LOST ALICE

CHAPTER I.

Why did I marry her? I often asked myself the question, in the days that succeeded our honeymoon. By right, I should have married no one. Yet I loved her, as I love her still.

She was, perhaps, the strangest character of her age. In her girlhood I could not comprehend her; and often think when I raise my eyes to her grave, quiet face, as she sits opposite me at dinner, that I do not comprehend her yet. There are many thoughts working in her brain of which I know nothing, and flashes of feeling look out at her eyes now and then and go back again, as captives might steal a glimpse of the outer world through their prison bars, and turn to their brick-walled solitude once more. She is my wife. I have her and hold her as no other can. She bears my name, and sits at the head of my table; she rides beside me in my carriage, or takes my arm as we walk; and yet I know and feel, all the time, that the darling of my past has fled from me for ever, and that it is only the ghost of the gay Alice whom I won in all the bloom of her bright youth, that lingers near me now.

She was not a child when I married her, though she was very young. I mean, that life had taught her lessons which are generally given to the grey-haired, and had laid burdens upon her which belong of right to the old. She had been an unloved child, and at the age of sixteen she was left to herself, and entirely dependent on her own exertions. Friends and family she had none, so she was accustomed laughingly to say; but I have since found that her sisters were living, and in happy homes, even at the time when she accepted that awful trust of herself, and went out into the great world to fulfil it. Of this part of her life she never speaks; but one who knew her then has told me much. It was a time of struggle and pain, as well it might have been. Fresh from the life of a large boarding-school, she was little fitted for the bustle of a great selfish city; and the tears came to my eyes as I think, with a kind of wonder, on the child who pushed her way through difficulties at which strong men have quailed, and made herself a name, and a position, and a home. She was a writer,—at first a drudge, for the weekly press, poorly paid, and unappreciated. By-and-by, brighter days dawned, and the wolf went away from the door. She was admired, read, sought after, and—above all—paid. Even then she could not use the wisdom she had purchased at so dear a rate. She held her heart in her hand, and it was wrung andt orture every day.

"I may as well stop breathing as stop loving," she would say, with a happy smile. "Don't talk to me about my folly. Let me go on with my toys; and, if they break in my hand, you cannot help it, and I shall not come to you for sympathy."

She was not beautiful; but something —whether it was her bright, happy face, or the restless gaiety of her manner—bewitched people, and made them like her. Men did the maddest things imaginable for her sake: and not only young men in whom folly was pardonable, but those who should have been too wise to be caught by the sparkle of her smile, or the gay ringing of her laugh. She did not trust them; her early life had taught her better; but I think she liked them for awhile, till some newer fancy came, and then she danced past them, and was gone.

It was in the country that I met her first; and there she was more herself than in the city. We were distant relatives, though we had never seen each other, and the Fates sent me to spend my summer vacation with my mother's aunt, in a country village, where she was already domesticated. Had I known this, I should have kept my distance; for it was only a fourteenth or fifteenth cousinship that lay between us, and I had a kind of horror of her. I hardly knew why. I was a steady-going, quiet sort of lawyer, and hated to have my short holiday rest and quiet broken in upon by a fine lady. I said as much to my aunt, in return for her announcement of "Alice Kent is here," with which she greeted me. She looker over her spectacles in quiet wonder as I gave her a slight sketch of the lady's city life, as I had had it from the lips of "Mrs. Grundy" herself.

"Well—live and learn, they say. But whoever would think it was our Alice you are talking of, Frank! However, I'll say no more about her! You'll have plenty of time to get acquainted with her, in the month you mean to pass here. And we are glad to see you, and your bed-room is ready,—the one you used to like."

I took up my hat, and strolled away to have a look at the farm. By-and-by, I got over the orchard wall, and crossed the brook, and the high road, and went out into the grove behind the house, whose farthest trees were growing on the side of the hill which looked so blue and distant from my chamber window. It was an old favorite place of mine. A broad wagon led through the woods, out to a clearing on the other side, where was a little sheet of water, called The Fairy's Looking-glass, and a beautiful view of a lovely country, with the deep green hills lying down in the distance, wrapped in a soft fleecy mantle of cloud and haze. I could think of nothing, when I stood there, on a fine sunshiny day, but the long gaze of Bunyan's Pilgrim through the shepherd's glass, at the beautiful city towards which he was journeying. And it seemed sometimes as if I could wander "over the hills and far away," and lose myself in one of the fair valleys at the foot of those hills, and be content never to come out and face the weary world any more.

I walked slowly through the woods, with the sunshine falling through the green leaves of the young beeches in chequered radiance on my path, drawing in long breaths of the fresh air, and feeling a tingling in my veins and a glow at my heart, as if the blood were flowing newly there, until I came to the little circular grove of pines and hemlocks that led out upon the Fairy's Looking-glass. Something stirred as I pierced my way through the branches, and I heard a low growl.

A girl was half-sitting, half-lying in the sunshine beside the little lake, throwing pebbles into the water, and watching the ripples that spread and widened to the other shore. A great black Newfoundland dog was standing between me and her, showing a formidable row of strong white teeth, and looking me threateningly in the face.

She started, and looked sharply round, and saw me standing in the little grove with the dog between us. She burst out laughing.

I felt that I was cutting rather a ridiculous figure, but I put a bold face upon the matter, and asked coolly.

"Are you Alice Kent?"

"People call me so."

"Then I suppose I may call you cousin, for I am Frank Atherton?"

"Cousin Frank! We have been expecting you this week. When did you come?"

"Just now."

She made room for me beside her. We talked long, about our family, our mutual friends, and the old homestead of the Athertons, which she had seen, though I had not. She told me about the house, and our cousins who were then living there, and I sat listening, looking now and then at her, as she sat with the sunshine falling round her, and the great dog lying at her feet. I wondered, almost as my aunt had done, if this was indeed the Alice Kent of whom I had heard so much. She was dressed plainly, very plainly, in a kind of grey material, that fell around her in light soft folds. A knot of plain blue ribbon fastened her linen collar, and a gypsy hat, lying beside her, was trimmed with the same color. Her watch chain, like a thread of gold, and a diamond ring, were the only ornaments she wore. Yet I had never seen a dress I had liked so well. She was tall, too tall, I should have said, had she been any one else; for, when we were standing, her head was almost on a level with mine, and slender, and quick and agile in all her movements. Her brown hair was soft and pretty, but she wore it carelessly pushed away from her forehead: not arranged with that nicety I should have expected in a city belle. Her features were irregular, full of life and spirit, but decidedly plain: her complexion fair, her mouth rather large, frank and smiling, her eyebrows arched, as if they were asking questions; and her eyes large, and of a soft dark grey, very pleasant to look into, very puzzling too, as I found afterwards to my cost. Those eyes were the only beauty she possessed, and she unconsciously made the most of them. Had she been a Carmelite nun, she would have talked with them: she could not have helped it. When they laughed, it seemed their normal state—the bright beaming glance they gave; but, when they darkened suddenly and grew softer and deeper, and looked up into the face of any unfortunate wight with an expression peculiar to themselves, heaven help him!

Though I had known her only five minutes, I felt this, when I chanced to look up and meet a curious glance she had fixed upon me. She had ceased to talk and was sitting, with her lips apart and a lovely color mantling on her cheek, studying my face intently, when our eyes met. There was an electric kind of shock in the gaze. I saw the color deepen and go up to her forehead, and a shiver ran over me from head to foot. It was dangerous for me to watch that blush, but I did; and I longed to know its cause, and wondered what thought had brought it.

"Fred, bring me my hat," she said to her dog affecting to yawn. "It is time for us to go home to supper, I suppose. Are you hungry, cousin Frank?"

"Yes—no," I answered, with my thought still running on the blush.

She laughed good-naturedly, and took the hat from the Newfoundland, who had brought it in his mouth.

"How fond you are of that great dog," I said, as we rose from our seat beneath the tree.

"Fond of him?" She stooped down over him with a sudden impetuous movement, took his head between her two hands, and kissed the beauty-spot on his forehead. "Fond of him, cousin Frank? Why, the dog is my idol! He is the only thing on earth who is or has been true to me, and the only thing—" She stopped short, and colored.

"That you have been true to," I said, finishing the sentence for her.

"So people say," she answered with a laugh. "But look at him—look at those beautiful eyes, and tell me if any one could help loving him. My poor old Fred! So honest in this weary world."

She sighed, and patted his head again, and he stood wagging his tail and looking up into her face, with eyes that were as she had said, beautiful, and what was better far, brimful of love and honesty.

"I doubt if you will keep pace with us," she said, after we had walked a few steps; "and Fred is longing for a race; I always give him one through the woods. Would you mind?"

"Oh, dear, no!"

The next moment she was off like the wind, and the dog tearing after her, barking till the woods rang again. I saw her that night no more.

CHAPTER II.

I was as I have already said, a grave steady-going lawyer, verging towards a respectable middle age, with one or two gray hairs showing among my black locks. I had had my dreams and fancies, and my hot, eager, generous youth, like most other men; and they had passed away. But one thing I had missed (save in my dreams), and that was a woman's love.

If I ever gave my visions a body and a name, they were totally unlike all the realities I had ever seen. The wife of my fireside reveries was a slight, delicate, gentle creature, with a pure pale face, sweet lips, the bluest and clearest of eyes, the softest and finest of golden hair, and a voice low and sweet, like the murmurings of an Aeolian harp. And she sat by my chair in silence; loving me silently, and her name was Mary. I dare say, if I had met the original of this placid picture in life, I should have wooed and won her, and have been utterly miserable.

So, as a matter of course, I fell into danger now. When Alice Kent went singing and dancing through the house, leaving every door and window open as she went, I used often to lay down my pen and look after her, and feel as if the sun shone brighter for her being there. When she raced through the grove or orchard with the great dog at her heels, I smiled, and patted Fred on the head: when she rode past the house at a hand gallop on her gray pony, Fra Diavolo, and leaped him over the garden gate, and shook her whip saucily in my face, I laid aside my book to admire her riding, and never thought her unwomanly or ungraceful.

We grew to be great friends— like brother and sister, I used to say to myself. How that glided gradually into loving, I could not have told. I met her one day in the village street. I turned a corner, and came upon her suddenly. She was walking slowly along, with her dog beside her, and her eyes fixed upon the ground, looking graver and more thoughtful than I had ever seen her before. At sight of me her whole face brightened suddenly; yet she passed me with a slight nod and smile, and took her way towards home. Seeing that flash of light play over her grave face, and feeling the sudden bound with which my heart sprang up to meet it, I knew what we were to each other.

It was late when I reached home, after a musing walk. The farmer and his wife had gone to bed, the children were at a merry-making at the next house, and a solitary light burned from the parlor window, which was open. The full moon shown fairly in the sky without a cloud. I unfastened the gate and went in; and there in the open door sat Alice, with a light shawl thrown over her shoulders, her head resting on the shaggy coat of the Newfoundland dog. His beautiful brown eyes watched me as I came up the path, but he did not stir.

I sat down near her; but on the lower step, so that I could look up in her face.

"Alice, you do not look well."

"But I am. Quite well. I am going away to-morrow."

"Going away! Where?"

"Home. To London. Well? What ails you, cousin Frank? Did you never hear of any one who went to London before?"

"Yes: but why do you go?"

"Why?" She opened her eyes and looked at me. "For many reasons. Firstly, I only came for six weeks, and I have stayed nearly three months; secondly, because I have business which can be put off no longer; and thirdly, because my friends are wondering what on earth keeps me here so long (they will say soon, it is you, Frank). They vow they cannot do without me any longer, and it is pleasant to be missed, you know."

"And so you are going back to the old life, Alice?" And by-and-by I suppose you will marry?"

I would not advise any man, be he old or young, in case he does not think it wise or purdent to marry the woman he loves, to linger with her in the doorway of a silent farmhouse, and hold her hand, and look out upon a moonlight night. The touch of the small slight fingers was playing the mischief with my good resolutions, and my wisdom (if I had any).

"Alice," I said, softly; and I almost started, as she did at the sound of my own voice, it was so changed. "Alice, we have been very happy here."

"Very."

I took both her hands, and held them close in mine. But she would not look at me, though her face was turned that way.

"There is a great difference between us, dear Alice. I am much older than you, and much graver. I have never loved any woman but you in my life, while you have charmed a thousand hearts, and had a thousand fancies. If you were what the world thinks you, and what you try to make yourself out to be, I should say no more than this—I love you. But I know you have a heart. I know you can love, if you will; and can be true if you will. And so I beseech you to talk to me honestly, and tell me if you can love me, or if you do. I am not used to asking such questions of ladies, Alice, and I may seem rough and rude; but believe me, when I say you have won my whole heart, and I cannot be happy without you."

"Yes, I do believe you," she said.

"But do you trust me, and do you love me?"

She might trifle with a trifler, but she was earnest enough with me.

"I trust you, and I love you," she answered, frankly. "Are you wondering why I can stand before you, and speak so calmly? Because, I do not think I shall ever marry you. You do not love me, as I have always said my husband should love me. I am wayward and exacting, and I should weary your life out by my constant craving for tenderness. I was made to be petted Frank; and you, though a loving, are not an affectionate man. You would wish me at the bottom of the Red Sea before we had been married a month; and, because you could not get me there, you would go to work and break my heart, by way of amusement. I know it as well as if I had seen it all—even now."

She looked at me, and all her woman's heart and nature were in her eyes. They spoke love and passion, and deep, deep tenderness—and all for me. Something leaped into life in my heart at that moment which I had never felt before—something that made my affection of the last few hours seem cold and dead beside its fervid glow. I had her in my arms within the instant—close—close to my heart.

"Alice! if ever man loved woman with heart and soul—madly and unreasonably if you will, but still truly and honestly—I love you, my darling."

"But will it last? O, Frank, will it last?"

I bent down, and our lips met in a long, fond kiss.

"You will be my wife, Alice?"

She leaned her pretty head against my arm, and her hand stole into mine again.

"Do you mean that for your answer? Am I to keep the hand, dear Alice, and call it mine?"

"If you will, Francis."

It was the first time she had ever given me that name. But she never called me by any other again until she ceased to love me; and it sounds sweetly in my memory now, and it will sound sweetly to my dying day.

(To Be Continued.)

Learn to laugh. A good laugh is better than medicine.

HOUSEHOLD.

ROAST FOWL.

If the following directions of a practical housewife are followed, a hen from four to six years old may be made not only as tender, but of richer flavor than her descendants:

The day before they are to be served take one or a pair of old hens and stew gently for four hours, allow to cool over night in the water in which they have been boiled, then roast in the usual way; that is, allow ten minutes to every pound, basting often with the drippings of roast beef or bacon fat, a large tablespoonful of which must be put in the pan with the chicken when first put in the oven. If young housekeepers would only awaken to the necessity of basting fowls often, they would avoid the dry meat that is too often found at otherwise daintily served tables.

The stuffing for fowls is also a rock upon which too many young housekeepers split, failing to realize the value of bee fsuet as teh foundation for the asme, using instead butter, which is far more expensive and much less satisfactory in its results. For a pair of chickens, take a cup of suet, finely chopped and free from strings, rub this between the hands into two cups of the crumbs of a stale loaf, a tablespoonful of chopped parsley and teaspoonful of chopped green thyme (or in the winter dried) and pepper and salt to taste; break an egg, without beating into this, stir with a fork to a paste, pat into balls and fill the crops of the fowls to a sightly plumpness, the remainder to be put inside. Such a stuffing or seasoning as this will be crisp yet moist, instead of the sloppy mouthful of salted and peppered bread one too often finds served as bird stuffing.

For ducks and geese, nicely boiled onions, well drained and chopped with sage and pepper and salt to taste is the proper stuffing, and they must never be offered without a generous dish of tart apple sauce, the snowy whiteness of which is attained by beating in half the juice of a lemon to each quart of sauce.

With chicken and game cranberry jelly is preferred by many to currant, and an easy and unfailing rule that is sure to "jell" is to boil a quart of the fruit first for one minute with quarter of a teacupful of water, then press through a bright tin colander or coarse hair sieve, return to the fire, let come to the boil with a large breakfast coffee cup heaping full of sugar and pour into the mold. This, made in the morning, will be properly stiff by evening, and will be just to the quivering stage without being too firm.

A thick chicken soup should always be made from the broth in which a fowl has been stewed, as when this is eaten the full nourishment of the chicken is obtained. Made as follows it is one of the most delectable soups ever tasted, once tried it will be a standing favorite, and is a recipe for which a notable cook is justly famous: Melt in a good-sized agate or porcelain-lined saucepan a heaping tablespoonful of butter; when boiling hot, but not brown stir in two scant tablespoonfuls of sifted flour, add salt and white pepper to taste, then stir slowly into a quart of the broth and a pint of milk boiling hot; stir until it is of the consistency of thick cream, and should invariably be served with Crouton. The last named are merely made from thick slices of a stale loaf cut into dice and thrown into deep, boiling lard to brown.

SWEEPING CARPETS.

Two things are to be observed in sweeping carpets, and that is to do the work well and do it slowly. In the first place, if the sweeping is poorly done it may as well have been left undone, for the carpet is still full of dust, which rises at every step and lodges on furniture and woodwork. If it is done in a hurry, the broom raises clouds of dust, which naturally settles back again on the carpet.

If possible, there should be two brooms, one for carpets and another for general use. The carpet broom should be as soft as can be procured. A stiff rough broom is extremely hard on any carpet, as it tears and frays it at every stroke. Before commencing to sweep all the furniture should be removed to another room, and cloths may be hung over the pictures. Then the wall should be brushed free of dust. A soft, clean cloth tied over the broom makes a convenient implement for wiping.

If the carpets are very dusty it may be necessary to sprinkle over them some coarse salt, damp sawdust, tea leaves, or even tiny bits of newspaper slightly dampened. These will attract and collect the dust, and may be brushed into the dust pan at intervals. The corners should receive special attention. A whisk broom is best for cleaning them, and also along the sides of the room. Short, even strokes of the broom collect the dust as no long,hurried strokes ever would, besides they raise comparatively little dust. The dust pan should be kept near by and the dust brushed into it every few feet. In this way the dust will not be distributed from one part of the room to another. If possible, the windows should be opened. After the sweeping is finished, a few minutes should elapse before dusting commences. This will give the dust time to settle.

A feather duster is "an illusion and a snare." Nothing is better than a soft cloth, preferably cotton, with just a suspicion of dampness in it. Such a dust cloth, if shook out of the window frequently during dusting will remove about all the dust. All the woodwork should receive attention before the furniture is put back into the room. If the carpets are not sufficiently clean after a careful sweeping, a cloth wrung out in water, in which has been mixed a little ammonia will brighten it up considerably. A stronger solution of ammonia and water will very often remove obstinate spots, which will not yield to soap and water.

There is more satisfaction in giving carpets a thorough cleaning than a haphazard one. In a room which is not in daily use, a careful cleaning should be sufficient for two weeks, except a little dusting now and then.

SOME GOOD RECIPES.

Milk Jelly for Invalids.—Necessary ingredients: Half a cowheel, one quart of milk, a two-inch stick of cinnamon and sugar to taste. Take half a prepared cowheel and cut it into small pieces, set it in a jar with the milk and cinnamon. Put the lid on the jar and tie a piece of paper tightly over it, set in a slow oven to stew for three hours. Then strain off the milk into a basin, take off any fat with white paper and sweeten to taste. When cold this jelly should be served with a little whipped cream or stewed fruit. The cowheel will make an excellent dish served with rich onion sauce.

Almond Cream Cake.—Sift one and one-half goblets of powdered sugar and one of flour, in which has been stirred a heaping teaspoonful of cream of tartar, and the beaten whites of ten eggs and stir gently; do not beat it. Bake in jelly pans. For cream, take a half-pint of sweet cream, yolks of three eggs, a tablespoonful of pulverized sugar, a teaspoonful of corn starch; dissolve starch smoothly with a little milk, beat yolks and sugar together with this; boil the cream, and stir these ingredients in, as for any cream cake filling, only make a little thicker; blanch and chop fine a half-pound of almonds and stir into the cream. Put together like jelly cake while icing is soft, and stick in a half-pound of almonds split in two.

Plum Pudding.—One pound of raisins, one pound of currants, half pound citron, one pound of beef suet, ten eggs, one pound sugar, one pint of breadcrumbs, soaked in milk, a little salt, a nutmeg or mace, flour added to make it stiff enough for the spoon to stand up right in it. Boil constantly five hours.

Fig Pudding.—One-quarter pound figs chopped fine, one-quarter pound breadcrumbs, one-quarter pound brown sugar, one-quarter pound suet, one-quarter pound of candied lemon peel and citron, one nutmeg, and five eggs, mix thoroughly, put into a mold and boil or steam four hours.

Mince Pies.—Three pounds of raisins, stone and chop a little; three pounds of currants, three pounds of sugar, three pounds of suet, chopped very fine; two ounces candied lemon peel, two ounces candied orange peel, six large apples, grated; one ounce of cinnamon, two nutmegs, the juice of three lemons, and rinds grated, and a half a pint of brandy.

English Mince Meat.—Two dozen greening apples, pared, cored, and chopped fine; two pounds of raisins, stoned and chopped, two pounds currants,washed and dried; two pounds of beef suet, chopped fine, without flour; one pound minced peel, chopped fine; half pound blanched sweet almonds, chopped fine; a quarter pound of mixed spice, one pound of white sugar; mix well, put in preserving pan at back of stove; let the mixture get well heated through to boiling point, occasionally stirring. Place in jars; when cold, seal; will keep any length of time; half the quantity may be used. If apples are not juicy enough,when the mixture has reached boiling point, add a little pure vinegar.

IN THE ANIMAL WORLD.

Peculiarities, Traits and Habits of Some of the Wild Animals.

The hog is a very sagacious beast.

No constricting snake is poisonous.

The wolf is more cunning than the fox.

The horse is more stubborn than the mule.

Some species of snakes are born cannibals.

The dog is the most intelligent of all animals.

No bad-tempered man can break a horse to perform.

One baby elephant will boss a whole herd of big ones.

The white clover is rank poison to the hippopotamus.

The wild buffalo is often more than a match for a lion.

The elephant is almost as amphibious as the hippopotamus.

The elephant can push many times more than it can pull.

The giraffe is dumb and was never known to utter any sound.

The polar bear is untamable. He is also partial to a sun bath.

The hippopotamus can be acclimated to live in very cold water.

Some elephants are exceedingly fond of plug tobacco and bad whiskey.

The smallest mouse will cause the biggest elephant to quake with fear.

Panthers when taken young make very docile and affectionate pets.

The rhinoceros is the most formidable and pugnacious of all wild beasts..

Don't trust to the fallacy that wild beasts can be controlled by the human eye.

A snake would starve to death rather than eat anything except living prey.

The parrot is but one among many species of birds that can be taught to speak.

America is the only country in which a baby elephant was ever born in captivity.

All animals are quick to recognize fear or ill-temper on the part of their keepers.

Lions born in captivity are more daneerous and harder to train than captured ones.

Johanna, the giantess gorilla, is insanely jealous. She would kill a dozen unarmed men.

With a single blow of his insignificant tail an elephant can knock out the strongest man.

Elephants form the strongest attachments for the horses and dogs with which they are associated.

Wild beasts vary in their moods. They often get the blues, at which times the keepers give them a wide berth.