

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.

She was never married, our dear old aunt. Our mother's old Aunt Bess: We girls could never imagine why. Though we often tried to guess.

Her sweet old face, her wistful smile, And her eyes that seemed to say: "I too had a lover once, my dears, In a long past yesterday."

We were a party of merry girls Who never had known a care; Our heads full of loves and love affairs. And our hearts as light as air.

One evening, our youngest, our winsome Kate (Her own wedding day was near), Said: "Why had you never a wedding day? Ah! do tell us, auntie dear."

But the sweet blue eyes grew sadly dim With tears that did not fall, And faint flush tinged her cheek as she said:

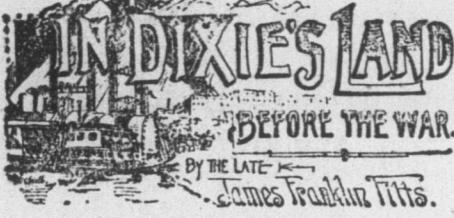
"My dear, he ceased to call."

A sudden hush fell over us then— Our heart-beats you might have heard, As she slowly rose and left the room With never another word.

Ah! since that April afternoon I have seen both shower and shine, Katie married—and Winnie dead— And a lonely heart is mine.

And oft in the quiet evening hour, On the silent shadows fall, I think of my dear old Auntie Bess, And her lover—who ceased to call.

—Maud Houston, in *Chamber's Journal*.



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CHAPTER XI.—CONTINUED.

He put down the burden, and not waiting for the silver piece that I wished to give him, he made a quick movement in the direction of the fields. The overseer abruptly withdrew.

The man who was seated had his back to me, but by the looks of the overseer he must have known that there was somebody beside the truant negro behind him. He rose and turned round. It was a thin, bent figure, in a flowered dressing-gown and slippers. His hair presented that singular appearance caused by turning white in patches and streaks. His face was hollow and wrinkled; his eyes were lusterless.

With the most apathetic expression he looked at me, and seemed to think that my appearance did not call for question or remark. At least he made none.

"I beg your pardon, sir," I said. "Is Mr. Pierce Bostock at home? Can I see him?"

"The overseer attends to all business," he said, peevishly. "Go to him; there he goes."

"I have no business that he can attend to. I must see Mr. Bostock personally."

"Must you, indeed?" He began to rouse a little at the word, and show irritation. "Where do you come from, anyway, young man, that you think a La Fourche planter can be made to attend in person at the beach and call of every interloper who fancies he has business with him? What?"

His own talk, delivered in a feeble, broken voice, excited him and brought on a fit of coughing. He stamped with vexation, and sat down on a bamboo settee through sheer weakness.

"I am Pierce Bostock," he said, when he could find voice again. "What the devil do you want?"

I ought to have expected this announcement, and to have been prepared for it; but I felt very much at that instant as though I had been following a chimera. To be exact, I felt cold and sick, and the hopes of long years vanished as a puff of smoke. And yet it seemed incredible. This Mr. Bostock—this the hearty, ruddy, happy planter who had crossed our stony New Hampshire fields ten years before, and pushed up our horizon everywhere—this feeble, testy, drooping invalid?

My hopes were all turned to ashes on the spot; yet I resolved to speak out, and end the farce. He would not recognize me, or would bid me begone if he should. No matter—I would see which he would do, and then tear this cruel leaf out of the book of my life, and turn to other scenes.

"Well—are you dumb? What do you say for yourself?"

"Mr. Bostock, I am Dorr Jewett. Do you not know me?"

A very faint appearance of interest came to his face.

"Jewett?" he repeated. "I believe I used to hear that name. Why, yes; Amos Jewett was my schoolfellow when I was a boy. Dorr—Dorr? That was my father's name."

I saw that his mind was groping for memory, and I waited.

He motioned me to sit down with him. He looked at me, but was silent. "Amos Jewett was my father," I ventured. "Don't you remember coming to our poor New Hampshire home ten years ago, sir? Don't you remember how kind you were to us? I was the boy you took so much notice of."

He heard me, and the mists seemed dispelled from his brain as by magic. A look of surprised intelligence came to his face.

"You Dorr Jewett?—little Dorr? Bless me, how you have grown! I'm not often glad to see anyone but my child, in these days; but I am glad to see you. Is your father well?"

"Why, he died, sir, more than a year ago. I wrote to you about it."

"I never read letters now—nor papers—nor books. Not now. Yet I do remember a nice letter you wrote me once, years ago, before—"

The change that came over that woe-faced terrified me. It was literally black with rage, with fury, called up by his own speech.

"Yes, sir," I hastened to say, "and you answered it so kindly."

"Did I? That is well; I am glad to hear it. So you've come to look up a wretched and lonely old man like me, have you, because I was kind to you? Do you know, my boy, I don't think there's another man in Louisiana, or

out of it, could soften me the way you have. I'm going to have you stay here, now you've come. Oh, yes, I do remember now all about the time I went to Boston, and back among the hills where I was born, and how I found you and poor Amos out in the fields, and ate your good mother's mush and milk."

His face seemed recreated. It actually wore a gentle smile.

"But it was long ago, and life has been hard and cruel with me since, and I had forgotten all these pleasant things. Why, boy, it seems to me as if you'd come to me from another world."

He took my hand in his own thin hand.

"You'll stay with me, Dorr Jewett, won't you?"

I believe the tears came to my eyes at the question. It was asked in a voice which was the ghost of his old friend. I will say here, that the subject need not be again referred to, that while my presence and the recollections it recalled had a temporary effect in withdrawing Mr. Bostock from the clouds that enveloped him, that unfortunate condition soon returned. He was sunk in melancholy, morose and peevish. There was never a time when the sight of his child or the sound of her voice would not cause him to brighten for a moment, and I could see that he sometimes tried to shake off his shadows and converse freely with me. But the effort was vain. The decline of his physical health was bad enough; but it was not to be compared to the changed condition of his mind. I watched him narrowly, and I began to think that Mr. Dorion was right. The man's mental faculties were impaired; but there was some mysterious terror, some haunting dread back of that condition. He would sit for an hour sunk in moody abstraction, and when suddenly addressed would start, look wildly at his daughter, and recover his sense of his surroundings slowly and with effort. Could all this be the result of remorse, the punishment of conscience for the slaying of Castex? No; for I recalled Mr. Dorion's shuddering description of the ferocity with which his friend had avowed that he meant to kill his adversary. My watchings, and my reflections by day and night, gave me no clew to the mystery of the man's demeanor, to the appalling change that had come over him.

So he rambled on, a wreck of mind as well as body, continually striving to struggle out of the gloom in which he was involved, and to reach backward to familiar faces and scenes.

A burst of melody shook the air; a clear, pure voice, singing a merry French song. Mr. Bostock raised his head, and a new intelligence gave momentary luster to his eyes.

"Ah, that's Coralie!" he said. "You shall see Coralie. Here she comes."

CHAPTER XII.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

Down the walk she came from the house, light of step and graceful as a fawn, clothed in pure white, with roses in her raven hair. She was coming directly to her father, when she saw me. She looked from me to him; his smile at once seemed to arrest her attention.

"Why, papa, what has happened?" she exclaimed. "You are almost laughing! When did that happen before?"

"This is Dorr Jewett," he said, "the son of my old friend and schoolmate in the north. Dorr, this is my daughter, Coralie. He will be with us some time, child. Everything must be made agreeable to him."

"Indeed, since he has made you



"THIS IS DORR JEWETT," HE SAID.

smile, papa, I hope he will stay long. You are very welcome, Mr. Jewett."

With bewitching grace she extended her hand. I took it, and new hopes came to me. The world seemed brightening.

We walked up to the house together. We sat in the cool rooms with their antique furniture. Mr. Bostock had become passive and silent, from the fatigue, I thought, of unusual emotions. But I was rejoiced to see that he looked often at me, and that my presence seemed to have a good effect on him.

I found Coralie charming, frank, unaffected. She wished to be told about the far northern states, their people and their ways. All that I had to tell interested her. Then she sang and played for me exquisitely. It was the music of nature. The mocking-bird's song that I heard that night in the magnolias was not sweeter.

At dinner Mr. Le Fevre, the overseer, came in, and we were made acquainted. He seemed a blunt man, but not rude, and his reserve soon gave way to conversation. I saw from the looks of the house-servants that he was no more a favorite indoors than out. The quadroon girl who stood behind Mr. Bostock's chair and pulled the cord that moved above the table a fan, keeping a current of air circulating in the room—this girl I once observed "making a face" at the overseer, when he was looking elsewhere.

"I hope you did not whip Jerry," said Mr. Bostock.

"No, sir, since you desired me not to. But a thrashing would do the boy lots of good."

"You are such a cruel man," the lady remarked.

"Ah, Miss Coralie, you'll never understand how lazy these niggers are, when they're not followed close. If it wasn't for me, your father wouldn't have half a crop, any year. That Jeremiah, for instance: he'd fish in the bayou and play the banjo all day, if I didn't look after him."

CHAPTER XIII.

"We do have better crops under Mr. Le Fevre's management," said Mr. Bostock. "Still, I don't see why he has to drive up the field hands so. They get along better on other plantations."

"I'll show you the difference when the cane is cut," said the overseer, with his mouth full.

"I think Mr. Le Fevre would get on easier with our people if he had always been at the south," said the lady.

"May be so, Miss Coralie. I'm Pennsylvania, and I came down here fresh, to learn about the niggers. I know 'em! They want bossing, and a good deal of it."

Weeks passed swiftly by, and I remained at this delightful home. Remembering my promise, I wrote to Mr. Dorion, giving him a full account of affairs here, and of the condition of his old friend. I will say here, that the subject need not be again referred to, that while my presence and the recollections it recalled had a temporary effect in withdrawing Mr. Bostock from the clouds that enveloped him, that unfortunate condition soon returned. He was sunk in melancholy, morose and peevish. There was never a time when the sight of his child or the sound of her voice would not cause him to brighten for a moment, and I could see that he sometimes tried to shake off his shadows and converse freely with me. But the effort was vain. The decline of his physical health was bad enough; but it was not to be compared to the changed condition of his mind. I watched him narrowly, and I began to think that Mr. Dorion was right. The man's mental faculties were impaired; but there was some mysterious terror, some haunting dread back of that condition. He would sit for an hour sunk in moody abstraction, and when suddenly addressed would start, look wildly at his daughter, and recover his sense of his surroundings slowly and with effort. Could all this be the result of remorse, the punishment of conscience for the slaying of Castex? No; for I recalled Mr. Dorion's shuddering description of the ferocity with which his friend had avowed that he meant to kill his adversary. My watchings, and my reflections by day and night, gave me no clew to the mystery of the man's demeanor, to the appalling change that had come over him.

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pleasant existence at this home. Mr. Bostock's habit was to retire early. This night he had chosen to remain up, and was sitting in his easy chair upon the veranda. Coralie was at the piano; I sat on the upper step, listening to the laughter and banjo-strumming from the negro quarters. Le Fevre sat lower down, smoking, engaged in his own thoughts. There was no moon that night, and the tall figure that came up from the road was upon us before we saw it.

"Does Pierce Bostock live here?"

The voice seemed familiar to me, though I did not at first remember where I had heard it.

"Yes," said the overseer, gruffly.

"What do you want?"

"I want to see him."

"Well, perhaps you can't. I attend to his business mostly. He don't see strangers."

"I am not a stranger. I reckon he'll see me when he knows I am here."

Mr. Bostock suddenly roused himself. "Who is that?" he asked.

"Yes, I think he'll see me," the stranger loudly repeated.

I heard a sigh from the invalid, a deep-drawn, troubled sigh.

"Tell him to go away," he faintly said.

"What makes him come here to annoy me? I don't want to see him."

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