

The Pride Of The Eye.

"You are sure there is nothing else you want, Arthur?"

"Quite certain, father, I'm perfectly comfortable."

"Well, don't read too much, try to sleep a little," and with a kindly glance back, my father steps through the door.

Reclining in my padded armchair, I cannot keep back bitter thoughts as my eye travels round my room; it is hung with dark silk curtains to soften the light; on the floor is a carpet which deadens all sound; and though it is only early autumn, a fire smoulders in the grate, from beneath which Dick, my little fox-terrier, blinks honestly up at me.

I rise, adjust my crutch, and hobble over to the window, pull aside the curtains and look out. My father is just disappearing. Along the road, fifty yards away, are cantering a man and a woman. How I wish I could still ride my Arab! If my eye does not deceive me, this couple are young and in the first flush of the real enjoyment of life. As they sweep past the gate, the girl raises her eyes, and they must have met those of the young fellow, for she turns her face away like a flash. But already they are behind the hedge, and out of view. With the aid of my crutch again I make my way back to a long low lounge near the fire, and get slowly settled on it. I give myself up to my wistful thoughts.

My memory goes back to the time when I had just left the military college, and returned home, proud of my appointment, to a lieutenancy in the Royal Canadian Infantry. I had been offered on graduation a commission in the Engineers in the Imperial service, but preferring to remain in Canada, had accepted the nomination to our own native corps.

My section of the regiment was stationed at Toronto, and thither I went to join it. As when I was at college, I had plenty of money, for my mother's death five years before had left me a comfortable fortune. This enabled me to enter into the social life of the city—a side of existence of which I have always been very fond. The officers of the garrison never suffered from any lack of invitations, either, for the scarlet tunic seems to catch a lady's eye. I soon felt quite at home and enjoyed my life immensely in the provincial capital. I had a certain amount of work to do; I ate well, drank well, and paid as much attention to the other sex as was good for me. But any flirtations I indulged in never went beyond flirtations; and I remember laughing to myself and rallying my brother-officers, when, a few weeks after meeting some girl or other whose face had struck them, they would suddenly begin to talk seriously of marriage, and about how a fellow really ought to settle down—that is to say if they were successful wooers, which by no means always happened.

One of the best known men in Toronto was Colonel Nelson, a veteran of the Raid of '66, and a chum of my father's since boyhood. When I first arrived in the city the Colonel invited me to come and see Mrs. Nelson and himself whenever I felt inclined. I very often took advantage of his hospitality. I had been spending the evening with them one June day and he and I were sitting smoking a cigar after dinner. We had been talking over the situation in South Africa, on whose horizon the war clouds were already gathering. Then a pause had come.

"I can't believe I am between fifty and sixty years old, Cranston," said the Colonel suddenly.

"I should never have taken you for that."

"Oh, I don't mean that, but when I sit here opposite you, I think I see your father again—you are so like him—and I seem to be a boy once more and forget I have a daughter who is to come out this winter. What a splendid-looking chap Harry Cranston—your father, I mean—was!—a face a Jew would take on trust, and as strong as Samson."

"Excuse me, Colonel," I interrupted, "You have just one daughter, haven't you?"

"Yes, Violet is all I have left now. She is in England at present finishing her education. She would have been here a year ago, but took some fad about getting a training in hospital nursing. She will sail for Montreal a week from to-day. That's her picture over there on the mantel."

I got up and stepped over to the fire-place.

"We just got that about a month ago, I thought you had seen it,"

went on Colonel Nelson, "and Violet writes that they tell her in England it is very like her. She does not seem to have changed much."

All this time I was looking at the photograph only half hearing what was said. The features were those of a girl about twenty, they were not remarkable for their regularity. The face was oval and refined, but the striking thing was—I hardly know how to describe it—the extraordinarily fascinating and interesting expression, at once sweet and resolute.

"When did you say she was coming home?" I asked, laying the portrait aside.

"She sails next Thursday."

"And she has been in Germany, was it, or France?"

The Colonel looked at me. "In England, at Cheltenham," he added.

I excused myself early, but in going out met Mrs. Nelson, in the hall.

"I am afraid you must find it dull, Captain, let me congratulate you; this is the first time I have seen you since your promotion, since you ceased to be Lieutenant Cranston—what was I saying? Oh, yes; I'm afraid you must find it dull here, for we are getting old, and the house is quiet, but perhaps in the autumn it will be livelier."

"Dull!" I answered, "not a bit, Mrs. Nelson, there is no place in Toronto where I feel so much at home. I always prefer old friends to new ones."

"I hope you will not forget us when we come back in the fall from Murray Bay."

"Oh, you are going to spend the summer there?"

"Yes, the Colonel and I are to meet Violet in Montreal, and then take her with us to Murray Bay for July and August."

"I shall not forget your invitation," I said as I bade them good night.

Apart from a notice in a society paper to the effect that, "the charmingly interesting daughter of Colonel and Mrs. Nelson, had returned to Canada, and was spending the gay summer months at the bains-de-mer at Murray Bay," I heard nothing of the Nelsons till they reached Toronto again in September.

About the time of their return private business called me home for a couple of weeks, and while there an invitation was forwarded from the Nelsons to a dance at their house. Presumably Miss Nelson was to come out. Of course I was much put out at not being able to meet the original of the photograph which had so interested me, but I had to decline.

I called one afternoon the week following my return to the city. Mrs. Nelson came into the drawing-room in a moment.

"Why, how do you do, Captain Cranston? I am so glad to see you, but so sorry you were out of town the other evening. How is your father?"

I was sorry, too. However Mrs. Nelson, I don't need to ask you how you are," I added, "for I have eyes."

"You are still the flatterer, Captain. I am so sorry, Violet is unwell to-day, has a dreadful headache, and cannot appear."

I was sorry too. However Mrs. Nelson asked me for dinner the following evening.

This time we did meet. I think I see her now. She was tall, noticeably tall, even among the tall women of to-day. But she was no lath of a girl. Her figure was already rounded. Her carriage, upright and easy, appealed to the soldier's eye. Her hair was almost black, her skin dark, but clear, and the tide of blood ebbed and flowed through her cheeks. But it was her eyes which betrayed the mystery of that strangely interesting expression I had wondered at in her photograph. They were hazel. A thousand lights flashed from them at once. Passion and modesty were both there. One moment I saw gentleness, the next, resolution. A certain hauteur and graciousness kept strange company.

"Violet," Mrs. Nelson was saying, "this is Captain Cranston, a very old friend of ours."

"You are a horseman, Captain Cranston, I think I heard mother say. There is just time before dinner, and if it is not too dark would you mind giving me your opinion of a new horse father has just bought me. He said that before he closed the bargain, he wanted you to see her. He is not home yet, so I just thought I'd ask you myself. But perhaps you don't feel like going out again?" she concluded, giving me a curious, half-shy look.

"On the contrary," I answered at once, "nothing would give me more pleasure. My horse and my profession are the two things I am fond of."

So off we started to inspect the

new mount, which turned out to be a splendid beast. The best part of it was that Miss Nelson accepted an invitation to go out riding the next afternoon.

During dinner the talk centred in South Africa. The Colonel insisted that if war broke out, Canada must send troops.

"I know," he said, "two men who will go if they have to swim there; one is called Cranston and the other Nelson."

"The idea!" laughed Mrs. Nelson, but with some alarm in her voice.

"We'll go together, Colonel," said I.

"You may, my boy, but I'm afraid I'm too old. They'd never take me," he answered with a glum look, and an amused glance at his wife.

The next day Violet and I had our ride. My Arab was put to it to keep pace with her mare. As we swept along Forest Hill Road, and then away across the breezy common, I let Violet get a little bit ahead, so that I could watch her splendid figure as she rode. She had perfect control over her animal, and as I drew up again to her, I saw the blood glowing in her face from the mad gallop through the brisk autumn air. People, I noticed, turned as we scudded past and looked after her. They showed their good sense, if not their good manners.

I had laughed at other men's heads being turned in a few weeks at the sight of a pretty girl. I had to include myself in the laugh now. But this time I found it was no laughing matter. It was no weak sentimental feeling I bore towards Violet. I wanted to be near her; my heart throbbled wildly whenever I saw her. I dreamt of her at night; I woke up in the morning thinking of her; I could read nothing; every printed page turned into a picture of her. This could not go on long; nor did it. At the end of a month I had offered her all a man can offer her head upon my shoulder.

Everything went well. Colonel Nelson was extremely kind. What he said I have no intention of repeating. They were the words of the Canadian gentleman that he is.

Shortly after our engagement a nephew of the Colonel's came to visit them. He was a fine looking chap, a big fair-haired fellow with blue eyes. I saw at once that he found his cousin very attractive, and this fairly set me wild. It is said that people are apt to admire their opposites, and I was silly and jealous enough to fear that Violet might be estranged from me. The very sight of Frank Hamilton made me sulky and silent and savage. I was rude to him, curliish and snappy. I don't know whether he understood or not, but anyhow he continued his debarment attentions to Violet. The war had already broken out, and I had volunteered for service to Africa. If I were not accepted, I determined upon being married at once. Of course if I were to go to the Transvaal, it would be senseless and unfair to ask Violet to consent to our immediate union. I went up to the Nelsons that very evening. Violet met me in the porch alone.

"There is something I want you to promise me," I said, as we went into the drawing room.

"What is it, Arthur?"

My blood leapt as I looked at her. She was dressed for the theatre. Her fine figure was seen to perfection in a tight fitting gown of dark-colored silk, which exactly suited her rich, southern complexion; and over all the picture glowed the subdued red light from a shaded table lamp.

"I want you to set our wedding day," I answered, "for some time within the next two months."

"Oh, I can't do that, no," and she gave me a very decided look.

"Why not?"

"I couldn't possibly be ready; just think, only eight weeks, and so much to do. Why, my trousseau is to come from New York."

"Never mind the trousseau; you can do without one."

"Well, but, no, I can't, you don't understand. Men are so absurd. But just think, Arthur, we've only known each other such a short time, it wouldn't be decent."

"Decency be hanged!"

"Besides that, you've gone and volunteered for South Africa, and I'm so afraid they'll accept you. If you do go, we could n't possibly be married till you come back. But if you are not chosen for the contingent, why then, perhaps—" she glanced up, caught my eye, and blushed furiously.

My heart bounded. I kissed her and returned filled with vague and delightful thoughts to the barracks.

In the morning paper two days later the list of commissions for the

contingent was announced. I was nominated to a lieutenancy. Of course all idea of marriage had to be put aside. Instead of passing my time settling the interesting details of a honeymoon, my hours were spent in a feverish preparation for the long journey to Cape Town.

I remember when I went to say good-bye to Violet. She was looking pale and anxious, I thought. Yet it only added to the fascination and beauty of her expression. I could see she spoke under considerable strain, but, like the high-spirited girl she was, she made no sign.

"I am proud to see you go to South Africa, Arthur, but—"

"I will come back, if I have to desert," I said, "I could do it now."

She smiled and shook her head. "I think too much of you to believe that," she said. "Now go," she exclaimed; and saying this, she pulled a gold pin with a head in the form of an enamelled violet from her collar and stuck it in my tunic. "And bring that back to me," she went on, "and—"

She paused out of breath. I stood watching her. She drew herself up and those hazel eyes flashed with lights I have never seen before or since.

"And—and," she burst out, "yes, I will, and nobody can hinder me. I will go, too."

"To South Africa!" I gasped.

"Yes, South Africa! I will enlist as a nurse. I have had some training in England. I will go and nurse you, if you are wounded. There!"

I have no intention of entering into any account of the weary voyage to Cape Town, the long wait at De Aar, and the exhausting cross-country march after Cronje. I was not wounded at Paardeberg, nor was I struck during the advance on Bloemfontein. It was at a little skirmish outside the Free State Capital, after the occupation of the town by our troops, that I was hurt. A shell burst near me, and the explosion shattered my left leg, tore two fingers off my right hand, and blinded one eye.

I must have been unconscious a long time. When I at last came to, I found myself in what looked like the bedroom of a private house. I could not at first understand what was the matter. A few things I noticed. Steps were sounding every minute outside my door. The air was heavy with drugs. It was very hot and I could hear groans from somewhere. I glanced up at the window and saw that it must be evening, for the light came in dusk and red. I was becoming a little wider awake now, and suddenly became aware that I was not alone. A nurse was sitting in a chair at the foot of my bed. She seemed to be asleep, and as hers was the only direction in which I could look, for to move pained me, I fell to watching her, as she sat shadowed in the fading light.

"How tired the poor girl looks!" I was thinking, "not bad-looking either; seems to be like somebody I know; wonder who it is? I have it; if she weren't so worn and pale and thin, she might pass for Violet, that is if her eyes are right—most likely they're only brown. Wonder where Violet is now? Round Bloemfontein somewhere, I suppose. Queer we've never met since she landed. Wonder where I am? If she knew I were laid up, she'd be here—"

And so my thoughts rambled on. My gaze turned once more to the nurse, who had moved. Just then she woke up with a little start, and instantly looked round at me. Our eyes met, and a moment later Violet's lips touched mine.

"Oh, Arthur, my love, at last! But you must n't speak, not a word." But she stood looking at me so wistfully and kissed me again.

There was a singular feeling and a new one for me in that kiss. Whether it was from sheer bodily weakness or for some other reason, there rushed through me no surge of passion. I thrilled, but—perhaps it was simply because I was not strong enough physically—my blood did not beat in my temples, as it used to; on the contrary a quiet contentment, a sort of faraway dreamy happiness crept over me, and in my hazy joy I lay back on the pillows and with half shut eyes watched Violet, who, shaking her head and with her finger on her lips, was stealing back to her chair.

Evidently she thought I had fallen asleep again. She sat down and turned her head partly away from me. My eye rested on her face. How thin and pale she was! Her eyes which I remembered at Toronto, when they danced and blazed in perfect health, were now dull and weary-looking, though some of the old light brightened them for a moment when I had first recognized her. Her hands lay before her in her lap. Her knuckles stood out, and the skin hung puckered

over her fingers. And how thin she had become! Her figure was no longer one series of faultless curves. It was angular now, and her shoulders were bent forward. But my eye always came back to the pined, jaded, pale face, and she must have felt my gaze upon her, for she turned, and rose smiling, and came over and laid her cheek against my bandages. She looked fondly at me and kissed me on the eyelids.

"You are to go to sleep, darling," she said.

I tried to raise myself and speak but fell back sweating and almost fainting with agony.

"Oh, Arthur, please lie still; do, just for to-night."

I could only look at her. She leaned forward and kissed me again, and in the gathering darkness once more that strange thrill of quiet contentment passed through me, and I lay back on my pillows and fell asleep.

I did not waken till the next morning. When I opened my eyes Violet was standing beside me with her hand to her head. She was not so pale as the day before.

"Well, how do you feel to-day, Arthur? You are looking much better."

"Yes, I feel very different this morning," I answered. "And your colour is much brighter to-day, too. We'll be able to do a little talking and pass away the time. Why is it you don't abandon such a helpless wreck as I am?" I went on gaily.

She smiled faintly and put her hand over her eyes.

"Is your head aching, Violet? I am afraid you are overdoing yourself," I said.

"I think I will soon be as much of a wreck as you are, Arthur, I feel so strangely this morning, and my skin is just burning."

She laid her hand on my brow.

"Why yes, dear, you are very feverish. You must tell McKenzie when he comes round. You'll have to knock off work. But you must hold out a little longer, and then you will help them to load me on a transport, and we'll both have this hole of an Africa."

Violet smiled and said, "Yes, just a little while." Then she went over to her chair and sat down wearily.

"But I don't see, Violet, how I am to ask you to marry me when we get home again."

She looked over at me, a twinkle lighting her eyes, which had a curious dullness in them that morning.

"Seriously, Violet, I'm in earnest. I'm a cripple for life. I've only half a man. I've lost a leg, a hand, and an eye—"

"Don't talk nonsense, Arthur. I once said to myself that the only man I could marry must be an Apollo; that is not so long ago—and she looked me straight in the face—but I have changed since then, and now—once more the tired face lighted—" "until you desert me. I will not give you up, and—"

A step sound out side the door.

"Good morning, Cranston." It was Dr. McKenzie. "Well, Miss Nelson, I don't need to ask how our patient is," and the surgeon turned cheerily towards Violet, who was standing beside him.

"The improvement began last night," she commenced. "He—," Suddenly she recoiled slightly.

"Oh, I feel so strangely this morning Doctor. I think it must be the heat," and Violet sank back into the chair in a swoon.

McKenzie instantly called a couple of attendants, and among them they carried her away. He was gone before I could ask any questions.

I cannot write any longer about this. That was the last time I saw Violet. She had taken enteric fever. As her constitution was shattered by the constant overwork, she could make no fight against it, and a few days later succumbed. I learned this afterwards, for they dared not tell it to me then, as I was too weak. They said she had been invalided home that very day. That of course kept me from expecting to hear from her for a considerable time. When they finally told me the truth I had a relapse.

Three months later I was helped ashore at Montreal. My father was at the dock to meet me. He brought me home.

Colonel Nelson came here to see me as soon as I arrived. He entered my room silently, and came and stood at the head of my couch. He took my sound hand and wrung it. The tears gathered in his eyes. He turned his face aside. He caught his breath, wrung my hand again, and rushed from the room.

I am making scarcely any headway in recovery. In spite of what the doctors say and what my poor father does his best to persuade himself is true, I know perfectly well that I shall never be restored to health. I was looking the other day at a photograph I had taken just before leaving Canada for the Cape. Instead of a man coming into the prime of life, I am only a broken, tottering scaffolding, ready to drop to pieces at the mere breath of disease.

From paying no attention to the world beyond the grave, my whole interest in gallant in that shadow-land to which my gallant-hearted girl has gone a little while before. But the thought of her causes no passion to burn within me, does not make my veins throb, nor my heart tighten. Ah, no! When her form comes before the eye of mind, she is not dressed in silk and jewels, appealing to the senses, her eyes glowing in the light of life and love. No, no! She is simply, plainly attired, her cheeks are wan, and her eyes are weary; yet an infinite sweetness beams in them. And when in my dreams she leans over and touches her lips to mine, instead of the old mad boiling of the blood a feeling of perfect contentment steals over me, and I lie back quietly on my pillows and forget the bitterness of it all.