

AUTUMN LEAVES. BY MONA CAIRD. Author of "The Wing of Azrael," "Whom Nature Leadeth," "A Romance of the Moors," etc., etc.

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Sunshine and silence. It was a wide-eyed country, not such as we call beautiful. The earth has foregone her spells; she lay brown and shorn and quiet.

These fancies drifted through a head cushioned on moss and half hidden among leaflets on the verge of a little wood, overlooking wide rough spaces of English country.

A pair of sprawling legs revealed their presence at intervals by commotions among dead leaves. The naturally dark face was still more bronzed with August sunshine; it was the face of a man saddened with years.

The vast expression which his bulk made in the surrounding brambles amused him. "I have gained in extension if I have lost in elevation since those benignant days, which this old tree knows as well as I."

The man shut his eyes and lay very still. The air was still, not a leaf stirred, the leaves and rustled mournfully; it was green with the first pale green of spring; the willow of primroses came up through the branches of the oak tree.

Madame de Verneville, to do her justice, had not insisted on the right to Wilfred's pen; she saw and told him that he had too many people on his shoulders.

"What a break would it be the young man's murmure somewhat. "Oh! it's you, is it? Come to measure the difference between principle and practice."

"Is it me, or I, as odious grammatical people will have it, forgetting that me is the most self-effacing form of expression showing that the speaker looks at himself obliquely."

"I think you are about the most self-effacing fellow I know," said the elder man, arranging his substance slowly against the oak trunk.

"I'm flattered, Mr. Parkes, is comparatively easy to a man of moderate size," said Wilfred Turner, sinking down among the underwood.

"Thank you, I have found a crevice. I like your way of taking exercise." "Joseph Parkes gasped when I saw you yesterday at Warrington Court that you had a reverence for literature."

"So I had, when you saw me yesterday at Warrington Court." "Your to-day's variation lands you in contempt for the great world-ruder. Ah, foolish youth, for whom the shrine is empty!"

"Oh! that's what you are doing!" Wilfred exclaimed. "Young man," said Joseph Parkes, "I have a Past."

went my way, and we never met again. The thing is as sudden as a sun myth. I heard shortly afterward of her engagement to some other fellow, whose very name I do not know.

Among the dancers Wilfred at once saw Bernice de Verneville. She was dressed in white, and her garment followed every movement like an echo, creating a lovely series of sinuous lines melting and reforming as she went.

On ran the music with delicious agility; the figures jiggered, and spun and swam and dived away, with elbow on hip, arm flung aloft, and body turned to right and left; then there was setting to partners, and mad jigging of couples face to face.

Whether or not Madame de Verneville were beautiful it would have been hard to decide; here was a spell-working face, potent, fascinating; his will was entranced. They were still flattening the tortured ground with unceasing steps, but gradually Wilfred felt that he was being brought to a halt.

"What was happening to him? Was he asleep or awake? Madame de Verneville seemed to be still luring him on, up the pathway to the terrace garden, and still without a word. Up and up the two figures went, silently dancing.

"I was a place for those who pine for rest and silence, yet my desire occasional opportunity to inform social pleasures. Some years ago a group of artists had taken the cottage, engaging a clever and benevolent relative of one of the sisters—Mrs. Haverley—a housekeeper or hostess."

"Good heavens!" the man of letters exclaimed. "Look at that library and those old world vistas of garden beyond! What a place to rest or work, or idle or make love in!"

"Nobody here need be sociable unless he pleases," Wilfred explained; "the rooms are divided by a movable canvas screen so that each room is a study as well as a bedroom, and there is no such thing as an interruption known in this house.

"What you wish to finish my sketch of the mill pond?" he said. "By the way, Wilfred, it has been arranged that we shall all come over here to-night after dinner—the members have unanimously invited our party—we are to have a repast of fruit and wines and lemonade and claret cup—Mrs. Haverley has said it and a frolic most festive."

"Well, what do you think of it?" inquired Wilfred. "Wouldn't this console you almost as well as woman's love?" "Better, my dear fellow, better," said Joseph; "bury me here, I beseech you. In life I am banished, in death let me dwell among you."

"Not your grave would make us sad," he said; "you would say: Here lies one who knew not how to live, therefore he dies. The roses grow the better for him— for me there is no such rest—business calls me away; there is no help for it. If my soul's salvation depended on my staying here to-night, I could not stay. Business is business. My grave shall some day remind you of the desert outside your gates.

"This lady is a mesmerist," said Wilfred. "I can quite believe it," Joseph answered. "You very nearly drew Old Horsford into the circle. He would have been kicking up his majestic heels in another two minutes if you had stayed. What's the matter?" he asked suddenly, noticing Wilfred's face.

"Nothing," was the instinctive response. "I'll take a little stroll, I think." He plunged away rather unsteadily into the darkness. Movement seemed a necessity to him. He wandered on and on among the intricate shrubberies, up and down the terraces, round and round, returning unawares again and again to the same spot. There was a forlorn lichen-covered rock that went to the brain like strong wine, while under the trees a company of fantastic-looking beings were dancing in

of attraction for Wilfred. He felt a vague sense of pleasure or relief whenever he came in sight of the monotonous flute player. The struggle in his mind was obscure, the sense of pain when the consciousness is confused and not subdued by chloroform. He struggled, but he scarcely knew against what! A sense of loss of regret, a sense of a future horror and green still, like the existence of the poor flute player. What did it mean? Where were the buoyant feelings of joy and belief, of interest and delicious excitement that had plunged him into a new world?

Or was it—was it jealousy? His brain twam and his self-respect sickened at the suspicion. Had he not been desiring above all things to see his little, pale, and thin, and then a heart-filled man? Had he not been willing to give years of his life for that friend's sake?

He retraced his steps toward the terrace, leaving the flute-player still piping silently to the listening shrubberies. The two figures were sitting in the same spot as before, almost in the same attitudes. Madame de Verneville's face was turned toward the darkness.

She was not recognized. If Wilfred so willed it the recognition might not take place, and since Joseph must at all events return to town he must have seen her. Meaning might remain without result.

Wilfred raised his head resolutely. He was shaken, but not conquered. Gratitude, sympathy, affection, friendship were not so easily overthrown, though rebel emotions might sweep the soul bare for a miserable half hour.

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"I fear that what I will scarcely serve as an introduction," said Joseph Parkes, politely. "You have found a charming set here," said Joseph, filling up the awkward pause. "I am glad to hear it, but we have had a constrained conversation was carried on, as if at an afternoon call. Joseph Parkes complimented Madame de Verneville on the dance she had led under the lime trees."

"Don't go," she said to Wilfred. "I am sorry we have met," said Joseph Parkes; "such meetings must always be painful." She rose and stood looking at her former lover with a face full of grief.

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