

## The Story Page

### The Stranger Within our Gates.

BY HARRIET WINTON DAVIS.

The new maid was depressing. Tom said he felt as if he had slain all her nearest of kin every time she spoke to him. What was the use of going around with such a preternaturally long face anyway? Bridget was always so nice and jolly. Eva, too, missed the smiling, freckled countenance. Bridget had been part of the little household so long that it seemed unnatural to see this solemn stranger in her place, but when the old mother had need of her who would bid her stay? It did seem a little hard, though, that Aunt Marion should have to go away, too, throwing the cares of housekeeping so suddenly on Eva's unaccustomed shoulders. Her school days had been so happy, and she realized with a little pang that they were over forever; but after all, she was glad. It was pleasant to be at home. She had just finished arranging the books she had unpacked, stopping occasionally to dip into one when her brother opened the door.

'Where's that graven image going now, Eva?' he asked, 'I met her at the head of the street with her bonnet on.'

'Who—Olga? O, she going to Carmel to get some things she left there. She's coming back on the four o'clock train.'

Tom groaned. 'I hoped she had taken her form off our door permanently. Really, Eva,' he said, 'she'll have a blighting effect upon us all. I can feel even my sweet sunshiny spirit being gradually crushed out. I am not the same merry youth I was before this thing of evil appeared to us.'

'O, Tom,' Eva laughed, 'that sounds as if it was too much Poe, instead of poor Olga,' but he went off muttering.

'Well, if I'm to be housekeeper I mustn't idle away any more time here,' Eva said, and started up attic to investigate the leak Olga had reported to her. 'What a forlorn place,' she thought, as she opened Olga's door. It was only in the centre of the room that one could stand upright. The one small window admitted little light or air. The uncovered floor was rough, the walls bare, while various discoloration overhead showed that this was not the first time the roof had sprung a leak.

'The poor girl! No wonder she can't smile—with such a room as this, and to think of dear, patient Bridget having it all these years! It's too bad. I shouldn't think Aunt Marion would have allowed things to go so.'

Then Eva felt to wondering as to how they could improve matters. Of course the first thing was to repair the leaky roof, and perhaps the walls could be papered. That would make it a little better. Some of the furniture looked shabby, too. If there was only a decent bureau and a more comfortable chair, and O, what a looking-glass! Eva thought, as she glanced into the little cracked mirror that hung by a twine string from a nail. 'Poor thing, I pity her if she thinks she looks as she does in that.' Wasn't there anything that could be spared from somewhere else to make this room look more attractive? But even then it could not help being hot and stuffy. Suddenly a thought struck her.

'If Olga could only have the old play-room downstairs! That is so nice and cool, it's too bad to use it for a storeroom,' and she opened the door and looked in. It was not very large, but the double window was wide and shaded by the spreading branches of the great apple tree. Often, as a child Eva had stood there and broken off the pink blossoms that fairly tapped on the panes as if calling attention to their own loveliness. She remembered how Aunt Marion used to warn her that for every one she picked a big red apple might be lost, but the roseate clusters were too alluring; there were always so many apples anyway—more than they could eat. Eva gave a little sigh as she thought of the childish days, then she turned her mind to the business in hand. 'She must have it—it's just the thing,' she said aloud in her eagerness, 'I'll ask papa as soon as he comes in.'

Then she saw Tom on the lawn, teaching the half-grown puppy to jump over a stick. 'O, Tom, please come here a minute,' she called, and hurried down the stairs.

'Well, what is it, Sis?' he asked, as he flung himself on the lounge. He listened in silence to her plans, then he looked at her critically for a moment. 'You're not a bad kind of a girl, Eva,' he said; 'you mean well. However, I think we'd better continue the roasting process. I'm afraid she'll stay if we make her too comfortable. Let's leave her in the attic.'

'O, Tom, please help me. I want to change things right away, if papa is willing,' she said coaxingly.

'Couldn't possibly, my child. I'm going down to the Point fishing. Run along now, little girl, don't tease,' and he waved his hand in dismissal.

Eva looked disappointed, but she did not wonder that Rocky Point was attractive, that lovely morning, and, besides, Tom seemed to dislike Olga so, anyway. She hoped her father would be more sympathetic. Tom was watching her out of the corner of his black eye.

'Eva,' he said presently, 'my new line has got into an awful mix-up. Can't you do something with it? My fingers seem all thumbs.'

Eva's slim white fingers were so dexterous in untangling the refractory knots that there was no danger of mistaking them for thumbs.

'I'll bring you home some of the nicest fish you ever laid your eyes on, for your dinner,' Tom said as he wound up his line.

Eva thought she would a good rather have his help at home, but she only smiled and said she would be ready for them. Tom went off whistling, with the dog at his heels. Eva busied herself about the house until her father came in, then she took him upstairs to show him the leak.

'Whew, but this hot!' he said as he mounted the attic stairs.

'Just think, Papa, how bad it must be to sleep here. See what a miserable little room,' she said as she opened Olga's door. She gave him a chance to examine the leak and then she laid the case before him—briefly, for her father had taken a newspaper from his pocket and was vigorously fanning himself.

'Of course let her have the room if you want to, Eva. I think myself it's better to use a good comfortable room like that for a human being than keep it just to stow away a lot of traps,' he said as they reached a cooler atmosphere. 'I declare I don't see how old Biddy stood that attic so long.' Then he added, 'Your aunt is a mighty good woman, but I must say she did let things go surprisingly. However, you're housekeeper here now, and we'll see how you make out,' and he pinched her ear.

To Eva's surprise she found Tom in the sitting-room. He listened silently while she and her father discussed the proposed change.

'I thought it would be so nice to get it all done while Olga's away and surprise her with it,' Eva said 'but I don't suppose we could. She'd have to be here to help.'

'What's the reason we couldn't?' Tom asked. 'I'll go over and get Mrs. Ryan; she's always ready for a job. I guess she and I can manage it, with you to boss us.'

'O, Tom, you dear boy,' Eva said delightedly. Then her face shaded. 'But you are going to the Point. Ross Baker said yesterday the fish were fairly jumping out of the water.'

'O, I know they're just dying to be caught, but they'll have to wait awhile. I've got some to fry now,' and Tom picked up his hat. Mrs. Ryan promptly appeared and they were soon ready for work. Tom took command like a general.

'Now if there's any of this stuff you want left down here, Sis, just pick it out and we'll cart the rest up to the attic in a hurry,' he said to her. Several pictures that had been marvels of beauty in her childish eyes were hanging in their old places.

'We'll leave them just where they are, they look so pretty,' she told Tom.

The old green and brown roses on which they used to play still carpeted the floor.

'Ingrains are powerful things to wear,' Mrs. Ryan said.

The neat bureau with its glass into which one could gaze without less of self-respect, a small table, a rocker that needed only a very little of Tom's mechanical assistance to become a cozy resting place

were to be left, while the few things pronounced worthy were brought down from Olga's room.

'Perhaps she would rather take those out herself,' Eva had said when Mrs. Ryan proposed transferring the contents of the bureau drawers. 'I'm so glad this bureau can lock up,' Eva thought. 'She will feel as if she had a little more privacy.'

'I guess that Olga's a pretty good girl,' Mrs. Ryan said to her in an interval of rest. 'I know some folks that lived near where she came from.' Then she repeated what they had said, how Olga had wanted to fit herself for teaching, but had put aside her own wishes to care for her brother's motherless children, and how, after she had grown to feel as if they were like her own, he had married again, and then somehow she had been made to know there was no place there any longer for her, and she had resolved to go into service. 'But they say she ain't never been the same since. It kind o' broke her all up. Poor thing!' Mrs. Ryan added sympathetically 'she seems awful sad.'

Eva listened with a heart full of pity. 'O, how could they treat her so?' she said to Tom when Mrs. Ryan went upstairs for something. 'I'm going to do all I can to make up to her for it.'

Tom said he didn't believe in the whipping post, but he thought a man who would treat his sister like that came mighty near deserving it. Then he pounded a loose tack into the carpet with a great deal of unnecessary force.

It was nearly four o'clock when Mrs. Ryan, with arms akimbo, announced that 'there didn't seem to be nothing more that she could do,' adding, as she surveyed the room with a satisfied smile, 'It certainly do look grand!'

Eva moved around the room, adding the finishing touches tenderly.

'It will give her a little homey feeling,' she thought, and the words, 'He setteth the solitary in families,' came into her mind. Or perhaps they had been there all the time.

'Wait a minute, for me, Tom,' she called over the balustrade, as she ran lightly up to her own room. She took a pretty vase from the mantel and, opening a drawer, selected a dainty table scarf. When she went downstairs Tom was busy near the window.

'O, what's that, Tom?' she cried.

'O, nothing but an extra shelf I had. I thought it might come in good for her to put something on. This seems to be a good place for it,' and he tried to look indifferent.

'O, what lovely carving! You do make such pretty things! Tom,' she added, rubbing her face against his cheek, 'how good you are!'

The shelf was hardly in position when they heard Olga on the stairs.

'She's on her way up to that dreadful room,' Eva whispered, but Tom had disappeared. Then she called: 'Olga, come in here a minute. I want you to see this room since we cleared it out. Isn't it improved?'

'It looks beautiful,' Olga answered, but looking very much like the graven image Tom had called her.

Eva grew a little embarrassed. 'We fixed it for you, Olga. That other room isn't comfortable and I'm sorry you ever had it. Try that rocking chair, Olga, and she pushed it toward the window. Olga obeyed mechanically.

'Do you really mean,' she asked, looking at her in a dull surprise, 'that you have done all this—taken all this trouble just for me?'

'But Olga,' Eva said, 'we enjoyed it, we didn't think it was a trouble. We wanted to do something to make you happier. You deserve to be happy and we want you to feel that you have a real home here. Then with a thought of the disappointed hopes, you can have some of my books if you want to study, Olga, and I'd love to help you about anything.'

But Olga was crying quietly. Eva looked at her in distress, with the tears in her own eyes. She did not know what to say but she took the hand that had done so much for others and gently pressed it.

Olga raised her head. 'Some way I've been just ready to give up. I've felt as if I didn't care what happened. Nobody else seemed to care either, and the heart's just been taken out of me.' Then she

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