

"I wish you'd send word to her to come down. Say dinner is ready."

"Is dinner to be served, ma'am?"

"No, of course not," rather sharply, and with another shiver. "Wait for the Colonel. Only tell Miss Mordaunt I am feeling lonely, and wish that she would join me."

The servant withdraws to do her bidding, and she still crouches by the fire, in her black dress, shivering.

The door opens. Miss Mordaunt appears.

"It is very late, Isabella. What can have come to Philip?"

"I'm sure I can't say, Miss Mordaunt—that is, of course, Philip is his own master—but still, what do you think?"

"How can I tell?" rather facetiously; "it is what I asked you."

Miss Mordaunt, rebuked, retires in silence to the farther end of the drawing-room, whilst Irene sits by the fire and fears—she knows not what.

Eight o'clock strikes—half-past eight—a quarter to nine—and they are still alone.

"What can have happened?" exclaims Irene suddenly, as she springs up from her position, and turns a burning face towards her companion.

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Mordaunt, what can have? but you quite alarm me. Hadn't we better—but, doubtless, you know best."

"Hush!" says Irene in a voice of authority, as she stands upright to listen.

For there is a noise as of many voices, each trying to hush down the other, in the hall.

(To be continued.)

THE KISS.

Ah! sweetly sang the meadow lark,
And brightly rose the morning sun,
For the heart of the cow-boy feeding his cows
And the heart of the milkmaid beat as one.

Merrily into the empty pail
The tiny streamlets beat and rung,
And gladly beat their hearts as well,
For they loved each other, and they were young.

Slowly, steadily, all the while,
The bucket filled to the shining brim,
And slowly, steadily, just the same,
Her heart was filling with love for him.

And as above the shining brim
The milky foam rose white as snow,
So love rose up in the cow-boy's heart,
And came at last to an overflow.

And as she left her milking stool,
He took the bucket, and gave—a kiss!
Ah! sweetly, merrily sang the lark,
But theirs were happier hearts than his.

AUNT JUDITH.

BY C. C.

CHAPTER I.

Within the house all was silent. Excepting an occasional short and angry growl from the bull-terrier which lay upon the terrace, when the flies tormented him more than usual, there was no sound to break the drowsy stillness of the July noon. Even the birds seemed too languid to sing, though in the grounds of Mellicote House their numbers were legion. These grounds stretched far and wide to the west of the house, an avenue of horse-chestnut trees making a noble road to the entrance of the mansion. If the visitor followed the footpath branching away from the avenue on the left, he came upon a pleasant miniature glade carpeted with cool moss, overhung with a lattice-work of branches; and in the centre of this glade lay a deep pool that reflected the shadows of the trees bending above it. On its margin grew long-stalked flowers and cool grasses. An old tree-stump, gnarled and gray, formed a convenient seat. A pleasant spot was this wherein to dream away a summer morning; for here on the hottest of noons it was cool and quiet—quiet always, save for the melodies of the birds, or the buzzing of a stray bee, or the sudden splash of a tiny fish in the pool.

In the drawing-room sat Miss Judith Tredegar, mistress and owner of Mellicote. Her white fingers were busily sorting Berlin wools of divers colors, which she was laying in neat piles upon a table at her side.

Any one looking at the deep-set but brilliant eyes, at the waxen whiteness at her skin, at the low white brow, from which rippled away abundant waves of silvery hair, could guess how beautiful this woman must have been in her youth. After the first glance of admiration, the gazer would feel an undefined disappointment in the mouth; cruel, resolute, stern, and haughty it was, lending a certain power to the face, which it robbed of half its beauty.

Opposite Miss Tredegar a young man was seated—a pleasant-faced, pleasant-voiced personage, whose clerical black dress and snowy tie bespoke his calling. Now and then he would cast a furtive glance at the open French window, or at the door of the apartment. These glances did not escape the keen eyes of the lady.

"This comes of having pretty girls about one's house," she thought, noting the five-and-twentieth glance. "At one time Austin Kinglake

thought one visit a month sufficient for me; now two a week are not enough."

But, though Miss Tredegar was aware of the reason of this remarkable difference, she preserved a rigid silence as to the whereabouts of the girls.

At the present moment they were in the glade, Juliet pillowing her amber-crowned head on a hoary limb of a fallen tree, Lenore, a pretty girl of eighteen, reading aloud from the *Bride of Lammermoor*; and standing with her back against a larch tree, through the boughs of which little sunbeams fell upon her curly head, was Audrey, who was two years older than Lenore, and three younger than Juliet.

Years ago, Miss Tredegar's niece, Effie Tredegar, had led a happy life at Mellicote until she incurred that lady's displeasure by her marriage. Miss Judith never forgave—her mouth gave warning of that—and through all the troubles that followed poor Effie Woodville in her married life, Miss Tredegar utterly ignored her existence.

In time Effie's husband died, and one year ago Effie herself died also, leaving these three girls penniless and alone. Then Miss Tredegar went to the rescue. She brought the three girls away from their wretched London lodging to her own beautiful home. To the girls this was like awakening from a horrible dream to a blissful reality.

"Now you are mine," Miss Judith had said—"my daughters from this day; and all I have is yours too, for I want you to be happy. But, understand me once for all, whenever you marry I have done with you. Mind, I do not forbid you to marry—I shall not shut my doors to mankind on your account. On the contrary, I wish you to please yourselves. If any of you choose to marry, I will provide the wedding-breakfast and the wedding-dress in the orthodox style—for you shall have no excuse for eloping. I don't approve of that style of thing. But, remember, from that day my connection with the one who marries entirely ceases. It may be that you will never need my aid or friendship. So much the better. It will absolve me from the painful necessity of refusing it; for I never break my word—your mother knew that."

The sisters listened in wonder. The dry, decisive tone, the set of the inexorable lips, silenced all but Audrey, who, in her quaint, fearless way, asked Miss Judith whether she had any reason for telling them that. The faintest flush rose in Miss Tredegar's waxen cheeks.

"Yes," she replied, after a momentary hesitation, "I have a reason. Come with me, and I will tell it you."

She led the sisters to a closed door at the end of an upper gallery. Taking a bunch of keys from her pocket, she fitted one into the lock, and opened the door. The girl looked on in wonder, little guessing how bitter a task she was performing—a task that required all her iron will to accomplish. They entered the chamber, in which reigned a sombre twilight. The three young hearts beat faster as their eyes fell upon what the room contained. Upon the old-fashioned bed lay spread out, as if for immediate use, a bridal dress of satin that had once been white, but now was yellow, a veil of rich lace, satin shoes, gloves, and something that might have been a bouquet, but was now a few dried stalks tied up with ribbon.

The room smelt musty, with the odor of a dead and gone-by day. It seemed as if only the ghost of a bride was wanting to complete the weird fascination of the room. Involuntarily the girls drew nearer to each other.

"Do you understand?" asked Miss Judith, pointing towards the things. Her voice was hard, her lips more cruel than ever. "This was my bridal dress. It was laid out so on a morning more than forty years ago, but my lover played me false on my wedding-day. I had loved him very deeply, but from that hour I have hated all men."

They understood now. It was the one weakness in the strong, self-reliant character.

"If I have pained you by my question, I am sorry, aunt," said Audrey.

"It is better you should know, child, that there may be no mistakes."

"That there may be no mistakes," whispered Juliet Woodville to herself that night, as, looking at the moonlit landscape from her chamber window, her thoughts reverted to a day, five years ago, when, on a chilly December morning, on board of an outward-bound ship, she had taken leave of a young lover who was going over the seas in search of a fortune, with his brave heart full of hope, though he had but a five-pound note in his pocket, and willing to do or dare aught in the world if perchance in the days to come he could make a home for his darling.

Very long Juliet knelt by the window, thinking of that day; and, as Miss Judith's words recurred to her, there came a stern expression into the beautiful face—an expression somewhat like Miss Tredegar's—that after that night never quite vanished from it. And the letter, that Juliet Woodville had written that very morning to go out by the next Californian mail, containing a full and glowing description of her new home, with many fond expressions of unchanged affection for her far-away lover, was never posted.

One year had passed since that night, and now, in the sultry stillness of the July noon, the girls were in the glade.

"Audrey," exclaimed Juliet, "are you really crying over a hero in fiction? I thought that rôle was generally reserved for Lenore."

"I was not thinking of the story," answered Audrey, gravely.

"Of what, then?"

"I was thinking," replied the girl, reluctantly, "of mamma, and of those old summers before papa died. Oh, Juliet, don't you remember?"

The little hot hands were clasping and unclasping nervously, the gray eyes were full of unshed tears.

"Remember?" echoed Juliet, in a sharp pained tone. "As if I could forget! Why do you bring up those bitter memories, Audrey?"

Audrey went on, heedless of Juliet's remonstrance, the shadows gathering in her deep eyes.

"Do you remember how white our father's hair turned after he lost his voice, and that flush on his dear, tired face, and our mother's patient endurance—and—"

"And the debt and poverty and want!" cried Juliet, bitterly. "Oh, Audrey, I cannot think of those days yet!"

"But, Juliet," said Lenore, "if it happened that you had to choose between this life and one like mamma's, with some one you loved, as she loved our father, how would you decide?"

The answer came in quick decisive tones.

"I would choose this one. I would crush the love out of my very heart if the acceptance of it must bring me such intense suffering. I will never voluntarily face poverty again."

She spoke fiercely. Lenore's voice sounded strangely gentle by contrast.

"But don't you think that a strong, lasting love, even with poverty, is sweeter than a loveless life of wealth?"

"No; the love might be a very good thing in its way—as I suppose it would be—but it could not compensate for the pain and bitter suffering of a life such as ours was," said Juliet, earnestly.

"I think it would," opposed Audrey. "If I loved a poor man, I would marry him, and face worse things than poverty for his sake."

Afterwards both her words and the scene returned to the recollection of the other two. The sisters talked on, little dreaming how soon this peaceful life was to be stirred into a vigorous vitality.

CHAPTER II.

It had been a fair voyage—in duration something less than a fortnight since the ship sailed from New York—and now the white cliffs of England were gleaming against the horizon.

"We shall run into dock to-morrow at sunrise, if all goes well," said an old sailor to one of the passengers, a tall, fair man, with a long, light moustache, a sun-browned skin, and a slight stoop in his shoulders. His heart gave a great throb under his pilot coat, and his lips trembled as the words fell on his ear.

"The sunshines on my home-coming—is that a good omen?" he mused, leaning over the bulwarks. "It is so long since she sent me a message—twelve weary months—and without her love neither life nor anything else is worth aught to me. My queen, my sweet love! I wonder whether any kind spirit whispers to her that I am so near—that the weariness and the waiting are over."

The man's grave lips softened; his blue eyes were looking beyond the cliffs.

"I wonder what happy fate brought that paper in my way; but for that I should not be here now. I should still be leading that hard, hopeless life, with nothing but the memory of her face to keep me from despair—with only the far-off, faint hope of one day calling her mine to make life tolerable."

The green waves curled about the bows, the fresh salt breeze whistled in the rigging, and the ship sped on steadily homewards.

"There is some one waiting to see you, ma'am," said a maid, entering Miss Woodville's dressing-room. Juliet was dressed to dine out. Her white train lay crisp and spotless on the crimson carpet. Bands of black velvet encircled her full white throat and rounded arms, and a black velvet snood confined the amber braids on her small head.

"Who is it?" she inquired, sharply. "I cannot see any one now."

"It is a gentleman, ma'am," was the answer, with a little hesitation. He would not give his name.

Audrey entered as the maid spoke. She was not going out, and she wore a simple high dress of black gauze. Juliet turned to her.

"Will you go down for me, Audrey?" said Juliet, explaining. "And, Ellen, go and see whether my aunt and Miss Lenore are ready."

With quiet footsteps Audrey entered the long cool drawing-room. Some one stood in the bay window. Audrey had a glimpse of a broad back clad in a pea-jacket, a fair head, the outline of a thin, clear-cut cheek, and a blue cloth cap, such as naval officers wear, lying upon a chair.

"A stranger," was the quick thought, and following it came a sudden sense of familiarity.

The slight bend of the tawny head, the whole attitude of the stranger struck some chord of her memory. He turned at the sound of a step. Audrey never forgot the light that came into the bronzed face, the outstretched hands, and then the doubt that made him pause when his eyes fell upon her.

The two confronted each other for a minute, and then a spark of amusement stole into Audrey's eyes.

"Miss Woodville?" he began in eager manner but hesitating tones.

"I am Audrey," corrected the young girl; "and you are—"

"Philip Bayard."

"Well, who is it?" asked Juliet, carelessly looking up from her glove-fastening and meeting Audrey's glad, astonished eyes.

"Juliet, it is Philip."

The color faded from Juliet's face. She sank upon an ottoman.

"Philip!" she gasped.

"Yes. Oh, Juliet, go down to him—he is waiting."

Just then Miss Tredegar's voice was heard on the landing. Juliet rose quickly from her seat and made her exit, leaving Audrey to explain to her aunt, who entered the room a moment later in a rich dress of gray silk, and with a costly lace shawl about her shoulders. She was accompanied by Lenore, who was going with Miss Tredegar and Juliet in Audrey's place, that young lady having a decided dislike to dinner-parties.

On the staircase Juliet paused for a minute to deliberate. When at length she passed on, there was a settled purpose in her mind. Philip Bayard went forward to meet the white-robed figure that came all too slowly towards him. The sun's last beams fell upon her face. Never afterwards did Philip Bayard feel such a thrill of agony as the sight of that face gave him. He had thought of it, and longed for it as a thirsty Arab longs for cool water, and now the sight of it stabbed him to the heart.

It was Juliet who stood before him, one of her gloved hands lying in both of his. He was very sure of that. He had not been so sure of Audrey's identity, whom he remembered as a little school-girl, his playmate in many a romp. But Juliet was unchanged, save that she was lovelier than ever—and yet she was not quite the same Juliet he had held in his arms on that winter morning five years ago; indeed, he wondered whether he ever could have kissed that pale, proud face. He did not kiss it now—he felt he could not dare. He was ill at ease, too, in the presence of the statey woman in her lace and velvet. He was roughly clad and roughly shod, and brown; and the cold gloved hand lying so passively in his own was vastly unlike the warm clasp of the hands that clung about his neck when he first won the heart of the poor curate's daughter, whose richest dress was of coarse merino, and who never wore lace like this, or satin shoes. All this flashed through Philip Bayard's mind in less than an instant. And in that moment something died in his heart, leaving a sort of hopeless dreariness in the place of the deep and warm passionate love that for so long had nestled there.

Juliet's eyes had fallen before his. An undefined sense of shame prevented her meeting the honest gaze of Philip's eyes. That same feeling made her draw her hand away. She had already noted the rough dress—such a contrast to her own!—and, noting it, the one hope she had cherished—that Philip had been successful very successfully, so that she might give him what-ever he asked, and that in spite of twenty aunts Judiths—died then and there.

"You are come home again, Philip," she said, trying hard to keep her lips from quivering, as she felt how cold and despicable and aimless the words were, but saying them for all that, because she felt that she must say something, and was fearful of saying too much.

"Yes, I have come back," he returned slowly, with a dim consciousness that a barrier was between them that he was powerless to throw down.

Then there was silence.

"She is proud and cold; I will not bend to her," he thought, bitterly.

"He is poor. I will crush the love I bear him out of my heart and out of my life," she decided.

So the barrier grew yet higher.

It was a relief when Miss Tredegar entered. Juliet introduced Philip Bayard to her aunt, and that lady begged that Mr. Bayard would remain at Mellicote House for that night, explaining that, although unfortunately she was engaged with Juliet and Lenore to dine out, Audrey would be at home. To which Philip replied, gravely, that he had secured a room at the inn where he had left his valise.

Miss Tredegar was very hospitable. This Philip Bayard had travelled some miles to see her niece, whom he had known in past days. There had been, she knew, some sort of a tie between him and Juliet, so she felt in some measure bound to honor this guest. She pressed him to partake of some refreshment, and after to-morrow she must insist upon his taking up his quarters at Mellicote for the remainder of his stay. Then she shook hands with him, and Lenore, in vaporous blue gauze and smiling shyly, did the same; lastly, Juliet gave him her cold hand again, and he was alone.

"This is the end of it!" he thought sorely; but he was prevented from falling into bitter reflection by Audrey's entrance, and soon after came the summons to dinner; whereupon Philip, looking doubtfully at his attire, begged to be excused, but Audrey laughingly took his arm, and in a pretty, imperious manner led him to the dining-room. Finally she dismissed the servant and presided at table herself, bewildering Philip with her charming frankness, and wondering to herself meanwhile at the change in Philip's face since she saw it half an hour ago.

"Juliet has been cruel to him," she thought, with womanly pity; and Audrey who was ever ready to do battle for the injured, was doubly kind.

Afterwards they went into the garden. The twilight was gathering, and the air was faint with delicious odors from the flower-beds.

"It is so long since I was in an English garden," said Philip, sighing.