

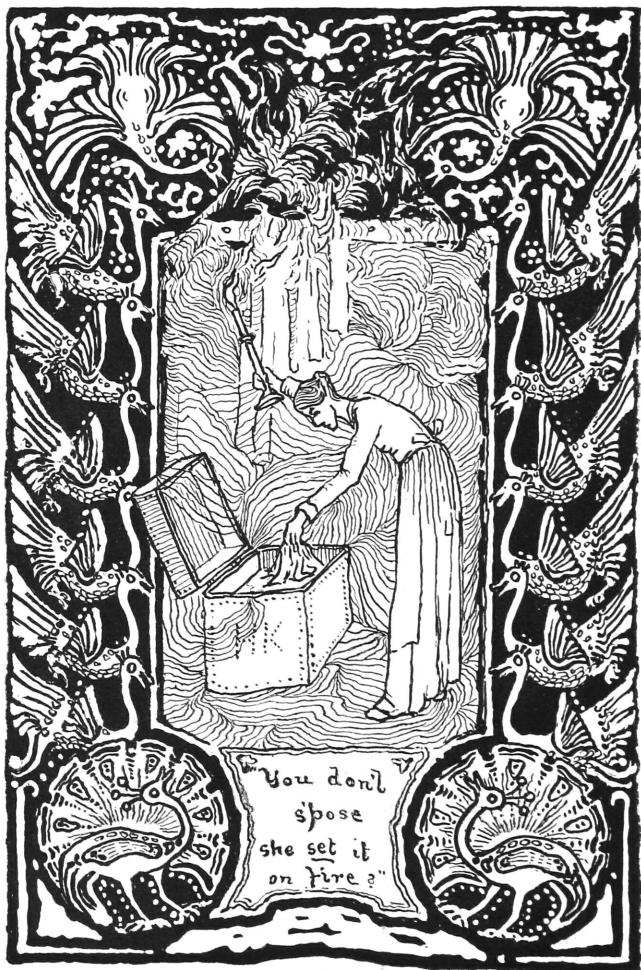
# THE LITTLE ROOM

## AND OTHER STORIES





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BY  
MADELENE YALE WYNNE



CHICAGO  
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1895

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*Decorations by the Author*

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## THE LITTLE ROOM.



OW would it do for a smoking-room ?'

'Just the very place ! only, you know, Roger, you must not think of smoking in the house. I am almost afraid that having just a plain, common man around, let alone a smoking man, will upset Aunt Hannah. She is New England—Ver-  
mont New England — boiled down.'

'You leave Aunt Hannah to me ; I'll find her tender side. I'm going to ask her about the old sea-captain and the yellow calico.'

'Not yellow calico — blue chintz.'

'Well, yellow *shell* then.'

'No, no ! do n't mix it up so ; you won't

know yourself what to expect, and that's half the fun.'

'Now you tell me again exactly what to expect; to tell the truth, I did n't half hear about it the other day; I was wool-gathering. It was something queer that happened when you were a child, was n't it?'

'Something that began to happen long before that, and kept happening, and may happen again; but I hope not.'

'What was it?'

'I wonder if the other people in the car can hear us?'

'I fancy not; we do n't hear them — not consecutively, at least.'

'Well, mother was born in Vermont, you know; she was the only child by a second marriage. Aunt Hannah and Aunt Maria are only half-aunts to me, you know.'

'I hope they are half as nice as you are.'

‘ Roger, be still ; they certainly will hear us.’

‘ Well, do n’t you want them to know we are married ? ’

‘ Yes, but not just married. There’s all the difference in the world.’

‘ You are afraid we look too happy ! ’

‘ No ; only I want my happiness all to myself.’

‘ Well, the little room ? ’

‘ My aunts brought mother up ; they were nearly twenty years older than she. I might say Hiram and they brought her up. You see, Hiram was bound out to my grandfather when he was a boy, and when grandfather died Hiram said he “s’posed he went with the farm, ’long o’ the critters,” and he has been there ever since. He was my mother’s only refuge from the decorum of my aunts. They are simply workers. They make me think of the Maine woman who wanted her epitaph

to be : "She was a *hard* working woman."

'They must be almost beyond their working-days. How old are they?'

'Seventy, or thereabouts ; but they will die standing ; or, at least, on a Saturday night, after all the house-work is done up. They were rather strict with mother, and I think she had a lonely childhood. The house is almost a mile away from any neighbors, and off on top of what they call Stony Hill. It is bleak enough up there, even in summer.

'When mamma was about ten years old they sent her to cousins in Brooklyn, who had children of their own, and knew more about bringing them up. She staid there till she was married ; she did n't go to Vermont in all that time, and of course had n't seen her sisters, for they never would leave home for a day. They could n't even be induced to go to Brooklyn

to her wedding, so she and father took their wedding trip up there.'

'And that's why we are going up there on our own?'

'Don't, Roger; you have no idea how loud you speak.'

'You never say so except when I am going to say that one little word.'

'Well, don't say it, then, or say it very, very quietly.'

'Well, what was the queer thing?'

'When they got to the house, mother wanted to take father right off into the little room; she had been telling him about it, just as I am going to tell you, and she had said that of all the rooms, that one was the only one that seemed pleasant to her. She described the furniture and the books and paper and everything, and said it was on the north side, between the front and back room. Well,

when they went to look for it, there was no little room there; there was only a shallow china-closet. She asked her sisters when the house had been altered and a closet made of the room that used to be there. They both said the house was exactly as it had been built—that they had never made any changes, except to tear down the old wood-shed and build a smaller one.

‘Father and mother laughed a good deal over it, and when anything was lost they would always say it must be in the little room, and any exaggerated statement was called “little-roomy.” When I was a child I thought that was a regular English phrase, I heard it so often.

‘Well, they talked it over, and finally they concluded that my mother had been a very imaginative sort of a child, and had read in some book about such a little room, or perhaps

even dreamed it, and then had "made believe," as children do, till she herself had really thought the room was there.'

'Why, of course, that might easily happen.'

'Yes, but you have n't heard the queer part yet; you wait and see if you can explain the rest as easily.

'They staid at the farm two weeks, and then went to New York to live. When I was eight years old my father was killed in the war, and mother was broken-hearted. She never was quite strong afterwards, and that summer we decided to go up to the farm for three months.

'I was a restless sort of a child, and the journey seemed very long to me; and finally, to pass the time, mamma told me the story of the little room, and how it was all in her own imagination, and how there really was only a china-closet there.

‘She told it with all the particulars; and even to me, who knew beforehand that the room was n’t there, it seemed just as real as could be. She said it was on the north side, between the front and back rooms; that it was very small, and they sometimes called it an entry. There was a door also that opened out-of-doors, and that one was painted green, and was cut in the middle like the old Dutch doors, so that it could be used for a window by opening the top part only. Directly opposite the door was a lounge or couch; it was covered with blue chintz — India chintz — some that had been brought over by an old Salem sea-captain as a “venture.” He had given it to Hannah when she was a young girl. She was sent to Salem for two years to school. Grandfather originally came from Salem.’

‘I thought there was n’t any room or chintz.’

‘*That is just it.* They had decided that



mother had imagined it all, and yet you see how exactly everything was painted in her mind, for she had even remembered that Hiram had told her that Hannah could have married the sea-captain if she had wanted to !

‘The India cotton was the regular blue stamped chintz, with the peacock figure on it. The head and body of the bird were in profile, while the tail was full front view behind it. It had seemed to take mamma’s fancy, and she drew it for me on a piece of paper as she talked. Does n’t it seem strange to you that she could have made all that up, or even dreamed it ?

‘At the foot of the lounge were some hanging shelves with some old books on them. All the books were leather-colored except one ; that was bright red, and was called the *Ladies’ Album*. It made a bright break between the other thicker books.

‘On the lower shelf was a beautiful pink sea-shell, lying on a mat made of balls of red shaded worsted. This shell was greatly coveted by mother, but she was only allowed to play with it when she had been particularly good. Hiram had shown her how to hold it close to her ear and hear the roar of the sea in it.

‘I know you will like Hiram, Roger ; he is quite a character in his way.

‘Mamma said she remembered, or *thought* she remembered, having been sick once, and she had to lie quietly for some days on the lounge ; then was the time she had become so familiar with everything in the room, and she had been allowed to have the shell to play with all the time. She had had her toast brought to her in there, with make-believe tea. It was one of her pleasant memories of her

childhood ; it was the first time she had been of any importance to anybody, even herself.

‘ Right at the head of the lounge was a light-stand, as they called it, and on it was a very brightly polished brass candlestick and a brass tray, with snuffers. That is all I remember of her describing, except that there was a braided rag rug on the floor, and on the wall was a beautiful flowered paper—roses and morning-glories in a wreath on a light blue ground. The same paper was in the front room.’

‘ And all this never existed except in her imagination ? ’

‘ She said that when she and father went up there, there was n’t any little room at all like it anywhere in the house ; there was a china-closet where she had believed the room to be.’

‘ And your aunts said there had never been any such room.’

‘That is what they said.’

‘Was n’t there any blue chintz in the house with a peacock figure?’

‘Not a scrap, and Aunt Hannah said there had never been any that she could remember; and Aunt Maria just echoed her — she always does that. You see, Aunt Hannah is an up-and-down New England woman. She looks just like herself; I mean, just like her character. Her joints move up and down or backward and forward in a plain square fashion. I do n’t believe she ever leaned on anything in her life, or sat in an easy-chair. But Maria is different; she is rounder and softer; she has n’t any ideas of her own; she never had any. I do n’t believe she would think it right or becoming to have one that differed from Aunt Hannah’s, so what would be the use of having any? She is an echo, that’s all.

‘When mamma and I got there, of course

I was all excitement to see the china-closet, and I had a sort of feeling that it would be the little room after all. So I ran ahead and threw open the door, crying, "Come and see the little room."

'And Roger,' said Mrs. Grant, laying her hand in his, 'there really was a little room there, exactly as mother had remembered it. There was the lounge, the peacock chintz, the green door, the shell, the morning-glory, and rose paper, *everything exactly as she had described it to me.*'

'What in the world did the sisters say about it?'

'Wait a minute and I will tell you. My mother was in the front hall still talking with Aunt Hannah. She did n't hear me at first, but I ran out there and dragged her through the front room, saying, "The room *is* here — it is all right."

‘It seemed for a minute as if my mother would faint. She clung to me in terror. I can remember now how strained her eyes looked and how pale she was.

‘I called out to Aunt Hannah and asked her when they had had the closet taken away and the little room built ; for in my excitement I thought that that was what had been done.

‘“That little room has always been there,” said Aunt Hannah, “ever since the house was built.”

‘“But mamma said there was n’t any little room here, only a china-closet, when she was here with papa,” said I.

‘“No, there has never been any china-closet there ; it has always been just as it is now,” said Aunt Hannah.

‘Then mother spoke ; her voice sounded weak and far off. She said, slowly, and with an effort, “Maria, do n’t you remember that

you told me that there had *never been any little room here?* and Hannah said so too, and then I said I must have dreamed it?"

"No, I do n't remember anything of the kind," said Maria, without the slightest emotion. "I do n't remember you ever said anything about any china-closet. The house has never been altered; you used to play in this room when you were a child, do n't you remember?"

"I know it," said mother, in that queer slow voice that made me feel frightened. "Hannah, do n't you remember my finding the china-closet here, with the gilt-edged china on the shelves, and then *you* said that the *china-closet* had always been here?"

"No," said Hannah, pleasantly but unemotionally — "no, I do n't think you ever asked me about any china-closet, and we have n't any gilt-edged china that I know of."

‘ And that was the strangest thing about it. We never could make them remember that there had ever been any question about it. You would think they could remember how surprised mother had been before, unless she had imagined the whole thing. Oh, it was so queer! They were always pleasant about it, but they didn’t seem to feel any interest or curiosity. It was always this answer: “The house is just as it was built; there have never been any changes, so far as we know.”

‘ And my mother was in an agony of perplexity. How cold their gray eyes looked to me! There was no reading anything in them. It just seemed to break my mother down, this queer thing. Many times that summer, in the middle of the night, I have seen her get up and take a candle and creep softly down-stairs. I could hear the steps creak under her weight. Then she would go through the front room



and peer into the darkness, holding her thin hand between the candle and her eyes. She seemed to think the little room might vanish. Then she would come back to bed and toss about all night, or lie still and shiver ; it used to frighten me.

‘ She grew pale and thin, and she had a little cough ; then she did not like to be left alone. Sometimes she would make errands in order to send me to the little room for something — a book, or her fan, or her handkerchief ; but she would never sit there or let me stay in there long, and sometimes she would n’t let me go in there for days together. Oh, it was pitiful ! ’

‘ Well, do n’t talk any more about it, Margaret, if it makes you feel so,’ said Mr. Grant.

‘ Oh yes, I want you to know all about it, and there is n’t much more — no more about the room.

‘Mother never got well, and she died that autumn. She used often to sigh, and say, with a wan little laugh, “There is one thing I am glad of, Margaret: your father knows now all about the little room.” I think she was afraid I distrusted her. Of course, in a child’s way, I thought there was something queer about it, but I did not brood over it. I was too young then, and took it as a part of her illness. But, Roger, do you know, it really did affect me. I almost hate to go there after talking about it; I somehow feel as if it might, you know, be a china-closet again.’

‘That’s an absurd idea.’

‘I know it; of course it can’t be. I saw the room, and there is n’t any china-closet there, and no gilt-edged china in the house, either.’

And then she whispered: ‘But, Roger, you may hold my hand as you do now, if you

will, when we go to look for the little room.'

'And you won't mind Aunt Hannah's gray eyes?'

'I won't mind *anything*.'

It was dusk when Mr. and Mrs. Grant went into the gate under the two old Lombardy poplars and walked up the narrow path to the door, where they were met by the two aunts.

Hannah gave Mrs. Grant a frigid but not unfriendly kiss; and Maria seemed for a moment to tremble on the verge of an emotion, but she glanced at Hannah, and then gave her greeting in exactly the same repressed and non-committal way.

Supper was waiting for them. On the table was the *gilt-edged china*. Mrs. Grant did n't notice it immediately, till she saw her husband smiling at her over his teacup; then she felt fidgety, and could n't eat. She was nervous, and kept wondering what was behind her,

whether it would be a little room or a closet.

After supper she offered to help about the dishes, but, mercy ! she might as well have offered to help bring the seasons round ; Maria and Hannah could n't be helped.

So she and her husband went to find the little room, or closet, or whatever was to be there.

Aunt Maria followed them, carrying the lamp, which she set down, and then went back to the dish-washing.

Margaret looked at her husband. He kissed her, for she seemed troubled ; and then, hand in hand, they opened the door. It opened into a *china-closet*. The shelves were neatly draped with scalloped paper ; on them was the gilt-edged china, with the dishes missing that had been used at the supper, and which at that moment were being carefully washed and wiped by the two aunts.

Margaret's husband dropped her hand and looked at her. She was trembling a little, and turned to him for help, for some explanation, but in an instant she knew that something was wrong. A cloud had come between them; he was hurt; he was antagonized.

He paused for an appreciable instant, and then said, kindly enough, but in a voice that cut her deeply :

‘I am glad this ridiculous thing is ended; do n't let us speak of it again.’

‘Ended!’ said she. ‘How ended?’ And somehow her voice sounded to her as her mother's voice had when she stood there and questioned her sisters about the little room. She seemed to have to drag her words out. She spoke slowly: ‘It seems to me to have only just begun in my case. It was just so with mother when she —’

‘I really wish, Margaret, you would let it

drop. I do n't like to hear you speak of your mother in connection with it. It —' He hesitated, for was not this their wedding-day? 'It does n't seem quite the thing, quite delicate, you know, to use her name in the matter.'

She saw it all now: *he did n't believe her*. She felt a chill sense of withering under his glance.

'Come,' he added, 'let us go out, or into the dining-room, somewhere, anywhere, only drop this nonsense.'

He went out; he did not take her hand now — he was vexed, baffled, hurt. Had he not given her his sympathy, his attention, his belief — and his hand? — and she was fooling him. What did it mean? — she so truthful, so free from morbidness — a thing he hated. He walked up and down under the poplars, trying to get into the mood to go and join her in the house.

Margaret heard him go out ; then she turned and shook the shelves ; she reached her hand behind them and tried to push the boards away ; she ran out of the house on to the north side and tried to find in the darkness, with her hands, a door, or some steps leading to one. She tore her dress on the old rose-trees, she fell and rose and stumbled, then she sat down on the ground and tried to think. What could she think — was she dreaming ?

She went into the house and out into the kitchen, and begged Aunt Maria to tell her about the little room — what had become of it, when had they built the closet, when had they bought the gilt-edged china ?

They went on washing dishes and drying them on the spotless towels with methodical exactness ; and as they worked they said that there had never been any little room, so far as they knew ; the china-closet had always been

there, and the gilt-edged china had belonged to their mother, it had always been in the house.

‘No, I do n’t remember that your mother ever asked about any little room,’ said Hannah. ‘She did n’t seem very well that summer, but she never asked about any changes in the house; there had n’t ever been any changes.’

There it was again: not a sign of interest, curiosity, or annoyance, not a spark of memory.

She went out to Hiram. He was telling Mr. Grant about the farm. She had meant to ask him about the room, but her lips were sealed before her husband.

Months afterwards, when time had lessened the sharpness of their feelings, they learned to speculate reasonably about the phenomenon, which Mr. Grant had accepted as something



not to be scoffed away, not to be treated as a poor joke, but to be put aside as something inexplicable on any ordinary theory.

Margaret alone in her heart knew that her mother's words carried a deeper significance than she had dreamed of at the time. 'One thing I am glad of, your father knows now,' and she wondered if Roger or she would ever know.

Five years later they were going to Europe. The packing was done; the children were lying asleep, with their travelling things ready to be slipped on for an early start.

Roger had a foreign appointment. They were not to be back in America for some years. She had meant to go up to say good-by to her aunts; but a mother of three children intends to do a great many things that never get done. One thing she had done that very day, and as she paused for a moment between the writing

of two notes that must be posted before she went to bed, she said :

‘ Roger, you remember Rita Lash ? Well, she and Cousin Nan go up to the Adirondacks every autumn. They are clever girls, and I have intrusted to them something I want done very much.’

‘ They are the girls to do it, then, every inch of them.’

‘ I know it, and they are going to.’

‘ Well ?’

‘ Why, you see, Roger, that little room —’

‘ Oh —’

‘ Yes, I was a coward not to go myself, but I did n’t find time, because I had n’t the courage.’

‘ Oh ! *that* was it, was it ?’

‘ Yes, just that. They are going, and they will write us about it.’

‘ Want to bet ?’

‘ No ; I only want to know.’

Rita Lash and Cousin Nan planned to go to Vermont on their way to the Adirondacks. They found they would have three hours between trains, which would give them time to drive up to the Keys farm, and they could still get to the camp that night. But, at the last minute, Rita was prevented from going. Nan had to go to meet the Adirondack party, and she promised to telegraph her when she arrived at the camp. Imagine Rita's amusement when she received this message: 'Safely arrived; went to the Keys farm; it is a little room.'

Rita was amused, because she did not in the least think Nan had been there. She thought it was a hoax; but it put it into her mind to carry the joke further by really stopping herself when she went up, as she meant to do the next week.

She did stop over. She introduced herself

to the two maiden ladies, who seemed familiar, as they had been described by Mrs. Grant.

They were, if not cordial, at least not disconcerted at her visit, and willingly showed her over the house. As they did not speak of any other stranger's having been to see them lately, she became confirmed in her belief that Nan had not been there.

In the north room she saw the roses and morning-glory paper on the wall, and also the door that should open into — what ?

She asked if she might open it.

‘Certainly,’ said Hannah ; and Maria echoed, ‘Certainly.’

She opened it, and found the china-closet. She experienced a certain relief ; she at least was not under any spell. Mrs. Grant left it a china-closet ; she found it the same. Good.

But she tried to induce the old sisters to remember that there had at various times been

certain questions relating to a confusion as to whether the closet had always been a closet. It was no use ; their stony eyes gave no sign.

Then she thought of the story of the sea-captain, and said, ‘ Miss Keys, did you ever have a lounge covered with India chintz, with a figure of a peacock on it, given to you in Salem by a sea-captain, who brought it from India ? ’

‘ I dun ’no’ as I ever did,’ said Hannah. That was all. She thought Maria’s cheeks were a little flushed, but her eyes were like a stone wall.

She went on that night to the Adirondacks. When Nan and she were alone in their room she said, ‘ By-the-way, Nan, what did you see at the farm - house ? and how did you like Maria and Hannah ? ’

Nan did n’t mistrust that Rita had been there, and she began excitedly to tell her all

about her visit. Rita could almost have believed Nan had been there if she had n't known it was not so. She let her go on for some time, enjoying her enthusiasm, and the impressive way in which she described her opening the door and finding the 'little room.' Then Rita said: 'Now, Nan, that is enough fibbing. I went to the farm myself on my way up yesterday, and there is *no* little room, and there *never* has been any; it is a china-closet, just as Mrs. Grant saw it last.'

She was pretending to be busy unpacking her trunk, and did not look up for a moment; but as Nan did not say anything, she glanced at her over her shoulder. Nan was actually pale, and it was hard to say whether she was most angry or frightened. There was something of both in her look. And then Rita began to explain how her telegram had put her in the spirit of going up there alone. She

had n't meant to cut Nan out. She only thought — Then Nan broke in: 'It is n't that; I am sure you can't think it is that. But I went myself, and you did not go; you can't have been there, for *it is a little room.*'

Oh, what a night they had! They could n't sleep. They talked and argued, and then kept still for a while, only to break out again, it was so absurd. They both maintained that they had been there, but both felt sure the other one was either crazy or obstinate beyond reason. They were wretched; it was perfectly ridiculous, two friends at odds over such a thing; but there it was — 'little room,' 'china-closet,' — 'china-closet,' 'little room.'

The next morning Nan was tacking up some tarlatan at a window to keep the midges out. Rita offered to help her, as she had done for the past ten years. Nan's 'No, thanks,' cut her to the heart.

‘Nan,’ said she, ‘come right down from that step-ladder and pack your satchel. The stage leaves in just twenty minutes. We can catch the afternoon express train, and we will go together to the farm. I am either going there or going home. You better go with me.’

Nan did n’t say a word. She gathered up the hammer and tacks, and was ready to start when the stage came round.

It meant for them thirty miles of staging and six hours of train, besides crossing the lake ; but what of that, compared with having a lie lying round loose between them ! Europe would have seemed easy to accomplish, if it would settle the question.

At the little junction in Vermont they found a farmer with a wagon full of meal-bags. They asked him if he could not take them up to the old Keys farm and bring them back in time for the return train, due in two hours.

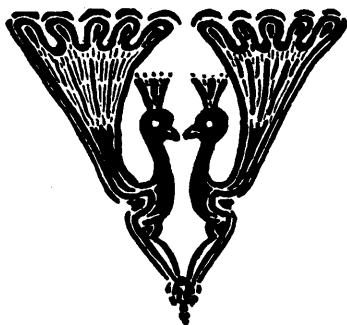


They had planned to call it a sketching trip, so they said, ‘ We have been there before, we are artists, and we might find some views worth taking ; and we want also to make a short call upon the Misses Keys.’

‘ Did ye calculate to paint the old *house* in the picture ? ’

They said it was possible they might do so. They wanted to see it, anyway.

‘ Waal, I guess you are too late. The *house* burnt down last night, and everything in it.’





## THE SEQUEL TO THE LITTLE ROOM.



OR the land's sake ! What 'll  
Maria do now !'

'That's just what Hiram said  
—"What'll Maria do now !"

It aint as if she had folks belongin' to her, and  
now the house is burnt, and Hannah is *as* she  
is, it does seem as if Maria'd find it hard git-  
tin' on alone and doin' her own thinkin'.'

'There wa n't nothin' saved, I s'pose.'

'Next door to nothin'; one washtub, I be-  
lieve, and the old gray horse that was out to  
pasture, that's about all ; I did hear, though,  
something about the men-folks' having saved  
a blue-chintz sofy—'t was the only thing they

could get out of the house before the roof fell in; they could n't seem to get a holt of anythin' else, 't was so hot, and the old house burnt like tinder; Hannah she was that scairt she seemed dazed, and this mornin' Miss Fife, she that married Ben Fife down on the Edge farm, at the foot of the hill, they took 'em in and did for 'em; and when Lucindy Fife went to call 'em to breakfast at five o'clock, there was Maria cryin' like a baby, and Hannah lyin', like an image, with her eyes starin' wide open; she must a had a shock in the night.'

'Fur the land's sake!' said the other woman again.

'Yes, and Miss Fife she tried to get Maria to eat somethin', but she would n't eat a thing; she just sat and cried; you know she was always sort of a shadder to Hannah, and now she's just like a baby.'

'I declair! I believe I'll go up to Miss

Fife's ; I hate to lose the time, I ought to stir butter to-day ; but just as likely as not lots of folks'll drop in, and I sort of want to hear it all at first hand.'

'I believe you're right, and if you'll set a while, I'll hurry up these doughnuts and be ready in no time ; it's a sort of lonesome walk up there.'

The Widder Luke turned the light side of a doughnut under, the fat sizzled, and Jane Peebles said : 'Did you hear what sofy 't was that they saved ?'

'I do n't rightly know myself which one 't was. Miss Culver she said it was the blue chintz one, but I do n't recollect as they had no blue sofy ; I do n't seem to know exactly what they did have. Hannah never was just the same to me after we had that tiff over the raspberry jam she and I made for the church sale ; but I aint goin' to bring that up agin

her, now she's laid low ; I shall go up there just the same in their time of trouble.'

'I s'pose the sofy must have been a new one, or they would n't have been so keen to save it.'

'I guess 't was ; — seems as if these doughnuts would n't never brown ; it's always so when you're in a hurry.'

'I guess I'll ask Maria about that sofy,' said Jane ; 'it's likely that she'll tell all she knows when she gets used to the situation ; I always thought Maria was a sight nicer than she seemed. I know once she came near tellin' me how they made that soft soap, that special kind you know, so white, and it keeps like jell, year after year ; 't was at a sewin'-bee, and Maria she warmed up and was just goin' to tell me, when Hannah she came in, and Maria she shet up as quick as anythin'. It was sort of curious how she knuckled down

to Hannah. Did you ever think Hannah was sort of set?' added Jane, in a low, mysterious tone.

'Hannah *set*! She was sotter'n a meetin'-house, and you know it, Jane Peebles, for all you sided with her about that raspberry jam.'

Widder Luke's eyes flashed as she lifted the kettle of hot fat. She got in a good stroke on an old score, and Jane did not dare to retort. Soon after twelve she and Jane Peebles were walking through the lane towards the Fifes' — there was a Sunday air about their dresses, but a Monday decision in their faces; the reporting in hill towns is done mostly by such volunteers, and one must 'git up airy' for the first news.

Widder Luke carried a plate of doughnuts as a neighborly tribute to the occasion.

At the Corners the women paused a moment; they could see from where they stood

the black skeleton of the burned barn silhouetted against the sky, beyond 'Huckleberry Hill.'

Just then Si Briggs came along in his spring wagon, with two strange ladies on the back seat. They took the right-hand road that led to the old Keys place, and as they passed, Mr. Briggs drew his reins with an osh-sh-sh to his horse.

'Won't you get in and ride up the hill?'

Widder Luke and Miss Peebles decorously hesitated a moment, and then climbed over the wheel and sat on either side of Mr. Briggs, who settled himself leisurely between the two women with neighborly familiarity. Then pointing backward with the butt-end of his whip to indicate and introduce his passengers, he said: 'These ladies were pretty well disappointed to find the Keys house burnt up;



they come all the way from — where did you say 't was you come from ?'

'We came down from the Adirondacks,' said Rita. 'We wanted to call on Miss Hannah and Maria, and if possible to get a sketch of the house, to paint a picture of it.'

'You do n't say so ! well I declair for it, it's too bad !' said the Widder Luke ; 'but there's sights of houses older'n that one you might paint ; there's the Fife house, where they are stoppin' now ; that's as old agin and more tumble-down, if that's what you want. I read a piece in the "Greentown Gazette" about artists ; it said they always took the worst-lookin' houses to paint, though it does seem queer to me.'

'Did you know the Keys house very well, and can you tell us how the rooms were built ?'

'Why, certain !' said Mr. Briggs. 'I've

been in it a hundred times if I have once.'

Rita and Nan bent forward to listen; the horse jogged slowly up the hill, Mr. Briggs flicking his whip from side to side to encourage the steady walk.

'There was a hall a-runnin' right through the middle, from front to back — an awful waste of space to my thinkin'; when my brother Joel built his house he sot out to have just such a hall, and I said to him, sez I: "While you're about it why do n't you build a house, or else build a hall and let it out for dancin'?" Joel was dead set agin dancin' and it kind of stuck in his mind, so he built his'n without any hall; you jest step right out of doors into the settin'-room; it's nice in summer, but a *leetle* cold in winter.'

'Yes, I should think it might be. What were the other rooms in the Keys house?'

'Wall, there was the family settin'-room,

on the right-hand side of the hall, and back of that the bed-room for the old folks; Hannah she's slep' there for some years now; on the north side there was the keepin'-room, and back of that the dinin'-room, though I'll be blessed if I know why it was n't a kitchen, that is, if a kitchen is where folks cook. Them Keyeses, way back to Jonathan Keys, was always folks for high-flyin' names, 'specially Hannah.'

'Was that all the rooms there were in the lower part?'

'Pretty much all, except a shed they used for a kitchen in old times.'

'Was n't there a little room between the front and back rooms on the north side?' asked Nan, a little hesitatingly, while Rita gave her a pinch of excitement.

'I don't no' as there was,' said Mr. Briggs. Jane Peebles spoke up:

‘I believe there was some sort of a room there. I remember once Maria said she kept that north door a leetle crack open in fly-time, and it did seem to rid the little room of flies considerble.’

‘I do n’t recollect,’ said Mr. Briggs, ‘as there was a door on the north side, but I aint sure; them pine-trees was so dark and the rose-bushes so thick; I can’t remember as I’ve been round there lately; it did n’t seem any special place to go to.’

‘Well!’ said Jane Peebles, decisively, ‘I guess there aint nobody in Titusville that knows any more about that house than I do, unless it’s the Keyeses themselves; and I *know* there was a little room.’

‘Now Jane!’ said Widder Luke (Jane wilted a little); ‘if there was a little room there, where was the door to it—on the inside

I mean? I guess I have n't been to the Baptist Sewing Circle for forty years for nothin', and the Keyeses have had it once every year, in January; and I venture to say I've set and sewed in that front room scores of times, and the only door in the front room was the door into the china-closet, except, of course, the door into the hall-way; and as to the dinin'-room, as they called it' (Si Briggs was a widower, and this was a subtle compliment to him), 'there wa n't no door at all on that side of the room, just blank wall, with them black pictures of the family done in ink, under glass. I always was struck with that one of Jonathan Keys, it did look exactly like Hannah — just so set and stubborn about the mouth. Poor Hannah, she has had her day though. I have often heard my mother say that Hannah was the prettiest girl in Titusville when she was

sixteen, though she was always that stiff. She was sixteen just before she went down to Salem.'

Here was an opening, and Nan plunged in.

'I heard something about that: did n't she meet an old sea-captain down there and come near marrying him?'

'I do n't know how near she came to marrying him, I know he never came to Titusville. Now I wonder how you ever came to hear that old story; it seems a hundred years ago since my mother told me.'

'Here we be!' called out Mr. Briggs, as he stopped his horse with the soothing down-east osh-sh-sh.

Beyond them yawned the black pit where the cellar of the Keys house had been; the ashes still guarded the mystery of the Little Room.

'My! but do n't it look mournful!' ejacu-

lated Widder Luke, and then she continued :  
‘ My mother said ’t was rumored round Titusville that Hannah had caught a beau down to Salem. Of course that made a stir and folks wanted to know all the particulars, but all they could find out by hook or by crook was that ’t was a sea-captain, and that he was after his third wife, having buried his two others, and that he had asked Hannah to marry him ; he gave her lots of heathenish stuff that he had brought from India for his first wife. They could n’t seem to find out much more than that, when suddenly Hannah came home, without any warnin’; she brought an extry trunk back with her, but she did look dreadful peakid; she was sort of pale, and her eyes had a look just like her Grandfather Keys’; she had n’t never looked like any of the Keyeses before. She did n’t let on that anything had happened, and she went everywhere just the same, and no-

body knew what she had brought home in that extry trunk, till one day, when the family had all gone to meetin', Nancy Stack — she was Hannah's mother's sister — she went and peeked in the trunk and she saw a lot of trash, sea-shells and queer sorts of calico; but just as she went to lift the tray to see what else there was, she heard the folks comin', so she shut it up quicker'n lightnin'; 't was a snap-lock and her apron got caught; she could n't take time to open it, so she just tore off a piece of the hem to get away, meanin' to go and get the scrap out some other time; but Hannah must have been in the habit of goin' to that trunk, and before night she found the checked gingham caught in the lid, and Nancy Stark she left very sudden that afternoon and did n't never set foot in the house again. It's queer how it all comes back to me. I s'pose it's



seein' the house gone and knowin' how Hannah was took last night.'

'Oh, do tell us more,' said Rita, breathlessly. 'We know Mrs. Grant, their niece, and it is all so interesting.'

'Wall, folks *is* generally interested in what they are interested in, but I do n't know that there's much more to tell. The captain he never turned up to get his third wife. Nancy Stark she died, and Hannah and Maria here always lived up there alone since the old folks died, and a pretty lonesome spot it was, to be sure.'

'Did anybody ever dare to ask Miss Hannah about the captain?'

'No, I guess not; folks up here mind their own business pretty much.'

There was a silence after this rebuke; but Nan, who always began to hold on when other people let go, said:

‘I heard once that they had some beautiful china in the china-closet, some that had belonged to their grandmother.’

Nobody volunteered any remark about this. Mr. Briggs had got out and was poking round with a stick in the ashes.

Nan persisted :

‘Did you ever see the china?’

‘I did’ said Jane Peebles, ‘sights of times.’

‘What kind was it?’

‘Oh, just blue willer pattern,—but there was sights of it.’

‘Then they did n’t have any other kind, white with a gilt edge, for instance?’

‘Wall, up *here*, blue willer, *if* it’s the real old kind, is considered good ’nough for most folks.’

‘Why, of course; I only wish I had any half so nice,’ said Rita, politely.

‘Be you a chaney collector?’ asked Widder Luke, with a defiant note.

‘Not at all, oh no ; but I do wish we could find out whether they ever did have a gilt-edged set.’

‘Sakes alive ! if you really want to know particular, I should n’t make any bones myself about asking Maria. I should like her to know I do n’t bear any grudge against ’em, though we did have a fallin’-out about that jam, Hannah and me, come ten years ago next August. I should n’t mind showin’ I had friendly interest in them — now, they’re in trouble.’

The ruins of the old house looked small and insignificant in the broad sunshine. The poplars were shrivelled by the fire, and the thicket of roses was blackened and trampled ; it was as dehumanized as if no one had lived there for a century.

Mr. Briggs came back to the wagon and said, briskly :

‘Wall ! where ’ll you go next ?’

Rita and Nan hesitated ; then Rita said :

‘Do you suppose Miss Maria would like to see us ? We met her niece just before she sailed for Europe. She asked us to call and give her aunts some messages, but if you think they are too much broken down by the fire and all—’

‘Oh, no ; it will do Maria good—it’s no use cryin’ over spilt milk, or burnt houses for that matter, and I guess you could look at Hannah too ; she can’t speak, I hear it said, but she lies right in the bed off of the livin’-room, and most everybody goes in to look at her.’

‘The theatre is nowhere,’ whispered Nan to Rita ; ‘but is n’t it ghastly !’

Miss Maria sat in state in the front room at the Fifes’ ; her black dress, borrowed from a neighbor, was large for even her plump figure,

and it had a tendency to make her look as if she had been ill for a long time and had grown thin ; her face was pale with the recent excitement, and wore the air of one who was waiting ; she sat quite erect in the rocking-chair, with her plump hands folded on her lap ; there was an appealing look in her eyes—she missed Hannah ; there was no one to give her a pattern for thought or act. Neighbors passed in and out, and there was something so passive in Maria's look that they talked of her freely as *she* as if she were not there. There was plenty of sympathy for her, but it was swept out of sight by the tide of curiosity and detail,—how the house had caught fire ; who had seen it first ; how Hannah slept so heavily she could not be roused for a long time ; how it happened that the well was so low ; how the pump-handle broke ; how the men tried to save something, but how little had been got

out ! and then, 'how bad Hannah looks,' and how old Simeon Bissell lived ten years after his stroke, and Hannah was younger than he, and the Keyeses were a long-lived family.

They passed in and out of Hannah's room, Lucinda Fife asking each new-comer to 'just step in and look at Hannah !'

Borne along by their sympathy and curiosity, Rita and Nan went in and looked on poor Hannah, stiff and uncompromising as of old, lying in her unwonted bed. She eyed them with her impenetrable gray gaze, and it was evident that the mystery of the Little Room would never be revealed by her, even if one could be bold enough to storm that granite citadel. They talked with Maria. She heard the messages from her niece in gentle silence. Rita took her passive hand and tried to tell her how they sympathized with her in her troubles, and to explain how it was they had

happened to come at this time, but it evidently did not get below the surface of Maria's consciousness. She seemed most taken with Nan, however, and to like to have her near her. Just before they left her, Rita ventured to ask if any of their gilt-edged china was saved.

'No, I guess not,' said Maria.

'Did they save the blue-chintz sofa?' impetuously asked Nan.

'No, I did n't hear as they did.'

'You *did* have a gilt-edged china set, did n't you?' said Nan.

'And a blue sofa?' persuaded Rita.

'I do n't seem to remember anything much,' said Maria, with an appealing glance towards the room where Hannah lay. It would be barbarity to press her further just then.

Rita and Nan went away — not to the Adirondacks, however, but to spend a few days with Jane Peebles, who gladly acceded to

their petition to be boarded there for a time.

‘Miss Peebles, where is that man Hiram who always lived at the Keys?’ asked Rita, as Jane helped them to apple-sauce and ginger-bread at supper.

‘Hiram? I guess he’s pretty well tuckered out, what with the fire and Hannah’s stroke; he come over here this mornin’ and wanted a piece of my huckleberry pie; he said he could n’t seem to relish any other food; he always did set a great store by my pie; it wa n’t any better than what Hannah made, so far as I could see, but he always ’lotted on havin’ the corner-piece when he brought me eggs from the farm.’

Miss Jane’s secret was not so hard to discover as was the secret of the Little Room.

‘I would like to talk with Hiram,’ said Nan.

‘Oh, Hiram he ’ll talk till doomsday, once



set him goin', and say pretty smart things too, for a man.'

'Hiram, can't you tell us something about the old house?' asked Nan the next morning, as Hiram rose from the kitchen table where he had been taking the solace of a corner-piece of Jane's huckleberry pie.

'That depends,' said Hiram, 'upon what you want to know. I s'pose I can tell as much as anybody.'

'What we really want to know,' said Rita, candidly, 'is whether there was a closet or a little room on the north side of the Keys house, between the front and the back rooms.'

Hiram rubbed his ear carefully and began in a judicial way :

'When Jonathan Keys first built that house, some time way back in 1700, he planned to have —'

‘Jane Peebles! Jane Peebles! you’re wanted right off, up to the Fifes’, and Hiram too; Hannah she’s took worse, and Maria she’s no more use than a babe unborn. I’m on my way up there now,’ concluded the Widder Luke, as she hurried up the hill.

When Rita and Nan went to say good-bye to Maria, a few days later, Maria clung to them. She had begun to like these new friends who had taken it upon themselves to try and do for her what Mrs. Grant would have done had she been there. She followed them to the door, and said, in a whisper :

‘I asked Hannah, only the day before her last shock, whether she *did* have any gilt-edged china, and she sort of nodded. Then I asked her if we had a blue sofy, and she nodded again; but come to think it over by myself, I do n’t think it really meant anything, because you know Hannah could n’t do anything else

but nod after she had that first stroke ; she could n't shake her head ; but I thought I would tell you, you have been so kind and you seemed so interested.'

Out on the stone wall at the Corners Nan and Rita sat and laughed and cried ; the tragedy and the comedy appealed to them, and not even when Nan said, as they walked down to Jane Peebles' house, 'All the same, *I saw the Little Room,*' and Rita said, '*I saw the china-closet,*' did they feel any bitterness.

'Good-bye,' said Hiram ; 'I'm real glad you came, and I want you to tell Miss Grant, when you write to her, that Hiram — she'll remember Hiram fast enough—Hiram is going to marry Jane Peebles, and that Maria sha n't never want for a home so long as Jane can make huckleberry pies.'

'Oh, we are so glad ; and you will send us a piece of wedding-cake, wo n't you ?'

‘I should n’t wonder,’ said Hiram.

‘Won’t you please tell us what you started to that time when Miss Hannah was taken worse so suddenly? we do so want to know whether there was a room or a china-closet there on the north side.’

‘I do remember now that I started in to tell you that; it wa n’t much anyhow, only when their Grandfather Keys built the house he boasted that he intended to build the *entire* house of timber that had n’t a knot in it. He spent ten years a-gettin’ the timber ready, and when it was done he found that right in the front-room closet they had put a piece of board with a great knot in it. He was dreadful mad, but he kept it there all the same — on purpose, he said, to show folks it wa n’t no use to set out to do anythin’ perfect in this world.’

‘Then there was a china-closet —’

‘Wall, yes, there certainly was a closet there.’

‘Oh, Nan!’ said Rita, as the cars moved away from where Hiram stood, ‘he did n’t say exactly what kind of a closet even then.’

‘No; but we can write to Jane and ask her to answer our questions with just yes or no. When she is Mrs. Hiram (I wonder if he ever had a last name) she will get it out of him if we can only interest her.’

‘Jane,’ said Hiram that evening, ‘if you could manage to wash on Saturday, so as to have an off-day on Monday, I don’t no but we might as well be married then as any other time. I should feel sort of easier in my mind if Maria came down to live with us before they think her room is better than her company up to the Fifes’, if Hannah should die.’

‘That’s so, Hiram. I’ll hurry round and fix things, and you better stop to-night and tell Maria that I’ll be real glad to have her come and live with us; and Hiram, I’ve been thinking that if the men folks did save that blue-chintz sofya —’

‘Wait a minute, Jane, I sort of want to tell you somethin’; ’t aint anythin’ I should want you to repeat, but it’s somethin’ that sort of troubles me some. You see, Miss Hannah she’s always been good to me, and I should n’t want to say anythin’ to set folks a-talkin’; but Miss Hannah haint been exactly well for some weeks, and only the day before the fire she came to me and she says she thought ’twas about time she put that old trunk full of duds, the one she’s always kept in her closet, out of the way, and she guessed she’d have me burn it up. I thought ’t was most a pity to destroy the trunk—it was a real good one, and had n’t

never seen no travel to speak of—and so I said I'd take the things out and burn 'em; that seemed to trouble her, and she was real short with me. She said I was no better than all the other folks, that I was pryin' round to see what she kep' in it. I sort of soothed her, and then she said she'd been pestered most to death by folks always askin' her about some old blue chintz, and about a little room; and she guessed that if she could put that trunk out of sight, mebby folks would mind their own business and let her have some peace. So when Maria was out to the garden for some stuff for dinner, Miss Hannah she got me to help her carry the trunk out of her room and put it in the hall-closet; it wa n't no kind of a place to keep it, but I thought it was better to humor her a mite, seein' she was out of sorts.

'In the middle of the night,' continued Hiram, dropping his voice and looking round

to see that nobody was coming up the walk, 'in the middle of the night I smelt smoke, and thought right off that the barn must be a-burn-in', but I could n't see no light; then I heard a sort of smothered noise, and I suspicioned right off what was the matter. I run to Maria's room and found her stumblin' round in the dark—her room bein' full of smoke she was sort of confused—and there was a turrible glare out in the hall. We found Miss Hannah out there wringin' her hands and callin' out: "Oh, the trunk will be burnt up, the trunk will be burnt up!" We could n't coax her to go away, and it did seem as she'd burn up in her tracks if I had n't just took her and carried her out. By that time the house was all blazin', and, though the folks began to come, it wa n't no use—it had to go. Hannah she was all dressed, and I do n't believe she had been to bed.'



‘You don’t think she *set* the house afire, Hiram?’

‘No, not a-meanin’ to; but what I think is that she felt lonesome without that trunk, and so she went down to the hall-closet when she thought we was asleep, and either she dropped her candle or else the things that hung in the closet caught fire, and she did n’t see it till ’t was too late, and then she was so fearful that the trunk would burn she would n’t go away.’

‘What was in the trunk?’

Hiram shuffled from one foot to the other, then hesitated a little, and said :

‘Jane, I’ve been comin’ to see you a good many years, most ever since we was young, and yet we haint never exactly spoke of gittin’ married till lately ; but they aint so slow down in the city, and I guess Hannah sort of expected to git married to that sea-captain down to Salem. Anyways, whatever she kept in that

trunk it came from Salem, and I *guess* 't was some stuff he gave her.'

'You do n't say so, all these years!'

In Paris, Mrs. Grant, with her husband, sat over the breakfast coffee in their little parlor in the Hotel St. Romain. The window opened on the balcony overhanging the Rue St. Roch. From the narrow street below floated the cry, '*Les moules, les moules?*' mingled with the clap, clap of the horses' hoofs on the asphalt below. The *concierge* sang as he swept the sidewalk before the door, and the newsboys cried, with their plaintive intonation, '*Le Figaro, Le Figaro! Le P'tit Journal!*'

'Roger,' said Mrs. Grant, 'I had such a curious dream last night. I suppose I must have been asleep, but I seemed to be awake, when suddenly I saw Aunt Hannah standing at the foot of my bed, just between the two

posts. She stood quite still, and her eyes were fixed on me with her peculiar expression of reserve, but also as if she had an intense desire to speak. I was just going to cry out, "Why, Aunt Hannah, is that you?" when suddenly I felt very passive, and as if a change was going on. The curtains of my bed moved back slowly, and I was again in that mysterious little room. I seemed to see either myself or my mother, I could not tell which it was, as a little girl, lying on the sofa; it was that same blue-chintz sofa I told you about; everything in the room was exactly as I remember seeing it when I was a child, even to the shell and the book on the shelf.

'I can't express to you how it was that I saw the little girl lying there; it was as if my mind was compelled by some other mind to see the little girl and the little room; and all the time I did not know whether it was my

mother or myself as a child that I was looking at, and I could feel all the time my Aunt Hannah's gray eyes, though I could not see her while the vision of the little room lasted.

‘It was some minutes before the scene began to fade, and it did so very gradually, just as it came: first, the roses and blue morning-glories on the paper began to waver and grow indistinct; then one object after another trembled and faded. It was exactly as if something outside of myself compelled me to see these things; and then, as the pressure of that other will was removed, the impression gradually disappeared. The last to go was the figure of the little girl, but she too faded; the bed-curtains seemed to evolve out of the walls of the room, and I was lying on my bed; but Aunt Hannah still stood between the foot-posts, with her eyes fixed on mine. Then came the impression that she could not speak,

but that she wanted to convey some thought to me; and then these words came to me — not as if a voice spoke them, but as if they were being printed on my mind or consciousness :

“Margaret, you must not worry any more about the Little Room, it has no connection with you or your mother, and it never had any: it all belongs to me. I am sorry that my secret ever troubled anyone else; I tried to keep it to myself, but sometimes it would get out. There’ll never be any Little Room to trouble anybody else any more.”

‘All the time I was hearing these words I felt Aunt Hannah’s eyes; and then she began to move backward, slowly, and she seemed to vanish down a long, long distance, till I lost sight of her. The last thing I saw was her gray eyes fastened on my face. I awoke, and found myself sitting up, with my head bent

forward, looking right between the foot-posts of the bed.'

'Your Aunt Hannah seems to be more fond of travelling than she used to be. Paris is further from Titusville than Brooklyn,' said Mr. Grant, lightly.

'Oh, do n't, Roger, do n't ! I think Aunt Hannah must be dead.'



## MY GHOST OF A CHANCE.



RULY, a most fitting place for the Starvation Act,' said the Author, as he laid a fresh supply of stationery on the table, 'and a whole week to do it in, unless the story pans out well, which of course it won't; I don't suppose there's a ghost of a chance of that.'

'Here I am!'

'Oh, there you are! yes, to be sure, so you are. And how do you do? I hope you will excuse my saying it, but aren't you an uncommonly small ghost?'

'Yes, I am slim; but I've seen smaller chances, and you know I am all the one you have got.'

‘Why, yes, as William has it, “A poor thing, but mine own.” Allow me to help you up on the table; there, how is that? Do you think you could sit on that cuff-box and rest your feet on the pen-wiper? I am afraid the table is rather bare and cold, and you don’t look very well. Is that comfortable?’

‘Oh, very, thank you;—and now you may begin.’

‘Yes, in a minute. I want to ask you first if you really are my only chance?’

‘Yes, absolutely your only one,’ said the small figure sitting on the box, with his hands resting on his knees. He was a clever-looking little ghost, eight or nine inches high, clean shaven, with his hair brushed back to hide an evidently increasing tendency to baldness—he was not in his first youth. He was plainly but neatly dressed, though his clothes looked a little shiny at the seams. His face was care-



worn and anxious in its expression, but attractive, and his manners were unobjectionable.

‘So you are my only chance, are you? May I ask where you came from?’

‘Oh, I am sent here from the “Bureau of Chances”; we have to go just wherever we are sent, you know; we have n’t any choice in the matter.’

‘Yes, of course, that stands to reason; I can readily understand no ghost of the slightest financial instinct would have chosen me to come to; I am all the more obliged for any chance at all, on any terms. It is very encouraging to have you sit there; I like it. I think I will try and do some work.’

‘Yes, I would,’ said the little Ghost, with alacrity.

The Author leaned back, and, clasping his hands behind his head, he fixed his eyes on the little Ghost, and began :

‘It is to be a story, you know—a romance. *She* is to be the central figure—a splendid red-haired creature, with great instincts, primeval, untrained, capacious; she is to *devour* the world; she can’t wait for experience; she hungers and thirsts for sensations; she is to *boom* through the story—no lagging, no questioning; see?’

‘Yes,’ nodded the little Ghost.

‘And then,’ continued the Author, ‘she is to meet the hero; he is to be Tradition, Culture, Development, Conservatism; and there will be, so to speak, no one else in the world except these two forces, and the battle royal will be between these two.’

‘Yes,’ nodded the little Ghost.

‘I think I will write that out before I go any further with the plot.’

‘I would,’ said the little Ghost.

‘Well, here goes,’ said the Author, drawing himself up to the table.

He wrote for some hours; his pen moved ceaselessly over the pages, and from time to time he laid a sheet at the feet of the little Ghost. The clock struck twelve, the clock struck one; the Author’s hair fell lankly over his pale face; on and on went his pen. At two, he looked up and saw the little Ghost sitting, all alert, on the cuff-box, with his blue eyes wide open; he gave a bright little smile in answer to the Author’s glance.

‘Why bless me! I had clean forgotten you! are n’t you tired?’ said the Author.

‘Not in the least; I feel quite fresh.’

‘Upon my word, you look it; I believe you are going to be a tough little chap, and will see me through. And now where will you sleep?’

‘Why, here, anywhere — I am not particular.’

‘Aren’t you hungry? you have n’t had anything to eat since you came. By the way, what do you eat?’

‘Oh, I’m all right, do n’t bother about me; I live very well on hope, and we are supposed to supply that ourselves.’

‘That’s extremely lucky for you; I have n’t had a scrap of hope for a month, and I’m afraid you’d starve if you depended on me.’

‘Thank you, that’s all right—good night.’

The Author slept heavily, all dressed as he was when he threw himself down on the bed. The little Ghost took off his necktie and his little boots, and, folding his coat carefully for a pillow, he too slept, after adjusting the pen-wiper for a coverlid. At six o’clock the little Ghost got up and rambled about the table for a while. He regulated the loose sheets of manuscript and counted the pages. He looked quite well in the morning light, and his step

had the assurance and measured quality that comes only to the prosperous. He carried his left hand carelessly in his pocket, with his elbow slightly raised, after the manner of the man of the world. He began to be restless towards seven o'clock, and at half-past seven he took his breakfast, very sparingly, off of his stock of hope, evidently considering the possibility of a longer stay than he had anticipated when he first got up. At eight o'clock, his face was full of anxiety, and he had dropped his nonchalant air and had taken his hand out of his pocket. At nine, his head was bent, and he paced to and fro from the inkstand to the dictionary, with his hands clasped behind him. He looked old and feeble. At ten, he had a slight fainting turn and had to sit down on the cuff-box. His forehead was damp and he shivered ; he was evidently deeply disturbed, and he was a pitiful little object to look at.

Then the Author awoke, and, sitting up, called out: 'Why, great heavens! what is the matter, are you ill?'

'Thank you, I do feel a little off this morning.'

'Morning, is it? Why, I feel as if I had just dropped off; you have n't been drinking my ink, have you? You are all blue around the gills?'

The little Ghost was offended, but he did not answer except by a reproachful look.

'Oh, do n't play the lacrimoso role; I'll be up in no time, and you must remember I wrote a pile last night; just hear me read some of it. Why, did I do all this? It reads better than I thought.'

'Yes, it reads very well — *very well indeed*. I think I will go out and take a stroll, and lunch at the club, and not write any more till to-night; I do my best work at night.'

As the Author said this, he looked right at the Ghost; there was a feeling in the room that somebody was justifying himself, but the little Ghost said nothing. Then the Author made himself a cup of coffee and freshened himself up, all the time not looking at the little Ghost. Then he took his cane, and, going out, he nodded carelessly, and said :

‘Good-bye, old boy; I will be back in good time, do n’t worry.’

All the way down the street the Author kept hearing the words : ‘I am all the chance you ’ve got—I am all the chance you ’ve got,—I am all the chance you ’ve got.’

‘Hang it all,’ said he, ‘I might as well go back and grind; it will please the little chap, and it don’t matter to anyone else. I don’t suppose he is much of a critic—he’ll never know how bad the stuff is that I wrote last night.’

So back he went. When the door opened

he was shocked to see his little Ghost of a chance apparently on the verge of dissolution. He lay across the dictionary, where he had evidently thrown himself in despair; his arm hung down over the edge of the book, and he was limp and almost like a lifeless thing. He smiled a wan but forgiving smile on the Author and then wearily composed himself, as if for death. The Author bent his head over the little Ghost to see if he was still breathing. The Ghost was alive, and he heard him whisper :

‘*Write, write, write !*’

Seizing his pen, the Author dashed ahead, hardly knowing what words came ; he knew that write he must to save his dear little Ghost of a chance — his only little chance. By the time he had written one chapter the Ghost was up and strutting around the table like a little king, but the poor Author was in the depths of despair; he knew that every word he



was writing was trash ; that nobody, even the most philanthropic of editors, would ever take his story, and that starve he must. Still, the little Ghost improved ; he grew stout, he grew rosy, he even seemed to be getting a fresh accession of yellow hair to cover his bald spot. At last the Author spoke :

‘Little *fiend*,’ said he, ‘you fatten on my despair ; you are nourished on my misery ; the vagaries of my tired brain are wine and bread to your morbid taste. Why should I drain my brain to feed you, you *pigmy* of chance ! you respectable little *vampire* ! you masquerader in the form of “my chance,” “my only chance !” Away with you, vanish, wither, be gone ! I will burn my words, even though you perish with the flame. I will not be saved by such a chance, if the price of my life be this unworthy work !’

And the Author thrust his manuscript into

the fire. . He turned, thinking to see the Ghost wither and die before him ; but instead of that there was the queer little contradictory fellow dancing on the table. He danced, he capered, he looked fairly fat ; in truth he began to puff with his exertions, and then he shouted out :

‘ O you authors ! O you strange creatures ! You think you can kill me by burning your manuscript ; why, you are feeding me, you are pampering me, and you yourself are improving in spite of yourself. Your chance is great, your chance is sure, you will *write* now ; you will be a success ! ’

And sure enough the next day the story was done. The Author went out with it, knowing it to be good ; it was a go. The Author’s hand rested lightly in his trousers’ pocket, and he walked with the assurance of a prosperous man. As he came back, he said to himself :

‘ Now, I am going to say to that little

Ghost chap: "Here, half of this gold is yours, half is mine; remain with me, and we will be partners, share and share alike."'

But when he went into the room, the fat little Ghost had gone back to the 'Bureau of Chances,' to be sent out again along with all the other little Ghost Chances. I recognized him the other day sleeping in the pigeonhole of the desk of a friend of mine.





## IN GRANADA.



EPITA,' said I, 'do tell me a story.'

'Señora Maria Madalena, would you like to hear about Seraphita? She was born in Granada. That was one hundred years ago.

'She was born in a high place; her mother was of a great family, and her father was great too, but he was very wild, and Seraphita was the prettiest thing that ever was born in Granada; everybody said so, and her mother used to think that the sun rose on the east side of her little bed, and set on the west.

'The days ran merrily, and the father felt so happy that he went all the time to the bull-

fights, and threw even money, yes, not only cigars but real money, to the torreadors. And all was beautiful till Seraphita was four months old; then she died. She had been very ill, so ill that her father did not go to the bull-fights for one whole week, and he paid for a great ceremony in the church, and everybody said, "Now Seraphita will get well," for he had paid more than one hundred pieces of gold for prayers. But Seraphita died, and her mother had so much heart-grief that she lost her wits. For one whole day she sat, cold and still, without a tear, and then she cried aloud and began to tear out handfuls of her smooth black hair, and it was a great pity, for her hair was black and long, and glistened like satin — she was called the Satin-haired. But she forgot how beautiful she was, and she would not eat anything, or even sleep.

‘Two nights after Seraphita died, and was

lying as white and beautiful as an angel, with wax candles at her head and feet and with a white flower in her hand, her mother went quietly into the room, and sent the old nurse, who was watching over Seraphita, away. Then she closed the door and threw herself on her knees, and prayed so hard that her prayers could not get up to Heaven, for they were more like curses than prayers,—and, Señora Maria Madalena, it is not good to pray like that; one must not send up prayers that are not fit to go to Heaven, for then Saint Peter shuts the gates of Heaven, and the prayers go wandering up and down in the great spaces of air, where there is no one to answer them.

‘The Devil, who is everywhere but in Heaven, came to her and asked, with a very sweet voice—for he can use any voice he likes—“What is it that Seraphita’s mother is praying for?”

“I want my child back; I want her in my arms that are so empty, and my heart that aches so.”

‘And then the Devil told her — I do not know exactly how he told her, but he made her know that he could give Seraphita back to her, just as she had been, with her rosy cheeks, and her black eyes, and her pretty black hair which was going to be like her mother’s; he could do this, only he could not give her soul back — she must be always without a soul.

‘And Seraphita’s mother talked with the Devil, for her wits were gone and she did not know right from wrong; and she promised him anything if he would only give her baby back to her again, even without any soul. And the Devil very politely said he did not want anything to be given to him; he was glad to give the child back, so long as she did not ask for the soul.



‘ And then, while the mother looked at Seraphita, the pink came into the baby’s cheeks and she smiled ; and then, because her joy was so great, the mother cried out loud, and her voice could be heard way down in the street. Then everybody came running in to see what was the matter ; and the father was so happy he carried Seraphita again to the church and they had another ceremony, and this time he paid even more gold, and there was a great *festa* in Granada.

‘ You see, nobody but the mother knew that only Seraphita’s body was there, that she had n’t any soul and never could have one ; only the mother knew, and she could not be happy.

‘ She grew very thin, and her smooth satin hair turned white on top, just where the Devil had laid his hand ; so she wore a veil, even in the house, and she hid her eyes as if she was

afraid, and she prayed day and night. Nobody knew what she prayed, because she did not dare to tell even her husband.

‘Bye and bye she grew so afraid and sad, because Seraphita somehow did n’t seem to her any more like her own child ; she was like a beautiful wax doll ; but she was not wax, and she looked just like herself to everybody else ; only to her mother she seemed strange, and she could not get the warm love back into her heart, even though she pressed Seraphita to her bosom night and day.

‘The little baby grew in spite of that, and she grew prettier and prettier all the time. Everybody loved her except her mother, and that was just what the Devil wanted.

‘The day Seraphita was one year old her mother could not bear it any longer, and she went to her priest and confessed to him all about it ; and then very soon she died, because

she had kept her secret so long it had just burned her heart out.

‘ After that—no one knew how it happened—but pretty soon everybody began to whisper and look queerly at Seraphita when the nurse carried her into the street; and her father seemed troubled, and he talked with the priest and wanted to pay some more money to the Church; but they would n’t have any more ceremonies for Seraphita, and the priests tried to make the people stop talking; what they said was “*nonsense*.” But it was not nonsense, and so they went on talking among themselves; and they would take their own children out of the way when Seraphita was old enough to play about.

‘ So she grew up all alone except for her father and her nurse and the priest who went to live in the house—which showed that the Church thought there was something in it, else

why should a priest go and live in the house ?

‘One day, when Seraphita was out walking, she came across some little boys who were stoning a black kitten to kill it — for everybody knows that black cats belong to the Devil. And Seraphita ran right in among the flying stones, and not one of them hit her, for the Devil held his hand between her and the stones, and she caught up the Devil’s kitten and hugged it tight, while the stones fell at her feet, and the boys cried out, “Devil’s brat ! Devil’s cat !” ’

‘Pepita,’ said I, ‘she seems to me to have been a very nice, soft-hearted little girl.’

‘Oh, no ! Señora Maria Madalena, you see black cats belong to the Devil, and if she had had any soul she could n’t have taken one in her arms.

‘She carried it home, and she used to feed

it, and she had to hide it away, because, of course, nobody wanted to have a Devil's cat around, and the cat would run and jump into Seraphita's arms whenever she came near; but it would fly like mad, and its hair would all stand on end, when anyone else came around, which shows—does it not?—that something was wrong. And another thing showed that all was not right with Seraphita: the priest began to teach her, and she learned faster than any child should. There was an evil spirit that whispered the words into her ear, so that she did not have to study.

‘She had power over horses, too, and if she just put her lips to a horse's ear he would turn and rub his nose on her face. You see, horses have no souls, and they knew that Seraphita had n't any.

‘And, besides that, she always looked very

old and grave when anybody was near ; but when she was alone in the fields or in the woods she would laugh out loud, and they could hear her talk with the birds, for she knew bird-language ; and she would lean over the water and talk to herself, or to the fishes. Oh, it was true, she had no soul ! ’

‘ Well, what became of her ? ’ I asked, as Pepita paused, to emphasize her statement.

‘ She grew up so beautiful that strangers would stop in the street and look at her as she passed ; but, of course, everybody soon found out all about her, and then they would not look at her—at least they would not look her in the eye, unless they had a charm on.’

‘ Do you mean that she had the “evil eye” ? ’

‘ Oh, yes ! why, she could make anyone have bad luck just by looking at them, and she could make flowers grow and blossom, and be more

colors than any other flowers. She knew she had the "evil eye," for she never went anywhere, or visited the sick or the poor, though she had plenty of money. She used to send the priest with food or clothes. You see, *she* knew.'

'And what became of poor little Seraphita?'

'Why, you see, when she was about twenty years old she was very ill again, and she lay in a trance for three days. The doctors would n't go near her, and her own old nurse had died, and they could n't get anyone to take care of her, till finally the priest sent to the convent for one of the Sisters. She was a very good woman, and she went to the house, and, creeping on her hands and knees, so that the Devil could not get hold of her, she went right into the room and prayed all night. Her prayers went straight up to Heaven; and she prayed

that Seraphita might die, and that before she died her soul should be given back to her.

‘And, Señora Maria Madalena, just as the sky began to grow pink in the east, and the white mist blew across the vega, and the birds began to call, what do you think happened?’

‘A beautiful white dove flew into the window and alighted on Seraphita’s breast, and, laying its bill close to her mouth, it breathed a soul into her, and then the dove just vanished, and Seraphita was dead.

‘Then, because God had been good to him, and had given Seraphita a soul again, her father built an orphan asylum and called it after her, “The Seraphita”; and you can see it over there, with the sun shining on it—it looks like gold.’

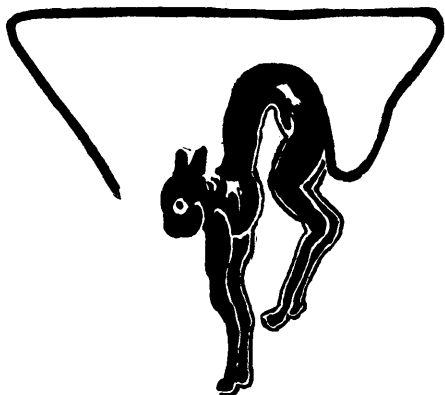
‘It is a pretty story, Pepita; but do *you* believe she had no soul?’



‘The Señora knows I am English on my father’s side, but my mother was Spanish.’

‘So you are half Spanish, and *half* believe it; is that so, Pepita?’

‘Yes, Señora.’





## THE VOICE.



HE saw her first on a Wednesday in May. She was sitting on the back door-step, doing nothing but just watching him plow. It looked as if that was what she was doing, so he tried to seem a little more unconscious than he had, when he really was unconscious, and every time he turned at the end of the furrow he glanced up at her from under his soft felt hat, which he wore pulled low over his eyes. She sat still, and he plowed ten furrows; the field was small; the apple-trees were in blossom, but the air was cool. He thought she would go in soon, but she sat with her hands idly in her lap. He had never seen

a girl sit still for so long before ; what was she waiting for ? It seemed as if she wanted to speak to him, but that could not be. Who was she, anyhow ? He did n't know anybody lived in the house ; they must have moved in very lately, maybe yesterday, and maybe she really did want to ask him something ; perhaps they had n't brought any potatoes with them — could she want to ask him if he had any to sell ? Perhaps she was lonesome ; but a boy could n't go and talk to a girl just because she looked lonesome. How slim she was, and she did n't look a bit like the Legget girls, who lived in the white house at the Crossing. How pretty the house looked with someone in it ; he liked a brown house best anyway ; it was a pity his mother had taken a notion to paint their own house white — it never had been the same to him since then.

Now the girl, whoever she was, was going

in. No, she was just standing up to see him better ; how queer ! She was more slender than he first had thought, and foreign-looking, too, with black hair and eyes, and her hair was braided in two long braids — it made her look young ; how old was she, anyway ? He had plowed now till he was almost opposite to her door, and only three apple-trees distant. If she sat there till he plowed to the corner of her garden he would say ‘ Good-afternoon.’

He plowed till he was within two furrows of the corner. He had not looked up at the end of the last furrow, and now he was turning again towards her. She was gone.

Thursday, he carried out the potatoes to plant. It was warmer than yesterday, and the south wind was blowing off the apple-blossoms. They fell from her garden into the furrows on his land, and he dropped the potatoes into pink and white rifts.

He looked almost every minute to see her come out of the door.

The house was very still, and they had not taken the boards down that had been nailed over the pantry windows to keep the storms from breaking the glass, and there were no curtains up. They could n't have been there long. Probably there was nobody but her and her mother, and they would have to wait for some neighbor to come in and help them take those boards down, and start the pump working. He would wash up after supper, and go over there. He could help them a lot before dark.

He would ask his mother to send over something to eat while they were getting settled. The neighbors always did that when folks moved into the neighborhood.

She was standing at the door now. It was certain she was older than he first thought —

she must be seventeen, or even older; he would be nineteen in October.

She certainly wanted to speak to him; she did n't exactly beckon to him, but she sort of waited as if she expected him to come. He laid the bag of potatoes down and vaulted over the fence. He stumbled awkwardly as he landed, and that was so ridiculous. She had a pretty, bright smile when he looked up after brushing off the soft dirt from his knees; it was n't a mocking smile either, only such a happy smile, as if she knew he would come. He stepped over the narrow bed of rhubarb, between the currant bushes, and then she was gone. Probably she had gone to call her mother. He waited a whole minute or more on the steps. Yes, she could have seen him quite well from there, better than he had seen her, because the sun had been in his eyes, and she was sitting in the shade.

She did not come out, and so he pushed the door open a little wider — she had left it almost half open. The hallway was dark at first, and it was not furnished. There was not even a mat at the door.

Why did n't she come back? It was so still he could almost hear his heart beat, and besides he was a little embarrassed. He could n't go away, and he did n't know exactly what to do.

He knocked on the open door. The sound went all over the house, and the dust where it had been disturbed was making the sun-beam in the kitchen beyond look like a regular golden beam. No one answered, but he heard a footstep in the sitting-room; he walked in; there was no one there; he grew curious, and his embarrassment wore off, for the girl was evidently more shy than he.



He went through the living-room. There was no furniture there either, but there were lots of flying dust particles, so that somebody had evidently just been through. He opened the door into the kitchen; nobody was there, but the stairs creaked ever so slightly. She was going up-stairs. He went swiftly into the hall, but could see no one. He walked clumsily up-stairs; how much more noise he made than she had. They would probably have a rag carpet on them later. Who were they anyway, and why did she run away from him?

The rooms up-stairs were connected by doors. He followed the footsteps from one room to another. At the end of the back one, which had a sloping roof on one side, there were very narrow stairs which led to the attic. The door at the foot of the stairs closed right before him. He was angry, and spoke up:

‘Does anyone here want to speak to me?’

There was no answer, and again he seemed to hear his own heart-beats.

He stood quite still, wondering whether to go away or to follow the footsteps, which he heard faintly overhead.

He followed the footsteps; the stairs were steep, and opened into the middle of the long garret, and nobody was in sight. But the agitated dust danced in the sunbeam which streamed way across the room. It was very clean up there — no lumber of any sort, no old furniture, no old trunks, no old papers or such litter — and it was as quiet as death. His heart beat now with excitement, not embarrassment. His quick eye saw that there was no other room, and that there was no place to hide except behind the chimney that ran through the front part and up through the roof. He walked

over to it. It seemed a long walk, it was so quiet and queer, and he felt as if he were being watched.

There was no one behind the chimney. He went all around it.

Now he felt quite himself again. He had been a fool, or else asleep, and he put his foot on the first stair, saying aloud 'Good-bye,' which meant 'good-bye to my foolishness.'

A timid voice said, 'Oh, do n't go!'

He stood with his lips parted, his damp hair clinging to his forehead where his cap had pressed it, his head bent forward to listen, every nerve tingling.

'Where are you?' he asked.

'Close beside you, here at your right hand.'

'I do n't see you.'

'No, you can't see me now.'

'Why can't I see you?'

‘Oh, I do n’t know,’ the voice sighed.

‘Was that you I saw yesterday on the steps?’

‘Yes, I was watching you plow, and I wanted to speak to you.’

‘I knew it, and that is why I came in. Can’t I see you?’

Again the sigh blew across his face.

‘What do you mean by my not being able to see you?’

‘*Can* you see me?’

‘No, not now ; but I saw you at the door, before you came up here.’

‘But you could not hear me then.’

‘I hear you now.’

‘Yes, but you do not see me.’

‘Can’t you be seen and heard too at the same time?’

Again a soft piteous sigh.

‘I want to know who you are, and why you can’t be seen and heard too.’

‘I do n’t know.’

‘I must go now, if you won’t let me see you.’

‘Oh, do n’t go!’

He stood irresolute; he was not one bit frightened, only he was aching to see her of the voice, and to know who she was. Then he asked:

‘Can’t I *ever* see you again?’

‘Oh, yes!’ said the voice, and it seemed to vibrate all around him, a dancing voice full of joy and hope.

He smiled with it, and then there was laughter all around him, moving here and there gaily.

‘I want to see you now.’

‘Then I can’t talk with you any more.’

‘Never mind, let me see you.’

A sigh, a soft moaning sound, a rustle as of garments, and she stood before him.

He had not been embarrassed by the voice, but now his heart began to beat, and he said, quite as he had meant to when he first went into the house :

‘Is there anything I can do to help you settle?’

That was an absurd thing to say to this slim, wistful girl, who stood looking at him. It was the natural boy asserting itself against the unknown, the unexpected.

Then he turned his head and looked into her eyes. They were the sweetest eyes he had ever seen. He had never before looked deep into any human eyes.

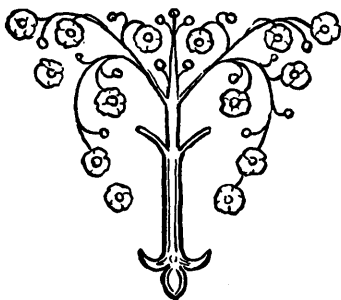
Then, home and circumstances, field and world, all became to him a dream, and only this maiden without a voice, this voice float-

ing into empty air, became to him his world.

Outside, the apple-blossoms floated down from her trees to his land, the potatoes lay unplanted. Vainly that night the cows waited for his hand to milk them. The real had become the shadow; he was in a new world. Illusive voice! vanishing shape to deal with!

Within, a wild delicious hope that he, he might at last unite voice and shape.

So from the plough-boy is the poet born.







## THE SCARF.



It is interesting to see a man handle delicate fabrics. The mind involuntarily estimates the strength of the man in its superabundance, comparing it to the task. The contrast makes it picturesque.

Mark watched his friend Rob as he sat drawing the thin, Eastern-looking scarf through his hands; his hands were good to look at — firm and shapely. The scarf was sheer, almost of the texture of a cobweb; it was white, with an ivory tint where the folds gave it substance. It clung now and then to his hand, or yielded reluctantly as he drew it from his sleeve where it had floated.

There was silence in the room, emphasized by the restless throbbing of the city below. The sails out on the bay dipped and courtesied in the fresh evening wind, and the ripples flushed red under the slanting sun.

‘Rob,’ said the older man, ‘all the same, I do n’t like it ; it is n’t like you.’

‘I am sorry you do n’t like it, and it *is* like me,’ said the other, slowly. ‘I have always counted acts as the man. How would you construe it if I said: “Your acts I like, but I do n’t like you”? That is n’t reasonable.’

‘You are splitting hairs, and I can’t match you at that. What I mean in plain English is, that I do n’t see why your finding a scarf should necessitate or excuse you for breaking an engagement.’

‘I did n’t find the scarf ; it found me. And I did n’t break the engagement ; an engagement, to my thinking, is not breakable ; break-

ing suggests force ; an engagement dissolves. What is it but the outward wording of an inward state of mind existing between two mutually attracted people ? the state of mind being changed — lo ! — pff ! ’

‘ You exasperate me beyond words, Rob, with your this and your that, all of it as thin as your scarf ; and, what is worse, you do not seem to feel the gravity of it all, not in the least. You say in August, “ Mark, congratulate me, I am the happiest man alive ; I am going to be married.” In October you say, “ Mark, I am a subject for congratulation, I am a disengaged man.”

‘ As a friend of both yours and Mabel’s, I ask why, and you answer by holding up that miserable, dangling scarf, and say : “ This is why ; I found this, and I am going across the water to find the owner.” ’

‘Excuse me, but I said “This scarf found me”—therein lies a great difference.’

‘It is all so trivial I would n’t forgive any man living but you.’

‘Thank you.’

The scarf, floated by the breeze, caught on Rob’s shoulder; he drew it slowly down; it lengthened out with the gentle strain and fell in a misty heap to his knee.

‘Do put that cussed thing away,’ said Mark, irritably, ‘and tell me, if you are ever going to, where it came from.’

‘I can tell you that better when I have found out myself.’

‘Who is she?’

‘She is a slender woman, neither dark nor light; her hair is fluffy—not crimped; her eyes are red-brown in some lights, and she wears soft raiment.’

‘When did you meet her?’

‘I have n’t met her yet.’

‘And what about Mabel?’

‘Oh, she is all right,’ said Rob, optimistically. ‘What I liked about her at first is exactly what I like now — she is so sensible; you can’t tell how sensible she is, Mark. She says I am preoccupied, and she does n’t think I am earnest. She is right; I am not what she calls earnest.’

‘You told her about the scarf, of course?’

‘No, that would n’t interest her. Now, tenement houses are in her line. If I had invested in a tenement house she would have found me no end interesting; but this kind of a thing is n’t appreciated by her; she is n’t in it.’

‘I call it puerile and ridiculous,’ said Mark, hotly.

‘I do n’t think you are quite right, then. What kind of a fabric should you take it to be?’

Mark took it in his hand. Whatever he did, he did sincerely and with care. He held the scarf up to the light ; he bent his head over it and scrutinized it through his glasses ; then he sniffed at it to see if it had any perfume, and stretched the meshes to see if it were hand-woven. At last he said :

‘I do n’t think I know anything about it. It is made of wool, not silk ; it is all delicate as a cobweb, but it does not call to my mind any stuff I ever saw. I should say it might have come from the East, possibly from India or even from Greece — Milesian wool.’

‘Yes, Milesian wool — it must be that,’ said Rob, enthusiastically.

‘You are not in earnest when you tell me you do not know anything more about it than I do?’

‘I am in earnest, but I can’t say exactly that ; and yet I know nothing about the scarf

except how it came to me ; you would call me practical, sane — not a dreamer ? ’

‘ Not a dreamer, if by that you mean that you are sufficiently on the earth to know how to live ; but you are a mixture. I saw an old tinker yesterday — a tinker and umbrella-mender combined — a little gray tramp of a fellow, about sixty years old, stubby beard, dirty, self-possessed, master of himself and of the world so far as he was concerned in it, with an optimistic vein in spite of some hard luck, and with the most beautiful clear eyes I ever saw. He was a wanderer—a traveller, I might say. He had seen the greater part of America, and understood it, too, and he had seen it all on foot or by means of stolen car-rides. He fairly made me long to travel, with his tales of Colorado ; he was immensely interesting. I talked with him for over an hour while he mended my umbrella and put a new ferule on

my cane ; and all the time, while I was listening to him, I was thinking : “ Now, here is my friend Rob, just as he would have been without the mixture ”—the mixture being, of course, your scholarly tastes and your money, half-tinker and half-student. I have no doubt but the tinker had tastes, too, but he had n’t the money.’

‘ I like the picture of your tinker.’

‘ Yes, you do, that is the trouble ; and it’s the tinker part of you that breaks an engagement for a scarf.’

‘ What would you have me do—tell Mabel that I am earnest and interesting, and beg her to marry a tinker ?’

‘ No, I fancy the thing is better as it is ; but I hope the scholar will have his chance some day. You are thirty ?’

‘ Thirty and one.’

‘ Some study, much travel ; a little business



—not enough for an anchor; wit in one pocket, wisdom late in coming—name, Robert Dudley.’

‘And till now a friend of Mark’s.’

‘Always that.’

Rob folded the scarf slowly. It clung to his fingers; it caught wherever chance blew it; it was fluttered against his face while he carefully squared the corners together and patiently rolled its misty length into pocket size.

‘Mabel,’ he said, meditatively and impartially, ‘is much too good for me; she is moral, without being morbid; she is dignified, without being stiff; she is generous, but not weak. She reads people as she reads books. At first she thought I, as a book, was interesting, that I had an ethical flavor; but she found I was only a sort of art for art’s sake literature, and she laid me down. I did not interest her more. She has no sense of humor, and it never oc-

curred to her that her one chance of cultivating it was to marry me. Now *she* will be different.'

'Yes, she will, and some day I shall discover, under a tinker's garb, my old friend Bob, mending umbrellas for a living, the mixture having lost its savor and the money gone.'

'I have never heard you stick so to a simile — it seems to please you. I like your tinker idea, but I deny the outcome.'

'Well, good-bye. I am sorry for it all.'

'No need for that; Mabel is rid of her tinker — *so* far, so good; the rest "lies on the knees of the Gods."'

'As you will. Good-bye; I will see you off on Saturday.'

A moment later, Rob spoke sharply over the balustrade:

'One minute' more; come back, I want a last word. Sit there, will you, just where I

sat ; no, do n't move the chair, let it face the table. Now lean your hands on your chin, so ; now look up—what do you see ?'

'What do I see? I see myself—a portion of myself—in the glass.'

'Hitch the chair this way, so that you can see your full face—now?'

'Well, what of it?'

'Tell me exactly what you see, in every detail.'

Rob had darkened the room and lit the gas ; it was burning just in front and over Mark's head, lighting up his face and shoulders, but leaving the room dark behind him.

'What do I see? I see my face and head, my collar and tie, and my shoulders, and my arms down to the elbows, and of course the table where they rest.'

'What do you see behind you?'

'I see—I seem to see the wall or door, I

can't tell exactly which, it is dark behind there.'

'Can you see the pictures on the wall?'

'Yes, by canting my head slightly, I see a frame. I can't tell what the picture is, though; I am near-sighted at best.'

'Yes, I know. I do n't want that picture to come into your range of vision; hold your head straight.'

'Then I see nothing but myself,' said Mark, turning round to see what really was behind him, and why he was put through these tactics. There was nothing behind him. Rob stood at the side of the table; but now he sat down, and said:

'I want your attention and your friendliest belief in what I am going to tell you. I am quite in earnest, and I assume that you will credit every word I say. The interpretation you give it will be your own — I shall not

combat it; but up to the point when you can consider it as a whole, I want you to hold your judgment in suspense.'

The two men sat facing each other, Rob's face being animated by his resolve to put his thought into words, to weigh his problem in the scales of an alien mind, to try and see himself and his idea through other eyes than his own. Mark's face was quiet, attentive, and delicate in its expression of suspended judgment. He was a man who held friendship as a sacred obligation, and was ready to meet a demand with single-minded generosity.

'A month ago,' said Rob, slowly weighing each word, 'I came home from Mabel's. We had come to an understanding as to the time for our wedding.'

Mark moved restlessly, and shaded his eyes with his hand.

'I sat down where you have just been sit-

ting, and leaned my chin on my hands as I made you do. I felt excited and disturbed. The full significance of the next step dawned on me in all its depth and meaning. I was carried along by my agitated thoughts, and found myself looking at myself in the glass. I was struck, as anyone is at such a moment, by the strangeness of my own face caught with some controlling emotion on it. I seemed outside and apart from my usual self. As the consciousness of observing myself came to me, I began to look more as I usually do when I casually glance in the glass, to tie my scarf, for instance. Then I fell to speculating on that other fellow that I had seen when he was un-awares. I suppose it is a common experience, this meeting with oneself. I must have been quite deeply absorbed, when, gradually, I saw over my left shoulder a shadow — no, not a shadow, but a semblance of a face. There

was a sort of golden halo or fringe of golden hair over a pair of smiling red-brown eyes. I caught myself smiling involuntarily in response. The eyes were above the level of my own, as if a woman were standing there looking over my shoulder and meeting my eyes in the glass. Mabel's eyes are dark. *Her* eyes were a red-brown. I could not see her face — not that it was hidden, but it was as if the eyes were so absorbing that they blotted out all else. This lasted for some minutes, then I turned to see what was behind me that would produce such an illusion. There was nothing there that could be twisted or warped into any semblance of a face. I took the same position again, my chin on my hands, my elbows on the table. It was some time before I could get the vision — not till my thoughts began to wander; then I saw those strange, beautiful eyes again, and the fluffy golden hair, and not

till I moved my head did they disappear. The eyes smiled at me ; the vision seemed warm and human—not in the faintest degree ghostly, except that somehow I could n't see much but the eyes. As I say, I was driven by curiosity to turn round, and she vanished. I failed to call her to me again that night, and the next, and for some days ; then she came again. I had sat here for hours waiting for her. I was determined to see what would come of it. I used to spend whole evenings here alone, waiting. When, at last, she did come, she came smiling, warm, human ; and this time I saw her mouth—a large, mobile mouth, less smiling than the eyes, but most lovely. She came again and again. Once I put my hand behind me suddenly—that was a mistake. She vanished, and it was many evenings after that before she came again. The next time, strangely enough, I could see her more distinctly than



ever. Her eyes were not smiling ; maybe that was why I could see the rest of her face better. Then I discerned how beautiful she was. Her chin was a perfect oval, and it terminated in a lovely point below her gracious mouth ; it was distractingly beautiful. My left hand was hanging by my side, and I could distinctly feel her draperies brushing tremulously against it. You will have the same sensation if you let this scarf brush across your hand — so. This silent drama went on for some weeks. I neglected everything for her. One day Mabel sent for me, and told me she had noticed my abstraction and had drawn her own conclusions, and that, if I were willing, she would like to discontinue the engagement. Willing ! I felt like a knave ; I was humiliated ; I suffered, but I could say nothing. It was a different thing to sit and smile into those red-brown eyes of my vision, and to meet Mabel's

dark, truthful ones, and not to be able to explain anything to her; to feel that for her there was no explanation; to know that I was submerged in a stream of life of which she had no part. Then Mabel's greatness saved me. She saw my suffering, and she did not press me for any explanation, but told me frankly that she must consider our relations as having reverted to their old standing—we must be only as friends; that she herself saw that her interests were more and more tending toward work among the poor, and her imagination absorbed in plans for the general welfare, rather than in the idea of making one man's home supremely happy, as it undoubtedly should be made. That was about it. It was noble of her, wasn't it? I had no choice but to accept her decision. That I wished for that very decision was bitterness to me. I see now that even

then I wanted the selfish comfort of being a martyr. Mabel is the noblest woman alive ; she has become my saint, instead of my wife.'

'But you have your phantom eyes left,' said Mark, dryly.

'Yes, she came again that night. In my exultant humiliation I was rash : I closed my hand on the drapery that fluttered against it. I closed my hand. The smiling eyes grew large with surprise and alarm, and the face vanished — I held in my hand this scarf.'

There was silence. Then Rob continued :

'I have sat here every night since then, often till after midnight : the face has never come back. For a while I expected to see the scarf vanish. I held it tightly for most of the night, and finally went to sleep with it wrapped closely around my arm and hand. It did not vanish — I have ceased to fear that. I know

that somehow or other it has taken its material form for me, and however it came, it came from someone, and I shall meet her, whoever she is; wherever she is, she is mine. She will become mine, she waits for me. I shall carry this scarf across the sea; I shall travel with it till I meet her; she will recognize it and me; the scarf is my credential; no matter where we meet, I shall know her by her red-brown eyes and pointed chin; she will know this'—and he fluttered the full length of the scarf in the air. It shimmered and doubled on itself, and coiled and shifted in sentient evolutions as it fell again to his knee.

'I do n't know what to think; you must not ask me to say anything,' said Mark, as he arose to go. 'All I can say is, that you have gone into a realm where I cannot follow — my path lies near the earth.'

‘No, of course he could not say anything; what could he say?’ thought Rob; ‘but I am glad I told him.’

‘I do n’t know what to think,’ said Mark to himself, as he went homeward. ‘Rob is as sane as I am; he is logical, given the premise, and why should n’t he see red-brown eyes — is there ever a minute when I cannot summon an inward vision of dark ones? Yes, is there ever a minute in my life when I am not conforming my acts, my thoughts, my very self, to a vision that is as unsubstantial as his own? What if the being whose eidolon he lives for is thousands of miles away? What if he saw her in spirit before he saw her in fact — does that mean so very much? Have I been able to banish the dark eyes, try as I did? And *he* has fostered the vision of the red-brown eyes till he is as sure, yes, a thousand times

more sure, of his title to them than I am of ever having a right to even touch the vaguest drapery that has brushed my hand as my love passed. He follows shadows of the unseen—*I follow the less substantial visions of the seen.*'

Up and down on the deck of the outward-bound steamer walked Rob, happy, and with expectant eyes. He had a word for each new friend, as he passed, on deck or in the reading-room ; but mostly he was walking and thinking. In Switzerland, he walked much, and always dined at the public table, and he could have told you in particulars about every other one at the table, especially as to the color of the eyes of the women. He enjoyed seeing multitudes of people ; but when, on meeting a chance friend, he was asked to go in a party over some particular route, he was always going the other way. His fancy was like the

wind, and he obeyed it as does the weather-cock.

In Italy he staid many weeks, always straying among crowds, dining in public, riding out to the villas, often standing on the Pincio watching the carriages as they went by, delighting in looking at the faces of the beautiful women. He strolled through galleries, less to see the pictures than to see those who looked at them. It seemed as if *she* must be somewhere waiting for him with those smiling eyes. Had her garments but just brushed over this stone pavement? Had her hand rested for a moment on this delicate, fretted iron-work as she leaned over to see the crowd below? Had she watched last night's glow as the sun had sent up those golden shafts behind that dome? Had she been in Venice, and watched the black gondolas as they slipped by in the night? Was it her voice that said,

out of the darkness, as one of the shadows flitted, bat-like, across his path, 'I could stay here forever, were I not driven by fate to further shores'?

There was no desolation in his search; it was only a searching and a waiting, and wherever the scarf floated, there was his land — his home.

'I am the Knight of the Immaterial,' he said to someone who detained him; 'I follow a thought.'

He began to buy trinkets such as women wear. His luggage took on new shapes. It had corners dedicated to strange bits of regally embroidered fabrics; to rings old and wonderful; to strings of delicious yellow pearls, numerous and small as sands of the shore, gathered on a string.

At Naples he thought to find her. At Castallamarie he looked for her in the orange



garden. At Amalfi he expected to see her leaning on the wall to scan the blue waters.

In the reading-room at Athens he sat looking over the American papers. People were going in and out ; some were reading, as if at their own club or at home. Fussy folks turned over all the papers, looking for something which was n't, and never would be, there. Men exchanged greetings and news in after-dinner leisure. At Rob's side sat Drayton, our American Charge d'Affaires. He had an appointment later at a reception, and had come in to escort a party of people who had especial claims on his attention. Suddenly Rob leaned over, and said to him :

‘ Who is that lady standing there at the end of the table with her fur cloak thrown back — the beautiful one standing by the old man — that Russian, with all those decorations or orders ? ’

‘That? why, that is Madame Dembevetskoi, the most beautiful woman in Athens. If she *is* a Russian, it is a tie between her and the Venus de Milo.’

‘I want to know her.’

‘That is all right — Americans have every privilege; I will introduce you to her to-morrow.’

‘No, now; I must meet her now.’

‘Great Scott! that is too American; you ask too much.’

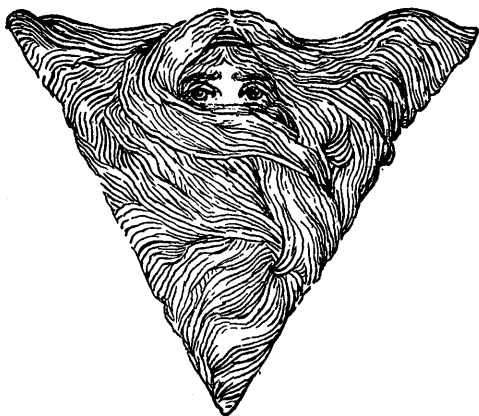
‘I ask just enough, and you will accede to my request.’

The two men looked at each other, then our functionary walked away with his diplomatic courtesy a little ruffled. A moment later he was introducing to Monsieur Dembevetskoi, ‘My friend, Monsieur Robert Dudley.’

In turn, Robert was presented to Madame.

The diplomat, once in action, never flinched fire, and he now engaged the Russian in an absorbing conversation, while Madame Dembevetskoi, holding with one hand her gray fur wrap, which was slipping from her, stretched out her other hand, and said, breathlessly :

‘Oh, Monsieur Dudley, please give me back my scarf!’





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