

Under the Lamps at Scarborough.

I hardly know how I came to be at Scarborough at all, but there I was, in an easy sort of man. I am afraid, indeed that I have been easy, and so to speak, the sport of circumstances all my life, and it has not been a very long one yet. At any rate, I found myself there, on a sweet September night, leaning over the wall of Spa Promenade, and staring out seaward. Behind me the lamps were only just lighted, but I had seen that the amphitheatre seats were occupied, and by the increase of rustling, and footsteps behind, I knew that the promenade was filling.

"I wonder what I came for?" I said to myself. "I don't know a soul here except the Nugents, and they will think I followed them, and then—"

"So you did follow me, after all, Robert?" I confessed that my start was more violent than the calm, ladylike tones seemed to warrant; the fulfillment of my prognosis came upon me suddenly. It was my aunt, Lady Nugent, who spoke, and with her there was her daughter, my cousin Cecile, commonly called "Cis," whom I had an uneasy presentiment that I was one day destined to marry.

"How are you aunt?" Good evening, Cis," I stammered, facing round. "No, I don't know that I have followed you exactly; but I am here, you see. How do you like it?"

"We have been here so often, Cis and I," said Lady Nugent, with a little shrug; "but 'tis a charming place. And then the flowers are so beautiful, and the music, and I always think there is something in the music, and lights, and the sound of the waves that touches one's tender feelings."

I believe I muttered internally, "Clap-trap!" but visibly I asserted with a sickly smile; for you see I was a little afraid of Lady Nugent, afraid of her at all times, but especially so when she did the sentimental. She seemed, in a metaphysical sort of way, to have her paw upon me.

There was, not and never had been, anything approaching to an engagement between Cecile and myself. In the days gone by we had flirted a little, and been a little silly,—perhaps very silly,—but that was over. At least I thought so. Six months ago, however, when I came into my property, and became a Nugent of Nugent, my natural feelings of satisfaction were damped in a very sudden and unlooked for manner by my aunt's proceedings.

It is rather a pleasant thing to find yourself a man of property, independent, unfettered; the world all before you, and the future, with its nameless hopes and possibilities, a book just opened, with its brightest pages unread. Under such circumstances a young man will dream, and his dreams will be sweet to him. He will not relish, any more than I did, the sudden waking up to find, as it were, a lass thrown about him, and his fate settled. Not that my aunt had any hold upon me at all in reality, but then she behaved as if she had. Cecile and I were treated with a sort of mysterious petting. It was inferred that there was a secret understanding between us, which must be respected, we were not subject to ordinary laws at all. Little *tele-actes* were planned for us; and others besides my aunt soon began to take it for granted that it was a "case," as people say, between us. For myself, no poor doomed creature before a rattlesnake could have been more helpless. It may seem weak, but I call any young fellow of my age and temperament to testify to the power of a clever woman when she wills a thing. As for Cecile, she used to laugh and say, "Poor mamma cannot realize that we have done with our toys Robert. You don't mind it, do you?"

"Mind what?" she would ask. "Mamma forgets," Cecile would say, looking hard at me, "that while I am a woman, you, being the same age in years, are yet a boy."

And then I would be piqued, and—well, say silly things to prove that I was a man indeed, and manly.

The worst of all was, that I believe Cecile really cared for me, and could have been very fond of her as a brother, but nothing more. My hand was passive, if hers touched it; her voice, even when it uttered my own name, sent no thrill through my heart; her presence was comparatively indifferent to me; and yet here I was, drifting away along the path to which Lady Nugent pointed, making, at times, feeble efforts to break away, but feeling that eventually I was doomed.

When the Nugents left London for Scarborough, and my aunt said to me with unpleasant playfulness, "Well, if you don't follow us, I shall come back and fetch you," I felt hopelessly that she would do as she said, and so I followed. I would rather have gone down to Nugent quiet as it was, or even have stayed in town to be worried by the lawyers about leases, back rents, conveyances, and all the rest of it; but I could not, and there it was.

"Don't you think so?" said my aunt. "Don't I think I beg your pardon," I said. "Don't I think what?" Lady Nugent tapped me on the shoulder good humoredly, with a significant half-glance at Cecile. "Moonstruck, Robert?" said she. "Well, come and see us to-morrow. We are at Loddersburgh Terrace, Providence. It is not quite the new fashionable, wither. But economy must be considered, you know." Cecile gave me an absent little nod, and two pale kid fingers, and they passed on. I did not offer to join them.

daughter? And then I wondered whether it might be possible that, for a certain sum per annum, Lady Nugent would let me off. And here—the little rows of twinkling gas jets in the hands' pavilion having sprung up long ago, and the chandelier glittering inside—there came a crash of brass instruments, followed by the softest and sweetest of Gounod's "Arias."

"Ah, well, did it matter much, after all, how my life was settled? Was it worth while struggling about it? All those dreams of mine were myths—something that comes in the springtime of youth when the imagination overflows; something dreamed of in all men's lives, but never realized."

Cecile was fond of me; I had no dislike to her. I would be good to her of course; we might get on as well as other couples did. Down at Nugent there would be for me the estate to see after, to say nothing of hunting, shooting and fishing. Oh, no doubt we might do very well without the enchanted light that came only in visions. If I could have had the light, so much the better; but perhaps no one ever did have it in reality.

As I thought thus, something—a little faint cry I thought it was—made me turn sharply to my right. I saw at first only a perambulator, with a pale, child-like face looking anxiously over the side, and then I was aware of a dog, a little bigger than a respectable rat, limping about amongst the legs that thronged the promenade.

"The wheel has gone over it," said the voice belonging to the childlike face. "O, please Robert!" I don't know whether I was idiot enough to take this plaintive "Robert" to myself, instead of applying it to the lad who propelled the perambulator; anyhow I dived at once after the little animal, picked it up and restored it. I was thankful, not by the childlike face, but by one bending over it; a face older, with more color in the cheeks, with blue gray eyes, and masses of sunny hair drawn away from it—not into the padded abortion which is so general, but into a coil of shining plaits, beautiful to look upon.

I was thanked, I say, by a face and voice such as I thought I had never looked upon or heard before; and as I raised my hat and drew back, my eyes met Lady Nugent's in her downward walk, and my heart sank.

"'Tis jolly up here, isn't it? Enough to make a man wish life was all sea side and sunshine." I lay on top of the Castle Cliff with a cigar in my mouth, and my friend Charlie Ferrars was perched on the turf beside me, holding his chin in his hands, and looking, to say the truth, rather discontented than otherwise. Why he did so, I did not know. Below us there was the sea, sleeping in a golden haze, out of which the sails shone like little immovable white dots in the distant. There was not a cloud in the sky; and the sound of the waves, if indeed it reached us at all, reached us, as Lady Nugent said, "dimly."

O, those waves!—the delight of the sun glancing gold upon them; the pleasure of the walk to the Northern Cliff, down the wooden steps and among the sand to the machines;—the former grandeur of being as it were, out to sea, and left there, the white rolls of foam lashing themselves against the wheels of your machine till it trembles again, and only the great waste of waters glittering before our open door;—then the plunge that puts life into you, and makes you feel as if you had no body, to speak of, this is, until breakfast time!

But I could not be poetical about all this to Charlie Ferrars up on the Castle Cliff, where we had met by the merest chance, and where he appeared to me to be doing anything but enjoying himself; I could not, for the life of me, tell why.

"They say a man pitched himself over here the other day," said Charlie, suddenly. "Did he?" said I. "Poor beggar! In debt, perhaps?" Charlie took his chin out of his hands, and replied, gloomily, "There are other things that may make a man desperate. But what do you know about debt,—a lucky chap like you?"

Something in his tone made me raise myself on one elbow to look at him, but he had turned his face away. If I had known then what was the matter with him, I think I should have put my arms round his neck and hugged him; but I did not know, and so I blundered.

"Charlie, old boy, there's something wrong," said I. "I've more money than I know what to do with; it would be a charity."

He broke into a constrained sort of a laugh. "Thanks, Bob," said he (I grieve to say that my old school-chums will call me Bob); "but it is not that. Sometimes I wish it was. However never mind. It's odd we didn't meet before, isn't it?" "Well, yes," said I. "But you see, the Nugents are here, and my aunt likes attention, and I've been with them a good deal. We steamed over to Kitley the other day. By the way, you know them, don't you?"

"A little," he replied. "A good thought, by Jove," said I. "My train starts at 1:30," was the grim response. "Thanks, all the same. I came down for a few days on business; can't spare any more time; and I must stay dawdling here any longer, either; so good by, old fellow. Meet you in town some time."

I shook hands indifferently enough, and after he was gone I reproached myself for it. But then I was pre-occupied, and impatient of anything that disturbed me. The world has changed with me since the evening I leaned over the seawall and wondered what I had come to Scarborough for. The train of thought that had been disturbed then by a steep little toy-terrier seemed very far back in the past now, very absurd and impossible, altogether not worth remembering.

I don't think my aunt and Cecile know why I was so punctual at the evening of the promenade, nor why, at a certain moment, my attention would wander in spite of myself, and my step involuntarily turn in one direction. It was no harm; I only wanted to see her; so I said to myself, There can be nothing wrong in looking at a beautiful picture; and she could never be anything more to me, since was I not already appropriated?

The sentence was very bitter to me now; I had lost all of my passive submission to my fate. At times, indeed, the elements of strong rebellion rose within me, and I said to myself that I would be free; and the next moment there would be the consciousness of Lady Nugent's voice in my ear and a paw figuratively upon my shoulder. Meaning time I only wanted to see her, to be from time to time a little nearer to this beautiful, unpainted picture, where there was no harm in looking at, which I saw in my dreams, and when I awoke from them, which I never utterly lost, even when Lady Nugent and my cousin were with me. Who was she? Where did she come from? Were her friends rich? I hardly know why; but I thought not; I rather preferred that they should not be. And yet, after all what could it matter to me?

This was how I came back with a sigh to the actual position of affairs—to find myself turning unwillingly from the open promenade into the Sp. Concert Room, with cousin Cecile and Lady Nugent. I dare say the concert was very fine that night; Cecile said it was. I only know that I had not the least idea what it was all about, and that when everybody was waiting in intense expectation for the appearance of the great star of the evening, it suddenly struck me with a sharp pang, "suppose they are gone away altogether?"

I looked at Lady Nugent; she was calm and pale; waiting; so was Cecile; so was everybody—waiting as though life depended upon a few shakes and trills, and ran half a note higher than any reasonable voice could go. How hot I was!—how suddenly impressed with the nothingness and inconsequence of the whole affair! My picture! My precious unpainted portrait! If she slipped away from me, I saw, as I had never seen before, how terrible a blank it would leave behind.

"'Tis close here," I said to Cecile, "awfully close. I wonder how you can bear it." "Is it?" she said. "Perhaps so! but hush, Robert, she is coming on." "Excuse me for five minutes," I whispered. Cecile just looked at me, raised her eyebrows in wonder at my want of taste, but did not speak, and the next moment I was out on the almost deserted promenade, with the cool salt breeze on my forehead, the stars beginning to come out overhead and the moon struggling from behind a cloud to throw down a long silver line across the water to its edge; and there, near the little pavilion, which had no band in it to-night, I saw the perambulator, the same lad propelling it, my picture, and close beside her, tall, black-coated, spectacled, I drew a long breath.

The stars seemed to have come down and got into my eyes; the lamps danced into each other, like will-o'-the-wisps gone mad; and the few occupiers of the seat under the colonnade became a confused mass of dingy color. In another moment I was shaking hands vigorously with the Rev. Richard Penryn, Vicar of Nugent, blessing my memory, which never loses a face when once seen, and explaining to the perplexed clergyman my claims upon his recollection.

"To be sure," he said at last; "our new curate. I'm stupid and near-sighted, and I did not remember you at all. And when shall we have the pleasure, but I forget, Mr. Nugent, this is my daughter, Constance, and this poor little weakling—"

"You are very rude, papa," broke in the childlike voice I remembered so well. "I am not a weakling, I'm strong enough now, if Constance would let me walk, but she won't. And I know Mr. Nugent quite well; he picked up Topsy for me. My name is Letty, Mr. Nugent, and papa has no right to call me Gypsy, as dare say you'll hear him do."

There was a laugh at this long speech. I don't very well know whether I joined or not, or said a word, indeed exactly what I did, or said, or thought, or how the time went. I know that once Mr. Penryn said something about the bay, and that we turned to look at it; and that far away, a black spot in the ripple of the moonlight, there was a fisherman's boat with a single light in it, which gleamed red against the silver. We could see the fisherman in his boat, motionless; and it seemed as if in some way this boat had got into my picture, and I could never forget it.

"It is so quiet here," said the vicar's daughter, in answer to my stupid remark that "I hardly expected to see them out." "Then you don't care for the gay promenade?" said I. "Indeed, but I do," she replied. "I like the music and the lights, and to look at all the people—"

"And the gossamer dress," put in the vicar. "'Tis a fine place for that sort of thing, which we don't get much of down at Nugent. We are a little out of the way down there, eh, Constance?" "Out of the world!" Somehow there came upon me a rustling of soft wind amongst the Nugent beeches; the sun shining over a green lawn; lights and shadows over distant woods; river, and blue hills beyond. Here was a sitting for my picture.

"I think I should like to be out of the world," I said. "At least I mean to go down to Nugent as soon as—that is, you are not going home yet, Mr. Penryn?" "No, not to Nugent," said the vicar, "but to the North Cliff. Terribly fashionable, I suppose, but it is better for the Gypsy here; and besides, it is less expensive. There is a concert in core, I believe," he added, stopping suddenly. "Some one told us so."

The words roused me into a guilty consciousness that my five minutes had grown into half an hour, if not more. "I am obliged to go," I said, hurriedly. "But I know no one in Scarborough; that is, scarcely any one. It would be a charity if—May I call upon you to-morrow?" "And welcome," replied the vicar, calmly, "if you will take the trouble. Here is the address. Good night."

"What have you been doing?" asked Lady Nugent, as I took my place. You look as if you had seen a ghost. They were looking at me curiously. Lady Nugent slightly unquiet and searching; and a spirit of malice came upon me.

"I have just met with the Vicar of Nugent and his daughters," I retorted, bravely. "We walked about under the lamps; and I suppose I'm dazzled a bit; that's all." "I was holding silk for Constance Penryn to wind; Gypsy was dressing up Topsy in a red shawl, much to his discomfort, and Mr. Penryn wrote or tried to write at a side table."

"I don't believe it air," said Letty. "I don't believe (be quiet, Top!) that you ever would sink before in your life; I dare say it would be fit to use. But you are so conceited. You know you thought I meant you when I called Robert to pick up Topsy. You think everybody must be thinking of you."

I laughed, and the vicar just murmured a word or two of remonstrance; but he was busy. You see it had come to this with me. Lady Nugent never knew where my mornings were spent. She was suspicious, I knew. She would have watched me if she could, but that was not possible; and in this case I was a match for her cross-questioning.

"Wait till we get to Nugent," I said to the small owner of the red shawl. "We shall see if you dare call me names there, where I am monarch of all I survey." "Of course you shall," she replied. "And you won't be married of all you survey, either. But Mr. Nugent,—by the way, I have a great mind to call you Robert."

"Do," said I. "It would be fun," said she. "What would they think at Nugent? You really mean to come there?" "Certainly," I replied. "For good," she asked. "Oh," said I, "I hope not for very bad."

"You know what I mean, sir," said she, "to settle down." "Yes, to settle down," said I. "We want a resident squire dreadfully," said the young lady, with great gravity; "papa says so, but then papa has an eye to subscriptions, and flannel, and good stuff of all sorts for the poor people. Now I (obviously, she difference!) simply think that you will let me go into the park whenever I like, just as if it were my own."

"Exactly," said I. "And all over the picture gallery," she continued, "and the drawing-rooms, and—"

"To the very store-rooms, if you like, in spite of cross old housekeepers," I exclaimed. "Mrs. Crane is not a cross old housekeeper," said Letty, indignantly. "She is a beautiful old lady, in black silk, and a white cap? She is a great deal more dignified than you are."

"Very likely," said I. "I'll tell you what more you shall do at Nugent: Should you like to go on the river in a boat?" "I should think so,—rather," said Letty. "Very well," said I, "I shall have one built,—a real clipper, and there shall be crimson cushions for it; and we'll call it 'The Gypsy,' in honor of you. What do you say?"

Letty had come up close to me by this time, and was looking at me with an eagerness that had something almost painful in it, while the poor little carrier started wistfully out of his crimson wrapper, and uttered a faint yelp of remonstrance.

"You are choking him, Gyp," said Constance. "That shows how much you know about it," was the retort. "But Mr. Nugent, do you mean it really?" "Yes, really," I replied. "Then I'll tell you what," said Letty; "you are the very nicest man I ever knew. Shall we get as far as the old Priory, do you think, and Norvea Wood?"

"I don't see why not," I replied. "I don't see why never says a word," continued Letty. "But perhaps you don't mean to take her?" "Involuntarily I looked at the face opposite me; and somehow the silk got tangled. I had to give it up from my clumsy fingers, to say a few words of apology, and then to find by my watch that it was time to go."

And haven't heard half about the bronze, Gypsy, nor about the yellow drawing-rooms, the Hall you were to help me to alter," said I. "Never mind; I shall see you to-night."

"That's no use, even if we go," retorted Letty, promptly; "which, perhaps, we shall not do. You will be with Lady Nugent and your cousin, then. I wonder if you are very fond of Miss Nugent."

"I like the music and the lights, and to look at all the people—"

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"let me tell you—" "I will let you tell me nothing," she interrupted, "Robert, I am engaged to Charles Ferrars. Do you think that while you are acting as you do now, mamma will listen to one word about him?"

In the new light that had fallen upon me, I think I was nearer falling in love with Cecile than ever I had been in my life.

"Charlie Ferrars?" I cried; "and he came down here to plead his cause with my aunt; and she told him she had other views for you, eh? Wouldn't let him see you, perhaps; so that was why he had an idea of throwing himself over the Castle Cliff. I see it all. O, Cis!"

"You are not vexed with me?" said Cecile. "Vexed?" said I. "If you could only know what it is to me. So I am to draw back for Charlie, and all the time to fall upon me? I am to pretend that I won't have you?"

"Robert!" she exclaimed. "Do you really love him Cis?" said I. "He is the best fellow in the world!"

I began searching about for my hat, which was in my left hand all the time. "What are you doing Robert?" she asked. "I thought you would help me."

"So I am to—'I will,' he replied. "Go to the promenade, Cis; you must. Tell my aunt I am too meet you. I will do that anyhow; only don't keep me now please."

In less than half an hour I was out on the balcony of Mr. Penryn's lodging, and Constance with me,—very close to me; I might even confess that my arm was round her. And casual passers-by could look up if they chose; they could see nothing for the heavy curtain over the window behind us. Even if they could have seen, I don't think, in my then state of mind, that I should have cared; and Constance was saying, "But you never mean that? You could not have had the heart to stay away from Nugent."

"But I should, though," said I. "If you had said anything else, I would never have gone near the place. Are you sure I am quite awake,—that 'tis a real 'you' I have here, or only a dream?"

"Do I look like a dream?" she asked. "Yes, you do, very, I replied. "I can hardly believe that you are not one. Why do you move away? I don't want to go. I am content. The world has been very good to me to-night."

"But Robert, you said—" "Ah, poor Cecile!" said I. "And you won't mind helping her, for my sake? Come then." " * * * * "

Once more under the lamps on the promenade. The band was playing, the seats under the colonade were full, and, passing along the sea wall I saw the fisherman's boat in the ripple of the moonlight, just as though he had never stirred from his post but stayed there to see the end. And there amongst the upward stream of people came my aunt and Cecile, Lady Nugent pale, stern displeased; Cecile with her head bent down. My heart gave me one great throbb of anticipation; then I put the little hand within my arm a little tighter and went forward boldly. I saw my aunt's eye fall upon me, upon us, rather. I saw the little start which she could not repress, the sudden haughty questioning, and the drawing herself up. Then, she spoke.

"Aunt," said I, "let me introduce Miss Penryn, the daughter of our vicar at Nugent. Constance, this is Lady Nugent, my aunt."

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