

finally settled herself at an open window, where she could catch the pouring rain-drops in her tiny hands. Unmindful of everything but her own miserable thoughts, the young wife sat sobbing before her smoking fire.

"What I might have been," she reflected, "and what I have come to—a common drudge! Auntie was right—I should not have married a poor man. I might have been mistress of Palace Hill. Oh, dear! I wish I had taken John Parker's diamonds in-tead of poor Ralph's rose."

As the clock was on the stroke of twelve, a quick step aroused her from her dreary dream. Her husband entered, taking in her slatternly dress and the untidy aspect of the room at a glance. Jennie saw it, and rose to her feet, flushing with shame and anger.

"What's brought you home so soon?" she asked sharply, giving the smoking fire a spiteful punch.

"I'm going to the city—I've heard of a good situation—and I came in to say good-bye."

"You're all the time hearing of good chances," replied Jennie, "but they don't amount to much."

"So it seems, but I'll hope for better luck this time. Where's Birdie?"

Hearing her father's voice the child clambered down, and came toddling to his side, her garments dripping, her little face and hands blue with cold.

"Oh, Jennie!" cried the father, "only look! She'll be sure to have the croup. Why didn't you look after her?"

"I can't look after everything; she's old enough to know better. There, you bad little thing, take that!"

Jennie put out her hand to slap the cold little cheek that lay against Ralph's breast, but he looked at her with something in his face that stopped her on the instant.

"Don't do anything you'll be sorry for by-and-bye, Jennie," he said, gravely. "You are not quite yourself this morning."

"No, and I never shall be myself again," she burst out passionately, half-beside herself with shame and anger at her own foolish temper. "I'm harassed and worried to death, and I wish I was in my grave."

Ralph put out his hand to clasp her, but she glided from him, and went into her bed room. He could catch the sound of her sobbing, and it pierced his heart like a knife. Once or twice, while he was drying and warming the child, a tear fell on her golden head. When he had lulled her to sleep, he tucked her away in her crib, and then went to the door of his wife's room.

"I must go now, Jennie," he said, opening it softly; "the train will be due in a few minutes. Come, and say good-bye."

Poor Jennie longed to throw herself in his arms, and entreat him to forgive her, but her heart was too proud. She sat quite still, her face averted.

"Good-bye, Ralph," she said, coldly; "you'll be back soon, I suppose."

"As soon as I can—to-morrow at the longest; but, Jennie, come and kiss me. I might never come back, you know."

She laughed, and answered lightly: "Oh, don't be foolish, Ralph. You'll be back, no doubt of that; we've been married too long to act like lovers."

Ralph turned with a quick step; but she caught the look on his face, and she never forgot it to her dying day. For a moment she sat hoping he would come back, then she started up, and rushed to the door; but it was too late—he was out of sight. A few moments later she heard the shrill cry of the steam whistle, and knew that he was gone.

The day was unspeakably long and dreary, and as night closed in the chill rain still dripped from the cottage eaves. Margie grew worse, and before bed-time Birdie tossed in a high fever. With an awful terror at her heart, Jennie ran across the road and called in her nearest neighbor, Miss Charity Stebbins. She came at once, for she was very kind of heart, though rough of speech.

"The child's been exposed," she said, as soon as her eyes fell upon the little sufferer—"taken sudden cold—have a turn o' croup 'fore mornin'. Get on a kettle o' water to boil, and warm some grease. Got none? In course, wimmen o' your stamp never provide for the hour o' trouble. Now, I'm an old maid—never thought to have children, but I always keep a bottleful in the left hand corner o' the third shelf o' my pantry; I'll run over and fetch it directly. I've been out all day in the wet, a doin' for them as don't thank me, maybe, but it's my way. I'm not the woman to set down an' moan an' fret, like you do, Jennie Hilliard. I'll wager a round sum, if you'd a bin tendin' to your business an' not thinkin' o' yourself, the child wouldn't a had this turn. I know—I've had my eye on you for some time, and meant to give you a talkin' to, an' it might as well come out now. Make that water boil—I want to bathe this child."

Jennie obeyed in silence.

"I seen yer husband this mornin'," Miss Charity went on. "I took my eggs down to the station, an' a couple of butter-pats. Got a good price, too. My butter always does bring a good price. Well, I seen her husband, and his face made my heart ache. It's a burnin' shame, Jennie Hilliard, how you treat that man—he is workin' and a strivin', an' you so onthankful and discontented. You'll be sorry for it by'n-by."

"Oh, Miss Charity," Jennie burst out with streaming tears, "I'm sorry now, and if ever I see Ralph's face again, I'll make up for it."

"It's to be hoped you will," sneered Miss

Charity, "but I'm not sure you'll ever see his face again; you don't deserve to, any rate. I've seen wimmen like you before—worry a man's heart out, an' then cry for him when he's gone."

Jennie sobbed as if her heart were breaking.

"What a home you might make him," Miss Charity went on, as she sifted some mustard into the bath she was preparing. "Why, bless me, if I had this house, I'd make it shine agin. It only needs the will—one pair o' hands can work wonders when they're willin'."

And then, instead of walking about in a dowdy frock, w' your hair on end an' your face all of pucker, you ought to be as fresh as a rose-pink—a pretty young thing like you—an' always have a smile for your husband when he comes home. It's your duty. I'm an old maid, but it's my opinion as a woman as has got a good husband and a baby oughtn't to mope; she ought to sing from sun to sun. Now I'm done—I'll go for the grease. I've said my say, an' if you don't like it you must do the other thing, that's all."

She flitted out, and poor Jennie went to the little crib and fell on her knees beside it.

"Oh, Birdie! little Birdie!" she moaned. "If Heaven will spare you and give me back my husband, I'll never complain again!"

The night went by, with wailing winds and dripping rain, and through all the dark hours Birdie hung between life and death; but Miss Charity worked bravely, and when the morning dawned the child slept and the danger was past.

Jennie went to work with an overflowing heart. Ralph would be home at ten, and he must find a different home from the one he had left. Somehow, this morning everything she essayed to do went well with her, and long before the hour she had everything in order, and was dressed in a pretty frock, with a blue ribbon in her yellow curls, and a shining light in her eyes.

She listened with eager impatience for the sound of the train. She had refused to kiss Ralph when he went, but she was ready to give him a thousand kisses on his return.

Ten o'clock—but the whistle did not sound. Eleven—yet Ralph had not come. Her heart lay like lead in her bosom. Presently the doctor came round to look after Margie.

"Doctor," she cried, "has the train come in?"

"The train! Why, haven't you heard the news? A terrible collision—the whole train smashed—nearly every soul killed or wounded!"

Jennie grew ghastly white, and caught his arm with a grasp like iron.

"Doctor," she whispered, "Ralph, my husband was in that train?"

"Good Heaven! What? Ralph—Ralph Hilliard?"

"Yes; he promised to be here in the first train. Oh, Heavens! Oh, Ralph!"

Roused by the sound of her voice, Birdie awoke.

"Mamma," she called, "has papa come, and brought Birdie the red shoes?"

"Oh, Birdie!" wailed the poor mother, he'll never come again!"

"Yes he will, mamma; he said he'd come and bring Birdie the red shoes. Don't you ky."

And, with a sigh of content, she turned over and closed her eyes. Papa had never broken faith with her, and her little heart trusted him entirely.

Jennie arose, and put on her hood and shawl.

"I'm going, doctor," she said. "Miss Charity will look after Birdie and Margie."

"But, child you don't know—"

"Yes, I do know," she interrupted; "but Ralph's there, and, dead or alive, I must be with him."

The sun was going down, red and lurid, when Jennie came in sight of her cottage on her return. A tiresome journey—hours of sickening suspense, and nothing accomplished. She had telegraphed to the city, and ascertained to a certainty that Ralph was in the doomed train, but amid the living or the dead she could not find him. There were a few bodies so badly mutilated that they could not be identified, and she had come to the conclusion that one of these was her husband. It was a terrible thought, but she had to bear it and go home to her child when night came on.

Standing there in sight of her cottage, in the tawny splendor of the Autumn sunset, she fully realized her loss. Home, and no husband!

At that moment the cottage door opened, and a little figure wrapped in scarlet flannel, came towards her with a wavering step.

"Mamma," piped Birdie's voice, "papa's come, and Birdie's got the red shoes."

Jennie caught sight of them, and dropped down where she stood, without a word or cry.

"I've killed her!" Ralph groaned, as he bore her into the cottage. "What a fool I was!"

"No," retorted Miss Charity; "she'll come round. Wimmen ain't killed easy!"

Half-an-hour later, when Jennie awoke from her terrible dream, her husband was bending over her.

"Ralph," she whispered, softly, putting her arm round his neck, "can you ever forgive me?"

Foolish Ralph began to cry like a baby.

"Hush, Jennie," he said. "We're going to be so happy. I've got a splendid place, and you shall have everything you want hereafter."

"I shall never want anything again, Ralph," clasping him close, "but you and Birdie. I've had my life-lesson—I'm fit to be a poor man's wife now."

"And it's me as deserves the credit, if ye are," snapped Miss Charity, as she put the teatray on the table.

THE ORPHAN IMBECILE.

Ah, who will take care of poor Lottie. Now that her kind mother is dead? There are those who will mourn her condition. Supply her with raiment and bread, And give her a couch to repose on, Where in the dark hours alone She will lay in her brain-sick condition And wonder where mother has gone.

Ah, who will take care of poor Lottie, The imbecile peevish and queer? Who will give her that earnest attention Sue had while her mother was here? The money of friends and of kindred May save her from poverty's smart, But who can supply the love-cordial To nourish her hungering heart?

Ah, who will take care of poor Lottie! Her dear mother's spirit beguiled To earth, still is hovering over Her stricken and desolate child. Relieved from life's wearisome burden, It lingers in love near earth's soil, To influence someone to love her Ere it wings its swift flight unto God.

Ah, who will take care of poor Lottie! 'Tis love that the lone creature needs— She may seem dead to every emotion, But still her heart hungrily bleeds. She may not be able to utter Her terrible grief and despair, But her bosom feels none the less keenly The terrible void that is there.

THE ARTIST LOVER.

They said in the large farmhouse where Ellen Ralston lived, that she was different from the rest of John Ralston's children, who were stalwart men, and broad-shouldered, rosy-cheeked girls, while Ellen was slender and graceful, with a colorless complexion and soft grey eyes.

While Jennie and Carrie could turn off a day's washing before breakfast, do a week's churning without feeling any fatigue, and treated the daily cooking and cleaning as a mere pastime, Ellen strove vainly to keep pace with them in any of the farm duties.

It came to be a practice that the more dainty work fell to her share, without any spoken contract.

The white Sunday shirts of her father and brothers, the ruffs for the throat and wrists of her sisters' best dresses, were given to Ellen to iron, while Jennie and Carrie tossed off whole baskets of heavier clothing.

The pies and nicer cooking also fell to Ellen's share, and gradually all the sewing was left to her, while the others took her share of household work, milking, and outdoor duties.

Without any complaint of illness the girl had a slender, frail figure, and a far-away look in her large, soft eyes, that was a strong contrast to the blooming flesh-and-blood beauty of the other Ralston girls.

The old women called her flinkey; and her brothers laughed at her dainty ways and soft, low voice, but wherever she moved there was an atmosphere of peace and gentleness surrounding Ellen Ralston, that won love for her from all who came under its influence.

Even those who thought she was too delicate for a farmer's wife, expressed no surprise when it was known that she was betrothed to sturdy Will Nelson, one of the most flourishing young farmers at H—, and whose curling brown locks, large blue eyes, and splendid figure, made him one of the handsomest of the rural beaux.

It had been a long, patient courting, for Will had won-bipped Ellen since he was a boy, and when he won her promise at last, he was uneasily conscious that there were unstirred depths in her heart his love had never awakened; that it was more from her gratitude for his patient love and devotion than from any answering affection that she had consented to marry him.

There might have been a quiet wedding in the old church, a peaceful home at the Nelson farm, with Will and Ellen passing from youth to age in sober married content, if the fates had not ordained that Craig Elliot should pass through H— while on a sketching tour, and seeing Ellen Ralston at church, be seized with an artistic desire to sketch her pure, lovely face.

It was not difficult in the primitive little country town to gain an introduction into the farmer's family.

There was much giggling and many jests for poor Ellen, when it was ascertained that the painter wanted to make a picture of her.

In their good-natured pride at the compliment to the family, Jennie and Carrie loaded her with all their most cherished finery for the first sitting, and where deeply chagrined when Mr. Elliot suggested a dress of pure unadorned white, with the silky brown hair falling in its own natural waves over the shoulders.

The country girl had no idea that in her own soul nestled the germ of artist love, as she went to her room to obey the directions given her.

But as she came again to the stiff parlor where the artist waited her, he could not repress his cry of admiration.

Over the starched Sunday dress of white cambric the girl had draped a soft muslin scarf, that floated like a cloud from her shoulders.

The long, half-curling hair was thrown back from the low, broad forehead to fall in masses

around the shapely throat, and at one side the drooping flowers of a spray of pure white clematis fell amidst the tresses.

She was awkwardly conscious of the artist's admiration, and it gave a stiffness to her attitude, as she demurely took the seat he pointed out to her.

A portrait painter by profession, Craig Elliot was accustomed to the embarrassment and the wooden attitude.

So he made no comment as he took out his card and crayons.

He was a long time arranging his table and sketching board to suit him, and while he fidgeted with these, he talked to Ellen.

Many a time he had drawn a fair face from its sitting for a picture expression to an interested animation by his words, for he was a man who had travelled and seen much of the world, and could talk easily and gracefully of men or books.

But never had a face worn the absorbed look of intentness that crept gradually over Ellen Ralston's as he spoke.

He opened a new world to the girl, who at eighteen had never been ten miles from her country home.

And as this wondrous vista of unknown scenes was unfolded before her, the girl became conscious of some new chord of her own nature thrilling into life.

She was an uneducated girl, though she could read and write, and her knowledge of books was confined to the family Bible, the almanac, and a few school books the three girls had studied in turn during the winters at the village school.

Yet, as she forgot herself, her life, her surroundings, in the artist's words, and strange echoing response of her own heart, there sprang to her lips words that would have amazed her friends at H—.

She was utterly unconscious of the poetry of her descriptions of some of the scenes in her own quiet corner of the world.

She never guessed how her large soft eyes shone with the new inspiration of her heart, how a delicate flush crept to her cheek, or how her voice rose and fell in the novel excitement that made her eloquent.

There was nothing forced in word or action, yet Craig Elliot wondered how so rare an actress came to be buried at H—.

She painted word-pictures for him till he seemed to hear the leaves rustling and the birds singing, and when she listened with clasped hands and eager eyes to his words, there was an eloquence even in her silence.

Two hours of fairyland, and then the sitting was over.

Ellen went to her room to put on a print dress, and descend to the kitchen to make pies for dinner.

Yet the glamor of those two hours hovered about her as she pared apples and kneaded dough.

There was a painful aching at her heart, as if she had been suddenly torn from home and those she loved.

The rough voices startled her as she dreamed over her work, and for the first time she experienced a mad desire to escape from every scene she had known, every face she had seen.

The next day, when the artist came for his second sitting, he brought a copy of Tennyson to lend to Miss Ralston, and while he worked, he quoted some of his favorite passages.

From one poet to another was easy transition, and Ellen found herself wondering if in infancy or where she had heard these words, that seemed like her own tongue to her.

Surely at some time she had thought in this language, so new and yet so strangely familiar.

The face that the artist copied became a sore puzzle to him in its ever-varying expression, each look more beautiful than the last.

Sail, he thought no Madonna had so exquisite a face.

Animated, he longed to have it for a Sibyl.

Smiling, though that phase was rare, it was a radiance of joyousness.

So, as day after day found the artist in the prim farm-house parlor, the old story that is ever new was written upon the heart of each.

The summer was in its prime, the July sun blazing over field and wood, when Craig Elliot read the record of the past three weeks upon his own heart, and knew that he loved Ellen Ralston, a girl who could scarcely write her own name legibly, but who had the brain and soul of a poetess, with the face of an angel.

She inspired him.

He was conscious that with her constant companionship he could reach a height in his chosen art that alone he could not touch.

Already her words had suggested to him a wide panorama of scenes that he would work into paintings in the quiet of his studio.

He was singularly alone in the world.

Orphaned when a mere child, with a large income entirely at his own control, he had wandered in Italy, sojourned at Paris, visited every city of note at home or abroad, and kept himself strangely "unspotted from the world."

He had seen fair faces, had met lovely women many times in his varied life, but no face had ever nestled in his heart as that of Ellen Ralston was doing, no voice had awakened every tender emotion of his nature as her voice could.

Having no authority to consult, no voice to say nay to his project, he determined to woo her manfully, to win her if true love could win her.

So the July evenings found him at the farmer's porch, or strolling through shady lanes with Ellen, making her strangely happy, yet