FIRST LOVE.

First love is best, the poet said—
Ah, poet, wise and true!
In youth it fanned my heart to flame,
In manhood burns—about the same—
And will my whole life through.

That first love! Can I e'er forget
The dawn of that fair time
When dimpled cheeks and soulful eyes
Revealed a glimpse of paradise,
And I bowed at the shrine?

'Twas then I swore my heart was true;
That she was wondrous fair.
But here today I've tried in vain
Just to recall her Christian name
And gave up in despair.

* * * * * *

Many a maid I've loved since then—
Hope to love many yet—
An Alice once, a winsome Ray,
A Beatrice and twice a May,
And then a Margaret.

But then I know the poet said
The first love stirs the flame.
Though maids galore you love and woo,
That first love lasts your whole life through.
Naught changes but the name.
—Albert Lang in Boston Globe.

SHROUDED IN SNOW.

There is, perhaps, no finer view of Mont Blanc in or around Geneva than that to be obtained from Colonel Tronchin's tower on the hill above Coligny. There you get a sunset effect that must have made many a painter despair, and, in the estimation of some, is superior to the grandeur of the sunrise seen from the Rigi. It is astonishing how the light lingers and the snow reddens in the sun after the orb has vanished beyond the green range of the Jura. The changing hues of the twilight—from the alabaster to the crimson, from the crimson to the steely gray, from the gray to the vivid pink, and then to dimness of the veil of mist arising from the valleys—are alone worth the trouble and expense of a special journey.

Geneva, indeed, is a delightful place at all times. The lovely lake, the stately Rhone, the turbulent Arve, the snowy mountain ranges cut in dazzling whiteness on the azure sky are attractions the like of which are not found together elsewhere, but with Mont Blanc included there is a combination of pleasing scenery perfectly irresistible. The many peaks that circle the Val d'Aoste are beautiful undoubtedly, but lacking the monarch of the mountains the view would seem shorn of half its glory. With him the panorama is perfect, the picture is complete.

From this point of vantage a couple of tourists, with a peasant girl, are admiring the inimitable tinting of the sunset sky. "You are right, Gisela, by Jove! This is the best I have seen since we entered your wonderful country. If this golden glow would only last! I believe I could look at it almost as long as I could at your pretty face, ma chere."

It is Sydney Athelstan, a tall, dark haired, well set up young Englishman, who speaks. He is touring Switzerland for the first time. Gisela's face flushes as rosy red as the fragrant rhododendron that flames the snow and ice 5,000 feet above them as she answers:

"You flatter me, m'sieur, but it is beautiful, for the night is clear. Let go my hand, please. I am only a peasant's child."

"But with the grace of a lady and the beauty of an artist's ideal!" fervently exclaims the young man. "M'Dieu, but you were made for something better than a mere cottager's daughter."

The girl wrenches her hand from his. The rose flush on her cheek fires into vivid scarlet. She points down the rugged path.

"If you will not have prudence, m'sieur, I must return alone to my father's roof, where Giotto, my betrothed, awaits me. I came to show you and your friend the place where the great English poet lived, and then the view of the mountain from here. Let us return together."

Athelstan listens with his soul in his eyes. Blue, uncertain, distrustful eyes they are, but fascinating to women.

As for Gisela, her wild rose beauty grows in fairness every day under the influence of maturing womanhood and the glow of a deep passion, for, despite her betrothal to Giotto and despite her shyness, she loves her stalwart young Englishman in her heart, and her bright eyes flash with pleasure at his coming. And his coming is frequent, is habitual. Together they climb the mossy banks of the valleys or the rugged ridges of the lower range, and when Giotto, ill at ease and revolving vengeance in his dull mind, goes with the sheep across the glacier to spend the summer months in solitary tending of the browsing herds the girl and her new lover take longer journeys and are altogether inseparable.

A month passes all too swiftly for the lovers. Then one evening, when the two have been away longer than usual, a telegram is left at the hotel for Athelstan. Sydney reads the message hurriedly and crumples it into his pocket with a muttered ejaculation.

"Mother is dead!" he says in a strained voice. "I must go home at once—tomorrow morning. I will go and pack up a few things now.

* * * * * *

"It will be fine today," says Gisela, the guide. And the others nod and acquiesce, for is she not as weatherwise as any man of them, as familiar with every nook and cranny of the mountains, with the paths of the avalanches, the portent of the south wind singing in the glaciers, the meaning of the flush and the fall of the rivers? Yes, it will be fine today if Gisela says so.

And the tourists hope it will be fine, for they are going to the Mer de Glace, which is a day's excursion from Chamouni, where they are staying. Mrs. Athelstan has not been to Switzerland before and is delighted with all she sees. Her husband has memories of a visit in the bygone years and hopes the sunbrowned woman with the flashing eyes—who insists on guiding them—does not remember him. She does not appear to recognize his features at first, though she starts at the sound of his voice, and a passing paleness crosses her handsome face. She goes on before them, chatting indefatigably all the way.

It is so much better for two people to go thus, with one trusty guide, than to loiter in parties, she says, as they are crossing the meadows in the valley. There is less danger of accident with fewer travelers together, except on the high peaks, where the rope is useful.

And so she leads them on, stepping over the furious river and climbing the precipices by a rugged path, now winding amid the firs and now through the verdant grass until they reach Montauvert, where you can stand on the edge of the plateau and look down on one side into the frozen sea and on the other into the vale of Chamouni.

From the surface of the sea of frozen billows the granite needles rise toward the sky, void of snow or ice, bidding defiance alike to the lightning and the tempests and the glacier sweeping past their base. They are grand, impressive, sublime, says Gisela, leading her companions by the side of the ice, where the rock and gravel are raised in a gigantic furrow by the frost and the avalanches and the crystal ocean grinding down its mountain bed; then, taking them out a little upon the bosom of the frozen sea and showing them the fissures and crevasses where the ice glitters clearer and up from the depths rolls the thunder of the ice masses falling from the roof of the crystal cavern at the foot of the glacier, where at intervals, bending low, you may hear the ripple of the rills that are hastening down to join and issue in the cold and muddy torrent of the iceborn Arve.

Then upward again, past the violet and gentian sprinkled verdure of the lateral moraines and the gorgeous beds of rhododendrons, to which the bees of Chamouni resort for honey, past the grassy slopes where the shepherds drive their herds across from Montauvert every year, Gisela leads them, talking fast but thinking faster, until they stand on a narrow ledge of rock at the foot of a glittering snow slope that overlooks the Glacier des Pelerhines and the cascade of that name.

"Speak softly here," she says, lowering her voice to a whisper. "The snow is insecure, and a sudden jarring of the air will surely bring an avalanche upon us. I have heard the shepherds and the guides caution each other against this place, for once before a snowslide swept down here. It was the wind made by its swift descent that snapped and felled the trees yonder."

Athelstan gazed down at the twisted, broken and prostrated trunks with a suddenly awakened fear. They are mutely, fiercely, eloquent of what fate awaits him and his wife should a word be spoken heedlessly or a foot ring incautiously against a stone.

"Why have you brought us here, then?" he asks in a whisper. "There is no special view."

"No, m'sieur, but there is special danger. I have waited for your return these many years. I have wished that we might meet here, with a certain death quivering above us. Can you not guess why?"

Her voice rises recklessly an inflexion higher. There is a flush of color upon her brow. Her attitude is one of gratified revenge.

"How can I guess, Gisela?" he stammers.

His face is blanched; his eyes dilate with dread. Ethel, his wife, glances from her husband to the girl with terror stricken amazement.

"What does she mean, Sydney? Explain it to me."

"She is mad, Ethel!" he returns, collecting himself a little. "Come, we will go back. It is time."

"You will not," cries Gisela, raising her voice until it becomes a shriek. "You will not. You will not escape my vengeance so easily." Long smoldering resentment at her base desertion has burst forth into the quenchless flame of hopeless jealousy, and she is careless what she does—careless of her own life.

"You made me love you," she goes on fiercely, "that summer so long past now; made me give up Giotto and grieve my parents and estrange my friends for your sake, and now you think to live happily with your English wife.

"You do not know that Giotto killed himself in his jealous anger, that my mother died of a broken heart, that my father died poor because I left them to go after you—though my search was vain. You do not hear the cry for retribution that rises from the ground where they sleep. You do not, but I do. Ha! ha!"

The sound of her laughter rings among the rocks and down the steeping vales and in and out among the vast snow masses piled around the crags. There is a trembling movement on the face of the slope of dazzling white above—an ominous, slipping, sliding sound.

"Quick! Hasten!" cried Athelstan, seizing his wife's arm. "The balance is disturbed; the avalanche is upon us. There is not a moment to be lost. Hasten!"

They hurry to the left, where the ledge broadens out upon the plateau—to the right it narrows more and more—leaving Gisela standing motionless, hurling her derisive mirth at them. Surely they will escape. The distance is not far.

But the great snow sheet, flinging stones and trees and frost spray far before its thunderous advance, is gaining fast upon them. It rushes headlong, a mass of overpowering majesty, terrible in its might, adown that awful slope, and ere the roar of it in their ears can drown the sound of that mocking mirth the snow foam billow that curls upon its lower edge sweeps them out into the gulf below.

There is a woman's cry, a man's curse, a mocking laugh cut swiftly short, and the avalanche passes on.

It roars along, its breath going before it like a destroying storm, and the gulf in which the three bruised bodies lie is filled with its snowy whiteness.

They sleep soundly there, beneath that chilly counterpane—sheltered in silence, shrouded in snow.—Exchange.

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