

Miss Fortescue the Seamstress,  
—OR—  
FORTUNE'S CHANGES.

"WHO is that lady, Miss Dunbar? She has a very sweet face." The interrogator was a young gentleman who had made an early evening call on the lady mentioned. The person to whom he referred was on the point of taking her leave as he entered.

"The young lady," said Miss Dunbar, slightly emphasizing the noun substantive, "has been working for me—a seamstress." "A seamstress! Upon my word, I should not have suspected it!" said the young man. "That accounts, no doubt, for the excellent taste displayed in her dress. And yet, from the slight observation I had of her, there was an ease in her manner, an air of refinement, one would not look for in a person of her calling."

"Really, Mr. Stanley, you are quite observing!" remarked the lady, with a light laugh. "As Miss Fortescue is generally employed in the first circles, she may have acquired a certain degree of polish, although I have not noticed that she differed from the generality of girls of her class, whose greatest ambition seems to be to ape the manners and copy the style of dress of those who move in the highest walks of life."

A furtive smile flickered for a moment on the young man's face at this characteristic remark, as he said in reply:

"Your remark may apply to some," said the young man, "but I cannot think it will to all. This Miss—Fortescue, I think you said was her name—she certainly exhibited none of that vulgar affectation of which you speak—at least I detected none."

"O, she may possibly be an exception. I have not observed her particularly, but I dare say a close scrutiny would discover the usual alloy."

"And in whom of us may not alloy be found, Miss Dunbar? Rarely, very rarely, will you find the pure metal. In the best there is always some base admixture."

"What are you discussing with such grave earnestness?" said a young lady, dressed in the height of fashion, as she entered the room. "I heard something about 'metals' and 'alloys,' which sounded very much like one of Professor—'s lectures."

"We were discussing the characters of dressmakers," said young Stanley, with a mock-serious tone.

"A very recondite subject, truly!" laughed the young lady. "Do not let me interrupt you."

"We had just commenced as you entered, Miss Gates," remarked Miss Dunbar.

"Pray proceed, I beg of you. But apropos," rattled on the young lady, "I met my lady Fortescue just around the corner. What grand airs she puts on, to be sure! One would never suspect that she belongs to the working classes. By the by, Miss Dunbar, my errand was to secure her after you have done with her, but she informed me that she does not intend to go out hereafter, and if we want her services we must wait upon her at her own house—the idea!"

"Insufferable!" exclaimed the young gentleman, smothering an inclination to laugh.

"You spoke of airs put on by Miss Fortescue, said he," wishing to draw the lady out. "I must confess that I thought her very unassuming. Her manners appeared natural, easy, and wholly free from affectation."

"Well, perhaps I should not consider her deportment exceptionable in one in a different sphere of life," replied Miss Gates.

"Pardon me, Miss Gates, but I fail to perceive why the deportment which would be perfectly proper in—say Miss Dunbar, or yourself, for instance—should be so offensive in Miss Fortescue."

In the meanwhile, she who had given rise to the discussion recorded in the last chapter, was proceeding on her homeward way with a light step and buoyant heart—more light and more buoyant by far than in the early days of her work life. A smiling expression lighted up her features as if some pleasant thought was nestling in her heart, lending an additional charm to her rare beauty. Occasionally a low snatch of song, a strain here and there of some favorite melody, would ripple from her lips as if she were surcharged with music. Her step, her carriage, every movement betrayed a natural grace. There was not the slightest approach to affectation to be discovered in either. The "grand airs" spoken of by Miss Gates, existed only in that lady's imagination, or the disparaging remark was prompted solely from envy or jealousy.

The appearance of the young dressmaker could not fail to attract the admiring attention of the most casual observer. The most critical could find nothing in it to cavil at. There was a total absence of everything like meretricious display. The materials of her dress were of the simplest kind, but she possessed one of those accommodating forms that rendered whatever she wore becoming to her, and she had the rare taste which makes the most ordinary attire attractive. Some ladies, let them be as painstaking as they will, how-

ever prodigal may be their means and appliances, lamentably fail to produce a pleasing effect. They never appear well-dressed. Others, and Miss Fortescue was a noticeable instance, meagre as may be their toilet, and slight the care bestowed upon it, win at once our admiration by the fitting and harmonious adjustment of their apparel. No part of it seems incongruous, nothing is out of place. The effect wrought seems something more than the accomplishment of mere art.

We have said nothing of the antecedents of our heroine. An instance cited by Frederick Stanley was in nearly every particular the counterpart of the experience of Alice Fortescue. She had been tenderly reared; until the death of her father she had enjoyed all the advantages wealth could bestow. The best of educational privileges had been hers, and she had not slighted them, nor had she neglected those graceful accomplishments which lend such a charm to the female character. All her life, until the shadow fell across her path, she had mingled in what is somewhat ambiguously styled "the best society"—society in which it is very doubtful if Miss Gates would be tolerated.

In an evil hour her father's fortune suddenly disappeared. A commercial crisis swept over the land, leaving in its wake wreck and ruin. The tempest burst when Mr. Fortescue was prostrated on a bed of sickness. The blow fell upon him with crushing effect. He was not in a condition to secure a remnant of his hardy-acquired property for his wife and child, and he died leaving them wholly unprovided for. There was no singularity in his case. There have been untold numbers of such misfortunes in the past—they are of daily occurrence—and there will be continual sad repetitions of them in the future.

Fortunately, Mrs. Fortescue possessed a limited fortune in her own right—a neat cottage-like tenement in a suburban town, and a small sum of money, a mere pittance, but sufficient for the time being to keep the wolf from the door. To this comparatively humble abode she removed soon after the death of her husband. The change from the palatial mansion, her late city residence, was indeed great, but she accommodated herself to her altered circumstances with an unrepining spirit. On her daughter's account, more than on her own, she regretted the changes that had taken place. For herself life had but little to offer. A few more years and she would be relieved from all worldly care. But the thought of leaving Alice unprovided for, at times cast a shadow upon her spirits.

At the time of her father's death Alice was just entering her seventeenth year. In her grief for her loss, she was scarcely conscious of the reverse of fortune that had befallen them. When, however, in course of time, the sad truth gradually dawned upon her, instead of yielding to despondency she aroused herself to meet the exigency with an unquailing spirit. The occasion brought into action the latent forces of her character. From the pampered pet of the household she suddenly developed into a noble, self-sustaining, energetic woman, willing for any sacrifice and prompt for any required duty. She insisted upon assuming tasks from which her mother would fain have relieved her, and she entered upon their performance with such a cheerfulness of spirit and such ready aptness as to immeasurably lighten her toil and dispel its irksomeness. That she felt the change in her condition, and keenly, too, at times, cannot be denied; but with a strength of character remarkable in one so young, and so delicately nurtured as she had been, she forced her thoughts away from the past, and with a brave fortitude disciplined herself to submit without a murmur to her lot.

A time soon arrived which put her resolution to the test. Their scanty means were nearly exhausted, and with gloomy forebodings Mrs. Fortescue looked forward to the period when actual want would stare them in the face. The good woman now reproached herself as she surveyed her scantily furnished dwelling, and thought how this, that and the other article, purchased before she fully realized her impoverished condition—before she had learned the full value of money—might have been dispensed with. It is true that their separate cost had been insignificant, but the aggregate amounted to a sum she now felt she was illy able to spare. To one who has had the command of unlimited means there is no lesson more difficult to learn than that of rigid economy.

She sought counsel of her daughter—instead of a burden she had begun to look upon Alice as a support—and suggested the propriety of disposing of such articles as were not absolutely needed.

"No, dear mother," said Alice, "let us keep them. They would bring us in but the merest trifle, and we might as well throw them away."

"But, my child," said the mother, in tones of sadness, "our means are nearly gone. Something must be done to replenish them."

"Listen to me, mother," and there was encouragement in the tones and looks of the young girl. "I have a project which I trust will afford us relief. Why may I not give lessons in music on the piano or in singing?"

"My dear child, what do you know about teaching?"

"I know that I have no experience as a teacher, mother; but I have been taught, and I think I can soon acquire the art. As for my qualifications, it would be a reproach to me, after so much had been expended on my musical education, if I were not competent. I have the vanity to believe that I am, and that, you know, mother dear, is one-half the battle."

Having fresh in her memory her late life of affluency, and luxurious ease, remembering also how her daughter had been brought up, with every want supplied, with not a wish ungratified, it was not strange, nay, it was very natural, that Mrs. Fortescue should at first view the proposal of Alice with some degree of repugnance. But her own good sense, backed up by the heroic arguments of her daughter—and in her case they were heroic—at last overcame this feeling, and reluctantly brought her to entertain and finally sanction the project.

This point settled, the next was to obtain pupils. To this task Alice immediately applied herself. Unfortunately, her sanguine hopes were doomed to an early disappointment. She found the field already fully occupied. Teachers of long standing had monopolized all the scholars. One or two only could be secured, not sufficient to make the business an object.

Disappointed but not disheartened at her failure, Alice had another proposition to offer.

"You once complimented me, mother," she urged, "on my expertness with the needle. Now I have ascertained that there is quite a demand for this kind of work, that it is remunerative, and why should we hesitate to perform it?"

"To think we should be reduced to such a strait!" sighed Mrs. Fortescue, with a very pardonable show of distaste.

"It is hard," said Alice, "but is it not something worse than folly to indulge in such reflections? As we are compelled to a humble diet," she added, with a light laugh, "the sooner we commence eating it the sooner we shall become used to it. I dare say, after a while, we shall come to rely it very well!"

Alice spoke thus lightly, not that she did not fully sympathize in her mother's feelings—not that she did not feel keenly the position in which they were placed—but she did it in part to give, if possible, a cheerful tone to her mother's spirits, and partly to cloak the emotions warring in her own breast. Mrs. Fortescue at once divined her motive, and folding her in a warm embrace, she said, with much feeling:

"The sacrifice, my dear daughter, will be a thousand fold more hard to be endured on your part than on mine; therefore do as you will, and may Heaven reward you for your filial devotion!"

It was not long before mother and daughter found plenty of employment, and the hungry wolf prowling at the door took his departure. If the elite of the place were not disposed to associate with Mrs. and Miss Fortescue, they were very ready to bestow upon them their patronage. With this the latter were well content. They were not ambitious to mingle with those who assumed to rank higher in the social scale, and they were too well versed in ways of the world to resent their exclusion.

It was a blessed thing for Alice that she was one who possessed a hopeful, cheerful disposition, and who preferred rather to bask on the sunny than grope on the shady side of life. Many placed in her situation would have made themselves miserable by contrasting their present with their former condition. But she wisely extombed the past, and successfully resisted any inclination to exhume it. She would not permit herself to indulge in repinings, knowing well how useless they were, and what evils they wrought, both mental and physical. She instituted a strict guard over her feelings, and whenever she experienced a tendency to despondency, she combated it with a firm determination to overcome it; and such was her strength of resolve, that she at last achieved that most difficult of all conquests, victory over self.

Hence it was that you seldom found a shadow upon her brow. Hence it was that her features always wore a pleasant, sunny expression, the reflex of a contented mind. We are aware we are portraying a very perfect character, but do not think it has not its prototype in life.

It was not customary with Alice to make engagements away from home. If her services were required the work was brought to the house. This was the general understanding. Still, in a few instances, and on special occasions, she had been induced to deviate from this rule. She had done so for Miss Dunbar. But her experience there led to a resolve that it should be the last engagement abroad.

What those experiences were she would have found it difficult to explain had she been questioned on the subject. Miss Dunbar was very polite; in fact, she rather overdid the matter—was too lavish of her courtesy. There was an evident lack of sincerity in her affability, which neutralized all her efforts to render herself agreeable. In her manners she was very lady-like, yet there was a certain indefinable something in her demeanor which seemed intended to make Alice sensible of the difference in their stations. There was po-

thing in her manner openly offensive, nothing which one could resent, and that made it all the more annoying. Alice was quick to perceive anything of this nature, and although she would not permit it to ruffle her, she determined that hereafter she would not subject her forbearance to any such tests.

Whatever annoyance Alice may have experienced at Miss Dunbar's, the cheerful frame of mind in which she returned from her day's labor conclusively indicated that she did not permit them to crowd her sunny disposition. Her happy mood, however, was principally inspired from the fact that a long cherished wish was on the eve of being gratified.

One of the greatest deprivations to which she had been subjected by the reverse of fortune was the loss of her piano, and from the moment she found that success would crown her efforts in the new occupation in which she had engaged, she resolved to replace it. For this purpose she devoted a portion of her earnings, such as could be conveniently spared. So numerous had been the calls for her services, and so industriously had she applied herself, that the requisite sum had been acquired much sooner than she had hoped for.

On her way to Miss Dunbar's in the morning of the day the reader was introduced to her, she had ordered an instrument, previously selected, to be sent to the house. It was the pleasing anticipation of again being able to indulge her taste for music that lightened her step and flooded her heart with melody as she hastened homeward in the evening, after accomplishing a few errands on her route.

"Has it come, 'mother dear'?" was her first eager inquiry as she entered the house.

"Yes, my child it is in the next room," responded the mother with a gratified smile.

Without waiting to remove her outer dress, the delighted girl hastened to the parlor, and soon her fingers were busily and lovingly employed among the ivory keys.

Although the instrument fell far short of the one she formerly used—a Chickering grand—yet never before it seemed to her, did keys respond so perfectly to her touch, never before did she elicit such richness and brilliance of tone. Most assuredly, never before did her voice gush forth more melodiously, never before express such deep pathos, than when, after a brief prelude, she commenced an "Ave Maria" of Schumann's. There was no striving for effects, no trickery of execution. She poured out her whole soul in the rendering, as if inspired, as indeed she was, by the very spirit of the illustrious composer.

Her mother listened with tearful eyes to the performance. Since the death of Alice's father she had not heard her daughter sing, and the sound of her voice again in song brought vividly before her scenes of the past. She strove, however, to conceal her emotions, and when the piece was finished, she said:

"It seems good my dear daughter, to hear your voice again."

"Does it make you sad, mother?" asked Alice, who at once perceived the effect her singing had produced.

"Sad, my child, but not sorrowful," replied Mrs. Fortescue. "Music of a character like that you have just performed, you know, always thus affects me."

It is curious to observe how slight are the causes that apparently often give a coloring to all our after life. It may be a word spoken, an act almost unconsciously performed, the meeting or not meeting with a particular person, a visit made or a visit deferred to some place, a letter misdirected or not sent—something as trivial as either of these occurrences not unfrequently works an entire change, for good or for evil, in our destiny, so that, unless we have faith that we are governed by something besides blind chance, we might conclude that we were the veriest sports of an accident.

Mrs. Fortescue was not the sole listener to her daughter's performance. Was it chance or was it Alice's good genius that directed the steps of a gentleman towards the cottage just as she commenced? The windows were open, and as he arrived abreast of them her rich full tones swelled out upon the evening air. Pausing in his walk, the unseen auditor stood as if entranced, resuming his way only when the last note died away, and a movement in the room indicated that the singer had left the instrument.

A few days after the incident just mentioned, on returning from an engagement at Miss Dunbar's—and Alice congratulated herself that the visit was a final one—to her surprise her mother handed her a letter left by the postman. Whom could it be from? She held no correspondence with a single being. She examined the handwriting and the address, scrutinized the post mark, puzzling over them as some people would on receiving an unexpected letter before they break the seal.

When at last the missive was opened and her eyes had glanced over its contents, a joyful exclamation burst from her lips.

"What is it, my child?" asked Mrs. Fortescue, with unconcealed interest.

"Listen, I will read it to you, mother." And Alice, hastily repeated the contents of the note.

It was from a gentleman, an entire stranger, who signed himself as chairman of the music committee of G— Street Church, one of the largest and wealthiest churches in the place. Its purpose was, that the soprano of the choir, composed of a quartet, had recently left, and Alice was invited to fill the vacancy. The present salary was \$800 a year, but possibly it might be raised hereafter. A rehearsal would take place on Saturday evening, and if she had concluded to accept the situation, he would call and accompany her to the church for the purpose of introducing her to the other members of the choir.

"Think of it mother!" exclaimed the delighted girl, after having read the note; "six hundred dollars a year! Double what we earn plodding all day with the needle!"

"But is there no mistake? Are you sure the letter is intended for you?" asked the mother scarcely less excited than the girl.

"Yes, see here, it is plainly written, 'Miss Alice Fortescue, L— Street.' A blessing on the one who wrote it!"

"But who can it be? Who knows anything about your musical abilities?" asked Mrs. Fortescue.

"It is all a mystery to me," replied Alice. "No one but you has heard me sing in this place. Whoever he is, a blessing on him, I repeat! No more work for you, mother dear! No more wearing your eyes out stitching, stitching from morning to night!" And in the exuberance of her joy the happy girl fondly caressed her parent.

"Are you confident, my child," asked Mrs. Fortescue, after the excitement produced by the reception of the note had in a measure subsided, "that you are capable of filling the situation?"

"Why, you know mother, my teacher often spoke of my 'extraordinary facility,' as he styled it, for reading music. Now that performed in church certainly cannot be very difficult, and I have not the slightest fear on that score. As for my voice you are the best judge of its quality."

"I have no doubt but what it will give perfect satisfaction; still, I shall feel some anxiety until I know you have stood the test," was the mother's reply.

Alice at once despatched a note accepting the position, in which she inserted a proviso, that, if on trial, her performance was not satisfactory, the committee was at liberty to cancel the engagement.

She now awaited the evening of rehearsal in no small flutter of excitement. Usually, she held her feelings under strict control; but the occasion to her was a momentous one, and it was not to be marvelled at that she looked forward to it with an unwonted degree of interest. Continued.

Strange Incidents, but True.

The Trenton, N. J., True Democrat says:

We knew a place in our childhood, called "Deadman's Den" where a small coach had been robbed and a number of passengers murdered. That place was pointed out as one where no grass would grow; and when we saw it, after our thinking powers were matured, it was in the same condition as when we first looked on it in our boyhood days.

A foolish man undertook to carry a sack of wheat, five bushels, from the village of Penn in the county of Bucks, in England, the village being named after William Penn who founded Pennsylvania. The destination was Totteridge. When nearly up the hill to the last named village, the man fell dead. The hill has since been called "Break Heart Hill," and on the spot where the man fell no grass has grown since.

Another instance of grass not growing where a fatality occurred, before we introduce the subject which calls for the remarks—"Pond Riding" is a place where a mail coach, horses, driver, guard and passengers went down one dark night. All humanity on that coach that wild night were drowned, as were also the horses. Down the bank where the coach went into Pond Riding, no grass grows. The above are all from our actual knowledge of superstitions, have all been seen by us and are enough the bare spots appear to verify the superstitions.

Now we come nearer home. Superstition has as little to do with our mental make-up as with that of any mind, and we only give the following, for thought for those who do sometimes wonder how the mysteries are woven with those circumstances which are within our comprehension. On Nov. 13, 1862, James Roland was murdered at Princeton by James Lewis, and the body cast into Princeton Cemetery. Lewis suffered the death penalty for his crime at Mercer Jail in 1863. In the cemetery, where the murdered man's head was forced into the ground, by the force of the blows from the club used by the murderer, no grass has grown since; and Mr. Peter Nolan, the sexton at the time of the murder and ever since, says there has not been anything done to prevent the growth of the grass at that spot. More than that; blood from the murdered man, in the fearful struggle for life, was scattered on a tombstone which bears the name of Edward Hunt, and has left black marks, which remain unto this day.

Peter Nolan, the sexton, was one of those who found the body of Rowland in the cemetery after the murder had been committed, and he vouches for the truth of the statement we have made.

Weave fancies as you please; try to reason to the best of your powers; the statements above are given as facts, and without attempting explanations or seeking to unravel cause, we leave the superstitions, or whatever they may be, in the bald state in which we have given them.