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## THE BUD AND BLOSSOM.

A REASON FOR BACHELORISM.

BY MRS. SERA SMITH.

"You have told me, Mr. Hunter, at least a dozen times, you would reveal to me the secret of your bachelorism; now we have no visitors, and no prospect of any; the quiet patter of the rain has tempted you to cigar and slippers; and that dim burning of the coal in the grate, the drowsy fire of June, just enough to dispel the damp, and not enough to rouse one uneasy nerve, is of itself a pledge for a long, tranquil evening. And yet—by no means, my dear sir, do n't toss aside your cigar, and as to sighing, it is out of the question—you are too stout for sentiment, have a well-to-do air, a sort of tell-tale good-dinner aspect, that do n't accord well with the sentimental."

Mr. Hunter drew from his bosom a small miniature, the portraits of two sisters, the one a girl of seventeen, the other a child of seven or eight—a bud and a blossom of female loveliness. Even I forgot the well-to-do air, and found myself unconsciously sympathizing as his smooth, unmarked face settled into an expression of melancholy. To be sure it was unnatural, and, just as it was about to reassume its habitual look of easy content, and the cigar was quietly restored to the lips, he caught a glimpse of my eyes, and they *might* have looked mischievous, for he flung the cigar aside, and declared he would never, no never, satisfy my curiosity. "Women were all alike heartless, untruthful, and full of whim. A man never knew where to find them—one thing to-day, another to-morrow. A book that is all preface—the reader never gets beyond the first page. No wonder married men are lean and cadaverous. That same lean Cassius must have been a married man. Ohello's occupation was done when he became a married man. Witness the

spleen of Iago—it is that of a married man. Macbeth was a married murderer—it makes me desperate—"

"Yes, desperate to be married. I won't enter into a defence, because, my dear sir, I do so much want that same story. I forgive this little ebullition of bachelor spleen, believing it may be of service to you. But, Mr. Hunter, here is the secret of all the bachelorism in the world—Inconstancy—remember the old ballad that saith,

'Sigh no more, ladye, sigh no more,  
Men were deceivers ever—  
One foot on sea and one on shore,  
To one thing constant never.'

"Now do tell me the story of these pretty girls, and I promise not to annoy you."

Mr. Hunter was too good-natured to refuse—bachelors *are* good natured.

"This is a painting from a sketch I made of the two girls, shortly before we embarked upon that fatal voyage. They were standing as you now see; Ellen with the same tranquil, gentle demeanor, and the roguish Anne in this very attitude indeed, but a thousand changeful meanings flitting over her face.

"I was but twenty-two—full of life, health, and the enthusiasm of early manhood. Ellen was the realization of my dreams, the one pure and blessed being forever floating about the fancies of the imagination, the impersonation of my ideal of womanhood at that time; meek, trusting, dependent, and loving with a singleness and purity of soul that sanctified every emotion. I need not say that the most restless dream of ambition, the most alluring incitements to pleasure, were as nothing to me when weighed by the wealth of her guileless tones of



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affection, the earnest and touching accents of tenderness that fell from her sweet lips.

"I was about to return to one of our southern cities, there to prosecute my profession, and Mrs. Lacey, a widow of some fortune, and long an invalid, determined to arrange her affairs and remove thither also, in company with her two daughters, my sweet Ellen and Anne.

"The first evening of our voyage Ellen joined me for a promenade on the deck, and as she confidently put her arm within mine, I shall never forget the renewed sense of manhood I experienced at that moment, nor the exquisite delight arising from a consciousness that a creature of such grace and tenderness relied on me, and me only, for protection. Believe me, too, a woman can realize but once, I mean only in the one individual who engrosses her whole heart, that sweet sense of dependence, that delight in appealing to the manliness of a being; to whom alone she is not ashamed to confess her weakness.

"You smile, but we bachelors know more of your woman hearts than you do yourselves. For instance, you admire strength, because you are physically inferior. You admire intellect, because however intellectual you may be, you delight still more in the affections. Beauty is nothing to you, but self-sustaining manliness is every thing. You admire nobleness and generosity of sentiment, because they are not your own characteristics—courage because you are cowards—"

"Oh! Mr. Hunter, Mr. Hunter, I do protest—"

"Yet hear me through. Love with a woman must be commingled with reverence. She cannot love deeply, fervently; she cannot feel that the whole of her own exhaustless and beautiful sympathies are welling up to the light, like a pure fountain gushing up to the sunshine, only as love has become an idolatry, a holiness, a religion; and wo unto her when such is its nature! Earth has set its seal against it; the very stars look down sadly upon it; every where an altar arises to the living God, on which the incense that may not, cannot find a worthy censor here, is transferred to that of the Eternal. Thus it is that women are more religious than men—and thus it is that one of the most gifted of their number has said,

"Oh, hope not, ask thou not too much  
Of sympathy below—  
Few are the hearts, whence one same touch  
Holds the sweet waters flow—  
Few, and by still conflicting powers  
Forbidden here to meet—  
Such ties would make this world of ours  
Too fair for aught so fleet."

"But to my story. We had been out three or four days, with favorable winds, and the sea and sky had revealed to us each day their varied aspect of beauty. A change had been threatening through the day, and as the night approached the dense settling of the vapors seemed to hem us in, and that strange utterance of the elements, where they call from point to point, holding as they do undivided empire over the world of waters, was sublime, not to say appalling.

Mrs. Lacey was a timid woman, and though the thread of life seemed every moment ready to sunder, she still clung to it with a wild tenacity. Ellen thought not of herself, and I believe she would have shrunk from witnessing the fearful uproar about us, as the vessel plunged onward, bravely onward, yet helpless even in her strength. I was leaning against the companion-way, alive to an almost painful sense of sublimity, when the light form of Anne rushed into my arms, and clasping hers about me she buried her face in my bosom.

"Oh! Charles, dear brother Charles, don't send me back—let me stay with you and I shall fear nothing."

"I gathered the sweet child to my bosom, and by a strange instinct approached the tattered of the ship. I became aware of a sudden and terrible tumult—of a blackness even more dense than the thick clouds about us. Anne clung convulsively to my neck, and I instinctively put out my hands for support, for there was a fearful crash, a wild reeling beneath me, and I felt myself lifted from my feet and borne onward in the thick darkness. I was clinging to the chains of a larger ship that had crossed our track in that fearful storm, and had passed over her gallant souls, leaving all to perish, save us two so wondrously preserved.

"When afflictions come singly upon ourselves we are overpowered with a sense of desolation; we tread the wine-press alone, and the burden is often too much for human endurance; but when the calamity is general the individual is merged in the many, and the selfishness of grief is forgotten. I scarcely wept for the gentle and beautiful Ellen. I was conscious of a dull aching weight of bereavement; but then I felt as an atom, a quivering, vital one indeed, but yet only as an atom in the great mass of human suffering. The ocean, too, pure and deep, seemed a fit resting place for the good and lovely.

When Anne awoke to consciousness, she called frantically for her mother and sister. Slowly and gently I revealed the sad reality. She stood with her little hands clasped, her wet hair streaming over her shoulders, and those deep earnest eyes gazing into mine with an intensity that pained me to the very heart. When all had become clear to her, she dropped her hands slowly and the tears gathered into her eyes; then, as by a new impulse, she drew herself to my bosom, and nestled there, like a dove, weary and desolate.

"Tender and beautiful sufferer! she gathered her duty only from my eyes, and assented to the slightest intimation of my will. I was her only friend on the earth, and her gentle nature, now doubly gentle in her sorrow, lavished all its tenderness on me.

"Gradually she awoke from the listlessness induced by newness to suffering, and the wonderful elasticity of her character revealed a thousand glowing and impassioned traits, that had hitherto escaped my observation. Frank and courageous, she regarded things as they were in themselves, and not as they might appear to others. Challenging the

opinions of none, with an intuitive feminine tact, her conclusions were always what one would desire.

"Nature is, after all, the best teacher—would women but yield themselves to the promptings of a simple and womanly nature, they would be far more effective than they at present are. Our sex are worshippers of truth—you smile—but it is true nevertheless; and might you, dared you preserve your primitive truthfulness of heart, we should fall down and worship you.

"But I digress, and am describing Anne rather as she appeared when, like Spenser's Amoree, she reclined in the lap of womanhood, than while she sat upon my knee, a tender and simple child.

"I would scarcely assert that Anne was endowed with genius; and yet I know not—at any rate it was thoroughly a woman's genius—earnest, truthful, affectionate, dependent, and yet nobly self-sustained—impassioned and yet never mistaking or perverting her emotions—embodying every quality of her sex, and yet elevating all—gay as a bird, simple as a child; her own bright nature investing all things with an ideal halo, and yet with a singular clearness of perception and soundness of judgment correcting all such illusions; a creature of contradictions, and yet grand in her consistency; a true woman; the life-study of a man, aye, and were he the wisest of his sex, he might never exhaust the sweet subject; just not an angel, but all a woman—"

"A creature not too bright nor good,  
For human nature's daily food;  
For transient sorrow, simple wiles,  
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles."

"The ship that had wrecked our own good barque was bound on a three years cruise, and all that time Anne was the only one of her sex on board. She never seemed to feel the peculiarity of her situation, all she said or did was feminine and becoming, and her little state room worthy of Goethe's Margery; it is not every maiden keeps her room so chary; might have been said of her.

"Never shall I forget the wild delight with which she hailed our approach to land, nor the care with which she nurtured the plants that were to relieve the monotony of the voyage—the touching gratitude with which she received the gift of a bird or animal that was to be her especial pet. And then to mark her many little expedients to preserve the order and taste of her poor garments: true, nothing could be more picturesque than her half oriental costume, the loose trowsers and robe confined by a girdle that every sailor vied in keeping tasteful. Her dark, changeful eyes and luxuriant hair might well afford to meet a skin embrowned by exposure, but rich with the brightest hue of health. The sailors called her the little queen, from her proud air, and the officers applied a thousand aristocratic epithets, all indicating a playful reverence. She was a child in heart, but a woman in manner.

"I need not recount her studies, nor that pretty reserve that made her apply to me, and to me only, for aid. Alas! I knew not the poison I thus imbibed.

I dreamed not that that sweet child could ever be aught to me but a sister.

"At length, after an absence of four years, I placed the dear girl under the protection of my mother. I was an only child, and she received Anne as the gift of God, a new object of attachment.

"But why dwell upon these things? Why tell how the child ripened into womanhood—beautiful, most beautiful, not in feature merely, though even there few of her sex were her equals; but beautiful in thought, in voice, and motion—that combination of parts, that wondrous result of grace, even where shades may be defective yet producing an harmonious whole? Why tell how her confiding, sisterly attachment remained unshaken, while I learned to love her with all the fervor of manhood? I felt it was hopeless, and became an exile from home, that I might not inflict a pang upon her trusting heart. After a long absence, in which time, which had only softened, I fondly trusted had cured me of my passion, I returned to find Anne but more lovely and attached, and now doubly lost to me. When she pressed her maidenly lips to my cheek, and again called me brother, I rebelled at the term and madly revealed the truth.

"Poor Anne! she recoiled from me trembling and in tears. At length she put her arms about my neck, and with the same gentle accent, the same confiding tenderness that I remembered upon that fearful night at sea, she uttered—"

"Dear, dear brother Charles, am I not your sister? You do love me, you will not cast me from you, though—though I have dared to love another."

"I raised her head, and her calm eyes met mine, though her cheek and bosom were dyed with blushes. "Never, dear Anne, you shall be my sister; God help me to regard you as such only."

"I kept my promise. Oh, God! did I not, through years of agony that language might never utter!

"Anne became the wife of another, and never, never, can I enough admire her refined womanly deportment. Her whole soul, with all its unutterable wealth of loving, was now his; and yet in my presence all was chastened to a tranquil content, as if she, truthful as she was, dreaded I should know her deep fount of feeling, lest it might enhance my own sense of solitude. "Most excellent wretch," Othello would have said; every where I traced the evidences of her benevolence, and every where was she mindful of my happiness.

"Holy and generous woman! the earnest, the true-hearted—earth was no place for thee. Enough, she died—died ere a shadow had fallen upon her bright nature—ere the thought had assumed shape that the creature of her idolatry had brought a desecrated gift to the altar."

How many of that class—deemed by the throng so cold and passionless—have for their solitary life some such cause as that which made my friend a bachelor! Surely there lives not man or woman who has not at some period loved; and thousands, like the heroes of fiction, make but one cast of the heart.