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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IF YOU TOUCH THEM THEY VANISH ***

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If You Touch Them They Vanish



"If I had the power," he thought, "I'd settle this region with innocent people who have been accused of crimes."

If You Touch Them They Vanish

*By
Gouverneur Morris*

*With illustrations by
Charles S. Chapman*

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1913*

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To

Illustrations

<i>"If I had the power," he thought, "I'd settle this region with innocent people who have been accused of crimes."</i>	
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I

Old Martha wondered if the Poor Boy would have a smile for her. He had had so many in the old days, the baby days, the growing-up days, the college days, the "world so new and all" days. There were some which she would always remember. The smile he smiled one Christmas morning, when he put the grand fur coat around her shoulders, and the kiss on her cheek. The smile he smiled that day when they met in front of the photographer's, and he took her in and had their photograph taken together: she sitting and glaring with embarrassment at the camera, he standing, his hand on her shoulder, smiling—down on her.

To save her life she could not recall a harsh word in his mouth, a harsh look in his eyes. In the growing-up days he had been sick a great deal; but the trustees and the doctors had put their trust in old Martha, and she had pulled him through. When the pain was too great, her Poor Boy was always for hiding his face. It was thus that he gathered strength to turn to her once more, smiling. It was Martha who spoke stories of princesses and banshees and heroes and witch-wolves through the long nights when he could not sleep. It was old Martha who drew the tub of red-hot water that brought him to life, when the doctor said he was dead.

If he had been her own, she could not have loved him more.

How many hundred cold nights she had left her warm bed, to return, blue with cold, after seeing that he was well covered! How she had dreaded the passing of time that brought him nearer and nearer to manhood, in whose multiple interests and cares old tendernesses and understandings are so often forgotten. But wherever he went, whatever he did, he had always an eye of his mind upon Martha's feelings in the matter. She was old, Irish, unlettered, but as a royal duchess so was she deferred to in the Poor Boy's great house upon the avenue.

Old Martha had seats for the play whenever she wanted them. And very handsome she looked, with her red cheeks and her white hair, and her thick black silk. One winter, when she had a dreadful cold, the Poor Boy took her to Palm Beach in his car, and introduced all his smart friends to her. But it was as if they had always known her, for the Poor Boy, who talked a great deal, never talked for long without celebrating "my nurse."

"Oh," he might say, "I, too, have known what it is to have a mother."

Or coming home late from some gay party, the sparkle still in his eyes, he might say to the old woman herself:

"I love people, but I love you more."

Of the Poor Boy who gave her so much she had never asked but one thing. One simple kindly act in the future. She had made him promise her that; take his oath to it, indeed; cross his tender heart. She had made him promise that when at last she lay dead, he would come to her and close her eyes.

He would keep his word; not a doubt of it. But he would do more. He would see to it that in Woodlawn, where his young father and mother lay, old Martha should lie, too, and that the ablest sculptor of the time should mark her grave for the ages.

The Poor Boy had the intuition of a woman, and the tenderness; he had the imagination of a poet and the simplicity of a child. Everybody loved him—the slim, well-knit, swift body, carrying the beautiful round head; the face, so handsome, so gentle, and so daring. He was not cast in a heroic mould, but he was so vivid that in groups of taller, stronger men it was the Poor Boy whom you saw first. Half the girls did, anyway, and most of the wives, and all the old grandmothers. The most ambitious girls forgot that he was princely rich, and wanted him for himself alone. But the "world-so-new-and-all" was cram-jammed with flowers, and the Poor Boy was dazzled, and did not more than half make up his mind which was the loveliest.

Old Martha was a firm believer in love at first sight (otherwise she might never have been a wet-nurse), and often, when the Poor Boy came home from some great gathering of people, she would ask him, "Did it happen to yez?" And he knew what she meant, and teased her a little sometimes, saying that he wasn't "just quite sure." (And he wasn't—always.)

One day the world crashed about old Martha's ears. The Poor Boy stood up in the court and said, "Not guilty," in his clear, ringing voice. But they didn't believe her child, her angel, and when they sent him to prison she tore her white hair, and beat her head against the wall of her bedroom until she fell senseless. And indeed it was true that Justice, the light woman, had again been brought to bed of a miscarriage. But who was to believe that, when Justice's whole family and her doctor gave out that the child was clean-run and full time? If any believed there were not many. The Poor Boy was a poor boy, indeed, and it seemed to him (trying so very hard not to go mad) that his life was all over.

As a matter of fact, it was getting ready at last to begin.

II

One day old Martha received the following letter:

"MARTHA, DEARIE: I didn't do it. But only you believe that, and I. You will go to Joyous Guard, for love of me, and put the cottage in order. I shall live there when I come out, and you shall take care of me. But are you too old? Can you do the cooking and the housework for us two? It's I that will split the wood and carry the coals. If the work is too heavy, dearie, you must choose some one to help you. Some one who will never come where I am, whom I shall never have to look in the face. For it's you only that I can look in the face now, or bear to have look in mine. My more than mother, God bless you, and believe me always, with all my love, your

"POOR BOY."

"Choose some one to help her!" Old Martha snorted. "Not if I was dead in my coffin and him wantin' only me," she said, "I'd rise up and boil my lamb's eggs for him."

But it was not alone that she sped northward to that great valley in the mountains, which the Poor Boy had called Joyous Guard, after Launcelot's domain. She took with her the Poor Boy's butler, a man of rare executive ability, and a young architect for whom the Poor Boy had had belief and affection. These three camped out in the cottage, and sent forth electric messages to plumbers, and upholsterers, and cabinet-makers. If her boy was to live in a tiny stone cottage, old Martha would see to it that that cottage should be a gem. She could spend what she pleased. She had been paid no wages since the Poor Boy's coming of age. Bonds with gilt edges were given to her on that day, deeds to two houses in which gentlefolk lived, and at all the stores where the Poor Boy had credit she had credit, just as his own mother would have had. She was a rich woman in her own right. And the young architect knew that, and in his heart was amazed at always finding her on the floor in a lake of lather, crooning as she scrubbed.

"Martha," he said once, "you're a bird. I wish I'd met you when *I* was a baby."

And she answered:

"Don't be thrackin' mud into the study." And then, "Mister Cotter," she said, "if ye have a heart in your body, put it into the furnace flue. It was always a bad egg for drawin', and betimes the snow will lie six feet deep in the valley."

"I'll put my heart and soul in that flue, Martha, for your sake, and we'll put it to the ordeal by fire. But who's to feed the furnace?"

"Who's to feed the furnace!" she put back her head and laughed. "Who but love, young man? Love will feed the furnace, press the trousers, and clean the boots. There will be no one to care for him but me. Mind that. No one but old Martha. Twenty year I've shed be the knowledge. It's no mere woman ye behold, Mister Cotter, 't is an army!"

"By Jove," he said, "I believe you."

And he passed out with his measuring-stick into the bright sunlight. And there stood, drawing deep breaths of the racy September air, and filling his eyes almost to overflowing with the magic beauty of the valley.

It spread away southward from the base of the cliff upon which he stood, melting at last into blue distance; an open valley studded with groups of astounding trees which were all scarlet and gold. Mountains, deep-green, purple, pale-violet, framed the valley, and through its midst was flung a bright blue necklace of long lakes and serpentine rivers. In the nearest and largest lake, towering castles of white cloud came continuously and went. Very far off, browsing among lily pads, Mr. Cotter could see a cow moose and her calf. And, high over his head, there passed presently a string of black duck. He could hear the strong beating of their wings.

Mr. Cotter was a practical man.

"Why the hell did he do it?" he mused. "He might have married, and wanted a real house in this paradise, and told me to go as far as I liked. He'd have asked us all up to stay—and now, my God! all it can ever be is a cage for a jail-bird."

When at last the cottage was in exquisite order, old Martha sent the others away and stayed on alone. In her room she had an elaborate calendar. To each day was tacked the name of its patron saint.

The old woman was religious, but every night she drew her pencil through the name of a saint, and the days passed, and the Poor Boy's term in prison drew swiftly to an end.

"Monday week," she said. "Next Monday." "Day after to-morrow." "To-morrow." "O Father of mine in heaven; O saints; O Mother heart—to-day!"

III

Old Martha wondered if the Poor Boy would have a smile for her. She imagined that he would look sick and broken, and that if he smiled at all it would be the bitter smile of the wronged. She imagined that he would wear ready-made clothes supplied by the prison authorities; and that he would no longer walk erect, upon swift feet, but bowed over, with dragging steps.

When he came at last what profoundly shocked her was none of this; but that to the superficial eye he had not changed at all. His hair, perhaps, was a little shorter than she remembered; his face was not exactly pale; it was more as if he had sat up too late, and was having an off day. As for the smile for which she hoped and longed, it began when he saw her running toward him, very swiftly for a heavy old woman, and it ended on her cheek.

"My old dear!" he said.

He took her hand and swung it as children do, and walked beside her into the cottage.

The spickness and spanness of it smote him between the eyes; the imagination and the taste which had changed it from a hunting-lodge into a gentleman's house, and the tact which had done away with the photographs of friends, and all things that could remind him of old days. He passed the whole house in review from top to bottom, and gratitude to the old servant grew very warm in the tired heart.

They stepped out from the living-room to the edge of the cliff and looked down the great valley.

"There was no time," said Martha, tremulous with joy, for she had been much praised, "to put the landscape to rights."

The Poor Boy looked up into the blue vault of heaven.

"Stone walls," he said, "and *that*, have been my landscape."

"But now," she said, "any day you like you can view the world from here to the North Pole."

He smiled.

"That way's south, Martha," he said, "but it will do. We own all the way to the ocean that way; but north only to the lake where the river rises. But even that's a day's travel. Oh, there's room enough even for me, and there's a great deal too much for you, you poor old dear. But have you made friends in the village? You must have them up to see you, days when I'm off somewhere or other. And you must have a helper, I see that. Yes, you must. If necessary, I'll face him, or her. I won't have you breaking down with looking after me. Don't say a word. I know you. You think it would be high jinks to wear your eyes out and your hands off for me, but I won't have it. The cottage is bigger than I remember. But maybe you've added to it, you old witch."

He stepped to the very edge of the cliff and looked straight down, to where, two hundred feet below, the perpendicular was first broken by a slope of titanic boulders, among which the trunks of dwarfed pines twisted here and there into the light, from the deep-buried soil.

"How easy," he thought, "to make an end!"

A dozen feet away old Martha fussed and fumed, like a hen over a duckling.

"Come back! Come back!" she said.

But the Poor Boy put on his teasing face, and danced a double shuffle, on the very edge of the big drop. Then, as suddenly, the fun went out of his eyes, and he came back.

"Oh, Martha," he said, his hand on her shoulder, "I am so tired."

Upon the great leather lounge in front of the living-room fire, he lay down. His ankles crossed, his hands crossed, his eyes on the ceiling, he looked like those effigies of knights which you have seen on tombs. 21

His eyes closed. He could hear her, dimly, putting wood on the fire.

"Yes," he said, "you must have help. I see that," the handsome mouth smiled; "only I don't really see it, said Alice," he went on, "because my eyes are closed, and I am falling so fast into a deep dark well that the white rabbit will never, never catch up with me.' Bet you a box of candy, Martha, you can't pry my eyes open with a crowbar."

For a long time the old woman dared not move, for fear her boots might creak. She continually wiped her eyes with the back of her hand, and rather than snuffle, heroically endured a running nose. 22

He had grown up in her care. Between herself and nature it was always a close race as to which should be the first to know his needs. But even to a stranger it must now have been obvious that he had not slept well for a long time. His face, having passed from under the control of his intellect, was haggard and harassed, the muscles of expression twitched and jumped. The hands upon his breast, their fingers interlocked, strained, and twisted.

A shoe creaked, a strong, cool hand lay lightly on the Poor Boy's forehead. He became quiet, one by one his muscles went into a state of complete relaxation; he breathed now with long, slow breaths. An hour passed. 23

The hand was lifted from his forehead, two shoes creaked a number of times, there was a rustling of heavy curtains, four times repeated; at each rustling the room grew darker. A door closing sounded faintly. The Poor Boy slept on. But for his breathing you might have thought him dead, flat on his back, ankles crossed, hands peacefully folded.

It was the middle of the night when he waked.

"Martha."

The old woman was there, crouched between the lounge and the fire. God knew how her poor bones ached. The Poor Boy would never know.

"Yes, dearie." 24

"Put your arms around me like old times and tell me you *know* I didn't do it."

There arose in the room, like sad music, the sound of the old woman's sobbing.

"I'm so tired," said the Poor Boy, "and so glad."

This time he slept till morning.

IV

For many days it appeared as if the Poor Boy's entire efforts were directed into an attempt to sleep off his troubles. Experience was like a drug of which he could not rid himself; he waked, tried to read, tried to walk, tried to enjoy looking out over the valley, and soon gave it up, and threw himself on his bed, or on the big lounge in the living-room. And these days, of course, so the pendulum swings, were followed by days and nights in which he could not sleep at all.

But old Martha was not worried, though she pretended to be. It was natural that having slept too much he should now sleep too little. She prescribed exercise and usefulness. One day she made him wash all the dishes, and prune all the rose-vines, and tie them in readiness for straw jackets when winter should set in, and she made him split wood in the cellar, and after dinner she made him go to the piano and play Irish music for her until the sweat stood out on his forehead. Then she ordered him under a cold shower, and when he was in bed she pulled up a chair, and told him the longest and dullest story she knew—"The Banshee of Kilmanogg." And behold he slept, and was wakened by birds in the ivy who were talking over their plans for going south for the winter. 26

The Poor Boy opened his rested eyes and listened to the birds. There were some who intended to travel by the seaboard air-line, others by the midland air-line; for the most part they were going to Florida and the Gulf States for the cold months; but a certain robin and his wife, tempted by the memory of crumbs and suet which a wise and wonderful old lady always put out for them, had determined to winter at Aiken in the holly-tree that stood by the old lady's 27

window. There were comparisons of resorts and disputes about them.

In the party were young birds who had never been south at all. And a certain old bachelor bird amused himself very heartily at the expense of these. He did not dwell upon the beauty of the journey that was before them, but upon its inconveniences, its dangers, and its horrors.

28

"The midland route would be all right," he said, "if it weren't for the farmers' boys with their long guns and the—ever see a cat, Bub?"

"No," twittered Bub nervously. "Don't expect to. *I'm* for the seaboard."

"That would be sense," said the old bachelor, "if it weren't for the Statue of Liberty."

"The what?"

"It's a big light—you never know just what it is, because when you fly into it to see, it breaks your neck and all the other worthless bones in your body."

"I'm not agoing to fly into any light."

29

"You *think* you won't," said the bachelor ominously. "But first your brains will scatter figuratively, and then—literally. Too bad!—too bad!"

All the young birds shuddered.

"Those big snakes in the South are rather nasty things, too," continued the bachelor bird. "I'm used to them, of course, and I've proved dozens of times that there's no such thing as hypnotism; but the effect of a snake's eye on very young and inexperienced birds is inconceivable, and not to be reconciled to the Darwinian theory or Mendel's law. What between snakes, hawks, and women's hats, the life of a bird—"

"Isn't what it used to be."

The bachelor turned upon his interrupter and scowled.

30

"On the contrary," he said, "it's *exactly* what it used to be. And that's the—ahem—of it! Pardon me, ladies."

"When do you start?" he was asked.

"Not for a week," he answered pompously. "I have several little odds and ends to look into first —" And right in the midst of his speech the call of the South hit him in the middle, you may say. It always does hit a bird like that, and it is contagious like girls fainting in a factory.

The cynical bachelor flew suddenly to the tipmost top of a tree, and poured forth the whole of his heart and soul in a song of the South. "I've got to go—I've got to go," he sang:

"For it's there that I must be,
Where the flower of the pomegranate blazes
In the top of the pomegranate tree.

31

"And as for the dangers of travel,
I'd laugh—if I hadn't to sing.
For a gale is a silly old zephyr
And a bird is a wonderful thing,
A wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful, wonderful thing."

Two more verses he sang at the top of his lungs, broke off short with a shrill cry of joy, and took wing.

Then the south-sickness spread, and even the young birds flew to the tops of trees, and defied gales, snakes, the Statue of Liberty, the boy with the gun, and the female (you wouldn't call her a woman) with the untrimmed hat. And away they flew, in ones and twos, until there were only a few left. One of these hopped on the window-sill in full view, and told the Poor Boy to get up.

"Don't be setting such an example of sloth," she said, and squeaked at her own temerity and flew away.

32

The Poor Boy leaped from bed, and flung his pajamas afar, and rushed for cold water.

The shower fell heavily with wondrous iciness, and the Poor Boy sang aloud and praised God, who had once more returned him the gift of seeing and hearing. At breakfast he told Martha, and with the utmost gravity repeated to her everything that the birds had said—for *him*.

33

V

The power of imagining returned to him slowly. There were whole days when his inner eyes and ears remained obstinately blind and deaf. When a

"Primrose by the river's brim
A yellow primrose was to him,

And it was nothing more"

(only there were no primroses at this season); when the southing birds in the ivy outside his window only made noises and were a nuisance; and when the burden of his thoughts was one long "done for—done for—done for." It was the affection of many people that he missed most, and the faith that so many people had had in him—shattered forever. But he missed their voices, too, and their faces; the cheerful sounds of "talking at once"; the massing of fresh, lovely gowns, the scintillation of jewels, the smell of gardenias, the music of violins, hidden by screens of palms and bay-trees. 34

What had he done to deserve exile and ostracism? He asked himself that question thousands of times. He knew, of course, what he was believed to have done, but he was in search of some committed sin, to account for his having been punished for one that had only been circumstantially alleged. And in the whole memory that he had of his life and acts he could not find an answer. Every life is full of little sins, but of major ones the Poor Boy had no recollection. 35

On the days when his imagination was "no good" he had the face of one who is worried over something important that has been lost and that can not be found. And, indeed, the gift was of tremendous importance to him, and he knew it. It was the weapon with which he must fight off insanity; the tongs with which he must snatch from the fires of experience whatever bright fragments of life were not yet consumed.

Now this imagination of the Poor Boy's was not a servant that came and went at command, but a master. He could not say to himself, "now I will lie back upon the wings of my imagination and fly a pleasant hour"—or rather he could say just that if he liked, but nothing would happen. It was he who served; he was an abode in which his imagination might lodge whenever it so pleased, and whence it might also fare forth. In the old days it had found lodgment in the Poor Boy's head decidedly comfortable, and had made long stays; but since society had wreaked its vengeance upon him, it seemed as if his head, as a dwelling-place, had lost its comforts and advantages. 36

His imagination was not of the kind which makes for literature or music. It could not, in other words, shake itself clear of experience, and journey into the unknown and the untried. It was not creative, but it was of a quality so intense and vivid as to wage, sometimes, successful disputes with the tangible and the real. Its action was a kind of dreaming of dreams, whose direction and outcome lay within the option of the dreamer. 37

Old Martha found him one day sitting on the kitchen steps with his feet in the first snow of the winter. But the Poor Boy was really at Palm Beach with a car-load of his friends, and he was not at all cold, he thanked her, but hot—positively hot.

Notwithstanding, she ordered a change of shoes and socks, and listened at his door half a dozen times that night for sounds of incipient cold.

The old woman's mirror told her that she was getting thin, that the work she had undertaken was too hard for her, and sometimes when the men drove in from the village with supplies (and the Poor Boy hid himself) she blarneyed them into lending a hand here and there. For a good joke sweetened with a little base flattery she got coals carried now and then, or heavy pieces of furniture moved when she was house-cleaning; but to the Poor Boy's constant appeals that she bring into the house a permanent helper she turned a deaf ear. As a matter of fact, having lived the best part of her life for the Poor Boy, she proposed, if possible, to die for him. 38

But when ("on top of the thinness," as he put it) she caught a heavy cold, he took the matter in dispute wholly out of her jurisdiction.

The cold having run its course and gone its way, he appeared to her one morning dressed for the winter woods. He had on moccasins and many thicknesses of woolens; he carried a knapsack and a light axe. He laid these on the kitchen table, and went into the cellar, where his long skis had passed the summer. He brought them, turning the corner of the cellar stairs with difficulty, back to the kitchen, and began to examine the straps with which they are adjusted to the feet. He asked for a little oil with which to dress the leather. She brought him oil in a saucer. 39

He dressed the straps of his skis and talked, more to himself than to her.

"Killing is bad, but in case I do actually run out of food I'd better take a rifle. I suppose the sleeping-bag will keep me warm, still I'd take along an extra blanket if it weren't so heavy. I'm not as fit as I used to be. Seems to me this compass acted queerly the last time I used it. Didn't I tell you once, Martha, about getting lost up here because a compass played me tricks? There were people to find me that time—but what's the odds? I can't get lost twice on my own acres. And what's the odds if I do?—" 40

Old Martha couldn't stand it any longer.

"Is it for fun you're scaring me out of my wits, young man?"

"*Scaring* you, Martha?" His face was innocent of any guile.

"Where do you think you're going, and when do you think you're comin' back—and me all alone in the house?" 41

Now his eyes gleamed way down in their brown depths with a spark apiece of malice.

"I don't know where I'm going," he said, "but I know that I'm not coming back until a little bird tells me that you have hired some one to help you with the housework."

She was furious.

"Faith, then," she said, "you'll not come back till Doom's Day."

He concluded his preparations in silence, and carried his skis outdoors to put them on.

"I say, Martha," he called, "hand me my pack and things, will you?"

"I will not."

He laughed, and managed, with more laughter and some peril, to come up the steps and into the kitchen on his skis. 42

He adjusted the pack to his shoulder, put on his mittens, and took up his rifle and his axe. Malice still gleamed in his eyes.

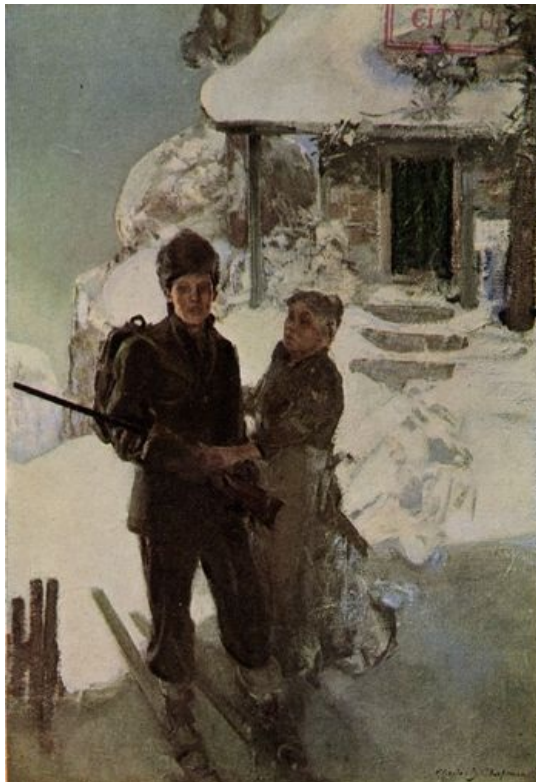
He went out as he had entered, but with more difficulty and peril. He crossed the kitchen-yard with long, easy strides.

But Martha was running after him, bareheaded. She lost a carpet slipper in the deep snow.

"Only come back, darlint"—she fought against tears—"and I'll fill the house with helpers from attic to cellar."

"One," said the Poor Boy judiciously, "will do. The nearest employment bureau will be in Quebec. Isn't there somebody in the village?"

"In the village! In Quebec!"



"Only come back, darlint";—she fought against tears;—"and I'll fill the house with helpers from attic to cellar."

Her indignation was tremendous. 43

"This side of New York there's not a gentleman's servant to be had," said she, "and but few there. I'll have to go meself."

"Couldn't you write?"

"Full well you know that I can only make me mark, and never the twicet alike."

"Well," said the Poor Boy, "the change will do you good, and I'll camp out in the house instead of in the woods till you come back. It will be easier, and ever so much safer."

The next day, looking very grand in her furs and feathers, old Martha started for New York. As the man from the village drove her through the woods to the little railroad station the tears froze on her veil.

Old Martha was longer in New York than she had intended to be. There were plenty of servants out of work on the lists of the various employment agencies which she visited. But Martha's requirements were such as the average servant can not meet or will not face, and candidates for the place and wages she offered asked questions and were not satisfied with her answers.

"And where is the house?"

"Canada."

"Is it a city?"

"It's country."

"Are there neighbors?"

45

"No."

"What manner of man is the master?"

"A fine, kind man."

"Married?"

"Single."

"An old man?"

"A young man. But you'll not see the master."

"Me work for a man I don't see?"

"He don't see nobody but me."

"What ails him?"

"Nothing. 'Tis his way. He's shy o' people."

"There'll be no company, then?"

"None."

"What men will there be to help about the place?"

"The men that drive in from the village with supplies."

46

"How far off is the village?"

"Twelve miles. When they can't drive they come in on snow-shoes."

"Hum!"

"What more can I tell you?"

"You've told enough. I would not touch the place with a pole, not for twice the wages. I'd rather be dead than twelve miles from everywhere and never a man in the house."

Girls who seemed able and willing wouldn't go, two were willing to try the place for a month, but Martha did not like their faces or their voices. She was in despair, until one day, far from any employment agency, a chance meeting settled the matter.

"Why, Martha!"

"If it isn't Miss Joy!"

And for a moment old Martha was dazed, for except in the pursuit of sport, tennis or golf, Miss Joceylin Grey was not the sort of girl who is met walking. And here she was crossing Madison Square on the long diagonal, in shoes that had not been blacked that day, and furthermore she was not headed for the avenue but away from it, and dusk was descending upon the city. And furthermore the color that had been her chiefest glory in the old Palm Beach and Newport days was all gone, and she looked very thin and delicate, and tired and discouraged. And where, oh where, were the gardenias that she always wore during the time of year when they are rarest and most expensive? Where even were the child's gloves, old Martha asked herself, her sables? Her pearls?

47

"Why, Miss Joy," she exclaimed, "you look as if your father had lost every cent he had in the world."

48

The girl flushed uneasily, but her eyes did not fall from the old woman's.

"Everybody knows that, Martha. Where *have* you been?"

"Stone deaf," said Martha, "among me own sorrows. But you're all in black."

"I lost my father, too."

Old Martha made a soft, crooning sound of pity.

"So," and Miss Joy tried to speak bravely. "I live all alone now, and—"

"Have ye no money?"

"Not a penny, Martha. I had a job as a reporter until they asked me to do things that I wouldn't do."

"And when did you lose this job?"

49

"Day before yesterday."

"And now?"

"Oh, something will turn up."

"Meaning that nothing has."

"Not yet." She was beginning to shiver with the cold. "Good-by, Martha, it's good to see you again, and I could stand here talking till all hours if it wasn't for the wind."

She had given both her hands to Martha, but this one would not let them go. Her fine, gentle, old face became set and obstinate.

"When did you eat last?"

The girl smiled wanly and shivered.

She felt her arm being drawn through Martha's. She felt herself pulled rapidly toward the avenue.

Martha, satisfied with the face of a passing taxicab's driver, whistled with sudden, piercing shrillness. 50

"Where are you taking me?"

Old Martha's eyes became humorous. It was pleasant to her to play fairy godmother to a millionaire's daughter.

"To me suite in the St. Savior," said she. "To a hot tub, dearie, and a hot dinner, and a warm bed."

In Martha's sitting-room were flowers. She could afford them. On the bureau in her bedroom was a large photograph of the Poor Boy, in an eighteen-carat gold frame, very plain and smart.

While Martha was undoing the hooks of her dress Miss Joy stood in front of the bureau and looked at this photograph. 51

"Poor Boy," she said presently.

"What's that?" said Martha.

"What's become of him, Martha?"

Martha told her.

"It was all so wicked," said the girl.

"Wicked," said Martha, "was no name for it. All his friends to believe he'd do a thing like that! I could skin them alive, the lot of them!"

"I was one of his friends, Martha."

"I make no war on women," said Martha.

"I say I was one of his friends—but I never believed he did it—I mean how could he, and why should he?"

"Perhaps you wrote to tell him you believed in him!"

"I wish I had," said the girl, "but I thought everybody would, and then you know we had a sort of a misunderstanding; and I was going to, and then my father's troubles got so bad that he couldn't hide them from me, and we used to talk them over all night sometimes, and I couldn't think about anybody else's troubles.—Is he up there all alone?" 52

"There's the last hook. And now I'll draw a tub."

Miss Joy undressed herself to the music of water roaring under high pressure into a deep porcelain tub. She was no longer hungry, for she had had a glass of milk on arriving at the hotel, but she was very tired and a little dizzy in her head.

As is the custom with girls who have been brought up with maids to dress and undress them, she flung her clothes upon a chair in a disorderly heap, and was no more embarrassed at being naked before Martha than if Martha had been a piece of furniture. 53

"Come and talk to me, Martha," she said, "while I soak."

So Martha sat by the tub as by a bedside, and Miss Joy with a sigh of comfort lay at length in the hot water and they talked.

"Is he up there all alone?"

"He is now. The housework was too heavy for one old woman. He sent me to New York to find a helper. But the wages don't make up for the loneliness in the young biddy's mind—in what she is plazed to call her mind—and I'm five days lookin' about and nothing done." 54

"Wages?" sighed Miss Joy. "They sound good to me."

"To think of wages sounding good to you, Miss Joy!"

"But they do. I'd do almost anything for money."

"Ye would not, Miss Joy."

"You don't know me."

"I know well that you could 'a' had Mr. Ludlow for the taking, and him nearly as rich as me Poor Boy."

"So I could," said Miss Joy, "and perhaps I shall marry him after all."

"What!" exclaimed Martha. "Marry that old devil! Tell me ye'd sooner starve—or—get out of me tub, and take yourself off!"

Old Martha rose hurriedly with a squeak of dismay, and rushed to close the door between the bedroom and the sitting-room. She returned breathing fast.

55

"They were knocking with the dinner," she explained, "and all the doors open! Ye've soaked long enough, deary. Come out."

"Not until you say that you know I wouldn't marry Mr. Ludlow to save me from drowning."

"Full well I know it," said Martha heartily. "Come out."

The girl came out of the tub reluctantly, and presently, swathed in Martha's best lavender dressing-gown (she had bought it that morning), was lifting a spoonful of clear green-turtle soup to her lips.

"Martha!"

"Miss Joy!"

"I see champagne."

56

"'Tis not only to look at, Miss Joy."

"It's wonderful," said Miss Joy, "starving—I meet you—champagne—and to-morrow—"

Her sudden high spirits suddenly fell.

"Oh, Martha, from the top of even a small tree to the ground is a cruel, hard fall!"

"We were speakin' of wages, Miss Joy. And of a certain young lady willin' to do almost anything for money. Will ye come back to the woods with me to help with the housework?"

"Oh, but Martha—it wouldn't do. It isn't as if I'd never known him—but we were such good friends—and it would all be too uncomfortable and embarrassing."

"Ye'd never see *him*, Miss Joy."

57

"Never see him!"

"He will look no one in the face but me. The faces that he loved are nightmares to him now—all but old Martha's. No, Miss Joy—ye might, peepin' from behind curtains, set eyes on me Poor Boy, but as for you, he'd not know if you was man or woman, old or young, unless I told him. He has his rules; when the men come in from the village he disappears like a ghost. When they have gone he comes back. There'd be hours for housework, when he'd be out of the way, and that there was a born lady helping old Martha out and kapin' the poor woman company—he'd never know—never at all."

"Hum," said Miss Joy to the bubbles in her glass of champagne.

"The life," said Martha, "will bring back the color to your cheeks, the flesh to your bones, the courage to your heart."

58

"Am I so dreadfully thin?"

"If I was that thin," said Martha, "I'd hate to have me best friends see me without me clothes. But ye've the makin's of a Vanus, and that's more than ever I had."

Miss Joy laughed aloud.

Then, after a silence, and very seriously: "You're sure he'd never know that I was in the house?"

"Not unless I told him."

"But you wouldn't tell him?"

"Not if he hitched wild horses to me sacret and lashed them."

Another thoughtful silence.

"There's just one thing, Martha," said Miss Joy, "that I *won't* do."

59

Martha flung up her hands in a gesture of despair.

"That's what they all say!" she cried. "That's how they all get out o' comin'. Well, what is it that ye won't do?"

Miss Joy hated to say. She was a little ashamed. She had enjoyed the reputation of being a good sport, a girl whom it was hard to dare. But she had her weakness. "I won't," she said, "I won't—I can't—bring myself to touch a live lobster."

Old Martha's face became extremely grave. She leaned forward. She was all confidence.

"Deary," she said, "nor more can I."

The two women exploded into laughter, loud and prolonged.

60

"Well," said Miss Joy at last, and she was still laughing, "it's a sporting proposition.... When do we start?"

"Ye must have warm clothes first."

"I have no money, Martha."

"Do ye remember a house ye took one winter, while your poor father was tearin' out the innerds of his own?"

"On Park Avenue and—"

"The same," said Martha. "The northwest corner. Ye were my tenants that winter.... Yes, deary, I am a rich old woman. And, between you and me, your poor father wanted that house the worst way, and me agents stuck him good and plenty. There's a balance comin' to ye, Miss Joy. 'Tis what they call conscience money, and 'twill buy ye warm clothes, and maybe a bit jool to go at your throat."

"Martha—Martha, what makes you so good to me?"

"Have ye not said ye never believed that me Poor Boy did what they said he did?"

"Is that the only reason?"

"There's another," said Martha. "For in all the world, next to his, ye've the swatest face and way with yez."

The old woman's emotions rose, and her brogue became heavier and heavier upon her, until her words lost all semblance of meaning. And Miss Joy, warm and well fed, leaned back in her deep chair and listened and tried to understand, and looked into Martha's face with eyes that were dark and misty with tenderness.

And she slept that night and late into the next morning, without stirring. And when she waked there was already a little flicker of color in her pale face.

VII

"Well, Martha," said the Poor Boy, when he had kissed her and welcomed her back, "did you find some one to help you?"

"She's a plain old thing," said Martha, "but honest and with good references. Would ye care to see her for yourself?"

"Good God, no," said the Poor Boy. "As long as I live I don't want to see any one but you. Tell her, will you? See that she understands. Tell her—gently, so as not to hurt her feelings, but firmly, that she has only to show herself to be dismissed. The day I see her—she goes."

"She'll not thank you," said old Martha. "Ye may safely leave that to me."

"And if she isn't a real help to you, Martha, she goes. Another thing, I'd rather she didn't talk very loud or sing, if she can help it. I don't want to know that she's here."

To Martha's discerning and suspicious eyes the Poor Boy seemed nervous, ill at ease, and eager to be off somewhere. He was dressed for deep snow-going, and kept swinging his mittens by the wrists and beating them together. He stood much on one foot and much on the other.

"What's vexing you?" she asked.

"Nothing," he said. "I've found something off here," he waved toward the valley, "that amuses me—just a silly game, Martha, that goes on in my head. The minute I get out of sight of the house it begins. It's done it every day since you left."

"What kind of a game will that be?"

"It's just making believe," he said with a certain embarrassment, "pretending things—and it makes me forget other things. I'll be back by dark."

He literally bolted, and could be heard saying sharp things to the straps of his skis, which had become stiffened with the cold.

Old Martha stood for a while staring at the door which he had closed behind him. She wondered if by any possible chance his mind was beginning to go. To relieve her own she hurried back to Joy in the kitchen, and began a conversation that had not flagged by tea-time.

The Poor Boy had found a long diagonal by which he could descend from the top of the cliff to the bottom in one swift silent slide. More than half-way down there was a dangerous turn, but he had learned to ski at St. Moritz when he was little, and never thought of the danger at all. The chief thing, turn or no turn, was to get to the bottom of the cliff as quickly as possible. Everything that was bitter and tragic in his life ended there, in an open glade among towering white pines.

The day that Martha had left for New York, the Poor Boy, standing very lonely on the top of the cliff and looking out over the valley, had been struck with a whimsical thought.

"If I had the power," he thought, "I'd settle this region with innocent people who have been accused of crimes."

At this suggestion the component parts of his nature began a discussion.

Reason: How would you know they were innocent?

Truthfulness: They'd tell me. And I'd know.

Snobbishness: Very few people in your station of life are accused of crime.

Cynicism: And very few of them are innocent.

Snobbishness: You wouldn't care to associate with people of lower station than yourself.

Affection: I love Martha better than anybody in the world.

Reason: Think of something more sensible.

Love of Detail: I wonder how we could dispose of sewage without polluting lakes and streams? I must send for books on the disposal of sewage.

Love of the Beautiful: I should like to settle the whole valley without changing the look of it—from here.

Eyes (roving from one group of screening trees to the next): It can be done. Put your village on the east side of the big lake, back of the hardwood ridge. Do you remember Placid Brook? That will flow through the main street. It will be kept clean and well stocked with trout, so that the old men can fish from the bridges. Above the village there shall be a path along the brook, all in the shade. Can't you see the girls and boys walking, two and two?

Love of Detail: All the houses in the village must be white. Who is going to make the laws?

Ego: I am. Because I own the valley. And put up the money.

Modesty: But there will be lots of men wiser than I am. And they will help.

Sudden Impulse: The women shall have votes.

Childishness: The men shan't.

Reason: Now I wonder. It's never been tried, and maybe it's what the world is waiting for and striving for.

Touch of Genius and Prophecy: It shall be tried. It is what the world needs. No votes for men. No men on juries....

Memory: (Things too recent and poignant for utterance.)

Vague Idea Gathered at School: Am I going to stand for being taxed without representation?

Sense of Justice: No.

Self-confidence: But if I can't influence some woman's vote I may as well drown myself.

Reason: Some men have no influence over anybody. *They* won't stand for taxation without representation.

The Poor Boy (as a whole) gives up with reluctance the idea of a government of the ladies, by the ladies, and for the ladies.

Wish to Do the Next Best Thing: Let it be a government by commission—a commission of three. A man and a woman—and—

Touch of Genius: The children must be represented. They shall elect a child.

Sense of the Ridiculous: Upon a platform of "Baseball in the streets—longer vacations, and more of them."

Reason: The child must not be related to the other members of the commission. We are against affairs of state being influenced by a slipper.

Sense of Decency, Good Form, Breeding, etc.: Candidates shall not vote for themselves; nor stump the valley proclaiming at the top of their lungs that they alone can keep the country from going to the dogs.

Fondness for an Occasional Glass of Champagne: How about liquor?

Self-control: If *everybody* else will do without it, *I* will.

Human Nature: We must encourage early marriages.

Ego: Of course, you exempt yourself.

Whole System of Nerves and Circulation: I do not!

Fastidiousness: She must be so and so and so (but he only succeeded in conjuring up a vague shadow of a girl).

Beginning like this (or something like it), deliberately, and thinking up things as he went along, the Poor Boy's imagination suddenly stepped in and took such a terrific grip of the situation that little by little the idea of a model settlement became as real as the most vivid and logical dream.

The valley was under three feet of snow. There was four feet of snow upon the surrounding hills and mountains, but already the engineers, headed by the Poor Boy, had been at work, and the masons and the carpenters. And many miles of ditches had been dug, and dams built, and a powerhouse, and roads (always among trees—so that the natural beauty of the valley was not so much as scratched), and already the village was complete, with its white houses and white school (with its longer holidays and more of them), its white library with the long lovely colonnade, commission house facing it, gardens in front of every dwelling, and pairs of lovers

strolling by Placid Brook.

Furthermore the village was full of people already, and half a dozen of them had been so clearly designed by the Poor Boy's imagination that he could see them, every line of their faces, every detail of their clothes. He knew every intonation of their voices. When he talked with them, he did not have to make up their answers—they just came. And better, other people, at first dim figureheads, were becoming clearer and more vivid all the time, so it seemed sure that before long he would know even the dogs of his settlement by sight. 74

The greatest difficulty in the game that he was playing lay in the imperfection of his memory. As he built each house in the village he saw it as plainly as I see the pages on which I am writing, but leaving it to go at the next house he had to return again and again to fix the image of the first. For instance, he got the whole village built, and lying in his bed that night could only remember with real distinction the commission house, the library, and one dwelling house, far down the main street. The rest was vague—houses—white houses—not high—not crowded, but all blurred and without detail, as if seen through tears. 75

He built the village, parts of it, four or five times before it became a definite thing to him. Before he could stop, let us say, before the Browns' house and take pleasure in the trim of their front door, before he could see the heliotrope growing in the snow-white jardinière in the living-room window, before he knew that Mrs. Brown made cookies every Friday, and that if you went round to the kitchen door and were very hungry and polite she gave them away while they were still hot and crisp. 76

It was precisely to call on Mrs. Brown that the Poor Boy had been so eager to leave his own house. Realities began for him at the bottom of the cliff. The road to the village crossed the glade in the pine woods—the snow was packed and icy with much travel, with the sliding of runners and the semicircular marks of horses' hoofs. As the Poor Boy sped along on his skis, he met people in sleighs and was overtaken and passed by others. They were his people—his alone. He had cheerful words for all of them, and they for him. They were hazy—a little—to the eye, but here and there he caught a face clearly and did not forget it again—a baby in a blue-and-white blanket coat, that had bright red cheeks and that smiled and showed two brand-new teeth; a boy with bare hands and red knuckles (the Poor Boy sent him a pair of warm mittens from the village store), and ears (one bigger than the other) which stuck straight out. 77

The Poor Boy came to a halt suddenly where a stream too vigorous to be ice-bound crossed the road (under a concrete bridge that had been built only the day before), ran out over a ledge of smooth granite and fell thirty feet with a roar.

"Yes," said the Poor Boy, "there's got to be a sawmill with a red roof and flower-boxes in the windows, and this is just the place for it or I'm very much mistaken.... I wonder ... I wish to the deuce Mr. Tinker was here, he's the best man we've got on water-power. The woods are full of trees that ought to be cut for the benefit of the others. Yardsley was showing me about them only yesterday. But this is a matter for Tinker." 78

The Poor Boy listened and heard sleigh-bells. They came swiftly nearer.

"Wonder who this is?"

Around the nearest turn of the road toward the village came a powerful roan horse, drawing a cutter; in the cutter sat an enormous man, but the Poor Boy had already recognized the horse. 79

"I'm damned," said he; "Tinker!"

He waved both arms and called a joyous greeting. The cutter came to a halt on the bridge.

"Just the man I wanted to see," said the Poor Boy. "I want advice and help. Yardsley says we're letting a lot of timber go to waste. Now how about a sawmill—right *here*?"

Mr. Tinker was a joyous bachelor of forty-five. He had been cashier of a bank. A deficit arising, he had been wrongfully accused of direct responsibility, and from prison he had come straight to the Poor Boy's settlement on special (most special) invitation. He had taken a room (and bath) in the village inn, and had made a little money out of contracts which the Poor Boy had thrown his way. 80

"What's the flow here in summer?" asked Mr. Tinker doubtfully.

"About half what it is now," said the Poor Boy.

"Hum—that would be width so and so—depth so and so.... What's the fall?"

"Thirty feet."

"Can't use it all, can we?"

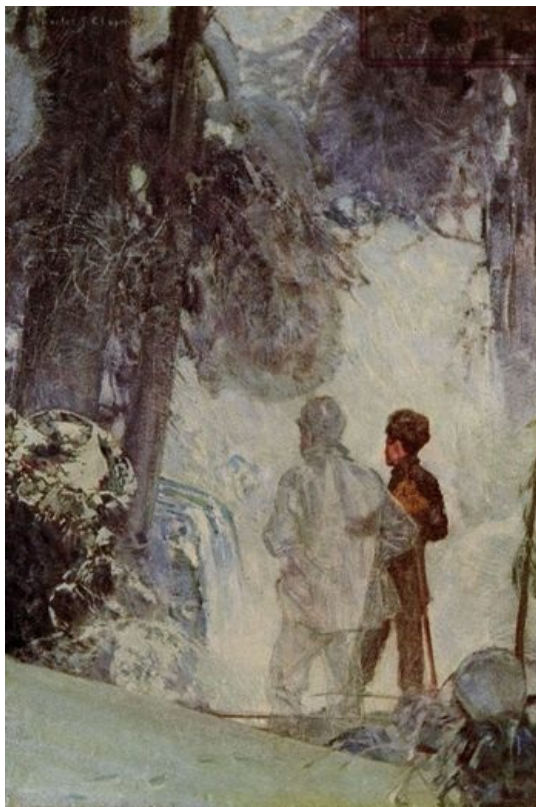
The Poor Boy shook his head.

"Well—I tell you, I'll bring a tape-measure to-morrow and go into the thing thoroughly. By the way, you know Mrs. Caxton, who's staying at the inn?"

"Yes—yes," said the Poor Boy, "they accused her of shoplifting and it wasn't she at all."

"Damn them," said Tinker.

"By all means," said the Poor Boy.



"Now how about a sawmill;—right here?"

"But what about her?" His eyes twinkled.

Mr. Tinker blushed and beamed.

"She's given up her rooms."

"What!" exclaimed the Poor Boy.

"And *we're* going to move to the little house on the corner."

"Then," said the Poor Boy, "what are you doing alone in the woods?"

"Came to find you," said Tinker. "Couldn't get married without you."

"Turn around," cried the Poor Boy. "I'm with you."

He knelt swiftly and took off his skis.

He started to slide an affectionate arm round the older man's shoulders, but jerked it back before it was too late.

"No," he muttered, "you mustn't try to touch them or they vanish."

"What's that?"

"Just that this is the best thing that ever happened. You're just made for each other, you two."

They sped on through the pine forest, talking of village matters, of school matters, and hitching-posts, of politics, of sewers—but mostly of love.

It was dark when the Poor Boy got back to his own house. But he was very happy and (in spite of many hot crisp cookies at Mrs. Brown's kitchen door) very hungry.

After he had dressed and dined, he soaked his hands in hot water to make them supple, and played Beethoven till far into the night.

Martha went boldly into the room to listen, and sat in a deep chair by the fire, as was her right. But Miss Joy listened without the door, and during the Adagio from the Pathetique her hands covered her bowed face and tears came through the fingers.

Then she crept off to bed, but Martha came before she was asleep to say good-night.

"Miss Joy," she said, "it's the first time since he came that he's played; other times he's only fooled and toyed."

"Martha," said Miss Joy, "I think it's the first time that *anybody ever* played."

"It's what the Poor Boy does best," said Martha, "and takes the least pride in. Listen now—he's making up as he goes—there's voices—only listen—there's one that insists and one that denies—but both their hearts are breakin'—breakin' in their breasts."

Miss Joy sat straight up in bed. "Listen, Martha—there's a third voice—things are going to come right for the other two—"

Thus the two women. As for the Poor Boy, he made music because he had been to a wedding that day and knew that if he got to thinking about it alone in the dark he might get so unhappy that he would remember where he had hidden his revolver and his rifles, and get up to look for them.

He played until he was exhausted in body and mind. Then he rose from the piano, closed it gently, and went to bed. He was very sad and unhappy, but quite sane again.

85

VIII

During the winter the Poor Boy made two excursions, lasting for a number of days, southward through his valley and beyond. It was supposed by Martha, wild with anxiety, and by Miss Joy, but little less so, that he went alone. As a matter of fact he had companions; Yardsley, the forester and surveyor; Wangog, the Huron chief, taciturn in talk, but a great woodsman; and Stephen Bell, a young man recently come to live in the village and a great favorite with the Poor Boy.

It had developed that there were enough people wrongfully accused of some crime or other in the world to settle the Poor Boy's lands from the big lake all the way to the salt sea. And the main object of his long excursions was to locate upon deep water, navigable for great ships, a site, not for a village, but for a city.

86

Already his first village had suburbs, and here and there, dotted about among the foot-hills, were villas belonging to a wealthier class of people: Bradleys, Godfreys, Warrens, Warings, etc., families of position and breeding, among whom was a constant round of little dinners and dances to which the Poor Boy dearly loved to be invited.



During the winter, the Poor Boy made two excursions southward through his valley and beyond.

Government by a commission of three was an established and successful fact. Though it must be owned that as the man member and the woman member could never agree about anything, all reins of policy were gathered into the hands of the child.

87

"A child leads us," was often in the mouths of the village elders, and often anxiety expressed as to what would happen when the child grew up. But that he would grow up was not likely, since he was the very image of what the Poor Boy himself had been at the same age—a charming, straightforward, most honorable boy, touched by the fairy godmother of justice, music, and fancy.

It was wonderful how much the school-children learned with three hours' schooling a day (except Wednesday, Saturday, and Sunday, when they had none), and how outdoor play the rest of the time was rapidly developing them physically and in the sense of responsibility and judgment. There were no recorded cases of weak eyes, nerves, or hysteria. There were no suicides among the children upon the occasion of failures to pass examinations.

88

Nor was morbid curiosity allowed to stalk among them, destroying as it went. They were brought up on a newer and more scientific catechism, beginning:

Teacher: Who made you?

Answer: My father and mother.

And among themselves they were encouraged to raise up questions and bring them to their elders for simple and instructive answers. And the punishment for lying to children and frightening them with mysteries was very terrible. 89

Upon his second long excursion the Poor Boy and his jolly companions (except Wangog, who was taciturn) came to the end of the Poor Boy's lands, a coast of granite sheathed with ice, and beyond, great broken cakes of ice heaving slowly with groans and grinding roars upon the tranquil winter ocean.

Back of the granite barriers the river spread right and left, and then went out to sea in a deep and narrow stream, curiously free from ice. Indeed, there was but little ice in the main basin, and a kind of steam hung over it so that the Poor Boy was compelled and delighted to conclude (with the aid of his companions) that the river toward its mouth must be swollen by warm springs. 90

"I wonder if ships couldn't come in all the year round?"

He was going to wonder about other things, when the taciturn Wangog grunted and pointed to where the smoke of a steamer lay black along the horizon, and after that, to them closely watching, little by little her black hull rose from the grays and whites and greens of the ice.

She proved to be many kinds of a ship, in rapid succession, but last of all she was a yacht, huge and black and glittering with much brass. She was owned by a great statesman, who, with nothing but his country's welfare at heart, had been accused of high treason, and who, having heard of the Poor Boy's asylum for unfortunates, was making for it as fast as he could. 91

She came slowly between the headlands and to anchor at last with a splendid splash that glittered in the sun like diamonds....

It was very disappointing. If the Poor Boy, searching a more than half-emptied knapsack, was ever to get home to his own house he must postpone his visit to—Lord Harrow's (yes, that was the name forever and ever) yacht. Why had the Poor Boy and his companions wasted so much time over an empty harbor, when they might just as well have had the yacht arrive in the early morning, giving time for visits, explanations, and lunch?

The Poor Boy began to stamp his feet. There was no sensation in them, and he found that they were frozen. He had come too far, he had exposed himself too much—the sea with its burden of ice groaned and clashed. His companions, so jolly but now (except Wangog, who was taciturn), looked pityingly upon him and began to fade. They vanished. He was all alone. A shrill wind was rising, dusk was descending. He stood and stamped his feet, and two plans fought in his head for recognition and acceptance. 92

He could board Lord Harrow's great black yacht and be welcomed into the light and the warmth of the great satin-wood saloon with its open fireplace and its Steinway grand. Lord Harrow's daughter, that lovely girl, would minister to him, and Warinaru, the steward, would bring him hot grog in cut crystal, upon a heavy silver tray of George the First's time. They would give him the best state-room, the green and white—white for winter, green for summer—and he would sleep—such a long sleep—with no dreams in it, no worries, no memories—no awakening! 93

That was one plan—a delightful plan. So easy of accomplishment! He had but to sit in the snow and wait; Lord Harrow would see him and send a boat. No. Lord Harrow's daughter should be the first.... No ... No. How foolish! Don, the spaniel, begins to whine and fret, to put his paws on the bulwarks and bark toward a spot on the shore.

A boat is lowered; Don, the spaniel, leaps in—they row, following the point of his nose, and the Poor Boy is found just in the nick of time.... 94

But the other plan, which was not delightful, was best.

"I told old Martha," the Poor Boy murmured, "to look for me at such a time. Why break her heart for a pair of bright eyes and a glass of hot grog? Why not keep my word? It's only two or three days of torture."

He turned from the river and ran upon his skis, stamping at each step, until he found shelter from the wind. His feet began to tingle and he knew that they were not frozen. But by the time he had a fire going they were numb again.

Between the Poor Boy and his old Martha was not two or three days of torture, but four. During part of the time snow fell, and wind flew into his face from the north. 95

Late on the fourth day he climbed the cliff upon which his house stood, not because it was the cliff upon which his house stood, but because it was an obstacle in his way. His house might be a month's journey beyond, for all he knew.

At the top of the cliff, among the pines was a young woman. She was by no means the first he had seen that day. But her face was clearer than the other faces had been, and when she darted behind a tree and tried to escape without being seen or spoken to, he ran after her, not knowing why he ran nor why he called her Joy—Joy—Joy! And he did not understand why she in her turn kept calling, "Martha—Martha—come quick—come quick!" 96

He knew best that she suddenly stopped running, and turned and waited for him, and that as he fell forward she caught him in her arms and began to drag him toward a bright light.

It was a most vivid hallucination. And when he woke in his bed, so warm and all, and Martha bending over him, the first thing he told her—smiling sleepily—was that he had mistaken her for Miss Jocelyn Grey.

"It was the realest sort of an hallucination," he said, "she caught me as I was falling—and of course she was you."



She suddenly stopped running, and turned and waited for him.

"How do you feel, Deary? We—I had a devil of a time with ye." 97

But the Poor Boy's mind was still upon the vision of Miss Grey.

"I saw her," he said, "and there was a look in her eyes that told me she'd *never—never* believed I'd done it.... And I was so glad, I tried to run to her for comfort, and all the time she was you. It was all so real—so real. It was a lot realer than some things that really did happen to me yesterday—yesterday morning, before I began to get snow-foolish."

"'Twas the day before yesterday ye came home," said Martha. "And all yesterday ye raved like a lunatic until night, when ye fell asleep, and I knew that all was well."

"Have you sat up with me all the time?" 98

"Ye forget I have an old female to help me. We took turns."

"You must thank her for me, Martha."

"I'll do that."

"Tell her I am grateful to her, and I think we should give her quite a lot of money, don't you?"

IX

The Poor Boy could not get Miss Jocelyn Grey out of his head, nor that look which she had had of belief in him. The episode was a rejuvenation, and there were days when he was steadily joyful from morning to night.

He was having luncheon one day, and he said to Martha:

"I never knew what Miss Joy believed. But ever since I saw—thought I saw her—that time—I've been as sure as sure that she knew justice had miscarried."

"I'm for thinking you're right," said old Martha.

"But if she believed in me, why didn't she write and say so? We were such good friends until we had a sort of misunderstanding." 100

"You never told me about that."

"Oh, it was silly. We were both staying with the Brettons; and one day Miss Joy turned her ankle and I wanted to carry her back to the house, and she wouldn't let me. Every step she took hurt her a lot, and me more. I was a spoiled boy. I always did what I wanted to do. It seemed to me that I wanted to carry her more than anything I'd ever wanted to do. And she wouldn't let me. So we managed to misunderstand each other very thoroughly, and then things began to happen—things began to happen."

The Poor Boy sighed. Then he looked up with a smile and a blush.

101

"I've always thought," he said, "that if she had let me carry her, I would have asked her to marry me. Anyway, it's the nearest I ever came to asking any one."

"And not very near," said Martha, "since she wouldn't be bothered with a lift."

"She was a good kid," said the Poor Boy. And then, more than half to himself: "I think I'll have her up for a visit."

"Fwaat!" exclaimed Martha.

"I'll have her stay with some of my make-believe people," he said. "She'll be the first person to come here that I ever knew before. She shall stay with—with? I have it, she's a guest of Lord Harrow's daughter, and they've just moved into Harrow Hall. That's the new Georgian House, on Lilly Pond...."

102

"When I was in New York I saw Miss Joy."

"You did!"

"She was prettier than any picture. She come up and give me both hands and says: 'Why, *Martha!*' And then we talked.—And she never believed you did it, never!"

"Ah! She might have written!"

"Troubles came on her poor father. He lost his money, and he died. She lost thought for any one but him."

"Miss Joy—*poor!* How dreadful! How wrong! What is she doing?"

"She's a sort of companion and helper to a rich old woman, and she's saving her wages against a rainy day."

The Poor Boy was terribly troubled about his old friend. She had been so generous, so debonair, such a gay and charming spender.

103

"Oh!" he cried. "Can't I do anything?"

"Once before," said old Martha, "ye tried for to give her a lift, and you know well what came of it."

His eyes flashed.

"She shall stay at Harrow Hall," he said. "Every day I shall take her walking, and every day she shall turn her ankle, and I shall carry her back to her house. And when I find out how poor she is I shall kill an old uncle of hers in the southwest—she never heard of him—his name is Eliphalet Pomfret Grey, and he shall leave her a pot of money.—Did she send me any message, Martha?"

104

"She did not."

He was sorry—inside.

Miss Joy thought that the Poor Boy was a very long time at his luncheon. She was feeling rather blue and lonely. She wanted to talk to Martha, and here it was half past two o'clock, and Martha still in the dining-room with the Poor Boy.

She could hear the sound of their voices but not the words. She could have heard the words by listening at the pantry door. But it never entered her head to do so. She was working at a marble-topped table trying to compose a cake according to a very complicated inspiration in a cookbook that weighed seven pounds. Miss Joy had a vague idea that her cake, not a large cake, was going to weigh more. It was going to be very dark and rich, something like a wedding-cake.

105

Martha came at last from the dining-room, and examined the mixture which Miss Joy had made.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Lady Godiva."

"Lady God help us! And what is the antidote?"

"Hard work in the open air. Why were you so long?"

"We got talking!"

"What about?"

"Mostly about the dangers of falling down and hurting yourself."

"Why," asked Miss Joy innocently, "is it so slippery out?"

Martha was overjoyed, and began to execute a sort of cautious tiptoe dance.

106

"What are you doing?"

"I'm showing ye how an old woman walks on thin ice," said Martha. She stopped dancing. "The

Poor Boy is off to his playground, and it's time you got ready for your walk."

"Did he say when he was coming back?"

"'Not before dark,' he said."

"Then I can go as far as the Three Beeches," said Miss Joy. She drew a long breath.

"'Tis a pity ye have to walk alone."

"But it's doing me so much good. I'd hate to know what I weigh."

"Be careful you don't fall and hurt yourself," said Martha. "And be careful your red cheeks don't set the woods on fire."

"Oh, Martha, are they—*too* red?"

"Miss Joy"—this with solemn and heartfelt faith—"unless it is for a nose now and then, the Lord Gawd never made anything *too* red in his life—"

The Poor Boy hurried to the beautiful new Georgian home that Lord Harrow had built on Lilly Pond, and was already occupying. As befitted a great man he had the whole lake to himself. His house, backed by noble beeches and pines, faced south, and was a wonderful deep red, with white trim. The house opened directly on a terrace, which in turn was built out over the lake. It was formally planted to box and roses. It was all under snow now, but white mounds marked the positions of the box-bushes, and neat stakes and straw jackets showed where the roses would bloom.

The terrace garden would be a great show in June. And the Poor Boy had no difficulty in closing his eyes for a moment and so seeing it.

The Poor Boy, privileged old friend that he was, entered without ringing, and started through the ground floor of the house, stopping at times to admire a mantel-piece, a ceiling, or a painting. Lord Harrow's new hothouses being in full blast, there were flowers everywhere, and great logs of birch roared and crackled in all the fireplaces. The Poor Boy peeped into the dining-room and drew back, his eyes almost drunk with mahogany, and gold and Spanish leather. Under a table in the hall stood a great silver punch-bowl in which water was kept for Don, the spaniel, to drink. There were stags' heads on the walls, and on each side of the stairway stood a splendid suit of Gothic armor. One suit was inlaid with enamel, black as ebony, and the other with red gold.

The Poor Boy lifted his voice and called up the columned wall of the stair:

"Anybody home!"

Lord Harrow's daughter leaned over the rail. She had a very white face and very wonderful red hair. Her way of speaking always reminded the Poor Boy of pearls falling from a string one by one.

"Joy Grey's just come," she said. "She's changing into outdoor things. Do you mind waiting?"

"How is she?" asked the Poor Boy eagerly.

"Oh, she's white and tired after all she's been through, poor duck; don't let her overdo at first. Where are you going to take her?"

"Aren't you coming with us?"

Three pearls fell.

"How—you—talk!"

"But—but—"

"Nonsense," exclaimed Lord Harrow's daughter. "You're head over ears in love with her, and she with you."

"What!" exclaimed the Poor Boy. "Do you mean that!"

"Mean it? Of course I do. And everybody knows it—except you two. I was in the village yesterday, and the people had heard that she was coming—to you—to *you*—and they were hanging wreaths in the windows as if for Christmas. When we drove through the village on our way here they lined the main street and cheered her."

"What did she do?"

"She was delighted. She thought they were cheering my father and me, and she said she was so glad that she had been asked to visit such wonderful distinguished people. The little duck!"

"The little *goat*," cried the Poor Boy. "The darling little goat!"

"Only call her that to her face—and she's yours."

"I daren't," said the Poor Boy, "now that I know that I love her—"

"Lucky I told you!" This with pearly sarcasm.

"Now that I know—I'm afraid—I'm afraid.... But I've always loved her. It began in Arcadia, that is, Central Park. You roller-skate there when you are little. She was knee-high to a grasshopper, and I was shoulder-high. She wore a coat of gosling-green with facings of primrose-yellow, and when she fell and barked the knee of one stocking I took her to old Martha, and old Martha mended her. Her knee itself wasn't really hurt, but it was all rough and gritty from the asphalt. She didn't cry. And so I loved her. Why is she so long changing into outdoor things?"

"Hush!" pearly Lord Harrow's daughter. "She's coming."

And the Poor Boy's heart echoed: "She's coming—she's coming."

At the last moment reason and experience whispered in his ear: "*Don't* be a fool—*don't* spoil everything. If you tell her you love her and she says she loves you, why the least you can do is to kiss her, and you know as well as I do that *if you touch them they vanish*."

So the Poor Boy walked with Joy that day and the next and the next, and they were never very far apart, and he got to love her more and more. And the more he loved her the more dangerous was it to tell her so, for things got to such a point that if she had suddenly vanished, the blow would almost have broken his heart.

X

But it was the heart of winter, not the Poor Boy's that was to be broken. March came, and a wind from the south. Snow melted in sunny corners, to freeze again at night, and melted and froze; and April came, and wherever the Poor Boy went with his love there was a sound of water falling, running, and roaring. The ice in lakes and streams wore thin along the shores, broke, lost its grip, tinkled in the brooks, clashed and cracked in the river. In the lakes the margin of water between the ice islands and the shore grew wider and wider. In open spaces, faced south, the snow melted and thinned until black soil showed in patches. Rain came, more and more frequently, until no day passed without rain, and the land was washed clean of winter, and rinsed, and became deep mud, that oozed and gaped under foot.

The Poor Boy had been happier than he had ever hoped to be again. And since Joy's coming (she still stopped with Lord Harrow's daughter, who conversed pearls) there had been an ecstasy in his happiness and a thrilling quality of romance. No man who has not endured solitude in long doses knows how vivid, real, and necessary people and things of the imagination may become. Sometimes the Poor Boy laughed at himself, but more often he surrendered to his inventions, his people, his dams, powerhouses, and schemes of amelioration, as you surrender to an opiate.

His valley from his own house to the sea was a thriving and virtuous state; on terms with other governments. Ships came and went; there were exports and imports, newspapers, news. News of inventions, of romances, of misunderstandings righted by Solomonian judgments; of successes, promotions; and almost every day in the foreign columns were to be found reversals of those judgments by which his friends and the citizens of his little state had been convicted of sins and crimes of which they had never been guilty.

But daily and sometimes nightly through the complex evolutions of his dreams the Poor Boy never lost grip upon his own personal love-affair. It had become more real, and with the bursting of woods and meadows into carpets of spring flowers more necessary to him than anything in life. It was joy for him, and rapture—a dizzy path into unknown lands where only the footprints of the "True Romance" marked the way. But suddenly sometimes in the very heyday of his ecstasy the tragedy of it smote him, you may say, between the eyes—so that villages vanished, homes, institutions, and all the creatures of his brain, and he saw himself, as another might have seen him, a very young man, all alone, thrust out forever and ever.

The thought that all unknown to him the real Miss Grey might love another, belong to another, tortured him. Tortured him, too, the knowledge that if this was so he had no right to entertain that beloved phantom that he had made of her in his North Woods. Or it tortured him to remember that his love for her could come to nothing—nothing. He must not tell her that he loved her; he must not, upon a night flooded with moonlight and the odor of flowers, so much as touch her hand, because he knew too well—too well—that "when you touch them they vanish."

Old Martha and Joy will never forget a certain June night. The Poor Boy did not come home for his dinner; supper of the most tempting nature and variety did not tempt him. He was drunk, ethereally drunk with the beauty of the night and with love. He opened many windows, and sat at his piano in the moonlight. The two women drew as near as they dared, to listen, while the Poor Boy's tantalized soul went out in splendid, beseeching singing. Until after midnight Schubert and Schumann and other lovers sang through the Poor Boy to their loves, and the women listened and cried and trembled, or were carried upward as it were upon angel wings into regions of pure and disembodied bliss.

At last there fell a long silence.

It was now the Poor Boy who listened. He had sent forth his questing, questioning soul, and he waited for an answer. But in those regions, that night, all things were still; and not so much as the hoot of an owl answered him nor the chirp of a cricket.

"Oh," he thought, "there is no answer for me in all the world, no answer. I have said all that I can say. And she—she doesn't hear—she will not hear—she can not hear."



His fingers began to follow an air that flowed with eternal sadness like blood from a broken heart.

His fingers found their way once more to the keys, and for a while harmonies rose in slow, quiet succession like a meditation, and took more shape presently as if something had been decided on, and began to follow an air that flowed with eternal sadness like blood from a broken heart ... and then once more the Poor Boy was singing:

"Let us go hence, my songs, she will not hear,
Let us go hence, together, without fear.
Keep silence now, for singing time is over,
And over all things old, and all things dear.
She loves not you nor me, as all we love her.
Yea! Though we sang as angels in her ear,
She would not hear."

121

He broke off abruptly. The knob had rattled in a door!—a door had opened, and been swiftly closed. The Poor Boy leapt to his feet. He thought he had heard *her* voice.

He stood, and trembled....

.

That "Yea! though we sang as angels in her ear, she would not hear," had been too much for Joy. She had sobbed and said things, and had tried to go to him. It was her voice that he had heard.

Martha had dragged her out of danger and sent her to bed with a scolding. "The conceit of some people!" she had exclaimed. "To be always thinking it's themselves as is grouped in the lime-light of another's thoughts!"

122

123

XI

"You can get away from people, but you can't get away from moths."

It was Martha herself, carrying a great paper bag of camphor-balls and a great roll of tarred paper, who announced this truth.

Rain was falling in torrents. Even the Poor Boy did not feel like going out. He looked with a certain longing at the bag of camphor balls.

"Going to put the furs away?"

Martha said that she was.

Time was hanging heavily that morning. There was neither music in the Poor Boy nor desire to read.

124

"I think—" he began, and was ashamed.

"You think?"

"Nothing."

"Out with it."

"Just that—well, you see, I've never done it—always had you. But I'm thinking it must be rather fun to fold things carefully, and put them in cedar chests, and sprinkle moth-balls over them, and tuck them in with tar-paper."

"And you think wrong," said Martha. "It is no fun at all."

"Oh!" said the Poor Boy. "You're used to it. You've always done it. But I haven't."

"No more," said Martha, "have you ever knit a comforter."

"I think that would be fun too," twinkled the Poor Boy; "a very little comforter. I should use very thick worsted and make very big, loopy, spready stitches. I think, if you don't mind, I'll put my own things away for the summer." 125

Martha clutched the bag and the roll of paper tighter. Her jaws set.

"Don't be selfish, Martha."

Her jaws relaxed.

"What do I do first, Martha?"

"First you get all your things in one place. Then you brush them and fold them. Then you lay them away in the chests."

The Poor Boy, in shirt-sleeves, was soon busily employed, making in the centre of the living-room an enormous pile of winter furs and woolens—coonskin coats, Shetland socks, stockings, oily Norfolk coats and mackintoshes, sweaters, mittens, fur gloves, fur robes, steamer rugs, toques, and mackinaws. 126

The great pile finished, he sorted his things into smaller piles: a pile to be thrown away, a pile to be given away, a pile to be kept.

A doubtful garment was a mackinaw of dark gray splashed with blood-color and black. It had seen better days, on the one hand; on the other, it was sound, and he had always liked the coloring. He carried it to the light and looked it over carefully.

What was there about an old lumberman's coat to bring a look of bewildered wonder into the Poor Boy's eyes? And what particular memories did he associate with the last time of wearing it? 127

He closed his eyes, frowned, thought, remembered.

"I wore this," he said to himself, "the time I went down to the sea, and nearly died getting back. Then it was mislaid, when I wanted to wear it again. Then spring came.... When I got back from the sea I thought I saw Joy. I thought she ran, and that I ran after her. Then that she turned and caught me as I fell.... I was wearing this coat. I haven't worn it since."

With fingers that shook he unwound from the top button of the coat a long, entangled hair, the color of old Domingo mahogany, which is either more brown than red, or more red than brown. Nobody can swear which.

When Martha came to see how the Poor Boy was getting on with his packing she was amused to find that he had tired of it. That his things were all in a mess, nothing packed or protected from moths, and that he himself was standing at a window looking out into the dark torrents of rain. At his feet was an old mackinaw. Martha picked it up and folded it. 128

"Shall I *resoom* where you've left off?" she asked.

"Please! But be careful of that coat."

She began to bring order swiftly out of chaos.

"Martha!"

"Don't be stopping me now."

"What would you do if you knew that something that couldn't possibly be true absolutely was true?" 129

"For that," said Martha bluntly, "I'd take two tablespoonfuls of castor-oil."

"It is true," said the Poor Boy, "and it can't be."

He passed one hand in front of his face as if brushing a cobweb or—a hair.

"A hot-water bag at the feet," Martha continued impetuously, "and another on the pit of the stomick is a favored remedy with some."

"Martha...."

"What else?"

"Has your helper got reddish-brownish, brownish-reddish hair—the color of the sideboards in the dining-room?"

"Well," said Martha, "she has and she hasn't. The first of every month 'tis that color or thereabouts; but be the twenty-ninth or thirtieth 'tis back to a good workin' gray." 130

"The day I got back from the sea," said the Poor Boy to himself, "was about the twenty-ninth or the thirtieth. But still if I'm going to believe what can't be true—I say, Martha, lend me a saucer of alcohol, will you?"

Old Martha bustled off and returned with what he required. The Poor Boy carried his chemical into the book-room and closed the door firmly, and much to Martha's disappointment, she being anxious to know what was toward in her darling's mind.

The Poor Boy placed the saucer of alcohol in the light, and dropped into it the mahogany-colored hair; nothing happened. The hair itself appeared brighter perhaps, but the crystal liquid was not discolored. The Poor Boy devoted half an hour to the experiment. There was no development.

131

"Not Ed Pinaud," he then said reverently, "dyed this hair, but the Lord God."

He put it away in a safe place, just over his heart.

"Not," he said, "because it is hers, but because it is the same color. And because there are stranger things in heaven and earth than ever any man wotted of in his philosophy."

Martha knocked on the door.

"Come in, Martha."

"Just to tell you that it's stopped raining, and if ye'll not take oil nor hot-water bags, the next best remedy for cobwebs in the brain is exercise."

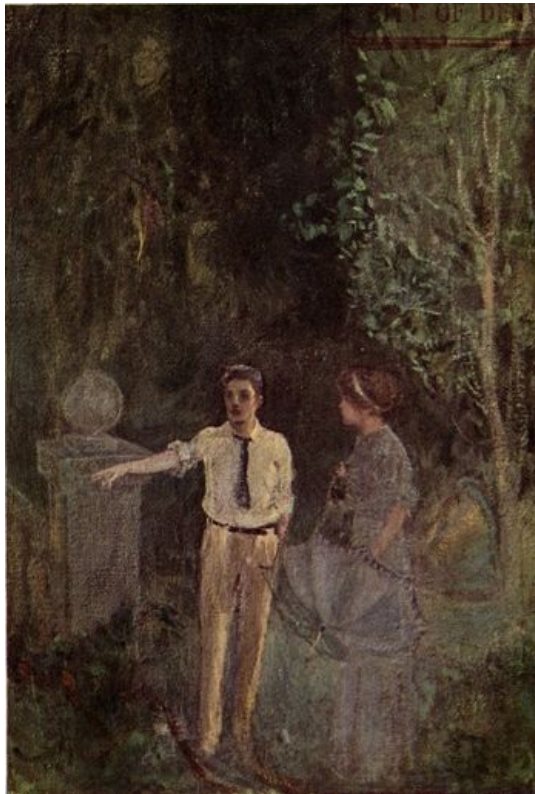
132

The Poor Boy was glad to get out.

He went straight to Lord Harrow's house and walked with Joy for hours—up and down between the glorious roses on the terrace. The path was wide. They could walk side by side without danger of touching each other.

She was very grave that afternoon. So was he. It was hard that they should love each other so much and not be allowed to talk about it or hold hands. But the Poor Boy knew mighty well that if he touched her she would vanish.

"There's comfort," thought the Poor Boy, "in loving a spirit—even if it can never be quite the real thing. She will always be just as I see her now, no older, untroubled, gentle, and dear."



"She will always be just as I see her now, no older, untroubled, gentle and dear."

He said poetry to her, and hummed songs. She dropped a rose that she was carrying. He stooped to pick it up, remembered, and let it lie. They looked into each other's eyes, very sadly.

133

He saw her mistily through tears. She vanished. Vanished the rose garden, vanished Lord Harrow's house. And remained only a wild lake, an open space in which he stood, and wild-woods, and beyond more woods and hills and mountains.

To the west the forest was intolerably bright, as if it was burning. The sun was going down.

134

Old Martha and Joy were bending over a tremendous pile of newspapers, cables, and telegrams that had just been brought in by special messenger from the nearest village in the outside world.

The messenger, a rosy old man, kept explaining why he had come.

"I know it's not my day to come in and that he don't want us hangin' about where he can see us, but the missus, she says, don't you dare to keep back this news from him even if he shoots you down in your tracks." 135

The newspapers said that the Poor Boy had been wrongfully accused, wrongfully convicted, wrongfully imprisoned, and that his 'scutcheon was clear in the eyes of all men.

Martha took it upon herself to open some of the telegrams. They were from old friends who wished to be the first, etc., etc.

"Oh!" cried Martha, "the bastes. Why couldn't they have come forward with their great hearts when his trouble was heavy upon him, when a word of belief would have strengthened him for what he had to go through?"

She wept. She raved. She talked pure Irish, and there was no one present who could understand her, and there were only seven people in Ireland who could have understood. 136

"Please!" said Miss Joy to the messenger, "God bless you, and go away."

He went slowly, his fingers inching their way continually around the battered circumference of the straw hat. He drove off, after a while, as one in a trance. The last thing that would have occurred to him was that his good-hearted impulse had made a rich man of him.

"We must find him," said Miss Joy, "and tell him—at once. You must find him. It's your duty and your privilege. He must hear the good news from you."

But Martha shook her head, and talked through her apron which she had thrown over it. When sense began to mingle with her words she pulled down this flag of distress, and showed a face red with emotion and tears. 137

"Full well I know his heart," she said. "'Tis an open book to me."

Then she laughed aloud.

"'Tis better than an open book, for I read like a snail and cannot write at all.... 'Tis you must bear him the glad tidings—you alone—with your bright hair the color of the old sideboards in the dining-room. Take the front page of a newspaper and run to him. 'Tis for you to do."

There was a wonderful light in Miss Joy's eyes. Martha mocked it: "Yea," said she, "'Tho' we sang as angels in her ear, she would not hear!' Be off!"

"How shall I find him?"

"If you don't know that then I am wrong. And it's me that should go. If your heart cannot take you to him, 'tis not the heart I've thought it." 138

But Miss Joy, clutching the front page of a newspaper, was gone, bareheaded, running, in the dusk.

As for old Martha, she wailed all alone in the kitchen. No one would ever know what it had cost her to send forth another on that errand of glad tidings.

.

The Poor Boy looked up calmly. What was possible in broad sunlight was no matter even of difficulty in the dusk. And yet it seemed to him that even for a creature of *his* brain she was preternaturally natural and solid-looking. Nor was he in the habit of letting her look quite so pale or breathe so hard. But when she spoke he was troubled; not because the sound of her voice was an unusual sound for him to hear, but because in the present instance it was accompanied with distinct vibrations. And that had never happened since she came to stay with Lord Harrow's daughter. 139

"Balking," she said, "has confessed!"

"Yes—yes," said the Poor Boy, "I always knew he *did it*. But I couldn't very well say so, *could I*? I had to take the *gaff*."

"There are telegrams and cables from all your friends to say how glad they are."

A shadow of bitterness came over the Poor Boy's face, but went swiftly.

"It can never be the same about *them*," he said. "They all believed. But now they are sorry." 140

He sighed deeply, and then smiled like sunshine.

"It was like you to bring me the news. Dear child, where is your hat, and why did you run so fast? You might have fallen and hurt yourself. Do you remember the day you turned your ankle and wouldn't let me carry you?"

"I'm not such a little fool as I used to be," she said. Her face was getting whiter and whiter.

"You *are* hurt!" he exclaimed.

"Yes," she said, "it's that same blessed ankle. I was so excited over the good news that I didn't mind at first, but now—I—I think I'll have to sit down and rest it."

141

The Poor Boy knew better than to give her a helping hand. *When you touch them, they vanish.* She sank down with a little moan.

"How am I going to get back to the house?" she said. "I'm sure I don't know."

"I'll send for a motor."

A motor? Was he crazy?

"A motor couldn't get in here," she said; "the trees are too close together."

"I'll have them down," said the Poor Boy; "it's only a matter of instants," and he smiled gently. "But you know as well as I do how these things are done."

"Here's the paper," she said. "Don't you want to read for yourself?" She held it out to him. But he shook his head.

142

"I can see the headlines from here," he said. "*Balking confesses*—yes, it's all there."

And then suddenly the Poor Boy turned his face heavenward and cried with a great bitterness:

"Oh, God! oh, God!—if it only was true!"

She thought he was mad. But she was not afraid. She wanted to go to him, to comfort him, to share with him her own fine, young sanity. But the turned ankle would not do any work, and she could not get up. He heard her moan. And looked at her once more, his eyes round with wonder.

"But I have just taken you to Lord Harrow's in a motor," he said; "and yet here you are—and in pain."

143

"I think I can walk," she said. "If you don't mind helping me a little."

"Of course I don't mind," said the Poor Boy cautiously. "But you know as well as I do that when you touch them,—they vanish."

There was a pained silence. She was bitterly disappointed. The Poor Boy was thoroughly bewildered. His imagination was playing him an extraordinary trick.

"That's the reason," he went on, "that we can never tell each other that we love each other, you know. 'Cause if we did, we'd have to kiss and hold hands—and that would be the end of everything—better you this way—than the other way and *no you*."

144

Her pain was becoming greater than she could bear.

"*Any* man would help me," she began; and then came the tears in a torrent.

The Poor Boy could not stand it.

"It is better," he said, "that she should vanish!"

He stepped swiftly forward.

The realness of her almost dazed him. In his happiest day-dreams in Lord Harrow's rose-garden by the lake there had never been quite so vivid a materialization. Furthermore, she had violets in her dress, and as he bent to lift her (and resolve her into the stuff o' dreams) the sweetness of them was strong in his nostrils.



And then carrying her swiftly home, he proceeded to go quite mad.

"Well—well," he thought, "people with too much imagination always do end by going mad. And now it's happened to me." 145

And it was just what did happen to him a moment later, only he was to go mad with a different kind of madness—a sane and wonderful madness.

He touched her and she did not vanish.

He made a sound that was half moan, half pity, and he lifted her in his strong arms. And then carrying her swiftly home, he proceeded, as I have forewarned the reader, to go quite mad. So did she, bless her, until there was no longer any pain in her ankle or in her heart.

"Well—well," said old Martha; "what's all this?"

She stood in the door of the house lighting them with a lamp. 146

"This," said the Poor Boy in his ecstasy, "is a new and wonderful thing."

He laughed aloud for joy.

"And the more you kiss her—the less she vanishes!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IF YOU TOUCH THEM THEY VANISH ***

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