THE MAN WHO DIED AT AMDHERAN.

THE guest drew a chair into the ring of firelight, and she to whom he had just been presented leaned gracefully back in a low seat in a shadowy corner, and crossed her hands over the fan which served as a fire-screen.

"How odd that you two should actually have met in Spain," said the pretty hostess, settling herself in a rocking-chair, "and that I never heard you mention it, Margaret!"

"No?" murmured the woman in the shadow.

"Hardly important enough for a note-book, perhaps," remarked the new guest, with a grave smile.

"What is not?" asked the host, entering and closing the door behind him. "Ugh! what a night to bring any one into the wilds for ducks, even a bohemian such as you, Douglas! What is not important, or what is, except that we are housed from this beastly weather?"

"Exactly," said his guest. "It was the fact that Miss Kennedy, having found me in Spain a long time ago, failed to put me in her note-book."

"No! You don't mean you two have met? And never told us?" exclaimed the host.

"It was a dreadful oversight," said the woman in the shadow, laughing softly. "Wait; I will hand you a match."

She arose to reach one from the mantel shelf; the fire, leaping suddenly, lighted her from head to foot. A tall figure in thin, black draperies; a white throat, a white face, gray eyes under straight black brows, a wealth of warm brown hair, and a delicately strong mouth whose very smile had in it a sweet gravity.

"And—you—two—met—before," continued the host, while lighting his cigar. "Well, I declare! Not that it's remarkable, Miss Kennedy, should this man have acquaintances in the Mountains of the Moon. He has been everywhere, seen everybody, knows everything worth knowing, has a language at every finger-end——"

"Dear!" said his wife.

"Fact, indeed! A year ago his easel was pitched in Egypt, doing some kind of cold-blooded impressionism. A month ago in Paris; I saw the sketches yesterday when I hunted him up. Lovely little model! Baby face, rings in its ears, tears in its eyes, and a mouth like a half-forgotten smile. We'll all go in one day and unearth the canvas mysteries.—Have a cigar, Douglas? No, they don't mind. Do as you please here."

"Thank you," said his guest. "I don't smoke."

"What! Since when?"

"Oh, half a dozen years ago," the other replied, carelessly. "I stopped it with some other things. Bad for the health, you know."

"Nonsense, man!" said his host. "Six foot three, with a chest like a rock and an eye like an eagle's! If there was not safety in numbers, I should say some woman had been preaching at you."

"*Dear!*" said his pretty wife, again.

The woman in the shadow turned the fan rather restlessly round and round in her white hands. The grave-faced guest smiled.

"There has not been much opportunity for me to be preached at," he said. "I decided long ago with—some one I knew, that it was easier to break good habits than bad ones. Not, believe me, that I think smoking a bad one; I don't; but I always had a talent for keeping promises, that is all. Hear how it rains!"

"It means a good day for ducks," said the host,—"in fact, several days. Now I've got you, Douglas, I shall not let you go soon."

His wife looked up with a smile from her crocheting.

"Surely you will remain awhile with us now? It is such a happy chance which brought us two friends at once." And she leaned over and patted the wrist of the woman in the shadow. The artist bowed his head gratefully.

"It's very good to be in a home, madame," he said. "I should like to stay, but—I fear I cannot."

"You artists are all alike," said the host. "Birds of passage. Never happy unless free. Well, I shall cage you, anyhow."

"Margaret, sing for us," spoke the hostess suddenly.

"I——" the other woman commenced in a quick, pleading tone, then stopped, and, rising, trailed her long draperies out of the firelight back to a dark end of the room.

"No more light, please," she said, at a gesture from the host. She struck a chord on the piano. "You each like a different style of music, or at least I think you do."

"So sing us three songs," said the host.

Instantly, with a superb fulness of tone, she broke into an old English ballad.

"Bravo!" he cried, when it ceased: "that was for me. Next."

"One more will do, and you can divide it between you," she answered.

Then quietly, to the last passionate outbreak, she sung Tosti's "Good-by." No voice could better have suited those hopeless words,

All the to-morrows must be as to-day!
All the to-morrows must be as to-day!

When it ended, there was silence for a moment. The artist, with his arms folded, was gazing intently into the fire. The host was watching a faint line of smoke curl to the ceiling, and his wife's needle flew rapidly.

With a soft rustle and a breath of violets the singer slipped back to her place in the shadow and resumed the fire-fan.

"Why do women break their hearts when they sing?" asked the host.

"They don't," spoke his wife, promptly; "they break another's. That is the true art." She smiled, but her bright eyes were misty. Her husband turned to the singer:

"Miss Kennedy, it is strange you never went on the stage. Your voice is simply wonderful!"

"I was near it once," she replied: "it was a good while ago, and —I had inducements abroad."

"May I ask why you did not?"

"Oh, yes. I talked it over with a friend, and changed my mind."

"Woman again," remarked the host. "I always wondered where they got the traditional right to change their minds, and why, when they have such excellent minds, as a rule, they need be changed so often."

"Hush, you bear!" said his wife, tapping him on the arm. "If I had not changed mine once you would have—done what?"

"Gone mourning all my days, as the hymn says."

The artist suddenly turned his eyes from the fire with a look of determination in them.

"It is a dangerous prerogative," he said. "I knew a fellow once who almost—died, because a woman changed her mind."

"Tell us," said the hostess. "I love a story."

"It is not a story really; there's not enough of it, you know."

"Never mind that," spoke the host. "Go ahead."

The woman in the shadow said nothing, although, as the artist glanced from one to another, his eyes turned last to where she sat.

"Well——" He paused, and seemed to speak with some effort,—perhaps from habitual reticence. "Well, it can do him no harm now, and you need not know his name. It was a fellow I knew, knew him better than any one else did, I think. I was with him for a long time when I first went across, a good while ago. He was a lonely man, and had never cared much for women, or known them well. He, too, was a painter, and had never had a thought beyond his art, until he met *her*. It was the same thing that has happened to more than one, I suppose. She was young and had a fortune; he had only his art, and, of course, vowed that he would not let her know he loved her. But it was no use, for he thought she loved him: at least he had every reason to believe it,—he did believe it with his heart and soul, poor fool! You see, I was with him at the time, so I remember it pretty well." He paused and drew a long breath; then, gazing steadily at the fire, continued, "Yes, he tried bravely not to tell her; but love was stronger. There was a short time of intoxication; it was his first and last glimpse of happiness. I forgot to say that the lady was travelling with a relative, a widow who was bent upon marrying her son to the heiress. I, as a looker-on, never trusted the woman for an instant. She may or may not have been perfidious, or—it may have run in the family; I never knew. At any rate, she was always on the alert to keep them apart and to get the girl away from the place, so their arrangements had to be made by letters, carried to and fro by a native boy who was attached to my friend and had been his model. Well, to cut it short, they were to have met on a certain morning, in one of the old churches of which the place was full, and there to have been married. My friend rose at dawn and walked for miles until the hour should arrive. Oh, he was fairly mad! Well, he went into the church out of the sunlight,—the sun was blinding that morning,—and it was dim and cool inside. He—I was with him—stood behind a pillar until his eyes could get accustomed to the dusk. He trembled; he felt almost

afraid to face his own joy. Some one came towards him. It was an old man who was always about the church. He held a letter which he had been instructed to give the painter gentleman. It was a cruel letter. I saw it afterwards. It said she had reconsidered the matter, and, in a few well-chosen words about the struggle between head and heart, spoke of her duties to Society, and, conclusively, that she had changed her mind." He paused.

"Humph!" said the host.

"Cruel thing!" exclaimed his wife, indignantly.

From the shadowy corner there was a tense sound like a quickly-drawn breath, and the fan was lifted as a shield from the fire.

"What did he do?" asked the host, knocking the ashes from his cigar.

"Nothing—I mean I don't just remember what happened then. He went nearly mad, I believe. You see, he was not like most men. He had never been happy before, and—and he had believed in her. She obliterated every other thought. The world was filled for him with nothing but her. When she went, everything was swept away. He had nothing to hold by. He—well, I believe he went to India soon after with the express purpose of getting killed."

"Oh!" exclaimed the hostess. Her work lay in her lap, and her bright eyes were fixed upon the artist.

"Yes," he continued, slowly: "he died at Amdheran."

"So she murdered him?" breathed the little hostess, her gaze still on the man, who had never turned his own from the fire, the light of which threw into sharp relief his clear strong profile and broad brow.

He nodded.

"Just about."

"Died at Amdheran," repeated the host, rising. "Guess I'll take a look at the weather. How came you to hear about the poor fellow's end, Douglas?"

"I was in India afterwards, you know. In fact, I have a lot of his traps and things," said the artist.

The host left the room, and the woman in the shadow suddenly leaned forward. The firelight leaped to the warm hue of her beautiful hair and showed a burning spot on either cheek. Her eyes were downcast, and she stroked the fringe of the fan with one white finger. Her voice was strangely low and tense as she spoke.

"Perhaps she—the girl—did not write the letter, or know anything about it——"

"Then why did she go away that morning?" asked the artist. He looked for the first time from the fire straight at her.

"May not she also have received a letter? one which—which she believed him to have written?" There seemed almost a pleading note in her voice. "A—cruel letter, too. Perhaps you did not think of that." She paused with a little shiver, and turned to the hostess: "How the wind blows! It makes me chilly, even here by the fire. I think I will say good-night now." The artist rose, walked to a window, and stood gazing out into the darkness. The hostess laid a firm little hand upon that of the woman beside her.

"No; wait a moment until I see to my household gods, and we'll go together. Why, your hands are cold, dear! Here's my scarf. Now stay by the fire until I am ready." She caught a soft, white thing from the back of her chair and threw it over the shoulders of the other woman, from whence it fell in long, straight lines. "Dear me, you must be done as Galatea while we have a real, live painter in the house.—And one thing more from you, sir. Will you tell me?" She turned brightly to the artist, and he walked back from the window. He was very pale, and his sombre eyes glowed.

"What will you, madame?"

"Did that man really die at Amdheran?"

"You asked for a story, so you must draw your own conclusions, madame," he said, looking down grimly at the little woman. "But remember, if you will, that Love is stronger than Death."

"Douglas," called the host from the hall-way, "this weather means ducks, and is good for several days. You'll stay?"

"Yes, dear!" cried his wife, flitting to the door. As she did so, the woman by the fire raised her eyes once, then rose and faced the man who stood gazing at her.

The pretty hostess pulled the door to after her, and, catching her husband's arm, drew him under the hall lamp. Her face was flushed and her little hands trembled as she seized both of his great ones and laughed excitedly up in his face.

"Will he stay?" she whispered, tremulously; "WILL HE STAY? Ned, you dear old bat, you haven't a soul above ducks!"

Virginia Woodward Cloud.