

THE SNOW-LADIES.

BY NATHAN D. WEBER.

A pale little orphan! And where should he go Through the pitiless night, in the drifting snow? Peaks he a home, where the fire of the room Flings a warm, rich glow through the gusty gloom? Nay, the Snow Ladies float through the dusky air. And beckon him on with their fingers fair. Their raiments are gleaming like curtains of mist, Flashed over and through with amethyst. Their large gray eyes are smiling and sweet; He follows them on through the village street. Glad are their beckonings, merry their mood; He follows them over the lonely road. Lightly and brightly they float before, And now he is out on the wild, bleak moor. "Whither, O whither, ladies bright, Would you lead me on through the desolate night?" "Afar, to the realm which thou never hast seen, 'Round the glistening halls of the good Snow Queen."

LESTELLE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ROSE AND SHAMROCK," ETC.

CHAPTER X.

DARCY'S EMBASSY PROVES A FAILURE.

It was certainly an awkward predicament for a pacific negotiator to be placed in, and boded to reason or treat with Lestelle while a fiery young lover stood beside her—a listener to his arguments—would be useless; yet how to retreat Darcy knew not. He could only hope that the superior tact of the lady would assist him out of his difficulties. Percy turned into the morning-room, with the assured air of one to whom the way was familiar; and his cousin obeyed his beckoning finger and followed. It was unattended; only the little spaniel lifting his head from his cushion, and wagging his tail in grateful recognition of the surgeon. One—two minutes elapsed, and Lestelle came hurriedly into the room. Her first glance and bow was for Darcy, her next for the Viscount, who was jealously watching her. Before she could speak to either of the cousins, Percy strode forward, and, seizing both her hands, exclaimed, "Do you know who this is, or why he is here? Do not listen to a word he utters, for he has been falsely pretending friendship for me, only that he might be the better able to play the spy upon my actions!" Lestelle colored as she looked from one to the other; but the manly frankness of Darcy's men seemed to reassure her. "You are too busy in your conclusions, my lord," she exclaimed, as she disengaged her hands from Percy's grasp. "Mr. Lesmere has not said anything yet of which either you or I have reason to complain." "Why is he here?" Percy demanded, hotly. "He will tell me presently. I promised him an audience, and nothing you can advance ought to prevent my listening to what he has to say."

nature, that he would have been better pleased if she had refused point blank to be separated from her young admirer. "Let him speak then," cried Percy, sullenly, "if he is not ashamed of the errand that has brought him here—if he has not been craftily striving to creep into your good graces from the most treacherous motives. Let him say—openly and honorably, and in my presence—why he comes!" Lestelle, whose shapely fingers were now laid lightly on the arm of the excited youth, gave Darcy a questioning look, and chafing a little at the taunts addressed to him, he answered it promptly. "Madam, I must premise that I have nothing to say to Viscount Branceleigh, nor will I agree to his being present at the audience you have promised me. My business is with you, and you only. I come to you the bearer of a message from the Earl of Glonaughton. Though I may have taken this office upon myself too hastily, still it was with motives of which I have no reason to be ashamed, and I must beg you to give me a patient hearing." Lestelle's eyes flashed and her bosom heaved. "Lord Glonaughton condescends to send to me—to me, the despised actress! Then I will hear you, sir! You shall report to me word for word what he has said. You need not fear that I shall take offence at a few harsh epithets. I am accustomed to have my simplest actions misrepresented; and from the most noble the Earl of Glonaughton and Wrayley, one ought to be able to bear a great deal." Percy would have interferred again, but she stopped him. "Sit down, dear friend. I will send Miss Hill to you till I can return. Be calm. Do you forget?" She finished her sentence in so low a tone that it was audible only to the still angry Viscount, who walked to the window, frowning and biting his nails. Signalling to Darcy to follow her, she led the way to a fanciful little boudoir, and pointed to a chair opposite the one in which she seated herself. "Without permitting myself to be swayed by your cousin's remarks," she said, with a sorrowful smile, "I am obliged to see that I guessed rightly when I said that you are not amongst my well-wishers. And yet I have never done anything to incur your dislike, Mr. Lesmere." There were tears in her eyes as she spoke, and Darcy felt confused. It thus were acting, what a consummate mistress of the passions she must be! He stooped his head against her, and answered gravely, "No one who saw Lord Glonaughton as I have seen him, sad and troubled at the conduct of his son, could feel very well-disposed towards the lady to whose influence over Viscount Branceleigh he is compelled to attribute it." Lestelle made an impatient movement, then checked herself, and steadied her voice before she replied. "You do not seem to know that my lord held me as his mistress, and that his son had earned for himself the name of gambler and spendthrift before I met him." "He was a rash, heedless boy, whom craftier men made use of for the vilest ends," retorted Darcy, indignantly. "You are not the first that has come to that conclusion," said Lestelle, composedly. "If you had been in England, what course would you have pursued?" "Stepped in, and rescued him from their clutches," was the prompt reply. "Need you have asked me this question?" "And yet it is imputed to me as a crime that I did the same," she observed, with a touch of sarcasm. "Viscount Branceleigh's debts of honor are paid, and his connection with his evil associates has entirely ceased since he has known me, yet this fact is ignored because I am an actress."

"Percy forgot his manhood, when he received assistance from a woman!" cried Darcy, all his family pride in arms, and Lestelle's face grew crimson. "I do not think with you, Mr. Lesmere. I wished to prove myself his friend, and—though it was with a reluctance that might have satisfied even you—he permitted it." "But his relatives cannot suffer him to be under this heavy obligation," Percy's kinsman replied, with haughty firmness. "Pardon me, madam, if I insist upon giving you a cheque for the amount you have advanced to my cousin." "You insist, sir!" Lestelle exclaimed, with equal haughtiness. "What gives you the right to say this to me?" "I am empowered by Lord Glonaughton to release his son from all the liabilities that his folly has entailed upon him," was the stately reply. "Will you, therefore, oblige me with a statement in full of the amount you have lent to Percy?" Lestelle smiled slightly. "You are too late, sir—the money has just been repaid by Percy himself. The obligation, if you choose to consider it one, is not so easily cancelled. Lord Glonaughton will still have to endure the thought that he owes his son's rescue to me." "You speak as harshly of my uncle as though he had wronged you," said Darcy, chafed by the bitterness of her tones. "How can I hope that you will listen patiently to what I wish to say, while you are indulging in such frolics?" "Nay; it was only a little feminine exultation at the thought that, insignificant though I am, I, too, may have my triumphs," she answered with a sigh. "To whatever you may have to propose on the part of the Earl, you shall find me not only a patient, but respectful, auditor; only remember that I too have rights and feelings that may not be wholly set aside, even though it be to oblige a peer of the realm." She folded her hands on the table, and leaning forward a little, fixed her eyes on Darcy's; and the young man bit his lip, and execrated himself for having undertaken a task which, every hour, seemed to grow more difficult. To a bold, meretricious woman, such as he had expected to find Lestelle, he could have spoken readily enough; but this fair girl bore upon her brow the impress of an untarnished purity, and he was at fault. At last he plunged desperately into the subject. "You must not blame Lord Glonaughton if he objects to an intimacy which he has reason to believe is likely to lead to a closer connection." "That is, he is afraid Viscount Branceleigh meditates marrying Madame Lestelle. Pray proceed, sir." "As he finds his son obstinately bent on ignoring his wishes, the Earl appeals to you, Madam," Darcy hurriedly went on. "Aware that the loss of a brilliant match must be a disappointment to any lady—"

But here Lestelle interrupted him. "Permit me to ask you, sir, in what the advantages of this brilliant match would consist? Does Lord Glonaughton think that the honor of bearing his son's name would compensate me for the studied contempt of Percy's nearest relatives? Should I be less contemned and detested by them than I am at the present moment?" "If you take this view of the matter, why encourage Percy's evident admiration?" asked Darcy, bluntly. "Shall I tell you? Because I like him, and because he is miserable—weighed down with the burden of an intolerable secret, and I am sometimes able to console him." "Percy troubled with a secret! Is he married?" "And to me?" she queried, with a saucy smile. "No, Mr. Lesmere. You may make yourself easy on that score. The pride of the Glonaughtons will never be wounded by such a misalliance." "Have I your permission to repeat this assurance to my uncle?" "No, sir," and Lestelle rose as she spoke. "I have but one message to send to Lord Glonaughton. If he has anything to ask of me, let him come here, and let me have it from his own lips. Tell him the daughter of Esther Waverill, of Halesby, has no other answer to give to his messenger." Darcy looked puzzled. "You place me in an awkward position," he said. "You leave me in ignorance of the why and wherefore you wish this. How can I urge my uncle to consent to a proposal which I must frankly tell you would be derogatory to his dignity?" "Then do not urge it," Lestelle replied. "Repeat my words, and let him make his own decision. Lord Glonaughton is an acute statesman, a man of the world, one not given to letting his feelings overpower his judgment; will he not know how to deal with the motherly girl who has scarcely a real friend to advise or sustain her?" "Lord Glonaughton is the soul of honor," his nephew proudly exclaimed. "You need not fear discourtesy, far less injustice, at his hands." "I am glad to hear it," was the reply, spoken so dubiously, that Darcy was offended. Taking his hat, he bowed stiffly. "As you positively refuse to hear me, madam, I have no alternative but to communicate your wishes to his lordship." He had scarcely reached the door when Lestelle flitted to his side, and looked up at him beseechingly, her beautiful eyes glistening with tears. "You are leaving me in anger. Oh, Mr. Lesmere, don't judge me too harshly. I recollect that you and I must perforce view everything from a different point of view, and that I have my wrongs to resent, and injuries to be redressed, as well as others. I have used no arts to attach Percy to me; I should be more than woman if I could drive from my presence one who finds in it some consolation when he is unhappy." "His father has most reason to be unhappy," Darcy reminded her. "True; but is the fault with Percy or with himself? Mr. Lesmere, you don't know all; neither do I; but I guess at your cousin's secret, and I see no remedy for the trouble it has brought with it." "You perplex me more and more. How can I play the peace-maker if no one deals openly with me?" cried Darcy. "Indeed, I cannot tell; I see your difficulties, but I cannot remove them," she answered, speaking with convincing earnestness. "Only believe me had commenced before I saw Viscount Branceleigh's face; and if you would serve him, prevail upon him to go abroad. A few years may bring about strange changes, and he may learn to endure his share of the world's trials with more fortitude." "Are you not bidding me give advice which you know Percy will not follow?" asked Darcy, suspiciously. "Would he not see in it directly another attempt to separate him from you?" "But how if I second the counsel? Come with me," she added, slipping her hand into his arm—"come and hear me help you to persuade him. Do you think my liking for him is

of such a selfish character that I have not the courage to tell him to leave me when I see a necessity for it? Come!" And Darcy made no effort to resist her will.

CHAPTER XI.

DARCY STILL LINGERS AT THE ACTRESS'S.

When they re-entered the morning-room, Percy was no longer there. He had grown out of humor at the length of the interview, and departed, leaving on the table a card with these few words pencilled upon it:—"I am tired of waiting your leisure—tired of my life, and of the ignoble part I am acting. When will you release me from my promise?" Lestelle murmured a gentle "Poor Percy!" and dashed away a tear before she turned to Mr. Lesmere. "Your cousin's restlessness has carried him away, but he may return shortly. Will you stay and share my luncheon? Miss Hill, to whom I owe my education, would be pleased to have the opportunity of inquiring after her beautiful pupil, the Lady Ida." While Darcy hesitated, she touched a bell, and assuring himself that it was solely to see Miss Hill, he stayed and renewed his acquaintance with that lady, who, however, evinced a degree of reserve and embarrassment whenever any allusion was made to Wyeit, which told him that the subject of her protracted engagement was a painful one, and must be avoided. Lestelle, delighted at having gained her point, flung care to the winds, and became the most charming of hostesses. Her gay badinage put her guest on his mettle, and even the grave Miss Hill was frequently constrained to join in their mirth. An adventure Darcy had met with in Greece, and which he had been persuaded to recount, was receiving the comments of his interested auditors, when a servant brought in a small packet, and laid it before Lestelle. Scarcely heeding the interruption, she continued questioning Darcy, with a keen perception of his meaning and thirst for information which he found very pleasant to be able to gratify. Her busy fingers unwittingly played the while with the string that secured the packet, till Miss Hill, more curious than her pupil, demanded, "What have you there, my dear? Shall I look?" "If you please," was the absent reply. "Did you make any stay at Missolonghi, Mr. Lesmere? You smile. You think I have the usual young lady enthusiasm for Lord Byron, but I haven't. His heroes are such fierce, lawless men, that I shudder at more than I admire them." "Do you like his 'Address to the Sea'?" Darcy asked; and her eyes sparkled, as she answered in the affirmative; adding, "I met with it for the first time on a stormy day at Ponza, whither Miss Hill had taken me, to indulge my longing to view the ocean, and I read the poem with a grateful feeling towards its author." Here Miss Hill stopped her by holding up a bracelet of pearls and rubies, so tastefully set that Lestelle uttered a cry of admiration. "How beautiful—how very beautiful! Look, Mr. Lesmere! Did you ever see anything more exquisite?" But Darcy's praise of the trinket was faintly spoken, and he grew very sober as, with almost childish delight in its beauty, the young actress clasped it around her wrist, and held her dimpled arm in various positions, to display the bracelet to advantage. "Mr. Lesmere thinks me very frivolous," she said, with a blush, as she detected the change in his demeanor. "But I can't help it—lace and gems have the same charms for me as they exercise over my more fortunate sisters, who can afford to buy real jewelry, whilst I have to content myself with paste and mock gold." "Those stones are not false ones," Darcy significantly observed. "I suppose not," Lestelle rolessly replied, as she dropped the trinket into its velvet-lined case. "This bracelet must be worth a considerable sum. Am I not right? So much the worse for the pocket of the silly youth who purchased it." "What is to be done with it, Lestelle?" asked Miss Hill, who was restoring the case to its wrappers. "I saw an appeal in the Telegraph for funds for that new hospital. Shall we forward it there?" "By all means. Was it sent here anonymously?" "No. Here is the name of the purchaser." Lestelle's lip curled as she looked at the card Miss Hill handed to her. If the gallant young nobleman, who was flattering himself that he should see his elegant gift on the arm of the actress that night, could have beheld the scornful glance with which she perused the complimentary allusion which accompanied it, he would have comprehended that there are women in the world whose smiles are not to be bought at so poor a price as gold. "You must not omit to write a few lines to this honorable gentleman," she said, as she tossed the card into the waste-paper basket. "Tell him that the secretary of the institution will acknowledge and thank him for his munificent donation." "Do you often dispose of the offerings made at your shrine in this uncommoal fashion?" asked the amused Darcy, whose countenance was beginning to clear. "Always—except when my votaries propitiate me with flowers. Those I cannot resist;