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FORT BENTON, M. T.,
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Office in Gibson's Building on Levee street,
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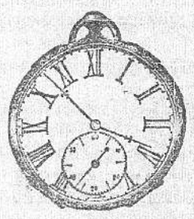

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NEW LAUNDRY.
Mrs. Kate Armstrong has leased the Benton Laundry, and is now prepared to execute laundry work intrusted to her care with neatness and dispatch. Particular attention paid to family washing.
KATE ARMSTRONG

Poetry.

THE STRANGER ON THE SILL.

Between broad fields of wheat and corn
Is the lowly home where I was born;
The peach tree leans against the wall,
And the woodbine wanders over all;
There is the shaded doorway still,
But a stranger's foot has crossed the sill.

There is the barn—and, as of yore,
I can smell the hay from the open door,
And see the busy swallows throng,
And hear the power's monotonous song;
But the stranger comes—the plain roof—
His sheaves are piled to the heated roof.

There is the orchard—the very trees
Where my childhood knew long hours of ease,
And watched the shadowy moments run,
Till my life has hid but a more shade than sun;
The swing from the bough still sways the air,
But the stranger's children are swinging there.

There bubbles the shady spring below,
With its bulrush brook where the hazels grow;
'Twas there I found the calamus root,
And watched the minnows poise and shoot,
And heard the robin tune his wing—
But the stranger's hooks is at the spring.

O, ye who daily cross the sill,
Step lightly, for I love it still;
And when you crowd the old barn eaves,
Then think what countless harvest sheaves
Have passed within the scented door
To gladden eyes that are no more.

Deal kindly with those orchard trees;
And when your children crowd their knees,
Their sweetest fruit they shall impart,
As if old memories stirred their heart;
To youthful sport still leave the swing,
And in sweet reverence hold the spring.

The barn, the trees, the brook, the birds,
The meadows with their lowing herds;
The woodbine on the cottage wall—
My heart still lingers with them all.
Ye strangers on my native sill,
Step lightly, for I love it still.

—*T. Buchanan Read.*

ABSENCE.

What shall I do with all these days and hours
That must be counted ere I see thy face?
How shall I claim the interval that lowers
Between this time and that sweet time of grace

Shall I in slumber steep each weary sense?
Weary with longings shall I flee away
Into past days, and with some fond pretence
Cheat myself to forget the present day?

Shall love for thee lay on myself the sin
Of casting from me God's great gift of time?
Shall I, these mists of memory locked within,
Leave and forget life's purpose sublime?

Oh how, and by what means, may I contrive
To bring the hour that brings thee back more near?
How may I teach my drooping hope to live,
Until that blessed time when thou art here?

I'll tell thee: for thy sake, I will lay hold
Of all good aims, and consecrate to thee,
In worthy deeds, each moment that is told,
While thou, beloved one, art far from me.

For thee I will arouse my thoughts to try
All heavenward flights, all high and holy strains;
For thy dear sake I will walk patiently
Through these long hours, nor call their minutes pains.

So may this doomed time build up in me
A thousand graces, which shall thus be thine;
So may my love and longing hallowed be,
And thy dear thoughts an influence divine.

—*Francis Anne Kemble.*

Selected Story.

MY FIRST PATIENT.

BY F. A. GROOM.

I.—MISS CLEMENT.

A practice is a plant of slow growth; nevertheless, it is a plant which I am going to cultivate. I have been a doctor's assistant long enough. It is high time, I think, that I had a brass plate and a red lamp of my own. Beside, there is dear Clara to consider. We have been engaged for three years, and I am sure that, what with her grumpy father and her nagging step-mother, she has a hard life of it. Not that she ever complains—she is too patient to do that; but I know well enough that her faithfulness to me, in the face of many more eligible offers, suffices as the text for endless diatribes on lack of common sense, forethought, &c.

I establish myself. The neighborhood is a new and increasing one, and I am assured of success by the affable agent who lets me the house.

I dare say that my want of patience is the cause of my disappointment. I have been informed scores of times by my loving sisters that I am terribly impatient and impulsive. Anyway, the influx of patients scarcely answers my hopes, and the fourth—no, the fifth—day of my residence at Alpha Lodge arrives, and no one has been so obliging as to fall ill and need my services.

The evening closes in cold and gloomy, and I sit by the fire and cheer myself by reading, for the dozenth time, a letter from Clara, received by the morning's post. It is a bright, loving epistle, a fit interpreter of the writer's bright, loving nature. It cheers and encourages me, and I weave a glowing picture of the future, when a wife's sweet face will smile at my side, and a wife's gentle hand will creep into mine, and—a ring at the bell, sharp, hurried, imperative.

In an instant the fairy visions vanished, and my precious missive is folded out of sight as my elderly maid enters to inform me that I am wanted immediately.

I find, waiting in the surgery, a comely young lassie of about fifteen.

"Be you the doctor, sir?" she says, breathlessly.

I answer in the affirmative, and inquire for what purpose my presence is required.

"O, please, sir, it's a lady as lodges with mother. She's took ill quite sudden; and, please, sir, mother says will you come at once?"

"Certainly I will. Where do you live?"

"No. 3 Pembroke Terrace, sir. The first row of houses on the right, in the second turning beyond the Bull's Head."

"Very well. The second turning, you say. Tell your mother I will be there directly."

"In a few minutes I have exchanged my slippers for boots, have invested myself with an overcoat, and, following the directions given, find myself at No. 3 Pembroke Terrace. The girl I have already seen opens the door and conducts me up stairs. In the doorway of a room on the second floor a woman is standing, evidently expecting me.

"I'm so thankful you've come, sir," is her greeting, "for I don't know what to make of her."

I give a glance around the apartment as I enter. It is a combination of bed and sitting-room, small, but neatly arranged. Tokens of refinement and taste are not wanting, either. Some books are on the drawers, a plaster statue of Silence stands on the mantel-shelf, and a couple of photographs relieve the barrenness of the walls, while on the dressing-table are few nick-nacks, cheap but tasteful.

My patient lies on the little iron bedstead, and I bid the landlady hold the light nearer, that I may be better able to examine her. She is young and good-looking—very good-looking indeed. Her colorless face is thrown into strong relief by the masses of dark hair which spread in tangled luxuriance over the pillow. Her eyes are closed, but the long black lashes sweep the ivory-hued cheeks, and the hand resting outside the coverlet is small and white and delicately shaped. She is utterly unconscious. Just an occasional tremulous breath is the sole sign of life.

"Has she been like this long?" I asked, noting the action of her pulse.

"More than two hours it must be, sir."

"H'm. Has she been out of health lately?"

"Well, sir, she's been mopey-like ever since she've been with me, and that's nigh on six months. But the last few weeks she's been very poorly, and this morning she called me in as I was a-going down stairs, and she says to me, she says 'Mrs. Larch, my head aches so, I think I shall take a rest to-day.'"

"She remained in bed all day, then?"

"She did, sir. I brought her up some tea about five, and she drank it, though she wouldn't eat the bit of toast I'd done for her. I came up an hour after, and found her like this."

"Has she lived well? Has she been well nourished?"

"I don't think she have, sir. She's paid me regular enough, but I believe she's kept herself pretty short. She haven't never said nothing, of course, but when one's got eyes, one can't help seeing with 'em."

I apply various restoratives, but it is some time before they have any effect. Then, after a brief interval of consciousness, she relapses again into a state of coma.

Her illness is a protracted one. Brain fever sets in, and her constitution is in such a general state of collapse that she nearly passes into the dim regions of the unknown world. Mrs. Larch is a good-hearted woman and an excellent nurse, and tends her lodger with kindly solicitude.

She is a very garrulous individual, is Mrs. Larch, and imparts to me the full extent of her knowledge of Miss Clement's history. I endeavor sometimes to stay her confidences, but it is an almost impossible task to stop her tongue when once it has commenced running. So perforce I become aware of a good many little facts connected with Miss Clement's mode, or rather means of living.

"It's pieters she paints mostly, sir," says Mrs. Larch, upon one occasion; "and she do do 'em beautiful, too. She painted my Tommy for me; and, lor, sir, I could almost have spoke to the pieter, it were that natural."

"Indeed!"

"Yes, sir. And she sells the pieters—leastways sometimes. But I don't believe she gets as much money for them as she ought to for 'em. She's always at it, tho'; for if she ain't painting, she's a-doing lace-work. There, sir, the delicatest lace as ever you see. Bless you, I'd be afeard to touch it with my clumsy fingers."

"Ah, I am afraid she has been trying her head too much."

"That's just it, sir. That's just as I've made bold to tell her again and again; but she's always answered me, 'I must live, Mrs. Larch; and I must work to live.' Not but that she's a born lady, as you can see, sir, though she do work. It's been hard lines for her, that it have; and its made my heart ache many's the time to see her getting so pale and thin."

"I am sure it has," I answered, for the honest woman's eyes are clouded with tears.

"That it have, sir; but, you see, I couldn't say much to her, nor do much, neither, for, for all that she's so gentle and pleasant, she's a bit proud, as real ladies often are. They don't like to talk about their troubles, they don't."

"No, they do not, certainly. Then, Mrs. Larch, I will try a fresh kind of medicine, I think; and be good enough, please, to give her some directly it comes.

"I will, sir, and good-day to you."

II.—TALBOT.

My first patient interests me wonderfully—not, be it understood, that there is the slightest danger of my falling in love with her. Clara is still *the* woman of the world to me. Indeed, I write and tell her all about Miss Clement, and her responses are most sympathetic and comprehensive, and utterly free from even the shadow of jealousy. She trusts me—dear girl!—and, please Heaven, I will deserve her trust.

I wish to let Miss Clement's friends know of her illness, but Mrs. Larch informs me that she has none.

"None that I know, sir; that is to say, no one's ever been to see her, and she never talks about no one, and no letters ever come to her."

So we can but do the best in our power for her, and leave the rest to Providence.

During her delirium there is one name ever on her lips—Charley. She tosses and turns and moans, and still it is this constant call for Charley.

To no other person does she allude. She connects the name with no incident, she designates it by no term of relationship.

"It's right down dreadful to hear her!" exclaimed her faithful nurse. "I'd be glad enough, that I would, if I could find this Mr. Charley and bring him to her. I do believe that sight of him would cure her, I do."

This opinion I likewise share. But then how to get at him? Where to find him? These are the questions I put to myself as I proceed homeward after a late call at Pembroke Terrace. I do not the symptoms at all. The intervals of delirium are certainly rarer and shorter, but between them she lies in a sort of stupor; not sleeping, asking no questions, and taking no notice of any one.

It is manifest that some mental trouble hinders her recovery, and of all maladies it is most difficult to "minister to a mind diseased;" to

"Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow—
Raze out the written trouble of the mind."

"She will never get well at this rate. She will gradually pine away. I must rouse her somehow. I—Halloa!"

The evening is cold and windy, and with head bent down I am walking briskly along, till, turning a sharp corner, I plump into violent collision with a gentleman.

"Halloa!" he returns, in gruff resentment.

"I beg your pardon. Why, Talbot, it is you?"

"None other, old fellow. I was just searching for your abode. You hang out somewhere in this locality, don't you?"

"Close by," I reply, linking my arm in his. "Come along."

Talbot is an old chum of mine, and a capital fellow to boot. I have lost sight of him for some time. He made a runaway match a while ago, I heard and absented himself from the circle of his acquaintances ever since. I am heartily glad to see him again, and so I tell him as, after supper, we sit and discuss bygone days.

He is a good deal altered, though, I find. He is a trifle younger than I am, and the silver streaks in his hair and beard are quite noticeable, while my locks are as black as ever they were. He looks much older—old, and haggard, and thin. He seems sad beyond measure, and has a way of lapsing into reverie, and becoming utterly oblivious of the presence of any other person.

"Does not my appearance please you?" he demands, with a grim laugh, catching me in the act of furtively scrutinizing him.

"No, it does not," is my blunt rejoinder. "What, in the name of fortune, have you been doing to yourself? Have you lost any money?"

He shakes his head slowly.

"What the? Is—" any thing wrong with your wife? I was going to say. But I don't. Instead I pass the spirit decanter.

"Help yourself," I remark, cheerily; "and if there is any thing I can do for you, I am at your service, remember."

He puffs at his cigar in a moody, unenjoying fashion, and there is silence between us for a space.

"Look here," he breaks out at last, "will it bother you to listen to my trouble? I feel sometimes as though I should go mad if I don't tell it to some one, and I've got that mood upon me now."

"Go ahead," I return, laconically.

"I suppose you know that I got married something less than a year ago?"

I nod my head in mute affirmation.

"Milly's father had made a pot of money in the city. He was an ambitious old fellow, and she was his only child. So he wanted her to marry a title—a sort of exchange, you see; money one side, rank the other. As ill-luck would have it, an old spendthrift lord saw her, and, I suppose, thought her money would do nicely to fill his empty coffers. He proposed to her father, and was accepted at once, and Milly was ordered to prepare her trousseau without delay, with *carte-blanche* to buy as many dresses and bonnets and gewgaws of every sort as she chose."

"But what did she think of her intended bridegroom?"

"Why, poor child, she entreated and implored her father not to force such a marriage upon her. She hated him. Small wonder, either. He was a thorough scoundrel, a wicked old *roue*, with nothing but his title and his blue blood to recommend him; only, unfortunately, those were precisely the recommendations which had most weight with Mr. Lewis. She even appealed to the man himself, and as politely as possible informed him that she did not wish to become his wife."

"Did he release her from the engagement?"

"The mean cur!"—Talbot's expression is far stronger and more forcible than I care to repeat—"No. He almost laughed in her face, and begged her to name the wedding-day. She was too rich a prize to let slip."

"Where were you all this time then?"

"I met her for the first time just after her engagement commenced. I was introduced to her at a party, and fell headlong in love with her. You wouldn't be astonished either, if you could have seen her. She was the very sweetest and loveliest darling in the world. I could tell she was not happy, and when I saw Lord Belsize, why, the reason was plain enough. I meet her pretty often, and fell deeper and deeper in love. I dare say I ought to have kept away from her, but I did not, I could not. And one day I lost my head, and told her that I loved her."

"Of course she was much scandalized at such an avowal?"

"No, she was not. Nothing of the sort. In fact, she owned that she liked me, too. I went to her father, and told him the state of affairs, and that I had a good income, and could afford to marry."

"And he did say, 'Bless you, my children; may you be happy?'"

Talbot's look is a sufficient rebuke to my levity.

"He swore at me, ordered me out of the house, and forbade me ever to speak to his daughter again."

"Did you obey his injuction?"

I feel the question is superfluous the moment I have asked it.

"I did not," he retorts, sharply. "I found means of communicating with her, and heard that the marriage was being hurried on; and, to make a long story short, persuaded her to agree to an elopement. Her wedding took place on the day fixed, but the bridegroom was not Lord Belsize, and her sole brides maid was a snuffy old pew-opener.

III.—CONCLUSION.

Talbot replenishes his glass with a liberal supply of brandy and a very scanty allowance of water, and takes a good pull at the mixture before resuming his narrative.

"We went abroad, and Milly wrote to her father, but all of her letters were returned unopened. She fretted about it, but still we were very happy—wonderfully happy."

His voice grows husky at this juncture, and he puts his hand up to shade his eyes.

"We had three weeks of happiness—three blissful weeks. Then I fell ill, caught some sort of fever, and it nearly did for me; indeed, the doctor told me afterward that it was principally Milly's nursing that saved me. When I began to mend, I noticed that she looked very pale and sad, but I set that down to fatigue and anxiety. But the very first day I was able to move without assistance Milly was missing."

"Missing?" I echo. "Whatever do you mean?"

"What I say—that Milly was missing."

"But what made her go? She must have had some reason for going."

"So she had; and to make that reason clear, I must inflict upon you another and an earlier page of my history. Eight—no, nine—years ago I went and made a fool of myself. It is not necessary to go into particulars, but I married a woman, thinking her an angel, and discovered, too late, that she was—that she was altogether the reverse of what I had imagined."

"I did not care to parade my folly before the world. I had plenty of money, and she would do anything for money. She was willing to come to terms, provided that I paid her a good price for the accomodation. I agreed to allow her a certain sum annually, and she in turn agreed to keep away from me and maintain silence as to the relationship between us. This compact was adhered to, and I never saw her from the day I parted with her. Four years later she died, and Teddy, don't put me down quite a brute if I confess that on hearing of her death my first sensation was of relief. It was an irksome, horrible tie from which I was released."

"Could you not have got a divorce?"

"Easily. But my mother was alive, and would have heard of it. She was in bad health, and the scandal would simply have killed her, for she was terribly proud."

"Did she know anything about your connection with this woman?"

"Know! No, indeed. The woman was good looking, and had a sort of dash that was taking enough; but she was of low origin. I was young and green in those days, and had grand notions about educating and refining her, and taking her to my mother and saying, 'Mother, here is one of nature's gentlewomen.' Bah! my ideas underwent a change when I knew her for what she was. I tried to forget her, and succeeded pretty well, only now and then a remembrance would crop out and disturb me. So when the news came that I was a free man, I was not hypocrite enough to pretend to grieve."

"Did you tell Miss Lewis about your previous marriage?"

"Yes. At least I told her that I had been married before, that my wife was dead, and that there were unhappy circumstances connected with the whole affair, which made me unwilling to revert to it. That was all I told her. The details were neither pleasant telling nor pleasant hearing.

"Well, while I was ill and delirious, there came a letter addressed to me, and Milly opened it. It purported to be from my first wife, and was written to inform me that the account of her death was false. She had been out of England, she said, but had now returned, and had heard of my marriage. She had no wish to trouble me, and would still continue to keep the secret, provided I gave her a certain sum she named, and renewed my former allowance."

"Humph! she judged your morals by her own, I suppose."

"Milly read the letter, and, as soon as I was out of danger and could manage a little for myself, left me."

"I don't see what else the poor girl could do."

"But, man, it was a lie—a cursed lie!"

"What was? I don't understand."

"Why, that the woman was alive. She died at the time my information specified. As soon as I was able to travel I went to the place, and verified every particular. I saw the doctor who attended her, and the clergyman who was with her when she died. I got a certificate of her death, and even went and saw her grave."

"What the deuse, then, was the meaning of this precious epistle?"

"It was a trick got up by her relations to extort money. They thought, situated as I was, I should not care to make close inquiries, but would pay what they asked. And even had I demanded an interview, there was a sister who bore a great resemblance to my dead wife, who was to personate her. The lapse of time since we met they trusted would aid them in carrying out their deception."

"Rather a clumsy imposition."

"Clumsy! It was devlish beyond expression! Think what it has made my poor Milly suffer!"

"Have you had no tidings of her since!"

"None—not a word. I have hunted everywhere, abroad and in England, and I have found no trace whatever."

"Did she not say in her letter to you what she intended doing?"

"No. She only said she had no alternative but to leave me; but that she should continue to love me as long as she lived. My poor Milly! My poor, poor darling!"

Talbot breaks down utterly at this, dropping his face on his arms, and sobbing like a child. I say nothing, simply because nothing befitting the occasion occurs to me to say. He recovers himself presently, and, detaching a locket from his watch-chain, opens it, and hands it to me.

"That is her portrait," he says.

I take the trinket from him, bend my head to examine it, and see smiling at me the pictured semblance of my first patient.

"What is it? What is the matter!" he cries, observing my start of surprise.

"I know where your wife is," I reply.

He is on his feet in an instant.

"You do? Where is she?"

He looks as though he would start off to her there and then.

"Sit down and be rational," I say, peremptorily.

"But I must go to her! I *will* go to her! For God's sake, man, tell me where she is!"