

AT THE ARROW'S POINT.

“Do you, then, believe in the possibility of love at first sight?” I queried of my friend, Henry Elvers, in response to some sentiment he had expressed.

“I do,” he replied, with unmistakable emphasis.

“Which means, I suppose, that you fell in love in this summary fashion with your beautiful wife?” I hazarded.

He nodded assent, and his fine eyes darkened with the force of some inward feeling or recollection.

“Bronson,” said he, “let me tell you a story that may shake your skepticism a little on more than one point.”

“I am open to conviction,” I answered, settling at once into an attitude of attention.

“On the thirteenth day of January, 1869,” he began, impressively, “I was standing at the foot of a public stairway in Leavenworth, Kansas. I was a stranger in the place, having arrived only two days previously from the far east, and excepting one or two young men whom I had met in a business way, I had not an acquaintance in the town. I was not in a particularly complacent or impressionable mood at the time, my thoughts being wholly pre-occupied with the business affairs of the Boston firm I represented. I was just arranging in my mind the wording of a dispatch I contemplated sending them when my ear caught the rustle of a woman’s dress and the sound of a light step descending the stairway behind me.

“There was something in the firm, yet light, foot-falls, and the slow, sweeping movements of the skirts, that suggested grace and freedom of movement, and it required an effort on my part to refrain from turning and glancing over my shoulder. Summoning all my gentlemanly instinct, however, I resisted the impulse, and gazed steadfastly out into the street. The next moment there was a slight stumble and a startled exclamation in a feminine voice, followed by a fall, and, turning quickly, I saw, prostrate at my feet, the loveliest woman I had ever beheld.

“To spring forward and lift her from the floor was, of course, the only thing to do, and I did it; and no angel in heaven need have blushed for the thrill of exquisite feeling that ran through me in the brief instant that she clung to me, unable to stand without my assistance. If I may not call it love at first sight, Bronson, you, at least, shall name it nothing baser; for no purer, sweeter feeling ever thrilled the breast of man.

“‘I am hurt,’ she said, simply, in a voice that seemed to vibrate through my being like the softened strains of distant music. As she spoke she sank down on one of the steps of the stairway, and her face, which

at first had flushed with natural embarrassment, grew deathly white.

“‘What can I do for you? May I not summon some one of your friends?’ I asked, bending above her in strangely earnest solicitude. ‘Pray command me, madam,’ I added, ‘for any service you may require.’

“‘Thanks; you are kind,’ she replied. ‘If I may trouble you to call a carriage—’

“Almost ere the wish was expressed I had bounded away in compliance. But, though I scanned the streets in all directions, no carriage could I discern; and as those were the prenatal days of the telephone, there was nothing for it but to walk to the nearest livery stable, several squares distant. This I did, and, as you may imagine, lost no time unnecessarily in the doing; yet, when I sprang from the carriage, twenty minutes later, I looked in vain for the lady I had left on the stairway. She was gone. I looked anxiously up and down the street, and even searched the stores in the immediate vicinity, but all to no purpose. She had vanished; and the stairway looked so blank, dirty and commonplace that I gave myself a mental pinch and wondered if I had dreamed the whole episode up to that point.

“Detecting a grin hovering around the hackman’s mouth, I promptly paid and dismissed him, and wandered hotelward in a decidedly crestfallen frame of mind.

“During the weeks immediately following I was kept very busy, both in mind and body, for our firm had, through my agency, established a branch house in Leavenworth, of which I assumed sole management. Under such circumstances, I know it would seem from your cynical point of view, that I ought, from sheer force of nature, have forgotten all about so slight an incident as my stairway adventure. But I did nothing of the kind. On the contrary, I never stepped out into the street nor turned a corner without looking for the beautiful unknown, and wondering where and how I should meet her again. That she and I would meet—at some time, in some place—I felt assured; for I knew as well then as I do to-day that in that woman I had met my fate.

“Don’t smile, young man. I was twenty-eight years of age, and had made love, in a light way, to fair women in nearly every state in the union; but this time I had received a home thrust, and the result was a new, simon-pure sensation. That matchless face, with its crown of golden hair, and its haunting, dusky eyes, was ever before me.

“I ventured to make inquiries of only one person—a young man, Stanley by name, whom I had employed as head salesman, and who soon proved himself companionable and worthy of my esteem. He had lived in Leavenworth for years, and was certain