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MIGNONETTE.

“Your qualities surpass your charms.”

—*Language of Flowers.*

I PASSED before her garden gate:
She stood among her roses,
And stooped a little from the state
In which her pride reposes,
To make her flowers a graceful plea
For luring and delaying me.

“When summer blossoms fade so soon,”
She said with winning sweetness,
“Who does not wear the badge of June
Lacks something of completeness.
My garden welcomes you to-day,
Come in and gather, while you may.”

I entered in: she led me through
A maze of leafy arches,

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Where velvet-purple pansies grew
Beneath the sighing larches,—
A shadowy, still, and cool retreat
That gave excuse for ling'ring feet

She paused, pulled down a trailing vine,
And twisted round her finger
Its starry sprays of jessamine,
As one who seeks to linger.
But I smiled lightly in her face,
And passed on to the open space.

—Passed many a flower-bed fitly set
In trim and blooming order,
And plucked at last some mignonette
That strayed along the border ;

THE QUEEN OF THE BEES.

GOING from Motiers Travers à Boudry to Neufchâtel, said the young professor of botany, you follow a road shut in between two walls of rock, of a great elevation. They are from five to six hundred feet high, and are carpeted with wild plants; mountain thyme, ferns, cranberries, ground ivy and other vines, which produce an admirable effect.

The road winds through the defile, mounts, descends, turns, is level or precipitous according to the thousand inequalities of the ground. Gray rocks overarch it in some places, in other places they divide and show you the blue distance, the dark melancholy depths skirted by pines, as far as the eye can reach. Behind all flows the Reuss, which leaps in cascades, creeps along under thickets, foams, smokes, and thunders in the abysses. The echoes bring you the tumult and roaring of the waves, like a great continuous hum.

Since my departure from Tübingen the weather had constantly been fine; but, as I reached the top of this gigantic staircase, about two leagues from the little village of Noirsauge, I suddenly saw great clouds of dark gray gathering over my head, and they soon invaded all the defile. This vapor was so thick that it penetrated my clothing like a heavy dew. Although it was only two o'clock in the afternoon, the sky had become dark as at the approach of night, and I saw that a terrible storm was at hand.

Looking all around for a shelter, I noticed through one of those large embrasures which unfold to you the perspective of the Alps, at two or three hundred paces from me, on the slope which leads down to the lake, an old chalet quite gray and mouldy, with little round window-panes, a sloping roof covered with large stones, an outside staircase with carved railing, and one of those basket balconies where the young Swiss girls are fond of hanging out their white chemises and little red petticoats. At this moment a tall woman in a black cap was in the act of folding the linen, and taking in the other things, which the wind was blowing about.

On the left of this building a large beehouse placed against the beams of the balcony, formed a projection above the valley.

You can well imagine that, without losing a moment, I sprang forward through the heath to gain this refuge, and it was well I did, for I had hardly reached the door when the storm burst forth with terrible fury. Every

gust of wind seemed as if it would sweep away the chalet, but its foundations were solid, and the security of the good people who welcomed me, completely reassured me.

Here lived Walter Young, his wife Catherine, and their only daughter, little Roesel. I remained with them three days, for the wind, which went down towards midnight, had heaped up so much fog in the Valley of Neufchâtel that our mountain was literally drowned in it. One could not go twenty paces from the chalet without losing his way. Every morning, when the good people saw me take my stick and buckle on my bag, they would exclaim:—

“Good heavens! what are you going to do, M. Hennétius? Don't think of starting. You'll get nowhere. In heaven's name stay with us.”

And Young, opening the door, would say, “See, sir, one needs to be tired of life to risk it among these rocks. The holy dove itself could not find its ark in the midst of such a fog.”

A single glance at the hill decided me to put my stick behind the door again.

Walter Young was a man of the olden time. He was nearly sixty. His fine face had a calm and benevolent expression. He had a real apostle's head; his wife, in a great black silk cap, pale and dreamy, had the same cast of countenance. These two silhouettes, traced upon the little lead-framed window-panes of the chalet, recalled to me past memories, like those pictures of Albert Durer, the sight of which alone takes us back to the simple faith, the patriarchal manners of the fifteenth century. The long brown beams in the sitting-room, the pine table, the chairs of ash-wood, with flat-backs cut out in the form of a heart, the pewter cups, the side-board covered with flowered dishes, the Christ of old box-wood on an ebony cross, and the worm-eaten clock with its china face and numberless weights completed the illusion. But there was another charm, besides, in the face of the daughter, little Roesel. I see her still, in her stiff head-dress with wide watered ribbons, her delicate figure draped in a loose blue garment, falling to the knees, her little white hands crossed in an attitude of reverie, her long fair tresses,—a slender, graceful, airy creature. Yes, I see Roesel seated in the large leather arm-chair, against the blue curtain of the alcove, smiling to herself, listening and dreaming.

On my arrival her sweet face had touched me, and I wondered why she looked so sad and suffering. Why did she droop her beautiful, pale forehead? Why did she not raise her eyes?

Alas! the poor child had been blind from her birth. She had never seen the broad surface of the lake, the blue sheet of water which blends so harmoniously with the sky, the fishermen's boats which furrow it, the wooded summits which tower above it, and are reflected tremulously in its waves, the mossy rocks, the Alpine plants, so green, so bright, so splendid in color; nor the sun sinking behind the glaciers, nor the great evening-shadows covering the valleys, nor the golden brooms, nor the wide heaths—nothing! She had seen none of these things—nothing of what we saw every day from the little windows of the ch^âlet.

What sad and bitter irony, I said to myself, looking through the small, round window-panes into the fog, and watching for the sunshine. What a bitter irony of fate! To be blind here, here, in the face of this sublime nature, of this illimitable grandeur, to be blind! O my God, my God, who can judge thy impenetrable decrees, who can dispute the justice of thy severity, even when it weighs heavily upon the innocent? But to be blind in the presence of thy grandest works, thy works which unceasingly renew our enthusiasm, our love, our admiration for thy spirit, thy power, and thy goodness! What crime can the poor child have committed to merit such a hard fate?

And I reflected upon these things. I asked myself what compensation Divine mercy could grant to this creature after having deprived her of the greatest of its benefits. And, finding none, I doubted its power.

"Presumptuous man," said the poet-king, "dares to glorify himself in his science and to judge the Eternal One! But his wisdom is as folly, his light as darkness."

On that day a great mystery of nature was to be revealed to me, doubtless to humiliate my pride and teach me that nothing is impossible with God, with whom, alone, it rests, to multiply our senses, and to satisfy those which are good in his sight.

Here the young professor took from his tortoise-shell snuff-box a slight pinch, which he delicately snuffed up his left nostril, raising his eyes to the ceiling with a contemplative air; then after a few seconds he continued as follows:—

Has it not sometimes seemed to you,

dear ladies, when you have gone into the country on pleasant summer-days, especially after a light shower, when the warm air, the white vapor, the thousand perfumes and the sweet breath of the plants penetrated and warmed you, that the foliage in the broad solitary walks, the bowers and bushes, leaned down to you, as if to seize and embrace you; that the little flowers, the daisies, the forget-me-nots, the convolvulus in the fresh turf, in the shadow of the hedges, and the mosses along the walks raised their hoods, and followed you with a long, long look,—have you not felt an unspeakable languor, a desire to sigh without any apparent reason, even to shed tears, and have you not asked yourself, "My God, my God, why does so much love penetrate me? Why do my knees bend? Why do I weep? Whence comes it all?" From the life, from the love of thousands of beings which surround you, which lean towards you, which spring forward to hold you, and murmur gently—"I love thee! I love thee. Remain—oh, do not leave me!"

It is because of these myriad little hands, these thousand looks and sighs and kisses of the air, the leaves, the breeze, the light, all this immense creation, this universal life, this infinite soul, pervading the sky, the earth, and the sea. It is this, ladies, that makes you tremble, sigh, and sit down by the roadside, your heads bowed down, sobbing and knowing not how to express the feelings of your overcharged hearts. Yes, this is the cause of your deep emotion.

But imagine, now, the rapt enthusiasm, the religious sentiment, of a being who should always be in such a state of ecstasy. Were he blind, deaf, miserable, abandoned by every one, do you think he would have anything to envy us? That his destiny would not be infinitely more beautiful than ours? For myself, I do not doubt it. Doubtless you will tell me it is impossible, the human soul would succumb under the weight of such felicity, and, besides, whence would it come? What organs could convey to it, always and everywhere, the feeling of universal life? I do not know, ladies. Nevertheless, listen and judge.

The day of my arrival at the ch^âlet I had remarked a singular fact—that the young blind girl was especially anxious about the bees. While the wind blew outside, Roesel, her head leaning on her hand, seemed very attentive.

"Father," said she, "I think the third hive in the bee-house, on the right, near the end, is still open. Go and see; the storm

comes from the north; all the bees are in. You can close the hive!"

And the old man went out at the side-door, came back again, and said—

"It is all right. I have closed it, my child!"

Then, half an hour afterward, the young girl awaking again, as if from a dream, murmured: "There are no more bees outside; but under the roof of the bee-house, some are waiting, they belong in the sixth hive from the door. Go, let them in, father!"

And the old man immediately went out. He stayed more than a quarter of an hour, then came back to tell his daughter that all was right, the bees had just gone in. The child bent her head and answered, "It is well."

Then she seemed to fall asleep. I, standing near the stove, lost myself in deep thought. How could the poor blind girl know that all the bees had not gone into this or that hive? That such a hive was open? It seemed inconceivable to me, but as it was only an hour since I had arrived, I thought I had no right to interrogate my hosts about their daughter. It is painful to question people about what touches them so nearly. I supposed that Young agreed to his daughter's observations from complaisance; to make her think that she was useful, that her foresight saved the bees from many accidents. This idea seemed to me the simplest, the truest,—I thought no more about it.

We supped about seven o'clock on cheese and milk, and when night came, Young took me into a tolerably large chamber up one flight of stairs, furnished with a bed and a few chairs, and wainscoted with pine, like most of the Swiss châteaux. You are separated from your neighbors only by partitions, and can hear every step, every word. That night I slept to the whistling of the wind, and the rattling of the window panes, beaten by the rain.

The next day the wind had gone down. We were plunged in fog. When I awoke I saw that my little window-panes were white-coated with fog. I opened my window. The valley looked like an immense steam-bath. Some spires of pine-trees alone stood out, relieved in outline upon this mass of vapor that filled the air; below, the clouds had accumulated in regular layers down to the surface of the lake. All was calm, motionless, silent.

Going down into the sitting-room I found my hosts at breakfast.

"We are waiting for you," said Young gayly.

"Pardon us," said the mother, "it is our breakfast hour."

"Oh! that is right—that is right. I thank you for not minding my laziness."

Roesel seemed more lively than she had been the night before,—the brightest color glowed on her cheeks.

"The wind has gone down," said she; "the storm is over."

"Must we open the hive?" asked Young.

"No, no; the bees would be lost in the fog, and then, everything is soaked with water. The brambles and mosses are full of it. The least gust would drown many of them. Let us wait. Ah! I know very well they are tired—they want to work—it torments them to eat their honey, instead of gathering it. But I don't want to lose them. Several of the hives are already weak; they would perish in winter. To-morrow we will see."

The two old people listened gravely, and made no objection. About nine o'clock the young blind girl wished to visit the bees. Young and Catherine followed her. I did so likewise, from a very natural feeling of curiosity. We crossed the kitchen, the door of which opened on a narrow terrace outside. Above it rose the roof of the bee-house. It was thatched, and from the eaves hung a magnificent honeysuckle and some festoons of wild grape-vine. The hives stood close together on three shelves.

Roesel went from one to the other, caressing them with her hand and murmuring:

"A little patience—a little patience. There's too much fog this morning. Oh, the misers who are complaining!"

And we heard inside a vague buzzing which grew louder and louder until she had passed. This rendered me more attentive. I felt that some strange mystery was underlying it, but what was my surprise, on entering the sitting-room again, to hear the blind girl say in a melancholy voice:

"No, father, I would rather not see to-day than lose my eyes. I will sing, I will do something to amuse myself, no matter what, but the bees must not go out."

While she was speaking in this way I looked at Walter Young, who, looking out of the window, answered simply:—

"You are right, my child; yes, I think you are right. Besides, you would not see much; the valley is perfectly white. Pshaw! it is not worth seeing."

And while I stood quite stupefied, the child said: "Ah! how beautiful it was day

before yesterday. Who would have thought that the storm on the lake would have brought us so much fog. Now we must fold our wings again and creep along like a poor caterpillar."

Then, after a few moments' silence: "How happy I was under the great pines of the Grindenwald; how the honey-dew rained from heaven. It fell on all the branches. What a harvest we had! What a harvest! And how sweet the air was on the shores of the lake, in the rich pasturage of Tanne-matte,—and the green moss; and the fragrant grass. I sang, I laughed; the wax, the honey filled our cells. What happiness to be everywhere, to see everything, to hum in the depths of the woods, on the mountain, in the valley."

Again there was silence. With mouth wide open, and eyes starting from my head, I listened intently, not knowing what to think or say.

"And when the shower came," she continued smiling, "how frightened we were! And how that great clap of thunder terrified us! A large drone, nestling under the same fern with me, shut its eyes at each flash of lightning; a grasshopper sheltered itself under its great green wings, and the poor little crickets clambered up on a high peony to escape from the flood. But what was most terrible was the nest of linnets quite near us in the brushwood. The mother flew right and left around us, and the little ones opened their large yellow beaks till we could see down their throats. How frightened we were! oh, how frightened! I shall remember it long. Thank heaven, a gust of wind brought us to the hill-side. Adieu! baskets, the vintage is over. We must not hope to go out thus very soon."

At these true descriptions of nature, this ecstasy, this worship of the day, of light, it was not possible for me to doubt.

"The blind girl sees," I said to myself, "she sees with thousands of eyes. The bee-house is her life, her soul. Every bee bears a part of it through space and returns, drawn by thousands of invisible threads. The blind girl penetrates into the flowers, the mosses. She becomes intoxicated with their perfume. When the sun shines she is everywhere,—on the hill, in the valleys, in the forests,—as far as her sphere of attraction extends." And I was confounded by this strange magnetism, and said to myself, "Honor, glory, honor to the power, the wisdom, the infinite goodness of the Eternal One. Nothing is impossible to Him; every day, every hour, reveals to

us his grandeur." While I was absorbed in these enthusiastic thoughts Roesel addressed me, smiling sweetly.

"Stranger!" said she.

"What is it, my child?"

"You are much astonished, and you are not the first one. The rector Hégel of Neufchâtel and other travelers have come expressly to see me. They thought I was blind. You thought so too, didn't you?"

"It is true, my child; I thank God that I was mistaken."

"Oh! said she, I hear that you are good,—yes, I hear it in your voice. When the sun shines, I will open my eyes to look at you, and when you go away I will go with you as far as the foot of the hill." Then, laughing archly, she added: "Yes, I will make music for your ear, and rest on your cheek; but take care,—take care,—you must not try to catch me; if you do, I will sting you. Promise me not to be angry."

"I promise, Roesel," I answered, with tears in my eyes, "and I promise you also to kill no more bees nor insects of any kind, unless they are hurtful."

"They are God's eyes," murmured she. "I have only my poor bees to see with, but He has all the hives, all the ant-hills, all the leaves of the forest, every blade of grass. He sees, He feels, He loves, He suffers, He does good with all these things. Ah! M. Hennétius, how right you are not to make the good God suffer, who loves you so much."

I had never been more affected. For a moment I could not speak. Then I said:—

"So, my dear child, you see by your bees. How can you do that?"

"I don't know, M. Hennétius; perhaps it is because I love them very much. When I was very small they adopted me. They have never done me harm. When I was little I liked to listen for hours, alone, on the floor of the bee-house, to their humming. Still I could see nothing; all was black around me, but insensibly the light came. At first I saw the sun a little, when it was very warm; then a little better; then the clematis and the honeysuckle of the chalet, like a shadow; then the full blaze of light. I began to go out of myself. My mind went away with the bees. I saw the mountain, the rocks, the lake, the flowers and mosses, and in the evening, all alone, I thought of them. I thought these things beautiful, and when any one spoke of this or that,—of the huckleberries, the mulberries, the heath,—I said to myself, I know these things. They are

black, brown, green. I saw them in my mind, and every day I knew them better through my dear bees. So I love them dearly, indeed, M. Hennétius. If you only knew how it troubles me when we must take the honey or the wax away!"

"I believe it, my child, I believe it."

My delight at this discovery was unbounded. For several days Roesel told me of her impressions. She knew all the flowers, all the Alpine plants, and gave me descriptions of a great many which had not yet received scientific names, and which are found, no doubt, only on inaccessible heights. The poor young girl was often moved in speaking of her dear friends, the little flowers. "How many times," said she, "have I talked for hours with a bit of golden broom or a tender forget-me-not with great blue eyes, and sympathized in their griefs. All would like to go away—to fly. All complain of withering in the ground, and being obliged to wait days and weeks for a drop of dew to refresh them!"

And thereupon Roesel undertook to tell me long stories of these endless conversations. It was marvelous. Only to hear her, one would fall in love with a wild rose or feel lively sympathy or deep compassion for the feelings of a violet, for its misfortunes and its concealed sufferings.

What shall I say more, dear ladies? It is painful to leave a subject in which the soul has so many mysterious outlets, and fancy such a scope; but everything in this world below must end, even the sweetest dreams.

Early in the morning of the third day, a light breeze softly lifted the fog from the lake. From my window I saw it roll up, heavier and heavier, and the breeze carried it farther and farther away, disclosing first a bit of blue, then the steeple of a hamlet, some green summits, then a skirting of pines, a valley, and the immense floating mass rose and rose towards us. By ten o'clock it had passed by, and the heavy cloud, resting on the arid summits of Chasser, still menaced us, but a last effort of the wind carried it over to the other side, and it disappeared in the gorges of Sainte-Croix. Then this sturdy Alpine vegetation seemed to renew its youth; the heather, the lofty pines, the old chestnut-trees, bathed in dew, glowed with a more vigorous health. There was something about

them joyous, laughing, and grave at the same time. One felt the hand of God in all this—His eternity.

I went down-stairs thoughtfully. Roesel was already in the bee-house. Young, half-opening the door, showed her to me seated in the shadow of the wild grape-vine, her head drooping, as if asleep.

"Take care," said he, "don't wake her. Her spirit is away. She sleeps, she dreams. She is happy."

The bees were whirling about in thousands, like a wave of gold, above the abyss. I looked at this marvelous spectacle for some minutes, praying softly that God would continue his love to the poor child.

Then, turning round, I said: "Master Young, it is time for me to go." He himself fastened my bag over my shoulder and gave me my stick. Mother Catherine looked at me with emotion. They both accompanied me to the door of the châlet.

"Farewell," said Walter, pressing my hand, "a pleasant journey, and think of us sometimes!"

"I shall never forget you," answered I in a very melancholy tone. "May your bees prosper. May you receive from heaven the happiness which you deserve."

"Amen, M. Hennétius," said good mother Catherine, "amen! A pleasant journey. Take care of yourself."

I left them. They remained on the terrace until I had reached the road. Three times I turned and waved my hat. They waved their hands. Good people! Why do we not meet with such every day?

Little Roesel accompanied me to the foot of the hill, as she had promised. For a long time her sweet music lightened the fatigue of my way. I seemed to recognize her in every bee that came to buzz in my ear, and I thought I heard her say playfully in her childish voice: "Take courage, M. Hennétius, take courage. Isn't it very warm? Look here, must I sting you? Ha, ha, ha! don't be afraid. You know we are good friends."

It was not until we had reached the end of the valley that she at last took leave of me, when the loud murmur of the lake drowned her gentle humming; but the thought of her followed me all through my journey, and I think it will never leave me.