

## ATHELSTANE'S LIVING PICTURE

And How it Broke the Ice.

THERE was just the faintest suspicion of discontent in Miss Marian Delury's superb black eyes as she dreamily contemplated her exquisite face and her half-draped figure in the full length oval gilt mirror. It was an insufferably hot night and she had regretted for the thousandth time her self denial in consenting to keep the big town house open while her mamma, the dashing and ever youthful widow Delury, made a flying trip across the water to look after some rather shaky Russian railroad securities that her Paris agent seemed to be juggling with to very little purpose. On her return mother and daughter were to make their annual summer pilgrimage together to Newport, which would be consolation. But for the present—faugh! Miss Delury's red lips parted in something like a sneer of contempt as she noted the tiny beads of dewlike perspiration that glistened amid the down of her satiny cheeks and her faultlessly turned neck and shoulders.

Miss Delury had inherited much of her mother's spirit of self-reliance and all of her ability to charm. She was the type of young woman known by the connoisseur in such matters as "fine." One result of her twenty-four years of cloudless existence had been the development of a figure that in girlhood had been a miracle of grace into present absolute perfection. And that, possibly, was one of the reasons why she sighed softly as she regarded her own dazzling beauty in that oval mirror to-night.

In this pulsating, end-of-the-century young woman two emotions were rather strongly developed—one of them a perfect recognition of the power and splendor of her own charms; the other, her love for Arthur Athelstane, the very handsome and well-bred youth of whom the daily newspapers invariably spoke as "the rising young lawyer."

As for the first, what of it? A beautiful woman that does not know she is beautiful is either blind or a fool. As for the second, what beautiful woman ever lived to the age of twenty-four without knowing the joy of an attachment for some fortunate man at some time or other? No; in these two respects the statuesque Miss Delury was distinctly in line with the times and tradition as well. But the discontent? Ah, that was another matter.

Her teeth glimmered through the rosebud curves of her lips in the ghost of a smile as she thought of the triumphs that awaited her presently down there by the sea. But then she sighed again. That, alas! was becoming an old story now. She had grown quite accustomed to the double row of masculine spectators that lined the beach and vainly strove to conceal their admiration as she walked, dripping like a naiad, out of the water. Still the memory was not disagreeable. It was pleasant to think of a lot of handsome fellows, eligible *partis* almost every one of them, simply transfixed with delight at even the semi-delineation of her glorious proportions revealed by her mermaid's attire. Still, what a few of them there were and how poor their opportunities when one thought of some of the women of the stage and their costumes, or lack of them.

Miss Delury sighed again, smiling dreamily and prepared to retire. "No," she reflected, "I will not call Susanne. Even the presence of one's maid, not to speak of her chatter, would add to the heat of this room. Besides, I do not need her."

She extinguished the wax tapers and proceeded to disrobe by the moonlight that, filtering in through the branches of the tall trees in the Square, covered the polished floor with a glittering arabesque of silver. If a Henner could have viewed her as she stood presently in the white rays before the mirror, with the inky cascade of her tresses accentuating, if such a thing were possible, the marvelous purity of her marble shoulders, the result would have been a canvas before which ages would have bowed down from the day of its creation till the crack of doom.

With a petulant movement she threw herself on her knees by the open window and, placing her round white arms upon the sill, rested her chin upon them and gazed dreamily out into the sweltering night, the moonlight shining down on the snowy draperies and the little pink toes that careaced the oaken floor. After five minutes of reverie, she suddenly started to her feet with the light of a new and brilliant idea sparkling in her glittering black orbs. Her lips parted and her bosom heaved. "Upon my word I've a mind to do it," she murmured breathlessly.

The next instant she had drawn the Venetian blinds close, relighted the tapers and commenced scribbling a note on a sheet of paper

from which she carefully clipped the Delury family crest. Soon after she crept into bed and fell asleep with a smile of full content playing over her delicate features. And among the silver-topped scent-bottles and other dainty litter of her dressing-table lay a square envelope, addressed to a leading theatrical manager.

Mr. Arthur Athelstane's passion for Miss Marian Delury—if so extremely calm and well regulated a young gentleman could harbor a sentiment sufficiently strong to deserve the name, was—well it was the love of a lawyer, and it was as warm in its way as the love of a man that spends his life among mouldy parchments and in dingy court-rooms, where the only human emotions on exhibition are those of the unfortunate clients can ever be. He loved the young woman sincerely, devotedly, and meant to win her for his wife if he could. So well did he manage to keep his emotions in check that he had not learned how dear he was to her. For he was really a splendid looking fellow, and if he had given her the smallest provocation—but he did not; and Miss Delury had often told herself that the only thing Arthur lacked to make him an ideal lover was an occasional exhibition of ardor that should prove him to be a creature of flesh and blood and not an irreproachably correct block of ice. And she had vowed that until she had satisfied herself, by whatever means that this well-bred reserve could be melted on provocation, she would remain Marian Delury—yes, if she had to do so till Doomsday.

The Widow Delury was expected home in five days and Arthur and Marian were discussing the proper ways and means of receiving her, when the young woman suddenly changed the subject. "Arthur," she said blithely, "why don't you take me to the Jupiter Theatre to see the living pictures?"

With an effort the lawyer repressed a temptation to blush. "I—I"—he stammered, "I do not think it would be exactly the thing, you know."

"Oh, you don't," pouted the girl, mimicking his tone, "and why not pray? Don't you know that in the summer everyone allows the proprieties to droop a little? We resume our good behavior with the autumn. And why shouldn't you take me anywhere where you go yourself, I should like to know?"

"I never go anywhere where I should be ashamed to take you," was the young man's sturdy reply.

"Do you mean to tell me that you haven't been to see the living pictures yourself?"

"I may be the only man in New York that can say it," answered Athelstane, coldly, "but I most certainly have not."

"Then all I can say is," rejoined the maiden, laughing, "that you appear to have missed a good deal. Don't you read the papers?"

"I only read what my secretary marks for me each morning. He knows what will interest me and what will not."

"Oh! then he didn't mark any of the extravagant praises of the beauty of Mlle. Beatrice Delacroix?"

"And who is Mlle. Delacroix?"

"According to the newspapers she is the only perfectly formed woman in existence. Why, they've done nothing but rave about her ever since she made her appearance. Just listen to this." And picking up the evening paper she proceeded to read:

The attraction at the Jupiter continues to consist of Mr. Ted Fleshleigh's array of living pictures. And, if one may be pardoned for repeating a verdict already often expressed, one must in candor admit that the picture, "Venus on the Halfshell," in which Mlle. Beatrice Delacroix poses as the figure, is enough to stun the senses of the beholder with its beauty. Artists agree that the equal of Mlle. Delacroix's figure was never before seen in any age, and the whole town weeps at the thought that it may never be again. She is peerless, incomparable.—etc., etc., etc.

"There," snapped the beautiful girl rather spitefully, "of course I know you wouldn't take me, but I shouldn't think that any man would care to miss the opportunity of seeing the only perfect woman in existence."

Athelstane left soon afterward and Miss Delury went to her chamber in a rather tired frame of mind. Having carried out her rather daring scheme of securing an engagement (under an assumed name of course,) at the Jupiter theatre, she was, curiously enough, only partially satisfied with her success. True, the sight of her, as she lay night after night in the huge make-believe shell on the sandy beach in the "picture," so posed—a point on which she had insisted with the manager—so as to turn her face completely away from the audience, she had quite taken the town by storm. The papers, as