

# FIRE AND ICE.

A New Story by Flora Annie Steel, Author of "On the Face of the Waters": It was in a little lath and plaster house down by the river that it all happened. The merest confection of a house, looking for all the world as if it were a Neapolitan ice. Strawberry and vanilla in alternate stripes, with shuttered windows of coffee, and a furled wafer of an awning over the filigree chocolate balcony. And it rested, so to speak, against a platter of green plantain leaves, bright as any emerald. No doubt the trees belonging to the leaves grew somewhere to the back or the side of it, but from the wide street in front you could see nothing but the green leaves surrounding the ice cream.

For the rest it was a three-storied house outwardly, inwardly a two-storied one, or, to be more strictly accurate, it consisted of a story and a half, since the further half of the ground floor and the whole of the middle story belonged to a different house, having a different entrance in a different street which lay in a different quarter. A very respectable quarter, indeed, whereas the less said about the morals of the wide street down by the river the better. They were so bad that the modesty of the middle story did not permit of a single window whence they could be seen. And this gave the house a queer, half-hearted look, for the top story and half of the lowest one which belonged to it was full of windows and doors opening on to the broad path leading to destruction. There were five, with fretted wooden architraves filling up the whole of the ground floor, so that you could see straight into the long shallow hall, whence there was no exit save by a narrow slit in the middle, showing a dim, steep staircase. It was always empty, this hall, though it was carpeted with striped carpets and painted elaborately in flowery arabesques of a dull pale pink and flaming crimson; an odd mixture, reminding you vaguely of blood stains on a rose leaf. And there was a red lamp over the center door, which sent a rosy radiance into the growing dusk; for it was lit early.

So was the pale, the palest of green lights on the top story, which you could swing from the roof when the coffee-ice shutters were thrown back as the evening breeze came down the river. It was pale, yet bright, like the first star at sun setting. And sometimes, but not often, of you watched in the early dusk you might see the owner of the ice cream house flit across the open window. She was like a sugar drop herself, rose or saffron decked with silver leaf. A slender scrap of a creature, who tinkled as she walked and gave out a perfume of heavy-scented flowers. But this was seldom; more often you only heard the tinkle, either of silver or laughter, since Burfani—for that was her name—was of those who barter the one for the other. It was in truth her hereditary trade, though neither her father nor her mother had practiced it, their race in life having been that of pater and materfamilias. A very necessary one if the race is to survive, and so in this generation also her brother had undertaken the duty by marrying his first cousin. The young couple being now in the privacy and propriety of the second story, engaged in bringing up a fine family of girls to succeed to the top story when Burfani's age should drive her to a lower place in life. In the meantime, however, she allowed them as much a month's allowance to enable the Zulfkar to light quill in the bazaars and keep his wife Lagigan in the strictest seclusion, as befitted one fled from the profession of bartering smiles in order to fulfill the first duty of woman—the rearing of babes.

Thus in more ways than one the house was congenial. On the side overlooking the broad path there was the rose-leaf hall, empty, sweet and garlanded, and the dark stair leading up and up to the warring stair of a lamp twinkling out into the sunset amid the sound of laughter and money. On the side giving upon narrow respectability a half full of household gear and dirt, where the little girls played, and a dark stair leading to a darker room where Lagigan sat day after day bewailing her sad fate; for, of course, life would have been much gaye over the way since she was a beautiful woman. For in one beautiful in a lavish, somewhat loud fashion than the lady belonging to the ice cream house with her delicate small face; but that was the very reason why she had been chosen out from many to carry on the race as it ought to be carried on. Burfani, of course, was clever, and that counted for much, but it never did in their profession to rely on brains above looks. Nevertheless Lagigan, when in a bad mood, was in the habit of telling herself that if she had been taught to sing and dance as the little lady had been taught, she could have made the ice-cream house a more paying concern than it was—to judge by the pittance they received from it. And this angry complaint grew with her years, until, as she sat sucking her fourth child, she felt sometimes as if she could strangle it, even though it was a boy, and though, as a rule, she was an affectionate mother. In truth, the sheer animal instinct natural to so finely developed a creature lasted out the two or three years during which her children were hers alone; after that, when they began crawling down stairs and playing in the hall, where she might never go, she became jealous, and then forgot all about them.

Nevertheless, the boy being some nine months old when he was suddenly carried off by one of those mysterious diseases common to Indian children, she wept profusely, and told Burfani—who as in duty bound came round decently swathed in a burka to offer condolence on hearing of the sad event—that some childless one had doubtless cast a shadow on him for his beauty's sake, seeing that—thank heaven! all her children as a rule, she was an affectionate mother. In truth, the sheer animal instinct natural to so finely developed a creature lasted out the two or three years during which her children were hers alone; after that, when they began crawling down stairs and playing in the hall, where she might never go, she became jealous, and then forgot all about them.

presence of the quaint little over-dressed dead baby awaiting its bier on the bed did not prevent attack and defense. "They favor thee, sister, replied Burfani suavely, "in mind also, to judge from what I see. Therefore I shall await God's will in the future ere I choose one to educate."

Lagigan tittered sarcastically, despite her half-dried tears. "Thy choice first, nevertheless. The best of the bunch in looks, aye, in brains too, perchance, marries my brother's son according to custom. Sure my mother chose thus, and I must do the same, sister."

She spoke evenly, though for the moment the longing to strangle something had transferred itself to the saffron-colored sugar drop, all spangled with silver, which had emerged from its chrysalis of a burka. "What business had the poor thin creature with such garments when her beauty was hidden by mere rags?"

Burfani laughed in her turn; an easy, indifferent laugh, and stretched out her slim henna-dyed palm with the usual friendly offering of cardamoms.

"Take one, sister," she said soothingly; "they are good for spleen and excessive grief. Ha! Ha! thou wilt be forlorn indeed, now thy occupation is gone."

Lagigan, with her mouthful of spices, tittered again more artificially than ever. "I can do other things, perchance, besides suckle babies. Maybe I weary of it and am glad of a change."

The saffron-colored sugar drop, seated on a low stool in front of the white-sheeted bed, with its solemn little gaily dressed burden, looked at its companion distastefully through its long lashes, catching some loops of the jasmine chaplets it wore, held them like a bouquet close to the crimson-tinted lips.

"It is a virtuous task, my sister," quoth Burfani, gravely, sniffing away at the heavy perfume as if she needed something to make her environments less objectionable. "Besides, it is ever a mistake to forsake the profession of one's birth."

"And wherefore should I?" interrupted Lagigan, seizing her opportunity recklessly. "Hast thou forsaken it, and are we not sisters?"

Again the cold critical look of dislike came from the long, narrow eyes with their drowsy lids.

"Such words are idle, sister. Forget them. Thou wouldst not find it easier—"

"How canst tell?" interrupted Lagigan once more. "As well say that thou couldst put up with my life."

The saffron and silver daintiness shifted its look toward the bed, and the henna-dyed hand straightened a wrinkle in the sheet softly.

"God knows," she said with a sudden smile; "anyhow, sister, 'tis not wise to change one's profession as one grows old."

As one grows old! This parting shot rankled long after the decent burka had slipped like a shadow through the swept and garnished hall, and so up the dark stair to the wandering starlight shining feebly out into the sunset. Long after the preacher and the bier, and the family friends had carried the gaily dressed baby to its grave, leaving the mother to the select and secluded tears of her neighbors. Long after, had fallen asleep cuddled together peacefully, innocent of that choice of the future. Long after Zulfkar, full of liquor, tears, and curses due to a surplusage in the funeral expenses allowed by Burfani to parental grief and to bad luck at cards, came home desirous of sympathy. He got none, for Lagigan, despite her seclusion, had never lost the empire which he felt she deserved as the handsomest woman he knew. 'Twas his own fault, she said, curly; he could marry another wife, have more liquor, and gamble as much as he liked if he chose. It was but a question of money, and if he were content to put up with a beggarly allowance for his sister, that ended the matter.

Whereupon, being in the maddish state of drink, he wept still more.

It must have been fully three months after the baby's funeral procession of gone down the respectable street, and so by a side alley found its way into the broad path leading alike to destruction and the graveyard, that Burfani went round to her sister-in-law again. This time she was in pink and silver like a rose-water ice, and her words were as cold as her looks.

"Say what thou wilt, Lagigan, the youth lingers. Have I not windows to my home? Have I not eyes? And such things shall not be bringing disgrace to respectable families."

Lagigan tittered as usual: "Lo what a coil because an idle stranger lingers at the back instead of the front. 'Tis for thy sake, doubtless, sister, though thou art unkind. I wonder at it, seeing he is not ill-favored."

"So thou hast seen him. So be it. See him no more, or I tell Zulfkar."

"Tell him what? That thou hast cast eyes on a handsome stranger, and, because he comes not to thy call, wouldst fasten the quarrel upon me? Zulfkar is no fool, sister; he will not listen!"

"If he listen not, he can leave my house—for 'tis time. And, mark my words, Lagigan Bibi, no scandal comes nigh it."

Caesar's wife could not have spoken with greater unction, and in good sooth she meant her words, since in no class is seclusion bound to be more virtuous.

So as the notes in the sunbeam of life danced along the broad path in front of the ice cream house and drifted up its dark stair, the painted and perfumed little lady under the pale green lamp kept an eye upon the virtue of her family. Thus ere long it came to be Zulfkar's turn to listen to his sister's warning; and, as he listened, he sucked fiercely, confusedly, at the In-laid hookah which stood for the use of approved visitors; for in good sooth there had been more money to spend of late, and Lagigan was discreet enough, save to those watchful, experienced eyes. The sound of his huzzlings and bubblings, therefore, was his only answer, and they fled the wide, low, white-plastered upper story, frescoed round

each coffee-shuttered window with flowery devices, until Burfani lost patience and began coldly:

"Hast been taking lessons of a camel, brother?" she asked, rustling the fanned decked fan she held; and then suddenly she seemed to grasp something, and the contemptuous indifference of her bearing changed to passionate anger. Her silver set feet clashed as they touched the floor, and she rose first to a sitting posture, finally to stand before the culprit the very personification of righteous wrath.

"So! thou hast taken gold. This is why thou canst ruffle with the best at Gulabani's—base-born parvenu who takes to the life of wickedness—as she hath done, bringing disgrace to the screened house where thy mother dwelt in decency. But thou dwellest there no longer—thou eatest no bread of mine—I will choose my pupils from another brood."

"Nay! sister, 'tis not proved," stammered Zulfkar.

"Not proved?" she went on still more passionately; "nay, 'tis not proved to thy neighbors, maybe; but to me. Mine eyes have seen—I know the trick—and out thou goest. I will have no such doings in my house, and so I warned her months ago. But there! what need for railing? Live on her gold, and thou wilt; it shall not chink beside mine."

She sank back upon the silk coverlet again, and with a bitter laugh began to rustle the fanned fan once more. And Zulfkar, after unavailing protests, slunk down the dark stairs, and so into the streets to a certain house over the liquor seller's shop, about which a noisy crowd gathered all day long.

And that night screams and blows came from the second story, and unavailing curses on the mischief-maker. But if the latter heard them she gave no sign to the approved visitors drinking sherbet in the cool upper story, with the windows set to the stars.

It was Zulfkar beating his wife, of course, because she was so handsome primarily; secondly, because she had been foolish enough to be found out; thirdly, because Burfani would keep her word.

And she did. The supplies stopped from that day. Within a week the second story lay empty, while Lagigan, with tears of pain and spite in a miserable little lodging in the very heart of the city. It is difficult even to hint at the impotent rage the woman felt toward her sister-in-law. Even Zulfkar's blows were forgotten in the one mad longing to revenge herself upon the pink and saffron daintiness which would not spare a crumb from a full table. For so to Lagigan's coarse, passionate nature the matter presented itself, bringing with it a fierce delight at the perfections of her own lover. He had deserted her for the time, it is true, but that was the way of lovers when husbands were angry; by and by he would come back and there would be peace, since Zulfkar must have gold.

So ran her calculations, but she reckoned without a certain fierce intolerance which the latter shared with her sister; also on the somewhat premature emptying of his pockets. But luck was not all against him. And so, when a few days after the flitting from the second story, she, being sick to death of dullness, thought the time had come for self-assertion, she found herself mistaken. Zulfkar, still full of Dutch courage, fell upon her again and beat her most unmercifully, finishing up with an intimidatory slash at her nose. It was not much, not half so serious as the beating, but the very thought of possible disfigurement drove her mad, and the madness drove her to a corner where she could plan revenge while Zulfkar slept heavily—for he was more than half drunk. And this, too, was the fault of the saffron and rose devil in the upper story, who had her amusements and spied upon other women's ways. And this meant days more ere she, Lagigan, would be presentably, even if she did not carry the mark to her grave, and all because that she devil was jealous—jealous of her lover.

Oh, for revenge. And why not? The door was unwatched, since Zulfkar had forgotten it in his rage; the streets were deserted. Even the broad path down the river would be asleep, the green light gone from above, only the red lamp swinging over the outer door, sending a glow . . . . fire! The thought leapt to her brain like a flame itself. Why not? Zulfkar had purposely kept—all unbeknown to her—the devil a second key to that empty second floor, and he was in a drunken sleep. If she stole it, if she took the bottle of paraffin, if she set fire to the wooden partition separating the stairs, if she broke the red lamp and pretended that was it.

She did not stop to think. She had begun the task almost before she had thought out the details, fumbling in Zulfkar's pockets as he lay. And there were two bottles of paraffin in the corner; that was because he had brought one home and the market woman another by mistake. So much the better, so much the bigger blaze. Then out into the street, not forgetting a box of safety matches, strange companions to such a task. She knew her way well, having wandered free enough as a child before the lot was drawn, the die cast which sent her to suckle babes. Yet being a woman beset by a thousand superstitious fears, it needed all her courage ere she found herself face to face with the thin wooden partition surrounding the steep stairs leading upward. How many times had she not listened to fet ascending those unseen stairs and heard the tinkle of laughter as the unseen door above opened.

Well, it would blaze finally and cut off at once all means of escape. A devilish plan, indeed, and the leaping flames ere she left them to their task showed the face of a devil incarnate.

And so to wait for a few minutes before the whole world must know that the saffron and rose daintiness was doomed. No more laughter—no more lovers—that would be for her, Lagigan, not for the other with her cold sneer.

A licking tongue of flame showed for an instant and made her pray heaven none might see it too soon. Then a crackle, a puff of smoke. Next a cry of fire; but, thank heaven, only from the broad path. And what good were the running feet, what good were the shouts of the crowd in which her shrouded figure passed unnoticed, unless the upper story had wings—for the stairs must be gone—hopelessly gone by this time.

More than the stairs, for with one sud-

den blaze the lath and the plaster house seemed to melt like ice itself before the sheet of flame which the soft night winds bent riverward.

And still the top story slept, or was it suffocated? No, there was someone at the window, someone gesticulating wildly. A man—not a woman! "Throw yourself down!" cried an authoritative foreign voice; "it's your only chance."

Surely since the ice melted visibly during the sudden hush which fell upon the jostling crowd. "Throw yourself down," came the order again. "We'll catch you if we can. Stand back, good people!"

"Quick, it's your last chance." Then there was a leap, a scream—a crash, as in his despair the man overleapt the mark and fell among the parting crowd. Fell right at Lagigan's feet, face uppermost. And it was the face of the handsome stranger—of her lover.

Her shriek echoed his as she flung herself beside him. And at the sound something white and ghostlike slipped back from the window with a tinkle of laughter.

"Burfani! Burfani!" shouted the crowd. "Drop gently, we'll save you. Burfani! Burfani!"

But there was no answer, and the next moment, with a roar and a crash, vice fell upon virtue, and both together upon the swept and garnished hall, and the hall where the little girl had lived.

The ice cream house had become a blazing pile of fire.

## PASSING OF LORD FAUNTEROY.

The Mother Tried to be Brave when the Curly Fell.

Washington Star: The scene was in a Ninth street barber shop and the time was a morning earlier in the week. The "tonorial artist" nearest the door had just called out "Next!" when there entered a very pretty young woman leading by the hand a four-year-old boy, with long, golden ringlets. He was a manly looking little fellow, and his hair was just the shade of the young woman's, although she looked almost too young to be his mother.

"Are you the man who cut this little boy's bangs last time?" she asked.

"Yes'm; want 'em cut ag'in?"

"No, not this time. I want his hair cut short all over. And won't you try to cut each curl off separately, for I want to send some of them out of town and one to his grandmother."

She had a pasteboard box in her hand in which to take away the gold that was more precious to her than any that has come from the Klondike. She said she wanted the little boy's hair cut. It was probably the lad's father who wanted it; she had only acquiesced.

Several of the ebony-hued artists gathered around to watch, while the lad took his seat in a big chair, as proud as Punch, for he was to be a "mother's little Lordy Faunteroy" no longer. He smiled, but there was a suspicious tremor about his mother's lips as she took a brush, and for the last time curled his beautiful ringlets about her slim and tapering finger.

Snip, snip! went the scissors, and one by one the curls were carefully laid away in the box. Before the last one was gone the young mother was huddled up in the foot-black's chair crying as if her heart would break. There was no doubt now that she was the child's mother. He was a baby no longer. It was much more comfortable for the child, and it was time it was done, and all that, but just the same he would never be mamma's little baby again, and she could not see the wealth of falling gold for the tears in her eyes.

Not a man in the place smiled, and even the "Shine-mister," seemed to see a bit of pathos in the scene. The barber over in the corner had to stop a moment while the man he was shaving wiped a sudden tear from his own eye. The man, gray-haired and somewhat crusty, was thinking of a lock of gold tucked away in the back of his desk in a busy downtown office, and his memory had gone back to the time when he tucked that strand beneath his blue soldier's blouse and with musket on his shoulder had started for the front.

"Next!"

## IN HUMOROUS VEIN.

"Mrs. Henry Peck has sued for a divorce."

"What's the trouble?"

"Her husband meant to write of her as his better half, but wrote it 'bitter.'"

—Philadelphia North American.

Brown—I see that the seal question has come up again.

Jones—Oh, yes. My wife notified me last night that she must have a complete sealskin outfit next winter.—Puck.

"It's jes' my luck," said Farmer Corn-tossel, gloomily. "I'm the wust guesser a-goin'. The only sure way for a man to git along is ter make up his mind what he's a gointer do, an' keep doin' jes' that!"

"Have you had luck?"

"Nothin' else. Last year I raised wheat when I orter have tuck in summer boarders. This year I tuck in summer boarders when I orter hev raised wheat."—Washington Star.

Bobby (admiring the India-link tattooing on Dickery's arm)—Did it hurt much?

Dickey—Not till my mother saw it.—Boston Transcript.

"You say the duel was declared off?"

"It had to be. There was no one present capable of deciding whether the duke had a right to wear all his cigarette buttons on the field."—Indianapolis Journal.

Reporter—Well, I've interviewed her, Editor—Did she talk without restraint?

Reporter—I should say n! She would not say a word until her husband came in and told her to keep still.—Detroit Tribune.

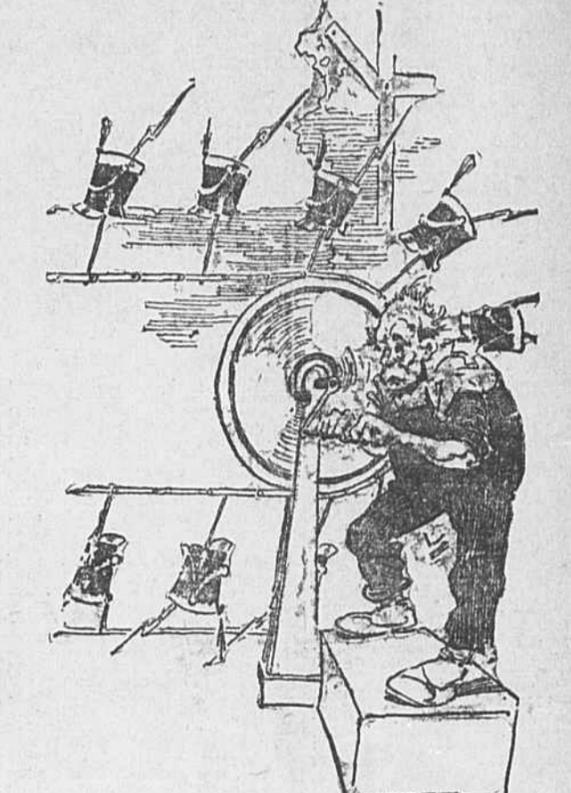
Miss Emily (aged forty or thereabouts, to Lord Harry Shaver)—Oh, how I should love to be a jubilee bride!

Lord Harry—Well, cheer up! You won't have to wait very long.—London Punch.

## THOSE DECEPTIVE STAGE SCENES.



1—Farewell, Pauline, may the good angel watch o'er you. I go to join the passing regiment. Farewell, farewell.



2—(This shows how the passing regiment was worked by the scene shifter.)

## BUSINESS VIEW.

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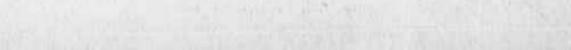
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## LAST OR LATEST.



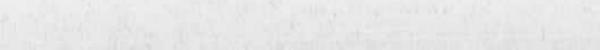
Artist—This is my last picture. Visitor—That's a comfort.



"Why does that girl make such a noise when she walks?" "She's knocked kneed."



Mrs. Oldgirl—Doctor, I wish to consult you with regard to my husband. He is very irritable, and, although he loves me dearly, he— Doctor—Ah, I see. You want to have him committed to an asylum.



Artist—This is my last picture. Visitor—That's a comfort.