

Cousin Rosalys

By Henry Harland

ISN'T it a pretty name, Rosalys? But, for me, it is so much more; it is a sort of romantic symbol. I look at it written there on the page, and the sentiment of things changes; it is as if I were listening to distant music; it is as if the white paper turned softly pink, and breathed a perfume—never so faint a perfume of hyacinths. Rosalys, Cousin Rosalys. . . . London and this sad-coloured February morning become shadowy, remote. I think of another world, another era. Somebody has said that "old memories and fond regrets are the day-dreams of the disappointed, the illusions of the age of disillusion." Well, if they are illusions, thank goodness they are where experience can't touch them—on the safe side of time.

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Cousin Rosalys—I call her cousin. But, as we often used to remind ourselves, with a kind of esoteric satisfaction, we were not "real" cousins. She was the niece of my Aunt Elizabeth, and lived with her in Rome; but my Aunt Elizabeth was not my "real" aunt—only my great-aunt by marriage, the widow of my father's uncle. It was Aunt Elizabeth herself, however, who dubbed us cousins, when she introduced us to each other; and at
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that epoch, for both of us, Aunt Elizabeth's lightest words were in the nature of decrees, she was such a terrible old lady.

I'm sure I don't know why she was terrible, I don't know how she contrived it; she never said anything, never did anything, especially terrifying; she wasn't especially wise or especially witty—intellectually, indeed, I suspect she might have passed for a paragon of respectable commonplaceness: but I do know that everybody stood in awe of her. I suppose it must simply have been her atmosphere, her odyllic force; a sort of metaphysical chill that enveloped her, and was felt by all who approached her—"some people *are* like that." Everybody stood in awe of her, everybody deferred to her: relations, friends, even her Director, and the cloud of priests that pervaded her establishment and gave it its character. For, like so many other old ladies who lived in Rome in those days, my Aunt Elizabeth was nothing if not Catholic, if not Ecclesiastical. You would have guessed as much, I think, from her exterior. She *looked* Catholic, she *looked* Ecclesiastical. There was something Gothic in her anatomy, in the architecture of her face: in her high-bridged nose, in the pointed arch her hair made as it parted above her forehead, in her prominent cheek-bones, her straight-lipped mouth and long attenuated chin, in the angularities of her figure. No doubt the simile must appear far-sought, but upon my word her face used to remind me of a chapel—a chapel built of marble, fallen somewhat into decay. I'm not sure whether she was a tall woman, or whether she only had a false air of tallness, being excessively thin and holding herself rigidly erect. She always dressed in black, in hard black silk cut to the severest patterns. Somehow, the very jewels she wore—not merely the cross on her bosom, but the rings on her fingers, the watch-chain round her neck, her watch itself, her old-fashioned, gold-faced watch—seemed of a mode canonical.

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She was nothing if not Catholic, if not Ecclesiastical; but I don't in the least mean that she was particularly devout. She observed all requisite forms, of course: went, as occasion demanded, to mass, to vespers, to confession; but religious fervour was the last thing she suggested, the last thing she affected. I never heard her talk of Faith or Salvation, of Sin or Grace, nor indeed of any matters spiritual. She was quite frankly a woman of the world, and it was the Church as a worldly institution, the Church corporal, the Papacy, Papal politics, that absorbed her interests. The loss of the Temporal Power was the wrong that filled the universe for her, its restoration the cause for which she lived. That it was a forlorn cause she would never for an instant even hypothetically admit. "Remember Avignon, remember the Seventy Years," she used to say, with a nod that seemed to attribute apodictic value to the injunction.

"Mark my words, she'll live to be Pope yet," a ribald young man murmured behind her chair. "Oh, you tell me she is a woman. I'll assume it for the sake of the argument—I'd do anything for the sake of an argument. But remember Joan, remember Pope Joan!" And he mimicked his Aunt Elizabeth's inflection and her conclusive nod.

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I had not been in Rome since that universe-filling wrong was perpetrated—not since I was a child of six or seven—when, a youth approaching twenty, I went there in the autumn of 1879; and I recollected Aunt Elizabeth only vaguely, as a lady with a face like a chapel, in whose presence—I had almost written in whose precincts—it had required some courage to breathe. But my mother's last words, when I left her in Paris, had been, "Now mind you call on your Aunt Elizabeth at once. You mustn't
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let a day pass. I am writing to her to tell her that you are coming. She will expect you to call at once." So, on the morrow of my arrival, I made an exceedingly careful toilet (I remember to this day the pains I bestowed upon my tie, the revisions to which I submitted it!), and, with an anxious heart, presented myself at the huge brown Roman palace, a portion of which my formidable relative inhabited: a palace with grated windows, and a vaulted, crypt-like porte-cochère, and a tremendous Swiss concierge, in knee-breeches and a cocked hat: the Palazzo Zacchinelli.

The Swiss, flourishing his staff of office, marshalled me (I can't use a less imposing word for the ceremony) slowly, solemnly, across a courtyard, and up a great stone staircase, at the top of which he handed me on to a functionary in black—a functionary with an ominously austere countenance, like an usher to the Inquisition. Poor old Archimede! Later, when I had come to know him well and tip him, I found he was the mildest creature, the amiablest, the most obliging, and that tenebrious mien of his only a congenital accident, like a lisp or a club-foot. But for the present he dismayed me, and I surrendered myself with humility and meekness to his guardianship. He conducted me through a series of vast chambers—you know those enormous, ungenial Roman rooms, their sombre tapestried walls, their formal furniture, their cheerless, perpetual twilight—and out upon a terrace.

The terrace lay in full sunshine. There was a garden below it, a garden with orange-trees, and rose-bushes, and camellias, with stretches of green sward, with shrubberies, with a great fountain plashing in the midst of it, and broken, moss-grown statues: a Roman garden, from which a hundred sweet airs came up, in the gentle Roman weather. The balustrade of the terrace was set at intervals with flowering plants, in big urn-shaped vases; I don't
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remember what the flowers were, but they were pink, and many of their petals had fallen, and lay scattered on the grey terrace pavement. At the far end, under an awning brave with red and yellow stripes, two ladies were seated—a lady in black, presumably the object of my pious pilgrimage; and a lady in white, whom, even from a distance, I discovered to be young and pretty. A little round table stood between them, with a carafe of water and some tumblers glistening crisply on it. The lady in black was fanning herself with a black lace fan. The lady in white held a book in her hand, from which I think she had been reading aloud. A tiny imp of a red Pomeranian dog had started forward, and was barking furiously.

This scene must have made a deeper impression upon my perceptions than any that I was conscious of at the moment, because it has always remained as fresh in my memory as you see it now. It has always been a picture that I could turn to when I would, and find unfaded: the garden, the blue sky, the warm September sunshine, the long terrace, and the two ladies seated at the end of it, looking towards me, an elderly lady in black, and a young lady in white, with dark hair.

My aunt quieted Sandro (that was the dog's name), and giving me her hand, said "How do you do?" rather drily. And then, for what seemed a terribly long time, though no doubt it was only a few seconds, she kept me standing before her, while she scrutinised me through a double eye-glass, which she held by a mother-of-pearl handle; and I was acutely aware of the awkward figure I must be cutting to the vision of that strange young lady.

At last, "I should never have recognised you. As a child you were the image of your father. Now you resemble your mother," Aunt Elizabeth declared; and lowering her glass, she added, "this is your cousin Rosalys."

I wondered,

I wondered, as I made my bow, why I had never heard before that I had such a pretty cousin, with such a pretty name. She smiled on me very kindly, and I noticed how bright her eyes were, and how white and delicate her face. The little blue veins showed through the skin, and there was no more than just the palest, palest thought of colour in her cheeks. But her lips—exquisitely curved, sensitive lips—were warm red. She smiled on me very kindly, and I daresay my heart responded with an instant palpitation. She was a girl, and she was pretty; and her name was Rosalys; and we were cousins; and I was eighteen. And above us glowed the blue sky of Italy, and round us the golden sunshine; and there, beside the terrace, lay the beautiful old Roman garden, the fragrant, romantic garden. . . . If at eighteen one isn't susceptible and sentimental and impetuous, and prepared to respond with an instant sweet commotion to the smiles of one's pretty cousins (especially when they're named Rosalys), I protest one is unworthy of one's youth. One might as well be thirty-five, and a literary hack in London.

After that introduction, however, my aunt immediately reclaimed my attention. She proceeded to ask me all sorts of questions, about myself, about my people, uninteresting questions, disconcerting questions, which she posed with the air of one who knew the answers beforehand, and was only asking as an examiner asks, to test you. And all the while, the expression of her face, of her deprecating, straight-lipped mouth, of her half-closed sceptical old eyes, seemed to imply that she already had her opinion of me, and that it wouldn't in the least be affected by anything I could say for myself, and that it was distinctly not a flattering opinion.

"Well, and what brings you to Rome?" That was one of her questions. I felt like a suspicious character hailed before the local

local magistrate to give an account of his presence in the parish ; putting on the best face I could, I pleaded superior orders. I had taken my *baccalauréat* in the summer ; and my father desired me to pass some months in Italy, for the purpose of "patching up my Italian, which had suffered from the ravages of time," before I returned to Paris, and settled down to the study of a profession.

"H'm," said she, manifesting no emotion at what (in my simplicity) I deemed rather a felicitous metaphor ; and then, as it were, she let me off with a warning. "Look out that you don't fall into bad company. Rome is full of dangerous people—painters, Bohemians, republicans, atheists. You must be careful. I shall keep my eye upon you."

By-and-by, to my relief, my aunt's director arrived, Monsignor Parlaghi, a tall, fat, cheerful, bustling man, who wore a silk cassock edged with purple, and a purple netted sash. When he sat down and crossed his legs, one saw a square-toed shoe with a silver buckle, and an inch or two of purple silk stocking. He began at once to talk with his penitent, about some matter to which I (happily) was a stranger ; and that gave me my chance to break the ice with Rosalys.

She had risen to greet the Monsignore, and now stood by the balustrade of the terrace, half turned towards the garden, a slender, fragile figure, all in white. Her dark hair swept away from her forehead in lovely, long undulations, and her white face, beneath it, seemed almost spirit-like in its delicacy, almost immaterial.

"I am richer than I thought. I did not know I had a Cousin Rosalys," said I.

It looks like a sufficiently easy thing to say, doesn't it? And besides, hadn't I carefully composed and corrected and conned it
The Yellow Book—Vol. IX. c beforehand,

beforehand, in the silence of my mind? But I remember the mighty effort of will it cost me to get it said. I suppose it is in the design of nature that Eighteen should find it nervous work to break the ice with pretty girls. At any rate, I remember how my heart fluttered, and what a hollow, unfamiliar sound my voice had; I remember that in the very middle of the enterprise my pluck and my presence of mind suddenly deserted me, and everything became a blank, and for one horrible moment I thought I was going to break down utterly, and stand there staring, blushing, speechless. But then I made a further mighty effort of will, a desperate effort, and somehow, though they nearly choked me, the premeditated words came out.

“Oh, we’re not *real* cousins,” said she, letting her eyes shine for a second on my face. And she explained to me just what the connection between us was. “But we will call ourselves cousins,” she concluded.

The worst was over; the worst, though Eighteen was still, no doubt, conscious of perturbations. I don’t know how long we stood chatting together there by the balustrade, but presently I said something about the garden, and she proposed that we should go down into it. So she led me to the other end of the terrace, where there was a flight of steps, and we went down into the garden.

The merest trifles, in such weather, with a pretty new-found Cousin Rosalys for a comrade, are delightful, when one is eighteen, aren’t they? It was delightful to feel the yielding turf under our feet, the cool grass curling round our ankles—for in Roman gardens, in those old days, it wasn’t the fashion to clip the grass close, as on an English lawn. It was delightful to walk in the shade of the orange-trees, and breathe the air sweetened by them. The stillness, the dreamy stillness of the soft, sunny afternoon was
delightful

delightful ; the crumbling old statues were delightful, statues of fauns and dryads, of Pagan gods and goddesses, Pan and Bacchus and Diana, their noses broken for the most part, their bodies clothed in mosses and leafy vines. And the flowers were delightful ; the cyclamens, with which—so abundant were they—the walls of the garden fairly dripped, as with a kind of pink foam ; and the roses, and the waxen red and white camellias. It was delightful to stop before the great brown old fountain, and listen to its tinkle-tinkle of cold water, and peer into its basin, all green with weeds, and watch the antics of the gold-fishes, and the little rainbows the sun struck from the spray. And my Cousin Rosalys's white frock was delightful, and her voice was delightful ; and that perturbation in my heart was exquisitely delightful—something between a thrill and a tremor—a delicious mixture of fear and wonderment and beatitude. I had dragged myself hither to pay a duty-call upon my grim old dragon of a great-aunt Elizabeth ; and here I was wandering amid the hundred delights of a romantic Italian garden, with a lovely, white-robed, bright-eyed sylph of a cousin Rosalys.

Don't ask me what we talked about. I have only the most fragmentary recollection. I remember she told me that her father and mother had died in India, when she was a child, and that her father (Aunt Elizabeth's "ever so much younger brother") had been in the army, and that she had lived with Aunt Elizabeth since she was twelve. And I remember she asked me to speak French with her, because in Rome she almost always spoke Italian or English, and she didn't want to forget her French ; and "You're, of course, almost a Frenchman, living in Paris." So we spoke French together, saying *ma cousine* and *mon cousin*, which was very intimate and pleasant ; and she spoke it so well that I expressed some surprise. "If you don't put on at least

least a *slight* accent, I shall tell you you're almost a Frenchman too," I threatened. "Oh, I had French nurses when I was little," she said, "and afterwards a French governess, till I was sixteen. I'm eighteen now. How old are you?" I had heard that girls always liked a man to be older than themselves, and I answered that I was nearly twenty. Well, and isn't eighteen nearly twenty? . . . Anyhow, as I walked back to my lodgings that afternoon, through the busy, twisted, sunlit Roman streets, Cousin Rosalys filled all my heart and all my thoughts with a white radiance.

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You will conceive whether or not, during the months that followed, I was an assiduous visitor at the Palazzo Zacchinelli. But I couldn't spend *all* my time there, and in my enforced absences I needed consolation. I imagine I treated Aunt Elizabeth's advice about avoiding bad company as youth is wont to treat the counsels of crabbed age. Doubtless my most frequent associates were those very painters and Bohemians against whom she had particularly cautioned me—whether they were also republicans and atheists, I don't think I ever knew; I can't remember that I inquired, and religion and politics were subjects they seldom touched upon spontaneously. I dare say I joined the artists' club, in the Via Margutta, the Circolo Internazionale degl' Artisti; I am afraid the Caffè Greco was my favourite café; I am afraid I even bought a wide-awake hat, and wore it on the back of my head, and tried to look as much like a painter and Bohemian myself as nature would permit.

Bad company? I don't know. It seemed to me very good company indeed. There was Jack Everett, tall and slim and athletic, with his eager aquiline face, his dark curling hair, the
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most poetic-looking creature, humorous, whimsical, melancholy, imaginative, who used to quote Byron, and plan our best practical jokes, and do the loveliest little cupids and roses in water-colours. He has since married the girl he was even then in love with, and is still living in Rome, and painting cupids and roses. And there was d'Avignac, *le vicomte*, a young Frenchman, who had been in the Diplomatic Service, and—superlative distinction!—"ruined himself for a woman," and now was striving to keep body and soul together by giving fencing lessons: witty, kindly, pathetic d'Avignac—we have vanished altogether from each other's ken. There was Ulysse Tavoni, the musician, who, when somebody asked him what instrument he played, answered cheerily, "All instruments." I can testify from personal observation that he played the piano and the flute, the guitar, mandoline, fiddle, and French horn, the 'cello and the zither. And there was König, the Austrian sculptor, a tiny man with a ferocious black moustache, whom my landlady (he having called upon me one day when I was out), unable to remember his transalpine name, described to perfection as "un Orlando Furioso—ma molto piccolo." There was a dear, dreamy, languid, sentimental Pole, blue-eyed and yellow-haired, also a sculptor, whose name I have totally forgotten, though we were sworn to "hearts' brotherhood." He had the most astonishing talent for imitating the sounds of animals, the neighing of a horse, the crowing of a cock; and when he brayed like a donkey, all the donkeys within earshot were deceived, and answered him. And then there was Father Flynn, a jolly old bibulous priest from Cork. An uncle of his had fought at Waterloo; it was great to hear him tell of his uncle's part in the fortunes of the day. It was great, too (for Father Flynn was a fervid Irish patriot) to hear him roar out the "Wearing of the Green." Between the

stanzas

stanzas he would brandish his blackthorn stick at Everett, and call him a "murdering English tyrant," to our huge delectation.

There were others and others and others; but these six are those who come back first to my memory. They seemed to me very good company indeed; very merry, and genial, and amusing; and the life we led together seemed a very pleasant life. Oh, our pleasures were of the simplest nature, the traditional pleasures of Bohemia; smoking and drinking and talking, rambuling arm-in-arm through the streets, lounging in studios, going to the play or perhaps the circus, or making excursions into the country. Only, the capital of our Bohemia was Rome. The streets through which we rambled were Roman streets, with their inexhaustible picturesqueness, their unending vicissitudes: with their pink and yellow houses, their shrines, their fountains, their gardens, their motley wayfarers—monks and soldiers; shaggy pifferari, and contadine in their gaudy costumes, and models masquerading as contadine; penitents, beggars, water-carriers, hawkers; priests in their vestments, bearing the Host, attended by acolytes, with burning tapers, who rang little bells, whilst men uncovered and women crossed themselves; and everywhere, everywhere, English tourists, with their noses in Bædeker. It was Rome with its bright sun, and its deep shadows; with its Ghetto, its Tiber, its Castle Sant' Angelo; with its churches, and palaces, and ruins; with its Villa Borghese and its Pincian Hill; with its waving green Campagna at its gates. We smoked and talked and drank—Chianti, of course, and sunny Orvieto, and fabled Est-Est-Est, all in those delightful pear-shaped, wicker-covered flasks, which of themselves, I fancy, would confer a flavour upon indifferent wine. We made excursions to Tivoli and Frascati, to Monte Cavallo and Nemi, to Acqua Acetosa. We patronised Pulcinella, and the marionettes, and (better still) the

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imitation marionettes. We blew horns on the night of Epiphany, we danced at masked balls, we put on dominoes and romped in the Corso during carnival, throwing flowers and confetti, and struggling to extinguish other people's *moccoli*. And on rainy days (with an effort I can remember that there were *some* rainy days), Everett and I would sit with d'Avignac in his fencing gallery, and talk and smoke, and smoke and talk and talk. D'Avignac was six-and-twenty, Everett was twenty-two, and I was "nearly twenty." D'Avignac would tell us of his past, of his adventures in Spain and Japan and South America, and of the lady for the love of whom he had come to grief. Everett and I would sigh profoundly, and shake our heads, and exchange sympathetic glances, and assure him that we knew what love was—we were victims of unfortunate attachments ourselves. To each other we had confided everything, Everett and I. He had told me all about his unrequited passion for Maud Eaton, and I had rhapsodised to him by the hour about Cousin Rosalys. "But you, old chap, you're to be envied," he would cry. "Here you are in the same town with her, by Jove! You can *see* her, you can plead your cause. Think of that. I wish I had half your luck. Maud is far away in England, buried in a country-house down in Lancashire. She might as well be on another planet, for all the good I get of her. But you—why, you can see your Cousin Rosalys this very hour if you like! Oh, heavens, what wouldn't I give for half your luck!" The wheel of Time, the wheel of Time! Everett and Maud are married, but Cousin Rosalys and I. . . . Heigh-ho! I wonder whether, in our thoughts of ancient days, it is more what we remember or what we forget that makes them sweet? Anyhow, for the moment, we forget the dismal things that have happened since.

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Yes,

Yes, I was in the same town with her, by Jove ; I could see her. And indeed I did see her many times every week. Like the villain in a melodrama, I led a double life. When I was not disguised as a Bohemian, in a velvet jacket and a wide-awake, smoking and talking and holding wassail with my boon companions, you might have observed a young man attired in the height of the prevailing fashion (his top-hat and varnished boots flashing fire in the eyes of the Roman populace), going to call on his Aunt Elizabeth. And his Aunt Elizabeth, pleased by such dutiful attentions, rewarded him with frequent invitations to dinner. Her other guests would be old ladies like herself, and old gentlemen, and priests, priests, priests. So that Rosalys and I, the only young ones present, were naturally paired together. After dinner Rosalys would play and sing, while I hung over her piano. Oh, how beautifully she played Chopin ! How ravishingly she sang ! Schubert's *Wohin*, and *Röslein, Röslein, Röslein roth* ; and Gounod's *Sérénade* and his *Barcarolle* :

“ Dites la jeune belle,
Où voulez-vous aller ? ”

And how angelically beautiful she looked ! Her delicate, pale face, and her dark, undulating hair, and her soft red lips ; and then her eyes—her luminous, mysterious dark eyes, in whose depths, far, far within, you could discern her spirit shining starlike. And her hands, white and slender and graceful, images in miniature of herself ; with what incommunicable wonder and admiration I used to watch them as they moved above the keys. “ A woman who plays Chopin ought to have three hands—two to play with, and one for the man who's listening to hold.” That was a pleasantry which I meditated much in secret, and a thousand times aspired to murmur in the player's ear, but invariably, when it came to the point

point of doing so, my courage failed me. "You can see her, you can plead your cause." Bless me, I never dared even vaguely to hint that I had any cause to plead. I imagine young love is always terribly afraid of revealing itself to its object, terribly afraid and terribly desirous. Whenever I was not in cousin Rosalys's presence, my heart was consumed with longing to tell her that I loved her, to ask her whether perhaps she might be not wholly indifferent to me; I made the boldest resolutions, committed to memory the most persuasive declarations. But from the instant I *was* in her presence again—mercy, what panic seized me. I could have died sooner than speak the words that I was dying to speak, ask the question I was dying to ask.

I called assiduously at the Palazzo Zacchinelli, and my aunt bade me to dinner a good deal, and then one afternoon every week she used to drive with Rosalys on the Pincian. There was one afternoon every week when all Rome drove on the Pincian; was it Saturday? At any rate, you may be very sure I did not let such opportunities escape me for getting a bow and a smile from my cousin. Sometimes she would leave the carriage and join me, while Aunt Elizabeth, with Sandro in her lap, drove on, round and round the consecrated circle; and we would stroll together in the winding alleys, or stand by the terrace and look off over the roofs of the city, and watch the sunset blaze and fade behind St. Peter's. You know that unexampled view—the roofs of Rome spread out beneath you like the surface of a troubled sea, and the dome of St. Peter's, an island rising in the distance, and the sunset sky behind it. We would stand there in silence perhaps, at most saying very little, while the sunset burned itself out; and for one of us, at least, it was a moment of ineffable, impossible enchantment. She was so near to me, so near, the slender figure in the pretty frock, with the dark hair, and the captivating hat, and the furs; with

with her soft glowing eyes, with her exquisite fragrance of girlhood; she was so near to me, so alone with me, despite the crowd about us, and I loved her so! Oh, why couldn't I tell her? Why couldn't she divine it? People said that women always knew by intuition when men were in love with them. Why couldn't Rosalys divine that I loved her, *how* I loved her, and make me a sign, and so enable me to speak?

Presently—and all too soon—she would return to the carriage, and drive away with Aunt Elizabeth; and I, in the lugubrious twilight, would descend the great marble Spanish staircase (a perilous path, amongst models and beggars and other things) to the Piazza, and seek out Jack Everett at the *Caffè Greco*. Thence he and I would go off to dine together somewhere, condoling with each other upon our ill-starred passions. After dinner, pulling our hats over our eyes, two desperately tragic forms, we would set ourselves upon the traces of d'Avignac and König and Father Flynn, determined to forget our sorrows in an evening of dissipation, saying regretfully, "These are the evil courses to which the love of woman has reduced us—a couple of the best-meaning fellows in Christendom, and surely born for better ends." When we were children (hasn't Kenneth Grahame written it for us in a golden book?) we played at conspirators and pirates. When we were a little older, and Byron or Musset had superseded Fenimore Cooper, some of us found there was an unique excitement to be got from the game of Blighted Beings.

Oh, why couldn't I tell her? Why couldn't she divine it, and make me an encouraging sign?

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But of course, in the end, I did tell her. It was on the night of my birthday. I had dined at the Palazzo Zacchinelli, and with the

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the dessert a great cake was brought in and set before me. A number of little red candles were burning round it, and embossed upon it in frosting was this device :

A birthday-piece
From Rosalys,
Wishing birthdays more in plenty
To her cousin "nearly twenty."

And counting the candles, I perceived they were *nineteen*.

Probably my joy was somewhat tempered by confusion, to think that my little equivocation on the subject of my age had been discovered. As I looked up from the cake to its giver, I met a pair of eyes that were gleaming with mischievous raillery ; and she shook her head at me, and murmured, "Oh, you fibber !"

"How on earth did you find out ?" I wondered.

"Oh—a little bird," laughed she.

"I don't think it's at all respectful of you to call Aunt Elizabeth a little bird," said I.

After dinner we went out upon the terrace. It was a warm night, and there was a moon. A moonlit night in Italy—dark velvet shot with silver. And the air was intoxicant with the scent of hyacinths. We were in March ; the garden had become a wilderness of spring flowers, narcissi and jonquils, crocusses, anemones, tulips, and hyacinths ; hyacinths, everywhere hyacinths. Rosalys had thrown a bit of white lace over her hair. Oh, I assure you, in the moonlight, with the white lace over her hair, with her pale face, and her eyes, her shining, mysterious eyes—oh, I promise you, she was lovely.

"How beautiful the garden is, in the moonlight, isn't it ?" she said. "The shadows, and the statues, and the fountains. And how sweet the air is. They're the hyacinths that smell so sweet.

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The hyacinth is your birthday flower, you know. Hyacinths bring happiness to people born in March."

I looked into her eyes, and my heart thrilled and thrilled. And then, somehow, somehow Oh, I don't remember what I said; only, somehow, somehow Ah, but I do remember very clearly what she answered—so softly, so softly, while her hand lay in mine. I remember it very clearly, and at the memory, even now, years afterwards, I confess my heart thrills again.

We were joined, in a minute or two, by Monsignor Parlaghi, and we tried to behave as if he were not unwelcome.

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Adam and Eve were driven from Eden for their guilt; but it was Innocence that lost our Eden for Rosalys and me. In our egregious innocence, we had determined that I should call upon Aunt Elizabeth in the morning, and formally demand her sanction to our engagement! Do I need to recount the history of that interview? Of my aunt's incredulity, that gradually changed to scorn and anger? Of how I was fleered at and flouted, and taunted with my youth, and called a fool and a coxcomb, and sent about my business with the information that the portals of the Palazzo Zacchinelli would remain eternally closed against me for the future, and that my people "would be written to"? I was not even allowed to see my cousin to say good-bye. "And mind you, we'll have no letter writing," cried Aunt Elizabeth. "I shall forbid Rosalys to receive any letters from you."

Guilt (we are taught) can be annulled, and its punishment remitted, if we do heartily repent. But innocence? Goodness knows how heartily I repented; yet I never found that a penny-weight of the punishment was remitted. At the week's end I got a letter from my people recalling me to Paris. And I never saw
Rosalys

Rosalys again. And some years afterwards she married an Italian, a nephew of Cardinal Badascalchi. And in 1887, at Viareggio, she died. . . .

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Eh bien, voilà! There is the little inachieved, the little unfulfilled romance, written for me in her name, Cousin Rosalys. What of it? Oh, nothing—except—except—Oh, nothing.

“All good things come to him who waits.” Perhaps. But we know how apt they are to come too late; and—sometimes they come too early.