

“MADEMOISELLE SUZETTE.”

BY FRANCES HODGSON BURNETT.

Yes, my name's Jagers—Signor Jager, the play-bills have it; and I'm the man that did it. And if you are particular about wanting to know the long and short of it, I'm hardened enough not to mind telling you, though I've never told the story straight out before, and, it is likely, never shall again.

“Terrible fatality!” the papers called it, and “shocking accident!” and all that. And so it was; and it was something more to me. A man does not find his life any lighter to bear, when he has a stain of blood on his hands, and it's the blood, too, of the woman he—

But never mind that—that's all over, like the rest of it.

She came to us in the early spring, nearly two years ago. I remember the time of the year well enough, and the night, too—a delicious, sweet-smelling, soft blowing sort of a night, after a pretty heavy shower.

We had just come from a little town about twelve miles behind, and were going to give our first entertainment in the new place the next day. We had the tents ready, and the company had scattered themselves, as they always did, when they had the time for a bit of a lark, for they were most of them young people, and given to that sort of thing. Fact is, I was the oldest performer among them, and I may as well own up that I wasn't a favorite, having the character of being a close, surly, sharp-tongued fellow, who didn't care to be sociable. And I dare say it was all true enough; at any rate, it's a way of mine to like to be left alone, and people generally find it out. So I was left alone that night, and was standing at the door of the big tent, looking up at the sky, and working out some notions of my own about the stars, when Leroy—that's the owner, you know—came up behind me, and touched me on the shoulder.

“Come in here, Jagers,” he says.

I turned half round, and saw he was smiling, as if something queer had happened.

“What's up?” I asked.

“Come into the back, and see,” said he. “I've got a fanciful little fish there as ever you saw, and I want your opinion on her.”

“Her?” said I.

“Yes,” he answered. “A girl, as I'm a sinner!”

I did not care about girls, and I did not care about going, but I went, because it was easier to go than to refuse. There was a kind of room at the back, curtained off from the rest of the tent. It was the owner's room, in fact, where all the business was done, and it was there Leroy led me.

“Come in,” he said, lifting the curtain, “and prepare yourself for a sensation.”

Now, I'm not a nervous fellow, or a susceptible one, and I was even cooler than usual that night, as I passed under the curtain, but I'll confess that when it fell behind me, and I saw her standing in the dim light, I gave a bit of a start.

She was not more than sixteen or seventeen, and she was dressed like any other little country lass just out of a hay-field or a dairy—short, coarse-blue petticoat, and print jacket, clumsy little shoes, and red handkerchief tied under her chin, and over her curly hair—and yet, I swear she was enough to make any man start at first sight of her. If it was to be comparing, I don't know anything I could compare her to but a rose-bud, or perhaps a red-tipped daisy, just opened fresh to the morning sun and dew; she was so rosy, and dimpled, and pretty, and childish. That was it, you see; she was more a child than a woman, a blooming, lovely, pouting child, half frightened, and half daring, and trying to look defiant from under her long, dark eye-lashes, even while the hand holding her little bundle was trembling, as I saw.

“This is my friend, the illustrious Signor Jager, my dear,” said Leroy, in his joking way. “The gentleman you saw at Rossthorpe, the only performer of the famous knife-trick in the world. Will you tell him why you came here.”

She gave me a shy, little, wilful look, and blushed and pouted more than ever, dropping her eyes the next minute, and working the toe of her stout little shoe into the sawdust.

“I ran away,” she said, at last.

“What for?” I asked, roughly enough. I had seen runaways before, and I knew faces like hers were better at home.

“I seen the show at Rossthorpe,” she answered, “and I want to be a lady, like them as acts, and rides the horses. I'm tired of farm work, and I won't stay at home no longer, and

my Aunt Jane needn't think I will. So I run away and come here, to see if I couldn't learn to be a actor."

I turned, and looked at Leroy, and he looked at me, hiding his laugh as well as he could.

"Well?" says he.

"It isn't well," I says. "She had better take her bundle and go back."

She heard me, and turned on me all in a pet, her soft, round, baby-face reddening, and quivering: big angry tears springing to her eyes.

"I won't go back!" she cried. "I won't go back—never—to be laughed at, and made game of. I'm going to be a lady. If you won't take me, some one else will. They've said many a time that—that my face was my fortune."

There was a childish triumph and certainty, even in the hesitant drop of her voice. Any simpleton could have seen that, little fool as she was, she knew her power as well as many a wiser and worldlier woman.

Leroy shrugged his shoulders, and spoke to me in an under tone.

"Shall I take her or not?" he asked.

"I won't have anything to do with it," I said.

"It is just such a face as we want," said he.

"Her clodhopper friends were not far wrong in saying it was her fortune. People will come, just to have a glimpse of her."

Then he spoke to her.

"What is your name?"

"Susy," she answered. "I won't tell the other one. You can call me anything you like. I don't want my real name on the bills if I stay; and it isn't a pretty one either."

"Susy?" said Leroy. "Well, Susy is a nice little name enough; but it won't do for a play-bill. Suppose we call you Mademoiselle Suzette."

Her eyes sparkled, and she laughed, like a child pleased with a new toy.

"Then you will take me?" she cried, eagerly.

"Yes," said he. "I'll take you, and we will see if we can't do something grand for you, though you will have to learn a good many things first. I'll take you, Mademoiselle Suzette, because your friends were in the right."

So it was agreed that she should stay. And when he was at leisure, Leroy took her up town, to the women's lodgings, and handed her over to the oldest of them, who was a good-natured creature, who had charge of the wardrobe, and sometimes took parts that did not need much good looks. Julia Mouncey, her name was, and a nice laugh Julia Mouncey had the next day, when she told us how Mademoiselle Suzette had conducted herself in her new role. We were

not a grand company; and if there were any jokes on hand, they were sure to be passed from one to the other freely enough.

"Bless you!" said the jolly soul. "It was as good as a comedy to hear her talk, and see her stand there with her eyes shining like a six-year-old's, just going wild with joy over the old things. I showed her tinselly rags, that wouldn't knock down for sixpence at auction. But I think the girls rather upset her when they came in, all in their common clothes. She thought they wore gauze and tights from morning till night, and she asked me afterward how it was that they didn't look red and white, and handsome, as they did when they were acting."

If they had not been a good-natured lot altogether, there would have been envy among them; but, as it was, they took to the girl as a good joke, and even made a sort of pet of her. She was not quick at learning things, and was plenty of trouble. But first one would give her a lesson, and then another, until she knew enough to go on and be looked at, if nothing else.

She was almost crazy with excitement the first night this happened, and the mixture of fright and ecstasy made her so pretty, that she was a sight to see. Leroy had built so much on her beauty, that he even commissioned Julia Mouncey to buy a couple of new costumes for her; and when she went in the first—a page's dress, that she had to dance a simple little dance in—you may believe it or not, but the whole house burst out into a roar of applause at the sight of her, even before she could make her bow and begin. It was her childish look that did it, as well as her loveliness. She had no stage air and grace, and could only stand behind the footlights, trembling with joy and fear; her immense, liquid, dark eyes dilated, and her cheeks, blooming with color, not knowing whether to run away or stay where she was.

Leroy stood at the side, in quite a fever of delight.

"Let her keep that baby look," he said, "and her fortune's made. Good Lord, how the public like a pretty little fool!"

The audience called her back again and again, but Leroy knew better than to let her go more than twice, though she was eager enough, and would have gone on half a dozen of times after the first, if she had been allowed.

When I came up, to be ready for my turn, she was standing at the left wing, panting like a bird, in her triumph. She had pulled off her little purple velvet, pearl-banded cap, and held it in her hand, and her hair lay in soft, moist, golden rings on her forehead. She looked as

fresh as a baby just out of the cradle, and she gave me one of her shy looks, from under her eye-lashes, and laughed and pouted.

"They liked me, you see," she said, "though you did say I'd better go back with my bundle."

"I didn't say they wouldn't like you," I answered.

She tossed her little head, and looked down at her cap.

"Then why did you say I had better go home?"

"Because I meant it," I said, and pushed by her without further parley.

I was a born fool. I knew it then, and I knew it all along, from first to last. There was not one thing about her that ought to have held a man's fancy for a minute. She was a vain, empty-headed little animal, and nothing more. She was ignorant for lack of opportunity; she was selfish, and had no more heart than a kitten. She cared for no human being but herself, and asked for nothing better than plenty of food and idleness, and fine clothes, and admiration; and yet I fell into her net in spite of every better feeling that held me back. If I had not given way myself, and, standing coolly aloof, had seen another man drift into such a mad fancy, how I should have jeered at him. And, for that matter, I jeered at myself, and struggled hard enough; but it was no use. Perhaps, however, I was a bit wrong in saying she had no other attraction than her baby bloom, and her big, dark eyes. There was something else about her, though it would be hard to describe what it was. It was a way she had, which took with women as well as with men, and made them wait on her, and treat her like a child; a sort of simple, helpless, careless fashion, of seeming to expect petting and sacrifice from everybody. She never did anything for herself, or gave thought for the future. So long as to-day brought comfort and sunshine, she never troubled herself about to-morrow. She would curl up in a warm corner, and watch Julia Mouncey sew for her until midnight, and then would turn in and fall asleep with a smile on her lips, never seeming to have a doubt but that her costumes would be ready for her, though her own little bungling fingers had not been trusted with the work for a minute.

"I'm glad I run away," she would say. "I wish I'd done it sooner. I'm happy here. You are all so good-tempered. I hate my Aunt Jane!"

"Though her Aunt Jane," said the Mouncey woman, afterwards, a trifle out of patience, "has been a mother to her, as I have found out from what her own lips have told me."

And yet it was this very pretty, selfish helplessness that fascinated us. A different face would have made it a different thing, but that face of hers made fools of one and all. Her very vanity helped her, too, since it caused her to be eager for admiration, and anxious to please people where it might be done without self-sacrifice. What was it but vanity that made her make advances in her pouting, whimsical way, even to me? Being the madman I was, how could I help watching her in secret at all times, and standing at the wings when she went on to sing her little idle songs, and dance her simple dances, which were mere nothings, and yet always brought down the house, as if they had been something wonderful?

I had been watching her so one night, when the public were more than usually cold over her, and as she came running off, she saw me, and stopped suddenly, hanging her curly head, and pouting out her red lips petulantly.

"What do you look at me for?" she demanded. "You don't like me. Why should you stand there always—when you hate me so?"

I set my back against the wing, and folded my arms grimly.

"Do I hate you?" I answered.

"Yes, you do," said she.

"Then, all the better for me," said I.

Most girls would have been rebuffed, but it was not her way to feel things deeply. She opened her eyes full upon me in an innocent, surprised fashion, but without a hint of real anger in her expression.

"I haven't never done nothing to vex you," she said.

"No," answered I.

"Other people like me," with a fresh pout.

"I dare say," said I.

It was only her vanity that was stung, but, as I have said, her vanity was all that ever was touched by anything. To see even an ugly fellow like me, cold and unresponsive, was enough to upset her a bit. The dimples about her mouth began to work, and her eyes grew big and moist all at once. She dropped her little cap, and stopped to pick it up, and when she raised her head, there were pettish tears on her lashes.

"I don't care," she said. "Every one else—" And there she broke off, and tried to run past me.

It sounds like a poor business enough, when it is told; but I swear to you, I lost all power over myself. Before I knew what I was doing, I had caught her by the arm, and was holding her fast.

"Let me go!" she said. "I—I hate you!"

“It was me that hated you a minute ago,” I said, almost savagely. “Look at me, and see if I hate you.”

I made her turn round in spite of her efforts, and I think my look frightened her, for the next instant she hid her face in her little hands.

“Do I hate you?” said I.

“I—I don’t know,” she panted. “No—no—you don’t. I want to go. They are calling me.”

“May I stand here and watch you every night?” I asked, and yet not gently, either. I was wild at myself, even while I said the words.

Then she drew her hands away, and gave me a look—half-triumph, half-terror.

“Yes,” she whispered, “if you like.”

“I do like,” I said, “or I shouldn’t do it.”

And then I let her go.

Only the next morning, Leroy came to me with a piece of news.

“The Wallers are going to-morrow,” he said.

“And we shall be in a nice fix if we can’t get some one to fill Lotta’s place. We can do without the other one well enough, but it is pretty bad on us to lose Lotta.”

He was right there. The public liked the knife-trick—principally, I used to think, because it was such a dangerous bit of business, and made them hold their breath until it was over, and I made my bow to them. And it was a dangerous business, too; as dangerous as it looked, which is saying a good deal.

This was how it was done, though, I dare say you have heard of it, if you haven’t seen it. The girl Lotta, dressed in a fancy boy’s costume, stood against a kind of screen, at which I threw a number of large, sharp knives, all escaping her by a hair’s-breadth, until she was literally pinned, or panned in with them. They pierced the screen above her outstretched arms, and under them, down her sides, and around her hand; and often as I had practised, and old as the trick was to me, I can tell you I never did it without an uncomfortable feeling, and a wish that it was over. But, as I have said, the public liked it, and it was so rare, that we could not dispense with it, and it was true enough that we should be in a tight place if we could not find some one willing to run the risk, and cool enough to do it safely.

“There’s no one who can do it,” I said.

Leroy laughed, a dubious, uncomfortable sort of laugh.

“Well,” said he, “it seems not; but I have an idea, if we can manage her—and there’s nothing more sure than that—she would take wonderfully.”

“Who?” I asked, sharply.

He laughed again, and twisted his mustache.

“Mademoiselle Suzette,” he answered. “You know what a sensation she always makes; and she isn’t nervous. She’s a cold-blooded little animal, though one would scarcely fancy so to look at her. And she would do anything for a new costume, and I’ve promised her the prettiest she likes to choose for herself.”

“What?” cried I. “Have you spoken to her about it?”

“Yes,” said he, shrugging his shoulders, “and though she was more than half-frightened at first, I am not sure but the idea of a new triumph pleased her. The costume was the bait, however. She would sell her soul for a spangled petticoat, and she would scarcely lose by the bargain.”

“Leave her alone,” I said. “Her soul is none of our business.”

There was a moment’s pause, in which he looked at me as if he was waiting to see what else I was going to say. Men understand each other well enough as a rule, and he understood me.

“I won’t do it,” I said, at last.

“You won’t?”

“No, said I.

“Very well,” said he, and walked away whistling.

He was sharp enough to know better than lose his temper, and argue the point. If he had done that, the end would only have been a row, and defeat for him; and, as I say, he knew better than to run any risk.

He managed the matter another way. He went and talked to Susy, and the consequence was, that when next I saw her, she was in a pet, and would scarcely look at me.

“What’s the matter?” said I.

“Nothing,” she answered, and looked crosser than ever.

In a minute, however, she took a new turn, as I knew she would.

“No one ever said they wouldn’t act with me before,” she broke out, tossing her head. “There’s plenty as likes me well enough to wish they could.”

“Who told you I wouldn’t act with you?”

“Mr. Leroy.” And then all at once she raised her eyes to mine. “Why wouldn’t you?” she asked.

“Because,” said I, faltering like a fool, “because I wouldn’t trust myself.”

“I’d trust you,” she said. “I’ll trust myself with you—with you.”

She had no more sentiment about the matter than Mouncey herself, but she blushed, a sudden

lovely blush, and then tried to laugh it off in her foolish, pretty fashion.

"I wouldn't trust everybody," she added; "but I know you wouldn't trust me."

I had never known just how weak I was until then, when I found myself giving way to her, knowing it was madness.

"Do you want to take the place?" I asked her.

We were standing at the door of the tent, and she looked out at the blue sky far away, as if she saw Heaven, and nothing nearer.

"Leroy says I shall wear pink satin, and black velvet and gold," she said. "And I do so like pink satin, when it's shaded with black velvet."

She made me feel rough and half-savage.

"Do you like it well enough to risk your life for it?" I said.

She gave me the usual pout, and a laugh like a bird's trill.

"You wouldn't hurt me?" she answered. "Nobody would; but you less than anybody." And that bit of daring, triumphant folly was harder on me than all the rest.

So, to make the story short, Leroy got his way, and I practised in secret by the hours. I did not want every one to know what an idiot I was, so I kept it quiet, only telling Leroy that I would not try the trick in public until I had got used to the idea of doing it with a strange face before me. It was even harder than I thought when it came to the point, and I had to practise with the child herself, shuddering at first at the whiz of the knives, and yet trying to laugh.

"Shut your eyes," I used to order her; "and keep them shut. I don't want to see them."

But of course we both got pretty well used to it in time. One thing is certain, she was the coolest of the two always, and, at last, could laugh, and look her loveliest, from beginning to end of the business, and did not seem to care how long it lasted, if people only applauded; and many a little tiff we had, because I was so determined never to let any amount of clapping and calling make me go through it twice in a night.

I suppose I ought to know what I looked forward to in those days, but I must say I don't I was oftener miserable than not, and always restless and ill at ease. She did not care for me, I know, nor for anybody else but herself, for the matter of that, though she had more admirers than she could have counted on her fingers in half a day.

"I don't want to be married," she used to say to Mouncey. "I wouldn't be married," with a little shudder, "for anything in the world. I want to live this way always. Jen-

nie Wyce, in Rossthorne, got married, and she used to have to nurse horrid little babies, and sew, and work. And she was pretty, too, once. I would rather die than live as she did. No one cared for her."

"Pooh!" said Mouncey, who was fond of joking her. "You must marry a lord."

"A lord!" she said, eagerly, opening her eyes to their widest, as Mouncey told me afterward. "Do lords ever marry girls like me?"

"I should think so," said Mouncey, "Read the penny journals, and see if they don't. They never marry any one else. They like actresses the best—and flower-girls, and milliners. I have read of one who took a little crossing-sweeper, broom and all, in preference to a beautiful young duchess, with golden hair, and a haughty way, and two million a year, not to speak of family diamonds."

"And," says the woman to me, when she told the joke, "she believed it, and colored up her loveliest, and lay on the sofa thinking about it, with her eyes all in a shine. You mark my words, the innocent little fool will be on the lookout for a lord from this day forward."

There might have been a fate in it. It was not three days, before Leroy came to me laughing.

"We are going up in the world, by Jove!" he said. "Ford tells me we had a live marquis among the audience last night, and he came to see Mademoiselle Suzette. Did you see that pale, handsome, long-legged fellow in the front row? That was he."

"He had better have stayed at home," I said, savagely.

"I dare say," said Leroy, "for his own sake, as well as for Mademoiselle Suzette's. For my part, I should not care to be troubled with her, charming as she is."

That night, when I went to look out at the audience, I found Mademoiselle Suzette peeping through a hole in the curtain; and when she heard me she turned round, blushing like a frightened child.

"I was looking for the lord," she stammered. "I never saw a lord, and they say there is one in the audience. Do you know which one he is?"

"He's in the second row to-night," I answered, half-sneering. "The third man—a swell, with lilies of the valley in his button-hole. How do you like his looks? Different from the rest of us, isn't he?"

"Oh, yes!" she burst out, at her first glimpse of him. "He's handsome, and nice, and his clothes are so beautiful!"

She stood there watching him until she was

obliged to go on, and then she went, all in a flutter.

“I—I wonder if he will like my singing,” she said, tremulously, to me, as she passed me. “I’m frightened.”

She had no need to have been frightened. It was not her singing he had come to hear.

His cool, indifferent face brightened, as soon as he caught sight of her, and he leaned forward, not missing a gesture or expression, as she did her part. Sometimes he smiled a little, but oftener he simply watched her, as he might have watched a beautiful bird, and at the end of her song he detached the lilies of the valley from his coat, and threw them lightly and deftly toward her, so that they fell at her feet.

She had never received such a tribute before. Ours were not swell performances, and the people who usually attended them, thought more of getting their money’s worth, than of paying compliments to the actors. She came off with the flowers fastened in her bodice, and she was in a state of such ecstatic excitement, that she ran by me without seeming to see me at all.

Well, the next night he was there again, and the next, and the next; and always, after the first time, he brought a bouquet with him, and threw it to her; and so it went on for a week. At the end of that time, Mouncey came to me in a fret.

“It’s time for you or Leroy to do something,” she said.

“There’s nothing to be done,” I answered.

I hadn’t been looking on without seeing things, but what right had I to interfere, though I was wretched enough to be more than half mad.

“There was a ring in her bouquet last night,” she went on, “and this morning she went out to meet him. Bessie Jones has written three notes for her already. I have found that out.”

“Well,” said I, savagely, “stop it if you can.”

“Don’t be a fool,” she replied. “It’s not women who can stop women—women like her, at least. If Leroy can bully her enough to frighten her, or if you give her a lecture—she is half afraid of you, and it pleases her vanity to think she has made a fool of you—she may be held in check until we go away from here; and then, if he does not follow her, she is safe enough. She would forget the Angel Gabriel a week after she lost sight of him.”

“Leave her alone,” I broke out. “You women have a spite against each other.” But I knew I was giving way to wild folly, even as I spoke.

She only laughed, in a comfortable scorn of the implied accusation.

“What?” said she. “Am I young enough to be jealous? A woman whose pink and white days are as far behind as mine are, ought to have got over envy. Bless you, man, I’m nigh on to fifty, and as tough as you. Keep your temper, and don’t be simple.”

That night, after the great knife-trick, when the bouquet flew toward Mademoiselle, a note fell out of it, and I poked it up and put it in my pocket. She colored up furiously, but dared not speak until we left the stage, and then she turned on me, ruffled like an angry bird.

“Give me my letter!” she demanded.

I took it from my pocket, but held it to.

“A nice fellow—my lord!” I said, trying to speak without raging. “A charming fellow!”

She stamped her little pink boot on the boards.

“Give me my letter!” she cried. “Quick, quick!”

“Why quick?” said I. “Is he waiting to know if you will come?”

She reddened to the very roots of her curly hair, in her pretty fury of impatience, and she struck her hands together.

“Give it me!” she said. “I will tell him. It is no business of yours. I hate you!”

And that was the truth, too. She would have hated the best friend she had, if they had crossed her in the merest trifle of a whim. That was her way. And yet, while I knew this, I could not help feeling a horrible pang when she spoke the words. They seemed to drive me wild, after a manner.

“Do you know where you are going to?” I asked her.

“Do you think I shall tell you?” she answered.

“I don’t mean that,” I returned. “I mean, do you know that you are going to the devil—to wretchedness and despair?”

I might as well have talked to the wind. There was not a warning on earth that could have touched her ever so slightly. She broke into a shower of tears, but it was only because she was afraid of being kept from her lover, and because my interference irritated her.

“I want my letter!” she sobbed, pettishly. “He—he will be gone!”

What seized hold of me I cannot tell. I seemed to burst into a rage of feeling, notwithstanding my better sense. I flung the note upon the floor, and staggered back against the rough wall, hiding my face in my hands. I must have been holding on to some hope before, without knowing it.

"Oh, my God!" I cried. "Why is it that you are not a good woman?"

I had not been in the habit of thinking about women, but just at that moment I seemed to be knocked down, all at once, with a sense of what my gloomy life might have been made, if she had had a pure, loving heart, and I might have worn it. But she answered me like a spoiled child.

"I don't want to be what you call a good woman. I hate good women!" And stooping down, she picked up her note, and was off in a flash.

Leroy was wiser than I was, however. We had been doing well enough, and making money, since our arrival in the town; but in half an hour after this he came to me.

"We must leave here to-night."

"What?" I answered.

He produced his pocket-knife, and began to trim his nails, composedly.

"I cannot afford to lose Mademoiselle Suzette," he explained, in his coolest style. "And I don't intend to if it can be helped. I mean to check-mate my lord."

I understood clearly enough then, of course; but I made no comment.

"It is the only way," he went on. "I know the foolish girl. That business of the ring looks badly for us, and he has money enough to give her as much trumpery as she can stand up under. And he will do it. He is one of your indifferent, lavish kind."

It seemed nothing but natural that there should be some trouble with the girl when she was told the news. When she came in that night, she found Mouncey putting the last few things in the trunks, and on hearing her explanation, the woman said she turned pale, and began to cry in an excited kind of way.

"I don't want to go," she said. "It's so sudden. What is it all for?"

"Business reasons of Leroy's," answered Mouncey. "What ails you?"

"Nothing; only—only I don't like to be worried so. Where are we going?"

"I don't know."

"I wasn't going to tell her," she added, afterward. "She was sharp enough, silly as she is, to slip out to him again, or, at least, to send him word."

She fretted and pouted all that night, and showed ill-humor through the whole of the journey, which Leroy had taken care should be a longer one than usual. Mouncey had a comfortless enough time with her; and when we reached our stopping-place, it was two days before she would take her usual place in the performances again.

"Says her head aches," said Mouncey. "And I dare say it does, after all that temper."

"Pooh!" commented Leroy, tolerantly. "Leave her alone. She will be eager enough to show herself in a day or so."

And so she was. Petulant as her humor was, she found it dull work playing the invalid, and the accounts the rest brought her of the enthusiasm of the audiences, stirred her vain little soul within her. On the fourth day her headache disappeared, and she was ready to appear.

"She's safe enough now," said Mouncey, in a week's time. "Safe until the next one comes on the boards. She has let my lord drift into the back-ground, and is full of nothing but the blue satin and silver Leroy has half-way promised her for the knife-trick."

She even became as friendly as ever with me, and acted quite as if she had forgotten her anger. The fact was that the people admired her so much, that she had quite enough to make her happy. And it was no wonder that they admired her, for she grew prettier every day; prettier in the rose on her cheeks, and the gold of her hair, and the softness of her dark, dewy eyes. There wasn't a man or woman living, who could have looked at her for the first time, without being fairly startled by the sight of so much beauty.

But I may as well cut my story as short as possible.

Leroy gave her the new suit, and Mouncey made it for her—a page's costume of blue satin, slashed with silver, and ornamented with pearl tassels and fringe, dangling and swaying as she moved.

She came out of the dressing-room the first night she wore it, just before we were to do the knife-trick, ready to go on in all her bravery. Mouncey had dressed her, and I'll own it upset me a bit, right at the beginning, just to look at her—all gloss of satin, and glow of color, her little head running over with short, soft baby curls; a half-shy, half-triumphant pout on her lips, her eyes full of delight. She saw me standing watching her, and she came and stopped before me.

"Is it as pretty as the pink?" she asked.

"Yes," said I.

"Is it—is it prettier?"

"Yes."

She laughed; a breath of a laugh, as if she was so pleased with herself that she could not help it, and then she stood pluming herself like a bird, turning her head over her shoulders, this way and that, and touching up her pearl fringes, and the white feather in her cap, and the studded belt at her tiny, lissome waist.

"I wish it was time for us to go on," she said. "I don't like to wait."

And those were the last words I ever heard her speak.

They called us almost the next instant, and on we went.

The very moment the audience caught sight of her, they broke loose. They clapped, and shouted, and stamped; they even waved their hats, and rose in their seats; and, for several minutes, there seemed nothing but to let her stand there, bowing, and dimpling, their eyes feasting upon her.

But of course it stopped at last, and we took our places, she in her usual position against the screen, and I myself at the other end of the stage. It isn't easy to tell, you may be sure—that's what shortens my breath, and makes me break down here and there.

I threw straight enough for a while, straight enough and cool enough. My hand was as steady as it had ever been, until near the end. It was the last knife I was going to throw—the very last—and she moved. I swear she moved! She turned her eyes towards something in the audience, not far from us—some one who had just come in; and somehow, she drew my eyes with her, and I saw, too. I saw him—her lover himself—sitting a few feet beyond the stage, watching us; watching her as he had always done, with a light, cool smile upon his fair face. It was the last knife, and I held it balanced in my hand; and I threw it, and it struck!

And there was a strange, sharp cry, and her little hands were tossed up wildly in the air, and she fell!

Good God! do you think any man could ever picture the least thrill of the madness that fell upon me!

There was a roar of voices, and a rush, and a kind of horrible shriek among the people; and some mounted their seats, and denounced me in their first tempest of excitement; and some climbed the stage, and those who were behind

ran on, and the women wrung their hands, and sobbed in hysterical fright, and the men crowded round; and the first among all was her lover, who came near, but did not speak, only stood by, with a white face, trying to hold still the shaking hand which held crushed a bouquet of lilies of the valley.

I had caught her almost as she fell, and I held her crushed against my breast, almost as he held the flowers, but my hand was red with the little stream which trickled from the triangular mark upon the side of her white temple.

The medical man who was brought in, only bent over her a moment, and then stood upright.

"Dead!" he said. "Penetrated the brain. Stand back, you men, and let them carry her away!"

And they took her from me, and left me, empty-handed, and panting. And all the crowd fell away, and stared at me as if I had been a strange wild animal loose among them.

I don't know what I thought of, or if I thought at all, I don't remember. I know I turned from right to left, and shook as if an ague had seized me, and then my eye caught a glimpse of one man again, and my blood seemed to rush and boil in my veins.

"You devil!" I shouted. "You devil—it was you—it was you—it was you!" And I sprang at his throat and clutched him, and so seemed to fall into black darkness.

That is how it was, and that is all. She was dead, and I had killed her. "Accidental death!" the jury brought in, with a censure upon the dangerous nature of my performance. And there were plenty who were sorry for me, and who were kind to me during my illness. It was worse for me than for her, some said. A pretty, innocent creature like that, they always added. "So pretty, and innocent, and young!" But, as I say to myself often, there is only one thing for me to remember, and I am not the man to forget it. She is dead, and the hand which struck her death-blow was mine—MINE!

A PRAYER IN WEAKNESS.

BY JANE STURTEVANT.

Oh, FATHER, infinite and near,
My will subdue, my heart control!
With weary, helpless, burdened soul
I cry to Thee, and Thou wilt hear!

The restless longings of the past,
The frantic clasp of hands that strained
To clutch a gift Thou kept'st, unstained
For meeker thanks—at last! at last!

The bitter word, the idle hand,
The blind revolt against Thy will,
Forgive them, Father, ah! if still
My prayer war not with Thy command.

Oh, make them memories dark and dim,
Whose warning visions only meet
My eyes when earth-love seems too sweet,
Or songs of triumph drown my hymn!