

## THE END OF THE BEGINNING.

[The Story Of An Over-Burdened Heart]

"Are you a witch or a woman?" the man said, irrelevantly.

"Perhaps I am both—I come of Salem stock, you know," and Miss Kent stretched herself in the boat, lazily.

Arnold took out a fresh cigarette, and began a search for his match-box.

"Do you mind rowing," Miss Kent began; "the New York boat is bearing down upon us, and I have not a fancy for going under."

With a few vigorous strokes the man swung the boat nearer shore, but not before the swell from the passing steamer had caught them, rocking them about unpleasantly. It roused Miss Kent from her comfortable attitude, and caused her to gaze with some curiosity on the boat that was ploughing its way up the river, its decks crowded to the rails with excursionists.

"Do you know if I were poor, I should never budge. The mere idea of taking one's pleasure like that—in herds—is horrible!" Miss Kent shrugged her shoulders, disgustedly. "Toss me a cigarette, dear man, and I'll give you a match in exchange. I happen to be sitting on the box, I believe."

The man looked at her and laughed. "You're a witch—all of you. A month ago I should have refused you the cigarette—I never used to like to see women smoke. To day I offer you the box—somehow you make it seem decent."

"What subtle flattery!" Miss Kent lighted a match and held it out to him. "You poor, deluded man, I feel sorry for you!"

Arnold shifted the oars, and, blowing out the match, covered the slim white hand with his two brown ones. "My dear," he said, "I do not want your pity. Will you let me talk to you a little?"

"Oh, please do not get serious, not now nor any time." A troubled look came into her eyes and was gone in a moment. "Think! we have hours ahead of us, and things are so charming as they are! Besides, I never am serious! Have I not told you that a hundred times? And it's much too drowsy a day to talk or think," she added convincingly. "Shall we not drift with the tide?"

The man dropped her hand and picked up the oars again. "You do not make things very easy," he said.

"Things have not been made easy for me."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing."

"Do you ever mean anything?"

"Sometimes."

"Thanks. Is it possible for the person of average intelligence to recognize your serious movements?"

"I do not make friends of persons of average intelligence."

"Thanks again; though possibly, I am flattering myself."

"Possibly." The girl was trailing her hand in the water and smiling up at him.

"You see the most tantalizing woman I know," Arnold said, pulling steadily. "One moment I want to tip you overboard, the next—but no matter about the next; it would not amuse you! Will you steer us into the creek, please? The tide is running very strong here."

Miss Kent gave the rudder a turn, swinging the boat into the creek that made its way back into the woods. The trees, rising from either side of the bank, were mirrored in the clear surface of the water, and the girl gave an exclamation of delight as the boat wound in and out, following the course of the narrow stream.

"Why have you never brought me here before? It is exquisite! You cannot expect me to talk in the face of all this! Nature, pure and simple, makes me tongue tied. Won't you encourage my enthusiasm a bit and say it is beautiful, too? She turned to him appealingly.

"It is very beautiful," Arnold said

simply, but his eyes were on the woman's face.

She flushed angrily. "Don't be stupid and commonplace."

He turned his face from her and looked over the water, where, through an opening in the woods, the broad, glimmering river could be seen, the mountains towering majestically beyond. Some familiar verses came into his head:

And on her lover's arm she leant,  
And round her waist she felt it fold,  
And far across the hills they went  
In that new world which is the old.

But he did not repeat them to Dorothy; she would laugh at such a display of sentiment. Arnold took off his hat flinging it into the bow of the boat.

"I uncover my head in the presence of your enthusiasm!" His voice was very mocking, but it changed again to its usual serious tone. "Perhaps you do not know, dear, that I grew up on the river. Not a nook or eddy or creek that I do not know by heart. And I love every turn of it, but it is too much a part of me to excite any special demonstration. As a boy I spent whole days drifting about, conjuring up visions of the old patroons who rode the waters in high disdain and lived like lords in the stately manor houses along the river banks. Sometimes I built air castles, too. Foolish day dreams, you would call them, and I have not altogether given up the habit yet."

"Were you not relying just a little on the environment, dear man, when you brought me here today?" Miss Kent laughed softly. "I see through your artifices; big, honest men like you are as transparent as glass. She pushed away the cushions on which she had been lying and sat up in the boat. "Give me an oar, this minute," she demanded, "two oars—and I want your seat. If I don't do something I shall grow sentimental! There is nothing like work to give one balance! Pull me up, Mr. Arnold!"

But the man did not move from his seat, and leaning forward he laid one hand on her shoulder. "It is not necessary that you should resort to such desperate means of killing sentiment. I wish for once you would give way to it. Why," he added bitterly, "do you always crush your better impulses—you who are so keenly alive to everything that is beautiful? Oh, my dear, my dear, do you not know how sweet you could make life for?"

"For any man, if I tried?" she interrupted flippantly.

Arnold drew back as if she had struck him. "You may finish it as you like."

Miss Kent pulled herself upon her knees, bringing herself on a level with the man who sat facing her. Then she took his face in her hands.

"I don't like to be nasty,"—her voice was childishly penitent—"and I am going to kiss you, as a sign of truce, if you will be very good and sit quite still." In her sudden change of mood she was all tenderness. She put her face up close to Arnold's. "Oh, shut your eyes, dear; I could not bear the humiliation of having you see me do it!"

She brushed his cheek lightly, but at the touch of her lips Arnold dropped the oars and flung his arms about her, drawing her close. He made no attempt to kiss her in return, fearing he should frighten her into the garb of cynicism which she habitually wore. Having gained so much he was willing to wait a little. But as he held her he felt transported, carried beyond himself. Was this "the new world which is the old?" He opened his eyes to make sure that it was all true, and then he bent his head over the flushed face that lay against him. "Look at me, sweetheart; turn your face this way."

She moved a little in his arms and lifted her head. Arnold tilted up her chin and laid his lips upon hers. He felt a thrill run through him, and then she trembled, but his eyes held hers with the intensity of his love, and she gave her lips up to him with absolute surrender.

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