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SATURDAY READING!

A Romance of a Very Curious Nature.

ALL IS WELL THAT ENDS WELL

Irene, a Beautiful Girl Meets with the Hardships and Troubles of this World but Finally Rewarded.

Three fair-haired maidens sat together eagerly discussing a subject, which, from appearances, was of intense interest to all.

A pretty picture these three daughters of Judge Charmon formed, as they sat in their sitting-room, just before retiring.

"But my dear Irene," cried Madge "why are you so quiet? You do not appear to be happy. I am sure there is every reason to be proud of such an offer."

Irene still kept her eyes bent upon the fire.

"Yes," she replied, speaking slowly, weighing each word, "I ought to feel it an honor, I know. I ought to think what an honorable man he is, and what a kind husband he would make, but—her voice seemed to be as far away as her thoughts."

"And why not dear?" tenderly said Clara, the oldest of the three. "Do you not love him? In that case there is no reason why you should for a moment be troubled with the subject. He may be everything that could be desired, still, if you do not love him, Irene, nothing in the world should make you marry him."

"I don't know," replied Irene. "I have hardly given myself time to think of him in that light. It was all so sudden. We had just returned from a drive. I was sitting in the hammock and he in a chair beside me. We had been talking of nothing in particular, when suddenly he said: 'Miss Charmon, we are good friends, are we not?'"

"Then he arose and stood before me, and said: 'I should hate to break that friendship through any act of mine. If I speak in error, I fear I may do so. You are young, beautiful, and accomplished, accustomed to have men pay you homage, perhaps in your kind treatment of me, you have but generously given me the happiness of performing the same service, but in doing this I have gone further; perhaps I have allowed my heart to lead my thoughts in a direction they should not take; perhaps in my passion I have mistaken little deeds of kindness from you, and imagined that some deeper sentiment prompted the action. Be that as it may, I can no longer conceal my heart. I love you.'"

"Oh!" uttered Madge, with deep feeling.

"And what answer did you make, dear?" asked Clara tenderly.

"I don't remember that—indeed, I don't remember anything I said, it was all so sudden, and he looked so handsome and tender. All I know is that in a moment he was at my side, kissing my hands in a most ardent fashion."

Another "Oh!" escaped Madge. "But you really must have given him some encouragement, Irene."

"Yes, I suppose I did," she replied, with another distant look into the grate.

"But you do not love him?" "Perhaps."

"What was your answer?" "I asked him to wait, and he said forever, so long as he once had hope."

"This was too much for Madge. 'Oh!' she cried. 'If you do not, I will myself! He is too lovely for anything.'"

Soon after, the three girls retired for the night.

How many thoughts crowded through Irene's pretty head, thoughts which had little to do with the man who had this evening offered and asked for the greatest gifts in human power to grant. No, she was thinking of one who, long ago, had been very dear to her. They had been children together. The families of each had been wealthy, and they were happy in their young love. Suddenly his people lost all, through the reverses of fortune. Gradually their intimacy had ceased. It was a heavy heart that he had yielded to what he had deemed his duty. He was no longer an eligible suitor for the hand of the youngest daughter of Judge Charmon. There were many others who had wealth, and who could offer her a home equal to the one she would leave, while he could offer her nothing save a loving heart. No, he would not do her the injustice to take her from her happy home, where every luxury surrounded her.

No words of love had ever crossed their lips. They had been satisfied to be together, and had never spoken of that deeper passion. How often he had afterward wondered if she had really cared for him, or whether it was but a childish friendship. This was long ago, fully four years; she was but a child at the time, but the germs of love had been sown, a deeper love than she had supposed. He had gone away. At first she wrote to him, but gradually his replies had ceased, until the correspondence stopped. It was two years since she had heard from him; she did not know even where he was. Gradually his image had faded from her heart, not dead, but dimmed by time, till she only recollected him with a sort of hazy recollection of a time when she had been very happy. Never had the remembrance been brought so distinctly to her as when Charles Reynolds this evening asked her for her hand. Then a sudden flood of tender recollections dimmed her thoughts; she hesitated, faltered in her speech, and he, mistaking her embarrassment for consent, had rapturously clasped her hands in his and poured forth his tender thoughts; and now that it was all over, that she had compromised herself to the extent of allowing him to believe she cared for him, her thoughts returned to the time when she had unwittingly yielded her heart to another. Never before had she known the truth, never before had she realized how dearly she had loved. And he, where was he now? Had he forgotten her?

Long she lay awake. Long she thought of the absent love, but finally sleep overtook her heavy eyelids and she slept.

The next morning, when the girls went down to breakfast, Judge Charmon sat at the table, reading the morning paper. Suddenly he spoke:

"Why, girls, here is an accident to an old friend of ours."

"An accident? To whom?" inquired Clara.

Judge Charmon read the article:—"Portsmouth. A sad accident. At 3:30 yesterday afternoon a carriage, containing a young girl, dashed madly up Main street. The horses had become frightened at a passing vehicle and were unmanageable. Several policemen and pedestrians tried in vain to stop the runaway. As the horses neared 6th street a young man rushed into the street before the crazed animals. Almost before the breathless spectators could utter an exclamation of terror they were upon him. He grasped them by the bridle, but they threw him from his feet. He clung bravely on, dragging along the pavement. Suddenly, to the horror of the beholders, he fell below the horses' feet, and the carriage passed over his body. The team was finally stopped without further accident. A crowd soon gathered around the courageous young man, and he was carried into a neighboring drug store, but life was almost extinct, and before a doctor arrived he had breathed his last. The horse had stepped upon his neck and the carriage crushed his body. The tragedy is particularly sad, since the unfortunate young man was a most promising one, having raised himself from want to his present position of responsibility. His name was Clarence Harper."

As Judge Charmon read the name a choking sound escaped Irene, and her head sunk as Clara rushed to her.

"Dear Irene!" She could say no more. She knew that Irene and Clarence had been very dear friends, but she did not know that it was his image which Irene had carried in her heart for so long.

"How terrible! Poor Clarence!" exclaimed the sympathetic Madge. Irene raised her head. No tears fell from those sad eyes; her face was ashy white. She gazed vacantly before her.

"Come, dear," entreated Clara, "drink a little coffee; you will feel better. It was very sad, and so sudden. He was such a good boy!"

The girls ate their breakfast in silence. When the meal was ended they withdrew to their rooms.

Half an hour afterward Clara heard a knock at her door. She opened it, and Irene entered. She was dressed in black, and her beautiful face was colorless. In her hand she held a packet of letters, these she held out to Clara.

"Read these, Clara," she said in a dreary tone, "they will explain themselves."

She laid the packet down and left the room.

An hour later Clara entered Irene's room and found her reclining on her bed. She kissed her tenderly.

"My poor, dear, little sister," she cried, "how you have suffered? So noble, so brave! Ah, how happy you might have been!"

She clasped her arms about the girl, and for the first time Irene wept. Her tears, so long restrained, burst forth in torrents. Finally her sobs ceased; she raised her tear-stained face to Clara.

"I loved him, Clara?" "I know you did my dear, and he loved you."

"Yes, I think he did; but why did he not write me?" "He felt he would be doing wrong to do so when he became poor."

"As though I cared whether he had money! It is all over now—he is gone! I have put on this dress just for to-day. For one day his memory shall be held sacred."

That evening Chas. Reynolds called. Irene pleaded illness and did not see him.

Time, that healer of all griefs, flew on. Six months afterward the engagement of Charles Reynolds and Irene Charmon was announced. They were married, and all the world wished them well.

Two years passed happily, and a child was born to them. Irene called him Clarence, in memory of him whom she had once loved. It was about this time that Mr. Reynolds was taken ill and died. His wife mourned him deeply, for he had been a good, true and loving husband. A year afterward she received a pressing request from an aunt, living at a distance, to spend a few months with her.

She took her baby boy and started on her journey. It was a beautiful day. Nature seemed to have put on her brightest raiment to bring sunshine to her troubled heart. She pressed the child to her breast, and, for the first time in many days, felt the weight of sadness lifted from her. How often she thought of that moment in after years.

She was received with open arms. Upon every side she saw the marks of loving tenderness. After tea they sat beneath the far-reaching elm tree on the grassy lawn, and watched her boy—such a pretty child. He was now two years old. He had already made the acquaintance of the large house dog, and was leading him proudly around.

The next morning brought letters from home. Clara and Madge would arrive in a week's time. What a family reunion, and how happy they would be!

Each day brought new color to Irene's face, and each moment more peace to her heart. At last the day came for her sisters' arrival. They were all at the station to meet the travelers. Irene clung to her sisters as if in fear of losing them. Proudly in little Clarence marched along with the rest. He was just beginning to prattle so as to be understood, and the lavish display of admiration pleased him greatly.

That evening Irene's aunt announced the arrival of a stranger.

"Such a nice gentleman! Rather quiet, but such a pleasant person. We met him quite by accident last summer. He writes me that he is visiting friends across the lake, and may drop in upon us at any moment."

"Ah, that will be jolly," cried Madge. "Men are always acceptable."

"You must be careful never to ask any questions which would cause him to try to remember any event which has transpired. He met with a severe accident several years ago, and since then has never been able to think of any past event without the greatest anguish. He says it is not a painful feeling, only a chaotic blank from which he can draw nothing."

"How sorrowful!" exclaimed Clara.

"But you will find him an excellent companion, nevertheless." Irene had been playing with Clarence, and paid little attention to what was said of the stranger.

The next morning passed rapidly away, but no stranger appeared. It was 4 o'clock, and Irene was sitting alone in the little summer house overlooking the beautiful lake. Clara had just left her for a book, and Madge volunteered to amuse Irene. Suddenly she was aroused from her reverie by the sound of her child's voice:

"I don't know you, but me ain't afraid."

She heard a low laugh that made her heart stop beating. That voice! Who was it? Clarence was talking to her? She heard footsteps approaching, but dared not raise her eyes.

"See, mamma," cried Clarence, "see who me's got!"

Half fearfully she raised her eyes. The book fell to the ground; she clasped her hands to her heart; her lips refused to move. The stranger stared at his eyes met hers, removed his hat, and passed his hand across his forehead as if to think. The child looked first at one and then at the other.

The stranger gazed at the child. "Clarence!" he gasped. Then his eyes sought hers. A gleam of consciousness beamed in his glance. "You are his mother?" He shook his head disconsolately. "No, I cannot recollect."

Tears were streaming from Irene's eyes; she laid her hand upon his arm and spoke his name.

"Clarence!" she said, tenderly. He started, held her from him a moment, then suddenly clasped her in his arms.

"'Tis she! 'Tis Irene! I can remember at last! That voice alone has recalled my absent recollection. Irene, my darling, mine!"

When Clara returned she found a stranger sitting beside Irene. Upon his knee was Clarence, and Irene's hand rested in his. Her face glowed with supreme happiness and her eyes beamed with love, while there still lingered tears within them. He was telling her how, after the accident, they had supposed him dead. He was removed to a hospital, and upon recovery, had lost his reason. Slowly this had returned to him, but the past was a blank.

"But now," he said, leaning toward her, "now you have brought all back to me. You whom I have never ceased to love and pray for. You are free; what is your answer?"

She raised her eyes to his and in their depths he read her love for him. Her head was pillowed upon his breast and their lips met.

Clara re-entered the house. The sinking sun cast a shimmering beam upon the golden lake as it sunk in peace to rest.—Waverly.

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Catarrh

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Catarrh

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Catarrh

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