

How Georgette Kept Tryst.

BY M. E. PENN.

It was a fete day at Versailles, and the palace and grounds were crowded with holiday-makers from Paris. A golden September afternoon was waning to its close. The autumn sunshine, low, but clear, lay in long shafts of light across the quaint and formal gardens, and glittered in the spray of innumerable fountains, tossing, falling, splashing, sparkling, on every side. The air was full of the laughing, liquid sound.

The crowd had gathered thickly round the Grandes Eaux, that is, the giant jet in the "Basin of Neptune," and "Apollo," leaving the remote parts of the grounds comparatively deserted. In one of the loneliest of the green and shady allees a young couple were slowly sauntering. The girl, who was dressed with the dainty neatness characteristic of a Parisian ouvriere of the better class, had taken off her hat, in order to decorate it with a spray of ivy, while her companion held her parasol, and watched her in admiring silence.

The sunshine touched her wavy brown hair with gleams of gold, and brought a tinge of rose to the delicate pallor of her face; a face which, in repose, had a look of patient melancholy, as if already life's shadows had fallen upon it. But when, glancing up from her task, she met her lover's eyes, it brightened all over with a smile so sudden and sweet that he was dazzled.

"Georgette, how lovely you are!" The remark seemed to escape him involuntarily. "It is my hat, not my face, you are to admire, if you please," she returned, with a demure little glance at him, as she put it on again. "Look, doesn't the ivy make a pretty trimming?"

"Charming; the frame is worthy of the picture. Suppose we sit down on the grass here for a few moments, that I may admire it at my leisure?"

"Yes, let us. I am so fond of this place," she responded.

It was a narrow walk, shut in by trees and quaint clipped hedges, with grass underfoot, and leaves overhead, green, shady, solitary. Near where they sat was a little fountain, and the statue of a water-nymph, in a mossy marble basin. The murmur of the crowd reached them vaguely, mingled with the rushing of water, and the music of a distant band.

"You love this spot? so do I," said the young man, as he stretched himself on the grass at her side. "It was in this very avenue, my darling, when these leaves were young, that you spoke the three sweet words which made me the happiest man in France."

"Did it really make you happy to know that I loved you, Etienne? I am so glad," the girl replied, letting her hand rest for a moment on his dark curls. "But my love can never be to you, dear, what yours is to me, because you have never known what it is to be utterly alone and uncared for, as I was till I met you, six months ago."

"My poor little love!" he murmured, raising her hand to his lips. "What a happy inspiration it was of mine, when I went on at a moment's pause, 'to take lodging' in the dear, dull old house in the Rue des Ecoles—little I dreamt that I should meet my fate under that roof! Do you know that it was your voice that decided me to take the rooms?"

"My voice?" "When the concierge showed me to me you were singing over your work in the story above. I asked him whose was that exquisite voice, like a chime of silver bells? It was a little flower-maker, au sixieme, he told me whom the neighbors called 'Miss Nightingale,' and it was worth five francs a month extra, he assured me, to have her for a few low lodger."

Georgette laughed and blushed. "What a compliment from old Pödevin!" "I quite agreed with him, and we came to terms on the spot. I found that my musical neighbor had a face that matched her voice, and if ever there was a case of love at first sight it was mine, Georgette. My heart went out to you, dear, from the moment when first your sweet, shy, blue eyes met mine."

"And mine to you," she whispered. "Is that true? then why did you take such trouble to avoid me, little coquette?" "Now that is ungrateful. Was I not—" "You were the kindest and most obliging of neighbors, I admit," he interrupted; "but you were as shy as a bird. I seldom caught a glimpse of you except we met by chance on the stairs, and then sometimes, instead of stepping to speak, you would dart past me like a flash of light."

"My time was more valuable than yours, you see," she explained. "I work in earnest, while you only play at work. You need not look dignified, you know it is the truth. If you had no other resource but your pen, no rich relations in the background who—"

"You forget that I cut myself adrift from them two years ago, when I gave up the profession they had chosen for me, and turned from the sandy desert of the law into the flowery fields of literature. From their point of view, I have committed social suicide; they have formally washed their hands of me."

His companion's face clouded. "What would they say if they knew that—that you were betrothed to a common work girl?" she asked with a troubled smile.

"They do know it," he answered quietly. "I wrote to my father some days ago."

She started, and the color rushed to her face.

"And he—has he answered your letter? what did he say?"

"What did he not say, rather?" returned Etienne, laughing. "You don't expect me to repeat it all, I hope? Why do you look so scared, child? You know that nothing he can say—nothing anyone can say or do would make me give you up."

"I know. But—perhaps it is selfish of me to let you sacrifice your prospects for my sake," she faltered, looking at him in wistful doubt. "Perhaps some day you will regret—"

"Georgette," he interrupted reproachfully "have you so little faith in my love? have you so soon forgotten all I said to you under these very trees when we plighted our troth?"

"How could I forget?" "Then trust me dearest, and do not fear the future. It comes to us smiling, with both hands full of blessings."

"Ah, do not expect too much from it, Etienne."

"Well, if it only brings me bread and cheese, and you, I shall be contented," he returned.

"Contented without fame or riches?" she questioned, smiling. "I thought you were ambitious?"

"So I was—once, but there is no room for ambition in a heart that is full to the brim of love. After all," he added philosophically, "what the happier should I be for riches or renown? I have set up my tent in the pleasant land of Bohemia, where there is no shame in a shabby coat, where poverty is picturesque, and even starvation has its poetical side."

Georgette raised her eyebrows.

"It is plain that whoever first said so never felt it," she commented, dryly. Something in her tone made her companion look round at her face.

"Georgette, how you said that! One would almost think that you—"

"That I had known that poetical pain myself?" she added, with a smile, half sad, half ironical. "Perhaps I have. You see I have only these"—holding up her hands—"to keep the wolf from the door, and if work fails me for a time, he peeps in. Ah, he is not in the least 'poetical' I assure you, but the ugliest monster you can imagine."

She shuddered, then broke into a laugh. "You look as startled as if you saw him at this moment peeping over my shoulder. Why do you talk of such horrors, Etienne? Let us change the subject."

Etienne was silent. A curious chill crept over him; a sudden shadow seemed to have fallen on the bright day. There was a jarring sense of incongruity in the association of Georgette with such grim realities as want and hardship. He looked at the sweet, courageous face, the fragile figure, the delicate little hands that had been forced to fight so hard a battle for bare existence, and his heart swelled with pity and a generous sort of shame as he contrasted his easy, indolent life with hers.

He seized her fingers and covered them with kisses.

"Dear, brave little hands! I never loved them so well. Thank heaven, they will not have to toil much longer."

She smiled, and passed her hand over his hair again.

"So when I share your tent in the pleasant land of Bohemia I shall have nothing to do all day but count my fingers?"

"You will have nothing to do but to love me and be happy."

"Aimer, chanter—voilà ma vie!" she broke into melody as naturally as a bird sings. "But do you know that it is getting late?" she added, looking round.

And, indeed, while they had been talking the golden afternoon had crept away. Shadows were lengthening on the slopes, and in the ferny hollows of the park it was already dusk.

Presently all the fountains ceased, and there was a sudden hush and stillness in the air; a sense of coolness, freshness, moisture; an odor of wet earth and grass. The water in the "Basin of Neptune" subsided into stillness, though its surface was still fretted with ripples like a miniature sea, and the great metal groups of Neptune and Amphitrite, Proteus, and the strange sea-monsters, dripped and glistened in the last rays of the setting sun. An hour later Georgette and her lover left the grounds, and made their way to the station, where a train was just starting for Paris.

It was pleasant to be borne swiftly through the wide, dusky landscape, alongside of the sweet Seine, dimly shining in the starlight; past Saint Cloud and Suresnes, with their pretty villas buried in foliage; past Puteaux with its market-gardens, and Asnières with its flotilla of pleasure-boats, till the lights of Paris began to sparkle round them, the vague white glare of the electric light showing where the Place de l'Opera lay; the long lines of lamps on the exterior boulevards stretching away in apparently endless perspective on every side.

Then came the loitering walk homewards along the brilliant streets, where all Paris seemed to be sitting outside the cafes taking its cigar and "chasse"—over the Pont Neuf, where they paused to look at the moon in the river, and so into the labyrinth of quaint old-world streets of the classic Quartier Latin.

It was nine o'clock when they reached the Rue des Ecoles. As they passed the concierge's den, the latter, a snuffy old man, in a holland apron and tasseled smoking-cap, put out his head and called them back.

"A letter for you, Ma'mselle Georgette. Came by the midday post. A man's writing," he added, as he handed it to her.

"I have no gentlemen correspondents, Monsieur Pödevin."

"It's a gentleman's writing anyhow," he repeated.

She scrutinized the direction with a puzzled look, then shrugged her shoulders, and put the letter into her pocket.

"Perhaps it is an order for flowers," she remarked.

"For orange-blossoms, hein?" suggested the old man, with a sly glance at Etienne.

"If so I shall not accept it," was Georgette's answer.

"Why?" her lover demanded, as he followed her upstairs; "surely it would be a good omen."

"No; if you make them for others you will never wear them yourself, they say."

"Superstitious child! You will let me see that letter, won't you? I shall not sleep till I know who is your mysterious correspondent."

"Is monsieur jealous, for example?" she asked, throwing a laughing glance at him over her shoulder.

"Not the least in the world," he protested, "I am only curious."

"Well, come up to my landing, and I will satisfy your curiosity as soon as I have lighted the lamp. Where is my key? ah, there it is!"

She unlocked her door and entered, while her companion stood outside, looking in at the humble little room whose threshold he had never crossed. The moonlight filled it, giving it a dreamy, unreal look, showing the little white bed in an alcove, the work-table with its pretty litter of half-finished flowers, the bird cage and plants in the window, and his own photograph on the wall, with a print of our Lady of Lourdes above it. Everything was so daintily neat and trim as Georgette herself, and the room was sweet with the scent of mignonette.

"Bon soir, Jaunet! and thou too, Mignon, said the girl, as she entered, greeting her feathered and furred companions.

The canary responded with a shrill chirp, while the cat jumped on to her shoulder and purred a welcome. When the lamp was lighted she came towards her lover, who was watching her with all his heart in his eyes.

Her hair, damp with the night dews, lay in loose curled rings on her forehead;

fatigue had made her paler than usual, but her eyes shone like twin stars.

"You look at me as if you had never seen me before," she said smiling.

"I have never seen you look so sweet."

"Thank you; but you say that every time we meet, do you know?"

"Because at every meeting I discover a fresh beauty."

"And never any defects?"

He took her face between his hands, and looked at it critically.

"Yes; you are too pale, but that is soon remedied. One—two," he kissed her on each cheek; "there, that is better. Now look at me; let me see if your eyes are laughing as well as your lips."

They were laughing when she raised them to his face, but the look of passionate tenderness they encountered made them droop with sudden gravity, and brought a still warmer tide of color to her face.

"My sweet!" he whispered, bending till his bearded cheek touched hers; "it is a delight to look at you; it is joy to love you, and to be loved by you is heaven itself. Is there another man in Paris, I wonder, so happy as I am at this moment?"

"Hush!" she interposed, putting her hand to his lips; don't boast of happiness, that is the way to lose it."

He laughed.

"Another superstition! How many more have you in stock? And now for the letter. Let me hold the lamp while you open it."

"You will let me read it for myself first, I suppose?" "No, you are not to look over my shoulder," she added, laughing and drawing back; "have patience."

Smiling still, she unfolded it, but she had hardly glanced at the first lines when her face changed. The color faded out of it suddenly; the light from her eyes, the laughter from her lips. She glanced rapidly down the page, then hastily refolded it, and thrust it into her pocket.

"Georgette!" Etienne exclaimed, "you promised to show it to me."

"Not now—to-morrow," she faltered.

"To-night; at once, if you please," he persisted, his face darkened; "it is no ordinary letter to cause such agitation. I have a right to see it; give it to me," and he laid his hand on hers.

She looked up at him piteously. "Not now—to-morrow," she repeated, hardly above a whisper.

He let go her hand, and turned from her, his face dark with jealous anger. She clasped her hands upon his arm, and detained him.

"Do not part from me in anger to-night—do not, my darling! trust me till to-morrow."

He looked at her a moment with troubled eyes, but there was no resisting the pleading of that sweet, tearful face.

"So be it," he said, gravely; "you shall tell me your secret at your own time. Good-night, Georgette."

As he bent towards her, with a sudden, impulsive movement, the girl put her arms round his neck, and drew his head down, kissing him again and again with quivering lips, then took the lamp from his hand, and turned away.

Touched and surprised by her unwonted effusion, he went slowly downstairs, pausing when he reached his own landing, to look up.

Georgette was leaning over the banisters with the lamp in her hand, looking down at him. There was an expression on her face he had never seen there before; a rapt, far-away gaze that gave it a spiritual look. The moment he glanced up at her she vanished into her own room, and all was dark.

Many a time in after years Etienne saw her in dreams, bending towards him with that rapt look in her eyes, with the shadows around her and the light upon her face.

Etienne passed a restless night and woke late next morning, feeling unrefreshed, and with a strange sense of oppression and uneasiness.

It was a gloomy day, with a leaden sky and a chill wind.

"The weather is breaking," the concierge remarked, when he brought up the roll and cup of cafe au lait for his lodger's "first breakfast." "Yeste day was the last of the summer."

"The last day of summer." The young man found himself repeating the words thoughtfully as if they contained some hidden meaning.

It was after eleven o'clock by the time he had finished. He went up to Georgette's room and tapped at the door. It was not latched, and as his summons met with no reply he gently pushed it open and looked in.

The expression of pleasurable anticipation faded suddenly from his face, giving place to one of blank perplexity and astonishment.

One glance showed him that Georgette was not there, and it showed him something else. All her belongings had vanished. The room was stripped and bare.

He hurried down-stairs to question the concierge.

"Oh, yes, Ma'mselle Georgette is gone, sure enough," the old man told him, coolly. "She came down shortly after nine o'clock, and told me that she was obliged to leave immediately. She said her telegram and fetched a fiacre herself. The driver carried her box down-stairs, and—paf! she was gone; all in a breath, as one may say. But she left a note for you, monsieur; that will explain it, no doubt."

"Why could you not tell me that at first?" Etienne asked impatiently, snatching it from his hand.

Enchased was the letter which she had received on the previous evening, together with a few lines in her own writing. He put the former aside without a glance and took up her hurried note.

"Dear love, I write with a breaking heart to bid you farewell," it began. "The letter I received last night was from your father. When you have read it you will know why I have left you."

Etienne uttered a passionate exclamation. "My father! ah—I understand. He knew that I should never give her up, so he has taken the surest means of driving her from me."

"If a marriage with me," Georgette wrote, "would ruin all your prospects, and spoil your life at the outset, as he says, I must never be your wife. I love you too well to injure you so cruelly, and therefore, though it tears my heart, I must say—adieu! Forgive me, my beloved—and forget me."

The letter ended there, but overleaf there was a postscript, which had evidently been added on a sudden impulse at the last moment.

"My courage fails me. I cannot, cannot write that cruel word, 'farewell.' I must have a hope, however slight, to keep me

from despair. Dearest, in two years' time you will be your own master; then, if your love is unchanged, we may meet again. On the first Sunday in September, two years hence, go to Versailles, and in the afternoon, when the fountains play, wait for me in the 'Verte Allee' where we sat yesterday. If I live I will come to you. Till then, my best beloved, adieu!"

Etienne read it through twice and mechanically refolded it, then took up his father's letter—a pitiless letter, every word of which must have gone like a knife to her heart.

He went out at once and spent the remainder of the day in searching for her, enquiring in every quarter where she was known. But all his efforts were in vain. Her lonely little figure had drifted out of sight, and was lost in the great labyrinth of Paris. Two long years must pass before he could see it again.

A chill September afternoon. The sky was covered with low-hanging clouds, the wind had a wistful sigh in it which promised rain.

It was unpropitious weather for a fete at Versailles, nevertheless there was no lack of visitors, and to one of them, who was slowly pacing the "Verte Allee," this quiet, cool, grey day, full of soft mists and moisture, had a pensive charm of its own, like a picture in neutral tints, or an air in the minor key.

Etienne was first at the trysting-place; that quaint green avenue where Georgette and he sat and watched the fountains, two years ago.

Not for a moment did he doubt that she would come. He knew—he felt that she would keep her word. He longed impatiently for the meeting; yet, mingled with that feeling there was a vague dread which he could not understand and could not shake off.

"She said 'when the fountains play,'" he muttered, consulting his watch. "It is after four o'clock now; will they never begin?"

Even as he spoke, the waters were released, and he heard once more the familiar musical sound—the rushing, splashing, rippling, falling all around him.

Still the walk was solitary. To right or left there was no approaching figure.

At length, at the upper end of the glade, a woman's figure appeared. He could not yet distinguish the features, but he knew the shape, the walk, the dress. It was Georgette. His first impulse was to rush to meet her, but he restrained himself that he might enjoy the exquisite pleasure of seeing her come to him. His heart swelled with a joy so keen that it bordered upon pain, and tears rushed to his eyes.

Still, he did not speak; he did not stir. The look of rapturous expectation had faded from his face. He stood as if he were turned to stone. Was this Georgette, with the wan, white cheeks, the hollow eyes, that looked at him with such forlorn appeal; the pale lips, that seemed to have forgotten how to smile?

There was a moment of silence.

Before he recovered himself sufficiently to speak, before he could even put out his hand to detain her—to his astonishment, she abruptly turned from him, and passed swiftly on down the walk.

He hastened after her, calling to her to stop, but she only quickened her pace; and before he could overtake her, she had reached the terrace round "Neptune's Basin," and was lost in the crowd. He hurried to and fro, looking for her eagerly among the groups who were loitering round the fountains or sitting under the trees. Nowhere was she to be seen. He went over the same ground half a dozen times, always returning to the walk in the hope of finding her there, till at length he paused in bewilderment and consternation, and realized that he had lost her.

What did it mean? why had she fled from him? Could it be that she had misinterpreted his manner when they met?

At the first moment he had been too shocked and startled to speak; had she imagined that his love died a sudden death when he found her so piteously changed? The thought gave him a pang of self-reproach. He longed to fold her in his arms and tell her that never before had she been so dear to him.

But where was he to look for her? That was the question he asked himself as, after leaving the St. Lazare terminus, he stood hesitating in the Rue d'Amsterdam. Then it occurred to him that she might possibly be lodging in her old quarters in the Rue des Ecoles once more, or at any rate he might hear of her there.

He hailed a fiacre and drove across the water to the familiar street. The old concierge, with the holland apron and tasseled cap of yore, was smoking a post-prandial pipe at the door of his lodge.

"Good evening, M. Pödevin," Etienne began; "you don't remember me, I see; but I was a lodger of yours two years ago."

The old man peered at him through the duck and then nodded.

"I recollect you now, though I did not at first. So many lodgers come and go, you see, like the swallows, in the course of two years," he said, apologetically.

"And it is but seldom, I suppose, that they come back to the old nest?"

"Well, it happens sometimes," the other returned, knocking out the ashes of his pipe against the door-post. "For example, there is Georgette Treville—you remember her? the little ouvriere on the sixth; we used to call her 'Ma'mselle Rossignol'—"

"Yes, yes," he assented, eagerly; "is she here now?"

"She came back to her old rooms a few weeks ago. There was some excuse for my not recognising her. She was so altered, I thought it was her ghost."

"Had she been ill?"

"That was what I asked her. 'No,' she said, 'she had not been ill—she had only been starving.'"

The young man uttered an exclamation that was like a cry of pain. "God heavens! it is not she!"

The other nodded at him grimly, as he pressed the tobacco down in his pipe.

"You would not have doubted it, if you had seen her. She had been short of work for several weeks, she told me; and to be short of work meant to be short of food, you see. It is a common case enough, monsieur."

Etienne was silent; there was a choking sensation in his throat, and a mist before his eyes. The old man watched him curiously.

"You were good friends, you and she, in the old times. She will be glad to see you again, pauvre petite. She has been ill the last few days with a sort of low fever, and has not been downstairs."

"But she was at Versailles this afternoon?" His companion stared at him. "Not like

ly. She was in bed this morning, and my wife said she seemed worse."

"She was at Versailles this afternoon, for I saw her!" Etienne persisted.

M. Pödevin pushed his cap aside, and rubbed his head with a puzzled look. "That is odd. I have not stirred from this lodge, and I can swear I never saw her pass. However, if she did go she has certainly returned by this time, for she was never out after dusk, and if you would like to see her—"

"Yes, I will go upstairs at once," Etienne interrupted, and he turned away.

A host of tender recollections rushed upon him as he mounted the familiar stairs to Georgette's door. It was half open, and he paused a moment on the threshold, looking in.

The room was in shadow except near the window, where the rays of the rising moon "made a dim silver twilight," and showed him—Georgette, seated with her back towards him at the little work-table. She still wore her hat and jacket, and was leaning with her forehead on her folded hands, in an attitude of weariness or dejection.

His heart beat painfully as he crossed the room to her side, and laid his hand lightly on her shoulder. She did not stir or speak.

"Georgette!" he whispered, then gently raised her head, and drawing it back against his breast, bent and kissed her.

Marble was not colder than the lips which met his.

A shudder ran through him from head to foot. His heart thrilled with a sudden awful fear.

"Georgette!" he cried aloud.

There was no answer.

"She has fainted," he gasped; "she has—only—fainted. She will be better presently."

He lifted the nerveless figure in his arms, and laid it on the bed; then went to the stair head, and called loudly for assistance.

"Bring the light here," he said, abruptly, to M. Pödevin, who carried a small hand-lamp. The latter complied, holding it so that the light fell full upon the figure on the bed.

The face was waxen-white, and awfully still; the eyes were closed, the lips parted in a smile of unearthly serenity.

"Oh, God—my darling!"

The cry broke hoarsely from his white lips, as he sank on his knees at the bedside. "Georgette, my love, my little dove! Have I found you only to lose you forever? Speak to me—look at me!"

But the "shy blue eyes" would never meet his again; the sweet lips were sealed for ever.

For her all was ended, but for him there were the desolate years to come; the loneliness, the weariness, the aching sense of loss which would never pass away.

Ten minutes later a doctor had been summoned, and the little room was full of horror-struck and compassionate faces.

"Syncope—inanition; defective action of the heart—humph!" muttered the surgeon, as he raised himself after a brief examination. "When did this happen? Who saw her last?"

"I saw her this afternoon, monsieur," a woman's voice replied, and the speaker came forward. "I lodge in the next room, and when I passed her door about two o'clock she was getting ready to go out. I was surprised, as she seemed so ill, but she told me she had promised to meet a friend at Versailles. However, she did not go, for when I returned she was sitting at the table there, as if she had fallen asleep."

"It was the sleep that knows no waking," spoke the doctor, gravely.

Etienne, who had not yet moved or spoken, rose slowly to his feet. "What time—was that?" he asked, in a voice not his own.

"Three o'clock, monsieur, as near as I can guess."

The young man's figure swayed as if he were falling. He put his hand to his eyes. Awe and wonder too deep for words overpowered him.

The angel of death had summoned Georgette before the hour appointed for their meeting.

Who was it, then—what was it, he had seen at the trysting place?

We are told that "love is stronger than death." "Is it irreligious to believe that its magnetic power might be permitted for a moment to draw back a spirit from the shadowy borders of the Silent Land?"

A Suicide's Diary.

"A vapor gradually fills the room; the candle is nearly exhausted; I begin to feel a violent headache; my eyes fill with tears; I feel a general sense of discomfort; the pulse is agitated."

"Forty minutes past ten; my candle has gone out; the lamp still burns; the veins at my temple throb as if they would burst; I feel very sleepy; I suffer horribly in the stomach; my pulse is at 80."

"Fifty minutes past ten; I am almost stifled; strange ideas assail me; I can scarcely breathe; I shall not go far; there are symptoms of madness."

"Sixty minutes