

now, having chosen her course, she must follow it — to the end.

For, in Arcadia, it would seem that a promise is still a sacred thing.

Now, in a while, lifting her eyes, they encountered those of the smiling Cavalier above the mantel. Then, as she looked, she stretched out her arms with a sudden yearning gesture:

“ Oh! ” she whispered, “ if I were only — just a picture, like you. ”

CHAPTER XXXI

Which, being the last, is, very properly, the longest in the book

In those benighted days when men went abroad cased in steel, and, upon very slight provocation, were wont to smite each other with axes, and clubs, to buffet and skewer each other with spears, lances, swords, and divers other barbarous engines, yet, in that dark, and doughty age, ignorant though they were of all those smug maxims, and excellent moralities with which we are so happily blessed, — even in that unhallowed day, when the solemn tread of the policeman's foot was all unknown, — they had evolved for themselves a code of rules whereby to govern their life, and conduct. Amongst these, it was tacitly agreed upon, and understood, that a spoken promise was a pledge, and held to be a very sacred thing, and he who broke faith, committed all the cardinal sins. Indeed their laws were very few, and simple, easily understood, and well calculated to govern man's conduct to his fellow. In this day of ours, ablaze with learning, and culture,

—venerated with a fine civilization, our laws are complex beyond all knowing and expression; man regulates his conduct—to them,—and is as virtuous, and honest as the law compels him to be.

This is the age of Money, and, therefore, an irreverent age; it is also the age of Respectability (with a very large R),—and the policeman's bludgeon.

But in Arcadia—because it is an old-world place where life follows an even, simple course, where money is as scarce as roguery, the old law still holds; a promise once given, is a sacred obligation, and not to be set aside.

Even the Black-bird, who lived in the inquisitive apple tree, understood, and was aware of this, it had been born in him, and had grown with his feathers. Therefore,—though, to be sure, he had spoken no promise, signed no bond, nor affixed his mark to any agreement, still he had, nevertheless, borne in mind a certain request preferred to him when the day was very young. Thus, with a constancy of purpose worthy of all imitation, he had given all his mind, and thought, to the composition of a song with a new theme. He had applied himself to it most industriously all day long, and now, as the sun began to set, he had at last

worked it all out,—every note, every quaver, and trill; and, perched upon a look-out branch, he kept his bold, bright eye turned toward a certain rustic seat hard by, uttering a melodious note or two, every now and then, from pure impatience.

And presently, sure enough, he spied her for whom he waited,—the tall, long limbed, supple-waisted creature—whose skin was pink and gold like the peaches and apricots in the garden, and with soft, little rings of hair that would have made such an excellent lining to a nest. From this strictly utilitarian point of view he had often admired her hair, (had this Black-bird fellow), as she passed to and fro among her flowers, or paused to look up at him and listen to his song, or even sometimes to speak to him in her sweet, low voice.

But to-day she seemed to have forgotten him altogether, she did not even glance his way, indeed she walked with bent head, and seemed to keep her eyes always upon the ground.

Therefore the black-bird hopped a little further along the branch, and peered over to look down at her with first one round eye, and then the other, as she sank upon the seat, near by, and leaned her head wearily against the great

tree, behind. And thus he saw, upon the pink and gold of her cheek, something that shone, and twinkled like a drop of dew.

If the Black-bird wondered at this, and was inclined to be curious, he sturdily repressed the weakness,—for here was the audience—seated, and waiting—all expectation for him to begin.

So, without more ado, he settled himself upon the bough, lifted his head, stretched his throat, and, from his yellow bill, poured forth a flood of golden melody as he burst forth into his “Song of Memory.”

And what a song it was!—so full of passionate entreaty, of tender pleading, of haunting sweetness, that, as she listened, the bright drop quivering upon her lashes, fell and was succeeded by another, and another. Nor did she attempt to check them, or wipe them away, only she sat and listened with her heavy head pillowed against the great tree, while the Black-bird, glancing down at her every now and then with critical eye to mark the effect of some particularly difficult passage, piped surely as he had never done before, until the listener’s proud face sank lower and lower, and was, at last, hidden in her hands. Seeing which, the Black-bird, like the true artist he was, fearing

an anti-climax, very presently ended his song with a long-drawn, plaintive note.

But Anthea sat there with her proud head bowed low, long after he had retired for the night. And the sun went down, and the shadows came creeping stealthily about her, and the moon began to rise, big and yellow, over the up-land; but Anthea still sat there with her head, once more resting wearily against “King Arthur,” watching the deepening shadows until she was roused by Small Porges’ hand upon her’s and his voice saying:

“Why,—I do believe you’re crying, Auntie Anthea, an’ why are you here—all alone, an’ by yourself?”

“I was listening to the Black-bird, dear,—I never heard him sing quite so—beautifully, before.”

“But black-birds don’t make people cry,—an’ I know you’ve been crying—’cause you sound—all quivery, you know.”

“Do I, Georgy?”

“Yes,—is it ’cause you feel—lonely?”

“Yes dear.”

“You’ve cried an awful lot, lately, Auntie Anthea.”

“Have I, dear?”

“Yes,—an’ it—worries me, you know.”

"I'm afraid I've been a great responsibility to you, Georgy dear," said she with a rueful little laugh.

"'Fraid you have; but I don' mind the 'sponsibility,—I'll always take care of you, you know!" nodded Small Porges, sitting down, the better to get his arm protectingly about her, while Anthea stooped to kiss the top of his curly head. "I promised my Uncle Porges I'd always take care of you, an' so I will!"

"Yes, dear."

"Uncle Porges told me—"

"Never mind, dear,—don' let's talk of—him."

"Do you still—hate him, then, Auntie Anthea?"

"Hush, dear!—it's very wrong to—hate people."

"Yes, a course it is! Then—perhaps, if you don't hate him any more—you like him a bit,—jest a—teeny bit, you know?"

"Why—there's the clock striking half-past eight, Georgy!"

"Yes, I hear it,—but—do you,—the teeniest bit? Oh! can't you like him jest a bit—for my sake, Auntie Anthea? I'm always trying to please you,—an' I found you the

fortune, you know, so now I want you to please me,—an' tell me you like him—for my sake."

"But—Oh Georgy dear!—you don't understand."

"—'cause you see," Small Porges, continued, "after all, I found him for you—under a hedge, you know—"

"Ah!—why did you, Georgy dear? We were so happy—before—he came—"

"But you couldn't have been, you know; you weren't married—even then, so you couldn't have been really happy, you know!" said Small Porges shaking his head.

"Why Georgy—what do you mean?"

"Well, Uncle Porges told me that nobody can live happy—ever after, unless they're married—first. So that was why I 'ranged for him to marry you, so you could *both* be happy, an' all revelry an' joy,—like the fairy tale, you know."

"But, you see, we aren't in a fairy tale, dear, so I'm afraid we must make the best of things as they are!" and here she sighed again, and rose. "Come, Georgy, it's much later than I thought, and quite time you were in bed, dear."

"All right, Auntie Anthea,—only—don't

you think it's jest a bit — cruel to send a boy to bed so very early, an' when the moon's so big, an' everything looks so — frightfully fine? 'sides — ”

“ Well, what now? ” she asked, a little wearily as, obedient to his pleading gesture, she sat down again.

“ Why, you haven't answered my question yet, you know. ”

“ What question? ” said she, not looking at him.

“ 'Bout my — Uncle Porges. ”

“ But Georgy — I — ”

“ You do like him — jest a bit — don't you? — please? ” Small Porges was standing before her as he waited for her answer, but now, seeing how she hesitated, and avoided his eyes, he put one small hand beneath the dimple in her chin, so that she was forced to look at him.

“ You do, please, — don't you? ” he pleaded.

Anthea hesitated; but, after all, — *He* was gone, and nobody could hear; and Small Porges was so very small; and who could resist the entreaty in his big, wistful eyes? surely not Anthea. Therefore, with a sudden gesture of abandonment, she leaned forward in his embrace, and rested her weary head against his manly, small shoulder:

“ Yes! ” she whispered.

“ Jest as much as you like — Mr. Cassilis? ” he whispered back.

“ Yes! ”

“ A — bit more — jest a teeny bit more? ”

“ Yes! ”

“ A — lot more, — lots an' lots, — oceans more? ”

“ Yes! ”

The word was spoken, and, having uttered it, Anthea grew suddenly hot with shame, and mightily angry with herself, and would, straightway, have given the world to have it unsaid; the more so, as she felt Small Porges' clasp tighten joyfully, and, looking up, fancied she read something like triumph in his look.

She drew away from him, rather hastily, and rose to her feet.

“ Come! ” said she, speaking now in a vastly different tone, “ it must be getting very late — ”

“ Yes, I s'pecks it'll soon be nine o'clock, now! ” he nodded.

“ Then you ought to be in bed, fast asleep instead of talking such — nonsense, out here. So — come along — at once, sir! ”

“ But, can't I stay up — jest a little while? You see — ”

"No!"

"You see, it's such a — magnif'cent night! It feels as though — things might happen!"

"Don't be so silly!"

"Well, but it does, you know."

"What do you mean — what things?"

"Well, it feels — gnom-y, to me. I s'pecks there's lots of elves about — hidden in the shadows, you know, an' peeping at us."

"There aren't any elves, — or gnomes," said Anthea petulantly, for she was still furiously angry with herself.

"But my Uncle Porges told me —"

"Oh!" cried Anthea, stamping her foot suddenly, "can't you talk of anyone, or anything but — him? I'm tired to death of him and his very name!"

"But I thought you liked him — an awful lot, an' —"

"Well, I don't!"

"But, you said —"

"Never mind what I said! It's time you were in bed asleep, — so come along — at once, sir!"

So they went on through the orchard together, very silently, for Small Porges was inclined to be indignant, but much more inclined to be hurt. Thus, they had not gone so very

far, when he spoke, in a voice that he would have described as — quivery.

"Don't you think that you're — just the teeniest bit — cruel to me, Auntie Anthea?" he enquired wistfully, "after I prayed an' prayed till I found a fortune for you! — don't you, please?" Surely Anthea was a creature of moods, to-night, for, even while he spoke, she stopped, and turned, and fell on her knees, and caught him in her arms, kissing him many times:

"Yes, — yes, dear, I'm hateful to you, — horrid to you! But I don't mean to be. There! — forgive me!"

"Oh! — it's all right again, now, Auntie Anthea, thank you. I only thought you were jest a bit — hard, 'cause it is such a — magnif'cent night, isn't it?"

"Yes dear; and perhaps there are gnomes, and pixies about. Anyhow, we can pretend there are, if you like, as we used to —"

"Oh will you? that would be fine! Then, please, may I go with you — as far as the brook? We'll wander, you know, — I've never wandered with you in the moonlight, — an' I do love to hear the brook talking to itself, — so — will you wander — jest this once?"

"Well," said Anthea, hesitating, "it's very late! —"

"Nearly nine o'clock, yes! But Oh!— please don't forget that I found a fortune for you—"

"Very well," she smiled, "just this once."

Now as they went together, hand in hand through the moonlight, Small Porges talked very fast, and very much at random, while his eyes, bright, and eager, glanced expectantly towards every patch of shadow,—doubtless in search of gnomes, and pixies.

But Anthea saw nothing of this, heard nothing of the suppressed excitement in his voice, for she was thinking that by now, Mr. Cassilis had read her letter,—that he might, even then, be on his way to Dapplemere. She even fancied, once or twice, that she could hear the gallop of his horse's hoofs. And, when he came, he would want to—kiss her!

"Why do you shiver so, Auntie Anthea, are you cold?"

"No, dear."

"Well, then, why are you so quiet to me,—I've asked you a question—three times."

"Have you dear? I—I was thinking; what was the question?"

"I was asking you if you would be awful frightened s'posing we did find a pixie—or a gnome, in the shadows; an' would you be so

very awfully frightened if a gnome—a great, big one, you know,—came jumping out an'—ran off with you,—should you?"

"No!" said Anthea, with another shiver, "No, dear,—I think I should be—rather glad of it!"

"Should you, Auntie? I'm—so awful glad you wouldn't be frightened. A course, I don't s'pose there are gnomes—I mean great, big ones,—really, you know,—but there might be, on a magnif'cent night, like this. If you shiver again Auntie you'll have to take my coat!"

"I thought I heard a horse galloping—hush!"

They had reached the stile, by now, the stile with the crooked, lurking nail, and she leaned there, a while, to listen. "I'm sure I heard something,—away there—on the road!"

"I don't!" said Small Porges, stoutly,— "so take my hand, please, an' let me 'sist you over the stile."

So they crossed the stile, and, presently, came to the brook that was the most impertinent brook in the world. And here, upon the little rustic bridge, they stopped to look down at the sparkle of the water, and to listen to its merry voice.

Yes, indeed to-night it was as impertinent as ever, laughing, and chuckling to itself among the hollows, and whispering scandalously in the shadows. It seemed to Anthea that it was laughing at her, — mocking, and taunting her with — the future. And now, amid the laughter, were sobs, and tearful murmurs, and now, again, it seemed to be the prophetic voice of old Nannie:

“ ‘By force ye shall be wooed and by force ye shall be wed, and there is no man strong enough to do it, but him as bears the Tiger Mark upon him!’ ”

The “Tiger Mark!” Alas! how very far from the truth were poor, old Nannie’s dreams, after all, the dreams which Anthea had very nearly believed in — once or twice. How foolish it had all been! And yet even now —

Anthea had been leaning over the gurgling waters while all this passed through her mind, but now, — she started at the sound of a heavy foot-fall on the planking of the bridge, behind her, and — in that same instant, she was encircled by a powerful arm, caught up in a strong embrace, — swung from her feet, and borne away through the shadows of the little copse.

It was very dark in the wood, but she knew,

instinctively, whose arms these were that held her so close, and carried her so easily — away through the shadows of the wood, — away from the haunting, hopeless dread of the future from which there had seemed no chance, or hope of escape.

And, knowing all this, she made no struggle, and uttered no word. And now the trees thinned out, and, from under her lashes she saw the face above her; the thick, black brows drawn together, — the close set of the lips, — the grim prominence of the strong, square chin.

And now, they were in the road; and now he had lifted her into an automobile, had sprung in beside her, and — they were off, gliding swift, and ever swifter, under the shadows of the trees.

And still neither spoke, nor looked at each other; only she leaned away from him, against the cushions, while he kept his frowning eyes fixed upon the road a-head; and ever the great car flew onward faster, and faster; yet not so fast as the beating of her heart, wherein shame, and anger, and fear, and — another feeling strove and fought for mastery.

But at last, finding him so silent, and impassive, she must needs steal a look at him, beneath her lashes.

He wore no hat, and as she looked upon him, — with his yellow hair, his length of limb, and his massive shoulders, he might have been some fierce Viking, and she, his captive, taken by strength of arm — borne away by force. — By force!

And, hereupon, as the car hummed over the smooth road, it seemed to find a voice, — a subtle, mocking voice, very like the voice of the brook, — that murmured to her over and over again:

“By force ye shall be wooed, and by force ye shall be wed.”

The very trees whispered it as they passed, and her heart throbbed in time to it:

“By force ye shall be wooed, and by force ye shall be wed!” So, she leaned as far from him as she might, watching him with frightened eyes while he frowned ever upon the road in front, and the car rocked, and swayed with their going, as they whirled onward through moonlight and through shadow, faster, and faster, — yet not so fast as the beating of her heart wherein was fear, and shame, and anger, and — another feeling, but greatest of all now, was fear. Could this be the placid, soft-spoken gentleman she had known, — this man, with the implacable eyes, and the brutal jaw, who

neither spoke to, nor looked at her, but frowned always at the road in front.

And so, the fear grew and grew within her, — fear of the man whom she knew, — and knew not at all. She clasped her hands nervously together, watching him with dilating eyes as the car slowed down, — for the road made a sudden turn, hereabouts.

And still he neither looked at, nor spoke to her; and therefore, because she could bear the silence no longer, she spoke — in a voice that sounded strangely faint, and far-away, and that shook and trembled in spite of her.

“Where are you — taking me?”

“To be married!” he answered, never looking at her.

“You — wouldn’t — dare!”

“Wait and see!” he nodded.

“Oh! — but what do — you mean?” The fear in her voice was more manifest than ever.

“I mean that you are mine, — you always were, you always must and shall be. So, I’m going to marry you — in about half-an-hour, by special license.”

Still he did not even glance towards her, and she looked away over the country side all lonely and desolate under the moon.

"I want you, you see," he went on, "I want you more than I ever wanted anything in this world. I need you, because without you my life will be utterly purposeless, and empty. So I have taken you—because you are mine, I know it,—Ah yes! and, deep down in your woman's heart, you know it too. And so, I am going to marry you,—yes I am, unless—" and here, he brought the car to a standstill, and turning, looked at her for the first time.

And now, before the look in his eyes, her own wavered, and fell, lest he should read within them that which she would fain hide from him,—and which she knew they must reveal,—that which was neither shame, nor anger, nor fear, but the other feeling for which she dared find no name. And thus, for a long moment, there was silence.

At last she spoke, though with her eyes still hidden:

"Unless?" she repeated breathlessly.

"Anthea,—look at me!"

But Anthea only drooped her head the lower; wherefore, he leaned forward, and—even as Small Porges had done,—set his hand beneath the dimple in her chin, and lifted the proud, un-willing face:

"Anthea,—look at me!"

And now, what could Anthea do but obey?

"Unless," said he, as her glance, at last, met his, "unless you can tell me—now, as your eyes look into mine,—that you love Cassilis. Tell me that, and I will take you back, this very instant; and never trouble you again. But, unless you do tell me that, why then—your Pride shall not blast two lives, if I can help it. Now speak!"

But Anthea was silent, also, she would have turned aside from his searching look, but that his arms were about her, strong, and compelling. So, needs must she suffer him to look down into her very heart, for it seemed to her that, in that moment, he had rent away every stitch, and shred of Pride's enfolding mantle, and that he saw the truth, at last.

But, if he had, he gave no sign, only he turned and set the car humming upon its way, once more.

On they went through the midsummer night, up hill and down hill, by cross-road and bye-lane, until, as they climbed a long ascent, they beheld a tall figure standing upon the top of the hill, in the attitude of one who waits; and who, spying them, immediately raised a very stiff left arm, whereupon this figure was joined