

## AGATHE'S PERFIDY.

"Are you sure that you will always love me, Agatha?"

"Always, Bertrand."

"You will never regret your choice, my darling? Not even should some man richly endowed with wordly goods come to seek your favor; are you quite certain?"

"Listen, Bertrand; such love as mine is born not to live but for a day like a gaudy butterfly that gladdens the eye from sun to sun and is never seen again; nay, it is enduring as yonder rock, pure as the blue ether above; a love that shall end only with death and perchance not then. I know that you are poor, but what is that to me. The united love of two beings who are all in all to each other is wealth enough. I will be true to you though all the world prove false."

"And I to you, I swear it," solemnly responded Bertrand Argyle, as he raised his hand on high as though he would pluck one of the gleaming points of light that flashed from the blue ether, above alluded to by Agathe De Reille.

Then ensued a broad, wide pause and sweet, solemn, hushed silence, during which the lovers did such little foolish acts as are always understood, but never chronicled.

While the silence endures, let us climb a tree and survey the landscape and things that we may complete the picture.

Off to the west, where the sun but just now was but is no more, its afterglow suffuses the cloud-wreaths with varied tints of purple and gold and ruby red that are reflected upon the rippling waters of the lake below in sheeny radiance. A little to the south of west the gibbons moon is humping itself. Gibbons is a good word to use, as few people know what it means. Yonder, wearily wending his homeward wend along the dusty way is a gibbons man. He, too, is half full. Softly the zephyrs sigh through the tree-tops and the bougs nod drowsily to one another, and from afar comes the horny-handed voice of the honest granger as he jaws his hired yeoman. From a neighboring wamp arises a faint, misty, vaporous fog, thickly studded with the random remarks of a male crowfrog, delivered in a low, thrilling, reverberating voice.

"Agathe," he begins at the conclusion of the pause above referred to, in the low, determined voice of one who feels his suspenders giving way and endeavors to hold on to his pantaloons by sheer force of will, "tomorrow I go forth to carve out a fortune for myself and for you. You will wait for me until I return with it, will you not, dear?"

"Forever; but—do you think it will take you very long?"

"I cannot say; it may be years, it may be more or less; but with you to spur me on, I know I shall not fail. And before I go take this; it is a deed of a tract of land in Florida made out in your name. It may not be of greater value than some other tracts that have been handed me from time to time by well-meaning persons, and then again it may. It cost me \$5; keep it, with my blessing."

"Oh, Bertrand, you are so good."

"Don't say anything about it; I would do even more for you. But see, the gloaming now has given away to gloom of night. 'Tis long past supper time; I am hungry, and so, no doubt, are you. Allow me now to guide your footsteps to your home, even as I hope soon to have the privilege of guiding them through life."

Thus they died away in the gathering gloom.

A bearded, bronzed man, attired in good clothes and an air of general prosperity, bounds buoyantly up the steps leading to the front door of a charming villa, and gives a long, strong pull at the bell knob.

It is Bertrand, returned after a year's toilful carving at fortune.

A domestic appears and ushers him into the faultlessly furnished front parlor. A female form in the full flush of fair femininity rises from the feutteul and looks at him with a perplexed, I-think-you-have-the-advantage-of-me expression upon her regal features.

"Agatha, can it be that you do not know me?" he murmurs.

"Mr. Argyle, I believe," she replies askance.

Bertrand steps forward with a rapid stride and seeks to size the slender, jeweled hand that is half extended to him. "Why are you so distant, Agatha, my darling; have you so soon forgotten our—"

"Forgotten nothing, Mr. Argyle," replies Agathe, drawing herself proudly erect; "but things have changed since then. You remember the deed you gave me of some Florida land."

"I do," replies Bertrand.

"Well, Mr. Argyle, a boom struck that section of Florida a short time ago and I sold out. I am worth a quarter of a million, and you can not expect that I would trust my future with a man whom I can not but suspect of wishing to marry me only for the money I possess."

Bertrand listens like one who is slowly undergoing the process of petrifaction. "Surely, you can not mean this?" he asks; "you are only jesting; tell me that this is nothing but a cruel joke."

"I never joke; and why should I tell you a falsehood?"

"Then you wish that we should meet hereafter as strangers?"

"That is about the size of my wish; I would gladly be a siser to you, but I fear you might sometimes consider such relationship near enough to attempt to borrow money on the strength of it. Therefore, I think it better that we should go our respective ways."

"This decision is final?"

"Quite so, Mr. Argyle."

"Then listen, Miss De Reille," exclaims Bertrand, whose form seems suddenly to grow about ten feet tall, while triumphant light blazes from his eyes and his words come quick and sharp like the rattle of peas in a cheese box; "you think you have the bulge on me, but you are wrong. When I gave you the deed I did not tell you that I retained a deed of four times the amount of land I gave to you. The same boom that struck your possessions swept over mine also; I sold out; I am today the proud possessor of a good \$million; thus are you punished for your perfidy! Farewell. Miss De Reille, we meet henceforth as strangers. I would not accept your love though it were tendered me on a golden tray. You have trampled under foot the honest love and the

million dollars of one who would have done all to serve you; I go; farewell! He laughs best that laughs last; ha-ha, ha-ha-ha, ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Stay, Bertrand; come back; return; I did not mean it; forgive me for—"

But Bertrand, with a last, shrill, strident laugh, had fled.

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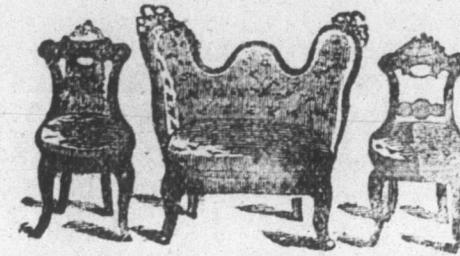
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