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# BY CELIA'S ARBOUR.

## A NOVEL.

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"THE GOLDEN BUTTERFLY," &c.

### CHAPTER XIII. A FLOWER OF LOVE.

It was very early in that year, or at the end of 1857, that I made a discovery about myself. Regarded from the point of view which the climbing of so many following years have enabled me to reach, the discovery seems a thing which might have been expected,—quite natural, and belonging to daily experience. At the time, I remember, it was most surprising.

I suppose no one would believe that a young man could come to the age of one-and-twenty, and remain so little of a man as I did. But I was deformed. I was morbidly sensitive of ridicule. I was extremely poor. I had some pride of birth. I could not possibly associate with the professional men, the drawing, dancing, and music masters of the town, who might have formed my set. Their thoughts were not mine: their ways were not my ways. Not that I claimed any superiority. Quite the contrary. Men who could ride, hunt, shoot, play billiards, and do all the other things which belong to skill of hand and eye, seemed, and still seem to me, vastly superior to a being who can do nothing except interpret the thoughts of the great masters. In a country town, unless you belong to the young men of the place, and take part in the things which interest them, you fall back upon such resources as you have in yourself. There was nothing for me but my piano and my books for the evening, and Celia in the afternoon.

It was partly on account of my deformity that we were so much together. When Leonard went away I had hardly an acquaintance of my own age in the town—certainly not a friend; and I was at the age when the imagination is strongest, and the need for close companionship is felt the most. In adolescence the heart opens out spontaneously to all who are within its reach. The friends of youth are close and confidential; there is no distrust, no reserve. I think it is rare for such a friendship as that between Celia and myself to exist between two persons who are not of the same sex, neither brother and sister, nor lovers. Yet it existed, up to a certain time, and then, without a break on her part, but after a struggle on mine, it was resumed, and has been since continued. There was no shadow of restraint between us, but only a perfect and beautiful confidence, when Celia was a girl and I was a boy. Like me, but for different reasons, she lived apart from other girls: she had no school-girl friendships; she never went to school, and had no masters, except myself. I taught her all I knew, which was not much, in a desultory and methodless fashion, and the girl poured out to my ear alone—it was a harvest sixty and a hundred fold—the thoughts that spring up as clear and bright as a spring of Lebanon in her pure young heart. The thoughts of youth are sacred things; most because young people lack power of expression, they are imperfectly conveyed in the words of the poets, who belong especially to the young. Great utterances by the men of old sink deep into the hearts of those who are yet on the threshold of life. They fertilise the soil, and cause it to blossom in a thousand sweet flowers. There is nothing to me, a teacher, and always among the young, more beautiful than the enthusiasms and illusions of youth, their contempt of compromise, their impatience of diplomatic evasions, fancied impartiality, and their eager partisanship. And I am sometimes of opinion that the government of the world—its laws—its justice—its preaching—its decisions on war and peace—its expenditure—should all be under the control of youth. Before five-and-twenty all but the hardest men are open to higher influences and nobler aims. The lower levels are reached, step by step, through long years of struggle for luxury and position. Let the world be ruled by the adolescent, and let the wisdom of the *senex*, who have, too, probably become cynical, disappointed, or selfish, be used for administration alone. Above all, no man should be Autocrat, King, President, or Prime Minister after his five-and-twentieth year. As yet, however, I have made no converts to my opinion, and I fear I shall not live to see this admirable reform.

I have had many pupils, and won some friendship among them, but Celia was my first and best. No one was ever like her in my eyes, so zealous for righteousness, so pitiful for wrongdoers, so sweet in thought. Perhaps we loved her so much—the Captain and I—that we saw in her more virtues than she possessed. It is the way of those who love. What would this world be worth without that power of illusion which clothes our dear ones, while yet in life, with the white robes of Heaven?

"Has she wings somewhere, do you think, Laddy?" said the Captain one evening. Turning over the pages of the Bible, he lighted on a chapter which, he announced to me, bore upon the subject, and he would read it. "Celia's price," he read, commenting as he went along, "is far above rubies. That is perfectly true. The heart of her husband—she shall have a good one—shall safely trust in her. If he can't trust in

her, he won't be fit to be her husband. She shall rejoice—there is prophecy for us, Laddy—in time to come. Many daughters—listen to this—have done virtuously, but Celia excels them all. The woman that feareth the Lord she shall be praised. Now, if that does not bear upon the girl, what does?"

It was not possible that our boy-and-girl confidences should remain permanently unchanged, but the change was gradual. I noticed, first of all, that Celia's talk grew less personal and more general. As I followed her lead, we ceased in a measure to refer everything that we read or played to our own thoughts. So that we grew more reserved to each other. An invisible barrier was rising between us that we knew nothing of. It was caused by the passage of the girl into womanhood, imperceptible as the rising of the tide, which you do not notice until you compare your landmarks, and see how the water has gained. It was the transformation of the child, open as the day, candid and unreserved, into the woman—the true emblem of her is this figure of the Veiled Nymph—who hides, nourishes, and guards her secrets, gathering them up in the rich garden of her heart until she can show them all to her husband, and then keep them for her son. A woman without the mystical veil is no woman, but a creature androgynous, amorphous, leathsome. So that Celia would never be again—I see it so well now—what she had been to me. Her face was the same as it had been, set grave at one moment with its fine delicate lines and ethereal look, and at the next bright and laughing like a mountain stream, but always sweet with the same kindness when she looked at me. Only it seemed at times as if I was groping about in the dark for the soul of Celia, and that I found it not.

"Cis," I said, one afternoon—we were in our old place, and she was leaning against the gun looking thoughtfully across the harbour. The tide was out, and instead of the broad lagoon was a boundless stretch of green and black mud intersected with a stream of sea water, up and down which boats could make their way at all tides.

"Cis, do you know that we are changed to each other?"

Almost as I said it I perceived that if Celia was changed to me, I was no less changed towards her.

"What is it, Laddy?" she asked, turning gently, and resting her eyes on mine. They were so soft and clear that I could hardly bear to look into them,—a little troubled, too, with wonder, as if she could not understand what I meant.

"What is it, Laddy? How are we changed?"

"I don't know. I think, Cis, it is because—because you are growing a woman."

She sat down beside me on the grass. She was so much taller than I that it was nothing for her to lay her hand upon my shoulder. We often walked so. Sometimes I took her arm. But now the gesture humiliated me. I felt angry and hurt. Was I then of such small account that she should change in thought, and yet retain the old familiar fashion, as if it mattered nothing what she said or did to me? It was a shameful and an unworthy feeling.

"Because I am grown a woman?" she repeated, quietly. "Yes, I believe I am a woman now."

She was, indeed, a stately, lovely woman, with the tall and graceful figure of Helen, and the pure face of Antigone, elastic in her tread, free in the movements of her shapely limbs, brave in the carriage of her head, full of strength, youth, and activity. Her face was long and oval, but her lips, which is not usual in oval faces, were full and as mobile as the leaf upon the tree. Her features were straight and delicate. All about her was delicate alike, from the tiny coral ears to the dainty fingers and little feet, which, like mine, went in and out. A maiden formed for love, altogether and wholly lovable; sweet as the new-mown hay, inexhaustive in loveliness—like the Shulamite, fair as the moon, clear as the sun, lovely as Tirzah, a spring of living waters, but as yet a spring shut up, a fountain sealed. And as I looked up at her my heart sank down within me.

"But why should that make a difference between us, Laddy?"

I put her hand from my shoulder roughly, and sprang to my feet, because suddenly my heart overflowed, and words came bubbling to my lips which had to be repressed. I walked to the parapet, and looked across the harbour, battling with myself for a few moments. Then I turned. The girl was looking at me with wonder.

"Why should that make any difference, Laddy?" she repeated.

I was master of myself by this time, and could answer with a smile and lightly:

"Because you have put away the thoughts of a child, Celia. You no longer think or speak as you used to. Not any sudden change, Cis. Do not think that I complain. I was thinking of what we were a couple of years ago, and what we are now. You cannot help it. You show your womanhood in your new armour of reserve. Very bright and beautiful armour it is."

"I mean no reserve, dear Laddy. We always

talked together since we were children, have we not? And told each other everything."

"Not lately, Cis, have we?"

She hesitated, and blushed a little. Then she evaded my question.

"Why, who could be more to me than you, Laddy? My companion, my tutor, my brother. What have I to hide from you? Nothing, Laddy, nothing."

"Not that you know of, Cis. But there is a change. I think that we do not talk so freely of our thoughts as we did. Do we?"

She pondered for a moment.

"I thought we did, Laddy. At least, I have not thought anything about it. There is no change indeed, dear Laddy. What if I am grown up, as you say, into a woman?"

"What, indeed, stately Cis! Only girls are so—they wrap themselves up in their own thoughts and become enigmas."

She laughed now.

"What do you know about girls, pray? We have so few thoughts worthy the name that we can hardly be said to wrap ourselves in them. And why should girls be enigmas any more than your own sex, sir?"

"I don't know. Perhaps we want to find out more than they care to tell us about themselves."

"Perhaps because men always think and talk of women as a class. Why can't they give us individuality?"

"You see, Laddy, we are different from men chiefly because we have no ambition for ourselves. I suppose it is our nature—so far we are a class—that we desire peace and obscurity for ourselves, and greatness only for those men we care about. I have no hopes for myself in the future, Laddy. But I want to see Leonard famous, and you a great composer of beautiful music, and the dear old Captain happy in your success, and my father to grow in honour and reputation. That is all my prayer for myself and my friends. And I like to think of men and women working all over the world to make us all better and happier. Perhaps it may come in my way some day to do something quietly for the love of God."

"You do something quietly, already, Cis," I said, "because you live as you do live."

"Ah, Laddy, I have so many people who love me. Life is very easy when one is surrounded by the affection of so many. Suppose one had been born in the courts, where the voices are rough and men swear. Look at that troop of miserable men." She pointed to a gang of convicts passing through Liberty gate.

"What have been their temptations? How could they have lived the Christian life?"

"Their standard is lower than yours, Cis. Do you remember the statue of Christ, which was always higher than the tallest man? The higher one's thoughts carry one, the more wonderful, the more unattainable seems the Christlike life. But our talk has led us into strange paths, Cis. All this because I said you were grown a woman."

"No, sir, you called me names. You said I was an enigma. See now, Laddy, I must never be an enigma to you. I promise this. If ever you think that I am hiding any thought from you, ask me what it is, and I will confess it unless it is an unworthy thought, and then I should be ashamed."

"You could not have unworthy thoughts, Cis."

She shook her head.

"Foolish and frivolous thoughts. Vain and selfish thoughts," she said. "Never mind them now. Let us only continue as we have always been—my brother, my kind and sweet-faced brother."

Mine, indeed; but that she did not know. She took my hands in hers, laid her sweet fair cheek to mine, and kissed me on the lips and forehead. I think I feel her kisses still. I did not dare—I could not return them. For when that ruby red-rose blossom of her lips met mine I trembled in all my limbs.

Think. I was small, mean of appearance, and deformed, but I was past twenty-one years of age. I was a man. And I loved the girl with an unbrotherly love, and with a passion which might even have belonged to a man whose back was straight.

If I trembled when she touched me, just as I rejoiced when I saw her, or heard the rustle of her dress, the kisses which she gave me struck my heart with a coldness as of death. Of course I knew it all along, but there is always a reserve power of illusion in youth, and I may have deceived myself. But now it came home to me with clearness as of crystal that Celia could never, never, by any chance, care for me in that way.

I realised this in a moment, and pulled myself together with an effort, returning the gentle pressure of her soft warm hand just as if my heart was as calm as her own. Then I answered in commonplace and at random:

"Thank you, Cis. Some day, perhaps, I shall take you at your word, and make you confess all sorts of hidden things. Tutor and pupil is all very well, so is elder brother and younger sister. But you are six inches taller than I already."

I have always thought that this simple speech was the wisest I ever made in my life, because I was so very near saying what I should have repented ever after. Had I said what was in my heart, and almost on my lips, I might have destroyed the sweet friendship which existed then as it still exists, pure and strong as the current of a great river. I thank God solemnly that I refrained my lips. "Whoso," says the

wise man, "keepeth his tongue, keepeth his soul from trouble." I loved her, that is most true; in those days when I was yet struggling with the impulses of a passionate love, there were moments when the blood ran tingling and coursing through the veins, and when to beat down the words running riot in my brain, was almost beyond my strength. We were so much together, and she was so unconscious. She could not understand how her voice fell upon my soul like the rain upon a thirsty soil. Even when we were apart there was no moment when Celia was not present in my thoughts. All the morning the music of my pupils, even the very scales, sang Celia, Celia, Celia, in accents which varied with my moods, now wild and passionate, now soft and pleading, now hopeful and now despairing.

There was one time—I do not know how long it lasted—a week or a dozen weeks—when I was fain to pretend illness because the misery of crushing this hopeless love was too great for me, and I craved for solitude.

### CHAPTER XIV.

In those days the new suburb, which is now a large town, had hardly yet been begun; there was no sea wall along the beach outside the harbour, and half a mile beyond the rampart you might reach a place perfectly lonely and deserted. There was a common, a strip of waste land where the troops drilled and exercised, and beyond the common an old castle, a square and rather ugly pile built by Henry VII., when he set up the fortresses of Sandown, Walmer, and Deal. It was surrounded by a star fort, and stood on the very edge of the sea, with a sloping face of stone which ran down to the edge of the water at low water and into the waves at high, protecting the moat which surrounded the town. As a boy I regarded this fortress with reverence. There had been a siege there at the time of the Civil War. It was held for the king, but the governor, after a little fighting with his Roundhead besiegers, surrendered the castle and then the town itself capitulated. One pictured the townsmen on the wall, looking out to see the fortunes of the battle, the men for Church and King, side by side with their sacred brethren who were for God and country, the discomfiture of the former when the Royal Standard was hauled down, and the joy of the Puritans when their party marched in at the town gates. Of course in my young imagination I supposed that the town was just the same then as now, with the bastions, curtains, ravelins, and glacis. It was a lonely place in those days, fit for a dreamy boy or a moody man. Beyond the castle the beach stretched far away under a low cliff of red earth, curving round in a graceful line; behind the beach was a narrow strip of ground covered with patches of turf, whose yellow and sickly sweet blossoms seemed to flourish independently of all seasons on its scanty edge grew sea poppies; and here, amidst the marshy ground which lay about, we used to hunt as boys for vipers, adders, and the like; even, the alligator of Great Britain, who is as long as a finger and as venomous as a lamb. Sometimes, too, we would find gipsy encampments planted among the furze, with their gaily painted carts, their black tents, every red Romany has a black tent like the modern Bedawi or the ancient dweller in the tents of Kedar. While we looked at the bright-eyed children and the marvellous old woman standing over the fire of sticks and the great black pot, there would come out of the tents one or two girls with olive skins and almond eyes and the almond eyes of Syria, but bolder, darker, and brighter. They would come smiling in Leonard's face, asking him to cross his hand with silver. When he said he had no silver they would tell him his fortune for nothing, reading the lines of his palm with a gibberish which showed their knowledge of the art. But it was always a beautiful fortune, with love, fighting, wife, and children in it. Behind this acre or two of furze stood, all by itself, a mill, and there was a story about this mill because its centre pillar, on which the vases revolved, had once been part of the masthead of a French frigate taken in action. And higher up the beach again, because this was a place full of historic association—stood two old earthwork forts at intervals of half a mile. The ramparts were green with turf, the grass all blown inland and lying on the days of each summer in long swathes upon the slopes, beaten down by the sea breeze; the moats were dry, and these, too, were grown over with grass; there was an open place at the back where once had been a gate and a drawbridge; there was a stone wall well in the open part of the enclosure, only some inclined to the belief that it was only a sham wall, and masked, *profero sub nomine*, a subterranean passage to the Castle; the fronts of these forts were all destroyed and dragged down by the advancing tide. No ruined city in Central America, no temple of the Upper Nile, no hill of Kouyounjik could be more desolate, more lonely, more full of imaginative associations than these forts standing upon the unpeopled beach in a solitude broken only by the foot-steps of the Coastguard. Before Leonard went away, and when we were boys together, this place was to us the uttermost part of the world, a retreat accessible on a holiday morning, where one could sit under the cliff or the grassy slopes of the fort; where I, at least, could dream away the hours. Before us the waves ran along the shingle with a murmurous sh—sh—sh, or, if the day was rough, rolled up their hollow threatening crests like the upper teeth of a hungry