

Beatrice

By

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TO

BEATRICE

"Oh, kind is Death that Life's long trouble closes,
Yet at Death's coming Life shrinks back affright;
It sees the dark hand,--not that it encloses
 A cup of light.

So oft the Spirit seeing Love draw nigh
As 'neath the shadow of destruction, quakes,
For Self, dark tyrant of the Soul, must die,
 When Love awakes.

Aye, let him die in darkness! But for thee,--
Breathe thou the breath of morning and be free!"

Rückert. Translated by F. W. B.

BEATRICE

CHAPTER I

A MIST WRAITH

The autumn afternoon was fading into evening. It had been cloudy weather, but the clouds had softened and broken up. Now they were lost in slowly darkening blue. The sea was perfectly and utterly still. It seemed to sleep, but in its sleep it still waxed with the rising tide. The eye could not mark its slow increase, but Beatrice, standing upon the farthest point of the Dog Rocks, idly noted that the long brown weeds which clung about their sides began to lift as the water took their weight, till at last the delicate pattern floated out and lay like a woman's hair upon the green depth of sea. Meanwhile a mist was growing dense and soft upon the quiet waters. It was not blown up from the west, it simply grew like the twilight, making the silence yet more silent and blotting away the outlines of the land. Beatrice gave up studying the seaweed and watched the gathering of these fleecy hosts.

"What a curious evening," she said aloud to herself, speaking in a low full voice. "I have not seen one like it since mother died, and that is seven years ago. I've grown since then, grown every way," and she laughed somewhat sadly, and looked at her own reflection in the quiet

water.

She could not have looked at anything more charming, for it would have been hard to find a girl of nobler mien than Beatrice Granger as on this her twenty-second birthday, she stood and gazed into that misty sea.

Of rather more than middle height, and modelled like a statue, strength and health seemed to radiate from her form. But it was her face with the stamp of intellect and power shadowing its woman's loveliness that must have made her remarkable among women even more beautiful than herself. There are many girls who have rich brown hair, like some autumn leaf here and there just yellowing into gold, girls whose deep grey eyes can grow tender as a dove's, or flash like the stirred waters of a northern sea, and whose bloom can bear comparison with the wilding rose. But few can show a face like that which upon this day first dawned on Geoffrey Bingham to his sorrow and his hope. It was strong and pure and sweet as the keen sea breath, and looking on it one must know that beneath this fair cloak lay a wit as fair. And yet it was all womanly; here was not the hard sexless stamp of the "cultured" female. She who owned it was capable of many things. She could love and she could suffer, and if need be, she could dare or die. It was to be read upon that lovely brow and face, and in the depths of those grey eyes--that is, by those to whom the book of character is open, and who wish to study it.

But Beatrice was not thinking of her loveliness as she gazed into the water. She knew that she was beautiful of course; her beauty was too

obvious to be overlooked, and besides it had been brought home to her in several more or less disagreeable ways.

"Seven years," she was thinking, "since the night of the 'death fog;' that was what old Edward called it, and so it was. I was only so high then," and following her thoughts she touched herself upon the breast. "And I was happy too in my own way. Why can't one always be fifteen, and believe everything one is told?" and she sighed. "Seven years and nothing done yet. Work, work, and nothing coming out of the work, and everything fading away. I think that life is very dreary when one has lost everything, and found nothing, and loves nobody. I wonder what it will be like in another seven years."

She covered her eyes with her hands, and then taking them away, once more looked at the water. Such light as struggled through the fog was behind her, and the mist was thickening. At first she had some difficulty in tracing her own likeness upon the glassy surface, but gradually she marked its outline. It stretched away from her, and its appearance was as though she herself were lying on her back in the water wrapped about with the fleecy mist. "How curious it seems," she thought; "what is it that reflection reminds me of with the white all round it?"

Next instant she gave a little cry and turned sharply away. She knew now. It recalled her mother as she had last seen her seven years ago.