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Fern Leaves from Fanny's Portfolio.

MARY LEE.

"Percy, dear Percy, take back those bitter words! As Heaven is my witness, they are undeserved by me. See, my eye quails not beneath yours; my cheek blanches not. I stand before you, at this moment, with every vow I made you at the altar unbroken in letter and spirit," and she drew closer to him, and laid her delicate hand upon his broad breast. "Wrong me not, Percy, even in thought."

The stern man hesitated. Had he not wilfully blinded himself, he had read truth and honour in the depths of the clear blue eyes that looked so unflinchingly into his own. For a moment their expression overcame him; then, dashing aside the slender fingers that rested upon him, he left her with a muttered oath.

Mary Lee had the misfortune to be very pretty, and the still greater misfortune to marry a jealous husband. Possessing a quick and ready wit, and great conversational powers, a less moderate share of personal charms would have made her society eagerly sought for.

As soon as her eyes were opened to the defect alluded to in her husband's character, she set herself studiously to avoid the shoals and quicksands that lay in the matrimonial sea. One by one, she quietly dropped the acquaintance of gentlemen who, from their attractiveness or preference for her society, seemed obnoxious to Percy.

Mary was no coquette. Nature had given her a heart; and, superior as she was to her husband, she really loved him. To most women his exacting unreasonableness would only have stimulated to a finished display of coquetry; but Mary, gentle and yielding, made no show of opposition to the most absurd requirements. But all these sacrifices had been unavailing to propitiate the fiend of jealousy; and there she sat, an hour after her husband had left her, with her hands pressed tightly together, pale and tearless, striving in vain to recall any cause of offence.

Hour after hour passed by, and still he came not. The heavy tramp of feet had long since ceased beneath the window—the pulse of the great city was still—silence and darkness brooded over its slumbering thousands. Mary could endure it no longer. Rising, and putting aside the curtain, she pressed her face close against the window-pane, as if her straining eye could pierce the gloom of midnight. She hears a step! it is his!

Trembling, she sank upon the sofa to await his coming, and nerve herself to bear his bitter harshness.

Percy came gaily up to her and kissed her forehead! Mary passed her hand over her eyes and looked at him again! No! he was not exhilarated with wine. What could have caused this sudden revulsion of feeling? Single-hearted and sincere herself, she never dreamed of treachery.

"Percy regrets his injustice," she said to herself. "Men are rarely magnanimous enough to own they have been in the wrong;" and, with the generosity of a noble heart, she resolved never to remind him, by speech or look, that his words had been like poisoned arrows to her spirit.

The following day Percy proposed their taking "a short trip into a neighbouring town;" and Mary, glad to convince him how truly she forgave him, readily complied. It was a lovely day in spring, and the fresh air and sweet-scented blossoms might have sent a thrill of pleasure to sadder hearts than theirs.

"What a pretty place!" said Mary. What a spacious house, and how tastefully the grounds are laid out! Do you stop here?" she continued, as her husband reined the horse into the avenue.

"A few moments—I have business here," replied Percy, slightly averting his face; "and you had better alight too, for the horse is restive and may trouble you."

Mary sprang lightly from the vehicle and ascended the capacious stone steps. They were met at the door by a respectable grey-haired porter, who ushered them into a receiving room. Very soon, a little, sallow-faced man, bearing a strong resemblance to a withered orange, made his appearance, and casting a glance upon Mary from his little twinkling black eyes, that made the blood mount to her cheeks, made an apology for withdrawing her husband for a few minutes, "on business," to an adjoining room.

As they left, a respectable middle-aged woman entered, and invited Mary to take off her hat. She declined, saying, "she was to leave with her husband in a few minutes."

The old woman then jingled a small bell, and another matron entered.

"Better not use force," said she, in a whisper. "Poor thing! So pretty, too! She don't look as though she'd wear a 'straight jacket.'"

The truth flashed upon Mary at once! She was in a lunatic hospital! Faint with terror, she demanded to see her husband, assuring them she was perfectly sane; to all of which they smiled quietly, with an air that said, "We are used to such things here."

By-and-by, the little wizen-faced doctor came in, and, listening to her eloquent appeal with an abstracted air, as one would tolerate the prattle of a petted child, he examined her pulse, and motioned the attendants to "wait upon her to her room." Exhausted with the tumult of feeling she had passed through, she followed without a show of resistance; but who shall describe the death-chill that struck to her heart as she entered it? There was a bed of snowy whiteness, a table, a chair, all scrupulously neat and clean; but the breath of the sweet-scented blossoms came in through a grated window!

Some refreshment was brought her, of which she refused to partake. She could not even weep; her eyes seemed turned to stone. She could hear the maniac laughter of her fellow-prisoners; she could see some of the most harmless marching in gloomy file through the grounds, with their watchful body-guard.

Poor Mary! She felt a stifled, choking sensation in her throat, as if the air she breathed were poison; and, with her nervous, excitable temperament, God knows the chance she stood to become what they really thought her. To all her eager inquiries, she received only evasive answers, or else the subject was skilfully and summarily dismissed, to make place for one in which she had no interest. Little Dr. Van Brunt daily examined her pulse, and "hoped she was improving; or, if she wasn't, it was his interest to issue a bulletin to that effect, and all "company" was vetoed as "exciting and injurious to the patient." And so, day after day, night aiter night, dragged slowly along. And Percy, with the meanness of a revengeful spirit, was "biding his time," till the punishment should be sufficiently salutary to warrant his recalling her home. But while he was quietly waiting the accomplishment of his purpose, the friend of the weary came to her relief.

"Leave me, please, will you?" said Mary to the nurse, as she turned her cheek to the pillow, like a tired child. "I want to be alone."

The old woman took her sewing and seated herself just outside the door, thinking she might wish to sleep. In a few moments she peeped cautiously through the open door. Mrs. Percy still lay there, in the same position, with her cheek nestling in the palm of her little hand.

"She sleeps sweetly," she muttered to herself, as she resumed her work.

Yes, Dame Ursula, but it is the "sleep" from which only the trump of the archangel shall wake her.

Mary's secret died with her, and the remorse that is busy at the heart of Percy, is known only to his Maker.

A TALK ABOUT BABIES.

Baby-carts on narrow side-walks are awful bores!

Are they? Suppose you and a certain pair of blue eyes, that you would give half your patrimony to win. were joint proprietors of that baby! I shouldn't dare to stand very near you and call it a "nuisance." It's all very well for bachelors to turn up their single-blessed noses at these little dimpled Cupids; but just wait till their time comes! See them, the minute their name is written "Papa," pull up their dickies, and strut off down street as if the Commonwealth owed them a pension! When they enter the office, see their old married partner—to whom babies have long since ceased to be a novelty—laugh in his sleeve at the new fledged dignity with which that baby's advent is announced! How perfectly astonished they feel that they should have been so infatuated as not to perceive that a man is a perfect cipher till he is at the head of a family! How frequently one may see them now looking in at the shop windows, with intense interest, at little hats, coral and bells, and baby-jumpers! How they love to come home to dinner, and press that little velvet cheek to their business faces! Was ever any music half so sweet to their ear as its first lisped "Papa?" Oh, how closely and imperceptibly, one by one, that little plant winds its tendrils round the parent stem! How anxiously they hang over its cradle when the cheek flushes, and the lip is fever-parched; and how wide, and deep, and long a shadow, in their happy homes, its little grave would cast!

My *dear* sir, depend upon it, one's own baby is never a "nuisance." Love heralds its birth!

ELSIE'S FIRST TRIAL.

Five happy years had Elsie Lee slept on her husband's bosom. False prophets were they who shook their heads at her bridal, and said she would rue the day she wedded Harry Lee; that he was "unsteady, impulsive and fickle."

She knew it was true, as they said, that he had loved unhappily before she met him; but the bright vision that had bewildered him was far beyond the seas; she might never cross his path again. Be that as it may, Elsie Lee was not the woman to cloud the sunshine of the present by dim forebodings, or question the past history of a heart now so loyal to her.

They were not rich; but light hearts seldom keep company with heavy coffers; and Elsie's fairy hand had made their small house better worth the seeing than many a gorgeous drawing-room with its upholstery show. And for sculpture, she could show you a little dimpled fairy, whose golden head was nightly pillowed on her breast, and whose match it were hard to find in any artists studio in the land. Yes, with Harry by her side, and her babe upon her knee, Elsie defied the world. Kings and queens might lord it where they liked—her reign was absolute in her own little kingdom.

"So you are married and settled since I went abroad," said Vincent to Harry; "have a nice little wife, so I hear; 'sown all your wild oats,' and made up your mind to be virtuous. Now, I shan't come to witness your felicity, for two reasons. Firstly, if your wife isn't pretty, I don't want to see her. I think it every ugly woman's pious duty to make away with herself! Secondly, if she is handsome, I shonld make love to her, spite fate or you; for I'm neither a 'non-resistant' nor a 'perfectionist,' as you very well know. And, thirdly, to sum up all I have to say, your old ideal, Miss ——, returned in the steamer with me, lovely as a Peri. She inquired about you; and if your little wife will allow you," and a slight sneer curled his handsome lip, "I'd advise you to call on her. But *prenez garde*, Harry! I defy any man to withstand her witchery. I'm an old stager myself, but she plays the very mischief with my petrified heart for all that."

"If his little wife would let him!" It rang in Harry's ear all the way home. Vincent thought him already in leading-strings. That would never do! and so he persuaded himself this was the reason he intended calling on the fair Marion, just to show Vincent how angelic Elsie was, and how far above such a petty feeling as jealousy. And then his imagination wandered back to by-gone days, when a radiant smile of Marion's, a flower she had worn in her hair, a touch of her small hand, was worth all the mines of Peru to him.

"Pshaw! how foolish; and I a married man!" and he stepped off briskly, as if in that way he could rid himself of such foolish thoughts.

Elise met him at the door, fresh and sweet as a daisy.

"You are not well, Harry," she said, as she marked his heightened colour; "yon've been annoyed with business."

"Not a bit," said he, patting her on the cheek, and tossing up his child. "Not a bit; and now let's have dinner, for I've a business engagement at four."

How absent he was! how abstracted! he seemed to eat just for the form of the thing, although she had been all the morning preparing his favourite dish. "Never mind," said the gentle little wife to herself; "he has some business perplexity that he is too thoughtful to annoy me with;" and she passed her hand caressingly over his forehead, as if to assure him silently of her sympathy.

"Elsie," said he, with a slight heart-twinge, "you have heard me speak of Marion Ruthven? Vincent says she has returned with him in the steamer; and as she is a stranger in the city, I feel as if I must call on her. She leaves soon for her brother's house in New York."

Elsie's heart throbbed quickly, but she bent her graceful head very closely over the little frock she was embroidering, so that Harry could not see the expression of her face, and said, in her usual tone, "Don't apoligise to me, dear Harry, if you wish to go."

"Like yourself, dear Elsie!" said he, kissing her cheek. And in half an hour afterwards he emerged from his dressingroom, where he had made himself very unnecessarily handsome, by a most careful toilette.

Elsie complimented him on his appearance, and gave him her usual warm-hearted kiss as he left; aud Harry said to himself, as he went down the street, "How glad I am she is not jealous! Some women would have made quite a scene."

Short-sighted Harry! look back into that little room. The frock has fallen from her fingers, and tears are falling fast upon it. Now she paces the floor. What! she jealous of Harry? Oh, no, no! but the bright, dazzling Marion! so talented, so gifted, so fascinating! If Harry's old penchant for her should return! Oh, what had she to oppose to all her witchery? Only a sweet, childish face, and a heart whose every pulsation was love—love for him who had won it. Oh, why did she ever come back? Such a happy dream as her wedded life had been, thus far!

Oh, how slowly the hours passed, as she gave herself up to this voluntary self-torture! Harry must not see her thus—no. She rose and bathed her eyes, and tried to busy herself with her accustomed occupations, and so far succeeded that when he sat opposite her at the tea-table that evening, he was quite convinced that he could repeat his call without giving his little wife a single heart-pang. Poor little proud Elsie!—he didn't know how you longed to throw your arms about his neck, and say, "Oh, never look on those bright eyes again, dear Harry! Be mine—mine only!"

No, he didn't know that! The spell had begun to work—he was blinded! Elsie hoped the fair enchantress would soon leave; but it was not so, and Harry became more abstracted every day, although his manner still continued kind as usual.

Elsie's heart could not be deceived. It was not "business" that kept him so often from his hearthstone. No, she had twice, thrice, heard him murmur the bright stranger's name in his dreams. But no word fell from her lips to remind him of all this heart-wandering. She was more studious than ever for his comfort. She never upbraided, never questioned. He went and came as he liked. Still it was telling fast, this secret sorrow, upon the patient little wife. There was a pallor on her cheek that told its own story. or would have done so to eyes less blinded than Harry's.

Our sorrows are so lightened by sympathy; but the grief that may not be spoken—the weight of trouble that slender shoulders must bend under alone—who shall know save those who have borne it?

Elsie was alone in her dressing-room, where she had sat for hours, motionless. A sudden thought seemed to inspire her. She started up, bathed her pale face, smoothed her sunny ringlets, and arrayed herself with more than usual care.

"That will be better," she murmured to herself, as she passed through the busy street to Lady Marion's dwelling.

"I do not recollect," said Marion, with a graceful courtesy, and blushing slightly, as Elsie entered.

"I am a stranger to you," said Elsie, her silvery voice tremulous with agitation; and, as her eye glanced over Marion's full, round figure, with its queenly grace of motion, and noted her large bright eyes, and raven hair, and snowy shoulders, she marvelled not at the spell! "I am Harry Lee's wife," said Elsie. "O Lady Marion! of all the hearts your beauty wins, only one I claim! For God's sake, do not wrest it from me! Earth would be so dark to me without my husband's love!" and her tears fell fast upon the fair stranger's hand.

"As God is my witness, never!" said the impulsive woman, touched with her sweet confidence. "I will never see him again;" and she drew her to her side with a sister's fondness.

"God bless you!" said the happy Elsie. "And you will keep my secret?"

"Elsie' 'tis very odd you were never the least bit jealous of my old friend Marion," said Harry, a few days after the above occurrence. "Very shabby of her, don't you think so, to leave town without even saying good-bye to me? *N' importe*; my little wife is worth a dozen of her;" and Harry kissed her cheek fondly.

A NIGHT-WATCH WITH A DEAD INFANT.

Moorest thou thy bark so soon, little voyager? Through those infant eyes, with a prophet's vision, sawest thou life's great battle-field, swarming with fierce combatants? Fell upon thy timid ear the far-off din of its angry strife? Drooped thy head wearily on the bosom of the sinless, fearful of earth-taint? Fluttered thy wings impatiently against the bars of thy prison-house, sweet bird of Paradise?

God speed thy flight! No unerring sportsman shall have power to ruffle thy spread pinions, or maim thy soaring wing. No sheltering nest had earth for thee, where the chill wind of sorrow might not blow! No garden of Eden, where the serpent lay not coiled beneath the flowers! No "Tree of Life," whose branches might have sheltered thee for aye!

Warm fall the sunlight on thy grassy pillow, sweet human blossom! Softly fall the night dews on the blue-eyed violet above thee! Side by side with thee are hearts that have long since ceased hoping or aching. There lies the betrothed maiden, in her unappropriate loveliness; the bride, with her head pllowed on golden tresses, whose rare beauty even the Great Spoiler seemed loth to touch; childhood, but yesterday warm and rosy on its mother's breast; the loving wife and mother, in life's sweet prime; the grey-haired pastor, gone to his reward; the youth of crisped locks and brow unfurrowed by care: the heart-broken widow, and tearful orphan—all awaiting with folded hands, closed eyes, and silent lips, alike with thee, the resurrection morn.

A PRACTICAL BLUESTOCKING.

"Have you called on your old friend, James Lee, since your return?" said Mr. Seldon to his nephew.

"No, sir; I understand he has the misfortune to have a bluestocking for a wife, and whenever I have thought of going there, a vision with inky fingers, frowzled hair, rumpled dress, and slip-shod heels has come between me and my old friend—not to mention thoughts of a disorderly house, smoky puddings, and dirty-faced children. Defend me from a wife who spends her time dabbling in ink and writing for the papers! I'll lay a wager James hasn't a shirt with a button on it, or a pair of stockings that is not full of holes. Such a glorious fellow as he used to be, too!" said Harry, soliloquising, "so dependant upon somebody to lsve him. By Jove, it's a hard case."

"Harry, will you oblige me by calling there?" said Mr. Seldon with a peculiar smile.

"Well, yes, if you desire it; but these married men get so metamorphosed by their wives, that it's a chance if I recognise the melancholy remains of my old friend. A literary wife!" and he shrugged his shoulders contemptuously.

At one o'clock the next afternoon, Harry might have been seen ringing the bell of James Lee's door. He had a very ungracious look upon his face, as much as to say, "My mind is made up for the worst, and I must bear it for Jemmy's sake."

The servant ushered him into a pretty little sitting-room, not expensively furnished, but neat and tasteful. At the further end of the room were some flowering plants, among which a sweet-voiced canary was singing. Harry glanced round the room; a little light stand or Chinese table stood in the corner, with pen, ink, and papers scattered over it.

"I knew it," said Harry; "there's the sign! Horror of horrors! an untidy, slatternly bluestocking! how I shall be disgusted with her! Jemmy's to be pitied."

He took up a book that lay upon the table, and a little manuscript copy of verses fell from between the leaves. He dropped the book as if he had been poisoned: then picking up the fallen manuscript with his thumb and forefinger, he replaced it with an impatient pshaw! Then he glanced round the room again. No, there was not a particle of dust to be seen, even by his prejudiced eyes; the windows were transparently clean; the hearth-rug was longitudinally and mathematically laid down; the pictures hung "plumb" upon the wall; the curtains were fresh and gracefully looped; and, what was a greater marvel, there was a child's dress half finished in a dainty little work-basket, and a thimqle of fairy dimensions in the immediate neighbourhood thereof. Harry felt a perverse inclination to examine the stitches, but at the sound of approaching footsteps he braced himself up to undergo his mental shower-bath.

A little lady tripped lightly into the room, and stood smilingly before him; her glossy black hair was combed smoothly behind her ears, and knotted upon the back of a remarkably well-shaped head; her eyes were black and sparkling, and full of mirth; her dress fitted charmingly to a very charming little figure; her feet were unexceptionably small, and neatly gaitered; the snowy fingers of her little hand had not the slightest *soupcon* of ink upon them, as she extended them in token of welcome to her guest.

Harry felt very much like a culprit, and greatly inclined to drop on one knee, and make a clean breast by confession; but his evil bachelor spirit whispered in his ear, "Wait a bit, she's fixed up for company; cloven foot will peep out by and by!"

Well, they sat down! The lady knew enough, he heard that before he came; he only prayed that he might not be bored with her book-learning or blue-stockingism. It is hardly etiquette to report private conversations; so I will only say that when James Lee came home, two hours after, he found his old friend Harry in the finest possible spirits, *tete-a-tete* with his "blue" wife. An invitation to dinner followed. Harry demurred; he had begun to look at the little lady through a very bewitching pair of spectacles, and he hated to be disenchanted and a bluestocking dinner!

However, his objections, silent though they were, were over-ruled. There was no fault to be found with that table-cloth or those snowy napkins; the glasses were clean, the silver bright as my lady's eyes; the meats cooked to a turn, the gravies and sauces perfect, and the dessert well got up and delicious. Mrs. Lee presided with ease and elegance; the custards and preserves were of her own manufacture, and the little prattler who was introduced with them, fresh from her nursery bath, with moist ringlets, snowy robe, and dimpled shoulders, looked charmingly well cared for.

As soon as the two gentlemen were alone, Harry seized his friend's hand, saying, with a half smile, "James, I feel like an unmitigated scoundrel! I have heard your wife spoken of as a 'bluestocking,' and I came here prepared to pity you as the victim of an unshared heart, slatternly house, and indigestible cooking; but may I die an old bachelor if I don't wish that woman who has just gone out was my wife!"

James Lee's eyes moistened with gratified pride. "You don't know half," said he. "Listen! Some four years since I became involved in business! at the same time my health failed me, my spirits were broken, and I was getting a discouraged man Emma, unknown to me, made application as a writer to several papers and magazines. She soon became very popular; and not long after placed in my hands the sum of three hundered dollars, the product of her labour. During this time, no parental or houshold duty was neglected; and her cheerful and steady affection raised my drooping spirits, and gave me fresh courage to commence the world anew. She still continues to write, although, as you see, my head is above water. Thanks to her as my guardian angel, for she says, 'We must lay up something for a rainy day.' God bless her sunshiny face!"

The entranoe of Emma put a stop to any further eulogy, and Harry took his leave in a very indescribable and penitential frame of mind, doing ample penance for his former unbelieving scruples, by being very uncomfortably in love with a "bluestocking."

THE LITTLE PAUPER.

It is only a little pauper. Never mind her. You see she knows her place and keeps close to the wall, as if she expected an oath or a blow, The cold winds are making merry with those thin rags. You see nothing of childhood's rounded symmetry in those shrunken limbs and pinched features. Push her on one side, she's used to it; she won't complain. She can't remember that she ever heard a kind word in her life; she'd think you were mocking if you tried it.

She passes into the warm kitchen, savoury with odorous dainties, and is ordered out with a threat by the poorly cook. In the shop-windows she sees nice fresh loaves of bread and tempting little cakes. Rosy little children pass her on their way to school, well-fed, well-clad, and joyous, with a mother's parting kiss yet warm on their sweet lips.

There seems to be happiness enough in the world, but it never comes to her. Her little basket is quite empty; and now, faint with hunger, she leans wearily against that shop-window. There is a lovely lady, who has just passed in. She is buying cakes and *bon-bons* for her lille girl, as if she had the purse of Fortunatus. How nice it must be to be warm and have enough to eat! Poor Meta! She has tasted nothing since she was sent forth with a curse in the morning, to beg or steal; and the tears will come. There is happiness and plenty in the world, but none for Meta!

Not so fast, little one! Warm hearts beat sometimes under silk and velvet. The lady has caught sight of your little woe-begone face and shivering form. Oh, what if it were her child! And, obeying a sweet maternal impulse, she passes out at the door, takes those little benumbed fingers in her daintily-gloved hands, and leads the child, wondering, shy, and bewildered, into fairy-land.

A delightful and novel sensation of warmth creeps over those frozen limbs; a faint colour tinges the pale cheeks, and the eyes grow liquid and lovely, as Meta raises them thankfully to her benefactress. The lady's little girl looks on with an innocent joy, and learns, for the first time, how "blessed are the merciful."

And then Meta passes out, with a heavy basket and a light heart. Surely the street has grown wider and the sky brighter! This can scarcely be the same world! Meta's form is erect now; her step light, as a child's should be. The sunshine of human love has brightened her pathway! Ah, Meta!—earth is not all darkness—bright angels yet walk the earth. Sweet voiced Pity and heaven-eyed Charity sometimes stoop to bless. God's image is only marr'd, not destroyed. He who feeds the ravens bends to listen. Look upward, little Meta!

"Never Look a Gift Horse in the Mouth."—The origin of this saying is said to be as follows:—"Two farmers who had been neighbours for many years, and who had lived upon very friendly terms, mutually agreed that whichever died first should leave to the other a valuable consideration, not specifying however, what it was to be. The one was called Martin Timson, and the other David Dean. David Dean was called away first, and bequeathed to Martin a favourite horse. When it was communicated to the latter, he manifested a great deal of disappointment, and observed that "he did expect something better than an old horse." "Not so old, neither," said the party who had brought him the information. A dispute now arose about the age, and it was agreed to go to the stable and examine it. Martin went up to the horse's head, and, in the act of opening its mouth to look at its teeth, the horse made a snatch and bit his nose off. A mortification in a few hours ensued, and, strange to say, Martin followed David to the grave. Hence came the saying, "Never look a gift horse in the mouth."