

ON THE STAIRS.

(Daniel Mullen, in Boston Traveller.)

Baby footsteps patter
Up the winding stair;
Mother watches smiling,
At her baby fair;
Thanks in this world could there be
Baby quite so sweet as he.

Now he reaches landing,
Takes his lofty place,
Sees far down below him
Mother's smiling face.
Says through red lips, eyes of blue
"Mamma ain't 'oo tumming, too?"

Mother running swiftly
Up the winding stair,
Catches little baby,
Kisses golden hair;
Whispers in his tiny ear,
"Mamma loves you—far too dear."

Twilight shadows gather
All about the room,
Mother by the window,
Sitting in the gloom,
In her hand, no more to use,
Lie a pair of tiny shoes.

Now the sunset glories
Bathe the western skies,
Mother look up sadly,
Through her tear dimmed eyes,
But for her sunshaft bears
Just a flight of golden stairs.

Far up on the landing
Smiles a baby's face,
Little hands are beck'ning
Through the air space,
Calls a child's voice, sweet and true,
"Mamma, ain't 'oo tumming, too?"

A Letter of Refusal.

"May I come in?"

The curtains from behind which the musical voice issued shook a little, but no one appeared. The man at the easel painted away industriously, putting in a sunset sky with strong, even strokes.

"When our forefathers signed the Declaration of Independence 120 years ago—," he began.

"Please—"

A face made its appearance at the parting of the curtains, a face framed in dark, wavy hair, with big shining eyes, made soft by long curling lashes, and a red, red mouth, just now drooping pitifully at the corners.

"They made all men free and equal," proceeded the man, never once looking up, "and since then a lot of ladies with abbreviated hair and petticoats have been struggling to make their sex also independent—and with considerable success."

"Don't be horrid," pleaded the red mouth, seconded by the shining eyes.

"Therefore, I was about to say," he went on, calmly, "I don't see how I can hope to prevent you from coming in, if you choose to do so."

She stepped inside, but did not advance into the room.

"I know you're going to be horrid," she said, plaintively.

He laid down his brush, and, turning at last, surveyed her deliberately as she stood, her slender shape outlined against the curtains. They were burlap curtains, which she had painted a dull brick red ("Pompeian red," she called it), and which she had ornamented with a Greek border in yellow floss and hung in the doorway, herself, in spite of his scoffing and ribald protests. They were pretty bad, those curtains, but whatever their limitations from an aesthetic point of view, they certainly made an effective background for the white-robed figure, and his eye lingered approvingly on the picture a moment before he said severely:

"What have you been doing?"

"Why, the idea!" she exclaimed, indignantly drawing her figure up to its full height and flashing a protesting glance at him from under her long lashes.

"I notice that you generally take it for granted I'm going to be horrid when you've been particularly horrid yourself," he observed blandly.

She did not reply to this daring remark, but, crossing the room to the mantel, carefully selected an especially ugly bull-dog pipe from the collection it contained. This she filled, with practiced fingers, from a battered tobacco jar that stood near, and then, crossing to the easel offered it to the man with a most bewitching little air of coaxing humility.

"My dear young woman," he cried, waving the offering away sternly, "do I look like a man who would accept a bribe? Do my features bear the imprint of vulnerable virtue, that you should thus seek to gain my favorable judgment for your nefarious goings-on by such a palpable—"

He said no more, for just then the stem of the pipe was dexterously inserted between his teeth, and, deftly striking a match on the broad sole of the shoe, conveniently presented to her by the careless attitude of its owner, the girl applied it to the tobacco in the pipe bowl. In spite of himself, he closed his teeth on the stem and drew a long breath, and as the first cloud of aromatic vapor rose to his nostrils his features relaxed.

"Well, who is it?" he asked, as the girl seated herself on a hassock and fixed her eyes on him appealingly.

"It's—it's—Hinsdale," she replied dolefully.

"Hinsdale. Why, I thought we disposed of Hinsdale three weeks ago, and since then—let me see—there was Smith and Devereux and—how many others?"

"Oh, never mind the others," she cried, petulantly. "It's Hinsdale now. We did dispose of him—or at least, I thought

we did—and I'm sure that letter I wrote—"

"Ah, did you write to him, too?" he asked, puffing a big cloud of smoke over his sunset and watching the effect of its vivid hues shining through the clouds of grayish vapor with an artist's delighted appreciation of color.

"Oh, well—the letter you wrote, then," she said. "Though I'm sure you didn't do it all; you only helped me."

"Oh, yes," he answered, indolently.

"But Hinsdale—he's broken out again?"

"Yes, worse than ever," and she sighed dismally, "and I want you to help me write him another letter—one that will fix it so he'll understand there's no hope—no possibility—I mean—of my ever being anything more to him—" here she floundered and broke quite down.

"Can't do it to-day," he said decidedly.

"I've got to get this picture done to-morrow—order, you know—and it'll be a scratch if I manage to do it. It means painting all night as it is."

"Oh, John, you must," she cried, eagerly. "I've just got to send it to him this afternoon by a messenger boy or he'll be sure to come up to-night and make a scene of something, besides—"

"No, it's no go," he said cruelly, taking up his brush. "You'll have to get rid of him somehow and come to-morrow—"

"But, oh, John," she burst out, tears coming to her eyes. "I can't come to-morrow. Aunt Maria has issued her commands—the fiat has gone forth—I'm forbidden to come here any more."

"The deuce you are." And he laid down his brush and faced around in his astonishment.

"Yes," she replied, furtively drying a tear on one of the ends of her muslin sash. (Jean never could find her handkerchief, being always without pockets.) "She says it's all well enough for me to take painting lessons of you, though everybody knows I never could learn to paint. Aunt Maria is so ignorant about such things, you know."

"Yes, I know." Blowing a ring of smoke ceilingward to hide a little smile. "And she doesn't mind my having a studio, if I'll fix one up at home, but she doesn't think it looks well for me to have one in this building and run in and out of here all the time—and so I've got to move to-morrow."

This time she forgot to dry the tear, and it ran forlornly down her cheek and fell with a splash on a study of the head of John the Baptist that lay on the floor. For a moment there was silence then John suddenly pushed back his easel and pulled a writing table toward him.

"Well, if you can't come to-morrow, I suppose I'll have to help you write your letter to-day," he said, but there was an unnatural sound in his voice and Jean looked up hastily through her tears.

John's face was grimly set, however, and told her nothing.

"Let me see—it was Hinsdale, I think you said—" he went on, still with that grating sound in his voice.

"Yes," she said, miserably, again having recourse to the crumpled sash.

"And I think we told him, in our last, that we'd be a sister to him," he proceeded, nibbling the end of his pen.

"Something of that sort." And she flushed warmly, clear up to the curly waves of dark hair on her temples.

"Evidently the 'sister' racket won't go down with Hinsdale," he said, reflectively. "You might offer to be his maiden aunt, you know—"

"There! I knew you'd be horrid!" she exclaimed, indignantly.

"It's a delicate job," he went on, reflectively. "Are you quite sure you mean to refuse him this time?"

"Of course I am," she burst out, indignantly. "You don't suppose I could care for a boy like him, do you?"

"He has a nice eye for color," proceeded John, drawing faces on the margin of the paper—faces that had big, soft eyes and pouting lips, strangely like the girl on the hassock, "and all his drawings are wonderfully strong. He's a gifted fellow, is Hinsdale—the best pupil I have."

"Yes; he's gifted enough," she assented.

"I've often wondered why he fancied you," said John.

"Oh, indeed!" she exclaimed, flushing once more.

"Yes. He's a dreamer, you know—an idealist—and it seems to me some angelic creature a little too poor and good for human nature's daily food, and that sort of thing, would be more in his line than a little human bundle of naughtiness like you," went on John, cheerfully. "You'd make a fellow like Hinsdale unutterably miserable, you know."

"You're very kind," said Jean, crimson with vexation. "But I shall not make Mr. Hinsdale miserable. I have not the slightest intention of ever doing so."

"Ah," replied John, coolly. "Then the sooner we write this letter the better. Now—what do you want to say to him?"

"Oh," she cried, struggling with her anger. "You are so disagreeable, I hate you—but I've got to have somebody to help me with this letter."

"Of course. And you really want to refuse him—for good and all?"

"Certainly I do. I want him to understand definitely that there is absolutely no hope of my ever caring for him in—the way he means—and once more she broke down, blushing but defiant.

"There's only one way to make a man understand that," said John, meditatively.

"Anything—so long as he understand, and leaves off being—being silly," she cried, impatiently.

John made no reply to this, but after a moment's deep thought commenced to write rapidly. Five minutes passed, during which John's pen scratched industriously over the paper and Jean sat bolt upright on her hassock, staring at the picture on the canvas. It was a pale, watery sunset that shed green gleams of light on a wide, lonely landscape, in the centre of which a woman stood alone gazing with desolate, hopeless eyes at the retreating figure of a man on horseback. It was painted with inimitable skill and a strange wild power that had made John Steele the most famous of the younger school of painters. What an artist he was and what a friend he had been to her! And now she must go away and perhaps never see him again, except in the class with the others. All those hours of merry comradeship was over—never to come again; all the sweet work and play together. A great sob came up in her throat, but just then John threw down his pen and she choked back the sob and, rising, reached out her hand for the letter. But he did not give it to her as she expected.

"It is a difficult thing to do," he said. "To make a man understand that no matter how much he cares for you, you can never care for him."

"Yes, I suppose it is," she assented. "But you have done it, I'm sure."

"Indeed, I may say there's only one way to convince a fellow of such an unpleasant fact," he went on.

"But you employed it?" she asked, eagerly.

"Yes. You may think it an extreme measure, though. I'll read it to you."

And he read aloud:

"Dear Mr. Hinsdale: I thought I had made it quite plain to you when, several weeks ago, you asked me to be your wife, that such a thing was quite impossible. I certainly tried to have you understand it, and I deeply regret that I did not succeed, because this renewal of your offer can only result in added pain to both of us. Believe me, I am deeply grateful for your preference, but you will realize, I am sure, how hopeless it is for you to ask more than my esteem when I tell you that I am engaged to be married to Mr. John Steele. Hoping that you will believe in the sincerity of my friendship, I am very sincerely yours,

"JEAN CHESTER."

The silence in the room could have been cut with a knife when John concluded his reading and laid the epistle back on the table. Jean stood rigid, gazing with a fixed and haughty stare at some point on the wall above John's head, when he turned and confronted her with a little embarrassment as he would have shown in facing a new pupil.

"Well—what do you think of it?" he asked, coolly.

"I think," she flashed out, "that you're the most conceited beast I ever saw."

"My dear girl," he protested, "I told you that extreme measures were necessary. It's the only way to get rid of him, and I'm willing to sacrifice myself in a good cause."

With great dignity Jean turned to leave the room, but somehow he was at the door before her, with his arms out-stretched.

"You're not going to leave me, little Jean!" he cried. "I can never get along without you any more, for, oh, I love you—love you—love you!"

A second she stood hesitating—then, with a little sigh, she went to him and burst out crying comfortably on his shoulder.

"Jean!" came a voice suddenly from behind the burlap curtain. It sounded like the clinking of ice in a pitcher.

"Aunt Maria!" gasped Jean, in horror.

"Oh, come in, Miss Chester," said John, drawing aside the Pompeian red draperies. "We were just going to find you and ask you to come to our wedding to-morrow at 12."

"Jean—what does this mean? Why didn't you tell me this before?" exclaimed Aunt Maria, aghast.

"I thought I ought to consult John before I told you," said naughty Jean.

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THE STORY OF GRACE DARLING.

BY ANNIE L. HANNAH.

On one of a rocky group of islands in the German Ocean, some four or five miles from the coast of Northumberland County, England, there lived about seventy years ago, a little girl. She had no companions save her parents, and one brother and we can imagine her wandering about her oceanbound home, feeding the water birds, hunting their eggs, gathering the feathery ferns, after which the Fern or Farne Islands, were called, or mounting with her brother the winding stairs to the lantern of the lighthouse, of which her father was keeper.

One night—it was the 6th of September 1838—a wild storm broke over the ocean; the waves rose mountain high, the night was pitchy black, and the rain poured in torrents. In the midst of this terrible tempest, a steamer going from Hull to Dundee, with sixty-three passengers on board, was wrecked on one of the Farne Islands. There on the ragged rock, with no help near, with the ocean like a boiling cauldron beneath them, the ship broke in two. The stern, where stood the captain and his wife, with many of the passengers, was swept immediately away; but the fore part remained jammed on the rocks. Clinging there for their very lives, expecting every moment to be torn away by the mad waters, nine human beings—all that were left of the large company—passed that horrible night, and there they were discovered, in the early morning light, by Grace Darling, nearly a mile away from the Island, with a sea between on which it seemed madness to attempt to launch a boat; and yet the moment her eye caught sight of those sufferers she declared that she must save them. Her father, who was well accustomed to the ocean, at first refused to go; it was only throwing away his life and hers, with out any possibility of saving the wrecked crew. When he found, however, that his daughter was determined to go he consented to make the attempt, though with very little hope that either of them would ever return. The terrible journey was begun, the mother assisting to launch the boat. With what sensation must she have watched the little craft, so tiny in comparison with the mighty waves, which now lifted it high up into the air, the next moment broke over it, threatening to capsize. On it went; now "mounting up to the heavens," now plunging from sight, while the anxious watchers on either side held their breath, and wondered if at last the end had come.

But God, who holds the waters in the hollow of his hand, was pleased to crown their noble efforts with success. The wreck was reached at last, and, one after another those stiffened hands, were unclasped and the wretched sufferers dropped, almost unconsciously, into the little boat. Slowly the return journey was made, and the rescued crew tenderly cared for.

Then from every part of Great Britain and from distant nations some tokens of every kind, expressing the admiration with which the daughter of the poor lighthouse keeper, had, by her noble courage, inspired all the world.

In England alone, there was raised for her a subscription of seven hundred pounds sterling, or three thousand five hundred dollars, and many valuable presents from persons of rank were poured upon her. Her portrait was taken, and appeared in all parts of the world, and the little island was visited constantly by those anxious for a glimpse of the heroine. All this would have been enough to turn the head of an ordinary girl, but while she was truly grateful for all the kindness showered upon her, did not change her modest, retiring character. She still lived with her parents on the lonely little island, though probably in greater comfort, owing to the generous gift of money which she had received.

But not for long did she stay to enjoy the fruits of her brave act; three years later her health began to give way, and on the 20th of October, 1842, she died of consumption.

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