

A Sad Hour.

THIS little introduction is to open the door of a home that was once in a house in a pleasant green square in London,—a comfortable family house, with airy and light and snug corners, and writing-tables, and with pictures hanging from the walls of the drawing-room, where the tall windows looked out upon the trees, and of the study upstairs where the father sat at his work.

Here were books and china pots and silver inkstands, and a hundred familiar things all about the house, which the young people had been used to for so long that they had by degrees come to life for them with that individual life with which inanimate things live for the young. Sometimes in the comfortable flicker of the twilight fire the place would seem all astir in the dance of the bright fires which burned in that hearth—fires which then seemed to be, perhaps, only charred coal and wood and ashes, but whose rays still warm and cheer those who were gathered round the home hearth so many years ago.

On one side of the fireplace hung a picture which had been painted by Miss Edgar, and which represented a pretty pale lady, with her head on one side. The artist had christened her Laura. On the chimney-piece, behind the old red pots, the little Dresden china figures, the gilt and loudly ticking clock, stood the picture of a kind old family friend, with a friendly, yet troubled expression in his countenance; and then, against a panel, hung a little water-colour painted by Hunt, and representing the sweet little heroine of this short history. Opposite to her for a while, was a vacant space, until one summer, in Italy, the father happened to buy the portrait of a little Dauphin or Neapolitan Prince, with a broad ribbon and order, and soft fair hair; and when the little Prince had come back from Italy and from a visit to Messrs. Colnaghi's, he was nailed up in his beautiful new frame on the opposite panel to the little peasant girl. There had been some discussion as to where he was to be placed, and one night he was carried up into the study, where he was measured with another little partner, but the little peasant girl matched him best; although the other was a charming and high-born little girl. Only a short time before Messrs. Colnaghi had sent her home in a gilt and reeded frame, a lovely little print of one of Sir Joshua's pictures. She lived up above in the study, and was christened Lady Marjory by the young people who did not know the little lady's real name. And it happened that, one night in this long ago of which I am writing, one of these young folks, sitting basking in the comfortable warmth of the fire, dreamt out a little history of the pictures they

were lighting up in the firelight, and nodding and smiling at her as pictures do. It was a revelation which she wrote down at the time, and which she firmly believed in when she wrote it; and perhaps this short explanation will be enough to make the little history intelligible as it was written, without any other change.

There was once a funny little peasant maiden in a big Normandy cap and blue stockings, and a bright-coloured kerchief, who sat upon a bank, painted all over with heather and flowers, with her basket at her feet, and who looked out at the world with two blue eyes and a sweet, artless little smile which touched and softened quite gruff old ladies and gentlemen who happened to see her hanging up against the parlour wall.

Opposite to the little peasant maiden was a lady of much greater pretensions. No other than Petrarch's Laura, indeed, in a pea-green gown, with a lackadaisical expression and her head on one side. But it was in vain she languished and gave herself airs;—everybody went up first to the grinning little peasant maid and cried, "Oh, what a dear little girl!"

At first the child, who, you know, was a little French child, did not understand what they were saying, and would beg Mrs. Laura to translate their remarks. This lady had brought up a large family (so she explained to the old gentleman over the chimney-piece), and did not think it right to turn little girls' heads with silly flattery; and so, instead of translating rightly, she would tell the little maiden that they were laughing at her big cap or blue stockings.

"Let them laugh," says the little maid, sturdily; "I am sure they look very good-natured, and don't mean any harm," and so she smiled in their faces as sweetly as ever. And quite soon she learnt enough to understand for herself.

Although Laura was so sentimental she was not utterly heartless, and she rather liked the child; and sometimes when she was in a good temper would tell her great long stories about her youth, and the south, and the gentlemen who were in love with her,—and that one in particular who wrote such heaps and heaps of poetry; and go on about troubadours and the belle-passion, while the little girl wondered and listened, and respected Laura more and more every day.

"How can you talk such nonsense to the child," said the old gentleman over the chimney.

"Ah! that is a man's speech," said the lady in green, plaintively. "Nonsense!—yes, silent devotion. Yes, a heart bleeding inwardly—breaking without one outward sign; that is, indeed, the nonsense of a faithful woman's love! There are some things no man can understand,—no man!"

"I am surprised to hear *you* say so," said the old gentleman, politely.

"Are you alluding to that creature Petrarch?" cried Laura. "He

became quite a nuisance at last. Always groaning and sighing, and sending me scrawls of sonnets to decipher, and causing dissension between me and my dear husband. The man disgraced himself in the end by taking up with some low, vulgar minx or other. That is what you will find," she continued, addressing the little girl,—“men are false; the truth is not in them. It is our sad privilege to be faithful—to die breathing the name beloved; heighho!” and though she spoke to the little girl, she looked at the old gentleman over the chimney-piece.

“I hear every day of a new arrival expected among us,” said he, feeling uncomfortable, and wishing to change the subject; “a little Prince in a blue coat all covered over with diamonds.”

“A Prince!” cried Laura, brightening up,—“delightful! You are, perhaps, aware that I have been accustomed to such society before this?”

“This one is but a child,” said the old gentleman; “but they say he is a very pretty little fellow.”

“Oh, I wonder—I wonder if he is the little Prince I dreamt of,” thought the little girl. “Oh, how they are all talking about him.”

“Of course they will put him in here,” said Laura. “I want to have news of the dear court.”

“They were talking of it,” said the old gentleman. “And the other night in the study they said he would make a nice pendant for our little friend here.”

When the little peasant maiden heard this, her heart began to beat, so that the room seemed to swim round and round, and if she had not held on by the purple bank she would certainly have slipped down on to the carpet.

“I have never been into the study,” said Laura, fractiously; “pray, who did you meet there when they carried you up the other night to examine the marks on your back?”

“A very delightful circle,” said the old gentleman; “several old friends, and some very distinguished people:—Mr. Washington, Dr. Johnson, the Duke, Sir Joshua, and a most charming little lady, a friend of his, and all his R.A.’s in a group. Our host’s great-grandfather is also there, and Major André, in whom I am sure all gentle ladies must take an interest.”

“I never heard of one of them,” said Laura, tossing her head. “And the little girl, pray who is she?”

“A very charming little person, with round eyes, and a muff, and a big bonnet. Our dear young friend here would make her a nice little maid.”

The little peasant child’s heart died within her. “A maid! Yes, yes; that is my station. Ah, what a little simpleton I am. Who am I that the Prince should look at me? What was I thinking about? Ah, what a silly child I am.”

And so, when night came, she went to sleep very sad, and very much ashamed of herself, upon her purple bank. All night long she dreamed wild dreams. She saw the little Prince coming and going in his blue velvet coat and his long fair hair, and sometimes he looked at her scornfully.

"You low-born, wretched little peasant child," said he, "do you expect that I, a prince, am going to notice you?"

But sometimes he looked kind, and once he held out his hand; and the little girl fell down on her knees, in her dreams, and was just going to clasp it, when there came a tremendous clap of thunder and a great flash of lightning, and waking up with a start, she heard the door bang as some one left the room with a candle, and a clock struck eleven, and some voices seemed dying away, and then all was quite dark and quiet again.

But when morning came, and the little girl opened her eyes, what was, do you think, the first thing she saw leaning up against the back of a chair? Anybody who has ever been in love, or ever read a novel, will guess that it was the little Prince, in his blue coat, with all his beautiful orders on, and his long fair hair, and his blue eyes already wide open and fixed upon the little maid.

"Ah, madam," said he, in French, "at last we meet. I have known you for years past. When I was in the old palace in Italy, I used to dream of you night after night. There was a marble terrace outside the window, with statues standing in the sun, and orange-trees blooming year by year. There was a painted ceiling to the room, with flying figures fitting round a circle. There was a great blue sky without, and deep shadows came striking across the marble floor day after day at noon. And I was so weary, oh! so weary, until one night I saw you in my dreams, and you seemed to say, 'Courage, little Prince, courage. I, too, am waiting for you. Courage, dear little Prince.' And now, at last, we meet, madam," he cried, clasping his hands. "Ah! do not condemn me to despair."

The little peasant maiden felt as if she could die of happiness.

"Oh, Prince, Prince," she sobbed, "oh, what shall I say? Oh, I am not worthy of you. Oh, you are too good and great for such a little wretch as I. There is a young lady upstairs who will suit you a thousand times better; and I will be your little maid, and brush your beautiful coat."

But the Prince laughed away her scruples and terrors, and vowed she was fit to be a princess any day in all the year; and, indeed, the little girl, though she thought so humbly of herself, could not but see how well he thought of her. And so, all that long happy day, the children talked and chattered from morning to night, rather to the disgust of Laura, who would have preferred holding forth herself. But the old gentleman over the chimney looked on with a gentle smile on his kind red face, and nodded his head encouragingly at them every now and then.

All that day the little peasant maiden was perfectly happy, and, when evening fell, went to sleep as usual upon her flowery bank, looking so sweet and so innocent that the little Prince vowed and swore to himself that all his life should be devoted to her, for he had never seen her like, and that she should have a beautiful crown and a velvet gown, and be happy for ever and ever.

Poor little maiden! When the next morning came, and she opened her sweet blue eyes, alas, it was in vain, in vain—in vain to this poor little loving heart. There stood the arm-chair, but the Prince was gone. The shutters were open, the sunshine was streaming in with the fresh morning air; but the room was dark and dreary and empty to her. The little Prince was no longer there, and, if she thought she could die of happiness the day before, to-day it seemed as if she must live for ever, her grief was so keen, the pang so cruel, that it could never end.

Quite cold and shivering, she turned to Laura, to ask if she knew anything; but Laura could only inform her that she had always said so—men were false—silent devotion, hearts breaking without one sign, were a woman's privilege, &c. But, indeed, the little peasant girl hardly heard what she was saying.

"The housemaid carried him off into the study, my dear," said the old gentleman, very kindly, "this morning before you were awake. But never mind, for she sneezed three times before she left the room."

"Oh, what is that to me?" moaned the little peasant maiden.

"Don't you know?" said the old gentleman, mysteriously. "Three sneezes on a Friday break the enchantment which keeps us all here, and to-night at twelve o'clock we will go and pay your little Prince a visit."

The clock was striking twelve when the little peasant girl, waking from an uneasy dream, felt herself tapped on the shoulder.

"Come, my dear, jump," said the old gentleman, holding out his hand, and leaving the indignant Laura to scramble down by herself as best she could.

This she did, showing two long thin legs, cased in blue silk stockings, and reached the ground at last, naturally very sulky, and greatly offended by this want of attention.

"Is this the way I am to be treated?" said she, shaking out her train, and brushing past them into the passage.

There she met several ladies and gentlemen hurrying up from the dining-room, and the little Prince, in the blue coat, rushing towards the drawing-room door.

"You will find your love quite taken up with the gentleman from the chimney-piece," said Laura, stopping him spitefully. "Don't you see them coming hand-in-hand? He seems quite to have consoled her for your absence."

And alas! at that instant the poor little maiden, in an impulse of

gratitude, had flung her arms round her kind old protector. "Will you really take me to him?" she cried; "oh, how good, how noble you are."

"Didn't I tell you so?" said Laura, with a laugh.

The fiery little Prince flashed up with rage and jealousy. He dashed his hand to his forehead, and then, when the little peasant maid came up suddenly, all trembling with shy happiness, he made her a very low and sarcastic bow and turned upon his heel.

Ah, me! Here was a tragedy. The poor little girl sank down in a heap on the stairs all insensible. The little Prince, never looking once behind, walked up very stately straight into the study again, where he began to make love to Sir Joshua's little lady with the big bonnet and the big round eyes.

There was quite a hum of conversation going on in the room. Figures coming and going and saluting one another in a courtly old-fashioned way. Sir Joshua, with his trumpet, was walking up and down arm-in-arm with Dr. Johnson; the doctor scowling every now and then over his shoulder at Mr. Washington's bust, who took not the slightest notice. "Ha! ten minutes past midnight," observed the General, looking at the clock. "It is, I believe, well ascertained that there exists some considerable difference between the hour here and in America. I know not exactly what that difference is. If I did I could calculate the time at home."

"Sir," said Doctor Johnson, "any fool could do as much."

The bust met this sally with a blank and haughty stare, and went on talking to the French lady who was leaning against the cabinet.

In the meantime the members of the Royal Academy had all come clambering down from their places, leaving the model alone in the lamp-lighted hall where they had been assembled. He remained to put on his clothes and to extinguish the lights which had now been burning for some hundred years. At night, when we are all lying stretched out on our beds, how rarely we think of the companies gathering and awakening in our darkened rooms below. Mr. H. C. Andersen was one of the first to note these midnight assemblies, and to call our attention to them. In a very wise and interesting book called *The Nutcracker of Nuremberg* (written by some learned German many years ago) there is a curious account of one of these meetings, witnessed by a little wakeful girl. On this night, alas, no one was waking; the house was dim with silence and obscurity, and the sad story of my little peasant maiden told on with no lucky interruption. Poor, poor little maiden! There she lay a little soft round heap upon the stairs. The people coming and going scarcely noticed her, so busy were they making the most of their brief hour of life and liberty. The kind old gentleman from over the chimney-piece stood rubbing her little cold hands in his, and supporting her drooping head upon his knee. Through the window the black night trees shivered and the moon rose in the drifting sky. The church steeple struck the half-hour, and the people hurried faster and faster.

“Tira, lira, lira,” sung a strange little figure dressed in motley clothes, suddenly stopping on its way. “What have we here? What have we here? A little peasant maid fainting in the moonlight—an old gentleman trying to bring her to! Is she your daughter, friend? Is she dead or sick or shamming? Why do you waste your precious moments? Chuck her out of window, Toby. Throw the babby out of window. I am Mr. Punch off the inkstand;” and with another horrible chuckle the little figure seemed to be skipping away.

“Stop, sir,” said the old gentleman, very sternly. “Listen to what I have to tell you. If you see a little Prince upstairs in a blue velvet coat tell him from me that he is a villain and a false heart; and if this young lady dies of grief it is he who has killed her; she was seeking him when he spurned her. Tell him this, if you please, and ask him when and where he will be pleased to meet me, and what weapons he will choose.”

“I’ll tell him,” said Mr. Punch, and he was off in a minute. Presently he came back (somewhat to the old gentleman’s surprise). “I have seen your little Prince,” said he, “and given him your message; but I did not wait for an answer. ’Twere a pity to kill him, you cruel-hearted old gentleman. What would the little girl say when she came to life?” And PUNCHINELLO, who was really kind-hearted, although flighty at first and odd in manner, knelt down and took the little pale girl into his arms. Her head fell heavily on his shoulder. “Oh, dear! What is to be done with her?” sighed the old gentleman, helplessly wringing his hands and looking at her with pitiful eyes; and all the while the moon streamed full upon the fantastic little group.

Meantime the little Prince upstairs had been strutting up and down hand in hand with the English beauty, little Lady Marjory, of the round brown eyes. To be sure he was wondering and longing after his little peasant maiden all the while, and wistfully glancing at the door. But not the less did he talk and make gallant speeches to her little ladyship, who only smiled and took it all as a matter of course, for she was a young lady of the world and accustomed to such attentions from gentlemen. It naturally followed, however, that the Prince, who was thinking of other things, did not shine as usual in conversation.

Laura had made friends with the great-grandfather, who was an elegant scholar and could speak the most perfect Italian. “See what a pretty little pair,” said he; “how well matched they are.”

“A couple of silly little chits,” said she, “what can they know of love and passion?” and she cast up a great quivering glance with her weak blue eyes. “Ah! believe me, sir,” said she, “it is only at a later age that women learn to feel that agonizing emotion, that they fade and pine away in silence. Ah-ha! What a tale would it be to tell, that untold story of woman’s wrongs and un—unrequited love!”

“ Ookedookedoo, there’s a treat in store for you, young man,” said Mr. Punch, skipping by. “ Will you have my ruffles to dry your tears? Go it, old girl.” And away he went, leaving Laura speechless from indignation. He went on to where the Prince was standing, and tapped him on the shoulder.

“ Where do you come from, you strange little man?” said Lady Marjory.

“ There are many strange things to be seen to-night,” said Punch, mysteriously hissing out his words. “ There’s a little peasant girl fainting and dying in the moonlight; she was coming to find her love, and he spurned her; and there is an old gentleman trying to bring her to life. Her heart is breaking, and he wants blood to anoint it, he says,— princely blood—shed in the moonlight, drop by drop from a false heart, and it is for you to choose the time and the place. This lady will have to find another cavalier, and will she like him, Prince, with fool’s cap and bells, and a hump before and behind? In that case,” says Mr. Punch, with a caper, “ I am her very humble servant.”

Lady Marjory did not answer, but looked very haughty, as fashionable young ladies do, and Mr. Punch vanished in an instant.

“ I hope I shall never see that person again,” said she. “ The forwardness of common people is really unbearable. Of course he was talking nonsense? Little Prince, would you kindly hold my muff while I tie my bonnet-strings more securely?”

The Prince took the muff without speaking, and then dropped it on the floor unconsciously. Now at last he saw clearly, in an instant it was all plain to him; he was half distracted with shame and remorse. There was a vision before his eyes of his little peasant maiden—loved so fondly, and, alas! wantonly abandoned and cruelly deserted—cold and pale and dying down below in the moonlight. He could not bear the thought; he caught Lady Marjory by the hand.

“ Come,” said he, “ oh, come. I am a wretch, a wretch! Oh, I thought she had deceived me. Oh, come, come! Oh, my little peasant maiden. Oh, how I loved her!”

Lady Marjory drew herself up. “ You may go, Prince, wherever you may wish,” she said, looking at him with her great round eyes, “ but pray go alone; I do not choose to meet that man again. I will wait for you here, and you can tell me your story when you come back.” Lady Marjory, generous and kind-hearted as she was, could not but be hurt at the way in which, as it seemed, she too had been deceived, nor was she used to being thrown over for little peasant maidens. The little Prince with a scared face looked round the room for some one with whom to leave her, but no one showed at that instant, and so, half-bewildered still and dreaming, he rushed away.

Only a minute before the old gentleman had said to Punchinello, “ Let us carry the little girl out upon the balcony, the fresh air may

revive her." And so it happened that the poor little Prince came to the very landing where they had waited so long, and found no signs of those for whom he was looking.

He ran about desperately, everywhere asking for news, but no one had any to give him. Who ever has? He passed the window a dozen times without thinking of looking out. Blind, deaf, insensible, are we not all to our dearest friend outside a door? to the familiar voice which is calling for us across a street? to the kind heart which is longing for us behind a plaster wall maybe. Blind, insensible indeed, and alone; oh, how alone! He first asked two ladies who came tottering upstairs, helplessly on little feet, with large open parasols, though it was in the middle of the night. One of them was smelling at a great flower with a straight stalk, the other fanning herself with a dried lotus-leaf; but they shook their heads idiotically, and answered something in their own language—one of those sentences on the tea-caddies, most likely. These were Chinese ladies from the great jar in the drawing-room. Then he met a beautiful little group of Dresden china children, pelting each other with flowers off the chintz chairs and sofas, but they laughed and danced on, and did not even stop to answer his questions. Then came a long procession of persons all dressed in black and white, walking sedately, running, sliding up the banisters, riding donkeys, on horses, in carriages, pony-chaises, omnibuses, bathing-machines; old ladies with bundles, huge umbrellas, and band-boxes; old gentlemen with big waistcoats; red-nosed gentlemen; bald gentlemen, muddled, puzzled, bewildered, perplexed, indignant. Young ladies, dark-eyed, smiling, tripping and dancing in hats and feathers, curls blowing in the wind, in ball-dresses, in pretty morning costumes; schoolboys with apple cheeks; little girls, babies, pretty servant-maids; gigantic footmen (marching in a corps); pages walking on their heads after their mistresses, chasing Scotch terriers, smashing, crashing, larking, covered with buttons.

"What is this crowd of phantoms, the ghosts of yesterday, and last week?"

"We are all the people out of Mr. Leech's picture-books," says an old gentleman in a plaid shooting-costume; "my own name is Briggs, sir; I am sorry I can give you no further information."

Any other time, and the little Prince must have been amused to see them go by, but to-night he rushes on despairingly; he only sees the little girl's pale face and dying eyes gleaming through the darkness. More Dresden, more Chinese; strange birds whirr past, a partridge scrambles by with her little ones. Gilt figures climb about the cornices and furniture; the book-cases are swarming with busy little people; the little gold cupid comes down off the clock, and looks at himself in the looking-glass. A hundred minor personages pass by, dancing, whirling in bewildering circles. On the walls the papering turns into a fragrant bower of creeping flowers; all the water-colour landscapes come to life. Rain beats, showers

fall, clouds drift, light warms and streams, water deepens, wavelets swell and splash tranquilly on the shores. Ships begin to sail, sails fill, and away they go gliding across the lake-like waters so beautifully that I cannot help describing it, though all this, I know, is of quite common occurrence and has been often written about before. The little Prince, indeed, paid no attention to all that was going on, but went and threw himself down before the purple bank, and vowed with despair in his heart he would wait there until his little peasant maiden should come again.

There Laura saw him sitting on a stool, with his fair hair all dishevelled, and his arms hanging wearily. She had come back to look for one of her pearl earrings, and when she had discovered it, thought it would be but friendly to cheer the Prince up a bit, and, accordingly, tapped him facetiously on the shoulder, and declared she should tell Lady Marjory of him. "Waiting there for the little peasant child; oh, you naughty fickle creature!" said she, playfully.

"You have made mischief enough for one night. Go!" said the Prince, looking her full in the face with his wan wild eyes, so that Laura shrank away a little abashed, and then he turned his back upon her, and hid his face in his hands.

So the sprightly Laura, finding that there was no one to talk to her, frisked up into the study again, and descrying Lady Marjory standing all by herself, instantly joined her.

This is certainly a lachrymose history. Here was Lady Marjory sobbing and crying too! Her great brown eyes were glistening with tears, and the drops were falling—pat—pat upon her muff, and the big bonnet had tumbled off on her shoulders, and the poor little lady looked the picture of grief and melancholy.

"Well, I never!" said Mrs. De Sade. "More tears. What a set of silly children you are! Here is your ladyship, there his little highness, not to mention that absurd peasant child, who is coming upstairs and looking as white as a sheet, and who fainted away again when I told her that the Prince's intended was here, but not the Prince. As for her—I never had any pa . . ."

"His highness? The Prince do you mean,—is he safe then?" said Lady Marjory, suddenly stopping short in her sobs. "Tell me immediately when, where, how, did you see him?"

"The naughty creature, I gave him warning," said Laura, holding up one finger, "and so I may tell your ladyship without any compunction. Heigho, I feel for your ladyship. I can remember past times;—woman is doomed, doomed to lonely memories! Men are false, the truth is not. . . ."

"Has he fought a duel,—is he wounded? Oh, why did I let him go!" cried Lady Marjory, impetuously.

"He is wounded," said Laura, looking very knowing; "but men recover from such injuries. It is us poor women who die of them without

a g-g-groan." Here she looked up to see if the bust of General Washington was listening.

Lady Marjory seized her arm with an impatient little grip. "Why don't you speak out instead of standing there maundering!" she cried.

"Hi-i-i," squeaked the green woman. "Well, then, he likes the peasant girl better than your ladyship, and it is his h-heart which is wounded. It would be a very undesirable match," she continued confidentially, recovering her temper. "As a friend of the family, I feel it my duty to do everything in my power to prevent it. Indeed, it was I who broke the affair off in the first instance. Painful but necessary. Who cares for a little shrimp of a peasant,—at least—I am rather sorry for the child. But it can't be helped, and nobody will miss her if she *does* die of grief."

"Die of grief!" said Lady Marjory, wonderingly.

"La, my dear, it's the commonest thing in the world," remarked Laura.

"Die of grief," repeated Lady Marjory; and just as she was speaking, in came through the door, slowly, silently stopping every now and then to rest, and then advancing once again, the old gentleman, and Punchinello, bearing between them the lifeless form of the little peasant maiden. They came straight on to where Lady Marjory was standing: they laid the child gently down upon the ground.

"We brought her here," said the old gentleman gloomily, "to see if the Prince, who has killed her, could not bring her to life again."

"O dear, O dear," sighed Punchinello, almost crying.

"Poor little thing, dear little thing." This was from Lady Marjory, suddenly falling on her knees beside her, rubbing her hands, kissing her pale face, sprinkling her with the contents of her smelling-bottle. "She can't, and shan't, and mustn't die, if the Prince or if I can save her. He is heart-broken. You, madam," she cried, turning to Laura, "go down, do you hear, and bring him instantly? Do you understand me, or you will repent it all your life." And her eyes flashed at her so that Laura, looking quite limp somehow, went away, followed by Punchinello. In a minute the Prince came rushing in and fell on his knees beside Lady Marjory.

And so it happened that the little peasant maiden lying insensible in Lady Marjory's arms, opened her sad eyes, as the Prince seized her hand. His presence had done more for her than all the tender care of the two old fellows. For one instant her face lighted up with life and happiness, but then looking up into Lady Marjory's face, she sank back with a piteous, shuddering sigh.

The old gentleman was furious. "Have you come to insult her?" he said to the Prince. "To parade your base infidelity, to wound and to strike this poor little thing whom you have already stricken so sorely? You shall answer for this with your blood, sir, and on the spot I say."

“Hold your stupid old tongue, you silly old gentleman,” said Mr. Punch. “See how pale the little Prince looks, and how his eyes are dimly flashing. He has not come hither to triumph, but to weep and sing dirges. Is it not so, little Prince?”

“Weep, yes, and sing dirges for his own funeral,” cried the old gentleman, more and more excited. “Draw, sir, and defend yourself, if you are a gentleman.”

But Lady Marjory, turning from one to the other, exclaimed,—

“Prince, dear Prince, you will not fight this good gentleman, who has taken such tender care of your little peasant maiden. Sir,” to the old gentleman, “it would be you who would break her heart, were you to do him harm.”

“And why should you want to do him harm?” said the little peasant, rousing herself and looking up, with a very sweet imploring look in her blue eyes, and clasping her hands. “He has done me none. It is the pride and happiness of my life to think that he should ever have deigned to notice me. It would not have been fit, indeed, that he, a Prince, should have married a little low-born peasant like myself.”

The Prince, scarce knowing what he did, beat his forehead, dashed hot burning tears from his eyes.

“Sir,” said he to the old gentleman, “kill me on the spot; it is the only fate I deserve, it will be well to rid the earth of such a monster. Farewell, little maiden; farewell, Lady Marjory. You will comfort her when I am gone. And do not regret me; remember only that I was unworthy of your love or of hers.” And he tore open his blue velvet coat, and presented his breast for the old gentleman to pierce through and through.

Now Lady Marjory began to smile, instead of looking as frightened and melancholy as everybody else.

“Button up your coat, dear little Prince,” said she. “You will have to wait long for that sword-thrust you ask for. Meantime you must console the little peasant girl, not I; for it is I who bid you farewell.”

“Ah, gracious lady,” cried the poor little monster, covering her hand with kisses, “it is too late, too late; a man who has broken her heart, who has trifled with yours so basely, deserves only to die—only to die.”

“Let me make a confession,” said Lady Marjory, speaking with a tender sprightliness, while a soft gleam shone in her eyes. “Our English hearts are cold, dear Prince, and slow to kindle. It is only now I learn what people feel when they are in love; and my heart is whole,” she added, with a blush.

Such kind words and smiles could not but do good work. The little Prince almost left off sobbing, and began to dry his eyes. Meanwhile, Lady Marjory turned to the little peasant maiden.

“You must not listen to him when he talks such nonsense, and is so tragic and sentimental,” she said. “He thought you had deceived him,

and cared for some one else. He sobbed it in my ear when he went away to find you."

"Hey-de-dy-diddle," cried Punchinello, capering about for joy; "and I know who told him—the woman in green, to be sure. I heard her. Oh the languishing creature! Oh the pining wild cat! Oh what tender hearts have women! Oh what feelings—what gushing sentiment!"

"You hold *your* tongue, you stupid Mr. Punch," said the old gentleman, who had put up his sword, and quite forgiven the little Prince.

"And so good-by, dear friends," said Lady Marjory, sadly indeed, but with a face still beaming and smiling. "See the moon is setting; our hour is ended. Farewell, farewell," and she seemed to glide away.

"Ah, farewell!" echoed the others, stretching out their hands.

The last rays were streaming from behind the house-tops. With them the charm was ending. The Prince and the peasant girl stood hand in hand in the last lingering beams.

"Good-night," said Punchinello, skipping away.

"Farewell," said the old gentleman.

"Goodness! make haste," said Laura, rushing downstairs, two steps at a time.

It seemed like a dream to the little peasant child, still standing bewildered. One by one the phantoms melted away, the moon set, and darkness fell. She still seemed to feel the clasp of the little Prince's hand in hers, she still heard the tones of his voice ringing in her ears, when she found herself once more on her bank of wild-flowers, and alone.
