

EXPERIENCE.

Hope fulfilled. I sought to find
In my life path dimly lined,
For I thought I saw it win!
Clearly through,
But the long, long years have taught me,
By the sorrow they have brought me,
That my way and God's were two.

In my youth, life dreams were bright,
With no tinge of shadow blight
Bringing in its dreary night
Care and woe:
But the happy youthful dreaming,
Was also too fond a seeming,
To be realized below.

In the mingled doubts and fears,
In the misty rain of tears,
Falling through the weary years,
I have found—
Not the bright and sweet ideal,
But the strong, and bitter real,
With the present measured round.

How the seeming good and ill,
Of our living shall fulfill
His own tender loving will,
Is not shown.

Starry hopes are ever fleeting,
Life ideals lack completing,

And the meaning is unknown.

But from all the bitter-sweet
Of a life work incomplete,
In my heart this lesson meet
Is enshrined:

God His finite plans doth fashion,
With an infinite compassion,
And a purpose ever kind.

Though we may not lift the screen,
From the mysteries unseen,
And the mystic bond between
Life and death;

Yet God wills, and God knoweth,

All His love around us flows,

And the key of life is faith.

—Maria U. Drake, in *Youth's Companion*.



CHAPTER IX.—CONCLUDED.

She drew away from him indignant.

"I am not a child, Mr. Oliver, and you must not treat me as one. In some things, in suffering and worry, I am older than you are; and few women could come out unscathed from the horrors of that ranch. I did. I kept my reason because I was frivolous and had my little dog to love, and a bright sunshiny day would chase all my night terrors away. I'd say, 'Minny, it's good just to be alive.' But always I have been afraid in the dark; when I was a child queer faces used to peer at me, faces circled in yellow light. As I grew older, I was more afraid of them, and slept in a lighted room. At the ranch Henri used to crawl up the porch and peer in the window with a mask on, until I shot one night; then it was not so funny. It amused him to torture me. I won't tell you any more, because you can't understand. But I shall not go to Denver. It would be a mockery."

"Dr. John telegraphed you need not—

—you must not come. Shall I tell you any more?"

"No." She rose and scattered the petals of one of her flowers on the carpet, brushing her dress with a trembling hand. "Nor will I put on black. I shall go home. What is my home, Mr. Oliver?" she cried, accusingly. "You have brought me here; I was doing your bidding. My aunt has left me; she has taken my baby. The man I married is dead; he has no interest in me but to haunt me. Everybody is gone. I who have made all the trouble am left to bear it alone. If she comes back she will know of this—my being here; she will distrust me; even Dr. John will. I seem to have grown old and wise, and, oh! so tired of the world!"

"Come here, Minny," he said, in a strange tone. She started and looked into his face. It had a different expression somehow, yet the gray eyes were very kind, and there was a tender smile about his mouth. She hesitated, then she returned to the sofa, sitting

gingerly at the extreme end. He turned so as to face her, but sat no nearer.

"Minny, we are both culprits—innocent ones. We have been punished long enough. If I thought—but I am twice your age, you have not been happy in bondage, and it would be bondage still, though a loving one. No red-haired young men in it, no wild journeys alone, no drawing back when once entered in. If I dared to dream, I would hope that you cared for me. I would say, Minny, I love you; let us go away from our troubles and have a long vacation. It is dreadful to talk this way in the shadow of death, but I cannot let you go back to Maine alone to the terrors there in that lonely house. I do not know where your aunt is, or when she will return; and if people should talk of this time, I could silence them if you were my wife."

She was strangely quiet, but he saw the roses tremble on her breast.

"You talk, Craig," she said, sadly, "as if this were part of your sacrifice for helping me once, for being a kind friend."

"How cruel women can be—even the sweetest of them! How can I be different, when I must remember the dead in Denver? Yet, Minny, I could talk love to you; other women have

said I did that thing well, and I did not care for them; your little finger is more precious to me than all the women I have ever known."

She sighed and moved a little nearer, a blush on her fair cheek.

"Even to touch you, to take your hand, seems dreadful," he cried, hastily. "What a coward custom makes of us all! If it were a year, now, instead of a day. Let the worst come." He took her cold little hand in his and drew her to his side. "Shall we go forth on our holiday. Minny, leaving no address, forgetting the past, and be as if the world were new and we but just created?"

"You talk nicely now," she said, slowly, holding herself erect and statelily in spite of his restraining hand, "but you said bondage, and that has frightened me. I have been soiled so much and driven about; I want to be loved and made a friend of. If you would be as sweet as on that ride, if you would call on me."

He drew her close and pressed his lips against that soft round cheek, blushing so prettily now.

"Try me, Minny. I swear to you those dear eyes shall never shed tears from any word or act of mine. I have loved you since you came out in the light that dismal night and I thought you a little girl."

"And I loved you," she whispered, lifting her tousled head from his arm, "when you looked so disgustedly amazed at things in that ranch that I told you, and all of a sudden smiled on me as you are smiling now. Craig, I mean to try and be grown-up and good always."

"No, just be yourself. And, now, dear, go smooth your hair and get your things on. We will be married in the quietest way. I know a couple of fellows I can get for witnesses; we can pick them up on the road."

She jumped up, all rosy and smiling. At the door she looked back. "May I take the dog, Craig?" she said, hesitating.

He smiled. "Of course," he said, resignedly. "You don't have to ask 'may I?' we are comrades, you know. By the way, tell the chambermaid to pack your trunk. Pay her. We will go away in the early afternoon. I want to be free from all memories."

She kissed her hand as she ran away, and he, somewhat dazed at the turn matters had taken, looked out on the street with unseeing eyes. In his heart, though, he was happy, deliriously so. He had loved her from the first, and there had been few holidays in his busy life. He would forget that ghastly specter lying at the morgue in Denver, and for months live for love. The world lay all before them; they would put the past by.

"I will steal my happiness from life," he cried. "Let the world condemn me. I can fight her battles; and no man knowing my story and hers, seeing her frightened, tortured by that maniac's memory, would do otherwise than I do now."

Mr. Minny appeared in her jaunty traveling-suit, her sealskin jacket, a dainty dotted veil over her hat, and her dog under her arm.

"I never get married like other people," she said, cheerfully. "Look at me in these clothes; and the other time I had on an old dress, too."

Oliver winced. "Perhaps at the third you'll have better luck, my pet."

"I have said something awful, I suppose," she laughed, "but I am so happy I don't care, and I said good-by to that ghost room. Oh, I'm so glad I've got somebody alive to be with!"

"I believe you are going to marry me out of fear," he said, as they drove along the carriage.

"You don't think that, sweetness," she said, contentedly; "and you have got your lovely look. You always were like a man out of a novel to me. A city bachelor, Aunt Hannah says. Won't she be surprised? but, do you know, she said I had leanings towards you all the time?"

Mr. Minny was very reserved when the two strange gentlemen joined them, and when the marriage service was being read trembled a little, until Skye yawning dolefully—he had not slept well, poor dog, in the hotel cellar—made her smile, and she was radiant when the solemn ceremony was over. They were married in a shabby parsonage of an out-of-the-way church, by an underfed parson in threadbare clothes, and Minny's generous heart rejoiced when she caught a glimpse of a fifty-dollar bill Oliver paid for the few moments' talk that meant so much—the ceremony that is, after all, the strongest link in the chain of human happiness.

Oliver had told his two friends something of the events preceding this strange marriage, so they were tactful enough to say the right things at the little dinner the four had in the very private room where Minny had eaten the day before. Skye behaved pretty well, and the only cloud on his mistress' brow was when one of the strangers stupidly asked if the dog was going on the wedding trip.

"Of course," she said, decidedly.

"Of course," echoed Oliver, meekly, and the two guests smiled the old, old smile of the married man who knows.

"It was a little like Hamlet," Minny whispered when she and her husband, and of course the dog, drove to the depot—"the wedding-feast."

He laid his finger lightly on her lips. "Sweet, there are things best unsaid."

"You will find me so full of faults," she sighed, in remarkable meekness. "Skye, give me your paw; this is your new papa, and if he gets cross, why, I can pet you. It will be no new experience to you, unhappy dog."

Then Oliver laughed and hugged her. "What a child you are!" he said.

At the depot he sent a telegram to Dr. John:

"I have married Mrs. de Restaud. We are on a trip, and want to hear nothing from Denver. Tell my clerks I won't be home for four months. Have sent word to Jones & Bailey to take my cases. I am happy, and she is divine. We have the dog along."

"CRAIG OLIVER."

When, after two months' absence, Oliver telegraphed Dr. John to forward his mail to St. Augustine, the first letter he opened was one addressed to

"Never in the world," said one of his

himself from Newcastle, Ma. Mrs. Minny leaned on his shoulder as he read:

"DEAR MR. OLIVER: The first thing I saw on my getting home from Paris, France, was a letter in my niece Minny's unreadable handwriting, which she says is Italian, but is hard to read as a picket fence. I would have wrote right away, but the house was in such a mass from shiftless people—I left some Baileys in charge of it—that I had to turn to and go to housecleaning before I could live in the place. I made out that Minny is married to you, and most likely on the very day her first husband was being buried. I do hope folks here won't learn of it; my family has given the village more to talk about than they ever had before, and they are dragging me over the coals now. Most 'em know I've been to France, and the rest are trying to do the same round."

"I guess you about feel oh-so sorry Minny to take care of her, and I forsee she set a store by you be one her first husband died. I was right too, in questioning you about her. Well, folks' ways is different nowadays. If I'd had Niecc Minny's bad luck with one man I never should have taken another one."

(Oliver looked back into the rosy face leaning over his chair. "Well, Minny?"

"You dear thing," cooed Mrs. Minny, with a soft little kiss, "she don't dream how lovely

friends. "There is some story about his wife; she does not go in society at all—a pretty little thing. I wonder, though, how a man can throw away his future for a pretty face."

"What was wrong?" asked another. "I'm not sure," answered the first. "I do know he married her the day after her husband—that crazy French fellow Dr. Restaud—died, and that he ran away with her one night from her home up in the North park. Oliver had a shooting-box there. You couldn't make him governor; regular exodus of our wives to the east; they never would call on her."

The words stung Oliver a little; but that evening, when his wife went to meet him at the door, wearing a little yellow gown, too, as in that night in the past, with Skye at her heels, he smiled in content. How infinitely small were all honors men might give man beside the real heart-happiness of love! He thought he would rather be married than be president; and he blessed the kindly fate that led him to the valley of the Troublesome and the little Troublesome lady there.

THE END.

TROUSERS THAT WERE A TRAP.

Anecdote by the Retired Burglar Who Lived More Than He Could Carry.

"I went one night," said the retired burglar, "into the room of a man who had his clothes stacked up on chair alongside the bed, with the trousers thrown on top in a careless sort of way, as though he had been too tired or too lazy to straighten 'em out. The right-hand pocket looked inviting and I reached into it. There was a pocket-book there, but when I tried to pull it out my hand was held on the sharp point of a dozen wires."

"You've seen those mousetraps with little cone-shaped wire traps for the mouse to run his head into? He can get his head in easily enough, but when he wants to pull it out the ends of the wires stick into his head and neck and hold him. Well, this man had fixed up a contrivance like that in his pocket. I could have freed myself by taking a little time and using a little more patience, but I said to myself: 'Why not carry the trousers off and take my time about it?' I gathered them up and started. It was a mistake; I hadn't gone six feet before I felt a little tug, and the points were pulled into the hand deeper than ever. Of course I knew at once what it all meant; there was a cord attached to one of the trousers' legs and the other end of it was tied to the man's hand, and that was what I had brought up against."

"Oliver drew his wife to his knee, and, dropping the letter, looked at her anxiously.

"The Patterns are awfully long-lived," she said, merrily. "Don't be a goose. She didn't think I would hear that, you know."

"I shall take you to Dr. John," he said, seriously, "when we get home."

"I like him so much!" she murmured. "In my trunk I have his smoking-cap: I'll give it back now; I have you. I kept it to remember our ride by."

Oliver took up the letter again.

"I can't have no regrets that Mr. de Restaud is dead. He was a dreadful profitless to own, but nobody could make Minny unhappy enough. I hope he had chance of heart before he died in that asylum; but Dr. John wrote didn't know anything. It was good of Dr. John to go there and stay by him; there isn't to my mind, many men angels walking about on earth, but the doctor's one of 'em. Before I forgot it, bring him with you when you come next summer, as I hope you will come, Mr. Oliver; for I set a store by you on account of your kindness to the poor child."

"You see she puts you on the back now," chirped Mrs. Minny.

"Before I close my letter I must tell you about my visit to Paris, France; and, though it seemed heartless to take Frankie away, Minny is honest about it and she will tell you I done right. I was mortal afraid Henry would steal him off, and, as he is a crousy child, he would get his death; so I just took him myself across ocean to Henry's folks. I was n't much sick on the voyage, nor the baby, but was bothered most in France account of folks not understanding me. Howsomever, there was some Philadelphia people along that I got acquainted with, and with my right, where they could talk with the French. Finally, when we got to the general's house, coming in a cab that cost me a dollar bill for waiting, on account of me being interested in talking, I found the general in—a old man, too, and he could talk English reasonable well. I up and told him everything, keeping Frankie on my lap. 'Now,' says I, 'if you don't want this poor little child and treat her as your own, I take him to my home, for I'm well-to-do, and the little creature's growed into my affections.' Goodness me, he knew most of it, that man Lewis having kept him informed. He set right down and talked friendly as possible, said Minny ought to have come to him, would treat her as a daughter; then his eyes filled with tears, and he took little Frankie in his arms, and told me their Alphonse was dead, and his eldest son's wife was a helpless invalid who wept night and day. I took my things and went upstairs with him to his room—such a grand house!—and there she placed little Frankie, that could only jabber in English, but nobody could understand her. She didn't know any language, and she stuck hands kind with me, and the upshot of that cab till I was eating dinner three hours afterwards, and I jumped right up and was running out, but Henry's brother, a respectable, solid-looking man, sent one of the help out, and a bill there must have been, but he wouldn't let me settle. 'For I left, news of Henry's death come and upset them all, and then Lewis and Annette was expected, and as I didn't want to see them two—especially him—he went away. They sent a cordial invite for Minny to come, but I told them I guessed she'd like America best, as I do, where you can tell what folks say when they are talking.'

"The general give me to understand they would legally adopt Frankie, and I told em you would be a good mother. He will have a fine property some day. I was a full houseperson going home. My old arms was empty and I cried myself to sleep lots of nights."

"I will now close. Be good to Minny, and come down early and stay all summer. Yours to command,

"HANNAH PATTEN."

He laid his finger lightly on her lips.

"Sweet, there are things best unsaid."

"You will find me so full of faults," she sighed, in remarkable meekness.

"Skye, give me your paw; this is your new papa, and if he gets cross, why, I can pet you. It will be no new experience to you, unhappy dog."

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