

## Two Dreams.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

For all reply I turn away from him, and begin quickly to retrace my steps down the narrow lane.

"Miss Travers! Miss Elsie! I am in fault now! You have repeatedly asked my forgiveness for what you have done, and I have withheld it. Oh, Miss Elsie, you can never know how deeply I feel this; but I forgive you. We will part friends, and may Heaven bless you!"

Then he raises his hand to his lips, and I can say no more.

Passively I allow myself to be led down the lane, along the high road, and so on to the vicarage gates.

"Good-bye, Miss Travers; and once again, Heaven bless you!" Sir Hugh murmurs; then I am standing just within the gates alone—while he passes away from me with quickened pace.

How wretched I feel as I creep slowly along to the hall-door.

My father is still absent, I find; so leaving a message for him with the servant, I betake myself to my chamber.

There I give vent to the torrent of tears with which my aching heart is burdened, and again and again I blame myself for the part I have played as regards Sir Hugh Staunton.

Cousin Maude is here, and I am fast forgetting all my late trouble while listening to her witty and laughable version of the end of the season in her dearly-beloved London.

Dinner over, and I pass out and stroll up and down the orchard.

Only we two, for dear father is away busy with parochial work, and Roger—well! Roger has not been such a constant visitor since the arrival of the stylish Lady Merton.

Of course I have confessed all to Cousin Maude—and she? At first she laughs most heartily at the rueful face which I, thinking it well-befits the occasion, have put on; then suddenly her mood changes, and she speaks to me, long and seriously, of what a foolish part I have played throughout.

First—and this is evidently most important to her—in contracting an engagement with a mere country practitioner.

Of course, a fashionable town physician would be another matter.

Secondly, in allowing such a little affair to interfere with my chance of securing such an excellent parti as Sir Hugh Staunton.

"Elsie, I fancy I am correct in supposing you have met Sir Hugh since that night on the balcony, and that he has again—she is saying, when I glance up, and—Roger stands before us!"

Has he heard? I know not.

A little willful spirit hovers around me, and I nod to him, then call back an excuse to Cousin Maude, and leave them together.

"And you might have been Lady Staunton!" rings in my ears as I make my way to my own chamber and there reflect on all Cousin Maude has said in response to my confession.

And—silly little me!—I blush, and a feeling of something like triumph comes over me.

Voices warn me of my neglected duties as hostess, and so I descend.

Down stairs in our pretty, flower-scented drawing room I find Cousin Maude at the piano, playing bits from Chopin, while standing a little aside is Roger, engaged in turning over a portfolio of music, which I brought with me from town.

"All my new songs are there, Roger," I say, as I pass him by on my way to a low table at the other end of the room, where—on his fancy-work.

"Yes; I see my favorite is here. You must please sing it for me presently Elsie."

"Which is that?" I question.

Roger holds up to my view the song he has selected.

I glance carelessly at it; but the hot blood will suffuse my face as I read the title, "Never to Part!"

Ah! how many times have I sung that same song with Sir Hugh standing by and leaning over, now and then, to turn the leaves!

But Roger's eyes are on me, so I thrust

aside all thoughts and recollections of that other, and make reply.

"I admire your taste, Roger, and I will do my best presently to render it as it should be sung."

Cousin Maude's fair and jewelled fingers still wander over the ivory keys, and Roger still turns leaf after leaf of my music, stopping now and again to read the words.

And then, I know not why, but my heart beats quicker!

I feel impelled by a something within me to watch my lover's face, as he thus peruses the words of my new songs.

My hands fall idly to my lap; I lean forward slightly, until my breath comes faster and faster.

A smile irradiates Roger's face as he reads the concluding words of the song he holds in his hand; then it vanishes, as, with a slight sigh, he places the piece with the pile he has already examined.

A pause ensues, while Cousin Maude's laying rises to a wail, then dies away in a pretty, soft air.

Roger seems listening intently to the latter, for his fingers are still, and his eyes become fixed on the title page of the next song.

I bend still more forward, and read distinctly the words, in good, bold print, "Oh, My Lost Love!"

As I read them, Sir Hugh's sad face again appears in misty outline before my mental vision.

The words of the song seem to come surging towards me, born to my ear in his tones; his eyes seem to be bent on my face in gentle, sad pleading, such as I noted in the dim and gather twilight that Sunday evening when

Crash!

My straying thoughts are back again.

Roger is standing over all my scattered music, while Cousin Maude is looking on, with a flushed and slightly angered expression on her handsome face.

"What is it?" I asked, rising and drawing near the scene of confusion.

"I must really beg your pardon, Lady Merton, for thus disturbing you; but I fancy I was startled at a mere nothing. I will just collect these scattered songs and then I must be returning homewards. Once again, Lady Merton, allow me to apologize for thus disturbing you."

It is of no consequence," Cousin Maude replies, with a haughty and proud bend of her dark head, then resumes her playing.

But no pretty, simple air proceeds from her fingers this time; in its stead, a brilliant march, whose triumphal tones seem reflected as it were, in the players' handsome face.

The slim white hands descend with a crash on the ivory keys, while the full lips assume a curled and triumphant expression.

And all this while Roger is on his knees collecting one by one, the pieces he let fall through his carelessness.

I watch in silence, and wonder greatly at the change which has come over my lover's face.

His lips are firmly shut and his brows knitted, as though he is suppressing some great feeling.

Perhaps Cousin Maude's haughty recognition of his apology has angered him, I reflect, while I still watch in silence, till the last song lies again with the others in its place in my portfolio.

Then Roger rises, places the latter aside turns to Cousin Maude, and mutters forth a few words of polite farewell; then, with a faint bow in my direction, he goes forth, closing the door after him.

He has gone without the song he asked me to sing.

Lost in astonishment, I rush quickly to the window, from which a view of the road—his homeward route—can be obtained, and strain my eyes eagerly in that direction.

In the uncertain light I can notice that my lover's head is bent low as he walks down the gravel path, and so out into the road.

As the gate clashes behind him, Cousin Maude brings her triumphant march to an end, and then joins me at the window.

"What have you done, little Elsie, to thus offend your good lover?" she asks, in mocking tones.

"I don't think Roger is offended with me," I return; then add, prompted to it by the same willful little spirit, "and I do not mind so very much if he is offended."

"You have just my spirit, little Elsie," Cousin Maude answers; "and I do not wonder at you not taking it to heart, considering your late triumphs, and securing such a prize as all the Belgravia girls are dying to obtain. Now that our dear and respected doctor has left us once again alone, come and sit down here by me, and tell me about your last meeting with Sir Hugh."

"I can't, tonight, Cousin Maude; it is too late. And, listen, there is the prayer bell!"

"Oh, I am sorry! I do hope your dear father will not dwell too long upon the miseries of Jeremiah. I can positively sleep, though it is only ten o'clock," replies Cousin Maude.

Then, arm in arm, we repair to my father's study, where await us the rest of the household.

That night, later on, I dream of Sir Hugh Staunton, and his name is on my lips when I awake to find the glorious July sunshine flooding my chamber.

"Elsie, I think you met Sir Hugh Staunton when you were in town!"

"Sir Hugh Staunton? Oh, yes; he came once or twice to Cousin Maude's. I believe I remember him slightly," the last word tremblingly and confusedly spoken, though I willed it otherwise; and my head will drop, though I want to hold it erect as ever.

It is October. Roger is on his way to visit a patient, one of Colonel Ellerton's gamekeepers, who has met with a rather nasty gun accident.

"Only slightly Elsie?"

"Why do you ask, Roger?" I question rather caustically.

"Shall I tell you why, Elsie?" Yes, I think the time has now come and I will tell you what I know. Elsie, did you ever see this before today?" Roger hurriedly asks, taking from his pocket a cabinet-sized photograph and holding it before my astonished gaze.

"Sir Hugh Staunton?" I exclaim, while a burning flood of crimson suffuses my face as my eyes rest on the well-remembered features; and then quickly vanishes, leaving me white and trembling.

And all the time I feel that my companion's gaze is anxiously fastened on me, while still my eyes seem riveted to the likeness he holds before me.

"Yes; this is a photograph of Sir Hugh Staunton, Elsie, but—"

"Where did you get it, Roger?" I interrupt.

"Did you ever receive such a photograph from Lady Merton or—? But I can't believe that possible, and you must forgive my asking it Elsie, for I was about to ask 'from Sir Hugh himself.'"

"Never, Roger!" I indignantly reply, gazing still at the well-remembered features.

Well-remembered, for have they not been present in my dreams now for many a day past? Alas for me! I am so young and admiration is sweet.

"Thank Heaven!" ejaculates Roger, and there is such gladness and relief in the accents of his voice, that I glance up hastily, and add—

"And I cannot possibly imagine where you found this," touching it daintily with my gloved fingers.

"That is my secret, Elsie, and I do not think it would be wise to impart it to you since you evidently know nothing of the matter. No! I will destroy it at once, and then I shall feel easier and more satisfied. Oh! Elsie, if you had confessed to its ownership I do not know what would have become of me. But now I feel a relief—a return to a happiness to which I have been a stranger for some time past. Yes, I will destroy this photo, and throw the pieces to the autumn winds."

So saying, my lover prepares to rend the likeness in two, when I suddenly lay my hands upon it, exclaiming—

"Stay, Roger! It may belong to Cousin Maude."

"I don't care in the least who may be the owner of it, provided it be not my own little Elsie," replied Roger.

At the same time encircling me with his arm, he lays his lips on mine, with all his old fondness and tenderness of manner.

"And now, Elsie, for the demolition of another's property!"

I am powerless to stay the act.

In a few seconds the ground around us is strewn with little bits of cardboard.

I glance at one as it floats earthward, with upturned face, and on it I note the features of the man on whom I am learning to allow my thoughts to dwell so constantly.

Dare I stoop and pick it up?

I am two or three paces in the rear, and Roger will never see.

I am just in the act of stooping—the small and jagged piece of cardboard is almost within my grasp, when my lover's voice sounds in my ears.

"That is right, Elsie," he says, carelessly. "Pick it up, and tear it in still smaller bits. Who knows? Sir Hugh himself may pass this way later on, and I would not that he should puzzle his brains, to the extent he doubtless would, as to who had thus ruthlessly destroyed such a flattering portrait of himself!"

The tears are not far off as, in my mortification, and not daring to refuse, I tear off first the well-shaped mouth, then the nose, while, finally, the eyes part company; for, in my anxiety to retain as long as possible the image of the man who has cast his glamour over me, I take infinite pains to render the pieces as minute as possible.

But the end comes.

The last tiny morsel flutters from my fingers, floats earthward, and finally rests on the sere and yellow frond of a bracken near by.

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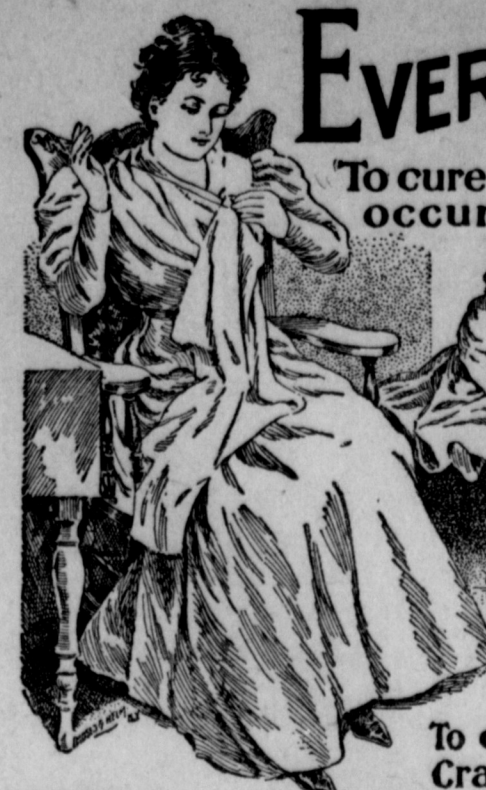
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And so Sir Hugh talks on, and ever and anon his eyes are turned fully upon me, and I return their glances in a shy and confused way. Once I read in them a look of such—well, a look that causes me to lower my gaze, and which covers my face with blushes; while still his low, soft voice sounds in my ear, filling me with pleasure, and yet with pain, at the same moment.



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"Now for my patient in good earnest! We have dawdled sadly, Elsie, and yet I do not regret the time thus wasted," Roger exclaims, laying my unresisting hand upon his arm, and so we walk on till the keeper's cottage appears in sight.

"I will wait outside, Roger. I do not care to sit indoors with old Granny Evans. She is so deaf that it is quite a labor to exchange even a few sentences."

"Very well, Elsie; I shall not be long. Which way do you intend taking, in case I should not see you when I come out?"

There lie four grassy plots before me. I must choose one, and Fate is at my side.

"I will walk down here," I reply, advancing towards the one nearest to us.

"Good-bye, then, for the present, Elsie; I shall be long."

And now I am free for a short time, and the first use I make of my freedom is to draw forth my handkerchief, and wipe away the tears which, though restrained in Roger's presence, now trickle quickly down my cheeks.

And then my thoughts revert to the cause of my grief.

"I can't possibly imagine where Roger found it," I murmur, ever so softly, for I am fearful lest any of the guests, whom I know to be staying at the colonel's for the shooting, should be near. "Cousin Maude must have brought it with her and left it lying about; but then, why should Roger have stolen it from her, and what induced him to take such an interest in a man of whom he knows nothing? Unless—"

There I stop, then seat myself on a fallen trunk at the side of the grassy path, and my musings.

My last word unless has recalled to me the evening when Cousin Maude and I strolled together in the orchard, and Roger suddenly joined us.

All too distinctly I recollect it, and remember also the subject of our conversation, and the import of the speech which, I believe, Roger must have overheard.

So absorbed do I become in my retrospections and recollections that I fairly start from my seat on the fallen trunk, with slight scream, as a black-and-tan terrier breaks from the brushwood at my side, and greets me with his noisy barking.

"Down, Nettle, down!" exclaims a voice at the same moment in my rear, then adds—

"Allow me to apologise for my dog thus startling you."

Hurriedly I turn.

There, hat in hand, and bowing most courteously, is Sir Hugh Staunton.

"Miss Travers! It is indeed, an unexpected pleasure."

"I did not expect to meet you, either, Sir Hugh," I stammer forth, after a few seconds of inexpressible confusion, during which I have allowed him to take unresisting possession of my hand.

"Nor I you, Miss Travers, though I did hope late would be kind to me, and, you see I was not disappointed. But my dog has disturbed you, I fear. Pray resume your seat."

I obey mechanically, and Sir Hugh, seating himself carelessly by my side whistles to his dog, who is roaming restlessly in and out of the brushwood and ferns, while I remain still in a state of delighted confusion.

I have so often dreamed of another meeting since that fair Sabbath evening, when my own lips gave Sir Hugh his conge, and now it has come—this longed for meeting; and I feel powerless to do or say anything.

"The time has seemed so long to me, Miss Travers, since—since we parted. Has it seemed the same to you? But no! That is a foolish question of mine, for, of course there are so many things a woman can take pleasure in, and they serve admirably to pass away the time; while as for us men, we have nothing but our pipes to fall back upon, and then often, amid their smoke, our thoughts revert to pleasanter and happier times, and we, in fancy go over the 'might-have-been.' Ah! believe me, Miss Travers, there is nothing sadder on this earth than that might-have-been."

And so Sir Hugh talks on, and ever and anon his eyes are turned fully upon me, and I return their glances in a shy and confused way. Once I read in them a look of such—well, a look that causes me to lower my gaze, and which covers my face with blushes; while still his low, soft voice sounds in my ear, filling me with pleasure, and yet with pain, at the same moment.

"Whose secret, Roger?"

"My mother's and mine, darling. Listen. Lay your hand in mine, and hear me patiently. You are not cold, dear?"

"No, oh, no, Roger! Tell me the dream—and the secret!" I answer quickly at the same time obeying Roger's request and placing my hand within his.

Silence for a few seconds, while my lover looks up at the October sky, and I watch the expression of his face.

Still with upturned face, he speaks again—

"Elsie, I will begin with the secret. Four years ago this very month I had a sister living—"

My delight at this meeting knows no bounds; but it is followed so closely by the recollection that Roger may appear at any moment, that, that I scarcely know which predominates—the pleasure or the pain.

"You are not wandering here alone, Miss Travers? If so, may I have the pleasure of accompanying you back to vicarage?"

"No; I am waiting here for—for someone, Sir Hugh," I stammer, "and I must be going now, or we may miss one another."

I rise as I speak, and with a hurried bow, am turning away, when a hand is laid unceremoniously on my shoulder, while a voice—and oh, how it thrills me!—sounds in my ear.