

The gentle voice pursued:

"Why should we in the compass of a pale  
Keep law, and form, and due proportion  
Showing, as in model, our firm estate,  
When our sea-walled garden, the whole  
land,  
Is full of weeds—?"

"But!" said Rasselas, "suppose that the prince of a royal house—since we have played at figures so long—suppose he finds himself incapable even of self-government; suppose him, since, his earliest memory, weighed in the balance and found, by those who understood those things, wanting. Suppose him to find a little kingdom—little, and yet great, too—that he thinks he can understand and help to govern well, and learn to govern himself in the process—and you know how well Horace liked his Sabine farm, sir. I'm not bringing up my best argument—he lifted Inez's hand to his lips. "I haven't exactly meant any deception. You know all about it, I see, and must have known all along."

But Inez drew away from him, and her face was white, as she said: "Who are you?"

"I hardly know," said Rasselas, sadly. "Over there"—he pointed toward the shining roofs and chimneys of the great house—"they called me by a name that I didn't like, and when I was a little boy I tried to change it."

"And what is it they call you over there?"

"She was standing by her father now, leaning a little, as for support, on his bent shoulders. The manner of Rasselas sank ignobly to the gloomy freeness of a detected thief.

"What's the use of asking that. Your father knew all along, and you must have guessed by now. I'm Harold Marlowe."

"The man I thought of marrying," said Inez slowly, "had a different name, and he was poor. He was different, I think, in a number of ways." And she turned towards the house.

It did not occur to Rasselas to try further self-justification. She did not glance back at all, but went slowly on with drooping head. The kitten, who had been cutting the flying leaves up and down the path, frisked at her skirt, and got in the way of her feet with careless good humour.

Rasselas looked after her until the door closed, then dropped his head in dejected silence. On raising his troubled eyes, he was amazed and somewhat offended to find the old man regarding him with a smile that was both amused and kindly. When one has just acted out what one supposes to be his life's high tragedy, nothing cuts deeper than a spectator's smile.

"I seem to have made an ass of myself," he said, selfish in his first thought.

"Why," said the poet, "not so bad—no—not more than most young men. I wouldn't worry about that aspect of it."

"It was child's play at first—and—this summer—I didn't see my way to deceive her—she liked me as the gardener's nephew—as a man rather below her, you see, in station. I know well enough how below her I am in every way, but I was afraid that as Harold Marlowe she might not let me help—and—you can't understand what it's been for me—this

digging around in the plants, and her showing me how to do things."

"Two in a garden—yes—the old plot." "I haven't been posing as the Lord of Burleigh or—or Tophetia. Oh, damn it! If you don't understand, it's no use my trying to explain. Every word I say makes me out more of a cad."

"I understand. Didn't I join in your little play, when you jumped out of the Happy Valley into the poor child's moon-flower bed, destroying her little dreams and plans? I let you stay and play, didn't I? And I let your distracted parents look for you—it did them no harm—" He chuckled, then by degrees grew serious and a little sad. "I think your greatest reason for the deception is the one you refrain from mentioning through delicacy—the disapproval of Abyssinia."

"Anything I do," groaned Rasselas, "is unpopular over there."

"You think you are misjudged?"

"I don't know. I have a better opinion of myself than they have of me—or I had until a few minutes ago." He looked wistfully at Inez's window, where the shade had been drawn down.

"I don't know anything about finance. To please them I tried to learn a little while ago, and blundered into a loss so heavy that—well, my father came so near disowning me then that I suppose it wouldn't be safe to cross him again. My notion was to do as I liked for once—to marry Inez and work on your farm here. It seemed as if we could be happy and as if I could make it pay, even if my father did cut me off entirely. I can reason about vegetables and small sums, even if I can't about millions and corporations and all that. One may be able to recite the multiplication table and do sums in long division, and yet make a poor fist at analytics."

"Yet it seems," the poet said doubtfully, "as if there were a question of responsibility. The kingdoms of to-day, though not called kingdoms, are so none the less, and those who are born to power—well, there was a king who, during a battle, sat still and envied the shepherds. Doubtless he would have made a better shepherd than king, and yet, being a king—"

"Being what he was, he ought to have resigned, abdicated—don't you think, sir?"

"Oh, what a pity it is that he has not so trimmed and dressed his head."

As he said this, he sighed.

"There are so many," sighed Rasselas, "who can trim and dress it better than he can; his younger brother, for example."

The poet went on: "I lived in a Happy Valley once, and I shirked it in something the way you want to do; but, then, you aren't a poet—are you?"

"No, indeed!" said Rasselas eagerly. "And perhaps to be happy is a duty, though the moralists don't teach so, and, as you say, this little farm is big enough to be happy in—if that were all. Big enough for you and Inez, as it was for me—and—another."

"But you heard what she said just now. It's all over. There's no use in argument."

"No, not in argument, but it may not be all over. Go back to Abyssinia for a while, and think it over. Make sure, too, whether you have a duty there

that you are shirking. I think Inez has some notion about that."

"If only you won't send me away for ever."

"No, not forever." The snow was sudden and unwholesome in the hollows between bare ridges and hemlocks, and a tremendous wind boomed in the naked trees. It was dark and rainy, neither spring nor winter, desolate beyond all other seasons.

The poet lay back in a Morris chair, his feet on a tabouret, pillows tucked under him at every possible angle, a gay Afghan over his long, thin legs. Breathing had become a serious matter with him which he was in haste to be done with as soon as might be. He seemed listening as if for some other sound than the wind, and watched Inez anxiously and furtively as she prepared his gruel over the coals in the fireplace.

"Inez."

"Yes, dearest."

"Mustn't make too much of things that don't really matter. Sometimes—it's better not to hold too rigidly to principles—they may be only—prejudices."

"Oh, papa, dear—surely right is right."

"Not always." He smiled whimsically. "I can't argue, though—now—you'll just have to accept—my conclusions."

"Don't ask me to forgive him, papa."

"Forgive—no. Stevenson says he doesn't know what forgiveness is. There isn't any such thing."

"You've made me burn your gruel, dear. I'll make some more, and you mustn't talk to me about him this time."

"I must talk—while I can. Wasn't that a step on the porch?"

"It was the wind. Nobody would come in such weather."

"Inez—" he raised himself up with difficulty and looked at her imploringly—"take what life offers—when it offers. Don't let happiness pass by for the sake of a whim. Happiness is a duty when it comes. It doesn't often come—not real happiness. I'm sure some one knocked."

"The wind has knocked all day, but I'll make sure." The knock was unmistakable this time. At first it had been timid, but was imperious at last, and when she opened the door the wind and rain entered noisily, but with them a young man, wet and stormy as young Spring itself, who threw his arms about her and kissed her.

And it was rather astonishing, if one thought of the manner in which she had dismissed him, how quietly her hands, clasped together behind his neck, and how meek her pale face was under his kisses.

"Did papa send for you?" she said at last.

"Yes. But I was ready to come anyway."

"Perhaps he is right. Come in and talk to him while I make his gruel."

"Good evening, Mr.—Johnson," said the poet tremulously. "I trust all is well in Abyssinia?"

"You will be pleased to know, sir, that I have made my peace with Abyssinia to such an extent that I can do as I like in the matter of most importance to me. I am cut off with a shilling at my own request, and the shilling is of moderately generous proportions."

Inez brought the gruel.

"I hope you aren't hungry?" smiled the poet; "if you are, I'm afraid you'll

have to put up with gruel. We've got out of the way of eating much else of late. I can't, and Inez is too lazy to cook just for herself."

"There's bacon," said Inez, shyly, "and eggs, I think." The hens were cackling this morning. And it won't take long to make biscuit."

"I'm more hungry for this than anything else—" Rasselas kissed her again—eyes, hair, and mouth, while her father smiled approval.

And the storm blustered savagely at doors and windows; but people who are contented with gruel, bacon, and eggs, and each other, are not troubled by such matters.

Once the poet, turning his dim eyes upon the trickling panes, observed cheerfully: "This is a real spring rain."

No one replying, he intelligently regarded the two cooks who were manipulating the frying pan over the coals, and making sad work of that frugal dinner by reason of their happy absent-mindedness.

"Without doubt, happiness is a duty," he said softly.

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