

Elöise Bienaimé

by W.

At the head of the semi-spiral stairs, which were of dark wood, protected by a balustrade of the same material, I was shown through an arched doorway on the right, and ushered into a small antechamber, furnished like a boudoir, richly corniced, frescoed, and hung with small Dutch paintings. Madame Bienaimé entered with as little noise as a ghost; the door closed, and we were alone.

“I am conversing with Mr. ——?” she asked, seating herself upon a fauteuil, and signing me to do the same.

I bowed assent.

“You will excuse the liberty I have taken,” she continued, speaking with the slightest possible accent, “in sending for you. I had a reason.”

The impression was so novel and unexpected, Madame appeared so serious and even severe, I was silent and astonished. Can this, thought I, be the reputed Ninon, the gay and dissipated Elöise Bienaimé—the intimate of Madame Sand, and the patron saint of the artists? Oh! world, what a liar art thou!

The woman before me might have reached her fortieth year, retaining the beauty and freshness of twenty-one, with the bearing of a matron. Her cheeks were not sullied by paint, and her chestnut hair fell in a shower of natural ringlets over a neck and shoulders snowy white. In her eyes—large, soft, and of a changeable hue—lay the possibility of every expression. “She is an actress,” I thought. “We have our scene to enact. The *rôle* of Madame is dignified and impressive—mine is to be impressive.” The parts were distributed, and the play began.

She had placed herself in the shadow of a curtain; I, on the contrary, sat in the full light of a tinted glass window. It was April, and the sash closed. “Bienaimé is diplomatic,” I thought. “She places herself in the shade, lest the expression of her eyes may betray the insincerity of the part she has assumed. Are we to be religious or moral? The conversation will perhaps touch upon Catholicism; in any event, it will be artistic.”

My momentary meditations were interrupted by the lady. “I have seen you at the house of Mr. Pleasants; but you have forgotten.”

I tried to recollect, but could not. My old friend Pleasants! a respectable person, and a strict Puritan!—Impossible. Madame Bienaimé could not have been there. It was a ruse. I bowed with an unmeaning smile. “You do not remember, then? It is natural: you were a boy; I, a young woman of twenty.”

I risked the usual commonplace remark.

“The compliment is appreciated,” she replied; “but I make no secret of my age.”

“Madame has no occasion to do so.”

“Very well,” she said, smiling; “you are like all gentlemen: you are displeased that a woman should appear young at forty; but the face may be youthful when the mind is grey. Let us leave such things to be repeated a hundred times by my poor Bontemps. Was he hurt by my refusal to see him?”

“I think—yes, considerably.”

“It was unavoidable. Bontemps is much too sensitive.—*Revenons, Monsieur*. Twenty years ago, I saw you at Mr. Pleasants’; I heard you often spoken of by the family. You are still a friend of theirs?”

“Yes.”

“They are as usual; and the daughter has never married? She is amiable.”

“An angel of goodness.”

“The same as when I knew her. We change seldom for the worse, you know—often for the better. Isabelle Pleasants has always devoted herself to good deeds. I was at one time an inmate of the house; I lived with Isabelle, and became passionately attached to her; but during my absence she has not corresponded with me. Will you allow what is said at this interview to be confidential for a time—at least, until I return to Paris[?]”

“Madame places unusual confidence in me; I must learn to deserve it.”

“May I then, ask more?”

“Anything in my power.”

“Assist me to a private interview with Isabelle.”

I was silent. To make matters worse, Madame rose and passed into the other room.

Assist roué Bienaimé, the social actress, to an interview with a saint—with Isabelle Pleasants! But how should I refuse without insult?—In a few moments she returned, and had evidently wept in the interval.

The tears were still lingering in her lustrous eyes, which resembled those of Raphael’s Saint Cecilia. She placed in my hands a small miniature, which I recognised as that of Isabelle in her youth. “This Bienaimé,” thought I, “is making a bold push for respectability, and I am the cat’s paw. Let us see who is the better diplomat. Some runaway; a talented French milliner, or lady’s companion of the Pleasants family—an ex-Lorette, perhaps, who has pushed her way in the

world, and wishes to be received.”

“Madame will suggest,” I said, coldly, “in what manner this interview shall be conducted, so that no one may be compromised.”

A burning blush rose to the very eyes of the beautiful woman, and as the heightened color entered the glowing pupils, they grew dark with an almost fierce expression; but it was only momentary. In an instant her self-possession returned.

A suspicion crossed me that I might be unjust.

“Bontemps has given me such pictures of your goodness,” she continued, “I have been led already into an error. I have taken too great a liberty; but perhaps an explanation may remove the unfavorable impression.”

There was an emotion in her voice which could not be assumed. She has then real feelings, at least sincerity, I thought. Let us see. How easy for wit and beauty to seem sincere!

“My name,” she continued, “was formerly Glinton. I was educated in New York. My father is still living. I remember when a child being attended by female servants, in the mansion of Mr. Glinton. I was suffered and even encouraged to tyrannize over them, and it seemed to be the pleasing occupation of my mother to cherish in me a sentiment of haughty independence. At table, I sat by her side, my little speeches applauded, my appearance noticed in loud whispers. I was mamma’s darling—her pet, ‘her own little daughter.’ As I grew in stature and intelligence, every accomplishment was procured for me, and nothing could be too costly or elegant for the adornment of my pretty self.

“My father maintained a handsome establishment. He was a man of fortune, and by his occupation as a barrister, enjoyed what was then a prince’s revenue. He spoke often of my expectations, and taught me to believe that I should bring my future husband a fortune worthy of such a family and rank as his own. Family pride was his weakness, and when that was touched, his purse flew open.

“At fifteen I had acquired the manners and habits of fashionable society, and assisted in entertaining the guests and visitors of the family.

“The striking resemblance which I bore to my father was frequently remarked, and it seemed to please him. He was cold and severe, but thoroughly a man of the world; ambitious, and devoid of sentiment. I remember only once to have seen him deeply moved. Mr. Glinton was tall and erect; his head almost bristled with wiry black hair; and his eyes shot forth a sinister fire. Politically he was powerful, not to say formidable; and though no one could claim his friendship, it was dangerous to be his enemy.”

“Have you seen him since your return from Paris,” I asked, becoming already interested in the narrative.

“I have; but he did not recognise me. Indeed, we are both changed: his hair is white.”

“You were then, unfortunately, separated from your family?”

“You shall hear all.—Though I was by nature too proud for ordinary coquetry, it was a matter of course, my parents being wealthy, that I should have admirers. Among the young gentlemen who visited at our house, there was one not many years older than I—a youth favored more by genius than by fortune, and distinguished by his talents. The addresses of this man were not disagreeable to me; but the haughtiness of my unhappy temper for a long time repelled him. While I met others with cold politeness or conventional gaiety, him I received often as an intimate and favored companion; profiting much by his conversation, for the sake of which only I pretended to receive him, but really admiring certain qualities which I had reason afterwards to fear and detest.

“Archibald Cumming, though but five years my senior, arrogated to himself the address and knowledge of a man of the world. He was about the middle stature, slender but powerful in frame, with singular graces of manner and speech. By paying due respect to the name and boasted honors of the Glinton family, he made himself acceptable to my father. Their talk was invariably political; Cumming used the patronage of my father for his own advantage, and in turn held himself a convenient instrument for the ambition or avarice of his patron. He was for that reason distinguished above other guests, and I was led to think him agreeable as a prospective or possible son-in-law.

“At seventeen I had offers of marriage, to which even my parents, with all their pride, could see no objection. My father treated my suitors with courtesy, while he dismissed them with firmness; by myself they were slighted with an inconsiderate scorn, which left me, in a little time, if not wholly without friends, at least with so many enemies among men, and so many jealous rivals among women, I found my position like that of a conqueror, whom all hate, but to whom all are obliged to bend. Young as I was, the reflection often occurred to me—for in the midst of vanity and levity I could reflect and judge—if overtaken by misfortune, to whom should I turn for refuge?

“Appreciating the real motives of Archibald Cumming, I soon found that in spite of this knowledge, my secret inclination was to favor his suit; my heart, as it were, impelling me in defiance of my judgment. I both loved and despised Archibald; but the love was a feeble impulse of the woman, the contempt an emanation of character. I believed myself to be better, wiser, and purer than he;—but nature had made him a man and me a woman.

“Our intimacy increased, although I had given him cause to dislike me. By sarcasms, by sudden bursts of scorn and passion, by vehement charges of unfaithfulness, betraying other passions than the innocent anxiety of love—by all the alternations of fondness and abuse, trust and defiance, I schooled the heart of my suitor to self-control, and opened to him the weak points of my character and sex.

“During the interval between my seventeenth and twentieth years, Cumming grew rapidly in favor with my father. Cultivating popularity, he arranged political combinations, of which Mr.

Glinton was the hero, and was expected to reap the advantage. It seemed to be tacitly understood, that in the event of their success, I was to be given to Archibald as a reward for his services.

“Meanwhile the reflective principle developed itself strongly in my intellect. Almost unawares, I became a calculator of the motives of those around me. With the development of this faculty came also an increased contempt; and the circle of my friends was still further narrowed. In truth, I had no friend. The proud hated, and the humble feared me. I was, pardon me, sir, a beautiful young woman; but it was a greater pleasure then, to realize the advantage, than it now is to remember it as a possession of the past.”

Madame Bienaimé paused in her narrative. “She is, after all,” thought I, “a woman, and a vain one;” but with this reflection I was compelled to admit that she was still a paragon of elegance. Her features had that rounded loveliness which Nicholas Poussin gave to his female figures: they were not sensual. The delicious *nêz retroussé*, the square and marble forehead, the limpid eyes, the slightly double chin; the complexion, alternately transparent pale, or suffused with flitting shades of carnation, claimed each their individual beauty and expression, and the effect of all was exquisitely attractive and feminine. Madame was almost *petite* in stature, and her feet and hands, though not ridiculously small, were delicate and finely proportioned. She wore long sleeves, and a dress reaching to the throat; but I could divine enough, from the conformation of wrist, neck, and ankle, and the outline of the whole, to believe that she was mistress of charms which might fascinate colder men than myself. Gradually the thought arose, “Could it be that the supposed *roué*, the imagined woman of the *demimonde*, whom good society disowned; the patron saint of German musicians, bearded painters, and questionable lions, living invested with—but not in—an atmosphere of scandal, might possibly be, was even probably, an innocent and intelligent soul—eccentric, perhaps, but living her own life in her own way, and blameless in the sight of Heaven? I had thought her a Camille, coarse and tender—I seemed to find her a Recamier, pure, intellectual, and too far elevated above the scandalous crowd to pay attention to their comments, or conform to their timid requisitions.

While these thoughts or rather feelings, were contending with the vulgar and easy suspicions with which I had come armed, Madame Bienaimé resumed her narrative, not without a glance at myself, in which I fancied there was a mixture of anxiety and curiosity[.]

“Proceed, Madame,” I said; “I am sincerely interested in the history.”

“Amid this strife of painful emotions, unsettled by dispiriting experiences, I had but one motive: the desire to be loved. Strange as it may appear, I derived no comfort from the petting tenderness of my mother, whom pride obliged me to treat with respect. She was a worthy woman and fitted to her position in life.

“I found her often in tears, and she declined to explain the cause. She would embrace me, call me her dear and only daughter, but with these words came sighs, and she would turn away, as if in sudden discontent.

“I was not as other children to my parents. Their indulgence, which was excessive, especially on the part of my mother, seemed to be careless; they had secrets, and I was not allowed the privacy

of their chamber. I was rather free of the house than mistress of it; I seemed to be allowed and suffered in all degrees of favor, every caprice indulged; as one suffers the annoyance of a lapdog or monkey. Other parents treated their children with respect; I seemed to be rather an object of compassion. My father, without unkindness withheld his confidence, as if at some future day he might have to regret it. His conduct was uniform, and yet he seemed to have no pleasure in my presence. Insensibly, in my nineteenth year I began to prepare mentally for some sudden and great calamity, which it would require all my powers to sustain. I withdrew from society, and as I became more domestic, the unhappiness of my parents seemed to increase. I was impelled to seclude myself, and in solitude passed hours of each day in reading and the study of music. In French literature I was already skilled. The manners and modes of thought of the French people attracted me. I became French in feeling, and indulged the desire to visit Paris. Mr. Glinton had resided in Paris for several years previous to my birth, which by my mother's account—though she spoke seldom and with hesitation of those early days—had taken place in France on a journey of herself and Mr. Glinton from Paris to Marseilles.

“It is not true that all great secrets are at length known to the world, but I believe that in families it is nearly impossible to preserve them through a generation. On a certain day, in the conservatory, where I sat reading an essay of Voltaire, screened from sight by the foliage of a jessamine, I overheard a conversation between my mother and one of her intimate friends, of which I was the subject. My mother spoke of the change that had taken place in my habits. She justly dreaded the influence of my reading; and while she praised my appearance and demeanor, seemed in doing so to solicit sympathy for a grief. Friendly questions were asked. ‘She had no visible cause of dissatisfaction,’ but, with a degree of bitterness which surprised me, complained of my want of resemblance to herself. Her friend only laughed; my mother wept. There was a silence.

“There was a trait in her character which affected her treatment of me—a kind of artificial—shall I say, absurd piety, which did not interfere with her worldliness, but made her only a formal attendant upon religious services. She comprehended nothing of the spirit of religion; what goodness she had was a mere natural yearning. This religiosity made her believe that to love her child was an affair of will and a duty.

“She described her painful efforts to sustain a true affection for me. How carefully she had disguised her feelings, and how she wished I could be married and leave her house.

“The friend listened with unfeigned wonder; but made few comments. There was a mystery, something unexplained. My mother asked her if such conduct as mine would not be considered ample reason for dislike, and seemed anxious to know whether it would suffice, in the opinion of the world, as a justification of her own coldness and withdrawal. All this was guardedly delivered, and the friend much embarrassed by the confidence.

“The effect of this revelation upon myself was not as painful as I expected. It served only to strengthen, while it isolated, my character.

“I bore no resemblance to my mother. Her features were sharp and aquiline; mine, rounded and soft. Her eyes were blue, and her hair a pale auburn; mine, dark, with a noticeable foreign

expression. She rarely understood my sentiments. The intimacy with Archibald, whom she disliked, was painful to her.

“In the summer of my twentieth year, began those events which led to a complete separation between myself and parents. Cumming, by a series of adroit political combinations, had accomplished everything for Mr. Ginton, who was now called upon to fulfil his part of the tacit agreement. Meanwhile Cumming redoubled his attentions to myself, and in my solitude and real unhappiness I allowed him to occupy the position, and to use the proper freedoms of an accepted and honorable lover. His character had not changed, but he seemed to be my only refuge.

“Mr. Ginton was no sooner in the full enjoyment of his newly acquired power when his demeanor towards Cumming underwent a sudden revolution. I had read of the ingratitude of statesmen, and fearing to lose the protection of Cumming, I urged him to make immediate application to my father. While we conversed, Mr. Ginton entered the room and saw us together. His brow darkened, and the wiry hair seemed to bristle with anger. Archibald rose, and in his own inimitably winning manner asked the honor of an alliance with the family of Ginton. While he was speaking my father regarded me askance, with a cold and repulsive look, which I returned with calmness and determination. He saw that I could no longer be treated as a child; I was demanding a natural right and would not be refused.

“When Archibald had finished the handsomely worded speech, there was a silence. My father crossed his arms behind him, and paced slowly back and forth, with a gloomy scowl. At length he said: ‘Your request, Mr. Cumming, does not take me by surprise. I have noticed the rather bold way in which you have assumed to be the accepted suitor of my daughter.’

“‘I perceive sir,’ said Cumming, with a sudden and easy change from respectful to familiar, ‘that the subject is disagreeable to you. Miss Ginton is perhaps too young.’

“‘Too young, Mr. Cumming, for *you*; who are a man without fortune or position; promising, I admit, and full of talent, but an adventurer. Make yourself a position and a fortune, and you may again address—’ he would have said ‘my daughter,’ but my glance met his, as cold, searching, and repulsive as his own, and he said, ‘Miss Ginton.’

“Cumming did not exhibit passion. His was a nature too wily and profound for tragic ecstasies. He only reflected. His calmness fortified mine. I resolved on the instant to renounce everything in his favor.

“‘Ginton,’ said he, addressing my father in a calculating manner, ‘it seems we have not understood each other.’

“‘Sir,’ responded the other, ‘I presume that on such an occasion at least, I am to be spoken to with respect.’

“‘Pooh! Do not fret yourself, Ginton; I love Elöise and am resolved. As for my being an adventurer, and that sort of thing, why, as I have expended several years in procuring honors for you, it will be much easier for me, in view of my experience and connexions, to obtain as much,

or more for myself. You can give me your daughter or not: it is peace or war between us; treat us both well; give her to me quietly with a handsome allowance, and I remain your friend; refuse, play the brute, as you do sometimes, and I will pull you down as fast as I have built you up. Is it a bargain? As for family, I am a Cumming—you only a Ginton; I shall make an excellent and serviceable son-in-law, kindly used; otherwise, a disagreeable one.’

“My father was thunderstruck by the tone and insolence of Cumming’s attack. His pride rose to the rescue and summoned anger to his aid. ‘Out of my house, sir,’ he exclaimed. ‘Dare you insult the man of whom you ask such favors? I knew you for a tool and a villain, but you have shown yourself a fool and a madman. Begone, I say!’

“Cumming, who was standing near me, betrayed no agitation. With a kind and sweet smile he held out his hand to me. ‘Farewell then, Elöise,’ he said; ‘I fear I have compromised you with your father. As for me, I cannot dissemble. We have been badly used, Elöise.’

“‘I will go with you,’ I exclaimed starting to my feet.

“‘You shall not go,’ said or rather roared my father, foaming with violent rage. ‘Off, scoundrel! be off with you!’

“I made no answer, but placed my hand in Cumming’s, who smiled triumphantly.

“‘You see,’ said he, ‘the girl has a noble spirit; we are well mated, Luty,’ he added, keeping my hand and leading me towards the door. I glanced at the window and saw a carriage standing before the house. Had Cumming anticipated all? His prescience amazed me; his steely hardness and indifference, the bold and superior method he had taken to force an equality of position; his protecting manner, and the calm courage with which he met the anger of a man who had always regarded him as a tool: all these things suddenly assumed the shape of heroism, and I seemed to love him with intensity. I no longer had a father.

“‘Stay,’ said Ginton, suppressing his passion and retiring as if to control himself. He beckoned with his hand. He could not speak. At length the words burst again from his livid lips. ‘Stay, fools, I have a secret to tell you. It is important; you had better hear it.’

“He fell, rather than sank, upon a sofa. I returned and stood before him.

“‘Come back, Cumming,’ continued my father; ‘the secret is for both of you.’ Cumming came slowly, and stood near us.

[“‘That girl,’ said my father, slowly and in a low voice, pointing to me with his nervous, bony finger, ‘is not a Ginton. You, Archie Cumming, wished to be allied with our family; know then she is an adopted child, bought by myself to comfort Mrs. Ginton in France: she is some beggar’s brat, begotten in sin, and since then nurtured in idleness and luxury. Take her, Archie; she too is an adventurer; you *will be* well mated, and poor Mrs. Ginton much relieved. As for me—I have been intending these many years to be rid of her, and would have sent her away, but for pity. Read this.’ He then drew forth and handed a paper to Cumming, who unfolded and read

it, and passed it to me in silence. It was in French, dated Dijon, July, 18—.

“Received from Madame Marguerite Ginton, *Americaine*, the sum of five hundred francs; in return for which, I have intrusted to her care and motherly kindness my daughter, Eloise, aged twelve months, weaned.

“ELÖISE DEMAREST, bonne.

“Signature attested, &c.’

“I would have returned the paper to my father, but Cumming with a movement quick as thought took it from me.

“That receipt, sir, if you please,’ said Ginton, sharply, in his law voice.

“By no means,’ responded the other, with a cold laugh. ‘There is no occasion for this, for Mrs. Ginton will always take pleasure in testifying that, after adopting this girl, giving her a costly and useless education, and assuring all the world for nineteen years, that she is the child of yourself and wife, you have together turned her out of doors, denied her freedom of marriage, driven away her only protector, and denounced her as a beggar’s brat, bought like a slave. Farewell, great and good man; you see the scale has already turned. Come Luty; in going you violate no father’s command.’

“Why was it that a thrill of pity caused me once again, as we passed out of the room, to look back? Large tears were rolling down the rugged cheeks of him I had venerated as a father. He gazed after me with remorseful and penitent eyes, and I seemed to see in them something of paternal sorrow. His lips quivered, he rose as if to follow, but sunk back again, covering his face with his hands.

“Cumming hurried me away. We entered the carriage, and for the first time for years, I wept; but these tears did not relieve the grief that almost crushed my heart.

“We drove on through several streets of the city, until I ceased to recognise the houses. It then flashed over me, by I knew not what intimation, that my relation to Archibald Cumming had been changed, almost reversed, by the disclosure in regard to my parentage. I was no longer a woman of family, the heir of influential parents, but a dependent outcast, without friends, relations, or the means of livelihood. In the society where I was educated, much could be learned of the dangers that surround the friendless and the feeble of my own sex. My confidence in Cumming had never been great. I knew that he was ambitious, and in many things regardless of conscience or of honour.

“Leaving the house of Mr. Ginton under the protection of this man, if I entered any other but one where I was known, without scandal, under the eyes and in the company of persons equal to those whom I had left, my reputation would be lost. Friends, I had none. Not one of Mr. Ginton’s fashionable acquaintances would receive me, as Cumming’s protégé.

“I remembered when a child, having been taken to the house of Mr. Pleasants, and with an emotion of security, I resolved to throw myself upon his protection. It is not necessary for me to describe this admirable man, whose soul, tempered equally by prudence and tenderness, expands continually with the warmth of a genial charity. I remembered the pure and saintly Isabelle, my equal in age, and rank, but in all virtues my superior. They would receive the poor outcast; they would believe her; would even provide out of their abundant wealth without stint, for her necessities; and better still, would enable her to become independent even of themselves.

“While I was completing this design, the carriage stopped before a house in an obscure part of the city. Cumming smiled furtively as he announced to me that in this house, which he said was his own, I should be secure under his protection. I then told him of my resolution, and was not surprised at the cold and even angry manner with which he received it. Seeing me resolute, however, he leaped hastily from the carriage, closed the door, and ordered the coachman to leave me at Mr. Pleasants’. ‘I will call tomorrow,’ said Cumming, as the carriage drove away. The tone of his voice alone would have made me distrust him.

“Through life I have been guided in important actions by impulses so sudden and irresistible, they have seemed to me the suggestions of a good genius. These have sometimes led me into situations of apparent danger, but in their final result I have implicit faith.

“I was kindly and courteously received by Isabelle Pleasants, who wept with unfeigned sympathy, when, almost without emotion I related my painful history. We were only once playmates in childhood, but she was glad to renew the acquaintance. Mr. Pleasants gave his consent to my remaining, and I was conducted to the chamber of Isabelle, and told by her to use all that it contained, and her purse beside, as my own.

“Love at first sight is not the only passion of quick birth. Anger, jealousy, hatred, the sense of insult, the discovery of faithlessness, the motives of avarice, and the ideas of genius, flash through the brain and heart with the suddenness of lightning. There are even friendships, however slow the aftergrowth of these, which arise at view. So was it with the friendship of Isabelle Pleasants and myself. She gazed continually upon my eyes, that day, and at night would not let me go from her. Again, and again, she kissed me with simple kindness, and begged to know wherein she could be of service. For the first time in life I recognised the power of affection in a pure and pious heart.

“The next morning Cumming came early. I suppressed all signs of my happiness, the first delicious fruit of newfound liberty and love, which struggled for expression in my countenance. I met Cumming with a composed air; extended my hand to him, but withdrew coldly from his warmer salutation. I thanked him for his friendly defence of me, seemed to forget the meditated treachery, and declined his further assistance. He was disturbed, and pressed for an explanation. I replied by intimating a wish that our acquaintance might be discontinued. It could be of no benefit to either.

“Archibald regarded me attentively; his eyes seemed to cling to mine with a cold eagerness. Had it not been for a new sense of the power of goodness which animated my will, and gave me the power of resistance, I should have failed. But the spirit of Isabelle Pleasants had entered into

fellowship with mine, and seemed to hover near me with a protecting influence.

“At length his regard seemed to be exhausted. The bold glances became timid and abased.

“‘Elöise,’ he said, in a voice modulated with an art which disguised the falseness of the tone—‘Elöise, for this cold and cruel repulse I have wasted my best years in vain endeavors to deserve your favor.’

“‘You had many motives,’ I answered; ‘love was the least. Ambition, power, and fortune were stronger stimulants than love.’

“A flash of satisfaction passed over his features, and he again looked at me confidently. I had yielded to him, he thought, the keynote of persuasion—had disclosed the secret cause of discontent. He had only to persuade me of his sincerity, and all would be well. Subduing more and more the natural fierceness of his spirit, he replied, with well-affected timidity—‘Intelligent as you are, Elöise, can you then have mistaken the cause for the effect—love for ambition? It was love that made me ambitious, and not ambition that caused my love.’

“I was struck with the seeming justice and subtlety of the defence. I had, then, admitted a bond of connexion; I, too, had been to blame. Necessity had forced me, too, to seek a protector in him; and for the time I had mistaken a feeling of dependence for an unselfish affection. Might not that feeling become a true bond? Was he to blame for a similar fault? Was it not better for two who understood each other, both worldly, both faulty, to make one life; and by forgiving and being forgiven, establish a true alliance? Was there no possibility of good in that?

“To intimate a suspicion of his honor at such a moment would be ungenerous.

“‘You can come tomorrow,’ I said. ‘At present it is impossible for me to speak.’ He left me without raising his eyes or bidding farewell; a ruse that nearly conquered my feeble will. Cumming had learned the homely maxim that ‘with women and doors it is best to use gentleness.’ Had it not been for a latent fear of dishonor, I should have yielded then.

“An interval of several days elapsed before he again presented himself; and this time he came armed with an indifference that was natural to him, or at least easier to assume than mock humility. Was it that these sudden and unexpected changes served to pique my curiosity? I became nervously anxious to know his real feelings towards me. I was mortified with the show of a cheerful scorn, which seemed to hint the existence of interior resources, deeper and stronger than I could conceive. It was not a humble *inamorato*, but one who could even live without me—distressing thought!—whom I was rejecting.

“He inquired kindly about my prospects, wished to know if *he* could be of service; talked like an elder brother; spoke of himself as if he had already learned fortitude, and scorned to solicit either of love or fortune favors not freely offered. He had learned, he said, seeming to speak only of other prospects, ‘to wait and hope.’

“Moved by new and painful emotions, I found that the tears were stealing into my eyes. I longed

to express the struggling sympathy. We were indeed a sister and brother in misfortune. His eyes sought and dwelt upon mine. He held out both his hands with a smile.

“While I allowed Archibald Cumming to fold me again to his heart, while his lips impressed a kiss upon my forehead, an imploring and passionate voice sounded in my thoughts. It was the voice of my father, who appeared, as at the instant of our separation, seeming to entreat me not to yield myself to his great enemy—to one who lived only to destroy him, and who had begun the work of ruin by attempting my dishonor.

“‘There is one imperative condition,’ I said, withdrawing from his embrace, ‘and that is, that you forgive my father, forget *his* injury to you, and your own hatred of him.’

“‘Elöise, you have no father!’ he exclaimed, with an accent fierce and natural. I saw at once the folly and weakness of my conduct. I was again free and self-possessed.

“‘You will, then, follow revenge?’

“‘While I live.’

“‘Why do you hate him?’

“‘Because he wished to destroy both you and me—because,’ he continued, bursting into ungovernable rage and curses, ‘because I hate him for his ingratitude, his contempt. Fool—dog that he is—I, to be a tool, used and rejected, cheated, scorned, and the dishonor of his house thrust upon *me*, with contempt. I, Archie Cumming, his main help, his builder, master, brain and hand; he maltreat *me*; *He!* Life itself is not long enough for revenge. And *you*, Elöise, whom he calls a “beggar’s brat, nursed in idleness and luxury,” you, intelligent, farseeing as you are, allow this hoary tyrant, this Turk, to thrust you from his roof, throw you upon the compassion of the world.’

“‘And,’ I added calmly, ‘upon the honor of a Cumming.’

“Cumming saw his error, but it was too late to recover the lost ground.

“‘Elöise,’ he exclaimed, ‘you are a woman without heart; insensible to injury as to kindness.’

“‘And therefore the less fitted to be a *companion* to you, Archibald.’

“The old sinister smile crept over his features; the cold eyes glistened with a chilling lustre.’

“‘*My* honor,’ said he, ‘is one with my success.’

“‘You are then as much my enemy as you are my father’s?’

“‘You mean to say that I have failed in this instance. Well, Elöise, I accept the alternative. You have repelled me often, first as an honorable lover, and afterwards, again, as a lover. I say, then,

as I said to him, let the issue come. Too much has passed, it seems, to make love possible. But,' he added, gradually assuming the natural familiar manner which had so enraged my father, 'there are other motives than love; and if you are not susceptible to them, still you may feel their consequences in others. Farewell, Miss—Miss—what shall I call you,' said he, laughing in his gay style.

“Demarest is my name, sir; the name of my mother.’

“Well, good day, Miss Demarest. We shall see whether a man’s wit or a woman’s will is the stronger; prosperity attend you.’

“Scarcely had I recovered from the shock of this interview, when my fortitude was again tried and my pride wounded more deeply than before. A paragraph appeared in the scandalous journals of the city, which described the elopement of Miss Elöise Ginton from her father’s house, in company with some person unknown, who had taken her to a lodging in a suspected neighborhood. That the young lady had not since made her appearance in society, but was probably living under an assumed name. Charitable persons were ‘earnestly desired’ to send information of her whereabouts to Mr. Ginton, ‘who,’ it was added, ‘was in great affliction for the loss of his only daughter and heir.’

“The wicked ingenuity of this publication, in which I recognised the work of my own and my father’s enemy, gave promise of a long continued and remorseless persecution. I could make no defense without exposing the weakness and cruelty of my father, whom it was impossible for me not to honor as a parent, notwithstanding the treatment I had received from him. Isabelle and Mr. Pleasants, at my earnest entreaty, promised to keep silence. It was necessary for me to hurry my departure from the city. A lady going to Paris with her children required such services as it was in my power to render. After my last interview with Cumming, I adopted the name of my real mother. I was now known only as Elöise Demarest.

“During the first year of our residence in Paris my knowledge of the French language and the facility with which I adopted the tone and habits of the Parisians, gave me influence with my employer, who was of a generous but indolent temper. She even allowed me the unusual privilege of assisting her to receive visitors, and from the rank of a governess I gradually assumed the position of a friend and companion. A tolerable voice and some knowledge of music enabled me to draw to her salöns a society to which she aspired, but was unskilled to entertain. I mean the society of artists and litterateurs. I was French by nature, artistically educated, and did not wish to be esteemed for any adventitious advantages. I became popular; my society was sought by persons who adorned wealth and rank with taste and intellect. It was soon in my power to secure a position. In my twenty-second year I accepted the friendship and establishment of Monsieur Bienaimé, a gentleman of good family, whose subsequent death left me sole mistress of an ample fortune.

“You wish to make a delicate inquiry. No, I am ignorant of that rare happiness which only love can confer. I comprehend it only by instinct. It was a point of resemblance between Isabelle and myself. We are defective; perhaps unhappy; but it is our destiny and we are resigned,” said the beautiful Bienaimé, regarding me with a smile so ravishingly sweet and simple, my heart

bounded with delight. But it was the delight only of admiration and respect; sentiments which may follow but rarely proceed the passion.

“Will Madame allow me to express my desire to fulfil every wish which she may have formed in regard to Isabelle Pleasants?” I said, feeling now thoroughly ashamed of my unjust skepticism. She thanked me and proceeded.

“Soon after my marriage an opportunity occurred of visiting Dijon. A poor woman named Elöise Demarest had formerly lived there, but for ten years or more nothing had been seen of her. The hotel keeper informed me that there was a small cottage in the suburbs formerly occupied by her. ‘It was a singular cottage,’ he said, ‘unlike any other in the vicinity.’ With emotions too painful to describe, I stood at last on the threshold of my birthplace, the home of my mother. I passed from room to room, followed by a talkative woman who wearied me with gossip about the occupants who had preceded her. But my emotions were intensified by discovering that the house was not French, but American in structure. None but an American could have designed it.

“This revelation engendered a strange and terrible suspicion, which it became a necessity of my existence to establish or dispel. To secure possession by purchase of my mother’s homestead and my own birthplace was not difficult.

“On my return to the hotel one day, after giving orders for the restoration of the house and garden, the landlord informed me that a *negociant* had just come from Paris, who, like myself, was making diligent inquiries for one Elöise Demarest, ‘original occupant of the American cottage at Dijon.’ The man was pointed out to me, and I recognised in him a police detective of Paris. I sent for this man. His object in coming to Dijon was publicly known. I offered to double his reward if he succeeded, and added a *douceur* to be permitted to see his memoranda. The application was successful. He showed me a memorandum book on one page of which was written in a handwriting which I shuddered to recognise:—‘Elöise Demarest—daughter of an Italian artist at Dijon, who died leaving her an orphan—became the mistress and housekeeper of a Mr. Ginton, an American, unmarried, who resided two years in Dijon and Paris; returned to America; married and brought his wife with him to France. Child by Elöise Demarest, twelve months old, adopted by Mrs. Ginton—she being ignorant of its parentage. Elöise Demarest, the mistress of Ginton, supposed to be still living, resided several years in the American cottage, until the annuity sent her from America was suspended. Disappeared. Is said to be a blonde—eighteen years of age at the time of the adoption of her daughter.’ The handwriting was that of Archibald Cumming.

“Six hours after his arrival in Paris, Cumming had sent the agent in search of evidence to assist in the ruin of my father. So much more prompt than those of love are the motives of revenge. Only four years had elapsed since Cumming and my father became enemies. Already the younger man had risen to eminence. He was the manager of a secret mission for your government.

“My mother was still only forty-two years of age. I had reason to hope that she yet lived. I returned to Paris, and there heard much of Cumming, who impressed all with the brilliancy and tact of his conversation. We recognised and silently avoided each other. My mother had

meanwhile been traced to Marseilles, and back again to Havre; at both places she had attempted to get a passage to New York, but failed for want of means. Month after month I prosecuted the search in Paris, to which city she had returned from Havre. Several persons named Elöise Demarest were discovered, but not the one we were in search of.

“‘One third of our lives,’ says Goethe, ‘is controlled by accident,’ but I believe that many events which seem to us accidental, result from powers unknown to us, working consciously in our favor or against us. That my mother is now living with me under my own roof is surely the *bienfaisance*, the well-doing of a beneficent power.

“In spite of my father’s unnatural treatment of me, the filial passion burned strongly in my heart. I had established a correspondence with a trusty agent in New York, who informed me of all that happened in my father’s family[.] At length I heard that Mrs. Ginton had died suddenly, on the receipt of certain attestations sent to her from Paris by ‘an unknown hand,’ through which she learned that her former adopted child, who had left her house in company with a seducer, was the natural daughter of her own husband.

“My correspondent, in a guarded and respectful manner, intimated his own knowledge of certain combinations formed against my father; whose high position had not saved him from calumny. He was charged with criminal corruption in his public life; with the exile and ruin of his only daughter; with having caused the death of his wife. To these were added intimations of a determination on the part of his enemies—against whom he was contending in sullen despair—to gather from his past history evidences of fraud and criminality, and with these to drive him beyond the pale of public sympathy and credit. Foremost in the rank of his enemies stood the former friend and ally, Archibald Cumming; now a person of mark, with all the appliances of wealth and popularity at his command. It was needed on his part only to bring forward a witness to his cruel accusations, and the work of ruin would be accomplished. Mr. Ginton would then fall at once from his pinnacle of honor, and become an outcast, as he was already a bankrupt.

“After completing the secret arrangements necessary to secure my father from poverty, I resolved upon a journey through Switzerland, in company with some artist friends whose society was always agreeable to me.

“Why is it that, since my first interview with Isabelle Pleasants, my life has been almost an unruffled tide of happiness and peace? Not even in the two years of my formal married life did anything occur to interrupt this golden stream.”

“Happiness is not earned,” I exclaimed, interrupting the charming narrator, whose eyes gave mine a sympathetic glance; “it is the free gift of heaven.”

“This journey was perhaps the most pleasurable of my life. The air, the sky, the earth itself, all whom I met, or who conversed with me, seemed to be angelic messengers sent to offer me hourly some new joy. The hope of finding my mother, and, if possible, to share with her a portion of my own content, seemed to be the groundwork of my satisfaction.

“Our party consisted of four persons, two friends of my own sex, and one a German art student,

who went as our companion and protector. As our carriage was entering one of the defiles of the lower Unterwalden, I saw in front of me two persons on horseback, in one of whom I recognised the square shoulders and masculine bearing of Archibald Cumming. His companion was the police detective whom I had met at Dijon. To be recognised by Cumming was to be defeated in my search.

“With a suitable apology to my companions, I ordered the carriage to return, and procured two horses at the inn—one for my German friend and one for myself. In two hours’ time we had again overtaken Cumming and his companion. The latter person lagged in the rear to learn who we might be that followed him. Bidding my companion ride slowly, I pushed my horse, and overtaking the detective at an angle of the road, beckoned to him to join me. He did this without being observed by Cumming, who was far in advance, and as we turned aside we were hidden from his view.

“‘Were you not liberally paid,’ said I; ‘then why have you deserted me?’

“‘By order of the Government, Madame.’

“‘Cumming has done this?’

“‘Yes.’

“‘And you have discovered the whereabouts of Elöise Demarest?’

“‘I have.’

“‘How much, then, for the information?’

“‘Madame will not betray?’

“‘Of course not. It is you who betray, not I.’

“‘Five thousand francs.’

“‘Very well; give me the information in writing.’

“‘Impossible! Madame must confide in my honor. I have an order for the arrest of Madame Demarest. She is in a cottage not five miles hence. I shall take her to Paris. She will then go to New York with Mr. Cumming. I will notify Madame of her arrival in Paris.’

“‘And you will be secret?’

“The detective bowed, placing his hand on his heart, and rode away.

“I tore rather than rode back to the hotel, and leaving my companions to pursue their journey alone, set off for Paris immediately, making them promise to give no information to any person

of my return. The second night after my return, the detective presented himself.

“‘Madame is ill,’ he said, looking at me with surprise. For a week I had neither eaten nor slept more than enough to sustain life.

“‘Is she here?’

“‘She waits in the antechamber.’

“‘Is it the person I seek?’

“‘The same—this time there is no error.’

“‘Does she know her daughter is living?’

“‘She knows nothing.’

“I placed the five thousand francs in the hands of the detective. He retired, and a moment after, a fair, sad-looking woman entered, dressed in the costume of a Swiss *bonne* or nurse. I asked her to be seated.”

The large eyes of Madame Bienaimé became suffused, and tears irrepressible rolled down her cheeks. She paused, sobbing.

“*Pardon, monsieur,*” she said, “*c’est le rêve de ma vie qui s’accomplit.*”

“It was great happiness,” she continued, smiling through her tears—“it was great happiness to see my poor *bonne*, my own mother, looking so fair, so beautiful. I maintained, however, great composure of manner,” she said, bursting into another fit of sobbing and tears—“great composure of manner. I did not weep at all,” she said, quieting herself, and wiping the tears from her eyes.

“It was such wonderful happiness, sir, to have a mother. She was a blonde still, but her features were of beautiful Italy. She looked at me with a quiet wonder.

“‘Your name,’ said I, ‘is Elöise Demarest?’

“She assented.

“‘And you are going to America?’

“‘I am, madame.’

“‘Do you believe, then, that he will receive you again?’

“‘You take an unusual liberty,’ she said, rising with a cold and dignified manner. ‘If madame has

no further business, I had better retire.’

“I was charmed with this haughtiness of my mother: it inspired me with that secret veneration which is necessary to filial love.

“‘Pardon me,’ I said; ‘when you have heard all, you will forgive all. I am well acquainted with the family of Mr. Ginton.’

“She seated herself again, pale and listening.

“‘You knew *him*, then?’

“‘I have known him since my childhood.’

“‘Are you his friend?’ she said, with an inquisitive and chilling glance.

“‘His and yours. You do not yet know my name?’

“‘No, madame.’

“‘Before my marriage it was Elöise Demarest.’

“A flash of secret recognition, like lambent lightning, passed over the face of my mother. She became paler, but did not move or speak. Her regard wandered over my person.

“‘I am the adopted daughter of Mrs. Ginton: it became necessary for me to leave the family of Mr. Ginton. I then assumed the name of my mother.’

“‘Where were you born?’

“‘At Dijon, in the American Cottage. I was sold by my mother to Mrs. Ginton.[’]

“‘It is false, Elöise!’ exclaimed my mother, rising and coming towards me, her arms outstretched and her face convulsed with the maternal passion. ‘I was miserably ill, and signed something—a paper, and you were taken from me, under promise of return. It was a base and wicked deception: I will not go back to him!’

“‘Remain with me, then, mother; we will comfort each other.’” * * *

The beautiful narrator again paused in her story, and I was left to imagine what she found it impossible to describe.

“‘Did not Cumming, then, betray the secret of your parentage in Paris?’” I said.

“‘No; it would have been dangerous for him to breathe a word against me there, nor did it suit the purity of his malice, if I may so express it, to give me the advantage of a romantic history. He

discontinued the pursuit in Paris, learning, what I wished him to know, that I intended to return with my mother to New York. On my arrival here, many years ago, in company with my mother, I sent for Cumming, and reproached him for the continued and insatiable malice of his conduct. With mild persuasions I strove against the bitterness of his spirit, and obtained at last an amnesty for my father. Vengeance was satiated, and the avenger weary of pursuit. Death overtook him unawares, in the midst of his prosperity, and his last hours were passed in penitence and reconciliation with myself.”

“And your father?”

“I have never made myself known to him. It would have been too painful for both. There was no bond of union betwixt me and him. Soon after the death of our enemy, I returned to France. This is my second visit to New York, and here I shall remain for a time.”

How the father of Elöise, aided by the secret bounty of his daughter, recovered in some degree his position and respectability, not knowing by what means he was sustained; how to this day, passing the “Hotel Bienaimé,” in —st Street, the old man, white-haired and stooping, looks up wondering at its magnificence, ignorant that the much-scandalized lady of the mansion is his rejected and ill-used Elöise; of these things I shall make no history, since they were not included in the narrative of my friend.

I assisted at the private interview between Isabelle Pleasants and the beautiful Bienaimé. The old friendship was renewed. The affair leaked out through the jealousy of the unfortunate Bontemps, who has denounced me as a traitor, both in love and friendship. Sarcastic and witty observations pass current upon the three of us; but in spite of these, the Pleasants’ family have arranged a traveling party with Elöise and myself: we are to visit Switzerland. What may after take place, heaven only knows. Madame is willing to endure the irksome formalities of another marriage, provided the officiating clergyman be a French priest. Singular taste!—but then she is naturally eccentric.

W.

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