

A PAIR OF PLAYERS

By VIOLA ROSEBORO.

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But lack of employment was not Mrs. Mason's worst trouble now. She was becoming all the time weaker and sicker. Yet she seemed happy, and when occasionally I managed to take her to the theater, no matter what the play or whom the players, her poor wrinkled, plastered old face beamed with unclouded joy. She would smother her cough in her handkerchief and forgetting her habitual economy recklessly squander her gloves in indiscriminate applause. I must add that she took an apologetic tone about this habit, but appealed to me to say if it was not very pleasant to applaud when one was pleased. "You see," she said, "out in Illinois the ladies hardly ever do applaud. At least they didn't use to. They didn't seem to think it was ladylike, and I always wanted to do so!"

Her emancipation from sewing and from such unbecoming conventionalities as forbade expression of her love for things theatrical seemed enough to make her last steps to the grave brighter than all her life before. For, as you have foreseen, to the grave she was soon to come.

It is curious, by the way, considering that there all life's stories must finally end, how conventional a goal it seems in story telling.

But, as it happens, the small events I have started out to relate culminated only as my friends took their parts in the universal tragedy and as always that tragedy brings out as no other setting could all the touching helplessness and sweetness of their dainty, stumbling, little lives.

Cassius did well on the road. The entertainment, with no literary merit and no plot, fulfilled its purpose and pleased a number of people. Cassius' share in its success, as we learned from his letters, covered him with glory. He soon was looking for a backer, that theatrical good fairy so inexplicably subject to en-trust, preparatory to starting as the toy man upon a starting tour, of course with "a play" properly built around him.

This ambition sounds wild enough, but what is wilder than history, especially—let us take a comprehensive phrase—history in the show business?

Cassius might have made a fortune. Needless to say he was sure he would, and win immortal fame as well.

But it was not to be. Aunt Maggie became too ill to be left alone. Her money was almost gone, and before the summer was past Cassius gave up his engagement and practically his search for a backer and returned to take care of her.

Through all this I heard nothing of Mrs. Mason's daughter. After Cassius' return he told me that while he was away she had sent her mother \$5. "She hasn't any appreciation of Aunt Maggie," was his only comment. But if her daughter cared little about her and was oppressed by little sense of duty, Mrs. Mason had consolations such as wiser people often lack.

Friendship, like all matters of feeling, is a mystery. Evidently to enjoy it is not necessary to be able to read what Emerson says about it. Here were these two, with nothing of intellect or deep spiritual experience to found congeniality upon, still building out of their crazy little tastes and loyal little affections the great blessing for themselves.

Cassius made up his mind to take Mrs. Mason out of the city. It seemed the right thing to do, but I was troubled as to how he was to take care of her anywhere. However, he had brought a little money home with him and was quite unburdened with fears for the future. "Oh, we'll get on somehow. I can do lots of things," he declared.

I took it as evidence that he could when in three days he found just the place he wanted and moved to it.

It was on Long Island and was half farmhouse, half old fashioned roadside tavern. It was within two miles of an ancient village, now brought low and become a summer watering place.

Yes, he was right, that young man, when he said he could do a lot of things. He did them. The one he had made of his diplomacy in getting my watch did not exhaust it. He entered his new boarding place on the regular footing, and that footing he made firm by paying his and Aunt Maggie's board in advance for two successive weeks. Then he successfully rearranged matters and defrayed his own expenses with his own labor.

He was incredibly industrious, and before the late lingering colony of visitors left the village he gave an entertainment for their benefit and his own. "A tutti frutti entertainment," he called it on bills he painted with a brush.

Something of his situation, his care of the dying woman, had gotten noised about (I don't think he aimed to conceal the facts), and the entertainment was, I was told, in every sense a success. I knew of its attractions only by hearsay, for, though I was taking a late vacation from city streets and dramatic agents and had established myself in the old tavern with my pair of players, I staid with Mrs. Mason while Cassius ministered to the public's amusement. Mrs. Mason had now become so weak that she needed more care than Cassius could give her.

"Cassius has finished the dress. It didn't show for half when you saw it," she told me on the instant of our meeting. She made him bring it for me to see and had it hung over a chair where she could catch it with her thin hand.

As soon as I was alone with him Cassius said, tears filling his eyes as he spoke: "She knows she is going to die, and she says she wants to be buried in that dress. I don't stand to hear her talk about it, but she told me that she's been so much company for me ever

since I've known her, and she's given me so much good advice."

And with this singular peroration of gratitude the boy broke down and sobbed. But he soon checked himself to tell me that he had sent for some more yellow embroidery silk and was going to embroider all the seams of the gown.

"She thinks it's as handsome as it can be, but it ain't. I always keep having ideas come to me when I'm at work on anything like that." With this incoming wave of artistic complacency he dried his eyes and quite cheerfully departed to split kindling wood.

The next day Mrs. Mason had herself dressed in the robe of her heart, and with the ingenuity only known to women and drunkards contrived to command enough solitude and strength to paint her face in the old unholly fashion. She was gently pleased and proud of the results, but Cassius said to me privately that he was worried to see her dress up so. "She hasn't had it on before since it was finished," he explained. They both had a habit of speaking of the gown as "it," as if there could be but one substantive for that pronoun. "She wouldn't put it on when I asked her to. She just said—that was the time—that she wanted to be buried in it; that she always wanted to wear something like that, and now she just wanted to think

of wearing it forever. I'm afraid she feels worse today and won't say so."

Cassius had waylaid me in a hall to soothe his fears, and when I returned to Mrs. Mason I fancied there was indeed a new melancholy in her mood. In her glowing raiment she was sitting, propped with pillows, looking out of the window at the level, sunny, autumn landscape.

After a long silence, without turning her eyes indoors, she said:

"That money Cassius owes you—he hasn't ever paid any of it?"

Then, after another silence: "No; of course he hasn't had any chance. I'm the one that owes it really."

My reply she showed no sign of hearing. Out of her own thoughts she spoke again, at last turning upon me the fixed gaze of a definite determination.

"I've thought of a way to pay it. I guess you'll think it's—I guess you'll like my idea. Cassius made this dress for me. It's mine, and I'll give it to you for the debt."

The crucified triumph of her inflections told her feeling that I'd come off



She was sitting, propped with pillows, well in this bargain, so I answered that the dress was worth a great deal more than \$10, as indeed it was, could one ever find the place in which it was worth anything.

"Yes, I know," assented Mrs. Mason, "but you've done a good deal for us. You do all the time, and it's mine, and I shan't ever really use it—while I'm alive."

She stopped and again looked a long time out of the window before she added conclusively, "I think you ought to have it."

I found it more than impossible to speak to a living woman about her fast nearing need of clothes for the grave. I could give no hint that I knew the wish she was sacrificing to honor.

Yet, hard as it was for me to understand any intensity in such a feeling, her strange, strained manner, her deep, fixed abstraction and her wide, sad, unseeing eyes told me that this crushed desire devoured her. In her little mind lived vividly the ancient, the primeval feeling that associates forever, even after death, body and soul—spirit—whatever we call all that gives identity.

In our modern world the vital passion springing, say, in Greek literature, from the deep belief in this or that circumstance of sepulcher is only imperfectly comprehended and with an effort, but here, forsooth, was all the feeling that once flowered in such beliefs and passion in yet a simpler, a more primitive, form, existing quite without religious association and in a poor battered little piece of womankind, only begetting an unutterable longing to wear forever a gown that was rich and rare.

And here was this desire—the consuming desire of the dying—trampled by the relentless conscience that had hunted her through life.

Truly the inevitable human conflict is found on queer battlefields.

I devoted myself to routing the conscience. I thought it had had its day, and I wanted Mrs. Mason to die comfortably, as such a veritable simple pagan should, soothed with the knowledge that all that yellow embroidery was to enwrap her through all time. But the conscience had acquired the strength it had overcome. It was a stubborn, unreasoning organ, and under its iron rule its pale victim grew daily more and more melancholy.

In her darkened consciousness the near and nearer approach of dread death itself was outweighed by the burden of this new sacrifice.

The queer, beautiful little friendship that was brightening her last days was perhaps the poor best wine in her sorry foetus of life, and now even it gave its own special cruel sting to her loss—the loss of the embroidered gown.

"I hope you'll think something more of it because Cassius did it," she said to me. "I should. Cassius don't always do just right. I never was satisfied

about his telling you he wanted to buy a trunk—you know I wasn't—but anyhow there are not many young men as good as he is. He never had any bad habits, and—and"—she began to cry weakly—"he's been so good to me, and we've had such pleasant times, talking about plays and things while he embroidered. I never had such pleasant times, and I've taken such an interest in every stitch."

The situation was certainly becoming intolerable, yet it was easier to discover this than to find a way to mend it. Here was I cast for a very Shylock and all my victim's moral nature involved in the determination to make me play the part. Thank God, I have occasional lucid intervals in which I glimpse the unfathomable and invaluable depths of inconsistency and unreasonableness in the human heart. I have a profound belief in the superior wisdom born of these qualities, and though my experience of them in Mrs. Mason may seem to contribute but slightly to sustain this faith I never elsewhere found them more to my mind. I could not break down her determination to pay Cassius' debt by any direct attack. I changed my tactics for the better plan of a transparent stroke, one warranted to deceive only with the consent of the deceived.

I conferred with Cassius privately and told him I would take the gown, and the debt would be paid, but that when the end came—I found it hard to steel myself to speak of grisly details of the woman with the sublime resignation of the dying faced bravely—when we could do nothing more for her, I should give it back to him to be used as she had wished. Then I told him that this was a confidential communication and that he was to betray it to Mrs. Mason at once, omitting only the fact that I had given this last command. She must believe that I supposed my secret intentions successfully secreted.

Surely this was a weak plot; but, as a plan for pleasing every one concerned, it was strong, and it succeeded. I don't know the fine ins and outs of Mrs. Mason's fixed credulity, but with that distinctly primitive, pagan feeling of hers I dare say my position as one who would be content to give her the desire of her heart, though she could not know it, looked possible. But indeed I do not think she thought much about it. Her weary scruples once tripped in my little net, she was only too glad to be done at last with her lifelong struggle—the struggle between conscience and desire all are born to, but which broke my heart with a new piteous sublimity as I watched this foolish old child. Perhaps it was hardly with a moral victory that she at last escaped from this "oral predicament," but how eloquently her compromise pleads the victories of the past!

Surely an audience of happy gods, watching our "blind and blundering race," must have reversed all other decisions at last and declared the tired sewing woman a pleasing player, must have found her demonstrating anew the endless diverting possibilities of their rich entertainment.

The fall was well advanced when on her, costumed to her mind, the curtain fell.

Cassius, the tide in his affairs having flowed and ebbed, again took up his fight with fortune in the despaired ranks of the supernumeraries.

THE END.

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Ship Francis Burned.

The ship Francis in command of Captain A. F. Smith, caught fire at sea last Sunday and was beached near Long Branch, N. J., to enable the crew and passengers to escape. The boat left San Francisco January 17 with a valuable cargo bound for New York city. The efforts of the crew to extinguish the fire were futile and the ship and cargo were totally destroyed.

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WEEKLY CROP BULLETIN.

Furnished by the Government Crop and Weather Bureau.

Lincoln, Nebr., May 11, 1897.

The temperature has been above the normal continuously the past week, averaging a daily excess of 4 degrees. The rainfall has been below the normal except in small areas in the eastern section. No rain fell during the first five days of the week, but general showers occurred on the last two days.

The past week has been very favorable for the advancement of farm work and the growth of all vegetation. Plowing for corn has been pushed and considerable corn has been planted. The continued rains this spring have delayed the corn planting until now the work is about a week behind the normal advancement at this time of year. The result is that an unusually large acreage is being listed. The early planted corn is coming up in the southern counties. Rye is beginning to head and wheat to joint in the southern counties.

REPORT BY COUNTIES

SOUTHWESTERN SECTION.

Butler—Wheat and oats look well; prospects good for a fruit crop; considerable corn ground plowed; pastures fine.

Cass—Wheat and oats have made rapid growth and look splendid; rye beginning to head; corn planting progressing finely; pastures good.

Clay—A great growing week; grain doing well; plowing for corn in progress and planting under full headway.

Fillmore—Small grain doing well; great deal of corn planted; prospects for a good crop of fruit; pastures good.

Gage—Rye heading out; grass and small grain have made a rapid growth; corn planting progressing rapidly.

Hamilton—Some corn planted; alfalfa not doing so well as expected; other grasses, oats and wheat doing well.

Jefferson—Wheat and oats are doing nicely; corn planting progressing and early planted coming up.

Johnson—Wheat and oats have made a good growth, a good beginning made in corn planting; pastures good.

Lancaster—Wheat is doing well; good week for work.

Nemaha—Considerable corn planted; much corn listed this year; all vegetation has made a rapid growth.

Nicholls—Small grain looks well; considerable corn planted; ground in fine condition; prospects for good fruit crop.

Otoe—Corn planting a little late but progressing rapidly; grain and grass growing well; fruit trees in profuse bloom.

Pawnee—About one-third of the corn planted; acreage of wheat and oats small but grain doing fairly well.

Polk—Good progress made in plowing for corn; some corn planted, will be more listed than usual; rye making immense growth; oats generally look well but some pieces thin.

Richardson—About half the corn crop planted and some coming up; small grain looking fine.

Saline—Corn planting well under way; fruit setting fairly well; more corn listed than usual.

Saunders—Considerable corn planted last of week; small grain and potatoes doing well; fruit trees blossoming very full.

Seward—Plowing and corn planting has been pushed well ahead; all vegetation coming on finely; fruit in good condition.

Thayer—Much corn planting; small grain growing well; fruit trees almost out of bloom.

York—Some corn planted but planting will not be general until next week; fruit prospects excellent.

NORTHEASTERN SECTION.

Antelope—Small grain looks well; plowing for corn well advanced and most farmers planting; some alfalfa sown.

Boyd—Crops looking nice; corn planting in progress.

Burt—Small grain and grass looking fine; corn planting has made good progress; fruit trees in full bloom.

Cedar—Small grain has grown rapidly; meadows and pastures full of grass; corn planting begun.

Cuming—Small grain doing finely; some corn planted.

Dixon—Corn planting begun but much plowing to be done yet; small grain doing well.

Dodge—All small grain doing finely; some corn planted.

Douglas—A few fields of corn have been planted; fruit trees in bloom; spring wheat doing well.

Holt—Wheat and rye on the uplands look well; plowing for corn making good progress; some corn planted.

Knox—A little early corn planted; fruit trees in bloom.

Madison—Soil in good condition for planting; corn planting just beginning; small grain and grasses doing well.

Platte—All vegetation has made excellent growth; some corn planted; much corn being listed in.

Stanton—Plowing for corn in progress; some corn planted; sugar beets are being planted as fast as possible; wheat is up.

Thurston—Small grain and grass doing well; some corn planted; fruit trees in full bloom.

Washington—Some corn planted; wheat and oats look well.

Wayne—Small grain looks first-class; some planting corn.

CENTRAL SECTION.

Boone—Small grain growing finely; corn planting begun.

Buffalo—Plowing for corn and planting in progress; fruit some injured by frost; grass is good.

Custer—Wheat, rye and oats doing well; some potatoes coming up; corn planting the order of the day.

Dawson—Spring sown grain doing well; plowing for corn and corn planting being pushed; irrigation begun along ditches.

Greeley—Small grain looks fine; corn about a third planted.

Hall—A great deal of plowing and some corn planting; small grain looks unusually well; fruit trees in full bloom.

Howard—Corn planting has been pushed with vigor; grass and small grain look well; prospect favorable for fruit.

Loup—Plowing for corn well advanced and planting begun.

Merrick—Early sown rye and wheat look well; oats up well; few fields of alfalfa badly winter killed.

Nazos—Wheat improved; alfalfa much winter killed.

Sherman—Corn planting started; some grain growing well.

Valley—Spring wheat in fine condition; corn planting well under way; some potatoes planted; cattle all in pasture.

SOUTHWESTERN SECTION.

Adams—Corn planting progressing rapidly; wheat looks well.

Chase—Rain would improve the small grain; some corn coming up; corn about one-third planted; grass is good.

Dundy—Dry week but soil is in good condition for planting corn; the greater part of the corn already planted.

Franklin—Small grain, alfalfa and all grasses growing well; a good deal of corn planted this week.

Frontier—Pastures good and small grain looking fine.

Furnas—Corn more than half planted; small grain doing well; prospects are for an abundance of fruit.

Harlan—A large amount of corn planted; first crop of alfalfa nearly ready to cut; fruit trees in full bloom.

Hitchcock—Crops all growing nicely; corn planting is being pushed; some corn up; will need rain soon.

Kearney—Plowing for corn being pushed; wheat and oats have made a rapid growth.

Lincoln—Plowing for corn being pushed; some corn planted.

Perkins—Corn half planted; rain needed but crops not suffering.

Phelps—Small grain looking nice; some corn planted.

Red Willow—Wheat and rye are doing well; grass far enough along to make good feed for stock on range.

Webster—Winter wheat jointing; rye beginning to head; corn coming up; probably a third of the corn planted.

WESTERN AND NORTHWESTERN SECTIONS.

Keith—Small grain and grass look well; corn planting progressing rapidly; ground getting dry and rain needed.

Keya-Paha—Wheat growing well; corn planting not finished.

Kimball—Small grain up; alfalfa doing finely.

Rock—Early potatoes up; alfalfa wintered good.

Scotts Bluff—Small grain mostly up and a good stand; alfalfa very fine; corn and potatoes being planted.

Thomas—Grass coming finely; some grain being put in.

G. A. LOVELAND,
Section Director, Lincoln, Neb.

NERVE OF A BLACKSMITH.

Forged a Tool to Perform an Operation on Himself with.

James Cummings, a blacksmith of Los Angeles, recently performed a novel operation on himself. When a boy of 5 years, back in New York, Cummings had his left hand mashed in a barn door, and, from lack of proper attention, the two fingers of that hand afterward grew together as far as the middle joint, leaving a sort of web of flesh connecting them. Cummings finally decided upon a plan by which he could regain the use of his injured members and save the trouble and expense of an operation by a surgeon.

Acting upon his own ideas, he repaired to a blacksmith shop and forged a chisel in the shape of a long and narrow letter U, which he fitted to a handle improvised from a piece of rough board. Calling a bystander to his assistance, he had the latter hold the tool in place and then struck a heavy blow with a hammer himself, cutting through the flesh and driving the chisel deep into the block on which his hand was laid. Having ready a handkerchief well soaked with carbolic saline, he wrapped up his hand and repaired to his own room, where he later dressed the wound. He claims to have had sufficient experience in the care of wounds to treat his own case successfully.

AT THE DENTIST'S.

The Forceps-Welder Is Told a Rather Unpleasant Thing.

A well-known Chicago dentist tells an excellent story on himself that will bear the light of day. The gentleman is the owner, among other possessions, of a cottage on Congress street and, as with most old-fashioned buildings of the kind, it has an out-house and other primitive conveniences in the rear of the premises. A new tenant of the cottage made it a sine qua non that before he signed the lease the service of a scavenger should be engaged and accordingly one of those useful but extremely malodorous functionaries was engaged.

About a week after this a well-dressed man called at the doctor's office at the corner of Madison and Ashland boulevard with a bill. It was the scavenger. The doctor promptly paid the bill, remarking that the work had been well done. The man lingered around a few moments and finally said:

"Doctor, you're a dentist, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"You have to pull and fill teeth?"

"Certainly; have you anything you wish attended to?"

"Naw," drawled the scavenger, "but I couldn't help thinking you must be in an extremely unpleasant business."

"I could have stood this from pretty nearly anybody but a scavenger," declared the doctor.

Something Very Remarkable.

Real Estate Owner—There are curious things presenting themselves to our notice all the time.

Friend—Yes; to an observer there is much that is curious in the world. But what led you to make the remark?

Real Estate Owner—I have a double tenement house which is occupied by two families, and the two female heads of these families have been living as neighbors for full three months, and are still on speaking terms.

Cabby's Fare.

Upon one occasion two ladies paid an English cabby a shilling for the distance they had ridden with one fourpenny bit, two threepenny pieces, one penny, and two halfpence. When cabby looked at the coins, he smiled drolly, and asked: "Well, well, how long might you have been saving up for this little treat?"

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Prosperity. Do you know that in these hard times a section of country fifty miles square called the Black Hills, has more material prosperity than any other place of the same size you can mention? \$8,000,000 was the 1