

were changing cooks just now, and so we couldn't go?

*Mrs. Harris.* La, stupid! any one would know that was just a reason the more for dining out. There's no time like it, unless when you're settled with a bad one. I really don't see but we've got to go, unless Providence mercifully clears the way, somehow, and the unlikeliest things do happen sometimes; though that's not to say that I am wishing the Chancellors any harm, to be sure. So just send off the note, Tom, to ease their minds, and say how pleased we shall be to come, and we're much obliged and all, and then we shall feel we've done our duty by them, and if Providence afterward should lend a hand to our staying away, there'll be nothing on our consciences, and no harm done.

*Mr. Harris.* And you don't mind saying we're pleased to accept, when we're just as blamed sorry as we can be? That's a lie on paper if ever anything was.

*Mrs. Harris.* Indeed, and it's not. It's a conventionality, that's all, and conven-

tionalities never are what they look to be on the face of them, you know, and nobody ever thinks of holding them to account. I wouldn't tell a lie for all the world, and you know it. But a conventionality is no more of a lie than what we say every Sunday in church when we declare we're miserable sinners because it's set in our Prayer-books for us to say so on Sunday mornings, though we know we've done our duty the week through like Christians, and ought to be handsomely commended for it. And so I don't mind your writing what it's only decently civil you should, though I shall pray steady till the day dawns that something may prevent our going.

*Mr. Harris.* Confound it all! It was just our luck to get invited.

*Mrs. Harris.* Well, we must forget ourselves in thinking of the pleasure we're giving them. It won't do to get selfish, Tom. We must think of others sometimes, especially when there's no way to think of ourselves first.

*Mr. Harris.* Right enough, Nan. But if there is a way out of going—

*Mrs. Harris.* Never you fear. If there is, we'll take it and no time lost. But, poor things, it would come awful hard on them, Tom, to lose us!

## The Independent.

NEW YORK, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 1887.

### THE GRACE OF LOVE.

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.

A GREAT while ago, there once lived a very beautiful and very rich little Princess. So beautiful and so rich she was, that suitors from all parts of the world came flocking in shoals to her palace, wearing out pantaloons by the million in protracted and agonizing kneeling at her tiny feet.

Notwithstanding the glory of it, however, the little Princess did not much enjoy this sort of thing; for whereas other young ladies could spend their time in making delightful slippers and comfortables for their friends, this poor little thing had to employ all hers in knitting everlasting mittens (which are very awkward, disagreeable things to make, besides being never pleasantly accepted), so that many a time did she wish she might only have been born married, and thus have been spared this continual worry and vexation of soul. For she was a proud, fastidious little Princess, and had declared that she

never would marry until she had found one who was in every way her superior, as was, of course, all extremely right and proper; only, though all kinds of paragons came to woo, somehow or other none of them ever proved superior enough to succeed in winning the little Princess for his bride. It really was pitiable to see so many fine fellows turned off daily; but the Princess was become so accustomed to it that she grew quite callous-hearted on the subject; and when she heard that of the thousands rejected, seven or eight shot themselves, and five or six felt badly, and three or four cut their wisdom teeth, and one or two stayed single, all for her sweet sake, she never shed a tear.

But one day, as a hundred or so stood in the outer court of the palace, squeezing on their gloves, and practicing tender glances and sighs, preparatory to entering the fair one's presence, a young man, of very different appearance from the rest, came quietly up and joined them.

"Well, fellow," said the others, "what errand brings you here?"

"The same as that on which you come," answered he, tranquilly. "Save that I shall succeed where you will fail. I come to wed the Princess."

"You!" they exclaimed in chorus, looking at him with scorn, for he was plainly dressed and of unimposing aspect. "You! You pretend to be her superior! You indeed!"

"I am," he replied, unmoved. "For I love her, and love ennobles."

Whereat the others laughed contemptuously.

"Just hear the fool!" cried one. "This graceless beggar dares to love!"

"Put him out!" screamed another. "The cut of his mantle is antique, and he has no buckles to his shoes, nor powder to his hair. Bah! It is scandalous to have him about!"

"Let him stay," said a third with a shrug. "It is as well to have a valet at one's back."

The young man at whom these sneers were cast smiled composedly. "Fortunes change," he said. "You who call me valet shall yet see me carry off the Princess to-night before your very eyes."

A murmur of derision ran through the crowd. But at that moment the palace doors were thrown open, and the court herald announced in a loud voice that her royal highness would now deign to receive offers; and that going in suitors would please take the right-hand door, and coming out the left-hand door, that thus collisions of a painful and disturbing nature might be avoided, and furthermore, no suicides were allowed in the royal presence. An immediate rush ensued toward the entrance, which opened directly into the great hall where the Princess sat upon her throne, with thousands of cushions lying before her over the floor, that suitors might not catch cold from kneeling too long upon the marble pavement, while huge hogsheads, filled with highly-colored and various-sized mittens, were piled up artistically in the background.

"Beautiful" is no fit word wherewith to describe this Princess. Had Webster or Worcester or any other dictionarians being seen her, he would certainly have invented some word on the spot, more capable of expressing the charm and grace and perfect proportion of feature, form and soul, which went to make up this rare and wonderful maiden.

And now, one after another, with different degrees of assurance, ecstasy, sentiment and pride, the crowd of suitors made their offers, extolling their several

excellencies and advantages over each other and everybody else, and modestly bringing into view those points wherein they bid defiance to the human race at large, and aspired to be divinities. But to-day, as yesterday, none was found superior to the Princess; one after another was duly admitted and dismissed with a consolatory cigar, and the promise that his name should not be handed in to Mrs. Grundy, who, pen in hand, sat in the reporter's chair; and still the little Princess waited smiling and peerless, upon her throne, in royal but wearying single-blessedness. Yet all this while the strange young man who had come in with the rest, said never a word to press his suit, and while the others were kneeling and praying and groaning and making no end of a to-do, he alone stood upright and silent, and held his head straight and high as if in proud disdain.

The little Princess was only a woman after all, so, of course, she grew piqued at last.

"Pray, why do you come here, you," she said, pointing her tiny ivory finger at him with an inimitable mixture of grace and scorn, "if not to woo me with the rest?"

"I come to wed lady, not to woo," he answered gravely, and moved forward with unbending head.

"To wed?" echoed the Princess, with a laugh that rang forth so deliciously sweet, that to hear it was to think only of the ripple of silver waves against shores of the purest crystal. "And pray, friend, is that your wedding garb?"

"She whom I love will look to the heart rather than to the raiment," answered he, as unabashed and gravely as before; and the Princess felt rebuked, and bit her sweet lips.

"Yet you bring no gift in your hands," she said. "How dare you ask aught of me?"

He looked at her and smiled, and she saw that his smile was sweet.

"Lady, I claim but gift for gift. I bring you my heart. Give me therefore yours."

"Yet you do not kneel in the asking," she said. "How may I listen to such a prayer?"

"Lady," he answered—and he looked tall and noble standing upright alone, amid the sea of bowed heads around—"I do not kneel, because I come neither to beg nor to pray, but to demand my right."

"How dare you!" cried the Princess, frightened at language so strangely unsoftened to meet her delicate royal ears.

"How dare you?"

"Love dares all, or is no love," answered he, and smiled still.

"I have sworn that I will wed none save him who is in all my superior," said the Princess, and looked at him curiously. "Do you call yourself my superior? Are you so vain?" And she drew up her exquisite head, and laughed a low, gurgling laugh.

"No," he answered! "For love is humble; yet as humility is superior to vanity, you are inferior to me in so far as you claim superiority."

"Am I vain, then?" asked the Princess, in grieved surprise.

"No!" thundered the crowd of suitors behind. "No! No! No! To the death with him who affirms it! No! No! A thousand times no!"

"Yes," said the young man who stood before her; and though he spoke so low, she heard him above all the rest, and hung her lovely head.

"At least," she said, "how can you vie with me in birth? I am a princess and sit upon a throne; and you"—

"Your throne is senseless marble and cold, dead stone," said he, "and mine is a woman's heart."

"You are poor," said she, "and I am rich."

"Nay, it is you who are poor," he replied, "since earth's sorest poverty is the having only self to love; and I am rich, for loving is wealth, and I have loved long and well."

"But I am wise and learned," said she. "I have studied much and profoundly. Can you know more than I?"

"Yes," answered he; "for I have learned that I am ignorant, and earth's highest wisdom can teach no more."

"But I am beautiful," she said, with a blush that spread over her face like the sunset glow over a lily. "And you"—

"A beauty that sees but self is blind," he answered, "and blindness is a deformity. It is I therefore who am beautiful, for you so fill my heart that wherever I am, you are present."

"They say I am good," stammered the

little Princess as a final plea. And tears stood in her wonderful eyes.

The young man came nearer and smiled again, and in his smile were only pity and tenderness and love. "Yet by your own showing, you are selfish and vain and weak," he said softly.

"And you?" asked the Princess, tremulously, yet smiling up at him as she spoke; "are you so much better than I?"

"Yes," he said, "for I am Love himself, and what is there upon earth that is truer and stronger and purer and better than Love?"

And the little Princess, looking at him, suddenly saw a great glory flash out in his face, and his quaint garb fell off, and he stood before her clad in robes of scarlet and gold, and a kingly scepter was in his hand, and he had wings such as we dream angels have, and his name, "Love," stood like a jeweled crown above his forehead. And the Princess hid her face in her hands and sobbed for very shame.

"I have found Love at last," she said. "It is he for whom I have waited so long, and searched so far and wide. Only Love dared claim me. Only Love knew how to win me. Only Love could teach me to love again."

And then Love bent over her, and folded her in his close, strong arms, and flew away with her right up into the far-off, wonderful Seventh Heaven, where none but those who know Love have ever been. And the suitors stayed behind with their mittens and their cigars, and their promises that none should ever know their names, and were sulky, and pretended to outsiders that "they never could tell what it was so immensely superior that the Princess saw in that fellow!" Only luckily the world's echoes cannot reach so far as up to the Seventh Heaven, and the little Princess never heard what they said.

But, my friends, this is only a fairy story, and, of course, could not ever happen in real life, you know.