

Sunday Mirror.

WILMINGTON, DEL., JULY 25 1880.

WILD OATS.

I've sown my wild oats long ago, And now am growing tame once more...

When youth has sown its wildest oat, And wildest hope has been sown...

UNDINE.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH. CHAPTER VIII.

THE DAY AFTER THE MARRIAGE.

A bright morning light awakened the young people; and Huldrand lay musing silently. As often as he had dropped asleep, he had been scared by horrible dreams of spectres, who suddenly took the form of fair women, or of fair women who were transformed into dragons.

So she went on all day; at once a young matron, and a bashful, tender, delicate bride. The three who knew her best were every moment expecting this mood to change, and give place to one of her crazy fits; but they watched her in vain.

Toward evening, Undine clasped the Knight's arm with modest tenderness, and gently led him out before the door, where the rays of the setting sun were lighting up the fresh grass, and the tall, taper stems of trees.

"By to-morrow it will have dried up completely," said the bride, in a faltering voice, "and thou mayest begone whither thou wilt." "Not without thee, my Undine," said the Knight, playfully; "consider, if I had a mind to forsake thee, the Church, the Emperor, and his ministers might step in, and bring thy truant home."

"No, no, you are free; it shall be as you please!" murmured Undine, half tears, half smiles. "But I think thou wilt not cast me away; is not my heart bound up in thine? Carry me over to that little island opposite. There I will know my fate. I could indeed easily step through the little waves; but I love to rest in thine arms! and thou mayest cast me off; this may be the last time." Huldrand, full of anxious emotion, knew not how to answer. He took her up in his arms and carried her over, now recollecting that from this very island he had borne her home to the Fisherman on the night of his arrival.

"You must know, my own love, that in each element exists a race of beings, whose form scarcely differs from yours, but who very seldom appear to mortal sight. In the flames, the wondrous Salamanders glitter and disport themselves; in the depths of earth dwell the dry, spiteful race of Gnomes; the forests are peopled by Wood-nymphs, who are also spirits of air; and the sea, the rivers, and brooks, contain the numberless tribes of Water-sprites. Their echoing halls of crystal, where the light of heaven pours in, with its sun and stars, are glorious to dwell in; the gardens contain beautiful coral plants, with blue and red fruits; they wander over bright seas-sands, and gay colored shells, among the hidden treasures of the deep, too precious to be bestowed on those latter days, and long since covered by the silver mantle of the deep; many a noble monument still gleams there below, bedewed by the tears of Ocean, who garlands it with flowery sea-weeds and wreaths of shells. Those that dwell there below, are noble and lovely to behold, far more so than mankind. Many a fisherman has had a passing glimpse of some fair water-nymph, rising out of the sea with her song; he would then spread the report of her apparition, and these wonderful beings came to be called Undines. And you now see before you, my love, an Undine."

The Knight tried to persuade himself that his fair wife was in one of her wild moods and had invented this strange tale in sport. But though he said this to himself, he could not for a moment believe it; a mysterious feeling thrilled him; and, unable to utter a word, he kept his eyes riveted on the beautiful speaker. She shook her head sadly, heaved a deep sigh, and went on:

"We might be happier than our human fellow-creatures, (for we call you fellow-creatures, as our forms are alike,) but for one great evil. We and the other children of the elements, go down to the dust, body and spirit; not a trace of us remains; and when the time comes for you to rise again to glorified existence, we shall have perished with our native sands, flames, winds, and waves. For we have no souls; the elements move us, obey us while we live, close over us when we die; and we light spirits live as free from care as the nightingale, the gold-fish, and all such bright children of Nature. But no creatures rest content in their appointed place. My father who is a mighty prince in the Mediterranean Sea, determined that his only child should be crowned with a soul, even at the cost of much suffering, which is ever the lot of souls. But a soul can be infused into one of our race, only by being infused into one of our kind; and I have obtained a soul; to thee I owe it. O best beloved! I and for that gift I shall ever bless thee, unless thou dost devote my whole futurity to misery. For what is to become of me should thou recoil from me and cast me off? Yet I would not detain thee by deceit. And if I am to leave thee, say so now; go back to the land alone; I will plunge into this brook; it is my uncle, who leads a wonderful, sequestered life in this forest, away from all his friends. But he is powerful, and allied to many great rulers; and as he brought me here to the Fisherman, a gay and laughing child, so he is ready to take me back to my parents, a loving, suffering, forsaken woman."

She would have gone on; but Huldrand, full of compassion and love, caught her in his arms, and carried her back. There, with tears and kisses, he swore never to forsake his beloved wife; and said he felt more blessed than the Greek stately Pygmalion, whose beautiful statue came Venus transformed into a living woman. Hanging on his arm in peaceful reliance, Undine returned; and she felt from her inmost heart, how little cause she had to regret the crystal palaces of her father.

CHAPTER IX.

HOW THE KNIGHT AND HIS YOUNG BRIDE DEPARTED.

WHEN Huldrand awoke from sleep the next morning, he missed his fair companion; and again he was tormented with a doubt, whether his marriage, and the lovely Undine, might not be all a fairy dream. But she soon reappeared, came up to him and said, "I have been out early, to see if my uncle had kept his word. He has recalled all the straying waters into his quiet bed, and now takes his lonely and pensive course through the forest as he used to do. His friends in the lake and the air are gone to rest also; all things have returned to their usual calmness; and you may set out homeward on dry land, as soon as you please." Huldrand felt as if dreaming still, so little could he understand his wife's wonderful relations. But he took no notice of this, and his sweet Undine's gentle attentions soon charmed every uneasy thought away.

A little while after, as they stood at the door together, looking over the fair scene with its boundary of clear waters, his heart yearned so toward this cradle of his love that he said, "But why should we go away so soon? We shall never spend happier days in yonder world, than we have passed in this peaceful nook. Let us at least see two or three more suns go down here." "As my Lord wishes," answered Undine, with cheerful submission; "but, you see, the old people will be grieved at parting with me when ever it is; and if we give them time to become acquainted with my soul, and with the new powers of loving and honoring them, I fear that when I go, their aged hearts will break under the load of sorrow. As yet they take my gentle mood for a passing whim, such as they saw me liable to formerly; like a calm sea on the lake when the winds are lulled, and they will soon begin to love some favorite tree or flower in my place. They must not learn to know this newly obtained, affectionate heart, in the first overflows of its tenderness, just at the moment when they are to lose me for this world; and how could I disguise it from them, if we remained together longer?"

Huldrand agreed with her; he went to the old couple, and finding them ready to consent, he resolved upon setting out that very night. The Priest offered to accompany them; after a hasty farewell the pretty bride was placed on the horse by her husband, and they crossed the stream's dry bed quickly, and entered the forest. Undine shed silent but bitter tears, while the old folks waited after her aloud. It seemed as if some foreboding were crossing their minds of how great their loss would prove.

The three travelers reached the deepest shades of the forest, without breaking sight. It was a fair sight to behold as the graceful woman sitting on her noble steed, guarded on one side by the venerable Priest in the white habit of his order; on the other by the youthful Knight, with his gorgeous attire and glittering sword. Huldrand had no eyes but for his precious wife; Undine who had dried her dewy tears, no thought but for him; and they soon fell into a noiseless interchange of glances and signs, which at length was interrupted by the sound of a low murmur, proceeding from the Priest and a fourth fellow-traveler, who had joined them unobserved. He wore a white robe, very like the Priest's dress, except that the hood almost covered his face, and the rest of it floated round him in such large folds that he was perpetually obliged to gather it up, throw it over his arm, or otherwise arrange it; yet it did not seem to impede him at all in walking; when the young people saw him he was saying, "And so, my worthy father, I have dwelt in the forest for many a year, yet I am not what you commonly call a hermit. For as I told you, I know nothing of penance, nor do I think it would do me much good. What makes me so fond of the woods is, that I have a very particular fancy for winding through the dark shades and forest walks, with my loose white clothes floating about me; now and then a pretty sunbeam will glance over me as I go." "You seem to be a very curious person," replied the Priest, "and I should like to know more about you."

"And pray who are you, to carry on the acquaintance?" said the stranger. "They call me Father Hellmann, answered the Priest, "and I belong to St. Mary's monastery, beyond the lake." "My name is Kuhlborn, for free I am as the bird of the air, or a trifle more free. For instance, I must now have a word with the young woman there." And before they could look round, he was on the other side of the Priest, close to Undine, and stretching up his tall figure to whisper in her ear. But she turned hastily away, saying, "I have nothing more to do with you now." "Hey-day!" said the stranger laughing, "what a prodigiously grand marriage yours must be, if you are to cast off your relations in this way! Have you forgotten Uncle Kuhlborn, who brought you all the way here on his back so kindly?"

"But I entreat you," said Undine, "never come to me again. I am afraid of you now, and will not my husband become afraid of me if he finds I have some strange family?" "My little niece," said Kuhlborn, "please to remember that I am protecting you all this time; the foul Spirits of Earth might play you troublesome tricks if I did not. So you had better let me go with you, and no more words. The old Priest there has a better memory than yours, for he would have it he knew my face very well, and that I must have been with him in the boat when he fell into the water. And he may well say so, seeing that the wave which washed him over was none but myself, and I landed him safe on the shore in time for your wedding."

Undine and the Knight looked at Father Hellmann, but he seemed to be plodding on in a waking dream, and not listening to what was said. Undine said to Kuhlborn, "There, I can see the end of the wood; we want your help no longer, and there is nothing to disturb us but you; so, in love and kindness I entreat you, be gone, and let us go in peace." This seemed to make Kuhlborn angry; he twisted his face hideously, and hissed at Undine, who cried aloud for help. Like lightning the Knight passed round her horse, and aimed a blow at Kuhlborn's head with his sword. But instead of the head, he struck into a waterfall, which gushed-foaming down a high cliff near them, and now showered them all with a splash that sounded like laughter, and wetted them to the bone. The Priest seeming to wake up, said, "Well, I was expecting this, because that brook gushed down the rock so close to us. At first I could not shake off the idea, that it was man, and was speaking to me." The man, who had whispered distinctly in Huldrand's ear, said, "Rash youth, dashing youth, not, I shame thee not; still shame"

ash young soldier, comes down," commanded Will; "and mind you encourage him to make all the love he can; and you two stay here and dress me; you don't want him to know you're in the house, do you?"

Minutes later they glided into the sunset, the sweetest witch of about eighteen summers that ever was, and Bel introduced her as "My cousin, Jennie Vaughn, from Devonshire, Mr. Fernleigh."

What lovely dark eyes she had, and shimmering golden hair! Why, even pretty Bel couldn't hold a candle to her! Who could resist making himself fascinating to her? And before he had left, Mr. Fernleigh had engaged her for a drive, telling Bel, as he shyly pressed her hand in parting, that of course, as a friend of hers, he would do all he could to make her cousin's visit agreeable.

How the girls rushed down into the parlor after he had left, and what a screaming and laughing there was! Will rolled on the floor almost in convulsions, very much to the detriment of his long train and fair tresses.

"What a lark it was," he gasped, "to see him sitting there, casting his killing glances at me so that you shouldn't see them, Bel!"

And he went off into a fresh outburst of laughter, while the object of their merriment wended his way leisurely toward his hotel, thinking to himself: "By Jove, a regular beauty! Bel herself is thrown in the shade, although there is a family resemblance. A lucky thing it is that I am so fondly attached to her, or I'll rouse Bel's suspicions. Why, I do believe that girl considers herself engaged to me, the way she acted to-day! Well, it's only polite to play agreeable to a guest of hers, and I'm going to do it."

The fun that followed the next few days! Everywhere Miss Jennie went Mr. Fernleigh was her devoted cavalier. "Solely for your sake," as he reassuredly told Bel, and "to oblige Miss Rathbourne," the rest of the girls understood it. Every evening Mr. Fernleigh took Miss Vaughan for a stroll in the elm-groves, and perhaps his attentions would have been a little less love-like, and his words a little more carefully chosen, had he known that behind the trees were hidden a score of mischievous girls with their handkerchiefs stuffed into their mouths and tears streaming down their cheeks in their efforts to keep themselves unobserved.

But the ending came, as it always does, sooner or later, and Mr. Fernleigh awoke one morning with the unpleasant conviction that he was deeply in love himself. He, the impregnable, the invincible, was in the toils at last! And, stranger still to relate, with a young lady of whose affections he was not at all certain.

Miss Jennie had persistently rejected all his advances—had given him to understand that she did not approve of flirting—in fact, had picked him, and close upon pique followed love; that is, as much love as his shallow heart was capable of feeling, and he determined that she should yield. And yield she did that very evening, very sweetly and graciously, much to his surprise.

"Had I been so sure of my prize I might at least not have been in such a hurry," he thought, ruefully; "but I shall have to face the music now."

"And you will come over to-morrow and announce our engagement?" asked Jennie, confidently. "How should he explain matters to Bel, and to all the others? What an idiot he had made of himself! But he really loved Jennie he told himself, and so would brave it out as best he could."

The next morning, when he stepped into Mrs. Rathbourne's drawing-room, he found himself in the presence of not only Bel, but a dozen other girls, every one of whom he knew—alas, only too well! Jennie was nowhere in sight, but Bel, coming forward, offered him a seat, saying: "You will excuse us, I know, Mr. Fernleigh, if we go on with our parts; we are rehearsing for private theatricals." And turning to Tiny, she went on: "Oh, Jennie, my darling, but for one little ray of hope! I love you so dearly! Why, why do you persist in thinking I am laughing with your feelings? I love you too dearly, my darling!"

What, Horace, you have made love to my wife, and to other girls, too; that I am sure of."

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