

Flynt's letters were many and very lover-like, and never one of them all but what spoke of her eyes. "If he knew how frightfully they pain me I am sure he would not praise them," said Isabel to herself. However she said nothing of this in her letters; indeed all their import was of him, his plans, his career, his little girl and their mutual love; but the terrible darting pain in her eyeballs had become a recurrent experience, something to be reckoned with in the possibilities of every half hour. She learned at the first premonitory quiver of pain to brace herself not to exclaim nor alter her expression, but so keen was the pain, so blinding the momentary agony, that for the instant sight and speech would fail her; now and then after one of these silent spasms her people would lovingly chide her for absent-mindedness, and hint at a sentimental cause. It was part of the discipline she held herself under, not to complain of what she called "little ills."

One day she was sitting under the trees with Dr. Parkman when the pain came: so acute was it, so piercing, that it wrung a moan from her, and a little cry, suppressed ere quite uttered. She raised her handkerchief to her eyes; when she lowered it a piteous, deprecating smile sweetened her grave lips, her beautiful eyes were quivering. Dr. Parkman leaned forward. A professional abruptness made his voice seem stern.

"What is it?" he asked.

"Must I tell?" she said. He smiled a little at her childish phrase.

"You must." She told him. His smile faded.

"We must understand this," he said rising. "You will let me examine your eyes, will you not? I can catch the 5.40 train to town. I will come back in the morning with the necessary articles for the examination."

She looked at him startled.

"Oh, but——" she began.

"My dear, leave this to me," he said gently; "it is necessary."

Something gripped her heart, for she saw he was seriously alarmed, and he was the world's most famous oculist. Her habitual unselfishness made her lay her hand upon his sleeve.

"You will not tell anyone? There is no need to worry them."

"No," he said readily, "certainly not till you wish it."

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It was eleven o'clock next morning when Isabel Stuart, issuing from the improvised dark room in the doctor's boarding place, turned and faced him.

"Now," she said, "tell me." He did not at first speak.

"Tell me," she insisted. The doctor's face was very grave.

"It is *amaurosis*," he said.

"Which means?" She spoke quietly, but her hands closed on the back of the chair.

The doctor felt that to this woman speech would be more merciful than silence; he sought for words, they came but stumblingly.

"It means, my dear girl, you must be brave; it means that in time, sometime, you——" he paused.

She completed his sentence in a voice she did not recognize—"Will be blind!"

"Yes." The doctor's lips uttered the word, but it seemed spoken within the very citadel of her consciousness, and spreading thence killed all hope in her.

"Hopelessly?" the word was whispered forth.

"Hopelessly." The doctor's answer was like a mournful echo.

That night Isabel Stuart fought her battle, and conquered. After the first shock of bitter knowledge had passed she had heard the *pros* and *cons* of her case discussed as no other living man could discuss them. The gist of it all was that sudden and irrevocable blindness would fall upon her. This meant,—her whole being shuddered in the pangs of realization. Only her God saw those dark hours in which Isabel Stuart wrought out the problem of her life. Nor will we be impious enough to guess at what passed therein. Suffice it that in the morning her tortured reasons gave birth to righteous resolution. It is said "joy cometh in the morning," and surely there was rejoicing among the angels that morning over another soul which had proved its right to be joint heir with Christ.

She wrote to Flynt Gerrard, breaking her engagement to him; she told him simply that her heart had changed, that she no longer felt she could share his life, that the career he had planned would not be suitable for her. The reticence of this letter was very bitter to her, the woman heart in her cried out so to be comforted, but she knew well that she must give no hint of the real reason underlying her action, else common manhood, apart from love, would make Flynt Gerrard hold to his bond. She knew, alas! so well, that a blind woman was no mate for him and his fortunes; how could she keep pace with him as she had planned to do; how give him the subtle inspiration towards good that she knew he needed (for the good in him was somewhat phlegmatic, numbed by many hard knocks against the world); how could she safeguard his child? But this encroaches upon those agonies of soul which came upon her in the night watches.

Flynt Gerrard, led astray by balked passion, wounded *amour propre*, and shaken by the memory of his former mistake, wrote her a letter accepting his dismissal, a letter of which each bitter word was a thorn in her heart.

Strangely enough, for a time the pains in her eyes were less frequent. There ensued for her a period during which she deliberately garnered to herself the treasures of sight.

The common phenomena of daily life became to her a precious panorama evidencing the whole epic of seeing. She considered as she had never done before the marvellous *minutiae* of nature. The ruby spots in the throats of the tiny catnip flowers, the delicate fronds of the bluebird's feather she found on the lawn, the swift iridescence of the dragon-flies' wings, the appearance, as of silver dust or delicate hoar frost, upon the petals of the roses—these things became as jewels set in the rosary of her recollections. It was borne in upon her how essentially selfish we are in the essence of our sympathies. Hitherto she had accorded a sympathetic word or a sigh to tales of those who were blind, now her whole being thrilled into kinship with them. Every newspaper she took up had in its pages some trace of the tragedy of blindness—doubtless it had always been thus, but "having eyes she had not seen." O terrible, irreparable omission! She heard some friends laughing over the bogus blindness of an importunate beggar; her whole heart grew sick thinking of the blasphemy of the needless patch. She understood the fervour of the old love song which rates the Well Beloved as worth "the very eyes of me." And of all the gracious promises of Holy Writ the one that seemed to her most gracious, most tender, most precious, was "and the blind shall receive their sight."