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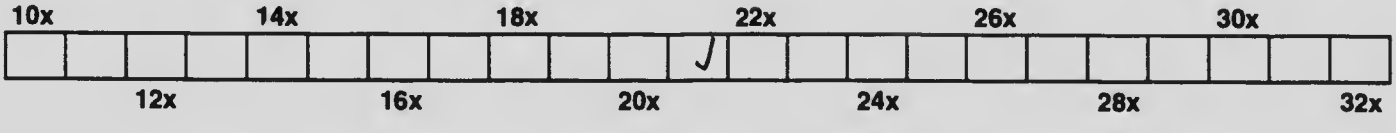

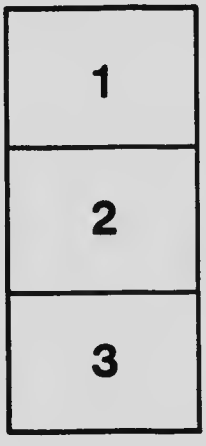

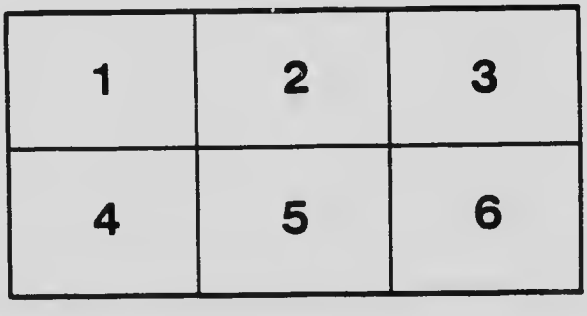

Tales of Old Toronto

By

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"A Canadian Book of Months."

Illustrated by

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TORONTO
WILLIAM BRIGGS
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TALES OF OLD TORONTO

LOVE AMONG THE RUINS

I.

THE time of which I write was some thirty years ago, when Belle Raymond was two-and-twenty. She was living in the house of her great-uncle Raymond. The dwelling was a dingy, semi-detached white brick house, characteristic of the period, and stood somewhere in the vicinity of Shuter and Bond streets. That was when Gerrard Street was uptown and Yorkville seemed a day's journey. The household consisted of Uncle Raymond, who was over seventy, wrinkled, pale-eyed and white-bearded; Aunt Elizabeth, his wife, close on his own age; her sister, Aunt Anne; Belle, and Belle's morose and trying brother Edward, aged about twenty-six, who with Belle had been left an orphan at an early age and had been adopted by Uncle Raymond.

The sitting-room in the little white brick house was small and square, and had been papered some years before in brown with dull gold flowers touched up with red. Now the paper was rubbed and dingy. The chairs and sofa were of walnut, of an early Victorian design, and covered with horsehair. There

was a marble-topped table in the centre, which bore up bravely under the never-changing load of a Bible, a Shakespeare, and a Fox's Book of Martyrs. There were ornaments of dangling cut glass on the mantelpiece, various china figures, and something wonderful under a glass case; an old-fashioned oil lamp hung from the ceiling over the centre-table and gave light to the family group.

In the daytime Belle did not find the room so bad. Just now it was winter, and when she sat at her sewing there were slight changes to be observed through the window from time to time. Sometimes the snow was piled high on the doorsteps and roofs of the red brick houses opposite, giving them a cosy aspect. Sometimes the generous sun of golden February afternoons flooded the street where the rich blue shadows did not fall. Then a swarm of birds came one morning and despoiled the brilliant mountain ash tree. Not many moments elapsed without someone passing by. There was always something not absolutely the same.

In the evenings, when the curtains were drawn in the little room, and Uncle Raymond sat in his skull-cap in his arm-chair on one side of the fire, breathing heavily, and Aunt Anne, Belle and Edward poring over books

or work under the lamp, it seemed as if nothing changed, as if things went on for ever in maddening monotony.

The old uncle gave his dry cackle at his own jokes, that never made Belle feel like

smiling; gave out his dry-as-dust information on topics that never interested her, or had to be read aloud to and shouted at on account of his increasing deafness.

Aunt Elizabeth was always meek and com-

pliant and characterless to a depressing extent. She talked little, which perhaps was some comfort.

Aunt Anne was full of gossip of tradespeople, of sewing, of church affairs, tantalizing in its remoteness from any kind of human interest.

Edward, too, did not seem in touch with young people or interests of his age. He stayed in perpetually of an evening and read or played patience.

Belle had taken on her from such surroundings a sort of crust of old age which stifled youthful emotion, and made her feel more or less dead to youthful pleasures, as if she could never hope to have an active share in the world outside the little white brick house. Occasionally a rebellious clamoring for some more youthful and lively thoughts or occupation would well up through the stupefying crust that dulled her emotional life.

Once when the old people had gone up to bed, and she and Edward were alone in the sitting-room, she burst into tears and appealed to her brother: "Oh, Edward, what a life this is, shut up with all these old people!"

Edward turned to her. "Belle, are you going crazy, or have you been reading

novels? Most girls would be only too thankful to have a soft spot to live in like you have. What do you want? You are not a beauty, or a millionaire, or a girl of eighteen."

Belle, only too humble, remembered again that she had been in long dresses for some six years, that she was no child, that she must not count on things that happened in novels happening to her. Her uncle was a strict Presbyterian. Dances were forbidden. They seldom were invited out to entertainments. Edward never brought any young men to the house. She had met an occasional youth at the few parties she had been to, but she was shy and diffident and made no effort to be attractive when there were other girls about. No youth had ever made love to her in her shut-in life, and she had seldom been told she was good to look at. Yet she was rather prepossessing. Her large grey eyes had never been kindled to coquetry, and her pretty lips had never curved in expressive answers to love-making, except perhaps to imaginary love-making that she had indulged in before she felt herself almost an old maid.

There was not much privacy in the queer little household. The days developed like a monotonous little play with the same scenery, the same actors—the breakfast table in the

poky little dining-room, the dinner table, the tea table with the tea and toast set on the old round of mahogany. Then the parlor in the evening. Then her little cold bedroom with the old dark wardrobe, the old walnut bed, the marble-topped washstand with the purple

jug and basin, the little square looking-glass over the dressing-table, where she saw herself night and morning. Belle thought there were lines coming at each side of her mouth. "Shall I see one line after another coming," she pondered. "till I am like Aunt Anne or

Aunt Elizabeth? Shall I wilt here like a forgotten weed, or something just as useless? Where is love, where is life—are they only in books? They are not here. Do realities, interesting things, ever happen to people? They don't happen to me."

The summer seemed a lonelier season than the winter. In the winter one was more shut in; one seemed to see just how the people at home lived. In the open summer there came glimpses of other lives which showed up her own as dull and narrow. The spring brought an uneasy stirring of hope in some intangible way. The ice broke up and melted into rills and streams which bubbled up through the old board walks The leafless poplars and willow wands colored tenderly, and startling patches of green showed on the terraces exposed to the strong March sun. The brown earth softened, and all these things gave forth a wonderful and deliciously disturbing perfume. In her walks Belle sometimes caught a sentimental glance of girl and boy, and at her window at night in the soft spring darkness, in a hopeless way, she imagined kisses on her lips.

Then came the summer. The chestnut trees spread their fans and proudly bore their white bouquets; the lilacs enchanted, and the

syringas were a perfumed joy. Uncle Raymond had his old wooden summer armchair placed on the sidewalk at the front door, and there the family grouped themselves till dusk. But in those sweet summer days she saw youths and maidens in boating dress going off in pairs to enjoy themselves. She caught glimpses of picnickers coming and going, and there were other sights and sounds of summer gayety which made her heart ache with its own solitude. When the dusk came she was heavily depressed and thought no more of love or pleasure for herself, because of its too mocking remoteness. The chestnut trees and syringas seemed hateful in their beauty and unfitness as a background for her imprisoning life. When the beauty of summer faded and became dusty-coated she grew more easy; the days shortened, the world around seemed less joyous and more in keeping with her own mood.

This winter faded away, leaving the thought in Belle's mind that next winter she would be twenty-three. Spring came, and then June, and the gates of heaven opened and let loose the comforting angel. One evening Belle came to the tea-table a few minutes late. Uncle Raymond was there, pink and wrinkled, and dipping his toast in

his tea; Aunt Elizabeth, silent, and gentle to nothingness; Aunt Anne, warted and parchment-like in her black dress, was chirping away; Edward, morose, sallow, and malicious; and—a stranger, fair-haired, about thirty-five, strong and weather-beaten, in a light tweed suit, was introduced to Belle as Cousin Alec Cowan, from Edinburgh. Cousin Alec was a second cousin, a lawyer, who had come into a modest fortune lately and was enjoying a little travel. He had been on the Continent for some months pursuing a hobby of sketching in water-color, and was now in America for a few weeks, and was staying in town with some other cousins.

Belle, too shy to speak, devoured with her eyes the refreshing sight. Cousin Alec had the light, clear blue eyes and fair skin that appeal most directly to a brunette like Belle. He talked and was entertaining. After tea all adjourned to the sidewalk, and the visitor stayed chatting till long after dusk. Unembarrassed, he glanced frequently at Belle and included her in the conversation, not always waiting for her shy and tardy replies.

The old people went indoors and one by one to bed, and Belle found herself alone with the visitor for a moment in the parlor.

"Good-night, little cousin," he said, "I

hope we shall meet again soon, and have another talk."

He took her hand, and—was it fancy?—seemed to be about to draw her a little closer. Then there was a step in the hall, and Edward came in smiling his sardonic smile. Alec dropped the hand and said good-night to Edward, saying he should be two or three weeks in town, and promising to call again soon.

Belle dropped asleep that night smiling on her pillow. She had all sorts of odd fancies as she fell into a doze. Had the cousin been looking at her admiringly? Had he been about to kiss her good-night? But, after all, he was as remote as heroes she had read of. He would surely be gone again in a flash.

The next morning she went to the shops on an errand, and as she was turning her steps up town again a voice, which seemed the voice of her dream, said, "Good-morning, little cousin, may I not walk a few steps with you?" And in an easy, bantering tone he added, "You are as fresh as a rose to-day, prettier than last night, I believe."

Belle grew crimson, and she thought, "Oh, if he knew that no one ever spoke to me like that he would not tease me so lightly." She tried to look at him and answer, but failed.

Just then they came to a confectioner's window.

"Come, cousin," he said, taking her by the arm, "I know you love sweets; I can tell by the shape of your lips."

By this time Belle was able to ugh and stammer out, "You are too kind."

"Not a bit of it," said Alec, and a box of sweets was put up. He walked a few steps with her, and then put them into her hand. "I shall come again soon to the ogre's cave," he said.

Belle almost danced home with her little prize. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks blazing as she went up the stairs, where she encountered Edward. He looked at her curiously, and she laughed to herself as she thought of the sweets hidden carefully under her cape.

She locked them in a drawer in her room. Her head was dizzy. She could not think clearly. She only knew that the glance of Cousin Alec's bantering blue eyes made her blood tingle, and that she was dying of impatience to see him again.

Sooner than Belle hoped he came again. He appeared in the evening and joined the little party on the sidewalk. After sitting for half an hour he suggested to Belle that he should take her for a little stroll.

Belle was amazed at his boldness, and looked questioningly at her aunts and at Uncle Raymond. But her uncle only said, "Yes, yes, child, take your cousin and show him about a little. Certainly, certainly!" And Aunt Anne actually fetched her a hat and a wrap! When they lost sight of the family party, Belle wondered if she was dreaming or awake. It was nearly dark, and she felt as if she were in some fairyland, with a prince by her side. Cousin Alec chatted on gaily on different topics. Then they came to a small park, and he suggested that they should sit down and have a little talk on one of the benches.

Belle had collected her wits, and thought to herself, "Let me enjoy every minute of this little adventure," for it seemed an adventure to her. "Let me not think of the future, nor how soon this pleasure may cease. Let me have a few happy moments in my dismal life."

When Alec said, "Now let us have a little cousinly confidence," and took her hand gently and spread her fingers out on his palm, she did not take it away.

He continued: "What a dismal old graveyard that house is for a sweet little rosebud like you to be blooming in."

She said with a sigh, that almost broke in ecstatic tears, "I wish you did think I was sweet."

"I do," he said heartily, and there seemed to be nothing else for it but to put his arm around her and hold her quite close.

Belle's cheeks burned, and whatever she possessed of wit or eloquence rose to her tongue as she told of her life in the little white house—of Uncle Raymond's tedious babblings, of Aunt Elizabeth's dreary quietness, of Aunt Anne's depressing small talk, of the unsympathetic disposition of Edward, of the absolute monotony of her life.

Cousin Alec was most sympathetic. "Egad, I'd run away," he said.

"And I'm getting old," continued Belle.

Alec laughed long and loud. Then he stopped suddenly, and gravely put his hand under her chin and turned her face to him. "You look about eighteen," he said, "you are nothing but a baby in arms. Do you know, I wanted to kiss you good-night last evening."

Poor Belle at this moment realized the utter dismalness of her life, and cried out, fearing the moment might pass forever, "Kiss me now!"

"I will, indeed," said her cousin.

He kissed her, and they both laughed.

" I think we must go back now," said Alec, " or that brother of yours will be in pursuit."

Belle kept vigil for hours that night. Many times she went over the small occurrences of that half-hour in the park. Her moment of triumph was there. No matter how scant the glimpse, the gates of Paradise had been opened to her. How gently he had taken her hand! How close he had held her! He had listened to her troubles, so long borne in silence. He thought her pretty. He had wanted to kiss her. He *had* kissed her. Her brain reeled with delight. This man, whc fair hair and cool blue eyes were so attractive to her, had laid his lips on hers in that sweet intimacy. After her long starvation and unhappiness she dared not look into the future. She was determined to draw all the available honey from the present.

And then to sit beside one she loved in the soft summer night. Oh, just such nights as those, how often she had longed to be loved! This night had been ideal. There was no moon. The hidden syringas gave forth their perfume enriched by heavy dews. The earth was mysterious with warm and heavy shadows. The elms in the park towered black and lacy against a softly luminous sky, lighted by fewer stars than in winter nights.

II.

THAT one kiss was sufficient for the present, for two or three days, for Belle. Then she realized that it was not sufficient, that her one desire in life was to see and kiss and be kissed again.

Then Cousin Alec came at the same hour on a fine evening when they were all sitting at the door. He was enviably cool and unembarrassed, Belle thought. She could not speak.

Presently he said that the cousins with whom he was staying had asked him to bring Belle up for a little visit that evening.

The cousins did not live far off, and Belle found herself on foot and alone with Alec once more. He did not speak of the last evening they met, but talked in a lively strain about Scotland and his travels. They stayed an hour or more chatting with the cousins, and started homeward.

As they neared the then deserted park, Alec laughed and drew her towards it, saying: "I cannot pass the park this way, can you?"

They sat on a bench as before, in the deep shade. This time Alec did not take her hand. They sat apart, talking softly for a little. Then he said: "It grows late, my dear little

cousin; the night is too nice to go in, and yet it is too sweet here to stay out. What say you, Cousin Belle?"

Something about the droop of her little face, which glimmered white in the darkness, made him lean towards her and touch her cheek.

"Not a *tear?*" asked he. But the cheek was surely wet. He drew her towards him, and as she gently relaxed into his arms and her little head dropped on his neck, and he felt her sigh on his cheek, that sigh said very plainly, "My heart is breaking for you, my dear, dear Alec."

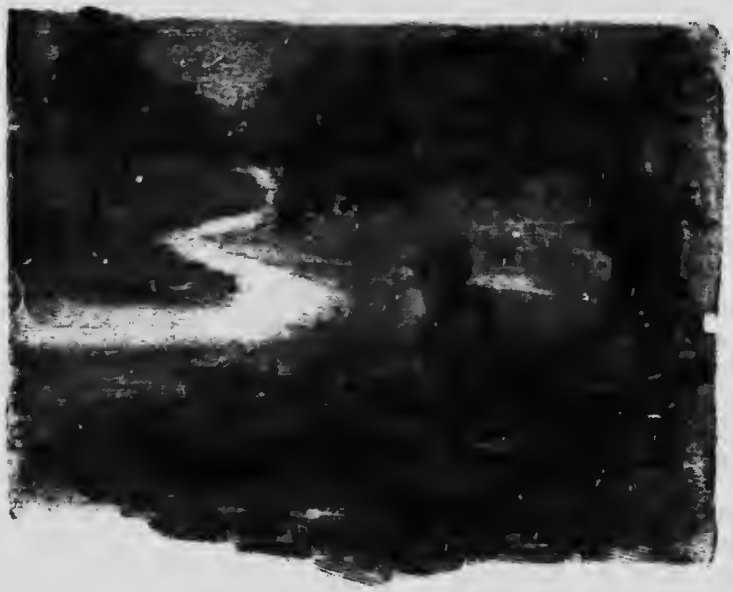
As he drew her on his knee and felt the bewitching slenderness and softness of her body close to him, he could not let her go at once, but kissed her tenderly and passionately till even the desolate child felt that the ten minutes in the lovely June darkness made up to her for the gray solitude of her past years.

Then he set her down upon the bench. "Little cousin Belle," he said, "you are much too sweet. I cannot forget you, but a roving rascal like myself must not spoil ever so little of your life."

"I would dare everything," whispered Belle, "to make ever so little of your life happy."

"Nonsense, child," he replied; "come, go home, and go to sleep and forget me at once."

He led home the silent girl, telling her he would come once more to Uncle Raymond's house to bid her good-bye, but that they must not wander about alone again.



But, partly by design, partly by accident, they did meet again various times in the next fortnight. There was a long day in the delectable summer valley of the Don—a day exquisite in the promise of long hours together, sweetly tragic, and the more

precious in the knowledge that it must end. A day of joyous, lover-like, child-like frolic, alternating with returns to contemplation of some feature of the dear one. The climax of folly was when Belle held up her dress above her ankles and waded barefoot in the shallows of the river, and Alec dried her little feet for the most part with kisses.

Then there was an afternoon roaming in the woods with confidences suspended till the gloaming. Then on a curving fallen tree they sat close, the silence broken by shy love names, soft whisperings, and the kisses daily more dear. They groped homeward, Alec's arm holding Belle close, her heart beating wildly at the deliciousness of the moment and at dread of the chill, lonely evening before her.

A last evening together there was under the stars which had glimmered pitilessly on her former desolation and would again. There was love-making a little bold, wrapt in its shield of summer night, a little desperate at the near parting. All that was dear to her Belle held in her arms—her sunburnt, roving Alec; and Alec held in his arms the tenderest, most loving girl that was ever there. That night they said farewell, Belle feeling that she had drunk enough of joy to last her long.

On sunny days between those meetings the world had been a blurred golden haze for Belle; on dark days the fire glowed within, and external things were dreamy and indistinct. She was perpetually conscious of parting kisses and caresses. The hours of meeting had been few, but she had learnt love as though she had spent a lifetime on it.

Utter loneliness soon descended upon her after the last parting. She felt herself a widow, but tragically rejoiced at having been loved and at loving so much. There were keepsakes in her bureau. A day would come —a calmer day—when she would go over them again: the cardboard box that had held the sweets; flowers Alec had picked; a charm from his watch-chain. Belle had a small, short, light curl which she did not keep in the drawer.

One morning, a few days after she had last seen him, Belle sat crushed and resigned at her sewing in the parlor. Aunt Anne was there at work too. The front door opened, there was a brisk step in the hall, and Alec appeared in the doorway.

"Good-morning, Aunt Anne; good-morning, Belle," he said. "Aunt Anne, I want to speak to Belle."

"You can speak to her, you can speak to her," quacked Aunt Anne.

"Yes, but, Aunt Anne, I want to speak to her without you."

Belle had jumped up crimson from her work.

"Without me!" began Aunt Anne, but Alec had put her gently out and closed the door, and she did not attempt to re-enter. Belle found herself on Alec's knee, weeping in his arms. "Are you weeping because you must marry me in a week and come away with me?" said Alec. "Kiss me, my precious girl; put your arms round my neck," he pleaded, and they kissed, amidst Belle's tears, warmly and long.

"Was there ever a kiss like that before," said Alec, "in this dreadful little room? It's a wonder this horsehair furniture doesn't fly out of the window. No, my girl, no more kisses like that for a week—business to attend to. What a brute I have been to torment you so. You little temptress, one more kiss before the old times are gone forever."

A moment for the kiss the gods allowed them—the happiest heaven of a moment it was to Belle, no more a widow—then the household, having taken alarm, came trooping

in. Aghast they were, Uncle Raymond and the aunts, but Alec boldly quieted them.

But did ever such golden hours come again, such sweet, warm moments, of which each one might be the last? Hours of trespassing in Paradise, under the nose of the angel with the flaming sword; kisses forbidden, and secret to all but the two; and the mild Canadian summer stars, the maple wood, and the silver, winding Don—the first rending of the veil of strangeness between the two lovers so aptly made for one another!

THE LONELY STUDENT

It was a winter's day when I first saw her. The snow lay new and soft and billowy on the ground. It pervaded the air illusively and confusingly, and it hung above in the sky, unborn, with its future of melting between heaven and earth, or swelling the white masses covering the earth. The houses round about the church were decorated like a Christmas card, with a load of white on porch and roof, and with fine white lines suggesting shutter slats, window-sills and door-panels.

The church mounted darkly, like a mountain, into clouds, in its square at the end of the street. In front of the edifice, and almost competing with it in height, was a great bare poplar.

There were grocers' wagons flying here and there, and milk carts on runners gliding over the road, and the children were running everywhere with their little sleighs. *She* was at the door of the white cottage adjoining a larger white house. She was sweeping the banked-up snow from the cottage steps—a slender, trim figure, poorly clad. She was about sixteen, pale and pretty, with red lips and fair hair.

I stopped and asked her name.

She looked surprised, and replied, rather shyly, "Selina."

"Who lives in this cottage?" I asked.

"Me and my father, the sexton," she said.

"Perhaps some day you will show me the church, my dear?" I said.

At this she ran into the cottage with no further word, and I returned to my room across the road.

I was then about twenty, a gawky youth, and, I suppose, an unattractive one. I had been in delicate health, and had recently returned from a two years' sojourn in Europe with my parents. I had just taken a room at a house in this old part of the town, and was attending lectures at the university. I never was jovial or hearty enough to make many men friends of my age, and girls did not seem to care much about me either. In fact, I was rather solitary, though I felt sociably enough inclined. Sometimes I felt myself drawn very much to some individual man, woman or child, who as a rule did not reciprocate my fancy.

I had addressed the young girl in the absent-minded way that I had, and I now began to ponder over it. I had probably offended or frightened her. I must remember

that I was in Canada, not on the Continent, and must not talk freely and patronizingly, even to a sexton's daughter.

I thought no more of the girl for a day or two, but when wandering into the church on the Saturday afternoon following, I met the sexton, a garrulous old man. He was willing enough to talk—showed the carved lectern with great pride, made remarks upon the frescoed ceiling, praised the stained-glass chancel windows, and told me he had been sexton "thirty year."

Then I spied, hanging back in the distance, Selina. "There is your daughter," I said; "does she want to speak to you?"

"Come here, Selina," he said; "what d'ye want? Don't be hanging off there."

As the slim figure reluctantly approached I felt joyful. I could not tell why. Was she not a common little wench, and should she not be very pleased if I noticed her?

She blushed as she came near us. The pupils of her eyes enlarged in a timid stare, and they looked very black in her white face. I noticed her pointed chin and her slender wrists, and a wild desire came over me to hold her tight in my arms. All she wanted to say was that the rector wished to speak to her father in the vestry, and off she went with him.

I wanted to say something to her, to detain her by some means, but desisted. I was afraid of frightening her a second time. I lingered alone in the church, which was not really a fine one, but had its own church-like beauty of lofty lighting, of large silence echoing at the faintest sound, of church trappings, which are always mystically attractive to me.

The winter passed slowly enough, with its opaque snowy days, its dismal slushy days, its crystalline days of brilliant sunshine, succeeded by gem-like nights of star-pricked sapphire.

The sexton, I found, was a widower possessed of a married daughter as well as Selina. The married daughter and her husband kept house for him, and Selina did not always live there, but was a good deal with an aunt in the country. After I saw her in the church she must have been away with this aunt nearly three months. I used often to think of her. I made various sketches of her in foreign guise—as a Dutch girl, as a Madonna in Memling's style, as a Norwegian with gilt ornaments in her hair; as a little Parisian, bareheaded, with a shawl tightly drawn across her breast and a length of French bread under her arm.

In the end of February the Lenten services

began. The afternoon litanies were in a tiny chapel upstairs, in a wing of the church. One dark, cold afternoon I was feeling depressed, and thought it would suit my gloomy mood to creep upstairs to the chapel and listen to the melancholy droning of a litany. When I had established myself in a corner seat and the service was well under way, I opened my eyes upon Selina at the far side of the chapel. She was sitting by another young girl, of a blowsy, uninteresting type. As I looked at her she met my glance, and then the blowsy friend saw me looking in their direction. She whispered something to Selina, and they both smiled. Thenceforward I forgot the litany. Presently I followed them out of the chapel.

I could not help speaking to Selina as we came out into the square. "I hope you have come back for some time," I said.

The friend tittered, and Selina looked down and said, "Yes, for two months or so; I am going to get confirmed."

"Oh," I said, "how interesting!"

The friend tittered again, and Selina shut her lips tightly and would not speak again, and then they both turned in at the door of the sexton's house.

She would not let me approach her again for some weeks, try as I would. She always

flitted, whether I saw her in the street or in the church, or whether I went in to have a smoke with her garrulous father in his own sitting-room.

Then I became head over ears in love with this will-o'-the-wisp. I wrote verses to her almost every night. I wrote them to her red lips, to her blue-black eyes, to her slim wrists, to her ankles, to her hair, and to her most slender, most attractive little figure. I almost cried at times because I could not put my head on that little childish breast and tell my loneliness.

I saw her at her confirmation, and for a brief moment tried to think she was my bride, with a veil over her most desired, adored features, only worn to make the unveiling a wilder ecstasy.

One evening the angel Spring descended upon our streets. The poplar stretched up into the mellow sky and gave forth strange perfume. The yielding, damp earth was full of scent. The nighthawks twanged on high, and I noticed the large buds of the chestnut trees. The children roved about, playing games in the street and calling to each other. I wandered to the far side of the church and strolled up and down till I heard the children's voices gradually ceasing. The spring

night, dewy and inspiring, was upon me. They were lighting up the chancel, for it was choir practice night. Then, as if I had waved a magician's wand for the wish of my heart to take shape, Selina appeared in the dusk. She seemed rather startled to see me, and I thought to myself, "It will only be a matter of a few seconds, and she will slip by me and out of my way."

But this time, for some reason, she did not evade me, and I found myself, in the joyous fulfilment of hope long deferred, strolling on this side of the square and talking to her. It may have been half an hour that we walked together. I talked as well as I could on all sorts of subjects, on things I had seen abroad, on books, on theatres. She replied in low, sibilant tones. Her remarks were scant and commonplace. Sometimes she said: "How grand!" and once she said, "I love the theatre; I have only been once." Then she remarked that I seemed lonesome.

It was she who was self-possessed and dignified, and I who felt that her ordinary little speeches were gracious and kindly. When she said, "Mr. Hatcherd, I must go now," I replied, "Just a moment longer; let us sit here on the steps."

We went into the shadow of a closed door-

way of the church and sat down. Then suddenly I drew her on my knee. She did not resist, and I snatched at my moment like a drowning man. I kissed her eyes, her cheeks, her ears. I kissed her lips, and, like a drowning man, ran the gamut of a lifetime —only this was a lifetime of love. She was my sweetheart, my bride, my long wedded wife! This was our bridal tent under northern skies at one instant, and at another I floated with her in a gondola on waters where love does not slink in apologetic corners, but languishes openly in company with other loves.

Then I noticed that the music in the church ceased. Till that moment I had not known that there was music. Selina freed herself, panting, stood up for a moment listening, and ran off like some slender wild animal.

I went back to my lodging and sat by the window in a delicious mental haze, drinking in the spring darkness. I sat there till midnight, when I heard the town clock striking. The moon had risen by that time and I was tingling with romantic passion. All my slight experiences of love, of sensuous delight in girl or woman, all I had read of love, pagan and intellectual, seemed to condense itself into epistolary form. I pulled the blind in

the face of the moon, lighted my lamp, and sat down to write. In an hour I had written a love-letter, made as beautiful as I was able to write, to Selina, and then I went to bed.

In the morning I read over my letter, and decided that I must see Selina and talk to her again, and make her understand me better, before I should give it to her.

She must have shut herself closely in the house, for I could not find her all day. I attended two or three lectures, all the while in a maze of love, wherein I wandered into the most exquisite imaginings.

The twilight of that day seemed to last forever. The children racketing about in the everlasting gray light annoyed me frightfully. At last they dispersed and I slowly walked towards the side of the church where I had walked with Selina on the previous evening. There was no one to be seen. There, where a gas lamp lighted up a cottage front, a fair-haired child toddled out screaming with laughter. Its mother came out, captured it, shut the door, and all was quiet again. I walked up and down impatiently, and finally in desperation thought I would call at the sexton's cottage and, under some pretext, ask to see him. I turned a corner to another side of the square, and presently I heard voices and

tittering. I stopped in a black shadow and waited. Then there came from the steps of the church two youths, accompanied by Selina

and the frowsy girl friend whom I had seen with her in the little chapel on that winter afternoon.

As they came into the light one of the boys

put his arm round Selina and, I suppose, tickled her, for she shrieked with laughter. I recognized him as a big, stout, red-faced boy who sang in the choir and was a clerk in a grocery store on the shopping street close by. The girls wore hats with cheap flowers. The frowsy friend was talking loudly and laughing hoarsely. Selina herself, to my astonishment, was merry and animated.

They turned in my direction. In the deep shadow, half in defiance, half in despair, I leant stock still against the old church palings, and with lowered head and eyes uplifted I glared at Selina, and I thought she knew whose the lurking figure was.

That night my thoughts were not as those of the night before. My mind swung, with an almost killing change, to an opposite extreme. Last night I had thought of raising Selina to my level. To-night it appealed to my imagination as a lovely and original situation that I should descend to her level. Yes, I would become anything, a street-car conductor, a bricklayer, or even a grocer's clerk. I would marry her; we would live in some whitewashed cottage. Her friends would be mine. I would consort with her family. I would make rude love to her, as the choir-boy had done. At this thought my head reeled

with passion. To live one's life all in one class of society, how dull, how chained by convention! How much better to be a hero in Selina's coterie than despised in my own.

The next morning I had a letter:

"MR. HATCHERD.

"DEAR SIR,—I know as ye saw me last nite. I am honest engaged to Jim Healy. I hope you won't come between us with telling him of the other nite. Plese don't, for I love him. Yrs respeckfly,

"SELINA."

I was stunned, dazed, and within a few hours was raving with fever. It was not for weeks that I knew exactly how the terrible little letter had affected me. Selina had set a wounding heel, not upon my heart for a moment, but upon my whole life. I was so desperately lonely and so desperately magnetized by her, I had hoped during those wild kisses on the church steps that here was a breast where I could lay my head and be consoled. I had thought that a girl in her position might give me a love mingled with a certain kind of worship that would wrap all the old wounds and my self-love in a cloak of balm. And there was a something in the coarse charms of her slight, plebeian face and

figure which drew me nearly out of my senses with longing, as a more elegant beauty had never done.

I left the place for a matter of three or four years. I abandoned my university course on account of ill-health. My parents both died, and when their estate was divided between myself and my brothers and sisters, there was for me a modest competence which would enable me to live in the hermit-like style I desired. One day I heard of a second-hand book business for sale near the old square. After negotiations with the owner I decided to take it over.

The shop, lined with time-colored volumes, ran into queer little inner rooms full of books, with west windows through which the setting

sun came, one might say, with a "romantic antiquarian gleam." What my friends thought of my venture I did not care, and I settled down among my books an old man at five-and-twenty.

For some time after I had started in business I avoided the street where I had lived as a student, but one day I was tempted into the shadow of the church. I found that the sexton had gone away, and I forbore to ask after his family. One day, however, as I wandered farther, turning along a street opposite one of the church doors, a child ran out of a doorway and a familiar face appeared at an open window to call it in. It was Selina's face. She saw me, hesitated, and spoke. I asked after her father, and she told me that he and her married sister had gone to the Northwest, and that she herself had been married three years. She had heard of my taking over the bookseller's business.

Then at her invitation I entered the cottage. The front door opened into a sort of living-room, where she had some ironing on the table. At my request she went on with her ironing. She had altered very much. She was plump, matronly, and self-possessed. I could look upon her more or less calmly. Yet her presence had a charm for me. I found

her self-possession magnetic and soothing. I talked to her of my business, of the present, of the future, of anything but the past. I felt myself not the fine gentleman but the humble admirer. The high mantel shelf was laden with teapots, an old-fashioned clock with pictures on it, and a couple of china dogs. There were geraniums in the window, and rocking-chairs with antimacassars about the room. Everything was neat and clean as a pin. She showed me her two children, and invited me to come in the following Sunday and meet "Jim." I came and found Jim quite friendly. I suppose she had told him I was a harmless sort of person.

After a time I became a frequent visitor to Selina's cottage. She treated me with a gentle patronage, and to me she was a sort of patron saint. I had few friends—one or two from my student days, a couple of cousins who came occasionally out of some whimsical curiosity to look me up in the bookshop, and one or two customers of a literary turn, who from frequent visits to my bookshelves fell into a sort of old acquaintanceship and asked me up sometimes of an evening to have a chat in their libraries.

But Selina's house was the brightest, most human spot in my life. I made friends with

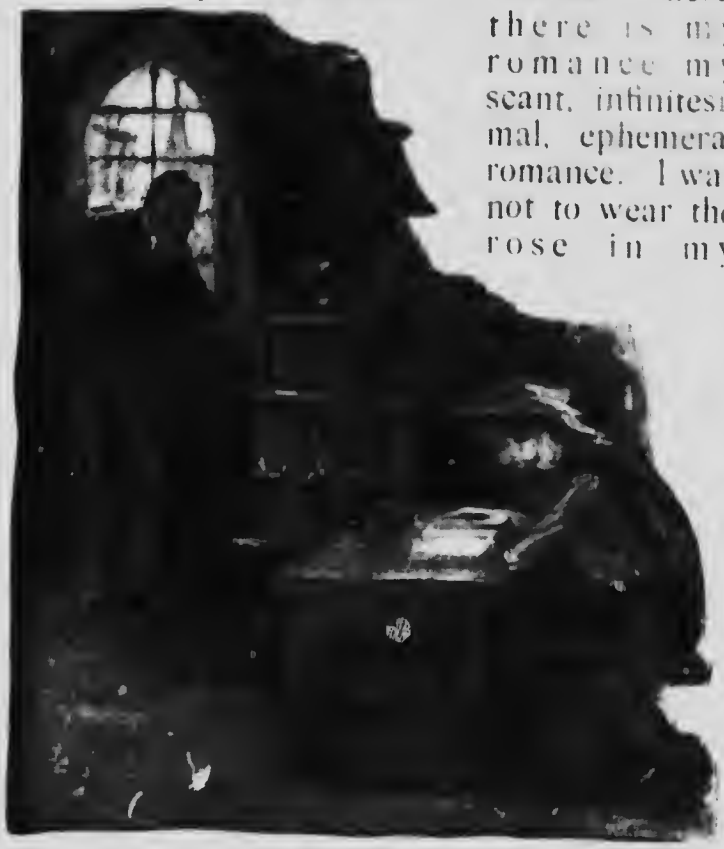
her children in the time-worn way, with pockets full of toys and sweets. I spent many a Sunday evening, Christmas, and Thanksgiving Day at her house, and in return gave them from time to time a modest feast in my rooms over the bookstore. We are all growing old together. I can see my own picture as I write—a thin, sallow man of fifty, ambling about in an old cloak which I rather fancy, fastened by small metal links in front.

A curious destiny, is it not, for one of a family of gentlefolks, to be the proprietor of a small bookstore and to have for bosom friends a humble family in a back street? But what matters?—our proper destiny is where we fit, not where it seems we ought to fit. Better to slide harmoniously into our own obscure corner than to shift about forever in perpetual discontent at not filling some impossible, brilliant place.

I had a tiny book which I kept a secret in a secret corner of my store. This was—a collection of the poems I had written about Selina before my illness. I had a few copies printed—it seemed as if something must come of our love, and this poor thing was all that had come of it. I had never shown it to anyone, and I did not mean to show it to Selina; but one day, a year or so after I had taken

possession of my business, I did show it to her and told her what it was. She had been out making some purchases, and had dropped in for a minute to invite me to tea the following Sunday. She looked very pretty, in a simple way, in a gray dress and a black hat which cast a mysterious shade over her large eyes and pale face. Moved by a sudden impulse, I opened the book for her inspection, mentioning the year of its inscription. She sat down, turning the pages and reading here and there for quite a little while. I watched her in silence. When she rose and handed me the book, she cast upon me a glance, mystifying, and paler than ever. She lingered for a moment, saying nothing. Her attitude was gentle, almost yielding, I fancied. I had an impulse to take her in my arms, but forbore. She spoke at last: "Fancy anyone writing those things about a poor girl like me! Thank you, Mr. Hatcherd." Then she was gone. I sank down in the chair she had just left, buried my face in my arms, and meditated long. It was as if she had given herself to me for a moment in a kind of a spiritual way, as if she had been mine again for the moment as she was on the church steps five years before. Her gaze at me might have meant mere kindness or pity, or

a sweet and fleeting desire. I was glad I had not rudely put the moment to the test. There there is my romance, my scant, infinitesimal, ephemeral romance. I was not to wear the rose in my



bosom, but only to snatch a tiny falling petal or two, and to grasp at the perfume from afar. God send you whom you love, reader! For my part, I have been afraid to break my calm of thankfulness for my humble seat in the presence of my rose.

THE FOOTSTOOL

OH dearie, dearie me! There it is finished, and not such a bad job for an old person! Thirty brassheaded nails driven in and many more taken out; the crimson rep stretched tight and the footstool re-covered; all the grandchildren off at school—a quiet house—and here I am alone with my relics. Ah, such relics! I took them off one by one this morning, and there they lie before me, the four old coverings of my footstool. I must shut my door that I may view them the more quietly.

Ah, I can scarcely say quietly! I can say solemnly, but the old tree feels a spring shuddering of the sap rising, and the stirring memories of young, young days shudder in me at this moment.

There is the oldest square! I have not seen it for sixty years. Sixty years! A tiny space in history, but a stupendous period, a lifetime, for many a poor human being.

There is the first covering—a royal blue with a garland of rosy flowers. I remember first seeing, through a mist of tears, that rosy garland lying on the blue. My sister Jeanie

and I lived with a collection of older relatives in an old, down-town house near the shopping district. We had a paved yard, but no garden, and any kind of rural outing was the greatest of treats for us. On this day that I am now recalling we were to visit the cemetery, old St. James', with one of the elders. The cemetery meant no dismal place to us. We thought it as pretty as any pleasure ground, with its curious stones and crosses, its hoops with hearts suspended, its various chains and railings so nicely arranged for jumping, and, not last in interest, the wreaths and floral ornaments redolent of history, in their various stages of decay. We loved to play about the narrow, rectangular paths; to dodge among the stones and monuments; to walk along the wide, curving road above the vaults which faced on the ravine. How we used to peer into the mysterious wooded depths of this ravine, where the crows cawed so loudly in the springtime. When we heard these warning, uncanny bird-notes rising above the dark glen, it seemed as if the crows must have some churchyard tale to tell of spirit-wanderings in their tangled woods.

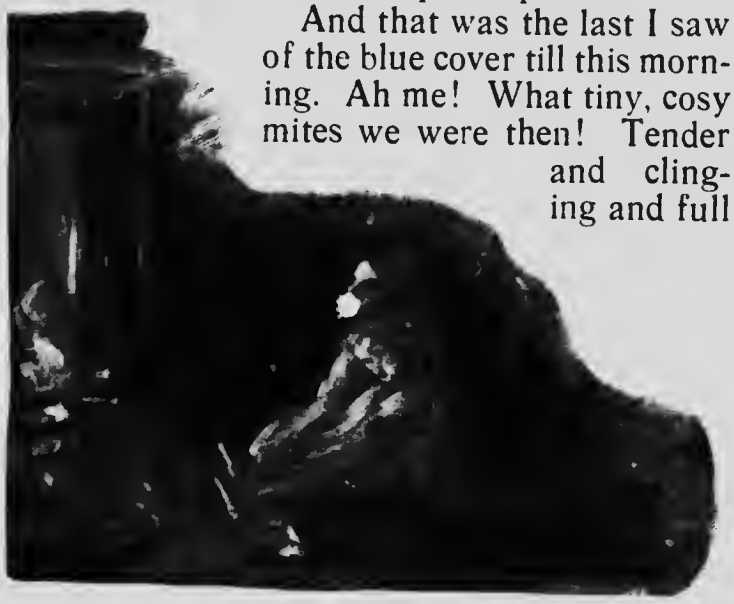
Well, on this day on the way to the cemetery I developed a toothache. I bore up bravely, determined to let nothing interfere

with my outing. I was taken into a grocery store, and there I tried a mouthful of cold water and peppermint as a remedy. Then, the pain growing worse, we visited a drug store, where a toothache remedy was applied. The pain was not to be cured so easily, and in sight of my happy hunting-ground, in the very shadow of the tombs, I gave myself sobbing into the arms of disappointment and of my elderly relative, who turned about and took us home.

Within doors again, I reposed in someone's lap with a bag of hot salt on my cheek, and there noticed for the first time, through weeping eyes, the pink wreath mockingly joyous on its splendid background of royal blue. An afternoon was lost. It might be weeks before I could see the cemetery again, for it was far from the house, and the elders only went two or three times a year.

One evening, while the footstool still wore this festive dress, Jeanie and I sat upon it before the fender and had quite a terrible fright. A nice fire was roaring up the chimney and a brown teapot sat on the hob. Suddenly the bars of the grate fell out and burning coals. teapot and all, fell into the fender. We sprang up, and our loud cries of fear summoned the household to the scene of the fire.

A spark or two was shaken out of our dresses and we were none the worse. A few embers had fallen on the hearthrug, and the chintz cover, which we had left defenceless and exposed, was burnt in a couple of places.



And that was the last I saw of the blue cover till this morning. Ah me! What tiny, cosy mites we were then! Tender and clinging and full of imaginings; adoring the elders, longing for wide laps and soft comfortings.

The footstool next took on a serviceable square of black, with a pattern of crimson birds and palm trees. There were curtains to match somewhere, or perhaps this was what was left over from the curtains. And well it

was that the color was black and serviceable, for those were racking days. The stool was turned upon its face and the square box beneath jumped in and dragged hither and thither in a series of jumps across the room, or used as a boat to rock about the floor. Things indoors were turned upside down, insulted, despised and misused. Outdoors was a better field for us. In winter we tore after sleighs for rides or snowballed the innocent bread-winners on their homeward way. We played hare and hounds over fences, and dropped from sheds into mysterious back-yards, upsetting barrels and what not, to run shrieking forth at some menacing face at a window-pane. We were strenuous, eager and terribly enthusiastic.

We adored Christmas—it was an eternity away. We were wild for our summer holidays—the nearer they approached the longer seemed the waiting. But such summer holidays those were! Living in the town, without garden or grass plot, the country was a paradise. Some cheap, strange place was sought out, and, however criticised by the elders, all its new horrors in the way of small stuffy rooms, pickle-covered dining-tables, and dusty village streets, were new and entrancing foreign experiences to Jeanie and me.

Empty houses were taken possession of, swept out, and used for playhouses. The village boys who came to pry were fought fist to fist and then made friends with.

What a sensation our daily bathing in river or lake gave us. I never felt anything like it after I was grown up; nothing like that delightful mad rush into fresh summer waters. We would have stayed in them all day had we been allowed. After a riotous, clothes-destroying day, we were captured and dressed again and passed quieter evenings. Some of these evenings we spent in an old fruit-garden, where we had permission to eat all the fruit we could. We learnt, by bitter experience only, *not* to eat all we could.

Other evenings I remember on a mountain-side, looking far away to the main street in the village below, where stood our hotel. It used to strike us as very interesting to spy our bird-cages hanging very small from the verandah roof. If we were allowed, on the way home we liked to loiter on the main street to exchange greetings with small friends we had made in the village. These small acquaintances were occasionally inimical, perhaps from a jealous sort of distrust and disapproval of a certain city freedom they saw in us. Ay, ay, but we were young limbs in those days!

Time passed and took us far away from the old home to boarding-school. After that the one, Jeanie, was taken in holy matrimony, and I, the other, was left to return home and keep house for an old uncle. Crabbed age was a book-worm, and kept his nose in his volumes.

There was mirth, partly smothered, in the old house. Young friends danced in and out and were entertained surreptitiously or openly. The housekeeper was liberal at these entertainments, and at other times liberally neglectful.

In those days a callow youth there was—a source of experiment—at one moment encouraged, at another flouted; brought to the fore when convenient, and scandalously cast adrift when in the way.

A mysterious dark and handsome one there was, older and more knowing. He it was who held the string while I danced. Long walks we had, long sittings at home when I could manage it; I absolutely bewitched the while, at times most happy, at times most miserable. Gossips were abroad, and Crabbed Age lifted his nose from his book to scold and rage.

Betimes the footstool was covered with a species of sampler brought from the boarding-

school—a wool-wrought mill, a rugged spreading tree, with a parcel of doves in the foreground, bore dainty feet. Then the spirit that had joyously bounded into winter snow-drifts and into summer streams danced with merry heart-beats, in girlish confidence, into the fresh of first love-making.

Then came the one, the perfect, the adored. There was a brief flight and a return to the crabbed old uncle's house. Age was set in the background, and a young wedded pair took possession. Some playful comrade had meanwhile covered the footstool with a gorgeous yellow damask which should give it a more bridal aspect. The bride's slim feet rested on the damask for a year or two at happy intervals, and the footstool sat at the feet of completest happiness. On summer evenings the chairs were set at the open win dow. Without, the old chestnut tree ruffled its plumage in the evening breeze, while within subdued whisperings rose and fell on the gentle waves of a contented love. A large old sofa was drawn up on winter evenings before the same grate where the brown teapot had breathed its last aromatic breath before its collapse in the ruddy avalanche.

Ah, those were trusting days, when we took our joys as a matter of course, when we

thought of griefs as strange, out-of-the-way accidents. The time was brief, so brief! Death and sorrow came when the blows could fall on the tenderest feelings.

The storms were weathered I knew not how. The old home was left, the home that now is far away. The footstool travelled, laid long in attics, and was lately unearthed. And to-day I first took off the yellow damask. Then I detached the sampler with brimming eyes and a little laughter. The red birds on their black ground I handled tenderly, wonderingly: they led me into a wonderland of the past, of old rooms full of ghosts. And the blue with the rosy garland lay finally before me—bringing me back, and back, and back—to my farthest recollections. Ah, soon I shall go back of that again, to whence I came! Shall I be born anew, a little child? What a span it is, what a little span it seems, when our griefs and ecstasies are faded and shrivelled and held up to the reminiscent vision of old age!

DISTANT YOUTH

NEW YEAR'S EVE, and here we are in the ingle-nook—three old, old friends. It is now some years since we have been all three together for New Year's, though we always try to be. When people get to be sixty there are illnesses which lay them low, there are death-beds to be attended, or one has friends and relatives that are very old, and need one by them.

We three are old maids. There sits Lucy, opposite me, white, thin, and placid. There, between us, is Mary, a little red in the face and thickset as to figure. And here am I. It does not matter what I look like; suffice it that I am of their day and generation. How Lucy has changed with the years! How forty years change everyone into nearly a new person! Thin, faded Lucy, with her lined face, her white hair,

her quiet, lifeless demeanor, was once a sparkling-eyed girl, with such a bloom and such dimples. Gently frivolous she was, full of life and gayety. Her father was a well-to-do merchant who had a wholesale business and a retail store as well. Lucy was an only child and worshipped by her parents. She had sealskins and silks, jewels and fine linen; in fact she was sometimes over-dressed.

How well I remember Lucy coming into our house one morning—in her twentieth year, I think it would be—clad in a sealskin sacque and a full blue silk skirt, with a long white plume flowing back from her turban. This time she had a young man in tow, one James Forsyth, a fine, strong, handsome fellow. A year or so after this, Lucy's father failed in business, and Lucy's finery gradually diminished. She went about a great deal with James Forsyth almost compromised herself. James declared frankly that he was fond of her, but that he could not afford to marry. I could never tell whether Lucy was deeply disappointed or not, but she grew cynical and reckless, and a very few years saw the best of her bloom fade. But notwithstanding her cynicisms concerning men, she was a vivacious, childlike spirit, so

easily pleased and made to bubble over with talk and laughter. Her father and mother are both dead these many years, and Lucy has a very small income which enables her to live in a boarding-house, and to clothe herself economically, and to take a tiny summer trip. She entertains herself with library novels. looking out of the window, and in gossiping with the other boarders.

Ah, Lucy! I have seen no stranger sight these many years than the contrast made with your blooming youth by your thin little figure, with its bit of antiquated vanity in the shape of queer old lace bibs and cuffs and strange old brooches and lockets.

And there is Mary. She has her knitting with her, and as she knits she talks of the country town she now lives in, and of its church affairs. She is not only interested in good works and charities, but has a ritualistic turn as well, in fact, is quite High Church.

Mary developed from a terrible tomboy into a very smart young lady. Her figure was the neatest I ever saw. She was a bit mannish in her dress, and so particular about her boots and her gloves. Mary could smoke, and could be very slangy, which was considered very fast in those days. She was a first-rate horsewoman, indeed, too much interested in

the stables, for she was found out in a flirtation with one of her father's grooms, an Englishman, who, however, turned out to be a gentleman, though a fallen one. He was dismissed, and Mary turned her attention to the military, the 9th regiment being stationed here at the time. Mary had several grown-up brothers, and there was a great deal of entertaining done at her father's house—dinners, balls and house parties. She was a great belle and, as I have said, turned her attention to the military, with whom she flirted profusely. But whether or no her heart was with the poor discharged gentleman groom, Mary's charms waned without her having taken upon herself that state in which the waning of charms is not of so much account. Mary lived in the family house till she was about thirty-five and the brothers had married or dispersed in other ways. Then she and her parents went abroad for ten years. Then her father died, and she and her mother took the house in O——, where she now lives. Her mother is very old, of course, and Mary is almost entirely occupied with her and her charities and church affairs.

When I look upon Mary I wonder whether she realizes the change in herself as vividly as I do. I suppose not—we women see our

own images mirrored several times daily, and the face and the form of our youth lurks perpetually in our minds. When I see Mary's stout figure, her fat, wrinkled hands, her stodgy foot in its countrified shoe reposing on the fender, I feel a bitter sigh rising in me for lost youth and grace. Well, we are old, old friends, and we cling together for old time's sake. But time steals some of the sweetness and harmony from the instruments. Mary and I own up that Lucy's dullness and triviality weary us, and Lucy and I find Mary trying sometimes. She is solemn and heavy and churchy; she eats slowly and keeps us waiting at the table long after we are done, and we do not enjoy a walk with her, for she crawls at a snail's pace. And I have no doubt at all that in many ways I am a tiresome old woman to them. Once I was sweet-tempered and easy-going; now I am worrying and over-particular. The least thing wrong in the house goes to my heart, and I know my maids find me a cranky mistress.

Mary has just reminded us that there was, just forty years ago to-night, a New Year's party at her father's house. That night, I remember, Lucy and James Forsyth were the admired of everyone, and everyone whispered

of an engagement between them. I remember, as they joined hands in " Sir Roger," someone called, " Time to let the New Year in," and we all ran into the hall. I remember the happy rising of young voices in the brisk whirl of the entering winter air. And then Mary ran in at the door crying out that she was the New Year. Then she drew Lucy and me aside and told us that she had vowed to George, her beloved groom, that she would run out to see him before the stroke of twelve. She told us she had no time to talk, she could only kiss him, and babbled on to our tolerant romantic ears of how desperately she loved him, and he her.

And now Mary is talking of her mother's ailments and of what they did for the little High Church children at Christmas time. And Lucy says that the people in the room over hers are so noisy she is afraid she will have to move. We are leaden and prosaic. The wings of our girlhood have dropped from our shoulders.

Alas for youth and beauty! What a short, tantalizing lease of them we poor humans have!

SCRAPS FROM A COMMONPLACE LIFE

In my bedroom this afternoon, at the country hotel where I had occasion to wait several hours, I marvelled, as I always do in such places, at the decorations and hangings. The ceiling was spotted in the centre with pale green conventional designs. There was a border of blue and brown, with a blue ornament at the four corners; the wall paper was green and brown and red, and so was the carpet. There were two cupboards, with red cotton plush curtains instead of doors, and the windows were veiled with ragged Nottingham lace. Are these decorations specially designed for these places? Who was the beneficent originator, I wonder, of such a popular, well-beloved scheme?

In this dismal room, the type of many thousands, I imagine many tragic meditations have been made. There must have been persons here called to this little town by death or sickness. There may have tossed on this bed unhappy ones fleeing disgrace. Here there may have been many desperate questions weighed and pondered, if not decided.

I began in my idleness to go over the leaves of my most ordinary life—a passage on the highroad of griefs and joys nothing but common and everyday. I found myself sighing and smiling over a childhood, a youth, and later days that might have been those of any dull and ordinary person.

In early childhood Christmas was a magic word, and all the sweet, small, appertaining things full of joy. When it approached, my brother and I regularly took down a "same old book" and read a "same old story" about stockings and puddings, and holly and snapdragon.

Down town on Christmas Eve there were sleigh-bells and crowds and parcels. We visited the arcade in the Market—full as could be of dear little toys, painted and tinselled and sometimes lettered in mysterious German letters. At home in the evening there was cedar to be pulled to pieces and stuck behind the pictures.

There was shortcake. There were rings at the bell and packages handed in. There was a glow in our hearts of delicious excitement. There was carol singing out of doors—it drove Christmas chiming into our hearts.

Oh, it was hard to go to sleep. We had red flannel nightgowns—the hateful, beastly

things, how they *did* scratch. We woke at four in the morning. How lovely the parcels felt in the dark—guessing at all sorts of shapes—I think that was the prime moment I think there was nothing so nice as that moment all Christmas Day, no matter how we enjoyed it.

The first beautiful thing out of doors I remember noticing—in a semi-conscious way—was the golden light on a February afternoon, one of the first really light winter afternoons, when the snow repeated the sunshine and the low sun gloried across the snow.

What great skates we had with the rabble at the rink! Figures of wild boys, and girls in velvet skating suits, are graven indelibly on my mind. What a long, happy time it was from three to six; and then we bundled home. I didn't like jam, but I loved cake for tea, and never had enough.

There was a governess—cross, oh, so cross! She could tell the most ravishing stories, and we had rapt moments when there were stories. There were tears at arithmetic; arithmetic was a bitter enemy—I can feel myself crying yet. She was cross. I had to hem, and was made to walk up and down when I nodded too early in the evening.

There were dolls, and they did what I could not do—they ran up bills—they went into the kitchen and ordered what they liked for meals —they travelled abroad. One day my sister would talk dolls no more—she was in love with one of the choir-boys and I was left to talk to myself.

There was a boat with an alcohol engine. On Saturday mornings my brother and I attached a strap to the handle of a wooden churn and made a dirty little bit of butter. We cooked onions in a doll's saucepan over the alcohol lamp and ate them.

There were some people near by who had a fine place. There was a lawn with a brick-lined well; there was a trellis with grapes; there was a poplar to climb into; there was a wood-paved yard with chickens; there was a hayloft and there was an old, untidy servant who gave us coffee in the kitchen. There was a cross aunt and a severe grandfather. The little girl of this house used to take a bath on Saturday nights, and I used to watch her shadow on the window-blind. She said I took opera-glasses to look at her; this was not true.

I used to tell packs of lies—from fear, imagination, and vanity.

One day in the winter I got out skating on

the sidewalk with a crowd of awful little boys. I fetched out a lot of old toys and Christmas cards and gave them to the boys as prizes for races. Then I took off my skates and began to fight them. Then my nose bled and at this they went off, and my skates were nowhere to be found. I got no sympathy. That was an experience!

Then I entered the little world of school, a world full of excitement for my childish mind. At home I had always detested and shirked lessons. Here I went at them vigorously, not at all for the sake of learning, but to triumph over others; and if at the end of the term I should be disappointed, everyone knew there were tears and loud lamentations, and I had to be comforted and given glasses of wine to raise my spirits. I gained great sympathy by these open-hearted emotions, and when reckoning days came there were very few in the school who wanted to see me fail in my ambitions.

There were always a few little girls whom I envied on account of their smart clothes. Some of them had watches of their own, and I pined and sighed for watches and fine dresses. I was plainly dressed in rather old-fashioned things, as I remember them; and occasionally my clothes were made fun of,

which aroused in me most bitter and unchristian feelings.

There was one little girl who was a great delight to us in early school-days. We used to call her the "patent fibber." I never remember seeing her in anything but a short red skirt and jersey, but her accounts of her wardrobe at home were astounding. She also boasted of her pair of cream-colored ponies, which were never seen. She had a white beaver hat which blew off into a mud puddle one day on the way home from school. With great presence of mind she left it in the puddle, saying she had lots of other hats at home.

Our poor governesses! I was never so happy as when I was impudent and raising a tempest about their ears. I often thought of them afterwards, poor souls, some of them only in the early twenties; probably feeling young enough, and craving fun and amusement as much as the rest of us, but condemned to be imposers of punishment, to seem old and severe.

What a multitude of subjects we had to study in those days! How we got up our lessons in hasty smartness for the day, forgot them the next day, crammed them again for examinations, and finally forgot nearly everything!

A COMMONPLACE LIFE

In my older school-days there was a pleasant house I used to visit, with plenty of boys and girls, and books and talk and laughter: a bohemian Sunday with music and walks and a getting of supper for ourselves. Home was nothing to me when I could hie me to this house. I always kept a toothbrush there for all-night visits.

Then a time came when I was shut up in misty England in a dull little school. I saw the pretty mists, the old houses, the holly bushes, the fine old trees, the ruins and historic sights, with a homesick eye. As a consolation I became devoted to the church—very High Church it was. Near the time of leaving I began to fancy a pretty youth I used to see at a gymnasium we went to. He was an honest, handsome lad, but of low degree, and I fear his accent was tainted. We used to manage a walk sometimes at dusk or in the early morning, and I longed to kiss him goodbye, but Holy Week was approaching and there were three communion services to be attended, and in the face of that such earthly gratification might be entertained in the mind but could not be carried out. I very soon forgot him when I was at home again in a more varied, exciting life, beside which my stay in the little English village seemed a stagnation.

At a conventional age I was tossed upon the world to a greater freedom. I wore long dresses and did pretty much as I chose; but never having been grown up before, I had no fear or feelings of responsibility. Then there was a making of friendships, not like the friendships made at school but a little more mature, which would run in our already forming mental rut. A bright face was seen, an opposite with many likenesses to oneself; there was a chat here and there, a few moments long, an afternoon together and a "Let us be together this evening, too, we have so much to say." The rut was forming, but the soul was tender and expansive, and friendships could be made as at no other time of life. Ideas on all subjects known to us floated in speech, hesitating at first, and, forming extempore, building ourselves, our characters, our thought.

Love came in various guises. An adoring boy rapped upon a cool, half-unfolded little heart. I was to learn a lesson and he was to help teach it, at his own cost, poor youth. He was made to wince and then to smile, to crouch and then be happy.

An older youth came then, and I was his fancy, and I was the adorer. If anything were to interrupt the expected hour of his

visit, I would break my heart. I braved smiles and scowls. There were more lessons learnt.

There was a jovial soul that prompted escapades, walks in the evening, and dinners in town. There was a gentle kick under the table and a " Let's get married and not tell

anyone about it." Picnics for two there were; a reading of poetry of Browning, in easier parts, I think; walks after dances in the small hours, a lingering in the porch, and what not imprudences; a wandering on thin ice, a guiding by one's lucky star to the shore. And the girlish friendships grew in sympathy over loves, in laughter over them; a daily comparing of incident, a confidence unrivalled.

There was a journeying to New York, that hard-featured metropolis, which was so beautiful, so glittering to youth, where one acquired some new cleverness perhaps, nothing else of good. Then one did not see its sordid difficulties, but loved its rapidity, its excitement.

Then came a happy dance into marriage bonds, a dance such as only youth or simplicity knows, a desire not to leave unturned such a chapter. An absolute carelessness as to its permanence, its tie on every action, yes, on every thought, warping and expanding at once, souring and sweetening in the same hour. Should one wait later there is many a hesitation, many a calculation, more difficulty in the harmony, though there may be more wisdom in the choice—a difficult and questionable situation, with arrangements that might be better, but God knows how. We

are yet in the dark ages about it. A sweet, warm honeymoon there is, a cosy nestling in a home; a watching from the window, meetings on homeward ways, a pride, a tenderness unexcelled—then a chilling by time. The wildest enthusiasm brings the greatest distaste, the hottest passion the deadest ashes. The best of men are honester than the best of women; the worst of men perhaps better than the worst of women. The most loving, constant pairs entertain between them the enmity of sex. Man is proud, vain, domineering—his wife must be this, must be that. Woman holds her own queenship ever in her own heart; she will offend, she will not see with his eyes. Neither will give up to the other. The woman looks forever out of woman's eyes, man out of man's. The corners are rubbed off; husband is no bachelor, wife no sour old maid. They have their own deceits, God help them, and they come more or less to a calm. The honeymoon wanes and tarnishes and is laid away. Hymen has set Cupid and Venus laughing at poor mortals. Love and passion and tenderness have caught them in a net, and they must disentangle themselves as creditably as they can; as cleverly as they can they must smooth out the net.

Then there was the baby, bringing discord and harmony at once. I used to play with the idea of a baby. At once when I thought of it as a reality I bought some dainty things to ponder over. What an extraordinary thrilling tenderness that was, the most delicate, the most mysterious of animal passions. How mingled with discomforts! How I used to wake in ghostly dawns and wish that it never was to be, and later in the day be happy about it.

Later what a crowd of cackling old women it brought about the place. If one could only have had the baby to oneself. Then it was only terribly troublesome, not alarming. When it grew into a character, into a little person, then there were fears for its body, a terrible sense of responsibility for its future life. "Do your best and let the rest go," we say about so many things, but when the best is done the child sits gravely on one's mind, waking one to agony by chance little incidents which touch one on the raw. The heart is forever naked, unprotected, to the touch of one's child. But what is a child, a child of two years old, for instance, but a bouquet of sweetness and dearness? During hours of absence from it do not its babblings chime wonderfully in your

ears—cannot you feel the velvet touch of its fingers, and cannot you recall the special sweet odor of your own child's hair and silken skin? Ah, Hymen, you drive us through fire indeed, but you give us in your delusiveness something which is more us than ourselves, which will not be wounded if we can take the wound ourselves.

Then man thinks the child is all his, imagines in a manner that he has borne it, and bred it, and gives it the million small attentions. Woman is corrected for doing nothing but spoil it. If woman is sensible she just says men are all alike. Well, well, let us put a merry face on life—we all have our thousand faults.

Amy, one of my greatest confidantes in my early grown-up days, was very much altered by marriage. She had four children and was most practically devoted to them; she knew everything they wore, everything they ate. She was almost entirely absorbed by them. She was happy, she was always pleasant, but lost entirely the light-hearted fire of her youth. We used sometimes to plan outings or jaunts like our girlish ventures, but something concerning her family nearly always made them fall through. Still at times we had a quiet hour and could talk with

enthusiasm over old happenings. I never made again such friends as in those days of old happenings. I have made new ones since, but they must be tactful, must not disturb my habits, and their habits must be such as will keep pace with mine. We do not want to reveal our souls so much to each other, we are not so childishly sympathetic. Laughter is more rare and perhaps more precious. The story of life is an older one; re-read tales are never the same. We are more epicurean, our pleasures must be more convenient.

Amy and I often talk of what irksome things men are. Yes, even Amy will acquiesce in this, despite her mildness; perhaps it is that most of her love is spent on her children—this leaves her eyes clearer.

This is the sort of thing we say:—"What a bore it is to sit downstairs of an evening to keep someone company who never speaks to you, when you have lots of odds and ends you might be doing upstairs! What a bore it is to have to consult anyone when you know perfectly well what you want to do beforehand; what a bore getting money from a man who always says he is on the verge of ruin; what a bore living in a house where someone else has the right to be as bad-tempered as they please," and so on. But there—if we had

not married we would have thought there was something most lovely about it and have forever regretted it.

One day lately I was at a party Amy had for her children. It gave me rather a shock to see how big the kiddies were all growing. There was a dark-eyed lass of fourteen coquetting in a pretty, childish way with two or three boys of her own age. In a very short time these children will be holding out their hands to pluck the best fruits of life. Time has sped so that it seems at moments that I was grasping for those first delicious fruits myself, and what a pang there is in that feeling. Well, as one gets older it should be a part of one's religion to keep sweet. What a lot of need there is to keep sweet! How one must struggle to endure the faults of one's friends; to put up with one's friends' friends! How one rejoices at the misfortunes of others, and how wicked that is!

This is a commonplace reminiscence of a commonplace life. But I suppose we should be thankful to be in commonplace and not in tragic situations. And are not the everyday unfoldings of life most wonderfully interesting, and the happenings of any age full of mystery and surprise.

THE UNHAPPY HOUSE

NOVEMBER 18, 18—

I AM sitting in our long, low parlor. Everything is dingy and old, but some people might think it nice. I might if it were not that I had to live here. There are high glass-doored book-cases filled with bound periodicals, walnut chairs in profusion, footstools, a fender stool in beadwork, steel engravings of gloomy subjects on the walls—but steel engraving renders any subject gloomy.

Elaine is upstairs crying with neuralgia. Now and again I can hear her—last night I envied her bitterly, bitterly. Oh, my heart was leaden! She went to a dance. She was so fair and pretty and lively as she came down in her light cloak, and I was not to go with her! Was I not invited? Was I not old enough? Was I too old? Yes, I was invited, and I am nineteen, not too old nor too young. There was another barrier—I have been out, I have been introduced to everyone, but there is a scarcity of partners for me. I am not only unattractive, but I am passed over, ignored in some way. Elaine has done her best for me, but no one brightens when they

speak to me or kindles any more than if they were talking to a tree. Sometimes some very uninteresting man likes to talk to me, but nothing sparkles between us, and after a moment with me all attractive or magnetic men seem naturally to gravitate to Elaine. Many a dull heartache have I had as they have left me as quickly and politely as possible.

To-night I feel quieter. I don't envy Elaine so much when I hear her crying. She has become terribly delicate in the last year or so.

Gerald, my brother, is twenty-three now. He, too, has changed very much. When he was twenty he was the sunniest, handsomest boy; now his cheeks are hollow and white, and he has moods. Now, I have moods, too, but mine seem to be more natural, and occasioned by something tangible, some sorrow or disappointment I can put my finger on. His mood sits on his brow like a cruel tyrant, and he can scarcely speak at times, he is so down. He has never been cheerful since, a few months ago, he failed in his law school examinations, but he was so terribly ill for a month before these exams that no one thought of blaming him.

My moods are instantly dispersed by some chance bit of happiness. When this happi-

ness is over, by the way, it seems that I have never really had cause to be happy, but as for cause for being miserable—that seems the reality of life, the *reason for being miserable.*

Gerald looks very white indeed to-night and very heavy. It is not cheerful. I have a curious kind of nervousness lately; it comes on about eight o'clock in the evening and lasts till nearly bedtime, or perhaps till only half-past nine. It seems as if the time would never pass. I look at the clock continually, and never more than a few minutes have passed. I do various things during these hours. If I cannot manage to read or work, I count the books in the book-shelves, the nails in the furniture upholstery, or the leaves in the carpet. You can imagine how well I know this room, and how well I adore it!

NOVEMBER 4, 18—

An old lady, a neighbor, came in with her daughter this evening, both very chirpy and deadly uninteresting. The cheerfulness of their voices irritated me. What have they to be cheerful about—their lives are occupied with church-going, charities, and the society of women all as old as themselves. The elder of these ladies has an admiration for me. She says I am "very bonny." "Very

bonny"—what a mockery! It is only the faces of old people or the most uninteresting people that light up when they see me.

My aunt is very different from us children, from Gerald and myself at all events, and does not understand us. What a blessing for her! She also does not understand why Elaine is delicate and suffers from neuralgia. Why she should not expect us to be delicate is a mystery to me when both our parents died before they were forty..

Annie is fifteen now. She is the joy of the house, if there is a joy in this house. She is auburn-haired, has a bright complexion, and is very talented. She sings, plays, and is clever at anything she takes up. We all wish her well, the dear knows.

The outward aspect of our old house is homelike, of a plain three-storied pattern, having a small colonial portico with a bench on either side, and high steps. It stands very near the street and has, to the south, a garden surrounded by a brick wall. There is a long bed of portulacas running to the south of the house. There is a lawn bordered with old-fashioned flowers, an orchard, and a shrubbery made up of huge lilac and honeysuckle trees.

The interior is inclined to be dark because

of the small windows. The furnishing of the large old rooms is of a gloomy, stuffy, early Victorian type. This house was almost on the outskirts of the town when we were little, but as we grew the town became a good-sized city, surrounding it and bringing it into a dingy *demode* quarter.

I and my brother Gerald and my two sisters, Elaine and Annie, came here to live with my aunt when both our parents were dead. Then Gerald was ten and Annie a baby of two. My aunt is a widow and childless, and is fond of us in her way. She is religious, cheerful, and matter of fact.

I think anyone who knew us as children would have thought us a normal and happy crew, and a comely one. All of us were pretty and active and romping. But from my earliest remembering days a foreboding heavy hand seemed laid on my heart. I had small worries. I thought I saw sights other children do not see. If I went out in the hall from the room where I was reading or playing with the other children, I was afraid that a skeleton form would appear to me. I had seen in an old book of fables the picture of a tall skeleton who represented Death. For years I expected it to take shape and move before me in some lonely part of the house at

night. Perhaps the others had their pet fears, too, but they did not confide them in me, and I thought I was alone in my terrors.

Then I passed some dreadful hours with my conscience, which used to trouble me about the slightest things. If I imagined I had cheated in the smallest way at school, which I never did, I was in the deepest distress, and probably lay awake all night over it.

There were times in my tenderest years when I had fits of depression. Sunday was always a bad time, and certain evenings when we were for some reason duller than usual.

At school I was more sensitive than other children. True, in my schooldays I seemed more on a par with others of my age than I ever was afterwards, but now and again some shrewd, terrible child or girl older than myself laid the discerning finger on some vain, sensitive spot in my nature, and there seemed to rise an uproar of ridicule about me. Dimly but not unconsciously, even then, I saw foreshadowed in miniature the world wherein I must struggle, in hidden and subtle ways not quite equipped as others, and when woe and disappointment came to me later, it came in strangely familiar guise, as trouble antici-

pated comes, as a particular flower will surely spring from a particular seed.

At school I met Mary Lewis, the girl who was to be my closest friend. At first sight I disliked her intensely. She was twelve years old, just my own age, and she was one of the first girls I noticed at the school on my first day there. She was a peculiar-looking child, with a sharp nose, bright black eyes, and fairish hair drawn tightly back from her forehead. I thought her exceedingly disagreeable and unattractive-looking, and made up my mind to keep clear of her. But after all she turned out to be my only real friend at school, one of the few I was really at ease with, and one of the few I could tell most of my mortifications to, and that is the test of understanding and equality, is it not? I have nearly always found that the weirdest, most unattractive person in any assembly is the only one who will be eventually an affinity of mine.

I confess I was often a little ashamed of our intimacy when seen so constantly together, but, however I tried to cut it short, I always drifted back to it. It was the most comfortable acquaintanceship I had.

Mary and I in our early schooldays had a vast contempt for girls who ran after men or

were flirts. There were two girls at the school who were our special objects of contempt. These were an Alice Maynard and a Daisy Evans, and they were both very grown up at sixteen, when we were very much of children at fifteen. These girls were boarders at the school, and used to have notes and candies and flowers sent to them through the day scholars from boys they had met on their Saturdays out, or even from boys they only had seen when they were out walking with a governess. While Mary at this time hated boys as much as I, she was not more popular at the school than I was, and she had, like me, a meditative, melancholy turn, and so we were companionable.

Mary Lewis I often see now. She was abroad and studied painting for a couple of years, and is now back in town. They rather make fun of her here. Elaine patronizes her, and Gerald imitates her behind her back and teases her to her face. She takes it patiently, for, truth to tell, she is a little smitten with Gerald, though she would not let him know it for worlds. Annie, being of a more intellectual turn, thinks, or tries to think, that Mary is interesting.

Mary and I have changed very much in our ideas about men since our schooldays. *Now*

we think that Alice Maynard and Daisy Evans, the flirting girls at school, were the most sensible girls there. We realize that the

people who enjoy the good things of this life are the sensible ones, not the hermits who hold themselves aloof. But when one is a hermit perforce the best thing one can do is

to acknowledge who has the better part. Perhaps this is the way one thinks at nineteen, but *après tout* one's age is one's age and one cannot foresee the future, and older ways of thinking.

Mary and I read a great deal, and when we are reading we often wish we had something better to do. On public holidays we feel the worst. Then nearly everyone else has plans and invitations. One Queen's birthday we got a bottle of port and played cards in the cellar. Another time we took tin pans and provisions and books and camped out the whole day in the country. But coming home it was so crowded and disagreeable it was depressing.

Mary says we are two children who have never grown up. Perhaps some day we will grow up and someone will love us.

NOVEMBER 15, 18—

This evening we are all a little happier. Gerald is bright, charming, and teasing his sisters. There have been two young men in to call, one of these an admirer of Elaine's, and the other—well, he is soft of voice, has a keen, kind eye, and has astonished me very much. He has asked to call again and see me on Sunday afternoon. But this has happened

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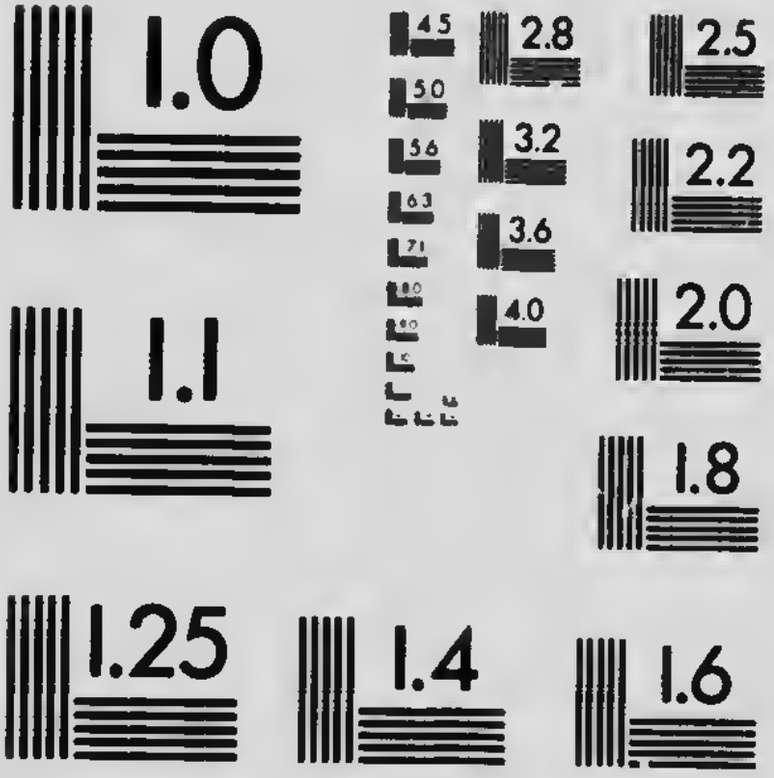

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to me before; someone has liked me the first time they saw me, and I have brightened and sparkled a little under the light of their kindness, and the next time something has frozen me, I have become unattractive again, and soon they begin to avoid me, and it becomes an awkwardness for me to bow to them even.

SUNDAY EVENING, NOVEMBER, 18—

John Evans came this afternoon, and a real sun has shone on me. Someone has seen that my hair is rich and dusky, that my cheeks are soft and round, and that my hands and wrists are slender and pretty. Someone thinks that my mind has treasures of its own. Perhaps I am changing for the better.

MARCH 1, 18—

To-night I went to a dance, and things seemed to go better. Gerald took me and looked after me a little. John Evans came up and claimed all sorts of dances, whether they were his or not. Elaine was teasing me about him. I was happy. I shall never go to another dance. I shall remember the brightness of this one and not let it be spoiled by some wretched affair where I was broken-hearted with neglect.

JULY 1, 18—

Gerald has failed again in his law school exams. His friends look on him cruelly, and my aunt can hardly speak to him. Last year he had the excuse of his illness; this year he has no excuse. He has lapsed into his former melancholy.

To-day I said to Gerald that law was not the only thing on earth, that if failure in law exams was his only worry, and so forth. He confided in me that that was not his worry at all; that he had not failed the first time on account of his illness—that he had given plenty of time to study before he was ill—that he had given sufficient time this year. He said that he could remember nothing that he read, that study was of no use, that his head was played out, that he would never be good for anything; and he would not be comforted. He is as sensitive in this matter as I am when people do not like me. His trouble is as real to him. But if I were he I shouldn't care a bit, I'd go in for farming or something like that.

Elaine has become very delicate. The doctor says she must go south this winter. She is very cheerful. She has so many friends and admirers, and flowers come for her all the time. In this family it seems one must pay a penalty for attractions and en-

joyment of life. However, Annie is still flourishing. She has developed a lovely voice and is to go abroad with aunt and Elaine this winter to study.

It would break your heart to see Gerald, he has become so extraordinary. He used to be so devoted to Elaine, and now he looks at her coldly and says he envies her, that he wishes he were Elaine on her deathbed dying of a cheerful spirit.

AUGUST 30, 18—

This is a perfect August day, everything in its glory. The lawn is flooded with sunshine, but has not dried up, as there has been plenty of rain. The phlox, the hollyhocks, the sunflowers, are in great display. It is very warm, and not a leaf is stirring. There is a road running up a distant hillside and topped by the intense blue as if it led to some enchanted country. But why are the sunflowers so unashamed and splendid, why is everything smiling this morning round a house which holds a tragedy?

Yesterday afternoon when I went upstairs I saw Gerald's figure by the window at the end of the corridor. His back was to me, but he turned when I came near him. His eyes were burning in his pale face, and he was the

personification of despair and gloom. He took my arm and inclined his head towards the garden. It was five o'clock, and a day as beautiful as this was, waning warm and golden. "It is a lovely earth," he said. His tone was heart-breaking, and I could not say any consoling word for fear of a repulse, but I felt a sob begin to shake me. "It is a splendid cover," Gerald went on, "for things that are not fit to be above it."

I threw my arms round him and sobbed aloud; then loosed my hold of him and ran to my room. I was afraid he was going to kill himself, but if he wanted to, how could I prevent it, and if he was so unhappy—I never was so sorry for anyone, I almost ached with depression and pity; and now the tragedy seems to have come mercifully, for Gerald wandered into this garden at about six this morning because he could not sleep, I suppose, and was seized with a fit. An old man who works about the garden discovered him. Aunt and Elaine were roused, and found him dying, and I was roused too late.

Aunt is prostrated, and Elaine and Annie are crying their eyes out. A death on a brilliant day like this, how striking, and how awful! But yet—there is poor Gerald at peace, and I think the pursuers who have

chased him to his death were of the most dreadful kind; fiends of the imagination—for it was nothing, I vow, but a desperate melancholia brought him to this. Surely there is a something fatal in all of us children, and it seems such a little time when we were only children, unconscious of fate and realities. My aunt, if she but knew it, has cause to be thankful; for I have observed many a family where there has been some cause for sickness or degeneration that has developed in two or three members some criminal degeneration. Alas, poor innocents, they have all been soft-cheeked, winning children till this, to which they did not give themselves, has turned and rent them, has wrapped them in a criminal's cloak and sent their friends away in contempt, and turned their mothers and brethren away broken-hearted.

Annie is in the wildest hysterics. I believe she is fearfully high-strung.

SEPTEMBER 30, 18—

It has been a more or less restful time. Aunt is better. Elaine is better for the moment. Annie had a very bad turn just after Gerald's funeral. She was found on his grave at midnight the night after he was

buried, and was threatened with brain fever, but she escaped that.

These three are busy with preparations for their winter abroad, and as for me, John is devoted, and as I am in mourning I am not expected to go out or be gay or attractive, and as a result have fewer rubs and disappointments.

I must tell you that when John first began to tell me of his love, and to appreciate and admire what there was in me to admire, I felt like a new person. I was more self-confident for the time with other people, and thought I must have changed, and that they must see things in me to love and admire as John did. I need not perhaps say that I was bitterly disappointed. Then my fear was that John, too, would give up loving me when he saw how absolutely indifferent other people were. But no, he loves me as surely as other people do not, so there is some compensation.

He has a slightly literary turn, but I could not stand for a man altogether bookish, and he is not that. He has a lively, sensuous nature—but I always think there must be some lack when anyone fancies me.

However, it is rare, it must be rare, when there is not *one* person to love us.

NOVEMBER 15, 18—

Aunt and my sisters have gone to Nice for the winter. I have a maiden cousin of Aunt's to chaperone me, and we two are alone with the servants. I have plenty of time for meditating.

Here are a few of my thoughts: I like men better than women. When I am with women who are bright and attractive, my wit and brightness, such as they are, disappear behind a cloud. My interest, my ideas vanish. When women do not dislike me they are just indifferent.

Sometimes when I try to please a man whom I like, I can sparkle a little, when he does not frighten me to death by indifference.

Sundays are a trial. I get terribly depressed, I suppose because there is nothing to work off my restlessness and excitability. At five o'clock, when the lights are lit and the dismal shadows cast by their inefficient illumination begin to lurk among the familiar monstrosities of chairs and sofas, this reaches its height. But John usually comes about this time, so there is some mercy for poor me.

DECEMBER, 18—

On Sunday evenings we have nice long hours alone, with just the firelight, and when

John and I have kissed each other many times and fervently I feel so much lighter in spirit. O.., we have happy hours by the fire! Sometimes, usually at the beginning, there is a grand blaze, then we are talking and laughing at the exhilarating pleasure of our meeting. Then it is a fine still red glow lighting up the near objects in a wonderful ruddy way. Then it dies to almost an ember, which only faintly reminds us that we are in our own parlor by just glimmering on a corner of furniture here and there. At this light I have partly explained my life and thoughts to John. But to whom can we tell the bitterness of life that lies nearest our heart? Might I not forfeit his adoration if I belittle myself? And we cannot all belittle ourselves together, so why one of us at a time? I feel as if I were the most wretched, useless being that ever was.

DECEMBER 28, 18—

I had a telegram to-day that Elaine was very ill. They are bringing her here. Annie is returning, too. I suppose she thinks she must accompany my aunt, though this is an unnecessary expense, as she is abroad to study.

FEBRUARY 1, 18—

The end has come for poor Elaine. She was too ill to be brought home. I have had news almost every day for two weeks, and now she is gone.

FEBRUARY 28, 18—

Elaine's burial is over. My aunt and Annie have settled down here again.

Aunt is a little worn out, but cheerful, considering. As for Annie, the child has lost her voice for the time—that is why she is home again. She cried so much at Elaine's death that she has injured the nerves in her throat. She cannot speak above a whisper, so that knocks the singing on the head for the present. She has lost her bright color and pretty childish fullness of face. She is sweet and amiable, and tries to be bright sometimes. But she has lost her spirit and her ambition, too, for she never opens a book to study, and she used to be so keen on languages, on history and all sorts of things like that.

John and I are to be married next summer. We are not going to live here, but he is going to practise in K——, a place of about twenty thousand inhabitants. He has friends and relatives there, and has bought a practice.

MARCH, 18—

There is more news—Mary Lewis has found "someone to love her." He is a young chemist here, not quite up to Mary in the

social scale, but intelligent and not bad looking. Mary says he likes her because he thinks she is a lady, that this is the attraction. She says her people are down on it, but that

she is delighted. She is especially pleased because they are going to live in a flat over the store.

Charley Basset, the young chemist, had us both to tea in the flat parlor, which was great fun. I wonder if poor Elaine's spirit was hovering over us with a patronizing smile.

Charley Basset says that he is going to build a house for Mary very soon, away from the pharmacy, but Mary tells me she means to take good care he doesn't. She means to keep in the flat and in Charley's set, as she has not been a success in her own.

TWELVE YEARS LATER, 18—

There was comfort in our moving to a smaller place to live. In the first place we're better off than most of the people in K——, and there are always people with whom that counts. At any rate, however, it may be the people are easier flattered, less smart, less exacting in a small place where people are not so prosperous.

Prosperity does various things for people. It makes most of them to the best of their ability drop intellectual pursuits and run to exciting, more material things, to sport, exercise of the muscles rather than of the brain,

to games of hazard, to style, to clothes spotless and fine-fitting, to great calculation in their choosing of friends, in their giving of invitations. Shabby and dull folk and dull entertainment are dropped as soon as possible by the prosperous ones; if this does not happen there will be some strange reason for it.

Well, I have been happier in my country-place than I ever was in town. Though there have been slights and wounds, there have been times when I have been made much of.

Deny it no one, we are in a material world and he who garners the most material pleasure in a judicious way has the richest sheaf that may be bound up on this earth-earth. All is vanity, vanity, the Siamese twin of the flesh which only dies with the flesh. The wounds which touch us on the raw, which sting us with desperate cruelty, are the wounds to our vanity or the deprivation of some material and sensuous delight which we have tingled and yearned for.

Well, twelve long years have passed, and the tree has hardened and toughened, and cuts and wounds are not so keenly felt. And then in extreme youth in our most humiliating sorrow we think we are alone. When we are older we find that others have suffered, too. We see those of our age triumphing in youth-

ful pleasures. But sometimes a few years turn the tables, and how tragically for our compeers. The brightest are scattered from the easy path by disease, by unhappy marriages, by failure, by disgrace. Those that we envied at twenty we pity at thirty.

There are compensations. My married life has been smooth and easy. I have no children to inherit my disposition or personality Our family is all departed from the red brick house. Annie died at twenty. I said that she had lost her voice, her strength, her ambition in her breakdown at Elaine's death. She lost her fullness of cheek, her color, at sixteen. A girl who has a bright color at sixteen is nearly always pale at twenty. She grew to resemble in her life and habits a frail little old woman. At the end she went into a decline.

I saw the old house again last summer. The owners were out of town, and telling a servant who answered the door who I was, I wandered into the garden for a few moments. There were factories in the neighborhood, and the place had a darker, smokier look, but was not greatly changed. The spot gained a painful preciousness in my mind—as I think the scene of our most vivid sensations, painful or happy, must gain after an absence of years.

I fell to remembering my unhappiness

within those walls, my wild longing for joys that were not to be mine, the childish amusements of Mary Lewis and myself, my blissful hours in the changing firelight with John. I was calmer now, far calmer and more indifferent. Did I envy those transports and agonies of my tender age? Mathew Arnold says:

"When I shall be divorced some ten years hence,
From this poor present self which I am now;
When youth has done its tedious vain expense
Of passions that forever ebb and flow;

"Then shall I wish its agitations back,
And all its thwarting currents of desire;
Then I shall praise the heat which now I lack,
And call this hurrying fever, generous fire;

"And sigh that only one thing has been lent
To youth and age in common—discontent."

But I do not wish its agitation back. I am not deceived as to their worth in my case.

THE WEST IN THE EAST

THE house is tranquil as ever this morning. I am writing in my boudoir, my square little boudoir with its gilt chairs, its sofa, its writing-table, set straightly in their places. The clock of bronze and blue enamel, the bronze candlesticks, the few ornaments, are set, each in its proper place, with the decisive, telling touch of the French housekeeper. It was not I who set them there originally; it was Pierre, my husband, or his mother, or perhaps his grandmother. This room was the same when I came here, just like it is to-day, and will be the same, in all probability, when I die. The long windows open on a stone terrace, the balustrades of which are decorated with urns and curious stone peacocks with hollow backs to hold flowers. Beyond there is a stretch of garden. The spring day on which I first saw this garden it reminded me of some strange, beautifully worked covering, so mathematical was its design, laid out with small flowers. There were primulas, crimson, yellow and pink. There were crocuses in thousands, yellow and white. There was a profusion of violets. The old trees at the far end, in their

scantiest leafage, showed boldly and most decoratively their grey, nude designs. They were as curious as fairy-tale trees.

This September day the same ground is aglow with an army of china asters fighting for supremacy of beauty with fiery ranks of marigolds and zinnias. The gnarled, most wonderfully shaped trees have leaves still verdant, and those trained on espaliers have, richly hanging in their leafage, such prizes of pears, such gorgeous, luscious plums! There is nothing stirring in the coppery September sun, no sound indoors. All is svelte, discreet, tranquil as the sleeping castle discovered by Dornroschen's prince in the fairy tale.

Germaine, my faithful cuisinière, has just cluttered out of a side door to go to market. The other servants, Jacques and Marie, are quietly about their business. And my daughter, Mathilde, is at school. I see over the brick wall our old curé going slowly into the village; then Madame Des Lormes and her daughter on their way to pay a morning call.

I alone am in a state of tumult such as these good souls never knew. A question has arisen which concerns my whole life.

This life of mine has, I may say, been divided into two parts. Of course there were

my school-days when I lived and laughed and played in a happy, unconscious state; but I speak only of the time since I knowingly chose my pleasures and made a scheme of life. There was the period lasting from my eighteenth to my twenty-second year, in which year I was married. My girlhood was spent in America. As a girl, I was fond of fun and adventure, and romantic when things and people appealed to my imagination. I had one or two love affairs with youths a little older than myself, and was desperately interested in them for the time being. I led a happy, free life in our bright and exhilarating country, surrounded by a pleasant and informal society. One of the youths in whom I was interested was a second cousin of mine named Francis Page. We were very near of an age, and the world of nature, literature and love-making opened to us together. For a couple of years we saw each other continually at the fireside and out of doors. We were not engaged; Francis's prospects were not settled at the time, and he conscientiously refused to bind me by any promises.

The spring that I completed my twenty-first year I went abroad with my mother. My great-grandmother was a Frenchwoman, and we have some cousins living at the city of

Tours, in France. These cousins we visited in the month of June, and at their house I met Pierre. He was a wine merchant and had a villa at C., a small town not far from Tours He was well-to-do, cultivated, and highly thought of by my French relatives. He was interesting in appearance, with his great pallor, his dark hair, his imperial, his black, soft eyes, mysterious with what seemed to me strange and unfathomable thoughts. He was soft of voice and charming of gesture, and with the dignity and the experience of his thirty years, he became to me an object of great fascination. I subdued myself where I thought it necessary, and made myself as attractive and fair to see as was in my power. We saw a good deal of him during our stay at Tours, and he took a party of us to dine and sleep at the villa at C. After a fortnight with the cousins we went to Paris and established ourselves in a furnished apartment till the weather should be too hot for the city.

One afternoon, a few days after we were settled, Pierre made his appearance and had an interview with mamma. As soon as he had gone mamma told me the news. Pierre had asked for my hand in marriage, professing himself deeply in love.

I was much excited, and at first excessively

amused. It was almost ridiculous to my western, rather provincial mind, that a Frenchman should propose to my mother for me. How could I marry and settle down in France with such an unknown quantity as this French gentleman to a life so absolutely foreign to my habits of twenty-one years' growth—those first long years which lay such a determining foundation for the more numerous, shorter after-years? Pierre's compliments, his conversation, his charming appearance, fitting harmoniously in his Tourangeau surroundings, I had reckoned only as the pretty flashing joy of a fortnight—to be laid away in memory with a happy, regretful sigh, as a sweet event in the chapter of my first European tour.

I may say that I smiled to myself till bedtime after this news, when I was not smiling with mamma. My poor mother vowed herself greatly relieved, as she said I had seemed so impressed.

As I lay in bed that night I went over the impossibility of myself as Pierre's wife. I began to recall the red brick villa trimmed with white stone, French, prim, and a trifle arid-looking, as it stood flush with its white road of sunny Touraine. I recalled the gardens, so charming in their prim luxuriance.

I recalled the villa's interior, with its glossy parquets, its staid salons, its tapestry-hung beds, its bronze sconces and ornaments, its mullioned windows. What a curiosity that house was to me, and what a curious entourage it had, in its village full of respectable provincials, people so different from ourselves.

And Pierre! I thought of his dark pallor, his mysterious eyes, of his mysterious love that I should never test, of his peculiar French life that I should never share. And then a longing crept over me to touch his pale cheek, to hear his soft, resonant tones close to my ear. And as if some wild, subtle, sensuous music were lulling me into it, I fell into a longing dream. Then a bold, hazarding mood came upon me, crowding out other considerations. Pierre Ramil was known to my relations to be honorable, good and well-to-do. In marrying him I should run no risk of being ill-treated. Why should I not have love explained to me by h , why should not he unfold to me the my tery of his dark eyes? And the red brick villa? During my hours there I had wondered what it would be like to linger in its walls day after day, with various expeditions in the set little village, where every corner had been built on, cultivated or

laid in roads, and perfected for many a year. Why should not the villa whisper its tale in my ear—the tale of an odd, narrow life, which must perforce be wafted forward on a mellow, perfumed breath, the breath of a tiny town of old Touraine?

If I listened to this lure I should be forever in its toils. But is not the woman who leaves her lonely virgin freedom for marriage forever in someone's toil? I had had some sweet boyish love in my own land, I had had twenty years of life there, what if I chose to alter my course in future?

I meditated, or rather my thoughts ran hither and thither, all that night. My mother had told Pierre that his proposal was sudden and unexpected, and he had begged that I would give him a trial, considering him, even if I could not accept him finally. He had told mamma that he would return the next day but one, and hoped that he would be at least allowed to pay his addresses to me.

In the morning I told mamma that I had decided to see Pierre again, to give him a trial. At the time she was greatly astonished and not over-pleased.

The upshot of it all was that before a month elapsed I had promised to marry Pierre the following September. We returned to Amer-

ica in July, and when the fall arrived my mother brought me to Paris to marry Pierre, as at that time his business affairs would not allow him to come to America. We went for a short wedding tour to some of the old towns in the South. We passed quickly through Lyons, and the first stay we made of any length was at Carcassonne. We arrived there in the afternoon, and made our way to an apartment that a young friend of Pierre's, Lucien Mallet, was lending us for the occasion. Lucien was going north for a few days, but was there on our arrival, and was preparing tea for us. He was a tall, pale young man, with a small, Byronic head. He welcomed us warmly. I almost laughed as I read the romantic good wishes in his dark, tender eye, his felicitations were written so openly on his sympathetic face. Lucien, no doubt, had been an ardent lover more than once, and was proud and glad of it, and no doubt he had hopes of some day making himself happy with some charming girl in marriage. I could see so plainly that he thought his rooms were to be glorified by our honeymooning there, and I thought he murmured this to Pierre. With a wave of the hand and a passing through a door or two we were introduced to the rooms, which consisted

of quite a nice-sized salon, a bedroom, and a dressing-room beyond. The salon was full of Lucien's possessions; the walls were hung with mellow family portraits, mirrors framed in gilt or tortoise-shell, and a few prints of amorous subjects, mythical and modern; swords, pistols, a dragoon's helmet and epaulettes. There was a table or two loaded with small possessions, pipes and snuffboxes. There was a high gray stone mantel, with a good fire blazing below it; the tea-table was placed there, a large old sofa, and arm-chairs were drawn up in range of its cheer. "Vous pouvez diner ici," said Lucien. The furniture was done in dark red, and there was a bachelor odor of smoke and an odd French indoor smell which I now know very well indeed.

The bedroom, which Lucien showed us himself, was full of sombre mahogany, also done in dark red. The bed was capacious, and a red canopy fell from a massive gilt cornice.

An autumn rainstorm had begun, and we were glad of our tea by the fire. Then Lucien with last felicitations called the porter from below and took himself away.

That was the most delicious moment of my life, when the door closed on Lucien. Pierre took my hands in his to kiss them. My

brain reeled with its flood of delicious sensations. How infinitely more piquant and thrilling to be alone and at the loving mercy of my interesting Pierre than to be on a wedding-trip with one of my old American friends with whom I had wandered in happy comradeship for years back. I had so seldom seen Pierre unchaperoned. In gentle courtesy he had kissed my mother as often as me. And here we were absolutely alone together. It was a most astonishing and blissful shock when I realized how alone I was with Pierre, how strange were my surroundings. I was turning a French page in my history in this old room hung with red and smelling faintly of France and of Lucien's cigars.

Through the window, veiled by driving rain, I had a glimpse of a dull gray street, and indoors the firelight danced in the huge chimney and again on the polished floor.

Lucien had said, "Vous pouvez diner ici," and there we did dine, or rather feasted, in firelight and wax candle-light, on most tempting viands served by the porter's wife and supplemented by a Burgundy of Pierre's providing.

The Burgundy was suited to the viands, and gently but forcefully opened the gates from brain and heart to speech, and love-

making was most harmonious and eloquent. But when our little table was removed from its place in front of the fire I was not alone with Pierre. The spirit of his French experience was with us, the spirit of Bourget, of Gauthier, and of a Cupid bred in France, hung over him whispering in his ear. In Pierre, the familiarity with all things feminine, a graceful and practised daring, sat most aptly, and love came from his lips as a song which suited well his voice.

When three days of storm were over we had some beautiful autumn weather. A golden October haze has always bewildered me a little, and when in these golden hours we wandered in the immense avenue of acacias in the outer town I felt almost as if Pierre and I were not real but stage lovers.

We used to sit for hours in the benches in this avenue, and as if it were yesterday I can remember glancing at his pale, interesting profile and smiling to myself at my isolation from all my western surroundings and experiences. I can remember with thrilling vividness his wonderful black eyes turning upon me as he felt my smile—that dark lover's gaze of his which was so novel.

On our return to C—— I found myself

better suited than I could have hoped with my new surroundings. I liked well the leisurely way one could live here, the time one could give to doing things well. The tradespeople, the d smakers, the servants, the gardeners, could not be hurried, and again, their time was at your disposal. The attend-

ing to necessary things became a pleasure, because there was appointed, ample time to give to them. Our déjeuners at twelve, and our dinners, later in the evening than our American dinner, were pleasant and prolonged repasts. If Pierre's friends and acquaintances were not always interesting, they were polite, lively, and agreeable for the

most part. Literature and the arts were largely discussed. Among the women dress was important and carefully considered, but not extravagant; one's hair-dressing and manicuring were matters which took time. One's corsets, gloves and shoes were always made to order in Tours, if not in Paris.

Among our friends were Madame Rigaux and her three daughters, Marcelle, Jacquelline and Jeanne. The two elder were nearly thirty, but Jeanne was pretty and lively and was engaged to be married to a young architect in Paris. There was a young couple, Monsieur and Madame le Grand; two maiden ladies, Mesdemoiselles Leroux, very lively and great card-players; and a few young men, lively and polite, who appeared at all entertainments. They were most exemplary in their conduct, in C—— at any rate.

Everyone who had any kind of an establishment gave evening entertainments, and sometimes long, sociable dinners, sometimes soirees with music and cards where tea, sweet wines and petits fours were served. In certain ways the proprieties were rigidly observed, and at times the freedom of conversation was astonishing. The young men discussed corsets and articles of feminine apparel freely, and talked scandal with the older

ladies. Before Mathilde was born I was expected to appear everywhere, there was no retirement allowed me. Jeanne Rigaux at that time carried about a piece of work which she said was a robe, a gift "pour la naissance," for Madame Ramil. Mathilde is now ten years of age, pale and dark-eyed like her father, gay and precocious, a thorough little Frenchwoman. In a black frock she attends an externat kept by the sisters of the Sacré Cœur at C——.

For me, I am become French of habit, at once talkative and restrained. I wear gowns of a certain staidness, and also of a certain exactitude of cut, which suggest what English-speaking people call a French figure, and which call for perfect finish in the garniture of head and the keeping of hands and feet. Pierre has perfect taste; he takes me twice a year to Paris, and attends me to the corsettière, to Madame Simon's, my couturière. We take a little furnished apartment, and Pierre says he carries me away to Paris to remind me that I am still his bride, to say again, "Comme vous êtes jolie partout, ma belle." There he becomes a perfect lover, and reminds me very prettily of every poor charm I ever possessed, and because he is such a fond husband, such a perfect lover, I have

taken a delight in becoming as perfect a Frenchwoman as I can. I can even wear French shoes gracefully.

You would imagine that I should get tired of the pale, quiet little scenes of this provincial town. Not at all. I visit them repeatedly, and they grow ever more fascinating. Yesterday I was crossing a square, the principal square, at eleven in the morning. There is a fountain in the middle and benches around it under the lime trees. The principal café fronts on it, also the first hotel. There are a pharmacie, and a r cerie, a patisserie and other shops. I sat down for a moment. There was not a soul to be seen. Then a waiter from the café came and stood at the door, looked up and down and across, and went within again. The man who owns the mercerie opened his door and bowed a customer out. The customer disappeared up a side street and I was again alone. And I sat and loved the sunny, sleepy silence, the graceful lindens shading the benches, the white two-story houses and the centrepiece of the little precinct. My homeward path took me up a narrow cobble-stoned way which is here called a street; it is a street, too, with small shop-windows on either side. Shady and dark at first because of its direction, the allée took a

turn into a flood of sunshine on the cobble-stone road. I met a dreamy-eyed peasant girl, quaint as a picture in her white cap and blue garments, but her eyebrows arching oddly upward above her blue eyes. An odd purse of the mouth between her brilliant cheeks gave her expression that quaintness, that foreignness, which bespeaks the foreign point of view, the foreign mind. Beyond where I met the girl the road ran up a sunny height where the towers of an old castle gleamed between the close sides of the street, like some narrow vignettes amidst the lines of a fairy tale. The castle is a ruin, deserted and not important to sight-seers. This sudden vision of it at the sunny turn of the narrow street is just one of the cameo-like chain of pictures which has formed in my brain since I came here to live.

And Madame Gruchard's room—there is a volume in that. Madame is not a first-rate dressmaker, but she fits me there with blouses. It is her bedroom and her old mother's room as well. The furniture is almost black with age, and the bed is hung with cretonne in a pattern of parrots picking at crimson flowers on a light yellow ground. There is a "prie-dieu" in a corner, and a wondrous erection of religious ornaments on

shelves above it. The mother is a picture of surprising old age. She looks over a hundred, wears the cap of her department in Normandy, and her peasant jewelry, and mutters away in her corner, things that mean nothing here below. There is a child in another corner who keeps a dolls' establishment. The dolls are all beautifully dressed by Madame Gruchard. There could not well be anything else in this room, but the only other one they have is a kitchen.

Then the church—it is garish as to interior and has no claim to artistic beauty, but still— In the first place, I have yet to see the church which does not satisfy me in the lighting of it. Sometimes it pleases me because the windows are high, like an old banqueting-hall; sometimes because the windows are low and small and the walls spring to a dim mystery in the far-away arch of the roof. The altars are stiff with calico stuck with artificial flowers hung about with bad but holy paintings, strung with queer relics, and set out with tinsel ornaments among the tapers. But these gew-gaws were not placed there yesterday; the church has been built a hundred years, and over it there floats the gray film of beautifying age which is here partout—the

odor of incense, the tinkle of the bell, a flutter of lace on scarlet, touch the gray-veiled, we will not say dusty, gaudiness with a soft yet telling note.

I have been home for three short visits during my ten years of married life, and as many times has my mother come to see me. There are no large sweeping waves of excitement in this quiet town, one dances here to a measured tune. There is no odor of pine trees, nor the exhilarating breath of a snowstorm; the perfumes are heavier and more condensed. But there has come a time to wonder if all this sweet old world pot-pourri is not flat, stale and unprofitable; whether it is not degenerate, easy and unoriginal to live in surroundings where the beauty cannot come to us freshly; where it has been so written, so painted, that we must see it with the eyes of others rather than with our own.

Francis, the old comrade of my youth, has been here. He turned up a fortnight ago from Paris, intending to stay at one of the inns here, but Pierre insisted on his coming to our house instead. We have been much alone together in the arbors of the garden, sipping those delicate white wines of Touraine, which provoke tender and philosophic reminiscence.

Yesterday we went over our early days. We were together again for the hour in our Western haunts by wood and lake. We were on a rock covered with pine needles; we had an immense blue heaven above us, we had a wide lake lapping at our feet, a pine-scented wind swept softly about us. Then the heavens darkened and we sat under a myriad stars twinkling in the crisp night, and we retold our early love-whispers, we laughed and talked and reminded each other of all things trivial or thrilling. A wild wind from the West has lashed the narrow waters of my life and filled me with a strong discontent.

I must explain that I have no wild idea of leaving my French home and my husband and child. The discontent I speak of is more chimerical than that, but it has stirred me with a determined wondering as to whether my life here is not degenerate and warped—as to whether I am not playing a foolish and fanciful game in a land of picturesque puppets. I feel to-day as if I were living in a closed room, breathing an atmosphere of old incense and unholy perfumes. Is not life in this land killing to all originality? Here the beauty of the surroundings has been made for us for many a year, and this village is no more attractive to-day than it was a hundred

years ago. There in the West we must struggle for the adornment of our homestead, we must fight for every inch of civilized decoration in house or garden. Here I have had only to sink lazily into my villa and garden, every inch of which was settled so long before I came. I made no poem of my own of them, I just sank into them and listened to their old whisperings, as rich and soothing in tone as the colors of a bouquet in a carpet of old Aubusson.

And a more trenchant question—has not my mind slumbered and decayed in listening to and joining in the quaint babblings of quaint persons? Should I not rather have been in my own country, making brisk, enlivening efforts in converse with persons of my own turn of mind? Am I ensnared in this curious byway, lit with the lights and colored with tones of the old world, of an atmosphere so fascinating that all must fall under its charm in a most chameleon-like, adaptive manner? All day my mind was drawn hither and thither in this new current which curled and eddied in the quiet stream of old. Such futile wanderings it made after a judgment, for was not my course already not only clear but deter-

mined? Towards evening I became quieter through mental exhaustion.

Another day has come. Pierre and Francis returned at dinner-time, and we had a tranquil, most amicable repast, lingering from the

waning sunset through a candle-lighted dusk. Our servants made many quiet journeys with our delicate wines and dishes, and waited on us most kindly and deftly. Then we had our chairs set on the stone terrasse. The full moon rose upon us and the temperature was

so perfect we did not wish to go to bed. The peasants carolled songs of Touraine and Provence as they passed outside the garden wall. Pierre sent to the village for musicians, and four of them came to our garden, where they played for us, and one young fellow, a comical, unashamed genius of the south, danced and sang for us. We sat till past midnight.

To-day the charm of the Old World is upon me. My discontent of yesterday seems wicked. I adore my soft-voiced husband, my black-eyed daughter. I love my sleepy villa, my kind servants. It is not many of my country who are called to the pleasant land of melody and peace who will have the privilege of growing old so sweetly and gently as I shall here.

THE ISLAND IN THE NORTH

I.

My uncle died this winter ten years ago, when I was five-and-thirty. He left behind him my aunt, his widow, and three daughters, but no sons. I had to manage their affairs for them, and there was some fatiguing litigation in connection with his bequests. In June I had to come to Canada concerning properties belonging to this aunt.

By July I had wound up my business, seen something of the eastern cities, and was determined to take a camping-out holiday on a small northern lake. At a hamlet on this lake an old friend of mine was living, in charge of a parish consisting of the village church and another some distance away. Paton had a delicate chest and a large family. He never had much luck, poor fellow. He had been for a couple of years in a Canadian town parish, but was now ordered north for his health, and I suppose was glad enough to get anything to do in a place which would benefit his lungs. It was he who had told me of the shanty and the island I was about

to visit. I intended my camping to last only three or four weeks, but for as many dollars I could rent the island and shanty for three or four months if I wished. The island was a good mile from the village. It was about a quarter of a mile lo g and very high in the centre and, except at one end, dropped precipitously into the lake. At this one end it sloped gently into shallow waters with a daintily marked sandy bottom. On this gentle slope was my shanty, consisting of two rooms, a kitchen and a bedroom. It had been cleaned before my arrival, and an old body from the hamlet was to come over two or three times a week to " redd " out the place for me.

On my first morning I unpacked the most necessary of my belongings, put a chair before the door, and enjoyed a quiet pipe. The day was clear and calm, and the waters lapped delicately on the shelving rock and sandy slope before me.

The sun was high above me when I turned my steps up the path behind my dwelling. The way led openly through blueberry bushes and bracken. I seemed each moment to be reaching the island's summit, but height after height came in my way with its low bush foliage glistening in the high, powerful

sun. Through the leafage huge pinkish boulders thrust themselves. I sat down after a few moments' climb, and it was not difficult to imagine myself in a wild cemetery full of rough giant tombstones. I climbed again and presently found I was really at the highest point; then looking about me more or less reposefully, now that I could climb no higher, I heard the clicking of rowlocks below the island. The boat must be very close-hidden by the banks, I thought—for I could not see it from my vantage-ground. It was very hot and exposed above the "giants' cemetery," and I turned about and slowly made my way down through the rocks and blueberry bushes.

When I came to the shanty I stopped at the entrance, my attention caught by the sound of voices near at hand. In a moment more I saw my trespassers—two women, or a woman and a child (or shall I call them two angel visitants?) had landed on my island. They were sitting on a low shelving rock in the shade of the alders, which grew wherever they could at the water's edge. It was impossible to move silently over the rocks and through the dry bushes, and I found the invaders' upturned faces gazing into mine. The elder woman, a brunette, pale and slight, had

risen; the younger, a girl or a child, fair-haired, sunburnt, and bare-footed, still sat on the rock. The woman spoke to me.

"You must forgive us," she said. "I did not know—perhaps you—"

"I am living on the island," I said. "You are very welcome indeed: don't think of going yet. It must be frightfully hot on the water."

She remained standing, however, and the girl drew up her feet, clasped her knees and

smiled. "We shall be rested in a moment," the woman continued, "and then we must go back; we have a long way to go."

"I have not had any visitors," I said, "won't you please sit a moment?" I was assuredly loth to have them depart suddenly, if it was only for the pleasure of looking at them a moment longer.

The standing woman, in her rough, simple dress, was of a supple, elegant build, and her smooth skin, dark eyes and rich coil of hair needed nothing to make a charming effect. The girl with her blonde, curling hair, her wide blue eyes, was of a startling prettiness, and I thought almost German in type.

I think I said the island was steep, that the lake was small and lovely, that I should be there for some weeks. My elder visitor was uneasily or shyly ready to depart; the child, whom I heard call her "mother," was lingering in her movements, while a mischievous, meditative smile lurked in her lips. Then they were gone.

II.

I HAD, of course, a standing invitation to drop in at the parsonage, and I confess that out of curiosity concerning my visitors I

looked them up very promptly. My curiosity was more amply gratified than I expected.

It turned out that Mrs. Paton had been at school in England with the dark lady, who was now a Mrs. Verner. At school she had been Celia Warren, an extremely pretty girl, and very musical. To this school had come, to teach the piano, Verner, a good-looking young German. He was a brilliant pianist, with an attractive personality. He made love to Celia, who was at the tender age of sixteen, and—eloped with her, and married her. Then followed an old, tragic story. Verner in two or three years became very dissipated in two directions, those of the bottle and of the fair sex. He took his wife to Germany. He entertained rakish men and women friends at his house.

Young, tender, backward in the German tongue, and perhaps not too willing to learn it, Celia was not of a disposition to adapt herself to her husband's tastes. His dissipations were a bitter insult to her. Christine, her daughter, was born a year after her marriage, and when she was four years old her mother managed to run away with her to England. The father came after his child. Celia was told that if she left her husband it would mean parting with her child. She went back

with him to Germany. Her husband continued to earn money through his musical talent in concert and the giving of lessons, but his house was a bedlam to her. When Christine was twelve years old her mother again escaped with her.

Celia's relatives had taken pity on her and provided her with a small yearly allowance. Coming to America, she had lived a hand-to-mouth existence in New York, sewing, giving German lessons, whatever she could do while keeping her eye on her child. Mrs. Paton had communicated with her from time to time, and on coming to this remote spot and finding a house up the river to be rented for a few dollars a year, had persuaded Celia Verner to bring her child and settle for a while. Mrs. Verner had not heard from her husband since her last flight, but Mrs. [illegible] told me it was her perpetual dread that he should find her. She was a Roman Catholic, Mrs. Paton regretted to say; she went as regularly as she could to mass at a little church some five miles away in a larger village. She was absolutely opposed to the idea of divorce, and besides it would be for her an impossibility, as it would mean parting with her daughter.

Paton and his wife came over to see me at

my shanty, and an old woman brought me supplies, so for some days I did not go again to the village.

I saw the morning mists unveil, the crystalline purity of the morning water, dappled with the green fringes of the island, rippling mildly blue, with heaven reflected in its bosom. The distant, circling hills lay bland and clear at ten in the morning; at noon they were misty with heat. The water no longer lapped and dimpled, but sulked in a glassy stillness. Then in this mirror I saw the hill girdle repeated like a mirage.

The skies were here a theatre for me, their leisurely spectator. The slow summer clouds strolled in lengths till they spanned the hills on either side or were dispersed in mountains hovering over me, stupendous, luminous and white. A hot night came, and the glassy lake reflected a planet and a few ambitious stars; then in a dark blue frosty midnight the firmament bristled with stars; even the milky way attained a sort of definite brilliance and became pierced with infinitesimal worlds.

The afternoons grew fresher again as they became intimate with early evening airs. The hills grew richly gold in the lowering sun, and a ravishing veil of purple played on their slopes like the mantle of some aerial dancer.

Here and there, and miles apart, in some slight curve, nestled gray wooden houses containing each some sad little settlement; some English family usually, living on a small remittance eked out by small farming. One settler, I learned, was the father of some lovely girls who eventually married in the district and started again in some isolated four walls in this same precinct where summer passes in a flash, where the land is a large rocky waste with a few acres here and there of arable land.

At the head of the lake, facing the west, I noticed an odd glimmering of bare tree trunks, and as in a perpetually watched scene the slightest change is interesting, I inquired why the trees seemed to grow directly out of the water. I was told that they grew out of a low marshy piece of ground which was the opening to a river. I used to picture that river running from the gates of the low shimmering tree-trunks. I thought it must run mystically through a dark forest tangle where there would be tall pines and vine-hung trees, owls staring down ominously, and sudden crisp rattlings below of squirrels and porcupines. There would be scarlet fungus and Indian-pipes and pitcher plants on its oozy banks.

Looking over the distant hills, I guessed at roads and lakes and settlements, always just beyond the summits. Then I took to voyaging in boat or canoe, being lured always by the desire to see what ambushed surprise lay round the next point. I climbed high sunny bluffs; I reposed in great peace at the sunset hour in strange new calming slopes; I pushed up dainty creeks with perfect reflections in their dark limeless waters. To my idle mind perforce recurred the vision of my first morning on the island; the blonde child grew blurred in my memory, but the dark, pale face, the whole graceful form of the mother, gently haunted me. Perhaps if I had not expected to see her again she would have left my thoughts more promptly. But there are women one sees once or twice in ball-rooms —there are women one sees on shipboard, perhaps does not even speak to—who linger in one's mind in a regretful fashion. This woman, sweet, dark, pale and a little sad in bearing, seemed to me, as I thought of her and tried to read her from my memory-picture, a soul framed at once for passion and fidelity, most magnetically attractive, and yet most virtuously womanly; one to compel the respect of men and fill men's hearts with

perhaps an unreasoning loneliness at her every withdrawal from them.

At first I laughed to myself at the rounding out of my thoughts from this flashing glimpse. Then by degrees, rushing in on the vacuum of my idleness, enticed by the sweetness of my surroundings, came the details of her melancholy life, linked with my mental picture of her delicate and beautiful sadness, her drooping aspect. My last, perhaps exaggerated idea of her, was as a shy and tragic being, fleeing from life, from admiration, from joy, from vanity.

A spirit of curiosity began to play upon my idleness, and I began to look forward to the time when I should again encounter and compare her with the mental picture I had had with me so frequently since I first saw her.

III.

I HAD a letter or two and provisions brought to me to the island, but in a few days I found I must go to the village on a visit to the store and post-office. I found the nearest landing to the post-office, moored my boat, and proceeded to mount an ascending road. There was not a soul in sight on the road, nor outside any of the houses that straggled along and tried to make a street of the ham-

let. The sky was cloudless, the road was coppery, sandy and silence-making. The sun poured down upon the store front; a dog lay on the platform before it asleep.

The scene was astoundingly quiet, when suddenly it became alive. My brunette visitor stepped out from the store, carrying a heavy basket. She gave me one precious glance from her splendid eyes, a slow, slight bend of the head, and the vision had passed me by. There was a singing in my ears—I had thought so much of her in my idleness, I suppose. The street had been so unutterably quiet, and she had appeared with such suddenness, with such grace. I could not turn abruptly about. I almost ran to the post wicket, rapped with the utmost impatience, got no letter, left my errand in the store undone, turned and saw her still in sight. I did not dare follow her too quickly, but caught her up at last.

I said, "Good morning," with what daring and politeness I could, and asked if I might not help her with the basket. She glanced at me a second and perhaps thought there was no help for it.

"Are you sure I'm not taking you out of your way?" she said, as we passed my boat at its moorings.

I laughed. "Never! I have endless commissions to do all over the village. Where is your boat?"

"Up this way," she replied, nodding her head forward. "There is a river up here, and we must row up it to get to our house."

I looked at her when I could, she seemed to me so very pretty in her restrained way, and I thought the faint pink which seemed most reluctantly to spread itself in her pallor the rarest blush I had seen in many a year.

We came to the parsonage, where there was a group of children lying and sitting in the wooden porch. Here she called, "Christine!"

"Yes, mother," a voice replied, and the blonde girl, barefoot still, came running down after us. Christine did not blush; she smiled and dimpled, and she too was fair to see. Her skin was very smooth and fine, her flesh was of a lovely light plumpness.

I walked with them till they came to the end of the houses which straggled on for half a mile at intervals. Then the road dipped through a bit of woods. Then there was an opening, the gleam of a river, and we turned aside to the water, where there was a canoe. Christine informed me that this river was the outlet of the lake and that this was their

canoe. There were a few lingering words at this moment—a word of thanks from my dark lady—and they were afloat. Christine waved her paddle in farewell, and I waved my hand.

On the evening of the third day after this I hied me to the village again, tempted by an early rising moon for a walk on the land. First, however, I turned into the parsonage. In the parlor in the dusk were several figures. I found Paton at the window with his pipe, Mrs. Paton apart in the shadows with Mrs. Verner, and Christine lying on the sofa romping with two of the children. The lamps were lighted, and I was contented. Mrs. Paton tried to leave then, I thought, but was persuaded to linger.

I spent then the only cosy, natural homelike hour I have had in her presence. Paton and I talked at the window, the children tossed and carolled and chirped on the sofa, and Mrs. Paton and Mrs. Verner talked softly in the background.

At nine o'clock Mrs. Verner said that she must leave, and Paton said that he would accompany them to their boat on the river. As no one could very well forbid me, I joined him and his charges. There was something very harmonious in the little tramp through

the moonlit village road. There it was fit to speak or be silent, and one could be near that sweet presence without a sense of intrusion. Their boat was launched on the moonlit river, and I, regretfully enough, watched the dark spot rippling the moon-path.

I went home more or less happily. It was a pleasure and a rest to be in the room with this woman; she diffused happiness for me. I pictured myself meeting her often during my few weeks' stay, perhaps ending in being her counsellor and friend. At the same time, I did not fail to perceive that this joy in her presence, this happiness diffused, could only come from an affinity, from a person one came dangerously near to loving.

IV.

MOST men have experienced, after a happy parting from the object of fancy, the easy slipping by of the first few days without a sight of her, then the slipping by of more days, a taking alarm, a fancy exaggerated and lashed into something stronger. A day on the island, or idling about the lake, or tramping on the desolately beautiful mainland, was more than a day; it was more like the fairy night encompassing the growth of the fairy beanstalk. My fancy grew into an

intense longing to look again upon Celia Verner.

The evening at the parsonage was a delusive omen. The happy circumstance of easy meeting did not repeat itself. I began to go every day to the hamlet, to the post, to the parsonage. I caught no sight of Mrs. Verner, but I did see her daughter. In fact, I was pretty sure to see the child. She used to pop out upon me, usually from the parsonage, where she seemed to love to spend her time romping or playing with the children. She said she always came in at least three times a week for letters or an errand.

She always ran up to me in a playful, familiar way, taking my arm or my hand. She was vastly pretty in her old dress. Her skin was browner, her lips redder than ever, her hair bleaching more prettily every day.

Such a babbler she was, about nothing at all —about the doings of Johnny and Ellen at the parsonage, the peculiarities of Mr. and Mrs. Paton, her own housekeeping, cleaning and cooking, the weather, the rocks, goodness knows what!

And sometimes she talked—and I let her, perhaps, when I should not—of her childhood at her father's house. Her mother had evidently kept the child close, but Christine

told of getting out of bed one night when her mother was asleep and going down to the parlor, where her father was with a number of ladies and gentlemen. They were noisy, she said, just like children, and they gave her a lot of stuff to drink that made her very ill afterwards.

One day in the village Christine invited me to walk down with her to her canoe on the river. As she was getting in she suddenly said, "Do come up with me, Mr. Ericson, and see our place up there." She jumped out of the canoe to the shore again and skipped round me, crying, "Do, do come!"

Such a perfect day it was, and such a sudden, tempting proposal! I did not resist long, and soon found myself paddling Christine up the river, which was a new and unexplored region to me.

We passed low, poor farms, whence cunning streams curled into the river; we passed tangled woodland and rocky bluffs; we entered a fairyland of dark pointed spruce trees that stood black at the still water's edge. In the middle of the stream was mirrored the deep blue sky and an immense white cloud. Then we were in a lighter, more open region, and presently pulled up at a tiny boathouse at the foot of a steep bank, where the canoe was

tied, and we walked and climbed a quarter of a mile.

As we approached the house I felt a desperate intruder; I seemed to be breaking into I knew not what of a retreat. Mrs. Verner probably heard that Christine was talking to someone, for she appeared at the side of the house with a startled air.

She was startled, but in some way I thought not altogether astonished. She held out her hand and bade me "Good morning." It was the first time I had taken that hand, and I thought I was touching it by unfair means. As I apologized I think I blushed vividly, and she took pity on me.

"There is no need to apologize, Mr. Ericson," she said; "the river would tempt anyone; it is a lovely trip and one you should not miss. Will you sit down a little?"

"Mamma, I want Mr. Ericson to stay to lunch with us," said Christine, and she ran to fetch a chair for me. She placed an old rustic chair in the shade outside the house, while I was embarrassed again at her suggestion.

"No," I said, "I cannot; in a few moments I will go back. I must—" and here she again pitied me, for she said: "Mr. Ericson, will you not stay and share our

lunch? You know, we have everything of the simplest."

I could see that in spite of her angelic politeness the invitation must be an effort. Then Christine cried again, "Indeed, you must!"

Mrs. Verner was moved to a smile. "Yes, indeed, you must," she repeated.

I had been a little irregular in my meals on the island; I had never thought of a mid-day meal in my excitement and I was at my wits' end. I could not leave at once, so perforce put my chagrin in my pocket; I could not lose this opportunity for an hour with her. Who knew but that I might be of some use to her? I accepted the invitation, insisting, however, that there should be no pains taken.

Christine skipped with delight. "I will get the mittagsessen!" she cried; "you sit here and talk, mütterchen."

"Nonsense, child," said Mrs. Verner, softly, "Mr. Ericson will excuse us both for a few moments."

Presently we sat at a little table under the trees. There were woods at the back of the clearing in which the house stood, and giant elms and maples made the little white cottage look very small and lowly. Except for a grass plot before the house, the clearing itself

was wild enough. In front we looked down the hill into a sea of trees.

The repast was scarcely sad, and scarcely gay, in spite of Christine's chatter. She had put dogberries on the table and had set them in her hair, and with her bleaching, shining tresses decked with the scarlet berries, her sunburnt face and her flashing teeth, she was a vividly beautiful creature. No sooner were we seated at the table than she jumped up, ran to the house and returned with a long brown bottle of Rhine wine.

"Behold!" she cried, and uncorked the bottle. A shade passed over her mother's face; she was about to exclaim, I think, but desisted.

Christine poured the wine in our glasses. Mrs. Verner did not touch hers, but I drank gladly enough.

The quietness, the loneliness of the house, the touch of humanity in the vast wilds, and the blue mists splashed with the splendid early turnings of the maples, have made that little feast a solemn and beautiful memory to me. I was intensely happy, but beneath my joy, as if most wistful strains of music were rising and dying in my ears, I had a heart-broken feeling that the happiness was snatched for a moment from a place where I

had no right to enter and where I should never step again. Mrs. Verner seemed more tranquil; she was exquisitely kind and polite in her gentle remarks. I think she gave herself up a little to the moment, to the beauty and rest of the surroundings. Perhaps the ever new tragedy of the fall day did not jar on her mood.

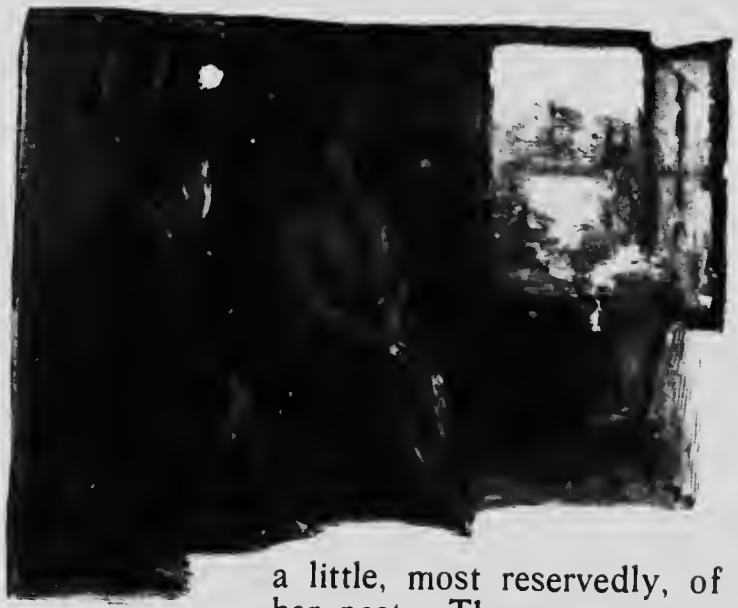
After we rose from the table I said something about leave-taking. Moved by some sudden impulse, she said, "Will you come into the house for a moment?"

"Gladly," I said. I was glad of anything which would give me a moment longer with her.

We entered by a door which opened immediately into their sitting-room. She invited me to sit down, and sat herself. Christine was busying herself removing the cloth and the dishes. The room was lined with wood, the ceiling was raftered, and the whole stained or painted dark, I do not remember which. The sunlit trees and the gleaming sky glowed like jewels through the open windows, like opals set in the darkness of the woodwork.

Ah, that was a happy thought of hers that we should sit in this room. By some divine chance, or mood of hers, we sat long. It

seemed long because I feared that each moment was to be the end. She talked a little, and I talked, watching her the while as much as I dared. She spoke of her coming to these northern wilds. She spoke of Christine, and



a little, most reservedly, of her past. These scant confidences were the pearls of speech to me. I got to know her face, the contour of her cheek, the sweep of her eyelashes, the soft lift of her eyes, the ripple of her hair, the curve of her beloved lips, unforgettably. The reposeful grace of her shoulders, the folding

of her slender feet, drove me wild with their nearness and their farness. Her slender wrists, her lovely hands, were roughened by her labors in the house. How my anger rose at this roughness, and how my heart ached, and how I loved the hands more dearly! Christine did not come, but I heard her song about the place.

I think two divinely happy hours slipped by. I drank in the dark room with its glowing windows. I noted the little shelf of books, some needlework, a picture or two—the touch of neatness, the pitiful settling of this dove in its poor nest. I held it all in the arms of my deepest heart. Then there was a touching again of the adorable hand. I dared do no more than touch it, I dared say no more than "Good-bye." I was a comer by an unfair chance. I had been richly endowed on my visit, I had broken bread with her, I had sat alone with her in her room in her abiding place, as no man in this remote land had been allowed before, perhaps. I had no boat of my own, and I would not take theirs; but Christine took me to a road where I could foot it to the village. I thought her smile at parting a little strange, and I held her hand a moment in gratitude. Her uplifted, brilliant face gazed into mine as if she were

about to say something of moment, but she desisted. pressed my hand, and ran home with a laugh.

My head was on its pillow early enough that night; but my eyes were on the stars perpetually, though my thoughts were nearer earth. Celia Verner's name rang in my ears. One image after another in her life passed before me—her pathetic girlhood, her love, her marriage, her motherhood, her misery. I saw her a trusting, passionate girl as a slip of a tender bride. I saw her at her wretched work. I saw her, dark, magnetic, reposeful, desirable, miserably dressed, but with a poetic grace withal. Miserable, baffled and impassioned, I tossed on my pillow.

The early, unsettled days of September were upon us, and at midnight a rain began which kept up till morning.

V.

By nine o'clock in the morning the sun was shining again, but my cabin was damp and the island was wet. I felt events were coming to a crisis, and I was terribly restless. The wet and slippery island was no place for a restless man. I decided to make for the mainland, where the sandy roads would soon be drained off and all the better for their wet-

ting. There I could walk for miles, and perhaps appease my restlessness or arrive at some conclusion.

I attained the village road leading past the store, and meditated a walk through a wood, across a farm, and up a tremendous hillside. I had passed the store only a little way when I heard a soft thudding behind me on the road. Christine, radiant and fresh as the morning, lightly caught my arm. I opened my heart to this child of Celia Verner's.

"How would you like a long ramble with me this morning?" I asked her.

"I should love it better than anything in the world."

"Done!" I cried; "Come along."

The air smelt of deep earth and bracken, and as we neared the woods the odor was strong of drenched pines.

These woods were weird and majestic in aspect. The ancient pines had been planted closely, and in consequence showed a tremendous length of trunk. The plumed tops, with light clouds skimming over them in the blue, seemed to attain a dizzy height. Then the wood was curiously light, so much of the timber had been taken out, and the huge crossed logs at the cuttings had the look of slaughtered giants.

Christine and I sat presently on one of the logs in a clearing near the centre of the wood. I looked at her, wondering curiously about her future, and trying to make a picture from her of her German father, and again trying to find points of likeness to her mother. Only faint traces there were of this likeness—the joining of her hand to the wrist and the setting of her cheek-bone in the neck.

I found Christine looking at me in her turn with a questioning, distrustful expression. Then she said, with strange intuition, "Are you thinking about my mother?"

"No," I answered untruthfully. "I was thinking of these empty woods."

And then I did forget her mother for the moment, and thought of the woods. In vast, quiet places how one's thought grows; if one's soul does not expand, one's thought grows. Christine sat in silence after my last remark, and the richly odorous quiet of the wood made my blood leap warmly and wantonly for a moment. My eye fell upon her rosy beauty, a beauty that showed warmly in the gray, green woods. But I saw her with an impersonal desire. My stirred imagination made me fancy myself some youth meeting and loving her in the inspiring forest.

I was too heavy at heart, too absolutely

absorbed and steeped in her mother's sorrow, to feel a nearer passion than that for this girl, whose beauty one could scarcely pass over unmoved. I shook off my thoughts and Christine her silence, and we passed gaily enough through the rest of the wood. Then we traversed the road enskirting the farm, which was a small one, backed by long, low rock, and bound by tamaracks and marsh-lands. Then the way wound upwards, and we came to a great hill, where we took a foot-path.

Slender and long-winded, Christine skipped upwards like a young goat, even singing as she went, and I did not do so badly myself.

The hill-top was hot but breezy, and we sat down on some stones. Then I took off my coat. Christine rolled it into a pillow, laid her cheek upon it, and stretched herself prettily on the ground. I remonstrated concerning the dampness, and a tiny pouting smile was her answer.

We were at the summit of a hill. Directly below us was a deliciously surprising chain of little lakes, almost ponds, blue under the sky and silvery with the breezy reflections of the sun. The lakelets were set in dark, low, swampy woods of thick-growing tamarack,

cedar and balsam. Beyond the woods was a farm or two, the homesteads gray and unpainted, the fields yellow with uncut grain. Everywhere surrounding farm and field were rocky slopes and dark blue lines of woodland.

Betimes I turned my eyes from the landscape to Christine. Then the thought came to me that I must consider her anew. I could not help smiling at her as she lay so softly on the hard ground, she was so vastly pretty. I thought now that she was no child, but a woman, a very young woman, and to-day an innocent one. She could not have hidden her prettiness. It was so striking, so obvious, but she could have sat with her hands clasping her knees as she did the first morning I saw her. Then I reproached myself a little. The [illegible] lovely and childlike stretch of her figure was a thing of beauty; she was a child in years, untarnished and innocent; she had been, during our short acquaintance, a dear little comrade to me. I laughed a little then at the beauty of the day, at the sylvan temptingness of her pose, at her innocence, at my own dreary old thoughts. At my laugh she raised her eyes to mine with a clear, steady gaze. "The girl has thoughts of her own," I said to myself.

Then she said, softly and emphatically, "I have never been so happy as I have this morning."

"You have years and years of the best of happiness before you, child," I answered. Then I got on my feet and offered her my hand to help her up. But she sprang up by herself, shook out my coat, held it for me, and we ran down the hill together.

VI.

THE end of September came. It was high time for me to be returning east to take my homeward passage. I was in a miserable frame of mind. I had seen Mrs. Verner in the distance, but had not had a word with her for three weeks. Those three weeks on the island seemed to me an eternity. It was cold, it was windy, and the autumn rains had set in. Well! well! little did I imagine that at my age and with my experience I should be in the toils of a sentiment so hopeless, so unsatisfying. On this memorable evening in September I walked in a forlorn hope a mile or so up the road in the direction of her house —the same road which I had traversed in the opposite direction on the day of my expedition up the river with Christine. I was in a

sort of despair, relieved by intermittent hopes that she might be on this road to-night. I should not have dared approach nearly to her house, but there was another mile allowed me before I should do that.

I had passed through woodlands; I had passed a stone homestead, with some boys and cattle; I was on a bridge crossing an alder-banked stream. There a gate to the left, beyond the bridge, swung on rusty hinges, and Celia stood beyond me, fastening the wooden bolt.

She bowed, hesitated, and I caught up to her. She told me, by way of making some remark, that she had been tempted to wander down to this stream for some watercress.

Behind us, in the fenced land which was the wild end of the farm I had just passed, there was an immense rocky hill, which I had once climbed, and from which I had discovered a fine view of the winding river. The evening was cool and cloudy, and perfect for exercise. I was so afraid that she would be gone from me at once that I made the first suggestion that came to me. I asked her if she had ever climbed to this high point. The ghost of a smile hovered on her lip as she replied in the negative. "Would you like to try now?" I asked; "the view is immense."

"I think not," she said slowly. She hesitated. Perhaps I looked imploring; I did not dare to say a persuading word.

"Perhaps—"

When she said that one word I pulled out the bolt and opened the gate. We put the parcel of cress at the gate-post and were on the way.

She avoided my assistance on the rugged climb; not once did I touch her hand. In ten minutes we had scrambled to the highest point, and sat on a lichen-covered rock, both a little breathless, looking on a gloomy and beautiful scene. Below us curved the river, disappearing and shimmering again between its dark banks, and beyond lay miles of uncultivated, impossible land, rough with stumps and underbrush and bristling with naked pines, dismal relics of the great fires of twenty or thirty years ago. The skies were filled with long rolling storm-clouds and cracked with a western crimson streak.

Perhaps, if it had been a joyous, radiant, calm evening, she would not have accompanied me.

We sat a few moments quietly enough, spying out familiar landmarks. She showed me the farmhouse a mile farther down the river, which was a mile from her house. I saw

again the little city of pointed balsams on a curve of the river bank. Behind us, far away in the lake, was my island. Then I allowed myself to speak of my surprise and interest

at her landing there on my first morning. Her mood changed; with her chin on her hand she averted her head; but when she turned to me again her face was softened and her eyes were downcast. When she raised them they were kind and reckless, perhaps, but with the shyest recklessness.

"You know my story. Mrs. Paton said she had spoken to you. I was angry at first, but perhaps it was for the best. This country is beautiful, maybe, for a happy person; for me it is a desolation. It sounds odd in one way, horribly ordinary in another, but I have not, with the exception of Mr. Paton, seen and talked to a gentleman in so many years as I have to you. I hope you are free, I hope you are happy. Fate set a net for my feet in my extreme youth and rashness, from which I shall never be free. This is my hiding-place. How long I shall be here I do not know; perhaps a very short time.' Suddenly she put her face in her hands and wept.

Oh, hateful grief! Oh, blessed tears! Oh, blessed intimacy of that moment! I was ready to lay myself and my all at her feet, even though it should be the vainest of sacrifices.

There was a yodeling from the river, and we saw, far below, Christine in the canoe. She waved to us, and her mother started to her feet, and called to her. But the girl either did not hear or chose to take no notice.

"Never mind," said she, "I was prepared to walk. I must go now. Forget my hateful tears."

"I shall never forget any confidence—" I

began. I was getting beyond myself. I was going to throw myself at her feet then and there and declare my perpetual service and devotion.

"Not a word," she said; "I shall only feel contented in your forgetting my stupid weakness."

My moment was deferred again; I could say no more then. We scrambled down the rocks again, the watercress was picked up, and the gate opened.

"It will be dark very soon," I said; "you will at least allow me to see that you get home safely."

"No," she said, with a little smile, "think how pitch dark it would be before you reached the island."

"There will be a glimmering on the road for an hour or more. I can at least wander into the woods and sleep," I said, "if I am benighted. It will not be so different to the shanty."

"No, Mr. Ericson, I will not allow it," she said, smiling. "Good-bye," she then said, with great finality, but at the same time gently holding out her hand to me.

This time, prudence or no prudence, I was not to be absolutely beaten and defrauded. I held the tender, most magnetic morsel close

and tight, and kissed it fervently. I saw, even through the falling night, that most precious blush rising under the brunette pallor. The hand was pulled away, not rudely but insistently. There was a "Good-bye" with a break in it, and she almost ran in her own direction.

Then I turned, most reluctantly, in mine. Oh, my blessed, darling woman! Oh, cruel, cruel fate, to snatch that evening hour from me! Who knows what persuasions, what comforts, what prop and stay my love might have given her had I been able to tell it under an inspiring, lenient darkness! It had made a tremendous growth, this love of mine, in a few weeks, and most of all perhaps in this last hour. Lost in the bush indeed! Would I not wander many a night sleeping on the ground in search of her and a responding love?

Most men with their average share of personality and attractiveness can be successful in their wooings by the force of the masculine mind, and if fate is not very much against them they will have few disappointments lingering in their memories. This woman, if she had responded to me, would have been most wholly acceptable. Her poetic face and figure, her possibilities of passion and affec-

tion, her restraint, her purity, would always have been infinitely attractive. Her appearance in this wild, large northern setting was like a shining planet in a black winter sky. Add to this the difficulties, the privations to my incipient love, what wonder that fancy had flamed into a desperate affection!

It was nine o'clock when I reached the island; at ten the storm broke. I was glad of the howling wind, the slashing rain, the thunderclaps and lightning flashes. I did not go to bed. I walked my floor; I sat and brooded. My spirit dashed against a dead wall. I resolved to see her again—to insist—to make her divorce—to marry—to carry her off.

I repeated her name aloud—I kissed her in imagination—I ran over in my mind her every little charm. When the morning came I slept till afternoon. It still rained when I awoke. I set my house to rights and thought on the morrow to go to her house—to take her by storm.

VII.

WHEN the next morning came the weather was still unsettled and the morning was gray. A gentle, warm rain was softly falling—falling in the persevering way which promises a

day of it. I stood up over my few breakfast dishes, stretched myself, and prepared to carry them off to be washed. Then there was a rustle outside the shanty, and Christine's brilliant face, with a tiny curl or two clinging to her wet temples, appeared between the enveloping of an old waterproof.

Laughing her bold yet gentle laugh, she threw off the cloak and said, "Let me do your dishes for you."

Worn, irritated, unhappy as I was, I said, rather shortly, "You had much better be crossing to the village again; we are going to have an all day's rain, perhaps a storm."

She laughed again, clattered the dishes on to a tray and took them into the kitchen. She sang a little at first, then became silent. I did not go near her while she worked. She had never come to my cabin before alone. I was provoked at that in my present mood, unreasonably perhaps. Her gaiety irritated me. She should not leave as gaily as she came. I made up my mind to that.

When Christine emerged from the kitchen I was standing at the table idly cutting tobacco. I made no movement to sit down, nor did I invite her to do so. She came and stood near me, drumming on the table with her fingers. She looked at me. I did not

speak. Then I had a curious sensation that something was pending, and I looked at her and into her eyes. She opened her lips to speak, but no words came. The color left her face and she fell, as it were, forward a step, and clung to my arm. Then her arms were about me and her face on my shoulder. She spoke, now low and quick and almost losing her breath.

"Mr. Ericson, don't send me away. Let me stay. I'll work, I'll do anything for you. My mother," she went on desperately, "my mother won't marry you, she will never have a divorce, she will go away very soon. I know she will. Don't send me away, or else let me see you again or find you somewhere."

I loosened her arms, upset, angry and stunned at the same time. I remember taking her by the wrists and shaking her.

"Are you the child of your mother?" I said. "Just think what you are doing and saying, for God's sake! My dear, I don't want to be harsh. Try to control yourself. Go home, now, there's a good soul."

I suppose I was going to continue the homily and dismissal with what kindness I could, but she pulled her wrists away from me, took a step towards the door, then turned suddenly in the opposite direction and ran

to the camp-bed where I slept. It was
ered at this moment with a serge cover.
she pulled aside at the head, then dropped
her knees and buried her face in the pil
with sobs which shook her desperately.

I dropped into a chair near the table
looked at her. At that moment I felt my
the meanest soul in creation. I do not th
I have ever sinned against innocence,
women are more often the tempters, bu
blushed one unforgettable blush. I win
at the thought of the easy, what seemed c
ventional, sins I had perpetrated during
life. I was abased to the deepest depths
perhaps illogically—at the thought of
beautiful girl, fresh from a most recent ch
hood, a near babyhood, laying herself,
love, her passion, in my unwilling and
nished hands.

Had I not grown past the weeping habi
could have wept with her. I dared not tou
her. I dared not comfort her. What was
be done for this girl—and her darli
mother? Heavens above, what a tempest
be raised in the mind of one poor wretch!
have often pondered in after years over
events of those few moments in that ru
shanty. Was this the first outbreak of b
blood, of inherited evil? Was it the m

tender of first passions that might have been garnered into a pure and precious love? If my heart had been free from the most spiritual, most alluring, most heart-binding of spells, could I have let her go without consideration of some future for both of us?

Never shall I forget that figure, abandoned to grief, her youth, her glowing beauty, when in two or three moments she stood up and tried to put on her waterproof with trembling fingers. Small irritations were gone in the face of such an emotion. I think I should have kissed her at the door, have said what words I could of comfort, but when I approached I was stayed by her pale look of unutterably wounded love and pride. I shall forever regret that I was obliged to see her depart casting on me that heart-broken glance.

VIII.

I COULD not follow Christine home, nor was it in me to go up the river that afternoon; but when the morning came I rose early, feeling that I could no longer wait for a sight of Celia Verner, that I could no longer delay in putting my fate to the test.

I reached the mainland about nine o'clock. I walked through the same woodland that I

had traversed two evenings before when
had climbed the rock with her. Everythin
seemed to be born to a new divineness,
crystalline freshness. The birches in thei
white elegant stems were sprightly as youn
virgins. The bracken, brown as it was, ha
never looked so lovely. The scent of th
soaked pine trees was most evident, mos
acceptable. The farmlands lay still an
clean and in a lovely silence in the tempere
September sun, and browsing sheep move
in their pasture in a drowsy, poetic measur
of their own. The roads were red and th
sky was cloudless blue; the land was shim
mering with light; the air, warm in the sun
with the fresh pleasant currents in it of early
autumn, was perfect. And I—I was having
my taste of tragedy. Pampered and selfish
epicurean and calculating the worth of pleas
ures and loves as I had been, I was preparing
for any part of sacrifice I might be called to
play.

As I walked toward her house I hoped each
step was bringing me nearer to her. Would
intense love, would arguments, prevail? The
daughter, what was to become of her? She
must not g back to her father—her father
might take er in the event of her mother
marrying me. And the daughter, yes, the

daughter had taken this mad fancy for me. That she would grow out of, no doubt. I knew not what was to be done. I only knew I must see Celia in case she should flee this place and me. And I knew that I was prepared to wait, to do anything but absolutely give her up. Yes, as I walked I hoped—but I ached with suspense, too, and sometimes with despair.

Before I reached Mrs. Verner's house there was a turn in the road of a quarter of a mile. It ran into a basin where flowed a creek, not quite a river, sometimes hidden by alders, sometimes slowly emerging. Trees abounded in this district, as full of character as human beings. The elms were wonderful, huge, old, lacy of foliage. They rose against the sky, sometimes ascending in a mighty solid trunk to their multitudinous breaks on high, sometimes branching profusely at earlier stages. Such beauty of nature, such a calm, golden weather! And I, in what a tumult!

My heart beat fast as I went through the last bit of wood to the cottage. I opened a gate, and there I was. There was no smoke from the chimney. Misery! The place seemed closed! The kitchen door was fast, the front door locked, too. The blinds were down. Perhaps they had gone to the village.

Then I heard footsteps on the leaves. I turned in an agony of suspense and saw a strange, middle-aged woman approaching. She was a farmer's wife, she told me, and belonged to the farm hard by, where Mrs. Verner got most of her provisions. She looked at me with a common, inquisitive stare.

"They've gone away from here," she said; "they went yesterday evening."

"Do they return?"

"I understand not," she replied; "I'm here to straighten up a bit more, then I hand the keys to the parson."

"Does he—" I began and stopped there. I could not talk to this woman. "I'm out for a tramp," I concluded, "I shall be off."

She said nothing more, and I turned on my heel feeling her eyes on me the while. I hid outside the fence, and in an hour or two I saw her leave the place. I went into the fenced property then, and found a place in the light woods of the clearing whence I could see the little house and the spot where we had lunched on that memorable day.

I lay long on the ground, desperately hurt and baffled. The play of the sun-chequered shadows on our lunching ground was an agony to watch. The closed blinds of the room where we had sat were a blow on my

heart. I painfully hugged my small, sweet memories. Each of her charms left a pang with me. Huge silvery-trunked maples, as rugged as the trees of Salvator Rosa, tossed their turning golden foliage to the blue. The humble little house sat silent below the beauteous, still, high woods; the chipmunks nestled in the leaves; a scarlet bird fluttered in the bushes; a whip-poor-will cried once or twice, and I still lay in my place. The shadows were lengthening when I roused myself.

I went straight from the cottage to the parsonage in the village. They could or would tell me nothing, but that Mrs. Verner and her daughter had come in suddenly on the evening before on their way to the train and that they had gone east to the city.

I cannot dwell upon my hurried departure from the island, though that is now nearly ten years ago. I lead a happy enough life, partly in my bachelor quarters in London and partly in my house in Surrey. But there are times when I am completely submerged in the undercurrent which flowed into the tranquil, self-centred stream of my life from that summer time in the wilds. I have travelled at times in a vain search for Celia Verner and her daughter, but have not found them.

At first my heart raged against the girl as the probable cause of her mother's departure, but her childlike charms, her gaiety, her beauty, her most unhappy surrender of herself, half in innocence, half in passion, in time melted my rage entirely, and at last I felt nothing but pity and fear for her future and a desire to help her.

The overpowering, almost unreasonable, emotion which the sight and touch and hearing of Celia Verner has left with me will remain with me, I think, as long as I live upon this earth, though time, blessed time, has calmed this love living on a memory into something of a benediction as well as a pain.