CARRIED BY STORM.

BY MRS. MAY AGNES FLEMING,

AUTHOR OF "A MAD MARRIAGE," "A LITTLE QUEEN," &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

THE ABBOTTS OF ABBOTT WOOD.

Abbott Wood is a comfy mansion, and more than one skeleton abides therein.

It has been said that something of mystery hangs over, and makes interesting, the master of the house. Colonel Ventnor, riding with him one day, has seen a little corner of that dark curtain which shrouds his past lifted. It was at the time Ventnor Villa was being built. Mr. Abbott, glad of such a neighbour, had interested himself a good deal in the proceedings, and saved the colonel a number of trips down from the city.

Colonel Ventnor, a refined man in all his instincts, did not much like the rough and ready lord of Abbott Wood, but he was obliged by his good nature, and he accepted it. It has happened since four years before this memorable evening on which little Olga loses herself in the woods.

It is a dark and overcast autumn evening, threatening rain. Leaving the villa and the workmen, they ride along the high road, Mr. Abbott detailing with the gusto customary with him when talking of himself, some of his adventures as a broker and speculator.

Suddenly his horse shies as a man springs forward from under a tree, and stands directly before him.

"Hang you!" roars Mr. Abbot. "What the deuce are you about? You nearly threw me, you beggar! What d've mean by jumping before a gentleman's horse like this?"

"It is Sleaford," he says, "by G——"

Colonel Ventnor looks at him. He is a gentleman in the best sense of the word—he swears not at all!

Then he turns to the tramp. He is a worthy-enough-looking vagabond, as perfect a type of the killer and blackguard, he thinks, as he has ever seen.

"I will ride on, Mr. Abbott" he says, quietly. "Much obliged for your good nature about those men. Good night."

"Stay! Hold off!" cries Mr. Abbott.

The colour comes back with a purple rush to his face, his eyes looked wild and dilated.

"I—I do——. I have known this fellow in California. He's a poor wretch that need to work for me. I haven't anything to say to him in private. You needn't hurry on his account, you know."

"Oh, certainly not," responds Colonel Ventnor. "Still as there is a storm brewing, I think it will be well to get to the hotel at once, and so avoid a drenching. I will see you again before I return to town."

He hits his hat and rides away, but not before he has heard the hoarse laugh of the tramp as he lays his hand with the same impudent familiarity on Mr. Abbott's bridle.

Next day, when he returns to the villa, he finds that gentleman waiting for him, and issuing concerns orders to the masons.

He is almost offensive in his officious friendliness and voluble explanations.

"A poor beggar, sir, that I knew out in 'Frisco. Knew all sorts out there—hundreds of the great unwashed, miners, gamblers, blackleg, all sorts. Had to, you know, in my business. Sometimes made tools of them, too. A man has to handle dirty tools in most trades, you know. Sleaford his name is—Giles Sleaford—a harmless beggar, but lazy as the deuce. Think I must do something for the old acquaintance sake. Got a large family, too,—lots of boys and girls—quite a 'numerous fa her,' as they say. Where's the good of being as rich as Rothschild if a man's not to do good with it? Hang it all! Let us help one another, I say, and when we see an unfortunate chap down, let us set him on his legs again. I think I'll let Sleaford have the Red Farm. There's nobody there, and it's a capital bit of land. He wasn't half a bad sort. There were a plaguey deal worse fellows than Black Giles out in San Francisco."

Colonel Ventnor assents politely, and keeps his own opinion of Mr. Abbott's dark friend to himself. Mr. Abbott has been looking him in the eye in a very marked manner during this little speech. It is a glance that says, plainly enough, "This is my version of the affair—I expect you to believe it, or take the consequence." But Colonel Ventnor's quiet, high breeding is too much for such as Mr. Abbott always. It puts him in a client rage, much as his wife's calm, uplifted repose of manner does.

"Come then all!" he thinks. "These aristocrats are all alike. Look down on a man as the dirt on their feet if he hasn't brought up to parly-voo frainsey, and jabber German and that. And they can do it with a look, too, without a word of blustery or noise. I dare say man alive to stand up before a minister when she's in one of her write, speechless rages, and look her in the eye. I wish I knew how they do it."

He sighs, takes off his hat, scratches his head perplexedly with his big, brown, brawny hand, and slaps it on again a little more defiantly cocked than before.

"And now here's Black Giles," he thinks glumly. "As if I hadn't enough on my mind without him. I wonder how much he knows. I wonder——"

He mounts his horse and rides off, pondering gloomily, in the direction of the Red Farm. It was a different looking place in those days to that it became later. Mr. Abbott was a very thorough landlord; no tenant might wreck and ruin any farm of his. This Red Farm, so called from the colour of the house, was one of the holiest bits of land in the county, and in high cultivation.

And here the Sleaford family came, two boys, three girls, the youngest a mere child then, but a weird-looking, cowed, starveling—and squatted. It could not be called anything else. Giles Sleaford laughed from the first at the notion of his farming, or even making the present.

The boys were like wild Indians—they fished, shot, snared birds and rabbits, stole fruit, robbed orchards, were a nuisance generally, and let the farm look after itself. The girls were of the same go-as-you-will stamp, boisterous young hoydens, handsome "prize animal" sort of damsels, with flashing black eyes, and impudent retorts for all who accost them. The neighbours wonder—why does Mr. Abbott, that most particular gentleman, let this wild lot ruin the Red Farm, and bear it like the meekest of men? Why does Giles Sleaford always have well filled pockets, good horses and clothes, whether he works or idles? They ask the question more than once, and he laughs loud and long.

"Why does he?" he cries. "Why, love you, that's little of what he would do for me. He loves me like a brother. He's an uncommon fine gentleman, ain't he? And got a lovely place, and a handsome wife, so I hear. I haven't been there to leave my card yet. Why does he? Bless your souls, he would turn out of his big house and give it to me, if I cooxed him hard enough."

Brightrook does not know what to make of it. It whispers a good deal, and looks furtively at the rich man riding by. What secret has he in his life that Giles Sleaford is paid to keep? He looks like a man who might have a dark record behind him. And what would Mr. Abbott say if she knew? But Mr. Abbott does not know; gossip does not reach her. She lives in a rarified atmosphere of her own, with her dainty wool, her ornaments, her children, and the plebeian name of Sleaford penetrates it not.

And so years go on. The Red Farm goes to ruin. Colonel Ventnor and family come with the primrose and flowers with the swallows. Abbott Wood grows more beautiful with every passing year, and the skeletons in its closets grin silently there still, when it falls out that this summer evening Olga Ventnor goes astray in the woods, and before ten at night all Brightrook is up and in quest.

"She may be at Abbott Wood," Frank Livingston suggests—Frank Livingston, calm and unflurried in the midst of general dismay. It is a theory of this young man's that things are sure to come right in the end, and that nothing is worth bothering about, so, though a little anxious, he is calm. "She spoke to me," he added, with a twinge of remorse, "this afternoon about taking her there. Promised to go over and play croquet with Loo and Geoff."

Colonel Ventnor waits for no more. He dashes spurs into his red roan steed, and gallops like a madman to Abbott Wood. On the steps of the great portico entrance he sees the master of the mansion, smoking a cigar, and looking flushed and angry. A domestic white squall has just blown over—not with the "missis;" there are never squalls, white or black, in that quarter—with one of the kitchen maids, who had done, or left undone, something to offend him. He has flown into a tremendous passion with the frightened woman, cursing up hill and down dale with a heartiness and fluency that would have done credit to the past master of the art of blasphemy, Sleaford himself.

The fact is, his wife had put him out at dinner, as she has a way of doing, and his slumbering wrath has had to find vent somewhere. Now the fuming volcano is calming itself down in the peaceful night air, with the help of a soothing cigar. He stares to see the colonel ride up, all white and breathless.

"Little Olga? No, she wasn't there—hadn't been—was perfectly sure of it. Lost!—the colonel did not say so! How was it?"

In a few rapid sentences, Colonel Ventnor tells him. Mr. Abbott listens with open mouth.

"By jingo! Poor little lass! He will join the hunt immediately. That French woman ought to have her neck wrung. He would be after the colonel in a twinkling."

And he is—mounted on his powerful black horse. And all night long the woods are searched, and morning comes, and finds the missing one still missing. The sun rises, and its first beams fall upon John Abbott, tired and jaded, coming upon Sleaford's. It is a place he avoids; he looks at it now with a scowl, and for a moment forgets what he is in search of. No one has thought of looking here, neither does he.

He is about to turn away, when the house door opens, and Giles Sleaford, unwashed and unshorn, comes forth.

"Hello!" he says, roughly; "you. What may you want this time of day?"

"We are looking for the colonel's little girl. You haven't seen her, I suppose?" says Mr. Abbott, quite civilly.

"Haven't I?" growls Black Giles; "that's all you know about it. I have seen her. She's here, and I wish she was anywhere else, keeping honest people from their sleep. She's in there fast enough if you want her. Why doesn't her own dad come after her? I should think you had enough to do to mind your own young 'uns, and your wife, from all I hear."

He laughs a hoarse, impudent laugh, that brings the choleric blood into John Abbott's face, and a demon into either eye. But wonderful to relate, he restrains himself.

Other members of the hunt ride up now, and it is discovered that little Miss Olga is very ill, and nearly out of her senses—why, nobody knows.

She woke up in the night, Lora supposes, and finding herself alone, took fright, and ran screaming out into the passages, and there fell, striking her head against the bottom stair, and hurting herself badly. Whether from the hurt or the fright, she is at present in a very bad way, and there is not a moment to be lost in removing her.

Frank is of the party. He takes his insentible little cousin in his arms and kisses her, with tears of genuine remorse in his boyish eyes. If he had gone with her as she wished, this would never have happened. Now she may never ask him for anything in this world again.

As he carries her out, a small figure, looking like a walking scarecrow, with wild hair, pale face, torn skirts, bare legs and feet, comes slowly and sullenly forward, and watches him and his burden with lowering, scowling glance.

"Here, you, Joanna!" calls out one of the Sleaford girls, sharply. "Come into the house, and help clear up. Come in this minute," with a stamp of her foot. "If you don't want a little more of what you got last night."

The girl makes no reply.

She slowly obeys, but her eyes linger to the last on Frank Livingston and his cousin. All the long light curls fall over his shoulder, the poor little fever-flushed face is hidden on his breast.

"One of yours, Sleaford?" says Mr. Abbott, graciously, looking after Joanna. "I didn't know you had one so young."

There is nothing in this speech apparently to provoke laughter, nor is it a time for mirth, but such is its effect on Mr. Sleaford.

He opens his huge mouth, and emits such a roar that the whole group turn and look at him indignantly. The joke is so exquisite that he heels not, but laughs until the tears start from his bleary eyes.

"Glad you find me so funny," says Mr. Abbott, huffily. "You ain't always in such good humour this time of morning, are you?"

And then, as Mr. Sleaford's only response is to take out his pipe and indulge in another fit of hilarity, he turns and rides indignantly away in the rear of his party.

Mr. Giles Sleaford, left alone in his retreat, emits between his expiring gasps of laughter and soliloquies—

"Is she one of yours, Sleaford?" And 'I didn't know you had one as young.' Oh, Lor', I haven't laughed so much in a month of Sundays! Old Jack Abbott thinks I've cracked a joke, maybe, but when he does they're run 'uns. 'Didn't know I had one so young.' It's the best thing I've heard this many a day—I'm deaded if it ain't."

CHAPTER II.

THE MISSES SLEAFORD AT HOME.

"The story they tell it one that won't wash," says Frank Livingstone. "I appeal to you, Geff. The story of meeting a wild girl in the woods, and being half scolded when Dan Sleaford finds her! Then, when they have her safely housed and asleep, of that same wild creature coming down the chimney——

"Down the chimney!" exclaims Geoffrey Lamar, amazed.

"Oh, well, something very like it, and going at her again with uplifted dagger. It's a fishy sort of yarn as they tell it. But," adds Frank, reflectively, "it is a peculiarity of Dan Sleaford's stories that they all have a piscatorial flavour."

The two young gentlemen were pacing arm in arm, under the horse chestnuts surrounding Ventnor Villa.

They form a contrast as they slowly saunter this—young Livingston two years the elder, tall, slender, very handsome, quick, volatile, restless. Young Lamar shorter, stouter, with a face that even at fifteen has a look of thought and power—a mouth with that square cut at the corners that betokens sweetness as well as strength, steady grey eyes, close cut dark hair, and the careless, highbred air of one borne to the purple.

"It does sound rather odd," he remarks. "But what motive have they for telling an untruth? And something has frightened her, that is patent enough. Poor little Olga!"

"They're a queer lot, these Sleafords," says Frank reflectively—"a most uncommonly queer lot. And there's a mystery of some sort hanging over the head of the house. You don't mean to say, old fellow, that living in Brightrook so long, you don't know any of them, eh?"

"Well in point of fact, you see, I do not live in Brightrook much. I spend Christmas and New Year weeks down here, and either the July or August of every long—but that is all. One month I give to yachting, and then, of course, all the rest of the year is spent at college. You are here a good deal more than I am, and Abbott Wood is so out of the way. As it happens, I have never heard of these people until to-day."

Frank Livingston stares at him, then straight ahead and whistles.

"Well, that is——. I say—you don't mind my asking, do you?—have you never heard your governor speak of them?"

"Never."

"Because Black Giles seems to know him most remarkably well. Says he used to be a pal of his out in San Francisco!"

"What?"

"Yes, I know it's a queer statement. And up in the village they say——"

"Go on."

A deeper frown shuts between Geoffrey Lamar's eyebrows. His stepfather is a sensitive subject with him.

"Well," he says, rather coldly, "they say—what?"

"I wouldn't mention this sort of thing if you were Mr. Abbott's son," goes on Frank, magnanimously, "but it is different, you know. Giles Sleaford, when half seas over, has a way of talking—nasty swearing sort of way that makes a fellow long to pitch him out of the window—of your governor. Calls Jack Abbott—as the disrespectful old rascal calls him—used to be out there in San Francisco the Damon to his Pythias. But never mind," says Frank, pulling himself up, "you don't like the subject. Beg pardon for introducing it, but I am such a fellow to say whatever comes uppermost. All these returned Californians have a shaky sidewalk in their past pathway, if we only knew it, I daresay."

Geoffrey Lamar does not seem to derive the cheerful consolation Frank intends from this philosophical remark. A frown contracts his forehead, and there is a pause.

"You know these people very well," he says, after that pause.

"Oh, uncommon. I'm *l'ami de la maison*—I have the run of the whole house, like the family cat. It's uncommonly jolly. I'll take you some evening, if you like. We have musical and demoralise reunions. All plays the fiddle, Dan the flute, Lora the banjo, and they all can sing. Lora gives me lessons on the banjo." Here Frank tries to look grave, but suddenly explodes into a great laugh. "And we play at 'Nap' and brag, and I lose all my loose cash regularly. It's the best fun going. Georgie Blake comes, and lots more. I would have asked you long ago, only you are such a solemn old duffer, and of too aristocratic a stomach to digest such vulgar doings. But if you'll come, I'll present you. They'll all know you before you, for are you not, oh, patent young seigneur, the lord of the land?—and you shall have a good time. Not just at once, of course. Must wait until the princess, poor little dicky, is on her pins again before I go anywhere."

It will be observed that Mr. Frank's style of conversation is exceedingly *decousu*—quite free and easy, and of the slang a trifle slangy. The prince of Wild Joanna's imagination has a most unprincely way of expressing himself.

"Say you'll come. Get rid of that owl-like face, and stop trying to look like your grandfather. What a fellow you are, Lamar! I would mope myself into the horrors if I lived as you do. Say you'll come to the very next Sleaford 'swarry.' We have a supper after the concert and the *valse à deux temps*, barbecued rabbit, and rich—everything highly genteel and *ex regle*. And you can wash it down with whiskey *ad libitum*, or you can join the ladies in cider cup and bottled ale, if you prefer such effeminate tipple. You will come?"

"Yes, I will come," Geoffrey answers, laughing. "These attractions not to be declined. I say, stop a moment, Livingston—whom have we here?"

A brilliant, black-eyed, brown, brunette, dressed in the loudest possible style—pink, and purple and yellow, all swearing at each other in her costume—advances towards them, a green parasol shading her already ripe charms from the too ardent glance of the sun.

CHAPTER I.

LORA RECEIVES HER REWARD.

When the young lady comes up to the two young men, Frank falls back and strikes an attitude.

"What!" he cries, "do these eyes deceive me? That form, that smile—that green umbrella! 'Tis she—Lora! Light of my eyes, beloved of my soul, whither away in such haste with the thermometer up in the nineties? What, still silent? Speak, loveliest of thy sex—speak ere I perish! Whither goest thou in such haste?"

Miss Lora Sleaford turks her green parasol, not at all discomposed by his impassioned address, and administers a gentle rebuke with the nozzle across Frank's shapely nose.

"Don't be a donkey," is her retort. "I suppose, considering I lost a night's sleep with that little girl, and had a lot of trouble with her every way I have a right to walk up and ask how she gets on. Why weren't you there last night?"

"Pressing business engagements, over which I had no control, my dearest Lora; but I see those beauteous orbs are riveted on the manly countenance of my friend. He is perishing for an introduction—was begging me, with tears in his eyes, just before you came up, to obtain him the entree to Sleaford's, and the acquaintance of Sleaford's two lovely daughters. Miss Lora Sleaford, allow me to present to you my young friend, Geoffrey Ernest Lamar."

Miss Sleaford bows gracefully—really gracefully—smiles radiantly, black eyes, red cheeks, coral lips, dazzling white teeth, all sparkle together.

She evidently takes Frank's chaff as a thing of course, and is perfectly well used to that style of address.

Geoffrey laughs, but reddens a little, with some of that becoming boyish bashfulness that Frank has never known.

"Blush not, my Geoffrey," says that young man of the world, with an encouraging clap on the back. "Miss Lora's charms floor us all at first, but we get used to 'em after a time. So will you. Don't be ashamed of yourself. Speak to her prettily. She's not half so dignified or unapproachable, bless you, as she looks. So you're going to the house, are you, Lora? That is a very pretty attention on your part. The little one is asleep now. Doctor says she'll pull through. But what a queer go it all is, this cock-and-bull story Dan tells about a wild girl, and the rest of it."

"It is true enough. I expect it was our Joanna," replies Lora, complacently adjusting a pair of flat gilt bracelets.

"You don't say so! Joanna? Why, what a little imp she is, to be sure. Shall we see you home, my friend and I, after your call, my Lora? Nothing would give us greater pleasure, you know."

But Miss Sleaford declines, with a toss of her white feathers. She is not going home; she is bound for Brightrook—Dan and the trap are waiting outside the gate. And so, with a parting bow and smile intended to do deadly execution on young Lamar, Lora trips away to the hall door.

Mrs. Ventnor, looking pale and anxious, receives her, and thanks her in very fervent words and a handsome present of jewellery for her kindness to her child.

She has crammed up Miss Sleaford at a glance, and sees she is of the type to whom whom jewellery is always acceptable.

There is another lady in the room—a lady who looks like a queen in a picture, Lora thinks, so grand, so stately, so beautiful is she. She's was even Miss Sleaford, who is not easily awed. It is Mrs. Abbott, she knows. She has seen her more than once—the mother of that dull, plain-looking young fellow outside. And yet, though one is beautiful and the other almost devoid of beauty, there is a resemblance between the two faces, in the firm mouth and proudly-curved chin, in the level, rather chill glance of the full dark eye, in the haughty poise of the head and shoulders. For you need not look twice at young Geoffrey Lamar to know that, although he has not fallen heir to his mother's beauty, he has to her pride.

This grand lady goes up to Lora and holds out one long, slim white hand.

"We are all your debtors," she says, in a slow, sweet, trained voice. "In saving our dear little Olga you have served us all. If you will accept this as a little token of my great regard——"

She slips from her fingers a circlet of rubies and the quick blood comes into Lora Sleaford's face.

"Thank you, ma'am," she says, almost healthfully.

With some trouble she gets the rich hoop on one of her fat fingers, and makes her courtesy, and departs, enchanted with her visit and its result.

But little Olga is really very ill, and lies tossing through the warm July days, fever-flushed, wild-eyed, thirsty, wandering.

Over and over again the wild girl of the woods is bending above her, her hands in her hair, her deadly weapon poised, and Olga's shrieks ring through the room, and they have to hold her in bed by force. All the long, lovely locks are cut off close, cruelly close, to the poor little burning head, and there are days when neither doctor nor nurse can tell how that fierce struggle is to end.

Lora Sleaford comes often to inquire, and Joanna, crouching like a toad in her corner, hears the story of the severed golden hair. A moment after she has slipped from her place, and gone out into the night. She then retraces her steps down the dewy grass, and buries her face in her folded arms.

She has got the desire of her heart, and she is not glad; a vague sort of remorse and unrest fills her. She did not want to kill this little heiress—only to frighten her; to cut off her hair, not to give her brain fever. If she dies will they hang her—Joanna? She knows Lora knows, and has told others. Well, let them hang her if they like; she did not mean to do it, and hanging cannot hurt much more than horse whipping. She does not care; she is past care, past hope, past help. It does not matter—nothing matters. Better to be dead at once, and done with it. But she hopes the little girl will not die, and presently—perhaps it is because she is all aching and half ill to-night—great tears well up, and fill and fall from her eyes, that burn generally with so baleful a light.

She has been beaten by Giles Sleaford, she has had her ears boxed by Dan, she has been scolded by Liz, she has worked like a slave since early morning, she is sore, and hungry, and hopeless, and ill.

"I wish I was dead," she sobs, her face hid in the sweet, wet grass. "I wish I had never been born!"

But little Olga does not die. She is a delicate child, and it requires the best of medical skill and ceaseless care to bring her through. Then comes what is called the crisis. There is a night when no one at Ventnor Villa nor Abbot Wood thinks of sleep—a night when Frank Livingston paces the wet grass, under the summer stars, until day-dawn, filled with fear and remorse for his share in the tragedy—a night when Colonel Ventnor walks the halls and passages, pale as no one has ever seen him pale before—a night when Mrs. Abbott sits through the long mute hours clasping the hand of the sick child's mother in her own, and with latent breath watching for that dread change. It comes, it passes, and burning heat changes to profound slumber, and tossing delirium to gentle perspiration, and little Olga is saved.

The news dies—it visits many homes, and some time that day it reaches Sleaford's, where Lora relates it to the family assembled at supper.

"So you see, little monkey," she winds up, addressing Joanna, "you ain't a murderer, after all, and won't be hanged this time. But you had better look out, and not try that sort of thing again. You mayn't get off so easy another time."

"It's only a question of a year or two, eh, Jo?" says Alf Sleaford, cocking his girl's ear. "You're bound to come to it some day. Of all the little limbs I ever met, you top the lot."

"I am what you all have made me," the child dashes out, with sudden fire, jerking herself free. "I only wonder I haven't killed somebody long ago—some of you, I mean. I will yet, if you don't let me alone."

A growl from Giles silences her, but in her poor, darkened, heathenish little soul that night there is a wordless thanksgiving for the news she has heard.

"I don't know what got into me," she thinks with a feeling akin to compunction. "She never did noth——to me, when it's said and done. I'm sorry I frightened her. I'm sorry, yes, I am, that she's had to lose all her pretty hair."

The other members of the Sleaford family circle are relieved also, but for a different reason.

"I'm sure I'm glad of it," Liz says, in a querulous tone. "The place has been like a graveyard ever since that night. Not a soul's been near the house, except once, George Blake. Can't we have a dance, Dan, some night next week?"

"And tell Frank Livingston, Dan, to bring young Lamar," suggests Lora. "I am dying for a dance. I saw two or three of the girls down at the Corners yesterday, and they were asking when we meant to have another spree."

"Dad means to go to the city next Tuesday," suggests Alf. "And as he ain't particularly useful or ornamental on an occasion like that, I vote we have the high jinks while he's gone."

This resolution is unanimously carried by the house, and next Tuesday is fixed for the Sleaford *fete*. The young ladies at once set to work to prepare their costumes and decorate the house. Dan turns the invitations verb. sap. and all are accepted, including that extended to Master Geoffrey Lamar. Frank goes without saying.

With a load off his conscience now that Olga is recovering, Frank is in wild high spirits, and ready for anything. He is generating a great deal of steam in these days of Olga's convalescence, and requires a safety-valve of some sort. He spends considerable of his precious time in the sick-room, and it is found does Olga more good by his lively presence than all the doctor's medicine. Geoffrey Lamar and little Leo Abbot, too, are there a great deal—their conversation and company excite the child a little, but the good results counterbalance the evil. Still, some of the days of this sort of thing—this state of unnatural goodness—has a depressing effect on Frank, and the Sleaford "swarry" is hailed with rejoicing.

"We always present some delicate little offering to the young ladies on these occasions," he remarks to Geoffrey. "Not bouquets or floral litter of that sort, but something sensible and solid. On various festive seasons of this nature, I myself have contributed a ham, a plum cake, a turkey, some port wine, and other of the fruitful tribe of that sort. The present being a special festival, it is my intention to appear in company with a dozen of champagne. You, young tip, being a lily of the field, and this your debut, will be exempt from taxation. The honour of your presence is sufficient in itself."

"It rather reminds one of Mrs. Nickleby and the love-stricken old gentleman in small clothes, who threw the vegetable marrows," says Geoffrey, laughing. "I wonder, Frank, you care to mingle with such a lot. You really seem to like it."

"And I really do, my aristocratic young friend. Human nature in all its varieties interests me in the abstract. Human nature as represented by Miss Lora Sleaford interests me consumedly in particular. A romp with that girl is equal to a boxing match any day to put a fellow in condition. Leave all your fastidious notions at Abbott Wood with your evening dress, put on a shooting-jacket, and come and be happy."

They are the latest guests. The old red farmhouse is all alight when they draw near, the scraping of Alf's violin is their greeting as they enter. Some half dozen young girls in gay muslin dresses, gilt brooches and chains, and rainbow ribbons, are there, and represent the Sleaford "set" in Brightrook. The young men are generally of a better stamp, and manner stronger. The lower rooms looked filled to overflowing as the two late guests arrive. A momentary rush of awe greets Geoffrey Lamar, but it does not last, the festive group here assembled are not awed easily or for long.

"For heaven's sake, do not introduce me to anybody!" whispers Geoffrey, nervously, afraid of a torrent of Frank's chaff. "Just let me alone, and I'll drift into port myself."

There is one face present that he recognizes, that of George Blake, and he seeks refuge by his side. Blake is a bright young fellow, poor, but of good connections; his mother, a widow, teaches music in the village. George, an only son, is at present beginning life in the office of the Brightrook News. He is about eighteen or nineteen—indeed, some of the gentlemen are on the good side of twenty.

But Mr. Blake is destined for higher duty than playing protector. Miss Liz Sleaford sails up, resplendent in crimson ribbons and cheap jewellery, and claims him as her own. They are all in the parlour. Alf, the musician, is perched on a sort of pedestal in a corner, to be out of the way, as there is not an inch of spare room for the coming engagement. The dance is a waltz. Frank is spinning round with Lora, as a matter of course. Mr. Blake is blessed with Liz, and five other couples revolve and bump against each other with much force and great good humour.

Geoffrey has seen a great many waltzes, but the energy, the "go" of this one he has never seen equalled. It is a night in early August. The full harvest moon is pouring its pale splendour over the warm, sweet world without. The faces of the waltzers are redder in ten minutes than the moon was when it rose. The living whirlwind dashing past him so confuses Geoffrey that he gets up at last, and with some difficulty makes his way into the kitchen. This apartment has but two occupants—Dan Sleaford and a small, scantily-dressed damsel of twelve, who appears to be assistant cook. Dan is the *chef*. At an early age he developed one talent—a talent for cooking. Many years of cultivation, and that talent has soared to the heights of positive genius.

Dan, in a state threatening spontaneous combustion, bends over the steaming cauldron, from which odours as of Araby the blest are wafted into the silent night. The youthful person, with him in a milky and slipshod manner, is emptying numerous baskets, and arranging their contents on the two deal tables, covered at present with very white cloths, and set out with the blue dall two-pronged forks, and a miscellaneous collection of knives.

It requires some skill on Mr. Sleaford's part to keep one eye on the cooking and the other fixed sternly on his small assistant, and see that she purloins none of the provisions.

On the present occasion the spread is something gorgeous. There is first of all the champagne—the silver-throated beauties contributed by Frank. Then a basket of able-bodied little Bruton pies, the delicate attention of Mr. George Blake, who has a weakness that way. Then a plum cake, with sugar coating an inch thick, the luscious offering of the young Brightbrook baker. Then a leg of lamb, with peas and mint sauce. A bottle of mixed pickles, a wedge of cheese, a tin of sweet biscuits, and sundries, the tribute by the great earthenware pot of tea is steeping for the ladies, while the whiskey and other spirituous fluids, together with a box of cigars, adorn a shelf of the cupboard. These delicacies comprise a supper fit for Brillant Savarin or the Olympian gods.

Geoffrey takes a seat on the sill of one of the open windows, trying to catch a breath of cool air, and amused, in spite of himself, at the novelty of all this. Dan Sleaford politely essays conversation, but, distracted between the cooking and his handmaid, the attempts are not brilliant. In spite of his Argus eyes, Joanna manages to filch a mutton pie, a handful of mixed biscuits, and a piece of cheese, and secrete this virtual somebody where about her garments.

Geoffrey watches this slish child with curiosity. She is of a type he has never seen before. He has a chivalrous veneration for all things feminine, engendered by his beautiful and stately mother; but this changeling—it is difficult to imagine her belonging to the same order of beings as his sister Loo or Olga Ventnor. This evening her best frock, such as it is, has been donned. She wears slops and stockings, and an effort has been made to brush down the thick shock of darkly-reddish hair. He sees the pale, pinched features—features not homely in themselves, but spoiled by an expression of settled sullenness and gloom. She looks uneasy, and most pathetically unchildlike. When Dan Sleaford girls at her, she shrinks as if she expected a blow. Her hard life is written in every line of her downcast and smileless face.

Inside the fun waxes fast and furious. Peals of laughter ring out, and the house quivers with the tread of the dancers. Alf's fiddle never falters nor fails. A schottische follows the waltz, then a quadrille, then a polka. Then George Blake performs a solo, the Highland fling—a dance which has more genuine fling about it as executed by Mr. Blake than any of the company have ever before beheld. Then there is a country dance. Then Dan Sleaford, crimson of visage, presents himself at the parlour door, and in stentorian accents announces the supper and accompaniments, and tersely commands them to "come on."

"What, Geoff, old boy, taking lessons in cooking?" cried Frank, wiping his hot face. "Phew! what a blazer of a night—and, by Jove, what a girl Lora Sleaford is to spin! There's more go in her than in any human being I ever met. She has been dancing every time, and hasn't turned a hair, while I—I give you my word, old fellow, I'm fit to drop."

But a bottle of foamy bottled ale restores the exhausted one, and he company sit down to supper. A very noisy company it is, a very hungry company, too, and despite the height of the thermometer, steaming tea, roast lamb, and mutton pies disappear with a celerity that speaks well for the faith the consumers have in their own powerful digestions.

Everyone helps himself and his partner to whatever chances to be handiest. Cheese and pickles vanish in company, lamb and pound cake, mutton pies and pone. The gentlemen slake their thirst with flagons of ale, it may be, but the hilarity carries him away and he finds himself laughing almost as noisily as the rest of them.

Once or twice he glances about for the attendant sprite. But she is no longer in waiting. Everyone helps himself. She is in a corner of the fireplace, as though she felt the heat no more than a salamander, munching her pilfered dainties, and staring, with bright, watchful eyes, at the people before her. No one notices her, or thinks of offering her anything to eat or drink. The dogs get an occasional morsel thrown them—she gets nothing.

Supper over, dancing is resumed with ardour and vigour. There is singing, too—spirited songs with ringing choruses, in which the whole strength and lungs of the "swarry" is thrown.

Miss Lora gives them—to a banjo accompaniment—"Sing, oh, for a brave and gallant bark, a brisk and lively breeze,"—which, being a free resounding chorus, goes near to lift the roof off. Liz does the sentimental, and warbles "Thou hast learnt to love another, thou hast broken every vow." Frank Livingston trolls forth, in a very nice tenor, "Sarah's Young Man," and the Misses Sleaford uplift their voices in a sanitized duet.

The remains of the plum cake and some cool lemonade are passed round the fair set. The gentlemen adjourn at intervals to the kitchen cupboard for a "modest quencher," a quiet cigar, and Geoffrey Lamar, growing rather bored, keeps his seat on the window sill, and wishes it were time to get out of this noise and heat, and go.

His interest in Joanna does not flag. She is a curious study, and he watches her. After supper she clears off the things, washes the dishes, puts them away, sweeps up the floor, all in profound silence, and with daft, swift hands. Then, instead of going to bed, although it is past midnight, she produces a tattered book, and resumes her corner to read, with hands over her ears, eyes riveted to the page. He watches her in silence for a while, then he speaks.

"What are you reading?"

He has to touch her to make her hear—then she looks up. How changed her look! the sullen moodiness has passed away, her eyes are eager, her face bright with the interest of her book. But in that instant, the old look of dark, frowning distrust, returns. She points to the page without a word.

"Monte Christo," he reads. "Do you like it?"

She nods.

"But the first and last seems to be torn out—that must spoil the interest, I should think. Do you read much?"

She purses up her mouth, and shakes her head.

"Why?"

"No books—no time."

"You are fond of stories?"

"Oh, ain't I?"

"Would you like me to bring you a book the next time I come?"

She looks at him, wondering, distrustful. He is a young gentleman, and he is taking notice of her—he is speaking to her kindly. No, she does that. He is offering her a book—no one has ever given her anything. Her sullen look comes back; she does not know what to make of it.

"I will bring you some books," he says, "and I will ask your sisters to let you read them—books accepted, including that extended to Master Geoffrey Lamar. Frank goes without saying.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

A Chinese Hotel.

Hote's vary in China, and one or two in Manchuria had a specious dignity about them, and rooms that were bright and fairly kept; and some worse than that was entered now, for we were on a high road where foreigners are becoming frequent. At the upper end there was a small building for superior guests. It was divided into three compartments, with earthen floors; the eating den had a broken table and a broken chair; the other two were for sleeping, and a lamp cast a dim light into the darkness—a tiny wick that floated in a tea of oil in an iron saucer crusted with the dirt of centuries. A meal under such circumstances was not exhilarating. The beef we had carried with us was so manipulated in the cooking that it looked exactly like a dish of caterpillars; there was egg plant stewed in pork broth—but pigs and dogs are the scavengers of China; there was seasoning of sea-slugs (at three shillings a pound) and of other condiments that were spread at an open window in reach of the cook's brawny arm; there were messes in bowls, balls of soft cake like putty from a glazier's shop, and there was musty rice. The trusty Li changed the uneaten courses with evident concern, and at last carried in in triumph hot water for the tea; but against the bowls which he suggested for tea-cups, lip, nose, and stomach revolted, and we withdrew to bed, cold and supperless, like naughty children. A mattress was stretched upon the hollow brick counter which serves as a bedstead, and underneath which we forbade the usual fire, afraid of what the heat might bring forth. We shivered through the early hours of the night with our feet to the care repulsive wall and our head to the passage. In the dull light it seemed as if hideous things crept along the ceiling, shining things rested on the walls, and crawling things gnawed among the paper and straw on the floor; fingers were thrust through the paper panes of the little lattice-window, and probably eyes peeped in, and the rush of chill air was welcome because it was pure; and as we dozed and watched, the mules munched outside, and the carters talked, and the querulous song of some gayer spirit rose above the other voices. There was a patter of little feet, a squeak, a rat, more rats: "They sometimes fall down through the thin ceiling," a friend had said. We could stand it no longer. The "Hall of Ten Thousand Felicities" had become to us a "Temple of Horrors;" and in the third watch of the night we had taken to the road once more, and saw, below the frosty stars, the lamps of other carts as they sparkled over the plain.

The Palace Hotel of Canada.—Rossin House, Toronto.

The central position of this excellent hostelry, its splendid accommodation, the graduated rates ((from $2 per day) and the careful supervision of the genial proprietor, M. H. Irish, Esq., and his obliging chief clerk, Mr. Nolan, render it the most popular home for the great mass of Canadian and American travellers while staying in the city.

ASSISTANT-POSTMASTER New, of Pittsfield, Mass., added $1,000 to his income in a year by removing fresh postage stamps from letters, putting on those that had been used, and selling the stolen ones. He used the money in maintaining his social pretensions.

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Don't fail to read Denver Land Company's double column advertisement. It should read 60 days from 1st Nov.

From the Age of 16 to 80.

Thousands of people from the age of sixteen to eighty years, are suffering from kidney complaints and other diseases arising from derangement of the urinary organs, who would be relieved by a few doses of Victoria Buchu Gva Uva and a permanent cure made by the use of a few bottles. Price, $1.

Scrapers is a good piece of furniture for a man to have in an upper chamber, provided he has common sense on the ground floor, and a bottle of Hagyard's Pectoral Balsam on the shelf, for use in case of a sudden cold, cough, or hoarseness. This Cough remedy is unsurpassed as a curative agent in croup, bronchitis, influenza, and all pulmonary complaints. For sale by all dealers.

"COOPER'S" are shewing a very handsome stock of Scarfs, Ties, Collars, Silk Handkerchiefs, Gloves, &c. Just the thing for the holiday season. Address, 109 Yonge St., Toronto.

14 CHICKAMAUGA ST., Toronto, May 13, 1878.

Messrs. Milburn, Bentley & Pearson,

Gentlemen,—Last fall I contracted a severe cold, which, by my neglect, settled on my lungs. I found every indication of the first stage of consumption, and, like many others, when a most too late, commenced to doctor up. I tried many remedies, but got no better; was almost satisfied I was incurable. Accidentally I heard of your Victoria Compound Syrup of Hypophosphites, and as a forlorn hope bought a bottle. I immediately felt relieved. After taking five (5) bottles I am cured, and never felt better in my life. I would heartily recommend your Hypophosphites.

Respectfully Yours, W. ELDRIDGE.

It is said by many, try first one remedy, and then another; but we find in the great majority of cases that these whirligig Hagyard's Yellow Oil for all purposes of a liniment, have no use for any other preparation, it does its work to effectually that none others need apply or be applied. It is equally good for man or beast, and can be used internally for Croup, Whooping Cough, and Asthma, externally for Rheumatism, Sprains, Bruises, Chilblains, Burns, Scalds, and all pains and aches from whatever cause they may occur. Sold by all dealers, at 25 cents per bottle.

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