

AT THE END OF THE ROUTE.

(From the Journal of Miss Elizabeth Northrup.) KATE JORDAN, in the Magazine of Travel.

Morning.—The "Florida Special" shoots onward, like the loadstar of the magnet. We have passed Philadelphia, the grouped smoking chimneys of Wilmington, and are darting straight toward Washington. I have my shoulder half turned away from Aunt Elsie, and with my head well back, sit staring at the rain-drenched panes, for it is pouring, with a vehemence that makes every close-growing tree a small cataract.

February.—New York and its gray, slushy streets left far behind. St. Augustine, and a two weeks' drifting upon its blue waters, our objective point. It is in prospect to cheer any heart except mine. Here is a theorem for a moral philosopher; a woman, young, free, of undeniable beauty and independently rich, miserably unhappy, with friends in plenty, yet alone. Ah! the one face which rises before me, the look of pain, love, and self-awakening in the eyes; it follows me and keeps peace away. Yes, the memory of that look turns all my roses to dust.

All my life I had known Rufus Darrow. He was a pseudo-confidant, Aunt Elsie's son, and she my mother's stepfather, and my chaperon when fate left me orphaned. As far back as the days when life meant a run across a meadow and the division of a penny cake, Rufus and I were chums. When the hobbledehoy period was past, and he came home from college, I from school, he became like my other self. Friends? There was something more in Rufus's eyes, a good deal more in his heart.

Four years ago and summer time, the luscious quiet of a June night stealing through the windows and holding New York under a spell. We were not going out of town until late that year, and as if to oblige us, the summer retained the breezes of spring, the sun seemed half asleep.

As I was sitting in the wide window-seat watching the long rows of shrouded houses, and the street lamps like sentinels in the twilight, my heart was heavy. I was thinking of Rufus. On that June night I admitted to myself that I loved him, and the sting of the afterthought was as acute as the pain in my throat. Had this feeling grown in me through the long years, creating its own ideal, twining around Rufus Darrow, defying his look, his voice, his footsteps—and was it all a mistake?

But you will not send it—you will never send it, I know. The next day—I folded up the confession of my sore heart yesterday, and put it away. But I shall continue to keep notes of my journey. It saves to talk to Aunt Elsie, if nothing else.

We left Richmond about half-past six last night, were all night reaching Charleston, and now, in the sunlight of a morning so golden it seems to have been freshly come in heaven, we are hurrying to Savannah. The train rumbles through heavily wooded country, past the great phosphate beds where negroes bend at work, along the very edges of cypress swamps, within arms' reach, it seems, of the cross-sunbeams and the wild cane brakes, suggesting the solitude and luxuriance of African jungles.

There is no life visible except at rare intervals a lonely negro at a cabin door, nothing modern or made by man save our iron-appointed train flashing over substantial drawbridges, winking echoes in that dank solitude that murmur of civilization. Thus the day passes, broken only by the stop at Savannah, until with a snort and shriek the train draws up at Jacksonville, once so mighty, now but a satellite among the comets. It signs of departed grandeur, and days that are no more. Few passengers alight, the majority going on to St. Augustine, which place we reach as the sun is filling the west with all the brilliant tints one sees in a dolphin's back.

Night.—I have added nothing to my notes since our arrival here three days ago. Now, as midnight steals on, and I sit alone by the open window, I must subdue the fever of the day, and brain, and set down the salient points of a new and wonderful story as they occurred. Of course, we came directly to the Ponce de Leon. Surely that dead and gone Spanish explorer, cavalier, and courteous senator, who sought for the fountain of perennial youth in this blossoming land, could have no more delightful memorial than this hotel. Oh, the beauty of its gardens and broad flowered lawns, the court, who can forget the breath from cypress bloom circling around it in the sun-shot air, the sleep notes of distant cathedral bells, the flavor of salt from the acres of blue sea the thrilling strains of the hand voicing the fugal query of "Nadty."

"What is love?" the maiden saith; "Is it more than life? Is it more than death?" The loveliness, the rapture of it all crept around me like a spell. Romance was in the air, and I felt my heart stir with the old pain of love. Bobbie Lawnton was enough to dispel the exotic dreaminess. He was waiting for his party. His broad, shining face, with its vagrant, blase smile, surmounted by a straw hat of unusual proportions, beamed upon us both. We were to be guests upon his yacht. He was a millionaire, and loved me. As yet he had not told me so, but he gave evidence of it after his fashion, and had confided the state of his heart to several of my friends.

"So dear of you to come!" he lisped. "I'll go out for a sail tomorrow afternoon, eh?" And we did. I shall never forget that first walk on St. Augustine's sea-wall, and the sight of the light-tower gleaming white upon Anastasia Island. "After all," I thought, as, leaning over the railing of the boat, I caught a reflection of myself in the water, gown and sailor hat; "after all, there is a joy in being young and pretty, with fine health and soul enough to feel the ecstatic beauty of God's earth. Let me fall as I will, one cannot be quite unhappy while the sun shines, and blue and blue, all flutter and whisper, like this."

Out on the bay, where it was deeply blue, the yacht was weighing its anchor. It came nearer, and "lay to" before Anastasia Island, and the sailor. We were rowed out to it, and soon with a good deal of laughter and chaff, were safely aboard. Bobbie was master of the craft, and years of experience on the Sound and New England waters, and the sailor. We sailed away. The boat was like a skimming kingfisher; the breeze just filled the sails; the air was exhilarating as the champagne cup served on the open deck; the murmur of the waves following the banjo's strains was like the accompanying voices of hidden mermaids.

and blamed Bobbie for the storm, as if he had been a malevolent Jove who had arranged it all maliciously beforehand. Simply to escape from her I went on deck. The sun had broken through the gray wall of sky, and the bay brilliant. Fishing smacks were out in great numbers, but every eye was fastened on a large sail-boat, skimming toward us like a great sea-bird. As it came nearer we saw the pilot plainly.

"The pilot on the boat!" said a man near me; "his words have a pretty sound, haven't they? It must be a fascinating occupation to a man who loves the water. It is venturesome, free. Even the money made from it has the charm of uncertainty—it depends largely on the wealth or generosity of the men who own the yachts which the pilot brings in. A good deal of money is made by these fellows. Well, here's the boat, and won't it be good to get ashore!"

The pilot was tall, and even in an old blue coat and stouped hat, even with averted head, there was a certain dignity and elegance in his bearing. He turned and looked up at Bobbie, making a careless, graceful motion of greeting. "What had happened? Was I really awake? Had the world gone topsyturvy? A sudden curtain seemed to fall over my sight, shutting out the bay, the housetops of the town beyond, the lights of the harbor, the broad, clear face of the pilot, looking up and past me. Another second and our eyes met. I do not know what mine said; his, strangely hard and half-defiant, said nothing. The pilot at the helm was Rufus Darrow.

His boat sped on, following the safe and devious windings of the channel, and our yacht followed. When we had landed I looked everywhere, but though the pilot's boat lay at its moorings, he had disappeared. As we turned and entered the carriage that was to take us to the hotel, I saw a tiny house at a short distance from the water—a bare, lonely place having the Spanish roof seen everywhere in St. Augustine. Instinctively I knew that Rufus lived there, a voice in my heart that I do not know how that day passed. Like an uneasy ghost, I wandered through the patio and corridors, among the gardens, down the quaint streets, until at sunset I found myself back at a stone's throw from the little house in the heart of the town. I longed, with a desire that hurt my heart, to stand before him, to meet his eyes. Yet, with the feeling, there was a curious dread. Perhaps he hated me now. Perhaps in his chosen isolation, just off the beaten track, he had buried his woman's love, had married, "the world forgetting, and by the world forgot."

Perhaps— But all surmises vanished, for the cottage door opened, and Rufus came down the path. His head was sunk on his breast, and his hands were in his pockets. As he turned, the western sunlight struck his eyes. Impatiently he looked up and saw me. Ah, he had kept his promise well! He had worked. The worn, tanned face, the intent eyes, but not those of the dreamer, and I had known. How strange is reality from the fabric of our dreams! I had often fancied meeting Rufus, and what the first words between us would be—words thrilling, strong. He only said: "How do you do, Bess?" and lifted the stouped hat with the old, easy grace.

"Rufus, we meet at last!" and I scarcely knew my tones, they trembled so. "I held out by hand. "No," he said, "turning away and looking out to sea, 'not yet. I cannot touch your hand until I am free. Do you understand? Do you know what I mean?' he asked, facing me passionately. "Soon I will be free, soon. I have worked hard, but not those of the winter season, and during the summer I have been assistant lighthouse-keeper; I saved every penny, except what was actually needed for bread and butter. Thank God that drudgery soon will end—soon. Listen."

"He came closer, his dark, luminous eyes compelled my gaze, and the light from the west, rapidly changing from crimson to violet, threw its mystery around us. A year later.—We are

"I heard of a chance to buy some phosphate beds up country for almost a song, and I made a successful deal there. Now I am negotiating with a New York syndicate for them. If they pay my price I will be a rich man."

The words were so strangely pathetic in his attitude and expression, despite the ring of triumph in the last words. I moved nearer, wild, appealing words of love trembling on my lips, but a rough voice calling "Darrow!" out of the shadows came like a discord into a troubled, tender song. I realized that memories made a gulf between us, that it was getting dark, that there was scarcely time to dress for dinner, and I turned away just as a boatman came to Rufus's side.

What did Bobbie Lawnton think of me that night? Restless, mocking, with feverishly bright eyes and a manner not my own, I led him on to tell me all that was in his poor, meagre little heart, and then refused to be his wife, though I said something of the beauty and gentleness in a sister's love which was at his disposal. Bobbie was not the man to be satisfied with this, however, and told me so dolefully; he really thought his little heart was hopelessly hurt; I knew better; you can't engrave anything lasting on dough. Of course, my conduct was contemptible. Poor Bobbie, who went to bed drunk that night, was the missile I flung in the face of the crowning Fate presiding over my life.

The thoughts of Rufus Darrow pursued me; his tones were in my ears. I had never loved him better than that night, when he stood before me in the rough pilot clothes, refusing to touch my hand. But what was impossible, and I went into the garden, mysterious with dew and moonshine. I knew I clasped his hands, I knew I went, and that an inarticulate prayer broke from my lips. When I looked up a negro boatman, holding a letter, stood before me. "Yuh pardin, miss, but can yuh dree me to jest whar I'll find Miss-Lomme see—Miss Elizabeth Northrup—so's I kin give her this letter direct?"

I am Miss Northrup. Give it to be," I said, a faint, sad stirring in my blood disturbing me, and I opened it just beneath the electric light, pulsing like a great white heart above me. It contained a few almost illegible lines from Rufus, praying to me to come to him just for one moment. "Something has happened," I said to the negro, seizing his arm. "What? Tell me what?" "Miss Darrow's boat collided tonight, just off the light-house. He is hurted bad, an' ah guess it's all up wid 'im. He looks like spook, mos'."

In twenty minutes I stood in Rufus's little cottage. It was a strange sight. A dimming wood fire made the hearth red and mingled with the ceiling lights, throwing a glow, the so-called not of earth, over Rufus's face. He lay on a couch, the brine-soaked shirt open at the throat, his face very white, a purple shadow on lids and cheeks. As I knelt beside him he stretched out his arms and took me in a close, hungry embrace. "How often you have been with me so in dreams, my dear!" he said, between difficult breaths. "Only in dreams. I never believed this could really be—never! By the time I had said all my contemptible dirt I had loved you would have forgotten me; that perhaps you would have married some lucky devil who had not, like me, misused his life. Ah, Bess, my pretty girl, my love from boyhood, my love now, give me the kiss that promises heaven, even though it means good-bye."

As my fingers strayed through his hair I noticed the gray silvering it; I noticed the worn, young face and yearning eyes. "Good-by! Oh, never, never! There was a prayer to God, as well as love for him, in that kiss. "You will live, Rufus," I said, in whispering, love-inspired tones. "Did I find you at the end of the route, after this long and time, only to lose you? Could God be so hard to us? Oh, no! You will live! We will be happy, dear!"

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