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above all and through all the beautiful face of Annie Templeton had been before him constantly.

Men will deceive themselves, just as Holbrook did, when he answered his haunts as a beautiful picture. Sometimes see will linger with me for days.

The ladies met him in the public park of the hotel. They welcomed him as a highly prized friend, and the risk with which they fairly threw themselves upon him was very pleasant.

"They had waited for him anxiously, and they were deeply interested in the smallest detail of the business he had undertaken for them. They hung upon his words as if he were bringing them salvation.

"My first step," he said, "will be to take out letters of administration for Mrs. Templeton, and this done we can take possession of all your brother's affairs."

He explained to them that the proceedings were likely to be long delayed and vexatious, and it was not long before he found himself installed not only as legal counsel, but as adviser upon all points in family matters.

It was very agreeable to him, to be the recipient of all the little confidences as to family details, cost of living, the ways and means—and he, who for twelve years had lived a bachelor life, found domestic considerations highly interesting, especially when presided over by a beautiful girl who paid special deference to his own wishes.

It was agreed that they should return to their home in Plainfield the following day, and set it in order for a prolonged absence.

While they were gone he was to obtain for them apartments, where they would be at least as comfortable as a hotel and secure greater comfort.

He did not tell them of the suspicions entertained by Tom Bryan and himself, for, in truth, he would have found it difficult to have presented them in an intelligible manner, if he had thought it wise to arouse hopes he was not certain of realizing.

Touching the murder, he informed them that a series of inquiries had been instituted, but that as yet it was impossible to say anything as to the result.

Finally he drew away from the subject in which the two ladies were so much interested, and directed their thoughts to other channels. Thus he induced them to lay aside their sorrows for a time, until the clock pointed so readily that the clock pointed it before he was aware it was so late.

He was more and more pleased with the character of Annie Templeton, her artlessness and sincerity and her charms of mind and temper.

This night he sat long in his room at the open window over his cigars, his thoughts busy with the charming young girl with whom, through accident apparently, he stood in closer relation than any other man, and he grew very tender over them.

CHAPTER XVII. OF A NEWPORT VERANDA.

OUR story moves along a day or two, and we are carried to Newport where, on a bluff overlooking a wide expanse of water, and well along the drive, stands a cottage, which elsewhere might be called a mansion, yet as compared with its neighbors it is small.

It has many angles, short towers and high eaves; many gables, curious windows, like eyes, in the veranda roof—a recessed balcony, and veranda cropping out there, in unexpected places, and a jumble of corners, projections and angles, yet all orderly, harmonious and artistic.

On the veranda which adjoins the porte cochere, a young lady paces up and down with evident impatience. The sun slowly sinking into the west, sends its rays shining under the roof of the veranda and lights up with golden gleams the shining hair of Flora Astgrave.

The house is the summer residence of Robert Witherspoon, and therefore the summer home of the lady.

The roll of carriage wheels in the distance attracts her attention, and she leans over the railing.

The carriage turning into sight, she views it with great expectancy plainly manifest on her beautiful face.

In a moment more she is enabled to ascertain its occupant, and as she smiles a smile of relief wreathes itself about her lips.

The carriage draws up at the steps and the occupant who alights is—Harry Fountain.

She greets him with suppressed joy. She hurries him off in charge of a servant, bidding him to hasten to a meeting with her on the veranda, as soon as he can remove the stains of travel.

Then she seats herself in one of the willow chairs which invite repose. She leans her head upon her hand, her elbow resting upon the arm of the chair, and she relapses into a deep slumber.

The thoughts she indulges are evidently not pleasant, for she frowns and her face is dark.

Then she sits upon Fountain, newly arrayed, rejoins her. He says gayly: "You perceive how obedient I am. You command and I am here."

She looks at him gloomily and says she is glad to see him.

"I should only wish," he retorts, "by your saying so, ma belle."

She looks at him angrily as she replies: "You can be very gay under all the circumstances. Is the distance from New York so great that you feel perfectly at ease here?"

from you comes with but ill grace, Flora," he said sternly. "I jeopardized my chances of peace, comfort and happiness in this world in order that I might give you my confidence. You hold every secret of my life—you know that of which no other person in this world knows."

"Except one—except one," she cried passionately, leaping to her feet and striding up and down the veranda. "Except one, and from the consequences of that one I would save you at the risk of my own life and honor, though it seems to me I hate you, hate you for it."

Fountain regarded her with amazement, and his face grew pale as he muttered under his breath, "Is it possible that she can have informed by some one?"

He stopped her as she passed him, and forced her to sit down.

"I do not know what you refer to," he replied. "From the time I confessed my love for you I have concealed nothing from you I considered important, or which could or ought to affect our relationship, even remotely."

"Oh, indeed! Have I had a record of your daily life?"

"No, you have not, nor will I give it you. The number of cigars I smoke, the glasses of wine I drink, the passages of the daily life of a young man of leisure, permissible in a bachelor, if to be condemned in a benedict, I have not broad, nor will I give, nor would any broad-minded girl, such as I have regarded you, tell the past three weeks, demanded them."

"Passages in the life of a young man of leisure—such, for instance, as strange disguises at late hours of night."

He flushed a dull red through his dark skin.

"Do not know to what you refer," he replied.

"You do not know," she repeated scornfully, and then, lifting her hands before her face as she clasped them so tightly as to fairly pain her, she cried in agonized tones, "I cannot, I cannot bring myself to speak of it to him. My God, can I not love him? Must I go on loving him in spite of myself?"

He watched her, strongly moved himself, showing anger and alarm. He muttered, "Some one has discovered it and betrayed me to her," finally he said with forced calmness:

"I cannot tell what possesses you. I presume in your own good time you will inform me what it is, when I can defend myself as I shall. I repeat, the withholding of confidence from you cannot be charged against me."

"When I confessed my love for you," he continued, "I told you that I did not have the fortune rumored credited me with; that it was nearly exhausted. When I made that discovery which shocked and nearly crazed me, I came to you at once, offering you the freedom of the world to hold you against your most slightly expressed wish, though it broke my heart to release you."

She shook her head, murmuring: "It is not that; it is not that."

"It is," he pursued, "that we are both poor, and you have finally concluded you cannot face poverty with me?"

"It is not that; it is not that," she repeated.

"No, I could hardly believe it were, for they are to both of us now old stories, and we have grown accustomed to them. Things are not worse for me, they are better. Providence has removed temptation from my path."

She leaped to her feet, crying aloud: "My God! can he refer to it like that? Is it possible that such a man can live?"

She swept up the veranda, so charged with emotion and passion that she could not remain still.

"Well, I have begun the effort, but I will abandon it if you wish. I have taken the first steps. I have even gone so far as to inquire for certain papers, and have called on a lawyer, Henry Holbrook."

She whirled upon him, her face picturing the greatest alarm.

"On Henry Holbrook? Are you mad? That man would hang you if he could. Great heavens! it was to take you from the possibility of meeting that man that I called you here. Do you know that Holbrook saw the murderer of Templeton escape into the park?"

She had grasped him by the shoulders and pulled him squarely in front of her. "Encore! Encore! The scene is good. You should go to the front veranda to release, and you would get, immediately, a fashionable audience."

"He followed her, saying: 'Well, I have begun the effort, but I will abandon it if you wish. I have taken the first steps. I have even gone so far as to inquire for certain papers, and have called on a lawyer, Henry Holbrook.'"

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Fountain did not find another chance for confidential conversation with Flora that night again.

Late in the evening he did find an opportunity to say to her: "If you will formulate your charges against me, I will try to meet them to your satisfaction. You have been misinformed about something, evidently."

"No," she replied in a low tone, placing great restraint upon herself, "never shall I revert to the matter again. I have thought it over, and accept the consequences. I love you too deeply, though I hate myself for it, but I'm yours, and I cast all consideration to the winds. Let it pass."

"Shall I be able to see you alone to-morrow? I must go back to New York to-morrow night," she said in alarm.

"Yes, I must. It is very important."

"Is it that enterprise we talked of?"

"No—it is the matter which calls me back—some notes to meet—some money to raise."

"Promise me you will keep out of the sight of Holbrook. Promise me you will avoid him in every way."

"We have not been in the habit of meeting."

"But promise me faithfully you will seek every way rather than meet him. He is dangerous to you."

"I do not understand you, neither do I fear him, but I will promise you."

Upon this they parted, she retiring for the night.

Dick Witherspoon persuaded Fountain to walk out for a smoke, and they shortly found themselves at a resort much frequented by the young men of that exclusive watering place.

A little play was going forward. In a far corner of the room a number were sitting at a table.

"Hello!" said Dick Witherspoon, "there is Tom Bryan what under the sun brings him here?"

"Who is Tom Bryan?" asked Fountain.

"The keenest newspaper man in New York and the best of his class, as well as one of the most amusing."

The two joined the party and were warmly greeted, while Fountain was presented to Tom.

"Tom was telling a rattling story of adventure, in which figured persons known to fame, and which was eliciting much laughter."

During its recital Tom placed both elbows upon the table, holding his hands upright to illustrate some point in his anecdote. He was telling the story at Fountain, and did not fail to notice that Fountain looked curiously at the buttons Tom wore in his coat.

They were the ones Holbrook had given him. To draw his attention to them was Tom's purpose.

When the tale was ended and the talk flagged for a moment, Fountain leaned forward and said:

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bryan, I am not often guilty of the enormity of directing attention to the wear of gentlemen, but the buttons you have on your coat are so different from the ones I have seen that I should like to make an inquiry."

"Pardon is granted, for I am rather fond of the coolest necktie. They are rare, and as a poor devil of a newspaper man, I don't often mount valuable jewelry, I am distinguished among my fellows for them."

"I never saw but one pair like them," continued Fountain, "and they were in the nature of an heirloom. Those buttons were of Florence manufacturer, my friend having had a diamond inserted in them. They had belonged to his grandfather, who received them as a present from an Italian, so he told me."

"Yes," said Tom, dumfounded by the coolness displayed by Fountain. "These buttons were given me by a gentleman, a friend for whom once I lay in my power to do a very great favor."

"It was possibly the same person," said Fountain.

"Possibly," replied Tom.

Tom had expected to disconcert Fountain by displaying them, and was taken aback by the fact that Fountain had directed attention to them.

He thought that either Fountain was a man of the coolest nerve, or that the buttons did not belong to him. He was loath to give it up, and consequently he detourally turned the conversation to New York matters, and was particularly Fountain so that he could observe every shade of expression, he suddenly said:

"I have been given a hint from headquarters that they are on the track of Tom's murderer."

GENERAL BUSINESS.

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