



ELlice QUENTIN

JULIAN HAWTHORNE



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# ELLICE QUENTIN

*AND OTHER STORIES*

BY

JULIAN HAWTHORNE

AUTHOR OF 'GARTH' ETC.



*A NEW EDITION*

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## PREFACE.

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• **CONCISENESS**, as distinguished from mere brevity, is a literary virtue ; and the novelist who can and will pack his stories into the smallest space compatible with the adequate development of his idea, deserves especially well of his readers. For he has a twofold temptation to do otherwise. In the first place, diffuseness is easy to the writer ; it relieves him from the strain of too closely fixing his attention upon the matter in hand ; he may approach it gradually and tentatively, and, as it were, teach himself what he wants to say by talking about it. In the second place, the existing conditions of publication and remuneration render it inadvisable, from a business point of view, to aim at compactness ; on the contrary, immediate profit is best consulted by inflexibly diluting whatever idea may present itself, into the largest bulk consistent with its remaining a recogni-

*Gen. Rec. 19 Apr. 4 Pickering = 1880*

sable idea at all—or even, at a pinch, a little beyond this limit. Nor are these the only objections that might be urged against short stories. That novelist must be empty-headed indeed, who, in the course of a thousand pages, does not occasionally generate something poignant and effective; whereas, if he confine himself to fifty or a hundred, he may conceivably escape the utterance of a single word worth listening to. Again, the ordinary novel-reader, accustomed, in view of the shortness of human life, to glance only at the heads and tails of paragraphs, and to take the rest as read, may chance inadvertently to observe the same practice with the short story; the consequence of which would be that the most conscientiously condensed tale would appear the most vacuous and insignificant.

Nevertheless, short story writing is a branch of the literary art worth cultivating, if only to confirm the fact that many stories which now appear long, would, if honestly written, turn out as short as the shortest. It is not too much to say that nine-tenths of the three-volume novels now published, if stripped of matter purely superfluous and



impertinent, would shrink into less than one-tenth their present dimensions. The best hope for modern fictitious literature, especially that written in the English language, lies in the incontinent and unsparing application of the pruning-knife; not only to relieve the increasing mental dyspepsia of readers, but to discover to writers what their work is worth, when extricated from its voluminous conventional wrappings.

The five stories comprised in the following pages were written, some long ago, some recently, as the lack of homogeneity in their style and conception sufficiently indicates. No writer who values his art will permit himself to produce work which (at the time at least) he would desire to see forgotten. As his mind grows, however, and his experience widens, he constantly detects imperfections in that which he had before deemed passable, and the impulse arises in him to blot out or ignore everything anterior to what he now regards as his best period. My critics would doubtless spare me the trouble of saying that little harm would have resulted, in the present instance, had that impulse been yielded to. But an author may, in some

measure, justify his soft-heartedness towards his offspring by pleading, first, that he is not always the person best qualified to pronounce judgment on the comparative merits of this or that child of his brain ; and secondly, that there is a faculty of youth as well as a faculty of maturity, and that the former may occasionally evolve something which, though crude in form, shall in substance be sounder than the products of later years. It may furthermore be remarked that stories contributed (as all of the present collection have been) to magazines, are liable, except in special cases, to pass out of the author's control ; whence it can happen that material which he himself might feel inclined to reject, may nevertheless make its appearance upon the responsibility of other judges. It only remains for him in that case to hope that the public will not see with his eyes.

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## ELLICE QUENTIN.

### I.

A MAN about thirty-four years of age was sitting a few years ago in his bachelor rooms in one of the inns of court. It was a spring afternoon, warm for the season; the window was open, and above the high-shouldered brick buildings a glimpse of eastern sky appeared, with a pinkish flush upon it, reflected from the sunset clouds in the opposite quarter of the heavens. Through the window were also visible the boughs of a tree upon which the bright green buds were beginning to unfold; and a couple of sparrows were chirping to one another as they fluttered from twig to twig. A muffled hush was in the air, peculiar to these London enclosures, into which horses and vehicles seldom enter; the roar of the great thoroughfare, though only a few rods distant, being almost inaudible to the occupant of this quiet chamber; while the light ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece, and the twittering of the birds, were both perceptible to him.

He sat heavily and motionlessly in his

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chair—a tall, powerfully-built man with gloomy brow and a thick dark beard. In his right hand he held an envelope, which had been torn open ; but, after reading the enclosure, he had mechanically put it back. The envelope bore the name of Geoffrey Herne, in a woman's handwriting, and the London post-mark. About half an hour had gone by since Herne read the letter, during which time he had been sitting as he was now, plunged in thought. His meditations had not, however, been occupied all that time with the subject of the letter ; but certain passages in his past life had been passing in review before his mind : passages in which Ellice Quentin was the central figure. She was a slender girl when he first knew her, looking taller than she was, with strange grey-green eyes, and a clear but bright colour in her cheeks. Her face was very attractive to some people, though it had no pretensions to regular beauty ; the features were delicately but oddly formed, indicating a refined and talented but wayward and unaccountable nature. In her ordinary home life, and also when she was in the company of those she did not like, she was silent, repellent, and cold ; but she not seldom in favouring circumstances kindled into brilliance of talk and action ; and there was a vein of passion in her which was itself the secret of her frequent coldness. Her lips, red as blood, were gracefully moulded and were perfectly under her control ; by subtle modulations she could render them expressive

of any emotion. Her figure was slight at this time, and scarcely as fully developed as that of most girls of her age; but she never made an ungainly movement, or fell into an awkward position; and she had such a genius for costume that whatever she put on straightway seemed to become an organic part of her. Her wrists were slender and long, and her fingers tapered almost to a point: Geoffrey Herne had felt their touch upon his face as soft as the thrill of delight that at the same moment swept his heart. But that was not until many months after their first meeting, which was unromantic enough; Mr. Quentin having invited him to dinner to discuss some professional business (Herne was a barrister). Ellice had treated him on this occasion with undisguised superciliousness, somewhat to Herne's amusement at first; for Mr. Quentin—an obese and ineffective elderly gentleman—though he boasted of blue blood somewhere in his veins, was far from being in a prosperous or dignified worldly condition; was very poor, in fact, and thought of nothing but obtaining possession of some property to which he had a very questionable claim. Meanwhile tradesmen used to present their bills with annotations at the bottom, intimating a desire more or less urgent to have them settled at once. Hereupon poor Mr. Quentin would wince and splutter; but Ellice, leaning back in her chair, with her hands folded on her lap, would meet his eye coldly and narrowly, with a sarcastic smile curling one side of her lips.

Mr. Quentin would rather face a score of insolent creditors than that little smile of his daughter's. For Ellice was a natural aristocrat far more than an hereditary one—she was born for a life of luxury and fastidious refinement, and her father could not help recollecting, at these moments, that he had thrown away eighty thousand pounds of money which should have been hers upon the turf; nor had he the consolation of reflecting that Ellice was ignorant of this fact. Ignorant of it! He sometimes shuddered to think how many facts discreditable to him that cold, silent girl probably knew. She was not always silent either; she could utter agonising remarks in a semi-jocose way. But let us do the young lady justice. It was within Mr. Quentin's memory that once, when he had returned home late at night, after a miserably unsuccessful interview with his lawyers, and had let himself into the house noiselessly with his latch-key, dreading to encounter Ellice's unsympathetic look, he had suddenly felt two slender arms drawn tightly about his neck in the darkness, and a hot and wet cheek pressed against his own. At that the unfortunate man had broken into sobs; Ellice had tried to soothe him, and sitting on his knee, with her head against his shoulder, had spoken to him such words as he had not heard since he and his dead wife were young. But after awhile she had fallen silent, and in the midst of an incoherent monologue of his on the subject of his wrongs and misadven-



tures, she had risen abruptly and left him, with only a curt good-night. She was a strange girl.

Geoffrey Herne's first impression of Ellice had not been particularly favourable, and if she had behaved as most young ladies would have done under the circumstances, he might probably have never bestowed a second thought upon her. But her gratuitous arrogance, after amusing him for awhile, began to pique him; and being possessed of an exceedingly keen tongue and wit of his own, he was tempted to enter into conversation with her. The dialogue which followed was probably worthy of a listener more intelligent than Mr. Quentin; the upshot of it being (so far as Herne was concerned) that he found it would require all his wit, and more than all his temper, to hold his own fairly against this oblique-eyed young lady, with her curving scarlet lips. They parted that night on terms of almost open hostility, and Herne, as he went homewards, more than once found his brows drawing together and his lips compressed at the recollection of the things she had said to him. 'She is a lady, though—confound her impudence!' was the sum of his mental comments. Her image was very vivid in his memory—unpleasantly so, indeed; not only that, but the intonation of her voice—her way of lifting back her head with a kind of haughty surprise when he addressed her; the gesture of her hands and shoulders—all were present to him. Moreover he recalled

one or two instances in which she had unmistakably had the better of him in the duel of words, and his face grew hot anew with a really disproportionate vexation. He would rather have made a fool of himself before the Lord Chief Justice of England than before that slender girl of twenty. He then resolved that he would avoid seeing her for the future; but he finally modified his determination so far as to tell himself that he would first give her such evidence of his superior qualities as should make her regret ever having had the temerity to provoke him.

As it turned out, this was a much longer and more arduous enterprise than he had anticipated; insomuch that after several months had gone by he did not seem much nearer the consummation than at first. The antagonism between him and Ellice had been—superficially, at least—constant and unrelenting; but meanwhile he had incidentally come to know her well, and he was too clear-sighted a man not to perceive that she was beginning to be indispensable to him. The discovery occasioned him much anxiety and inward struggle. His predilections had for years been against marriage, and he certainly had little encouragement to think that Ellice would ever dream of marrying him. One day, however, after a peculiarly bitter passage-at-arms, he rose and took up his hat to depart. He had something to say first, though, which had been on his mind for a week or two past.

'You are going?' she said indifferently, or, rather, with an air as of relief.

'Yes, I am going; and, as I shall probably not see you again, I will say good-bye.'

'Oh! You have had enough of it at last?'

'I am going to Australia.'

She looked slowly up at him as he stood near her chair, and looked slowly down again, while the colour gradually deepened in her cheeks. 'This is really the most entertaining thing I have heard from you in a long time,' she said lightly after awhile.

'It is the part of wisdom not to outstay one's best witticism,' returned Geoffrey in the same tone; 'so I'll be off at once. Good-bye.' He held out his hand.

'Good-bye,' she answered coldly. But she did not look up, or move her own hand.

'You won't shake hands?'

'What is the use, since we are never to meet again? If you are going, you can go without that.'

'Well, I suppose I can,' said he; and after standing a moment, during which she made no sign except to draw one deep breath, he turned and walked with a heavy tread to the door.

'Mr. Herne!' he heard her say as he laid his hand upon the latch. He looked round without speaking. She beckoned him to her with a movement of the head and hand.

'Excuse me,' she said, 'but I think you—you have left something. Will you come back here a moment?' There was a vibration in her voice that was new to Geoffrey. He came back.

'You were going away without shaking hands,' she said, looking up at him with a curious smile.

'You said that——'

'Oh, well, don't let us quarrel any more; I am tired of it. Here is my hand.'

Geoffrey took it. How soft it was—and how cold! It lay lightly in the embrace of his fingers, but he could perceive a slight tremulousness in it, which seemed also to pervade her whole body.

'You spoke of my having left something——' he began at length.

Her hand suddenly became alive in his, and grasped it tightly. She drew it to her cheek, that was as smooth as the petal of a lily; then slowly turned her face until her lips rested on it. All the blood flew tumultuously through Geoffrey's veins and sang in his ears. He was on his knee beside her, and looking in her eyes, which met his for a moment, and then sank.

'Now go to Australia!' she said in a whisper.

'Ellice—Ellice! Were you the thing I was leaving behind, my dear?' he said, bending forwards till his lips touched hers. . . After that there could be no more misunderstandings.

Geoffrey Herne did not go to Australia, either alone, as he had arranged to do, or with Ellice as his wife, as he perhaps might have done; for at this time she would have followed him anywhere in the world—or out of it. But it was decided that they should remain in England, where Geoffrey had good practice as a barrister, in addition to his settled income of six hundred pounds, and be married in May—that is, in about six months. Mr. Quentin put on a portentous aspect when he was first informed of the affair, protruding his under lip and rubbing slowly behind his ear with his middle finger. He sighed and muttered something about having once anticipated a 'more brilliant future—no offence to you, Herne, of course—for his dear Ellice.' But as a matter of fact he was by no means averse to the match, if he had not actually done what he could to promote it. There is apt to be a good deal of humbug inwoven in the characters of elderly men who have seen better days and are not resigned to worse ones. Geoffrey perceived that Mr. Quentin desired to make a merit of doing what really was pleasing to him; and it was not in an expectant son-in-law's heart to object to that. So matters on that side went smoothly.

To make the same remark regarding his relations with Ellice would be a triumph of understatement. These two found heaven in each other. 'I was made to love and to be loved,' she once said to him, as they sat

together in the little parlour on Christmas Eve. 'Be sure you make me love you enough!'

'If you had told me to be sure to love you enough——'

She smiled and said, 'Never mind about that: that will be my affair. But I must love so as to forget everything!' He was sitting on a low stool at her feet, his head leaning against her side. She let one arm fall about his neck, and her soft hand caressed his bearded cheek. 'As I love you at this moment,' she continued, in a tender murmur.

He took her hand in his and kissed the soft palm. 'What is it you wish to forget?' he asked presently.

'To tell you would be to remember.'

'But I wish to know.'

'I am not your wife yet: I shall not tell you. . . I wish to forget that I have only three dresses, and that you are not the eldest son of an earl.'

Geoffrey leant back his head till he could see her face, and laughed.

'Don't! Worse things have happened,' she said quickly.

'Worse than what?'

'Nothing. Do you think me beautiful?'

'I love you too much to know whether you are beautiful or not. I used to think you were beautiful some time ago, I believe.'

'You do not know what I can be yet. Loving you will make me seem beautiful—even to you!'

'Is that why you want to love me?'

'I don't know. It suits me. I wanted it. I wanted many things, but that most—at least now. Don't you sometimes think it would be wise to die?'

'I haven't thought so since I thought of going to Australia.'

'That isn't what I meant. This is a heavenly happiness; there cannot be another so good; and yet I . . . we might try others. Sometimes I feel as if all the world would be too little for me.'

'I shall never want any other kind of happiness; I shall only want more of this kind,' remarked Geoffrey, who did not know that Ellice was opening to him deeper glimpses of her inner self than anyone—than even she herself—had ever before been in the way of getting. He did not know, and therefore, in the security of his well-being, he did not look. But long afterwards he understood.

The weeks and the months went by, and the lives of the lovers grew to be more than ever one delicious life. Ellice's prophecy proved true: she did become more beautiful, in every way. Her moods, her silences, her coldness, were gone; she was even-tempered, blithe and tender; her singular eyes glowed with luxurious light; the curving of her lips was eloquent of refined enticement.

'Did any woman ever love as I do?' she sometimes asked. 'Do I overflow your heart?'

Geoffrey could have but one answer to such questions; and then she would add, 'This is my world, darling; keep me in it!' When they parted in the evening she would whisper to him, 'I do not like to have you leave me; something might happen . . . .' And Geoffrey, as he made his nightly way back to London from the little Putney villa, would image his coming married life in bright colours upon the darkness, and smile to himself at what he took to be Ellice's wayward or superstitious forebodings. 'I am not going to be one of those sentimental dastards who are afraid of their own good luck,' he said comfortably to himself. 'Ellice is in the unsubstantial idealism of love as yet; when we really come together she will forget her premonitions. Earthquakes do not seek people out merely because they are happy; and it would be more reasonable to suppose that those persons attract the lightning into whose souls the iron has already entered. Ha! that is rather a neat figure. I think that would be a good subject for a sonnet.'

This last observation will enable the reader to comprehend how hopelessly in love Geoffrey must have been. But he was not even embarrassed at his condition; he prided himself on it, as if no one had ever thoroughly sounded the depths of the master passion before him. No; neither poetry, romance,



nor history were able to furnish him with a parallel to his love; he had practically invented it. 'Not that I take any credit to myself for that,' he would protest modestly to solitude; 'no doubt there have been plenty of fellows who had as much capacity for love as I—or nearly as much. But then I always have the advantage of them in this—that I love Ellice! and that is enough to make a Titan out of a pigmy.' In short, Geoffrey was well content, and convinced that the universe must have been after all created by a personal and benevolent God; though in his former days he had shared the doubts of the late Mr. Mill and others on that subject. He even found latent charms in poor old Mr. Quentin, who was the father of all fascination, and must therefore have it in him somewhere. Mr. Quentin talked about his 'claim' after dinner, with a sort of sapient vapidness of tone and phrase; and pointed out to Geoffrey how probable it was, after all, that his long-baffled hopes would be realised. Geoffrey said that no doubt it was probable enough. He was thinking of Ellice, and arguing that a world which could produce her could surely produce so comparatively contemptible a miracle as the success of Mr. Quentin's suit. It would be little less than a miracle if it occurred. Geoffrey, who, from friendly motives, had at one time investigated the matter almost as thoroughly as a solicitor could have done, knew enough about it to know that. Nevertheless, he now, in the opulence of his felicity,

agreed with Mr. Quentin, that all might turn out as he wished. Mr. Quentin, who had great faith in the judgments of those who agreed with him, mentioned what Geoffrey had said to Ellice the next morning. Ellice, who was lifting spoonfuls of coffee from her cup and letting them trickle back again, replaced her spoon quietly in the saucer on hearing this, and became meditative, with chin on hand and downcast eyes.

'What would you do if you got this property, father?' she enquired after a while.

'Take you up to London, and present you to our gracious Sovereign, and let you mingle among those to whose rank in life you were born,' replied he eloquently. 'As for myself,' he continued, lifting up his double chin and settling his stock, 'I shall—should enter Parliament and—and——'

'Give the State the benefit of your experience of unpaid tradesmen's bills,' interposed Ellice sarcastically. It was the old tone, unused by her since her betrothal; but a change seemed all at once to have come over her. Her father's under lip fell, and he stared at her in a piteously crest-fallen way. She pushed back her chair from the table, folded her arms, and gazed intently at the fire. The silence lasted some time. At length she said slowly, still keeping her eyes on the fire, 'I hope, for both our sakes, you will never get it.'

'For both our sakes——?' began Mr. Quentin, with a remonstrative emphasis on

'both'; but his daughter again interrupted him.

'When I say "both," I do not mean myself and you. But what absurdity it all is!' she broke off with a short mocking laugh. 'I might as well hope that the Queen will not come out here this afternoon, and take a cup of tea with us.'

'Well, I must say, Ellice, that I don't understand all this,' exclaimed Mr. Quentin, clearing his throat and pulling down his waistcoat with the air of a man who feels he has been unfairly attacked. 'If you care nothing for ease and dignity yourself, that is no reason why you should grudge your father the means of—hm—comfort and consideration appropriate to advancing years. And hereafter, when I am gone——'

Ellice put up her hand, and a curious smile crossed her lips. 'You are too imaginative, father,' she said, in a quiet, but no longer antagonistic, voice. 'I am very matter-of-fact, and I can see that if what you wish came to pass, it would be the ruin of my happiness. And I daresay you remember that when I am not in a good humour I am not pleasant company. For heaven's sake do not let us mention this foolish subject any more.'

She got up and went out of the room; and Mr. Quentin, after standing for several minutes with his back to the fire, now putting his hands beneath his coat tails, now thrusting them in his pockets, and now inserting

his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat in the jerky manner of one whose composure and self-esteem have been exasperated, pulled from his breast-pocket a large leather-covered memorandum-book, opened it, and applied his thick nose diligently to its contents. After a prolonged investigation, he closed it, and ejaculating 'Fifteen thousand a year! and got by a fluke! Why mayn't a fluke transfer it to me?—and then, I fancy, I should see my way to a better match for Ellice than this affair with Herne,'—he buttoned his coat, took a cheroot from the stand on the mantelpiece, lit it, sighed, and walked out.

It is always a question whether, after all our efforts, calculations, and precautions, the issue of events does not remain precisely as much beyond prediction as would have been the case had we forborne to disquiet ourselves. One grey, moist morning, towards the end of May, and about three weeks before the predicted wedding-day, Ellice was walking along one of the suburban roads that lead towards London, in a state of unusual excitement. Her eyes were fixed in pre-occupation, her colour was high, and her lips occasionally moved, as if under the influence of vivid thought. Presently the figure of Herne appeared coming along in the opposite direction at his customary long, measured stride. It was his habit when he took a holiday to walk out from London to the Quentins' villa in Putney; and Ellice had

expected to meet him. To Geoffrey, however, the encounter was an unlooked-for pleasure; and when he recognised Ellice from afar, he began to make gestures expressive of satisfaction. He did not notice that she made no response to them.

When they met he took her hand and kissed it. The road was only half a country one; several houses were within sight, and he probably thought that a warmer greeting would be open to objection. But Ellice raised her eyes to his with a curiously intent look, in which there was a subtly enlightening expression, readable only to a lover, and which informed Geoffrey that he might follow the dictate of his heart. He was not the man to neglect such a permission, and he stooped and kissed her lips. At the same time he apprehended that some wheel or other must be out of gear: women are seldom heedless of conventionality if their minds are serene.

'Have you come to carry me home with you?' he asked jocosely.

'Let us walk towards London,' answered Ellice, slipping her hand through his arm and causing him to turn. 'I am not going to be at home to-day.'

'Where shall we go, then?'

'Anywhere! I don't care where. To London.'

'By all means. But then there is no necessity for walking. The train will be quicker.'

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'No ; I prefer to walk—for the present,' said Ellice, speaking quickly and nervously, and pressing her companion's arm between her hands.

'And how long may we be away ?'

'I never wish to go back !'

Geoffrey's face suddenly became grave. Her tone and her whole manner now confirmed him in his first suspicion—that something was wrong. He glanced down at Ellice, rapidly passing in mental review all probable or possible causes of the difficulty. At length he said :

'Have you had a row with your father ?'

'Yes—no ; that is no matter. I want to talk only about ourselves. Do you love me ?'

'If we are going to talk about that, it will take some time. One day is not long enough for me to tell you how much I love you.'

'Do you love me enough to do anything for me, or with me ?' She moved her free hand down his sleeve to his hand, and repeated, 'Anything ?'

'I love you : there is no stronger word or thing that I know of,' replied Geoffrey, feeling, indeed, an immense gush of tenderness in his heart, which his anxiety deepened.

She made no immediate answer, but Geoffrey felt that she was full of restrained excitement, and he insensibly prepared himself for some kind of shock. In this short space he recognised that there might be much

in Ellice which he had never known or comprehended.

'But there are so many things in the world!' she broke out suddenly and vehemently. 'Why are they there unless we were meant to have some relation to them? Wealth, and society, and power, and fame; to be able to go where you like and do what you will; to carry out all that is in your mind, without any hindrance from mean and contemptible obstacles that degrade you as well as imprison you! How can one even love with one's whole heart if all those things are wanting? Are you sure you could, Geoffrey?'

'I don't expect to have perfection in everything,' replied he, beginning to feel relieved; 'but the question is, whether all these things you speak of are better worth having than love. Of course, it would be pleasant to have both; but, as a matter of fact, most people seem to get either the one or the other, and not both—except those poor devils who get neither.'

'Oh, I know it—I know it. That is perfectly true, though I don't know why it should be so—I don't think it ought to be so.' She relinquished his arm, and began feverishly to pull off her gloves. 'It is hateful to have to choose,' she added.

'Luckily, we are spared that pain, at all events,' remarked Geoffrey with a smile.

Ellice stopped in her walk, and turning a little towards him, looked at him attentively.

She had the air of mentally putting some alternative before herself, and deciding which course she would pursue. She then walked on more slowly, with her eyes downcast.

'One thinks what one would do in such and such a case, even when it does not actually come to pass,' she said. 'A great fortune is a great thing—it is something real. Suppose you had to choose between a great fortune and me?'

'It would be choosing between a great fortune and a greater. Of course I should take the greater,' returned Geoffrey, feeling a certain intellectual satisfaction in his answer. But Ellice pressed her scarlet lips together, as if rejecting any merely complimentary or epigrammatical evasion of her enquiry. She was, in fact, more in earnest than he was, because he had come to the conclusion that she was merely disquieting herself, as women sometimes will, about an imaginary, not to say impossible, contingency. The best way to treat such conduct was to laugh at it.

'But you are a man,' she resumed presently, 'and it would be different with you, because when a man has not got a fortune, he always thinks he can make one. But if you were a woman?'

'In that case I should get the man to decide for me.'

She came close to his side and once more took his arm. 'Yes,' she said, speaking rapidly, 'yes, to feel that a thing is done and cannot be undone. It is so terrible to



wait, Geoffrey; something might happen—you might die, or—— Geoffrey, I wish it were done.'

'You wish what were done?' demanded he, looking down at her, while his heart gave a bound.

She made no other reply than to meet his eyes intently, the colour gradually overspreading her face.

'That we were married?' he asked at length, in a low tone.

She gave a sudden sigh; then a smile trembled across her lips for a moment, but without affecting the earnestness of her brow.

'Then something has happened?' said Geoffrey, heavily and gravely. 'Tell me.'

'I have told you. What more can I say? I am afraid: I want to be safe!'

'I would have married you six months ago if you would have had me,' said Geoffrey, almost coldly; for he dreaded lest passion should hurry him on to do something which, while for the moment satisfying Ellice, might in the end lead her to reproach him. It was difficult to think clearly at such a juncture, and yet something must be thought and said at once, for no lover can endure to seem in need of stimulus from his mistress. 'Does your father know of this?' he asked.

'No; he would prevent it,' she answered excitedly. 'Geoffrey, do not stop to think whether this is wise or foolish. Do not ask me. . . . We are together. This is the time.'

'But unless we have a special licence—and that is impossible!'

'Impossible?'

'Ellice—you are not of age.'

She turned very pale, and slowly let go his arm. 'You should not have thought of that—you do not love me.' She turned away, and her hands fell to her sides.

Geoffrey made no reply; for, man of the world and strong though he was, he was trembling all over, and could not trust his voice to speak.

'Good-bye,' said Ellice presently, still keeping her face averted.

'Look at me, my girl!' he exclaimed, taking hold of her wrist: and at his touch she did look up at him for a moment with a singular expression, half wayward and half winning, which he remembered vividly for a long time afterwards. He continued: 'We cannot break the law. If we love each other we can marry in three weeks——'

She raised her other hand quickly, and he stopped. After a pause she said, 'Geoffrey, look at me—look in my eyes, dear. I love you—not in three weeks, but—now.'

The tone in which the words were spoken made Geoffrey feel as if his ordinary life were taken away from him, and a new, perverted, delirious life put in its place. Instinctively, he sought self-defence in incredulity; but it was in vain—there was no mistaking what her eyes said, whatever construction might be forced upon her words. For an instant, a

fire sprang up in his own eyes; but then, with a savage effort of the will, he dropped her wrist and said huskily :

‘No!’

‘Well, it is fate!’ returned Ellice with a light sigh. Presently she bit her lip, and gave a little laugh. ‘How seriously we have been taking things: anybody would suppose that we—meant something. Good-bye, Geoffrey.’

‘What do you mean by good-bye?’

‘Nothing; only that I am going home, and that you are not to come with me. Oh, you need not look solemn, or angry. But I must go alone, really.’

‘What——’

‘And I will write to you to-morrow, and tell you why. Good-bye; we must not do more than shake hands on this street corner, with that chemist’s shop opposite, and the waggon coming along. Good-bye until to-morrow.’

‘This is strange!’ was all that Geoffrey could mutter. She went away from him, walking lightly and swiftly, turning her head towards the right or the left occasionally, but never looking back. Presently he saw something fall from her dress and flutter to the ground without her noticing it; and after she had passed out of sight he walked slowly to it, and picked it up. It was a little black bow. Geoffrey pinned it inside his coat. The next day he received the following letter :

'You were quite right, Geoffrey, and I thank you. But I am going to make you hate me and despise me even more than you did then. We shall not marry in three weeks, or ever. It is better so. I suppose I was destined to experience both—the love of the world as well as your love ; to try them both, I mean. I daresay I should never have been contented else. I am a strange girl, as I have told you before. It seems to me I have loved you as much as a woman can ever love a man ; and if yesterday—never mind, we will forget that. I have not changed either, only that somehow yesterday seems ages away from me. I do not understand myself, and I don't think I want to. Perhaps marriage would not have come up to my ideal of it ; and I could not have borne to be disappointed in it—with you. Perhaps I have had the sweetest that love can give. The other cannot be so sweet, I know ; but I must try it, too. It is fate !

'ELLICE.

'The person with whom we have been having the lawsuit about the property died last week, and left the property to us, on condition that I married his nephew.'

And at the bottom of the page was added : 'Do not hate me always.'

Geoffrey Herne took this shock with a serenity that surprised himself. Indeed, he got so far as to say, after a few days, that he was glad it had turned out so. Of

course he never answered the letter, and he never spoke to anyone of the episode of his engagement to Miss Quentin. It had been known to but few of Herne's acquaintances; and if they learnt the sequel they were all too considerate, or too cautious, to discuss the matter with him, or in his presence. To tell the truth, he was not a very genial companion. He had always had a biting tongue, and now it had become almost venomous. Whenever he saw an opening for saying a cruel witty thing, he said it unhesitatingly, and without compunction, no matter if it were at the expense of his dearest friend. 'I must have my little joke,' he would reply if any remonstrance were attempted. The men in his club began to fight rather shy of him; no one could get the better of him in repartee, and he was noted for never forgetting or forgiving a slight or an ill-turn, even if it were unintentional. 'Herne will have his revenge if he waits a year for it,' used to be said of him in reference to such affairs. It was worth nobody's while to be his enemy, and nobody knew how to be his friend. He saw very little of society; but he worked with vigour at his profession, and every month added to his reputation as a barrister. 'He will be Q.C. before he's forty if he keeps on,' was prophesied of him by a certain learned judge, not given to reckless predictions. It was evident, therefore, that his love-disappointment had done him no harm.

One day, contrary to his usual custom, he

accepted an invitation to a garden-party at Lady Feuilleton's suburban villa. It was a gentle June afternoon, a year and a month after his last interview with Ellice Quentin. A broad rectangular lawn, soft and deep to the foot, was surrounded with tall limes and elms, whose voluminous leafiness cast grateful shadows athwart the turf. Beneath the trees a path lay in sunshine-fretted gloom. The house, with its balcony and open windows, stood at one end of the lawn; at the opposite end a marquee had been set up; a large sheet of canvas had moreover been pinned down upon an area of the level turf as a dancing floor. Chairs of designs more or less fantastic were placed in straggling groups along the shady side of the lawn, and these were occupied by men and women in summer attire—it was very warm—and bright-coloured parasols and fans made the scene lively as well as lovely. When the music began the charm was complete.

Geoffrey Herne, however, appeared to feel particularly morose, and spoke in a tone which, though punctiliously courteous, had a covert sneer underneath it. In reality, he was perhaps not morose; on the contrary, he may have felt a piteous forlornness at the heart, of which he was ashamed, and which he desired to conceal. His hostess, a vivacious, Parisian-looking little lady, was paying him special attention, and chatted to him inveterately. At last Herne said he must go home; Lady Feuilleton expostulated volubly,

and ended by proposing that he should accompany her into the house, and drink a glass of iced claret-punch with her. Herne thought that would be as good a way as any of preparing his escape, and therefore he complied. They entered the parlour arm-in-arm. The change from sunlight to gloom rendered objects almost undistinguishable, and Geoffrey tripped over something which turned out to be the skirt of a lady's dress, and he made his apologies without discerning the features of the lady to whom he was making them. She had been sitting down—she rose hurriedly, but said nothing in reply.

'Have you come for a freshener, too, Lady Feuilleton?' said a man's voice, which, for some reason, immediately inspired Geoffrey with a feeling of aversion and contempt.

'Who are you, pray?—Why, Mr. Amidon, I declare!' exclaimed the hostess. 'And who is this with you? surely not your wife?'

'Incredible, but true!' replied the other, with a short cackling laugh.

'Dear me! what is society coming to! I'm so delighted—so good of you to come. How do you do, dear? Oh! and let me introduce my friend Mr. Geoffrey Herne—Mrs. Amidon. You ought to get on capitally together; you are both so sarcastic! We came to get some iced punch: have you had any? Well, you must join us. Dear

me! Mr. Herne, can you lift that jug? it's so heavy. Just a glass all round, and then I must run back to my guests. What a lovely dress, dear!

'Capital punch, upon my soul!' said Mr. Amidon, as he set down his emptied glass. He and Lady Feuilleton chatted together for a minute or two, laughing and fencing. He was a youngish-looking man, with a flaxen moustache and pale grey eyes, rather red round the edges. His complexion was not good, and when he laughed his chin retreated towards his throat and he twisted his shoulders. Geoffrey stood looking at him in silence. Mrs. Amidon had again sat down in a chair beside the table and was fanning herself. Presently Mr. Amidon expressed an intention of accompanying Lady Feuilleton back to the garden, and they went out, leaving Mrs. Amidon and Geoffrey to 'become acquainted,' as Lady Feuilleton put it. When they were gone, Mrs. Amidon closed her fan and looked up.

'Will you sit down by me for a moment, Geoffrey?' she said.

'Of course you understand, Mrs. Amidon,' said he, 'that I should not have come here if I had expected to meet you.'

'Then I am glad you did not know. I have wanted to meet you and talk with you. And, after all, that proves me to be charitable; for people generally dislike and avoid those whom they have injured.'



'Without calling your charity into question, Mrs. Amidon,' said Geoffrey, 'I may be permitted to relieve you from the burden of supposing that you have injured me. I should put it upon another ground—that we are apt to shun those who have benefited us. In an indirect way I may have benefited you, by keeping you occupied until Mr. Amidon was ready to come forward.'

She was looking at him while he spoke with her head a little on one side, her scarlet lips occasionally moving slightly. Now her eyelids drooped, and she sighed.

'I have looked forward to this meeting often,' she said, 'and I was prepared to hear you say worse things than that. Perhaps, after all, you have not cared so much as I thought you would. I have no heart to fight with you, Geoffrey, as we used to fight in——'

She paused. Her persistence in calling him Geoffrey produced an effect upon him. The sound penetrated far into him, and set vibrating chords which long neglect had scarcely rendered less sensitive. He was further disturbed by her not attempting to defend herself: not that anything could make her conduct defensible, but the blow that provokes no return loses half its virtue to the striker. And, finally, it must be confessed that her aspect and propinquity were not without their influence. She was more fully developed, more beautiful than

when he saw her last; and there were slight modifications in her manner and expression which were on the side of gentleness and sadness, and which moved Geoffrey to unwilling sympathy. Perhaps she had suffered enough to conciliate even his resentment.

'What do you think of Mr. Amidon?' she enquired presently.

'I have not had much opportunity of judging; but I should think,' said Geoffrey, with diminishing bitterness, 'that he would be a very suitable husband for you.' It struck him as peculiar that Ellice, in spite of her culpability towards himself, did not shrink from meeting his eyes, or from introducing topics of conversation which might have been supposed at least as unwelcome to her as to him. But hers had always been a strange and unaccountable character.

She opened and closed her fan, glanced out of the window towards the sunlit lawn, then back at him, and said: 'Do you want to—leave me?'

A minute before Geoffrey had fancied that he did wish to leave her; now, for some reason, he changed his mind, and dropped into a chair opposite her.

'What do you want of me?' he asked.

'Do I look the same to you as when you saw me last?'

'You look better than you did then—handsomer—and you are more expensively

dressed. And, of course, the fact that you are one of the leaders and ornaments of society has its effect upon me.'

'Geoffrey, it may not be often that we come across each other again; why should we hold masks before our faces? We have been intimate. You have not forgiven me for leaving you. You have said to yourself, "If she had loved me she would have given up the world for me"; and so you concluded that I was a hypocrite from the beginning. But if I had been a hypocrite, I would have married you; or I would never have let you know that I loved you.'

'Probably I don't understand you—and never did.'

'No man ever was your rival, Geoffrey; the world was your rival; but yet you should not be jealous; because, though it drew me irresistibly, it never drew that best part of me that was yours. I could not have lived without the world—without longing for it; and I could not live with the world without longing for—— Forgive me!'

'Take care what you say now, Ellice! You touch fire!' exclaimed Geoffrey in a suppressed growl, with a glow kindling under his gloomy brows.

She rose quickly from her chair, moved close to him, and laid her hand upon his.

'Burn me, then!' she answered, with a strange, tragic smile. And while they confronted each other, she continued: 'My sin

was that I preferred living falsely with the world, to living falsely with you.'

'You made the world a bad place for me,' returned Geoffrey; but his tone was no longer stern, and his hand now held hers. 'I had but one love, unfortunately, and that was yours. But you have a husband.'

'I have a name,' she answered carelessly, 'which I wear as I wear this hat, because it is the fashion. Only the one is called a husband and the other a hat.'

'That is not the whole of it. You can change your hat to-morrow; but there is only one way for a woman to get rid of a husband.'

'What difference about him, Geoffrey, if you will be my friend?'

'Your friend?' he repeated sharply, dropping her hand.

'Oh, do not be angry again! . . . no, no, not that! do not ask me to do that! . . . I am not so selfish, nor so wicked, Geoffrey, as to wish you to—to give up your life to what has not, after all, been wholly yours. I am not worth that. I only ask that you should be my friend. Help me to live so as to respect myself. What can I say? I know that what is past cannot be recalled; you can never feel towards me as you might have done if—if I had been less weak. But I am so lonely; I hoped you could—'

'No: that won't do! nothing like that,' interrupted Geoffrey in a heavy voice. 'I am not a monster of virtue and self-restraint

Ellice: and I'm not a cur either. Do you suppose your husband would fall in with this arrangement. And do you suppose that I would condescend to sneak about his premises, having a secret understanding with his wife—secret from him? It is true enough that there can no longer be a fresh and pure love between you and me; but there can be no friendship—because, for good or evil, I love you still! I can commit a crime, but I will tell no lie, nor live one. Everything must be open and above board between us and the world, or there must be nothing at all.'

'Oh, Geoffrey, this is terrible!' murmured Ellice, letting her folded hands hang before her. In fact, she had not anticipated his attitude; she was a woman who wanted much, but who was not, perhaps, willing to go all lengths in order to get it. At the same time she could not help admiring what he had said and liking him all the better for it; and she certainly did not admire Mr. Amidon, or passionately like the fashionable life which they led, and of which she had seen enough clearly to comprehend its limitations. Nevertheless, a woman who has achieved a position before the world will hesitate profoundly before abandoning outward conventionality for avowed outlawry. Compromises are more convenient. But how if a stubborn man persists in refusing to stoop to compromise? The compromise was in itself reasonable in the highest degree, if not also in the highest

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degree moral ; but that evidently made no impression on Geoffrey.

There was a sound of voices and laughter approaching the open window ; Lady Feuilleton and Mr. Amidon were coming back from the lawn. Ellice took up her fan nervously, and passed a hand over her hair. She had been able to entertain such reflections as the above, while the man with whose soul she had played fast and loose was standing, as it were, with the sword at his heart. He now spoke again ; and the words in which he began made her start, for it brought back to her memory another scene of a year and a month before. Only this time he did not grasp her wrist.

'Look at me, my girl ! I will wait in the drawing-room of the Lansdowne Hotel this evening from nine o'clock until eleven. If I see you there, there will be no trouble in getting free from your husband. If not, never try to see me again. You will have done worse than murder.'

The others came in, full of badinage and liveliness. Lady Feuilleton protested that she believed Mr. Herne and Mrs. Amidon had been flirting.

'Quite the contrary,' returned Mrs. Amidon, smiling composedly. 'Only we have been discovering that we knew each other long ago, and that I have lost the wager we made as to which of us would be married first. I will pay it now,' she added, taking a white rosebud from the vase on the table.

She went up to Geoffrey and slipped it into the button-hole of his coat. As she did so, she murmured below her breath, with a glance into his eyes :

‘ Before this fades—— !’

And then Geoffrey, with a very brief adieu, went out.

There can be little doubt that, when Ellice did that, and said those words, she was resolved to meet Geoffrey in the Lansdowne drawing-room, between nine and eleven o'clock ; and at all events she could not endure to be left in an awkward or unpicturesque situation. But unfortunately it was then only six in the afternoon ; three hours in which to wait, to reconsider, to doubt. It would be doing her injustice to say that there was not a struggle. The struggle was even carried to such a pitch that, at half-past nine, a hansom cab drove up to the corner of the street below the Lansdowne Hotel, and a lady got out of it, veiled, with a satchel in her hand. She paid the cabman, and then walked along towards the hotel. The broad bay window of the drawing-room abutted upon the sidewalk ; a street lamp stood on the opposite side of the road. As the lady passed the window she glanced up, and saw a man seated there with a newspaper, which he was not reading, in his hand. Her knees trembled, but she said to herself : ‘ If he looks out and recognises me, I will go to him.’ Even then he turned, slowly, and looked out ; she stood still, unable to move. He must have seen

her; but he did not recognise her; after a moment he turned away. Then she faced about, and ran back along the sidewalk, with what feelings in her heart who can tell? The hansom had not yet gone from the place where she left it; and she was driven back to her house in Mayfair, where she was to receive some distinguished guests.

## II.

GEOFFREY HERNE'S reflections were upon these matters, as he sat in his chair on the spring day with which this story began. An interval of two years had elapsed since he waited for Mrs. Amidon in the drawing-room of the Lansdowne Hotel. During that period his professional success had been rather on the wane. He was as clever and sarcastic as ever—perhaps more so; but he neglected his work. He was morose and indolent; the stimulus to achieve great things was lacking. He conceived himself to have fathomed life and to have proved it worthless. 'What is the odds what a man does? The devil is at the bottom of it all!' he sometimes would remark. His more philosophical and healthy-minded friends detected something petulant or childish in this attitude of his; and the futility of their attempts to induce him to 'throw it off' served to confirm them in their opinion. It should be understood that nothing



definite was known about what had occurred further than that Herne had had a row with some woman. But other men have had rows with women, and got over it.

The letter which Herne had just received and read was not long, though it was sufficiently suggestive; and it may as well be given here :

‘ Dear Geoffrey,—I shall never see Mr. Amidon again. I wish to see you at once. I know you must have had hard thoughts of me, but if I had had you always with me, I should have always done what you wish. It is when you leave me that I lose my strength. That is the secret of all our trouble. When we are together I always have known that I love you, and that I can never love anything but you; but when we are parted, other thoughts come; sometimes I imagine that love is all imagination. Geoffrey, I have never told you what I did not know to be true. If you had only made me yours at first! Even as I write to you at this moment, and think of my life since I saw you last, I half doubt whether anything is real of what I have felt for you; and yet they were the deepest feelings of all. I seem fated not to be happy; and yet I have tried ways of happiness more than most women. What is with me is real; what is away from me—you—are like a dream. But you are a dream that I believe in more than in reality; and I come to you in my trouble. Come and see me this evening

without fail. I remember what you said to me at parting two years ago. At last I have done my part; I do not ask you to do yours; but at least come to me.—Yours,

‘ELLICE.’

Two years is a long time. Geoffrey had not forgotten Ellice, and her evil influence upon his life had not ceased to be operative; but he had ceased to feel the need of her personal presence. He had grown so accustomed to the wrong of her desertion, that this had become more necessary to him than she herself was. After a while we make friends with our grievances, and would be at a loss were they suddenly removed. An hour ago there was nothing that Geoffrey would have desired less than to hear again from his lost Ellice.

Nor was this all. Within the last three weeks a new element had come into Geoffrey's gloomy life. He had admitted it in a mood of self-contemptuous indolence; but since then it had worked upon him gently but powerfully, and was now on the way to make itself an unlooked-for resource and consolation. It had aroused a sentiment of gratitude in Geoffrey's heart, which, by-and-by, perhaps, would develop into something warmer and more tender. It had invested his future with a subdued but brightening light, so that he had doubtfully told himself that his latter days might be happier than those which were passed. Now, above all things, he wished for no change, no disturb-

ance. Nevertheless, it was at this moment that the change and disturbance had come. He could feel, stealing subtly through his veins, a lawless and reckless heat which he remembered but too well, though it had long been a stranger to him. These written pages came from her, had been touched by her hand, and caressed by her breath. From them seemed to proceed an insidious mist, blinding his eyes to honour, and leading astray his judgment. How great and unaccountable was her power over him! It had not always been for evil—not so at first. No; at first it had been the purest and loftiest emotion of his heart. But now that it was become evil, it was not less strong: it was stronger.

Still, it might be resisted; it should, it must be resisted! Geoffrey pulled himself out of his reverie, and stood upright. After glancing confusedly first this way and then that, he went to the tall secretaire between the windows, and unlocked one of its inner drawers. Out of the drawer he took the black silk bow and the dried rosebud, which, at different times, had come to him from Ellice. Of late he had often thought of destroying these relics, but he had put off doing so, adducing many arguments to justify himself in his procrastination. Now, however, the thing must be done, if it were to be done at all. Geoffrey brought them and laid them upon the letter which he had placed upon the mantelpiece, after

once more taking it from its envelope. After a pause, he folded the letter about them, and grasped the little bundle in his hand. The next moment he quickly replaced it on the mantelpiece and faced towards the door. Had not some one knocked?

The knock was repeated. He strode heavily and wrathfully to the door, and opened it. There stood a woman, dressed in black, with a red rose in her bosom. She immediately threw back her gauze veil, but before she did so he had recognised her. Moreover, in spite of the utter surprise of her appearance at this place and hour, it seemed to him that he had been all along secretly expecting her. With a sort of dogged sullenness he made way for her, and she came in without hesitation, and with perfect grace.

'We are together again, Geoffrey,' she said, when he had closed the door, facing him as he advanced towards her. She took a hand of his in both hers, and added, 'Yes, you are real! You see, I would not wait. It was not worth while to risk anything more.'

'You are too late, by some weeks,' answered he, looking over her head at the wall.

'Why? Ah, you mean that—you don't care for me any more!' She let go his hand, and looked at him askance. Geoffrey, though he was thinking of far different

things, noticed that she was paler than he had remembered her, except that her lips were scarlet as ever, and to the beauty of her face was superadded a depth of expression, distinct from its natural feminine mysteriousness. He suddenly fetched a deep sigh, like one who is oppressed, and then he walked to the mantelpiece, and rested his elbow on it, and his head on his hand.

'It is not necessary,' said Ellice, after a pause. 'I did not even expect it. I have done you too much harm—a great deal too much. But it is partly for that reason that I came. Whatever there is left of me belongs to you, if it can be of any use to you. I would like to die in some way that would make you forgive me.'

'Forgiveness is a word which children use,' replied he; 'it is never anything more than a word. The only thing I could not forgive you is, that you have come in my way again.'

A light sparkled in Ellice's eyes, and she smiled a very little. For, although the superficial significance of the words was repellent enough, she could discern the essential, reluctant flattery underlying them. It was not because she was odious to Geoffrey that he wished her away; but because she was too much the contrary. She was safe, therefore.

'Let us talk together this once,' she said, 'and afterwards, if you like, you need

never see me again. May I sit down here with you beside me? How happy we might have been!

'Do you wish me to remember that you are a married woman?' he demanded sullenly. 'You seem to think that everything is a game and a plaything. Can you alter or take back what you have been doing these last three years? What have you done with your husband?'

'Do you remember a thing you said two years ago, Geoffrey, when I asked you to be my friend? Well, there need be no secret now. I mean never to see Mr. Amidon again. I don't care what society says or thinks. He has made it impossible for me to live with him. I don't blame him, for he never could have had much satisfaction out of me, poor creature. He knew from the beginning that I cared nothing for him; it was merely an arrangement on account of property, and I—I consented more for my father's sake than——'

'You need not take the trouble to say that to me!' interrupted Geoffrey with a harsh laugh.

'No; I will tell you the whole truth,' she said, leaning back in her chair and surveying him attentively. 'I have always told you that, so far as I knew it; but now, for the first time, I think I know it all. I thought I needed something more than your love, but it was a mistake. I had not had enough of it to know what it could be—that is all.'

Mr. Amidon has at least taught me that ; he has taught me by showing me all that it is not. I used to think there were so many pleasant things in the world, that no one pleasure—not even the pleasure of your love—could make up for the loss of the others. But I have found that no pleasure can be really enjoyed except through love ; one might as well save money for dresses by going without food. What is the use of fine clothes if you are dead ?’

‘Do you intend to divorce your husband ?’

Ellice looked down for a moment at her hands, then glanced up with a smile and nodded.

‘Does he know of it ?’

‘No. He does not know where I am at this moment. I left him suddenly yesterday in Paris. But he cannot help himself ; he has no defence.’

‘Well, and after you have got your divorce—what then ?’

Ellice was looking straight at Geoffrey when he asked this question, and for all answer she gave him another of her strange, unexpected smiles.

Geoffrey stood up ; this scarcely disguised avowal that she believed her power over him to be undiminished so far defeated itself as to give him strength for at least temporary resistance. He took her letter with its enfolded contents off the mantelpiece.

‘Two years have made more difference

with me than they seem to have made with you,' he said. 'I don't pretend to be as fresh-hearted and as ready to begin life over again now as I was then, and perhaps I can give you the friendly counsel to-day which you expected of me that afternoon at Lady Feuilleton's. You will make a great mistake, in my opinion, in leaving your husband. He can be of more use to you than anybody else can. The longer you live the more of that sort of help you will need. You will find it more inconvenient to give up the world than it was to give up me. My advice is that you take the next train back to Paris.'

'I will go if you send me,' replied Ellice, rising with an unhurried movement, and standing in slender gracefulness before him. 'If that advice comes from your heart, Geoffrey, I will do even that for you, if it will make you happier. But—will you be happier? Am I grown ugly and hateful to you? Look at me, Geoffrey! You used to think my lips were beautiful.'

'Look at this!' returned he, breaking out into fierceness. He unfolded the letter, and showed her the black bow and the dried rosebud. 'These came from you. I have kept them till now, but at the moment you came in I was going to burn them, and let that part of my life be annihilated with them; for I had begun a new life, which they dishonoured. Why do you come now? You promised to come before that flower faded. Did you think it was immortal?'



'You have kept it all this time,' said Ellice softly, drawing a deep breath. 'Then, perhaps, it may not be too late to make it bloom again. Shall we try, Geoffrey?'

His eyes and face glowed; he felt himself drawn towards her as by the strong current of a river; their hands met, when, as if by some sudden impulse independent of his own will, he uttered the words:

'We cannot; I am going to be married.'

At first it seemed as if this announcement had produced no effect whatever upon Ellice. She continued to clasp Geoffrey's hands, and her gaze was untroubled. But presently she began slowly to grow pale, until her whole face was quite white, while her eyes darkened until they appeared black. Her lips fell apart a little, and it was with difficulty that she moved them to say: 'You—I did not hear. What was it?'

Geoffrey did not speak again. It was with a conscious effort that he held himself upright, and looked at her. He wished this were over. Ellice now slipped her hands from his and drew them back against her shoulders, as if they had touched something unwholesome; but all the while she kept questioning him with a gaze half incredulous, half wistful. At last, however, and all at once, the full significance of what he had told her seemed to leap into her mind, charging her features with a vivid and sinister expression, the like of which Geoffrey had never seen in her before. It ended in her laughing

somewhat shrilly, and sitting down again in her chair. She felt nervously for her handkerchief, and having got it, pressed it several times to her mouth.

'You took me quite by surprise,' she began, in a thin voice. 'You are really going to be married! How dramatically you brought it out! Who—may I ask to whom?'

'No name that you have ever heard,' said Geoffrey stolidly.

'And you have been engaged to her long? You love her passionately, of course?'

'We have been engaged about three weeks. She deserves the best love——'

'Yes—I didn't mean to pry into your tender affairs! Geoffrey, have you kissed her—often, I mean?'

'Yes, a hundred times,' he answered, between his teeth.

Ellice gave an involuntary shudder, and made a gesture as if to shut out what he had said from her ears. The emotion brought the blood surging and tingling back to her face. She turned her head aside and remained for some time with her gaze fixed upon the wall. Geoffrey ventured to make no sign, for he had tried his resolution to the uttermost, and knew too well where another struggle would leave him. Yet, at heart, perhaps, he grudged himself a victory so much less sweet than defeat would have been. At that moment Ellice was for him

the only woman in the world. He was ready to fall at her feet. He felt as if all the outrage had been on his side and all the suffering on hers.

At last she got up, outwardly quiet, save for the deep flush in her cheeks and the sparkle in her eyes, which travelled over Geoffrey occasionally as she spoke, but never rested steadily upon him. 'You have made me feel ashamed of myself,' she said. 'I think you should have told me this news at first. No—I take that back. I broke in upon you uninvited and—but it was because I thought—I did not think—— You must believe that I am not so unwomanly as to have done it if I had known.' She paused, buttoning and unbuttoning her glove mechanically, her lips moving silently. Finally she looked up and said in a fresher tone: 'May I ask you one favour?'

Geoffrey moved his head in silent assent.

'I shall go away—I shall go back to-morrow evening,' she went on. 'You see I am wise enough to take your advice now. But I want very much to see—this lady before I go. You need not be afraid; I should say nothing that could pain her; but you can understand why I should like to see her. I suppose I may tell you—for you must know it already—that she is the only woman in the world whom I can feel an interest in seeing. When I picture you to myself hereafter, I want to be able to picture her too. Will you bring her to see

me to-morrow, before I go? Tell her that I am an old-acquaintance of yours; a married woman, who feels an interest in what concerns your happiness. Will you come with her?’

‘Oh, Ellice,’ said he, in a broken voice, ‘I will come with her—or, if you say so, I will come without her!’

She seemed to hesitate for an instant, drawing in her breath, and sending him one swift and penetrating glance. But the next instant she answered quite composedly, and as if she had not understood the significance of his avowal. ‘Oh, no, come with her; I should like to see her! Thank you; now I will go; good-bye till to-morrow!’ And before he could take her hand in farewell, or find words to speak, she had retreated to the door, opened it, and passed out.

It was dark when she departed. Geoffrey lit no lamp; but after locking his door, he sat for many hours with his head on his hands; and everywhere, standing forth against the gloom, he saw her slender supple figure, her fascinating wayward face: the changes of her voice murmured in his ears; and the desire of her ruled his heart and mind.

It was not with the feelings of a triumphant lover, proud to exhibit his mistress to envious eyes, that Geoffrey Herne presented himself, with the girl he was to marry, at Ellice’s apartments the next day. Not that

Gertrude Hamilton was in any respect a bride to be ashamed of. She was handsome, wholesome, and serene ; full of kindness and common sense ; pure in thought and upright in deed. She had given her whole honest love to Geoffrey, moreover ; and having done so, she had as little thought of changing as the moon has of ceasing to be the earth's satellite. So short a time ago as yesterday forenoon, Geoffrey had seen his way to a life of sober happiness with her ; but now he could only think, ' She is not Ellice ' ; and he shunned to meet her quiet, confident look, and could not respond frankly to her conversational advances. He felt himself a cheat ; and inwardly kept repeating to himself the ominous question : ' How will it end ? How will it end ? '

Mrs. Amidon received her guests with a charm of cordiality that at once produced a favourable impression upon Gertrude. She was dressed in a flowing tea-gown of some oriental stuff which became her especially well ; there was colour in her cheeks, and her manner varied between languor and what seemed restrained excitement ; but a certain rare feminine sweetness pervaded all. On the table by her side was a silver salver, holding a decanter of wine and three glasses. These glasses, which had already been filled to the brim with wine, were of Venetian design, each one of a pattern different from the others. The room was in half light and furnished sumptuously.

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Ellice addressed almost all her questions and remarks to Gertrude; never meeting the latter's eyes, but occasionally glancing at her with great keenness. To Geoffrey she scarcely spoke; and when he addressed her, she would reply to him, as it were, through Gertrude. Geoffrey had noticed that she had avoided shaking hands with either of them at meeting; and, as he sat observing her, the fantasy now and then seized him that she was not a tangible human being of flesh and blood, but a beautiful wraith. There was a refinement and a sensitiveness in her gesture and aspect as of one who could scarcely have part in the vain, self-seeking world: and yet what an odd commentary upon this appearance her actual life (as far as one could know it) had been!

After a while she said, rising, and speaking with more vivacity than she had shown before: 'Now I am going to ask you both to take a glass of wine with me.'

Gertrude thanked her, but said she seldom took wine, unless for medicinal purposes.

'Oh, but let me beg of you to make an exception this time,' returned Ellice, with singular earnestness. 'I have set my heart—yes, my heart, upon your drinking with me. Do not refuse me. I shall never have the opportunity of asking another favour of you.' She took up the salver as she spoke, and held it towards Gertrude, with the three glasses upon it. 'Choose one,' she said. 'I

am superstitious. I cannot let you off from this. Take whichever you like.'

'Certainly, if it will oblige you,' said Gertrude, smiling. 'I suppose they are all the same wine? I will take this.' And she took the slenderest of the three glasses.

'The wine is the same,' observed Ellice, 'but the glasses sometimes make a difference in the taste. Well, you have chosen; now, Geoffrey, it lies between you and me.'

Her hands trembled a little as she presented the salver to him, so that the glasses jingled, and some of the wine was spilt. 'Quick!' she said in a whisper; and he took the glass with the curved brim and the snaky stem. As she set down the salver her hand was steady again, and when she raised the remaining glass between her fingers not a drop was spilt.

'You remember the last time we drank together, Geoffrey?' she said, looking directly at him now for the first time. 'I shall never drink wine in my life after this. I am glad you and Gertrude have chosen as you have done. It is better—much better. You had your free choice, and left this for me. I drink to your health, my friends.'

She drank her glass out, and set it down. The others followed her example.

'It is very good wine, I'm sure,' remarked Gertrude.

'You will get no harm from it,' replied Ellice, tremulously and smiling; 'nor will you, Geoffrey. And it will be good for me,

too. 'You will——' she began to tremble so violently that she could not stand, and sank down in a chair. 'You will think—kindly of me?' she went on in a scarcely audible voice. A strange alteration was rapidly creeping over her features. Her lips quivered, her eyes dilated, and there was a choking in her throat. Geoffrey, who, for the last few moments, had kept his eyes fixed upon her searchingly, suddenly flung himself down on his knees beside her with a hollow cry of anguish.

'Ellice! you have poisoned yourself,' he cried with thick utterance. 'Could you not have forgiven me enough to let me go too?'

'You—had your—chance; it was death—to one or other of us three,' she answered with difficulty. 'Fate chose me. Oh! do not trouble me now; I am content. Of what use have I ever been in the world? She is better for you.'

'What is the matter? Can I be of any help?' enquired Gertrude, in concern and perplexity.

For a minute Geoffrey made no reply. Then he rose stiffly, kissed the dead woman's lips, and turning away from her, but not towards Gertrude, answered heavily, 'None!'



## THE COUNTESS'S RUBY.

### I.

ONE hot August forenoon, some years ago, two men met at a certain point of the coast of Normandy, and shook hands with mutual good-will.

The elder of these men had lived in the world about five-and-thirty years; he had had losses, and successes as well; but the latter, happening to have arrived a year or so after he had got tired of waiting for them, found him grown a trifle soured and cynical, and apt to carp at the sunshine which had withheld its warmth from his bones until they had contracted an ineradicable chill. His bitterness was perhaps more of the head than of the heart, but was none the less observable on that account. He was an Englishman by birth, and a born painter also—at least in his own opinion. He had begun his career with the firm persuasion that his genius entitled him not only to hang on the line at the Academy, but to be one of the hangmen. The Royal Academicians did not immediately fall in with his views on either point;

and when, after many years, they relented, and gave his picture the place of honour, and intimated their purpose of filling with his name the first vacancy on their august roll, this lofty and unforgiving gentleman made a bow and begged to be excused. He had made his name known without the Academy's help; he had won pecuniary independence in a land where the word of the Academy was not law; and he would now, therefore, with all due respect to the members of that body, see every mother's son of them at the deuce before he would have anything to do with them. Such an ultimatum necessarily finished the episode; the Academy preserved a dignified silence, and the lofty and unforgiving gentleman continued to spend the best part of his time in Paris, exhibiting every year in the Salon, and telling the story of his quarrel with the English potentates to whomsoever cared to hear an amusing anecdote caustically related. He was a lengthy, meagre, harsh-featured personage, this same cynical artist, but he prided himself on the Parisian polish of his manners and his French accent, and he was, in fact, a good deal of a favourite in society.

The man who shook hands with the person above described was in most respects as unlike him as could be imagined. To begin with, he was an American; and, sentimental twaddle to the contrary notwithstanding, there is no nationality so irreconcilable with the English, and so incapable of

sympathy with them, as that which styles itself American. But this man, in addition to his Americanism, was full ten years the junior of the other, and nearly the same number of inches shorter. His face was smooth and almost boyish, handsome even to an unusual degree, yet open to one criticism—that of being perfectly in harmony with the figure of its owner. The world has seen many great men under six feet high; but in them the countenance possessed the power or the nobility that more than compensates for defective stature; and, in looking upon it, the beholder quite forgot to be critical as to the greater or less degree of its elevation above the earth's surface. In a word, the face of this young American was the face of a short American—a recommendation, doubtless, from the purely æsthetic standpoint, but otherwise unfortunate. The lively blue eyes lacked depth and sternness; the fine straight nose might well have been a thought longer or higher; the mouth was too little and too academic in its curves; the forehead, though capacious, lacked the fine and expressive modelling which announces a master intellect. For the rest, this young American had a clear, deep colour in his cheeks, such as any woman might have envied, and the only fault of which was that no emotion had power either to diminish or to heighten its intensity; soft dark hair, a small silky moustache, and broad white teeth. The best feature in his face was probably the chin, which betokened

a vigorous and persistent will. In figure he was square-shouldered, and rather plump than lean : his hands and feet were small and well shaped. If the enumeration of these merely physical details seems out of proportion with what was specified on that score in the portrait of the Englishman, it should be remembered that the younger man had as yet achieved little in the world beyond this attractive personal appearance. His moral and social history were yet to make. He was the son of a Boston millionaire ; he had been educated at Harvard College ; he was courted and caressed in Beacon Street drawing-rooms ; and he had written quite a number of poems, odes, lyrics, and sonnets, philosophical, commemorative, imaginative, and erotic, which, reversing the natural sequence of states, first led a brilliant butterfly life in newspapers and magazines, and afterwards shut themselves up in the chrysalid of a gilt-edged, cloth-embossed volume, whence they afterwards showed no symptom of emerging.

These two men, such as they are here shadowed forth, found themselves face to face by the water's edge on that sultry August morning, and greeted each other with hearty enough cordiality.

As if to compensate for their physical dissimilarity, they were dressed almost precisely alike. Both had on shoes made of a flat sole of plaited hemp, with stout linen uppers curiously embroidered with red and

blue braid, and laced round the ankle after the manner of the ancient sandal. Both wore a kind of straw bonnet, high-crowned and wide-brimmed, clewed down on either side the face by a broad ribbon tied under the chin. Neither possessed any other essential article of clothing except a close-fitting tunic or set of tights, with the legs and arms cut off close to the body. Over this was lightly thrown a long mantle of Turkish-towel stuff. The tights were striped horizontally, alternate white and blue for the Englishman, and red and white for the American; and herein lay the sole distinction between their respective costumes. It is true that the American's fitted much the more closely and smoothly of the two; but that is neither here nor there.

In front of these simply-attired friends, and breaking in baby ripples at their feet, stretched in slumbrous calm a pale and turquoise ocean, destitute of any visible horizon. A tender haze which brooded in that region so intermingled sea and air that distant ships seemed to sail in the clouds, and clouds to voyage upon the water.

Behind them rose a mounded beach of purple shingle, uncomfortable to tread upon, but invaluable as a bulwark against the incursion of high tides into the low-lying village beyond. This village snuggled in the valley formed between the two hills which abutted at either extremity of the beach in precipitous

cliffs, reflecting their pallid faces in the molten surface of the summer sea.

Between the village and the beach, and surmounting the latter like a fort, extended the casino parade, an embankment of masonry lying parallel with the shore, and backed by the casino itself, long, low, and flat-roofed, all windows and awnings. It contained a card room, billiard room, restaurant and theatre, the last transmutable into a ball room by the simple process of removing the pit seats.

The persons of whom I write were not alone by the water's edge; on the contrary, they had scarcely more than elbow room. On either side of them stood, chattered, and gesticulated a hundred human beings of both sexes and all ages, arrayed more or less on the same general principle already detailed. A hundred others paddled, plunged, and bobbed in the pellucid element in front. Twice as many lounged, fluttered, and ogled in serried groups in the rear—these last resplendent in the latest Parisian fashions for the month of August. Down upon this gay scene of colour, sparkle, and sound glowered the hot, lazy sun, longing for the still nine-hours-distant time when he might cool his own sweltering sides in the luxury of a sea bath.

Beyond the average range of the swimmers sped hither and thither a score of light skiffs or canoes, whose occupants prudently wore their bathing dresses and sat heedfully

amidships as they plied their long paddles. Finally, I may mention the diving-board, an infernal machine of a thirty-foot plank supported at a third of its length on the axle of a tall pair of wheels, and so rolled into the water, to be rushed up and jumped off of by dashing divers. That diving-board was a daily thorn in the side of the English artist, who was not a dashing diver and who would have greatly preferred to take to the water like a duck—that is quietly and smoothly—but whom a false pride constrained to mount that penitential plank morning after morning, and upset himself off the end of it with an agonised effort—seldom or never successful—to strike the water vertically. What fools sensible people will make of themselves for the sake of being like the fools who are ready-made!

It may as well be mentioned here, since the truth is sure to crop out sooner or later, that the name of the cynical and Frenchified English artist was Mr. Claude Campbell, and that he was, consequently, no less a personage than myself, who write concerning him. Let this confession put the reader on his guard against whatever exaggerative or prejudicial statements he may fancy he detects in what I have told or have yet to tell. I do not pretend to be an absolutely impartial historian of events in which myself have been an actor. I promise only to set down things as they appeared to me at the time, and leave the reader to draw his own

conclusions. Did I make the world, or even organise human society? No; nor am I responsible for the logic of events, which, on the other hand, has often struck me as being a shocking bad system of logic.

As for the red-cheeked American, he was Jefferson Montgomery, Esquire, of Boston, as aforesaid, and he shall speak for himself.

## II.

'HULLO, Jeff! Just a year since we parted on Beacon Hill.'

'My *dear* Campbell,' said Jeff, giving my hand a strong pressure, while his blue eyes beamed and his white teeth flashed, 'this is *really very nice*. Have you been here long?'

'Maybe a week.'

'*A week? Really! how very strange!*'

As I do not intend to underline all Mr. Jeff's speeches, I will explain here that he was one of those persons who choose their words with care, and then bestow upon them a certain emphasis—an emphasis of breath—a soft cough, so to say, intended merely to call your attention to the word in question as an unexceptionable word. At first you wondered at the speaker's earnestness; afterwards you begot a nervous oppression of the breathing apparatus, referable to the obscure phenomena of sympathetic affections. For my own part, the kind



of conscientious self-complacency of which I considered this idiosyncrasy of my friend to be a symptom tended to arouse in me all my caustic and combative instincts; and, inasmuch as the young poet was fertile in 'notions' and resolute in upholding the same, our conversations were apt to become discussions, and our discussions disputes. Our disputes had never deepened into quarrels—we were too dissimilar for that—though a listener might sometimes have found it difficult to make the distinction. But to resume.

'Why strange?' was my enquiry.

'Why, that we shouldn't have encountered previously.'

'On the contrary, the strangeness is in our meeting at all. I came here to make studies, and you, I suppose, to make conquests. How many so far?'

'Oh, you old cynic! I don't know a soul in the place. It was an accident my being here at all, and I've been doing nothing but admire these lovely cliffs and the poetic scenery.'

'Poetic? That reminds me. Pardon my thoughtlessness, Jeff. You have been wooing the muse, of course?'

'Well, I confess I have been attempting something; it's unfinished as yet, but I hope it is fresh and strong; and I believe it to be original in treatment as well as in idea. It will be my most ambitious effort so far. A pagan maid falls in love with the Spirit of

the Ocean, and a poet is in love with her, and between these two loves——'

'She comes to the ground, or into the water. Which is it?'

'You are always so ready to mock, Campbell. But of course it doesn't come from the heart; it's only your badinage. And really, don't you think the conception fine? I should like to read you my description of the pagan maid.'

'Portrait of anybody in particular?'

'Well, between you and me, Campbell, there *is* a young lady here—I don't know who she is, but she really does seem to be almost the type I need—for my poem, I mean. A noble creature—the true grand pagan style. You would like her; she would charm the artist equally with the poet.'

'So you have been trotting up hill and down dale after a pagan, and call it writing a poem on metaphysical abstractions! Do you never mean to give up this sort of thing, my dear boy?'

'Really, what do you mean?'

'Dangling after women the way you do.'

'What an expression! Every cultivated man feels it his duty to love woman and to frequent her society.'

'But why not choose out a representative woman and frequent the whole sex in her person?'

'Do you advocate marriage, then?' asked the poet, his blue eyes pensively interrogating the horizon.

'I say that, if you must make an ass of yourself at all, you should confine yourself within the narrowest possible limits.'

'Have you ever contemplated matrimony, Campbell?'

'It is the last thing I should contemplate for myself.'

'You have never yearned for a counter-soul?'

'I don't know what you mean, but I venture to say I never have,' I replied. 'But what would be folly in me would be philanthropy in you.'

Jeff heaved a long sigh. 'Let me whisper you a secret. You know my papa made a fortune in the Crimean war. We had a contract to furnish the Russians with briar-wood pipes. Well, Russia is now on the eve of another conflict, and papa has sent me over to arrange the terms of another contract.'

'But what has this to do with your getting married?'

'Why, the person who manages the business on the Russian side is our old friend—the same who concluded the arrangements with papa twenty-five years ago. Our relations have always remained intimate and cordial. And immediately subsequent to the Russian war this commissioner married, and—had—oh!'

The poet's voice died away; his eyes were fixed upon something a little farther along the beach.

'There! there!' he murmured. 'Oh! is she not—divine?'

'Ha! that is your pagan, is it?'

'Going out in a canoe,' continued Jeff.

This young and strikingly handsome girl, of proportions almost statuesque, was not seen by me now for the first time. I had, in fact, noticed her shortly after my arrival in town, and had taken that pleasure in observing her which an artist feels for whatever is thoroughly picturesque. Who she was I knew no more than Jeff, and it was not to be expected that another man's admiration of her should be disagreeable to me; but some men are not any man, and I must admit that the revelation of her identity with the subject of Jeff's rhapsodies affected me unpleasantly. The girl's beauty, patent to me, was not of a type to reveal itself to every careless and uneducated eye. But I will not attempt to defend my feeling. I simply state it.

The young lady took her seat in the canoe and grasped the paddle, and an elderly moustachioed gentleman pushed her off from shore. She was dressed in a rather remarkable bathing suit of black, slashed with scarlet; her round, firm arms were bare from the shoulder, and her legs from the knee; her hair was gathered up in the customary oilskin cap. With two or three vigorous strokes she sent her skiff well out beyond the crowd of bathers.

When I turned again towards Jeff I found he was no longer at my side; he wa-

walking up the diving board, on the end of which he balanced himself a moment and then launched himself head foremost into the water, which closed over him with scarce a ripple. Presently his head appeared some distance beyond the spot at which he had entered, and he began swimming seaward with vigorous strokes. He was directly in the wake of the fair pagan, who, unaware of his pursuit, was paddling leisurely towards the thickening haze on the horizon, herself and her canoe mirrored distinctly on the glassy surface.

'Does he propose to overtake her and make her hear his poetry *tête-à-tête* in twelve fathoms of water?' I asked myself. 'At any rate, he resembles Byron in his swimming powers. And how neatly the fellow took the water! Let me see if I can't acquit myself as well as a Boston republican.'

With a sudden access of valour I snatched off my peignoir and cast it behind me, and, without stopping to see where it fell, I mounted the fatal plank with deliberate steps, saw the treacherous element smile for a moment beneath me, shut my eyes, and let myself go.

## III.

I FORESAW, in that instant of time which intervened between my last foot leaving the plank and my head reaching the water, that I was going to make a failure more than usually ignominious. A sounding thwack, taking effect along the entire length of my frame, and a painfully tingling sensation, only partly the result of shame, immediately apprised me that my prophetic instinct had not been at fault. I sank, however, and I was glad to sink ; for though I dislike having my head under water, my wounded self-esteem made me dread putting it out again. Much as I have seen and suffered, and callous though I have become to most of the attacks of destiny, upon some points I am still sensitive. In a decent suit of clothes and a dignified attitude I can sustain almost any misfortune ; but if my personal appearance be laughable, or my position a false one, my soul has much ado to maintain her constancy.

Need was, however, that I should emerge at last, and up I bobbed accordingly. I swam about moodily and unsociably during my customary fifteen minutes ; and such was the dejection of my spirits that the water seemed colder than usual, and as I waded my way up a steep incline of the shingle on my way out, there was a tendency to con-

vulsive shudderings in the muscles of my lower jaw. Chilled, humiliated, and conscious that I cut a ridiculous figure before a fashionable and merciless world, I only wished to seize my peignoir, wrap it round me, and vanish from the view and memory of mankind. Some men are cowed by one thing, some by another; and, once cowed, a man is no better than a whipped school-boy, and feels far less respectable.

I hastened, then, to hide my discomfiture in my peignoir; but at that moment the certainty flashed upon me that I knew not where my peignoir was. I had omitted to note the place where I had laid it down: all places on a shingle beach are alike, especially when that beach is crowded to the water's edge.

I was standing face to face with the crowd, dressed in the curtailment of costume already described, which, hanging in dripping folds about my meagre form, rendered grotesque that which by nature was ungainly merely. For the first time in my life I regretted my six feet of stature; at five feet I should have felt less defenceless as well as appeared less conspicuous. There I stood before the world, shivering, lost, and helpless.

What was I to do? It was a pressing question, for every moment rendered the situation not only physically but morally more intolerable.

Should I return to the water, whence I came?

Too late! Not only would I catch my death—a minor evil—but the world by this time knew that I had started to come out, and by detecting the cowardice of my retreat would render it cowardice thrown away.

Should I steal the first peignoir that came to hand and fly? Hundreds were scattered about. It was but reaching forth my hand.

No, I could not steal: not because I was too honest—far from it; a cowed man is beyond the reach of scruples—but because I lacked the courage to be a thief. I feared detection, and knew I lacked the effrontery to brazen out the robbery.

Should I pretend I never had a peignoir, and stalk insouciantly through the crowd and up to the beach as I was?

Impossible. I had not the spirits for such a *tour de force* in the first place, and in the second I had not the figure for it. Moreover, the *mairie* had issued edicts against bathers promenading without peignoirs, and the thought of being arrested by a squad of gendarmes and marched in my present condition to a lock up was not to be contemplated.

I must, therefore, either stand where I was until my peignoir came to me or institute a deliberate search after my peignoir. To search, perhaps for hours, amidst a wilderness of spotless hostile skirts and immaculate shrinking pantaloons for a peignoir scarcely distinguishable from any other peignoir, and which, too, might have already been appro-



priated by some person more heedless (or more self-possessed) than myself! Decidedly there are times in a man's life when he is forced to avow that Providence has omitted to endow human beings with the only boon really worth their having—the power, namely, of instant and unobtrusive self-annihilation.

My search began. I went to a peignoir and examined it; it was not mine. With shaking limbs I blundered towards another a few yards off; it was not mine. At this juncture I heard, and affected not to hear, a titter of laughter. With my heart full of murder and suicide I pounced upon a peignoir quite near at hand. It was the same I had examined first. My brain began to reel.

'Monsieur!' said a gentle voice near me. 'Pardon, Monsieur!'

Could such words be addressed to me? As I tottered on the shifting pebbles, throwing dazed glances here and there, I became aware that a lady, middle-aged and of noble demeanour, was standing beside me with a folded peignoir in her hands.

'Pardon, but did Monsieur chance to be searching for anything?' she asked in French.

'My peignoir——'

'I have perceived that Monsieur dropped this upon entering the water: it shall be his perhaps?' and with a smile too truly polite even to seem compassionate this angel of mature years placed my own identical peignoir in my arms.

I clutched it as Macbeth clutched the phantom dagger; only more fortunate than the thane, I felt it in my grasp. Some part of my senses returned to me.

'Madame,' I stammered as well as my chattering teeth would let me, 'you come from doing me the greatest favour woman can confer upon man. I shall never forget it. I thank you, madame, from the depths of my soul, and I salute you with the most distinguished gratitude and respect.'

The doer of this noble action bowed and smiled graciously, and I, with my peignoir about me, stalked boldly through the crowd to my toilet cabin. The distance was not great, but such was the glow of gratitude in my heart that by the time I arrived there I was not only warm but almost dry. Nor did the effect of this kindness stop at my skin; my immortal part, as Jeff might have called it, was sweetened and exalted; never, that I could remember, had I been succoured so opportunely or in such poignant need. Be that lady who she might she was worthy of all homage, and if it would have done her any good I believe that, confirmed bachelor though I was, I would have offered her my hand and heart as soon as I had finished my toilet.

But I trusted to my good genius to find me some better way of requiting her favour. It is sad to reflect how few ways there are of obliging our fellow-creatures. People would do more for one another but for the difficulty

of finding something at once practical and practicable to do.

The first thing that attracted my notice, when I issued from my cabin and returned to the beach, was that the haze, which all the morning had lain along the horizon, had now thickened greatly and advanced upon the shore. Nothing was visible at twenty paces, and the fog, shone through by the sun, drifted softly over the bustling crowd, which was already beginning to stream homewards.

It was a pretty spectacle, but one likely to be regarded with different feelings by an Englishman safe on dry land and an American lost in twelve fathoms of water. Jeff had not come back to shore, and being out of sight of land, it necessarily followed that he was lost. The danger was graver than might at first sight have appeared, for the swimmer had had time to get fully a mile out to sea, and at that distance there were strong currents which might sweep him away altogether. I scanned the white blank before me with anxious eyes, but it revealed nothing. Poor Jeff!

I began to experience that uncomfortable sensation occasioned by knowing a friend to be in peril, and feeling the necessity of doing something to rescue him. More grievous but more convenient is it when the inevitable occurs at once, and saves us the annoyance of suspense. I could have sorrowed heartily and sincerely over the poor poet's drowned body laid out upon the shingle, but there was

no satisfaction in taking measures to ascertain whether or not the corpse were an accomplished fact—to postpone, in other words, the luxury of grief for the anguish of action.

A group of sailors were collected round a boat at the water's edge, which they seemed to be on the point of launching. A lady was haranguing them earnestly. As I approached I recognised her as the heroine of my late adventure with the peignoir. She was saying—

'It was in that direction that I last saw her. She is already, perhaps, a kilomètre distant. There is no time to lose, mind you. Behold me distracted.'

Here was my opportunity; I could kill both my birds with one stone. I stepped forward with raised hat, and placed myself at the disposal of feminine distress. Having respectfully recalled myself to her recollection, I begged to be honoured with the distinction of being permitted to promote the alleviation of the anxiety under which she appeared to be labouring.

She thanked me with ardour, but to inconvenience me would desolate her.

Having received at her hands a favour beyond estimation, I should expire of chagrin in the case of being refused the privilege of testifying in some degree the depth and liveliness of my recognition.

Madame hereupon vouchsafed to inform me that Mademoiselle her daughter had

paddled away with herself into the fog, and there was fear that she be lost in unknown oceans.

I had divined as much as this, but I was careful not to say so; nor did I open my mouth on the subject of Jeff. It was sufficient for me to perceive that Jeff and the young lady in the case were probably not far apart, and that to find one would be to find both. Meanwhile I would not deprive Madame of the gratification of believing that I was acting in her interests only. So, entreating her to be tranquil and to expect my return with her daughter in less than a quarter of an hour, I clambered into the boat with all possible dignity and despatch and bade my men shove off. Madame observed my departure with eyes that were genuinely moist.

It was a tolerably mild piece of heroism. Had I been ten years younger I might have wished that the waves had been running mountains high, but at thirty-five—the age of sense and of feeling combined—I was better pleased with the conditions as they were. I was not in love with anybody, and wished only to combine courtesy and good breeding with the fulfilment of a private duty. It had gratified me to observe, in my brief conversation with Madame, her appreciation of the altered aspect of one whom she had first known as an idiot and a scarecrow: not to mention his fluency in speaking the language of the most polished people in the world. I admired, too, the kindly ingenuity

with which Fate had brought me acquainted with the mamma of the beautiful pagan, and under circumstances so promising.

But it is unsafe to call Fate good-humoured: it spoils her temper. Our boat was barely afloat when an event occurred which rendered our proposed voyage unnecessary. Somehow or other, without noise and without premonition, the fog rolled swiftly back to the horizon whence it came; and there was Mademoiselle not more than a hundred yards from shore. She was paddling in with admirable coolness and indifference; and close behind her I was happy to see the black head and rosy visage of the poet, who was swimming on his back with every appearance of ease and comfort.

#### IV.

I HASTENED to get on shore again and offer to Madame my congratulations. She replied that her obligations to Monsieur were none the less. His courtesy, his chivalry, had been such as one never sees paralleled.

Monsieur, covered with confusion at consideration so undeserved, changes the subject by calling the attention of Madame to the charming picture made by Mademoiselle in approaching the beach. Had he had his sketch-book with him, he would have been tempted to make a little drawing of Mademoiselle.

Ah! Monsieur was, then, an artist? Madame, and Mademoiselle likewise, were all given to artists. They had made purchase of several pictures during their residence in Paris.

Monsieur will venture to call himself an artist, and will, furthermore, have the assurance to make Madame acquainted with his name—M. Claude Campbell, at the service of Madame.

But truly! and did Monsieur Campbell happen to know this Campbell,—he, the great Campbell, he who painted this picture divine which exhibited itself at the last Salon, and was entitled the 'Ruined Rampart'?

Monsieur, even in blushing and being overwhelmed, assures Madame that he is that same fortunate Campbell whose unworthy effort Madame comes from qualifying with such generosity.

Great God! Monsieur is he, then, indeed that sublime, that adored man of genius? What happy chance! What charming *rencontre*! But in this case Madame hopes that the name of the Countess Semaroff will be to Monsieur not altogether unfamiliar?

Oh! Heaven! Is it possible that Monsieur is so happy as to kiss the hand of the noble lady who deigned to constitute herself the purchaser of the above-mentioned 'Ruined Rampart'? Monsieur is of a verity transported.

The Countess Semaroff observes that Mademoiselle—the Countess Almara in effect

—will partake of her mamma's enchantment in meeting Monsieur Campbell, of whose genius she is an ardent admirer.

Our rude and artless talk was suspended at this point by the disembarkation of the Countess Almara. Apprehending that the simplicity of her costume might render my immediate presentation undesirable, I exchanged a cordial *au revoir* with the Countess Semaroff and discreetly withdrew. The beautiful pagan, after exchanging a few sentences with her mother, the latter speaking earnestly and the former laughingly, proceeded to take her turn upon the diving-board, and acquitted herself in a manner truly admirable. She dove like a plummet, and her white feet flashed beneath the surface as succinctly as a mermaid's tail. Up she came again, fresh and dripping, within a few yards of my returned prodigal, the Boston poet; but no signal of recognition that I could detect passed between them. To suppose that the ardent and romantic Jefferson had failed to improve the occasion of being isolated from the world under such peculiar circumstances with the subject of his late rhapsodies seemed to me, however, highly improbable. But the young Countess had doubtless played discretion under the watchful maternal eye; and Jeff, perhaps, intended to conceal his escapade from my friendly inquisition. I was resolved nevertheless to penetrate his reticence, and promised myself the pleasure of listening to an entertaining story over our *déjeuner*. As



to my own accidental introduction to the Countess mother, and the unexpected tie between us, I judged it advisable to forbear mentioning it just at present.

The poet reached his depth and waded ashore. I stepped forward to meet him, raising my cap.

'Captain Webb, I presume?'

'Oh—but, Campbell!' exclaimed he with an ineffable look, 'was she not heavenly?'

'Postpone your ecstasies; you'll be a rheumatic cripple for life as it is. Do you know you've been in an hour?'

'It doesn't seem ten minutes—and yet I have lived a lifetime too!'

'You have water on the brain. Do you know where your peignoir is?'

Somewhat to my mortification, he did know, and, as he threw it over his shoulders, remarked placidly, 'But really I'm not in the least cold. Men of my age have hearts, Campbell, and a heart on fire keeps the blood warm under all circumstances.'

'It takes a Bostonian to have a heart warranted to burn under water for an hour.'

'And then,' he continued without heeding me, 'did not a goddess keep the flame alive with her ambrosial breath?'

'Decidedly he must have had an adventure,' thought I. 'But despatch your toilet, young man, and then you shall *déjeuner* with me, and we'll have chablis and cigarettes.'

'I shall be most happy, indeed. I won't

be a moment dressing,' said the poet beamingly; and he dodged into his cabin.

'Pathetic little youth!' thought I as I paced the parade to and fro. 'Good fellow at bottom, but so soft!—the sort of creature that men trample on and women make game of. He has that most offensive of qualities—inoffensiveness. But, luckily for his peace of mind, he idolises himself, and is too slow-witted to comprehend the contempt of other people. After all, his self-conceit has as much justification as anybody's. He sees a pretty face when he looks in the glass, writes pretty verses with conscientious rhymes, utters pretty sentiments, and uses pretty phrases. How is he to know that the world reads all this prettiness without the *r*? But Providence, in emptying his skull, has mercifully filled his pockets. With ten thousand pounds a year he can buy something. What he can't buy is the ability to win for a wife such a woman as this young countess. Is he in love with her? He thinks so, no doubt, and means to make himself poetically miserable about her. His type of men are for ever losing their hearts miles above the reach of their heads. He has been getting off some inane namby-pambyism to her this morning, disgusting or amusing her as the case may be, and has come off serene in the conviction of having made a delightful impression. And now—confound him!—he will be for prosecuting the acquaintance and expecting me to back him up. What shall I do? It would be

friendly to dissuade him from having anything more to say to them ; but he's obstinate and won't be dissuaded. Well, the spectacle of such a wooing can't fail to be entertaining, and, since I can't prevent it, why shouldn't I enjoy it ? To augment excitement I might give Mademoiselle Almara a quiet hint to tip him an occasional dose of encouragement. Poor Jeff ! Ah ! here he comes ! Now let us watch him expand under the influence of chablis.'

The unsuspecting poet took my arm, and we set out for my lodgings.

'How charming the Old World is,' he remarked presently.

'You are an American, and everything here delights you by contrast.'

'But I'm patriotic—very. I'm a descendant of the Puritans, and my forefathers fought on Bunker Hill.'

'Yes, you Yankees are always bringing up the men of '76, whom, were you to meet them on Beacon Street to-day, you would cut dead. Since you have really contrived to civilise yourselves a little in the last century, why do you insist upon falling back on the reputations of a parcel of tagrag farmers who were shot ages before you were born ? If I were a Yankee I'd keep mum about them.'

'Ah, you may talk, but at least you know America is the greatest country on earth,' rejoined my friend with unruffled good-humour. 'I'm sure you were delighted with your visit last year.'

'I confess to some scenery; beyond that one sees in the States only things which he thanks Heaven he hasn't got at home. America makes Europeans grateful and contented.'

'I defy you to put your finger on one feature of civilisation here that does not exist in a superior form in the States. There now!'

'To begin with, then, why did you take the trouble to come over here to get a wife, if there are more desirable wives to be had in Boston?'

'How did you know that?'

'How? Have I heard anything from you this morning except about pagan goddesses?'

'Oh, you mean her? Yes; oh, yes!'

'Good heavens! does the man mean to insinuate that he has any other woman in this hemisphere in his eye?'

'Why, to tell you the truth, my father sent me over here just for that very purpose—that and the pipes.'

'What and the pipes?'

'To meet the young lady I am going to marry.'

'And is your beautiful pagan the young lady you are to marry, pray?'

'Ah! I just wish she was!' said Jeff very ruefully.

'This is becoming interesting, my young friend. But here's my house: we'll have our breakfast, and then a consultation over our wine. Come in.'

## V.

I REPRESSED my curiosity during the meal, but when we had settled down to our second bottle and the cigarettes I fixed my eyes on my companion and said—

‘Well?’

‘Did you see that dive?’ asked he.

‘Hers?’

‘Hers of course. Everything I say or do means her, now and for ever, one and inseparable!’ cried Jeff, upon whom the wine was evidently beginning to work.

‘But what about the other young lady——?’

‘Sink the other young lady, sir! I never have seen her, and I never want to.’

‘Well, then, about the pagan. Did the fog reveal your souls to one another?’

‘Now, Campbell, I wish you would please not chaff,’ said Jeff seriously. ‘I don’t like a man to be always cynical. Is there really nothing sacred to you anywhere? We Bostonians are not brought up so; and this is a sacred subject to me.’

‘Not more so than to me, my dear fellow. You shan’t have cause to complain of me again.’

‘I accept your apology,’ said Jeff with dignity. ‘Your health.’

We emptied our glasses.

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'Who was that handsome middle-aged lady you were talking with?' Jeff asked.

The question rather took me aback. 'You are more the traditional Yankee than I had imagined; you pretend to tell a story and only ask a question. As for that lady, I never saw her before in my life. I should fancy her a Pole or an Austrian. But do get on with your story.'

'There is no real story with a beginning, middle, and end. Real life doesn't arrange itself in that way.'

'There is always a middle, at any rate.'

'I will plunge *in medias res*, then. Did you observe her paddling out?'

'To be sure I did.'

'And did you divine her object?'

'Well, as to that——'

'My dear Campbell, don't you see that it was a case of *fugit inter salices*? She paddled out in order that I might pursue her.'

'Oh! How did you find out that?'

'By intuition,' cried the poet enthusiastically. 'We are in such complete sympathy, she and I, that I feel what she feels. A motion of the shoulder, a turn of the neck, a flirt of the paddle, all bear a secret meaning to my eye. Why, for a quarter of an hour after starting out this morning, I could see nothing but her back; and you know there isn't ordinarily much—conversation in a person's back.'

'I believe you are right, Jeff.'

'But in this case,' he continued warmly, 'I saw through her back all that was going on in her mind.'

'Poetic insight. I have heard of it before, but never knew it to act so powerfully as it does with you.'

'Yes; and, in proof that I'm not mistaken, she did just what I knew she would do beforehand.'

'And what was that?'

'How good this chablis is! The first thing she did was to paddle straight out to sea. She did that to try my faith.'

'Did she succeed?'

'A poet's faith can move mountains,' said Jeff, a little inconsequently. 'Had I been as others—had I been less terribly in earnest—I should have got discouraged or offended and given up the chase. But that is not the Puritan style. I kept right on, and at last I forced her to alter her tactics.'

'And all this through the back of her head? Wonderful!'

'Well, so she altered her tactics, and—what do you think?'

'I haven't a glimmering.'

'She stopped—short,' said Jeff, leaning across the table with his blue eyes wide open and speaking in an impressive under-tone; 'and there she sat perfectly still, with her back still turned towards me.'

'So that you might continue to read her thoughts?'

'Campbell, I trust you are not scoffing?'

'My dear fellow——'

'You are my friend, but there are some things——'

'Nothing injures friendship so much as unjust suspicions, Jeff,' I said, with a solemnity almost equalling his own. He softened at once.

'Forgive me, old fellow; I was hasty. The blood of Bunker Hill, you know. Well, and so I gained upon her—and here's her health, Campbell.'

'Bumpers!' said I; and again we set down our glasses empty. I began to feel a little warmed up myself.

'At last I was within ten yards of her. Just then I ran into one of those horrid blue jelly-fish, and it startled me so that I made a splash, and she——'

'Turned round?' I suggested, for he had paused agitatedly.

'Any other woman would have turned round: she did not. She started perceptibly, dipped her paddle on the right side of the canoe, and shot diagonally towards the left. For a moment I saw her in profile.'

'Well, didn't she tip you a wink? I beg your pardon, Jeff, upon my word. I mean, did she not, at the moment of the profile, bend upon you a smile or a glance of encouragement?'

'What encouragement did I need? Besides, the time for encouragement had not yet come; I was still at the period of probation.'



'Her tacking, then, was a fresh trial of your constancy?'

'Not of my constancy—that was already confirmed—but of another quality, my self-respect. Respect, Campbell, is ever the basis of true love. This was a most critical juncture in our acquaintance. Had I slavishly followed her tack I should have lost more ground morally than I gained materially. No, I did not tack; I kept straight on, and, as she had paused again, I was soon beyond her. It was at that supreme moment that we found ourselves enveloped in the fog—alone together, between sea and heaven!'

'Jeff, this is becoming exciting.'

'I kept on. By-and-by, however, I stopped. I could now barely detect the outlines of her canoe through the pallid film of mist; but anon the outlines grew distincter—she was approaching!

Right on she came with graceful strength,  
And paused within a paddle's length,  
A moment eye to eye they stayed,  
The poet and the pagan maid.'

'Jeff, this is poetry.'

'A verse I composed at the time. Do you like it?'

'Can you ask? But this suspense is wearing me out. Do, pray, come to the point.'

'What point, dear Campbell?'

'Hang it! the point of contact.'

'Sir, I fail to understand you,' said the majestic Jeff.

‘Gammon! Who understands better than a poet the dramatic necessity of a point of contact? Here are your characters lost—I mean, here are your poet and your pagan maid lost in your fog, and staying eye to eye. Beyond reach of outside help, you are all in all to each other. “Bonjour, Countess.” “Bonjour, Monsieur.” “We appear to be lost.” “I fear you are fatigued,” she says. “The delight of conversing with the Countess Almara would suffice to restore me, were that the case.” “Perhaps, if you were to rest your hand on the gunwale,” she continues. “You overwhelm me,” murmur you. “Nay, I would keep you from being overwhelmed,” she smiles. “You are my guiding star!” you exclaim. “If I only knew whither to guide you. And mamma will be so anxious,” she sighs. “Knows the Countess Semaroff that we are together?” you enquire. Just at this instant another of those horrid blue jelly-fish comes along, causing you to give another splash and sink. She screams, stretches out her hand to save you; you catch it, press it impulsively to your lips. . . . Well, there’s your point of contact. Now go ahead.’

The close and serious attention which Jeff had given to this sally of mine had stimulated me to make it as absurd as possible, and may be that last glass of chablis had something to do with my sprightliness. But in proportion as I warmed Jeff seemed to cool; he leaned his cheek upon his hand, and directed a profound gaze into the bottom of

his empty wine-glass. At length he muttered these singular words—

‘How curiously things come out!’

‘But what happened after you kissed her hand?’

‘I didn’t kiss it,’ sighed the poet.

‘Not after accepting the support of her canoe?’

‘I didn’t accept it; she didn’t offer it.’

‘Nor speak about it at all?’

‘She said nothing; I said nothing: neither of us said anything.’

‘Then why, in the name of stupefaction, did you take the trouble to get lost in the fog with her? Better have stayed on shore.’

‘Had I known the Countess Semaroff was there, perhaps I should,’ said Jeff, looking up.

I coloured in spite of myself. I, a man of five-and-thirty, had been carried away to reveal to this boy the secret of my acquaintance with these ladies. I should now have no excuse to offer for not introducing him. Verily that chablis cut both ways. I hastened to revert to our original topic.

‘So there was no point of contact after all?’

‘Not what you would call such, O you English materialist,’ said the poet eloquently.

‘But our points of view are so incompatible. Is not the soul more than the body? and, if so, is not a look of the eyes more than a touch of the hand? Our spirits met, Campbell, though our earthly frames held aloof.’

'But would your spirits have met any less had your earthly frames behaved in a more materialistic and intelligible way?'

Jeff shook his head dreamily.

'You are of those who know not how to enjoy the rose upon its stalk. You must needs cull it and insert it in your *boutonnière*. You are not sensitive enough to apprehend the rarest delight of the *grande passion*—that of regarding the beloved object in her intact state ere the pure sphere of her personality has been invaded by materialistic approach.'

'Well, Jeff, it's evident you know more about women than I do. But, admitting what you say, I still maintain (provided your intentions with the Countess are really serious) that you are not taking the nearest way to a matrimonial issue. The flesh is sluggish, but it has its compensations.'

The inspired Bostonian took his cigarette between two fingers and waved it in an illustrative manner as he said—

'Suppose, dear Campbell, you were starting on a journey through a delicious tract of country—a winding valley, say—and suppose, before setting out, you climbed a hill commanding this valley, and took a bird's-eye view of your proposed route. Would you enjoy that journey more or less for having anticipated it spiritually by that glance?'

'Ha! methinks I conceive you. Your psychological business is merely a sort of barmecide feast, designed to whet the palate

for solid viands to follow. Having brought the transcendental part of your love-making to a happy issue, you now propose to pursue the game upon a practical basis ?'

Jeff blew a serene cloud and regarded me with a complacent smile.

'Yes, I mean to marry her now,' said he.

'And leave the other without even a bird's-eye view ?'

'By-the-by, I must tell you about that. You know I was saying this morning that the Russian commissioner, our friend, had married. Well, he had a daughter, and this daughter and I were by our respective papas destined for each other.'

'I see—a union of policy, like those of the royal families of Europe.'

'To me the idea of utilising the sacred covenant of marriage in the interest of mere business always seemed horrible and revolting. I told my father so.'

'And he, I'll venture to say, told you you were a sentimental young idiot.'

'If that had been all——' said Jeff, wagging his head significantly.

'Well, what was there more ?'

'Only this. After I had protested one day, with all the eloquence I could muster, against the cold-blooded inhumanity of binding down two fresh young souls, who had never seen each other, to such a contract, he replied (you remember his dogmatic, high-handed way), "Either you marry her or you live on three hundred pounds per annum."

'In that case,' said I, not without a secret feeling of relief, 'you certainly won't marry the pagan maid?'

'Why not?'

'Because, to go no further, you won't get her to take you at three hundred pounds per annum. You don't know what living on such an income means. I do; and I can tell you that, even without a wife and children, it's no joke.'

'But, dear Campbell, you seem to forget that I love her.'

'Take the advice of a man who has seen more of the world than you have, and forget it yourself. I am talking seriously now, Jeff, and for your good. You do not love this Countess Almara, and, to be frank with you, it is not possible that she ever should care for you. You have a strong will; use it on the side of common sense and—filial piety. Where were you to meet your intended?'

'Paris was the rendezvous appointed, but——'

'Pack up your traps and be off to Paris this very afternoon.'

'But it wasn't for a week yet that——'

'Never mind. Get away from here; that's the main point. Don't remain within reach of temptation.'

'Campbell, this is not temptation; it's a foregone conclusion. I am going to marry the Countess Almara. Our meeting here was fated. I shall not go to Paris.'

'But I tell you the Countess Almara won't have you.'

Jeff was silent awhile. Presently he looked up and said—

'How do you know she won't?'

'Well—never mind,' I thought it prudent to reply.

There was another silence. Suddenly Jeff said, 'Campbell, if I went to Paris would you go with me?'

This turn embarrassed me again. It would not exactly suit my convenience to go to Paris that afternoon. There were some things I wanted to—attend to. I wondered whether my young friend was becoming suspicious.

'Could I be of any service to you there?' I enquired.

'After all I don't know that you could,' said he after a moment's reflection. 'Besides, thanking you all the same for your advice, dear Campbell, I've made up my mind to stay here. I can never love, much less marry, any other woman than the Countess Almara.'

There was a certain element of nobility in the placid obstinacy of the young fellow, who was committing the amazing folly of resigning ten thousand a year for the sake of a girl to whom he had never spoken, and until the last two or three days never seen, that touched me a little and made me resolve not to let him ruin himself without another effort to save him.

'Jeff, you are an ass,' I said bluntly.

'Your brain has been addled with the pursuit of what you are pleased to imagine poetry, until you have grown to believe that a man can live on love and lyrics instead of on beef-steak and bullion. You say you can never love any but the Countess Almara; I say it is, at all events, your duty to try. Go to Paris, and at least make the acquaintance of the young lady your father has selected for you. If you find her unlovable, at all events that will be some satisfaction.'

'Thank you very much, Campbell, but I can't, really.'

'You persist in running your head against a wall?'

Jeff smiled mildly and said nothing.

'All right; *liberavi animam meam*. I wash my hands of you. One thing: I can't take the responsibility of giving you an introduction.'

'You know them both, then?'

'Well, I have not been presented to the young lady yet, but——'

'I shall be happy to present you when I know her myself,' said Jeff forgivingly; 'and when we are married I trust you and I will be better friends than ever.'

'Oh! fathomless self-conceit and fatuity of Bostonian youth!' I muttered to myself as I lit a final cigarette and preceded the poet to the door. 'Poor Jeff! upon my soul I am sorry for him!'

And when we parted outside I shook his hand with a feeling not far removed from



respect mingling with my impatience, and I watched him walk away with the kindly hope that the Providence which presides over children and fools might keep a beneficent eye upon the poor little poet.

## VI.

I WAS in rather an ill-humour that afternoon. After a short turn about the town I returned to my *atelier* and tried to paint; but colour had lost its harmony for me, and composition its meaning. I took up Balzac's *Deux Frères*, and plunged into the details of the miseries of Agatha, the villany of Philip, and the genius of Joseph; but the appalling truth of the picture depressed and irritated me. I stretched myself on the lounge and gave way to moody reverie. I pictured to myself a man five-and-thirty years of age, who had had his romance and got cured of it a dozen summers ago, who piqued himself on his sceptical and unimpassive temperament, who had fallen into confirmed bachelorhood, who was prolific of cynical and pro-Malthusian doctrines to erotic young fellows under thirty, and whose eminence in the world of art was due to the unalloyed devotion of both heart and brain which he had hitherto lavished upon it. I asked myself what was the fitting punishment for such a man's apostasy from his principles.

'Such a man,' I answered myself, 'is not fit to be trusted abroad. I condemn him to pack up his traps and go home, and I give him two hours to complete his preparations for starting.'

The clock—the tall Norman clock with its round face of embossed brass and its huge slow-swinging pendulum—struck half-past three. I got up and rung the bell. Presently a withered old lady appeared, in a black gown, white cap and apron, neat blue stockings, and low shoes.

'Madame Enault,' I said, 'I shall leave you this afternoon. That a porter be here at five o'clock to take my baggage to the diligence; and, if you please, that we make up our little accounts.'

Madame Enault was crushed. She was sent to grass! Monsieur going to leave that very day even?

'Perfectly.'

Monsieur had perhaps encountered something to miscontent him? Madame Enault would do anything in her power to render things more satisfactory to Monsieur.

'Madame misconstrues me. It is that affairs demand my departure.'

'Monsieur will he pardon Madame Enault?'

'But without doubt.'

'Monsieur will, then, recollect that, in coming here, he was so good as to engage the rooms for six weeks, whereas only one week has elapsed. . .'

'You are completely in reason, Madame, and you will be paid for the whole six weeks precisely as if I had remained.'

Madame drops a curtsey and will instantly apprise a porter of Monsieur's intentions.

I now proceeded to pack my trunks and painting gear, and then, it being a little after four, I sallied forth for a farewell stroll on the parade.

It was a magnificent afternoon. A fresh cool breeze had replaced the lazy calm of the morning. The horizon line and the profile of the cliffs were defined sharp and clear. Great white castellated clouds sailed across the blue, and rhythmic waves came tumbling in frothy profusion along the beach. The whole scene was like a shout of joy, and it had never spoken so feelingly to me as now that I was saying good-bye to it.

As I turned away after a long look seaward, I met the Countess Semaroff and her daughter face to face.

I bowed. Madame smiled and gave me her hand, and before withdrawing it she looked at her daughter and said—

'My very dear, this is Monsieur Campbell. Ah, Monsieur, it has been a dream of my daughter to meet you.'

'I trust Mademoiselle will not find in me an illustration of the proverb, "*Songe mensonge*,"' I said, clumsily enough.

Mademoiselle smiled slightly, as courtesy required, but all the while her eyes rested

upon me searchingly and doubtfully, as though to satisfy herself whether I were to be believed in or distrusted, whether she might expect to find in the artist the complement and justification of his works. No kind of look, perhaps, is so difficult to sustain with composure as this. The most redoubtable artist is conscious that the inspiration of his best efforts comes from a source superior to himself, in comparison with which the average level of his thoughts and motives makes but a sorry show. The merciless and undisguised inquisition of an ardent and unsophisticated young woman is thus apt to become not a little trying, especially when the inquisitrix is furnished with such a pair of eyes as nature had endowed the Countess Almara withal.

Indeed, strange and striking in other respects as was the beauty of the young Countess, it was her eyes that individualised her and rendered her a paragon among women. Large and perfectly black they were—so black that it was a wonder to see them so full of light. The iris was of breadth so unusual that, like a black sun between two clouds, its upper and lower rims were infringed upon by the imperial eyelids. The human eye, as every portrait painter knows, has in itself but a narrow range of expression : it is the setting that imports. Now, the Countess Almara's upper eyelid was falcon-like—straight above the pupil, and falling away thence towards the cheek in a long

sweeping curve—a bold, lavish eyelid, indicative of keen intelligence and a noble temper. In singular contrast with this was the lower lid, most sensitively and changefully fashioned, responsive to every shifting emotion, sad, mirthful, wistful, pleasurable, tender; this it was that betrayed the woman, as the other announced the countess. Like the shimmer of light upon water, the delicate nerves in this region were never at rest; here, as upon a photographic plate, was legible the impress of each word or unuttered thought. Thus it might be affirmed of the Countess Almara that she had two eyes where other women have but one; and certainly she was able to do four times more execution with her pair than most daughters of Eve can accomplish.

There was a fine unconventionality in the cast of her features which was in itself an element of life. The low and broad forehead terminated in far-reaching and strongly defined eyebrows. The nose, long and finely chiselled, especially about the nostrils, descended from between the eyes in a line which, towards the end, had just enough of an upward tendency to redeem it from classic tameness. Tameness, in fact, is the word most expressive of everything that the young Countess was not. Her mouth was generous; the upper lip, short and slender, lay like a coral snake upon the full and voluptuously moulded lip below; thence curved forth the chin, clean cut and mettlesome, which she

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habitually carried high, and to which she communicated movements of fascinating wilfulness. Her profile, as a whole, was therefore of the concave rather than the convex order, and possessed a charmingly wild, barbaric quality, by no means inconsistent with a thorough refinement.

Of her grand figure I have already spoken. Her bearing was elastic and vigorous, yet pervaded always by the subtle and inevitable dignity of a high-bred lady. A kind of scarlet barret-cap surmounted the heavy black coil of her hair; and she wore a close-fitting dress of black serge, with a scarlet bow fluttering at the throat and a scarlet belt around the waist. It was a costume simple to severity, but in which she looked diabolically handsome. Her only ornaments on this occasion were two broad hoops of gold in her ears, and, on her left hand, an antique ring with an enormous ruby in it. Such a ruby not one lady in a thousand would dare to put on; it must have come to her, I thought, from the tomb of some early royal ancestress. It harmonised well with what I took to be the essential character of the Countess Almara.

Here, however, has been more than enough of personal description, which is never so futile as when it attempts to catch the secret of a lovely woman's charm. As an artist I have dwelt upon details which to the ordinary eye would have combined for the production of a single effect more or less acutely pleasurable. I looked at her with

the instinctive longing which an artist feels to interpret beauty upon canvas ; and the critical admiration of my glance met and partly disconcerted the critical inquiry of her own.

'I have much happiness in speaking to Monsieur Campbell,' she said after a moment in a deep fresh voice. 'To me it is not as if I were speaking to a stranger.'

We walked on slowly, the young Countess between her mother and me. I felt a childish desire to utter something brilliant and profound ; and, knowing by experience that such a wish is always fatal to the deed, I took refuge in the intensity of commonplace.

'Mademoiselle finds this place enjoyable?'

'After the city, truly, yes.'

'Paris is indeed hot in this month.'

'It is from St. Petersburg that we come here.'

'Mademoiselle the Countess is, then, a Russian?'

Here the elder lady interposed with a smile, 'Not altogether Russian, monsieur. For my part, I am a Circassian. My father was attached to the Court of the Czar after the conquest of our poor country. I was married among our conquerors—what will you? For Almara, she may be called the Reconciliation, is it not?'

'If all quarrels could find such reconciliation——' I began.

The Countess Semaroff laughed good-naturedly. 'There, you are *spirituel*; one

sees you have lived much in Paris,' she was kind enough to say.

'But it is not in the *salons* of Paris that you have found the power to conceive your pictures. I refer not to the execution—the *technique*—all that which labour and experience may acquire; but it is the thought, look you, the life that is in your work; and this can be found not in any city, not in any society, but only in the man himself who feels, who sees.'

It was the young Countess who spoke thus, and with an energy of tone and expression that caused those nerves of self-approbation which are situated somewhere in the back part of a man's throat to thrill pleasantly. I had not expected to find in so young a woman an appreciation at once so earnest and intelligent.

'You have studied art yourself?' I said to her.

'Behold, my very dear, you will permit that I sit on the bench and read my letter while you and Monsieur Campbell have your little debate. When you are fatigued you shall rejoin me. Go, then.' And with this the good Countess established herself upon a seat sheltered from the breeze, but which we would pass and repass at every turn of our promenade. Our conversation continued.

'I do not name myself student; I am a lover,' said the Countess Almara. 'My life has not been a school; it has been a passion. I cannot talk learnedly, as do many; I know



not the names of things; but I know what reaches my heart: that I understand and never forget.'

'It is, then, that your heart has taught you more than the heads of many students teach them.'

'I should like to believe that,' she exclaimed with animation. 'I like not to be told, "You must believe this; you must say that." I would believe and say because I cannot help it. Figure to yourself that my life has not been altogether after the convenances. A child, I lived in a grand château beside a lake; beyond the lake was a mountain, and on all sides a forest. I had a gun, I hunted, and I swam and rowed upon the lake, and I had my horses and my dogs. To sew, to play with dolls, look you, I cared not for it. I am not as the French, not even as the Russians; like my mother, I am Circassian; yes, I am more Circassian than she instead of less.'

'I believe it well. But later you left this château—you travelled?'

'I have been to many places and seen much society, and I have learned to behave *comme il faut* and to speak the French. But it is only a little comedy that I act; I feel that within me remains always the little girl of the lake and forest, but dressed differently, and with a face that does not tell the truth, as then. I can look happy when I am sad, and grave when I wish to laugh.'

'But you are happier than you were before?'

'Oh, for example, behold a question of difficulty,' said the Countess, shrugging her shoulders. 'One is never happy as in childhood; but, in fine, one finds a way to be happy. To love what is beautiful is happiness, but then it is a happiness full of all that is most sad.'

'It is not often that one has discovered that truth at your age, mademoiselle.'

'But it is true, is it not? For beauty dies; or if not beauty, then the eye, the soul, that has enjoyed it. Why was it ever shown to us? It only makes us long for what never comes, for what can never be.'

This gloomy philosophy, uttered by one who should have seen as yet only the sunshine of life, roused me to attempt what, for me, was the anomaly of vindicating the more hopeful view. Some platitude I brought forth about the soul finding in another world the fulfilment of unsatisfied aspirations, and I asked her whether she doubted immortality.

We were leaning on the broad wooden railing of the promenade, looking seaward. The Countess was turning her ring absently on her forefinger.

'There ought to be immortality,' said she, 'to recompense us, not for what we have suffered in the world, but for what we have enjoyed!'

'Yes, you could not have hit upon a

stronger argument,' returned I after a moment's thought.

'Is it strong enough?'

'Strong enough certainly to justify hope.'

'Ah, my God, one hopes without any justification at all. You conceive, monsieur, I am not of those who believe all we are told of the holy Greek Church. To believe, and after all to be deceived! I could not bear it. I have not found anyone so wise as to make all doubts seem foolish. But I have found many things that tell me, "Destiny mocks you." Yes,' she added, turning towards me with a kind of fierceness in her look, 'yes, destiny mocks me.'

'This girl has sustained some terrible injustice in her life,' I thought to myself. 'It glows in her words like the fire in her ruby.'

After a pause she spoke again.

'Figure to yourself, monsieur, a life that feels itself strong and capable of all enjoyments and aspirations; and this life, in the midst of its joy and freedom, one day meets its destiny, which says, "You are a slave: your aspirations are ashes; your joy shall make you weep; you shall become all that you despise. If you struggle to be free, you shall but dig your dungeon deeper. So it shall be to the end; but I do not forbid you to hope." Well, is not that mockery?'

'Destiny has not that power over us. I who speak to you have suffered, mademoiselle, but I have not found that suffering degrades. It chills, perhaps.'

'Ah, you speak of men. I am a woman; it is another thing that! But behold me who discourse thus to you, who see me for the first time—who think me mad.'

'Oh, Countess! . . .'

'Do you know why I say to you these things, which I have said before to no one—to no one, Monsieur Campbell? It is because they grew in my mind as I looked at your picture—your picture, that is now mine as well. Many hours have I looked at it, and I said, "The man who has conceived that he has known what are the secrets of life. If I meet him I will tell him these secrets of mine; he is worthy to hear them. He can interpret mysteries." But your interpretation is profound, monsieur; not everyone can read it.'

'If I could always paint for such as you, Countess, I might some day realise my ideal.'

She stood meditatively, her hands hanging folded and her eyes dreaming.

'When I saw that picture,' she said at length, 'I felt that it was the picture of my soul. There she sits within her rampart, which was once whole and sound. But now there is a breach, and that breach will never be built up again—never, never. Once the enemy has entered; and though for years and years she may watch and guard, yet at some hour, some moment even, her eyes will droop and her hand waver. . . . Then he springs and clutches her, and it is ended.

See him where he lurks there outside among the bushes. He waits; he is sure. And she—regard that terror in her eyes. Monsieur, it is a sublime thing to be a great painter.'

She held out her hand to me impulsively; there were tears in her eyes, but she smiled them away with a wilful defiance. Our hands just touched; then she withdrew hers. 'You see I have not had your picture for nothing; I have looked at it,' she said.

I was deeply touched. 'You have seen through it into the heart that conceived it.'

'Let us talk of other things,' she exclaimed abruptly in a lighter tone. 'Come, let us walk, else madame my mother will think again that I am lost.'

We resumed our promenade accordingly, but for awhile in silence.

'You look at my ruby. Do you find it handsome?' She had been turning and twisting the ring upon her finger, and my eyes had more than once been drawn to it. Almost as soon as she had spoken she slipped the ring off and laid it in my hand.

'It is a real antique,' I said, concealing the surprise this sudden act inspired in me. 'It is an heirloom in your family, perhaps?'

'It is a magic ring; there is a spell connected with it,' said the Countess, laughing.

'Let me not be the breaker of the spell,' I rejoined, holding it towards her. But in-

stead of taking it from me, she extended her long taper finger, and I put the ring on it.

'There, you have put it on, and now it will never come off,' she said with a strange smile. 'It is the ring of my destiny.'

'Yours should be a rich destiny, then.'

'Yes, I shall be rich; I shall make a figure in the world,' she replied still smiling. 'Nevertheless the spell is a curse; for so long as I wear the ring I must be miserable, and if I lose it I shall be wicked.'

'Is there no third alternative?'

'There was, but now the moment is passed. That is your fault, monsieur.'

'My fault?'

'If, when I gave you the ring just now, and it was in your power, you had flung it far, far away into the sea, then the curse would have left me, and I should have been free always.'

'If that be all I'll soon set you at liberty. Give me the ring.'

She shook her head. 'It is now too late. Such a chance can come only once. Have I not told you destiny mocks always? Behold my mother who beckons us.'

We approached Madame, who took her daughter's hand affectionately in hers. 'My very dear, we dine to-day at half-past four; we must make our toilette early. But, my God! how your hand is cold, my child. You have been chilled by that fog this morning.'

The Countess Almara laughed. 'It was not I; it was that poor young man with

the black hair and the blue eyes who was swimming so far out; that he should have been chilled I could believe it. In effect it was droll,' she continued, turning to me. 'Figure yourself this little man—he was very little—little like that,' and she held her palm about four feet from the ground. 'Well, he swims out a fine distance, even as far as I go in the canoe. When the fog comes I hear a splash; I look round; I perceive this unfortunate infant. I think he shall be drowned, and I go towards him to preserve him. Then I see that this infant it is a man; and this man he seems to fear me more than to be drowned, for he swims away when I approach. So I return towards the shore, but slowly, so that he may see me and follow me; and, in fine, when we are nearly arrived the fog dissolves itself, and behold us.'

'Do you by hazard know this gentleman?' inquired the Countess Semaroff of me. 'He has the air of an Englishman.'

'No; he is an American,' I answered with a touch of prevarication.

'Ah, these Americans, how I hate them!' murmured the Countess Almara.

Madame rose with a shrug of her shoulders. 'We shall have the pleasure of seeing Monsieur Campbell at the dance this evening?'

'Without doubt—that is—no. I am to depart by the diligence even at the present hour.'

'Depart to-day? Impossible! After having met Monsieur to lose him so soon!'

'Madame, I am desolated, but—affairs.'

'You will not go to-day,' said the Countess Almara, in a voice so low it could have been audible only to myself.

'Perhaps, indeed, I could manage to postpone for a few days——' I resumed, still addressing myself to Madame.

'Good. We remain here but a few days longer ourselves; and when we go you shall accompany us. That will be charming. Is it agreed?'

'Madame, a thousand acknowledgments.'

'Till this evening, then.'

I bowed low. The Countess Almara laid her hand in mine, our eyes met, her lips seemed to form the word 'Merci,' but she did not utter it aloud; then she turned brusquely and followed her mother, and they were soon out of sight.

## VII.

I DREW a long breath, stroked my beard thoughtfully, looked at my watch, and set out at a brisk pace for my lodgings. Before I had gone far I heard my name called, and turning, saw Mr. Jefferson Montgomery, who signalled to me with one gloved hand while with the other he lifted his hat in adieu to an elderly gentleman with a tremendous sweep of moustachios. My friend now hastened to-



wards me, his white teeth flashing, his blue eyes beaming, and with a general air of prosperity and benevolence.

'I am so glad to see you, dear Campbell. But they told me you were going to leave us. Surely you're not?'

'What an idea! I shall be here at least a week.'

Jeff took my arm with perfect cordiality and good faith. I did not want him, but there was nothing for it but to let the poor little man come. Arrived at my house, I sent him upstairs while I stopped to have a word with my landlady.

'Madame Enault, I shall be able to remain another week.'

Madame Enault was delighted, but would Monsieur pardon her?

'Freely and completely. What then?'

Only that, since Monsieur's notice to leave another monsieur had engaged the rooms, and Madame Enault had agreed with him for a month.

'Then let him know that you misunderstood me and that he must go elsewhere.'

To a marvel; only, alas! this gentleman had deposited the hire of the rooms in advance.

'You will return his deposit to him.'

Perfectly, but that, having had a heavy bill to meet, Madame Enault had been constrained to pay the money away.

'Ah! and Madame requires me to supply her with the cash in question?'

Monsieur had exactly divined the necessity that unfortunately existed.

Providence had treated me too well for me to be severe with so thrifty and unimpeachable a landlady; accordingly a financial transaction took place, the porter was remanded, and I went upstairs.

'And so you have been introduced,' said Jeff. He was reclining Adonis-like upon the lounge, exquisitely dressed.

'To whom do you refer?'

'Now don't be English and reticent. Whom should I mean but my countess? I do so want to hear your opinion of her.'

I could not help laughing a little, for to be seriously angry with the bard of Beacon Street was not easy.

'Unless you wish to write yourself down irrevocably an ass, my dear boy, you will not again apply the possessive pronoun to the Countess Almara. It sounds much as if a horse-fly should speak of his proprietorship of a four-in-hand.'

'My dear Campbell, you are really impolite.'

'I know it, and I hold you responsible for forcing me to address you with such brutality. I'm not accustomed to it.'

'How you do go on!' sighed Jeff, wiping his eyebrows with his cambric handkerchief. 'One never knows when you're in earnest. But really don't you think we shall make a first-rate match?'

'Gracious Powers! Do you know that

there are probably not two men living for whom the Countess Almara would not be more than a match ?'

'Exactly. In fact, there is only one who could mate with her on equal terms, and—well, I happen to be he.' Jeff uttered this with perfect modesty and conviction.

'My young friend, your chances with that young lady are not hopeless; they are ridiculous. She actually cannot maintain gravity at the thought of you. Must I reveal that she speaks of the "pauvre enfant," that she is convinced you are only four feet high, and that she declares she frightened you terribly in the fog this morning? Eloquent looks and sympathy of souls indeed!' and I laughed rudely.

'I don't believe a word you say,' replied Jeff, laughing also. 'But there is one thing that I do begin to believe.'

'What is that?'

'That I've got a rival, eh? ha, ha, ha!'

'You have an entirely too lively imagination,' was my cold reply.

'Ah, Campbell, you are very deep—very. If I were less sure of my countess than I am I declare I should feel uneasy.'

'Merely for curiosity's sake, where do you find encouragement?'

'You were in earnest, then, when you said this morning that you knew less than I about women? Your difficulty is, probably, that you regard woman as a species of man, when in fact no woman who amounts to any-

thing has a particle of masculinity about her. They may pretend to it sometimes, just to bamboozle fellows who are inexperienced; but they drop it in the presence of a man who sees through them.'

'Through their backs. I understand.'

'Exactly. Well, then, my countess, when I have my eye upon her, is her simple womanly self, because she knows my insight is unerring; but with you I'll wager she talks literature, and art, and morals, and things of that kind, eh?'

'I will not deny it, Jeff.'

'Of course she did, and why? Because she knew she could make you believe she really cared for such things; and, womanlike, she couldn't resist humbugging you.'

'And her laughing at you, her contemptuous allusions to your stature and so forth were also impositions upon my naïve ignorance of the sex?'

'Indeed, my dear Campbell, they were.'

'It is me, then, and not you that she considers ridiculous?'

'At all events you can see that it's not me,' said Jeff leniently. 'Why, just consider the points in me which she professed to consider laughable. My height! Now the last thing a woman bothers herself about in a man is his height. When there is a question of physical attractions, she looks first at his shoulders, then at his eyes, then at his feet and hands, then at his chin. If these please her his height may take care of itself; and if

you won't mind my saying it, the less it has to take care of the better. Look at Napoleon Bonaparte, Martin Luther, Frederick the Great, Benjamin Franklin, Plato, General Grant. Why, pretty nearly everybody who has stood a head and shoulders above his generation has been under five feet eight.'

'Bravo, Jeff! You are both eloquent and sagacious. Beacon Street should be proud of you.'

'Knowledge of this kind is a matter of temperament and intuition. Experience can but confirm what the soul has already divined; and if the previous divination do not exist, age and experience are just so much to the bad, if you won't mind my saying so. And so she ridiculed the fog incident?'

'She alluded to it with an apparent spice of humour,' I said diffidently.

'Dear girl,' murmured the poet tenderly. 'That seeming ridicule was almost as direct an avowal of affection as a modest woman could have made. That mutual voiceless self-revelation of ours, which my dear Campbell professes to discredit, has evidently stirred my Countess to her depths. It has aroused the potent germs of the master passion of her life. She trembles to confess herself to herself; how, then, could she do otherwise than veil herself from a stranger? and what better veil than a simulated mirth and mockery? But really now you don't need me to tell you this; it's the A, B, C of the feminine nature.'

'Jeff, you puzzle me; you are either more or less than human. At all events you are an incarnate solution of the old problem how to make the best of it. Well, what are your proximate intentions?'

'To dance the "Boston" with her this evening.'

'You will be at the ball, then?'

'Indeed, yes. Shall not you?'

'I shall; for since you are definitely resolved upon playing the donkey, I want to be in a position to hear your opening bray.'

'At ten o'clock, then; but it will be a variation upon *A Midsummer Night's Dream*,' answered the poet with imperurbable geniality; and so we parted.

## VIII.

THE ball—or rather the *soirée dansante*—was announced for nine o'clock, and at thirty minutes after that hour I passed through the doorway.

An oblong hall, the floor space framed in on three sides by an embankment of benches, with the orchestra on the fourth. This orchestra comprised a piano, two violins, and a trombone, all in evening dress. The assembly to whom this unexceptionable quartette discoursed was by no means so rigorously attired. There were coats and trousers of all hues, and skirts and waists of

all fashions and degrees of lowness. The scene was a motley one, but all incongruities were harmonised by the universal element of uncompromising enjoyment, pervading black and grey, high and low alike, and animating the heels and heads of the spectators upon the benches as well as the actual performers upon the floor. The orchestra sawed and thrummed with hearty good-will, and the lamps on their brackets and the windows in their frames jarred and rattled to the rhythmic fall of feet. In the pauses of the dance and clatter the roar of the surf came in through the open door upon the wings of the cool salt breeze.

The most polished people in the world dance, if not ideally, at least really. There is no languishing, no shilly-shallying, but downright roundabout, vigorous hard work. A Frenchman who has danced over night must needs feel the effects of it on getting up in the morning; and as for his partner, who has danced for herself and for him on two separate counts, it is a wonder she ever gets up at all. Their scheme of a waltz is simple and telling, being based upon the primitive principle of planetary motion—revolution round their own axis and revolution round their orbit. This double motion is kept up with mechanical regularity until nature—or more frequently the orchestra—gives way. The orbit of one couple being the orbit of all, the general effect of a lively waltz is of a voluntary human whirlpool com-

posed of self-centred *tête-à-tête* eddies. By centrifugal law the centre of the whirlpool remains empty.

A moment's inspection of this whirlpool satisfied me that it did not contain the Countess Almara. As I was proceeding to a scrutiny of the benches the *frou-frou* of a crisp skirt along the aisle caused me to turn and find my face within eighteen inches of the clear firm cheek of the beautiful pagan. She and her mother passed without appearing to see me; and they were followed by a military-looking personage of some fifty years of age, bald-headed, broad-shouldered, and bulky, whom I fancied I had noticed once or twice before. After seeing the ladies into their seats he returned past me up the aisle and went out.

Presently I came down, exchanged greetings with my friends, and sat in a vacant seat near the Countess Almara. Her manner was distraught and preoccupied; her smile only came from her lips, and though she looked me in the face occasionally with a certain intentness, she seemed scarcely to see me or to comprehend my words.

Her personal appearance was more diabolically handsome than ever. As usual, her colours were black and red, but, being in silk, they were exceptionally effective. There was a glimpse of warm white neck and smooth rounded arms; her hair, coiled on the top of her head, revealed the graceful bend of the nape. Her bracelet and neck-



lace matched the earrings of the morning, and beneath the delicate film of her glove was discernible the form of the great ruby.

'Might I have the honour of this dance?'

'Not yet, not yet. In this moment I feel myself unable. Let us rather talk. I am not myself; you see it. Listen to the sea. My God! how it roars! I wish I were out on it in my canoe with the great waves.'

I laughed to disguise the concern which her manifest agitation caused me.

'In that case, mademoiselle, you would be without the advantage of my society; and I doubt whether my little friend Montgomery even would venture to swim after you on such a night as this.'

'Oh, he is your friend, then, this Monsieur Mont—Mont-go-merie? And I have spoken of him to you slightly. I did not know, and I am foolish; I speak without forethought. You will forget it? Yes.'

'If anyone should apologise it is I, for not having warned you beforehand of our tender relations. But be reassured; Monsieur Montgomery is a poet, and intends making you the heroine of an epic. If you are gracious to him this evening he will forgive you anything.'

'It is not of him that I shall demand pardon,' said the Countess with the slightest imaginable intonation of scorn. 'But he is your friend, and you shall see how I will be polite.' She breathed and moved nervously, her thoughts being evidently absorbed in

some subject foreign enough to anything I could guess. Her eyes were restless, and she fanned her flushed cheeks in vain.

'What day is this?' she demanded suddenly.

'The fifteenth of August.'

'I shall remember it always—always.'

The hand that held the fan drooped, and, seemingly by accident, touched my own. The momentary glance that swept my face showed an inward trouble and appeal, and, if I read it aright, a something deeper and more passionate beyond. With the unexpectedness that was one of her characteristics she rose to her feet.

'Come, I feel better at present: let us dance; come.'

In her preoccupation she had not perceived that the music had ceased some minutes, and the dancers all left the floor.

'What hast thou, then, dear one?' inquired the Countess Semaroff, looking up indolently through her eye-glasses.

Almara perceived her blunder, and I could mark a pulsation of anger pass through her body while she muttered behind her teeth, 'That I am imbecile!'

'Don't you find it very warm here? Suppose we take a turn to the door,' I suggested. She thanked me with a look, exchanged a glance and a word with her mother, and taking my arm, we began to move down the aisle.

Presentiments, though commonly decep-

tive, do nevertheless exist. Just at this time I had a presentiment that some crisis was impending. If I could secure a few minutes' privacy with the young Countess, I was resolved to tell her a secret which already burned within me, though I myself had not known it until this very evening. But I felt conviction, I felt confidence, and I felt that there was no time like the present.

Events the most insignificant upset purposes the most momentous. There were two doors to the hall, and in order to reach the one at which we were aiming it was necessary to cross the floor. As we stepped on the floor at one side a couple of gentlemen appeared on the other; we met in the very centre of the hall, but it was not until I felt the Countess press my arm that I thought to notice who either of the gentlemen was. To my ineffable annoyance I then recognised the infatuated Jeff leaning on the arm of the bulky gentleman with the moustachios, who was positively in the act of introducing him to my partner.

The Countess seemed as much taken by surprise as myself. She returned Jeff's elaborate obeisance with a grand curtsey, and then stood erect and silent, her hand still resting within my arm. The music struck up another waltz.

'May I have the honour of this dance?' inquired Jeff with his sweetest emphasis.

I waited to hear the Countess say she

was engaged and to pass on with her; but after an instant's pause she slowly relinquished my arm, and uttering the conventional words, 'Je veux bien,' she resigned herself to the triumphant Bostonian.

Then, when it was too late, I realised that our engagement had been for the previous dance, and not for this one, if indeed there had been any definite engagement at all, and that, as I had heard Jeff's request in silence, the Countess had been forced to suppose that I desired we should part. It was one of those absurd misapprehensions which occur in ball-rooms as well as in other places, but which I had never found so vexatious as in the present instance.

Meantime Jeff and she had eddied away from me; another couple, revolving up from behind, came into collision with me. I felt myself in a false position, and beat a retreat to the Countess Semaroff, beside whom I seated myself with the gloomy grin of a baffled man.

But the Countess made herself particularly gracious and entertaining, and I was perforce obliged to give her a good deal of attention, though my real interest was monopolised by the proceedings of Jeff and his partner. Jeff was undoubtedly the best dancer in the room, and the 'Boston' step which he danced was not only more graceful and easy than the ordinary whirligig, but, by the device of 'reversing,' enabled him to perform his evolutions undisturbed in

that vacant centre of the merry-go-round which has been already described. This proficiency of his contributed to the sum of my misfortunes for that evening. I am not myself a good dancer, and I therefore shrank from affording the Countess Almara an opportunity of comparing Jeff's performance with my own. I resolved not to dance at all, and to trust to luck for an opportunity of getting a few minutes' private conversation with her.

But the stars in their courses fought against me on this night of August 15. Madame introduced me to the military gentleman, who turned out to be her husband, and he and I presently fell into an animated political discussion. When Jeff and his partner returned they took seats on the further side of the Countess, and it was almost impossible for me to appropriate so much as a glance from those eyes which now held so large a portion of my world's light. I could mark her forced attention to the poet's vapourings; I could divine her secret disgust, and I understood that she endured this petty martyrdom from a mistaken idea of making me reparation for her slight upon him. But I was practically incapacitated for either explanation or consolation. The intangible trammels of society and etiquette are as strong as the thread that bound Fenrir, and I finally made up my mind that I might as well go home.

'Before you go, dear Monsieur Campbell,'

said the Countess Semaroff with a glance at the Count, 'we will venture to entreat of you a great favour.'

'I despair of expressing to you the extent of the obligation which your condescension would impose upon us,' added the Count with his bland, impassive politeness.

'Am I really, then, so fortunate as to be able to contribute in any way to the pleasure of the Count and Countess? What happiness!'

'Behold how it becomes ravishing!' exclaimed the Countess. 'Almara, my very dear, Monsieur Campbell will perhaps consent.'

The young Countess had been sitting with her hands folded listlessly in her lap, absorbed apparently in her own thoughts, which were who knows how far removed from the confiding chit-chat which poor Jeff was babbling at her ear. She now raised her head and turned her eyes upon me. The deep sentiment contained in that look would have drawn from me, had she required it, the sacrifice even of that happiness which was to be the substance of my life. She said not a word.

'Thou must ask Monsieur; do thou ask him, Almara,' continued the Countess, smiling, 'since it concerns thee.'

'Is it that you would paint a portrait of me?' said Almara simply.

'Merely a sketch, dear monsieur,' put in the mother persuasively. 'The opportunity may not again occur for us. It is not often

one has the fortune to meet Monsieur Campbell.'

'And there can be but one Monsieur Campbell in the world,' added the Count with a bow.

'Something at all events—a likeness merely—a work of three days,' subjoined Madame earnestly.

I had had time to suppress the first impulse of delight, and to command my face to an expression of polite affability. In this so-called favour I recognised the agency of the Countess Almara. To the father and mother it meant securing a likeness of their daughter from the hand of the first portrait-painter of the day; but to that painter and to that daughter it meant hours spent in comparatively undisturbed enjoyment of one another's society—hours of silent sympathies, of low-spoken words that sounded little but meant much; hours that would count for years in the progress of a mutual understanding where each sought to reveal all and withhold nothing.

'It will give me great pleasure to sketch Mademoiselle,' said I. 'Four or five sittings will suffice. To-morrow, after the bath, we will speak further on the subject. At present I must retire. Madame the Countess, monsieur, mademoiselle, *au revoir*.'

'Good-night, Campbell,' spoke up Jeff as I moved away. 'Thank you ever so much; but you must expect to find me a severe critic. *Au revoir*.'

## IX.

BUT our drama was not to reach its conclusion without a modicum of the tragic element, and this modicum was to be introduced by no less heroic a character than the little poet of Beacon Hill.

It is yet early to point the moral of my tale; but I may remark that we are not seldom helped along the path of life, and even have our true direction pointed out to us, by ineffective obstacles. The person or circumstance obstructing us first arouses us to appreciate the advantages of a course which we might else never have thought of, or, having thought of, might have lacked energy to pursue.

In this sense it may be said that I owed my introduction to the Countess Almara, and still more the colour which that acquaintance immediately assumed, to the unintentional influence of my Boston friend. His vague rhapsodies first drew my attention to a woman whom I had till then admired without appreciating her. His transcendental love-making had shown me how truly she was lovable, and his infatuated pursuit of her had stimulated me to a decision whose gravity might else have given me pause. Left to myself, I should doubtless have fallen in love, but I should have been a great deal longer about it. At the age of



five-and-thirty the passions are more enduring than in youth, but do not ordinarily kindle so readily. Jeff was the match that set me afire, and he the goad that drove me at a pace which surprised myself. But I do not care to dwell upon this phase of my romance. To have been the rival of one you contemn is unpleasant, and the superior nature cannot avoid remorse in looking back upon such a contest.

However, the sittings began and fulfilled all our anticipations—Almara's and mine. The further I penetrated into her mind and heart the richer did these appear. Our speech and bearing still observed a chivalrous sort of ceremony towards one another; we did not as yet permit ourselves to be frankly lovers. But our reserve was only an instinctive device for gaining a deeper realisation of our happiness. Strong natures often illustrate this paradox: they are repelled for a time by the intensity of their attraction to each other.

Moreover, we were never left entirely to ourselves; the customs of Continental etiquette are immovable, and so was the Countess Semaroff from my *atelier* or from the little antechamber opening out of it. But the restraint was purely formal, and even added to the zest of our enjoyment by giving it the air of being something to intrigue for. It may not be creditable to human nature, but it is a fact that the most precious gifts of love are the smuggled ones.

But why did I not declare the state of affairs at once to the Count and Countess, and thus settle a question of such vital moment to me? In the first place, I could plead the lover's excuse—the desire to keep the secret of his heart for a time veiled, even from her he loved. But, besides this, I felt uncertain how the avowal would be received, not by Almara herself—I was sure of her—but by her parents. A marriage between even an eminent artist and a woman of noble birth is not an everyday occurrence; and I felt the prudence of sounding the views of the Count and Countess on this subject before putting my fate to the touch. In case of refusal, indeed, I should not hesitate to take Almara in spite of them, feeling as I did that our love would be compensation for all losses; and it may be that I contemplated the possibility of a hostile turn of the die with something like a pleasurable thrill. A man likes to prove his power in the teeth of obstacles; and, as I looked at Almara's proud and passionate beauty, I thought how grand would be the response to the summons of her heart. It would be almost a pity to forego that spectacle.

Another source of my hesitation had to do with the mystery which still continued to invest my beautiful sitter—that mystery which seemed concentrated in her ruby. What it might be I knew not; Almara quietly but resolutely foiled all my attempts to lead the conversation up to the subject. Of course

I was not able, situated as we were, to make any serious attack upon her reserve ; but it was evident that her secret would probably remain a secret until all concealments were finally at an end between us. All that troubled me in the matter was a fear lest it should turn out to be a hindrance to our union ; but, as time went on, this apprehension faded from my mind. Almara was gradually losing those traces of depression and anxiety which she had betrayed in our first interviews. The sunnier side of her character came out ; she chatted with gaiety and abandon ; the shadow of pain and revolt was passing away. She still turned and twisted the heavy ring upon her finger, but now rather caressingly than impatiently. And once, I remember, as she and I and the rest, including Jeff, were sitting after sundown round a table outside the casino, laughing, gossiping, admiring the afterglow along the western horizon, and sipping iced coffee out of tall glasses, on this evening of the last day but one of the sittings I saw her lift her hand to her lips with one of those unexpected movements of hers and bestow a quick kiss upon the ruby. No one seemed to notice this strange gesture, which indeed was so managed as to have escaped any eye less keen than a lover's. What was the meaning of it ? Almara's glance met mine ; for a moment she seemed disconcerted, but the next moment laughed and said saucily—  
'Monsieur Campbell, do you know a cure for burnt fingers ?'

The next day at noon the last sitting was over. I sat alone in the *atelier*, adding the finishing touches to the portrait. At four o'clock the whole party, not forgetting Jeff, were to be present for the 'private view.'

No one, not even Almara, had thus far been permitted to see the picture; and as for my Boston friend, I had not suffered him even to be present at any of the sittings. Besides that the little man had a disturbing effect upon me I wished these hours to be as far as possible sacred to my sitter and myself—oases of serene communion uninvaded by Bostonian ineptitudes. On the other hand, I must plead guilty to having used Jeff (or allowed Almara to use him) outside the studio in a manner perhaps inconsistent with the strict loyalty of friendship.

No definite words had passed between her and me on the subject, but, by a tacit agreement, the unsuspecting poet was made to do duty as a blind. Almara, in short, made show of a particular and sentimental interest in him, thus closing people's eyes to the state of feeling between ourselves. She acted her part so well, and the delighted Jeff so purred and beamed under her condescension, that I sometimes felt remorse. He deserved it, no doubt; it would teach him a lesson; and yet I disliked seeing even Jeff make such a fool of himself. The fact that he would have scouted my representations, had I sought to enlighten him, did not remove my responsibility. Almara did not seem to share my

scruples ; women never look at these things as men do. She fascinated Jeff without mercy ; they canoed, dived, and danced together. A stronger brain than his might have failed to detect any insincerity in her manner. Perhaps, indeed, she was not for the time being any less sincere with him than she was with me. The histrionic side of a woman's nature is generally strong, and is sometimes developed to such a pitch that what they enact seems as real to them as what they are in sober earnest about.

About half an hour before the time appointed for receiving my visitors there was a knock at my door, and Jeff came in. He was as neat, complacent, and pretty as a miniature on ivory. I had just put the last touch to the canvas, and was standing back in thoughtful contemplation of the work.

'Well, how do you like it ?' I asked him after the first words.

'Campbell, I am almost satisfied ; and that, from me, is the highest eulogy that can be bestowed upon you.'

'You never told me that you were the final umpire in art criticism.'

'Oh, I only pretend to be the final umpire on the subject of Almara.'

'Come, Jeff, let this farce have an end,' said I, laying my hand kindly on his shoulder. 'From this hour you must give up your pretensions in that quarter. To use the homely phrase, the Countess Almara is meat for— Well, let us say for your elders.'

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'Oh, my dear fellow, not at all; we suit each other perfectly. But I knew we should; you remember my telling you so? I should think you would have noticed it this week past yourself.'

'What I have noticed, my poor Jeff, has caused me more than one twinge of conscience. You must try and forgive me. The fact is, the Countess Almara and I——'

The poet interrupted me with an arch laugh.

'Twinge of conscience, did you say? Twinge of jealousy you mean. My dear old Campbell, if I have anything to forgive, I forgive it with all my heart. But my object in coming here so early was to ask you to forgive me.'

'Ah, I fancy I understand you, and I admit having thought you rather reprehensible on that score. Considering that your father made that provisional arrangement regarding your income in case you thwarted his wishes——'

'Yes, but that was only in case I——'

'In case you married anyone but the lady he had selected for you. Exactly. And you decided that you preferred the Countess to the income.'

'Really you are mistaken, Campbell. I have no idea of risking my income. I know the value of money.'

'All I was going to say was that you have not been acting quite ingenuously towards the Count and Countess Semaroff,

not to speak of their daughter. They look upon you as a young gentleman able to dispose of ten thousand pounds a year. Now, if you had proposed to them for her hand without letting them know——'

'Propose to them for it? But, my dear Campbell, that was all settled from the beginning.'

'Do you mean to say they have admitted you as a suitor?'

'Why, what else could I mean?'

'And you omitted to tell them that in case you married her, you would have but three hundred pounds income?'

'Indeed, I told them nothing of the sort. Why should I?'

'Because an honest man in your place would have told them!' I replied coldly. 'You are sailing under false colours. You are giving yourself out to be a millionaire when you have only the salary of a clerk.'

'But isn't a clerk with ten thousand a year a pretty decent millionaire?'

'But you will have ten thousand a year only as long as you are unmarried.'

'That is so far the case that, after I'm married, I shall have twenty thousand a year—my wife's income added to my own.'

'Well, Montgomery, I don't care to beat about the bush with you. If you can reconcile your conduct with your own code of honesty it's no concern of mine. But as regards the Countess Almara—I am going to marry her myself.'

'You? Oh, you are joking.'

'I have loved her from the first; she loves me——'

'Oh! I say! ha, ha, ha! Has she told you so?'

'We have not openly declared ourselves in so many words—you are welcome to whatever consolation that may afford you—but there are other means of coming to an understanding than by words.'

'Well, that is true, at any rate: it is for that I came to ask your pardon, Campbell. But really was it not in great measure your own fault?'

'Upon my word, Montgomery, I fail to catch your drift.'

'Well—the long and short of it is she's been flirting with you.'

'With me? You surprise me.'

'You see she didn't want you to suspect our engagement. You remember that first conversation you had with her, when she made those allusions to my height, and said she hated Americans, and so on?'

I made a sign of assent.

'When she said those absurd things, though only in fun, she did not know that I was her intended; and when, a few hours later, we found each other out, she naturally felt annoyed at having spoken of me to a stranger in such terms. You understand?'

'Pray go on,' I said, taking up my palette and brushes and standing before the



canvas, so that my face was turned from the speaker.

'So she begged her mother and me not to let you suspect; and the more thoroughly to lull your suspicions (and also because the girl is a born flirt, as all feminine women are) she—just—you know what—made love to you in a mild way, I suppose.'

Jeff paused. 'The man is mad—raving mad!' I muttered, still making pretence of retouching my background. Jeff flowed on.

'Of course a man like you, a man of the world, a great artist, and getting on in the forties—of course I knew you'd only be amused, and would take nothing seriously; and you know you scoffed at the notion of matrimony when I asked you about it. But still she can be so attractive when she chooses that latterly I began to fear you might be the least bit fetched, after all. I told Allie I'd never forgive her if it turned out so.'

'Told—*who*?'

'Allie—Almara, you know. We always called each other "Allie" and "Jeffie" in our letters.'

'Letters? You corresponded, then?'

'Regularly—for the last five years.'

'I see; and—and so it's been a settled thing—but—is this your first meeting?'

'Yes, and that is what made it so amusing. It had been arranged, you know, that I was to meet them in Paris on the 20th—'

'Meet whom? You must excuse me,

but you have such an unsystematic way of imparting your information. I'm a bit confused.'

'To meet the Semaroffs. The Count is the Russian commissioner with whom we are in treaty about the cigarette-holders. We were to be formally betrothed in Paris, Allie and I——'

'Would you mind calling her the Countess Almara in speaking of her to me? I—I have unpleasant associations with the other name. Go on.'

'The point is that, happening to stop here on my way, I was a good deal taken with the "beautiful pagan," without of course knowing who she was; and I might have made myself very unhappy about her if it hadn't been for you.'

'Eh?'

'Yes, a fact. The first I knew of my pagan maid being one and the same with Allie—Countess, I mean—was your mentioning her name to me that first day at breakfast. Don't you remember my remarking how strangely things came out? It was accident our both happening to be here, but it was you who made us known to each other. Wasn't it curious?'

'Very curious, very amusing, the whole thing—ha, ha! And so that story about the three hundred a year was—part of your poem, I suppose?'

'Not at all. But the Countess Almara being my papa's selection, I risked nothing

in marrying her. I tried to explain it to you at the time, but you pitched into me so, and insisted upon my leaving her and marrying somebody else, that at last, just for the fun of the thing, I allowed you to believe that I was really as great a fool as you took me for.'

Hereupon ensued a pause of some minutes. Jeff, I believe, lit a cigarette. What I did I have no recollection; but I must have remained standing before the easel. At length I felt that Jeff was standing behind me.

'It couldn't be better, really,' he said. 'They'll like it so much at home.'

'Beg pardon?'

'It's to go to Boston, you know, to give papa and mamma an idea of how their daughter-in-law looks. Ah! you've put in the ring, too. I'm glad of that. Handsome ruby, isn't it?'

'An antique. Such rings are not made nowadays.'

'Except by Tiffany; he manufactures them after the antique models. I got this at his store in New York six months ago, and paid fifteen hundred dollars for it. By the way, my dear Campbell, how much will this sketch be?'

'Hum, let me see. How long have I been over it?'

'Just six days.'

'Well, then, I'll let it go for six thousand pounds. I don't care to make money out of friends.'

The smoke of Jeff's cigarette got into his windpipe; and while he was coughing the door opened, and the two countesses, followed by the Count, came in.

After the portrait had been criticised and the compliments exchanged I drew near to Almara, who was standing apart from the others, near the easel.

'Countess, permit my congratulations.'

'There was a slight involuntary quivering of the eyebrows and of the corner of her mouth, and she kept her eyes upon the portrait as she said in a low tone—

'You know it, then?'

'Your future husband has just told me.'

She shifted her position a little, and began to blush slowly.

'I have included a portrait of the ruby, you observe,' I went on. 'Are you satisfied with it?'

'Very well—excellent,' she said mechanically.

'I was not sure whether you might prefer to have it omitted. That evening on the beach—you remember,—you seemed to wish it out of the way. I will conjure it away even now, if you say the word,' and I took up the palette and brushes.

There was a pause: she understood me; the colour gradually left her face, which she still kept averted. At length, with a perceptible effort, she said—

'It had better remain.'

'I think so too,' I said, laying down the

palette. The company was now prepared to depart.

'Before you go, Countess, I wish—merely out of curiosity—that you would tell me one thing.'

'Well, monsieur?'

'Are you an angel or a devil?'

Then at last she raised her face, pale as marble, and her black eyes met mine in a quiet, strange look. She shrugged her shoulders slightly.

'I know not—well, I am a woman. Adieu. You will not forget me.' And there, at all events, she spoke no more than truth.

The modest price which I had put upon my portrait appeared to overtax the resources of Beacon Street, and the work remained upon my hands. That night Madame Enault's chimney caught fire—an occurrence unprecedented in the middle of August. I explained that I had burnt up some rubbish, which had proved to be remarkably inflammable, and made the fullest apologies; but the good lady's nerves did not recover their tone until after the exhibition of tincture of argentum—a sound dose. This, so far as I can recollect, was the last noticeable episode of my summer holiday.

## A LOVER IN SPITE OF HIMSELF.

### I.

AT first, I simply laughed the idea to scorn. I refused to regard it, even for a moment, in a serious light. I jested with myself about it, and became positively witty on the subject. I let slip no opportunity to cast ridicule upon it. My chief regret was that I had no acquaintance in town to whom I could expatiate on the complete absurdity of the suggestion. In default of this, I took out of my toilet drawer the nine square inches of cracked mirror before which I was accustomed to do my shaving and cravat-tying, and, gazing curiously at the heavy-browed, rugged-featured visage therein reflected, I sarcastically inquired of it how soon it intended getting its portrait painted on ivory, and hung in a locket round a fair lady's neck? I entreated it, with sardonic humour, to give an example of a winning smile—of an ardent glance—of a beseeching gaze. Then I threw myself in my chair, put my feet upon my table, filled

my rankest pipe with my strongest tobacco, and while I smoked and lolled, I bade myself, with a hoarse chuckle of mockery, amend the rudeness and unconventionality of my manners, and abandon all selfish and offensive habits. In short, I did everything to prove the folly and groundlessness of this preposterous notion—except to forget it.

So went matters the first day. The following morning I arose to find myself quite as firm as before, but somewhat less disposed towards jocosity. I abused my imbecility with as much vigour as yesterday, but with fewer quips and humours. I began to see that, for such a fool as I had proved myself, stringent means were best; I ought to be too much ashamed of the affair to laugh at it or treat it lightly. Accordingly, I went about all day with a sour and malignant expression of countenance: whenever old Joanna, the maidservant, happened to venture into my apartments, I growled like a dangerous dog at her: and I gave her my orders that no visitor was to be admitted, and no letters or messages were to be brought up, in a tone of such energy and menace, that you would have thought my privacy was as important and as liable to intrusion as Chancellor Bismarck's: instead of which, the only person I knew in Dresden, after my six months' residence there, was the German-American banker; and it was not likely that he would give himself the trouble to visit me—no, indeed! for my whole yearly revenue (not

including the sums received for my pictures, because I had never yet sold any) did not reach fifteen hundred thalers; and though I knew that at least twelve per cent. of this sum went into my German-American friend's pocket under the name of 'commission,' yet even that *douceur* would not suffice to bring him a mile and a half away into the outskirts of the Neustadt, and up three flights of dark and devious staircases, to pay me a complimentary call. However, had he, in spite of probability, actually made his appearance, I should not have hesitated, in my then state of mind, to kick him downstairs again.

Well, that day passed, and was followed by a restless and weary night; and I awoke in the morning to confront the fact that my attack had now lasted no less than forty-two mortal hours, and, so far from abating, showed every symptom of being on the increase.

I was now seriously alarmed. Here was I grappling with an insidious and potent enemy, who apparently knew all my weak places, and how to take advantage of them, but of the proper methods of defending myself against whom I was fatally and completely ignorant. I had done what I could, only to prove that I could do nothing: and in this case, doing nothing was not a negative but a positive evil. The more I pondered over my helplessness, the more disturbed did I become. What did it all mean? What should I do? What was to be the end of it?



I ate my breakfast of coffee and rolls in silence and humility: old Joanna had no cause whatever to complain of violent manifestations from me. I spoke to her submissively and gently. I even entertained the question whether it might not be prudent to lay the case before her and entreat her advice upon it. But shame prevented me; I could not steel myself to endure her gaze of incredulity deepening into contempt. No—as I had struggled in the solitude of my own heart, so in the same solitude would I suffer and submit. If I was really to become a slave, let me at least conceal my fetters. Joanna could not succour me, for she had never made the resolutions and embraced the principles that I had—only to see them, at this late day, violated and broken. In a word, I determined to hold my peace and to put the best face possible upon my discomfiture.

By the time I had arrived at this decision it was already afternoon, and my customary walking hour was at hand. Should I go out as usual, or not? I had refrained from going yesterday, but no good effects had come of my forbearance. On the other hand, if I found reason to remain at home to-day, the same reason would be in as good force to-morrow, and the day after; and the logical result must be that I should never go out at all. Now this was a prospect which I could not bring myself to contemplate. In the first place, I was naturally of an active and energetic temperament, and my health demanded

plenty of vigorous exercise in the open air. Secondly, although my pride was fain to put up with the lot of a slave, I was scarcely as yet prepared to regard myself as a prisoner likewise: and finally, if I did go out, the chances were a hundred or perhaps a thousand to one that I did not meet her. Moreover, what if I did? I could not well be worse off than I was now; and there might be a remote possibility that a more deliberate scrutiny of the object of my infatuation would tend to my disenchantment.

Since I have thus betrayed my secret, I may as well pause here and make a thorough confession. Yes—there could be no doubt about it; I—Thomas Wyndham—was in love at last, and that, too, with a woman I did not know and who did not know me. Nothing could have been more inopportune, nothing more undesirable, nothing more impossible—but nothing was more certain! I loved. It had come upon me no less abruptly than overwhelmingly. A chance encounter in the street—a look—an indrawn breath—and I, who up to my five-and-twentieth birthday had laughed at scars, now felt a wound which not all the drowsy syrups of the East could medicine. There was no palliating feature in the case; it was not only love, it was love at first sight; it was not only love at first sight, it was love unrequited. And once more, the lover was Tom Wyndham!

But I perceive that some further explana-

tion will be necessary. Although, then, as has been intimated, I had existed in this great, beautiful, and seductive world during more than a quarter of a century, I had remained all that time heart-whole; and though my immunity had never happened to cost me an effort, it was none the less in accordance with a certain hard-and-fast rule which I had long ago laid down for my guidance throughout life. This rule was, to uphold, at all times and against all comers, the dogma that a bachelor life was, for Tom Wyndham, the only proper, expedient, and dignified one. Marriage, so far as I was concerned, was against both my principles and my interest. I was an artist, to begin with, and in my opinion it was the duty of every true artist to live for his art alone, jealously eschewing whatever might tend to divide or alienate his devotion. His transactions with the sex, if any transactions there must be, should be strictly in the way of business; he might paint them, but never woo them. But beyond this, I was (or so I had fondly imagined) constitutionally and impenetrably proof against female fascinations. Like the famous Duke of Gloster, I was not formed for sportive tricks, nor made to court an amorous looking-glass. In other words, I had always been noted for my awkwardness and infelicity in women's society; and I could not doubt that I was as tiresome and oppressive to them as they were always terrible and often hateful to me.

Here, then, were good and sufficient obstacles enough against matrimonial entanglements; and there were others behind. I was as poor as I was unattractive; I was destitute of the faculty of money-making, and I was as incapable of winning a rich wife by my personal merits as I should have been of living upon her bounty afterwards. In short, and not to multiply objections, confirmed bachelorhood was my category by every law, moral, mental, and material; notwithstanding which, I had committed the inconceivable imbecility of losing my heart and head at the same moment, and . . . but it is enough that I lost my temper at the time; to lose it over again now would be undignified.

Let me rather record a few particulars of my previous history. My father had been a wealthy Englishman; he married the daughter of a rich American planter. My mother died when I, her only child, was but a few years old. My father returned to England after her death, and I was brought up there in the lap of luxury. I was sent to Rugby, and thence to Cambridge; and it was there I first met my cousin Floyd Wyndham—the son of my father's younger brother. We were as different as white and black, but we were the greatest friends in the world. There never was such a lovable fellow as Floyd, and he was the most popular man in our College, and, indeed, wherever he went. He had all the social graces and instincts that I lacked; it was as inevitable to him to

charm people as it was to me to repel them ; and the best of it was, his success never cost him the least effort—on the contrary, he rather turned up his nose at it. What he saw to like in me I'm sure I cannot imagine ; but all the same he did love me with his whole heart, and would have done anything in the world to oblige me. Dear old Floyd ! with your lazy blue eyes, your quiet, audacious manner, your drawl and your fun : what a contrast you were to me, to be sure !

I never knew anything of his family, there being some misunderstanding or other between my father and his ; but our rooms at the College were contiguous, and we were together every day. There was a picture on the wall over his mantelpiece—a portrait of our maternal grandmother, and a lovelier face no painter ever drew. Whenever I dropped in to have a chat with Floyd, I used to sit where I could keep that face in view ; it was the only woman's face I ever ventured or cared to look twice at. Floyd used to laugh, and say it was like me to be spoony on my own grandmother : adding, that he had a little sister growing up who was going to be exactly like her, and that I had better begin paying my addresses to her immediately. But, jesting aside, I honestly believe that the memory of that portrait had a good deal to do with my bachelorhood. As for Floyd's sister, I never had seen her or had the opportunity of testing her alleged resemblance.

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