

HER HANDKERCHIEF.

By W. Morton Smith.

CHANCE had brought to light a woman's handkerchief. He could not imagine how it had escaped from its place in the dresser. But there it was, on the table at his side.

He took it in his hand. How the sight and touch thrilled him! It was only a small bit of a thing—not very pretty as it reposed there in his palm, all crumpled; but tender memories were stirred within him as he touched it, and to him it was the sweetest, most precious thing in his crowded bachelor's room.

He was not a young man; nor yet an old one. In his hair were silver streaks, and there were certain lines in his face that one could not help noticing—marks one would hardly say of age, as one looked into his clear eyes and observed his erect and athletic frame. Rather the scars left by untoward circumstance. A man may not hide all that has moved his heart and stirred his soul. He cannot suffer deeply and leave no sign. No man who allows the world to look upon his face can entirely conceal his history. Furrowed brow and streaks of silver may be titles to closed chapters in life, chapters that we would not unseal.

He placed the handkerchief on the table and sat and looked at it. He lighted a cigar, and soon rings of smoke circled about him, assisting, it may be, in the thralldom induced by the sight of the long hidden trifle.

He could hear the steady fall of rain outside. It was a bad night, and the knowledge of it contributed to his sense of loneliness. Melancholy thoughts and loneliness often come to us, as seated at a warm and comfortable fireside, we hear the sough of the wind or the down pour of the rain out of doors.

Tonight there was no escaping the reminiscent mood that hung upon him, as he sat alone with the paltry inanimate thing that had come unexpectedly out of the past—that past he would forget, and turned his thoughts backward to a time when a great happiness had been his—for a space.

Every time a joy leaves its abode in the realm of Jove and seeks to ease the burden of a mortal, a sorrow darts out on its heels from the cave of Lucifer. Sometimes the race is short, and sometimes it is prolonged. But the pursuer is always sure of its prey.

In his case the flight came to a speedy end.

He did not seek to recall it; but the memory of it all forced itself upon him. He could not keep it back. For once he would make no effort.

He began at the very beginning. It was all so clear; every detail of their first meeting presented itself so vividly.

It was in a ball room. A Strauss waltz, distilling a subtle intoxication, was just beginning to sound its invitation to dance, and he found himself, by some fortunate chance, at her side. He had longed to approach her all the evening. Mrs. Mannering presented him, and, after a few words whose incoherence he remembered, he was dancing with her.

Yes, it was the one dance in all his life. While it lasted it was a delirium, and afterward the memory haunted him. He would never forget it. His was not an emotional nature, and it was seldom that music affected him save as it appealed to his artistic sense. And as for dancing—he danced for much the same reason that he wore a boutonniere and a long coat in the mornings, or looked in at the club of an afternoon, or left a card at a few chosen places. It was a part of the social routine, which, at this time, he had somewhat carefully

observed.

But this dance, this waltz, was unlike anything in his experience. The fervid strains seemed as tho' intended for him and—her, alone, as they glided together. Subtly it formed a bond of union—of communion, between them. Hardly a word was spoken; but the few minutes of that waltz brought him the assurance his heart had longed for since, a month before, he had first seen her. Somehow the music reached his heart strings, and the dance, after the first few seconds was—intoxication.

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At their third meeting he had told her his story. Then had followed a period of happiness such as he had never hoped for; and then, one day, came the end.

It was about nothing at all. Trivialities so often eventuate into great troubles. Just a few hasty words that gave rise to mutual accusations, and in an angry passion he left her—five years ago, aye to a day, almost to an hour. He had seen her only once since their parting, and then at a distance. In his anger he had wronged her, cruelly. But she had taunted him, and his pride—or obstinacy had risen as an insurmountable barrier—insurmountable until too late.

Soon after business had taken him away and he suffered in silence. Once, after the lapse of months, he had written humbly and pleadingly; but no answer came. It was a painful time. Gradually he forced himself to dismiss all thought of her from his mind. In his new life that had begun after their paths had diverged there was little to remind him of her. Tonight was the first time in three years that he had allowed himself to dwell on these events, the recollection of which gave him infinite pain.

But the handkerchief, the exquisitely delicate bit of fabric, exhaling a delicious perfume, had brought it all back; the glamour of the great ball room, the faces of people he had ceased to know, the music, the passionate music, of that waltz; the delightful meetings

that followed, and then the end. Though he remembered it distinctly, it seemed to have occurred so long ago!

Once more he took the handkerchief from its resting place and fondled it. It was so suggestive of her! The beautiful lace, the sweet perfume, the daintiness of it, all spoke to him of her! He thought of it as almost a part of her. He derived a sort of pleasure from the thought that this inanimate thing had so thoroughly proved his faithfulness by appealing to him so effectively as coming from her. Some specially tender memories were associated with this crumpled white mass that he held in his hand. Nothing else, he told himself, but this handkerchief that meant so much to him could have



Mr. Stubb Pen—There! that batch of jokes have fallen into the fire. Pick 'em out, Puss, please.

Mrs. Pen—And save your chestnuts from the fire, dear?

caused him to recall in its entirety the experience he had long ago resolutely committed to forgetfulness.

Yes, he could recognize every thread, almost. There in one corner was her monogram, "E. L." How well he remembered these letters her own fingers had traced!

He unfolded the handkerchief to observe the monogram. And there it was—"M. H."—Mary Hadley, a girl who had flitted across his vision some two years before he had waltzed with "E. L."

He lighted a fresh cigar and started, in the wet, for the club.

Fair Visitor—So you have decided not to sell your house?

Fair Host—Yes, You see we placed the matter in the hands of a real estate agent. After reading his lovely advertisement of our property neither John nor myself could think of parting with such a wonderful and perfect home.