

THE AUGUST MOON

BY HARRISON CLARK.

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"A" cried Wilberton, sitting up straight
in his chair on the year-round resort
hotel veranda. "Here is where Dull
Monotony packs his things and hikes
from the seaside."

"I should like to know why," commented Mrs. Wilberton skeptically. "I am sure nothing has occurred—"

"Well, something will occur very shortly," her husband assured her. "Why," he exclaimed, "things simply cannot be quiescent with a woman as pretty as that in their midst."

He nodded. Mrs. Wilberton letting her gaze follow the direction of the nod, saw a young woman following the valise-encumbered porter toward the hotel entrance. She was a tall young woman, and slender, and her tan travelling gown was unquestionably in the latest style. By the hand she held a very small boy who was having great trouble with a very large straw hat.

"Your taste in women is constantly changing," Mrs. Wilberton averred in a tone which plainly conveyed her contempt for such inconsistency. Mrs. Wilberton was fat and she was not tall, and her eyes were not gray. "Since when—"

"Oh, I always liked them tall and slender!"

"This one is positively thin!"

"And with dark hair and big gray eyes!"

"One can never be sure about hair."

"And clear, clean complexion, free of drug store blush—"

"It is certainly absurd to regard that complexion



"DULL CARE RETREATS FROM A WOMAN AS PRETTY AS THAT."

as real, or pretty, or even artistically done. And anyhow it will not last two days in this sun and sea breeze."

"She walks well, a sort of queenly gait—"

"Very carefully studied from some second-rate actress, I dare say—not at all natural, and decidedly—er—indolent!"

"She doesn't seem to be very enthusiastic," agreed Wilberton.

"Probably some stenographer or dressmaker taking a vacation on her year's savings," commented Mrs. Wilberton, with an air of dismissing the subject. "No one seems to recognize her, and there are nice people here from everywhere. She is registering. It would seem, as you are so greatly interested in her, you would see who she is, or at least that she registers, and where she is from," she added reprovingly.

"Oh, so I might! Hadn't occurred to me."

Wilberton arose deliberately and sauntered into the office. The new arrival was just leaving for her room, still under the porter's guidance and still holding by the hand the little boy with the big hat.

"Who is she, Julius?" he asked of the hotel clerk.

"The lady who just registered? The one wit' the little boy? Just went out? In the cottage No. 43? The tall one wit' the black hair—yes?"

Wilberton took possession of the register and read the name, Helen Alvyn Brown, St. Louis.

"Is she 'Miss' or 'Mrs.' wondered Wilberton.

"W'y, she's got a little boy!" declared Julius. Without enthusiasm he returned to his wife.

"Men do find out so little," complained that lady when he had reported. "Why on earth respectable people cannot go to a hotel without being brought into contact with such persons—"

Wilberton, recognizing this as the beginning of a sermonistic disquisition which might lead into unpleasant paths, applied his usual preventive.

"Oh, I was about to forget my appointment to meet Stacy at the clubhouse for a game of billiards before luncheon. If you will be very careful," he called as he was leaving, "the new arrival may not contaminate you before I return."

Twenty-four hours later the Wilbertons were again in their chairs on the hotel veranda, watching the morning train arrivals.

"Oh, isn't that the handsomest man!" exclaimed Mrs. Wilberton, as a six-footer built like a lumber cutter and carrying himself with the swing of a college athlete and the air of a colonel on campaign, crunched his way behind the porter over the

crushed-shell walk.

"I don't think he is Adonis come to the seaside, so far as face is concerned," commented Wilberton. "His features are rather heavy and that jaw belongs to a prize fighter. But Lord, I should like to own those shoulders! I'd have something decent to eat, or I'd do things to that cook. He is certainly—a—dandy!"

Mrs. Wilberton gave a little sniff of annoyance. "I sometimes believe you would not care if I eloped—"

"Why—is Ajax Hercules an old name?" asked Wilberton.

"Certainly not!" was the positive reply, accompanied by the flirt of a fan. "And at any rate I am sure that is not his name. I wish you would be more careful about holding your shoulders up! If you had taken my advice you would be as fine-looking as that man."

"Why I do believe that man has already registered!" said Mrs. Wilberton. Men do things so precipitately. I am willing to wager that he did not ask a word about the rates or the hours for meals, or whether his room had hot and cold water—"

"Or whether the chambermaid had a family, or whether tight sleeves would be worn in 1999," Wilberton interrupted. "I shouldn't be surprised if he had his trunk checks in his hand and didn't have to block the line while he searched for them at the bottom of an alligator-skin suit case."

"Men have pockets," Mrs. Wilberton began with dignity.

"Women are the architects of their own dresses," retorted Wilberton.

And he rose and went to the register.

"It's Brown!" he announced upon his return. "William J. Brown. How fortunate it is not Jones or Smith!"

"The husband of Mrs. Brown! Perhaps he is Mr. Brown!"

"No, I think he is 'Colonel' Brown. He registers from St. Louis, and that is in the colonel belt."

"Why that's where she's from."

"I wonder how they left the seven thousand other Browns of St. Louis!"

"I was sure there was a mystery about that woman as soon as I laid eyes on her."

It is a mystery where she keeps herself. She hasn't been seen out of her room. She hasn't been in the water, and she wasn't in the parlor or on the veranda last night, and Miffin says she wasn't at breakfast—"

"Jeremiah Wilberton, I should think a man of your age and responsibilities—"

"Oh, that's all right. Charley Herpel was giving me the details, and he hasn't either age or responsibilities."

"Well, you seem to have remembered—"

"Just that instant!—remembered that Stacy was waiting for me to play billiards—"

And he sauntered away.

"No, he isn't her husband," said Wilberton confided as they entered the dining room for dinner. "I know he isn't, for he has room in the annex, while she is in the cottage."

She turned to her soup silently. Wilberton dined with a slice of tomato. Suddenly a shriek rang out.

"Goodness me!" cried Mrs. Wilberton, starting nervously. "Those children!" as the shriek was repeated. "Why on earth they are permitted in the dining room, and why on earth mothers haven't any more sense and consideration—"

"She didn't bring her boy," said Wilberton, pleased.

"I daresay," Mrs. Wilberton began coldly, after a pause, "she is one of those intellectual persons who regard children as incumbrances and has the poor little thing locked in a room this very minute simply starving—Why, isn't that Mr. Brown?" she interrupted herself excited as the arrival of the morning walked thoughtfully down the dining room. "It is! And—look!—he is going straight toward her table! I knew they must be acquainted!

"I'll bet his chest measurement is one hundred," declared Wilberton under his breath, as Brown sat down. "I shall certainly incite him against the cook."

"See!" whispered his wife. "She has turned pale. And he doesn't look in her direction! I wonder what on earth!"

"His appetite's all right," declared Wilberton. "I hope he'll get indigestion so that he will be in proper mood for the cook."

"Oh!" gasped Mrs. Wilberton on the veranda some two hours after dinner. There was a chorus of similar gasps from the other women.

Helen Alvyn Brown was entering the parlor. She was dazzlingly beautiful, her dark hair piled high, rose in it, a cloud-gray princess gown perfectly fitting her long, exquisitely rounded body, and not a jewel save the fiery opal blazing in one ring on her right hand. There was a slight flush in her cheek and she was smiling and talking vivaciously with the enchanted Herpel who was leading her to the piano.

There was a complete cessation for a moment of feminine chatter and a positive wave of masculine "whew's" as she touched the keys. She smiled up at Herpel and laughed: "What shall it be?" And without waiting for his stammering reply began the Jewel Song. Her voice rippled gloriously through the parlor and the hotel corridors, and along the veranda out into the sweet moonlight.

"Lord!" said Wilberton as the last note died softly away. His wife was resuming the comment which he had silenced four times in the course of the song. He arose abruptly.

"I want a cigar," he said.

"All about him the hum of enthusiastic praise of the singer and the song, praise tainted here and there with envy and rendered offensive in many

places by the absurdities of ignorance. He made his way to the hotel desk, which was also the cigar stand. Julius was in a state of fearsome perturbation, and queer foreign exclamations were exploding from his lips.

"I shall invite him to a challenge," he detonated as Wilberton came up.

"Let me have a cigar," begged Wilberton.

"He called me a chackass in my face," protested Julius.

"A cigar, please," Wilberton repeated. "Who is this zoological expert?"

"Who? W'y, that Brown—that pig proat—" and he sputtered a volley of presumptively adequate expletives.

"Brown? What was the occasion for his succinct diagnosis?"

"W'y he come up to the task, ant ask for a cigar—yes? Ant the lady is singink, ant while I reach for the cigar I say, 'The lady sing nice—yes?' Ant he—vot you say—groont!—oooh!—so! 'She has a goot coice—better as many vot I hear in Berlin.' I say. 'Ant still more he groont—oooh! 'You know he's laty? I say. 'I see you start to sit by t'e same taple wit' her—' Ant right in my face he say, 'You Chackass!' and go stomp! stomp! out from the office!"

"And so he called you a damned jackass!" mused Wilberton.

"No," Julius corrected him hastily—"not t' em—he dit not say tam!"

Mrs. Wilberton was absorbed in talk about the cloud-gray princess with two other women when Wilberton returned to the veranda; and as the Mystery was singing again—a present-day ballad—he strolled away, listening and smoking. Presently he came to a seat under the salt cedars, and dropped into it, unconsciously listening to the voice. It was several minutes before he knew that a man was in the next seat, likewise smoking. The discovery did not interest him; for the Mystery had burst into a rippling, rollicking thing, which he recognized as belonging to the "Chimes of Normandy," or "Bohemian Girl," or the "Sultan of Zulu," or something—its origin being of infinitesimal importance, and the thing worth while being the delicious sweetness of its present rendering. And he listened, and smoked, and looked out over the moonlit bay.

"Something like a sigh came from the next seat as the song ended, and the glowing cigar was lowered and its ash slipped away. Wilberton left moved by compassion.

"That's a beautiful voice," he said; and he was surprised at the softness of his words—as though the song were not ended and he did not wish to interrupt it.

"The most beautiful I have heard since—ever," said the Next Seat.

"A Miss Brown of St. —" began Wilberton.

"Yes, I know," interrupted the Next Seat. "Mrs. Brown."

"Oh! Mrs.," agreed Wilberton. "She's beautiful. Widow?"

"Widow—yes," he answered. And then: "I knew her husband—name the same—related, you know. Knew them both before they were married.

Wilberton awoke with a start. There was the rustle of a woman's garments and a woman, alone, dropped with a sigh into a seat a few feet away. The shadows were dark under the salt cedars; neither the glare of the electric lights from the hotel nor the glow of the moonlight filtered through the thick foliage. But out on the rippling bay a silvery path of light was laid, and the woman was clearly silhouetted against this.

There couldn't be any doubt of it—she was Alvyn Brown; and Wilberton stared wonderingly and went to making wild guesses as to why she had stolen away, and how she had managed to escape from her worshipful retinue. And while he was wondering and making guesses the dark head dropped and there was an outburst of woman's sobs—passionate, miserable.

And instantly there came the crash of an overturned seat, and the man who had been behind the other cigar came looming through the shadows. He stopped before the sobbing woman.

"Helen!" he cried. His voice was tender and low.

"Oh, why don't you leave me alone!" cried the woman. Her head was raised and her attitude was resentful—perhaps defiant. "You know I don't want—that I want to be left alone."

"Helen!" he said. "I was tender and low."

"Oh, why don't you leave me alone!" cried the woman. Her head was raised and her attitude was resentful—perhaps defiant. "You know I don't want—that I want to be left alone."

"I didn't know you were here," he answered; and then, with a trace of bitterness: "I believed the mistaken paragraph which said you had gone to Palm Beach. I thought the length of the Gulf of Mexico was distance enough between us to please even you."

"You had no right to think what would please me."

"There are some rights which cannot be withdrawn or surrendered," he answered sadly. "And

I have not molested you—"

"You have! You have driven me to pretend that I was enjoying myself, when I wanted to rest—rest! For I am so tired!"

The last word was a cry; and throwing her arms against the back of the seat she leaned her head upon them and wept hysterically.

The man stood statuile for a moment; then with a yearning cry he took a step forward, bent over, and caught the weeping woman in his arms.

"Good Lord!" cried Wilberton voicelessly. The man's exclamation was not of surprise at the man's actions but for the sudden realization that he was



WITH A YEARNING CRY BROWN
CAUGHT HER IN HIS ARMS.

an eavesdropper. He got carefully to his feet and stole away without disturbing a pebble. And he did not look back!

"Wake up, my dear," cried Wilberton at seven o'clock the next morning as he burst into his wife's bedroom. "I've been to a wedding," he cried, and began to hum the Mendelssohn march very much out of tune.

Mrs. Wilberton assumed a sitting posture and, cried, Jeremiah!" with the same single and eye-defying motion.

"Tum—tum, tum tum tum," hummed Wilberton. "You bet! Best man—gave bride away—"

"Who?" screamed Mrs. Wilberton. "And why didn't you take me?"

"Guess both answers," said Wilberton. "Tum—tum, tum—tum, tum tu-u-m, tu—Woman, unhand me!" For Mrs. Wilberton had him by both shoulders shaking him.

"I'll scream!" she cried.

"Do you think you can do any better than that?" he asked. "Hist!" he whispered, and tiptoed and listened in approved farce-comedy fashion. "It's—the—Browns!"

Mrs. Wilberton collapsed to a seat upon the side of the bed. "What did she have on?" she asked breathlessly.

"Something green and yellow—"

"Jeremiah!" she shrieked. "Impossible!"

"I don't know; but it was pretty. And she was more beautiful than ever—"

"I knew that woman would figure in a sensation! How did they happen to invite you?"

"Brown saw me on the beach (I went for a walk this morning) told me—asked me—I was delighted. He said they had made it all up last night—too late then to find a preacher—wanted to have it all over before hotel woke up—"

"I always did say there was a mys—"

"Yes; I believe I heard you. Lady was ready—so was the kid—impressed automobile—broke law and robbed park of all its bloom for bridal bouquet—honk, honk, to license clerk's house—honk, honk, to parsonage—"if any man, . . . let him forever after hold his peace"—I will!—Ten dollars please—and—". He yawned wearily. "Oh, there wasn't anything