

CHAPTER XVIII.—Continued.

Arthur assented, and they went off together; Sir John, whose eyes appeared to be a little heavy under the influence of the port, presuming that he was not wanted. But, no sooner had the door closed than the worthy knight proved himself very wide-awake. Indeed, he commenced a singular course of action. Advancing on tiptoe to the safe in the corner of the room, he closely inspected it through his eye-glass. Then he cautiously tried the lid of an artfully contrived subdivision.

"Um!" he muttered, half aloud, "that's where they are; I wish I had ten minutes."

Next he returned swiftly to the table, and, taking a piece of the soft bread which he was eating instead of biscuit, with his wine, he rapidly kneaded it into dough, and, going to the safe, divided the material into two portions. One portion he carefully pressed upon the keyhole of the subdivision, and then, extracting the key of the safe itself, took a very fair impress of its wards on the other. This done, he carefully put the pieces of dough in his breast-pocket, in such a way that they were not likely to be crushed, and, with a smile of satisfaction, returned to his chair, helped himself to a glass of port, and dozed off.

"Halloo, Bellamy, gone to sleep? Wake up, man. We have settled this business about the mortgage. Will you write to Mr. Borley, and convey Mr. Heigham's decision? And perhaps"—addressing Arthur—"you will do the same on your own account."

"Certainly I will write, Caresfoot; and now I think that I must be off. Her ladyship does not like having to sit up for me."

George laughed in a peculiarly insulting way.

"I don't think she would care much, Bellamy, if you stayed away all night. But, look here, tell her I want to see her to-morrow; don't forget."

Sir John bit his knightly lip, but answered, smiling, that he would remember, and begging George not to ring, as his trap was at the hall-door and the servant waiting, he bade an affectionate good-night to Arthur, to whom he expressed a hope that they would soon meet again, and let himself out of the room. But, as soon as the door was closed, he went through another performance exceedingly inappropriate in a knight. Turning round his smug face red with anger, he pirouetted on his toes, and shook his fist violently in the direction of the door.

"You scoundrel!" he said, between his teeth, "you have made a fool of me for twenty years, and I have been obliged to grin and bear it; but I will be even with you yet, and her too, more especially her."

So soon as Sir John had left, Arthur told his host that, if the morning was fine, he proposed to go and fish in Bratham Lake, and that he also proposed to take his departure by the last train on the following evening. To these propositions George offered no objections—indeed, they were distinctly agreeable to him, as lessening the time he would be forced to spend in the society of a guest he cordially detested, for such was the feeling that he had conceived toward Arthur.

Then they parted for the night; but before he left the room, George went to lock up the safe that was still open in the corner. Struck by some thought, he unlocked the separate compartment with a key that hung on his watch-chain and extracted therefrom a thick and neatly-folded packet of letters. Drawing out one or two, he glanced through them and replaced them.

"Oh! Lady Anne, Lady Anne," he said to himself as he closed the case, "you are up in the world now, and you aspire to rule the county society, and have both the wealth and the wit to do it; but you must not kick over the traces, or I shall be forced to suppress you, Lady Anne, though you are the wife of a Brummagen knight, and I think that it is time you had a little reminder. You are growing a touch too independent."

CHAPTER XIX.

Arthur's sleep was oppressed that night by horrible nightmares of fighting dogs, whereof the largest and most ferocious was fitted with George's red head, the effect of which, screwed, without any eye to the fitness of things to the body of the deceased Snarleyow, struck him as peculiarly disagreeable. He himself was armed with a gun, and, whilst he was still arguing with Sir John Bellamy the nice point whether should he execute that particular animal, as he felt a carnal longing to do, it would be manslaughter or dog-slaughter, he found himself wide awake.

It was very early in the morning of the 1st of May, and, contrary to the usual experience of the inhabitants of these islands, the sky gave promise of a particularly fine day, just the day for fishing. He did not feel sleepy, and, had he done so, he had had enough of his doggy dreams; so he got up, dressed, and taking his fishing rod, let himself out of the house as he had been instructed to do on the previous evening, and, releasing Aleck from his out-house, proceeded toward Bratham Lake.

And about this time Angela woke up too, for she always rose early, and ran to the window to see what sort of a day she had got for her birthday. Seeing it to be so fine, she threw open the old lattice, at which her pet raven

recovered himself pretty well, however. Rising from his stone seat, he took off his hat, and said, humbly: "I beg your pardon, but you startled me so, and really for a moment I thought that you were the spirit of the place, or," he added, gracefully, pointing to a branch of half-opened hawthorn bloom she held in her hand, "the original Queen of the May."

Angela blushed again. The compliment was only implied this time; she had therefore no possible pretext for getting angry.

For a moment she dropped the sweet eyes that looked as though they were fresh from reading the truths of Heaven before his gaze of unmistakable admiration, and stood confused; and, as she stood, it struck Arthur that there was something more than mere beauty of form and feature about her—an indescribable something, a glory of innocence, a reflection of God's own light that tinged the worship her loveliness commanded with a touch of reverential awe.

"The angels must look like that," he thought. But he had no time to think any more, for next moment she had gathered up her courage in both her hands, and was speaking to him in a soft voice, of which the tones went ringing on through all the changes of his life.

"My father told me that he had asked you to come and fish, but I did not expect to meet you so early. I—I fear that I am disturbing you," she made as though she would be going.

Arthur felt that this was a contingency to be prevented at all hazards. "You are Miss Caresfoot," he said, hurriedly, "are you not?"

"Yes—I am Angela; I need not ask your name, my father told me. You are Mr. Arthur Heigham."

"Yes. And do you know that we are cousins?" This was a slight exaggeration, but he was glad to advance any plea to her confidence that occurred to him.

"Yes; my father said something about our being related. I have no relations except my cousin George, and I am very glad to make the acquaintance of one," and she held out her hand to him in a winning way.

He took it almost reverently. "You cannot," he said, with much sincerity, "be more glad than I am. I too, am without relations. Till lately I had my mother, but she died last year."

"Were you very fond of her?" she asked, softly.

He nodded in reply, and, feeling instinctively that she was on delicate ground, Angela pursued the conversation no further.

Meanwhile Aleck had awoke from a comfortable sleep in which he was indulging on the other stone seat, and, coming forward, sniffed at Angela and wagged his tail in approval—a liberty that was instantly resented by the big raven, who had now been joined by another not quite so large. Advancing boldly, it pecked him sharply on the tail—a proceeding that caused Master Aleck to jump round as quickly as his maimed condition would allow him, only to receive a still harder peck from its companion bird; indeed, it was not until Angela intervened with the bough of hawthorn that they would cease from their attack.

"They are such jealous creatures," she explained; "they always follow me about, and fly at every dog that comes near me! Poor dog! that is the one, I suppose, who killed Snarleyow. My father told me all about it."

"Yes, it is easy to see that," said Arthur laughing, and pointing to Aleck, who, indeed, was a lamentable case, having one eye entirely closed, a large strip of plaster on his head, and all the rest of his body more or less marked with bites. "It is an uncommonly awkward business for me, and your cousin will not forgive it in a hurry, I fancy; but it really was not poor Aleck's fault—he is gentle as a lamb, if only he is let alone."

"He has a very honest face, though his nose does look as though it were broken," she said, and, stooping down she patted the dog.

"But I must be going in to breakfast," she went on, presently. "It is eight o'clock; the sun always strikes that bough at eight in spring," and she pointed to a dead limb, half hidden by the budding foliage of the oak.

"You must observe closely to have noticed that, but I do not think that the sun is quite on it yet. I do not like to lose my new-found relations in such a hurry," he added, with a somewhat forced smile, "and I am to go away from here this evening."

The intelligence was evidently very little satisfactory to Angela, nor did she attempt to conceal her concern.

"I am very sorry to hear that," she said. "I hoped you were going to stay for some time."

"And so I might have, had it not been for that brute Aleck, but he has put a long sojourn with your cousin and the ghost of Snarleyow out of the question; so I suppose I must go by the 6.20 train. At any rate," he added, more brightly, as a thought struck him, "I must go from Isleworth."

She did not appear to see the drift of the last part of his remark, but answered: "I am going with my father to call at Isleworth at three this afternoon, so perhaps we shall meet again there; but now, before I go in, I will show you a better place than this to fish, a little higher up, where Jake's, our gardener, always sets his night-lines."

Arthur assented, as he would have been glad to assent to anything likely to prolong the interview, and they walked off slowly together, talking as cheerfully as a sense that the conversation would soon come to an end would allow. The spot was reached all too soon, and Angela with evident reluctance, for she was not accustomed to conceal her feelings, said, that she must now go.

"Why must you go so soon?"

"Well, to tell you the truth, to-day is my birthday—I am twenty to-day—and I know that Pigott, my old nurse, means to give me a little present, at breakfast, and she will be dreadfully disappointed if I am late. She has been thinking a great deal about me, you see."

"May I wish you many, very many,

happy returns of the day? and" with a little hesitation,—"may I also offer you a present, a very worthless one, I fear?"

"How can I—?" stammered Angela, when he cut her short.

"Don't be afraid; it is nothing tangible, though it is something that you may not think worth accepting."

"What do you mean?" she said, bluntly, for her interest was aroused.

"Don't be angry. My present is only the offer of myself as your sincere friend."

She blushed vividly as she answered: "You are very kind. I have never had but one friend—Mr. Fraser; but if you think you can like me enough, it will make me very happy to be your friend, too." And in another second she was gone, with her ravens flying after her, to receive her present and a jobation from Pigott for being late, and to eat her breakfast with such an appetite as an entirely new set of sensations can give.

In the garden she met her father, walking up and down before the house, and informed him that she had been talking to Mr. Heigham. He looked up with a curious expression of interest.

"Why did you not ask him in to breakfast?" he said.

"Because there was nothing to eat except bread and milk."

"Ah!—well, perhaps you were right. I will go down and speak to him. No; I forgot I shall see him this afternoon."

And Arthur, let those who disbelieve in love at first sight, laugh if they will, sit down to think, trembling in every limb, utterly shaken by the inrush of a new and strong emotion. He had not come to the age of twenty-four without some experiences of the other sex, but never before had he known any such sensation as that which now overpowered him, never before had he fully realized what solitude meant as he did now that she had left him. In youth, when love does come, he comes as a strong man armed.

And so, steady and overwhelming all resistance, the full tide of a pure passion poured itself into his heart. There was no pretense or make believe about it; the bolt that spread from Angela's gray eyes had gone straight home, and would remain an "ever-fixed mark," so long as life itself should last.

For only once in a lifetime does a man succumb after this fashion. To many indeed, no such fortune—call it good or ill—will ever come, since the majority of men flirt or marry, indulge in "platonic friendships," or in a consistent course of admiration for their neighbours' wives, as fate or fancy leads them, and wear their time away without ever having known the meaning of such love as this. There is no fixed rule about it; the most unlikely, even the more sordid and contemptible of mankind, are liable to become the subjects of an enduring passion. Only then it raises them; for though strong affection, especially if unrequited, sometimes wears and enervates the mind, its influence is, in the main, undoubtedly ennobling. But, though such affection is bounded by no rule, it is curious to observe how generally true are the old sayings which declare that a man's thoughts return to his first real love, as naturally and unconsciously as the needle, that has for awhile been drawn aside by some overmastering influence, returns to its magnetic pole. The needle has wavered, but it has never shaken off its allegiance; that would be against nature, and is therefore impossible; and so it is with the heart. It is the eyes that he loved as a lad which he sees through the gathering darkness of his death-bed; it is a chance but that he will always adore the star which first came to share his loneliness in this shadowed world above all the shining multitudes in heaven.

And, though it is not every watcher who will find it, early or late, that star may rise for him, as it did for Arthur now. A man may meet a face which it is quite beyond his power to forget, and be touched of lips that print their kiss upon his very heart. Yes, the star may rise, to pursue its course, perhaps beyond the ken of his horizon, or only to set again before he has learned to understand its beauty—rarely, very rarely, to shed its perfect light upon him for all his time of watching. The star may rise and set; the sweet lips whose touch still thrills him after so many years may lie to-day

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