THE STORY OF A PHOTOGRAPH.
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HERE are not many more beautiful scenes in the world than that presented by Studley Park, near Richmond, in Victoria. I do not mean now, when it is probably fenced in and preserved as a public promenade or recreation ground, but twenty years ago, when it was untouched, fresh as it came from the hand of nature, without any of those so-called 'improvements' which, if they make it a better carriage-drive or smoother walk, yet take away that weirdness and wildness which are so characteristic of Australian scenery. In those days a man travelling in the bush might well fancy his own eyes were the first white man's to gaze on some romantic scene, or indulge the fancy, dear to the poetical spirit ever innate in the human breast, that he stood face to face with untouched nature; now, even Australia is tolerably well known from coast to coast, and the ashes of the fires, or scorched hollow of the tree where the explorer boiled his billy and
baked his damper, may be seen scattered far and wide.

Twenty years ago Studley Park was a wild romantic spot, whose glades the revelry of picnic and pleasure parties only invaded during the intense heat of Christmas. The tall white gums, with shattered untidy bark rattling in the fierce hot wind, presided like huge genii over the scene. On the hills and in the valleys the sweet-scented wattle threw its yellow tassels to the breeze, and beneath it blue star-shaped wild flowers—cyclamen, sundew, purple sarsaparilla, and the scarlet pea—peeped up from the short, crisp grass, where the children looked for the white, sweet manna in the season when it fell. In the distance, the Yarra Yarra wound its devious way around the bases of the hills, and stumbled and brawled fiercely over the stony falls by Dwight’s Mills. A very un-English scene, indeed, yet one to remember and look back upon with affection if it at all belong to the country one calls ‘home.’

Beneath these straggling, rattling gums (the leaves did not whisper together gently like English leaves, but hustled each other noisily), three young people were wandering about the time of which I write. One was a tall fair girl of apparently eighteen years of age, in whom it was easy to see the young man was deeply interested; the other girl was one of those quick, energetic personages of whom it may be safely predicted that they will cut some pathway for themselves through the thorny thickets of the world; short and
strong, with dark curling hair, she formed a complete contrast to her friend who rose up languid and lily-like beside her. All three seemed wrapped in admiring the extreme beauty of the sunset which dyed the rippling waters beneath their feet in the colours of the dying dolphin, gilded the brown leaves of the gum trees with a tinge of red, stretched across the grass like a flood of fire, and crowned the sombre she-oaks with a blaze of glory. Awakening from his reverie, the youth was the first to speak, and he addressed her who resembled a lily.

'And now, Caroline, that we are really engaged, I suppose I may ask you for your photograph—that one of which the photographer has unhappily broken the negative? At least I shall have your image with me, even if I cannot have you always just yet.'

'Yes, John,' was the reply, 'I will give it you when we get home. It is the only one I have ever had taken.'

'I shall value it more highly than anything else I possess, dearest,' he returned. 'And if Alma here ever becomes the great painter she hopes to be, after her voyage to England, and her studies in Rome, she shall paint me a still more beautiful portrait of you.'

'So I will,' said the girl addressed as Alma; 'and as I have known Carrie so intimately all our lives, I think I should have the greatest chance of succeeding with her. And that puts me in mind to tell you that I am going to take my passage to England in the *Marco Polo*, which sails in a month from now. All difficulties
are overcome, and I will go and try to make a name for myself, and be a credit to Victoria.'

'None will wish you greater success than we shall, Alma,' said the lovers, almost in one breath.

'I know it,' she said. 'Meanwhile I shall think of you both in your happy bush home, and sometimes, sometimes in the midst of all the art treasures of Rome, almost wish to be once more with you.'

These three never met again.

A long white dusty road through the bush, bordered with the most uncompromising of three-railed fences; in the distance, round you everywhere, an interminable plain, covered with short scorched grass; overhead the clear Australian sky palpitating with heat, which seems so far off because there is no mist to give the effect of distance, beneath which nature appears to lie breathless, overcome. Fierce blasts of the fiery north wind speed across the plain, and when they come to the road arouse thick clouds of white dust, which either rush along in dense masses, or curl round and round in a kind of vortex, carrying dead leaves high in the air, as if they were enjoying a witches' dance. The intense, overpowering solitude is only broken by the harsh cries of the laughing jackass, who seems to have retired here from the world to chuckle over its mistakes and follies. But stay! there is something else alive: in the dry grass beside the road a huge snake is curled, sometimes wriggling comfortably in its sleep, and so catching
gleams of light on its shining skin which betray its whereabouts. A traveller on horseback, his clothes white as a miller's from the eternal dust, now comes slowly into view; seeing the snake, which rises on end at the noise of the horse's hoofs, with true bushman's instinct, before it has time to escape, he hits it a heavy blow with his loaded stock-whip—so heavy, that it falls to the ground apparently to rise no more. Our traveller (for it was no other than the John of the former part of our story, now burnt brown by the sun, and 'bearded like a pard') dismounted from his horse, and, after examining the reptile, which was between five and six feet in length, curiously for a while, took it up, and saying to himself, 'I should like to have a specimen of this species,' tied it in a double knot to his stirrup-iron.

John Walton resumed his journey in the same slow and melancholy fashion, but before long became aware that the snake, far from being dead, had reared itself up and was about to make a dart at his left thigh; to raise his whip and strike it again as hard as he could, was but the work of an instant, and the creature hung down as lifeless as before. Rather unnerved at his narrow escape, he looked round for some roadside shanty or inn where he might obtain a little refreshment, and soon saw the blue smoke of what proved to be a shepherd's log hut, curling up among some gum trees. Here he was speedily made welcome, and invited, with true Australian hospitality, to share the mutton, damper, and tea just prepared.
for the evening meal; while the snake, which he still intended preserving, was untied from the stirrup and thrown ignominiously on the dung-heap. John had scarcely seated himself on one of the benches which did duty as chairs, when he jumped up suddenly, exclaiming, 'My picture! my lost picture! Why, how did it come here? How glad I am to see it again!'

'That photograph?' inquired the shepherd.

'Yes, yes; it is the only likeness I ever had of my dead wife. She gave it me herself, and I coloured it with my own hand.'

'Well, now, that is extraordinary! My mate and I found it in an album which was in a small box lying by the roadside, about two years ago. Not far from this, either.'

'Indeed! Then I can only account for it this way. Two years ago, I was moving my furniture and things from one house to another, and the case containing the book must have fallen from the bullock dray without the driver's observing it. I missed it at once, and advertised and inquired everywhere without success. But what made you stick it on the wall?'

'Oh, it is the likeness of such a pretty woman! Just for its beauty we put it there, because we liked to look at it. But, of course, it's yours, and you must have it again.'

'I will give anything for it. My wife gave it me when we were engaged; it is the only likeness I ever had of her, and she has been dead now more than two years.'
So the photograph returned to its original owner, who made the shepherd a handsome present, and spent the night at the hut dilating over their pipes and nobby on the merits of the lost wife, a subject of which John Walton was never known to tire.

But the snake, which was the cause of the photograph's being found, was not idle meantime. In the morning six hens and two cocks were found lying in a bleeding heap on the dunghill, stung to death by the poisonous reptile, which, however, had safely decamped to the shelter of the neighbouring bush. John Walton, in order not to lose the valued picture again, took it with him to Melbourne, cut the tiny head out, and had it put in a gold locket, which he declared nothing on earth should ever induce him to part with.

Some years now elapsed, and the scene of our little story shifts far away—to no less a place than the imperial city of Rome itself. Here in the Forum, one bright spring day, a lady artist sat sketching. Around her were the gigantic ruins of the glorious past: broken column and statue lay at her feet; above her towered the noble pillars which have been for ages the models and admiration of the world. The Capitol was behind her; the stony road over which Caesar passed in triumph encircled its base; the white and graceful arch which commemorates the victory of Titus over the Jews crowned the nearest height; to the left, the huge bulk of the
Colosseum filled an enormous space; on the right rose the complicated arches of the Palatine, overtopped by cypress trees, through which the winds for ever moan the dead emperors who dwelt there; while in the distance Monte Cavo and the Alban hills lay like clouds upon the horizon, alone unchanged and unchangeable as when Rome was the mighty mistress of the world, and the nations stooped in chains at her feet. Curiously enough, the church of Santa Francesca Romana, with its square tower, still occupies one end of the excavations of the Forum, blending the present with the past, representing mediaeval, as the ruins do imperial Rome, and the new lines of white Parisian-like buildings the modern capital of the house of Savoy. Where elsewhere on earth is such a scene? where such poetry, so much grandeur? What memories crowd around the very name! The history of the long centuries during which she has existed is all comprised within the one word—Rome! and the poet and the artist will ever turn to her lovingly, as to the country which is by birthright his home, whatever land may claim him as her own.

The artist sat and sketched, oblivious, as artists generally are, of her surroundings, enjoying the sweet spring air, and absorbing, almost unconsciously, the melancholy spirit of the scene. For success—and success Alma had obtained—is ever mingled with sorrow: the loss of youth, the loss of friends, the loss of hope;—perhaps failure and success are more nearly allied than we imagine. Amid these
sombre meditations she suddenly felt her elbow touched, and, turning round, saw a lady and gentleman standing there, inquiring glances in their eyes.

'I beg your pardon,' said the gentleman, 'but is it—is it Miss Alma Lewis to whom I am speaking?'

'Mr. Walton! It is so long since I have seen you, I did not recognise you.'

'So glad to see you again. May I introduce Mrs. Walton?'

At first the name startled the artist; she did not know her old friend had died many years ago, and the new, unknown face, though so lovely and genial, was a surprise.

After a few moments' conversation: 'Now I have found you,' said John Walton, 'you must paint me a portrait of my dear lost Caroline. Many artists have tried and failed; but you, who were the friend of her youth, and knew her so well, will be able to get the likeness—to do her justice. I have only one photograph of her,—it is fading,—you can refresh your memory from that. But take the greatest care of it; it is the treasure I value most highly in the world.'

They then passed on to other subjects. Alma related her struggles and successes, which were not a few, though her fame had not yet reached the remote part of the bush in which the Waltons resided. She told of her life in the Schools of the Royal Academy, London, of her labours for many years unrewarded, of the medals she had gained, and the honour and
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competence she had won. They in their turn gave her news of the childish friends, of whom, in the lapse of years, she had lost sight, and told her tales of that wonderful place by the sea which fifty years ago was a handful of huts and tents, and is now queen city of the South. John Walton also related how his wife had bequeathed her young children to the care of her friend, the lady whom he had since married. Finally, the young artist promised to go to London with them and paint the wished-for portrait from the precious photograph (which was entrusted to her for the purpose), and her own recollections of her early friend.

So Alma came to London and painted the portrait successfully—successfully even in the eyes of the still adoring husband. One day, when the picture was done, she looked for the photograph to return it. In vain! Knowing so well its value, she searched and searched for it, but always in vain—no trace could she discover. The tiny thing, taken out of the locket in which it was kept, had been pasted on a thin card, which was put in an undirected envelope, and this again carefully placed in a book. The servants were examined, every box and drawer turned out, with no success; and Alma, remembering Mr. Walton's repeated cautions, felt that she dared not tell him of the loss, for the bond which bound him to his first wife was of that kind which knows neither change nor diminution, here or in eternity, and he valued this little relic of her, her first gift and only portrait, more than all his flocks and stations.
It is strange,' he remarked to Alma one day, 'what a fate there was about Caroline. Nothing belonging to her was ever lost.' Alma felt a throb like a knife go through her while he was speaking. 'She gave me this diamond pin, and one day I missed one of the stones. A few months after, I saw something sparkle in the hay in the bottom of a horse-trough; it was the diamond! You remember the story I told you about the photograph, which I found in a shepherd's hut more than two years after it was lost?'

'I do indeed,' replied Alma faintly.

'Well,' said he, 'I believe nothing that belonged to her ever was or will be lost. There is a charm about it.'

Poor Alma! that conversation cost her a mauvais quart d'heure.

Long she pondered how to break the sorrowful news of her loss to him, and at length decided she could do it better by writing. But one day, while she still hesitated, she received a letter from a friend in Italy, with whom she had corresponded only since she had been in England, and in it was what gave her more delight than anything else could possibly have done—the much-loved photograph. How could it have come there? Alma had put the letter to her friend in the blank envelope, which had fallen from the book, without being aware of its presence there. Had the letter been sent to a less careful person, it might have been overlooked or destroyed, but her friend
was a lady of minute observation, and returned the photograph to the sender. So the little picture was carefully restored to its place in the locket, where it still remains, unless, indeed, it has again commenced its wanderings, again to be found, as it bears a charm, and to form, perhaps, the subject of another story.