

AT THE WINDOW OF PARADISE.

By RALPH HENRY BARBOUR.

They sat in a third-story window of Hollis. Her name was Grace; his was Hugh; they had other names, but those don't matter. They were cousins—in a way; the connection was difficult to trace offhand; he couldn't have done it, nor she. Her mother would have explained at once, but just now her mother was conversing with Jack's mother at the other window, and when two mothers get together on Class Day evening they dislike being interrupted. The room belonged to Jack and Billy. Billy was Grace's brother. Both hosts had Class Day duties, and ever since noon they had been coming and going with flowing gowns and rakishly tilted hats, very red of face and rather breathless, but infinitely important. Jack's mother said they made her so nervous, she didn't think she could last out the day. Just now they were absent, and as a result the study was very quiet and peaceful. The gas jets were turned down to mere pin-points of yellow flame. Over by the door the cut-glass bowl and tumblers caught the light in their facets and glowed wanly.

Grace sat on the window-seat, propped with innumerable cushions. One bare arm rested upon the sill, and the palm above it afforded a nestling place for her chin. None had ever called Grace pretty; it would have been sacrilege. She was beautiful, with a beauty that embraced not only ideal regularity of feature but life and warmth as well. It was no wonder that the man at her side loved her; he would have felt himself disgraced if he hadn't. He had loved her since he had been a first year student in the Law School and she had been a pink and laughing atom of humanity in ridiculously long garments that were forever getting in his way when he was allowed to take her in his arms. Just when his love had changed and intensified to the secret adoration of the present he could not have told; he believed it was that never-to-be-forgotten moment when, glancing idly into the ballroom of the summer hotel, he had seen her swaying over the floor in Jack's arms. He had stolen away, into the darkness and counted bitterly the years separating his age from Jack's. Afterward he had steeled himself to see her surrounded at all times by suitors, realizing the hopelessness of his case and doggedly repeating to himself, like a litany of renunciation, that so long as she was happy the rest didn't matter. During three years he had found it necessary to repeat it very often, sometimes without much conviction. Tonight, seated beside her, breathing in the charm of her presence and feasting his eyes recklessly upon her face, the litany had lost its effectiveness.

Below them spread a paradise of soft, swaying lights and stirring branches, a fairyland of joyous sound and changing colors. From their aerie they looked down upon thousands of many-hued lanterns dipping and trembling in the breeze, whose ranks crossed and recrossed in beautiful and bewildering geometrical confusion. Above their heads the branches of the great elms met and whispered, their green depths shot with strange lights and shadows. Other shadows danced prankishly over the turf and the moving throng or marched gravely across the white front of University Hall as gigantic and grotesque silhouettes. The air was filled with a golden haze that softened distant outlines and with the laughter and chatter of many voices mingled with the strains of music.

"Class Day was rather different in my time," the man was saying with a touch of regret in his deep voice. "Things were a good deal simpler then. We had one band instead of three. And we didn't light up over

there back of Weld or in front of Sever. We just had a lot of old-fashioned Chinese lanterns and a lot of little red and green and purple buckets made of gelatine stuff that caught fire every now and then and smelled awfully, and we strung 'em helter-skelter between the trees, set a gaslight inscription in front of Holworthy there and were happy. In the middle of the evening someone choked off the band and the Glee Club got up on the platform and sang—sang 'Johnny Harvard' and 'Nut Brown Maiden' and 'Where, Oh, Where is my Little Dog Gone' and 'Fra Diavolo'; and the old Glee Club leaders were chased on to the stand and made to sing or yodel their best, and were paid in cheers. The dance was in Massachusetts then, and the old building used to shake so we

tion and smoothed her hair back from her forehead. "I realize that fact very clearly tonight," he added. "Listen!"

In the centre of the yard the band had started the Blue Danube Waltz. The man leaned forward until the upward thrown light from the myriad swaying lanterns bathed his face in the mellow radiance. The music stirred old memories and present regrets, and the feeling of melancholy which had haunted him all the evening grew suddenly stronger and brought a crease to the broad forehead and a little droop to the firm, well-formed mouth. He turned lightly that he might see her face, warm with the glow and clear-cut against the dark drapery at her back. Her gray eyes were looking dreamily down from under half-closed lids,

years ago; the one you think of when you hear the Blue Danube. I fear you bachelors are a sentimental lot, after all, Cousin Hugh!"

"There was no girl twenty years ago," he answered gravely. She shook her head as though unconvinced.

"Is the memory too sacred?" she asked in a mocking whisper. "Very well, he shan't be teased." Then, turning again to the window, "Isn't it beautiful?" she asked.

"Very." He fancied he detected something of boredom in her tones. "Perhaps you'd rather dance, Grace? I've a card for Beck, you know, and I'm sure your mother will trust you to me unchaperoned."

She shook her head slowly without turning. "No, I don't believe I care to dance tonight. But don't let me keep you. Jack said he would be back at nine."

"It's a quarter of," he said, holding his watch to the light. "If I'm not boring you too much I think I'll stay until he returns."

She frowned slightly, then laid a slim, cool hand on his. "What is it?" she asked wistfully. "You're not—the Cousin Hugh I like tonight."

His hand trembled under hers, but he answered steadily though: "I'm sorry, Grace; don't mind me, please. It's just that I'm feeling so awfully out of it tonight. Perhaps when you get to forty-three you'll understand, though I hope you won't, my dear. I think I'm a little jealous, too, jealous of these big, happy youngsters; jealous of Jack especially. May I smoke?"

She nodded and watched him light a cigarette. "Jealous?" she echoed questioningly.

"Yes." He blew a cloud of smoke out of the window and watched it melt into the golden haze. "Yes, jealous with the sour jealousy of a middle-aged old party of forty-three whose hair is getting thin about the temples, who has a bout now and then with the rheumatism, who can't dance any longer, who doesn't know enough slang to talk to a pretty girl and who has no business to be here at all tonight, getting morose and—er—grouchy, but should be back in town priming up for tomorrow's law suit. My dear, I'm a back-number, and tonight I realize it thoroughly for the first time. I've been trying hard to deceive myself into thinking I'm still a gay young Lothario, but tonight—it won't do, Grace; I'm shown up in my true colors."

"Ah, please don't!" she cried. "It isn't so, Hugh dear. You're not old a bit; you're lots younger than some of the boys I've met here today; it isn't years alone, Cousin Hugh. And you dance beautifully—"

"Like a bear on a chain!"

"And anyone might have a touch of rheumatism—"

"Two weeks of it the last time!"

"And girls don't like slang; nice girls, at least. And as for Jack—"

"He's the best fellow in the world," he interrupted heartily. "As clean and healthy and good-souled as the old college ever turned out. If I'm jealous of him it's because—"

After a moment of silence, "Because?" she prompted him.

"Because I'm a regular old dog in the manger, Grace; because of his good-fortune."

"Good-fortune? You mean about Uncle Nat's taking him into business?"

"No, not that. The fact is I'm not sure that I've any right to speak about it. Just shut me up if you like."

"But I don't know what you're talking about," she said despairingly. "Don't be mysterious, Hugh. What good-fortune?"

"Well, perhaps I'm making a fool of myself, Grace," he answered un- easily. "But I gathered from some- thing your mother said this after-



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could scarcely keep step. We had fireworks, too; set pieces, you know, that looked like the college seal if you weren't too particular, and at the end one that said 'Vale' in crimson letters. After that we went home to bed. It was all a great deal simpler, Grace, and—primitive, but—well, it was terribly comfy and jolly."

"And how many centuries ago was that?" asked the girl quietly.

"Twenty years," he answered. "To- night is a sort of an anniversary, you see."

"Only twenty years," she repeated with a trace of irony. "To hear you, Cousin Hugh, one would think you were speaking of things that hap- pened in another existence!"

"It was another existence, my dear," he answered ruefully. She lifted her hand with a little gesture of irri-

and her lips, wont to curve in smiles, were thoughtfully straight. Hugh thought that he had never seen her more beautiful, and he knew that he had never found his secret so hard to keep. He turned his gaze from her by a supreme effort as the last strain of music died away on the soft night air. Grace gave a little sigh and faced him.

"Wasn't it sweet?" she asked gently.

"Yes," he replied. "They—they used to play that twenty years ago."

She gave a little laugh that didn't sound quite true.

"Oh, dear, such a doleful Cousin Hugh as it is. Did the music make him sad? Come now, tell me all about it; who was she?"

"She?"

"Of course! The girl of twenty