

B E B E E,

OR

TWO LITTLE WOODEN SHOES.

BY OVIDA.

Continued from last week:

pace; sometimes the sun set tremulous miles off, and the stars spinned round; but she singed round, and the stars shone bright.

Sometimes at night she thought she saw old Amemis. "But what if I don't see her?"

"Amemis never will hurt me."

And now, as she grew nearer her goal, her natural buoyancy of spirit returned as it had never done, to her share the evening that he had come. She was more gay, more light and more exuberant. Her fancy grew keener and more dominant. All things of the earth and air spoke to her as a went along as they had used to do. All that she had learned from the books in the long cold months came to her clear and wonderful.

She was not so very ignorant now—ignorant, indeed, but still so knowing something that would make her able to read him if he liked it, and to understand it talked of great things.

She had no fixed thought of what she would be when she reached her.

She fancied she would wait on him, and tell him, and make his wife, and be caressed by him, and have him buy pretty rings of gold and silver, and have him kiss her foot, and be quite happy if he only touched her now and then with his lips—her thoughts went no further than that; her love for him was that of intensity and absorption in which nothing but herself is remembered.

When a creature loves much, even when it is as little and as simple as Bebe, the world seems to be all its own and all its ways are as though. The scenes exist; they are as though they had never been.

Wherever roamed an ospite world may play with passion, or may idle with sentiment, but does not love.

She did not hear what the villagers said to her. She did not see the streets of the town as she passed them. She kept herself close to the wall, and now and then, by sheer instinct of habit, noticed them. She had no perception what she did, except of walking, walking—walking always, and seeing the white road go by like pale ribbons unrolled.

She got a dreamy, intense sleepless light in her blue eyes that frightened some of those she passed. They thought she had been fever stricken and was not in her senses.

The sun was low, drawn lowlands, wearing out her little shadow, but it wearied her patience and her courage.

She was very dusty and fatigued. Her wooden skirt was stained with weather and torn with briars. But she had managed always to wash her own white in broad water, and she had always, always to keep her pretty bright curly soft and silken—for he had liked them so well, and she had woven them through his hand again. So she had, held a thousand times to give her strength while the mist would seem over her sight, and the earth would seem to tremble as she went. On the fifteenth day from the swan's water before she had left her, by the swan's water before she was a Paria.

Shining away in the sun: white and gold, she was.

She was so tired—oh, so tired—but she could not rest now. There were bells ringing always in her ears, and a heavy pain always in her head. But what of that—she was so near to him.

"Are you ill, you little thing?" a woman asked her who was gathering early cherries in the outskirts of the great city.

"I am ill," she said, and smiled. "I do not know—I am sorry."

And she went onward.

It was evening. The sun had set. He had not eaten for twenty-four hours, but she could not pass for anything now. She crossed the gleaming river and she heard the cathedral chimes. Paris in all its glory was about her, but she took no more note of it than a person that has tied its intent on reaching home.

No one looked at or stopped her, a little dusty peasant with a bundle on a stick over her shoulder.

The click-clack of her wooden shoes on the pavements made none look up, little rats the same way every day like this to make their fortunes in Paris. Some grew into great lords, others became the confederates of that brief summer of 1789, when they drifted into the Saine water, rusted, wind-torn, fallen leaves that were wasted of no man.

Anyhow, it was so common to see them, pretty not homely things, with their noisy shoes and their little all in a bundle, that one never looked once at Bebe.

She was not bewildered. As she had gone through her own city only thinking of the roses for her basket and of old Amemis in her garden, so she went through Paris, only

thinking of him for whose sake she had come thither.

Now that she was really in his home she was happy again though her head ached with the heat and pain and all the sunny glare was too strong for her eyes.

She had only two sons left, but she stopped and bought two little rosellas to take to him. He had used to care for them much, and so much was so much dearer fitted to be with him.

He was the girl who sold him the way to the street he lived in. He was not very far off the quay, where he had his shop, to air, to warm, where he could sell his homely music all around. She felt for her beads, and said ave of praise. God was so good.

It was quite night when she reached the street and sought the number of his house. She spoke his name softly, and trembling very much with joy, not with fear, but it seemed to her so sacred a thing ever to enter again.

The old man looked out of a den by the door, and told her to go straight up the stairs to the third floor, and then turn to the right. The old man chuckled as he glanced after her, and listened to the wooden steps patter-wait up the broad stone steps.

Bebe climbed them—ten, twenty, thirty, forty. "He must be very poor!" she thought, "so high up, and yet the place was wide and bare, and there was no chair." Her heart beat so fast; she felt suffocated, her limbs shook, her eyes had a red blood like red floating before them; but she thanked God each step she climbed—a moment and another, death—the red nail and the iron railing was swept from the floor, and when it was picked up a hasty glance showed that the particular jar that had been dedicated to this purpose had not been broken.

"He will be glad—oh, I am sure he will be glad!" she said to herself, as a fear that had never before entered her heart possessed her. "If he should get married, he would be with us."

But even then, what did it matter? Since he was ill she should be there to watch him night and day; and when he was well again, if he should wish her to go away—one could always die.

"But he will be glad—oh, I know he will be glad!" she said to the rosebuds that she carried to him. "And if God will only let me live, we'll be happy."

His name was written on a door before her. The handle of a bell hung down; she pulled it timidly. The door unclosed; she saw no one, and went through. There were low lights burning. There were heavy scents that were strange to her. There was a faint taste gloom from old armor, and old weapons. The room was dark, and the shadows lost in the softness and thickness of the carpets.

It was not the home of a poor man. A great terror from her heart—if she were not wanted here!

She went quickly through three rooms, seeing no one, and at the end of the third there was a door.

"It is I—Bebe," she said softly, as she pushed open the door; and she left out the two most roses.

The words died on her lips, and a great horror froze her, still and silent, there.

She saw the dusky room as in a dream. She saw her lamp stretched on the bed, leaning on his elbow, glowing and playing cards upon the lace coverlet. She saw women with loose, sliding hair and bare limbs, and rubies and diamonds glimmering red and white.

She saw men crying aloud upon the couch, throwing dice and shouting and laughing with execration.

She saw them lay against the pillows of his bed in a beautiful bower, wicked looking things, the same violet snakes, who leaned over him as he threw down the painted cards upon the lace, and who had cast about his throat her curved, lean arm with the great coils of dead gold all lighter on it.

She sat up in bed and slipped her feet on to the floor, the floor felt rough. She felt that he had never seen odors of wine and tobacco, clouds of smoke, shouts of laughter and mirth, all by himself.

She was good like a frozen creature and saw the roses to her hand. Then with a great piercing cry she let the roses fall, and turned and sat. At the sound he looked up and saw her, and shook his beautiful brown hair off him with a oath.

But Bebe fled down through the empty rooms, the lattice windows, the flower boxes on the beams, the lattice feet never paused, her aching limbs never slackened, she ran on, and on, and into the lighted streets, into the fresh night air; on, and on, straight to the river.

From his brim such was his strength caught and held her. She struggled with him. "Lie down! let me die!" she shrieked to him, and strained from him to get at the cool gray silent water that waited for her.

Then she lost all consciousness and saw the stars no more.

When she came back to any sense of life, the stars were still, and the face of Jeannot was standing over her, wet with tears.

He had followed her to Paris when they had come first, and had come straight by train to the city, making sure it was thicker she had come, and then had sought her many days, watching for her by the houses of fashion.

She shouldered away from him as he held her, and looked at him with blank, tearless eyes.

"I am not touch me! Take me home."

That was all she ever said to him. She never called him or told him anything. She never noticed that he was strange that he should have been upon the river bank. He left her, and took his silently in the cool night back to the iron ways.

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