

# A PAIR OF PLAYERS

By VIOLA ROSEBORO.

(Copyright, 1896, by the Author.)

"Aunt Maggie, it's raining. Have you got your rubbers? Yes, I brought the big umbrella. You'd better tie a handkerchief over your head, though."

These remarks were made in a queer, half mincing yet masculine voice outside my dressing room door. They were evidently addressed to some one in another dressing room.

We were in a dirty little place called by its patrons an opera house.

I recognized the queer voice. It belonged to an odd, active boy who had taken a part in the evening's theatrical performance. But what caught my attention was the statement that it was raining.

I had that day come on from New York to join this company. I was exhausted with fatigue. I had no umbrella. Certainly I should need a handkerchief over my head.

When I was ready to leave the hall, it seemed deserted, but as I reached the outer door I came on the herald of the weather. He was on his knees, his mouth full of pins, shortening Aunt Maggie's petticoats. The woman was also a member of the company.

They barred my way. As I stopped they both looked up and spoke together.

"Why, it's Miss Addington. Miss Addington, allow us to introduce ourselves." The boy had sprung to his feet with preternatural alertness, and now, continuing the last speech I have quoted, said, "This is Mrs. Mason, and I am Cassius Wetherby." Then with an abrupt change of tone: "Let me pin up your skirts too. I have a whole paper of pins here. Allow me." And there he was upon his knees at my feet working away with professional dexterity and speed.

"We were saying it must have been a very hard evening for you. You did wonderfully."

"No rehearsal at all. It was wonderful."

"Why, Cassius, she has no umbrella."

"Well, we've one big enough for three."

With a loquacity and good nature too great to be quelled by a mouthful of pins Cassius kept up his part in a conversational duet till he had arranged my wet weather toilet to his mind.

Then, with all possible care for my comfort, the two escorted me to the hotel, the hotel where all the company were housed.

I had had a good fire kept in my room, so I asked them to come in with me and dry themselves. Theatrical people are apt to be reserved and indifferent with any new unknown member



coming into a theatrical company, inhospitality, obvious or disguised, being always the natural result of continuously multiplied dealings with strangers, so as we ranged ourselves about my rusty stove, speaking upon an unconsciously reasoned hypothesis, I said:

"You are new to this business. You won't take so much trouble about people when you've been longer on the road."

Both my visitors answered me. I had not thought of this middle aged woman as being new to anything, but with the boy she cried out, "Oh, we've had a good deal of experience." "Indeed we're quite old stagers," said he.

Then I realized that here were indeed two novices, stage struck novices.

The company to which we belonged was a melancholy organization. It played a "repertory," and it staid a week in towns that "combinations" and stars—real stars—leave in one night, and it visited places that such more fortunate mummies neglect altogether. The bill was changed at every performance, taking our sojourn in one town, and nine or more performances were given in the week. In short, we were a "snide" company. We represented theatrical life in one of the least glittering phases.

Nevertheless he knows little of show folk who would assume the absence of good talent among us. We, like many another such bankrupt organization, were headed by an excellent, solidly trained old actor. He was our star and our manager, and, "down on his luck" as he was, I had been glad to join his company for the experience I could get out of it. I already had enough experience to know that there was little prospect of any other compensation from him. This being my position, I hastily so explained it to Mrs. Mason and Mr. Wetherby, hoping to soothe their feelings by calling myself a novice. They exchanged glances of satisfaction at the announcement.

"That's just what I've told Aunt Mag," said Cassius.

"Cassius and I think you can't have too much experience," said Aunt Mag, continuing: "We come for experience too. Mr. Leroy isn't altogether what I'd wish in some respects."

"This is between ourselves, of course," put in Cassius.

"Cassius, Miss Addington is a lady, and a lady of discretion," Mrs. Mason certified with an astuteness equally surprising and gratifying. "He some-

times uses profane language, Miss Addington, and—but I won't talk about it. I don't wish to gossip, but he is a first rate stage manager, isn't he, Cassius? We feel that we have learned a great deal in this engagement, don't we?"

Cassius did, and he also reminded Mrs. Mason that it was late and that I was tired, and he told me that it just rained Aunt Maggie not to have her sleep. "I'll have to bring her breakfast up to her now. They close the dining room so early. They don't show the consideration they ought to professional people."

I congratulated Mrs. Mason on her prospect of breakfast in bed. That truth brought forth more conversation:

"Oh, Miss Addington, he is so good to me. I don't know—I suppose I'd have been sewing in Chicago yet if he hadn't—no, I wouldn't, I'd have another year. I couldn't have sewed another year."

"She's so good to me; that's the thing of it."

"And he isn't my nephew at all, you know."

"No; we're no relation."

"We're just friends. I don't know why people say just friends. He's more than a son to me. He never tries to make me over into something else as your own family do, Miss Addington."

I put in a word of thanks for her divination of my case; but, unconscious of interruption, she was saying that tomorrow she must tell me all about it—her and Cassius' friendship.

"I think," said she, "it's real pleasant to know that people can find such friends in the world—an old woman and a boy, too—that they can take so much comfort in each other. He is just a boy, for all he's so ambitious, but he isn't like other boys. He's so good. Some ways he's more like a girl, but he's manly, too, you know."

The next day after rehearsal Mrs. Mason visited me again. She overflowed with friendliness and talk, biographical and autobiographical.

One thing about Mrs. Mason must have antagonized many a person and made her stand in the minds of the judicious as an example of the demoralizing effects of the stage. Such an example she was, to be sure, for she was painted like a barber's pole, and that was undoubtedly the result of the achievement, too late in life for safety, of a make up box. But when one saw how simple and kind and more than respectable she was the effect of all that red and white and black stuff on her tired, worn, middle aged face became as touchingly humorous as it was aesthetically disastrous. It was put on with the confidence of a creature who has little practice in deceit and none at all in the detection of it.

She had that flat backed, slim figure which a 50-year-old possessor always believes to be youthful in effect, but only the dullest of observers could have been blind to the time wearied and labored character of Mrs. Mason's uprightness.

She dressed with a painstaking, inexpensive elaboration of details that showed she loved her clothes. But she was one of those not uncommon women whose love of personal adornment, to be understood aright, must be understood somewhat subtly. She had, as I soon learned, as little personal vanity and as little delusion as to her own natural charms as possible (you see, I do not say she had none), but she loved beauty so passionately that she must, for the peace of her life, play at being better looking than she was, and it was necessary to this game that she exaggerated the power of art to help her.

Early in this our second interview she said, "I have a daughter, Florence—that's her name." When she said "Florence," my mind automatically answered, "Florence Mason," and as with the turning of a key I remembered a long ago had passed from my mind, as if it to be forgotten forever.

A whole history that it was this woman's history, heard years before—the history of her most eventful and momentous years. Florence Mason, an airy, irresponsible young person, the kind one in shallow moments calls harmless, I had once chanced to know. She had a pretty voice, musical aspirations and a habit of talking to herself. During the fortnight in which she considered me a congenial soul (I am a good listener) she told me a great deal about her mind, her gifts, her nature, and incidentally her heredity. She said she owed her moral attributes to her mother, her power of self sacrifice and her sternness of principle—that her mother had sacrificed everything to principle.

Some people might have found it confusing to learn on top of all this and a great deal more that her mother was, in the daughter's phrase, a "grass widow," now seeking to go upon the stage. But this announcement found me prepared to recognize that its general air did its subject injustice. I had heard the outlines of her story and had managed to gather from it some notion of the woman's simple and singular character, a character singular only in its simplicity, for the love of pleasure and the passion for moral uprightness that were its basis are surely the very stuff from which man and fate weave human destiny. It was because in this stray, witless bit of humanity this typical combination of forces was so uncomplicated by other issues that she was so interesting and so touching. She felt no sense of inconsistency in her desires; she did not dream of pleasure and duty as things created to conflict; she was innocent of all such modern feeling, a feeling that penetrates so many souls even when they reject it as a doctrine. No; she was an interesting survival, a simple pagan who wanted all of life she could get, but who was ruled by her conscience. However, whether or not the last of life is necessarily at war with the hunger and thirst after righteousness, this queer, tragic human experience may be safely trusted to bring them to battle sooner or later. With Mrs. Mason the conflict had come both soon and late, early and often, yet with-

out ever altering the original terms, the original simplicity of her attachment to each. So with her the new struggle was always the old typical one, unsoftened, unmeasured by any belief in the doctrine of self abnegation for its own sake.

Something of all this I had gathered even from the daughter's tale.

When Florence was about 4 years old, Mrs. Mason had discovered that her husband was cheating a poor family in a sale of land. Of his integrity she had had doubts before, but when she made this discovery and could doubt no more she took a course that seems to have presented itself to her mind as the only one possible. With a singular observance of feminine mistiness as to masculine business she simply took her child in her arms, and with nothing in her pocket left him at once and forever. The significance of this act remains dubious until we learn that, although all this happened in Illinois in the days of the famous easy divorce laws, Mrs. Mason never sought a divorce or tolerated with patience any suggestion that she should have one. The husband, by

the way, went to California, where it appears he never felt any need of legal freedom. He was never heard of any more, so we are not to be bothered with him.

"No, my mother always said she was a married woman; that you couldn't be married but once, it seemed to her, but she couldn't, she just couldn't. If you knew her, you'd know she really couldn't live with a man who cheated people, particularly poor people. She just picked me up and went to Chicago and began sewing for a living. That was all she could do, and she just hated it. Perhaps you think she oughtn't to have told me all this about my father, but she couldn't keep things to herself. She isn't that way a bit."

"She worries me dreadfully telling things. I can't think how any one with so much moral principle can have so little dignity. Then I was all she had, and she didn't know but my father would come back and claim me some time, or she might die, and then I might come up with him some time, and she was so afraid I might be like that and not care about right and wrong. She cares enough, but people criticize her dreadfully. They always did, and I wish she wasn't so bent on going on the stage. One doesn't want one's mother on the stage, you know. But she's been awfully good to me as far as she could understand me, and I know I'm a strange nature. I said: 'Mother, I'm not going to keep on against this stage business. You'll just have to be happy your own way, but I can't stand being around mixed up with it. I've got to consider myself and my future.' So I got a place to live away from her, for I had some music pupils. My mother spent a lot of money on my music. So I got some pupils as soon as I left school—beginners. It would have been bad for my pupils to get wind of her going on the stage, and I told you she never could keep anything. I adore dignity and reticence myself. Don't you?"

And here before me was the woman that for a personal scruple of conscience had for 20 years fought such a bitter battle; who had fought it and won it with her hated needle; who with no other weapon had actually conquered an education for her child, had sent her to private schools and good music masters. No wonder she wanted to do something she liked now. I was to learn more details of her campaign. The horror of those years of sewing was so strong upon her that some expression of it was always likely to break in upon her general conversation.

In this first tete-a-tete she interrupted the story she had begun about her first acquaintance with Mr. Wetherby by exclaiming: "But when I say I'd been doing dressmaking for years, that don't tell you anything. You don't know anything about it. You don't know anything about it."

Then with a sort of solemn retrospective desperation she went on: "Miss Addington, I never learned dressmaking. I always hated to sew worse than anything in this world, but I was handy at it, and I liked to make my own clothes look nice, because I couldn't afford to buy any one else do it for me. But it's one thing to make your own clothes and another—indeed it is another—to make other people's. I never did understand any sure way to make a fit—nothing about lots of things real dressmakers know. I had taste; that was all. I could do things others couldn't and make things look like pictures—when I had any luck. You ask any one that ever saw my work. That was the only reason I ever got anything to do."

"I never cut into a fine piece of goods that I wasn't so giddy with fear that I thought I should faint. I'm absent-minded, and I get mixed up so easy, and such awful accidents can happen in dressmaking, and it wasn't only cutting into it, it was the whole time any hand-some thing was around I never drew a breath but in fear. That's a way to live, isn't it? You don't know anything about it. I cut two side gorges once for the same side, and it was brown broad-cloth velvet, and we never could match it. But I don't want to think about it. Yes, of course, that's what every one said—learn a system, learn a system—and I've nothing to say back that doesn't sound silly, but after all one's own way

is best for oneself sometimes, or if it isn't best it's all you can do. I've tried to make Florence see that when she finds fault with me. You see, I never could have learned a system so that it wouldn't have upset me more than I was upset. Of course I learned a lot of things as I went along, but nothing ever could make me sure, because I never was meant to do that work. I could have designed things, just that, real well, but there wasn't any chance for my getting a place to work like that. Then—and you'll think this was terribly foolish, but it was the only way I kept alive all those years—I was always pretending to myself that something was going to happen, that I shouldn't have to sew next year. If I'd given up playing that way to myself, I'd have died or gone mad, and there was Florence. Then I sold the lot. It was a little lot I bought once with \$50 outside Chicago, when they said the place, the village, was going to have a boom. It didn't, of course, but at last, after ten years, it did a little, and it had been growing some all the time, and I sold the lot for \$400, and then I stopped. I couldn't have done another stitch. The doctor said it would kill me to run the machine any more anyhow. I hoped it would if I had to, though I'm afraid it was wicked to feel so."

"Then I said to myself I'd go on the stage. You can't think, Miss Addington, how well and young and happy it made me feel for a minute just to say that over to myself, though, of course, I felt bad enough that it should worry Florence so."

"I always was wild about the stage. Even when I had Florence at boarding school, and the bills were awful, I'd stint myself on things—I didn't care if it was food—and get a cheap seat once in a great while and go to the theater. That gave me such a rest it gave me new heart. I forgot everything while I was there, and then I could go on awhile again. Then I met Cassius, as I told you, and he was all alone in the world, and so was I, except for Florence, but Florence was so against everything about the stage, and she was so afraid her pupils would hear about me, and of course that was right, but Cassius was wild about the theater, and he was so kind to me. He'd go my errands, and as long as he was in that house where I had my rooms he'd build my fire for me cold mornings; he would do it. He was so good every way, and we just talked our hearts out about plays and actors and dramatic things. He said it was a son I needed, and he'd try to make out to be a nephew anyhow. He began to call me Aunt Maggie, and we've managed our plans together ever since. I suppose people wouldn't think I could have a real friend in a boy like that, but if ever there was a friendship we have it, and it's been such a comfort to me you can't think. I've always been so lonely. And I try to take an interest in all he cares about, and I give him lots of good advice, but we never worry trying to make each other different, and that's so pleasant. We've played four engagements, counting this one, and it's only a year and a half we've been trying. Of course the stage isn't nice every way, but I think it's lovely more ways. I'm ailing a good deal, and the cars are hard on me, but then, you see, now we're not in the cars much."

This talk was not exactly the monologue I have taken the liberty to represent it, but my part in it was unimportant. The last sentences aroused my curiosity. How had these two incompetent infants ever managed to get four engagements, even though the other three were as unimportant as the present one? And how much money had they earned? And the \$400—was it all gone?

The precariousness of their situation, of the feeble woman's situation particularly, made me shiver.

But I was glad she wasn't sewing. I could understand that she found any risk of starvation cheerful compared to the certainties of life as a seamstress. I said nothing of knowing Florence. It did not seem that the information could give any particular pleasure, and I did not care to bore myself with a proper exhibition of interest in her. The pair before me were more entertaining.

I say the pair before me, for if Mr. Wetherby was not present in the flesh he enjoyed a glorified existence in all Mrs. Mason's talk.

You see, I have called my story "A Pair of Players" not because that title is justified by the literal truth, but because I desire to pay tribute to my friends' glowing aspirations.

Cassius came for Aunt Maggie at supper time. We were in the sphere of the midday dinner.

"I've been telling her all about things," said that lady.

"I hope you haven't been knitting with wet feet," said Cassius. "I meant to ask you if you'd changed your shoes. I have to take good care of her, Miss Addington. She doesn't take care of herself right. Excuse me, may I?" And with one of his nippy little feminine movements he picked up and bent a scrutinizing eye upon an embroidered canvas photograph case.

"I embroidered a little myself," he said, "and I like to look at anything new in that line. The sale for tonight is the best this week. I think business is looking up. That's very pretty, very pretty. I have a great eye for colors. Well, we must be getting to supper if we are going to have any voices tonight, mustn't we?"

As he and Mrs. Mason had only about ten lines between them in the night's play, this solicitude about voice was an example of their disinterested artistic scrupulosity.

(CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.)

Everybody Says So.

Cascarets Candy Cathartic, the most wonderful medical discovery of the age, pleasant and refreshing to the taste, acts gently and positively on kidneys, liver and bowels, cleansing the entire system, dispel colic, cure headache, fever, habitual constipation and biliousness. Please buy and try a box of C. C. C. today—10, 25, 50 cents. Sold and guaranteed to cure by all druggists.

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# AGRICULTURE

Potatoes and Fertilizers.

The deductions of M. Comon, one of the foremost French agriculturists, prove that the dry matter content of potatoes is notably increased by the use of phosphatic and potassic fertilizers, but lessened if nitrogen fertilizers predominate. This fact has been often suspected and the labors of M. Comon and his coadjutors now leave no doubt in this respect. M. Comon says: "In the culture of the potato the question of fertilizers is supreme. The plant is not fastidious in this respect, but if not fertilized it will yield little. A large and first-class yield can be expected only through plenteous and suitable fertilizing. That the yield depends in great part on fertilizing is not disputed by any sane person, but it is less generally known that the kind of fertilizer exerts an influence on the quality of the product. This is a fact that seems to be undoubted. The exclusive use of dressings in which nitrogen preponderates is prejudicial to the elaboration of dry matter; the simultaneous use of these same nitrogenous fertilizers, with phosphatic and potassic fertilizers is, on the contrary, favorable to the securing of tubers of a high content. While this statement may have only a secondary importance for the majority of our potato growers, who cultivate this plant merely for their own consumption or for that of the inhabitants of the towns, it is far otherwise with those who grow the potato for industrial purposes and have in view the production of the starchy matter. The importance of the observation of this truth in practice can be easily reckoned. Allowing that an acre planted in potatoes gives an average of 10,000 kilos (22,000 pounds) of tubers, the gain of 3 per cent of dry matter, for example, obtained by the application of phosphatic fertilizer to potassic in the stead of nitrogenous organic fertilizer, would result in an increase equivalent to nearly 20 per cent in the yield."

Home Grown Celery.

We know many farmers who have learned to like celery, and who buy considerable amounts every fall and winter, but without a thought of growing it themselves. They keep from planting celery under the impression that its cultivation, and especially the blanching of the leaves, is a difficult operation. Celery used to be grown much more expensively than now. The deep trenching that was once thought necessary is now considered injurious, as sudden showers in summer will fill the trenches with water, and half bury the young plants in mud before they have fairly begun growing. It is much better to plant on level surface, and blanch the stalks by excluding light with boards set against the rows of celery on each side. The soil needs to be as rich as it is possible to make it, and with plenty of water so that the growth shall never cease. If there is any stoppage of growth, the celery will be tough, stringy, and lacking in the nutty flavor of celery grown from start to finish as quickly as possible. Coarse stable manure must not be used for celery. No matter how much water the celery has, the manure will at some time heat and cause the celery to stop growing. That will make the celery tough, no matter how well grown it is otherwise. The best manure for celery is nitrate of soda, which will furnish nitrogen in available form without heating.

Prairie Fires.

Year by year, as regularly as the seasons come round, thousands of settlers suffer, more or less seriously, from prairie fires, says Farmers' Advocate. Not only is property destroyed, but frequently human life is sacrificed. Owing to the luxuriant vegetation this year, the chances are that these fires will be more widespread and destructive than usual, and no one can feel safe from now till the ground is whitened with snow, unless securely safeguarded from all possible danger. These fires arise from many and various causes. The railway companies are blamed for much of the trouble, but if everyone exercised the amount of care and spent as much money, proportionately, to guard against this danger as do the railways, there would be less damage done. Reckless and careless travelers, sportsmen, and others set out many a fire; threshers often neglect to extinguish the fire that lies dormant in the cinder piles under their engines, and from burning straw piles escape many a destructive fire. Too much caution cannot be exercised.

More Diversity Needed.—The seeming certainty that the great staple southern crops will no longer warrant the farmers and planters of the southern states in buying away from home all their current supplies and producing at home only these great southern staple crops, must lead every thinking person identified with southern agriculture to the imperative necessity that now confronts us of protecting ourselves by producing at home all of the agricultural products that we have been in the habit of buying from the other states. This is said in no selfish spirit, but as a matter of absolute necessity, and without which reform general bankruptcy will surely reach most of the farmers and planters of the south.—Southern Farmer.

Ex-Gov. Northern of Georgia has established some fifty agencies in Illinois, Michigan, Indiana, and Wisconsin for the purpose of encouraging emigration to that state.

Clean out the hen house often. The health of the poultry requires it.

# BADLY FRIGHTENED.

The Stranger Was Not a Dick Turpin—Just Wanted to Ask a Question.

Had I been a woman I would have screamed at the top of my voice. But being only a man I gulped down the lump that swelled up in my throat and treated myself to an imitation of bravery, just as a writer in the Detroit Journal. Says as I had entered the shade that hangs like a pall about the church on Bagley and Park a figure loomed up before me indistinctly silhouetted against the gray stones of the edifice. It was a man. He quickly withdrew a hand from his coat pocket and, pointing his index finger straight at me, muttered in a hoarse voice: "Stand a moment."

I could see no gleam in his eye, but I imagined that his extended finger was the barrel of a revolver and I thought I saw that gleam. I stood. I confess that my knees knocked together and a cold perspiration began to ooze out of my anatomy.

"Say," he said, after eyeing me for a moment, "you needn't be afraid of me." But I was. I thought he had evil designs on me. The darkness of the place suggested a repetition of several things that Dick Turpin made a business of. I was not in conversational frame at the moment, chiefly because I was trying to masticate the lump in my throat and get it to go down.

"Say," he repeated, "you needn't be afraid of me. I'm no thug. All I wanted to ask you is if this is the Grand Circus or Belle Isle."

THE CARRIER PIGEON.

An Explorer's Wife Cheered by the Message That It Brought.

One day a wonderful bird tapped at the window of Mrs. Nansen's house at Christiania. Instantly the window was opened and the wife of the famous arctic explorer in another moment covered the little messenger with kisses and caresses, says the Philadelphia Times. The carrier pigeon had been away from the cottage thirty long months, but it had not forgotten the way home. It brought a note from Nansen stating that all was going on well with him and his expedition in the polar regions. Nansen had fastened a message to a carrier pigeon and turned the bird loose. The frail courier darted out into the blizzard air. It flew like an arrow over a thousand miles of frozen waste and then sped forward over another thousand miles of ocean and plains and forests, and one morning entered the window of the waiting mistress and delivered the message which she had been awaiting so anxiously. We boast of human pluck, sagacity and endurance, but this little carrier pigeon, in its homeward flight, after an absence of thirty months, accomplished a feat so wonderful that we can only give ourselves up to the amazement and admiration which must overwhelm every one who reads the marvelous story it told. Mrs. Nansen's pigeon is one of the wonders of the world.

Worth Seeing.

An amusing instance of the workings of an inquiring mind is given by Mr. Frederick Crowest in his "Musical Anecdotes." The company of one of the opera houses, at the close of a London season, had arrived at Liverpool to embark for a continental tour. The musical instruments were being shipped with the rest, and among them was the double bass, or "big fiddle," as it is also called, not cases as usual, for this member of the string family will stand a little rough treatment. It soon attracted the attention of the Jack Tars, three or four of whom settled round, scrutinizing it with keen interest. By the order of an officer they soon dispersed, but not long afterward another bluff seaman was discovered secretly watching it with wondering eyes. He was asked his reason for standing thus idle.

"Well, yer know," said Jack, "I'm just waiting for to see the length of the bloke's arm that can play that there fiddle!"

Not Enough for Two.

Patrick was the captain of a brick schooner that plied between New York and Haverstraw on the Hudson. One day his schooner was loaded, ready to start for New York. But Patrick never gave the word to the crew to cast off the hawsers and get under way. Instead, he sat lazily swinging his leg over the spokes of the wheel, smoking his pipe. The owner of the brick yard, who was also the owner of the schooner, seeing that the vessel had not started, and wishing to have the load landed in New York as soon as possible, rushed down to the dock and irately demanded of Patrick why he did not get under way.

"Shure, yer honor, there's no wind."

"No wind! Why, what's the matter with you? There's Lawson's schooner under sail, going down the river now."

"Yis, I've been er watchin' her, but it's useless my gettin' under way. She's got the wind now, and, faith, there's not enough of it fer two."—Harper's Round Table.

His Mistake.

First Commercial—I have done well here for a small place like this. My orders for to-day come close on \$700. Chorus—That's good—very good. You have done well. Second Commercial (who has not spoken before, looking over the top of his paper)—Oh, it is wonderful what one does in a small place sometimes. Why, my last journey down here my discounts came to