

(4) CHAPTER 2 cont.

WITH A noble goodness all his own, Adrian took infinite delight in bestowing to prodigality the treasures of his mind and fortune on the long-neglected son of his father's friend. As I was to learn, after the abdication his father had retreated from politics into an unhappy private life. The Ex-Queen possessed none of the domestic virtues, while her attractive courage and daring had been rendered null by her husband's secession. She despised him, and did not care to conceal it. To please her the King had cast off his old friends, but acquired no new ones by her help. In this dearth of sympathy, he turned to his almost infant son, whose early signs of talent and sensibility were to prove well worthy of the father's confidence they inspired. Adrian never wearied of the stories about old times in which my own father had played a distinguished part; the man's triumphs, escapades, keen remarks, he'd committed to memory from childhood. Even the Ex-Queen's enduring dislike—bitter, sarcastic, contemptuous—failed to touch the boy's admiration for the one-time favorite. So it was natural, that when he learned of our existence, he immediately formed the plan of bestowing on this celebrated person's offspring all the advantages procurable by one of his own wealth and rank. When he found me a vagabond shepherd of the hills, a

poacher, an unlettered savage, still his kindness did not fail. He believed that his father was to a degree culpable of neglect towards us, and that he was bound to every possible reparation. At the same time, he was pleased to say that under all my ruggedness there glimmered forth an elevation of spirit, beyond mere animal courage, which combined with what I'd inherited of my father's looks, gave proof that all his virtues and talents had not died with him. Whatever was in there, my noble young friend resolved should not be lost for want of culture.

I became an eager participant in an ambitious plan to cultivate my intellect. At first, my great object was to match my father's merits and render myself worthy of Adrian's friendship. But curiosity soon awoke, followed by an earnest love of knowledge for its own sake which made me pass days and nights in reading and study. Already well acquainted with what I may term the panorama of nature—the night stars, the cycles of animal life, the change of seasons—I was at once startled and enchanted by my sudden extension of vision, when the curtain was drawn back to reveal the intellectual world, and I saw the universe, not only as it presented itself to my outward senses, but as it had appeared to the wisest across time. Poetry and its creations, philosophy and its researches and classifications, alike roused sleeping ideas in my mind, and gave me new ones.

I felt as the sailor, who from the top-mast first sighted the shore of America, and like him I rushed to tell my companions of my discoveries in unknown regions. But I was unable to excite in any breast the same craving appetite for knowledge

that existed in mine. Not even Perdita could understand me. Her own visionary relationship with the world was sufficiently inexhaustible to content her. She listened as ever to my latest adventures, and sometimes took an interest in this new species of information; but she did not, as I did, look on it as an integral part of her being, which once obtained could no more be shed than the sense of touch, or something equally basic. We both agreed in loving Adrian; though Perdita, still a child, couldn't appreciate as I did the extent of his merits, or feel the same sympathy with his pursuits and opinions.

I was forever with him. A sensibility and sweetness in his disposition, gave a tender and unearthly tone to our conversations. Then he was so various: merry as a lark carolling on high, soaring in thought as an eagle, innocent as the mild-eyed dove. He could lighten Perdita's too-deep seriousness or take the sting from my typical self-tortures. I looked back to my restless desires and painful struggles with my fellow beings as to a troubled dream, and felt myself as much changed as if I had transmigrated into another form. But it was not so: I was the same in strength, in earnest craving for sympathy, in my yearning for active exertion; only all was softened and humanized. Nor was Adrian's instruction limited to the cold truths of history and philosophy. For while he taught me by their means to subdue my own reckless and uncultured spirit, he also opened to my view the living page of his own heart, and gave me to feel and understand its wondrous character.

The Ex-Queen of England had, even during his infancy, endeavored to implant daring and ambitious designs in the mind of her son. She recognized his genius and surpassing talent; these she cultivated for the sake of afterwards using them for the furtherance of her own views. She encouraged his craving for knowledge and his impetuous courage; she even tolerated his irrepressible love of freedom, hoping it might, as is too often the case, lead to a passion for command. She tried to raise him with a sense of resentment towards, and a desire to revenge himself upon, those who had been instrumental in bringing about his father's abdication. In this she did not succeed. The accounts furnished him, however distorted, of a great and wise nation asserting its right to govern itself, excited his admiration. The rumors about him were true: early on, he'd become a republican from principle. Still his mother did not despair. To the love of rule and haughty pride of birth she added determined ambition, patience, and self-control. She devoted herself to the study of her son's disposition. By the application of praise, censure, and exhortation, she tried to seek and strike the fitting chords; and though the first melodies that followed her touch played out of tune, she built her hopes on his talents, and felt sure that she would at last win him. The kind of banishment he now experienced, in Cumberland, arose from other causes.

She had also a daughter, now twelve years old—his fairy sister, Adrian was wont to call her; a lovely, animated, little thing, all sensibility and truth. With these, her children, the noble widow lived at Windsor, admitting no visitors save her

own partisans, travelers from her native Germany, and a few of the foreign ministers. Among these, and highly favored by her, was the ambassador to England from the free States of Greece, Prince Zaimi, whose daughter, the young Princess Evadne, passed much of her time at Windsor Castle. This sprightly, clever Greek girl was a sort of plaything for the Countess, who found alleviation from the monotony of a retired life in her talents and vivacity; around Evadne, her usual stiff, stately attitudes relaxed as they never did around her own children.

Evadne was now eighteen. For all the time they'd spent together at Windsor, Adrian's relative youth prevented any suspicion as to the nature of their relationship. But he, uncommonly ardent and tender of heart, had already learned to love; while the beautiful Greek smiled encouragingly on the boy. It was strange to me, who, though older than Adrian, had never loved, to witness my friend's sacrifice of his whole heart. There was neither jealousy, disquiet, or mistrust in his sentiment; only devotion and faith. His life was swallowed up in the existence of his beloved; his heart beat only in unison with hers. This was the secret law of his life—he loved and was beloved. Neither human efforts nor events could bring him happiness or misery, for the universe was no more than a dwelling for him and his chosen one. Say life and society were a wilderness, a tiger-haunted jungle: through the midst of its worst errors and thickest excesses, there was a disentangled and flowery pathway along which they might journey in safety and

delight. Their track would be like the passage of the Red Sea, dry, between two seawater walls of destruction.

Alas! why must I record the hapless delusion of this matchless specimen of humanity? What is it in our nature that kept urging us forever on towards pain and misery? Were we not formed for enjoyment? Though we set our sails to fill with pleasure, disappointment—the ruthless pilot of our life's bark—never fails to carry us onto the shoals. Who was better framed than this highly gifted youth to love and be beloved, and to reap unalienable joy from a first and blameless passion? If his heart had slept but a few years longer, he might have been saved; but it awoke in its infancy; it had power, but no knowledge; and it was ruined, even as a too early-blowing bud is nipped by the killing frost.

I did not accuse Evadne of hypocrisy nor of wishing to deceive her lover; but the first letter that I saw of hers convinced me that she did not love him. It was written with elegance, and, foreigner as she was, with great command of English. The handwriting itself was exquisitely beautiful; there was something in her very paper and its folds, which even I, impartial and unskilled in such matters as I was, could discern as being tasteful. There was much kindness, gratitude, and sweetness in her expression, but no love. Evadne was three years older than Adrian; and who, at eighteen, ever loved someone so much their junior? I compared her placid epistles with the burning ones that Adrian had shown me. His soul seemed to distil itself into the words he wrote; and they breathed on the paper,

bearing with them a portion of the life of love, which was his life. The very writing used to exhaust him; and he'd weep over them, merely from the excess of emotion they awakened in his heart.

Evadne had made Adrian promise not to let his mother find out about the two of them. For a while he contested the point but finally yielded. A vain concession; for Adrian's soul was painted in his countenance, and concealment or deceit were completely alien to the trusting frankness of his nature. His demeanor quickly betrayed his secret to the quick eyes of the Ex-Queen. With characteristic wary prudence, she concealed her discovery, but hastened to remove her son from the sphere of the attractive Greek. He was sent to Cumberland; but an active correspondence between the lovers, arranged by Evadne, was kept hidden from his mother. Thus Adrian's absence, designed to separate, united them in firmer bonds than ever. To me my friend discoursed ceaselessly of his beloved Ionian. Her country, its ancient greatness, its late memorable struggles, all led to her glory and excellence. He only submitted to being away from her because she continued to command it; if she'd let him, he would have declared his love before all England, and resisted, with unshaken constancy, his mother's opposition. But Evadne, with feminine prudence, perceived how useless it would be to assert himself like that at fifteen; more years would give weight to his power. Perhaps there was besides a lurking dislike to bind herself in the face of the world to one whom she did not love—not love, at least, with

that passionate enthusiasm which her heart told her she might one day feel towards another. He obeyed her injunctions, and passed a year of exile in Cumberland.

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