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MELISSA'S TOUR.

LUCY looked across the table at me with a face of blank horror. "Oh, Vernon," she cried, "what are we *ever* to do? And an American at that! This is just *too* ghastly!" It's a habit of Lucy's, I may remark, to talk italics.

I laid down my coffee-cup, and glanced back at her in surprise. "Why, what's up?" I exclaimed, scanning the envelope close. "A letter from Oxford, surely. Mrs. Wade, of Christ Church—I thought I knew the hand. And *she's* not an American."

"Well, look for yourself!" Lucy cried, and tossed the note to me, pouting. I took it and read. I'm aware that I have the misfortune to be only a man, but it really didn't strike me as quite so terrible.

"DEAR MRS. HANCOCK,

"George has just heard that your husband and you are going for a trip to New York this summer. *Could* you manage to do us a *very great* kindness? I hope you won't mind it. We have an American friend—a Miss Easterbrook, of Kansas City—niece of Professor Asa P. Easterbrook, the well-known Yale geologist, who very much wishes to find an escort across the Atlantic. If you would be so good as to take charge of her, and deliver her safely to Dr. Horace Easterbrook, of Hoboken, on your arrival in the States, you would do a good turn to her, and, at the same time, confer an eternal favour on

"Yours very truly,
EMILY WADE."

Lucy folded her hands in melodramatic despair. "Kansas City!" she exclaimed, with a shudder of horror. "And Asa P. Easterbrook! A geologist, indeed! That horrid Mrs. Wade! She just did it on purpose!"

"It seems to me," I put in, regarding the letter close, "she did it merely because she was asked to find a chaperon for the girl; and she wrote the very shortest possible note, in a perfunctory way, to the very first acquaintance she chanced to hear of who was going to America."

"Vernon!" my wife exclaimed, with a very decided air, "you men are such simpletons! You credit everybody always with the best and purest motives. But you're utterly wrong. I can see through that woman. The hateful, hateful wretch! She did it to spite me! Oh, my poor, poor boy; my dear, guileless Bernard!"

Bernard, I may mention, is our eldest son, aged just twenty-four, and a Cambridge graduate. He's a tutor at King's, and though he's a dear good fellow, and a splendid long-stop, I couldn't myself conscientiously say I regard guilelessness as quite his most marked characteristic.

"What are you doing?" I asked, as Lucy sat down with a resolutely determined air at her writing-table in the corner.

"Doing!" my wife replied, with some asperity in her tone. "Why, answering that hateful, detestable woman!"

I glanced over her shoulder, and followed her pen as she wrote—

"MY DEAR MRS. WADE,

"It was *indeed* a delight to us to see your neat little handwriting again. *Nothing* would give us greater pleasure, I'm sure, than to take charge of your friend, who, I'm confident, we shall find a most charming companion. Bernard will be with us, so she won't feel it dull, I trust. We hope to have a very delightful trip, and your happy thought in providing us with a travelling companion will add, no doubt, to all our enjoyment—especially Bernard's. We both join in very kindest regards to Mr. Wade

and yourself, and I am ever

“Yours most cordially,
LUCY B. HANCOCK.”

My wife fastened down the envelope with a very crushing air. “There, *that* ought to do for her,” she said, glancing up at me triumphantly. “I should think she could see from that, if she’s not as blind as an owl, I’ve observed her atrocious designs upon Bernard, and mean to checkmate them. If, after such a letter, she has the cheek to send us her Yankee girl to chaperon, I shall consider her lost to all sense of shame and all notions of decency. But she won’t, of course. She’ll withdraw her unobtrusively.” And Lucy flung the peccant sheet that had roused all this wrath on to the back of the fireplace with offended dignity.

She was wrong, however. By next evening’s post a second letter arrived, more discomposing, if possible, to her nerves than the first one.

“Mrs. Lucy B. Hancock, London.

“DEAR MADAM,

“I learn from my friend Mrs. Wade, of Oxford College, that you are going to be kind enough to take charge of me across the ocean. I thank you for your courtesy, and will gladly accept your friendly offer. If you will let me know by what steamer you start, I will register my passage right away in Liverpool. Also, if you will be good enough to tell me from what *depôt* you leave London, and by what train, I will go along with you in the cars. I’m unused to travel alone.

“Respectfully,
MELISSA P. EASTERBROOK.”

Lucy gazed at it in despair. “A creature like that!” she cried, all horror-struck. “Oh, my poor dear Bernard! The ocean, she says! Go along with you in the cars! Melissa P. Easterbrook!”

“Perhaps,” I said tentatively, “she may be better than her name. And, at any rate, Bernard’s not *bound* to marry her!”

Lucy darted at me profound volumes of mute feminine contempt. “The girl’s pretty,” she said at last, after a long, deep pause, during which I had been made to realize to the full my own utter moral and intellectual nothingness. “You may be sure she’s pretty. Mrs. Wade wouldn’t have foisted her upon us if she wasn’t pretty, but unspeakable. It’s a vile plot on her part to destroy my peace of mind. You won’t believe it, Vernon; but I *know* that woman. And what does the girl mean by signing herself ‘Respectfully,’ I wonder?”

“It’s the American way,” I ventured gently to interpose.

“So I gather,” my wife answered with a profound accent of contempt. To her, anything that isn’t done in the purest English way stands, *ipso facto*, self-condemned immediately.

A day or two later a second letter arrived from Miss Easterbrook, in reply to one of Lucy’s, suggesting a rendezvous. I confess it drew up in my mind a somewhat painful picture. I began to believe my wife’s fears were in some ways well grounded.

“Mrs. Lucy B. Hancock, London” (as before).

“DEAR MADAM,

“I thank you for yours, and will meet you on the day and hour you mention at St. Pancras *depôt*. You will know me when you see me, because I shall wear a dove-coloured dress, with bonnet to match, and a pair of grey spectacles.

“Respectfully,
MELISSA P. EASTERBROOK.”

I laid it down and sighed. “A New England schoolmarm!” I exclaimed with a groan. “It sounds rather terrible. A dove-coloured dress, and a pair of grey spectacles! I fancy I can picture her to myself—a tall and bony person of a certain age, with corkscrew curls, who reads improving books, and has views of her own about the fulfilment of prophecy.”

But as my spirits went down, so Lucy’s went up, like the old man and woman in the cottage weather-glass. “That looks more promising,” she said. “The spectacles are good. Perhaps after all dear Bernard may escape. I don’t think he’s at all the sort of person to be taken with a dove-coloured bonnet.”

For some days after Bernard came home from Cambridge we chaffed a good deal among ourselves about Miss Melissa Easterbrook. Bernard took quite my view about the spectacles and dress. He even drew on an envelope a fancy portrait of Miss Easterbrook, as he said himself, “from documentary evidence.” It represented a typical schoolmarm of the most virulent order, and was calculated to strike terror into the receptive mind of ingenuous youth on simple inspection.

At last the day came when we were to go to Liverpool. We arrived at St. Pancras in very good time, and looked about on the platform for a tall and hard-faced person of Transatlantic aspect, arrayed in a dove-coloured dress and a pair of grey spectacles. But we looked in vain: nobody about seemed to answer to the description. At last Bernard turned to my wife with a curious smile. “I think I’ve spotted her, mother,” he said, waving his hand vaguely to the right. “That lady over yonder—by the door of the refreshment-room. Don’t you see? That must be Melissa.” For we knew her only as Melissa already among ourselves: it had been raised to the mild rank of a family witticism.

I looked in the direction he suggested, and paused for certainty. There, irresolute by the door and gazing about her timidly with inquiring eyes, stood the prettiest, tiniest, most shrinking little Western girl you ever saw in your life—attired, as she said, in a dove-coloured dress, with bonnet to match, and a pair of grey spectacles. But oh, what a dove-coloured dress! Walter Crane might have designed it—one of those perfect travelling costumes of which the American girl seems to possess a monopoly; and the spectacles—well, the spectacles, though undoubtedly real, added just a touch of piquancy to an otherwise almost painfully timid and retiring little figure. The moment I set eyes on Melissa Easterbrook, I will candidly admit, I was her captive at once; and even Lucy, as she looked at her, relaxed her face involuntarily into a sympathetic smile. As a rule, Lucy might pose as a perfect model of the British matron in her ampler and maturer years—“calmly terrible,” as an American observer once described the genus: but at sight of Melissa she melted without a struggle. “Poor wee little thing, how pretty she is!” she exclaimed with a start. You will readily admit that was a great deal, from Lucy.

Melissa came forward tentatively, a dainty blush half rising on her rather pale and delicate little cheek. “Mrs. Hancock?” she said in an inquiring tone, with just the faintest suspicion of an American accent in her musical small voice. Lucy took her hand cordially. “I was sure it was you, ma’am,” Melissa went on with pretty confidence, looking up into her face, “because Mrs. Wade told me you’d be as kind to me as a mother; and the moment I saw you I just said to myself, ‘That *must* be Mrs. Hancock: she’s so sweetly motherly.’ How good of you to burden yourself with a stranger like me! I hope indeed I won’t be too much trouble.”

That was the beginning. I may as well say, first as last, we were all of us taken by storm “right away” by Melissa. Lucy herself struck her flag unconditionally before a single shot was fired, and Bernard and I, hard hit at all points, surrendered at discretion. She was the most charming little girl the human mind can conceive. Our cold English language fails, in its roughness, to describe her. She was *petite, mignonne*, graceful, fairy-like, yet with a touch of Yankee quaintness and a delicious *espièglerie* that made her absolutely unique in my experience of women. We had utterly lost our hearts to her before ever we reached Liverpool; and, strange to say, I believe the one of us whose heart was most completely gone was, if only you’ll believe it, that calmly terrible Lucy.

Melissa’s most winning characteristic, however, as it seemed to me, was her perfect frankness. As we whirled along on our way across England, she told us everything about herself, her family, her friends, her neighbours, and the population of Kansas City in general. Not obtrusively or egotistically—of egotism Melissa would be wholly incapable—but in a certain timid, confiding, half-childlike way, as of the lost little girl, that was absolutely captivating. “Oh no, ma’am,” she said, in answer to one of Lucy’s earliest questions, “I didn’t come over alone. I think I’d be afraid to. I came with a

whole squad of us who were doing Europe. A prominent lady in Kansas City took charge of the square lot. And I got as far as Rome with them, through Germany and Switzerland, and then my money wouldn't run to it any further: so I had to go back. Travelling comes high in Europe, what with hotels and fees and having to pay to get your baggage checked. And that's how I came to want an escort."

Bernard smiled good-naturedly. "Then you had only a fixed sum," he asked, "to make your European tour with?"

"That's so, sir," Melissa answered, looking up at him quizzically through those pretty grey spectacles. "I'd put away quite a little sum of my own to make this trip upon. It was my only chance of seeing Europe and improving myself a piece. I knew when I started I couldn't go all the round trip with the rest of my party: but I thought I'd set out with them, any way, and go ahead as long as my funds held out; and then when I was through I'd turn about and come home again."

"But you put away the money yourself?" Lucy asked, with a little start of admiring surprise.

"Yes, ma'am," Melissa answered sagely. "I know it. I saved it."

"From your allowance?" Lucy suggested, from the restricted horizon of her English point of view.

Melissa laughed a merry little laugh of amusement. "Oh no," she said; "from my salary."

"From your salary!" Bernard put in, looking down at her with an inquiring glance.

"Yes, sir; that's it," Melissa answered, all unabashed. "You see, for four years I was a clerk in the Post Office." She pronounced it "clurk," but that's a detail.

"Oh, indeed!" Bernard echoed. He was burning to know how, I could see, but politeness forbade him to press Melissa on so delicate a point any further.

Melissa, however, herself supplied at once the missing information. "My father was postmaster in our city," she said simply, "under the last administration—President Blanco's, you know—and he made me one of his clerks, of course, when he'd gotten the place; and as long as the fun went on, I saved all my salary for a tour in Europe."

"And at the end of four years?" Lucy said.

"Our party went out," Melissa put in, confidentially. "So, when the trouble began, my father was dismissed, and I had just enough left to take me as far as Rome, as I told you."

I was obliged to explain parenthetically, to allay Lucy's wonderment, that in America the whole *personnel* of every local Government office changes almost completely with each incoming President.

"That's so, sir," Melissa assented, with a wise little nod. "And as I didn't think it likely our folks would get in again in a hurry—the country's had enough of us—I just thought I'd make the best of my money when I'd got it."

"And you used it all up in giving yourself a holiday in Europe?" Lucy exclaimed, half reproachfully. To her economic British mind such an expenditure of capital seemed horribly wasteful.

"Yes, ma'am," Melissa answered, all unconscious of the faint disapproval implied in Lucy's tone. "You see, I'd never been anywhere much away from Kansas City before; and I thought this was a special opportunity to go abroad, and visit the picture-galleries and cathedrals of Europe, and enlarge my mind, and get a little culture. To us, a glimpse of Europe's an intellectual necessary."

"Oh, then, you regarded your visit as largely educational?" Bernard put in, with increasing interest. Though he's a fellow and tutor of King's, I will readily admit that Bernard's personal tastes lie rather in the direction of rowing and football than of general culture; but still, the American girl's point of view decidedly attracted him by its novelty in a woman.

"That's so, sir," Melissa answered once more, in her accustomed affirmative. "I took it as a sort of university trip. I

graduated in Europe. In America, of course, wherever you go, all you can see's everywhere just the same, purely new and American. The language, the manners, the type don't vary: in Europe, you cross a frontier or a ribbon of sea, and everything's different. Now, on this trip of ours, we went first to Chester, to glimpse a typical old English town—those Rows, oh! how lovely!—and then to Leamington, for Warwick Castle and Kenilworth. Kenilworth's just glorious, isn't it?—with its mouldering red walls and its dark green ivy, and the ghost of Amy Robsart walking up and down upon the close-shaven English grass-plots."

"I've heard it's very beautiful," Bernard admitted gravely.

"What! you live so close, and you've never *been* there!" Melissa exclaimed, in frank surprise.

Bernard allowed with a smile he had been so culpably negligent.

"And Stratford-on-Avon, too!" Melissa went on, enthusiastically, her black eyes beaming. "Isn't Stratford just charming! I don't care for the interminable Shakespeare nuisance, you know—that's all too new and made up; we could raise a Shakespeare house like that in Kansas City any day; but the church, and the elms, and the swans, and the river! I made such a sweet little sketch of them all, so soft and peaceful. At least, the place itself was as sweet as a corner of heaven, and I tried as well as I could in my way to sketch it."

"I suppose it *is* very pretty," Bernard replied, in a meditative tone.

Melissa started visibly. "What! have you never been there, either?" she exclaimed, taken aback. "Well, that *is* odd, now! You live in England, and have never run over to Stratford-on-Avon! Why, you do surprise me! But, there! I suppose you English live in the midst of culture, as it were, and can get to it all right away at any time; so, perhaps, you don't think quite as much of it as we do, who have to save up our money, perhaps for years, to get, for once in our lives, just a single passing glimpse of it. You live at Cambridge, you see; you must be steeped in culture, right down to the finger-ends."

Bernard modestly responded, twirling his manly moustache, that the river and the running-ground, he feared, were more in his way than art or architecture.

"And where else did you go besides England?" Lucy asked, really interested.

"Well, ma'am, from London we went across by Ostend to Bruges, where I studied the Memlings, and made a few little copies from them," Melissa answered, with her sunny smile. "It's such a quaint old place, Bruges. Life seems to flow as stagnant as its own canals. Have you ever been there?"

"Oh, charming!" Lucy answered; "most delightful and quiet. But—er—who are the Memlings? I don't quite recollect them."

Melissa gazed at her, open-eyed. "The Memlings?" she said slowly; "why, you've just missed the best thing at Bruges if you haven't seen them. They've such a naïve charm of their own, so innocent and sympathetic. They're in the Hôpital de St. Jean, you know, where Memling put them. And it's so delightful to see great pictures like those—though they're tiny little things to look at—in their native surroundings, exactly as they were first painted—the Chasse de Ste. Ursule, and all those other lovely things, so infantile in their simplicity, and yet so exquisitely graceful, and pure, and beautiful. I don't know as I saw anything in Europe to equal them for pathos in their own way—except, of course, the Fra Angelicos at San Marco in Florence."

"I don't think I've seen them," Lucy murmured, with an uncomfortable air. I could see it was just dawning upon her, in spite of her patronizing, that this Yankee girl, with her imperfect command of the English tongue, knew a vast deal more about some things worth notice than she herself did. "And where did you go then, dear?"

"Oh, from Bruges we went on to Ghent," Melissa answered, leaning back, and looking as pretty as a picture herself in her sweet little travelling-dress, "to see the great Van Eyck, the 'Adoration of the Lamb,' you know—that magnificent panel-picture. And then we went to Brussels, where we had Dierick Bouts and all the later Flemings; and to Antwerp, for Rubens and Vandyck and Quintin Matsys; and the Hague after that, for Rembrandt and Paul Potter; and Amsterdam in the end, for Van der Helst and Gerard Dow, and the late Dutch painters. So, you see, we had quite an artistic tour—we

followed up the development of Netherlandish art, from beginning to end, in historical order. It was just delightful.”

“I went to Antwerp once,” Bernard put in, somewhat sheepishly, still twirling his moustache; “but it was on my way to Switzerland; and I didn’t see much, as far as I can recollect, except the cathedral and the quay and the hotel I was stopping at.”

“Ah, that’s all very well for *you*,” Melissa answered, with a rather envious air. “You can see these things any day. But for us, the chance comes only once in a lifetime, and we must make the most of it.”

Well, in such converse as this we reached Liverpool in due time, and went next morning on board our steamer. We had a lovely passage out, and all the way, the more we saw of Melissa, the more we liked her. To be sure, Lucy received a terrible shock the third day out, when she asked Melissa what she meant to do when she returned to Kansas City. “You won’t go into the Post Office again, I suppose, dear?” she said kindly, for we had got by that time on most friendly terms with our little Melissa.

“I guess not,” Melissa answered. “No such luck any more. I’ll have to go back again to the store as usual.”

“The store!” Lucy repeated, bewildered. “I—I don’t quite understand you.”

“Well, the shop, I presume you’d call it,” Melissa answered, smiling. “My father’s gotten a book-store in Kansas City; and before I went into the Post Office I helped him at the counter. In fact, I was his saleswoman.”

“I assure you, Vernon,” Lucy remarked in our berth that night, “if an Englishwoman had said it to me, I’d have been obliged to apologize to her for having forced her to confess it, and I don’t know what way I should ever have looked to hide my face while she was talking about it. But with Melissa it’s all so different, somehow. She spoke as if it was the most natural thing on earth for her father to keep a shop, and she didn’t seem the least little bit in the world ashamed of it either.”

“Why should she?” I answered, with my masculine bluntness. But that was perhaps a trifle too advanced for Lucy. Melissa was exercising a widening influence on my wife’s point of view with astonishing rapidity: but still, a perfect lady must always draw a line somewhere.

All the way across, indeed, Melissa’s lively talk was a constant delight and pleasure to every one of us. She was so taking, that girl, so confidential, so friendly. We really loved her. Then her quaint little Americanisms were as pretty as herself—not only her “Yes, sirs,” and her “No, ma’ams,” her “I guess” and “That’s so,” but her fresh Western ideas and her infinite play of fancy in the Queen’s English. She turned it as a potter turns his clay. In Britain, our mother tongue has crystallized long since into set forms and phrases. In America, it has still the plasticity of youth; it is fertile in novelty—nay, even in surprises. And Melissa knew how to twist it deftly into unexpected quips and incongruous conjunctions. Her talk ran on like a limpid brook, with a musical ripple playing ever on the surface. As for Bernard, he helped her about the ship like a brother, as she moved lightly around with her sylphlike little form among the ropes and capstans. Melissa liked to be helped, she said: she didn’t believe one bit in woman’s rights; no, indeed—she was a great deal too fond of being taken care of for that. And who wouldn’t take care of her, that delicate little thing, like some choice small masterpiece of cunning workmanship? Why, she almost looked as if she were made of Venetian glass, and a fall on deck would shatter her into a thousand fragments.

And her talk all the way was of the joys of Europe—the castles and abbeys she was leaving behind, the pictures and statues she had seen and admired, the pictures and statues she had left unvisited. “Somebody told me in Paris,” she said to me one day, as she hung on my arm on deck and looked up into my face confidingly with that childlike smile of hers, “the only happy time in an American woman’s life is the period when she’s just got over the first poignant regret at having left Europe, and hasn’t yet reached the point when she makes up her mind that, come what will, she really *must* go back again. And I thought, for my part, then my happiness was fairly spoilt for life, for I shall never be able again to afford the journey.”

“Melissa, my child,” I said, looking down at those ripe rich lips, “in this world one never knows what may turn up next. I’ve observed on my way down the path of life that when fruit hangs rosy-red on the tree by the wall, some passer-by or other is pretty sure in the end to pluck it.”

But that was too much for Melissa's American modesty. She looked down and blushed like a rose herself. But she answered me nothing.

A night or two before we reached New York I was standing in the gloom, half hidden by a boat on the davits amidships, enjoying my vespertinal cigar in the cool of evening; and between the puffs I caught from time to time stray snatches of a conversation going on softly in the twilight between Bernard and Melissa. I had noticed of late, indeed, that Bernard and Melissa walked much on deck in the evening together; but this particular evening they walked long and late, and their conversation seemed to me (if I might judge by fragments) particularly confidential. The bits of it I caught were mostly, it is true, on Melissa's part (when Bernard said anything, he said it lower). She was talking enthusiastically of Venice, Florence, Pisa, Rome, with occasional flying excursions into Switzerland and the Tyrol. Once as she passed I heard something murmured low about Botticelli's "Primavera;" when next she went by, it was the Alps from Mürren; a third time, again, it was the mosaics at St. Mark's, and Titian's "Assumption," and the Doge's Palace. What so innocent as art, in the moonlight, on the ocean?

At last Bernard paused just opposite where I stood (for they didn't perceive me), and said very earnestly, "Look here, Melissa,"—he had called her Melissa almost from the first moment, and she seemed to prefer it, it seemed so natural—"Look here, Melissa. Do you know, when you talk about things like that, you make me feel so dreadfully ashamed of myself."

"Why so, Mr. Hancock?" Melissa asked innocently.

"Well, when I think what opportunities I've had, and how little I've used them," Bernard exclaimed with vehemence, "and then reflect how few you've got, and how splendidly you've made the best of them, I just blush, I tell you, Melissa, for my own laziness."

"Perhaps," Melissa interposed with a grave little air, "if one had always been brought up among it all, one wouldn't think quite so much of it. It's the novelty of antiquity that makes it so charming to people from my country. I suppose it seems quite natural, now, to you that your parish church should be six hundred years old, and have tombs in the chancel with Elizabethan ruffs or its floor inlaid with Plantagenet brasses. To us, all that seems mysterious and in a certain sort of way one might almost say magical. Nobody can love Europe quite so well, I'm sure, who has lived in it from a child. *You* grew up to many things that burst fresh upon us at last with all the intense delight of a new sensation."

They stood still as they spoke and looked hard at one another. There was a minute's pause. Then Bernard began again. "Melissa," he faltered out, in a rather tremulous voice, "are you sorry to go home again?"

"I just hate it!" Melissa answered, with a vehement burst. Then she added after a second, "But I've enjoyed the voyage."

"You'd like to live in Europe?" Bernard asked.

"I should love it!" Melissa replied. "I'm fond of my folks, of course, and I should be sorry to leave them; but I just love Europe. I shall never go again, though. I shall come right away back to Kansas City now, and keep store for father for the rest of my natural existence."

"It seems hard," Bernard went on, musing, "that anybody like you, Melissa, with such a natural love of art and of all beautiful things—anybody who can draw such sweet dreams of delight as those heads you showed us after Filippo Lippi—anybody who can appreciate Florence and Venice and Rome as you do, should have to live all her life in a Far Western town, and meet with so little sympathy as you're likely to find there."

"That's the rub," Melissa replied, looking up into his face with such a confiding look (if any pretty girl had looked up at *me* like that, I should have known what to do with her; but Bernard was twenty-four, and young men are modest). "That's the rub, Mr. Hancock. I like—well, European society so very much better. Our men are nice enough in their own way, don't you know; but they somehow lack polish—at least, out West, I mean—in Kansas City. Europeans mayn't be very much better when you get right at them, perhaps; but on the outside, any way, to *me*, they're more attractive somehow."

There was another long pause, during which I felt as guilty as every eavesdropper before me. Yet I was glued to the

spot. I could hardly escape. At last Bernard spoke again. "I should like to have gone round with you on your tour, Melissa," he said; "I don't know Italy. I don't suppose by myself I could even appreciate it. But if *you* were by my side, you'd have taught me what it all meant; and then I think I might perhaps understand it."

Melissa drew a deep breath. "I wish I could take it all over again," she answered, half sighing. "And I didn't see Naples, either. That was a great disappointment. I should like to have seen Naples, I must confess, so as to know I could at least in the end die happy."

"Why do you go back?" Bernard asked, suddenly, with a bounce, looking down at that wee hand that trembled upon the taffrail.

"Because I can't help myself," Melissa answered, in a quivering voice. "I should like—I should like to live always in England."

"Have you any special preference for any particular town?" Bernard asked, moving closer to her—though, to be sure, he was very, very near already.

"N—no; n—none in particular," Melissa stammered out faintly, half sidling away from him.

"Not Cambridge, for example?" Bernard asked, with a deep gulp and an audible effort.

I felt it would be unpardonable for me to hear any more. I had heard already many things not intended for me. I sneaked off, unperceived, and left those two alone to complete that conversation.

Half an hour later—it was a calm moonlight night—Bernard rushed down eagerly into the saloon to find us. "Father and mother," he said, with a burst, "I want you up on deck for just ten minutes. There's something up there I should like so much to show you."

"Not whales?" I asked hypocritically, suppressing a smile.

"No, not whales," he replied; "something much more interesting."

We followed him blindly, Lucy much in doubt what the thing might be, and I much in wonder, after Mrs. Wade's letter, how Lucy might take it.

At the top of the companion-ladder Melissa stood waiting for us, demure but subdued, with a still timider look than ever upon that sweet shrinking small face of hers. Her heart beat hard, I could see by the movement of her bodice, and her breath came and went; but she stood there like a dove, in her dove-coloured travelling-dress.

"Mother," Bernard began, "Melissa's obliged to come back to America, don't you know, without having ever seen Naples. It seems a horrid shame she should miss seeing it. She hadn't money enough left, you recollect, to take her there."

Lucy gazed at him, unsuspecting. "It does seem a pity," she answered sympathetically. "She'd enjoy it so much. I'm sorry she hasn't been able to carry out all her programme."

"And, mother," Bernard went on, his eyes fixed hard on hers, "how awfully she'd be thrown away on Kansas City! I can't bear to think of her going back to 'keep store' there."

"For my part, I think it positively wicked," Lucy answered with a smile, "and I can't think what—well, people in England—are about to allow her to do it."

I opened my eyes wide. Did Lucy know what she was saying? Or had Melissa, then, fascinated her—the arch little witch!—as she had fascinated the rest of us?

But Bernard, emboldened by this excellent opening, took Melissa by the hand, as if in due form to present her. "Mother,"

he said tenderly, leading the wee thing forward, “and father, too; *this* is what I wanted to show you—the girl I’m engaged to!”

I paused and trembled. I waited for the thunderbolt. But no thunderbolt fell. On the contrary, Lucy stepped forward, and, under cover of the mast, caught Melissa in her arms and kissed her twice over. “My dear child,” she cried, pressing her hard, “my dear little daughter, I don’t know which of you two I ought most to congratulate.”

“But I do,” Bernard murmured low. And, his father though I am, I murmured to myself, “And so do I, also.”

“Then you’re not ashamed of me, mother dear,” Melissa whispered, burying her dainty little head on Lucy’s shoulder, “because I kept store in Kansas City?”

Lucy rose above herself, in the excitement of the moment. “My darling wee daughter,” she answered, kissing her tenderly again, “it’s Kansas City alone that ought to be ashamed of itself for putting *you* to keep store—such a sweet little gem as you are!”



Transcriber's Note

This text has been preserved as in the original, including archaic and inconsistent spelling, punctuation and grammar, except that obvious printer's errors have been silently corrected.

[The end of *Melissa's Tour* by Grant Allen]