To Phyllis in Her Garden.

Sweet Phyllis! For your lovely sake
I weave these rambling numbers,
Because the morn is just awake
And keeps me from my slumbers;
Because I see your dainty dress
Among the clinging grasses,
Because you claim a soft caress
From every breeze that passes.

Because we've passed some joyous days,
A thousand charming hours,
Among your mazy garden ways,
Embowered with your flowers;
Because whene'er I hear your words
Some pleasant feeling lingers,
Because I think your heart has chords
That vibrate to your fingers.

Because you've got those long, soft curls
I've sworn should deck my goddess;
Because you're not like other girls,
All rustle, blush and bodice.
Because I think you'd scarce refuse
To sew one on a button;
Because I know you'd sometimes choose
To dine on simple mutton.

Because your tiny little nose
Turns up so pert and funny;
Because I know you choose your beaux
More for their mirth than money;
Because I think you'd rather twirl
A waltz, with me to guide you,
Than talk small nonsense to a churl
With countless wealth beside you.

Because I think I'm just so weak
As some of these fine morrows,
To seek your garden there to speak
My story—and my sorrows.
Because the rest's a simple thing,
A matter quickly over,
A church, a priest, a sigh, a ring,
And a lifetime spent in clover.

A GORDON'S PRIDE

CHAPTER XII.

The love story enacted at St. Ina's Bay was a romantic one. Whatever might be the secrets and follies of Laurie Nugent's life, he was most certainly thoroughly in earnest now; whatever flirtations he might have indulged in, this was the one great master-passion of his life. It had taken complete possession of him. He would have given his life for the beautiful brown-haired girl whose smiles were glimpses of paradise to him. He would have given his life for her—yet he did not spare her, he had no pity for her, no remorse. His whole soul, every thought, every energy of his mind, was bent upon winning her. He seemed to have concentrated his very existence on that desire. But, knowing what he knew, why did he not spare her? Because his love was essentially selfish. He was capable of committing any crime for the sake of winning the girl he loved—would have hesitated at nothing; but he was not capable of sparing her, of saving her from himself, of giving her up and leaving her. His love was utterly selfish.

He was frightened at himself, at the vehemence of his own passion, at its ascendancy over him. There were times when he almost loathed himself because a woman's smile could make his sun, or her frown his shade. There were times when he wondered if it were possible that he could be the same cynical, careless man who had laughed at love, and thought of it only as a pastime.

The day had no brightness for Laurie Nugent until he had seen Ethel; he fell asleep with her name on his lips, he dreamed of her at night—fair, gracious, sweet, and winsome, yet so proud and reserved; he woke thinking of her, longing for the hour in which he should see her, thinking of a thousand pretty things that he would say to her. The world was wide, the world was large, but in it all he saw only Ethel Gordon—proud, beautiful, bewitching Ethel. He caught himself repeating her name as the words of a song. It was as though he had gathered every force of his mind and soul together, and had centered them on her. Love with such a man, in such force, was rather a passion than an affection. He had sworn to himself that he would win her, that the sweet face should shine upon him and no other, that her sweet lips should speak to him and no other man, of love.

Yet with it all he was prudent. He seldom spoke to Ethel in the presence of Lady Stafton—or Helen Digby; he knew that it would be hardly safe to do so—that, if they perceived any attention on his part, they would, after the fashion of chaperons, begin to make inquiries as to his position and fortune—such inquiries as would not suit him. So, with skill and adroitness worthy of a better cause, he continued to keep the elder ladies quite in ignorance of his friendship with Ethel.

When Miss Gordon was with them, he passed with a bow; if he spoke to them, he contented himself by looking at her. When his heart beat, and his pulse throbbed with impatience, he comforted himself by saying that very soon she should be his, free from all restraints, from all surveillance, Yet, with all his prudence and caution, he had some narrow escapes.

One morning Helen Digby was restless, and even before the early dawn found herself unable to sleep; she had dreams that frightened her, uneasy dreams of Ethel Gordon; and she rose, thinking the morning air would refresh her and drive the disagreeable phantoms away. She went out on the lawn, and there saw Ethel talking to Laurie Nugent; Ethel held in her hand some wild roses round which was entwined a spray of blue convolvulus. Miss Digby went up to her; she bowed coldly to Mr. Nugent, and laid one hand warningly on the girl's shoulder.

"Ethel," she said, "I did not know hat you were up and out."

"Did you not?" was the careless rejoinder. "I am out early every morning."

"I thought myself very fortunate in meeting Miss Gordon," said Laurie Nugent, with a coldly polite bow; "it is not often that ladies believe the morning air to be beneficial."

He passed on, as though he had just stopped to exchange a morning greeting with Ethel, and then Helen Digby turned gravely to the young girl.

"My dearest Ethel," she said, "I do not like to seem officious, but your father trusted you entirely to me—so entirely, that I feel bound to see that you form no new friendships unless they are such as he would sanction."

"My father never interfered with me in that way himself," interrupted Ethel, quickly.

"Perhaps not, my dear; but then the circumstances were different. You had none but old friends around you, you were not among strangers, and your father, of course, could do as he liked."

"Equally, of course, can I," said Ethel proudly. "Will you explain, Miss Digby, what you mean, and to what you are alluding?"

"Certainly I will, Ethel—plain speaking suits us both best. I saw you talking to Mr. Nugent: now, I merely say, my dear child, be cautious."

"Cautious of what? Mr. Nugent is an acquaintance of yours—a friend of your friends, I have heard you say."

"I grant it; a woman of my age, Ethel, may form acquaintances that a young girl had better not form. I say nothing about Mr. Nugent—nothing against him, for I know nothing; but I think you had better avoid him."

"You will pardon me if I ask why," said Ethel; and Miss Digby saw the gleam of defiance on her beautiful face.

"In the first place, we know nothing of him, except that he is a friend of Lady Delamaine's; in the second, I tell you frankly, I do not like his face."

"Why do you not like it?" asked Ethel.

"I cannot tell. It looks to me like a false face. It is not the face of a good man. There is cunning in the sharp eyes, and cruelty on the thin lips."

"You are prejudiced," said Ethel, coldly. "I have never heard of any sensible person disliking a man for the color of his eyes or the shape of his lips."

"Ethel, you will not understand me. It is not that. I say the expression of the face is bad—and I am sure it is not the face of a good man. Mind, I know nothing against Mr. Nugent; but nature never made a mistake in her handwriting, and she has written 'Beware' on his face."

Ethel looked up at her, and the defiance deepened on her face.

"Before you fatigue yourself by arguing any further, Miss Digby, will you tell me in what way Mr. Nugent concerns me?"

There was such scornful pride in the beautiful eyes that Helen Digby hastened to explain herself more fully.

"I do not suspect that there is anything clandestine between you, my dearest Ethel—I—have never thought of such a thing. I only wish to warn you. You are very young, Mr. Nugent is very handsome—a perfect man of the world—and I think it best to warn you."

"You must be more explicit still, Miss Digby."

Helen Digby sighed. Her charge was terribly perverse.

"I wish to warn you very distinctly and clearly against Mr. Nugent, Ethel. You are very lovely, my dear, and, naturally enough, he must admire you. He may pay you compliments, and flatter you; do not believe him, do not trust him, do not put faith in anything he may say."

"You are supposing, Miss Digby, that I am not old enough to take care of myself."

"No, Ethel, I am only supposing that you are inexperienced. I should not like Sir Leonard to think that I had not taken good care of you."

"And I should like to show that I was able to take better care of myself than you could of me," retorted Ethel; and with those words, proudly spoken, she walked away, leaving Helen Digby to her own reflections.

That was the turning of the scale; from that day the balance weighed in Laurie Nugent's favor. That Miss Digby disliked him and had warned her against him was quite sufficient to make Ethel Gordon like him and incline in his favor. Helen Digby could not have done anything more fatal than express distrust of him. If Ethel could have acted as she liked, she would have talked to him more than before, and it would always have been in the presence of Miss Digby; but Laurie Nugent was wiser. He saw by Helen's face that she had not been quite pleased at seeing Ethel with him on the lawn.

"Discretion is the better part of valor," he said to himself. "If Miss Digby should suspect what I have sworn, she will take Ethel where I cannot follow, and then I must lose her; but, if I use a little self-control, she will not even suspect."

So for the next few days, although it cost him more than he would have cared to acknowledge, he did not once approach Ethel—he did not even seek an opportunity of addressing her chaperon.

"She shall not think me eager; she shall find me perfectly indifferent," he said; and Ethel was surprised to find how much she missed him.

Helen Digby, like the noble, simple unsuspecting woman she was, laughed at herself for her suspicion. It had been only a passing thought, an idea that came from seeing them together, which she laughed at now. Laurie Nugent appeared to be sublimely indifferent to Ethel, and she, proud, cold, and haughty, would never care for any one. Helen Digby was quite at her ease, and in a few days had forgotten the circumstance, or, if she remembered it, it was only with a smile.

CHAPTER XIII.

"The time has seemed so long since we spoke," said Laurie Nugent to Miss Gordon, several days after the lawn incident, "that I wonder how I have lived through it."

"I do not see why you should not have spoken to me as usual," observed Ethel.

He gave one quick, shrewd glance at her—the beautiful face was quite calm and serene.

"I thought Miss Digby seemed displeased on Tuesday morning when she saw you speaking to me on the lawn, and, as I would not for worlds subject you to her displeasure, I thought it better not to address you."

He knew that the arrow had gone home when she drew her slender figure to its full height.

"Miss Digby's pleasure or displeasure affects me but very little," she said. And then Laurie Nugent knew that he held the key to the whole situation. The girl disliked her guardian, and would do anything to vex her.

"That was Tuesday," he said, "and this is Sunday. How I have lived through the week I cannot tell; it has seemed to me a century long."

It was Sunday evening, and the chiming of the Sabbath bells mingled with the music of the waves—a calm, beautiful evening, when all nature seemed to know that Heaven's calm rested upon it. The sweet chime of the bells sounded from the distant church spire.

Laurie Nugent's diplomacy was strikingly successful that bright Sunday evening. From some of the satelites who were in his pay he had heard that Miss Gordon was not going to church, and that Miss Digby and Lady Stafton were.

"They will never leave her here alone," he thought, "if they knew that I am not going."

So half an hour before church time he framed an excuse to speak to Miss Digby, and then casually mentioned that he intended going through the woods to Skilton Old Church, as it was called.

Miss Digby and Lady Stafton set out, leaving Ethel alone. Lady Stafton had said something about the propriety of so leaving her, but Miss Digby, believing that no one was in the hotel but the manager, the servants, and a few lady guests, declined to interfere.

"It is hard enough to exercise any authority over her when the object is an important one," she said. "I must not try her too far by interfering without cause."

So the elder ladies went to church, and Ethel went to her favorite spot to hear the chiming of the bells. She looked up in surprise when Laurie Nugent appeared suddenly by her side.

"I thought you were going to church," she said.

Again he gave her one quick glance; the beautiful face was quite serene; there was no suspicion of his strategy.

"I did intend going," he replied; "but I changed my mind."

"I thought that was only a lady's privilege," rejoined Ethel, with a smile so bright and beautful that he took courage and flung himself on the rich, thick clover at her feet.

"How sweet and sad those bells are!" he said, suddenly. "How calm and still the evening is! Have the birds a Sunday of their own, I wonder? Near to my window there is a great elm-tree, and there has been such a solemn cawing of the rooks."

"When I was a child," observed Ethel, "I always thought the sunshine was of a different color on Sundays—it seemed to have a more golden mellow light."

When she was a child! As though she were anything else then! He looked up into the beautiful girlish face; it was so kind and sweet that he took courage and told her how cruelly long that week had seemed to him, in which he had hardly seen her.

And then—they seemed such old friends—she told him her simple story—how she had for so long been a petted, spoiled, beloved darling, the pride of her father's life; how she had ruled with easy fantastic sway the entire household, and how dearly she had loved that sway; how her love and her affection seemed to fill her father's life; and how suddenly this happy state of things had ended—how her father, having begun to find her full of faults, had determined to marry again, and had left her to learn the difficult lesson of obedience from her future step-mother.

"It seems very hard," he said; "I do sympathize with you. One can never throw off the habit of a lifetime."

So, gradually, by kind, gentle words, and delicately veiled expressions of dislike to Helen Digby, he led her on until he knew the simple story of her life by heart. He understood that Sir Leonard had repented when too late of the indulgence with which he had treated his daughter; he understood that the second marriage was more for her sake than his own, to provide her with a wise, sensible womanly guide.

"I suppose," he said, "that in all your life until now you have never been opposed or contradicted—you have done just as you would?"

She looked up at him brightly. "Papa liked my rule," she said, "and I made every one happy."

It pleased her to hear kind words from him. The scene was picturesque, the hour pleasant, the sound of those murmured words delightful; and on this evening Laurie Nugent said more than he ever said before. He told her how he had missed her; and there was such a ring of true passion in his words that proud Ethel was subdued as she listened.

"You think, because I have known you so short a time, I must be exaggerating. Ah, no, the brightness of day, the brightness of dawn comes with your presence. The flowers around us here are fair, but none are so fair as you; the gleam of the sun is bright, but it is not so bright as you; the sound of your voice is sweeter than the chiming of those Sabbath bells, or the music of the birds. When I look at you, all my life seems complete; the fairest dreams I have ever had are realized. I could worship you as men of old worshipped goddesses."

She smiled as she listened. He would have been better pleased if her dark, proud eyes had drooped, and her face had flushed. She smiled serenely, as she would have smiled at the words of a pleasant poem or the notes of a beautiful song. Still, she was not angry—and that was one point gained. If she would only listen to his pleadings—to all the love stories that he knew so well how to tell—he felt sure that he should win her in time.

"You can imagine how those who have lived for months in darkness long for the blessed light of the sun," he said. "So have I longed to see you."

She laughed a low sweet musical laugh.

"What am I to you," she said, "that you should wish to see me?"

He looked up into her face with a glance that stirred the depths of her heart.

"What are you to me!" he echoed. "Miss Gordon, all words fail me when I try to answer that question. What is the light of day to an imprisoned man? What is the sun to the world—the dew to the flowers—sweet dropping rain to thirsty plants? What is grateful shade to a sun-scorched traveller—the sight of land to a storm-tossed sailor? What are you to me? If from sunrise to sunset I sat and spoke to you of nothing else, I could not tell you what you are to me."

She glanced at him with the most natural and charming surprise in her dark eyes, the lovely dimpled lips were smiling; there was no confusion, no embarrassment in her manner, and, looking at her, Laurie Nugent wondered if she loved him—if ever he should win her—or if he should have to leave her at last.

"I have not displeased you I trust," he said, looking at the beautiful downcast face. "You asked me the question so suddenly I was taken by surprise. If all the poetry in the world were compressed into a single song, it could not describe my affection for you—if all the love that has ever been felt by mortal men could be placed in one heart, it would still fall far short of the love I feel for you."

The glanced at him quickly.

"You love me, then?" she queried, in a voice that breathed sweetest music.

"I love you!" he repeated—and the sound of his words startled him even more than it did Ethel Gordon.

They sat for some minutes in silence, while the chiming of the bells floated around them.

"I love you!" repeated Laurie Nugent. "I have summoned courage at last to say so. I loved you the first moment that I saw you, and I shall love you until I die. I know it is presumption. You are far above me as the blue sky or the golden sun; but I love you, and by the ladder of love I hope to climb to your side."

He caught her white hands in a passionate grasp, so tightly as almost to cause her to cry aloud.

"What the men of old did to win the women they loved I would do, Ethel. I would serve for you twice seven years, content if I might win you at last; I would love you all my life, and be content to win one word, one smile, in return, as I lay dying; I would go out and fight for you as did the heroes of old; I would live for you, I would die for you; for I love you, Ethel, as no man has ever loved a woman before."

His voice died away in passionate murmur, and he buried his face in the silken, shining folds of her dress. She sat silent and motionless, for his words had fallen upon her with a blank surprise—she had not expected them.

"Ethel," he continued, "I have nothing to offer you that is worthy of you. What would be worthy? If I had all the world's wealth, and could lay it at your feet, it would be unworthy of you. If I were an emperor, and could raise you to the throne by my side, and could give you the crown from my brow, it would be unworthy of you. I can give you nothing but the deep passionate love of my heart, my faith, my truth, my life."

He paused again, with the last word trembling on his lips. Her proud, frank eyes were shining down upon him, but there was no confusion in her face, no hesitation in her manner.

"Why do you love me so much?" she asked, with the simple wonder of a child. "I do not understand it."

"I cannot tell you, Ethel. Why do I love you? I cannot help it. I loved you before I knew your name, or had heard you speak. My heart went from me in the first glimpse I had of your beautiful face. Ask the birds why they sing, the flowers why they bloom, the sun why it shines. It would be easier for those to answer than for me to say why I love you. I cannot help it. It is my destiny, and no fairer one was ever given to man."

He raised his handsome head, and looked up into the calm, proud, severe face.

"I am almost frightened at my own presumption," he continued; "it is as if a slave had dared to raise his eyes to the fairest, the proudest, the brightest of queens. Ethel, say you are not angry with me."

"I am not angry," she replied.

"You will think I grow courageous with kindness. Say even more than that—what will you give me in return for my great love?"

"I do not know," she answered; and there was a grace so childlike, so innocent, so pure in her looks and word that once more the impulse was strong upon him to save her from himself. Only one moment did it last, and then the selfish, passionate love rose in his heart, and he was kneeling at her feet.

"Ethel, I pray you give me something in return for my love—give me liking that will in time become love. Bid me do something that I can prove how dearly I love you. Do not send me from you to despair and death. I am a strong and a proud man; my pride and strength, with my love and my life, are lying at your feet—stoop and raise them, Ethel."

He could not have spoke more effectively; one of Ethel's weakest points was this love of power to which he now appealed. It was something to find that this strong, handsome, powerful man had laid his life in her hands—knelt at her feet, praying for one kind word from her. It flattered her; she had fancied herself so neglected, she had been deposed from her natural sovereignty, and it was pleasant to find that in one man's heart she reigned a most triumphant queen.

It was not love that caused her to leave her white hand in his passionate grasp—it was not love that caused her to droop her beautiful face over him—it was not love that shone in her eyes and trembled on her lips. It was only gratified vanity—gratified love of power.

"Ethel, say you will love me," he said. "Say you will make some little return for my deep love."

"I will," she responded; "at least I will try."

Once again he buried his face in the shining, silken folds, and she saw his strong frame trembling. Something like a drawn sigh escaped his lips.

"I was afraid," he said, in a low voice. "I was sorely frightened, Ethel; for I felt myself quite unworthy of you."

Then he sat by her side and talked to her until the girl fancied that she was transported to some other sphere. It was pleasant to hear how beautiful she was, how completely she had conquered him, how strong were the chains that bound him to her, how deeply and truly he loved her. It was so pleasant that she abandoned herself to the charm, and Laurie Nugent, with a wild, exultant triumph, said to himself that he had won her—that she was his own.

The golden light of the evening sun faded into the purple gloaming, the vesper song of the birds gradually ceased, but still they sat on.

At length Laurie Nugent rose.

"It is growing late," he said. "Ethel, my darling—I may call you darling now, and there is no sweeter word—I hardly like to propose it, but do you not think it would be better not to say anything at present to Miss Digby?"

She raised her head proudly, with that haughty glance that he knew so well.

"Do you suppose I should ever say anything to Miss Digby? It is no business of hers—it concerns papa. When I think it needful I shall write to him."

"Miss Digby would take the keenest pleasure in parting us," observed Mr. Nugent—"I am quite sure of that; and, O, Ethel! let me have a few days' happiness, a few days of such unutterable bliss as rarely falls to man's lot! You will not even tell your father yet?"

"Not unless you wish me to do so," she replied.

"He would be sure to write and place the whole matter in Miss Digby's hands; and then she would triumph. Keep your own sweet counsel, Ethel."

"Miss Digby shall never triumph over me," she said, proudly.

"And, Ethel, now that you have accepted me for your knight, you will consent sometimes to see me—you will let me join you in your evening rambles—you will be kind to me for the sake of the great and mighty love I bear you?"

She promised, and bending his handsome head he kissed the white, soft hands—he looked at the beautiful face, but dared not touch it with his lips—and then, slowly and reluctantly, he went away through the silent woods.

Helen Digby wondered that night at Ethel; the girl looked so beautiful, with a softened light on her face, and a dreamy expression in her eyes. Her words were unusually gentle, her manner had more than its ordinary charm. Helen was delighted, and cherished the vain hope that Ethel was beginning to like her at last. When the ladies had discussed the sermon, the congregation, and the long, pleasant walk home, Lady Stafton said—

"I did not see Mr. Nugent. He went to the old church, I suppose."

"I am almost glad we did not see him," remarked Miss Digby. "I really cannot tell why, but I am beginning to have a strange mistrust of him. I do not like Mr. Nugent."

A moment afterward, looking at Ethel, she saw the fair young face crimson, and Helen sighed as she wondered at it.

"You are prejudiced, Helen," said Lady Stafton, laughing. "There is nothing particular in Mr. Nugent to admire, nor do I see anything to dislike."

Then Ethel rose and said good-night. Helen Digby looked pleased.

"Ethel is beginning to like me and to feel more at home with me," she said. "How happy I shall be when she cares for me! She is a grand, noble, generous girl, despite her pride and her love of power. I cannot help longing for her affection."

Lady Stafton laughed again, thinking her friend sentimental, while Ethel went to her room to dream once more of the scene in the woods.

Laurie Nugent was triumphant; he had barely hoped for so great a success. Ethel was so beautiful, so haughty, her smiles, though so sweet, were so rare, that he had hardly dared to hope that Ethel would listen to him. On the calm Sabbath evening he walked through the silent woods, feeling, with his poetical, beauty-loving nature, the charm of the scene around him. Yet no beauty, no charm tempted him to spare Ethel. He thought of her proud, fair young beauty—of her high spirit, her noble nature; he wondered how she would endure the life that lay before her; he wondered whether in the time to come she would dislike him, hate him, loathe him. He wondered over all these things, yet the idea of sparing her, of saving her, was beyond him—he was not capable of the sacrifice.

"I must hasten matters now," he said, as he stopped to gather a spray of wild clematis. "I cannot hide from myself that I increase the chances of danger by lingering here. Ah, me! if life could be passed among love and flowers, I, for one, should be quite content."

CHAPTER XIV.

Did she love him, or did she not? That was a question Laurie Nugent often asked himself during the next few days. He had deemed himself well versed in the ways of women; he thought, with a half contemptuous smile, of how easily they were understood, of how easily they were managed; he wondered at the nonsense men wrote and uttered about the impossibility of understanding the fairer half of creation. But this young girl puzzled him. She had met him and talked with him; she had even answered some of the passionate love-letters he had written to her; but her proud, serene calm fairly puzzled him.

Her face never changed its color for him, her eyes never drooped beneath his, her hands never trembled when he held them in a warm, loving clasp; she had none of the pretty shyness that he thought belonged naturally to young girls in love; she did not seem to study his looks and words as others had done; she was kind, gracious, gentle, but she never lost her proud serenity, her dignified calm. He thought much of it, but he could not tell whether she loved him.

Nor had Ethel answered a like question satisfactorily to herself. It was very pleasant to be wooed in so chivalrous a fashion—to see a tall, strong, handsome man submissive as a child—to know that he obeyed her slightest wish, that he trembled at her frown, that her least word could raise him to heaven, or fling him into the depths of despair. Ethel Gordon's love of power was gratified by her ascendency over Laurie Nugent. It was flattering to see the color change on his handsome face, the strong hand tremble at her approach. But, if all she had read of love in posey was true, she did not love him. She believed she did. The break in the calm monotony of her life had been more than pleasant; the stir of gratified vanity, the love of rule, the desire of doing something that Miss Digby did not approve, the wish to oppose her—the delightful consciousness of disobeying her—all these things Ethel Gordon mistook for love.

And so mistaking, she was bitterly disappointed. She had now reached the shores of that golden land that in the distance had so completely charmed her. She found them bleak and barren; the bright fairy-land was but a dry waste. She sighed deeply as she said to herself that she was in love, and that love after all was not what she had imagined. She recalled the glowing verses of the poets who had written of it, the glorious melodies that told of it, the books written in eloquent words with love for a theme—and that was all.

(To be continued.)

Mr. W. W. Corcoran, the millionaire banker and philanthropist of Washington, is said to be exceedingly proud of his ancestry. He glories in the fact that his father was only a poor, honest shoemaker, and he treasures the old cobbler's shop sign board among his choicest possessions.

An orator, holding forth in favor of "woman, dear, divine woman," concludes thus: "Oh, my hearers, depend upon it, nothing beats a good wife." "I beg your pardon," replied one of his auditors, "a bad husband does."