be stabbed by them in the very outset. I must try to remain in my present position—it seemed the safest. With feverish rapidity I locked the side door. That, opening on the passage, alas, had no key; so I edged my chair round to keep a keen watch on it, and for farther protection placed a large ottoman supplemented by a heavy footstool against it. That done, I returned to my seat wearily speculating over the length of time that must elapse—for it was yet early—the return of the family should dispel my mental tortures.

(To be concluded next week.)