

STRONGER THAN LIFE.

CHAPTER III.

It is Friday evening—the evening of the Rollestons' dance.

I have heard and seen nothing of "the Count" since yesterday; nobody has mentioned violets, nobody has accused me of pilfering. Whether he is in the house or not I know not, nor whether he has been in since I changed his dead camellia for my bunch of purple Woodhay violets yesterday. I have been fully occupied between my singing-lessons and my visits to Dexter Square—so fully that such a person as Mrs. Wauchope's handsome ill-tempered lodger could certainly find no room in my thoughts. If I am thinking of any one now, as I lean back in my comfortable hammock-chair, with my buckled shoes on the fender, it is of Gusie Deane. Poor Gus is devoted to me—has been devoted to me since we were children. And Gus is not a bad-looking fellow by any means. He is a little fair man, and I do not like little fair men as a rule. But then he is a Captain in the "Blues," and I believe he really likes me. I do not care for him, of course; but it is fun to have a lover. I have had a good many lovers—so at least they tell me—but I have up to this time walked "in maiden meditation, fancy free." I am not a flirt—my worst enemy—if I have any enemies—could not accuse me of flirting. It is an amusement which I both dislike and despise. And I do not flirt with Gus, though he is and has always been my "chum." He does not care to be called my chum now so much as he used. Olive says it is because he thinks "sweetheart" a prettier word. I do not care about sweethearts. I shall never be so foolish as to fall in love with any one. I think love is all nonsense. And most of the men who have wanted to marry me—I do not mean poor Gus, of course; and, besides, he never asked me to marry him—were in love with Woodhay, and not with Allie Scott. If I had no money I might believe in love—a little; but, as it is, I do not believe in it at all.

"Shall I light the candles on your dressing-table, ma'am?"

Mary Anne's voice wakes me out of what was perhaps as much a dream as a reverie.

"What o'clock is it?" I ask, yawning.

"It is half-past seven, ma'am. Is this your dress? I'll unpack it for you and lay it on the bed."

The back drawing-room is my bedroom. I leave my easy chair reluctantly—it is a cold night even for March, sharp and frosty—and follow Mary Anne into the inner room, where a newly lighted fire burns in the grate.

"Why didn't you light that before?" I ask, shivering.

"The Count—he came in unexpectedly, wanting his dinner," Mary Anne answers, kneeling down to put some life into the fire by means of a rapid fanning with her apron, "and I had to attend to him. He's just like that always—walking in when he's least expected. Gentlemen is a bother—you never know when they'll be in and when they won't!"

I take out my dress from its flat pasteboard box myself, unwilling to trust it to the tender mercies of Mary Anne's grimy fingers. There is a note from aunt Rosa in the box, and another bunch of my dear Woodhay violets. Aunt Rosa tells me no news—they are all well at Yattendon, and have had very cold weather. I lay down her note and take up the violets, thinking, as I place the dewy, fragrant purple blossoms to my lips, of the dear old trees at Woodhay about whose mossy roots they grew.

"Send Mrs. Wauchope up to me," I say to the maid of all work, when she has done what she can for my sulky fire.

Mrs. Wauchope will make a better attempt at getting me into my dress than she could, and will not perhaps leave such traces of the stain she must necessarily put upon my sky-blue lace. I have arranged my hair in its usual simple fashion before my landlady comes up, gathered closely round my head into a loop of close plaits at the back, and curling in a slight natural fringe about my forehead. And before the Deanes' carriage comes for me I am ready, standing before the dingy old-fashioned glass and wandering what Olive will think of me and of my dress.

What I see in the glass is a tall girl, in a long closely fitting cuirasse body of blue silk, ending in sashes of crepe of the same color, and with a billowy blue skirt lying along the carpet like the crisp waves of a summer-sea—a girl with a pretty white neck and arms, with hair neither fair nor dark, but of a curious ash-color, with eyes neither blue nor gray, but a mixture of both, with a nose neither big nor small, a mouth neither large nor small—a face that denies all laws of beauty, yet a face which Olive says she would never be tired of looking at—but then Olive is my friend, and prejudiced; I do not set much store by her verdict. What I know myself to be is a girl with a swinging gait and a well-poised head, whose outdoor life has developed muscle and straight limbs, and who, oddly enough, has a pair of eyes which have not looked out of the family face since my great-grandmother died, about a hundred years ago.

While I consider myself, gravely and dispassionately, as though my reflection in Mrs. Wauchope's depressing greenish tinged mirror were another person, I hear the Count's voice upstairs, talking to my landlady. My heart beats quicker for a moment. Can he have discovered the theft of the dead "button-hole"? But no; he goes in and shuts the door; Mrs. Wauchope comes down-stairs, passes my door, and I breathe freely again. I gather up my gloves and fan, having put my violets nestling near my heart, the only spot of darker color in my skyey dress, and, walking into the drawing-room, impelled by I know not what spirit of

mischief or of folly, I sit down at the piano and begin to sing "Thy voice is near." I do not think my voice is audible in the attic, I feel sure the words are not distinguishable; and, even if they were, who could tell what silly freak led me to sing them?

"Word after word I seem to hear,
Yet strange it seems to me
That though I listen to thy voice,
Thy face I never see."

"Why, Allie my dear, you're by far the nicest girl in the room!"

The remark is Olive's, of course.

"So I have been telling her," says Gus, who has been my partner in the waltz which has just come to an end.

"Don't talk nonsense! Who is that gentleman who has just come into the room?"

We are standing near a doorway. Gus and Olive both turn their heads.

"Which gentleman?" Olive asks, blinking through her spectacles.

"Oh, he has moved on now—you can't see him with the crowd!"

"Why did you ask?" Gus says. "Was there anything remarkable about him?"

"He was remarkably handsome, that was all."

"Oh!" says Gus, screwing his glass into his eye.

"I know everybody here," Olive remarks, looking round the room. "If you see him again when I am in your neighborhood, point him out to me, and I am almost sure to know who he is. Allie, you look jolly; I hope you are enjoying yourself as much as you seem to be doing."

"Oh, quite as much!"

"I am having such fun with him," Olive says, glancing after her late partner, with a world of mischief in her saucy dimpled face. "He is so silly—you've no idea what a donkey he makes of him self!"

"You'd better not make a donkey of yourself," Gus remarks severely.

"Oh, he doesn't know I'm laughing at him! Men are so vain, they would think anything sooner than that that you were making fun of them."

"You know a lot about them!" says Gus, with a glance of brotherly scorn directed downward at his pretty little sister.

"I know enough to know that. Here is Captain Cathcart coming for me. And there is the 'Weit von Dir.' Oh, Allie, don't waste a note of that delicious waltz!"

Ten minutes later I am in Olive's neighborhood again, this time waiting for Fred to bring me an ice.

"There is the man I mean, Olive—standing with his back to the wall—the tall dark one talking to Colonel Rolleston."

"Yes; I observed him just now. I thought I knew everybody here; but I do not know who he is, nor does Captain Cathcart. Isn't he splendidly handsome, Allie; I don't think I ever saw such a handsome face in my life."

"He is very handsome," I answer, glancing at the grand-looking boy—for he scarcely seems more than that—as he stands talking to Colonel Rolleston, and looking with splendid careless eyes about the room. His face is dark, almost foreign looking, with a straight nose, a slight dark moustache, and a pair of the most beautiful, fierce, tender, laughing, long-lashed eyes I have ever seen.

"I shall get Katie Rolleston to tell me his name," Olive promises, as her partner whirls her away; and Fred returning with my ice, that and the waltz put everything else out of my head.

It is nearly half an hour later when somebody introduces me to a partner for the coming waltz whose name I do not catch; and, looking round carelessly, still talking to young Rolleston, I find the unknown standing before me with his eyes fixed inquiringly on my face.

I accept him, of course, and walk away with him, wishing I had caught his name. He is a rather silent partner, appearing to be more anxious to study me than to make himself agreeable; but whatever he does say is clever and amusing, and so boyish wital that it is absolutely refreshing after the "society" talk to which I have been compelled to listen for the last two hours. He dances well, and knows how to take care of his partner. Once, when somebody by accident steps on my dress, he turns round with a wicked flash of the eye which brings Mrs. Wauchope's ill-tempered lodger into my mind. And once or twice I find him looking at me with an expression which puzzles me a little. It is not admiration, nor criticism, nor depreciation; but it is easier to say what it is not than what it is—rather a mixture of amusement and curiosity, as if trying to read some riddle in my face.

When the waltz is over, he resigns me to Gus, having just put down his name opposite to the only disengaged dance on my programme, a mazurka. I can make nothing of the hieroglyphic scrawled in pencil; but I fancy the last letter of the initials looks like "B."

"Is that your handsome man?" Gus asks, looking after him as he makes his way slowly through the crowd.

"Yes," I answer at once. "Do you know his name?"

"Don't you know it?"

"No; I could not catch it when he was introduced to me."

"Why, that is Baxter—Garard Baxter, the painter, a clever fellow, but no 'stay' in him. If he had, he would have made a name for himself long ago."

"He looks a mere boy."

"He is one-and-twenty. He could paint pictures if he liked; but he won't take the trouble. Jack Rolleston knows him well; but I've only met him once or twice. He has been a way in Scotland for the last month or two, sketching; I don't consider him so very handsome."

I think Gus is a little jealous, or I would think so if I had time to think of anything but my own astonishment. So this is Mrs. Wauchope's lodger; this is the Count; this is the whilom glazier, the

man whom I christened Ginx's baby! It is strange, it is astonishing, it is not to be believed! The episode of the violets rushes to my recollection—the words I had so imprudently sung this very evening—sung to him! It is well for me that he has no idea who I am—would never dream of identifying me with Mrs. Wauchope's spinster tenant "of a certain age." Aunt Rosa would have good reason to be ashamed of me if she knew what pranks I have been playing—good reason to say that she was right and I was wrong about the advisability of my coming up alone to Carleton Street! I shall never be so foolish again. I ought to have had more sense—a girl of very nearly one-and-twenty! It has been a lesson to me not to be carried away by the wild spirits which have been my bane always, the love of adventure which my good aunt has so often tried to nip in the bud! If I had known that Mrs. Wauchope's "four-pair-back" was a person like this, I should not have dared to play what my laggard sense of propriety now stigmatizes as a silly practical joke, all the more silly because the victim would never know who perpetrated it. Standing with Gus near the upper end of the room, I wish devoutly that I had not promised him a second dance. What if I should be foolish enough to betray my identity with Mrs. Wauchope's "drawing-room"? What if he should ask me where I am staying in London? I shall be very cool to him, very reserved and distant, so that the idea of asking such a question shall never enter into his head. I am sorry now that I got myself into this scrape—I should liked to have known my fellow-lodger who is so poor and so proud. But I have made any further acquaintance impossible, all through that wretched little bunch of violets!

I avoid his look for the rest of the rest of the evening, though more than once I am conscious that he is quietly studying me. Gus seems rasher annoyed at my absence of mind. Once or twice he has offered me a penny for thoughts which he certainly would not have communicated to him for a great many pounds. Retribution has not been long in following on the heels of my offence; but I hope the lesson will be a salutary one, and congratulate myself that no worse mischief has befallen me.

The dance I have begun to dread has come at last—the dance for which I am engaged to Mr. Baxter. He comes up at the first notes of the mazurka.

"This is ours, I think?"

I take his arm; and, as I take it, my heart gives a sudden bound of dismay.

In the button-hole of his sombre evening coat he wears—a bunch of half-withered violets!

"This has been a pleasant evening," he says, when we have taken a couple of circuits of the room.

"Yes," I answer vaguely, my heart beating fast.

"Small dances like this are much more enjoyable than gigantic crushes—don't you think so?"

"Yes."

After the first glance at the violets, I do not dare to look at them. Any one might wear violets—almost every one wears violets in March. But these are my violets—I know it intuitively, though why he should care to wear them, having no clue to the giver, puzzles me more than the name of the giver can have puzzled him.

"You do not go out much?"

"No," I answer, wondering if the remark is a question or an assertion. If it is an assertion, how does he know?

"Shall we take another turn, or are you tired?"

"I am not tired," I say, thinking what an amusing companion he must find me.

We take a few more turns, and then come to a stand-still. Mr. Baxter seems to prefer to talk.

"You are fond of violets?" glancing at the bouquet in my dress.

A rush of foolish guilty crimson dyes my cheeks which I would have given worlds to have kept out of them. But it comes there, and it stays, while my partner lowers his dark imperial head to look into my half-frightened, half-defiant eyes.

"Very fond," I answer glibly. "I think every one is fond of violets."

"I am," he says, smiling a little.

"You must be to wear so poor a bunch."

"You would not call them poor, unless—"

"Unless what?"

"No matter," he returns, laughing. "But it is not very polite of you to disparage my violets."

"It is not indeed. I hope you will forgive me," I say, conscious that, unless he is on an entirely wrong scent, I have stupidly betrayed myself.

"Certainly. There is nothing to forgive. You only spoke the truth when you said my violets were a little faded—they were badly treated—poor little flowers?"

"How was that?" I ask innocently.

"Well," he says, deliberately looking not at me now, but at the violets, "they were given to me by a lady whose name I did not know. And, if I had not fortunately discovered them in time, they would have died for want of water in a dusty glass."

"Indeed!" I observe quietly, looking past him at the dancers.

"It was kind of her, was't not—to me—not to the violets?"

"So much depends upon her motive," I answer carelessly, wondering if he knows.

"She could have had but one motive."

"And that?"

"Well," he says, smiling, "I do not know that I ought to tell you what I think."

"You think so badly of her!" I exclaim, the troublesome crimson rushing to my cheeks again.

"If I thought badly of her, should I wear her violets?"

"She never meant you to know who left them for you probably."

"Probably."

"You say you do not know her name?"

"I did not know her name."

"But you know it now?"

"Yes, I know it now."

"And it is—"

He shakes his head.

"I know you do not think so badly of me as to suppose I would answer that question."

I breathe a great sigh of relief. He does not know then—he does not connect me with the suspected party, whoever she may be. Perhaps he thinks it was the younger Miss Pryce! Mary Anne told me they sometimes got flowers up from the country.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

An Army's March Arrested by Locusts.

Of all destructive foes none are more dreaded in most Eastern lands than the locusts, whose dire visitations may well be deemed national calamities. In point of fact, the lands which are exempt from their occasional presence are the favored few. A very few details of their invasion of southern Russia in the years 1879 and 1880 will give us some idea of their multitude. They fell upon the province of Caucasus, utterly destroying vineyards and gardens; blockading the streets so that traffic was suspended; filling the ovens, so that for several days baking was quite out of the question; and so choking the water-courses that not a cup of water could be drunk until filtered.

In Georgia they fairly routed a detachment of Russian troops, who, not liking to turn aside on their march repelled by mere insects, attempted to face the locust army, although report said it covered twenty square miles of country. So the soldiers advanced, but soon found themselves literally covered by the clinging, creeping insects, which crawled all over them, until finally the men fairly turned and fled, slipping and sliding as they ran over the crushed and oily bodies of their myriad foes. For forty-eight hours they were detained, taking refuge in a village, and assisting the inhabitants to kill millions of the invaders, whose corpses they carted off to manure the fields, which, however, were in the meantime stripped of every blade of grass or corn, and the trees shorn of every green leaf.

On the road from Tiflis to Poti the locusts lay so thick on the line that the trains were obstructed. Large districts of southern Russia were swept as bare of all vegetation as if a fire had raged over the land, and hundreds of peasants, utterly beggared, abandoned their homes to seek bread wherever it might be found. In the province of Cheoson alone, a sum of fifty thousand rubles was voted by Government for expenditure in the effort to free the land of this plague; in another district, twenty thousand persons were employed daily for three months in the same work; the Government expenditure on the whole organization was estimated at two hundred thousand rubles, without any calculation of the loss on crops of all descriptions.

Another notable scene of locust-plague was Algeria in the year 1866, when the damage done by these insects was estimated at fifty million francs, and resulted in a famine so appalling that two hundred thousand natives died of starvation.

Harmless Dynamite Outrages.

Two mysterious men bearing a package, two loud and quick reports, some displaced stones and falling plaster, a "severe" scalp wound and nobody seriously injured, flying detectives and ubiquitous inspectors of explosives, a rattled home secretary, and the blackened face of an American clock—these served up with every suggestion of an alarmed imagination, and the world is asked to be shocked over another dynamite outrage. View the hysterical cablegrams of the day as the reader may, he cannot suppress a smile over the disproportion between the damage and the scare. If the entire admiralty building with all that it contained had been destroyed it could hardly have inspired more excited dispatches. For the moment the prospect of two great nations entering upon a desperate struggle for an empire was obscured by the dust from an exploded tin can. Of course suspicion is immediately directed against Irish sympathizers in London. The utter futility of the explosion insures this. If any one had been killed there might be reason to question the origin of the outrage. But there is no mistaking the Irish outrage. Ten explosions in London, counting this one, have been laid at the door of Irish agitators. Not one of them has been followed by a death. They serve to keep the English incensed against the Irish. That is the chief mischief they do.

The Funny Afghan Gun.

The Afghan matchlock or jzail has no parallel as a firearm on the face of the earth. It is about five feet long, and is fitted near the muzzle with a prong which supports it on the ground when it is about to be fired off. It is fitted with a powder pan and a catch for holding a fuse. An Afghan marksman has to depend upon the state of his ruse, and therefore he is by no means a certain shot. During the last Afghan war it used to be a joke among the British soldiers that an Afghan would poison his jzail upon a rock, calculate when his enemy would be likely to arrive in front of his muzzle, fix his fuse, and then go off to some little distance and sit down and smoke. If the enemy arrived in front of the matchbox just as it went off, why then he would most likely be killed, but if he didn't, and the weapon went off a quarter of an hour after he had passed it, then no harm was done, and its owner would philosophically "set" his jzail again in hopes of catching the next comer, and then go off to his rock, smoke and wait developments.

SCIENTIFIC.

The warming of flour and the consequent abstraction of the moisture adds greatly to its durability.

A Southern paper says that five fingers of a negro woman's right hand are the best cotton pickers invented yet.

Professors Ayston and Perry are of the opinion that a gas engine will be the motive power of the vessel of the future.

In India cats are sometimes attacked by cholera, according to a French authority, and may communicate the disease to man.

A new theory of the causation of volcanic eruptions attributes them to the formation of axes or cores of molten matter by atmospheric pressure.

Geologists assert that if the continents and the bottom of the ocean were graded to a uniform level, the whole world would be covered with water a mile deep.

Dr. Seltzer, in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, recommends beef tea, made very hot with red pepper, for delirium tremens. A London surgeon is stated to have treated 150 cases successfully with this remedy alone.

It is said that the rate of the filtration of the water supplied by the various water companies to London does not in any case exceed 540 gallons per square yard of filter bed in twenty-four hours.

Professor Fisher, of Munich, has succeeded in obtaining from distilled coal a white crystalline substance, which, as far as regards its action on the system, is exactly the same as quinine, though it assimilates with the stomach more easily than quinine does.

It is not generally known that nutmegs are poisonous, but a physician writes to the *American Journal of Pharmacy* detailing the case of a lady who nearly died from eating a nutmeg and a half, and he points out the fact that the toxic effects of the drug are described in both the National and United States Dispensatories.

The trial of the dynamite projectiles near Washington has aroused curiosity concerning the peculiar effect of this powerful explosive differing from that of gunpowder. It is explained that by reason of its quickness of action the armor of a ship or the wall of a fort, in a word, the solid offers less resistance than the miles of atmospheric surrounding. This has been shown by a recent illustration. By placing 100 pounds of gunpowder on a hard surface, then applying a light to it, an explosion would of course follow, and the explosion would take an upward course; but should ten pounds of dynamite be placed in a like position and exploded the action is so quick that after being fired it would tear up the earth for many yards around.

The death rate of Russia is the highest in Europe. This, the *Medical Recorder* says, is attributed to the paucity of medical men and the habits of the rural population. According to late returns, the average duration of life is only twenty-six years and the mortality among infants is frightful. More than 60 per cent of infants die before they reach their fifth year. Of 8,000,000 boys only 3,770,000 attain the age of military service—that is to say their 25th year; and of these at least 1,000,000 are found, by reason of shortness of stature and weakness of body, to be unfit for military duties.

Dr. Baugless, before the Nineteenth Century Club, describing the cemetery of Kensal Green, in London, where Leigh Hunt, Thackeray and others famous in English history were said to be buried, said that seven acres of the cemetery were set apart for the burial of London's poor. The directors of the cemetery in a country which laid more stress on burial than any other in the world said that there were in the seven acres 133,500 graves. Each grave held ten coffins, making the total of 1,335,000 bodies of poor people buried there. It was figured that by burying over the same ground once every ten years the seven acres would last indefinitely. This gave 2.2 feet of surface space to each body for one day only.

German Designs on Africa.

The *Manchester Guardian's* London correspondent writes that from intelligence which has been received in this country from Germany and Zanzibar there seem good reasons to believe that the Germans meditate fresh annexations in Eastern Equatorial Africa on a much larger scale than has hitherto been attempted. It has already been announced that Dr Oscar Lenz is about to proceed from Berlin to the Congo at the head of one of the most important geographical expeditions ever sent from Germany. At the same time Dr Fischer, who preceded Mr Joseph Thomson in his exploration of the Massai country, is to go to the regions between the Congo and the Nile, approaching it through Uganda, the kingdom of the late Mtesa. The two travellers are to meet, but before they do so it is understood that Dr Fischer will hoist the flag of the Fatherland in the region on the south side of Kilimanjaro, and which Mr H. H. Johnston has recently described as one of the most fascinating, fertile, and in every way promising portions of Africa. Dr Fischer has been already concerned in the recent German acquisitions in the vicinity of Zanzibar, the territorial area of which has been, however, very much exaggerated, as it does not amount to more than 2,500 square miles. The importance attached both in Germany and Africa to the enterprise of Drs Lenz and Fischer points, however, to a much more formidable expansion on the part of Germany in the region mentioned than is implied even in the acquisition of the Kilimanjaro territory. It is considered not impossible that the German explorers may be able to rescue Lupton Bey, Emir Bey, and the other foreigners in the Egyptian service, who, as no authentic news of their being killed by emissaries of the Mahdi has arrived, are believed to be still holding out in the Sudan.