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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A FEW SHORT SKETCHES ***

**A Few
Short Sketches
By Douglass Sherley**

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[Transcriber's Note: unusual spellings have been retained as in the original.]

**THOSE RUSSIAN VIOLETS
TO
LADY VIOLET**

I

THOSE RUSSIAN VIOLETS

There had been a brilliant reception at the house of Mrs. Adrian Colburn in honor of her guest—a most attractive young woman—from the East. The hours were brief, from five to seven. I had gone late and left early, but while there had made an engagement with Miss Caddington for the large ball to be given that night by the Boltons.

Miss Caddington was a *debutante*. She had been educated abroad, but had not lost either love of country or naturalness of manner. During the short but fiercely gay season from October to Christmas she had made many friends, and found that two or three lovers were hard to handle with much credit to herself or any real happiness to them.

She was not painfully conscientious, nor was she an intentional trifler; therefore she was good at that social game of lead on and hold off.

"Call at nine," she said, "and I will be ready."

But she was not ready at nine. The room where I waited was most inviting. There were several low couches laden with slumber-ropes and soft, downy pillows, all at sweet enmity with insomnia. The ornaments were few but pleasing to the eye. Art and her hand-maiden, Good Taste, had decorated the walls. But there was a table, best of all, covered with good books, and before it, drawn in place, an easy-chair. An exquisite china lamp, with yellow shade, shed all the light that was needed. Everywhere there were feminine signs—touches that were delightful and unmistakable.

From somewhere there came a rich oriental odor. It intoxicated me with its subtle perfume. I picked up "After-Dinner Stories" (Balzac), then a translation from Alfred de Musset, an old novel by Wilkie Collins, "The Guilty River;" but still that mysterious perfume pervaded my senses and unfitted me for the otherwise tempting feast spread before me. I looked at the clock; it was nine thirty. I turned again to the table, and carelessly reached out for a pair of dainty, pale tan-colored gloves. Then I seized them eagerly and brushed them against my face; I had found the odor. The gloves were perfumed. They had been worn for the first time to the reception, and had been thrown there into a plate of costly porcelain, to await her ladyship's pleasure and do further and final service at the ball. They bore the imprint of her dainty fingers, and they were hardly cold from the touch and the warmth of her pretty white hands. They seemed, as they rested there, like something human; and if they had reached out toward me, or even spoken a word of explanation regarding their highly perfumed selves, I should indeed have been delighted, but neither surprised nor dismayed.

But while the gloves did not speak, did not move, something else made mute appeal. Tossed into that same beautiful plate, hidden at first by the gloves, was a bunch, a very small bunch of Russian violets. Evidently they had been worn to the reception, and while I was wondering if she would wear them to the ball I heard a light step, the rustle of silken skirts, and I knew that my wait was ended.

She looked resplendent in evening dress, and swept toward me with the grace, the charm, the ease of a woman of many seasons instead of one hardly half finished.

"Here are your gloves," I said. She quickly drew them on and made them fast with almost a single movement.

"And your Russian violets," I added. She looked at them hesitatingly, but slightly shrugged her shoulders, that were bare and gleamed in the half glow of lamp and fire like moonlight on silvered meadow, and, turning, looked up at me and said:

"I am ready at last; pray pardon my long delay."

While we were driving to the ball I asked her about the perfumed gloves with an odor like sandal-wood or like ottar of roses. She said they had been sent her from Paris, but they were in all the shops, were pleasant, but not rare. She said nothing about the violets, nor did I mention them again. Yielding to an impulse, I had before we left the house thrust them into my waistcoat pocket when she had turned to take up the flowing silk of her train.

All the evening I could catch the odor of those Russian violets that had been lightly worn, indifferently cast aside, and smothered by those artificial creatures, the perfumed gloves, for they were jealous of the natural fragrance and would have killed it if they could.

All the evening I found myself nervously looking about for Russian violets, but there were none to be seen. Miss Bolton wore violets, but not the deep, dark, wide and sad-eyed violet known as the Russian.

We had a curious talk, driving home, about the responsibility of human action—hardly the kind of conversation for "after the ball." Miss Caddington astonished me by saying that she considered it useless to strive against the current of that which is called "Destiny;" that it was better to yield gracefully than to awkwardly, unsuccessfully struggle against the tide. I was deeply interested,

and asked her what she meant, what association of ideas had produced the speech.

"For instance," she said, "if a man who fancies himself in love with me deliberately dictates a certain course of action which I do not care to follow, and grows angry with me, and finally breaks with me altogether, I certainly do not in any way feel responsible for any of his subsequent movements. Am I right?"

In parting with her, and in answer to her question, I made, as we so often make in reply to real questions, a foolish answer:

"I will tell you on New Year's night."

I drove to the club. I was aglow with my enjoyment of the evening, and wanted to talk it over with some congenial fellow. I found John Hardisty, a man that I had known for many years, and who always seemed to enjoy my rambling accounts—even of a ball.

Hardisty was a quiet man, keenly observant of people, but himself free almost entirely from observation. In the financial world he held a clerical but valuable position; in the social world, being a gentleman and a club man, he was invited everywhere; and, being very punctilious about his calls and social obligations, he was always invited again. People in recounting those who had been at balls, dinners, and the like, always named the guests, then added, "And Hardisty, I believe." No one was ever very sure. He had no intimate friends and no enemies—he was not noticed enough to inspire dislike. But he was a man of positive opinion, which he generally kept to himself. He had settled convictions, which he never used to unsettle others. I had known him in his old home, Virginia; so perhaps he felt more friendly toward me and talked more freely with me.

He was a man of a fine sentiment and a sensitive nature. He ought to have been a poet instead of a clerical expert. He was intensely fond of flowers, but never wore them. He used to say that it was heresy for a man to wear a flower, and sacrilege for a woman to let them die on her breast.

When I told him about those Russian violets he seemed interested, but, when I finished, astonished and grieved me by yawning in my face and calmly stating that he considered the story trivial, far-fetched, and, in short, stupid.

"There is," he said, "only one thing for us to do—have a drink and go to bed—for the club closes in ten minutes." He ordered a small bottle of wine, something I had never seen him drink, and talked in a light, nonsensical strain, for him a most unusual thing. In telling the story I had drawn out the little bunch of Russian violets and placed them on the table. They were very much wilted, but the odor seemed stronger and sweeter than ever. When we parted for the night I forgot the violets. The next day, the twenty-ninth of December, I did not see John Hardisty, although he was at his office and in the club that night, and insisted on paying his account for December and his dues to April first. December thirtieth he was at his office, where he remained until nearly midnight. He went to his room, which was near the club, and was found by his servant, early the next morning, the last of the old year, dead. He was lying on the bed, dressed and at full length. His right hand clenched a pistol with one empty barrel; gently closed in his left hand they found a little bunch of faded violets—that was all.

Not a line, not a scrap of paper to tell the story. His private letters had been burned—their ashes were heaped upon the hearth. There were no written instructions of any kind. There were no mementoes, no keepsakes. Yes, there was a little Bible on the candle-stand at the head of his bed, but it was closed. On the fly-leaf, written in the trembling hand of an old woman, was his name, the word "mother," and the date of a New Year time in old Virginia when he was a boy.

There was money, more than enough to cause quarrel and heart-burnings among a few distant relatives in another State, but there was absolutely no record of why he had with his own hand torn aside the veil which hangs between life and death.

When the others were not there I slipped into his room and reverently unclosed his fingers and read the story written there—written over and above those Russian violets which she had worn—for they were the same. There they remained.

On the lid of his casket we placed a single wreath of Russian violets. But all the strength and all the sweetness came from those dim violets faded, but not dead, shut within the icy cold of his lifeless palm.

Miss Caddington and many of those who had known him went to the New Year reception the next night and chattered and danced and danced and chattered. They spoke lightly of the dead man; how much he was worth; the cut of his dress suit; the quiet simplicity of his funeral; the refusal of one minister to read the office for the dead, and the charity of another—the one who did.

And then—they forgot him.

That New Year's night I sat in my study and thought of the woman who had worn those Russian violets, and asked me if she were right in her ideas about responsibility for human action.

Nowadays I frequently see her—she is always charming; sometimes brilliant. Once I said to her:

"I have an answer for your question about responsibility."

"About responsibility?" she said, inquiringly; then quickly added: "Oh, yes; that nonsense we talked coming home from the Bolton ball. Never mind your answer, I am sure it is a good one, and perhaps clever, but it is hardly worth while going back so far and for so little. Do you think so? Are you going to the Athletic Club german next week? No? I am sorry, for, as you are one of the few men who do not dance, I always miss a chat with you."

Miss Caddington goes everywhere. Her gowns are exquisite and her flowers are always beautiful and rare, because out of season. But neither in season nor out of season does she ever wear a bunch—no matter how small—of those Russian violets.

FIVE RED POPPIES

TO

LADY VIOLET AGAIN

II

FIVE RED POPPIES

They hung their heads in a florist's window. The people of the town did not buy them, for they wanted roses—yellow, white or crimson. But I, a lover, passing that way, did covet them for a woman that I knew, and straightway bought them.

As I placed those poppies in a box, on a bed of green moss, I heard them chuckle together, with some surprise and much glee. "What a kind fool he is," said the first poppy, "to buy me, and take me away from those disagreeable roses, and other hateful blossoms in that damp, musty window."

"I heard," said the second poppy, "one sweet lily of the valley whisper to the others of its simple kind that we would die where we were unnoticed, undesired by any one—how little it knew!"

"How cool and green this bed of moss," cried the third poppy; "it is a most excellent place to die upon. I am willing, I am happy."

"Nay," said the fourth poppy, "you may die on her breast if you will. She may take you up and put you into a jar of clear water. She may watch you slowly open your sleepy dark eye. She may lean over you; then let your passionate breath but touch her on the white brow, and she may tenderly thrust you into her whiter bosom, and quickly yield herself, and you, to an all-powerful forgetfulness. She may twine me into her dark hair, and I will calm the throb of her blue-veined temples, and bring upon her a sleep and a forgetting."

The fifth poppy trembled with joyful expectation, but said not a word.

Toward the close of the next day I went to her, the woman that I knew, to whom I had sent the poppies.

I trod the stairway softly, oh, so softly, that led to her door. Shadows from out of the unlighted hall danced about me, and the sounds of music—harp music—pleased me with a strain of remembered chords.

She rose to greet me with provoking but delicious languor. She gave me the tips of her rosy fingers. Her lips moved as if in speech, but no words reached me; she barely smiled. In a priceless vase near the open window they held their heads in high disdain—those four red poppies who had gleefully chuckled and chatted together on the yesterday; but the fifth and silent poppy drooped upon her breast. I turned to go; she did not stay me; I stole to the door. "Take us away with you," cried those four garrulous poppies; "we are willing to die, and at once if need be, but not here in her hateful presence. Take us away." But the poppy on her breast only drooped and drooped the more and said not a word.

I opened the door. The shadows had fled—the hall was a blaze of light. The music had ceased—only the noise of street below broke the silence. "If thus you let me go, I will not return again," I said.

The woman did not speak, neither did she stir. But the poppy on her breast with drooping head uplifted softly cried, "Go, quickly go, and—forget!"

I went down the broad stairway between a row of bright lights—a dazzling mockery—I went out into the night. I passed by a certain garden where red poppies grew. I leaned over the low wall. I buried my hot face among them. I crushed them in my hands and stained my temples with their quivering blooms. But all to no purpose; they did not, could not bring forgetfulness. I am thinking always of that woman, of those four red poppies, and of that one red poppy which drooped on her breast that night and said to me, "Go, quickly go, and—forget."

THE NEW CURE FOR HEART-BREAK

TO

LITTLE MISS PREVIOUS

III

THE NEW CURE FOR HEART-BREAK

A CHRISTMAS GIFT STORY

Hat Mark.
Shaving Papers.
Embroidered Slippers.
Onyx Cuff Buttons.
Inkstand from Italy.
Her Picture—in Silver Frame.
Scarf-pin with Pearl and Diamonds.

It was Christmas eve, several years ago. We had dined together at the Cafe de la Paix, near the Grand Opera-house, Paris. The dinner was good, the wine excellent; but George Addison was best of all.

I have never known why he should have told me that night of his "Cure for Heart-break."

Was it the grouse?

Was it the Burgundy?

Was it some strange influence?

George Addison is the man who first came to the front in the literary world as the careful and successful editor of that now valuable book, "The Poets and Poetry of the South." A fresh edition—about the eleventh—is promised for the New Year.

But he fairly leaped into fame, and its unusual companion, large wealth, when he gave ungrudgingly to his anxious and generous public that curious little hand-book, "The Perfected Letter Writer."

Young ladies who live in the country buy it clandestinely, and eagerly read it privately, secretly, in their own quiet bed-chambers during the silent watches of the night. When occasion demands they boldly make extracts therefrom, which they awkwardly project into their labored notes and epistles of much length and less grace.

Even women of fashion have been known to buy it—and use it, not wisely, but freely.

There are men, too, who consult its pages reverently, frequently, and oftentimes, I must add, with most disastrous results. It is, as is well known, a valuable but dangerous manual.

Therefore the name of George Addison is a household word, although he is mentioned as the editor of "Poets and Poetry of the South," and never as the author of "The Perfected Letter Writer"—a book which is seldom discussed. But nothing, until now, has been known of his "New Cure for Heart-break." If he had lived a few years longer, and could have found time from the more heavy duties of his busy life, he doubtless would have turned to some use the practical workings of his wonderful cure. But Death, with that old fondness for a shining mark, has seen fit to remove him from this, the scene of his earthly labors (See rural sheet obituary notice).

In the early career of George Addison, when he was obscure and desperately poor, he met her—that inevitable she—Florence Barlowe.

She had three irresistible charms. She was very young; she was very pretty—and, most charming of all, she was very silly. Time could steal away—and doubtless did—the youth. Time could ravage—and surely must have—her beauty. But nothing could—and nothing did—mar the uninterrupted splendor of her foolishness. She was born a fool, lived a fool, and undoubtedly must have died—if dead—the death of a glorious and triumphant fool.

George Addison was from the first attentive. But he was shy in those days, and knew not how, in words, to frame the love that filled his heart and rose like a lump in his throat whenever he saw her pretty face and heard her soft voice. She was a fool, it is true, but she was like so many fools of her kind, full of a subtle craft which acts like the tempting bait on the hook that catches the unwary fish.

So she made him a present—it was of her own handiwork. Each Christmas tide she repeated the process; each year enriching the hook with a more tempting offer. It took her seven years to graduate in presents from a hat mark to a scarf-pin of little diamonds and a big rare pearl; but somehow there was a hitch and a halt within the heart of George Addison.

He never said the word. He just loved her, and waited. She grew desperate. She startled him by instituting a quarrel, which was not very much of a quarrel, for it takes two, I have always understood, to make one—in all senses of the word. He did not quite understand, and told her so. She wept in his presence, and forbade him the house. She made her father threaten his life, which was now almost a burden. He still did not understand; so he did—from her standpoint the worst thing possible—nothing. While she was impatiently waiting at home for a reconciliation and a proposal—which never came—he was dumbfounded with grief, and employed his time, tearfully of course, selecting all of her favorite poems—for she was fond of a certain kind of poetry. Then it was that the idea of "Poets and Poetry of the South" came upon him. The popularity of the book was assured in advance, because he selected only those poems that he thought would please Florence Barlowe—and her taste was average—so is the taste, I am told, of the general public.

About a year after their rupture his compilation volume appeared, and was an instantaneous success. The approach of Christmas made him painfully realize their estrangement. Finally he awakened to a full knowledge of the situation. A slow anger started up within him and gradually swept over him like a tidal wave.

It was Christmas eve.

He lighted his lamp—his quarters were still poor and very cheerless. He unlocked a drawer which contained his few treasures, and there they were—the seven gifts entire from the fair hand of pretty Florence Barlowe. There was also a little packet of letters, notes, and invitations from the same hand.

"She never really cared for me," he said, as he tenderly drew them out from their place one by one. "I want a love-cure," he added, "I must have one, for I must be done with this, and forever."

Now, gentle reader, do not censure him, this George Addison, lover, for he straightway sent them back to her? No, not that—but this: He deliberately—although it gave him a pang—arranged to dispose of them all as Christmas gifts to his friends and relatives. It was after this fashion: The hat-mark, G.A., done in violent yellow, on a glaring bit of blue satin, was hard to dispose of; but he finally thought of a little nephew—the incarnation of a small devil—so he wrote a note to the mother, inclosing the hat-mark, with this explanation: "G.A., you must readily see, stands for 'Good Always.' What could be more appropriate for your darling child?"

The shaving papers, like Joseph's coat of many colors, he sent to Uncle Hezekiah, an old family servant, who delighted in them, even until the hour of his happy death, unused, for who ever heard of using beautiful shaving papers!

The embroidered slippers, which had made up a trifle small, were mailed with much glee to a distant relative in Texas on a cattle ranch, where slippers were unnecessary—but Addison did not consider himself responsible for that—for he had discovered from personal experience that the less sensible the gift the more often it is given.

The onyx cuff buttons were well worn, and had rendered excellent service, although they were not good to look upon. Yet, Jennings, the chiropodist, had taken a fancy to them long ago, so he concluded to let him have them on the one condition that they must not be worn to the house of the Hon. Junius Barlowe, where it was his custom to go on the third Sunday of every month, and never to the Addison house, which he visited on the second Thursday of each month.

The inkstand from Italy was large in promise, but poor in fulfillment—the place for ink was infinitesimally small. George tried to use it once when he had three important thoughts to transmit. He wrote out two of them, but the third thought had to go dry. There was a much decayed gentleman of the old school who lived across the street from the Addisons. It had been the custom of George Addison's grandfather, and father also, to always send this individual some useful gift on Christmas Day; therefore the inkstand from Italy was sent over the next morning. It failed to give what might be termed complete satisfaction, but the old neighbor had not been satisfied for a small matter of fifty years. Therefore George held himself, and he was perfectly right, blameless.

It was easy enough to slip the picture of a pretty Dancer, who, in that long ago day, was all the rage among the young men about town—into the silver frame, heart-shape, but what could he do with her picture? It was much prior to the time of the cigarette craze and cigarette pictures—so he could not send it to one of those at that time uncreated establishments, to be copied and sent broadcast. He was something of an artist. He cleverly tinted the thing another color—made her eyes blue instead of brown, and changed her golden sunlit wealth of hair into a darker, if not richer shade. It was a full-length picture. Her trim figure was shown to advantage. Her slender white hands were clasped above her bosom, and there was a look of heavenly resignation on her serenely beautiful brow. He cruelly sent it to the editor of "Godey's Ladies' Magazine," and it was blazoned forth as a fashion plate, much enlarged and with many frills, in the following February number of that then valuable and highly fashionable periodical. In return he received their check for five dollars, drawn upon a National Bank of Philadelphia, and with a note stating that while the customary price was two dollars and fifty cents they felt constrained to send him a sum commensurate with the merits of the fancy picture which he had kindly forwarded them, and that they would be pleased to hear from him again, which they never did—nor their check either; for, while he was too poor to have kept it, yet he was too proud to cash it. I am told that it hangs in a Boston museum, framed with a rare collection of postage stamps—one of his many gifts to that edifying institution while yet alive.

Her final gift, the scarf-pin, with the big pearl and little diamonds, met with some mysterious disposition. In telling me the story in the French cafe, he hesitated, spoke vaguely, and finally refused to state just what he had done with the pin. He may have dropped the pearl, like Cleopatra, in a goblet of ruby wine and drained the contents with the dissolved jewel for dredges and for luck, and he may have given the pretty little diamonds to news boys or small negroes wandering haphazard about the highways of his town. Anyhow, this much is sure, it was given away—that much he made clear.

When he fell upon the letters with an idea of burning them—which I believe is more general than the returning of them—he fortunately bethought himself of publishing them—just as they were. And lo! then was born his "Perfected Letter Writer," which enabled him to leave a bequest of many thousand dollars to Harvard College, where he was educated, and also a certain sum of money to be discreetly distributed each year among the deserving and bashful young men of Boston, between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, to be used by them in making Christmas gifts to worthy young women of their choice.

As might have been expected, that clause of his will was successfully contested, on account of its vagueness, by his brother and sister, who morally, if not legally, cheated the "Bashful Young Men of Boston" out of a unique and much deserved, much needed inheritance. This cure for heart-break must be a severe but effectual one. When I met George Addison in Paris, then an old man, he was as rosy as a ripe apple, and just as mellow. He was gracious, kindly, and had learned well the difficult art of growing old with grace, and without noise. He dated his success, his happiness too, from the moment he made the resolution to trample on his feelings and rid himself in that novel method of every tangible vestige of that past, which he got rid of by gift, not burial. Therefore, he had no ghostly visitors—no useless regrets.

Florence Barlowe, with malice toward all and charity to none, devoted her outward self to good works of the conventional kind. She had several offers, but she never married, and she never forgave George Addison for his failure to speak for that which he might have had for the asking. Pride, not love, was the ruler of her heart—if she had one.

To those who have this Christmas tide the heart-ache, and the heart-break of love gone another way, let them try this new cure, and remember the happy, successful life, and the ripe old age, full of years and honor, of dear old George Addison, who wrote "The Poets and Poetry of the South" and "Perfected Letter Writer."

THE LITTLE BLIND MAID

TO

LADY CHARLOTTE

IV

THE LITTLE BLIND MAID

Overlooking a big smoky city which lies below, and a wide and winding river which runs beyond, there is a large building on the top of a hill which is dedicated to education. But it was built for the comfort and the pleasure of a certain rich man and his family.

Shortly after its occupation the owner died, leaving a large fortune, a young widow and three

daughters.

During the long period of mourning, which was strictly observed but only partially felt by the widow, there came to live in the big house an attractive man of about five and thirty, who had been both friend and partner of the merchant prince. He had been given entire charge of the large estate, and he gave to it and the family most of his time. His habits were excellent, but his tastes were convivial, and his little bachelor dinners the desire of his acquaintances and the delight of his friends. His apartments were entirely separate from the family, but he spent most of his unengaged evenings in their quiet little circle. The children called him uncle, the mother called him Basil, and the people who knew them looked upon him as one related, and spoke no gossip concerning them.

But one fine day that little fellow—always young—who is said to have wings and a quiver full of arrows, came into the house. He kissed the mother, a woman of forty and with attractions more than passing pleasant; he touched the heart of the eldest daughter, Rose, eighteen years of age, and he took the bandage off of his own eyes and put it over the head of Basil, who straightway thought he loved the daughter, who was a woman of no beauty, little intelligence and less amiability. Being blind with the bandage of the boy Love, he could not see that the mother had centered her full blown affections upon him. Therefore it came to pass that the mother and daughter were rivals. He, being a man, did not understand; they, being women, did. When he asked for the hand of her daughter he could not comprehend not only why she should make denial, but why she stormed, wept bitter tears, filled his startled ears with unreasonable reproaches, and upbraided him as an ingrate and a man without feeling.

Her opposition made him believe in his love for Rose, but shortly the beauty and the charm of Grace, the second daughter, about sixteen, dissipated that belief, although he had pledged himself with word and ring to Rose.

Grace, mortified by the rivalry between her mother and sister, and conscious of a growing passion for the man who had, unintentionally, crept into the lives of three women in one household bound by the closest ties of blood, fled the place, and went down the broad river to a little town, where she found quiet and friendly shelter in the home of a relative. It was a curious place, very old, and in the heart of evergreens. There was a young girl, Lydia, who was much older, had loved, and knew that priceless art of bringing comfort to those who were loving either wisely or too well. Letters, books, and gifts came from Basil bearing one burden—his love for Grace. The mother, more jealous of Rose than of Grace, consented to his marriage with either, and fell into a state of despondency which made quick and mysterious inroads upon her hitherto excellent health.

When Grace, being called home by the alarming state of her mother's health, parted with Lydia, she said:

"My duty is clear; I can not be the rival of my mother and Rose. I love him, but I must give him up." And so she did, although the engagement between Rose and Basil was broken and never renewed.

Rumor said cruel things about Basil: that he had wasted their beautiful estate and enriched himself out of their many possessions. Anyhow, they left their mansion on the hill-top, and it was sold to an institution of learning, and the grounds were divided and subdivided into lots. The mother never recovered. After an illness of several years she died suddenly at some winter resort, with the old name of Basil on her lips that formed the word and then were forever still. Rose and Grace could look upon those familiar features and behold the trace of beauty which time and disease had tenderly spared. But Mary, the third daughter, blind from her birth, could only feel the face of her beloved and kiss the lips that could no longer speak her name. Blind! and without a mother, even if she had been foolish for her years, and had, in an hour of human weakness, yielded to a love which was useless, out of the question, unnatural. She was twelve, yet the little blind maid was old enough to know her loss, to feel her sorrow.

Rose, cold, selfish, unsympathetic, lamenting the loss of a lover whom she had no power to hold more than the death of her mother, feeling no love for the sister who had made for her sake a useless sacrifice, was not a desirable companion for the little blind sister.

Grace, upon whom the care of the child had fallen these latter years, and who had been faithful and loving to her charge, had begun to put worldly things from her, and when that long-expected but sudden death came upon them, she resolved, after much meditation and prayer, to enter some holy order and lead a life dedicated to the Master.

Clad in the robes of a Carmelite nun, she may have been too unmindful of the little blind one who had clung to her and plead with her not to leave her alone with Rose. For after all, what is raiment even if it be fine, aye, purple and fine linen; what is food, even if it be dainty like the ambrosia of the Gods; what is warmth, what is comfort, what are all these things if the heart be cold, naked and hungry? Grace had provided for her bodily comforts, but she had failed to fill her own place left vacant with some heart that would be kind and loving to Mary, blind and helpless.

After Grace entered the Carmelite Convent, which was many miles away from their old home, Rose and Mary returned to the big smoky city, and were swallowed up in the multitude of people who exist in buildings and houses, where men and women huddle together and have, as they had, a certain amount of comfort, but lose their identity, and are finally swept away into that great stagnant pool of obscurity where existence in great cities goes on and on without either ebb or

flow.

The little blind maid was lonely and sick at heart. The noise and the cry of the street smote her to the earth. The people in the house where they lived, were as kind as they knew how to be; but how little they knew about kindness, and nothing about peace and quiet. She felt that she was a burden to Rose, and she knew that Rose could never be any thing to her. Those poor, sightless eyes shed tears of homesickness for Grace, and she was sorely oppressed with the desire to be with her again and feel the touch of those cool, quiet hands against her face and over her eyelids that so often burned with pain, and to hear that voice, which was never loud and harsh. But what could she do? This is what she did: With her own hand, unaided, she wrote a letter to the Pope at Rome, and gave it with a piece of silver to an honest house-maid, who carried it to her priest for proper direction, which he wrote upon it, marveling much when he read her earnest words of entreaty, begging the Pope to please send back her Sister Grace from the convent, because she was a little girl, "blind, helpless and very lonely."

The Pope may be infallible, but he is surely human, for when he read the simple words sprawled out upon a sheet of paper, blistered with the tears of the little blind maid crying out from across the seas her appeal for the return of her sister from those convent walls, he was moved to a compassion which was not only priestly, but very human. He bestirred himself in her behalf. He wrote letters to the convent of those Carmelite nuns. He made earnest inquiry about Grace, and finally, after many days of weary, heart-sick waiting, a letter came to the parish priest for little Mary. It was written by the Pope himself, and brought to the blind girl in far-off America the greeting and the blessing of the great Roman Pontiff. He told her in kindly words that she had asked what he was powerless to grant; that he could not drive out her sister from the shelter of those holy walls which she had so wisely chosen, and where she devoutly wished to remain, and therein peacefully, prayerfully end her days, but that he could send her there to the arms of that sister; that he could and would gladly give her dispensation from the duties and the obligations of the holy order; that she might do, as no other had ever done, live among the Carmelites and yet not be a Carmelite. "Go," he wrote, "little blind maid, and have quickly gratified the wish of your heart. No holy vows, no robes of the order need be yours. Your sister can not come to you, but you may go to her, and live where you may daily hear the sound of her voice and often feel the touch of her loving hands, which have been consecrated to holy service. God for some wise purpose hath made you blind, but He has put it into my heart, His servant, to do this thing for you. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

So she went among them, this little blind maid, and the nuns of that Carmelite convent called her the "Blessing of the Pope," and they loved her the more because her name was Mary.

Grace, now free from the passionate desires which had driven her there, made prayers for Basil as a good sister makes supplication for her favorite brother, and she found favor not only in the sight of those about her, but in the eyes of the Lord. The old pain in her conscience about the little blind sister left out in the world had been removed, and she secretly and openly rejoiced in the companionship of Mary.

Basil and Rose lived in the big city of smoke and commerce, but no unkindly chance brought them together. She led that life which suited her best. She followed out her own selfish desires, which were not many, and easy to gratify. She made no friends, and was not lonely; because she had never known the sweet and the joy of real companionship.

He (Basil) lived at the club. They spoke of him as being well preserved, whatever that means. He was popular, went to good dinners, and frequently gave them, yet—ah! that little word yet! Yet he sometimes made pause in the social round, and alone, by his own fireside, caught the sound of a voice which he had not heard for years, and the fleeting glimpse of a woman's face which he had fondly loved. Had loved? Yes, still loved. Then the vision of convent walls, a Carmelite cloister, a sister kneeling at the shrine of the Blessed Virgin praying for him, and by her side, feeling her way to the altar rail, Mary, the little blind maid, repeating a fervent amen to her sister's petition; then—darkness about him, cold ashes on the hearth, and in his heart a shiver of regret and a feeling of unworthiness.

In that Carmelite convent this is the prayer each night of little Mary, blind, but happy: "God, give my dear sister Rose more kindness and sweetness. God, keep my good and beautiful sister Grace, and may God please send a big, strong angel to help my Uncle Basil make a good fight. Give him faith, and afterwhile a mansion and a crown in that pretty land where little Mary will not be blind, and where she will not only hear the songs of the angels, but see their shining faces. God, make me good and keep me true. Amen."

THE PRIEST AND THE WOMAN

TO

A NUN WITHOUT CLOISTER

THE PRIEST AND THE WOMAN

Near the doorway of a house in a narrow street, where Death had lodged yesterday night, stood a Priest. A woman, passing by, knelt at his feet, passionately kissed the hem of his robe, and hurried on, beneath an Arch, into a Garden where there were many flowers and a Shrine to the Blessed Virgin.

The Priest did not move. But a flush of unwonted color rose into his white face and made it crimson with shame.

"After all these years," he sighed.

"Ave Maria! Ave Maria!" wailed the voice of the woman in the Garden where there were many flowers, before the Shrine of the Blessed Virgin.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A FEW SHORT SKETCHES ***

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