

FATE'S AIDE-DE-CAMP.

BY LEIGH WEBSTER.

From New York Ledger:

"Fate sends you this circle With a task that is sweet— To search the world over, And make it complete. This task once accomplished—whenever it be— Revealed, Oh, seeker! thy true love to thee."

His first sensation was one of anger. "Some joke of the fellows, I suppose. It's pleasant to think I'm a laughing stock to the crowd! I have been rather unsocial of late, but this is going too far. St. Valentine's, eh! So it is! Rather an expensive joke—this thing is the real thing—odd, too," and he held it up to the light. "It is only a part of a ring. I can see that there must be another band with a clover leaf set the other way to fit into this. Two four-leaved clovers mated—pretty idea! It ought to be a lucky combination. Now, who could have sent it to me? The address looks a little like Temple's—at least, as it might if he was trying to disguise his hand. Well I could stand it better from him. Search the world over—there is only one place where I care to look, and not likely to find it there!

"One thing, though; I really ought to call on her before I leave town. She has always treated me well, and it is hardly the thing to drop off so suddenly and completely. Might arouse her suspicions, if she happen d to think of me. She will have heard of this case, and I'll appear wedded to law—absorbed in my work. Speak in an easy way of Tom Blake, and make a graceful exit from her life. Why haven't I thought of it before? I'll go tomorrow night. Tomorrow! Why, that is St. Valentine's day! Well, I hardly care to go there that night. Somebody else would be there—he would any night, for that matter—and it is the last opportunity, if I leave town next morning.

"Parshall, you have some superstitious nonsense sneaking through your head, but we'll put a stop to that. I won't go at all."

St. Valentine's Day—a whirl of snow. No one could go out and [perhaps] no one come in. To one girl it was the longest day she had ever known, as she wandered, restlessly, from one room to another disdainful of the dainty concoctions, of lace, bon-bons, and tender sentiments, with which the good saint had favored her. She drew a sigh of relief, when, at last—dinner over—her guardian departed to his club and she was free to partake herself to the little drawing-room, which was her special nook. The soft lights—the perfume of flowers—soothed her spirits, and she laughed a little as she noted the work thrown carelessly on the table.

"How many things I have tried to do to day and what a farce it has all been!"

She moved about the room—a graceful figure in her dull green gown, with its touches of silver. On her left hand was a curious ring, which she paused often to study—then with a sigh, sunk into a great chair before the fire and steadily contemplated both hands with the deepest attention. The firelight showed an anxious and troubled face.

"How could I do it? If he comes, what a false position I should be in. What untruths I shall have to imply. It he were to find me out, I should be overwhelmed with shame. How could he suspect? Did I not take every precaution? But, then—

he won't come. I feel sure of that." (A ring at the bell). "Yes, Katy"—taking the offered card—"you may bring him in here. What shall I say? I must go through with it now!

"Good evening, Mr. Parshall. How good of you to come out a night like this. I asked you to come in here, the drawing room is so big and cheerless. Do take this seat near the fire. I have been fairly scorching my face all the evening, and will gladly resign my place to you."

She turned, picked up a fan, and carefully seated herself with her back to the light. Her guest had been, apparently, struck dumb; for now that there was an opportunity, he had no word to say. He had sank down obediently into the warm corner pointed out to him, and was gazing fixedly at the hand which held the fan. Could he believe his eyes? It was half a shadow, yet, when she had held out her hand in greeting just now, the ring looked so familiar it had taken his breath away. Seeing her eyes follow the direction that his had taken, he said, boldly:

"What a curious ring!"

(To be Continued.)

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