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Title: The Intoxicated Ghost, and other stories

Author: Arlo Bates

Release date: July 24, 2012 [EBook #40312]

Language: English

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE INTOXICATED GHOST, AND OTHER STORIES ***

THE INTOXICATED GHOST

THE INTOXICATED GHOST
AND OTHER STORIES

BY
ARLO BATES



BOSTON AND NEW YORK
HOUGHTON, MIFFLIN AND COMPANY
The Riverside Press, Cambridge
1908

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THE INTOXICATED GHOST
AND OTHER STORIES

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THE INTOXICATED GHOST

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I

It was not her beauty which made Irene Gaspic unusual, although she was bewitchingly pretty; nor yet her wit, her cleverness, or her wealth, albeit she was well endowed with all these good gifts: other girls were pretty, and wise, and witty, and rich. It was something far more piquant and rare which marked Irene as different from her mates, the fact being that from her great-aunt on the mother's side, an old lady who for nearly ninety years displayed to her fellow-mortals one of the most singular characters possible, Irene had inherited the power of seeing ghosts.

It is so generally regarded as a weakness even to believe in disembodied spirits that in justice to Irene it is but fair to remark that she believed in them only because she could not help seeing them, and that the power with which she was endowed had come to her by inheritance quite without any wish on her part. Any fair-minded person must perceive the difference between seeing ghosts because one is so foolish as to believe in them, and believing in their existence because one cannot help seeing them. It might be added, moreover, that the firmness which Miss Gaspic had displayed when visited by some of the most unpleasant wraiths in the whole category should be allowed to tell in her favor. When she was approached during a visit to Castle Doddyfoethghw—where, as every traveler in Wales is aware, is to be found the most ghostly phantom in the three kingdoms—by a gory figure literally streaming with blood, and carrying its mangled head in its hands, she merely remarked coldly: "Go away at once, please. You do not alarm me in the least; but to come into the presence of a lady in such a state of unpleasant dismemberment is in shockingly bad taste." Whereat the poor wraith fell all along the ground in astonishment and alarm, leaving a stain of blood upon the stone floor, which may be seen to this day by any one who doubts the tale enough to go to Castle Doddyfoethghw to see.

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Although Irene seldom referred to her inheritance, and professed, when she did speak of it, to feel a lively indignation that her aunt Eunice Mariamne should have thrust upon her such a bequest, she was too thoroughly human and feminine to lack wholly a secret pride that she should be distinguished by a gift so unusual. She had too good taste openly to talk of it, yet she had not the firmness entirely to conceal it; and her friends were pretty generally aware of the

legacy and of many circumstances resulting from its possession. Some few of her intimates, indeed, had ventured to employ her good offices in communicating with family wraiths; and although Irene was averse to anything which savored so strongly of mediumship and other vulgar trades, she could not but be pleased at the excellent results which had followed her mediations in several instances.

When, therefore, she one day received a note from her old school friend Fanny McHugh, inviting her to come down to visit her at Oldtower, with the mysterious remark, "I not only long to see you, dear, but there is something most important that you can do for me, and nobody but you," Irene at once remembered that the McHughes had a family ghost, and was convinced that she was invited, so to say, in her professional capacity. [6]

She was, however, by no means averse to going, and that for several reasons. The McHugh estate was a beautiful old place in one of the loveliest of New England villages, where the family had been in the ascendancy since pre-Revolutionary days; Irene was sufficiently fond of Fanny; and she was well aware, in virtue of that intuition which enables women to know so many things, that her friend's brother, Arthur McHugh, would be at home at the time named for the visit. Irene and Lieutenant Arthur McHugh had been so much to each other at one time that they had been to the very verge of a formal engagement, when at the last moment he drew back. There was no doubt of his affection, but he was restrained from asking Irene to share his fortunes by the unpleasant though timely remembrance that he had none. The family wealth, once princely for the country and time, had dwindled until little remained save the ancestral mansion and the beautiful but unremunerative lawns surrounding it. [7]

Of course this conduct upon the part of Lieutenant McHugh was precisely that which most surely fixed him in the heart of Irene. The lover who continues to love, but unselfishly renounces, is hardly likely to be forgotten; and it is to be presumed that it was with more thought of the young and handsome lieutenant in flesh and blood than of the Continental major in ghostly attenuation who lurked in the haunted chamber that Miss Gaspic accepted the invitation to Oldtower. [8]

II

Oldtower stands in a wild and beautiful village, left on one side by modern travel, which has turned away from the turnpike of the fathers to follow the more direct route of the rail. The estate extends for some distance along the bank of the river, which so twists in its windings as almost to make the village an island, and on a knoll overlooking the stream moulders the crumbling pile of stone which once was a watch-tower, and from which the place takes its name.

The house is one of the finest of old colonial mansions, and is beautifully placed upon a terrace half a dozen feet above the level of the ample lawn which surrounds it. Back of the house a trim garden with box hedges as high as the gardener's knee extends down to the river, while in front a lofty hedge shuts off the grounds from the village street. Miss Fanny, upon whom had largely devolved the care of the estate since the death of her widowed mother, had had the good sense to confine her efforts to keeping things in good order in the simplest possible way; and the result was that such defects of management as were rendered inevitable by the smallness in income presented themselves to the eye rather as evidences of mellowness than of decay, and the general effect remained most charming. [9]

Irene had always been fond of the McHugh place, and everything was in the perfection of its June fairness when she arrived. Her meeting with Fanny was properly effusive, while Arthur gratified her feminine sense by greeting her with outward calmness while he allowed his old passion to appear in his eyes. There were, of course, innumerable questions to be asked, as is usual upon such occasions, and some of them were even of sufficient importance to require answers; so that the afternoon passed rapidly away, and Irene had no opportunity to refer to the favor to which her friend's letter had made allusion. Her suspicion that she had been summoned in her capacity of ghost-seer was confirmed by the fact that she had been put in the haunted room, a fine square chamber in the southeast wing, wainscoted to the ceiling, and one of the handsomest apartments in the house. This room had been especially decorated and fitted up for one Major Arthur McHugh, a great-great-uncle of the present McHughes, who had served with honor under Lafayette in the Revolution. The major had left behind him the reputation of great personal bravery, a portrait which showed him as extremely handsome, and the fame of having been a great lady-killer and something of a rake withal; while he had taken out of the world with him, or at least had not left behind, the secret of what he had done with the famous McHugh diamonds. Major McHugh was his father's eldest son, and in the family the law of primogeniture was in his day pretty strictly observed, so that to him descended the estate. A disappointment in love resulted in his refusing to marry, although urged thereto by his family and much reasoned with by disinterested mothers with marriageable daughters. He bequeathed the estate to the eldest son of his younger brother, who had been named for him, and this Arthur McHugh was the grandfather of the present lieutenant. [10]

With the estate went the famous McHugh diamonds, at that time the finest in America. The "McHugh star," a huge stone of rose cut, had once been the eye of an idol in the temple of Majarah, whence it had been stolen by the sacrilegious Rajah of Zinyt, from whose possession it passed into the hands of a Colonel McHugh at the siege of Zinyt in 1707. There was an effort made, about the middle of the eighteenth century, to add this beautiful gem to the crown jewels of France, but the McHugh then at the head of the family, the father of Major McHugh, declared that he would sooner part with wife and children than with the "McHugh star," an unchristian [11]

sentiment, which speaks better for his appreciation of jewels than for his family affection.

When Major McHugh departed from this life, in 1787, the McHugh diamonds were naturally sought for by his heir, but were nowhere to be found. None of the family knew where they were usually kept—a circumstance which was really less singular than it might at first appear, since the major was never communicative, and in those days concealment was more relied upon for the safety of small valuables than the strength which the modern safe, with its misleading name, is supposed to supply. The last that was known of the gems was their being worn at a ball in 1785 by the sister-in-law of the owner, to whom they had been loaned for the occasion. Here they had attracted the greatest attention and admiration, but on their return to Major McHugh they seemed to vanish forever. Search had of course been made, and one generation after another, hearing the traditions, and believing in its own cleverness, had renewed the endeavor, but thus far the mystery had remained unsolved.

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III

It was when the girls were brushing out their hair together in that hour before retiring which is traditionally sacred to feminine confidences, that Irene asked rather abruptly:—

“Well, Fanny, what is it that you want of me?”

“Want?” replied her friend, who could not possibly help being femininely evasive. “I want to see you, of course.”

“Yes,” the guest returned, smiling; “and that is the reason you gave me this room, which I never had before.”

The hostess blushed. “It is the handsomest room in the house,” she said defensively.

“And one shares it,” Irene added, “with the ghost of the gallant major.”

“But you know,” protested Fanny, “that you do not mind ghosts in the least.”

“Not so very much now that I am used to them. They are poor creatures; and it seems to me that they get feebler the more people refuse to believe in them.”

“Oh, you don’t suppose,” cried Fanny, in the greatest anxiety, “that the major’s ghost has faded away, do you? Nobody has slept here for years, so that nobody has seen it for ever so long.”

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“And you want me to assure it that you think it eminently respectable to have a wraith in the family, so you hope it will persevere in haunting Oldtower?”

“Oh, it is n’t that at all,” Fanny said, lowering her voice. “I suppose Arthur would be furious if he knew it, or that I even mentioned it, but I am sure it is more for his sake than for my own. Don’t you think that it is?”

“You are simply too provoking for anything,” Irene responded. “I am sure I never saw a ghost that talked so unintelligibly as you do. What in the world do you mean?”

“Why, only the other day Arthur said in joke that if somebody could only make the major’s—” she looked around to indicate the word which she evidently did not care to pronounce in that chamber, and Irene nodded to signify that she understood—“if only somebody could make it tell where the McHugh diamonds are—”

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“Oh, that’s it, is it?” interrupted Irene. “Well, my dear, I am willing to speak to the major, if he will give me an opportunity; but it is not likely that I can do much. He will not care for what I say.”

“But appeal to his family pride,” Fanny said, with an earnestness that betrayed the importance of this matter to her. “Tell him how we are going to ruin for want of just the help those diamonds would give us. He ought to have some family pride left.”

Miss Gaspic naturally did not wish to draw her friend into a conversation upon the financial straits of the family, and she therefore managed to turn the conversation, only repeating her promise that if the wraith of the major put in an appearance, she would do whatever lay in her power to get from him the secret which he had kept for a century. It was not long before Fanny withdrew, and, taking a book, Irene sat down to read, and await her visitor.

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It was just at midnight that the major’s spirit made its appearance. It was a ghost of a conventional period, and it carefully observed all the old-time conditions. Irene, who had been waiting for it, raised her eyes from the book which she had been reading, and examined it carefully. The ghost had the likeness of a handsome man of rather more than middle age and of majestic presence. The figure was dressed in Continental uniform, and in its hand carried a glass apparently full of red wine. As Irene raised her eyes, the ghost bowed gravely and courteously, and then drained the cup to its depth.

“Good-evening,” Miss Gaspic said politely. “Will you be seated?”

The apparition was evidently startled by this cool address, and, instead of replying, again bowed and again drained its glass, which had in some mysterious manner become refilled.

“Thank you,” Irene said, in answer to his repeated salute; “please sit down. I was expecting you,

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and I have something to say.”

The ghost of the dead-and-gone major stared more than before.

“I beg your pardon?” he responded, in a thinly interrogative tone.

“Pray be seated,” Irene invited him for the third time.

The ghost wavered into an old-fashioned high-backed chair, which remained distinctly visible through his form, and for a moment or two the pair eyed each other in silence. The situation seemed somehow to be a strained one even to the ghost.

“It seems to me,” Irene said, breaking the silence, “that it would be hard for you to refuse the request of a lady.”

“Oh, impossible,” the ghost quavered, with old-time gallantry; “especially of a lovely creature like some we could mention. Anything,” he added in a slightly altered tone, as if his experiences in ghostland had taught him the need of caution—“anything in reason, of course.”

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Irene smiled her most persuasive smile. “Do I look like one who would ask unreasonable things?” she asked.

“I am sure that nothing which you should ask could be unreasonable,” the ghost replied, with so much gallantry that Irene had for a moment a confused sense of having lost her identity, since to have a ghost complimenting her naturally gave her much the feeling of being a ghost herself.

“And certainly the McHugh diamonds can do you no good now,” Miss Gaspic continued, introducing her subject with truly feminine indirectness.

“The McHugh diamonds?” echoed the ghost stammeringly, as if the shock of the surprise, under which he grew perceptibly thinner, was almost more than his incorporeal frame could endure.

“Yes,” responded Irene. “Of course I have no claim on them, but the family is in severe need, and —”

“They wish to sell my diamonds!” exclaimed the wraith, starting up in wrath. “The degenerate, unworthy—”

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Words seemed to fail him, and in an agitated manner he swallowed two or three glasses of wine in quick succession.

“Why, sir,” Irene asked irrelevantly, “do you seem to be always drinking wine?”

“Because,” he answered sadly, “I dropped dead while I was drinking the health of Lady Betty Rafferty, and since then I have to do it whenever I am in the presence of mortals.”

“But can you not stop?”

“Only when your ladyship is pleased to command me,” he replied, with all his old-fashioned elaborateness of courtesy.

“And as to the diamonds,” Irene said, coming back to that subject with an abruptness which seemed to be most annoying to the ghost, “of what possible use can they be to you in your present condition?”

“What use?” echoed the shade of the major, with much fierceness. “They are my occupation. I am their guardian spirit.”

“But,” she urged, bringing to bear those powers of logic upon which she always had prided herself, “you drink the ghost of wine, don’t you?”

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“Certainly, madam,” the spirit answered, evidently confused.

“Then why can you not be content with guarding the ghost of the McHugh diamonds, while you let the real, live Arthur McHugh have the real stones?”

“Why, that,” the apparition returned, with true masculine perversity, “is different—quite different.”

“How is it different?”

“Now I am the guardian of a genuine treasure. I am the most considerable personage in our whole circle.”

“Your circle?” interrupted Irene.

“You would not understand,” the shape said, “so I will, with your permission, omit the explanation. If I gave up the diamonds, I should be only a common drinking ghost—a thing to be gossiped about and smiled at.”

“You would be held in reverence as the posthumous benefactor of your family,” she urged.

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“I am better pleased with things as they are. I have no great faith in the rewards of benefactors; and the people benefited would not belong to our circle, either.”

“You are both selfish and cynical,” Irene declared. She fell to meditating what she had better say

to him, and meanwhile she noted with satisfaction that the candle was burning blue, a fact which, to her accustomed eye, indicated that the ghost was a spirit of standing most excellent in ghostly ranks.

"To suffer the disapproval of one so lovely," the remnant of the old-time gentleman rejoined, "is a misfortune so severe that I cannot forbear reminding you that you are not fully familiar with the conditions under which I exist."

In this unsatisfactory strain the conversation continued for some time longer; and when at length the ghost took its departure, and Irene retired to rest, she could not flatter herself that she had made any especial progress toward inducing the spirit to yield the secret which it had so long and so carefully guarded. The major's affections seemed to be set with deathless constancy upon the gems, and that most powerful of masculine passions, vanity, to be enlisted in their defense. [22]

"I am afraid that it is of no use," Irene sighed to herself; "and yet, after all, he was only a man when he was alive, and he cannot be much more than that now when he is a ghost."

And greatly comforted by the reflection that whatever is masculine is to be overcome by feminine guile, she fell asleep.

IV

On the following afternoon Irene found herself rowing on the river with the lieutenant. She had declined his invitation to come, and had immediately felt so exultant in the strength of mind which had enabled her to withstand temptation that she had followed the refusal with an acceptance. [23]

The day was deliciously soft and balmy. A thin haze shut off the heat of the sun, while a southerly breeze found somewhere a spicy and refreshing odor, which with great generosity it diffused over the water. The river moved tranquilly, and any one capable of being sentimental might well find it hard to resist the influences of the afternoon.

The lieutenant was as ardently in love as it is possible for a man to be who is at once a soldier and handsome, and indeed more than would have been expected from a man who combined such causes of self-satisfaction. The fact that Irene had a great deal of money, while he had none, gave to his passion a hopelessness from his point of view which much increased its fervor. He gazed at his companion with his great dark eyes as she sat in the stern, his heavy eyebrows and well-developed mustache preventing him from looking as silly as might otherwise have been the case. Miss Gaspic was by no means insensible to the spell of the time and of the companionship in which she found herself, but she was determined above all things to be discreet. [24]

"Arthur," she said, by way of keeping the talk in safe channels and also of finding out what she wanted to know, "was search ever made for the McHugh diamonds?"

"Search!" he repeated. "Everything short of pulling the house down has been tried. Everybody in the family from the time they were lost has had a hand at it."

"I do not see—" began Irene, when he interrupted brusquely.

"No," he said; "nobody sees. The solution of the riddle is probably so simple that nobody will think of it. It will be hit upon by accident some day. But, for the sake of goodness, let us talk of something else. I always lose my temper when the McHugh diamonds are mentioned."

He relieved his impatience by a fierce spurt at the oars, which sent the boat spinning through the water; then he shook himself as if to shake off unpleasant thoughts, and once more allowed the current to take them along. Irene looked at him with wistful eyes. She would have been so glad to give him all her money if he would have it. [25]

"You told me," she said at length, with a faint air of self-consciousness, "that you wanted to say something to me."

The young lieutenant flushed, and looked between the trunks of the old trees on the river-bank into the far distance. "I have," he responded. "It is a piece of impertinence, because I have no right to say it to you."

"You may say anything you wish to say," Irene answered, while a vague apprehension took possession of her mind at something in his tone. "Surely we have known each other long enough for that."

"Well," the other blurted out with an abruptness that showed the effort that it cost him, "you should be married, Irene."

Irene felt like bursting into tears, but with truly feminine fortitude she managed to smile instead.

"Am I getting so woefully old and faded, then, Arthur?" she asked. [26]

His look of reproachful denial was sufficiently eloquent to need no added word. "Of course not," he said; "but you should not be going on toward the time when—"

"When I shall be," she concluded his sentence as he hesitated. "Then, Arthur, why don't you ask me to marry you?"

The blood rushed into his face and ebbed away, leaving him as pale as so sun-browned a fellow could well be. He set his teeth together over a word which was strangled in its utterance, and Irene saw with secret admiration the mighty grasp of his hands upon the oars. She could be proud of his self-control so long as she was satisfied of the intensity of his feelings, and she was almost as keenly thrilled by the adoring, appealing look in his brown eyes as she would have been by a caress.

"Because," he said, "the McHughs have never yet been set down as fortune-hunters, and I do not care to be the one to bring that reproach upon the family."

"What a vilely selfish way of looking at it!" she cried.

"Very likely it seems so to a woman."

Irene flushed in her turn, and for fully two minutes there was no sound save that of the water lapping softly against the boat. Then Miss Gaspic spoke again.

"It is possible," she said, in a tone so cold that the poor lieutenant dared not answer her, "that the fact that you are a man prevents you from understanding how a woman feels who has thrown herself at a man's head, as I have done, and been rejected. Take me back to the shore."

And he had not a word to answer.

V

To have proposed to a man, and been refused, is not a soothing experience for any woman; and although the ground upon which Arthur had based his rejection was one which Irene had before known to be the obstacle between them, the refusal remained a stubborn fact to rankle in her mind. All the evening she nursed her wounded feelings, and by the time midnight brought her once more face to face with the ghost of the major, her temper was in a state which nothing save the desire to shield a lady could induce one to call by even so mild a word as uncertain.

The spirit appeared as usual, saluting, and tossing off bumpers from its shadowy wine-glass, and it had swallowed at least a dozen cups before Miss Gaspic condescended to indicate that she was aware of its presence.

"Why do you stand there drinking in that idiotic fashion?" she demanded, with more asperity than politeness. "Once is quite enough for that sort of thing."

"But I cannot speak until I have been spoken to," the ghost responded apologetically, "and I have to continue drinking until I have been requested to do something else."

"Drink, then, by all means," Irene replied coldly, turning to pick up a book. "I only hope that so much wine will not go to your head."

"But it is sure to," the ghost said, in piteous tones; "and in all my existence, even when I was only a man, I have never been overcome with wine in the presence of a lady."

It continued to swallow the wraith of red wine while it spoke, and Irene regarded it curiously.

"An inebriated ghost," she observed dispassionately, "is something which it is so seldom given to mortal to see that it would be the greatest of folly to neglect this opportunity of getting sight of that phenomenon."

"Please tell me to go away, or to sit down, or to do something," the quondam major pleaded.

"Then tell me where the McHugh diamonds are," she said.

A look of desperate obstinacy came into the ghost's face, through which could unpleasantly be seen the brass knobs of a tall secretary on the opposite side of the room. For some moments the pair confronted each other in silence, although the apparition continued its drinking. Irene watched the figure with unrelenting countenance, and at length made the curious discovery that it was standing upon tiptoe. In a moment more she saw that it was really rising, and that its feet from time to time left the carpet entirely. Her first thought was a fear that it was about to float away and escape, but upon looking closer she came to the conclusion that it was endeavoring to resist the tendency to rise into the air. Watching more sharply, she perceived that while with its right hand it raised its inexhaustible wine-cup, with its left it clung to the back of a chair in an evident endeavor to keep itself down.

"You seem to be standing on tiptoe," she observed. "Were you looking for anything?"

"No," the wraith responded, in evident confusion; "that is merely the levitation consequent upon this constant imbibing."

Irene laughed contemptuously. "Do you mean," she demanded unfeelingly, "that the sign of intoxication in a ghost is a tendency to rise into the air?"

"It is considered more polite in our circle to use the term employed by the occultists," the apparition answered somewhat sulkily. "We speak of it as 'levitation.'"

"But I do not belong to your circle," Irene returned cheerfully, "and I am not in sympathy with the occultists. Does it not occur to you," she went on, "that it is worth while to take into

consideration the fact that in these progressive times you do not occupy the same place in popular or even in scientific estimation which was yours formerly? You are now merely an hallucination, you know, and there is no reason that I should regard you with anything but contempt, as a mere symptom of indigestion or of mental fatigue."

"But you can see that I am not an hallucination, can you not?" quavered the poor ghost of the major, evidently becoming dreadfully discouraged.

"Oh, that is simply a delusion of the senses," Irene made answer in a matter-of-fact way, which, even while she spoke, she felt to be basely cruel. "Any physician would tell me so, and would write out a prescription for me to prevent my seeing you again."

"But he could n't," the ghost said, with pathetic feebleness. [32]

"You do not know the physicians of to-day," she replied, with a smile. "But to drop that, what I wished to say was this: does it not seem to you that this is a good opportunity to prove your reality by showing me the hiding-place of the diamonds? I give you my word that I will report the case to the Psychical Research Society, and you will then go on record and have a permanent reputation which the incredulity of the age cannot destroy."

The ghost was by this time in a state of intoxication which evidently made it able only with the utmost difficulty to keep from sailing to the ceiling. It clung to the back of a chair with a desperate clutch, while its feet paddled hopelessly and helplessly in the air, in vain attempts once more to get into touch with the floor.

"But the Psychical Research Society is not recognized in my circle," it still objected.

"Very well," Irene exclaimed in exasperation; "do as you like! But what will be the effect upon your reputation if you go floating helplessly back to your circle in your present condition? Is levitation in the presence of ladies considered respectable in this society of whose opinion you think so much?" [33]

"Oh, to think of it!" the spirit of the bygone major wailed with a sudden shrillness of woe which made even Miss Gaspic's blood run cold. "Oh, the disgrace of it! I will do anything you ask."

Irene sprang to her feet in sudden excitement.

"Will you show me—" she began; but the wavering voice of the ghost interrupted her.

"You must lead me," it said. "Give me your hand. I shall float up to the ceiling if I let go my hold upon this chair."

"Your hand—that is, I—I don't like the feeling of ghosts," Irene replied. "Here, take hold of this."

She picked up a pearl paper-knife and extended it toward the spirit. The ghost grasped it, and in this manner was led down the chamber, floating and struggling upward like a bird. Irene was surprised at the amount of force with which it pulled at the paper-knife, but she reflected that it had really swallowed an enormous quantity of its ghostly stimulant. She followed the directions of the waving hand that held the wine-glass, and in this way they came to a corner of the room where the spirit made signs that it wished to get nearer the floor. Irene pulled the figure downward, until it crouched in the corner. It laid one transparent hand upon a certain panel in the wainscoting. [34]

"Search here," it said.

In the excitement of the moment Irene relaxed her hold upon the paper-knife. Instantly the ghost floated upward like a balloon released from its moorings, while the paper-knife dropped through its incorporeal form to the floor.

"Good-by," Irene cried after it. "Thank you so much!"

And like a blurred and dissolving cloud above her head the intoxicated ghost faded into nothingness. [35]

VI

It was hardly to be expected that Irene, flushed with the proud delight of having triumphed over the obstinate ghost of the major, could keep her discovery to herself for so long a time as until daylight. It was already near one in the morning, but on going to her window, and looking across to the wing of the house where the lieutenant's rooms were, she saw that his light was still burning. With a secret feeling that he was probably reflecting upon the events of the afternoon, Irene sped along the passage to the door of Fanny's chamber, whom she awakened, and dispatched to bring Arthur.

Fanny's characteristically feminine manner of calling her brother was to dash into his room, crying:—

"Oh, Arthur, Irene has found the McHugh diamonds!" [36]

She was too incoherent to reply to his questions, so that there was manifestly nothing for him to do but to follow to the place where Irene was awaiting them. There the young couple were deserted by Fanny, who impulsively ran on before to the haunted chamber, leaving them to

follow. As they walked along the corridor, the lieutenant, who perhaps felt that it was well not to provoke a discussion which might call up too vividly in Irene's mind the humiliation of the afternoon, clasped her quite without warning, and drew her to his side.

"Now I can ask you to marry me," he said; "and I love you, Irene, with my whole heart."

Her first movement was an instinctive struggle to free herself; but the persuasion of his embrace was too sweet to be resisted, and she only protested by saying, "Your love seems to depend very much upon those detestable old diamonds."

"Of course," he answered. "Without them I am too poor to have any right to think of you."

"Oh," she cried out in sudden terror, "suppose that they are not there!"

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The young man loosened his embrace in astonishment.

"Not there!" he repeated. "Fanny said that you had found them."

"Not yet; only the ghost—"

"The ghost!" he echoed, in tones of mingled disappointment and chagrin. "Is that all there is to it?"

Irene felt that her golden love-dream was rudely shattered. She was aware that the lieutenant did not even believe in the existence of the wraith of the major, and although she had been conversing with the spirit for so long a time that very night, so great was the influence of her lover over her mind that she began at this moment to doubt the reality of the apparition herself.

With pale face and sinking heart she led the way into her chamber, and to the corner where the paper-knife yet lay upon the floor in testimony of the actuality of her interview with the wraith. Under her directions the panel was removed from the wainscot, a labor which was not effected without a good deal of difficulty. Arthur sneered at the whole thing, but he yet was good-natured enough to do what the girls asked of him.

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Only the dust of centuries rewarded their search. When it was fully established that there were no jewel-cases there, poor Irene broke down entirely, and burst into convulsive weeping.

"There, there," Arthur said soothingly. "Don't feel like that. We've got on without the diamonds thus far, and we can still."

"It is n't the diamonds that I'm crying for," sobbed Irene, with all the naïveté of a child that has lost its pet toy. "It's you!"

There was no withstanding this appeal. Arthur took her into his arms and comforted her, while Fanny discreetly looked the other way; and so the engagement was allowed to stand, although the McHugh diamonds had not been found.

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VII

But the next night Irene faced the ghost with an expression of contempt that might have withered the spirit of Hamlet's sire.

"So you think it proper to deceive a lady?" she inquired scornfully. "Is that the way in which the gentlemen of the 'old school,' of which we hear so much, behaved?"

"Why, you should reflect," the wraith responded waveringly, "that you had made me intoxicated." And, indeed, the poor spirit still showed the effects of its debauch.

"You cannot have been very thoroughly intoxicated," Irene returned, "or you would not have been able to deceive me."

"But you see," it answered, "that I drank only the ghost of wine, so that I really had only the ghost of inebriation."

"But being a ghost yourself," was her reply, "that should have been enough to intoxicate you completely."

"I never argue with a lady," said the ghost loftily, the subject evidently being too complicated for it to follow further. "At least I managed to put you as far as possible on the wrong scent."

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As it spoke, it gave the least possible turn of its eye toward the corner of the room diagonally opposite to that where it had disappeared on the previous night.

"Ah!" cried Irene, with sudden illumination.

She sprang up, and began to move from its place in the corner an old secretary which stood there. The thing was very heavy, but she did not call for help. She strained and tugged, the ghost showing evident signs of perturbation, until she had thrust the secretary aside, and then with her lamp beside her she sat down upon the floor and began to examine the wainscoting.

"Come away, please," the ghost said piteously. "I hate to see you there on the floor. Come and sit by the fire."

"Thank you," she returned. "I am very comfortable where I am."

She felt of the panels, she poked and pried, and for more than an hour she worked, while the ghost stood over her, begging that she go away. It was just as she was on the point of giving up that her fingers, rubbing up and down, started a morsel of dust from a tiny hole in the edge of a panel. She seized a hairpin from amid her locks, and thrust the point into the little opening. The panel started, moved slowly on a concealed hinge, and opened enough for her to insert her fingers and to push it back. A sort of closet lay revealed, and in it was a pile of cases, dusty, moth-eaten, and time-stained. She seized the first that came to hand, and opened it. There upon its bed of faded velvet blazed the "McHugh star," superb in its beauty and a fortune in itself.

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"Oh, my diamonds!" shrilled the ghost of Major McHugh. "Oh, what will our circle say!"

"They will have the right to say that you were rude to a lady," Irene answered, with gratuitous severity. "You have wasted your opportunity of being put on record."

"Now I am only a drinking ghost!" the wraith wailed, and faded away upon the air.

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Thus it came about that on her wedding-day Irene wore the "McHugh star;" and yet, such is human perversity that she has not only been convinced by her husband that ghosts do not exist, but she has lost completely the power of seeing them, although that singular and valuable gift had come to her, as has been said, by inheritance from a great-aunt on her mother's side of the family.

A PROBLEM IN PORTRAITURE

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I

"It does not look like him," Celia Sathman said, moving aside a little that the afternoon light might fall more fully upon a portrait standing unfinished upon the easel; "and yet it is unquestionably the best picture you ever painted. It interests me, it fascinates me; and I never had at all that feeling about Ralph himself. And yet," she added, smiling at her own inconsistency, "it *is* like him. It is n't what I call a good likeness, and yet—"

The artist, Tom Claymore, leaned back in his chair and smiled.

"You are right and wrong," he said. "I am a little disappointed that you don't catch the secret of the picture. I knew Ralph would n't understand, but I had hopes of you."

A puzzled look came into Celia's face as she continued to study the canvas. Her companion smoked a cigarette, and watched her with a regard which was at once fond and a little amused.

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The studio was a great room which had originally been devoted to no less prosaic an occupation than the painting of oil-cloth carpeting, great splashes of color, which time and dust had softened into a pleasing dimness, remaining to testify to its former character. It stood down among the wharves of old Salem, a town where even the new is scarcely to be distinguished from the old, and Tom had been delighted with its roomy quiet, the play of light and shadow among the bare beams overhead, and the ease with which he had been able to make it serve his purpose. He had done comparatively little toward furnishing it for his summer occupancy. He had hung a few worn-out seines over the high beams, and placed here and there his latest acquisitions in the way of bric-à-brac, while numerous sketches were pinned to the walls with no attempt at order. On the door he had fastened a zither, of which the strings were struck by nicely balanced hammers when the door was moved, and in the still rather barn-like room, he had established himself to teach and to paint through the summer months.

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"I cannot make it out at all," Celia said at last, turning away from the easel and walking toward Claymore. "It looks older and stronger than Ralph, as if— Ah!" she interrupted herself suddenly, a new light breaking in her face. "Now I see! You have been painting his possibilities. You are making a portrait of him as he will be."

"As he may be," Claymore corrected her, his words showing that her conjecture was in truth the key to the riddle. "When I began to paint Ralph, I was at once struck by the undeveloped state of his face. It seemed to me like a bud that had n't opened; and I began at once to try and guess what it would grow into. I did n't at first mean to paint it so, but the notion mastered me, and now I deliberately give myself up to the impulse. I don't know whether it's professional, but it is great fun."

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Celia went back and looked at the picture once more, but she soon returned to stand leaning upon the tall back of the chair in which her betrothed was sitting.

"It is getting too dark to see it," she remarked; "but your experiment interests me wonderfully. You say you are painting what his face may be; why not what his face must be?"

"Because," the artist replied, "I am trying to get in the best of his possibilities; to paint the noblest there is in him. How can I tell if he will in life realize it? He may develop his worst side,

you know, instead of his best."

Celia was silent a moment. The darkness seemed to have gathered quickly, rising clouds cutting off the light of the after-glow which had followed the sunset with delusive promise. She leaned forward and laid her finger-tips lightly upon Tom's forehead with a caressing motion.

"You are a clever man," she said. "It is fortunate you are a good one."

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"Oh," he returned, almost brusquely, though he took her hand and kissed it, "I don't know that I can lay claim to any especial virtue. Are you remembering Hawthorne's story of 'The Prophetic Pictures,' that you think my goodness particularly fortunate in this connection?"

Instead of replying, she moved across the studio with her graceful, firm walk, which had won Tom's deep admiration before he knew even her name. She took up a light old-fashioned silk shawl, yellow with time, and threw it across her arm.

"I must go home," she remarked, as if no subject were under discussion. "I am sure I don't know what I was thinking of to stay here so late."

"Oh, there is no time in sleepy old Salem," was his response, "so it can't be late; but if you will go, I shall be proud to walk up with you."

He flung away the end of his cigarette, locked the studio, and together they took their way out of the region of wharves, along the quaint old dinginess of Essex Street. It is a thoroughfare full of suggestions of the past, and they both were susceptible to its influences. Here of old the busy life of Salem flowed in vigorous current, laden with interests which embraced half the globe; here sailors from strange lands used to gather, swarthy and bold, pouring into each other's ringed ear talk of adventure wild and daring; here merchants walked counting their gains on cargoes brought from the far Orient and islands of which even the names had hardly grown familiar to the Western World.

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Hawthorne has somewhere spoken of the old life of New England as all too sombre, and declared that our forefathers "wove their web of life with hardly a single thread of rose-color or gold;" but surely the master was misled by the dimness gathered from time. Into every old web of tapestry went many a bright line of scarlet and green and azure, many a woof of gold that time has tarnished and the dust of years dulled until all is gray and faded. Along the memory-haunted streets of Salem, from the first, went, side by side or hand in hand, the happy maiden and her lover; stepped the bridal train; passed the young wife bearing under her heart with fearful bliss the sweet secret of a life other than her own; or the newly made mother bore her first-born son through a glory half sunlight and half dreams of his golden future. In later days all the romance of the seas, the teeming life which inspired the tongue of the prophet's denouncing lyre to break into rhapsodies of poetry, the stir of adventurous blood, and the boldness of daring adventurers have filled these old streets with vivid and undying memories.

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The artist and his companion were rather silent as they walked, he studying the lights and shadows with appreciative eye, and she apparently absorbed in thought. At length she seemed to come in her reverie to some doubt which she needed his aid to resolve.

"Tom," she asked, rather hesitatingly, "have you noticed any change in Ralph lately?"

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"Change?" repeated Claymore interrogatively, with a quick flash of interest in his eyes despite the studied calmness of his manner.

"Yes. He has n't been the same since—since—"

"Since when?" the artist inquired, as she hesitated.

"Why, it must be almost ever since we came home and you began to paint him," Celia returned thoughtfully; "though I confess I have noticed it only lately. Has n't it struck you?"

Her companion, instead of replying directly, began carefully to examine the carving on the head of his walking-stick.

"You forget how slightly I knew him before," he said. "What sort of a change do you mean?"

"He has developed. He seems all at once to be becoming a man."

"He is twenty-eight. It is n't strange that there should be signs of the man about him, I suppose."

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"But he has always seemed so boyish," Celia insisted, with the air of one who finds it difficult to make herself understood.

"Very likely something has happened to sober him," Tom answered, with an effort to speak carelessly, which prevented him from noticing that Celia flushed slightly at his words.

They had reached Miss Sathman's gate, and he held it open for her.

"It was very good of you to come this afternoon," he told her. "When will you take your next lesson?"

"I can't tell," she replied. "I'll let you know. Won't you come in?"

The invitation was given with a certain faint wistfulness, but he declined, and lifting his hat, bade

her good-night. She turned on the doorstep and looked after him as his strong, resolute figure passed down the street, and a sigh escaped her.

"I wonder if Tom will seem to me so reserved and cold after we are married," was her thought.

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II

People in general thought Tom Claymore's nature cold and reserved because his manner was so. He was reticent perhaps to a fault, but the reticent man who is cold is a monster, and Tom was far from being anything so disagreeable as that. His was the shy artistic temperament, and the circumstances of his rather lonely life had fostered a habit of saying little while he yet felt deeply, and since he took life seriously, he seldom found himself disposed to open his heart in ordinary conversation.

Even with his betrothed he had not yet outworn the reserve which every year of his life had strengthened, and Celia, despite her betrothal, was not wholly free from the common error of supposing that, because he did not easily express his sentiment, he lacked warmth of feeling. She had been his pupil in Boston, and it was for the sake of being near her that he had established himself at Salem for the summer, making a pretext of the fact that he had promised to paint the portrait of her cousin, Ralph Thatcher.

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Tom Claymore could not have told at what stage of his work upon this portrait he became possessed of the idea that he had been unconsciously painting rather the possibilities than the realities of his sitter's face. At first he smiled at the thought as a mere fanciful notion; then he strove against it; but he ended by giving his inspiration, or his whim, free rein, and deliberately endeavoring to portray the noblest manhood of which Ralph Thatcher's face seemed to him to contain the germs. He felt a secret impatience with the young man, who, with wealth, health, and all the opportunities of life, seemed still too much a boy properly to appreciate or to use them; and as the portrait advanced, the belief grew in Claymore's mind that, when it was completed, some effect might be produced upon Thatcher by its showing him thus vividly the possibilities of character he was wasting. The artist did not, it is true, attach much importance to this notion, but when once he had given himself up to it, he at least found much interest in following out his endeavor. The idea of a sitter's being influenced by a portrait is by no means a novel one among painters, and Claymore took pains to have Thatcher see the picture as soon as it got beyond its early stages. He wanted it to have to the full whatever influence was possible, and he was eager to discover how soon its departure from an exact likeness would become apparent to the original.

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A curious complication followed. It was not long before it began to seem to Tom that Ralph was growing up to the ideal the portrait showed. At first he rejected the idea as utterly fanciful. Then he recalled an experience a brother artist had related to him in Paris, where a girl who had been painted in the dress of a nun worn at a fancy ball, came, by brooding over the picture, to be so possessed with a belief in her vocation that she ended by actually taking the veil. The cases were not exactly parallel, but Claymore saw in them a certain similarity, in that both seemed to show how a possibility might be so strongly expressed on canvas as to become an important influence in making itself an actuality. He became intensely interested in the problem which presented itself. He had before this time remarked to Celia that Ralph only needed arousing to develop into a noble man, and he began to speculate whether it could be within his power to furnish the impulse needed—the filament about which crystallization would take place all at once. He worked slowly and with the utmost care, taking pains to have Thatcher at the studio as much as possible even on days when he was not posing, so that the picture might be constantly before his eyes; and of one thing at least he was sure beyond the possibility of a doubt—Ralph was certainly developing.

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"*Post hoc sed non ergo propter hoc,*" he said to himself, in the Latin of his school debating-society days; but secretly he believed that in this case the effect was no less "because" than "after."

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On the morning after Celia had talked with her betrothed about the picture, Ralph gave the artist a sitting. The young man seemed so preoccupied that Tom rallied him a little on his absence of mind, inquiring if Thatcher wished his portrait to have an air of deep abstraction.

"I was not thinking of that confounded old picture at all," the young man responded, smiling. "I was merely—well, I do not know exactly how to tell you what I was doing. Do you ever feel as if the reflective part of you, whatever that may be, had gone into its office for private meditation and shut your consciousness outside?"

"Yes," Tom answered; "and I always comfort myself for being excluded by supposing that at least something of real importance must be under consideration or it would n't be worth the trouble to shut the doors so carefully."

"Do you?" returned the sitter. "I had a jolly old clerical uncle who used to lock the door of his study and pretend to be writing the most awe-inspiring sermons, when he really was only having a well-fed nap. I am afraid," he went on, with a sigh and a change of manner, "that there is little of real importance has ever gone on in my mind. Do you know, I am half inclined to hate you."

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The artist looked up in surprise.

"Hate me?" he echoed. "Why should you hate me?"

"Because you are everything that I am not; because you succeed in everything and I never did anything in my life; because at this poker-table of life you win and I lose."

A strange tinge of bitterness showed itself in Ralph's voice, and puzzled Claymore. It was not like Thatcher to be introspective, or to lament lost possibilities. The artist rubbed his brush on his palette with a thoughtful air.

"Even if that were so," he said, "I don't see exactly why you should vent your disappointment on me. I'm hardly to blame, am I? But of course what you say is nonsense anyway."

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"Nonsense? It is n't nonsense. I've done nothing. I know nothing. I'm good for nothing; and the worst of it is that the girl I've wanted all my life realizes it just as well as I do. She is n't a fool; and of course she does n't care a rap about me."

The confession was so frankly boyish that Claymore had a half-impulse to smile, but the feeling in it was too evidently genuine to be ignored. One thing at least was clear: Ralph was at last beginning to be dissatisfied with his idle, purposeless life. He had come to the enlightenment of seeing himself as he might look to the eyes of the woman he cared for. The reflection crossed Claymore's mind that some disappointment in love might have brought about whatever change he had observed in his sitter, and that any influence which he had ascribed to the portrait had in reality come from this. The thought struck him with a ludicrous sense of having befooled himself. It was as if some gorgeous palace of fancy, carefully built up and elaborated, had come tumbling in ruins about his head. He made a gesture, half comic, half deprecatory, and laid down his palette.

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"The light has changed," he said. "I can't paint any more to-day."

III

Claymore was intensely imaginative, and he possessed all the sanguine disposition of the artistic temperament, the power of giving himself up to a dream so that it for the time being became real. Matters which the reason will without hesitation allow to be the lightest bubbles of fancy are to such a disposition almost as veracious fact; and often the life of an imaginative man is shaped by what to cold judgment is an untenable hypothesis. The artist had not in the least been conscious how strong a hold the idea of awakening Ralph Thatcher had taken upon his mind, until the doubt presented itself whether the portrait had in reality possessed any influence whatever. He was not without a sense of humor, and he smiled inwardly at the seriousness with which he regarded the matter. He reasoned with himself, half petulantly, half humorously; sometimes taking the ground that his theory had been merely a fantastic absurdity, and again holding doggedly to the belief that it was founded upon some fragment at least of vital truth. He recalled vaguely a good many scraps of modern beliefs in the power of suggestion; then he came back to the reflection that if Ralph was in love, no suggestion was needed to cause a mental revolution.

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Wholly to disbelieve in its own inspirations is, however, hardly within the power of the genuinely imaginative nature. Whatever his understanding might argue, Tom, in the end, would have been false to his temperament had he not remained convinced that he was right in believing that to some degree, at least, the picture he was painting had influenced his sitter. Without any consciously defined plan, he got out a fresh canvas, and occupied himself, when alone in the studio, by copying Ralph's head, but with a difference. As in the other picture he had endeavored to express all the noblest possibilities of the young man's face, in this he labored to portray whatever potentiality of evil might be found there. Every introspective person has experienced the sensation of feeling that a course of action is being followed as if by some inner direction, yet without any clear consciousness of the reason; and much as might have come a hint of the intentions or motives of another person, came to Tom the thought that he was painting this second portrait that its difference from the first might show him upon what foundations rested his fanciful theory. He wished, he told himself, at least to see how far he had expressed a personality unlike another equally possible.

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As a faint shade on the artist's inner consciousness rested, however, a feeling that this explanation was not completely satisfactory. He would have been shocked had he even dreamed of the possibility that artistic vanity, aroused by the doubt that it possessed the power of moulding the life and destiny of Ralph, had defiantly turned to throw its influence into the other scale, to prove by its power of dragging the sitter down that its dominance was real. Had any realization of such a motive come to Claymore, he would have been horrified at a thought so evil; yet he failed to push self-investigation far enough to bring him to an understanding of his real motives.

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The painter worked steadily and with almost feverish rapidity, and before the end of the week he was able to substitute the second portrait for the first when Ralph, who had been out of town for a few days, came for his next sitting. Tom was not without a good deal of uneasy secret curiosity in regard to the effect upon Thatcher of the changed picture. He appreciated how great the alteration really was, a difference so marked that he had lacked the courage to carry out his first intention of exhibiting the new canvas to Celia. He excused himself for hesitating to show her the portrait by the whimsical pretext that it would not be the part of a gentleman to betray the discreditable traits of character he believed himself to have discovered as among the possibilities of her cousin's nature. What Ralph would himself say, the painter awaited with uneasy eagerness,

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and as the latter, after the customary greetings, walked up to the easel and stood regarding his counterfeit presentment, Tom found himself more nervous than he would have supposed possible.

Ralph studied the picture a moment in silence.

"What in the devil," he burst out, "have you been doing to my picture?"

"What is the matter with it?" the artist asked, stepping beside him, and in turn fixing his gaze on the portrait.

"I'm sure I don't know," Ralph replied, with a puzzled air; "but somehow or other it seems to me to have changed from a rather decent-looking phiz into a most accursedly low-lived one. Do I look like that?"

"I suppose a mirror would give a more disinterested answer to that question than I could."

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Claymore glanced up as he spoke, and hardly repressed an exclamation of surprise. Ralph's whole expression was changing to correspond with that of the portrait before him. Who has not, in looking at some portrait which strongly impressed him, found in a little time that his own countenance was unconsciously altering its expression to correspond with that portrayed before him; and the chances that such a thing will occur must be doubly great when the picture is one's own image.

A portrait appeals so intimately to the personality of the person represented, human vanity and individuality insist so strongly upon regarding it as a part of self, that it stands in a closer relation to the inner being than can almost any other outward thing. It is, in a sense, part of the original, and perhaps the oriental prejudice against being portrayed, lest in the process the artist may obtain some sinister advantage, is founded upon some subtle truth. It can hardly be possible that, with the keen feeling every man must have in regard to his portrait, any one should fail to be more or less influenced by the painter's conception of him, the visible embodiment of the impression he has made upon another human mind; and since every picture must contain something of the personality of the artist, it follows that a portrait-painter is sure to affect in some degree the character of his sitters. It would rarely happen that this influence would be either intentional or tangible, but must it not always exist?

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Claymore stood for a little time watching Ralph's face; then he walked away, and returned with a small mirror which he put in the latter's hand. Thatcher looked at the reflection it offered him, and broke into a hard laugh.

"By George!" he said; "it does look like me. I never realized before that I was such a whelp."

"Fiddlesticks!" Claymore rejoined briskly, taking the glass from him. "Don't talk nonsense. Take your place and let's get to work."

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IV

On the afternoon of the same day Celia came into the studio with her face clouded. She received her lover's greetings in an absent-minded fashion, and almost before the musical tinkle of the zither on the door which admitted her had died away, she asked abruptly:—

"What in the world have you been doing to Ralph?"

"I? Nothing but painting him. Why?"

"Because he came down here this morning in a perfectly heavenly frame of mind. He has been in Boston to see about some repairs on his tenement-houses at the North End that I've been teasing him to make ever since the first of my being there last winter; and he came in this morning to say he thought I was right, and he was going to take hold and do what I wanted."

"Well?" questioned Tom, as she broke off with a gesture of impatience.

"And after he 'd been down here for his sitting, he came back so cross and strange; and said he'd reconsidered, and he did n't see why he should bother his head about the worthless wretches in the slums. I can't see what came over him."

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"But why should you hold me responsible for your cousin's vagaries?"

"Oh, of course you are not," Celia replied, with a trace of petulance in her tone; "but I am so dreadfully disappointed. Ralph has always put the whole thing off before, and now I thought he had really waked up."

"Probably," Claymore suggested, "it is some new phase of his ill-starred love affair."

Miss Sathman flushed to her temples.

"I do not know why you choose to say that," she answered stiffly. "He never speaks to me of that now. He is too thoroughly a gentleman."

"What!" Tom burst out, in genuine amazement. "Good heavens! It was n't you?"

Celia looked at him in evident bewilderment.

"Did n't you know?" she asked. "Ralph has been in love with me ever since we were in pinafores. I did n't speak of it because it did n't seem fair to him; but I supposed, of course, that was what you meant when you spoke. I even thought you might be jealous the least bit."

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Claymore turned away and walked down the studio on pretense of arranging a screen. He felt as if he had stabbed a rival in the back. Whether by his brush he had really an influence over Thatcher, or the changes in his sitter were merely coincidences, he had at least been trying to affect the young man, and since he now knew Ralph as the lover of Celia, his actions all at once took on a different character, and the second portrait seemed like a covert attack.

"Ralph is so amazingly outspoken," Celia continued, advancing toward the easel and laying her hand on the cloth which hung before her cousin's portrait, "that I wonder he has not told you. He is very fond of you, though, he naively says, he ought not to be."

As she spoke, she lifted the curtain which hid the later portrait of Ralph. She uttered an exclamation which made Claymore, whose back had been turned, spring hastily toward her, too late to prevent her seeing the picture.

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"Tom," she cried, "what have you done to Ralph?"

The tone pierced Claymore to the quick. The words were almost those which Celia had used before, but now reproach, grief, and a depth of feeling which it seemed to Tom must come from a regard keener than either gave them a new intensity of meaning. The tears sprang to Miss Sathman's eyes as she looked from the canvas to her lover.

"Oh, Tom," she said, "how could you change it so? Ralph does not look like that."

"No," Claymore answered, his embarrassment giving to his voice a certain severity. "This is the reverse of the other picture. This is the evil possibility of his face."

He recovered his composure. Despite his coldness of demeanor, there was a vein of intense jealousy in the painter's nature, which tingled at the tone in which his betrothed spoke of her cousin. He had more than once said to himself that, despite the fact that Celia might be more demonstrative than he, his love for her was far stronger than hers for him. Now there came to him the conviction, quick and unreasonable, that although she might not be aware of it, her deepest affection was really given to Ralph Thatcher.

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"Why did you paint it, Tom?" Celia pursued. "It is wicked. It really does not in the least resemble Ralph. I suppose you could take any face and distort it into wickedness. Where is the other picture?"

Without a word Tom brought the first portrait and set it beside the second. Celia regarded the two canvases in silence a moment. Her color deepened, and her throat swelled. Then she turned upon Claymore with eyes that flashed, despite the tears which sprang into them.

"You are wicked and cruel!" she said bitterly. "I hate you for doing it."

Tom turned pale, and then laughed unmirthfully.

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"You take it very much to heart," he remarked.

The tears welled more hotly in her eyes. She tried in vain to check them, and then with a sob she turned and walked quickly from the studio, the zither tinkling, as the door closed after her, with a gay frivolity that jarred sharply on Tom Claymore's nerves.

V

It was nearly a fortnight before Tom saw Celia again. For a day or two he kept away from her, waiting for some sign that her mood had softened and that she regretted her words. Then he could endure suspense no longer and called at the house, to discover that she had gone to the mountains for a brief visit. He remembered that he had been told of this journey, and he reflected that Celia might have expected him to come and bid her good-by. His mental attitude toward her had been much the same as if there had been some actual quarrel, and now he said to himself that, after all, there had been nothing in their last interview to justify this feeling. He alternately reproached himself and blamed her, and continually the condition of things became more intolerable to him.

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His temper was not improved when Ralph, at one of the sittings, which continued steadily, mentioned in a tone which seemed to the artist's jealous fancy rather boasting, that he had received a letter from his cousin. Tom frowned fiercely, and painted on without comment.

Claymore was working steadily on the second portrait, which was rapidly approaching completion. He said to himself that if his theory was right, and the reflection of his worst traits before a man's eye could influence the original to evil, he would be avenged upon Ralph for robbing him of Celia, since this portrait of Thatcher was to have a place in the young man's home. He also reflected that in no way else could he so surely wean Celia from an affection for her cousin, as by bringing out Ralph's worst side. He despised himself for what he was doing, but as men sullenly yield to a temptation against which all their best instincts fight, he still went on with his work.

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He naturally watched closely to see what effect the portrait was already having on his sitter.

Whether from its influence or from other causes, Ralph had grown morose and ungracious after Celia's departure, and Tom was certainly not mistaken in feeling that he was in the worst possible frame of mind. Even the fact that his cousin had written to him did little to change his mood, a fact that Tom, sore and hurt at being left without letters, noted with inward anger.

The two men were daily approaching that point where it was probable that they would come into open conflict. Ralph began to devise excuses for avoiding the sittings, a fact that especially irritated the artist, who was anxious to complete the work. The whole nature of their relations toward each other had undergone a change, and all frankness and friendliness seemed to have gone out of it. Sometimes Claymore felt responsible for this, and at others he laughed at the idea that he had in any way helped to alter Ralph. He was uneasy and unhappy, and when a couple of weeks had gone by without a word from Celia, he resolved that he would follow her to the mountains, and at least put an end to the suspense which was becoming intolerable.

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He sent word to Thatcher that he was going out of town for a few days, packed his valise, and went down to his studio to put things to rights for his absence. He arranged the two or three matters that needed attention, looked at his watch, and found that he had something over an hour before train time. He started toward the door of the studio, hesitated, and then turned back to stand in front of the easel and regard the nearly completed portrait of Ralph Thatcher.

It was a handsome face that looked out at him, and one full of character; but in the full lips was an expression of sensuality almost painful, and the eyes were selfish and cruel. The artist's first feeling was one of gratified vanity at the cleverness with which his work had been done. He had preserved the likeness, and scarcely increased the apparent age of his sitter, while he had carried forward into repulsive fullness the worst possibilities of which he could find trace in the countenance of the original. As he looked, a cruel sense of triumph grew in Claymore's mind. He felt that this portrait was the sure instrument of his revenge against the man who had robbed him of the love of his betrothed. He considered his coming interview with Celia, and so completely was he possessed of the belief that he had lost her, that he looked forward to the meeting as to a farewell.

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At the thought a sudden pulse of emotion thrilled him. He saw Celia's beautiful, high-bred face before him, and there came into his mind a sense of shame, as if he were already before her and could not meet her eyes. The sting of the deepest humiliation a high-minded man can know, that of standing condemned and degraded in his own sight, pierced his very soul.

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"It is myself and not Ralph that I have been harming," ran his thought. "It has never occurred to me that, even if I was dragging him down, I had flung myself into the slime to do it. Good heavens! Is this the sort of man I am? Am I such a sneak as to lurk in the dark and take advantage of the confidence he shows by putting himself into my hands! Celia is right; she could not be herself and not prefer him to the blackguard I have proved myself."

However fanciful his theory in regard to the effect of the portrait upon Thatcher might be, Tom was too honest to disguise from himself that his will and intention had been to do the other harm, and to do it, moreover, in an underhanded fashion. Instead of open, manly attack upon his rival, he had insidiously endeavored to work him injury against which Ralph could not defend himself.

"The only thing I have really accomplished," groaned poor Tom to himself, "is to prove what a contemptible cur I am."

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He took from his pocket his knife, opened it, and approached the canvas. Then that strong personal connection between the artist and his work which makes its defense almost identical with the instinct of self-preservation, made him pause. For an instant he wavered, moved to preserve the canvas, although he hid it away; then with desperate resolution, and a fierceness not unlike a sacred fury, he cut the canvas into strips. So great was the excitement of his mood and act that he panted as he finished by wrenching the shreds of canvas from the stretcher.

Then he smiled at the extravagance of his feelings, set the empty stretcher against the wall, and once more brought to light the original portrait.

"There," he said to himself, as he set the picture on the easel, "I can at least go to her with a decently clean conscience, if I am a fool."

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VI

It was well on toward sunset when Claymore reached the mountain village where Celia was staying with a party of friends. All the hours of his ride in the cars he had been reviewing his relations toward her. With his imaginative temperament he was sure to exaggerate the gravity of the situation, and he was firmly convinced that by the destruction of the portrait he had virtually renounced his betrothed. He recalled jealously the many signs Celia had given of her interest in her cousin, and he settled himself in the theory that only Ralph's boyishness and apparent want of character had prevented her cousin from winning her love. Looking back over the summer and recalling how Thatcher had advanced in manliness, how his character had developed, and Celia's constant appreciation of his progress, Claymore could not but conclude, with an inward groan, that although she was pledged to him, her affection was really given to his rival.

Whether Celia was aware of the true state of her feelings, Tom could not determine. Her silence of the last fortnight had perplexed and tormented him; and he felt sure that in this time she could

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not have failed to reflect deeply upon the situation. He believed, however whimsical such a theory might seem, that his only chance of holding her was by bringing home to her the dark side of Ralph's character, as he was convinced he had been the means of showing her the best traits of her cousin. The effect of the portraits had become to him a very real and a very important factor in the case, and although he was at heart too good to regret that he had destroyed the second picture, he was not without a feeling of self-pity that fate had forced upon him the destruction of his own hopes. The logical reflection that, if his ideas were true, he had himself chosen to take up the weapon by which he was in the end wounded, did not occur to him, and would probably have afforded him small consolation if it had.

A servant directed him down a wood-path which led to a small cascade, where he was told he should find Miss Sathman. As he came within sound of the falling water, he heard voices, and pressing on, he was suddenly brought to an abrupt halt by recognizing the tones of Ralph Thatcher. What the young man was saying Tom did not catch, but the reply of Celia came to his ears with cutting distinctness.

"And does it seem to you honorable, Ralph," she said, "to follow me here and talk to me in this way, when you know I am engaged to another man, and he your friend?"

"No man is my friend that takes you away from me!" Thatcher returned hotly. "And besides, I happen to know you have quarrelled with him. You have n't written to him since you came here."

"I have not quarrelled with him," Celia answered. "Oh, Ralph, I have always believed you were so honorable."

"Honorable! honorable!" repeated the other angrily. "Shall I let you go for a whimsical fancy that it is not honorable to speak to you? I have loved you ever since we were children, and you—"

"And I," Miss Sathman interrupted, "have never loved anybody in that way but Tom."

The woodland swam before Claymore's eyes. Instinctively, and hardly conscious what he was doing, he drew himself aside out of the path into the thicket. What more was said, he did not know. He was only aware that a moment or two later Ralph went alone by the place where he lay hidden, and then he rose and went slowly toward the cascade and Celia.

She was sitting with her back toward him, but as she turned at the sound of his footsteps, the look of pain in her eyes changed suddenly into a great joy.

VII

It was nearly a year before Tom told Celia the whole story of the two portraits. The temptation and the effects of his paltering with it were so real in his mind that he could not bring himself to confess until he had made such effort as lay in his power at reparation. He finished the original picture without more sittings, for Ralph, much to the artist's relief, kept away from the studio. Then he left Salem, saying to himself that his presence there might drive Ralph from home, where Tom wished him to remain, that the influence of the face, if it really existed, might help him.

"I do not know," Celia said thoughtfully, "whether the changes in Ralph came from the pictures or from his disappointment; but in either case I can see how real the whole was to you, and I am glad you stood the test; although," she added, smiling fondly upon her husband, "I should have known from the first that you would n't fail."

"But you must acknowledge," Tom responded, replying to the latter portion of her remark by a caress, "that Ralph has come out splendidly in the last year—since he has had that portrait to look at."

"Yes," she replied musingly, "and he is fast growing up to the picture."

THE KNITTERS IN THE SUN

The spinsters and the knitters in the sun.
Twelfth Night, ii, 4.

The mellow light of the October sun fell full upon the porch of the stately old Grayman house, and the long shadows of the Lombardy poplars pointed to the two silvery haired women who sat there placidly knitting.

The mansion dated back to colonial times. That it had been erected before public sentiment was fully settled in regard to the proper site of the village might be inferred from its lonely position on the banks of the river which flowed through the little town a mile away. The funereal poplars, winter-killed and time-beaten now in their tops, had been in their prime half a century ago, yet

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they were young when compared to the house before which they stood sentinel. From the small-paned windows of this dwelling Graymans whose tombstones where long sunken and rusted with patient moss had seen British vessels sailing up the river with warlike intent, and on the porch where the women sat knitting peacefully, Captain Maynard Grayman had stood to review his little company of volunteers before leading them against the redcoats, and had spoken to them in fiery words of the patriots whose blood had but a week before been shed at Lexington. The place had still the air of pre-Revolutionary dignity and self-respect.

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As the poplars had steadily cast their sombre shadows upon the Graymans, father and son and son's son, as generation after generation they lived and died in the old mansion, so had the Southers no less constantly remained the faithful servants of the family. They had seen the greatness of the masters wane sadly from its original splendors, the family pride alone of all the pristine glories remaining unimpaired; they had striven loyally against the fate which trenced upon the wealth and power of the house; and they had seen money waste, reputation fade, until now even the name was on the verge of extinction, and the family reduced to a bed-ridden old man querulously dwelling in futile dreams of vanished importance and the lovely and lonely daughter who wore out her life beside him.

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As the Graymans diminished, the Southers, perhaps from the very energy with which they strove to aid the fallen fortunes of their masters, had waxed continually. The change which keeps from stagnation republican society, abasing the lofty and exalting the lowly, could not have had better illustration than in the two families. It was from no necessity that old Sarah was still the servant of the house; a servant, in truth, with small wage, and one who secretly helped out the broken revenues of her master. Dollar for dollar, she could have out-counted the entire property of her employers; and might have lived where and as she pleased, had she been minded to have servants of her own. In old Sarah's veins, however, flowed the faithful Souther blood, transmitted by generations of traditionary adherents of the Grayman family; and neither the persuasions of her children, who felt the quickening influence of the new order of things, nor the amount of her snug account in the village savings bank, could tempt the steadfast creature from her allegiance. When long ago she had married her cousin, an inoffensive, meek man, dead now a quarter of a century, she had made it a condition that she should not abandon her service; and her position in the Grayman mansion, like her name, had remained practically unchanged by matrimony.

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She was a not uncomely figure as she sat in the October sunlight knitting steadily, her hair abundant although silvery, and her figure still alert and erect. From her dark print gown to the tips of her snowy cap-strings she was spotlessly neat, while an air of mingled energy and placidity imparted a certain piquancy to her bearing. Her active fingers plied the bright needles with the deftness of long familiarity, and from time to time her quick glance swept in unconscious inspection over the row of shining tin pans ranged along the porch wall, over the beehives in their shed not far away, robbed now of their honey, over the smooth-flowing river beyond, and over her sister who knitted beside her. She had the air of one accustomed to responsibility and used to watching sharply whatever went on about her. She bestowed now and then a brief look upon the yellow cat asleep at her feet with his paws doubled under him, and one instinctively felt that were he guilty of any derelictions in relation to the dairy, her sharp eye would have detected it in some tell-tale curl of his whiskers. She scanned with a passing regard of combined suspicion and investigation the ruddy line of tomatoes gaining their last touch of red ripeness on the outside of the window-ledge, her expression embodying some vague disapproval of any fruit of which the cultivation was so manifestly an innovation on good old customs. In every movement she displayed a repressed energy contrasting markedly with the manner of the quiet knitter beside her in that strange fashion so often to be found in children of the same parents.

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The second woman was little more than a vain shadow from which whatever substance it had ever possessed had long since departed. Hannah West was one of those ciphers to which somebody else is always the significant figure. In her youth she had been the shadow of her sister, and when her husband departed this life, she had merely returned to her first allegiance in becoming the shadow of Sarah Souther once more. She was a tiny, faded creature, who came from her home in the village to visit her sister upon every possible occasion, much as a pious devotee might make a pilgrimage to a shrine. She believed so strongly and so absolutely in Sarah that the belief absorbed all the energy of her nature and left her without even the power of having an especial interest in anything else. What Sarah Souther did, what she thought, what she said, what were the fortunes and what the opinions of her children, with such variations as could be rung on these themes, formed the subject of Mrs. West's conversation, as well as of such transient and vague mental processes as served her in place of thought. The afternoons which she passed in aimless, placid gossip with her sister were the only bits of light and color in her monotonous existence, to be dwelt upon in memory with joy as they were looked forward to with delight.

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"I d' know," Hannah remarked, after an unusually long interval of silence this afternoon, "what's set me thinkin' so much 'bout George and Miss Edith as I hev' lately. Seems ef things took hold o' me more the older I get."

A new look of intelligence and alertness came into Sarah's face. She knit out the last stitches upon her needle, and looked down over the river, where a little sail-boat was trying to beat up to the village with a breeze so light as to seem the mere ghost of a wind. The story of the hapless loves of her son and Edith Grayman was sure to be touched upon some time in the course of every afternoon when she and Hannah sat together, and she was conscious of having to-day a fresh item to add to the history.

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"I had a letter from George yesterday," she said, approaching her news indirectly that the pleasure of telling it might last the longer.

"Did you?" asked Hannah, almost with animation. "I want to know."

"Yes," Sarah answered, a softer look coming into her bright gray eyes. "Yes, and a good letter it was."

"George was always a master hand at writin'," Hannah responded. "He is a regular mother's son. He would n't tell a lie to save his right hand."

"No," Sarah responded, understanding perfectly that this apparently irrelevant allusion to the veracity of her son had a direct bearing upon the difficulties which had beset his wooing; "when Mr. Grayman asked him if he had been makin' love to Miss Edith, he never flinched a mite. He spoke up like a man. There never was a Souther yet that I ever heard of that 'u'd lie to save himself."

She laid her knitting down upon her lap and fixed upon the little boat a regard which seemed one of the closest attention, yet which saw not the white sloop or the dingy sail with its irregular patch of brown. Some tender memory touched the eternally young motherhood in her aged bosom, and some vision of her absent son shut out from her sense the view of the realities before her.

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"He would n't 'a' been his mother's son if he had 'a' lied," Hannah remarked, with a sincerity so evident that it took from the words all suspicion of flattery.

"Or his father's either," Sarah said. "I never set out that Phineas had much go to him, but he was a good man, and he was as true as steel."

"Yes," her sister assented, as she would have assented to any proposition laid down by Mrs. Souther, "yes, he was that."

They sat for a moment in silence. Sarah resumed her knitting, and once more became conscious of the lagging sloop.

"That's likely Ben Hatherway's boat," she remarked. "If he don't get on faster, he'll get caught in the turn of the tide and carried out again."

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Hannah glanced toward the boat in a perfunctory way, but she was too deeply interested in the theme upon which the talk had touched to let it drop, and her mind was hardly facile enough to change so quickly from one subject to another.

"What did George say?" she asked. "You said it was a good letter."

"Yes," the mother answered, "it was a regular good letter, if I do say it that had n't ought. He's comin' home."

"Comin' home?" echoed Hannah, in a twitter of excitement. "I want to know! Comin' home himself?"

"I dunno what you mean by comin' home himself," Sarah replied, with a mild facetiousness born of her joy at the news the letter had brought; "but 't ain't at all likely he'll come home nobody else. He's comin', 't any rate. It'll be curious to see how him and Miss Edith 'll act. It'll be ten years since they said good-by to one another, and ten years is considerable of a spell."

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"Happen he'll be changed," Hannah observed. "Ten years does most usually change folks more or less."

"Happen," Sarah responded, in a graver and lower tone, "he'll find her changed."

As if to give opportunity for the testing of the truth of this remark, the slight figure of Edith Grayman at that moment appeared at the head of the steep and crooked stairway which led from the chambers of the old house into the kitchen close by the porch door. She was a woman whose face had lost the first freshness of youth, although her summers counted but twenty-seven. Perhaps it was that the winters of her life had been so much the longer seasons. There was in her countenance that expression of mild melancholy which is the heritage from generations of ancestors who have sadly watched the wasting of race and fortune, and the even more bitter decay of the old order of things to which they belong. She was slender and graceful in shape, with a stately and gracious carriage, and the air of the patrician possibly a faint shade too marked in her every motion.

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As she came slowly down the time-stained stairway, her fair hair twisted high upon her shapely head, her lips slightly pressed together, and her violet eyes pensive and introspective, Edith might have passed for the ghost of the ancestress whose rejuvenated gown of pale blue camlet she wore.

The long shadows of the lugubrious Lombardy poplars had already begun to stretch out in far-reaching lines, as if laying dusky fingers on the aged mansion, and the sun shone across the river with a light reddened by the autumn hazes. The knitters, as they turned at the sound of Edith's footfall, shone in a sort of softened glory, and into this they saw her descend as she came down the winding stair.

"Father is asleep," Miss Grayman said, stepping into the porch with a light tread. "I am going down to the shore for a breath of air before the night mist rises. You will hear father's bell if he wakes."

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She moved slowly down the path which led toward the river, and the regards of the two old women followed her as she went.

"She is a born lady," Sarah said, not without a certain pride as of proprietorship.

"She is that," Hannah acquiesced. "Does she know he's comin'?"

"I just ain't had the sponce to tell her," was the response. "Sometimes 't seems just as though I'd ought to tell her, and then agen 't seems if 't would n't do no kind or sort of good. Two or three times she's sort of looked at me 's if she had an idea something was up, but even then I could n't bring it out."

"When 's he comin'?"

"Any day now. He was in Boston when he wrote, and he's likely to be on the boat 'most any day."

Hannah laid down her knitting for a moment in the breathless excitement of this announcement. The romance of young George Souther and Edith Grayman had thrilled her as nothing in her own experience could have done, so much more real and so much more important were these young people to her mind than was her own personality. For ten years the tale, brief and simple though it was, had for her been the most exciting of romances, and the possibility of the renewal of the broken relations between the lovers appealed to her every sense.

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The story of the ill-starred loves of the young couple was really not much, although the two gossips knitting in the sun had spun its length over many a summer's afternoon. Young, lovely, and lonely, Edith Grayman had responded to the love of the manly, handsome son of her nurse as unconsciously and as fervently as if the democratic theories upon which this nation is founded had been for her eternal verities. She had been as little aware of what was happening as is the flower which opens its chalice to the sun, and the shock of discovery when he dared to speak his passion was as great as if she had not felt the love she scorned. Indeed, it is probable that the sudden perception of her own feelings aroused her to a sense of the need she had to be determined, if she hoped to hold her own against her lover's pleading. She was beset within and without, and had need of all her strength not to yield.

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"She gave in herself ten years ago," Sarah commented, following the train of thought which was in the mind of each of the sisters as they watched Edith's graceful figure disappear behind a thicket of hazel bushes, turning russet with the advance of autumn. "She stood out till that night George was upset in that sail-boat of his and we thought he was never comin' to. It makes me kind o' creepy down my back now to recollect the screech she give when she see him brought in; an' mercy knows I felt enough like screechin' myself, if it had n't 'a' been for knowin' that if I did n't get the hot blankets, there wa'n't nobody to do it. She could n't deny that she was in love with him after that."

"But she sent him off," interposed Hannah, in the tone of one repeating an objection which persistently refused to be explained to her satisfaction.

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"Yes," Sarah returned; "that's what you always say, when you know as well 's I do that that was to please her father; and there he lies bed-rid to-day just as he did then, and just as sot in his way as ever he was."

The pair sighed in concert and shook their gray heads. Of the real significance of the romance which lay so near them they were almost as completely ignorant as was the great yellow cat, who opened his eyes leisurely as Hannah let fall her ball of yarn, and then, considering that upon the whole the temptation to chase it was not worth yielding to, closed the lids over the topaz globes again with luxurious slowness. Themselves part of the battle between the old order and the new, the good creatures were hardly aware that such a struggle was being waged.

"She said," Sarah murmured, bringing forward another scrap of the story, "that she never 'd marry him 's long 's her father objected, and if I don't know that when once Leonard Grayman 's sot his mind on a thing to that thing he 'll stick till the crack o' doom, then I don't know nothin' about him; that's all. She won't go back on her word, and he won't let her off, and that's just the whole of it."

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"No," Hannah agreed, sniffing sympathetically, "they won't neither of 'em change their minds; that you may depend upon."

"He'd object if he was in his coffin, I do believe," Sarah continued, with a curious mixture of pride in the family and of personal resentment. "The Graymans are always awful set."

"George must be considerable rich," Hannah observed, in a tone not without a note of reverence; "he's sent you a power o' money, first and last, ain't he?"

"Considerable," the other replied, with conscious elation. "I never used none of it. He kept sendin' till I told him it wa'n't no manner o' mortal use; the family would n't let me use it for them, and I had more 'n I knew what to do with anyway. I've got more 'n 'nough to bury me decenter 'n most folks."

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"Yes, I s'pose y' have," Hannah assented.

The knitters sat silent a little time, perhaps reflecting upon the thoughts which the mention of the last rites for the dead called up in their minds. The shadows were growing longer very fast now, and already the afternoon had grown cooler.

Suddenly a step sounded on the graveled walk, and a firmly built, handsome man of thirty-two or three came around the house and neared the porch where the old women sat.

"George!" cried old Sarah, so suddenly that the cat sprang up, startled from his dreams of ancestral mice. "Where on earth did you come from?"

"I want to know!" Hannah exclaimed, rather irrelevantly, in her excitement dropping a stitch in her knitting.

She was instantly aware of the misfortune, however, and while the mother and son exchanged greetings after their ten years' separation, Hannah occupied herself in endeavors to pick up the loop of blue yarn which her purblind eyes could scarcely see in the dimming light. When the stitch had been secured, she proffered her own welcome in sober fashion, being, in truth, somewhat overcome by this stalwart and bearded man whom she remembered as a stripling. The two women twittered about the robust newcomer, who took his seat upon the porch steps, pouring out each in her way a flood of questions or exclamations to which he could hardly be expected to pay very close attention. [105]

After a separation of ten years the greetings were naturally warm, but the Southers were not a folk given to demonstrativeness, and it was not to the surprise of Mrs. Souther that before many minutes had passed her son said abruptly:—

"Where is she?"

"There, there," his mother said, in a tone in which were oddly mingled pride, remonstrance, and fondness, "ain't you got over that yet?"

"No," he responded briefly, but laying his hand fondly on that of his mother. "Where is she?" [106]

"Like as not she won't see you," his mother ventured.

"She sent for me."

The two women stared at him in amazement.

"Sent for you?" they echoed in unison, their voices raised in pitch.

"Yes," he said, rising and throwing back his strong shoulders in a gesture his mother remembered well. "I don't know why I should n't tell you, mother. She said she had been proud as long as she could bear it."

The situation was too overwhelmingly surprising for the women to grasp it at once. Their knitting lay neglected in their laps while they tried to take in the full meaning of this wonderful thing.

"It is n't her pride," old Sarah said softly. "'T 's his; but she would n't say nothin' against her father if she was to be killed for it."

"Is she in the house?" he asked.

"No; she 's down to the shore," his mother answered, with a gasp. [107]

At that moment sounded from the house the tinkle of a bell. The two women started like guilty things surprised.

"Oh, my good gracious!" ejaculated Hannah under her breath.

"What is that?" demanded George.

"That's his bell," Mrs. Souther answered. "He wants me. You need n't mind."

"But he must have heard—" began Hannah breathlessly. Then she stopped abruptly.

"Do you think he heard me?" George asked.

"Oh, he 'd wake up about this time anyway," his mother said. "Besides," she added, with a novel note of rebellion in her voice, "what if he did? You have a right to come to see me, I should hope."

Again the bell tinkled. Old Sarah turned to go into the house.

"You'll find her down to the shore," she repeated.

He turned away at her word, and with long, rapid strides took the path which Miss Edith had taken earlier. The mother paused to look at him from the threshold. Hannah knitted on with a feverish haste and a frightened countenance. For a third time the bell called, now more imperatively, and Sarah mounted the crooked stairway followed by the frightened gaze of her sister. [108]

In the cool and shaded chamber into which Sarah went, a chamber fitted with high-shouldered old mahogany furniture, the youngest piece of which had known the grandfathers of the withered

old man who lay in the carved bed, the air seemed to her electric with dreadful possibilities. Mr. Grayman was sitting up in bed, his scant white locks elfishly disheveled about the pale parchment of his face, his eyes unnaturally bright.

"Where have you been?" he demanded, with fierce querulousness. "Why did n't you come when I rang?"

She did not at first reply, but busied herself with the medicine which it was time for him to take.

"Whose voice did I hear?" the old man demanded, as soon as he had swallowed the teaspoonful of liquid she brought him. [109]

"Hannah is here," she answered briefly.

"But I heard a man's voice," he continued, his excitement steadily mounting. "I know who it was! I know who it was!"

"Lie down," his nurse said sternly. "You know the doctor said your heart would n't stand excitement."

"It was George!" he exclaimed shrilly. "He's an impudent—" A fit of gasping choked him, but he struggled fiercely to go on. "If she speaks to him, if she looks at him even, I'll curse her! I'll curse her! I'll come back from my grave to—"

A convulsive gasping ended the sentence. He tore at his throat, at his breast, he struggled dreadfully. Old Sarah supported him in her arms, and tried to aid him, but nothing could save him from the effect of that paroxysm. With one tremendous final effort, the old man threw back his head, drew in his breath with a frightful gasp, then forced it out again in the attempt to utter a last malediction. [110]

"Curse—" The shrill word rang through the chamber, but it was followed by no other. A strong, wrinkled hand, a hand that for a lifetime had worked faithfully for him and his, was pressed over his mouth. He choked, gasped, and then the male line of the Grayman family was extinct.

In the meantime Hannah had been sitting on the porch, knitting like an automaton, and staring at the yellow cat with eyes full of dazed terror. She heard the disturbance in the chamber above, but it came to her very faintly until that last shrill word rang down the ancient stairway. Then she dropped her knitting in complete consternation.

"Oh, goodness!" she said aloud. "Oh, goodness gracious me!"

She was swept away completely by the sudden turmoil which had come to trouble the peaceful afternoon. With the leveling tendencies of modern days Hannah had become in a way familiar, as she had for a time lived at a distance in a town of some size, and of late years in the village, where the unruffled existence of the old Grayman place might almost seem as remote as the life of another century. But Hannah never made any application of modern principles to "the family." The Graymans were an exception to any rules of social equality or democratic tendency. The presumption of her nephew in raising his eyes to Miss Edith had always been all but incredible to the simple old soul; and to understand that a lady of the Grayman stock could for a moment have entertained feelings warmer than those of patronage for a Souther was utterly beyond Hannah's power. She had heard George say that Miss Edith had sent for him; but she had understood it no more than she would have understood a vision of the Apocalypse. The slow steps by which the girl had come to be in revolt against the family traditions, to be ready to abandon her heart-breaking resolutions, and to summon her lover, could have been made credible to old Hannah only on the theory of madness. She sat there in the silence which had followed that shrill cry from the chamber of death, dazed and half cowering, unable to think or to move. [111]

At last she saw George Souther returning alone by the river-path. The brightness was gone from his face, and his lips were contracted sternly. [112]

"She 's sent him away again," Hannah West said within herself. "She had to."

The universe seemed to her to be righting itself again. Some monstrous aberration might for a moment have come upon Miss Grayman, but the stars in their courses were not more steadfast than the principles of the blood. Hannah breathed more freely at the sight of her nephew's drawn face. She wished him no ill, but she could not regard this desire of his as not unlike that of a madman who would pluck the moon from the sky. She instinctively accepted his evident failure as a proof that sanity still existed in the world, and that the moral foundations of society were still undestroyed. [113]

"Where is mother?" George asked abruptly, as he came upon the porch.

"She ain't come down yet," Hannah answered, her thin hands going on with the knitting like a machine.

"I don't think I'll wait," he said simply. "She'll understand."

But at that instant the figure of his mother appeared on the stairway. She came out upon the porch, bent, gray, cowering. As her eye caught the face of her son, however, she straightened herself and a new look came into her eyes.

"Where is Miss Edith?" she asked abruptly.

George came to her and took her hand gently.

"Mother," he said, "you must n't blame her. She can't break her father's heart. She has sent me away again."

His mother looked at him quietly, but with eyes that shone wildly.

"You need n't go," she announced calmly. "He is dead."

"Dead!" echoed her son.

"Dead!" cried Hannah shrilly.

"Yes," Sarah responded, with increasing calmness. "He had one of his paroxysms. The doctor said he'd go off in one of them. You'd better go to Miss Edith and tell her."

Hannah rose from her chair as if the feebleness of age had come upon her suddenly.

"The doctor said he must n't be excited," she quavered. "Did he know George was here?"

The son, who had half turned away, wheeled back again.

"Was that what killed him?" he demanded.

Old Sarah straightened herself with a supreme effort. The very strain of uttering a falsehood and of the dreadful secret which must darken her soul for the rest of her life gave to her words an added air of sincerity.

"He did n't know," she said. "He went off as peaceful as a child."

Her son waited for nothing more, but once more hastened down the river-path. Hannah stood as if transfixed.

"But, Sarah," she said, "I heard—"

Sarah looked at her with a wild regard. For a moment was silence.

"No," she said, "you heard nothing. He did not say it!"

She leaned against the doorpost and looked at her right hand strangely, as if she expected to see blood on it. Then she stood erect again, squaring her shoulders as if to a burden accepted.

"Be still," she said. "They're coming."

Mechanically old Hannah, bowed and bewildered, began to do up her knitting in the fading autumnal afternoon.

"It is growing chilly," she muttered shiveringly.

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A COMEDY IN CRAPE

"For my part," observed Mrs. Sterns stoutly, turning the seam of the flannel shirt she was making for some unknown soldier, "I don't believe any one of the three was ever really engaged to Archie Lovell. He went round with all of them some, of course; but that was n't anything—with him."

A murmur from the group about her told at least of sympathy with her point of view, and assent showed itself in the remark with which Mrs. Small continued the conversation.

"It's awful easy for a girl to put on mourning when a man's dead, and say she's been engaged to him; but if any one of 'em had been engaged to Archie Lovell while he was alive, she'd have bragged enough of it at the time."

The murmur of assent was more pronounced now, and one or two of the members of the Soldiers' Aid Society expressed in word their entire agreement of this opinion. The ladies who made up the society usually improved the opportunities afforded by their meetings to discuss all the gossip of Tuskamuck, and the matter which they were now talking over in the corner of Dr. Wentworth's parlor was one which had caused much excitement in the little community. It was in the days of the Civil War, and anything connected with the soldiers aroused interest, but a combination of romance and gossip with a tragedy in the field contained all the elements of the deepest sensation. News had come after the battle of Chickamauga of the death of Archie Lovell, and although this was followed by a vague rumor that he might perhaps be among the missing rather than the killed, it had never been really disproved. As time had gone on without tidings of the missing man, his death had been accepted, and even his aunt, Old Lady Andrews, whose idol he had been, and who clung to hope as long as hope seemed possible, had given him up at last. She had ordered a memorial stone to be placed in the village graveyard, and the appearance of the marble tablet seemed in a way to give official sanction to the belief that Archie Lovell would never again carry his bright face and winning smile about the village streets, and that nevermore

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would he drive the gossips of Tuskamuck to the verge of desperation by flirting so markedly with a dozen girls that they could by no means keep track of him or decide what his real preference—if he had one—might be.

Whatever loss the gossips sustained by his death, however, was soon made up, for no sooner was the news of his loss known than three girls, one after the other, announced their engagement to the dead hero, and one after the other donned widow's weeds in his memory. So many girls had been the recipients of Archie's multifarious attentions that it would have been easy for almost any one of Tuskamuck's maidens to bring forward such a claim with some show of probability; but unfortunately, by the end of 1863 too many damsels had done this sort of thing for the posthumous announcement of an engagement to be received with entire solemnity or assured credence. A sort of fashion of going into mourning for dead soldiers had set in, and undoubtedly many a forlorn damsel by a tender fiction thus gratified a blighted passion which had never before been allowed to come to light. Cynic wits declared that it added a new terror to a soldier's death that he could never tell who would, when he was unable to deny it, claim to have been betrothed to him; and when, as in the present case, three disconsolate maidens wore crape for the same man, the affair became too absurd even for the responsive sympathies of war-time.

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"The way things are going on," observed Mrs. Drew, a stern woman with a hard eye, "the men are getting so killed off that the only satisfaction a girl can get anyway is to go into mourning for some of 'em; and I don't blame 'em if they do it."

The quality of the remark evidently did not please her hearers, who could hardly bear any slightest approach to light speaking concerning the tragedy in which the nation was involved.

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"If it was any one of the three," Mrs. Cummings declared, after a brief silence, "it was Delia Burrage. He used to go round with her all the time."

"No more 'n he did with Mattie Seaton," another lady observed. "He used to see Mattie home from singing-school most of the time that winter before he enlisted."

"Well, anyway, when Delia presented the flag to the company the night before they went off, he was with her all the evening. Don't you remember how we had a supper in the Academy yard, and—"

"Of course I remember. I guess I was on the committee; but he used to go with Mattie lots."

"He sent Mary Foster that wooden chair he carved in camp," spoke up another lady, coming into the field as a champion of the third of the mourners who were so conspicuously advertising their grief to an unbelieving world.

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"Well, that was a philopena; so that don't count. She told me so herself."

The case was argued with all the zeal and minuteness inseparable from a discussion at the Tuskamuck Soldiers' Aid Society, and at last, when everybody else began to show signs of flagging, a word was put in by Aunt Naomi Dexter. She had throughout sat listening to the dispute, now and then throwing in a dry comment, wagging her foot and chewing her green barège veil after her fashion, and looking as if she could tell much, if she were but so disposed. Aunt Naomi scorned sewing, and was the one woman who was privileged to sit idle while all the others were busy. She never removed her bonnet on these occasions, the fiction being that she had only dropped in, and did not really belong to the society; but gossip was to Aunt Naomi as the breath of her nostrils, and she would have died rather than to absent herself from a company where it might be current.

"I don't know how many girls Archie Lovell was engaged to," she now remarked dryly. "I dare say he did n't himself; and for all I know, he was engaged to all three of those geese that are flying the black flag for him. But I can tell you the girl he really wanted to marry, and she is n't in black, either."

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The ladies all regarded her with looks of lively curiosity and interrogation; but she rolled the sweet morsel of gossip under her tongue, and evidently had no intention of being hurried.

"Who is it?" Mrs. Cummings demanded at length, in a tone which indicated that no more trifling would be endurable.

Aunt Naomi moistened her lips with an air like that of a cat in contemplation of a plump young sparrow.

"I don't see who there is that's any more likely to have been engaged to him than Mattie," the champion of that young lady asserted combatively.

"He'd no more have married her than he would me," Aunt Naomi asserted contemptuously.

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"Who was it, then?" Mrs. Smith demanded impatiently.

Aunt Naomi looked about on the eager faces, and seemed to feel that interest had been brought up to its culmination point so that it was time to speak.

"Nancy Turner," she pronounced briefly.

The name was received with varying expressions of face, but few of the ladies had any especial comment to offer in word. Some scorned the idea, and the champions of the three mourners still

stood by their guns; but the new theory plainly had in it some force, for the women were all evidently impressed that in this suggestion might lie the real solution to the vagaries of Archie Lovell's multitudinous wooing. As Mrs. Cummings said, however, Nancy Turner was a girl who kept her own counsel, and if she had indeed been engaged to the missing soldier, nobody would ever be the wiser for it. It was discouraging to the gossips to be confronted with a mystery which they could have so little hope of ever solving, and the talk gradually turned to other topics, this one remaining as available as ever to be taken up whenever conversation might languish.

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The Sunday following this meeting of the Soldiers' Aid Society was a warm and beautiful spring day, which invited to the open air. Public morality in Tuskamuck was narrow in its interpretations, and among other restrictions it imposed was the impropriety of walking on Sunday except by strolling in the village graveyard. The theory, if carefully investigated, would have been found, in all probability, to have its roots in some Puritan notion that youth in its thoughtlessness would be sobered and religiously inclined by the sight of the grassy mounds, the solemnly clumsy mortuary inscriptions, and the general reminders of death. In practice the fact did not entirely justify such a theory, for the graceless young people instinctively sought for amusement rather than for spiritual enlightenment, chatted and laughed as loudly as they dared, examined the epitaphs for those that might by any distortion of their original intent be made ludicrous, and exchanged jokes in most unsabbatical fashion. They even indulged thoughtlessly, in the very midst of these grim reminders of a life wherein is neither marriage nor giving in marriage, in little rustic flirtations, and eagerly picked up morsels of gossip by sharp observation of young couples strolling oblivious of watching eyes among the graves.

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To-day the desire to see the newly set stone which had been placed over the empty mound which was to preserve the memory of Archie Lovell attracted an unusually large number of village folk to turn into the graveyard after afternoon service, and an exciting whisper had gone about that the three disconsolate betrothed damsels had all come to church with flowers. The little groups drifted slowly through the weatherbeaten gate behind the church, but the very first of them were deterred by seeing a black-robed figure laying already her bunch of geraniums on the grave. Delia Burrage, who sang in the choir, had, as was afterward told from one end of the town to the other, slipped down the gallery stair without waiting for the benediction, and so had managed to be first in the field.

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The gathering groups of villagers had hardly time to note with what tender care the bereft Delia arranged her bunch of scarlet blossoms at the foot of the still snowy marble slab than they were set aquiver with delicious excitement by the sight of a second crape-enshrouded figure that came to the spot, also bearing flowers. Mary Foster carried in her black-gloved hands a cluster of white pyrethrums, a favorite house-plant in Tuskamuck. Miss Foster came up on the side of the mound opposite to the first comer, and humbly laid her offering below the red geraniums; but although she was thus forced to place her flowers farther from the stone than the other, she was evidently determined not to be outdone in devotion. She fell on her knees, and bowed her face in her handkerchief in a grief so dramatic that Miss Burrage was left far behind, and had no resource but to come to her knees in turn, in a weak imitation of her rival.

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The spectators were by this time in a sort of twitter of gratified excitement, and exchanged many significant looks and subdued comments. Those boldest pressed nearer to the scene of action, keenly curious to hear if word passed between the bereaved ladies. Excitement rose to its highest when slowly down the long path came Martha Seaton, more voluminously draped in sable weeds than either of the others. She carried a wreath of English ivy, and a sort of admiring shudder ran through the neighbors as they saw that to this funeral wreath Miss Seaton had sacrificed the growth of years of careful window gardening.

"My! She 's cut her ivy!" one of them gasped.

"Why, so she has! Well, for the land's sake!" responded another, too much overwhelmed to speak coherently.

"Trust Mattie Seaton for not letting anybody get ahead of her!" a third commented, in accents of admiration.

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Human curiosity could not keep aloof at a moment such as this, and as Mattie advanced toward the Lovell lot, the neighbors followed as if irresistibly impelled. They closed in a ring around the spot when she reached it, and they looked and listened with an eagerness so frank as almost to be excusable. They could see that the earlier comers were watching from behind the handkerchiefs pressed to their eyes, and with the approbation which belongs to a successful dramatic performance the audience noted also the entire coolness with which Miss Seaton ignored them until she stood close to the drooping pair. Then she flung back her long veil of crape with a sweeping gesture, and with a regal glance of her gypsyish black eyes looked first at them and then at the flowers.

"Oh, thank you so much for bringing flowers," she said, in a voice evidently so raised that her words should be distinctly heard by the ring of spectators. "Archie was so fond of them!"

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The words gave no chance of reply, and an audible chuckle arose from the listening throng, so obviously had her tone and manner made the other mourners outsiders. When Mattie slowly and deliberately moved around the headstone until she stood behind it, hung her wreath on its rounded top, and bowed her head upon it with her handkerchief covering her eyes, she had completely taken possession of the whole situation. As one of the young men of the town

inelegantly observed, she was "boss of that grave and the others did n't count." As if in a carefully planned *tableau vivant*, she stood, a drooping figure of anguish, while the other two had become merely kneeling ministrants upon her woe.

"Well, if that ain't the beatin'est!" chuckled old Ichabod Munson, puckering his leathery face into an ecstasy of wrinkles. "Gosh, I wish Archie Lovell could see that. He'd be 'most willin' to get kilt for a sight o' his three widders, an' that Seaton girl comin' it so over t' others." [133]

"He'd think he was a Mormon or a Turk," observed Miss Charlotte Kendall, with her deep, throaty chuckle that not even the solemnity of the graveyard could subdue. "He'd see the fun of it. Poor Archie! He did love a joke."

The situation over the tombstone was one from which retreat to be effective must be speedy. Mattie Seaton was apparently the only one to appreciate this. But for a few moments did she remain with her forehead bent to the slab; then she kissed the cold marble feverishly; and in a voice broken, but still in tones easily audible to the listening neighbors, she said to the kneeling girls:—

"Thank you so much for your sympathy;" and before they could reply she had dropped again the cloud of crape over her face, and was moving swiftly away up the path to the gate.

Never was exit more dramatically effective. The pair left behind exchanged angry glances, then with a simultaneous impulse started to their feet, and as quickly as possible got away from the sight of their fellow townfolk. They might be silly, but they were not so foolish as not to know how ridiculous they had been made to look that afternoon. [134]

It was only a few days after this that the village was stirred by the news that Old Lady Andrews, who so mourned for Archie, who had adored the handsome, good-natured, selfish, flirtatious dog all his life, had gone South in the hope of recovering his remains, and of bringing them home to rest beneath the stone she had erected. The village pretty generally sympathized with the desire, but thought the chance of success in such a quest made the undertaking a piece of hopeless sentiment. The time since the news of Archie's death was already considerable, his fate from the first had been uncertain, and the chances of the identification of his grave seemed exceedingly small.

"I figure Ol' Lady Andrews would 'a' done better to stay to hum," 'Siah Appleby expressed the sentiment of the town in saying. "Like's not 'f she finds out anythin' certain,—which 't ain't all likely she will,—she'll find Archie was just hove into a trench 'long with a lot more poor fellers, an' no way o' sortin' out their bones short o' the Day o' Judgment. She'd sot up a stone to him, 'n' she'd a nawful sight better let it go at that." [135]

The sentiment of the matter touched some, but the years of war had brought so much of grief and suffering that most had settled into a sort of dull acquiescence unless the woe were personal and immediate. The neighbors sympathized with the feeling of grief-stricken Old Lady Andrews, but so many husbands and fathers, brothers and sons and lovers, had vanished in unidentified graves that the nerves of feeling were benumbed. It would in the early years of the war have been unbearable to think of a friend as lying in an unnamed grave in the South; now it seemed simply a part of the inevitable misery of war.

The "three widows," as the village folk unkindly dubbed them, were less in evidence after the episode in the graveyard. They avoided each other as far as possible, and were evidently not unaware that they were not taken very seriously by their neighbors. They perhaps knew that jests at their expense were in circulation, like the grim remark of Deacon Daniel Richards, that he did not see how any one of them could claim more than a "widow's third" of Archie's memory. They kept rather quiet, at least; and the weeks went by uneventfully until the departure of Old Lady Andrews again drew attention to the story. [136]

The old lady went alone, and once gone she sent no word back to tell how she fared on her quest. Now that her nephew was missing, she had no immediate family; and she wrote to none of her townfolk. The spring opened into summer as a bud into a flower, and life at Tuskamuck went on with its various interests, but no one was able to do more than to speculate upon her movements or her success.

One afternoon in June the Soldiers' Aid Society came together for its weekly gathering in the vestry. The meeting had been appointed at the house of the Widow Turner, but Nancy Turner had been suddenly called out of town, and her mother, somewhat of an invalid, had not felt equal to the task of entertaining without her. The bare room, with its red pulpit and yellow settees, had a forlorn look, despite the groups of busy women and girls scattered over it; but its chilling influence could not check the flow of conversation. [137]

"Did you hear where Nancy Turner's gone?" one woman asked of the group in which she sat. "She must have gone very suddenly."

"I understood there was sickness somewhere," another responded vaguely.

"Maybe it's her aunt over at Whitneyville," a third suggested. "Mis' Turner told me in the spring she was real feeble."

"Mis' Turner herself 's real frail. She did n't feel well enough to come this afternoon."

"Where 's Aunt Naomi?" inquired Mrs. Cummings. "It's 'most five o'clock, and she almost always comes about three."

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"Oh," responded Mrs. Wright, with a laugh and her quick, bright glance, "you may depend upon it she's getting news somewhere. She'll come in before we go home, with something wonderful to tell."

As if in intentional confirmation of the words, Aunt Naomi at that moment appeared in the doorway. Her shrewd old face showed satisfaction in every wrinkle, and from beneath the unflinching veil of green barège draped from her bonnet over the upper left-hand corner of her face her eyes positively twinkled. She took a deliberate survey of the room, and then with her peculiar rocking gait moved to the group which had been discussing her absence.

"Good afternoon, Aunt Naomi," Mrs. Cummings greeted her. "We were just wondering what had become of you."

"And I said," put in Mrs. Wright audaciously, "that you must be getting some wonderful piece of news."

Aunt Naomi hitched up her shawl behind with a grasshopper-like motion of her elbows, and sat down with a wide grin.

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"Well, this time you were right," she said. "I was hearing Old Lady Andrews tell about her trip."

"Old Lady Andrews?" echoed the ladies. "Has she got home?"

"Yes; she got here this noon."

"And nobody but you knew it!" ejaculated Mrs. Cummings.

They all regarded Aunt Naomi with undisguised admiration, in every look acknowledging her cleverness in discovering what had been hid from the rest of the village. She smiled broadly, and seemed to drink in the sweet odor of this surprise and their homage as an idol might snuff up grateful fumes of incense.

"Did she bring home the body?" Mrs. Cummings asked after a moment, in a voice becomingly lowered.

"Yes, she did," Aunt Naomi answered, with a chuckle of levity which seemed almost indecent. "She had a dreadful time finding out anything; but she had friends at Washington—her husband had cousins there, you know—and at last she got on the track."

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"Where was he buried?"

Aunt Naomi paused to wag her foot and to nibble at the corner of her green veil in a way common to her in moments of excitement. She looked around in evident enjoyment of the situation.

"He was n't buried anywhere," she said, with a grin.

"Why not?" demanded Mrs. Wright excitedly.

"Because he was n't dead."

"Was n't dead?"

"No; only taken prisoner. He was wounded, and he's been in Libby."

"How is he now?"

"Oh, he's all right now. He's coming over here to show himself, and see his friends."

The words were hardly spoken when in the doorway appeared the well-known figure of Archie Lovell. He wore the uniform of a lieutenant, he was pale and worn, but handsomer than ever. On his arm was a blushing damsel in a hat with a white feather, her face all smiles and dimples. An exclamation went up from all over the room.

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"Why, it's Archie Lovell!"

It was followed almost immediately by another:—

"And Nancy Turner's with him!"

"No; it's Nancy Lovell," announced Aunt Naomi, in a voice audible all over the vestry. "They were married in Boston."

The bridal couple advanced. All about the room the ladies rose, but instead of greeting the newcomers, they looked at the "three widows," and waited as if to give them first an opportunity of accosting their mate, thus returned as if from the very grave, and so inopportunistically bringing another mate with him. Miss Burrage and Miss Foster shrank from sight behind the backs of those nearest to them; but Mattie Seaton swept impulsively forward with her hand extended cordially. Her crisp black hair curled about her temples, her eyes shone, and her teeth flashed between her red lips.

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"Why, Archie, dear," she said, in her clear, resonant voice, "we thought we had lost you forever. We all supposed you were dead, and here you are only married. Let me congratulate you, though

after being engaged to so many girls, it must seem queer to be married to only one!—and you, Nancy,” she went on, before Archie could make other reply than to shake hands; “to think you got him after all, just because you went ahead and caught him! I congratulate you with all my heart; only look out for him. He’ll make love to every woman he sees.”

She bent forward and kissed the bride before Mrs. Lovell could have known her intention, and turned quickly.

“Come, Delia,” she called across the vestry; “come, Mary! There’s nothing for us to do but to go home and take off our black. We may have better luck next time!”

With this ambiguous observation, which might have been construed to cast rather a sinister reflection upon the return to life of the young lieutenant, she swept out of the vestry, complete mistress of the situation; and although Archie Lovell always strenuously denied that he had ever been engaged to any woman besides the one he married, a general feeling prevailed in Tuskamuck that no girl could have carried it off with a high hand as Mattie did, if she had not had some sort of an understanding to serve her as a support.

But never again while the Civil War lasted did a girl in Tuskamuck put on black for a lover unless the engagement had been publicly recognized before his death.

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A MEETING OF THE PSYCHICAL CLUB

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The meeting of the Psychical Club had been rather dull, and it was just as the members were languidly expecting an adjournment that the only interesting moment of the evening came. The papers had been more than usually vapid, and, as one man whispered to another, not even a ghost could be convicted upon evidence so slight as that brought forward to prove the existence of disembodied visitants to certain forsaken and rat-haunted houses. At the last moment, however, the President, Dr. Taunton, made an announcement which did arouse some attention.

“Before we go,” he said, smiling with the air of one who desires it to be understood that in what he says he distinctly disclaims all personal responsibility, “it is my duty to submit to the Club a singular proposition which has been made to me. A gentleman whom I am not at liberty to name, but who is personally known to many—perhaps to most—of you, offers to give to the Club an exhibition of occult phenomena.”

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The members roused somewhat, but too many propositions of a nature not dissimilar had ended in entire failure and flatness for any immediate enthusiasm.

“What are his qualifications?” a member asked.

“I did not dream that he possessed any,” Dr. Taunton responded, smiling more broadly. “Indeed, to me that is the interesting thing. I had never suspected that he had even the slightest knowledge or curiosity in such matters, and still less that he made any pretensions to occult powers. The fact that he is a man of a position so good and of brains so well proved as to make it unlikely that he would gratuitously make a fool of himself is the only ground on which his proposition seems to me worth attention.”

“What does he propose to do?”

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“He does not say.”

“He must have given some sort of idea.”

“He said only that he was able to perform some tricks—experiments, I think, was his word; or no—he said demonstrations. He thought they would interest the members.”

“Did he say why he offered to do them?”

“No further than to observe not over politely that he was weary of some of the nonsense the Club circulated, and that he would therefore take the trouble to teach them better.”

The members smiled, but some colored a little as if the touch had reached a spot somewhat sensitive.

“It is exceedingly kind of him,” one elderly gentleman remarked stiffly.

“He is explicit in his conditions,” the President added.

The members were beginning to seem really awake, and Judge Hobart asked with some quickness what the conditions were.

“First,” the President answered, “that his identity shall not be revealed. I am not to tell his name,

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and he trusts to the honor of any member who may recognize him. A meeting is to be appointed when and where we please. He is to know nothing more than the time. I am to send a carriage for him, to provide certain things of which he has given me a list, to arrange a room according to his directions, and to give him my word that no record of the meeting shall appear in the newspapers."

"Are the things he wishes difficult to procure?"

"This is the list," said Dr. Taunton, taking a paper from his pocket. "You will see that they are all sufficiently simple.

"Two rings of iron, four or five inches in diameter, interlocked and welded firmly.

"A ten-inch cube of hard wood.

"A six-inch cube of iron.

"A sealed letter, written by some member.

"A carpenter's saw.

"A gold-fish globe ten inches or so across.

"Three smaller globes, one filled with red, one with blue, and one with a colorless liquid.

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"A scale on which a man may be weighed.

"A stick of sealing-wax.

"A flower-pot filled with earth.

"An orange seed."

"The articles are simple enough," Judge Hobart commented. "Are the arrangements required difficult?"

"No. He asks for a committee to examine him in the dressing-room; a platform insulated with glass and some substance he will furnish, and a little matter of the arrangement of lights that is easy enough."

The members of the Club meditated in silence for a moment, and then Professor Gray spoke.

"It must depend, it seems to me," he said, "on the sort of a man your mysterious magician is. If he is a person to be trusted, I should say go ahead."

"He is a gentleman," the President answered; "a man of social standing, money, education, and with a reputation in his special branch of knowledge both here and in Europe. If I named him, you would, I feel sure, give him a hearing without question."

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"What is his specialty?" one member inquired.

"I hardly think it would be fair for me to tell. It would possibly be too good a clue to his identity."

"Is it fair to ask if it is connected with any psychical branch?"

"Not in the least. I think I said at the start that I never suspected him of any interest in such subjects. He was asked to join this Club, and declined."

"Did he give any particular reason?"

The President smiled satirically.

"He said it would never accomplish anything."

"Perhaps that shows his common sense," Judge Hobart observed dryly. "I am bound to say that it has not accomplished much thus far. What I do not understand is why at this late day he takes an interest in our work."

"He did n't go into that. He did not seem especially anxious. He merely told me that he was willing to show the Club certain things, and named his conditions. That is about the whole of it."

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"Well," observed Judge Hobart, with his air of burly frankness, "I vote we have him. The only reason for shying off is that so many fellows, otherwise sensible, lose their heads the moment they try to investigate anything psychical."

"Is that a reflection on our Club?" Professor Gray asked good-naturedly.

In the end the decision was that the President should be instructed to make arrangements with the unknown, and an evening was chosen for the meeting. The place was left to the President, to be imparted to the members confidentially on the day appointed. Then the gentlemen went their several ways, each, except the President who knew, speculating upon the possible identity of the mysterious wonder-worker.

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When the clock struck eight on the evening appointed, the members of the Club were all present. The room to which they had been summoned by Dr. Taunton was simply furnished with a table, before which the seats were arranged in a semicircle, and behind which was a small platform on which stood a single chair. This platform was raised on blocks of glass, above which were thin slabs of a substance which to the eye seemed like a sort of brown resin, in which were to be discerned sparkles of yellow, as of minute crystals. The chair was in turn insulated in the same manner, while before it for the feet of the performer was placed a slab of glass covered with the same resinous substance. On the chair lay a thick robe of knitted silk. Beneath the table was a trunk containing the articles of which the President had read a list at the previous meeting.

The members examined everything and handled everything except the platform and the chair upon it. These they were especially requested not to touch. At five minutes past eight a carriage was heard to stop outside, and almost immediately the President came in. [155]

"The gentleman is in the dressing-room," he said, "and is ready for the examining committee. If the members will be seated, we shall be prepared to receive him."

The members took their seats, and there was a brief interval of silence. Then Judge Hobart and Professor Gray, who had gone to the dressing-room, reëntered. Between them was a tall man, well formed, rather slender, but showing in his figure some signs of approaching middle age. He wore simply a single garment of knit silk. It was laced in the back, and fitted him so tightly that the play of his muscles was as evident as it would have been in a nude figure. His face was covered down to the lips by a black mask of silk.

The unknown stepped out of the loose slippers he wore, mounted the platform, put on the silk robe, and sat down in the chair. Judge Hobart made a formal statement that the performer—that their guest had neither properties nor apparatus concealed about his person. Then he sat down, and silence filled the room. [156]

"We are ready," President Taunton said.

The stranger smoothed from his lips the smile which had curled them when Judge Hobart so nearly spoke of him as the "performer." He rose, and stood on the slab before his chair.

"I must say a word or two by way of preface," he began, in a voice cultivated and pleasant. "In the first place, I have no concealed motive in coming here to-night. I am not even—as I shall convince you before we are done—gratifying my vanity by advertising my powers. It has seemed to me that the Club is not on the right track, and although in one sense it is none of my business, I am interested in the subject which it is, as I understand, the object of this body to investigate. The paper by Judge Hobart in a recent number of the 'Agassiz Quarterly' decided me to show to him that certain forces which he conclusively proves to be non-existent do, nevertheless, exist. As I am personally known to perhaps half the gentlemen in the room, and am likely to meet some of them not infrequently, I take the liberty of asking that if any one shall chance to recognize me, he will remember that I come on the condition that my identity remain concealed. The President," he continued, "will bear me out when I say that I have not seen the things provided for use this evening, and that I had no knowledge of the place appointed for the meeting. The dressing-gown I sent him because the scantiness of my dress makes it rather a necessity. I presume that he has examined it carefully enough to be sure that it is innocent of witchery and of trickery." [157]

He paused for a moment, and then in a tone somewhat more determined went on.

"One thing I must add. I decline to answer any questions whatever in regard to the means which produce the effects to which I shall call your attention. Those from whom I have learned would be sufficiently unwilling that I exhibit my power at all, and were there no other reason, their wishes would be sufficient to prevent me from offering information or explanation. I may not succeed in doing all that I shall attempt. I have laid out a pretty serious evening's work, especially for one who lives as I do amid unfavorable conditions; and of course I can receive no assistance from my audience." [158]

He took off the dressing-gown and dropped it into the chair. Then he removed from his finger a large seal ring, and laid it between his feet on the resinous slab.

"I wish to show you first," the stranger said, "that if I chose, I could manage to deceive you into thinking that I accomplished much that I did not really do. For instance, I perhaps at this moment look to you like an elephant."

The members of the Psychological Club gasped in astonishment. Surely upon the platform stood a large white elephant, twisting his pink trunk.

"Or a palm tree," they heard the voice of the stranger say. [159]

No; not an elephant stood on the platform, but a tall and graceful date-palm, crowned with a splendid cluster of spreading fronds.

"Or Dr. Taunton."

The members looked in amazement from the figure of the President sitting in his chair, twirling his gold eye-glasses with his familiar gesture, and his double on the platform, as faithful as a reflection in a mirror, doing the same thing.

"But all this is mere illusion," the voice went on; "I am none of these things."

Once more they saw only the silken-clad figure, tall and supple, smiling under the black mask.

"What I profess to do," the speaker continued, "I shall really do, and not depend upon cheating your senses. I shall hope to leave you proofs and evidences to establish this completely. The difficulty of the different expositions of force is not to be judged by appearances. First, for instance, I shall show you an exceedingly simple and easy thing. It has come to be customary, for some foolish reason, to speak of these phenomena as illustrations of the 'fourth dimension.' The term, I suppose, is as good as another, since it certainly conveys no definite idea whatever to people in general. I will ask a couple of gentlemen to take a pair of interlocked iron rings that I suppose are among the articles prepared, and to bring them to me. I do not wish to leave my insulation, as in later trials I shall need all my force."

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The rings were taken from the trunk and brought forward. They were of iron as thick as a man's thumb, were linked together, and firmly welded. To pull them apart would have been impossible for teams of strong horses. By the direction of the stranger they were held before him by the two gentlemen.

"I have asked Dr. Taunton," he said, "to have the rings privately marked, so as to insure against any possible suspicion of substitution. I have never seen them."

He leaned forward, and laid his hand lightly on the junction of the rings. They fell apart instantly. Both were unbroken; and neither gave the slightest appearance of strain or rupture. A murmur of surprise circled the room, and then the members of the Club broke into hearty applause.

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The stranger laughed frankly.

"I thank you, gentlemen," he said good-humoredly; "but I am not a juggler."

He asked next for the cube of wood and for the sealed letter.

"I have never seen either of these," he said, the phrase being repeated almost with a mechanical indifference. "I suppose that the President or the person who wrote the letter can identify the note wherever he finds it."

At his direction President Taunton held up before him the cube with the letter lying upon it. The stranger laid his hand over the letter, and then showed an empty palm toward the audience.

"You see I have not taken the letter," he said. "If the saw is there, please cut the block in two in the middle. Cut it across the grain."

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While the sawing was going on, the magician put on his wrap and sat down. He resumed his signet ring, and sat with his head bowed in his hands. When the block had been divided, the ends of the letter, cut in halves, appeared in the midst of the wood.

"I think," the stranger said, "that the two halves of the note will slip out of the envelope without difficulty, and Dr. Taunton will then be able to say whether it is the original letter or not."

The president with a little trouble pulled out the pieces of paper and fitted them together. He examined them critically, even using a pocket-glass.

"If I had not been deceived earlier in the evening, and if I did not know that it is wildly impossible," he said, "I should say that this is my letter."

"I believe because it is impossible," quoted the stranger. "You may keep the pieces and decide at your leisure."

He rose as he spoke, and once more threw off his robe. The Club waited breathless. He again placed the ring between his feet.

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"I wish now," he said, "the three globes filled with colored fluid."

These were brought to him on a tray, and at his bidding placed close together in a triangle.

"This is only another of the innumerable possible variations upon the penetrability of matter, and would come under the head in common nomenclature of that stupidly used term 'fourth dimension.' I said that I am not a juggler, but of course I chose some of the tests because they are picturesque, and so might amuse an audience. See."

He laid his hand upon the top of the three globes. Instantly they became one by intersection, the three bases being moved nearer together. Each globe preserved perfectly its shape, and in the divisions now made by the coalescing of the section of one sphere with that of another the liquid was of the hue resulting from a mingling of the colors of the differently tinted fluids.

A murmur went around. Several of the members rose to examine the globes.

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"Put them on the table," the wonder-worker said, "and then everybody may see."

"We are not to ask questions of methods," Judge Hobart observed. "Is it proper to inquire whether the experiment involves a contradiction of the old law that two bodies cannot occupy the same space?"

"Not at all," was the answer. "Modern science has shown clearly enough that to seem to occupy space is only to fill it as the stars fill the sky. I have only taken advantage of that fact to crowd

more matter into a defined area.”

The members were asked to seat themselves, and when this had been done, the stranger said: “Any number of examples of this power could be given, but these should be enough, unless some one would prefer to improvise a test on the spot.”

“I am glad that you say this,” Professor Gray remarked. “I am subject to the prejudice, foolish enough but common, of being more impressed by experiments of my own contriving. Do you mind, sir, if Dr. Taunton and I loop handkerchiefs together, and let you separate them while we hold the ends?”

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“Certainly not,” was the reply.

The experiment was instantly successful, and was repeated for double assurance.

“If we had nothing else to do,” the stranger observed, “we might go on in this line indefinitely; but this is enough of the ‘fourth dimension,’ so called. Now we will try development.”

III

The flower-pot filled with earth was placed upon the slab at the feet of the magician. The orange seed was laid upon the earth.

“So ingenious an explanation has recently been given—or, more exactly, recently revived—of the development of a plant from a seed, that you may suppose me to have all the different pieces of an orange grove concealed about me, despite the fact that my dress is not adapted to the concealment of a needle. However, you may judge for yourselves.”

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He leaned forward, and with the point of his finger pushed the seed into the earth.

“Will some one cover the pot with a handkerchief?” he said. “Please be careful not to touch me or it. Hold the handkerchief out, and drop it.”

One of the members followed the directions, and for a moment the stranger sat quiet, his eyes fixed on the covered flower-pot. The centre of the handkerchief was seen gradually to rise, and when the cloth was lifted, the astonished eyes of the Club beheld a glossy shoot, three or four inches in height. Without again covering it, the magician continued to gaze fixedly upon the plant. Before the eyes of the spectators the shoot became a shrub, the shrub a tree; the fragrance of orange blossoms filled the air, and among the shining leaves began to swell the golden fruit. The time had been numbered only in minutes, yet there stood a tree higher than a man’s head, and laden with golden globes.

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“Take it away,” the wonder-worker said, “and let me rest a little before I try anything more. You will find the tree to-morrow, and I think you will concede that it is too bulky to have been concealed under these fleshings. If you think it only an optical delusion or the result of hypnotism, try to-morrow by the senses of persons who do not know how it was produced.”

He sat for some moments with his head bowed in his hands. Then at his direction a globe about a foot in diameter was filled with clear water and placed on the table. The lights were then turned down so as to leave all the room in shadow except the platform.

“I must ask you to be as quiet as possible,” the magician requested. “The experiment is a difficult one, and from living in the atmosphere which surrounds my daily life I am out of the proper condition.”

Putting his hands behind him, he sank downward on the slab to his knees, and so reached forward as to press his thumbs upon his great toes. The position was a singular one, and earlier in the evening might have raised a smile. Now all was breathless silence for a couple of moments. Then the stranger sprang suddenly to his full height, and directed his forefinger with a violent movement toward the globe. A spark of violet light not unlike that from an electric battery flashed from the outstretched finger to the globe, and was seen to remain like a star in the midst of the water.

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From this violet centre, with slow, sinuous movement, numerous filaments of light grew out in the liquid, until the globe was filled with tangled and intertwined threads like the roots of a hyacinth in its glass. Slowly, slowly, the nucleus rose to the surface, dragging the threads behind it. Then above the water began to form a faint haze. With gradual motion it mounted, absorbing by degrees the fire from the phosphorescent fibres which served for its roots, until a faintly luminous pillar of dully glowing mist four or five feet high showed above the mouth of the globe.

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The magician made strange gestures, and a slow rotary motion was discerned in the cloud. Without abrupt or definitely marked alteration the pillar was modified in shape until more and more plainly was evident a resemblance to the human form. He rose to his full height, and extended both his hands toward the figure. Slowly it detached itself from the water and from the globe, and floated in the air, the perfect shape of a woman, transparent, faintly luminous, but with a lustre less cold than at first. One of the men drew in his breath with a deep and audible inspiration. The shape wavered, and another spectator impulsively cried “Hush!” The word seemed to break the spell. The wonderful visionary form trembled, shivered, and its exquisite beauty melted in the air.

The magician resumed his seat with visible disappointment.

"I am sorry," he said. "I am already tired, and you distracted my attention. The experiment has failed. May the lights be turned up, please."

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A murmur of disappointment ran around the room.

"I am sorry," he repeated. "I should have impressed on you more strongly the need of absolute quiet. I am not quite up to beginning this over again. Let me show you the opposite—disintegration. It is easier to tear down than to build up."

The block of iron he had asked for was by his direction laid on the floor in front of the platform. The magician sat for a moment with closed eyes, his hands laid palm to palm upon his knees. Then with an abrupt movement he pointed his two forefingers, pressed together, toward the cube. A report like that of a pistol startled the members, and the solid iron shivered into almost impalpable dust. The members of the Club crowded together to the spot.

"Please do not touch my platform," he requested, as he had earlier in the evening. "I must still show you something more."

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IV

"Levitation is a phenomenon which is common enough," he said by way of preface, "but our examination would by no means be complete without it. Of course I am only touching upon a few of the less subtle principles that underlie what is commonly misnamed occultism; but this is one of the obvious ones. Please let some heavy man step upon the scales."

Judge Hobart was with some laughter persuaded to take his place upon the platform of the scales, and the indicator marked a weight of two hundred and six pounds.

"Will you look again?" the stranger asked of the gentleman who had read the number.

"Why, he weighs nothing!" the weigher exclaimed, in astonishment.

"His weight has broken the scales," another member declared.

"You may think," the magician went on, "that I have bewitched the spring. Will somebody lift the Judge?"

Professor Gray, who happened to stand nearest, put out one hand and picked the venerable Judge up as easily as he would have lifted a pocket-handkerchief. As he took his victim by the collar, the effect did not tend toward solemnity.

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"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the Judge. "Put me down, sir, at once."

The stranger made a little sign with his hand. The Professor saw and understood, so instead of putting Judge Hobart down, he lightly tossed the rotund figure upward. The Judge, probably more to his amazement than to his satisfaction, found himself floating in the air with his head against the ceiling, and with his legs paddling hopelessly as if he were learning to swim. The other members shouted with laughter.

"That will do," the magician said. "I did not mean to turn things into a farce."

The ponderous form of Judge Hobart floated softly to the floor; his face showed a wonderful mixture of bewilderment, wounded vanity, and relief.

"It's very warm at the top of the room," he said, wiping his red forehead; "very warm. Heat rises so."

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"Other things rise also at times," somebody said.

Everybody laughed, and then the members settled into quiet again, and listened to the magician.

"Examples of this sort are infinite in number, but one is as good as many. The principle is everywhere the same. Levitation is really too simple a matter to occupy more of our time. The transporting of matter through space and through other matter is more interesting and more important. It is also more difficult, and consequently less common. Some time ago it was proposed in London, as a test of the reality of occultism, that a copy of an Indian paper of any given date be produced in London on the day of its publication in Calcutta. The test was shirked by those who are advertising themselves by pretending to powers which they did not have, and those who were able to do the feat had no interest in helping to bolster up a sham. That the thing was easily possible is the last fact with which I shall trouble you to-night. Allow me to offer you a copy of the 'London Times' of this morning."

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As he spoke, a newspaper fluttered from the air above, and fell upon the table. The stranger checked a movement which Judge Hobart made to examine it.

"Let me seal it first," he said. "It will make future identification surer. Please lay it with that stick of sealing-wax on the platform."

When this had been done, he took the wax and held it above the paper. The wax melted without visible cause, and dropped on the margin of the journal. Leaning forward, the magician pressed

his seal into the red mass, and then flung the paper again on the table.

"It will be easy," he remarked, "to compare this with a copy received through the ordinary channels. You do not need to be instructed in the means proper for securing and identifying this. The experiment may seem to you a simple one, but I assure you that it is so difficult that you cannot hope to repeat it without preparation you would find pretty severe."

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He rose as he spoke, and drew his robe about him.

"I have to thank you," he continued, "for your patience and attention. As I meet so many of you not infrequently, it is better to trust to your courtesy not to name me than to your ignorance."

He pulled off, as he spoke, the black mask, and with cries of surprise more than half the members of the Club called out the name of one of the best-known club men of the town, a man who had traveled extensively in the East, a man who had proved his powers by distinguished services in literature, a man of wealth and of leisure, and one of dominating character. Smiling calmly, he replaced the mask, and stood a moment in silence.

"That is all," he said.

Then, with a peculiar gesture he waved his arms over the company, and repeated a few words in some unknown tongue. He stepped down from the platform and walked quietly from the room. But by that gesture or spell he had strangely wrought upon their minds; from that moment no man of them all, not even the President, has ever been able to remember who was their acquaintance who that evening did such wonders in the sight of the astonished Psychological Club.

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TIM CALLIGAN'S GRAVE-MONEY

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I

"'T was a fool's notion to get tipped out of a boat anywhere," said Tim Calligan to his circle of fellow pensioners at the Dartbank poor-farm, "me that's been on the water like a bubble from the day me mother weaned me, saints rest her soul, and she as decent a woman as ever was born in County Cork."

Tim was relating the oft-told tale of his escape from drowning, a story of which they were fond, and which he delighted to tell. The old man had a fertile Celtic fancy, and his narrations were luxuriant with exuberant growth.

"So there was meself drownin' like a blind kitten in a pond,—and many 's the litter of 'em I'd sent to the cat's Purgatory by the way of that very river, saving that the Purgatory of cats there ain't any, having no souls, by the token that having nine lives they'd belike have nine souls, and being so many they'd crowd good Christian souls in Paradise,—blessings on the holy saints for previnting it."

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"No more could I make me head stay out of water," Tim went on, "than if it was a stone. 'Good-by, Tim, me boy,' sez I to meself. 'Ye're gone this time,' sez I, 'and I'll miss nothing in not being at yer wake, by the token that there won't be no wake; and ef there was,' sez I, still to meself, 'there could be nothing to drink but water here in this cursed stream.' And down I went again, like a dasher in a churn. 'Holy St. Bridget,' thinks I, 'how far 'll it be to the bottom of this ondecient river. Likely it goes clean through to Chiny,' thinks I, 'and one of them bloody, onbelaving heathen 'll be grabbing me presently with his mice-eating hands. But it's better being pulled out by a heretic heathen than staying in and soaking.' With that up again I goes, like a shellaly at a fair; and it was like fire flashing in me eyes. Sez I to meself: 'That 'll be Widdy Malony's bit of a house,' sez I, spaking always in me mind because of the floods of water in me mouth. 'It'll be burning to the very ground,' sez I, 'and me missing all the fun of it. The blessed saints help the poor woman, turned out of house and home to get bite and sup for her children like a chipmunk, and every one of them taking after Dennis, and I might have married her meself long ago if they was fewer, for I'd want a ready-made family small,' sez I to meself, plunking up and down in the water like a dumpling in the broth. "'T is pitiful to think of her house burning down over her head,' sez I, 'and she never to know the man might have made her Mis' Calligan's down here drowning in plain sight of the very flames of it, and she nor nobody doing one thing to save him, praise be to the handiworks of God. Faith, and 't would be better for the both of us if she had more water and meself more fire,' sez I in me mind. And all the time 't was no fire, but just the blessed sun I'd never see again, barring I had n't got saved, and it shining and flashing in the eyes of me from the widdy's windows."

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The tale was long, for it included an enumeration of all the sensations and emotions which Tim had really experienced, and all those which, in the course of long years, he had been able to imagine he might have felt. As at the poor-farm time was not an object, however, except of slaughter, the length of the narrative was its greatest recommendation.

"And with that," Tim at last ended his recital, "I felt the whole top of me head pulled off as I lay soft and easy on the bottom of the flood, and thinking nothing at all, but reflecting how soft the mud of it were and pitying Pat Donovan that he'd never get the quarter I owed him. 'That 'll be a Chany-man or the Divil, Tim, me boy,' sez I to meself; and then I made no more observes to meself at all, owing to the soul having gone out of me body. And all the time it was Bill Trafton catching me by the hair, him having dove for me just shortly after me being dead, and dragging me to the top when I could n't be moved from the bottom, and was likely to die any minute, saving that it was dead already I was. And he saved me life, by the token that the soul had gone out of me peaceful; but, Holy Mother, how'll I be telling ye the pain of its coming back! 'T was like the unwilling dragging back of a pig out of a prairie patch to get the soul of me back from the place it had gone to, and they rubbing me to show it the care they'd take of me, and coaxing it for two mortal hours."

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As the tale ended, the bleared eyes of one of the auditors were attracted to a light wagon which had turned into the lane at the foot of the long slope upon which the poor-house stood.

"Somebody 's comin'," old Simeon observed deliberately. "Likely it's the new Overseer."

"Yes, that's him," Tim assented. "That's Dan Springer."

"I 'spected he was a-comin'," Grandsire Welsh commented, with a senile chuckle. "Huldy and Sam's been a-slickin' up things."

"Huldy and Sam," in more official language Mr. and Mrs. Dooling, were the not unworthy couple who had the poor-farm in charge.

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"Wa'n't you sayin' t'other day," asked old Simeon, "thet you particular wantid to see the Overseer?"

"It's pining for him I am the time," Tim answered.

The old men sat silent, watching the approach of the visitor, who drove up to the hitching-post near them, and who leaped from his wagon with a briskness almost startling to the aged chorus.

"Spry," old Simeon commented. "I've seen the time, though, when I was spry too."

Springer fastened his horse, and came toward them.

"How d' do, boys?" he said cheerily. "How goes it?"

The contrast between his great hearty voice and the thin quavers in which they answered him was pathetic. He lingered a moment, and then turned to make his way into the house. Tim rose and hobbled rheumatically after him.

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"Whist, Mister Springer," he called; "would ye be after waiting a wee bit till I have a word of speech with yer."

"Well, what can I do for you?" Springer asked good-naturedly. "Don't they treat you well?"

The old man took him by the arm and drew him around the corner of the house, away from the curious eyes of his companions.

"Whist!" he said, with a strange and sudden air of excitement. "Wait till I'm after telling yer. Your honor'll mind I'm after *trusting* yer; *trusting* yer, and ye'll no be betraying an old man. It's meself," he added, with a touch of pride at once whimsical and pathetic, "is ninety-three the day."

"Are you as old as that? Well, I'd keep your secret if you were twice as old," Springer returned, with clumsy but kindly jocoseness.

Tim raised himself until he stood almost upright.

"It's the money," he whispered, "the money I've saved for me burying."

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He turned to stretch his thin, bloodless finger toward the bleak cluster of mounds on the hillside where mouldered the dead of the poor-farm.

"I'll no lie there," he said, with husky intensity. "I've scraped and scraped, and saved and saved, and it's the wee bit money I've got to pay for a spot of consecrated ground over to Tiverton. Ye'll no put me here when I'm gone! I'll no rest here! Me folks was respectable in the Old Isle, an' not unbeknowing the gentry; and there's never a one put outside consecrated ground. Ye'll promise me I'll be put in the graveyard over to Tiverton, and me got the money to pay."

Springer was as unemotional and unimaginative as a hearty, practical, well-fed man could be, but seeing the tears in the old pauper's bleared eyes, and hearing the passion of his tone, he could not but be moved. He had heard something of this before. His predecessor in office had mentioned Tim, and his twenty years' saving, but so few were the chances a pauper in Dartbank had of picking up even a penny that the hoard even of so long a time could not be large. Now and then some charitable soul had given the old man a trifle. A vague sympathy was felt for the pathetic longing to be assured of a grave in consecrated ground, even among the villagers who regarded the idea itself as rank superstition.

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"It's all right, Tim," the Overseer said. "If you go off while I have the say, I'll see to it myself. If you'd be any more comfortable over in Tiverton, we'll plant you there."

"Thank yer honor kindly," Tim answered. "The Calligans has always been decent, God-fearing folks, and it's meself'd be loth to disgrace the name a-crawling up out of this unholy graveyard forby on Judgment Day, and all the world there to see, and I never could do it so sly but the O'Tools and the O'Hooligans 'd spy on me, and they always so mad with envy of the Calligans they'd be after tattling the news all over Heaven, and bringing shame to me whole kith and kin."

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The Overseer laughed, and responded that if Tim had laid by the money to pay for the job, he would certainly see that the grave was made in the consecrated earth of Tiverton churchyard. Then with a brisk step he passed on to attend to the sordid affairs of his office within. The most troublesome matter was left until the last.

"As to the Trafton child," he said to Huldy and Sam, "I don't see that anything can be done. I've spoken to the Selectmen about it, and they don't think the town should be called on to pay out twenty-five dollars when here's a place for the child for nothing."

"That's just what I told Louizy," Huldy responded. "I said that's what they'd say; but Louizy 's dretful cut up."

Springer moved uneasily or impatiently in his seat, so that the old wooden chair creaked under the weight of his substantial person.

"I know she is," he said; "if I could afford it, I'd send the child to her folks myself; but I can't, and I don't see but the girl's got to go to 'Lizy Ann Betts. Perhaps she won't be so hard on her."

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"Hard on her," sniffed Huldy; "she'll just kill her; that's all."

At the word a wretched-looking woman pushed into the kitchen as if she had been listening at the door. She held out before her a right hand withered and shriveled by fire.

"Oh, Mr. Springer," she broke out, tears running down her cheeks, "don't send my Nellie to be bound to that woman! She's all I've got in the world; and she never wanted till I was burned. Send her to my folks in Connecticut and they'll treat her as their own."

She sank down suddenly as if her strength failed, and sat stiff and despairing, with eyes of wild entreaty.

"It's hard, I know," Springer answered awkwardly, "but Nellie'll be near you, and she would n't be in Connecticut. 'Lizy Ann Betts ain't a bad-hearted woman. She'll do well by the child, I hope."

"She'll do well?" the mother cried shrilly, raising herself with sudden vehemence. "Did she do well by the last girl was bound to her from this farm? Did n't she kill her?"

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"There, there, Louizy," interposed Huldy, "it ain't no sort of use to make a fuss. What the S'lectmen say they say, and—"

She was interrupted by a cry without, and in an instant the door was flung open by old Simeon, who with wildly waving arms and weirdly working face cried out:—

"F' th' Lord's sake! Come quicker 'n scat! Old Tim's in a fit!"

II

The account old Simeon and Grandsire Welsh gave of Tim's seizure was that he had been sitting outside the kitchen window, where they all were listening with interest to the conversation within, when suddenly he had thrown up his arms, crying out that he could not do it, and had fallen in a fit. No one at the poor-farm could know that Tim had reached the crisis of a severe mental struggle which had been going on for days. He had for days listened to the bitter words of Mrs. Trafton, and had sympathized with her grief over her child; and all the time he listened he had been secretly conscious that the little hoard he had gathered for his burying would save Nellie from the Betts woman, a shrew notorious all over the county for her cruelty. He remembered that Bill Trafton had saved him from drowning; that Mrs. Betts had the credit of having caused the death of her last bound child; and against this he set the terror of rising at the Resurrection from the unblest precincts of the Dartbank Potter's Field. The mental conflict had been too much for him, and the appeal of Mrs. Trafton to the Overseer had broken old Tim down.

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Tim was got to bed, and in time recovered his senses, although he was very weak. Mrs. Trafton volunteered to watch with him that night, and so it came about that at midnight she sat in the bare chamber where old Tim lay. As the hours wore on Tim seemed much brighter, and asked her to talk to him to while away the time. The only subject in her mind was her child.

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"If Nellie was with my folks," she said, "I'd try to stand being away from her; but it's just killing me to have that Betts woman starve her and beat her the way she's done with the others. She'd kill Nellie."

Tim moved uneasily in bed.

"But ye'd be after seein' the child here," he muttered feebly.

"I'd see her no more'n if she was with my folks," returned Louizy bitterly; "but I'd know how she was suffering."

The sick man did not answer. He turned his face to the wall and lay silent. After a time his

regular breathing showed that he slept, while the watcher brooded in hopeless grief. At length Tim grew restless and began to mutter in his sleep.

"The poor creature's having a bad dream," Louizy said to herself, as his words grew more vehement and wild. "I wonder if I'd better wake him."

She was still debating the matter in her mind when Tim gave a sudden cry and sat up in bed, trembling in every limb. His face was ghastly.

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"Oh, I will, I will!" he cried out. "I will, so help me Holy Mary!"

"Tim, Tim, what's the matter?" asked the nurse.

The old man clutched her hands desperately for a moment, and then seemed to recover a little his reason. He sank down again and closed his eyes. For a time he lay there silent. Then he said with strange solemnity:—

"'T is a vision meself has had this night, Louizy."

She thought his mind still wandering, but in a moment he went on with more calmness: "I'll tell it to ye all, Louizy. Give me a sup till I get strength. I'm no more strong than a blind kitten that's just born."

She gave him nourishment and stimulant, and Tim feebly and with many pauses told his dream. The force of a natural dramatic narrator still shaped his speech, and as he became excited, he spoke with more and more strength, until he was sitting up in bed, and speaking with a voice more clear than he had used for many a day.

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"But it was a fearsome dream's had holt on me the night. 'T is meself's been palarvering with the blessed St. Peter face to face and tongue to tongue; and if I'd ought to be some used to it through having been dead once already by drowning, this time I was broke up by being dead in good earnest, by the same token that when St. Peter set his two piercing black eyes on me, I could tell by the look of 'em that it was straight through me whole body he was seeing.

"And the first thing I knew in my dream I was going all sole alone on a frightsome road all sprinkled over with ashes and bones, and I that crawly in my back I could feel the backbone of me wiggling up and down like a caterpillar, so my heart was choking in my throat with the fear of it. And I went on and I went on; and all the time it was in the head of me there was that coming behind was more fearsome than all the bones and skelingtons forninst. And I went on and I went on, seeming to be pushed along like, and not able to help meself; and all the time something was creeping, and creeping, and creeping behind, till all the blood in my body was that chilled the teeth of me chattered. And I went on and I went on till I could n't stand it one mortal minute more; but I had to turn if the life went out of me for it. And there behind was a mite of a girl, a wee bit thing, thin and starved looking, and seeming that weak it was pitiful to see. 'Poor thing,' sez I to my own ghost, 'it's pitying her the day is Tim Calligan, if I be him,' sez I, 'and not some other body, for having no body perhaps I ain't anybody at all, but just a spook in this place that ain't nowhere.' And all the time I was that scared of the wee bit child, being as it were where it could n't be, and me dead before it and it dead behind me, and always following and following; so without thinking deeply what was to be done, I starts up and runs as hard as my legs that was turned into ghost shanks would let me. And I run through them ashes, stumbling on bones and seeing shadows that would get in the way and I had to run through 'em, and the weight of the horror of it words would n't tell.

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"And when I run, the wee bit child run; and it scared me worse than ever when the further I run away from it the closer it was to me, till at last it had a grab on the tail of my coat; and it clung on, and I that mad with fear I had no more sense than a hen with its head cut off and goes throwing itself round about for anger at the thought of being killed, and not knowing it is dead already. And oh, Louizy, the scaresomeness of the places I run through a-trying to get rid of that wee bit thing! It's downright awful to think of the things that can happen to a dead man while he's alive all the time and forgetful of it through dreaming!

"So when I'd been going on till mortal man could n't stand it no longer, let alone a ghost, there I was just forninst the gate of Heaven, not in the least knowing how I come there or would I get in; and blessed St. Peter himself on a white stone outside the gate sitting and smiling and looking friendly so the terror went out of me like a shadow in the sun. And I scraped my foot, and I went up close to him, standing that way would I hide the child ahind of me; for sez I to meself: 'What'll I say to his Reverence and he axes me about the girl?' And St. Peter he sez to me, mighty polite and condescending: 'Good-morning,' sez he. 'The top of the morning to your Reverence, and thank ye kindly,' sez I. 'And what'll be your name?' sez he. 'Tim Calligan, your honor,' sez I, answering as pert as ever I could; for there was that in his manner of speaking that made me feel shivery, as if me heart'd been out all night in a snowstorm. 'It's a decent, respectable body I am, your Reverence,' sez I, 'though I say it as should n't, having nobody else at hand that would put in a word for me.' 'And was ye buried in holy ground?' sez he. 'I was that,' sez I; 'and many's the weary year I've been scraping to do that,' sez I. 'And what'll that be behind ye?' sez he. And I looked this way and that way, trying to make as if I did n't know; and at last I pretended to spy the child, and to be that surprised he could n't suspect I ever clapped eyes on the wee bit thing before. 'That, your Reverence,' sez I, 'has the look of a scrap of a girl. Is it one your Reverence is bringing up?' sez I, being that desperate I was as bold as a brass kettle. 'And what'll she be doing here?' sez his Reverence, paying no heed to the impertinence of the question. 'Sure, how'll I

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know that?' sez I. 'Will she be coming with you?' sez he. 'Don't she belong hereabouts?' sez I, trying hard to brazen it out, and feeling my heart go plump down out of my mouth into my boots, more by token that I was barefoot the time. 'Will she be coming with you?' sez he again. 'Sorra a bit,' sez I; 'I just could n't get away from her,' sez I. 'And what for'll you be trying to get away from her, and her no bigger than a bee's knee?' sez he, looking at me so hard that I could n't hold up my face forninst him. 'Well, your Reverence,' sez I, looking down at the stones, and seeing the weeds trying to grow between them in the very face of Heaven itself, 'it's inconvenient traveling with a child anywhere, let alone the ondecient places I've been through this night; and the girl was n't mine, and I might get blamed for keeping her out late, with her folks getting scared about her, not knowing where she was, and not understanding she was where your Holiness would be after caring for her.' And with that St. Peter put out his hand, looking that sharp his eyes went through me like needles; and he pulled the wee bit child from behind me, and he sez to her: 'What is the name of yer?' 'Nellie,' sez she, her voice so thin you could n't hear it, only knowing what she said from the moving of her lips like shadows on the wall. 'And how came you here?' sez he. 'I was beat and starved to death,' sez she, shivering till 't was a mercy she did n't go to pieces like a puff of smoke. And with that St. Peter looked at me once more, and the cold sweat run down my backbone like rain down a conductor in a thunder-storm. 'Your Reverence,' sez I, trembling, 'I did n't beat and starve the girl.' 'That may be,' sez he, 'but there'll be some reason why she's hanging on to your coat-tail like a burr on a dog,' sez he. 'What for are you following Tim Calligan,' sez he to the girl, 'and he dead and resting in holy ground?' And with that she put you her little front finger, that was as thin as a sparrow's claw that's starved to death in winter, and she pointed to me, and sez she: 'He would n't give the money to send me to my folks,' sez she; 'and my own father saved the life of him when he was dead and drowned before I was born,' sez she. 'What for would n't you give the money, Tim?' sez St. Peter, sitting there on that white stone like a judge trying the life of a man. 'Your Reverence,' sez I, falling down on the stones at the feet of him, 'twenty years was I struggling, and saving, and scraping to get the bit money for a grave in holy ground! If I'd give it to the child, I'd be down this blessed minute I'm having the honor of conversing with your Holiness—and it's proud I am of your condescending so far!—lying in unconsecrated ground all cheek by jowl with heretics, and like as not getting my bones mixed with theirs at the blessed resurrection. Sorra a bit did I know the suffering of this poor wee bit thing.' 'And did her father save your life?' sez he. 'He did that,' sez I, 'and a good, decent, God-fearing man he were,' sez I, 'barring he were a heretic, your Reverence, owing to his not being asked, it's likely, would he be born a good Catholic,—and I hope your Reverence ain't been too hard on Bill Trafton if he's come this way,' sez I. 'Tim,' sez St. Peter, looking at me with a look like one of the long isuckles on the north side of the barn in January,—'Tim, 't is no use trying the palarver on me,' sez he. 'Ye know ye let this child get bound to that Betts woman, and now she'll be bate to death, and who's to bear the blame if not ye that might have stopped it? Do ye think, Tim Calligan,' sez he, raising his voice so the blessed angels come a-looking over the holy walls of Heaven to see what would be the matter,—by the same token that the little gold hoops floating round their heads kept clashing together and sounding like sleigh-bells, their heads was that close together on top of the wall, and all their eyes looking at me that sorrowful like it nigh broke my heart,—'do ye think,' sez he, 'you're sleeping in holy ground when the price of the grave your worthless old carcass is in was the life of this wee bit child?' And all the angels shook their heads, and looked at me that reproachful the heart in me got so big it would have killed me with its swelling only saving that I was dead already, not to say being dead twice; and I fell to sobbing and praying to St. Peter for mercy,—and the first thing I knew I woke up in bed, praise be to the handiworks of God! made alive again, this being the third time, counting the time I was first born."

Tim's tale was long, and it was interrupted by frequent intervals of rest made necessary by his weakness. When he ended, the pale forecast of dawn shone into the squalid room. Louizy was crying softly, in the suppressed fashion of folk unaccustomed to give full vent even to grief. Tim lay quiet for a long time. At last he aroused himself to feel beneath the mattress, and to bring to light a dirty bag of denim. This he pressed into the hand of his nurse.

"It'll take you both," he murmured feebly. "Blessings go with ye, and the saints be good to the soul of Tim Calligan, coming up at the Day of Judgment like a scared woodchuck out of unblessed ground!"

III

Tim failed rapidly. The excitement of his dream and the moral struggle through which he had passed had worn upon his enfeebled powers. On the second day after his seizure the priest came from Tiverton to administer the last rites. When this was over, Tim lay quiet, hardly seeming alive. Thus he was when Springer, who drove over late in the afternoon, came in to see him.

"Tim," Springer said, "Mrs. Dooling has told me what you have done. The ground you lie in will make little difference to a man that would do a thing so white as that."

"Thank you kindly," Tim answered, in the shadow of a voice. "Father O'Connor's promised to bless my grave. It's not the same as being at Tiverton where the ground would be soaked with the blessing all round, but leastways St. Peter 'll not be after flinging it in my face that the blood of the child's on me."

The Overseer regarded him with such tenderness as did not often shine within the doors of the poor-farm.

"Tim," he said, leaning forward as if he were half ashamed of his good impulse, "don't worry any more. I'll pay for your grave at Tiverton, and see that you are put in it."

The old pauper turned upon him a glance of positive rapture. He clasped his thin, withered hands, trembling like rushes in the winds of autumn.

"Holy and Blessed Virgin," he prayed, almost with a sob, "be good to him for giving a poor old dying creature the wish of his heart! Blessed St. Peter—"

But the rush of joy was too great. With a face of ecstasy the old man died.

MISS GAYLORD AND JENNY

When Alice Gaylord was, by the death of her grandmother, set free from the long servitude of attending upon the invalid, it might have seemed that nothing need hinder the fulfilling of her protracted engagement to Dr. Carroll. The friends of both the young people expressed, in decorous fashion, their satisfaction that old Mrs. Gaylord, ninety and bed-ridden, should at last have been released, and it was entirely well understood that what they meant was to signify their pleasure at the ending of Alice's tedious waiting. Some doubt in regard to the girl's health, however, still clouded the prospect. Long care and confinement had told on her; and when a decent interval had passed after the death, and the wedding did not take place, people began to say that it was such a pity that Alice was not well enough to be married.

Dr. Carroll was thinking of her health as, one gloomy November afternoon, he walked down West Cedar Street to the house where Gaylords had dwelt from the time when West Cedar Street began its decorous existence, and where Alice declared she had herself lived for generations. He glanced up at the narrow strip of sky like dull flannel overhead, around at the dwellings like a row of proper spinsters ranged on either side of the way, and at the Gaylord house itself, a brick and glass epitome of old Boston respectability. He reflected impatiently that of course Alice could be no better until he got her out of an atmosphere so depressing. Then he remembered that he had always liked West Cedar Street, and he began to wonder whether he were not getting so morbid over Alice that some other physician should be called in.

He had long been baffled by being unable to discover anything wrong, beyond the fact that the girl was worn out with the strain of ministering to an imperious and exacting invalid. She was nervously exhausted; and he said to himself for the hundredth time that rest was the only thing needed. A few months would set everything right. The difficulty was that time had thus far not come up to what was expected of it. Carroll was forced to acknowledge that, in spite of tonics and rest, Alice was really not much better, and he had come almost to feel that the real cause of her languor and weakness was involved in teasing mystery.

The prim white door, with its fan-light overhead and the discreetly veiled side-windows fantastically leaded, was opened by Abby, a sort of housekeeper, who had the air of being coeval with the house, if not with Boston itself. George always smiled inwardly at the look with which he was received by this primeval damsel, a look of virginal primness at the idea of allowing in the house a man who was professedly a suitor, and he declared to Alice that he was still, after long experience, a little afraid of Abby's regard. To-day her customary look vanished quickly, to give place to one more vivid and spontaneous. Abby put up a lean finger, mysteriously enjoining silence, and spoke instantly in a sibilant whisper.

"Will you please come in here, sir, before you go upstairs?" she said.

She waved her thin hand toward the little reception-room, and the doctor, in mild wonderment, obeyed the gesture and entered. Abby closed the door softly, and came toward him with an air of concern.

"I must tell you, sir," the old servant said in a half voice, "a queer thing's come."

"A queer thing's come," he repeated, leaning against the mantel. "Come from where?"

"It's come, sir," repeated Abby, a certain relish of her mystery seeming to his ear to impart an unctuous flavor to her tone. "It's just come. Nobody knows where things come from, I guess."

"Oh, you mean something's happened?"

"Yes, sir; that's what I said."

"But what is it?"

"I don't know, sir; but it's queer."

He looked at her wrinkled old face, where now the mouth was drawn in as if she had pulled up her lips with puckering-strings lest some secret escape. He smiled at her important manner, and, leaning his elbow on the mantel, prepared for the slow process of getting at what the woman

really meant. It proved in the event less laborious than usual, and he reflected that the directness with which Abby gave her information was sufficient indication of the seriousness with which she regarded it.

"Miss Alice ain't right, sir. She does what she don't know."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, really startled.

"She wrote a letter to you last night, and then instead of mailing it she cut it all up into teenty tonty pieces, postage stamp and all; and then said she did n't know who did it."

Carroll stared at the woman. Whimsies and mysteries were alike so foreign to Alice that his first and natural thought was that Abby had lost her mind.

"It's true, sir, every word," Abby insisted, answering his unspoken incredulity. "She did just 's I say." [214]

"If she said she did n't know who did it," the young man said sharply, "she did n't know."

"Of course she did n't know. That 's what's queer."

"But she could n't have done it herself."

"Oh, but I saw her doing it, sir, and I wondered what was the matter with the letter; only I did n't notice the postage stamp, or I'd have spoken."

Carroll knew that Abby was as well aware as was he of Alice's invincible truthfulness, and that he had not to reckon with any unfounded suspicion of deceit. If Alice had said she did not know who destroyed the letter, then it was evident that she had done it unconsciously and in some condition which needed to be inquired into. He leaned back against the mantel, and playing absently with the dangling prisms which hung above a brazen pair of pastoral lovers on the old-fashioned candelabra, he heard Abby's story in full. Miss Gaylord had said to the servant that she was about to write the letter, and that it must be posted that evening. Going to the parlor after the note, Abby had seen her mistress cut it to pieces. The maid withdrew, supposing that for some reason the note needed rewriting; but on returning some time later, she had been met by the declaration that it was on the table. As it was not there, her mistress had joined in searching for it, but nothing could be found save the fragments in the waste-basket. Miss Gaylord had insisted that she had not cut it, and that she was entirely ignorant of how the damage had occurred. [215]

Dr. Carroll was puzzled and troubled, nor was he less so when Alice had given him her account. She did this unsolicited, and with evident frankness.

"I suppose, George," she said, "it's absent-mindedness; but if I have got so far that I don't know what I'm doing, I'd better be shut up for a lunatic at once."

"Has anything of the sort ever happened before?" he asked.

"I am not sure," was her answer; "but sometimes I've found things done that I could not remember doing: my clothes put in queer places, and that sort of thing, you know. I never really thought much about it before. You don't think—" [216]

He could see that she was seriously troubled, and he set himself to dissipate her concern.

"I think you are tired, and so you may be a little absent-minded; but I certainly do not think it's worth making any fuss about. You and Abby will have a theory of demoniacal possession soon, to account for a mere slip of memory."

He did not leave her until it seemed to him that she no longer regarded the incident seriously; but in his own mind he was by no means at ease. At the earliest moment possible he went to consult with a fellow physician who was a specialist in disorders of the nerves, and to him he told the whole case as accurately as he was able. The specialist put some questions and in the end asked:—

"Has she ever been hypnotized?"

"I'm sure she never has," Carroll answered. "She might easily be a subject, I should think. She's naturally nervous, and just now she is run down and unstrung." [217]

"It seems like a case of self-hypnotism," the other said. "Sometimes, you know, patients unconsciously hypnotize themselves, or get hypnotized, without having any idea of it."

"But would n't she know it afterward?"

"Oh, no; the second personality generally knows all about the first—"

"You mean," interrupted Carroll, "that the normal person is the first and the hypnotized is the second?"

"Yes. The personality that comes to the surface in hypnotism, the subliminal self, knows all about the normal person, but the normal person has no idea of the existence of the secondary, the subliminal personality."

"It's so cheerful to think of yourself as a sort of nest of boxes," Carroll commented grimly, "one personality inside of the other, and you only knowing about the outside box."

"Or you *being* only the outside box, perhaps," the specialist responded, with a smile. "Well, what we don't know would fill rather a good-sized book."

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The suggestion of hypnotism remained in Carroll's mind, and it was not many days before he had a sufficiently plain but altogether disagreeable confirmation of the specialist's theory. He was with Alice in the old drawing-room, a place of quaint primness, with fine, staid Copley portraits, and an air of self-respecting propriety utterly at variance with psychical mysteries. He stood gazing out of the window, while Alice moved about the room looking for a book of which they had been speaking, and his eye was caught by a sparkling point of light on the sunlit wall of the house opposite. He made some casual remark in regard to it, and Alice came to look over his shoulder.

"What is it?" she asked.

"It must be a grain of sand in the mortar, I suppose," he answered. "It is making a tremendous effect for such a little thing."

She did not answer for an instant. Then she burst into a laugh which to him sounded strange and unpleasant, and clapped her hands.

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"Well, I've come," she said joyously.

He wheeled quickly toward her. Her face seemed to have undergone a change, slight yet extraordinary. She was laughing with a glee that was not without a suspicion of malice, and she met his look with a boldness so different from the usual regard of Alice as to seem almost brazen. He could see that his evident bewilderment amused her greatly. A mischievous twinkle lighted her glance.

"Oh, of course you think I'm she; but I'm not. I'm a good deal nicer. She's a tiresome old thing, anyway. You'd like me a great deal better."

Carroll was entirely too confused to speak, but he was a physician, and could not help reflecting instantly upon the cause of this strange metamorphosis. He naturally thought of hypnotism, and he came in a second thought to realize that Alice had with amazing rapidity been sent into a hypnotic condition by looking for an instant at the glittering point on the wall of the house across the street. What the result might be, or what the words she spoke meant, he could not even conjecture.

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"Don't stare at me so," the girl went on. "I'm Jenny."

"Oh," he repeated confusedly, "you're Jenny?"

"Yes; I'm Jenny, and I'm worth six of that silly Alice you're engaged to."

He took her lightly by the shoulders and looked at her, quite as much for the sake of steadying his own nerves as from any expectation of learning anything by examination. Her eyes shone with an unwonted brightness, and seemed to him to gleam with an archness of which Alice would not have been capable. The cheeks were flushed, not feverishly, but healthily, and the girl had lost completely the appearance of exhaustion which had troubled him so long. The head was carried with a new erectness, and as he regarded her she tossed it saucily.

"You may look at me as much as you like," she said gayly. "I can stand it. Don't you think I am better looking than she is?"

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He was convinced that Alice could not know what she was saying, yet he involuntarily cried out:—

"Don't, Alice! I don't like it!"

She pouted her lips, lips which to his excited fancy seemed to have grown redder and fuller than he had ever seen them, and she made a droll little grimace.

"I'm not Alice, I tell you. Kiss me."

In all their long engagement Alice had never asked him for a caress, and the request hurt him now as something unwomanly. Instead of complying, he dropped his hands and turned away. She laughed shrilly.

"Oh, you won't kiss me? I thought it was polite to do what a lady asked! Well, if you won't now, you will some time. You'll want to when you know me better."

She moved away, but he caught her by the arm.

"Stop!" he ordered her, with all the determination he could put into the word. "Wake up, Alice! Be done with this fooling!"

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The bright face grew anxious and the pouting lips beseeching.

"Don't send me away! I'll be good! Don't make her come back!"

"Alice," he repeated, clasping her arm firmly, "wake up!"

"You hurt me!" she cried half whiningly. "You hurt me! I'll go."

The wild brightness faded from the eyes, a change too subtle to be defined seemed to come over

the whole figure, the old tired expression spread like mist over the face, and the familiar Alice stood there, passing her hand over her eyes.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a startled way. "Did I faint?"

He was conscious that his look must have alarmed her, and he made a desperate effort to speak easily and naturally.

"I guess you came mighty near it," he answered, as naturally as he could. "It's all right now."

For some days nothing unusual happened, so far as Carroll knew. He watched Alice closely, and he plunged into all the literature on the subject of hypnotism upon which he could lay hands. He was not sure that at the end of a week's hard reading he was much clearer than at the beginning, although he had at least accumulated a fine assortment of terms in the nomenclature of animal magnetism. He cautiously questioned Abby, and learned that for some time Alice had been subject to what the old servant called "notional spells when she were n't herself." His friend the specialist was greatly interested in all that Dr. Carroll could tell him about the case. [223]

"It is evidently a subliminal self coming to the surface," he pronounced. "I've seen cases somewhat similar, but only one where the patient was not hypnotized by somebody else."

"But what can I do about it?" George demanded. "I don't want any subliminal selves floating about. I want the girl I know."

"Build up her general health," the other advised. "You say she's run down and used up with taking care of her grandmother. Get her rested. That's the only thing I can say. She is n't really ill, is she?" [224]

"God knows what you call it," was Carroll's response. "She can't be called well when she goes off the way she did the other day. I tell you it was frightful, simply frightful!"

The days went on, and once more George had the uncanny experience of a chat with Jenny. Alice had been looking over some of her grandmother's belongings, and when he called, came down to him with a necklace of rhinestones dangling and sliding through her fingers.

"See," she accosted him, in the buoyant manner he remembered only too vividly, "is n't this gay? I should wear it, only I'm in her clothes, and she won't wear anything but poky black."

Carroll tried to steady his nerves against the sudden shock.

"Of course you wear black, Alice," he said; "it is only six months since your grandmother died." [225]

She made him a merry, mocking grimace.

"Now don't pretend you don't know I'm Jenny," she retorted. "I saw you knew me the minute you heard me speak. Alice! Pooh! She'd have come into the room this way."

She darted to the door and turned back, to advance with her face pulled down and her eyelids dropped.

"How do you do, dear?" she greeted him, with a burlesque of Alice's manner so droll that he laughed in spite of himself.

Jenny herself burst into a shout of merriment and whirled about in a pirouette, swinging the sparkling chain around her head.

"Is n't it fun?" she exclaimed, pausing before him with her head on one side; "she can't even look at a bright thing half a minute but off she goes, and here I am. Before I go this time, I'm going to stick up every shiny thing I can find where she'll see it."

Carroll had a sickening sensation, as if the girl he loved had gone mad before his very eyes; yet so completely did she appear like a stranger that the feeling faded as soon as it arose. This was certainly no Alice that he knew. He could not speak to her as his friend and betrothed, although it was equally impossible to address her as a stranger. He was too completely baffled and confused to be able to determine on any line of action, and she stood smiling at him as if she were entirely conscious of what was passing in his troubled brain. [226]

"Did you know I cut up her letter?" Jenny demanded, with a smile apparently called up by the remembrance.

"Yes," he answered, exactly as if the question had been put by a third person.

"It was an awfully foolish letter," the girl went on. "I won't have her writing like that to you. You've got to belong to me."

He had neither the time nor the coolness to realize his emotions, but he accepted for the moment the assumption of the individuality of Jenny.

"You are nothing to me," he said. "I am engaged to Alice." [227]

"Oh, that's all right. I know that. I know all about her; lots more than you do. But I tell you, you'd a great deal better take me. I'm just as much the girl you're engaged to as she is."

He looked at her darkly and with trouble in his eyes.

"Where is Alice?" he asked.

"Oh, she's all right. She's somewhere. Asleep, I think likely. I don't want to talk about her. I never liked her."

"Talk about yourself, then. Where are you when Alice is here?"

"Oh, that's stupid. I'd rather talk about what we'll do when we are married. Shall we go abroad right off?"

"It will be time enough to talk about that when there's any prospect of our being married."

"You would n't kiss me the other day," Jenny said, looping the necklace about his throat and bending forward so that her face was close to his.

A feeling of anger so strong that it was almost brutal came over him. He tore the necklace out of her hands and threw it across the room. Then, as on the previous occasion, he caught the girl by the wrists. [228]

"Go away!" he commanded. "Let Alice come back!"

"Oh, you hurt me!" she cried. "I can't bear to be hurt! Let me go!"

He tightened his grasp.

"If you don't go, I'll really hurt. I won't have you fooling with Alice like this."

Her glance wavered on his; then the eyelids drooped; and he loosened his hold with the consciousness that Alice had come back.

"Why, George," she said, in her natural voice; "I did n't know you were here."

He took her in his arms with a feeling as near to the hysterical as he was capable of, and then instantly devoted himself to dissipating the anxiety which his obvious agitation aroused in her.

As time went on, the appearances of Jenny became more frequent. The fact that this secondary personality had once been in control of the body which it shared with Alice seemed to make its reappearance more easy. Alice evidently became more susceptible to whatever conditions produced this strange possession. It was clear to Carroll that each time the elfish Jenny succeeded in gaining possession of consciousness,—for so he put it to himself, entirely realizing what a confusing paradox the phrase implied,—she became stronger and better able to assert herself. He grew more and more disturbed, but he was also more and more completely baffled. Sometimes the matter presented itself to his professional mind as a medical case of absorbing interest; sometimes it appealed to him as a freak of gigantic irony on the part of fate; and yet again he was swept away by love or by passionate pity and sorrow for Alice. He felt that, all unconscious of her peril,—for she knew nothing of her mysterious double,—she was being robbed of her very personality. [229]

Most curious of all was his feeling toward Jenny, who had come in his mind to represent an individual as tangible, as human, and as self-existent as Alice herself. He never allowed himself to encourage her presence, despite the fact that natural curiosity and professional interest might well make him eager to study her peculiarities. He insisted always upon her speedy departure from the body into which she had intruded herself—or so he doggedly insisted with himself—like an evil spirit. He had soon learned that her fear of physical pain was excessive; that, like the child that she often seemed, she could be managed best by dread of punishment; and he for a considerable time had been able to frighten her away by threats of hurting her. As the days went on, however, she began to laugh at his menaces, and he was obliged to resort to trifling physical force. The strong grasp on the wrists had sufficed at first, but it had to be increased as Jenny apparently decided that he would not dare to carry out his threats, and one day he found himself twisting the girl's arm backward in a determined effort to drive off this persistent ghoulish presence. The idea of injuring Alice came over him so sickeningly that, had not his betrothed at that instant recovered her normal state, he felt that he must have abandoned the field. As it was, he was so unmanned that he could only plead a suddenly remembered professional engagement and get out of the house with the utmost possible speed. [230]

There were other moods which were perhaps even worse. Now and again he was conscious of a strong attraction toward this laughing girl who defied him, looking at him with the eyes of Alice, but brimming them with merriment; who tempted him with Alice's lips, yet ripened them with warm blood and pouted them so bewitchingly; who walked toward him with the form of his betrothed, but swayed that body with a grace and an allurement of which Alice knew nothing. He felt in his nostrils a quiver of desire, and shame and self-scorn came in its wake. Not only did he feel that he had been false to Alice, but by a painful and disconcerting paradox he felt that he was offering to her a degrading insult in being moved by what at least was her body, as he might have been moved by the sensual attractiveness of a light woman. Jenny was at once so distinct, so far removed from Alice, and yet so identified with her, that his emotions confounded themselves in baffling confusion. It was not only that he could not think logically about the matter, but he seemed also to have lost the directing influence of instinctive feeling. Jenny represented nothing ethical, nothing spiritual, not even anything moral. He was filled with disgust at himself for being moved by her, yet humanly his masculine nature could not but respond to her spell; and the impossibility of either separating this from his love for Alice or reconciling it with the respect he [232]

had for her left him in a state of mental confusion as painful as it seemed hopeless.

He became so troubled that it was inevitable Alice should notice his uneasiness, and he was not in the least surprised when one evening she said to him:—

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“George, what is the matter? Are you worrying about me?”

He had prepared himself over and over to answer such a question, but now he only hesitated and stumbled.

“Why—what makes you think anything is the matter?”

“I know there is; and I’m sure it’s my fainting-spells.”

She had come to speak of her seizures by this term, and George had accepted it, secretly glad that she had no idea worse than that of loss of consciousness.

“Why, of course I am troubled, so long as you are not well, but—”

“You don’t like to tell me what is the matter,” she went on calmly, but with an earnestness which showed she had thought long on the matter. “I dare say I should n’t be any better for knowing, and I can trust you; but I know you are worrying, and it troubles me.”

His resolution was taken at once.

“See here, Alice,” he said, “the truth is that you need to get away from Boston and have an entire change of scene and climate. You used to be a good sailor, and a sea voyage will set you up. I’m going to marry you next week and take you to Italy.”

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“Why, George, you can’t!”

“I shall.”

“Even if I were well, I could n’t be ready.”

“Who cares? As to being well, you are going so you may get well. When I order patients to go away for their health, I expect them to go.”

She became serious, and looked at him with eyes of infinite sadness.

“Dear George,” she said, “I can’t marry you just to be a patient. You must n’t go through life encumbered by an invalid wife.”

“I’ve no notion of doing anything of the kind,” he responded brightly. “It would be too poor an advertisement, and that’s the reason I insist on taking you abroad. What day do you choose, Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday? We sail Saturday.”

He would listen to no objections, but got Thursday fixed for the wedding, and pushed forward rapidly his preparations for going abroad. He enlisted the coöperation of a cousin of Alice, an efficient lady accustomed to carry everything before her, and, as Abby warmly approved of his decision, he felt that Alice would be ready. He saw Alice but briefly until Sunday evening, when he found her in a state of much agitation.

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“I am really out of my mind,” she said. “What do you think I have done?”

“I don’t care, if you have n’t changed your mind about Thursday.”

“I ought to change my mind. Oh, George, I’ve no right—”

“That is settled,” he interrupted decisively. “What have you done that is so dreadful?”

She produced a waist of dove-colored silk.

“Of course I could n’t be married in black, you know, and this was to be my dress. See here.”

The front of the waist was cut and slashed from top to bottom.

“I must have done it some time to-day. Oh, George, it’s dreadful!”

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For the first time in all the long, hard trial of their protracted engagement, she broke down and cried bitterly. He took her in his arms and soothed her. He told her he knew all about it, and that she was going to be entirely well; that he asked only that she would not worry, but would trust to him that she would come safely and happily out of all this trouble and mystery. She yielded to his persuasions, and, indeed, it was evident that she had hardly strength to resist him even had she not believed. She rested quietly on his shoulder and let him drift into a description of the route he had laid out, and in her interest she seemed to forget her trouble.

Before he left, she asked him what she could tell the dressmaker, who would suspect if she was given no reason for being called upon to make a new waist. He took the injured garment, went to the writing-table, and splashed ink on the cut portions.

“You showed it to me,” he said gayly, “and I was so incredibly clumsy as to spill ink on it. Men are so stupid.”

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She laughed, and he went away feeling that he could gladly have throttled Jenny, could he but succeed in getting her in some other body than that belonging to his betrothed. If he was

irritated by this experience, however, he had one to meet later which tried him still more. Abby, on letting him into the house on Tuesday, once more led him mysteriously into the reception-room.

"Miss Alice's been writing to herself, sir."

She held toward him a sealed and stamped envelope addressed to Alice. He took it half mechanically, and as he wondered how he was to circumvent this new trick of the maliciously ingenious Jenny, he noted that the handwriting was strangely different from Alice's usual style.

"Did she give you this to post?" he asked.

"It was with the other letters, and I noticed it and did n't mail it."

"I'll take it," he said. "You did perfectly right."

He wondered whether the prescience of Jenny would enable her to discover that he had destroyed her note to Alice; then he smiled to realize how he was coming to think of her as almost a supernatural demon, and reflected that nothing could be easier than for her to leave a paper where Alice must find it. A couple of days later he found his thought verified when Alice said to him:—

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"George, who is Jenny?"

As she spoke, she put into his hand an unsigned note which said only, "George loves Jenny." The instant which was necessarily taken for its examination gave him a chance to steady himself.

"You wrote it yourself," he said quietly. "Don't you recognize your paper and your writing? It's a little strange, but sleep-writing always is."

"Then I am a somnambulist!" she exclaimed, with flushing cheek.

"There is nothing dreadful in that," he replied. "You have promised to trust me about your health. I know all about it, and if you write yourself forty notes, you are not to bother."

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She sighed, and then bravely smiled.

"I'll try not to worry," she told him; "but I am a coward not to send you away. I wonder why I should have chosen Jenny as the name of your beloved."

"I'm sure I don't know; it's an ugly name enough," he responded, with a quick thought that he hoped Jenny could hear. "At any rate, I tell you with my whole heart that you are the only woman in the world for me."

He did not see Jenny again until the evening before his marriage. He fancied she was avoiding him, especially as once Alice sent down word that she was too busy to see him. He received, however, a note on Wednesday. The hand, so like that of Alice and yet so unmistakably different, affected him most unpleasantly, nor was he made more at ease by the contents.

"You think you got ahead of me by telling Alice she was a sleep-walker, did n't you! Well, I don't care, for I'm going to get rid of her for always when we are married. I did n't mean to be married in that nasty old gray dress, and I won't be, either. You see if I am. You are very unkind to me. You might remember that I'm a great deal fonder of you than she is, because I've got real feeling and she's a kind of graven image. You'll love your little wifie Jenny very dearly."

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Dr. Carroll began to feel as if his own brain were whirling. He could not reply to the note, since he could hardly address a letter to Jenny somewhere inside the personality of Alice. He realized that a strain such as this would soon so tell on him that he would be unfit to care for Alice, and he made up his mind that the time had come for the strongest measures. To tell what the strongest measures were, however, was a problem which occupied him for the rest of the day, and about which he consulted the specialist. Even when, that evening, he walked down West Cedar Street, he could hardly be sure that he would carry out his plan. He was told at the door by Abby that Miss Alice had given strict orders against his being admitted.

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"When did she do that?" he inquired.

"This forenoon, sir, when she gave me that note to send to you. She was queer, sir. She had a cab and went down town shopping, and came back with a big box. Then she had a nap, and to-night she's all right."

"I'll go up, Abby. It is necessary for me to see her."

As he came into the drawing-room Alice sprang up to meet him.

"I began to be afraid you would n't come," she said. "I've been queer to-day, I know; and there's a dressmaker's box in my room I never saw, and it's marked not to be opened till to-morrow. Oh, George, I am so frightened and miserable! I know I ought to send you away, and not let you marry me."

"Send me away, by all means, if it will make you feel any better. I shan't go. Sit down in this chair; I want to show you something."

She took the seat he indicated. He trimmed the fire and left the poker in the coals. Then from his

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pocket he took a ball of silvered glass as large as an orange, and began to toss it in his hands. She stared at it in silence for half a minute. Then the unmistakable laugh of Jenny rang out.

"So you really wanted to see me, did you?" she cried. "I knew you would some time."

"Yes," was his reply. "You may be sure I wanted to see you pretty badly before I'd take the risk of doing something that may be bad for Alice."

"Oh, it's still Alice, is it?" Jenny responded, pouting. "I hoped you'd got more sense by this time. Honest, now," she continued, leaning forward persuasively, "don't you think you'd like me best? The trouble is, you think you're tied to her, and you don't dare do what you want to. I'd hate to be such a coward!"

He looked at the beautiful creature bending toward him, and he could not but acknowledge in his heart that she was physically more attractive than Alice, that she stirred in him a fever of the blood which he had never known when with the other. All the attraction which had drawn him to Alice was there, save for certain spiritual qualities, and added was a new charm which he felt keenly. He could not define to himself clearly, moreover, what right or ground he had for objecting to this form of the personality of his betrothed, to this potential Alice, who in certain ways moved him more than the Alice he had known so long. He had only a dogged instinct to guide him, an unescapable inner conviction that the normal consciousness of the girl had inalienable rights which manhood and honor called upon him to defend. In part this was the feeling natural to a physician, but more it was the Puritan loyalty to an idea of justice. The more he felt himself stirred by the fascination of Jenny, the more strongly his sense of right urged him to end, if possible, this frightful possession forever. Both for himself and for Alice, he was resolute now to go to any extreme.

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"You are at liberty to put it any way you please," he responded to her taunt, with grave courtesy. "I called you to tell you that I am going to marry Alice to-morrow, and that I will not have her personality interfered with any more."

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"Oh, you won't? How are you going to help it?"

He looked at her eyes sparkling with mischievous defiance, at her red lips pouted in saucy insolence, and he wavered. Then in the instant revulsion from this weakness he turned to the fire and took from the coals the glowing poker.

"That is how I mean to help it," he said.

She shrank and turned pale; but she did not yield.

"You can't fool me like that," she said. "You would n't really hurt the body of that precious Alice of yours. You can't burn me without her being burned too."

"She had better be burned than to be under the control of a little devil like you."

For the moment they faced each other, and then her glance dropped. She fell on her knees with a bitter cry, and held up to him her clasped hands.

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"Oh, why can't you let me stay!" she half sobbed. "Why won't you give me a chance? You don't know how good I'll be! I'll do every single thing you want me to. I know all your ways as well as she does, and I'll make you happy. Why should n't I have as much right to live as she?"

The wail of her pleading almost unmanned him. He felt instinctively that his only chance of carrying through his plan was to refuse to listen. The thought surged into his mind that perhaps she had as much claim to consciousness as Alice; he seemed to be murdering this strange creature kneeling to him with streaming eyes and quivering mouth. He had to turn away so as not to see her.

"I will not listen to you," he said doggedly. "I will not have you trouble Alice. As sure as there's a God in heaven, if you come back again when I am with her, I'll burn you with a hot iron; and I mean to watch her all the time after we are married."

"If you married me, you'd have to help me against her," Jenny said, apparently as much to herself as to him.

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He made no other answer than to bring the heated iron so near to her cheek that she must have felt its glow. She threw back her head with a cry of fear. Then a look of defiance came over the face, and the red lips took a mocking curve; but in the twinkle of an eye it was Alice who knelt on the rug before him.

The strain of this interview, with the after-necessity of reassuring Alice, left Carroll in a condition little conducive to sleep. All night he revolved in his head the circumstances of this strange case, comforting himself as well as he was able with the hope that at last he had frightened Jenny away for good. He reflected on the Scriptural stories of demoniacal possession, and wondered whether hypnotism might not have played some part in them; he speculated on the future, and now and then found himself wondering what would have come of his choosing Jenny instead of Alice. A haggard bridegroom he looked when Abby opened the door to him the next forenoon, and he grew yet paler when the old servant said to him, with brief pathos,—

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"She 's queer again."

Carroll set his teeth savagely. He hardly returned the greetings of the few friends assembled in the drawing-room, but went at once to the fireplace, applied a match to the fire laid there, and thrust the poker between the bars of the grate. The clergyman came in, and in another moment the rustle of the bride's gown was heard from the stairs outside. Then, on the arm of a cousin of the Gaylords, appeared in the doorway a figure in white. The sweat started on Carroll's forehead. He realized that Jenny was making one more desperate effort to marry him. He remembered her last words of the evening before, and saw that then she must have had this in mind. He looked her straight in the eyes, and then turned to the grate. As he stooped to grasp the poker the bride stopped, trembled, put her hand to the door-jamb as if for support. Then George, watching, put the iron down and advanced to Alice. What the assembled company might think of his stirring the fire at that moment he did not care. He felt that he had triumphed; and at least it was Alice and not Jenny whom he married.

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So far as Carroll can determine, Jenny never again intruded upon Alice's personality. Renewed health, varied interests, and the ever watchful affection of her husband gave Mrs. Carroll self-poise and fixed her in a normal state. But there is a little daughter, and now and then the father catches his breath, so startlingly into her face and into her manner comes a likeness to Jenny.

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"So you think," Dr. Polnitzski said, smiling rather satirically, "that you are really tasting the bitterness of life?"

"I did n't say anything of the sort," I retorted impatiently. "I was n't making anything so serious of it; but you'll own that to be thrown over your horse's head on a stake that rips a gash six inches long in your thigh is n't precisely amusing."

"Oh, quite the contrary," he answered. "I'm prepared to admit so much."

"In the very middle of the hunting season, too," I went on, "and at the house of a friend. More than that, a man never gets over the feeling that everybody secretly thinks an accident must be his own fault and he a duffer. Even Lord Eldon, who's good nature itself and no end of a jolly host, must think—"

"Nonsense," my physician interrupted brusquely, "Lord Eldon is not a fool, and he realizes that this was n't your fault as well as you do yourself. You take the whole thing so hard because you've evidently never come in contact with the realities of life."

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He was so magnificent a man as he stood there that the brusqueness of his words was easily forgiven; he had been so unremitting in his care ever since, in the illness of Lord Eldon's family physician, he had been called in on the occasion of my accident, that I had become genuinely attached to him. Our acquaintance had ripened into something almost like intimacy, since my host and his family had been unexpectedly called from home by the illness of a married daughter, and it had come to be the usual thing for Dr. Polnitzski to pass with me the evenings of my slow convalescence, which would otherwise have been so intolerably tedious.

"I dare say I've been too much babied most of my life," I returned; "but a month of this sort of thing is pretty serious for anybody."

He smiled, then his face grew grave.

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"I dare say you may think me tediously moral," he said, "but I can't help thinking of what I see every day. For some years I've been trying to do something for the poor people about here, and especially for the operatives over at Friezeton. If you had any idea of the things I've seen— But, after all, you would n't understand if I were to tell you."

"I know," I returned, "that you have devoted yourself to the most generous work among those poor wretches."

"I beg your pardon," responded he, stiffening at once, "but we will, if you please, waive compliments."

"But," I persisted, "Lord Eldon and others have more than once expressed their wonder that you, with talents and acquirements so unusual, should bury yourself—"

"I was not speaking of myself," he interrupted, somewhat impatiently, "but of my poor patients. If you knew what they suffer uncomplainingly, it might make you a little more content."

We were both silent for a little time. I looked across the chamber at the strong figure of the Russian, as he stood by the fire, and wondered what his past had been. I knew that he was a mystery to all the neighborhood where he had lived for the better part of a dozen years. He was evidently a gentleman, and he seemed to be wealthy. I had myself found him to be of unusual culture and refinement, and he had unobtrusively won recognition as a physician of marked skill

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and attainments. The wonder was why he should be living in England as an exile, and why he so persistently resisted all efforts to draw him from his retirement. He devoted himself to philanthropic work in a perfectly quiet fashion, declining to be enrolled as part of any organized charity. He was more and more, however, coming to be appreciated as a skillful physician, and to be called in for consultation. He impressed me on the whole as a man who had a past, and I could not but wonder what that past had been.

"I dare say you are right," I answered, somewhat absently, "but has it never occurred to you that it is easy to make the mistake of judging the suffering of others by our own standards instead of by their real feelings? It seems to be assumed nowadays that all men are born with the same sensibilities, yet nothing could be farther from the truth."

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Dr. Polnitzski did not reply for a moment. He seemed this evening to be unusually restless. He walked about the room, getting up as soon as he sat down, and made impulsive movements which apparently betrayed some inward disturbance.

"Of course you are right," he said at length, in an absent manner. "The classes not bred to sensitiveness cannot have the real sensibility—"

He broke off abruptly and came across to my couch.

"We were talking," he began, with a sudden, bitter vehemence which startled me, "of real suffering. See! I have lived here silent in an alien land for long years; but to-day—to-day is an anniversary, and I have somehow lost the power to be silent any longer. If you care to listen, I will tell you what I mean by suffering; I will tell you what life has been to me."

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"If you will," I responded, "I will try to understand."

He seemed hardly to hear or to heed my words, but, walking up and down the chamber, he began at once, speaking with the outbursting eagerness of a man who has restrained himself long.

"My father," he said, "was one of the small nobles in the neighborhood of Moscow. I was his only son, and when he died, in my seventeenth year, I had been his companion so much that I was as mature as most lads half a dozen years older. My mother was a gentle, good woman. I loved my mother, but she made little difference in my life. She was kind to me and she prayed for me a good deal. She thought her prayers answered when I grew up without debauchery. She may have been right; but I have lived to think that there are worse things than debauchery."

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He paused a moment, and then went on, looking downward.

"Once the little mother was frightened," he went on again, with a strange mingling of bitterness and tenderness in his tone. "There was a girl, the daughter of the steward; her name was Alexandrina."

His voice as he pronounced the stately name was full of feeling. He seemed to have forgotten me, and to be telling his story to an unseen hearer.

"Shurochka!" he said, dwelling on the diminutive with a fond, lingering cadence most pathetic to hear. "Shurochka! I loved her; I was mad for her; my blood was full of longing by day and of fire by night. It was the complete, mad passion of a boy grown into a man, and pure in spite of an ardent temperament. I used to stand under her window at night, and if it were stinging with cold or storm I was glad. I seemed to be doing something for her; you know the madness, perhaps, in spite of the cold temperament of your race. I did not for a moment really hope for her. Her family had betrothed her to her cousin, and it would have broken my mother's heart for me to marry the descendant of serfs. I could n't even show her that I loved her. My father out of his grave said to me what he had said again and again while he was alive: 'Do not hurt those under you; and especially do not soil the purity of a maiden.' I did not try to conceal from the little mother that I loved Shurochka, and maybe the servants gossiped, as they always do; but Shurochka herself I avoided. I was not sure that I could trust myself to see her. It was a happiness to the little mother when the girl was married and taken away to the home of her cousin in Moscow. She felt safe for me then, and she was very tender. Time, she said, would take this madness out of my heart."

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He looked into the glowing fire with a strange expression and mused a little.

"My good mother!" he said again. "She was too near a saint to understand. That has been a madness time could n't take out of my heart! I've gone out here on the moors and flung myself down on the ground and bitten the turf in agony because it seemed to me that I had borne this as long as human endurance was possible! No; if the spirit of the little mother sees me, she knows that time has not taken the madness out of me!"

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His face had grown white with feeling, and he seemed to struggle to control himself.

"I can't tell you whether it was wholly from the loss of her and the death of my mother which came soon after, or whether it was the current of the time, the unrest in the air, that drew me toward the men who were striving to free Russia from political slavery. I went to St. Petersburg to continue my studies, and there I was thrown with men aflame with the ardor of patriotism. Constantly the cause of Holy Russia secretly took more and more absolute possession of me. I confided it to nobody. I did not even suspect that anybody had the smallest hint of my state of mind, and yet, when the time came, when I had made my decision to throw in my lot with the patriots, I found them not only ready, but expecting me. They had felt my secret comradeship by

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that sixth sense which we develop in Russia in our zeal for country, and the imperative need of such an intelligence in the work we have to do.

"I did n't take the step from simple patriotism, perhaps. Motives are generally mixed in this world. There was a last touch, a final reason in my case, as in others, that had a good deal of the personal. I was ripe for the cause, but there was a gust to shake the fruit down. There came bitter news from Moscow."

Again he paused, but only for a second; then threw back his head and went on with a new hardness in his tone more moving than open fierceness.

"Shurochka was gone. It was whispered that a noble high in the army had carried her off, but no one dared to speak openly. We must be careful how we complain in Holy Russia! When her husband tried to find her, when he tormented the police to right him, he was arrested as a political offender—the charge always serves. The man, as I afterward learned authoritatively, was no more a conspirator than you are. He was sent to the mines of Siberia simply because he complained that his wife had been stolen, and so made himself obnoxious to a man in power. It was fortunate for me that I did not learn the officer's name, or I should have gone to Siberia too."

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Dr. Polnitzski threw himself into a chair by the fire and remained staring into the coals as if he had forgotten me, and as if he again were back in the dreadful days of which he had spoken. I waited some time before I spoke, and then, without daring to offer sympathy, I asked if he were willing to go on with his story. He looked at me as if he saw me through a dream; then he came to sit down beside my couch.

"Pardon me," he said. "I was a fool to allow myself to speak, but now you may have the whole of it. It is n't worth while for me to tell you my experiences as a patriot—a Nihilist, you would say. I was full of zeal; I was young and hot-headed; I thought that all the strength of my feeling was turned to my country. I know now that a good deal of it was consumed in the desire for revenge upon that unknown officer. Russia, our Holy Russia, I said to myself, must be to me both wife and child. Stepniak said to me once that Russia was the only country in the world where it was a man's duty not to obey the laws. You cannot understand it here in England, where it never occurs to you to fear, as you lie down at night, that for no fault whatever you may in the morning find yourself on the way to lifelong exile and some horrible, living death. I could tell you things that I can hardly think of without going mad; they are the events of every day in our unhappy land. The heroism, the devotion, of those striving to free Russia can be believed only by the few that know they are true. They are beyond human; they are divine. Why, the things I have known done by women so pure and delicate that they were almost angels already—"

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He broke off and wiped his forehead.

"I beg your pardon," said he, in a tone he evidently tried to make more natural. "I will not talk of this. I have not spoken so for years and I cannot command myself. It is enough for you to know that I saw it all, and that, to the best of my ability, I did my part. As time went on, I established myself as a physician at St. Petersburg. My family connection, although I had no near relatives, was of use to me, and in the end I had an excellent position. I was fortunate in the curing of wounds, and I had the luck to attract attention by saving the life of a near relative of the Czar. All this I looked at as so much work done for the cause. Every advance I made in influence, in wealth, in power, put me in a position to be so much the more serviceable to the great purpose of my life. Personal ambition was so swallowed up in the tremendousness of that issue that self was lost sight of. The patriot cannot remember himself in a land like Russia."

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"When the execution"—He paused and turned to me with a singular smile. "You would say the assassination—when the death of General Kakonzoff was determined in our Section, no part was assigned to me, but I was high enough in the counsels of the patriots to know all that was done. He had possession of information which it was necessary to suppress. He came to St. Petersburg to present it in person. He told me frankly enough afterward that he could not trust any one because he counted upon a reward for giving the evidence himself. We were minutely informed of his plans and his movements. We had taken the precaution to replace his body-servant by one of our own men as soon as he began to make inquiries about two patriots who were suspected by the government. He had proofs which would have been fatal to them, and it was necessary to intercept these. If he had been put out of the way, our agent would easily have got possession of the papers, and without the testimony of the general our two friends were safe. The plot failed through one of those chances that make men believe in the supernatural. He was shot as he stepped out of the train at the St. Petersburg station, but the very instant our man fired, Kakonzoff stumbled. The bullet, which should have gone through his heart, passed through his lungs without killing him."

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The perfectly cool manner in which Dr. Polnitzski spoke of this incident affected me like a vertigo. To have a man who is one's daily companion, and of whom one has become fond, speak of an assassination as if it were an ordinary occurrence, is almost like seeing him concerned himself in a murder. I lay there listening to the doctor with a fascination not unmixed with horror, despite the fact that my sympathies, as he knew beforehand, were strongly with the Nihilists. To be in sympathy with their cause and to come so near as to smell the reek of blood, so to speak, were, however, very different things.

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"By a strange chance," the doctor went on, "I was summoned to attend the wounded man, and although it was a desperate fight, I was after some days satisfied that I could save his life."

"But," I interrupted, "I don't see why you should try to save his life if you were of those who doomed him to death in the first place."

He looked at me piercingly.

"You forget," he answered, "that I was called to him as a physician. It is the duty of a physician to save life, as it may be the duty of a patriot to take it. I was trying to do my best in both capacities. I had given the best counsel I could in the Section and, when he was on his feet, I would have shot him myself if it had seemed to my superiors that I was the best person to do it. Does it seem to you that I could have taken advantage of his helplessness, of his confidence, of my skill as a physician, to deprive him of the life which it is the aim of a physician's existence to preserve?"

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He waited for me to reply, but I had no answer to give him. The situation was one so far outside of my experience, so fantastically unreal as measured by my own life, that I could not even judge of it.

"See," he went on, leaning forward with shining eyes and with increasing excitement of manner, "the patient puts himself into the hands of his physician, body and soul. To betray that trust is to strike at the very heart of the whole sacred art of healing. If I, as a physician, took advantage of this sick man, I not only betrayed the personal trust he put in me, but I was false to the whole principle on which the relation of doctor and patient rests. Don't you see what a tremendous question is involved? That to harm Kakonzoff was to go beyond the limits of human possibility?"

"Yes," was my answer; "I can understand how a doctor might feel that; but I don't know how far the feeling of a patriot might overbalance this; how far the idea of serving his country would overcome every other feeling."

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Polnitski gave me a glance which made me quiver.

"It is a question which I found I did not readily answer," he said, "when I received from the chief of our Section an order not to let Kakonzoff recover."

He sprang up from his chair and began to pace the floor.

"What could I do?" he said, pouring out his words with a rapidity which increased his slight foreign accent so that when his face was turned away I could hardly follow them. "There was my country bleeding her very heart's blood. Every day the most infamous cruelties were done before my eyes. And if this man Kakonzoff lived to tell his story, it meant the torture, the death, of men whose only crime was that they had given up everything that makes life tolerable to save their fellows from political slavery. It lay in my power to let Kakonzoff die. A very slight neglect would accomplish that. To the cause of my country I had sworn the most solemn oaths, and sworn them with my whole heart. I had never before even questioned any order from the Section. I had obeyed with the blind fidelity of a man that loved the cause too well to think of his own will at all. But now—now, I simply found what I was asked to do was impossible! I could not do it. I fought it out with myself day and night, and all the time the patient was slowly getting better. The gain was slow, but it was steady, and I could not fail to see that his giving his wicked testimony against the patriots was simply a matter of time."

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"But one day, through no fault of mine—indeed, because my express orders had been disobeyed—he became worse. I can't tell you the relief I felt in thinking the man might die and I be spared the awful necessity of deciding. If he would only die without fault of mine—but I still did my best. I gave minute directions, and when I left him I promised to return in a few hours. As I went through the antechamber on my way out of the hotel, some one came behind me quickly and laid a hand on my arm. I thought it was the nurse, following to ask some question. I turned round to be face to face with Shurochka! My God! It was like a crazy farce or a bad dream!"

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It is impossible that Dr. Polnitski should not have known what an effect his story was producing on me, and it is hardly doubtful that his responsive Slav nature was more or less moved by my excitement. He seemed, however, scarcely to be conscious of me at all. His face was white with suffering, and he spoke with the vehemence of one who tries to be rid of intolerable pain by pouring it out in words.

"In a flash," he went on, "it came over me what her presence meant, and I said to myself, 'I will kill him!' I had always hoped that in striking against the creatures of the Czar's tyranny I might unknowingly reach the man that had harmed her; but I had wished not to know, for I could not bear that personal feeling should come into the work I did for my country. That work was the one sacred thing. Now what I had feared had been thrust on me. Shurochka was changed; there were marks of suffering in her face, and she showed, too, the effects of training which could never have come honestly into the life of a woman of her station. She was dressed like a lady. At first she did not know me. She spoke to me as a stranger, and implored me to save Kakonzoff. She caught me by the arm in her excitement; and then she recognized me. Then—oh, my God, what creatures women are!—then she cried out that I had loved her once, and that in memory of that time I must help her. Think of it! She flung my broken heart in my face to induce me to save the scoundrel she loved!"

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"It was Alexandrina, my old-time Shurochka, clinging to me as if she had risen from the grave where her shame should have been hidden, and I loved her then and always. I could hardly control myself to speak to her. All I could do was stupidly to ask if he was kind to her, and she shrank as if I had lashed her with the knout. She cried out that it was no matter, so long as she

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loved him, and that I must save him: that she could not live without him. I—could n't endure it! I shook off her hands and rushed away more wild than sane, with her voice in my ears all agony and despair."

His face was dreadful in its pain, and I felt that I had no right to see it. I closed my eyes, and tried to turn away a little, but in my clumsiness I knocked from the couch a book. The crash of its fall aroused him. He mechanically picked up the volume, and the act seemed somewhat to restore him to himself.

"You may judge," he began again, "the hell that I was in. I could have torn the man to bits, and yet—and yet now I said to myself that to obey the Section and let Kakonzoff die would be doing a murder to gratify personal hate. Yet all the sides of the question tortured me. I asked the valet in the afternoon about the woman that had spoken to me. He shrugged his shoulders, and said she was only a peasant that the general was tired of, but that she would not leave him, although he beat her. He beat her!"

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There were tears in my eyes at the intensity with which he spoke, but Dr. Polnitzski's were dry. He clenched his strong hands as if he were crushing something. Then he shook himself as if he were awaking, and threw back his head with a bitter attempt at a laugh.

"Bah!" he exclaimed, with a shrug. "I have never talked like this in my life, but it is so many years since I talked at all that I have lost control of myself. I beg your pardon."

He crossed the room, sat down by the fire, and began to fill his pipe.

"But, Dr. Polnitzski," I protested eagerly, "I do not want to force your confidence, but you cannot stop such a story there."

He looked at me a moment as if he would not go on. Then his face darkened.

"What could the end of such a story be?" he demanded. "Any end must be ruin and agony. Should I be moved by personal feelings to be false to everything I held sacred? Should I take my revenge at the price of professional honor? I said to myself that in time she might come to care for me, if this man were out of her life. Kindness could do so much with some women. But could I make such a choice?"

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"No," I said slowly, "you could not do that."

"Could I restore him to life, then, and have him go on beating that poor girl and flinging her into the ditch at last?"

I had no answer.

"Could I let him live to destroy the patriots whose sworn fellow I was? Do you think I could ever sleep again without dreaming of their fate? Could I kill him there in his bed—I, the physician he trusted? Could I do that?"

"In God's name," I cried, "what did you do?"

He regarded me with a look that challenged my very deepest thought.

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"The patriots were spared," he answered. "That was my fee for saving the life of General Kakonzoff. A year later I paid for having asked that favor by being exiled myself."

"And—and—the other?" I asked.

"She, thank God, is dead."

For a moment or two we remained motionless and unspeaking. Then I silently held out my hand to him. I had no words.

IN THE VIRGINIA ROOM

"Childless," was the word which she murmured in her heart, as she entered the building which had once been the Presidential Mansion of Jefferson Davis and now is the Confederate Museum. Why the thought of her estranged daughter flashed upon her as she came to do honor to the memory of her long dead husband, Mrs. Desborough could not have told, but so overwhelming was the sadness of her mood that she could hardly wonder if this bitter memory took advantage of her moment of weakness to obtrude itself. She set her lips tightly and put it determinedly into the background. She would not think of the daughter who was lost to her; to-day and here no thought but should go back in loving homage and passionate grief to the hero whose name she bore.

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She went at once to the Virginia Room, bowing quickly but kindly to the custodian of the Museum, and as she pushed open the door of the sad place, she thought herself alone. The heavy

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April rain which was drenching Richmond outside kept visitors away, and the building was almost deserted. In her yearly visits to this spot, those pilgrimages which she had made as to a shrine, she had once before had the Virginia Room to herself, untroubled by the presence of strangers; and now with a quick sigh of relief she realized how great had been the comfort of that solitude. To her sensitive nature it was hard to stand before the memorials of her dead and yet to be aware that strange eyes, eyes curious if sympathetic, might be reading in her face all the emotions of her very soul. To preserve the calm necessary before the public had always seemed to her almost like being untrue to the memory she came to consecrate; and to-day it was with a swelling sigh of relief that she threw back her heavy widow's veil with the free, proud motion which belonged to the women of her race and time—the women bred in the South before the war. She was an old woman, though not much over sixty, for pain can age more swiftly than time. The high-bred mien would be hers as long as life remained, and wonderful was her self-control. Again and again she had felt unshed tears burn in her eyes like living fire, yet had been sure that no stranger had had reason to look upon her as more than a casual visitor to the museum; but to be able to let her grief have way seemed almost a joy. She felt the quick drops start at the bare thought. Life had left her no greater blessing than this liberty to weep undiscovered over the memorials of her dead.

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At the instant a man came from behind one of the cases, so near that she might have touched him. Instinctively she tried to take her handkerchief from her chatelaine, and in her confusion detached the bag. It fell at the feet of the gentleman, who stooped at once to pick it up. As he held it out, she forced a smile to her fine old face.

"Thank you," she said; "I—I was very awkward."

"Not at all," he responded. "Those bags are so easily unhooked."

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The tone struck her almost like a blow. To the disappointment of finding that she was not alone in this solemn place was added the bitter fact that the intruder who had come upon her was not of her people. An impulse of bitterness from the old times of blood and of fire swept over her like a wave. The room had carried her back as it always did to the past, and after almost two-score years she for the first time broke through the stern resolve that had kept her from hostile speech.

"You are a Northerner!" she exclaimed.

The words were nothing, but the tone, she knew, was hot with all the long pent-up bitterness. She felt her cheek flush as, almost before the words were spoken, she realized what she had said. The stranger, however, showed no sign of resentment. He smiled, then grew grave again.

"Yes. Do not Northerners visit the Museum? I supposed nobody came to Richmond without coming here."

She was painfully annoyed, and felt her thin cheeks glow as hotly as if she were still a girl. To be lacking in politeness was sufficiently humiliating, but to seem rude to one from the North, to fail in living up to her traditions, was intolerable.

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"I beg your pardon," she forced herself to say. "To come through that door is to step into the past, and I spoke as I might have when—"

"When a Yankee in the house of President Davis would have required explicit explanation," the stranger finished the sentence she knew not how to complete.

Even in her discomposure she appreciated both the courtesy which spared her the embarrassment of being left in the confusion of an unfinished remark and the adroitness which gave to his reply just the right tone of lightness. He was evidently a man of the world. Her instinct, not to be outdone in politeness, least of all by one of her race, made her speak again.

"I was rude," she said stiffly. "To-day is an anniversary on which I always come here, and I forgot myself."

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"Then I must have seemed doubly obtrusive," he returned gravely.

He was certainly a gentleman. He was well groomed, moreover, with the appearance of quiet wealth. One of his hands was ungloved, and she noted appreciatively how finely shaped it was, how white and well kept. The North had all the wealth now, she reflected involuntarily, while so many of the descendants of old Southern families were forced to earn their very bread by occupations unworthy of them. They could not keep their fine hands, hands that told of blood and breeding for generations, as could this stranger before her. His attractiveness, his air of prosperity, were offensive to her because they emphasized the pitiful poverty of so many of her kin whose forefathers had never known what want could be.

"The Museum is open to the public," she replied, with increasing coldness.

She expected him to bow and leave her. Not only did he linger, but she seemed to see in his face a look of pity. Before she could resent this pity, however, she met his eyes with her own, and the look seemed to her to be one of sympathy.

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"Will you pardon my saying that I too came here to-day because it is an anniversary?"

"An anniversary?" she echoed. "How can an anniversary bring a Northerner here?"

"It is n't mine exactly. It is my son's. His mother is a Virginian."

So highly strung was her mood that she noticed almost with approval that he had said "is" and not "was." He had at least not deprived his wife of her birthright as a daughter of the sacred soil. She began to be aware of a growing excitement. She could hardly have heard unmoved any allusion to a marriage which had taken from the South a woman born to its traditions and to its sorrows. She felt a fresh impulse of anger against this prosperous son of the North who had carried away from a Virginia mother a daughter as she had been robbed of hers. The cruel pang of crushed motherhood which ached within her at the remembrance of her own child, the child she had herself cast off because of her marriage, was so fierce that for a moment she could not command her voice. She could not shape the question which was in her heart, but she felt that with her eyes she all but commanded the stranger to tell her more.

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"We live in the North," he explained, "but she has long promised the boy that when he was eight he should see the relics of his Virginian grandfather which are in the museum here. Unfortunately, when the time came, she was not well enough to come with him; and as she wished him to be here on this especial day, I have brought him."

The Southern woman felt her heart beating tumultuously, and it was almost as if another spoke when she said in a manner entirely conventional:—

"I trust that her illness is not serious."

"If it were, I should not be here myself," he answered.

She collected her strength, which seemed to be leaving her, and forced herself to look around the room. She could not have told what she expected, or whether she most hoped or feared what she might see.

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"But your son?" she asked.

The man's face changed subtly.

"My father," he replied, "was an officer in the Union army. I wished to see this place first, to be prepared for Desborough's questions. It is n't easy to answer the questions of a clever lad whose two grandfathers have been killed in the same battle, fighting on opposite sides."

The name struck her like a blow. She leaned for support against the corner of the nearest case, and fixed her gaze on the pathetic coat of General Lee behind the glass which showed her as a faint wraith the reflection of her own face. Desborough had been her husband's name, and this the anniversary of his death; she felt as if the dead had arisen to confront her, and that some imperative call in the blood insistently responded. Yet she could not believe that her son-in-law was before her, regarding her with that straightforward, appealingly honest gaze; she said to herself that the name was merely a coincidence, that every day in the year was the anniversary of the death of some Virginian hero, and that this could not be her daughter's husband.

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"Have you decided what to tell your son?" she heard her voice, strange and far off, asking amid the thrilling quiet of the room.

The stranger regarded her as if struck by the note of challenge in her tone. His serious eyes seemed to her to be endeavoring to probe her own in search of the cause of her sharpness.

"I can do no more," was his answer, "than to tell him what I have always told him—the truth, as far as I can see it."

"And the truth which you can tell him here—here, before the sacred relics of our dead, the sacred memorials of our Lost Cause—"

She could not go on, but stopped suddenly that he might not hear her voice break.

"He has never been taught anything but that the men of the South fought for what they believed, and that no man can do a nobler thing than to give his life for his faith."

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She became suddenly and illogically sure that she was talking to her son-in-law, although the ground of her conviction was no other than the one she had just before rejected. The whole thing flashed upon her mind as perfectly simple. Her daughter knew that on this day she was always to be found here, and had meant to meet her, with the little son bearing his grandfather's name. The question now was whether the husband knew. Something in his air, something half-propitiatory, something certainly beyond the ordinary deference offered to a lady who is a stranger, gave her a vague distrust. She was not untouched by the desire for reconciliation, but she had again and again resisted that before, and least of all could she tolerate the idea of being tricked. The possibility that her son-in-law might be feigning ignorance to work the more surely upon her sympathy angered her.

"Do you know who I am?" she demanded abruptly.

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"I beg your pardon," he answered, evidently surprised, "but I have never been in Richmond before. If you are well known here, or are the wife of some man famous in the South, I am too completely a stranger to recognize you."

"Yet you seemed to wish to explain yourself to me. Why?"

"I don't know," he began hesitatingly, searching her face with his straightforward gray eyes. Then he flushed slightly, and broke out with new feeling: "Yes; I do know. You came just as I was

going away because I could not endure the sadness of it; when every one of these cases seemed to me to drip with blood and tears. That sounds to you extravagant, but the whole thing came over me so tremendously that I could n't bear it."

"I do not understand," she returned tremulously. "You have such collections at the North, I suppose."

"But here it came over me that to all the sorrow of loss was added the bitterness of defeat. I felt that no Southerner could come here without feeling that all the agony this commemorates had been in vain; and the pity of it took me by the throat so that when I spoke to you, you were a sort of impersonation of the South—of the Southern women; and I wanted to ask for pardon."

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She drew a deep breath and raised her head proudly.

"Not for the war," he said quickly, with a gesture which seemed to wave aside her pride and showed her how well he had understood her triumph at the admission seemingly implied in his words. "I am a Northern man, and I believe with my whole soul that the North was right. I believe in the cause for which my father died. Only I see now that if he had lived in the South, the same spirit would have carried him into the Confederate army."

"But for what should you ask pardon, if the North was in the right?"

"For myself; for not understanding—for being so dull all these years that I have lived with a wife faithful in her heart to the South and too loyal to me to speak. We in the North have forgiven, and we think that the South should forget. It has come over me to-day how easy it is for the conquerors to forgive and how hard that must be for the conquered."

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"You do not understand even now," she said, her voice low with feeling. "Because we are conquered we can forgive; but we should be less than human to forget."

The room was very still for a little, and then, following out her thought, she said as if in wonder: "And you, a Northerner, have felt all this!"

He shook his head, with a little smile.

"It is perhaps too much to ask," returned he, "that you Southern women should realize that even a Northerner is still human."

"Yes, yes; but to feel our suffering, to see—"

"It has always been facing me, I understand now, in my wife's eyes—the immeasurable pathos of a people beaten in a struggle they felt to be right; but she had been so happy otherwise, and she never spoke of it."

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"In the heart of every Southern woman," she said solemnly, though now without bitterness, "is always the anguish of our Lost Cause. We cover the surface, we accept, and God knows we have been patient; but each of us has deep down a sense of the blood that was poured out in vain, of the agony of the men we loved, of how they were humiliated—humiliated, and of the great cause of liberty lost—lost!"

For long, bitter years she had not spoken even to her nearest friends as she was talking to this stranger, this Northerner. The consciousness of this brought her back to the remembrance that he was the husband of her daughter.

"Has your wife no relatives in the South who might have made you understand how we Southern women must feel?" she asked.

He grew instantly colder.

"I have never seen her Southern relatives."

"Pardon the curiosity of an old woman," she went on, watching him keenly; "may I ask why?"

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"My wife's mother did not choose to know the Yankee her daughter married."

"And you?"

"I did not choose to force an acquaintance or to be known on sufferance," he answered crisply. "I was aware of no wrong, and I did not choose to ask to be forgiven for being a Northerner."

She knew that in her heart she was already accepting this strong, fine man, alien as he was to all the traditions of her life, and she was not ill pleased at his pride.

"But have you ever considered what it must have cost the mother to give up her daughter?"

"Why need she have given her up? Marriages between the North and the South have been common enough without any family breach."

She was utterly sure that he knew neither to whom he was talking nor what had been the real cause of her separation from her daughter. She experienced a sort of wild inner exultation that at last had come the moment when she might justify herself; when she might tell the whole dreadful story which had been as eating poison in her veins. She raised her head proudly, and looked at him with her whole soul in her eyes.

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"If you have patience to listen," she said, feeling her cheeks warm, "and will pardon my being personal, I should like to tell you what has happened to me. My husband was a colonel in the Confederate army. We were married when I was seventeen, in a brief furlough he won by being wounded at the battle of the Wilderness. I saw him, in the four years of the war before he fell at Five Forks, less than a dozen times, and always for the briefest visits—poor scraps of fearful happiness torn out of long stretches of agony. My daughter, my only child, was born after her father's death. Our fortune had gone to the Cause. My father and my husband both refused to invest money abroad. They considered it disloyal, and they put everything into Confederate securities even after they felt sure they should get nothing back. They were too loyal to withhold anything when the country was in deadly peril."

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She paused, but he did not speak, and with swelling breast and parching throat she went on:—

"At Five Forks my husband was killed in a hand-to-hand fight with a Northern officer. He struck his enemy down after he had received his own death-wound. I pray God he did not know the day was lost. He had gone through so much, I hope that was spared him. On the other side of death he must have found some comfort to help him bear it. God must have had some comfort for our poor boys when he permitted the cause of liberty to be lost."

She pressed her clenched hand against her bosom, and as she did so her eyes met those of her companion. She felt the sympathy of his look, but something recalled her to the sense that she was speaking to one from the North.

"It is not the cause of liberty to you," she said. "I have forgotten again. I have not spoken of all this for so long. I have not dared; but to-day—to-day I must speak, and you must forgive me if I use the old language."

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He dropped his glance as if he felt it an intrusion to see her bitter emotion, and said softly: "I think I understand. You need not apologize."

"After the war," she went on hurriedly and abruptly, "I lived for my daughter. I worked for her. She—she was like her father."

She choked, but regained the appearance of composure by a mighty effort.

"When she was a woman—she was still a child to me; over twenty, but I was not twice her age—she went North, and there she fell in love. She wrote me that she was to marry a Northerner, and when she added his name—it was the son of the man who killed her father."

"It is not possible!" the other exclaimed. "You imagined it. Such things happen in melodramas—"

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She put up her hand and arrested his words.

"This happened not in a melodrama, but in a tragedy—in my life," she said. "I need not go into details. She married him, and I have never seen her since."

"Did he know?"

"No. It was my wedding gift to my daughter—that I kept her secret. That was all I had strength to do. You think I was an unnatural mother, of course; but—"

She saw that his eyes were moist as he raised them in answering.

"I should have said so yesterday without any hesitation; to-day—"

"To-day?" she echoed eagerly, as he paused.

"To-day," he answered, letting his glance sweep over the pathetic memorials so thick about them—"to-day at least I understand, and I do not wonder."

She looked at him with all her heart in her eyes, trying to read his most hidden feeling. Then she touched his arm lightly with the tips of her slender black-gloved fingers.

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"Come," she said.

She led him across the room, and pointed to a colonel's sash and pistols which lay in one of the cases under a faded card.

"Those were my husband's."

"Those!" he cried. "You Louise's mother? It is impossible!"

"It may be impossible; but, as I said of the other thing, it is true."

"The other thing?" he repeated. "What—do you mean the thing you said—that my father and he—That cannot be true. I should surely have known!"

"It is true," she insisted. "At the moment it happened they were surrounded by our soldiers, and his own men probably did not realize just what happened. But I—I know every minute of that fight! One of my husband's staff had been at West Point with them both, and he told me. He saw it, and tried to come between them. Your wife married you, knowing you to be the son of the man who killed her father."

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The Northerner passed his hand across his forehead as if to wipe away the confusion of his mind.

His eyes were cast down, but she saw that their lids were wet.

"Poor Louise!" he murmured, seemingly rather to himself than to her; "how she must have suffered over that secret. Poor Louise!"

"You come here," Mrs. Desborough went on, feeling herself choke at his words, but determined not to give way to the warmer impulse of her heart, "and even you are moved by these sacred relics. What do you think they are to us?"

She was half conscious that she was appealing to the memorials around her to strengthen her in her purpose not to yield, not to make peace with the son of the man who had slain her husband, her hero, her love; she felt that in harboring for an instant such an impulse she was untrue to the Cause which, though lost, was for her forever living with the deathless devotion of love and anguish.

"These relics do move me," her son-in-law said gently. "They move me so deeply that they seem to me wrong. I confess that I was thinking, before you came in, that if I were a Southerner, with the traditions of the South behind me, and the bitter sense of failure to embitter me, they would stir me to madness; that I should feel it impossible ever to be loyal to anything but the South. The war is over. The South at last is understood. She is honored for the incredible bravery with which, under crushing odds, she fought for her conviction. Why prolong the inevitable pain? Why gather these relics to nourish a feeling absolutely untrue—the feeling that the Union is less your country than it is ours?" [301]

"Because it is just to the dead," she answered swiftly. "Because it is only justice that we keep in remembrance how true they were, how gallant, how brave, how noble, and—O God!—that we make some poor record of what we of the South have suffered!"

He shook his head and sighed. She saw the tears in his eyes and did not attempt to hide her own. [302]

"Would you have it forgotten," she demanded passionately, "that the grandfather of your son—the father of your wife—was one of God's noblemen? Would you have him remembered only as a beaten rebel? I tell you that if we had not gathered these memorials, every clod that was wet with their blood would cry out against us! In the North you call these men rebels; there is no battlefield in the South where the very rustle of the grass does not whisper over their graves that they were patriots and heroes! And this, poor though it be"—and she waved her hand to the cases around them—"is the best memorial we can give them."

He made a step forward, and held out both his hands impulsively. She did not take them, and they dropped again. He hesitated, and then drew back.

"It must be as it is," he said sadly. "Even if I blamed you women of the South, I could not say so here. Only," he added, his voice falling, "can you forget that the women of the North suffered too? I grew up in the shadow of a grief so great that it sapped the very life of my mother, and in the end killed her. Do you think I could visit that upon the innocent head of Louise?—I did not mean, though, to speak of myself, now that I know who you are. I will not intrude on you; but my little son, with your husband's name and his mother's eyes, is certainly guiltless. I will not come with him, but may I not send him with my man to see you this afternoon, so that I may say to Louise that you have kissed him and given him your blessing? Sorrow has taken away his other grandmother." [303]

It seemed to her that she could not endure the speaking of one syllable more. Her whole body trembled, and she raised her hands in an impulsive gesture which implored him to be silent. All the old mother-love for Louise, the passionate crying of her lonely heart for this unseen grandson with the blood of her dead husband warm in his veins, the grief of black years and fidelity to old ideals, warred within her, and tore her like wolves. She cast a glance around as if to find some way by which she could flee from this position which it was too terrible to face. Then she saw her companion look at her with infinite pity and sadness. [304]

"Then," he said, "I can only say good-by."

But she sprang forward as if she burst from chains, and threw herself upon his breast, the agony of the long, bitter past gushing in a torrent of hot tears.

"Oh, my son! my son!" she sobbed.

[305]
[306]

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