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A PAIR OF BLUE EYES

《一双碧眼》

北京师联教育科学研究所 编



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A Pair of Blue Eyes

by Thomas Hardy

'A violet in the youth of primy nature,
Forward, not permanent, sweet not lasting,
The perfume and suppliance of a minute;
No more.'

PREFACE

The following chapters were written at a time when the craze for indiscriminate church-restoration had just reached the remotest nooks of western England, where the wild and tragic features of the coast had long combined in perfect harmony with the crude Gothic Art of the ecclesiastical buildings scattered along it, throwing into extraordinary discord all architectural attempts at newness there. To restore the grey carcasses of a mediaevalism whose spirit had fled, seemed a not less incongruous act than to

set about renovating the adjoining crags themselves.

Hence it happened that an imaginary history of three human hearts, whose emotions were not without correspondence with these material circumstances, found in the ordinary incidents of such church-renovations a fitting frame for its presentation.

The shore and country about 'Castle Boterel' is now getting well known, and will be readily recognized. The spot is, I may add, the furthest westward of all those convenient corners wherein I have ventured to erect my theatre for these imperfect little dramas of country life and passions; and it lies near to, or no great way beyond, the vague border of the Wessex kingdom on that side, which, like the westering verge of modern American settlements, was progressive and uncertain.

This, however, is of little importance. The place is pre-eminently (for one person at least) the region of dream and mystery. The ghostly birds, the pall-like sea, the frothy wind, the eternal soliloquy of the waters, the bloom of dark purple cast, that seems to exhale from the shoreward precipices, in themselves lend to the scene an atmosphere like the twilight of a night vision.

One enormous sea-bord cliff in particular figures in the narrative; and for some forgotten reason or other this cliff was described in the story as being without a name. Accuracy would require the statement to be that a remarkable cliff which resembles in many points the cliff of the description bears a name that no event has made famous.

T. H.

March 1899

THE PERSONS

ELFRIDE SWANCOURT	a young Lady
CHRISTOPHER SWANCOURT	a Clergyman
STEPHEN SMITH	an Architect
HENRY KNIGHT	a Reviewer and Essayist
CHARLOTTE TROYTON	a rich Widow
GERTRUDE JETHWAY	a poor Widow
SPENSER HUGO LUXELLIAN	a Peer
LADY LUXELLIAN	his Wife

MARY AND KATE	two little Girls
WILLIAM WORM	a dazed Factotum
JOHN SMITH	a Master-mason
JANE SMITH	his Wife
MARTIN CANNISTER	a Sexton
UNITY	a Maid-servant

Other servants, masons, labourers, grooms, nondescripts, etc., etc.

THE SCENE

Mostly on the outskirts of Lower Wessex.

Chapter I

'A fair vestal, throned in the west'

Elfride Swancourt was a girl whose emotions lay very near the surface. Their nature more precisely, and as modified by the creeping hours of time, was known only to those who watched the circumstances of her history.

Personally, she was the combination of very interesting particulars, whose rarity, however, lay in the combination itself rather than in the individual elements combined. As a matter of fact, you did not see the form and substance of her features when conversing with her; and this charming power of preventing a material study of her lineaments by an interlocutor, originated not in the cloaking effect of a well-formed manner (for her manner was childish and scarcely formed), but in the attractive crudeness of the remarks themselves. She had lived all her life in retirement--the monstrari gigito of idle men had not flattered her, and at the age of nineteen or twenty she was no further on in social consciousness than an urban young lady of fifteen.

One point in her, however, you did notice: that was her eyes. In them was seen a sublimation of all of her; it was not necessary to look further: there she lived.

These eyes were blue; blue as autumn distance--blue as the blue we see between the retreating mouldings of hills and woody slopes on a sunny September morning. A misty and shady blue, that had no beginning or surface, and was looked INTO rather than AT.

As to her presence, it was not powerful; it was weak. Some women can make their personality pervade the atmosphere of a whole banqueting hall; Elfride's was no more pervasive than that of a kitten.

Elfride had as her own the thoughtfulness which appears in the face of the Madonna della Sedia, without its rapture: the warmth and spirit of the type of woman's feature most common to the beauties--mortal and immortal--of Rubens, without their insistent fleshiness. The characteristic expression of the female faces of Correggio--that of the yearning human thoughts that lie too deep for tears--was hers sometimes, but seldom under ordinary conditions.

The point in Elfride Swancourt's life at which a deeper current may be said to have permanently set in, was one winter afternoon when she found herself standing, in the character of hostess, face to face with a man she had never seen before--moreover, looking at him with a Miranda-like curiosity and interest that she had never yet bestowed on a mortal.

On this particular day her father, the vicar of a parish on the sea-swept outskirts of Lower Wessex, and a widower, was suffering

from an attack of gout. After finishing her household supervisions Elfride became restless, and several times left the room, ascended the staircase, and knocked at her father's chamber-door.

'Come in!' was always answered in a hearty out-of-door voice from the inside.

'Papa,' she said on one occasion to the fine, red-faced, handsome man of forty, who, puffing and fizzing like a bursting bottle, lay on the bed wrapped in a dressing-gown, and every now and then enunciating, in spite of himself, about one letter of some word or words that were almost oaths; 'papa, will you not come downstairs this evening?' She spoke distinctly: he was rather deaf.

'Afraid not--eh-hh!--very much afraid I shall not, Elfride.

Piph-ph-ph! I can't bear even a handkerchief upon this deuced toe of mine, much less a stocking or slipper--piph-ph-ph! There 'tis again! No, I shan't get up till to-morrow.'

'Then I hope this London man won't come; for I don't know what I should do, papa.'

'Well, it would be awkward, certainly.'

'I should hardly think he would come to-day.'

'Why?'

'Because the wind blows so.'

'Wind! What ideas you have, Elfride! Who ever heard of wind stopping a man from doing his business? The idea of this toe of mine coming on so suddenly!...If he should come, you must send him up to me, I suppose, and then give him some food and put him to bed in some way. Dear me, what a nuisance all this is!'

'Must he have dinner?'

'Too heavy for a tired man at the end of a tedious journey.'

'Tea, then?'

'Not substantial enough.'

'High tea, then? There is cold fowl, rabbit-pie, some pasties, and

things of that kind.'

'Yes, high tea.'

'Must I pour out his tea, papa?'

'Of course; you are the mistress of the house.'

'What! sit there all the time with a stranger, just as if I knew him, and not anybody to introduce us?'

'Nonsense, child, about introducing; you know better than that. A practical professional man, tired and hungry, who has been travelling ever since daylight this morning, will hardly be inclined to talk and air courtesies to-night. He wants food and shelter, and you must see that he has it, simply because I am suddenly laid up and cannot. There is nothing so dreadful in that, I hope? You get all kinds of stuff into your head from reading so many of those novels.'

'Oh no; there is nothing dreadful in it when it becomes plainly a case of necessity like this. But, you see, you are always there when people come to dinner, even if we know them; and this is some

strange London man of the world, who will think it odd, perhaps.'

'Very well; let him.'

'Is he Mr. Hewby's partner?'

'I should scarcely think so: he may be.'

'How old is he, I wonder?'

'That I cannot tell. You will find the copy of my letter to Mr. Hewby, and his answer, upon the table in the study. You may read them, and then you'll know as much as I do about our visitor.'

'I have read them.'

'Well, what's the use of asking questions, then? They contain all I know. Ugh-h-h!...Od plague you, you young scamp! don't put anything there! I can't bear the weight of a fly.'

'Oh, I am sorry, papa. I forgot; I thought you might be cold,' she said, hastily removing the rug she had thrown upon the feet of the sufferer; and waiting till she saw that consciousness of her

offence had passed from his face, she withdrew from the room, and retired again downstairs.

Chapter II

'Twas on the evening of a winter's day.'

When two or three additional hours had merged the same afternoon in evening, some moving outlines might have been observed against the sky on the summit of a wild lone hill in that district. They circumscribed two men, having at present the aspect of silhouettes, sitting in a dog-cart and pushing along in the teeth of the wind. Scarcely a solitary house or man had been visible along the whole dreary distance of open country they were traversing; and now that night had begun to fall, the faint twilight, which still gave an idea of the landscape to their observation, was enlivened by the quiet appearance of the planet Jupiter, momentarily gleaming in intenser brilliancy in front of them, and by Sirius shedding his rays in rivalry from his position over their shoulders. The only lights apparent on earth were some spots of dull red, glowing here and there upon the distant hills,

which, as the driver of the vehicle gratuitously remarked to the hirer, were smouldering fires for the consumption of peat and gorse-roots, where the common was being broken up for agricultural purposes. The wind prevailed with but little abatement from its daytime boisterousness, three or four small clouds, delicate and pale, creeping along under the sky southward to the Channel.

Fourteen of the sixteen miles intervening between the railway terminus and the end of their journey had been gone over, when they began to pass along the brink of a valley some miles in extent, wherein the wintry skeletons of a more luxuriant vegetation than had hitherto surrounded them proclaimed an increased richness of soil, which showed signs of far more careful enclosure and management than had any slopes they had yet passed. A little farther, and an opening in the elms stretching up from this fertile valley revealed a mansion.

'That's Endelstow House, Lord Luxellian's,' said the driver.

'Endelstow House, Lord Luxellian's,' repeated the other mechanically. He then turned himself sideways, and keenly scrutinized the almost invisible house with an interest which the indistinct picture itself seemed far from adequate to create.

'Yes, that's Lord Luxellian's,' he said yet again after a while,
as he still looked in the same direction.

'What, be we going there?'

'No; Endelstow Vicarage, as I have told you.'

'I thought you m't have altered your mind, sir, as ye have stared
that way at nothing so long.'

'Oh no; I am interested in the house, that's all.'

'Most people be, as the saying is.'

'Not in the sense that I am.'

'Oh!...Well, his family is no better than my own, 'a b'lieve.'

'How is that?'

'Hedgers and ditchers by rights. But once in ancient times one of
'em, when he was at work, changed clothes with King Charles the
Second, and saved the king's life. King Charles came up to him

like a common man, and said off-hand, "Man in the smock-frock, my name is Charles the Second, and that's the truth on't. Will you lend me your clothes?" "I don't mind if I do," said Hedger Luxellian; and they changed there and then. "Now mind ye," King Charles the Second said, like a common man, as he rode away, "if ever I come to the crown, you come to court, knock at the door, and say out bold, 'Is King Charles the Second at home?' Tell your name, and they shall let you in, and you shall be made a lord." Now, that was very nice of Master Charley?

'Very nice indeed.'

'Well, as the story is, the king came to the throne; and some years after that, away went Hedger Luxellian, knocked at the king's door, and asked if King Charles the Second was in. "No, he isn't," they said. "Then, is Charles the Third?" said Hedger Luxellian. "Yes," said a young feller standing by like a common man, only he had a crown on, "my name is Charles the Third." And----'

'I really fancy that must be a mistake. I don't recollect anything in English history about Charles the Third,' said the other in a tone of mild remonstrance.

'Oh, that's right history enough, only 'twasn't prented; he was rather a queer-tempered man, if you remember.'

'Very well; go on.'

'And, by hook or by crook, Hedger Luxellian was made a lord, and everything went on well till some time after, when he got into a most terrible row with King Charles the Fourth

'I can't stand Charles the Fourth. Upon my word, that's too much.'

'Why? There was a George the Fourth, wasn't there?'

'Certainly.'

'Well, Charleses be as common as Georges. However I'll say no more about it....Ah, well! 'tis the funniest world ever I lived in--upon my life 'tis. Ah, that such should be!'

The dusk had thickened into darkness while they thus conversed, and the outline and surface of the mansion gradually disappeared. The windows, which had before been as black blots on a lighter