

**BARR AMELIA**

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A ROSE OF A HUNDRED  
LEAVES: A LOVE STORY

Amelia Barr

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# **Amelia Edith Huddleston Barr**

## **A Rose of a Hundred Leaves: A Love Story**

### **CHAPTER I.**

#### **THE WILD ROSE IS THE SWEETEST**

I tell again the oldest and the newest story of all the world, – the story of Invincible Love!

This tale divine – ancient as the beginning of things, fresh and young as the passing hour – has forms and names various as humanity. The story of Aspatria Anneys is but one of these, – one leaf from all the roses in the world, one note of all its myriad of songs.

Aspatria was born at Seat-Ambar, an old house in Allerdale. It had Skiddaw to shelter it on the northwest; and it looked boldly out across the Solway, and into that sequestered valley in Furness known as “the Vale of the Deadly Nightshade.” The plant still grew there abundantly, and the villagers still kept the knowledge of its medical value taught them by the old monks of Furness. For these curious, patient herbalists had discovered the blessing hidden in the fair, poisonous amaryllis, long before modern physicians called it “belladonna.”

The plant, with all its lovely relations, had settled in the garden at Seat-Ambar. Aspatria’s mother had loved them all: the girl could still remember her thin white hands clasping the golden jonquils in her coffin. This memory was in her heart, as she hastened through the lonely place one evening in spring. It ought to have been a pleasant spot, for it was full of snowdrops and daffodils, and many sweet old-fashioned shrubs and flowers; but it was a stormy night, and the blossoms were plashed and downcast, and all the birds in hiding from the fierce wind and driving rain.

She was glad to get out of the gray, wet, shivery atmosphere, and to come into the large hall, ruddy and glowing with fire and candle-light. Her brothers William and Brune sat at the table. Will was counting money; it stood in small gold and silver pillars before him. Brune was making fishing-flies. Both looked up at her entrance; they did not think words necessary for such a little maid. Yet both loved her; she was their only sister, and both gave her the respect to which she was entitled as co-heir with them of the Ambar estate.

She was just sixteen, and not yet beautiful. She was too young for beauty. Her form was not developed; she would probably gain two or three inches in height; and her face, though exquisitely modelled, wanted the refining which comes either from a multitude of complex emotions or is given at once by some great heart-sorrow. Yet she had fascination for those capable of feeling her charm. Her large brown eyes had their childlike clearness; they looked every one in the face with its security of good-will. Her mouth was a tempting mouth; the lips had not lost their bow-shape; they were red and pouting, but withal ever ready to part. She might have been born with a smile. Her hair, soft and dark, had that rarest quality of soft hair, – a tendency to make itself into little curls and tendrils and stray down the white throat and over the white brow; yet it was carefully parted and confined in two long braids, tied at the ends with a black ribbon.

She wore a black dress. It was plainly made, and its broad ruffle around the open throat gave it an air of simplicity almost childlike in effect. Her arms below the elbows were uncovered, and her hands were small and finely formed, as patrician hands should be. There was no ring upon them, and no bracelet above them. She wore neither brooch nor locket, nor ornament of any kind about her person; only a daffodil laid against the snowy skin of her bosom. Even this effect was not the result of coquetry; it was a holy and loving sentiment materialized.

Altogether, she was a girl quite in keeping with the antique, homelike air of the handsome room she entered; her look, her manner, and even her speech had the local stamp; she was evidently

a daughter of the land. Her brothers resembled her after their masculine fashion. They were big men, whom nature had built for the spaces of the moors and mountains and the wide entrances of these old Cumberland homes. They would have been pushed to pass through narrow city doorways. A fine open-air colour was in their faces; they had that confident manner which great physical strength imparts, and that air of conscious pride which is born in lords of the soil.

Indeed, William and Brune Anneys made one understand how truthfully popular nomenclature has called an Englishman “John Bull.” For whoever has seen a bull in its native pastures – proud, obstinate, conscious of his strength, and withal a little surly – must understand that there is a taurine basis to the English character, finely expressed by the national appellation.

A great thing was to happen that hour, and all three were as unconscious of the approaching fate as if it was to be a part of another existence. Squire William finished his accounts, and played a game of chess with his brother. Aspatria walked up and down the hall, with her hands clasped behind her, or sat still in the Squire’s hearth-chair, with her dress lifted a little in front, to let the pleasant heat fall upon her ankles. She did not think of reading or of sewing, or of improving the time in any way. Perhaps she was not as dependent on books as the women of this generation. Aspatria’s mind was sensitive and observing; it lived very well on its own ideas.

The storm increased in violence; the rain beat against the windows, and the wind howled at the nail-studded oak door, as if it intended to blow it down. A big ploughman entered the room, shyly pulled his front hair, and looked with stolid inquiry into his master’s face. The Squire pushed aside the chess-board, rose, and went to the hearth-stone; for he was young in his authority, and he felt himself on the hearth-stone to hold an impregnable position.

“Well, Steve Bell, what is it?”

“Be I to sow the high land next, sir?”

“If you can have a face or back wind, it will be best; if you have an elbow-wind, you must give the land an extra half-bushel.”

“Be I to sow mother-of-corn<sup>1</sup> on the east holme?”

“It is matterless. Is it going to be a flashy spring?”

“A right season, sir, – plenty of manger-meat.”

“How is the weather?”

“The rain is near past; it will take up at midnight.”

As he spoke, Aspatria, who had been sitting with folded hands and half-shut eyes, straightened herself suddenly, and threw up her head to listen. There was certainly the tramp of a horse’s feet, and in a moment the door was loudly and impatiently struck with the metal handle of a riding-whip.

Steve Bell went to answer the summons; Brune trailed slowly after him. Aspatria and the Squire heard nothing on the hearth but a human voice blown about and away by the wind. But Steve’s reply was distinct enough, —

“You be wanting Redware Hall, sir? Cush! it’s unsensible to try for it. The hills are slape as ice; the becks are full; the moss will make a mouthful of you – horse and man – to-night.”

The Squire went forward, and Aspatria also. Aspatria lifted a candle, and carried it high in her hand. That was the first glimpse of her that Sir Ulfar Fenwick had.

“You must stay at Seat-Ambar to-night,” said William Anneys. “You cannot go farther and be sure of your life. You are welcome here heartily, sir.”

The traveller dismounted, gave his horse to Steve, and with words of gratitude came out of the rain and darkness into the light and comfort of the home opened to him. “I am Ulfar Fenwick,” he said, – “Fenwick of Fenwick and Outerby; and I think you must be William Anneys of Ambar-Side.”

“The same, sir. This is my brother Brune, and my sister Aspatria. You are dreeping wet, sir. Come to my room and change your clothing.”

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<sup>1</sup> Clover.

Sir Ulfar bowed and smiled assent; and the bow and the smile were Aspatria's. Her cheeks burned; a strange new life was in all her veins. She hurried the housekeeper and the servants, and she brought out the silver and the damask, and the famous crystal cup in its stand of gold, which was the lucky bowl of Ambar-Side. When Fenwick came back to the hall, there was a feast spread for him; and he ate and drank, and charmed every one with his fine manner and his witty conversation.

They sat until midnight, – an hour strange to Seat-Ambar. No one native in that house had ever seen it before, no one ever felt its mysterious influence. Sir Ulfar had been charming them with tales of the strange lands he had visited, and the strange peoples who dwelt in them. He had not spoken much to Aspatria, but it was in her face he had found inspiration and sympathy. For her young eyes looked out with such eager interest, with glances so seeking, so without guile and misgiving, that their bright rays found a corner in his heart into which no woman had ever before penetrated. And she was equally subjugated by his more modern orbs, – orbs with that steely point of brilliant light, generated by large experience and varied emotion, – electric orbs, such as never shone in the elder world.

When the clock struck twelve, Squire Anneys rose with amazement. “Why, it is strike of midnight!” he said. “It is past all, how the hours have flown! But we mustn't put off sleeping-time any longer. Good-night heartily to you, sir. It will be many a long day till I forget this night. What doings you have seen, sir!”

He was talking thus to his guest, as he led him to the guest-room. Aspatria still stood by the dying fire. Brune rose silently, stretched his big arms, and said: “I'll be going likewise. You had best remember the time of night, Aspatria.”

“What do you think of him, Brune?”

“Fenwick! I wouldn't think too high of him. One might have to come down a peg or two. He sets a good deal of store by himself, I should say.”

“You and I are of two ways of judging, Brune.”

“Never mind; time will let light into all our ways of judging.”

He went yawning upstairs and Aspatria slowly followed. She was not a bit sleepy. She was wider awake than she had ever been before. Her hands quivered like a swallow's wings; her face was rosy and luminous. She removed her clothing, and unbraided her hair and shook it loose over her slim shoulders. There was a smile on her lips through all these preparations for sleep, – a smile innocent and glad. Suddenly she lifted the candle and carried it to the mirror. She desired to look at herself, and she blushed deeply as she gratified the wish. Was she fair enough to please this wonderful stranger?

It was the first time such a query had ever come to her heart. She was inclined to answer it honestly. Holding the light slightly above her head, she examined her claims to his regard. Her expressive face, her starry eyes, her crimson, pouting lips, her long dark hair, her slight, virginal figure in its gown of white muslin scantily trimmed with English thread-lace, her small, bare feet, her air of childlike, curious happiness, – all these things, taken together, pleased and satisfied her desires, though she knew not how or why.

Then she composed herself with intentional earnestness. She must “say her prayers.” As yet it was only saying prayers with Aspatria, – only a holy habit. A large Book of Common Prayer stood open against an oaken rest on a table; a cushion of black velvet was beneath it. Ere she knelt, she reflected that it was very late, and that her Collect and Lord's Prayer would be sufficient. Youth has such confidence in the sympathy of God. She dropped softly on her knees and said her portion. God would understand the rest. The little ceremony soothed her, as a mother's kiss might have done; and with a happy sigh she put out the light. The old house was dark and still, but her guardian angel saw her small hands loose lying on the snowy linen, and heard her whisper, “Dear God! how happy I am!” And this joyous orison was the acceptable prayer that left the smile of peace upon her sleeping face.

In the guest-chamber Ulfar Fenwick was also holding a session with himself. He had come to his room very wide awake; midnight was an early hour to him. And the incidents he had been telling filled his mind with images of the past. He could not at once put them aside. Women he had loved

and left visited his memory, – light loves of a season, in which both had declared themselves broken-hearted at parting, and both had known that they would very soon forget. Neither was much to blame: the maid had long ceased to remember his vows and kisses; he, in some cases, had forgotten her name. Yet, sitting there by the glowing oak logs, he had visions of fair faces in all kinds of surroundings, – in lighted halls, in moon-lit groves under the great stars of the tropics, on the Shetland seas when the aurora made for lovers an enchanted atmosphere and a light in which beauty was glorified. Well, they had passed as April passes, and now, —

As a glimpse of a burnt-out ember  
Recalls a regret of the sun,  
He remembered, forgot, and remembered  
What love saw done and undone.

Aspatria was different from all. He whispered her strange name on his lips, and he thought it must have wandered from some sunny southern clime into these northern solitudes. His eyes shone; his heart beat. He said to it: “Make room for this innocent little one! What a darling she is! How clear, how candid, how beautiful! Oh, to be loved by such a woman! Oh, to kiss her! – to feel her kiss me!” He set his mouth tightly; the soft dreamy look in his face changed to one of purpose and pleasure.

“I shall win her, or die for it,” he said. “By Saint George! I would rather die than know that any other man had married her.”

Yet the thought of marriage somewhat sobered him. “I should have to give up my voyage to the Spanish Colonies, – and I am very much interested in their struggle. I could not take her to Mexico, I suppose, – there is nothing but fighting there; and I could not – no, I could not leave her. If she were mine, I should hate to have any one else breathe the same air with her. I could not endure that others should speak to her. I should want to strike any man who touched her hand. Perhaps I had better go away in the morning, and ride this road no more. I have made my plans.”

And fate had made other plans. Who can fight against his destiny? When he saw Aspatria in the morning, every plan that did not include her seemed unworthy of his consideration. She was ten times lovelier in the daylight. She had that fresh invincible charm which women of culture and intellect seldom have: she was inspired by her heart. It taught her a thousand delightful subjugating ways. She served his breakfast with her own fair hands; she offered him the first sweet flowers in the garden; she fluttered around his necessities, his desires, his intentions, with a grace and a kindness nothing but love could have taught her.

He thanked her with marvellous glances, with smiles, with single words dropped only for her ears, with all the potent eloquence which passion and experience teach. And he had to pay the price, as all men must do. The lesson he taught he also learned. “Aspatria!” he said, in soft, penetrating accents; and when she answered his call and came to his side, her dress trailing across his feet bewitched him. They were in the garden, and he clasped her hand, and went down the budding alleys with her, speechless, but gazing into her face until she dropped her tremulous, transparent lids before her eyes; they were too full of light and love to show to any mortal.

The sky was white and blue, the air fresh and sweet; the swallows had just come, and were chattering with the starlings; hundreds of daffodils “danced in the wind” and lighted the ground at their feet; troops of celandines starred the brook that babbled by the bee-skips; the southernwood, the wall-flower, the budding thyme and sweet-brier, – a thousand exhalations filled the air and intensified that intoxication of heart and senses which makes the first stage of love’s fever delirious.

Fenwick went away in the afternoon, and his adieus were mostly made to the Squire. He had done his best to win his favour, and he had been successful. He left Seat-Ambar under an engagement to return soon and try his skill in wrestling and pole-leaping with Brune. Aspatria knew he would

return: a voice which Fenwick's voice only echoed told her so. She watched him from her own window across the meadows, and up the mountain, until he was lost to her vision.

She was doubtless very much in love, though as yet she had not admitted the fact to herself. The experience had come with a really shocking swiftness. Her heart was half angry and half abashed by its instantaneous surrender. Two circumstances had promoted this condition. First, the singular charm of the man. Ulfar Fenwick was unlike any one she had ever seen. The squires and gentlemen who came to Seat-Ambar were physically the finest fellows in England, but noble women look for something more than mere bulk in a man. Sir Ulfar Fenwick had this something more. Culture, travel, great experience with women, had added to his heroic form a charm flesh and sinew alone could never compass. And if he had lacked all other physical advantages, he possessed eyes which had been filled to the brim with experiences of every kind, – gray eyes with pure, full lids thickly fringed, – eyes always lustrous, sometimes piercingly bright. Secondly, Aspatria had no knowledge which helped her to ward off attack or protract surrender. In a multitude of lovers there is safety; but Fenwick was Aspatria's first lover.

He rode hard, as if he would ride from fate. Perhaps he hoped at this early stage of feeling to do as he had often done before, —

To love – and then ride away.

He had also a fresh, pressing anxiety to see his sister, who was Lady of Redware Manor. Seven years – and much besides years – had passed since they met. She was his only sister, and ten years his senior. She loved him as mothers love, unquestioningly, with miraculous excuses for all his shortcomings. She had been watching for his arrival many hours before he appeared.

“Ulfar! how welcome you are!” she cried, with tears in her eyes and her voice. “Oh, my dear! how happy I am to see you once more!”

She might have been his only love, he kissed and embraced and kissed her again so fondly. Oh, wondrous tie of blood and kinship! At that moment there really seemed to Ulfar Fenwick no one in the whole world half so dear as his sister Elizabeth.

He told her he had lost his way in the storm and been detained by Squire Anneys; and she praised the Squire, and said that she would evermore love him for his kindness. “I met him once, at the Election Ball in Kendal. He danced with me; ‘we neighbour each other,’ you see; and they are a grand old family, I can tell you.”

“There is a younger brother, called Brune.”

“I never saw him.”

“A sister also, – a child yet, but very handsome. You ought to see her.”

“Why?”

“You would like her. I do.”

“Ulfar, there is a ‘thus far’ in everything. In your wooing and pursuing, the line lies south of Seat-Ambar. To wrong a woman of that house would be wicked and dangerous.”

“Why should I wrong her? I have no intention to do so. I say she is a lovely lady, a great beauty, worthy of honest love and supreme devotion.”

“Such a rant about love and beauty! Nine tenths of the men who talk in this way do but blaspheme Love by taking his name in vain.”

“However, Elizabeth, it is marriage or the Spanish colonies for me. It is Miss Anneys, or Cuba, New Orleans, and Mexico. Santa Anna is a supreme villain; I have a fancy to see such a specimen.”

“You are then between the devil and the deep sea; and I should say that the one-legged Spaniard was preferable to the deep sea of matrimony.”

“She is so fair! She has a virgin timidity that enchants me.”

“It will become matronly indecision, or mental weakness of will. In the future it will drive you frantic.”

“Her sweet sensibility – ”

“Will crystallize into passionate irritation or callous opposition. These childlike, tender, clinging maidens are often capable of sudden and dangerous action. Better go to Cuba, or even to Mexico, Ulfar.”

“I suppose she has wealth. You will admit that excellence?”

“She is co-heir with her brothers. She may have two thousand pounds a year. You cannot afford to marry a girl so poor.”

“I have not yet come to regard a large sum of money as a kind of virtue, or the want of it as a crime.”

“Your wife ought to represent you. How can this country-girl help you in the society to which you belong?”

“Society! What is society? In its elemental verity it means toil, weariness, loss of rest and health, useless expense, envy, disappointment, heart-burnings, – all for the sake of exchanging entertainments with A and B, C and D. It means chaff instead of wheat.”

“If you want to be happy, Ulfar, put this girl out of your mind. I am sure her brothers will oppose your suit. They will not let their sister leave Allerdale. No Anneys has ever done so.”

“You have strengthened my fancy, Elizabeth. There is a deal of happiness in the idea of prevailing, of getting the mastery, of putting hindrances out of the way.”

“Well, I have given you good advice.”

“There are many ‘counsels of perfection’ nobody dreams of following. To advise a man in love not to love, is one of them.”

“Love!” she cried scornfully. “Before you make such a fuss about the Spanish Colonies and their new-found freedom, free yourself, Ulfar! You have been a slave to some woman all your life. You are one of those men who are naturally not their own property. A child can turn you hither and thither; a simple country girl can lead you.”

He laughed softly, and murmured, —

“There is a rose of a hundred leaves, But the wild rose is the sweetest.”

## CHAPTER II. FORGIVE ME, CHRIST!

The ultimatum reached by Fenwick in the consideration of any subject was, to please himself. In the case of Aspatria Anneys he was particularly determined to do so. It was in vain Lady Redware entreated him to be rational. How could he be rational? It was the preponderance of the emotional over the rational in his nature which imparted so strong a personality to him. He grasped all circumstances by feeling rather than by reason.

In a few days he was again at Seat-Ambar. Aspatria drew him, as the candle draws the moth which has once burned its wings at it. And among the simple Anneys folk he found a hearty welcome. With Squire William he travelled the hills, and counted the flocks, and speculated on the value of the iron-ore cropping out of the ground. With Brune he went line-fishing, and in the wide barns tried his skill in wrestling or pole-leaping or single-stick. He tolerated the rusticity of the life, for the charming moments he found with Aspatria.

No one like Ulfar Fenwick had ever visited Ambar-Side. To the young men, who read nothing but the Gentleman's Magazine and the Whitehaven Herald, and to Aspatria, who had but a volume of the Ladies' Garden Manual, Notable Things, her Bible and Common Prayer, Fenwick was a book of travel, song, and story, of strange adventures, of odd bits of knowledge, and funny experiences. Things old and new fell from his handsome lips. Squire William and Brune heard them with grave attention, with delight and laughter; Aspatria with eyes full of wonder and admiration.

As the season advanced and they grew more familiar, Aspatria was thrown naturally into his society. The Squire was in the hay-field; Brune had his task there also. Or they were down at the Long Pool, washing the sheep, or on the fells, shearing them. In the haymaking, Aspatria and Fenwick made some pretence of assistance; but they both very soon wearied of the real labour. Aspatria would toss a few furrows of the warm, sweet grass; but it was much sweeter to sit down under the oak-tree with Fenwick at her side, and watch the moving picture, and listen to the women singing in their high shrill voices, as they turned the swaths, the Song of the Mower, and the men mournfully shouting out the chorus to it, —

“We be all like grass! We be all like grass!”

As for the oak, it liked them to sit under it; all its leaves talked to each other about them. The starlings, though they are always in a hurry, stopped to look at the lovers, and went off with a Q-q-q of satisfaction. The crows, who are a bad lot, croaked innuendoes, and said it was to be hoped that evil would not come of such folly. But Aspatria and Fenwick listened only to each other; they saw the whole round world in each other's eyes.

Fenwick spoke very low; Aspatria had to droop her ear to his mouth to understand his words. And they were such delightful words, she could not bear to lose one of them. Then, as the sun grew warm, and the scent of the grass filled the soft air, and the haymakers were more and more subdued and quiet, heavenly languors stole over them. They sat hand in hand, — Aspatria sometimes with shut eyes humming to herself, sometimes dreamily pulling the long grass at her side; Fenwick mostly silent, yet often whispering those words which are single because they are too sweet to be double, — “Darling! Dearest! Angel!” and the words drew her eyes to his eyes, drew her lips to his lips; ere she was aware, her heart had passed from her in long, loving, stolen kisses. On the fells, in the garden, in the empty, silent rooms of the old house, it was a repetition of the same divine song, with wondrously celestial variations. Goethe puts in Faust an Interlude in Heaven: Fenwick and Aspatria were in their Interlude.

One evening they stood among the wheat-sheaves. The round, yellow harvest-moon was just rising above the fells, and the stars trembling into vision. The reapers had gone away; their voices

made faint, fitful echoes down the misty lane. The Squire was driving home one load of ripe wheat, and Brune another. Aspatria said softly, "The day is over. We must go home. Come!"

She stood in the warm mystical light, with one hand upon the bound sheaf, the other stretched out to him. Her slim form in its white dress, her upturned face, her star-like eyes, – he saw all at a glance. He was subjugated to the innermost room of his heart. He answered, with inexpressible emotion, —

"Come! Come to me, my Dear One! My Love! My Joy! My Wife!" He held her close to his heart; he claimed her by no formal special yes, but by all the sweet reluctances and sweeter yieldings, the thousand nameless consents won day by day.

Oh, the glory of that homeward walk! The moon beamed upon them. The trees bent down to touch them. The heath and the honeysuckle made a posy for them. The nightingale sang them a canticle. They did not seem to walk; they trod on ether; they moved as people move in happy dreams of other stars, where thought and wish are motion. It would have been heaven upon earth if those minutes could have lasted; but it was only an interlude.

That night Fenwick spoke to Squire William and asked him for his sister. The Squire was honestly confounded by the question. Aspatria was such a little lass! It was beyond everything to talk of marrying her. Still, in his heart he was proud and pleased at such high fortune for the little lass; and he said, as soon as Fenwick's father and family came forward as they should do, he would never be the one to say nay.

Fenwick's father lived at Fenwick Castle, on the shore of bleak Northumberland. He was an old man, but his natural feelings and wisdom were not abated. He consulted the History of Cumberland, and found that the family of Ambar-Anneys was as ancient and honourable as his own. But the girl was country-bred, and her fortune was small, and in a measure dependent upon her brother's management of the estate. A careless master of Ambar-Side would make Aspatria poor. While he was considering these things, Lady Redware arrived at the castle, and they talked over the matter together.

"I expected Ulfar to marry very differently, and I must say I am disappointed. But I suppose it will be useless to make any opposition, Elizabeth," the old man said to his daughter.

"Quite useless, father. But absence works miracles. Try to secure twelve months. You ought to go to a warm climate this winter; ask Ulfar to take you to Italy. In a year time may re-shuffle the cards. And you must write to the girl, and to her eldest brother, who is a fine fellow and as proud as Lucifer. I called upon them before I left Cumberland. She is very handsome."

"Handsome! Old men know, Elizabeth, that six months after a man is married, it makes little difference to him whether his wife is handsome or not."

"That may be, or it may not be, father. The thing to consider is, that young men unfortunately persist in marrying for that first six months."

"Well, then, fortune pilots many a ship not steered. Suppose we leave things to circumstances?"

"No, no! Human affairs are for the most part arranged in such a way that those turn out best to which most care is devoted."

So the letters were thoughtfully written; the one to Aspatria being of a paternal character, that to her brother polite and complimentary. To his son Ulfar the old baronet made a very clever appeal. He reminded him of his great age, and of the few opportunities left for showing his affection and obedience. He regretted the necessity for a residence in Italy during the winter, but trusted to his son's love to see him through the experience. He congratulated Ulfar on winning the love of a young girl so fresh and unspoiled by the world, but kindly insisted upon the wisdom of a little delay, and the great benefit this delay would be to himself.

It was altogether a very temperate, wise letter, appealing to the best side of Ulfar's nature. Squire William read it also, and gave it his most emphatic approval. He was in no hurry to lose his little sister. She was but a child yet, and knew nothing of the world she was going into; and "surely

to goodness,” he said, looking at the child, “she will have a lot of things to look after, before she can think of wedding.”

This last conjecture touched Aspatria on a very womanly point. Of course there were all her “things” to get ready. She had never possessed more than a few frocks at a time, and those of the simplest character; but she was quite alive to the necessity of an elaborate wardrobe, and she had also an instinctive sense of what would be proper for her position.

So the suggestions of Ulfar’s father were accepted in their entirety, and the old gentleman was put into a very good temper by the fact. And what was a year? “It will pass like a dream,” said Ulfar. “And I shall write constantly to you, and you will write to me; and when we meet again it will be to part no more.” Oh, the poverty of words in such straits as these! Men say the same things in the same extremities now that have been said millions of times before them. And Aspatria felt as if there ought to have been entirely new words, to express the joy of their betrothal and the sorrow of their parting.

The short delay of a last week together was perhaps a mistake. A very young girl, to whom great joy and great sorrow are alike fresh experiences, may afford a prolonged luxury of the emotions of parting. Love, more worldly-wise, deprecates its demonstrativeness, and would avert it altogether. The farewell walks, the sentimental souvenirs, the pretty and petty devices of love’s first dream, are tiresome to more practised lovers; and Ulfar had often proved what very cobwebs they were to bind a straying fancy.

“Absence makes the heart grow fonder.” Perhaps so, if the last memory be an altogether charming one. It was, unfortunately, not so in Aspatria’s case. It should have been a closely personal farewell with Ulfar alone; but Squire Anneys, in his hospitable ignorance, gave it a public character. Several neighbouring squires and dames came to breakfast. There was cup-drinking, and toasting, and speech-making; and Ulfar’s last glimpse of his betrothed was of her standing in the wide porch, surrounded by a waving, jubilant crowd of strangers, whose intermeddling in his joy he deeply resented. Anneys had invited them in accord with the traditions of his house and order. Fenwick thought it was a device to make stronger his engagement to Aspatria.

“As if it needed such contrivances!” he muttered angrily. “When it does, it is a broken thread, and no Anneys can knot it again.”

The weeks that followed were full of new interests to Aspatria. Mistress Frostham, the wife of a near shepherd-lord, had been the friend of Aspatria’s mother; she was fairly conversant with the world outside the fells and dales, and she took the girl under her care, accompanied her to Whitehaven, and directed her in the purchase of all considered necessary for the wife of Ulfar Fenwick.

Then the deep snows shut in Seat-Ambar, and the great white hills stood round about it like fortifications. But as often as it was possible the Dalton postman fought his way up there, with his packet of accumulated mail; for he knew that a warm welcome and a large reward awaited him. In the main, the long same days went happily by. William and Brune had a score of resources for the season; the farm-servants worked in the barn; they were making and mending sacks for the wheat, and caps for the sheeps’ heads in fly-time, sharpening scythes and tools, doing the indoor work of a great farm, and mostly singing as they did it.

As Aspatria sat in her room, surrounded by fine cambric and linen and that exquisite English thread-lace now gone out of fashion, she could hear their laughter and their song, and she unconsciously set her stitches to its march and melody. The days were not long to her. So many dozens of garments to make with her own slight fingers! She had not a moment to waste, but the necessity was one of the sweetest delight. The solitude and secrecy of her labour added to its charm. She never took her sewing into the parlour. And yet she might have done so: William and Brune had a delicacy of affection for her which would have made them blind to her occupation and densely stupid as to its design.

So, although the days were mostly alike, they were not unhappily so; and at intervals destiny sent her the surprises she loved. One morning in the beginning of February, Aspatria felt that the postman

ought to come; her heart presaged him. The day was clear and warm, – so much so, that the men working in the barn had all the windows open. They were singing in rousing tones the famous North Country song to the barley-mow, and drinking it through all its verses, out of the jolly brown bowl, the nipperkin, the quarter-pint, the quart and the pottle, – the gallon and the anker, – the hoghead and the pipe, – the well, and the river, and the ocean, – and then rolling back the chorus, from ocean to the jolly brown bowl. Suddenly, while a dozen men were shouting in unison, —

“Here’s a health to the barley mow!”

the verse was broken by the cry of “Here comes Ringham the postman!” Then Aspatria ran to the window and saw him climbing the fell. She did not like to go downstairs until Will called her; but she could not sew another stitch. And when at last the aching silence in her ears was filled by Will’s joyful “Come here, Aspatria! Here is such a parcel as never was, – from foreign parts too!” she hardly knew how her feet twinkled down the long corridor and stairs.

The parcel was from Rome. Ulfar had sent it to his London banker, and the banker had sent a special messenger to Dalton with it. Over the fells at that season no one but Ringham could have found a safe way; and Ringham was made so welcome that he was quite imperious. He ordered himself a rasher of bacon, and a bowl of the famous barley broth, and spread himself comfortably before the great hearth-place. At the table stood Aspatria, William, and Brune. Aspatria was nervously trying to undo the seals and cords that bound love’s message to her. Will finally took his pocket-knife and cut them. There was a long letter, and a box containing exquisite ornaments of Roman cameos, – precious onyx, made more precious by work of rare artistic beauty, a comb for her dark hair, a necklace for her white throat, bracelets for her slender wrists, a girdle of stones linked with gold for her waist. Oh, how full of simple delight she was! She was too happy to speak. Then Will discovered a smaller package. It was for himself and Brune. Will’s present was a cameo ring, on which were engraved the Anneys and Fenwick arms. Brune had a scarf-pin, representing a lovely Hebe. It was a great day at Seat-Ambar. Aspatria could work no more; Will and Brune felt it impossible to finish the game they had begun.

There is a tide in everything: this was the spring-tide of Aspatria’s love. In its overflowing she was happy for many a day after her brothers had begun to speculate and wonder why Ringham did not come. Suddenly it struck her that the snow was gone, and the road open, and that there was no letter. She began to worry, and Will quietly rode over to Dalton, to ask if any letter was lying there. He came back empty-handed, silent, and a little surly. The anniversary of their meeting was at hand: surely Ulfar would remember it, so Aspatria thought, and she watched from dawn to dark, but no token of remembrance came. The flowers began to bloom, the birds to sing, the May sunshine flooded the earth with glory, but fear and doubt and dismay and daily disappointment made deepest, darkest winter in the low, long room where Aspatria watched and waited. Her sewing had been thrown aside. The half-finished garments, neatly folded, lay under a cover she had no strength to remove.

In June she wrote a pitiful little note to her lover. She said that he ought to tell her, if he was tired of their engagement. She told Will what she had said, and asked him to post the letter. He answered angrily, “Don’t you write a word to him, good or bad!” And he tore the letter into twenty pieces before her eyes.

“Oh, Will, I cannot bear it!”

“Thou art a woman: bear what other women have tholed before thee.” Then he went angrily from her presence. Brune was thrumming on the window-pane. She thought he looked sorry for her; she touched his arm and said, “Brune, will you take a letter to Dalton post for me?”

“For sure I will. Go thy ways and write it, and I’ll be gone before Will is back.”

It was an unfortunate letter, as letters written in a hurry always are. Absolute silence would have piqued and worried Ulfar. He would have fancied her ill, dying perhaps; and the uncertainty, vague and portentous, would have prompted him to action, if only to satisfy his own mind. Sometimes he feared that a girl so sensitive would fade away in neglect; and he expected a letter from William

Anneys saying so. But a hurried, halting, not very correct epistle, whose whole tenour was, “What is the matter? What have I done? Do you remember last year at this time?” irritated him beyond reply.

He was still in Italy when it reached him. Sir Thomas Fenwick was not likely ever to return to England. He was slowly dying, and he had been removed to a villa in the Italian hills. And Elizabeth Redware had a friend with her, a young widow just come from Athens, who affected at times its splendid picturesque national costume. She was a very bright, handsome woman, whose fine education had been supplemented by travel, society, and a rather unhappy matrimonial experience. She knew how to pique and provoke, how to flirt to the very edge of danger and then sheer off, how to manipulate men before the fire of passion, as witches used to manipulate their waxen images before the blazing coals.

She had easily won Ulfar’s confidence; she had even assisted in the selection of the cameos; and she declared to Elizabeth that she would not for a whole world interfere between Ulfar and his pretty innocent! A natural woman was such a phenomenon! She was glad Ulfar was going to marry a phenomenon.

Elizabeth knew her better. She gave the couple opportunity, and they needed nothing more. There were already between them a good understanding, transparent secrets, little jokes, a confessed confidence. They quickly became affectionate. The lovely Sarah, relict of Herbert Sandys, Esq., not only reminded Ulfar of his vows to Aspatria, but in the very reminder she tempted him to break them. When Aspatria’s letter was put into his hand, she was with him, marvellously arrayed in tissue of silver and brilliant colours. A head-dress of gold coins glittered in her fair braided hair; her long white arms were shining with bracelets; she was at once languid and impulsive, provoking Elizabeth and Ulfar to conversation, and then amazing them by the audacity and contradiction of her opinions.

“It is so fortunate,” she said, “that Ulfar has found a little out-of-the-way girl to appreciate his great beauty. The world at present does not think much of masculine beauty. A handsome fellow who starts for any of its prizes is judged to be frivolous and poetical, perhaps immoral: you see Byron’s beauty made him unfit for a legislator, he could do nothing but write poetry. I should say it was Ulfar’s best card to marry this innocent with the queer name: with his face and figure, he will never get into Parliament. No one would trust him with taxes. He is born to make love, and he and his country Phyllis can go simpering and kissing through life together. If I were interested in Ulfar – ”

“You are interested in Ulfar, Sarah,” interrupted Elizabeth. “You said so to me last night.”

“Did I? Nevertheless, life does not give us time really to question ourselves, and it is the infirmity of my nature to mistake feeling for evidence.”

“You must not change your opinions so quickly, Sarah.”

“It is often an element of success to change your opinions. It is hesitating among a variety of views that is fatal. The man who does not know what he wants is the man who is held cheap.”

“I am sure I know what I want, Sarah.” And as he spoke, Ulfar looked with intelligence at the fair widow, and in answer she shot from her bright blue eyes a bolt of summer lightning that set aflame at once the emotional side of Ulfar’s nature.

“You say strange things, Sarah. I wish it was possible to understand you.”

“Who shall read the interpretation thereof?” is written on everything we see, especially on women.”

“I believe,” said Elizabeth, “that Ulfar has quarrelled with his country maid. Is there a quarrel, Ulfar, really?”

“No,” he answered, with some temper.

Sarah nodded at Ulfar, and said softly: “The absent must be satisfied with the second place. However, if you have quarrelled with her, Ulfar, turn over a new leaf. I found that out when poor Sandys was alive. People who have to live together must blot a leaf now and then with their little tempers. The only thing is to turn over a new one.”

“If anything unpleasant happens to me,” said Ulfar, “I try to bury it.”

“You cannot do it. The past is a ghost not to be laid; and a past which is buried alive, it is terrible.” It was Sarah who spoke, and with a sombre earnestness not in keeping with her usual character. There was a minute’s pregnant silence, and it was broken by the entrance of a servant with a letter. He gave it to Ulfar.

It was Aspatria’s sorrowful, questioning note. Written while Brune waited, it was badly written, incorrectly constructed and spelled, and generally untidy. It had the same effect upon Ulfar that a badly dressed, untidy woman would have had. He was ashamed of the irregular, childish scrawl. He did not take the trouble to put himself in the atmosphere in which the anxious, sorrowful words had been written. He crushed the paper in his hand with much the same contemptuous temper with which Elizabeth had seen him treat a dunning letter. She knew, however, that this letter was from Aspatria, and, saying something about her father, she went into an adjoining room, and left Ulfar and Sarah together. She thought Sarah would be the proper alterative.

The first words Sir Thomas Fenwick uttered regarded Aspatria. Turning his head feebly, he asked: “Has Ulfar quarrelled with Miss Anneys? I hear nothing of her lately.”

“I think he is tired of his fancy for her. There is no quarrel.”

“She was a good girl, – eh? Kindhearted, beautiful, – eh, Elizabeth?”

“She certainly was.”

He said no more then; but at midnight, when Ulfar was sitting beside him, he called his son, and spoke to him on the subject. “I am going – almost gone – the way of all flesh, Ulfar. Take heed of my last words. You promised to make Miss Anneys your wife, – eh?”

“I did, father.”

“Do not break your promise. If she gives it back to you, that might be well; but you cannot escape from your own word and deed. Honour keeps the door of the house of life. To break your word is to set the door wide open, – open for sorrow and evil of all kinds. Take care, Ulfar.”

The next day he died, and one of Ulfar’s first thoughts was that the death set him free from his promise for one year at the least. A year contained a multitude of chances. He could afford to write to Aspatria under such circumstances. So he answered her letter at once, and it seemed proper to be affectionate, preparatory to reminding her that their marriage was impossible until the mourning for Sir Thomas was over. Also death had softened his heart, and his father’s last words had made him indeterminate and a little superstitious. A clever woman of the world would not have believed in this letter; its *aura* – subtle but persistent, as the perfume of the paper – would have made her doubt its fondest lines. But Aspatria had no idea other than that certain words represented absolutely certain feelings.

The letter made her joyful. It brought back the roses to her cheeks, the spring of motion to her steps. She began to work in her room once more. Now and then her brothers heard her singing the old song she had sung so constantly with Ulfar, —

“A shepherd in a shade his plaining made,  
Of love, and lovers’ wrong,  
Unto the fairest lass that trod on grass,  
And thus began his song:  
‘Restore, restore my heart again,  
Which thy sweet looks have slain,  
Lest that, enforced by your disdain, I sing,  
Fye! fye on love! It is a foolish thing!

““Since love and fortune will, I honour still  
Your dark and shining eye;  
What conquest will it be, sweet nymph, to thee,

If I for sorrow die?  
Restore, restore my heart again,  
Which thy sweet looks have slain,  
Lest that, enforced by your disdain, I sing,  
Fye! fye on love! It is a foolish thing!”

But the lifting of the sorrow was only that it might press more heavily. No more letters came; no message of any kind; none of the pretty love-gages he delighted in giving during the first months of their acquaintance. A gloom more wretched than that of death or sickness settled in the old rooms of Seat-Ambar. William and Brune carried its shadow on their broad, rosy faces into the hay-fields and the wheat-fields. It darkened all the summer days, and dulled all the usual mirth-making of the ingathering feasts. William was cross and taciturn. He loved his sister with all his heart, but he did not know how to sympathize with her. Even mother-love, when in great anxiety, sometimes wraps itself in this unreasonable irritability. Brune understood better. He had suffered from a love-change himself; he knew its ache and longing, its black despairs and still more cruel hopes. He was always on the lookout for Aspatria; and one day he heard news which he thought would interest her. Lady Redware was at the Hall. William had heard it a week before, but he had not considered it prudent to name the fact. Brune had a kinder intelligence.

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