

VIXEN

By Miss M. E. Braddon.

CHAPTER XIX.

"Yes, dear, I obeyed you. You were hard and cruel to me that night in the plantation; but I knew that you were wise and honest and true; and I made up my mind that I would keep the engagement entered upon beside my mother's deathbed. So I held on, Vixen—yes, I will call you by the old name now, henceforward you are mine, and I shall call you what I like—I held on, and was altogether an exemplary lover, went wherever I was ordered to go, and always came when they whistled for me, and, in a word, did my duty in that state of life to which it had pleased heaven to call me; and my reward has been to be fitted with every circumstance of ignominy on my wedding morning."

"Jilted!" cried Vixen, her big brown eyes shining in pleasant mockery. "Why, I thought Lady Mabel adored you!"

"So did I," answered Roderick naively, "and I pitied the poor dear thing for her infatuation. I still believe that Mabel was fond of me once, but Lord Mallow bowled me out. The second time I brought a marriage certificate in his pocket when he came home from Ashbourne, and had the art to engage rooms at Southampton, and sleep there a night en passant. He left a portmanteau and a hat box there, and that constituted legal occupancy; so, when he won Lady Mabel's consent to an elopement he had only to ride over to Southampton and give notice to the parson and clerk. The whole thing was done splendidly. Lady Mabel went out at 8 o'clock, under the pretense of going to early church. Mallow was waiting for her with a fly half a mile from Ashbourne. They drove to Southampton together, and were married at 10 o'clock in the old church of St. Michael. While the distracted duchess and her woe-worn henchmen were everywhere for the bride, and all the visitors at Ashbourne were gazing themselves in their wedding finery, and the village children were filling their baskets with flowers to strew upon the pathway of the happy pair, emblematical of the flowers which did not blossom in the high way of life, the lady was over the border with Jock of Hazeldean! Wasn't it fine, Vixen?"

"At half past ten there came a telegram from my runaway bride:—

"Ask Roderick to forgive me, dear mamma. I found at the last, that my heart was not in the game, and I have married to Lord Mallow. I do not think my cousin will grieve very much."

"That last clause was sensible anyhow, was it not, Vixen?"

"I think the whole business was very sensible," said Vixen, with a sweet, grave smile.

"She will be very happy as Lady Mallow," said Roderick. "Mallow will legislate for Ireland, and she will rule him."

"But how did you come here?" asked Vixen, looking up at her lover in simple wonder. "All this only happened yesterday morning."

"Is there not a steamer that leaves Southampton nightly? Had there not been one, I would have chartered a boat for myself. I would have come in a cockle shell; I would have come with a swimming bell; I would have done anything wild and adventurous to hasten to my love. I started for Southampton the minute I had seen that blessed telegram, went to St. Michael's, saw the registry with its entry of Lord Mallow's marriage, hardly dry, and then went down to the docks and looked my berth. Oh, what a long day yesterday was—the longest day of my life!"

"And of mine," sighed Vixen, between tears and laughter, "in spite of the shepherd's pipe."

"Are those Jersey people you have picked up?" Roderick asked innocently.

"This turned the scale, and Vixen burst into a joyous peal of laughter.

"How did you find me here?" she asked.

"Very easily. Your custodian—what a grim looking personage she is, by the way—told me where you were gone and directed me how to follow you. I told her I would have come in a cockle shell; I would have come with a swimming bell; I would have done anything wild and adventurous to hasten to my love. I started for Southampton the minute I had seen that blessed telegram, went to St. Michael's, saw the registry with its entry of Lord Mallow's marriage, hardly dry, and then went down to the docks and looked my berth. Oh, what a long day yesterday was—the longest day of my life!"

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sunny lanes, stopping to look seaward through a gap in the hedge, or to examine a fern which was like the ferns of Hampshire.

"I'm afraid you'll never like Briarwood as well as the Abbey House," said Roderick, humbly. "I tried my best to catch it up for Lady Mabel, for, you see, as I felt I fell short in the matter of affection, I wanted to do the right thing in furniture and decorations. But the house is lamentably modern and commonplace. I'm afraid you'll never be happy there."

"Roderick, I could be happy with you if our home were no better than the charcoal-burner's hut in 'Mark Ash,'" protested Vixen.

"It's very good of you to say that. Do you like sage-green?" Roderick asked, with doubtful interest.

"Pretty well," he replied. "It reminds me of mama's dressmaker, Madame Theodore."

"Because Mabel insisted upon having sage-green curtains, and chair-covers, and a sage-green wall with a chocolate door—did you ever hear of a door?—in the new morning-room I built for her, I'm rather afraid you won't like it; I should have preferred pink or blue myself, and no dado. It looks so much as if one had run short of wall-paper. But it can all be altered by and by, if you don't like it."

CHAPTER XX.

They found Miss Skipwith pacing the weedy garden walk in front of her parlor window, with a disturbed air, and a yellow envelope in her hand.

"My dear, this has been an eventful day," she exclaimed. "I have been very anxious for your return. Here is a telegram for you; and as it is the first you have had since you have been staying here, I conclude it is of some importance."

Vixen took the envelope eagerly from her hand. It was from Captain Carmichael, Miss Tempest's father.

"Come home by the next boat. Your mother is ill, and anxious to see you. The carriage will meet you at Southampton."

"Poor Vixen looked at her lover with did not blossom in the high way of life, the lady was over the border with Jock of Hazeldean! Wasn't it fine, Vixen?"

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post has told you what old friends we are; that, in fact, I am quite the oldest friend she has. I came to Jersey on purpose to ask her to marry me, and she has been good enough—smiling blissfully at Vixen, who tried to look daggers at him—"to say yes."

"Dear me!" exclaimed Miss Skipwith, looking much alarmed; "this is very embarrassing. I am so unused in such matters. My life has been given up to study, far from the haunts of man. My nephew informed me that there was a kind of—in point of fact, a flirtation between Miss Tempest and a gentleman in Hampshire, of which he highly disapproved, the gentleman being engaged to marry his cousin."

"It was I," said Roderick, "but there was no flirtation. I was Miss Tempest's oldest friend—her old playfellow, and we liked to see each other, and were always friendly together; it was an understood thing that I was to marry my cousin. It was Miss Tempest's particular desire that I should keep an engagement made beside my mother's deathbed. If Miss Tempest had thought otherwise I should have been at her feet. I would have flung that engagement to the winds, for Violet Tempest is the only woman I ever loved. And now all the world may know it, for my cousin has jilted me, and I am a free man."

(To be Continued.)

FACTS ABOUT THE BANANA.

Ripened During Voyage as Good as Ripened Under Tropical Sun.

There is a vast amount of ignorance prevailing among intelligent people concerning the growth, production and marketing of bananas. Many people imagine that the natives in tropical cities step out of their huts in the early morning and pick and eat bananas fresh from the plant, the same as they would oranges and other fruits. Bananas ripened on the plant are not suitable for food.

Bananas, even after traveling 3,000 miles in a green state, are every bit as good as bananas ripened under a tropical sun. This is probably true of no other export fruit. The plant of which bananas is the fruit is not a tree, nor is it a bush or vine. It is simply a gigantic plant, growing to a height of from fifteen to twenty feet. About eighteen feet from the ground the leaves, oftentimes eight feet long, come out in a sort of cluster from the center of which springs a bunch of bananas.

These do not grow with the bananas pointing upward, naturally, and if the stem grew straight they would hang exactly as seen in the fruit stores and grocers' windows. This, however, is not the case; the stem bends in the weight of the fruit, and it brings it into directly the opposite position, with the large end of the stalk up and the fingers pointing toward the sun.

A word of explanation concerning some banana terms: Each banana is called a "finger" and each of these little clusters of fingers surrounding a stalk is called a "hand"; the quality and value of each bunch depend on the number of hands it has. Some may wonder how the fruit is cut from the top of a plant fifteen feet from the ground.

The native laborers cut the stalk part way up its height; the weight of the fruit causes the stalk to slowly bend over until the bunch of bananas hangs nearly reaches the ground, then the bunch is cut off with the ever ready machete and carried to the river or railroad for shipment. The plant at the same time is cut close to the ground. The banana is a very prolific producer of itself and at every cleaning of the land it is necessary to cut down many of the young plants, or "suckers," as they are termed. In order that they may not become overcrowded up to a certain limit; the fewer suckers on a given acre the larger the fruit they will produce.

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WOMEN AND FASHION

Woman's Enemy.

"It is not the work that tires you at all; it is the way you do it," said a wise counselor to a discouraged and broken-down school teacher.

The world fits the case of many a woman who is not a school teacher. The farmer's wife who does the whole week's work in her imagination after she goes to bed Sunday night; the bookkeeper who in her dreams adds columns of figures to bring out an obstinate balance; the school girl who grows hot and cold in anticipation of an examination; the dressmaker who never forgives her apprehension lest her customer shall not be pleased—all these and a score of other kinds of women need to learn the lesson of the value of the mind at ease.

A conscientious, worrying wife of a Maine farmer hurried to the hen house one day with a pan of food. She slipped and fell—and a broken hip stopped the quick footstep and dulled the keen vision for "things which must be done." For three months the patient lay in bed, alone many hours of each day, thinking over her life and habits and responsibilities—her successes and her failures. When she could hobble to a wheeled chair, she was a different creature from the anxious, nervous woman who had been forced to submit to imprisonment.

A perspective of the months and years of life, a new conviction that peace of mind is more important than pies and cakes, a sense of proportion which included herself and the claims of her own nature as well as the appetites of her hungry family and the profits of the farm, had revealed themselves to her in the long days of enforced inactivity.

"My broken hip saved my life and my soul, too, I guess," the grateful woman used to say, looking to you, one who had counted that the worst enemy of good work is worry—YOUTH'S COMPANION.

A Modern Meditation.

Idle rest, for idleness is the mother of all sins.

Neither dawdle nor dilly-dally; for the dawdler groweth weary and accomplisheth naught.

Delay not, nor postpone; for more crimes are due to postponement than to deliberate intention toward the sun.

Never indulge thyself in despair; for there is no surer way to miss all the good things that are waiting to you.

Neither indulge in vain retrospection; for what is done is done forever, and the only wise thing is to forget it.

Blame not thyself nor any other person too much; for there are laws stronger than any of us that govern the universe.

Make hope and industry thy habits; for by these two practices shall a man reach the highest place—even contentment.

The Perfect Hostess.

You know her as soon as you step over the sill.

She has diffused an atmosphere of welcome over the entire house.

You feel at home in every room, even though left alone, says the Cooking Club Magazine.

And you are left alone sometimes.

For the perfect hostess doesn't dog your footsteps every minute.

She knows that you will want to write letters, and nap and read.

She gives you the house to entertain yourself in and you can have her, too, whenever you want her.

She does not nag you out with too many entertainments or too many persons.

She doesn't make you feel that you've got to "pay for your keep" by doing chores.

Neither does she refuse to let you help her, if she sees it would make you happy.

She gives you the impression it's a joy just to have you in the house.

And you always want to see her again.

Dressed in Their Best.

The little coat on the standing figure is made of bright red cloth, trimmed with black braid and straps of the cloth, finished with gilt buttons. It is cut with a very full flare in the skirt. The dress is navy blue cashmere, trimmed with parallel crimson silk folds, with stitches between them done in blue and white silk.

The guimpe is white chiffon, trimmed with navy blue soutache.

Advice to Letter Writers.

Edward Everett Hale tells letter writers to know what they want to say, to say it, to use their own language, using short words rather than long, with as few words as possible, and to leave out all the fine passages. That is no doubt good advice, but it would seem to apply more particularly to those who write letters on a newspaper. Surely the "fine passages" need not be left out of a friendly letter, and most persons who get letters are not so particular as to logical sequence.

During the Reception.