THE

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# AN AMERICAN FLIRTATION.

TIME, a warm, moonlit night in April; Scene, a public parlor in a comparatively old and incomparably respectable hotel; Place, one of the very loveliest of the many lovely little spots that have sprung up along the shores of the wonderful Mediterranean to lure the shivering Briton from his wintry home; Dramatis personæ — but no; the actors were out of the way for the moment, and the audience, to wit the rest of the hotel company, was discussing them in their absence. A fire of dry olive wood and odorous pine cones burned brilliantly on the hearth, intended, however, like many another blaze, for display rather than for comfort, as the windows were wide open at the same time, and the breath of the roses outside stole fragrantly in through the green lattices.

A number of ladies — an inordinate number it seemed at the first glance, so voluminous were the petticoats and so various the shawls — sat comfortably established about the room. They were nearly all old, nearly all interested in the subject-matter, and quite all English, as was indicated by the brilliancy of the gowns and the universality of that formidable piece of architecture known as the cap, even without the added testimony of their voices, — those soft, full, pleasant tones which are the privileged birthright of Englishwomen, and which the Pilgrim mothers, in their transatlantic voyage, unfortunately lost by the way.

"Of course they are engaged," said one of these ladies, with that emphasis which seems to establish indisputably the fact which it announces. "It 's impossible that they are not."

"Well, no, Lady Bruce, I believe not, — not exactly, you know," said another voice, a little apologetic cough following the hesitating contradiction like a gentle "By your leave." "Of course I did n't like to ask either Mr. Elsworth or Miss Allison point-blank, but I hinted the question to that friend of hers, — that wide awake little Miss Wright, with the American nose, you know. And she said there was n't anything in it on either side; it was only the American way. It seems all the young men in the States are always particularly devoted to some girl or other, — first one, and then another, continuously."

"It 's a very shocking way," said Lady Bruce severely, pausing in her work to smooth out a blue worsted stripe upon her purple satin knee. "I hope we may never import it into England. How is one to know whether a young man means anything or not?"

"He never does mean anything, I am told."

"Oh, but, my dear Miss Woodruff, a little common sense will tell you that there must come a time when he does mean something, don't you see? And if this sort of thing goes on in the mean while, how are parents ever to judge of his intentions? Now this Theodora Allison, — if that young Elsworth is n't courting her, why is he allowed to dangle after her in this open fashion? If any young man devoted himself to my daughter in that marked manner, I should ask him his intentions directly. I should fail in my duty if I did n't."

Miss Bruce, a small, plain, white-faced little thing, hopelessly deficient in that bright, healthful beauty which belongs to most young English faces, was sitting silently by her mother's side, and blushed the color of her hair at the bare idea of a young man ever being devoted to her in the way that Mr. Elsworth was devoted to Miss Allison. Perhaps up in heaven there might be some manly angel detailed for that

kind office, but certainly here on earth every other impossibility would happen first.

"They went off for a walk this afternoon," volunteered a third lady, with an amused laugh.

"Alone, I suppose?"

"Quite alone, if you please."

"Fancy, now! Goodness knows where they went to."

"Only to the pier, I believe," answered Mrs. Pemberry reluctantly, feeling that she owed an apology for the tame admission. "Theo told me about it at the *table d'hôte* to-night. She said it was so interesting watching the workmen dump in stones. Odd taste, is n't it?"

"Extraordinary!" said Lady Bruce, thrusting on her thimble as one would clap an extinguisher on a candle. "The unprotected way in which American parents allow their girls to go about with young men is something incomprehensible. Fancy my Anna here going about alone with a young man!"

Anna again blushed, the suggestion was so shameful and so undeniably attractive.

"They went on a donkey ride this morning, did you see?" said somebody else from an unimportant corner. "It was quite a large party, to be sure; still Mr. Elsworth started by the side of Miss Allison, and came back by her side, and doubtless he never left her for a moment."

"American girls do seem to have such a good time of it!" murmured little Miss Bruce quite irrelevantly.

It was a bold speech. Lady Bruce glanced around sharply, then bent again to her work. "American girls are the worst brought up in the world," she pronounced scathingly; "and this free-handed comradeship between young men and young women is simply scandalous. The girls treat the men like so many other girls, and the men treat the girls as if making love to each one they speak to. It 's an unnatural and preposterous state of affairs. But in the case of these two, of course there can be no question how matters stand. They are engaged."

"Hush, here he is!"

A sudden expectant silence fell upon the room as a young man appeared in the doorway. The *entr'acte* was over, and the curtain had risen again upon the drama.

The new-comer was a tall, handsome fellow, with a noticeable air of good breeding and refinement. He stood still an instant, while his pleasant glance shot swiftly around the little circle. Miss Allison was not there yet, and what a dull time the poor women were having! He must make the best of it till she came. In another moment he had gathered Miss Woodruff's skein from the back of a chair, and was holding it for her with admirable grace and dexterity, chatting amiably and generally as he did so, with an easy flow of talk that could hardly fail to please his feminine audience, even though it betrayed neither great originality nor unusual intelligence. It was the guiding rule of this young man always to make the best of existing circumstances, extracting the utmost pleasure from even the most unpropitious materials, — a selfish principle which produced charmingly unselfish effects; and he now threw himself so heartily into the task of entertaining and of being entertained that even Lady Bruce was won over, observing to Mrs. Pemberry, in what she intended for an undertone, that this agreeable polish of manner was due entirely to the young fellow's foreign education, no American being able to get it at home.

Miss Allison, with her friend Miss Wright, came in somewhat later. Miss Bruce looked up at her with a faint pang, impossible to repress. It was very hard that American girls should have not only all the fun and all the young men, but so much of the prettiness and the tasteful dressing, too. Theo Allison certainly was enviably pretty. With her large, innocent blue eyes and her fluffy hair, parted on the side and falling across her forehead in great light rings that tempted one to lift them into place with caressing fingers, and with a certain quaint picturesqueness of dress, which had always some little dainty extra touch to make it an altogether different affair from every other toilette, she was indeed a pleasant object to look upon.

Elsworth naturally rose at once to give her a chair, and as naturally placed his own beside it, immediately concentrating upon her the attentions hitherto diffused among the roomful. He was only acting up to his creed, — doing what brought himself the most pleasure at the time; and no one could deny that for a young man it must certainly be pleasanter to talk with Theo than with any one else present. After her entrance, therefore, those who had for a short

while enjoyed the privilege of the full loaf had again to content themselves with the crumbs. The two sat chatting merrily enough, yet saying nothing whatever that the others might not overhear; and in point of fact what was so overheard formed the chief staple of conversation for the rest, who used it as a text upon which to build running commentaries.

"He calls her Miss Theo. Why should n't he say Miss Allison?" said Lady Bruce, biting off a thread as if it were a dissenting opinion. "It would make me shiver to hear my daughter familiarly spoken to in society as Miss Anna. I should fancy that all the young men were footmen."

"Oh, he 's asked her to go to church with him to-morrow!" broke in Miss Bruce, with wide eyes, aghast at the idea of this devotion to a fellow creature being carried into the very heart of the sanctuary. Dear, dear, how was it possible that Miss Allison could say her prayers rightly, with such a handsome young fellow kneeling directly beside her! Would n't she get the service hopelessly jumbled up, and perhaps begin with the "We beseech Thee to hear us" before it was time to have done with the "Good Lord, deliver us"? "I know *I* should," said honest little Miss Bruce pathetically to herself.

"Do young ladies often go to church alone with young gentlemen, in America?" she inquired timidly of Miss Wright.

Miss Wright gave her a keen little glance of intelligent condolence.

"Often," she replied, with the relish of one speaking from personal experience of a desirable and not widely enough disseminated custom, — "very often. It 's good for the young men. They would otherwise stay at home, perhaps, to smoke injurious cigarettes."

"But I should think it might n't be quite as good for the girls," stammered Miss Bruce confusedly. "It might distract them from the service. Why, if I had a young man next me and he looked over my Prayer-Book, I should be so afraid it might open of itself at the marriage service that I could n't attend to anything else."

"It would be much more likely to open at the commination service, I should say; there are so many things you English are forbidden to do," replied Miss Wright, with compassion. "Theo, are we not to have some music?"

The request being warmly seconded, Theo rose at once and went to the piano, Elsworth following as a matter of course to find her the music and turn over the leaves. She was an accomplished performer, and for a while all voices were still as her skillful fingers swept over the keys, gliding from one harmony into another before any one had time to ask for more, or even to know that the first was ended.

"Why does n't it fluster her to have him stand so near and never take his eyes off her?" whispered Miss Bruce. "It would make me play all my sharps flats."

"Oh, we Americans are so used to young men that we never think of minding them," Miss Wright returned, with what seemed the very acme of *sang froid* to the little English girl. "They never put us out."

"And are you as used to them as Miss Allison?" ventured Miss Bruce. This stolen talk about young men was certainly treading on forbidden ground, but after the first step it did not seem so wrong to go further.

"Oh, yes, I am quite as used to them," responded Miss Wright calmly, "though to be sure I have none here; but that is because there is no one here but Mr. Elsworth, and he belongs to Theo."

"Belongs to Miss Allison?" repeated Miss Bruce eagerly. "Oh, then they are" —

"Oh, no, they 're not," said Miss Wright. "They 're merely having a good time together. It 's so much pleasanter for a girl to have some man always devoted to her, and so much easier for a man to devote himself to one girl rather than to half a dozen, don't you see?"

"Oh," said Miss Bruce blankly, conscious of a sympathetic pity for the neglected five.

"At home I have any number of gentleman friends," continued Miss Wright, with an air of being rather bored by the subject which possessed so absorbing an interest for her companion. "But Europe is a poor place for men. We girls leave our good times behind us when we come abroad. Europeans are always in earnest when they go in for this sort of thing, you see, and that quite spoils it. Theo was uncommonly lucky to get hold of Fred Elsworth here."

"But how do Americans act when they *are* in earnest?" asked Miss Bruce,

growing bold in iniquitous inquiry.

"Oh, they don't act any differently. The girls just know it 's different; that 's all. It 's perfectly easy to tell. Any American girl understands directly whether a man is in love with her or whether he 's only passing the time. But I must go upstairs now. Good-night;" and with a bright nod around at the roomful of ladies, and scarcely a glance in the direction of Elsworth, — to whom, since he belonged to Theo, she was as indifferent as to a log of wood, — Miss Wright made her escape.

Soon after she had disappeared something dreadful happened. Theo rose all at once from the piano in the middle of a bar, turning around a sweet, flushed face.

"I can't play another minute!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands to her cheeks. "The heat is stifling."

Elsworth looked at her concernedly. "I am afraid you have over-exerted yourself, Miss Theo. That sonata is one of the most difficult of the set. You have played too long."

"No, it is not that, only I am so warm. Those shutters don't let in a breath of air."

"Come outside," suggested Elsworth. "It 's a lovely night, and there 's quite a refreshing breeze in the garden. It will revive you."

"I believe it would," assented Theo, bending back her neck, as if even the soft lace at her throat impeded her breathing. "Do let me get out of this stuffy atmosphere for a moment," and she impulsively turned to the door.

"Wait. You may need a shawl!" cried Elseworth. "Ah, here is one. Miss Woodruff, you are always so kind, — I 'm sure you won't object to lending us this. We 'll be back in a minute," and he hurried off after his fair companion.

A blank silence followed the departure of the reckless couple. Was it possible that such improprieties as this were of daily occurrence in America, — young men and young women going out *alone* together into the garden at night? To be sure, the garden was very small, — scarcely more than an open vestibule; one could hear the voices of the two as they paced leisurely up and down before the house, passing and repassing the windows; and to be sure, there was a brilliant full moon shedding its broad rays with an effulgence that should have turned the darkest deed white; and to be sure, too, the garden was never less deserted than at this hour, when the proprietor and his book-keeper and at least a maid or two were always strolling about it. But still — no, it was impossible to believe that such regardless acts were common even in the land of enormities. Miss Bruce felt her heart beat high, half in rebellious sympathy with the sinners, half in alarm at the scandal of their behavior. After this, what might they not do! And out there in the garden, what might they not be doing this very moment! He might be holding her hand. He might even, — he would n't mind the proprietor and the maids, perhaps, — he might even — even be pressing it! A little chill ran over Miss Bruce as the unmaidenly thought flashed through her mind, and she looked guiltily around in an agony lest some one had read it on her face. Everybody else looked around, too. Mrs. Pemberry raised her eyebrows till they were almost lost under her cap, and Miss Woodruff coughed deprecatingly, feeling somewhat incriminated from the fact that she had lent the offenders the countenance of her shawl.

Lady Bruce was the first to speak: —

"Do you understand that this is an ordinary proceeding for American young people, Mrs. Pemberry, — going out alone in this way at nine o'clock at night?"

Mrs. Pemberry lifted her hands in protest at the appeal. "Don't refer to me, please. I was never but five weeks in America, and then only in Nova Scotia. I 'm sure I don't know what may n't go on in the States. Almost anything, I believe."

"How can Mrs. Allison allow her daughter to do such things!" continued Lady Bruce. "Do you suppose she knows it? She seems a refined, well-bred woman, too. Anna, you 'll remember never to be with Miss Allison again unless I am by. It 's really scandalous to leave those two out there alone. Some one ought to go to them. If it were not for my rheumatism, I would go myself."

A merry laugh rang out near the window as she spoke. The pair were just passing.

"Yes, indeed," said Theo's high, clear voice. "*Riz de veau* five days out of seven is rather often, I admit."

"And the chickens," responded the gentleman with animation, — "don't you think it would be an advantage if they

had fewer legs and more wings?"

And the voices passed out of hearing.

"If I were not afraid of stopping in the night air, I should certainly go outside to them," said Mrs. Pemberry virtuously. "But the girl can't come to any real harm, can she? After all, every one knows she 's an American."

"That excuses a great deal," added gentle old Miss Woodruff conciliatorily. "Those two young things are certainly deeply interested in each other, — deeply; and one must make allowances for people in love. I dare say to stand out there under the moon and look in each other's eyes is bliss enough to risk everything for, even a sore chest to-morrow."

The voices were going by the window again.

"You don't mean it! The man cheated you!" Elsworth was saying. "Why, I only gave twenty-three francs for mine, and I thought that an awful price. Try the shop on the left-hand side next time," and distance swallowed up the rest.

"All I can say," declared Lady Bruce oracularly, "is that, if they are not engaged, they ought to be. I never saw such devotion before, — he waiting on her every movement, without thought for another being if she is present, and she accepting it all in the most matter-of-fact way as her rightful due. Why, *of course* they are engaged."

"Oh, I feel so much better," said Theo from the door. "Miss Bruce, you ought to have come, too. You don't know how nice it is outside, only all the couriers are smoking. Miss Woodruff, thank you so much for the shawl."

Miss Woodruff took it back, with the smile of generous pardon difficult to withhold from an offender who has the grace to be young and pretty, while Lady Bruce rose austerely, and carried off her daughter to the safe seclusion of their own apartments. Anna never dreamed of asking to be left behind, though there was a whole roomful of competent old chaperones, and only one young man to be chaperoned from. She followed her mother obediently upstairs, and sat for a long time pretending to read by the glimmer of an incapable lamp, which threw as dull a light upon her book as the book threw upon her brain. In reality she was wondering whether in that great and strange world over the seas, which seemed to be stocked so full of unappropriated young men, it could be possible that even plain girls — even ugly girls, she added stoutly to herself, catching a glimpse of her constructive little face in the mirror — might stand a chance of winning from any one such lovely service as was now being laid at Theo's feet. How gladly would she repay with her whole soul's wealth but a tithe of such devotion as this! It was a great pity indeed that English people could not spend their winters sometimes in America, instead of always on the Riviera. Oh, what a land that must be, where life's highest pleasures not only were never forbidden fruits, but were hung by a beneficent fate within convenient reach of even the most timid hand! One could afford to be just a little barbarous, for the sake of being denizens of such a country.

The next day was Sunday, and, attended by her faithful cavalier, Theo came to church in the morning, looking prettier than any picture. Anna saw the couple the moment they entered, and colored high with interest, becoming immediately so wholly absorbed in them that she made sorry work with her responses, and at last forgot to turn over the leaves of her book as the service proceeded. It was surprising that Theo could look so innocent and unabashed all the time, though not even Miss Wright was there to support her. Once Mr. Elsworth leaned towards her and murmured something in the tiny pink ear next him, and the faintest gleam of a smile appeared on Theo's charming face, followed by the lightest possible deepening of the delicate rose in her cheeks. Was she blushing at what he had said, or only blushing because she had smiled? And once, when some unprofessional chorister in the background added a few original and altogether unpraiseworthy notes to the anthem, Theo turned to Elsworth with a wicked little glance of intelligence. Anna watched the pair breathlessly, and wondered whether "Woman, wilt thou take this man to be thy wedded husband?" got elaborately mixed up with the text in Theo's brain, as it somehow did in hers.

The sermon, truly, was quite lost on poor Anna. It was a black-letter day for her morals. She felt as if she were reading a novel in church. But who could lay down so sweet a romance unread, when it was fate, not will, that thus enticingly turned the leaves?

Mrs. Pemberry joined Lady Bruce at the conclusion of the service. Theo and Mr. Elsworth were directly in front of them, as they all strolled slowly home-

words along the sun-bright esplanade.

"Engaged, don't you think so?" whispered Miss Woodruff, with a nod of her many plumes towards the pair in front.

"Unquestionably!" answered Lady Bruce, quite aloud. "Ought to be, if they are n't. Anna, can't you keep up with us?"

Anna was lagging behind. It seemed indelicate to walk within earshot of this self-centred couple. Perhaps even Lady Bruce was moved by some compunction-ate instinct of the sort, for she presently quickened her pace, till her party was only rewarded 'Theo, but passed her by. Anna could see Lady Bruce catching a bit of their conversation in the moment of passing, though she conscientiously tried her best not to hear.

"Hot, was n't it?" from Elsworth.

"Awfully," from Theo.

"Hard work, too."

"Yes. I wish I had stayed at home. There was sure to be a mail."

"That 's so. The steamer 's in. Let 's hurry."

Oh, how silly to hurry home for letters when one could linger on such a this-is-the-walk as that! Anna sighed. How little some over-blessed people appreciate Heaven's favors!

But that very afternoon, as she sat at the window of the reading-room, while Lady Bruce bent devotingly over the Times, undisturbed by the hungry gaze of an old gentleman who had been waiting already three quarters of an hour for the paper, Anna saw the fortunate pair starting out again for a stroll, Theo turning up her bright face to a window above to kiss her hand to her mother. Mrs. Allison certainly seemed to see no harm in her daughter's walking off all alone with a young man. Strange that two mothers judged so differently of the same thing, one deeming altogether right what the other deemed altogether wrong! But of course it is always one's own mother who knows best. That is what makes a line of action clear and easy to each daughter. Still Anna's eyes rested wistfully on the pair.

"Prettily matched, are n't they, dear?" murmured Miss Woodruff, drawing a fur cape closer around her neck, with the mincing caution of a confirmed invalid, as she stretched out her head beside Anna's to look after them. "Very imprudent of them to go out in this wind; and likely as not, too, they 'll forget that they should come in before dinner. But I suppose young people can't be minding dreams when they 're in love. Foolish, foolish; but it seems they can't be separated a moment. I hope my they 're going up among the olives!"

Anna's heart beat high. Up among the olives! All alone, with that kindly, lazy screen shutting them out from sympathetic eyes! "Do you think so?" she answered faintly. Through her mind there darted, like the glimpse of a painted picture, a possible scene under the gray old trees: two young people seated together on a bench not long enough for three, holding each other by the hands and not speaking for content. No wonder she blushed so hotly and turned away her head. "Do you think so?" she repeated, lower yet.

"I should think it natural," said Miss Woodruff, quite off her guard from her deep interest in the couple. "At least," she added hastily, recollecting her duty towards the uncontaminated young girl at her side, — "at least, it 's most foolish and out of the way, and not at all to be recommended, my dear; but they 're so wrapped up in each other, poor things, — see him buttoning her gloves; I almost feel as if we ought n't to look, — and they 'll like to have a good, quiet talk, all by themselves, I doubt not. It 's the way of young people in their state. It 's a very foolish state, my dear."

"Good-by," called a cheery voice from some window out of sight. "Good-by, Theo."

"It 's Miss Wright," whispered Anna.

Theo looked up, still holding out one gloved hand towards her knight, and with the other tilting back her hat, the better to see her friend. "Oh, Nettie, do change your mind, and come too!"

"Can't. Letters to write," came down in decisive answer.

"Merely an excuse, I am sure," commented Miss Woodruff, reaching out her head still further in a vain attempt to see Miss Wright, too. "When one is at home one says headache, and when one is abroad one says letters. But it 's kind of her to take their condition into consideration, utterly foolish as it is."

"So sorry," Theo called out skyward. "We are going to the public gardens. It 's fun to see the crowds there. Good-by."

The picture in Anna's mind of the two alone beneath the olives was suddenly obliterated. Still, in a crowd,

an Italian crowd, — and she rapidly reflected that English was not taught in the common schools, — almost as much might be ventured as in a tête-à-tête. Theo was still greatly to be envied.

"What do you suppose they talk about when they are off all alone?" she asked Miss Woodruff, in the convenient half whisper in which their conversation was conducted out of regard to Lady Bruce and the Times.

"Oh, my dear!" exclaimed the good little old lady, scandalized at such an over-curious question, and hastily drawing in her head. "It won't do for us to imagine. They are Americans, and so of course not to be judged by our codes; but I really would n't like to guess. It 's very improper, their being allowed off so beyond all restraint and oversight of their guardians, and I don't know at all what they may be saying under such circumstances; but I have a sort of idea," — she glanced around uneasily at Lady Bruce, and lowered her voice still more, — "of course I don't *know*, but I have a sort of idea that the young man must either be making her a declaration every moment, or at the least paying her very open compliments, such as he would n't dream of doing in the presence of a mamma, they would sound so foolish. And compliments *are* foolish; remember that, my dear. They are always foolish, even when the mamma is n't by."

"But Theo," whispered Anna almost inaudibly, — "what could she be saying? She could n't be accepting him over and over again, you know."

"Well, no, she could n't. That is true," agreed Miss Woodruff, after a moment's consideration. "I don't see what she could be saying. Perhaps she only listens. But, as I said, it won't do for us to imagine it too closely. It 's a very unhealthful subject for young girls. You should keep your mind clear of all such foolishness. And I think your mamma is wanting you."

It was an easy way for Miss Woodruff to be rid of the delicate subject. But Anna was absorbed, body and soul, in this one theme, and for her there was no escape from it, turn where she would. All the sultry afternoon she sat closeted in her own little room behind closed blinds, peering down stealthily through the slats. Her book lay unopened on her lap. If lost in reading she might miss seeing Theo as she came back. She was more than rewarded for the long watch, when at last the two returned, by the glimpse of a bunch of violets in Theo's belt that was not there before. Were these the first flowers he had ever given her? Violets were cheap on the Riviera, but oh how precious these must be! Doubtless as he gave them he told her that they were the color of her eyes, only less sweet, and less blue, and less perfect, as all things were less perfect to him than she was. Perhaps she permitted herself to smile back at him as he said it, unless, frightened at the love welling over in her heart, her lashes had drooped lower than before, and she had not dared to lift her head.

Surely, the next best thing to having a romance in one's own life is the living near some one else's romance, and poor little Anna felt very, very near to Theo's, — so near that it quite made her heart jump when they met. She wondered if Theo had made a confidant of her friend, and if so how it was possible for Miss Wright to look so unconscious and cool all the time, just as if no such lovely secret lay throbbing on her soul. For of course Theo and Mr. Elsworth were betrothed. Everybody said they were only waiting for the arrival of Mr. Allison for the engagement to be announced. And it was but a few days later, in fact when it was suddenly proclaimed that Mr. Allison was actually coming.

"He will be here to-morrow night," said Miss Woodruff, her gentle face all aglow with pleasure. "Theo told me just now, and you never saw such bright eyes and rosy cheeks. 'I dare say his coming means a great deal to you, my dear,' I said, very significantly. 'It 's surely a great deal more than just your papa's coming back that brings such roses to these bonny cheeks.' The pretty creature stooped and kissed me, and laughed, and then ran away, redder than ever. Silly of her not to say anything, was n't it? But one can't expect sense of young people in love, and it 'll be all settled now."

"Time it was," said Lady Bruce, — "high time. I hope they 'll be married the day after. Then perhaps they can see enough of each other, which they don't seem able to do now."

But the very day of Mr. Allison's expected arrival a remarkable event took place.

Lady Bruce, with her docile daughter at her side, stepped into the reading-room on her way indoors from a walk,

and quite ran into Mr. Elsworth, who, cap in hand, and arrayed unmistakably in traveling garb, was saying farewell to the two or three ladies present.

"Ah, Lady Bruce, I am glad not to have to leave without saying good-by to you!" exclaimed the young man, coming up to her with his most cordial smile. "I am just off for Genoa."

"Indeed? How soon do you return?"

"I really can't say," he rejoined, smiling still more. "But it will hardly be again this season."

Lady Bruce drew back, and looked at him.

"What!" she said.

Her tone gave the monosyllable something of the character of a pistol shot. Anna looked to see the young man felled by it, but he merely shook his head in the most amiable way, and drew out his watch.

"Yes, — hardly again this season," he repeated cheerily. "I am to join friends, who are not thinking of coming this way. Perhaps" — he looked quite embarrassed all of a sudden — "you have all been so kind to me, perhaps it may interest you to hear what calls me away. You must congratulate me. I am going to Genoa to meet the young lady to whom I am engaged, and whom I am to marry next fall, so that whether I shall ever return here or not will depend, you see, upon a higher will than my own. However, I hope I may meet you all again some day. Good-by, Lady Bruce. Good-by, Miss Woodruff. Good-by, Miss Bruce. Good-by."

He shook hands heartily all round, including in his large good-humor a newly arrived old maid, with whom no one had as yet exchanged a syllable, and who was greatly taken aback at this exuberant cordiality; and in another moment he was off.

The group of ladies looked at each other in consternation.

"Well!" said Lady Bruce. "What has he done with Miss Allison? What does it all mean? And her father coming this very day!"

"Oh, the poor pretty dear! the poor pretty young creature!" sighed Miss Woodruff, with wet eyes. "The wretch has broken faith with her. Oh, the unfeeling, cruel monster! the heartless scoundrel! To think of her pink cheeks last night, and her bright eyes! Oh, the poor pretty child! She 'll be crying her sweet eyes out now up-stairs, locked in her room. To think there 's no saying a word to comfort her! Whatever will she do? However will she look us all in the face again, and we knowing how it is? I said to her only last night, 'I dare say your papa's coming means a great deal to *you*, my dear,' and I said it *most* significantly."

Anna stood by, very white and silent. Was this, then, the cruel end of that lovely romance she had been watching from its beginning? Down to the profoundest depths of her compassionate heart, she pitied that poor girl up-stairs. Vividly as she had pictured the scene beneath the olives, she now pictured Theo in her desolation. How had he told her the cruel truth? Had he thrown it at her shortly, bluntly, unfeelingly, as he had thrown it at them, regardless of her pain? Had it nearly killed her to hear it, or had she been brave, as heroines sometimes are, and smiled up at him unflinchingly over her broken heart, as if listening to welcome news? Oh, but it was cruel, cruel! And she could do nothing to show her sympathy! Unless — what if she should lay a rose beside the girl's plate at dinner? She could slip it into place as she went by. Her mother and she were always down before the rest. Nobody need know who put it there, and perhaps Theo would feel a little comforted, finding so delicate a message of love from an unobtrusive friend. Comforted somewhat herself with the idea, Anna stole away into the garden to seek her flower. It must be very fair, very sweet, very perfect, that rose that was charged with so tender a burden of sympathy. She found it at last, after a long and patient search, and returned to the house just as the omnibus drove up to the door from the station. There were but two passengers, one of them evidently Theo's father. Mrs. Allison had come downstairs to meet him, all smiles and gentle gladness; and Miss Wright was there, too, with her American nose, and her wide-awakeness, and her air of encyclopædical intelligence. Anna did not like to push by to reach the door, and so stood a little aside, timidly waiting till the greeting should be over, and holding her rose gingerly between her fingers, lest pressure should fade it.

The omnibus stopped, and almost before the passengers could alight a third figure sprang out from behind the others and threw herself into the old gentleman's arms. It was Theo. Was she

laughing or crying on her father's neck? Anna's eyes dropped. How could she lift them to the poor girl's face, so dreading what she should see there?

But the other passenger, a handsome young fellow, much like a second edition of Elsworth, was bolder than Anna. He walked up to Theo, and standing directly behind her loosened her hands from her father's neck, and so drew her backward till he could look down into her face.

"Theo!" he said.

And right before everybody that strange and bold young man stooped and kissed her on the lips. Theo's face was rosier than the dawn, and her eyes were brighter than any stars, and she looked like one who had that very minute entered heaven.

In the hall there was the usual bustle of officious porters, and ubiquitous bags, and bowing landlords. Back of them all stood Lady Bruce.

"Miss Wright," she said, unceremoniously stopping that young lady on her way up-stairs after the others by lunging at her with her parasol, "is that young man Miss Allison's brother?"

"Bless you, no," returned Miss Wright, cheerfully, moving a step or two out of reach of the dangerous weapon. "That 's Theo's *fiancé*. Good-looking, is n't he?"

"And Mr. Elsworth? Pray, was he her fiancé *pro tem*?"

"Oh," answered Miss Wright brightly, "I always told you there was nothing in that. They were only good friends. Each one knew all the time that the other was engaged. It made it very safe and pleasant for them."

Lady Bruce gave an unaristocratic grunt. "And what name do you give such sort of devotion as theirs, if you please? It 's a common thing in your country, I believe."

"Very common, indeed; rather oftener than not," replied Miss Wright, unconcernedly, turning to follow her friends up the stairs. "Nobody means anything by it, and everybody understands. You might call it an American flirtation, if you like. *Au revoir.*"

Just outside the doorway poor little Anna stood transfixed. Her rose had fallen to the ground, and the heel of the bold young man who had kissed Theo had crushed it quite out of shape as he passed by.

So nobody meant anything, and everybody understood.

Ah, could it be that if anything like that ever happened in her own life it would mean no more than this?

*Grace Denio Litchfield.*

# THE YOUTH'S COMPANION.

## NOVEMBER 6, 1884.

### MY LOST BABY.

Where is my Baby gone?
  Little girl, say,—
Some one has stolen her
  All in a day.
'Tis but a year or two,
Since with a tear or two
And just a fear or two,
  I went away,
And here, in this very room,
  My Baby lay.

Where has my Baby gone?
  No one has said;
Sister, come weep with us,
  Baby is dead!
Not sick at all she was,
This is how tall she was;
You see too small she was
  Out of her bed
To clamber and run away,—
  Yet she has fled.

Oh, where is Baby gone?
  Left she no track?
Little girl, laughing so,
  Go bring her back!
Yes, she had hair like you,
And was named Claire like you,
And she was fair like you,—
  Eyes just as black;—
But *you* are not *she*, you know,
  Alack and alack!

GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.