

Literature, &c.

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THE STOLEN ROSE.

GERALDINE DELISLE was the year previous to the late Revolution, which in one day shattered one of the great monarchies of the earth, the reigning belle in her circle. Lovely in form and face, she wanted but to correct some trifling defects of character to be perfect. But if she had large black eyes and massive brow, and beautiful hair and white teeth—if she had a lily white hand and tiny feet, she knew it too well, and knew the power of her charms over man. But Geraldine had no declared suitor; she never gave the slightest encouragement to any one. Many offered themselves but they were invariably rejected, until at twenty her parents began to be alarmed at the prospect of her never marrying. Monseigneur and Madame Delisle had found so much genuine happiness in marriage—the only natural state for adult human beings—that they had promoted the early marriage of two sons and an elder daughter; and now that Geraldine alone remained, they earnestly desired to see her well and happily married before they died. They received numerous offers; but the young girl had such winning ways with her parents, that when she declared that she did not like the proposer, they never had courage to insist.

During the season of 1847 Geraldine never missed a party or ball. She never tired as long as there was music to listen to, and it was generally very nearly morning before she gained her home. About the middle of the season she was sitting by her mother's side in the splendid salons of the Princess Menzikoff. She had been dancing, and her late partner was saying a few words, to which she scarcely made any reply. Her eyes were fixed upon a gentleman, who, after observing her for some time, had turned away in search of some one. He was the handsomest man she had ever seen in her life, and she was curious to know who he was. A little above the middle height, slight, pale, with great eyes, soft in repose like those of a woman, he had at once interested Geraldine, who, like most women, could excuse every bad feature in a man save insipid or unmeaning eyes; and she asked her mother who he was.

'He's a very bad man,' said Mme. Delisle. 'Of noble family, rich, titled, young, and handsome. He is celebrated only for his follies. He throws away thousands on very questionable pleasures, and has the unpardonable fault, in my eyes, of always ridiculing marriage.'

'I cannot forgive him for ridiculing marriage, mamma, but I can excuse him for not wishing to marry.'

'My dear, a man who dislikes marriage is never a good man. A woman may from caprice or from many motives object to marrying, but a man, except when under the influence of hopeless affection—and men have rarely feeling enough for this—always must be a husband to be a good citizen.'

'Ah, mamma, you have been so happy that you think all must be so; but you see many who are not.'

'Mme. Delisle,' said the Princess Menzikoff, who unperceived had come round to her, 'allow me to introduce you to my friend Alfred de Rougement. I must not call him count, he being what we call a democrat with a clean face and white kid gloves.'

'The princess is always satirical,' replied M. de Rougement smiling; 'and my harmless opposition to the government now in power, and which she honors with her patronage, is all her ground for so terrible an announcement.'

Mme. Delisle and Geraldine both started and colored, and when Alfred de Rougement proposed for the next dance, was accepted, though next minute the mother would gladly have found any excuse to have prevented her daughter from dancing. Alfred de Rougement was the very 'bad man' whom she had the instant before been denouncing. But it was now too late. From that evening Geraldine never went to a ball without meeting Alfred. She received many invitations from most unexpected quarters, but as surely as she went she found her new admirer, who invited her to dance as often as he could without breaking the rules of etiquette. And yet he never spoke: the dance once over, he brought her back to her mother's side, and left her without saying a word, coming back when his turn came again with clockwork regularity. In their drives Mme. Delisle and Geraldine were always sure to meet him—scarcely was the carriage rolling up the Champs Elysees before he was on horseback within sight. He merely bowed as he passed however, keeping constantly in sight without endeavoring to join them.

One evening, though invited to an early soiree and to a late ball, during dinner they changed their mind, and decided on going to the opera at the very opening, to hear some favorite music which Geraldine very much admired. They had not yet risen from dessert when a note came from Alfred de Rougement, offering them his box, one of the best in the house.

'Why he is a regular Monte Christo,' cried Mme. Delisle impatiently. 'How can he know our movements so well?'

'He must have bribed some one of the servants,' replied Geraldine; 'we talked just now of where we were going before they left the room.'

'But what does he mean?' said Mme. Delisle. 'Is he going to give up his enmity to marriage, and propose for you?'

'I don't know, mamma,' exclaimed the daughter, coloring very much; 'he may spare himself the trouble.'

'Geraldine—Geraldine! you will always then make me unhappy!' said her mother shaking her head.

'But you cannot want me to marry Alfred? You told me everything against him yourself.'

'But if he is going to marry and be steady, I owe him an apology. But go and dress; you want to hear the overture.'

They went to Alfred's box—father, mother and daughter. But though in the house he scarcely came near them. He came in to ask after their health, claimed Geraldine's hand for the opening quadrille at the soiree to which they were going after the opera, and went away. The young girl rather haughtily accepted his offer, and then turned round to attend to the music and singing.

Next day, to the astonishment of M. and Mme. Delisle, Alfred de Rougement proposed for the hand of their daughter, expressing the warmest admiration for her, and declaring with earnestness that the happiness of his whole life depended on her decision. Geraldine was referred to. She at once refused him, giving no reason, but expressing regret that she could not share his sentiments. The young man cast one look of reproach at her, rose, and went away without a word. When he was gone she explained to her parents, that though in time she thought she should have liked him, she did not admire his mode of paying his addresses; she thought he ought to have spoken to her first. Mme. Delisle replied that she now very much admired him, and liked his straightforward manner; but Geraldine stopped the conversation by reminding her that he was rejected, and that all discussion was now useless.

That evening Geraldine danced several times with her cousin Edouard Delisle, a young man who for a whole year had paid his addresses to her. They were at a house in the Faubourg St. Germain, where the ball room opened into a splendid conservatory. Geraldine was dressed in white, with one beautiful rose in her hair, its only ornament. Edouard had been dancing with her, and now sat down by her side. They had never been so completely alone. They occupied a corner near the end, with a dense mass of trees behind them and a tapestry door. Edouard once again spoke of his love and passion, vowed that if she would not consent to be his he should never be happy: all this in a line which showed how fully he expected again to be refused.

'If you can get mamma's consent, Edouard,' she replied quickly, 'I am not unwilling to be your wife.'

Edouard rose from his seat and stood before her the picture of astonishment. Geraldine rose at the same time.

'But where is your rose?' said the young man, still scarcely able to speak with surprise.

'It is gone—cut away with a knife!' replied she thoughtfully; 'but never mind, let us look for mamma.'

Edouard took her arm, and in few minutes the whole family were united. The young man drew his uncle away from a card table, saying that Geraldine wished to go home. After handing his aunt and cousin to their carriage, he got in after them, quite an unusual thing for him.

'Why Edouard you are going out of your way,' said the father.

'I know it. But I cannot wait until tomorrow. M. Delisle, will you give me your daughter's hand? Geraldine has given her consent.'

'My dear girl,' exclaimed the mother, 'why did you not tell us this before? You would have saved us so much pain, and your other suitors the humiliation of being rejected.'

'I did not make up my mind until this evening,' replied Geraldine. 'I do not think I should have accepted him to-morrow. But he was cunning enough to come and propose before I had time for reflection.'

'You will then authorise me to accept him?' said M. Delisle.

'I have accepted him, papa,' replied Geraldine.

That evening Edouard entered the house with them, and sat talking for some time. When he went away, he had succeeded in having the wedding day fixed for that day-month. Geraldine looked pale the next day; and when her mamma noticed it, said that she should go to no more parties, as she wished to look well the day she was married, and expressed a wish to go on excursions into the country instead. Mme. Delisle freely acquiesced. Edouard came to dinner, looking much pleased, but still under the influence of the astonishment which had not yet been effaced from his plump and rosy face.

'Why, what do you think?' he said towards the end of the dinner—'Alfred de Rougement has left Paris. All his servants were dismissed this morning, and his steward received orders to meet him at Constantinople.'

'Indeed?' replied Mme. Delisle gravely, while Geraldine turned deadly pale. 'But this room is too close for you, my child.'

'No, mamma, said she quietly; 'but we are forgetting all about our excursions. I should like to go to Versailles to-morrow, and take all the pretty places round Paris in turn.'

'Bon!' cried Edouard; 'that suits me. I shall be with you early, for I suppose you will go in the morning.'

'I want to breakfast at Versailles,' replied Geraldine, 'so we must go earlier than usual to bed.'

'That I vote to be an admirable proposition. At eleven I will go. But you are going to practice the new variations on *Pastoris*, are you not?'

'Yes; and you are going to sing, monsieur,' said Geraldine, rising from the table. 'So come along and pa and ma can play triac all the time.'

That evening the cousins played and sang together until about ten, when they took tea, which Edouard, good natured fellow, pretended to like prodigiously, drinking three cups of milk and water under the serious impression that it was the genuine infusion—a practice very common in France, where tea is looked on as dangerous to the nerves. Next day they went to Versailles, breakfasted at the Hotel de France, visited the interminable galleries of pictures, and dined in Paris at a late hour. The day after they went to Montmorency.

Swiftly passed the hours, and days, and weeks, and soon Geraldine saw the last day which was to be her own. In twenty-four hours she was to leave her mother's home forever, to share that of a man to whom it must be supposed she was very much attached, but who was not exactly the companion suited to her. Geraldine was very grave that morning. It had been arranged that they were to go to St. Germain; and though the sky was a little dark, the young girl insisted on the excursion not being put off.

'This is the last day I shall have any will of my own,' said she; 'so you may let me exercise it.'

'My dear Geraldine,' replied her cousin kindly, 'you will always find me ready to yield to you in everything. I shall be a model husband, for I am too lazy to oppose any person.'

'My dear Edouard,' put in Mme. de Lisle, 'a man who consults his wife's happiness will always be happy himself. We are very easy pleased when we see you try to please us. The will is everything to us.'

'Then let us start,' said Edouard laughing, 'it will help to pass the time, and I am eager to try.'

They entered the open carriage which they usually used for their excursions, and started, the sun now shining very brightly. Edouard was full of spirits, he seemed bursting with happiness, and was forced to speak incessantly to give it vent. Geraldine was very grave, though she smiled at her cousin's sallies, and every now and then answered in her own playful, witty way. The parents, though happy, were serious too. They were about to lose their child, and although they knew she would be always near them, a feeling of involuntary loneliness came over them. A marriage day is always for affectionate parents a day of sorrowful pleasure—a link in the chain of sacrifices which makes a parent's love so beautiful and holy, so like what we can faintly trace in thought as the love of the Creator for man.

They took the road by Bongival, and they were about a mile distant from that place when suddenly they found themselves caught in a heavy shower. The coachman drove hastily for shelter into the midst of a grove of trees, which led up to a villa that appeared totally uninhabited. But it was not so; for the *porte cochere* flew wide open as they drew up, and two servants advancing politely requested them to take shelter within the house.

'But perhaps we are intruding,' said Mme. de Lisle.

'No, madame. Our master is out, but had he been at home, he would also insist on your entering.'

Edouard left out, and set the example of compliance. The whole party followed the servants, who led the way into a suite of splendidly furnished rooms. The style was that of the *renaissance*, of the richest materials, while the walls were covered with genuine paintings by the first masters. The servants then left them, and they were heard next minute assisting to take the horses from the carriage. The rain fell very heavily all the time.

'Upon my word we are very fortunate,' said Mme. de Lisle; 'in ten minutes we should have been soaked through. The master of the house must be some very noble-minded man. No ordinary person would have such exceedingly polite and attentive servants.'

'Some eccentric foreigner,' said Edouard; 'all his servants are men; I don't see a petticoat any where.'

'Some woman-bater, perhaps,' said Geraldine, laughing, as she took from the table before her a celebrated satire against her sex.

'All the more polite of him,' said Mme. de Lisle, while looking with absolute horror at a book which she knew spoke irreverently of marriage.

'If you will pass this way,' said a servant, entering, 'we shall have the honor to offer you breakfast. The rain has set in for some hours, and your servant spoke of your wishing to breakfast at St. Germain. But you will not be able to wait so long.'

The whole party looked unfeignedly surprised; but there was no resisting a servant spoke so politely, and who threw open a door whence they discovered a table magnificently laid out. Several servants were ready to wait.

'*Ma foi!*' cried Edouard, 'there is no resisting such temptation. You seem to know

your master's character, and we take your word for it that he would make us welcome.'

With these words he gave Geraldine his arm, and led the way, setting the example also of attacking the delicate viands offered to them so unexpectedly. All breakfasted with appetite after their ride, and then returned to the room they had first occupied. The shower was now over, and the warm rays of the sun was quickly clearing away all trace of the rain.

'What a beautiful house and grounds your master has here,' exclaimed Edouard; 'the garden appears to me even better than the house.'

'It is very beautiful,' said the servant addressed.

'Can we go over it?' continued the young man.

'Certainly, monsieur. I was about to show it you.'

'I shall remain here,' said Geraldine; 'my shoes are very thin; besides I wish to look at the pictures.'

Edouard demurred, but the young girl bade him go at once; and like an obedient lover he took her mamma's arm and went into the garden.

The instant all were gone Geraldine rose from her chair and tottered across the room. She was pale, and looked cautiously around, as if to do some guilty act. Presently she stood before a curtain which had been hastily drawn before a kind of niche in the wall, or rather before a portion of the room. But it had been done very quickly; and through two apertures you could see stained glass, and on a small table something under a glass case. Geraldine could not restrain herself. She pulled away the curtain, and there, under a large glass on a velvet cushion, lay the rose which had been cut from her head-dress on the night she had accepted the hand of her cousin. Near it was a pencil sketch of herself.

'My God!' she cried passionately, 'he did love me, then. What a great fool I have been. Wicked pride! to what will you lead me!'

'My Geraldine,' exclaimed Alfred, who rose from a chair where he had been seated in a dark corner—'pardon me! But I could not resist the temptation. To see, to hear you once more, for the last time, was my only wish. Do you forgive me?'

'Do you forgive me?' said Geraldine, hanging down her head, and speaking in a low, soft, sweet voice, that had never been hers before.

'My God!—what?' exclaimed Alfred, who pale and trembling, stood by her side.

'You will not force me to say, Alfred,' she continued in a beseeching tone.

'Do I understand right? O forgive me, Geraldine, if I say too much; but is it possible that you do not hate me?'

'Hate you, Alfred. How can I hate one so generous and good? If you think me not bold to say it, I will say I love you. After behaving as I did, that confession will be my punishment.'

'My Geraldine! then why did you refuse me?' cried Alfred in a tone of passionate delight.

'Because you did not seem to love me; because you only in my eyes sought to marry me because others did.'

'Geraldine, I seemed cold because I loved you with all my heart and soul. But I was a known satirist on marriage, and I was ashamed to let the world see my deep affection. I wanted them to think that I married merely because it was a triumph to carry off the reigning belle.'

'You deceived me and all the world together,' replied Geraldine; 'but to own the truth, after you were gone and took my rose with you, I guessed the truth.'

'The rose! but did you know?'

'I guessed.'

'My love!' cried Edouard, returning alone to fetch Geraldine, to whom he wanted to show the garden—'what is the meaning of this?'

'My good cousin,' said Geraldine, advancing towards him, and taking both his hands, 'come here; you will forgive Geraldine, won't you? I have been very wicked. Do excuse your cousin, will you not? but I was only going to marry you because I thought Alfred did not love me.'

'Hein!' cried Edouard quite bewildered.

'Don't be angry with me,' continued Geraldine gravely; 'I should have been a very good wife, and have loved you very much had I married you.'

'Oh, then, you do not mean to marry me now?' said Edouard in a tone of deep sadness.

'What am I to do,' cried Geraldine. 'See my dear cousin, how he loved me! How can I marry you when my heart is given to another?'

'You were going to do so, but for a shower of rain,' said Edouard with a vain attempt at gravity. 'But take her, M. Alfred; I think after all I'm lucky to have escaped her! I don't forgive you a bit, because it's hard to find out that when at last one thinks one's self loved, the lady was only pretending.'

'You do forgive me!' exclaimed Geraldine shaking her head, and putting his hand into that of Alfred, who shook it warmly.

'Yes, yes!—of course you're pleased! But I must marry now. I shall ask Helene at Bordeaux to have me, as nobody there will know anything about my present mishap.'

At this moment M. and Mme. Delisle returned; their astonishment was of course very great. Edouard gravely introduced the young couple.

'You see, madame,' he said, 'that while