

## HINO ILLÆ LAORYMÆ.

Last night, and there came a guest,  
And we shuddered, my wife and I;  
A guest, and I could not speak;  
A guest, and she could but cry;  
And he went, but with no good-bye.

A little before the dawn  
He came, but he did not stay,  
And he left us alone with our tears,  
For he carried our babe away,  
Was there ever a sadder day!

Had you ever a babe of a year,  
With curls on a tiny head,  
With limbs like the peach's bloom,  
And learnt that your babe was dead?  
Could you have been comforted?

Had it woven around your heart,  
As with fairy gossamer strand,  
Slight as that of the worm,  
Strong as the hempen band  
Which holds tall ships to the land?

Did you look in its baby eyes,  
As your treasure lay on your knee,  
And wonder what things they saw,  
And see what they could not see,  
The life that was yet to be?

Did it lie at your breast day by day  
While you gathered it near and more near?  
Did it sleep on your bosom by night,  
Ever growing so dear, oh, so dear,  
Your darling, your babe of a year.

While you dreamed of the wonder you held,  
A thing of so perfect a plan,  
Of the wonderful mystery of birth  
Of the wonderful mystery of man  
As only a mother can.

Till your heart, like a human thing  
Seemed to yearn for the child at your side,  
Yearn to gather it to itself,  
To the love that swept up, like a tide  
Whose fulness is ever denied?

If to you came that terrible guest  
We so dreaded, my wife and I,  
You will know why I could not speak,  
You will know why she could but cry—  
You have seen your own baby die.

FREDERICK A. DIXON.

## AN OLD MAID'S LOVE.

BY SUSAN ARCHER WEISS.

I had fallen into a doze as the stage-coach slowly progressed along a smooth and sandy country road. Being the only passenger so far, I had rejoiced in the luxury of undisputed possession, and was not over-pleased when being aroused by the stopping of the vehicle, I ascertained that we were to take in two other passengers.

One of these was a burly, florid, good-humored-looking man, and, as I soon learned from himself, was a well-to-do grazier of the name of Catlin. The other was of my own sex—a little, middle-aged lady, brisk and bright, who appeared accompanied by a silken poodle and a mockingbird in a cage—besides the usual basket, umbrella and parcels. She entered the coach smilingly, apologising for disturbing me, as I removed my own parcels from the opposite seat, then proceeded to arrange her effects with the air of one who had just taken possession of lodgings and was putting them in order. The grazier, though evidently as much a stranger to her as to me, kindly assisted by pointing out how the umbrella and parcels might be more conveniently disposed of, while I won her heart by noticing the little dog and suggesting that the bird-cage might be suspended from the ceiling of the coach.

When these arrangements were effected the little lady settled herself in a corner, looked smilingly about her, and seemed inclined to be sociable. Thus falling in with the grazier's humor, the two speedily became chatty and communicative, and it was not very long before I had learned the whole of Miss Allison's history. Indeed it did not take many moments to relate, being a remarkably ordinary and uneventful one. She had been born and always lived on the "little farm" which was now her own, having been left to her by her parents. She was not rich, she said, modestly, but had more than was sufficient for her own wants, and she meant to leave it all to her niece Alethia, who was considered the prettiest girl in the county of Gates, and had taken the highest prizes for drawing and French at the Mount Prospect Academy. She was only a farmer's daughter, it was true, but she had very dainty and delicate ways, and had never been forced to do coarse work. Like herself, Alethia was an only child, and her father, Miss Allison's brother, was "very well off," and with what she would get from him and from herself, Alethia would be rich, and a match for any young man in the country. And Miss Allison tossed her head and looked brightly around, apparently very proud of her niece, Alethia.

"The young lady's got a fine name in addition to her other attractions," remarked the grazier, good-humoredly.

"You think so?" replied she, looking pleased. "They wanted to call her after me; and I should have liked it if I had had a pretty name. But Priscilla isn't a pretty name," she added, with a light laugh; "and, to make it worse, they call me Prissy. It used to worry me when I was young, for I liked pretty names as well as other pretty things, so I resolved that my niece should be more fortunate than myself in that respect. Well, when she was a week old, I looked over all the books I could find about the house, and at last came across Alethia, which seemed just the right thing. And I think it suits her, only

she prefers to have it Alithia. That's French, you know."

"I take it, you know French, ma'am?" suggested Mr. Catlin, in a complimentary manner. "Oh, no; I had no advantages of education, which I've often lamented over; and that was why I insisted upon Alethia being sent to Mount Prospect Academy, and offered to pay for it myself if her father wouldn't. I think I should have made a good scholar," she added, with a half-sigh, "for I had a natural liking for books and pictures. I used to write poetry, too, when I was a girl."

"Shouldn't wonder, ma'am. And bein' so smart, you nat'rally looked down upon the men, and wouldn't bemean yourself to have one of 'em for a lord and master," said the grazier, with a good-natured chuckle.

The little old maid laughed, too.

"It wasn't because I had an over opinion of myself, but, somehow, the men I knew never suited me."

"Mebbe the right one hasn't come yet," he suggested, in a consolatory manner.

"No, nor I don't expect him to come at this time of day. He's staid away too long if he meant to come at all. After thirty-five a woman's got no business to be thinking of getting married—and I'm past thirty-five," she added, with a little defiant "don't care" air.

"Possible? Well, now I shouldn't take you for nigh that; and I've always maintained that no woman can live to thirty without some time bein' in love. If she don't meet the right one, why, she'll fall in love with the wrong one, and that's the way unfortunate matches come about."

"Well, sir, I'm past thirty-five, as I've said, and very certain am I that I've never been in love, and never shall be."

She said this very positively, while smiling and blushing a little. But at that moment a sharp exclamation from the driver, and a sudden stop of the stage-coach, caused us all to look from the windows.

"What is the matter?"

We had no need to ask, for there, right before our eyes, in the hot and dusty road, lay the figure of a man apparently dead, with a small bundle and stick beside him.

We were all out in a moment, and the driver, assisted by Mr. Catlin, lifted the inanimate form and bore it to the shade of the pine-trees by the roadside. He was quite unconscious, though not dead, as we had at first thought; and while I ran for water from a neighboring brook, Miss Allison produced a bottle of smelling-salts, and the driver a flask of spirits. Mr. Catlin, meanwhile, stooped down and carefully examined him.

"He's not hurt anywhere," he said, gravely, "but he's ill, very ill, poor fellow!"

"What ails him?" we inquired anxiously.

The grazier looked up and solemnly uttered one word:

"Starvation!"

An exclamation of horror and compassion broke from Miss Allison. She hurried to the coach and returned with a little basket of luncheon. Her hands trembled and her eyes were blinded with tears as she stooped down and placed a few crumbs of bread moistened with currant-wine between the white lips.

The sight was enough to draw tears from any one, let alone the warm-hearted little old maid. There he lay, a young man of not more than three or four-and-twenty, with regular, clear-cut features, clustering brown hair thrown back in a damp and tangled mass from his white forehead, and clothes which, though shabby, worn and travel-soiled, bespoke him not of the common or laboring class. And he was starved—worn out and nearly dying for want of food, and from the heat and fatigue of travelling on foot through the burning summer noontide.

As we gazed his eyes slowly opened—beautiful eyes they were—large and dark and pathetic in their wistful half-consciousness. The sight drew a fresh burst of tears from Miss Priscilla's eyes, which were assuming an unbecoming redness.

"What are we to do with him?" I inquired, anxiously.

"I'll carry him on to Atlees," replied the driver. "We can't leave him alone on the road to die. But I don't know as anybody there'll take him in. He's only a tramp, though a genteel-lookin' one."

"I will take him in," spoke up Miss Priscilla, promptly. "We're only six miles from my house, and there he shall stay until he's able to take care of himself. If his mother could see him now!" she added, in a faltering voice aside to me; "and if she's dead, I'll take her place and be a mother to him as well as I can, poor young man!"

In the coach she continued to tend him most carefully, every now and then insisting upon his taking a few crumbs of roll and a sip of her currant-wine. He was conscious now, but too weak even to speak, and we all forbore to force him to that exertion.

In little over half an hour we stopped at a white gate opening on the road, and leading by a short carriage-way to a pleasant, comfortable-looking farm-house, with a broad piazza in front covered with vines. Here we all alighted, and while Miss Allison hastened forward to prepare things, the men assisted our invalid to the house, I taking charge of the old maid's umbrella, which in her haste she had overlooked and left in the coach.

They laid the new guest on a snow-white bed in the coolest and neatest of chambers, and a motherly old colored woman went to prepare chicken-broth. I observed Mr. Catlin speak to

Miss Allison aside, and saw him take out a plethoric pocket-book, but she peremptorily made him put it away. Then he carefully pinned a bill in the young man's breast-pocket, and he and the driver departed, promising to send the doctor from Atlees.

I remained at the urgent request of Miss Allison. She had learned that I was going to a quiet little farm-house only a few miles distant, where I proposed to spend the hot summer months, and she would not let me continue my journey through the blazing noontide sun. In the evening, when it became cool, she drove me over in her old-fashioned gig, by a shaded woodland road leading directly from her house to the farm, and she expressed the hope that I would come often to see her while I remained in the neighborhood.

I was glad to avail myself of this invitation. I had from the first liked the bright, lively, kind-hearted little lady, and I liked her the better the more I knew of her.

My first visit to her was made ostensibly to inquire after her patient. He had been very ill, she told me, with a touch of brain fever, and she was still anxious about him. Her whole heart seemed stirred with compassionate tenderness as she related to me what she had gathered concerning him. He was a poor artist who had failed in his business, and without home, friends or means, was making his way on foot to the north, in the hope of finding some kind of an opening there. What little money he had possessed was exhausted, and, having been refused food or a night's lodging by one and another on the way who never took in "tramps," he had finally succumbed to hunger and fatigue, and would probably have died, Miss Priscilla said, with a choking sob, if we had not fortunately found him in time.

When I again called, I found Mr. Arthur Field so far improved as to be sitting up, and even moving about his room a little. Miss Allison took me in to see him, charging me not to talk too much. And how assiduous she was in her attentions—how carefully she watched even his looks and words in her anxiety to do all that could be done for him. And how quietly, intensely grateful he was.

"She is an angel!" he said to me in a low voice, in reply to some remark of mine on her goodness of heart. "I had no idea that such were to be found on earth."

Miss Priscilla blushed a little when I told her of this.

"He's a little weak-minded still, poor fellow," she said, lightly touching her forehead with her knitting-needle (she was knitting him a pair of socks, having already furnished the rest of his wardrobe). "By-and-by he will find out that angels don't go about in calico dresses and muslin aprons."

She was afraid that he felt it a little lonesome, she said, as he grew well. She had written to Alethia to pay her a visit. They both drew, and they both liked the same books, she had discovered. Alethia would make it pleasant for him.

After a while I noticed that she left off calling herself his mother; and that she took pains with her dress, and arranged her hair in a new and becoming style which gave her a much more youthful appearance. I even discovered the disappearance from her temples of a few gray hairs which I had before observed there. As for Mr. Field he was all tender and respectful devotion, and evidently did really consider her as in goodness at least something very near an angel.

"Priscilla," said I one day (I was somewhat older than she, and we had become friendly and intimate), "do you know that I think Arthur Field more than half in love with you?"

"Nonsense!" she answered. But she blushed painfully, notwithstanding.

"Hasn't he told you so?" I ventured.

On this she burst into tears. And then, in her usual frank and impulsive way, it all came out.

"I know it is perfectly ridiculous," she said; "an old woman like me, nearly forty years old, and a boy such as he, not yet five-and-twenty. But he insists that years make little difference where—where true esteem and attachment exist."

A sudden thought flashed upon me, and I spoke it out at once in my fear for her.

"He is poor, and you have money enough. Perhaps he is influenced by that consideration."

"No," she answered, quite calmly. "I told him some days since, when he was talking about leaving and looking for work, that he must stay here and take care of my little place. (It needs looking after, you know, and he'll soon learn), and I promised to provide for him. Alethia will have enough of her own, even if she don't marry. In fact I told him that I would look upon him as an adopted son and make him my heir, and so he need not feel anxious about the future. And then he—well"—blushing a good deal and her hands trembling a little—"he proposed that I should take him as a husband instead of a son. And he said I was still young, that people didn't grow old at five-and-thirty, and that for himself, after all the terrible trials he had gone through, and all my goodness to him, he should never love any woman as well as he does me. It's a boyish talk, you see."

Despite her attempt to speak lightly, there was a light in the old maid's eyes, a softness and tenderness in her voice, which betrayed that to her this offer of youthful love—the first ever laid at her feet, probably—was the dearest to her heart of anything on earth.

"If I were young," she continued—and there was a positive sharp pain in her voice and expression—"if I were young and pretty as I once

was, I might think of it. And if I had met him then, so exactly like what I used to think of and dream of as the sort of man I could love, so refined, noble, and handsome, so different from the coarse men I was accustomed to—why, we might have suited each other and been happy together. But an old maid like me—why, it's ridiculous, isn't it? People would make no end of fun over it."

Notwithstanding all this, things began to assume a definite shape, such as it was impossible to mistake, and I was not at all surprised when Miss Priscilla at length admitted to me in confidence that she and Arthur Field were to be quietly married in October. And, meantime, she added, Alethia was coming to stay with her until the marriage should take place.

Owing to circumstances, it was two weeks before I again saw my friend Miss Allison. Then riding out to spend an afternoon and take tea with her, I came suddenly upon her in the fields, walking very fast and nervously, and as if with no special aim. She warmly welcomed me, but not in her old bright happy way, and I noticed that she was looking badly.

"Where is Mr. Field?" I inquired.

"In the house."

"What, by himself?"

"Oh, no; Alethia is with him. Did you not know that she had come? Been here nearly two weeks."

I had, in fact, forgotten Alethia's expected visit, but presently, approaching the house, saw Mr. Field bending over the shoulder of an extremely pretty and delicate-looking girl, apparently directing her in a sketch she was making. Glancing from them to Priscilla I saw her lips unconsciously contract into an expression of repressed pain which at once revealed the whole story.

It was wonderful what self-command she exercised during the evening. I am quite sure that neither Arthur Field nor Alethia suspected what she was suffering. But, indeed, they appeared too much absorbed in themselves and each other to bestow much notice on other people.

I repeated my visit on the following week. It was now the young people who were looking miserable. Arthur was seated beside Miss Priscilla, dutifully reading to her from a newspaper, scarcely glancing at the young girl who stood with her back to him, looking from the window. By-and-by she went out.

"Take this shawl to her, Arthur," said Miss Allison; "she has gone to walk in the garden, and I fear it is cool."

"I don't think it is cool," he answered, dully, "and I would prefer staying here, if I am not in your way."

But I saw, and so did Priscilla, that his glances involuntarily wandered from the window towards the slender figure loitering amid the rose-bushes in the garden. Perhaps she expected him to follow, but he conscientiously resisted the temptation.

On the Sunday following I met all three at the country church. Miss Allison was looking very badly, pale, nervous and hollow-eyed; but both the young people were radiant. They were a remarkably handsome couple as they sat one on each side of their older companion, who looked older than ever from the contrast. Yet both were most tenderly solicitous for her comfort, and Arthur conducted her on his arm to her old-fashioned carriage with an almost chivalric devotion. I rode home with them at her earnest request, and after our early tea we walked in the rose-garden together, leaving the young couple to themselves.

"What day have you fixed upon for your marriage?" I inquired.

She drew a quick, sharp breath, but answered calmly:

"That is broken off. I shall never marry."

"I was almost prepared for this."

"It was an absurd notion from the first," she continued, "and I am ashamed of myself for having ever dreamed of it."

"Has he said anything—?"

She interrupted me quickly.

"No, no; not a word. On the contrary, he insisted upon it until—until I succeeded in making him believe that I had never really cared for it. You see, he held himself bound in honor. But they were so unhappy, he and Alethia—poor child; and how could I be so hard-hearted as to separate them! So I talked to them both, and—here she broke down into a little gasping sob—"they are to be married at Christmas."

"Does Alethia's father consent?"

"He did not at first. He came down for a day or two, and I had to talk him over to it. I mean to leave everything of mine to Arthur; and shall, meantime, make over to him sufficient to prevent its being said that Alethia married a beggar. And in every other respect he is her equal, if not her superior."

The generous, unselfish little old maid! I could have kissed her in my admiration and sympathy, and I quite agreed with Arthur Field when he said to me again, with great fervor and a certain moisture in his fine eyes:

"She is an angel!"

I was not at the wedding, but Priscilla herself sent me a piece of the wedding cake. She wrote a few lines cheerfully, telling of their plans, and of how she had purchased a few acres more of land to make the farm larger for Arthur. But I do not believe that the little old maid, though she makes a first-rate aunt, ever entirely got over the first love that had come to her—too late, alas, to be to her a joy and a blessing. Oh, youth, what an inestimable treasure thou art; so often lightly disregarded to be afterwards lamented in vain regret and yearning.