

The Pleasure-Pilgrim

By Ella D'Arcy

I

CAMPBELL was on his way to Schloss Altenau, for a second quiet season with his work. He had spent three profitable months there a year ago, and now he was devoutly hoping for a repetition of that good fortune. His thoughts outran the train; and long before his arrival at the Hamelin railway station, he was enjoying his welcome by the Ritterhausens, was revelling in the ease and comfort of the old castle, and was contrasting the pleasures of his home-coming—for he looked upon Schloss Altenau as a sort of temporary home—with his recent cheerless experiences of lodging-houses in London, hotels in Berlin, and strange indifferent faces everywhere. He thought with especial satisfaction of the Maynes, and of the good talks Mayne and he would have together, late at night, before the great fire in the hall, after the rest of the household had gone to bed. He blessed the adverse circumstances which had turned Schloss Altenau into a boarding-house, and had reduced the Freiherr Ritterhausen to eke out his shrunken revenues by the reception, as paying guests, of English and American pleasure-pilgrims.

He rubbed the blurred window-pane with the fringed end of the strap

strap hanging from it, and, in the snow-covered landscape reeling towards him, began to recognise objects that were familiar. Hamelin could not be far off. . . . In another ten minutes the train came to a standstill.

He stepped down from the overheated atmosphere of his compartment into the cold bright February afternoon, and through the open station doors saw one of the Ritterhausen carriages awaiting him, with Gottlieb in his second-best livery on the box. Gottlieb showed every reasonable consideration for the Baron's boarders, but he had various methods of marking his sense of the immense abyss separating them from the family. The use of his second-best livery was one of these methods. Nevertheless, he turned a friendly German eye up to Campbell, and in response to his cordial "Guten Tag, Gottlieb. Wie geht's? Und die Herrschaften?" expressed his pleasure at seeing the young man back again.

While Campbell stood at the top of the steps that led down to the carriage and the Platz, looking after the collection of his luggage and its bestowal by Gottlieb's side, he became aware of two persons, ladies, advancing towards him from the direction of the Wartsaal. It was surprising to see any one at any time in Hamelin station. It was still more surprising when one of these ladies addressed him by name.

"You are Mr. Campbell, are you not?" she said. "We have been waiting for you to go back in the carriage together. When we found this morning that there was only half-an-hour between your train and ours, I told the Baroness it would be perfectly absurd to send to the station twice. I hope you won't mind our company?"

The first impression Campbell received was of the magnificent apparel of the lady before him; it would have been noticeable in

Paris or Vienna—it was extravagant here. Next, he perceived that the face beneath the upstanding feathers and the curving hat-brim was that of so very young a girl as to make the furs and velvets seem more incongruous still. But the incongruity vanished with the intonation of her first phrase, which told him she was an American. He had no standards for American dress or manners. It was clear that the speaker and her companion were inmates of the Schloss.

Campbell bowed, and murmured the pleasure he did not feel. A true Briton, he was intolerably shy; and his heart sank at the prospect of a three-mile drive with two strangers who evidently had the advantage of knowing all about him, while he was in ignorance of their very names. As he took his place opposite to them in the carriage, he unconsciously assumed a cold blank stare, pulling nervously at his moustache, as was his habit in moments of discomposure. Had his companions been British also, the ordeal of the drive would certainly have been a terrible one; but these young American girls showed no sense of embarrassment whatever.

“We’ve just come back from Hanover,” said the one who had already spoken to him. “I go over once a week for a singing lesson, and my little sister comes along to take care of me.”

She turned a narrow, smiling glance from Campbell to her little sister, and then back to Campbell again. She had red hair, freckles on her nose, and the most singular eyes he had ever seen; slit-like eyes, set obliquely in her head, Chinese fashion.

“Yes, Lulie requires a great deal of taking care of,” assented the little sister, sedately, though the way in which she said it seemed to imply something less simple than the words themselves. The speaker bore no resemblance to Lulie. She was smaller, thinner, paler. Her features were straight, a trifle peaked; her skin

skin sallow ; her hair of a nondescript brown. She was much less gorgeously dressed. There was even a suggestion of shabbiness in her attire, though sundry isolated details of it were handsome too. She was also much less young ; or so, at any rate, Campbell began by pronouncing her. Yet presently he wavered. She had a face that defied you to fix her age. Campbell never fixed it to his own satisfaction, but veered in the course of that drive (as he was destined to do during the next few weeks) from point to point up and down the scale between eighteen and thirty-five. She wore a spotted veil, and beneath it a pince-nez, the lenses of which did something to temper the immense amount of humorous meaning which lurked in her gaze. When her pale prominent eyes met Campbell's, it seemed to the young man that they were full of eagerness to add something at his expense to the stores of information they had already garnered up. They chilled him with misgivings ; there was more comfort to be found in her sister's shifting red-brown glances.

"Hanover is a long way to go for lessons," he observed, forcing himself to be conversational. "I used to go myself about once a week, when I first came to Schloss Altenau, for tobacco, or note-paper, or to get my hair cut. But later on I did without, or contented myself with what Hamelin, or even the village, could offer me."

"Nannie and I," said the young girl, "meant to stay only a week at Altenau, on our way to Hanover, where we were going to pass the winter ; but the Castle is just too lovely for anything," she added softly. She raised her eyelids the least little bit as she looked at him, and such a warm and friendly gaze shot out that Campbell was suddenly thrilled. Was she pretty, after all ? He glanced at Nannie ; she, at least, was indubitably plain. "It's the very first time we've ever stayed in a castle," Lulie went on ;
"and

“and we’re going to remain right along now, until we go home in the spring. Just imagine living in a house with a real moat, and a drawbridge, and a Rittersaal, and suits of armour that have been actually worn in battle! And oh, that delightful iron collar and chain! You remember it, Mr. Campbell? It hangs right close to the gateway on the court-yard side. And you know, in old days, the Ritterhausens used it for the punishment of their serfs. There are horrible stories connected with it. Mr. Mayne can tell you them. But just think of being chained up there like a dog! So wonderfully picturesque.”

“For the spectator perhaps,” said Campbell, smiling. “I doubt if the victim appreciated the picturesque aspect of the case.”

With this Lulie disagreed. “Oh, I think he must have been interested,” she said. “It must have made him feel so absolutely part and parcel of the Middle Ages. I persuaded Mr. Mayne to fix the collar round my neck the other day; and though it was very uncomfortable, and I had to stand on tiptoe, it seemed to me that all at once the court-yard was filled with knights in armour, and crusaders, and palmers, and things; and there were flags flying and trumpets sounding; and all the dead and gone Ritterhausens had come down from their picture-frames, and were walking about in brocaded gowns and lace ruffles.”

“It seemed to require a good deal of persuasion to get Mr. Mayne to unfix the collar again,” said the little sister. “How at last did you manage it?”

But Lulie replied irrelevantly: “And the Ritterhausens are such perfectly lovely people, aren’t they, Mr. Campbell? The old Baron is a perfect dear. He has such a grand manner. When he kisses my hand I feel nothing less than a princess. And the Baroness is such a funny, busy, delicious little round ball of a thing.

thing. And she's always playing bagatelle, isn't she? Or else cutting up skeins of wool for carpet-making." She meditated a moment. "Some people always *are* cutting things up in order to join them together again," she announced, in her fresh drawling little voice.

"And some people cut things up, and leave other people to do all the reparation," commented the little sister, enigmatically.

And all this time the carriage had been rattling over the cobble-paved streets of the quaint mediæval town, where the houses stand so near together that you may shake hands with your opposite neighbour; where allegorical figures, strange birds and beasts, are carved and painted over the windows and doors; and where to every distant sound you lean your ear to catch the fairy music of the Pied Piper, and at every street corner you look to see his tatterdemalion form with the frolicking children at his heels.

Then the Weser bridge was crossed, beneath which the ice-floes jostled and ground themselves together, as they forced a way down the river; and the carriage was rolling smoothly along country roads, between vacant snow-decked fields.

Campbell's embarrassment was wearing off. Now that he was getting accustomed to the girls, he found neither of them awe-inspiring. The red-haired one had a simple child-like manner that was charming. Her strange little face, with its piquant irregularity of line, its warmth of colour, began to please him. What though her hair was red, the uncurled wisp which strayed across her white forehead was soft and alluring; he could see soft masses of it tucked up beneath her hat-brim as she turned her head. When she suddenly lifted her red-brown lashes, those queer eyes of hers had a velvety softness too. Decidedly, she struck him as being pretty—in a peculiar way. He felt an
immense

immense accession of interest in her. It seemed to him that he was the discoverer of her possibilities. He did not doubt that the rest of the world called her plain, or at least odd-looking. He, at first, had only seen the freckles on her nose, her oblique-set eyes. He wondered what she thought of herself, and how she appeared to Nannie. Probably as a very commonplace little girl; sisters stand too close to see each other's qualities. She was too young to have had much opportunity of hearing flattering truths from strangers; and, besides, the ordinary stranger would see nothing in her to call for flattering truths. Her charm was something subtle, out-of-the-common, in defiance of all known rules of beauty. Campbell saw superiority in himself for recognising it, for formulating it; and he was not displeased to be aware that it would always remain caviare to the multitude.

II

"I'm jolly glad to have you back," Mayne said, that same evening, when, the rest of the boarders having retired to their rooms, he and Campbell were lingering over the hall-fire for a talk and smoke. "I've missed you awfully, old chap, and the good times we used to have here. I've often meant to write to you, but you know how one shoves off letter-writing day after day, till at last one is too ashamed of one's indolence to write at all. But tell me—you had a pleasant drive from Hamelin? What do you think of our young ladies?"

"Those American girls? But they're charming," said Campbell, with enthusiasm. "The red-haired one is particularly charming."

At this Mayne laughed so oddly that Campbell questioned him in surprise. "Isn't she charming?"

"My

"My dear chap," said Mayne, "the red-haired one, as you call her, is the most remarkably charming young person I've ever met or read of. We've had a good many American girls here before now—you remember the good old Clamp family, of course?—they were here in your time, I think?—but we've never had anything like this Miss Lulie Thayer. She is something altogether unique."

Campbell was struck with the name. "Lulie—Lulie Thayer," he repeated. "How pretty it is." And, full of his great discovery, he felt he must confide it to Mayne, at least. "Do you know," he went on, "*she* is really very pretty too? I didn't think so at first, but after a bit I discovered that she is positively quite pretty—in an odd sort of way."

Mayne laughed again. "Pretty, pretty!" he echoed in derision. "Why, *lieber Gott im Himmel*, where are your eyes? Pretty! The girl is beautiful, gorgeously beautiful; every trait, every tint, is in complete, in absolute harmony with the whole. But the truth is, of course, we've all grown accustomed to the obvious, the commonplace; to violent contrasts; blue eyes, black eyebrows, yellow hair; the things that shout for recognition. You speak of Miss Thayer's hair as red. What other colour would you have, with that warm creamy skin? And then, what a red it is! It looks as though it had been steeped in red wine."

"Ah, what a good description," said Campbell, appreciatively. "That's just it—steeped in red wine."

"And yet it's not so much her beauty," Mayne continued. "After all, one has met beautiful women before now. It's her wonderful generosity, her complaisance. She doesn't keep her good things to herself. She doesn't condemn you to admire from a distance."

"How

"How do you mean?" Campbell asked, surprised again.

"Why, she's the most egregious little flirt I've ever met. And yet, she's not exactly a flirt, either. I mean she doesn't flirt in the ordinary way. She doesn't talk much, or laugh, or apparently make the least claims on masculine attention. And so all the women like her. I don't believe there's one, except my wife, who has an inkling as to her true character. The Baroness, as you know, never observes anything. *Seigneur Dieu!* if she knew the things I could tell her about Miss Lulie! For I've had opportunities of studying her. You see, I'm a married man, and not in my first youth; out of the running altogether. The looker-on gets the best view of the game. But you, who are young and charming and already famous—we've had your book here, by the bye, and there's good stuff in it—you're going to have no end of pleasant experiences. I can see she means to add you to her ninety-and-nine other spoils; I saw it from the way she looked at you at dinner. She always begins with those velvety red-brown glances. She began that way with March and Prendergast and Willie Anson, and all the men we've had here since her arrival. The next thing she'll do will be to press your hand under the tablecloth."

"Oh, come, Mayne; you're joking," cried Campbell, a little brusquely. He thought such jokes in bad taste. He had a high ideal of Woman, an immense respect for her; he could not endure to hear her belittled even in jest. "Miss Thayer is refined and charming. No girl of her class would do such things."

"What is her class? Who knows anything about her? All we know is that she and her uncanny little friend—her little sister, as she calls her, though they're no more sisters than you and I are—they're not even related—all we know is that she and Miss Dodge (that's the little sister's name) arrived here
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one memorable day last October from the Kronprinz Hotel at Waldeck-Pyrmont. By the bye, it was the Clamps, I believe, who told her of the Castle—hotel acquaintances—you know how travelling Americans always cotton to each other. And we've picked up a few little biographical notes from her and Miss Dodge since. *Zum Beispiel*, she's got a rich father somewhere away back in Michigan, who supplies her with all the money she wants. And she's been travelling about since last May: Paris, Vienna, the Rhine, Düsseldorf, and so on here. She must have had some rich experiences, by Jove. For she's done everything. Cycled in Paris: you should see her in her cycling costume; she wears it when the Baron takes her out shooting—she's an admirable shot, by the way, an accomplishment learned, I suppose, from some American cow-boy. Then in Berlin she did a month's hospital nursing; and now she's studying the higher branches of the Terpsichorean art. You know she was in Hanover to-day. Did she tell you what she went for?"

"To take a singing lesson," said Campbell, remembering the reason she had given.

"A singing lesson! Do you sing with your legs? A dancing lesson, *mein lieber*. A dancing lesson from the ballet-master of the Hof Theater. She could deposit a kiss on your forehead with her foot, I don't doubt. I wonder if she can do the *grand écart* yet." And when Campbell, in astonishment, wondered why on earth she should wish to do such things, "Oh, to extend her opportunities," Mayne explained, "and to acquire fresh sensations. She's an adventuress. Yes, an adventuress, but an end-of-the-century one. She doesn't travel for profit, but for pleasure. She has no desire to swindle her neighbour of dollars, but to amuse herself at his expense. And she's clever; she's read a good deal; she knows how to apply her reading to practical life. Thus, she's learned from Herrick

not

not to be coy ; and from Shakespeare that sweet-and-twenty is the time for kissing and being kissed. She honours her masters in the observance. She was not in the least abashed when, one day, I suddenly came upon her teaching that damned idiot, young Anson, two new ways of kissing."

Campbell's impressions of the girl were readjusting themselves completely, but for the moment he was unconscious of the change. He only knew that he was partly angry, partly incredulous, and inclined to believe that Mayne was chaffing him.

"But Miss Dodge," he objected, "the little sister, she is older ; old enough to look after her friend. Surely she could not allow a young girl placed in her charge to behave in such a way——"

"Oh, that little Dodge girl," said Mayne contemptuously ; "Miss Thayer pays the whole shot, I understand, and Miss Dodge plays gooseberry, sheep-dog, jackal, what you will. She finds her reward in the other's cast-off finery. The silk blouse she was wearing to-night, I've good reason for remembering, belonged to Miss Lulie. For, during a brief season, I must tell you, my young lady had the caprice to show attentions to your humble servant. I suppose my being a married man lent me a factitious fascination. But I didn't see it. That kind of girl doesn't appeal to me. So she employed Miss Dodge to do a little active canvassing. It was really too funny ; I was coming in one day after a walk in the woods ; my wife was trimming bonnets, or had neuralgia, or something. Anyhow, I was alone, and Miss Dodge contrived to waylay me in the middle of the court-yard. 'Don't you find it vurry dull walking all by yourself?' she asked me ; and then blinking up in her strange little short-sighted way—she's really the weirdest little creature—'Why don't you make love to Lulie?' she said ; 'you'd find her vurry charming.' It took me a minute or two to recover presence of mind enough to ask her whether Miss Thayer had commissioned her

her

her to tell me so. She looked at me with that cryptic smile of hers ; 'She'd like you to do so, I'm sure,' she finally remarked, and pirouetted away. Though it didn't come off, owing to my bashfulness, it was then that Miss Dodge appropriated the silk bodice ; and Providence, taking pity on Miss Thayer's forced inactivity, sent along March, a young fellow reading for the army, with whom she had great doings. She fooled him to the top of his bent ; sat on his knee ; gave him a lock of her hair, which, having no scissors handy, she burned off with a cigarette taken from his mouth ; and got him to offer her marriage. Then she turned round and laughed in his face, and took up with a Dr. Weber, a cousin of the Baron's, under the other man's very eyes. You never saw anything like the unblushing coolness with which she would permit March to catch her in Weber's arms."

"Come," Campbell protested, "aren't you drawing it rather strong ?"

"On the contrary, I'm drawing it mild, as you'll discover presently for yourself ; and then you'll thank me for forewarning you. For she makes love—desperate love, mind you—to every man she meets. And goodness knows how many she hasn't met, in the course of her career, which began presumably at the age of ten, in some 'Amur'can' hotel or watering-place. Look at this." Mayne fetched an alpenstock from a corner of the hall ; it was decorated with a long succession of names, which, ribbon-like, were twisted round and round it, carved in the wood. "Read them," insisted Mayne, putting the stick in Campbell's hands. "You'll see they're not the names of the peaks she has climbed, or the towns she has passed through ; they're the names of the men she has fooled. And there's room for more ; there's still a good deal of space, as you see. There's room for yours."

Campbell glanced down the alpenstock—reading here a name,
there

there an initial, or just a date—and jerked it impatiently from him on to a couch. He wished with all his heart that Mayne would stop, would talk of something else, would let him get away. The young girl had interested him so much; he had felt himself so drawn towards her; he had thought her so fresh, so innocent. But Mayne, on the contrary, was warming to his subject, was enchanted to have some one to listen to his stories, to discuss his theories, to share his cynical amusement.

“I don’t think, mind you,” he said, “that she is a bit interested herself in the men she flirts with. I don’t think she gets any of the usual sensations from it, you know. I think she just does it for devilry, for a laugh. Sometimes I wonder whether she does it with an idea of retribution. Perhaps some woman she was fond of, perhaps her mother even—who knows?—was badly treated at the hands of a man. Perhaps this girl has constituted herself the Nemesis for her sex, and goes about seeing how many masculine hearts she can break by way of revenge. Or can it be that she is simply the newest development of the New Woman—she who in England preaches and bores you, and in America practises and pleases? Yes, I believe she’s the American edition, and so new that she hasn’t yet found her way into fiction. She’s the pioneer of the army coming out of the West, that’s going to destroy the existing scheme of things and rebuild it nearer to the heart’s desire.”

“Oh, damn it all, Mayne,” cried Campbell, rising abruptly, “why not say at once that she’s a wanton, and have done with it? Who wants to hear your rotten theories?” And he lighted his candle without another word, and went off to bed.

III

It was four o'clock, and the Baron's boarders were drinking their afternoon coffee, drawn up in a circle round the hall fire. All but Campbell, who had carried his cup away to a side-table, and, with a book open before him, appeared to be reading assiduously. In reality he could not follow a line of what he read; he could not keep his thoughts from Miss Thayer. What Mayne had told him was germinating in his mind. Knowing his friend as he did, he could not on reflection doubt his word. In spite of much superficial cynicism, Mayne was incapable of speaking lightly of any young girl without good cause. It now seemed to Campbell that, instead of exaggerating the case, Mayne had probably understated it. The girl repelled him to-day as much as she had charmed him yesterday. He asked himself with horror, what had she not already known, seen, permitted? When now and again his eyes travelled over, perforce, to where she sat, her red head leaning against Miss Dodge's knee, seeming to attract and concentrate all the glow of the fire, his forehead set itself in frowns, and he returned with an increased sense of irritation to his book.

"I'm just sizzling up, Nannie," Miss Thayer presently complained, in her child-like, drawling little way; "this fire is too hot for anything." She rose and shook straight her loose tea-gown, a marvellous garment created in Paris, which would have accused a duchess of wilful extravagance. She stood smiling round a moment, pulling on and off with her right hand the big diamond ring which decorated the left. At the sound of her voice Campbell had looked up; now his cold unfriendly eyes encountered

countered hers. He glanced rapidly past her, then back to his book. But she, undeterred, with a charming sinuous movement and a frou-frou of trailing silks, crossed over towards him. She slipped into an empty chair next his.

"I'm going to do you the honour of sitting beside you, Mr. Campbell," she said sweetly.

"It's an honour I've done nothing whatever to merit," he answered, without looking at her, and turned a page.

"The right retort," she approved; "but you might have said it a little more cordially."

"I don't feel cordial."

"But why not? What has happened? Yesterday you were so nice."

"Ah, a good deal of water has run under the bridge since yesterday."

"But still the river remains as full," she told him, smiling, "and still the sky is as blue. The thermometer has even risen six degrees. Out-of-doors, to-day, I could feel the spring-time in the air. You, too, love the spring, don't you? I know that from your books. And I wanted to tell you, I think your books perfectly lovely. I know them, most all. I've read them away home. They're very much thought of in America. Only last night I was saying to Nannie how glad I am to have met you, for I think we're going to be great friends; aren't we, Mr. Campbell? At least, I hope so, for you can do me so much good, if you will. Your books always make me feel real good; but you yourself can help me much more."

She looked up at him with one of her warm, narrow red-brown glances, which yesterday would have thrilled his blood, and to-day merely stirred it to anger.

"You over-estimate my abilities," he said coldly; "and on the whole,

whole, I fear you will find writers a very disappointing race. You see, they put their best into their books. So, not to disillusion you too rapidly"—he rose—"will you excuse me? I have some work to do." And he left her sitting there alone.

But he did no work when he got to his room. Whether Lulie Thayer was actually present or not, it seemed that her influence was equally disturbing to him. His mind was full of her: of her singular eyes, her quaint intonation, her sweet seductive praise. Yesterday such praise would have been delightful to him: what young author is proof against appreciation of his books? To-day, Campbell simply told himself that she laid the butter on too thick; that it was in some analogous manner she had flattered up March, Anson, and all the rest of the men that Mayne had spoken of. He supposed it was the first step in the process by which he was to be fooled, twisted round her finger, added to the list of victims who strewed her conquering path. He had a special fear of being fooled. For beneath a somewhat supercilious exterior, the dominant note of his character was timidity, distrust of his own merits; and he knew he was single-minded—one-idea'd almost; if he were to let himself go, to get to care very much for a woman, for such a girl as this girl, for instance, he would lose himself completely, be at her mercy absolutely. Fortunately, Mayne had let him know her character: he could feel nothing but dislike for her—disgust, even; and yet he was conscious how pleasant it would be to believe in her innocence, in her candour. For she was so adorably pretty: her flower-like beauty grew upon him; her head, drooping a little on one side when she looked up, was so like a flower bent by its own weight. The texture of her cheeks, her lips, were delicious as the petals of a flower. He found he could recall with perfect accuracy every detail of her appearance: the manner in which

which the red hair grew round her temples ; how it was loosely and gracefully fastened up behind with just a single tortoise-shell pin. He recalled the suspicion of a dimple which shadowed itself in her cheek when she spoke, and deepened into a delicious reality every time she smiled. He remembered her throat ; her hands, of a beautiful whiteness, with pink palms and pointed fingers. It was impossible to write. He speculated long on the ring she wore on her engaged finger. He mentioned this ring to Mayne the next time he saw him.

“Engaged? very much so I should say. Has got a *fiancé* in every capital of Europe probably. But the ring-man is the *fiancé en titre*. He writes to her by every mail, and is tremendously in love with her. She shows me his letters. When she’s had her fling, I suppose, she’ll go back and marry him. That’s what these little American girls do, I’m told ; sow their wild oats here with us, and settle down into *bonnes ménagères* over yonder. Meanwhile, are you having any fun with her? Aha, she presses your hand? The ‘*gesegnete Mahlzeit*’ business after dinner is an excellent institution, isn’t it? She’ll tell you how much she loves you soon ; that’s the next move in the game.”

But so far she had done none of these things, for Campbell gave her no opportunities. He was guarded in the extreme, ungenial ; avoiding her even at the cost of civility. Sometimes he was downright rude. That especially occurred when he felt himself inclined to yield to her advances. For she made him all sorts of silent advances, speaking with her eyes, her sad little mouth, her beseeching attitude. And then one evening she went further still. It occurred after dinner in the little green drawing-room. The rest of the company were gathered together in the big drawing-room beyond. The small room has deep embrasures to the windows. Each embrasure holds two old faded green velvet

velvet sofas in black oaken frames, and an oaken oblong table stands between them. Campbell had flung himself down on one of these sofas in the corner nearest the window. Miss Thayer, passing through the room, saw him, and sat down opposite. She leaned her elbows on the table, the laces of her sleeves falling away from her round white arms, and clasped her hands.

"Mr. Campbell, tell me what have I done? How have I vexed you? You have hardly spoken two words to me all day. You always try to avoid me." And when he began to utter evasive banalities, she stopped him with an imploring "Don't! I love you. You know I love you. I love you so much I can't bear you to put me off with mere phrases."

Campbell admired the well-simulated passion in her voice, remembered Mayne's prediction, and laughed aloud.

"Oh, you may laugh," she said, "but I am serious. I love you, I love you with my whole soul." She slipped round the end of the table, and came close beside him. His first impulse was to rise; then he resigned himself to stay. But it was not so much resignation that was required, as self-mastery, cool-headedness. Her close proximity, her fragrance, those wonderful eyes raised so beseechingly to his, made his heart beat.

"Why are you so cold?" she said. "I love you so; can't you love me a little too?"

"My dear young lady," said Campbell, gently repelling her, "what do you take me for? A foolish boy like your friends Anson and March? What you are saying is monstrous, preposterous. Ten days ago you'd never even seen me."

"What has length of time to do with it?" she said. "I loved you at first sight."

"I wonder," he observed judicially, and again gently removed
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her hand from his, "to how many men you have not already said the same thing."

"I've never meant it before," she said quite earnestly, and nestled closer to him, and kissed the breast of his coat, and held her mouth up towards his. But he kept his chin resolutely high, and looked over her head.

"How many men have you not already kissed, even since you've been here?"

"But there've not been many here to kiss!" she exclaimed naïvely.

"Well, there was March; you kissed him?"

"No, I'm quite sure I didn't."

"And young Anson; what about him? Ah, you don't answer! And then the other fellow—what's his name—Prendergast—you've kissed him?"

"But, after all, what is there in a kiss?" she cried ingenuously. "It means nothing, absolutely nothing. Why, one has to kiss all sorts of people one doesn't care about."

Campbell remembered how Mayne had said she had probably known strange kisses since the age of ten; and a wave of anger with her, of righteous indignation, rose within him.

"To me," said he, "to all right-thinking people, a young girl's kisses are something pure, something sacred, not to be offered indiscriminately to every fellow she meets. Ah, you don't know what you have lost! You have seen a fruit that has been handled, that has lost its bloom? You have seen primroses, spring flowers gathered and thrown away in the dust? And who enjoys the one, or picks up the others? And this is what you remind me of—only you have deliberately, of your own perverse will, tarnished your beauty, and thrown away all the modesty, the reticence, the delicacy, which make a young girl so infinitely dear.

dear. You revolt me, you disgust me. I want nothing from you, but to be let alone. Kindly take your hands away, and let me go."

He roughly shook her off and got up, then felt a moment's curiosity to see how she would take the repulse.

Miss Thayer never blushed: had never, he imagined, in her life done so. No faintest trace of colour now stained the warm pallor of her rose-leaf skin; but her eyes filled up with tears; two drops gathered on the under-lashes, grew large, trembled an instant, and then rolled unchecked down her cheeks. Those tears somehow put him in the wrong, and he felt he had behaved brutally to her for the rest of the night.

He began to find excuses for her: after all, she meant no harm: it was her up-bringing, her *genre*: it was a *genre* he loathed; but perhaps he need not have spoken so harshly to her. He thought he would find a more friendly word for her next morning; and he loitered about the Mahlsaal, where the boarders come in to breakfast as in an hotel, just when it suits them, till past eleven; but the girl never turned up. Then, when he was almost tired of waiting, Miss Dodge put in an appearance, in a flannel wrapper, and her front hair twisted up in steel pins.

Campbell judged Miss Dodge with even more severity than he did Miss Thayer; there was nothing in this weird little creature's appearance to temper justice with mercy. It was with difficulty that he brought himself to inquire after her friend.

"Lulie is sick this morning," she told him. "I've come down to order her some broth. She couldn't sleep any last night, because of your unkindness to her. She's vurry, vurry unhappy about it."

"Yes, I'm sorry for what I said. I had no right to speak so strongly, I suppose. But I spoke strongly because I feel strongly.

However,

However, there's no reason why my bad manners should make her unhappy."

"Oh, yes, there's vurry good reason," said Miss Dodge. "She's vurry much in love with you."

Campbell looked at the speaker long and earnestly to try and read her mind; but the prominent blinking eyes, the cryptic physiognomy, told him nothing.

"Look here," he said brusquely, "what's your object in trying to fool me like this? I know all about your friend. Mayne has told me. She has cried 'Wolf' too often before to expect to be believed now."

"But after all," argued Miss Dodge, blinking more than ever behind her glasses, "the wolf did really come at last, you know; didn't he? Lulie is really in love this time. We've all made mistakes in our lives, haven't we? But that's no reason for not being right at last. And Lulie has cried herself sick."

Campbell was a little shaken. He went and repeated the conversation to Mayne, who laughed derisively.

"Capital, capital!" he cried; "excellently contrived. It quite supports my latest theory about our young friend. She's an actress, a born comédienne. She acts always, and to every one: to you, to me, to the Ritterhausens, to the Dodge girl—even to herself when she is quite alone. And she has a great respect for her art; she'll carry out her rôle, *côte que côte*, to the bitter end. She chooses to pose as in love with you; you don't respond; the part now requires that she should sicken and pine. Consequently she takes to her bed, and sends her confidante to tell you so. Oh, it's colossal, it's *famos*."

IV

"If you can't really love me," said Lulie Thayer—"and I know I've been a bad girl and don't deserve that you should—at least, will you allow me to go on loving you?"

She walked by Campbell's side, through the solitary uncared-for park of Schloss Altenau. It was three weeks later in the year, and the spring feeling in the air stirred the blood. All round were signs and tokens of spring: in the busy gaiety of bird and insect life; in the purple flower-tufts which thickened the boughs of the ash trees; in the young green things pushing up pointed heads from amidst last season's dead leaves and grasses. The snow-wreathes, that had for so long decorated the distant hills, were shrinking perceptibly away beneath the strong March sunshine.

There was every invitation to spend one's time out of doors, and Campbell passed long mornings in the park, or wandering through the woods or the surrounding villages. Miss Thayer often accompanied him. He never invited her to do so, but when she offered him her company, he could not, or at least did not, refuse it.

"May I love you? Say," she entreated.

"*Wenn ich Dich liebe, was geht's Dich an?*" he quoted lightly. "Oh, no, it's nothing to me, of course. Only don't expect me to believe you—that's all."

This disbelief of his was the recurring decimal of their conversation. No matter on what subject they began, they always ended thus. And the more sceptical he showed himself, the more eager she became. She exhausted herself in endeavours to convince him.

They

They had reached the corner in the park where the road to the castle turns off at right angles from the road to Dürrendorf. The ground rises gently on the park-side to within three feet of the top of the wall, although on the other side there is a drop of at least twenty feet. The broad wall-top makes a convenient seat. Campbell and the girl sat down on it. At his last words she wrung her hands together in her lap.

“But how can you disbelieve me?” she cried, “when I tell you I love you, I adore you? When I swear it to you? And can’t you see for yourself? Why, every one at the Castle sees it.”

“Yes, you afford the Castle a good deal of unnecessary amusement. And that shows you don’t understand what love really is. Real love is full of delicacy, of reticences, and would feel itself profaned if it became the jest of the servants’ hall.”

“I think it’s not so much my love for you,” said Lulie gently, “as your rejection of it, which has made me talked about.”

“No; isn’t it rather on account of the favours you’ve lavished on all my predecessors?”

She sprang from the wall to her feet, and walked up and down in agitation.

“But after all, surely, mistakes of that sort are not to be counted against us? I did really think I was in love with Mr. March. Willie Anson doesn’t count. He’s an American too, and he understands things. Besides, he is only a boy. And how could I know I should love you before I had met you? And how can I help loving you now I have? You’re so different from other men. You’re good. You’re honourable, you treat women with respect. Oh, I do love you so, I do love you! Ask Nannie if I don’t.”

The way in which Campbell shrugged his shoulders clearly expressed

expressed the amount of reliance he would place on any testimony from Miss Dodge. He could not forget her "Why don't you make love to Lulie?" addressed to a married man. Such a want of principle argued an equal want of truth.

Lulie seemed on the brink of weeping.

"Oh, I wish I were dead," she struggled to say; "life's impossible if you won't believe me. I don't ask you to love me any longer. I know I've been a bad girl, and I don't deserve that you should; but if you won't believe that I love you, I don't want to live any longer."

Campbell confessed to himself that she acted admirably, but that the damnable iteration of the one idea became monotonous. He sought a change of subject. "Look there," he said, "close by the wall, what's that jolly little blue flower? It's the first I've seen this year."

He pointed to where a periwinkle grew at the base of the wall, lifting its bright petals gaily from out its dark glossy leaves.

Lulie, all smiles again, picked it with child-like pleasure. "Oh, if that's the first you've seen," she cried, "you can take a wish. Only you mustn't speak until some one asks you a question."

She began to fasten it in his coat. "It's just as blue as your eyes," she said. "You have such blue and boyish eyes, you know. Stop, stop, that's not a question," and seeing that he was about to speak, she laid her finger across his mouth. "You'll spoil the charm."

She stepped back, folded her arms, and seemed to dedicate herself to eternal silence; then relenting suddenly:

"Do you believe me?" she entreated.

"What's become of your ring?" Campbell answered irrelevantly. He had noticed its absence from her finger while she had been fixing in the flower.

"Oh,

"Oh, my engagement's broken."

Campbell asked how the fiancé would like that.

"Oh, he won't mind. He knows I only got engaged because he worried so. And it was always understood between us, that I was to be free if I ever met any one I liked better."

Campbell asked her what sort of fellow this accommodating fiancé was.

"Oh, he's all right. And he's very good too. But he's not a bit clever, and don't let us talk about him. He makes me tired."

"But you're wrong," Campbell told her, "to throw away a good, a sincere affection. If you really want to reform and turn over a new leaf, as you are always telling me, I should advise you to go home and marry him."

"What, when I'm in love with you!" she cried reproachfully. "Would that be right?"

"It's going to rain," said Campbell. "Didn't you feel a drop just then? And it's getting near lunch-time. Shall we go in?"

Their shortest way led through the little cemetery in which the dead and gone Ritterhausens lay at peace, in the shadow of their sometime home.

"When I die the Baron has promised I shall be buried here," said Lulie pensively; "just here, next to his first wife. Don't you think it would be lovely to be buried in a beautiful, peaceful baronial graveyard instead of in some horrid crowded city cemetery?"

Mayne met them as they entered the hall. He noticed the flower in his friend's coat. "Ah, my dear chap, been treading the periwinkle path of dalliance, I see? How many desirable young men have I not witnessed, led down the same broad way
by

by the same seductive lady! Always the same thing, nothing changed, but the flower, according to the season."

When Campbell reached his room and changed his coat, he threw the flower away into his stove.

Had it not been for Mayne, Miss Thayer might have triumphed after all; might have convinced Campbell of her passion, or have added another victim to her long list. But Mayne had set himself as determinedly to spoil her game as she was bent on winning it. He had always the cynical word, the apt reminiscence ready, whenever he saw signs on Campbell's part of yielding. He was very fond of Campbell. He did not wish to see him fall a prey to the wiles of this little American syren. He had watched her conduct in the past with a dozen different men; he genuinely believed she was only acting now.

Campbell, for his part, began to feel a curious and growing irritation in the girl's presence. Yet he did not avoid it; he could not well avoid it, she followed him about so persistently; but his speech began to overflow with bitterness towards her. He said the cruellest things; then remembering them afterwards when alone, he blushed at his brutalities. But nothing he said ever altered her sweetness of temper or weakened the tenacity of her purpose. His rebuffs made her beautiful eyes run over with tears, but the harshest of them never elicited the least sign of resentment. There would have been something touching as well as comic in this dog-like forgiveness, which accepted everything as welcome at his hands, had he not been imbued with Mayne's conviction that it was all an admirable piece of acting. When for a moment he forgot the histrionic theory, then invariably there would come a chance word in her conversation which would fill him with cold rage. They would be talking of books, travels, sport, what not, and she would drop a reference to this man or to that. So-and-so had taken her to
Bullier's,

Bullier's, she had learned skating with this other. She was a capital shot, Hiram P. Ladd had taught her ; and he got glimpses of long vistas of amourettes played in every State in America, and in every country of Europe, since the very beginning, when, as a mere child, elderly men, friends of her father's, had held her on their knee and fed her with sweetmeats and kisses. It was sickening to think of ; it was pitiable. So much youth and beauty tarnished : the possibility for so much good thrown away. For if one could only blot out her record, forget it, accept her for what she chose to appear, a more endearing companion no man could desire.

V

It was a wet afternoon. Mayne had accompanied his wife and the Baroness into Hamelin. "To take up a servant's character, and expostulate with a recalcitrant dressmaker," he explained to Campbell, and wondered what women would do to fill up their days, were it not for the perennial villanies of dressmakers and domestic servants. He himself was going to look in at the English Club ; wouldn't Campbell come too ? There was a fourth seat in the carriage. But Campbell was in no social mood ; he felt his temper going all to pieces ; a quarter of an hour of Mrs. Mayne's society would have brought on an explosion. He felt he must be alone ; yet when he had read for half an hour in his room he wondered vaguely what Lulie was doing ; he had not seen her since luncheon. She always gave him her society when he could very well dispense with it, but on a wet day like this, when a little conversation would be tolerable, of course she stayed away. Then there came down the long Rittersaal the tapping of high heels and a well-known knock at his door.

"Am

"Am I disturbing you?" she asked; and his mood was so capricious that, now she was standing there on his threshold, he thought he was annoyed at it. "It's so dull," she said, persuasively: "Nannie's got a sick headache, and I daren't go downstairs, or the Baron will annex me to play Halma. He always wants to play Halma on wet days."

"And what do you want to do?" said Campbell, leaning against the doorpost, and letting his eyes rest on the strange piquant face in its setting of red hair.

"To be with you, of course."

"Well," said he, coming out and closing the door, "I'm at your service. What next?"

"What would you like to do? Shall I fetch over my pistols, and we'll practise with them? You've no notion how well I can shoot. We couldn't hurt anything here, could we?"

The Rittersaal is an immense room occupying all the space on the first floor that the hall and four drawing-rooms do on the floor below. Wooden pillars support the ceiling, and divide the room lengthwise into three parts. Down the centre are long tables, used for ceremonial banquets. Six windows look into the courtyard, and six out over the open country. The centre pane of each window is emblazoned with a Ritterhausen shield. The sills are broad and low, and cushioned in faded velvet. Between the windows hang family portraits, and a fine stone-sculptured sixteenth-century fireplace and overmantel at one end of the *Saal* faces a magnificent black carved buffet at the other. Lulie, bundling up her duchess tea-gown over one arm, danced off down the long room in very unduchess-like fashion to fetch the case. It was a charming little box of cedar-wood and mother-o'-pearl, lined with violet velvet; and two tiny revolvers lay inside, hardly more than six inches long, with silver engraved handles.

"I won

"I won them in a bet," she observed complacently, "with the Hon. Billie Thornton. He's an Englishman, you know, the son of Lord Thornton. I knew him in Washington two years ago last fall. He bet I couldn't hit a three-cent piece at twenty feet, and I did. Aren't they perfectly sweet? Now, can't you contrive a target?"

Campbell went back to his room, drew out a rough diagram, and pasted it down on to a piece of stout cardboard. Then this was fixed up by means of a penknife driven into the wood against one of the pillars, and Campbell, with his walking-stick laid down six successive times, measured off the distance required, and set a chalk mark across the floor. Lulie took the first shot. She held the little weapon out at arm's length—pulled the trigger. There was the sharp report, and when Campbell went up to examine results, he found she had only missed the very centre by half an inch.

Lulie was exultant. "I don't seem to have got out of practice any," she remarked. "I'm so glad, for I used to be a very good shot. It was Hiram P. Ladd who taught me. He's the crack shot of Montana. What! you don't know Hiram P.? Why, I should have supposed every one must have heard of him. He had the next ranche to my Uncle Samuel's, where I used to go summers, and he made me do an hour's pistol practice every morning after bathing. It was he who taught me swimming too—in the river."

"Damnation," said Campbell under his breath, then shot in his turn, and shot wide. Lulie made another bull's-eye, and after that a white. She urged Campbell to continue, which he sullenly did, and again missed.

"You see I don't come up to your Hiram P. Ladd," he remarked savagely, and after a few more shots on either side he

put

put the pistol down, and walked over to the window. He stood with one foot on the cushioned seat, staring out at the rain, and pulling at his moustache moodily.

Lulie followed him, nestled up to him, lifted the hand that hung passive by his side, put it round her waist, and held it there. Campbell, lost in thought, let it remain so for a second: then remembered how she had doubtless done this very same thing with other men in this very room. All her apparently spontaneous movements, he told himself, were but the oft-used pieces in the game she played so skilfully.

"Let go," he said, and flung himself down on the window-seat, looking up at her with darkening eyes.

She sat meekly in the other corner, and folded her offending hands in her lap.

"Do you know, your eyes are not a bit nice when you're cross;" she said, "they seem to become quite black."

He maintained a discouraging silence.

She looked over at him meditatively.

"I never cared a bit for Hiram P., if that's what you mean," she remarked presently.

"Do you suppose I care a button if you did?"

"Then why did you leave off shooting, and why won't you talk to me?"

He vouchsafed no reply.

Lulie spent some moments wrapped in thought. Then she sighed deeply, and recommenced on a note of pensive regret:

"Ah, if I'd only met you sooner in life, I should be a very different girl."

The freshness which her quaint, drawling enunciation lent to this time-dishonoured formula, made Campbell smile. Then remembering all its implications, his face set in frowns again.

Lulie

Lulie continued her discourse. "You see," said she, "I never had any one to teach me what was right. My mother died when I was quite a child, and my father has always let me do exactly as I pleased, so long as I didn't bother him. Then I've never had a home, but have always lived around in hotels and places; all winter in New York or Washington, and summers out at Long-branch or Saratoga. It's true we own a house in Detroit on Lafayette Avenue, that we reckon as home, but we don't ever go there. It's a bad sort of life for a girl, isn't it?" she questioned, pleadingly.

His mind was at work. The loose threads of his angers, his irritations, his desires were knitting themselves together, weaving themselves into something overmastering and definite.

The young girl meanwhile was moving up towards him along the seat, for the effect which his sharpest rebuke produced on her never lasted more than four minutes. She now again possessed herself of his hand, and holding it between her own, began to caress it in child-like fashion, pulling the fingers apart and closing them again; spreading it, palm downwards on her lap, and laying her own little hand over it, to exemplify the differences between them. He let her be; he seemed unconscious of her proceedings.

"And then," she continued, "I've always known a lot of young fellows who've liked to take me round; and no one ever objected to my going with them, and so I went. And I liked it, and there wasn't any harm in it, just kissing and making believe, and nonsense. And I never really cared for one of them—I can see that now, when I compare them with you; when I compare what I felt for them, with what I feel for you. Oh, I do love you so much," she said; "don't you believe me?" She lifted his hand to her lips and covered it with kisses.

He

He pulled it roughly away, got up, walked to the table, came back again, stood looking at her with sombre eyes and dilating pupils.

"I do love you," she repeated, rising and advancing towards him.

"For God's sake, drop that damned rot," he cried with sudden fury. "It wearies me, do you hear? it sickens me. Love, love, my God, what do you know about it? Why, if you really loved me, really loved any man—if you had any conception of what the passion of love is, how beautiful, how fine, how sacred—the mere idea that you could not come to your lover fresh, pure, untouched, as a young girl should—that you had been handled, fondled, and God knows what besides, by this man and the other—would fill you with such horror for yourself, with such supreme disgust—you would feel yourself so unworthy, so polluted . . . that . . . that . . . by God! you would take up that pistol there, and blow your brains out!"

Lulie seemed to find the idea quite entertaining. She picked the pistol up from where it lay in the window, examined it with her pretty head drooping on one side, looked at it critically, and then sent one of her long, red-brown caressing glances up towards him.

"And suppose I were to," she asked lightly, "would you believe me then?"

"Oh, . . . well . . . then, perhaps; if you showed sufficient decency to kill yourself, perhaps I might," said he, with ironical laughter. His ebullition had relieved him; his nerves were calmed again. "But nothing short of that would ever make me."

With her little tragic air which seemed so like a smile disguised, she raised the weapon to the bosom of her gown. There came

came a sudden, sharp crack, a tiny smoke film. She stood an instant swaying slightly, smiling certainly, distinctly outlined against the background of rain-washed window, of grey falling rain, the top of her head cutting in two the Ritterhausen escutcheon. Then all at once there was nothing at all between him and the window; he saw the coat-of-arms entire; but a motionless, inert heap of plush and lace, and fallen wine-red hair, lay at his feet upon the floor.

“Child, child, what have you done?” he cried with anguish, and kneeling beside her, lifted her up, and looked into her face.

* * * * *

When from a distance of time and place Campbell was at last able to look back with some degree of calmness on the catastrophe, the element which stung him most keenly was this: he could never convince himself that Lulie had really loved him after all. And the only two persons who had known them both, and the circumstances of the case, sufficiently well to have resolved his doubts one way or the other, held diametrically opposite views.

“Well, just listen, then, and I’ll tell you how it was,” Miss Nannie Dodge had said to him impressively, the day before he left Schloss-Altenau for ever, “Lulie was tremendously, terribly in love with you. And when she found that you wouldn’t care about her, she didn’t want to live any more. As to the way in which it happened, you don’t need to reproach yourself for that. She’d have done it, anyhow: if not then, why, later. But it’s all the rest of your conduct to her that was so cruel. Your cold, complacent British unresponsiveness. I guess you’ll never find another woman to love you as Lulie did. She was just the darlingest, the sweetest, the most loving girl in the world.”

Mayne,

Mayne, on the other hand, summed it up in this way: "Of course, old chap, it's horrible to think of: horrible, horrible, horrible! I can't tell you how badly I feel about it. For she was a gorgeously beautiful creature. That red hair of hers! Good Lord! You won't come across such hair as that twice in a lifetime. But, believe me, she was only fooling with you. Once she had you in her hunting-noose, once her buccaneering instincts satisfied, and she'd have chucked you as she did all the rest. As to her death, I've got three theories—no, two—for the first is that she compassed it in a moment of genuine emotion, and that, I think, we may dismiss as quite untenable. The second is, that it arose from pure misadventure. You'd both been shooting, hadn't you? Well, she took up the pistol and pulled the trigger from mere mischief, and quite forgetting one barrel was still loaded. And the third is, it was just her histrionic sense of the fitness of things. The rôle she had played so long and so well now demanded a sensational finale in the centre of the stage. And it's the third theory I give the preference to. She was the most consummate little actress I ever saw."