

Two Dreams.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

It is a brilliant moonlight night in May. I am standing alone at one of the open windows in the spacious and handsome drawing room at my Cousin Maude's in Belgravia, for my father has at length been prevailed upon by Lady Merton to allow me to taste, for a brief spell, the delights of a London season.

So I am standing with my lace trimmed silken skirt flowing around me, and the perfume of the lovely bouquet I hold in my hand making fragrant the air, while the moonlight floods the whole scene, and converts it into a veritable fairy-land.

And I do not know why, but it makes me think of Oakdene—my father's parish; and then I remember Roger Elston, the young doctor to whom I am engaged and whom I love passionately, and I fall to wondering what he would think of me could he but see me now, arrayed in all my pretty bravery of pale pink silk.

'I wish he could see me,' I tell myself, with a little pardonable vanity, for the long chevel glass in my room reflected a very pretty, flushed face and charming petite figure as I passed before it several times this evening before submitting myself to my Cousin Maude's inspection.

The latter is so severe respecting one's appearance, and she has determined, she tells me, that I shall make an early conquest of some one of the many aristocratic men who attend her receptions, balls, and so forth.

And I have listened to her ambitious views for myself, and laughed softly and secretly as I remembered Roger—my own true love—whom I have left in dear Oakdene, and from whom I am hoping to receive a letter by the next post.

'I wonder what Roger is doing now? I wonder if he is thinking of me?' I continue, unconsciously half aloud this time.

'Why, Elsie, whom are you addressing?' breaks in Cousin Maude's voice, and then her hand is laid on mine as she adds: 'Come away from the open window at once, child. The nights are still chilly, and I mustn't allow you to run the risk of taking cold now, just when Sir Hugh is expected—and you know what he thinks of my little country cousin's singing!'

And the clear tones are followed by a well-satisfied laugh, as my cousin draws one of my hands within hers, and turns to lead me away.

At that instant a breeze springs up, and the fresh air stealing in brings with it the scent of the fragrant flowers now lying at my feet, and waits it upwards.

'Elsie, take care! Do you not see you have dropped your flowers? What would Sir Hugh think if he were to arrive at this moment, and find his gift so neglected?'

'I am very sorry, Cousin Maude; I had quite forgotten them, I believe, poor things! They are not much hurt, though,' I returned, laughingly, as I stoop and pick up the bouquet I dropped in my fit of abstraction when dwelling upon my absent lover.

'Elsie, I can't understand you!' exclaims my cousin, as she follows me across the room, and seats herself at my side on one of the satin-covered couches.

'In what particular respect, cousin Maude? I laughingly ask.

'Why, you are so seemingly, perfectly indifferent to Sir Hugh Staunton's attentions, while most girls of your age would be nearly wild with pride and delight to think that they had secured the notice of the best part of the season.'

'But I have not yet secured him, Cousin Maude,' I replied, mischievously.

'Not quite yet, certainly Elsie; but the chance is yours, just as though the actual words had been spoken. And it will be so nice for both of us, Elsie dear. Sir Hugh's country seat is a splendid old place, and I shall be so glad to join you there for a little spell of quiet and repose; for really, Elsie, I find a season now quite tiring enough. It was so different when dear Merton was alive. He managed so many things for me but now I am quite alone.'

As my cousin concludes, she draws forth a delicate lace handkerchief, and wipes carefully and cautiously, her fine eyes.

I am spared an answer to this speech, which I deem rather premature, considering Sir Hugh Staunton has not spoken a word to me that all the world might not hear.

But then of course, I argue, I am young and having been so country-bred what can I possibly know of the manner in which such as Sir Hugo, and his aristocratic and town-seasoned colleagues conduct their wooing of the fair Belgravian maidens?

Again Roger and I are so unsophisticated and rusticated, evidently, for we—

But why describe the embracings, or repeat the sweet phrases that we employ? They are sacred to us.

To return. I am sorely puzzled how to reply, when the door opens. Sir Hugh himself is announced by the tall footman in crimson plush.

Cousin Maude is addicted to bright and showy colours, and is herself this evening resplendent in old gold and crimson.

It is her reception, and Sir Hugh had hardly paid his homage to the handsome hostess ere others are announced.

The rooms fill fast, and I am soon the centre of a smiling and admiring group; still, Sir Hugh always contrives to place himself at my side.

Cousin Maude's eyes fairly blaze with triumph and delight as she notes his presence in such continual proximity to myself, as he from time to time passes in and out among her guests.

'The conservatory has but few occupants Elsie,' she murmurs once.

Simple enough words, but I think I understand their deeper meaning.

A crimson flush of annoyance and shame floods my face for an instant, and then I remember Roger.

All the hot and hasty anger dies away as I recollect that I have brought all this upon myself by not speaking of my engagement to him.

But, then, I would rather bear anything than see her scornful looks.

I am so young and inexperienced.

'You find this room too warm, I fancy, Miss Travers?'

'I believe I do, Sir Hugh,' I reply.

'I know of a delightfully cool spot, if you will allow me to conduct you to it,' my companion continues.

'I shall, indeed, be grateful for a little cool air,' I return.

Placing my gloved hand within his arm, I let him lead me to an open window, and thence to a seat on the covered balcony.

'How deliciously cool and fresh it is here, Sir Hugh!' I exclaim, seating myself in one of the low chairs.

'I am very glad you approve of the change, Miss Travers,' he replies, gravely. And then, glancing up at the fine, tall figure of my escort, as he leans against the iron balustrade of the balcony, and noting the expression on his face, became aware of what I have done in thus allowing him to lead me away from the crowded rooms.

What shall I answer him when he—

But he is speaking, even while I am ruminating as to a suitable reply.

'Miss Travers, I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for thus giving me the opportunity which I have sought in vain for the past week.'

I glance up again at the face bent to wards me, and read in the dark eyes what is to follow.

'Oh! Sir Hugh!' I exclaim, hastily, and letting his flowers, which I still hold, fall again to the ground. 'I have been very wrong! I know it now! But I did not think.'

'Your flowers, Miss Travers. Allow me,' he replies, stooping low to pick them up as he speaks.

I bow, and receive them back, but I shiver perceptibly as I do so.

'Miss Travers, I cannot be sufficiently grateful to you for thus giving me the opportunity which I have sought in vain for the past week.'

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pleadingly up into his face—

'Please do not let cousin Maude know,'

'Miss Travers can trust me in all things,' comes the low-spoken reply as his dark eyes encounter my pleading gaze.

'Ah! here are the trunks!' exclaims Cousin Maude, as we re-enter.

'I feared a scolding, Lady Merton,' says Sir Hugh, glancing meanwhile at me.

'Shall I scold Sir Hugh, Elsie?' whispers my cousin, and there is such a meaning look in her fine eyes, that I feel inclined to reply in like strain.

'Not Sir Hugh, Cousin Maude. I deserve the scolding, if either; for I wished to quit these hot rooms for a time, and he was good enough to bear me company.'

'And now you must pay forfeit for your long absence, and favor my guests with a song,' Sir Hugh, you would like some music?

'Lady Merton already knows my great penchant for music; and Miss Travers has so many times heard me express my admiration of her charming voice.'

'You will spoil my little cousin with flattery, Sir Hugh,' laughingly exclaims Cousin Maude, as she accompanies him and myself to the grand piano at the further end of the inner drawing room.

I sing repeatedly, song after song, Roger's favorites included—sing till Cousin Maude insists that I shall be asked for no more that evening.

And so the hours sped by, fraught with many a triumph for the handsome hostess and much admiration and attention for myself.

But none of the brilliant throng would have recognized the charming Elsie Travers in the poor tear stained faced girl, crouching by the side of the pretty French bed later on.

For now the excitement of the evening is fairly over, I realize full what I have done and tears and bitter repentance, mingled with longings for home and Roger burst from my full and burdened heart.

'Only a few more days and I shall once again see my dear father and Roger,' I murmured as I at length seek my pillow and I dreamed of untried dreams of Sir Hugh Staunton, and my affianced lover.

'Very glad indeed to see my little Elsie at home once more,' exclaims my father for the twentieth time, as he regards me across the small tea table with his dear, tender eyes.

'And I am more than glad to be at home again,' I respond, warmly.

'But my little Elsie enjoyed her visit?' questions my father anxiously.

'Very, very much dear father.'

'Ah! I do not expect there were many who failed to recognize what a charming little creature Lady Metton's cousin is,' he says, fondly.

'Now, father dear, no flattery, if you please; I have had quite enough of that commodity lately, so I am getting quite tired of it.'

Then, suddenly changing my tone I ask—

'And Roger, father? Tell me again why he was not at the station to meet me? I scarcely heard what you said about it just now, I was so taken up with you.'

'Roger was very disappointed and vexed not to be there to join his welcome with mine; but, unfortunately, he was sent for to a distant farmhouse to attend a case, and so could not be present; but he hopes to look in upon his return, to—here he comes! I am going out to visit poor Granny Hodge, she is failing fast.'

My father leaves the house as Roger enters it. And then—

Oh, the delight at once again finding my dear one's arms around me, and to have his kisses showered upon my lips!

'Oh, Roger, Roger!' I almost sob forth, 'I am so glad to be with you again!'

'And I have so longed for your return, Elsie! comes the answer in earnest, passionate tones.

Then I glance shyly up at my lover, and am struck with his handsome face and fine figure.

Of course, I have always considered him handsome, but now his good looks seem to be enhanced, as I mentally contrast him with Sir Hugh Staunton and others whom I have left behind me in aristocratic Belgravia.

'What is it, Elsie?' Roger asks presently, as, thinking out my own thoughts, I continue to gaze absently at his face.

'I lower my eyes then, and blush.

'Tell me, Elsie,' he pleads, bending his face down to mine.

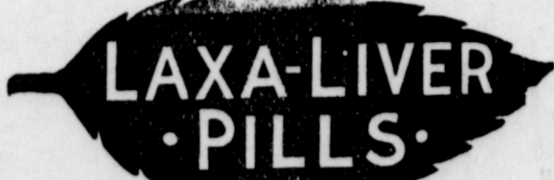
'I did not realize before how good looking you are Roger!' I stammer forth.

'Ah, Elsie, Elsie, you have learnt the



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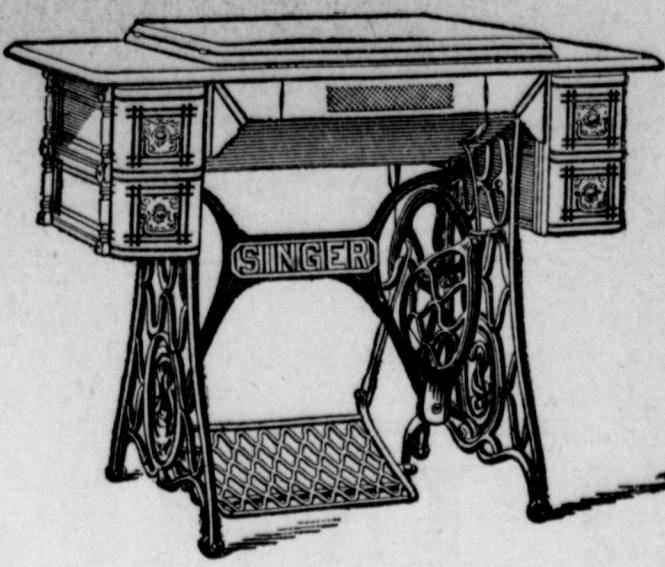
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art of flattering, then, from your town bred acquaintances! laughingly retorts my lover. Then he adds: 'I want you to come out with me to our favorite seat in the orchard, and then I must hear all particulars respecting this wonderful visit. Will you come Elsie?'

Before he has fairly concluded his request, I spring away and fetch hat and wrap.

A few minutes later, and we are treading the small gravel path which leads to the orchard.

'How sweet the roses are!' I exclaim, as side by side, we pass the small roseray—my father's hobby—and the fragrance of the crimson, pink, and white petals is wafted to us by the gentle evening breeze.

The sun is setting, and leaving in his wake gorgeous streaks of crimson and gold.

'You do not get such roses as these in London, I expect,' replies Roger.

'I have had no roses this summer,' I reply.

'Then let me bear the blame of plucking one of Mr. Travers' especial beauties.'

So saying Roger bends forward, and gathers a lovely deep-headed crimson bud from a neighboring bush.

'What a beauty!' I exclaim. 'And how I shall treasure it, it being the first I have received this season, and also because it was given me by you.'

'Keep it, darling, till our wedding day, and I will replace it by others fresher and fairer,' whispers my lover, as he holds open the wicket gate leading into the orchard.

On through the long grass 'neath the trees, we stroll till our favorite spot is reached.

Here is the 'patriarch' of the orchard—an old gnarled, and hoary trunk, with branches bent and twisted so as to form a species of bower.

'Now for a nice quiet talk, Elsie,' Roger says, as we seat ourselves on the lowest branch.

For all reply I lean back against the hoary trunk, and sigh—a sigh of perfect content and happiness.

For, oh! it is so grand to be once again at dear Oakdene, and in the presence of my lover!

'What a sigh, Elsie! For which of your late admirers is that intended?'

'Roger!' in surprised and indignant tones, but a blush suffuses my face as I remember Sir Hugh Staunton.

'My darling, I was only jesting. But I want you to tell me that you still love me as much as ever. I have never doubted you, Elsie, for one single moment, not even though your letters have been few and far between; but—'

'Oh, Roger! I meant to have written much oftener; but Cousin Maude—'

'Never mind that now, darling. I am not going to find fault with my dear little Elsie! I shall like to hear once again from her lips that she still loves me,' Roger continues, drawing me still nearer to him.

'Roger, I do love you, and more than ever, if that is possible,' I reply, in low earnest tones, glancing up meanwhile into my dear one's face. 'Are you satisfied now?'

But he is silent, and looks fixedly down the green and leafy perspective.

'Roger, what is it?' I question anxiously.

'My darling, I was thinking over a dream I had lately. Nay, do not laugh, Elsie,' he protests gravely, noting the smile breaking over my face. 'Do not laugh, please. For, oh! it seemed so real—so terribly real! And I had so longed to hear from your lips that you really and truly love me still. Will you repeat your words once again, dear?'

I glance in surprise at my lover's face, but obediently repeat—

'Roger I do love you—and, if possible, more than ever.'

'Thank Heaven, it is only a dream!' issues from his lips, and he breathes a sigh of relief.

'What was your dream, Roger?'

'It is not worth relating now, my darling,' he replies.

'But I do so want to know.'

'And I so want to know how my darling has enjoyed her visit, and what she has seen and done during the time,' retorts my lover.

The words are lightly spoken, but the manner is decided.

And so I press my questioning no further, but comply with his wish, and answer cheerfully—

'Oh Cousin Maude was so kind to me and took me everywhere with her. That is why you got so few letters from me, because there seemed something for every hour—nay, every moment of the day. And then in the evening, came theatres, balls, concerts. I never enjoyed my self so much in all my life before. But I always wished you were with me, dear.'

'To have one more admirer of you as you appeared in your sweet dresses, eh, Elsie?' my lover laughingly asks.

'How can you sir!' I retort. 'Of course I missed you terribly.'

'I know you did Elsie; and now one more kiss from your dear lips and then I will take you back to the house.'

One more long passionate embrace and then Roger and I retrace our steps beneath the star-spangled sky, through the wicket-gate, up the gravel path, till the hall door is reached.

'You will come in, Roger?'

'N't to-night Elsie. My mother will be expecting me, and I promised her I would not be late.'

'I have been so thoughtless and selfish, Roger! I have never once inquired for your mother.'

'I will excuse you to her dear, since I have so engrossed your attention,' Roger laughingly replies; then continues: 'My mother sent her kindest love, and she will be so glad to see you when you find time to call. She is very anxious to hear of your doings among the gay set you have been visiting in Belgravia.'

'Please give her my love, Roger, and I will certainly come and see her as soon as possible.'

'Thank you, Elsie. Now one more sweet good-night, and then we must part for the present.'

'Good night, dear, dear, Roger!' I answer, standing on tip toe to kiss him.

One fond and lingering embrace, and then we part. I listen to his firm tread till it dies away in the distance.

Then the hall door closes on me.

'I will write to Cousin Maude tomorrow,' I tell myself, as I walk along towards the quaint old church.

It is a lovely morning, and I do not hurry myself, even though the bell is giving notice by its slower and more fitful tones that it will soon stop and the service commence.

My father is already in the small vestry putting on his white robes, for I can see the same fluttering in the summer breeze through the partially open door.

Still, I do not hurry; the spell of a perfect summer morn is on me, and I feel it is good to be sauntering slowly along in the sweet, pure sunshine.

Aut the bell ceases presently and then I reflect how much a