

# The Inglenook

## Four-Light Windows.

BY ANNIE HAMILTON DONNELL.

"I hope there'll be four-light windows in heaven," Orpha Tripp uttered the words aloud. She was accustomed to utter many of her thoughts aloud, "for company," she said. When Lysander was away—Lysander was usually away—she sat alone beside her tiny tiny-paned window, piecing her quilts. She was lonely then. Orpha Tripp was lonely, too, when Lysander was not away; but she had never confessed it to herself.

"Yes, I hope there'll be four-light windows in heaven," she repeated slowly, letting the gay patchwork pieces lie unmolested in her lap. She was gazing out through the network of small glass panes. They made a queer, distorted "view" of the little old-fashioned yard and the berry-patch beyond. Orpha Tripp said it was like looking through a transparent checker-board. She had odd fancies, as most lonely women have.

"It's some better since I got my throne fixed," she mused; "I don't have to crane my neck so, and things look better straight ahead, too, even if you do have to look at 'em by piecemals."

The "throne" was a rude platform covered with a rug, which creaked uncanonically under her rookers; but it lifted her little lean figure in nearer proximity to the window sill. Orpha had made it herself when Lysander was away. She had waited ten years for him to build it.

The four-light windows were her yearning ambition. She had given up everything else long ago,—having the house painted and the bay window, and the little porch on the shady side of the house, and even the plank walk out to the well. One by one she had given them up, but not the four-light windows. She clung to them obstinately, patiently.

"I inherited the craving for four-light windows," I guess. Mother wanted 'em all her life, too," she said with a wistful smile. "And that's one reason I hope they have 'em in heaven. Poor mother! I like to think she's setting beside one looking down at me."

Lysander had gone to the court-house at the Centre. There was to be a final settlement of his dead brother's estate, and at last he was coming into his "fortune." It was not much in the eyes of anyone else but little Orpha Tripp. To her it meant—it might mean so much! She got up now and went out-of-doors, across the yard, to the lilacs. Her face was flushed with eagerness. She hardly dared to listen for Lysander's wheels on the road.

"I shall do it!" she cried, beating her hands together softly. "I shall ask Lysander. I've got to. Maybe after he's put the windows in, it'll stylish up the house so he'll want to paint it—and put the bay window in. Maybe Lysander'll think of the porch, too! He won't ever have another chance like this, with Eben's money right in his pocket, so. Hark! No, Lysander's got a loose spoke; that isn't Lysander. I most wish I'd asked him to let me go to the Centre with him. It's dreadful hard work waiting at home."

She sank down on the dry grass weakly. The excitement had unnerved her. The nearer the time came for Lysander to get home, the more sanguine she grew. She could almost see the coveted four-light windows in the weathered walls of the little house. She could see how they "stylished" it up, and how clear and big the panes of glass looked with the sun on them.

Hark! A wagon was coming along the road, and a loose spoke rattled in one of its wheels. Lysander was coming.

Orpha Tripp got to her feet hurriedly, and went

back to her work. Lysander would be fretted to see her out there waiting. When he came in a little later, she would say it to him. It was better to get over this fluttered feeling first. She was fifty-six years old, but she had never "said" anything to Lysander before—like this.

Half an hour later Lysander Tripp came in. He was humming a tune in a deep bass rumble. The omen was propitious.

"Lysander, did—did you get it?" stammered Orpha hurriedly. "Did they pay you the money at last?"

"Pay it! Well, I guess they did! I guess I'd waited long enough for that money, Orpha."

"I guess you had, Lysander. Eben died a long time ago. Lysander—"

Her throat felt dry, and she stopped and began again.

"Lysander—"

"Well, what say? Where's the weekly paper that came yesterday?"

"Lysander, you know you know I've been cleaning house lately? I didn't clean the windows, Lysander. I thought it mightn't be worth while if they were going to be stored up in the barn chamber. It seemed kind of wasted work, Lysander."

The nervous little speech ended, and Orpha looked away through the tiny panes of distorted glass. She was keenly conscious of Lysander's bewilderment and then of his gradual understanding. She waited for his answer with intense eagerness. It came at last.

"The windows don't need washin'. You better save your strength," he said. "And that makes me think"—why should the windows make Lysander Tripp think? "about the Simmonds's wood lot. I went round on my way home, and clinched it, Orpha. There was just money enough to a T. Lucky, wa'n't it?"

There was no answer. The little lean wife by the window was opening and shutting her fingers fast, very fast. After a minute she got up and went out of the room.

"Supper's ready, Lysander," she called gently by and by. She had made warm mush, as Lysander liked it. The little teatable was set with delicate neatness and care. The next day Orpha Tripp washed the tiny paned windows.

The spring was late in coming "to stay," and the summer lagged, too. But the July days were terrible with heat, and Lysander Tripp's little frail wife withered under the blast perceptibly. She grew leaner and paler and lonelier. Lysander was away from home all day and she sat alone, piecing quilts on her "throne" by the window. The house she could see through the checkerboard of panes—it was the only house in sight, loomed, unpainted and grim, in her "view." She rarely looked towards it. It was the county poorhouse.

"But it's got four-light windows," she murmured wistfully. "It must be nice to set by 'em and sew. You could most forget where you were."

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One day when Lysander came home at tea-time, he could not find his wife. Her "throne" was empty. The calico bits for her quilt were neatly folded in their basket, and some of her sewing things were on the high window-sill,—her thimble without any top, and her scissors and emery.

"Orpha! Orpha, where be you?" Lysander called persistently. Over and over again his big voice boomed out through the empty house. It had never been empty before. His heavy steps woke queer, loud echoes. The door slammed uncanonically. He wandered from room to room in a steady round.

"Orpha, where be you? Orpha!"

Then he found her letter. He found it basted with neat, long stitches to the roller towel. It took him a good while to get it off. His fingers fumbled. Orpha had never written him a letter before, and her painstaking, cramped handwriting was strange to him, as if some one else were writing him.

"I've gone away, Lysander," the little letter read. "I got so dreadful lonesome. I've gone where there's four light windows to look out of. I wanted to see how it seemed. All of a sudden it came to me this afternoon that I'd go. You won't mind, Lysander, will you?"

The small, careful letters waved in a sudden mist. Something odd clutched at Lysander Tripp's heartstrings. Something choked him, stifled him, paralyzed him. Orpha had "gone away"—Orpha! he could not remember that she had ever gone away before, on little visits or shopping trips, as other women went. She had never even "gone away" with him.

"I never took her. I never asked her," he muttered dully. "Nor she never asked to go. I wish Orpha'd asked to go!" He said it over and over in a helpless way. He had carried the letter into the sitting room to read it. He was sitting on Orpha's "throne," crumpling it in his big fingers and gazing stupidly through Orpha's tiny-paned window—ah, the window! What was it the letter said about a window? Lysander Tripp suddenly sat upright and began to count the little square panes rapidly. One, two, three how many, how very many, there were! And Orpha had wanted a four-light window so much!

How many things she must have wanted! The bay window—he had never built her that. The bit of a porch to sit on and piece her quilts, the plank walk out to the well he found himself counting the different things he had never done for Orpha, mechanically, on his fingers. Then he dropped his gray head into his arms, and began to cry the terrible, hot, wrenching tears that men cry who have never cried before. He had never learned how to cry.

Thirty six years before he had brought little shy, happy Orpha home to this little unpainted, old-fashioned house. It was unpainted and old-fashioned now. Then she had not minded.

"We'll paint it, Lysander, won't we? And we'll put in four-light windows," she had cried gayly. "You've no idea how four-light windows'll stylish it up, Lysander! And they're so nice to look through! And bay windows and little shady porches to sit and sew on—you can't think how they'll fix us up, Lysander!"

Why did he remember it all now when Orpha had "gone away"? Why did he remember just how confident and gay her voice had sounded, and how young and pretty Orpha had looked?

He remembered something else, too, now,—how he had found her sitting on the shady side of the house one day jogging something with her foot, something that was not there. She had flushed all over her sweet face, but she had met his eyes bravely.

"I'm making believe, Lysander," she had said softly. "I'm out on the porch, rocking the cradle. It's shady and nice out here."

But, when the little son had come, he had never lain in a cradle out on a shady porch. His first bed had been a tiny, tiny grave. There had never been another baby.

"I got so dreadful lonesome," the letter said. Orpha Tripp had been lonesome always.

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"Why? why, Lysander!"

It was dusk, and still the sorrowing man's head lay in his folded arms. Orpha touched it timidly with her finger-tips.

"Why, Lysander!"

"Orpha!" he cried out sharply. He thought he was dreaming that she had come back to him. But her finger-tips were warm.

"Why,—why, Lysander! Why, you've been crying! And you haven't eaten your supper that I left all ready. Didn't you find my note?"

He put out his hands, and lifted her up beside