

# The New Northwest.

FREE SPEECH, FREE PRESS, FREE PEOPLE.

VOLUME XI.—NO. 16.

PORTLAND, OREGON, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 29, 1881.

PER YEAR—\$3 00.

(Written for the New Northwest.)

## CLAIRE.

A NEW-YEAR'S STORY.

BY ABIGAIL SCOTT DUNWAY.

"I wish father could see me to-night!"

She stood before the mirror in her aristocratic cousin's city home, and gave the last touches to her simple toilet by fastening clusters of scarlet-petaled fuchsias with their deep-green leaves and royal purple hearts in her raven hair and snowy bosom.

"My dress will not be rich, like Augusta's," turning to survey herself at full length. "It's nothing but cheap mull over red *mousseline de laine*, trimmed with cotton edging; and hers is cream-tint satin, ruffled everywhere with Point d'Alencon. Her train would make me a respectable suit!" glancing at her own abbreviated skirts with a little shrug of contempt; "and her diamonds are just lovely! How critically she eyed my cheap de *laine* when I unpacked my trunk, and how daintily she touched my cotton-lace. She'll be ashamed of me at the ball. I wish I was safely back at my home in the wilds of Coquille. Why did I ever come to Portland, I wonder?"

"Why, Claire!" exclaimed her elegantly-attired city cousin, as she swept into the room in the full-fledged glory of fashionable elegance, "how charming you look! Those flaming bows, that I objected to before you put them on, look lovely over that white mull. Your complexion is just splendid! Who but you would dare to wear those glaring scarlet and purple fuchsias? You'll make a sensation at Mrs. Lofty's New-Year's ball."

"Then you won't be ashamed of me?"

"Oh, Claire!"

"Forgive me, 'Gustie! I didn't mean to offend. But I do wish this ball was well over. I don't know the ways of city people, and I'm terribly afraid I'll do something silly and absurd before I get away."

"Nonsense, Claire! Just act your own sweet self, and everybody will be delighted."

Alanson Lofty, nephew of Honorable Solomon Lofty, and heir presumptive to an old English estate, was to be the evening escort of Miss Augusta Stylish, and he did not seem at all pleased when the young lady, who made her appearance muffled from head to foot in snowy zephyr wrappings, was accompanied by a veiled and hooded Miss, who looked to be about a dozen years of age.

"My cousin, Miss Vale—Mr. Lofty."

The young gentleman bowed coldly at the hooded figure.

"She has come to spend the Winter with us," said Miss Stylish, "and I took the liberty of inviting her to accompany us to the ball to-night."

Mr. Lofty was vexed, and Claire knew it. She would have retreated had there been time; but her cousin nervously hurried her down the steps and into the carriage, and they were whirled away to Mrs. Lofty's up-town mansion and ushered into the dressing-room before she had time to analyze the heart-ache that intruded itself unbidden.

Miss Stylish readily removed her wraps and re-adjusted her laces. But Claire was less fortunate. The meshes of her hood were tangled in her hair, and it took some time to remedy the mishap to her abundant tresses. Other ladies, even more grandly arrayed than Miss Stylish, buzzed about the room, or stopped to stare at her, thereby increasing her nervousness and lighting up her face with a ruddy hue which fairly matched her flaming *mousseline de laine*, and made her painfully conscious of appearing at double disadvantage.

"We are ready to join Mr. Lofty now, Claire," said her cousin. "Let's go down."

"But, see!" exclaimed Claire, exhibiting her white glove, with the red and purple stain of a crushed fuchsia upon it. "I can never appear in company with a glove like that!"

"Hide it with your handkerchief, then. Mr. Lofty is looking this way."

Claire looked up and encountered a set of handsome teeth beneath a heavy brown mustache, and a pair of keen blue eyes laughing at her from under a broad brow, crowned with light-brown hair.

"Pon my word, Miss Vale, you remind me of a humming bird!" he said, gaily. "I thought you were only a child."

Claire did not reply. He took her gloved hand, with the fuchsia stain wrapped snugly in her handkerchief, and closed his arm over it with a gentle pressure, and led the way to the dancing hall, which was filled with revelers. Miss Stylish led Claire to a seat, and joining Mr. Lofty in the mazes of a waltz, left the country maiden to her own reflections.

"How handsome Mr. Lofty is, and how noble!" thought Claire. "Why is it that I, who so dearly love social life and culture, should be doomed to spend my days in the back woods? Why couldn't

I become the wife of a wealthy, refined and cultured gentleman like Mr. Lofty, and rise to a high position? I wonder if 'Gustie loves him, or if he loves her?' Heavens, how I could worship such a man!"

The waltz was ended, and Mr. Lofty led Miss Stylish, flushed and panting, to a seat.

"Of course I claim your hand for the next dance, Miss Vale," he said, bending low and gazing at her with an eager, hungry light in his deep-blue eyes.

"Thanks, sir. I do not dance."

"Oh, Claire! For shame!" exclaimed Miss Stylish. "You dance divinely. It's your one attraction."

"She has seen me dance the Coquille jig, Mr. Lofty," said Claire, getting redder every moment.

"But I couldn't get on the floor before all these people. I couldn't, indeed."

"What is the 'Coquille jig,' Miss Vale?"

"A country dance, sir."

"You ought to see her in it, Mr. Lofty," said Miss Stylish. "You could never stop laughing."

Another gentleman claimed Miss Stylish for a dance, and another, and then a third, and Mr. Lofty and Miss Vale were left alone for the next hour.

"Would you like to step into the conservatory, Miss Vale? You look bored."

"What, sir?"

"You look annoyed and disgusted."

"I am out of my element, sir. I belong in the wild woods."

"Why do you keep your hand bound up in this handkerchief?" he asked, playfully, as he drew it once more within his arm with the same gentle pressure that had sent the hot Castilian blood to her cheek when they first met; a pressure that awoke within her the fires of a new experience now—an experience as thrilling as it was fascinating.

"I wounded my glove, sir, and it isn't at all presentable."

"A good answer, truly. Here is the conservatory. Let's sit down behind this acacia tree. Let me see your glove. How did you hurt it?"

"With a fuchsia, sir."

"Ah, I see. It's lucky it was not your heart that was wounded. Now tell me all about your home and how you live, and about your father and mother, and the cows and chickens."

"There isn't much to tell, sir. Mother is dead, and I live with father in the edge of a blackened clearing, in a house built of logs, with wild vines trained over them, where humming birds come to build their nests in Summer. There's an arm of the sea comes near our home, and the ocean beach is about two miles away over the rocks."

"I wish you would invite me to visit you, Miss Vale."

"Oh, sir, if you only would!"

"I will, next Summer."

Miss Stylish found them an hour later, and chided them for absenting themselves from the revelers.

"I didn't think it had been so long," said Claire.

"I'd have sworn we hadn't been away ten minutes," added Mr. Lofty.

"Your aunt will hardly consider you a gallant escort," said Miss Stylish, haughtily. "Lunch has been in progress half an hour."

Mr. Lofty begged pardon, and made haste to repair his breach of etiquette.

During the remainder of the evening he devoted himself to other guests, paying little further heed to Claire.

"May I return to-morrow and see that Coquille jig?" he asked, laughingly, as he left the ladies on the doorsteps of Miss Stylish's home and bade them good-night.

"Certainly," said Miss Stylish.

"How could you?" asked Claire.

"Never mind. Don't be a goose. He'll come, and you'll dance the jig, and we'll have a merry laugh, and that will be the end of it."

"What is that stain on your dress, there, over your heart?" asked Miss Stylish, as the two girls stood before the mirror in Claire's bed-room.

Claire looked at her dress and then at her glove.

"I stained my glove with the fuchsia, and then stained my dress with the glove. What will father say?"

"If he's an adept at reading fatalities, he'll say you wounded the fuchsia's heart and got your own heart wounded in turn. Be careful, Claire! You're treading on dangerous ground. This looks like an omen of trouble."

"Bah! I'm not superstitious."

"Nor am I."

"But you're jealous."

Miss Stylish laughed contemptuously. The idea that she should be jealous of a wild-wood bird like Claire was too absurd to merit a reply.

Mr. Lofty returned to his bachelor's quarters in a musing mood.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, as a vision of the raven-haired, cherry-lipped little flesh-and-blood phantom danced attendance upon his closed eye-

lids; "if she isn't a stunner! 'Pon my word, I'd rather have her for a wife, rusticity and all, than to be tied for life to her higher-toned cousin. But I suppose I must marry the cousin. Heigh-ho! My word is pledged, and there's no honorable way of getting out of it."

Promptly at the appointed hour on the following day he rang the door-bell, and was admitted into the stately presence of Miss Stylish.

"I had hoped to meet Miss Vale," he said, after the usual greetings had been exchanged.

"Does she interest you so much?"

"Yes. There is all the freshness of a wild rose about her; and she's such a mere child. I'm afraid I did wrong to monopolize her company last night."

Augusta's lips assumed a well-defined pout.

"Call her, please."

Claire, obedient to the summons, entered the parlor in a flutter of embarrassment. Her flaming *mousseline de laine* had given place to a gorgeous suit of plaid, toned down by black ribbons of the exact shade of her abundant hair.

"How is the wounded glove, Miss Vale?"

"All right, sir; I removed the stain with ether; but the poor fuchsia is dead for good and all."

"Can you give us the Coquille dance this morning, Miss Vale? You promised, you know."

"My cousin promised, sir; not I. Let her try it."

"I promised for you, Claire. Pray oblige me."

Claire appealed to them to excuse her, but they grew the more urgent; and she advanced to the center of the room and pirouetted with a sort of tremulous, vibratory motion for a full minute.

"I told you she was a humming bird," said Mr. Lofty.

Claire heard the words and seemed to catch their spirit. For full fifteen minutes she seemed oblivious of their presence. The wild abandon of the jig, to which she devoted her mind and body, held the two spectators spell-bound.

When it was over, Claire retreated to her room, abashed beyond measure at her own temerity.

"What will he think of me? Oh, dear!" she cried, throwing herself upon the bed and giving up to a paroxysm of tears.

She appeared at dinner with swollen eyes.

"Mr. Lofty has asked permission to accompany us to the opera to-night, Claire," said her cousin.

"I excused myself on the plea of a prior engagement with mamma. But I told him you could go with him, and you must."

A strange thrill passed through Claire's nerves—an intermingling of delight and dread.

"You'll go, of course."

"Will it be proper?"

"Quite so, you little goose. Mr. Lofty is the same as your cousin, you know."

The mother of Miss Stylish fell ill of a fever, and as the young lady was confined at home during the remainder of Claire's visit, the humming bird, as he still called her, became the constant companion of Mr. Lofty in all his walks and drives. He knew it was not right, he said to himself; but he quieted his conscience by the fancy that he could not help it, when in living over again their many interviews he had recalled Claire's passionate gaze into his eager eyes, as he had explained to her that Augusta was cold and incapable of loving as he loved; as he could not help loving the woodland sprite who had taken him captive in spite of his betrothal.

"I am going away to-morrow, Mr. Lofty," said Claire.

They were returning from the theater in a closed carriage, and the ride had been a long one, thanks to the extra fee placed in the driver's hand by the girl's obliging escort.

"Going away! Pray, what will I do, Claire?"

He had caught her in a strong embrace which she had no power or will to resist.

"I cannot do without my humming bird; indeed I can't."

"Papa is coming for me. The Winter is almost gone. I'm a wretch, Mr. Lofty. I've won you away from 'Gustie.'"

"She doesn't care."

"Because she doesn't suspect it."

"If she loved me she'd suspect."

Claire's heart echoed the words.

"If you were only free, Alanson!" she said, passionately.

"Marry me to-night, Claire, and then you'll have a right to claim me. We won't tell anybody for the present. Then, when you go away with your father, I will know you are mine, and will have a right to you, you see. I will tell Miss Stylish and make it all right with her, and I will come to you as soon as my business is settled."

They drove to the bachelor quarters of Mr. Lofty's many chums; a down-town club room, where a mature woman would not have gone for her reputation's sake, if pure. Here a marriage ceremony was performed by a man in a surplice and wig. It was a solemn and impressive service, and Claire uttered her low responses with her soul in the words.

"The play must have been long last night,"

said Augusta, the next morning, addressing Claire at the breakfast table. "You were out late."

"It didn't seem long to me, and I didn't realize that it was late," was Claire's ingenuous reply.

The country home in the edge of the blackened clearing had no longer any attractions for Claire. She drooped when the dark days kept her indoors and moved listlessly about the house, taking no interest in her surroundings. When the bright weather came, she spent hour after hour upon the rocks overlooking the white-capped surf, and listening to the breakers' roar.

The ides of April came and went, and the first days of May brought Mr. Lofty to her humble country home. Together they wandered by the sea shore, or scaled the rocks for birds' eggs, or gathered wild flowers from the billowy hillsides.

"My business will be in such a shape that I can marry you openly by next New Year," said Mr. Lofty, fervently.

"But what of 'Gustie'?"

"The match is declared off."

"Then I'll write and tell her of our engagement."

"Not for the world, dear Claire."

"Why not?"

"Because you must trust me utterly. My wife must have no will but mine."

Alas! poor Claire!

It is so sweet to love and trust; so sweet to rely in one's entire confidence upon a strong right arm; so easy, when one is true and pure, to judge another by one's self; and there is so much bliss in it, that there is little wonder that women make mistakes. And Claire was so young, too, and motherless!

Mr. Lofty returned to the city, and Claire kept on in the even tenor of her way, wandering in the woods, clambering upon the rocks, or sauntering on the beach among the glistening dunes where her lover had often traced their marriage vows in large white letters in the changing sands.

Claire's father paid little heed to her ways or wanderings. He was an innocent-minded rustic, like herself, and knew naught of the outer world and its quicksands.

The long Summer came and went, and the Autumn moved slowly by, coloring the sunlit air with gorgeous dyes that left their imprint on maples and alders, gilding them with an oriflamme of many-tinted glories. Nothing was changeless except the ever-changing sea.

November went, and December was almost gone.

"He will be here to marry me on New-Year's Eve," said Claire, to her father, holding up his parting gift, a ring with a ruby setting, and kissing it reverently.

The morning preceding the New Year dawned and Claire was in a flutter of delight.

"I'll wear the *mousseline de laine* with the mull overdress, and look just as I did when he saw me first," she said, as she began to array herself for the expected meeting.

She had forgotten the stain on the white mull overdress until she stood before the little glass to arrange a cluster of the well-remembered flowers in the simple laces at her throat—fuchsias that she had cultivated for the purpose all the Autumn through. She was nervous with excitement. In her haste the purple heart of a flower was crushed between her fingers, leaving the stain upon her hand.

"A letter for Claire," said a village maiden, who had come over to assist at the simple nuptials.

Claire tore the envelope open, leaving an imprint of the purple coloring of the flower on the white paper.

The letter was from Augusta Stylish, and contained the wedding cards of herself and Alanson Lofty!

Claire did not shriek or faint. She busied herself mechanically about her duties and kept her own counsel.

There was an hour to spare before the expected arrival of the groom and clergyman, and she would take a walk, she said, as enveloping her form in a cloak and hood, she wandered out alone.

The Winter tides surged over the white sand dunes and lashed the beach in an agony of anger. Sea gulls sought refuge among the rocks from an approaching storm, and a white-winged schooner that sometimes touched at the slimy little wharf stood well out to seaward, while all hands reefed her sails.

The day wore on, and the rustic neighbors sought in vain for Claire. The night wind raged like a monster maniac, but retreated to the far-off mountains when the morning dawned. Then the tide went out, and the watchers on the beach saw a stranded figure, robed in red and white and wrapped in seaweed, at rest upon the ocean's surf-beaten edge.

It was the body of Claire.

In one hand she still grasped the letter that had brought her the news of which none but herself had been aware. In the other was a crushed fuchsia, emblematic of her own wounded heart.

The letter was clutched with a death grip. It was removed untorn from the icy fingers, and its import, when deciphered, told the truth, and yet not all the truth.

Mrs. Alanson Lofty received her numerous callers on that New-Year's Day in sublime unconsciousness of the fact that, concerning the proud man whom she had that morning wedded, her country cousin, could she have spoken, would have truly exclaimed:

"Yesterday, before God, I was his wife; to-day, before the law, he is your husband!"