

should have chosen such a one. Yet she never could explain or account for the curious choice of a woman.

After a while, from sheer force of habit again, he got into his bathing suit. He caught sight of himself in the tiny scamed bit of looking-glass that hung among the not-over-delicate caricatures of French by English, English by French, which had apparently occupied many holiday-making schoolboys of both nations. He did not look as if he had had a blow. He looked much as usual, he thought to himself with a certain bitterness, not at all as though he had the choice before him of shooting himself or of marrying Mary Grey. Poor little girl, he thought: that she should be the alternative. She was too good to be married because another woman had broken his heart.

He was running along the sands now bare-headed, in his ringed bathing costume, a graceful athletic figure.

His eyes went towards the bathing-tent. He was too late for Flora. She was coming back from the sea.

Then he saw her turn sharply and look out to sea. There was an elderly Frenchwoman bathing in the shallow water near the shore, that is, if one might call it bathing, which consisted in bobbing up and down in the water barely reached her knees.

But what grotesque exercise was she doing at this moment? She seemed to have dropped on her knees in the water, and to be extending her hands towards Heaven. Not a sound came on the wind but the cry of gulls. The beach was full of merry babble and laughter, the shouting of children at their play, the calling of vivacious French people one to another.

Suddenly he understood. Not another soul on the beach seemed to know what was happening. The Frenchwoman—why, it was Madame D'Aurigny. And those bobbing heads like corks on the surface of the water some distance out—they were drifting down channel. They were the girls he had been speaking to half an hour ago—Therese and Marie, drowning before everyone's eyes.

He uttered one hoarse cry, and ran

like a madman, like an athlete. Fortunately he had not forgotten his old form at Oxford. He saw nothing but those bobbing heads out in the sea, and Flora plunging into the water towards them. She must not go; she would be drowned herself; no woman could breast that current. Oh, heroic soul, she was going. He must stop her, must turn her back. If she should drown, why, he had done well to love her even if he must lose her. Not one woman in a thousand would have been so brave.

"No! no!" he shouted, overtaking her in the shallow water. "I shall have to save you, and they will be drowned."

She understood and let him pass her, and stood with the water about her feet, her hands clasped a moment. Then she saw the mother in her paralysis of terror and ran to her.

"They will be saved," she cried. "They will be saved! He is so strong and brave. See, he has reached one of them. He is holding her; he is coming back. Ah!"

Something white flashed by her in the sunlight. It was the sailor who was in charge of the bathing, who had fled through the astonished people on the beach, stripping off his garments as he went till he entered the water stark naked. Portel Saint Louis had not had such a sensation for long, and no one remembered to be scandalised at this unprecedented behaviour.

Indeed, Robert Herrick and Gausset, as the bathing-man was called, were the heroes of the hour. Herrick had been almost drowned by Therese's long hair, which had coiled itself about him, but he brought her out still breathing, although it took a good deal of work over the two girls before they were finally resuscitated.

It was the kind of thing Herrick detested. He walked through the crowd as though he were merely returning from bathing, with a face that forbade praises, and, having dressed himself, only waited to hear that the girls were all right before starting for a long walk over the sand hills to a distant village, where he lunched on oysters and white wine, an omelette, a salad, and a plate

of cold ham; and was rather ashamed to find he could eat with appetite, although he had lost Flora.

He felt miserable enough, however, as he recrossed the sand hills in the pink after-glow, when all the miles and miles of downs and dunes were grey and rosy in the reflection of the sky. He had made up his mind to one thing: he was going back to England. He would go to-morrow, and escape Madame D'Aurigny's gratitude, and the fuss about a very common matter, which he dreaded of all things.

He let himself into the little house, the green door of which opened on the sitting-room. The windows were open on the steep, ill-paved little street, only the jugs of great hollyhocks to screen the room from the passer-by. Madame Polle had not been in to light the lamp, and the room glimmered in dusk with only the wall standing out of the shadows.

Someone who had been sitting by the window stood up as he came in. It was Flora in a pink frock, which showed in the dusk like the ashes of roses into which the sunset had lately fallen.

"I wanted to see you," she said tremulously, "and Madame Polle would have me wait."

"I am sorry you have had to wait for me," he said with grave courtesy, although his heart was beating wildly. Why had she come to him like this?

"I have been sitting with Therese," she said. "They are both as well as possible, but of course suffering from shock. Madame D'Aurigny," she laughed shyly—"You should hear the things she says about you."

He stirred uneasily. "It was the chance that I was going in to bathe," he said. "Gausset did better than I—and you, you would have drowned yourself in the attempt to save them."

"I know," she said. "Don't you praise me for stopping still when I was told I knew I should have embarrassed you."

"I should have had to save you, of course," he said simply: the dusk hid

the colour that came to her cheek at his speech.

"Therese has told me," she said with a sudden timidity, "that—there was something she told you—just before: it was a mistake, of course; and her mind has been in trouble about it. She asked me to tell you that—that it was not true—that I was engaged to Captain Haliburton. I promised I would tell you to-night. That is why I waited for you."

He drew a long breath, as though a weight had been rolled off him.

"I am obliged to Mademoiselle Therese for correcting the mistake," he said. And then, his passion overcoming his old scruples, "I have been in hell ever since I heard it."

He was startled at the boldness of his own speech when he had made it. The shadows were deeper in the room now. She stood up before him glimmering, and her face drooped like a white rose.

"If it is not Haliburton it will be someone else," he said, almost roughly. Suddenly her hands went out in the darkness, and fluttered to his breast.

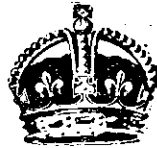
"It will never be anyone else," she said in a whisper. "I have loved one man for eight years, and he has never asked me for his love."

He caught her hands in his. "Flora!" he cried.

"Ah!" she said. "Do you understand at last, To think that I should have to tell you!"

And then Madame Polle brought in the lamp.

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