

CHAPTER X. SAINT ANTHONY'S WELL.

I STOOD on the rocky eminence in front of the ruins of Saint Anthony's Chapel, and looked on the magnificent view of Edinburgh and of the old Palace of Holyrood, bathed in the light of the full moon.

The Well, as the doctor's instructions had informed me, was behind the chapel. I waited for some minutes in front of the ruin, partly to recover my breath after ascending the hill; partly, I own, to master the nervous agitation which the sense of my position at that moment had aroused in me. The woman, or the apparition of the woman--it might be either--was perhaps within a few yards of the place that I occupied. Not a living creature appeared in front of the chapel. Not a sound caught my ear from any part of the solitary hill. I tried to fix my whole attention on the beauties of the moonlit view. It was not to be done. My mind was far away from the objects on which my eyes rested. My mind was with the woman whom I had seen in the summer-house writing in my book.

I turned to skirt the side of the chapel. A few steps more over the broken ground brought me within view of the Well, and of the high boulder or rock from the foot of which the waters gushed brightly in the light of the moon.

She was there.

I recognized her figure as she stood leaning against the rock, with her hands crossed in front of her, lost in thought. I recognized her face as she looked up quickly, startled by the sound of my footsteps in the deep stillness of the night.

Was it the woman, or the apparition of the woman? I waited, looking at her in silence.

She spoke. The sound of her voice was not the mysterious sound that I had heard in the summer-house. It was the sound I had heard on the bridge when we first met in the dim evening light.

"Who are you? What do you want?"

As those words passed her lips, she recognized me. "You here!" she went on, advancing a step, in uncontrollable surprise. "What does this mean?"

"I am here," I answered, "to meet you, by your own appointment."

She stepped back again, leaning against the rock. The moonlight shone full upon her face. There was terror as well as astonishment in her eyes while they now looked at me.

"I don't understand you," she said. "I have not seen you since you spoke to me on the bridge."

"Pardon me," I replied. "I have seen you--or the appearance of you--since that time. I heard you speak. I saw you write."

She looked at me with the strangest expression of mingled resentment and curiosity. "What did I say?" she asked. "What did I write?"

"You said, 'Remember me. Come to me.' You wrote, 'When the full moon shines on Saint Anthony's Well.'"

"Where?" she cried. "Where did I do that?"

"In a summer-house which stands by a waterfall," I answered. "Do you know the place?"

Her head sunk back against the rock. A low cry of terror burst from her. Her arm, resting on the rock, dropped at her side. I hurriedly approached her, in the fear that she might fall on the stony ground.

She rallied her failing strength. "Don't touch me!" she exclaimed. "Stand back, sir. You frighten me."

I tried to soothe her. "Why do I frighten you? You know who I am. Can you doubt my interest in you, after I have been the means of saving your life?"

Her reserve vanished in an instant. She advanced without hesitation, and took me by the hand.

"I ought to thank you," she said. "And I do. I am not so ungrateful as I seem. I am not a wicked woman, sir--I was mad with misery when I tried to drown myself. Don't distrust me! Don't despise me!" She stopped; I saw the tears on her cheeks. With a sudden contempt for herself, she dashed them away. Her whole tone and manner altered once more. Her reserve returned; she looked at me with a strange flash of suspicion and defiance in her eyes. "Mind this!" she said, loudly and abruptly, "you were dreaming when you

thought you saw me writing. You didn't see me; you never heard me speak. How could I say those familiar words to a stranger like you? It's all your fancy--and you try to frighten me by talking of it as if it was a real thing!" She changed again; her eyes softened to the sad and tender look which made them so irresistibly beautiful. She drew her cloak round her with a shudder, as if she felt the chill of the night air. "What is the matter with me?" I heard her say to herself. "Why do I trust this man in my dreams? And why am I ashamed of it when I wake?"

That strange outburst encouraged me. I risked letting her know that I had overheard her last words.

"If you trust me in your dreams, you only do me justice," I said. "Do me justice now; give me your confidence. You are alone--you are in trouble--you want a friend's help. I am waiting to help you."

She hesitated. I tried to take her hand. The strange creature drew it away with a cry of alarm: her one great fear seemed to be the fear of letting me touch her.

"Give me time to think of it," she said. "You don't know what I have got to think of. Give me till to-morrow; and let me write. Are you staying in Edinburgh?"

I thought it wise to be satisfied--in appearance at least--with this concession. Taking out my card, I wrote on it in pencil the address of the hotel at which I was staying. She read the card by the moonlight when I put it into her hand.

"George!" she repeated to herself, stealing another look at me as the name passed her lips. "'George Germaine.' I never heard of 'Germaine.' But 'George' reminds me of old times." She smiled sadly at some passing fancy or remembrance in which I was not permitted to share. "There is nothing very wonderful in your being called 'George,'" she went on, after a while. "The name is common enough: one meets with it everywhere as a man's name And yet--" Her eyes finished the sentence; her eyes said to me, "I am not so much afraid of you, now I know that you are called 'George.'"

So she unconsciously led me to the brink of discovery!

If I had only asked her what associations she connected with my Christian name--if I had only persuaded her to speak in the briefest and most guarded terms of her past life--the barrier between us, which the change in our

names and the lapse of ten years had raised, must have been broken down; the recognition must have followed. But I never even thought of it; and for this simple reason--I was in love with her. The purely selfish idea of winning my way to her favorable regard by taking instant advantage of the new interest that I had awakened in her was the one idea which occurred to my mind.

"Don't wait to write to me," I said. "Don't put it off till to-morrow. Who knows what may happen before to-morrow? Surely I deserve some little return for the sympathy that I feel with you? I don't ask for much. Make me happy by making me of some service to you before we part to-night."

I took her hand, this time, before she was aware of me. The whole woman seemed to yield at my touch. Her hand lay unresistingly in mine; her charming figure came by soft gradations nearer and nearer to me; her head almost touched my shoulder. She murmured in faint accents, broken by sighs, "Don't take advantage of me. I am so friendless; I am so completely in your power." Before I could answer, before I could move, her hand closed on mine; her head sunk on my shoulder: she burst into tears.

Any man, not an inbred and inborn villain, would have respected her at that moment. I put her hand on my arm and led her away gently past the ruined chapel, and down the slope of the hill.

"This lonely place is frightening you," I said. "Let us walk a little, and you will soon be yourself again."

She smiled through her tears like a child.

"Yes," she said, eagerly. "But not that way." I had accidentally taken the direction which led away from the city; she begged me to turn toward the houses and the streets. We walked back toward Edinburgh. She eyed me, as we went on in the moonlight, with innocent, wondering looks. "What an unaccountable influence you have over me!" she exclaimed.

"Did you ever see me, did you ever hear my name, before we met that evening at the river?"

"Never."

"And I never heard your name, and never saw you before. Strange! very strange! Ah! I remember somebody--only an old woman, sir--who might once have explained it. Where shall I find the like of her now?"

She sighed bitterly. The lost friend or relative had evidently been dear to her. "A relation of yours?" I inquired--more to keep her talking than because I felt any interest in any member of her family but herself.

We were again on the brink of discovery. And again it was decreed that we were to advance no further.

"Don't ask me about my relations!" she broke out. "I daren't think of the dead and gone, in the trouble that is trying me now. If I speak of the old times at home, I shall only burst out crying again, and distress you. Talk of something else, sir--talk of something else."

The mystery of the apparition in the summer-house was not cleared up yet. I took my opportunity of approaching the subject.

"You spoke a little while since of dreaming of me," I began. "Tell me your dream."

"I hardly know whether it was a dream or whether it was something else," she answered. "I call it a dream for want of a better word."

"Did it happen at night?"

"No. In the daytime--in the afternoon."

"Late in the afternoon?"

"Yes--close on the evening."

My memory reverted to the doctor's story of the shipwrecked passenger, whose ghostly "double" had appeared in the vessel that was to rescue him, and who had himself seen that vessel in a dream.

"Do you remember the day of the month and the hour?" I asked.

She mentioned the day, and she mentioned the hour. It was the day when my mother and I had visited the waterfall. It was the hour when I had seen the apparition in the summer-house writing in my book!

I stopped in irrepressible astonishment. We had walked by this time nearly as far on the way back to the city as the old Palace of Holyrood. My companion, after a glance at me, turned and looked at the rugged old

building, mellowed into quiet beauty by the lovely moonlight.

"This is my favorite walk," she said, simply, "since I have been in Edinburgh. I don't mind the loneliness. I like the perfect tranquillity here at night." She glanced at me again. "What is the matter?" she asked. "You say nothing; you only look at me."

"I want to hear more of your dream," I said. "How did you come to be sleeping in the daytime?"

"It is not easy to say what I was doing," she replied, as we walked on again. "I was miserably anxious and ill. I felt my helpless condition keenly on that day. It was dinner-time, I remember, and I had no appetite. I went upstairs (at the inn where I am staying), and lay down, quite worn out, on my bed. I don't know whether I fainted or whether I slept; I lost all consciousness of what was going on about me, and I got some other consciousness in its place. If this was dreaming, I can only say it was the most vivid dream I ever had in my life."

"Did it begin by your seeing me?" I inquired.

"It began by my seeing your drawing-book--lying open on a table in a summer-house."

"Can you describe the summer-house as you saw it?"

She described not only the summer-house, but the view of the waterfall from the door. She knew the size, she knew the binding, of my sketch-book--locked up in my desk, at that moment, at home in Perthshire!

"And you wrote in the book," I went on. "Do you remember what you wrote?"

She looked away from me confusedly, as if she were ashamed to recall this part of her dream.

"You have mentioned it already," she said. "There is no need for me to go over the words again. Tell me one thing--when you were at the summer-house, did you wait a little on the path to the door before you went in?"

I had waited, surprised by my first view of the woman writing in my book. Having answered her to this effect, I asked what she had done or dreamed of doing at the later moment when I entered the summer-house.

"I did the strangest things," she said, in low, wondering tones. "If you had been my brother, I could hardly have treated you more familiarly. I beckoned to you to come to me. I even laid my hand on your bosom. I spoke to you as I might have spoken to my oldest and dearest friend. I said, 'Remember me. Come to me.' Oh, I was so ashamed of myself when I came to my senses again, and recollected it. Was there ever such familiarity--even in a dream--between a woman and a man whom she had only once seen, and then as a perfect stranger?"

"Did you notice how long it was," I asked, "from the time when you lay down on the bed to the time when you found yourself awake again?"

"I think I can tell you," she replied. "It was the dinner-time of the house (as I said just now) when I went upstairs. Not long after I had come to myself I heard a church clock strike the hour. Reckoning from one time to the other, it must have been quite three hours from the time when I first lay down to the time when I got up again."

Was the clew to the mysterious disappearance of the writing to be found here?

Looking back by the light of later discoveries, I am inclined to think that it was. In three hours the lines traced by the apparition of her had vanished. In three hours she had come to herself, and had felt ashamed of the familiar manner in which she had communicated with me in her sleeping state. While she had trusted me in the trance--trusted me because her spirit was then free to recognize my spirit--the writing had remained on the page. When her waking will counteracted the influence of her sleeping will, the writing disappeared. Is this the explanation? If it is not, where is the explanation to be found?

We walked on until we reached that part of the Canongate street in which she lodged. We stopped at the door.