



CHAPTER I.

The Dream.

"And this is Valentine's Eve, is it? Ethel, you've broken my dream." And Mr. John Bruce, so well known in the scientific world as a patient and laborious student and lucid teacher, laid down his pen, and glanced across his writing table at his wife with rather a thoughtful look in his honest, kind brown eyes.

"Have I? I thought you never did dream, John."

"Well, I don't often. But I dream last night with a vengeance. That cold duck I had for supper was responsible for it, of course. It was a very curious dream."

"What was it, John?"

"Mr. Bruce laughed. "Why, if you weren't such a sensible little woman, I should hesitate to tell it you. My Scotch cousins would say I've been what they call 'forespoken'—and if either you or I were in the very least superstitious, we should be conjuring up all sorts of bogey fancies on this pleasant, comfortable Valentine's Eve."

"Why, John, whatever did you dream?" asked Ethel Bruce, smiling.

"She was a very fair, pretty woman, of eight and twenty."

A tender, loving little soul, devoted to her clever husband, and firmly cherishing the idea that there was no one like him in the world.

A very pleasant, home-like picture of the room present, with its cosy crimson curtains at doors and windows, its blazing fire, its pretty mistress, engaged with her sewing, on one side of the hearth, its master, thoughtful and studious, on the other.

The Bruces were in easy circumstances, and their home life was almost ideal.

When his wife pressed him to tell his dream, John Bruce turned his chair to the fire, and looked into the blaze for a moment or two with slightly knitted brows.

"Let me think," he said. "I must tell it you in order. Ah! I have it. I'd forgotten it until a moment or two ago, when you mentioned Valentine's Eve. Well, now listen."

"In my dream I seemed to be sitting in this room, just where I sit now. I was writing busily, and it was very late. The clock in the hall struck 12, and I remembered it was Valentine's Eve. I left my writing and began to think of other Valentine's Eves—of one in particular."

And he smiled affectionately at his wife, whom he wooed and won just ten years ago.

"Well, dear, go on."

"I was just turning to my writing again, when I noticed one of those curtains move—and it waved his hand towards the heavy crimson curtains which draped the window. The next moment, a shape—I say a shape, for I could not distinguish whether it was man or woman, or, indeed, anything human—emerged from the folds of the curtain and came swiftly towards me."

"It was all in gray—the garment long and flowing, and the face quite concealed. Before I could spring up to defend myself—and, indeed, my limbs seemed paralyzed—I saw the flash of a naked blade, and realized that I was about to be murdered. I tried to shriek, but could not make a sound. You know what nightmares are. But the shock woke me. I found myself safe in bed upstairs, with you sleeping tranquilly beside me; and I made up my mind not to make my supper off cold duck again."

"Mrs. Bruce had listened with that curious kind of interest which the recital of weird dreams usually evokes, but she only smiled at the conclusion of it, and said—

"I'm not sorry to find you can dream a bad dream as well as I. I thought you were superior to them, John."

But another person who had listened to Mr. Bruce did not take it by any means so coolly.

This was a little girl of eight or nine, who had sat near the fire on a footstool, almost entirely hidden by her mother's skirts.

She sprang forward suddenly, and clung to her father's knees, raising her eyes to his face, and crying out, with great agitation—

"Oh, papa, will that dream come true?"

Mr. Bruce laughed as he lifted his little daughter on to his knee, and stroked her fair hair with a loving touch, which showed how passing dear she was to him.

She was their only child—a dainty

spiritual little creature, with a mind and soul beyond her years.

Very lovely she was, with a skin as delicate as a rose-leaf, luminous, dark eyes, and a wealth of beautiful gold-brown hair.

Those large, lustrous eyes were fixed on her father's face now with a look of terror and distress.

His weird dream had sunk deep into her childish mind.

He glanced at his wife amusedly.

"Marjorie is too sensitive, my dear," he said. "She oughtn't to hear such things till she is older."

"But, papa, will it come true?" persisted the child, wistfully. And the tears stood in her eyes.

"Come true? No, my pet. Things happen in real life exactly contrary to our dreams. So you may set your little heart at rest."

Then he proceeded to give an explanation of dreams—an explanation befitting a man of science and a philosopher.

The child listened attentively, and in the end gave a deep-drawn sigh of relief.

"I'm glad to know," she whispered, "I couldn't bear to let you die, papa."

And she put her little arms round his neck and buried her face on his bosom.

"My tender-hearted darling!" said the fair, young mother, smiling at husband and child.

Four or five hours later, Mr. Bruce was sitting at work in the room, but he was now quite alone.

His wife had left him an hour ago with a tender good-night, and a laughing reference to his dream.

The two servants were in bed and fast asleep.

The house was very still.

There was no sound in it save the loud ticking of the clock in the hall.

Mr. Bruce went on with his writing, rapidly.

So absorbed was he that he did not hear the opening of the door, nor the sound of a light footfall.

A soft hand laid on his arm made him look up, and to his utter amazement he saw his little daughter standing close beside him, clad in her white night-gown, her feet naked, her hair falling like a golden cloud about her shoulders.

"My darling, whatever are you doing here?"

"Oh, papa!"

And she began to sob a little.

"Well, my precious, what is it?" he asked, anxiously.

"Papa, I was frightened about you! I woke up, and thought about your dream. It frightened me—and—and I came down to see if you were safe."

The child was shivering—with fear, not with cold.

Her cheeks were pale; her eyes dilated.

There could be no doubt as to the genuineness of her distress.

"My foolish little daughter!" exclaimed Mr. Bruce; but he caught her up in his arms and strained her to him in a passion of tenderness. "I am all right—and shall be. But you will catch your death of cold. Run back to bed, darling."

"No, not just yet, papa," and she nestled more closely to him. "Let me stay just a little while."



"But, Marjorie, I couldn't write if you stayed, and I want to get to the end of my chapter. Run back to bed—or stay! I'll show you something first. Look here, Marjorie. This is a Valentine for mamma."

He opened a drawer of his writing table and took a small package out of it.

It was a morocco case, containing a locket, inlaid on one side with blue enamel.

"Oh, papa, how pretty!" cried the child. "Do let me look at it."

She examined it, and was handing it back to him, when, somehow or other, it slipped from her fingers and fell on the tiled hearth, after striking sharply against the edge of the fender.

When Mr. Bruce picked it up a bit of the pretty blue enamel was chipped off.

Marjorie's sorrow was extreme, but her father, like the kind-hearted philosopher he was, took it very coolly.

"Don't fret, dear. Mamma won't mind a great deal; accidents will happen. It wasn't your fault. And now run back to bed. I shall have finished in less than half an hour, and I'll come into your room and kiss you good night."

"Kiss me now, too, papa," said the child, raising her sweet, wistful face to his.

He kissed her a dozen times.

"Good night, my darling. My precious, precious Valentine!" he said. For Marjorie had been born on St. Valentine's Day.

She left the room obediently, and had got as far as the top of the stairs when she heard a sound, which made her childish heart beat fast with terror—her father's voice, raised in a loud, strange cry.

Back she ran to the room, wild with fear, and with her face as white as her gown. As she opened the door she caught a glimpse of a tall form escaping through the open window, from

which this curtain had been pushed aside.

On the floor in front of the window, her father was lying—still, quite still.

A moment later, Mrs. Bruce, aroused from sleep by the strange cry, rushed into the room. She found Marjorie, bare-footed and in her night-gown, kneeling on the floor in an agony of grief and terror, vainly trying to support her dead father in her arms.

CHAPTER II.

In the Train.

Nine years later.

The London express from Crewe was on the point of starting.

The guard had all but raised his whistle to his lips, when a porter was seen hurrying along the platform with a young lady, dressed in slight mourning, who was evidently anxious to catch the train.

The porter pulled open a door; it belonged to a first-class compartment, and there was a single passenger inside—an elderly gentleman with a thick travelling rug wrapped round his knees, and books and papers littering the seat beside him.

The young lady gave a little incoherent exclamation, and seemed as though she would have drawn back.

But there was no time for this.

The guard banged the door, the whistle sounded and the train moved out of the station.

The young girl—for she was nothing more, being barely eighteen years of age—sank into one of the comfortably cushioned seats, with a look of such unmistakable agitation and distress that the gentleman could not but observe it.

"I hope there is nothing amiss," he said, courteously. "Surely they have not put you in the wrong train. This is for London."

"I'm in the right train, thank you, but," she flushed crimson, then added, bravely, though with an evident effort: "But this is a first-class compartment and I am only a third-class passenger."

"Indeed! That is a very trifling accident," said the gentleman, pleasantly. "I think you need not worry over it. No doubt the porter made a mistake."

"Yes, that was it," murmured the girl, with a suspicion of tears in her eyes. "Can you tell me how far I shall have to go before I can change?"

"Well, we stop at Stafford, I believe. Don't be uneasy. You may take my word for it, the railroad company will not be hard on you."

And he smiled in a frank, pleasant fashion, calculated to set her entirely at her ease.

After this there was silence for a minute or two.

The gentleman turned to his papers; but, nevertheless, he gave, every now and then, a quietly scrutinizing look at the girl sitting opposite.

She was of middle height, slender, and graceful, with a refined and exceedingly lovely face.

A pure oval face—the eyes large and lustrous, and fringed by long, dark lashes, the complexion delicate as a rose-leaf, the shining hair of a beautiful golden brown.

A truly lovely face, the gentleman decided, but rather a sad one just now.

He noticed the extreme paleness of her dress—indeed, his clear gray eyes seemed to take in everything at a glance—and came to the conclusion that she was a gentlewoman, though a poor one.

He himself was a distinctly aristocratic-looking man of sixty—his hair gray, his somewhat military-looking moustache almost white.

From head to foot he was pervaded by that air of extreme neatness and cleanliness which is even more attractive in an old man than in a young one, and which pleasantly characterizes a certain type of elderly English gentlemen.

After a few minutes, he laid aside his papers and looked at his young traveling companion.

It was easy to see that she was in deep trouble; the tears were standing in her lovely eyes.

"My child," said the old gentleman, "you are too young"—his look added, "and too pretty"—"to be making this long journey all alone. Have you friends to meet you?"

The pleasant, fatherly manner appealed to the girl's inmost heart; it caused her tears to flow faster and faster.

"You are in trouble, I see. Is there anything I am an utter stranger, and don't wish to be inquisitive—but is there anything I can do for you?"

Sympathy is always welcome.

The girl needed no further encouragement to tell her simple story.

She was an orphan, she said; had lost both her parents while she was very young, and had been brought up by a relation of her mother's, who had lived in the south of France.

This relation having died recently, and her annuity dying with her, the girl was left to make her own way in the world.

She had no other relative that she knew of, and no friends in England.

Through the medium of an advertise-

ment, however, she had, a fortnight ago, obtained an engagement as companion to an English lady, and had traveled from France yesterday to fulfil it.

Imagine her grief and horror to find on reaching her destination that the lady had been suddenly called to Africa, to nurse her husband, who was dangerously ill there.

She had telegraphed to France, apprising the girl of her change of plans and asking her to postpone her journey till she heard from her again; but unfortunately, the latter had started before the telegram arrived, and she reached her English destination only to find the house shut up, and in the hands of a caretaker.

"And what will you do, my poor

child?" asked the gentleman, very kindly, having listened to the pathetic little story with much interest and sympathy.

"I don't quite know. I am going to London now, to try to find out an old servant, whose address I have. She would let me stay with her a little while."

"Do you mind telling me your name?"

"Marjorie St. Clair."

"You don't mind my asking you, I hope. I am not asking from mere idle inquisitiveness."

"Indeed, I don't know how to thank you enough; you have been so very kind."

"Will you allow me to give you my card?"

And he handed her one, inscribed with the name—Geoffrey Hyde.

After having sat deep in thought for a minute or two, he took up a newspaper again, glanced down its advertisement columns, and finally handed it to Marjorie pointing to the advertisement he wished her to read.



Under the heading "Wanted" she read—

"As companion, a young lady of refined tastes and cheerful disposition; must be musical. Address, Alpha."

"I imagine that would suit you, Miss St. Clair," said Mr. Hyde. "You are musical, I think you said."

"Yes, but—"

"But you don't know whether you could get the situation. Isn't that what you would say? Well, you have only to decide whether you will accept it. I happen to be 'Alpha,' Miss St. Clair."

"Oh!"

Marjorie uttered this little exclamation, and then sat silent, looking at him with a world of gratitude shining in her eyes.

"Take a little time, and think this over," said Mr. Hyde, kindly. "It is my daughter for whom I want a companion, my only child, and a dear, sweet girl, with whom, I feel sure, you would be happy. We are by no means people of fashion; but our home is a pleasant one, a quiet country house, a dozen miles from London, and very prettily situated. As to references, I can only refer you to my friends and neighbors."

"Oh, sir!" exclaimed Marjorie, tearfully, quite overcome by his kindness.

"Well, then, my dear child, think it over for yourself. If you do decide to come to us, I tell you frankly I shall be very pleased, and so, I am sure, will my daughter. But don't let me urge you unduly. Decide according to your own feelings. Only I would suggest that, if you are coming to us, you might just as well come at once. Go home with me this afternoon. That will be much better than going hunting over London for your old servant, whom, after all, you might not find."

After a moment he added, gravely: "London is certainly not the place for a young girl like you to be alone in."

"I don't know how to thank you," said Marjorie, with deep emotion. "Your kindness is so very great. And if—if you are quite sure I shall not be intruding, I will accept your generous offer, and—ah—bless you for making it."

"My child, I have not the slightest doubt it is heaven that has willed our meeting. We hear of special Providence often; and if we only look we might see them for ourselves. But now," he added, in a kind, cheery tone, "we will consider the main question settled; and as to little details, you must arrange them with my daughter."

After a little more conversation the train stopped at Stafford.

You will stay with me, of course?" said Mr. Hyde, noticing her look of hesitation and indecision. "You will not leave this for a third-class compartment?"

She thanked him with her eyes, and the next moment a man-servant, in neat dark livery, came up to the window, and, touching his hat, asked if his master wanted anything.

"Thank you, Coulson, I think not," said Mr. Hyde; "or stay! you might send a telegram for me."

He pulled out his note-book, scribbled a few words in it, tore out the leaf and handed it to the servant, with instructions to despatch the telegram at once.

"Just a word to my daughter," he explained, as the man departed, "to prepare her for the pleasure of your arrival."

A few more minutes and the train was on its way again.

It is hardly necessary to say that Marjorie St. Clair was no other than the child whose father had met with so tragic a death on that fatal St. Valentine's morning nine years ago.

The change in her name had been brought about by her going to live with her mother's cousin, Miss St. Clair.

This lady had desired the child to be called by her name; and now Marjorie rarely remembered that it was not her own.

Her father's murderer had never been discovered, in spite of the most vigilant search on the part of the police.

It seemed pretty certain, however, that plunder had been the object; for a roll of bank notes was missing from the drawer of the writing table—also the pretty gold locket which had been intended for poor Ethel Bruce's Valentine.

She, poor soul, followed her husband to the grave within six months of the tragedy that had wrecked her life.

It was late in the afternoon when Mr. Hyde and Marjorie alighted at a little country station, they having left the express at Euston, and finished their journey in one of the slow local trains.

A well-appointed carriage was in waiting.

Mr. Hyde and Marjorie entered it; the servant who had traveled with his master mounted beside the coachman, and away they drove towards Denelands, which Mr. Hyde had told Marjorie was the name of his home.

A drive of half an hour brought them to it.

It was a handsome white building, ample and substantial, though plain.

It was surrounded by a large garden and shrubberies, and there was a neat white lodge at the entrance-gate. There appeared to be no other houses within a distance of half a mile.

Just behind it, on a slight eminence, was a wood; at the side of it a wide lake.

The carriage bowed swiftly and smoothly up the drive and stopped at the hall door.

Mr. Hyde, with great courtesy, assisted Marjorie to alight and led her into one of the parlors opening out of the hall.

It was a remarkably pretty, refined apartment. A cheerful fire was burning in the grate.

A lady's work-basket and some needle work were lying on the table; an empty chair stood near.

"Ah, my daughter is not here, I see," remarked Mr. Hyde, glancing swiftly round the room. "Sit down, Miss St. Clair, and I will fetch her."

Marjorie seated herself near the fire, and awaited the coming of Miss Hyde, with no small degree of trepidation.

When Mr. Hyde made his generous offer, she accepted it almost at once, simply because she was so distressed and overwrought that she knew not what else to do.

But now she could not but reflect that the daughter might not approve her father's choice.

She might be a haughty, mistrustful young lady, who would object to this intrusion on the part of an utter stranger.

Mr. Hyde had remarked, in the course of conversation, that he was a widower, so Marjorie knew his daughter was mistress at Denelands.

In a minute or two the door opened and a young lady entered—tall and graceful, and wearing an elegant tea gown of black and gold, which trailed on the carpet behind her.

She looked a little haughty, but held out her hand with frank cordiality.

"How do you do, Miss St. Clair?" was her greeting. "My father has told me about you. I hope we may be able to make you comfortable. I am Miss Hyde."

Marjorie, as she murmured a grateful word or two, looked up at the face above her own, and saw in a moment how very beautiful it was.

A somewhat southern-looking face with a clear, creamy skin, large blue eyes, fringed by almost black lashes, a firm, beautiful mouth and slightly wavy, very dark brown hair.

Her age might be four or five and twenty; her bearing was one of singular dignity and grace.

She sat down, begged Marjorie to do the same, and began to talk with perfect ease, and in a clear, high-bred tone.

"My father says you have told him that the lady to whom you were going and who has left England so suddenly, may return. In the course of six weeks," she said. "If she does, and you prefer to go to her, we shall, of course, wish you to please yourself. If not, we shall be happy to have you continue to stay with us."

These were kind words, and Miss Hyde's manner did not seem insincere.

And yet, in some subtle, mysterious fashion, Marjorie received the impression that she was not really a welcome guest, so far as this young lady was concerned.

Presently Miss Hyde rang the bell, and desired a servant to bring in tea.

"We will have it here together," she remarked. "My father is tired with his journey, and will take his in his own room. And there is no one else in the house at present. After tea I dare say you will like to go upstairs and have the evening to yourself. You must be tired, too. Allow me to help you to take off your hat and jacket."

And very graciously and gracefully she persisted in helping her, in spite of Marjorie's remonstrances.

During tea the two girls sat opposite each other, and more than once Marjorie caught Miss Hyde's eyes fixed upon her with a look she could not fathom—a scrutinizing gaze, as though she would penetrate into the

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innermost secret of her soul. That look puzzled Marjorie. There came a day when she understood it well.

To Be Continued.

Swamp Trees.

A botanical expert calls attention to the fact that certain kinds of trees grow in swamps, not so much because they like such soil, but because in the competition with others they have been relegated to such unfavorable surroundings and been obliged to accommodate themselves to them.

Short People.

Apart from the Lapps, whose height as a rule, is about five feet, other races of small people inhabit different parts of Europe. Quite 14 per cent of the population of Sicily and Sardinia does not exceed 4 feet 11 inches in height.

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