

A MISTAKE.

By Harkarn.

1.

The noonday sun was beating down fiercely upon the Esplanade in Bombay, as it knows how to do at the beginning of May, and in the drawing room of a bungalow situate of the Back Bay side, and shaded by cocoanut trees, sat two ladies the one elderly and the other young, trying to keep cool with the thermometer standing at 35 degrees. Both were attired in appropriate and charming costumes of gauzy white and were very pleasant to look at, Mrs. Meredith being a handsome woman of fifty, having spent a great portion of her life in India without her health being impaired, while Eleanor Grayling was a maiden of nineteen, who made the heart of the Anglo Indian glad, for not having been in the country many months, her complexion had still the rose colored tints which recalled the far off home beyond the seas. Her wavy hair was light auburn, her eyes blue and her features grecian, so that some had likened her to Clytie.

I am now and then puzzled to decide which I prefer as a picture, a beautiful woman in her youth or her age. The former seems just fresh from the Maker's hands and claims your admiration; she resembles a ship starting on its voyage, and you lift your hat and wish her God speed! But the latter has passed through the storms and breakers; she is nearing port, and as you see the colors, though faded, still flying you feel that the voyage has been well spent, the dangers overcome and victory at the helm; and admiration is swallowed up in reverence as you greet her.

Eleanor Grayling was not related to General and Mrs. Meredith, although she called them uncle and aunt. She was an orphan, the child of a brother officer of the General's, both her parents having died some ten years previous to the commencement of this tale, leaving her but a slender income and no relations to speak of. Captain Grayling on his deathbed had asked the General to look after his daughter, and Meredith, when home on leave, just at the time that Eleanor had completed her education, paid her a visit, and persuaded her to accompany him on his return to India and make his bungalow her home.

The Merediths had one child, a son, stationed with his regiment at Indore in the Malwa district, and if the General hoped that Eleanor might one day become his daughter-in-law, who shall blame him? He is not the first who has built castles in the air for the loved ones, and tried to wave fairy wands of happiness over them. The General was a hale old man of over sixty years, forty of which he had spent in India, and firmly believed there was no country like it,

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"Bad climate, pooh! nonsense!" he would cry in his emphatic way, "Too little exercise, and too much brandy pawnee, is what bowls a man over. It is a great deal healthier climate than that of England, for you do know when you will have dry and wet and hot and cool weather, whereas in England you never can tell what is going to happen. Why sir, when I was at home in '67—Hermit's year—the Derby was run in a snow storm, by George! a snow storm, at the end of May sir, as I'm a sinner. Climate forsooth! let a man rise at daylight, take lots of exercise, go in for 'shikar,' limit himself to one 'peg' before he turns in at ten o'clock, and he'll be all right." In which it must be admitted there is a vast amount of truth.

"So we are really off to Mahabeshwar to-morrow aunt, are we?" said Eleanor.

"Yes dear, so it is arranged," replied Mrs. Meredith, "and I dare say you will not be sorry to escape from this stifling heat."

"No indeed, aunt. Do you expect uncle and your son to tiffin?"

"Yes. Hark! there is the 'ghari.'" said Mrs. Meredith. The sound of wheels were heard approaching and a moment or two afterwards the General entered the room accompanied by a young man, who was immediately embraced by Mrs. Meredith and then presented to Eleanor.

Walter Meredith was a dark complexioned man of about eight and twenty, of fair height, not ill looking, but pale and very unlike his ruddy open faced father, indeed on closer inspection there was an air of languid dissipation about the eyes which was not agreeable. Immediately after the introduction Eleanor slipped away feeling that, as the parents had not seen their son for about twelve months, she might be a little "de trop," but very soon the tiffin gong sounded, and she hastened to take her place at the table.

Although the General was a moderate man he was by no means an ascetic, and had everything of the best. There was a bottle of Mumm's champagne, iced to a turn, to welcome his son, a curry such as you could not obtain, for love or money, out of India, by George! as the General said, and with the punka waiting a pleasant breeze overhead, and Eleanor's pretty face opposite, Walter Meredith gave himself over to enjoyment.

II.

Those who have not risen early and seen the sun rise at Mahabeshwar have missed one of nature's finest pictures. Eleanor Grayling was standing in the verandah of the little bungalow on the morning after their arrival waiting for her "chota hazri," and watching the heavy mist rolling over the numerous hills which were on every side of her, when suddenly the highest peaks became tipped with golden tints, which latter, gradually increasing

in strength and brilliancy, seemed to drive the mist down through the valleys, until the sun rising in all its majesty rent the gauzy curtain to pieces piercing it through and through, then the white mantle vanished swiftly, unfolding as it went scene after scene of beauty, until the grand panorama was complete.

"Oh how lovely!" cried Eleanor in ecstasy.

"It is indeed," said Mrs. Meredith, coming to her side, "I hope you slept well after your journey?"

"Like a top, aunt, and actually with a blanket over me! Such a luxury after that dreadful heat in Bombay."

At this instant the General appeared, bowed and spurred, and exclaimed:

"Why Nell, where is your habit, I thought you were coming riding with me?"

"So I am, uncle, I won't be a minute," and Eleanor flew off.

"Be quick," shouted the General after her, then turning to the native servant he said "char loa" and in a few moments tea, toast and fruit—the usual bill of fare for "chota hazri," or little breakfast, in India—were laid upon a small table in the verandah.

Ten minutes later General Meredith and Eleanor mounted their horses and cantered off for a brisk ride in the cool morning air.

"This is better than the Esplanade or Back Bay sands uncle," said Eleanor, touching up her pretty Arab horse with her whip, and sending him forward at a good gallop.

"Aye, aye," replied the General, spurring on his own horse, "it must be confessed it was 'bote gurrum' (very hot) in Bombay. I wonder that lazy boy Walter can lie in bed a morning like this. Gently, gently Nell, the horses a trifle 'musty' (fresh) with the change of air."

And so it proved, for Eleanor's horse all at once giving his head a shake, took the bit between his teeth and bolted away as hard as he could lay his feet to the ground.

"Sit firm!" shouted the General, knowing that with his weight he could not possibly overtake the runaway at the first burst.

Eleanor was a fair but not a very experienced horsewoman, and she rather lost her nerve at the start, which her horse was not slow to discover and take advantage of. There was not much danger so long as the road was straight and devoid of obstacles, but whether these favorable circumstances would continue until the horse began to have enough was quite problematical, and the General pounding away some distance behind, grew very anxious. On rushed the runaway in his mad career, snorting like a steam engine, and Eleanor felt herself becoming giddy as she was whirled past rocks and trees at a terrific pace. At length about a