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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SUMMER EVENING'S DREAM ***

A SUMMER EVENING'S DREAM

By Edward Bellamy

1898

It is a village street, with great elms on either side, while along the middle stands another row set in a narrow strip of grassy common, so that the street and roadway are in reality double. The dwellings on either side are not only widely parted by the broad street, but are still further isolated, each in its large garden of ancient fruit trees. It is four o'clock of a sunny August afternoon, and a quiet, Sabbath-like but for its lazy voluptuousness, broods over the scene. No carriage, or even pedestrian, has passed for an hour. The occasional voices of children at play in some garden, the latching of a gate far down the street, the dying fall of a drowsy chancicleer, are but the punctuation of the poem of summer silence that has been flowing on all the afternoon. Upon the tree-tops the sun blazes brightly, and between their stems are glimpses of outlying meadows, which simmer in the heat as if about to come to a boil. But the shadowed street offers a cool and refreshing vista to the eye, and a veritable valley of refuge to the parched and dusty traveler along the highway.

On the broad piazza of one of the quaint old-fashioned houses, behind a needless screen of climbing woodbine, two girls are whiling away the afternoon. One of them is lounging in a lassy rocking-chair, while the other sits more primly and is industriously sewing.

"I suppose you 'll be glad enough to see George when he comes to-night to take you back to the city? I'm afraid you find it pretty dull here," said the latter, with an intonation of uneasy responsibility sufficiently attesting that the brilliant-looking girl opposite was a guest.

That young lady, when addressed, was indulging in a luxurious country yawn, an operation by no means to be hurried, but to be fully and lazily enjoyed in all its several and long-drawn stages, and as thus practiced a wonderfully calming and soporific relaxation wholly unknown to the fretted denizens of cities, whose yawn is one of irritation and not of rest. "I do so enjoy your Plainfield yawns, Lucy," she said when she had quite finished. "Were you saying that it was a little dull? Well, perhaps it is, but then the trees and things seem to be enjoying themselves so hugely that it would be selfish to make a fuss, even if it is n't exactly my kind of fun."

"Your kind of fun is due by the six-o'clock stage, I believe."

The other laughed and said, "I wish you would n't make another allusion to George. I think of him so much that I 'm ashamed, as it is. I 'm sure this is a very aggravating place for an engaged girl to be at. One gets so dreadfully sentimental with nothing to take up the mind, especially with such monstrous moons as you have. I got fairly frightened of the one last night. It drew me out through my eyes like a big plaster."

"Mabel French!"

"I don't care; it did. That was just the feeling."

There was no hurry about talking, for the rich, mellow summer silence had a body to it that prevented pauses from seeming empty, and it might have been half an hour afterward that Mabel suddenly leaned

forward, putting her face close to the vine-trellis, and cried in a low voice, "Who's that? Po tell me! They're the very first persons who have gone by this afternoon, I do believe."

A pretty phaeton was slowly passing, containing an elderly gentleman and lady.

"Oh, that is only Lawyer Morgan and old Miss Rood," replied Lucy, just glancing up, and then down again. "They go out driving once a week regularly, and always at about this time in the afternoon."

"They look like afternoon sort of people," said Mabel. "But why does n't Lawyer Morgan take out his wife?"

"He has n't got any. Miss Rood comes nearest to that. Oh, no, you needn't open your eyes; there's not a proper old maid in town, or old bachelor either, for that matter."

"Are they relatives?"

"No, indeed."

"How long has this Platonic romance been going on, pray?"

"Oh, ever since they were young,—forty years, perhaps. I only know by tradition, you see. It began ages before my day. They say she was very pretty once. Old Aunty Perkins remembers that she was quite the belle of the village as a girl. It seems strange, does n't it?"

"Tell me the whole story," said Mabel, turning round so as to face Lucy as the phaeton passed out of sight.

"There's not much to tell. Mr. Morgan has always lived here, and so has Miss Rood. He lives alone with a housekeeper in that fine house at the end of the street, and she entirely alone in that little white house over there among the apple-trees. All the people who knew them when they were young are dead, gone away, or moved off. They are relics of a past generation, and are really about as much shut up to each other for sympathy as an old married couple."

"Well, why on earth are n't they married?"

"People hereabouts got tired of asking that full thirty years ago," replied Lucy, with a little shrug. "Even the gossips long since wore out the subject, and I believe we have all of us forgotten that there is anything peculiar about their relations. He calls on her two or three times a week, and takes her out driving on pleasant days; escorts her to places of amusement or social gatherings when either of them cares to go, which is n't often; and wherever they are, people take it for granted they will pair off together. He is never seen with any other lady."

"It's very strange," said Mabel thoughtfully, "and I'm sure it's very romantic. Queer old couple! I wonder how they really feel toward each other, and whether they would n't like to be married?"

Awhile after she suddenly demanded, "Don't you think Miss Rood looks like me?"

Lucy laughed at first, but upon closer inspection of the fair questioner admitted that there might be some such resemblance as the shriveled apples brought up from the cellar in spring bear to the plump, rosy-cheeked beauties that went down in October.

If Mr. Morgan and Miss Rood, as they rode past, had chanced to overhear Mabel's question why they had not married, it would have affected them very differently. He would have been startled by the novelty of an idea that had not occurred to him in twenty years, but the blush on her cheek would have been one of painful consciousness.

As boy and girl they had been each other's chosen companion, and as young man and maiden their childish preference had bloomed into a reciprocal love. Thanks to the freedom and simplicity of village life, they enjoyed as lovers a constant and easy familiarity and daily association almost as complete in sympathy of mind and heart as anything marriage could offer. There were none of the usual obstacles to incite them to matrimony. They were never even formally engaged, so wholly did they take it for granted that they should marry. It was so much a matter of course that there was no hurry at all about it; and besides, so long as they had it to look forward to, the foreground of life was illuminated for them: it was still morning. Mr. Morgan was constitutionally of a dreamy and unpractical turn, a creature of habits and a victim of ruts; and as years rolled on he became more and more satisfied with these half-friendly, half-loverlike relations. He never found the time when it seemed an object to marry, and now, for very many years, the idea had not even occurred to him as possible; and so far was he from the least suspicion that Miss Rood's experience had not been precisely similar to his own, that he often congratulated himself on the fortunate coincidence.

Time cures much, and many years ago Miss Hood had recovered from the first bitterness of discovering that his love had become insensibly transformed into a very tender but perfectly peaceful friendship. No one but him had ever touched her heart, and she had no interest in life besides him. Since she was not to be his wife, she was glad to be his lifelong, tender, self-sacrificing friend. So she raked the ashes over the fire in her heart, and left him to suppose that it had gone out as in his. Nor was she without compensation in their friendship. It was with a delightful thrill that she felt how fully in mind and heart he leaned and depended upon her, and the unusual and romantic character of their relations in some degree consoled her for the disappointment of womanly aspirations by a feeling of distinction. She was not like other women: her lot was set apart and peculiar. She looked down upon her sex. The conventionality of women's lives renders their vanity peculiarly susceptible to a suggestion that their destiny is in any respect unique, —a fact that has served the turn of many a seducer before now. To-day, after returning from his drive with Miss Rood, Mr. Morgan had walked in his garden, and as the evening breeze arose, it bore to his nostrils that first indescribable flavor of autumn which warns us that the soul of Summer has departed from her yet glowing body. He was very sensitive to these changes of the year, and, obeying an impulse that had been familiar to him in all unusual moods his life long, he left the house after tea and turned his steps down the street. As he stopped at Miss Rood's gate, Lucy, Mabel, and George Hammond were under the apple-trees in the garden opposite.

"Look, Mabel! There's Mr. Morgan going to call on Miss Rood," said Lucy softly.

"Oh, do look, George!" said Mabel eagerly. "That old gentleman has been paying court to an old maid over in that little house for forty years. And to think," she added in a lower tone, intended for his private ear, "what a fuss you make about waiting six months!"

"Humph! You please to forget that it's easier to wait for some things than for others. Six months of my kind of waiting, I take it, require more patience than forty years of his—or any other man's," he added, with increased emphasis.

"Be quiet, sir!" replied Mabel, answering his look of unruly admiration with one of half pique. "I 'm not a sugar-plum, that's not enjoyed till it's in the mouth. If you have n't got me now, you 'll never have me. If being engaged isn't enough, you don't deserve to be married." And then, seeing the blank expression with which he looked down at her, she added with a prescient resigned-ness, "I 'm afraid, dear, you 'll be so disappointed when we 're married, if you find this so tedious."

Lucy had discreetly wandered away, and of how they made it up there were no witnesses. But it seems likely that they did so, for shortly after they wandered away together down the darkening street.

Like most of the Plainfield houses, that at which Mr. Morgan turned in stood well back from the street. At a side window, still further sheltered from view by a gyringa-bush at the house corner, sat a little woman with a small, pale face, the still attractive features perceptibly sharpened by years, of which the half-gray hair bore further testimony. The eyes, just now fixed absently upon the dusking landscape, were light gray and a little faded, while around the lips there were crow's-feet, especially when they were pressed together, as now, in an unsatisfied, almost pathetic look, evidently habitual to her face when in repose. There was withal something in her features that so reminded you of Mr. Morgan that any one conversant with the facts of his life-romance would have at once inferred—though by just what logic he might not be able to explain—that this must be Miss Eood. It is well known that long-wedded couples often gain at length a certain resemblance in feature and manner; and although these two were not married, yet their intimacy of a lifetime was perhaps the reason why her face bore when in repose something of that seer-like expression which communion with the bodiless shapes of memory had given to his.

The latching of the gate broke up her depressing reverie, and banished the pinched and pining look from her features. Among the neighbors Miss Rood was sometimes called a sour old maid, but the face she kept for Mr. Morgan would never have suggested that idea to the most ill-natured critic.

He stopped at the window, near which the walk passed to the doorway, and stood leaning on the sill,—a tall, slender figure, stooping a little, with smooth, scholarly face, and thin iron-gray hair. His only noticeable feature was a pair of eyes whose expression and glow indicated an imaginative temperament. It was pleasant to observe the relieved restlessness in the look and manner of the two friends, as if at the mere being in each other's presence, though neither seemed in any haste to exchange even the words of formal greeting.

At length she said, in a tone of quiet satisfaction, "I knew you would come, for I was sure this deathly autumn's flavor would make you restless. Is n't it strange how it affects the nerves of memory, and makes one sad with thinking of all the sweet, dear days that are dead?"

"Yes, yes," he answered eagerly; "I can think of nothing else. Do they not seem wonderfully clear and near to-night? To-night, of all nights in the year, if the figures and scenes of memory can be reëmbodied in visible forms, they ought to become so to the eyes that strain and yearn for them."

"What a fanciful idea, Robert!"

"I don't know that it is; I don't feel sure. Nobody understands the mystery of this Past, or what are the conditions of existence in that world. These memories, these forms and faces, that are so near, so almost warm and visible that we find ourselves smiling on the vacant air where they seem to be, are they not real and living?"

"You don't mean you believe in ghosts?"

"I am not talking of ghosts of the dead, but of ghosts of the past,— memories of scenes or persons, whether the persons are dead or not— of our own selves as well as others. Why," he continued, his voice softening into a passionate, yearning tenderness, "the figure I would give most to see just once more is yourself as a girl, as I remember you in the sweet grace and beauty of your maidenhood. Ah, well! ah, well!"

"Don't!" she cried involuntarily, while her features contracted in sudden pain.

In the years during which his passion for her had been cooling into a staid friendship, his imagination had been recurring with constantly increasing fondness and a dreamy passion to the memory of her girlhood. And the cruelest part of it was that he so unconsciously and unquestioningly assumed that she could not have identity enough with that girlish ideal to make his frequent glowing references to it even embarrassing. Generally, however, she heard and made no sign, but the suddenness of his outburst just now had taken her off her guard.

He glanced up with some surprise at her exclamation, but was too much interested in his subject to take much notice of it. "You know," he said, "there are great differences in the distinctness with which we can bring up our memories. Very well! The only question is, What is the limit to that distinctness, or is there any? Since we know there are such wide degrees in distinctness, the burden of proof rests on those who would prove that those degrees stop short of any particular point. Don't you see, then, that it might be possible to see them?" And to enforce his meaning he laid his hand lightly on hers as it rested on the window-seat.

She withdrew it instantly from the contact, and a slight flush tinged her sallow cheeks. The only outward trace of her memory of their youthful relations was the almost prudish chariness of her person by which she indicated a sense of the line to be drawn between the former lover and the present friend.

"Something in your look just now," he said, regarding her musingly, as one who seeks to trace the lineaments of a dead face in a living one, "reminds me of you as you used to sit in this very window as a girl, and I stood just here, and we picked out stars together. There! now it's gone;" and he turned away regretfully.

She looked at his averted face with a blank piteousness which revealed all her secret. She would not have had him see it for worlds, but it was a relief just for a moment to rest her features in the sad cast which the muscles had grown tired in repressing. The autumn scent rose stronger as the air grew damp, and he stood breathing it in, and apparently feeling its influence like some Delphian afflatus.

"Is there anything, Mary,—is there anything so beautiful as that light of eternity that rests on the figures of

memory? Who that has once felt it can care for the common daylight of the present any more, or take pleasure in its prosaic groups?"

"You'll certainly catch cold standing in that wet grass; do come in and let me shut the blinds," she said, for she had found cheerful lamplight the best corrective for his vagaries.

So he came in and sat in his special arm-chair, and they chatted about miscellaneous village topics for an hour. The standpoint from which they canvassed Plainfield people and things was a peculiarly outside one. Their circle of two was like a separate planet from which they observed the world. Their tone was like, and yet quite unlike, that in which a long-married couple discuss their acquaintances; for, while their intellectual intimacy was perfect, their air expressed a constant mutual deference and solicitude of approbation not to be confounded with the terrible familiarity of matrimony; and at the same time they constituted a self-sufficient circle, apart from the society around them, as man and wife cannot. Man and wife are so far merged as to feel themselves a unit over against society. They are too much identified to find in each other that sense of support and countenance which requires a feeling of the exteriority of our friend's life to our own. If these two should marry, they would shortly find themselves impelled to seek refuge in conventional relations with that society of which now they were calmly independent.

At length Mr. Morgan rose and threw open the blinds. The radiance of the full harvest-moon so flooded the room that Miss Eood was fain to blow out the poor lamp for compassion. "Let us take a walk," he said.

The streets were empty and still, and they walked in silence, spelled by the perfect beauty of the evening. The dense shadows of the elms lent a peculiarly rich effect to the occasional bars and patches of moonlight on the street floor; the white houses gleamed among their orchards; and here and there, between the dark tree-stems, there were glimpses of the shining surface of the broad outlying meadows, which looked like a surrounding sea.

Miss Rood was startled to see how the witchery of the scene possessed her companion. His face took on a set, half-smiling expression, and he dropped her arm as if they had arrived at the place of entertainment to which he had been escorting her. He no longer walked with measured pace, but glided along with a certain stealthiness, peering on this side and that down moony vistas and into shadow-bowers, as if half-expecting, if he might step lightly enough, to catch a glimpse of some sort of dream-people basking there.

Nor could Miss Rood herself resist the impression the moony landscape gave of teeming with subtle forms of life, escaping the grosser senses of human beings, but perceptible by their finer parts. Each cosy nook of light and shadow was yet warm from some presence that had just left it. The landscape fairly stirred with ethereal forms of being beneath the fertilizing moon-rays, as the earth-mould wakes into physical life under the sun's heat. The yellow moonlight looked warm as spirits might count warmth. The air was electric with the thrill of circumambient existence. There was the sense of pressure, of a throng. It would have been impossible to feel lonely. The pulsating sounds of the insect world seemed the rhythm to which the voluptuous beauty of the night had spontaneously set itself. The common air of day had been transmuted into the atmosphere of reverie and Dreamland. In that magic medium the distinction between imagination and reality fast dissolved. Even Miss Bood was conscious of a delightful excitement, a vague expectancy. Mr. Morgan, she saw, was moved quite beyond even his exaggerated habit of imaginative excitement. His wet, shining, wide-opened eyes and ecstatic expression indicated complete abandonment to the illusions of the scene.

They had seated themselves, as the concentration of the brain upon imaginative activity made the nerves of motion sluggish, upon a rude bench formed by wedging a plank between two elms that stood close together. They were within the shadow of the trees, but close up to their feet rippled a lake of moonlight. The landscape shimmering before them had been the theatre of their fifty years of life. Their history was written in its trees and lawns and paths. The very air of the place had acquired for them a dense, warm, sentient feeling, to which that of all other places was thin and raw. It had become tintured by their own spiritual emanations, by the thoughts, looks, words and moods of which it had so long received the impression. It had become such vitalized air, surcharged with sense and thought, as might be taken to make souls for men out of.

Over yonder, upon the playground, yet lingered the faint violet fragrance of their childhood. Beneath that elm a kiss had once touched the air with a fire that still warmed their cheeks in passing. Yonder the look of a face was cut on the viewless air as on marble. Surely, death does but touch the living, for the dead ever keep their power over us; it is only we who lose ours over them. Each vista of leafy arch and distant meadow framed in some scene of their youth-time, painted in the imperishable hues of memory that borrow from time an ever richer and more glowing tint. It was no wonder that to these two old people, sitting on the bench between the elms, the atmosphere before them, saturated with associations, dense with memories, should seem fairly quivering into material forms, like a distant mist turning to rain.

At length Miss Rood heard her companion say, in a whisper of tremulous exultation, "Do you know, Mary, I think I shall see them very soon."

"See whom?" she asked, frightened at his strange tone.

"Why, see us, of course, as I was telling you," he whispered,—"you and me as we were young,—see them as I see you now. Don't you remember it was just along here that we used to walk on spring evenings? We walk here no more, but they do evermore, beautiful, beautiful children. I come here often to lie in wait for them. I can feel them now; I can almost, almost see them." His whisper became scarcely audible and the words dropped slowly. "I know the sight is coming, for every day they grow more vivid. It can't be long before I quite see them. It may come at any moment."

Miss Rood was thoroughly frightened at the intensity of his excitement, and terribly perplexed as to what she should do.

"It may come at any time; I can almost see them now," he murmured. "A—h! look!" With parted lips and unspeakably intense eyes, as if his life were flowing out at them, he was staring across the moonlit paths before them to the point where the path debouched from the shadow.

Following his eyes, she saw what for a moment made her head swim with the thought that she too was

going mad. Just issuing from the shadows, as if in answer to his words, were a young man and a girl, his arm upon her waist, his eyes upon her face. At the first glance Miss Rood was impressed with a resemblance to her own features in those of the girl, which her excitement exaggerated to a perfect reproduction of them. For an instant the conviction possessed her that by some impossible, indescribable, inconceivable miracle she was looking upon the resurrected figures of her girlish self and her lover.

At first Mr. Morgan had half started from his seat, and was between rising and sitting. Then he rose with a slow, involuntary movement, while his face worked terribly between bewilderment and abandonment to illusion. He tottered forward a few steps to the edge of the moonlight, and stood peering at the approaching couple with a hand raised to shade his eyes and a dazed, unearthly smile on his face. The girl saw him first, for she had been gazing demurely before her, while her lover looked only at her. At sight of the gray-haired man suddenly confronting them with a look of bedlam, she shrieked and started back in terror. Miss Rood, recalled to her senses, sprang forward, and catching Mr. Morgan's arm endeavored with gentle force to draw him away.

But it was too late for that. The young man, at first almost as much startled as his companion at the uncanny apparition, naturally experienced a revulsion of indignation at such an extraordinary interruption to his tête-à-tête, and stepped up to Mr. Morgan as if about to inflict summary chastisement. But perceiving that he had to do with an elderly man, he contented himself with demanding in a decidedly aggressive tone what the devil he meant by such a performance.

Mr. Morgan stared at him without seeing him, and evidently did not take in the words. He merely gasped once or twice, and looked as if he had fainted away on his feet. His blank, stunned expression showed that his faculties were momentarily benumbed by the shock. Miss Rood felt as if she should die for the pity of it as she looked at his face, and her heart was breaking for grief as she sought to mollify the young man with some inarticulate words of apology, meanwhile still endeavoring to draw Mr. Morgan away. But at this moment the girl, recovering from her panic, came up to the group and laid her hand on the young man's arm, as if to check and silence him. It was evident that she saw there was something quite unusual in the circumstances, and the look which she bent upon Mr. Morgan was one of sympathy and considerate interrogation. But Miss Rood could see no way out of their awkward situation, which grew more intolerable every moment as they thus confronted each other. It was finally Mr. Morgan's voice, quite firm, but with an indescribable sadness in the tones, which broke the silence: "Young people, I owe you an apology, such as it is. I am an old man, and the past is growing so heavy that it sometimes quite overbalances me. My thoughts have been busy to-night with the days of my youth, and the spell of memory has been so strong that I have not been quite myself. As you came into view I actually entertained the incredible idea for a moment that somehow I saw in you the materialized memories of myself and another as we once walked this same path."

The young man bowed, as Mr. Morgan ended, in a manner indicating his acceptance of the apology, although he looked both amazed and amused. But the explanation had a very different effect upon the girl at his side. As she listened, her eyes had filled with tears, and her face had taken on a wonderfully tender, pitiful smile. When he ended speaking, she impulsively said, "I 'm so sorry we were not what you thought us! Why not pretend we are, to-night at least? We can pretend it, you know. The moonlight makes anything possible;" and then glancing at Miss Rood, she added, as if almost frightened, "Why, how much we look alike! I 'm not sure it isn't true, anyway."

This was, in fact, an unusually marked example of those casual resemblances between strangers which are sometimes seen. The hair of the one was indeed gray and that of the other dark, but the eyes were of the same color by night, and the features, except for the greater fullness of the younger face, were cast in the same mould, while figure and bearing were strikingly similar, although daylight would doubtless have revealed diversities, enough that moonlight refused to disclose.

The two women looked at each other with an expression almost of suspicion and fear, while the young man observed, "Your mistake was certainly excusable, sir."

"It will be the easier to pretend," said the girl, as with a half-serious, half-sportive imperiousness she laid her hand on Mr. Morgan's arm. "And now it is thirty years ago, and we are walking together." He involuntarily obeyed the slight pressure, and they walked slowly away, leaving the other two, after an embarrassed pause, to follow them.

For some time they walked in silence. He was deliberately abandoning himself to the illusion, supported as it was by the evidence of his senses, that he was wandering in some of the mysterious be-tween-worlds which he had so often dreamed of, with the love of his youth in her youth-time charm. Did he really believe it to be so? Belief is a term quite irrelevant to such a frame as his, in which the reflective and analytical powers are for a time purposely held in abeyance. The circumstances of her introduction to him had dropped from his mind as irrelevant accidents, like the absurdities which occur in our sweetest and most solemn dreams without marring their general impression in our memories. Every glance he threw upon his companion, while on the one hand it shocked his illusion in that she seemed not likely to vanish away, on the other strengthened it with an indescribable thrill by the revelation of some fresh trait of face or figure, some new expression, that reproduced the Miss Rood of his youth. Not, indeed, that it is likely his companion was thus perfectly the double of that lady, although so much resembling her, but the common graces of maidenhood were in Mr. Morgan's mind the peculiar personal qualities of the only woman he had ever much known.

Of his own accord he would not have dared to risk breaking the charm by a word. But his companion—who, as is tolerably evident by this time, was Mabel French—had meanwhile formed a scheme quite worthy of her audacious temper. She had at once recognized both Mr. Morgan and Miss Rood, and had gone thus far from a mere romantic impulse, without definite intentions of any sort. But the idea now came into her head that she might take advantage of this extraordinary situation to try a match-making experiment, which instantly captivated her fancy. So she said, while ever so gently pressing his arm and looking up into his face with an arch smile (she was recognized as the best amateur actress in her set at home), "I wonder if the moon will be so mellow after we are married?"

His illusion was rudely disturbed by the shock of an articulate voice, softly and low as she spoke, and he

looked around with a startled expression that made her fear her rôle was ended. But she could not know that the eyes she turned to his were mirrors where he saw his dead youth. The two Miss Roods—the girl and the woman, the past and the present—were fused and become one in his mind. Their identity flashed upon him.

An artesian well sunk from the desert surface through the underlying strata, the layers of ages, strikes some lake long ago covered over, and the water welling up converts the upper waste into a garden. Just so at her words and her look his heart suddenly filled, as if it came from afar, with the youthful passion he had felt toward Miss Bood, but which, he knew not exactly when or how, had been gradually overgrown with the dullness of familiarity and had lapsed into an indolent affectionate habit. The warm, voluptuous pulse of this new feeling—new, and yet instantly recognized as old—brought with it a flood of youthful associations, and commingled the far past with the present in a confusion more complete and more intoxicating than ever. He saw double again. "Married!" he murmured dreamily. "Yes, surely, we will be married."

And as he spoke, he looked at her with such a peculiar expression that she was a little frightened. It looked like a more serious business than she had counted on, and for a moment, if she could have cut and run, perhaps she would have done so. But she had a strain of the true histrionic artist about her, and with a little effort rose to the difficulty of the rôle. "Of course we will be married," she replied, with an air of innocent surprise. "You speak as if you had just thought of it."

He turned toward her as if he would sober his senses by staring at her, his pupils dilating and contracting in the instinctive effort to clear the mind by clearing the eyes.

But with a steady pressure on his arm she compelled him to walk on by her side. Then she said, in a soft, low voice, as if a little awed by what she were telling, while at the same time she nestled nearer his side, "I had such a sad dream last night, and your strange talk reminds me of it. It seemed as if we were old and white-haired and stooping, and went wandering about, still together, but not married, lonely and broken. And I woke up feeling you can't think how dreary and sad,— as if a bell had tolled in my ears as I slept; and the feeling was so strong that I put my fingers to my face to find if it was withered; and when I could not tell certainly, I got up and lit my lamp and looked in the glass; and my face, thank God! was fresh and young; but I sat on my bed and cried to think of the poor old people I had left behind in my dream."

Mabel had so fallen into the spirit of her part that she was really crying as she ended. Her tears completed Mr. Morgan's mental confusion, and he absolutely did not know whom he was addressing or where he was himself, as he cried, "No, no, Mary! Don't cry! It shall not be; it shall never be."

Lightly withdrawing her hand from his arm, she glided like a sprite from his side, and was lost in the shadows, while her whispered words still sounded in his ear, "Good-by for thirty years!"

A moment after, three notes, clear as a bird's call, sounded from the direction whither she had vanished, and Miss Rood's companion, breaking off short a remark on the excessive dryness of the weather, bowed awkwardly and also disappeared among the shadows.

When Miss Rood laid her hand on Mr. Morgan's arm to recall him to the fact that they were now alone together, he turned quickly, and his eyes swept her from head to foot, and then rested on her face with an expression of intense curiosity and a wholly new interest, as if he were tracing out a suddenly suggested resemblance which overwhelmed him with emotion. And as he gazed, his eyes began to take fire from the faded features on which they had rested so many years in mere complacent friendliness, and she instinctively averted her face.

Long intimacy had made her delicately sensitive to his moods, and when he drew her arm in his and turned to walk, although he had not uttered a word, she trembled with agitation.

"Mary, we have had an extraordinary experience to-night," he said. The old dreaminess in his voice, as of one narcotized or in a trance, sometimes a little forced, as of one trying to dream, to which she had become accustomed, and of which in her heart of hearts she was very weary, was gone. In its place she recognized a resonance which still further confused her with a sense of altered relations. His polarity had changed: his electricity was no longer negative, but positive.

Her feminine instinct vaguely alarmed, she replied, "Yes, indeed, but it is getting late. Had n't we better go in?" What lent the unusual intonation of timidity to her voice? Certainly nothing that she could have explained.

"Not quite yet, Mary," he answered, turning his gaze once more fully upon her.

Her eyes dropped before his, and a moment after fluttered up to find an explanation for their behavior, only to fall again in blind panic. For, mingling unmistakably with the curiosity with which he was still studying her features, was a newborn expression of appropriation and passionate complacency. Her senses whirled in a bewilderment that had a suffocating sweetness about it. Though she now kept her eyes on the ground, she felt his constant sidewise glances, and, desperately seeking relief from the conscious silence that enveloped them like a vapor of intoxicating fumes, she forced herself to utter the merest triviality she could summon to her lips: "See that house." The husky tones betrayed more agitation than the ruse concealed.

He answered as irrelevantly as she had spoken, "Yes, indeed, so it is." That was their only attempt at conversation.

For a half hour—it might have been much more or much less—they walked in this way, thrilling with the new magnetism that at once attracted and estranged them with an extraordinary sense of strangeness in familiarity. At length they paused under the little porch of Miss Rood's cottage, where he commonly bade her good-evening after their walks. The timidity and vague alarms that had paralyzed her while they were walking disappeared as he was about to leave her, and she involuntarily returned his unusual pressure of her hand.

A long time after, behold her still encircled in his arms, not blushing, but pale and her eyes full of a soft, astonished glow! "Oh, Robert!" was all she had said after one first little gasp.

They never met George or Mabel again. Mrs. Morgan learned subsequently that two young people from the city answering their description had been guests at the opposite house, and had left Plainfield the morning after the events hereinbefore set forth, and drew her conclusions accordingly. But her husband preferred to

cherish the secret belief that his theory that memories might become visible had proved true in one instance at least. least.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK A SUMMER EVENING'S DREAM ***

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