

“ALL’S DROSS BUT LOVE”

A STRANGE RECORD

OF

TWO REINCARNATED SOULS

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BY

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“ALL’S DROSS BUT LOVE.”

“All’s dross but love ; the largest son of time,
Who wandered singing through the listening world,
Will be as much forgot as the canoe
That crossed the bosom of a lonely lake,
A thousand years ago !”

ALEXANDER SMITH.

I.

ONE thousand eight hundred and nine years ago, upon an afternoon in Summer, a woman, young, beautiful, rich, an aristocrat of aristocrats, stood in an upper room in a house in Pompeii that faced westward upon the sea. The apartment, one of the most exquisitely appointed in all that brilliant,

(RECAP)

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voluptuous, and vicious city, was bathed in the violet light of a superb sunset; and the slender pillars, the mosaic floor, the purple Tyrian tapestries, the bronze statues, the marble tables, and the dazzling paintings on the walls, seemed almost to lose their color and to palpitate into each other in the fierce throb of that blinding glare.

Aphrota was one of the most illustrious beauties of that little Vesuvian city, whose population has been variously estimated at 12,000 and 20,000. She was one of the very few Pompeiian women who lived almost entirely alone in a house filled with slaves. The self-appointed solitude was shared by one old woman, Vestalia, who filled a position which in these modern times would be described as something between *duenna* and companion. But so far as any wish or will of her own was regarded, Vestalia was as much Aphrota's slave as the lowest servant who knew freedom only in name, and she

occupied the position for precisely the same reason that a decayed gentlewoman would accept of such a post now in the home of a young and wealthy lady, who, without parents, chose, from caprice or self-will, to defy custom and to manage her own affairs, without the protection or intervention of a male kinsman, old or young.

Aphrota had a score of lovers, but whether her heart was so framed that she could not love, or whether she held passion in check from the strong desire to remain unfettered, not even Vestalia understood. This was one of the secrets of that supple and evasive nature, which yet appeared so limpid and candid. If you peer into deep water you will see your own image reflected there; but beyond that you will see other images, only half revealed, tantalizing as they furtively emerge from obscurity only to re-enter it again ere their outlines can be accurately traced. Thus it was with those who strove

to gaze deeply into Aphrota's eccentric nature. No one on whom she smiled peered therein without seeing—or thinking he saw—his own reflection. His vanity eagerly told him so. But on withdrawing his eyes he brought away with him the impression that her copious character and richly varying temperament were full of misunderstood impulses and emotions, which fought each other like angry shadows.

One who, in this inquisitive age, inspects a drop of water with a microscope, sees vengeful monsters fighting there in a wondrous world of their own, concealed from unassisted mortal view. So it was with Aphrota's heart.

Upon the afternoon in question one person alone was with her—a handsome man of thirty, with dark eyes and characteristically Roman features. He had laid his toga aside, but his purple tunic, with the rich girdle, the golden fringe, and the costly

jewels, which glittered here and there, proclaimed his wealth and fashion. He was evidently greatly piqued at some rebuff he had experienced at the hands of the beautiful girl, who stood near one of the bronzes looking down upon him with calm superciliousness. The man was Photius, one of the wealthiest of her suitors, and the one, it was said, whom she had not discouraged.

"At least," he said, frowning darkly, "since you disdain the homage of a man who is your equal, as much as mortal man may hope to be, perhaps you will be erratic enough not to disdain that of one so low that no man lives who would not dread to be lower."

"What mean you?" asked Aphrota, the arrogance of her tone adding to the angry meaning that flashed from her violet eyes—eyes capable of holding tears as tender as the dew that seeks the flower.

Photius smiled, and taking from his

girdle a scrap of papyrus handed it to Aphrota, saying :

"It is not written in the tongue we speak, you see, but in the old Oscan dialect. But you, Aphrota, who speak so many tongues, know even that."

Aphrota scanned the papyrus. She was a woman of great self-control, but the color rushed to her cheeks, and her lip trembled with passion. The inscription was not very long. Its reading occupied but a few moments.

"May I ask," she said, biting her lips, "who had the insolence to write this, of *me*? If it be you, Photius"—

"I?" exclaimed the man. "Would *I* have the audacity to pray to the gods, as this fellow has done, that if the beautiful Aphrota died, her soul—her real self—might become one with mine, dwelling in me, as my blood dwells within my veins? The very thought were sacrilege to one more beauti-

ful than beauty. I would as soon pray to Jupiter that Venus and I should have our two souls refashioned into one." And he regarded with malignant content the frown of fury that gathered on her brow.

"Who is the writer?" she asked with hoarse intensity.

"Who should he be?" answered Photius, knowing how the proud aristocrat before him would wince at his answer, "who should it be but Othrapa?"

"Othrapa!" she repeated. Even Photius, who knew her so well, was not prepared for the accent of malicious rage which her voice took on. "Othrapa? My slave?"

"Othrapa, your slave, your charioteer," answered Photius. "Were that man not a slave, Aphrota, he might be a poet. In fact, poets have been slaves ere now. He is handsome—that he owes to nature. He is intelligent—that he owes to good brains. He is your charioteer—that he owes to for-

tune. Think you, Aphrota, that a man can be your charioteer, can see you, hear you, almost touch you, every day, and not fall in love with you, even though he be a slave?"

She writhed under his satirical words. Photius continued :

"It is a beautiful idea the rascal has expressed—beautiful, but presumptuous. Slaves have been scourged to death for less. And he so meek and unassuming, too! They say he is a Nazarene, and has forsaken the gods which are good enough for the noble-born. And look, Aphrota, the cunning rogue has written your name and his underneath, at the bottom of his verses! With good reason, he might say. The letters are the same in each!"

Aphrota's face melted from redness into the pallor which indicates intense vindictiveness mingled with a sense of ridicule and insult.

"How know you the slave composed it?"

she asked, in the same husky voice, so different from the natural music of her song-like tones.

“It fell from his sleeve, where he had thrust it, as I passed by. He had been conning it. I picked it up—I am always suspicious of I know not what in these learned slaves—and taxed him with it. He blushed, but would not deny. Had it been written in our tongue I should have thought the knave had jotted down a fragment he remembered. But the Oscan dialect, of which I understand enough to catch its drift, made me see that the words were his own. By Apollo! the knave that can handle a stylus to such good effect had better spend his time in reading Horace than in driving a chariot.”

He glanced at Aphrota again and saw that her face was convulsed with passion. He would gladly have taken back the words he had spoken, for he had said them only

to cause her deep though transient annoyance, and had supposed that the worst punishment meted out to the impassioned slave would be a drubbing such as the serfs of that time were used to endure. He was astonished at the indignation which he had roused and which deformed the goddess-like countenance until it glared upon him like a Fury's.

"Nay, give me back the verse," he said. "I will destroy it."

By a great but imperceptible effort Aphrota regained her composure.

"I did wrong to be angry," she said. "This—this poem, shall we call it?—was written for me, not you. I will restore it to Othrapa," and she tucked the papyrus inside one of the annulets of gold around the arm of the bronze Venus. "After all," she continued, erasing from her features the last approach to a frown, "shall I blame my slave for finding me beautiful? He is a

better poet than a charioteer. He keeps his horses in check—no better," she smiled for a moment bitterly, "than he does his thoughts. He is a dreamer." Perhaps some recollection of what Photius had said about Othrapa's being a Nazarene—a follower of that strange Christian religion that had lately manifested itself even in Pompeii—lingered in her mind, for her former look of resentment, intensified, shot for a moment through her artificial veil of sweetness, and betrayed that kind of hatred which a master feels for his slave when the latter presumes to assert freedom even of conscience.

"And now leave me, Photius," she continued. "See! the sun is declining. You have lingered long. Sallust will expect you. His banquet waits for you. You spoke to me of love. Well, love me! Love me as much as you please. I forbid you not. But when you ask me to love you, good Photius—and chide me that I love you not

—you ask me for a boon I have never given yet to mortal man, perchance may never give. What if I reserve it for some god alone?"

She drew herself up to her full height, and looked down upon him (he was still seated) in all the insolence of triumphant and exultant beauty. Her fair hair, in accordance with a fashion of the period, was thickly powdered with fine gold dust, which, as a lingering sunbeam caught it, seemed transformed into a quivering aureole sown with diamond glints. She indeed looked like a goddess, worthy of the god of whom she spoke.

Photius arose, and gathering his toga from a low stand, the slab of which was of rainbow-colored marbles, curiously joined, made Aphrota a low bow, which concealed a glance wherein the malevolence that comes of baffled hope struggled successfully with the admiration he could not but feel, and

withdrew without a word. Scarcely had he gone than Aphrota snapped her fingers impatiently, with a resonance begot by habit. A female slave, attired simply in a white tunic that fell to her ankles, hurried from an inner room.

"Send Othrapa hither," said her mistress. "And after he has come, take Epaphron with you by the outer corridor to the inner room, and bid him wait there till I summon him." The slave scarcely restrained a glance of surprise. Othrapa had never penetrated to that room before. As for Epaphron, his services seldom were required there, unless some unusual and weighty duty connected with the household were to be performed. Epaphron was a Nubian, giant in stature, black as night, strong as a lion, cruel as life, relentless as death.

In a few moments Aphrota's orders were executed. The door giving upon the outer corridor opened—she had closed all others

herself—and a man entered of about her own age. He was of middle height, in the severe half-nude simplicity of the slave. Constant exposure to the sun had reddened his face and neck and hands. His countenance was serene. The firmness and sweetness of the mouth were equal. There was a brave gravity in the large and beautiful gray eyes, darkly fringed. His brown hair was literally a crown of glory to him, in its rich, fine waves. He was a beautiful animal, but he was more than that. For, as the fairness of the skin could be divined beneath the sun-flush that stained it, so something of a spiritual light seemed to float from the eyes which he now turned reverently toward his mistress.

As he gazed at that lovely spectacle, no suspicion came to him that so great a lord as Photius had betrayed his innocent secret. No lurking distrust whispered to him that he was feasting his eyes upon one of the

most beautiful beings in the world for the last time in all his life.

Aphrota was seated on the richly ornamented chair which Photius had left vacant. In her hand she held a bit of papyrus which Othrapa did not at first observe. Her fingers (excepting the middle one of each hand) were covered with rings, as the custom was with Pompeiian ladies, and unconsciously she toyed with one, the most remarkable of them all, though not the most expensive. It was made of a transparent, milk-white stone, through which there flashed perpetually a coil of golden fire. The circumference of the ring was cleft in twain so as to represent two heads—a serpent's head and a human head, opposed to each other. A cross of gold, holding a ruby, like a drop of blood, filled the space, which would otherwise have been vacant, between the heads, and completed the continuity of the ring. As the eyes of the Nazarene slave fell upon it he

saw thus symbolled, by the mere accident of some jeweller's caprice, the Tempter, the Human Nature that yielded, and the Atonement that expiated, all within the span of a woman's ring.

"If it were your doom," began Aphrota, "to cross the Styx this night,"—and her voice became as cold as the waters of the mythical river of which she spoke—"if you were to enter the Shades one hour from now, would the recollection of your mistress bring you comfort there?"

There was a certain vibration in Aphrota's voice which caused the unhappy man to look at her questioningly. Her beauty was so dazzling that he attributed to it a moral goodness, as beauty-worshippers are prone to do. He opened his lips to answer, but she motioned him to silence with a slight, disdainful gesture.

"I am told that you write poetry," she continued. Othrapa started, and observed

for the first time how cruel a smile had crept to her lips. "In fact I have the proof of it." She held up the papyrus. The slave clasped his hands before him, gave one sigh and uttered not a word. "You, dog-faced slave, dared to think thus of me in your inmost heart! Having thought so, you dared to utter it. Come nearer—nearer still." He advanced, according to her mandate, until he stood within two feet of that radiant form clad in gold-fringed white, whose under tunic of blue swept the mosaic floor. One naked arm and shoulder, which the jewel-held folds of the ingeniously sensuous dress constrained to sparkle bare, hinted at the blushful pearliness of the body thus concealed.

"Look at me!" exclaimed Aphrota, stretching forth her undraped arm. The last rays of the sun enveloped her in their warm crimson glow. "You shall wander into the Shades this night, but not those

reached by crossing the black river. Look on me, and let the last fixed gaze you rivet on a human being remain a tantalizing memory, merited by your insolence, to haunt you through the rest of life."

Before Othrapa could guess what punishment was devised for him, she opened, with flashing movement, the door of the inner room, and snapped her fingers as she had done before. The gigantic Nubian, whom we have mentioned as Epaphron, advanced with surreptitious step, wonderfully soft considering his enormous size. He fixed his gloating and malefic eyes upon the Christian slave, who, knowing that all resistance was useless, and sustained, perhaps, by the teachings of the creed he had adopted, scarcely looked at him, but remained with glances riveted upon the exquisite heathen who was about to wreak upon him her revenge.

"Bandage his eyes," exclaimed Aphrota,

addressing Epaphron and pointing to Othrapa.

In an instant Epaphron had whipt off Othrapa's girdle and bound it over Othrapa's eyes. These had remained fixed on Aphrota's to the last. When the bandaging was complete, she gave a sigh of relief, for there had been something in those eyes, that had inquired so searchingly of hers, before which she almost blenched. Now that they had taken their last pleasurable look at her and all human things forever, they left her with an uneasy sense, as though she were to be unceasingly reminded of them with terrible remorse.

"Now lead him forth," said Aphrota, "and instantly, in some dark place, where there is just light enough to let the work be done speedily and well, cut off his eye-lids, which have dared to raise themselves too insolently before me, and set the dog to work at the

Mills. And, hark you, Epaphron, from to-day you are my charioteer."

Othrapa had listened in silence to his sentence. The shudder which had passed through him announced itself only in a rippling quiver of the throat and chest. He remained for a moment, still facing the beautiful Pompeiian, as though his eyes were gathering all the little of life that now remained to them to pierce the bandage, whose removal would give him that agonizing and persistent sight which would end at last in blindness. Then, at the rude touch of the Nubian, he walked away, with firm tread. The door opened and closed once more, and Aphrota was left alone.

There was still light enough to read by. She went to the window and, holding the papyrus before her, read slowly once again the lines which, composed by a slave, had aroused such deep resentment.

"Why, that man has a soul!" she said, as

she read, and read once more and yet again, the words that had welled up from the lowest depth of feeling's fountain. "If Photius could feel like this, why then—but Photius is mere flesh; while this slave"—

She sat for an hour, thinking, then summoned the slave girl, who came, bearing one of those exquisite many-metalled inlaid table-lamps for which the Pompeiians were remarkable.

"Quick!" said her mistress. "Hie to Epaphron. Tell him I countermand my orders. Let Othrapa work at the Mills. But as for the rest, tell Epaphron, as he values his life, to do no harm unto Othrapa. Lose not a moment, and return."

The girl hastened away. Aphrota paced up and down in a feverish mood, the equal of which she had never experienced before. It was not long ere the girl returned, her cheeks pale, her eyes full of tears. Her answer was given ere she had spoken a

word. Aphrota's first cruel orders had been instantly and literally obeyed.

From that day the life of the brilliant beauty of Pompeii changed. Whether the picture of the innocent man, whom she had reduced to such abject misery, haunted her, while at the same time her pride allowed her to offer him no mitigation from a life of labor which was then dreaded as much as are the galleys now, cannot be known. The ultimate result of the horrible act that had been perpetrated on him was to reduce him to blindness, and ere this came to his relief he was tortured with mental and physical agony, the result of the savage mutilation. After that, his doom was every day to repair to the seaside and back again, in order to help the ships unload their cargo and do his amount of duty at the frightful Mills.

Aphrota plunged into a life of gayety, She had a certain chastity of soul which

rendered her incapable of loving in the only way in which the voluptuaries around her understood love. Her nature yearned for that perfected passion in which soul and body blend their requirements, and the vast desires of both are satisfied, with a completeness that seldom falls to mortal lot. But there were gayeties in Pompeii in which, at any rate, she could partially forget the wrong she had inflicted and the unattainableness of that for which she pined. She was more surrounded with suitors than ever. Her heart was more inaccessible than it had been before. Her house became the centre in which everything that could feast the senses or banquet the intellect was discovered, and fortunately the matronly Vestalia still remained to cast over such symposia the atmosphere of her own unimpeachability. So a year went by.

Again, upon a day late in Summer, Aph-

rota sat alone in the room in which she had listened to Photius and sentenced Othrapa. It was a festal day. Almost the whole population was out of doors, and ten thousand were in the amphitheatre, filling the twenty-four rows, for the purpose of seeing gladiators—Thracians, Gauls, and Samnites—assassinate each other in obedience to the inverted thumb. Even Vestalia, who had a true Pompeiian lady's taste for blood, had gone to the exhibition, to enjoy the agonized and ever-fruitless appeals of the vanquished ere, slain by the victors, some slave harpooned them with a hook and thrust them through the Gate of Death, to be despoiled of arms and clothing. Save for the slaves about the house, Aphrota was alone. More than that, she was soundly sleeping.

It was on this account that considerable havoc had arisen in the city ere she awoke and realized what had happened. It was the fatal 24th of August, in the year 79,

when Vesuvius suddenly broke forth, without warning, and spouted forth a rain of fire, deadly as that which blasted the cities of the plain. This frightful phenomenon has been so often described that no attempt to do it even the feeblest justice will be made here. Suffice it to remind the reader that the moment the awful phantom was seen—a gigantic column of smoke bursting forth at the head into an immeasurable flower of fire—the amphitheatre where the multitude was assembled became a scene of panic which no description ever can describe. Madness instantly spread throughout the city. Though the event happened only about one in the afternoon, darkness soon supervened, torrents of boiling mud mingled themselves with a storm that resembled flaming snow, and destruction was further hastened by thick showers of fine white ashes. The ground trembled. Buildings shook and fell. Lightnings broke forth.

Shrieks and lamentations echoed through the air. In the midst of this blind, unearthly, and tumultuous horror, Aphrota awoke.

As she did so, she felt herself seized in strong arms—whose, she could not tell, the darkness had grown too dense. Too stunned to struggle, she allowed herself to be borne as in a dream—not one of those dreams, alas! in which we tell ourselves we are awake, and wake at last to find our sufferings were but mockery. This was a waking dream in which all that was worst in the possibilities of life became horribly true. The arms that were around her were strong, protecting arms. The feet of the man who held her never stumbled. She wondered how he could thread the devious way so unfalteringly in the darkness, which was only momentarily relieved by livid lightning.

After a little while the breath of the sea

came to her. She was still too frightened to feel anything but a sense of joy that perhaps safety was at hand. She rested with strange security in those strong upbearing arms. Something in the atmosphere—the “aura,” as physiologists sometimes call it—of the man who carried her seemed to become part of her own. In the midst of the universal delirium, it soothed her.

Yet a few more moments and they had reached the shore. She felt her saviour treading with still more careful feet up a plank which led to the deck of a ship. She looked around her. It was her own ship—a pleasure-craft indeed, but one in which escape was possible, when desperation added courage to hope. The man who bore her set her down, and turned away. She caught him by the sleeve.

“Who are you?” she exclaimed. She peered into his face, but they were in a circle of darkness and she could not see,

though she discerned near by some of her own slaves, who had deserted her, thinking only of their own safety, and the cowering figure of Photius, who was making incoherent entreaties that the vessel might put to sea.

"Who are you?" she repeated.

"It matters not," said a melancholy voice which pierced her through the heart almost as woundingly as the sharp stylus, which, more than once in Pompeiian history, had been used for assassination.

^W She snatched a lantern from a sailor, one of her own servants, and holding it aloft gazed into the face of the man whom she still detained by the sleeve. In that relentless glare she saw a spectre—a white thin face, whose lidless eyes, sunken and withered, stared at her as a corpse so mutilated might stare.

"Othrapa!"

The light fell to the ground and was

extinguished. Aphrota dropped beside it, her swoon unhelped, unheeded, in that dreadful hour. The sightless phantom shrank back into the darkness. The vessel moved from the trembling shore.

As it receded, a man who had leaped from the deck into the ocean, and for whom this world held nothing, ran up on the shore, to lose his life, if possible, saving others. As he stood on dry land he paused a moment to tighten his girdle. While thus occupied his fingers touched something that felt like a piece of cold metal. A flash of purple lightning, that illumined that chaotic city for an instant, showed that the man's eyes were lidless and sightless and that he held within his hand a slender milk-white ring. In the struggle of flight (to which, used to the road, daily, his blindness had been no obstacle) the ring had fallen from Aphrota's finger, and caught in a fold of his girdle. As the lightning flashed over him, the fiery

coil within the ring leaped to meet the larger flame, and seemed rejoicing with vitality. But it must have appeared like the smile of God to him, for recognizing it as Aphrota's ring, by its configuration, he placed it upon his finger, and raised it to his lips and kissed it.

At that moment a terrific wave came, and lifting him upon its crest, bore him onward and dashed him against a fallen column that had been levelled by a lightning bolt, and left him there mangled and dead.

II.

NEXT to a church in one of the cross streets in the upper part of New York, near the Park, there stands, or stood, a mysterious-looking house defended from public observation by a high gray-stone wall, after the manner of many residences in London. The house was inhabited by Dr. Loncastle, a man of about thirty-five years of age, who had made a great reputation by his management of diseases of the brain and nerves, and whose monograph, entitled “Occult Treatment in Madness” (which, however, did not profess to be a scientific treatise), had gained for him a repute from which he afterwards shrank. During his wonderfully industrious and lucrative career he had found time, even at that early age,

besides scientific works, to make translations from Greek and Latin authors who are known only by name to most students familiar with those tongues. It was plain that he devoted much of his time to something besides his profession, and since none of these occupations were visible to the world, the world avenged itself by ascribing to him uncanny pursuits that would not bear inspection.

In this old-fashioned and secluded house Dr. Lonycastle had desired to almost wholly give up practice. He would have given it up entirely had he not realized how nearly impossible it was for a popular physician to rid himself of the claims of his profession. He resorted to the expedient of making his fees so large that only the few consented to give them, and even then he found his hours encroached on more than he willed.

It was nearly midnight of a desolate December day, toward the latter part of the

month. No snow had fallen, but the weather was intensely cold, and bleak winds whistled around the corners and under the broad eaves of the old house, and shook the branches of the great trees that stood at intervals in the grounds like aged sentinels prepared to die rather than desert their posts. A coupé drove up to the curb opposite the postern in the gray wall. A lady, dressed in black, and veiled, alighted, and rang the bell. After some delay an old man-servant with a wrinkled, antique face, that looked more Italian than American, answered.

“The doctor sees no one,” he replied in response to the lady’s request, “after three in the afternoon. Now it is past eleven. Call to-morrow.”

“To-morrow?” repeated the lady, with a vague, frightened, yearning look. “To-morrow will be too late. I may not be living,” she added, as if to herself,

"Ah, well, if it is a case of life or death," said the servant, relenting. "But so many people say that—anything to see the doctor."

"Yes—yes! "It *is* a case of life or death," said the lady, in a low, intense voice.

"I will take in your card," said the servant, who had learned to speak English plainly. "Does he know you? Is it for yourself you wish to see him?"

"Know me?" repeated the lady, in the same vague tone she had used before, which gave the servant the idea that she was wandering in her mind. "I do not know. How can I tell whether he will know me or not? Yes—it is for myself I wish to see him. For whom else?" she questioned, not as though asking the man, but as though querying her own uncertainty.

"Well, I will see," answered the man, taking the card. "He may not see you

even then, he is so fixed in his rules. So saying, he admitted the visitor, closed the postern, led the way up the walk into the house and ushered her into a small room on the first floor, plainly furnished in sober colors. Dark crimson curtains were closely drawn. A solitary argand mingled its white light with the ruddy glances of a grate fire. Wrapped in this interblending warmth and radiance, but apparently heedless of the comfort they bestowed, the lady waited, standing by the mantle, while the servant bore away her card.

In a very few moments he returned.

"I am sorry," he said, with a glimpse of sincerity in his voice, which servants are not apt to express, "but Dr. Lonycastle is very busy. He says he cannot see you until to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" she repeated. "Why to-morrow—even if I am alive to come," (she still preserved the singular manner of ap-

pearing to be speaking half to herself) "will be Christmas."

The servant smiled, if so grim and remote an approach to humor could be called smiling.

"That makes no difference," he said. "Every day is alike to him. When he sees people at all, one day is the same as another. There is no holiday for him."

The lady showed no inclination to go. Possibly she had heard of Dr. Lonycastle's exclusivism and had come prepared to vanquish it.

"I must see Dr. Lonycastle to-night," she said. "It has been too long deferred. If I do not see him, I can never tell,"—she suddenly broke off as though realizing that she was about to utter secret thoughts aloud. The extreme sadness, the deep humility of her voice, in spite of the determination it announced, impressed the servant. He glanced at her pityingly. She

opened a small, plainly-bound book she had been reading, and, turning down one leaf therein, offered it to the man, saying :

“Ask Dr. Lonycastle to look at the leaf I have turned down. I think he will see me then.”

The man hesitated. She drew a piece of gold from a port-monnaie she opened swiftly. The man shook his head, declined the bribe, with an eloquent gesture, and taking the book proceeded on his errand once again. Evidently bribes were useless in that establishment. This time he was gone a little longer than at first. He returned without the book, but with a look of amazement on his face.

“Dr. Lonycastle will see you, madam. Step this way.” He led her through a long narrow hall, at the end of which was a door. Opening this, he allowed her to pass him, and as he closed it after her, she found herself ushered into a large, lofty room, with

slender pillars, purple curtains, and dusky recesses, illumined by one only lamp, which stood upon a fantastic antique table, and shed a golden circle of light. The curious features of this room riveted the woman before she noticed its occupant, and she murmured to herself:

"It reminds me—it reminds me——"

Meanwhile, Dr. Lonycastle sat observing her. This was his private study, not the one in which he received his patients. Probably from convenience, or for some other motive more obscure, he had had the visitor shown into this, his literary holy of holies. Notwithstanding the many thousands of books that lined the shelves, the whole apartment had an antique air. It was warmed with several large square brass braziers, from the fire in which issued a fragrant warmth as though incense were burning there. The carved and gilded chair in which Dr. Lonycastle sat, the desk upon which lay the book

the lady had sent in to him, the bronze statues revealing nymphs, fauns, and goddesses, the brilliant minglement of iris-hued marbles forming the mantel, upon which a vase, centuries old, rested, the highly intricate and decorated frieze, the panelled pictures from mythology upon the walls, the stone floor—Mosaic—only partially hidden by luxuriant rugs—all seemed grateful to the eye of the visitor, who uttered, in a breath so low that Dr. Lonecastle did not hear it:

“I feel as though I were at home!”

Then, for the first time, she looked at the man himself, raising her veil to do so.

A man, fair, vigorous, and handsome, who had preserved his youth wonderfully, with large blue eyes, neither sad nor joyous: speaking rather of patience and resignation; hair dark, not black, into which stray streaks of silver were just beginning to steal; a placid countenance which indicated self-

repression, so far as that which is repressed may be indicated; wonderfully placid, until the woman lifted her veil and slowly approached. Then, indeed, a look of puzzled astonishment and involuntary admiration sprang into his features. He had seen no face like that before. He had seen many a face as youthful and as fair, but none which had been invested with such pleading, wistful, irresistible sadness. Stirred out of his professional imperturbability, he rose, and motioned to a low-seated chair beside the desk, facing himself.

"You will pardon me," said the lady, in accents so singularly melodious, that they suggested a trained musical voice, "but this apartment,—it overcame me at first. It is Pompeiian, is it not?" and she seated herself on the chair he had indicated and gazed at him with the full radiance of her dark sweet eyes, with the air of one who has

come from a long distance to carry out a solemn intent.

“Yes,” replied the doctor, glancing at the visitor’s card, which bore the name “Miss Desharm.” “When I was visiting Italy some years ago, curiosity took me to Pompeii. There I was able to benefit the health of Signor Fiorelli, who was then superintending the excavation of the buried city made by the Italian government. Fortunately I restored him to health, and with the permission of the Government he presented me, out of gratitude, with the vases, the statues, the furniture, everything which you see here—excepting of course the books, the Mosaic floor, the paintings on the walls, such things as could not be transported, or as did not belong to the half-ruined house in Pompeii, from which the articles were excavated. Even my servant is an imported Pompeiian of to-day.”

It was seldom that Dr. Lonycastle spoke

at length to a stranger. But he was noted for his prejudices, and when his prejudices took the form of predilections he was sometimes betrayed into loquacity.

The woman brought back her gaze to him whence it had wandered around the strangely appointed room.

"You say that you went to Pompeii out of curiosity," she answered. "Was there no other motive?"

"Impulse," replied the other frankly. "I should say an irresistible impulse did I not know that what are called irresistible impulses can often be resisted."

"You made the selections yourself?"

"Yes. I was requested by Signor Fiorelli to do so, and I acquiesced."

"And why," asked the woman, in her far-away manner, "why did you select this?" and she pointed to a bronze statue of Venus, around whose arms were rings of gold, "and this," pointing to the antique lamp upon the

table, which really formed part of the table itself.

“Impulse, impulse!” said the doctor, smiling slightly, though there was a sadness in the smile.

“You are a wise doctor,” remarked Miss Desharm, “and I am an ignorant woman. But I tell you it was an irresistible impulse. You could not have resisted it if you had tried. There was a reason for it—a reason which you, with all your wisdom, do not know, or which, if it has occurred to you, you have rejected as inconsistent with common-sense. Yet you were as much under its spell as you are under a spell now,—a spell which constrains you to talk thus freely to me, a stranger. You were busy, it was near midnight—yet you received me. Why?” And with a quick gesture she pointed to the volume she had sent to him, which lay open at the leaf she had folded, face downward, on the desk.

"I admit," said the doctor, "that there was something in what met my eye there, which, accompanied by your message, made me willing to forego my rule and receive you. I will explain it presently. But now let us come to the object of your visit. You wish my advice?"

"No," answered the woman, fixing upon him a magnetic glance. "I have come to see you for something more important even than your advice. Tell me," she continued, before Dr. Lonycastle could recover from the surprise of this reply; "while you were at Pompeii, while you were at that—that house, did you never feel as though something of the history of its inmates had been mirrored and recorded upon these vases, these statues, which you selected?"

They gazed at each other earnestly and in silence.

"I had strange sensations in Pompeii," said the doctor, "particularly in that crum-

bling house. And in the excavated streets I came across unusual sights."

"Such as what?"

"I saw a skeleton—a human skeleton—a man's. The spine and two of the bones of the legs were broken, as though he had been dashed with crushing force against the broken pillar at whose base he was disinterred. As the skeleton was lifted up there fell from its finger a curious ring"—

"Made of a milk-white stone," interrupted the woman. "It had two carved heads—a serpent's and a woman's—joined together by a cross of gold. The cross held a ruby, like a drop of frozen blood."

The doctor stared at her aghast. "How know you that?" he cried.

Before she could answer, a sound of many voices singing a joyously solemn refrain swept dimly through the room. It was the chant of the choristers echoing from the adjacent church where the midnight mass of

Christmas Eve was being celebrated. While it continued the doctor looked intently upon an object which his visitor had not observed before. It was a large silver cross, hung with immortelles, that loomed spectrally out of one of the dusky corners of the room. As the hymn died away and silence was restored, the doctor turned to her and said, in calmer tones :

“ Verily you almost make me think there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of by our scientific philosophers.”

“ There are ! ” said the woman, her face lighting up. “ And what became of the ring? Ah ! ” she exclaimed, with smothered emotion ; for Dr. Lonycastle had extended his left hand, and there, upon the final finger, shone the milk-white ring, the slender coil of fire writhing and palpitating within it like an imprisoned spirit.

“ A soothsayer from Palestine sold it me,”

she murmured, as if to herself. The doctor stared at her in amazement. He had treated madness in a great many forms—never in this.

"Oh! do you not—do you not remember?" she exclaimed mournfully. "I know more of you than you do yourself. I know you are deeply read in ancient lore, unknown to the wisest men of this country and Europe. Not in vain was the impulse which led you to Pompeii—which gathered around you these antique relics; which induced you to make this Pompeiian room your favorite abode. I, a stranger, an alien, with no ties in all the world, have been led to you by an equally mysterious impulse from a distant shore. I read your book—this book," picking up the volume she had brought with her. "Among various things there, revealing your intimate knowledge of antique tongues, I read your translation of a poem—the leaf is turned down. Ah! do you

not know me now? In another form I am the same soul so vainly loved by my cruelly-treated slave, Othrapa—I am Aphrota, living again after eighteen hundred years."

The doctor gazed at her blankly. Mysterious sensations stirred within him. She picked up the volume and read with quivering voice the following lines, which a foot-note explained had been done into English from the Oscan dialect, as found written upon a piece of papyrus hidden in an exhumed cabinet at Pompeii:

If thou shouldst die, my prayer would still be this :
That thy pure soul should enter into mine,
And all thou art with all I am combine,
In union subtler than the nuptial kiss,
Deeper and holier than its fevered bliss,
Which more than choicest juices of the vine,
Intoxicates the flesh before a shrine
When naught that passion dreams of comes amiss.
Slowly would I absorb thee, drop by drop,
Until thy spirit's glad and golden blood,
Mingling in me, redeemed that coarser tide.

Thus would I hold till life itself should stop,
My pulse kept rich by such sweet overflow—
Nearer to thee than if thou hadst not died.

“Do you not remember?” she asked, as she ended. “This translation lacks the over-powering sweetness, the grand simplicity, perhaps the utter spirituality of the original—but still the thought, the feeling are there. Do you not remember? The beautiful, cruel, arrogant woman; the gigantic Nubian; the wretched, adoring, bandaged slave? Othrapa!” She struck the doctor’s shoulder with her hand. Her face had grown heavenly in its mixture of sadness and love. He rose bewildered, his features working. She sat at his desk, and seizing a pen, wrote rapidly for a few moments, then held the manuscript before him. He uttered a cry of recognition. It was a precise copy of the original verse which he had found locked in an unearthen cabinet from Pompeii, and of which he thought no living eye save his was cognizant.

Hurriedly he went to the cabinet, which stood in a remote corner, and returned with shrivelled scrap of papyrus. The woman grasped it eagerly. The soul that looked forth from her eyes had not beheld it for eighteen hundred years.

She turned from it to address the doctor, but he remained as if entranced. The moment in which he had handed her the papyrus, the vistas of memory, so long shrouded, opened in obedience to some occult law, and looking down them he saw himself, plainly, as he used to be, in that remote incarnation, a slave burning with an insane passion for one utterly beyond his reach. He was placed *en rapport* again with his beautiful and arrogant mistress, whose infamous cruelty to him had not so crushed his love that he had not hastened to save her life. All the impulses of that previous life swept over him, and in tones which were a mingling of rapture and despair, he cried :

"Aphrota! Aphrota!"

"Othrapa! I loved you then,—I love you now!"

Unconsciously his arms were half extended, in reality to that former image which lived in his awakened memory. Mistaking his gesture for one of invitation, Aphrota flung herself passionately upon his breast, and for a few moments they stood together in close union, he realizing, as the sense of the present stole back to him, that he had obtained, too late, the love of the woman whom he had once profoundly worshipped; she realizing from the coldness of his embrace, that, loving in this life the man whom she had so vilely punished for his adoration in that life so long ago, no love was left in him to give her in return. His utter unresponsiveness increased this conviction. As the sense of the present became complete in Dr. Lonycastle, he yet retained a sufficiently clear impression of his enslaved Pompeiian self to comprehend en-

tirely the past and the present personality of the woman who was clinging to him.

Gently he kissed her on the brow, with a kiss as unimpassioned as a brother's. Tenderly he unclasped her hands, and they resumed their seats, facing each other.

"Aphrota," he said, "for so I will call you—and call you me Othrapa if you will—I have sometimes thought, in my mystic studies, where such things are taught as veritable facts, that I might one day pass through an experience akin to this. But though it may be that we all live and die many times, ere we die, never to live again as mortals, it is given to few to remember—if only for a few hours, or moments—the past as we do now. That poem I translated, falling into your hands, awakened sleeping memories, and impelled you to come to me. I loved you, centuries ago, when you were unattainable as a star. "Now, *you love me.*"

Aphrota hid her face in her hands and uttered a pleading cry.

"Now, *you* love *me*," he continued, "when I am as unattainable as you were then. It is part of the education of life—part of the dissatisfaction of this fleshly being. But some day—far hence, perchance, in space and time—souls like us, that have sought each other vainly, at widely separated epochs here, will melt together and form one dual soul mingling in one another evermore."

"And *I*," exclaimed Aphrota, rising, and pressing both hands on her heart, while her face streamed with tears, "how am I to live without your love? When I came hither I felt as though I should die with to-day unless I could attain the love I once despised."

"There is something better than human love," said Othrapa, though the sadness in his voice seemed to belie his words. "There is something so much higher than human love, that it gives to human love all the sanctity it has."

"What can be better?" she asked.

"The love of God," he answered. "That is why I keep in sight yonder silver cross, wreathed with immortelles, emblem of its deathless might. That is why, when I look upon this ring, I see imaged there the whole history of the temptation, fall, and redemption of man, unconsciously shadowed forth in this soothsayer's amulet. I too am without ties, without love."

He ceased. "Must we then part?" she asked, extending her hand.

"In this life, yes," he answered. "In the life before this I suffered everything. It left me without capacity to love again, as I then did. But in a better world, with purer feelings, with finer powers, we shall meet and love infinitely, in higher ways, forever."

She gave him one long last look, even as the slave, about to be blinded by her command, had looked sorrowfully in her eyes, ages ago. She read in his looks that this

farewell must be, that it was the frightful punishment which is identical with natural result, and not an extraneous, judicial, or, mayhap, vengeful infliction. She shrank before this appalling woe, and felt that rest and sleep, those gentle eyelids of the soul, had been torn from her, and that henceforth she must rage, without escape, amid the fires of life until indurating time rendered her senseless to the light of happiness, the peace of love. Bowing her head, she accepted the prophecy implied in his words, and gave him her hand in silence, though she looked at him no more. In silence, too, he pressed her to his heart again, and kissed her with a tenderness that knew no passion. In this continued wordlessness, broken by neither sigh nor tear, he opened the door, conducted her down the long passage to the waiting room, whence the servant was now absent, prolonging an unusual vigil in some distant nook. As Dr. Lonycastle was about to open the

door leading from the waiting room to the hall of exit, he felt a light touch pulling gently at his sleeve. Instantly he remembered how the saved Aphrota had strenuously detained Othrapa by the sleeve upon that fearful day when all the gods seemed dying on their thrones. Now the touch moved him, but it did not melt.

The light had been left burning. Gazing upon her, he saw a woman in whom the beauty of health had become transformed in a few moments to the beauty of remorse, despair,—an illness of the soul transcending every fleshly pain. He was startled by such immediate anguish. He was more startled when, without a sign, she fell prone, mute, as though the heart, which had been slowly bleeding through no outward wound, had suddenly burst, having suffered in one moment more than most souls, with gifts of pain, endure throughout a lifetime.

He kneeled beside her, and raised her gently in his arms. His touch informed

him that her heart had ceased to beat, that through her lovely pulse no longer ran the rivulet of life. Nay, as he clasped her hands, his self-possession shaken, their growing coldness gave a chill unto his own. Through this coldness he suddenly discerned a pressure, remotely warm, ineffably faint, as though consciousness and unconsciousness were struggling with each other in the being he held—as though the soul, already taking flight, were pleading with the flesh for this brief respite to bid farewell, and thus express undying love, unblaming resignation. At that instant all the book-wisdom of the physician fell from him. He felt too much to think; and even had he thought, it is probable he had progressed too far in occult intelligence not to know that there is a moment when, if life is to be restored to the moribund, no drug or resource of science (as science is generally understood) can work the charm. The sweetest, strongest, most passionate in-

fluences of his abject former life rushed over him with irresistible force, now that he realised that she whom he had once loved, and whom he had recently found himself unable to love, was departing—had departed—and that centuries might elapse ere they could meet again. And if so, where? True, upon some mighty orb, perchance, whose peerless angelization made earth's mortality a tiny dream. He could not bear the thought. After all, there was something worth living for in this harsh life, if one could only largely love and be supplied with large love in return. What would his own life now become, having had this experience and allowed the opportunity of perfecting it to pass away forever?

He picked the body up again, trusting only to the constraining power of love.

"Aphrota!" he cried, "awake! Come back to me! I love you! I misunderstood myself! I loved you then—I love you now! You said those words to me, and now they

come from me to you.” He kissed her on the eyes, and lips, and neck. He kissed those palms in whose chaste hollows the tide of death had driven out the tide of life. He would not abandon this battle with nature. “Aphrota!” he cried again, “your soul is not yet so far out in space as not to hear me. You shall hear me! You *shall* hear me! Come back to me! If you sinned, I have sinned. If I have suffered, you have suffered. Oh, yes! Your suffering killed you. Mine could not kill me. Aphrota! Aphrota!”

He held her in his arms, rocking to and fro, feeling at last that strange chill which advances like a living creature into the heart, never to leave it, when hope at last is over. He could not feel resigned. He had studied deeply some of those old, cave-rescued Sanscrit volumes which, inscribed upon material indestructible by fire or water, enforce maxims of submission and obedience not inferior to those that Christians teach. He

had need now of all so-gathered strength. Rousing himself from the lethargy which had begun to creep over him, he kissed those wondrous lips, for which, in undestroyed Pompeii, he had once, with all the pitiful grotesqueness of an impossible adoration, ravenously yearned.

"Good-bye, my lost Aphrota," he said. "A hundred or a thousand years—many, many more, perhaps—will pass before we meet again. But when we do, dead darling, whom I could not forgive, the Power that fills all space and time will let us love together."

He raised her gently, laid her upon the couch, and composed her unresponsive hands. In doing this a faint stir of melody arose, heard here—no, there,—was it in the room? He smiled bitterly. Could that be a strain from the church? He listened again. No, it did not have the measured chant, the regular human construction. The sounds came like little motes of music.

They reminded him of the faint fringe of high sweet notes swept lightly from the hand of a pianist. Again he listened, and again they came, little points of melody melting even as they rose.

Then he understood. He translated with the insight of experience this mystical response to his prayer.

"Aphrota!" he exclaimed, kneeling beside her, and pressing on her lips a kiss which contained the soul of all the kisses his pure heart had ever dreamed. He had no need to say "Kiss me!" for the kiss was there. He had no need to exclaim, "Awake!" for her eyes opened, slowly. Explanation was superfluous to souls like theirs which had passed through death to meet in life again. She raised herself without his help, and they clung to each other in those fond murmurings that make speech blush.

Slowly she raised her face:

"We belong to each other forever," she said, perceiving the resurrection of his love

not only in the long caress, but through the inexplicable intuition of a soul that has left life and been drawn back to it by the love of the one it loved.

"Let us go to the church," she whispered. "We may be in time for midnight mass. See! I am well and strong!" She stood up, the picture of strong, joyous, happy youth.

They left the house and entered the wreathed and glowing church. They were in time to join in the sacrament. And when midnight was over, and the joy-bells announced that Christmas Day had dawned, Othrapa—or Dr. Lonycastle, as you will—placed upon Aphrota's finger the mystic milk-white ring, in token of the betrothal that ere long should make them one,—in token also that highest human love cannot exist without the love of something higher still.

THE END.

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