

Continued from 1st page.

though they never lacked a dainty dish for a guest.

Alice had made the biscuits to-day for breakfast herself. Miss Vane, their guest coming down the stairs, saw her in the kitchen, her soft arms powdered with flour, her cheeks turned pink. It was a pretty home picture, Miss Vane thought, who had a man's taste in female beauty. "Now I would be vulgar in a kitchen. I am always vulgar out of full toilet," glancing down at her own large slovenly figure; "But Alice is like a child in that. She is her own sweet innocent self always, standing apart. Dress or work don't touch her."

She leaned out of the window. Her face was sorrowful this morning, and her eyes sunken. Miss Vane was a victim to some obscure ailment which some of her friends called hysteria, and others a secret sorrow. Whatever it might be, the girl seldom slept at night; from midnight till morning the house shook under her heavy tread as she prowled about, now lying on the parlor floor, now creeping with her cold feet into Alice's bed, then out to the porch, tramping up and down in the darkness and rain like a caged animal. By noon she was usually curled up asleep under your feet somewhere, a heavy, dead lump of matter. People who saw Charlotte Vane in the ball room likened her to all kinds of glowing tropical birds and flowers; but orderly house keepers found her unendurable, a very messenger of Satan sent to buffet them.

Charlotte flung the window open and thrust out her head and shoulders into the wet foggy air. The first morning rays had touched the upper waves of rising mist in the valley below, and brought out rose and saffron lights in them, half deadened by the somber number of the sea below. Beyond, rising out of the fog, was a peak of the South mountain, a glimpse of clear light, green woods and running streams.

"The hills of Beulah!" cried Charlotte. A choking lump rose in her throat. She was as easily moved as a child. The unexpressed power, the utter repose in this grand mood of nature calmed her, as the damp air cooled and steadied her body. She stood a long time without moving. Perhaps for her, too, there were hills of Beulah waiting about this dark unintelligible world. For her too—

"What is it?" said a pleasant clear voice at her elbow.

"The sunrise." "Oh, it is nice. But it's horribly chilly! Come to breakfast, Charlotte, dear."

Down in the bright little breakfast room Mrs. McIntyre was waiting, seated by the fire in her worn velvet chair, the cat curled up at her feet, and her soft white fingers busy with that everlasting cloud of white netting. Miss Vane, who never sat on a chair, curled herself up on the rug at her feet, and put her head on her lap.

"The fire is pleasant this chilly morning, isn't it, Charlotte?" removing, with soft motherly little touches and pats, the obnoxious curl papers. "Some of the gentlemen might call before breakfast is over, my dear."

"So they might." The word fired her blood as the sound of the trumpet does the trained racer's. She stretched her long lazy limbs and got up. "Truth is, I ought never to show' except at night. Even Ally with her baby complexion don't light up as well as I do. Don't blush, child, whenever one speaks of you. By the time you have been through as many seasons as I have, you'll talk of your own points as though you were a horse," with a bitter laugh, that had a stifled sob underneath.

Sometimes Miss Vane, when in a good humor, was as gay and brilliant with her as though they had been gentlemen. She told queer, cynical stories of her seasons at New Orleans, Havana, or Paris, out of which, however, all vicious meaning was purged in respect to the innocence of the little bread and butter girl, as she called Ally. But to-day she was silent, almost, cast furtive gloomy glances over at Alice's lovely little face, soft brown hair, neither chignon nor fluffed, and fresh morning dress. These people were altogether genuine and fresh; it was that which puzzled and irritated her. They had known great trouble. Would nothing break their cheery, bright calm? When Charlotte had visited Virginia before, the McIntyre estate was as large as a German principality; now they were wretchedly poor.

Alice, after various mental pokes to rouse Miss Vane, gave it up. "Have you decided, mamma, about my blue silk?"

Charlotte pricked up her ears at the first mention of dress. "That store of old lace you had put by for Ally—heard the soldiers tore it into rags before your eyes."

Mrs. McIntyre nodded and stroked pussy gently. Yet she did grow pale. "Don't bring ghosts, even of old lace, to the breakfast table!" cried Ally, quickly.

"But the idea of merino at a ball, Alice!" solemnly. "You don't understand, child. And yet you sit here and do nothing!"

"What could we do, Charlotte? The lace was torn into shreds—perfect shreds, I assure you!"

"Who talks of lace?" vehemently. "You and your mother are in want, actual want. You have culture, but of you, fine taste and shrewd wit. Why do you not use them to help yourselves and the world?"

Mrs. McIntyre's face deepened in color, but she did not speak.

"I'm sure, Charlotte," piped Ally with a nervous quiver, "I do not wish mamma to want. I'd teach myself if anybody would learn; but I only know two pieces and they're out of date. I can embroider very nicely!"

"Your cousin cannot mean that we should be seamstresses, Alice," quietly. "Seamstresses—yes. Anything that would give a place in the world. I wish, God knows, that I had no fortune, that I might do something to justify my right to live," cried Miss Vane, who was now fully mounted on her last hobby.

Joe's horse's hoofs were heard outside.

Children Cry for

side, and Miss Vane abandoned her cause and vanished. A man—any man—to her was a foe to be overcome, and she was never victorious in her morning wrappers. She went to her room and spent the day there, in planning how to use her fast wasting life. She was in deadly earnest in the matter. She thought, as she did every day, of lecturing, of going into a hospital or a nunnery. The happiest time of her life had been during the war, when she had been a Confederate spy at Washington, carried maps in her boot heels or chignon, and when she appeared as Maryland at a masquerade ball in Richmond, with gold chains fettering her beautiful bare arms.

"Ah! then I was a patriot! Then I lived! Like a man," she thought. The tears were in her eyes. "What was it Mrs. McIntyre had said of Alice? Wife and mother?" She tossed slatternly and nerveless on the bed, saying the words over dully again and again. Would she ever be a loving wife as those women? She thought a baby's fingers might take away the stain and sore from her breast, but nothing else could. Nothing.

Then her thoughts went off at a tangent to James Vogdes. She had known him but a week or two, but she loved him. She was sure she never had loved any man so much before. If she could only be sure that he cared for her! She sat up on the bed, her sallow skin heating into mellow passionate tints, her eyes half shut and brilliant as an animal's watching his prey. If she could rid him of that weak feeling for Alice! It was not love. That silly commonplace girl had but a surface touch: she could never raise the brain power, the fever passions which Charlotte felt were latent in him. "I am his equal! I will make him mine—to-night."

The next moment she bethought her of her dress for the evening. She had known him but a week or two, but she loved him. She was sure she never had loved any man so much before. If she could only be sure that he cared for her! She sat up on the bed, her sallow skin heating into mellow passionate tints, her eyes half shut and brilliant as an animal's watching his prey. If she could rid him of that weak feeling for Alice! It was not love. That silly commonplace girl had but a surface touch: she could never raise the brain power, the fever passions which Charlotte felt were latent in him. "I am his equal! I will make him mine—to-night."

CHAPTER III.

Joe Page kept an anxious watch on the door all day for Miss Vane. Alice was a nice little thing, but a man of the world like himself found, of course, her more attractive in a higher type of woman. However, he lounged away the day contentedly enough. The little parlor, as usual, was cheerful and sunny, and Ally was always vivacious and stout tempered, and secretly relieved a bit of gossip, as every woman does, however well bred. Joe mentally parted her on the head pattingly. What a thorough little housekeeper was so tender and watchful with her mother! too they were intimate as two happy girls together. Just the very wife for James Vogdes. There was a whisper going about the neighborhood that Vogdes had been a sailor for Alice ever since the little girl had left school, which was in fact but a few months ago.

"I'd give all I'm worth to know if he has changed his mind since he saw Miss Vane," thought Joe, looking steadily at his boot tops, his heart in a heroic glow of jealousy. "But how the deuce is a fellow to find out?"

"Secundus is training that pony capably," he remarked. "The bay, you know? Vogdes intends it as a birthday gift for Miss Vane."

Now, there had been a vague rumor that the pony was to be broken for Alice.

"I never knew a woman ride more beautifully than Charlotte," Mrs. McIntyre remarked quickly. "I always think of Di Vernon," said Ally with a little gush of enthusiasm. "By the way, Vogdes bade me give you his compliments, Aunt Letitia. He will ride over this afternoon. Tom wants to see Miss Vane."

"Tom is very fond of dear Charlotte," said Ally. "Everybody is that, though," forcing a smile; and then the little girl got up and went to her own room in great haste, only to sit down and stare at the whitewashed wall when she reached it. Charlotte was lovely, there was no denying that; especially in that puffed yellow silk—and her arms and hands were models for a sculptor, as Cousin Joe said—"When they are clean," Ally added as a footnote in her secret soul, with a malicious twinkle of her head. "But that is no reason why she should take—my—my friends away from me," said Ally, trying to hold back the tears in her blue eyes. "Cousin Joe hasn't asked me to dance once this summer, and even Secundus brings all the bouquets for Miss Vane, and now there's Tom gone! Dear little fellow! It was hard she couldn't leave me Tom." The little urchin was in the habit of running down to the cottage every day, and Alice's devotion to him (when nobody saw her) was something wonderful to behold. How she brushed and curled his yellow hair how she slyly sewed on missing buttons, or darned tears in his trousers, whispering, "Poor little motherless fellow!"

Meanwhile, down stairs, Mr. Page entertained Mrs. McIntyre with some of his most brilliant anecdotes of society and blue bits of philosophy. Alice's mother, he remembered, had been both belle and bel esprit in her youth, and it was worth while to show her how superior young men of this day were in savoir vivre to those of her own.

The lady, her white fingers busy with her wool, turned Joe over and over, and read his whole secret leisurely; and she was fiercely jealous of Vogdes, who he believed meant to put his fate to the test with Miss Vane to-night. The poor boy was as helpless in her gentle handling as a miserable little mouse upon whom a white motherly old cat has laid her velvet paws.

She smiled complacently as she went up stairs to dress for tea. Poor Charlotte! that would be a terrible menace for any man under her rule as housekeeper. But she was thankful that Vogdes' attention had been directed from Alice. A widow with an unruly boy, a man whose early youth had been scarred with passion, was not the husband she would choose to take her pure white flower to his bosom.

[To be Continued]

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