

CONTRAST.

The bells of Lent rang up, rang down, through all the babel of the town; Rang soft, and clear, rang loud or low, As loud or low March winds did blow.

Through wide-flung doors the hurrying throng Caught hints of psalm and snatch of song— The bright, strong song of psalm and prayer, Of cross and passion and despair.

One, hurrying by amid the throng, Who caught the sweetness of the song Above the turmoil of the street, Turned suddenly her weary feet.

And through the wide-flung doors passed in And out the wayward whirl and din. "Call me away from flesh and sense— Thy grace, O Lord, can draw me thence."

In fervent tones the singers sang, While solemn hymns rang— "From flesh and sense," the words struck clear Upon the stranger's listening ear.

"From flesh and sense," she looked across The light amidst the gleam and gloss Of diamond-fire and satin shone— A princess' raiment, that had won

A prince's ransom in the past; Across the aisles toward east Her seeking glance in bitter need Of raiment that scarce met the need

That winter keen and merciless Brought home to her with savage stress, And they, they were to her as spin, These little fair, apparelled in

These costly robes, while others strive, And mourn to find themselves alive Beneath the banner of the day, That leave small time or need to pray.

"Call me away from flesh and sense, When flesh itself seems half-drawn thence "For you, for you, oh favored ones, These silken stalls, these organ tones,

Her bitter thought ran, as the prayer Floated in music on the air, "For you, for you this house you call The house of God; for me the thrall

"Of toll and toll, from day to day, While life wastes sordidly away, In vainest hope and dull despair. Of some sweet time, when one from care

"May pause and rest a little space, And meet life's bright things face to face, But faint at heart and very low Of hope and comfort I but know

"In these dark days the needs of earth, All else seems worth of little worth; And little worth your silken prayer Against my wail of dull despair."

"BOYCOTTED."

"We are 'Boycotted.'" Yes; "Boycotted," in the fullest sense of the term. All our servants have gone. Men-servants and maid-servants. From the cook to the pantry-boy—butter, housemaids, ladies' maid—all are gone, bag and baggage, all protesting against going, yet all afraid to stay; and we are all alone in our glory, and strange to relate, our spirits have risen in consequence—gone up to fever heat; in fact, we laugh, actually, as the last mental departs, and then we look at each other with a sort of defiant expression, and laugh again, for it is rather ridiculous, after all.

Here we are—the Desmonds of Castle Desmond—alone, utterly alone. Bercif of household servants, of farm laborers, of coachmen, groom—all not forgetting the darning maid and a dozen cows waiting to be milked." What are we to do? "Fight it out," Gerry declares with a gleam in his gray eyes; and we all with triumphant clamor echo his sentiments.

"Of course we must never give in. I should think not; give in, indeed!" exclaim the clear, defiant, young voices; for there is a flavor of delicious excitement about it all, and we feel like war-horses scenting the battle from afar, and surely we can keep up the farge for that short space of time. There is dignity even in the way he unwinds the yards of white cashmere from his throat, and lays it down on his coat. He has a very grand manner, and he is nice-looking, too, quite a handsome man, just the age I like—about forty. What a pity I am only the servant! But he has shaken himself together, and passing his hand over his hair and straightening himself, as if he was on parade, signifies that he is ready; and so I precede him across the hall, and throwing open the drawing-room door, announce:

"Colonel Tremaine," with a flourish, and retire, feeling that the stage has lost a great and shining light in me. Oh! the dishing-up of that dinner, the heat of our faces, and the desperation of our manner! Shall I ever forget it!

Gerry says a flying visit just as the soup is being poured into the tureen. "Tremaine is delighted with everything, and hasn't an idea we're 'Boycotted,'" Mab, you look splendid! Don't laugh, mind, girls, at dinner."

And off he goes, and the work of dishing-up progresses. "Eily, turkeys don't keep their legs up like that."

"I can't help it," Eily cries, desperately, struggling with the bird's long, yellow legs, that are held toward heaven supplicatingly, while the unfortunate turkey goes bumping and steaming about the table, and refuses to get into shape or form.

"He will think it is the Irish fashion of trussing."

I cannot speak for laughing as Eily settles the bird in a dish with its legs in the air.

"Mah, you go on with the soup. See, he is looking more natural, and the beef is really beautifully done, and the sauce does away with the effect of this animal's legs, I think."

"Yes," I answer, dubiously, looking at the white sauce flowing round and the long strings of celery hanging like garters round the terrible yellow ankles of that most miserable bird.

But, putting a good face on the matter, I carry in the soup, feeling a little nervous as I announce dinner and see them all coming in. Gerry gives me one delighted look.

Mamma is murmuring to Colonel Tremaine about the state of the country, and her fears for Gerry's safety; and Nora is acting her part to perfection. So they take their places, and Eily and I hand round the soup without any disaster.

Sherry with soup, and I gravely fill Colonel Tremaine's glass and go round the table. The pepper in the soup makes them all cough, but the conversation goes evenly on, and we are waiting admirably.

"I thought you had more sisters, Desmond?" the colonel asks; and Eily dashes off with more haste than sense, and I hear a smothered laugh.

"They are away," mutters Gerry, red as a pomegranate, and Nora steps into the breach.

"I am sorry you have missed them, Colonel Tremaine; they will be here next week, I think."

we toil into the dairy with our milk-pails. "By Jove! I had no idea it was such hard work," Gerry says, wiping his forehead.

"I don't envy the pretty maid who went a-milking," I say, laughingly. "I always thought the dairy was such a nice place, with the red floor, the cream, and all the rest of it; but I see now a dairy-maid's place is no sinecure."

Gerry pulls out his watch. "I must get the dog-cart and drive over to meet Tremaine."

Eily looks up from skimming the cream. "If it safe for you to go alone?"

"Oh, nonsense, it is safe enough," and he goes.

Eily and I can think of nothing but acting up to our new characters as the domestics of the Desmond family.

Our dresses, caps, and aprons are all perfect of their kind, and even mamma smiles a smile as I rehearse a little for her benefit, and bring fresh coals for the drawing-room fire and brush up the hearth in the dearest fashion imaginable.

Dot, all befriended and beloved by Nan's careful fingers as if "Boycotted" was a thing unknown, watches with her big eyes.

"Is Mab making a play, mamma?" "Yes, my darling."

"The child will tell Colonel Tremaine the first thing," remarks Eily, as she draws the curtains and then whisks round on Dot suddenly.

"Dot, if you tell, I'll—I'll—'Boycott' you," she says in an awful voice.

And the youngest-born, awed by any threat, promises "not to tell—oh, not any one."

"She will all the same, I feel convinced," Eily says, as we depart to the kitchen.

"What a nuisance a child is coming in at the end of a large grown-up family!"

After which speech she betakes herself to the mysteries of mashing potatoes.

Nora, the beauty of the family, has arranged the dinner-table to her liking, and is now dressed and awaiting Colonel Tremaine's arrival in the drawing-room.

"I would feel easier if Dot was in bed," I say.

"Remember I am Susan, and you are Mary, Eily."

"No, Mab, I am Susan; the name suits me best. Oh, that wretched child, I hope he likes pepper in his soup, for the head of the castor has gone in."

"Never mind. Eily, who is to bring him his hot water in the morning?"

"You must," promptly. "You look awfully like a house-maid, Mab; and besides I should laugh, I know that I should."

"But I couldn't go into his room," in horrified accents. "Eily, I couldn't; and you must get your shutters for yourself, and you know I could just knock at his door and say, 'Your hot water, sir.'"

"And he will say, 'Come in,'" laughs Eily. "Oh, Mab, it is glorious, and perhaps he will give us each half a sovereign when he goes away."

A loud ring at the door! He has come; and with my heart in my mouth, and trying to look prim and demure, I proceed to answer the summons. Opening the hall-door wide I see a tall figure enveloped in an ulster, standing on the steps.

"It is he," I cry, and he calls out, and drives the trap round to the yard, having no one to do it for him.

"Will you please come to the drawing-room, sir?" I whispered, timidly, and surely no handmaiden had ever such a small voice before.

He is struggling out of his coat and mufflers, and I watch him, bursting with amusement the while at the joke of the thing.

He is very tall, very dignified, a very proper sort of man, and it would never do to let him suspect the harmless ruse we are playing on him.

He is to be here only for two days, and surely we can keep up the farge for that short space of time. There is dignity even in the way he unwinds the yards of white cashmere from his throat, and lays it down on his coat. He has a very grand manner, and he is nice-looking, too, quite a handsome man, just the age I like—about forty. What a pity I am only the servant! But he has shaken himself together, and passing his hand over his hair and straightening himself, as if he was on parade, signifies that he is ready; and so I precede him across the hall, and throwing open the drawing-room door, announce:

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Gerry are expressing their pleasure at the delightful prospect.

The turkey, legs and all, has made its appearance, and I have at last, after three trials, hoisted the roast beef over mamma's shoulder and set it on the table, nearly falling over Colonel Tremaine as I did.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I cry, taken off my guard, and speaking in my own voice, forgetting to say, "Sir," in the excitement of the moment.

Gerry laughs; it was nearly all up with us then, but Eily is thrusting a plate of turkey under the colonel's nose, and I have a few moments to recover myself.

Gerry's face, frowning at those uplifted appearing legs of that fearful bird, is a sight but he carves on, and the dinner progresses on the whole in a very satisfactory manner.

The snipe are raw, and a little feather; it must be confessed, and their legs have the same upward inclination as the turkey's had, but Colonel Tremaine devours the blackened, fluffy morsel, for we anxiously watch his every mouthful; and I breathe freely when he declines Eily's most unpalatable-looking pudding—it took her hours to make it—but the result is not all her fancy painted.

With the dessert, that most awful child Dot comes in and makes for mamma; but nurse must have trained her pretty well, for she says nothing to Eily and me; but presently, when her first shyness has worn off, she looks at Colonel Tremaine, and says, with terrible distinctness:

"I know a secret, and you don't."

"Dot," shouted Gerry, "come to me for an orange."

So she goes round the table, making matters worse by saying:

"Oh don't be frightened, Gerald; for I won't tell the secret."

The awful dinner is over at last, and we are back in the drawing-room talking it over with mamma and Nora.

Mamma says she does not like it at all; the plan never met with her approval; Colonel Tremaine will be sure to find out, etc., etc. But what can we do. "Boycotted," we are, and "Boycotted," we must remain.

"Colonel Tremaine rather admires the Irish peasantry," Nora says, smiling.

"He said our maids were very pretty, girls, he had seen and the tall one with the great eyes was a real beauty, much better-looking than half the London beauties. Now, Mab, what do you say to that?"

"He will be making love to Mab when she is bringing up his boots and shaving water," says Eily, delightedly.

"Oh, I saw him admiring her that time she nearly sent the beef spinning into his lap—don't look so indignant, Mab, and come and make the coffee, and you can carry it in to the colonel."

It may be great fun, but it is very risky. Ever instant the chances of discovery seem to increase. When I proceed to the drawing-room, coffee-tray in hand, I find the colonel and Gerry already seated there—Colonel Tremaine in close proximity to Dot, with—oh! horror of horrors!—an open photograph book between them, Dot with a desire of impairing information explaining who every one is.

"That's Gerry, and this is me; and that—oh—that's Mab."

Here she stops and looks up at him, gazing, nodding her head.

"That's the secret, and I mustn't tell you."

"Coffee, sir," I whisper in agony.

And straight from contemplating the photograph Colonel Tremaine looks right up into my face, gives one quick, puzzled started look, first at me, then down at the photograph, and then his eyes are lifted again and meet mine full, and I am sure there was a gleam of amusement in his face—a sort of ray of enlightenment as he takes his coffee-cup slowly from the tray, while, sitting with humiliation, I look on more heroically endeavoring to retrieve the moment by saying to that dreadful child, in a voice that will be shaky in spite of myself:

"Miss Dot, nurse is waiting for you to go to bed."

Round-eyed she stares.

"Why, Mab?" is on her lips, but I give her a terrible look that recalls her to her senses, and take myself and coffee-tray out of the room.

But I am sure that the colonel more than half guesses that I am not the Susan I pretend to be.

CHAPTER II.

Seven o'clock on a raw February morning is not the pleasantest moment of the day, and it is not an hour calculated to make "Boycotted" appear a bearable ordeal.

But we bravely proceed to the farm-yard, and manfully struggle with those melancholy cows again. Our success is not brilliant and the growl a little cross, and grumbling at the long row of white, red and roan backs, all waiting to be milked.

Gerry has gone to the stable to attend to the horses, and Eily and I are patiently filling our milk-pails by thumbfuls.

"I can get on famously with one hand, but when I try two I get out of time," Eily says, dimly.

"So do I," I answer, in equally mournful accents. "Oh, Eily!"

A tall figure rises up beside Clover, who looks as if she would kick over the moon; and I put up the bucket and milk away for my life. What possessed the man to come out at this hour of the morning? There he stands, calmly surveying our frantic efforts, and I feel that he is smiling—nay, laughing.

"Allow me,"

"Who?" simultaneously from all.

"George Dane. He came over and volunteered his services this morning," says Gerry, giving a quick look at Eily, who flushes scarlet and looks daggers.

"I am sure we can dispense with his services," she retorts, scornfully.

George Dane has been Eily's devoted slave for three years; she has refused him twice, and now they have quarrelled hopelessly.

"Don't 'Boycott' me," says a humble voice at the door, and George Dane makes his appearance with a would-be contrite smile on his face.

He is quite good looking enough, quite nice enough and quite rich enough, too, if Eily could only see it; but she is a veritable coquette, as poor George has found out long ago.

We have been "Boycotted" for three weeks, and we are holding out still—very grimly, as in a head-gear; provisions are getting scarce. The last turkey has met its end, the last goose doted, and groceries are at a premium; but I—well, I sing:

"If we must starve, ah, why must it be now?"

For in my heart I find myself blessing the land league, and counting those three weeks in which I lived; hitherto I only existed.

But what a fool I am. Colonel Tremaine will marry Nora, mamma thinks so, Gerry thinks so, and Nora is sure of it.

Why on earth should he think of me! one of the young ones, not out yet, even. Of course he looks upon me as a jolly sort of girl, a very good companion, while Nora—

The family have it all settled without saying anything, but mamma leaves them together on every opportunity, and Nora wears a look of conscious pride and importance.

I am only Mab to him, nothing more, while Nora, oh, what joys we woman-kind are from seventeen to seventy, I could lay down my life for this grave, dignified man, and give it all without a sigh; and he doesn't want me or my life, only Nora.

He is thinking of her now, I feel sure, as we stand together in the stable-yard. He is grooming Nora's pony, and hissing softly like a cobra over the process, and I am watching him; while in the harness-room I can hear Eily and George Dane carrying on a laughing argument. Eily has been very civil to him of late. Col. Tremaine stops hissing and looks at me over the pony's back.

"Oh, young Dane looks very happy to-day, don't you think so?"

"I don't know," I said, gravely.

He laughs a little.

"Don't you know anything about love and lovers, Queen Mab?"

"No," I make answer, "indeed I do not; and laugh back at him, looking not at him as I speak."

"It will come some day," he replies; and then he lowers his voice suddenly, and the color flames up in my face hotly.

"I don't think it would ever come to me."

So softly he whispers the words, and yet they strike full and strong, like a sledge-hammer.

Is he going to tell me of his love for Nora?

"Mab?"

Only my own name, but I cannot bear to hear it in his voice.

"May I tell you about it, dear?"

"No!" I gasp, with one wild look at his transformed face, one wild wish that he would look at that smile for me; and then I speed away with flying feet, and leave him there, and I wish that it was all over, and that he and Nora were married.

On the way I meet Nora. So calm and unruffled she looks; a fit wife for him, such a contrast to my wild, turbulent nature. And yet I wonder if Nora has one thought of the love for him that I have—I who have given it all unasked, unthought, whose love must die unrequited, of unthought."

"Where is Colonel Tremaine?" asks Nora; and I answer, without looking at her:

"In the yard. You will find him out there."

"Mamma is anxious about Gerry," she continues. "Some one told her he had gone to Lisree about those tenants, and she is in a fidget. Will you go to her, Mab?"

"But I cannot face any one now, and so I walk far away down the avenue, out of sight of everybody, and think over all these past days; the days when he and I worked together, gay and merry always, though we were 'Boycotted' and in danger to our own land; and I was happy, with a happiness that comes but once in a life-time, until I awoke to find it was all a mistake. How he and I used to be such friends, such companions, and Eily and George Dane.

Working together in the kitchen, cooking, laughing always, or helping to look after the farm, or the horses, or the thousand-and-one things that our awkward hands had learned to do so deftly now, it was always he and I, two; and now—

"Oh, what a fool I am!" My cheeks are wet, and the first tears that a man ever brought to my eyes are coming thick and fast.

A boy springs out of the bushes suddenly, and showing a dirty piece of paper in my hand, vanishes like lightning.

Everything startles us, these strange, terrible times, and I feel frightened as I examine the missive. But the fear changes to terror as I read the few badly written words:

"The young master will be shot as he passes the lime-kiln coming home to-night. A warning to a friend."

The lime-kiln! Quick as thought I remember the place—a lonely bit of road a mile or more away, and Gerry must pass it coming home, there is no other way for him to come.

Something must be done. He must be warned.

Sick and cold with horror I read and reread the scrap of paper, but make nothing more out of it.

Whoever goes to warn Gerry must pass the lime-kiln.

Who is to go?

"I must choke, and my heart swells with love for Gerry and that other love. Gerry must be saved, but not by him. I know well that he would go at once; I know so well what he would do—how he would go himself to the lime-kiln, and save Gerry that way. And they might fire at him, perhaps."

No, no; my life before his! And so I speed back to the house, and running in white and desperate, stand face to face with Colonel Tremaine.

"Mab, what has happened? You are as white as a sheet!"

"Nothing," I answer, hastily. "I am tired. I have a dreadful headache."

So I have. My head will burst, I think, and Gerry's life lies in my hands.

His fingers touch mine.

"Mab, have I offended you?"

As he speaks the clock strikes out five, and Gerry will be here immediately, or rather there.

"Let me go!" I cry out, with a sob, a wild, bitter look up into his face; for I have almost chosen between my brother's life and his! Oh, no, not that! And I lay up stairs and leave him there, with that grave, puzzled look in his eyes.

There is such a little time to do anything in. Gerry must be on his way home now,

coming nearer and nearer to that dreadful place.

I suppose I have a good deal of presence of mind or self-control, for I am outwardly calm enough as I go to the nursery and say quietly to the nurse that I wish she would go down stairs and get me a cup of tea. When she is gone I turn to Dot and send her down to the drawing-room to say I am going to lie down with a headache. The child runs off and the moment has arrived.

In the wardrobe hangs nurse's long black cloak with its heavy hood. Snatching it from the peg, I dart away, and creeping cautiously to Gerry's room, take a revolver from his case. We have been practicing every day and I know I am a good shot.

I may wait it this evening, I think, as with cold hands I hide it, and slip away down the back stairs, unseen by anybody, and run as fast as my feet will carry me through the shrubs, and reach the avenue by a path that is unseen from the drawing-room window.

Once outside the gate I put on the long cloak, and with the hood over my head I fly as if for my life along the white, hard road, my fingers tightly clutching the revolver.

The life of the man I loved better than life was safe, but if I had sacrificed Gerry for him!

Was it wrong? I scarcely know; and on, walking and running, feeling like one unable to get on, running and stumbling, struggling every nerve to get on time.

Along way off now I can see the old limekiln, and my heart gives one wild bound as further on beyond that, just where the road winds, I see a solitary horseman, and know that it is Gerry all unconscious, riding home.

Which of us will reach the spot first? I am the nearest, but dare not run now for I might be seen.

The cloak hides me well. Who would notice a country girl passing along this lonely country road?

A little further on, and I can recognize Gerry on the road, and the gray horse. He is coming so fast, trotting, and I am almost screaming out as I see him coming faster and faster, and I am far away yet from the limekiln.

It must be all over in a minute, either way.

I am running now, shaking with fear and excitement, and I who piqued myself on being a good shot, know that my trembling hands couldn't hit a hay-stack now. Oh, heavens! they are waiting for me; I see a head cautiously peeping from behind the old wall, and I draw nearer.

Heaven's God give me strength now! On he comes, poor Gerry, cantering on the grass at the side of the road.

Little he dreams that there are murderers lying in wait as he comes nearer and nearer, and never notices me as I fly for dear life toward him; but I cannot get to the limekiln first.

He has won the race!

"Gerry!" I shriek, and run into the middle of the road and wave him back.

"Gerry, Gerry! go back!"

On he comes; for a little more strength! Heaven's God give me strength now! It is a very hoarse cry that breaks from my lips, and then—

Oh, if I live to be a hundred I must see it all then as I see it now.

A shot fired, and then a horse dashed riderless away, and Gerry lying on his face on the road, quite still, and over the white fields a man running like the wind.

"Gerry, Gerry!"

And like one bereft of reason I fall prone beside him, and with wild agony unspeakable, but still face to face with my brother, and it is my fault; it seems to me a long time, but I believe it is only a moment or two after all, till I feel Gerry struggling and getting upon his feet, and hear him say:

"Thank God!" under his breath.

Not dead—not hurt.

"Mab?" he cries, as I lift my head and look at him, "what brings you here, and what on earth does it all mean?"

Mine is a gasping, incoherent story, but Gerry's face flushes as he listens.

"Brave girl," he whispers fondly.

"You saved me, Mab. I thought you were some mad woman, but your cry must have frightened that wretch, for she never touched me."

"You are sure, Gerry?"

"Yes; I'm not touched. The horse shied and pitched me off, and I suppose I was stunned for a second."