

A Village Ophelia and Other Stories eBook

A Village Ophelia and Other Stories

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A VILLAGE OPHELIA

On the East end of Long Island, from Riverhead to Greenport, a distance of about thirty miles, two country roads run parallel.

The North road is very near the Sound and away from the villages; lonely farm-houses are scattered at long intervals; in some places their number increases enough to form a little desolate settlement, but there is never a shop, nor sign of village life. That, one must seek on the South road, with its small hamlets, to which the “North roaders,” as they are somewhat condescendingly called, drive across to church, or to make purchases.

It was on the North road that I spent a golden August in the home of Mrs. Libby. Her small gray house was lovingly empaled about the front and sides by snow-ball bushes and magenta French-lilacs, that grew tenderly close to the weather-worn shingles, and back of one sunburnt field, as far as the eye could see, stretched the expanse of dark, shining scrub-oaks, beyond which, one knew, was the hot, blue glitter of the Sound.

Mrs. Libby was a large iron-gray widow of sixty, insatiably greedy of such fleshly comforts as had ever come within her knowledge—soft cushions, heavily sweetened dishes, finer clothing than her neighbors. She had cold eyes, and nature had formed her mouth and jaw like the little silver-striped adder that I found one day, mangled by some passing cart, in the yellow dust of the road. Her lips were stretched for ever in that same flat, immutable smile. When she moved her head, you caught the gleam of a string of gold beads, half-hidden in a crease of her stout throat. She had still a coarsely handsome figure, she was called a fine looking woman; and every afternoon she sat and sewed by the window of her parlor, dressed in a tight, black gown, with immaculate cuffs about her thick wrists. The neighbors—thin, overworked women, with numerous children—were too tired and busy to be envious. They thought her very genteel. Her husband, before his last illness, had kept a large grocery store in a village on the South side of the Island. It gave her a presumptive right to the difference in her ways, to the stuff gown of an afternoon, to the use of butter instead of lard in her cookery, to the extra thickness and brightness of her parlor carpet.

For days I steeped my soul in the peace and quiet. In the long mornings I went down the grassy path to the beach, and lay on the yellow sands, as lost to the world as if I were in some vast solitude. I had had a wound in my life, and with the natural instinct of all hurt creatures, I wanted to hide and get close to the earth until it healed. I knew that it must heal at last, but there are certain natures in which mental torture must have a physical outcome, and we are happier afterward if we have called in no Greek chorus of friends to the tragedy, to witness and sing how the body comported itself under the soul's

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woe. But there is no sense of shame when deep cries are wrenched from the throat under the free sky, with only the sea to answer. One can let the body take half the burden of pain, and writhe on the breast of the earth without reproach. I took this relief that nature meant for such as I, wearing myself into the indifference of exhaustion, to which must sooner or later ensue the indifference brought by time. Sometimes a flock of small brown sandbirds watched me curiously from a sodden bank of sea-weed, but that was all.

This story is not of myself, however, or of the pain which I cured in this natural way, and which is but a memory now.

One gray morning a white mist settled heavily, and I could see but a short distance on the dark waters for the fog. A fresh access of the suffering which I was fighting, the wildness of my grief and struggles, wore me out, so that I fell asleep there on the rough sand, my mouth laid against the salty pebbles, and my hands grasping the sharp, yielding grains, crushed as if some giant foot had trodden me into the earth.

I was awakened by a soft speculative voice. "Another, perhaps," I thought it said. Starting up, I saw standing beside me a thin, shrinking figure, drenched like myself by the salt mist. From under a coarse, dark straw hat, a small, delicate face regarded me shyly, yet calmly. It was very pale, a little sunken, and surrounded by a cloud of light, curling hair, blown loose by the wind; the wide sensitive lips were almost colorless, and the peculiar eyes, greenish and great-pupiled, were surrounded by stained, discolored rings that might have been the result of weary vigils, or of ill-health. The woman, who was possibly thirty, must once have been possessed of a fragile type of beauty, but it was irretrievably lost now in the premature age that had evidently settled upon her.

Struggling to a sitting posture, I saw that the thick white fog had closed densely, and that the woodland back of us was barely distinguishable. We too seemed shut in, as in a room. "You live at Mrs. Libby's," said the young woman, after a moment's hesitation. "I am Agnes Rayne. I hope I did not frighten you."

"No," I replied, brushing the sand from my damp clothing as I rose. "I am afraid if you had not come by fortunately, I should have had a thorough wetting. Can we get home before the storm begins?"

"You would not have taken cold down here on the beach," she remarked, turning and looking out to sea. It seemed strangely to me as if those odd eyes of hers could pierce the blinding mist. "I will not go back with you. I have just come."

Whatever she did or said that might have seemed rude or brusque in another, was sweet and courteous from her manner. "Very well," I said. Then I paused,—my desire

to meet her again was absurdly keen. Stepping closer to her side, I extended my hand. “Will you come to see me, Miss Rayne? I am very lonely, and I should be so—grateful.”

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She touched my fingers lightly with a chilly little hand, yet she never looked at me as she replied, "Yes, some day."

As I plodded heavily through the wet sand, I was irresistibly impelled to turn my head. She was merely standing exactly as I left her, thin and straight, in the black gown that clung closely to her slender limbs, with the mass of light hair about her shoulders.

Drenched as I was, when I reached home, with the large warm drops of the storm's beginning, I stopped in the sitting-room a moment before going to my room. The smell of ironing scented the house, but Mrs. Libby was resting placidly in the rocking-chair, her feet on a cushioned stool. She was eating some peaches, tearing them apart from the stone with strong, juice-dropping fingers, and dipping them in a saucer of coarse sugar before she devoured them.

"Mrs. Libby, who is Agnes Rayne?" I asked.

"She is old Martin Rayne's daughter, up to the corner. Seen her down to the beach, I expect. Speak to you? Did? Well, she's as queer as Dick's hat-band, as folks say 'round here. Some say she's crazy—love-cracked, I guess she is." Mrs. Libby paused to kill a fly that ventured too near her saucer on the table at her side, with a quick blow of the fleshy hand. I used to turn away when Mrs. Libby killed flies. "Oh! I d'know! She's just queer. Don't commess with anybody, nor ever go to meetin'. The minister called there once; he ain't ever been again, nor told how he was treated, that's sure. They live queer, too. She don't ever make pies, ner p'serves, ner any kind of sauce. 'N' old Martin, he's childish now. He always was as close-mouthed as a mussel. Nobody ever knew whether he liked such goin's on or not."

I went up the high, narrow stairs, thoughtfully to my small room under the eaves, dark with the storm, and smelling of must and dampness. I smiled a little. It was more than probable that these people would count slight eccentricity in a lady—and this was undoubtedly a lady, whatever her birth and surroundings—as madness. After dinner I stood by the window a long time. Through the network of apple-boughs, I could see the road. Mrs. Libby, coming heavily into the sitting-room, divined my thoughts.

"If you're wondering how Agnes gets home, she goes cross-lots, right through the scrub-oak 'n' poison ivy 'n black-b'ries, 'f she's in a hurry. She ain't afraid o' rain; like's not, she stays down to the shore the whole 'durin' day."

"I suppose the people here talk about her."

"Most of 'em have too much to do to talk," replied Mrs. Libby, smoothing down her shining bands of hair before the hanging glass, and regarding her reflected large, white face and set smile, with dull satisfaction and vanity. "They're used to her now."

One glaring afternoon within the week, I sat out on the tiny porch, idly watching a fat spider throw his ropes from the box-bush to the step. I had been sitting there for three hours, and only one creaking farm-wagon had passed, and two dirty brown-legged children. The air was breathless and spicy, and in the rough clearing opposite, the leaves seemed to curve visibly in the intense heat. Did anything ever happen here? It seemed to me as much out of the range of possible happenings as the grave.

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"There's Agnes coming," said Mrs. Libby, inarticulately. She held between her lips some ravellings and bits of thread, and she was sitting by the open window, laboriously pushing her needle through a piece of heavy unbleached cloth.

The young woman who came swaying delicately along the path, with something of the motion of a tall stalk of grass in the wind, wore a scanty white gown, which defined almost cruelly the slenderness of form, that seemed to have returned to the meagre uncertainty of young childhood. To-day, her light hair was strained back from her wide forehead, and knotted neatly under the brim of her rough straw hat. She looked much older as she stood before me in the golden light.

"Will you come home with me this afternoon?" she asked directly. "It is not far; perhaps it might amuse you."

I consented gladly. As we walked along the narrow paths that skirted the roadside together, she turned to me, a sudden flush burning on her thin face. "I am afraid you think I am very cruel to bring you out this hot afternoon, but it is so long since I have talked to any one—so long! I have read your books, and then I said last night to myself: 'If I do not go over it all to some one—tell it aloud, from beginning to end—put it into words, I shall go mad. She is a woman who could understand.' Yes, when I saw your hands on the beach that day, all bruised inside, and on one a little cut, where you had wrenched at the sand and stone before you slept, I knew you were my escape. I am abject, but think of the years I have been dying, here, if you despise me."

"No," I said, "it is not abject. Sometimes in one's life comes a crisis, when one must snatch at some remedy, or else die, or go mad. If there is not then something in us that makes us believe in a future, we, of course, die; but I could never think it a cure myself, merely to be free of the body, because I believe in the soul's immortality, and the body is such a diversion! Once rid of it, with all its imperious clamor to be fed and warmed—nothing but utter freedom to think—the grave has never appealed to me as an escape. Madness is a shade better, perhaps; but then that depends on the form of the illusion. For me the body has got to work out the soul's agony. For you, words may bring relief. Try—try anything that suggests itself."

"Do not think you will hear anything new. It will bore you. Are you willing to listen?"

"I am indeed," I replied. We had come to a lonely farm-house, its roofs moss-grown and sunken, the grass knee-high about it. There was hardly a sign of life about the place, though I could see an aged man smoking a pipe peacefully in the shade of an apple tree at the back. Everything wore an air of melancholy, desertion and loneliness.

My companion lifted the gray gate's rusty latch. The grass was crushed enough to form a path to the front door, which stood open. She led the way into a large, low room off the little hall. The floor was bare. There was a large table in the centre, heaped with

books, and some withering flowers stood in a glass. A couple of common chairs, a mattress, on which was thrown an antique curtain of faded blue as a drapery; on the white-washed wall, a tiny and coquetish slipper of yellowish silk, nailed through the sole. This was all the furnishing.

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She stood looking around at the barrenness curiously, trying perhaps to see it with the eyes of a stranger. "This is my room," she said, "and the very walls and floor are saturated with my sufferings." She went restlessly to the window, and threw open the broken blind. As the radiance of the afternoon flooded the place with light, I seemed to see it and its wasting occupant, here in this horrible desolation, in the changing seasons, when the window gave on the bitter rigors of blue and white winter mornings, the land choked with snow, on the golden blur of autumn, on the tender mists of April, draping the earth, and forever the cry of the waves on the shore haunting the air. That there was nothing of the mad woman about her, that she had retained reason in such a place, in such a room, with an eating grief to bear, impressed me as one of the marvels of the brain's endurance, with which nature sometimes surprises us. It seemed to me that this might be the hour of partial deliverance to the poor soul who had evidently lived and died so much.

"Why have you stayed here?" I asked. She had now taken the chair fronting me. We were stiffly seated as if for a business interview. I had a desire to take the poor figure in my arms, but I felt as if she were as intangible as a spirit. When mental pain has devoured the body, as physical pain so often does, there is something thrice as ethereal about the wreck.

"What difference could it make?" she asked in her slightly husky voice, with faint surprise. "It is only the old love-story of a village girl you will hear. My mother was different from these people, but I had never known anything beside this life, except books. Of course you can understand how much else than love the man brought me. I was quite beautiful then. Does it not seem strange that it could have been true! I burst into real blossom for him—like Aaron's rod, was it not? And now you see, I am only the bare rod."

She dropped her lids and looked down at herself calmly. The warmth had curled the short hairs into a light halo around her forehead, the little neck was bent, she had folded her hands in her lap. The piteous child-like chest and limbs revealed by the tight white gown, brought tears to my eyes. There was something solemn, terrible, in this virginal decay.

"All that I was to be, was forced into growth at once. He made me a new self; he was in a sense creator, teacher, parent, friend, idol, lover. He was the world I have not known; he taught me that I could myself write, create. I was nearer madness in those days than now, for when he threw himself here—" She rose and pointed to the floor near the table—"here on these boards at my feet, and begged me to listen to his love, to be his wife—I, his wife!—it was as strange, as unreal as a vision.—I had a month." She did not raise her sweet, level voice, but the eyes that she fixed on mine were dilated to blackness, and her face was illumined with

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an inexpressible light of triumph. "I had one great month of life. Even you cannot have had more in all your years of the world than I in my month! And then he returned to his work again. He was very busy, you understand, a great man, even then, in the world of letters. He could not come to see me, could not leave; but he wrote every day. He will never put into his book such words as he wrote me; he gave me more than he has ever given the world. It may have his books. I have read them, but I have his very soul in these letters!

"I told you he made me believe that I could write. 'What was I, what was I,' I used to ask myself, 'to be lifted from this to his height?' And then I had a secret, which began in that thought. I wrote a novel. It is eight years back now. I never mentioned it in my letters. I knew it was good, as good as his own work. He would be so proud! He talked of publishing-houses, books, authors. I had not forgotten one word. I sent it to a house, one of the largest and best, and it was accepted. It is strange, but I was not at all surprised. Somehow I had never doubted it would be accepted. And then I went to the city alone for a day. I had only a little time; it seemed to me the greatest act of my life to be there, where he was, yet not to see him! But you see I had planned it all in those long nights when the autumn storms would not let me sleep. The rain would dash against this window, and half awake, I would see myself when he should come, with my head against his arm, saying, 'I have been making something for you. Guess.' And then he would laugh and say, 'Perhaps—is it a cake for my tea, home-darling? Is it—is it a cover for my writing-table? No, you do not sew. Tell me.' And then I should say proudly. 'It is nothing of that kind. It is a book, and the people whom you think such good judges say it must be a success!' I saw it again as I was coming down the stairs from the publisher's office. They had praised my work until the blood seemed all in my head and made me dizzy, and the sounds of Broadway confused my country ears.

"At home that dusk my letter stood against the mantel as I came in here. I laughed when I saw the post-mark, to think I had been there. I laid it against my cheek softly where his hand had touched it, writing my name. It so prolonged the pleasure—you know—you are a woman like that. And at last I read it here." She posed herself unconsciously by the table. "It said, 'Have I loved you? I do not know. Curse me, and forget me. I am to be married to-day.'"

A pin from my hair fell to the bare floor and broke the silence with its frivolous click. The tears were raining down my cheeks. She did not look at me now. She stood grasping the table with one tense hand, her white face thrown a little back. Just as she had stood, I knew, eight purgatorial years ago.

The story was done. She sank into the chair.

"And the book?" I asked at length.

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She roused from her reverie. "Oh! yes, the book. It had no purpose to live for, you see. I sent for it, cancelled the agreement. They wrote to me twice about it, but I was firm; there was no reason why I should trouble. I have everything I want," and again her voice trailed into silence.

I looked about the strange, bare room, at the strange, slender figure, and I rose and folded her about with my arms; but she struggled in my embrace. "No, no, do not touch me!" she cried sharply, in a tone of suffering. My hands fell from her, and I knelt abashed at her side. "Oh! please forgive me. I cannot be touched. I hate it. You have been so good," she said, with compunction, regarding me with a certain remorse. I was not aggrieved at being repulsed. As I resumed my seat, I said, "You have only one life to live; snatch at least what you can out of the years. Take my wisdom. You have the book yet? Good. Come back with me; we will get it published. Open your heart, make one effort at living: you can but fail. Come away from the sound of the waves and the wind through the scrub-oaks; from this room and its memories. Be what you might have been."

For the first time she faintly smiled. She shook her head. "I told you I was like Aaron's rod. See for yourself. The power of thought or interest in everything else has withered and wasted like my face and body. My days are almost as irresponsible as a child's now. I have gone back to the carelessness of a little girl about the conditions of life. It was once, and once only for me. But you have given me relief, or rather I have given myself relief this afternoon. And now, will you leave me? I am so glad to have said it all over, and yet, since I have done it, I cannot bear to see you."

The peculiarity of her voice and manner, of which I have spoken, that made all her words sweet and gentle, however unconventional they might be, left me unoffended.

"Perhaps you are right," I said, "yet I wish you would try my way." She did not make any reply, and I left her standing with downcast eyes by the door.

Mrs. Libby still sat sewing by the window when I returned. "Have a pleasant time?" she asked, a gleam of curiosity in her cold eyes. "Seems to me you didn't stay long."

"No, not very long."

"See that queer room of hers? Folks ain't asked into it much. They said she took the minister right in there when he called. Kitchen table piled up with books, 'n papers, books 'round on the floor, 'n' a mattress a-layin' in a corner. Some of the boys peeked in one day when she was down to the beach, 'n' told all 'round how it looked. And a white shoe onto the wall. I expect it must be one o' hers she used to wear. It was before I moved over from South side, but Mrs. Hikes says she had the flightiest clothes when he was courtin' her. Her mother left her some money, I guess, any way, 'n' there

wasn't anything too rich, ner too good, ner too foreign for her to wear. 'N' look at her now! Well, it's 'long toward tea-time. You look tired."

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I was indeed very tired. I could not assimilate the strange impressions I had received. That night the moon-light streamed broadly into my window through the apple-boughs that showed black shadows on the floor. About midnight I opened my eyes suddenly. Mrs. Libby in a much-frilled night-dress was shaking my shoulder vigorously.

"You'll have to get up. Agnes Rayne's dyin', 'n' she's took a notion to see you. They've sent Hikeses' boy after you; bleedin' at the lungs is all I can get out of him. The Hikeses are all dumb as a stick of cord-wood."

She sat down heavily on my bed, and put a pillow comfortably to her back while I dressed. Hikeses' boy sat waiting for me in the porch whistling under his breath. He was the tallest and lankiest of them all, and like some ghostly cicerone, he never spoke, but led the way through the dewy grass into the white, glorious moonlight, and kept a few yards ahead of me in the dusty road until we reached the Rayne farmhouse.

Through the windows I saw a dim light, and figures moving. I pushed open the door without knocking. A doctor, young and alert, had been summoned from the village, and the dull light from a kerosene lamp, set hastily on the table, touched his curly red hair as he knelt by the mattress. An old white-bearded man sat huddled in one of the shadowy corners, weeping the tears of senility, and a tall, dust-colored woman, whom I rightly took to be Mrs. Hikes, stood stolidly watching the doctor. Outside the crickets were singing cheerily in the wet grass.

"Oh, yes, so glad you've come," murmured the doctor as he rose.

Then I stepped closer to the little figure lying in the old blue curtain, that was stiffened now with blood. The parted lips were gray; the whole face, except the vivid eyes, was dead. The night-dress was thrown back from the poor throat and chest, stained here and there with spots of crimson on the white skin, that seemed stretched over the small bones. I stooped beside her, in answer to an appealing look. She could not lift the frail, tired hand that lay by her, its fingers uncurled, the hand of one who, dying, relinquishes gladly its grasp on life. The hands of the strong, torn from a world they love, clench and clutch at the last; it is an involuntary hold on earth. The doctor moved away. The whining sobs of the old man became more audible. I put my ear to her cold lips.

"His letters ... the letters ... and ... my book ... I told you of, take them. Here, in the closet ... by ... the chimney..."

I could hardly distinguish the faint whispers. I raised my hand impatiently, and the old man stopped moaning. Mrs. Hikes and the doctor ceased speaking in low undertones. Only a great moth, that had fluttered inside the lamp chimney thudded heavily from side to side.

"Yes, yes. What shall I do with them?"

She did not speak, and seeing her agonized eyes trying to tell mine, I cried aloud, "Give her brandy—something. She wants to speak. Oh, give her a chance to speak!"

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The doctor stepped to my side. He lifted the wrist, let it fall, and shook his head. "Don't you see?" he said. I looked at the eyes, and saw.

Some days later I went to the lonely house. The old man was sitting in a loose, disconsolate heap in his seat by the apple-tree. The tears rolled down the wrinkles into his beard, when I spoke of his daughter.

"There were some letters and papers she wished me to have," I said. In the closet by the chimney. "If you are willing—"

The old man shuffled into the house, and threw open the blinds of the darkened room. Some one had set the books in neat piles on the table; the chairs were placed against the wall. The drapery had been washed and stretched smoothly across the mattress. There were two or three dark stains on the floor that could not be washed out. The slim little slipper still decked the wall.

I looked up at the door by the chimney. "Here's the key," said the old man, brokenly. "I found it to-day under the mattress." I tried it, but it did not turn in the lock. I was hardly tall enough to reach it. The old man fetched me a chair on which I stood, and after a moment or two I felt the rusty lock yield. The little door gave and opened.

Nothing was there, nothing but the dust of years that blackened my fingers, as I put in my hand, unconvinced by my sense of sight.

"Are you sure no one has been here, no one who could open the closet?"

"Nobody," he proclaimed in the cracked tone of extreme age. "She must have wandered when she told you that. People wander when they are dying, you know. Her mother—but that was long ago." He tapped the key thoughtfully on the mantel. "You see how the lock stuck, and the door. I don't expect Agnes had it open for years. I expect she wandered, like her mother." He peered vaguely in at the empty space, and then turned to me. "I forget a great deal now. I'm getting an old man, a very old man," he said, in an explanatory tone.

"But did you know she had letters somewhere, a pile of papers? You remember her getting letters, do you not, letters from her lover?"

He looked up at me apologetically, with dim, watery blue eyes. "I don't expect I remember much," he confessed. "Not of later years. I could tell you all about things when I was a boy, but I can't seem to remember much that's happened since mother died. That must have been along about twenty years ago. I'm all broken down now, old—very old. You see I am a very old man."

I left him shutting the room into darkness, and passed out into the sunlight, sorely perplexed.

Mrs. Libby was baking when I returned, and the air of the kitchen was full of the sweet, hot smell that gushed from the oven door she had just opened. She stood placidly eating the remnants of dough that clung to the pan.

“Mrs. Libby,” said I, sinking down on the door-step, “what was the name of Agnes Rayne’s lover? You told me once you could not remember. Will you try to think, please?”

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"Well, I was talking to Mrs. Hikes after the fun'r'l," said Mrs. Libby, still devouring the dough. "He boarded to the Hikeses', you see, 'n' she had it as pat as her own," and then Mrs. Libby mentioned calmly a name that now you can hardly pass a book-stall without reading, a name that of late is a synonym for marvellous and unprecedented success in the literary world. I had met this great man at a reception the winter before; let me rather say, I had stood reverently on the outskirts of a crowd of adorers that flocked around him. I looked so fixedly at Mrs. Libby that her smile broadened.

"Don't know him, do you?" she queried.

"I think I have met him," I replied. "Was he engaged to Agnes Rayne?"

Mrs. Libby waited to pierce a loaf of cake with a broom splint. She ran her thick fingers carefully along the splint and then turned the brown loaf on to a sieve.

"Mrs. Hikes says she don't believe a word of it. Folks think he just courted her one spell that summer, not real serious, just to pass the time away, you might say, like many another young man. Mrs. Hikes says, she never heard of him writin' to her, or anything, 'n' if he had, old Hawkins that brings the mail couldn't have kep' it, any more'n he could keep the news he reads off postal cards. They talked enough first about her being love-cracked, but there wa'n't any signs of it I could hear, excep' her trailin' 'round the beach, 'n' looking wimbly, 'n' not doin' jus' like other folks. She never *said* a word to anybody. Might 'a' been it turned her some," said Mrs. Libby, thoughtfully, rolling the flour in white scales from her heavy wrists. "Might 'a' been she was queer any way—sending off to the city for white silk gowns, 'n' things to wear in that old rack of boards, jus' because she was bein' courted. Most would 'a' kep' the money 'gainst their fittin' out. I guess that was all there was, jus' a little triflin', 'n' she took it in earnest. Well, it don't make any difference now," she concluded coolly, as she turned to her sink of baking-dishes.

I sat listening stupidly to her heavy tread, to the cheery clash of the tins as she washed and put them in place. To never know any more! Yet after all, I knew all that could be known, strangely enough. Then, with a long shiver, I remembered the small closet beside the chimney with its empty, dusty shelves.

"Mrs. Libby," said I, rising, "I think I will go back to the city to-morrow."

A STORY OF THE VERE DE VERE.

The landlord called it an apartment-house, the tenants called their three or four little closets of rooms, flats, and perhaps if you or I had chanced to be in West — Street, near the river, and had glanced up at the ugly red brick structure, with the impracticable fire-escape crawling up its front, like an ugly spider, we should have said it was a common tenement house.

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Druse, however, had thought it, if a trifle dirty, a very magnificent and desirable dwelling. The entrance floor was tessellated with diamonds of blue and white; there was a row of little brass knobs and letter-boxes, with ill-written names or printed cards stuck askew in the openings above them. Druse did not guess their uses at first, how should she? She had never in all her fifteen years, been in the city before. How should one learn the ways of apartment-houses when one had lived always in a little gray, weather-beaten house, on the very outskirts of a straggling village in Eastern Connecticut?

It happened like this. One day, Tom, the fourth of the nine hungry and turbulent children, sent to the store on an errand, returned, bringing a letter. A letter, that was not a circular about fertilizers, or one of those polite and persuasive invitations to vote for a certain man for a town office, which penetrated even to the Hand's little gray kennel of a house toward election-time, was such a rarity that Mrs. Hand forgot the bread just done in the oven, and sank down wearily on the door-step to read it.

"Well, you ain't a-goin'," she said to Drusilla, who stood quite patiently by, with a faint color in her pale face. "No, sir, you ain't a-goin' one step. She was too stuck-up to come here when she was alive, 'n' you ain't a-goin' to take care of her children dead, 'n' that's the end of it."

Druse made no reply. She never did. Instead, she bent her thin, childish back, and pulled the burning bread out of the oven.

None the less, Druse went.

It was all Pop's work. Pop was meek and soft; he cried gently of a Sunday evening at church, the tears trickling down the furrowed leather-colored skin into the sparse beard, and on week-days he was wont to wear a wide and vacuous smile; yet somehow, if Pop said this or that should be, it was,—at least in the little house on the edge of the village.

And Pop had said Druse should go. For after all, the case is hard, even if one *is* occupying a lofty position to rural eyes as a carpenter in "York," with a city wife, who has flung her head contemptuously at the idea of visiting his ne'er-do-weel brother; the case is hard, no matter how high one's station may be, to be left with three motherless children, over-fond of the street, with no one to look after them, or make ready a comfortable bit of dinner at night. And so, considering that Elviry was fourteen, and stronger than Druse, any way, and that John Hand had promised to send a certain little sum to his brother every month, as well as to clothe Druse, Druse went to live in the fourth flat in the Vere de Vere.

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Perhaps that was not just the name, but it was something equally high-sounding and aristocratic; and it seemed quite fitting that one of the dirty little cards that instructed the postman and the caller, should bear the pleasing name, "Blanche de Courcy." But Druse had never read novels. Her acquaintance with fiction had been made entirely through the medium of the Methodist Sunday School library, and the heroines did not, as a rule, belong to the higher rank in which, as we know, the lords and ladies are all Aubreys, and Montmorencis, and Maudes, and Blanches. Still even Druse's untrained eye lingered with pleasure on the name, as she came in one morning, after having tasted the delights of life in the Vere de Vere for a couple of weeks. She felt that she now lived a very idle life. She had coaxed the three children into a regular attendance at school, and her uncle was always away until night. She could not find enough work to occupy her, though, true to her training, when there was nothing else to do she scrubbed everything wooden and scoured everything tin. Still there were long hours when it was tiresome to sit listening to the tramping overhead, or the quarrels below, watching the slow hands of the clock; and Druse was afraid in the streets yet, though she did not dare say so, because her bold, pert little cousins laughed at her. She was indeed terribly lonely. Her uncle was a man of few words; he ate his supper, and went to sleep after his pipe and the foaming pitcher of beer that had frightened Druse when she first came. For Druse had been a "Daughter of Temperance" in East Green. She had never seen any one drink beer before. She thought of the poem that the minister's daughter (in pale blue muslin, tucked to the waist) had recited at the Temperance Lodge meeting. It began:

"Pause, haughty man, whose lips are at the brim
Of Hell's own draught, in yonder goblet rare—"

She wished she had courage to repeat it. She felt if Uncle John could have heard Lucinda recite it—. Yet he might not think it meant him; he was not haughty, although he was a carpenter, and the beer he drank out of one of the children's mugs. But it troubled Druse. She thought of it as she sat one afternoon, gravely crotcheting a tidy after an East Green pattern, before it was time for the children to be back from school. It was a warm day in October, so warm that she had opened the window, letting in with the air the effluvia from the filthy street, and the discordant noises. The lady in the flat above was whipping a refractory child, whose cries came distinctly through the poor floors and partitions of the Vere De Vere.

Suddenly there was a loud, clumsy knock at the door. She opened it, and a small boy with a great basket of frilled and ruffled clothes, peeping from under the cover, confronted her.

"Say, lady," he asked, red and cross, "Is yer name De Courcy?"

"No, it ain't," replied Druse. "She's the back flat to the right, here. I'll show you," she added, with the country instinct of "neighboring."

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The boy followed her, grumbling, through the long narrow hall, and as Druse turned to go, after his loud pound on the door, it suddenly flew open. Druse stood rooted to the ground. A dirty pink silk wrapper, with a long train covered with dirtier lace, is not a beautiful garment by full daylight. Yet to untrained eyes it looked almost gorgeous, gathered about the handsome form. Miss De Courcy had failed to arrange her hair for the afternoon, and it fell in heavy black folds on her shoulders, and her temples were bandaged by a white handkerchief. Perhaps it was not strange that Druse stood and gazed at her. The dark, brilliant eyes fixed themselves on the slight, flat-chested little form, clad in brown alpaca, on the pale hair drawn straight back from the pale face, and arranged in a tight knob at the back of the head.

A whim seized the fair wearer of the negligee. "Come in and sit down, I want to talk to you. There, leave the clothes, boy. I'll pay your mother next time," and she pushed the boy out, and drew the young girl in with easy audacity.

Druse looked around the room in bewilderment. It was not exactly dirty, but things seemed to have been thrown in their places. The carpet was bright, and much stained, rather than worn; hideous plaques and plush decorations abounded. A crimson chair had lost a leg, and was pushed ignominiously in a corner of the tiny room; a table was crowded with bottles and fragments of food, and a worn, velvet jacket and much-beplumed hat lay amongst them. A ragged lace skirt hung over the blue sofa, on one corner of which Miss De Courcy threw herself down, revealing a pair of high heeled scarlet slippers. "Sit down," she said, in a rather metallic voice, that ill accorded with the rounded curves of face and figure. "I've got a beastly headache," pushing up the bandage on her low brow. "What did you run for, when I opened the door? Did your folks tell you not to come in here, ever?"

"Why, no, ma'am!" said Druse, raising her blue, flower-like eyes wonderingly.

"Oh! well," responded Miss De Courcy, with a hoarse little laugh of amusement. "I thought they might have—thought maybe they objected to your making 'cquaintances without a regular introduction, you know. Haven't been here long, have you?"

"No," said Druse, looking down at her tidy, with a sudden homesick thrill. "No, I—I come from East Green, Connecticut. I ain't got used to it here, much. It's kind o' lonesome, days. I s'pose you don't mind it. It's different if you're used to it, I guess."

Somehow Druse did not feel as timid as usual, though her weak little voice, thin, like the rest of her, faltered a trifle, but then she had never called on a lady so magnificently dressed before.

"Yes, I'm pretty well used to it by this," replied Miss De Courcy, with the same joyless little laugh, giving the lace skirt an absent-minded kick with her red morocco toe. "I lived in the country before—when I was little."

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"You did!" exclaimed Druse. "Then I guess you know how it is at first. When you think every Friday night (there ain't been but two, yet) 'There, they're gettin' ready for Lodge meetin';' and every Sunday evenin' 'bout half-past seven: 'I guess it's mos' time for the Meth'dis' bell to ring. I must get my brown felt on, and—'"

"Your what?" asked Miss De Courcy.

"My brown felt, my hat, an'—oh! well, there's lots o' things I kind o' forget, and start to get ready for. An' I can't sleep much on account of not having Bell an' Virey an' Mimy to bed with me. It's so lonesome without 'em. The children here won't sleep with me. I did have Gusty one night, but I woke her up four times hangin' on to her. I'm so used to holding Mimy in! Oh! I guess I'll get over it all right, but you know how it is yourself."

Miss De Courcy did not reply. She had closed her eyes, and now she gave the bandage on her head an angry twitch. "Oh, how it aches!" she said through her shut teeth. "Here, give me that bottle on the stand, will you? It'll make it worse, but I don't care. My doctor's medicine don't seem to do me much good, but I sort of keep on taking it," she said to Druse, grandly as she poured out a brownish liquid into the cloudy glass that the good little housekeeper had eyed dubiously, before giving it to her.

Miss De Courcy's doctor evidently believed in stimulants; a strong odor of Scotch whiskey filled the room.

"It smells quite powerful, doesn't it?" she said. "It has something in it to keep it, you know. It's very unpleasant to take," she added, rolling up her brown eyes to Druse's compassionate face.

"I do' know as it would do you any good, prob'ly it wouldn't," said Druse shyly, shifting the glass from one hand to the other, "but I used to stroke Ma's head lots, when she had a chance to set down, and it ached bad."

Miss De Courcy promptly stretched herself at full length, and settled her feet comfortably in the lace skirts, in which the high, sharp heels tore two additional rents, and pulled the bandage from her forehead.

"Go ahead," she said, laconically. Druse dragged a chair to the side of the couch, and for some minutes there was silence—that is, the comparative silence that might exist in the Vere De Vere—while she deftly touched the burning smooth flesh with her finger tips.

Miss De Courcy opened her eyes drowsily. "I guess I'm going to get a nap, after all. You're doing it splendid. You'll come and see me again, won't you? Say, don't tell your folks you was here to-day, will you? I'll tell you why. I—I've got a brother that drinks. It's awful. He comes to see me evenings a good deal, and some daytimes. They'd be

afraid he'd be home, 'n' they wouldn't let you come again. He's cross, you see 'n' they'd never—let you come again 'f you—”

Miss De Courcy was almost overpowered by sleep. She roused herself a moment and looked at Druse with dull pleading. “Don't you tell 'em, will you? Promise! I want you to come again. A girl isn't to blame if her father—I mean her brother—”

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"Yes, ma'am, I'll promise, of course I will," said Druse hastily, her thin little bosom swelling with compassion. "I won't never let 'em know I know you, if you say so. No, ma'am, it's awful cruel to blame you for your brother's drinkin'. I've got some pieces about it at home, about folkses' families a-sufferin' for their drinkin'. I'd like to come again if you want me. I'm afraid I ain't much company, but I could stroke your head every time you have a headache. It's awful nice to know somebody that's lived in the country and understands just how it is when you first—"

Druse looked down. The doctor's remedy was apparently successful this time, for with crimson cheeks and parted lips, Miss Blanche De Courcy had forgotten her headache in a very profound slumber. Druse gazed at her with mingled admiration and pity. No wonder the room seemed a little untidy. She would have liked to put it to rights, but fearing she might waken her new friend, who was now breathing very heavily, she only pulled the shade down, and with a last compassionate glance at the victim of a brother's intemperance, she picked up her crocheting and tip-toed lightly from the room.

After that life in the Vere De Vere was not so dreary. Druse was not secretive, but she had the accomplishment of silence, and she kept her promise to the letter. Druse could not feel that she could be much consolation to so elegant a being. Miss De Courcy was often *distracte* when she brought her crocheting in of an afternoon, or else she was extremely, not to say boisterously gay, and talked or laughed incessantly, or sang at the upright piano that looked too large for the little parlor. The songs were apt to be compositions with such titles as, "Pretty Maggie Kelly," and "Don't Kick him when He's Down," but Druse never heard anything more reprehensible, and she thought them beautiful.

Sometimes, quite often indeed, her hostess had the headaches that forced her to resort to the doctor's disagreeable remedy from the black bottle, or was sleeping off a headache on the sofa. Miss De Courcy did not seem to have many women friends. Once, it is true, two ladies with brilliant golden hair, and cheeks flushed perhaps by the toilsome ascent to the fourth floor, rustled loudly into the parlor. They were very gay, and so finely dressed, one in a bright green plush coat, and the other in a combination of reds, that Druse made a frightened plunge for the door and escaped, but not before one of the ladies had inquired, with a peal of laughter, "Who's the kid?" Druse had flushed resentfully, but she did not care when her friend told her afterward, with a toss of the head, "*They're* nothing. They just come here to see how I was fixed."

After a little Druse offered timidly to clean up the room for her, and quite regularly then, would appear on each Wednesday with her broom and duster, happy to be allowed to bring order out of chaos.

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"Well, you are a good little thing," Miss De Courcy would say, pulling on her yellow gloves and starting for the street when the dust began to fly. She never seemed to be doing anything. A few torn books lay about, but Druse never saw her open them. She had warned Druse not to come in of an evening, for her brother might be home in a temper. Druse thought she saw him once, such a handsome man with his hair lightly tinged with gray; he was turning down the hall as Druse came wearily up the stairs, and she saw him go in Miss De Courcy's room; but then again when Gusty was sick, and she had to go down at night and beg the janitress to come up and see if it were the measles, there was a much younger man, with reddened eyes, from whose glance Druse shrank as she passed him, and he certainly reeled a little, and he also went in Miss De Courcy's door, and from motives of delicacy she did not ask which was he,—though she felt a deep curiosity to know. Not that Miss De Courcy refrained from mentioning him. On the contrary, she told heart-rending incidents of his cruelty, as she tilted back and forth lazily in her rocking-chair, while Druse sat by, spellbound, her thin hands clasped tightly over the work in her lap, neglecting even the bon-bons that Miss De Courcy lavished upon her.

One morning there was a cruel purple mark on the smooth dark skin of Miss De Courcy's brow, and the round wrist was red and swollen. Druse's eyes flashed as she saw them. "I expect I'm as wicked as a murderer," she said, "for I wish that brother of yours was dead. Yes, I do, 'n' I'd like to kill him!" And the self-contained and usually stoical little thing burst into passionate tears, and hid her face in Miss De Courcy's lap.

A dark flush passed over that young lady's face, and something glittered in the hard blue eyes. She drew Druse tight against her heart, as though she would never let her go, and then she laughed nervously, trying to soothe her. "There, there, it ain't anything. They're all brutes, but I was ugly myself last night, 'n' made him mad. Tell me something about the country, Druse, like you did the other day—anything. I don't care."

"Do you wish you was back there, too?" asked homesick Druse, wistfully. Druse could no more take root in the city than could a partridge-berry plant, set in the flinty earth of the back-yard.

"Wish I was back? Yes, if I could go back where I used to live," said Miss De Courcy with her hoarse, abrupt little laugh. "No, I don't either. Folks are pretty much all devils, city or country."

Druse shivered a little. She looked up with dumb pleading into the reckless, beautiful face she had learned to love so well from her humble tendings and ministrings. She had the nature to love where she served. She had no words to say, but Miss De Courcy turned away from the sorrowful, puzzled eyes of forget-me-not blue, the sole beauty of the homely, irregular little face.

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"I was only a-joking, Druse," she added, smiling. "Come, let's make some lemonade."

But Druse did not forget these and other words. She pondered over them as she lay in her stifling little dark bedroom at night, or attended to her work by day, and she waged many an imaginary battle for the beautiful, idle woman who represented the grace of life to her.

The fat janitress sometimes stopped to gossip a moment with Druse.

"Ever seen Miss De Courcy on your floor?" she asked, one day, curiously.

"Yes, ma'am, I—I've seen her," replied Druse, truthfully, the color rising to her pale cheeks.

"O Lord!" ejaculated the janitress, heaving a portentous sigh from the depths of her capacious, brown calico-covered bosom, "if I was the owner of these here flats, instead of the old miser that's got 'em, wouldn't I have a clearin' out! Wouldn't I root the vice and wickedness out of some of 'em! Old Lowder don't care what he gits in here, so long's they pay their rent!"

Druse did not reply. She felt sure that the janitress meant Miss De Courcy's drunken brother, and she was very glad that "old Lowder" was not so particular, for she shuddered to think how lonely she should be were it not for the back flat to the right. Even the janitress, who seemed so kind, was heartless to Miss De Courcy because she had a drunken brother!

Druse began to find the world very, very cruel. The days went on, and the two lives, so radically unlike, grew closer entwined. Druse lost none of her stern, angular little ways. She did not learn to lounge, or to desire fine clothing. If either changed, an observer, had there been one, might have noticed that Miss De Courcy did not need as much medicine as formerly, that the hard ring of her laugh was softened when Druse went by, and that never an oath—and we have heard that ladies of the highest rank have been known to swear under strong provocation—escaped the full red lips in Druse's presence.

One morning Druse went about the household duties with aching limbs and a dizzy head. For the first since she had acted as her uncle's housekeeper, she looked hopelessly at the kitchen floor, and left it unscrubbed: it was sweeping day, too, but the little rooms were left unswept, and she lay all the morning in her dark bedroom, in increasing dizziness and pain. For some days she had been languid and indisposed, and now real illness overcame her; her head was burning, and vague fears of sickness assaulted her, and a dread of the loneliness of the black little room. She dragged herself down the hall. Miss De Courcy opened the door. Her own eyes were red and swollen as with unshed tears. She pulled Druse in impetuously.

“I’m so glad you’re come. I—Why, child, what is the matter with you? What ails you, Druse?”

She took Druse’s hot little hand in her’s and led her to the mirror. Druse looked at herself with dull, sick eyes; her usually pallid face was crimson, and beneath the skin, purplish angry discolorations appeared in the flesh.

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"I guess I'm goin' to be sick," she said, with a despairing cadence. "I expect it's somethin' catchin'. I'll go home. Let me go home."

She started for the door, but her limbs suddenly gave way, and she fell, a limp little heap on the floor.

Miss De Courcy looked at her a moment in silence. Her eyes wandered about the room, and fell on a crumpled letter on the table. She paused a moment, then she turned decisively, and let down the folding-bed that stood in the corner by day. She lifted the half-conscious Druse in her strong young arms, and laid her on the bed. It was only a few minutes' work to remove the coarse garments, and wrap her in a perfumed, frilled nightdress, that hung loosely on the spare little form. Miss De Courcy surveyed the feverish face against the pillows anxiously. Druse half opened her dull eyes and moaned feebly; she lifted her thin arms and clasped them around Miss De Courcy's neck. "Ain't you good!" she said thickly, drawing the cool cheek down against her hot brow.

"I'm going for the doctor, Druse," said Miss De Courcy, coaxingly. "Now, you lay right still, and I'll be back in no time. Don't you move; promise, Druse!"

And Druse gave an incoherent murmur that passed for a promise.

The doctor, who lived on the corner, a shabby, coarse little man, roused her from a fevered dream. He asked a few questions perfunctorily, turned the small face to the light a moment, and cynically shrugged his shoulders.

"Small-pox," was his laconic remark, when he had followed Miss De Courcy into the next room.

"Then she's going to stay right here," said that young woman firmly.

"Well, I guess *not*" replied the doctor, looking her over. "How about your own complexion if you take it?" he added, planting a question he expected to tell.

Miss De Courcy's remark was couched in such forcible terms that I think I had better not repeat it. It ought to have convinced any doctor living that her complexion was her own affair.

"Oh! that's all right," replied the man of science, unoffended, a tardy recognition of her valor showing through his easy insolence. "But how about the Board of Health, and how about me? She's better off in a hospital, any way. You can't take care of her," with a scornful glance at the draggled finery and striking hat. "What do you want to try it for? I can't let the contagion spread all over the house, you know; how would you get anything to eat? No, it's no use. She's got to go. I'm not going to ruin my reputation as a doctor, and—"

Miss De Courcy smiled sweetly into the doctor's hard, common face. She drew a purse from her pocket, and selected several bills from a roll that made his small eyes light up greedily, and pressing the little packet into his not too reluctant fingers, she remarked significantly, as she sat down easily on the top of a low table:

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"You're mistaken about what's the matter with her, doctor. She's got the chicken-pox. You just look at her again as you go out, and you'll see that I am right. But it's just as well to be careful. You might mail a note for me when you go out, and my wash-woman will buy things for me, and bring them up here to the door. I'll swear I won't go out till you say I may, or till you take me to the hospital. And then, as you go along, you can step into the front flat left, and tell her uncle she's took bad with chicken-pox. He's got a lot of young ones, and he'll be glad enough to let me do it, see? And of course, chicken-pox is quite serious sometimes. I should expect to pay a doctor pretty well to bring a patient out of it," she added, with a placid smile.

The doctor had turned, and was looking with deep interest at a chromo on the wall.

"I'll take another look at her. I may have been mistaken, doctors sometimes are—symptoms alike—and—m—m—you can get that letter ready for me to mail."

Strange days and nights ensued. Druse had a dim knowledge of knocks at the door at night, of curses and oaths muttered in the hall, of Miss De Courcy's pleading whispers, of a final torrent of imprecations, and then of a comparative lull; of days and nights so much alike in their fevered dull monotony that one could not guess where one ended and another began; of an occasional glimpse that melted into the general delirium, of Miss De Courcy's face, white, with heavy, dark-ringed eyes, bending over her, and of Miss De Courcy's voice, softened and changed, with never a harsh note; of her hand always ready with cooling drink for the blackened, dreadful mouth. Yes, in the first few days Druse was conscious of this much, and of a vague knowledge that the rocking ship on which she was sailing in scorching heat, that burnt the flesh from the body, was Miss De Courcy's bed; and then complete darkness closed in upon the dizzy little traveller, sailing on and on in the black, burning night, further and further away from the world and from life.

How could she guess how many days and nights she sailed thus? The ship stopped, that was all she knew; but still it was dark, so dark; and then she was in a strange land where the air was fire, and everything one touched was raging with heat, and her hands, why had they bandaged her hands, so that she could not move them?

"I can't see," said Druse, in a faint, puzzled whisper. "Is it night?"

And Miss De Courcy, bending over the bed, haggard and wan, and years older in the ghostly gray dawn, said soothingly:

"Yes, Druse, it's night," for she knew Druse would never see the light again.

"Miss De Courcy!"

"Yes, Druse."

“I expect I’ve kept your brother out all this time. I hope he won’t be mad.”

“No, no, Druse; be quiet and sleep.”

“I can’t sleep. I wish it would be morning. I want to see you, Miss De Courcy. Well, never mind. Somehow, I guess I ain’t goin’ to get better. If what I’ve had—ain’t catchin’—I suppose you wouldn’t want to—to kiss me, would you?”

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Without hesitation, the outcast bent her face, purified and celestial with love and sacrifice; bent it over the dreadful Thing, loathsome and decaying, beyond the semblance of human form or feature, on the bed,—bent and kissed, as a mother would have kissed.

The gray dawn crept yet further into the room, the streets were growing noisier, the Elevated trains rushed by the corner, the milkmen's carts rumbled along the Avenue, the sparrows twittered loudly on the neighboring roofs. And yet it seemed so solemnly silent in the room. "Well, now!" said Druse, with pleased surprise, "I didn't expect you would. What a long time it is gettin' light this mornin'. To think of you, a-takin' care of *me*, like this! An' I ain't never done a thing for you excep' the headaches and sweepin', an' even that was nicer for me than for you. I knew you was awful good, but I never knew you was religious before, Miss De Courcy. Nobody but folks that has religion does such things, they say. I wish I could remember my prayers. Ain't it strange, I've forgot them all? Couldn't you say one? Just a little one?"

And Miss De Courcy, her face buried in her hands, said, "Lord, have mercy upon us," and said no more.

"Thank you," said Druse, more feebly, and quite satisfied. "We won't forget each other, an' you'll promise to come by'm'by. Won't you? I'll be so pleased when you come!"

"Yes, Druse," whispered Miss De Courcy, "I promise."

And then the terrible form that had been Druse sat up in bed with a mighty effort, and turned its sightless eyes joyfully toward Miss De Courcy's tear-stained face.

"It's morning! I can see you!" it said, and fell back into the faithful arms and upon the faithful breast.

And so Druse, not having lived and died in vain, passed away forever from the Vere De Vere.

A LAMENTABLE COMEDY.

I stood one July noon on the platform of the desolate station at Wauchittic, the sole passenger waiting for the stage. The heat was quivering in the air. I watched the departing train, whirling like a little black ball down the narrow yellow road, cut between the green fields, and was vaguely glad that I was not going to the end of the Island on it. This was somewhere near the middle, and it was quite far enough from civilization.

The village, like so many Long Island villages, was distant from the railroad. Only one or two farm-houses were in sight. There was hardly a sound in the hot noonday air, now that the train had gone, except the whistling of a cheerful station agent, who sat in

the window of the little oven-like Queen Anne structure, in his shirt sleeves, looking out at me with lively interest. I had sought for a quiet country place in which to finish my novel, the book which would decide beyond doubt whether I had a future as a writer, or whether I was doomed to sink to the level of the ordinary literary hack, for into it I had put, I knew, all that was my best.

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As I looked absently down the track, I reviewed the past winter months, the long days and evenings spent at my desk in the stuffy little lodgings to which I was limited by my narrow income, interrupted frequently by invasions on various pretexts of the ill-fed chambermaid, who insisted on telling me her woes, or by my neighbor from the next room, the good little spinster, who always knocked to ask if she might heat a flat-iron at my grate when I was in the midst of a bit of minute description. She would sit down, too, would poor withered Miss Jane, in my little rocking-chair to wait while the iron heated, and she said she often told the landlady she did not know how I could write, I had so many interruptions.

I had come to a place now, I thought, trying to quell the sense of loneliness that oppressed me, as I looked around at the expanse of stunted wood and scrub-oaks, where I could be perfectly undisturbed. If the farmer's family with whom I was to board, were noisy or intrusive, one could take one's writing materials and go—well, somewhere—into the woods, perhaps. I was only twenty-two, and I was sanguine.

I saw a cloud of white dust down the road—nothing more, but the station-agent, with a certainty born of long experience, shouted encouragingly: "Thar she comes!" and presently I found myself in a large, sombre and warm conveyance, very like the wagon known to the New York populace familiarly, if not fondly, as "the Black Maria."

The driver was a tow-headed lad of sixteen, so consumed with blushes that, out of pity, I refrained from questions, and sat silently enduring the heat behind the black curtains, while we traversed, it seemed to me, miles of dusty, white road, bordered by ugly, flat fields, or dwarf woods and undergrowth, before we stopped at a smart white farmhouse. The farmer's wife, hearing our approach, stood on the little porch to welcome me. Mrs. Hopper gave a peculiar glance at my begrimed person and face, and I followed her up the narrow stairs with an odd, homesick sinking of the heart, seized by a momentary pang of that "nostalgia of the pavement," felt oftener by the poor than rich dwellers of the city, in exile. Perhaps I loved New York in an inverse ratio to what I had suffered in it. All the miseries of hope deferred, unremitting labor, and unnumbered petty cares attendant upon a straightened income, were forgotten, and I yearned for its ugly, midsummer glare, even its unsavory odors, and my stifling little chamber "*au troisieme*" as I surveyed the tiny bare room, with its blue and gray "cottage set," its white-washed walls, hung with a solitary engraving of Lincoln and his Cabinet. It was not a beautiful spot, truly, yet I thought dubiously, as I drank in the silence, it might be a very good place in which to bring to an end the sufferings of my heroine, who had agonized through several hundred pages of manuscript.

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"I expect you're tired," said Mrs. Hopper, sitting down carefully on the edge of the feather-bed to which I was condemned. "It's a pretty quiet place here—ain't much of a village, but then you said you wanted a quiet place to write in. I guess you'll be s'prised—there's another orther here. Maybe you know him, his name's Longworth, John Longworth? Don't! Why, he lives to New York! No, he ain't right here in the house, he's across the street to the Bangses', but you'll see him," she said, encouragingly. "It'll be awful pleasant for you two orthers to get acquainted. The Bangses don't keep cows, an' every night at milkin' time, over he comes to get a glass o' warm milk; guess he likes to talk to our men-folks. Old Bangs ain't much comp'ny for anybody, let alone a writer. He's got a man with him to wait on him; a kind o' nurse, I b'lieve. He was near dead before he came here, though he looks pretty smart now—had a fever. Some of the folks here hev got it around he was out of his head, a man so, a-settin' around out o' doors, writin' from mornin' till night. Lord, how mad it made the Bangses!" Mrs. Hopper indulged in an abrupt retrospective laugh of enjoyment. "They was so set up, havin' a writer there, an' Mary Bangs was pretty well taken down when I told her we was a-goin' to have one here. She acted as if she didn't b'lieve there was more'n one orther to New York, an' that was Mr. Longworth," continued Mrs. Hopper, regarding me with a proprietor's pride, as I removed my hat and hung it on a nail driven in the wall. I smiled as I reflected that I, too, should doubtless be looked on with suspicion as a fit subject for a straight-jacket, if I, an able-bodied young woman, should sit "out o' doors" with my writing, while my presumable betters were working.

"Well, I guess I'll go down now," said Mrs. Hopper, after a brief pause, in which she examined my gown. "I expect you want y'r dinner. We live a good piece from the store, Miss Marriott an' any time if you should get out of ink, don't make any bones of asking for it. We've got some right here in the house, an' you're as welcome to it as if you was my own daughter."

I was glad to find, at dinner, that the family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Hopper only, with the exception of a couple of farm-hands, whose lumbering tread down the back-stairs wakened me each morning about four. I found Mr. Hopper a tall, bent old man, with meek, faded blue eyes, and a snowy frill of beard. He had an especially sweet and pathetic voice, with a little quaver in it, like a bashful girl's.

He laid down his knife and fork, and looked at me with an air of gentle inquiry, as I took my seat at the table. "Mrs. Hopper tells me you're a literary," he said at length. I'm afraid I replied, "Yes?" with the rising inflection of the village belle, nothing else occurring to me to say.

"Well," said Mr. Hopper, softly, pushing back his chair, and rising to leave the table, "it's in our fam'ly some too. And in Ma's. One o' my uncles and one o' her brothers." He shuffled out of the room with a placid smile, as Mrs. Hopper said, deprecatingly, but with conscious pride, "La, pa, Jim never wrote more'n two or three pieces."

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For a few days I took a vacation. I wandered about the “back lots,” down to the mill-dam, up and down the lonely, winding street where all the prim houses—and they were very far apart—wore a desolate, closed look, as though the inhabitants were away, or dead. I grew accustomed to my environments; the little bedroom began to seem like home to me. On my way to the post-office some one passed me on the sandy, yellow patch, a man clothed after the manner of civilization, whose garments, cut by no country tailor, were not covered by overalls. I knew it must be “the other orther.” None of the males in Wauchittic appeared in public, except on Sunday, save in overalls. It would have been, I think, considered unseemly, if not indecent.

The man was young, with a worn, delicate face, marked by ill-health, and though I had studiously avoided the yard near “milkin’ time,” in spite of Mrs. Hopper’s transparent insistence each evening on my going out to see the brindled heifer, I think my indifferent glance was assumed, for though John Longworth, so far as I knew, had not his name inscribed on the records of fame, and was probably a penny-a-liner on a third-rate newspaper, I had the instinct of fellow-craft, that is, alas! strongest in the unknown and ardent young writer. He walked feebly, and his brilliant eyes were haggard and circled, as though by long illness. I saw him drive by nearly every afternoon, accompanied by his nurse, a good-humored young fellow, who helped him tenderly into the carriage, and drove, while he lay back with the irritated expression that the sense of enforced idleness and invalidism gives a man in the heyday of youth. Mrs. Hopper, who was loquacious to a degree, told me long stories of his parents’ wealth, of the luxuries brought down with him, and of the beautiful pieces of furniture he had had sent down for his room, for his physician had recommended him to an absolutely quiet place for the entire summer. She burned with an irrepressible desire to have me make the acquaintance of this son of wealth and literature, either from the feminine proclivity for match-making, or because, possibly, she thought, having an intense reverence for writers, that our conversation would be of an edifying and uncommon character. I fear she was disappointed, for on the occasion of our first meeting,—I believe Mr. Longworth came to see Mrs. Hopper on some trifling business, and I happened to be writing on the front porch,—our remarks were certainly of the most commonplace type, and I saw a shade of disappointment steal across her face, as she stood by triumphantly, having accomplished her wish to “get us acquainted.”

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Mr. Longworth overtook me the next day, as I was returning listlessly, toward noon, from a long walk, my arms full of glowing St. John's wort, the color of sunset. Back of me lay the long stretch of flat road, and the fields on either side were scorched with the sun. The heat was intolerable. Mr. Longworth would carry the flowers for me, and I resigned them, knowing that nothing is more distasteful to a man than to be treated like an invalid. And the bunch was really a heavy burden,—I had gathered such an enormous armful, together with some tender creepers of blackberry vine. We chatted of the place, of the people, and I found that my companion had a keen sense of humor. As we neared the house, after a moment's hesitancy, I asked him to come and rest on the little porch, where a couple of splint rockers and a palm-leaf fan invited one to comfort and coolness. He accepted the invitation with alacrity, though he chose to sit on the wooden steps, while I tilted lazily back and forth, overcome by the noonday lull and heat.

He looked so boyish when he took off his hat, with the dark little curls falling over his forehead, that I thought he could not be older than I. The walk had perhaps been more than he could bear, for he was so pale that I could not help saying, "Pardon me, Mr. Longworth, but you look so ill. Will you let me give you a glass of wine?" I had brought a little with me. He looked slightly annoyed, but he answered gayly,

"I suppose Mrs. Hopper has been telling you I am a confirmed invalid. Indeed I am almost well now, and I need Wilson about as much as I need a perambulator, but I knew if I did not bring him, my mother would give up Bar Harbor, and insist on burying herself with me, either here or at some other doleful spot, stagnation having been prescribed for me. Oh, well, I don't mind the quiet," he continued, leaning his broad shoulders against the pillar, and pulling at a bit of the St. John's wort, for he had thrown it down in a straggling heap on the floor of the porch. "I'm at work on—on a book," he said with a boyish blush.

"Yes," I replied, smiling. "Mrs. Hopper told me that there was 'an urther,' in Wauchittic."

"And that was what Mrs. Bangs told me the other day!" he declared audaciously. And then we both laughed with the foolish gaiety of youth, that rids itself thus of embarrassment.

"It is my first book," he confessed.

"And mine," I said.

Our eyes met a little wistfully, as if each were striving to read whether the other had gone through the same burning enthusiasms for work, the same loving belief in its success, the same despondent hours when it seemed an utter failure, devoid of sense or interest, and then, somehow, we felt suddenly a mutual confidence, a sense that we knew each other well, the instant *camaraderie* of two voyagers who find that they have

sailed the same seas, passed through the same dangers, and stopped at the same ports.

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I heard Mrs. Hopper open the hall-door, caught a glimpse of her looking out at us with satisfaction on her face, warm from the kitchen fire, and heard her close it, with much elaboration, and, tip-toe heavily away.

“Yes, this is my first book,” he went on, as though we had not paused. “Of course I have had experience in writing before, magazine sketches, and that sort of thing, and beside that, I once had a mania for newspaper work, and much to my mother’s horror, I was really a reporter on one of the city papers—*The Earth*.”

“Circulation guaranteed over 380,000,” I continued, rather ashamed of my flippancy, although he laughed.

“Exactly. Well, after a time I had an offer to go on the editorial staff of the *Eon*, through a friend who has influence with the management, and it was just then I was taken ill with this typhoid fever that has left me the wreck you see,” he said, with a whimsically sad smile. “That is not the worst, though,” he went on, a shadow falling over his upturned face, “I cannot explain it, although my doctor pretends to. I had written—oh! say half-a-dozen chapters of this book before my sickness. As soon as I began to be convalescent, I wanted to amuse myself by going on with it. I had my plot roughly blocked out, my characters were entirely distinct in my mind, yet when I took up my pen again, I found I could not write connectedly. It was simply horrible. I shall never forget that day. Of course I imagined I should never write again. I sent for two or three doctors, announced that I had paresis, and was told that it was madness for a man who had been as ill as I to attempt any sort of literary work for weeks, if not months. But the sense that I absolutely could not write preyed upon me. I used to do a little each day in spite of their orders, but it is only now that I am beginning to feel the confusion of ideas lessening, and the ability to present them coherently growing. Even yet I only write disconnected parts of the chapters I had planned. It is—oh! what is that pet word of phrenologists? *continuity*, that I have not at my command. I suppose you cannot quite understand the agony of such an experience, never having gone through it. Only yesterday I tore up thirty pages of manuscript, and had more than half a mind to burn the whole thing. It is only the consideration of the possibly great loss to the literary world that withholds me, you know,” he said with a half bitter laugh, throwing down the ruins of the flowers he had pulled to pieces with his thin, nervous hands, and rising.

“But I’ve been an unconscionable bore, even for a valetudinarian, and I believe they are privileged to tax people’s amiability. I hope I haven’t tired you so that you will forbid my coming again. I will promise not to talk about myself next time,” he said, as he turned to go down the path.

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I wondered what his book was like, as I lazily watched him cross the street in the noonday sun, and then I remembered with a twinge of conscience that I had hardly written a thousand words since I came. This soft air, redolent of spicy midsummer odors, seemed to produce an invincible indolence, even of thought. After the struggles of the past winter, I was feeling the reaction in utter relaxation of will and purpose. I wondered, were I in Mr. Longworth's place, would I ever write again, from the mere love of it? Was the end, even if that end were success, worth the pain of attaining it? And then, fearing to question myself further, I went to my room and began to write.

Late July was very beautiful in Wauchittic. From the ocean, a dozen miles distant, was wafted the faintest suggestion of the odor of the sea, the wide fields of lush pasture seemed to drink the sun. All night the murmur of the little stream falling over the mill-dam, filled the dark hours with soft whispers. The low woods, with their glittering leaves of the scrub-oak, tempted me, and I discovered fairy glades in their depths, where the grass was thin and pale, and strong ferns grew about the roots of the trees. Sometimes Mr. Longworth would accompany me on my trips of exploration, and, happy in our youth and the gladness of summer, and forgetful of strict conventionality, we would spend long mornings together, writing and reading in an especially cosy spot at the edge of the woods back of the farm. Mr. Longworth was growing so strong that Wilson's position was almost entirely a sinecure, and he spent most of his time lounging in the one village store, relating remarkable stories of New York to a circle of open-mouthed idlers. Day by day, I watched the lessening pallor and the growing health of Mr. Longworth's face, and saw him visibly gain strength. He could carry all the rugs and books and writing materials to our sylvan sanctum without fatigue, and he was so boyishly proud of his health that he used to exhaust himself with too long walks, for which I administered lectures that he always received submissively. One warm morning we had spent an hour in writing. I had grown tired, and throwing down my pen and pad, I left Mr. Longworth still at work, and strayed out into the field in the sun. There had been no rain for days, and the locusts filled the air with their *zeeing*. The wide field was dotted with golden patches of the arnica blossom, or yellow daisy, as the farmers called it. I wandered through the hot, knee-high grass, picking handfuls of the broad yellow suns, then childishly threw them away, and pulled others, with great heads of sweet red clover, and spears of timothy too. I was so happy. My whole being was filled with causeless peace and gladness. From time to time I glanced back to the shade of the oak trees, to the tall, slender figure, with the dark head bent over the white sheets of manuscript, and I sang softly a little song for very joy of my

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life. I looked up to the deep, cloudless sky, around at the wide stretch of green in the golden sunlight, then almost unconsciously back once more to the edge of the woods, where the spread rugs made a tiny home fit for the heart of summertime. Nor did I guess, even then, which was the dominant note of this wonderful chord that my life had unconsciously struck. I knew only that the world was far more beautiful than I had ever dreamed, and still singing under my breath the little cadence that seemed to fit the day, I wandered slowly back, leaving a path crushed between the tall, sun-faded grasses as I went.

Mr. Longworth laid down his work as I approached. A strange, absurd shyness possessed me, after the weeks of strengthening friendship and simple good-fellowship, but I held out the great bunch of daisies playfully to him, as I seated myself on the pile of rugs. He reached his hand for them eagerly, and buried his face in their sunny depths.

His eyes shone feverishly with his stress of work, and his thin cheeks were flushed. "You look tired," I said. "You should not write so long."

Thus far, though we had often jested about it, we had never read each other portions of our work.

"When I get mine half done," I had said, when he begged me to read him a chapter.

"When I can manage to make a chapter run smoothly to its end," he had replied laughing, in turn, but now to-day, urged by some necessity for an absorbing topic into which I could plunge, losing my restlessness, I insisted that he should read fragments, at least, to me.

He demurred at first. "I have told you how stupid it sounds, these disconnected bits, little descriptions, detached conversations. Sometimes I think I shall never use them after all." He fingered the pages absently.

"No, read it to me as it is," I begged. "I must hear it. I understand, of course, how it is written."

And so, yielding to my entreaties, he read, while I leaned back against the tree trunk, listening at first critically, and interested, perhaps, because it was his work, then with clasped hands and shortening breath, leaning forward that I might lose no word. A little squirrel scampered through the undergrowth back of us, and far in another field I could hear Mr. Hopper's quavering voice, as he called to the haymakers. Sometimes a leaf rustled, falling to the ground, but it was very quiet.

At last he laid down the leaves, and fixed his dark eyes eagerly on my face, as if he would read my thoughts, but my eyes were full of tears, and they were selfish tears. "My poor book!" I said, with a tender contempt for it.

"Do you mean—?" he began incredulously.

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"I mean that this is wonderful, and that I know I shall never write again," I said. "I do not know how it is, but I can read by the light of your book that you have genius, and that I am a failure. It is well that something brought it home to me before I wasted any more time." I meant to speak bravely, but I knew more than this. I knew that, with all my air-castles shattered, with the knowledge that to him literature was a pastime, while to me it meant livelihood, I gloried more in his success than I should in my own, that I was glad that he, and not I, was to have fame; and in the tumult of new emotions against which I struggled, my lip quivered, I turned aside my head, and felt, but I did not see, the hand that touched mine, thrilling me so that I drew away.

"Miss Marriott—Kate—"

"No, no," I cried, facing him with my cheeks crimson, and speaking rapidly, "I want you to let me send a few pages for a reading to Mr. —, the editor of —'s Magazine; he is a friend of mine; he has been so good to me. You say you have no publisher in view. I am certain he will take this when it is finished, and you know what that means; it will make your reputation, and—"

"Ah, but you see, these are only fragments," he said, sadly, regaining his composure. "Suppose I am never able to weave them properly into the plot? You cannot know how discouraged I am sometimes."

"Will you not let me send them?" I asked eagerly. "It is quite true that they are only fragments, but no one could write such things and then fail of success in elaborating; it is impossible. Come, let us go, it is nearly dinner-time," I went on, not giving him time to speak, as I began gathering up the books and rugs. "No, do not talk of my book; it is over. It was only a fancy of mine. I ought to have known I could not really write, and it came to me clearly this morning—so clearly! If you will let me be godmother to yours, that will be a little consolation," I said laughing, and having now his consent to send his MSS. to Mr. —, I hurried him homeward, talking gaily of indifferent topics, and avoiding the tender, questioning eyes that sought my own.

That there was bitterness in the realization that I had miserably failed, that my novel was stupid and lacked the elements of interest, I cannot deny. Why I had not seen it all before, I can never understand, but this morning, as I compared it with the brilliant and strange play of fancy that characterized Mr. Longworth's work, I felt it keenly and conclusively. In the long afternoon hours I spent that day alone with my manuscript, I learned to face calmly the fact that I must go back to newspaper work without the vestige of a hope that I should ever write a readable novel. What it meant to me to arrive at this conclusion no one will understand who has not had the same hopes and the same downfall, yet through those hours in the little white-washed bed-room, with the locust boughs tapping against the window, the memory that I strenuously put away of that warm clasp, of the new tenderness in the voice that had called me by my name,

softened the sharp pangs of disappointment; and he, at least, would not fail as I had done.

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Toward sunset I laid away my dead book, and went down to the sitting-room where Mrs. Hopper sat placidly mending. She looked a trifle anxiously at my reddened eyelids. "Feel well?" she queried, plying the needle swiftly. "You mustn't let things prey onto your mind," she admonished, "or you won't get your money's worth of good out of the place, and besides, Lord! what is there worth worryin' over, any how? Money ain't worth it, and love ain't worth it," she declared, with a keen glance at me. "But, there, what *is* the use of tellin anybody that? I worried some before I married Pa. I guess it's natural. I thought, thinks I, 'Mary Ann Bishop, he's years older'n you, 'n' he's weakly, 'n' there ain't much doubt but what you'll be left a relic'. Now look, that was ten years ago, and Pa ain't no more out o' slew 'n' he was then. 'N' then I thought, 'There, he's had one wife.' (Pa was a widower.) 'N' I expect he'll be always a-comparin' of us.' It ain't happened once, at least, not out loud, an' oh! how good he was to that woman! It didn't seem as if he *could* be as good to his second. It was all over the place," said Mrs. Hopper laying down "Pa's" calico shirt, and speaking in low and impressive tones, as befits the subject of death, "how he bought her a bran-new wig two weeks before she died, an' he let her be buried in that wig, that cost over thirty dollars! An' as for a stone! Well, there, he went over to Gilsey's marble-yard to New Sidon, 'n' picked out a sixty-dollar tomb, 'n' never asked 'm to heave off a cent! An' that man, Miss Marriott," said Mrs. Hopper, "he'd do just as well by me as ever he done by her, 'n' I'm contented, 'n' I'm happy. I can tell you, I'm a believer in marriage," she said, with a proud smile, as she rose to get tea.

Mr. Longworth brought over a neat package of manuscript that evening, which I sent, with a letter to Mr. ——. We sat talking on the porch, watching the moon rise and flood the dew-wet fields with a tide of white radiance. Occasionally we heard Mr. or Mrs. Hopper in the lamp-lit sitting-room making brief comments on neighborhood gossip, or the crops, and then Mrs. Hopper would go on silently sewing, and "Pa," his white head bent over a "Farmer's Almanac," made long and painful calculations on a scrap of paper in which he seemed to get much mysterious assistance from the almanac.

Without, the cool night air touched my face gently. My head was burning and fevered with the day's emotions, but I felt the infinite peace of the evening calming me.

"No," I said firmly, "indeed I have decided wisely, Mr. Longworth. I am going back to my old work cheerfully, and shall never think again of my—my disappointment. I believe I can easily get work on my old paper, the "*Courier*," and I have been offered an editorial position on a new fashion paper, beside my weekly letter to the "*Red Canon Gazette*." Naturally I did not tell him that I had spent all my savings of a year on this planned vacation, when I was to finish the book that should reimburse me.

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"You shall not go back to that wretched drudgery," said Mr. Longworth, in his impetuous, nervous manner. "Do not imagine you are ever to do it again. Tell me," he said, lowering his voice, and leaning toward me so that he could see my face, shaded by the vine-hung trellis. "Could you be happy—"

We heard Mr. Hopper moving around the room uneasily, and instinctively Mr. Longworth paused.

"Ma," said the old man, a trifle reproachfully, "I'm afraid you don't try to make it cheerful for them young folks. Why don't you go out and set for a spell? I guess I'll go."

"Stay where you are, Joseph," said Mrs. Hopper, in loud tones of disapproval, that were wafted through the open window to us. "Did we want the old folks forever runnin' after us before we was married?" Mr. Longworth tried not to steal a mirthful glance at me, but he found it hard to resist. "Oh! pshaw, Ma," replied the old man gently. "There ain't none of that goin' on. He ain't a marryin' man," and we heard his slippered feet pattering softly over the oil-clothed entry, and his mild face beamed on us through the net door, which he held open for a moment before he came out and seated himself in the rocking-chair.

"Well, now, this *is* comfortable," he said, with a cheerfully social air. "I can tell you this is a night for authors. Here's a chance for poetry!" with a wave of his thin, weather-worn hand toward the peaceful fields. "Made any this evenin'?" he inquired. "Ain't? well, I guess you'll never come across a more inspirin' night," he said, with some disappointment. "I expected likely you'd have some you could say right off. Fer a plain farmer, I don't s'pose there's anybody fonder'n I am of verses," he said, musingly. "I b'lieve I told ye 'twas in our family. I wish you could have met my uncle, Mis' Marriot, died on his ninety-second birthday, and had writ a long piece on each birthday for a matter of forty year. That ther man was talented, I tell ye. There wasn't no occasion he couldn't write a piece onto. Why, the night Ma and me was married (we was married in Ma's sister's parlor) we hadn't more'n turned 'round from the minister, 'n before anybody had a chance t' congratulate us, uncle, he steps right up in front of us, an' sez he:

'Now you are married, an' man an' wife
May you live happy this mortal life,
An' when your days on this earth is o'er
May you both meet together on the evergreen shore.'

"It come to him, jus' come to him that minute, like a flash," said the old man, reflectively, the pathos of his sweet, tremulous voice lending unspeakable melody to the preposterous stanza.

Mr. Hopper had evidently settled himself for the remainder of the evening, and after a time Mr. Longworth bade us good-night, and went across to the Bangs homestead.



All that night I tossed about on my uncomfortable feather-bed, or rather, when I found I could not sleep, I rose after a time, and wrapped in my dressing-gown, I sat by my tiny window, watching the shadows of the wind-blown locust-boughs on the moonlit grass below, full of the dreams which are the stuff that romances are made of, and which, though I had often used them as “material,” I had never known myself before; shy and tender dreams they were, that glorified that summer night, and kept me wakeful until dawn.

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The next day and the next I was ill and feverish, so ill that I could not rise. Mr. Longworth brought for me great bunches of choice flowers, for which he must have sent Wilson to the next town of New Sidon, and a dainty basket of fruit. The third day I rose and dressed toward noon, and weak as I felt, I decided to walk down to the post-office, for I thought perhaps the air would do me good, and beside, the mail was never brought up until after dark, and I longed to find if Mr. —— had written me as I expected, about the manuscript. I knew he would be very prompt with me.

I found several letters in the box for me, and eagerly scanning the envelopes, I discovered the well-known buff tint, with the red device of a female figure with a book clasped to the breast, that is the livery of “——’s Magazine.” I tore it open, reading as I slowly walked. Mr. —— had written as follows, in his hurried hand:

“OFFICE OF ——’s MAGAZINE.

“MY DEAR MISS MARRIOTT:

“I return the MSS. you sent us, and I have no hesitation in saying that your friend is a genius. In fact, I was so chained by the somewhat wild and singular style that I sat up most of Tuesday night to go through it myself.

“Of course in their present disconnected state, the fragments are quite unavailable to us, but when worked into a story, they ought to make a success. I hope we shall have the first reading of the completed book. I understand it is the work of a beginner, but it bears none of the marks of the novice, and I can but think we have discovered the ‘coming American novelist.’

“By the way, how is your own book coming on?

“Yours in haste,

“—— ———.”

I had walked on some distance from the post-office as I read this, for Mr. ——’s chirography was almost undecipherable, even to one accustomed to it. I was just folding the letter to replace it in the envelope, when I heard heavy footsteps hurrying behind me. I turned my head and saw Wilson, quite red in the face with trying to overtake me. “Beg pardon, Miss,” he said, touching his hat, “I saw you coming out of the office, and—I’d like to speak to you a minute, if I may.”

“What is it?” I asked, somewhat surprised. I stepped back from the path, and Wilson stooped down awkwardly, and picked a twig from a low bush that grew by the fence. “Well,” he began, drawing a long breath, “I’ve been thinking it over, and I’ve made up my mind to tell you. I expect I ought to have done it before, but my orders was so strict, and—you see I’m saving up to get married, and a man hates to lose a good place,—but

that's neither here nor there, Miss, the truth is, I ain't Mr. Longworth's nurse, and I ain't his valley neither. I'm—I'm his attendant."

"Well, what of it?" I said, with some irritation. How could Wilson's absurd distinctions matter to me? What did I care whether he called himself valet, or nurse, or attendant?

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To his credit, be it said that there was no tone of half-exultation, almost pardonable after my manner of annoyance, as he went on. His heavy, spatulate finger-tips were stripping the little twig bare of its leaves. As he continued, I fixed my lowered eyes on that bit of alder. I remember every tiny, bright brown knot on it, and how one worm-eaten leaf curled at its edges.

“You see,” said Wilson, clumsily, “I mean I was his attendant up to the Retreat. It was a real high-toned place, and they did not take any dangerous ones, only folks like him. His people ain’t the kind that stand for price. They’ve got plenty, and they don’t care what they pay. I dare say you’ve been in his father’s store many a time,—Longworth & Whittles, one of the biggest and best dry-goods stores on Sixth avenue. The old gentleman’s rolling in gold, and there ain’t a nicer lady in New York City than Mrs. Longworth. You see, it was this way. Young Mr. Longworth didn’t like business, and they sent him abroad to be educated, and when he come back he just fooled around and went out a good deal, and finally, he got in with some literary folks. One of his friends took him to their receptions, and he got it into his head he was going to be a writer. His folks didn’t care, they’d have paid a publisher any price to take his books if it would have done any good; but finally he took to shuttin’ himself up in his room day and night, writin’ all the time, and it told on him pretty well, for I guess he’d never wrote anything but cheques before. And then he’d burn it up as fast as he wrote, and not eat, and not come out o’ that room for days at a time. He kept a-saying it would be all right if it would only fit together but that’s just where it is, it don’t any of it fit together. And now he just writes over and over the same things he wrote a year ago. He don’t know it, he burns ’em up, and then he thinks it’s all different. He got so bad the doctors said he’d be better up to Dr. Balsam’s Retreat, where they could kind of soothe him down, and make him think his health was out of order, and get his mind off his writing, but he did have a pretty bad fever up there, an’ ever since he thinks he was editor or somethin’ on some paper, and he can tell it off straight as a string. He’s all right about everything else, and if you didn’t know about it, you’d think he was just what he says, sure enough.”

“It’s pretty near killed his mother. Seems funny; a young fellow with nothing to do but spend money, getting it into his head to write books! Well, they said I wasn’t to tell anybody, and I *ain’t* told anybody but you, and I thought as you was a writer, and pretty busy, I guessed you wouldn’t want to waste your time over his book. They say, folks do, that it’s first-rate, as far as it goes; but you see it don’t never get any farther, and it never will. I thought I’d better tell you about it,” said Wilson, his plebeian, kindly face crimson with a delicate pity that would have done honor to an aristocrat, and still working assiduously at the little twig, “I knew you was a genuine writer yourself, and it seemed a pity for you to take up your valuable time helpin’ him on, about something that can’t amount to anything.”

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May he be forgiven that gentle falsehood!

I looked for a moment at the wide-spread field and distant woodland, lying green in the peaceful sunshine, at the place grown so dear to me, that now whirled before my eyes. Far down the road a heavy farm-wagon creaked its way toward us, in a cloud of white dust.

"You did quite right to tell me, Wilson," I said, turning to go. "No one shall hear of it from me."

I looked down at the buff envelope from "——'s Magazine," which I had crushed in my hand, and smoothed it out mechanically, as I went on in the increasing heat.

It was only August, but my summer was over.

AN AFRICAN DISCOVERY.

"Of course it is very curious; but if you'll pardon me, my dear fellow, you might as well tell me you had found a philosopher's stone."

Still, the rough glass phial, with odd metal bands around its neck, had a fascination for me. I picked it up again, and tilted it idly back and forth in my hand, watching the slimy brown fluid, the color of poppy-juice, slip along its sides.

Hilyard smoked on imperturbably. The color mounted under his bronzed skin up to the light rings of his hair; there was a momentary angry flash in his pale blue eyes, but it was only for an instant.

"Perhaps you would like to try it, since you are so skeptical," he said, grimly.

"Thanks, I have no wish to poison myself, and I have no doubt it is a poison; but what I do doubt is the remarkable qualities you claim for it. How did you come across the vile stuff, anyway?"

Hilyard stretched himself comfortably in his chair, and took his beloved pipe from his handsome mouth. "Oh! well, you know," he said, lazily, "I don't claim to be a Stanley by any means, but I did go a good bit into Africa. I wasn't bent on discovering anything, and I loafed around, and shot big game when there was any to shoot, and I learned some odd things from those devils of witch-doctors, as well as a few on my own account. You remember my old craze for medicine and chemistry?"

"I fell in with a tribe of savages who interested me immensely. The art of torture was brought to a perfection among them that would have made the persecutors of the Inquisition turn green with envy. It was refined torture, such as one would not expect to



see save among those who possessed mental powers equal to their cruelty. No decapitations, no stranglings, among these delicate fiends, I can assure you; nor were they satisfied with a day's torment, that should culminate in death. Captives were kept for weeks, frequently for months: the wounds made by one day's torture were dressed at night, and stimulating drink given to keep up the strength, that they might endure for a longer period. It was the custom to deliver prisoners or offenders to the family of the chief or king for the first day's torment; then down through the various nobles, or

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what corresponded to the aristocracy (and I assure you the class distinctions were as closely drawn as in May-Fair), until, if the unfortunate possessed a fine physique, it was not unusual for almost every family in the tribe to have had a day's amusement with him; and it was considered a point of honor not to actually take life, but rather let it spend itself to the last drop, in agonies undreamed of among what we call the civilized, while to invent some new and horrible form of torture conferred an honor upon the discoverer such as we give men who have made some wonderful advance in art or science.

“‘How could I endure such sights?’ Oh! well, one gets hardened to anything, you know, and to tell the truth, I was in search of a new sensation, and I found it. I watched with as much fascination as the savages—no, more—for it was new to me and old to them. Oh! come, Lewis, you needn't draw off your chair; and that reproving, Sunday-school expression is rather refreshing from a man who upholds vivisection. I tell you candidly that there is nothing on earth comparable to the fearful, curious combination of pleasure and horror with which one watches torture one is powerless to stop. It is morbid, and probably loathsome. No. It is not morbid, after all; it is natural, and not a diseased state of mind. Have you never seen a sweet little child, with a face like an angel, pull the wings from a butterfly, or half kill a pet animal, and laugh joyfully when it writhed about? I have. The natural man loves bloodshed, and loves to hurt men and creatures. It is bred in the bone with all of us, only, as far as the body is concerned, this love is an almost impotent factor in modern civilization, for we have deified the soul and intellect to such an extent, that it is them we seek to goad and wound, when the lust of cruelty oppresses us, since they have grown to be considered the more important part; and we know, too, that the embittered soul avenges itself upon its own body, so that we strike the subtler blow. What we call teasing, is the most diluted form of the appetite. Well, this is wide of the mark, I suppose. At any rate, my dusky friends, presumably having no sensitive souls to attack, did their very best with their enemies' bodies, and as I was saying, theirs was no mean accomplishment in that line.

“I am not going to wound your susceptibilities by describing some of the functions which I have witnessed under that blazing sun. I will only tell you that during one especial occasion of rejoicing, a feast was given after a victory over a neighboring tribe, when the bound captives were piled together in black, shining heaps, that had a constant vermicular movement, each human pile guarded by a soldier. The chief at whose right hand I sat, being filled with joy, as well as rather too much drink, began boasting to me of the glories of his tribe, of his possessions, of the valor of his warriors, and above all of the great wisdom and learning of his medicine-man, who was beyond all wizards, and upon whom witchcraft was powerless, and who prepared a poison for such of the chief's enemies as it was not expedient to openly destroy; and this poison, he explained to me, was of a secret and mysterious nature, and unknown to any other tribe.

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"My curiosity was somewhat aroused, and I questioned him, whereupon he told me that the drug, being tasteless, was given in food or drink, and that the victim was seized with a terrible and immeasurable sadness and depth of despair, in which life appeared too horrible to endure, and which the unfortunate always ended by seizing a weapon of some sort and killing himself; and the chief, being of an inquiring mind, had caused the poison to be administered to a man who was carefully guarded and allowed no weapon.

"And what did he do?' I queried, for the chief assured me that the drug itself did not produce death, but only caused an irresistible desire for it.

"The chief did not reply in words, but with a meaning smile, pointed to a vein on his black wrist, and set his sharp, pointed teeth against it, in a way that was a reply.

"I was anxious to see for myself, naturally, suspecting some hocus-pocus, so I ventured to be respectfully dubious.

"The chief was in an amiable mood; he bade me visit his tent with my servant at moon-rise, and he would prove that this was no lie, but the truth.

"When we went out, it was about eleven o'clock, and the surrounding jungle was full of the horrible noises of an African night; the wail of the small lemur, that sounds like the death-moan of a child; the more distant roar of the lion in the black depths of the forest, too thick for the moonlight to ever penetrate; the giant trees of the bombax around the encampment, wreathed with lianes and parasitical poison vines that cast fantastic shadows on the ground, white with the perfectly white moonlight of the tropics, that reminds one of the electric light in its purity of ray and the blackness of the shadows that contrast with it.

"Noiselessly my black servant and I proceeded to the chief's enclosure. His slaves permitted us to pass, by his orders, and we found ourselves in his tent, where he sat in grave silence on a pile of skins, the flare of a torch revealing fitfully the ugly face of the medicine-man, crouched with due humility on the earthen floor at his master's feet. After an exchange of compliments, his highness informed me that he had ordered one of his female slaves to be brought, that the poison had already been administered without her knowledge, and he also briefly remarked, as a proof of his clemency, that it was fortunate for her that the white man had doubted the drink, as otherwise she would have been given over to torture, since she had proved unfaithful to her lord, the chief having bestowed her on one of his sentries, whom she had betrayed with a soldier.

"As he spoke sounds were heard outside, and, between two guards, the unfortunate woman was dragged into the tent. It was not lawful for her to address the chief, so she stood, panting, dishevelled, but silent, in the yellow torchlight. Her hair was nearly straight and hung in tangles on her beautiful shoulders; without so much as a girdle for

covering, she felt no shame, but only looked about with rolling, terrified eyes, the picture of a snared animal.

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"No one spoke. She stood swaying from side to side, her beautiful figure pliant as grass.

"Finally, with a long moan, she threw herself at the chief's feet. He regarded her impassively, and she gathered herself into a sitting posture, rocking to and fro, her head buried in her arms."

"And you made no remonstrance?" I said.

"The poison had already been administered, my dear Lewis," said Hilyard. "And beside, it was in the interest of science. It really seemed a shame to pick out such a beautiful creature; they are so rare in those tribes," he continued, regretfully.

"Well, we sat there, perfectly mute, for about half an hour, I suppose. The chief was almost as impassive as an Englishman. I have seen the Almehs in Cairo, but I have never seen real poetry of motion—mind more completely expressed by matter—than that woman's body translating the anguish she endured; languor turning to deep weariness, weariness to agony, agony to despair. There was not a note in the gamut of mental suffering that she left unstruck—that savage, whom one would not guess possessed a mind. There came a pause. She looked about with a wild, fixed purpose in her eyes; like a panther she leaped on me with her sinuous body, in a second she had snatched the knife from my belt, and had fallen on the earthen floor, her head almost severed from the trunk by the violence of the blow she had struck at her throat with the keen blade. The chief made a sign to the guards who had brought her in (one of whom, by the way, was her deceived husband) to remove the body, and then he inquired, with some satisfaction, if I believed in the drug.

"I was about to leave on the morrow for the coast, and I begged with all humility for the formula, or what answered for it, of the medicine-man, who shook his head decidedly.

"From a corner of the tent he produced a small wicker cage, in the bottom of which lay coiled a snake of a bright orange yellow color, whose very triangular head showed it to be an especially venomous variety of the *naja* species.

"Muttering a few words and crooning to it after the manner of snake-charmers, it presently became lethargic, and he seized it by the neck and poured a few drops from an earthen bottle down its throat; then he dropped its tawny coils into its cage again, and placed the cage in front of me. Soon the serpent roused. It glided frantically about its cage; like a trail of molten gold was its color. Suddenly it coiled upon itself in a spiral, and *stung itself to death!*

"After the most profound praise and flattery, and the present of a little glass medicine dropper which I chanced to have with me, and a small quantity of arsenic, which he tested with very satisfactory results, on a dog, he gave me a portion of the drug, but I'm



sorry to say I could not prevail on the old scoundrel to give or sell the secret of its composition," concluded Hilyard regretfully, lifting the phial with tenderness. "I've tried to analyze it myself, and I sent it to a celebrated chemist, but the ingredients completely defy classification, and tests seem powerless to determine anything except that they are purely vegetable," he said, shaking the liquid angrily, and then rising to lock it in his cabinet.

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I, too, rose with a shudder, half-believing, half-sceptical, yet none the less with a strong distaste for the memory of the story I had just heard. I left Hilyard arranging the shelf of his cabinet, and opening the long French window I walked out on the lawn.

Under the elm I saw Mrs. Mershon, Amy's aunt, with whom we were all staying. Kate Mershon was idly tossing a tennis-ball into the air, and making ineffectual strokes at it with a racquet, and at Mrs. Mershon's feet sat Amy, reading, the golden sunlight resting tenderly on her head, and bringing out the reddish tones of her hair. We were to be married in a month, and she looked so beautiful in the peace and quiet of the waning day, that I wished we two were alone that I might take her in my yearning arms and raise that exquisite colorless face to my lips. She never seemed so lovely as when contrasted with Kate's mature, sensual beauty, dark and rich as the Creole, and completely devoid of that touch of the pure and heavenly without which no woman's face is perfect to me. Amy was brilliant, full of raillery at times, but in the depths of those great clear eyes, like agates, in the candor of that white face, like a tea-rose, one read the beautiful chastity of soul in whose presence passion becomes mixed with a reverence that sanctifies it.

Later that evening, when the drawing-room was gay with light and music, and Kate was singing one of Judie's least objectionable songs, with a verve and grace of gesture that the prima donna herself need not have despised, Amy and I went out on the moonlit lawn, leaving Hilyard leaning over the piano, and Mrs. Mershon sleeping peacefully in a corner. We strolled up and down the gravelled path in a silence more pregnant than words, and I felt my darling's hands clasped on my arm, and heard her gown sweep the little pebbles along the walk.

Something brought to my mind the conversation with Hilyard, and I half thought to repeat it, but the night seemed too peaceful to sully by telling a tale of such horrors, and beside, I fancied Amy disliked Hilyard, although he had been intimate with the family for years, and in fact, he and Amy had almost grown up together; but he had been travelling for three years, and since his return Amy declared that he had grown cynical and hard, and altogether disagreeable, and as I really liked him, although our ideas on most subjects were radically opposed, I thought I would not connect him, in Amy's mind, with an unpleasant story.

I looked down into the delicate face lifted to mine, and pressed a fervent kiss on the cream-white cheek. There was usually, even in her tenderest moments, a certain virginal shrinking from a caress that was an added charm, but to-night she moved closer to my side, and even touched her lips to mine shyly, an occurrence so rare that I trembled with joy, realizing as never before, that this sweet white flower was all my own. I wanted to kiss her again, and with

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more fervor, upon the mouth, but for her I had the feeling that I could not guard her, this dear blossom of purest whiteness, too jealously. I would no more have permitted myself, during our betrothal, to give her a very ardent caress, the memory of which, however harmless it might seem to the majority of affianced people, might cause her a troubled thought, than I would have permitted a stranger to kiss my sister. Her maiden shyness was a bloom which I did not wish to brush off. I took her hand in my own as we turned to retrace our steps to the house, and stood looking down at her in the wonderful September moonlight. She seemed a vestal virgin, in her long, clinging dress of white wool, with a scarf thrown about her head and throat.

Within, Kate had finished her selections from opera and bouffe, and out into the soft evening drifted her rich contralto in the yearning strains of the "Blumenlied."

"I long to lay in blessing
My hands upon thy hair,
Praying that God may preserve thee
So pure, so bright, so fair!"

I bent over and touched my lips to Amy's forehead reverently. "God keep you, my snow-flower!" I whispered. And then we went silently in together.

The next day was so fine that Mrs. Mershon decided to drive over to the neighboring town in the afternoon for some shopping, and Hilyard, needing some simple chemicals for an experiment, which he hoped to find there at the chemist's, accompanied her. Kate and Amy and I had intended to go to a friend's for tennis, but at luncheon I received a telegram calling me to the city on urgent business. We were only a half hour's trip out, but I thought I might be detained until too late for dinner, so promising to return as early in the evening as possible, I hurried off.

On arriving in New York, I found the affair which had threatened to be a prolix one, only demanded a few minutes' attention from me. I strolled into the Club; there chanced to be no one there whom I cared to see; the city was hot and ill-smelling, and I decided I could not do better than surprise Amy by returning earlier than she expected, and accordingly I took the first train out, walking up from the station.

The little villa looked quite deserted as I approached. I wondered if Amy and Kate had gone to the Waddells' without me. I went to the side door, and hearing voices in the library, I went softly into the back drawing-room, with the foolish, boyish thought that I would walk in suddenly and interrupt an exchange of confidences which I should pretend to have overheard. I do not know what impelled me to play such an antiquated, worn-out trick; however, I was just advancing into the room through the wide-open but curtained doorway, when a chance sentence made me pause, struck as by a blow in the

face. Through an interstice, left by an ill-adjusted fold of the portiere, I had a glimpse of the room. My betrothed, in one of her favorite

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white negligees, was stretched on the Turkish divan by the open fireplace, filled now with an enormous bowl of flowers. Her arms were raised above her head, and there was an enigmatic smile on her lips; her face had the sleepy wisdom of the Sphinx. Kate was crouched on the floor by her side, listening eagerly. Now and then she would say: "Oh! how clever you were!" "So he never guessed." "Yes, yes, and then, what did he say then?" urging her on with a feverish greed for details, which my affianced did not disdain to impart lazily, the faint, contemptuous smile always upon the pink lips I had not ventured to kiss with ardor.

I did not know that I was listening, as I stood there, panting for breath, my hand clutched against my throat, lest I should groan in my agony. Phrase by phrase, I heard the whole dreadful story, told, without the shadow of regret or repentance, by the woman in whom I believed as I believed in Heaven, told with cynical laughter instead, and impatient contempt of the innocence, sullied years ago by Hilyard—the friend I trusted and loved. I could draw to-day exactly the pattern of that portiere, the curling leaves of dull crimson, the intricate tracery of gold thread.

"And Lewis?" suggested Kate, at length.

Amy rolled her head restlessly on the pillow. The soft golden hair was loosened from its pins, and fell over the slender shoulders. "Oh! well, one must marry, you know," she said, indifferently.

I moved away silently and unnoticed. I went to brush my hair aside from my wet forehead, and noticed, parenthetically, that my hand was soiled with blood, where my nails had bitten the palm. With the death of love and faith in me had come an immense capacity for cunning, concealment and cruelty, the trinity of power that abides in certain beasts. Came also a dull purpose, growing each moment in strength.

I do not remember that I felt a single throe of expiring love, the love that had filled my heart to the brim. An immeasurable nausea of disgust overcame me, to the exclusion of other ideas, a fixed sense that a thing so dangerous in its angelic disguise, so poisonous and loathsome, must not remain on earth; this jest of Satan must be removed lest it contaminate all with whom it came in contact. Yet did there live any being uncontaminated already? Were not all vile, even as she was vile? My brain reeled. Surely to the eyes of any beholder, she was the incarnation of purity! That which animated me was not a personal sense of grievance so much as the inborn, natural desire one feels to exterminate a pest, to crush a reptile, the more dangerous that it crawls through flowers to kill. As I have said, I felt power for strategy, unknown to my nature before, rising in me. Certain ideas were suggested to me, on which I acted with coolness and promptness. I felt like a minister of God's will, charged with

destruction. It no longer remained for me to decide what to do: some power dwelling in me impelled me, against which I could not, even if I would, have struggled.

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I went to my room, still unobserved, washed my face and hands, and looking in the mirror, saw my face reflected, calm and placid, unmarked by the last half-hour. I descended the stairs, and came in by the porch.

Amy sprang up from the couch as I entered, gaily humming a tune. It chanced to be the song to which we had listened the night before:

“I fain would lay in blessing,”—

She drew her loose tea-gown about her, and tried to gather up the unfastened masses of golden hair, with a charming blush.

“Lewis!” she exclaimed. “Where did you come from? How you frightened me!”

“Well, you see, after all, I was not detained so long, and I thought if I hurried back, we might go to the Waddells’! I heard nothing of you, so I just ran up to get off the city dust concluding you had gone on without me. In fact, I was starting over there, when I thought you might be in here, so I came back—and found you. But it’s rather late to go, don’t you think?” said I. I had retreated to the window and stood with my back studiously turned, while my betrothed repaired the ravages made in her toilet by her siesta.

“Yes, indeed,” said Kate, “It is too late by far, and so hot! Let us be lazy until dinner. Do you want to read to us while we embroider? I know you do!” and going to the book-case, she brought one of Hamerton’s books which I had been reading aloud to them the day before.

Amy had quietly disappeared, and came down in an incredibly short time in a fresh, simple gown, with her work in her hand. I read until dinner, or rather until it was time to dress, and then I laid the book aside, and went up-stairs with the rest. Hilyard and Mrs. Mershon might return at any time. I stole downstairs, and into the room devoted to Hilyard’s chemical experiments. Fool! I had forgotten to bring a cup or bottle with me. I looked hurriedly around the bare room, and discovering a broken bottle on a shelf, I took the key of the cabinet from its place and unlocked it.

Yes, there in the corner stood the rough glass bottle, with the metal around it. I removed the stopper, and having no idea of the amount necessary to produce the desired result, poured out several tablespoonfuls, filling up the phial from the faucet at the rough sink in one corner of the room. I replaced the phial, locked the cabinet, and concealing the broken bottle in my dressing-gown, lest I should meet one of the servants, I retraced my steps to my own room. I was not wholly credulous of its marvellous properties, although Hilyard was not given to boasting or lying—except to women—but I believed it at least to be a poison, and I believed that it defied analysis, as he said.



I took from my drawer a pocket flask of sherry, and emptying all but a wine glass, I added the drug, first tasting and inhaling it, to make sure it had neither perceptible flavor nor odor. Then I locked the flask in my dressing-case as the dinner-bell rang.

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We were a merry party that night. Mrs. Mershon went to sleep as usual in the easy-chair in the corner, but Hilyard was gayer than I had seen him for weeks. A capital mimic, he gave us some of his afternoon's experiences in the little country town, occasionally rousing Mrs. Mershon with a start by saying, "Isn't that so, Aunt?" and she, with a corroborative nod and smile, would doze off again. Cards were suggested, but, mindful of my hand, its palm still empurpled and scarified, I suggested that Kate sing for us instead, and we kept her at the piano until she insisted that Amy should take her place.

Amy was tired, she declared, and indeed, the rose-white face did look paler than its wont, but she went to the piano and sang Gounod's "Ave Maria," and two or three airs from Mozart. She always sang sacred music. Then she sank into a chair, looking utterly fatigued.

"There, Amy," I exclaimed, "I have just the thing for you. I went into Lafitte's to-day to order some claret down, and he insisted on filling a flask with some priceless sherry for me. I'll bring you a glass." Amy protested, "indeed she did not need it, she should be better to-morrow," with a languid glance from those clear eyes; but I ran up to my room, and returned with the flask.

"Just my clumsiness," I said, ruefully looking at the flask, "I uncorked it, to see if it were really all he said, and I've spilled nearly the whole of it."

"Oh! come now, Lewis," laughed Hilyard, "Is that the best story you can invent?"

I laughed too, as I brought a glass, and poured out all that remained. Hilyard, I had managed, should hold the glass, and as I assumed to examine the flask, he carried the wine to Amy. Not that I wished, in case of future inquiries, to implicate him, but I felt a melodramatic desire that he should give his poison to Amy with his own hand: the wish to seethe the kid in its mother's milk.

I watched her slowly drain the glass, without one pang that I had given her death to drink. I experienced an atrocious satisfaction in feeling that no chance whim had deterred her from consuming it all. I took the flask to my room again, saying that I had forgotten a letter from my mother, which I wished Amy to read, as it contained a tender message for her.

As I stood alone in my room a fear overcame me that I had been a credulous fool. Suppose the whole story of the drug were a fabrication, what a farce were this! Who ever heard of a poison with so strange an effect? True, but who had ever heard of chloroform a century ago? Let it go that he was a discoverer, and I the first to profit by it. I would take this ground, at least until it was disproved; time enough then to devise other means.

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Amy's room was next to mine; on the other side slept—and soundly, too, I would wager—her aunt. Indeed, our rooms connected by a door, always locked and without a key, of course. By a sudden impulse I took out my bunch of keys. Fortune favored me; an old key, that of my room at College, not only fitted perfectly, but opened it as softly as one could wish, and the door itself never creaked. Locking it again, I went into Amy's room through the hall. A low light was burning. I looked about anxiously. Would she find the necessary means at hand without arousing the household? It must be. Suicide must be quite apparent, and the instrument must be suggested by its presence, without any search.

Among the trinkets in the large tray on her bureau, lay a tiny dagger with a sheath. I remembered the day Hilyard gave it to her. The rainy day when we were all looking over his Eastern curiosities, and she had admired it, and he had insisted on her accepting it. The handle was of carved jade, representing a lizard whose eyes were superb rubies, and a band of uncut rubies ran around the place where the little curved blade began. Ah! that was it! The very stones made one dream of drops of blood. I laid it carelessly on the bureau, at the edge of the tray. If she noticed its displacement, she would think the maid had been looking at it, and the very fact of her picking it up and laying it among her other trinkets would bring it to her thoughts when she awoke, with mind set on death. *His* poison, *his* dagger—what fitness! Heaven itself was helping me, and approving my ridding earth of this Lamia whose blood ran evil.

When I gave Amy the letter, she took it languidly, saying she would read it in her room; she was going to bed; the wine had made her drowsy; and the others, too, declaring themselves worn with the great heat of the day, we bade each other good-night, and the house was soon silent.

I undressed on going to my room, since, in case of certain events, it would be to my interest to appear to have just risen from bed, and I even lay down, wrapped in my dressing-gown, and put out my light. I almost wondered that I felt no greater resentment and rage at Hilyard, yet my sense of justice precluded it. As well blame the tree around which the poison vine creeps and clings. I looked deeper than would the world, which doubtless, judging from the surface, would have condemned him rather than her, had all been known. She of the Madonna face and the angel smile, anything but wronged? Never! The world would have acquitted her triumphantly had she committed all the sins of the Borgias. For myself, alas! I had heard her own lips condemn her, when, led by wanton recklessness, or the occult sense of sympathy, she had talked to her cousin this afternoon. Hilyard? Yes, it had chanced to be Hilyard, but she, and not he, was most to blame. Hers was not a sin wept over and expiated by remorse and tears;

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it was the soul, the essence of being, that was corrupt to the very core in her. Had madness seized me when I listened? I know not. I know I lay calmly and quietly, certain only that it was well she was to die, certain that, if this failed, she must die in another way before night came again, pitying neither her nor myself in the apathy which held me, believing myself only the instrument of some mighty power which was directing me, and against whose will I could not rebel, if I wished.

For some time I could hear my betrothed moving about in her room; then all was quiet, and she had doubtless lain down to sleep. By the moonlight that filled my room I consulted my watch after a little while, feeling that I had lost all sense of time, and found that it was half past twelve, and that we had been upstairs over an hour. I concluded it would hardly be safe to open the door yet; she might not be asleep. For another half hour I lay patiently waiting. My mind was not excited, and I reviewed rather the trifling events of my few hours in the city than what had transpired since.

At last I rose, and in the dead quiet I moved softly to the connecting door. I knew that it was concealed in Amy's room by a heavy portiere, and as it opened on my side, I had only to hide myself behind the curtain's folds—as once before on that previous day, alas!—and, unguessed by her, watch her at my ease.

The key moved gently in the lock; the lock yielded; a moment more and I had pulled a tiny fold of the curtain aside, and commanded a full view of the silent room. It was flooded with moonlight, and as light as day. The bed was curtained, after the English fashion, but I fancied I could hear a slight rustle of the coverings, as though one were roused, and stirring restlessly. So light was the room that I could discern the articles on the bureau and dressing-table. A branch of a great elm, which grew at the side of the house, stretched across one window, and its leaves, dancing in the night-breeze, made an ever-changing pattern in shadow on the carpet. Did ever accepted lover keep such a tryst as mine before? And she, just waking from her first sleep behind the delicate white curtains of that bed, her tryst was with death, not with love.

From the grove back of the house came a whip-poor-will's plaintive song, pulsing in a tide of melody on the moonlit air. Was it a moan from the bed, half-coherent and hopeless in cadence? Heaven grant that she waken no one until it is too late, I thought fervently. I heard her step from the bed. Once I would have hidden my eyes as devoutly as the pagan blinded himself lest he should see Artemis, on whom it was desecration to look, but now I hesitated no more to gaze on her than on any other beautiful hateful thing which I should crush. Her loveliness stirred neither my senses nor my compassion; both were forever dead, I knew, to woman. Full in the stream of moonlight she stood, the soft, white folds of her nightdress enveloping her from the throat to the small feet they half hid. Her eyes were wide open, she was awake.

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She remained for some moments by the window, meditating, apparently. She talked to herself rapidly and in low undertones. What would I have given to be able to hear all she thus said! Her expression was one of deep mental agony, and I began to feel a growing confidence. How can words express the hideousness of the change of countenance, the indescribable horror and distress of a creature that is being pressed closer and closer toward a yawning gulf of blackness from which there is no escape? How relate the outward signs of an inward terror at which we can but vaguely guess? Would that I could have penetrated to the depths of that soul for one instant to realize completely the bitterness of the dregs it was draining! She advanced to the middle of the room; she stretched out both arms with a gesture of horror and despair. A long, convulsive shudder shook her from head to foot. Her eyes filled with the unearthly fear of one who sees walls closing in on her, of one bound, who sees flames creeping closer and closer. In one instant I could see her pass the line dividing mere mental anguish from insanity; the unmistakable light of madness shone in her glance. With a cry of delight she seized the little dagger. She was rushing down the corridor like the wind. Should I follow her? I hesitated a moment. I heard a long, low cry of mental agony; all the sounds of a house aroused from slumber by some dreadful calamity.

Had she gone to Hilyard's room, to die on his threshold? It was silent once more, except for the exclamations from the different bed-chambers, and the hurrying sounds of footsteps down the corridor. Then I, too, following the rest of the household, entered the room of death. Amy sat curled up on the side of the bed, laughing like a pleased child at the red stream that trickled from Hilyard's breast among the light bed coverings, and dripped slowly to the floor.

* * * * *

Although I am never gay any more, I am not unhappy, for I am more than satisfied with the effect of Hilyard's African drug. It is true that it did not fulfill with accuracy all that he claimed for it; perhaps I gave an overdose, or too little. If that is the case, he suffered for not having been more exact. He should have mentioned, in telling his little story, the amount necessary. However, as I say, I have no reason to find fault with its results in this case.

In looking over the effects of the deceased for Mrs. Mershon, I concluded that I should probably meet with no occasion to use the little glass phial again, and as the drug seemed to be rather uncertain in its ultimate effect, I decided, after some reflection, to throw it away, and accordingly I emptied it out of the laboratory window on the flower-bed beneath. I half expected to see the rose-bushes wither under it, but it only shone slimily on the leaves for a while, and then was washed off by a timely shower.

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My friends have not tormented me with condolences, for as one of them wrote me, the grief that had befallen me was beyond the reach of human consolation. There are few indeed who lose a friend by death, and a betrothed wife by madness, in one terrible night. My fidelity, it is said, is most pathetic, to her who is hopelessly lost to me, for though years have passed by, I am still so devoted to her memory, that no other woman has claimed a moment of my attention. And my sister who is rather sentimental in her expressions, declares that the love I had for Amy drained my nature dry. I think she is possibly right.

AN EVENING WITH CALLENDER.

The room was filled with a blue haze of tobacco smoke, and I had made all of it, for Callender, it seemed to me, had foresworn most of his old habits. He used not once to lie back languidly in a lounging-chair, neither smoking, nor talking, nor drinking punch, when a chum came to see him. Indeed, after the first effervescence of our meeting, natural after a separation of four years, had subsided, I found such a different Tom Callender from the one who had wrung my hand in parting on the deck of the *Marius*, that I had indulged in sundry speculations, and I studied him attentively beneath half-closed lids, as I apparently watched the white rings from my cigar melt into the air.

Where, precisely, was the change? It was hard to say. The long, thin figure was nerveless in its poses; the slender brown hand that had had a characteristic vigor, lying listlessly open on the arm of his chair, no longer looked capable of a tense, muscular grasp of life; the slightly elongated oval of the face, with its complexion and hair like the Japanese, was scarcely more hollowed or lined than before, but it had lost that expression of expectation, which is one of the distinctive marks of youth in the face. He had been politely attentive to my experiences in Rio Janeiro, with which I have no doubt I bored him unutterably, but when I asked about old friends, or social life, he lapsed into the indifference of the man for whom such things no longer exist: reminiscence did not interest him. I asked him about the plays now on at the leading theatres—he had not seen them; about the new prima donna—he had not heard her. Finally I broke a long silence by picking up a book from the table at my side. “Worth reading?” I asked, nibbling at it here and there. (It was a novel, with “Thirty-fifth thousand” in larger letters than the title on the top of its yellow cover.) As I spoke, a peculiar name, the name of a character on the leaf I was just turning, brought suddenly to my mind one of the few women I had known who bore it.

“By the way, Callender,” I said animatedly, striking down the page that had recalled her with my finger, “What has become of your little blue-stocking friend? Don’t you know—her book was just out when I sailed,—‘On Mount Latmos,’—‘On Latmos Top,’—what was it?”

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A dark flush burnt its way up to the black, straight hair.

“She is—dead,” Callender replied, with a hopeless pause before the hopeless word.

“Dead!” I echoed, unable to associate the idea of death with the incarnation of life that I remembered.

Callender did not reply. He rose, with the slight limp so familiar to me in the past, but which I noticed now as if I had never seen it before, and went to a desk at the far end of the spacious room. I smoked on meditatively. It was odd, I thought, that chance had guided me straight as an arrow, to the cause of the change in my friend. One might have known, though, that he, the misogynist of our class, would have come to grief, sooner or later, over a woman. They always end by that.

I heard him unlocking a drawer, turning over some papers, and presently he limped back to his chair, bringing a heavy envelope. He took from it a photograph, which he gave to me in silence. Yes, that was she, yet not the same—oh! not the same—as when I had seen her the few times four years ago. These solemn eyes were looking into the eyes of death, and the face, frightfully emaciated, yet so young and brave, sunk in the rich masses of hair. It was too pitiful.

Callender had taken a package of manuscript from the envelope; the long supple fingers were busy among the leaves, and he bent his head to see the numbered pages. At last, having arranged them in order, he leaned back again in his chair, holding the papers tenderly in his hand. There was nothing of the *poseur* in Callender; his childlike simplicity of manner invested him with a touching dignity even though he owned himself vanquished, where another man would have faced life more bravely, nor have held it entirely worthless because of one narrow grave which shut forever from the light a woman who had never loved him.

“I think you would like to read this,” he said at length. “And I would like to have you. To her, it cannot matter. I wanted to marry her, toward the end, so I could take care of her. —She was poor, you know—but she would not consent. She left me this, without any message. I knew her so well, she thought it would be easier for me to forget her; but now I shall never forget her.”

He gave me the little package of leaves, whose rough edges showed that they had been hurriedly cut from a binding, and then he fell again into his old lethargic attitude. I am not an imaginative man, but a faint odor from the paper brought like a flash to my mind the brilliant, mutinous face, radiant with color and life, that I had seen last across a sea of white shoulders and black coats at a reception a few weeks before I went to South America. The writing was the hurried, illegible hand of an author. I thought grimly that I had probably chanced upon a much weakened and Americanized Marie Bashkirtseff, for though I had only been home a few weeks, it goes without saying that I



had read a part at least of the ill-fated young Russian's dairy. Yet in the presence of the grief-stricken face, outlined against the dark leather chair-back, I felt a pang of shame at a thought bordering on levity. There was indeed one likeness: both were the unexpurgated records of hearts laid ruthlessly bare; both were instinct with life: in every line one could feel the warm blood throbbing.

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A few of the pages of this journal, which I copy word for word from the manuscript lying before me, I give the reader. Call the dead writer an egotist, if you will: wonder at Callender's love for this self-centred nature; I think she was an artist, and as an artist, her experience is of value to art.

"December—18—.

"I have just torn out some pages written a year or so ago. A diary of the introspective type is doubtless a pandering to egotism, but I have always detested that affectation which ignores the fact that each person is to him or herself the most interesting soul—yes, and body—in the universe, and now there is nothing of such infinite importance to me as this. I fear I shall never write again. All thought or plan, in prose or verse, seems dead in me: broken images and pictures that are wildly disconnected float through my tired mind. I have driven myself all day. I have been seated at my desk, with my pen in my hand, looking blankly at the paper. No words, no words! Just before my first book went to press, I overworked. I was in a fever; poems, similes, ran through my excited hours. I could not write fast enough. In that mental debauch I believe that I squandered the energy of years, and now I can conceive no more. If I could only sleep, perhaps I could write. Oh! long, long nights, crowded with the fearful acceleration of trivial thoughts crushed one upon another, crowding so fast. 'My God,' I pray, 'Let me sleep, only sleep,' and conquered by this abject need, this weariness unutterable, I am fain to believe that this gift, common to the brute and slave, is better than anything my mind can gain for me, and there is nothing so entirely desirable in all the world as a few hours' oblivion.

What a dream came to me this Autumn! The doctor had given me an opiate. At first it had no effect. I tossed as restlessly as before on my hard bed, sighing vainly for the sleep that refused to come. The noises in the street vexed me. The light from an opposite window disturbed my tired eyes. At last, I slept. Oh! the glow, the radiance unspeakable of that dream! I was in a long, low room. A fire leaped on the hearth, as though it bore a charmed life. Upon the floor was laid a crimson carpet. There were great piles of crimson mattresses and cushions about the room, the ceiling was covered with a canopy of red silk, drawn to a centre, whence depended a lantern, filling the room with a soft rosy twilight. The mantel was a bank of blood-red roses, and they also bloomed and died a fragrant death in great bowls set here and there about the floor. And in the centre of this glowing, amorous room was a great couch of red cushions, and I saw myself there, in the scented warmth, one elbow plunged in the cushions, with a certain expectation in my face. It was very quiet. Far down an echoing, distant corridor I heard footsteps, and I smiled and pushed the roses about with my foot, for I was waiting, and I knew that soft foot-fall drawing nearer, nearer. My heart filled the silence with its beating. I looked about the room. Was it ready? Yes, all was ready. The very flowers were waiting to be crushed by his careless feet. The fire had died to a steady ardent glow. How close the steps were drawing! A moment more—

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I opened my eyes suddenly. I heard a door shut loudly, the sounds of boots and clothing flung hurriedly down came through the thin partition, and I knew that the lodger in the next room had tramped heavily up the stairs, and was hastening to throw his clumsy body on the bed.

Elsie was breathing softly by my side, and my incredulous, disappointed eyes saw only the reflection on the ceiling, like two great tears of light, and I slept no more until the morning.

I read this, and it sounds coherent. Perhaps I have been needlessly alarmed, perhaps the fear that is so terrible that I have not written it lest it seems to grow real, is only a foolish fear. I must write, I must make myself a name. To bring him that, in lieu of dower, would be something; but poor, unknown, and of an obscure birth.—Will I not have earned a short lease of happiness, if I achieve fame for his sake?

I will barter all for one week,—no, one day—of happiness. I do not wish to grow old, to outlive my illusions. Only a short respite from cares and sorrow, a brief time of flowers, and music, and love, and laughter, and ecstatic tears, and intense emotion. I can so well understand the slave in the glorious “*Un nuit de Cleopatre*,” who resolved a life-time into twelve hours, and having no more left to desire, drank death as calmly as it were a draught of wine.

January, 9, 18—.

“Elsie, my poor little sister, is ill. Only a childish ailment, but I have not written for three days, and she has lain, feeble and languid, in my arms, and I have told her stories. We have moved again, and here, thank God! the furniture, and the carpets and the paper do not swear at each other so violently. I say, thank God! with due reverence. I am truly and devoutly grateful for the release from that sense of unrest caused by the twisted red and green arabesques on the floor. Here all is sombre. The walls are a dull shade, the carpet neutral, the furniture the faded brocatelle dedicate to boarding-houses; but it is not so bad. The golden light lies along the floor, and is reflected on my ‘Birth of Venus’ on the wall. Above my desk is a small shelf of my best-loved books,—loved now; perhaps I shall destroy them next year, having absorbed all their nutriment, even as now, ‘I burn all I used to worship. I worship all I used to burn.’ Under the bookrack is a copy of Severn’s last sketch of Keats, the vanquished, dying head of the slain poet, more brutally killed than the world counts. The eyes are closed and sunken; the mouth, once so prone to kiss, droops pitifully at the corners; the beautiful temples are hollow. Underneath I have written the words of de Vigny, the words as true as death, if as bitter: ‘Hope is the greatest of all our follies.’ I need no other curb to my mad dreams than this.

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"It has been cold, so cold to-day. I left Elsie asleep, and went to the office of the —— Magazine with an article I wrote a month or so ago. The truth is, Elsie should have a doctor, and I have no money to pay him. I was almost sure Mr. —— would take this. He was out, and I waited a long time in vain, and finally walked back in the wind and blowing dust, chilled to the heart. I wished to write in the afternoon, but I was so beaten with the weather that I threw myself on the bed by Elsie to try to collect my thoughts. It was no use. I found my eyes and mind wandering vaguely about the room. I was staring at the paper frieze of garlanded roses, and the ugly, dingy paper below it of a hideous lilac. What fiend ever suggested to my landlady the combination of crimson roses and purplish paper? How I hate my environments! Poverty and sybaritism go as ill together as roses and purple paper, but I have always been too much given up to the gratification of the eyes and of the senses. How well I remember in my first girlhood, how I used to fill bowls with roses, lilacs and heliotrope, in the country June, and putting beneath my cheek a little pillow, whose crimson silk gave me delight, shut my eyes in my rough, unfinished little room, and the vales of Persia and the scented glades of the tropics were mine to wander through. Yes, a dreamer's Paradise, for I was only sixteen then, and untroubled by any thoughts of Love; yet sometimes its shadow would enter and vaguely perplex me, a strange shape, waiting always beyond, in the midst of my glowing gardens, and I sighed with a prescient pain. How have I known Love since those days? As yet it has brought me but two things—Sorrow and Expectation. In that fragmentary love-time that was mine, I well remember one evening after he left me, that I threw myself on the floor, and kissing the place where his dear foot had been set, I prayed, still prostrate, the prayer I have so often prayed since. I begged of God to let me barter for seven perfect days of love, all the years that He had, perhaps, allotted to me. But my hot lips plead in vain against the dusty floor, and it was to be that instead; he was to leave me while love was still incomplete. But I know we shall meet again, and I wait. He loved me, and does not that make waiting easy?

"My book *must*, it *shall* succeed. It shall wipe out the stain on my birth, it shall be enough to the world that I am what I am. To-night I shall write half the night. No, there is Elsie. To-morrow, then, all day. I shall not move from the desk. Oh! I have pierced my heart, to write with its blood. It is an ink that ought to survive through the centuries. Yet if it achieve my purpose for me, I care not if it is forgotten in ten years.

"*February 12, 18—.*

"I have seen him to-day, the only man I have ever loved. He loves me no more. It is ended. What did I say? I do not remember. I knew it all, the moment he entered the room. When he went, I said: 'We shall never meet again, I think. Kiss me on the lips once, as in the old days.'

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"He looked down at me curiously. He hesitated a moment—then he bent and kissed my mouth. The room whirled about me. Strange sounds were in my ears; for one moment he loved me again. I threw myself in a chair, and buried my face in my hands. I cried out to God in my desperate misery. It was over, and he was gone—he who begged once for a kiss, as a slave might beg for bread!

"And now in all this world are but two good things left me, my Art and little Elsie. Oh! my book, I clung to it in that bitter moment, as the work which should save my reason to live for the child."

"February 18, 18—

"I have written continuously. I drugged myself with writing as if it were chloral, against the stabs of memory that assaulted me. There will be chapters I shall never read, those that I wrote as I sat by my desk the day after the 12th, the cold, gray light pouring in on me, sometimes holding my pen suspended while I was having a mortal struggle with my will, forcing back thoughts, driving my mind to work as though it were a brute. I conquered through the day. My work did not suffer; as I read it over I saw that I had never written better, in spite of certain pains that almost stopped my heart. But at night! ah! if I had had a room to myself, would I have given myself one moment of rest that night? Would I not have written on until I slept from fatigue?

"But that could not be. Elsie moved restlessly; the light disturbed her. For a moment I almost hated her plaintive little voice, God forgive me! and then I undressed and slipped into bed, and so quietly I lay beside her, that she thought I slept. I breathed evenly and lightly—I ought to be able to countefit sleep by this, I have done it times enough.

"Well, it is of no avail to re-live that night. I thought there was no hope left in me, but I have been cheating myself, it seems, for it fought hard, every inch of the ground, for survival that night, though now I am sure it will never lift its head again.

"And now, as I said, there is nothing left in all earth for me but my sister and my Art.
"Poete, prends ton luth."

"May 10, 18—.

"My book is a success, that is, the world calls it a success; but in all the years to come he will never love me again, therefore to me it is a failure, having failed of its purpose, its reason for being. What does he care for the fame it has brought me, since he no longer loves me?

"Had it only come a year ago!

"I went to see Mrs. — to-day, and I started to hear his voice in the hall, as I sat waiting in the dim drawing-room. He was just going out, having been upstairs, Mrs. — said,



to look at the children's fernery; and I, as I heard that voice, I could have gone out and thrown myself at his feet across the threshold, those cadences so stole into my heart and head, bringing the old madness back. I had one of the sharp attacks of pain at the heart, and Mrs —— sent me home in the carriage. Elsie is in the country, well and strong. I am so glad. These illnesses frighten her sorely. I am perhaps growing thin and weak, but I cannot die, alas! Let the beauty go. I no longer care to preserve it.

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“When I reached home, I lay in the twilight for some time on the sofa, not having strength to get up to my room. There is, there can be, no possible help or hope in my trouble, no fruition shall follow the promises Spring time held for me.

“Oh, God! if there be a God! but why do I wish to pray? Have I not prayed before, and not only no answer was vouchsafed, but no sensation of a listening Power, a loving Presence, assuaged my pain. Yet, human or brute, we must make our groans, though futile, when we are in the grasp of a mortal agony.

“*June 20, 18—.*

“I have been thankless. I have been faithless. Let me bless God’s name, for He has heard my prayer at last, and he will let me die—very soon.

“It was so cool in the doctor’s office this morning. The vines about the window made lovely shadows on the white curtains and the floor. The light was soft. His round, ruddy German face was almost pale as he stammered out technical terms, in reply to my questions.

“‘Oh, Mees!’ he said, throwing up his fat hands. ‘You ask so mooch! Den, if I frighten you, you faints, you gets worse. No, no, I will not have it!’

“But at last, reassured by my calmness, he told me, as I leaned on the back of his high office chair. A month more, or perhaps two. Not very much pain, he thought. But certain. And I, faithless, have believed the good God did not listen when I prayed!

“Little Elsie is safe and happy with our aunt. Already she seldom talks of me. Yet I have had her, my care, my charge, for almost six years. Children soon forget. There will be a little money for her education, and Aunt wishes to adopt her. There is nothing that I need grieve to leave behind.

“If he had still loved me, if it were circumstance that kept our lives apart, I could send for him then; but to die in arms that held me only out of compassion—glad to relinquish their burden as soon as might be—no, I must go without seeing his face again.

“And to-night I can only feel the great gladness that it is to be. Suppose I knew that there were twenty-five more such years as these! Suppose it should be a mistake, and I had to live!

* * * * *

I looked from these last written words to the photograph. My eyes were blurred, but Tom only leaned back, motionless as before, apathetic as before.

“How long—” I began, tentatively.

“She lived a week after that,” Callender replied, in his dry, emotionless voice.

“And the man?”

“He was my brother,” replied Callender. “She never saw him again. He married Miss Stockweis about a month after.”

I thought of Ralph Callender, cold, correct, slightly bored, as I have always known him, of Miss Stockweis, a dull, purse-proud blonde.

I seized the poor little photograph and raised it reverently to my lips.

“Forgive me, Tom,” I said, slightly abashed. (I never could control my impulses.) “The best thing you can do is to thank God for her death. Think of a woman like that—”

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"Thank you," said Tom wearily. "Yes, I *am* glad."

And then I grasped the thin brown hand in my own for a moment, and felt it respond faintly to my clasp.

We sat as quietly as before in the cheerful, smoke-filled room, I puffing slightly at my Ajar, and Tom's sleepless eyes fixed absently on the wall; and then presently I went to the window and watched the dull gray dawn creep over the still sleeping city.

"Well, here's another day," I said with a sigh, turning back to the room. "I must go, old fellow."

There was no reply. Startled, I bent over the chair, and looked in the face, scarcely more ivory-white than before. And then I saw that for Callender there would be no more days.

THE END.