

HERMIA SUYDAM

By
Gertrude Atherton

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HERMIA SUYDAM

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FROM HERBERT SPENCER'S CHAPTER ON "THE WILL."

To say that the performance of the action is the result of his free will is to say that he determines the cohesion of the psychical states which arouse the action; and as these psychical states constitute himself at the moment, this is to say that these psychical states determine their own cohesion, which is absurd. These cohesions have been determined by experiences—the greater part of them, constituting what we call his natural character, by the experiences of antecedent organisms, and the rest by his own experiences. The changes which at each moment take place in his consciousness are produced by this infinitude of previous experiences registered in his nervous structure, co-operating with the immediate impressions on his senses; the effects of these combined factors being in every sense qualified by the psychical state, general or local, of his organism.

HERMIA SUYDAM

CHAPTER I.

A SECOND AVENUE HOUSEHOLD.

When Crosby Suydam died and left exactly enough money to bury himself, his widow returned to New York, and, taking her two little girls by the hand, presented herself at the old Suydam mansion on Second Avenue. "You must either take care of us or see us go to the poor-house," she said to her brother-in-law; "I am not strong enough to work, and my relatives are as poor as myself." And she sank into one of the library chairs with that air of indifference and physical weakness which makes a man more helpless than defiance or curse. Did John Suydam still, in his withered, yellow frame, carry a shrunken remnant of that pliable organ called the heart? His brother's widow did not add this problem to the others of her vexed existence—she had done with problems forever—but in his little world the legend was whispered that, many years before, the last fragment had dried and crumbled to dust. It must be either dust or a fossil; and, if the latter, it would surely play a merry clack and rattle with its housing skeleton every time the old man drew a long breath or hobbled across the room.

John Suydam's age was another problem. His neighbors said that the little yellow old man was their parents' contemporary. That he had ever had any youth those parents denied. He was many years older than Crosby Suydam, however, and the world had blamed him sharply for his treatment of his younger brother. Crosby had been wealthy when he married, and a great favorite. Some resentment was felt when he chose a New England girl for his wife; but Mrs. Suydam entertained so charmingly that society quickly forgave both, and filled their drawing-rooms whenever bidden. For ten years these two young people were illuminating stars in the firmament of New York society; then they swept down the horizon like meteors on a summer's night. Crosby had withdrawn his fortune from the securities in which his father had left it, and blown bubbles up and down Wall street for a year or so. At the end of that time he possessed neither bubbles nor suds. He drifted to Brooklyn, and for ten years more, struggled along, at one clerkship or another, his brother never lending him a dollar, nor offering him the shelter of his roof. He dropped out of life as he had dropped out of the world, which had long since forgotten both him and his unhappy young wife.

But, if John Suydam had no heart, he had pride. New York, in his opinion, should have been called Suydam, and the thought of one of his name in the poor-house aroused a passion stronger than avarice. He told his sister-in-law that she could stay, that he would give her food and shelter and a hundred dollars a year on condition that she would take care of her own rooms—he could not afford another servant.

It was a strange household. Mrs. Suydam sat up in her room all day with her two little girls and in her passive, mechanical way, heard their lessons, or helped them make their clothes. Her brother she met only at the table. At those awful meals not a word was ever spoken. John, who had atrocious table manners, crunched his food audibly for a half-hour at breakfast, an hour and a half at dinner, and an hour at supper. Mrs. Suydam, whose one desire was to die, accepted the hint he unconsciously gave, and swallowed her food whole; if longevity and

mastication were correlatives, it was a poor rule that would not work both ways. She died before the year was out; not of indigestion, however, but of relaxation from the terrible strain to which her delicate constitution had been subjected during the ten preceding years.

John Suydam had her put in the family vault, under St. Mark's, as economically as possible, then groaned in spirit as he thought of the two children left on his hands. He soon discovered that they would give him no trouble. Bessie Suydam was a motherly child, and adversity had filled many of the little store-rooms in her brain with a fund of common-sense, which, in happier conditions, might have been carried by. She was sixteen and Hermia was nine. The day after the funeral she slipped into her mother's place, and her little sister never missed the maternal care. Their life was monotonous. Bessie did not know her neighbors, although her grandparents and theirs had played together. When Mrs. Suydam had come to live under her brother-in-law's roof, the neighborhood had put its dislike of John Suydam aside and called at once. It neither saw Mrs. Suydam, nor did its kindness ever receive the slightest notice; and, with a sigh of relief, it forgot both her and her children.

A few months after Mrs. Suydam's death another slight change occurred in the household. A fourth mendicant relative appeared and asked for help. He was a distant cousin, and had been a schoolmate of John Suydam in that boyhood in which no one but himself believed. He had spent his life in the thankless treadmill of the teacher. Several years before, he had been pushed out of the mill by younger propounders of more fashionable methods, and after his savings were spent he had no resource but John Suydam.

Suydam treated him better than might have been expected. These two girls, whom a malignant fate had flung upon his protection, must be educated, and he was unwilling to incur the expenses of a school or governess. The advent of William Crosby laid the question at rest. John told him that he would give him a home and a hundred dollars a year if he would educate his nieces, and the old man was glad to consent.

The professor taught the girls conscientiously, and threw some sunshine into their lives. He took them for a long walk every day, and showed them all the libraries, the picture galleries, and the shops. In spite of the meanness of her garb, Bessie attracted some attention during these ramblings; she had the pretty American face, and the freshness of morning was in it. Poor Hermia, who obediently trotted behind, passed unnoticed. Nature, who had endowed the rest of her family so kindly—her father and mother had been two of the old dame's proudest works—had passed her by in a fit of abstraction. Under her high, melancholy forehead and black, heavy brows, stared solemnly a pair of unmistakably green eyes—even that hypocrite Politeness would never name them gray. Her dull, uninteresting hair was brushed severely back and braided in a tight pig-tail; and her sallow cheeks were in painful contrast to the pink and white of her sister's delicate skin. Her eyelashes were thick and black, and she had the small, admirably shaped hands and feet of the Suydams, but the general effect was unattractive. She was a cold, reserved child, and few people liked her.

The professor took the girls to the theater one night, and it was a memorable night in their lives. Each was in a fever of excitement, and each manifested it characteristically. Bessie's cheeks were flushed to her eyelashes, and she jerked the buttons off both gloves. Her gray eyes shone and her pink lips were parted. People stared at her as she passed and wondered who she was. But for once in her life she was blind to admiration; she was going to see a play! Hermia was paler than ever and almost rigid. Her lips were firmly compressed, but her hands, in her little woolen gloves, were burning, and her eyes shone like a cat's in the dark. They sat in the gallery, but they were in the front row, and as content as any jeweled dame in box or

parquette.

The play was Monte Cristo, and what more was needed to perfect the delight of two girls confronted with stage illusion for the first time? Bessie laughed and wept, and rent her gloves to shreds with the vehemence of her applause. Hermia sat on the extreme edge of the seat, and neither laughed, wept, nor applauded. Her eyes, which never left the stage, grew bigger and bigger, her face paler, and her nostrils more tense.

After the play was over she did not utter a word until she got home; but the moment she reached the bedroom which the sisters shared in common she flung herself on the floor and shrieked for an hour. Bessie, who was much alarmed, dashed water over her, shook her, and finally picked her up and rocked her to sleep. The next morning Hermia was as calm as usual, but she developed, soon after, a habit of dreaming over her books which much perplexed her sister. Bessie dreamed a little too, but she always heard when she was spoken to, and Hermia did not.

One night, about three months after the visit to the theater, the girls were in their room preparing for bed. Hermia was sitting on the hearth-rug taking off her shoes, and Bessie was brushing her long hair before the glass and admiring the reflection of her pretty face.

"Bessie," said Hermia, leaning back and clasping her hands about her knee, "what is your ambition in life?"

Bessie turned and stared down at the child, then blushed rosily. "I should like to have a nice, handsome husband and five beautiful children, all dressed in white with blue sashes. And I should like to have a pretty house on Fifth Avenue, and a carriage, and lots of novels. And I should like to go to Europe and see all the picture-galleries and churches." She had been addressing herself in the glass, but she suddenly turned and looked down at Hermia.

"What is your ambition?" she asked.

"To be the most beautiful woman in the world!" exclaimed the child passionately.

Bessie sat down on a hassock. She felt but did not comprehend that agonized longing for the gift which nature had denied, and which woman holds most dear. She had always been pretty and was somewhat vain, but she had known little of the power of beauty, and power and uncomeliness alone teach a woman beauty's value. But she was sympathetic, and she felt a vague pity for her sister. She thought it better, however, to improve the occasion.

"Beauty is nothing in itself," she said, gently; "you must be good and clever, and then people will think——"

"Bessie," interrupted Hermia, as if she had not heard, "do you think I will *ever* be pretty?"

Bessie hesitated. She was very conscientious, but she was also very tender-hearted. For a moment there was a private battle, then conscience triumphed. "No," she said, regretfully, "I am afraid you never will be, dear."

She was looking unusually lovely herself as she spoke. Her shoulders were bare and her chemise had dropped low on her white bosom. Her eyes looked black in the lamp's narrow light, and her soft, heavy hair tumbled about her flushed face and slender, shapely figure. Hermia gazed at her for a moment, and then with a suppressed cry sprang forward and tore her sharp nails across her sister's cheek.

Bessie gave a shriek of pain and anger, and, catching the panting, struggling child, slapped her until her arm ached. "There!" she exclaimed, finally, shaking her sister until the child's teeth clacked together, "you little tiger cat! You sha'n't have any supper for a week." Then she dropped Hermia suddenly and burst into tears. "Oh, it is dreadfully wicked to lose one's temper like that; but my poor face!" She rubbed the tears from her eyes and, standing up, carefully

examined her wounds in the glass. She heaved a sigh of relief; they were not very deep. She went to the washstand and bathed her face, then returned to her sister. Hermia stood on the hearth-rug. She had not moved since Bessie dropped her hands from her shoulders.

Bessie folded her arms magisterially and looked down upon the culprit, her delicate brows drawn together, her eyes as severe as those of an angel whose train has been stepped on. "Are you not sorry?" she demanded sternly.

Hermia gazed at her steadily for a moment. "Yes," she said, finally, "I am sorry, and I'll never get outside-mad again as long as I live. I've made a fool of myself." Then she marched to the other side of the room and went to bed.

CHAPTER II.

JOHN SUYDAM GIVES HIS BLESSING.

One day a bank clerk came up to the quiet house with a message to John Suydam. As he was leaving he met Bessie in the hall. Each did what wiser heads had done before—they fell wildly and uncompromisingly in love at first sight. How Frank Mordaunt managed to find an excuse for speaking to her he never remembered, nor how he had been transported from the hall into the dingy old drawing-room. At the end of an hour he was still there, seated on a sofa of faded brocade, and looking into the softest eyes in the world.

After that he came every evening. John Suydam knew nothing of it. Bessie, from the parlor window, watched Mordaunt come down the street and opened the front door herself; the old man, crouching over his library fire, heard not an echo of the whispers on the other side of the wall.

Poor Bessie! Frank Mordaunt was the first young man with whom she had ever exchanged a half-dozen consecutive sentences. No wonder her heart beat responsively to the first love and the first spoken admiration. Mordaunt, as it chanced, was not a villain, and the rôle of victim was not offered to Bessie. She was used to economy, he had a fair salary, and they decided to be married at once. When they had agreed upon the date, Bessie summoned up her courage and informed her uncle of her plans. He made no objection; he was probably delighted to get rid of her; and as a wedding-gift he presented her with—Hermia.

“I like her better than I do you,” he said, “for she has more brains in her little finger than you have in your whole head; and she will never be contented with a bank clerk. But I cannot be bothered with children. I will pay you thirty dollars a quarter for her board, and William Crosby can continue to teach her. I hope you will be happy, Elizabeth; but marriage is always a failure. You can send Hermia to me every Christmas morning, and I will give her twenty-five dollars with which to clothe herself during the year. I shall not go to the wedding. I dislike weddings and funerals. There should be no periods in life, only commas. When a man dies he doesn’t mind the period; he can’t see it. But he need not remind himself of it. You can go.”

Bessie was married in a pretty white gown, made from an old one of her mother’s, and St. Mark’s had never held a daintier bride. No one was present but Mordaunt’s parents, the professor, who was radiant, and Hermia, who was the only bridesmaid. But it was a fair spring morning, the birds were singing in an eager choir, and the altar had been decorated with a few greens and flowers by the professor and Hermia. At the conclusion of the service the clergyman patted Bessie on the head and told her he was sure she would be happy, and the girl forgot her uncle’s benediction.

“Bessie,” said Hermia an hour later, as they were walking toward their new home, “I will never be married until I can have a dress covered with stars like those Hans Andersen’s princesses carried about in a nutshell when they were disguised as beggar-maids, and until I can be married in a grand cathedral and have a great organ just pealing about me, and a white-robed choir singing like seraphs, and roses to walk on——”

“Hermia,” said Bessie dreamily, “I wish you would not talk so much, and you shouldn’t wish for things you can never have.”

“I will have them,” exclaimed the child under her breath. “I will! I will!”

CHAPTER III.

BROOKLYN AND BABYLON.

Thirteen years passed. Bessie had three of her desired children and a nice little flat in Brooklyn. Reverses and trials had come, but on the whole Mordaunt was fairly prosperous, and they were happy. The children did not wear white dresses and blue sashes; they were generally to be seen in stout gingham and woolen plaids, but they were chubby, healthy, pretty things, and their mother was as proud of them as if they had realized every detail of her youthful and ambitious dreams.

Bessie's prettiness had gone with her first baby, as American prettiness is apt to do, but the sweetness of her nature remained and shone through her calm eyes and the lines of care about her mouth. She had long since forgotten to sigh over the loss of her beauty, she had so little time; but she still remembered to give a deft coil to her hair, and her plain little gowns were never dowdy. She knew nothing about modern decorative art, and had no interest in hard-wood floors or dados; but her house was pretty and tasteful in the old-fashioned way, and in her odd moments she worked at cross-stitch.

And Hermia? Poor girl! She had not found the beauty her sister had lost. Her hair was still the same muddy blonde-brown, although with a latent suggestion of color, and she still brushed it back with the severity of her childhood. Nothing, she had long since concluded, could beautify her, and she would waste no time in the attempt. She was a trifle above medium height, and her thin figure bent a little from the waist. Her skin was as sallow as of yore, and her eyes were dull. She had none of Bessie's sweetness of expression; her cold, intellectual face just escaped being sullen. Her health was what might be expected of a girl who exercised little and preferred thought to sleep. She had kept the promise made the night she had scratched her sister's face; during the past fifteen years no one had seen her lose her self-control for a moment. She was as cold as a polar night, and as impassive as an Anglo-American. She was very kind to her sister, and did what she could to help her. She taught the children; and, though with much private rebellion, she frequently made their clothes and did the marketing. Frank and Bessie regarded her with awe and distant admiration, but the children liked her. The professor had taught her until he could teach her no more, and then had earned his subsistence by reading aloud to John Suydam. A year or two before, he had departed for less material duties, with few regrets.

But, if Hermia no longer studied, she belonged to several free libraries and read with unflagging vigor. Of late she had taken a deep interest in art, and she spent many hours in the picture galleries of New York. Moreover, she grasped any excuse which took her across the river. With all the fervor of her silent soul she loved New York and hated Brooklyn.

She was sitting in the dining-room one evening, helping Lizzie, the oldest child, with her lessons. Lizzie was sleepy, and was droning through her multiplication table, when she happened to glance at her aunt. "You are not paying attention," she exclaimed, triumphantly; "I don't believe you've heard a word of that old table, and I'm not going to say it over again."

Hermia, whose eyes had been fixed vacantly on the fire, started and took the book from Lizzie's lap. "Go to bed," she said; "you are tired, and you know your tables very well."

Lizzie, who was guiltily conscious that she had never known her tables less well, accepted her release with alacrity, kissed her aunt good-night, and ran out of the room.

Hermia went to the window and opened it. It looked upon walls and fences, but lineaments were blotted out to-night under a heavy fall of snow. Beyond the lower roofs loomed the tall walls of houses on the neighboring street, momentarily discernible through the wind-parted storm.

Hermia pushed the snow from the sill, then closed the window with a sigh. The snow and the night were the two things in her life that she loved. They were projected into her little circle from the grand whole of which they were parts, and were in no way a result of her environment.

She went into the sitting-room and sat down by the table. She took up a book and stared at its unturned pages for a quarter of an hour. Then she raised her eyes and looked about her. Mordaunt was sitting in an easy-chair by the fire, smoking a pipe and reading a magazine story aloud to his wife, who sat near him, sewing. Lizzie had climbed on his lap, and with her head against his shoulder was fast asleep.

Hermia took up a pencil and made a calculation on the fly-leaf of her book. It did not take long, but the result was a respectable sum—4,620. Allowing for her sister's brief illnesses and for several minor interruptions, she had looked upon that same scene, varied in trifling details, just about 4,620 times in the past thirteen years. She rose suddenly and closed her book.

"Good-night," she said, "I am tired. I am going to bed."

Mordaunt muttered "good-night" without raising his eyes; but Bessie turned her head with an anxious smile.

"Good-night," she said; "I think you need a tonic. And would you mind putting Lizzie to bed? I am so interested in this story. Frank, carry her into the nursery."

Hermia hesitated a moment, as if she were about to refuse, but she turned and followed Frank into the next room.

She undressed the inert, protesting child and tucked her in bed. Then she went to her room and locked the door. She lit the gas mechanically and stood still for a moment. Then she threw herself on the bed, and flung herself wildly about. After a time she clasped her hands tightly about the top of her head and gazed fixedly at the ceiling. Her family would not have recognized her in that moment. Her disheveled hair clung about her flushed face, and through its tangle her eyes glittered like those of a snake. For a few moments her limbs were as rigid as if the life had gone out of them. Then she threw herself over on her face and burst into a wild passion of weeping. The hard, inward sobs shook her slender body as the screw shakes the steamer.

"How I hate it! How I hate it! How I hate it!" she reiterated, between her paroxysms. "O God! is there nothing—nothing—nothing in life but this? Nothing but hideous monotony—and endless days—and thousands and thousands of hours that are as alike as grains of sand?"

She got up suddenly and filling a basin with water thrust her head into it. The water was as cold as melting ice, and when she had dried her hair she no longer felt as if her brain were trying to force its way through the top of her skull.

Hermia, like many other women, lived a double life. On the night when, under the dramatic illusion of Monte Cristo, her imagination had awakened with a shock which rent the film of childhood from her brain, she had found a dream-world of her own. The prosaic never suspected its existence; the earth's millions who dwelt in the same world cared nothing for any kingdom in it but their own; she was sovereign of a vast domain wrapped in the twilight mystery of dreamland, but peopled with obedient subjects conceived and molded in her waking brain. She walked stoically through the monotonous round of her daily life; she took a grim and bitter pleasure in fulfilling every duty it developed, and she never neglected the higher duty she owed her intellect; but when night came, and the key was turned in her door, she sprang

from the life she abhorred into the world of her delight. She would fight sleep off for hours, for sleep meant temporary death, and the morning a return to material existence. A ray of light from the street-lamp struggled through the window, and, fighting with the shadows, filled the ugly, common little room with glamour and illusion. The walls swept afar and rolled themselves into marble pillars that towered vaporously in the gloom. Beyond, rooms of state and rooms of pleasure ceaselessly multiplied. On the pictured floors lay rugs so deep that the echo of a lover's footfall would never go out into eternity. From the enameled walls sprang a vaulted ceiling painted with forgotten art. Veils of purple stuffs, gold-wrought, jewel-fringed, so dense that the roar of a cannon could not have forced its way into the stillness of that room, masked windows and doors. From beyond those pillars, from the far perspective of those ever-doubling chambers came the splash of waters, faint and sweet as the music of the bulbul. The bed, aloft on its dais, was muffled in lace which might have fringed a mist. Hidden in the curving leaves of pale-tinted lotus flowers were tiny flames of light, and in an urn of agate burned perfumed woods. * * *

For this girl within her unseductive frame had all the instincts of a beautiful woman, for the touch of whose lips men would dig the grave of their life's ambitions. That kiss it was the passionate cry of her heart to give to lips as warm and imploring as her own. She would thrust handfuls of violets between her blankets, and imagine herself lying by the sea in a nest of fragrance. Her body longed for the softness of cambric and for silk attire; her eye for all the beauty that the hand of man had ever wrought.

When wandering among those brain-born shadows of hers, she was beautiful, of course; and, equally inferable, those dreams had a hero. This lover's personality grew with her growth and changed with every evolution of the mind that had given it birth; but, strangely enough, the lover himself had retained his proportions and lineaments from the day of his creation. Is it to be supposed that Hermia was wedded peacefully to her ideal, and that together they reigned over a vast dominion of loving and respectful subjects? Not at all. If there was one word in the civilized vocabulary that Hermia hated it was that word "marriage." To her it was correlative with all that was commonplace; with a prosaic grind that ate and corroded away life and soul and imagination; with a dreary and infinite monotony. Bessie Mordaunt's peaceful married life was hideous to her sister. Year after year,—neither change nor excitement, neither rapture nor anguish, nor romance nor poetry, neither ambition nor achievement, nor recognition nor power! Nothing of mystery, nothing of adventure; neither palpitation of daring nor quiver of secrecy; nothing but kisses of calm affection, babies, and tidies! 4,620 evenings of calm, domestic bliss; 4,620 days of placid, housewifely duties! To Hermia such an existence was a tragedy more appalling than relentless immortality. Bessie had her circle of friends, and in each household the tragedy was repeated; unless, mayhap, the couple were ill-mated, when the tragedy became a comedy, and a vulgar one at that.

Hermia's hatred of marriage sprang not from innate immorality, but from a strongly romantic nature stimulated to abnormal extreme by the constant, small-beer wave-beats of a humdrum, uniform, ever-persisting, abhorred environment. If no marriage-bells rang over her cliffs and waters and through her castle halls, her life was more ideally perfect than any life within her ken which drowsed beneath the canopy of law and church. Regarding the subject from the point of view to which her nature and conditions had focused her mental vision, love needed the exhilarating influence of liberty, the stimulation of danger, and the enchantment of mystery.

Of men practically she knew little. There were young men in her sister's circle, and Mordaunt occasionally brought home his fellow clerks; but Hermia had never given one of

them a thought. They were limited and commonplace, and her reputation for intellectuality had the effect of making them appear at their worst upon those occasions when circumstances compelled them to talk to her. And she had not the beauty to win forgiveness for her brains. She appreciated this fact and it embittered her, little as she cared for her brother's uninteresting friends, and sent her to the depths of her populous soul.

The books she read had their influence upon that soul-population. The American novel had much the same effect upon her as the married life of her sister and her sister's friends. She cared for but little of the literature of France, and the best of it deified love and scorned the conventions. She reveled in mediæval and ancient history and loved the English poets, and both poets and history held aloft, on pillars of fragrant and indestructible wood, her own sad ideality.

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE GREEN ROOM OF LITERATURE.

Hermia's imagination in its turn demanded a safety-valve; she found it necessary, occasionally, to put her dreams into substance and sequence. In other words she wrote. Not prose. She had neither the patience nor the desire. Nor did she write poetry. She believed that no woman, save perhaps time-enveloped Sappho, ever did, and she had no idea of adding her pseudonym to the list of failures. When her brain became overcharged, she dashed off verses, wildly romantic, and with a pen heated white. There was a wail and an hysterical passion in what she wrote that took the hearts of a large class of readers by storm, and her verses found prompt acceptance by the daily and weekly papers. She had as yet aspired to nothing higher. She was distinctly aware that her versification was crude and her methods faulty. To get her verses into the magazines they must be fairly correct and almost proper, and both attainments demanded an amount of labor distasteful to her impatient nature. Of late, scarcely a week had passed without the appearance of several metrical contributions over the signature "Quirus;" and the wail and the passion were growing more piercing and tumultuous. The readers were moved, interested, or amused, according to their respective natures.

The morning after the little arithmetical problem, Hermia arose early and sat down at her desk. She drew out a package of MS. and read it over twice, then determined to have a flirtation with the magazines. These verses were more skillful from a literary point of view than any of her previous work, because, for the sake of variety, she had plagiarized some good work of an English poet. The story was a charming one, dramatic, somewhat fragmentary, and a trifle less caloric than her other effusions. She revised it carefully, and mailed it, later in the day, to one of the leading New York magazines.

Two weeks passed and no answer came. Then, snatching at anything which offered its minimum of distraction, she determined to call on the editor. She had never presented herself to an editor before, fearing his betrayal of her identity; so well had she managed that not even Bessie knew she wrote; but she regarded the magazine editor from afar as an exalted being, and was willing to put her trust in him. She felt shy about acknowledging herself the apostle of beauty and the priestess of passion, but ennui conquered diffidence, and one morning she presented herself at the door of her editor's den.

The editor, who was glancing over proofs, raised his eyes as she entered, and did not look overjoyed to see her. Nevertheless, he politely asked her to be seated. Poor Hermia by this time was cold with fright; her knees were shaking. She was used to self-control, however, and in a moment managed to remark that she had come to inquire about the fate of her poem. The editor bowed, extracted a MS. from a pigeon-hole behind him, and handed it to her.

"I cannot use it," he said, "but I am greatly obliged to you, nevertheless. We are always grateful for contributions."

He had a pleasant way of looking upon the matter as settled, but an ounce or two of Hermia's courage had returned, and she was determined to get something more out of the interview than a glimpse of an editor.

"I am sorry," she said, "but of course I expected it. Would you mind telling me what is the matter with it?"

Editors will not take the trouble to write a criticism of a returned manuscript, but they are

more willing to air their views verbally than people imagine. It gives them an opportunity to lecture and generalize, and they enjoy doing both.

“Certainly not,” said the editor in question. “Your principal fault is that you are too highly emotional. Your verses would be unhealthy reading for my patrons. This is a family magazine, and has always borne the reputation of incorruptible morality. It would not do for us to print matter which a father might not wish his daughter to read. The American young girl should be the conscientious American editor’s first consideration.”

This interview was among the anguished memories of Hermia’s life. After her return home she thought of so many good things she might have said. This was one which she uttered in the seclusion of her bed-chamber that evening:

“You are perfectly right,” with imperturbability. “Protect the American young girl lest she protect not herself” should be the motto and the mission of the American editor!”)

When she was at one with the opportunity, she asked: “And my other faults?”

“Your other faults?” replied the unconscious victim of lagging wit. “There is a strain of philosophy in your mind which unfits you for magazine work. A magazine should be light and not too original. People pick it up after the work of the day; they want to be amused and entertained, they do not want to think. Anything new, anything out of the beaten track, anything which does not suggest old and familiar favorites, anything which requires a mental effort to grasp, annoys them and affects the popularity of the magazine. Of course we like originality and imagination—do not misunderstand me; what we do not want is the complex, the radically original, or the deep. We have catered to a large circle of readers for a great many years; we know exactly what they want, and they know exactly what to expect. When they see the name of a new writer in our pages they feel sure that whatever may be the freshness and breeziness of the newcomer, he (or she) will not call upon them to witness the tunneling of unhewn rock—so to speak. Do you grasp my meaning?”

(Hermia at home in her bed-chamber: “I see. Your distinctions are admirable. You want originality with the sting extracted, soup instead of blood, an exquisite etching rather than the bold sweep and color of brush and oils. Your contributors must say an old thing in a new way, or a new thing in so old a way that the shock will be broken, that the reader will never know he has harbored a new-born babe. Your little lecture has been of infinite value to me. I shall ponder over it until I evolve something worthy of the wary parent and the American Young Girl.”)

Hermia in the editor’s den: “Oh, yes; thank you very much. But I am afraid I shall never do anything you will care for. Good-morning.”

The next day she sent the manuscript to another magazine, and, before she could reasonably expect a reply, again invaded the sanctity of editorial seclusion. The genus editor amused her; she resolved to keep her courage by the throat and study the arbiters of literary destinies. It is probable that, if her second editor had not been young and very gracious, her courage would again have flown off on deriding wings; as it was, it did not even threaten desertion.

She found the editor engaged in nothing more depressing than the perusal of a letter. He smiled most promisingly when she announced herself as the mysterious “Quirus,” but folded his hands deprecatingly.

“I am sorry I cannot use that poem,” he said, “but I am afraid it is impossible. It has decided merit, and, in view of the awful stuff we are obliged to publish, it would be a welcome addition to our pages. I don’t mind the strength of the poem or the plot; you have made your meaning artistically obscure. But there is one word in it which would make it too strong meat for the

readers of this magazine. I refer to the word 'naked.' It is quite true that the adjective 'naked' is used in conjunction with the noun 'skies;' but the word itself is highly objectionable. I have been trying to find a way out of the difficulty. I substituted the word 'nude,' but that spoils the meter, you see. Then I sought the dictionary." He opened a dictionary that stood on a revolving stand beside him, and read aloud: "Naked—uncovered; unclothed; nude; bare; open; defenseless; plain; mere.' None of these will answer the purpose, you see. They are either too short or too long; and 'open' does not convey the idea. I am really afraid that nothing can be done. Suppose you try something else and be more careful with your vocabulary. I trust you catch my idea, because I am really quite interested in your work. It is like the fresh breeze of spring when it is not"—here he laughed—"the torrid breath of the simoon. I have read some of your other verse, you see."

"I think I understand you," said Hermia, leaning forward and gazing reflectively at him. "Manner is everything. Matter is a creature whose limbs may be of wood, whose joints may be sapless; so long as he is covered by a first-class tailor he is a being to strut proudly down to posterity. Or, for the sake of variety, which has its value, the creature may change his sex and become a pink-cheeked, flax-haired, blue-eyed doll. Hang upon her garments cut by an unconventional hand, looped eccentrically and draped artistically, and the poor little doll knows not herself from her clothes. Have I gazed understandingly upon the works of the literary clock?"

The editor threw back his head and laughed aloud. "You are very clever," he exclaimed, "but I am afraid your estimate of us is as correct as it is flattering. We are a set of cowards, but we should be bankrupt if we were not."

Hermia took the manuscript he had extracted from a drawer, and rose. "At all events you were charitable to read my verses," she said, "and more than good to attempt their re-form."

The editor stood up also. "Oh, do not mention it," he said, "and write me something else—something equally impassioned but quite irreproachable. Aside from the defect I mentioned, there were one or two verses which I should have been obliged to omit."

Hermia shrugged her shoulders. She might repeatedly work the lovers up to the verge of disaster, then, just before the fatal moment, wrench them apart and substitute asterisks for curses. The school-girls would palpitate, the old maids thrill, the married women smile, and the men grin. No harm would be done, maidens and maids would lay it down with a long-drawn sigh—of relief?—or regret?

Hermia kept these reflections to herself and departed, thinking her editor a charming man.

When she reached the sidewalk she stood irresolute for a moment, then walked rapidly for many blocks. The Mecca of her pilgrimage was another publishing-house. She stepped briskly upstairs and asked for the editor with a confidence born of excitement and encouragement. After a short delay she was shown into his office, and began the attack without preliminary.

"I have brought you some verses," she said, "which have been declined by two of your esteemed contemporaries on the ground of unconventionality—of being too highly seasoned for the gentle palates to which they cater. I bring them to you because I believe you have more courage than the majority of your tribe. You wrote two books in which you broke out wildly once or twice. Now I want you to read this while I am here. It will take but a few moments."

The editor, who had a highly non-committal air, smiled slightly, and held out his hand for the verses. He read them through, then looked up.

"I rather like them," he said. "They have a certain virility, although I do not mistake the strength of passion for creative force. But they are pretty tropical, and the versification is

crude. I—am afraid—they—will hardly—do.”

He looked out of the window, then smiled outright. It rather pleased him to dare that before which his brethren faltered. He made a number of marks on the manuscript.

“That rectifies the crudeness a little,” he said, “and the poem certainly has intellectuality and merit. You can leave it. I will let you know in a day or two. Your address is on the copy, I suppose. I think you may count upon the availability of your verses.”

Hermia accepted her dismissal and went home much elated. The verses were printed in the next issue of the magazine, and there was a mild storm on the literary lake. The course of the magazine, in sending up a stream of red-hot lava in place of the usual shower-bath of lemonade and claret-cup, was severely criticised, but there were those who said that this deliberately audacious editor enjoyed the little cyclone he had provoked.

This was the most exciting episode Hermia could recall since Bessie’s marriage.

CHAPTER V.

THE SWEETS OF SOLITUDE.

A few weeks later Frank made an announcement which gave Hermia a genuine thrill of delight. A fellow bank-clerk was obliged to spend some months in California, and had offered Mordaunt his house in Jersey for the summer. Hermia would not consent to go with them, in spite of their entreaties. As far back as she could remember, way down through the long perspective of her childhood, she had never been quite alone except at night, nor could she remember the time when she had not longed for solitude. And now! To be alone for four months! No more evenings of domestic bliss, no more piles of stockings to darn, no more dinners to concoct, no more discussions upon economy, no more daily tasks carefully planned by Bessie's methodical mind, no more lessons to teach, no more *anything* which had been her daily portion for the last thirteen years. Bridget would go with the family. She would do her own cooking, and not eat at all if she did not wish. Her clothes could fall into rags, and her hands look through every finger of her gloves. She would read and dream and forget that the material world existed.

It was a beautiful spring morning when Hermia found herself alone. She had gone with the family to Jersey, and had remained until they were settled. Now the world was her own. When she returned to the flat, she threw her things on the floor, pushed the parlor furniture awry, turned the framed photographs to the wall, and hid the worsted tidies under the sofa.

For two months she was well content. She reveled in her loneliness, in the voiceless rooms, the deserted table, the aimless hours, the forgotten past, the will-painted present. She regarded the post-man as her natural enemy, and gave him orders not to ring her bell. Once a week she took her letters from the box and devoted a half-hour to correspondence. She had a hammock swung in one of the rooms, and dreamed half the night through that she was in the hanging gardens of Semiramis. The darkness alone was between her and the heavens thick with starry gods; and below was the heavy perfume of oranges and lotus flowers. There was music—soft—crashing—wooing her to a scene of bewildering light and mad carousal. There was rapture of power and ecstasy of love. She had but to fling aside the curtains—to fly down the corridor—

It is not to be supposed that Hermia's imagination was faithful to the Orient. Her nature had great sensuous breadth and wells of passion which penetrated far down into the deep, hard substratum of New England rock; but her dreams were apt to be inspired by what she had read last. She loved the barbarous, sensuous, Oriental past, but she equally loved the lore which told of the rugged strength and brutal sincerity of mediæval days, when man turned his thoughts to love and war and naught besides; when the strongest won the woman he wanted by murder and force, and the woman loved him the better for doing it. Hermia would have gloried in the breathless uncertainty of those days, when death and love went hand-in-hand, and every kiss was bought with the swing of a battle-axe. She would have liked to be locked in her tower by her feudal father, and to have thrown down a rope-ladder to her lover at night. Other periods of history at times demanded her, and she had a great many famous lovers: Bolingbroke and Mirabeau, Napoleon and Aaron Burr, Skobelev and Cavour, a motley throng who bore a strong racial resemblance to one another when roasting in the furnace of her superheated imagination.

Again, there were times when love played but a small part in her visions. She was one of the

queens of that world to which she had been born, a world whose mountains were of cold brown stone, and in whose few and narrow currents drifted stately maidens in stiff, white collars and tailor-made gowns. She should be one of that select band. It was her birthright; and each instinct of power and fastidiousness, caste and exclusiveness, flourished as greenly within her as if those currents had swept their roots during every year of her life's twenty-four. When ambition sank down, gasping for breath, love would come forward eager and warm, a halo enveloped the brown-stone front, and through the plate-glass and silken curtains shone the sun of paradise.

For a few weeks the charm of solitude retained its edge. Then, gradually, the restlessness of Hermia's nature awoke after its sleep and clamored for recognition. She grew to hate the monotony of her own society as she had that of her little circle. She came to dread the silence of the house; it seemed to close down upon her, oppressing, stifling, until she would put her hand to her throat and gasp for breath. Sometimes she would scream at every noise; her nerves became so unstrung that sleep was a visitor who rarely remembered her. Once, thinking she needed change of scene, she went to Jersey. She returned the next morning. The interruption of the habit of years, the absolute change of the past few months made it impossible to take up again the strings of her old life. They had snapped forever, and the tension had been too tight to permit a knot. She could go down to the river, but not back to the existence of the past thirteen years.

For a week after her return from Jersey she felt as if she were going mad. Life seemed to have stopped; the future was a blank sheet. Try to write on it as she would, the characters took neither form nor color. To go and live alone would mean no more than the change from her sister's flat to a bare-walled room; to remain in her present conditions was unthinkable. She had neither the money nor the beauty to accumulate interests in life. Books ceased to interest her, imagination failed her. She tried to write, but passion was dead, and the blood throbbed in her head and drowned words and ideas. She had come to the edge of life, and at her feet swept the river—in its depths were peace and oblivion—eternal rest—a long, cool night—the things which crawl in the deep would suck the blood from her head—a claw with muscles of steel would wrench the brain from her skull and carry it far, far, where she could feel it throb and jump and ache no more—

And then, one day, John Suydam died and left her a million dollars.

CHAPTER VI.

SUYDAM'S LEGACY AND HERMIA'S WILL.

Hermia attended her uncle's funeral because Frank came over and insisted upon it; and she and her brother-in-law were the only mourners. But few people were in the church, a circumstance which Hermia remembered later with gratitude. The Suydams had lived on Second Avenue since Second Avenue had boasted a brick or brownstone front, but no one cared to assume a respect he did not feel. Among the tablets which graced the interior of St. Mark's was one erected to the dead man's father, who had left many shekels to the diocese; but John Suydam was lowered into the family vault with nothing to perpetuate his memory but his name and the dates of his birth and death engraved on the silver plate of his coffin.

Hermia took no interest in her uncle's death; she was even past the regret that she would be the poorer by twenty-five dollars a year. When she received the letter from Suydam's lawyer, informing her that she was heiress to a million dollars, her hands shook for an hour.

At first she was too excited to think connectedly. She went out and took a long walk, and physical fatigue conquered her nerves. She returned home and sat down on the edge of her bed and thought it all out. The world was under her feet at last. With such a fortune she could materialize every dream of her life. She would claim her place in society here, then go abroad, and in the old world forget the Nineteenth Century. She would have a house, each of whose rooms should be the embodiment of one of that strange medley of castles she had built in the land of her dreams. And men would love her—she was free to love in fact instead of in fancy—free to go forth and in the crowded drawing-rooms of that world not a bird's flight away find the lover whose glance would be recognition.

She sprang to her feet and threw her arms above her head. New life seemed to have been poured into her veins, and it coursed through them like quicksilver; she felt *young* for the first time in the twenty-four centuries of her life. She dropped her arms and closed her hand slowly; the world was in the palm. She smiled and let her head drop back. She moved it slowly on the pivot of her throat. Her eyes met the glass.

The cry of horror which burst from her lips rang through the room. For this girl had lived so long and so consistently in her imagination that it was rarely she remembered she was not a beautiful woman. During the past hours she had slowly grasped the fact that, as with the stroke of a magician's wand, her dream-estates had been hardened from shadow into substance; it had not occurred to her that the gift most coveted was the one gift withheld.

She sank in a heap on the bed, all spirit and hope gone out of her. For many minutes she remained motionless. Then she slowly straightened herself until she was erect once more, and in her face grew a look of hope fighting down doubt. In a moment hope triumphed, then gave way to determination, which in turn yielded to defiance. She sprang forward and with her clenched hand shattered her mirror into a star with a thousand points.

"I *will* be beautiful!" she cried aloud, "and I will never look into a glass again until I am."

CHAPTER VII.

A HEROINE IN TRAINING.

The thirty or forty thousand dollars over John Suydam's million had been left to Bessie. She immediately bought a charming house on St. Mark's Avenue—it did not occur to her to leave her beloved Brooklyn—and Hermia furnished it for her and told her that she would educate the children. Hermia did not divide her fortune with her sister. She kept her hundred thousands, not because gold had made her niggardly, but because she wanted the power that a fortune gives.

The old Suydam house was one of the largest of its kind in New York. Exteriorly it was of red brick with brown-stone trimmings, and about the lower window was a heavy iron balcony. Beneath the window was a square of lawn the size of a small kitchen table, which was carefully protected by a high, spiked iron railing.

Hermia put the house at once in the hands of a famous designer and decorator, but allowed him no license. Her orders were to be followed to the letter. The large, single drawing-room was to be Babylonian. The library just behind, and the dining-room in the extension were to look like the rooms of a feudal castle. The large hall should suggest a cathedral. Above, her boudoir and bed-room was to be a scene from the Arabian Nights. A conservatory, to be built at the back of the house, would be a jungle of India.

The house was to be as nearly finished as possible by the beginning of winter. She wrote to her mother's sister, Miss Huldah Starbruck, a lady who had passed fifty peaceful years in Nantucket, and asked her to come and live with her. Miss Starbruck promised to come early in December, and then, all other points settled, Hermia gave her attention to the momentous question of her undeveloped beauty.

She went to a fashionable physician and had a long interview with him. The next day he sent her a trained and athletic nurse, a pleasant, placid-looking young woman, named Mary Newton. Miss Newton, who had received orders to put Hermia into a perfect state of health, and who was given *carte blanche*, telegraphed for a cottage on the south shore of Long Island. She had a room fitted up as a gymnasium, and for the next four months Hermia obeyed her lightest mandate upon all questions of diet and exercise. Once a week Hermia went to town and divided the day between the house-decorators and a hairdresser who had engaged to develop the color in her lusterless locks.

On the first of December, Miss Newton told her that no girl had ever been in more superb condition; and Hermia, who had kept her vow and not yet looked in a mirror, was content to take her word, and both returned to town.

CHAPTER VIII.

HERMIA DISCOVERS HERSELF.

Had Hermia been a bride on her wedding-night she could not have felt more trepidation than when she stood on the threshold of her first interview with her new self. She was to meet a strange, potent being, who would unlock for her those doors against which, with fierce, futile longing, she had been wont to cast herself, since woman's instinct had burst its germ.

She entered her bedroom and locked the door. But she did not go to the mirror at once; she was loath to relinquish pleasurable uncertainty. She sank on a rug before the hearth and locked her hands about her knee in the attitude which had been a habit from childhood. For a few moments she sat enjoying the beauty of the room, the successful embodiment of one of her dearest dreams. The inlaid floor was thick with rugs that had been woven in the looms of the Orient. The walls were hung with cloth of gold, and the ceiling was a splendid picture of Nautch girls dancing in the pleasure palace of an Indian prince. The bed, enameled to represent ivory, stood on a dais over which trailed a wonderful Hindoo shawl. Over the couches and divans were flung rich stuffs, feathered rugs, and odd strips of Indian conceits. The sleeping-room was separated from the boudoir by a row of pillars, and from the unseen apartment came the smell of burning incense.

Hermia leaned back against a pile of cushions, and, clasping her hands behind her head, gazed about her with half-closed eyes. There was a sense of familiarity about it all that cast a shadow over her content. It was a remarkably close reproduction of an ideal, considering that the ideal had been filtered through the practical brain of a nineteenth century decorator—but therein lay the sting. She had dreamed of this room, lived in it; it was as familiar as Bessie's parlor in Brooklyn, with its tidies and what-nots; it wanted the charm of novelty. She had a protesting sense of being defrauded; it was all very well to realize one's imaginings, but how much sweeter if some foreign hand had cunningly woven details within and glamour above, of which she had never dreamed. The supreme delight of atmospheric architecture is the vague, abiding sense that high on the pinnacle we have reared, and which has shot above vision's range, is a luminous apex, divine in color, wondrous in form, a will-o'-the-wisp fluttering in the clouds of imagination.

Hermia sighed, but shrugged her shoulders. Had not life taught her philosophy?

Where the gold-stuffs parted on the wall opposite the pillars, a mirror, ivory-framed, reached from floor to ceiling. Hermia rose and walked a few steps toward the glass without daring to raise her eyes. Then with a little cry she ran to the lamps and turned them out. She flung off her clothes, threw the lace thing she called her night-gown over her head, and jumped into bed. She pulled the covers over her face, and for ten minutes lay and reviled herself. Then, with an impatient and audible exclamation at her cowardice, she got up and lit every lamp in the room.

She walked over to the mirror and looked long at herself, fearfully at first, then gravely, at last smilingly. She was beautiful, because she was unique. Her victory was the more assured because her beauty would be the subject of many a dispute. She had not the delicate features and conventional coloring that women admire, but a certain stormy, reckless originality which would appeal swiftly and directly to variety-loving man. Her eyes, clear and brilliant as they had once been dull and cold, were deep and green as the sea. Her hair, which lay in a wiry cloud about her head and swept her brows, was a shining mass of brazen threads. Her complexion

had acquired the clear tint of ivory and was stained with the rich hue of health. The very expression of her face had changed; the hard, dogged, indifferent look had fled. With hope and health and wishes gratified had come the lifting and banishment of the old mask—that crystallization of her spirit's discontent. Yes, she was a beautiful woman. She might not have a correct profile or a soft roundness of face, but she was a beautiful woman.

She pinched her cheek; it was firm and elastic. She put her hands about her throat; it rose from its lace nest, round and polished as an ivory pillar. She slipped the night-gown from her shoulders; the line of the back of her head and neck was beautiful to see, and a crisp, waved strand of shorter hair that had fallen from its place looked like a piece of gold filigree on an Indian vase. Her shoulders did not slope, but they might have been covered with thickest satin. She raised one arm and curved it slowly, then let it hang straight at her side. She must always have had a well-shaped arm, for it tapered from shoulder to wrist; but health and care alone could give the transparent brilliancy and flawless surface.

Hermia gazed long at herself. She swayed her beautiful body until it looked like a reed in an Indian swamp, blown by a midnight breeze. It was as lithe and limber as young bamboo. She drew the pins from her hair. It fell about her like a million infinitesimal tongues of living flame, and through them her green eyes shone and her white skin gleamed.

Tossing her hair back she sprang forward and kissed her reflection in the glass, a long, greeting, grateful kiss, and her eyes blazed with passionate rapture. Then she slowly raised her arms above her head, every pulse throbbing with delicious exultation, every nerve leaping with triumph and hope, every artery a river of tumultuous, victorious, springing life.

CHAPTER IX.

HELEN SIMMS.

A year later Hermia was sitting by her library fire one afternoon when the butler threw back the tapestry that hung over the door and announced Helen Simms. Hermia rose to greet her visitor with an exclamation of pleasure that had in it an accent of relief. She had adopted Helen Simms as the friend of her new self; as yet, but one knew the old Hermia. Helen was so essentially modern and practical that restless longings and romantic imaginings fled at her approach.

Miss Simms, as she entered the room, her cheeks flushed by the wind, and a snow-flake on her turban, was a charming specimen of her kind. She had a tall, trim, slender figure, clad in sleek cloth, and carried with soldierly uprightness. Her small head was loftily and unaffectedly poised, her brown hair was drawn up under her quiet little hat with smoothness and precision, and a light, severe fluff adorned her forehead. She had no beauty, but she had the clean, clear, smooth, red-and-ivory complexion of the New York girl, and her teeth were perfect. She looked like a thoroughbred, splendidly-groomed young greyhound, and was a glowing sample of the virtues of exercise, luxurious living, and the refinement of two or three generations.

"What do you mean by moping here all by yourself?" she exclaimed, with a swift smile which gave a momentary flash of teeth. "You were to have met me at Madame Lefarge's, and have tried on your new gown. I waited for you a half-hour, and in a beastly cold room at that."

"I beg your pardon," replied Hermia, with sudden contrition, "but I forgot all about it—I may as well tell the bald truth. But I am glad to see you. I am blue."

Helen took an upright chair opposite Hermia's, and lightly leaned upon her umbrella as if it were a staff. "I should think you would be blue in this 'gray ancestral room,'" she said. "It looks as if unnumbered state conspiracies and intrigues against unhappy Duncans had been concocted in it. I do not deny that it is all very charming, but I never come into it without a shiver and a side-glance at the dark corners."

She looked about her with a smile which had little fear in it.

"These stern gray walls and that vaulted ceiling carry you out of Second Avenue, I admit; and those stained-glass windows and all that tapestry and antique furniture waft me back to the days of my struggles with somebody or other's history of England. But, *Hermia mia*, I think it would be good for you to have a modern drawing-room in your house, and to sit in it occasionally. It is this semblance of past romance which makes you discontented with the world as you find it."

Hermia gave a sigh. "I know," she said, "but I can't help it. I am tired of everything. I dread the thought of another winter exactly like last. The same men, same receptions, same compliments, same everything."

"My dear, you are blasé. I have been expecting it. It follows on the heels of the first season, as delicate eyes follow scarlet fever. The eyes get well, and so will you. Five years from now you will not be as blasé as you are this moment. Look at me. I have been out four years. I was blasé three years ago, but to-day I could not live without society and its thousand little excitements. See what you have to look forward to!"

Hermia smiled. "You certainly are a shining example of patience and fortitude, but I fear you have something in you which I lack. I shall grow more and more bored and discontented. Three

years of this would kill me. I wish I could go to Europe, but Aunt Frances cannot go yet, and I don't care to go alone the first time, for I want to see the society of the different capitals. After that I shall go to Europe by myself. But in the mean time what am I to do?"

"Have a desperate flirtation; I mean, of course, a prolonged one. Heaven knows you are the most fearful flirt in New York—while it lasts. Only it never lasts more than a week and a day."

"I am not a flirt," said Hermia. "I have not the first essential of a flirt—patience. I have been simply trying with all my might to fall in love. And I cannot have a prolonged flirtation with a man who disappoints me."

"My dear, as a veteran, let me advise you. So long as you keep up this hunt for the ideal you will be bored by everything and everybody in actual life. All this sentiment and romance and imagination of yours are very charming, and when I recall the occasions wherein you have kept me awake until two in the morning, I forgive you, because I found you quite as entertaining as a novel. But it is only spoiling you for the real pleasures of life. You must be more philosophical. If you can't find your ideal, make up your mind to be satisfied with the best you can get. There are dozens of charming men in New York, and you meet them every week. They may not be romantic, they may look better in evening clothes than in a tin hat and leather legs, but they are quite too fascinating for all that. Just put your imagination to some practical use, and fancy yourself in love with one of them for a month. After that it will be quite easy."

"I can't!" exclaimed Hermia emphatically, as she turned to pour out the tea the butler had brought in. "I get everything they know out of them in three interviews, and then we've nothing left to talk about."

Helen removed her glove from her white hand with its flashing rings, and, changing her seat to one nearer the table, took up a thin slice of bread-and-butter. "Is it five o'clock already?" she said, "I must run. I have a dinner to-night, the opera, and two balls." She nibbled her bread and sipped her tea as if the resolution to run had satisfied her conscience. "Shall I have the pleasure of seeing you have twice as many partners as myself?"

"No; I am not going out to-night. You know I draw the line at three times a week, and I have already touched the limit."

"Quite right. You will be beautiful as long as you live. Between Miss Newton, three nights' sleep a week, and a large waist, you will be quoted to your grandchildren as a nineteenth-century Ninon de l'Enclos. But, to return to the truffles we were discussing before the tea came in—another trouble is that you are too appallingly clever for the 'infants.' Why do you not go into the literary set and find an author? All I have ever known are fearful bores, but they might suit you." She put down her tea-cup. "I have it!" she exclaimed; "Ogden Cryder has just come back from Europe, and I am positive that he is the man you have been waiting for. You must meet him. I met him two or three years ago, and really, for a literary man, he was quite charming. Awfully good-looking, too."

"He is one of the dialect fiends, is he not?" asked Hermia, languidly. "It is rather awkward meeting an author whose books you haven't read, and I simply cannot read dialect."

"Oh! get one or two and skim them. The thread of the story is all you want; then you can discuss the heroine with him, and insist that she ought to have done the thing he did not make her do. That will flatter him and give you a subject to start off with. An author scares me to death, and, upon the rare occasions when I meet one, I always fly at him with some reproach about the cruel way in which he treated the heroine, or ask him breathlessly to *please* tell me whether she and the hero are ever going to get out of their difficulties or are to remain *planté là* for the rest of their lives. This works off the embarrassment, you see, and after that we talk

about Mrs. Blank's best young man."

Hermia smiled. It was difficult to imagine Miss Simms frightened, breathless, or embarrassed. She looked as if emotion had not stirred her since the days when she had shrieked in baby wrath because she could not get her chubby toes into her toothless mouth.

"Ogden Cryder might at least have something to talk about," Hermia answered. "Perhaps it would be worth while."

"It would, my dear. I am convinced that he is the man, and I know where you can meet him. Papa has tickets for the next meeting of the Club of Free Discussion, and I will tell him to take you. He knows Mr. Cryder, and shall have strict orders to introduce you. What is more, you will have the pleasure of hearing the lion roar for an hour before you meet him. He is to give the lecture of the evening."

"Well," said Hermia, "I shall be glad to go, if your father will be good enough to take me. Which of Cryder's books shall I read up?"

"'Cornfield Yarns' and 'How Uncle Zebediah sowed dat Cotton Field' are the ones everybody talks about most. Some of the yarns are quite sweet, and the papers say—I always read the criticisms, they give the outline of the plot, and it saves an awful lot of trouble—that Uncle Zebediah is the most superb African of modern fiction. Uncle Tom has hidden his diminished head. 'Unc. Zeb.,' as he is familiarly called, rolls forth an amount of dialect to the square inch which none but a Cryder could manipulate. It is awful work pulling through it, but we all have to work for success in this life."

She drew on her long, loose, tan-colored glove, pushed her bangles over it, then carefully tucked the top under her cuff. "Well, *addio, Hermia mia*," she said, rising; "I will send you a note to-morrow morning and let you know if anything can possibly happen to prevent papa going on Wednesday evening. In the mean time, make up your mind to be vanquished by Ogden Cryder. He really is enchanting."

CHAPTER X.

A MENTAL PHOTOGRAPH GALLERY.

After Helen left, Hermia went up to her room. There she did what she never failed to do the moment she entered her bedroom—walked over to the glass and looked at herself. She had not even yet got used to the idea of her beauty, and sometimes approached the mirror with dread lest her new self should prove a dream. She saw nothing to alarm her. A year's dissipation had not impaired her looks. Excitement and good living agreed with her, and Miss Newton tyrannized over her like the hygienic duenna that she was.

She sank down on the floor before the long glass, resting her elbow on a cushion. Her crouching attitude reminded her of the women whose lines had fallen in days of barbaric splendor. It is not to be supposed for a moment that this effect was accidental. Hermia had determined, before she burst upon New York, that her peculiar individuality should be the suggestion of the untrammelled barbarian held in straining leash by the requirements of civilization. Her green eyes and tawny hair were the first requisites, and she managed her pliant body with a lithe grace which completed the semblance.

She wore to-day a tea-gown of Louis XIV. brocade and lace, and she watched herself with an amused smile. A year and a half ago her wardrobe had consisted of coarse serges and gingham aprons.

She put her head on the cushion, nestled her body into the feather rug, and in a vague, indolent way let her memory rove through the little photograph gallery in her brain set apart for the accumulations of the past twelve months. There were a great many photographs in that gallery, and their shapes and dimensions were as diverse as their subjects. Some were so large that they swept from floor to ceiling, although their surface might reflect but one impression; others were too small to catch the eye of the casual observer, and the imprint on them was like one touch of a water-colorist's brush. Many pasteboards of medium size were there whose surfaces were crowded like an ant-hill at sundown; and pushed into corners or lying under a dust-heap were negatives, undeveloped and fading. At one end of the gallery was a great square plate, and on it there was no impression of any sort, nor ever had been.

Hermia pushed up her loose sleeve and pressed her face into the warm bend of her arm. On the whole, the past year had been almost satisfactory. A clever brain, an iron will, and a million dollars can do much, and that much Hermia's combined gifts had accomplished.

She opened the windows of her photograph gallery and dusted out the cobwebs, then, beginning at the top, sauntered slowly down. She looked at her first appearance in the world of fashion. It is after the completion of her winter's wardrobe by a bevy of famous tailors, and she wears a gown of light-gray cloth and a tiny bonnet of silvery birds. The *début* is in St. Mark's; and as she walks up the center aisle to the Suydam pew, her form as straight as a young sapling, her head haughtily yet nonchalantly poised, every curve of her glove-fitting gown proclaiming the hand that cut it, Second Avenue catches its breath, raises its eyebrows, and exchanges glances of well-bred, aristocratic surprise. Late that week it calls, and this time is not repulsed, but goes away enchanted. It does not take long for the unseen town crier to flit from Second Avenue to Fifth, and one day his budget of news sends a ripple over the central stream. John Suydam's heiress, a beautiful girl of twenty, with a style all her own, yet not violating a law of good form! The old red-brick house transformed into an enchanted palace, with a

remarkably wide-awake princess, and a sacrifice to modern proprieties in the shape of a New England aunt! How unusual and romantic! yet all as it should be. We begin to remember poor Crosby Suydam and his charming young wife. We recall the magnificence of their entertainments in the house on lower Fifth Avenue—now resplendent with a milliner's sign. Both dead? How sad! And to think that John Suydam had a million all the time! The old wretch! But how enchanting that he had the decency to leave it to this beautiful girl! We will call.

They do call; and a distant relative of Hermia's father, Mrs. Cotton Dykman, comes forward with stately tread and gracious welcome and offers her services as social sponsor. Hermia accepts the offer with gratitude, and places her brougham at Mrs. Dykman's disposal.

Mrs. Dykman is a widow approaching fifty, with lagging steps yet haughty mien. Her husband omitted to leave her more than a competence; but she lives in Washington Square in a house which was her husband's grandfather's, and holds her head so high and wears so much old lace and so many family diamonds (which she hid in the wall during the late Cotton's lifetime) that the Four Hundred have long since got into the habit of forgetting her bank account. To her alone does Hermia confide the secret of her past external self and the methods of reconstruction, and Mrs. Dykman respects her ever after.

In a photograph near the head of the gallery Hermia and Mrs. Dykman are seated by the library fire, and Hermia is discoursing upon a question which has given her a good deal of thought.

"I want to be a New York society woman to my finger-tips," she exclaims, sitting forward in her chair; "that is, I want to be *au fait* in every particular. I would not for the world be looked upon as an alien; but at the same time I want to be a distinctive figure in it. I want to be aggressively *myself*. The New York girl is of so marked a type, Aunt Frances, that you would know one if you met her in a Greek bandit's cave. She is unlike anything else on the face of the earth. You cross the river to Brooklyn, you travel an hour and a half to Philadelphia, you do not see a woman who faintly resembles her unless she has been imported direct. The New York girl was never included in the scheme of creation. When the combined forces of a new civilization and the seven-leagued stride of democracy made her a necessity, Nature fashioned a mold differing in shape and tint from all others in her storehouse, and cast her in it. It is locked up in a chest and kept for her exclusive use. The mold is made of ivory, and the shape is long and straight and exceeding slim. There is a slight roundness about the bust, and a general neatness and trimness which are independent of attire. And each looks carefully fed and thoroughly groomed. Each has brightness in her eye and elasticity in her step. And through the cheek of each the blood flows in exactly the same red current about a little white island. Now all this is very charming, but then she lacks—just a little—individuality. And I *must* have my distinctive personality. There seems nothing left but to be eccentric. Tell me what line to take."

Mrs. Dykman, who has been listening with a slight frown on her brow and a smile on her lips, replies in her low, measured accents, which a cataclysm could not accelerate nor sharpen: "My dear, before I answer your amusing tirade, let me once more endeavor to impress you with the importance of repose. You may be as beautiful and as original as your brains and will can make you, but without repose of manner you will be like an unfinished impressionist daub. Few American women have it unless they have lived in England; but I want you to take coals to Newcastle when you make your *début* in London society.

"In regard to the other question," she continues, "experience and observation and thirty years of that treadmill we call society have taught me a good many things. One of these things is that eccentricity is the tacit acknowledgment of lack of individuality. A person with native

originality does not feel the necessity of forcing it down people's throats. The world finds it out soon enough, and likes it in spite of its own even pace and sharply defined creeds. That is, always provided the originality wears a certain conventional garb: if you would conquer the world, you must blind and humor it by donning its own portable envelope. Do you understand what I mean, my dear? You must not startle people by doing eccentric things; you must not get the reputation of being a *poseuse*—it is vulgar and tiresome. You must simply be quietly different from everybody else. There is a fine but decided line, my dear girl, between eccentricity and individuality, and you must keep your lorgnette upon it. Otherwise, people will laugh at you, just as they will be afraid of you if they discover that you are clever. By the way, you must not forget that last point. The average American woman is shallow, with an appearance of cleverness. You must be clever, with an appearance of shallowness. To the ordinary observer the effect is precisely the same.”

She rises to her feet and adjusts her bonnet. “It is growing late and I must go. Think over what I have said. You have individuality enough; you need not fear that people will fail to find it out; and you assuredly do not look like any one else in New York.”

Hermia stands up and gives Mrs. Dykman's *tournure* a little twist. “You are a jewel, Aunt Frances. What should I do without you?”

Whereupon Mrs. Dykman looks pleased and goes home in Hermia's brougham.

Hermia is fairly launched in society about the first of January, and goes “everywhere” until the end of the season. It gets to be somewhat monotonous toward the end, but, on the whole, she rather likes it. She is what is called a success; that is to say, she becomes a professional beauty, and is much written about in the society papers. She receives a great many flowers, constant and assiduous attention at balls, and her dancing is much admired. She gets plenty of compliments, and is much stared upon at the opera and when driving in the park. Her reception days and evenings are always crowded, and her entertainments—supervised by Mrs. Dykman and a valuable young man named Richard Winston—are pronounced without flaw, and receive special mention in the dailies.

And yet—Hermia rubbed her fingers thoughtfully up and down several of the pictures as if to make their figures clearer—in her heart she did not deem herself an unqualified success. Men ran after her—but because she was the fashion, not because they loved her.

During that first winter and the ensuing season at Newport, she had a great many proposals, but with two or three exceptions she believed them to have been more or less interested. She did not seem to “take” with men. This had angered her somewhat; she had expected to conquer the world, and she did not like obstacles.

She had an odd and voluptuous beauty, she had brain and all the advantages of unique and charming surroundings, and she flattered men when she remembered that it was the thing to do. Was it because the men felt rather than knew that they did not understand her? Or was it because she did not understand them? She was keenly aware of her lack of experience, and that her knowledge of men was chiefly derived from books. And wherein she was right and wherein wrong she could not tell.

She shrugged her shoulders. “I suppose experience will come with time,” she thought, “and I certainly have not much to wish for—if—only—”

She clasped her hands behind her head and turned her mental eyeglass upon the unused plate at the head of the gallery.

When the news of her good fortune had come, her heart's first leap had been toward the lover who awaited her in the world thrown at her feet. That lover, that hero of her dream-world,

she had not found. Occasionally she had detected a minor characteristic in some man, and by it been momentarily attracted. In no case had the characteristic been supplemented by others; and after a long and eager search she had resigned herself to the painful probability that ideals belonged to the realm of the immaterial.

But, if she had sighed farewell to the faithful and much-enduring hero of her years of adversity, she had by no means relinquished the idea of loving. Few women had ever tried more determinedly and more persistently to love, and few had met with less success. She had imagined that in a world of men a woman's only problem must be whom to choose. It had not taken her a year to discover that it is easier to scratch the earth from its molten heart than to love.

She sprang to her feet and walked up and down the room with swift, impatient steps. Was she never to be happy? never to know the delights of love, the warmth of a man's caress, the sudden, tumultuous bursting from their underground fastness of the mighty forces within her? Was she to go through life without living her romance, without knowing the sweet, keen joy of hidden love? Would she end by marrying a club-room epigram flavored with absinthe, and settle down to a light or lurid variation on Bessie's simple little theme? She laughed aloud. Perhaps it need not be stated that a year of fashionable life had increased her contempt for matrimony.

Was Ogden Cryder the man? An author, yet a man of the world; a man of intellect, yet with fascination and experience of women. It sounded like! It sounded like! Oh! if he were! He might have flaws. He might be the polaric opposite of her ideal. Let him! If he had brain and passion, skill and sympathy, she would love him with every fiber of her being, and thank him on her knees for compelling her so to do.

CHAPTER XI.

A TAILOR-MADE FATE.

Helen Simms was a young woman who had cantered gracefully under the flick of society's whip since the night of her *début*. Occasionally she broke into a trot, and anon into a run. The speedier locomotion took place on unworn by-paths; when on the broad highway she was a most sedate representative of her riding-school. At times she had been known—to a select few—to kick; and the kick had invariably occurred at the crossing of the highway and the by-path, and just before she had made up her mind to forsake the road for the hedges.

She had all the virtues of her kind. On Sunday mornings she attended St. Thomas's, and after service was over walked home with her favorite youth, whom she patronizingly spoke of as her "infant." In the afternoon she entertained another "infant" or read a French novel. Nor was her life entirely given over to frivolity. She belonged to the sewing-class of her church, and like its other members fulfilled her mission as a quotable example, if she pricked her fingers seldom; and once a week she attended a Shakespeare "propounding." She took a great deal of exercise, skimmed through all the light literature of the day, including the magazines, and even knew a little science, just enough to make the occasional clever man she met think her a prodigy as she smiled up into his face and murmured something about "the great body of force" or a late experiment in telepathy.

She had a bright way of saying nothing, a cool, shrewd head, and an endless stock of small-talk. Both sexes approved of her as a clever, charming, well-regulated young woman—all of which she indisputably was.

Enthusiasm had long since been drilled out of her, but she had for Hermia an attachment very sincere as far as it went—it may be added that, if there had been more of Miss Simms, there would have been more attachment. It is possible that Hermia, without her brilliant position, would not have attracted the attention of Miss Simms, but it is only just to Helen to say that the conditions affected her not a whit; she was quite free from snobbery.

She liked Hermia because she could not understand her—much as she was influenced by the sea in a storm, or by mountains with lightning darting about their crests. Whenever she entered Hermia's presence she always felt as if the air had become suddenly fresher; and she liked new sensations. She did not in the least resent the fact that she could not understand Hermia, that her chosen friend was intellectually a hemisphere beyond her, and in character infinitely more complex. She was pleased at her own good taste, and quite generous enough to admire where she could not emulate.

She was constantly amused at Hermia's abiding and aggressive desire to fall in love, but she was by no means unsympathetic. She would have regarded an emotional tumult in her own being as a bore, but for Hermia she thought it quite the most appropriate and advisable thing. Once in a while, in a half-blind way, she came into momentary contact with the supreme loneliness and craving of Hermia's nature, and she invariably responded with a sympathetic throb and a wish that the coming man would not tarry so long.

She was so glad she had thought of Cryder. She honestly believed him to be the one man of all men who could make the happiness of her friend; and she entered the ranks of the Fates with the pleasurable suspicion that she was the author of Hermia's infinite good.

She surprised her father, the morning after her last interview with Hermia, by coming down

to breakfast. She was careful to let him finish his roll to the last crumb and to read his paper to the acrid end. Then she went over and put her finger-tips under his chin.

He glanced up with a groan. "What do you want now?" he demanded, looking at her over his eye-glasses. His periodical pettings had made him cynical.

"Nothing—for myself. Did you not say that some one had sent you tickets for the next meeting of the Free Discussion?"

"Yes; but you can't have them to give to some girl who would only go to show herself, or to some boy whose thimbleful of gray matter would be added before the lecture was half over. I am going to hear that lecture myself."

"How perfectly enchanting! That is what I wished, yet dared not hope for. And you are not only going yourself, but you are going to take Hermia Suydam with you."

"Oh!" Mr. Simms raised his eyebrows. "I am? Very well. I am sure I have no objection. Miss Suydam is the finest girl in New York."

"Of course she is, and she will make a sensation at the club; you will be the envied of all men. And there is one thing else you are to do. As soon as the exercises are over I want you to present Ogden Cryder to her. I have particular reasons for wishing them to meet."

"What are the reasons?"

"Never mind. You do as you are told, and ask no questions"—this in a tone which extracted the sting, and was supplemented by a light kiss on Mr. Simms' smooth forehead.

"Very well, very well," said her father, obediently, "she shall meet him; remind me of it just before I leave. And now I must run. I have a case in court at ten o'clock."

He stood up and gave one of his handsome, iron-gray side-whiskers an absent caress. He was not a particularly good-looking man, but he had a keen, dark eye, and a square, heavy jaw, in both of which features lay the secret of his great success in his profession. He was devoted to Helen, and had allowed her, with only an occasional protest, to bring him up. He could be brusque and severe in court, but in Helen's hands he was a wax ball into which she delighted to poke her dainty fingers.

Helen wrote a note to Hermia, and he took it with him to send by an unwinged Mercury.

On Friday morning Helen went over to Second Avenue to make sure that her friend had not changed her mind. She found Hermia in her boudoir, with one of Cryder's books in her hand and another on a table beside her.

"What do you think of him?" demanded Miss Simms, somewhat anxiously, as she adjusted her steel-bound self in a pile of cushions—straight-backed chairs in this room there were none.

Hermia shrugged her shoulders: "A decorous seasoning of passion; a clear, delicate gravy of sentiment; a pinch of pathos; a garnish of analysis; and a solid roast of dialect. Woe is me!—I have read two whole volumes; and I pray that I may like the author better than his books. But he is clever; there is no denying that!"

"Oh, horribly clever! What are you going to wear, to-night?"

"That dark-green velvet I showed you the other day."

"Lovely! And it will match your eyes to a shade. You will look, as usual, as if you had just stepped out of an old picture. Mr. Cryder will put you in a book."

"If he does I shall be a modern picture, not an old one. That man could not write a tale of fifty years ago."

"So much the better for you! What you want is to fall in love with a modern man, and let him teach you that the mediæval was a great animal, who thought of nothing but what he ate and drank. I do not claim that the species is extinct; but, at least, in these days we have a

choice.”

CHAPTER XII.

THE CLUB OF FREE DISCUSSION.

Hermia looked at her reflection that evening with a smile. The shadowed emerald of her velvet gown made her hair glow like vibrant flame. The color wandered through her cheeks and emptied itself into her lips. Her eyes were as green as the limpid floor of ocean-hollowed caverns. Across her ivory-white shoulder swept a curving blue vein, thin as an infant's lash, and on the rise of her right breast were three little moles, each marking the corner of a tiny triangle.

Mr. Simms called for her promptly, and when they arrived at the club-rooms they strolled about looking at the pictures and the people until the exercises began. There were many literary and artistic celebrities present, all of whom looked much like ordinary and well-bred people; but to Hermia there was a luminous halo about each. It was her first experience in the literary world, and she felt as if she had entered the atmosphere of a dream. It was one of her few satisfactory experiments. She was much stared at; everybody knew her by reputation if not by sight; and a number of men asked to be presented.

Among them was Mr. Overton, the editor who had published her poem in his magazine. She changed color as he came up, but his manner at once assured her that she was not recognized: he would have vindicated his fraternity, indeed, had he been keen-sighted enough to recognize in this triumphant, radiant creature the plain, ill-dressed, stooping girl with whom he had talked for half an hour at the close of a winter's day two years before. Hermia, of course, no longer wrote; life offered her too many other distractions.

Mr. Overton suggested that they should go into the lecture-room and secure good seats. He found them chairs and took one beside Hermia.

"Ogden Cryder gives the address to-night," he said, after he had satisfied Hermia's curiosity in regard to the names of a half-dozen people. "Do you like his books?"

"Fairly. Do you?"

Mr. Overton laughed. "That is rather a direct question, considering that I print one of his stories about every six months."

"Oh, you might not like them. You might publish them out of tender regard for the demands of your readers."

Mr. Overton had a characteristic American face, thin, nervous, shrewd, pleasant. He gave Hermia a smile of unwonted frankness. "I will confide to you, Miss Suydam, that such is the case with about two-thirds I publish. I thank Heaven that I do not have to read a magazine as well as publish it. I have an associate editor who sits with his finger on the pulse of the public, and relieves me of much vexation of spirit."

"But tell me what you think of Mr. Cryder."

Mr. Overton raised his eyebrows. "He is indisputably the best dialect writer we have, and he is a charming exponent of surface passions. Whether he would drown if he plunged below the surface is a question; at all events he might become improper, and morality pays in this magazine era. There he is now; no doubt we shall have a delightful address."

Hermia turned her head quickly, but Cryder had taken a chair at the foot of the rostrum, and there were many heads between her own and his. A moment later, however, the president of the club made the preliminary remarks, and then gave place to Cryder.

Hermia watched him breathlessly as he ascended the steps and stood beside the table, waiting for the hearty welcome to subside. Was it *he* at last? He was certainly good to look at; she had never seen more charming eyes—clear golden-hazel, half melancholy, wholly intelligent. His small, well-shaped head was thickly covered with short, soft, gold-brown hair; the delicate, aristocratic features were as finely cut as those on an intaglio; and the thin, curved lips were shaded by a small mustache. His figure, tall, light, graceful, had a certain vibrating activity even in repose. His hand was white and tapering as that of a woman, and his auditors were given opportunity to appreciate it.

The subject of the lecture was “The Dialect Element in American Fiction,” and Mr. Cryder did it justice in a clear, ringing, musical voice. He very properly remarked that it was the proud boast of America that no other country, ancient or modern, could present such an array of famous dialects, consequently no other country had ever had such infinite variety in her literature. He would say nothing of the several hundred dialects as yet awaiting the Columbus-pen of genius; he would merely speak of those nine already discovered and immortalized—the Negro, the Yankee, the Southern, the Creole, the Tennessee Mountain, the Cow-boy, the Bret Harte Miner, the Hoosier, and the Chinese. Each of these, although springing from one bosom, namely, that of the Great American People, had as distinct an individuality as if the product of an isolated planet. Such a feature was unique in the history of any country or any time. The various *patois* of the French, the provincialisms of the English, the barbarisms of the Scotch, the brogue of the Irish, were but so many bad and inconsequent variations upon an original theme. Reflect, therefore, upon the immense importance of photographing and preserving American neologies for the benefit of posterity! In the course of time would inevitably come the homogeneity of the human race; the negro, for instance, would pervade every corner of the civilized earth, and his identity become hopelessly entangled with that of his equally de-individualized blonde brother. His dialect would be a forgotten art! Contemporaries would have no knowledge of it save through the painstaking artists of their ancestors’ time. Reflect, then, upon the heavy responsibility which lay upon the shoulders of the author of to-day. Picture what must be the condition of his conscience at the end of his record if he has failed to do his duty by the negro dialect! Picture the reproaches of future generations if they should be left ignorant of the unique vernacular of their grandfathers’ serfs! (Applause.) He did not lay such stress upon the superior importance of the negro dialect because he had enrolled himself among its faulty exponents; he had taken his place in its ranks *because* of that superior importance. Nevertheless, he was by no means blind to the virtues of those other eight delightful strings in the Great National Instrument. No one enjoyed more than he the liquid and incomprehensible softness of the Creole, the penetrating, nasonic strength of the Yankee, the delicious independence of the Hoosier, the pine-sweet, redwood-calm transcriptions of the prose-laureate of the West. He loved them all, and he gloried in the literary monument of which they were the separate stones.

To do Mr. Cryder’s oration justice would be a feat which no modest novelist would attempt. Those who would read that memorable speech in its entirety and its purity will find it in the archives of the club, in the sixth volume of the Sessional Records. After reading brief and pithy extracts from the nine most famous dialect stories of the day, he sat down with the applause of approval in his ears.

Hermia turned to Mr. Overton: “He was guying, I suppose,” she said.

Mr. Overton stared. “Certainly not,” he said, severely. “The value of precisely rendered dialect is incalculable.”

Hermia, quite snubbed, said no more; and in a few moments, Mr. Duncan, a shrewd, humorous-looking little Scotchman, rose to reply.

“I have nothing whatever to say in contradiction to Mr. Cryder’s remarks regarding the value of dialect,” he said, looking about with a bland, deprecating smile. “On the contrary, I have yet another word to add in its favor. I hold that the value of dialect to the American author has never yet been estimated. When a story has a lot of dialect, you never discover that it hasn’t anything else. (Laughter, and a surprised frown from Cryder.) Furthermore, as America is too young to have an imagination, the dialect is an admirable and original substitute for plot and situations.” (Laughter and mutterings; also a scowl from Cryder.) “Again, there is nothing so difficult as the handling of modern English: it is a far speedier and easier road to fame to manipulate a dialect familiar to only an insignificant section of our glorious sixty millions.” (“Hear, hear!” from a pair of feminine lips, and many sympathetic glances at Cryder’s flashing eyes.) “Yet again, the common fault found with our (I wish it understood that I speak always from the standpoint of the country which I have adopted)—with our writers is lack of passion. Now, nobody can be expected to be passionate when groaning in the iron stays of dialect. Dialect is bit and curb to the emotions, and it is only an American who is sharp enough to perceive the fact and make the most of it. What is more, pathos sounds much better in dialect than in cold, bald English, just as impropriety sounds better in French, and love-making in Spanish. Contrast, for instance, the relative pathos of such sentences as these—the throbbing sadness of the one, the harsh bathos of the other: ‘I done lubbed you, Sally!’ ‘I loved you, Maria.’” (Laughter from one side of the house; ominous silence from the other.) “Truly, ’tis in the setting the jewel shines. I would like to say, in conclusion,” he went on, imperturbably, “that Mr. Cryder, in his enumeration of American neologics has omitted one as important and distinctive as any in his category, namely, that of fashionable society. In the virility, the variety, and the amplitude of her slang, America is England’s most formidable rival.”

He left the platform amidst limited applause, and then Mr. Cryder’s pent-up wrath burst forth, and he denounced in scathing terms and stinging epigrams the foreigner who had proved himself incapable of appreciating one of his country’s most remarkable developments, and attempted to satirize it from his petty point of view.

The auditors were relieved when the exercises were over and the club’s disruption postponed, and, betaking themselves to the supper-room, dismissed both lecture and reply from their minds.

Hermia was standing by one of the tables talking to three or four men, when Mr. Simms brought up Cryder and introduced him. Cryder looked absent and somewhat annoyed. He was evidently not in a mood to be impressed by feminine loveliness. At the end of a few moments Hermia wisely let him go, although with a renewed sense of the general flatness of life. At the same time she was somewhat amused, and sensible enough to know that it could not have been otherwise.

CHAPTER XIII.

OGDEN CRYDER.

Only the nineteenth century could have evolved Cryder. The infancy of a democratic civilization produces giants. The giants build hot-houses, and a flower, delicate, beautiful, exquisitely perfumed, but fragile, light as bubbles of blown glass, is the result. America is now doing the best she can with her hot-house flora. She has no great men, but the flora is wondrous fine. Outside the forcing-houses is a wilderness of weeds in which lies her future's hope.

Cryder would have taken the medal at an orchid show. He was light as a summer breeze, yet as stimulating and fresh. He was daintily humorous, yet seldom witty enough to excite envy. His conversation was like the song of a lark, clear, brilliant, trilling, with never a bass note to disturb the harmony. In a quick, keen, flashing way, he had an exact knowledge of the salient world. He was artistic to his finger-tips, and preferred an aquarelle to an oil. He had loved many times and hoped to love as many more, and his love was always that of an æsthete. For coarse passions he had a cold contempt. He had broken many roses from their stems, but more because he thought an herbarium looked better when filled than because he enjoyed the plucking of the flower. Probably it is needless to observe that he never drank more than a pint bottle of champagne, and that he never over-ate.

The day after his address at the club he was walking down the avenue when he met Helen Simms. He turned back with her, and finished the afternoon in her drawing-room.

Helen did not give him so much of her time without an object. She cared little for Cryder, and few of her doings were unprompted by motive; life was too brief.

"You met Miss Suydam last night, did you not?" she asked, when Cryder was comfortably established in an easy-chair near the fire.

"Yes, for a moment. I was a little put out by Duncan's attack on me, and only stayed for a few words. I needed the solace of a cigarette."

"I read the account of the affair in this morning's papers. Mr. Duncan's remarks were purely foolish, as he must have realized when he saw them in print. However, you have the consolation of knowing that after your reply he will not be likely to attack you again. But I am glad you met Miss Suydam. She will interest you as a study. She is all the rage at present. Every other man in town is in love with her."

Cryder turned to her with some interest in his eyes. "Is she so very fascinating? She is certainly handsome—yes—stylishly handsome."

"Oh, she is a beauty! Such a unique type! And she is quite as different from other people herself. That is her great trouble. She is called a terrible flirt, but it is the men's fault, not hers. She is always looking for something, and can never find it."

"Sad and strange! Is she a young woman with yearnings?"

"Not at all. She is the most sensible woman I know. She is merely unusually clever, consequently she is very lonely. I do not believe any man will ever satisfy her. She is like the sleeping princess in the enchanted castle. She shuts herself up in that wonderful house of hers and dreams of the lover who never comes."

"You touch my fancy; and what do you mean by her wonderful house?"

"That house would delight your author's soul. Every room is the materialization of a dream,

as Hermia would say;” and she gave him an account of her friend’s inartistic but original abode.

Cryder listened with much interest. Romance was a dead-letter to him, but he was alive to the picturesque. He concluded that it would be quite enchanting to make love to a woman in a feudal library or an Indian jungle, and more than satisfactory to awaken the sleeping beauty. It would be a charming episode for his present brief stay in New York, altogether quite the choicest specimen in his herbarium. What she was waiting for was a combination of brain and skill.

“You have made me want to know her,” he said, “but, of course, she did not ask me to call.”

“I will take you to see her some time.”

“That is very good of you. Some afternoon when you have nothing better to do.”

“Come on Monday. That is her day. You won’t have much chance to talk to her, but then you can go again as soon as you like.”

Cryder took out his note-book and penciled a memorandum, “On Monday, then.”

Helen concluded that if she had been born a man she would have elected diplomacy as a career.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN A METROPOLITAN JUNGLE.

Cryder called on Hermia Monday afternoon. Although the room was full he had a few words with her, and she thought him very charming.

"I want to talk to you," he said. "I have wanted to talk to you ever since I met you, but I was in such a bad humor the other night that I would not inflict you. Are you ever alone? Cannot I have an hour or two some evening?"

Hermia smiled. "Come on Thursday evening. I have not another evening until late next week."

"I have an engagement, but I will break it. And will you think me impertinent if I ask you to show me all over this wonderful house? There is nothing like it in Europe."

"I shall be delighted," said Hermia, enthusiastically. "So few people appreciate it."

"It is good of you to think I can. But in thought I always dwell in the past (he hated the past), and although my work is realistic, because realism is of more value to literature, yet my nature is essentially a romantic one. Only, one so seldom acknowledges romance, one is so afraid of being laughed at."

He watched her as he spoke, and saw a sudden gleam come into her eyes. A year's training and her own native cleverness had taught Hermia not to believe all that men said to her, but Cryder had struck a well-loved chord. And she had no wish to be skeptical.

On Thursday evening Hermia arrayed herself with great care. After much deliberation she donned a gown which as yet she had never worn. It was of tan-gold velvet, with irregular appliqués of dark-brown plush. Down the front was a curious design of gold braid and deep-green brilliants.

She received Cryder in the conservatory. It had but recently been completed, and looked enough like a jungle to deceive the most suspicious of tigers. The green tiles of the floor were painted with a rank growth of grasses and ferns. Through the palms and tropical shrubs that crowded the conservatory glared the wild beasts of far-off jungles, marvelously stuffed and poised. The walls were forgotten behind a tapestry of reeds and birds of the Orient. In one corner was a fountain, simulating a pool, and on its surface floated the pink, fragrant lilies that lie on eastern lakes. Few people had seen this jungle—before its completion, Hermia had learned that it was dangerous to test her city's patience too far.

Hermia sat down on a bank and waited for the curtain to rise. She felt the humor of the situation, but she knew that the effect was good. A few moments later Cryder came in and was charmed. He had the same remote yearning for the barbaric that the small, blonde actor has for the part of the heavy villain. As he walked down the jungle toward Hermia, he felt that he gave this Eastern ideal its completing touch.

Hermia held up her hand. "I would not have dared do this for any one but you," she said, "but you will understand."

"For Heaven's sake do not apologize!" exclaimed Cryder. He raised her hand to his lips and sat down on the bank beside her. "There was never anything so enchanting in real life. And you—you are Cleopatra in your tiger-hood."

"I was Semiramis before," said Hermia, indifferently. She turned her head and gave him a meditative glance. "Do you know," she said, with an instinct of coquetry rare to her, "I cannot

understand your being a realistic author.”

He was somewhat taken aback, but he replied promptly: “That is a mere accident. To tell you the truth, I care no more for realism than I do for idealism, and dialect is a frightful bore. I will tell you what I have told no one else. Now that my position is established, my name made, I am going to leave dialect to those who can do no better, and write a great romantic novel.”

Hermia thought his last remark a trifle conceited, but she forgave it for the sake of its sentiment. “I shall like that,” she said, “and be romantic without sensationalism. Tell me the plot of your book.”

“It is too vague to formulate, but you and your house are to be its inspiration. I have wanted to meet a woman like you; the study will be an education. Tell me of your life. You have not always been as you are now?”

Hermia gave him a startled glance. “What do you mean?” she demanded.

“I mean that you have two personalities, an actual and an assumed. You are playing a part.”

Hermia gave him a fierce glance from beneath her black brows. “You know that until a year ago I was poor and obscure, and you are rude enough to remind me that I play the part of *grande dame* very badly,” she exclaimed.

“I beg your pardon,” said Cryder, quickly, “I knew nothing of the kind. You might have spent the last ten years in a fashionable boarding-school for all I have heard to the contrary. But I repeat what I said. I received two impressions the night we met. One was that you were at war with something or somebody; the other that you had a double personality, and that of one the world had no suspicion. It is either that you have a past, or that you are at present in conditions entirely new and consequently unfamiliar. I believe it is the latter. You do not look like a woman who has *lived*. There is just one thing wanting to make your face the most remarkable I have seen; but until it gets that it will be like a grand painting whose central figure has been left as the last work of the artist.”

Hermia leaned her elbow on her knee and covered her face with her hand. She experienced the most pleasurable sensation she had ever known. This was the first man who had shown the faintest insight into her contradictory personality and complicated nature. For the moment she forgot where she was, and she gave a little sigh which brought the blood to her face. To love would not be so difficult as she had imagined.

“What is it?” asked Cryder, gently. He had been watching her covertly. “I want to amend something I said a moment ago. You have not lived in fact but you have in imagination, and the men your fancy has created have made those of actual, prosaic life appear tame and colorless.”

Hermia’s heart gave a bound. She turned to him with shining eyes. “How do you know that?” she murmured.

“Is it not true?”

“Yes,” she said, helplessly, “it is true.”

“Then I will tell you how I know. Because I have lived half my natural life with the population of my brain, and dream-people know one another. Ours have met and shaken hands while we have been exchanging platitudes.”

“That is very pretty,” said Hermia; “I hope their estates border upon each other, and that their chosen landscape is the same, for dream-people may have their antipathies, like the inhabitants of the visible world. Because we have taken out our title-deeds in dream-land, it does not follow that our tenants live in harmony.”

“It would not—except that we both instinctively know that there has not been even border warfare. There have been marriage and inter-marriage; the princes of my reigning house have

demanded in state——”

Hermia interrupted him harshly: “There is no marriage or giving in marriage in my kingdom. I hate the word! Are you very much shocked?”

Cryder smiled. “No,” he said, “one is surprised sometimes to hear one’s own dearest theories in the mouth of another, but not shocked. It only needed that to make you the one woman I have wanted to know. You have that rarest gift among women—a catholic mind. And it does not spring from immorality or vulgar love of excitement—you are simply brave and original.”

Hermia leaned forward, her pupils dilating until her eyes looked like rings of marsh about lakes of ink. “You know that—you understand that?” she whispered, breathlessly.

Cryder looked her full in the eyes. “Yes,” he said, “and no one ever did before.”

His audacity had the desired effect. Men were always a little afraid of Hermia. She looked at him without speaking—a long gaze which he returned. He was certainly most attractive, although in quite a different way from any man born of her imaginings. Perhaps, however, that gave him the charm of novelty. He was almost magnetic; he almost thrilled her—not quite, but that would come later. She had received so many impressions this evening that no one could master her. Yes, she was sure she was going to love him.

“No,” she said, at last, “no one ever did.”

“You have been loved in a great many ways,” Cryder went on; “for your beauty, which appeals to the senses of men, yet which at the same time frightens them, because of the tragic element which is as apparent as the passionate; for your romantic surroundings, which appeal to their sentiment; for the glamour which envelops you as one of the most sought-after women in New York; for your intellect; and for your incomprehensibility to the average mind, which has the fascination of mystery. But I doubt if any man has ever known or cared whether you have a psychic side. If I fall in love with you, I shall love your soul, primarily. Passion is merely the expression of spiritual exaltation. Independently of the latter it is base. A woman of your strong psychical nature could never forget the soul for the body—not for a moment.”

“That is very beautiful,” murmured Hermia, dreamily. “Can it be? And are you sure that I have any spirituality?”

“If you do not know it, it is because you have never loved and never been loved in the right way.” He sprang suddenly to his feet, and then, before she could answer, he was gone.

She sank her elbow into a cushion and leaned her cheek on her palm. Cryder had touched her sensuous nature by the artistic novelty of his wooing—her ideal had been brutal and direct. She had always imagined she should like that best, but this was a new idea and very charming. It appealed to the poetic element in her. The poetic vase tossed aloft the spray of refined passion and rode contemptuously over the undertow of sensuality. That was as it should be.

She went up-stairs, and, after she was in bed, thought for a long time. She slept until late the next day, and in the afternoon paid a number of calls. In the temporary seclusion of her carriage she took pleasure in assuring herself that Cryder was uppermost in her mind.

CHAPTER XV.

A CLEVER TRIFLER.

The next afternoon Cryder came again. Hermia received him this time in the hall which, with its Gothic roof, its pictured windows, its walls ribbed and dark, and its organ, looked like a cathedral. As she came down the broad staircase, in a gown that made her look as if she had stepped from some old French canvas, Cryder stood gazing at her for a moment, then without a word sat down before the organ and began to play. The organ needs only a skillful hand; its own rich, sonorous tones pour soul through cold, calm fingers. Cryder played Tristan's Death Song, and Hermia sank into a chair and felt that naught existed but glory of color and surge of sound.

Cryder played but a short time—he never did anything too long—then went over and sat beside her. He made her talk about herself, and managed to extract much of her past. He learned nothing, however, of her former lack of beauty. Then he entertained her brilliantly for an hour with accounts of celebrated people he had met.

After he had gone she felt a vague sense of disappointment; he had not touched upon co-personal topics for a moment. The sense of disappointment grew and deepened, and then she gave a sudden start and smiled. She could not feel disappointment were she not deeply interested. Was this the suffering, the restlessness, which were said to be a part of love? Surely! She was pained that he could talk lightly upon indifferent subjects, and apparently quite forget the sympathy which existed between them. The pain and the chagrin might not be very acute, but they were forewarnings of intenser suffering to come. Of course she wanted to suffer. All women do until the suffering comes. After that they do not go out of their way to look for it.

She went up-stairs and sat down before the fire in her boudoir. It was very delightful to fall in love with a man as mentally agreeable as Cryder. He would always entertain her. She would never be bored! The intervals between love-making would never drag; she had heard that they were sometimes trying. And then the pictures between those framing intervals—when the fierce, hot tide of passion within her would leap like a tidal wave, lashed into might by the convulsion at its heart. And Cryder! To see the tiger in the man fling off its shackles and look through the calm brown of his eyes! (Like all girls, Hermia believed that every man had a tiger chained up inside him, no matter how cold he might be exteriorly.) What a triumph to break down that cool self-control!

Her maid brought her a cup of tea and she drank it; then, resting her elbows on her knees leaned her chin on her locked fingers. There were some things she did not like about Cryder. He lacked literary conscience, and she doubted if he had much of any sort. Her high ideals still clung to her; but perhaps this was her mission in life—to remold Cryder. A man is always much under the influence of the woman who gives him his happiness; she would have a grand opportunity to make him better. When the end came, as of course it would—she was no longer such a fool as to imagine that love lasted forever—he should have much to thank her for.

When a woman thinks she loves a man, she dreams of making him better. When she really loves him, she would have him share his virtues with the saints. She loves his faults and encourages them; she glories in the thought that his personality is strong enough to make her indifferent to defects. This lesson, however, Hermia had yet to learn; but she was pleased with

the idea of putting the spirituality of which Cryder had accused her to some practical use. She had not a very clear idea what spirituality meant, but she thought she was learning.

CHAPTER XVI.

A LITERARY DINNER.

A few weeks later Hermia gave a dinner to Cryder. The other guests were Mr. Overton, Mr. Simms, Alan Emmet, a young author who combined the literary and the sensational in a manner which gave him much notoriety, Mr. Langley, Cryder's publisher, and Ralph Embury, a noted young journalist. Helen Simms was there to chatter serious thought to ambush, and Miss Starbruck, primly alert, and waiting to be shocked.

Poor Miss Starbruck! She drifted like a gray shadow through Hermia's rooms, and longed for her modest cottage at Nantucket. She had been an active member of sewing-circles and reading-clubs, and the farther down her past's perspective did this unexciting environment retreat, the oftener did she sigh as she contrasted its cool shadows with the hot glare into which fate's caprice had suddenly cast her. But Hermia was considerate—if Miss Starbruck appeared at her niece's dinners and receptions, and drove with her occasionally, she could sit up in her room and dream of Nantucket and bewail duty as much as she pleased. Mrs. Dykman was chaperon-in-chief.

Hermia wore a gown of white velvet, simply made, and fitting in wrinkleless perfection the free lines and curves of her full, lithe figure. About her throat hung a silver chain of Roman workmanship, and around her waist a girdle of similar but heavier links. The wiry maze of her hair outshone the diamond pins that confined it.

Miss Simms wore a dinner-gown of black tulle and a profusion of chrysanthemums. Her hair was as sleek as a mole.

The conversation was naturally more or less literary, and Hermia drew out her ambitious guests with a good deal of skill. It was hard to curb them when they were started, but she managed to make each feel that he had had an opportunity to shine. Some day, when her personal interest in life had ceased, she intended to have a *salon*, and this was a pleasant foretaste. She even let Mr. Simms tell a few anecdotes, but after the third gently suppressed him.

It is not easy to check the anecdotal impulse, and both Mr. Langley and Mr. Overton were reminiscent. The former told a tale of a young man who had brought him a manuscript ten years before, and never returned to ask its destiny.

"He looked delicate, and I imagine he died of consumption," said the great publisher, placidly, as he discussed his pâté. "At all events I have never heard from him since. Our readers unanimously advised us not to publish the manuscript. It was entirely out of our line, and would have involved great risk. We put it aside and forgot all about it. The other day I happened to meet one of the readers through whose hands it passed—he has not been with us for some years—and he asked me why I did not publish the rejected book. 'That sort of thing has become fashionable now,' he said, 'and you would make money out of it.' I merely mention this as an illustration of how fashion changes in literature as in everything else."

"You publishers are awful cowards," said Emmet, in his drawling tones; "you are so afraid of anything new that all authors you introduce are branded Prophets of the Commonplace."

Mr. Langley's blonde, pleasant little face took a warmer hue, and he answered somewhat testily: "The publisher was brave, indeed, who presented you to the public, Mr. Emmet."

In spite of the general laugh, Emmet replied imperturbably: "The best advertisement I had,

and the only one which I myself inserted, was that 'Mrs. Bleeker' had been refused by every conservative house in New York. My reward is that I have the reputation instead of the firm."

"No; the firm hasn't any left—that's a fact," retorted Mr. Langley; and Emmet turned to Helen with a pout on his boyish face.

"Do my books shock you?" he asked her.

Helen smiled. "No, they do not," she said, briefly. "I quite adore them. I don't always acknowledge having read them, but I don't mind telling you, considering that you are the author."

"Oh, some women assure me that nothing would induce them to read my books. I am glad you have the courage of your opinions. I scorn women who have not, and I will not talk to a girl unless I can do so as freely as to a man."

"Oh, I am not a prude," said Helen, lightly. "I only draw the line at positive indecency, and you are quite vague enough. But do you always talk to men on improper subjects?"

"Oh—no; I merely meant that I like to feel the same lack of restraint with women as with men. It is a bore to call up every thought for inspection before you utter it."

"Yes," said Helen; "you wouldn't talk at all, you would only inspect."

"Speaking of mysterious disappearances," broke in Embury's voice, "what has become of that girl who used to give us such bucketfuls of soulful lava?—the one who signed herself 'Quirus'?"

Mr. Overton laughed, and much to Hermia's relief every one turned to him. "She brought me that poem I published, herself, and I came near laughing outright once or twice. I have seen few plainer women; there was such a general dinginess about her. At the same time there was a certain magnetism which, I imagine, would have been pronounced had she been a stronger woman. But I should not be surprised to hear that she had died of consumption."

"Is it possible?" said Embury. "Her work was strong, however. Why didn't you take her in hand and bring her up in the way she should go?"

"My dear Embury, life is too short. That girl was all wrong. She worked her syllogisms backward, so to speak. Her intellect was molten with the heat of her imagination, and stunted with the narrowness of her experience. She reasoned from effect to cause. Her characters, instead of being the carefully considered products of environment and heredity, were always altered or distorted to suit some dramatic event. Intellect without experience of the heart and of life is responsible for more errors than innate viciousness which is controlled by worldly wisdom, or natural folly which is clothed in the gown of accumulated knowledge. I have seen so many clever writers go to pieces," he added, regarding his empty plate with a sigh; "they lie so. They have no conscience whatever, and they are too clever to see it."

"Then how can they help themselves?" asked Hermia, with a puzzled look.

"They had better wait until they can."

Hermia did not care to pursue the subject, and saw, moreover, that Embury was waiting to be heard. "What would journalism do if no one knew how to lie?" she asked him, with a smile, and was somewhat surprised when every man at the table except Embury laughed aloud.

Embury colored, but replied promptly: "It would probably die for want of patronage."

"You are right, Embury," said Cryder. "You could not have found a more appreciative field for your talents."

Embury looked at him reproachfully, and Cryder continued: "I never could resist the temptation to kick a friend when he was down. I will give you an opportunity later."

"Life is made up of lost opportunities—I probably shall not see it. True, I might review your

books, but to do so I should have to read them.”

“Is this the way literary people always spar?” murmured Hermia to Cryder.

“Oh! do not let it worry you,” he replied. “This is only facetiousness—American humor. It doesn’t hurt.” He dropped his voice. “Are you not well? You look tired.”

“I am tired,” said Hermia, returning his gaze—he seemed very near to her at that moment. “Clever people, singly, are very delightful, but *en masse* they keep one on the rack.”

“Don’t bother any more!” said Cryder. “Leave them to me; I will take care of them.”

“You are good,” murmured Hermia. “When I am old I shall like a *salon*; I shall like the power of it. Now—it bores me a little.”

Cryder bent somewhat nearer to her. “Do not wait too long for anything,” he murmured. “A man’s power comes with age; a woman’s power goes with age.”

He turned from her suddenly and addressed a remark to Embury which immediately gave that clever young man a chance to entertain his companions for ten minutes. Hermia found herself drifting from her guests. She had undergone many evolutions of thought and feeling during the past few weeks. At times she had believed herself in love with Cryder; at others, she had been conscious of indifferent liking. She was puzzled to find that his abstract image thrilled her more than his actual presence. On the other hand, she *liked* him better when with him. He was so entertaining, so sympathetic; he had such delicate tact and charm. When absent, she sometimes thought of him with a certain distaste; he had qualities that she disliked, and he was diametrically different from all imagined lovers. Then she would make up her mind to close her eyes to his deficiencies and to love him spiritually. She would compel herself to think of him for hours together on an exalted mental and spiritual plane, where passion had no place. Not that she believed him incapable of passion, by any means—she believed that all men were constructed on the same plan—but he was so different from that man who now dwelt behind a barred door in her brain that she felt it her duty, to both, to love him in a different way. She was surprised to find that after such æsthetic communion she almost hated him. Reaction following excess of passion may be short-lived; but immoderate sentimentality leaves a mental ennui that requires a long convalescence. Sentimentality is a growth of later civilization, and trails its roots over the surface like a pine; while passion had its seeds planted in the garden of Eden, and is root, branch, twig, and leaf of human nature.

In summing up her sensations she had come to the conclusion that on the whole she was in love with him. No one had ever moved her one-tenth as much before. If she had not lost her head about him, it was because her nature had slept too long to awake in a moment. That would come by degrees. There were times when she felt the impulse to cast herself on her face and sob farewell to the dreams of her youth and to the lover who had been a being more real than Ogden Cryder; but she thrust aside the impulse with a frown and plunged into her daily life.

At opportune moments Hermia’s attention returned to her guests. Miss Starbruck rose at a signal from her niece and the women went into the library. The men joined them soon after, and Cryder, much to the gratitude of his tired and dreamy hostess, continued to entertain them until eleven o’clock, when they went home.

CHAPTER XVII.

AN ILLUSION DISPELLED.

The front door had closed after the last guest, the butler had turned down the lights in the hall, Miss Starbruck had gone up-stairs, and Hermia was standing by the library fire. She heard some one come down the hall, and turned her head, her expression of indifference and mental fatigue lifting a little. The portière was pushed aside and Cryder entered the room.

The next morning Hermia stood gazing at her bedroom fire for a few moments before going down-stairs. Her face wore a peculiar expression. "Is there anything in love?" she murmured, half aloud. "*Is there?*"

She went down to the library and sank listlessly into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. She did not love Cryder. There was but one answer to the question now. Imagination and will had done their utmost, but had been conquered by fact. She had made a horrible mistake. She felt an impulse to fling herself on the floor and shriek aloud. But the self-control of years was stronger than impulse. In spite of the softening influences of happier conditions, she must suffer or enjoy in her old dumb way until something had smashed that iron in her nature to atoms or melted it to lava.

But, if she was saturated with dull disgust and disappointment, her conscience rapped audibly on her inactive brain. It was her duty to herself and to Cryder to break the thing off at once—to continue it, in fact, was an impossibility. But she shrank from telling Cryder that he must go and not return. He loved her, not as she had wanted to be loved, perhaps, but with his heart, his sentiment. She liked him—very much indeed—and had no desire to give him pain. He might suffer the more keenly because of the fineness of his sensibilities. Suppose he should kill himself? Men so often killed themselves for women who did not love them. She remembered that she had dreamed of men dying for hopeless love of her; but, now that it seemed imminent, the romance was gone. It would be nothing but a vulgar newspaper story after all.

What should she do? She must tell him. She turned to her desk, then sank back into her chair. She could not write. He would come again that evening. She would tell him then. Written words of that sort were always brutal.

How she got through that day she never knew. It seemed as if the very wheels of life were clogged. The sky was gray and the snow fell heavily; the gas had to be lighted in the house. No one called; but Hermia was willing to be left to solitude. She was not restless, she was dully indifferent. The grayness of the day entered into her and enveloped her; life in the Brooklyn flat had never looked colder and barer than in this palace which her will and her wealth had created.

When evening came she gave orders that no one but Cryder should be admitted. Somewhat to her surprise he did not come. She did not care particularly, but went to bed at half-past nine, and had Miss Newton rub her to sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A BLOODLESS ENTHUSIAST.

Cryder did not come the next day or evening, nor did he write. At first Hermia experienced a mild fear that he was ill; but Helen Simms called the following morning and said, en passant, that she had met him a few moments before on the street. Then Hermia began to be piqued and a little mortified. For several hours she thought less about dismissing him. The next day the whole thing seemed like a dream; she caught herself wondering if it had really happened. At this point she received a note from Cryder.

“It is a year since I have seen you, but I have a book due at the publisher’s on Thursday, and I have been working night and day. After the weary grind is over you will see too much of me. In the mean time I am with you always. In fancy I look into your eyes and see the waves break over the rocks, and watch the moon coquet with the tides. Now the green bosom of the sea is placid for a moment, and I see * * * the mermaids * * * sleeping in their caves—

“Until to-night!

“O. C.”

Hermia shrugged her shoulders. It was very pretty, but rather tame. At the same time her pride was glad to be reassured that he still loved her, and she once more put her dismissal into mental shape and blunted the arrow of decree with what art she possessed.

When he was shown into the library that evening she rose nervously, wondering how she was to keep him from kissing her. He raised her hand lightly to his lips after his old habit, complimented her Catherine de’ Medici gown, and threw himself into an easy-chair by the fire.

“How grateful this fire is!” he exclaimed. “It is one of those horrid, sleety nights. The horse slipped once or twice.”

“Did you come in a cab?” asked Hermia.

“Yes; I had not the courage to face that long block from the elevated.”

He settled himself back in his chair, asked permission to light a cigarette, and for an hour entertained her in his most brilliant vein. Hermia listened with the most complex sensations of her life. The predominating one at first was intense mortification. There was no danger of this man blowing out his brains for any woman. She was rather the most agreeable woman he knew just then, but—there were plenty of others in the world. Then her brain and her philosophy came to her aid, and she began to be amused. She had always been able to laugh at her own expense, and she indulged in a little private burst whilst Cryder was reciting a graphic passage from his lately finished book. The laugh added several years to her twenty-five, but on the whole, she concluded, it did her good.

Then she began to reason: Why break it off? He is the most agreeable man I have ever known; why lose him? If I dismiss him thus cavalierly, he will be piqued at least, and I shall not even have his friendship. And I can never love or have a throb of real feeling. All that was the delusion of a morbid imagination. There are no men like those I have dreamed of. The ocean rolls between the actual and the ideal.

She did Cryder some injustice in the earlier part of her meditations. He was really very fond of her. There were many things about her that he liked immensely. She was beautiful, she was

artistic, she had a fine mind, and, above all things, she was the fashion, and he had carried her off. But he never rushed at a woman and kissed her the moment he entered the room; he did not think it good taste. Moreover, she looked particularly handsome in that black-velvet gown and stiff white ruff, and her position in that carved, high-backed chair was superb. His eye was too well pleased to allow the interference of his other senses. After a time he went over and lifted her face and kissed her. She shrugged her shoulders a little but made no resistance.

CHAPTER XIX.

TASTELESS FRUIT.

She began to have an absurdly married feeling. When she had made up her mind to drift on the wave she had chosen, she had consoled herself with the thought that, if love was a disappointment, the situation was romantic. By constantly reminding herself that she was the heroine of "an experience," she could realize in part her old wild dreams. To create objective illusion was a task she soon renounced. No matrimonial conditions were ever more prosaic and matter-of-fact than the various phases of this affair.

The evenings were long and very pleasant. Cryder smoked innumerable cigarettes in the most comfortable chair in the library, and was never dull. Hermia began to get rather fond of him in a motherly sort of way. One night he had a cold and she gave him a dose of quinine; occasionally she sent him certain of her cook's dainty concoctions. She always had a little supper for him on his particular evenings, and took care that his favorite dishes were prepared.

She had her intervals of disgust and fury with fate, but they were becoming less frequent. Like all tragic and unversed women she was an extremist. She had dreamed that life was one thing; her particular episode had taught her that it was another. There was no medium nor opposite pole; she had been wrong in every theory.

Ennui was her worst enemy. Sometimes she got tired of the very sound of Cryder's voice—it ceased so seldom. She longed for variety of any sort, for something to assure her that she was not as flatly married as Bessie and her husband. One day when she was more bored than usual Helen Simms came in.

"How brilliant you look!" she exclaimed. "What *is* the matter with you?"

"Ennui; life is a burden."

"Where is Ogden Cryder? I thought he had put ennui to flight."

"He is charming," said Hermia, "and I am having that flirtation with him that you advised; but even that is getting a little monotonous."

"I will tell you what you want," exclaimed Helen, decidedly. "You want to see something of the champagne side of life. You have had enough of a flirtation by a library fire in a feudal room; it is time you did something a little more *risqué*! Get Mr. Cryder to take you to some awfully wicked place to dine—some place which would mean social ostracism were you found out—only you mustn't be found out. There is nothing actually wrong in it, and the danger gives one the most delightful sensation."

Hermia elevated her nose. "I hate anything 'fast,'" she said. "I prefer to keep out of that sort of atmosphere."

"Oh, nonsense! It is the spice of life; the spice without the vulgarity. To have all the appearance of being quite wicked, and yet to be actually as innocent as a lamb—what more stimulating? It is the only thing which has saved my valuable life. I always amuse myself picturing how poor papa would look if he should suddenly descend upon me. Then after the dinner take a drive through the park in a hansom—at midnight! You quite feel as if you were eloping; and yet—with none of the disagreeable consequences. You elope, and that is the end of you. You drive through the park in a hansom, and go home and to bed like a good little girl. The next week—you drive through the park in another hansom. Then you feel that life is worth living. Some night you and Mr. Cryder, Mr. Winston and myself will have a tear."

“No!” exclaimed Hermia; “I abominate that sort of thing, and I will not go.”

But Helen, unconsciously, had appalled her. Was there no other escape from ennui? What a prospect! Mrs. Dykman had promised to take her to Europe. She determined to make that lady hasten her plans and go at once.

CHAPTER XX.

A COMMONPLACE MEETING.

Quintard, after an absence of five years, had returned to New York to find Hermia Suydam the sensation of the year. He saw her first at the Metropolitan Opera-House, and, overhearing some people discussing her, followed the direction of their glances. She had never looked more radiant. Her hair shone across the house like burnished brass; her eyes had the limpid brilliancy of emeralds, and the black lashes lay heavy above and below them; her skin was like ivory against which pomegranate pulp had been crushed, and her mouth was as red as a cactus-flower. Her neck and arms and a portion of her bust were uncovered. Although it was a first night and most of her sister belles were present, her peculiar, somewhat barbaric beauty glittered like a planet in a firmament of stars.

Quintard left his seat at the end of the second act and walked back and forth in the lobby until he met Ralph Embury.

“Do you know Miss Suydam?” he asked the lively little journalist.

Embury hastened to assure him that he had the honor of Miss Suydam’s acquaintance.

“Then introduce me,” said Quintard.

Embury went at once to ask Miss Suydam’s permission for the desired presentation, and, returning in a few moments, told Quintard to follow him. Cryder gave his chair to Quintard, and Hermia was very gracious. She talked in a low, full voice as individual as her beauty—a voice that suggested the possibility of increasing to infinite volume of sound—a voice that might shake a hearer with its passion, or grow hoarse as a sea in a storm. Quintard had never heard just such a voice before, but he decided—why, he did not define—that the voice suited its owner.

She said nothing beyond the small-talk born of the conditions of the moment, but she gave him food for speculation, nevertheless. Had it not been absurd, he would have said that twice a look of unmistakable terror flashed through her eyes. She was looking steadily at him upon both occasions—once he was remarking that he was delighted to get back to America, and again that he had last seen Tannhäuser at Bayreuth.

He was also perplexed by a vague sense of unreality about her. What it meant he could not define; she was not an adventuress, nor was her beauty artificial. While he was working at his problems the curtain went down on the third act, and she rose to go. She held out her hand to him with a frank smile and said good-night. When she had put on her wraps she bent her head to him again and went out of the door. Then she turned abruptly and walked quickly back to him. The color had spread over her face, but the expression of terror had not returned to her eyes. They were almost defiant.

“Come and see me,” she said quickly.

He bowed. “I shall be delighted,” he murmured; but she left before he had finished.

“She is lovely,” he thought, “but how odd! What is the matter with her?”

CHAPTER XXI.

BACK TO THE PAST.

Hermia gave a little supper after the opera, and, when the last guest had gone, she went up to her room and sank down in a heap before her bedroom fire. As she stared at the coals, the terrified look came back to her eyes and remained there. She had received a shock. And yet Quintard had only uttered a dozen sentences, and these she could not recall. And she had never seen him before. Had not she? She closed her eyes. Once more she was in her little Brooklyn room; that room had been transformed * * * and she was not alone. She opened her eyes and gave a quick glance about her, then plunged her head between her knees and clasped her hands about the back of it. She must conjure up some other setting from that strange, far-away past of hers—one that had never been reproduced in this house. There had been splendid forests in those old domains of hers, forests which harbored neither tigers nor panthers, bulbuls nor lotus-lilies. Only the wind sighed through them, or the stately deer stalked down their dim, cool aisles. Once more she drifted from the present. He was there, that lover of her dreams; she lay in his arms; his lips were at her throat. How long and how faithfully she had loved him! Every apple on the tree of life they had eaten together. And how cavalierly she had dismissed him! how deliberately forgotten him! She had not thought of him for months—until to-night.

She raised her head with abrupt impatience and scowled. What folly! How many men had not she met with black hair and dark-blue eyes and athletic frames? What woman ever really met her ideal? But—there had been something besides physical resemblance of build and color. A certain power had shone through his eyes, a certain magnetism had radiated from him—she shuddered, threw herself back on the rug, and covered her eyes with her hands. To meet him now!

CHAPTER XXII.

QUINTARD IS DISCUSSED.

The next afternoon Hermia was sitting in the library with Miss Starbruck when Helen came in. Hermia greeted her eagerly. Helen always diverted her mind. Perversely, also, she wanted to hear some one speak of Quintard.

"I have only a few moments," said Helen. "I told Mr. Winston to call for me at four. We are going to find a place to walk where we shall not meet everybody we know——." She stopped suddenly as she caught sight of Miss Starbruck's gray, erect figure and shocked expression. "I beg your pardon, Miss Starbruck," she said, sweetly; "I did not see you."

"Why do you object to meeting people you know when you walk with young men?" demanded Miss Starbruck, severely.

Helen, by this time, had quite recovered her presence of mind. "Oh! they always want to stop and talk," she said, lightly, "and that is such a bore." Then she turned to Hermia: "I saw Grettan Quintard in your box last night. Did you ever hear such a name? As hard as a rock! But I imagine it suits him—although he felt pretty bad five years ago."

"What about?" demanded Hermia.

"You never heard that story? But, to be sure, that was before your time. He was awfully in love with Mrs. Theodore Maitland—one of the prettiest women in town—and she with him. Everybody was talking, and finally Mr. Maitland found it out. He was very cool about it; he calmly went down town to a lawyer and told him to begin proceedings for a divorce. He sent for his things and took rooms at a hotel. Everybody cut Mrs. Maitland, and she felt so horrible that she killed herself. Quintard was fearfully upset. He went abroad at once and staid five years. This is his first reappearance."

"A true nineteenth-century romance!" exclaimed Hermia, sarcastically. "An intrigue, a divorce court, and a suicide!" But she had listened with a feeling of dull jealousy, and the absurdity of it angered her. Her imagination had made a fool of her often enough; was she about to weakly yield herself to its whip again? What was Quintard or his past to her? "I rather liked his face," she added, indifferently. "Did you know him before he went away?"

"Only by sight. I was not out. For the matter of that he went out very little himself until the Mrs. Maitland episode. He cared nothing for society, and only went into it to be with her. He wasn't even very much of a club man, and had few intimates. I met him the other night at Mrs. Trennor-Secor's dinner, and he took me in. I can't say I care much for him; he's too quiet. But he is awfully good-looking, and has great distinction. It is time," she added, glancing at the clock, "for Mr. Winston to appear."

"Are you engaged to that young man?" asked Miss Starbruck.

Helen stared. "Oh, no!" she said, with a little laugh; "he is only my first infant-in-waiting."

The "infant" arrived as she spoke. He was a mild, blonde, inoffensive-looking youth, so faithful to his type that it was difficult to remember him by name until closer acquaintance had called out his little individualities. He had his importance and use, however; he knew how to get up and carry off a ball. He even attended to the paying of the bills when husbands were too busy or had moved to Greenwood. He had saved Hermia a great deal of trouble, and she rewarded him by taking him to the theater occasionally. He admired her in a distant, awe-struck way, much as a pug admires the moon; but he preferred Helen Simms.

“I am afraid you will find it rather cold for walking,” he said to Helen, with his nationally incorrect imitation of English drawl and accent. “It is quite beastly out, don’t you know?”

“Yes,” said Helen, “I know; but you will have to stand it. Good-bye, Hermia. A walk would not hurt you; you are looking pale.”

“Aren’t you going to let me sit down for a moment?” asked Winston.

“No, it is getting late; and, besides, Hermia doesn’t want you. Come.”

They went out, and Miss Starbruck remarked: “That is the average man of to-day, I suppose. They were different when I was young.”

“Oh, no; that is not the average man,” said Hermia; “that is only the average society man. They are two distinct species, I assure you.”

“Well, at all events, I prefer him to that dreadful Mr. Quintard. I hope he will not come to this house, Hermia.”

“Oh, I have invited him,” said Hermia, indifferently. “He shines beside some who come here, if you did but know it.”

“Then I am thankful I do not know it,” exclaimed Miss Starbruck. “I think I will go up-stairs and talk to Miss Newton.”

“No,” said Hermia, “stay and talk to me. I am bored! I hate to be alone! Sit down.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

PLATONIC PROSPECTS.

She met Quintard the next afternoon at a tea. She was standing with a group of people when he joined her. After a moment he asked her to go over to the other side of the room and talk to him. She was somewhat amused at his directness, but went with him to a sofa and ignored the rest of the company for a half-hour.

At the end of that time she drew a long sigh of relief. He was not her ideal; he was commonplace. He talked very well, but with none of Cryder's brilliancy. He was even a little didactic, a quality she detested. And he had none of the tact of an accomplished man of the world. She was not surprised to hear that he had not been to five entertainments in as many years. There was no subtle flattery in his manner; he did not appear to take any personal interest in her whatever; sometimes he appeared inattentive to what she was saying. She wondered why he had insisted upon talking to her. Moreover, he was cold, and coldness and her ideal had never shaken hands. He looked as if nothing could move that calm self-control, that slow, somewhat stiff formality.

She saw him several times during the next two weeks, but never alone. In the mean time she heard much of him. His personal appearance, his wealth, his exile and its cause, made him an interesting figure, and people began to remember and compare all the tales regarding him which had floated across the Atlantic during the last five years. These tales were of a highly adventurous nature, and were embroidered and fringed.

Quintard was not very grateful. He went out seldom, and got away as soon as he could. This, of course, made people wonder what he was doing.

Hermia heard all these stories with some surprise. They seemed so incongruous with the man. Assuredly there was neither romance nor love of adventure in him; he was quite matter-of-fact; he might have been a financier. She thought, however, that he had humor enough to be amused at the stories he had inspired.

One evening he found her alone. The night was cold, and she was sitting in a heap in a big arm-chair by the fire, huddled up in a soft, bright, Japanese gown. She did not rise as he entered, and he looked at her calmly and took a seat on the other side of the hearth.

"You look comfortable," he said. "Those gowns are the warmest things in the world. I have one that I wear when I sit by the fire all night and think. If my dinner does not agree with me, I do not sleep like a lamb."

This was romantic! Hermia had a fine contempt for people who recognized the existence of their internal organs. She raised her brows. "Why do you eat too much?" she demanded.

"Because I happen to feel like it at the time. The philosophy of life is to resist as few temptations as you conveniently can. I have made it a habit to resist but three."

"And they are?"

"To tell a woman I love her, to make love to the wife of a friend, and to have a girl on my conscience. The latter is a matter of comfort, not of principle. The girl of to-day nibbles the apple with her eyes wide open."

Hermia did not know whether she was angry or not. Her experience with Cryder had affected her peculiarly. He had the super-refinement of all artificial natures, and there had been nothing in his influence to coarsen the fiber of her mind. Moreover, he had barely ruffled the

surface of her nature. She always had a strange feeling of standing outside of herself, of looking speculatively on while the material and insignificant part of her “played at half a love with half a lover.”

She was not used to such abrupt statements, but she was too much interested to change the conversation.

“Do you mean that you never tell a woman when you love her?” she asked, after a moment.

“If I loved a woman I should tell her so, of course. I make it a principle never to tell a woman that I love her, because I never do. It saves trouble and reproaches.”

Hermia leaned forward. “Did not you love Mrs. Maitland?” she asked.

The color mounted to Quintard’s face.

“My dear Miss Suydam, this is the nineteenth century—the latter quarter. Love of that sort is an episode, a detached link.” He leaned forward and smiled. “I suppose you think I talk like the villain in the old-fashioned novel,” he said. “But codes of all sorts have their evolutions and modifications. The heroes of the past would cut a ridiculous figure in the civilization of today. I am not a villain. I am merely a man of my prosaic times.”

It was as she had thought—no romance, no love of the past. But the man had a certain power; there was no denying that. And his audacity and brutal frankness, so different from Cryder’s cold-blooded acting, fascinated her.

“Oh, no! I do not think you a villain,” she said; “only I don’t see how you could have had the cruelty to——”

“I am inclined to be faithful, Miss Suydam,” he interrupted. “In my extreme youth it was the reverse, but experience has taught me to appreciate and to hold on to certain qualities when I find them—for in combination they are rare. When one comes to the cross-roads, and shakes hands good-bye with Youth, his departing comrade gives him a little packet. The packet is full of seeds, and the label is ‘philosophy.’”

“I found that packet long before I got to the cross-roads,” said Hermia, with a laugh—“that is, if I ever had any youth. How old are you?”

“Oh, only thirty-four as yet. But I got to the cross-roads rather early. What do you mean by saying that you never had any youth?”

“Nothing. Are all those European stories about you true?”

“What stories?”

“Oh! all those stories about women. They say you have had the most dreadful adventures.”

Quintard shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know what the stories are,” he said. “Nor do I particularly care. I am not posing as a masculine Circe or a destroyer of households. You must remember that there are more than two classes of women in the world. There are many women who are without any particular ties, who live a drifting, Bohemian sort of existence, who may have belonged to society once, but have exhausted it, and prefer the actualities of life. These women are generally the most companionable in every respect. And they are more or less indifferent to public opinion.”

“I was sure of one thing!” exclaimed Hermia; “but, if possible, you have made me more sure: you have not a spark of romance in you.”

An expression of shyness crossed Quintard’s face, and he hesitated a moment.

“Oh, well, you know, nobody has in these days,” he said, awkwardly. “What would people do with romance? They would never find any one to share it.”

“No,” said Hermia, with a laugh, “probably they would not.”

He went away soon after, and she did not see him again for a week. Cryder came the next

night, and Hermia had never liked him less. He was as entertaining as usual, but he was more like highly-charged mineral water than ever. He spoke of his personal adventures; they were tame and flat. Nothing he said could grasp her, hold her. He seemed merely an embodied intellect, a clever, bloodless egoist, babbling eternally about his little self. As she sat opposite him, she wondered how she had managed to stand him so long. She was glad Quintard had come to relieve the monotony. He was the sort of man she would care to have for a friend.

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN UNEXPECTED CONFESSION.

She met Quintard next at one of Mrs. Dykman's *musicales*. That fashionable lady was fond of entertaining, and Hermia was delighted to pay the bills. If it pleased Mrs. Dykman to have her entertainments in her own house rather than in the mansion on Second Avenue, she should be gratified, and Winston never betrayed family secrets.

People were very glad to go to Mrs. Dykman's house. She never had any surprises for them, but they always went away feeling that her evening had been one of the successes of the season. In her palmier days she had done much entertaining, and seen a great deal of the world. She had been a beauty in her youth, and was still so handsome that people forgot to insult her by calling her "well preserved." If her hair had turned gray, the world never found it out; she wore a dark-brown wig which no one but her maid had ever seen elsewhere than on her head; and her unfathomable gray eyes had not a wrinkle about them. She still carried her head with the air of one who has had much incense offered her, and, although her repose amounted to monotony, it was very impressive. She had grown stout, but every curve of her gowns, every arrangement of draperies, lied as gracefully and conclusively as a diplomatist. She was one of the few women upon whom Quintard ever called, and he was a great pet of hers.

"She may not be an intellectual woman," he said to Hermia, on this night of the *musical*, "but she has learned enough in her life to make up for it. I have seldom met a more interesting woman. If she were twenty years younger, I'd ask her to marry and knock about the world with me."

"Yes? I suppose you find the intellectual a good deal of a bore, do you not?"

"Was that a shot? By itself, emphatically yes—a hideous bore. When combined with one or two other things, most eagerly to be welcomed."

"What other things?"

"Oh, womanliness and *savoir*—but, primarily, passion."

"Do you know that you are very frank?" exclaimed Hermia.

"I beg your pardon," humbly. "I have a bad habit of saying what I think, and, besides, I feel a doubly strong impulse to be frank with you. I abominate girls as a rule; I never talk to them. But I have rather a feeling of good comradeship with you. It always seems as if you *understood*, and it never occurs to me that I can make a mistake with you. You are quite unlike other girls. You have naturally a broad mind. Do not deliberately contract it."

"No," said Hermia, quite mollified, "I have no desire to; and, for some peculiar reason, what you say may startle but it never offends. You have a way of carrying things off."

After the music and supper were over, Hermia sat with him awhile up-stairs in her aunt's boudoir.

"Have you idled away your whole life?" she asked. "Do you never intend to *do* anything?"

"Do you think it is doing nothing to spend five years in the study of Europe?"

"But what are you going to *do* with it all? Just keep it in your head?"

"What would you have me do with it? Put it in a book and inflict it on the world?"

"Yes. Give yourself some definite object in life. I have no respect for people who just drift along—who have no ambition nor aim."

"Well, I will tell you something if you will promise not to betray me," he said, quickly: "I am

writing a book.”

“No?” exclaimed Hermia. “Actually? Tell me about it. Is it a novel? a book of travels?”

“Neither. It is a series of lives of certain knights of Norman days about whom there are countless fragmentary legends, but nothing has ever been written. I am making a humble endeavor to reproduce these legends in the style and vernacular of the day and in blank verse. Imagine a band of old knights, broken-down warriors, hunted to the death, and hiding in a ruined castle. To while away the time they relate their youthful deeds of love and war. Do you like the idea?”

Hermia leaned forward with her eyes expanded to twice their natural size. “Do you mean to tell me,” she said, “that you care for the past—that its romance appeals to you?”

Quintard threw himself back in his chair and raised his eyebrows a little. “I have gone so far, I may as well confess the whole thing,” he said. “I would have lived in the feudal ages if I could. Love and war! That is all man was made for. Everything he has acquired since is artificial and in the way. He has lost the faculty of enjoying life since he has imagined he must have so much to enjoy it with. Let a man live for two passions, and he is happy. Let him have twenty ways of amusing himself, and he lowers his capacity for enjoying any one in the endeavor to patronize them all.”

Hermia remembered her experience with Cryder. He had talked very beautifully of the past—once. Life was making her skeptical. “Have you written any of your book?” she asked.

“Yes, it is nearly done.”

“Would you let me see it? Or is that asking too much? But—that period of history particularly interests me. I used to live in it.”

“Did you? I should be very glad to have you read my effusions; but wading through manuscript is a frightful bore.”

“I have waded through a good deal,” said Hermia, briefly. “Bring it to-morrow night. No,”—she had suddenly recollected that the next was Cryder’s evening. “Bring it the next night—no—the next. Will that do?”

“Yes,” said Quintard. “I will afflict you, with great pleasure, if you will let me.”

When they went down-stairs, Mrs. Dykman wrapped Hermia’s furs more closely about her. “I hope, my dear,” she murmured, “you do not mind that the whole house is talking about you. Do you know that Mr. Quintard is the only man whom you have condescended to notice during the entire evening?”

“No?” said Hermia. “I had not thought about it. No, I don’t mind. A woman is not happy until she is talked about—just a little, you know. When her position is secure, it makes her so picturesque—quite individual.”

“You will be engaged before the week is over. You will be accused of having deserted Mr. Cryder, and entered upon a more desperate flirtation yet. The ultra caustic will remember Grettan Quintard’s reputation.”

“You can deny the engagement,” said Hermia.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE POWER OF PERSONALITY.

A few evenings later Quintard came with a portion of his book, which he had had type-written for her. While he amused himself with the many rare volumes on the library shelves, Hermia read the introduction and the four tales with equal interest and astonishment. They had a vital power which seemed to grip her mind as with a palpable hand and hold it until she had read the last of the sheets. Quintard had reproduced the style and spirit of the age with remarkable fidelity—the unbridled passions, the coarse wit, the stirring deeds of valor. He made no attempt at delicate pathos or ideality. When a man suffered, he raged like a wounded boar; every phase of his nature was portrayed in the rough.

Hermia dropped the sheets into her lap and gazed into the fire. Her opinion of Quintard had quite changed. Why did she not love him? But she did not. He attracted her mentally, and his character fascinated her, but stone could not be colder than her heart. Did he go out of the room that moment never to return, she would not care, save that a promising friend would be lost. He had come too late. She no longer possessed the power to love. She shrugged her shoulders. They could be friends; that was quite enough.

Her comments were very flattering and discriminating, and he was much gratified, and gave her a general idea of the rest of the book. She had one or two books that might help him, and she promised to send them to his rooms.

“You are a remarkable mixture,” she said, in conclusion; “at times you seem almost prosaic, altogether matter-of-fact. When I first met you, I decided that you were commonplace.”

“You will allow a man to have two sides, at least,” said Quintard, smiling. “I cannot always be walking on the ramparts of imagination. I enjoy being prosaic at intervals, and there are times when I delight to take a hammer and smash my ideals to atoms. I like to build a castle and raze it with a platitude, to create a goddess and paint wrinkles on her cheek, to go up among the gods and guy them into common mortals, to kiss a woman and smother passion with a jest.”

“That is the brutality in your nature.”

“Yes,” said Quintard, “I suppose that is it.”

She watched him for a moment. He had taken a chair near her and was leaning forward looking at the fire, his elbow on his knee, his chin in the cup of his hand. His strong, clean-cut profile stood out like a bas-relief against the dark wood of the mantel. The squareness of his jaw and the thickness of his neck indicated the intense vitality of his organism; his thick, black mustache overshadowed a mouth heavy and determined; his dense, fine hair clung about a head of admirable lines; and his blue eyes were very dark and piercing. He had the long, clean-limbed, sinewy figure of a trained athlete, and there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh on it. He combined the best of the old world’s beauty with the best of the new, and Hermia looked at him with a curious mixture of national and personal pride.

“I like brutality,” she said, abstractedly; “all the great men of the world had it.” She turned to him suddenly. “You look as if you always got whatever you made up your mind to have,” she said. “Do you?”

“Yes,” he said, “usually.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

HERMIA HEARS THE TRUTH.

He called one morning soon after and spent the entire day with her. He had finished the last of the stories and he read it to her. The tale was a tragic one, and had a wild, savage pathos in it. It brought the tears to her eyes, and at the climax she leaned forward with a gasp.

“Oh, you can cry?” said Quintard.

“It is only nervousness,” hastily. “I never do. I may have been able to once, but I no longer possess feeling of any sort. Don’t think that I am ridiculous and blasé; it is simply that I cannot take any personal interest in life. I have made the discovery that there is nothing in it a little sooner than most people—that is all.”

“You are a little crazy,” said Quintard. “You will get over it.”

The blood mounted to the roots of Hermia’s hair, and her eyes looked as fierce as if she were one of Quintard’s barbarians. She felt more anger than she cared to betray. No other man living would have dared make such a speech to her. Cryder would have humored her, and she had expected Quintard to be suitably impressed.

“What did you say?” she demanded, with an effort at control.

He looked at her unmoved. “You have a great many ridiculous notions about life,” he said. “In addition, you have less knowledge of yourself than any woman I have ever known. The two things combined have put your mind out of joint.”

Hermia felt as if she were stifling. “I wonder you dare,” she said through her teeth.

“Your point of view is all wrong,” he went on; “you see everything through glasses that do not fit your eyes. You are not fond of talking about yourself, but you have given me several opportunities to gather that. You think you have exhausted life, whereas you have not begun to live. You simply don’t even know what you are thinking about. You know less about the world than any woman of brain and opportunities I ever met in my life, and it is because you have deliberately blinded yourself by false and perverted views.”

Hermia’s teeth were clinched and her bosom was heaving. “You may as well finish,” she said, in a voice ominously calm.

“Just to mention one point. You have said you do not believe in matrimony—particularly when people love each other. I have had every experience with women that a romantic temperament can devise, so perhaps you will allow me to tell you that I have come to the conclusion that the only satisfactory relationship for a man and woman who love each other is matrimony. The very knowledge that conditions are temporary, acts as a check to love, and one is anxious to be off with one affair for the novelty of the next. Moreover, if human character is worth anything at all, it is worth its highest development. This, an irregular and passing union cannot accomplish; it needs the mutual duties and responsibilities and sacrifices of married life. If ever I really loved a woman I should ask her to marry me. You have got some absurd, romantic notions in your head about the charm and spice of an intrigue. Try it, and you will find it flatter than any matrimony you have ever seen or imagined.”

Hermia, with a cry of rage, sprang from her chair and rushed from the room. She dropped her handkerchief in her flight, and Quintard went forward and picked it up. “She is ready to tear me bone from bone,” he thought; “but, if I have destroyed some of her illusions, I shall not mind.” He passed his hand tenderly over the handkerchief, then raised it suddenly to his lips. A wave

of color rushed over his dark face, making it almost black. "She was superb in her wrath," he muttered, unsteadily.

He laid the handkerchief on the table and went back to his seat. After a time Hermia returned. She was very pale, and looked rather ashamed of herself. It was characteristic of her that she made no allusion to the past scene. She had a book in her hand. "I came across this in an old book-shop the other day," she said. "I am fond of prowling about dusty shelves; I suppose I shall end by becoming a bibliomaniac. This is a collection of fragmentary verses which it is said the Crusaders used to sing at night on the battle-field. I thought you might use it."

Quintard looked as pleased as a boy. "It was very good of you to think of me," he said impulsively, "and I shall make use of it. But tell me what you think of this last yarn."

"It is magnificent," said Hermia; "I believe you are that rarest object in the history of the world—a poet."

"I have written miles of it, and have made some of the most beautiful bonfires in history."

Hermia laughed. "Could you never be consistently serious?"

"Yes, I could," said Quintard, briefly.

Hermia looked at the door. "Higgins is coming to announce luncheon," she said.

CHAPTER XXVII.

FIVE POINTS OF VIEW.

At five o'clock Mrs. Dykman, Helen Simms, and Cryder dropped in for a cup of tea, and Miss Starbruck came down-stairs.

Quintard insisted that, in spite of Miss Starbruck's open disapproval of him, she was his proudest conquest; and her abuse was certainly growing milder. She rarely failed to appear at these informal tea-drinkings; there was just enough of the worldly flavor about them to fascinate without frightening her; and it was noticeable that to whatever Quintard chose to say she listened with a marked and somewhat amusing interest. The poor old lady was no more proof against personal magnetism and the commanding manliness which was Quintard's most aggressive characteristic than her less rigid sisters. Quintard threatened to marry her and deprive Hermia of her only natural protector, but Miss Starbruck was as yet innocent of his designs.

"This is quite a family party," said Helen; "let us draw our chairs close to the fire and warm ourselves with brotherly affection; it is so beastly cold out. But by this great log fire one thinks himself in the hall of an old English castle; and the streets of New York are not. I feel almost romantic."

"Let us tell stories," suggested Cryder.

"No," replied Helen, promptly, "I don't want to listen to long stories. You would tell your own, and I can't understand dialect. Besides, I want to talk about myself—I beg that prerogative of your sex. As this is a family party, I am going to tell my woes and ask advice. I want to get married! Shall I, or shall I not?"

"Who is the man?" asked Cryder. "How can we advise until we know whether he is worthy to buy your bonnets?"

"I have not decided. The man is not much of a point. I simply want to be married that I may be free," and she heaved a sigh.

"Free of what?" asked Hermia, sarcastically. "Of freedom?"

"Oh, this is not freedom, my dear. A girl always has to be chaperoned. A married woman chaperones. Oh, the difference!"

"But where do you propose to keep the future Mr. Helen Simms?" asked Cryder, laughing.

"At his club, or in a rose-colored boudoir. Mine will be blue."

"Helen Simms! you are the most immoral young woman I ever—ever——." The wrathful voice broke down, and all turned to Miss Starbruck with amused sympathy.

"Are you not yet used to our wicked Gotham?" asked Quintard, taking a chair beside her.

"No!" Miss Starbruck had recovered her voice. "And I think it abominable that the holy institution of matrimony should be so defamed."

"Oh, dear Miss Starbruck," cried Helen, good-naturedly. "It is time you left Nantucket. That primitive saying has long since been paraphrased into 'the unholy institution of whithersoever thou goest, in the other direction will I run.' And a jolly good revolution it is, too. Please do not call me immoral, dear Miss Starbruck. You and I were born on different planets, that is all."

"Marriage is a necessary evil," said Mrs. Dykman's soft, monotonous voice. "You have done well to defer it as long as possible, but you are wise to contemplate a silken halter. No woman's position is established, nor has she any actual importance until she has a husband.

But marry nothing under a million, my dear. Take the advice of one who knows; money is the one thing that makes life worth living. Everything else goes—youth, beauty, love. Money—if you take care that does not go too—consoles for the loss of all, because it buys distractions, amusement, power, change. It plates ennui and crystallizes tears to diamonds. It smooths wrinkles and keeps health in the cheek. It buys friends and masks weakness and sin. You are young, but the young generation is wiser than the old; my advice, I feel sure, will not be thrown away.”

“And this!” exclaimed Miss Starbruck, hoarsely; “this is what life has come to! I am an old maid, and have done with all thought of marriage; but I am not ashamed to say that many years ago I loved a young man, and had he lived would have married him, and been a true and faithful and loving wife. That a woman should marry from any other motive seems to me scandalous and criminal.”

“What do truth and duty mean?” demanded Hermia scornfully. “Monotony and an ennui worse than death. You are happy that you live your married life in imagination, and that your lover died before even courtship had begun to pall. Still”—she shrugged her shoulders as she thought of Bessie—“perhaps you wouldn’t have minded it; some people don’t.”

“No,” said her aunt; “I wouldn’t have minded it. I would have appreciated it.”

Hermia turned to her with a curious glance. “How differently people are made,” she said with a sigh. “The monotony of married life would drive me mad.”

Quintard rose and rested his elbow on the mantel. “Did it ever occur to you,” he said, “that monotony is not an absolutely indispensable ingredient of married life?”

Hermia shrugged her shoulders. “It ruins more wedded lives than jealousy or bad temper.”

“True; but if married life is monotonous, it is largely the fault of those who suffer from the monotony. It is true that the average human animal is commonplace; therefore monotony in the domestic relations of such men and women follows as a matter of course. They suffer the consequences without the power to avert them. Those who walk on the plane above, shiver under the frozen smile of the great god Bore as well—but they can avert it. The ennui that kills love is born of dispelled illusions, of the death of the dramatic principle, which is buried at the foot of the altar. When a man is attempting to win a woman he is full of surprises which fascinate her; he never tarries a moment too long; he is always planning something to excite her interest; he watches her every mood and coddles it, or breaks it down for the pleasure of teaching her the strength of his personality; he does not see her too often; above all, he is never off guard. Then, if he wins her, during the engagement each kiss is an event; and, another point, it is the future of which they always talk.”

“How is it after marriage? We all know.”

Cryder gave an unpleasant little laugh, common to him when some one else had held the floor too long. “Taking your own theory as a premise,” he said, “I should say that the best plan was not to get married at all. People who marry are doomed to fall between the time-honored lines. Better they live together without the cloying assurance of ties; then, stimulus is not wanting.”

“That is all very well for people who are independent of the world’s opinion,” said Mrs. Dykman, “but what are they to do who happen to have a yearning for respectable society?”

Cryder shrugged his shoulders. “They must be content with water in their claret. You can’t get intoxicated and dilute your wine, both.”

“I deny that,” said Quintard. “I believe that matrimony can be made more exciting and interesting than liaison, open or concealed, because it lacks the vulgarity; it can be made

champagne instead of beer.”

“You ought to know,” murmured Mrs. Dykman.

“Mr. Quintard!” exclaimed Miss Starbruck; “I am glad to hear you say that, although I do not think it is a very proper subject to discuss before both men and women.”

“My dear Miss Starbruck,” broke in Helen, with a laugh; “this is the progressive nineteenth century, and we are people of the world—the wild, wicked world. We are not afraid to discuss anything, particularly in this house, where the most primitive and natural woman in the world is queen. It has come to be a sort of Palace of Truth. We don’t offend the artistic sense, however.”

“Miss Simms has been right more than once to-day,” said Quintard. “She said a moment ago that one must be married to be free. May I venture the assertion that, in the present state of society, the highest human freedom is found in the bonds of matrimony alone?”

“Explain your paradox,” said Hermia, who had made no comment to Quintard’s remarks.

“It is easily explained. I say nothing whatever of passing fancies, infatuations, passions, which are best disposed of in a temporary union. I refer to love alone. When a man loves a woman he wants her constant companionship, with no restraint but that exercised by his own judicious will and art. He wants to live with her, to travel with her, to be able to seek her at all hours, to follow his own will, unquestioned and untrammelled. This, outside of conventional bonds, is impossible without scandal, and no man who loves a woman will have her lightly spoken of if he can help it. But let the priest read his formula, and the man so bound is monarch of his own desires, and can snap his fingers at the world. I have neither patience nor respect for the man who must have the stimulus of uncertainty to feed his love. He is a poor, weak, unimaginative creature, who is dependent upon conditions for that which he should find in his own character.”

“I never expected to hear you talk like this, Mr. Quintard!” exclaimed Miss Starbruck, “for you have been a very immoral man.”

Quintard looked at her with an amused smile. “Why immoral, Miss Starbruck?”

“You have—well, people say——” stammered poor Miss Starbruck, and then broke down.

Mrs. Dykman came to the rescue. “Miss Starbruck means that you have lived with a number of women and have not taken any particular pains to hide the fact.”

“Is that immoral? I think not. I have lived with no woman who had anything to lose, and I have lived with no woman who was not my equal intellectually. Companionship was quite as much an object as passion. I never took a woman out of the streets and hung jewels upon her and adored her for her empty beauty, and with a certain class of women I have never exchanged a dozen words since my callow youth. Furthermore, I never won a woman’s affections from her husband. If I ever got them he had lost them first. Therefore, I protest against being called immoral.”

“If you want to go into the question of moral ethics,” said Cryder, “you cannot plead guiltless altogether of immorality. In openly living with a woman who is not your wife you outrage the conventions of the community and set it a bad example. It may be argued that you do less harm than those who pursue the sort of life you let alone; but the *positive* harm is there.”

All looked at Quintard, wondering how he would reply. Even Hermia felt that he was driven into a corner.

“The question is,” replied Quintard, slowly, “What is morality? The world has many standards, from that of the English Government to that of the African barbarian, who follows his instincts, yet who, curiously enough, is in all respects more of a villain than his artificial

brother. That point, however, we will not discuss. A man's standard, of course, is determined by the community in which he lives. We will consider him first in relation to himself. Man is given a temperament which varies chiefly according to his physical strength, and tastes which are distinctly individual. And he not only is a different man after the experiences of each successive decade, but he frequently waits long for the only woman for whom he is capable of feeling that peculiar and overwhelming quality of love which demands that he shall make her his wife. But in the mean time he cannot go altogether companionless, and he meets many women with whom life is by no means unennobling. As to the community, I deny that he sets it a bad example. It is a wiser, more educating, and more refined life than insensate love-making to every pretty weak woman who comes along, or than associations which degrade a man's higher nature and give him not a grain of food for thought. If more men, until ready to marry, spent their lives in the manner which I have endeavored to defend, there would be less weariness of life, less drinking, less excess, less vice of all sorts."

Miss Starbruck shuddered, but felt that the conversation had gone out of her depth, and made no reply. Hermia looked at Quintard with a feeling of unconscious pride. Until he finished speaking, she did not realize how she would hate to have him beaten.

Cryder rose and began walking up and down the room. "When you argue," he said fretfully, "I always feel as if you were hammering me about my ears. You have such a way of pounding through a discussion! One never knows until the next day whether you are right or whether you have simply overwhelmed one by the force of your vitality. Personally, however, I do not agree with you, and for the same reason that I would never marry; I dislike responsibilities."

Quintard gave him a glance of contempt, under which Hermia shrank as if a lash had cut her shoulders; but before he could reply Helen rushed to the front. "And all this discussion has come out of my poor little bid for sympathy and advice!" she cried. "You have frightened me to death! I am afraid of the very word matrimony with all your analysis and philosophy. To me it was a simple proposition: 'Marry and chaperon; don't marry, and be chaperoned.' Now I feel that, if a man proposes to me, I must read Darwin and Spencer before I answer. I refuse to listen to another word. Mrs. Dykman, I am going home; let me drive you over."

They all went in a few moments, and Hermia was left alone with her reflections.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

TWO HISTORIES ARE ALMOST FINISHED.

Hermia saw a great deal of Quintard. They walked together, they rode together, and circumstances frequently forced them into each other's society for hours at a time. She liked him more with every interview, but she did not feel a throb of love for him. The snow on her nature's volcano was deep as the ashes which buried Pompeii.

He had many opportunities to put his wearing qualities to the test. Once they met at a fashionable winter rendezvous in the country. The other women were of the Helen Simms type; the rest of the men belonged to the Winston brotherhood. For the greater part of four days Hermia and Quintard devoted themselves exclusively to each other. When they were not riding across the country or rambling through the windy woods, they sat in the library and told stories by the fire.

One day they had wandered far into the woods and come upon a hemlock glen, down one side of which tumbled melting snow over great jutting rocks that sprang from the mountain side. Quintard and Hermia climbed to a ledge that overhung one of the rocky platforms and sat down. About and above them rose the forest, but the wind was quiet; there was no sound but the dull roar of the cataract. A more romantic spot was not in America, but Quintard could not have been more matter-of-fact had he been in a street-car. He had never betrayed any feeling he may have had for her by a flash of his eye. He discussed with her subjects dangerous and tender, but always with the cold control of the impersonal analyst.

He smoked for a few moments in silence and then said abruptly: "Don't imagine that I am going to discuss religion with you; it is a question which does not interest me at all. But do you believe in the immortality of the soul?"

"No," said Hermia.

"Why not?"

Hermia lifted her shoulders: "I have never thought agnosticism needed defense."

"Agnosticism is the religion of the intellectual, of course. But I have some private reasons for going a step beyond agnosticism, and believing in the persistence of personality. Do you want to hear them?"

"Yes," said Hermia, "but it all comes down to the same proposition. Religion has its stronghold in Ego the Great. *La vie, c'est moi!* I am, therefore must ever be! Now and forever! World without end!"

"I refuse to be snubbed beforehand. Why are children so frequently the ancestors of their family's talent? When heredity cannot account for genius, what better explanation than that of the re-embodiment of an unquenchable individuality? The second reason is a more sentimental one. Why is a man never satisfied until he meets the woman he really loves, and why are his instincts so keen and sure when he does meet her? Why, also, does he so often dwell with the ideal of her before he sees her in material form?"

Hermia felt herself paling, but she exclaimed impatiently: "Don't talk to me of ideals—those poor, pale photographs of ourselves, who have neither mind nor will nor impulse; who jump out like puppets as the strings are pulled; who respond to every mood and grin to every smile! They are born of the supreme egoism of human nature, which admits no objective influence to any world of its own creating—an egoism which demands vengeance for the humiliation of

spirit one is called upon to endure in the world of men. Your other arguments were good, however. I like them, although I will not discuss them until you have further elaborated. In the mean time solve another problem. What is the reason that, when a woman falls in love, she immediately, if a believer, has an increase of religious feeling; if a non-believer, she has a desire to believe, so that she may pray? Sentimentality? The softening of her nature under the influence of love? The general awakening of her emotional possibilities?"

"Neither—or all, indirectly. She is not drawn to God in the least. She is drawn to the idealized abstraction of her lover, who, in the mists of her white-heated imagination, assumes the lineaments of the being most exalted by tradition. If there were a being more exalted still than God, her lover's phantom would be re-christened with his name instead. It is to her lover that she prays—the intermediate being is a pretty fiction—and she revels in prayer, because it gives her a dreamy and sensuous nearness to her lover."

Hermia sprang to her feet and paced the narrow platform with rapid steps. "It is well I have no 'pretty fictions,'" she said, "you would shatter them to splinters."

He rose also. "No," he said, "I would never shatter any of your ideals. Such as you believe in and I do not, I will never discuss with you."

Hermia stood still and looked away from him and through the hemlock forest, with its life outstretched above and its death rotting below. The shadows were creeping about it like ghosts of the dead bracken beneath their feet. The mist was rolling over the mountain and down the cataract; it lay like a soft, thin blanket on the hurrying waters. Hermia drew closer to Quintard and looked up into his face.

"Do you believe," she said, "that perfect happiness can be—even when affinities meet?"

"Not perfect, because not uninterrupted," he replied, "except in those rare cases where a man and woman, born for each other, have met early in youth, before thought or experience had formed the character of either. When—as almost always happens—they do not meet until each is incased in the armor of their separate and perfected individualities, no matter how united they may become, there must be hours and days of terrible spiritual loneliness—there must be certain sides of their natures that can never touch. But"—he bent his flushed face to hers and his voice shook—"there are moments—there are hours—when barriers are of mist, when duality is forgotten. Such hours, isolated from time and the world——"

She broke from him as from an invisible embrace and stood on the edge of a rock. She gave a little, rippling laugh that was caught and lost in the rush and thunder of the waters. "Your theories are fascinating," she cried, "but this unknown cataract is more so. I should like to stand here for an hour and watch it, were not these rocks so slippery——"

Quintard turned his head. Then he leaped down the path beneath the ledge. Hermia had disappeared. He was about to swing himself out into the cataract when he staggered and leaned against the rock; his heart contracted as if there were fingers of steel about it. With a mighty resolution, he overcame the physical weakness which followed in the wake of the momentary pain, and, planting his feet on one of the broad stones over which the torrent fell, he set his shoulder against a projecting rock and looked upward. Hermia lay on a shelf above; the force of the cataract was feebler at its edges and had not swept her down. Quintard crawled slowly up, his feet slipping on the slimy rocks, only saving himself from being precipitated into the narrowing body of the torrent below by clinging to the roots and branches that projected from the ledges. He reached Hermia; she was unconscious, and it was well that he was a strong man. He took her in his arms and went down the rocks. When he stepped on to the earth again his face was white, and he breathed heavily. "My heart beats as if I were a woman," he muttered

impatiently, “what is the matter with me?”

He laid Hermia on the ground, and for a moment was compelled to rest beside her. Then he aroused himself and bent anxiously over her. She had had a severe fall; it was a wonder her brains had not been dashed out. He lifted her and held her with her body sloping from feet to head. She struggled to consciousness with an agonized gasp. She opened her eyes, but did not appear to see him, and, turning her face to the torrent, made a movement to crawl to it. Quintard caught her in his arms and stood her on her feet.

“What are you doing?” he asked roughly.

She put her hand to her head. “I like to watch it, but the rocks are so slippery,” she said confusedly, yet with a gleam of cunning in her shadowed eyes.

Quintard caught her by both shoulders and shook her. “My God!” he exclaimed, “did you do it purposely?”

The blood rushed to her head and washed the fog from her brain. “You are crazy,” she said; “let us go home.”

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN EPOCH-MAKING DEPARTURE.

A woman never moralizes until she has committed an immoral act. From the moment she voluntarily accepts it until the moment she casts it aside, she may do distasteful duty to the letter, but she does it mechanically. The laws and canons are laid down, and she follows them without analysis, however rebelliously. She may long for the forbidden as consistently as she accepts her yoke, whether the yoke be of untempted girlhood or hated matrimony; but the longing serves to deepen her antipathy to bonds; she sees no beauty in average conditions. After she has plucked the apple and eaten it raw, skin, core and all, and is suffering from the indigestion thereof, she is enabled to analytically compare it with such fruits as do not induce dyspepsia.

Although Hermia was far from acknowledging that she loved Quintard, she allowed him occasionally to reign in her imagination, and had more than one involuntary, abstract, but tender interview with him. This, she assured herself, was purely speculative, and in the way of objective amusement, like the theater or the opera. When she found that she thought of him always as her husband she made no protest; he was too good for anything less. Nor, she decided, had she met him earlier and been able to love him, would she have been content with any more imperfect union.

Cryder still came with more or less regularity. There were brief, frantic moments, as when she had sought death in the torrent; but on the whole she was too indifferent to break with him. Her life was already ruined; what mattered her actions? Moreover, habit is a tremendous force, and he had a certain hold over her, a certain fascination, with which the physical had nothing to do.

After she had known Quintard about two months she found herself free. Cryder, in truth, was quite as tired as herself. Ennui was in his tideless veins, and, moreover, the time had come to add another flower to his herbarium. But he did not wish to break with Hermia until his time came to leave the city. If she had loved him, it might have been worth while to hurt her; but, as even his egoism could not persuade him that she gave him more than temperate affection, he would not risk the humiliation of being laughed at.

One evening he told her that he must go South the following week and remain several months. His dialect was growing rusty, and the public would expect another novel from him in the coming spring. He hated to say good-bye to her, but his muse claimed his first and highest duty. Hermia felt as one who comes out of a room full of smoke—she wanted to draw a long breath and throw back her head. She replied very politely, however—they were always very polite—that she should miss him and look forward to his return. Neither would avow that this was the end of the matter, but each was devoutly thankful that the other was not a fool.

Cryder looked melancholy and handsome when he came to say good-bye. He had on extremely becoming traveling clothes, and his skin and eyes had their accustomed clearness. He bade Hermia a tender farewell, and his eyes looked resigned and sad. Then an abstracted gaze passed into them, as if his spirit had floated upward to a plane far removed from common affection.

Hermia had much ado to keep her mouth from curling. She remembered what Quintard had once said of him: that he always wanted to throw him on a table to see if he would ring. Bah!

what a *poseur* he was! Then she mentally shrugged her shoulders. His egoism had its value; he had never noticed the friendship which existed between her and Quintard. Had he been a jealous man he would have been insufferable.

After he had gone he seemed to glide out of her life—out of the past as of the present. She found herself barely able to recall him, his features, his characteristics. For a long time she never thought of him unless some one mentioned his name, and then she wondered if he had not been the hero of a written sketch rather than of an actual episode.

Whether it was owing to Cryder's removal or to Quintard's influence, she could not tell, but she found herself becoming less blasé. Her spirits were lighter, people interested her more, life seemed less prosaic. She asked Quintard once what it meant, and he told her, with his usual frankness, that it was the spring. This offended her, and she did not speak for ten minutes.

On another occasion he roused her to wrath. He told her one day that on the night he met her he had been impressed with a sense of unreality about her; and, acting on a sudden impulse, she told him the history of her starved and beautiful girlhood. When she finished she expected many comments, but Quintard merely put another log of wood on the fire and remarked:

“That is all very interesting, but I am warned that the dinner-hour approaches. Farewell, I will see you at Mrs. Dykman's this evening.”

Hermia looked at the fire for some time after he had gone. She was thankful that fate had arranged matters in such wise that she was not to spend her life with Quintard. He could be, at times, the most disagreeable man she had ever known, and there was not a grain of sympathy in his nature. And, yes, he *was* prosaic!

CHAPTER XXX.

THROUGH THE SNOW.

Two days later Hermia went to a large dinner, and Quintard took her in. She was moody and absent. She felt nervous, she said, and he need not be surprised if he found her very cross. Quintard told her to be as cross as she liked. He had his reasons for encouraging her in her moods. After the dinner was over she wandered through the rooms like a restless ghost. Finally she turned abruptly to Quintard. "Take me home," she said; "I shall stifle if I stay in this house any longer. It is like a hot-house."

"But what will Mrs. Dykman say?"

"I do not care what she says. She is not ready to go, and I won't stay any longer. I will go without saying anything to her about it."

"Very well. There will be comment, but I will see if they have a telephone and order a cab."

"I won't go in a cab. I want to walk."

"But it is snowing."

"I like to walk in the snow."

Quintard thought it best to let her have her way. Moreover, a walk through the snow with her would be a very pleasant thing. He hunted up a housemaid and borrowed a pair of high overshoes. Hermia had on a short gown; she pulled the fur-lined hood of her long wrap about her head, Quintard put on the overshoes, and they managed to get out of the house unnoticed. The snow was falling, but the wind lingered afar on the borders of the storm.

"You had better let me call a cab."

"I will *not* drive," replied Hermia; and Quintard shrugged his shoulders and offered his arm.

The walk was not a long one under ordinary circumstances; the house at which the dinner had been given was in Gramercy Park; but, with a slippery pavement and snow-stars in one's eyes, each block is a mile. Quintard had an umbrella, but Hermia would not let him raise it. She liked to throw back her head and watch the snow in its tumbling, scurrying, silent fall. It lay deep in the long, narrow street, and it blotted out the tall, stern houses with a merry, baffling curtain of wee, white storm-imps. Now and again a cab flashed its lantern like a will-o'-the-wisp.

Hermia made Quintard stop under one of the electric lamps. It poured its steady beams through the storm for a mile and more, and in it danced the sparkling crystals in infinite variety of form and motion. About the pathway pressed the soft, unglorious army, jealous of their transformed comrades, like stars that sigh to spring from the crowded milky way. Down that luminous road hurried the tiny radiant shapes, like coming souls to the great city, hungry for life.

Hermia clung to Quintard, her eyes shining out of the dark.

"Summer and the country have nothing so beautiful as this," she whispered. "I feel as if we were on a deserted planet, and of hateful modern life there was none. I cannot see a house."

"I see several," said Quintard.

Hermia gave a little exclamation of disgust, but struggled onward. "Sometimes I hate you," she said. "You never respond to my moods."

"Oh, yes, I do—to your real moods. You often think you are sentimental, when, should I take you up, you would find me a bore and change the subject. You will get sentimental enough some day, but you are not ready for it yet."

“Yes? You still cling to that ridiculous idea that I shall some day fall in love, I suppose.”

“I do. And how you will go to pieces.”

“That is purest nonsense. I wish it were not.”

“Have you got that far? But we will not argue the matter. Your mood to-night, as I suggested before, is not a sentimental one. You are extremely cross. I don’t know but I like that better. It would be hard for me to be sentimental in the streets of New York.”

Hermia rather liked being bullied by him at times. But if she could only shake that effortless self-control!

They walked a block in silence. “Are you very susceptible to beauty?” she asked suddenly.

Quintard laughed. “I am afraid I am. Still, I will do myself the justice to say that it has no power to hold me if there is nothing else. Beauty by itself is a poor thing; combined with several other things—intellect, soul, passion—it becomes one of the sweetest and most powerful aids to communion.”

“Why do you think so much of passion?” she demanded. “You haven’t any yourself.”

They passed under a lamp at the moment, and a ray of light fell on Quintard’s face, to which Hermia had lifted her eyes. The color sprang to it, and his eyes flashed. He bent his head until she shrank under the strong, angry magnetism of his gaze. “It is time you opened your eyes,” he said harshly, “and learned to know one man from another. And it is time you began to realize what you have to expect.” He bent his face a little closer. “It will not frighten you, though,” he said. And then he raised his head and carefully piloted her across the street.

Hermia made no reply. She opened her lips as if her lungs needed more air. Something was humming in her head; she could not think. She looked up through a light-path into the dark, piling billows of the vaporous, storm-writhed ocean. Then she caught Quintard’s arm as if she were on an eminence and afraid of falling.

“Are you cold?” he asked, drawing her closer.

“Yes,” said Hermia. “I wish we were home. How thick the snow is! Things are in my eyes.”

Quintard stopped and brushed the little crystals off her lashes. Then they went on, slipping sometimes, but never falling. Quintard was very sure-footed. The snow covered them with a garment like soft white fur, the darkness deepened, and neither made further attempt at conversation. Quintard had all he could do to keep his bearings, and began to wish that he had not let Hermia have her way; but she trudged along beside him with a blind sort of confidence new to her.

After a time he gave an exclamation of relief. “We are within a couple of blocks of your house,” he said. “We shall soon be home. Be careful—the crossing is very slip——. Ah!”

She had stepped off the curbstone too quickly, her foot slipped, and she made a wild slide forward, dragging Quintard with her. He threw his arm around her, and caught his balance on the wing. In a second he was squarely planted on both feet, but he did not release Hermia. He wound his arms about her, pressing her closer, closer, his breath coming quickly. The ice-burdened storm might have been the hot blast of a furnace. He did not kiss her, his lips were frozen; but her hood had fallen back and he pressed his face into the fragrant gold of her hair.

He loosened his hold suddenly, and, drawing her arm through his, hurried through the street. They were at Hermia’s door in a few moments, and when the butler opened it she turned to him hesitatingly.

“You will come in and get warm, and ring for a cab?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said, “I will go in for a moment.”

They went into the library, and Quintard lit all the burners. He touched a bell and told the

butler to bring some sherry and call a cab.

When the sherry came he drank a glass with her, and entertained her until the cab arrived, with an account of a wild storm in which he had once found himself on the mountains of Colorado. When the bell rang she stood up and held out her hand with a smile.

“Good-luck to you,” she said. “I hope you will get home before morning.”

He took her hand, then dropped it and put both his own about her face, his wrists meeting under her chin. “Good-night,” he said softly. “Go to those sovereign domains of yours, where the castles are built of the clouds of sunset, and the sea thunders with longing and love and pain of desire. I have been with you there always; I always shall be;” and then he let his hands fall, and went quickly from the room.

Hermia waited until the front door had closed, and then she ran up to her room as if hobgoblins were in pursuit.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE DYKMAN REPRIMAND.

While Hermia was sitting in the library the next day in a very unenviable frame of mind, the door opened and Mrs. Dykman came in.

"Hermia," she said, after she had disposed herself on one of the severe, high-backed chairs, "it is quite time for you to adopt some slight regard for the conventionalities. You are wealthy, and strong in your family name; but there is a limit. The world is not a thing you can hold in the hollow of your hand or crush under your foot. The manner in which you left Mrs. Le Roy's house last night was scandalous. What do you suppose the consequences will be?" Her cold, even tones never varied, but they had the ice-breath of the Arctic in them.

"Are people talking?" asked Hermia.

"Talking? They are shrieking! It is to be hoped, for your own sake, that you are going to marry Grettan Quintard, and that you will let me announce the engagement at once."

Hermia sprang to her feet, overturning her chair. She had a book in her hand, and she flung it across the room. Her eyes were blazing and her face was livid. "Don't ever dare mention that man's name to me again!" she cried. "I hate him! I hate him! And don't bring me any more tales about what people are saying. I don't care what they say! I scorn them all! What are they but a set of jibbering automatons? One year has made me loathe the bloodless, pulseless, colorless, artificial thing you call society. Those people whose names and position each bows down to in the other are not human beings! they are but a handful of fungi on the great plant of humanity! If they were wrenched from their roots and crushed out of life to-morrow, their poor, little, miserable, self-satisfied numbers would not be missed. Of what value are they in the scheme of existence save to fatten and puff in the shade of a real world like the mushroom and the toadstool under an oak? They are not *alive* like the great world of real men; not one of them ever had a strong, real, healthy, animal impulse in his life. Even their little sins are artificial, and owe their faint, evanescent promptings to vanity or ennui. I hate their wretched little aims and ambitions, their well-bred scuffling for power in the eyes of each other—*power*—Heaven save the mark! They work as hard, those poor midgets, for recognition among the few hundred people who have ever heard of them, as a statesman does for the admiration of his country! And yet if the whole tribe were melted down into one soul they would not make an ambition big enough to carry its result to the next generation. A year and I shall have forgotten every name on my visiting-list. Great God! that you should think I care for them."

Mrs. Dykman rose to her feet and drew her furs about her. "I do not pretend to understand you," she said. "Fortunately for myself, my lot has been cast among ordinary women. And as I am a part of the world for which you have so magnificent a contempt, one of the midgets for whom you have so fine a scorn, I imagine you will care to see as little of me in the future as I of you."

She was walking majestically down the room when Hermia sprang forward, and, throwing her arms about her, burst into a storm of tears. "Oh, don't be angry with me!" she cried. "Don't! Don't! I am so miserable that I don't know what I am saying. I believe I am half crazy."

Mrs. Dykman drew her down on a sofa. "What is the trouble?" she asked. "Tell me."

"There is nothing in particular," said Hermia. "I am just unstrung. I feel like a raft in the middle of an ocean. I am disgusted with life. It must be because I am not well. I am sure that is it."

There is nothing else. Oh, Aunt Frances, take me to Europe.”

“Very well,” said Mrs. Dykman; “we will go if you think that traveling will cure you. But I cannot go for at least five weeks. Will that do?”

“Yes,” said Hermia; “I suppose it will have to.”

CHAPTER XXXII.

FUTURITY.

A few days later Hermia had a singular experience. Bessie's youngest child, her only boy, died. Hermia carried her sister from the room as the boy breathed his last, and laid her on a bed. As Bessie lay sobbing and moaning, sometimes wailing aloud, she seemed suddenly to fade from her sister's vision. Hermia was alone, where she could not tell, in a room whose lineaments were too shadowy to define. Even her own outlines, seen as in a mirror held above, were blurred. Of one thing only was she sharply conscious: she was writhing in mortal agony—agony not of the body, but of the spirit. The cause she did not grasp, but the effect was a suffering as exquisite and as torturing as that of vitriol poured upon bare nerves. The insight lasted only a few seconds, but it was so real that she almost screamed aloud. Then she drifted back to the present and bent over her sister. But her face was white. In that brief interval her inner vision had pierced the depths of her nature, and what it saw there made her shudder.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

CHAOS.

She began to hate Cryder with a mortal hatred. When he left her he had flown down the perspective of her past, but now he seemed to be crawling back—nearer—nearer—

Had it not been for him she might have loved Quintard. But he had scraped the gloss from life. He had made love commonplace, vulgar. She felt a sort of moral nausea whenever she thought of love. What an ideal would love have been with Quintard in this house! There was a barbaric, almost savage element in his nature which made him seem a part of these rooms and of that Indian wilderness.

And every nook and corner was eloquent of Cryder! Sometimes she thought she would take another house. But she asked herself: Of what use? She had nothing left to give Quintard, and her house was his delight. She no longer pretended to analyze herself or to speculate on the future. Once, when sitting alone by Bessie's bed in the night, she had opened the door of her mental photograph gallery and glanced down the room to that great, bare plate at the end. It was bare no longer. On its surface was an impression—what, she did not pause to ascertain. She shut the door hurriedly and turned the key.

At times all the evil in her nature was dominant. She dreaded hearing Quintard speak the word which would thrust her face to face with her future; but the temptation was strong to see the lightning flash in his eyes, to shake his silence as a rock shakes above the quivering earth. And Quintard kept his control because he saw that she was trying to tempt him, and he determined that he would not yield an inch until he was ready.

She made up her mind to go away from all memory of Cryder and live on some Mediterranean island with Quintard. She was not fit to be any man's wife, and life could never be what it might have been; but at least she would have him, and she could not live without him. There were softer moments, when she felt poignant regret for the mistake of her past, when she had brief, fleeting longings for a higher life of duty, and of a love that was something more than intellectual companionship and possession.

Quintard's book came out and aroused a hot dispute. He was accused of coarseness and immorality on the one side, and granted originality and vigor on the other. The ultra-conservative faction refused him a place in American literature. The radical and advanced wing said that American literature had some blood in its veins at last. Hermia took all the papers, and a day seldom passed that Quintard's name, either in execration or commendation, did not meet her eyes. The derogatory articles cut her to the quick or aroused her to fury; and the adulation he received delighted her as keenly as if offered to herself.

He was with her in his periods of elation and depression, and it was at such times that the better part of her nature was stirred. He needed her. She could give him that help and comfort and sympathy without which his life would be barren. She knew that under the hard, outer crust of her nature lay the stunted germs of self-abnegation and sacrifice, and there were moments when she longed with all the ardor of her quickening soul to give her life to this man's happiness and good. Then the mood would pass, and she would look back upon it with impatience.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

LIFE FROM DEATH.

Hermia was in bed one morning when her maid brought her the papers. She opened one, then sat suddenly erect, and the paper shook in her hands. She read the headlines through twice—details were needless. Then she dropped the paper and fell back on the pillows. A train had gone over an embankment in the South, and Ogden Cryder's name was in the list of dead.

She lay staring at the painted canopy of her bed. It seemed to her that with Cryder's life her past was annihilated, that the man took with him every act and deed of which she had been a part. A curtain seemed to roll down just behind her. A drama had been enacted, but it was over. What had it been about? She had forgotten. She could recall nothing. That curtain shut out every memory.

She pressed her hands over her eyes. She was free! She could take up her life from this hour and forget that any man had entered it but Grettan Quintard. Cryder? Who was he? Had he ever lived? What did he look like? She could not remember. She could recall but one face—a face which should never be seen in this room.

Though her mood was not a hard one, she felt no pity for Cryder. Love had made every object in life insignificant but herself and her lover.

She would marry Quintard. She would be all that in her better moments she had dreamed of being—that and more. She had great capacity for good in her; her respect and admiration for Quintard's higher qualities had taught her that. She threw up her arms and struck her open palms against the bed's head. And how she loved him! What exultation in the thought of her power to give him happiness!

For a few days Quintard felt as if he were walking on the edge of a crater. The hardness in her nature seemed to have melted and gone. The defiant, almost cynical look had left her eyes; they were dreamy, almost appealing. She made no further effort to tempt him, but he had a weird feeling that if he touched her he would receive an electric shock. He did not suspect the cause of the sudden change, nor did he care to know. It was enough that it was.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IDEALS RESTORED.

They were sitting together one evening in the jungle. The night was hot and the windows were open, but the curtains were drawn. The lamps were hidden behind the palms, and the room was full of mellow light. Hermia sat on a bank of soft, green cushions, and Quintard lay beside her. Hermia wore a loose gown of pale-green mull, that fell straight from her bosom's immovable swell, and her neck and arms were bare. She had clasped her hands about her knee and was leaning slightly forward. Beside her was a heavy mass of foliage, and against it shone her hair and the polished whiteness of her skin.

"Now that you are famous, and your book has been discussed threadbare, what are you going to do next?" she asked him.

"I want to write some romances about the princely houses of India—of that period which immediately antedates the invasion of the East India Company. I spent a year in northern and western India, and collected a quantity of material. We know little of the picturesque side of India outside of Macaulay, Crawford, and Edwin Arnold, and it is immensely fertile in romance and anecdote. There never were such love-affairs, such daring intrigues, such tragedies! And the setting! It would take twenty vocabularies to do it justice; but it is gratifying to find a setting upon which one vocabulary has not been twenty times exhausted. And then I have half promised Mrs. Trennor-Secor to dramatize Rossetti's 'Rose Mary' for her. She wants to use it at Newport this summer, or rather, she wanted something, and I suggested that. I have always intended to do it. But I feel little in the humor for writing at present, to tell you the truth."

He stopped abruptly, and Hermia clasped her hands more tightly about her knee. "What are your plans for 'Rose Mary'?" she asked. "I hope you will have five or six voices sing the Beryl songs behind the altar. The effect would be weird and most impressive."

"That is a good idea," said Quintard. "How many ideas you have given me!"

"Tell me your general plan," she said quickly.

He sketched it to her, and she questioned him at length, nervously keeping him on the subject as long as she could. The atmosphere seemed charged; they would never get through this evening in safety! If he retained his self-control, she felt that she should lose hers.

She pressed her face down against her knee, and his words began to reach her consciousness with the indistinctness of words that come through ears that are the outposts of a dreaming brain. When he finished he sat suddenly upright, and for a few moments uttered no word. He sat close beside her, almost touching her, and Hermia felt as if her veins' rivers had emptied their cataracts into her ears. Her nerves were humming in a vast choir. She made a rigid attempt at self-control, and the effort made her tremble. Quintard threw himself forward, and putting his hand to her throat forced back her head. Her face was white, but her lips were burning. Quintard pressed his mouth to hers—and Hermia took her ideals to her heart once more.

Time passed and the present returned to them. He spoke his first word. "We will be married before the week is out. Promise."

He left her suddenly, and Hermia sank back and down amidst the cushions. Once or twice she moved impatiently. Why was he not with her? The languor in her veins grew heavier and wrapped her about as in a covering. She slept.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

AN AWAKENING.

When Hermia awoke there was a rattle of wagons in the street, and the dawn struggled through the curtains. There was a chill in the air and she shivered a little. She lay recalling the events of the night. Suddenly she sat upright and cast about her a furtive glance of horror. Then she sat still and her teeth chattered.

Cryder's face looked at her from behind every palm! It grinned mockingly down from every tree! It sprang from the cushions and pressed itself close to her cheek! The room was *peopled* with Cryder!

She sprang to her feet and threw her arms above her head. "O God!" she cried; "it was but for a night! for a night!"

She fled down the room, Cryder, in augmenting swarm, pursuing her. She flew up the stairs and into her room, and there flung herself on the floor in such mortal agony as she could never know again, because the senses must be blunted ever after. Last night, in Quintard's arms, as heaven's lightning flashed through her heart, every avenue in it had been rent wide. The great mystery of life had poured through, flooding them with light, throwing into cloudless relief the glorious heights and the muttering depths. Last night she had dwelt on the heights, and in that starry ether had given no glance to the yawning pits below. But sleep had come; she had slid gently, unwittingly down; she had awakened to find herself writhing on the sharp, jutting rocks of a rayless cavern, on whose roof of sunset gold she had rambled for days and weeks with a security which had in it the blindness of infatuation.

She marry Quintard and live with him as the woman he loved and honored above all women! She try to scale those heights where was to be garnered something better worth offering her lover than any stores in her own sterile soul! That hideous, ineffaceable brand seemed scorching her breast with letters of fire. If she had but half loved Cryder—but she had not loved him for a moment. With her right hand she had cast the veil over her eyes; with her left, she had fought away all promptings that would have rent the veil in twain. Every moment, from beginning to awakening, she had shut her ears to the voice which would have whispered that her love was a deliberate delusion, created and developed by her will. No! she had no excuse. She was a woman of brains; there was no truth she might not have grasped had she chosen to turn her eyes and face it.

She flung her arms over her head, grasping the fringes of the rug, and twisting them into a shapeless mass. She moaned aloud in quick, short, unconscious throbs of sound. She was five-and-twenty, and life was over. She had wandered through long years in a wilderness as desolate as night, and she had reached the gates of the city to find them shut. They had opened for a moment and she had stood within them; then a hand had flung her backward, and the great, golden portals had rushed together with an impetus which welded them for all time. She made no excuses for herself; she hurled no anathemas against fate. Her intellect had been given to her to save her from the mistakes of foolish humanity, a lamp to keep her out of the mud. She had shaded the lamp and gone down into the mire. She had known by experience and by thought that no act of man's life passed without a scar; that the scars knit together and formed the separate, indestructible constituent fibers of his character. And each fiber influenced eternally the structure as a whole. She had known this, and yet, without a glance

into the future, without a stray thought tossed to issues, she had burnt herself as indifferently as a woman who has nothing to lose. It was true that great atonement was in her power, that in a life's reach of love and duty the scar would fade. But that was not in the question. With such tragic natures there is no medium. She could not see a year in the future that would not be haunted with memories and regrets; an hour when that scar would not burn.

If life could not be perfect, she would have nothing less. She had dealt her cards, she would accept the result. She had had it in her to enjoy a happiness possible only to women of her intellect and temperament. She had deliberately put happiness out of her life, and there could be but one end to the matter.

She sprang to her feet. She had no tears, but it seemed as if something had its teeth at her vitals and was tearing them as a tiger tears its victim. She walked aimlessly up and down the room until exhausted, then went mechanically to bed.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DOCTRINE OF THE INEVITABLE.

Late in the day her maid awoke her and said that Mrs. Dykman was down-stairs.

Hermia hesitated; then she bade the girl bring the visitor up to her boudoir. It was as well for several reasons that Mrs. Dykman should know.

She thrust her feet into a pair of night-slippers, drew a dressing-gown about her, and went into the next room. Mrs. Dykman, as she entered a moment later, raised her level brows.

"Hermia!" she said, "what is the matter?"

Hermia glanced at herself in the mirror. She shuddered a little at her reflection. "Several things," she said, briefly. "Sit down."

Mrs. Dykman, with an extremely uncomfortable sensation, took a chair. On the occasion of her first long conversation with Hermia she had made up her mind that her new-found relative would one day electrify the world by some act which her family would strive to forget. How she wished Hermia had been cast in that world's conventional mold! It had come! She was convinced of that, as she looked at Hermia's face. What *had* she done?

"I have something to tell you," said Hermia; and then she stopped.

"Well?"

Mrs. Dykman uttered only one word; but before that calm, impassive expectancy there was no retreat. She looked as immovable, yet as compelling, as a sphinx.

Hermia told her story to the end. At so low an ebb was her vitality that not a throb of excitement was in her voice.

When she had finished, Mrs. Dykman drew a breath of relief. It was all very terrible, of course, but she had felt an indefinable dread of something worse. She knew with whom she had to deal, however, and decided upon her line of argument without the loss of a moment. For Hermia to allow any barrier to stand between herself and Quintard was ridiculous.

"It is a very unfortunate thing," she said, in a tone intended to impress Hermia with its lack of horror; "but has it occurred to you that it could not be helped?"

"What do you mean?"

"Do you remember that for more years than you can count you nursed and trained and hugged the idea of an adventurous love-affair? The moment you got the necessary conditions you thought of nothing but of realizing your dream. To have changed your ideas would have involved the changing of your whole nature. The act was as inevitable as any minor act in life which is the direct result of the act which preceded it. You could no more have helped having an intrigue than you could help having typhoid fever if your system were in the necessary condition. I think that is a logical statement of the matter."

"I do not deny it," said Hermia indifferently; "but why was I so blind as to mistake the wrong man for the right?"

"The men of your imagination were so far above reality that all men you met were a disappointment. Cryder was the first who had any of the qualities you demanded. And there was much about Cryder to please; he was one of the most charming men I ever met. You found it delightful to be with a man who, you thought, understood you, and whose mind was equal to your own. You were lonely, too—you wanted a companion. If Quintard had come first, there would have been no question of mistake; but, as the case stands, it was perfectly natural for

you to imagine yourself in love with Cryder.”

Hermia turned her head listlessly against the back of the chair and stared at the wall. It was all true; but what difference did it make?

Mrs. Dykman went on: “Moreover—although it is difficult for you to accept such a truth in your present frame of mind—the affair did you good, and your chances of happiness are greater than if you took into matrimony neither experience nor the memory of mistakes. If you had met Quintard first and married him, you would have carried with you through life the regret that you had never realized your wayward dreams. You would have continued to invest an intrigue with all the romance of your imagination; now you know exactly how little there is in it. What is more, you have learned something of the difference in men, and will be able to appreciate a man like Quintard. You will realize how few men there are in the world who satisfy all the wants of a woman’s nature. There is no effect in a picture without both light and shade. The life you will have with Quintard will be the more complete and beautiful by its contrast to the emptiness and baldness of your attempt with Cryder.”

Hermia placed her elbows on her knees and pressed her hands against her face. “You are appealing to my intellect,” she said; “and what you say is very clever, and worthy of you. But, if I had met Quintard in time, he would have dispelled all my false illusions and made me more than content with what he offered in return. No, I have made a horrible mistake, and no logic will help me.”

“But look at another side of the question. You have given yourself to one man; Heaven knows how many love affairs Grettan Quintard has had. You know this; you heard him acknowledge it in so many words. And yet you find no fault with him. Why, then, is your one indiscretion so much greater than his many? Your life until you met Quintard was your own to do with as it pleased you. If you chose to take the same privilege that the social code allows to men, the relative sin is very small; about positive right and wrong I do not pretend to know anything. With the uneven standard of morality set up by the world and by religion, who does? But relatively you are so much less guilty than Quintard that the matter is hardly worth discussing. And, if he never discovers that you give him less than he believes, it will not hurt him. When you are older, you will have a less tender regard for men than you have to-day.”

Hermia leaned back and sighed heavily. “Oh, it is not the abstract sin,” she said. “It is that *it was*, and that *now* I love.”

“Hermia,” said Mrs. Dykman, sternly, “this is unworthy of a woman of your brains and character. You have the strongest will of any woman I have ever known; take your past by the throat and put it behind you. Stifle it and forget it. You have the power, and you must surely have the desire.”

“No,” said Hermia, “I have neither the power nor the desire. That is the one thing in my life beyond the control of my will.”

“Then there is but one thing that will bring back your normal frame of mind, and that is change. I will give you a summer in London and a winter in Paris. I promise that at the end of that time you will marry Quintard.”

“Well,” said Hermia, listlessly, “I will think of it.” She was beginning to wish her aunt would go. She had made her more disgusted with life than ever.

Mrs. Dykman divined that it was time to leave the girl alone, and rose. She hesitated a moment and then placed her hand on Hermia’s shoulder. “I have had every experience that life offers to women,” she said—and for the first time in Hermia’s knowledge of her those even tones deepened—“every tragedy, every comedy, every bitterness, every joy—*everything*.”

Therefore, my advice has its worth. There is little in life—make the most of that little when you find it. You are facing a problem that more than one woman has faced before, and you will work it out as other women have done. It was never intended that a life-time of suffering should be the result of one mistake.” Then she gathered her wraps about her and left the room.

Shortly after, Hermia drove down to her lawyer’s office and made a will. She left bequests to Helen Simms and Miss Newton, and divided the bulk of her property between Bessie, Miss Starbruck, and Mrs. Dykman.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

BETWEEN DAY AND NIGHT.

Hermia sat by the window waiting for Quintard. It was the saddest hour of the day—that hour of dusk when the lamplighter trudges on his rounds. How many women have sat in their darkening rooms at that hour with their brows against the glass and watched their memories rise and sing a dirge! Even a child—if it be a woman-child—is oppressed in that shadow-haunted land between day and night, for the sadness of the future is on her. It is the hour when souls in their strain feel that the tension must snap; when tortured hearts send their cries through forbidding brains. The sun has gone, the lamps are unlit, the shadows lord and mock until they are blotted out under falling tears.

Hermia rose suddenly and left the room. She went into the dining-room and drank a glass of sherry. She wore a black gown, and her face was as wan as the white-faced sky; but in a moment the wine brought color to her lips and cheeks. Then she went into the jungle and lit the lamps.

She was standing by one of the date-trees as Quintard entered. As he came up to her he took her hand in both his own, but he did not kiss her; he almost dreaded a renewal of last night's excitement. Hermia, moreover, was a woman whose moods must be respected; she did not look as if she were ready to be kissed.

“Are you ill?” he asked, with a tenderness in his voice which made her set her teeth. “Your eyes are hollow. I am afraid you did not sleep. I?”—the dark color coming under his skin—“did not sleep either.”

“I slept,” said Hermia—“a little; but I have a headache.”

They went to the end of the room and sat down, she on the bank, he opposite, on a seat made to represent a hollowed stump.

They talked of many things, as lovers do in those intervals between the end of one whirlwind and the half-feared, half-longed-for beginning of another. He told her that the Poet's Club, after a mighty battle which had threatened disruption, had formally elected him a member. Word had been sent to his rooms late in the afternoon. Then he told her that they were to be married on Thursday, and to sail for Europe in the early morning on his yacht. He spoke of the places they would visit, the old cities he had loved to roam about alone, where idle talk would have shattered the charm. And he would take her into the heart of nature and teach her to forget that the world of men existed. And the sea—they both loved the sea better than all. He would teach her how every ocean, every river, every stream spoke a language of its own, and told legends that put to shame those of forest and mountain, village and wilderness. They would lie on the sands and listen to the deep, steady voice of the ocean telling the secrets she carried in her stormy heart—secrets that were safe save when some mortal tuned his ear to her tongue. He threw back his head and quoted lingeringly from the divinest words that have ever been written about the sea:

“Mother of loves that are swift to fade,
Mother of mutable winds and hours,
A barren mother, a mother-maid,
Cold and clean as her faint, salt flowers.
I would we twain were even as she,
Lost in the night and the light of the sea,
Where faint sounds filter and wan beams wade,
Break and are broken, and shed into showers.

* * * * *

“O tender-hearted, O perfect lover,
Thy lips are bitter, and sweet thine heart.
The hopes that hurt and the dreams that hover,
Shall they not vanish away and apart?
But thou, thou art sure, thou art older than earth;
Thou art strong for death and fruitful of birth;
Thy depths conceal and thy gulfs discover;
From the first thou wert; in the end thou art.”

Hermia leaned forward and pressed her hands into his. “Come!” she said.

He dropped on the cushion beside her and caught her to him in an embrace that hurt her; and under his kiss the coming hour was forgotten.

After a time he pushed her back among the cushions and pressed his lips to her throat. Suddenly he stood up. “I am going,” he said. “We will be married at eight o’clock on Thursday night. I shall not see you until then.”

She stood up also. “Wait a moment,” she said, “I want to say something to you before you go.” She looked at him steadily and said: “I was everything to Ogden Cryder.”

For a moment it seemed as if Quintard had not understood. He put out his hand as if to ward off a blow, and looked at her almost inquiringly.

“What did you say?” he muttered.

“I tried to believe that I loved him, and failed. There is no excuse. I knew I did not. I tell you this because I love you too well to give you what you would have spurned had you known; and I tell you that you may forget me the sooner.”

Quintard understood. He crossed the short distance between them and looked into her face.

Hermia gave a rapturous cry. All that was brutal and savage in her nature surged upward in response to the murderous passion in this man who was bone of herself. Never had she been so at one with him; never had she so worshiped him as in that moment when she thought he was going to kill her. Then, like a flash, he left her.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE REALIZATION OF IDEALS.

She stood motionless for a few moments, then went up-stairs. As she crossed the hall she saw that the front-door was open, but she was too listless to close it. She went to her boudoir and sank into a chair. In the next room was a bottle of potassium cyanide which she had brought up from the butler's pantry. It had been purchased to scour John Suydam's silver, which had the rust of generations on it. She would get it in a few moments. She had a fancy to review her life before she ended it. All those years before the last two—had they ever really existed? Had there been a time when life had been before her? when circumstances had not combined to push her steadily to her destruction? No temptations had come to the plain, unattractive girl in the little Brooklyn flat. Though every desire had been ungratified, still her life had been unspoiled, and she had possessed a realm in which she had found perfect joy. Was it possible that she and that girl were the same? She was twenty years older and her life was over; that girl's had not then begun. If she could be back in that past for a few moments! If, for a little time, she could blot out the present before she went into the future! She lifted her head. In a drawer of her wardrobe was an old brown-serge dress. She had kept it to look at occasionally, and with it assure, and reassure, herself that the present was not a dream. She had a fancy to look for a moment as she had looked in those days when all things were yet to be.

She went into her bedroom and took out the dress. It was worn at the seams and dowdy of cut. She put it on. She dipped her hair into a basin of water, wrung it out, and twisted it in a tight knot at the back of her head, leaving her forehead bare. Then she went back to the boudoir and looked at herself in the glass. Yes, she was almost the same. The gown did not meet, but it hung about her in clumsy folds; the water made her hair lifeless and dull; and her skin was gray. Only her eyes were not those of a girl who had never looked upon the realities of life. Yes, she could easily be ugly again; but with ugliness would not come two years' annihilation.

She threw herself into a chair, and, covering her eyes with her hand, cried a little. To the hopes, the ambitions, the dreams, the longings, which had been her faithful companions throughout her life, she owed those tears. She would shed none for her mistakes. She dropped her hand and let her head fall back with a little sigh of content. At least there was one solution for all misery, and nothing could take it from her. Death was so easy to find; it dwelt in a little bottle in the next room. In an hour she would be beyond the reach of memories. What mattered this little hour of pain? There was an eternity of forgetfulness beyond. Another hour, and she would be like a bubble that had burst on the surface of a lake. Then an ugly thought flashed into her brain, and she pressed her hands against her eyes. Suppose there were a spiritual existence and she should meet Cryder in it! Suppose he were waiting for her at the threshold, and with malignant glee should link her to him for all eternity! His egoism would demand just such revenge for her failure to love him!

She sprang to her feet. With difficulty she kept from screaming aloud. Was she mad?

Then the fear left her eyes and her face relaxed. If the soul were immortal, and if each soul had its mate, hers was Quintard, and Cryder could not claim her. She felt a sudden fierce desire to meet Cryder again and pour out upon him the scorn and hatred which for the moment forced love from her heart.

She dropped her hands to her sides and gazed at the floor for a while, forgetting Cryder. Then she walked toward her bedroom. As she reached the pillars she stopped and pressed her handkerchief to her mouth with a shudder of distaste. Cyanide of potassium was bitter, she had heard. She had always hated bitter things—quinine and camphor and barks; her mother used to give her a horrible tea when she was a child. * * * The taste seemed to come into her mouth and warp it. * * *

She flung her handkerchief to the floor with an impatient gesture and went into the next room.

A moment later she raised her head and listened. Then she drew a long, shuddering breath. Some one was springing up the stairs.

She thrust her hands into her hair and ruffled it about her face; it was half dry, and the gold glinted through the damp.

Quintard threw open the door of the boudoir and was at her side in an instant. His face was white and his lips were blue, but the fierceness was gone from his eyes.

“You were going to kill yourself,” he said.

“Yes,” she replied, “I shall kill myself.”

“I knew it! Sit down and listen to me.”

He pushed her on to a divan and sat in front of her.

“I find by my watch that it is but an hour since I left you,” he went on. “I had thought the world had rolled out of its teens. For most of that hour I was mad. Then came back that terrible hunger of heart and soul, a moment of awful, prophetic solitude. Let your past go. I cannot live without you.”

Hermia bent her body until her forehead touched her knees. “I cannot,” she said; “I never could forget, nor could you.”

“I *would* forget, and so will you. I will make you forget.”

She shook her head. “Life—nothing would ever be the same to me; nor to you—now that I have told you.”

He hesitated a moment. “You did right to tell me,” he said, “for your soul’s peace. And I—I love you the better for what you have suffered. And, my God! think of life without you! Let it go; we will make our past out of our future.”

He sat down beside her and took her in his arms, then drew her across his lap and laid her head against his shoulder.

“We are the creatures of opportunity, of circumstance,” he said; “we must bow to the Doctrine of the Inevitable. Inexorable circumstance waited too long to rivet our links; that is all. Circumstance is rarely kind save to the commonplace, for it is only the commonplace who never make mistakes. But no circumstance shall stand between us now. I love you, and you are mine.”

He drew her arms about his neck and kissed her softly on her eyes, her face, her mouth.

“You have suffered,” he whispered, “but let it be over and forgotten. Poor girl! how fate all your life has stranded you in the desert, and how you have beaten your wings against the ground and fought to get out. Come to me and forget—forget—”

She tightened her arm about his neck and pressed his face against her shoulder. Then she took the cork from the phial hidden in her sleeve. With a sudden instinct Quintard threw back his head, and the movement knocked the phial from her hand. It fell to the floor and broke.

For a moment he looked at her without speaking. Under the reproach in his eyes her lids fell.

He spoke at last. “Have you not thought of me once, Hermia? Are you so utterly absorbed in yourself, in your desire to bury your misery in oblivion, that you have not a thought left for

my suffering, for my loneliness, and for my remorse? Do you suppose I could ever forget that you killed yourself for me? You are afraid to live; you can find no courage to carry through life the gnawing at your soul. You have pictured every horror of such an existence. And yet, by your own act, you willingly abandon one whom you profess to love, to a life full of the torments which you so terribly and elaborately comprehend.”

Hermia lay still a moment, then slipped from his arms and rose to her feet. For a few moments she walked slowly up and down the room, then stood before him. The mask of her face was the same, but through it a new spirit shone. It was the supreme moment of Hermia’s life. She might not again touch the depths of her old selfishness, but as surely would she never a second time brush her wings against the peaks of self’s emancipation.

“You are right,” she said; “I had not thought of you. I have sulked in the lap of my own egoism all my life. That a human soul might get outside of itself has never occurred to me—until now. I will live and rejoice in my own abnegation, for the sacrifice will give me something the better to offer you. I have suffered, and I shall suffer as long as I live—but I believe you will be the happier for it.”

He stood up and grasped her hands. “Hermia!” he exclaimed beneath his breath, “Hermia, promise it! Promise me that you will live, that you will never kill yourself. There might be wild moments of remorse—promise.”

“I promise,” she said.

“Ah! you are true to yourself at last.” Suddenly he shook from head to foot, and leaned heavily against her.

She put her arms about him. “What is the matter?” she asked through white lips.

“There is a trouble of the heart,” he murmured unsteadily, “it is not dangerous. The tension has been very strong to-night—but—to-morrow”—and then he fell to the floor.

She was beside him still when Miss Starbruck entered the room. The old lady’s eyes were angry and defiant, and her mouth was set in a hard line. For the first time in her life she was not afraid of Hermia.

“I heard his voice some time ago,” she said, hoarsely, “and at first I did not dare face you and come in. But you are my dead sister’s child, and I will do my duty by you. You shall not disgrace your mother’s blood—why is he lying there like that?”

Hermia rose and confronted her, and involuntarily Miss Starbruck lowered her eyes.

“He is dead,” said Hermia, “and I—have promised to live.”

THE END.

Transcriber’s Notes:

Spellings and hyphenation have been retained as in the original. Punctuation has been corrected without note.

[The end of *Hermia Suydam* by Gertrude Franklin Horn Atherton]