

Literature.

DISFIGURED.

CHAPTER I.

"What are you saying, Miss Heath? Pray give us all the benefit of your remarks."

The speaker, a young man of some five-and-twenty summers, was lazily reclining on the grass-carpeted ground, his back resting against a stone, fallen at some distant period from the ruined tower that furnished the shade in which the whole party were grouped.

It was a picnic-party. The meal being finished, the partakers thereof had left the turfy enclosure which had served as a dining-room, to settle down in this shady corner, here to wait until the heat should diminish, for the sun was shining with almost tropical intensity.

"Certainly, Mr. Emerson," said the young lady addressed, who made an agreeable picture, in her pink cotton dress, shown up by the dark background of ivy. "I merely said that I know why Nellie Heriot is not here. Her nerves have not recovered since the fright she had the day before yesterday."

"Indeed!" drawled a young Hercules, whose eyes had been glued to the fair speaker for some time. "How interesting! What was it?"

"A ghost?" asked the youngest girl present.

"Or a spirit-message through the dining-room table?" asked Emerson, solemnly.

"Neither," said Phyllis Heath. "She met with a tramp when out walking, and he terrified her into giving him everything of any value she had about her—watch, rings, purse, and a little locket she wore round her neck. Silly girl, to go for a long walk alone. I never do!"

"I should think not!" said Hercules, otherwise Carter Abbott.

"But I wonder," remarked a quiet girl in brown, "that she did not scream for help or run away. Phyllis says she was so frightened that she handed over everything like a lamb."

"How dreadful!" said another. "It makes one feel quite nervous." "Miss Heriot must be rather foolish, I think," stifferly said Prudence Heath, elder sister to Phyllis.

"What should you have done in her place, Miss Heath, if I may venture to ask?" And the dark eyes of Kane Emerson danced mischievously under the hat he had pulled low, to ward off a passing sunbeam which had squeezed its way through a clink in the old gray pile.

"I never walk alone," Prudence curtly replied.

"I should have fainted, I'm sure, Kane," said Lottie Emerson.

"Don't doubt it, my dear," he said, drily; "especially if you saw help coming." Lottie laughed.

"How disagreeable and sarcastic brothers are! You are very silent, Joan! What are you thinking? What would you have done?" She turned as she spoke to a tall, fair graceful girl, seated upon a projecting corner of stone. Her large hat lay on her knee, that she might more conveniently lean her head against the hard old wall.

Many eyes followed Lottie's in the pause that followed her question, but the ones that contained the most interest were those of Kane Emerson and of Fred Lenthall, his friend, a thoughtful-looking man of apparently thirty.

"I would not have given up a thing," said Joan, with a half-scornful smile; "I should have knocked the fellow down." A burst of laughter followed, but Emerson said, under his breath:

"By George! I believe she certainly would!" "That comes of going in for gymnastics," said Phyllis Heath, looking pensively at her own little delicate wrist. "I am afraid that if I hit a man I shouldn't hurt him."

Joan's red lips took a more disdainful curve, but Carter Abbott, who had been gradually edging himself nearer to the object of his intense admiration, contrived to whisper:

a landing, and looked out from a deep embrasure at the blue lily-covered, old moat.

"Now, Mr. Lenthall," said Lottie, "let us be in front this time. I know we can get up more quickly than they do."

He was compelled to follow. Joan was about to do the same, when Emerson stopped her.

"Wait a minute, please, Miss Kennet, and let us rest on this window-sill," he said, suiting the action to the word. "I twisted my ankle slightly coming up. It will be all right directly."

"How unfortunate!" said Joan, sitting down as far from him as the width of the niche would allow.

"Quite the contrary. Any pain would be welcome, if it kept you always by my side."

"Compliments are wasted on me, Mr. Emerson." "That was no compliment, but the plain truth."

"You are so much given to small fictions," Joan said, with a quiet smile, "that I never know when you are speaking truth. I am compelled to take refuge in believing nothing you say."

Emerson looked vexed and mortified. "That is rather harsh. I don't think I quite deserve it."

Joan arose.

"I will go on to the top," she said, "and you can join us on the way down."

"Don't go yet," he entreated, following her to the rude staircase. "Do listen to me for five minutes."

"I have heard enough fiction for one day. I have a great dislike to being taken in, Mr. Emerson."

"What do you mean?—Oh! my ankle. Well, I will own that was a little bit of invention to keep you—"

She was already up some steps, so he had to give up the idea of saying more. He stood for a moment, frowning and silent, then bounded up in pursuit.

Some few days after this Joan Kennet was walking homeward in the cool evening after an afternoon spent with a friend.

The lower edge of the sun was just touching the purple horizon, and the portions of the landscape that lay highest were suffused with ruddy orange light.

The lane was a lonely one, but Joan was not nervous. She lingered to let her eyes dwell on the soft alternation of the gold and purple tints, nor did she hurry when she heard behind her the heavy tread of a man.

A shambling, shuffling tread it was, its sound accompanied by a hoarse cough. It came nearer and nearer, and then she was aware of a thick and husky voice addressing her in a whining monotone:

uncovered head and tattered coat told her the truth. Her face changed, and she walked on without a word.

"Miss Kennet," he said, again, "I hope you were not really alarmed?" No reply.

"You are offended, I see," said Emerson, keeping by her side. "Well, I humbly apologize. It was what you said at the castle the other day that put the idea into my head."

Still there was no response. "I wish I hadn't done it," he said, gloomily. "I am always putting my foot in it with you. Do speak, unless you want me to blow out my brains. No, don't go in yet—not till you have forgiven me."

He laid his hand on the gate, and held it shut, waiting for a reply. But Joan merely looked him coldly over, with an inward inclination to laugh at his odd appearance.

"How could I tell you would take it so seriously?" and Kane opened the gate, finding she was still dumb.

Joan passed through, then half turned.

"I think," she said, with energy, "there are few things more contemptible than a practical joke."

"What an idiot I am!" thought the young man, as she disappeared. He stood leaning on the gate-post for awhile, absorbed in thought.

The moon was rising as he walked back. He scarcely raised his eyes from the ground, but kicked the stones along as he went, as though they had had a share in his discomfiture.

"Hi!" He looked up. The call came from Lenthall, who, with a cigar between his lips, was sitting on the stile.

"Well!" He waited until Fred Lenthall came to his side.

"Emerson," said the latter, looking him over, "if it pleases you to make yourself look like a stupid, pray do so. But, if you frighten Miss Kennet again like this, you shall answer for it to me."

"Indeed," said Kane, coolly. "How long has it taken you to compose that speech?"

"Wherever you acquired a taste," Lenthall went on, ignoring the last remark, "for this vulgar masquerading—"

"Fred, you're an idiot," interrupted his friend. "Don't grand-language me. If you want to punch my head, do it like a man. I'm ready."

He threw off his rough "gaberdine," and made a feint of rolling up his shirt-sleeves, but Lenthall did not move.

"You evidently want to be laid up with rheumatism," he said. "The air is full of moisture."

Kane picked up the coarse garment and proceeded to put it on once more.

Lenthall and Joan, that she felt encouraged to proceed.

"He came down on his head, with oh! such a horrid thud! And then somehow he and the horse seemed to be all mixed up, and it sprawled about trying to get up, and at last did get on to its feet and galloped away. I just saw from the window that there was blood on his face, and that he did not move."

"And what did you do then?" Abbott asked breathlessly.

"Oh, I don't like to tell you," and Phyllis, hung her little head, and looked at the ground. "I am such a little goose, I know. I fainted."

(To Be Continued.)

It is told of a retired farmer that after returning from a Continental tour, on which he had long set his heart, he was narrating one evening to his friend the doctor, how he had visited "the majestic Lake of Geneva and trodden the banks of blue Leman."

"Excuse me," interrupted the doctor.

"Lake Geneva and Lake Leman are synonymous."

"That, my dear sir," replied the farmer, "I know very well; but are you aware that Lake Leman is the more synonymous of the two?"

"Hit de 'pear lak Providence is on my side," said the colored brother. "You know I los' my lef' arm in de sawmill las' year?"

"Yes."

"Well," I got \$50 damage fer dat, en fo' I'd half spent de money 'long come de railroad en cut off William's leg, en I got so much money for dat dat I ain't done countin' it yit! If Providence des stan's by me, en dey keep on a-hackin' at us, we'll soon be livin' in a painted house wid two brick chimlys!"

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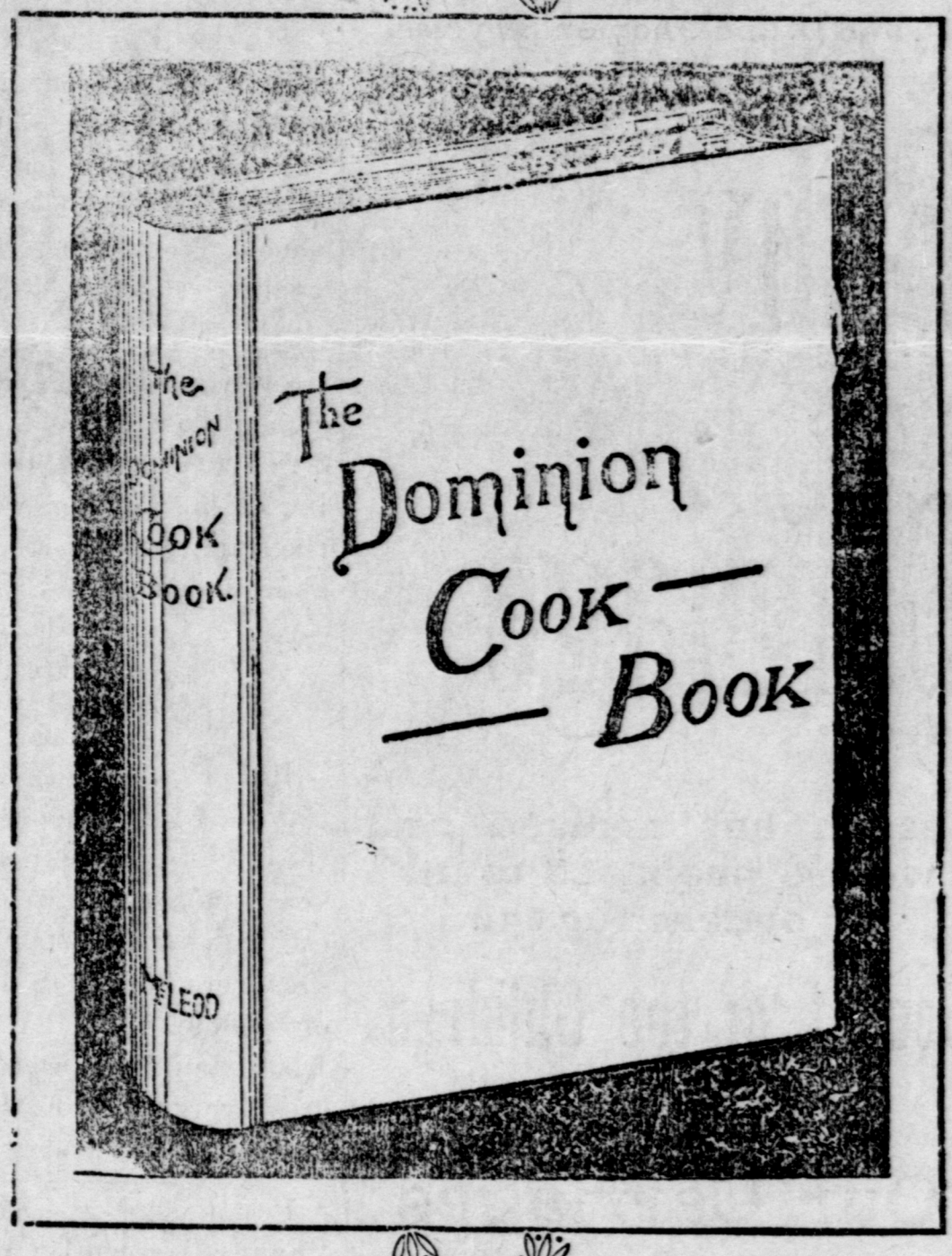
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