



THE OLD COUPLE.

They sat in the sun together. Till the day was almost done. And then, at the close, an angel stepped over the threshold stone. He folded their hands together. He touched their eyelids with balm. And their last breath floated upward Like the close of a summer psalm. Like a bridal pair they traversed The unseen, mystical road. That leads to the Beautiful City. Whose builder and maker is God. Perhaps, in that miracle country. They will give her lost youth back. And the flowers of a vanished spring-time Shall bloom in the spirit's track. One draught of the living waters Shall restore his sunshower's prime. And eternal years shall measure The love that outlives time. But the shapes they left behind them— The wrinkles and silver hair— Made sacred to us by the kisses The angel imprinted there— We'll hid away in the meadow. When the sun is low in the west. Where the moonbeams cannot find them. Nor the wind disturb their rest. But we'll let no fall-tide tombstone. With its age and date arise O'er the two who are old no longer. In their Father's house in the skies.

THE SECOND MARRIAGE.

BY MISS CATHERINE KERRIE.

"I cannot write any more," said a letter from one of my most esteemed correspondents. "The soul of my life has fled, only the gaunt skeleton of existence remains to me. There is no more poetry, no more art, no more inspiration for me. My little Ellen is dead."

"But," I wrote in reply, "you are young yet, such despair is unnatural. Twenty-five years cannot have exhausted all the sources of happiness, of contentment. Happiness still dwells in the universe for others; but my heart is consumed, blackened with fire, withered." I knew it was impossible that such feelings should be lasting. Youthful hearts, buoyant by nature and replete with excellences, are fertile in everything but despair. But a change of scene, of association, was very necessary to Aurelia. My next letter contained a pressing invitation for her to spend the winter with me. At first she hesitated; but when, at Michaelmas, I made a journey to Coverdale on purpose to bring her home with me, her good aunt joined her entreaties to mine, and the result was, Aurelia yielded passively, and suffered herself to be brought away.

I anticipated a double pleasure in presenting Aurelia Desmond to my friends—for, in spite of her protestations, I was determined that she should be so introduced. Over and beyond the benefit which I felt sure she would derive from the companionship of a small circle of refined and cultivated, yet mostly original minds, I prophesied a pleasant surprise to more than one of them, in contemplating the purity and simplicity of character which made the young widow so charming; and I imagined that the delicate tints of mystery which I would weave about her should brighten the charm.

Aurelia had been an orphan from infancy. Her mother had been of Quaker parentage, and left her infant, with her dying breath, to the care of her only sister, a member of the order of Friends. By Aurelia's marriage with one of the world's people, she had forfeited the religious sympathy of the congregation; but after the death of her idolized husband, she had been reinstated in their favour, though she had never conformed herself wholly to their rules of dress and speech. Of course, even at the death of her only child, little Ellen, she wore no mourning; and the fact, together with the Quaker-like simplicity which made her like always to be addressed by her first name, determined me to conceal as much as possible of her former history from her new acquaintances. It was partly for her own benefit, too, that I arranged this little plot; since the purpose of her visit would, doubtless, be the more effectually gained if she could be spared all those condolences and expressions of sympathy which the knowledge of her desolate condition would naturally call forth.

Familiar as I was with the pure and noble qualities of her mind, her stately and statuesque beauty, heightened, perhaps, by that dignity which a great grief always imposes, impressed me deeply, and a tender attachment sprang up between us.

She was introduced to my friends only as Aurelia Desmond; and they, appreciating the simple dignity of the appellation, pronounced it with such deep respect that its plainness could not possibly have been offensive to the most fastidious.

I confess that my anticipations of Aurelia were not at first perfectly realized. She certainly attracted as much attention as I could have desired, for the charm of her beauty and intelligence, heightened by the mournful reserve which displayed so perfectly her abstraction of soul and deep acquaintance with sorrow, made her everywhere an object of profound interest. But she herself was little affected by this attention. No eloquence or brilliancy of manner could attract her outward from the intrenched citadel of her sorrowful thoughts; no piquancy of wit or repartee could awaken more than the faintest smile about her beautiful mouth; no display of sympathy, or unspoken appreciation of her unknown grief, could melt her from her high reserve and make her even by sighs com-



AURELIA VISITS MR. RAYMOND'S STUDIO.

nunative. I felt that my resources were fast falling me, there was but one left.

"Aurelia," I said, one bright winter morning, "let us go and pay a visit. A friend of mine has just finished a beautiful picture, at least he considers it his masterpiece, and invites my inspection. It will be a pleasure to you to accompany me, I am sure."

"Yes," she replied, simply, "I like pictures. I hope it is a landscape, with fine trees, a meadow distance, and a blue thread of a river crossing the foreground. I shall see then if he has clothed his stones with the right kind of moss, and tinted the petals of his blossoms correctly."

It was the first time I had known her to show so much interest. I was encouraged. I watched her as she deliberately completed her toilet, by tying the soft satin bow under her chin, arranging the rich sable furs, drawing on the delicate gloves, taking up the faintly perfumed handkerchief, and the pretty muff, and saying quietly, "Now I am ready."

It was impossible, I thought, not to love one so pure, so sorrowful, so sweet.

"It was very thoughtful in thee," she said, as we walked along—using her pretty Quaker speech, as she sometimes did in confidential moments—"to screen me from comment and inquiry by withholding my story from thy friends. Sometimes, indeed, I feel that I am lending myself to deception; but dost not thou think it an innocent one?"

"Certainly," I replied. "I think it perfectly justifiable under the circumstances."

"And yet I have thought that, if it were discovered, it might lend an unpleasant seeming to our conduct. Dost thou think there is danger?" "Scarcely," I replied. "At least the probability is so remote, if it exists at all, that it isn't worth while to discuss it at present. By-and-by we may perhaps, feel justified in ourselves making the revelation. Father Time is dealing tenderly with you, I think, Aurelia."

Her beautiful eyes filled with tears. "Is it kind or cruel in him," she said, "to stent the sting from our sorrows? When I can no longer nurse my grief, the last moments of my happiness will have passed away."

"Ah!" I said, "the bliter flints, like the sweet, have their seasons of bloom, maturity, and decay. In place of your asphodel will grow up spring violets by-and-by."

She only sighed and shook her head. We had reached the studio, and were entering. At this moment my friend Mr. Raymond was engaged; so we amused ourselves, for a time, with the paintings hung on the walls, the little sketches, half-finished, which were turned their backs towards us—against the ceiling, but which I knew pretty well how to draw forth and exhibit in a proper light.

Yet, while thus entertaining Aurelia, I was not so much admiring the pictures as studying, by side glances, the strange lady with whom Mr. Raymond was talking. She was a very striking person; there was that about her which not only arrested, but riveted my attention. The influence by which my eyes seemed perpetually to turn to her, from whatever station I assumed, reminded me of the ancient arts of fascination and witchery; and I wondered if she exerted the same power over Raymond, who was stooping over the chair in which she sat to catch her murmured tones. Hardly—Raymond was a man of many experiences and much penetration.

Finally she rose, shook out her dainty flouncers with a silken touch, all the while that her full expressive eyes were turned upon Raymond, and having given him her hand in a warm, impressive manner that was full of art, called slowly down the room. As she passed us, I noticed that her eye fell upon Aurelia. There was a quick, and, it seemed to me, malignant glance of recognition, a slight and haughty stoop of the proud form, and she passed on with an added touch of hauteur in her manner. I looked at

Aurelia; he usually pale face was now aglow with a faint flush, and her bright eyes seemed to come and go between her parted lips in points like that of a frightened deer. Mr. Raymond was approaching, however, and I touched her arm to recall her to self-command.

The movement was effectual. The flush subsided, leaving only a faint trace of rose in either cheek, which added inexpressibly to her loveliness. I could see by Raymond's eye, as I introduced my friend, that he was struck by her appearance; and I purposely engaged them in conversation; that they might gain some insight into each other's natures before we commenced speaking of strictly artistic matters. Then I questioned Raymond about the sketches at which we had been looking; and thus it was, perhaps, fifteen minutes before the chief purpose of our visit was bronched, and by that time Aurelia's composure was perfectly restored.

Raymond led us at once to the centre of the room where, in the full light of the sky-window, stood an easel covered with a cloth. The covering was carefully drawn aside, and the next moment there was revealed to us simply the head of a little girl of three years. It was exquisite in outline and colouring, and the expression was life-like; thoughtful, serious, tender almost beyond words, yet childlike without. I indulged in a flood of rapturous exclamations, but, turning to Aurelia, I saw that her eyes were suffused with tears, and, in another instant, I heard her softly murmuring, "My child—my child!"

Raymond was gazing upon her with a deeply penetrating glance.

"Am I mistaken," he asked of me, in a whisper, as Aurelia's preoccupation shielded her from the inquiry, "or is this Mrs. Desmond, the widow of my old friend, Harry?"

But Aurelia's quick ear caught the sound, she blushed crimson; and, extending her hand with the artlessness of a child, exclaimed, "You knew my husband? Ah! then you will be the friend of his wife, and refrain from exposing her to the sharp comments of the world. No one knows my history here but Mrs. Earle."

Raymond readily assented to her discretion, and, thinking to divert her attention from the embarrassing topic, asked her opinion of the picture.

"It is perfect. So like my own little Ellen, too. Ah! Mr. Raymond, I should have thought only a mother's heart could have nourished such an inspiration."

Raymond blushed at the rather embarrassing compliment.

"We artists," he said, "see beauty in all its forms. We gaze upon young children, perhaps, more tenderly than even some maternal eyes—since where shall we catch glimpses of divine beauty, perfect and unvoiced, if not in the human soul fresh from its mother's presence, and unstained as yet by contact with the world? The child is to the man what the clear mountain spring is to the turbulent and roaring river."

That visit to Raymond's studio proved the turning point in Aurelia's history. Raymond came afterwards often to see us, and by his subtle, yet gentle knowledge of human nature, aided, perhaps, by his thorough knowledge of her antecedents, succeeded in that in which so many had failed. He beguiled Aurelia of her grief, and by his graphic powers of conversation, he touched the only chord in her heart which grief had not had power to unstring. Already I began to build up the most gorgeous air-castles for my two friends, rose as the hues of sunset.

I had never inquired of Aurelia concerning her acquaintance with the lady whom he had met in Raymond's studio, thinking that it might perhaps be an unpleasant topic. But, sitting one day in her room, a sketch dropped from her portfolio. My eye rested upon it only a moment—for she immediately swept and replaced it—but its characteristics were too striking not to be readily apprehended. It was

a mere outline of flowing robes, heavy fur mantle, nodding plumes, and dainty muff; but the face which the bonnet encircled was not that of the handsome woman we had seen at Raymond's, but the ugly and distorted head of a serpent, while dimly through the length of the figure I could trace the scaly, serpentine evolutions and stinging tail, which formed the proper continuation of that odious head. It was a strange conception to come from the brain of my magnanimous and high-souled friend.

"Dost thou see her—dost thou not see her?" exclaimed Aurelia, one day, running into my room, with eyes distended, and hair flowing like a whirlwind.

I followed the direction of her eager hand and, looking out, saw that same elegant lady entering the gate.

"I cannot meet her," said Aurelia. "She would sting me so, with her sharp tongue, that I should die of her venom. Go thou down, my dear friend, and say I am preoccupied—ill—anything that is not too gross a deception—that I may escape her. You will see that I am not merely a coward, when you meet her snaky eye and listen to her beguiling accents."

The servant had already admitted her; so there was no alternative but to comply with Aurelia's request. I stepped to my dressing-room to add a hasty touch to my toilet, and, turning, met the servant with a card, which Aurelia had sent to me from the guest below. It was a neat, elegant missive, with this name—

"MRS. HAROLD MOUNTJOY."

A new light dawned upon me as I read that name; and whatever tremors I may have felt, after Aurelia's excited description, they vanished now. I knew with whom I had to deal, and felt sure that whatever game she might play, I knew a secret art by which, if necessary, to checkmate her.

Mrs. Mountjoy rose, as I entered, as if about to greet warmly an old friend. Upon seeing a stranger, a slight change passed quickly over her countenance, and she bowed coldly in answer to my salutation.

"Mrs. Desmond desires to be excused," I said, coolly; for I was quite willing our visit should understand that her presence was unwelcome. "She labours under a slight indisposition, which will prevent her seeing any guests this morning."

"Indeed," replied Mrs. Mountjoy. "I regret it extremely, I assure you. It is some years since I have met Mrs. Desmond, and it would give me great pleasure to renew her acquaintance. Please to present my compliments to her, and say that, since I am so unfortunate this morning, I shall give myself the pleasure of calling again. I heard of her presence here through our mutual friend, Mr. Raymond; and, indeed, I have been greatly stimulated to persevere in my earnest resolve to renew our friendship by that gentleman's enthusiastic description of her. She was Miss Leslie when I knew her, and sufficiently charming; but I can readily believe that time has only matured her loveliness."

I had not heard the hiss of the serpent once throughout all this long speech. Her voice was honeyed sweet tones; but at the conclusion I perceived distinctly the snake-like glitter of her eye.

"Mrs. Desmond is, indeed, a very lovely woman," I said, stupidly; "quite worthy the friendship and esteem of the noblest. She is in peculiar affliction, however, at present, and sees very little society."

"Indeed! I thought her quite gay, and I have admired her resolution in so effectually concealing the deep grief which the death of her little daughter must have caused her. I may add that Miss Leslie and myself were rivals in our girlhood. Please say to her, with my regards, that I consider it a particularly good fortune to me that this opportunity for renewing our acquaintance occurs at a time when my

happy marriage and her touching grief render the indulgence of the old jealousy, which I had certainly reason to indulge in then, utterly absurd. Tell her that I promise good behaviour for the future, if she will but admit me on the list of her friends."

I confess I was more than surprised at such importunity from Mrs. Harold Mountjoy. Her husband was old, wealthy, and gentle; her position, as a leader of fashion, at present an enviable one, however temporarily attained. Why she should so especially care, unless for some sinister motive, to renew her acquaintance with Aurelia, who moved in so entirely different a sphere, I did not at first see clearly. But in an instant I remembered her earnest and impressive manner, as she bade Raymond adieu, that morning, and a great light illumined my mind. I was more than ever determined that Mrs. Mountjoy should not succeed in this perilous scheme of hers.

But Raymond! And here a doubt entered my mind which I had once or twice before entertained. He was a man of noble intellect, of a quick perception of right or wrong; but of the strength of his moral principles, I had then and even now entertained a suspicion. If Mrs. Harold Mountjoy, with her insinuating grace, her artful fascinations, and the strong bribe of her powerful patronage, should throw herself too much in his way, how far would he yield himself to her influence, and while he thought himself accepting of her homage to his father, become in reality the victim of her machinations? For several reasons the question was an interesting one to me.

Raymond called that evening. Aurelia happened to be upstairs at the time, writing a letter; so that I enjoyed the wished-for opportunity of a *tête-à-tête* with him.

"A friend of yours called here to-day," I said, "who, it seems, is also an old acquaintance of Aurelia's—Mrs. Mountjoy. She is an interesting character; do tell me about her."

Raymond smiled the peculiar smile of a man of the world.

"Yes. She and Aurelia were rivals once, I think. That is, after Harry's engagement with Miss Leslie, he met Mrs. Mountjoy. That was before her marriage, and she was near breaking off the match. What a schemer she is! And yet I like her."

"What is it that you like in her?"

"Her smartness, her cunning, her utter impetuosity of being sincere make her exceedingly amusing, I assure you. So she called on Aurelia, did she?"

"Yes. Expressed a great admiration for her, and a strong desire to renew the old acquaintance; told me of your enticement, and of her entire credence of them. Aurelia wouldn't see her. Do you know, Mr. Raymond, I suspect the woman of sinister designs upon you?"

Raymond smiled, and then, for a moment, looked serious.

"I can tell you," he said, "what I dare not tell Aurelia, that she herself has been my salvation. I met Mrs. Mountjoy in society, in the most usual way in the world. The result was an acquaintance, which time, her nets, and my indifference to consequences were fast ripening into an intimacy. I do not know what her object was, nor do I care. It might have been simply the pleasant sensation which such natures undoubtedly feel in the exercise of their peculiar power. At any rate, her sighs, her eager questions, her half-convincing were doing their work, when Aurelia's noble countenance, and pure, childlike heart, awoke me, by a sense of contrast, to my danger. What do you think about several marriages, my friend? Do you share Aurelia's opinion, that a person can never be twice happy in married life?"

"Not altogether. With some weak, or narrow, or idiosyncratic natures it may be so. But for the woman with the large heart and overflowing sympathies of Aurelia, it is different. Undoubtedly, she will never forget her Harry; but in the years which are to come, I doubt not she may be won to bestow equal, or even deeper, tenderness upon another. And why not? Her nature is deepening day by day."

"And that other would be the happiest man on earth?"

"If you think so, persevere, and win the prize."

Raymond's declaration, which followed but a short time after the above conversation, took Aurelia quite by surprise. I was not disappointed—nor, I think, was she—she gave him an unqualified refusal.

He told her his story; confessed the weakness of which he had been guilty; showed her her power, not so much to sway him from any course which he had deliberately chosen, as by pure associations to influence his choice; pleaded his earnest love and reverence for her, and then left the case in her hands.

"Such assurance," said Aurelia, with a smile, "to make even his faults plead for him?"

"At least it proves his sincerity," I said. "A courtship based upon such candour is free from many dangers."

"I cannot forget," she said, "that that sweet picture once lay warm and pure at his heart. I know he must, at the core, be tender and true. I am willing to be, my I am proud and happy to be his friend, his sister even; but I have been a wife once; and it is over—I cannot be again."

It was nearly spring, and Aurelia returned to her quiet home. Mr. Raymond came often to see me, and I knew that he had not forgotten Aurelia. Mr. Harold Mountjoy died that spring, and left his widow free in the exercise of her peculiar talents. She frequented Raymond's studio more than ever, but to no effect. Her spell once broken, Raymond was too clean-sighted to be caught again.

Aurelia wrote frequently, and I saw by her letters that her home was not to her what it had once been.

"I am haunted," she wrote to me in the early autumn. "I walk out in the woods, and the mellow sunshine mocks me with the loss of loving smiles; the winds, whispering in the