

room with a top light on the second floor ; Stein had had it prepared, he had thought out everything.

“ And the dress ? ” she asked.

“ That dress,” said Jean, looking at the garment she wore, a mist-blue morning-gown suggestive of bluebells in the haze of the woods of Spring.

CHAPTER XV

THE PICTURE

HE did not stay more than an hour in all. There was no suggestion that he should remain to luncheon, or that his position was other than an entirely business one. He might have been a man come about the refurnishing or decoration of the house. This pleased him, if anything. He preferred remaining at a distance from the object of his passion, not to see her in the morning till she walked into the studio, not to see her till next day when he began his day's work.

The eye can be surfeited and the hand. Yes, he did not want to be treated as a man of her set, but just as a workman, and he did not want especially to see her again after he had re-created her on canvas—except in the Salon, well hung.

Coming down to the quay, he called upon Herdjiman for some rope the boatman had promised to get him from the big harbour.

Herdjiman lived in the street of the Winds. In Ragusa one is so struck by the fineness of the main thoroughfares that the little streets, some mere alleys, are apt to escape one's notice, but Ragusa has a large population, larger than one

would think from a first glance, a population that for the main part depends on the sea.

Here and at Spalato live families of the men who man the mail boats, the fishing boats and what pleasure yachts there are, to say nothing of the longshoremen like Herdjiman who depend on visitors.

His house was very small, set in this alley that opened on to the harbour frontage ; it consisted of only four rooms. Two upstairs, two below, and the lower front room was the parlour. It had only an oil-cloth for floor covering, and the sofa and four chairs were of horse-hair, yet the furniture would have fetched many thousands of francs because of the ship models that stood about on brackets on the walls, on the mantelpiece, everywhere. Herdjiman's father and grandfather had been makers of model ships in their spare time and they did not make them after the fashion of our models to-day, that is to say by cutting them out of a solid piece of wood or moulding them from papier mâché, they built them as real ships are built, plank by plank laid on ribs properly fixed to a keel.

Here were old Dutch ships—the Herdjimans hailed from Holland—and here was the *Foudroyant*, on whom Herdjiman's grandfather's nephew had served, for it was the charm of these things that each ship had a history connected with the history of the Herdjimans.

Better than any Heralds' College device this simple statement in ships of the deeds of a family, yet the good Herdjiman was so little of a snob that he never, if possible, drew a visitor's attention to the Family fleet.

But, of course, when attention was drawn to the things, and when he had to speak of them, the fact came out quite simply and inevitably—as to-day,

when Jean, having received his coil of halyard line stopped to admire the ships.

His interest in them was another link between him and Herdjiman, the link of the craftsman. And as he finished looking at the things the painter in him had to have its say, and unconsciously he drifted into art talk, and the fact that he was going to do the portrait of the Baroness Hauptmarch came out.

"That young girl," said the boatman. "When you told me some time ago you were going to paint a picture for M. le Baron I did not think of her. But is he not away?"

"Oh, yes," said Jean; "and I hope to have it done before he comes back, he's gone to Berlin."

Herdjiman seemed about to say something, but whatever it was he held it back. Then Jean, having taken up his halyard line, went into the street and to the mole where the *Karan* was moored by the steps.

He pushed off and raised the sail to the wind, blowing from across Lagosta.

As he drew near Beljazi he saw *Karan* standing on the shore, she had seen his sail and was standing there to meet him, her eyes sheltered by her hand against the dazzle of the water.

His heart went out to her. It seemed to him all of a sudden that their future, so difficult and so problematical, was now assured. He had not been thinking of *Karan*, the woman he had to paint had absorbed his thoughts. But now as he let go the sheet and steered the boat right for the sands, he recognised that he and *Karan*, and the Hauptmarch and Stein had formed a little plexus of interests. On the shoulders of the Hauptmarch, standing on the shoulders of Stein, would stand he and *Karan*.

It was not only a question of money, but of

position ; as an unknown artist his relationship with Karan would keep him down and impoverish him ; as a famous man she would, if anything, in that queer world of Paris add to his fame.

And he loved her.

He did not know how much till just now as he stepped on to the sands and took her in his arms.

The love of passion had passed, he loved her quite simply and with that glow of affection that once established in the normal human heart will remain.

It was safe to prophesy that these two would be lovers despite old age, and in the years far from now.

He told her of the incidents of the day, and how he was going to paint a portrait of a lady for M. le Baron Stein, and how he would have to start early to-morrow morning. It took an hour to cross in the boat, and if the wind were unfavourable, it would take two, so he would have to start at eight.

Karan nodded.

He would be away nearly all day, and it would be like that for a good while, for it might take him a fortnight or three weeks to finish the picture—longer perhaps if he could not work every day.

She understood.

It was his work. The fact that his work would be on the portrait of a lady left her quite indifferent.

It was a strange fact that the two most opposite people in the world, Karan and Stein, were under the same obsession, filled with the same sense of full possession. Stein away in Berlin, Karan at Beljazi.

Stein had no ideas at all about any other man in connection with Sidonie Hauptmarch ! Karan of any other woman in connection with Jean. It is not often in this cynical and faithless modern world

that one meets a man or a woman with faith, a man or a woman loving and fearless in their love.

In the case of Stein this fearlessness was based more on the egoism of monomania than anything else ; the midsummer madness that takes men sometimes in their autumn, and which then amounts almost to a disease.

In the case of Karan it was just first love in a soul so deep and true to instinct that a second love would be impossible to her.

Like the crows that marry for life, Karan would have to love for life now that she had let herself be captured by Jean.

So it came about, with a certain vein of comedy in the texture of the situation, that the millionaire in Berlin and the poor girl of Beljazi entrusted their most precious possessions to the hands of the god whose eyes are at the back of his head and whose name is Unwatchfulness.

Perfect Love casteth out Fear.

All the same, Fear has its uses if only to save children from burning their fingers, and lovers from what the Euphemists call Nature.

The wind was fair on the morrow, and the sparkling sea held the purple islands beneath an unclouded sky. A steamer tramping along in the distance and making for the Bocche-di-Cattaro, smoke far away in the direction of Meleda and the sail of a fishing boat to the westward, these were all the signs that the sea gave of life, save, there to the east, just lit by the light of morning across the Dalmatian mountains—Ragusa.

Herdjiman was on the quay where he landed, and they gave each other good-morning. At the villa the same manservant who had let him in

yesterday appeared, in the painting room the girl of yesterday.

Actually and during the time of waiting he had half-dreaded something happening to her, as though she might fade before he could pluck her and place her in his garden for all time.

But she had not faded, she would at least last the few weeks of the transplanting operation. This morning, as he stood before her and after the first few words of conventional welcome, he pondered over her as she sat taking his directions as to pose, just as though she were unconscious of his presence, as he was of hers.

To a surgeon all women that fall under his art are the same, and kings are the equals of beggarmen. To the artist nothing exists but that which he can take and hold and preserve, ugliness or beauty, or that quality of strangeness which can claim to be in the domain of neither beauty nor ugliness.

Talking to her as he painted he spoke nothing of Beljazi, in fact, in some way he gave her to understand that he was staying at an hotel in Ragusa. It did not interest her in the least where he was staying, and as for his conversation, it was at all events at first of the type that one has to endure at the photographers—till she realised that his talk was the simple murmuring of absent-mindedness, just something to keep her posed, that he had no interest at all in her or what she thought. This put her at her ease.

Then, as time went on and the days passed, and the picture grew, the common interest in the work produced a new bond between them—a bond that had nothing to do with sex or society, but which was more akin to the tie that a game can produce between two people who are playing on the same side.

The Baroness Hauptmarch was growing. On the canvas she was growing with the steadfastness and living energy of a child in the womb, and as she grew on the canvas the more Jean fell under the spell of her wonder, her influence and her power—the one on the canvas.

This was his work, a thing far more enduring than flesh.

Here was eternal grace, colour, charm, those things that appear only to fade. Disappearing unless trapped by the magic of art.

A hundred years hence people would look at the Baroness Hauptmarch, the real one, the eternal one, the one on the canvas, and they would say, "Matisse."

This one in the flesh would have changed by then. Indeed, even now, from day to day she was unstable. No human being is ever the same from day to day. One day she would be a shade paler, the texture of her skin would have changed, or her eyes be less bright, or her expression less full of life, for all these things were related to the gross mechanism of liver and lungs, and hearts and spleens, and the glands that secrete the Hormones; but the one on the canvas was related, truly, only with the conception of her in the brain of the artist. That was the source of her real life. A letter had come from Stein saying that he was returning. The picture was near completion and the girl, showing the letter to Jean one morning in the studio, said: "Look! we are nearly in time, it will be as good as done before he comes back——"

"It is finished," said Jean; "only a little has to be done to the dress, and that could be done by another if I were to drop dead to-day."

He glanced, head aside, at the picture, then he

glanced at the original to compare it with his work.

Her face had lost its brightness as though overcast by the cloud of some mournful thought.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RETURN OF THE BARON

THE following night a little before eleven o'clock, Herdjiman, who had retired to rest at ten, was awakened by a knocking at the front door. His wife was away, having gone on a visit to a relation living at Spalato, a Frenchwoman married to one of the sailors of the Lloyd Trentino Company.

The good Herdjiman roused from his sleep turned on his elbow listening, he fancied for a moment that it was a sound heard in a dream, but it came again, and springing from bed he went to the window and opened it.

"Coming," he cried.

Then he lit the candle, got into a shirt, coat and trousers and came down, candle in hand.

His mind was all upset. Could anything have happened to Jean, or might it possibly be Customs?

He was not entirely innocent. Small parcels of tobacco and little casks of Italian brandy were sometimes to be found deposited as by fairies under his bed, or in the big locker of the sitting-room. However, the fairies had not been at work lately, and the house was clear of anything that a preposterous government always grinding the faces of the poor might call Contraband.

So, with a fairly stout heart he undid the bolts,