

"Yes, at least I received a letter from my aunt last evening, informing me that some change in Mr. McMichael's business arrangements would hasten the wedding. They have been engaged since last spring."

In the confusion of questions and comments that followed, Rex's silence remained unnoticed by all save Arthur, who alone saw the young artist's face flush to a livid, ghastly whiteness, as for an instant, with his back to the little group, he leaned heavily on a richly carved antique chair, one of the "properties" of the studio. Three or four minutes passed, then with perfect self-control he joined in the conversation. Van Brunt's heart stirred with a pang of keenest pity, as he noted how utterly the voice had lost the hopeful, joyous ring thrilling in its tones a few short moments before. It was low and hoarse, but only the friend's ear noted the change.

A few moments more and Rex excused himself to his guests, pleading a business engagement, and requesting Arthur to do the honors of his studio in his absence. Van Brunt followed him at the door.

"Let me get rid of these fellows and go with you."

Rex shook his head. "I must be alone," he grasped, "to realize—my own folly. Married to-morrow! No doubt the picture is intended for a bridal gift. Arthur"—the words came through his set teeth—"it's needless to invent another world of torment for our sins. Heaven knows the earth can hold torture enough. Good-bye, old friend." Then forcing a smile: "You see I did well to take that picture for an omen, the error lay only in the interpretation. A bridal gift!" He turned away, then wrung Arthur's hand and vanished down the stairway.

Out into the roar of Broadway he plunged, threading his way blindly through the crowd, facing a keen sharp mist, almost a rain that blew into his face, as he made his way toward the landing of the Hudson River steamers. It was a gray, raw day, with a rising wind; the water looked dull and turbid, and when the boat moved off from the wharf the increasing dusk made the banks loom through the mist in shadowy outlines. Rex paced the deck until he reached the landing nearest Hawksnest, then sprang on shore, and walked through the darkness toward the house, more than two miles away. The wind, ever increasing in violence, here and there tore asunder the heavy pall of clouds, whose jagged edges were silvered by the moon, visible at times for an instant. At last the well known mansion appeared; the moon shining out for a second enabled him to make his way along the wide piazza, now shrouded in darkness, for the blinds of the dining-room windows had been closed to protect the glass from the fierce gusts blowing directly from the river. Rex slowly approached. An irresistible impulse had brought him here, a wild mad longing to see Eve once more, learn the truth from her own lips. Perhaps in the depths of his heart still lingered a faint, desperate hope that all might yet be well, that she would denounce the whole story as baseless gossip. Once he caught himself repeating aloud the words she had uttered—"People will find me what they think me." He had always believed her true; would his loyal faith be rewarded?

The wind, with a sudden shriek, tore open one of the blinds of the long French windows, then died away for an instant. Rex, shielding himself behind a pillar, approached and glanced into the room. The table in the center was heaped with morocco cases, some closed, some half open, revealing a gleam of silver amid their satin linings. Eve, her delicate blonde beauty rendered still more striking by the plain black woolen dress she wore, relieved at throat and waist by clusters of Jacqueminot roses, held in both little hands a large case, where, flashing and glowing with a thousand prismatic hues that fairly dazzled the young man's eyes, lay a magnificent set of diamonds. The girl's face wore a proud, exultant expression as she bent her head a moment over the gems, then taking out a pair of superb ear-rings, closed the lid, put the case on the table with the others, and approaching the mirror, slipped first one ornament, then the other into the small, shell-like ears, where they glittered like sparks of fire. Her lips parted and the notes of the jewel song in "Faust" floated faintly out to Rex. He fairly ground his teeth. "So she is like the rest," he muttered, "not one thought of the poor wretch she has deluded. Trying on his wedding gift, the diamonds for which she has sold her soul. Soul?" He laughed bitterly. "They are right. She has none. The fairies at the christening feast denied her that. She has robbed me of everything, youth, hope, love, even my art, for how can I ever touch a brush again without—" He broke off abruptly, almost with a groan.

Perhaps the sound reached Eve, for she turned slowly from the mirror and perceiving the open blind, approached the window. Suddenly Rex's white face appeared, ghostlike in the darkness, almost touching hers. Only the pane of glass divided them. Eve turned white and sick. With all the very limited capacity of a cold, shallow nature she love the eager, impulsive, enthusiastic young painter, whose strength of passion she was powerless to realize, far less fathom. Nay, at times she had even gone so far as to ask herself whether she could not for his sake give up the wealth she craved and find contentment by his side. But these moments were only when under the spell of Rex's devotion, during the flying visits she had encouraged,

when he could slip away from New York for a few hours and wander by her side through the dusky woods, or row on the broad river. When he had left her, a few moments' reflection made her shake her head over the romantic folly and never did Mr. McMichael receive from his fair fiancée letters so charming as after one of these visits.

She had eagerly availed herself of the change in the time of her approaching marriage to alter all the arrangements, insisting that no one but relatives should be invited, and hoping that by making the wedding so private no news of it would reach Rex until she was beyond his reach on the wide ocean. She dreaded a possible scene and moreover had a vague fear that Mr. McMichael might not quite approve the little summer idyl enacted at Hawksnest. Only five minutes before she had felt so safe, the marriage was to take place the next evening, and as she mentally phrased it "nothing uncomfortable" had occurred. Rex had probably not heard the tidings, or, if any rumor had reached him, determined to act in the only sensible way, treat the whole affair as a passing flirtation, and very possibly on her return from Europe, paint her picture in some other style. She would make a lovely Undine, and induce Mr. McMichael to be a liberal patron of the young artist.

With these thoughts in her mind she had gone to the window and confronted Rex. At the first glimpse of his white, set face, her hopes vanished. For one moment she turned sick with fear, but the next instant her quick brain was revolving the best plan of escaping from the difficulty. Mr. McMichael was expected in the train that arrived at ten o'clock. It was now after eight. In that short time she must soothe Rex and send him away, if she did not wish to be fatally compromised on the eve of her wedding. These thoughts flashed through her mind with the speed of lightning in the second that his white lips said hoarsely: "I must speak to you."

Should she admit him or go out into the night? Surely the latter plan was the more prudent. Her mother or one of the servants might come in at any moment, and the interview promised to be a stormy one. Throwing a white shawl that lay on the sofa around her head, she noiselessly opened the French window and glided, wraith-like, into the gloom. A gust of wind, sweeping fiercely up from the river, plucked at her hair and dress; the night now that the moon was again shrouded in clouds, was intensely dark. For one instant her courage sank, then she remembered her desperate position, the power her lightest world had always exerted over the impulsive young fellow and with a half contemptuous smile at her own foolish fears, took a step forward. Suddenly she felt her slender wrist seized as if in a vise, while she was dragged rapidly, roughly forward across the lawn, toward the pines, now looming a mass of denser shadow against the inky sky. She dare not cry out, the servants must not find her in this situation, it would be far too fertile a theme for gossip.

Trembling with a vague fear, she laid her other hand upon his arm. "Please don't, Mr. Daland, you hurt me, and—" trying to speak carelessly. "I can't be dragged through bush and briar in this way. What have you to say to me?"

Rex shivered. The same sweet, musical tones that had rung in his ears through all the long, long hours of that summer, as he bent over his easel, toiling unweariedly on, cheered by the bright hopes ever floating before him. And now, now—

Yet Eve had not been wholly mistaken. The soft, clinging touch of her fingers on his arm still made his pulses thrill.

"Oh! you can feel that kind of pain," he said bitterly, with a short laugh; yet in the same instant released her wrist, drew her slender hand through his arm and walked at a somewhat slower pace through the dense gloom of the pines. There is something strangely softening in the touch of those we love. A sudden revulsion of feeling came over Rex at the light pressure of the little hand. After all, what he had heard might have been mere idle gossip. Then the memory of the scene he had just witnessed suddenly flashed across his mind with so sharp a pang that he almost groaned aloud. Yet linked with that memory, strangely enough, came the recollection of the words she had spoken on the last evening of his stay with Arthur at Hawksnest. "People find me what they think me." Ah, and had he not thought her true, believed in her, trusted her? Aye, and he would trust still, until her own words proved her false.

Eve, far more terrified by this strange silence than she would have been by the fiercest reproaches, and almost breathless from the speed at which she was hurried on, made no reply to the taunt. Scarcely three minutes elapsed ere they emerged from the shadow of the trees, and Rex suddenly paused. The moon gleaming through a rent wind-driven cloud, shone full upon them revealing the black pines, the sullen waves of the river crested with foam, the narrow path that curving sharply toward the left led down to the little wharf, while straight before them was a ledge of rock scarcely fifty paces broad, and slippery with the pine needles blown thither by many a summer breeze. On the extreme verge of the cliff grew the slender ash to which Eve had clung on the first evening she crossed Rex Daland's life-path. Its leaves, then green with the rich tints of early summer, now rustled dry and withered in the chill night-wind.

Rex turned slowly and faced his companion. How fair she looked and how he had loved her, nay, loved her still. With a fierce hungry gaze his eyes drank in each detail of that exquisite beauty, the perfect oval of the face, the small, regular features and large deep blue eyes, whose sweeping black lashes cast a shadow on the rounded cheek. The black dress, with its clusters of deep red Jacqueminot roses, brought out in yet stronger relief the pure, creamy complexion. The diamonds in her ears glittered and flashed like twin stars, the little head, crowned with its golden hair, was held proudly erect, but her eyes shunned his. She stood like a criminal before a judge not daring to break the silence. At last Rex spoke in a low, hoarse tone:

"Three months ago, in this very spot, you said:—'People will find me what they think me.' Well"—there was a momentary break in his voice, then he continued more firmly—"I have thought you noble, truthful, sincere as you are beautiful. Do I find you so?"

Utter silence. Not a sound disturbed the dead stillness of the night, save the low wash of the water against the little wharf and the rustling of the pine trees overhead. Rex fancied he could hear the hurried heavy throbs of his own heart.

"Answer me!" he exclaimed fiercely, suddenly seizing both her hands in his strong clasp.

"All these three months that I have toiled and hoped, while you—can you deny it?—lured me on with smiles and glances, aye, and words of encouragement, were you only playing with me, filling up the time till Mr. McMichael returned? It was a dangerous game."

The moon shone full open his face; something in his look or the concentrated fury in his tone startled Eve. She shrank back with a low, frightened cry.

"Oh! Rex, Rex, forgive me."

"Forgive you," he repeated bitterly. "It is an easy thing to ask. Do you know what you have done? Only drained my life of every joy, of every hope, leaving it empty as a withered husk. I might have made myself a name among men. I might have had my share of happiness—if only I had never looked upon your face. Lorelei indeed! Oh! Eve," with a sudden, despairing cry, "and I love you so dearly."

She burst into a passion of sobs. For the moment her cold, shallow nature was stirred to its depths. All the heart she possessed belonged to her handsome impetuous young lover, and though when absent she could think and plan with coolest calculation, the sight of his grief touched her strangely. In a low, hurried voice, half choked with tears, she told the story of her life—that her mother was far from rich and had been living much beyond her means to educate her only daughter and keep up the style maintained in the fashionable circle, to which their family connections gave them admittance.

"As far back as I can remember anything, Rex, mamma has always told me I must marry a rich man; my whole education, all my accomplishments were to serve this one purpose, and I was willing. I had never seen any one for whom I really cared. I"—with a sudden flush crimsoning her face to the roots of her golden hair—"I don't believe I have as much love to give as most people. Perhaps with a little dreary smile—" "It has been educated out of me. Last winter Mr. McMichael came to New York: every body was talking about him; everybody wondered who would be the lucky girl to become his wife. I liked him very well; he's not a boor, and rather fine looking. I wanted to please mamma, and I suppose it flattered my vanity to have him lavish all his attentions upon me. When in the spring he offered himself, I accepted him, and poor mamma was so delighted. Then in June Arthur wrote that you were coming. I had seen you once or twice, you had been pointed out to me at the theatre, and though my trunks were packed for Newport, I determined to stay, for I—" She paused a moment and then continued: "You came, and from the first instant, when leaning over the cliff I saw you in the boat, I was attracted by a power stronger than my will. I could not bear to tell you of my engagement, to utter the words that I knew would part us forever. The longer my silence continued the harder it was to speak, and—as my love for you grew stronger with each meeting—I began to hope I might gain courage to tell mamma all and break off my marriage. It was not to take place till the late autumn, and that seemed so far off in those delicious golden days of June and July. Then"—she paused a moment and continued in a lower, more hurried tone—"then, suddenly as a clap of thunder, came a letter from Mr. McMichael. Business compelled him to go to Paris, and he would not sail without me. I was desperate, and Oh! Rex, I did try to summon up courage to tell mamma, but at my first words she was so horrified, spoke of the scandal it would make to break the engagement on the very eve of the marriage, that it would kill her to be plunged into poverty, and she had not a cent left, the very house over our heads was mortgaged. I saw it would break her heart—"

"And did not think of mine," Rex muttered hoarsely.

The moon shone through a jagged rift in the clouds full upon the pair. What a transformation seemed to Rex to have come upon the woman he had so madly worshipped. The violet eyes raised to his appeared to glitter with a cold, steely light; beneath the mask of faultless beauty he saw the selfish heart. Loving him, it might be, with all the strength of which her shallow, calculating nature was capable,

Mr. McMichael's carriages and diamonds far outweighed all the simple happiness he could offer. With a revulsion of feeling perhaps natural, he did not even give her credit for the pain with which every feature of the fair face was now eloquent. A passing grief it doubtless would be, Eve Tresham was not one to feel any sorrow long, but at this moment she was enduring the keenest suffering of her life, as she stood gazing for the last time at the only man who had ever stirred her cold heart to a throbbing of real emotion, and in whose eyes, now meeting hers with such an icy look, she read in place of passionate devotion, only contempt and scorn.

The clouds had again drifted over the moon, and the outlines of Rex's tall figure were scarcely discernible, as in a low, steady voice, with a touch of mocking sarcasm in the tones he said:

"But it would be folly to reproach a woman like you for breaking one heart more or less. What is it to you that my life henceforth be a worthless thing—not because of foolish love and longing; no, you have killed all that by simply showing me a glimpse of your true self, but because you have robbed me of my faith in all things good and beautiful, and that faith is the breath of an artist's life. Without its existence is scarce worth—" He stopped suddenly, perhaps afraid of betraying the agony he suffered, and which, in his sudden change of feeling he fancied would gratify her vanity; then, after a moment's pause, added in tones of the most formal courtesy:—"If you are not afraid to walk back to the house alone, Miss Tresham, I will take leave of you here. The skiff is at the pier, and I'll row down the river to the next landing. Mr. McMichael"—here a touch of savage irony broke through the cold civility of his voice—"is expected this evening, and should he find us together might demand an explanation, which would perhaps cost you the diamonds I saw you admiring an hour ago."

With the inconsistency that with some women suddenly enhances the value of anything lost beyond recall, Eve Tresham at that moment was ready, may eager to give up the wealth and luxury she had been taught from infancy to believe the greatest good earth could bestow, only to have one of the worshipping glances of which Rex's dark eyes had been so prodigal, to feel once more the warm clasp of his strong hand.

Moving forward a step, she stretched out both arms, exclaiming passionately: "Rex, dear Rex, come back to me!"

A fierce gust of wind drowned the words, her arms embraced the empty air, the trees swayed and creaked above her head, an owl hooted drearily, the darkness was so intense that she could not see a foot from where she stood. She strained her ears to hear his steps on the path leading to the little pier—no sound. Suddenly the fierce wind swept the clouds aside, the moon cast a pale, livid light on the black water, the black pines. No figure was visible on the wharf; she glanced toward the cliff, saw Rex almost on the verge, and called his name in tones whose passionate appeal rang above the fierce howling of the storm. He started at the cry, half turned toward her, his face radiant with a sudden hope, but in the same instant his foot slipped on the pine needles with which the rocks were strewn, there was a momentary effort to recover himself, a clutch at the ash-tree—the cliff was empty and a heavy splash echoed from the sullen waves below.

Had he gone to the cliff intending to throw himself into the river, or merely missed the way in the darkness, mistaking it for the path that led to the pier? Who could say?

Next morning the paper were full of details of the sad accident which had befallen one of the most promising young artists in the city. Going up the Hudson to spend the night at the house of an intimate friend, he had strolled out with the lady's daughter to watch the storm, and while standing on a cliff, lost his footing. The servants summoned by Miss Tresham's screams, were too late to render any assistance, indeed the bruises on the head showed that he must have been stunned, if not killed by the rocks in his fall.

One paragraph continued: "Rumors assert that the young lady, one of the most beautiful belles in New York, is about to marry Mr. McMichael, the California millionaire, and fortunate possessor of the dead man's last work, a superb painting, containing most brilliant promise of future fame, of which Mr. Daland had given the name of 'Lorelei.'"

HUMOROUS.

WHY is a dilatory man like a dog's tail?—Because he is always behind.

PARADOXICAL as it may seem the demand for the electric light continues heavy.

THE police detective who succeeded in catching his breath hasn't been promoted.

WHILE the cornet virtuoso may not be a confirmed drunkard, nobody will deny that he's "a regular blow-it."

"EVERY fellow for him-self!" said the tire to the hub. "You jest spoke in time," replied the hub, "and wheelwright it down."

"THEY tell me Brown has a great ear for music," said Fenderson. "Well," replied Simmons, "I know he has a great ear—two of them, in fact; but I did not know that they were for music. I supposed they were for brushing flies off the top of his head."

TONY PASTOR's company played a very successful engagement at the Royal.