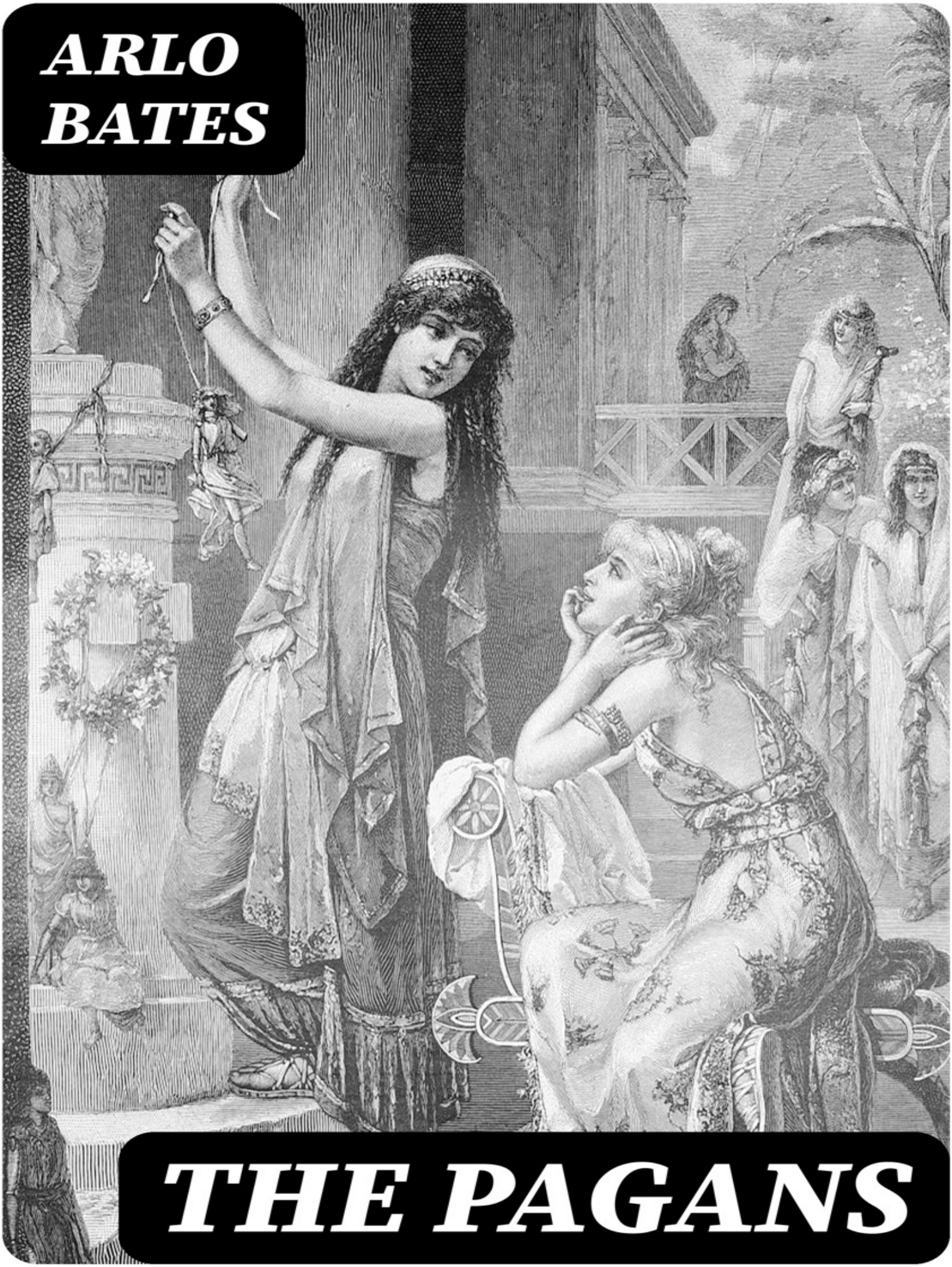
ARLO BATES



THE PAGANS

Arlo Bates

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I.

SOME SPEECH OF MARRIAGE.
Measure for Measure, v—i.

A fine, drizzling rain was striking against the windows of a cosy third floor sitting-room, obscuring what in pleasant weather was a fine distant view of the Charles river. The apartment was evidently that of a woman, as numerous details of arrangement and articles of feminine use suggested; and quite as evidently it was the home of a person of taste and refinement, and of one, too, who had traveled.

Arthur Fenton, a slender young artist, with elegant figure and deep set eyes, was lounging in an easy chair in an attitude well calculated to show to advantage his graceful outlines. For occupation he was turning over a portfolio of sketches, whose authorship was indicated by the attitude of the lady seated near by.

She was a woman of commanding presence, with full lips, whose expression was contradicted by the almost haughty carriage of her fine head and the keen glance of her eye, which indicated too much character for the mere pleasure-seeker. Her hair was of a rich chestnut, and she wore a dress of steel gray cashmere, relieved at the throat by a knot of pale orange, which harmonized admirably with her clear complexion. She watched her companion as if secretly anxious for his good opinion of her drawings, yet too proud to betray any feeling in the matter. He, for his

part, turned them over with seeming listlessness, breaking out now and then with some abrupt remark.

"Yes," he said suddenly, after a ten minutes' silence, "I'm going to be married at once. It will be 'a marriage in the bush,' as the Suabians call an impecunious match, since neither of us has any money; and I, at least, haven't so great a superfluity of brains that in this intelligent age of the world I am ever likely to make much by selling myself; and that is the only way any body gets any money nowadays."

"I hardly think you'd be willing to sell," his companion answered, "no matter how good the market."

"There's where you are wrong," he answered, looking up with a sudden frown, "the worst thing about me is that with sufficient inducement—or even merely from the temptation of an especially good opportunity—I should sell myself body and soul to the Philistines."

"One would hardly fancy it, from the way you talk of Peter Calvin and his followers."

"Oh, as to that," retorted the artist, "don't you see that judicious opposition increases my market value when I am ready to sell? If I could only be sufficiently prominent in my antagonism, I might absolutely fix my own price."

The lady made no answer, but regarded him more intently than ever.

"That's a good thing," he broke out again, holding up a drawing. "Why don't you do that in marble, or better still, in bronze?"

"I am putting it up in clay," she answered. "I thought I had shown it to you. It is to be fired as my first experiment

in a big piece of terra-cotta. That is the first sketch; I think I have improved upon it."

It was the study for a bas-relief representing the months, twelve characteristic figures running forward with the utmost speed. Gifts dropped from their hands as they ran; from the fingers of June fell flowers, from those of August and September ripened fruits, upon which November and December trampled ruthlessly. January, in his haste, overturned an altar against which February stumbles.

"It is melancholy enough," Fenton observed, regarding it closely. "How melancholy every thing is now-a-days?"

"To a man about to be married?" she asked, with a fine smile.

"Oh, always to me. The fact that I am going to be married does not prevent my still being myself."

"Unfortunately not," she returned, with a faint suspicion of sarcasm in her tone. "You pique yourself upon being somber."

"I dare say," answered he, a trifle petulantly. "Pain has become a habit with me; discontent is about the only luxury I can afford, heaven knows!"

"Unless it is gorgeous cravats."

"Oh, that," Fenton said, putting his hand to the blue and gold tie at his throat. "I'm trying to furbish up my old body and decrepit heart against my nuptials, so I invested fifty cents in this tie."

"You couldn't have done it cheaper," remarked she; "though, perhaps," she added dryly, "it is all the rejuvenation is worth."

Fenton smiled grimly and again applied himself to the examination of the drawings, while the other looked out at the rain.

"Boston has more climate, and that far worse," she remarked, "than any other known locality."

"Does that mean that you are going to Herman's this afternoon?" asked
Fenton.

"I should have gone this morning if you had not insisted upon my wasting my time simply because you had determined to waste yours."

Fenton laughed.

"You are frank to a guest," he said. "I wished to be congratulated on my marriage."

"I shall not congratulate you," she answered. "You are spoiled. The women have petted you too much."

"According to the old fairy tale all goes well with the man of whom the women are fond."

"I remember," she said. "I always pitied their wives."

"I shall treat Edith well."

"You are too good-natured not to, I suppose; especially when you look forward to your marriage with such rapture."

"But, Helen, have I ever pretended to believe in marriage? Marriage is a crime! Think of the wretched folly of those who talk of the holiness of love's being protected by the sanctities of marriage. If love is holy, let it have way; if it is not, all the sacraments priests can devise cannot sanctify it."

"Then why, Arthur, do you marry at all?"

"Because marriage is a necessary evil as society is at present constituted."

"But," Helen said slowly, "you who pretend to have so little regard for society—"

"Ah, there it is," he interrupted. "Man is gregarious by instinct; he must do as his fellows do. He must submit to the most absurd *convenances* of his fellowmen, as one sheep jumps where another did though the bar be taken away. If he were strong enough to stand alone he might take conventions by the throat and be a god!"

His outburst was too vehement and sudden not to come from some underlying current of deep feeling, rather than from the present conversation. He had risen while speaking, his head thrown back, his eyes sparkling. His companion regarded him with admiration, not unmixed, however, with amusement.

"And you," she said, "choose to call yourself a man without enthusiasms."

"Yes," replied he, smiling and regaining his seat, "I am a man without enthusiasms."

"That is the cleverest thing you ever said," Helen continued, musingly. "And so we understand you intend to be ruled by conventionality and marry?"

"Precisely; it would be unjust to Edith to even talk to her of my views."

"I should hope so!" exclaimed his hostess. "But you will at least have her to yourself, and that pays for every thing."

"Oh, *peutêtre!*" Fenton returned dubiously, perfectly well aware that the remark had been made to elicit comment, yet too fond of talking to resist temptation and leave it

unanswered, "*peutêtre*, though I never believed in the desert-island theory. It is more in your line; you still have faith in it."

"Oh, I do," she rejoined quickly; "and so would you if you were in love. You'd be content to be on a rock in the mid ocean if she were there."

"Love on a desert island," returned the young man, smiling significantly; "Oh, *le premier jour, c'est bon; le deuxième jour, ce n'est pas si bon; le troisième jour—mon Dieu, mais comment on s'ennuie!*"

"No, no, no," Helen broke in impetuously. "Good, always! Always, always, or never!"

Fenton threw back his head and burst into a shout of laughter.

"'Twere errant folly to presume,
Love's flame could burn and not consume,"

he sang, going off again into peals of laughter. "Good by, *mon amie*; oh, *mais comment on s'en*—"

"Stop," interrupted she. "I'll have no more blasphemy."

"Good-by, then," he said, picking up his hat.

"You may as well stay to lunch," his hostess said rising.

"No," returned he. "I must go and write to Edith."

And off he went, humming:

"'Twere errant folly to presume
Love's flame could burn and not consume."

II.

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THE HEAVY MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT.

Measure for Measure; iv—i.

As many of the Boston clocks as ever permitted themselves so far to break through their constitutional reserve as to speak above a whisper, had announced in varying tones that it was midnight, yet the group of men seated in easy attitudes before the fire in one of the sitting-rooms of the St. Filipe Club showed no signs of breaking up. Indeed, the room was so pleasant and warm, with its artistically combined colors, its good pictures and glowing grates, and the storm outside raged so savagely, beating its wind and sleet against the windows, that a reluctance to issue from the clubhouse door was only natural, and there would be little room for surprise should the men conclude to remain where they were until daylight.

The conversation, carried on amid clouds of fragrant tobacco smoke and with potations, not excessive but comfortably frequent, was quiet and unflagging, possessing, for the most part, that mellow quality which is seldom attained before the small hours and the third cigar.

"Yes, virtue has to be its own reward," Tom Bently was saying lightly, "for, don't you see, the people who practice it are too narrow-minded to appreciate any thing else."

"And that makes it the most poorly paid of all the professions," was the retort of Fred Rangely, who was lounging in a big easy chair; "except literature, that is. Even sin is said to get death for its wage, and that is something."

"Virtue may be an inestimable prize for any thing you newspaper men can tell. It is not a commodity you are used

to handling."

"Literature has little to do with virtue, it is true," was the response. "Who would read a novel about virtuous people, for instance? I'd as soon study the catechism."

"How art has to occupy itself with iniquity," Fenton observed with a philosophical puff of his cigar. "Or what people call iniquity; though a truer definition would be nature."

"Painting occupies itself with iniquity in its models," Rangely said lazily. "I heard to-day—"

"No scandals," interrupted Grant Herman, good humoredly. "You are going to tell the story about Flackerman, I know."

The speaker was the most noticeable man in the group. Tom Bently, an artist, was a tall, swarthy fellow with thin black beard, stubble-like hair, and a gypsyish look. Next came Fred Rangely, an author of some reputation, of whom his friends expected great things, rather short in stature, thick-set, and with a good-tempered, intelligent face. Fenton's appearance has already been touched upon; he was of elegant figure, with a face intellectual, high-bred, but marred by a suspicion of superciliousness. Amid these friends, Herman gained something by contrast with each and naturally became the center of the group. This prominence was partly due to his figure, of large mold, finely formed and firmly knit, carrying always an air of restful strength and composure which made itself felt in whatever company he found himself. His head, although not out of proportion with his fine shoulders and trunk, was somewhat massive, a fact which was emphasized a little by

the profusion of his locks, now plentifully sprinkled with gray. His face was indicative of much character, the lips firm and full, the eyes large and dark, now serious under their heavy brows and now twinkling with contagious merriment.

"It isn't every model you can talk scandal about," chuckled Bently, in reply to Herman's remark. "We had a devilishly pretty fuss in Nick Featherstone's studio the other day. Nick found his match in the new model."

"What new model?" inquired Fenton, arranging himself into an effective pose before the fire.

"Do you remember the picture of an Italian girl that Tom Demming sent to the Academy exhibition two years ago? A homely face with lots of character in it, and a splendid pose?"

"You mean the one he called *Marietta?* It was well done, if I remember."

"Oh, stunningly. That's the girl. She's just landed, and Demming gave her letters to me. She's a staving good model!"

"But she isn't pretty."

"No; but she is suggestive. She has one of those faces that you can make all sorts of things out of. Rollins made a sketch of her head that is stunning; a lovely thing; and it looked like her too. Then her figure is perfect, and what is more, she knows how to pose. She meets an idea half way, you know, and hits the expression wonderfully. She has given me points for my picture every time she has been at the studio."

"Is her name Ninitta?" Grant Herman asked.

"Yes; do you know any thing about her?"

"I think I've seen her in Rome. But what is she doing on this side of the water?"

To Arthur Fenton's keen perception there seemed more feeling in the tone than an inquiry into the affairs of a stranger would be likely to evoke, but he gave the matter no especial thought.

"Yes," he echoed lightly, "what is she here for? There is no art in this country. New York is the home of barbarism and Boston of Philistinism; while Cincinnati is a chromo imitation of both. She'd better have staid abroad."

"Your remark is true, Arthur," Bently laughed, "if it isn't very relevant. What people in this country want isn't art at all, but what some Great Panjandrum or other abroad has labeled art. They don't know what is good."

"That is so true," was the retort, "that I almost wonder they don't buy your pictures, Tom."

"But why does the girl come to America?" persisted Herman, with a faint trace of irritation in his tone. "She could do far better at home."

"Oh, Demming wrote that she was bound to come. You can never tell what ails a woman anyhow. Probably she has a lover over here somewhere."

Herman made no reply save by an involuntary lowering of his heavy brows, and Rangely brought the conversation back to its starting-point by asking:

"But what about Nick Featherstone?"

"Oh, Nick? Well, Nick tried to kiss her yesterday, and she offered to stab him with some sort of a devilish dagger arrangement she carries about like an opera heroine."

"Featherstone is always a strong temptation to an honest man's boot," growled Herman out of his beard, as he sat with his head sunk upon his breast, staring into the fire.

"They had a scene that wouldn't have done discredit to a first-class opera-bouffe company," Bently went on, laughing at the remembrance.

"Nick was fool enough to hollo to somebody in the next room, and the result was that we all came trooping in like a chorus. It was absurd enough."

And he laughed afresh.

"But the girl?" persisted Grant Herman, not removing his gaze from the fire. "How did she take it?"

"Oh, she was as calm and cold as you please. She gathered herself together and went off without any fuss."

"I wish when you are done with her, you'd send her round to me," Herman rejoined. "I want a model for a figure, and if I remember her, she'll do capitally."

He rose as he spoke, with the air of a man who intends going home.

"By the way," Fenton said to him, "isn't the Pagan night next week?
Don't you have it this month?"

"Yes; you'll get your invitations sometime or other. Good night all."

"Oh, don't break good company," Rangely remonstrated. "I have half a bottle here, and I do hate an alcoholic soliloquy."

But the movement for departure was general, and in a few moments more the members of the company were

wending their individual ways homeward through the pelting rain.

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THE SHOT OF ACCIDENT.
Othello; iv.—i.

The sun shone brightly in at the windows of a little bare studio next morning, as if to atone for the gloom of the darkness and storm of the night. The Midas touch of its rays fell upon the hair of Helen Greyson, turning its wavy locks into gold as she softly sang over her modeling.

She seemed to find in her work a joy which accorded well with the bright day. Pinned to the wall was an improved sketch of the bas-relief whose design had attracted Fenton's notice in her portfolio, while before the artist stood a copy in clay, upon which she was working with those mysterious touches which to the uninitiated are mere meaningless dabs, yet under which the figures were growing into sightliness and beauty.

Suddenly her song was interrupted by the sound of footsteps without, followed by a tap upon her door.

"Come," she called; and Grant Herman entered in response to the invitation.

He carried in his arms a large vase, about whose sides green and golden dragons coiled themselves in fantastic relief.

"Your vase came from the kiln," he said, "and I knew you would want to see it at once. It is the most successful firing they have done here."

"Oh, I am so glad," she returned, laying down her modeling tools, and approaching him eagerly. "I was sure there wouldn't be a head or a tail left by the time the poor monsters came out of the fiery furnace. What a splendid color that back is! And that golden fin is gorgeous."

"Yes, Mrs. Greyson," Herman said, "you have produced a veritable dragon's brood this time. I can almost hear them hiss."

"Do you know," she responded, smoothing the glittering shapes with half chary touches. "I should not be wholly willing to have the vase in my room at night. They might, you know, come to life and go gliding about in a ghastly way."

"I always wondered," the sculptor observed, "that Eve had the courage to talk with the serpent. Do you suppose she squealed when she saw him?"

"Oh, no, she probably divined that mischief was brewing, and that contented her."

Herman had set the vase where all its gorgeous hues were brought out by the sun, which sparkled and danced upon every spine and scale of the writhing monsters. He walked away from it to observe the effect at a greater distance.

"There is no pleasure like that of creating," he said. "Man is a god when he can look on his work and pronounce it good."

"Which is seldom," she returned, "unless in the one instant after its completion when we still see what we intended rather than what we have made."

"It is fortunate our work cannot rise up to reproach us for the wide difference between our intents and our performances. Fancy one of my statues taking me to task because it hasn't the glory it had in my brain."

"It is on that account," Mrs. Greyson said smiling, "that I fancy
Galatea must have been most uncomfortable to live with. Whenever
Pygmalion found fault, she had always the retort ready: 'At least I am
exactly what you chose to make me.' Poor Pygmalion!"

"It was no more true than in the case of every man that marries; we all bow down to ideals, I suppose. Except," he added with a little hesitation, "myself, of course."

The words were somewhat awkward in the hesitating accent which gave them a suggestiveness at which the faintest of flushes mounted to her cheek. She bent her observations more closely on the vase.

"It is fired so much better than the last miserable failure," observed she, going to a shelf and reaching after a dusty vase, massive and fantastic, which had been ruined in the kiln.

"Let me help you," Herman said.

But she had already loosened the vase, which proved heavier than she expected, and it was only by darting forward, and throwing his arms about her, that the sculptor was enabled to save her from a severe blow. The vase fell crashing to the floor, breaking into heavy shards, rattling the windows and the casts upon the wall by the concussion.

An exclamation escaped him. He had drawn Mrs. Greyson backward, and for a brief instant, held her in his strong clasp. It was an accident which to mere acquaintances might mean nothing; to lovers, every thing. Herman was for a moment pale with the fear that Helen might be injured; then the hot blood surged into his cheeks as he released his hold and stepped back, He bent over the fragments of the vase that she might not see his face, and by so doing, as he reflected afterward, he failed to perceive what was her expression. He straightened himself with an impetuous movement, and came a step nearer.

"How can you be so careless?" he demanded, almost with irritation. "It might have killed you."

"I did not remember that it was so heavy," she returned, a little pale and panting. "Do you think I was trying to pull it on my head? I am very much obliged, though. You have saved me a heavy blow at least. There is not much left of that unlucky vase. It was always ill-starred."

"All's well that ends well," returned the sculptor, sufficiently recovering his self-control to speak lightly; "only don't run such a risk another time."

"Oh, I assure you," she replied, "I do not make my vases either to break my head or to be broken themselves. I shall take better care of this one, you may be confident."

"I was more concerned for yourself than for the vase."

"For myself it really does not so much matter."

"It is scarcely kind to your friends to say so."

"Oh,—my friends!"

Over her face came an inexplicable expression, which might be gloom or exultation, and the tone in which she spoke was equally difficult of interpretation. She seemed determined, however, to fall into no snares of speech; she smiled upon the sculptor with a glance at once radiant and perplexing.

She turned towards the new vase and began slowly to whirl the modeling-stand upon which Herman had placed it. A thousand reflections danced and flickered about the little room as it revolved in the sunlight, glowing and glittering like the sparkles from a carcanet of jewels. The fiery monsters seemed to twine and coil in living motion as the light shone upon their emerald and golden scales and bristling spines.

"I wonder if Eve's serpent was so splendid," Mrs. Greyson laughed, twirling the stand yet faster upon its pivot. "Would I do for Mother Eve, do you think?"

"If the power to tempt a man be the test," he retorted with an odd brusqueness quite disproportionate to the apparent lightness of the occasion, the dark blood mantling his face, "there can be no doubt of it."

A swift change came over her at his words. She left the vase and stand abruptly. She flushed crimson then grew pale and looked about her with a half frightened glance, as if uncertain which way to turn. The movement touched her companion as no words could have done.

"I beg your pardon," he muttered.

And with a still deeper flush on his swarthy cheek he turned abruptly and quitted the room.

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AFTER SUCH A PAGAN CUT.
Henry VIII.; i.—3.

"In the first place," said Edith Caldwell brightly, "you know, Arthur, that I ought not to be in Boston at all, when I have so much to see to at home; and in the second place Aunt Calvin is shocked at the unconventionality of my being seen any where in public after the wedding cards are out; but I was determined to see this picture. I saw it when he had just begun it in Paris, you know, three years ago."

"As for being seen," Arthur Fenton returned, "we certainly shall never be seen here. The Art Museum is the most solitary place in the city; and as for conventionalities, why, the wedding is so quiet and so far off that I think nobody here even realizes that the stupendous event is imminent at all."

"Oh, but I do," Edith said, laughing and clasping her hands with a pretty gesture of mock despair. "I feel that the day of my bondage is advancing with unfaltering tread, like the day of doom."

"Then you should do as I do by the day of doom, disbelieve in it altogether until it comes."

"It is of no use. Even disbelief will not alter the almanac, as you'll find when the day of doom swoops down on you."

They were sitting upon one of the hard benches in the picture-gallery of the Art Museum before an important work just sent over from Europe by its American purchaser. The afternoon light was beginning to be a little dim, and Edith was troubled with the consciousness that the errands which had brought her for the day to Boston were far from being accomplished. It was pleasant to linger, however, especially as this might be the last tranquil day she should pass with Arthur before their marriage.

She rose from her seat and crossed to the picture of Millet representing a peasant girl with a distaff of flax in her hand. Fenton sat a moment looking after his betrothed, critically though fondly, then with a deliberate movement he left his seat and followed her.

"Think of the distance between this country and that picture," he remarked, regarding the beautiful canvas. "Art in America is simply an irreclaimable mendicant that stands on the street corners and holds out the catch-penny hand of a beggar."

"Oh, no," Miss Caldwell replied, turning her clear glance to his, "that is only an impostor that pretends to be art. The real goddess has her temples here."

"Yes," returned he, with a laugh that covered a sneer, "but not in the way you mean."

A shadow passed over her face; she turned a wistful glance towards him.

"I cannot understand, Arthur," she said, "why you speak so bitterly about art here. Of course, all great men are apt to be misunderstood at first, but you—"

"I am over estimated," he interrupted, inly vexed at having given the conversation this turn. "It is only for the sake of talking, *ma petite*. Don't mind it."

"But, Arthur," she persisted, "I want to say something. Uncle Peter talks as if you sided with the artists here who—who—"

She was wholly at a loss to phrase what she wished to say, both because her ideas were rather vague and because she feared lest she might offend her lover by talking upon a subject which he had markedly avoided. He made now a fresh effort to divert the talk into a new channel.

"Never mind the artists," he said, "we really must go. Besides, you are only in town for a day and it is no use to attempt the discussion of questions which involve the entire order of the universe. I promised Mrs. Calvin I'd bring you back in half-an-hour, and we've been here twice that time already."

He ran on brightly and rapidly, leading the way out of the gallery and down the stairs, and she followed with a suspicion of shadow upon her face as if the subject of which she had spoken was one of real importance to her.

"Come in and see the jolly old Pasht," Arthur suggested, as they descended the wide staircase.

She acquiesced by turning with him into the room devoted to the Way collection of Egyptian antiquities, in the center of which stands a somewhat mutilated granite statue of the goddess Pasht, the cat-headed deity, referred to the