

blusher. "I know what you would say," she said. "You English are blunt. You talk to young ladies so strangely." "Well, Mademoiselle Isaline, it seems to me that you at Les Pentes are like Miranda on the island. You see nobody and there is nobody here to see you. You must not go and fall in love, like Miranda, with the very first man you happen to meet with, because he comes from the Normal School at Geneva. There are plenty of men in the world, believe me, beside M. Claude."

"Ah, but Miranda and Ferdinand both loved one another," said Isaline archly; "and they were married and both lived happily ever afterward." I saw at once she was trying to pique me.

"How do you know that?" I asked. "It doesn't say so in the play. For all I know Ferdinand lost the crown of Naples through a revolution and went and settled down at a country school in Savoy or somewhere and took to drinking, and became brutally unsociable and made Miranda's life a toil and a burden to her. At any rate I am sure of one thing—he wasn't worthy of her."

What made me go on in this stupid way? I'm sure I don't know. I certainly didn't mean to marry Isaline myself; but at least not definitely; and yet when you are sitting down at tea on a rustic garden seat, with a pretty girl in a charming white crimped cap beside you, and you get a chance of insinuating that other fellows don't think quite as much of her as you do, it isn't human nature to let slip the opportunity of whispering it."

"But you don't know M. Claude," said Isaline practically, "and so you can't tell whether he is worthy of me or not."

"I'm perfectly certain," I answered, "that he can't be even though he were a very paragon of virtue, learning and manly beauty."

"If Monsieur talks in that way," said Isaline, "I shall have to go back at once to mamma."

"Wait a moment," I said, "and I will talk, however you wish me. You know, you agree to give me instruction in conversational French. That naturally includes lessons in conversation with ladies of exceptional personal attractions. I must practise for every possible circumstance of life. So you have read Shakespeare, then. And any other English books?"

"Oh, many. Scott and Dickens, and all, except Byron. My papa says a young lady must not read Byron. But I have read what he has said of our lake in a book of extracts. It is a great pleasure to me to look down among the vines and chestnuts there, and to think that our lake, which gleams so blue and beautiful below, is the most famous in poetry of all lakes. You know, Jean-Jacques says, 'Mon lac est la première' and so it is."

"Then you have read Jean-Jacques, too?"

"Oh, mon Dieu, no. My papa says a young lady must especially not read Jean-Jacques. But I know something about him—so much as is *convenable*. Hold, here! Do you see that clump of trees down there by the lake, just above Clarens? That is Julie's grove—"le bosquet de Julie," we call it. There isn't a spot along the lake that is not thus famous, that has not its memories and its associations. It is for that that I could not choose ever to leave the dear old Pays de Vaud."

"You would not like to live in England, then?" I asked. (What a fool I was, to be sure.)

"Oh, ma foi, no. That would make one too much shiver, with your chills and your fogs, and your winters. I could not stand it. It is cold here, but at any rate it is sunny. Well, at least, it would not be pleasant."

But, after all, that depends. You have the sun, too, sometimes, don't you?"

"Isaline!" cried Madame from the window. "I want you to come and help me pick over the gooseberries. And to say the truth I thought it quite time she should go."

## II.

A week later I met M. Claude again. He was a very nice young fellow, there was not a doubt of that. He was intelligent, well educated, manly, with all the honest, sturdy, independent Swiss nature clearly visible in his frank, bright, open face. I have seldom met a man whom I liked better at first sight than M. Claude, and after he had gone away I felt more than a little ashamed of myself to think I had been half trying to steal away Isaline's heart from this good fellow, without really having any deliberate design upon it myself. It began to strike me that I had been doing a very dirty, shabby thing.

"Charlie, my boy," I said to myself, as I sat fishing with bottom bait and dangle my legs over the edge of a pool, "you've been flirting with this pretty little Swiss girl; and, what's worse, you've been flirting in a very bad sort of way. She's got a lover of her own; and you've been trying to make her feel dissatisfied with him, for no earthly reason. You've taken advantage of your position and your fancied London airs and graces to run down by implication a good fellow who really loves her, and would probably make her an excellent husband. Don't let this occur again, sir." And having thus virtuously resolved, of course I went away and flirted with Isaline next morning as vigorously as ever.

During the following fortnight M. Claude came often, and I could not disguise from myself the fact that M. Claude did not quite like me. This was odd, for I liked him very much. I suppose he took me for a potential rival; men are so jealous when they are in love. Besides, I observed that Isaline tried not to be thrown too much with him alone; tried to include me in the party wherever she went with him. Also, I will freely confess that I felt myself every day more fond of Isaline's society, and I half fancied I caught myself trepidating a little inwardly now and then when she happened to come up to me. Absurd to be so susceptible, but such is man.

One lovely day about this time I set out once more to try my hand (or rather my feet) alone upon the Aiguille. Isaline put me up a nice little light lunch in my knapsack, and insisted upon seeing that my alpenstock was firmly shod and my pedestrian boots in due climbing order. In fact, she loudly lamented my perversity in attempting to make the ascent without a guide; and she

must even needs walk with me as far as the little bridge over the torrent beside the snow line to point me out the road the guides generally took to the platform at the summit. For myself, I was a practised mountaineer, and felt no fear for the result. As I left her for the ice, she stood a long time looking and waving me the right road with her little handkerchief, while as long as I could hear her voice she kept on exhorting me to be very careful. "Ah, if Monsieur would only have taken a guide! You don't know how dangerous that little Aiguille really is."

The sun was shining brightly on the snow; the view across the valley of the Rhone, toward the snowy Alps beyond, was exquisite; and the giants of the Bernese Oberland stood out in gloriously brilliant outline on the other side against the clear blue summer sky. I went on alone, enjoying myself hugely in my own quiet fashion, and watching Isaline as she made her way slowly along the green path, looking round often and again, till she disappeared in the shadow of the pinewood that girt round the tiny village. On farther still, up and up and up, over soft snow for the most part, with very little ice, till at last, after three hours' hard climbing, I stood on the very summit of the pretty Aiguille.

It was not very high, but it commanded a magnificent view over either side—the Alps on one hand, the counterchain of the Oberland on the other, and the blue lake gleaming and glowing through all its length in the green valley between them. There I sat down on the pure snow in the glittering sunlight and ate the lunch that Isaline had provided for me with much gusto. Unfortunately I also drank the pint of white wine from the head of the lake—Yvorne, we call it, and I grew it now in my own vineyard at Pic de la Baume—but that is anticipating again; as good a white wine as you will get anywhere in Europe in these depressing days of blight and phylloxera. Now, a pint of vin du pays is not too much under ordinary circumstances for a strong young man in vigorous health, doing a hard day's muscular work with legs, arms and sinews; but mountain air is thin and exhilarating in itself, and it lends a point to a half bottle of Yvorne which the wine's own body does not by any means usually possess. I don't mean to say so much light wine does one any positive harm; but it makes one more careless and easy going; gives one a false sense of security, and entices one into paying less heed to one's footsteps or to suspicious looking bits of doubtful ice.

Well, after lunch I took a good look at the view with my field glass; and when I turned it toward Les Pentes I could make out our farmhouse distinctly, and even saw Isaline standing on the balcony looking toward the Aiguille. My heart jumped a little when I thought that she was probably looking for me. Then I wound my way down again, not by retracing my steps, but by trying a new path, which seemed to me a more practicable one. It was not the one Isaline had pointed out, but it appeared to go more directly, and to avoid one or two of the very worst rough-and-tumble pieces.

I was making my way back, merrily enough, when suddenly I happened to step on a little bit of loose ice, which slid beneath my feet in a very uncomfortable manner. Before I knew where I was I felt myself sliding rapidly on, with the ice clinging to my heel, and while I was vainly trying to dig my alpenstock into a firm snow-bank I became conscious for a moment of a sort of dim, indefinite blank. It was followed by a sensation of empty space, and then I knew I was falling over the edge of something.

Whirr, whirr, whirr, went the air at my ear for a moment, and the next thing I knew was a jar of pain and a consciousness of being enveloped in something very soft. The jar took away all other feeling for a few seconds; I only knew I was stunned and badly hurt. After a time I began to be capable of trying to realize the position; and when I opened my eyes and looked around me I recognized that I was lying on my back, and that there was a pervading sensation of whiteness everywhere about. In point of fact I was buried in snow. I tried to move and get on my legs again, but two things very effectually prevented me. In the first place I could not stir my legs without giving myself the most intense pain in the spine; and in the second place, when I did stir them I brought them into contact on the one hand with a solid wall of rock and on the other hand with a vacant space, or at least with very soft snow unsupported by a rocky bottom. Gradually, by feeling about with my arms, I began exactly to realize the gravity of the position. I had fallen over a precipice and had landed on a snow-covered ledge half way down. My back was very badly hurt, and I dared not struggle up on to my legs for fear of falling off the ledge again on the other side. Besides, I was half smothered in the snow, and even if anybody ever came to look for me (which they would not probably do till to-morrow) they would not be able to see me, because of the deep covering drifts. If I was not extricated that night I should probably freeze to death before morning, especially after my pint of wine. "Confound that Yvorne!" I said to myself savagely. "If ever I get out of this scrape I shall never touch a drop of the stuff again as long as I live." I regret to say that I have since broken that solemn promise twice daily for the past three years.

My one hope was that Isaline might possibly be surprised at my delay in returning and might send out one of the guides to find me. So there I lay a long time, unable even to get out of the snow, and with every movement causing me a horrid pain in my injured back. Still I kept on moving my legs every now and then to make the pain shoot, and so prevent myself from feeling drowsy. The snow half suffocated me, and I could only breathe with difficulty. At last, slowly, I began to lose consciousness, and presently I fell asleep. To fall asleep in the snow is the first stage of freezing to death.

## III.

Noises above me, I think, on the edge of the precipice. Something coming down, oh, how slowly. Something comes, and fumbles about a yard or so away. Then I cry out feebly, and the something approaches. M. Claude's

hearty voice calls out, cheerily, "*Enfin, le voilà!*" and I am saved.

They let down ropes and pulled me up to the top of the little crag clumsily, so as to cause me great pain, and then three men carried me home to the farmhouse on a stretcher. M. Claude was one of the three, the others were laborers from the village.

"How did you know I was lost, M. Claude," I asked feebly, as they carried me along on the level.

He did not answer for a moment; then he said, rather gloomily, in German, "The fraulein was watching you with a telescope from Les Pentes." He did not say Fraulein Isaline, and I knew why at once—he didn't wish the other carriers to know what he was talking about.

"And she told you?" I said, in German, too.

"She sent me. I did not come of my own accord. I came under orders." He spoke sternly, hissing out his gutturals in an angry voice.

"M. Claude," I said, "I have done very wrong, and I ask your forgiveness. You have saved my life, and I owe you gratitude for it. I will leave Les Pentes and the Fraulein to-morrow, or at least as soon as I can safely be moved."

He shook his head bitterly. "It is no use now," he answered with a sigh; "the Fraulein does not wish for me. I have asked her and she has refused me. And she has been watching you up and down the Aiguille the whole day with a telescope. When she saw you had fallen she rushed out like one distracted and came to tell me at the school in the village. It is no use; you have beaten me."

"M. Claude," I said, "I will plead for you. I have done you wrong and I ask your forgiveness."

"I owe you no ill will," he replied, in his honest, straightforward Swiss manner. "It is not your fault if you, too, have fallen in love with her. How could any man help it? Living in the same house with her, too! *Allons*," he went on, in French, resuming his alternative tongue (he spoke both equally), "we must get on quick and send for the doctor from Glion to see you."

By the time we reached the farm house I had satisfied myself that there was nothing very serious the matter with me after all. The soft snow had broken the force of the concussion. I had strained my spine a good deal and hurt the tendons of the thighs and back, but had not broken any bones nor injured any vital organ. So when they laid me on the old fashioned sofa in my little sitting room, lighted a fire in the wide hearth and covered me over with a few rugs, I felt comparatively happy and comfortable under the circumstances. The doctor was sent for in hot haste, but on his arrival he confirmed my view of the case and declared I only needed rest and quiet and a little arnica.

I was rather distressed, however, when Madame came up to see me an hour later and assured me that she and Monsieur thought I ought to be moved down as soon as possible into more comfortable apartments at Lausanne, where I could secure better attendance. I saw in a moment what that meant—they wanted to get me away from Isaline. "There are no more comfortable quarters in all Switzerland, I am sure, Madame," I said; but Madame was inflexible. There was an English doctor at Lausanne and to Lausanne accordingly I must go. Evidently it had just begun to strike those two good, simple people that Isaline and I could just conceivably manage to fall in love with one another.

Might I ask for Mlle. Isaline to bring tea? Yes, Isaline would bring it in a minute. And when she came in, those usually laughing black eyes were obviously red with crying. I felt my heart sink within me when I thought of my promise to M. Claude; while I began to be vaguely conscious that I was really and truly very much in love with pretty little Isaline on my own account.

She laid the tray on the small table by the sofa and was going to leave the room immediately. "Mademoiselle Isaline," I said, trying to raise myself and falling back again in pain, "won't you sit with me a little while? I want to talk with you."

"My mamma said I was to come away at once," Isaline replied demurely. "She is, without doubt, busy and wants my aid." And she turned to go toward the door.

"Oh, do come back, Mademoiselle," I cried raising myself again and giving myself, oh, such a wrench in the spine; "don't you see how much it hurts me to sit up?"

She turned back, indecisively, and sat down in the big chair just beyond the table, handing me a cup and helping me to cream and sugar. I plunged at once in *mediocris*.

"You have been crying, Mademoiselle," I said, "and I think I can guess the reason. M. Claude has told me something about it. He has asked you for your hand and you have refused him. Is it not so?" This was a little bit of hypocrisy on my part, I confess for I know what she had been crying about perfectly; but I wished to be loyal to M. Claude.

Isaline blushed and laughed. "I did not cry for M. Claude," she said. "I may have other matters of my own to cry about. But M. Claude is very free with his confidences if he tells such things to a stranger."

"Listen to me, Mlle. Isaline," I said. "Your father and mother have asked me to leave here to-morrow and go down to Lausanne. I shall probably never see you again. But before I go I want to plead with you for M. Claude. He has saved my life and I owe him much gratitude. He loves you; he is a brave man, a good man, a true and earnest man; why will you not marry him? I feel sure he is a noble fellow, and he will make you a tender husband. Will you not think better of your decision? I cannot bear to leave Les Pentes till I know that you have made him happy."

"Truly?"

"And you go away to-morrow?"

"Yes, to-morrow."

"Oh, Monsieur!"

There isn't much in these two words, but they may be pronounced with a great deal of difference in the intonation, and Isaline's intonation did not leave one in which much doubt as to how she used them. Her eyes filled with tears and she half started up to go. Ingrate and wretch that I was, forgetful of my promise to M.