

**THE FAIRY FIDDLER.**

'Tis I go fiddling, fiddling  
By weedy ways forlorn.  
I make the blackbird's music  
Ere in his breast 'tis born.  
The sleeping larks I waken  
'Twixt the midnight and the morn.  
No man alive has seen me,  
But women hear me play,  
Sometimes at door or window,  
Fiddling the souls away,  
The child's soul and the collier's  
Out of the covering clay.  
—Nora Hopper.

**AN UNSIGNED WILL.**

The doctor opened the creaking wooden gate. It was half past 9 on a clear frosty winter night, and he was five miles from home, and cold and hungry.

"How is she?" he said to the gaunt, grim old woman who opened the door. "I don't know. Better see yourself. I'm no doctor," was the rough reply.

The room was low and mean, but the woman who lay on the bed struggling with death had a coquettish air that clashed with her age. Perhaps it came from the real face on her nightcap, perhaps from the valences that encircled her shriveled brown throat, or maybe the golden fringe, which, too young for the shrunken face, gave it to her.

"Amaryllis," said the surly woman, "here's the doctor."

The humble country practitioner stepped forward, and even in the dim lamplight could be seen the flannel cuffs, hiatus of gray stocking between old trousers and clumsy boots, frayed linen twofold collar, silver watch chain and greasy, ready-made tie that betrayed the small local practice.

"Amaryllis, wake up, wake up. Doctor's here. God knows you've called enough for him."

The woman on the bed, whose name seemed a jest, opened her heavy, vague eyes, coughed faintly and groaned.

"Is it Dr. Watson, Janet?" she asked. "Of course! There's none other for miles," was the testy reply.

Dr. Watson went through the orthodox force of feeling pulse and taking temperature, but saw at a glance that she was at the last whirl in her dance of death.

"Has she made her will?" he asked softly. However, Amaryllis caught the words, and in a cracked scream of excitement said:

"That's it. That's it, doctor. I want to make a will. I can't die easy. Janet, get him pen and ink."

"It's nonsense, doctor," said Janet. "Let her die in peace. She need make no will—she's no kin nor kin but me, her sister."

"Put the pillow under my head, both pillows," called the patient. "I'm choking! Yes, that's it. Now, doctor, for God's mercy do what I ask—Janet will let me—or I can't die easy."

Janet's face grew black with anger. "She's not fit to make a will, and I'm all she has in the world," said she. "Listen, listen, doctor! I'm in my mind; I can't die easy. It's short enough—£3,000 and the cottage to Janet, the rest to Charles Harford, now on the training ship, the *Mengarch*."

The doctor took out a stylographic pen and picked up from the fender an old letter, on only one side of which there was writing.

"Stop, stop!" said Janet. "She's mad. There's no such person. Ask her who he is."

"God forgive me," groaned Amaryllis. "I'll do anything if someone knows I've been a wicked woman."

The doctor scribbled some old de Cologne on her hand from a curious old silver bottle that stood on a chair by the bedside and gave her something to drink out of a medicine bottle. Then with desperate energy the old woman told her story, despite the efforts of death to check her speech.

"Father and mother were cruel, good people, and I was a little young woman that hated church and psalms and dull Sunday books, so when he came, Frank Harford, the handsome sailor, he had my heart for the asking. They would none of his addresses, for he wasn't a God-fearing man, they said, so off we went with no blessing from parson, but a curse from father. He lasted for ten years well enough. I had a little house not in cold Norfolk, but here in this village, and he passed as my brother when on land, for he was most white at sea. However, the time came. I was older than he by some years and fretted for his absence—yes, and drank a bit—so he grew tired, but didn't break with me, was afraid to, I think—God knows why. Then her face caught him—Mary's, the coast guardsman's daughter. He kept it from me, but the village gossiped. He meant to marry her and cast me off. How I hated her, poor thing! I knew him well enough, handsome devil! He'd have married her because he thought no other way would do, and I vowed he should not marry her nor any but me, and me he wouldn't. I asked her to the house, and he courted her before my face and thought me a blind fool.

"One night, his birthday, I had her to supper and got down from London some champagne. She was to stay the night, home was so far off and the weather rough. The little fool, the little ignorant fool, believed that the champagne—never before seen in our

village—was only fine cider and drank her share, and he was boisterous at the jest. Then I went out on a pretext, saying I'd be back in an hour. The next day she ran away with him. Confound her! I never saw him again."

At this point Amaryllis seemed to break down, but after dozing for a few minutes she continued in a faint voice: "He left her soon enough and went to sea, leaving her and the baby to shift as they might. Me he dropped after that night. We'd a fearful quarrel, for he guessed that I'd schemed it all. Five years later he wrote, said he had 'found God' and married a rich woman and wanted to make amends. He'd always kept me well enough, for his father left him £3,000 and this cottage—he'd settled it on me. He sent me £500 for her and her child and begged me to look after them. I did sure enough, for I still hated her. I found she was in London, so I sent her just enough to keep her going, for I wanted her to live the cruel life, which, as I expected, she had come to lead. Year by year he sent me money, till last year, when a letter came to say he was dead. I kept nearly all of the money, and when, two years ago, she died, I sent no more, but I had the child watched, and he's 'Charles Harford' on the *Monarch*. And, doctor, since I've been ill and seen the parson I feel I can't die without doing right, so make the will, for love of God!"

The doctor began to write. "Stop," said Janet, who during the tale had walked up and down like a wild beast. "It's all madness; she's delicious."

The dying woman heard her words. "In the box under the bed you'll find all Frank's letters. They'll prove the story."

In a few minutes Dr. Watson had finished the short will and read it to Amaryllis. Janet sat grimly on the black horsehair sofa and did not offer to raise her sister to sign.

"Come, Miss Webster," he said impatiently. "one mustn't lose time." She did not move.

"What about witnesses?" she asked. "I'll be one," he answered, "you"—"Not me," she replied hastily, "that would make my legacy bad—I know that. Father was a lawyer."

The doctor knew this was true and was at once vexed and perplexed. "To ease her"—he said.

"It's no use," she broke in. "I'll not. Will she last three parts of an hour? I can get to Mr. Trelois, our nearest neighbor, in the time, and bring him."

Dr. Watson looked at his patient. "Yes, perhaps an hour, but be quick." Janet put on an old black hat that looked like a bonnet flattened for country wear and a rough shawl of sham Shetland fleece, opened the door, letting in more of the cold air than was necessary, and went out, slamming it heavily.

The doctor sat down by the bedside, then recollected he was hungry, and as Amaryllis did not answer his request rummaged in an unlocked cupboard and found some bread and cheese, which he ate ravenously, moistening it with some brandy that he found in a bottle by the bedside, despite his strict orders against alcohol in any form. He made up the fire and sat in front of it, longing to smoke till his genial warmth crept gently through him and sleep overcame the poor man, who had walked five and twenty miles that day on his ill-paid rounds.

The noise of the opening of the door awoke him, and, conscience-stricken, he hastened to the bed. Amaryllis was still alive, but on the very limits of the borderland. There was still time. He turned to Janet.

"Here's the last life," he said. "Bring him in quickly."

"He's not with me," she replied stolidly. "He was out."

Dr. Watson looked at his watch. "It's two hours since you started, what?"

Janet gave a deary smile. "They expected I'd be away some minutes. I waited. He was too drunk when he came in."

A bright idea came into the doctor's mind. "Sign as witness," he said. "If the legacy is bad, it does not matter. You'll get it just the same as next of kin."

"Do you think I didn't know that?" replied Janet, with a hoarse laugh. "Then you've never been to Mr. Trelois?" shouted the doctor. "You?"

"I'm not such a fool," she answered grimly. "But, oh, it was cold in the garden!"

As she spoke she came close to the fire, which glowed impartially on her rugged, dingy face.

"D—!" said the doctor passionately. "I'll go myself. It may not be too late."

He started up, and his chair fell. Amaryllis opened her empty eyes, then a look of intelligence came into her ashen face. The doctor had nearly reached the door, when in a tone half whisper, half shriek, she called out: "Doctor, don't leave me before it's made!"

He turned, saw her sitting up, but as he moved toward her she fell back, and the nightcap came off, showing the scanty gray hair to which the golden fringe was fastened.

"Too late," said the doctor, feeling for the beating of the heart. "Too late; you!"

"I'm an honest woman," answered Janet, "and I've no sympathy with other people's blows."—Exchange.

**A Matter of Business.**

"It is possible, sir, that you may know my errand."

The elderly man, who sat in his private office, looked up from his desk as his visitor spoke and shook his head.

"I had thought," replied the other as he dropped into a chair and reached over and selected one of the Havanas from a box on the desk, "that you might have noticed my growing regard for your charming daughter. I was first attracted to her, sir, some two months ago, and the acquaintance which promised so little at first has gradually ripened into love."

"It has, has it?" replied the older man, feverishly taking up a fountain pen and absentmindedly trying to sign a check with it.

"Yes, sir," exclaimed his visitor, "it has, indeed. I have seen your daughter, sir, under the most trying circumstances, and never knew her to lose courage. She is the kind of girl that I love, until now, searched for in vain. Her unflinching persistence in the face of well nigh insurmountable difficulties, her unvarying good humor, her persistence, are all qualities which, in turn, have appealed to me and inspired a depth of passionate love that, up to this time, I did not dream my nature was capable of. I will, however, pass over the sentimental side and proceed to business. I have come, sir, to ask if you will consider from me a proposal of marriage for the hand of your daughter."

As he spoke the elderly man had risen, and now stood over him with a dangerous gleam in his eye.

"No, sir!" he exclaimed emphatically. "I will not! Such a proposition is absurd. I wouldn't consider it for a moment."

His young and courtly companion arose, and taking up his hat prepared to leave the room.

"Very well, sir," he replied loftily as he slipped a circular out of his pocket and handed it to the fair haired typewriter near the door, "I was going to say, in case you had favorably considered my proposal, that I would gladly take a 25 per cent discount off my bill of \$200 for teaching your daughter how to ride the bicycle."—Life.

**A Left Handed Compliment.**



"Back again, doctor? I've been so much better since you went away!"

**Perils of Wedded Life.**

They had been married only a short time, when one night, along in the darkest hours, she put her elbow into the tender place just back of his lower ribs and hoarsely whispered:

"Oh, Algernon, Algernon, wake up, wake up!"

"Whatever?" Algernon sleepily murmured in one word.

"Oh!" she almost shrieked. "I'm sure I hear burglars in the pantry, and I know they are after that loaf of cake I put away to harden. Do get up, love, for my sake. Hark! What dreadful noise is that—that awful crash!"

"Probably dropped the cake," Algernon sleepily said. "How many do you think there are of 'em?"

"Oh, there must be three at least," she wailed. "Do get up, love, and find your revolver."

Algernon adjusted his pillow for another nap.

"Lie down, dear," he soothingly said. "If there are only three of 'em your cake is safe—they never can get it down the steps."

And then he heartlessly went to sleep, while she lay there shivering until the cold dawn came to dispel the terrors of the night. But in the morning she had her revenge, for the first thing they found on going down to the pantry was a dead burglar lying at full length on the pantry floor.

In the darkness he had pulled the cake off the upper shelf, and it struck him full on top of the head.—New York Recorder.

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