

HEARTS AND DIAMONDS.

BY "THE SECOND."

VALERIE BELAYRE felt very cross. I mention this because it was something uncommon. Generally she was a sweet, loving little creature, though, like many other spoiled children, apt to be capriciously thoughtless. The cause of her crossness this evening was very great; literally, it was at least six feet high; in society it went by the name of Mr. Pendennis Channingsly. The first few weeks of her belledom at Carnevon Bay had pleased Valerie very much; she had agreed with Jettie Penrydden (who was her friend, and took care of her) that "it was fun," but latterly she had grown tired; and last night, when Adolphus Flutterby had spoken so contemptuously of the young lawyer as "only a plough-boy," she had felt quite disgusted. She hardly knew what had made her so angry; she was sure she did not like Pen Channingsly, and what Mr. Flutterby had said was quite true, still it had ruffled her temper. Valerie was not like handsome, energetic Jettie, who could separate the chaff from the wheat, and scatter it in a manner at once graceful and bewildering; she was naturally too dependent and sensitive, and consequently after the gloss of a new acquaintance was worn off, was more frequently bored than edified.

Pen Channingsly's quiet, handsome face had at first attracted her, and half inclined her to make friends with him; but, not thoroughly understanding the theory of "still waters," his somewhat cold dignity had chilled her, and, unworthy as she knew the feeling was, her favorable impression had subsided into something which was almost dislike. She was thinking of him, this evening, as she sat at the hotel window, looking out on the bay, and frowning very prettily on the strength of her irritation. How sweet she was, to be sure, in her cool, brilliant organdie, made still brighter with knots of scarlet ribbon fluttering at throat and waist, flaming like the wing of a tropical bird in a foam crown of short, flossy blonde hair; even the tiny pearl-shell ears adding flash and sparkle in the scintillations of their restless, quivering diamonds. Jettie Penrydden thought so; and, looking up from her sketching, smiled. They had been talking of Pen Channingsly a few moments before, and this had led Valerie's thoughts into their present channel.

"Well, Leri," said the young lady, "what do you think of him?"

Leri started, and then executed a small manoeuvre. Sleepily hiding her delicate, agate gray eyes under their black lashes, she yawned prettily, as a proof the subject was not very interesting.

"Think of him?" she echoed. "I think he's very big, Jettie."

"Oh, rubbish!" ejaculated Jettie, forcibly (she was apt to be forcible). "You know what I mean, his manners?"

"Oh," in rather a disdainful tone, "they are very—in fact, rather too *distingue* for a person of that kind."

The look in Jettie's eyes was rather quizzical. She was a straight-forward sort of girl, possessed of the peculiar gift of expressing an unfavorable opinion under a veil of fun, which made it amusing.

"That sort of people!" she exclaimed. "Are you an American, my dear, or the descendant of a three-tailed bashaw, or is it possible you are only a very charming little goose? I had the temerity to imagine myself living in a republican age, but, as I find I am mistaken, I am happy to say I am not ashamed of my forefathers. I believe one of my grandmothers was washerwoman to a nobleman's wife; in my opinion an infinitely more exciting position than that held by the lady herself. Imagine the fun on scrubbing days!"

Valerie laughed in spite of herself. "Jettie," she said, "you always take a fancy to such odd people."

Jettie pushed aside her drawing impatiently, and came to the window. "Is Pen Channingsly an 'odd' person?" she asked. "I wish you would define the term."

"Not like anybody else. Besides"—and Leri looked rather ashamed of herself—"don't you know what he was?"

"I know what he is, and that is quite enough for me. But if you mean what he has risen from, I can only say I am very sorry for you."

Leri looked amazed. Aristocracy was a curious hereditary failing of hers. "Do you think every one is alike, then?" she queried, naively.

"Alike. No. I think there is a slight difference between Mr. Channingsly and Adolphus Flutterby—but it happens to be a difference of brains. But apart from that, tell me what you mean by 'not like anybody else!'"

Valerie's pearly skin took an additional shade of pink. "I don't exactly know."

Miss Penrydden interrupted her rather sharply. "It occurs to me I do," she said, coolly. "The matter of brains, to some persons, might be a distinction without a difference; this cannot be, it is a self-evident fact to me, at least. It is rather curious your fascinations have availed nothing in this case, still I am surprised to see you so piqued about it." It was too bad of Jettie, but, not being quite perfect, she had lost patience, and felt a trifle spiteful.

The pink deepened to carmine. "Piqued!" indignantly. "If you think I dislike Mr. Channingsly because"—

"Precisely," was the provoking interposition. "And added to that, I think you are a little afraid of him."

Valerie was annoyed beyond bearing. To

think Jettie, of all people, should tell her openly of a weakness she had never acknowledged even to herself. Like many other people, she had a strong objection to looking unpleasant personal truths in the face, so she got angry, and did something very foolish. "I am not afraid of Pen Channingsly," she said, "and I will bet you a diamond ring that if I choose to take the trouble, he will propose to me before he leaves Carnevon." Very wrong and foolish, was it not? still I have nothing to do with that, I am only telling a story.

"*Ma chère*," was the reply she gained, "I will bet you two diamond rings, that if you meddle with edge tools you will cut your fingers, and lose not only your diamonds but your heart also."

She shook her pretty blonde head till her ear-rings flashed like sparks of light. "My heart is quite safe," she said. "I will prove that to you before a month is passed."

"I rather question it. I have warned you, though. If you hurt yourself, you must give your diamond to Pen Channingsly. I don't want it. *Au revoir* for the present; I am going to practise," and, nodding gayly, Miss Penrydden ran down stairs to the grand piano.

She was accustomed to brisk skirmishing with every one, that was her peculiarity, and Valerie always came in for her share, so she forgot about the foolish bet before she had finished her fantasias. Then, stepping on to the piazza, she ran against the redoubtable Pen himself, smoking quietly. She was quite startled; she had thought him absent on a boating excursion, which her friend and herself had declined joining on account of fatigue. "I wonder if he heard us," she thought. "He must have heard, if he has been sitting long, and he looks as if he had been camping here for a week." But a glance at his calm face reassured her, and when, in the evening, the party returning, Leri came down looking like a blonde fairy in gauzy white muslin, and sprays of tremulous syringa bells, the gentleman greeted her with so self-possessed an air as to make Jettie feel she had nothing to fear. "Thank goodness," so she said inwardly.

It so happened, however, that she was mistaken. Mr. Pendennis Channingsly was habitually self-possessed, and the total upsetting of a very pleasant dream, painful thought it might be, did not rob him of his nonchalance. Detained unexpectedly by business, he had returned to the hotel too late to join the excursionists, and, solacing himself with book and cigar, he had been surprised by the sound of a very sweet voice proceeding from an open window above him. This voice, happening to be one which always sounded uncommonly sweet in his ears, he stood his ground, and in so doing gained a foreknowledge of the fate in store for him. "Thank you, *ma petite*," he said, as the thing unfolded itself, "but I am fond of the game

of chess, and experience has taught me that an excellent thing in its way is—checkmate." In spite of his large heartedness, the man was but human, and wounds of pride are more difficult to heal than wounds of the heart. (Apropos of this. Are there such things as hearts in these days?)

When they met in the evening, Leri found great cause for astonishment. Calm, unimpressible, Pen fell into her train as naturally, to use Jettie's words, "as if he had been Apollo No. 1 all summer." At first she felt hardly at ease (probably the effect of a guilty conscience); she had not looked upon her bet seriously, and only thought of it to feel ashamed of her want of delicacy. She knew Jettie would forget it, if it was not mentioned again, so, as a proof of penitence, tender-hearted little Valerie tried her best to meet Mr. Channingsly's advances with a gratefulness which should atone for past misdemeanors. But, alas for this world of cross purposes, to watching Pen every merry jest, every pretty action, was only "confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ." Poor Valerie's thoughtless words had led her into a tangle of circumstances from which she would find it difficult to extricate herself.

The summer days flew by on golden wings, laden with pleasure and excitement. Carnevon Hotel filled and emptied, refilled and lost its guests again; but, of the original party, still a few remained. Of the few, Jettie Penrydden, Valerie, and Pendennis Channingsly occupied their old places. Valerie's bet had sunk into oblivion, as also had her dislike to its object. Her awe of him was overcome by his constant gentle attentions, she grew to look up to him as a sort of instinct. What he thought, it would be difficult to say; I fancy his emotions towards her were of a very mixed order. "People" generally said he was in love. Elderly matrons and virgins on the wane, having no flirtations of their own to attend to, took great interest in this one, and discussed it liberally. Miss Waterfall and Mademoiselle Chignon agreed that "it was very strange; she had been carrying it on all summer, and had brought it no farther than quotations yet." And then they appealed to Mrs. Shoddy, who shook her head, which doubtless meant a great deal. Handsome Pen himself walked through the debate stately and taciturn, head as erect as ever, and said nothing. (Apropos of this, also, and again. Would it not be better for the world generally, if some members of society made the same number of remarks?) Jettie Penrydden watched matters quietly, which showed her approval of the state of affairs. She looked upon her little friend pretty much as one would regard a pet bird or a sweet-tempered baby; protecting and strengthening her, scolding her energetically if she was naughty, praising and caressing her if she was

good. Having an exalted opinion of Pen, she allowed him what is called (if I may be permitted to resort to slang) "full swing," which liberty, in a certain self-possessed style, he took as if it was his right. Ruled by his air of strength, Leri half felt as though she belonged to him, and accordingly let him read more of her really honest, susceptible heart, than she would have done if she had understood all things.

Watching her day by day, clear-sighted as he was Pen felt puzzled. It would have been a difficult matter to abstain from admiring her delicate beauty, even had there been no other attraction, but that was not all. Like most proud, strengthful people, he was drawn towards her by her pretty, almost child-like timidity of manner. Jettie he admired as a splendid specimen of quick-witted, somewhat sarcastic girlhood. Valerie stirred his innermost heart with her shy, sweet eye, and soft little clinging hands.

"It cannot be acting," he said, pacing his room one evening. "But how can I hope that it is truth?" and then came ringing in his ears the words he had heard, "My heart is quite safe; I will prove that to you before a month is passed;" and the thought that this timid sweetness came only at the sound of his voice, made it, in his prejudiced eyes, not a cause of pleasure, but a fresh proof of falsehood; and he went down stairs to meet her with a hardened heart. He found her in the deserted parlor, standing on a footstool laughing and chirruping to a macaw which swung in a gilded cage above the vine-clad window. Her loose sleeve had fallen back, and her bare, dimpled arm gleamed whitely in the embowering green, as she held up one pretty hand that the bird might peck at the ring on her finger. As he entered, Jettie, promenading outside with one of her "special objects," called to her, as she passed, with what seemed to Pen warning significance.

"Take care, Leri, or you will lose your diamond!"

"No, I sha'n't!" flashed back Leri, carelessly. "My diamond is as safe as my heart."

"Proof upon proof," thought misguided Pen, as he advanced, feeling very stern, but smiling as pleasantly as if he did not wish to annihilate everything that wore muslin and yellow hair. "Is your heart safe, Miss Valerie?" he asked, gayly.

She jumped down from her perch, blushing till she rivalled the carnations at her belt. "I think it must be," she laughed; "for, at least, you startled me sufficiently to show no one holds it in possession but myself."

"It is not in any danger then. But, Miss Valerie, will you believe me, if I tell you that this theory of heart-beating is a poetic fiction to me? Mine never troubles me in the slightest degree."

"Perhaps you have got no heart, or, perhaps

you are very strong-minded. Jettie says" (Jettie was Valerie's oracle, consulted and quoted on all occasions) "it is nervousness, and I dare say it is."

"That may possibly be. But is it people or things which affect you?"

Leri shook her head, laughing, but with a brighter bloom on her creamy cheeks nevertheless. "That is not a fair question," making a pretty little *moue*. "Besides, it is you who should understand hearts; I never studied anatomy."

Pen, leaning against the window, looked down at her with a quickened purpose in his mind. "I may as well end it now," he thought, bitterly. "Ah, me! what a pity these golden apples are hollow at the core." "Miss Valerie," he said, aloud, "if you will come with me to the beach, I will tell you something about hearts which I think you have never learned before."

She glanced up at him, and then her eyes drooped. Her hat lay on the table beside them; he took it up, and giving it to her, they passed out of the hotel together. He did not speak, it needed all his strength to preserve his self-control. Never, until this moment, when he must shut her out of his heart forever, had he known how dear, how very dear she had become to him. To Leri, it seemed as though he was silent for an hour, but at last the words came, slow and stern. "You say I should know more of hearts than yourself. Perhaps I do; nevertheless, it was from your lips I learned how lightly women value them."

"What did he mean?" the sweet eyes were full of grieved surprise. Poor Leri! she did not understand it, but she knew it was not the realization of the bright dreams which had made her so happy.

"I heard your wager with Miss Penrydden, on the day of the Island picnic," he went on. "And I have helped you to play at cross purposes. I had not asked you for bread, Miss Valerie, but perhaps you saw I wanted it, and, forestalling the asking, gave me stones. I dare say I am very presumptuous; the heart of a man who is 'only a clod' can hardly be worth more; yet I had dared to hope you might rate it higher than a diamond—a paltry jewel, to wear upon your hand, to boast of as an ornament."

She did not speak or move. Had the day darkened? The soft moan of the waves seemed changed to hoarse thunders. Her face flushed and paled, one moment crimson, the next, dead white. She had learned to love him so; she had placed so much trust in him; she had tried, with pure girlish impulse, to be worthy of the love he had seemed to give, to make up for her past injustice to him, and this—this was the ending. Her eyes were dry and burning, but the hot tears rose in her throat, chokingly. Ah! if Pen could only have read

the depths of the little, half-broken heart then, I think he would have been merciful. Irrepressible Jettie, in her friend's place, would have skirmished magnificently, and dashed aside the cloud in ten minutes; but Valerie would sooner have died. No! he had misunderstood her; he thought her heartless and deceitful; she could only shrink and hide her wound silently; he did not believe her; that was too great a grief to struggle against. Pen looked at her astonished. It was scarcely shame that was on her face; what was it? He was struck with a strange feeling, half pity for her, half regret for his bitterness. Could she possibly love him after all? *Could* it only have been an impulse of thoughtless pique? How pale she was, poor child; for she was little more; he had been too harsh.

"The dew is falling," he said kindly. "Had we not better return?"

She took his proffered arm without a word, walking by his side as if she were dreaming.

Once at the hotel, and parted from her companion, Leri had but one more object in view—that was, to reach her room unaccompanied. Jettie was absent, riding with Apollo No. 10. Breaking away from the "dear five hundred," she ran up stairs to her chamber and locked herself in. She did not cry when she found herself alone—her heart was far too sore for that—she only sat by the open window, resting her hot cheek upon her arm, and thinking wearily. In spite of her efforts, her thoughts would pass in review over the last three months. Everything came back—every tender word she had clung to as a proof of the precious hope that she was loved. Ah, they had meant so much a week ago, they meant so little now. How kind he had been; how chivalrously gentle; how she had watched for him when he had been absent, wondering if he might not possibly be thinking of her; how her pulse had quickened at the sound of his dear voice, at the very ring of his foot upon the pavement. How well she remembered the night when he had twisted the spray of japonicas in her curls, and whispered—

"All for the love of the little mermaid,
And the gleam of her golden hair."

Even now, the thought of his magnetic eyes and light touching fingers made her raise her head with a swifter heart beat; it was only for a breathing space, though—the next moment she dropped her face again with a tearless sob. "It was not true," she said, shivering with keen pain; "he never loved me. Oh, he never loved me!"

The night came on; still she kept her place. It seemed, at last, as if she had lost all control over herself; her limbs trembled, her face seemed blazing, her head ached with the tumult of strange thoughts with which it thronged. She had a vague idea she was waiting for Jet-

tie; but when she heard her go to her room to retire for the night, she made no effort to call her. After that, lulled by the low plash of the water, she fell into a heavy slumber.

The next morning Miss Penrydden rose early, she had heard that Pen Channingsly was going to leave Carnevon, and this, coupled with the fact that he had promenaded with Valerie in the evening, roused her curiosity to an alarming extent.

"I thought something was the matter when she shut herself up so quietly, the shy little thing;" soliloquized the young lady, putting the finishing touch to a very fine chignon. "I know just exactly how she will look, bless her! I wish I was a man, that I might fall in love with her myself; but, on the whole, I believe I would rather be Jettie Penrydden considering Apollo No. 1."

Five minutes more and she was standing at Valerie's door, knocking vigorously. At first there was no answer, then she heard some one walk unsteadily across the room, the door was unlocked, and Leri, with crushed dress and dew-damped hair, gazed blankly on her face for a moment, and then slipped quietly on to the carpet.

Jettie's fright did not rob her of her presence of mind; she raised the limp little figure from the carpet, laid it on the bed, and rushed down stairs for assistance. The first person she met was Fendennis Channingsly; she stopped him in an instant. "Leri was very sick; wouldn't he go for the doctor, or send some one else?"

He would go himself "that instant," and, hardly waiting to ask what was the matter, he went on his errand.

Returning with a medical man, he was besieged by the "dear five hundred." Little Miss Belayre was not only admired by the gentlemen, but was also adored by the ladies; by some honestly, by others, on the principle of borrowed radiance.

"What was the matter? Do tell us, Mr. Channingsly. We do so hope it is nothing dangerous. Give our love to her, and tell her we are sorry," said one gushing damsel, with somewhat erratic ideas on the subject of delirium.

The doctor made an effort, and, extricating himself, went up stairs, leaving the unfortunate Pen struggling in a sea of muslin, trying to answer ten questions in a breath, and prevent ten ladies from leaving the hotel in terrible fear of cholera, fever, etc.

Jettie Penrydden was sitting by her friend's bedside holding her slender, feverish hand, and looking very anxious. "She caught cold," she said, in answer to the doctor's look of inquiry. "She fell asleep by the open window, and must have been there all night."

The doctor nodded. "That's it," he said. "And enough to kill her, too. Bad affairs, these watering-places, for a delicate organiza-

tion. Excitement upon excitement—weeks of it, and a surfeit of cold to finish off with. Poor little doll."

"Is it dangerous?" asked Jettie, tremulously.

"Well, I hope not. Serious, though. What is she saying?"

She was moving uneasily and talking. Jettie bent over her. "What is it, darling?"

The soft eyes opened wide. "O Pen!" she pleaded, "please believe me; I loved you always."

"Humph!" grunted the doctor, significantly.

"The best thing you can do is to keep her mind easy. I have seen this sort of thing before."

For three weeks following, Carnevon Hotel languished. Down stairs the gentlemen grew pale with anxiety, the ladies with vexation. Apollos Nos. 10 and 12 ceased thirsting for the blood of Apollo No. 1, and became friendly from excess of sympathy and lack of opposition. Up stairs, Jettie nursed and petted her patient as no other person in the world could have done; during her hours of delirium she constituted herself sole attendant. In her first day of watching she had learned a secret which she determined should be kept sacred.

"Poor little girl," she said, kissing the pale, childish face. "If I don't make it right, I shall fully expect to be vanquished in my next battle royal with the mythological hero."

The day a length came when Miss Jettie announced her intention of appearing in the parlor with her pretty convalescent. The gentlemen rejoiced openly, whereupon the ladies pouted in secret. Apollo No. 1 became an object of universal and deadly hatred, because he was the first to receive the news in a small pink note, upon the strength of which he assumed airs of triumph. Pale little Leri allowed her friend to arrange her toilet as unresistingly as a quiet child might have done, trying to look strong and happy, and failing signally. The consummation of Jettie's efforts was a costume delicate and lacy, giving one an impression of a fragile white blossom, fair and drooping.

It was rather a trial to Valerie the confusion of congratulations, and, before it was settled, she almost repented braving it, and felt half inclined to make an undignified exit. Wishing heartily that it was over, she amused herself with watching Jettie, who was manœuvring among her adoring battalions with the tact of a professed strategist. "How beautiful and brilliant she is," soliloquized Leri; "I wish I was like her."

"Rather high-headed, but a splendid fellow, nevertheless," broke in a voice behind her. "Not seen him since his return. Why, here he comes. Talk of the, etc."

She looked up to see who "he" was. Some one was entering the room; a glance, and she sank back in her chair with an excited heart-

fluttering, and the somebody, who happened to be Pendennis Channingsly, made his way to her side as calmly as if they had not been parted for an hour. She hardly knew what to say; she could only flush and tremble, and answer his grave greetings with confused shyness. He took a seat beside her quietly, with an air of ease which amazed her—by no word or glance giving a sign that he remembered their last interview. His manner was pleasant and kind, but Leri could not overcome her embarrassment, and, before half an hour passed, she worked herself into a perfect fever of excitement.

After a while came Jettie, sparkling and smiling; and how do you suppose she answered her friend's appealing look? "Leri," she said, gayly, "have you forgotten you owe something to Mr. Channingsly? I think you had better hand him the stakes while you have the opportunity," and, passing on, seated herself at the piano, filling the room with a young tornado of brilliant music.

Leri colored hotly; she did not understand the seeming unkindness; it appeared that her companion did, though.

"I think I won the stake fairly," he whispered, bending over her chair; "won't you give it to me, Leri?" There was no sarcasm in the tender voice now.

"It is your right," she said, half-chokingly.

"There were two prizes to be gained," he went on, softly. "Valerie, I wonder if I may choose between them?"

She caught her breath quickly, the room fairly whirled; it was almost empty now, the only remaining occupants being quick-witted Jettie, and a single musical adorer; a grand crash of the keys, and they too passed out. Leri's face drooped on to the arm of her chair, but Pen, bending over her, raised it with quiet strength.

"If you give me my choice," he said, "do you know what I shall ask for? Not the diamond—for I hope I have won the heart. Darling, I want 'the little mermaid.'"

What could she say? She said what was the easiest; she said—nothing. She laid her soft cheek on his breast, clinging to him with her tender hands. Pen stooped and kissed her, the best, indeed I should fancy, the only thing to be done under the circumstances.

Meeting them, later in the evening, Jettie, to Leri's great astonishment, took matters very coolly. "I know all about it, my dear," she said, oracularly, after she had repeated Pen's part of the performance; "I thought you would lose your diamond."

"But I got the heart," said Leri, shyly; "and that was better."

"Well," agreed Jettie, "I believe it was." And so do I, reader. At any rate, hearts proved the winning card in this game, at least.