

'Hush! Hush!' remonstrated he, and the old lady next him smiled gratefully.

In the second half of the programme Miss Athelstane was down to sing again. He longed for her re-appearance, that beautiful, calm, oval face, with its long, dark lashes and the sweet, trustful smile.

At length she came; but although 'The green hill far away' moved many to tears, a feeling of awe at the recollection of that scene on Calvary restrained the audience from applause.

'Sir Edward Douglas tells me that she is the cleverest pupil they ever had at the college,' whispered one who was sitting within earshot of the literary man.

'Clever does not seem to me exactly the word to describe her,' replied some one else. 'I should rather call her exquisitely good. She suggests an atmosphere of exalted purity.'

'And Dan Gilbertson has just offered her £500 a year to take Nell Solly's part in 'The Unthinking Girl.'

'You don't say so. Surely some one will prevent her from doing that.'

'Her guardian angel, very likely. They are the only people I know of nowadays who can afford to be unmercenary.'

The literary man could hear no more. At the end of the next 'cello solo he got up and left the hall. The walk home by the sea in the starlight brought a certain amount of alleviation to his agonising thoughts; yet the idea of his little singing maiden being drawn away and swallowed up in the gulf of comic opera haunted his sleep, and he dreamed of Dan Gilbertson in the form of a fiery dragon, slain by himself in the guise of St. George, just as the lady of his heart was about to be devoured.

Next morning she was sitting again in her usual place upon the shore, and he found it difficult to persuade himself that this solitary child was identical with the sweet singer of yesterday.

He ensconced himself a little nearer than he had ventured hitherto and watched her with a tender wondering pity and anxiety. After that overheard conversation in the concert room he longed more than ever to know something about her history and her circumstances. Had she no one to shield her from the temptations of the world? No one to fight her battles or give her good advice?

He doubled up his arm and felt a well-developed biceps with a smile of satisfaction. If it had only been a matter of personal strength that was required nothing would have given him greater pleasure than to have entered the lists on the spur of the moment as her champion knight; but as things really were he failed to see how mere brute force was going to avail his heroine. There was only one other force of which he had experienced the quality—the force of prayer.

'Benediction at half-past four,' his landlady had told him. Perhaps Miss Athelstane would be going too, and he might march some paces in the rear, acting as her invisible escort by the way. He studied her carefully to see if she were about to move, but at ten minutes past the hour she still lay motionless, evidently, asleep, and he rose quietly and left her, to plead her cause before the throne of God.

The pretty custom of blessed flowers was new to him, and he treasured his tiny bouquet in the hope of being able to find some means of conveying it to her.

She was still asleep when he returned to the beach, and the fast approaching waves seemed to have nearly reached her feet. He felt concerned for her bodily safety, and resolved, with the help of a great inclination, that it was his obvious duty to awaken her. He laid his offering of the holy flowers at her right hand, seeing the glistening pearls of her rosary twined round her fingers. The Office of Our Blessed Lady and the Fiorretti of St Francis were beside her. All the secrets of her inner life appeared in that moment to have been revealed. He understood now the heavenly quality of her voice and her beautiful repose of manner; they were an answer to her fervent prayers, she came down to this silent place to commune with her Creator.

He withdrew a little distance, leaving it to her angel guardian to awaken her. The sea was not so perilously near as in his first impulsiveness he had imagined.

At the sound of the Angelus she rose to her knees, and after making the sign of the Cross the little bouquet caught her eye. She raised it to her lips: 'Dear Lady, you have sent me the flowers and a blessing! How good God is!'

Yes, she was a Catholic, and with the knowledge of it his interest in her increased enormously.

At the altar rails on Easter morning he and she knelt side by side. He, conscious of the close proximity, was offering his Communion for her earth-

ly welfare; she, unconscious of everything except her union with her Saviour, was murmuring softly, 'A hundred thousand welcomes, dearest Lord.'

When his thanksgiving was finished he noticed that she was kneeling in advance of him, a little to the right, but she had not yet raised her head, and he could not watch her here.

There was a lady whom he knew just leaving the church. He followed her, entering into conversation just beyond the porch. They were still talking when his little sea-maiden passed by: 'Rosa, dear!' exclaimed the lady, greeting her with a caress. She knew her intimately. The introduction was soon accomplished. 'You both go the same way,' she added, 'Sir Herbert Donnington is staying at the Red Lion Inn.'

So they walked back together. How natural it was! and yet the literary man felt as though the most wonderful thing in the world had happened.

They spoke of the concert. It was the first time she had sung since a serious illness, she told him. She was so thankful that he thought her voice had sounded well. The air of Little Morley had undoubtedly done her good.

'I see you sitting by the sea,' he said.

'Do you?' Her surprise was entirely genuine.

'I have never seen you!'

'That was because you never looked my way.'

She laughed. 'I always look straight out before me—it is so beautiful, so wonderful.'

'The varying clouds in that immense expanse of sky, touching the blue sealine of the horizon; and then the line of silver white, and then sand, wet sand, dry sand, and sand with sky reflections; and the countless shades of grey and yellow pebbles on the beach, with, for white, occasionally a seagull or a sail, and for the darkest note the rich lines of the breakwaters.'

'So its artistic loveliness appeals to you?' said he, 'I used to wonder what you thought about.'

'Oh, I just feel that, I don't think—at least, I try not to do so, because I promised my doctor that I wouldn't. He told me to sit by the sea and let my mind float out on the ocean of God's love and trust His providence for the future.'

The literary man found her sensitive and charming as she gradually unveiled the subject of her own troubles. During that short walk home he discovered all that he had been so anxious to understand. She was twenty-two years of age, and her mother was sixty. They lived upon a small annuity which would die with her mother, and the mother had been given less than a year, at the most, to live. This was a secret which the family doctor had confided to Rosa just before she came away, saying it would be wiser for the old lady to remain unaware of her own critical condition. Rosa's health had temporarily broken down under the combined strain of study at the Royal College of Music and sick-nursing at home, and it was on her account that they came to Little Morley for rest and change of air. It was now definitely decided that she could not afford to study any more, and she feared it would be almost impossible to obtain a sufficient number of lucrative engagements to sing at concerts at 'at homes'. The only good offer that had been made to her came from a quarter which—she hesitated.

'I know,' replied the literary man.

He called upon her mother after this, discovering her to be the widow of his first editor, and the recollection of a boyish gratitude easily expanded into a debt which he felt it would be an honor now to be allowed to pay.

Mrs. Athelstane found him a good-looking, distinguished, sympathetic companion, with many mutual friends, amongst whom was the very 'old Betton,' who had recommended him to the place. In the course of a day or two when Mr. Betton arrived the quartet was complete.

'Headaches, weak pulses, low temperature, and want of sleep' had been—her mother told the literary man—what ailed her child, but now that Rose was so very much better their doctor wrote advising her to take long rambles in the country.

'Perhaps you will allow me to accompany her,' suggested Sir Herbert, endeavoring not to express by the eagerness of his manner how very much pleasure those country walks would give to him. Mrs. Athelstane seized upon his offer.

There are so many cows about and one never knows when they will turn out to be bulls and 'toss you.'

Her vagueness raised his smile, but the supposition was such a distinct advancing of his cause that he let it pass.