

She was a tall young girl of about twenty-two or three, holding herself erect and with fine dignity. Even beneath the opera cloak it was easy to infer that her neck and shoulders were beautiful. Her almost extreme slenderness was, however, her characteristic; the curves of her figure, the contour of her shoulders, the swell of hip and breast were all low; from head to foot one could discover no pronounced salience. Yet there was no trace, no suggestion of angularity. She was slender as a willow shoot is slender—and equally graceful, equally erect.

Next to this charming tenuity, perhaps her paleness was her most noticeable trait. But it was not a paleness of lack of colour. Laura Dearborn's pallour was in itself a colour. It was a tint rather than a shade, like ivory; a warm white, blending into an exquisite, delicate brownness towards the throat. Set in the middle of this paleness of brow and cheek, her deep brown eyes glowed lambent and intense. They were not large, but in some indefinable way they were important. It was very natural to speak of her eyes, and in speaking to her, her friends always found that they must look squarely into their pupils. And all this beauty of pallid face and brown eyes was crowned by, and sharply contrasted with, the intense blackness of her hair, abundant, thick, extremely heavy, continually coruscating with sombre, murky reflections, tragic, in a sense vaguely portentous,—the coiffure of a heroine of romance, doomed to dark crises.

On this occasion at the side of the topmost coil, a white aigrette scintillated and trembled with her every movement. She was unquestionably beautiful. Her mouth was a little large, the lips firm set, and one would not have expected that she would smile easily;