

SWEETEST EYES WERE EVER SEEN.

BY JOANNA E. WOOD.

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He who said suddenly, "Let there be light!"
 To thee the dark deliberately gave;
 That those full eyes might undistracted be
 By this beguiling show of sky and field,
 This brilliance that so lures us from the Truth.
 He gave thee back original night, His own
 Tremendous canvas, large and blank and free,
 Where at each thought a star flashed out and sang,
 O blinded with a special lightning, thou
 Hadst once again the virgin dark!"

—Stephen Phillips.

"If Camœns had seen you he would have been false to Catarina," said Flynt Gerrard, dropping the volume of Browning from which he had been reading, and taking instead the white hand which shone palely against the bright silk of the Mexican hammock.

"For shame!" said Isabel Stuart, a soft feigned indignation in her voice; "what blasphemy!"

"It is quite true!" her lover persisted; "I think a man who cares for a woman always cherishes a special *tendresse* for some one of her beauties, for her brow, her hair, her hands—and it is so with me, and it is to your eyes, 'sweetest eyes were ever seen,' that I would pay my dearest vows. Such gentle eyes! That never see wrong without wishing to right it, never see sin without searching its excuse. Isabel, when are you coming to me?" The eyes he had been praising were raised to his shyly, but withal steadfastly.

"Do you want me so much—sure?" she said.

"Yes," he half whispered; "yes, I want you sorely."

Silence fell upon them whilst their eyes met in acknowledgment and confirmation of their mutual love. It was summer about them and summer in their hearts. Crickets shrilled in the shade of the grass; from the bosom of a maple tree a robin called and was answered from the hedge, where the squirrels chattered as they ate the tiny cones of the cedar; a high-holder, perched upon the topmost branch of a cherry tree, uttered its imperious note; a tiny brown bird stole softly through the tangled stems of the raspberries to its hidden nest. It was a day when the soul expands and aspires. The lovers dwelt upon thought of each other, their eyes seeming at once retrospective and tenderly anticipative. He was thinking of the slight creature to whom he had first given his name, happily—for he would not lie to his own soul—happily she had died in time to save the name she bore from dishonor, her little child from a heritage of shame. Death had been very merciful to those tangled in the meshes of her destiny, merciful perhaps most of all to herself. From thought of this misguided girl-wife Flynt's thoughts turned, as a ship towards safe haven, to the woman at his side, Isabel Stuart. He often thought how well her old Highland name suited her. She seemed to have preserved so perfectly the graces of the old-fashioned, almost archaic womanliness which such a name suggests; gentle, yet fearless, tender and very wise in all womanly secrets.

Flynt told her once that he was sure she would have done as did Katherine Douglas when she thrust her white arm through the staples, a living bar between her king and his assassins.

"I hope I would," said Isabel, tranquilly. "Surely what a Douglas did for a Stuart, a Stuart might have done. I would have liked to be 'Kate Bar-lass.'"

Flynt loved her with a mixture of ardour and reverence which brought out the best in him.

Isabel, sitting in her hammock, her hand in her lover's, mused upon that lover, his life and its promise. She, better than anyone in the world, comprehended how nearly his career had been shipwrecked in the shoals of a shallow woman's frivolity; she knew what his patience had been, a little stern perhaps because of strenuous self-repression, but oh, so long-suffering! She guessed at the approaching catastrophe which death had anticipated, and apprehended the sad and righteous joy with which he must have looked upon the dead face of his unwise wife. "Unwise" was the word Isabel used in her thoughts; she never "cast the stone" at a sinner. Isabel thought of the little girl, bearing such a fantastic name in evidence of her mother's folly even in small things, the little girl who already showed herself self-willed, unreasonable, and petulant, so that her father, looking at her, feared greatly. Isabel felt much tenderness for the poor mite, already studied eagerly everything which might bring her in touch with child nature, everything that might help her to awaken and develop the dormant germ of nobility which she was sure must be in Flynt's child. Isabel had perhaps inherited some shred of the second sight from far-off Highland ancestors. She had wonderful intuitional perception of character. A certain prescience told her that Flynt would need someone beside him to help him keep his feet in the rapidly flowing tide of success which was setting his way. A university education, super-imposed upon a character inherited from generations of men and women who had struggled and lived in illustration of the dogma of "the survival of the fittest," had produced a man capable of most things and with a "heart for any fate." Beginning, like many of his illustrious countrymen, as a country lawyer, he soon outgrew the provincial position. His ill-starred marriage had for a time stayed his progress, but afterwards he went on with greater impetus. Next year, Isabel knew, would see him in Washington, and then—she feared for him. Not for his ambitions, but for his ideals, and she meant to be a trumpet in their cause. She was so proud of him and of the promise of his future.

She looked up at him; suddenly a terrible pain shot through her eyes, dazing her for a moment with its sharp agony. It passed in an instant and she could hardly realize that for a second Flynt's face had been shut out from her vision—he bent towards her, urging his cause and ere he left her that night Isabel had fixed the date for their wedding. It was ratified by her father and mother, and Flynt Gerrard departed with perhaps more of triumph and less of humbleness in his heart than was fitting.

In his first letter to Isabel, Flynt told her that Dr. Parkman was coming to the little country town where Isabel lived. Flynt described him as a man of whose friendship he felt very proud, and asked Isabel to get her father to call upon him.

Dr. Parkman arrived in Almond. The Stuarts called; it was a surprise to the famous Doctor to find people of their calibre living in a provincial town; they soon became fast friends. The Doctor had not studied the *Material* so persistently without learning something of the subtleties of the *Spirit*. He did reverence before Isabel Stuart and the two became dear friends; the fullness of Dr. Parkman's experience, the breadth of his philosophy, the insight of his sympathy appealed very strongly to Isabel. She grew to look upon him as a real friend and counsellor.