

Do not be alarmed, I am not going to treat you to theology; not that I despise it, but I should be awkward at it,—Lisette, too. For my part, I hold in reverence all who lead a life of thought, theologians as well as others. To eat, drink, sleep, dress well, and to-morrow die, has never prepossessed my fancy much,—nor Lisette's either. To go through life like a great burly drone, knocking up against flowers, burying his proboscis in their cups, without looking or wondering at anything, without even inhaling the perfume of the blossoms he pierces, then, when evening comes, to die congealed beneath the leaves, or to be killed in a matter-of-fact way by a bee who has done with him,—whatever may be said for it, neither Lisette nor I find any sense or any poetry in a case like this. But dreamers—I do not mean by this empty dreamers—I mean the dealers with ideas, those who go digging into some rich vein, deep down in the mine, or soar on daring wing beyond the skies,—these, however poor their condition or their outward man, we—Lisette who knows none of them, and I who know but few—hold these to be true sages, great poets. In fact, it is just they who take the world in tow. Not easy-going people, elastic, satisfied with themselves and with all else, because seeing little beyond their particular peck of oats; but souls with vigorous griefs and mighty joys, men of the day-time, who want light everywhere, who prefer suffering to a truth-haunted sleep, who feel themselves travellers, pilgrims, wrestlers, always under arms, on the march, in the battle; often bruised, harrassed, losing courage, but sometimes visited by such fulness of joy, believing so boldly what they do believe, reigning so absolutely in the realm of soul, sowing so richly the soil they tread, conquering so triumphantly the adverse circumstances barking at their heels, that, as we see them pass, we feel that they are indeed the masters, the living men, and all others slaves, dead!

“I am sad,” said Lisette to me. “Listen: you will laugh, but I have had a dream.”

“Dreams are liars,” answered I, foolishly enough.

“Oh, dear, no! Dreams are not all true, I know, yet Joseph dreamed; Pharaoh saw the seven fat, then the seven lean kine, come out of the rushes of the river; it was God who made him see them.”

“Yes, God can employ”——

“The Lord has many messengers,” she broke in; then she shook her head. “It has left a gloom upon me.”

“Come, tell it, Lisette.”

“You will laugh; but it's no matter, I am going to tell it.

“I was walking in a meadow, towards evening; the sun was down, the plants drooped, clouds of dust rose from the road,—a wide smooth road; much quality went along it, coaches, riders, merchants, gentlemen, men walking behind their cows, poor people, too—a crowd like a fair. They all went one way; I did not trouble myself about where it led, did not seem much to care, it was as though I understood without knowing—I am tiring you.”

“Not at all.”

“Old people are slow.”

“Take your time.”

“I had not chosen that road, yet I went with the rest. I walked on the grass easily enough, though I was in a great hurry.

“On one side, under the thorns, I saw a rough path; one of those mountain tracks full of brambles and stones, felled trees that one had to stride over, roots on a level with the ground in which the foot caught. There was no crowd there; every now and then some heavily laden traveller, some woman, looking harrassed and sad. They sat down, or rather all but fell; then they looked to the top of the hill, took courage, rose, settled their baggage better on their shoulders, and bending under it, dragged on amongst the stones.

“The others, those on the highway, had not taken any notice of me; these gave me sad looks, but said nothing. It was uncomfortable; it seemed as though they were mourning over my fate. As for me, badly off as they were, I did not pity them, never thought of doing so.