

B doubtfully, "it would have taken longer than that."

"It must have taken," said A, after a pause, during which he and B continued to stare at the column, "a million years, at least, to grow that size."

"I should have fancied, myself, it would have taken longer than that," said B, less doubtfully.

"By Jove," said A, after a longer pause, and in sheer desperation, "no fellow can tell how long it must have taken—billions and billions of years. I wonder whether Murray believes in the Old Testament."

We stood looking, I know not how long, at this timeless form. At last B broke out wildly.

"I must get away, A, right away; I can't stand it. Fancy this place being all quiet for I don't know how long; and this thing growing about the size of a sugar-plum bigger every thirty years, and now being so big! It's awful; I can't stand it."

"I should like," said A sentimentously, as we walked away, "to know whether Murray believes in the Old Testament."

Often before I saw that cave I have dreamt at night that I have fallen from my bed, and started a wild descent through eternal space. The feeling was awful; eternity oppressed me. But standing before that pillar, trying to realise its immense age, the oppression of feeling was far worse.

"Shan't look at that again," said A. "Horrid feeling, thinking of it. Seems as if all the laws of gravity were wrong, and there was no top or bottom or side to anything."

It is strange, in the face of the mathematical fact of infinity of space, how very seldom we are troubled by the idea how completely our reason is bound by the convention of a limit. Out in the sunlight, where spring, summer, autumn, and winter follow in regular course; where the wind blows to-day, and is still to-morrow; where trees and flowers bloom and fade and men are born and die,—everything to unreflecting observation suggests limit. But at night, in darkness, it seems strange that we are not more often oppressed by the awfulness of infinity. Be this as it may, I swear—ay, far greater test of belief, will bet 100L.—that no one, not even King George IV. of England or Lord Chesterfield—who, I take it, are about the two greatest snobs this earth has ever been burdened with, and therefore least likely to be impressed by wonder—could have stood unnerfed before that column in the second of the caves of Adelsberg. For ages and ages and ages, no light, no sound; perfect stillness; not even, for that countless time, even the ripple of an earthquake. For ages and ages and ages, one tiny drop of water always falling and falling and falling down to the ground below, always from one point above. For ages and ages and ages, each little space of thirty years seeing a tiny rise in the ground beneath from the constant fall of the one drop of water. And now—after how mighty a lapse of time—a column of sixty feet in height, and forty feet in circumference.

After the discovery of the leg of bacon, the curiosity of the German man and woman began to abate; and the guide himself, I fancy, got somewhat tired of answering their numerous questions, for he commenced to trade wildly on their belief—the next thing they referred to being, he declared, a giraffe; and the next, he affirmed with a perfectly calm face, to be a ghost. The suspicions of the Germans, that he was not strictly telling the truth, seemed to be aroused by this, for they asked him no more questions; but after another look of admiration at the leg of bacon, came with us out of the cave.

"How many more are there?" said A, as we entered another passage, now low and narrow, now high and wide, but always clothed with white shining stalactites and stalagmites.

"More? Many more. Very. Come big cave where people dance. Other cave, where concert-room. Come other waterfall," replied the guide, smiling and nodding his head.

In all, we were three full hours wandering in these caverns. At some point—where, I now forget—the rail laid down ended, and the German woman had to leave her chair and walk. She fell in most cheerfully with the necessity, and taking her husband's arm, stumbled along sleepily, with fast-closed eyes, and trusting implicitly to his guidance. Now and again he would murmur, "Sehr hubsch," and she, trying hard, but unsuccessfully, to open her eyes, would dutifully echo, "Sehr hubsch." It was at the farthest point we reached that they mournfully ate the last of the sausage, and emptied the square bottle; and then the German, after an address to the guide, placed the said bottle in the very extremity of the cave, and carefully pressed down into it the cork. The guide smiled, and pointing at the German, turned to us and said,

"He very funny man. He make feon for all who come here. Dey tink dese spirits, but dere is none. Eh?" And he and the German went into a roar of laughter, which the echoes took up and broke hideously.

"Horrible," said A, turning away. "Can't be content with eating sandwiches? Ought to be kicked for making such a vile pun."

How many caverns we saw, I know not. There was the dance-room, as our guide called it—a huge place with a smooth floor of sand, and long wooden benches here and there. Then, there was the concert-room, so called from a strange mass of long stalactites and stalagmites at one end that looked curiously like an organ. There was the waterfall, formed by the moisture falling over a smooth rock—"though some

thinks it more like umbrella?" said the guide interrogatively.

At last, tired out with our underground wanderings, and sleepy with such unwonted exercise of our sense of wonder, we turned back. The German woman managed to open her eyes when we got back to the rail and chair, and she and her husband seated themselves thereon, and fell into a deep sleep. Steadily we trudged on through the long winding passages, now low and narrow, now wide and high, but always damp with the constant drip, drip of water. At last, all the caves were passed, and we stood in that we had first seen. It was quite dark now; only the candles we held threw a little halo of light round us, and made the darkness visible. I stood for a moment listening to the river, as it flowed on with clatter and splash over the broken rocks of its bed then I turned down the last passage away from the caves of Adelsberg.

"Wouldn't have missed seeing that for anything!" said A, as we came out into the misty raining night.

"It was quite worth," cried B enthusiastically, "losing one's luggage for!"

"By Jove!" returned A. "Forgot all about the luggage. We must see about it."

THE SACRIFICE.

Looking into the future, which seems only a dull blank, and into the past, so full of anxiety, pain and grief, I ask myself if my life has really been a wasted one; if, in spite of prayer and an earnest endeavor to follow the right path, I have strayed into the wrong one, merely because it was narrow and dark.

I am in a despondent mood to-night, and the sunlight to-morrow may warm and cheer my sore heart.

Fannie hurt me when she called me an old maid to-night; true enough it is, for I am thirty-two to-day—but—but—tears? I thought they were dried up long ago.

I was eighteen years old when I was betrothed to Karl Schaumann, a young German in my father's employ, confidential clerk, and next to our own Max in his heart.

We are of German origin, on our father's side, though Max and I are English by birth, and had a darling little English mother, who died many years ago.

Father and Max remember her better than I do, for I was only a little girl when she died, while Max was ten years old.

Father was very glad when Karl asked me to be his wife, and gave us a betrothal feast, to which our German friends were all bidden.

I was very happy.

To me Karl was, and is, the true-hearted, loyal lover, who won my heart before I knew I had one.

In his young, strong frame, his kindly blue eyes, and crisp, golden curls, I could paint all of a hero I needed for a husband, and that Karl loved me I was as certain as I was that my heart beat for him only.

We were two weeks betrothed, when a fire broke out in my father's warehouse, and in the effort to save something of the property my dear father was killed, and Max crippled for life.

It was a long time before we realized the full weight of that misery.

He was only twenty-five, so strong and full of vigor, that we thought the dreary burden of pain would pass away and he would be again able to move as before.

He had lost no limb, but had lain under a fallen beam for hours before he was rescued, and the spine was permanently and incurably injured.

We had been told that sufficient was left of our father's property to give us a support, with close economy, and we had moved from our own home to a quiet country town, in order to live cheaply, when the doctor broke the heavy news to us.

He had driven over from the city, as he often did, and found Max lying as usual upon his low couch, where Karl and I lifted him each morning.

It was a close June day, and Max had had a restless night, so he was not so cheerful as usual.

"Doctor," he said, after the usual questions were all answered, "when shall I walk again? It is three months since I was hurt. Shall I walk soon?"

The doctor's fine face saddened, and he looked at me.

"Loretta," he said gently, "come close to Max, my dear. You love each other very dearly, children?"

"Love each other," cried my brother. "Loretta is my very life. You do not know half her devoted care for me, doctor."

"Does she make the time fly?" he asked, treading on the edge of his terrible task of communicating the truth.

"She does all that can be done. She reads to me, talks to me. She even"—and Max looked slyly at me—"she even neglects her wonderful Karl for me."

"Good little girl," said the doctor.

"But you do not answer my question," cried Max; "when shall I walk?"

"Max, my boy," said the doctor, "I have known you from a baby, always manly, strong and brave. A good son, a kind brother, and an honorable man in every sense of the word. You have borne sorrow well, pain bravely; now can you bear a heavier sorrow, a greater pain than all?"

"An operation?" said Max with white lips, but steady eyes.

"Alas! my boy, no operation can avail you." "You do not mean I must lie here, helpless and useless, all my life," cried Max with a wail in his voice, that it was agony even to hear.

"Even so. God help you to bear it!" "Go away! Let me alone!" said my brother, turning his face from us; and the doctor led me from the room.

"Loretta," he said, gently, "you must help Max now, as you have never helped anyone in your life. Do not sob and shake so. You are to be the brave, true woman I have faith in for your brother's companion and comfort. I am afraid, he will, in his first despair, try to take his own life."

"Watch him carefully, Loretta. Let him be alone for a little while now, and then go in to him. I will see you again to-morrow."

It was well I was ordered to leave Max for a time alone, for I was in no condition then to sustain or comfort him.

The grief I felt far exceeded that I had experienced when the coffin lid hid my father's face for ever from my sight.

My young, noble brother stricken down in the first pride of manhood, seemed too terrible to realize.

It was no selfish grief I struggled to conceal in that bitter hour.

Not once did my own position cross my mind; my sorrow was all for Max.

It was a long time before I could control my sobs and tears, but I grew quiet at last, and entered again the bright little room that was his prison.

He was lying very still, his eyes closed, his lips white, and his hand folded over his breast. So still I almost feared the shock had killed him.

Very softly I went to his bedside, and bent to kiss his lips.

He opened his arms and drew me to him, while in a low, solemn voice he said—

"God's will be done."

I knew then, I knew every hour later, that there was no fear my noble brother would seek the suicide's cowardly escape from pain.

As the days wore on, something of his old cheerfulness returned, and jests would come to his lips, while his bright smile and hearty laugh were always ready to answer any effort I made to cheer him.

We, Max and I, learned leather work and wax flower making, and added materially to our income by the sale of our work.

We had become almost reconciled to our sorrow when another trial came.

I have said but little of Karl; it is so hard to touch upon that wound that will never heal; but I must now.

From the time of my father's death, Karl had been out of employment.

It was our gain in many ways, for he was as devoted to Max as if he were already his brother; but his savings were fast diminishing in his hours of idleness.

I had not realized this until an offer came for him to accompany my father's old partner to Germany, where he was going to establish the same business in his own country.

Knowing Karl well, and realising his value, he made him offers that it would have been actual insanity to refuse and Karl came to remind me of my betrothal vows and ask me to accompany him to Germany.

And I loved him.

I loved him better than my life—loved him, and bade him go to seek a fairer, truer bride in his own fatherland.

I cannot dwell upon that parting.

He went and with the mutual agreement that, as the separation must be life-long, it was better it should be final, and not tortured by letters or tidings.

He kissed me and blessed me, and left me—fourteen years ago.

Ah, me!

Long before this he has found his true wife and is happy.

I hope he is happy.

The neighbors were all very kind, and there were none more attentive than our clergyman, the Rev. Erasmus Stiles, and his daughter Fannie.

Fannie is small and light, dark and brilliant in beauty, full of vivacity, witty, rather brusque in manner, and saucy as a kitten.

Fancy such a sunbeam in our sick room.

She came and went at pleasure, flashing in and out, bringing flowers, smiles, and pleasure in every visit, and wakening to life the merriest laugh Max ever possessed.

She would bring a guitar and sing bright songs—would put her nimble little fingers upon our wax work and produce the most grotesque figures—would improvise parodies upon our poetical readings, and yet would be really helpful if we were busy, or Max was suffering too much for gaiety.

The winter passed away, not too sadly.

Max accepted my sacrifice humbly and gratefully, acknowledging he needed me, and trying by every loving art to prove to me his appreciation of my love.

He missed Karl sorely, but never spoke of him.

And his name passed out of our lives, though his image can never leave my heart.

I was in our little sitting-room, packing some wax flowers, when Fannie came dancing in with the first spring violets.

Max was lying in his own room, opening from the one where I was busy, and he called out eagerly for a sight of the blue-eyed treasures.

Nodding gaily to me, Fannie ran in, and I resumed my work.

The murmur of their voices came to me as I twisted the dainty flowers into sprays and packed them away in their soft cotton beds.

I heard them as they spoke, and slowly the truth came to us all—came to flood the room beyond with happiness, to chill and numb me, till my work fell from my fingers, and I crept away to moan out my misery alone.

They loved each other.

She offered him her bright young life in return for his love, and I stood alone.

I loved him so much.

All else was gone from me.

For him I had given up my own hope of being a beloved wife, and it was all in vain—all wasted.

They had forgotten me in their happiness, and Karl was across the ocean.

Oh, it was selfish to grieve, but my heart seemed breaking in that hour of struggle.

They were married when the June roses bloomed, and then we learned that Fannie was rich.

They have been very happy.

Money has procured for Max many alleviations of his crippled condition.

Strong servants lift him into the low carriage for drives, his wheeled chair is in the garden on all pleasant days, and the best medical skill has often eased his pain.

Crippled for life, he can never regain the use of his limbs, but with Fannie for a gaoler, his prison is a paradise.

And I am the old maid sister.

In a quiet way, I lead, I hope, a not useless life, but my way is a lonely one.

Max and Fannie love me, but their life would be as complete and perfect, if the roses were blossoming over my grave.

So I sum up to record of my life—a wasted sacrifice.

One day later.

Did I write the record of my life not twenty-four hours ago?

Is this the same Loretta who dropped tears over her past only yesterday?

Despondent, repining, unchristian.

I do not deserve my great happiness.

I have stolen away to say one little prayer of humble thanksgiving, and as I sit here, I can hear floating through the open windows the voices of Max, Fannie, and Karl.

He has come back for me.

He is a rich man now, and has a home for me in Germany.

And he loves me truly yet.

He, who might win the youngest, fairest bride in the Fatherland, has crossed the ocean to see if I were still free.

Karl, Karl I am coming—nothing can separate us now; I am coming, if my heart does not break for joy!

Note written in a different hand—

We found Loretta on the evening of Karl's return sitting at her desk, her hands clasped, her face uplifted, with a smile upon the lips that never spoke an unkind word, quite dead.

WHO KISSED THE ADMIRAL?—The Washington Capital has the following account of a fresh mystery: "Quite a startling event occurred to one of our gallant naval officers who has sailed the salty seas, carrying our banner in the days when the stars and stripes floated in honored recognition on every ocean. The gay old Rear Admiral P. of I street was calling on New Year's Day, and as the shades of night came on he found himself descending the steps of a house where the bevy of beauty made the old Admiral dizzy. He was feeling his way down, and had just gained the bottom step, when suddenly a pair of female arms were thrown about his marine neck and two soft lips imprinted a kiss upon his seafaring mouth that sounded like the explosion of a Dahlgren. The astounded Admiral was so dumfounded by the salute that he went down to use a nautical phrase, on his beam ends. He hinged on his centre and seated himself somewhat violently on the bottom step. Here, before he could recover his breath or understanding, the violence upon him was repeated, and a sweet voice said: 'There, take that for a parting!' And then voice, kisses, female arms and all disappeared into the night. The Rear Admiral P. ascended the steps, re-entered the mansion, and resolved himself into a naval board of enquiry. He stated his case and put the question, 'Who kissed the Admiral?' There was some musical laughter and a roguish twinkle in bright eyes, but no satisfactory answer or explanation was elicited. From that out until midnight the gallant Admiral went among his friends wanting to know who kissed him, but in vain. And to this hour it is involved in mystery. When the question of who kissed the Admiral is answered, we have one other, and that is—Why in the name of old Scratch did she kiss him?"

A CHAIN OF DESTRUCTION.—According to the following statement the negroes of Alabama handle the pistol and the axe quite as adroitly as the shovel and the hoe. Two of them got into a dispute and one shot the other. A brother of the slain ran up with an axe and split open the head of the man who had fired the fatal shot. A friend of dead man number two killed murderer number two with an axe, and a fifth negro soon laid the last axe-man low with the same deadly weapon. Before the fourth negro was cold another axe laid number five dead on the heap. The surviving murderer then took to his heels, and was at large at last accounts.