

OLIVE: A REMINISCENCE.

If you were to write into fiction the true story of the man or woman you met yesterday, it would be counted as too wildly unreal.—T. W. Higginson.

MY customary vacation had been postponed a few weeks by unforeseen events, and I was preparing, about the middle of September, to visit the mountains in Colorado, when my intentions were suddenly thwarted by the receipt of the following letter:

MY DEAR COUSIN:

I have recently met with an experience which is worthy of being told in the most glowing terms; but after vainly trying to begin in a way suitable to so lofty a theme, I have thrown my anxieties behind me and proceed pell mell to "pluck out the heart of my mystery."

Know then, my dear Arthur, that I am in the same little wayside country village where we were accidentally detained a year ago, where you said, you may remember, that the railroad had shied away from the unprepossessing spot and made a detour for the benefit of remorseless hackmen. Here in this old town too commonplace and monotonous to be romantic, and too quaint too breed ennui, have I been lingering for several weeks, staying at a semi-public house, where several boarders are besides myself. The house is an ancient, half-decayed, composite structure, some parts of which I hazard nothing in saying will never see the storms of their fiftieth year if they stand a hundred more. But all this has no more to do with my subject than the preliminary dash before the swimmer plunges into the cold stream.

How can I write the word? What will my phlegmatic cousin say when he learns that I, his imperturbable, nomadic relative, am suffering the most exquisite torments from a pair of eyes that look down into mine every day at meal time? In love? Perish the thought! Passion? Ah, no, my good Arthur, a hundred times no! A week ago I would have laughed to scorn the barest intimation that there was a woman in the world who could acquire a particle of influence over me. To-day—do not laugh at me when I confess it—I am an abject slave to one pair of eyes, and according as they beam refulgently, or shed scorn or indifference upon me, I am in heaven or hell. No, truly, I would not have believed it possible; and yet, the instant her eyes and mine met, a spark of love's fire leaped forth and sent a thrill through all my frame. We were in the dining room, it was my first meal, and (Oh, heavens! I hear you exclaim) she was waiting on the tables. I was looking about the large room with idle curiosity, when my attention was drawn to a fairy-like creature moving across the floor, her head turned to one side, while her eyes were fixed upon me. For an instant our eyes seemed to draw us toward each other by invisible bonds, and when the influence passed and I awoke, as it were, from a trance, I was leaning towards her, and my heart beat violently as if I had been suddenly dropped from a dizzy height. I think the strange effect of that glance was mutual, for she nearly always comes to take my order, which we make the occasion for a little silent communication in the way of eye-beams. I often catch her eyes fastened upon me at other times, and when our eyes meet the effect is like that of uniting a disconnected electric current. Sometimes in placing the dishes on the table her hand touches mine, conveniently resting on the cover, and there is a response which sends a current of etherialised fire darting through my veins. Once—I never can forget the occasion—she came to take my order for tea. She leaned a little over the table and turned her head grace-

fully to look into my face, and I looked up into hers so dangerously near; and while she repeated the call I lost myself in the depths of such wonderful eyes as I had never imagined. I could not remember a word she said, and stammered and hesitated in trying to ask her to repeat it. What an experience that brief look was! No, it was too brief for an experience, but it was long enough for a memory, and it went deep enough to stir up all the slumbering fires of love and passion. Adoration shone from my eyes, for my soul and body were delirious with impassioned love, and the color mounted to her cheeks and a self-surrender beamed from her large eyes which nearly intoxicated me with bliss. From that moment I have been that woman's slave, following her with hungry eyes, jealous of the slightest glance or word bestowed upon her by another, listening for her step, plunged into trepidation and nervousness when she approaches, tongue-tied in her presence, and unable to utter a word out of the most impassioned utterances that tremble on the end of my tongue.

You will say this is the fancy of a moment, that I am bewitched by my pretty waitress. But you must wait till I have done, for I have not said anything yet about the sylph that has worked this charm. And it is out of the very confidence I feel in the extreme beauty of the subject that I have purposely made such slow progress toward this part of my confession, and also because if my pen is incapable of describing what witchery she has caused in my old, stony heart, how could I but hesitate to try to paint the features of her in whose smiles I bask?

As my eyes follow the point of my pen along the page, I can not but wish that it was iris-hued, and guided by the hands of a cherubim. Nay, my cousin, she is beautiful. I do not think I could be snared so easily, if at all, by commonplaceness. Her eyes are large like a gazelle's; I can not tell what their most constant color is, but I believe they are of a dark brown, with the gift of changing in hue and intensity at the dictate of the owner's heart. They are deep, pure eyes, apparently without guile; and yet, ah! I can not express that evanescent gleam which now and then darkens over their depths; but it is something like that faint, fugitive shimmer of lightning on a starlight night when there are no clouds. Long lashes shade their wild light, and seem to serve the two-fold purpose of protecting them from the common gaze and of heightening their ravishing beauty as they languish underneath. They are not intelligent eyes, such as highly endowed women have; but as I read their meaning in their limpid wells they indicate the union of all the elements which are necessary to the full perfection of physical beauty and the endowment of the passion of love in all its intensity. To set off such a pair of eyes, Olive—for I soon found that was her name—has a face to which their lustre is the crown, as if a pair of priceless kohinoors were set in an arabesque of Etruscan gold. Her cheeks, when she leaned down to take my orders, I saw were of peachy texture, with the first auroral tint upon them, and as I shot the glance of my eye as powerfully as I could—almost rudely I confess it would have been if it had not indicated absolute admiration—into hers, so unsuspectingly open, the color of her cheeks deepened into a rosy red and ran down her snowy neck and up the arch of her brow, where it mingled with the wealth of her hair. The latter feature you would marvel at if you could see it. She has some simple way of dressing it, probably the easiest way of disposing of its voluminous folds, but it rests upon her head like a crown of softened gold, which it perfectly resembles in color. In figure she is slight and tall, lissome as a wild willow that grows alone on the bank of a stream. Her arms are most beautifully moulded, and her hands are small,