

The Two Bracelets

I WAS poor, and taught in a French boarding-school.

My father and mother were dead, so I spent my Summer vacations with a rich aunt and her daughter Nettie.

Mrs. Renton—that is my aunt’s name—had always a hearty welcome for me, and begged me to make my home with her. But she was not a woman whom I could admire. Her idol was the world of fashion. To it she devoted her brilliant powers of mind, her attractive person, and her earthly possessions; whilst she totally neglected her daughter, who of all girls needed protection and watching.

She was pretty, young, and without worldly knowledge, though through reading French romances she had contracted a taste for adventure which I had often told her would lead her to harm. Therefore, though we were of the same age, twenty—I don’t mind telling in a story—I took the older sister’s part, won her confidence, and tried to be her mentor.

The Summer of 186— came, and with it the usual cordial invitation to spend my holidays with the Rentons. But I had just recovered from a fever brought on by overwork, and the “extra gay times” which Nettie promised seemed any thing but refreshing. Therefore, I went with the old maid who kept our school to a farmhouse near the village, on the borders of which was my aunt’s Summer residence.

I persuaded myself for a while that this was a delightful mode of life; but before my vacation was over, I had come to the conclusion that the “fresh eggs, cream, butter,” etc., which were put upon the table in such profusion as to take away one’s appetite, did not recompense me for being separated from my fellow-creatures. For, with the farm people I could not associate; when they were not working or eating, they were sleeping. And as for Miss Griffin — well, if I did not in ten school-months, I certainly did in my vacation, cease to call *her* a fellow-creature.

Solitude would have been preferable, for then I could have abandoned myself to enjoy the hills, the wood and the river in my own free way. But with Miss Griffin I was forced to live according to a fixed programme—breakfast, a short walk, dinner, a shorter walk, tea, then reading botany to the horrid woman until bedtime, which she insisted should be *half-past eight*.

Fear of losing my situation made me, like a slave, submit to his routine, but one evening I rebelled.

“Miss Griffin, what planet is that in the west?” asked I, just after tea, and thus enticed the old thing out on the porch. The farmer sat there smoking, and his wife by his side was hushing their baby to sleep.

It was just such an evening you read of in poetry—moonshine, breezes, sweet perfumes and all that, so I will not tell you of it here. But it was what I liked, and I was determined to enjoy it, so I seated myself upon the steps.

Miss Griffin fell into the trap, and immediately began a discourse on the geography of the heavens.

The rustic part of her audience dozed, and I built castles in the air.

What was it to me whether Venus was in right or wrong ascension? All I cared for was that some star would make my life a little less dull.

“The altitude of a star is the number of—” and the lecture suddenly ceased.

The attention of all was drawn to a gentleman riding up the path.

“I am a stranger in these parts: can you tell me how far I am from Eagleside, and which is the right road?” he asked, when his horse was quite up to the porch-steps.

“Wall,” said the farmer, first indulging in a yawn, “I guess it’s about five mile and a half, and you must take the road that turns to the left.”

“Thank you,” said the stranger, dismounting. “Now will you oblige me by watering my horse? he has come a long way. And, my good woman,” continued he, addressing the farmer’s wife, “will you quench my thirst in a glass of the excellent milk I know is in your dairy?”

The farmer went with the horse to the trough, and the woman entered the house.

Then the gentleman, after gazing at the Griffin for a moment, said to her:

“Beg pardon, madame, but as I came up I overheard you giving some useful information about the stars. Perhaps you could favor me with the name of that very brilliant one which has lighted me on my lonely way?”

Miss Griffin was transported. In the first place, he had called her “madame,” and in the second place, he had appealed to her astronomical knowledge.

She stood up, to be more impressive, perhaps to be nearer the stars, and recommenced her harangue.

He came up the steps, and stood by her side. Their backs were turned toward me.

He listened and looked, while she pointed and talked.

Presently his hand was stretched behind Miss Griffin, and a note was dropped in my lap.

The farmer and his wife returned. The stranger thanked them and Miss Griffin, and took his departure.

I now expressed myself very much in want of repose, and retired to my room, where I hastily examined the note, and found it to be from Nettie.

“DEAREST FLORA—Meet me tomorrow at the S—field Depot in time to take the 11:30 train for the city. Please do not disappoint me. Get off from that virago Griffin without telling her more than that I have sent for you. Let her think you are coming to our house. Much discretion is required. Word by mail could not reach you in time, so that Mr. Aldrich has kindly consented to deliver this note. Yours, in anxiety, NETTIE.”

“What could it mean?” thought I. “The world must be coming to an end when Nettie talks of discretion!”

I packed a few things in my satchel, and made other arrangements for leaving. Mr. Waters, the farmer, brought our letters from town daily in the morning, so that when at the breakfast-table I announced my intention of taking the 10:15 train, on account of news from Nettie, my cousin, no one questioned me, or connected in any way the stranger’s visit with my departure.

For the sake of rarity the train was on time. Nettie was at the depot, and to my great astonishment, by her side stood Mr. Aldrich. This threw some light upon the mystery. I was to witness a runaway match between my cousin and this gentleman. It seemed strange to me that he would be a party in any clandestine affair; he looked so noble. As for Nettie—I was not much surprised.

“I will explain all in the cars; we must hurry —see, they are about to start,” said Nettie, following Mr. Aldrich, and dragging me into the New York train.

“What is the meaning of all this?” I asked.

“Well, it is a long story,” said Nettie. “Let us get comfortably fixed before I begin. Allow me to introduce Mr. Aldrich to you—my cousin, Miss Flora Dean.”

I bowed, and the handsome gentleman made some pleasant remark about our rencontre of the previous evening.

“Now, Flora, I have done what you will call a very dreadful thing. You know I wrote about Mr. Berini, and sent you his picture—”

“Yes,” interrupted I, “and I wrote back that I was surprised you would encourage the attentions of such a looking man.”

“Well, hear me out before you scold. He proposed, oh! *so* sweetly, and made such handsome presents, that I consented to become engaged, for you know all the girls in my set are getting married. But he said it must be kept a secret from ma until he could go to Italy, and arrange some law business concerning his estates there. Then he would return and make me mistress of his wealth, and take me to his lovely chateau on the Arno. So he bade me farewell yesterday morning. But Mr. Aldrich, who has been at our house a great deal lately, guessed at half my

secret, and made me tell him the rest, and he says he feels certain Alphonso does not intend to go abroad.”

“You may be surprised,” said Mr. Aldrich, addressing me, “that I should interfere in Miss Renton’s affairs. But I will speak plainly. This man who calls himself Alphonso Berini—I beg your pardon, Miss Renton—has to me the face of a rascal. It is also rather to his disfavor that he has carried away a large portion of Miss Renton’s jewelry. Therefore, as I am an old friend of the family, I have taken the liberty of disclosing my suspicions.”

“But why not tell your mother?” asked I of Nettie.

“Oh, that would never do. You know, Alphonso would be angry with me if I told her. And if it *should* turn out as Mr. Aldrich fears, she would make matters worse, and we would have less chance of recovering my diamonds. I am just the least little bit frightened, and intend, with Mr. Aldrich’s assistance, to find out the truth. Therefore I wrote to you to come, for I want you to stay with me. I made the ‘Jerome Races’ the excuse for coming to the city at this time. I am going to open our town-house, and Aunt Betsey will play *chaperon*.”

“But, Nettie,” said I, “what about your diamonds? How did he get them?”

“Oh, I gave them to him. He gave me three beautiful sets—pearl, turquoise, and emerald; and that he might not think that I was entirely without jewelry, I showed him that diamond necklace that grandma left me, and which ma never would let me wear. He said the stones were exquisite, but oh! how he laughed at the old-fashioned setting! And then he offered to take them to Paris, and have them done in the latest style, *au jour*. And when he is in Florence, he is to get me some beautiful cameos.”

“And do you believe in him yet?” asked I.

“Yes; I have perfect faith in my Alphonso. He would not deceive me. But I wanted to come to the races anyhow, and at the same time I may as well convince this Mr. Prudence that I am right and he is wrong.”

“I should think that the jewels he gave you were sufficient to guarantee his return!”

At this remark of mine a comical expression overspread Mr. Aldrich’s face.

“Why, the fact is, Miss Dean,” said he “*they* have gone along with the diamonds to be reset in Paris.”

Nettie looked rather chagrined at this, but, brightening up a little, said:

“But he left me one of the two turquoise bracelets for a keepsake; the set is an heirloom in his family. See here!”

She pushed up the sleeve of her traveling-dress, and displayed her snow-white arm clasped by a handsome band of gold, set with a double row of the stones.

It must have been of great price, but could not be compared with the value of the diamonds.

We reached the city, and Mrs. Renton's house, about three in the afternoon.

Mr. Aldrich then went to see whether any one having the name "Alphonso Berini" had sailed for Europe.

Nettie lay down to rest, and I went to see how things were going on at the school.

Some of the teachers remained there during the Summer, and took charge of such pupils as chose to stay rather than go to their very distant homes.

To my surprise, I was told that Isabella Drake, our prettiest parlor-boarder, had already returned, and wished to see me; but she was out then.

I would have waited to see her had not something occurred which made me wish to hasten back to Nettie and Mr. Aldrich.

As I passed one of the up-town theatres, on my way to the school, I saw, standing at the ticket-office, the man whose picture Nettie had sent me as that of "her Alphonso."

I immediately stepped up, glanced at the numbers on the two tickets he had bought. They were orchestra chairs, "B2" and "B4."

He had no sooner turned away than I purchased seats "6" and "8."

Therefore it was that I hurried home, and, finding Nettie and Mr. Aldrich together, I told them of the circumstance.

"Now," said I, "Mr. Aldrich can take me to the theatre; we will sit next to him, and he knowing neither of us by sight, we will be able to trace him."

"No," cried Nettie, vehemently; "you must have been mistaken. It was not he whom you saw; and although Mr. Aldrich says he cannot find that any Alphonso Berini has gone to Europe, I know there *has*, for he told me he would sail this morning in the *Trinacria*. I *myself* will go, instead of you, to the theatre. If he is there I will see him with my own eyes."

"Oh, Nettie, Nettie, your faith is worthier of a better cause!" exclaimed I, seeing this wayward child in tears for the sake of a man I supposed to be a rascal.

When we had finished dinner, Nettie started to prepare for the theatre, and I joined her, saying:

“You may take me to the school. I will spend the evening with a young lady there, and you may call for me when the play is finished, unless Mr. Berini detains you. Then I shall stay all night.”

But upon reaching the school, I found Isabella out a second time.

“Miss Drake has gone to the theatre with her brother,” was the word I received.

“With her *brother!*” thought I. “I never heard she had a brother. Here I have to stay in this poky old school alone all evening.”

But I had barely seated myself to a book in Isabella’s room, when the door opened, and in walked the young lady herself.

“Oh, Miss Dean!” she exclaimed, “I am so glad to find you here. You must help me out of my troubles.”

She then threw herself down wearily upon the sofa, and I noticed she looked worn and pale.

I thought you were gone to the theatre with your brother?” said I.

“I went to the theatre with a man I called my brother to elude the vigilance of the teachers. But he is not and what is worse, he is a rascal, and I am his dupe.

Again I listened to the story of a girl’s folly, and I asked myself why women would allow themselves to be deceived.

The carriage sounded upon the pavement just as Isabella finished.

“You ask me to help you. Come home with me and I will,” said I.

I merely introduced her to Nettie and Mrs. Aldrich, and not till we reached home did I explain.

“What happened at the theatre?” I asked of Nettie, as soon as we entered the parlor.

She looked toward Isabella, and I said:

“You need not hesitate to speak before Miss Drake, for she is here to prove how faithful is your Alphonso.”

“Well, then, he was not there at all, and another gentleman with a lady took the seats you supposed he would have. So, you see, miss, you were mistaken after all.”

“Very well,” said I. “Now listen to me for a minute. A certain man, calling himself James Carson, corresponded with Miss Drake, and with numerous presents and protestations of love induced her to lend him large sums of money, and leave her home with the intention of marrying her. By appointment he took her to the theatre tonight, and on the way she promised to meet him

tomorrow at his hotel with sufficient money to defray the expenses of their passage to England. Upon nearly reaching their seats at the theatre, he stopped suddenly, told the usher that he objected to sitting so near the stage, and asked him if he would get some one else to take his seats— orchestra chairs, 'B 2' and 'B 4.' With this request the usher complied; but instead of taking the two seats vacated for him, Mr. Carson, after hesitating for a moment, suggested that he should take Miss Drake to some other place of amusement, as he did not like the character of the play at that one. She felt this to be a ruse. She began now to see through him, and, feigning a headache, she said she preferred to go home. She knew that this man had seen some one whom he feared, and she did not wish to be with a man afraid or ashamed to show his face. She was completely disenchanted; but lest she should lose all chance of recovering her money, she concealed from him that any change had taken place in her feelings. Now, Nettie, look at this bracelet, which was one of Mr. Carson's presents to Miss Drake."

Isabella took from her pocket a turquoise bracelet.

"It is the mate to mine!" exclaimed Nettie.

"Yes," said I; "and probably came from the same man. At any rate, we'll see."

Then I proposed a plan, and it was unanimously agreed that it should be carried out.

On the following morning, Miss Drake kept her appointment with Mr. James Carson.

The hour was eleven, and the place, the ladies' parlor of the — Hotel.

Five minutes later we—Nettie, Mr. Aldrich, and myself—entered the room, and found Isabella conversing with a gentleman—at least I will call him one.

"Alphonso!" cried Nettie.

And the man sprang to his feet, and gave vent to a horrid oath.

Mr. Aldrich then stepped forward to the fear-stricken creature, and said:

"For the sake of these ladies I will not expose you to the authorities if you immediately return to them their jewels and money. But refuse, and by ringing the bell I can summon the police.

The wretch was deadly pale, and trembled fearfully.

"Say nothing," he said, "and I will get them directly; they are in my room;" and he moved toward the door.

"I will go with you," said Mr. Aldrich.

And they left the room together.

I had no fear that this James Carson, *alias* Alphonso Berini, would make any resistance, for, in comparison to his puny frame, Mr. Aldrich looked like a giant.

I now turned to the two girls.

Their looks betrayed their disgust; but we did not exchange words upon the subject, for a stranger had entered the room.

In a few minutes Mr. Aldrich returned with James Carson, *alias* Alphonso Berini.

The stranger looked up from his newspaper, and had the delicacy to remove to the door, where he was out of hearing, and again buried himself in the paper.

The girls found the money and jewels all right, and they returned the turquoise bracelets.

Then, anxious to be out of this scoundrel's presence, we hastened to depart.

But before we could leave the room, the man of the newspaper came up, and, laying his hand on Alphonso's shoulder, said:

"I am a detective, and I arrest you for robbery. I will take charge of these bracelets, as they are among the articles you have stolen."

We waited to hear no more. Nettie and Isabella had learned a lesson, and were wiser women.

We are all three happily married now, and my name is Mrs. Aldrich.

Frank Leslie's Pleasant Hours, 1875 vol. 17 p. 353