

Saltus Edgar

Eden: An Episode



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I

It was not until Miss Menemon's engagement to John Usselex was made public that the world in which that young lady moved manifested any interest in her future husband. Then, abruptly, a variety of rumors were circulated concerning him. It was said, for instance, that his real name was Tchurchenthaler and that his boyhood had been passed tending geese in a remote Bavarian dorf, from which, to avoid military service, he had subsequently fled. Again, it was affirmed that in Denmark he was known as Baron Varvedsen, and that he had come to this country not to avoid military service, but the death penalty, which whoso strikes a prince of the blood incurs. Others had heard that he was neither Bavarian nor Dane, but the outlawed nephew of a Flemish money-lender whose case he had rifled and whose daughter he had debauched. And there were other people who held that he had found Vienna uninhabitable owing to the number of persistent creditors which that delightful city contained.

In this conflict of gossip the real facts were as difficult of discovery as the truth about Kaspar Hauser, and in view of the divergence of rumors there were people sensible enough to maintain that as these rumors could not all be true, they might all be false. Among the latter was Usselex himself. His own account of his antecedents was to the effect that his father was a Cornishman, his mother a Swiss governess, and that he had been brought up by the latter in Bâle, from which city he had at an early age set out to make his fortune. Whether or not this statement was exact is a matter of minor moment. In any event, supposing for argument's sake that he had more names than are necessary, has not Vishnu a thousand? And as for debts, did not Cæsar owe a hundred million sesterces? But however true or untrue his own account of himself may have been, certain it was that he spoke three languages with the same accent, and that a decennary or so after landing at Castle Garden his name was familiar to everyone connected with banks and banking.

At the time contemporaneous to the episodes with which these pages have to deal John Usselex had reached that age in which men begin to take an interest in hair restorers. In his face was the pallor of a plastercast, his features were correct and coercive, in person he was about the average height, slim and well-preserved. He carried glasses rimmed with tortoise-shell. He wore a beard cut fan-shape and a moustache with drooping ends. Both were gray. In moments of displeasure he smiled, but behind the glasses no merriment was discernible; when they were removed his eyes glowed luminous and shrewd, and in them was a glitter that suggested a reflection caught from the handling and glare of gold. In the financial acceptance of the term he was good; he was at the head of a house that possessed the confidence of the Street, his foreign correspondents were of the best, but in the inner circles of New York life he was as unknown as Ischwanbrat.

Miss Menemon, on the other hand, had no foreign correspondents, but in the circles alluded to she was thoroughly at home. Her father, Mr. Petrus Menemon, was not accounted rich, but he came of excellent stock, and her mother, long since deceased, had been an Imryck. Now, to be an Imryck, to say nothing of being a Menemon, is to be Somebody. Miss Menemon, moreover, was not quite twenty-two years of age. To nine people out of ten she represented little else than the result of the union of an Imryck and a Menemon; but to the tenth, particularly when the tenth happened to be a man, she was as attractive a girl as New York could produce. As a child she had not been noticeably pretty, but when, as the phrase is, she came out, she was assuredly fair to see. She was slight and dark of hair, her face was like the cameo of a Neapolitan boy, but her eyes were not black, they were of that sultry blue which is observable in the ascension of tobacco-smoke through a sunbeam; and about her mouth and in the carriage of her head was something that reminded you of the alertness and

expectancy of a bird. She was not innocent, if innocence be taken in the sense of ignorance, but she was clean of mind, of eye, and of tongue. She had been better instructed than the majority of society girls, or, if not better instructed, at least she had read more, and this perhaps, because on emerging from the nursery her father's first care had been to make her unafraid of books.

Petrus Menemon himself was a tall, spare man, scrupulous as to his dress, and quiet of manner. In his face was the expression of one who is not altogether satisfied, and yet wishes everyone else to be content. He had an acquired ignorance which he called agnosticism. He enjoyed the formidable reputation of being well-read; but it is only just to explain that he was well read chiefly in the archaic sense – in the bores and pedants of antiquity. Yet, if his taste was stilted, he made no effort to inculcate that taste in his daughter; he gave her the run of the library and allowed her to drag from the Valhalla of the back books-helves what friends and relatives she chose. Indeed, his attitude to her was one of habitual indulgence. By nature she was as capricious as a day in February, a compound of sunlight, of promise, and of snow; and when she was wilful – and she was often that – he made no effort to coerce, he argued with her as one might with a grown person, seriously, and without anger. And something of that seriousness she caught from him, and with it confidence in his wisdom and trust in his love. To her thinking no one in all the world was superior to that gentle-mannered man.

When she left the nursery she was supplied with a governess, and as she grew older, with masters of different arts and tongues. But as a child she was often lonely, and the children whom she saw playing in the streets were to her objects of indignant envy. On Sunday it was her father's custom to take her to morning service, and afterward to her grandmother, a lady who lived alone in a giant house in South Washington Square, in the upper rooms of which the child was persuaded that coffins lay stored in heaps. During these visits, which were continued every Sunday until the old lady died, an invariable programme was observed: the child repeated the catechism, recited a verse from the hymnal, after which she was gratified with sponge-cake and a glass of milk, and then was permitted to look at the pictures in a large Bible, in which, by way of frontispiece, was an engraving of a man with a white beard, whom her grandmother said was God. Such, with the exception of tiresome promenades on Second Avenue, where her father's house was situated, such were her relaxations.

And so it came about that in the enforced loneliness of her childhood she ransacked a library in which the "Picara Justina" of Fray Andrs Perez stood side-by-side with the Kalevala, a library in which works stupid as the Koran and dead as Coptic touched covers with the "Idyls of the King" and the fabliaux of mediæval France. Soon she had made friends with the heroes and heroines that are the caryatides of the book-shelves. In their triumphs she exulted; by their failures she was depressed. At the age of thirteen she spoke of King Arthur as though he were her first cousin. The next year she was in love with Amadis of Gaul.

A little later she hung on the wall of her bedroom a bit of embroidery of her own manufacture, a square piece of watered silk, on which in bold relief stood the characters 60 H, a device understood by no one but herself, one which her imagination had evolved out of the aridity of a French copy-book, and which each night and each morning said to her, *Sois sans tache*.

Indeed, her brain had been the haunt of many an odd conceit, the home of fays and goblins. Her imagination was always a garden to her except when it happened to be a morass. She had not only castles in Spain, she had dungeons as well; and of them she was architect, mason, and inhabitant too. It was her mood – a circumstance aiding – that dowered her fancy with wings. Now she would be transported to new horizons where multicolored suns batted on intervals of unsuspected charm, now she would be tossed into the opacity of an abyss where there would not be so much as a goaf for resting-place. Now Pleasure would lord the day, now the sceptre would be held by Pain. As often as not the intonation of a voice, the expression of a face, any incident however trivial would suffice, and at once a panorama would unroll, with no one but herself for spectator. As she grew older her mind became more staid, its changes and convolutions less frequent. The goblins were replaced by glyptodons, Perrault by Darwin. But the prismatic quality of her fancy remained unimpaired. She

garmented everyone with its rays. Those who were nearest to her enjoyed the gayest hues; in others she looked steadfastly for the best. And yet, in spite of this, or precisely on that account, no one was ever better able to distort trifles into nuclei of doubt. In brief, she was March one minute and May the next. Apropos of some misunderstanding, her father said to her jestingly one day, "Eden, did you ever hear of such a thing as hemiopia?" The girl shook her head. "Well," he continued, "there is a disease of that name which affects the eye in such a manner that only half the object looked at is seen. Don't you think you had better consult an oculist?"

Meanwhile her education had been completed by Shakspeare. Love she had learned of Juliet, jealousy of Othello. But of despair Hamlet had been incompetent to teach. She was instinct with generous indignations, enthusiastic of great deeds, and through the quality of her temperament unable to reason herself into an understanding of the base. When she "came out" she found herself unable to share the excited interest which girls of her age exhibited in Delmonico balls. At the dinners and dances to which she was bidden, she was chilled at the discovery that platitude reigned. As a rule, the younger men fought shy of her. She acquired the reputation of making disquieting answers and remarks of curious inappositeness. But now and then she met people that found her singularly attractive and whose hearts went out to her at once, yet these were always people with whom she fancied herself in sympathetic rapport.

Among this class was a man who succeeded Amadis. His name was Dugald Maule; he was six or seven years her senior, and by profession an attorney and counsellor-at-law. It should be noted, however, that he did not look like one. He looked like an athlete that had taken honors, a man to be admired by women and respected by men. In private theatricals he was much applauded. He had studied law in the hope of being judge, and in being judge of pronouncing the death sentence. He could imagine no superber rôle than that. To him, after months of self-examination, Eden Menemon surrendered her heart. The surrender was indeed difficult, but as surrenders go it was complete.

The threads by which he succeeded in attaching her to him it is unnecessary to describe. Suffice it to say that little by little she grew to believe that in him the impeccable resided. She had accustomed herself to consider love in the light of a plant which if rightly tended would bloom into a witherless rose. She had told him this, and together they had watched the bud expand, and when at last it was fulfilled to the tips he saw it in her eyes. That evening, when he had gone, the sense of happiness was so acute that she became quasi-hysterical. The joy of love, slowly intercepted and then wholly revealed, vibrated through the chords of her being, overwhelming her with the force of an unexperienced emotion, and throwing her for relief into a paroxysm of tears. Then followed a day of wonder, in which hallucinations of delight alternated with tremors of self-depreciation. It seemed to her that she was unworthy of such an one as he. For, to her, in her inexperience, he was perfection indeed, one unsulliable and mailed in right. And then, abruptly, as such things occur, without so much as a monition, she read in public print that he had been summoned as a co-respondent. To overwrought nerves as were hers, the announcement was rapider in its effect than a microbe. A fever came that was obliterating as the morrow of steps on the sand. For a week she was delirious, and when at last she left her room the expression of her face had altered. She felt no anger, only an immense distrust of the validity of her intuitions. Had Dugald Maule been in trouble, she would have, if need were, forsaken life for his sake; but the Dugald Maule for whom she would have been brave had existed only in her own imagination. It was this that brought the fever, and when the fever went, disgust came in its place. It was then that the expression of face altered. She looked like one who is done with love. Presently, and while she was still convalescent, her father sent her abroad with friends, and when she returned, Dugald Maule had to her the reality of a bad dream, a nightmare that she might have experienced in the broad light of an earlier day.

In the course of that winter it so happened that her father one evening brought in to dinner a man whom he introduced as Mr. Usselex. Eden had never seen him before and for the moment she did not experience any notable desire to see him again. She attended, however, with becoming grace

to the duties of hostess, and as the conversation between her father and his guest circled in and over stocks, she was not called upon to contribute to the entertainment. When coffee was served she went to her own room and promptly forgot that Mr. Usselex existed.

But in a few days there was Crispin again. On this occasion Eden gave him a larger share of attention than she had previously accorded. There were certain things that she noticed, there was an atmosphere about him which differed from that which other men exhaled. In the tones of his voice were evocations of fancies. He seemed like one who had battled and had won. There was an unusualness in him which impressed and irritated her simultaneously. It was annoying to her that he should intrude, however transiently, into the precincts of her thought. And when he had gone she took her father to task: "What do you have that man to dinner for?" she asked. "Who is he?"

Mr. Menemon, who was looking out of the window, announced that it was snowing, then he turned to her. "Eden," he said, "I am sorry. If you object he need not come again. Really," he continued, after a moment, "I wish you could see your way to being civil to him."

"Surely I am that," she answered.

To this Mr. Menemon assented. "The matter is this," he said. "While you were abroad I became interested in a mine; he is trying to get me out of it. He is something of a prophet, I take it. Though, as yet," he added despondently, "his prophecies have not been realized."

"Then he is a philosopher," said Eden, with a smile; and her father, smiling too, turned again to interview the night.

Thereafter Mr. Usselex was a frequent guest, and presently Eden discovered that her annoyance had disappeared.

The people whom we admire at first sight are rarely capable of prolonging that admiration, and when circumstances bring us into contact with those that have seemed antipathetic, it not infrequently happens that the antipathy is lost. It was much this way with Eden. Little by little, through channels unperceived, the early distaste departed. Hitherto the world had held for her but one class of individuals, the people whom she liked. All others belonged to the landscape. But this guest of her father's suggested a new category; he aroused her curiosity. He left the landscape; he became a blur on it, but a blur on which she strained her eyes. The antipathy departed, and she discovered herself taking pleasure in the speech of one who had originally affected her as a scarabæus must affect the rose.

She discerned in him unsuspected dimensions. He was at home in recondite matters, and yet capable of shedding new light on threadbare themes. During discussions between him and her father at which she assisted she gained an insight into bi-metallism, free trade even, and subjects of like import, the which hitherto she had regarded as abstract diseases created for the affliction of politicians and editorial hacks. He was at home too in larger issues, in the cunning of Ottoman tactics and the beat of drums at Kandahar. Concerning King Arthur he was vague, but he had the power to startle her with new perspectives, the possibilities of dynamics, the abolition of time, the sequestration and conquest of space. And as he spoke easily, fluently, in the ungesticulatory fashion of those that know whereof they speak, more than once she fell to wondering as to the cause of that early dislike. In such wise was Desdemona won.

It so happened that one evening she chanced to dine with a friend of hers, Mrs. Nicholas Manhattan by name, a lady whose sources of social information were large. Among other guests was Alphabet Jones, the novelist.

"Did you ever hear of Mr. Usselex?" Eden asked, over the sweets.

Mrs. Manhattan visibly drew on the invisible cap of thought. "Never heard of him," she presently exclaimed, as one who should say, "and for me not to have heard argues him unknown."

But Jones was there, and he slipped his oar in at once. "I know him," he answered. "He is the son of a shoemaker. No end of money! Some years ago a cashier of his did the embezzlement act, but Usselex declined to prosecute."

"Yes, that is like him," said Eden.

"Ah! you know him, then?" and Jones looked at her. "Well," he continued, "the cashier was sent up all the same. He had a wife, it appeared, and children. Usselex gave them enough to live on, and more too, I believe."

"He must have done it very simply."

"Why, you must know him well!" Jones exclaimed; and the conversation changed.

Meanwhile winter dragged itself along, and abruptly, as is usual with our winters, disappeared. In its stead came a spring that was languider than summer. Fifth Avenue was bright with smart bonnets and gowns of conservatory hues. During the winter months Mr. Menemon's face had been distressed as the pavements, but now it was entirely serene.

It was evident to Eden that Mr. Usselex was not a philosopher alone, but a prophet as well. Concerning him her store of information had increased.

Toward the end of May her father spoke to her about him and about his success with the mine. He seemed pleased, yet nervous. "I saw him this afternoon," he said; "he is to be here shortly. H'm! I am obliged to go to the club for a moment. Will you – would you mind seeing him in my absence?" For a moment he moved uneasily about and then left the room. Eden looked after him in wonder, and took up the *Post*. And as her eyes loitered over the columns the bell rang; her face flushed, and presently she was aware of Usselex' presence.

"What is this my father tells me?" she asked, by way of greeting.

"What is it?" he echoed; he had found a chair and sat like Thor in the court of Utgarda.

"About the mine and all that."

The man eyed her enquiringly for an instant and picked at his cuff. "Let me ask you a question," he said: "Did your father say nothing except about the mine?"

"No, not that I remember, except to imply that you – that he – no, he said nothing worth repeating."

"In finding you alone I supposed he had told you that – "

"That the mine – "

"That I love you."

In the corner of the room was a great colonial clock. Through the silence that followed it ticked sleepily, as though yawning at the avowal. Mr. Usselex had bent forward; he watched the girl. She was occupied in tearing little slips from the paper which lay in her lap. She did not seem to have heard him at all.

"Miss Menemon," he continued, "I express myself badly. Do not even take the trouble to say that you do not care for me. It is impossible that you should. You know nothing of me; you – "

"Oh, but I do though," the girl exclaimed. "The other day, a month or two ago, I have forgotten, someone said your father was a shoemaker, and what not about you beside. Oh, I know a great deal – "

"Then, Miss Menemon, you must know the penalty which is paid for success." He straightened himself, the awkwardness had left him, and he seemed taller than when he entered the room. "Yes," he continued, "the door to success is very low, and the greater is he that bends the most. Let a man succeed in any one thing, and whatever may be the factors with which that success is achieved, Envy will call a host of enemies into being as swiftly as Cadmus summoned his soldiery. And these enemies will come not alone from the outer world, but from the ranks of his nearest friends. Ruin a man's home, he may forget it. But excel him, do him a favor, show yourself in any light his superior, then indeed is the affront great. Mediocrity is unforgiving. We pretend to admire greatness, but we isolate it and call that isolation Fame. It is above us; we cannot touch it; but mud is plentiful and that we can throw. And if no mud be at hand, we can loose that active abstraction, malice, which subsists on men and things. No; had I an enemy I could wish him no greater penance than success – success prompt, vertiginous, immense! To the world, as I have found it, success is a crime, and its atonement, not death, but torture. Truly, Miss Menemon, humanity is not admirable. Men mean well enough, no doubt; but nature is against them. Libel is the tribute that failure pays to success. If I am slandered,

it is because I have succeeded. But what is said of my father is wholly true. He did make shoes, God bless him! and very good shoes they were. Pardon me for not having said so before."

Eden listened as were she assisting at the soliloquy of an engastrimuth. The words he uttered seemed to come less from him than from one unknown yet not undevined. And now, as he paused for encouragement or rebuke, he saw that her eyes were in his.

"Miss Menemon," he continued, "forget my outer envelope; if you could read in my heart, you would find it full of love for you."

"Perhaps," she said, and smiled as at a vista visible only to herself. "I will tell my father what you say," she added demurely.

With that answer Mr. Usselex was fain to be content. And presently, when he had gone, she wondered how it was that she had ever cared for Dugald Maule.

A week later the engagement of Miss Menemon to John Usselex was announced. Much comment was excited, and the rumors alluded to were industriously circulated. But comment and rumors notwithstanding, the marriage took place, and after it the bride left her father's dingy little house on Second Avenue for a newer and larger one on Fifth. Many people had envied Usselex his wealth; on that day they envied him his bride.

II

It was late in November before Eden found herself in full possession of her new home. Shortly after the ceremony she had gone to Newport, and when summer departed she made for Lennox, which she deserted for Tuxedo. It was therefore not until the beginning of winter that the brown hollands were removed from her town residence.

During the intervening months she had been wholly content. She had not led the existence of which at sixteen she had dreamed in the recesses of her father's library, nor yet such an one as Dugald Maule had had the ability to suggest. On the other hand, she had for her husband something that was more than love. She regarded him as one of the coefficients of the age. Among the rumors which her engagement created was one to the effect that she was to be used as Open Sesame to doors hitherto closed to him; and this rumor, like the others, some fair little demon of a friend had whispered in her ear. But the possibility of such a *quid pro quo* had left her undisturbed. If a privilege paltry as that were hers to bestow, there was indeed no reason why she should begrudge it.

It so happened, however, that she was not called upon to make the slightest effort in that direction. Everybody discussed the marriage, and at the wedding, as is usually the case, the front seats were occupied by those who had said the most in its disfavor. At Newport there was a fleeting hesitation. But the exclusion of the bride from entertainments being practically impossible, and moreover, as it is not considered seemly to invite a wife and overlook a husband, both were bidden; and to the surprise of many it was discovered that Usselex had not only as fine an air as many of the foreign noblemen that passed that way, but that he even possessed a keener appreciation of conventionalities. Added to this his wealth was reported to be fabulous. What more could Newport ask? If his origin was more or less dubious, were there not many whose origins were worse than dubious, whose origins were *known*? Indeed, not everyone was qualified to throw a stone, and gradually any thought of stone-throwing was dismissed. His opponents became his supporters, and after the *villegiatura* at Lennox and at Tuxedo no further question was raised.

In returning to town therefore, Eden was wholly content. She had married a man of whom she was proud, a man who, while subservient to her slightest wish, had taught her what love might be. Altogether, the world seemed larger, and she felt fully prepared to do her duty in that sphere of life to which God had called her.

That sphere of life, she presently discovered, was to be co-tenanted by her husband's secretary. Usselex had mentioned his existence on more than one incidental occasion, but after each mention the actuality of that existence had escaped her; and a week or so after her return to town she found herself mediocrally pleased at learning that he would probably be a frequent guest at her dinner-table.

In answer to the query which her eyebrows took on at this intelligence, Usselex explained that now and then, through stress of business, he was in Wall Street unable to provide the individual in question with his fullest instructions, and for that reason it was expedient for him to have the man of an evening at the house. Immediately Eden's fancy evoked the confidential clerk of the London stage, a withered bookkeeper, shiny of garment, awkward of manner, round of shoulder, square of nail, explosive with figures, and covered with warts, and on the evening in which the secretary was to make his initial appearance she weaponed herself with a vinaigrette.

But of the vinaigrette she had no need whatever. The secretary entered the drawing-room with the unembarrassed step of a somnambulist. His manner was that of one aware that the best manner consists in the absence of any at all. His coat might have come from Piccadilly, and when he found a seat Eden noticed that the soles of his shoes were veneered in black. In brief, he looked well-bred and well-groomed. He was young, twenty-three or twenty-four at most. His head was massive, and his features were pagan in their correctness. The jaw was a masterpiece; it gave the impression of reservoirs of interior strength, an impression which was tempered when he spoke, for his voice was

low and unsonorous as a muffled bell. His eyes were of that green-gray which is caught in an icicle held over grass. And in them and about his mouth something there was that suggested that he could never be brutal and seldom tender.

At table he made no remark worthy of record. He seemed better content to watch Eden than to speak. He ate little and drank less, and when the meal was done and Eden left him to her husband and the presumable cigar, she made up her mind that he was stupid.

"He is a German," she reflected; "with such a name as Adrian Arnswald he must be. H'm. The only German I ever liked was a Frenchman, the author of the *Reisebilder*. Well, there seems to be no bilder of any kind in him." She picked up the *Post* and promptly lost herself in a review of the opera. "There," she mused, "I forgot Wagner. After all, as some one said of the Scotch, you can do a good deal with a German if you catch him young. Mr. Arnswald does not appear to have been caught in time." She threw the paper from her and seated herself at the piano. For a moment her fingers strayed over the keys, and then, in answer to some evoking chord, she attacked the *Ernani involami*, than which few melodies are richer in appeal. Her voice was not of the bravura quality, the lower register was not full, and the staccati notes were beyond her range; a professor from a conservatory would have disapproved of her method as he would have disapproved of that of the ruiceñor. But then the ruiceñor sings out of sheer wantonness, because it cannot help it; and so did she.

And as she sang, anyone who had chanced that way would have accounted her fair to see. Her gown was black, glittered with jet, about her throat was a string of pearls, her arms were bare, the wrists unbraceleted, and in her face that beauty of youth and of fragility which refinement heightens and which eclipses the ruddier characteristics of the buxom models of the past. An artist might not have given her a second glance, a poet would have adored her at the first. And as she still sang, Arnswald entered the room and approached the piano at which she sat.

She heard his steps and turned at once expectant of Usselex. Then, seeing that he was alone, "What have you done with my husband?" she asked.

"Nothing," the young man answered. "Nothing at all. A gentleman, a customer, I fancy, sent in his card, and I left him to him." He found a seat and eyed her gravely. "If I disturb you – "

"Oh, you don't disturb me in the least. What makes you look as though you came from another planet?"

"What makes *you* look as though you were going to one?"

Mr. Arnswald is passably impertinent, thought Eden; but the expression of his face was so reassuringly devoid of any non-conventional symptom that she laughed outright at the compliment. "Do you care for music?" she asked.

"Surely, Mrs. Usselex."

"Yes, of course. I forgot. All Germans do. Tell me, how long have you been in this country? How do you come to speak German without an accent?"

"I was born here, Mrs. Usselex."

"You were born here! I thought you were a German. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You did not do me the honor to ask."

"But your father was, wasn't he?"

"No, my father was a Russian, I think."

"You think? Why do you say you think? Don't you know? I never knew anyone so absurd."

"My father died when I was very young, Mrs. Usselex. I do not remember him."

"But your mother could have told you – "

"If she didn't, Mrs. Usselex, it was because she had a good excuse."

"What was that?"

"She died also."

"Mr. Arnswald, I am sorry. I had no right to ask such thoughtless questions. My mother died too. I do not remember her either. Truly you must forgive me." And as she spoke she rose from the

piano and reseated herself at the lounge which she had previously vacated. "Tell me about yourself," she added. "I am not asking out of idle curiosity."

"You are very good to express any interest, Mrs. Usselex. But really there is little to tell. I used to live in Massachusetts, in Salem, with my grand-parents and my sister. You can see Salem from here, and you can understand what a boy's life in such a place must be. Afterwards I was sent to school, and later I went abroad. When I returned Mr. Usselex took me in his office. I have been there ever since. He has been very kind to me, Mr. Usselex has."

"He says – how is it he puts it? – oh, he says you have the genius of finance."

"I can only repeat that he is very kind."

To this Eden assented. "Yes, he is that," she said, and hesitated for a moment. "Tell me," she added. "You said you were fond of music. Will you go with us on Monday to the opera?"

This invitation was accepted with the same readiness as that with which it was made. And presently the young man took his leave. When the portière fell behind him, Eden felt a momentary uneasiness at the unpremeditated invitation which she had just extended. One doesn't need to be a German to be stupid, she mused, and felt sure that her husband would disapprove. But when she told him he expressed himself as well pleased.

The next day happened to be Sunday, and on that afternoon Mr. Arnswald came to pay his dinner-call. Meanwhile Eden's imagination had been at work. Now imagination is a force of which the action is as varied as that of volition. There are organizations which it affects like a dissolvent, there are others which it affects like wine. In some it needs a spur, in others a curb. Give it an incident for incubator, and according to the nature of the individual it will soar full-feathered into space or addle in its own inaction. In Eden its gestation was always abrupt. With a fact for matrix it developed as rapidly as a spark mounts into flame. The fact in this instance was Arnswald.

When he left her the night before, she had gone again to the piano, her fingers had fluttered like butterflies over the keys, then in answer to some strain, an aria from the *Regina di Golconda* had visited her – the *Bel paese, ciel ridente*, which she had hummed softly to herself, unconscious of any significance in the words. But presently she fell to wondering about the fair land, the fairer sky which the song recalled. Something there was that kept telling her that she had met Adrian before. In his voice she had caught an inflection that was not unfamiliar to her. In the polar-light of his eyes was a suggestion of earlier acquaintance. His infrequent gestures brought her the shadow of a reminiscence. And in his face there was an expression that haunted her. For a while she struggled with memory. But memory is a magician that declines to be coerced. Now and then it will pull its victim by the sleeve, as it had pulled at Eden, yet turn to interrogate and a dream is not more evanescent. But still she struggled with it. A silence, an attitude, a combination purely atmospheric had evoked a charm, and though memory declined to return and undo the spell, still she labored until at last, conscious of the futility of the effort, or else wearied by the endeavor, she consoled herself as in similar circumstances we all of us have done with the mirage of anterior life.

The possibility of recognition she then put behind her, but the man remained. There was a magnificence about him which disconcerted her, an air that appealed. In some way his evening dress had seemed an incongruity. She told herself that he would look better in a silken pourpoint, and better still in the chlamys-robe of state. She decided that he needed a dash of color, some swirling plume of red, and fell to wondering what his life had been. It was evident to her that he had been gently bred. About him the feminine influence was discernible, one no doubt which begun at the cradle had continued ever since. In the absence of a mother there had been someone else, a sister, perhaps, and a procession of sweethearts to whom he had been swain. But the latter possibility she presently dismissed. Love-making is the occupation of those that have none, and Arnswald's hours were seemingly well-filled. In Salem he might have left a combustible maiden, he might even have found one in New York, but in that case Eden felt tolerably sure that he had little time in which to apply the match. And then at once her fancy took a tangential flight; a little romance unrolled before

her – the mating of Arnswald to some charming girl whom she would herself discover, and the life-long friendship that would ensue.

On the following afternoon therefore, when the young man put in an appearance, he was received with unaffected cordiality.

"I have been thinking about you," Eden announced, when he found a seat. "I am glad you came, I want you to tell me more of yourself."

"I reproached myself for having exhausted your patience last evening," he answered.

"Then you deserve to be punished. You go with us to the opera to-morrow, do you not? Very good, you must dine with us first. There is a friend of mine whom you will meet there. I want you to like her."

"If she resembles you in any way that will not be difficult."

"He begins well," mused Eden, and a layer of cordiality dropped from her. But presently she recovered it. Arnswald had been looking in her face, and the change in its expression had not passed unobserved.

"I mean," he continued, "that there are people that make you like them at first sight and you, Mrs. Usselex, are one of those people. When I left you last evening I told myself that you exhaled a sympathy which is as rare as it is delightful. I have met few such as you. As a rule the people I have been brought in contact with have been hard and self-engrossed. You are among the exceptions, and it is the exception –"

Eden interrupted him. "Now that is nonsense," she said severely. "The people whom we can like are not as infrequent as all that. Do you mean to tell me that there is no one for whom you really care?"

Arnswald shook his head and smiled. "No, Mrs. Usselex," he answered, "I don't mean to say that. There are some for whom I care very much. There is even one for whom were it necessary I would lay down life itself."

At this Eden experienced a mental start. The possibility of mating him to some charming girl whom she was herself to discover had suddenly become remote. But she nodded encouragingly to the confidence.

"Yes," he continued, and into his polar-eyes came a sudden flicker. "Yes, there is one whom I have recently come to know and who is to me as a prayer fulfilled. Were I called upon to make a sacrifice for her, no matter what the nature of that sacrifice might be, the mere doing of it would constitute a well-spring of delight."

Eden smiled at the dithyramb as were she listening to some fay she did not see. Arnswald had been looking at her, but now, as though ashamed of the outburst, he affected a little laugh and dropped back into the conventional. Presently he rose and took his polar-eyes away. When he had gone Eden smiled again. "He may have the genius of finance," she mused, "but he has the genius of love as well."

III

Eden had but recently returned to town and the claims of mantua-makers and milliners were oppressive. They took her time, they came to her in the morning, and she, with the courtesy of kings, returned the visit in the afternoon. But to little purpose. They were vexatious people, she discovered. They deceived her wantonly. They promised and did not fulfill. The live-long day they had irritated her, they had obtained her confidence by false pretences, and now, after a round of interviews each more profitless than the last, on reaching her house the dust of shops was on her mantle, and she could have gone in a corner and sworn.

Moreover it was late, dinner would presently be served. Arnswald, she learned, had already arrived, he was in the parlor with her husband, and as she hurried to her room she told herself that she would have to dress in haste, an operation which to her was always fertile in annoyance. An entire hour was never too much. But her maid was agile, dexterous of hand, and before the clock marked seven she was fully equipped, arrayed for dinner and the opera as well.

On leaving the room, Eden left her vexation behind her. It had been fleeting and inoffensive as the anger of a canary. And now, on descending the stairs, she was in great good spirits again, the crimes of mantua-makers and milliners were forgotten, and she prepared to meet her husband and her guest. Half-way on her journey to the drawing-room, however, she discovered that she was empty-handed; she had omitted to take a fan and she called to her maid to bring her one. And as she called the front door-bell rang. She hesitated a second, and called again. But presumably the maid did not hear. Thereupon Eden re-ascended the stairs and went back to her room.

The maid was busying herself in a closet and the fan was on the table; Eden picked it up, and as she did so she noticed that one of the sticks was broken. It took several minutes to find another which suited her gown, and when she again descended the stair some little time had intervened.

On reaching the parlor she drew the portière aside and peered into the room. At the furthest end stood Arnswald, his back turned to her, and near him in a low arm-chair was her husband. He seemed to be reading something, and it was evident that her entrance had been unobserved either by him or by his guest.

For a second's space Eden stood very still. There was much of the child in her nature, and during that second she meditated on the feasibility of giving them both some little surprise. Then at once, as though impelled by invisible springs, she crossed the room very swiftly, very noiselessly, her fan and the fold of her dress in one hand, the other free for mischief, and just when she reached the chair in which her husband sat, she bent over him, from his unwarned fingers she snatched a note, and with a rippling laugh that was like the shiver of sound on the strings of a guitar, she waved it exultingly in the air.

Mr. Usselex looked up at once, but he had looked too late; the note had gone from him. He started, he made a movement to repossess himself of it, but Eden, with the ripple still in her voice, stepped back, laughed again, and nodded to Arnswald, who had turned and bowed. "What is it?" she cried; "what have you two been concocting? No, you don't," she continued. Her voice was unsteady with merriment, her eyes wickedly jubilant. Usselex had made another attempt to recapture the letter, and flaunting it, Tantalus-fashion, above her head, she defied and eluded him, gliding backwards, her head held like a swan's, a trifle to one side. "No, you don't," she repeated, and still the laughter rippled from her.

"Eden!" her husband expostulated, "Eden – "

"You shall not have it, sir; you shall not." And with a pirouette she fluttered yet further away, the bit of paper held daintily and aloft between forefinger and thumb. "Tell me this instant what you have been doing all day. There, you needn't look at Mr. Arnswald. He won't help you. Will you, Mr. Arnswald? Of course you won't."

Usselex, conscious of the futility of pursuit, made no further effort. In his face was an anxiety which his fair tormentor did not see. Once he turned to Arnswald, and Arnswald gave him an answering glance, and once his lips moved, but whatever he may have intended to say the words must have stuck in his throat. And Eden, woman-like, seeing that she was no longer pursued, advanced to a spot just beyond his reach, where she hovered tauntingly, yet wary of his slightest movement and prepared at the first suspicion of reprisal to spread her wings in flight.

"And who do you suppose was here at lunch to-day? You must guess or you shan't have your letter back. I'll give you just one minute. Oh! I saw Laura Manhattan at Fantasia's. Don't forget that we are to dine with her to-morrow. She came in to row about a dress. I was rowing, too. You have no idea what a day I have had. You will have to give Fantasia a talking to. Look at the frippery I have on. And she promised that I should have something for to-night. There ought to be some punishment for such people. Don't you think so, Mr. Arnswald? When people in Wall Street don't keep their promises, they are put in jail, aren't they? Well, jail is too good for that horrid old French-woman of a dressmaker, she ought to have the thumb-screws, the rack, and the hot side of the fagot. I will never believe her again, no, not even when I know she is telling the truth. She is the most ornamental liar I ever encountered. It is my opinion she would rather lie than not. Laura told me – but here, the minute's up – you must guess, you must guess rightly, and you can only guess once."

And Eden waved the letter again and laughed in her husband's beard.

The gown which she wore, and which she had characterized as frippery, was an artful combination of tulle and of silk; it was colorless, yet silvery, and in it Eden, bare of arm and of neck, looked a water nymph garmented in sheen and foam. From her hair came an odor of distant oases. In her eyes were evocations of summer, and beneath them, on her cheeks and on the lobes of her ears, health had placed its token in pink. The corners of her mouth were upraised like the ends of the Greek bow, and now that she was laughing her lips suggested a red fruit cut in twain. She was the personification of caprice, adorably constructed, and constructed to be adored. Arnswald evidently found her appearance alluring, for his eyes followed her every movement.

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