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THE TWO MARYS; OR, THE O'DONNELLS OF INNISMORE.

CHAPTER I.—IN QUEST OF A GOVERNESS.

'What, you in London, and alone, Mrs. Montague?' exclaimed a portly middle-aged gentleman, addressing himself to a showily-dressed lady, who had just stepped from an elegant equipage, and was about to enter the Burlington Hotel, 'what urgent business can possibly have brought you to London in this severe season?'

'The most critical business a mother can possibly have upon hands, my dear sir,' rejoined the lady, 'an attempt in which I have often failed before, simply the cause of my journey to London is that I may find a suitable governess for Millicent and Alice.'

'Why, you do not surely mean to say that you have come to London merely for a governess,' replied the gentleman with elevated eyebrows and a glance of unfeigned astonishment.

'Oh, Mr. Mainwaring, how lightly you speak,' rejoined the lady in a half-offended tone, 'I assure you, she added, 'I have more than half a mind to bid you good bye at once, instead of inviting you to my comfortable rooms and asking you to share my luncheon with me; however, give me your arm, you uncouth creature, and I will tell you a little news about 'Fairview.'

Nothing loth to partake of the creature comforts Mrs. Montague had alluded to, Squire Mainwaring gladly accompanied his friend's wife to one of the best suites of apartments which she had engaged for her use at the hotel at which she was stopping; and, seated by a blazing fire, the Squire remained some few moments at the uppermost thought in his mind, surprise, Mrs. Montague, his early friend, one of the wealthiest of our merchant princes, could possibly find pleasure in the society of the very woman with whom he had passed some twenty years of his existence. 'How shall I manage to get over the next two hours,' he sighed to himself, but a glance at the window and the dreariness of the scene without, the leaden hue of the sky, and the heavy flakes of snow drifting against the glass reconciled him to the infliction he knew he was about to undergo.

In a few moments Mrs. Montague returned, now disenthralled of her sables and velvets, and throwing a glance of complacency around the comfortably furnished room, she drew an easy chair beside the fire and answered the Squire's questions about her husband with uncommon brevity.

He well knew there was a point on which she would never weary, this was talking of her children; he dreaded the governess topic being introduced again, and it afforded him no small relief when the luncheon was served up, as it for a time checked the garrulity of Mrs. Montague. But the good things were at length discussed, and the creature comforts, of which Mrs. Montague had freely partaken, and the generous wine she had drunk only served to increase her loquacity, and the Squire was aware that his penance was at hand, when again ensconcing herself in her easy chair she sighed deeply, and said—

'I cannot tell you, my dear sir, how anxious I feel about this matter of a governess for my poor girls. I am resolved now to look out for a German lady. Really the English governesses I have had have proved the very reverse of clever, and that Mademoiselle de Roux was so flippant, I felt that it was a positive duty to dismiss her before her first quarter had expired; I do hope I shall be more fortunate with the next I engage.'

'And yet, my dear madam,' said the Squire, 'you have had some very charming, intelligent, young women whom I should have considered every way qualified to discharge such onerous duties; nay,' he added, 'your eldest daughter, in her own person, could bear witness to the truth of what I say, for she is, assuredly, an accomplished girl.'

'But not well informed,' says Mr. Montague, 'be is for ever dining it into my ears that your own daughters, Margaret and Bertha, are superior to ours in every respect, and yet, mercy on me,' ejaculated Mrs. Montague, with a blank, hopeless look upon her face, 'how much trouble has the education of those girls occasioned me, and as to expense why, no amount of money, I am sure, has been spared; and have I not been perpetually on the watch, and directly I have found a governess wanting in any point I have dismissed her. What has been the secret in Mrs. Mainwaring's management? why has she succeeded so well when I have failed with all my penetration and care?' Had the Squire chosen to speak out his own thoughts, he would have bluntly told Mrs. Montague that it was her own unparalleled self-conceit which had everything to do with the failure she so bitterly lamented; but

her husband was his bosom friend, and he merely replied,—

'Mrs. Mainwaring was very happy in her selection of a governess for our daughters, she was with us for several years—change is always hurtful.'

'True,' answered Mrs. Montague, 'I have found it so, but what, on earth, is one to do when one meets with incompetent people? How rarely can a woman be found at once accomplished and well informed. I have had ladies in my own family, for instance, well up in two or three things, brilliant pianoforte players, and speaking French fluently, but then perhaps they could not draw, or teach singing, or if they did, they would know nothing of German, and Mr. Montague says that, with two solitary exceptions, I have never had a really well-informed woman; and yet, I am sure I have always examined them very closely myself before engaging them—and surely I am a competent person to judge—and yet, see what failures I have met with.'

As to the competency of the very silly, ill-informed Mrs. Montague to judge on such a point the Squire had strong misgivings, and he drily remarked—

'If we expect too much, my dear madam, we are almost sure to meet with disappointment.—My wife never looked out for a paragon of accomplishment, a moderately accomplished, and certainly a well-informed woman we did seek for, and we found such in the person of Miss Segrave.'

As the Squire spoke thus he turned wearily to the window, and noting, with no small relief, that the snow had ceased to fall, he gladly rose to take his departure, first volunteering to escort, on her journey back to the North, the poor lady whose society was so dull and rapid that he was imposing on himself no small penance in making an offer which might probably meet with her acceptance; however, he was spared the inconvenience, Mrs. Montague assuring him that her husband had agreed to be with her in a few days at the latest.

For some moments after his departure the lady sat leaning her head upon her hand, absorbed in thought, then suddenly she rang the bell, drew her writing table towards her, pushed angrily away several letters which had already arrived from the various registry offices to which she had applied before leaving Manchester, and exclaimed aloud,—

'Yes, I am determined I will try a German now, and what is more, I will only have one direct from her own country.'

As she spoke thus, her maid entered; she desired her to wait, and, taking a slip of paper, she wrote as follows—

'Wanted immediately a gentleman's family in the North of England, a German lady, not under twenty-eight years of age, as governess to two young ladies of the respective ages of thirteen and eighteen years, liberal salary to be given, and unexceptionable references to be required.'

Then referring to the columns of the Times, she selected from thence the name and address of an advertising agent, to whom she wrote, requesting him to put her advertisement, without delay, in the columns of the Allegemeine Zeitung, and despatched her maid with her important message, requesting her to see that a porter was sent with it immediately, to defray the expense, and to bring her back word as to when her advertisement would appear.

Then, and then only, did Mrs. Montague breathe freely, she had arranged this momentous business, for the present, to her heart's content, and reclining in her easy chair, a look of self-satisfaction passing over her still fair, but expressionless countenance, she amused herself and wore away the time by re-perusing the letters we have alluded to, and then enumerated, as far as her memory would aid her, the various luckless ladies who she had declined to engage that morning. She had seen several who called upon her from no less than three registry offices to which she had sent her name. Something like a sigh escaped this vain worldly woman as she thought of the faded and sad countenances of the majority of the unfortunate girls whom her high sounding offer of a liberal salary had tempted to call upon her—clever, too, they had been for the greater part—at least, clever and accomplished enough to have suited any reasonable person, but not Mrs. Montague, who, herself an ill-informed and extremely unaccomplished woman, valued talent at a very low rate. 'I pitied that poor girl,' she said to herself, half-aloud, 'who spoke so confidently as to music and Italian, and was obliged to own that she knew little of German beyond the mere rudiments; what a sigh escaped her when I told her she would not suit me; but I shall never forget the matchless impudence of that tall fashionably-dressed damsel, who, so confident in her own talents, dared to tell me that I wanted

a paragon for my daughters, such as I shall not meet with in a hurry. Well, well, it is trying work,' muttered the poor foolish woman, 'but one thing my present plan will ensure, and that will be German in all its purity.'

We question whether any sensible person, who had really, with head or hands, gone through a hard day's work, was ever more wearied and fatigued than was this silly and illiterate Mrs. Montague under what was a self-imposed torture, namely, her quest of a governess.'

CHAPTER II.—THE OLD VETERAN AND THE FRAULEIN MARIA.

The shadows of the early winter evening were beginning to fall, veiling in obscurity the city of Coblenz, the high and mighty fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, a vast in its extent, spreading far and wide over the rock facing the city on the contrary side of the river, looming down in all its gloomy grandeur on the scene beneath. But not with Coblenz or its fortress have we to do; but follow with us, gentle reader, the step of an aged priest, who treads his way in the grey of the winter evening to a lowly hamlet in the environs of the town. Amongst the humble cottages which composed the hamlet were scattered here and there a few pretty villas or cottages of better kind than those around them, though, at the same time, they were entirely free from any pretensions to elegance. To one of these the priest directed his steps, and his summons for admission was answered by a young German lady, whose countenance, though far from handsome, was, nevertheless, pleasing, for it contained great sweetness of expression, and was shaded by a glittering mass of rich brown hair. Withal, however, there was a cast of sadness on the face of the Fraulein Maria Flohrberg, as she returned the kindly greeting of her visitor, and led him into the little sitting room of her humble home, in which was seated a veteran officer, whom the chances of war had deprived of his right arm, and whose weather-beaten countenance was more impaired by the hardships of his life than by the hand of time; beside him was seated an elderly lady, work in hand, and about the room assembled some three to four children, whose ages varied from ten or fourteen years, happy in the youth that as yet knew not care, or if perchance it did—for the children of the poor must share the sorrows of their kinsred—still, at that early age, they know not grief for long, their sorrow is evanescent as the shower of an April day.

But there was no mistaking the fact, the impression of some deep care was unmistakably sealed on the brows of the elder members of the family. And the cause of this care rose from the gripping poverty which had long fallen on the family of Herr Flohrberg.

'Be seated, I pray you,' said the veteran, addressing the clergyman, and welcoming him to his poor abode; 'be seated, and tell me to what happy chance I owe the pleasure of this visit.'

'Simply because I have seen in the columns of the Allegemeine Zeitung, an advertisement of a situation which it may suit our good Maria to enquire more about,' replied the priest. 'I have heard her say she wished to go to England, and if you really think you can part with her, it strikes me this may suit.'

The mother said not a word, but her work dropped from her hands, and a deep-drawn sigh told of the grief which would be hers should her daughter leave her. The old officer took off his spectacles and wiped them, muttering a few half-inaudible words as to the darkness of the day, but the poor Frau knew that her husband's eyes were humid with a tear; and Maria herself stood a little apart, her first surprised look having faded away into a glance expressive both of hope and fear combined.

Mrs. Montague's advertisement then had penetrated into this lowly hamlet, half a league from Coblenz, and Maria was the German damsel whom fate had destined for the unenviable post of governess in her wealthy home in England.

Maria herself was the first who had the courage to speak.

'A liberal salary!' said she, as, stepping half timidly forwards, she glanced at the paper from which the priest read; 'a liberal salary, why that would do very much; it would help you both, my dearest mother and father, and it would buy shoes and clothes for Mina and Gustave and Adolf, and over and above all this, would help to support Lotchen, still not so old as to be unable to assist my mother in her daily work.'

'I can't part with you Maria, child, indeed, I cannot,' said the poor mother, now fairly overcome, whilst the Herr Flohrberg, with the left hand which fortune had still left him, wiped both eyes and spectacles more vigorously than ever, and muttered between his closed teeth divers impatient speeches as to the inequalities of fortune—he having been overlooked as to promotion in the service of his country—and the pain he felt at the thought that a daughter of his should be

obliged to go to a foreign country and seek her bread among strangers.

Maria, however, was nothing shaken in her resolution either by the tears of her mother, or the sensitive pride of her father, but, taking the paper from the hand of the clergyman, copied out the address, thanked him warmly for the trouble he had taken in her behalf, and then, advancing to her parents, she took a hand of each within her own, saying:

'Dearest parents, this separation will not be eternal. Have you not both grieved, especially you, my mother, at the sternness of the poverty which you knew, sooner or later, would enforce this parting? I too, oh, believe me, I too, shall feel it, but I go to earn for you that which will make your home more pleasant, and add a few slender comforts under your many trials. I have now your permission, have I not?' added Maria, with a faint effort at a smile, 'if so, as our good friend returns to Coblenz, I put myself under his protection, and come back early in the morning.'

'And what would you at Coblenz, my child?' replied the veteran, 'not to seek the Lady of General O'Donnell, I hope. Nay, nay, Maria, their friendship must not be put so sorely to the test. I forbid you to visit Coblenz for such a purpose as that you think of.'

'Nay, then,' said Maria, 'it must even be that my design must be abandoned: for of a truth, unless the General or his Lady have the heart to help me, I must be a burthen to you instead of a help.'

'Charity never faileth, my friend,' said the priest, addressing the old officer, 'the General and his wife will help Maria, if in their power, and I will see her safely as far as Coblenz.'

But the father's permission was with a doubt obtained, and it is doubtful whether it would have been given but for the intercession of the clergyman; and all his objections finally ruled, Herr Flohrberg at last yielded his consent.

With a rapid pace then they wended their way out of the quiet village, and advanced in the dusk of the winter evening, through many an intricate and tortuous labyrinth to the city of Coblenz. To a somewhat elegant building, the owner of which General O'Donnell was a visitor, they bent their steps, but a disappointment awaited Maria, neither herself nor his wife were at home; they had accepted an invitation given by an officer at that time residing in the fortress of Ehrenbreitstein, and, to add to her distress, she found they would both be absent for perhaps more than a week.

'It is now too late, Fraulein, for you to go to the fortress to-night,' said the good natured master of the house, on beholding the nervous anxiety of Maria, and the dejected expression of her countenance when aware of the absence of her friends. 'It is much too late, so my daughter Amelia will make you welcome here for the night, and as soon as the morning sun hath risen, an early breakfast will be ready for you, and you can then start off on your way to the fortress.'

With a grateful heart she accepted the friendly offer, and in the hospitable parlour of Amelia, who was well known, retired to the countess's room, which had been prepared for the purpose of sad farewells and of an English stranger's faces.

Excitement, however, rendered her restless and disturbed, and long before she was summoned in the morning by the pretty little soubrette, who attended on Amelia, she had performed the duties of the toilet, and had for some time anxiously awaited the summons to breakfast.

The morning meal over, Maria, all anxiety to get over the unpleasant affair she had on hand, namely, the appeal she had resolved to make to the kindness of an old tried friend, set off on her visit to the fortress.

It was a fine bright morning, and the rays of the sun lighted up the rocks, crowned by walls and ramparts, frowning down in lofty and imposing grandeur on the placid waters of the Rhine, and the still quiet city, and bestowing an air of grave and stern security on the whole domain. Walls rising above the ramparts, above ramparts, gulls and precipices on the very verge of the horizon, whilst here and there were seen the sentinels placed at regular intervals, their helmets flashing brightly in the rays of the morning sun.

But let us accompany Maria to a portion of the interior of the fortress inhabited by one of the officers who, with his wife, were, for the time being, the host and hostess of General O'Donnell, himself long in the service of Austria. Sombre indeed, and in perfect keeping with the exterior of the fortress, was the room into which Maria Flohrberg was ushered. Small caseinets placed in the massive walls, showed little beyond save frowning rocks, towers, and ramparts, and in the distance spires of the churches of Coblenz; the furniture was heavy, and an air of severe simplicity reigned around. 'Not long

was Maria left in suspense, for a venerable lady entered the room, and the former placed in her hand the paragraph she had cut from the paper containing the advertisement, and in broken sentences, and a blush upon her brow, asked 'would Mrs. O'Donnell help her, she would so faithfully repay her out of her first quarter's salary? yet,' she added, 'I know, Madame, how heavily I tax your friendship, we owe yourself and the General so much.'

'Poor child, surely I will not desert you now,' said the lady, 'remain here awhile, Maria, and I will tell the General the cause of your visit.'

Thus speaking she withdrew, and Maria, full of excitement and hope, paced up and down the spacious apartment, till the heavy measured footsteps of the old General sounded on her ear.

The chances of war had spared General O'Donnell. True it is that every bullet hath its commission, for whilst poor Flohrberg had lost his arm, his friend had escaped unscathed, beyond, perhaps, a few scars. He numbered some seventy years, but his fine tall form had yet bent beneath their weight; his hair flowed down upon his shoulders, white as the driven snow, as well as his beard; his countenance still retaining the freshness of perfect health, and lighted up by a pair of keen black eyes, the glance of which was as piercing as when in the days of his early youth he was wont to wander amongst the glens and valleys of his own old home—the seat of his ancestors—the ancient Castle of Innismore. With a kindly look and a warm welcome the General approached Maria, exclaiming,

'My good A-elbeid has been telling me, Maria, that you wish to answer an advertisement, and that if you are engaged you will need money for your outfit and for your expenses, and I will repay you out of my quarter's salary, sir,' stammered forth Maria, 'we have had so much from you, and, I assure you, I could not have asked you this favor had I not known it was in my power to return it.'

'Maria, my poor Fraulein,' said the good General, 'I never lend, what you require I shall give you.'

Maria would, to own the truth, sooner have had the benefit conferred in the way she had asked, but she well knew it were in vain to remonstrate, for that this was one of the General's peculiarities, he would do a good action in his own fashion, but did not like to be interfered with in the manner of conferring it.

General O'Donnell was an excellent man, and one who, though reputed rich, practised quietly, with his excellent wife, many an act of self-denial in order to give to others some of this world's goods: the poor Flohrbergs had been more or less, constantly receiving assistance from them, and the only sore feeling on the part of poor proud Herr Flohrberg, was the unvarying remark that accompanied the General's not un-frequent, nay, sometimes weekly remittances, 'what I send you is not a loan, but a gift.'—Oddly enough this was the only point on which the two men were at issue. Flohrberg, ever ready, nothing loth to borrow, if only allowed to fancy the obligation under which he lay, lessened by considering it as a loan, which his own sanguine temperament led him to believe he would one day be in a position to return; the General, knowing full well that his oft repeated remittances were in the true sense of the word, gifts, as Flohrberg never could have it in his power to repay them, felt, perhaps, a species of satisfaction in insisting on placing things on their right level and calling them by their right names.

Maria, knowing, then, the character with whom she had to deal, said no more as to repayment, but expressed warmly the gratitude she really felt.

'Write at once to England,' said the General, 'and as soon as you have the engagement, come to me for the sum you require: I only wish it were Ireland that you were going to visit; my brother, the O'Donnell, of Innismore, would make you welcome, Maria; and my niece Mary, and yourself would soon yet be good friends; however, the day may may yet come when you may meet and speak to her of old times and old friends whom you have left behind at Coblenz.'

Her eyes moist with tears, Maria took her leave, and hastened on her homeward way, in order to pen an epistle to the English lady.

We will here pause to say a few words of the families of the O'Donnells and the Flohrbergs, to whom we have introduced our readers.

The General was the younger son of an old Irish family whose ancestral home was fast falling to decay, but whose hospitality survived the wreck of their fortunes. Early in life he had chosen the profession of arms, served in the Austrian army, and signalized himself to such an extent as to rise to the high post he at present held. None, however, but those who were honored by his friendship, recked of the soft, warm heart that beat under that rough exterior. But his life had been a prosperous one; he was honored and respected by those amongst whom his lot was cast, and, in the course of time, mar-