

Year After Year.

Year after year the cowslips fill the meadow,
Year after year the skylarks thrill the air,
Year after year, in sunshine or in shadow
Rolls the world round, love, and finds us as we were.

Year after year, as sure as birds returning,
Or field flowers blossoming above the wintry mould,
Year after year, in work or mirth or mourning,
Love we with love's young youth, that never can grow old.

Sweetheart and lady-love, queen of boyish passion,
Strong hope of manhood, content of age begun,
Loved in a hundred ways, each in a different fashion,
Yet loved supremely, solely, as we never love but one.

LOVERS YET.

(By the author of "Madeline's Lover.")

"What is it, Beatrice?" asked Lillian, as the two sisters stood alone in the bright little dressing-room.

"I can hardly tell you in sober words," she replied. "Lord Airlie has asked me to be his wife—his wife; and, oh, Lilly, I love him so dearly!"

Pride and dignity all broke down; the beautiful face was laid upon Lillian's shoulder, and Beatrice wept happy tears. "I loved him so, Lilly," she went on; "but I never thought he cared for me. What have I done that I should be so happy?"

The moonbeams never fell upon a sweeter picture than these fair young sisters, Lillian's pure, spiritual face bent over Beatrice.

"I love him, Lilly," she continued, "for himself. He is a king amongst men. Who is so brave, so generous, so noble? If he were a beggar, I should care just as much for him."

Lillian listened and sympathized until the bright dark eyes seemed to grow weary; then she bade her sister good night, and went to her own room.

Beatrice Earle was alone at last—alone with her happiness and love. It seemed impossible that her heart and brain would ever grow calm or quiet again. It was all in vain she tried to sleep. Lord Airlie's face, his voice, his words, haunted her.

She rose, and put on a pretty pink dressing gown. The fresh air, she thought, would make her sleep, so she opened the long window gently, and looked out.

The night was still and clear; the moon hung over the dark trees; floods of silvery light bathed the far-off lake, the sleeping flowers, and the green grass. There was a gentle stir amid the branches; the leaves rustled in the wind; the blue, silent heavens shone bright and calm.

The solemn beauty of the star lit sky, and the hushed murmur, appealed to her. Into the proud, passionate heart there came some better, nobler thoughts. Ah, in the future that lay so brilliant and beautiful before her she would strive to be good, she would be true and steadfast, she would think more of what Lilly loved, and spoke about at times! Then her thoughts went back to her lover, and that happy half hour in the rose garden. From her window she could see it—the moon shone full upon it. The moonlight was a fair type of her life that was to be, bright, clear, unshadowed. Even as the thought shaped itself in her mind, a shadow fell among the roses. She looked, and saw the figure of a tall man walking down the path that divided the little garden from the shrubbery. He stood still there, gazing long and earnestly at the windows of the house, and then went out into the park and disappeared.

She was not startled. A passing wonder as to who it might be struck her. Perhaps it was one of the game-keepers or gardeners; but she did not think much about it. A shadow in the moonlight did not frighten her.

Soon the cool fresh air did its work; the bright dark eyes grew tired in real earnest, and at length Beatrice retired to rest.

The sun was shining brightly when she awoke. By her side lay a fragrant bouquet of flowers, the dew drops still glistening upon them, and in their midst a little note, which said—

"Beatrice, you will come into the garden for a few minutes before breakfast, just to tell me all that happened last night was not a dream?"

She rose quickly. Over her pretty morning dress she threw a lightshawl, and went down to meet Lord Airlie.

"It was no dream," she said simply, holding out her hand in greeting to him.

"Dear Beatrice, how very good of you!" replied Lord Airlie—adding presently, "We have twenty minutes before the breakfast-bell will ring; let us make the most of them."

The morning was fresh, fair, and calm, a soft haze hanging round the trees.

"Beatrice," said Lord Airlie, "you see the sun shining there in the high heavens. Three weeks ago I should have thought it easier for that same sun to fall than for me to win you. I can scarcely believe that my highest ideal of woman is realized. It was always my ambition to marry some young girl who had never loved any one before me. You never have. No man ever held your hand as I hold it now, no man ever kissed your face as I did last night."

As he spoke a burning flush covered her face. She remembered Hugh Fernely. He loved her better for the blush, thinking how pure and guileless she was.

"I fear I shall be a very jealous lover," he continued. "I shall envy everything those beautiful eyes rest upon. Will you ride with me this morning? I want to talk to you about Lynton—my home, you know. You will be Lady Airlie, of Lynton, and no king will be so proud as I shall."

The breakfast-bell rang at last. When Beatrice entered the room Lady Earle went up to her.

"Your papa has told me the news," she said. "Heaven bless you, and make you happy, dear child?"

Lionel Dacre guessed the state of affairs, and said but little. The chief topic of conversation was the ball, interspersed by many conjectures on the part of Lord Earle as to why the post-bag was so late.

It did not arrive until breakfast was ended. Lord Earle distributed the letters; there were three for Lord Airlie, one to Lady Earle from Dora, two for Lionel, none for Lillian. Lord Earle held in his hands a large common blue envelope.

"Miss Beatrice Earle," he said—"from Brookfield. What large writing! The name was evidently intended to be seen."

Beatrice took the letter carelessly from

him; the handwriting was quite unknown to her; she knew no one in Brookfield, which was the nearest post-town—it was probably some circular, some petition for charity, she thought. Lord Airlie crossed the room to speak to her, and she placed the letter carelessly in the pocket of her dress, and in a few minutes forgot all about it.

Lord Airlie was waiting; the horses had been ordered for an early hour. Beatrice ran up-stairs to put on her riding habit, and never gave a thought to the letter.

It was a pleasant ride; in the dark after days she looked back upon it as one of the brightest hours she had ever known. Lord Airlie told her all about Lynton, his beautiful home—a grand old castle where every room had a legend, every tree almost a tradition.

For her he intended to work wonders; a new and magnificent wing should be built, and on one room therein art, skill and money should be lavished without stint.

"Her boudoir," he said, "should befit for a queen and for a fairy."

So they rode through the pleasant sunlight air. A sudden thought struck Beatrice.

"I wonder," she said, "what mamma will think? You must go to see her Hubert. She dreaded love and marriage so much. Poor mamma!"

She asked herself, with wondering love, what could have happened that her mother should dread what she found so pleasant. Lord Airlie entered warmly into all her plans and wishes. Near the grand suite of rooms that were to be prepared for his beautiful young wife, Lord Airlie spoke of rooms for Dora, if she would but consent to live with them.

"I must write and tell mamma to-day," said Beatrice. "I should not like her to hear it from any one but myself."

"Perhaps you would allow me to inclose a note," suggested Lord Airlie, "asking her to try and tolerate me."

"I do not think that will be very difficult," laughingly replied his companion.

Their ride was a long one. On their return Beatrice was slightly tired, and went straight to her own room. She wrote a long letter to Dora, who must have smiled at her description of Lord Airlie.

He was everything that was true, noble, chivalrous, and grand. The world did not hold such another. When the letter was finished it was time to dress for dinner.

"Which dress will you wear, miss?" asked the attentive maid.

"The prettiest I have," said the young girl, her bright face glowing with the words she had just written. What dress could be pretty enough for him? One was found at last that pleased her—a rich white crepe. But she would wear no jewels—nothing but crimson roses. One lay in the thick coils of her dark hair, another nestled against her white neck, others looped up the flowing skirt.

Beatrice's toilette satisfied her—this, too, with her lover's fastidious taste to please. She stood before the large mirror, and a pleased smile overspread her face as she saw herself therein.

Suddenly she remembered the letter. The morning dress still hung upon a chair. She took the envelope from the pocket.

"Shall you want me again, Miss Earle?" asked her maid.

"No," replied Beatrice, breaking the seal. "I am ready now."

The girl quitted the room, and Beatrice, standing before the mirror, drew out a long, closely written letter, turning presently in amazement, to the signature, wondering who could be the writer.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The sun shone brightly upon the roses that gleamed in her hair and nestled against the white neck. Could it be lingering in cruel mockery upon the pale face and the dark eyes so full of wild horror? As Beatrice Earle read the letter, the color left her lips, her heart seemed to stand still, a vague nameless dread took hold of her, the paper fell from her hands, and with a long, low cry she fell upon her knees, hiding her face in her hands.

It had fallen at last—the cruel blow that even in her dreams and thoughts she had considered impossible. Hugh Fernely had found her out, and claimed her as his own.

This letter which had stricken joy and beauty from the proud face, and left it white and cold almost as the face of the dead, was from him; and the words it contained were full of such passionate love that they terrified her. The letter ran as follows:

"MY OWN BEATRICE—From peril by sea and land I have returned to claim you. Since we parted I have stood face to face with death in its most terrible form. Each time I conquered, because I felt I must see you again. It is a rite saying that love is immortal. Death itself would not part me from you—nay, if I were buried, and you came to my grave and whispered my name, it seems to me I must hear you.

"Beatrice, you promised to be my wife—you will not fail me? Ah, no, it cannot be that the blue heavens above will look on quietly and witness my death blow! You will come to me, and give me a word, a smile, to show how true you have been.

"Last evening I wandered round the grounds, wondering which were the windows of my love's chamber, and asking myself whether she was dreaming of me. Life has changed for you since we sat upon the cliffs at Knutsford and you promised to be my wife. I heard at the farm all about the great change, and how the young girl who wandered with me through the bonnie green woods is the daughter of Lord Earle. Your home doubtless is a stately one. Rank and position like yours might frighten some lovers—they do not daunt me. You will not let them stand between us. You cannot, after the promises you uttered.

"Beatrice, my voyage has been a successful one; I am not a rich man, but I have enough to gratify every wish of your heart. I will take you away to sunny lands over the sea, where life shall be so full of happiness that you will wish it never to end.

"I await your commands. Rumor tells me Lord Earle is a strange disappointed man. I will not yet call upon you at your own home; I shall wait your reply at Brookfield. Write at once, Beatrice, and tell me how and when I may meet you. I will go anywhere, at any time. Do not delay—my heart hungers and thirsts for one glance at your peerless face. Appoint an hour soon. How shall I live until it

comes? Until then think of me as—Your devoted lover,

HUGH FERNELY.
Address, Post-office, Brookfield."

She read every word carefully, and then slowly turned the letter over and read it again. Her white lips quivered with indignation. How dared he presume so far? His love! Ah! if Hubert Airlie could have read those words! Fernely's love! She loathed him; she hated with fierce, hot hatred the very sound of his name. Why must this most wretched folly of her youth rise up against her now? What must she do? Where could she turn for help and counsel?

Could it be possible that this man she hated so fiercely had touched her face, and covered her hands with kisses and tears? She struck the little white hand which held the letter against the marble stand, and where Hugh Fernely's tears had fallen a dark bruise purpled the fair skin; while hard, fierce words came from the beautiful lips.

"Was I blind, foolish, mad?" she cried. "Dear heaven, save me from the fruits of my own folly!"

Then hot anger yielded to despair. What should she do? Look which way she might, there was no hope. If Lord Earle once discovered that she had dealt falsely with him, she would be driven from the home she had learned to love. He would never pardon such concealment, deceit, and folly as hers. She knew that. If Lord Airlie ever discovered that any other man had called her his love, had kissed her face, and claimed her as his own, she would lose his affection. Of that she was also quite sure.

If she would remain at Earlescourt, if she would retain her father's affection and Lord Airlie's love, they must never hear of Hugh Fernely. There could be no doubt on that head.

What, should she do with him? Could she buy him off? Would money purchase her freedom? Remembering his pride and his love, she thought not. Should she appeal to his pity—tell him all her heart and life was centered in Lord Airlie? Should she appeal to his love for pity's sake?

Remembering his passionate words, she knew it would be useless. Had she not been married before he returned—were she not Lady Airlie of Lynton—he could not have harmed her. Was the man mad to think he could win her—she who had had some of the most nobly-born men in England at her feet? Did he think she would exchange her grand old name for his obscure one—her magnificence for his poverty?

There was no more time for thought; the dinner-bell had sounded for the last time, and she must descend. She thrust the letter hastily into a drawer, locked it, and then turned to her mirror. She was startled at the change. Surely that pale face, with its quivering lips and shadowed eyes, could not be hers. What should she do to drive away the startled fear, the vague dread, the deadly pallor? The roses she wore were but a ghastly contrast.

"I must bear it better," she said to herself. "Such a face as this will betray my secret. Let me feel that I do not care—that it will all come right in the end."

She said the words aloud, but the voice was changed and hoarse.

"Women have faced more deadly peril than this," she continued, "and have won; is there any peril I would not brave for Hubert Airlie's sake?"

Beatrice Earle left her room. She swept, with her beautiful head erect, through the wide corridors and down the broad staircase. She took her seat at the sumptuous table, whereon gold and silver shone, whereon everything recherche and magnificent was displayed. But she had with her a companion she was never again to lose, a haunting fear, a skeleton that was never more to quit her side, a miserable consciousness of folly that was bringing sore wretchedness upon her. Never again was she to feel free from fear and care.

"Beatrice," said Lady Earle, when dinner was over, "you will never learn prudence."

She started and the beautiful bloom just beginning to return vanished again.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear," continued Lady Earle; "I am not angry. I fear you were out too long to-day. Lord Airlie must take more care of you; the sun was very hot, and you look quite ill. I never saw you look so you do to-night."

"We had very little sun," replied Beatrice, with a laugh she tried to make a gay one; "we rode under the shade in the park. I am tired but not with my little ride."

It was a pleasant evening, and when the gentlemen joined the ladies in the drawing-room the sun beams still lingered on flowers and trees. The long windows were all open, and the soft summer wind that came in was laden with the sweet breath of the flowers.

Lord Airlie asked Beatrice to sing. It was a relief to her; she could not have talked; all the love and sorrow, all the fear and despair that tortured her, could find vent in music. So she sat in the evening gloaming, and Lord Airlie, listened to the super voice, wondering at the pathos and sadness that seemed to ring in every note.

"What weird music, Beatrice!" he said, at length. "You are singing of love, but the love is a sorrow. Your songs are generally so bright and happy. What has come over you?"

"Nothing," was the reply, but he, bending over her, saw the dark eyes were dim with tears.

"There," cried Lord Airlie—"you see I am right. You have positively sung yourself to tears."

He drew her from the piano, and led her to the large bay-window where the roses peeped in. He held her face to the mellow evening light and looked gravely into her beautiful eyes.

"Tell me," he said simply, "what has saddened you, Beatrice—you have no secrets from me. What were you thinking of just now when you sang that dreamy 'Lebewohl'? Every note was like a long sigh."

"Shall ye laugh if I tell you?" she asked.

"No," he replied; "I cannot promise to sigh, but I will not smile."

"I was thinking what I should do if—anything happened to part us."

"But nothing will ever happen," he said; "nothing can part us but death. I

know what would happen to me if I lost you, Beatrice."

"What?" she asked, looking up into the handsome, kind face.

"I should not kill myself," he said, "for I hold life to be a sacred gift; but I should go where the face of no other woman could smile upon me. Why do you talk so dolefully, Beatrice? Let us change the subject. Tell me where would you like to go when we are married—shall it be France, Italy, or Spain?"

"Would nothing ever make you love me less, Hubert?" she asked. "Neither poverty nor sickness?"

"No," he replied nothing you can think of or invent."

"Nor disgrace?" she continued; but he interrupted her, half angrily.

"Hush!" he said. "I do not like such a word upon your lips; never say it again. What disgrace can touch you? You are too pure, too good."

She turned from him, and he fancied a low moan came from her trembling lips.

"You are tired, and—pray forgive me, Beatrice—nervous, too," said Lord Airlie; "I will be your doctor. You shall lie down here upon this couch. I will place it where you can see the sun setting in the west, and I will read to you something that will drive all fear away. I thought during dinner you looked ill and worn."

Gently enough he drew the couch to the window, Lady Earle watching him the while with smiling face. He induced Beatrice to lie down, and then turned her face to the garden, where the setting sun was pleasantly gilding the flowers.

"Now you have something pleasant to look at," said Lord Airlie, "and you shall have something pleasant to listen to. I am going to read some of Schiller's 'Marie Stuart.'"

He sat at her feet, and held her white hand in his. He read the grand, stirring words that at times seemed like the ring of martial music, and again like the dirge of a soul in despair.

His clear, rich voice sounded pleasantly in the evening calm. Beatrice's eyes lingered on the western sky all aflame; but her thoughts were with Hugh Fernely.

What should she do? If she could but temporize with him, if she could but pacify him for a time until she were married, all would be safe. He would not dare to talk of claiming Lady Airlie—it would be vain if he did. Besides, she would persuade Lord Airlie to go abroad; and seeing all pursuit useless, Hugh would surely give her up. Even at the very worst, if Hubert and she were once married, she would not fear; if she confessed all to him he would forgive her. He might be very angry, but he would pardon his wife. If he knew all about it before marriage, there was no hope for her.

She must temporize with Fernely,—write in a style that would convey nothing, and tell him he must wait. He could not refuse. She would write that evening a letter that should give him no hope, nor yet drive him to despair.

"That is a grand scene, is it not?" said Lord Airlie, suddenly; then he saw by Beatrice's startled look that she had not listened.

"I plead guilty at once," she replied. "I was thinking—do not be angry—I was thinking of something that relates to yourself. I heard nothing of what you read, Hubert. Will you read it again?"

"Certainly not," he said, with a laugh of quiet amusement. "Reading does not answer; we will try conversation. Let us resume a subject you ran away from before—where shall we go for our wedding-trip?"

Only three days since she would have suggested twenty different places; she would have smiled and blushed, her dark eyes growing brighter at every word. Now she listened to her lover's plans as if a ghostly hand clutched her heart and benumbed her with fear.

That evening it seemed to Beatrice Earle as though she would never be left alone. In the drawing-room stood a dainty little escritoire used by the ladies of Earlescourt. Here she dared not write lest Lord Airlie should, as he often did, linger by her, pretending to assist her. If she went into the library Lord Earle would be sure to ask her to whom she was writing. There was nothing to be done but wait until she retired to her own room.

First came Lady Earle, solicitous about her health, recommending a long rest and quiet sleep; then Lillian, full of anxiety, half longing to ask Beatrice if she thought Lionel Dacre handsome and kinder than any one else; then the maid, Suzette, who seemed to linger as though she would never go.

At length she was alone, the door looked upon the outer world. She was soon seated at her little desk, where she speedily wrote the following cold letter, that almost drove Hugh Fernely mad:

"MY DEAR HUGH—Have you really returned? I thought you were lost in the China Seas, or had forgotten the little episode at Knutsford. I cannot see you just yet. As you have heard, Lord Earle has peculiar notions—I must humor them. I will write again soon, and say when and where I can see you.

"Yours sincerely,
BEATRICE EARLE."

She folded the letter and addressed it as he wished; then she left her room and went down into the hall where the post-bag lay open upon the table. She placed the missive inside, knowing that no one would take the trouble to look at the letters; then she returned as she had come, silently.

The letter reached Brookfield at noon the following day. When Hugh Fernely opened it he bit his lips with rage. Cold, heartless lines! Not one word was there of welcome, not one of sorrow for his supposed death; no mention of love, truth or fidelity; no recognition of his passionate worship; no promise that she would be his—what could such a letter mean?

He almost hated the girl whom he had loved so well. Yet he could not, would not believe anything except that perhaps during his long absence she had grown to think less kindly of him. She had promised to be his wife, and, let come what might, he would make her keep her word.

So he said; and Hugh Fernely meant it. His whole life was centered in her, and he would not tamely give her up.

The letter dispatched, Beatrice awaited the reply with a suspense no words can describe. A dull wonder came over her at times why she must suffer so keenly. Other girls had done what she had done—nay, fifty times worse—and no Nemesis haunted them. Why was this spectre of fear and

shame to stand by her side every moment and distress her?

It was true it had been very wrong of her to meet this tiresome Hugh Fernely in the pleasant woods and on the sea shore; but it had broken the monotony that had seemed to be killing her. His passionate love had been delicious flattery; still she had not intended anything serious. It had only been a novelty and an amusement to her; although to him, perhaps it had been a matter of life or death. But she had deceived Lord Earle. If, when he had questioned her, and sought with such tender wisdom to win her confidence—if she had told him her story then, he would have saved her from further persecution and from the effects of her own folly; if she had told him then, it would not have mattered—there would have been no obstacle to her love for Lord Airlie.

It was different now. If she were to tell Lord Earle, after his deliberate and emphatic words, she could expect no mercy; yet, she said to herself, other girls have done even worse, and punishment had not overtaken them so swiftly.

At last she slept, distressed and worn out with thought.

CHAPTER XXXII.

For the first time in her life, when the bright sun shone into her room, Beatrice turned her face to the wall and dreaded the sight of day. The post-bag would leave the Hall at 9 in the morning—Hugh would have the letter at noon. Until then she was safe.

Noon came and went, but the length of the summer's day brought nothing save fresh misery. At every unusual stir, every loud peal of the bell, every quick footstep, she turned pale, and her heart seemed to die within her.

Lady Earle watched her with anxious eyes. She could not understand the change that had come over the brilliant young girl who had used to be the life of the house. Every now and then she broke out into wild and feverish gait. Lillian saw that something was ailed with her sister—she could not tell what.

For the fiftieth time that day, when the half-door-bell sounded, Beatrice looked up with trembling lips she vainly tried to be still. At last Lady Earle took the burning hands in her own.

"My dear child," she said, "you will have a nervous fever if you go on in this way. What makes you start at every noise? You look as though you were waiting for something dreadful to happen."

"No one ever called me nervous," replied Beatrice, with a smile, controlling herself with an effort; "mamma's chief complaint against me was that I had no nerves;" adding presently to herself, "This cannot last. I would rather die at once than live in this agony."

The weary day came to a close, however; and it was well for Beatrice that Lord Airlie had not spent the day with her. The gentlemen at Earlescourt had all gone to a bachelor's dinner, given by old Squire Newton of the Grange. It was late when they returned, and Lord Airlie did not notice anything unusual in Beatrice.

"I call this a day wasted," he said, as he bade her good night; "for it has been a day spent away from you. I thought it would never come to an end."

She sighed, remembering what a dreary day it had been to her. Could she live through such another? Half the night she lay awake, wondering if Hugh's answer to her letter would come by the first post, and whether Lord Earle would say anything if he noticed another letter from Brookfield. Fortune favored her. In the morning Lord Earle was deeply ingrossed by a story Lionel was telling, and asked Beatrice to open the bag for him. She again saw a hated blue envelope, bearing her own name. When all the other letters were distributed, she slipped hers into the pocket of her dress, without any one perceiving the action.

Breakfast was over at last; and, leaving Lord Airlie talking to Lillian, Beatrice hastened to read the letter. None of Hugh's anger was there set down; but, if she had cared for him, her heart must have ached at the pathos of his simple words. He had received her note, he said—the note so unworthy of her—and hastened to tell her that he was obliged to go to London on some important business connected with his ship, and that he would be absent about three weeks. He would write to her at once on his return; and he should insist upon seeing her then, as well as exact the fulfilment of her promise.

It was a respite; much might happen in three weeks. She tore the letter into shreds, and felt as though relieved of a deadly weight. If time could but be gained, she thought—if something could but happen to urge her marriage with Hugh Airlie before Hugh returned! At any rate for the moment she was free.

She looked like herself again when Lord Airlie came to ask her if she would ride or walk. The beautiful bloom had returned to her face and the light to her eyes. All day she was in brilliant spirits. There was no need now to tremble at a loud ring or rapid step. Three weeks was a long time—much might happen. "Oh if Lord Airlie would but force me to marry him soon!"

That very evening Lord Airlie asked her if she would go out with him. He wanted to talk to her alone, for he was going away on the morrow, and had much to say to her.

"Where are you going," she said, with sad, wondering eyes, her chance of escape seeming rapidly to diminish.

"I am going to Lynton," he replied, "to see about plans for the new buildings. They should be begun at once. Even if we remain abroad a whole year they will then be hardly finished. I shall be away ten days or a fortnight. When I return Beatrice, I shall ask you a question. Can you guess what it will be?"

There was no answering smile on her face. Perhaps he would be absent three weeks. What chance of escape had she now?

"I shall ask you when you will fulfil your promise," he continued—"when you will let me make you in deed and in word my wife. You must not be cruel to me, Beatrice. I have waited long enough. You will think about it while I am gone, will you not?"

Lord Earle smiled as he noted his daughter's face. Airlie was going away, and therefore she was dull—that was just as it should be. He was delighted that she cared so much for him. He told Lady Earle that he had not thought Beatrice capable of such deep affection. Lady