

Our Home

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25 Cents a Year.

A WESTERN MEMBER.



A LUXURIOUSLY-LINED carriage, fragrant with the perfume of tea-roses.

In the darkness of the night their sweetness seemed more penetrating, more intense.

Louise Standish reveled in this delicious sweetness, as she did in luxurious surroundings, leaning back easily against the soft, dull red cushions, wrapped in her clinging, fur-lined silk cloak; the prettiest bonnet imaginable on her small, shapely head; on her slender white hands long, wrinkled "mousquetaires;" her slender little feet well-shod; her graceful young figure shown to charming advantage in an artistically-fitting dress of rich material, brilliant with long-flashing fringes of jet.

How very different life was now from what it had been! How changed everything—even Washington itself—seemed! Could this be the same place she had fairly hated only a few months ago? She felt like one in a dream, and was afraid of waking. She glanced up at her husband, a broad-shouldered, fine-looking man, to re-assure herself—to make certain it was really all true.

"Oh, Gilbert!" she cried, all of a sudden, sitting quite erect now, and slipping one daintily-gloved hand in his. "Oh, Gilbert, I am so very, very happy, I am afraid it can't last!"

Mr. Standish pinched the small hand in his slightly—caressingly.

"What makes you so very, very happy?" he said, smilingly.

"Of course you do!" Louise stated promptly, and recklessly leaning the pretty bonnet against the broad shoulders.

"I am very glad if I do."

"Of course you do, and you know it! Then our wedding-trip; our pretty rooms at the hotel; the hotel-life itself—oh, all this is delightful! Do you know, Gilbert, I am beginning to forget almost that I ever was in that dreadful Treasury?"

"And I want you to forget it," said Gilbert Standish, tenderly.

"I wonder how people can forget some things so easily," observed Mrs. Standish, thoughtfully. "My ten years of 'office' life seem like a dream now. I know no other but this happy one with you, and—the old, old pleasant life with father, long ago! Isn't it strange—isn't it fortunate that we can forget, sometimes?"

Tears almost shone in Louise's eyes; she buried her face in the tea-roses fastened in her dress and was silent for some little time.

All her old life came rushing back to her as they were whirled down the wide, smooth "Avenue," past the great white building she was so thankful to escape. She felt as though she must get out, and climb those endless granite steps from sheer force of habit.

Had she not done so day after day for ten years? She had belonged to that numerous class in Washington who had "seen better days"—it was such a numerous class that it almost became pathetic, one was apt to think! In her early life, when quiet young—just as her girlhood was dawning—her father (all she had in the world) had failed financially, and soon after died, and she had been left alone to earn her

livelihood, as best she might. Some kind friend in power, a college colleague of her father's, had taken compassion on her loneliness and helplessness, and had procured her a position in one of the government departments in Washington.

She had been very thankful for this, and had left the little New England home among the sheltering blue hills rejoicingly.

She was to be independent of her friends, at any rate—that was a great comfort. These friends, somehow, had not been quite so cordial since her father's failure and death.

So she came to Washington and took a small room, high up in a tall, cheerless boarding-house.

How people had stared at her the first day, when she came down to the great long dining-room at dinner! She had looked so young—so frail and white in her heavy mourning; she had hardly seemed fitted to battle with the world.

But she had managed to take care of herself these ten years (it seemed more like twenty!) and she was not a little proud of it. Somehow, though, she felt she had never had any girlhood—it seemed buried—lost in that great white building!

The work had not been so hard nor the hours so long—people who lived away from Washington or who were not in "office," she found, thought the hours from nine to four very short—but to her they seemed interminable. Perhaps that was because she was not very strong, however; and it was the confinement in the close, furnace-heated atmosphere more than anything else. How glad she was when any holiday came, and her month's "leave" in the summer—ah, how she looked forward to it!

She always went north—she felt the need of the northern bracing air—and once she went back to the little quiet town of her birthplace. The old house with its sloping moss-grown roof, and honeysuckle-covered porch, its pretty wild garden, had been sold—had passed into the hands of strangers—so she had stopped at the rambling town hotel; but it had been a comfort to be even that near home. In the sweet, still dusk she used to walk by the old place. No one could see her then, and she would lean against the white, somewhat tumble-down fence, and smell the flowers. Even this did her good. Then, before the scorching summer was over, while the fierce heat was still raging, she would come back, her vacation being at an end.

How she hated the very sight of that glittering white dome, as the train ran slowly into the city, and the Capitol loomed up before her against the hot, blue sky!

The glaring brick pavements and concrete streets dazzled her, after the green fields and blue hills, and made her eyes ache; in the still, hot air stifled her, and the Treasury seemed like a huge vault. The people she had constantly to meet in "office," jarred on her—there were but few who were congenial—the work became more tiresome, more monotonous, the confinement less endurable. Sometimes she would almost think she would not take any "leave"—the coming back was so dreadful.

It was very nice to be able to earn seventy-five dollars a month—it was better pay than she could get by doing anything else, she knew—but she could not help thinking now and then how different her life would have been if her father had only lived.

She was thinking of this rather sadly one chill December afternoon, as she walked through the falling snow home. The ground was already white, and the "Avenue" thronged with sleighs, for sleighing in Washington was a somewhat rare enjoyment, and people were quick to take advantage of it.

Next week would be Christmas, Louise remembered with a painful start. How she wished it might never come! It was such a sad day now.

She remembered with a pang what a happy day it had been, and tears came crowding to her eyes. The little parlor, hung with evergreens, and lit with the leaping, crackling wood-fire; the old piano on which lay the Christmas presents—her father's and hers—covered mysteriously with a snowy sheet, rose vividly before her.

So dim were her eyes that on reaching the boarding-house she almost stumbled up the snow-covered steps, and would have fallen had not some one coming down kindly grasped her hand and steadied her.

"Thank you!" she managed to say, a little breathlessly, and clinging to the cold iron railing.

A tall, good-looking man, well protected from the storm by a heavy overcoat, raised his hat and passed on.

That evening at dinner, Louise was asked if she had not seen the new member from Colorado, and the Hon. Gilbert Standish was pointed out to her as he sat drinking his coffee and finishing his dessert at the next table.

The young girl instantly recognized him as the gentleman who had rendered her such efficient and kindly aid on the steps.

The following day, Miss Triplett, the somewhat faded blonde maiden lady with whom Louise boarded, moved Mr. Standish's seat—she being something of a match-maker in her way—to one at the same table with, and next Miss Louise Arden.

They met frequently after this; not only at the table, but in the parlor, where every evening Miss Triplett's boarders congregated to exchange common-places, and have a "little music"—a very little music, in reality, for Miss Triplett's numerous boarders were not possessed of the most musical or cultivated voices.

One night Mr. Standish asked Miss Arden if she would not sing for them. "You look as though you could sing," he said, smilingly.

Somehow, Louise felt in the mood for singing that evening, and so, much to the surprise of many in the room, for she had rarely ever touched the yellow-keyed piano during her stay in the house, she rose, and crossed over to the instrument.

In spite of the want of practice, her fingers were still limber, her voice still very sweet and clear, and not untrained. In her youth—in those "better days," she had studied under a good teacher.

The new member listened attentively. The simple, pathetic ballad touched him, somehow, inexpressibly—he could hear every word she sang; a somewhat rare quality in most singers; and the sentiment of the song was very pretty.

After that, in answer to the little storm of applause she received, she sang Ardit's gay Italian waltz-song, full of delicious, sparkling little runs, and quite artistic in its way.

This captivated the parlor; Miss Triplett's boarders crowded around the singer, praising, and at the same time chiding her for not having shown her capabilities before, and Gilbert Standish came and led her back from the piano, as if she had indeed been some famous concert queen, or cantatrice.

Louise's cheeks glowed—it always brought the color to her cheeks, the light to her eyes, to sing—and Standish could not help thinking how very pretty she was—a little color was all she needed; it was ordinarily so pale.

After this, Standish frequently got her to sing for