

THE PROPOSAL.

[EDITH LEWIS.]

In one of the parks of San Francisco, John Brighton, an elderly Englishman, was walking. It was noon. The place was half deserted. A sort of golden silence reigned, broken only by the murmur of a little child, or the splashing of the fountains. The air was filled with sunlight and the odor of tulips. A few orioles flashed among the trees. It was the background for a philosopher to melt into and lose himself, wrapped around with light and fragrance. Nothing, however, would have been less melting than the figure of the Englishman. He moved with a sort of stiff energy, striking off with his cane as he passed, the heads of the roses. In this unchecked pursuit he traversed the park five times. The sixth turn, however, brought him to a by-path which seemed to promise a diversion. He turned into it, making his way along a breast-high laurel hedge, until faint sounds behind it led him to pause and look across.

Somewhat retired from view among the rose bushes, a little child was playing at a fountain. Near him sat a girl, dressed in a gown of black stuff, very heavy and close fitting. She was rather small, and exquisitely pretty. Nevertheless it was evident to the Englishman that something was wrong. Her face, with its soft and delicate contours, wore an odd, gray pallor, out of keeping in that July noon. Her eyes, large, black and shadowy, were kept constantly turned upon the child, with a sort of burning languor. Her hands shook helplessly when she raised them to put back the hair from her brow.

Brighton regarded her silently from behind the hedge. All at once, as he stood, a singular thing occurred. The place had been used for a picnic ground. In the grass lay a loaf of bread, sodden from exposure, the remnant of some excursion, some pleasure party. It caught the girl's eye. For a moment she regarded it fixedly. Then her charming face was convulsed with eagerness. Glancing covertly about, she was reaching for the loaf, when an exclamation from the ledge discovered Brighton's presence. He came hastily forward. But the girl was already upon her feet. Color had burned two bright spots in her cheeks. She was trembling with rage and indignation. She strove twice for words which would not come. Her eyes blazed on him silently. "Don't stand," said he.

She made a step toward him, then groping backwards, dropped to her seat and lay there. Brighton shook his head solemnly.

"Wait for me," he said. He started off on a run through the bushes, leaped a hedge, and brought up inside an immaculate cafe, a square distant. The waiters were astounded at the apparition of their most irreproachable patron, bareheaded, breathless, using strange English profanities, and with heat demanding "nourishing food of any sort whatever." With trembling hands they prepared a tray. He took it. He did not volunteer an explanation. He marched forth up the quiet street, followed by a handful of urchins whom he dismissed at the park entrance with dispensations of silver.

The girl was lying in the same attitude. Reaching her, he set down the tray, removed the covers, and began feeding her the broth by spoonfuls. Then he poured out a glass of wine and buttered a roll. She received what he gave her docilely, but with apparent indifference. All at once she raised her head sharply and looked about.

"Georgie!" she cried. The child had wandered to a distance. At her call, however, he came racing

back and stood panting at her knee. He was an elf-like, little creature with solemn eyes, and hair like spun gold. He regarded Brighton gravely. "Sit down," said the girl. "Don't run."

She held her wineglass to his lips. Then she gave him the rest of her broth. A faint color had fluttered into her face. Brighton watched them with a grim smile.

"So this is how your countrymen treat you," he said at last.

She raised her head with spirit, replying:

"They're not my countrymen. I'm a Southerner."

Brighton chuckled.

"I'm from the north of Wales, myself," he said, "and I call myself an Englishman. However, we won't quarrel. What are you going to do now?"

She leaned back and looked at him for a moment without replying.

"I'm going to thank you for your kindness," she presently said. "Then I'm going home."

"Home!" he echoed. "Home!" He laughed. "Don't tell me you've a home," he said. "The bed goes before the loaf."

She eyed him without emotion.

"I daresay you're right," she answered. For a moment she was silent. Then she slowly raised her eyes.

"My husband died in June," she said. "I am a widow. I was taking him back from Japan. A sea voyage, the doctor said. So we went to Japan. It is a frightful place. Never take them there, they always die. My husband," she added, "died on the return, in sight of San Francisco."

"Our money—I suppose we spent it. There was so much to pay for—doctors and nurses, hotels and voyages—I always gave whatever they asked. When it was over, I discovered we had nothing. I pawned my rings—all my gowns. Then, for the sake of my little boy, I entered a shop. Four days ago, they discharged me. My landlord has sent me away. I came to the park. That is all."

Brighton gazed at her.

"The boy—what have you done with him?" he asked.

She glanced toward the child apathetically. Then she drew from her glove a small coin.

"For his supper," she exclaimed, holding it out.

"You have saved that," he gasped, "for the boy?"

She met his eyes with a sort of defiance.

"One does not starve one's child," she said.

Brighton meditated.

"How old are you?" he asked.

"I am nineteen."

"Have you no relations—no friends?"

"I quarreled with them when I married. I shall never go back," she replied.

For a long space there was silence. In the trees a few birds chattered. The child began again to drop pebbles in the fountain.

Brighton paced back and forth between the roses and the hedge. The girl lay quietly, her lashes drooping. All at once he turned to her again. His manner bore traces of agitation.

"Listen to me," he said. "You cannot remain here."

She glanced up, but said nothing.

"I have a plan," he continued. "You must accept it, whether you like or no. Look at me. I am forty years your senior. I am a bachelor. I have no relations to quarrel with, and I am very rich. This is what you must do. I don't ask if you like me. I ask you to take me as I am, to accept—"

She sprang to her feet.

"No," she cried, "No. I cannot marry you. I cannot marry you. My husband—"

she drew herself up with a face that held him for an instant motionless, with dazzled eyes. Then he moved toward her.

"You shall have the child," she said, "and I will go."

He looked at her. With one hand she had gathered her skirts as if to fly. The other she held extended toward the child. There was something in her

kindly. "That idea of yours—it was charming—I should like it very much. But I should not have made the mistake you feared. I intended to offer to adopt you."

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Notice to Creditors.—E 1466.
In the county court of Lancaster county, Nebraska:
In the matter of the estate of Susan R. Link, deceased.
To the creditors of said estate:
You are hereby notified, that the County Judge will sit at the county court room in Lincoln, in said county, on the 16th day of October, 1900, and again on the 16th day of January, 1901, to receive and examine all claims against said estate, with a view to their adjustment and allowance. The time limited for the presentation of claims against said estate is six months from the 16th day of July, 1900, and the time limited for the payment of debts is one year from the 16th day of July, 1900.
Notice of this proceeding is ordered published for four weeks successively in The Courier of Lincoln, a weekly newspaper published in this State.
Witness my hand and the seal of said court this 4th day of June, 1900.
[SEAL.] FRANK R. WATERS,
County Judge.
By WALTER A. LESSE, Clerk County Court
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