

The Secret of a Picture.

IN TWO INSTALMENTS.

She let Lord Dartrey lead her through the beautiful hall, down a rotty carpeted passage, and into a small, but very delightful room.

His lordship gave the order for tea and flowers, and followed the girl into the room closing the door behind him.

Eola glanced over the beautiful oak paneling, and at the exquisite landscapes, which, hanging at intervals between the dark woodwork, made the most charming effect.

She glanced at Eastern carpets and embroidery, bronzes and china, and then her eyes flew towards, and remained upon, the one portrait in the room contained.

It hung alone, in the best light the room could give, and it was a life sized portrait of a young girl.

It was exquisitely painted, and magnificently beautiful.

Eola clasped her hands, and drew a deep breath, almost a sob, as she looked.

The fair face, with its deep tender eyes, smiled down upon her.

The golden brown hair above the face, caught the light, and made a halo around it.

The slight graceful figure in simple white dress, with the neck a little low, and wide loose sleeves falling from the lovely arms, was the most attractive Eola had ever seen.

"Oh! who is she?" she breathed, rather than spoke.

"Whom should you think she is?" her companion's deep voice replied.

"I think she is an angel I saw years ago."

"Ah! take off your hat, please."

Eola obeyed, scarce wondering.

It all seemed so dreamlike, and one never wonders in a dream.

She took off her shabby hat, and pushed her beautiful hair back; it was quite glossy with the dampness.

Her face was pale, and her eyes wistful; but, oh, so sweet and lovely!

She looked again at the picture, and then up towards her companion.

He looked at her, and then at the picture, and said nothing.

"Tell me who she was—is, Eola pleaded."

"She is an angel now. She was the only woman I ever loved."

"Ah, and you lost her?" She forgot he was the Earl of Dartrey.

She forgot that she was a shabby little girl.

She put out her hands to him impulsively, only thinking of the sorrow she saw in his worn, lined face, and the sympathy she felt in her warm young heart; and she saw the earl's handsome features soften and quiver as his eyes looked down into hers.

"Thank you, my child," he said, softly.

The powdered footman brought in the tea and Eola, as gracefully and easily as if she had been familiar with Dresden china and silver services, poured it out, handed a cup to Lord Dartrey, and drank her own.

Somewhat, all her awe of his lordship had vanished.

She felt more at home and happier in this lovely room than she had ever done in her mother's house.

She talked in her pretty girlish natural way as she drank her tea and ate the most delicious of cakes; and Lord Dartrey, saying very little, smiled upon her encouragingly.

The servant entered again, with a basket beautiful hot house flowers which he tendered to Eola.

"Those are for you, not for your mother's party," said Lord Dartrey, with great kindness.

The girl rose, grasping her two baskets of blossoms.

"I must go," she said regretfully. "I don't know how to thank you! It has been like sunshine coming in here. May I look at it again?"

She whispered the last words, and his lordship nodded.

He looked at her as she stood gazing at that lovely pictured face, and then he saw

a rush of tears dim her eyes, and she bent quickly and kissed the portrait.

The tears were still in her eyes, and her voice was broken, as she turned to that lonely man behind her, and putting down her baskets outstretched her hands to his.

"Oh, I am sorry for you!" she sobbed, she the shabby little girl, and he the peer of the realm. "You have lost her, you say. Ah, did you bear it—how did you bear it and live till now?"

"My child, I cannot tell. I think of her happiness, and the day of re-union will come," his lordship, answered softly.

"Ah, surely, surely yes! She is yours more certainly, more safely than ever she could be on earth. And you will be together again. I know. But your loneliness now without her!" She looked up again at the face she could not leave. She is an angel."

Then she said—

"Good-bye, Lord Dartrey; you have been very kind to me. I think you so much for the great pleasure you have given me, and shall never forget it."

"Then I shall hope to soon see you here again. I shall call on your mother tomorrow."

And Eola went out to the waiting carriage.

CHAPTER IV.

A YOUNG GIRL'S HEART.

Eola was so elated that she forgot all caution: she let those boys dash up to the door of Cedar Cottage, and she sprang out from the fine carriage, and rushed in with her flowers, crying—

"I have had such an adventure. I have been to Highfields. Lord Dartrey—just fancy it—gave me these flowers; he sent me home through the rain, and he was so kind. Ha—"

"Lord Dartrey! You!" shrieked Julia and Blanche, in the wild notes of jealousy.

The Misses Caxton were looking their worst en deshabille—the grand toilet would begin presently—and Mrs. Caxton glanced from their plebeian unattractive physiognomies to Eola's sweet, radiant face with a frown.

"Eola, what forward thing is this?" Her tones chilled all the poor girl's warmth.

"You have been pushing yourself into the notice of Lord Dartrey?"

"You have been into Highfield?" cried Julia, breathless. "Did you see any of the earl's visitors?"

"I saw no one but Lord Dartrey, who offered me shelter, and sent me home. I am sorry I mentioned it as you are so eager to suspect me of things I should never dream of doing."

"Do not speak to your elder sister in that way—how very ill mannered you are, Eola! Go and arrange the flowers at once. Emma has been waiting for your help with the table. Not another word, now. Blanche, dear, be calm; excitement spoils your complexion, my love," in a delicate whisper.

Eola went away to arrange the flowers as she had been directed.

"They shall not have one of mine," she said at first, with her sore little heart beating fast. "To accuse me of forwardness! Lord Dartrey said they were to be for my very own, and I will put them all in my own room." Then, as she touched them lovingly, that beautiful pictured face rose before her, and tears stole again into her eyes.

"I am not much like an angel," she said, remorsefully, "cherishing angry feelings like this. I will give them all my flowers, all but this one white rose."

The table was just more beautiful when the distinguished guests began to arrive.

Blanche and Julia, their stiff bodies clad in sea-green silk and satin, and their countenances wreathed in company smiles, welcomed their guests in loud voices; and Eola went off to the kitchen to give the overworked servants "a little help," as her mother phrased it.

Tired and hot, when the dinner was gloriously over the youngest Miss Caxton climbed up to the shabby old schoolroom and sank into a chair by the fire.

She sang a little song to herself—a glad little song, for the white rose at her throat brought back the lovely room and that sweet picture at Highfields.

She closed her eyes and saw it distinctly.

"May I come in?" said a voice, but its owner was already within the room.

He was standing opposite as Eola opened her forget-me-not eyes, and he was the stranger of the ice mishap.

The girl sprang to her feet and flushed and paled.

This man, clad in faultless evening dress looked more than ever handsome and distinguished, and Eola's heart was so undisciplined.

"I—I—you—you!" she stammered, and caught her breath and changed color again.

"Am I intruding?" he asked, with an entreating look in his dark eyes.

"Very much; undoubtedly, I imagine you are one of the guests here this evening; but I do not know my sister's friends. I am not 'out' yet, you know, and I am quite at loss to guess how you found your way up here."

Poor little girl! In her endeavour to be frigid, as her conscience told her would be her mother's desire, in her overwhelming joy at just hearing the sound of this man's voice again, and in her terror lest Blanche or Julia should come upon the scene and repeat—perhaps in his presence—that awful accusation of "forward-pushing," she was not self possessed.

But with every breathless attempt at

dignity, and every change of color, she was so pretty that the visitor grew more and more fascinated.

"I will tell you how I found you out," he said, in confidential tone, and coming nearer—"I saw your cook, a most estimable woman."

"Oh!—with rapture—did you, then, like the entrees?"

"I know nothing about the entrees. I was careful not to touch them."

"Did no one eat them?" poor Eola faltered.

"Some; to their cost, I think. But let me tell you I saw cook peeping round her kitchen stairs, and I asked her where you were, because nothing on earth would have induced me to come here to-night but the hope of seeing you."

"I am sure," said Eola, with her eyes dancing and her heart fluttering, "you ought not to say these things to me!"

"One is always right in speaking the truth," he corrected her, gravely. "I saw cook peeping, and when I asked for you, she pointed up this way, whereupon I adventured, and heard you singing, and here I am."

He drew a chair to the fire, and sat down close to Eola.

"Don't do that," she begged. "You must go away."

"You look tired," the man said, tenderly regarding her, and heeding her orders not one jot.

Then Eola became conscious that her hair was ruffled, her sleeves pushed back, and her dimpled arms floured from those entrees of which he had spoken in scorn.

"I am very tired. I am resting. Please will you go away?"

"Are you too tired to listen to me for a few minutes? I am leaving the neighborhood in a couple of days," he said, deferentially.

"Going! and the room seemed to grow dark."

"Shall you care?" He caught her hands in a swift, close clasp. "Eola! she shall be just as you decree. Shall I go or stay?"

The girl laughed; she felt her first touch of woman's power.

"If you will go now," she said, demurely, and fingering the white rose at her throat, "you may stay wherever you like away from here."

"You are very unkind," he said, plaintively. "You drive me from you as if I had had the ill-luck to offend you—and you have never inquired—with a touch of diplomacy—if I caught cold from my icy bath the other night."

"Did you? No," looking at him merrily. "You don't appear one bit the worse."

"Appearances deceive. I am really much sicker."

"Men deceive," Eola laughed. "I have always heard that, and oh! but do tell me, is Lord Bellevue here to-night?"

"Poor fellow—yes, I believe so."

"Is he a friend of yours?" curiously.

"I know him as well as anybody I fancy."

"Then do tell me—he is paying attention to Blanche, isn't he? Do you think he means to marry her?"

"Blanche is the one with the highest color—the worst of the pair, in fact?"

"But Lord Bellevue is paying her attention!"

"Have you seen him in the act?" dryly.

"I have not seen him at all, but I have hopes of him. Between ourselves I have great hopes that Lord Bellevue will marry Blanche."

There was the sound of voices, of steps, and the opening of a door.

Eola paled and remembered her position.

"Oh, please go; it is unpardonable your remaining here, you know, because, if you were seen, it would be considered so terribly improper, and—and—oh! please go!"

The sounds arose again.

"I will go if you will give me that rose," he said very soft and low. "That sweet rose has touched your sweeter throat. Give it me, sweet Eola, and in return you shall have tomorrow a basket full of better ones."

Yielding to the command in his eyes, she unstasted the trumpety little brooch which held her rose, and put the flower into his hand, her eyes downcast.

She saw him lift it to his lips and smile, and then he went away.

And Eola sat by her dying fire in a dream.

CHAPTER V.

A BITTER DISAPPOINTMENT.

There was high good humour at Cedar Cottage on the morning following the

The Crow of Croup.

It strikes terror to a mother's heart to have her child wake up at night with a croupy cough.

Child can scarcely speak, can hardly breathe—seems to be choking.

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dinner party.

"Unquestionably," said Mrs. Caxton, smiling archly, "somebody was very attentive to somebody else last evening."

She looked at Blanche, and Julia looked acid as vinegar.

"You are mysterious," she snapped. "Have these attentive people no names?"

"One is called Lord Bellevue; the other—eh! Blanche, my dear, perhaps we must not be too precipitate, eh?"

Blanche smirked and giggled.

"I can't say I saw anything very remarkable," she simpered. "But Lord Bellevue is, without doubt a very fascinating man, and such good style. How common all the other men looked, to be sure," she added.

"Who were the other men?" Eola put in suddenly, and her voice was breathless and her face flushed.

Her mother regarded her disapprovingly.

"How red your face is, child! One would almost think—"

The stalwart cook entered with a basket; in that basket were such crowds of exquisite roses that the two Miss Caxtons sprang to their feet simultaneously.

"For me?" shrieked Julia.

"For me?" said Blanche, with a red, bony hand extended imperiously.

"For Miss Eola," said cook, with a malicious grin. "He brought it miss—him as come with the cream, you know. He said 'Give it into Miss Eola's hand,' so that is what I do. L! miss, he is a lover worth having, I say."

"A milkman! What disgrace are you preparing for us now, Eola?" Mrs. Caxton's thin lips pinched themselves. "But, as I said, and as I have always foreknown, you—why are you remaining in the room cook?" sharply.

"Because half my errand isn't done, mum. Lord Dartrey—the old earl himself, is in the drawing-room, and he asked to see you, mum. When we saw him a-coming, Emma was so dirty that she begged of me to answer the door, which I did and his lordship have been waiting now some minutes."

Mrs. Caxton started as if a bomb had exploded.

"Dear dear, it never rains but it pours. Lord Dartrey too, is a bachelor; it might be—"

She hurried away, keeping her visitor waiting until she had changed her cap, and put on ornaments; and she returned in a triumph which rendered her of a hue of a boiled best root.

"The earl desires us to lunch with him today. He would take no denial. He was most pressing. Really, I suppose Lord Bellevue has done this. It is very marked. My dears, you must both look your very best."

"Am I invited?" asked Eola, breathlessly.

Mrs. Caxton fixed her with a stony stare.

"Certainly you remain at home. I should not dream of taking three girls anywhere."

"But—but, Lord Dartrey said—tears choked the pretty voice. "I am surprised at you, Eola. This thirst after unsuitable gaiety is most unseemly in you." A pause there, a significance which made poor sensitive Eola shudder. "Julia and Blanche are, of course, quite different."

Julia and Blanche went off over-dressed, like their mother; this sudden elevation into the "upper ten" must be signalled by gorgeous clothing.

Eola put on a linen apron, and dusted and packed away silver and china, until cook put a confidential hand in at the door.

"Miss Eola, here's that gentleman again wants to see you; of course, him as brought the cream and roses. As real a gentleman as ever I saw, and I'm glad that you should have him to yourself, my dearie."

"May I come in?" asked the voice Eola so well knew by this time, and that impatient, real gentleman had followed cook, who smiled and beat a retreat.

Eola, dusty and aproned, but oh! so winsome and fair, tried to hide her gladness of heart.

"I have been thinking very seriously," she said, pointing her guest to a distant chair. "I am glad of this opportunity of saying a few words to you."

"I, too, am glad—more glad that I can say. May I come a wee bit nearer? You look so sweet—I mean so stiff—over there."

"Don't stir until I have had my say out," Eola cried, desperately.

"Quite so; then I can have mine," he acquiesced, readily. "We shall not be interrupted—they are all away. It is good fortune."

"My mother and sisters are luncheon at Highfields. I ought not to entertain anyone, especially a gentleman whose name I do not know."

"No, you really do not."

He seemed intensely amused.

"I am going to ask you not to come here any more, and not to send me any roses, or cream, or anything else. You are leaving entirely in two days, you said?"

Her voice broke.

"I said it was to be as you decreed."

He deliberately left his chair, and came close to her side.

"You said I might stay; but it shall be as you desire. If you tell me to go, after I have said my say, I go. If you bid me remain, I stay, for I love you, my little one—I love you with all my heart and soul."

She raised her eyes, wonderingly wide, pure as a child's, and something in their violet depths gave the man sudden courage.

"My darling, I believe you do care for me."

And he, holding her hands, drew her close, and kissed her.

That kiss seemed to lift the girl into a woman.

"I do care," she said, in her sweet, shy way. "I don't in the least know who you are, but it would be a falsehood to say I do not care for you. Yet, it is impossible you can really—really love me—she colored all over at the boldness of her words—because, whoever you are, you are high and grand, above me, who am nobody, and if you are amusing yourself, as they say men do with silly young girls—"

The fright in her eyes made him gather her closer in her arms, and kiss her sweet face again and again.

"It is a matter of life and death to me, Eola, and his grave, almost solemn tones quelled the fear and doubt in her heart."

"I love you as I never loved—as I never thought to love any woman. I believe—he smiled, looking down into the sweet, wondering face—"that you witch my heart away with those blue eyes of yours in the first moment I saw you. Do you remember, sweetheart? You were sitting upon the ground, crying over spilled cream."

"Don't Eola interjected, growing even more hot and red. "What must you have thought of me?"

"That is the point. I thought instantly that you were sweeter, fresher, fairer, than any woman I had ever pictured, even in my dreams. I have seen a great many women, dear, and have, of course—oh, well, no matter!—he caught himself up rather sharply, and with another smile. "I saw you again, and admired you more, and then came my fall below the ice, and your self-devoted heroism rescued me from those waters of death."

His voice sank low, and he paused for a moment.

"But—but," stammered Eola, more nervous than ever. "I don't want to be loved for—I mean just only for gratitude."

"Oh, was there ever such a difficult young woman?" the man laughed, and he gathered her hands again in his strong, close clasp. "My darling, my darling, it is pure selfishness on my part, this love of mine for you. I want you, I crave for you, I can't be happy, in any case, without you. I know you through and through, and I yearn to possess you. Whereas you know nothing at all about me."

"Nothing at all," she said, with a contented, happy, trusting glance.

"And yet I ask you to marry me all unknowingly. I ask you to promise to-day to be my wife. And I swear, Eola—his deep tones vibrated—look at me sweet one—I swear that if you will do this—pledge yourself to me in trust and confidence—your sweet faith shall never be misplaced. Eola, will you trust me?"

"With my life—until death!" she answered, and the words did not seem to be her own at all, but something greater, deeper, stronger than herself.

Then he drew her into his arms and kissed her again, very gently, almost reverently, and the gates of Elysium opened before the young and radiant girl.

"May I tell your mother and sisters of

(CONTINUED ON FIFTEENTH PAGE.)

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