

above all and through all the beautiful face of Annie Templeton had been before him constantly. Men would deceive themselves, just as Holbrook did, when he answered his own awakening by saying: "Her face haunts me as a beautiful picture I sometimes see with my finger with me for days."

CHAPTER XVII. ON A NEWPORT VERANDA.

UR story moves along a day or two, and we are carried to Newport. 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 corners; many gables, curious windows, like eyes, in long sloping roofs—a recessed balcony here, and verandas 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 shooting under the roof of the veranda and lights up with golden gleams the shining hair of Flora Ashgrove.

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 does so 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."

from you comes with—but in 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 me which no other person in this world knows."

"Except one—except one," she cried passionately, leaning 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, 'It is possible that she can have been 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 relations, 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 would not give, nor will I give, nor would any broad minded girl, such as I have regarded you until the past three weeks, demand 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. 'I 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 hate 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 did not know you had given up, telling you I was illegitimate."

"When I made the further discovery that by an effort I might receive a fortune, but involved in the effort might possibly be the exposure of my illegitimacy, I came to you with it and you bade me make the effort, promising to face the world with me, saying you had no property and we would fight together."

"These are the great events of my life, is the answer with which you have seemed to regard me recently due to my illegitimacy? If it is, let me say, as I once said to you before—you can be free. I am too proud in my degradation 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.' 'Is it,' 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 was, 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 Tom from my path.'"

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."

"I shall be able to see you alone to-morrow? I must go back to New York to-morrow night." "To-morrow night," she said in alarm. "Yes, I must. It is very important." "Is it that enterprise we talked of?" "No—it is not that 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." "I 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 party 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 fellows, 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 he 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 he did not fail to notice that Fountain looked curiously at the buttons Tom wore in his cuffs."

"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 wear are so curious that I should like to make an inquiry.'"

"Parson is granted, for I am rather fond of these buttons. They are rare, and as a poor devil of a newspaper man doesn'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 Florentine manufacture—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 dexterously turned the conversation to New York matters, and then watching 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 buttons.'"

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