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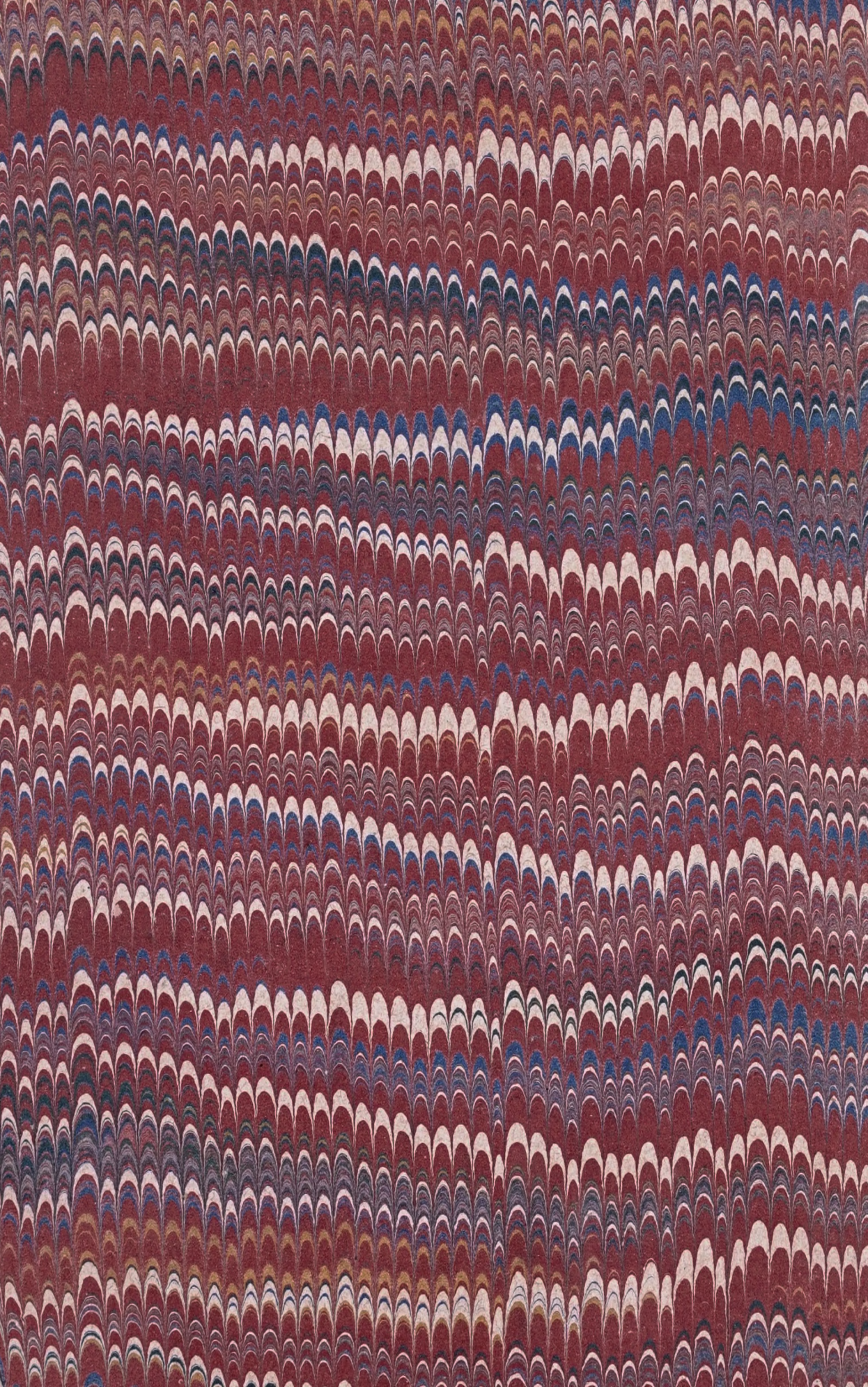
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THE

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Love and Mirage;  
 —OR—  
 THE WAITING ON AN ISLAND.  
 An Out-of-Door Romance.

• 17 TO 27 VANDEWATER ST  
 "NEW YORK."

# George Munro

PUBLISHED



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# LOVE AND MIRAGE;

OR,

THE WAITING ON AN ISLAND.

*AN OUT-OF-DOOR ROMANCE.*



NEW YORK:  
GEORGE MUNRO, PUBLISHER,  
17 TO 27 VANDEWATER STREET.







# LOVE AND MIRAGE.

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## CHAPTER I.

### THE LANDING.

FREE to roam and free to love! Could words more welcome come and go in a young man's brain? Unbidden were they there, and unbidden stayed they, after the fashion of all sweet guests, sure of approval as the rose and the zephyr; and the happy conviction somehow took possession of Arthur Venning's mind that, having roamed so far, he should find love. If not here, where, indeed? This sunny place seemed made for love and romance—a little world islanded from commonness or vulgar gloss. As yet he was but on the threshold; and what a fresh and tranquilizing picture met his eyes that summer morning! what soothing sounds greeted his ears accustomed to the bustle of cities! Close under the windows of the little hostel flashed quiet waves upon a green shore, and the sun, as it rose slowly in the heavens, shone upon a repetition of the same scene—far and wide, cool gray waters and grassy banks. A few hundred yards lower down lay the little steamer which had landed Arthur Venning and his fellow-traveler on this sweet place the night before, and it was with a feeling of satisfaction he now watched it gradually move away in the direction of the open sea. The last link binding him to the world of every day was broken. Who freer now to wander and to love?

It might seem strange to others, as indeed it often perplexed himself, that a young man so favored of nature and circumstance as Arthur Venning should be in quest of romance. He blamed rather the world, whose favorite he was, than himself, that he had well-nigh reached his thirtieth year without ever having fallen in love. Men go a-wooing and maidens are won, it is true, in brilliant circles of great cities, but are hearts ever broken there? Arthur Venning had no wish to break his heart, he only wanted to feel sure that he possessed one; like many another he was rebelling against the monotony with which excess of culture has leavened social life. He would fain taste a little naturalness, breathe a more ingenuous air. His best years must not be absorbed in coldly gratifying a curious intellect, or enjoying an existence no less satisfactory to himself than to outsiders. Lazily as he might acknowledge the fact, it was patent to all. None could pronounce Arthur Venning a failure.

But is not that life a failure which has no passion in it? Yes, said this young critic of life, in general, and his own being especially. It must be so, otherwise the great poets of all time have but fabled, and poetry itself is a sham and a make-believe. Then he smiled at



the notion that a man of the world like himself, and a frequenter of fastidious circles in London and Paris, should have come to this outlandish spot in search of an emotion.

With that smile on his lips, half satirical, half self-approving, he set about the business of his toilet. After all, he reasoned, continuing his soliloquy, what are the ending of most romance but disillusion and commonplace? The fireside, the home, the headship of a house: are these to be set against a man's freedom? Never.

His thoughts were rudely disturbed by the intrusion of a head, with hair the color of his own, from behind the door, and a voice asking, in humorous dismay,

“*Did you put in any soap?*”

Only a brother could have intruded thus, and with brother-like unceremoniousness the speaker was answered by a bar of soap flung at his head. Then the elder shouted, as he went on with the business of dressing,

“You lazy fellow! I thought you were out reconnoitering long ago.”

“And I could hardly believe my ears when I heard you get out of bed just now. You were to be up at five o'clock,” retorted the other.

“I wish you would make haste and look after a trap,” replied Arthur. “I say, Hervey, I can get a sketch if you will send me a cup of coffee and manage everything.”

“Sketch away,” was the good-natured answer, and the careless dialogue nicely indicated the position of the pair: Arthur's playfully assumed superiority, Hervey's as playful submission.

The elder brother did not aver of the younger,

“All thy passions, matched with mine,  
Are as moonlight unto sunlight, and as water unto wine.”

A stranger might have made the comparison with some aptness. The two were uncommonly alike; but as yet the alike force of character and mental supremacy clearly belonged to the first-born. Arthur, moreover, had a better presence, a finer appearance, although nature had kindly endowed both brothers as to the outer man. And Arthur had already made himself a position in the world of art and letters, while Hervey, of an artistic turn also, although presumably studying law, was still wondering what he should do with himself and his opportunities.

Meantime the sketcher set to work in business-like fashion, and the idler went down-stairs to flirt with the pretty girl preparing breakfast, make acquaintance generally, and find out what was to be had in the shape of a conveyance. The people assorted well with the place, a charming rusticity, an ingratiating pastoralness stamping both, not unmixed with a touch of roughness, free, however, from acerbity. The brothers continued their journey in exuberant spirits. Their carry-all was of the rudest—for seats they had only sacks stuffed with straw—the horses ambled slowly over stony ways; but the pleasant little land, the pearly sea hemming it round about, the glowing noon after the cool day-spring! How could they ever forget these first impressions?

And as they journeyed on amid the yellow corn-fields, losing sight



of the sea for awhile, a veritable Eden seemed this unknown island under the northern star.

There were roses growing in strange abundance before thatched dwellings—the trimmest, most romantic imaginable. “Surely fay-folk should live in them,” said Arthur to his companion. Nor were the golden plateaux between village and village hardly less wonderful, so had the flowers run riot from one end of this land to the other. It was one vast parterre in the midst of cool, gray seas. Lovelier and more surprising still was the last stage of their journey, for straightway the road led them, without warning, into the heart of a dense beechen forest, where once more they caught gentle sea-sounds. When they emerged, instead of mellow corn-fields and Arcadian homesteads, there lay the blue waves close under their feet, wooded ways and hanging rose-gardens leading down to the marge.

“Arrived then!” said Hervey, turning over the pages of a six-penny guide-book bought on the other side of the water. “And yonder handsome white house, with the lawn and the lime-trees, should be the hotel. Suppose we dine?”

“Suppose we do; and we can make out our plans afterward,” said the elder brother, wholly absorbed in contemplating the naïve graces of the place. “But, my stars, how beautiful! I must go to the water’s edge.”

“There goes the dinner-bell. A *table d’hôte* at noon, then? Well, I will go indoors and secure our places,” Hervey good-naturedly replied.

He paid the driver and sauntered toward the hotel, while Arthur found his way to the shore—five minutes’ walk only by whitewashed cottages, each standing in its bower of roses. This was the village street, and the uses to which the fisher-folk had turned their homely dwellings was indicated by the prevailing life and bustle.

Arthur Venning sighed as he met groups of well-dressed holiday-makers. The world, if not fashion, then, had invaded his Arcadia. Yet he admitted that there might be consolations as he caught sight of one pair of blue eyes after another. Where, indeed, should these northern roses and northern beauties be found together except under such conditions? This cool, green island, caressed by summer seas, was inaccessible during the greater part of the year. It must be taken like a wit when in the humor. He was about to descend a little wooden stair leading to the shore, when Hervey came up to him flushed with running.

“You really must turn back,” he said. “The dinner has begun, and I have secured our places opposite the two prettiest girls in the world. Was ever such luck?”

Back they turned, therefore, Arthur as usual making merry at his brother’s expense. How absurd it was, ever working himself up to a pitch of excitement about pretty girls, and nothing coming of it year after year. Nevertheless, when he took his seat he could but acknowledge that Hervey was right. The pair of sisters on the other side of the table were—well—quite distractingly pretty, thought the young man, as, having bowed courteously, he glanced from one to the other.

Blue eyes, silken curls, rosy lips, and velvety cheeks, however, are common enough, and often make up a combination wholly uninter-



esting. Nothing, indeed, gives the observer a more irritating sense of waste than prettiness without beauty; but here was a charm independent of both. The look, the glance, the expression, call it by what name we will, of the two beautiful sisters, might have redeemed a downright ugly face; and is not the look in a human being what manner is to a book? If that fails to please, all other graces are vain, or touch us coldly. We may be instructed after a fashion; enriched and delighted, never.

Like as were the pair in the matter of eyes blue as alkanet, the loveliest blush imaginable, brown hair, and teeth of pearl, there was the same difference between them as between the brothers. The largest share of outward beauty, and evidently strength of character, had fallen to the first-born. Just as Hervey was a copy of Arthur, so the younger girl was a copy of the elder—a charming copy, too! One hardly coveted the original more than the picture beside it. It must here be explained that the Teutonic maiden has little in common with a certain type of her English or American sister.

This quartette could now fall into easy, pleasant talk without need of further introduction than a smile and an inclination of the head; firstly, because such was the fashion of those parts, but chiefly because coquetry is not a plant that flourishes on German soil. The naturalness of the girls' behavior was due as much to circumstances as to character. They could freely talk with two strangers of the other sex because custom permitted, and there was no consciousness of being on forbidden ground to lead them further. And if not here, surely in no corner of the world could ceremony be dispensed with. Who would be at the trouble of going half-way to the North-pole without perspective reward?

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## CHAPTER II.

### “EYES BLUE AS ALKANET.”

AN introduction of some kind can generally be contrived by those who have their wits about them. Arthur, ingenious of the ingenious, a stickler by routine in the matter of etiquette to boot, before ten minutes were over had put himself and his brother almost on the footing of old friends. He recollected that he had with him the card of a well-known German professor whose pupil he had been at Göttingen years ago, and now produced it with excellent effect. The lines scrawled on the back were so conveniently worded as to introduce him at any time, to any one, and in any place.

The elder girl smilingly read it and handed it to her sister; she in her turn, after perusal, passed it on to the elderly pair under whose protection they seemed to be.

“Very good, very good!”

Thus saying, the old professor and his wife, who were evidently kindly disposed toward these well bred young Englishmen, nodded in friendliest fashion, and before coming back to Arthur the card had gone the round of the table, and the question of their respectability was settled. He was now on the point of producing another, but on second thoughts refrained, at least for the present. The other card withheld, thin as writing-paper and having a gilt edge,



was inscribed with the name of a very grand personage indeed—no other than that of a reigning prince, commending him to another, the potentate of these parts, and one of the richest subjects of the empire.

Arthur feared to appear a snob in the eyes of his ingenuous friends, and then as yet there were no more difficulties to smooth away. The rest of the meal passed off pleasantly as a family dinner-party. How wonderful what followed was in the eyes of the London-bred men! For two or three hours later they were out-of-doors, with the two girls for guides, four happy lovers a Maying in the old ballads no more natural or pleased with each other's company. A party of half a score quitted the hotel together, but soon Arthur was leading the way under the elder sister's wing, carrying her basket, gathering flowers for her, feeling on a sudden as if he were young indeed. It was the first time he had ever gone a Maying with a beautiful girl, and the first time he had ever known a woman named Elizabeth. The name, as well as the simple white dress she wore, took his fancy. No fashion, no artificial graces, no lendings here. A sweet woman, a sweet name, a sweet gown. That was all.

"What made you come to this island?" asked Elizabeth when they sat down to rest.

"To wait for a mirage," Arthur answered, with perfect seriousness. Then he turned to her, putting in his turn the same direct question,

"What made you come to this island?"

Elizabeth's answer was prompt as his own. "To fly from a sorrow," she replied, looking down at her flowers. "Will the mirage come, do you think?" she added.

"Will the sorrow go?" asked Arthur. "We must both have faith."

And as he glanced at the eyes blue as alkanet that had suddenly filled with tears, he would have given worlds to ask more.

"They say here that sooner or later all seekers after mirage are rewarded. But there are sorrows not to be charmed away, and mine is one," she said. "Let us not talk of it. I am happy at this moment."

"Who could help being happy?" again asked Arthur.

The girl laughed bitterly.

"You speak as if there were no lost souls in the world," she said.

"Can happiness or even enjoyment be the portion of a burdened conscience?"

"Well," Arthur replied, soothingly, "thank Heaven, I have not a burdened conscience, and I am sure you have not either."

"Nor my little sister Flora," answered Elizabeth, glancing behind her.

"Nor my brother Hervey," echoed Arthur, also glancing round him. The other pair were close behind, but quite occupied with each other. Elizabeth's mood now changed, and she said, almost in a merry vein, although there was significance in the words,

"Then you shall watch over your brother, and I over my sister, to see that no harm comes to them."

"As if harm could happen to them," laughed Arthur, lightly. Once more Elizabeth grew enigmatic and grave.



then Elizabeth beckoned Flora to her side on the rustic bench. Hervey, following Arthur's example, flung himself on the turf.

"What have you been talking about?" asked Elizabeth, with the authority of an elder sister.

"We began by particulars, and ended in generalities," Hervey answered, quickly. "Is it right or wrong to be happy? That is the ethical problem we were deep in just now. And what have you been talking about?" he asked of Elizabeth, smiling in his turn.

"We have riddled, as one Sphinx to another," was Arthur's reply.

"May we not hear the riddles?" asked Flora, simply.

"Hear, then, and be wise! One running after a mirage, one eluding a shadow—what will they find? Or let me put you in a maze more hopeless still. A phantom brother, a dream-sister, a suspended sword."

"We have been discussing the reciprocal advantage of having brothers or sisters," put in Elizabeth, with a sign of impatience.

"But why do we talk so much in a beautiful place? Let us go on."

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### CHAPTER III.

#### THE WALK.

WHY, indeed? The place was too lovely for prattle. The very breath of praise seemed inappropriate. With deepest wisdom Nature has surely ordained that the butterfly and the beetle play their brilliant little parts in her great show without a word. Were the animal world as loquacious as the human, who could support the universal hubbub! They had been climbing all this time, ever a musical plash of waves in their ears, ever interlaced branches overhead, broad patches of azure visible here and there, but the sea and the sky shut out for the nonce. Under their feet velvety moss, about them many a gray old trunk, tapestried with bright leaves and blossoms of creeping plants, the scarlet and the blue. By-and-by they came to a break in the wooded foreland, and what a change! The earth had here been cleft asunder, and from two dimpled hills that parted gently was seen the wide open sea, still and far off as in a picture, and of a pearliness lovelier than any color.

But the little dell between the twin slopes—and it was but one of many hereabouts—who shall describe the ineffable charm of those grassy stairs, the dark runlet trickling down, the golden warmth above the cool, green shadows below? In the light of golden, lawny spaces beyond the opening glanced white-winged butterflies, as the wide expanse of sea and sky was broken by silvery sea-birds or the flashing sheen of a ship at anchor. Wild with delight, the girls now sprung from one hill to another, holding by stem or branch as they peered down.

"Have no fear for us!" cried Elizabeth, as they stood on the giddiest height. "We are both accustomed to precipices now, and this is nothing to what we will show you to-morrow." She let Arthur hold her hand, however, as she slowly descended the steep sides of the tiny ravine. Flora also accepted Hervey's help, and soon all four were safely landed at the bottom.



“Will you really show us more wonderful places to-morrow?” asked Arthur.

“It is the custom,” replied Elizabeth, “that those who arrive on the island first should act the cicerone to new-comers. We will then next take you, with other acquaintances, to the Black Lake.”

“An awful name!”

“But a sweet place! We can go by steamer and walk home, making a halt on the way.”

“And after the Black Lake?”

“There is the lighthouse, like no other ever built. Nothing here is to be matched anywhere in the world.”

Arthur glanced at his beautiful companion, and thought that the remark applied at least to one of the beings on it. She continued in the happiest humor to enumerate the marvels to be seen. The sea, the forest, the glory of the day and the sense of freedom, seemed to intoxicate her.

“Then there are the fisher-maidens of the Blue Bay,” she went on, gayly. “They wear wonderful dresses, of the fashion of a thousand years ago, and have the bluest eyes in Christendom!”

Arthur did not say it, but the thought was in his mind that eyes blue enough were at hand.

“Ah!” he broke in, laughingly, when she had come to an end of her list, “you do not read your guide book. You are an untrustworthy cicerone! You have left out one of the chief sights of the island!”

The four had been running hither and thither in search of butterflies, making posies with the zest of school-children, and had joined in a summer song. When Arthur spoke, Elizabeth, kneeling on the ground, was letting Flora wreath her hat with flowers.

“And what is that?” asked the girl, without looking up.

“You must know that a prince has his chateau and chase here?”

She made no answer, and Arthur went on in the same careless, teasing voice.

“An amiable and charming prince, too, if report speak truly. Have you never heard of him?”

Elizabeth sprung from the ground, and Arthur saw that, for some reason or other, the question had ruffled, nay, disconcerted both sisters.

Flora crimsoned and fanned herself, pretending to be suddenly overcome with the heat.

Elizabeth, while outwardly self-composed, could not conceal her discomposure. She did not change color, but scorn and anger flashed from her eyes as she made curt reply—

“I have no love for princes.”

Arthur smiled inwardly. In this fair girl had he found one of the would-be reconstructors of society on revolutionary principles, as numerous among the one sex as the other?

The daringness and independence of character shown by Elizabeth in bagatelles seemed to warrant the idea. It tickled his fancy to think that here he had a beautiful convert to win over to the cause of order and expediency.

“I hope you do not include all in your category. You would not, for instance, think the worse of me for knowing this same prince?”



Perfect mistress of herself, Elizabeth still made no effort to conceal her scorn. It took entire possession of her as she turned upon her companion quickly with another question.

"How much do you know of him?" she asked.

Arthur laughed lightly.

"To tell you plainest truth, nothing at all as yet. I merely put the question to probe the depth of your democratic convictions," he said, feeling now that he was on the wrong track. Elizabeth laughed also—the short, artificial laugh that seemed to hide a feeling of relief.

"Indeed you are wrong there. I am no democrat in the sense that the word is generally used; one may have well-founded dislikes without being a theorist."

"I am thankful that you are no theorist," Arthur said.

"And I am thankful that you do not keep bad company."

"Oh!" he cried, with a shocked look. "Can there be bad company on this island?" He would not now say a single word about the letter in his pocket introductory from one foreign prince to another.

"So they say. But let us wait for the others to catch us up; we will then make a halt at the forester's, where we can have curds and whey." Meantime Hervey and Flora had been absorbed in almost artless contabulation. The poor child seemed ready to cry of chagrin after that little episode, and quite unable to resist taking this new friend into her confidence.

"Elizabeth feels things too strongly," she said. "She cannot help speaking out before strangers." Then correcting herself, she added, apologetically, "Of course, coming from Professor Brandt, we do not consider you as strangers. But think no more of what she said just now."

"Your sister has evidently a poor opinion of princes in general, and of this one in particular."

Flora made indifferent answer. How many other generous-minded girls were ready, like Elizabeth, to castigate those who fell below their own lofty standards of morality, especially of the other sex. The little outburst of feeling seemed to him to mean no more than this. The prince in question was a worldling, a votary of pleasure; in fact he had obtained an unenviable reputation. He should tell Flora nothing about the introduction in Arthur's pocket for the present.

"There are some things Elizabeth will never forget or forgive; she says we are not bound to pardon injustice. But of what use to eat out one's heart without being able to obtain redress for wrongs?"

"Ah ha!" thought Hervey. "There is a question of family pride or interest here. This high personage has affronted or injured one of Flora's kindred, and refuses to make redress."

Then he ran over in his mind the various probabilities that might meet the case. Yes, there had been high play at cards; a brother, uncle, or cousin of the lovely Elizabeth, and her sweet, haughty apologist, had been ruined by enforced payment of a debt of honor.

"Some families are born to misfortune," resumed Flora, as if such a summing up afforded comfort. "We must bear what trials



Heaven sees fit to send; only, of course, I cannot moralize to Elizabeth, as she is an elder sister."

"I do not think moralizing does anybody any good. Arthur preaches to me perpetually, and I am not one whit the wiser."

Thereupon both laughed gayly.

"Strange," began Flora, "that you should feel toward your brother as I do toward Elizabeth. We love each other dearly, yet she seems to forget that there are only five years between us, and that I am no longer a child."

"If you have no more to complain of, you are fortunate," rejoined Hervey. "Not a day passes but I tell Arthur he must think me an idiot. We are the best possible friends for all that."

Thus the pair prattled on while they continued their wonderful walk through the beechen forest above the sea. At first the way had led them through the coppice, woods, and tangled undergrowth, now close to the edge of the bluff, now through the heart of a tiny comb, opening upon the glassy bay. Here might be seen those storm-beaten trees, such as were used by Trojan archers. Not a stem or branch but had been contorted by the wind into the strangest forms—some of them might have been taken for kobolds, or other woodland folk, their quaint forms and eye-like cavities having a curiously human look.

They had now reached higher open ground, where veteran trees of superb aspect had been allowed ample room in which to throw out their branches, each standing in open, lawny spaces, magisterial and alone. Nothing strikes the imagination more than these glorious relics of ages long passed away; for not a tree was here but, if transported to a modern park, would have dwarfed its neighbors as an African lion its menagerie-bred brethren. There they stood, and there, if left undisturbed, they would stand for ages, more proud, generous, superb, while generations of pygmies passed under their shadow, uttering feeble praises.

"There is the forester's! We can now rest," Flora cried. "And see, Elizabeth is nodding and waving her hand to friends on every side. It is the universal meeting-place."

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## CHAPTER IV.

### A QUESTION.

THE forester lived a little way off, and it was to a wooden hut or pavilion near that holiday-makers and wayfarers betook themselves for curds and whey, or other homely regales. The wide world could not show a fairer halting-place. The sea that lay close behind was shut from view by the thickly interlaced branches of beech and pine, while from the open, sunny plateau on which stood the hut, broadened on either side a vast wilderness or natural park, vista on vista of glade, grove, and alley, all now interpenetrated with the warm afternoon glow. On the smooth sward lay broad disks of gold, like yellowing leaves of water-lilies on an olive-green lake; but further off, among the closely serried forest-trees, sunshine played fantastically as the coruscations of lightning, inky cloud and fiery flash, not



more strikingly contrasted than the dense shadows of the beeches thus fitfully lighted up. Beyond all, cloud upon cloud, billow upon billow, stretched the remoter reaches of the forest, no horizon marking the separation of world and sky in the dim, purple haze.

The score and odd idlers lounging in front of the pavilion were, however, not intent on exquisite lights and shadows just then. In a minute or two Elizabeth, with charming grace, had introduced the two young Englishmen to this group of acquaintance and that, and the four were sipping milk, and less pastoral drinks, at a long table with a goodly fellowship.

“How delightful are these garden taverns, this out-of-door inn-keeping!” said Arthur, as he scanned the inscription over the door of the little hostelry opposite. “In England we have not the word, because we do not possess the thing. Here the inn is only the place to sleep in, and the garden or forest is the keeping-room, the closet, the hall. To escape from walls and artificial horizons, and live for a time the life of the bee, the bird, the butterfly—can anything be more enchanting?”

“That reminds me,” said Elizabeth, as she smilingly handed him the black bread and butter, “this day week there is to be a dance in the forest. The fishermen, every summer, thus do honor to their guests, and rich and poor dance in company.”

“Shall we be invited?” asked Arthur.

“Every one is invited,” answered Elizabeth. “But here come more friends, and more and more,” and she rose, and Flora also, to greet the new-comers, most of them what may be called wayside acquaintances—friends made, as the fashion is in these parts, at the mid-day ordinary, on the steamboat, or in forest resort. It is, moreover, no hard matter to find friends among those of the same manner of thinking, and belonging to the same social grade as ourselves. These kindly professors and pastors, with their families, belonged to one pattern, and the same might be said of the merchants, military men, and sprinkling of titled personages. What difference of rank there might be was kept out of sight during the holiday season, just as school-boys fall out of rank on the play-ground.

On a sudden, however, there emerged from the depths of the forest the tall figure of a man, who could evidently be no chance-made acquaintance of the two girls; rather a kinsman, or at least it seemed, from the affectionate way in which he greeted them, an old friend. Sunburned, travel-stained, with his knapsack on his back, and a huge knob-stick in one hand, he yet had a fine appearance. The well-shaped head, the lofty brow, the frank, honest expression, proclaimed the honest gentleman in spite of his somewhat ragamuffin exterior.

“At last we meet again!” he said, throwing down knapsack and stick and glancing from one sister to the other, as he stood bare-headed before them. “At last!”

“After five years,” Elizabeth answered. “Not so very long ago we heard of you in the heart of Africa.”

“Where, indeed, have I not been since we last saw each other, my little friend? And Flora has grown up! But”—here he looked about him inquiringly—“there were three flowers when I went away. The eldest sister, the beautiful Stella, where is she?”



Flora crimsoned with a childish look of pain, while her rosy lips quivered, and tears fell from her downcast eyes. Elizabeth looked up, rigid as a statue. The light that a moment before had been in her face died out; speech did not come.

The man darted a glance at the gowns of the two girls—they wore white, and white may also be the symbol of mourning. Then looking unutterably aghast and woe-begone, he got out the words under his breath, "She is dead?"

The younger sister looked at the elder. Elizabeth was now constrained to speak.

"We are but two."

The look of misery in her face stopped all further questioning; nor could any private conversation be carried on in such a place and at such a time. She added, with a great effort at collectedness,

"Ask no more. We have come here to forget."

"Stella dead? Merciful heavens!" ejaculated the man, under his breath; then gradually recovering himself, and seeing the humor in which Elizabeth was, he added,

"I wish I were going to stay on this island, since I find you here. But I never stay anywhere, as you know."

"Why in such a hurry just now?" asked Elizabeth, who had by this time regained self-composure.

"I am bound further northward, and only landed here a few hours ago to get a glimpse of the place. Our steamer lies at anchor in the bay."

Elizabeth now turned to introduce the stranger to her new friends, who had withdrawn a little. Mr. Venning and his brother would be glad, she felt sure, to shake hands with one of their oldest friends, and a naturalist not unknown to fame, attached, moreover, to a scientific expedition that must have been heard of in England. Carl Fleming, in his turn, must be pleased to find in these tourists former pupils of Professor Brandt, of Göttingen. So she said pleasant things all round, and the business of coffee drinking went on more genially than before.

"I am glad that we now know one another's names," Flora said, simply, to Hervey, who had contrived to remain by her side. "Is it not odd that they should be the same in your language as well as ours? We have Hervé and Arthur, and you also have Elizabeth and Flora."

"And Flora is as pretty in one tongue as another; though your surname calls you flower twice over," Hervey laughingly rejoined.

"Yes," Flora answered, merrily, "I have my two names in one; but my sister's, Elizabeth Flower—Elizabeth Blume. That sounds better in English, I think."

The company soon broke up into little knots, some to penetrate further into the recesses of the forest, others to explore the cliff. A few, Arthur and the new-comer among them, lazily stretched their limbs on the mossy carpet. Here and there might be seen the straw hat and blue veil of some fair sketcher, while in the open space before the little *châlet* a dozen children joined hands in a merry round.

"I cannot tell you how shocked I was just now to learn that those beautiful girls had lost their elder sister," said the naturalist, as he offered Arthur a cigar. "I have known them from childhood



though my wandering life keeps us apart. The rose is left"—here he glanced at the elder sister—"and the sweet, shy bird"—here he looked toward Flora; "but where now is she who was the star?"

Arthur listened almost carelessly. Truth to tell, he was watching the exquisite picture that the pair of sisters made as they moved gracefully to and fro beside the swing. Swinging was a favorite pastime here, and they were giving delightful turns to two youngsters left out of the round.

"Do you know how it happened?" added the other.

Arthur explained that his acquaintance with the whole company dated from that morning only.

"And I see no one else I can question. But why do I want to learn more?"

"The beautiful also must die!"

Then, as if forgetting that he was not alone, he repeated the wonderful little poem he had begun. At any other time Arthur would have heard Schiller's verses delightedly, but he was in no mood for a theme just then. This breezy forest world which was yet the world of the sea; this unwonted freshness and freedom he was breathing, as purer, less trammelled air; this little life he was living, twice islanded from the world of every day—all these filled him with the wild joy of living, rather than deep musings about death and fate.

"Sorry enough am I to quit such a place and such a company," said Carl Fleming, rising as soon as he had finished his cigar.

"Who knows? we may all meet here again on my return."

"I am in no hurry."

"Happy Englishman! enviable human being!" rejoined the other. "But summer is of the shortest on this little island. In six weeks from to-day, if you are wise, you will pack your portmanteau and be off and away. Otherwise you may be frozen in for the winter."

Time as well as death may be a mere word in certain ears and at certain seasons. Arthur smiled, and his looks said what was in his thoughts. Six weeks seemed as far off just then as six years. Then his companion made brief adieux to the two girls and hastened away. The rest of the company also began to disperse in groups of twos and threes.

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## CHAPTER V.

### THE WALK HOME.

SOMEHOW or other—none knew how it was—our little company returned in the order it had come; Arthur still keeping his place by Elizabeth's side, Hervey in close attendance upon Flora.

The girls had undertaken to show them a different way home, and what a way it was! Enchantment could go no further.

They had suddenly quitted the upper forest world, still bathed in golden light, and after a sharp descent of wooded pathway found themselves in the cool twilight below, the waves of the tideless sea rippling gently on one side, while on the other rose chalk banks gleaming silvery white against the pure heavens, and fringed with rare flowers, hanging-gardens by the sea.



High above, ripe sunshine lingered about the coppice woods, but around them all was gray, pearly, silvery, only one blotch of deep orange breaking the wide expanse. Just opposite lay a fishing-brig at anchor, two ships instead of one, the twin imaged in the water more beautiful than the one solidly standing out against the sky; and as they walked along they saw colors no less bright close under their eyes, ruby-red and orange tangle, gleaming pebbles, patches of emerald-green sand, and how many other lovely things lying in the transparent water? Arthur's attention, however, was at once arrested by a flower in full blow on the chalk bank. Starry bright it was, and exquisite in form, each perfect glome shining out from the background of white cliff and glossy, round, green leaves. There seemed a spirit in every one of these blossoms, and as you looked at them it seemed impossible to believe that some pensive sympathy with human things might not be here, some wistful communing with mortal joy or sorrow. Flawless each tiny, ivory cup as a gem, like one to another, as pearls on a string, yet a narrow observer could hardly help finding a certain individuality, an approach, if not to consciousness, to that sentient being so closely allied to it.

"Will you get me some of my favorite flowers?" asked Elizabeth, for they were all growing out of easy reach.

"I am so little skilled in flower-lore that I do not so much as know its name," Arthur replied.

"The name tells you nothing, and this lovely flower has no legend that I know of. It is the only one I have ever had a real passion for; it was my sister's favorite flower; I love it for her sake."

Arthur understood the look of dreamy sadness that now filled his companion's eyes. It was not Flora she was thinking of—the careless, sportive, living Flora—but that other sister he would never know—Stella, the beautiful, the dead.

Meantime he was scaling the steep chalk banks, gathering a tuft of creamy buds, glossy leaves here, a tall peduncle there, Elizabeth watching him with pensive approval. The sight of this natural flower-bed, sprinkling of earth-stars before their brighter compeers shone forth, seemed to sadden her inexpressibly. She evidently forgot that this willing knight was a mere acquaintance of yesterday.

"Do not be ruthless. Leave plenty for others," she said, beckoning him to come down, and awaiting the spoils with almost passionate impatience. Then when he was by her side, holding up both hands full of the pure white globes, delicately penciled with faintest violet, and shedding faint fragrance, she bent down and ecstatically and tearfully kissed them where they lay.

What wonder that the polished London-bred man of the world had not a syllable at command. At last he did get out, in a low, subdued voice,

"You loved her very dearly then, this sister?"

Elizabeth, with tears still glistening on her eyelids, now motioned him to sit down, so that she might the more conveniently bestow the lovely things in her basket. As she did so, he watching her, she said, by way of answering his question,

"Do we not all love best that which is most beautiful? And these



flowers that I have never yet found growing anywhere else will always be very dear to me—very dear and very sad—because they will always remind me of a joy that is gone.”

“We must all look forward to the joy to come,” put in Arthur, not in the least knowing what he meant, only knowing that the speech sounded appropriate under the circumstances.

“There might be joy for me,” began the girl, earnestly; then breaking off suddenly, as if she felt that she was too forwardly confiding to a stranger, “Some day, perhaps,” she added, “I may tell you what I mean. That is to say, if we get to know each other better, and I can look upon you in the light of a friend.”

“Might I but be your friend!” cried Arthur. His manner was honest and hearty, without a touch of sentiment. Elizabeth made answer: “Friendships are not made in a day.” She went on speaking, while she steadily caressed her flowers, pressing one dainty floret to her lips, another to her heart, breathing their delicate fragrance, fondling them as if they were living things:

“You may in time become my friend, and prove very serviceable to me.” She stopped short, smiling gravely as she perused his questioning face. “How can I tell if the friendship I have to offer is worth the services I must ask in return?”

“Are you a brave man?” she suddenly asked, still studying his physiognomy.

“Try me,” was Arthur’s tart reply.

Elizabeth saw the look of vexation that came into her companion’s face and made quick apology.

“Pray pardon me. I had no right to put such a question. I do not know how it is; I forget we are strangers to each other,” she said.

“Let me also ask your forgiveness,” Arthur replied, speaking with uncompromising sincerity. The strange, new situation in which he found himself seemed to demand it. “I did wrong to take affront just now. How can a man aver of himself that he is brave till his courage has been put to proof? As yet mine lies dormant; alike physical and moral ordeals are to come. But” — here the young man’s voice gained in fervor, and Elizabeth realized that there might be a heroic side to this pleasant, polished man of the world—“but let me tell you my theory about courage, no matter of what kind, for it is a subject on which I have cogitated deeply. A crisis there comes to every human being, so at least I believe, when his heroism is tested, when he must go through the fire for once and for all.”

“That I believe also,” put in Elizabeth.

“We must store up our little stock of the heroic virtues against they are needed—for needed they surely will be, and that, perhaps, when we least expect it,” he went on. “Thus it comes about that although, Heaven be praised, my existence up to the present time has been unusually smooth and comfortable, I am always on the lookout for a summons, like a fireman off duty.”

“Strange,” mused Elizabeth, “such thoughts have often crossed my own mind. Once in every life-time human beings are brought face to face with the awful aspect of destiny. Some are sore afraid, and others show almost a godlike resolution.”



“Oh do not let us soar to such comparisons! Is it not enough to be a man?” cried Arthur.

“It should be; and just a man’s *sang-froid*, a man’s daring, I need now. If I might only find in you the friend, the brother, the champion of my dreams—”

She broke off again, taken aback by her own out-spokenness and abandon, and glanced at Flora, now daintily picking her way through the water, Hervey holding her hand as she stepped from stone to stone.

“Flora and I are alone in the world, and you have no sisters. Perhaps that is why we are drawn with such friendliness one toward the other,” she said, in a half-apologetic voice, although her companion looked in no need of apology. She added, with the same irresistible manner, half-joyfully confiding, half-birdlike shy, “And none of us know how these things are; we often find friendship and sympathy when we most need them.”

Arthur was about to make appropriate answer when she quickly, and, as he thought, unkindly changed the subject. She could not forget her flowers, and the recollections of mixed pain and delight they brought, while she was evidently anxious to discard personal talk.

“The thought in my own mind now must have struck you,” she said. “Is it not strange that while we cling passionately to certain aspects and certain ineffably lovely creations of nature, they have nothing to do with us, and remain outside our poor little life of clouds and sunshine? The beautiful, visible world is not made for us. Think of this island. I have heard my parents say that, not so very many years ago, never a stranger was seen in the fairy spot where we now are. Yet the water, crystal clear, flowed then as now, showing the golden flowers of the sea; these hanging-gardens made the air fragrant; and there was the glory of the woods above.”

“But is it not well for our peace of mind that it should be so?” asked Arthur. “Were the natural world in perpetual sympathy with us, nature, a mirror of our joys and sorrows, who could support such dual existence? The weight of twofold memory, the real and the reflected, would crush us.”

“You are right. Why must we be the slaves of one?” cried Elizabeth.

Then, with a sudden impulse, as if the sight of the flowers, and the associations they called up, were becoming unbearable, she emptied her basket. One by one she now took out each tall stem, with its twin leaves of deep green, and blossom of moony white, and laid them tenderly in a tiny hollow close by, memories in their grave!

“If we ever become friends,” she said, “I will tell you why the sight of these flowers is insupportable to me. Now let us join the others, and all hasten home.”

There was no hastening, however; why should there be, when the evening became more delicious every moment? Elizabeth and her companion still kept close to the cliffs, now thridding lovely little green ways cut in the forest, that here dipped to the water’s edge, now skirting the chalk banks, fragrant with melilot and origome,



Hervey and Flora, only removed from them by an arm's-breadth or two, remained on the shore.

The girl, playfully eager, was searching for amber. It was often found here, she said, and kept the wearer from wizardry and the evil eye.

"You surely do not believe in such things?" laughed Hervey.

"Only when I am on this island," Flora answered, with perfect gravity. "It is an enchanted place, as you will discover if you stay here long enough. You may throw aside your talisman when you reach the opposite coast."

"But if the sorcery is of an agreeable kind, better submit to the spell," Hervey said, still mocking and ironic.

"I could tell you a story that I think would make you believe in evil influences beyond mortal ken," Flora answered, in a low, timid, yet eager voice. "Can it be otherwise explained how souls beautiful as those of angels become dark and evil? But I must not talk to you in this way; Elizabeth would be angry."

"Your sister has evidently taken kindly to my brother. She sees that we are not adventurers anyhow," pleaded Hervey, in an aggrieved tone.

"Elizabeth is older than I am. I must be guided by her in everything," Flora made reply, and could not be brought to talk of amber or angelic souls any more. The four were now overtaken by friends and acquaintances, with whom they lingered on the strand till after sunset. A sunset it hardly seemed, rather a sunrising, so pure and bright the heavens, so intense the rosy glow gradually spreading over sea and sky. The whole visible world seemed turned into a globe of ruby, and when the ruby faded, sapphire was there instead, waves and skies melted into one.

It was still early when the brothers reached their hotel, and Arthur, alone in his bedchamber, took out his watch, smiling curiously as he wound it up.

Just twelve hours were flown since he last glanced at the familiar dial, and in the interval he had fallen in love.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### NO WHITHER!

LOVE as well as sorrow may be a thing to shun; and next morning Arthur Venning was hurrying with what speed he could command from the scene of yesterday's glamour.

Capricious as lover's mood seemed also the climate of this island; yesterday a fairy bower lapped by southern seas, on the morrow a dreary place. Vague sounds of storm had disturbed Arthur during the night, and when he drew aside his curtain he saw the lime-branches tossed against the blurred pane, and heard the waves breaking angrily against the shore. No pleasure skiff could put out to sea in such a storm, and were the day dawning goldenly, all the same he must be off and away. In the humor he now was, made up of feverish disturbance of sweetest kind, chains could hardly have bound him, fetters would have been forced somehow.



The need of solitude and escape was imperative. He must separate himself from these new, bewildering impressions, to find out if they were anything deeper or more lasting.

So, no word said, no warning given—thus unceremoniously the brothers treated each other always—he was out of the house betimes, bound with all dispatch, no whither.

It is not very easy to escape either foes or fascinations in an island without railroads, where roads are few and like the paths of the sea—not to be trusted in bad weather. A mackintosh and umbrella are all very well, but avail little when rain is tumbling down in fits, and winds blow from the four corners of the globe. If there was only a railway, only a town, only some attainable dry place or other within reach! ejaculated Arthur Venning. What should he do with himself in such a hurricane, such a deluge, sighed the unfortunate lover, almost ready to anathematize the lucky stars he had blessed a few hours before.

Plodding on thus uncomfortably, with his sketch-book under his arm, he had reached the top of the village street when a rumbling sound and an unwieldy vehicle, shaped like an old-fashioned berlin, came to divert his thoughts; and in a twinkling this tumble-down conveyance, which, as he saw by the somewhat pompous insignia, carried his Imperial Majesty's mails, occurred to him as a solution of the problem. Here was the post ready to carry him, if not to a desirable place, certainly away from the spot in which he then was. Without a second thought he stopped the post-boy, and took a seat inside of the dingy old stage-coach, being better than the top under certain circumstances, he said to himself, as he shut out the wind and the rain.

He would have been alone, but for one heavy passenger of his own sex who was fast asleep in a corner. Arthur took possession of the other, and comfortably disposing of himself, began to wonder what he should do next. The post would stop somewhere or other. Anything deserving the name of a town the island did not possess, and a village hostelry, with a smoky parlor, and not so much as a newspaper to be had, offered few attractions. Well, mused Arthur Venning, as he also closed his eyes for a doze, anyhow I have brought my sketch-book and moist colors, and I may find a rustic beauty to sit for me.

He nodded and nodded, while the outlandish ramshackle vehicle toiled up hill and down hill, through the wind and the rain, till it was brought to a standstill with a jerk that rudely aroused both passengers.

“What place is this?” asked Arthur of his fellow-traveler.

“No place at all,” was the reply; “but the horses are changed here. Are you going to the Ferry?” he asked.

“In the name of all the saints, no!” cried Arthur, aghast. He had left the Ferry just two days ago. Was there only one road, then, in this island? Must he go backward or forward, cross the narrow strip of sea dividing him from shops, railways, and civilization, or return crestfallen whither he had come?

“Then,” politely replied the stranger, “if you are not going to the Ferry, you are going to the Residency, of course, and there is the other coach waiting to take you.”



A bright thought now flashed across his mind. Yes, there was certainly one dry spot in this deluged land. Not a church, not an interior, not a museum could this luckless island boast of, in which a *dilettante* might profitably spend a wet morning, so he had heard. But this Schloss was also a covered place. It contained, so at least folks said, some pictures and works of art worth looking at, which travelers were permitted to see. In fine, it offered exactly the pastime he wanted, and if the weather cleared up he should have a pleasant journey home in the evening. That little missive introductory safely stowed away in his pocket, Arthur, of course, determined to withhold. To present himself before a grand personage on a wet day was out of the question. An umbrella and aristocratic acquaintances are incompatible; but he might fairly present himself at the doors as an English artist, craving leave to see his serene highness's collections. Anyhow, on the arrival of the stage-coach at its destination, he would breakfast, or rather dine—the dinner in these parts taking place at midday—undergo a process of drying and brushing, and then proceed on foot to the palace. The weather did not improve, but Arthur's spirits rose when the tumble-down old carriage stopped before a well-built inn, and a glance showed him that all the pleasant possibilities he had just now entertained would be realized. An hour later he was hastening across the park, sketch-book under his arm. If only the sky would clear, and the necessary permission be granted, he might make a charming study here, he thought. The views on all sides were said to be magnificent, the palace itself a gem of modern art; but under a leaden sky, and through a mist of rain, these things could only be guessed at.

Arthur had received glowing accounts of the prince's graciousness to art loving strangers, but was hardly prepared for the reception accorded him; for no sooner were the words "an English artist" out of his mouth, than, without waiting to hear more, the elderly woman who opened the door ushered him in, and beckoning him to follow, led the way upstairs.

He noticed with a little surprise that it was a side staircase she now took, and not the nobly proportioned flight of marble steps royally carpeted that evidently led to the state apartments. His conductress had motioned him to wear a pair of felt over-shoes lying on the threshold, so that it could be no precautionary measure on her part. He supposed he should see the grand entrance afterward, and followed without a word. What was his astonishment when the woman, still chary of her words, opening the door of a small but beautiful room, evidently a woman's room, handed him a chair and went away! His first impulse was to go after her and ask if she had made a mistake, explaining that he was there by no appointment. On second thoughts the matter seemed to have little mystery about it. He but waited for an informal permission to see the pictures; that was all. Five minutes passed, during which he surveyed the room, taking in every artistic feature with his quick, well-trained eye. The charming pictures on the wall, the choice, modern furniture, the veriest bagatelle, were works of art, the superlatively bound books all testified to the elegant taste of their possessor. What immediately riveted his attention, however, were two portraits of a beautiful and sumptuous woman, which lay unframed, as though hardly finished, on



two easels. Each picture was evidently the work of a different hand, and never surely could portrait-painter have had a harder or more delicious task.

Arthur was standing before the two canvases spell-bound, when, without any warning, the door opened and a lady came in. He saw at a glance that she was the sitter; but how much more beautiful! She was dressed in black, and as she moved toward him he fell back, hushed and awe-struck by the pathos in her face.

This glorious creature might have sat to-day for a Mater Dolorosa, yet the simple sable garment she now wore became her no less than the queenly gems and dazzling textures with which she was bedight in both pictures; perhaps even better. There was more here of the star than the queen, the quiet, subdued, yet overmastering loveliness that needs no mundane lendings, that enforces consenting homage because it is itself.

"You are an English portrait-painter," she said, removing the two pictures from the easel and seating herself opposite to it. "Pray begin the sitting at once."

Arthur now realized his dilemma. He was evidently mistaken for the third artist invited to enter the lists. A German, possibly a French hand had failed to carry off the palm. Some countryman of his own was to compete in his turn. There was not a minute for deliberation; he unhesitatingly accepted the challenge. After all, he said to himself, explanation could not be very difficult. A painter, not unskilled in portraiture, he had been accidentally asked to take this lady's portrait. What should he do but accept, leaving any mystery to be cleared up afterward? Such a misinterpretation of the true state of affairs, under the circumstances, could but meet with indulgence. And who knew? He might now succeed, as he had often done before, in achieving, no *chef d'œuvre* certainly, but a sterling likeness. That was most likely the one thing needed, and was within his capabilities.

He set to work in business-like fashion, and having prepared his colors, turned expectantly to the sitter.

"Have you any instructions to give me?" he asked, not in the least knowing how to address her.

"None whatever," was the almost indifferent reply, "except that I wish to be taken in this plain black gown as I am."

Arthur bowed, mutely acquiescent, and leaning back in his chair took that long, long look, only permissible under precisely such circumstances. And as he gazed and gazed, the same feeling of awe and perplexity came over him, dominating mere admiration. Who could this rare creature be, and what was the secret of the more than sorrow looking out of her clear eyes?

Hardly the mistress of a proud house, he said, or even a member of it, otherwise would she stay there unattended and alone? He settled the question in his own mind by saying that she certainly belonged to the prince's family, but was, perhaps, a humble kinswoman, one by whom trouble had come upon the rest.

Not the burden of a secret grief only seemed to weigh her down.

Something more, also, he read as he studied that calm, pensive face. From those beautiful eyes looked forth no shy, girlish ques-



tioning of life and destiny, but a woman's collectedness and passive resignation.

The mystery of existence had been solved for her.

Of the future she had neither supreme joy nor sorrow to ask. No maiden, but a wife was here. Whose, it behooved him not to ask.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A CHARGE.

THE pose was settled, and the task fairly entered upon, when a strange sensation came over Arthur, for a moment hindering the facile pencil, just before used with so much *aplomb*. Again and again he looked at his beautiful sitter, and each glance but heightened the sudden conviction that had flashed across his mind. He must have seen this unforgettable face before. Those clear eyes, so lovely and so pathetic, did not now meet his own for the first time. Yes, the matter was past doubt. At some period or other, and in a place indistinct enough, but certainly not dreamland, they had met before.

The revelation embarrassed him not a little, for any former acquaintance, however slight, must sooner or later force him to drop the mask, and he felt now some compunction at having assumed it. Yet if he should succeed, his triumph would need no palinode.

Up to this time the sitter had only opened her lips to assent to his choice of position and other technical arrangements. When he paused, she rose and inspected the sketch.

"You have certainly caught the likeness," she said, speaking in the same indifferent tone, as if her beauty were no more a thing to glory in than the black dress she wore; "and that is what these two miss," she added, glancing at the rejected canvases.

"The simpler a portrait is, the better to my thinking," Arthur replied. "What we want is not a picture, but a personality, unmistakable, stamped with character and originality as the living face itself."

"The life should be there," answered the lady. Then changing the subject abruptly, she said, with affected carelessness, as if wishing to conceal her motive, "You come from England. Tell me one thing: can a woman earn her bread there without difficulty?"

"Under certain circumstances, yes."

"What circumstances?" The question was put eagerly.

"A livelihood there depends, as I presume it does all over the world, on aptitude. A clever woman, I suppose, can earn much more than her bread anywhere."

"What do you call cleverness?"

"Well," Arthur said, with some diffidence, "I call it the faculty of giving out. Many people have a respectable amount of knowledge, but general dullness of parts makes it useless to them."

Her interlocutor seemed to reflect.

"I am thinking," she said, pensively, "of common people and common cases. Are there more children than teachers in your country; more sick than there are nurses to look after them?"



"I fear not; but there is room for a few paragons even in that line. Can I help you with regard to any special protégée?" he asked.

Instead of an answer came a question, put in the simplest, most natural way in the world.

"What is your name?" she asked, looking straight at him.

Concealment was no longer possible. Arthur started to his feet, positively blushing with contrition and dismay.

"Pray pardon me," he began, regaining self-possession as quickly as he had lost it. "I came here to-day in the capacity of a mere tourist, not of a portrait-painter; but when I saw that I was mistaken for the professional artist evidently expected, I rashly hazarded the part; and I can handle the brush, as you see."

The ingenuous speech and honest smile accompanying it seemed in some degree to disarm the lady's displeasure; still there was excessive hauteur in her manner, and reproach in her astounded look.

"You are an utter stranger here?" she asked.

"Entirely so, a mere holiday excursionist, come to this island for a few weeks' pleasure. It is true I bear a letter introducing me to the prince, but I had no intention of presenting it to-day. Allow me to see him, to explain—"

"The prince is absent," she said, coldly. Then, after a pause, during which she seemed to ponder on what was best to be done, she looked at him as if to read him through and through, and made slow reply:

"You are an Englishman, and they say an Englishman's word is worth something. Give me yours that not a syllable shall ever pass your lips concerning this interview."

"Certainly," Arthur said.

"They say that your countrymen are curt, but why may not one word suffice? I will trust you."

"I hope so," was the retort, again direct to bluntness; then, with a sudden glow of eagerness, he asked,

"Will you not permit me to finish the sketch?"

Once more the lady reflected. Yes and no were written by turns in that pale, proud face; she seemed to wish for the picture, but was evidently anxious to be rid of his company. "I think it will be better to leave off now," she said, at last, with some show of reluctance. "I will, however, keep the drawing, and you shall finish it at some future time, if circumstances permit."

Arthur looked delighted, and at once proffered a visiting-card. It was, however, merely glanced at and returned to him.

"English travelers are not so frequent here that there would be any difficulty in finding you," she said, smiling faintly. "But one word more before you go." She looked on the ground, paused irresolute, then, with strange hesitancy, got out the words, "This person—this protégée—of whom I spoke just now, has no friends in England. Are the friendless flouted there as elsewhere?"

Arthur once more had recourse to his card-case. "Surely not, but pray let me leave my English address," he urged, feeling at that moment as if he could canvass every educational and philanthropic body in London on behalf of this adorable patroness.

"On my return you can write to me. I shall be proud to serve your friend; but," he added, with sudden light breaking on him,



“I have a letter introducing me to the prince. We may meet here again.”

A second time the lady became rigid as a statue.

“The prince is absent, and I am here for a few days only,” she answered, with excessive hauteur. Arthur, chilled into silence, began putting his brushes together without much alacrity, his incomparable sitter lingering as if to get out one unwilling word more. At last she said, when he stood on the threshold ready to go,

“I thank you, and I rely upon you. Remember that.”

The same woman-servant was there to conduct him down-stairs. He could only bow and hurry away, certainly in need of no more distraction yet awhile.

The lovely vision of Elizabeth was for the nonce effaced from his mind as completely as the most desperate lover could desire. Instead of a girlish figure in white, ineffably blue eyes speaking mystery, soft brown hair fringing a candid brow, and delicious glances of appeal, there floated before his inner vision an image lovely, passionless, pathetic, as the doomed heroine of old Greek tragedy. No life in those clear eyes but the life that was gone. No story written on that pale, beautiful face but of wrongs past telling and supreme endurance under misfortune. The more Arthur dwelt on this vision the more it enthralled and perplexed him. Who might this rare lady be?

He had hardly quitted the precincts of the chateau when the clouds parted, the sun gleamed forth, and the rain, no longer a steady volume of water, became a mere sprinkling of crystal dew-drops on golden leaves. To his great astonishment he found that it was already three of the clock. Little time to spare if he would return from whence he had come that day. As he paused irresolute whether to go or stay, no wonder a smile rose to his lips. Could he choose but laugh half ironical, half self-depreciatory, at the peccadillo in which he now found himself? To go back was to fly toward certain peril; to stay was to run hazards perhaps more dangerous still. Fortunately the island was too small to hold a third snare, soliloquized the young man almost cynically. He made up his mind to return. Hervey would expect him, and he had not so much as brought a pair of slippers. We may lose our hearts, but nobody can afford to lose his knapsack, again moralized Arthur, trying to make merry at his own expense. So he did not attempt to get an idea of the place, but hiring a carriage, or rather something that went by that name, drove straight back to the bower of roses above the bay. The country through which he passed was very uncommon, but Arthur willfully refused to see it. What could have induced him to come to this remote spot? he mused: much better to eschew romance, do the regular Swiss round, flirt with half a dozen conventional beauties, as he had often done, returning to his London life not a whit the wiser or the worse. But these lovely, confidential Elizabeths, these beautiful, mysterious goddesses in black, what would come of it all? No good, he felt sure, as he somewhat prosaically and ill-temperedly reviewed the events of the last forty-eight hours, summing up with the thought that it was hardly worth while coming so far in order to make a fool of himself, the thing might have been done so much nearer home.



The sky was now brilliant, and the charming landscape glowed like a bit of mosaic. As the unshapely carry-all crawled along, Arthur, though persistently unappreciative and ill-humored, could but take in an enchanting prospect here and there. Am I in Italy? he asked himself, as he caught sight of a tiny inland sea of purest azure, shut in by richest foliage, sapphire and emerald dazlingly bright, or little creeks, crystal clear, winding in and out, in which alike cloud-land and the bright world below were perfectly mirrored. Everywhere golden corn and wild-flowers, scarlet and blue, everywhere silence and solitude, save for companies of sea-ravens wheeling overhead.

The journey was made slowly, with many a halt by the way, and it was nightfall ere the traveler reached the top of the little rose-bordered street sloping toward the shore. The place, however, was all astir, and Arthur saw with astonishment gay Chinese lanterns hanging from every window, flags flying, bands of music on the march, and every soul on the alert.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### A COMPACT.

“You shall tell me what you have been doing with yourself afterward; let us go now and see the boats coming in,” cried Hervey, meeting him in the middle of the village. “You have lost the fishermen’s regatta, but you will see the little procession on the water. And from *their* garden,” he added, exuberantly.

He put his arm within the other’s, and led the reluctant Arthur into the most romantic little garden in the world, also lighted up with globes of ruby-red and deep orange in honor of the occasion. It was one of those hanging-gardens by the sea, of which there were many here; below it the lime-trees and rose-beds, grassy banks running sheer into the water. A light palisade divided plot and steep bank, while on each side of the house were bowers for the use of the guests. This bit of poetry was, translated into plain prose, a lodging-house, kept by a fisherman and his wife, of such good repute that they never had an empty chamber during July and August. These worthy folks and their children were now enjoying this animated scene with the rest of the company—four or five families in all—who slept indoors certainly, but made parlors of the little summer-houses allotted to them in the garden.

“I am delighted that you have come back in time,” said Elizabeth, advancing toward Arthur with charming gayety. “Is it not a fairy sight?” she added, pointing to the little flotilla of illuminated boats on the water, “and will it not furnish a bright recollection of our island?”

It is wonderful how a sense of festivity exhilarates the mind as yet unsurfeited by handsomer shows! A few colored lights on the water, a band or two of rustic musicians, flags flying, and children dressed in white and crowned with garlands; how little was here, yet more than enough to put the company into a sportive mood. Elizabeth was no more radiant than the rest. One and all had entered heart and soul into the spirit of the occasion.



"We live here," Elizabeth went on, when Arthur had greeted acquaintances of yesterday's making on both sides, "and only go to the hotel to dine. But where have you been? What made you run away on this day of all others?"

"I am sure I cannot tell. I went because I could not stay where I was, I suppose."

Elizabeth turned to him sharply.

"And what makes you ever enigmatic?"

"May you not be my exemplar? You were riddling all yesterday."

She seemed ruffled.

"We cannot intrust the story of our lives to strangers," she said.

"And feelings must ever be more charily dealt with than facts," retorted Arthur.

"Ah!" cried Elizabeth, looking honestly aggrieved now. "Nobody here could intentionally have hurt your feelings, I am sure."

"I am sure of it also. But it is useless to reason with a tired, hungry, and ill-tempered man."

"Will you be in a better temper to-morrow?" asked Elizabeth, much as if she were feelingly sympathetic about a toothache. His captious mood seemed to dampen her high spirits and make her a little mistrustful.

"What is to happen to-morrow?" he asked.

"We have all made up our minds to visit the light-house, provided the weather is fair. The excursion has to be made by sea."

"All? Why must it be all?" retorted Arthur, glancing round, not with disdain, but certainly impatience. His looks said that estimable as he found these worthy pastors and professors and their families, he should infinitely prefer a fellowship of four.

"Why, indeed?" laughed Elizabeth, gayly. "Because the little steamer is not safe unless well ballasted. We pack ourselves in as closely as we can to steady it."

Arthur made a comic grimace.

"A delectable place, this island of yours, if an hour or two's sail is fraught with imminent peril of life and limb."

"Rare delights are worth rare hazards," answered Elizabeth, sententiously.

"I will cheerfully embark with you in a ship that has no bottom at all, on one condition."

"What may your condition be?"

"I am dying to know why you want a brother."

A shadow, but a shadow only, clouded Elizabeth's gaysome mood.

"We will make a bargain, then. You shall tell me what you mean by coming here to wait for a mirage, and I will explain—"

"The sorrow you fly from?" Arthur put in.

"Nay," said Elizabeth, gently and pensively. "I cannot promise so much."

"Make clear at least one of your mysteries. You hinted at a duel."

"You ask too much. We were strangers to each other two days ago."

"Who need dogsear an almanac except the bill-discounter?"



Friendships and peaches may ripen in a day—it depends upon the kind of day, of course.”

“But if, indeed, Time counts for little in the making of our friends, the fitness of things must be taken into consideration,” said Elizabeth, demurely. “We are alone in the world, Flora and I. We must be very circumspect.”

“Well,” Arthur resumed, pleasantly, “you shall be as circumspect as you please to-morrow. You shall flout your faithful henchman, and fence yourself round with dragonish duennas. But I really will go to the light-house and help me to keep the ship steady.”

Just then a sudden blaze of fireworks diverted their attention, acquaintances came up, and the remainder of the evening was enjoyed in company. And not till near midnight the rose-garden was hushed, save for the ripple of the waves, while till a later hour still the sound of music and singing disturbed the village.

Arthur could not sleep; he was in one of those moods when self-questioning was all the more tormenting because it seemed unnecessary. Why should he take any thought for a morrow which was pretty sure to be a pleasant echo of to-day? Why need he disquiet himself at having two beautiful images before his mind instead of one? The lovely Elizabeth might stay “a cherished visitant,” the sweet and stately vision without a name would probably never be anything more. He dared not entertain the hope of seeing that incomparable lady in the black dress again. Those deep, pathetic eyes that seemed to read the secret of destiny had, without doubt, questioned his own for the first and last time. He had lived through a brief, distracting experience that must stand apart from the ordinary occurrences of life.

But Elizabeth?

Could not his introspections stop short here? How could harm come to him through this sweet girl? Why should he not, in all trustfulness and security, allow himself to drift into love and marriage like others? Yet he reasoned, this young man, half æsthetic, half worldly, not without a touch of romance in his disposition, and certainly not without a touch of expediency, the thing I have desired is not an unmixed good. Love and wedlock, however charming, are disturbing influences. A man engaged heart and soul in intellectual work, and possessing some share of ambition, is best alone. Alike the paragon of spirit and attractiveness, who absorbs him, and the wrongheaded beauty, who is as a millstone round his neck, are hinderances to his mental expansion and highest intellectual aims. Measles in the nursery and *chef d'œuvre* in the atelier are incompatible. No, he would revel in all the deliciousness this island had to offer him, and turn his back upon it when the time came, as one who has seen a mirage and nothing more.

“An idea strikes me,” he said to Hervey next morning, as they took their coffee in the hotel garden: “why not stay at the light-house for a few days?”

Hervey looked blank.

“We are very well here.”

“But we ought to see something of the island.”

“That will not take us very long,” the younger brother replied, still lethargic.



"I am afraid, if I leave you alone here, you will be making a fool of yourself about that pretty Flora."

"Well," Hervey retorted, bearishly, "I suppose making a fool of one's self, as you call it, is no disgrace."

"We know absolutely nothing of these girls, charming as they are—their social position, family history, and so forth," Arthur said, affecting his gravest, worldliest manner.

"I do not mean to be a prig when I take to myself a wife, so expect no great things of me in that line," Hervey answered, still ruffled and disrespectful.

"I tell you what it is: we had better take the next steamer, and be off and away. I do not relish our position. I do not, indeed."

"You had better get ready to go to the light-house," Hervey answered, swallowing the remainder of his coffee. Then both brothers had a hearty laugh, and began to make their preparations, Arthur adhering to his first intention. He should stay away a week at least.

"I wish you joy of it," was all Hervey remarked.

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## CHAPTER IX.

### SWEET TALKS OF TWO.

THERE was no harbor on this side of the island, so that passengers had to be embarked in small boats, putting off straight from the shore. As Arthur and his companions took their places in one of these, they saw the empty steamer lying at anchor, swaying to and fro like a buoy. Elizabeth had certainly not exaggerated the business of ballasting. No toy boat could look less seaworthy than the frail craft in which some scores of pleasure-seekers were so gaily about to adventure themselves. As, however, one by one, the boats discharged their burden, the tiny steamer grew gradually steadier, and when at last it could hold no more, there seemed nothing left to be desired. Hardly a spice of danger to tickle the palates of the enterprising! although, if report spoke truly, these little cruises, whether made by steam or sail, could never be very safe.

The currents were treacherous, squalls were apt to rise without warning, and the best steamers, necessarily, were placed at the disposal of tourists.

Smooth seas, clear heavens, and gay company seem to bring security, and soon not a soul on board paid further heed to the crazy structure cleaving the bright waves so unconcernedly. The day was flawless, yet without the dazzling splendor of lower zones. Warm, tender, suffused with pearly light, a lovely sublunar sphere seemed this every-day world of July. In the transparent atmosphere all things stood out clear against the pale, azure heavens—cliffs shining white, cresting forests, sails of distant shallops, but with softly graduated light and shadows, and quiet, dove-like harmonies.

Arthur, sketch-book in hand, persistently avoided an animated group within ear-shot. He heard the voices of Flora and Hervey in merry persiflage, mingled with Elizabeth's graver tones. One or two friends had joined them, and from a certain retirement in the elder sister's manner, he gathered that she meant to be as good as her



word, and to study circumspection in the future. Flora and Hervey she apparently regarded as a pair of children who only needed a frown now and then. For an hour they coasted the cliffs—snowy walls partitioning two blue worlds—then, as if about to turn their backs upon the island altogether, they steered straight out into the open sea for an hour more. They had now reached their destination. On the other side of the fine foreland come upon so suddenly stood the famous light-house.

The laziest must climb the dizzy escarpment as best they could; no shelter from the noonday sun on the narrow strip of shore, nothing on wheels to raise them to the airy heights from which one or two pygmies were looking down. Full-sized human beings they could hardly be. None, however, shirked his duty, and soon the almost perpendicular sides of the cliffs had been scaled by all. Sea-sights and sea-sounds now vanished; they found themselves in a golden world of corn and flowers, not a tree anywhere. But who wanted shadow under these breezy heavens, every breath wafting coolness and fragrance, every step lifting into airier regions?

“This is delightful,” cried Arthur, in the best possible humor. “I shall be able to sketch; but I see no light-house.”

“The wise traveler never looks out for anything,” laughed Hervey.

“But,” Flora added, in a matter of fact way, “the light-house we must see, because we dine there. And look! yonder is the tall, red tower, and the tables all ready laid in front.”

“May we sit at your table?” asked Arthur of Elizabeth, smiling rather mischievously.

“It is a great scramble. We must just take the first empty places we find,” was Elizabeth’s unpromising reply; and true enough, though Arthur found an empty place at a merry table, it was not hers. Hervey contrived to sit near the sisters.

“How charming is this homely fare, eaten in such a place!” cried the enraptured Londoner. “Black bread soaked in beer soup! It tastes to me perfectly delicious.”

“Does it really?” Flora said, with an ingenuous sigh. “For my part, I would so much rather eat fine wheaten bread, and such potage as they gave us at the hotel in Berlin every day.”

Poor little thing, thought Hervey, the life I could offer her would indeed be soft and easy compared to that she is evidently accustomed to!

Elizabeth interposed with dignity, and in rather a satiric vein, Hervey thought.

“I do not agree with Mr. Venning. The fare is detestable in our island, but I dare say it will do him good.”

“Do you take me for so gross a materialist, then?” asked Hervey, affecting a grievance.

“Which of us is free from materialism?” answered Elizabeth, severely. “You confessed to me yesterday that to eat with steel forks cost you a pang.”

Hervey took the reproof meekly. At any price he must ingratiate himself with the elder sister. Before Flora he needed no caution.

Meantime Arthur, as soon as dinner was over, without a word set off, sketch-book in hand, determined to shut his mind to other



temptations for the present. Having come so far it would be absurd to go home empty-handed, and wonderful sketching was here of a dream-like, unearthly kind. The vast, golden plateau open to the four winds of heaven, the flower-crowned buttresses flanking a continent, the encircling sea dim and remote as in a picture, were not to be matched with any recollections brought from the old world or the new. Austereness of the north was here, side by side with southern fullness of life and glow, dazzling brightness of flowers under pale northern constellations. The light-house itself, a fine, square, many-storied tower of deep red brick, stood in the midst of the corn and the poppies; but who cared to climb to the top, when the very ground on which it stood seemed to belong to an upper sphere? Arthur dawdled, deliciously choosing this spot and that for to-morrow's labor. His mind was quite made up now to stay behind, so that there could be no need of hurry, he reflected. Throughout all these artistic enthusiasms he was wondering what Elizabeth could be about, and at last made up his mind to go and see.

From the headland scores of fairy ways led down to the shore, and in whichever direction he looked he saw straw hats and fluttering veils. Some were disporting themselves on the flowery plateau, others taking giddy paths that overlooked the sea further below, a few had escalated the light-house, and were surveying surely half Europe from the top! Arthur skirted the cliffs, distracted by the matchless scene—the broad open sweeps bathed in golden light and enameled with wild flowers dazzlingly bright; the pale phantom-like sea; the ineffable solitude and the silence that brooded over all.

He had not gone far when he espied Elizabeth sitting alone on a grassy ledge of the cliff. A freshly gathered posy lay beside her, but she was gazing intently on the sea, lost in reverie. So absorbed was her mood that not till he was within a few paces did she turn round to greet him in no uncordial fashion, he thought.

"May I rest here also?" he asked, letting his knapsack slide to the ground.

"There is no privilege here, not a boundary mark or a barrier in the whole island," Elizabeth replied, smiling. "Pray sit down."

"Here, if anywhere under the sun, then, people should speak their minds," Arthur began. "You and I have something to say to each other; we should not stand upon ceremony as if in a drawing-room."

"Yes, I have many things to say to you—if I dared—"

There the girl stopped, hardly a blush, just a deeper carnation, mantling her cheeks.

"And I have one thing to say to you—if I dared," echoed Arthur, emboldened by her timidity.

"Why should any man be afraid?" asked Elizabeth, with that fine flash in her eyes he had seen before. "You may behave as you please; the breath of slander cannot harm you. But what a little thing may suffice to cover a woman with shame!" Arthur naturally interpreted her words to be a passing comment.

"Surely this is the very reverse of a squeamish place!" he urged. "If our *tête-à-tête* is ill-naturedly gossiped about, then the rest of our neighbors fare no better."



True enough, many a group of the little company scattered about the headland had broken up into twos, and with excellent reason—the paths in this love-making island nowhere admitted of three.

“I am not thinking of a *tête-à-tête* just now,” answered Elizabeth, “although even that might be blamed in me. I was looking further when I spoke.” She turned toward him with the beautiful expression of candor and ingenuousness that rendered her face so charming, and added, “How can I feel sure that you are what I take you to be?”

“And what is that?” asked Arthur, briskly.

All along he had been willing one thing and wishing another. He longed for the very confidences he felt ready to flee from.

“A good man,” was the childishly straightforward reply. “None other can be my friend.”

“What is goodness?” Arthur asked, impatiently. “Church-going? Then I am a sinner. Converting the heathen? Gramercy, write me down a villain. Alms-giving in the public ways? ’Tis but a brand fit for the burning am I. But has not God given me a conscience as well as my more saintly neighbors? May not my creed be every whit as good as theirs; better, if I damn them not? You catechize me.”

“Are you pitiful toward the weak?” asked Elizabeth, with almost solemn inquisitorialness. “Could you slay the vile?”

Arthur smiled.

“A man can hardly affirm so much of himself without blushing. Would you have me boast of being a paragon?”

Elizabeth inquired.

“My own countrymen have many virtues,” she went on, “but I have always believed that there is more pitifulness in the English character, more gentleness, perhaps, dare I say it, a higher sense of honor? Was it not in England that you invented the word gentleman?”

“That I am,” Arthur said, almost meekly. He was trembling inwardly before this sweet confessor, wondering what she would ask him next.

“Then,” said Elizabeth, with the same collectedness and directness of purpose, “if an English gentleman is all I take him to be, you will not despise a friendless girl for confiding in him. Listen,” she said, “I must speak out. Something, I know not what, prompts me to appeal to you.”

## CHAPTER X.

### SELF-BETRAYAL.

A PERILOUS position, *certes*, not a living soul within ear-shot, a lazy, languid world of flowers and lapping waves all their own. Time the monitor napping, nothing under the sun seeming to matter but this sweet talk of two. Let moralists rail as they may, the world grows wiser than it was. Men’s brains are busy with schemes undreamed of when prehistoric lovers went a Maying; and we are mere babes and sucklings in science to our great-grandchildren as yet unborn. ’Tis all the same. From the time our globe was set



a-spinning till it shall be brought to a stand-still, one empire sways humanity. A pair of lovely eyes will enslave the soul of man forever. A pretty girl makes the poetry of the work-a-day world.

Elizabeth went on soberly as before. "You find us here surrounded by kindly people, but these are traveling acquaintances, as we say in our own language. Flora and I have few real friends left, that is why, while talking to you as a sister might to a brother, I trust to you never to take advantage of our forlorn position in the least little thing."

Arthur winced. Was, then, love-making forbidden for once and for all?

"It is very hard upon us both, especially upon Flora," she went on. "I am older, and do not expect so much from life; but Flora is as yet a mere child. No wonder she looks upon happiness as a right."

"And why may you not be happy too?" asked Arthur, with kindly solicitude.

"Happy!" cried Elizabeth, proudly. "Were men and women only born to run after contentment? I can bear sorrow, but it is disgrace that crushes me and breaks my heart."

Arthur dared not ask an explanation. He must wait till Elizabeth should dash away her burning tears, and, mastering herself by an effort, vouchsafe to enlighten him.

"You must not learn our story here," she said at last. "Most likely none know it, or if some do, they would keep silent out of common charity. Flora and I belong to a ruined house, and the curse that lies on it is a curse of shame."

"But the innocent are no longer punished, even in public opinion, for the guilty," Arthur said, consolingly. "We must leave our kinsfolk to blush for their own misdeeds, and hold up our heads high all the same."

"There speaks out a man's daring; women must feel things and take things differently. We cannot show a brazen front to the world when inwardly we are humbled to the dust."

Arthur felt more and more hopelessly at a loss. Had the father or any kinsman of this beautiful girl played the part of coward or traitor in any of the late wars? Was the family escutcheon thereby blotted forever? or might not one of her blood and name have gone over to the ranks of those secret guilds whose watchword is regicide, and dishonor come there? Again, he had heard of many crashes in the world of commerce lately, brought about by unfair speculation and shameless abuse of public credulity. A third solution of the mystery might be looked for in such quarters. Or, lastly, supposing that Elizabeth owned a kinswoman as lovely as herself, and that disgrace had come in the female line—a shameful marriage, a catastrophe worse still?—all these things were within the limits of possibility.

Elizabeth's thoughts seemed to have gone on another track, for she now turned to him with a sudden change of manner, and put the question,

"Why did you smile the other day when I lamented that a woman could not fight a duel?" she said.



“Why? Because the fighting of duels has long fallen into ridicule with us. The laws, indeed, no longer permit it.”

“Yet dishonor is avenged that way, if your novelists depict manners faithfully.”

“Oh! Abide by some fiction-mongers and you have an English constitution as fantastical as that of the moon, which, you know, a gay Greek was whisked up to once upon a time! But I beg your pardon. I have no right to speak slightly of the duel, since it is still accepted in your country and in some others for which I entertain profound esteem.”

“How, then,” Elizabeth went on, “are questions affecting family honor settled by you?”

“That depends upon the kind of question,” said Arthur. “The foul-mouthed is amenable to the law of libel; the coward, if we trouble ourselves to punish him at all, is let off with a horsewhipping. There is another word for you of English coinage.”

“Would a man who insulted a woman get that?” asked Elizabeth.

“Well,” Arthur replied, “he might get much more. The law does for us what dueling does for you.”

Elizabeth looked down, and on each pale cheek now burned a painful blush.

“I was thinking of offenses not amenable to the law in any country,” she said, slowly and sadly. “There are many.”

Arthur looked expectant.

“I will give you an imaginary case,” she said, speaking deliberately, and, as he saw, with great effort. She had evidently nerved herself up to say something painful to disclose. “Suppose that you had a sister you loved very dearly, and that a man should win her love—the very life of a woman—under promise of marriage, then basely desert her, what punishment would such a villain receive at your hands?” she asked, turning toward him with indignant eyes and cheeks afire.

“This offense is also punishable according to the letter of English law,” was Arthur’s reply. “For the most part, however, a proud woman—and I hope my sister would be of the proudest—would allow no vengeance to be wasted upon that contemptible vacillator, a recalcitrant lover.”

His answer seemed far from satisfactory to Elizabeth. She reflected for a while.

“I have not made my meaning clear, I see,” she said. “The most solemn promise a human being can make—the word that is as a bond—the declaration given upon oath. Shall a man forswear these, and yet get off scot-free?”

“My honest opinion,” answered Arthur, “is that the jilt, whether of your sex or mine, is too contemptible a culprit to be brought to the bar at all. Society should turn a cold shoulder upon such gentry, and appear to ignore their very existence. That is at last my notion.” Elizabeth looked at him with an expression that more than discommended. There was almost contemptuous pity in the blue eyes now welling up with tears, and passionate remonstrance in the clear voice, as she faltered out, “You have no sister!”

Arthur felt himself in a position all the more embarrassing on ac-



count of its very deliciousness. He must try to console this fluttering, tearful girl by his side—yet how? And her last words sadly disturbed him, for it seemed as if there could be but one reading of the beautiful Elizabeth's story. It was her own heart that had been wrung, her own troth shamelessly played with, herself and no other who needed a champion and upholder. She then knew what love was, and the sorrow she would fain flee from was the mirage he had come to seek. The conviction humiliated him, yet he reflected that it could hardly be otherwise. These exquisite Elizabeths never reach woman's estate without woovers enow; if of unworthy sort, more's the pity. In his enthusiasm he felt ready, civilian as he was, to measure swords with the most martial Prussian in the empire on behalf of his beautiful friend.

"I have no sister" he began, astonished at his own hesitancy; "but may not a man be moved to chivalrous feeling by other claims? Take me into your confidence and I will do anything you ask me."

"Will you really?" said Elizabeth, brightly, although one tear was still visible on her cheek. "Anything? Anything in the world?" she added, with strange, almost wild animation.

"You have my word for it," Arthur went on, growing in his turn strangely animated. "Only remember rare services claim rare rewards. I leave you free to exact; expect no moderation from me when my turn comes."

Elizabeth hardly seemed to heed the import of the words, but grew gayer and gayer, while, deftly enough, she led him to other subjects.

"I must think—I must take time before opening myself more to you," she said. "To-day it is enough for me to know that I can count upon one intrepid and generous-minded friend. Now tell me something. What could you mean by saying, when we first met, that you came here to wait for a mirage?"

"Is not this the land of mirage?" asked Arthur, airily. "Might not a painter be taken here at his word?"

"If he lived to the age of the Patriarchs, yes," Elizabeth replied, laughing. "A mirage, it is true, may be seen to-morrow—likelier still, not for a hundred years! They say that only old folks on this island have ever witnessed one at all."

Arthur, for the life of him, could hold his peace no longer. The wonder of the scene, the irresistibleness of the situation, the bewildering charm of Elizabeth's manner, as distinct from coquetry as her beauty from cheap prettiness—these things mastered him. He felt, perhaps, a touch of self-contempt, but mingled with it an exhilaration that knew no bounds.

"Is not everybody's life a waiting for mirage?" he whispered. "But I can wait no longer. Three days ago, at one of the clock, I fell in love."

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## CHAPTER XI.

### ON THE BRINK.

THAT disturbing confession had the very last effect a lover could desire. Elizabeth, without a word or look expressive of disapproba-



tion, merely rose, saying hurriedly and agitatedly that it was time to join the others.

"I have kept already away from Flora much too long," she said, drawing down her veil to hide a blush. "What was I thinking of, and you too? We shall have to embark in half an hour!"

"I intend to stay here," Arthur made answer, rather morosely, Elizabeth thought. She looked the inquiry she preferred not to put into words.

"Truth to tell," he went on, vindictively, "if I return I should want to be talking to you all day long. I had better stay for awhile where I am."

Again Elizabeth took refuge in silence, Arthur resenting it more and more. He saw Hervey and Flora with others approaching, and heard the harsh whistle of the steamer summoning the holiday-makers to embark. He certainly should remain behind for at least a week. But for all that Elizabeth ought to answer him.

"Do express an opinion one way or another," he finally added, almost tartly. "Shall I go or stay?"

Flora was already near, hastening toward them to boast of her sea-holly. She had a sheaf of it—a wonderful sight as she now held it up in the pure, transparent light—a flower that belonged to the sea, a leaf that belonged to the sky!

Arthur looked at Elizabeth.

"We had better do our thinking apart," she said, in a low voice. That was all. Then the conversation became a mere buzz. Everybody had an adventure to tell of. Some at peril of life and limb had found a sea-crow's nest in the cliffs; others a piece of amber on the shore; golden sea-poppies, rare agates, fossils, were the spoils of a few. Only Arthur was empty-handed. "Mr. Venning is no naturalist?" asked one of the party.

"Mr. Venning stays at the light-house. He has plenty of time before him," Elizabeth answered, quickly. "Will he have fine weather?"

"That no one can answer for on this island," another made answer. "Like a capricious beauty, one smile is here purchased by a dozen frowns—I apprehend a change soon."

"Would you not do better to return?" asked Hervey; but Arthur persisted in his intention. A weather-bound week had no terrors for him, he said. He had one book and plenty of sketching materials.

"Solitude has ever charms for your country-folks, I know," laughed a third tourist. "You English really relish a Robinson Crusoe existence, otherwise I would gladly offer you my company."

Arthur pleasantly declined the proffered sociability, and felt positive satisfaction as he watched the rest of the company embark, by little and little the crazy vessel being steadied by its living freight. There are no common nights in these regions. As the little steamer slowly and laboriously got under way, it glided straight into the fiery west, leaving Arthur alone in his mellow world, deep azure skies, warm air stirring the corn and the flowers—a little kingdom of pure deliciousness all his own. Small as was this island—to be traversed lazily in a long summer day—the traveler yet gained here a marvelous sense of vastness and expansion. There was awfulness



and sublimity in these natural parapets, high as mountains, that walled it round about, dreamy loveliness and mystery in the glimpses gained from all parts of its tiny capital, miles away, that crested a fair hill; above all, gloom and majesty in its ancient beechen groves close to a fairy sea. Arthur sat down on a flowery monticule, watching the black speck on the waters, with thoughts alike distractingly sweet and yet uneasy. The longer he speculated on the matter, the more he felt convinced that Elizabeth must be the heroine of her own story. Adorable as she was, there yet lived a man ignoble enough and blind enough to woo and then desert her. This beautiful girl had undoubtedly been jilted by some villain whom he could at that moment have hurled with alacrity from the precipice on which he sat. But her love for this craven-spirited wretch was long turned to bitterest scorn; of that he felt sure. Like himself she was free to love. Did she understand the meaning of his words? Was he already something to her? Would this sweet place, islanded from the world of every day and all familiar things, be the scene of their betrothal?

Arthur was angry with himself for letting his thoughts wander to another figure in this romance of three days—the sad-eyed lady of the pictures. Who might she be, and what was her story?

Well, he concluded, there is time enough for all questions to be settled, all problems to be solved. If so many things had happened in less than one week, how many more might happen in six? And with that philosophical reflection he returned to his homely quarters in the light-house. A supper of black bread, salt fish, and thin beer, may even be swallowed by a fastidious Londoner, under certain circumstances, without a wry face. Arthur ate and drank contentedly, while he flirted with the light-house-keeper's pretty daughter, then took a last turn abroad before going to rest.

There was no moon, but an effulgence more subdued, a light softer and more transparent. Every object was clearly defined in this wondrous atmosphere that was neither wholly day nor night, fairer than both, while over all brooded ineffable calm and stillness. Only the sound of the raves as they plashed against the shore broke the pervading silence.

“I wish I were a genius!” sighed Arthur, as he loitered back to write down his impressions certainly, but in a critical rather than a poetic vein. He could tell others what he saw; he could not make them feel what he felt: the difference, I take it, between talent and genius. He stayed on, well pleased with his quarters; indeed had it been otherwise there was no possibility of getting away. The sky was fair, but winds were contrary, and neither sail nor steamer could make for the light-house till they changed. The sea, a smooth, silken floor no longer, had changed from silvery gray to dark aquamarine, and, broken up into short, angry waves, with white crests, dashed ominously against the shore. There was a rough road that led homeward across the corn-fields, it is true, but alike horses and carry-alls were now busy with the gathering in the corn, and this roundabout way would have taken a whole day. Arthur preferred to wait for a steamer, enjoying himself lazily meanwhile. This grim tower, set as a watch over treacherous seas, soon seemed a home.



He even grew accustomed to the coarse fare, which certainly was made more palatable by the pretty maiden who served it. The homely saws and primitive ways of the fisher-folk amused him, while alike on the breezy headland or on the narrow strip of shore below he got sketching in plenty. Then there were the flowers, and even a Londoner may care for these when making holiday on an island. He thought, if he stayed there six months instead of so many weeks, he should become not merely an admirer of the picturesque but a real lover of nature, which is quite another thing.

At the end of the fourth day this delicious dawdling was rudely interrupted. The wind had changed suddenly; the sea showed a glassy surface; the light-house folk were astir, catering for expected guests; and there, sure enough, was the little steamer making for the lea. For all that, Arthur was minded to stay, and would have stayed had not the captain put in his hand a tiny missive from Hervey. It was a penciled scrawl, evidently worded in desperate haste. "You must come back in the steamer," ran Hervey's missive. "An invitation from the prince this moment arrived. For to-morrow, mind."

Arthur did not know whether to be pleased or vexed. He liked this toying with love and destiny; to be on the brink of making love near this sweet Elizabeth, yet so far off, within a hair's-breadth of fate, but not yet caught in her toils. He must accept the invitation against his will—a man of the world could not slight an invitation brought about by a letter introductory. To do so would look almost like an insult to the writer of it—a common friend of the prince and himself. Arthur was too well versed in the ways of society not nicely to appraise the value of good company. It is ever expedient to visit at great men's houses. We are all bound to accept the standards of the world. Expediency is cousin-german to the virtues. Thus he moralized, although only one thought lent interest to the projected visit.

Would that vision flash before him once more—the unforgettable face, the black-robed figure, the deep, pathetic eyes? So intense was this memory that he almost trembled with eagerness as he contemplated the possibility of a meeting. All the brightness and beauty associated with Elizabeth's name were pure human; the lady of the picture seemed to him to belong to a world as yet unknown to him—intense, passionate, unattainable by speculation.

With mixed feelings of regret and looking forward he took a last stroll on that fragrant, flowery platform, half-way, as it seemed, between the stars and the sea. Around him all was gold and blue; the yellow of the corn, the dazzling blue of the flowers, and vaster even than his airy abiding-place stretched the warm heavens above and the warmer sea below, dove-like hues and dove-like quiet everywhere. "I shall never come here again," mused Arthur, as he descended the steep sides of the cliff, and once more intrusted himself to the tender mercies of the crazy steamer. "Why should I wish to see it again?" he added. "Is it mine as long as I live?"

He made up his mind to say nothing of the coming visit to Elizabeth. Hervey would hardly have alluded to the subject, since even to mention an invitation from a prince is to boast of it; and as every personal topic becomes matter for gossip in small watering-



places, he determined to keep their movements dark. Moreover, perhaps from some democratic notions picked up at school, Elizabeth had already expressed herself unfavorably concerning princes in general and one in particular. Much better she should not be enlightened as to his acquaintances in this line.

## CHAPTER XII.

### FORESHADOWING.

THERE are some places in which it is impossible to keep anything secret, and this little fishing village was one. Long before the moment for departure came, it was noised abroad that these two Englishmen had received the honor of an invitation to the palace. How can a community be expected to keep silence on a matter redounding to its credit? From one end of the hamlet to the other people were proud that this mark of distinction had been vouchsafed to their especial visitors. The thing would be talked of for years to come. A princely invitation, and to whom? To a pair of unassuming young Englishmen, civilians, untitled, undecorated, nobodies in popular estimation till this startling piece of information had come to take everybody's breath away.

The deportment of the brothers astounded observers no less. They absolutely never once alluded to the subject. But for the loquaciousness of their driver, and that young and old, gentle and simple, were on the alert, not a soul would have known of their destination, as next day they quietly drove through the village street, all the world agape, acquaintances bowing and smiling at the windows.

Only Elizabeth and Flora held aloof. They had been placed opposite the pair, as usual, at the *table-d'hôte*, but both girls seemed a little shy and spiritless, Arthur thought. He forbore to question Hervey afterward, and Hervey made no overtures. The subject of their beautiful friends was banished as if by tacit understanding.

We went here, we did that, Hervey said, when describing the way in which the last few days had been spent. He never so much as once mentioned Flora's name. Then there were many items of English news to discuss—a heap of newspapers and letters were opened and glanced at on the way. Both found plenty to talk about without venturing on dangerous ground. All this time they were going the same road Arthur had passed over so sullenly a few days back. To-day the weather was dazzlingly bright, and his own mood unusually animated and sparkling. What Hervey mistook for mere high spirits indeed was downright excitement and restlessness. He felt in a double, nay, threefold sense, the bewilderment of an adventurous traveler, bound he knows not whither, on the verge of discoveries and emotions he cannot so much as coldly prefigure. The scenery, too, moved him not a little, and although he had made the same journey before, he was now seeing it for the first time.

“On my word, this is the most wonderful little country in the world,” he cried, when they were about half-way to their destination. “Look at yonder town, with its grand old church perched on the hill! I have seen an Eastern city just as gemmy, aërial, and



transparent; amethystine pyramid, surmounted by a crystal dome, and all around mother-of-pearl and molten gold! But the cloud-picture will not melt, and when we are on the other side of the hill we shall find colors as brilliant and solid as in North Italy—lapis-lazuli sea, hanging woods of malachite, and little close-shut landscapes, each a veritable mosaic.

“We shall go straight back to-morrow, of course,” Hervey said, yawning. He was evidently in no mood for scenery, no matter how bewitching.

“Really,” Arthur rejoined, “you seem to forget that time is going fast. We are bound to see something of the island before leaving it.”

Hervey did not look as if the island particularly interested him.

“And if the prince insists upon keeping us another day, we are bound to stay,” the elder brother went on. “I wonder if I have time to make a sketch.”

Here followed a discussion with the driver, and the result was that Arthur descended to make his sketch, while Hervey went on in the carry-all. “The horses must rest for two hours on the top of the hill,” said their conductor, so Hervey offered to go on and order the dinner, while Arthur followed on foot half an hour later. The two just perceptibly jarred each other. Arthur was irritated at Hervey’s indifference to this strange sweet landscape; Hervey wondered how his brother could be more enthusiastic about places than human beings. The island was certainly delicious and romantic, but it lacked charm when Flora was not by. While the younger man’s state of mind was perfectly clear to the elder, Arthur, on the contrary, was a complete puzzle to Hervey. How indeed can one man understand another, and a subtler? We perpetually fall into the error of measuring others by our own standard, just as we are apt to appraise the material world, according to the limited capacities of self-consciousness. What is deeper than ourselves we shall hardly attain to, whether it be an individual character or that wonderful environment of humanity we loosely call creation.

It was plain enough that Hervey loved the artless Flora, and intended to marry her; but if Arthur loved Elizabeth, why this restlessness, this unevenness of temper, this quarreling with a captivating state of things?

But although Arthur’s conduct troubled him, the easy-going Hervey could not break through the habits of a lifetime. The elder might say what he would, the younger could only say what betitted. Each was sure to go his own way, only one would ever play the part of critic.

There were intellectual differences no less striking. Every impression told upon Arthur’s inner life; Hervey saw things quickly and seized their meaning readily, but they hardly enriched, much less metamorphosed him. This picture, for instance, he was looking on now, he would remember as long as he lived. Many a prospect he had seen in his travels far more superb and intrinsically, none that affected him so strangely.

Was he indeed beholding shadows or substantial things, cloud-land or solid hill, and structure of men’s hands? Could the fabled mirage he had come in quest of be fairer to the eye, touch the spirit



with finer emotion? And as he gazed and gazed he threw down his paint-brush in a rapture of despair. Impossible to reproduce these silvery lights, this matchless iridescence. He had delicate hues enough on his palette, but the colors of that fair city, and the hill on which it stood, and the sky round about, he could not find. City, did I say? The island possessed none. Tiniest townling this, a mere fairy place, yet by virtue of its ancient church and position it wore from afar almost the aspect of a citadel. Arthur, however, put away his sketching things and attempted no more. And, as often happens, when he had walked a mile or more and he came anear, there was nothing wonderful to see at all, only a church of the olden time, perched on a high hill, and a straggling village street of cheerful white-washed houses, each with its flower-garden after the fashion of these parts. There, too, was the unromantic Hervey, quite delighted at the prospect of a dinner, delighted also that the day was half over, that the morrow and Flora would soon come.

“We shall most likely be bored to death at the palace,” he began.

“Now, Hervey,” the elder brother admonished, tartly, “bored or no we must make ourselves agreeable. But why in the name of common sense should we be bored?”

“If asked to stay over to-morrow, I shall say I have an engagement; which will be the truth,” Hervey retorted. “I am going to escort Elizabeth and Flora to the Black Lake.”

“I shall stay if I am pressed, and so of course must you,” was the curt reply. Hervey took the answer as it was meant, and then they chatted of other things. An hour later they were off again; and while Hervey dozed conveniently, Arthur had time to think quietly over his position. He must hold himself on his guard, for he might need all his tact, nonchalance, and self-possession. His former visit and its untoward adventure might accidentally reach the ears of his host and require explanation; or his beautiful sitter, what if she should let carelessly fall a compromising word? For his mind was made up beforehand. He should now see her again, and learn the reason of her strange reserve and sadness. They should come to know each other, at least, so he felt sure, because he willed it.

Then he thought of his sweet friend Elizabeth. Ah, little of mystery or adventure here! Only an honest falling in love. For in love he was—Hervey no deeper—but he felt that Time sufficed for love and Elizabeth. His life should belong to her. Two days he must first have to himself, two days for a little life of feeling and emotion with which she had nothing to do.

“The prince?” Hervey asked, suddenly waking from his drowse. “Is he old or young, married or single?”

“I have not the least notion,” Arthur made answer; “but we shall soon find out. We are already within the precincts of the park.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE WORLD.

BUT a veil was lifted from the scene Arthur had gazed on coldly a few days before. It was as some glowing Alpine landscape from which the morning mists have cleared. Instead of clinging vapor



and watery clouds, pierced here and there by wan, melancholy green, a veritable revelation of the warm, voluptuous South now flashed on his eyes.

Could this airy structure, with its colonnade of purest marble breaking the azure sky, lie in the very lair of the north wind? These terraced gardens and lovely little lake, on which the swan "sailed double, swan and shadow," these rich red roses, each a floral paragon, these orange groves showing golden fruit and waxen bloom amid the same green leaves, the snow-white statues gleaming from bright foliage, all spoke of Italy. Immediately around the palace were parterres and smooth, lawny pleasance, but far and wide stretched the park, alley upon alley, *bosquet* upon *bosquet* offering dappled light and shadow, with occasional glimpses of the pale, crystalline, inland sea. To add to the magic of the place, the air from end to end was fragrant with the sweet smell of the lime-trees just now in full flower. It was captivating. It was unsurpassed.

If the outside of the palace was a surprise to the travelers, what were their feelings when the wide portal admitted them within? Exact taste and boundless outlay could accomplish no more. Arthur's experienced eye saw at a glance that his host was not only an expensive man but a skilled art collector. On every side were evidences of connoisseurship and discrimination: here an exquisite statuette from some modern atelier; there a fascinating little *chef d'œuvre* from the hand of the great Cellini. Every object, indeed, was a work of art, from the gold inkstand of mediæval workmanship on the writing-table, to the hand-bellows adorned with the prince's monogram in pearls and turquois. All ages and all countries had been laid under tribute for this palace of art within sound of arctic seas. There were canvases of Tintoret to and the superb Spaniard, panels of Cordovan leather, old as the Crusades, Gobelin tapestries, *faience* of Moustier and Nevers, when heroes paid homage to a prince of Urbino, and cabinets of the famous Buhl himself. What was there not? And all in fastidious keeping. No profusion, nothing out of place, not a bagatelle that represented mere wealth. These impressions were of the moment only, for the inspection of the palace and its art collections could not, of course, be thought of then. The brothers were conducted straight to their chambers, and informed that the prince would receive them in the octagon drawing-room half an hour later, "which was the hour of dinner," added the servant. "His Highness dines at six in the summer season."

Arthur went through the business of dressing with mixed feelings. It was an imperative duty to talk his best that evening, and he knew well enough that he could talk well when he chose. But his thoughts would wander to the mysterious adventure of the week before. "The prince dines at six in the summer season."

He repeated these words to himself several times, but without any possibility of attaching a dubious meaning. His host might be married, a bachelor, or widowed. One thing seemed certain. He was now alone.

"Arthur," said Hervey, putting his head in his neighbor's door when half-way through his toilet, "now you won't stay here after to-morrow, will you?"



“Don't you be a fool!” was Arthur's unflattering retort. “The Black Lake can wait, and Flora can wait. Never refuse good company and good fare when you can get them.”

Arthur's surmises were true. When they descended to the dazzling little octagon room, lighted only from above, its sole adornment a series of frescoes, they found the prince unattended. His secretary, who came in a moment later, made up the quartet.

“It is the first time I have had the honor of entertaining any of your countrymen here,” began the prince, blandly, “and indeed I know not if my art collection has ever been visited by an English amateur. What Englishman has not seen the moon rise on the pyramids, and the sun refuse to set at Hammerfest? You set off for the North-pole as unconcernedly as for Epsom races, but all pass my island by.”

“Fortunately for your Highness,” replied Arthur, quickly; “did people know what it is like, the park you so magnanimously throw open would be as crowded as the Prater on Whit-Monday.”

This beginning made all things easy, and when was a dinner-party of four agreeable men otherwise than perfect? There is an abandon which mere social reunions of both sexes cannot attain to; within the limits of entire discretion in speech and deportment, a freedom, if not from restraint, at least from the desire of pleasing, which must actuate men when placed beside women at the dinner-table. These genial diners were one and all as far removed from undue exhilaration as could be. Yet the pleasure that may honestly arise from the enjoyment of matchless wines and rare meats comes into stronger relief than at mixed assemblies. Princes are bound to get at knowledge by short cuts, and Arthur soon found that he was being affably drawn out on many subjects useful to an art collector. His pleasant host, by the time dinner was over, knew as much about the last phases of artistic development in England and France as if he had expended time and eyesight upon all the best publications of a twelvemonth. What would you have? We humble folks surely do not expect to be bidden to princely tables for nothing.

Arthur Venning, artist and art critic in a fastidious, limited field, was a capital talker on his own subject. He just escaped being called an amateur, but his work, both on paper and canvas, while unpretentious in the extreme, possessed qualities which many who had made much more of a name might envy. Alike his drawing and his writing showed consummate taste, skill, and finish. He knew what form was—a rare achievement—and had he been poor or ambitious would doubtless have done much more.

“I cannot permit you to go away to-morrow,” said the prince, when the quartet smoked cigarettes on the balcony. What desecration to smoke amid such roses! thought Arthur, who was not wedded to the pastime. “You really must remain my guests one night more.”

Arthur accepted delightedly. Hervey tried to look as if the proposal were to his mind. Their host went on:

“I am compelled to go to-morrow to my hunting schloss in the forest, and the thought has occurred to me that perhaps Mr. Hervey Venning would like the drive, while Mr. Arthur Venning might prefer to be left behind among the pictures.”



“The very privilege I could have asked,” Arthur said. “The fact is, with your Highness’s leave, I should like to make a few notes of your great masters for the benefit of art lovers at home.”

“Do exactly as you please,” answered the prince, evidently charmed at the notion that the fame of his collection would now reach English ears.

“A Velasquez in a remote islet inhabited by a handful of fishermen. Your phlegmatic countrymen will be astonished, eh?”

“They will come to see,” put in Hervey, mischievously.

“All the better. How the English are loved everywhere on the Continent! How they spend money and flatter us!” laughed the prince, gayly. Then, with almost a rollicking air, he went on to say, that having in view the prosperity of the island, and a good investment, he contemplated building a big hotel and bath just outside the park, and a casino within its very precincts, finally laying down a railway to the landing-place over against the Continent.

Arthur looked positively shocked. Was the last little Eden in Europe to be handed over to the tourist by contract? This earthly Paradise, if any existed, to be invaded by the building speculator? Every imaginable horror passed before his mind—shill-voiced, elderly ladies with their courier and poodle; transatlantic explorers in bands of fifty; the typical English paterfamilias with his correct family, stiff as whalebone; the bustle, the artificiality, the vulgarity of Swiss travel brought to these idyllic woods on the shores of the Baltic.

“Mr. Venning does not seem taken by my plans,” continued the host, as he gracefully scattered the ashes of his cigarette among the roses. “But is not taste a moloch that devours us? Would not an art lover sell the mummy of his grandmother for an Old Master? And we must all live.”

As soon as it grew dusk they went in doors, and dawdled through the splendid salons, glancing at this *chef d’œuvre* and that. Arthur looked and listened for a sign of feminine presence, but none came. No women were to be seen anywhere; no delicate belongings indicated even the occasional sojourn of a mistress. And, as the evening wore on, the prince accidentally alluded to his celibate condition.

Still Arthur’s mind would revert to his adventure with mixed feelings of relief and curiosity. He was pretty certain that no reference would now be made to the circumstance of his first visit. The woman servant who had opened to him was nowhere to be seen, not a trace of the beautiful sitter; the prince evidently in ignorance of the whole affair. These reflections were welcome, but he could not resign himself to the thought that the mystery should end there. He must find out who this lady was, and unravel the secret of her sadness and her isolation. But the prince was going to carry Hervey off to the hunting schloss in the forest next day, and as he should have the palace to himself, he would by some means or other solve the problem. It was late when the party separated, yet Arthur had no inclination for sleep. Vague foreshadowings of trouble disquieted him; and the realities of the day were not altogether agreeable.

We cannot put our thoughts into plain language when under a strange roof, but Arthur had already discovered without a word that on one point he and Hervey were of the same mind; they did not



feel unreservedly drawn toward their host. Charming as he was, a man of culture and of the world, much traveled, an apt talker, gay, cosmopolitan, something was wanting; just that undefinable something we must have in our friends. And as Arthur lay pondering in the midnight silence, he seemed to find in this character he was studying just the glimmering of light, the clew he wanted. Yes, he said to himself, at last, I have a clew. How, indeed, can a man choose but carry about with him his life-story written in his face?

## CHAPTER XIV.

### MYSTERY

THE travelers woke up to find a perfect day wedded to a perfect place. Within and without prevailed deliciousness. Light showers had fallen during the night, sprinkling the roses with diamonds, while as the sun rose high in the heavens the fragrance of the lime-trees was wafted warmly throughout the length and breadth of the park. Under the majestic alleys of silver fir and pine, and in the dappled glades far away, were coolness and shadow; alike palace, rose-garden, and fairy lake lay in warm sunshine. The white statues amid glistening green leaves, the exotics wreathing airy columns, the silvery fountains springing from marble basin, the glow of richness, warmth, and beauty, were enough to make a beholder swear himself in Italy; and, wander whichever way he might, his eyes would find the sea, on this superlative July morning, clear turquoise lapping golden sands.

Close about the palace all loveliness and witchery reached their acme, yet the picture was incomplete—it wanted a beautiful woman. So at least Arthur thought as he lingered among the statuary and the orange-trees before going in-doors to revel in another kind of enchantment. He could not conceive of any man taking pleasure in such a place alone. Such camellias should grow for a girl's fair head; such roses should put the finishing touch to the dress of a beauty. The orangery looked cold for want of an exquisite gown. The prince had carried Hervey off betimes, saying they should not be back till dinner-time, so that Arthur had the day and the place to himself. He was free to do as he pleased, and wander whither he would.

At last he went indoors, and in accordance with his host's suggestion very carefully and observantly made the round of the state drawing-room. Amid the works of art that met his eyes on every side—a Canova here, a Thorwaldsen there, sculpture predominating in this room—his attention was soon riveted by a man's head in marble, evidently a modern *chef d'œuvre*, and the likeness of a face that he seemed to know. He looked, and looked, and looked again. Where had he seen that well-shaped head, that cold yet admirable contour, that beautifully proportioned throat? He started and smiled to himself. How was it that he now for the first time discovered his host to be one of the handsomest men he had ever seen? Stooping down he found the name of an Italian sculptor engraved on the base, and in juxtaposition the word "Roma" with a date. The bust was seven years old, and in the interval the sitter had grown a beard, quite reason enough for non-recognition at first sight. But



the excellence of the work, considered from an artistic point of view, fascinated. It was a masterpiece both of design and execution, a striking achievement of imagination, as well as critical faculties of a high order. Opening his sketch-book he amused himself by making a copy.

So absorbed he grew in his task that when, half an hour later, the door behind him was unclosed softly he did not observe the sound. As soon, however, as a footfall touched the polished floor close by his chair he turned carelessly around to see who the intruder might be. The genial occupation of the last half hour had driven all irrelevant thoughts and stray conjectures out of his head. Bent solely on making a fair copy of the fine piece of sculpture before him, not once had the dominant fancy of the day before disturbed his mood. The sad, ineffably lovely apparition in black was for the moment forgotten.

On a sudden she was there, looking sadder, even more beautiful than before. She wore the same kind of dress, noiseless, nun-like drapery of funereal black, only relieved by a white lace kerchief knotted about her throat, and on her bosom a bunch of the white, starry flowers Arthur knew. They were the rare flowers he had found growing on the island, the flowers Elizabeth so loved for her dead sister's sake. He sprung to his feet, overcome with surprise and pleasure. He was about to speak, to explain, to apologize, when, without a word, the lady silenced him.

Do not speak to me. Do not look at me, her face said, as she swiftly and noiselessly crossed the room. No written mandate plainer, no vehement utterance more imperative than the glance she gave him as she drew near. He stood dumfounded, yet secretly on the alert. In silence the charge was given; in silence the pledge accorded. So far the two entirely understood each other.

But the little scene did not end here. Arthur's naturally quick perceptions, sharpened by the lady's meaning glance, told him that her coming was not accidental, that she had something further to say to him. He watched her passage from one end of the room to the other, therefore, with apparently careless yet vigilant eyes, waiting for a further sign. The manner of giving it was simple. As the black-robed figure now traversed the salon from end to end, she was obliged to pass the chair on which he had deposited his notebooks and sketching-blocks. So deftly and noiselessly that the action must have been unperceived even had others been by, she here let fall from her hand a folded paper, then passed on. Arthur sprung forward to open the opposite door, waited automatically to close it upon her, and returned to his bust as if nothing had happened. The lady's manner impressed upon him the necessity of extreme caution, so that he durst not venture on taking any notice of the missive for the present. Not till a fair silhouette had been made, and the sketch-book laid down, could he contrive to satisfy his curiosity.

There were only a few penciled words in English, and they were these:

“I have something to say to you. By the iron-bound oak, on the eastern confines of the park, in an hour's time we could talk unobserved.”



In an hour's time! Arthur set to work upon his memoranda with extraordinary zeal. What would the prince think if he should find nothing done during his absence! A whole long summer day and not a note worth mentioning! So, with desperate determination to put away all conjecture and all personality for three-quarters of an hour, he began to jot down a few critical remarks upon the great pictures in the gallery.

For nothing short of a picture-gallery was this sumptuous reception room, and as he passed from canvas to canvas he found the minutes fly despairingly fast. He should have to stay another day at the palace, and what would Hervey say to that?

Still, three-quarters of an hour may be turned to excellent account when the faculties are sharpened by mixed feelings of bewilderment and responsibility. Arthur was bound to keep his word to his host. He was all the same bound to stay a lady's bidding. By the time he must set off in search of the iron-bound oak he had covered a dozen pages with apt and serviceable notes.

The eastern confines of the park lay far away from the palace, and its enticing precincts in an inland direction. Here, instead of close-shaven lawns and stately avenues, fairy dells, and winding walks, was a wilderness of tangled grass and undergrowth. The wild deer might be seen sporting amid these solitudes, and far as the eye could reach stretched the interminable forest. Where, indeed, the park ended, the forest began. Arthur's quick eye soon discerned an ancient oak with straggling, leafless branches and battered sides, pieced together by massive iron bands.

There was a moss-grown rustic seat under its branches, but umbrageous shadows no longer, and the very birds and butterflies had long forsaken it. Bare and desolate it stood in its hoary age, a Lear of the forest world! Without glancing round, Arthur seated himself on the wooden bench, and pulling out a sketch-book began to draw the picturesque scene before him. How could he feel sure that he was not watched? This meeting must appear purely accidental to possible observers.

As he waited, putting many surmises and suggestions together, light dawned on his mind. He seemed hardly to need any explanation on the part of the lady now. Her history had already revealed itself to him. He felt sure that he knew the saddest and weightiest things she had to tell. By-and-by he saw her coming; if so lovely in her sadness, what must she be in a moment of joy?

For the life of him Arthur could not help putting down his sketch-book and gazing at the picture she made as she emerged from the wood. It was, above all, the dignity of the black robed figure that struck him then. A woman may be perfect without absolute beauty, if she possesses this admirable gift of dignity, and, not possessing it, wants all things in certain fastidious eyes. Arthur Venning could not remember having seen any one who so nearly approached his ideal of feminine excellence. The look, the manner, the indescribable something that makes every human being what he is, were faultless to his thinking, the pathetic wistfulness and look of appeal heightening her beauty. All was impressive, not to be matched, still less forgotten or described.



Agitated and expectant he sprung to his feet, and bared his head as she drew near.

## CHAPTER XV.

### REVELATION.

SHE made a sign to him to be seated, and sitting down also began without preamble. "Will you do something for me when you get back to England?" Then looking straight into his face, she added, with painful eagerness, "That forlorn lady I mentioned to you, who wants to gain her bread in your country, is myself. Can you help me?"

What could Arthur do but express his readiness, his devotion? "Only let your wishes be made known, and I will exert myself to the utmost to serve you," he stammered forth, alert to the deliciousness of the situation, yet prosaically alive to the difficulties of the task he was imposing upon himself. Without sisters, without feminine kinsfolk, he was surely the last person in the world who should proffer help to a lady in such straits. Despite his prompt affirmation, just a shade of discomposure was visible to the eyes intently watching his own.

"I am asking a great kindness, I know," she went on, speaking in the same quiet, almost despairing voice. "I have no one to say a good word for me, not a friend in the world, yet I must live."

Again she looked at Arthur, as if to read him through and through, then, evidently with a growing confidence and almost a feeling of liking, she went on:

"Your looks tell me that you have a kind heart, and I am sure you are honorable; I will therefore trust you so far. You must find me such service in your country as may be performed by those who have no past, no history. Oh!" she cried, her whole sorrowful soul seeming to lean on him in the extremity of her helplessness and desolation, "surely in England, if anywhere, I may find one large heart, to whom a woman is a woman still, in spite of such misfortunes as mine!"

A tear or two fell, but without wiping them away she hurried on, now in low, eager tones:

"None but yourself are to know that I have lost my good name. I am bound to tell you, or you could not help me. You will keep silence, I know."

Arthur's looks answered for him.

He was fain to be eloquent, but the words did not come; none seemed weighty enough for the occasion.

"There are many things I can do well," she continued, with plaintive earnestness. "I would fulfill any trust committed to me; I would be good to little children or sick folk. But there is one charge I should like best of all."

Then, smiling through her tears, she said, "It is a foolish fancy, I cannot help living in terror of people's eyes. If I could only minister to the blind in one of their asylums, or devote myself to some sightless person, I think I could grow almost happy again."

"You must be happy again," Arthur rejoined, with affected



cheerfulness, although his heart was sinking within him. This superb creature a hospital nurse, a serving-woman! The thought was not to be borne.

"Have you any blind friend?" she asked, artlessly, not in the least divining what track his thoughts had taken. "I am skilled in music. I have a fine voice, so people say; I know many things—"

"That is but a dreary prospect you speak of," Arthur said; "I will try to think of a better scheme. There are rich women in England who want a friend to travel with them, dispense charity for them, help them to make the best of their lives. Among these you may find one who would be as a sister to you."

The glimmer of hope that had lighted up her face died away. She shook her head, and made answer almost in a desponding tone:

"I cannot go into the world, and even good women might not be kind to me. I yearn for a little kindness, but I will not be cast down," she added, as she caught Arthur's sorrowful glance. "You hear how easily I speak your language. I am also learned in Italian."

"That reminds me," Arthur broke in, with extreme animation, "I think I do know an old lady, charming, too, who wants a young one to take her to Italy;" and he expatiated on the prospect all the more glowingly, because it had also occurred to him that he should very likely spend the winter in Rome himself.

Suddenly, however, he was checked by a look of such utter misery on his companion's face as to seal his lips. He sat still, blank, silent, dejected. Not an adequate word occurred to him, not a phrase in the whole vocabulary seemed delicate enough and emphatic enough for the expression of his chivalrous devotion. No dilemma could be more painful to a generous-minded man. Moved to passionate pity, stirred by feelings perhaps the nearest approach to magnanimity of a lifetime, he was yet frozen into silence, chilled to outer coldness, by the very sorrow he would fain console.

To a man like Arthur Venning, nice in his tastes even to fastidiousness, and fashioned, although he knew it not, rather according to his own standard than that of the world, the very helplessness and appeal of this beautiful woman made her sacred in his eyes. She had thrown herself on his English sense of honor and manliness, and he must take care lest by a look or syllable he might seem to abuse the confidence placed in him. He durst not offer balm or ruth; even a trivial expression of sympathy would be out of keeping. He could only hearken to her story, and vouchsafe the common kindness one wayfarer on the dusty high-road of life is bound to show another.

"Do not speak to me of Italy!" she cried. "It is a fatal place. The forfeit—"

For a moment the fair cheeks were dyed with crimson, then she broke off and went on proudly and collectedly:

"You have promised to help a forlorn lady to earn her bread. If I am more outspoken to you than I should be—if I confide things to you I ought hardly to confide to any one, much less a man and a stranger, it is because from my childhood upward I have been taught that an Englishman's word may be relied on."

Arthur listened with sealed lips.



He had spoken once on his own behalf. Would a dozen speeches lend force to his simple yea or nay?

"You cannot help me unless you know something of my history," she went on, hurriedly and fearfully, as if dreading lest time might not serve for all that she had to say. "I have not a friend in the world, and I am in the power of bad people. How can I leave this island and get secretly to England? Will you try to think of a plan? Englishwomen are great travelers; if any came here I could return with them."

The wistfulness, the almost agonized look of entreaty, wrung Arthur's heart. All kinds of projects flashed before his mind. He would write that very day to some of his pleasant woman friends, and urge upon them the seductions of a Baltic trip. Better still, he would think of some school-mistress or music-teacher in want of a holiday, and thus procure the necessary protection. Vague hopes and promises in plenty his interlocutor now read in the young man's face.

"It must be done soon," she added, in the same quick, agitated tones. "I could get away in September."

Arthur's countenance cleared.

"There is, fortunately, time then for making the necessary arrangements," he said, promptly and cheerfully. He was determined, at all costs to himself, to be sternly matter-of-fact. "I can turn over in my mind the best means of furthering your wishes. Meantime," he added, with an encouraging smile, "who can tell what may or may not happen? Friends of mine might arrive unexpectedly any day from England, or touch here on their way back from Norway. I need only commend to their protection a foreign lady desirous of going to England. Can I write to you?"

"It will be better not to do so. I will let you know how to communicate with me when the time comes," she replied, rising. "How long do you stay on this island?"

As long as I can serve you, were the passionate words on Arthur's lips. He checked himself, and made answer in the most indifferent voice he could command:

"My time is at my own disposal; I am absolutely free to go or stay. It will give me real pleasure if I can be of use to you."

"I will send you a sign," she said. "Your address I learned on the occasion of your first visit to the palace."

"The address matters little, but do not forget the name, Arthur Venning. A letter bearing that superscription will find me anywhere on the island."

"And my prayers shall find you wherever you are," was the tearful answer.

As she lingered before him, so beautiful in her sadness, so sad in her beauty, they interchanged the yearning look that one human being may well accord another in moments of supreme emotion, even when the next shall see them strangers. There was no sentiment on his part, no feminine feeling on hers; instead, deep, unutterable sympathy stirring the hearts of both, and an understanding with which his passionate admiration, and her own consciousness of it, had nothing to do. Never in his life had anything touched him so nearly as this loveliness, this desolation; not until now did she realize the



healing there may be in a brave man's word. But for once sex and personality were merged in something higher than these, and the pair embodied in each other's eyes divine compassion and intense gratitude only.

And as if anxious to express an emotion she could not put into words, having risen to go, she turned back. With a little sob and a wistful smile she now unfastened the knot of white flowers worn on her bosom, and put them into his hands. What eloquence could have said so much? Those silvery, star-shaped blossoms were the thanksgiving of one who had not so much as a word to give, the benison of a breaking heart.

Strangely moved, Arthur put away the flowers in his pocket-book and strolled back to the palace, with little heart for the jovial bachelor's dinner to come. He longed now, as keenly as Hervey, to be well out of the precincts, although the way back should lead to perplexity, retribution, and Elizabeth.

Elizabeth, Elizabeth! What was there in a fair girl's name to disquiet a young man thus? But even the name he had found so sweet seemed unreal and remote to Arthur now. Was the fancy of yestreen already supplanted by a deeper feeling? Was this new empire love indeed? the other dream and shadow?

Arthur came to the conclusion, while hopelessly distracted by these thoughts, that at least he was no longer free to wander and to love. He had often regretted the unemotional current of his existence, and even reproached himself for an apparent want of susceptibility to the passions that consume other men. Now love had asserted its claim, and instead of scant measure dealt out to him, a very foison of love and deliciousness promised to be his portion.

“ But the future lay veiled in mystery,  
Hid are the threads of destiny.”

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## CHAPTER XVI.

### INTERLUDES.

THE rest of the visit passed off uneventfully. The same faultless dinner, the same flow of talk, the same acquisitiveness on the part of host and response on that of guests. In certain social relations there need be no question of personal liking; we accord and accept hospitality without going below sympathies skin deep, and inclinations that lie on the surface. The prince and his visitors parted company with graceful compliments that meant nothing, and expressions of regard called forth by the occasion. They should never meet again, but had done their best to be agreeable to one another while intercourse lasted. Next day, before nightfall, the travelers were in their old quarters. Hervey hastened down to the hanging-garden by the shore, hoping to find Flora under the lime-trees; Arthur shut himself up in his room, to ponder the letter he must dispatch by to-morrow's boat.

First of all he thought and thought till he had satisfactorily made out the history of his beautiful suppliant. He knew German middle-class life well, and the splendid intellectualism of it, the sordid



penury of it, and viewed by the light of past experiences, it seemed to him perfectly comprehensible that Italy might be as the apple to some beautiful and beauty-loving German Eve born in these latter days. A vivid picture soon composed itself before his mental vision. He imagined a struggling family, and perhaps narrow-minded circle, of which one gifted girl was the paragon, condemned nevertheless to a tread-mill of toil for daily bread. On a sudden the prison-doors fly open. Love and Italy await her! The artistic cravings and intellectual aspirations suppressed for years are to be satisfied at last. She loves, and in her lover finds not only the beauty which is to her as a religion, but the sympathy as necessary to an ardent and poetic nature as air itself.

Musing thus, Arthur thought he could understand how here even a delicate-minded and proud maiden might fall into a snare. There would be passion on the man's side, and no lack of arguments on behalf of the sacrifice demanded of her. Might not a young nobleman, wooing the daughter of some poor pastor or professor, plausibly plead his cause thus: "I am not now my own master, but the bond between you and me shall be sacred, and the first day that makes me umpire of my fortunes shall seal it in the eyes of men"?

And to the mind of an unworldly, magnanimous girl, implicitly trusting her lover's word, the very nature of such a bond would seem to guarantee after-confirmation. Other and subtler reasonings on his part might apparently justify the step. A thousand circumstances might go against her. Is not feminine generosity overreached by a man's reckless word every day?

Arthur sat down to write, with the unshakable conviction that his protégée was the victim, not the tool, of a worldling's selfishness. If ever a fair spirit matched a beauteous body, it was hers. The pathos of wrong, rather than of remorse, was written on her face. More sinned against than sinning was inscribed on that pure forehead. Were it otherwise, cannot mortal lapse be washed out with bitter tears? Is not the misguided soul oftentimes nearer the angels than those who keep the beaten track?

With such thoughts as these, Arthur penned a very long letter, indeed, on this lady's behalf. He had bethought himself of a former music-mistress of his own, of whom he had never lost sight, as the very person to help him out of this charming dilemma. She was pinched in circumstances, elderly, and not too rich in friends. It would be easy, he thought, to induce her to give the stranger a home, even make the journey from London to escort her, if necessary.

Arthur was by no means rich, but he could lay hands on a hundred pounds in order to gratify a generous whim, and he reflected that if he put two seas between his beautiful charge and her sorrow, the rest would be easy. She would learn to forget. Under his friend's quiet roof there would be nothing to recall the past. She should be amused by giving German lessons; she should gradually be won over to smile and to hope.

There was real benevolence, as well as chivalrous sentiment, at the bottom of Arthur's schemes, and the thought struck him oddly, as it might, methinks, strike many another, When did I ever go out of my way to mend a breaking heart? This fastidious, easy-going,



highly-cultured Londoner possessed a conscience, but somehow or other it had not been touched as often as might be. But the chivalrous feeling here predominated, and it could hardly be otherwise. If the consciousness of a kindly act warmed his heart, the gratitude of a beautiful woman, in no less degree, warmed his imagination. A deeper chord was touched still. This girl had appealed to all that was best and manliest within him, and in responding to the call, he felt that she it was who played the part of benefactor and good genius. Are not those who inspire us with a noble impulse our guardian angels ever?

The letter he penned was a very long and deliberate one, and in its folds was inclosed a check. "It may happen," he wrote, by way of postscript, "that I shall have to telegraph to you quite suddenly to come out here, or, which will do quite as well, delegate some one of your acquaintance, in order to accompany this lady back to England. Why she cannot travel alone, and all other questions, I will answer when we meet. The only thing to be thought of now is to procure her an escort and a home till she can decide upon what to do in the future. She is to know nothing about this check, of course. As an old friend of mine you offer her shelter for a few weeks. That explanation will be enough, and at this season of the year your journey hither would have nothing extraordinary about it. I am sure you will go out of your way to second an old pupil whom you scolded for false notes twenty years ago, and you will learn to feel as much interest in my protégée as I do. But take no steps till you hear from me."

Most carefully and circumstantially was the letter worded, yet, strangely enough, when the moment came to consign it to the post, Arthur locked it up in his desk instead.

This little romance was all his own; he could not bear the thought of another so much as breathing near it. And the natural, feminine curiosity of this soft-hearted, admirable music-mistress, a romance herself, albeit travestied by the *embonpoint* of fifty, would any injunction on his part suffice to keep her inquisitiveness?

Terribly, yet rapturously perplexed, he at last decided to leave the letter where it was for the present. There was luckily yet time, and, in the summer, letters crossed these seas every day. He could afford to dwell on the problem a little longer.

Next morning Hervey dashed into his room with great news. The fishermen's ball was to take place that afternoon in the forest. Everybody was going, and the sight would be captivating, he said, all in a breath.

"Everybody? That means Flora?" Arthur said, slyly. "Seriously, now, Hervey, what are you thinking of? Flirtation has its limits for a man to contemplate marriage who has never so much as earned a sixpence with which to pay his boot-cleaner."

Hervey was also in an exhilarated humor. "I never coveted a carriage and pair," he answered. "When I take a wife, fashion and I part company."

"A man may be a decent member of society without having his clothes made by a royal tailor," laughed Arthur; "but nakedness must be covered, and the digestive machine kept agoing."

"You forget one thing," retorted the younger brother. "Flora



is a German, and Germans know how to live delightfully upon a hundred a year. Well, you will go to the ball, of course?"

"Of course. Will Elizabeth dance with me, do you think?"

Hervey looked disconcerted.

"I do not understand Elizabeth," he said; "she seems positively to resent our visit to the palace. How could it possibly be interpreted as a slight upon herself?"

"How indeed?" was Arthur's careless answer. But when Hervey had left him, his thoughts recurred to the question he had mooted. Why had Elizabeth all along shown such strange aversion to the prince's name?

Arthur recollected well her look of disconcertion when the princely chase had been accidentally mentioned. There was no misreading the cold disapproval written on her face just before his departure with Hervey for the palace. Then he recalled their talk at the light-house. She had spoken of a broken word and outraged honor. Could these things point to but one conclusion? The lovely, ingenuous Elizabeth must have been wooed by one of the prince's kinsmen; and through his instrumentality, he being head of the house, these betrothals had been annulled. In Elizabeth's eyes the prince evidently embodied disloyalty itself; in no other way was such bitter feeling on the part of an amiable girl to be accounted for. He determined to have a close talk with Elizabeth as soon as might be—that very afternoon, if possible. It behooved him to get at the bottom of her mysteries and to find out how it stood with her heart; for in the midst of these vague reflections a disturbing conviction made itself heard. He had already gone too far to draw back. Those last lover-like words whispered in her ear could not be misinterpreted or unsaid. He was free no longer.

Now Arthur, without possessing the heroic qualities, was endowed with one virtue which often counts for much more. To his somewhat cold, well-disciplined nature, crookedness was simply impossible in the least little thing. He must see whither he was going, and have the ground clear, no complications, no half understandings, least of all, no shufflings. The thought that his extraordinary interest in his beautiful protégée might be disloyalty to Elizabeth grew more and more hateful to him. He could not let a day go by in uncertainty. Either Elizabeth should claim him for once and for all, or that sadder, lovelier vision, that somehow strangely reminded him of her.

Arthur had doubtless a touch of romance in his disposition—what human being is without it? Taken by this sweet Teutonic maiden as he had never been taken by any other woman till a week ago, he yet acknowledged a feeling of dismay.

Love is sweet, and the look of certain blue eyes may open a new kind of heaven in manly breasts; but habit is tyrannical, and liberty hath charms. To fall in love is to catch a first glimpse of Edelweiss on Alpine slopes. To determine on marriage is to strive for the prize, maybe easily won and worn, maybe a clutch at a bagatelle, or a smiling plunge into destruction.



## CHAPTER XVII.

## IDYLS.

NOTHING could be prettier than the rustic jollity prepared by the fisher-folk for their guests. The site chosen was a fair, open space in the very heart of the forest, with park-like knolls and beechen groves affording rich shadow round about. A smooth circle of golden sward was set apart for the dancers, and a little beyond, the flame of gypsy fires and fisher-maidens, bustling about tables covered with snowy napkins, betokened the preparation of coffee. On the lower branches of the encircling trees were hung Chinese lanterns, which lent the scene a festive look, the effect of these bright colors being heightened by the gay dresses of the ladies. The celebration was entirely popular, and rich and poor had turned out to take part in it: but as costume exists no longer, even in the Cannibal Islands, it could hardly be looked for here. The fair-haired, apple-cheeked daughters of these sturdy islanders, descendants of pirate kings of the olden time, were dressed every whit as modishly as the belles of Northern capitals, who had come so far in search of the picturesque. Not an outlandish head-gear to be seen, not one pig-tailed, short-kirtled Gretchen among the bevy of home-bred beauties, nor were the men bedizened after the manner of their forefathers. The chimney-pot hat, the frock-coat, the pantaloons, formed the Sunday dress of the poorest. After all, let æsthetes tear their hair and wring their hands over the vanished costumes that made the world so pretty. All who care for the moral uplifting and social regeneration of our poorer brethren know that deepest wisdom and highest promise underlie this imitative instinct on their part. When all the world are clothed like ladies and gentlemen, all the world will strive after the ideal contained in the words, not the least feature of which is decorum and gentleness in speech and behavior. By dress is the divine doctrine of equality to be preached, from one end of the globe to the other. Here, moreover, equality was no fiction, even on Prussian soil. The fisherman might invite a titled *fräulein* to the waltz, the village girl, without shame, accept the hand of a grandee for the cotillon. All was geniality and neighborly feeling. Arthur and Hervey were soon busy among the coffee-cups, serving not only Elizabeth and Flora but any womankind who happened to be handy. Then, flushed with the heat of the gypsy fires, and breathless with running to and fro in company of other cavaliers, they made raids upon the cakes piled in neighboring stalls. It was a scene of indescribable enjoyment. Everybody was hot, not a gown without its tear, yet all faces showed exhilaration. Why merry-making out-of-doors should always raise our spirits may be accounted for in the fact that Nature compels naturalness, strive against her as we will. The footmark of fauns and satyrs still lingers in the forest; something, we know not what, reminds us that the pranksome world of Eld hath not wholly vanished.

By-and-by, according to local fashion, the procession formed for



the dance, young and old making the round of the woodland *cirque* in couples to the slow time of music. Hervey, enchanted, led off Flora; Arthur, somewhat crestfallen, saw Elizabeth already paired with an elderly partner, no other than the fisherman at whose house she lodged. This worthy personage never danced but once a year, and always upon these occasions demanded the hand of one of the prettiest guests in the place—a favor readily accorded, as he was a famous boatman, and well known to all. But the luck ran against Arthur. Dressed in white, with blue corn-flowers in her hair and on her bosom, Elizabeth seemed possessed by the very genius of dancing just then. She had hardly dismissed her first partner when another came up—a gray-haired colonel, a *table-d'hôte* acquaintance—to claim a promise of three weeks' standing; then a little lad who had been similarly favored, then a still younger child, just able to toddle through the quadrille.

Sparkling, animated, rosy, Elizabeth had evidently made up her mind to fling care to the winds for that afternoon.

Arthur fancied himself avoided because he reminded her of things she would fain forget. He was determined, however, to have one dance, and patiently bided his turn. At last it came. "I began to think that you had made up your mind not to dance with me at all; yet if I had offended, I hoped it was not past forgiveness," he said, looking rapturously at the nappy girl. Not a five-year-old coquette in the sash and white frock showed more contentment than Elizabeth just then.

"You had not offended me, but I am bound to dance with all my particular friends. I have not danced for years; it delights me beyond measure."

"Because you do it so beautifully."

"Every one dances well in our country, although, of course, some better than others. If you had only seen my sister!" she said.

"I have been watching Miss Flora. I hardly think her performance comes up to the level of your own."

"Oh! I was not thinking of Flora, but of our eldest sister—the one we have lost," cried the girl, coloring painfully.

A dark thought had overshadowed her bright mood against her will; the gaysome fit dropped from her as a garment. She would dance no more that day.

"Look at Flora and your brother," Elizabeth said, as they rested under the lime-trees within sight of the dancers. "Why cannot you and I be as light-hearted as those two?"

She had then detected his own preoccupation and skin-deep carelessness, thought Arthur. How it fared with the pair of young lovers waltzing just then so merrily it was easy to see; would a better opportunity come for finding out how it stood with themselves?

"That is a question no other can answer for us. Let us for once and for all get to the bottom of things. Speak—or listen," he said.

"I have not the courage to speak, and till I have spoken I dare not listen," answered Elizabeth.

"If summer lasted longer than two months in this sweet place, and life were all holiday, I should be the last person to rebel against



such a state of things," rejoined Arthur. "Yet what more can this island give me than the thing I came to seek?"

"But the sorrow I fled from follows me still. Flora is a child, and concerns herself about nothing so long as the sun shines. I cannot help looking deeper."

"The deeper you look the more valorous you should become," Arthur said. "Why this shrinking from me? Am I not your friend?"

"Yes," said Elizabeth, firmly and almost affectionately; "I have no misgiving where your loyalty is concerned. True you are, I am sure, and brave too. It is your very generosity that makes me hesitate; I fear to put it to a test that might make even my friendship for you bitterness and rue."

"Friendship! friendship!" cried Arthur. "May we not use a dearer, better word, you and I? So I have dreamed and hoped."

"No, no," Elizabeth made answer, evidently torn by inner conflict, shrinking, notwithstanding, from a stern sense of duty, the sweetness and solace implied in his words.

"I must not, I dare not, let our intimacy go further. What room is there for better feelings in a heart overflowing with hate? We can be good friends, and some time or other I may summon up courage to unburden myself to you; but by word of mouth never!"

"You shall write to me," Arthur put in kindly. Strange that with this beautiful girl, as with that other whose image was ever before his eyes, he had to play the part of consoler! Elizabeth's sorrow seemed at times hardly less deep and absorbing than the grief of the unknown lady: in both cases how flatteringly welcome his consolations and sympathy!

"Some day or other you shall certainly have a letter from me," Elizabeth said, smiling. "You will then understand these foolish, childish thoughts I have often given utterance to in your hearing — requital, revenge, and so forth. How absurd to count upon redress for such wrongs as mine! How sinful to nurse in one's bosom plans of vengeance and retribution! We must oftentimes leave the wicked in God's hands."

"And in the devil's!" laughed Arthur. "That is to say, to their evil conscience. Never fear that it does not sting."

"Have all human beings a conscience, think you?"

"Something that takes the place of one, anyhow. Something that makes people fear, and fear is hell; otherwise, why do the most atrocious criminals ever show a craven spirit?"

Arthur never doubted that Elizabeth was dwelling upon her own story. She had been brought to trust an unworthy lover, and womanly pride rather than outraged feeling had spoken out now.

His words seemed to satisfy her.

"It must be so," she mused, "otherwise, all keenest pain would be endured by the true and the lofty minded only. God would not permit such an injustice. Surely the gail and bitterness of wickedness are tasted by the wicked themselves!"

She lapsed into silence, and Arthur humored her mood. These girlish confidences could but be very sweet, and if she had gently, yet firmly, degraded him from the rank of lover to friend, there was a melancholy consolation in that thought also. A newer, deeper



interest was no longer a treachery to his feeling for her. He might freely indulge in other hopes and recollections. All things, at least for a time, were made clear as day between them.

When Elizabeth woke up from her reverie her mood was altered. She spoke now with alacrity, whether natural or affected he could not tell, and seemed anxious to touch on lighter themes. She asked him a dozen questions about his stay at the light-house; then, after having played round the subject, she led up to his late visit.

"How captivating is our island! and nowhere more so than on that southern part. And the lime-trees at the Residency!" she cried. "In Berlin we boast of lindens that look as if they came out of a child's toy village. Can the world show nobler trees than those in the prince's park?"

"In good sooth, no," Arthur said, carried away by her evident enthusiasm. "And the palace itself, with its marble colonnades and rose-garden about its fairy lake! I think I never saw a place that more struck my imagination."

"I have never been inside the palace," Elizabeth went on, in calm, slightly artificial tones. "They tell me it is more captivating within than without—a reminder of Haroun-al-Raschid. Are these reports exaggerated?"

"I do assure you, not in the least," Arthur said, forgetting for the moment her apparent distaste to this very subject. "There is a Titian, a Tintoretto, a Velasquez, and dazzling splendors of a modern date. All these you should see."

Elizabeth listened coldly. It was quite clear that she wanted to learn more, but hesitated to show her inquisitiveness.

"Was the party at the palace an agreeable one?" she asked.

"We were but four," Arthur said: "the prince, his secretary, my brother, and myself."

Elizabeth's face still betokened curiosity. She turned red, then pale; finally taking up her fan and using it as vigorously as if they were in a crowded drawing-room rather than a cool forest nook, she got out the query,

"Then the prince is not married?"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

### A PASTORAL.

THE fisherman's ball ended for most folk at the children's bedtime; and while the sun yet gilded the rim of the upper forest world, many were already wending their way homeward. How wonderful was the path, one of many, found by the too happy Flora and her knight Hervey, as they separated from their friends, determined to have at least this one walk by themselves! Elizabeth would frown, and Flora was in mortal terror of her elder sister's righteous anger; could Elizabeth's anger ever be otherwise? But just to-day Flora felt a little reckless and even audacious. The dance out-of-doors, the feeling of festivity in the air, the music ringing through the woodland, exhilarated her beyond measure. She hoped, although she did not feel sure of it, that these things would in some degree



affect Elizabeth also, and that she would make allowance for conduct arising from feelings she shared. From the natural *cirque* high up on the crown of the forest that had been chosen for the dance, a dozen paths led homeward; and Flora, who acted as guide, naturally chose the most romantic, if indeed there was any choice in this island of romance. They first of all scrambled down the sides of a charming little ravine, the abrupt, tangled path leading into a cool, quiet glade, where not a sign reached them of the upper world or the lower—alike forest and sea were here utterly shut out from ken. Flora laughingly put her finger to her lip, and, listening, Hervey caught one sound—a low, musical murmur of hidden waters, although, as yet, no rivulet or brook was to be seen.

“We must find the brook and follow it, or we shall lose our way,” Flora said; and on the other side of the glade, true enough, they soon discovered a little mountain rivulet, trickling and tossing over a pebbly bed, making as much ado, indeed, as many a broad stream. Down it ran, between ferny banks and mossy stones, at every bend showing miniature cascades and wears, the white crests of the tumbling waters and the large, creamy agaric the only points of light in the dark picture. Here and there gleamed, duskily, deep orange *poziza* and other flowers of the underworld, and when they came to an opening they caught sight of a sun-ray gilding the upper region now left far behind. Around them all was coolness and deep shadow, but no monotony, every bend of the little torrent leading into new scenes; like a tricky sprite playing at hide-and seek, it now hid itself behind a huge tree-stem, now dived deep into a tiny comb, and now slowly and deliberately meandered amid sedges dark as itself. This gamesome elf was up to a hundred antics, and never left the happy lovers for more than a minute or two at a time. It seemed to have fellowship with their captious, uncertain mood—sweetest mood, perhaps, in which lovers ever find themselves—on the brink of a perfect understanding, at the same time willing and unwilling to attain it.

The artless girl knew as well as words could have told her what was on Hervey's lips—the secret of two or three delicious weeks hitherto not divulged by speech; and Hervey felt no misgivings, no playing with happy fate, no toying with sweet convictions on the part of this transparent-natured maiden. All with her was fair and legible as the blue eyes that opened to her lover's as a book. Flora's mission in the world was to love and to smile, no despicable one seeing how much the toiling, moiling world is in need of love and smiles.

Love came not so much a surprise, perhaps, to the eighteen-year-old Flora as to the London-bred man of the world, almost ten years her senior. Hervey had caught his brother's trick of jesting at serious things—courtship and marriage among them—without taking account of the deeper feeling underlying Arthur's apparent skepticism. In sober fact Arthur only waited for a perfect woman to fall in love and marry; and all the time Hervey listened to his jests in sober earnest, and acted upon them, Arthur kept a steady lookout lest his ideal should escape him. So impossible is it for the lesser nature to comprehend the larger! As a natural conse-



quence, we who imitate our betters, oftener aim at their weaknesses rather than their strong points.

Arthur had seemed to hold himself above sentiment, and Hervey could not choose but follow suit. On a sudden he woke up to the discovery, and a pleasant one too, that, after all, his brother and himself were not superior beings, but prone to make themselves ridiculous; in other words, fall in love like ordinary mortals. Thus they strayed homeward, following the stream, one moment shy and monosyllabic, the next audacious and voluble. They were quiet when the rivulet just plashed, and that was all; the moment it battled noisily they also became garrulous. It had led them lower and lower, and ever into deeper shadow; warm amber light still lingered about the high reaches of the forest, but their own little world, dusk and cool at all times, was now growing more and more obscure, the lovely green light turning every dell and glade into a solemn place. With the bendings and windings of the river, they had passed from one scene of enchantment to another, and finally it landed them on a grassy stage, where the wood ended, and the open, park-like spaces skirting it began.

One slope more and the corn-fields would be reached, and the narrow little village street leading to the sea. Already they had before their eyes an arc of pale blue, and set round about broad stretches of ripe, yellow wheat. In helping his companion over the brooklet Hervey had been obliged to take her hand, and somehow, after crossing it for the last time, he still retained his hold.

Flushed, sparkling, a stranger to herself in the moment of first girlish abandonment, Flora saw that her lover was equally distracted and happy. Hervey seemed suddenly overtaken by extraordinary self-confidence. His dauntless demeanor and airy post should have belonged indeed to one bent on far more startling emprise than the winning of a gentle maiden's hand. He looked, indeed, as if by anticipation he had already accomplished some tremendous exploit. Nothing magnifies us so much in our own estimation as first love, and Hervey and Flora were no less enchanted with each other and themselves than two little children just able to toddle, who have rubbed cheeks and made friends.

"You will let me speak to Elizabeth to-morrow, will you not?" at last Hervey said, conscious of doing the beautiful thing he had to do in the most awkward manner possible.

Flora laughed gayly and arched her pretty brows. "You talk to Elizabeth every day without asking my leave," she said; then blushing, she flitted like a shy little bird from the tempting snare. "I know what we shall both get to-morrow, a scolding."

"Nonsense," Hervey answered; "Elizabeth has no right to scold me, and soon she shall have no right to scold you either. Listen, be serious," he added, making her for a moment sit on the turf beside him. "Things are very desperate, Flora, I believe, between my brother and your sister, but anyhow between us two. I want you to marry me this very year. Why wait," he blurted out, "since we love each other?"

Flora let one little hand rest within her lover's while she spoke out openly and daringly as himself. This new friend had, on a sudden, become so very close and dear! Her secrets must be his. In the



least as well as greatest of his concerns she was henceforth to bear a part. The sense of acquisition and enlargement that promptly took possession of her was sweet and bewildering.

"I dare not disobey Elizabeth," she said, overcome with joyousness and sad misgiving. "If she separates us, I am bound to submit; but I shall always love you all the same."

"Nonsense," again urged Hervey, finding piquancy in the use of such unceremonious speech, already, as he thought, a guarantee of the sweet, unceremonious life to come. "My little girl, my own Flora, you have only to say a word, and not the whole world, much less Elizabeth, can separate us."

Flora hearkened, blushing, tearful, blissful, yet unconvinced.

"Elizabeth made me promise long ago never to—to—to do anything without consulting her," she stammered. "Elizabeth says that I must never dream of marrying, because of the misfortune and disgrace that have befallen our family."

"Misfortune, disgrace!" cried the young man, sturdily; he had never felt so manly and self-confident in his life. "Are you to be made unhappy because of the misdeeds of others? All the more reason why you should be loved and protected, as I will love and protect you."

The pair were alone in their little world of cool, green, and deepening shadow, not so much as a bird to espy their doings. Quite unpardonably Hervey caught her for a moment, lover-like, in his arms, and snatched a first kiss from her rosy lips.

"Say all that to Elizabeth," Flora whispered.

"But I deny Elizabeth's right to interfere," Hervey went on. "When Arthur asks her to marry him, as of course he will, take my word for it, she will never dream of consulting you."

"Elizabeth is five years older than I am."

"And Arthur is my senior also. Brothers and sisters have no jurisdiction over each other, and only self-assumed authority. I never dreamed, for instance, of telling Arthur that I intended to speak to you to-day."

"With men it is different," Flora said. "We have no mother, remember, and our father is incapable of taking care of us. It is Elizabeth's affection, not her love of authority, that makes her seem to domineer. She says that we are bound to disclose our family history before accepting an offer of marriage."

"Marry me first, and I will listen to as much family history as you like afterward," Hervey said, growing more and more defiant; "or at least promise to marry me."

"No, Elizabeth would be displeased. But I promise never to marry any one else," Flora answered.

"I will talk to your sister; I will win her over. Arthur may say that my means are insufficient, but we will be very economical. I am sure two people can be as happy as the day is long on three hundred a year."

Flora opened her blue eyes with childish delight. The sum had a handsome, nay, magnificent sound in her German ears. "Three hundred a year, indeed! I would undertake to keep house on one!"

"Not in England," laughed Hervey; and so they prattled on about marriage and money and the countless topics that after the



first whisper of love become common property. Then all at once aroused to the fact that the woods had grown very dark, and night was alarmingly near, they hastened home with the air of belated children who expect a whipping.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

### CATASTROPHES.

AND next day, Sunday, how blessed were the young lovers as they attended divine service in the open air, forest church, Waldkirche, as the island folk called it, for no other was near. Baptisms, bridals, and burials were solemnized in the Dom of the little capital, that, perched on its airy height, could be seen from almost every part of the island; and in winter resolute church goers from remote villages plodded thither through the snow, the undertaking only just being accomplished in the brief winter day. When leaves were green, and mossy banks afforded pleasant resting-places, nothing more delightful than this woodland-temple kind of amphitheater had been made in the forest. The pastor's gown and cassock were in readiness, hanging on a tree hard by, and when the congregation had patiently awaited his arrival for half an hour or more, at last he came. How Flora's sweet, well-trained voice thrilled with joy as she joined in the grand old Lutheran hymn by her lover's side! How rapturously the young Londoner gave way to these naïve, genuine emotions! Perhaps the sermon fell on careless ears, but the first prayer in which they joined in this forest aisle seemed a sacred bond. What passed afterward between the sisters Hervey did not learn as yet, but next morning when he met Flora on the shore just below the little garden, her eyes were red with weeping.

They could not be alone in these narrow, winding ways between the beechen wood and the sea, so they took the first steep path that led upward. Cool and fragrant were these dappled glades and close-set spinets of larch and pine just above the unruffled bay. The wide world could surely show no sweeter place, to-day as always, all the more poetic and soothing from the absence of intense color and sharp lights and shadows. A subdued twilight radiance wraps this fair island—fair perhaps as Eden's, described for us by pearl-divers in Indian seas. The flowers of these hanging-gardens are of hardy northern growth, yet they fling a rich mantle about the nether parts of the ancient forest. And deep and somber the forest shadows above; no turquoise sea, no golden sands, no dazzling heavens here; every scene we gaze on rests alike the eye and the mind.

Little heed, however, paid poor weeping Flora to the delicious world she had waked up to that morning. She was with Hervey, sitting beside him on the very bench they had chosen during their first walk together; he was her own true friend, to be the husband of her choice, yet she was crying now as if her little heart would break.

And at last the disconcerted lover got out the reason. This was to be a parting. That very day Elizabeth was going to take her away.

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“Not on account of what you said to me last night,” Flora got out between her sobs. “Elizabeth seemed hardly vexed, hardly astonished even, but something else has happened; I may not tell you what now, and in consequence everything is settled. We are to leave the island this very afternoon.”

“I will see your sister; she cannot refuse to hear what I have to say,” Hervey cried. “Or, I have a better plan still; I shall go with you.”

The meaning of a lover began to dawn upon Flora’s artless mind in right good earnest. Hervey, then, would cling to her whatever might happen. Love did not mean only a stolen kiss and the sweet confidences of two, but a bond, a duty, a fellowship that, once called into existence, would tell upon every incident of life. Her sorrows, her joys, her common days were no longer her own; love made them Hervey’s business also. Even Elizabeth could not have it otherwise.

“Go with you, or follow after, if your sister offers any objection to the first plan,” Hervey went on. “The road to Bremen lies open to all. She may refuse my escort; she cannot forbid the railway to give me accommodation.”

He was smiling and confident in spite of Flora’s distress, not able indeed to see why an abrupt departure need prove a terrible misfortune. Were there not country lanes and rustic stiles inviting to lover-like confabulations outside this island? Arthur might make what comments he pleased; he should at once make ready for his journey.

“We are not going straight home,” Flora said. “Elizabeth wishes me to have more sea-bathing. We shall stop for a week or two on the opposite coast.”

She had brightened as she heard, yet he could see that one sorrow he had not touched. Why such mysteriousness on Elizabeth’s part?—this sudden breaking up of a summer holiday. He looked the questions he could not venture to put even to his betrothed.

“Elizabeth will say nothing as to the reason of our departure, and you must put no questions to her,” Flora went on. “She has other things to think of just now besides our affairs. I am not quite sure that she would object to your company; she seems terribly cast down.”

“I fear sad tidings have reached you from home,” at last said the young man kindly, with almost brother-like solicitude. No curiosity, only a desire to be serviceable, prompted the speech.

“Not from home,” Flora said, flushed and tearful. “But I dare not say a word; perhaps Elizabeth will confide in you. Let us both go to her.” Hervey jumped from his seat with alacrity. Yes, that was the best thing to do, he said. There was always a good deal to think of before a hurried departure. He could put his own belongings together in a quarter of an hour. For the present he placed himself entirely at the sister’s service.

They lingered under the beechen shadow for a whisper, a hand-clasp, a fond look, then went back to the little villa in the rose-garden. It was the favorite hour for bathing, and the place seemed deserted alike within and without, not an occupant in any of the tiny summer-houses perched above the sea, not a sound in-doors save of brooms being lustily plied in the upper chamber. Flora led her



companion to the little parlor now familiar to him; but how changed its aspect since yesterday. No pretty work baskets, no posies of freshly-culled wild-flowers; on all sides that unmistakable bareness and coldness of the sea-side lodging, the habitation that belongs to nobody. Beneath the window stood a huge trunk with open lid, showing all kinds of hastily packed feminine treasures. But evidently wearied ere her task was done, Elizabeth had thrown herself on the sofa. There Flora and Hervey found her, pale, overcome with bodily lassitude and dejection.

“Mr. Venning wants to know if he can be of use to us,” Flora said, quite cheerfully. It was wonderful how Hervey’s view of the question inspired and emboldened her. “May he not come in?”

Elizabeth looked almost too wearied to open her lips. She tried to smile, however, and, sitting up, began to give instructions. Hervey had ever been a favorite with her, and she liked this unaffected good-nature and alacrity to serve. While Flora bustled about in the next room, she set him several tasks—to secure two places in the steamer starting for the opposite shores that afternoon; to see to the transport of luggage on board; to run hither and thither for the paying of visitors’ tax and depositing an address at the post-office; all these matters would now be well off her mind, and she thanked her henchman beforehand.

“I am grieved to have to leave this sweet place in the middle of our summer holiday,” she said. “We have had happy days together, Mr. Venning; I shall often think of them.”

Hervey stood before the pale girl, hat in hand, not looking in the least like a lover about to be separated from his mistress, much less dismissed altogether. Elizabeth could not understand this apparent indifference, almost stolidness, on the part of Flora’s faithful knight. Flora’s briskness puzzled her still more. An hour before, this child had seemed as near despair as eighteen years can be; now she was making ready for departure without a sign of reluctance.

“Flora has spoken to me of your wishes,” Elizabeth went on, with calm decision, “but I cannot think of her prospects now. She must not build too much on hope.”

Then suddenly overcome with the bitterness of unspoken sorrow, she rested her head on the sofa-pillow, and her utterance became thick with tears.

“It would make me very happy to see Flora happy with you”—here she held out one hand, which the young man clasped brother-like—“you are kind and loyal, I feel sure, and would be good to my poor little sister; but you are an English gentleman—none so proud, they say. You would never wed a girl with a tarnished name, ally yourself with a family dishonored forever and forever!”

Hervey spoke out bluntly, after true British fashion.

“What family escutcheon without its blot?” he said. “A man marries the woman he loves; and he loves her the better, not the worse, because of misfortune. Trust me with Flora’s happiness; it shall be safe in my keeping, let her kinsfolk be what they may.”

“You have a generous heart,” murmured Elizabeth; “I feel drawn toward you as to a brother. Yet I must not let you win my Flora’s love till you know all. I wish I could unburden myself to



you now, but I am too weary in body and in spirit; I had hardly any sleep last night," she added, wistfully.

"Do not undertake this journey to-day then; rest till to-morrow," Hervey said, overcome with affectionate concern for the pale, overwrought girl. "The delay of one day can surely be of no moment."

"You are wrong," cried Elizabeth, rising from her seat with sudden animation, a feverish brightness in her eyes and on her cheek. "Dear friend—brother if you will that I call you so—do not try to persuade me to stay. I shall get no more rest here. I came to seek a little happiness, a spell of oblivion, but the shadow that hangs over our house, the shadow whose name is shame, follows us wherever we go. There is a fatality about this island; help me to hasten away and you will be my kindest friend."

"Of course you must leave, if you wish it, by this afternoon's boat," Hervey said, in a pleasant, matter-of-fact voice; "but I cannot let you undertake this troublesome journey without escort. I leave this island then to-day as well as you."

"What will your brother say? And idlers here may gossip unkindly," Elizabeth urged, after a momentary indecision.

"Arthur has no right to say anything; the rest can but make a hazard at the truth," Hervey said. "What other construction should be put upon such a step but the right one? Your sister's future husband may surely accompany you home; for when you leave the sea, I go too."

"Home, home!" cried Elizabeth, with an unutterable look of anguish. "Little it is of a home we have now, my poor Flora and I."

"Then we will all three make one together," answered Hervey, astonished at his own audacity. "So now I will go and arrange everything for our journey."

When Hervey was gone, Elizabeth once more rested on the sofa, with the listless aspect of one whose powers of endurance have been cruelly overtaxed. The beautiful glow of health and vivaciousness had vanished; yet the high spirited girl was suffering from no bodily weariness, only a mental shock had wrought the change.

As she lay thus passive amid so many claims upon her time and attention, something like a smile lighted up her pale face. Yes, Hervey's honest declaration was a ray of sunshine in the gloom! Flora, the bride of an honorable English gentleman—in Flora the family fortunes edified, the family honor vindicated. This seemed indeed cheering to think of. Elizabeth was leaving Arthur, perhaps without a word of farewell, but the prospect hardly dismayed, much less grieved her just now. Concerning her own future she could not speculate. Only to place the sea between her and this love-like hate, the clinging misery, the shadow from which there seemed no escape!

## CHAPTER XX.

### IN COUNCIL.

ARTHUR was quietly sketching from his chamber-window when Hervey dashed in, after the merest pretense at a knock. The elder brother never went through this formality with his junior; but Arthur was an Etonian while Hervey still wore petticoats, and an as-



sumption of superiority had still been kept up in little things. Arthur, moreover, earned money. Hervey did not—a quite sufficient reason for any amount of outward respect.

“I fear I am disturbing you,” Hervey began; “but I have something to say. Elizabeth and Flora are going away this afternoon, and I intend to accompany them.”

Arthur looked up quietly from his sketch-book. “I hope you will have a pleasant journey,” was all he said, in the tone Hervey knew so well. His motives were seen through, and his brother was making merry at his expense. Hervey waited for a moment to see what else Arthur would say, but Arthur’s mood seemed uncommonly curt just then.

“The steamer starts at three o’clock,” began Hervey, not easily to be checked or put out of countenance.

“A very convenient hour. You will have time for the *table d’hôte* dinner,” was the reply.

“I do not think Flora and her sister will dine at the hotel to-day; they have much to do and to think of at the last moment.”

“Naturally,” Arthur made answer, while he carelessly plied his paint-brush.

No surprise, no inquiry concerning such precipitate departure? Hervey could not in the least account for this provoking behavior on Arthur’s part; he must feel curiosity in any matter that regarded Elizabeth. Not to believe so was in thought to insult his own brother. Had not Arthur devoted himself to Elizabeth, during these past weeks, almost as exclusively as he had been devoted to Flora? And Arthur might be many things Hervey did not yet expect. He could never be mean, above all, to a woman.

“We are not coming back to the island,” he said at last, thinking that this speech must elicit one in return. Arthur merely made answer, as he held up his drawing to the light,

“It would hardly be worth while.”

This was too much. Hervey almost glared at his brother as he blurted forth,

“I may as well tell you that I am going to marry Flora.”

“Now, really, Hervey.”

Arthur at last put down his sketch-book, good-naturedly resigning himself to a spoiled morning, perhaps a spoiled subject.

“Now, really.”

“I shall write for the newspapers,” Hervey began, stoutly and apologetically; “and you know that German notions are very different to English ones. Flora will cheerfully keep house on less money than an English girl would spend on æsthetics.”

“You won’t have much of a margin for æsthetics, certainly,” the elder brother said, lazily ironic. “Tell me, now, have you a hundred pounds in the bank?”

The culprit had not a word to say.

“We can live in lodgings for the first year or two,” he said at last.

“Of course I have nothing to say in the matter—nothing whatever,” Arthur went on. “I am not sure that a struggling life would do you any harm for a time, and money is to be made by the newspapers. But—” and here he leaned back in his chair and quiet-



ly eyed his brother—"but, Hervey, marriage is not a luxury to be purchased *au prix fixe*. Have you thought of that? The man who marries, goes to sea without a compass. One year's expense is no sort of guide for that of the next. I should not like to have you blow your brains out because the butcher had dunned you for his bill."

Hervey laughed. Arthur had taken the matter so much more agreeably than he expected.

"We should probably live in the country. There are places even in England, charming too, where people can live upon next to nothing."

"How about the newspapers? If you mean to give up London there is no help for you but to turn curate. Any jackanapes can preach a sermon."

Again Hervey laughed in the best possible humor. He was so boyishly, naïvely happy that Arthur might make what fun of him he would.

"Well," he said, with the consciousness of a wise utterance, "fortunately newspapers no more than pulpits require Aristotles. The business of the world is, for the most part, done by nobodies like myself."

"On my word, you are becoming quite witty! I think I must fall in love too," Arthur made answer; and what with his brother's genial mood and his own exhilaration Hervey could not for the life of him keep back a speech that spoiled all—the first impertinent speech he had made to his senior in his life.

"I suppose you are going to marry Elizabeth?" he said, looking straight into the other's face. The words were no sooner out than Hervey saw how deeply they were resented. Intense annoyance was written on Arthur's pleasant face. He took up his sketch-book and fiercely plied the discarded brush.

"You suppose! You suppose! How can I help what you suppose? Be as suppositive as you please. Are we bound to make good every fool's suppositions?"

"You are complimentary this morning," Hervey said, with unassailable good-humor, trying to laugh away his blunder.

"Do let us have done with personalities. We might all have the temper of angels but for personalities," Arthur answered, returning to the aggressive words, as if one buffet had not laid them low enough. "Personalities strip off the last rag of civilization, and take us back to the deluge"

Hervey stood by the door, willing enough to cut short this unpromising talk, but was too disturbed to go away without eliciting a word of explanation. Arthur could not look upon the intercourse of the past three weeks as a mere midsummer flirtation—such Elizabeth certainly did not regard it.

"One can but put two and two together," he said, pleasantly, hoping thus to make all things smooth.

"Of course everybody has a perfect right to put two and two together," Arthur retorted, savagely, "but for Heaven's sake keep the application of your mental arithmetic to your own affairs."

Hervey yet lingered irresolute. The bare notion of a misunderstanding with his brother was hateful to him; the pair had never



quarreled in their lives. But zeal on behalf of his future sister-in-law led him into the committal of one blunder more.

"I could not help believing that you and Elizabeth understood each other," he stammered forth.

That speech was the unluckiest Hervey had made during the entire conversation. Arthur was now really angry, for if his brother's words meant anything at all, they indicated the kind of reproach most stinging to a proud man. Hervey, then, and if Hervey, why not every soul here, had watched his behavior toward Elizabeth, and had come to the conclusion that it was of a compromising nature. He saw also himself brought to the bar of public opinion, his actions common property, the arrangement of his future life no longer a matter of individual concernment. And the worst of this odious position was that his own brother, his junior, was sitting in judgment against him. He cut short the confabulation with an epigram that made poor Hervey feel how painful these relations had, on a sudden, become. "If everybody could help believing that he understood his neighbor's affairs, the world would be a tolerable place," he said, and bent his head over his drawing, evidently determined to say no more.

"I had better go and finish my packing," Hervey made quiet answer; then he went to his own room, feeling bitter enough. They should meet at dinner. Arthur would be on the landing-place to take courteous leave; there would be no visible estrangement. But for a long time to come their intercourse was spoiled. The coming separation gave an intense feeling of relief, and to Hervey's boyish, affectionate nature, the sense of Flora's nearness came as a sweet consolation. He had at least one friend to confide in, one person in the world who would never silence him with an epigram.

The cause of this embittered feeling troubled Hervey most of all, for he must now believe that Elizabeth's fascination over Arthur had been transitory only, a mere summer sentiment destined to pass away with its roses and zephyrs. Elizabeth was as unapproachable as Arthur. To Flora and himself she would never, he felt sure, open her lips on this subject. Arthur's want of depth, want of loyalty even, would be locked within her own breast, and no one would ever learn what a reality had passed between them. It was characteristic of Hervey, as it is of most mortal kind, that he was lamenting a brother's lapse purely hypothetical. Like many another, Arthur Venning was being blamed merely for not doing the thing the world expected him to do, so lamentably most of us forget that the exercise of judgment is a matter of accurately weighing or casting up. Leave out a thimbleful or a fraction, and what will our reckoning be worth?

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## CHAPTER XXI.

### TILL WE MEET AGAIN!

HERVEY was right so far. Arthur had too much self-command and self-respect to betray his ruffled humor, and even toward himself at the dinner-table he showed no acerbity. He was cold and taciturn; that was all.



But on the landing-place he felt bound to be friendly; and if his face were less animated and his voice less genial than usual, at least neither Elizabeth nor Flora could have guessed what had taken place between the brothers.

“You have indeed taken us all by surprise,” he said, pleasantly, as all stood on the little wooden landing-place, surrounded by acquaintances. “The summer will last yet a few weeks longer.”

Elizabeth colored painfully.

“We had no idea of leaving so soon till yesterday,” she answered; “but it must be.”

“This is not a farewell,” Arthur answered, in the same cheery, every-day voice. “Who could help coming a second time to our island? and if not here, we are sure to meet elsewhere. Rhineland, Goetheland, the Black Forest—is not each a second England at certain seasons of the year?”

“And our island friends will ever be welcome to Bremen,” Elizabeth said, glancing from Arthur to others standing near. The girl was strangely animated, almost excited, evidently thankful to go, yet—could it be otherwise?—almost heart-broken at the interruption of a summer holiday.

“Then it is understood. We are to meet at Bremen?” Arthur added, perhaps with hidden meaning, intended for Elizabeth’s ears only. “Bremen, at least, is accessible all the year round.”

“Oh, do not reproach this sweet place!” cried Elizabeth. “If the summer here is shorter than anywhere in the wide world, is it not by compensation sweeter?”

“That I admit unreservedly,” Arthur made gallant reply; he was talking not only to Elizabeth, but to twenty, and Hervey was standing close by.

Exerting himself to be off-hand yet friendly, perhaps all the time feeling that Elizabeth took in a deeper meaning, he added, “There can surely be but one island and one summer in our recollections, henceforth and forever.” The final signal for embarking was now given, and the boat waited to take Hervey and his charge alongside. Amid the general leave-taking, the brothers shook hands after frigid English fashion.

“What shall I do with your letters?” asked Arthur.

“Keep them till I write from Bremen, if you please,” was the equally cold retort.

Hervey saw with what difficulty Elizabeth maintained self-composure at the last. Yes, his mind was made up. His elder brother was behaving heartlessly to this sweet girl. She could never, never be the Elizabeth of old, and all through fault of his!

“Well, I suppose you will turn up in Cheyne Walk some time or other,” Arthur said, as Hervey settled himself in the boat.

“I suppose so,” was all the other said.

The stalwart boatmen now put their hands rhythmically to the rowlock, the pellucid waves showed crisp white curls, the upturned faces of the passengers stood out between bright sea and sky in strong relief, and the boat moved off amid waving of handkerchiefs and a chorus of German voices:

“Auf weidersehen! Auf weidersehen!”  
(Till we meet again! Till we meet again!)



Arthur lingered on the little wooden landing-place till the empty boats had returned and the steamer was fairly on its way, then he went back to his quarters with a feeling of mingled self-reproach and relief. He had sedulously avoided making acquaintance on the island, and now derived inexpressible satisfaction from the fact of being alone. None to pry into his motives, none to comment on his doings. He was as sorry as he could be to have hurt Hervey's feelings, but why would he meddle with things that did not concern him? And with affairs, above all others, which concerned a man's self alone! For criticism in general Arthur cared not a straw. People might say what they chose about his writings, his sketches, his manner of life, himself; but to be criticised in the matter of liking and sentiment, in the matter of feeling for a woman, that was past all endurance. Hervey ought to have shown more reticence, more delicacy, at any rate more knowledge of the world. Well, the sea now separated them, and by the time they should meet again all soreness would be healed. Hervey might commit this romantic piece of folly if he chose, and take to himself a portionless bride ere he had set to work in right good earnest to win his bread. It would be his own part as elder brother to help him all he could; certainly no word of reproach should ever pass his lips. He might do so much worse than marry a simple German girl who would make her own gowns, and not require half her husband's income for the pursuit of æsthetics! This pretty little Flora would make a very safe sister-in-law indeed, and safety is the first virtue to be sought in relations. With a certain sense of relief, also, he thought of his own affairs; all was now crystal clear between Elizabeth and himself. Scripture was no plainer than her downright utterances of two days ago. She liked him; he was her friend; but her heart was not free to love. Another feeling, all bitterness, which yet he must believe had been joy unalloyed once, shut out others for a time. She could but shake off this sorrow before looking hopefully forward. He was bound to accept her decision, which lent itself to no misinterpretation. For a time, a period to which she had put no limits, they were to be friends and nothing more. In other words, both were absolutely free. But for Elizabeth's passionate confessions of the other day, Arthur must have determined upon a wholly different line of conduct. He was a scrupulously honorable man; the notion of behaving meanly to a woman was as odious to him as that of criminal dishonesty in affairs of business. He had made love to Elizabeth; but for her naïve outpouring he should have followed Hervey's example; no other course would have occurred to him, although—

That unwelcome "although!" how many a man has found himself in Arthur's dilemma, falling in love twice and the second time too soon! How many a man, rather than behave unhandsomely to a sentimental girl, has straightway pledged himself to a thankless bond, an affection that is but duty! and for life long! There was no fickleness in Arthur's disposition; he was loyalty itself. But the image of Elizabeth had straightway been eclipsed by one infinitely lovelier, and yet, in some strange way, recalling her own. There were glances, smiles, and aspects of this sweet Elizabeth that recalled a dozen times a day this dazzling creature whose sister she might well be. If inconstancy were here, Elizabeth must surely



pardon it, since in adoring this stranger he seemed to adore her second self. Arthur, therefore, in these first moments of a mood that approached exultation, was alive to the precise prosaic state of affairs. Elizabeth had refused, or at least silenced him. Elizabeth was gone, and he felt glad. Glad for two reasons: first of all because he could not bear the thought of forcing on her acceptance an affection charged with a heavy lien, and secondly, because he was, in sooth, bound hand and foot by another fancy. He had loved Elizabeth as fondly as an honest man can love a sweet girl, till just two weeks ago; since that time he had learned the meaning of a stronger word; he could now understand the desperate scot men pay to passion. It was therefore with a glad sense of disentanglement and relief that he saw the last puff of smoke fade from view, and returned to betake himself to his usual pursuits. Few Englishmen but rejoice at some time or other in the feeling of utter isolation; we like to be in a place where we may be married, or, for the matter-of-fact, buried without causing an approach to a flutter. This kind of exaggerated reaction against personal vanity it is that impels men to abandon hearth and duty for the mere sake of escaping identity; fleeing from the self so terrible when reflected in the opinion of one's neighbors!

Arthur was far from carrying his feelings to such a pitch, but he did now revel in this utter remoteness from the world that knew him. For a short space he was to be ignored by society and his friends—as completely shut from view as a reckless iceman blocked up in north seas. He knew for a certainty that there was no countryman or countrywoman of his on this island. In another week or two the German holiday-makers would begin to cross the sea. If he stayed a month the chances were that he should have his little Paradise to himself—and one other!

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### FIRST DAYS OF WAITING.

ARTHUR had not made up his mind to sit down and wait for such windfalls as chance might bring. Yet what may chance count for in a life that is life indeed? We play with words as we will. The thing called Destiny is the shape into which a commanding spirit throws its existence.

He felt how frail was the tenure linking him to the ideal. Nothing in the wide world interested him now but the loneliness and the sorrow that already seemed remote and unreal as the things beheld in a dream. He dared hardly hope for a fulfillment of the lady's promise. Obstacles would be put in her way, or at the last she might be overtaken by timidity, and would shrink from confiding even in the word of an honest man, the honor of an Englishman. The more he pondered, the more he felt that this moving adventure was drifting from him and receding into the dim tracks of memory. It was for him to make illusions tangible, to translate phantoms into the living reality. Yes, he could, he must see her again. Come what might, he would here bend circumstance to his will.



There was time enough to deliberate upon the best mode of effecting his purpose, and solitude is very favorable to the forming of plans: none of us, perhaps, are sufficiently alone. If the time spent in listening to opinions we do not intend to take, were devoted to a close scrutiny of the matter in hand, how much more expeditiously the business of life would be got through! In affairs of individual concern, each must be his own Nestor. August was but half out, and not till September could his beautiful protégée be free; so at least she had said during their last interview. There was no need, then, for precipitate action on his part. For another week or two he could afford to dawdle deliciously as before: sketch, make little cruises, or excursions on foot, do the hundred and one things flirtation had prevented him from doing hitherto. Arthur was thorough in the least little thing. In spite of the new impressions and emotions mastering him, he determined to carry out his original plan, and explore this wonderful island from end to end before going back to England. So, next day, as the weather was superlatively fine, he set off for the one spot that had fascinated him most of all, the Black Lake—that lovely little sheet of water in the heart of the forest, so silvery bright in mid-day sunshine, so purplely dark under a sunless heaven when the limpid water reflected the dense beechen shadow as in a mirror.

This legendary place had singularly attracted him from the first, and as yet he had not been able to enjoy it alone. Instead of making the climb through the forest, a glorious three hours' walk, he now engaged a skiff to take him round the foreland, thus reaching the lake from above. Nothing could be more fairy-like than this cruise of an hour in glassy waters, close under the cliffs and hanging-gardens of the forest. The silveriness of these natural parapets, the rich foliage mantling many a scarp, the rare purity and pearliness of sea and sky, made up an ineffable whole. Such a day and such a scene could but move Arthur Venning, whose appreciation of certain delicate phases of Nature and Art almost approached an extra sense. As yet these subtler impressions had not touched the inner life of feeling and emotion, but he was now in the mood when the ideal, the poetic, the best that is in man or woman, asserts itself. He felt, moreover, those secret promptings, those welcome yet disturbing prophecies of the new, fuller, deeper existence that had hitherto been only the unspoken spiritual, or at least intellectual part of him—noble aspirations, soul-reaching whispers, and trumpet calls, solemn claims and admonitions. What generous mind that lends itself to the guidance of the poet, the philosopher, the artist, is insensible to these? But when the voice heard is that of the man's own soul speaking to himself, ah! then, the purpose of his being is already half fulfilled. He can rest content with commonness never any more. Far from resisting the influences at work both within and without Arthur yielded to them. It was the first time that deepest feeling, the second intenser self that makes us what we are, had made itself audible. He hearkened, readier to obey than to parley, much less hold back. By some rare chance, nothing occurred to jar his mood. When he quitted the boat, knapsack on shoulder, and had climbed to the top of the wooded foreland, he found the place comparatively deserted. A fortnight ago the chalet



gardens were animated as by a bivouacking army—not a bed to be had for love or money; not a cup of coffee, except after an hour's waiting; every rustic bench occupied; host, neat-handed Phyllises, and waiters blowsed with running. To-day a few stragglers disported themselves under the trees, one or two carry-alls full of excursionists drove up just as Arthur arrived, but it was evident that the tourist season was already on the wane. Truth to tell, a late spell of bad weather had driven away numbers, and September being at hand, not many were venturesome enough to come. In this pleasant chalet, thus nestled amid ancient beechen trees, Arthur took up his quarters to nurse his dreams and build his air-castles. Never was a spot more in keeping with those visions and reveries that seem so unsubstantial and phantasmal a man cannot choose but keep to himself. From this eyry, perched midway between sea and sky, he might drop a pebble into the glassy waters hundreds of feet below, or on the other side, by delicious woodland ways, get down to the little lake imbosomed in the very heart of the forest.

Brooding stillness, mystery, enchantment, everywhere. All kinds of legends and historic myths, the earliest in this part of Christendom, were associated with this little tarn, so magically lovely in the broad light of a summer day, so eerie and fraught with mysterious gloom under a clouded heaven or pale, sublunar radiance. Stage upon stage, spur upon spur, the dense beechen forest encircled it with a green wall, shutting out all but the meridian sun. The water-lilies needed no more; and wonderful was it to see them, their mimic constellations in a fairy firmament. There was all the charm of contrast here, yet a feeling of congruity. But for these globes, pure as ivory, bright as gold gleaming out of the dark, the place would have been too weird, too uncanny for mortal eyes to gaze on with pleasure. The water-lilies irradiated the lake, broke it up into a thousand smiles, laughed away for the nonce the significant awfulness of its very name!

“I will make a drawing here,” Arthur said, “and perhaps by the time it is done I may hit upon an expedient.”

In other words, he wanted to devise some way of communicating with the lady of the flowers. He knew that his letters would follow him safely enough to this remote spot—when did a letter go astray in the well-drilled German Empire? But he did not feel at all sure that the one letter he now waited for would ever be written! Not one but a thousand things might stand in the way, so hard is it for those who have once tasted despair to make an effort on behalf of happiness. He could not have misread those wistful eyes. She had drained the bitter chalice, and when the time for resolve should come, was as likely to yield to what would wear the shape of implacable destiny as to flee toward deliverance; but she should be rescued, and by him. He had made up his mind so far with very little trouble; how to effect his purpose was a matter requiring much more deliberation.

The month of September, so eagerly looked for, had come at last. Arthur might now fairly expect a sign, or use such expedient as he should hit upon. Nor was there any time to lose. September has but thirty days, and the island was oftentimes cut off from all communication with the mainland in October, so at least folks said.



To wait on a fair Eden islanded from the vulgar world for a mirage was all very well. To be ice-bound in these northern seas, in the company of a few fishers, made him already shiver to think of it, especially when the wind bellowed from all quarters, and a swirling rain darkened the heavens and deluged the land. Several days of such weather were now his portion in the chalet above the Black Lake: but with half a dozen sketches to finish, a volume or two of George Sand, and all kinds of bright, audacious hopes within his breast, he found such imprisonment delightful. Seven months of it might not pass so quickly.

On a sudden, however, the storm vanished as some energumen miraculously driven out, and this forest would become a perfect place. Arthur hardly gave himself time to drink in the unspeakable deliciousness of these first golden days of autumn, so busy was his mind now with the problem that must be solved soon or never.

Not an expedient, not a shift escaped his alert mind, and he thought he had at last hit upon a safe means of communicating with the beautiful prisoner when his wishes were brought about in a wholly unlooked-for-manner.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

### SPELLBOUND.

WHEN, indeed, did the thing we live for come to pass after expected fashion? He was planning the day's business over his early cup of coffee when a servant knocked at the door with a hurried message.

"A lady who had arrived late last evening and was about to continue her journey at once," he said, "wanted to consult the English gentleman as to the best means of getting to London. Would the Herr speak to her for five minutes?"

"Certainly," was Arthur's prompt reply, as he rose to follow the lad.

A moment before, his mind had been occupied with a sketch he wanted to finish that morning. Wholly thrown off his guard by the matter-of-fact summons, he was now prepared to meet some country woman, some intrepid, cheery spinster returning from a solitary trip to Iceland, perhaps even some stray acquaintance, since he knew how many women, and each and all indefatigable travelers! The one woman who had entirely engrossed his thoughts during the past three weeks—whose future had been such a matter of delicious concernment to him—strange that for the moment she should be utterly forgotten!

Great, then, was his astonishment to find himself, without any warning, in her presence, suddenly brought face to face with her as with any ordinary human being. The situation had evidently changed; that he saw at a glance. There was no more need for mystery and disguise. She was free to confer with him, to make her plans, to go whither she would. There were travelers' belongings scattered about the room—a reticule with silver clasps here, a bundle of plaids there—and as she sat in hat and cloak, ready for



immediate departure, she was busily turning over the pages of a guide-book.

Taken aback as he was, Arthur could but note how beautifully these things became her—the black felt hat, with its broad brim, simple and dignified as in an old picture; the plain, black silk pelisse, bordered with dark fur, making graceful lines. She was very pale, but the expression of listless resignation, almost of passive despair, had given way to a look of proud, passionate self-assertion. Weakness had never been stamped on that rare physiognomy, rather a disdainfulness of suffering for suffering's sake—a challenge of relentless fate to do its very worst. Now the woman predominated over the victim, the haughty spirit over the outraged heart. The crisis she had passed through had left her at least mistress of herself.

“I have made up my mind to go at once to your country,” she said, with a steady, downright look, and an unfaltering voice.

Arthur was for the first time realizing the sweetness of her voice.

“Can you think of some good woman who will give me shelter while I seek how best to gain my bread?”

“That I readily undertake to do,” Arthur answered, straightway producing his pocket-book. “But you look much too wearied to undertake such a journey immediately; rest at least one day.”

There was something about Arthur Venning to inspire confidence under any circumstances—the easy initiative of the well-bred man, the pleasantness and *savoir faire* of the man of the world; lastly, the alertness to help those weaker than himself, which is the next best thing to downright heroism. And just such ready help and confident counsel she stood in need of, her look said, so wistful yet so deprecatory of anything approaching to officiousness or sentiment, so full of appeal to all that was single-minded and noble in this new friend.

“I could stay a little; I am free to go or come,” she answered, hesitatingly. Then, as if determined that he should understand her position: “If I have not a friend in the world, at least I have hardly an enemy.”

“Be guided by me, then, and take a little rest; we will consult together as to your journey and your prospects in England. And do not call yourself friendless; in accepting my help you make me your friend.”

She glanced at him with a look of inquiry. It occurred to her on a sudden that this kindly, delicate-minded young Englishman had a wife—was already the head of a family. By virtue of such a position, he now assumed this air of almost brotherly protectiveness. Arthur made haste to explain himself.

“Those who travel much,” he said, in the same easy, agreeable voice, “can seldom make a journey without being able to render a little service to somebody; and such chance-made acquaintances may well ripen into friendship. Your country-people, indeed, have coined a word for this pleasant relationship, *Reise-behaunschaf*—traveling friendship.”

“It is kind of you to take so much trouble about me. I will not prove ungrateful,” she answered, smiling sadly. “I have a good



voice. When your friends get up concerts for charitable purposes, I will sing for them."

"Endowed with a fine voice, your way in my country will be easy indeed," Arthur said, eagerly. "There is no gift more appreciated."

She looked round the room, and her eyes lighted on a piano.

"I will try to summon up courage, and let you judge of my singing. It used to be much admired," she said. "And I should be glad to earn money. I want it, not for myself, but for others."

"I should, of course, have an opportunity of appraising your talents before I recommend them to strangers. By all means let me hear you sing, by-and-by. First let us plan your journey."

He straightway wrote a short letter introductory to his old acquaintance, the music-mistress, and handed it to her with his own card.

"You will be in good hands, at any rate, for a time," he said, "and on my return to London I am sure of being able to find you pupils. There are really no difficulties to appall you. Now for your route."

She handed him the guide-book, and he penciled an itinerary on the fly-leaf, carefully adding a note or two that might be useful in case of need—the name of a friendly English banker at Hamburg, who was begged to render any service the bearer might require; the address of a kind landlady at another stage of the journey; finally, in the most considerate and delicate way possible, he threw out a hint as to the expense. Was she amply provided with money? Had she not better take an English bank-note or two for use on first arrival? It would be so easily repaid after his return. And when his mind had been set at ease on that score, and every detail of the journey gone into, conversation took another turn. Mention of a certain artistic city she was to pass through led to the discussion of a work of art with which it had been recently enriched. For a few minutes the pair forgot everything else in their artistic enthusiasm. How can a single sentence reveal the intellect that makes the man or woman what they are! The few eager utterances Arthur now heard indicated to him that insight into art as rare as the creative faculty itself. He hearkened to one who regarded art as no bright envelope thrown over sordid human existence, rather a transformation of existence itself, rendering splendid and pure what was otherwise circumscribed and mean. This little digression, brought about by mention of a newly disinterred Greek statue, smoothed matters wonderfully. Arthur felt as much at ease now as if he were discussing Wagner or Rossetti with some intimate woman-friend wearing the last æsthetic costume over five-o'clock tea in Belgravia. But he heard no woman in Belgravia, indeed in all the world, at all to be compared to this one. There was a distinction combined with the most entire simplicity, naïve yet passionate eagerness about things intellectual, a whole-heartedness and transparency, quite apart from the well-trained and perhaps slightly artificial culture of the women he made friends of in London circles. Then the matchless voice! Rich, sweet, pathetic, and dissimilarly toned, it might almost have consoled the blind for the face they could not see. They



had talked thus for half an hour when she said, cheerfully, putting off her hat and cloak.

"I think I could sing to you now, I am so happy at the prospect of earning money in rich, generous England."

She sat down to the piano, and played the opening phrases of a well-known accompaniment to one of Beethoven's famous songs, with easy, well-reined-in fervor. The born musician straightway proclaimed herself; not a trace of effort, not a strained accentuation, yet nothing slurred over that the composer intended to be there. So far the performance was flawless. Arthur's trained ear and true feeling for music generally were to be much further gratified. No sooner did the sweet, strong, passionate voice fill the place than everything else in the wide world seemed dwarfed and dwindled to nothingness. As much of existence as has deepest meaning was now made vocal in a song—a song, moreover, that seemed made for this especial voice, although it had been sung by every cantatrice of European celebrity. And for a brief spell the rapturous consciousness of power exhilarated the singer, translated the stricken woman into a wild, gladsome spirit. The lendings of personality and circumstance dropped off. She was no longer herself, but something brighter, more felicitous; something that had no taint of mortality or earth about it; something she would fain, escaping bodily incumbrance, remain forever.

But the spell worked not long. A skylark's exuberant carol is not sooner hushed near the fallow than this exuberant mood passed away. The voice faltered, the trembling fingers slid from the keys. She quitted the piano, and hid her face in her hands.

"Old memories came back to me," she murmured. "'Tis a song my father loved—"

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

### LOVE.

ARTHUR let her weep a little, yet lingered, offering a stray word or two of encouragement. In England, he said, there would be less to remind her of the past. The bustle and animation of London were the best possible medicine for a mind given overmuch to retrospection. And we must all take heart, he added. As for her singing, it was of a kind that needed no praise. On the score of making her way, then, she need have no uneasiness.

"You are very kind," she answered, having quickly dried her tears, "and there are kind people everywhere. It is foolish of me to dread the future."

"Nor need you dread the journey either," Arthur said, kindly. "My friend will meet you on arriving in London. Everything shall be made as easy as possible."

Still, seeing a look of hesitancy and reluctance in her face, he went on:

"I shall leave this island myself soon. I may even overtake you on the road, and be able to help you through the most troublesome stage of your journey." Then, growing painfully eager, he said,



“Anyhow, we shall meet in October. I must be back by that time.”

Still the same look of misgiving, the same silence. Was she beginning to distrust him also, to see, in his alacrity to help, a less welcome motive than common charity? Was she on the verge of dreading his very chivalrousness, his devotion? Such a thought was not to be entertained for a moment. Throughout this interview he had been exercising self-mastery, determined in the least little thing to betray no other motive but prosaic wayside benevolence. Even with regard to her singing he had kept back any approach to warm admiration. For a time, at least, she must see in him an ordinary well-doer, nothing more.

But when he saw her overcome, as he thought, by a sense of dire forlornness, sad and helpless in her matchless beauty as any common woman, he was momentarily thrown off his guard. The impulse to console became irresistible.

“If you really feel timid about this undertaking, I will precipitate my own departure on purpose to escort you,” he said.

That was his first blunder. To English and American ears such a proposal might seem free from forwardness, much less impertinence. Arthur forgot that he was addressing no confident, much traveled countrywoman, no fair free-and easy Yankee, equally ready to take him in hand. He was speaking to a German girl, imbued with very different notions from her cradle upward, and who, under any circumstances, would have resented an initiative of this kind. But it was not an apparent violation of social etiquette that now made his listener's pale cheeks glow and eyes flash. Rendered morbidly alive to anything that should wear the look of disrespect or slight, she had no word to say; too sad, too dejected for scorn, she heard him out.

In his intense anxiety to soothe and cheer her, he also entirely misread his companion's mood, wrongly interpreting the pensive questioning, the passiveness, the almost agonized look of doubt. So he blundered on from bad to worse.

“I must soon be returning, anyhow,” he went on. “Why should I not render you such small service?”

Then, beguiled by the changing expressions of the face he had been studying as in a picture, desperately fascinated by her beauty, and unmindful of all the collectedness and reserve he had imposed on himself, he added, in a voice shaken with eagerness,

“Accord me the right to protect you.”

The words were hardly out of his lips when he realized how utterly they were misread. He would never forget that look as long as he lived. Till a moment before, she had smiled upon him out of very gratitude and fullness of heart; smiled upon him as if he had been kinder and better than mere mortal—almost akin to the angels in his tenderness and pity.

Now she turned away as from some vile thing—the bitterest enemy a forlorn creature could have. The trembling lips moved, but no utterance came; and well was it for Arthur that she did not utter the word he might have found hard to forgive, that, certes, she could never have forgiven herself.

She was leaving him thus, not contempt alone but despair written



in her face—a despair new since yesterday—when Arthur proudly, even scornfully, finished his sentence.

“Be my wife,” he said.

The unspoken abhorrence and deprecatory look did not vanish all at once; first, doubt gradually made its appearance in their place; next a feeling of bewilderment: last came sweet, ineffable assurance. She sat down, trembling from head to foot.

“Would you marry me—a fallen thing?” at last she said, in a low voice. “May one man’s generosity attain the measure of another’s meanness?”

Said Arthur, stoutly,

“There is a church on this island, and a wedding ring can cross the sea. As I stand before Heaven, I am ready to make you my wife, now and here.”

“Why would you marry me?” she asked, in the same sweet, plaintive tone. “Can it be my poor beauty or my misfortunes? Is it admiration that moves you or sweet pity?”

Again Arthur spoke out with manful fervor,

“Does an honest man marry a woman for any reason but one? I would make you my wife because I love you.”

“Oh!” she cried, “do not let us use that word. In my ears it has a baneful sound. There must be a better feeling than love born of compassion like yours, such gratitude as mine!”

“What matters the word?” retorted Arthur, at every step put on the defensive. “A man can but honor a woman in one way, be it admiration, pity, what you will, that prompts him.” Then he held out his hand and repeated the words,

“Let me make you my wife, on this island and as soon as may be.”

A light came into her beautiful eyes: first of sad retrospection, then of joyful looking forward. Gradually sorrow seemed to drop from her as a garment, and hope was there to take its place, radiant yet subdued, beautifying, past power of words to describe; but for a while the tears lingered as rain-drops on a flower opening to the sunshine after a storm.

“My mother died of a broken heart; my father is mad in the spittal, and all through me,” she murmured. “I cannot bring her back again, but I think if I went to my father with a brave man by my side, and showed him my wedding-ring, he might understand. His reason would perhaps come back again! Who knows? Heaven is very merciful.”

Then she wiped away her tears, and went on in the same soft, pathetic voice:

“What joy that would be! For madness is worse than death. The dead are at rest, but my poor father never ceases to grieve for his lost daughter, his pride, his darling. Sometimes he curses me with fearful ravings, they say, and sometimes he cries like a child, reproaching me pitifully and tenderly. And my dear, dear sisters, homeless, looked down upon, what joy for them to have me back again! for the wedding-ring will make all things right,” she said, between laughing and crying, and kissing the hand that clasped her own. “Who will dare to flout the Englishman’s wife?”



Arthur smiled proudly and approvingly. Who indeed? his face said.

“Is it not wonderful to think of the good one human being can do another?” she went on, in a voice tremulous with emotion. “You have crossed my path to save me from despair and be my guardian angel, but the good will not stop there. Is not all doing good since Christ set the example a kind of expiation, an atonement for the sins of others? You will hold me all the dearer for having so befriended me, and will be better and happier too. Oh!” she cried, with sudden light beaming from the beautiful eyes, “if to do wrong is such darkness and woe, what must the brightness and joy of conscious rectitude be like?”

“Nay,” said Arthur, in quite a humble yet aggrieved voice, “you set me up too high. I ask you to marry me because you are the first woman I have seen I would fain make my wife. For Heaven’s sake do not talk of befriending and well-doing; the words do not apply.”

“But,” she went on, determined to make him see her meaning, “you may be more generous than you know; you may have mistaken pity for love. Anyhow, the best of all joys, the joy of others which is one’s own giving, will be yours, and you will at last understand what I mean when I speak of a better feeling than love. Those who love each other in the common way have nothing to forgive, nothing to be thankful for. Should I let you so bind yourself, unless I trusted you as you must trust yourself? You would not behave magnanimously now unless you were sure of being able to behave so always. You would never reproach me by word, look, or deed, I know. And the best, deepest feeling a woman can bestow shall be yours. My affection for you shall be that of mother, sister, wife, in one.”

Then she added again, ready to break into tears, “You will take me to my old home, will you not? Oh, to see my sisters! To have them love me as of old; and if God sees fit to restore my father to reason, to hear him bless me and call me his child, his own Eva once more. No, it is too much joy; it can never, never be.”

Arthur soothed her, lover-like, before going away. Better for both, he said, to be alone awhile. Later he would take her for a little walk in the forest; if not they should see each other next day and the next.

“And the next,” he added, confidently. “It must be as I say.”

He left her outwardly calm and unmoved, and went about the day’s business as usual.

An Englishman makes war or love, ruin overtakes him, or Fortune’s choicest gifts are poured into his lap, but the gaping world is none the wiser. He suddenly finds himself a millionaire, a hero, a ruined man, or an accepted lover, and straightway stolidly orders his dinner.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## RETROSPECTIVE.

“AND now,” said Eva, “you shall have my story.”

They had sauntered down to the marge of the lake, warm light cradling them softly, none but themselves denizens of this golden world. Hardly a scene for tales of tears and passion, yet in spite of the ineffable peace and loveliness, the deep, dark waves on which lay the golden water-lilies might symbolize the hidden mystery and despair underlying human life, brightened by the mercy of Heaven with fair hopes.

They sat down on the skirts of the wood, both under the spell of the strange sweetness and solitude. It seemed, in their first transport of sympathy and understanding, as if they hardly needed explanation. Heart had already spoken to heart, soul to soul. Words could hardly make things clearer, yet Eva was fain to tell all now. Her pent-up confidences and secret thoughts long kept in check must find utterance at last. He held his peace. What will not a rare woman hazard in order to escape inadequate existence? Unkindness may be endured even by those possessed of little patience; laborious, nay, loveless days made light of. But when the inner life which is light indeed, lacks space and nutriment, when the soul is penned up between prison walls, an ardent nature can endure it no longer, and freedom is purchased at desperate cost.

Eva's story was much of the kind Arthur Venning had looked for. This brilliant girl had been the victim of her own intellectual aspirations, and of another's subtle influences for ill, surely of evil chance also. In her case it seemed admissible to talk of fate and destiny, so implicitly were the toils of both woven about her feet.

A small official, living in a remote little Residency or ducal capital, had three daughters, the two younger of whom promised to be paragons, but cast into the shadow by the attractions of their elder sister. On her, indeed, nature had lavished such bounties as might promise a matchless fortune—beauty, stateliness, *esprit*, a voice of uncommon richness, also artistic aptitude quite out of the ordinary way. And she was ambitious, though what play was there for rare character and parts in the future carved out for her?

Eva and her younger sister must just be trained as school-teachers, and afterward paired off with some estimable pastor, professor, or official. A life that should be her own, the best and fullest expression of herself, in other words, the highest good attainable to human beings, was as remote from her as from some veiled thing called a woman shut up in Eastern seraglio.

“Oh!” cried Eva, passionately, “henceforth women *must* have happier destinies. By virtue of freedom they will at last attain to full mental stature, and will grow strong and wise and happy. For is not injustice, alike in large and small things, at the bottom of most human misery, and what can be more unjust than the distortion of claims into the semblance of a duty? In the pride of my



youth, on the threshold of life, possessed, moreover, as I believed, with a natural gift that might prove a career, I was bidden to marry a man because it was my duty. Yet I blame my parents very little. We were poor; the proposed marriage was a suitable one; why could I not be as easily contented with a humdrum, narrow existence as other girls? They little understood how the notion crushed, almost hardened me. I was to be no longer myself, to give up all that was life indeed, to drag through life at the bidding of others. I began to feel afraid of myself. I had wild thoughts of fleeing, or apprenticing myself to some stage-manager as vocalist, of breaking with my family even. As I sat wrestling with these thoughts, determined to evade the reality they would fain force upon me, yet heart-broken at the notion of causing sorrow to my parents and sisters, an arch-tempter stood before me in the shape of a savior. We were often at court, my second sister and myself, and the prince, who was related to the ducal house, had danced with me once or twice.

“ ‘Dear child,’ he now said—he was older than myself by ten years, and his rank and knowledge of the world permitted this familiarity—‘do not weep any more. You are free, and it is to me you are indebted for your freedom.’

“ I looked up in amazement, and he went on, matter-of-fact, even kindly, yet carefully concealing anything like sentiment.

“ ‘I bring you even better news still. In a week you will be on your way to Italy. The world of art, the musical future you have dreamed of, are to be yours.’

“ Then he went on to explain, still in the same easy, almost indifferent manner, that my kind friends at court had heard rumors of the distastefulness of the marriage proposed to me, and that he had hit upon a plan by which time might be gained and matters smoothed over for all of us. His mother, sister of the reigning duchess, was about to start for Italy, and wanted a young lady as companion—*lectrice* they called it. I was the very person to please her somewhat fastidious tastes. I was to have every facility afforded me for cultivating my voice. The marriage thus postponed need never take place, and I should quit my parents on affectionate terms as if nothing had happened.

“ My poor parents! Not even a brilliant marriage could have made them prouder than prospects like these. I was to see Italy, then the world, and travel from one German court to another. They wept when they parted from me, but it was tears of joy. My sisters looked upon me already as a grand personage, destined to raise the family fortunes. I never saw them again.

Yet, for a time, all went well. The prince was not only my benefactor and kind friend, he was my intellectual guide, my spiritual teacher, nothing more, so at least I blindly believed, and I was too happy, too absorbed in my rich, full art life to suspect the truth. I really liked him. I felt more than grateful to him. He was indeed daily and hourly becoming necessary to me, but I was far from suspecting as yet that his will was to become my destiny.”

She paused for a moment, and added, in a quiet, mysterious voice:

“ For such things must be. Looking back on the past, I can pity myself and forgive. I was no mere weakling, caught in the



grip of an iron purpose, rather a victim who, blindfolded by subtlety and wile, is made to walk blindfolded toward the pitfall. On a sudden the scales fell from my eyes. One morning the prince came to me with a look that revealed all.

“ ‘We are alone,’ he whispered. ‘You must know what I have come to tell you. I have loved you from the first, and you—I think you have learned to love me a little.’

— “I was dumb. Did I ever love this man? I know not; I only know that he influenced me strangely, and that his will seemed to paralyze mine. Intellectually he had already claimed me as his. Ten years older than myself, with a vast knowledge of the world and of art, an unerring critical faculty, moreover, he had, indeed, made me what I was. I owed my real, that is to say, my spiritual and artistic, existence to him. He had found me a curious, ardent girl; he had molded me into the thoughtful woman, the artist. He, the fallen angel, had given me a soul.

“ ‘We are alone. Now, if ever,’ he said. ‘Our fate lies in our hands. The duchess will not return to-day, and her presence is the only barrier to our happiness. Go with me. Become my wife.’

“ ‘What could I do but draw back and tremble?’

“ ‘Listen,’ he cried, ‘my love, my own! My mother has set her mind upon a great marriage for me. The bride is chosen, negotiations are already opened. If I return to Germany free, my destiny is sealed; and does not the same lot await yourself? I plead your cause as well as my own, and more, all that is dear to you—Italy, your art.’ ”

“ ‘A fallen angel, did I say?’ ” reiterated Eva, after a pause. “ ‘Who can aver that he did not then mean fairly by me, and that he had made up his mind to sacrifice worldly prospects for my sake? I believed so then; sometimes I almost believe so still.’ ”

How, indeed, could she help trusting him? Whether for a brief moment he had been worthy of it was a secret locked within his own breast. His studied care for her happiness during many months, his unvarying friendliness and well-reined-in chivalrousness and devotion, above all his solicitude for her future as she would fain shape it for herself—all these things compelled her to regard him as the best, truest friend she had in the world. And what he said was true. In him and him only lay her chances of happiness. That very day she had received a letter from home, urging the claims of her unwelcome suitor; and if not in love with the prince, she was at least drawn to him by a feeling as tenacious—gratitude of the deepest, most ardent kind. So she trusted him, and all things seemed to show that at the moment of making this proposal he had not intended to deceive her, only to keep the marriage secret. At any rate, when they reached the appointed place all things were in readiness according to his promise—ring and book, priest and notary. But at the last moment it was found that, owing to the fact of both bride and bridegroom being aliens, some additional forms must be gone through to make the marriage valid. Married they were, indeed, but it was a marriage not valid in the eyes of the civil law. Then they hurried away to have the necessary formalities gone through, so the prince said, on German soil. But again no



sooner had they crossed the frontier than fresh obstacles presented themselves. The prince was summoned home in consequence of the illness of his uncle, the head of the house. Eva, cut loose from her home, her protectress, could but cling to him and trust him still, awaiting his return to be acknowledged openly as his wife. For his wife she was. Before the altar he had taken her; he declared again and again that he was on the point of keeping his word. Once even a marriage contract, in accordance with the laws of Germany, had been drawn up. She had allowed herself to be brought to this remote island, on the understanding that here at last she was openly to take his name.

Whether or no there was a warring still of good and evil purpose in this worldly heart, whether indeed, but for certain worldly circumstances, he would have made the penniless *bourgeoise* maiden his princess, who shall say? There came at last a day when every vestige of hope was wrested from her. As best he could, with many excuses and apologies, he broke the tidings that, in order to restore his fortunes, he was compelled to marry a rich woman. Financial crises, speculation, evil times had so reduced his income and so hampered his estate that there was nothing left for him to do but this—"or blow his brains out," he added, with a haggard smile.

Then he tried to win her pity, her forgiveness, and used every argument to induce her not to return to her family, but to pursue her artistic career—she owed it to herself, to art.

There was nothing he would not do to further her wishes, he said. Lastly, he told her of all the flattering things that had been said about her fine voice in high places, glowingly painted the future and the fortune in store for her if she would go through a thorough course of training. She might become a prima donna, anything; where was her ambition?

"Ambition," sighed Eva. "My only ambition was to be loved at home once more. That voice of mine! I only valued it for my father's sake; it would console him, I thought; it would win me his forgiveness. But my parents hardened against me; and what wonder? I had broken their hearts. Why did I not tell them all at first? I but mused within the hope of a joy that should make all things right. They were so ambitious for me, so proud of their Eva. Poor father! poor mother! what wonder that the truth was more than you could bear? My father went mad; my mother took to her bed and never left it more; my sisters were forbidden to mention my name. But now I shall be as one who was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found!"

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

### LOVERS.

How calm and peaceful looked the little lake as Arthur lingered by it, listening to Eva's sweet voice. Here on the brightest days of the year are to be seen rather the subdued winter harmonies that greet our eyes in southern England than the gorgeous glow of summer. To-day about waves and sky lay just these quiet, tender hues we see



on certain mild January days of our dear native land. The glassy waters of the mere reflected pure tints of pearl and clouds just touched with rosy gold floating on a pale azure sky. On the cool gray surface of the water rested the water-lilies, their bright gold and ivory cups subdued in the placid light. Ineffable the sweetness and stillness here. Not a bird on the branch, not a fawn gamboling athwart the forest reaches. They were near the sea, but could not hear its ripple.

“Are you versed in the history of this island?” asked Eva, with a smile. “Do you know why this little sheet of water embosomed in the ancient beechen forest is called the Black Lake, and the granite block on which we are sitting bears the name of the Stone of Sacrifice?”

“I am not entirely ignorant,” said Arthur. Had not Elizabeth, indeed, acted as his cicerone here? “But tell me what you know.”

“This place, then,” she said, “was consecrated in the olden time to one of the most fearful divinities ever mortal bent knee to. Whoever served her was henceforth to be kept pure from all contact with anything human, and there was but one way to accomplish this: the minister to the god was also the victim. Even the very slaves who washed the golden car of the goddess were straightway cast into the lake: and how many unfortunate beings may have been offered upon this very stone!” She rose and showed him a huge red stain in the granite block, shaped, indeed, like those savage altars we read of on which were immolated human offerings.

“This is but a natural streak, a vein of porphyry in the formation,” she said, “but the islanders will ever believe the stain to be caused by human blood. How fearful these early creeds! yet methinks they point a parable. The evil passions that weak mortals serve, do they not exact of their slaves the supreme sacrifice? Is there any one who has hearkened too much to self, which is but another name for passion, without falling a victim?”

She was thinking of her girlhood, and of those ardent longings for a richer, fuller life that had led her to Italy, to despair! Had she been of a less ambitious spirit, all the misery of her life might have been spared.

Said Arthur, gayly,

“I read herein a more acceptable interpretation of the allegory. This goddess of yours should, I think, rather symbolize a purifier than a destroyer, since it is by virtue of passions that men rise and fall, in other words, fulfill their destiny. We must be first crushed, to be afterward uplifted, tried as clay is proven in the fire.”

Thus they talked, with the beautiful confidence and exclusiveness of lovers who find that every hour brings them nearer to one another, shuts them more and more within a little world of their own. The longest day could never be long enough for these spoken volumes.

“I have now told you my life, will you not tell me yours?” asked Eva. This was the next day, when much had been talked over of more immediate interest. The marriage was to take place in a few days, and that very night Arthur would cross over to the opposite shore in order to buy the wedding-ring. Next day before nightfall he should be back again, and then another little journey was in store



for him—he must traverse the island from end to end for the purpose of securing the services of a priest.

They had just returned from a long ramble in the forest, and for the first time Arthur accompanied Eva to the tiny anteroom, turned into a rustic boudoir, that led out of her chamber. There were so many things to carry upstairs—spoils of the forest, spoils of the sea—that he would not let her burden herself. And when arrived on the threshold there seemed still much to say; so he followed her within.

Happiness wearies even as doth sorrow, and Eva was now languid from overjoy. Her spirits during the last two days had been wonderfully buoyant. Joy beamed from her eyes and imparted bloom to her cheek. It was no longer a vision of sorrow and beauty that moved stately before Arthur's eyes; instead, a dazzling fellow-creature on whom Nature had lavished her choicest gifts, and with whom it were good to live. What was Eva not? what could she not do? In the exuberance of her late mood, all the inborn sprightliness and vivacity of her character were revealed, as well as mental endowments of deeper kind. She should have been a leader and inspirer of men and women in some high sphere; for what may not perfect loveliness do when combined with depth of feeling and a passionate craving after intellectual beauty? "Kind God in heaven!" was Arthur's secret thought, "what may not existence be like by this woman's side!"

Deeply as was Eva moved also at the thought of sharing his life, intensely as she appreciated the intellectual sympathies and aspirations drawing them together, it was a common, sheer, human contentment that she drank in now. The thought bringing tears of rapture and thanksgiving was the thought of home. It seemed too good to be true, but true nevertheless. A short week more, a little week, and her sister would learn the blessed tidings—their Eva no longer a shame to them, her name a terror never any more, the past buried and forgotten, new life in store for all. And that scene of explanation and reconciliation would be ever before the impatient eyes. Never would Prodigal be so welcomed, so wept over! She already heard her sisters' voices, already a thousand times in fancy her tears of pure joy were mingled with theirs; she saw a flash of understanding light up her father's face as she clasped him close, and, pointing to Arthur, whispered, "Husband—Eva's husband."

Around that last thought centered her fondest, most passionate hopes. She would willingly have laid down her life if by that means her father's reason could be restored. There was now a better way: when the grief that had brought the madness should be removed, must not the madness go? Eva clung to this hope with a tenacity that nothing could shake. Yes, the good God in his mercy would permit this cure. Not only was their lost Eva to be restored to her sisters, but their father, like the man Christ healed, sitting clothed and in his right mind. No wonder that in these first moments of looking forward she thought more of Arthur's deed than of Arthur's self. The curse of shame was to be removed from her house, the family escutcheon cleared of its blot, and by him only. His love was equal to a matchless sacrifice. But before the happiness of loving him and compensating him she was to taste of another



of less selfish kind. She was meantime living less in the world of realities with him than in the world of hopes of which he was author.

Something like reproach, however, stung her when she thought that to-morrow he would not be there. She felt a grateful, ardent impulse on the eve of this short separation to throw herself into his life for a brief spell and forget her own. Was he not henceforth to be all in all to her? Had she any right even for a day thus to live in a world of thought he could not share?

So again, with sweet insinuation, she repeated the question.

Arthur laughed.

The story was but a dull one, he said; but such as it was, she should have it and she would.

Wearied from her long walk she had thrown off her hat, and now rested on a low stool, leaning her head on the arm of Arthur's chair; for he had taken out his sketch-book, and while he talked lazily plied pencil and brush. To have something to do seemed an excuse for staying a little longer with her, and there was a tempting bit of forest glade within sight.

So he became busily idle, and by-and-by in her weariness—she did not know it—the beautiful head rested no longer on the arm of the chair, but had slipped to his knee. He chatted on; not for worlds would he have ventured so much as to touch the perfectly shaped head lying close under his sketch-book, or even to notice the intrusion. As yet she had never kissed him, and he bided his time. She was to see that no woman in all the world was so sacred in his eyes as the one about to become his life.

Thus, then, they began to talk, Eva's face being turned from him, her sweet voice a little languid from fatigue. She wanted very much to hear this dull story, she said, and first and foremost to know one thing—had he ever cared for any woman but herself?

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A REVELATION.

“To tell you plain truth,” Arthur said, gayly, after some talk of his London experiences, “I never so much as fancied myself in love till I reached this island a few weeks back. There is a fatality about the place. Had I never seen you, I do believe my fate would have been sealed all the same.”

“What happened?” Eva said, with natural feminine curiosity. Is not the first question a girl asks almost always of an avowed lover, “Whom did you love before me?”

“I was tempted to visit these remote shores by the most romantic accounts,” Arthur went on. “I made up my mind, indeed, that I was not only to see the fabled mirage here, but that I should find the maiden of my dreams. And true enough! Hardly had I set foot in the island when I thought my time was come. The pretty, pretty girl!”

“Was she your countrywoman or mine?”

“Of pure Teuton blood, with such blue eyes and fair hair as I do verily believe are never found out of Germany.”



“What attracted you to her besides the blue eyes and fair hair?” Eva asked, still playful.

Arthur also went on, as gay and careless as before.

“So many things! To begin with, she had a lovely expression—*blick*, you Germans call it—and a voice pleasant to listen to.”

Eva laughed gently. These naïve confessions of her lover amused her not a little.

“Would you have married her?” she asked.

“Ah! who shall say? But for a certain visit on a wet day to a certain lady awaiting her limner, I think it likely. We were, anyhow, capital friends.”

If these confidences pleased Eva, how much more grateful were they to her lover! He was confiding in her as he had never yet confided in any human being, and the new-fresh sense of nearness and exclusiveness was inexpressibly delicious. They were beginning to lead the life of one that has become the life of two.

“This blue-eyed beauty had a certain likeness to yourself; I could almost have sworn you were sisters,” Arthur added, laughingly. “So you see I was but falling in love with you by anticipation.”

“Such fancied likeness is mere nationality,” Eva replied, without strained interest or the faintest suspicion of the revelation in store for her. “We Germans also find all English girls of a type alike. But tell me more.”

Trusting him implicitly she yet wanted to discover how far Arthur’s fancy had gone; she could not suppose him to be blameworthy in the least little thing. All the same she felt sorry for the blue-eyed maiden he had evidently made love to. The story interested her.

“For once and for all understand that when I asked you two days ago to be my wife, I was as free to do so as if there were no other woman on this island, or, for the matter of that,” laughed Arthur, “in all the world. I have never had a fancy for entanglements of this kind; indeed, I had made up my mind long ago that I should die a bachelor. And why?—for the vain and preposterous reason that I could never find a woman good enough for me.”

Eva smiled sadly.

“But,” resumed the happy, unconscious lover, “I will be quite open with you. I did ask your pretty double if she liked me, and—the rest of it. She parried the question, hinted at circumstances and family misfortunes that made it her duty not to marry. I cannot help thinking that there was a faithless lover in the way.”

Eva’s face was still turned from him as she rested thus, the beautifully shaped head just touching his knee. She put yet another question, in the low, gentle tones of one who is wearied in body rather than in spirit, deep, unutterable contentment thrilling the exquisite voice.

“What was that sweet girl’s name?”

A moment, one short moment more in the fair sunshine, on the golden sward, then a precipice and a horrible abyss, from which there was no escape.

Arthur was skillfully manipulating his clouds, but in a second or two his answer came.



“Elizabeth—Elizabeth Flower in my own tongue, Blume in yours. What a pretty name for a pretty girl!”

Eva never stirred. Had Arthur's suspicions been aroused he could not have discerned by any outward sign that this simple name brought despair to his listener's heart. The fair head lay motionless as that of a sleeping child on its pillow; the limbs did not tremble. Only the eyelids closed, as if from excessive weariness, and the beautiful cheek grew pale. Eva, accustomed to make almost super-human efforts at self-control, was stilling the tumult of her bosom by force of indomitable will. She would calmly hear to the end; time for her heart to break afterward.

Arthur chatted on. He spoke of Elizabeth's devotion to her younger sister, of Hervey's fancy for Flora, of the excursions they had made together. Even those mysterious star-shaped flowers were mentioned—the flowers Elizabeth, with all a German girl's sentiment, so loved for her dead sister's sake. Then he reverted to her passionate dwelling on the wrong that had been done her, supposed by him to be some man's faithlessness.

“She liked me well enough, I do believe,” he said, carelessly, and without a vestige of vanity underlying the thought. “But now let us talk of ourselves. By the-way, you have never yet told me your own name?”

Eva could bear this tension no longer. She rose now and looked at him with inexpressible wistfulness, yet no ghastly betrayal; she would be mistress of herself if the short agony killed her.

“To-morrow will do,” she said, smiling calmly as the dying smile. “I will rest now. Fare thee well, dear.”

Then bending low she kissed him on the brow. The strange sweetness and searchingness of that long look did not strike Arthur at the time; he was accustomed to find in her face what he found nowhere else under heaven. But the unwonted pallor and sudden evidence of bodily endurance strained to the utmost gave a momentary feeling of uneasiness.

“I cannot bear to leave you, even till to-morrow,” he whispered.

But Eva would stay for no lover-like speeches. With her hand on the door she once more glanced at him, tenderness, thankfulness, benison unutterable in her eyes. A reiterated farewell trembled on her pale lips. Then he was alone.

All was perfectly still, and Arthur, having finished his drawing, noiselessly put together his sketching things and stole down-stairs. She would sleep, he said, and he must be more careful of her health in future. The long forest rambles must be cut short. He had not now to do with the robust organization of country-bred maidens like Elizabeth and Flora, but with a physique of finer strain. Eva's naturally magnificent health, as she confessed, had been undermined by mental suffering. Months must elapse before she should be fairly herself.

On the whole, however, he went away in a cheerful frame of mind. By sunset next day he should be back again, and for other reasons no less important than the purchase of the wedding-ring he was forced to cross the sea.

There was a banker on the Old World seaport opposite with whom he had certain business to transact; he also wanted to consult some



able lawyer as to the steps necessary for the legalization of such a marriage on German soil. And this blissful bridegroom, no more than any other, would greet his bride-elect empty-handed. On this island not so much as a silver-thimble was to be purchased, but surely some beautiful bridal gift might be found in a city numbering a hundred thousand souls!

So in elate spirits he set off, making light of the long descent through the forest. The path wound downward all the way, and two hours' brisk walking brought him to the little harbor lying close under the wooded scarp. The steamer was there, and in a quarter of an hour was gliding gently over the unrippled crystalline sea.

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## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### WHITHER?

WHERE was Eva's joy now?

As long as Arthur remained in the adjoining room she was forced to exercise self-control. Not a sigh escaped her lips, not a moan of pain; rigid as a statue she awaited his going. But when at last she heard the door close after him, she threw herself on her bed, past weeping, past praying; only low, stifled sobs betrayed the inner conflict. Oh! Fate was pitiless. There was no hope, no joy, no love left for this poor Eva to cling to any more; she must just drift away on the tide of misery, and let despair do with her as it would. Those fond, foolish dreams of yestreen, where were they now? The return home as Arthur's wife, her father's recovery, reconciliation with her sisters—had she, indeed, for a brief moment believed in these things? Yes, Elizabeth and Flora might be made happy, but in another way, not by their sister Eva; their bliss she could never share. For no misconception of Arthur's narrative was possible. He had first seen Elizabeth and won her heart, and she knew this sweet, steadfast Elizabeth well. Other girls might easily fancy themselves in love with a frank, chivalrous Englishman after Arthur's pattern; Elizabeth never would. If she cared for any man at all, her feeling would be deep and unalterable. Nor was she at all likely to entertain romantic dreams about any one indifferent to her, she must have relied upon Arthur Venning's liking before venturing to like him in return.

It was all as clear as day. Only one reason had prevented Elizabeth from accepting Arthur's love. She was too proud to marry, because of the shame that had fallen on her house; she refused him on account of her sister's dishonor. But for her own sister, her elder sister, Elizabeth might yet become a happy wife.

This conviction took possession of Eva's troubled spirit, as if it were some horrible agency at work upon body and brain; some engine invented for torture, or dire *seps* insinuating poison and agony into every vein, drying up the springs of life and hope.

Her sweet Elizabeth, her own fond little sister! Was it not enough to have ruined her prospects, overwhelmed her with shame, broken her mother's heart, wrecked her father's reason—must she also steal her lover's heart?



Arthur might take his wife home indeed. What would Elizabeth feel when she recognized in Eva's husband her own lover—the man, but for Eva's wrong-doing, she might herself have married?

It must never be.

There was only one way of saving Elizabeth. She must hide herself from Arthur, flee from him straightway, and discover some secure hiding-place where love like his could never find her out. But where? This island offered no such harborage, Arthur knew it far too well. Before nightfall, moreover, on the morrow he would be back again. In this short space of time whither could she betake herself, leaving not a trace behind? For one thing she felt sure of; if Arthur followed her, as he undoubtedly would, and if he discovered her retreat, he would insist on the fulfilment of her promise. Elizabeth would be sacrificed. A second time her elder sister would prove her baleful star.

But if not? Ah! even thus poor Eva might yet bring about good and not evil. Hid from Arthur's ken forever, he was sure in time to master himself, to woo a second time, and finally win Elizabeth as his bride. For her sister Eva's sake she would grow all the dearer to him. The racking misery of conflict at last spent itself, and blank, cold despair took its place. Eva sat up and tried to think. She pictured the bright future in store for her sisters—the pair wedded to these generous English brothers; their home made in happy England, far away from the scene of their sorrow and shame. Perhaps even their father's madness would yield to these blissful influences, and he might yet spend a happy and honored old age by the fireside of a son-in-law. The old man would be made welcome for his sweet daughters' sake. And in time would not Eva and her awful story be almost forgotten—Eva herself fade from the memory of these happy ones? Or if not faded utterly, might she not become a half sorrow only, a name to be wept over gently? Elizabeth and Flora would tell their children of a gifted Aunt Eva lost to them forever—would perhaps even call some little daughter after her, in token of forgiveness, and as they grew older and wiser and sadder, would think of her kindly, would love her as in their childish days.

And Arthur Venning, her generous protector, her magnanimous bridegroom, would not he also forget? Men are strong and proud; they subdue their griefs and live them down as women cannot do. He will be happy. He loves me, thought Eva, but how much may generosity and pity have determined him to make me his wife? And admiration also—my little beauty he said he should be so proud of. But Elizabeth is beautiful too, and Elizabeth will hold him all the dearer for having tried to save her poor Eva!

She felt inclined to weep now, and almost able to pray, but the soft mood passed. She dared not weep; she must steel her heart against self-pity.

Eva was in a crisis of destiny when personality merged in larger interests, and the ego, the individuality, the thinking, suffering, sentient self, virtually ceases to be, or is as if it were not. She must consider life and the world wholly irrespective of her own existence—to think and act indeed as if Eva herself did not exist at all. This self-annihilation must naturally be the precursor of all deeds of superhuman heroism or self-devotion. None could voluntarily immo-



late himself to duty, patriotism, or sentiment, unless that self had been first shriveled to nothingness. Eva, then, having made up her mind that she must sacrifice herself for her sister's sake, could hardly weep over her own life any more. There was now nothing left to wish for or hope. Life—as much of meaning as it had for her—could mean blank endurance only. Her plain duty was to hide herself forever and forever from those she loved.

But where?

The warm after-glow had filled the little chamber, and the soft air seemed to stifle her. She would go out-of doors, she thought, and try to make a plan; for the dire problem must be solved at once.

Where could she hide herself?

What a prison seemed this island and life to Eva, as she lingered by her window and looked out wistfully. Far away stretched the forest-reaches, just gilded by the rays of the setting sun, and as she stood thus motionless, the murmur of the sea was audible from afar. But the forest offered no hope of escape, nor the sea either, for Arthur knew it nook and corner; and if she set sail on the morrow, the very vessel that bore her away would meet that of her returning lover. As she lingered thus, all other thoughts merged in that desperate one where should she hide herself? The after-glow faded, and twilight stole on apace. Already the beechen groves about the chalet were growing dusk, and in the pure gray of evening every object wore a subdued aspect of tender, inviting melancholy. This ancient forest is never more impressive than in the twilight of early autumn. In summer the birds sing, and the sound of the woodman's ax breaks the hush, but with the first September mists ineffable solitude and stillness steal over the scene, precursors of the long, silent reign of snow.

Eva looked and listened as if waiting for a voice, some answer to the question that had shaped itself into doom. All her thoughts were now narrowed to a point, all her faculties bent upon one object—she must escape this happiness with Arthur. But how?

The twilight shadows deepened, and great calm infolded the island world. To Eva rather a resting-place than a prison it seemed now—no *carcer* of bruised and broken spirit; instead a quiet haunt for tired body and brain dedicate to oblivion and eternal rest.

And as little by little she let this thought take possession of her mind, despair was no longer written on her face, but in its place a certain unwonted calm, an almost startling aloofness from things sweet and human.

If smiles were banished from it for evermore, so at least were tears, and no more anguish-stricken remorse or self-pity, only cold, collected resignation and passiveness.

The sea had not responded to her, nor the forest, but at last she had hearkened to a voice within, and accepted its awful mandate.

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## CHAPTER XXIX.

### REFUGE.

GRAYLY and soothingly evening enticed Eva to herself, as some mild mother inviting to rest a weary child. Warm, golden light still lingered about the chalet, but night was fast stealing over the



forest, and already the black pine-tops showed faintly against the sober heavens. No brilliant constellations shining out of intense purple skies, no sharp definitions of light and shadow to-night; instead creeping mists and crepuscular gloom, with tender, subdued melancholy infolding all things. It was as if earth and heaven wore a veil out of pity for human sorrow, and Nature herself were moved to compassion for one breaking heart.

Hardly misery was written on Eva's face as she walked gently toward the forest; rather a look of cold, hard resolve, perhaps even of satisfaction. The supreme valediction to life and hope were given; all she needed now was Rest, and that she knew right well where to find. Oh! to be beyond reach of compassionating love and retributive memory, the world's superciliousness and the frown of the cruel—at peace forever and forever!

She followed a path she knew well—she had taken it with Arthur many a time—a little traverse leading through the beechen forest to the Stone of Sacrifice and the Black Lake. It was still a twilight world in which she moved, and in the open spaces might be seen yet a pearly sky bending over the dusky trees, and tender, rosy lights flickering here and there. Night was imminent, but had not yet come. When she reached the opening in the heart of the wood, she sat down and wept a little. A momentary softness came over her; she would fain for a brief space have rested her head on some kind bosom, and poured out a last word or two of penitence or prayer. She thought then that such a farewell ought not to be made without some shrift, some final appeal to Love, human and divine. It seemed then as if in a sentence she could have said all there was to say on her own behalf, and summarized her life, with its pitiful shortcomings and sorrows, so as to win plenary pardon alike from friends and judge. In God's forgiveness she never doubted.

Yes, the sting of separation was here; she could never now plead for herself as none could plead for her. None would ever be in a position to judge her aright. The subtlety with which she had been tempted, the poignancy of her remorse, who could measure? If, indeed, we know not our own weakness till too late, shall others, coldly judging, better appraise us?

She wept for a while out of sheer human forlornness, and murmured the names dear and familiar to her. In one overmastering moment of passionate longing she called on Elizabeth, her father, Arthur, but they could not hear. She was alone—no human thing so lonely under the vast heaven.

While she waited thus for night to come, with tears in her eyes and self-pity in her heart, one especial scene of her childhood flashed before her with more than the vividness of dreams. She recalled a forest scene like this, when toddling by her father's side they had been overtaken by the gloaming. So little was she that it was the first time she had ever seen the stars out-of-doors, and when the shadows frightened her and the solitude, how well she remembered it! her father had taken her in his strong arms, soothing her to sleep, and she remembered nothing more till it was morning. The sun shone on her little bed; all the gloom and the terror had vanished. There was the sweet, bright day with its full measure of cheerfulness and affection, a mother's love, a father's pride, the prattle of



baby sisters; and now she was alone. Strange to have been so smiled upon and cared for once, and now to meet the end thus desolate!

One question flashed across her mind too awful to dwell upon: that childish adventure in the forest, the momentary tremor, the apparent peril, the joyful climax. Might she discover here a parallel, a prophecy, applicable to her present case? Had this dark day also a to-morrow? Was there a morning beyond the grave?

Then she recalled the conversation with Arthur Venning two short days ago. They were sitting on the Stone of Sacrifice, where now she sat alone, and she had half playfully recalled its legend. Little did she think how soon those fearful rites she described then would be renewed, and that in these happy modern days the Black Lake was to receive its victim. For, said Eva, fancifully following up this thought, might not the allegory apply to her own story? Was she not one of the ministers to self-passion, call it by what name we will, they had spoken of, that self-centered force or blind impulse that sooner or later turns upon us a Nemesis?

Looking back on life now, an alert conscience acting the part of umpire, she could but feel that if she had been more sinned against than sinning, yet had she grievously sinned; and that if she were a victim of other's wrong-doing, her own lapse, nevertheless, needed expiation. She must, to use Arthur's words, be tried, as clay in the fire, fitted for a better being if God so willed it by his annealing. So she lingered, weeping, praying, yet unmoved from her implacable purpose, almost, indeed, clinging to her resolve as if it were a duty. She must be hidden from sight and forgotten in order that the guileless Elizabeth should be made happy. Not twice must Elizabeth's heart be well-nigh broken by her elder sister.

Eva lingered, and had some kind human being crossed her desolate path then, she might have been saved to more sorrow but—can we doubt it?—to a better fate. Had some little straying child come that way, and putting its hand in hers, begged to be led home, some woodman stricken in years, recalling her father, all might yet have been otherwise for her and her loved ones. But none came, and meantime night was there. Eva waited till the last glimmer of rosy light should vanish from the west, and the distant forest rim hardly break the horizon, then she knew what she should do. The way back to the chalet was easy to find, yet not hard to miss. Nothing cruel or in scorn should be said of her afterward. The fisher folk would hereafter recount how a stranger lost her way one gloomy autumn night, and strayed into the Black Lake. The story would be told thus, and if Arthur guessed another version of it, he would hold his peace. The gathering darkness deepened. Soon hardly a vesture of day lingered in the west, and no sharp demarkation of forest and sky was any longer visible, only a gentle gradation of intermingling shadows. Eva glanced toward the opening through which she had passed, and saw that the bright vista of an hour ago made only a just perceptible break in the prevailing somberness. She took that for a sign. There was nothing more to wait for. No bidding but this one had made itself audible. She must obey and leave the rest. So she went the dark way, as some poor wounded bird that flutters toward dusky covert, there to die unmolested. Eva



let the night suck her in, darkness infold her with murky wings, silence claim her as its own. Not a sound broke the stillness of the forest, not a star shone out of the heavens. Night had come indeed.

But was the day far behind? A few short hours of gloom and silence, a brief trance-like spell of quietude, and the pure light of morning would glimmer in the east, a cheerful twitter of birds break the stillness of the forest, slowly but surely heralding the dawn. And may not some clear day-spring await Eva's soul? Is not the veil of darkness to be lifted from that sorely tried spirit after the tribulation and the tomb? For sin and sorrow are finite, but the Eternal Wisdom that compasseth us round about hath no limitation. Let not the inadequacy of human judgment blaspheme the pity of Heaven!

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## CHAPTER XXX.

### REACTIONS.

It was little likely that Arthur Venning should escape a transitory yet tremendous reaction of feeling when first left to his own thoughts. Fascinated to desperation by Eva's beauty, and melted by the forlornness of her position, he had bound himself to what? A marriage, the secret of which none must know, and which would hang over his head like the sword of Damocles as long as he lived. Arthur Venning just missed being a commonplace man as he knew right well, but he could not help asking himself now if he were in the least degree heroic. Could he brazen the shame and scorn that should come through a wife? And as he asked himself this question he smiled ironically at the difference between dreams and fact, a man's ideal and the shape into which circumstances mold it. If there was one thing he had felt ambitious about it was marriage. When he married, he always said to himself, he should look, perhaps, foolishly high, but otherwise would never dream of marrying at all. He should in this matter look well before and after, taking into account alike his honorable lineage and the generation to come. His children, if he had any, should be able to boast of their mother. And now?

Not for one awful moment did Arthur Venning contemplate a base declension, an abject recoil. By his manly word he would stand as long as he lived, and nothing endured for Eva's sake should ever wring from him as much as a look of betrayal. But the truth of his position did for a brief interval humiliate and appal him. The most worldly-minded Nestor could not have made the nature of his sacrifice clearer.

The dark thought would go as it had come, he felt sure of that; but why had it come at all? There was the sting. Was the good opinion of the world to be put in the balance with Eva's love? Was he, in deed and in truth, a worldling after all? If so, then Eva could never be sure of him, much less could he answer for himself; and his very generosity might prove a curse to her instead of a blessing.

To have to answer for one's self is a thorny and uphill way to heroism. Even a poor creature may do a splendid deed on a sud-



den; but to be obliged to make sure of ourselves by long looks ahead, to feel under the necessity of sentineling the weak places and setting watch over untoward impulses—ah! who but trembles at the prospect of such palmary proof, such fiery ordeal?

Arthur Venning was well aware that up to a certain point he was of the world, worldly. Well-bred and well-born, with just enough means to make these conditions acceptable, he had hitherto escaped anything like a buffet of fate or fortune. But this smooth, honorable, and not by any means purposeless existence, was that of a man of the world?

He often and often said of himself that his very aptitudes suffered from overmuch ease and prosperity; he, with more ambition, might have been less successful, but the gain would have been greater than the loss. If ambition counted for little in his past life, passion counted for nothing at all. Till this waiting on the island he did not understand the meaning of the word. He loved this beautiful Eva as he never dreamed of loving. No questioning, no dubiousness here. She was the first woman he had ever seen with whom he would wish to live. The sacrifice he was called upon to make for such happiness was surely small.

It galled him beyond measure that the conviction of sacrifice forced itself upon him and could not be got rid of. He was overcome by the sense of his own inadequacy—a dread lest Eva should discover limitations in his nature undoing the very generosity which made her adorable to him. It was the world he feared, and he saw clearly how it might eventually come between them. Arthur was not by any means romantic; he had seen a good deal of life; he knew well enough that marriage means not only sentiment and poetry, but the prosaic life of every day with its little carking cares and mean little miseries. There was only one way of making happiness sure for himself and Eva: they must hide themselves from the world.

Then he mused somewhat scornfully. England, at least, the cultured, æsthetic, over-refined life of London, is not the universe. Existence was surely to be tolerated elsewhere. And with this thought came another, also calling up a supercilious smile.

If the world was little to Arthur Venning, how much less was Arthur Venning to the world! Were I, for instance, he reasoned, by some untoward accident to meet with my end on this island, how long should I be remembered? Perhaps a day, maybe a sennight, certainly not longer. And if I were to take back some Scandinavian peasant maiden as my bride and parade her in fashionable circles, wearing the gala costume of her canton, that would be no more than a nine days' wonder to what we are pleased to call society either. Let society unearth Eva's story and enjoy its nine days' wonder, an' it will! My life is my own, to do with it as I please. After all, he concluded, with the airy yet conscious cynicism of one who has lived his whole life in the world, dead or living, set on a pinnacle or flouted and bemired, it is all one. Self is the microscope that makes us slaves of opinion.

Having thus had his fling at himself and society, Arthur gave way wholly to joyful thoughts. They would travel and make their home in some bewitching nook of Italy or Southern France, and there



suffice for one another. For years to come they would avoid the perils and pitfalls of London. Then he prefigured Eva's rapture at the first sight of Athens and Granada, the sweet, quiet days they should spend in lovely places together, the books they should read, the work they should project under these delicious influences. One practical misgiving dismayed his lover-like transports: he fortunately possessed an income adequate to his wants, but he must now think of another. The notion of being straitened in means after marriage was odious to him. A superb woman like Eva, if not surrounded with the sumptuousness and splendor that would so well become her, must have no sordid cares. The very first thing he had to do was to make sure of more liberal earnings; no hard matter, forsooth, with her to spur him on to excellence he had not yet attained either in literature or art.

Everything, therefore, happily settled in his mind, he at last embarked for his island and his bride. Things had gone against his wishes since quitting Eva three days ago. Hardly had he touched the opposite shore when a squall arose, one of those sudden storms of wind and rain that put prompt return out of the question. He might be able to cross in two or three days, so the sailors said, but could promise nothing. There he was, and there he must abide till the weather mended. Two days were not too much for all he had to do, and Eva would be under no anxiety about him he comforted himself with thinking. The storm would account for his non-appearance. On the third day, however, he did begin to chafe at untoward fortune. The wind still blew a terrific hurricane, the rain fell in torrents, and the sea raged angrier than ever. Getting back was as problematic as if it had been two days ago.

He now made up his mind to wait no longer, but reach the island by a roundabout route practicable at all times. A long railway journey must be first made, then the island sea crossed by ferry-boat at the point where it narrowed to a mere channel, finally the island traversed tediously from end to end by the mail-cart.

But anything seemed better than fretting away another day in inaction. So he set off; even six hours' railway traveling at a snail's pace, through one of the dismalest regions in Europe, and in deplorable weather, could not damp his spirits. Reaction had followed reaction. He now bitterly blamed himself for the ungenerous thoughts of yesterday. Life and the outer world seemed bewildering and rapturous to him as he journeyed toward his island and its fairy hopes. Much more than mere lover's triumph elated him now. It was Eva's dazzling beauty and pensive stateliness that had first taken him captive, then her pathetic history that had overwhelmed him with passionate pity. With a woman so beautiful, so rarely endowed, and so sweet, it were good to live. And should not a man live for something better and deeper than the applause of society, and that hateful thing called success? Then he thought of Hervey, reproaching himself for his roughness and acerbity during their last interview. Hervey was going to make the perilous leap, too, and had doubtless long ago forgotten and forgiven. He could not blame his brother certainly. Flora was the very wife for him; of Elizabeth he must not think as yet. In the meantime the weather showed signs of mending, and by the time he reached the coast the storm



had spent its fury. There was, therefore, no longer any necessity to cross the island by road. A steamer being ready to start when Arthur reached the harbor, he could now reach his destination by the quicker route he had taken with Hervey a few weeks before.

The storm had cleared, but there was no sudden break of sunshine, no instantaneous sparkle and glitter of a jeweled earth washed clean by the rain, but a quiet, gradual clearing away of mist and rain. It was, indeed, a slow, steady transition from summer brilliance to autumn mellowness. The hurricane had marked the close of one season and the beginning of another. The quiet harmonies of the island, along which the steamer gently coasted, were subdued to yet softer tones. Almost a sublimer world it seemed now to Arthur as he sailed over silvery seas under a cool, gray sky. Hardly a zephyr blew from the lee shore, and the waters of the small inland seas, traversed one after another, seemed almost supernaturally becalmed. The deep indentures of the coast gave this little cruise rather the semblance of thridding an archipelago, so nearly like islands these tiny promontories and headlands.

Lovely and dreamlike the scene, all the lovelier and more dreamlike because it shifted so quickly. Now the little steamer glided gently between twin cantons that seemed made for pleasure only, smooth, verdurous spaces sloping down to the crystal waves; now it passed under natural parapets, silvery bright, yet aerial, as if destined to melt away on the morrow. Far way was the open sea, with many an islet breaking its surface line, both pale and lovely as cloudland. The indescribable witchery of the scene, the delicate opalescent color, the magic stillness fascinated Arthur anew. He felt as if he now, for the first time, realized the beauty of this little land twice islanded from the common world. Three days' sojourn on the frigid plains opposite made it seem doubly a fairy haunt. He was lost in admiration of these airy combinations of color, so delicate and pure as to be hardly colors at all; these matchless harmonies of form, so ethereal and exquisitely penciled that it seemed as if a shower of rain would wash them away. He could hardly believe that he had gazed on the self-same scenery a little while ago. Was it that awakening of deepest feeling intensified his powers of appreciating nature? or did he happen just then simply to be in a more generous and sympathetic frame of mind? He was aroused from his reverie by a sudden commotion on board, one of those unanimous movements that betoken some emotion or passion electrifying a vast concourse of people. Every face looked one way, every one turned on his heel, and a moment later a cry of ecstasy was ringing from one end of the vessel to the other.

“The mirage! the mirage!”

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## CHAPTER XXXI.

### MIRAGE.

ARTHUR gazed with the rest. Meantime at a signal from the captain the helmsman's hand paused on the wheel, the ship's pace was slackened. For a brief space she all but stood still. They were now far away from the shore, and to all appearances, although it was not



so, in the open sea. The coast in view on one side was dim and shadowy, on the other a mere line, hardly deeper in color than the waves, not a flashing sheer, not a glistening sail anywhere to be seen. The little craft was a solitary thing between sleepy summer seas and warm, amber sky.

All at once that sweet, strange monotony vanished, and over against the steamer and the island the heavens showed miraculous transformation. It was as if the vast span of golden cloudland were suddenly withdrawn, unveiling a fair city built on a stately hill. In the midst rose a church of the olden time, while round about were clustered dwellings, such as men use now with many a garden sloping toward the sun. A pleasant place it seemed, and joyous too, with a certain majesty imparted by its rare site and ancient walls, giving it the appearance of a citadel built to dominate the sea. For where the velvety swards, flung about it as a mantle, ended, the sea began, while running back from the marge were sunny, billowy corn-lands and a broad, shining road that curled about the hills. It was not only the exquisite outline of this aerial landscape that made it unforgettable, stamping the picture on the minds of the beholder as is stamped the first view of Athens from the harbor or Venice from the Adriatic—just such a majestic little city and gracious environment we may see any day in Greece, Italy, and, for the matter of that, France; but where find such rainbow pencilings, such unimagined yet subdued glories of color? This ancient minster, with its mediæval dwellings, fair open gardens, and vast champaign, was painted on the heavens in hues unfamiliar to human eyes. Not only each dye was purer, more ethereal, yet deeper than those known to us by the same name, but here were to be seen colors and gradations absolutely undreamed of, the whole scene bathed in gemmy light. The ruddy glow of the sard, the brilliance of the beryl, the bright rays of the chrysolite, the deep-hued hyacinth were here, and all the loveliest dyes we meet in shells, flowers, feathers of birds, and all other radiant things. But although the colors we know of, and many more strange to mortal ken, were thus brought together in dazzling juxtaposition, the blending was so complete, the harmony so perfect, that none need fear to gaze. The warm, jeweled radiance, moreover, was subdued to a certain paleness and apparent evanescence, so that to the spectator every second was precious. The spectacle was as real as it could be while it lasted, but it could not last long. A transparence and airiness, a suggestion of unreality not to be defined, went far to tone down what would otherwise have been an almost unbearable intensity of light and color. The picture was rendered all the clearer and more impressive, by the soft golden radiance of the sky, on this delicious background the city and its surroundings being penciled in lines of pure silver. All eyes were riveted on this scene, when suddenly they discerned a feature of it hitherto missed. So exquisite and complete the first impression, so magically had the phantasmagoria broken upon the beholders, that no one had as yet been collected enough to make out any details. Now, however, when the first transport had passed away, and they could gaze calmly, they were aware of a thing—of dream within dream, vision within vision, marvel capping marvel. This fair city that had arisen from the



clouds was no abode of long buried dead, no place under a spell of perpetual dreams and drowsy head. Life was here, and pageantry, at the first glance as it seemed, of joyful kind.

What had just now worn the semblance of a mere blotch of sunlight on the picture, a whiteness and silveriness as of a garden of lilies when closely regarded, showed symmetry and coherence.

No accidental brightness was this but a stately procession that had wound from the interior of the island toward the cathedral, and in the fair, open space just below now made solemn pause. Surely some bridals were about to be celebrated in the minster on the hill; if not, what could mean the long train of maidens dressed in white, headed by a priest and acolyte, also snowy-vestured and with solemn gait? So long was the procession that, as it halted, it made a ribbon-like brightness athwart the hill, reaching from the level ground to the very church doors.

But on a closer scrutiny it was clear that no cheerful pageantry was this, and if, indeed, the air was ringing with music, it were rather a dirge than a wedding-march. These white-robed girls and children, bearing garlands, had their heads bowed as if in grief, and on the hill-top toward which they were wending, close under the church porch, rested what looked like a flower-crowned bier.

It was then some maiden the fisher-folk were bearing to the grave. The fair pageant painted on the sky meant no joyous bridal, but a solemn preparation for the tomb. The procession halted, and, was it fancy or might it indeed be? over the glassy waters, borne through the still air, were now wafted strains of music, sweet voices of youths and maidens chanting psalm or evangely to the accompaniment of rustic plaintive instruments. Most sweet and insinuating was this stream of melody as it came from afar, soft, flute-like tones, and the piercingly tender psaltery alternating with the deep, rich notes of the solemn trombone.

Now the music swelled into a grand volume of sound, and now it died away on the ear; now it was a passionate outpouring of grief, and now a sigh of resignation. Prayer breathed in these homely yet moving symphonies, and hope, pity, and mysterious questioning of destiny, with pious leaning on the Divine Will. It was as if an angelic choir were poised on this golden stair, between earth and heaven, interceding with divine pity on behalf of mortals gone astray. No cithara or citole, touched by seraphic hands, could be sweeter than the music of these rustic pipes attuned to the clear treble of boys and girls. And all the while the song they sung yet seemed for comfort. An intense, unspeakable pathos thrilled through every note. Some uncommon sorrow, some out-of-the-way grief evidently prompted this ineffable song, so unearthly sweet, so interpenetrated with tenderness and pity and love. Did every soul on board receive this mysterious music? or was it an impression, a delusion, that only touched the ear through the fancy of one or two? None cared just now to question his neighbor, or peradventure would ever care. But the mirage, of which every soul present had heard of from his forefathers, was there. One and all stood transfixed with delight and astonishment, but, most of all, Arthur Venning. As he gazed and gazed, he asked himself the meaning of it; where had he before seen the real semblance of this city in the



clouds? The entire scene, he could not doubt it, was quite familiar to him; he had seen more than once, and with waking eyes, this self-same ancient church crowning the pleasant hills. The little scattered city with its hanging gardens, and the fair open country round about, he seemed to know equally well. That road winding ribbon-like upward he had certainly climbed more than once. Not a feature of the scene was new to him; he gazed and gazed, and by degrees the truth dawned; the cloud-picture was but an image or eidolon of the little capital of the island, now hidden from sight, but not far away. He recalled his journeys thither—the first made alone, the second with Hervey—and could now discover in these aerial reflections an exact counterpart of what he had seen then, only instead of massive piles and solid masonry, sunny lawns and waving corn-fields, he now saw their image painted in radiant hues on a pale, golden sky. He well remembered, on the occasion of that second journey made with Hervey, how he had been struck by the dreamlike loveliness of the scene; he had even compared the island citadel to some Eastern city with crystal dome surmounting an amethystine pyramid. Yet he had not exaggerated, and seeing the same picture now, not in reality but through the medium of aerial portraiture, he felt that his comparison did not overshoot the mark. Exquisite had been the reality, exquisite the image, and neither the one nor the other were to be adequately described, much less portrayed. Far too delicate and airy, in the one as in the other, the subtle gradations of color, the radiant pencilings of outline, ever to be caught by painter, whatever a poet might do with such a subject. As he thought of the phenomenon, the more and more did he feel able to explain it. Some village maiden was being buried that day under the shadow of the Dom, and the peasant girls from far and near had accompanied the bier to its resting-place. Long and tedious the journey from hamlet buried in the forest to the capital on the hill, and welcome the halt midway between plain and church.

Priest and acolyte, white-robed mourners and flower-crowned bier, were all imaged in the wondrously transparent atmosphere with their environment. Nor, when his mind dwelled on the music, the almost superhuman pathos of it and the bell-like distinctness of every sound, did he find this phenomenon inexplicable. Abnormal conditions of the atmosphere would as readily account for one marvel as another, and both were not unheard of in this little fabled land, land of marvels now as of yore.

Least of all did sadness or any foreshadowing of evil enter Arthur Venning's mind. Even among these hardy island folks maidens must die, more's the pity.

Maidens must die, mused Arthur, for a moment; but when the cloud pageantry was lost sight of, he turned to his own affairs with thoughts elastic and heart elate.

A few hours more and he should be with Eva. A short day or two and the old life of the world should have ended for him, and the new life of love and single-mindedness begin.



## CHAPTER XXXII.

“THE BEAUTIFUL ALSO MUST DIE!”

“MR. ARTHUR VENNING here, too! Now we shall know all.”

The harbor had been reached long ago, and Arthur was now almost at his journey's end. He had found a carriage at the landing-place, but quitted it on the outskirts of the forest, taking a little path that led straight to the chalet. He was in the highest spirits, although not free from a certain feeling of trepidation to which all of us are liable when returning to a place lately left under happy auspices. He was thus accosted by a voice that did not sound wholly unfamiliar to him, as with airy port he wound his way through the beechen groves. Looking up he saw a pedestrian, wearing the usual garb of a German tourist—Tyrolese hat, short gray tunic with green collar, buttoned round the waist like a school-boy's, and the invariable plaid swung across the shoulders. This wanderer, however, wore something that formed no part of the ordinary traveling gear of the Teutonic professor. Round his right arm was bound a broad band of crape, evidently put on but just now, and where the ends met was a white flower tied by white ribbon. The crape band, the white flower, and something quite unusual in the speaker's face, arrested Arthur's attention. In a moment he had recognized the frank, pleasant, manly face of the speaker. It was no other than the naturalist, the Carl Fleming whom Elizabeth and Flora Flower had introduced to him on the very first day he visited the woods in company of the sisters. Arthur well remembered his sudden appearance and the hint thrown out by him then, that perhaps he might return to the island from Iceland in time to find them all there.

But what mystery had Carl Fleming to learn of Arthur Venning? Why this startling gravity of manner, this look of shock and sorrow? The two men greeted each other bareheaded after ceremonious German fashion, and Arthur found himself, he knew not why, monosyllabic and ill at ease. He wanted to find no acquaintances here just now, least of all the old friend of Elizabeth and Flora!

The young professor, while he seemed anxious to unburden himself of some unwelcome piece of news or some weight on his mind, was friendly and unconstrained.

“Strange,” he said. “Do you remember what occurred on this very spot to a day two months ago? We were all here, you, your brother, myself, and the two sisters Flower, when I inadvertently asked Elizabeth after their elder sister, the beautiful Stella, as we used to call her. You may not have observed the embarrassment and dejection of the two girls, Elizabeth's downcast eyes, Flora's tears. They let me suppose she was dead, but it was not so. Eva still lived; was on this very island.”

Arthur felt his attention painfully riveted. A glimmer of the truth dawned upon his mind, but of no tragedy as yet. Eva, his Eva, Elizabeth's sister? It could not be.



The other looked at him with sympathetic understanding. The two German sisters and the two English brothers had become friends, Carl Fleming knew. Any sorrow touching Elizabeth and Flora Flower, Arthur, as well as Hervey Venning, could but feel keenly.

"Then Eva still lived," Fleming went on, emphasizing the first word, "and but for my accidental landing here two days ago, her sisters might ever have remained in ignorance of her sad fate."

He pointed sadly and significantly to the crape badge on his right arm, and added,

"We have buried the beautiful Eva this very day—there is no church here—under the Dom on the hill."

The horrible conviction was already clutching Arthur's throat, ready as some murderous foe to do its worst. But for one desperate moment he held it at bay, wrenching from that hateful grasp the joy of an hour ago. He realized that his future was no longer in jeopardy, but forfeited forever. Yet as those struggling for dear life against deadly odds hope while breath remains, so for a passing interval, Arthur Venning fought against despair. It could not be. Some cruel freak, some chance coincidence was this. Were there not many Evas in the world, and, perchance, one other worthy to be compared to his own?

He tried to put a decisive question, but words failed him. Uncertainty was growing more hideous than the truth, yet he remained dumb. And all this time his companion was setting down this silence and outward impassibility to British phlegm. "These cold English!" thought the demonstrative, somewhat sentimental, but really warm-hearted German professor; "will nothing move them?"

He continued his narrative all the same: "I reached the chalet on my way back to the Continent three days ago to learn that an awful catastrophe had just happened. A lady staying here on her way to England, whither she was going as teacher, she said, had been found drowned in the Dead Lake. What was my sorrow to discover in the dead girl Elizabeth's elder sister, the beautiful, the gifted Eva!"

Arthur sunk on to a moss-covered stone with loosened limbs and ashy cheek; but he would yet be master of himself. He threw his knapsack on the ground, the precious knapsack containing the bridal gift destined for Eva, and having with him a tiny flask of cordial put it to his lips. The draught enabled him to hear the rest with some show of composure.

"This shocks you inexpressibly, I see," said the other, at last convinced that, however little Arthur might betray his feelings, he did really grieve for the awful calamity that had befallen Elizabeth and Flora. "It will be long before I forget my own horror and dismay when I recognized her," he went on. "I telegraphed at once to the sisters, who I learned from the visitor's list had gone to a little seaside resort on the opposite coast, and they got here just in time."

"Elizabeth here?" at last Arthur got out.

"She arrived with her sister last night, and much she wants to see you. She thinks, perhaps, you can throw some light on this mystery, as the people at the chalet say that you were often seen talking together. Maybe you know, as I know now, something of poor Eva's story. Never breathe my suspicion to her sisters, or your



own, if you see things in the same light, but my notion is that the proud, unhappy girl came by no accident to her untimely end. She could no longer contend with the world's scorn. Oh!" groaned the young man, honestly giving way to an emotion no Englishman would have shown before strangers, "could you have seen Eva Flower as I saw her five years ago, you would weep like me over her unhappy fate. What have we not buried with Eva? She was a star that shone upon the dull, common world."

He wiped away his tears, and pointed to a sunny opening in the forest.

"In yonder glade you and I met just eight weeks ago. Do you remember how full I was of Eva when we two were left alone? I spoke to you of her beauty, and quoted our great poet's matchless threnody, 'The beautiful also must die!' I lamented Eva's supposed death then. How much sadder to see her dead and to learn how she died!"

He covered his eyes with his hands, as if to shut out a dread picture, and groaned.

"Eva, the same Eva, yet Eva's self no longer. Why did the great Homer call our mortal covering lifeless clay, the man, and regard the spirit as mere shadow and nothingness? The marble brow, the unspeaking eyes, the lips frozen into everlasting silence. Merciful Heaven! must all that was Eva end in these? But I will go," he added, starting up. "We shall both be best alone. I am bound to the village, and you, of course, are returning to the chalet. Elizabeth much wants to see you; she thinks you may be able to throw light on this terrible mystery. Little Flora"—here he looked significantly at Arthur and smiled—"Flora, who wore short frocks and pinafores when I last saw her, has evidently the best possible comforter. Adieu then, or, rather, till we meet again."

He waved his hand, and hastened downward through the forest. Arthur, not feeling secure against intruders in the beaten track he was following, sought a covert where he might confront his sorrow undisturbed and alone.

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## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### ALONE.

HE sat down in a quiet place that mellow September afternoon, and for a while delusive calm held him captive. The blow had fallen, but the torture of the wound was yet to make itself felt. Arthur Venning was in that state of mind when a transient aloofness from misery, almost amounting to torpor, made actualities harmless. The words he had just heard were still ringing in his ears without meaning.

This sweet, solitary island yet belonged to him and to his bride. In the tragedy just now revealed to him he bore no part. The dirge and the white-robed weepers, the procession and the flower-crowned bier, would henceforth belong to dreams.

This maiden Carl Fleming wept for, buried to-day in the quiet graveyard above the sea, could not be the Eva he loved, nor could his Eva be Elizabeth's sister. He had but yielded to the panic of a



moment, and seen in the strangest coincidence fateful, unimagined woe for himself. What deep, death-like calm brooded over the forest! Autumn had mellowed the air, but not yet touched the rich foliage; all the glory of summer remained, tempered down to a sober melancholy. On such a day as this, an unusual stillness following the tremendous storm, the least sound might be heard, but sounds there were none. The busy, humming insect life was over for this year. Not a bird was astir amid the branches, nor little four-footed thing among the fern leaves; and no sign of human life penetrated these solitudes just now. In the summer there would be a chance pedestrian making his way through the forest or a woodman at work among the distant reaches, or a party of tourists merrily traversing the island on foot. Now all this was over. The vast beechwood seemed a cool, green tomb.

In a dreamy condition, almost amounting to trance, or at least hallucination, Arthur Venning let an hour glide by. The mellowness deepened, the twilight shadows were stealing on, but as yet the nook in which he had hidden himself was a golden place. Night and sorrow seemed as yet far off; it was perhaps the sweetness of the hour as much as the deliciousness of the scene that lulled him into momentary, illusive peace. It seemed to Arthur Venning as if he now beheld this fairy world for the first time. He had visited these sylvan haunts again and again, but somehow they never wore this insinuating look of grace, nobility, and loveliness. It was autumn that worked the change, autumn the enchanter that steals upon the forest unawares, leaving nothing quite as before, imparting a softness and suavity wanting in summer time, a tender repose and melancholy, too, that wraps the spirit as sweet slumber wrought by fabled apothegm.

The truth is, these ancient beechen forests should be frequented, as we frequent our friends, in all seasons and all moods. It was impossible that Arthur Venning should have beheld these same scenes, because he now looked upon them with wholly different eyes. Life counts not by months nor by years, but by deeds and emotions; and to some the awakening of love is as the first consciousness of a soul.

On a sudden he became aware of the gloaming, and took out his watch to look at the time. That little natural action aroused him from his stupor and recalled him to himself.

The awful thought made him its own. The march of time did not now matter; there was nothing for him to go back to. In this sweet, serene world Eva was not; Eva was dead!

He faced his misery with the dogged resolve that no living soul should ever unveil it. He would keep his secret even from Elizabeth's tender scrutiny; she should find in him a sympathizing friend, never her sister's lover! For one day at least he could surely control himself. Time enough to weep for Eva after, when he should be alone.

Then he put together the scattered links of Eva's narrative, as given by herself, by Elizabeth, and Carl Fleming.

How more than blind he had been not to discover at once that the story Elizabeth had told him was Eva's—the desertion, the dishonor, the craving for requital, even revenge! It was not the sweet, im-



petuous, frank Elizabeth who had been wronged; she was telling all along her sister's story, burning with generous impulse to avenge her sister's wrongs. How well he remembered the stray hints she had let fall during their first walk in the forest! with what girlish naïvete she had mooted the question of dueling, of a brother's championship, of baseness in high places! And when alone on the monticule under the light-house, and she had spoken of wasted hopes and affections, of worldly ruin and a blotted family escutcheon, she was thinking not of herself but Eva.

Amid these crowding thoughts one problem forced itself on his mind: if Elizabeth had never alluded to herself during these long confabulations, she was then heart free, perhaps caring for him all the time. Certainly his conduct would not look blameless in Elizabeth's eyes, whether he concealed his true relation to Eva or no.

He had indeed asked the younger sister to be his wife, and done his utmost to extract a promise from her, and when she refused him on conscientious grounds, as she said, he straightway abandoned her altogether. Yet it was hardly his own fault that he had wronged Elizabeth past forgiveness. Another agonized thought: if, indeed, Carl Fleming's surmises were true, what had led Eva to the desperate deed? Was she actuated by the playful revelation he had made concerning Elizabeth, their summer flirtation, their liking for each other? Did the elder sister, seeing the younger's happiness in jeopardy, sacrifice herself for her sake? He recalled every circumstance of that last interview, the calm, strange way in which she had taken leave of him. Oh! why had she not thrown herself into his arms and told him all? Why had he not divined the truth? Then all might yet have been well.

If not for Elizabeth's sake, was it for his the dark deed was done? Did she at the last dread lest his constancy might not bear the proof to which it would inevitably be put? Did she think to save him from shipwreck too? or Eva had suffered too much to bear joy again, and that conviction was the saddest to bear. Her mind had been unstrung, first by a horrible crisis, then by a series of anxious hopes and illusions, painfully dispelled one after another. The very brightness of her humor during the week's halt at the chalet was fitful. He could not believe it then, but now realized that passing fits of intense melancholy alternated with the brilliant, sparkling moods that made her an incomparable companion; and if it were so when he was by, what might she not have suffered from despondency during his absence?

She might, in deed and in truth, mistrust the future and refuse to believe in happiness any more after such an experience as hers. And even on himself she could, perhaps, hardly bring herself to rely. Arthur Venning loved her, and was ready to make her his wife; but would he not quail, like other men, before the world's scorn?

It is in human nature to blame ourselves for a thousand things when bowed down by grief and sudden calamity, and Arthur now reproached himself for having quitted Eva at all, and for not having divined the reason of her searching look when she bade him farewell.

It seemed to him, as he lingered in these dreary woods alone, that a golden gift of fortune had dropped into his hand, and he had let it fall. But self-reproach was useless. What he had to do was to



summon up courage and meet Elizabeth; and Flora he must also encounter, and Hervey too. He would have given worlds to possess the island and his grief to himself just then, but that should be when the others were once more away.

On a sudden the forest became inexpressibly somber, and almost eerie in its deep, unbroken silence and monotony. He rose with haggard face and dry eyes, and plunged into a side path, then drew back horror-stricken. It would lead him by the Black Lake!

There was another, less direct way, and he now entered it. The gloom and solitude of the twilight appalled him. He thought of Eva, and quickened his steps in order to get out of this dread place as soon as possible. By little and little all the horror of her fate was forcing itself upon his mind. He might be thousands of miles away, but one picture would never be got rid of. At unexpected times, and in remote scenes, a vision was sure to rise up, darkening his spirit and casting a pall over the cheerful, sunlit world.

The vision was there now. As he threaded the dark beechen groves, it flitted by, no shadowy thing of dreams, as it seemed to his morbid fancy, but the living awesome reality. In this forest gloaming he was no longer alone. Something sadder even than himself was there. He looked up wondering if indeed what the island folk said and believed in was true, and that the precincts of the Black Lake were haunted by ghostly shapes, or if the news of an hour ago had turned him crazy.

There, flitting through gloomy vistas in the direction of the inauspicious spot, was a black draped figure, Eva's self. With head bowed down and furtive, timid movements, as if anxious for the night to cover her, the figure glided on, Arthur watching it with frozen blood and heart that stood still. It seemed to waver in indecision, and in the gathering gloom he discerned a gesture of despair or perhaps of intercession. The head was for a moment thrown back, the arms upraised in the attitude of a suppliant; then once more, and with hastening steps, the apparition flitted toward the dark lake in the forest's heart close by.

Now Arthur Venning had not a grain of superstition in his nature. He knew well enough that the eerie stories told by the islanders concerning these localities could not be true, that of all who slept the last sleep in the Dead Lake none ever disturbed the surrounding solitudes by ghostly visits. Yet so affected was he by the tragedy just brought home to him, and so deeply was he influenced by every circumstance concerning it, the cloud phantasmagoria, the aerial following to the tomb, that his mind was in a state to receive any impression. He was sure all the time that it was but hallucination, but for the moment no reality could appear more true.

There in the somber woods, within ear-shot of him, was Eva—the Eva they had buried that day. Just so she must have looked on that last dread walk through the forest. It was an image of the woe-laden figure that had come this way three days ago. He could bear this tension no longer, and in a minute or two more reached the spot where she stood. But no pale ghost was this, no specter; rather it seemed a living, hardly less lovely Eva he now held fast.

“Arthur, my brother Arthur!” cried Elizabeth; “I was looking for you.”



## CHAPTER XXXIV.

## BROTHERLY, SISTERLY.

"I HAVE sent Flora to bed. The poor little thing was worn out with sorrow and fatigue," Elizabeth said, as they walked back to the chalet. "Hervey, too, I think drowzes. You see, we were traveling the greater part of last night; but I could not take any rest till I had seen you."

In a voice that conveyed the most implicit trust in him, and at the same time put him on an affectionate standing, the old romantic relation being left wholly out of sight, a brotherly, sisterly confidence and intimacy, by virtue of Flora's betrothal with Hervey, taking its place, she added:

"Will you tell me everything that passed between my sister Eva and yourself?" without the remotest suspicion that Arthur could have anything to conceal.

"Had we not better put off talking till to-morrow?" Arthur asked.

"No," she answered, with decision; "I shall be better able to bear this trouble when I know all." Here her voice dropped to an agonized whisper as she added, "I will conceal nothing from you. We must keep this from Flora; but I cannot help thinking Eva fled to death as a refuge. She had suffered so much, and knew how much suffering she had caused others. It must have been so."

Arthur Venning was dumb. He let her lead him to their little sitting-room—the chalet was empty, and they could have had as many rooms as they pleased now—but there speech did not come.

Elizabeth wept a little before she could say a word more, and he had scant comfort to give.

Suddenly she rose, and unlocking a drawer placed a little water-color portrait in his hand. It was the self-same sketch he had made of Eva during that first strange visit to the palace. While he appeared to examine it, Elizabeth hung over the picture weeping bitterly. "We found this in her room," she said. "How sad, and yet how beautiful! I never saw my Eva look thus. When we parted she was bright as a star, and Stella all called her because she seemed to shine amid others. Oh, Eva, Eva! why were you born to be so unhappy?"

Arthur felt conscious that he must seem unsympathetic, and Elizabeth hastened to apologize for him.

"You do not love her!" she cried, passionately, "or you would weep as I am doing now. But tell me what passed between you. The people here say that she was on her way to England, and had consulted with you as to finding means of livelihood there. Is that so?"

"It is as you say."

"Were you kind and encouraging?" she asked, after a pause.

Again Arthur made sign of affirmation.

"There must have been some new sorrow at the last. It could not have been because she heard that Flora and I had left the island



so hastily. For, do you know why we went away?" she asked, with a sad smile. "It seemed captious and unreasonable of me then, I know; but I may tell you now. I discovered that Eva was on this very island. Our father had made us promise solemnly never to see her." She calmed herself now and went on again with a look of rebuke. "But all this time I am talking to you as if you knew my poor Eva's story, and you could not know it, of course, she would never tell you."

"She told me—" broke in Arthur.

Elizabeth looked up scrutinizingly, and with an expression of intense, almost fearful surprise. Arthur tried to extricate her as well as himself from the difficulty.

"How could I help her unless I knew something?" he said, hoping to appear collected and matter-of-fact. "She asked me to find her some kind of employment in England. I was bound to know her circumstances."

Elizabeth looked hopelessly perplexed and dejected.

"You say you were kind and encouraging," she said, almost appearing to shrink from Arthur, in a momentary apprehension, that made him hateful to her. "Were you considerate, respectful?" she broke forth at last. "Did you treat Eva as you treat me?"

How like the dead Eva was the living Elizabeth in her flashing scorn, her lightning-like look penetrating his very soul! The girl's passion unmanned him. He saw himself driven into trusting Elizabeth as he had never intended to trust any living soul.

"Was I considerate, respectful! Did I treat Eva as I treat you!" he cried. Then he got out the words, with bitter scorn, "I asked her to be my wife."

Both were pale and silent now. Elizabeth's flush and Arthur's angry frown had died away. They sat opposite each other, full of passionate thoughts, yet both unready of utterance. Elizabeth was the first to grow calm and kind. She could not in the least think of herself now, or of any slight, real or imaginary, Arthur had put upon her; her mind was wholly bent on Eva, and the secret, as she had feared, buried in Eva's grave.

"Why did you ask her to marry you?" she asked, very sadly and wonderingly.

"You may well put that question to me," Arthur answered, very bitterly; "had I not put the same question to yourself a few weeks before? And what will you say when I speak of love?" he added, growing more and more ironic and self-condemnatory. "But scorn me as you will, love it was that prompted me—first I pitied this beautiful Eva, then I loved her."

All the time that Arthur's mood was hardening under the intense humiliation of this confession, Elizabeth's manner but grew softer and kinder. She was passing through one of those crises that make even the most impulsive natures seem passionless. Elizabeth's affection for her brilliant elder sister had been sheer idolatry. That Arthur Venning should have willed to do this thing but drew her nearer to him; she could overlook a lapse on the part of her lover that took the shape of magnanimity to Eva.

Arthur, not reading these single-minded thoughts, continued his palinode.



“Think meanly of me as you will, but at least exonerate me from absolute disloyalty toward yourself. You had told me in the plainest possible words that you could not think of marriage. When you spoke of outraged feeling and a forfeited word, I imagined you to be telling your own story; I supposed that you had already cared too much for another ever to care for me—”

“My friend, my brother,” Elizabeth broke in, with wonderful sweetness and calm, “I am not thinking of myself, do not you think of me; let us talk of Eva. It would comfort me inexpressibly to believe that some accident had brought about her death, but I cannot put away horrible misgivings that it was not so.” She looked up as if for comfort. What had he to give? He sat like a conscience-stricken man. “Your offer of marriage should have inspired hope,” she went on; “that is to say, if Eva was not too broken-hearted to look forward. Did she give you any answer?”

Arthur’s answer was swift and startling.

“We were to have been married on this island,” he said, averting his face.

Elizabeth remained long buried in deep thought; then she said, forcing him into further disclosures, “If so, then what could have happened to bring about this sudden change of feeling? There must have been a cause, and no trifling one, to drive her to despair. Oh! will you not let me know all?” she added, beseechingly, ready to go on her knees to him in the extremity of her suspense. “No matter how cruel, how more than sad, only let me have the truth,” she pleaded.

Arthur hesitated; her passionate appeal was almost more than he could bear. There was something so like Eva in the candid, fair face upraised to his own—such a tone of Eva’s in the clear, girlish voice—that he was shaken to the very roots of his nature. He felt it impossible to answer, more than impossible to refuse. That momentary conflict aged him.

“Elizabeth—my sister Elizabeth,” he said, at last, “do you remember something I said to you when we first knew each other? You asked me then if I were a brave man, and I made answer that courage and valor must be tried. I remember saying to you—how little I thought we should both soon be put to the proof—that I believed a crisis came to us all when we need every vestige of heroism that is in us. Can you be brave now?”

“Oh! Arthur, I am sure you have something terrible to break to me. My Eva! you did not abandon her at the last? no unkind word dropped from your lips? you were good to her?” she cried, seizing Arthur’s hand and raising it to her lips. “For if you were good to Eva, and it was through no fault of yours she despaired at the last, I will adore you, Arthur; you shall be loved by me as never brother was loved by sister yet. But tell me, it was not you who sent Eva to her doom?”

She was shaken by emotion now, and the sweet, calm, dignified manner was changed to impetuous, irresistible pathos. Arthur, hardly knowing what he did, wholly unmanned and pliant to her will, spoke out gently and tremblingly, “No, Elizabeth. My best friend, my sister! I am blameless. And do not weep too much for our lost Eva. She died nobly; it was to insure, as she thought, your



own happiness." He spoke now with great tenderness and humility. "That night before I went away we were talking of my past life. She asked me playfully if I had ever loved before, and I told her of you. I said that I had never cared for any woman till I set foot on this island, and that a few weeks before I had asked a sweet girl named Elizabeth Flower to become my wife—that she had refused."

Light was breaking on Elizabeth's mind now. Arthur felt her quick breath come and go, sure precursor of mental or bodily agony. She was kneeling by his side, looking up into his face, resolved to have the truth if it killed her. "How could I suppose," he went on, "that the story you told me was her own, and that but for Eva you would not have refused my love? I spoke of the obstacles you had hinted at—family misfortune, disgrace. I said that but for these I might have persuaded you to marry me; and, God forgive me! I even let her think that you had begun to care for me—that we had begun to care for each other."

Elizabeth saw it all now. She was weeping as if her heart would break. There was no one to blame, but no one to give comfort.

"You would have done as much for her," Arthur said, in a low voice.

"I knew all along how Eva loved me," cried Elizabeth, at last; "but now she will never know how I loved her. I durst not even write. My father from the first would have it so. All were so hard upon my poor Eva, Arthur, Arthur!" she said, in tones startlingly artless and yet solemn. "Do you think there is life and memory beyond the grave? Shall I ever be able to make Eva understand there? I know that death ends the kind of existence familiar to us. It must be so; but will there be sympathy, communication, between those who have loved, misjudged, wronged each other here? Will there be reparation, think you?—some kind of spiritual intercourse, some means of self-justification on the part of those who seem now to act blindly? It would comfort me if I could believe this. But do you believe it?"

"Without aspiration there can be no belief," Arthur made answer. "Till now I have never suffered enough to look beyond the present."

She looked at him with an expression of wholly new concern, mingled with some self-rebuke. She had all this time lost sight of his own sorrow.

"Arthur," she said, "you do not weep. Your voice is hard, yet you loved Eva; you want comfort too!"

"There is time enough for weeping," he said, with a dreary smile. Then he rose to go; but first he went toward her, and pressed a brother's kiss on her pure, candid forehead.

"Heaven bless you," he said; "Elizabeth, my sister Elizabeth!"

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## CHAPTER XXXV.

### THE END OF THE WAITING.

Two days later Arthur Venning was once more waiting on his island alone. He had taken affectionate leave of Hervey and the sisters, but, for no reason that he cared to give, declared his intention of remaining behind yet a week or two.



“Do not stay till the sea is frozen,” Hervey said, cheerily. The brothers’ misunderstanding had been righted with a word.

Arthur wore a semblance of cheerfulness too. “Well,” he retorted, glancing at Flora, who had never looked prettier than in her black gown, “I should be all the nearer to Bremen in the spring; you say you will want my presence then.”

“Yes, we must have you then,” Hervey replied, blithely. Flora had turned away her blushing face. Arthur added, “You will find me in London most likely, Hervey, if you do turn up there yourself this winter.”

Arthur had something he wanted to say to Elizabeth, but lacked courage. Did she guess why he lingered on the island? Had she a parting injunction to give about Eva’s grave? He dared not ask.

All that passed between them Hervey and Flora could hear too—a word of friendly farewell, a promise on Elizabeth’s part to write, an admonition on Arthur’s that she should be careful of her health. Then the boat put off, and Arthur, to his inexpressible relief, found himself alone.

It was his first sorrow. No wonder that even the sweet company of Elizabeth was unwelcome, almost unbearable to him. Only one thing he craved now, and that was solitude. Who, indeed is enough alone? Alike in our joys, sorrows, and common moods, the world is too much with us. Arthur Venning’s longing for privacy and quiet indicated depths of feeling he was conscious of for the first time. He had not told Elizabeth the whole truth, for if he had hitherto not known what sorrow was, still less had he known of himself. He had never supposed that anything could make him suffer as he was suffering now.

He went back, without losing time, to the little capital with its ancient minster, but found no more the same place. No golden dome now flashed above an amethystine hill, no corn-fields now lay bathed in amber light, no rose-gardens sloped down to a silvery sea. About the somber tower hovered the gray sea-ravens, croaking hoarsely as they wheeled hither and thither. Summer had vanished from the hanging pleasure-grounds; far and wide stretched the bare, brown fallow-land under a cheerless sky. All was sad and common.

Arthur went straight to the quiet graveyard under the Dom, and sat down by the mound of freshly turned earth on which lay faded chaplets. Could he leave Eva in this dreary place? Could he find any comfort in the cheerful, busy life to which he was returning? Not a creature was stirring in this Old World God’s Acre where he now sat alone. Far away stretched the sea, many a rocky islet breaking the monotone of cold, metallic, silvery gray. Inland he saw sweeps of barren hill and dark forest, the fairy world of yestreen, translated into gloom unutterable.

Arthur recalled the charm and delicious freshness of his first few weeks in the island almost with wonder now. How enthusiastically he had entered into the spirit of this unique summer holiday! How young and naïve he had felt when exploring the island with Elizabeth and Flora! How he had reveled in the sweetness and beauty of the place! How easy it had been to fall in love, or fancy himself falling in love, with Elizabeth.



Then he thought of the feeling that had been love indeed, that had led him to a desperate resolve. Was it so with all men as with him, or was he born with deeper feelings than he had ever given himself credit for? One thought comforted him inexpressibly, and it was that none but Elizabeth would ever share his secret. He might mourn for Eva as much as he pleased; he might appear superficial where the other sex was concerned—even cold, cynical, bitter—the world would never know why. He had something of the worldling and much of the Briton about him here; the desperate scot paid to feeling would be known to himself only. He rose at last, and rang the bell of a tiny postern leading into the cathedral cloisters. The summons was answered by the sacristan's daughter, one of those fair-haired, blue-eyed, well-favored young women common to the island. These rustic beauties often spend their whole lives without crossing the narrow channel, shutting them off from the continent, and yet, with the most entire freedom from coquetry or self-consciousness, possess easy, gentle manners, acquired one knows not how.

"I have something to say to you; do me the favor to come out, Fräulein," he said, raising his hat and addressing her with the formal politeness now exacted from the humblest ranks in Germany. "You see this grave?" he said, pointing to the mound raised two days ago.

"Yes, I see it," said the girl.

He took out two gold pieces and put them into her hand.

"Now," he said, "I want you to keep this special grave covered with fresh flowers from to-day till next July. Will you undertake the task? Here is your payment."

The girl had colored with astonishment and pleasure at sight of the guerdon—a royal one in her simple eyes.

"Dear God in heaven!" she cried, "is the gentleman dreaming? In a month more not a grave will be seen any more than the dead who lie in it. There will be several feet of snow, sure as we stand here, till April."

"True," Arthur said, "I had not thought of the snow; but till it comes, and when it goes, will you remember the flowers?"

"Oh, yes!" she answered, eagerly. "And I can procure roses and such like; my brother is under-gardener at the palace."

"No hot-house blossoms, understand that," Arthur put in, quickly. "Only the posies you find in your own garden, or in the woods and fields." He glanced at the little plot just outside the postern, and added, "I see rosemary here, and pansies in blow, and a last white rose or two; then in the brook by yonder garth are forget-me-nots in plenty, and in the spring the woods will be white with lilies-of-the-valley—Mai-Blumen you call them; these are the flowers for graves."

"I understand," said the girl, and stooping down she culled the choicest offerings she had to give. "Take these now, and I will see that the gentleman's wishes are carried out; I will not forget."

Arthur glanced at her before saying farewell. "Such charges are sacred," he said. She had a sweet face, but a careless one. He did not feel sure of her memory. "Promise." She crimsoned; tears



came into her eyes. Then she held out her rough little hand, and falteringly gave the word.

He went back to the lonely grave uncomforted. He had gratified a foolish, sentimental whim, he reflected, but if it brought him no solace, at least Elizabeth would be made happier—he had done it partly for her sake.

Yet as he lingered thus, he said that Elizabeth would never be anything but a sister to him. His love, all that was best in him, lay buried here. He thought and believed that he should visit this lonely grave every summer as long as he lived. He said to himself that when once he had recovered from the shock, he should have an unruffled, even existence to the end of his days; love, much less passion, should never trouble him any more.

To this his mind was fully made up, yet with the discomfoting half-consciousness that perhaps it could not be so. He might appear to forget Eva against his will—was he not here made aware of a truth on which rests the very stability of human society, the capacity for hope within the human breast? The divine order of things has so willed it; were it otherwise the world would be one vast tomb, and life an unbroken threnody. But alike in the spirit as in the flesh, we must abide with the living and not the dead.

Having bidden Eva farewell there was nothing to keep Arthur Venning any longer on his northern island. His coming and waiting were not in vain. He had found Love and Mirage, and thus seen fulfilled the dearest wishes of his heart. Wiser, *certes*, he was for the supreme experience of life, but happier? 'Tis a question each heart must answer for itself, other oracles are dumb.

THE END.



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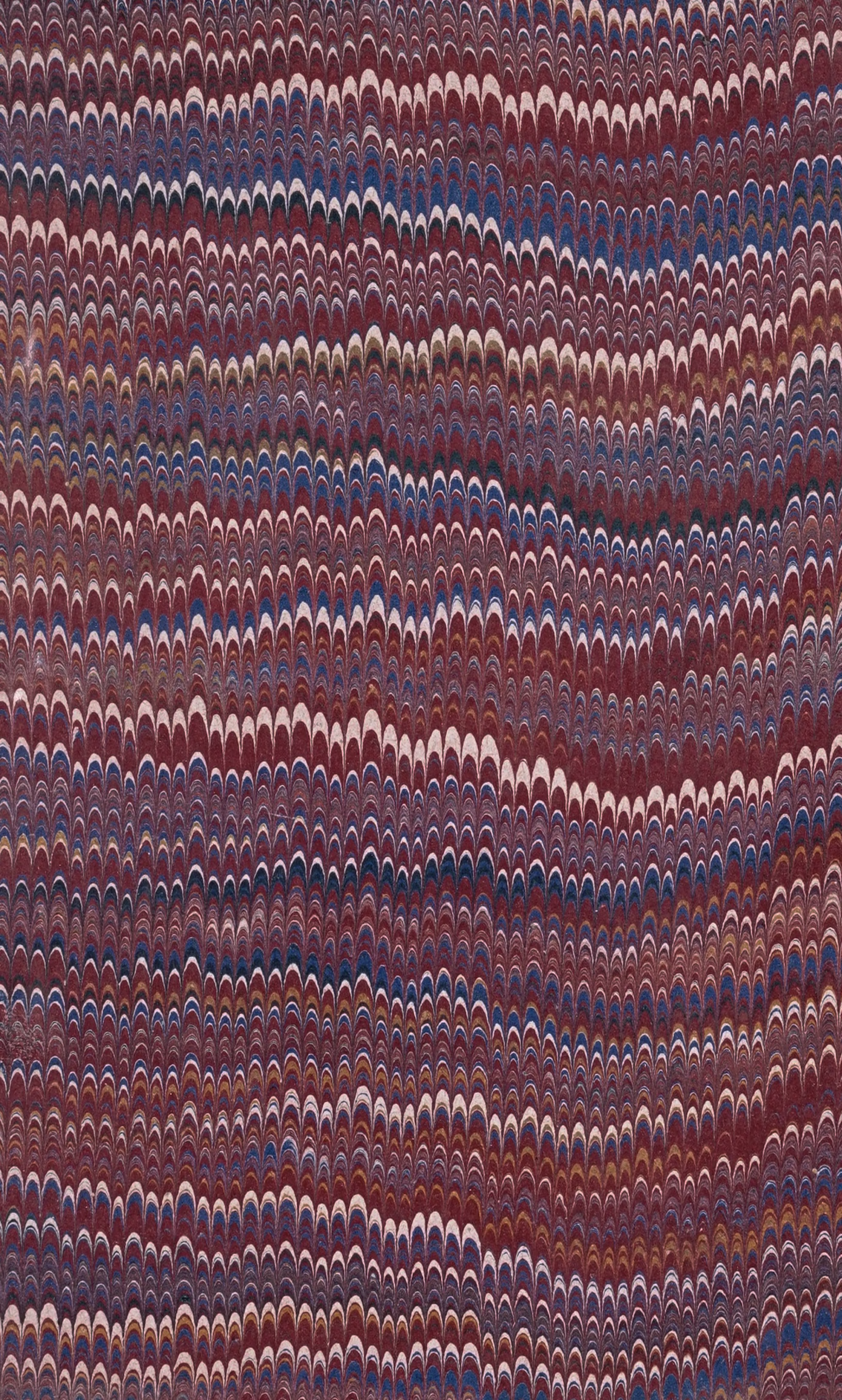














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