

The Gipsy's Prophecy.

BY R. P. SHILLABEER.

Concluded.

"Well," said he, "if that was Miss Marlow, I have never seen a young lady who so commended herself. I have been perplexed with wonder ever since I saw her how one so beautiful could have dropped down upon a scene like this."

"And your perplexity drove away the fish, I suppose?"

"Can't say, nor can I remember to have tried to catch any."

"Poor fellow!"

"Well, I don't need any commiseration. It is only a matter of curiosity, anyhow, and to-morrow I will catch a basketful."

"I'll wager," said George, "that you have thought twenty times to-day of that ridiculous prophecy."

"Well," he replied, "since you have alluded to it, I have, but without reference to anything in particular. It often troubles itself."

"Had it no reference," said Mrs. George, "to that thread which is being spun somewhere and waiting for you to find?"

"Well, if it had," he replied, "you surely would not urge me to endanger it by the peril I am in."

"All must take their risk," she said, as she had before.

Abel turned the subject gaily, and plunged into a romp with the children; but "curiosity" had taken a decided hold upon him, to which, however, he gave no outward sign, and the subject of the late conversation was not alluded to.

His going abroad now, was inspired by a wish to meet again his rural divinity, the 35th being secondary, of which, however, he caught a goodly share, and his fowling piece was often heard in the woods.

He hovered about the house with the hope of meeting her, sent presents of fruits, ordered from town, to Miss Marlow, who was acknowledged by the old lady, and adopted other small stratagems to get within the charmed circle, but in vain. He admitted no confidants to the state of his feelings, and imagined that his anxiety was unobserved, as the young partridge, which hides its head under a leaf, doubtless imagines its body all hidden; but Mrs. George, with a woman's insight, saw it all. At length finding all schemes unavailing, his self-pride led him to abandon his hope, and the fish bit better than ever.

One day, sitting beneath a tree arranging some flies, he was startled at hearing, a short distance from where he sat, the sweet notes of a joyous song in a female voice, which lent a charm to the solitude. When the song had ceased, he arose and moved softly toward the point from which it had proceeded, and there, through an opening amid intervening boughs, sat the object of his former meeting, engaged in weaving a garland of leaves. Her straw hat lay on the grass by her side, and her long dark hair, falling in waves over her shoulders, gave her the presumed appearance of a forest nymph.

Abel waited but a moment, and then broke the ice by breaking through the bushes and stood before Alice Marlow, who started with much surprise at his sudden apparition, but did not suspend her employment.

"Good morning, Miss Marlow," said he, "I believe I am right in thus naming you."

"You certainly are, sir," said she, "and I respond to your salutation: Good-morning. We abide under the same roof, I think," she continued.

"Yes, happily," he replied; and Abel Dorne, which means the individual before you, is rendered more happy by becoming personally acquainted with his charming co-tenant."

"You are very polite to say so. It requires very little to make some people happy."

"But when opportunity is denied, happiness may be painfully deferred."

"Maybe so; but will you please oblige me by bringing me some of those oak leaves which overhang the brook. My lap is so full it is inconvenient for me to move."

"Yes if you will sing me the song you were wasting on the desert air just now."

"I will," and she broke into a strain of most bewitching cadence, which continued until the leaves were brought, when mutual thanks were voted and accepted, and then, throwing himself upon the sward, Abel attempted to imitate her in manipulating the leaves, but found it more intricate than law.

"There," said she, seeing his difficulty, fold the leaf in this way over the preceding one, and then thrust the stem through both, which holds them in place; then add other leaves in the same manner, and the art is learnt."

"I see. Folded thus?"

"No, you have folded the leaf wrong. There, turn it this way, with the gloss outside."

"Yes, yes; now I know."

He sat and worked diligently, with her bright brown eyes now and then glancing down upon him, until the garland was completed, when she gathered the whole green fabric about her, rendering her more like a wood-nymph than before, and left him with a smiling farewell, to his meditations. His reflections took a new form, and that form was Alice Marlow. The little incident of a moment enhanced to his mind all the sunlight and wild beauty of the woods, and the graceful country girl was installed as an aylvan goddess. It was a bad day for fishing, and he returned with an empty creel but a full heart. His face bespoke his happiness.

"She's a jewel," said he to Mrs. George.

"To whom do you allude?"

"Our neighbor, Miss Alice."

"You have met her, then?"

"Yes, this morning in the woods, and my skill helped achieve that garland which I see around the room."

"She is indeed, a jewel."

"Perhaps," said George laughing, "she may be that missing thread which has so provokingly failed to put in an appearance."

"Indeed," replied Abel, gaily, "we can't tell; but those horrid contingents, you remember. By Jove, it would turn red hot love to ice and bar all hope to think of them."

"Yes, but all must take their chance,"

remember," said Mrs. George.

IV.

Notwithstanding the acquaintance had been so happily begun, the inter-diction was not lifted, and Abel found himself still shut out from the craved communion. After a few trials to remove the barrier, his pride revolted, and, feigning a call back to town, he left his friends with a promise to join them a week or so before their return, to finish up the docket, as he professionally termed it. He had a lurking hope that some inquiry might be made for him and some regret felt for his departure, and it was not very gratifying to his self-esteem, afterwards, to learn that the only regret had been felt by his friends, and not a word expressed by any other regarding his absence.

He was absent a week or so, during which time he had gone to Pleasant Cove, at Bald Cliff, in hope of meeting the gipsy or of hearing something relating to the old-time affair, regarding which some one, he thought, must have known; but he was not gratified, yet the stone he found where it was cast, though nearly covered with sand. That was a monument to the terrific fact.

He was received joyfully by the Calfs on his return to them, and the next day George proposed to join him in a ramble through the woods. They were gone nearly all day, making much noise with their guns but killing very little, when, on their return, they came in view of the farm-house through the trees. Feeling in his pouch George found two rifle bullets, and bantered Abel on a trial of skill in marksmanship, challenging him to compete for a trifling wager. They selected the knot of a pine tree, at a convenient distance, for the target, and drew lots for the first chance. Abel won, and, taking careful aim, he fired. He was moving to see where his shot had struck, when there came from the house a piercing shriek, and a great commotion was manifest about. Women were seen running about as if frantic, and a servant girl came bounding across the meadow, wringing her hands, her hair wildly blowing about her ears, shouting before she reached where they stood:

"Miss Alice is shot dead!"

They waited to make no enquiries, but, throwing down their guns, rapidly ran toward the house. Mrs. Calf stood in the door calling upon them to hasten, and pointed wildly to Mrs. Marlow's rooms. They rushed in upon a scene of fearful grief and dismay. There upon the floor, where she had fallen, and bleeding profusely, lay the young lady, beside whom her mother knelt in all the bitterness of woe, holding one of the moveless hands, and uttering words of the deepest tenderness, her mind wandering under the terrible calamity.

Abel, though overcome by the sight, retained his presence of mind, and, stooping over the prostrate girl, found that her heart still beat, and applied himself to learn the extent of her injury. His early education aided this, and, calling for water, he washed the blood from her face, which he found to proceed from a wound in her forehead, just covered by her hair. The bullet had ploughed to the bone, glanced off, and lodged in the window-casing across the room. Neighbors had been immediately summoned, who came rushing in, the most of them skilled in rural leechcraft, and when he called for styptics, with which to stop the flow of blood, they were ready with their astringent herbs. These were effective, restoratives were applied, the young lady opened her eyes intelligently and was removed to a sofa, and, after applying plaster from his own resources, Abel left the patient in the care of her female friends and her mother, who had recovered from a fainting fit which had been induced by reaction of feeling at her daughter's restoration.

The bullet, which had been fired from a shot gun, had glanced from the tree, though not in the direction of the house, and wrought the mischief described. Abel's joy at the escape of the young lady was mingled with a feeling of delight that, through this accident, he had obtained entrance to the coveted precinct, and, as she had escaped, he was radiant with happiness.

"Do you catch any glimpse of the mystical thread in this adventure, Abel?" asked George.

"I don't dare seek it," said Abel, at once grown serious; "for there must be another risk of violence, according to the prophecy, and rather than subject one I loved to such a peril as this I would leave my passion behind me and fly to the uttermost parts of the earth."

"All must take their risks, Abel," said the oracular Mrs. George.

"What is to be will be," said George sentimentally.

Abel made no further reply. The next day he had an invitation from Mrs. Marlow to visit his patient, whom he found sitting up, but pale and languid, the wound concealed by her hair. She extended her hand to him as he came in, and gave him a smile of welcome. The mother was profuse in her demonstration. He told her the story of the accident, and joined with her in an expression of gratitude at the young lady's marvelous escape. Then he had some soothing words to say to the patient which had her proper effect, and after a short visit he left, promising to come again, after an urgent invitation from the mother, supported by a look from the invalid. A wonderful interest in her welfare, though she had fully recovered, brought him daily to the Marlow's, or the singular number would express it better. Yet he was not in love, as he understood the passion, but he could not describe his feelings, and that prophetic thread of destiny loomed in his mind as large as the cable of a suspension bridge. They walked, rode and sat together, with full and free communion, but they made no talk of love. One day he found her engaged in looking over and arranging a box of what she called precious mementoes, and his gaze was attracted by a little blue shoe which lay half hidden among other matters.

"Please allow me to look at that," he said, in an agitated manner.

"Certainly," she replied, and looked with anxious surprise at his pale face as he examined it.

"What may this little shoe be a memento of?" he eagerly asked.

"Oh, of an early adventure of my own, in papa's prosperous days, when we went to the beaches; and at one time I came near losing my life by a big stone which was recklessly rolled down from the top of a hill, but leaped over my head and fell into the sea. On leaving the beach with my nurse I lost one of my shoes, and have kept this ever since as a memento. I have forgotten the name of the beach."

"Will you please excuse me for a few moments?" he said, and, without waiting to hear her consent, he darted from the room, greatly to her surprise. He rushed madly into the apartments of his friends, tore up to his chamber, dashed open a trunk with the ferocity of a baggage smasher, seized a small shoe from the nook where it for years had rested, and ran back in a very short space of time. He threw himself into the chair he had left, and placed on the table, beside the "memento"—its mate!

The young lady, startled by his agitation and strange conduct, and seeing the shoe, could only say:

"What does this mean?"

His face was lit with joy. His eyes, suffused with tears, beamed on her with infinite tenderness, and, impelled by a sense of chivalry which always appears in the old romances in such cases, he dropped on his knees before her.

"It means, my blessed one," said he, "the removal of all obstacles to my happiness, and yours, I trust. It means that I have found a thread of existence to twine with my own, years ago pressed, without fear of threatened calamity. It means a future of unselfish love and devotion to the wife of my choice. To you, the only woman I have ever loved, whom twice I have been near destroying, I offer an honest and faithful affection."

She gave him her hand confidently, and then, the first plunge being taken, they sat and talked seriously but happily regarding the past and the future, during which the mother came in, who was very much surprised to be informed of the step taken, but could only shed tears at what she was very glad to learn, and invoked the widow's blessing on the twain.

Then he led her to the apartments of the Calfs, where no announcement of his happiness was necessary, as his face revealed it, and a rapturous welcome was extended by his friends, who hailed the event as a most delightful close to the summer's enjoyment.

"But," said George, "how about that prophecy? How could you have brought to incur the risk, Abel?"

"Here is the fulfillment of the prophecy," he replied, showing the little blue shoe, "and here is the Cinderella who has come to claim her slipper and reveal to me the fact that the risk has passed. Twice tried by fate, the cord that has been twisting all these years has no break to fear in the future, and the gipsy's prophecy is fulfilled to the letter."

Those little blue shoes, shrouded in an ornate case of crystal and gold, form a prominent and attractive ornament in the home of Abel Dorne, and the tale has often been told of the perilous adventure at Bald Cliff.

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