

A LOVE SONG.

The song the robin sings in May, It is the one I sing; He has the same sweet words to say...

THE FLEUR-DE-LIS

Was it Dream, Illusion or a Mingling With the Dead?

BY S. L. BACON.

I was a young man then, 24 years of age. That is very young, is it not? And I had been at work ever since I was a mere lad...

I had been given just at this time a holiday because of a generally wornout condition of body and mind, having been warned by my physician that unless I followed his prescription of absolute rest and change I should succumb to a fever very prevalent then...

It had occurred in December, more than three months before, and in the fury of the hurricane and the blackness of the night the ship had completely lost her bearings and, steered at random, had struck a terrible reef some distance out. The crew and the three passengers she carried had made for the boats, but before their escape could be effected the vessel was swung about and the boats dashed against the rocks...

Afterward the wind had driven the vessel on with its powerful lashings and hurled it upon the shore. It was fastened firmly by two projecting points of rock and lay upon its side, a mere discolored carcass of what had been the Fleur-de-lis.

I was sufficiently interested, especially as the sun was warm and bright, to follow my host's suggestion and stroll off to view the wreck myself. I took the direction he had pointed out and after brisk walking found myself nearing the coast. The flat yellow sands stretched before me, and as I stepped upon their moist surface I felt that the sea had been there not long before. There was a fresh wind blowing, and the strong, fragrant salt air seemed to bring returning strength with it. I walked faster. I felt a sense of exultant life.

Finally I came upon what had looked in the distance like a black rock. It was the ruins of the vessel. But it was not entirely destroyed. After climbing over the lower side I could see into the hold, which was filled with debris. I marveled at the rotten planks creaked under me that the ship should have remained here so long. I even suspected some of the keener spirits of the town of making her fast, that their object of interest and curiosity might not be lost.

I stood upon the deck of the stranded vessel and looked about me with delight and admiration. From necessity I was with the large manufacturing firm of Davenport & Co., but by nature I was an artist. With the love of art strong within me I had all my life been obliged to crush it down until I had the means to justify my ambition and cultivate what I felt sure was my gift. Only recently had I been able to begin study, and strong encouragement had been given me. Now I seated myself amid the ruins, with my back to the shore, drew out my sketch-book and lost myself in my beloved work.

I worked steadily, for there were several fantastic points to make, and along the coast, which stretched to the right of me, there were many beautiful views to be sketched. But I was not strong, and the long walk had tired me. Moreover, the strong salt breeze carried a soothing potion upon its breath. The low surge of the waves was like a cradle song. My pencil slid from my inanimate fingers, my head dropped to one side, and my eyes closed. I slept.

I awoke suddenly. It was the sensation of cold, of a chill, which awakened me. How long had I slept? The sky had changed; it was dark, lowering. I heard the cry of a gull flying inland. I rubbed my eyes. Where was I? Was this the Fleur-de-lis? I looked again.

Then I sprang to my feet and cried aloud in horror, for the ship was moving.

The sands of the fast receding beach were enveloped and concealed by the water. The tide was up, and the vessel, the vessel upon which I stood, was detached from its hold and headed out to sea!

I cried aloud. I shrieked. I thought I must jump into the water. Finally I felt the hopelessness of my situation and resigned myself to despair. A strong wind had sprung up, almost a squall, and it drove the ship on faster. The shores faded, about me was the measureless sea. Night came on. I was faint and worn with hunger, and I crawled down into the hold and wished for death to come to my release.

Suddenly as I lay there I heard a faint sound. It was not like any noise I had ever heard, and yet it was strangely familiar to me. I strained my ears; while I listened there passed me suddenly a gleam of light. It was surely some one carrying a lantern. Some one. Who?

I started up. Cold inspiration was upon me. The next instant I knew and recognized the sounds I had heard. It was the moving of the machinery of a vessel, but dim and far away, like the suggestion rather than the actual thing. I rose and with the sense of returning strength all fear left me. I climbed upon deck. The masts were there as they had been when the Fleur-de-lis was happily sailing homeward. The sailors were at their post. The captain, a tall, slender man, stood with his glass to his eyes. But about them all was an air of vague strangeness. A deep melancholy, mingled with an unearthly quiet, pervaded them. Their movements were felt rather than heard.

As I stood looking without fear upon the marvelous scene my attention was arrested by the figure of a young girl. She stood with her profile toward me, the wind stirred the little curls of her light hair, with a faint, transparent hint of color in it, as is sometimes seen upon the heart of a cloud. She had a blue scarf twisted about her throat, which she held in place with the delicate fingers of one hand. On one of them there glistened a ruby of great size and brilliancy.

She turned her face slowly as I looked and smiled a faint, unworldly smile. I approached her and lifted my hat.

"Will you tell me," I said, my eyes meanwhile feasting upon her beauty, "what ship this is and where it is going?"

She looked at me half sadly, I thought, and answered in a low, vibrant tone: "It is the Fleur-de-lis, but it is dead, you know. We are all dead, and we are sailing through eternity. You are a stranger. I am glad to see you. We have been alone so long."

The voice of this young girl thrilled me as nothing had ever done before. My heart beat fast. I looked into her blue eyes, with their changing lights, and the past and future faded. I cared only for the present.

"Are you alone?" I ventured. I could scarcely restrain myself from putting my hand on her delicate wrist, from caressing her soft hair.

"No," she replied; "I have my maid and Mme. d'Estell with me."

"You are French, then?"

"Yes, but I was at school in England. An absent look came into her eyes. "That was long, long ago. I must go now and help madame with dinner. We take the cook's place. He was lost, you know."

She smiled sadly and left me. A repast was presently served in the long saloon, but all hunger seemed to have left me, nor did I see any of the others partake of anything set before them. Afterward I walked on deck with the girl. We paused, looking at the horn shaped moon together. I felt the blown strands of her hair upon my face.

"Will you tell me your name?" I whispered to her. She turned her face to me serenely. "I have forgotten," she said simply. The answer did not surprise me, for to me the past was a blank.

"Then I shall call you Psyche," I said. "Very well," she replied, and we began to walk again.

Thus days went by, or at least some form of time, just what I could not tell. I was like one intoxicated with a joyous wine. I thought and cared only for the beautiful French girl; her seductive beauty enchanted me; her proximity thrilled me with intense delight.

she rose and came to me, leaning over my shoulder to look at it.

At that moment a crash of thunder sounded, and a brilliant flash of lightning illuminated the ship. I looked up. The sky had grown black as night. The sea, with its inky waves, seemed to bound toward us. It hissed under the sing of the wind. The vessel rocked from side to side, and the water splashed upon the deck. I sprang to my feet and, thrusting the picture into my bosom, seized my companion's hand.

Another and still another clap pealed through the air. In a few moments we were almost in complete darkness save when the lightning shot in flashing lines across the sky. The fury of the storm was indescribable. The wind seemed to have gone mad. Salt spray dashed on my face, cutting like a knife. In the darkness I turned and threw my arms about the girl. As my lips sought hers there came suddenly a cry—a cry that rushed upon me like a resurrection. I felt my companion slip from my arms. By a vivid flash of lightning I caught a glimpse of her face. It was like a shadow, but wearing still that sad smile upon the lips.

The next instant a light flashed before my eyes. The storm had abated, had ceased. All was calm. Beside me stood a tall man in uniform. His appearance seemed strange to me. He suggested that which I had forgotten. He had his arm thrown about me, and he seemed to be supporting me.

"Feel better now?" He spoke in a loud, gruff voice, and it was to me like the memory of a dream.

He held something to my lips. It was like liquid fire. I sipped and turned from him.

"Psyche!" I cried. The ship, the crew, my beloved, all were gone. I stood alone upon the ruins of the Fleur-de-lis. The sea was calm and placid, the sky blue. The rotten planks were beneath my feet.

"Come, hurry," said my companion. "This won't last much longer." And he dragged me to the side of the vessel, where there was a boat. Just before I saw the masts of an English frigate. I felt myself being transported to the boat, and, though I shrieked and struggled, begging that those I had been with on the Fleur-de-lis might be saved or at least that I might remain there also, it was of no avail.

"He is raving," I heard the officer mutter. "The strain has caused insanity, not unusual in such cases."

I thought of Psyche, of my love, and with the despair of the thought I swooned away.

I remained unconscious, ill, for many days, and when I was myself again we were nearing the shores of England. As I tottered weakly upon the deck and, wrapped in a heavy cloak, reclined in my easy chair I suddenly bethought me of my portrait. I put my hand in my bosom. There, close to my heart, I felt it. Tremblingly I drew it forth. I gazed with a sense of joy and relief upon it. Just as it had been completed it was now—the beautiful, perfect features, the exquisite turn of the head, the sweet, melancholy smile.

I pressed it to my lips in a delirium of joy. I spent myself upon it. At least I had this tangible proof of the past. It was more than I had dreamed possible, a treasure. For when I related my experience to those on board I saw from their incredulous faces that they regarded my words but as the incoherent wanderings of a distraught brain.

The captain told me that he had espied a floating wreck, that with his glass it had appeared to him that some one was signaling, and he had sent to investigate. This story, and not mine, was everywhere received among my friends, and as I noted their pitying glances when I eagerly related my narrative, I ceased finally to make any mention of it.

But in the solitude of my chamber I kissed the loved face which I carried against my heart and heaped every dear and endearing name upon it. I had a case of chased gold made and fitted the picture to it. A fine, almost invisible gold thread was fastened to this, and it never left my person. As often as I gazed upon the sweet face which looked back at me I longed with an intense longing for the original. My heart cried out for my lost one. Willingly would I have spent all my days upon that ghastly wreck to have possessed the joy of her presence.

I mingled but little in society, for it held no attraction for me. I was considered a woman hater and looked upon with curiosity. But I was prosperous in my business. Fortune smiled upon me. I made rapid strides and all that I touched seemed to yield to me. But whatever art I had in painting was lost, gone from me forever. Vainly I strove to restore my talent. I could accomplish nothing. Since the painting of that one perfect picture all else was of no avail. Finally I abandoned the effort in despair.

So time passed. Years came and went. I watched the gray hairs come about my temples, and in my uneventful life counted time "by the figures on a dial."

Eighteen years went by. It was the summer of 1889. We all remember the great heat of that year. I took a little trip into Switzerland, to Interlaken. The first evening I was there, after dinner, I stepped out on the piazza of the hotel with my cigar. I raised my eyes from lighting it. I saw standing at the other side of the balcony the figure of a young girl. Her profile only was toward me as she gazed out at the beautiful view. Her light hair was uncovered, and she had a blue scarf twisted about her throat. As I looked she raised one hand to draw it more closely, and I caught the flash of a deep red stone upon her finger.

My heart seemed to stand still. Throwing away my cigar and shaking as with an ague, I approached her. As

I passed her I was obliged to steady myself by the railing. Her face was identically the same as the one I felt against my fast beating heart. She looked at me curiously and with sympathy, and the pallor of my face might well have startled her.

I sought M. Lanze, the maitre d'hotel, and begged to be introduced. He hesitated, but my earnestness increased, and finally he presented me to the young girl. Her name was Marie Ramee, and she was traveling with her invalid mother. She had but just left school.

"You remind me of a dear friend," I said to her in explanation of my presumption. The words quivered upon my lips.

When night came, I took out the portrait. I looked eagerly upon the face. It was indeed a perfect likeness of this French girl. But as I looked it seemed to grow less distinct, or were my eyes tired? I replaced it without kissing the lips as I usually did.

Marie and I were much together. We walked or sat on the broad piazza looking out on the beauties around us. I longed to show her the picture, but refrained. I knew not why. When I looked at it at night it seemed less fresh, less clear. I wondered if my cares had injured it.

There came at last a day when I felt that Marie loved me. I divined that precious gift was mine and for me was reserved God's greatest blessing. Trembling, though I felt that the treasure was already within my reach, I asked for her love. My arms encircled her, her warm lips met mine. Then I told her the story of the Fleur-de-lis—a story I had vowed never to relate again. Her eyes widened, her face paled like a white flower.

"The Fleur-de-lis!" she exclaimed. "Surely it is not possible, dear one! My mother's only sister, my young aunt, a beautiful girl, scarcely 18, was lost on that vessel. It is for her I am named. She was returning from England with a companion and maid. They all perished." Her blue eyes filled with tears. "You see it is not possible, sweetheart."

"But it is," I exclaimed, "and I have her portrait. I painted it, and I will show it to you now." I put my hand in my bosom and drew out the case. With trembling fingers I opened it. Vaguely I gazed at it. There was nothing there; the face had faded utterly!

While I looked, horror stricken, upon the empty case there was breathed close to my ear a faint sigh. Twice it came almost imperceptibly, then it ceased. It was not my companion, for when I looked at her she was smiling. —St. Louis Star.

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