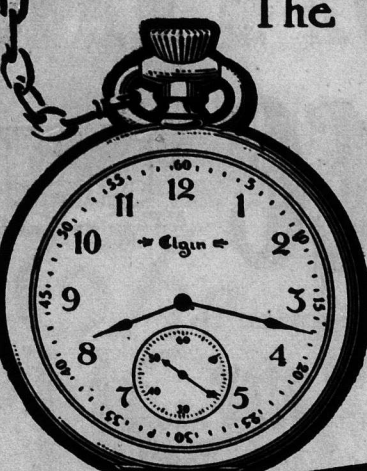


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"You like him, maybe? It's time you liked somebody, Del."

Del curled the red feather about her fingers, and put her hat on over her eyes, then a little cry broke from her, half sob, half anger.

"I might perhaps—I don't know. He's good. I think he'd let me have a parlor and a door bell. But he's going to marry somebody else, you see. I shan't tell you his name, so you needn't ask."

Asenath looked out straight upon the water. A dead leaf that had been caught in an eddy attracted her attention; it tossed about for a minute, then a tiny whirlpool sucked it down.

"I wasn't going to ask; it's nothing to me, of course. He doesn't care for her, then—this other girl?"

"Not so much as he does for me. He didn't mean to tell me, but he said that I—that I looked so—pretty, it came right out. But there! I mustn't tell you any more."

Del began to be frightened; she looked up sideways at Asenath's quiet face. "I won't say another word," and so chattered on, growing a little cross; Asenath need not look so still, and sure of herself—a mere humpbacked fright!

"He'll never break his engagement, not even for me; he's sorry for her and all that. I think it's too bad. He's handsome. He makes me feel like saying my prayers, too, he's so good! Besides, I want to be married. I hate the mill. I hate to work. I'd rather be taken care of—a sight rather. I feel bad enough about it to cry."

Two tears rolled over her cheeks and fell on the soft plaid shawl. Del wiped them away carefully with her rounded fingers.

Asenath turned and looked at this Del Ivory long and steadily through the dusk. The pretty, shallow thing! The worthless, bewildering thing!

A fierce contempt for her pink-and-white, and tears and eyelashes and attitudes, came upon her; then a sudden sickening jealousy that turned her faint where she sat.

What did God mean—Asenath believed in God, having so little else to believe in—what did He mean, when he had blessed the girl all her happy life with such wealth of beauty by filling her careless hands with this one best, last gift? Why, the child could not hold such golden love! She would throw it away by-and-bye. What a waste it was!

Not that she had these words for her thought, but she had the thought distinctly through her dizzy pain.

"So there's nothing to do about it," said Del, pinning her shawl. "We can't have anything to say to each other—unless somebody should die, or anything; and, of course, I'm not wicked enough to think of that—Sene! Sene! what are you doing?"

Sene had risen slowly, stood upon the log, caught at an aspen-top and swung out with its whole length above the water. The slight tree writhed and quivered about the roots. Sene looked down and moved her marred lips without a sound.

Del screamed and wrung her hands. It was an ugly sight.

"Oh, don't, Sene, don't! You'll drown yourself! you will be drowned! you will be—Oh, what a start you gave me! What were you doing, Sene, Martyn?"

Sene swung slowly back and sat down.

"Amusing myself a little—well, unless somebody died, you said? But I believe I won't talk any more to-night. My head aches. Go home, Del."

Del muttered a weak protest at leaving her there alone; but with her bright face clouded and uncomfortable, went.

Asenath turned her head to listen for the rustle of her dress, then folded her arms, and with her eyes upon the sluggish stream, sat still.

An hour and a half later, an Andover farmer, driving home across the bridge, observed on the river's edge—a shadow cut within a shadow—the outline of a woman's figure, sitting perfectly still with folded arms. He reined up and looked down; but it sat quite still.

"Hullo there!" he called; "you'll fall in if you don't look out!" for the wind was strong, and it blew against the figure; but it did not move nor make reply. The Andover farmer looked over his shoulder with a sudden recollection of a ghost-story which he had charged his grandchildren not to believe last week, cracked his whip and rumbled on.

Asenath began to understand by-and-bye that she was cold, so climbed the bank, made her way over the windy flats, the railroad and the western bridge confusedly with an idea of going home. She turned aside by the toll-gate. The keeper came out to see what she was doing, but she kept out of his sight behind the great willow and his little blue house—the blue house with the green blinds and red moulding. The dam thundered that night, the wind and water being high. She made her way up above it and looked in. She had never seen it so black and smooth there. As she listened to the roar she remembered something that she had read about seven thunders uttering their voices.

"He's sorry for her, and all that," they said.

A dead bough shot down the current while she stood there, throwing up its little branches like helpless hands.

It fell in with a thought of Asenath's, perhaps; at any rate, she did not like the looks of it, and went home.

Over the bridge, and the canal, and the lighted streets, the falls called after her: "He's sorry for her, and all that." The curtain was drawn aside when she came home, and she saw her father through the window, sitting alone, with his gray head bent.

It occurred to her that she had often left him alone—poor old father! It occurred to her, also, that she understood now what it was to be alone. Had she forgotten him in these two comforted, companioned years?

She came in weakly and looked about.

"Dick's in, and gone to bed," said the old man, answering her look. "You're tired, Sene."

"I am tired, father."

She sank upon the floor—the heat of the room made her a little faint—and laid her head upon his knee;—oddly enough, she noticed that the patch on it had given away—wondered how many days it had been so—whether he had felt ragged and neglected while she was busy about that blue neck-tie for Dick. She put her hand up and smoothed the corners of the rent.

"You shall be mended up tomorrow, poor father!"

He smiled, pleased like a child to be remembered. She looked up at him—at his gray hair and shrivelled face, at his blackened hands and bent shoulders, and dusty, ill-kept coat. What would it be like if the days brought her nothing but him?

"Something's the matter with my little gal? Tell father, can't ye?"

Her face flushed hot, as if she had done him wrong. She crept up into his arms and put her hands behind his rough old neck.

"Would you kiss me, father? You don't think I'm too ugly to kiss, maybe—you?"

She felt better after that. She had gone to bed now for many a night unvisited; it had seemed hard at first.

When she had gone half-way upstairs, Dick came to the door of his room on the first floor and called to her. He held the little kerosene lamp over his head; his face was grave and pale.

"I haven't said good-night, Sene."

She made no reply.

"Asenath, good-night."

She stayed her steps upon the stairs without turning her head. Her father had kissed her good-night. Was not that enough?

"Why, Sene, what's the matter with you?"

Dick mounted the stairs and touched his lips to her forehead with a gently compassionate smile.

She fled from him with a cry like

the cry of a su-

her door and lo-

ing clang.

"She's walked little nervous," up his lamp; "I Then he wen look at Del's fore he burned burn it.

Asenath, whe door, put her ing-glass and tore it off so s on snapped at little crystal s upon the floor.

There was no neck of her dre ed the plainnes her face. She s the first sight of the drawer whe was folded, but "I'll see the v with pinched lip self about and a letting the cruel shoulders, letti ous grow purpl she put her elb her chin into h a motionless h unrouted, un face that stared darkening at its ing its hair, her outline of its r

By-and-bye sh into her hands. face! She felt to blot it out tears" used to l sums upon her happy! But he all that. Why such faces?

She slipped u wildered.

"He can't mea she said, speak there and said sure of it.

Then she th more—of her springs, and litt

After a time was growing fai into the kitchen stayed a minut

The fire was re tacking. It seen and comfortable herself very ho she sat down c head in a chair as she ought t hours ago.

She climbed o'clock, having way, to give D

But when tor up with a brig kitchen fire for all the water, the potatoes, a about the house paleness, and s about it.

"I'll wait till making ready f "Oh, I can't, So other morni nights.

I am quite a to all romantic duct was prep Floracita, in the forgets the whe as to struggle, It is proud an young fellow; p she frees him; till she marrie (having had a ity to refuse overwhelms th with a sense o the eternal fitn

But I am not as the biograp factory girl, an tages.

Asenath was Such heroic clen none could tel were, or whethe was one of th is easy to be q had not been might have a ce under given cir