







POETRY.

A LESSON FROM THE DANDELIONS.

Happy little dandelions,
Smiling in the grass,
Looking into my face
So brightly as I pass.

SELECT STORY.

ZILLOH ST. CLAIR.

By the author of "The Gipsy's Revenge," "A Woman's Secret," etc.

CHAPTER II.

BRUCE DELMAR.

CONTINUED.

Delmar's face blushed guiltily. For an instant he stood in silence, perplexed and chagrined; but quickly recovering his self-possession, he tried to assume a careless air, as though the discovery were a matter of trifling moment.

"Ah! so that is what you are wondering about," he said, taking the handkerchief and slipping it into his pocket. "Of course, the handkerchief isn't mine—I mean, of course, I've no right to that bit of foolery in the corner; he acted, alluding to an embroidered coronet worked above the name of 'Bruce.' It was merely for a joke that I ever had the thing."

"It is a joke that I intend to take in very serious earnest," remarked Val, while the look of scorn in his eyes deepened.

"Delmar grew white to the lips. "Come Val, my boy," he said, with a sudden change of manner, and speaking in a friendly, pleading tone, "don't cut up rough, for upon my word, I'm bothered enough just now. You have become possessed of a secret, which I'd have rather kept to myself a little longer; but surely you don't mean to betray me? There's nothing mean about you, I know, nothing of the spy or the sneak; you'll keep the little secret you've accidentally found out, won't you Val?"

He laid his hand on Val's arm as he made this appeal, but the lad flung it off as though it had been a serpent, and faced him with eyes that were fairly ablaze with passionate wrath and scorn.

"I keep your secret," he exclaimed. "What do you mean me for—as great a scoundrel as yourself? What does it mean when such men as you, aristocratic, white-handed men, who have coronets upon their handkerchiefs, come down to a little corner place like this, and pass themselves off as humble painters? It means some devilry, and it is devilry, that I will have no hand in. Who is it you are so particularly anxious to deceive—who is it you most fear my denouncing you to? Is it Zilloh?"

The man's face had grown livid with rage as the boy hurled forth his scathing invectives; a savage gleam shone in his red-brown eyes, the veins in his forehead swelled; his hands clinched themselves with a spasmodic movement, as if it was with difficulty he controlled himself from committing some act of violence.

"What do you mean by prying into my affairs, you insolent young sneak?" he broke out fiercely. "What business are they of yours? Are you in love with Zilloh yourself, may I ask? Ah! that's it, upon my soul!" he went on with bitter contemptuousness. "And a pretty lover you are for her, aren't you? Did you think Zilloh could ever care for you, you miserable, pale-faced cripple?"

Val winced as though beneath a blow, and indeed there was more of pain and humiliation than a mere blow could have caused him in that brutal taunt. Upon the subject of his lameness, he was painfully sensitive, and hitherto it had never been made the occasion for a single cruel or taunting word. The guardian, the kind old rector, and Zilloh, looked him too well to let any work or glance of theirs remind him of his infirmity, and he had been too reticent to seek for friends away from them.

So now Bruce Delmar's harsh taunt fell upon him like a lash—a stinging, maddening blow, which he was powerless to return. A hot crimson flush swept across his face then retreated, leaving him deathly pale; his lips moved, but no words came. Fixing upon his enemy a dark, quiet look, he turned away, slowly and calmly, and in a minute or two, was lost to sight.

Then Delmar began to bitterly reproach himself with his own stupidity.

"Why didn't I keep my temper, instead of quarreling with that young idiot?" he muttered. "If I'd only been civil and conciliatory to him, might have talked him into believing anything I liked to tell. One needn't have been so sharp to have hoodwinked him; and as it is, I have just spoilt my own game. The young wretch will set the village on fire with his tongue before to-morrow's here. I had better beat a retreat. But Zilloh—how can I leave her? How I love that girl! What is there I would not do to win her?"

He paced up and down the lane, with an expression of fierce moodiness upon his handsome face, then presently an eager exclamation broke from him.

"In the lane, not ten paces away, was Zilloh herself, coming towards him. She was looking unusually beautiful as she passed under the arching trees that shadowed her path, and formed a fitting background for her face and figure. Her white dress was simply made, flowing round her in soft folds; the wind stirred her dark curls, as she now came towards him with a free, light step a joyous smile on her red lips, a look of unutterable happiness in her sweet eyes.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELOPEMENT.

A hot flush rose to Bruce's face for a moment, as he thought that she had

probably met Val Grey; but a little consideration convinced him that this was unlikely, as she was coming from an opposite direction to that taken by Val; to make sure, however, he said, as he hurried up to her and tenderly clasped her hand—

"Have you seen your young friend Valentine? He has only just left me."

"No I have not seen him. Which way did he take?" asked Zilloh.

Bruce indicated the direction by a wave of his hand; then he turned to the girl who stood in timid yet stately grace beside him and said—

"Zilloh, I want to speak to you—want to speak to you very seriously indeed. Can you spare me a few moments during? I never dreamed of seeing you this afternoon. Are you a witch, my queen—did you divine how badly I wanted you, that you should chance to meet me just at this moment?"

"Do you really want me Bruce?" she asked, her eyes dropping beneath his ardent gaze. "I had no thought of seeing you, but the afternoon was so lovely, that I felt I must walk through the lanes. You know Bruce, you told me only yesterday that you should not be out all to-day, that you should be busy with your picture?"

"Ah! and so I should have been mine own," he responded fondly, "if it had not been for something that has happened—a letter I have received. That is what I want to talk to you about, my sweet, but I don't care to be interrupted or intruded upon. Shall we go to that charming nook beside the old mill? No one will disturb us there."

Zilloh suffered him to lead her whither he would; her mind was shadowed by a vague alarm; his look and tone were grave, as she had ever known them, and she was oppressed with fears as to what this gravity might forbid.

There was a seat at the foot of a tree beside the old mill. Bruce led her to it, and then flung himself down on the grass at her feet.

"My own," he began passionately. "Ah! if you only were my own! I wonder if you will care about what I have to tell you. Dear, I shall have to leave Ingledon to-morrow."

"Leave Ingledon!—to-morrow!"

The words fell from Zilloh's lips mechanically, as though she had scarcely grasped at their full meaning. Slowly the color forsake her cheeks, her lips quivered, and into her beautiful dark eyes there stole a look of such fear and anguish that was more touching than tears. She loved Bruce Delmar very dearly, loved him with all the depth and intensity of devotion that a warm-hearted girl feels for the man who has been the first to open her heart to love. She had not known him many weeks, not much more than a fortnight, but he contrived to see her very often, and with nature such as hers, love is a plant of rapid growth.

Her uncle had met him somewhere in the village, and pleased with his artistic taste, had invited him to the parsonage. Then Bruce had professed to fall in love with the quaint, old, rose-covered house, and had begged permission to sketch it, a permission which was heartily accorded. This of course, meant more visits to the parsonage, and before long he had succeeded in obtaining a sketch of Zilloh herself. He belonged to a class of men who were as yet almost strangers in Zilloh's limited world. Refined, polished, versed in all those little arts and courtesies which are so dear to a woman's heart, he was not long before he had won her love; but—and this was something of a drawback to Bruce's mind—he himself had fallen more deeply in love with her than he thought prudent; more deeply than he would have cared to own. His was one of those natures that prefer to love and ride away, but somehow, he felt that it would be a hard thing for him to "ride away from Zilloh St. Clair."

Equally hard—harder even, would it be for her to part from him. He was the first love of her heart—the first, the last, the only love that heart can ever feel, she told herself, as with pale and quivering lips, she repeated his words, "leave Ingledon to-morrow," and realised that a dreary blank her life would be to her if he passed out of it.

He on his part, was wondering in what words he could best speak that which he had to say. An instant or two, he lay at her feet in silence, watching her face; then he said in slow, lingering tones—

"Zilloh, shall you care? Can you bear to part from me? Darling, with sudden passion, "I cannot bear to part from you." Zilloh's face was pale no longer; the rich warm color swept over it in a crimson flood, and her eyes drooped beneath his gaze.

"Tell me, oh! tell me, my darling," he whispered, taking her hand and holding it closely between his own, "tell me, can you bear to send me from you? Only say the word, Zilloh, say you do not care, and I will leave you—aye, even though it breaks my heart."

"I shall not send you away; you know I care," murmured the girl in shy, sweet accents.

He showered kisses upon her hands with all that rapture of devotion which girls are so proud of in a lover.

"How, sweet?—why, it is the kindest thing in the world. I have thought it all out; my plan needs only one thing to make it perfect—that is your consent. Listen, dear: this very evening you must go away to London. I should see you off by the train, but should not accompany you. It would not do for me to be missing at the same time as yourself; besides, I have several things to arrange before I could leave here. But to-morrow I should join you, armed with a special license; we should be married at the nearest church, then straight to Italy or Spain, where we would stay until my family consented to receive my bride with all the honor that would be her due. What does my Zilloh say to my plan?" and again he looked into her face, with eyes alight with the fire of love.

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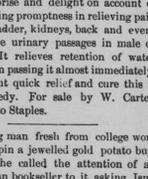
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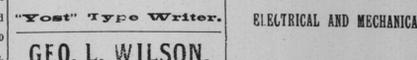
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