

PHRYNETTE MARRIED

one. Acute pain is the beginning of consciousness. I knew my girl posthumously. I knew her in my sorrow as I had never known her when she was my joy."

"Poor Médor; poor Hélène!"

"No, *petite*, poor Médor! but not poor Hélène. She would have been unhappy as the time came when my love was not all-sufficient. Hélène was plain, and women have no right to be plain. She died just when she would have awakened to humiliation and emptiness. She had sixteen years of as much happiness as any beautiful child can have, for, while I loved her ugliness, Phrynette not a day passed that I did not tell her that she was beautiful. I did not send her to school that other girls should not teach her what she died without knowing—that she was ugly!"

"You dear soul!"

Médor is a dear, he is full of qualities. I don't know whether to admire him more for his gentleness or his courage. For it must require prodigious courage to live on bravely when one is——

"How old are you, Médor?"

"Fifty-two, *mon petit*."

He does not ask "why?" which is very characteristic of him. He seems to have done his questioning even so long ago. Fifty-two—old, alone, without wife, child, friend, youth, expectancy, to know that the best of one's life is all behind one and that each new day is colder, emptier, longer, sadder—what courage!

"Médor, it is a pleasure to be ill to be nursed by you; you are so very gentle. How did you come by so much sweetness? You are as gentle as a woman."