

LETTERS AND A LESSON.

Her ladyship sat up with a blank stare. Twenty minutes ago, being dressed in good time, she had come into that room with two letters in her pocket, and had unawares fallen asleep. Now, as she started up with the clang of the dinner bell in her ears, and dived into said pocket for her handkerchief, no letters were there.

"What can that mean!" she cried, as she hurried up to her dressing-room. Augusta her step-daughter—the "thorn in her side," and but five years younger than herself—came, calm and scornful as usual, down the stairs.

"I will join you in a moment," said Lady Margaret, and she sped past her to her own apartments. No letters there; nor had she expected to find any.

"You have not had—but of course you have not seen any letters, Simpson?" said she to her maid, who came in to clear up.

Certainly she had—two—which her ladyship had left on her dressing-table, ready for the post, and she, Simpson, had given to the post for that purpose.

Her mistress thanked her and went then, bewildered.

The next day, toward evening Lady Margaret, who was the daughter of an impoverished peer and the second wife of General Whyte, whom his brother officers had dubbed a "cantankerous old cuss," was sitting in her sanctum, when her husband walked in. She rose affectionately, but he retreated.

"Excuse me," said the old soldier—he was forty years her senior, and had been away from home on business—"I have come twenty miles to ask you a question." He laid a paper before her. "Did you," he asked sternly, "write that letter?"

She grey white as she looked at it, but her glance was steadfast. "I did, said she; but—"

"Silence," cried he. Dress, and come with me. The appointment shall be kept, but with a third party. He, of course, has the letter intended for me."

"You forget," said she, with dignity, that this gentleman was my mother's dearest friend, and as an elder brother to myself until—"

"Dress," he said, as he strode towards the staircase. "I shall await you below."

Burton, the butler, came along as she was shutting her door. She pulled the old man in, and made a breathless communication to him, upon which he ran down a back stair, clapped on a cloth cap, and dashed out of the house.

Ten minutes or so after, the General and his wife came forth, and went down the beech-walk towards the home wood, to an adjacent property.

Two hours passed ere they returned. Together they entered the library.

"You warned that man, of course," said he; but no matter, I'll find him. I shall go back to town to-night, and leave England in a few days' time. You will remain here, I beg, for the present, making any communication intended for me to our solicitor. Have you anything to say before I go?"

"Nothing," answered she gravely, "except to repeat that your suspicions are as unworthy of yourself as they are unjust to me."

"Bah," said he, striding to the door. "No innocent married woman makes lovers' appointments with a man who dares not show his face in her husband's house. Good-night."

He had inadvertently left the mischievous letter on the table, and she drew it from its envelope.

"My DEAR REGINALD" (it ran)—"Meet me to-morrow, (same time and place as before,) and we will discuss the future prospect. The General is away, and the risk of discovery, therefore, so much less for both sides.—Truly yours, MARGOT."

Yes, this was the letter she had written and carried in her pocket to the drawing-room—upon this she insisted—and had thought safely delivered hours ago to the enemy of her house, but the rightful owner. There was a strange mark, like a dab of purple ink on the covering, she noticed, as she put it into her pocket and proceeded to her own apartments.

In the corridor her foot caught in the folds of a heavy curtain, and so dislodged a lady's handkerchief—a thing of lace and pertumour. Across the embroidered initials was a stain, a purple mark like that on the mischievous letter, and as Lady Margaret examined the spot by the corridor lamp she changed color.

"Why," said she, smelling it, "this is paint."

She reflected a moment, then hurried to the drawing-room and looked out of its big French window. A portion of the wood-work had become delaced, and was being painted, and of the same color as the stains on handkerchief and letter.

"I remember," she gasped, "that the window was ajar. Ah, it is hard to suffer in such a cause, but I will not be the first to speak."

A whole year passed. "The General," so people told each other, "was still in foreign parts;" the two ladies lived on—fighting man a silent battle—at the old country seat.

Augusta was a zealous correspondent, but then her martial father had absolute control over her fortune, and could make her a beggar any day if she crossed him.

Suddenly she had notice to write no more—his movements would be so uncertain, the General declared. As a fact, the death of a dear friend whose place was but four miles distant from his own, and to whose children he had been appointed guardian, made his return to England necessary, and he wished his presence there not to be known to his household.

On the second evening after his arrival he went out at dusk into the park.

Involuntarily he strayed towards his own estate; it is possible that he might have gone straight to his wife, if, as he paced about under the trees, he had not seen a man and woman, whose appearance brought him to a sudden standstill, come slowly across the park. He could hear only the mutter of voices, but she wore a sadly-familiar garment—a long silver-grey mantle with the white hood drawn over her face—and the man, like himself, was wrapped in a long great coat.

They parted with lovers' embraces that drove the old man mad, so that when the enemy came, whistling, his way he sprang like a wild beast upon him, and felled him with one terrific blow.

Then he ran here, there, anywhere, and so found himself at his own lodge gates. A carriage was passing him, and he crept out of the range of its flashing lamp.

A sweet voice that went to his heart spoke to the attendant; then a man leaned out,

at sight of whom he started up, to look straight into the rebuking eyes of his wife. But the man! This was the whom he thought he had left there for dead, perhaps! Who, then, was the other? Heaven help him now!

The next day arose a hue and cry over the injured man. One of the farm laborers had found him, and he was carried to Whyte House, where the General's daughter took speedy possession of him. For a week he hung between life and death; after that he rallied a bit. A reward for information had been meanwhile offered, and Augusta one morning sought out her step-mother.

"Lady Margaret," said she, "you know more of this business than you admit."

"Possibly," answered her ladyship, "just as you know more of these two letters than you acknowledge. You should avoid wet paint, and be careful of your handkerchief on these occasions. Be good enough to leave my room now; I am busy."

One fine October morning, a fortnight later, Augusta found her lover equipped for a journey. He had some pressing business on hand, he insisted; Burton would look after him, but go he must.

On the evening of the second day he returned, exhausted, but exultant. He handed her a note from her father, in which he formally consented to her marriage with one Reginald West, Captain, R. N.

"Is my father in England?" cried she, overpowered. "What does it all mean?"

"Have you seen that before?" asked he, laying down beside her a horse-shoe scarpin of antique make.

"Many times," answered she, "in my father's necktie."

"Exactly. I have heard you speak of this article as an heir-loom. Well one of the gardeners found that near the place where I was struck down, and brought it to me. I could then put the awful suspicion I have had all along into words, and I have done so. The letter I bring you is the price of my silence. Your father is in England, but unless he can effect a reconciliation with her ladyship he will go abroad again. I have also seen Mr. West my guardian, and have heard from him of some misdirected letters, or trick, rather."

"It was an accident," she blurted, "not a trick."

What did she know about it? he demanded, sorely afraid, man of honor as he was, before that cowed and cringing air. She must tell him at once, he insisted, or he would go straight to her ladyship.

"I hate her," muttered she, sullenly; and I thought she was writing to my father and your guardian about you and me, having found us out herself, and I took the letters from her pocket while she was asleep. Then I was disturbed, and had only time to get them to her dressing table, and in my fright I put them into the wrong envelopes. This, I declare, I never meant to do. I would have confessed, only I hate her, and I am afraid of my father."

"Be good enough," he said, after a severe pause, "to explain to her ladyship—your father I will see myself—that I leave here at once. As lovers we shall never meet again." Nor did they.

Later in the evening, as Lady Margaret sat alone, her husband walked in.

"I deserve nothing," said he, "and am come to ask all. You wrote that letter, not on your own account, but my daughter's, and have suffered for her sins, my wife. I owed to both men what reparation I could give, and I have paid my debt. Until now I did not know that Captain West had returned from his abroad; my uncle has told me. You guessed who had assaulted the young man?" he faltered.

"I did," said she. "Mr. West's carriage had broken down that night, and I was taking him home in mine. Did she wear my cloak? Oh, no, hers has a white hood, and is of a greyish tinge, but is otherwise not like mine. Let me put the case clearly. Ronald, this young man's ancestor ran away with your ancestress—a wife and mother—and there has been war to the knife between you since. What is likely to have occurred it—"

"He'd have had a bullet into him," cried the old soldier, grimly, "and she would have been bundled out neck and crop."

"Of course. Your daughter has had her lesson—let her alone," said she.

"But what—what—about me?" he whispered, creeping nearer. "I've had my lesson too, Madge."

Well, she loved that peppery old husband of hers.

"Profit by it," she murmured, "and—come home."

BOTH WITTY AND INGENIOUS.

How a Parisian Jeweller Made a White Hair a Thing of Beauty.

A French woman buntered about her beloved Paris, told a story at a dinner table a few nights ago that is worth keeping, says an Exchange.

"I should like to tell you," she said, "how a countrywoman of mine saw Paris give a rebuke twenty years ago. It was just after the Franco-Prussian war, and feeling was ready to show itself anywhere. Mme. Von Konig was a young woman who ten years before had married a German army officer. Her heart was torn during the struggle, and while her aid went to her husband, her tears were shed for Paris. At a dinner party one night some one had the bad taste to speak of 'conquered Paris.'"

"Paris may be conquered," said Mme. von Konig, "but she still retains her ability to create a beautiful thing out of nothing."

"The next day one of the gentlemen present sent her a single white hair, asking her what Paris could make of that. She sent it to a great French jeweller and told him of her challenge."

"Presently there came back to her a device in gold and enamel. On a bed of rubies stood the Prussian black eagle, holding in its mouth the single white hair. Attached to one end of the tiny gold workmanship, at the other, the arms of Lorraine. Underneath was engraved: 'Alsace and Lorraine; you hold them by a hair.'"

Origin of Ox-Tail Scup.

During the reign of terror in Paris in 1793 many of the nobility were reduced to starvation and beggary. The abattoirs sent their hides fresh to the tanneries without removing the tails, and, in cleansing them, the tails were thrown away. One of these noble beggars asked for a tail and it was willingly given to him. He took it to his lodgings and made (what is now famous) the first dish of ox-tail soup. He told others of his good luck, and they annoyed the tanneries so much that a price was put upon them.

AUNT JOAN'S FIRE OPAL.

One murky morning in November I was called into the manager's room of the Metropolitan Bank, to find my Aunt Joan seated in front of the great box she was so fond of overhauling, with a number of jewel cases spread out before her.

"Mrs. Letherby wishes you to take her jewels to Birmingham to be repaired by Messrs. Headcourt," said Mr. Weymouth. "You had better change places with Madden to-night, and go down to Brading and Ashley's with the bullion."

"And take every precaution, Charles," said my aunt, looking severely over her spectacles. "Mr. Weymouth has been explaining to me what is done about the gold."

"Yes, sir; yes, aunt," said I flushing with pleasure.

Here was a delightful break in the monotony of my existence! The tax on worn sovereigns is, as everyone knows, a nuisance to bankers, and our astute manager avoided sending his to the Bank of England by forwarding a large amount monthly to Birmingham, where the firm of Brading and Ashley used it over the counter. Ten thousand pounds was generally the sum taken, and the junior clerks competed for the task, as it gave them a run in the mail, a holiday and the receipt of a guinea besides the hotel expenses.

At midnight I was safely ensconced in the corner of a first-class carriage; the porters had lifted in the heavy box containing the gold, and the valise with my aunt's jewels. The chief of these was a handsome diamond necklace, with an enormous pendant, containing a very large flawless opal, with the red flame at its heart which gives these gems their uncanny appearance. Aunt Joan said this ornament was "priceless," a figure of speech which meant that a jeweller had told her he could not get a necklace like it under ten thousand pounds.

I pulled my travelling cap about my ears, tipped the guard, who assured me as he locked the door that no one else should get in, plunged my hands into my pockets, and dropped into a reverie. Of course I thought most of Caroline Lee, my aunt's companion, and the girl I loved with all my soul. I thought that perhaps this journey might be a step on the way to gain her. I would be so careful, so discreet, that the partners of the Birmingham bank should take special notice of me.

My reveries turned to fantastic dreams, and I knew no more of the outer world until Aunt Joan's fire opal seemed to leap at my eyes, and for one brief, sickening second I saw a man with uplifted hand, from which blood was streaming, and was conscious of a crashing blow on my head; and then came darkness, thick darkness, in which I sank and sank—

"He must be asked no questions," said a deep voice beside me.

"Very well, sir, I will try to keep him as quiet as I can," replied a woman's tone. The footsteps died away, and the rustle of a starched apron told me my nurse had seated herself. I remained quite still, and my dulled brain began slowly to work. I had a fearful pain in my head, one eye was covered with a bandage. It hurt me to look at the long white wall of the hospital ward; and although I could lift the eyelid of my free eye now, I dimly recollect having tried vainly many times before to open it.

"What has happened to me?" I said at last, in a voice which I could not recognise for my own.

"You were injured in the train, and must stay here for some time," said my nurse, a sweet-looking woman, with a firm mouth and soft grey eyes. "I will tell you anything you wish by-and-by," she continued; "but try and rest now."

I obeyed her then, and for many weary weeks after. Slowly I gathered what facts there were to know. My aunt's jewels had been taken out of their cases, and carried off, with the exception of one bracelet, which was found (covered with blood) on the floor of the railway carriage. More than half of the gold was gone, and as £5,000 means over a hundredweight troy, the thief must have been a powerful man to burden himself thus.

They believed that he had been hidden under the seat of the carriage when I took my place, and that, owing to my deep sleep, he was able to emerge with safety. At Brandon the train slowed, and he must then have taken the opportunity to get off, as his tracks could be followed on the whitened earth of a shed where he had taken himself to remove the traces of his crime.

An engine-cleaner found a sovereign beneath one of the locomotives in the morning, and some soiled clothes were left in a pail of red-stained water. Heavy footsteps could be followed a little way up the line, and down a bank, but in the field below all clue ended.

No jewels were heard of, the cases had been left in the carriage; and what with the darkness, and the time that elapsed in Birmingham before the horror-stricken officials communicated with the police, and settled what to do with that which they believed to be my dead body, the clever thief had plenty of time in which to efface himself.

I recovered at length. My aunt was so angry with me and the bank, that in spite of what I had suffered, she forbade me her house; and finding from Caroline Lee's distress the secret of our love, sternly ordered her to give up all idea of marriage with such a "blunderer" as she called me. The directors of the "Metropolis" were kinder; they gave me sick leave for four months, and then took me on again in my old post. Needless to say, I worked with a will, as soon as my health permitted; and that the hope of recovering my aunt's jewels was never absent from my mind.

Five years went by. Caroline was still unmarried; my aunt's veto remained in force, and my life was a dreary one, though occasionally brightened by a glimpse of my darling in the Park when she took the pugs for an airing, and in Bond street when she had to do my aunt's shopping.

I had risen in the bank, and was now head clerk in the branch whence I had been sent that November night to Birmingham. We were very busy; important affairs were on hand, and amongst them the amalgamation of the bank of Brading & Ashley with the "Metropolis," and the greater part of the arrangements, tell on Mr. Weymouth, manager in the city. As he could not leave town at this juncture I was commissioned to take down some important papers, and have an interview with the partners of the country firm.

I found them very busy at the bank, pre-

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TRAINS WILL LEAVE ST. JOHN:

Express for Campbellton, Pugwash, Pictou and Halifax.....	7.00
Express for Halifax.....	13.30
Express for Sussex.....	16.30
Through Express for Point du Chene, Quebec, Montreal and Chicago.....	16.55

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TRAINS WILL ARRIVE AT ST. JOHN:

Express from Sussex.....	8.25
Express from Chicago, Montreal, Quebec, (Monday excepted).....	10.25
Express from Point du Chene and Moncton	10.25
Express from Halifax, Pictou and Campbellton.....	19.00
Express from Halifax and Sydney.....	22.30

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