

IN THE COURSE OF TIME

When Maud and I were nine or ten, we shared our "every grief and joy, Played, quarreled, 'made it' again, As if she, too, had been a boy." But when we reached thirteen or so I seldom let her join my play: "You're nothing but a girl, you know, With frank contempt I used to say." Years passed, and we were seventeen, Fair Maud was older far than I; She laughed at me with scorn severe, For I was "just a boy," and shy. But when we came to twenty-three, I more than scolded all my ears; She then had due respect for me, And—quite ignorant our equal years. Time, though obtrusive to men, Can spore his scythe, it seems, at will; For now my son is nearly ten. White Maud is three-and-twenty, still— Charles P. Sherman, in *Life*.



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CHAPTER VII.—CONTINUED.

"Oh! I am quite capable of it, I assure you," said Eric. "I'll get the princess to poison you. Still, no, on second thought, I can't. She's entirely too strong a hater of our transatlantic republic. If I talked with her about that Borgian Burgundy for you, she would be certain to snub me for wishing to give you so old-world and aristocratic an extinction."

The princess, though much more prairie than a Borgia, had already contrived to make her son's little court a nest of discontentments. Her severities, her arraigning edicts, had bathed in gloom all the merry abandon of Clarimond's environment, and by the time that May touched the valley with its tender promises, she had filled it also with feuds and bickerings. It was her wish that the hotels adjacent to the springs should be closed permanently, but on this point the king showed firm disfavor. "The waters are wonderfully healing," he said. "Let those who choose come and drink of them."

"Bah!" said his mother. "My dear Clarimond, you cheapen your charming little kingdom. And then those unspeakable Americans!"

"Unspeakable, indeed," said the king, "in occasional instances."

"What do you mean?" asked the princess, with a start.

"I mean the enchanting young American lady of whom I caught a glimpse last evening," he replied. "I've not yet found out her name, but Eric has promised to get it for me. Perhaps Lispenard might know her, but as you are probably aware, he is now in Munich."

The princess gnawed her mother lip and said nothing. Her son's civilities to Bianca d'Este had not been half as accentuated of late as she desired them to be.

The name of this enchanting young American lady, in whom the king found himself uncommonly interested, was Kathleen Kennard. On the morrow Eric Thaxter made that discovery and at once imparted it to Clarimond. For some reason Eric refrained from mentioning the former relations between Kathleen and his absent friend. All the time, however, he was telling himself that it was a very small world, and wondering if Alonzo would not agree with him to this effect when he returned from Munich.

"I should like greatly to know that girl," the king said to Eric a day or two later. "Her face somehow haunts me. Do what you can about it, won't you?"

If Mrs. Kennard had heard those words from the royal lips it is certain that her heart would have given a very lofty leap indeed.

CHAPTER VIII.

The truth was that Kathleen's mother had brought her to Saltravia with a most ambitious motive. After leaving Stuttgart they had been living for several months in Dresden, and there she had heard things concerning Clarimond which made it seem at least conceivable that a splendid event might crown past disappointments and chagrins. Poor Kathleen, whose health had somewhat failed of late, did not dream of the audacity which underlay her mother's proposal that they should visit the Saltravian springs. They had hardly been there three days at the hotel when Clarimond, strolling one evening, just at sunset, passed the casino, saw Kathleen, and was struck by her peculiar loveliness. The princess detested his democratic way of exhibiting himself, as she called it, and more than once implored him not to appear thus publicly. But the king had no idea of hedging himself with his own divinity. He had long ago formed the habit of going and coming like a private gentleman, and, though the stars of the crowd did not precisely please him, they were less of a bore than would have been compulsory self-immurement. Mrs. Kennard was quickly plunged into an ecstasy by his evident admiration of Kathleen.

"I do wish one could know him," she said to her daughter. "Did you notice how he looked at you, my dear?"

"No," said Kathleen. "It seemed to me that he looked at everybody equally, and in the most amiable manner."

"They say," continued Mrs. Kennard, "that he is wonderfully amiable for a king. And he certainly is very handsome; don't you think so?"

"I think him very distinguished."

Kathleen's eyes glistened as she added:

"There's a picturesqueness about him that corresponds perfectly with this lovely land he rules. He interests me very greatly. I don't mean so much because of his royalty as of the artistic atmosphere in which he seems to dwell; though one must allow each its attractive force."

"His being royal is hardly an objection, I should say," remarked Mrs. Kennard. "One can endure it. At least I can—that is in a son-in-law." And she laughed a sort of tinkling little laugh.

"Mamma! Good heavens! What are you saying?" As she spoke, Kathleen flushed to her temples and then grew colorless.

They had left the casino and had reached a somewhat lonely spot, where

at a distance you could see the pale marvels of the palace towering with its innumerable spires, turrets and crenellations above the bounteous verdure of the dark-green champaign. Between masses of spicy-scented hemlocks flashed and flashed a cascade, and so strong was the afternoon breeze that it blew little spray-laden gusts from the foamy and tumbling turbulence of water. Mother and child were not wholly alone, as it chanced, and Mrs. Kennard, with a look to right and left as though an ambushed listener were possible, if not just a likelihood, suddenly said:

"I'm not dealing in such fairy dreams my dear, after all." And then she let her hand rest on the girl's arm, steadily and meaningly pressing it.

"Mamma! mamma! Even if I cared to marry anyone, I—"

"You shall not sacrifice your life to that ruffian, Kathleen. For this is what he had been to us both. I shall never be happy until I see you married happily—and brilliantly, too. Of course King Clarimond would be a glorious triumph for you. I've dared to dream of such an event. Yes, Kathleen, I actually have. And there are strong reasons, my dear, why I should so have dreamed. You remember that Mrs. Winslow in Dresden—that bright little Boston woman with the lemon-colored eyebrows—who gave us our letter to the Jerninghams here? Well, it was she who first roused me in my daring idea. She looked at you on the evening that we dined with her, and murmured to me that you had the air of a queen, because your manner was at once so grand and so simple, and then (this she said in the frankest yet most abrupt fashion, as if it were only an afterthought), because you were so entirely, so exceptionally handsome. Before that the wobbly little creature had been speaking of the king of Saltravia. She had told me that his hatred of morganatic marriages had given offense to some of the haughtiest nobles of Europe, and that he had refused to receive a certain princely cousin of his on account of having contracted such an alliance. Then she said other things concerning Clarimond; she spoke of his intense democracy, of his rumored assertion that he meant to marry the woman he loved, even though she were born a peasant; and lastly of his well-known regard for America and the American people. This, my dear was the secret of my having brought you here. You see, I'm making a clear breast of it to you now. Don't stare at me in that amazed manner. You act as if you'd just heard an explosion of dynamite."

"I have, mamma—and a rather loud one."

Mrs. Kennard drew herself up and gave several short nods. "Kathleen, stranger things have happened. And if there's a woman living who could bring about such a development I believe that I am she."

They had reached a small rustic seat, within a thicket of laurels whence rose a bust in granite of Pouslinski, the famed Russian poet. Kathleen sank into the seat almost exhausted, heaving a quick sigh, while her mother stood beside her, a presence of extreme stateliness and distinction.

"Are you tired, my dear, so soon?" she asked.

Kathleen looked up at her with a cold, fatigued smile. "You've wearied me beyond expression," she answered.

"My child!"

"Oh, mamma, it's true! You know that I loved him, and that I love him still! To you it may sound senseless enough, but he is more to me than a whole dynasty of kings! And then for you to torment me by this new folly! As if you had not already made me go through enough! As if I were not the butt and jeer of hundreds of people at this very hour! Surely you might have some mercy after what you dragged me through in London!"

"Kathleen! Kathleen! This is atrocious!"

"It is indeed!" cried the girl, and without another word she sprang to her feet and hurried away, leaving her mother to gaze at her figure as it re-entered the fringed frondage of the hemlocks.

Well though she believed that she knew Kathleen, Mrs. Kennard had not a doubt that the actual success of her new and most characteristic design would win from her child the gladdest sort of acquiescence. There are some natures that can no more conceive of others really refusing certain positive worldly gains when the chance comes for palpably grasping them than a man born color blind can conceive of the lights and shade in a canvas by Rousseau or Daubigny. If it was fate that this extraordinary, this unprecedented young king should fall in love with her daughter, his nuptial path would of course be one strewed with roses. As if any woman could or would refuse to become a queen. Kathleen was capable of odd behavior, beyond a doubt; but even her worst vagaries must end at the bounds of lunacy.

That afternoon the Kennards had received an invitation to go and drink tea at the Jerningham's villa. They had not yet met the Jerninghams, though brother and sister had both left cards upon herself and Kathleen a few days ago, finding them absent from the hotel. When Mrs. Kennard again saw her daughter she refused to pay the proposed visit.

"Say that I am unwell, mamma," was Kathleen's announcement. "Say anything you please. I shall not go."

"But you must, my dear. They are not people to treat rudely, although I have learned since we have been at the hotel that they are exclusively in the foreign set and that neither the king nor any of his court honor their entertainments. It seems that Mr. Jerningham has made himself unpopular in Saltravia. I mean since Mr. Eric Thaxter caused the king to treat him so cruelly. But perhaps you haven't heard about that. No? Oh, then, I won't bore you with our private grievances. And yet, after all, they've been horribly public ever since my dear brother was ousted from his position and that Alonzo Lispenard was made to replace him."

"Eric Thaxter," broke in Kathleen.

"I remember that name. Where have I heard it?"

"Really I don't know, my dear. Perhaps during your London days. He can't be anyone of the least importance in New York, though I am told that he

originally belonged there. He is of great importance here, however, he is a sort of power behind the throne. The king is devoted to him. I must manage to meet him. Poor, dear, gouty old Mrs. Madison has promised to present him soon. One sees him now and then at the Casino, she tells me, and not seldom in the company of the king himself. He has the entree into the very most difficult Saltravian houses. Indeed, why not, since that charming Clarimond deigns to be his friend? You will change your mind about the Jerninghams, my dear, will you not?"

"No," replied Kathleen, with much firmness. Then she looked at her mother very fixedly, and pursued: "Now, mamma, let me one thing be clearly understood between you and me. I do not wish to go at all into society while we are in Saltravia. We came here for the waters—at least I did, if you did not. It is late in the day for me to try and impress upon you that my social life has ended. You must have seen that in Dresden! And as for a certain idea of yours, I can only say that it would be painful to me beyond words—painful and mortifying in the extreme—were it not so strongly flavored with an element of wild absurdity."

Mrs. Kennard attempted no further persuasions. "Let me achieve her presentation to the king," she mused, "and that nonsensical desire for secluding herself will vanish like one of the Saltravian morning mists." And while she robed her stately figure, that afternoon, in the most becoming gown that her limited wardrobe possessed, the new yearning cheered her spirit as an elixir-like cordial warms the blood. Because an aim was dazzling, even dizzying, should it for that reason be deserted? Ah, to think of the exquisite victory it would mean! How that horrible marchioness of Dendulow would writhe when she heard of it! To be the mother of a queen! There was something splendidly distinctive in the very boldness of the project. The fact that an effort like this seemed with novelty and daring was no sign that it would prove a failure. After all, so much depended on Kathleen's powers of fascination, and these were immense. Then, too, was she not just American enough to be called an American girl, and was not this the next remarkable and stirring act for the American girl to commit? Margaretta Kennard surveyed herself in the dressing mirror as she donned her bonnet, and thought how the matronly symmetries of her figure would grace a court. And then to have her portrait painted by some famous European artist and hung in the palace as that of the "queen's mother!" Perhaps several centuries after her death it would hang there. And for several centuries, no doubt, they would recollect her great accomplishment over seas in New York, whence her stock had sprung. Everybody who could claim the faintest relationship with her would do so. "Queen Kathleen" would rate for them as an ancestress worth having; that humiliating Dendulow affair would be mercifully hidden (why not?) by the capacious mantle of history itself. "Queen Kathleen!" What a delightful sound it had! "Clarimond and Kathleen!" There was not as much real honed romanticism in even "Romeo and Juliette!"

It must be confessed that meditations of this kind produced an intoxicating effect upon this most curious of American "aristocrats." Her state of mind was almost an agitated one by the time that a short stroll had brought her to the gates of the Jerningham villa. She felt herself on the verge of society here in Saltravia, felt that to-day might prove but the quiet threshold of many beautiful morrows. There were not more than twenty guests present, and these were nearly all her own country folks. In the course of a little time she was presented to at least half of them, finding that she already knew a few, that she had heard of a number more, and that certain others were not by any means of a desirable type. Then it entered her shrewd mind that this set into which she had drifted was altogether the wrong set, and that if she kept Kathleen quite out of it she would be doing a most prudent act.

The Jerninghams, brother and sister, had evidently a great grudge against the king and his court, and it was pleasant for them to feel that their friends were of the same rather rancorous mind. They never spoke against Clarimond, but they hinted that he was foppish and frivolous and had all the proverbial bad faith of princes. Brother and sister were oddly alike, both being tall and slim, both having a sunken look about the cheeks and slaty-hued eyes with pink-edged lids. They both talked with a slight lisp, and in talking used their hands with the same jerky little gestures. Neither of them often said "I." It was always "we" with them, so that after awhile you got the impression that nothing happened singly to this devoted brother and sister, but that human experience treated them to its good and its ill in perpetual duo, as the rain and sun treat two apples on a single stem.

Harriet Jerningham made herself notably civil to Mrs. Kennard, and after while they had a private chat together amid the general babble of the little modish drawing-room.

"We hear your daughter is so wonderfully beautiful, Mrs. Kennard," said the sister of the depoed art superintendent. "Pardon me, but we do! And it grieves me greatly to hear that she is indisposed to-day. The waters sometimes affect people for a few days just like that. We can't live away from them now, though at first we thought them really quite horrid. That is why my dear brother hasn't departed from Saltravia. I mean since Mr. Eric Thaxter caused the king to treat him so cruelly. But perhaps you haven't heard about that. No? Oh, then, I won't bore you with our private grievances. And yet, after all, they've been horribly public ever since my dear brother was ousted from his position and that Alonzo Lispenard was made to replace him."

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"I remember that name. Where have I heard it?"

"Really I don't know, my dear. Perhaps during your London days. He can't be anyone of the least importance in New York, though I am told that he

back next week for the great royal ball at the palace. Pray, do you know him?"

"Yes—yes, I've met him. He's a—New Yorker, you know."

"True. I suppose you have met him in society over there—the 'Four Hundred,' as they call it?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Kennard, feeling a little dizzy and hardly knowing just what answer left her lips. "Quite right. It—er—was in the 'Four Hundred,' as you say."

"Such a queer name, isn't it?" babbled Miss Jerningham. "We can't get used to it, you know. There was nothing of that sort when we were there."

"Oh, yes, there was," her listener might mentally have said, "only you know nothing about it." But Mrs. Kennard was in no mood for any such comments, whether mute or vocal. "And so this Alonzo Lispenard," she presently faltered, "holds a position here under the king."

"Oh, yes—yes, I've met him. He's a—New Yorker, you know. There was nothing of that sort when we were there."

"Yes," said Mrs. Kennard. "Let me achieve her presentation to the king," she mused, "and that nonsensical desire for secluding herself will vanish like one of the Saltravian morning mists."

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