

The White Shadow

By Robert W. Chambers

Listen, then, love, and with your white hand clear
Your forehead from its cloudy hair.

I.

“Three great hulking cousins,” said she, closing her gray eyes disdainfully.

We accepted the rebuke in astonished silence. Presently she opened her eyes, and seemed surprised to see us there yet.

“O,” she said, “if you think I am going to stay here until you make up your minds

“I’ve made up mine,” said Donald. “We will go to the links. You may come.”

“I shall not,” she announced. “Walter, what do you propose?”

Walter looked at his cartridge belt and then at the little breech-loader standing in a corner of the arbour.

“Oh, I know,” she said, “but I won’t! I won’t! I won’t!”

The uncles and aunts on the piazza turned to look at us; her mother arose from a steamer-chair and came across the lawn.

“Won’t what, Sweetheart?” she asked, placing both hands on her daughter’s shoulders.

“Mamma, Walter wants me to shoot, and Don wants me to play golf, and I—won’t!”

“She doesn’t know what she wants,” said I. “Don’t I?” she said, flushing with displeasure.

“Her mother might suggest something,” hazarded Donald. We looked at our aunt.

“Sweetheart is spoiled,” said that lady decisively. “If you children don’t go away at once and have a good time, I shall find employment for her.”

“Algebra?” I asked maliciously.

“How dare you!” cried Sweetheart, sitting up. “Oh, isn’t he mean! isn’t he ignoble!—and I’ve done my algebra; haven’t I, mamma?”

“But your French?” I began.

Donald laughed, and so did Walter. As for Sweetheart, she arose in all the dignity of sixteen years, closed her eyes with superb insolence, and, clasping her mother’s waist with one round white arm, marched out of the arbour.

“We tease her too much,” said Donald.

“She’s growing up fast; we ought not to call her ‘Sweetheart’ when she puts her hair up,” added Walter.

“She’s going to put it up in October, when she goes back to school,” said Donald. “Jack, she will hate you if you keep reminding her of her algebra and French.”

“Then I’ll stop,” said I, suddenly conscious what an awful thing it would be if she hated me.

Donald’s two pointers came frisking across the lawn from the kennels, and Donald picked up his gun.

“Here we go again,” said I. “Donny’s going to the coverts after grouse, Walter’s going up on the hill with his dust-shot and arsenic, and I’m going across the fields after butterflies. Why the deuce can’t we all go together, just for once?”

“And take Sweetheart? She would like it if we all went together,” said Walter; “she is tired of seeing Jack net butterflies.”

“Collecting birds and shooting grouse are two different things,” began Donald. “You spoil my dogs by shooting your confounded owls and humming birds.”

“Oh, your precious dogs!” I cried. “Shut up, Donny, and give Sweetheart a good day’s tramp. It’s a pity if three cousins can’t pool their pleasures for once.”

Donald nodded uncertainly.

“Come on,” said Walter, “we’ll find Sweetheart. Jack, you get your butterfly togs and come back here.”

I nodded, and watched my two cousins sauntering across the lawn—big, clean-cut fellows, resembling each other enough to be brothers instead of cousins.

We all resembled each other more or less, Donald, Walter, and I. As for Sweetheart, she looked like none of us.

It was all very well for her mother to call her Sweetheart, and for her aunts to echo it in chorus, but the time was coming when we saw we should have to stop. A girl of sixteen with such a name is ridiculous, and Sweetheart was nearly seventeen; and her hair was “going up” and her gowns were “coming down” in October.

Her own name was pretty enough. I don’t know that I ought to tell it, but I will: it was the same as her mother’s. We called her Sweetheart sometimes, sometimes “The Aspen Beauty.” Donald had given her that name from a butterfly in my collection, the Vanessa Pandora, commonly known as the Aspen beauty, from its never having been captured in America except in our village of Aspen.

Here, in the north of New York State, we four cousins spent our summers in the family house. There was not much to do in Aspen. We used the links, we galloped over the sandy roads, we also trotted our several hobbies, Donald, Walter, and I. Sweetheart had no hobby; to make up for this, however, she owned a magnificent team of bêtes-noires—Algebra and French.

As for me, my butterfly collection languished. I had specimens of nearly every butterfly in New York State, and I rather longed for new states to conquer. Anyway, there were plenty of Aspen beauties—I mean the butterflies—flying about the roads and balm-of-Gilead trees, and perhaps that is why I lingered there long enough to collect hundreds of duplicates for exchange. And perhaps it wasn’t.

I thought of these things as I sat in the sun-flecked arbour, watching the yellow elm leaves flutter down from the branches. I thought, too, of Sweetheart, and wondered how she would look with her hair up. And while I sat there smoking, watching the yellow leaves drifting across the lawn, a sharp explosion startled me and I raised my head.

Sweetheart was standing on the lawn, gazing dreamily at the smoking debris of a large firecracker.

“What’s that for?” I asked.

“It proclaims my independence,” said Sweetheart—“my independence forever. Hereafter my cousins will ask to accompany me on my walks; they need no longer charitably permit me to accompany them. Are you three boys going to ride your hobbies?”

“We are,” I said.

“Then good-bye. I am going to walk.”

“Can’t we come too?” I asked, laughing.

“Oh,” she said graciously, “if you put it in that way I could not refuse.”

“May we bring our guns?” asked Donald from the piazza.

“May I bring my net?” I added, half amused, half annoyed.

She made a gesture, indifferent, condescending.

“Dear me!” murmured the aunts in chorus from the piazza as we trooped after the Aspen beauty, “Sweetheart is growing very fast.”

I smiled vaguely at Sweetheart. I was wondering how she would look in long frocks and coiled hair.

II.

In the fall of the year the meadows of Aspen glimmer in the sunlight like crumpled sheets of beaten gold; for Aspen is the land of golden-rod, of yellow earth and gilded fern.

There the crisp oaks rustle, every leaf a blot of yellow; there the burnished pines sound, sound, tremble, and resound, like gilt-stringed harps aquiver in the wind.

Sweet fern, sun-dried, bronzed, fills all the hills with incense, vague and delicate as the white down drifting from the frothy milkweed.

And where the meadow brook prattled, limpid, filtered with sunlight, Sweetheart stood knee-deep in fragrant mint, watching the aimless minnows swimming in circles. On a distant hill, dark against the blue, Donald moved with his dogs, and I saw the sun-glint on his gun, and I heard the distant “Hi—on! Hi—on!” long after he disappeared below the brown hill’s brow.

Walter, too, had gone, leaving us there by the brook together, Sweetheart and I; and I saw the crows flapping and circling far over the woods, and I heard the soft report of his dust-shot shells among the trees.

“The ruling passion, Sweetheart,” I said. “Donny chases the phantom of pleasure with his dogs. The phantom flies from Walter, and he follows with his dust-shot.”

“Then,” said Sweetheart, “follow your phantom also; there are butterflies every where.” She raised both arms and turned from the brook. “Everywhere flying I see butterflies—phantoms of pleasure; and, Jack, you do not follow with your net.”

“No,” said I, “the world to-day is too fair to—slay in. I even doubt that the happiness of empires hinges on the discovery of a new species of anything. Do I bore you?”

“A little,” said Sweetheart, touching the powdered gold of the blossoms about her. She laid the tip of her third finger on her lips and then on the golden-rod. “I shall not pick it; the world is too fair to-day,” she said. “What are you going to do, Jack?”

“I could doze,” I said. “Could you?”

“Yes—if you told me stories.”

I contemplated her in silence for a moment. After a while she sat down under an oak and clasped her hands.

“I am growing so old,” she sighed, “I no longer take pleasure in childish things—Donald’s dogs, Walter’s humming birds, your butterflies. Jack?”

“What?”

“Sit down on the grass.”

“What for?”

“Because I ask you.”

I sat down.

Presently she said: “I am as tall as mamma. Why should I study algebra?”

“Because,” I answered evasively.

“Your answer is as rude as though I were twenty, instead of sixteen,” said Sweetheart. “If you treat me as a child from this moment, I shall hate you.”

“Me—Sweetheart?”

“And that name!—it is good for children and kittens.”

I looked at her seriously. “It is good for women, too—when it is time,” I said. “I prophesy that one day you will hear it again. As for me, I shall not call you by that name if you dislike it.”

“I am a woman—now,” she said.

“Oh! at sixteen.”

“To-morrow I am to be seventeen.”

Presently, looking off at the blue hills, I said: “For a long time I have recognised that that subtle, indefinable attitude—we call it deference—due from men to women is due from us to you. Donny and Walter are slower to accept this. You know what you have been to us as a child; we can’t bear to lose you—to meet you in another way—to reckon with you as we reckon with a woman. But it is true: our little Sweetheart has vanished, and—you are here!”

The oak leaves began to rustle in the hill winds; the crows cawed from the woods.

“Oui c’est moi,” she said at length.

“I shall never call you Sweetheart again,” I said, smiling.

“Who knows?” she laughed, and leaned over to pick a blade of wild wheat. She coloured faintly a moment later, and said: “I didn’t mean that, Jack.”

And so Sweetheart took her first step across that threshold of mystery, the Temple of Idols. And of the gilded idols within the temple, one shall turn to living flesh at the sound of a voice. And lo! where a child had entered, a woman returned with the key to the Temple of Gilded Idols.

“Jack,” said Sweetheart, “you are wrong. No day is too fair to kill in. I shall pick my arms full—full of flowers.”

Over the yellow fields, red with the stalks of the buckwheat, crowned with a glimmering cloud of the dusty gold of the golden-rod, Sweetheart passed, pensive, sedate, awed by the burden of sixteen years.

I followed.

Over the curling fern and wind-stirred grasses the silken milkweed seeds sailed, sailed, and the great red-brown butterflies drifted above, ruddy as autumn leaves aglow in the sun.

On the sand-cliff there are marigolds,” said Sweetheart.

I looked at the mass of wild flowers in her arms; her white polished skin reflected the blaze of colour, warming like ivory under their glow.

“Marigolds,” I repeated; “we will get some.”

“The sand slides on the face of the cliff; you must be careful,” she said.

“And I may see one of those rare cliff butterflies. I haven’t any good examples.”

I fancy she was not listening; the crows were clamouring above the beech woods; the hill winds filled our ears with a sound like the sound of the sea on shoals. Her gray eyes, touched with the sky’s deep blue and the blue of the misty hills, looked out across the miles of woods and fields, and saw a world; not a world old, scarred, rock-ribbed, and salt with tears, but a new world, youthful, ripe, sunny, hazy with the splendour of wonders hidden behind the horizon—a world jewelled with gems, spanned by rose-mist rainbows—a world of sixteen years.

“We are already at the cliff’s edge,” I said.

She stepped to the edge and looked over. I drew her back. The sand started among the rocks, running, running with a sound like silver water.

“Then you shall not go either,” she said. “I do not care for marigolds.”

But I was already on the edge, stooping for a blossom. The next instant I fell. There was a whistle of sand, a flurry and a rush of wind, a blur of rock, fern, dead grasses—a cry!

For I remember as I fell, falling I called, “Sweetheart!” and again “Sweetheart!” Then my body struck the rocks below.

III

Of all the seconds that tick the whole year through, of all the seconds that have slipped onward marking the beat of time since time was loosed, there is one, one brief moment, steeped in magic and heavy with oblivion, that sometimes lingers in the soul of man, annihilating space and time. If, at the feet of God, a year is a second passed unnoted, this magic second, afloat on the tide of time, moves on and on till, caught in the vortex of some life’s whirl, it sinks into the soul of a being near to death.

And in that soul the magic second glows and lingers, stretching into minutes, hours, days—aye, days and days, till, if the magic hold, the calm years crowd on one by one; and yet it all is but a second—that magic moment that comes on the tide of time—that came to me and was caught up in my life’s whirl as I fell, dropping there between sky and earth.

And so that magic moment grew to minutes, to hours; and when my body, whirling, pitching, struck and lay flung out on the earth, the magic second grew until the crystal days fell from my life, as beads, one by one, fall from the rosaries that saints tell kneeling.

Those days of a life that I have lived, those years that linger still aglow in the sun behind me, dim yet splendid as dust-dimmed jewels, they also have ended, not in vague night, but in the sunburst of another second—such a second as ticks from my watch as I write, quick, sharp, joyous, irrevocable! So, of that magic second, or day, or year, I shall tell—I, as I was, standing beside my body flung there across the earth.

I looked at my body, lying in a heap, then turned to the sand cliff smiling.

“Sweetheart!” I called.

But she was already at my side.

We walked on through fragrant pastures, watching the long shadows stretch from field to field, speaking of what had been and of all that was to be. It was so simple—everything was clear before us. Had there been doubts, fears, sudden alarms, startled heartbeats?

If there had been, now they were ended forever.

“Not forever,” said Sweetheart; “who knows how long the magic second may last?”

“But we—what difference can that make?” I asked.

“To us?”

“Yes.”

“None,” said Sweetheart decisively.

We looked out into the west. The sun turned to a mound of cinders; the hills loomed in opalescent steam.

“But—but—your shadow!” said Sweetheart.

I bent my head, thrilled with happiness.

“And yours,” I whispered.

The shadows we cast were whiter than snow.

I still heard the hill winds, soft in my ears as breaking surf; a bird-note came from the dusky woodland; a star broke out overhead.

“What is your pleasure, Sweetheart, now all is said?” I asked.

“The world is all so fair,” she sighed; “is it fairer beyond the hills, Jack?”

“It is fair where you pass by, north, south, and from west to west again. In France the poplars are as yellow as our oaks. In Morbihan the gorse gilds all the hills, yellow as golden-rod. Shall we go?”

“But in the spring—let us wait until spring.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“Until spring?”

“It is written that Time shall pass as a shadow across the sea. What is that book there under your feet—that iron-bound book, half embedded like a stone in the grass.”

“I did not see it!”

“Bring it to me.”

I raised the book; it left a bare mark in the sod as a stone that is turned. Then, holding it on my knees, I opened it, and Sweetheart, leaning on my shoulder, read. The tall stars flared like candles, flooding the page with diamond light; the earth, perfumed with blossoms, stirred with the vague vibration of countless sounds, tiny voices swaying breathless in the hidden surge of an endless harmony.

“The white shadow is the shadow of the soul,” she read. Even the winds were hushed as her sweet lips moved.

“And what shall make thee to understand what hell is? . . . When the sun shall be folded up as a garment that is laid away; when the stars fall, and the seas boil, and when souls shall be joined again to their bodies; and when the girl who hath been buried alive shall be asked for what crime; when books shall be laid open, when hell shall burn fiercely, and when paradise shall be brought very near:

“Every soul shall know what it hath wrought!”

I closed my eyes; the splendour of the starlight on the page was more than my eyes could bear.

But she read on; for what can dim her eyes?

“O man, verily, labouring, thou labourest to meet thy LORD.

“And thou shalt meet HIM!”

“When the earth shall be stretched like a skin, and shall cast forth that which is therein;

“By the heaven adorned with signs, by the witness and the witnessed;

“By that which appeareth by night; by the daybreak and the ten nights—the ten nights;

“The night of Al Kadr is better than a thousand months.

“Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures; the Most Merciful, the King of the Day of Judgment. Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious; not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray!”

* * *

In the sudden silence that spread across earth and heaven I heard the sound of a voice under the earth, calling, calling, calling.

“It is already spring,” said Sweetheart; and she rose, placing her white hands in mine. “Shall we go?”

“But we are already there,” I stammered, turning my eyes fearfully; for the tall pines dwindled and clustered and rose again cool and gray in the morning air, all turned to stone, fretted and carved like lacework; and where the pines had faded, the twin towers of a cathedral loomed; and where the hills swept across the horizon, the roofs of a white city glimmered in the morning sun. Bridges and quays and streets and domes and the hum of traffic and rattle of arms; and over all, the veil of haze and the twin gray towers of Notre Dame!

“Sweetheart!” I faltered.

But we were already in my studio.

IV.

The studio had not changed. The sun flooded it.

Sweetheart sat in the broken armchair and watched me struggle with the packing. Every now and then she made an impulsive movement toward the heap of clothes on the floor, which I checked with a “Thanks! I can fix it all alone, Sweetheart.”

Clifford seemed to extract amusement from it all, and said as much to Rowden, who was as usual ruining my zitherine by trying to play it like a banjo.

Elliott, knowing he could be of no use to us, had the decency to sit outside the studio on one of the garden benches. He appeared at intervals at the studio door, saying, “Come along, Clifford; they don’t want you messing about. Drop that banjo, Rowden, or Jack will break your head with it—won’t you, Jack?”

I said I would, but not with the zitherine.

Clifford flatly refused to move unless Sweetheart would take him out into our garden and show him the solitary goldfish which lurked in the fountain under the almond trees. But Sweetheart, apparently fascinated by the mysteries of packing, turned a deaf ear to Clifford’s blandishments and Rowden’s discords.

“I imagined,” said Clifford, somewhat hurt, “that you would delight in taking upon yourself the duties of a hostess. I should be pleased to believe that I am not an unwelcome guest.”

“So should I,” echoed Rowden; “I’d be pleased too.”

“What a shame for you to bother, Jack! she said. “Mr. Clifford shall go and make some tea directly. Mr. Rowden, you may take a table out by the fountain—and stay there.”

Clifford, motioning Elliott to take the other end of the Japanese table, backed with it through the hallway and out to the gravel walk, expostulating.

“The sugar is there in that tin box by the model stand,” she said, when he reappeared, “and the extra spoons are lying in a long box on Jack’s big easel.”

When Rowden, reluctantly relinquishing the zitherine, followed Clifford, bearing the cups and alcohol lamp, I raised my head and wiped the dust from my forehead. I believe I swore a little in French. Sweetheart looked startled. She knew more French than I supposed she did.

“What is it, Jack?”

“Mais—rien, ça m’embête—cette espèce de malle—”

“Then why won’t you let me help you, Jack? I can at least put in my gowns.”

“But I must pack my colour box first, and the gun case, and the box of reels, and the pastel case, and our shooting boots, and the watercolour box, and the cartridge belt, and your golf shoes, and—”

“O dear!” said Sweetheart with a shudder.

I stood up and scowled at the trunk.

“To look at you, Jack,” murmured Sweetheart, “one might think you unhappy.”

Unhappy! At the thought our eyes met across the table.

“Unhappy!” I whispered.

Then Clifford came stumbling in, wearing a pair of Joseph’s sabots, and, imitating that faithful domestic in voice and manner, invited us to tea under the lilacs and almond blossoms.

“In a moment,” cried Sweetheart impatiently. “Go and pour the tea.”

Clifford looked aghast. “No, no!” he cried; “it’s impossible—I won’t believe that you two are deliberately getting rid of me so you can be alone to spoon! And your honeymoon already a year old, and—”

Sweetheart frowned, and tapped her foot.

Clifford retired indignant.

Then she raised her eyes to mine, and a delicate colour stained her cheeks and neck.

“Yes,” I said, “we have been married nearly a year, Sweetheart.”

We looked at our white shadows on the floor.

V.

Sweetheart sat under the lilac blossoms pouring out tea for Clifford, Elliott, and Row-den. She was gracious to Clifford, gentle to Elliott, and she took Rowden under her wing in the sweetest way possible, to which Clifford stated his objections.

“Mr. Rowden is younger than you are,” she said gravely. “Monsieur Clifford, I do not wish you to torment him.”

“Rowden’s no baby; he’s as old as Jack is, and Jack doesn’t murder music.”

“I am glad to see you acknowledge Jack’s superiority in all matters,” said Sweetheart with a dangerous smile.

“I don’t,” cried Clifford laughing; “and I don’t see what you find to care about in a man who clips his hair like a gendarme and paints everything purple.”

“Everything is purple—if Jack paints it so,” said Sweetheart, smiling at her reflected face in the water. She stood at the rim of the little stone fountain with her hands clasped behind her back. Elliott and Clifford were poking about in the water plants to dislodge the solitary goldfish, while Rowden gathered dewy clusters of lilacs as an offering.

“There he goes!” said Elliott.

“Poor fellow, living there all alone!” said Sweetheart. “Jack must leave word with Joseph to get him a little lady fish to pay his court to.”

“Better put in another gentleman fish, then, if you’re following Nature,” said Clifford, with an attempt at cynicism which drew the merriest laugh from Sweetheart.

“Oh, how funny is Monsieur Clifford when he wants to be like Frenchmen!” she murmured.

“Jack,” said Elliott, as I came from the studio and picked up a cup of tea grown cold, “Clifford’s doing the world-worn disenchanted roué.”

“And—and I fear he will next make love to me!” cried Sweetheart.

“You’d better look out, Jack,” said Clifford darkly, and pretended to sulk until Sweetheart sent him off to buy the bonbons she would need for the train.

“They’re packed,” I said, “every trunk of them!”

Sweetheart was enchanted. “All my new gowns, and the shoes from Rix’s—O Jack, you didn’t forget the shoes—and the bath robes— and—”

“All packed,” I said, swallowing the tea with a wry face.

“Oh,” she cried reproachfully, “don’t drink that! Here, I will have some hot tea in a moment,” and she ran over and perched on the arm of the garden bench while I lighted the alcohol lamp and then a cigarette.

Rowden came up with his offering of lilacs, and she decorated each of us with a spray.

It was growing late. The long shadows fell across the gravel walks and flecked the white walls of the sculptor’s studio opposite.

“It’s the nine-o’clock train, isn’t it?” said Elliott.

“We will meet you at the station at eight-thirty,” added Rowden.

“You don’t mind, do you, our dining alone?” said Sweetheart shyly; “it’s our last day—Jack’s and mine—in the old studio.”

“Not the last, I hope,” said Elliott sincerely.

We all sat silent for a moment.

“O Paris, Paris-how I fear it!” murmured Sweetheart to me; and in the same breath, “No, no, we must love it, you and I.”

Then Elliott said aloud, “I suppose you have no idea when you will return?”

“No,” I replied, thinking of the magic second that had become a year.

And so we dined alone, Sweetheart and I, in the old studio.

At half-past eight o’clock the cab stood at the gate with all our traps piled on top, and Joseph and his wife and the two brats were crying, “Au revoir, madame! au revoir, monsieur! We will keep the studio well dusted. Bon voyage! bon voyage!” and all of a sudden my arm was caught by Sweetheart’s little gloved hand, and she drew me back through the long ivy-covered alley to the garden where the studio stood, its doorway closed and silent, the hollow windows black and grim. Truly the light had passed away with the passing of Sweetheart. Her hand slipped from my arm, and she went and knelt down at the threshold and kissed it.

“I first knew happiness when I first crossed it,” she said; “it breaks my heart to leave it. Only that magic second! but it seems years that we have lived here.”

“It was you who brought happiness to it,” I said.

“Good-bye! good-bye, dear, dear, old studio!” she cried. “Oh, if Jack is always the same to me as he has been here—if he will be faithful and true in that new home!”

The new home was to be in a strange land. Sweetheart was a little frightened, but was dying to go there. Sweetheart had never seen the golden gorse ablaze on the moors of Morbihan.

VI.

I went inside the brass railing and waited my turn to buy the tickets. When it came, I took two first class to Quimperlé, for it was to be an all-night ride, and there was no sleeping car. Clifford had taken charge of the baggage, and I went with him to have it registered, leaving Sweetheart with Elliott and Rowden. All the traps were there—the big trunks, the big valises, my sketching kit, the zitherine in a leather case, two handbags, a bundle of umbrellas and canes, and a huge package of canvases. The toilet case and the rugs and waterproofs we took with us into the compartment.

The compartment was empty. Sweetheart nestled into one corner, and when I had placed our traps in the racks overhead I sat down opposite, while Clifford handed in our sandwiches, a bottle of red wine, and Sweetheart’s box of bonbons.

We didn’t say much; most had been said before starting. Clifford was more affected than he cared to show—I know by the way he grasped my hand. They are dear fellows, every one. We

did not realize that we were actually going—going, perhaps, forever. She laughed, and chatted, and made fun of Clifford, and teased Rowden, aided and abetted by Elliott, until the starting gong clanged and a warning whistle sounded along the gaslit platform.

“Jack,” cried Clifford, leaning in the window, “God bless you! God bless you both!”

Elliott touched her hand and wrung mine, and Rowden risked his neck to give us both one last cordial grasp.

“Count on me—on us,” cried Clifford, speaking in English, “if you are—troubled!”

By what, my poor Clifford? Can you, with all your gay courage, turn back the hands of the dials? Can you, with all your warm devotion, add one second to the magic second and make it two? The shadows we cast are white.

The train stole out into the night, and I saw them grouped on the platform, silhouettes in the glare of the yellow signals. I drew in my head and shut the window. Sweetheart’s face had grown very serious, but now she smiled across from her corner.

“Aren’t you coming over by me, Jack?”

VII.

We must have been moving very swiftly, for the car rocked and trembled, and it was probably that which awoke me. I looked across at Sweetheart. She was lying on her side, one cheek resting on her gloved hand, her travelling cap pushed back, her eyes shut. I smoothed away the curly strands of hair which straggled across her cheeks, and tucked another rug well about her feet. Her feet were small as a child’s. I speak as if she were not a child. She was eighteen then.

The next time I awoke we lay in a long gaslit station. Some soldiers were disembarking from the forward carriages, and a gendarme stalked up and down the platform.

I looked sleepily about for the name of the station. It was painted in blue over the buffet—“Petit St. Yves.” “Is it possible we are in Brittany?” I thought. Then the voices of the station hands, who were hoisting a small boat upon the forward carriage, settled my doubts. “Allons! tire hardiment, Jean Louis! mets le cannotte deboutte.”

Arrête toi Yves! doucement! doucement! Sacré garce!”

Somewhere in the darkness a mellow bell tolled. I settled back to slumber, my eyes on Sweetheart.

She slept.

VIII.

I awoke in a flood of brightest sunshine. From our window I could look into the centre of a most enchanting little town, all built of white limestone and granite. The June sunshine slanted on thatched roof and painted gable, and fairly blazed on the little river slipping by under the stone bridge in the square.

The streets and the square were alive with rosy-faced women in white head-dresses. Everywhere the constant motion of blue skirts and spotless coiffes, the twinkle of varnished socks, the clump! clump! of sabots.

Like a black shadow a priest stole across the square. Above him the cross on the church glowed like a live cinder, flashing its reflection along the purple-slatted roof from the eaves of which a cloud of ash-gray pigeons drifted into the gutter below. I turned from the window to encounter Sweetheart’s eyes. Her lips moved a little, her long lashes heavy with slumber drooped

lower, then with a little sigh she sat bolt upright. When I laughed, as I always did, she smiled, a little confused, a little ashamed, murmuring: "Bonjour, mon chéri! Quelle heure est-il?" That was always the way Sweetheart awoke.

"O dear, I am so rumped!" she said. "Jack, get me the satchel this minute, and don't look at me until I ask you to."

I unlocked the satchel, and then turning to the window again threw it wide open. Oh, how sweet came the morning air from the meadows! Some young fellows below on the bank of the stream were poking long cane fishing-rods under the arches of the bridge.

"Sweetheart," I said over my shoulder, "I believe there are trout in this stream."

"Mr. Elliott says that whenever you see a puddle you always say that," she replied.

"What does he know about it?" I answered, "for I am touchy on the subject; 'he doesn't know a catfish from a—a dogfish.'"

"Neither do I, Jack dear, but I'm going to learn. Don't be cross."

She had finished her toilet and came over to the window, leaning out over my shoulder.

"Where are we?" she cried in startled wonder at the little white town and the acres of swaying clover. "Oh, Jack, is—is this the country?"

A man in uniform passing under our window looked up surprised.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded; then, seeing Sweetheart, he took off his gold-laced cap, and added, with a bow: "This carriage goes no farther, monsieur—madame——"

"Merci!" exclaimed Sweetheart, "we wish to go to Quimperlé!"

"And we have tickets for Quimperlé," I insisted.

"But," smiled the official, "this is Quimperlé."

It was true. There was the name written over the end of the station; and, looking ahead, I saw that our car had been detached and was standing in stately seclusion under the freight shed. How long it had been standing so Heaven alone knows; but they evidently had neglected to call us, and there we were inhabiting a detached carriage in the heart of Quimperlé. I managed to get a couple of porters, and presently we found all our traps piled up on the platform, and a lumbering vehicle with a Breton driver waiting to convey us to the hotel.

"Which," said I to the docile Breton, "is the best hotel in Quimperlé?"

"The Hotel Lion d'Or," he replied.

"How do you know?" I demanded.

"Because," said he mildly, "it is the only hotel in Quimperlé."

Sweetheart observed that this ought to be convincing, even to me, and she tormented me all the way to the square, where I got even by pretending to be horrified at her dishevelled condition incident to a night's railway ride in a stuffy compartment.

"Don't, Jack! people will look at us."

"Let 'em."

"Oh, this is cruel! Oh, I'll pay you for this!"

And they did look at us—or rather at her; for from the time Sweetheart and I had cast our lots together, I noticed that I seemed to escape the observation of passers-by. When I lived alone in Paris I attracted a fair share of observation from the world as it wagged on its Parisian way. It was pleasant to meet a pretty girl's eyes now and then in the throng which flowed through the park and boulevard. I really never flattered myself that it was because of my personal beauty; but in Paris, any young fellow who is dressed in the manner of Albion, hatted and gloved in the same style, is not entirely a cipher. But now it was not the same, by a long shot.

Sweetheart's beauty simply put me in my place as an unnoticed but perhaps correct supplement to her.

She knew she was a beauty, and was delighted when she looked into her mirror. Nothing escaped her. The soft hair threaded with sunshine, which, when loosened, curled to her knees; the clear white forehead and straight brows; the nose delicate and a trifle upturned; the scarlet lips and fine cut chin—she knew the value of each of these. She was pleased with the soft, full curve of her throat, the little ears, and the colour which came and went in her cheeks.

But her eyes were the first thing one noticed. They were the most beautiful gray eyes that ever opened under silken lashes. She approved of my telling her this, which duty I fulfilled daily. Perhaps it may be superfluous to say that we were very much in love. Did I say were?

I think that, as I am chanting the graces of Sweetheart, it might not be amiss to say that she is just an inch shorter than I am, and that no Parisienne carried a pretty gown with more perfection than she did. I have seen gowns that looked like the devil on the manikin, but when Sweetheart wore them they were the astonishment and admiration of myself. And I do know when a woman is well dressed, though I am an art critic.

Sweetheart regarded her beauty as an intimate affair between ourselves, a precious gift for our mutual benefit, to be carefully treasured and petted. Her attitude toward the world was unmistakable. The world might look—she was indifferent. With our intimate friends she was above being flattered. Clifford said to me once: "She carries her beauty as a princess would carry the Koh-i-noor—she knows she is worthy of it, and hopes it is worthy of her.

"We ought to be so happy that I am beautiful!" she would say to me. "Just think, supposing I were not!"

I used to try to make her believe that it would have made no difference.

"Oh, not now," she would say gravely. "I know that if I lost it it would be the same to us both, now; but you can't make me believe that, at first, when you used to lean over the terrace of the Luxembourg and wait patiently for hours just to see me walk out of the Odeon."

"I didn't," I would always explain; "I was there by accident."

"Oh, what a funny accident to happen every day for two months!"

"Stop teasing! Of course, after the first week—"

"And what a funny accident that I should pass the same way every day for two months, when before I always went by the Rue de Seine!"

There was once such an accident, and such a girl. I never knew her; she is dead. I wondered sometimes that Sweetheart knew, and believed it was she herself. Yet the other woman's shadow was black.

Sweetheart had a most peculiar and unworldly habit of not embellishing facts. She presently displayed it when we arrived at the Hotel Lion d'Or.

"Jack," said she nervously, "the cinders have made your face unpleasant. I am ashamed. They may not believe you are my husband."

"As monsieur and madame," I said, "we may have dirty faces and be honest."

"Do you suppose they—they will believe it? These queer people—"

"They'd better!" I said fiercely.

"I—I hadn't thought of that," she said. "You see, in our own little place in Paris everybody knew it, but here—"

I said, "Dearest, what nonsense!" and we marched unceremoniously up to the register, where I wrote our names. Then, with a hasty little squeeze of her gloved hand, she turned to the maid and tripped off to inspect our quarters. While I was pumping the fat-headed old proprietor about the

trout fishing in the vicinity, the maid returned with the request that I mount to the room above. I followed her along the tiled passages and found Sweetheart sitting on a trunk.

"It's charming! charming!" she said. "Just look at the roses outside, and the square, and the river! and oh, Jack, the funny little Breton cattle, and the old man with knee-breeches! It's charming! and"—here she caught sight of the enraptured and fascinated maid—"and you are charming, with your red cheeks and white coiffe," she said. "Oh, how pretty!"

"Oh, madame!" murmured the servant in dire confusion.

I said, "Dearest, that will do. Nobody speaks of my peculiar charms, and I wish to be noticed."

The presence of the maid prevented Sweetheart from making amends, so we told her we were satisfied, and we would spare her life if she prepared breakfast in seventeen seconds.

She accepted the gift of existence with a dazed courtsey, and vanished.

It was refreshing to get hold of a sponge and coldwater after fourteen hours in a cramped compartment. Hunger drove us to hurry—a thing we rarely did in the morning—and the way we splashed cold water about would have been fatal to any but a tiled floor.

"Dear," I said, "you have not yet seen me in my Tyrolese knickerbockers and beautiful shooting jacket. You have never beheld my legs clothed in Tyrolese stockings, at twenty francs a pair."

"The legs?" she inquired from the depths of a bath robe.

I ignored the question, and parted my hair with care. Then I sat down on the window and whistled.

Of course I was ready first. Sweetheart's hair had got into a tangle and needed to be all combed out.

"Oh, I know you are impatient, because you're whistling the Chant du Depart," she said from the door of her toilet room.

"As usual," I said, "I am ready first."

"If you say that again "she threatened.

I said it, and dodged a sponge. Presently I was requested to open the trunk and select a gown for her. Dear little Sweetheart! She loved to pretend that she had so many it needed long consultation to decide which.

"The dark blue?" I inquired.

"Don't you think it is too warm?"

"The pale blue, then—or the pink and white?"

"Why not the white, with the cuffs a l'Anglaise, and the canoe hat?"

I hauled it out.

Then, of course, she changed her mind.

"I think the gray is better for the morning; then I can wear the big chip hat."

I fished up the gray. It was light, almost silvery, and had white spots on it.

"Jack, dear," she said, coming out with her hair tucked up in a knot, drawing the bath robe up to her chin with both hands, "I think that the white cloth would be better, and that I can wear the beret."

By this time the trunk was in a pretty mess, which amused her; but at last I ferreted out the white cloth dress, and, refusing to listen to further discussion, sat down on the window seat. Sweetheart enjoyed it.

"Stop telling me to hurry," she said; "I can't, if you keep saying it all the time."

After a while she called me to fasten her corsage, which hooked with about ten hundred hooks along the side and collar. I hated to do it, and my finger ends stung for hours after, but, as

Sweetheart very rightly says, "When we are rich enough to have a maid you needn't," I submitted with an air which delighted her. Her tormenting "Thank you, Jack," was the last straw, so I calmly picked her up and carried her out, and almost to the dining room, where I set her down just in time to avoid the proprietor and three domestics issuing from the office.

Sweetheart was half inclined to laugh, half indignant, and wholly scandalized. But she did not dare say anything, for we were at the dining-room door.

There were some people there, but except for a slight inclination we did not notice each other. We had a small table to ourselves by the rose-bowered window.

We were very hungry. Breakfast began with fresh sardines just caught, and ended with little Breton cakes and a demi-tasse. I finished first; I always do, because the wretched habit of bolting my food, contracted while studying under Bouguereau at Julian's, clings to me yet. Oh, I shall have a merry time paying for it when I am forty! I began, as usual, to tease Sweetheart.

"If you continue to eat like this, dear, you will never be able to wear your new frocks.

This one seems a trifle too tight now."

Sweetheart, who prided herself as much on her figure as on her lovely face, repelled the insult with disdain and nibbled her Breton biscuit defiantly. When at last she condescended to rise, we strolled out under the trees in front of the hotel, and sat down on the low stone wall surrounding the garden. The noon sun hung in the zenith, flooding the town with a dazzling downpour. Sunbeams glanced and danced on the water; sunbeams filtered through the foliage; sunbeams stole under Sweetheart's big straw hat, searching the depths of the gray eyes. Sunbeams played merry mischief with my ears and neck, which were beginning to sting in the first sunburn of the year. Through the square the white-coiffed women passed and repassed; small urchins with silver-buckled hatbands roamed about the bridge and market-place until collected and trooped off to school by a black-robed Jesuit frère; and in the shade of the firs a dozen sprawling men in Breton costume smoked their microscopical pipes and watched the water.

"They are an industrious race," said I with fine irony, watching a happy inebriate pursuing a serpentine course toward the café opposite.

Sweetheart, who was as patriotic a little girl as ever hummed the Marseillaise, and adopted France as long as she lived in it, was up in arms in an instant.

"I have read," she said with conviction, "that the Bretons are a brave, industrious race. They are French."

"They speak a different language," I said— "not a word of French in it."

"They are French," repeated Sweetheart, with an inflection which decided me to shun the subject until I could unpack my guide-book.

We sat a little while longer under the trees, until we both began nodding and mutually accused each other. Then Sweetheart went up to the room to take a nap, and I, scorning such weakness, lay down in a steamer chair under our window and fell fast asleep in no time.

I was aroused by a big pink rose which hit me squarely on the mouth. Sweetheart was perched in the window seat above, and as I looked up she sent a shower of blossoms down upon me.

"Jack, you lazy creature, it's five o'clock, and I'm dressed and ready for a walk!"

"So am I," I said, jumping up.

"But not like that. You must come up and make yourself nice for dinner."

"Nice? What's the matter with these tweeds? Aren't these new stockings presentable?"

"Look at your hair!" she said evasively. "Come up this minute and brush it."

I went, and was compelled to climb into a white collar and shirt, and trousers of an English cut. But before we had gone far along the great military road that climbed the heights above the little

river, I took Sweetheart's hand in mine and imparted to her my views and intentions upon the subject of my costume for the future.

"You see, dearest, we are here in Brittany for three reasons. The first is, that I should paint outdoors. The second is, that we should economize like the deuce. The third is, our shadows—"

"I know," she interrupted faintly. "Never mind, Jack, dear."

We walked silently for a while, hand clasping hand very tightly, for we were both thinking of the third reason.

I broke the silence first, speaking cheerfully, and she looked up with a quick smile while the shadow fell from her brow.

"You see, dear, in this place, where we are going, there are no people but peasants. Your frocks are all right for a place like this; we must both wear our free-and-easy togs—I for painting, and you for scrambling about after your wild flowers or fishing with me. If you get tired of seeing me in corduroys or tweeds, I'll dress for you when you think you can't stand it any longer."

"Oh, Jack, I do like your knickerbockers—"

"And you shall wear your most gorgeous gown for me

"Indeed I won't," she laughed, adding impulsively, "indeed I will—every day, if you wish it!

At the top of the hill stood an ancient Ursuline convent surrounded by a high wall, which also inclosed the broad acres of the wealthy sisterhood. We sat down by the roadside hedge and looked across the valley, where the hurrying river had ceased to hasten and now lingered in placid pools and long, deep reaches. The sun had set behind the forest, and the sky threw a purple light over woods and meadow. The grassy pools below were swept by flocks of whistling martins and swallows. One or two white gulls flapped slowly toward the tide water below, and a young curlew, speeding high overhead, uttered a lonesome cry. The grass—the brilliant green grass of Brittany—had turned a deep metallic blue in the twilight. A pale primrose light grew and died in the sky, and the forest changed from rose to ashes. Then a dull red bar shot across the parting clouds in the west, the forest smouldered an instant, and the pools glowed crimson. Slowly the red bar melted away, the light died out among the branches, the pools turned sombre. Looking up, we saw the new moon flashing in the sky above our heads. Sweetheart sighed in perfect contentment.

"It's beautiful!" I said, with another sigh.

"Ah, yes," she murmured, "beautiful to you, and to me—to me, Jack, who have never before seen this land of Morbihan."

After a while she said, "And the ocean—oh, how I long to see it! Is it near us, Jack?"

"The river runs into it twenty kilometres below. We feel the tide at Quimperlé." I did not add, "Baedeker."

"I wonder," I said presently, "what are the feelings of a little American who sees this country—the real country—for the first time?"

"I suppose you mean me," she said. "I don't know—I don't think I understand it yet, but I know I shall love it, and never want to go back."

"Perhaps we never shall," I said. "The magic second may stretch into years that end at last as all ends."

Then our hands met in that sudden nervous clasp which seemed to help and steady us when we were thinking of the real world, so long, so long forgotten.

IX.

I was awakened next morning by a spongeful of cold water in the face, which I hate. I started up to wreak vengeance upon Sweetheart, but she fled to the toilet room and locked herself in. From this retreat she taunted me until further sleep was out of the question, and I bowed to the inevitable—indignantly, when I saw my watch pointed to five o'clock.

Sweetheart was perfectly possessed to row; so when I had bolted my coffee and sat watching her placidly sip hers, we decided to go down to the bank of the little stream and hire a boat. The boat was a wretched, shapeless affair, with two enormous oars and the remnants of rowlocks. It was the best boat in town, so we took it. I managed to get away from the bank, and, conscious of Sweetheart's open admiration, pulled boldly down the stream. It was easy work, for the tide was ebbing. The river up to the bridge was tidal, but above the bridge it leaped and flowed, a regular salmon stream. Sweetheart was so impatient to take the oars that I relinquished them and picked up my rod. The boat swung down the stream and under the high stone viaduct, where I insisted on anchoring and whipping the promising-looking water. The water was likely enough, and the sudden splash of a leaping grilse added to its likelihood. I was in hopes a guise might become entangled with one of the flies, but though a big one shot up out of the water within five feet of Sweetheart, causing her to utter a suppressed scream, neither grilse nor trout rose to the beautiful lures I trailed about, and I only hooked two or three enormous dace, which came up like logs and covered the bottom of the boat with their coarse scales.

Sweetheart had never seen a French trout uncooked, and scarcely shared my disappointment.

"They are splendid fish," she repeated; "you are unreasonable."

There was an ancient Breton squatting on the bank; from his sulky attitude I took him to be a poacher visiting his infernal set lines and snares; but I hailed him pleasantly with a bonjour, which he returned civilly enough.

"Are there trout in this stream?"

"About the bridge," he replied cautiously.

"Have you caught any?"

"I ain't fishing," he said, much alarmed.

"What's that?" I demanded, pointing to as plump a trout as ever I saw, floating on the end of a string under the bank.

"Where?" he asked, looking about him with affected concern.

"There!"

He looked around, everywhere except where I pointed. He examined the horizon, and the tree tops, as though he expected a fish on every twig. I poled the boat up to the bank and pointed out the fish.

"Ma doui!" he exclaimed, "there is a fish!"

"Yes, a trout," I said.

"Trout?" He burst into a forced laugh. "Trout! Ha! ha! Why, monsieur, that is a dace—a poor little dace!" He hastily jerked it up with a long homemade gaff which lay—of course quite by accident—at his feet.

"A poor little dace!" he mumbled. "Of course, monsieur would not care to claim such a poor, coarse little fish; but I am only too glad to eat it—ah, yes, only too glad!"

"You see," said Sweetheart impulsively, "that you are wrong. Give him our fish; that will make four dace for the poor fellow."

I placed the three dace across the blade of my oar and held it out to the poacher. He took them as if he were really glad to get them. Then I said, "These are dace, and they don't have red spots."

He stood as if ready to bolt, but I laughed, and settled back on my oars, saying: "You're a poacher; but I don't care a continental, and you can poach all day in this confounded country, where there is about one trout to the kilometre. Don't look scared. What do I care? Only don't tell me I'm unable to distinguish a trout when I can see the tip of his nose."

I then sailed majestically out into the stream.

Sweetheart wanted to know whether that was really a real poacher. She had read about them. Her ideal poacher was a young, stalwart, eagle-eyed giant, with a tangle of hair and a disposition toward assassination. The reality shocked her.

"Anyway," she said, "you frightened the poor old thing. How rough men are!"

We returned to the landing place with difficulty, for the tide was still on the ebb, and we got aground more than once. My hands were in a fine condition when at last I drove that wretched scow into the mud and lifted Sweetheart out to the firm bank. The evil-eyed old man who rented us the boat glanced sardonically at my rod and blistered hands, and I was glad enough to pay him all he asked and break away for the hotel.

We had an hour to lunch in, pack, and be ready for the trap which was to bear us to our destination—the distant village of Faöuet, in Morbihan.

X.

A long drive on a smooth white road, acres of gorse and broom, beech woods and oak thickets, and the "Heu! heu! Allo! Allous! en route!" of the Breton driver, these are my recollections of the ride to Faöuet. There are others, too—the hedges heavy with bloom, the perfume of the wild honeysuckle, the continual bird chorus from every grove and every bramble patch—and Sweetheart's veil flying into my face.

We have spoken of it since together, but she has few recollections of that journey. She only remembers it as her first steps into our heritage.

And so we entered into our heritage, Sweetheart and I; and our heritage was very fair, for it lay everywhere about us. It was a world which we alone inhabited. Men said, "This land is Gloanec's," "This is Gurnalec's," "This is Kerdec's"; they spoke of "my woods" and "his meadows" and "their pastures." And how we laughed; for when we passed together through their lands, around us, far as the eye could reach, our heritage lay in the sunshine.

XI.

One day, when Sweetheart had been weeping—for we were thinking of the end to the magic second—I spoke of our heritage which swept far as the eye could reach across the moors of Faöuet.

She said: "The past is ours, Jack; the present is ours; the future—"

We tried to smile, but our hearts were like lead. Yet we know that the future will also be ours. I know it as I write.

XII.

The letter from St. Gildas, bringing with it a breath of salt air, lay on the table before us. Sweetheart clasped her hands and looked at me.

"I'm in favour of going at once," I said for the third time. Over by the wall were piled my canvases, the result of three months in Faöuet.

The first was a study of Sweetheart under the trees of the ancient orchard in the convent grounds. What trouble I had had with that canvas! I remembered the morning that the old gardener came over and stood behind me as I painted; and when I had replied to his "Good-morning," I recalled the pang his next words gave me:

"I am so sorry, monsieur, but it is forbidden to enter the convent grounds."

My canvas was almost finished, and, as the romancers have it, "my despair was great!" A month's work for nothing—or next to nothing!

Sweetheart rose from her pose on the low bough of the apple tree and came over to my side. "Never mind, Jack; I shall go and ask the Mother Superior about it."

I knew that she would win over the Mother Superior; and when, that evening, she came back radiant, crying, "She is lovely!—she says you may finish the picture, and I think you ought to go and thank her," I put on my cap, and stepping across the street, we rang at the gate.

The old gardener let us in, and in a moment I stood before the latticed windows behind which some one was moving. In a low voice the invisible nun told us that the Superior granted to us the privilege of working in the orchard, but we must be careful of the grass, because it was almost time to cut it.

"I am sure we may have confidence in you," she said.

"We will not trample the grass, my sister, and I thank you for us both."

The lattice trembled, was raised a little, and then fell.

"You are English," said the hidden nun.

"I am American, my sister."

I looked at the lattice a moment, then dropped my eyes. I may have been mistaken, but I think she sighed.

Sweetheart came closer to the lattice and murmured her thanks.

There was a pause.

Then came the voice again, sweet and gentle: "May Our Lady of Saint Gildas protect you"; and we went out by the little iron wicket.

The next picture was another study of Sweetheart in the woods; the next, another study of Sweetheart; and the others were studies of the same young lady.

The light in the room had grown dim, and I walked to the window which overlooked the convent chapel. The chapel windows were open; within, the nuns stood or knelt chanting. Three white-veiled figures were advancing to the altar, and the others, draped in black now knelt behind. I didn't think I had any business to look at them, so I did not. After all, they were cloistered nuns, and it was only on hot nights that they opened the chapel windows. Sweetheart was speaking beside my shoulder.

"Poor things! The ones in white, they are the novices; they will never see parents or friends again. When they enter the gates they never leave—never; they are buried there."

I said: "After all, we are much like them. We have left all; we have nothing now but each other, for the world is dead, and we are bound by vows which keep us within the narrow confines of our heritage."

“But our heritage is everywhere-as far as we can see.”

“Ah, yes, but we can only see to the horizon. There is a world beyond.”

“I have renounced it,” said Sweetheart faintly.

XIII.

The letter from St. Gildas had been lying on our table for a week before I thought of answering it, and even then it was Sweetheart who wrote:

“DEAR MR. STUART:

“Jack is too lazy to answer your kind note, so, in pure shame for his discourtesy, I hasten to reply to your questions.

“First: Yes; we have been working very hard, and Jack’s pictures are charming, though he growls over them all day.

“Second: Yes; we intend to stay in Brittany this winter for lots of reasons—one being economy, and another, Jack’s outdoor painting.

“Third: Yes; we are coming to St. Gildas.

“Fourth: To-morrow.

“Fifth: No; we had not heard of Mr. Clifford’s affair with the policeman; and oh, I am so sorry he was locked up and fined! Jack laughs. I suspect he, too, was as wicked as you all when he was a student, alone in Paris.

“Sixth: I know you are Jack’s oldest and most intimate friend, so I allow you more liberty than I do Messieurs Clifford and Elliott; therefore I will answer your question as to whether the honeymoon is not on the wane. No! no! no! There are three answers to one question. See how generous I can be!”

Sweetheart called me to see whether or not I approved. I did, and added my answer to Stuart’s last question as follows: “No, you idiot!” Then I signed the note, and Sweetheart sealed and directed it.

So we left for St. Gildas next morning before sunrise and in the rain. This leaving at such an unearthly hour was not my doing, but Sweetheart was determined, and rose by candlelight in spite of desperate opposition on my part. It was cold, and the rain beat against the windows.

It was many kilometres to St. Gildas, but before we had gone six, the rain had ceased and the eastern sky flushed to a pale rose.

“Thank goodness!” I said, “we shall have the sun.”

Then the daily repeated miracle of the coming of dawn was wrought before our eyes. The heavens glowed in rainbow tints; the shredded mist rising along the river was touched with purple and gold, and acres of meadow and pasture dripped precious stones. Shreds of the fading night-mist drifted among the tree tops, now tipped with fire, while in the forest depths faint sparkles came from some lost ray of morning light falling on wet leaves. Then of a sudden up shot the sun, and against it, black and gigantic, a peasant towered, leaning upon his spade.

XIV.

We were fast nearing the end of our long journey. The sun blazed on us from the zenith, and the wheels creaked with the heat of the white road. The driver leaned back, saying, “We enter Finistère here by this granite post.” Presently he added, “The ocean!”

There it lay, a basin of silver and blue. Sweetheart had started to her feet, speechless, one hand holding to my shoulder, the other clasped to her breast. And now, as the road wound through the hills and down to the coast, long stretches of white sand skirted the distant cliffs, and over the cliffs waved miles and miles of yellow gorse. A cluster of white and gray houses lay in the hollow to the left almost at the mouth of the river, and beyond, the waves were beating in the bar—beating the same rhythm which we were to hear so long there together, day and night. There was not a boat to be seen, not a creature, nor was there any sign of life save for the smoke curling from a cottage chimney below. The ocean lay sparkling beneath, and beyond its deeper blue melted into the haze on the horizon.

Suddenly, in the road below, the figure of a man appeared, and at the same moment a pointer pup came gambolling up beside us in an ecstasy of self-abnegation and apology. I sprang out of the lumbering vehicle and lifted Sweetheart to the ground, and in an instant we were shaking hands with a stalwart young fellow in knickerbockers and jersey, who said we were a pretty pair not to have come sooner, and told Sweetheart he pitied her lot—meaning me.

Then we walked arm in arm down a fragrant lane to the river bank, where the dearest old lady toddled out of the granite house to welcome us and show us our rooms. Sweetheart went with her, while I stopped an instant to chat with Stuart.

“That is Madame Ylven,” he said. “She is the most stunning peasant woman in Finistère, and you will want for nothing.” Then, after a moment, “Good heavens! Jack, what a beauty your wife—” He stopped short, but added, “What a delicious little beauty Sweetheart has grown to be!”

A white-coiffed maid came to the door, and said, “Will monsieur have the goodness to come? Madame wishes him to see the rooms.”

The wind blew from the south, and the thunder of the sea was in my ears as I mounted the stairs to our new quarters.

Sweetheart met me at the door, saying, “It seems almost too much happiness to bear, but I feel that we are at home at last—alone together for all time.”

Alone together? The ocean at our threshold, the moors and forests at our back, and a good slate roof above us. Before me through the open door I could see the great old-fashioned room, warm in the afternoon sunlight—the room we were to live in so long, the room in which we were to pass the happiest and bitterest moments of our lives.

She hesitated an instant before the threshold. I think we knew that we stood upon the threshold of our destiny. Then I said, half in earnest: “Are you afraid to cross with me into the unknown future? See, the room is filled with sunshine. Are you afraid?”

She sprang across the threshold, and, turning to me, held out both hands.

XV.

The sun slipped lower and lower into the sea, until a distant tossing wave washed it out against the sky. Light died in the room, and shadows closed around us; yet it was in the darkness and shadows that we drew nearer to each other, then and after.

XVI.

Stuart stood under our window and yelled up at me, “Oh, Jack! I say, Jack!”

Sweetheart, who was fussing over the half-unpacked trunk, went to the window and threw open the panes.

“You don’t mean to say you have had your coffee?” she said. “Jack isn’t up yet.”

“Jack is up,” I explained, coming to the window in pajamas. “Hello!”

“I only wanted to say that I haven’t had my coffee,” he explained, “and I’m going to take it with you when you’re ready.”

Sweetheart picked up her béret, and, passing a hatpin through it, turned to me with a warning, “I shall eat all the breakfast, monsieur!” and vanished down the stairs. A moment later I heard her clear voice below:

Sonnez le chnur,
Chasseur!
Sonnez la mort!

Before I had finished dressing, Sweetheart tripped in with my coffee and toast.

“Of course I’ve finished,” she said, “and you don’t deserve this. Mr. Stuart has gone off with his canvases, and says he’ll see you at lunch.”

I swallowed the coffee and browsed on little squares of toast which she condescendingly buttered for me, and then, lighting a cigarette, I announced my intention of commanding an exploring expedition consisting of Sweetheart and myself. A scratching at the door and a patter of feet announced that I had been overheard.

Sweetheart unlatched the door, and the pointer pup of the evening before charged into the room and covered us with boisterous caresses, which we took to indicate that he not only approved of the expedition, but intended to undertake the general supervision of it himself. I resigned the leadership at once.

“His name,” said Sweetheart in the tone of one who presents a distinguished guest, “is ‘Luff.’ ”

I gravely acknowledged the honour by patting his head.

“I’m afraid,” I said to Sweetheart, “that there is a bar sinister upon his escutcheon, but possibly it is only the indelible mark of the conquering British foxhound.”

Sweetheart said, “Nonsense!” and the expedition moved, Luff leading with a series of ear-splitting orders in the dog language which we perfectly understood.

In ten minutes we stood on the cliffs, the salt wind whipping our faces. Saint-Gildas des-Prés lay at our feet.

“I know,” observed Sweetheart calmly, “all about this place. Captain Ylven told me at breakfast.”

“Well,” said I, “what’s that island on the horizon?”

Then she overwhelmed me with erudition, until I longed for Baedeker and revenge.

“That is the Isle de Groix, and all about us is the Bay of Biscay. This little hamlet on the cliff is St. Julien, and if we follow the coast far enough we come to Lorient.”

“Follow the coast? Which way?”

Sweetheart had forgotten, and I triumphed in silence, until she stamped her foot and marched off to assist Luff in investigating a auspicious hole in the cliff.

I went to the edge of the plateau and looked over. The surf thundered against the rocks, tossing long strands of seaweed over the pebbly beach. A man with a wooden rake stood in the water up to his knees. He raked the seaweed from the breakers as a farmer rakes weeds from the lawn. The salt wind began to sting my lips and eyes. My throat felt dry and salty. I turned toward the hamlet of St. Gildas. I had not imagined it so small. Besides our house there were but three

others clustered under the river bank. Behind it stretched woods and grain fields broken by patches of yellow gorse. Across the river stood a stone chapel almost lost in the miles of moorland. To the east and west the downs covered with gorse and heather rolled to the horizon. Here and there along the cliffs stood what appeared to be the ruins of ancient forts, and on a rock, just where the river sweeps out into the sea, rose a dirty white signal tower. The tower was low and squatty and wet. It looked like some saline excrescence which had slowly exuded from the brine-soaked rock. On the bar hundreds of white gulls rose and settled as the tide encroached; curlew were running along the foam-splashed shore under the eastern cliffs across the river.

On our side of the river the cliffs were covered with blackthorn and hawthorn, with here and there a stunted oak, probably so placed by Providence as general rendezvous for all the small twittering birds of Finistère. Birds were everywhere. From the clouds came the ceaseless carol of skylarks; from the grain fields and the flowering gorse rose an unbroken chorus, taken up and repeated by flocks of microscopical songsters among the blackthorns on the cliffs.

“This is paradise, this wilderness,” I thought.

Then, as I heard Sweetheart’s mocking voice from the cliff:

O frère Jaques,
Dormez vous!

“I’m not asleep!” I cried in answer. “What is it?”

“Luff has unearthed a poor little mole, but I won’t allow him to hurt it.”

“Jack, dear,” she said, as I came up, “couldn’t we keep it as a pet? See, the poor little thing is blind.”

As it was blind we called it “Love,” which later was changed to “Cupid,” and finally, when we discovered its true gormandizing character, for “Cupid” we substituted “Cupidity,” by which name it flourished and fattened.

“What a change,” said Sweetheart sadly, “from Blind Love to Blind Greed!”

The mole grew very fat.

XVII.

When the winds stir the leaves among the poplars, and the long shadows fall athwart the fields; when the winds rise at night, and the branches scrape and crack above the moonlit snow; when in the long hot days the earth is bathed in fragrance, and all the little creatures of the fields are silent; when in the still evenings the flowers perfume the air, and the gravel walks shine white in the moonlight; when the breezes quicken from the distant coast when the sand shakes beneath the shock of the breakers, and every wave is plumed with white; when the calm eye of the beacon turns to mine, lingers, and turn away, and the surf is yeasty and thick; when I start at the sound of a voice from the cliffs, and my eyes are raised in vain; when the white gulls toss and drift in the stormclouds, and the water hurries out in the black ebb tide; when I rise and look from the window; when I dress; when I work with pen and colour; when I rest; when I walk; when I sleep—there is one face before my eyes, one name on my lips. For the white shadow is turning gray, and God alone knows the end.

XVIII.

And God alone knows the end, for the mists are crowding, brooding like angry-browed clouds, and I hear the whistle of unseen winds, and my life-flame wavers and sinks and flares, blown hither and thither, tossing, fading, leaping, but fading, always fading.

In a flash, like a printed picture on a screen, illuminated, keenly etched in the white glare, I see the bed, and the people around me, the black gowns, the pale eyes of the doctor, the sponge and basin, the rolls of lint.

Voices, minute but clean-cut and clear as picked harp-strings, tinkle in my ears; the voice of the doctor, other voices, but always the voice of the doctor—"The splinter of bone on the brain; the splinter pressing on the tissues; the depression."

The doctor! That is the man! That is the man who comes to my side, who follows, follows where I go, who seeks me throughout the world! I saw him as I lay flung on the turf, limp, unconscious, below the cliffs on the Aspen hills; I felt his presence in the studio; I heard him creeping at my heels across the gorse thickets of St. Gildas. And now he has come to cut short the magic second, to turn back time—back, back, into the old worn channels, rock-ribbed and salt with tears.

As a leaf of written paper torn in two, so shall my life be torn in two; and the long tear shall mangle the chapter written in rose and gold.

Then, too, my shadow, already turned from white to gray, shall fall with a deeper stain wherever I pass; and I shall see the yellow gorse glimmer and turn to golden-rod, and the poplars turn to oaks; and the twin towers of Noire Dame, filmy, lace-carved, and gray with centuries, shall dwindle as I look—dwindle and sway and turn to pines, singing pines that murmur to the winds, blowing across the Aspen hills.

* * *

All that is fair shall pass away; all that I love, all that I fear for—these shall the doctor take away, lifting them from my memory on the point of a steel blade. What has he to give in return? A hell of vapour, distorting sight; a hell of sound, drowning the soul.

* * *

Gigantic apparitions arise across the world of water, wavering like shadows on the clouds. Steel-clad, clothed in skins, casqued in steel, their winged heads bend and nod and move against the clouds. And even they are changing as clouds change shape. I see steel limbs turn red and naked. I see winged casques trail to the earth, feathered, painted in colours of earth.

Ihó! Inâh! Etó! E-ho!

The bridge of stars spans the vast lake of air; the sun and the moon travel over it.

* * *

My shadow is turning dark; I can scarcely see the doctor, but now—God have mercy!—I can touch him.

* * *

All the high spectres are stooping from the clouds, bending above me to watch. I know them and their eyes of shadow—I know them now; Hârpén that was to Chaské what Hârpstinâ shall be to Hapéda; and Hârka shall come after all with the voice of winter winds:

“Aké u, aké u, aké u!”

But the magic second shall never return.

“Ma cânté maséca!”

* * *

Now they leave my bed, the people who crowded there under the shadowy forms of the spectres; now the doctor bends over; I see and feel him. His hands are tangled in the threads of time; he is cutting a thread; he—

XIX.

When I spoke to him first I spoke in the French language. Before he answered, the scream of a blue jay in the elms outside set my nerves aquiver, and I called for Donald and Walter.

As I lay there I could see the Aspen hills from the window, heaps of crumpled gold bathed in sunshine. Over them sailed the froth from the silken milkweed; over them drifted the big brown-red butterflies, luminous as richest autumn leaves.

Some one closed the door softly. The doctor had gone.

The sunlight poured into the window, etching my shadow on the wall behind. Lying very still there I saw it motionless beside me. The shadow was black.

Somebody said in the next room, “Will he die?”

“Die?” I said aloud.

A bird twittered outside my window.

The door opened again, noiselessly.

“Sweetheart?” I whispered.

“Yes, Jack.”

After a moment I said, “When do you go back to school?”

“I? I finished school a year ago.”

“Come nearer.”

“I am here, Jack.”

“Time stopped a year ago.”

“A year ago to-day.”

The same gray eyes, the same face, paler, perhaps.

“We have journeyed far,” I sighed, “always together, but in those days our shadows were white as snow. Am I going to die? There are tears in your eyes.”

They fell on my cheek; her arms fell too, closer, closer, around my neck.

“Life has begun,” she said.

“Life? What was the year that ends today? The magic second of life?”

“A year of death, to me!”

Ah, but her soul knows of a life in death! And she shall know it, too, when her shadow turns whiter than snow. For the Temple of Idols has closed its doors at the sound of a voice, and an idol of guilt has turned to flesh and blood.

I-hó!

So shall she know of the life in death when her soul and her body are one.