

*The* LETTER  
H

CHARLES FELTON PIDGIN

*[Faint, illegible handwriting, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*





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# *The Letter H*

*A Novel*

BY

CHARLES FELTON PIDGIN

*Author of "Blennerhassett," "Quincy Adams Sawyer,"*

*"The Climax," etc., etc.*



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*The Letter H*

*Issued July, 1904*

*This Book*  
*is dedicated to My Friend*  
**MISS MARION LAIRD LAW**  
*of*  
*Newark, New Jersey*  
*in Recognition of*  
*Many Suggestions and Much Encouragement*  
*During Its Writing*



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# THE LETTER H

## CHAPTER I

### HARLINGTON HALL

“ Y’ run ’long dar, Rastus, d-dar’s gwine be a sho’ nuff fes’val in d-dis yere old house nex’ week, w-when Mis’ Dorus is a ’comin’ back hum.”

“ Does yo’ k-k-knowed fo’ suttin’ shore, Jimmy?”

“ Sho’ nuff. Ole Mars’ da h-he’s gib m-ma de odors fo’ a jolly big s-s-spread. De chickens gwine cum be killed by de w-w-wholesale an’ de oys’ers gwine cum up in bags an’ dar’s gwine be pie an’, an’ ice cream, an’ ——”

“ An’ c-c-cake, Jimmy?”

“ Cake, shore, an’ boat full o’ c-candy—an’ all de folkses is c-comin’ up frum York, an’ all roun’ de kentry.”

“ S-say, Jimmy, is we uns c-comin’ in fo’ any o’ dis?”

“ L-lor’, Rastus, de Lor’ hissself ain’t near so g-g-genr’us as de ole Marse Gen’al w-w-when it

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come to doin' any thin' fo' Miss Dorus, an' I heerd him say wif his own mouf' dat de chilluns wus to hab all dey could eat, an' we's shorely de chilluns, ain' we?"

The youngsters loitered along the box-bordered path, past the front of the mansion, and slowly around to the side. Two little curly-headed coons they were, their black eyes round with mischief. Four dusky cheeks were puffed out fat and healthy; four little black hands each nestled in its own particular pocket; and four little black feet dragged lazily over the path. They were so exactly alike that it was only Jimmy's extra six inches that distinguished him from Rastus. Unless they were together and the extra height of the one was evident, there was no means of telling them apart. They talked alike, even to the stutter. It was delicious. It lingered over the b's and m's and struggled with the ch's and k's. Nor was it only an occasional stutter. It was ever on the lips of the boys as it was ever on the lips of their father. Still chattering of the delights of the coming feast, they disappeared around the end of the porch.

Harlington Hall, located on the western shore of the Hudson River, far up past Storm King and

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Crow's Nest, stood like some old castle of the Long Ago. It was not that it was particularly ancient, for it had stood under the shade of the big elms for less than two decades. The boards of which it was constructed were wide and caulked, giving it the appearance of stone; and its color in the shadow of the trees showed dull gray. Solitary, square, sombre, it was manorial. The lawn, broken by many shrubs and trees, stretched down to within two score feet of the shore, where a long terrace began, ending at the railroad.

The owner had put soul into the building of his house, for it was one to dream of and to love. What the building lacked in decoration, if it lacked aught in having none, was more than compensated by the picturesque environment. Great tall trees stood close to it, elms and chestnuts, where the sun played at hide-and-seek; and in front of the house, just beyond the wide driveway, were two huge cedars, the pointed tips of which reached past the topmost gables; while below, spreading inch by inch from point to base, the lower branches swept the ground, covering an area of forty feet. Between them was the walk to the river, and, standing like eternal guardians, they called forth ever-repeated, ever-wonder-

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ing remark from those who saw them. When they were planted, or by whom, none knew; but an old Indian legend had it that these tall sentinels were set over the bodies of two white squaws, stolen from the land of the Connecticuts by a chieftain of the Shwangunks. Circumstance waits for neither tale, nor tradition to build her castles; nor did General Harlington delay in the building of his mansion because of the morbid relic of Indian lore, but chose the spot back of the twin evergreens.

On a certain mellow afternoon in the late spring-time, when the grass was greenest in all the year; when the leaves were young and the rosebuds were beginning to show color; when the birds were singing the long days through and the river and the sky were as blue as sapphires, a stranger came walking up the gravel path from the river, having reached it by way of the railroad track from a landing a short distance away. His clothes were conventional, no less his appearance. He seemed more like a merchant of large and prosperous affairs than the member of Congress and sharp politician that he really was. His skin was sallow, and his eyes, which were dark, had a half-shifting glance. As he made his way slowly up the length of the path toward the

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house, his eyes wandered approvingly over the fine old mansion with its air of affluence. He was considering with cold calculation that the house was admirably located—a few minutes' walk from the landing, only a short distance from the village and a pleasant drive from one of the fair-sized cities of the Hudson. On the several hundred acres which comprised the small realm were a stock farm and a truck garden of considerable size. Indeed, there seemed nothing lacking. One thing, as much a part of the estate as the house itself, he overlooked. At the foot of the great steps stood a mongrel—half setter, half cocker—with ears alert and eyes bright, ready to welcome or forbid the newcomer. As the man came out of the shade of the two cedars, the dog, dissatisfied with its close scrutiny, sprang with a threatening growl. The stranger started, shrugged his shoulders and attempted to mount the steps. The dog barked, short and snappy, and, stretching out a long neck, fastened his teeth in the visitor's trousers, just escaping the flesh but securing a firm hold, thus forcing him to a standstill. Dogs, like children, know their friends.

At this point the big oaken door was swung back and the master of the house stood on the threshold.

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There was no mistaking him. The courtly manner, the military bearing, the fine, kindly face, could belong only to General Horace Harlington.

“Come, Sire,” he said sternly; then, recognizing the newcomer, he came briskly down the steps, holding forth his hand in welcome; and, with an expression of genuine pleasure, continued:

“Why, Higby, old man, I’m right glad to see you.”

“I believe you,” said the stranger, “but your hospitality is well guarded. Your brute of a dog nearly finished me.”

“Sire, poor dog, is getting old and querulous, like his master. Did he really injure you?”

Harlington, after examining the torn trousers, led his guest into the house, jovially asking many questions.

The interior, like the exterior, suggested comfort, ease and luxury. There was no attempt at over-decoration. The wide reception-room, the hall and the apartments adjoining, were hung with rich tapestries and laid with Persian carpets, while all about was a quantity of quaint, antique furniture.

The big dog had followed the two into the reception hall, and, still keeping a watchful eye upon

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Higby, stretched out near his master. Harlington looked down at the beast and up at the man.

“I am sorry that Sire gave you so unpleasant a welcome to Harlington Hall,” he said, “but remember, you are almost a stranger here now. Five years is a long time to a dog.”

“And to a man,” Higby responded. Then he added gallantly, “Except to you, General. The years pass you lightly.”

The General’s face had been alight with ingenuous gladness, but, at this reference to the passage of time, a bit of sadness crept into his smile.

“They leave their mark,” he said gravely; “not on my white head—it was white twenty years ago. But every day that takes me farther from my dead wife brings me no nearer resignation.”

Higby’s face was serious. He lighted a cigar before he spoke and puffed at it for a few minutes.

“And the little girl,” he asked at length, “how is she?”

“Her aunt writes that she is well. They have been in Paris for a long time, you know. She seems to be enjoying herself continually, with the gaieties and the shopping. There has been no time for morbid fancies.”

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The General turned to one of the windows and looked out over the peaceful scene—the sunshine dancing on the water, and the grass, and the gently-moving boughs. He sighed a little and said slowly:

“Poor little girlie! I fear this place will be too dull for her.”

Then he turned and looked at Higby, and added impressively:

“I can never free my mind from the thought of the inheritance of my innocent darling. It is the penalty of the past, though God knows that it was not my crime.”

In the shadow of the curling blue smoke, Higby sat in silence. His face grew very white and showed the dark rings under his eyes. He lifted his cigar to his lips and let it drop regularly for several minutes, and then in his easy, natural way he spoke:

“You expect Dorus home soon?”

“Next week. Lenore says she is very like her mother.”

After they had talked some time of Dorus and her trip abroad, the General turned impressively to his friend:

“Henry, it is a little over twenty years since I built this house. I was not a young man, and I had

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grown tired of living alone and wanted a home. Besides, I hoped that some day I should meet a woman whom I would wish to make its mistress. Hardly was it built when Lincoln's second call for volunteers obliged me to leave it and enter the army. While in Louisiana, as you well know, I met my fate. How I wished the cruel war would close, so that I might bring her here and live the life for which I had so long yearned. I knew that she would love the river, and the country, and the house, and we planned that here we should grow old together. I have never changed one thing in the house—not one thing. It remains as she would have seen it if her life had been spared, and now our little girl is coming home—our little girl whose mother died without knowing that her child was a daughter.”

Harlington leaned against the window frame, and the silence was unbroken save for the regular tick, tick, of the grandfather's clock. Higby, behind the clouds of blue smoke, was making a desperate effort to maintain his composure.

“It was eighteen years ago that she died and Dorus was born,” Harlington went on, “but those years have not softened the pain one whit, Henry; and the longing and the loneliness are as strong today as they ever were.”

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Harlington was perceptibly moved. "I don't talk like this very often," he said, "and you are the only man I could talk to about it at all. I have not had a chance to speak to you for five years, so you will have to let an old man rave on a bit more. I was lonely enough—God knows I was—for thirty-eight years before she came into my life to make it heavenly. Then, after just two years of our dream, it snapped like that, and now I'm lonelier than ever."

He paced up and down the room like a caged beast, his face bent into inexorable sternness, his eyes glinting steel blue.

"And the worst of it is, I am so powerless. Nothing could bring my wife back to me."

For a few minutes the General paced on, then turned to his guest almost bitterly:

"I didn't intend to treat you this way, Higby, but a man has certainly got to let his feelings out some time. Dinner at six, Higby."

Higby arose. The air in the house had grown stifling, and he wanted the wind, and the air, and the sunshine. He wished to get away from the house, away from the General; to be alone under the blue sky, and with miles and miles of the blue

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river before him. But even there he would wish to hide. Eighteen years of misery for Harlington! Why, it had been eighteen years, and seven more, for him—twenty-five years of horror, unhappiness and wrong-doing!

Meanwhile, at the house, Harlington was trying to dismiss the matter from his mind. He had known Higby since they were lads together at college; and he had made a confidant of his friend during all the years that had intervened, never doubting that that confidence was reciprocated. Calming his nerves by that eminently masculine panacea, a strong, black cigar, he called his man, bidding him prepare for the guest. By the time the evening meal was announced his bitter mood was gone, and at the dinner table the two old friends talked of stocks and bonds, the last great railroad accident and the changes which the years had brought to each. Higby never forgot that meal. Sitting there in the warm glow of the hanging lamp, cheerful though the place was, it seemed lonesome, as if there was something lacking. He remembered the woman who might have made the house a home.

“It seems a bit lonesome,” he said.

“It is,” replied the host, laying down his knife

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and fork and looking across the table at Higby; “here I am in this big house, and not a soul to bear me company but the servants and their children—and good old Sire. By the way, how is the leg? He didn’t really hurt you, did he?”

“No, only my trousers. The pair is in ruins. Fortunately, your invitation bade me come prepared to stay, and I have a supply to draw upon.”

“I don’t know what to make of Sire. He is usually gentle with strangers—except tramps.”

“He probably thought me one,” said Higby, with a laugh.

“Not that, my Lord Chesterfield,” said the host; “you were ever a gallant, Henry, and in the old days many a chase you led me with the girls. It’s a fact, Henry, though I never acknowledged it before, that I was mightily glad you were off in Paris with your wife when I went courting in New Orleans. Gad, Henry, I was glad in those days that you and your latest fashions were not around. Until Dorus told me that she would marry me, I wouldn’t even risk a meeting with you.

“Well, you found there was nothing to fear, after all. She didn’t like me when we did meet.”

“Curious, wasn’t it?” said the General, stroking

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his mustache. "It was the only thing that bothered me—that she didn't seem to want you about at all. It would have bothered me more, perhaps, if she had." He added a trifle wistfully, "Well, it won't be lonesome here when Dorus gets home. Lenore writes that wherever they go she is the life of the place. It's two years since I've seen her, and then she was the merest child. Lenore has been like a mother to her. And your boy, Higby, how is he?"

"The apple of mine eye. Quite as fine a youth as your daughter is a maiden. He is everything that could be desired in a son. I am waiting now to see the happy termination of our compact, made when my boy was in kilts and your girl in the cradle."

"Yes, Henry, but Dorus is to make her own choice. She is young yet, and unless she chooses Herman of her own free will, the compact must be broken."

"He that sweareth to his own hurt and changeth not," quoted Higby soberly.

"That is scriptural," said Harlington, "but the Bible never said: He that sweareth to another's hurt and changeth not. No, Higby, a broken compact, but not a broken heart."

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“The heart must be guided,” and Higby involuntarily began to take an inventory of the good things his son would miss if he lost the heiress of Harlington.

“Guided, but not forced,” said the General sagely. “Nothing would pain me so much as to know that the compact must be broken; but I would break every contract in the world rather than ruin my baby’s happiness.” He brought his hand down on the table, making the glasses clink; and then, leaning back in his chair, said quietly: “It all depends on a woman’s caprice.”

Higby’s look was tragic. “My boy has built castles in the air without number,” he said sadly, “and Dorus Harlington has been the queen of them all. It would break his heart, and mine too, if the contract were broken.”

Harlington leaned across the table and took his friend’s hand:

“It rests with a mightier than us all,” he said solemnly. “Fate alone will guide the caprice of a woman; and it may be for us, and it may be for her, that the die is cast.”

It was late when the party of two broke up. They bade each other good night at the foot of the wide

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stairway; Higby to go to his room and dream of Harlington Hall and all its coveted possessions, and the master of Harlington to the little library where were kept all his dearest treasures.

From out of the carved secretary he took a jewel case, and lifted therefrom a miniature set about with pearls and rubies. Out from the blazing circlet looked a face radiantly beautiful. Masses of dark brown hair piled high in the fashion of the early sixties, a curling lock falling over a white shoulder and resting on a whiter breast, gray eyes full of world love and heaven love, a nose that tilted a bit, and a mouth that was large, sweet and sensitive—a face for women to love and for men to worship—the face of the mother of Dorus Harlington.

## CHAPTER II

### WHEN THE BRAVE MEETS THE FAIR

“ Good morning, Carina.”

“ Good morning, Ernesto. Did you sleep well? ”

“ Amazingly well. And you, Carina? ”

“ Ah, so so. I had a bad dream.”

“ Ah! the midnight feast. We must dispense with them.”

“ Yes, we must, but not because of bad dreams.”

“ Surely not because of bad money? ”

“ Because of no money.”

“ But the checks which came yesterday? ”

“ Must serve until the season opens next fall.”

“ There are the summer hotels and——”

“ Surely, but there are the bills, and the people who think a poor violinist and his mother mere clods who would not know how to handle money if they got it.”

“ But if we should find my father——”

“ And if we should not find him? ”

The woman turned to the man as she asked the

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question. There was bitterness in her voice, but none in her face. About her was an atmosphere of gentle sweetness, and in her manner something that was most refined. At the first glance, the woman seemed scarcely old enough for the relation between the pair to be that of mother and child; but the man, who was perhaps eighteen years younger, resembled her sufficiently to be recognized immediately as her son. Unlike the majority of dark women, who appear older than their years, Mme. del Tonjours, as she called herself, seemed almost girlish. Her hair was black, and her eyes were large and limpid. The whites had a curious bluish tinge, and even in the morning sunshine they were starry. Her throat, as it showed above the cream-white border of her morning gown, was full and white, and her arms, which showed in the loose sleeves, were plump and dimpled.

While the young man had her features, his character had evidently been cast in a different mould. She was southern, he was essentially American—not in lineaments, but in pose, carriage and manner. Like his mother's, his hair was black, and hung clustering over his forehead, long and curling. Both spoke in English, the mother with a slight Spanish

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accent, the son without more than a suggestion of foreign origin.

“And if we should find him—what then?” the woman repeated slowly.

The boy clenched his hands and drew himself up to his full height, his expression serious and stern. Then he threw his arms about his mother and cried, laughing:

“Another year of happiness for us, sweetheart.”

“Yes, Ernesto,” said the mother simply.

She lifted her hands to his shoulders and kissed him tenderly on the lips; then she pushed back the dark hair, and bringing his face down to hers placed her lips fervently upon a blood-red scar in the centre of his forehead. For a full minute her lips rested on it; and then, the little ceremony over, she walked swiftly out of the room into an adjoining chamber.

The boy swung out of the door, down the long corridor and out into the street. “Poor mother,” he was thinking, “she will never rest until she has found my father.”

He turned into Park Avenue and walked along at a rapid stride. Tall and broad-shouldered, with the gracefulness of movement that marks the Latin

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faces, with his handsome head held erect and his eyes snapping with fire and life, he attracted a great deal of attention. Both men and women turned to look at him. People invariably fancied that he was "somebody," that indefinite term applied to those out of the ordinary. At any rate, there was little conventionality about Ernesto del Tonjours.

It was nearly noon; the sun was warm and brilliant, and in the freshness of the air he threw aside the shadow that had come with his mother's words. A baby, in daintiest clothes, looked up at him, and at his smile crowed happily; a dog sniffed at his heels, and he turned and snapped his fingers at it. The sparrows were chattering gaily, and the peace and happiness of early summer had settled even in Park Avenue. The earth was in harmony with the sky, and the world was in harmony with heaven, this sunshiny June day.

Under the balmy influences, Ernesto forgot that only a little earlier in the day the whole world had seemed sadly out of joint, and that his mother's search for the father had never seemed so futile. He was young, and the world was all before him. He turned into Forty-second Street, crossing over

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to the big station. The hurrying crowd was life to him. He had been in quaint old Mexico, he had seen the throngs in Munich, and had watched the streams of people on the boulevards in Paris; but in this hurrying, ever-moving, ever-changing human kaleidoscope he saw all nations, all people. The women were more beautiful than any he had seen in Paris; more quaint and fantastic than even Mexico or Munich could boast. Ernesto's mind was filled with the marvel of New York.

The click of a carriage door drew his eyes to the curb. The carriage was being driven away, but hurrying up to the entrance, her long skirt gathered about her, a wide straw hat framing her face, cheeks of rose pink, dust-brown hair about her temples, gray eyes wide and wise, a girl brushed past, so closely that her sleeve touched him. Only one second and she was gone, but the gray eyes had looked straight into his, and he felt that the most beautiful girl in America was hurrying into the Grand Central Station.

"Shine, Mister?" cried a bootblack at his elbow as he passed.

"'Gad, they *did* shine," he answered absently.

Then he swore a little, for, of a sudden, the sun-

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shine all went back into the clouds, and Ernesto was again in the Forest of Despair. For Ernesto was twenty-one, and the woes of the world are very cutting when one is twenty-one.

When Ernesto got back to the hotel he was much calmer. For although the vivid flash of those wonderful gray eyes, the surprise, the understanding in the instant's greeting had startled him, and the touch of her sleeve as she passed sent the blood dancing through his veins, there was the chilling, deadening sense that came with the sober second thought that until his father had been found he could not think of any woman—and particularly of a woman like the girl whom he had seen

He opened his violin case and fingered the instrument gently. The violin and the little mother were all that he had in the world to love and cherish. And the soul of the Mexican boy was made to be filled with that affection which had been denied to him all his life—except from the little mother and the violin—they had never failed him. Standing all alone in the sunshiny room, he began to play. First, it was a wild, passionate outburst—vengeance, and fury, and rage—then, of a sudden, as though the imprecation had turned to pleading, a sad, sweet

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wail broke from the instrument. It was as if the violin had absorbed the story of the man's heart-aches from the touch of his hands, and was pouring out its sympathy to him.

Ernesto was not one, but two people that morning, and a battle was raging between them; passionate rage on the one side and tender entreaty on the other. The frail violin, now weird, and plaintive, and sad, now short, sharp, staccato, told the story of the battle. Finally, he lifted the violin from his shoulder, kissed it softly and laid it away in its case—the Mexican in him was conquered, the sturdy, independent American dominant.

The little mother in the next room had listened to it all. She had been father and mother to the boy ever since his birth, and they had never been parted. She had taught him all that she could of what she had learned in her girlhood days at the Spanish convent; and for the rest, he had picked it up on their journeys. That was the Yankee in him. Only in music had other teachers than his mother been sought, and it was through them that he had been brought in touch with the better people whom they had known.

Mme. del Tonjours was proud of the boy. Natu-

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rally, she saw only the virtues and none of the faults of his character. None knew better than she the treachery and baseness that could lie behind a handsome face. None knew better than she what kind of a man Ernesto's father had been. But the evil she could not deny in the father was entirely lacking in the make-up of the son. His chief fault was a tendency to vacillate, which often got the better of him. He was half Mexican, half American. Indolent at times, and again most energetic. By turns passionate and unrestrained, or reserved and cold. Had he been all Mexican, his name might have been famous as a master violinist on two continents; had he been all American, his mother's little fortune would have been the stepping-stone to a wider future for him. But he was neither, and the union of strength and weakness in his nature was pathetic. There were possibilities untold in his character—but they were only possibilities.

The result was the development of Ernesto del Tonjours from a boy of promise into a man whose ambition came and went; inciting him at times to great things, then leaving him careless and indifferent. The prophecies of the masters who had taught him had come to naught. He was still only

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a travelling violinist, getting an engagement when and where he could. Yet, withal, he had a charm of personality which drew to him resistlessly those with whom he had to do, and which made his mother blind to his negative traits.

As she felt the thrilling harmonies of the violin, the high-soaring notes and then the sudden minor chords, she wondered what new experience he had had. She had learned to know every tone of his violin and to translate its stories into the language of her own heart. When the big, broad-shouldered fellow stood in the doorway smiling at her, she knew instantly that in the battle the American blood had conquered the Mexican.

“Yes?” she questioned, with an indefinable accent, half confessing that she had heard and interpreted it all, and half asking for fuller confidence.

He was leaning against the doorway, his hands in his pockets, a good-natured, quizzical smile in his eyes. He had often said banteringly that when he met a girl as pretty and as gentle and as lovable as his mother, he might by chance fall in love; and as he stood looking down at the little woman, the picture of the girl he had seen at the Grand Central Station came before his mind's eye. He found this picture

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so absorbing that he forgot to answer his mother's query.

"Yes?" she repeated, this time imperatively.

He slipped into the place beside her on the couch.

"Carina," he began, caressingly, "the little mother is first, ever and always."

She laughed back into his eyes.

"Listen to twenty-one," she said scoffingly.

"Yes?" It was wonderful the amount of feeling that she could put into that monosyllable. "The little mother is first ever and always—until—come, tell me about her."

"There's no holding a secret when you're about," he said, as he took her hand and stroked it gently. "Well, she's pretty—and she burned me when she passed, if that's any sign."

"A sign, merely, that—the matter is very inconsequential; I think she is only a passing fancy."

"You are skeptical."

"None has more cause to be, my son," said the mother, slowly; "there's an old English song that says,

'Love me little, love me long.'

The love that burns when it passes you will soon die out."

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The Senora let her dark eyes wander past the boy and out of the window. Wistfully she looked, without seeing; a pathetic droop at the corners of her mouth.

“I used to think, like you, my boy,” she said, in a voice that was low and that trembled with emotion, “that love was some great power which would do wonderful things for us—make us happy and contented. I used to think that it was worth an eternity of tears to love as we loved, your father and I; that love was all, and the rest—our friends, our families—nothing. It was a foolish poet that wrote, ‘’Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.’ You called me skeptical a moment ago. Why shouldn’t I be? My love has made me a wanderer upon the face of the earth. Twenty years of tears, and regret, and remorse, have almost wiped out the memory of the few months of happiness. My friends are gone, my family gone—treachery, fraud, and neglect, have been my portion. Ernesto, you are all I have. The love I bore your father died long ago. You are all that binds me to earth and keeps alive in me the thought that I am a woman and a mother.”

The pathetic, small face was flushed, the wistful

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*When the Brave Meets the Fair*

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eyes angry, the body intense and strained. The passion of her Spanish ancestors was centred in Mme. del Tonjours. The world had been very hard to the little woman, but it had failed to crush her; and her passionate nature was in but little more restraint than when, as a girl, in the old days, love had led her on; alluring her to phantom fields of happiness and content.

“Ernesto,” she said, “will you promise me that nothing, absolutely nothing, will make you forget your vow to find your father?”

She looked with deep scrutiny at the young fellow, who had paled under the passion of her outburst.

“Mother, I promised you that five years ago when we began the search. Do you think I would fail you now?”

“No, dear; I just wanted your promise again. We women must have things told us again and again, just to keep us content.”

After a little silence, she went on briskly:

“We must be up and doing if we mean to accomplish anything at all this summer. Our success, or rather your success, has made me hope for better things.”

“Was it success?” Ernesto asked indifferently.

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## *The Letter H*

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“I didn’t notice. I know it was infernally stupid, and I’m downright glad the season is over.”

“May not Kingsland take you next year as second violin?” the mother asked.

“I think not,” was the response. “I saw Kingsland last night, and told him I wasn’t making any plans for next season.”

“Ernesto! how foolish of you. It would mean a steady position for the season.”

“That’s just what I don’t want. I think I’d rather be on the move.”

“That’s generous, I’m sure,” was the rather bitter remark that the woman could not suppress.

“You might better be a bit uncomfortable travelling than attempt to put up with me when I am not satisfied.”

“True enough,” said the mother, “but I’m not as young as I was once, and it seems unfair in you to make me endure more than is necessary.”

“But the excitement, mother! You know you like it as well as I do.”

“That last Western trip was all I wanted.”

Mme. del Tonjours leaned back on the couch, a flicker of amusement in her expression chasing away the look of half sullen anger which had been there.

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## *When the Brave Meets the Fair*

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“ Will you ever forget, Ernesto?” she asked, laughing. “ We can laugh about it now, but it was far from funny then. There we were in Chicago, you with a valet, and I with a maid; and by the time we got to St. Louis we were walking to save car fare.”

Ernesto's laugh rang out cheerily.

“ And who wouldn't go through it all again?”

The mother smiled and sighed.

“ Perhaps if I were young,” she said, “ I might choose it too, Ernesto; but unless assured that it was coming out all right, I would infinitely prefer a second-rate boarding-house in some out-of-the-way place and a release from worry.”

“ You shall not worry any more than I can help,” said the boy.

“ But you can't help it, dear, until your father is found.”

“ We'll start out on the hotel routes as soon as the season opens,” he cried enthusiastically.

Mme. del Tonjours leaned forward eagerly. “ The hotels are open now,” she said.

“ Then we will start as soon as you can get ready. Have you any idea where we shall begin?”

“ I have it all planned,” she cried. “ We can start at Saratoga and work up past Lake George into the

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## *The Letter H*

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Adirondacks, then over the Green Mountains and into New Hampshire. Of course, if luck favors us, we shall not need to move fast."

"But the season at Saratoga has not really begun in June," said Ernesto. "Would it not be wiser to start with some of the Hudson River towns; to which summer boarders go early and stay late, and work from there up through the Catskills, and so on?"

After much discussion it was so arranged. They had no one to consider but themselves; had lived for years with trunk and valises, and the matter of preparation was soon done. Early the next week they started out on their journey.

## CHAPTER III

### FROM A FAR COUNTRY

A brisk breeze was lashing the waves; flags were flapping noisily on the masts; and the big ocean liner, the *Altruria*, was ploughing resistlessly over the waterways. Two women, one young and pretty, the other older and most distinguished looking, stood near the rail. Their eyes were fastened on the western horizon as though expecting to see the land rise up out of the misty distance at any moment.

The younger was holding with her left hand a gray Tam o' Shanter, while the wind tossed wisps of brown hair across her forehead and over her cheeks and up over her cap. She made a sweet picture as she stood there in the wind, with her trim, stylish travelling suit, her cheeks glowing, and her eyes sparkling. There were approving glances thrown at her all along the line of steamer chairs, and people laid down their books and magazines to watch her. There was something winning about her, and her fresh, girlish beauty had won admirers from the first day out from Liverpool.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Aunt Lenore,” she said to the older woman, “one more day and we shall be at home.”

There was emphasis on the word “home,” and as she said it, it seemed almost sacred.

“Our pilgrimage seems longer now than ever,” said the lady.

“I wish we had come home long ago,” said the girl, with a suggestion of contrition in her voice. “It seems almost wicked to have left poor papa alone all this time. How lonely the old house must be without us!”

“There’s conceit for you,” remarked Miss Clifton laughingly.

“Oh,” said the young woman, smiling, “it did sound conceited, didn’t it? But you know what I meant. It would be lonely without you.”

“Thank you, dear. It would indeed be lonesome without you.”

The girl turned her glance out over the endless stretch of sea. For days the good ship had been ploughing the green waters, and for days the infinite silence and the great emptiness of the sea had exercised an irresistible fascination over her. Her life seemed one with the wide, limitless ocean with its tumultuous tossing, its ever-restless, never-ending struggle to be at peace.

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## *From a Far Country*

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“Auntie,” said the girl, softly, after a long pause, “how wonderful the sea is! How infinite! Do you know, that one word means more to me than any other word in any language; just as the sea means more than any other thing. It is full of everything. Here,” she waved her hand toward the horizon, “it is infinite. Here,” and she motioned again to the blue sky where the billowy cumuli drifted on and on, “it is infinite. It is never ending; it is without bounds, limitless, eternal, infinite. It comes near showing us the nature of God, for God is infinite.”

She put her hands on the rail and let her eyes rest on the horizon, where the sky met the sea and the beginning of the world seemed to be. Her aunt gave her a swift look, tinged with apprehension, but discreetly refrained from speaking.

“When I look out over the sea, or at the sky, I seem to shrink all up. I wonder if God put me where I was meant to go? I wonder if he didn’t mean me to be one of the workers and to help push the great world on—I wonder if he really meant me to be Dorus Harlington?”

The girl stopped, breathless, her face flushed and her eyes shining brightly from under their long lashes. But the face of the woman beside her clouded with anxiety.

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## *The Letter H*

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“I do not believe that He made a mistake,” she said softly, though in her heart she was wondering, if, indeed, He had.

The voyage had been a fair one, and on this last evening but few of the places at the table were unoccupied. Although Miss Harlington was young in the matter of years, she had travelled extensively; and as the daughter of General Harlington, had been received everywhere. These circumstances, added to a naturally fearless nature, had resulted in giving the girl a distinction of manner which, even for an American girl, was quite remarkable.

A United States Senator and his wife, returning from the Lake Country in England, sat opposite to her; and on her left was a young collegian just getting back from a two years' trip through France and Germany. Beside Miss Clifton was a stagey person whose photograph had been blazoned in all the American journals the year before, when she had figured as *divorcée* in a sensational case, and who was now relying on the notoriety this had given her for advertisement. A slender, dark-faced violinist and his wife, and several tourists, and a number of plain business men were also at this table. A young editor, whose white hair contrasted well with his fresh,

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## *From a Far Country*

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ruddy complexion, had the place to the left of the Senator's wife, and between courses, told of the varied experiences of a newspaper man, both as editor and reporter.

"To my mind," said he, after the soup had been removed, "there is no task so utterly thankless as that of an editor or a reporter."

"The editors are all right," said the Senator, with a little shrug, "but the reporters—Lord help 'em! They do more mischief with their everlasting stories than a herd of wild steers let loose in a city."

The editor, whose face was pleasant and frank, glanced sharply at his neighbor; and then, breaking his roll into pieces, said with decision—for he had just remembered something about this Senator:—"I think you do us an injustice."

The Senator flushed: "You mistook my meaning. I include in that class only the reporters."

Travis was never so happy as when given a chance to stand up for his men.

"You forget, Senator Baldwin," he said, "that the majority of editors began life merely as reporters and that without reporters there would be no newspapers, and that without newspapers there would be no progress. The good done for mankind by report-

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## *The Letter H*

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ers, banked up against the harm, is as the blue ocean against a lily pond."

Travis smiled again, a seemingly inconsequential smile, but it meant that he had recalled a certain newspaper story about Senator Baldwin, and that he had managed to get in a word for his men. But the smile, which sat well on a wide mouth, and better still in a pair of laughing blue eyes, caught a reflection in the sweet face of the girl almost opposite. Travis was nearer forty than twenty, but the quick intelligence of the glance arrested his attention.

"It is wonderful," said the girl, softly, in a low, sweet voice that had a trick of taking unto itself certain unexpected little accents, "it is wonderful what you editors and reporters do for us. What a very bare, dull world it would be if there were no newspapers."

The girl looked over at the Senator's little wife, who was as insignificant in appearance as her husband was imposing.

"We can but admit that," she said; "think of the fads and fashions they tell about," and she smiled at Dorus.

"And the ghost stories," ventured one of the commercial travellers, eager to be in the conversation with the Senator and Travis.

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## *From a Far Country*

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“And the scandals,” the actress added as her contribution.

“And the elections,” suggested the European salesman, looking at Baldwin for approval.

“And *les critiques*,” said the slim violinist, with a shrug.

“For my part,” remarked Dorus, “I have a personal debt to pay them. If it hadn’t been for seeing the dear old names and the dear old places in print, I should have died of homesickness long ago.”

“And I, too, enjoyed them,” said Miss Clifton.

“Thank you,” said Travis, laughing. “This is like so many wedding presents, or Christmas gifts, or bouquets.”

Afterwards, when the starry night took the place of the sunset glory, and the passengers assembled in the cabin to listen to the music and to chat sociably, Dorus slipped away from her aunt, who was gossiping innocently with the Senator’s wife, and went swiftly up the passage, and out on deck. It was quite abandoned and she went far forward to the place below the bridge, and leaned over the railing. With her hands holding fast, she looked intently up into the sky. One who has been out on the broad sea, alone with the ship in the midst of space, with a

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## *The Letter H*

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million stars more or less looking down and the soft flapping of the waves coming up out of the stillness, may know how Dorus Harlington felt standing there alone. Immigrants in the steerage have stood speechless with awe, in the silence and the glory of a moonless night at sea; writers have prayed to a hundred gods, for the power to translate the unutterable longing of the twinkling firmament and the restlessness of the ocean; poets have felt, in the wonder of its immensity, things there is no language to express;—and its unthinkable majesty wrapped Dorus Harlington, sensitive, imaginative, in a spell of unexplained longing, of hope unaccountable.

“So you like to be alone.” It was a practical, every-day voice that startled her from her dreams.

“I don’t think I was alone,” gravely.

“One’s thoughts are good company, sometimes.”

“One’s thoughts can’t help being good company here.”

She had put the jaunty little Tam o’ Shanter on her head, and had thrown on a golf cape. Travis leaned over the rail beside her, the romance of the night and the stars in his eyes.

“You’re right there,” he said in response to her half-whispered statement. “What an imaginative child you are,” he finished, abruptly.

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## *From a Far Country*

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“I? Imaginative?” she turned to him, laughing. “It’s only on occasion. You must pinch me or prick me when you see any of the symptoms approaching. It’s unwholesome, I fear; and yet, even you, though you claim you are not imaginative, are impressed by this.”

“One must needs be a worse than senseless thing not to feel the majesty and beauty of it,” answered Travis, though he had not taken his eyes from the girl’s face.

“And to think that this is the last night of it!” he sighed. “It almost makes me feel like going back to Europe.”

“Ye-es,” answered Dorus, “but I’m going home. We live on the Hudson, you know, and that is more beautiful than anything I saw in Europe.”

“Well, after careful deliberation,” the man said seriously, “I guess Park Row and City Hall Park strike me as being about as wonderful as anything over yonder,” waving his hand back towards the east.

“How lovely that was of you to speak so at the table,” the girl was looking directly at him.

“Lovely? It tickled me to pieces to get back at Baldwin. I forgot that he was mixed up in that mining deal, until he inadvertently reminded me of it

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## *The Letter H*

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when we were speaking. By the way, that was jolly of you to say what you did about the newspapers keeping you from being homesick."

Dorus was still leaning on the rail, and the wind was blowing cold over the sea. She drew her cape closely about her and pushed the big hood over her head.

"Yes," she said slowly, "I liked to read about my friends, and if they weren't mentioned;—and they weren't very often,—I just like to read about New York, and Albany, and Washington, and Boston. So long as it was America I was reading about, I was satisfied, with all the outlandish German papers and the French things. When I was a little girl we used to sing an old hymn, Auntie and I, about not missing the violets, and the summer, and the birds, until they were gone. Well, after we got away from home, where it is so beautiful and quiet, I missed it so;—I never fully appreciated it until I left it; and—well, I'm so glad I'm going back."

Travis knew she was General Harlington's daughter; and now, before the voyage was over, he wanted to find out the truth of a certain rumor that he had heard before he knew her.

"You won't forget to ask me to your wedding,"

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## *From a Far Country*

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he said softly. The effect on the girl of this apparently simple question was all he needed for an answer. Her shoulders straightened, her head went back, and her voice was decidedly haughty as she answered:

“I might, if you even mention it again.”

A moment later, they went back to the saloon. Travis, with his instinct to get at the bottom of things awake and guessing, was back on the deck again a little later, whistling softly to himself:

“So the land lies there. I had heard the rumor, and I suppose she doesn’t like it for a cent. Heigh ho! she’s worth the winning, but, by George, I don’t envy the man that tries to tame her. I’ll keep my eye on the story, as old Baily used to tell me to “Keep me eye on me precinct.”

The next morning presaged one of the brightest of June days—clear sky, blue sea, and the air soft and warm. The *Altruria* sighted Fire Island early in the morning; and, about noon, she swung in between the big forts on the Narrows. The guns guarding the entrance to the port, the green terraces of Wadsworth and Hamilton and picturesque Lafayette, glistened and shone in the June sunshine, as the steamer sailed majestically up towards the

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## *The Letter H*

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dock. All the passengers were on the deck. Well forward on the landing side was a little group that included Miss Clifton and her niece, Travis, and the Senator with his wife. There was silence for awhile, as Liberty grew every moment more distinct, and the shaggy skyline of the city came nearer. Miss Clifton lifted her hand and pointed towards the ragged line of skyscrapers.

“The most beautiful city in the world,” she said softly. Her eyes were fastened on the place where the city lay shining in the sunshine. It seemed set within a charmed circle, and all about it the blue waters were dancing. On both the East and the North River hundreds of boats, ships and schooners, sailboats and tugboats, and ferryboats without number, hurried hither and thither; making a never-to-be-forgotten picture of bustle and life.

“The most beautiful city in the world,” repeated Travis, after a pause.

Then Dorus stepped forward, her face glowing, her eyes shining, her whole body tense with emotion; and in her fresh, sweet voice, started the anthem—

“My country 'tis of thee,  
Sweet land of liberty,  
Of thee I sing.”

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## *From a Far Country*

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When the little tugs had pulled the great steamer, like some mighty hulk, about in the river, and had hauled her slowly into her place in the slip; when handkerchiefs were fluttering to answering handkerchiefs, the passengers made ready to land. Dorus, the bonny little gray Tam o' Shanter supplanted by a hat of conventional design; her slim figure gowned in a tailor-made suit of blue, stood beside her aunt holding the rail. Both were watching the people on the pier. Both knew that no friends of theirs were waiting for them, for they were several hours before the time they had expected to arrive.

There was one other person aboard the *Altruria* who had no friends awaiting his arrival. Travis stood in such a position that Dorus Harlington and her aunt came between his eyes and the swarming people on the pier. He was watching the girl intently yet covertly, as he had been watching her—studying her ever since the first day out from Liverpool. She was a type he had never met before. Although far from being one of the tiresome class who think they know all girls, yet he met and talked with many in many different positions in life, and he felt that at least he could judge a woman with discrimination. But Dorus Harlington baffled him. He shook

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## *The Letter H*

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his head in perplexity. There was something about her indescribably charming, but in this charm was a bit of the unexplainable—a trifle of something that was mysterious.

From the waving brown of the girl's hair, the soft curve of her cheek and chin, the upward tilt of her nose, the shadow of her lashes, Travis drank in every detail, then turned to the aunt for comparison.

Lenore Clifton had never been beautiful, even under the sunny, southern skies that make the brilliant beauty in Creole girls and kill it in Creole women. But, in the curves of the face, the waves of the hair, Travis traced a family resemblance. In the elder there was the dignity of maturity. Lenore Clifton was the kind of woman that keeps the world poised. She was not a society light and belonged to no clubs; but in her quiet way, she helped make those about her glad of their lives.

Travis wondered how many years would pass before the real Dorus would wake up, and her mysterious charm be explained. It was not as though she were conscious of something which she lacked; nor did she seem to be aware of her peculiar expression,—it was a look of expectation, longing, even of suspense; and the chance observer might say it was dissatisfaction.

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## *From a Far Country*

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Travis, whose interest in the rumor that she was pledged to marry the man to whom her father had promised her in her infancy, was only deepened by the episode of the night before, watched her face through the blue smoke of his cigar.

“I’ll be hanged if I’m in love with her,” he said to himself; “but she’d drive me to smoking cigarettes if she wore that look on her face all the time. I’ll be further hanged if I wouldn’t like to know what it means. She’s too young to have a past, but she certainly looks as though she had something on her mind. Heigh ho!” he said, as he flipped the cigar into the water, “if they ask me to come and see them, I’ll go.”

And they did.

Dorus and her aunt took a carriage, driving immediately to the Grand Central Station, whence they went by rail to Harlington Hall on the Hudson.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRISONERS OF FATE

What pen could describe Dorus' raptures as they journeyed up the Hudson, or the delight that greeted the arrival of the two ladies at Harlington Hall on the afternoon of the day the *Altruria* reached port. A telegram from the city had apprised the General of their coming, and although he was a trifle annoyed that they were forced to see to their own luggage, and take the long railway journey with no other attendant than their maid, yet even this was forgotten in the pleasure of the reunion.

Dorus was still clinging to her father in the first close embrace, when in from the kitchen came the colored mammy who had nursed her when she was born in old New Orleans; and who had come north with the family. She could not leave the child, even though she knew that the turning-point of the war had come, and that she would be free. She stood for a moment, her face wreathed in smiles, her ample proportions filling the doorway. Dorus saw her and flew to her with wide arms.

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## *Prisoners of Fate*

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“Saida! Saida!” she cried, “I’m so glad to be home.”

“Fo’ de sake o’ de lan’,” cried Saida, the big tears in her eyes, as she folded the motherless girl to her heart, “de stray lamb is come back to de fol’. Bress de Lor’, oh ma soul, de chile’s come back to her ole mammy Saida.”

“Didn’t you think that I could take care of her?” asked Miss Clifton, smilingly, as she held out her hand to the negress.

“Lor’, chile, dar cyant nobody take care o’ Miss Dorus lak’ her mammy. I reckon she’s needed me a heap worse’n I’ve needed her, though ’twas moughty lonesome in dis yere big house thout you uns both. Bress her pretty face, ain’ she a pictur’?”

Saida’s black face shone with pride. Like the majority of colored people who had been slaves, her devotion to the family was inviolable. The family which she served was to her next to her God, and she would have gone through fire and water for any one of them.

“Ain’ she de libin image ob her ma, po’ lady. How she would hab gloried in de li’l’ gal now.”

There was a shuffling of feet in the room behind the library, and then a voice issued:

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## *The Letter H*

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“Saida! Saida! w-where yo’ good fo’ nuthin’ gone?”

The voice was full and rich, and stumbled plaintively over the first syllables. Dorus laughed gaily, and then called: “Luke, oh Luke!”

Immediately a black face and curly black head appeared at the door, followed by a big, broad-shouldered fellow of some forty years, more or less. Over his face a slow smile broke. The mouth widened, the eyes brightened, and then the grin stretched from ear to ear. He came forward, stuttering, and scarcely able to do more than smile—but such a smile! If Luke were dumb, his smile would speak for him:

“W-w-well, de good Lor’ reserve us!”

“You haven’t lost your stammer, Luke,” said Dorus.

“No—praise de Lor’,” replied Luke, reverently.

“Now that I’ve seen Luke and Saida, I know that I’m at home,” cried Dorus, when the laugh had subsided. “How are the boys?” she continued, turning to Saida again.

“Bof bloomin’ lak de roses ob Sharon,” answered the black, with motherly pride.

“Really?” said the girl, delightedly. “The angels! where are they?”

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## *Prisoners of Fate*

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The "angels" were pocket editions of their father—tightly curled hair, big, round, black eyes, flat noses, round, puffy cheeks, and Luke's own smile.

Mirth-provoking the pair were, clinging to each side of their mother, and forced reluctantly into the awe-inspiring presence of the master and the newly-arrived mistress. Peal after peal of laughter rang from Dorus, while Miss Clifton and the General smiled, not so much at the picture of the two "angels," as from the infection of the girl's merriment.

Dorus was Southern at heart, though the summers and the winters that had passed over her head were Northern summers and winters; and she took the constant companionship of negroes with the accustomed carelessness of the real Southern girl. The two boys were to her like dolls, to be loved, admired, and petted; but in no measure to be considered in the same class with herself. So the two little curly-headed chaps were treated as a child might treat some new mechanical toy.

"You shall be my little pages," Dorus cried joyously, "to wait on me always. Come," she said laughing, "I've just the things for you to wear to make you the dearest little pages in Christendom."

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## *The Letter H*

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She took each small and unwilling page by the hand, and ran, laughing, out on the porch.

“Moughty fine gal,” said Luke.

“Sho’,” said the woman, “she couldn’t help bein’ nothin’ else, coz she wuz Miss Dorus’ own li’l’ gal.”

“Lor’,” said Luke, enthusiastically, “I thought ’twas the dead come ter life when I seed her a-holdin’ on ter ma babies lak she loved ’em sho nuff. She’s her mother all over agin.”

Luke still expatiating on the likeness of Dorus to her mother shuffled into the kitchen, followed by his wife. As the ringing laugh came back through the open door from the porch where Dorus was learning the peculiar virtues of her new toys, General Harlington turned to Miss Clifton:

“Do you hear that laugh, Lenore? What a merry, light-hearted girl she is! How she will brighten up this old house, where I have seen so many desolate days since she—since you both went away.”

“That sounds better,” said Miss Clifton, smiling back at the General; “of course you have missed me as well as Dorus.”

“I did, Lenore,” the General averred, soberly, “but my loss was my daughter’s gain, and that reconciled me to the double deprivation. But, seriously,

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## *Prisoners of Fate*

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Lenore, you are not worried about her at all, are you?"

"No! no! indeed. May Heaven grant that the curse will be averted!" and Miss Clifton looked anxiously at the girl's father.

"Amen," he said softly.

"So speaks the loving father's heart," said Lenore, "but the practical aunt must say that Dorus is often moody and fretful. She has something on her mind which she will not tell, even to me."

"Sentimental, perhaps. Girls of that age often are. She may even be in love."

"No—no, I'm sure she is not."

"Perhaps not really," persisted the General; "girls have ideals, and Dorus is probably no exception. Girls' fancies run towards ideals first; and many an unhappy wife to-day is herself to blame for not working to bring her husband up to her ideal of romantic manhood; rather than blaming him because he is not ready-made to match her pattern. I trust my little girl, when the time comes, will choose one who is worthy of her, and whom she can idealize."

"What a philosopher you are, even on love matters," said Lenore. "I must find Dorus," she continued, passing out of the door.

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## *The Letter H*

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“ Yes, I can philosophize on love in the abstract, and on other people’s love affairs, but precious little good it does me. Philosophy has not dulled the sting in my heart, nor healed the wound.” Harlington threw himself into a big chair, and, ignoring the beautiful June scene without, sat motionless, his gray head buried in his hands.

Despondency in a man young and vigorous is to be despised, for it denotes weakness; but despondency in a man whose hair is silvered with age provokes pity, for it signifies regret, and in regret lies the sting of failure and the pain of memory. His mood was the more strenuous in the poignancy of its pain because all about him was joyous happiness. The winsome young mistress had come home at last. Merry laughter floated in through the open door. The thrilling and trilling of bird songs made a harmony of gladness, and the piping of the tuneful whistles on the river boats was as a carol of joy for the return of the mistress of Harlington Hall. And, meantime, the master of Harlington was drinking the dregs of memory. The sweet, clear eyes of the little daughter whose birth had cost him his wife brought back vividly the scenes that had made him an old man long before his time.

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## *Prisoners of Fate*

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Into his mind there came the picture of the city of tents where his soldiers had camped at Thibodeauxville, of the little house that he called headquarters, and which, with a thousand little touches of femininity, was indelibly stamped with the personality of his wife. He remembered Higby's arrival, and the innocent gossip of the camp. Then the coming of the strange woman and her child, and her claim that a man by the name of Horace Harlington was her husband.

He remembered Higby's explanation of having been in Mexico with a scapegrace friend, who had assumed the name of Harlington to cover one of his sentimental escapades. Then, with strange persistency, the thought came back, as it had scores of times before, of Higby's eagerness to go North and his anxiety not to be seen by the woman. Next came the awful *dénouement*, when the Mexican learned the name of the commanding general, and throwing herself at his own feet, claimed him as her husband. Harlington groaned in agony as, with terrible distinctness, every detail of that time came back to him—his wife's overhearing of the Mexican woman's piteous pleading, and the letter H branded on the child's white forehead. His wife's mind had

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## *The Letter H*

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given way, and in her madness she tried to murder the boy, burying her knife in the couch. "See! see! Lenore!"—the very words and accents came back to Harlington—"there, do you not see him? He lifts his curls from his forehead—that horrible letter H that his mother burned upon it for his father—my husband—to know his son!" The old general groaned and cold perspiration stood out on his forehead. He grasped the arms of his chair and swore a terrible oath:

"God! that my sweet wife should die believing that of me. By heaven, what have I done that my life should be cursed like this? Thirty-eight years before I found her—one short year of love and contentment, and then the terrible tragedy that killed her—and then the years of agony. And Dorus, too? Is the curse on her?"

Harlington's head dropped into his hands, and the tears that come but rarely to the eyes of a strong man dampened his fingers.

A shadow fell across the floor, and in through the French window came Higby. He had never looked more trim and spruce; not a hair was out of place, his clothes were immaculate. He was in the room before he noticed the motionless figure in the chair. Then he started.

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## *Prisoners of Fate*

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“Horace!” he cried.

The head was lifted wearily, and into the eyes there struggled back a realization of the present.

“Ah, Henry, glad to see you,” said the General, rising slowly.

The traces of tears were unmistakable.

“Tears, Horace?” said Higby. “Has Dorus come?”

The question received a nod from Harlington, and Higby rattled on: “Of course she has. Then those are tears of joy for the happy present.”

The General shook his head, and both men dropped into their chairs. Harlington placed the tips of his fingers together, and leaning back in his chair let his eyes rest on the large portrait hung above the fireplace. It was his wife, taken from the miniature which he guarded in his secretary. In the face, tenderness and sympathy struggled for the mastery. There was a touch of mischief in the big, serious, gray eyes which followed one soberly about the room, and a dash of coquetry in the curve of the red lips.

“I will be honest,” said Harlington, his eyes on the gray ones in the frame, “I will be honest. They are tears of sorrow for the sad, the bitter past.”

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## *The Letter H*

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Higby rose abruptly, and walked up and down the room.

“Curse that meddling woman! Curse all such women!” he cried, with feeling. “That woman was an adventuress. Her every act proved it. She claimed you when you said your name was Horace Harlington, but she did not recognize you. When you proved that you could not be the one of whom she was in search, at sight of my picture, she said I was the man—probably remembering to have seen me with my friend. She was an adventuress, but not a dangerous one, for she was a bungler——”

“Yes, but that bungling broke up my home—killed my wife, made me an old man in a year.” The General spoke passionately. “Do you know, Henry—I never told you before—but in my despair I cursed you as the cause of all my trouble.”

“Horace, we will forget that;”—Higby spoke with the air of an injured man—“you have suffered, so have I. Your daughter lives——”

“Yes, and she is the image of her mother,” broke in Harlington.

“My son lives,” continued Higby, “and I have striven to make my Herman a better man than his father, and worthy of such a girl as Dorus.”

## CHAPTER V

### COLONEL HIGBY TAKES TO MATCH-MAKING

It was nearly a week after the arrival of Dorus and her aunt at Harlington Hall.

Lenore Clifton was glad to be home. The sombre old house had never seemed so beautiful to her—the General's genial hospitality so cordial.

As for Dorus, she was like some wild thing set free. Dorus was clever when she was in the mood, but even Miss Clifton was startled at the sparkling brilliancy the girl displayed for the first few days after their return. There are some natures so finely strung that the merest trifle serves to set them in tune with the world, and which are plunged into the veriest discord by an incident of no consequence. One such was Dorus, and it seemed that some force, unknown to any but herself, had transformed her into this wonderfully bright, light-hearted creature.

The festivities that had been planned to welcome her home-coming had been delayed, for Dorus had insisted that she needed some time to get acquainted

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## *The Letter H*

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again with her home. She flew from room to room, from the cellar to the attic and back again, into the library, then into the stately drawing-rooms, and she seemed never to get enough of her own dainty room. Nor did it seem possible for her to get tired of sitting on the wide veranda, gazing at the wonderful view of the green lawns, the hills and the blue river. She was a loyal little American was Dorus, and to her the Hudson River, and Storm King, and Old Crow's Nest were more beautiful far than the Rhine, or the Elbe, or the Thames. She might travel, but it was that she might the more truly appreciate the valley of the Hudson. She even went so far as to write a little poem about it, which she sent to a magazine, but which was never published.

At last the day came that had been chosen as the time for the gala event, when the welcome of the whole countryside was to be given to the young mistress of the Hall. Dorus was so busy that she seemed to be everywhere at once. Hers was a nature that combined the practical and the romantic in a curious way. She was dreamy, sensitive, imaginative, as Travis had said; yet, with characteristic nervousness she threw herself into every active

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## *Colonel Higby Takes to Match-making*

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work that presented itself. She was the soul of the busy household, and had taken the lead in the arrangements.

On this afternoon, in searching for her father, she stumbled upon Higby quite unavoidably. He had just got back from Albany, where he had spent a few days. The girl did not know that he had returned until she came upon him, ensconced in a big arm-chair in the library, to all intents and purposes immensely well satisfied with himself. He heard her voice as she came slowly down the hall:

“Daddy! Daddy!”—with a slow, rising inflection on the “dy.” “Where yo’ gone, Daddy?” The softness of her laugh, the sweetness of her Southern accent, came floating in through the open windows, and Higby and Harlington stood listening until she herself appeared at the door. She wore a simple gown of blue, and her broad hat was carried in her hand. As she stood framed by the doorway, she was a picture of sincere, sweet girlhood.

“Well, I declare,” she said, at sight of Higby. She had never liked him, although, as her father’s friend, she had always been courteous to him. Higby saw a number of emotions reflected in her face, and the chief of them was not one of welcome.

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## *The Letter H*

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He bowed with the ease of a Chesterfield, and advanced toward Dorus, who was followed by Lenore.

“Ladies,” he said, with courtly ease, “the five days that I have been away have seemed very long without your delightful company, and to-night I shall have to share you with so many worshippers, though you will find among them no more devoted admirer than myself.” His air was half-bantering, and as he shook hands with them he laughed easily. Dorus tossed her head somewhat contemptuously, for high-flown compliments always jarred upon her.

“Which is the stronger, Colonel Higby, devotion or admiration?”

“At the present instant, each is struggling for the mastery,” replied Higby, with a low bow.

Dorus laughed.

“Colonel Higby, you are living in the wrong age. You are mediæval—the incarnation of chivalric thoughts and dainty speeches. Auntie, aren’t you sorry that Colonel Higby is so old?” She turned to Miss Clifton at the last impudent clause, while the face of the older woman flushed painfully.

“Colonel,” said Miss Clifton, “she is a wild, wayward child.”

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## *Colonel Higby Takes to Match-making*

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Dorus turned with a mock-serious expression and with pouting lips to her father:

“Daddy, will you allow Aunt Lenore to speak so of me before company? Do you think I am wayward, papa?”

The winsome gray eyes, the low voice and the soft Southern accent were irresistible.

“Dearest,” said her father, taking the lovely face in his hands, “I know you are my blessing.”

Dorus wheeled about to her aunt.

“There, do you hear that, Auntie?” she cried triumphantly. “I am a blessing to one man; I wonder if I shall ever be to another?”

This last she said gayly, half in fun and half in earnest, but Higby grasped his chance.

“Of course you will,” he began; “to Herman, for instance. Have you forgotten him? Shouldn’t you remember your old playmate?”

“I guess so,” said the girl, throwing herself into a chair.

Higby stood looking at her, and thinking that perhaps the broad acres of Harlington would not be so easily won after all.

“I don’t believe I’ve forgotten him entirely,” continued the girl, “though I can’t say positively. What is he like, anyway?”

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## *The Letter H*

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The tone she used evidenced less of interest in Herman Higby than a desire to keep the conversation going. The General and Miss Clifton had sauntered out of the door to the lawn. Higby was delighted to be alone with the girl. He really loved his boy, and though he coveted Harlington Hall, it was for his son's sake.

"Well," he began, "he is rather tall, above medium height, fair——"

"I hate blondes," the girl interrupted, with scarcely a hint of interest in her voice. Higby was surprised, but he went on without noticing the interruption:

"Classic features——"

"Always in genteel repose, like a face carved in ivory, I suppose," the girl interrupted again. "For my part, marble brows and alabaster noses always remind me of Italian images."

Higby lost patience. Dorus was very beautiful, and very rich, but not even Dorus could be allowed to ridicule Herman with impunity.

"My dear young lady," he said, in the tone of one trying to scold a petulant child, "you supply your own similes, and then find fault with me as if I were the author."

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## *Colonel Higby Takes to Match-making*

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"It's a bad habit I learned in Paris," she said. "There, people, you know, are so superficial that they are rarely sensitive to polite abuse. What is his hair? Unless my memory is treacherous, it was suspiciously near a red—auburn in the shade."

"Your memory is not reliable. It is fair. He is a decided blonde."

"And his temperament?" asked Dorus sweetly. "Is he as cross as you—can be?"

Higby laughed uneasily at the thrust. He felt that in his effort to get even with the girl he had been worsted.

"Herman is very gay," he said, reverting to the subject of his son.

"I detest gayety in a man—it usually denotes a frivolous disposition."

Higby was nonplussed. Dorus had left home a merry, light-hearted child. Now she was even more beautiful than she had given promise of being. The large majority of beautiful women, Higby had reasoned, were far from clever; and he had not doubted that Dorus belonged to the large majority. Like many wiser men, he had reckoned without his host. She was so bewilderingly beautiful, with her strange, misty eyes; and the misty brown hair whose tint

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## *The Letter H*

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was in perfect harmony with the grayness of the eyes; that to Higby her cleverness seemed almost uncanny. He had set out determinedly to be a matchmaker, and had anticipated no difficulty. He had lived at a time and in a set of people where daughters married as they were bidden; and sons, too, for that matter. He had loved with all the love of which a diminutive soul is capable; but his father's wish pointed to an entirely different and an eminently suitable wife elsewhere, and he had unquestionably obeyed the parental dictum. That a mere slip of a girl like Dorus should set up her will and her opinions against those of her father was an almost incredible proposition to him; and in its continuance he foresaw the ruin of all his hopes and plans with regard to the acquisition of Harlington Hall and the heiress of Harlington.

Higby's emotions had concentrated, and his one overmastering sensation was anger. The girl's attitude of indifference was insufferable to his fatherly pride. If she had said "I hate him," he would have viewed the situation with altered feelings, for Higby knew that when a woman says "I hate," nine times out of ten she means "I love," and the tenth time it is "I adore."

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## *Colonel Higby Takes to Match-making*

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The girl was watching a tiny rowboat, its occupant pulling hard against the stream. The tears came to her eyes. She forgot Higby. She was thinking how pitiful was the struggle of the wee, small boat against the strong, almost resistless current, and yet how bravely it pushed ahead. "That's me," she was thinking ungrammatically; "the whole world is against me, but if that little boat can fight its way alone, I am sure I can, too."

After a long pause, Higby spoke.

"Your opinion of my son," he said, coming back to the subject with a persistency that should have won him favor, "is unjust because premature, and a father could hardly be expected to extol the virtues of his son to one who should know them."

"What did you say?" asked Dorus, turning her wide gray eyes, full of new determination and purpose, upon him. "Oh yes, about Herman," she continued, bringing herself back to the discussion with an effort. "Colonel, you haven't been a bit interesting. I thought you would let me talk about Paris, and the host of beaux I had there, and here you've been monopolizing the entire conversation," and she laughed wickedly.

"That same curl of the lip that I remember in

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## *The Letter H*

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her mother," said Higby to himself. "She doesn't like me—her mother never did." Aloud, he said:

"After all, you will be glad to see him."

"Oh, being a man, I suppose he'll be amusing," she retorted.

At this Higby's anger flared up anew.

"Do you imagine that I have brought him up simply to become amusing? He is now at Harvard." There was satire in the man's voice.

"Why is he leaving?" she asked. "Has he graduated?"

"It is vacation."

"Oh! Why don't you put him in the army?"

"Why so?"

"Oh, when men are in the army they are out of the way."

"Ha! ha!" laughed Higby. "Well, time will show. And as Lenore and the General came back he turned to greet them, with something that was akin to relief."

## CHAPTER VI

### “THE TRAUMEREI”

A woman is never so much of a woman as when she is in her own room, surrounded with all the dainty little accessories that mark her own individuality. Dorus's tasteful chamber was no exception to the rule, and it was full of all the faintly-fragrant little trifles that were her very own. Something of the peace and tranquillity that was expressed in its arrangement entered the soul of Dorus when she returned to it immediately after her encounter with Herman's father. Upon her dressing-table were the photographs of a few dear friends. In the centre was a picture of Herman Higby. "I hate you," she cried angrily to the innocent picture, and with a quick movement of her hand she dropped the little pasteboard slip down behind the dressing-table.

"Nanny," she called, softly, "Nanny, do come and make me pretty."

"Nanny," she said, when her maid came, "fo' de sake ob de lan', do talk me into a cheerful mood. Colonel Higby has made me feel perfectly miserable.

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## *The Letter H*

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I think he is clean daft, for he hasn't said an earthly word except in praise of his son Herman."

Nanny laid the blue skirt she was folding, over a chair; and then turned and eyed her mistress with fond admiration. Dorus in a travelling costume was charming, but Dorus in negligée was bewitching. Nanny, in her class, was second to none in point of good looks, and it was with an artistic appreciation of the charm of blue eyes, golden hair and rosy cheeks that she wore a perky bow over her pompadour and insisted upon donning a dainty ruffled apron on all occasions. Moreover, Nanny was clever.

"Why, I thought you were going to marry him," she said with seeming innocence.

The slim figure that was relaxed wearily in the big chair straightened instantly, and there was a suspicion of the flash of steely flame in the gray eyes.

"Don't you dare say that again!" exclaimed the mistress of Harlington haughtily. "And don't you ever tell anyone such a thing, or I shall be very, very angry. I know you can be discreet, Nanny."

Kind as Dorus always was to her attendant, the maid knew that when she spoke in this tone obedience was expected. There was a pause of embar-

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“ *The Traumerei* ”

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rassment, but when Dorus spoke again it was in her usual kindly tone. “Nanny!”

“ Yes, Miss Dorus.”

“ Do my hair high, like mother’s in the picture.”

“ Yes, Miss Dorus,” said the girl again.

Dorus watched the maid deftly pile the masses of her hair, and noted eagerly that when she finished, the resemblance between herself and the mother she had never known was more startling than ever.

“ I must wear something low-necked and old-fashioned looking, Nanny,” she said presently.

Finally she was ready. Her gown was of pale, soft muslin, and over her shoulders was a little lace ruffled affair, leaving her throat exposed.

“ Dorus,” she said to her image in the glass, “ just be good enough to keep your eye on Colonel Higby when you go down stairs. He may have something on his mind, and this might help him to an understanding.”

Dorus had no idea what she expected when she faced Higby. A man comes to his conclusions by logic, but a woman reaches them invariably by way of feminine intuition. And Dorus’s intuition told her that the memories revived by seeing one so

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## *The Letter H*

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nearly like the other Dorus Harlington would affect Higby in some way.

She was very stately as she went step by step down the broad stairway that June afternoon. She stood in the doorway a moment, the shadows surrounding her like the atmosphere of an old portrait. As the paintings of the old masters are softened, the colors mellowed and the brilliancy toned down by the influence of time, so, in the hazy light, Dorus stood in her gown of pale cornflower, the atmosphere caressing her—a part of the picture.

Lenore gave a little gasp as she saw her, and her father, rising, whispered softly: "My Beautiful!" But Higby only tossed away his cigar after a brief glance at her.

So the first situation created by Dorus was a failure. She felt that there was something amiss, and she was most annoyed that she had failed to evoke any emotion on the part of Higby. As for the latter, he was confounded. He wondered what had possessed the girl to assume the attitude of antagonism, and an instant's review of all his conversation with her since her return was sufficient to show that she had seized every opportunity of making a thrust at him which could not fail to be

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## “ *The Traumerei* ”

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unpleasant. With a man's utter disregard for the verity of a woman's intuitions, he cast about for some motive for this. He tried to reason out the why and wherefore, but could reach no result. He had endeavored to be pleasant with her. He had taken rebuffs and had held his peace, when his instinct was to cut deep with a retort. Now he was absolutely nonplussed, but not a line in his face showed his perplexity. He only leaned back in his chair a trifle more comfortably.

“Miss Dorus,” he said languidly, “you accused me a while ago of not showing a proper interest in your travels. Do tell us about them.”

“Oh, pshaw,” she returned carelessly, “I'm so tired of it all and so glad to be at home that I don't want to talk about it.”

Dorus had a ready wit, and her ambition seemed to be to worst Higby at every turn. The conversation soon became a running fire of repartee between the two. Lenore and Harlington, thus left out, stepped through the open window to the porch.

“We are no match for Dorus,” said the General, “and I can't be cross with her. “We'll go and superintend the preparations for to-night. What could we do without you, Lenore?” he added, as they reached the porch.

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## *The Letter H*

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Higby watched them.

“Do you think your aunt will ever marry?” he drawled.

“Marry?” she snapped. “I should think not. Do you imagine I would allow such a thing? I couldn’t exist without Auntie. I wouldn’t give her up except to the best man living—so don’t you be silly enough to lift an eye in that direction.”

Higby lifted his hands in mock consternation.

“Heaven deliver me,” he said, “I’m not a marrying man.”

“I’m happy to hear it,” she retorted.

There was silence for a few minutes, and then Higby drew out his gold-mounted cigar case and turned to the girl again, somewhat perfunctorily. “Do you object to smoke?” he asked.

“Sometimes less than to the smoker,” she said coolly. And Higby instantly replaced the cigar in its case.

Just then, soft, and faint, and far away, resting on the cool air like the fragrance of June lilacs, came the pathetic music of a violin. Clear and sweet, mingling in harmony with the sounds of nature, came the notes of the “Traumerei.” Dorus started—almost frightened. The instinctive antagonism

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“ *The Traumerei* ”

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aroused in her by the proximity of Higby was subdued instantly, and note by note she followed the sweet harmony, forgetful of all else. At the first strain she had risen from her chair, and with her hands on the back stood and listened. Every fibre of her sensitive body was tense. Her eyes were dark with feeling, while every sense seemed absorbed by the insistent melody and the tenderness and pathos of the violin.

Higby glanced at her.

“ What can Luke be thinking of ? ” he exclaimed petulantly. “ Why doesn’t he send that musician about his business ? ”

Dorus turned to him gently. Her face was suffused with color, and her eyes were luminous and soft.

“ Ah ! ” she said, “ he is doing that—well. ” After a pause, she went on : “ It is his legitimate business, and who could do it better ? ”

Higby was conscious that she had been touched—deeply.

“ Why must we be so annoyed ? ” he grumbled. “ The idea of any one being allowed to make day and night hideous with cheap music ! It is not legitimate. ”

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## *The Letter H*

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“ Oh, Colonel Higby,” cried the girl, taking a step towards him impulsively, “ you don’t know what you are saying. Isn’t it beautiful?”

“ Excuse me, Miss Harlington,” said Higby, “ if I take my departure. I hate the whining of a violin—if you enjoy it, I leave you to your reverie.”

He turned as he said the last word, and went swiftly out of the French window.

Dorus sank back into her chair, relieved more than she could say. Softly, the insistent music came—clear and sweet, and wonderfully tender. She covered her face with her hands, and lost herself in thought. Thus it was that Lenore, coming softly into the room, found her.

“ Why, Dorus, dear,” she asked in some agitation, “ what is the matter—crying?”

The girl looked up, her face shining.

“ No,” she said, with a strange, half-mystical smile, “ only dreaming.”

Lenore started. “ Of what?” she asked anxiously.

“ Well, it wasn’t a rhinoceros, and it wasn’t a windmill,” she answered, with a playful little nod of her head.

“ Oh, whom, then?” persisted the aunt.

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“ *The Traumerei* ”

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Dorus looked towards the place whence the music had appeared to come—just out beyond the shadows of the great twin cedars. The music had ceased now, and there were only the sweet sounds of the wind in the trees and the singing of the birds. The playfulness had gone from the girl’s face, and in its place was an expression of exaltation—of ineffable sweetness.

“ Of my future husband,” she half whispered.

Lenore paled under the dark olive of her complexion.

“ Who is he, dear—Herman Higby? ”

The sweetness lingered on her face, and her voice was soft and low:

“ No, not Herman Higby. The one of whom I was dreaming I never saw, nor did I ever hear his name——”

“ Then how will you know him when you meet? ” asked Lenore, eagerly.

“ No fear of that. I should know him among ten thousand.”

“ Lenore grew white to the lips, and her hands trembled. She shuddered a little. Through her mind passed the words of the girl’s mother—spoken eighteen years before—“ I should know him among

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## *The Letter H*

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ten thousand." Tears welled in her eyes, and to her lips came a prayer that the girl would never meet the poor unfortunate being whom her frantic mother so longed to destroy.

"Auntie," said the girl, "I'm in a confidential mood to-day. I'll tell you all I know about him, if you will listen and won't laugh at me."

For answer, Lenore brushed the misty brown hair from the low, broad forehead and kissed her gently:

"Does a true mother ever laugh at her daughter's confidences?"

They sat down together on the couch.

"Do you know, Auntie," began the girl, "I think I must have met him in some of the past ages of the world. We may have stood together when the Queen of Sheba arrived at King Solomon's gates, and while my hero, it may be, was admiring her beauty and grandeur; I had eyes for none but him—or he may have been Pompeii's king, and I his slave."

She stopped, her gaze resting on the scene beyond, and over and over in her mind echoed the plaintive melody of the "Traumerei."

Lenore watched the girl narrowly, and the unshed tears made her eyes shine unnaturally. "The curse will work its course," she said sadly, to herself.

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“ *The Traumerei* ”

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“ And when you think of this unknown hero,” her aunt asked, interrupting the girl’s musings, “ is it with feelings of hatred? ”

Dorus looked at her aunt.

“ Hatred? ” she repeated passionately—then, as though she had not heard aright—“ Can a woman hate her own soul? He has grown into my life, he is part of myself. Awake or sleeping, that face comes to me. The lips are motionless, but the eyes seem to say, ‘ We shall meet ’; and when we do, be he king or beggar, I shall love him, and—” She stopped short, looked at her aunt and gave a quick, hysterical laugh :

“ It is all very silly, isn’t it, Auntie? Don’t mind me, will you? ”

The older woman put her arms around the young girl, and kissed her tenderly.

“ Young girls are apt to talk nonsense, but they outgrow it, and you must. Dismiss such strange fancies—they can do you no good. They may even do you harm, by leading you to refuse an honest, tangible love such as Herman Higby can give you.”

Lenore kissed the girl again, and then rose abruptly, and with a puzzled glance at her, left the room.

## CHAPTER VII

### TWO MEN AND A MAID

Dejection was apparent in every lineament of Dorus Harlington's pretty face. She had curled up in the big sleepy-hollow chair after her little talk with Lenore. She heard the music again, afar off, softened by distance, and like the dream music in a fairy story. How long she sat there she did not know, but as the music grew fainter and fainter, and finally died away altogether, her mood passed.

There was a man's step on the door-sill; and then, as though fearing that the pathetic little person curled up in the chair was asleep, there came a whisper fluttering across the room:

“Dorus!”

The girl did not move. She knew quite well the great person that was expected, but to be the more tormenting she gave no sign of pleasure or recognition.

“Who are you,” she cried with mock dignity, “unbidden guest, that with so mute a step and bated breath doth steal upon me unawares?”

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## *Two Men and a Maid*

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The steps were heard advancing across the room until they were close to the back of her chair. But still she did not turn, nor even lift her head.

“I am he,” the voice went on softly, “whose dearest dream is to see you happy.”

She laughed, pleased in spite of herself at the implied compliment.

“That voice,” she said, “recalls a dream of other days—one I thought forgotten.”

“Dost know me?” persisted the stranger.

“’Tis he who has been exiled and proscribed so long—Herman, the Count de Higby,” she said mockingly.

Herman leaned down, a wave of tenderness came over his face and he took the two little hands in his.

“Look upon my altered mien and say if I am he,” he said.

The gray eyes that met his were dancing with mischief:

“Avaunt! thou beardless youth, thou art not Herman.”

Red lips gleaming, dust-brown hair tumbling caressingly over white temples, gray eyes laughing—the man looked down at the picture she made in the big sleepy-hollow chair.

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## *The Letter H*

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“But thou art Dorus,” he cried, pressing the little hands closely—the tighter because of the flutter in them—“only more beautiful than ever,” he added in a low voice.

There was open admiration in his face, and he let the hands go reluctantly.

“Silly,” the girl answered. “Whatever improvement there may have been in my personal appearance, I can assure you my disposition and temper have not profited thereby.”

“We won’t argue about that,” he said, laughing at the memories of past days and years. “I hope we shall not quarrel as we did when we were children. I know we won’t.”

“Don’t be too sure of that, Mr. Higby. I have not forgotten how you once pinched my poor kitten’s ears until it was black in the face; and, also, with the most heartless cruelty, how you seemed to delight in sticking pins into my doll’s eyes.”

Both laughed heartily at the memory.

“Pray excuse my being so bold as to remind you that the kitten in question was a black one, and its face was not susceptible of the marked change you mention,” said Herman. “As for the doll’s eyes, I considered them useless appendages, and, more-

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## *Two Men and a Maid*

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over, a vulgar burlesque on the genuine article, being made of black thread."

They laughed again; then the girl spoke with an assumed asperity in her manner:

"Your long-postponed explanation and defence do not change the fact that your acts were meant to afflict me. It was I, sir, and not the kitten or doll that drew forth your vindictiveness; and I warn you, sir, that the injury has not been forgotten, and never will be forgiven."

The proud poise of her head, the sparkling brilliancy of her sweet face, the gleam of her eyes and the flash of her little white teeth were irresistible. He looked down at her with an air that bespoke possession:

"The loving heart takes pleasure in forgiving the injury that a loving hand may have inflicted. Dorus, my child love has become a man's passion. For years I have loved an ideal, only to find the real more beautiful than my imperfect fancies had painted."

"Well, I like that!" she cried. "I was afraid I might find you a sensible youth, in which case my little schemes might have gone a-begging."

"If I were sensible," the man responded, "I would become a fool for your sake, Dorus, and let

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## *The Letter H*

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my good sense and your schemes go a-begging together."

"As much as to say that good sense could not be understood by me. Young man," she continued sternly, "have you seen your father since your arrival?"

Herman shrugged his shoulders. "I have not," he said. "My heart led me to you."

"Well, now let your filial respect lead you to your father, who is as anxious to see you as——"

"You are to have me go," Herman finished for her.

"Hardly," replied the girl, a bit wearily, "but I told you my disposition had a sharp edge. I am tired; I shall see you again a little later."

He clasped her hand, then went slowly out of the room, a puzzled expression in his eyes.

Herman gone, Dorus threw herself back into the chair and watched the flickering shadows on the floor. She was not thinking of him. Her moods came and went like the breeze, and the one which had caused her to chatter and play with her childhood's lover was gone. Her mind was filled again by the insistent, plaintive voice of the violin and the melody of the "Traumerei." She wondered why she

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## *Two Men and a Maid*

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had been put into the world, and vaguely she felt a new loneliness—a lack of something.

Out of the vagueness of her dreams one face alone stood clear and constant—a face that was dark, and resolute, and tender; eyes that flashed full of meaning into hers. And always the plaintive pleading of the “*Traumerei*.”

The rattle of pans and the voice of Saida making preparations for the evening aroused in Dorus thoughts of the party to take place that night. Only a brief space before she had been the soul of the affair, now she could not endure the thought of gaiety. Of such contrariness was Dorus made.

Her one thought now was to find the original of the face about which centred her hazy dreams. Without seeing, she gazed out of the long French window, through the trees to the placid river. Up through the vista she saw coming a tall, broad-shouldered figure—a young man carrying a violin—nearer and nearer he came, straight to the house, as though drawn by some magnetic attraction. An angle of the building hid him at last. She turned, some one was entering at the farther end of the room. She raised her head to look directly into the eyes of Ernesto del Tonjours. Both stood si-

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## *The Letter H*

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lent. The gray eyes burning into the black ones, the black ones into the gray. Then, over the girl's face surged the red blood, wave on wave. The man dropped his too ardent gaze. He tightened his lips, and drew his shoulders back straight.

“Mademoiselle,” he began, with a perceptible effort, “h-how can I serve you?”

Dorus stepped forward impulsively, then stopped short, covered with confusion. Ernesto, too, strode half-way across the room, and then stopped as suddenly as Dorus had done. The girl was devouring him with her eyes. She pressed her hand on her breast, as though to stop the wild beating of her heart. For a moment, the strange ecstasy that thrilled her excluded a realization of the demands of propriety, and for the time being, she lived alone in a world with neither rules nor conventionality to which she must conform. She had recognized instantly that this man was the one whom she had passed on her way into the station the day of her arrival in New York. Now, she knew that his face and the dream-face were identical. The change in garb from the faultlessly attired gentleman in town to the rough, picturesque costume of a traveller she did not notice. The knowledge that he was

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## *Two Men and a Maid*

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there, in her father's house, excluded all other thoughts.

So she stood, but only for an instant. Saida's lusty voice summoning the two little pickaninnies recalled Dorus to herself, and she quickly cast about for some excuse for holding the musician near her without compromising herself **more** than she had done.

Ernesto, however, seeing and seeming to understand her confusion, had started for the French window. A timid voice detained him :

“ Sir! Sir! ”

When he had turned completely about and stood facing her again, she went on with restraint and apparent embarrassment :

“ May I tell you how much I enjoyed your playing? ” she said. “ I have just come from Paris, where we heard the most beautiful music, but I never heard anything so like a human voice calling to me as when you played just now. You are a professional, of course. Perhaps, if you are staying near by, you will come up and give us some music some evening very soon. I am sorry we cannot have the pleasure to-night, but we are having a large party in honor of my home-coming. ”

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## *The Letter H*

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Ernesto bowed low. His longing to stay, to stay forever in this lovely spot, to talk forever with this charming girl, almost overmastered him; yet he felt that he must not yield.

“I shall only be here to-night,” he murmured. “I am obliged to go on in the morning.”

The girl’s eyes sought his, full of passionate entreaty.

“Will you not tell me your name?” she asked softly.

“My mother calls me Ernesto,” was the answer.

There was no more to be said. Dorus stepped forward impulsively and extended her hand:

“Will you not say good-bye?”

Ernesto’s face might have been hewn of stone, so cold and impassive was it. He looked as he had looked a hundred times, passionless and unresponsive, as he was when he faced a large audience. But behind the calm exterior was the memory of the electric thrill that had come at the touch of her sleeve, and he shrank from clasping the little pink hand. If, on a crowded thoroughfare like Forty-second Street, with the commotion and the various distracting disturbances about him, and with no premonition of her coming, he had felt such wonderful

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## *Two Men and a Maid*

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ecstasy from the simple brushing of sleeve to sleeve, what might it not be now, with every nerve and fibre awake to her presence? He drew back from the outstretched hand.

“My hands must not touch yours,” he said, as naturally as he could. “I have been picking flowers and digging up ferns in the woods, so that mine are too earthy to touch your white ones.”

Quite overwrought, one hand hanging at his side, the other closed about his violin, none knew the struggle it was to keep his hand from taking the little, frail, confiding one reached out to him.

With a backward tilt of her head and a low cry, the girl sprang forward and laid her hands gently on the lapels of his coat.

He made a strong effort to release himself. With white lips, he pushed her back:

“Be careful, child.”

“The risk is mine,” was the answer, low, and deep, and steady.

With her hands, she touched his face, his arm, his hands.

“Oh, destiny,” she cried. That I could go with you—and you could play, and I could sing. If I were a poor girl, then I could speak—then I would dare tell you how much— Oh! Ernesto—go——”

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## *The Letter H*

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She pushed him away from her, and with the soul of sorrow in her eyes, she watched him go—out into the soft, balmy sunshine. Out between the twin cedars he passed slowly.

“Ernesto! Come back”—it was only a whisper.

## CHAPTER VIII

### TRACES OF AN INHERITANCE

Dorus slept but ill when her aunt sent her to her room for a nap before dinner, and her first thought on waking was not about the great ball, but about the musician. The reflection of her face in the mirror startled her. There were signs of tears in her eyes, and something in her expression puzzled her. She wondered what force had compelled her to act as she had done; yet she realized that the entire scene would be repeated should the same conditions present themselves again. Dorus was much given to analyzing her motives, but this—it was unprecedented, and without explanation.

She felt that it was some trick of inheritance, some force generated centuries before. Mentally, she tried to enumerate her ancestors. The Harlingtons, with their long line of American heroes and heroines; and far back in England to the Norman rule—centuries of bravery, and honor, and valorous deeds—was it there? And her mother's family—Creoles!

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## *The Letter H*

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There was a shudder and a gasp as Dorus realized that she knew not one thing about her mother's family. Her brows contracted somberly, and the gray eyes grew deep and fathomless as she tried to reason why she had never been told more about them. They had kept her mind full of the thoughts of the greatness of one side of her ancestry—was the other sprung from less than common soil? Were they underlings?—but Lenore was not—and her mother's portrait! Surely there was nothing low or sordid there. What could be the reason for this secrecy? Dorus pondered.

It seemed years since the first low note of the "Traumerei," with its portentous minor chords and its plaintive prelude of impending ill, had come softly from beyond the shadow of the twin cedars. The years in Europe were as a dream, consuming in time but the space of the closing of an eye. Oppressing her with the burden of its reality, only the consciousness that she had made the decision of her life was clear, and that, forever, her soul was linked to that of the musician. Everything else seemed unreal. Even the degradation of being coldly repulsed was secondary now. Uppermost was the thought that she had driven him from her. Life

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## *Traces of an Inheritance*

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with him near seemed impossible—but infinitely more so was life in which he had no part. He was only a musician, and with this thought came into her memory the words that she had said to Lenore—“we shall meet, and when we do, be he king or beggar, I shall love him.”

The afternoons were long, and being unable to rest, Dorus walked out into the open, intending to take a short stroll before the evening meal. In the absorption of her thoughts, she wandered a considerable distance from the house. When she paused, her mind was suddenly distracted from her painful thoughts by the beautiful vista that opened before her. Trees warm and green with the indescribable warmth and greenness of June, the sky infinite in its blueness, and beyond, through the brown tree trunks and boughs, the grand old Hudson twinkling and glistening in the afternoon sun. Dorus stood in the woodland path, transfixed by the stilly grandeur that spread before her vision.

A creaking of twigs and branches recalled her to herself, and she turned expectantly to the point from which the noise came. As Ernesto broke through, Dorus paled. With proximity to the musician, all the uncontrollable passion of her soul broke loose

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## *The Letter H*

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again. Her face became instantly surcharged with feeling, and her hands caught at her skirts feverishly.

“Ernesto!” The name slipped gently from her lips.

Del Tonjours questioned her agitation with a look, and extended a handkerchief, a fine and dainty trifle, towards her.

“I found it in the path,” he said; “it is yours, I think.”

Dorus hesitated, then stepped towards him with an evident effort to appear unconcerned.

“Yes, it is mine,” she said nervously. “I must have dropped it. Thank you.”

Del Tonjours acknowledged her thanks with a slight bow, and moved forward as if to pass on through the woods to the path.

Dorus lifted her shoulders with a characteristic motion and called him back imperatively:

“Stay, please, I wish to speak with you.”

As Ernesto turned and regarded her with his serious, dark eyes, she lost control of herself, and with a little cry held her hands out to him.

“Ernesto! Ernesto!” she cried pitifully, “what can you think of me?”

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## *Traces of an Inheritance*

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What he thought, Ernesto kept to himself.

"You are weeping," was all that he said.

"Yes, I am," she cried passionately, "bitter tears of shame and remorse. Tell me, do you think me silly—or base?"

There was no avoiding the issue.

"I think you are neither," he said slowly; "you are in grief."

"You are not answering me," cried the girl, stamping her foot. "You are a man, you think—you know. From your eyes I can tell you believe me one or the other. I have gone too far to recall my words or explain my actions. I could not if I would. It is past my knowledge, heaven knows. Could the birds tell why they fly southward in the autumn? Do the coral insects know why they build their reefs? It is instinct, and this, too, is an instinct I cannot explain. Tell me, what did you think of me?"

While Ernesto felt the irresistible attraction that had filled his being at their first meeting and every moment he had been near her since, the explanation of her actions had but one meaning for him—but he looked into the clear gray eyes, with their earnest, eager questioning—and that he could not tell her.

"You were, perhaps—amusing yourself," he said hesitatingly.

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## *The Letter H*

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Dorus looked up, astonished.

“At your expense?” she asked, so ingenuously that del Tonjours was sorry he had not advanced some other hypothesis.

“I do not know,” he said, extricating himself as best he could; “but if you were, it doesn’t matter. I don’t pretend to understand or find fault with a woman’s moods.”

Both stood silent a moment. Once more Ernesto turned to go.

“Stay,” cried the girl a second time, a daring look in her eyes. She put out her little hand and laid it on Ernesto’s coat sleeve:

“I have a favor to ask of you. If you will grant it, it will enable me to prove that I never intended to make fun of you. Will you grant it?”

The frank face, upturned to the musician’s, appealed irresistibly to the inborn chivalry of the man.

“I dare not promise,” he said slowly. “It might not be in my power to do as you wish.”

Desire made Dorus courageous. She was more earnest than ever.

“As you no doubt think,” she began, “I have strange moods and fancies. You must not be surprised at what I am going to ask you to do. To-

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## *Traces of an Inheritance*

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night,—as I told you before—there is to be a party at my father's house. It is to be a welcome home for me, his only daughter, on my return from Europe. I want you to be present—will you come?"

Ernesto started. He was amazed at the daring of the girl. The man does not live who is unconscious of youth, and vitality, and beauty. Ernesto was no exception. Mysterious as he felt his connection with her to be, he dared not have it flaunted in the very eyes of all the people of the countryside.

"I must not," he replied. "What would your friends think? You do not even know who I am."

"I—I have set my heart on your being there to-night." Her tone was pleading. "I have a plan; if you will follow it implicitly it will be all right, I can assure you. You are an Italian?"

"No. My father—I mean my mother—and I are Mexicans."

"I have travelled a great deal in Italy," said Dorus, "and I thought you an Italian. Others will think so if you say your name is Signor Brindelli—now remember," she continued eagerly, "Signor Arturo Brindelli. Now, what is your name?"

"Ernesto," was the answer, a flash of mischief in the man's eyes.

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## *The Letter H*

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Both laughed, and the girl shook her finger at him.

“Naturally,” she declared; but for to-night what is it to be? Can you remember?”

Ernesto took a step back, and lifting his cap, made a sweeping bow:

“To please a lady’s fancy, Signor Arturo Brindelli.”

Dorus clapped her hands ecstatically.

“Capital,” she cried; “you do it just as he did!”

“He? Who?” asked the man.

“Why, the real Signor Brindelli, of course,” she laughed back. “Sit down, and I will tell you about him.”

Close to the spot where they stood was a huge, flat boulder. In one side of it was as perfect a divan as one might find in Nature’s workshop, hewn out in some past age when the rocks were torn from the bosom of the earth, and smoothed over by the action of the sunshine, and the wind, and the rain, during the years that it had lain still and immovable. Upon it, the afternoon sunshine lay in a gold stream, and looking like a lady in a picture, Dorus stood beside it. In the slanting gold that kissed her, her face was framed in an aureole of sunny gleams, and be-

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## *Traces of an Inheritance*

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neath the dark lashes her eyes shone with a light that was half winsome, half wild. She placed her white hands on the rock, and with a pretty motion perched herself upon it, making room for the musician by drawing the fluffy ruffles of her skirt close about her.

He was only a man, after all, and it would have taken the strength of a god to resist the winsomeness of the girl's invitation. Ernesto's eyes narrowed, and he gave a quick, articulate sigh as he watched her, but he took his place beside her without a word. To his hot, impulsive Latin blood, the contact with her cool soft gown, the faint, elusive fragrance of violets that seemed to hover near her, the charm of her soft southern voice were maddening. He wondered vaguely why he did not end it all at once and leave the girl without courtesy or explanation. He wondered what was the power that impelled him onward in this mad flirtation; for in his saner moments he felt it to be such.

There was something about this strange girl that attracted the man, in spite of his better judgment. He shuddered and wondered if it was not all some passing dream. He could not understand her. He could not understand himself. She was so frail and dainty, educated, rich, beautiful; while he was but

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## *The Letter H*

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beginning the struggle for the art which he adored. He realized the infinite distance between them and rebelled. With a wave of passion, came the consciousness of the one thing which alone put the universe between them. It was his mother's name and not his father's that he bore. Yet, here he was, sitting close beside this beautiful girl, forced almost to touch her at every movement.

Tacitly, but none the less determinedly, he faced the problem of how he was to evade the love of the girl when his whole body and soul revolted at evasion.

After Ernesto had seated himself beside her, she became quiet. She seemed to have forgotten her reason for asking him to stay.

"Is it not beautiful, this homeland?" she asked irrelevantly.

"For your homeland, yes," he spoke slowly; "but I have none."

She turned, with quick sympathy.

"None?" she questioned. Then added, "Not none, but all."

"It is only so to those who have a home, like you," he said bitterly. "You say all, but we of the nomads can only say none."

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## *Traces of an Inheritance*

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The girl flushed: "It is yours for the asking," and she pointed where the river lay blue and beautiful in the calm of the late afternoon.

The Mexican's shoulders squared, and again his eyes narrowed. She could not dream how hard it was to refuse the gift.

A silence fell upon them. For her, the struggle seemed to be over. Near to him, she yielded to the magnetism that drew her; and the pain and the sorrow that had torn her with anxiety and fear when he was away she remembered as in a dream. In Ernesto there was a dogged determination to see the game to the finish, but to commit himself in no way.

At last the silence was broken.

"I was going to tell you about Brindelli," Dorus began. "He saved me from being killed by a runaway, so I really owe my life to him. Do you know"—she turned to the Mexican, and her voice was dangerously low and soft—"do you know, even while I was trying to persuade myself to care for him, I was thinking of you, Ernesto. I must have seen you and known you in some other world, for I've loved you—how I have loved you!—for years."

It was as though she had made a remark upon the weather, so quietly had she said it. The man drew

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## *The Letter H*

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himself away. When a goddess tells a slave that she loves him, the slave would do well to annihilate himself rather than show a similar passion for the goddess.

Dorus noticed the motion and restrained herself.

“You will come to-night, will you not? As my guest, my equal—nay, my superior? Think yourself, for this one evening, an Italian gentleman—imagine me a poor country girl.”

“Ah,” he said, “it would be impossible to imagine you anything but what you are—rich and beautiful.”

Dorus’s lips quivered. “Rich—and you are poor. I had forgotten. But you are to be an Italian gentleman. Signor Brindelli was very rich, so you are a millionaire for to-night.”

Ernesto smiled. “Very well, I will come. And I hope your friends will find me very like a real Italian gentleman.”

“To-night we must forget everything but our new-found, but, alas, short-lived happiness. You will not fail me?” she went on, anxiously.

Ernesto bowed slowly as he said, “I will be there.”

With a quick, impulsive movement, he disappeared through the bracken as he had come. Dorus turned to the stone once more and rested her head upon its lichen-grown top.

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## *Traces of an Inheritance*

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“Oh, destiny! Oh, destiny!” she cried, pitifully. Ernesto was gone, and the love and contentment that had buoyed her up in his presence fell from her like a garment. And once more, in a hopeless, irresistible wave—the pity of it—and the pain of it—and the degradation—swept over her soul.

## CHAPTER IX

### A CHANCE ENCOUNTER

When Ernesto broke through the branches his mind was full of strange, wild thoughts, as it had been since he had first seen the love-light dancing in the eyes of this bewitching, beautiful girl. In the morning the search to which he had consecrated his life—the finding of his father and the forcing of justice for his mother—was the thought uppermost in his mind. Yet before the day was over a slip of a girl, with eyes whose expression was ever-changing, which were soft and tender, cool or passionate, at will; and which were full of world love and heaven love—a girl whose very name was strange to him—had upset all his plans. Had, in fact, with the wonder of her presence, supplanted everything that he had ever thought worth while. He tried to conjure up her picture, and, fresh from his interview with her, it came readily. He marvelled at the miracle of her hair, and wondered if he had ever seen hair of just that tint before. In the

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## *A Chance Encounter*

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shadow there had been no suggestion of bronze, so soft it was and dull; and yet he had seen the sunshine dancing over it and turning it to a brown that was full of fire and living glory. He remembered the unconventional arrangement of her dress, as though her costume had been copied from the fashion of other days—the fine lace about the slender, soft pillar of her neck, showing the little hollow that seemed made to be kissed. She was so ethereal that she seemed made out of the sunshine and the air; and the soft texture of her skin, the cream of her complexion, the dull tone of her hair, seemed one with the atmosphere.

Ernesto had but just gone beyond hearing distance of the girl, when a shout and a crash as of a heavy body falling arrested his attention. Peering through the trees, he saw, not twenty feet from him, in the opening of the forest, a big bay horse, stretched on the ground, his body heaving in great gasps. Held down by the entanglement of the reins and the stirrup, with one leg under the animal, was a young man. Ernesto hurried forward, and, jumping lightly over the accumulated brush and stones, reached the scene; and with little difficulty succeeded in extricating the young man from his awkward position.

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## *The Letter H*

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The latter did not speak for a moment, as he shook himself free from the dust which clung to his clothes.

“Thank you sincerely,” he said at last, frankly holding out his hand. “You arrived just in the nick of time.”

They bent their attention to the horse, which lay in a quivering heap, its great eyes already glassy and staring. The neck was broken and there seemed nothing to be done.

The horseman turned once more to Ernesto. “That was a narrow escape,” he said. “I nearly broke my own neck as well as poor old Dan’s. I thought he could take that wall. Poor old Danbury. He was such a good horse, and so game.”

“Are you hurt?” asked Ernesto.

“Nothing serious, only a little lame,” was the answer. “The horse fell across my right leg when we dropped, and I should have had a hard time of it getting free but for your opportune arrival.”

He looked at the horse again. “You are sure the horse is dead?”

“He is dead,” was Ernesto’s grave reply. “His neck is broken.”

“How can I repay you for your assistance?” said the horseman kindly. “Are you staying near here?”

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## *A Chance Encounter*

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As he spoke he drew his card case from his pocket and took out a card.

“There is my card—Herman Higby, son of Colonel Henry Higby, the member of Congress for the Twentieth New York District. You may have heard of him. I shall tell my father of your kindness and if at any time we could be of any service to you call upon either of us—we are at Mr. Harlington’s for a few days,” indicating the direction of the old mansion that Ernesto knew only too well, “but we live at Lake George.”

As he moved off his limp was very perceptible. The Mexican sprang to assist him, “You are very lame,” he cried. “Shall I go with you to Mr. Harlington’s?”

“Oh, no,” was the answer. “I can walk this off. Thank you very much, and good-bye—till we meet again.”

The men clasped hands, and Herman limped towards the Harlington house, while Ernesto went on down the road. The great elms, with their gigantic trunks, reached far up, while above spread and interlaced their branches; the pale blue of the sky, glorified with the rosy glow of the western sun, showed through the canopy of green. Ernesto went

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## *The Letter H*

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on towards the village, stepping lightly over the roadway, full of the vigor and the restlessness of youth.

Meantime Dorus, in the little woodland nook, had given way to tears. "He does not love me—he does not love me," she said to herself over and over again. In the shame of her avowals the tears had come unbidden. She did not realize that, as yet, she alone of the Harlington household had seen the violinist, and that the secret of her infatuation belonged to herself and the Mexican. When it at last dawned upon her that to all the others she was still the same Dorus, and that they would never be any the wiser unless she herself enlightened them, a great resolve was formed in her mind. They should not know, unless—if Ernesto should—but no! she could trust him—he would never speak.

Again the crackling of the dried twigs and branches aroused her as it had when Ernesto had found her there, and the girl peered through the trees, almost expecting to see the dark, handsome face of the violinist a second time. She started as Lenore broke through into the little woodland bower; her face, which was clouded with anxiety, cleared as she caught sight of the girl behind the table-rock.

"Oh, there you are, Dorus," she cried; "we did not know where you had gone."

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## *A Chance Encounter*

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Traces of tears were still visible in the girl's eyes, but Lenore's expression of surprise did not encourage Dorus to make a confession of the happenings of the last few minutes.

"Weeping, Dorus?" the aunt went on. "Are you ill—or only frightened?"

The girl remained silent, and Lenore felt hurt. When she spoke again there was a touch of bitterness in her tone. When a woman is hurt she shows it in one of two ways; if she is wounded by her lover she weeps—if by anyone else she scolds.

"You were not alone?" Lenore questioned, severely. "I saw some one leaving you as I came along the path."

The girl in silence rested her head upon her arm as she leaned on the top of the rock.

"Who was he? And what did he say to you?" insisted the aunt, with growing indignation. Still the silence, unbroken, but for the gay chattering of the birds in the tree-houses.

"Dorus, why don't you answer me?" Miss Clifton stepped to the girl's side and laid her hand upon the brown head.

"Thoughtless girl, we have been looking everywhere for you. Why did you come to this lonely

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## *The Letter H*

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place?" After a little pause, she went on: "What did that rude person say to you, my child?"

Dorus looked up, her face flaming. "Person?" she repeated sharply.

"Yes, that man. I caught a glimpse of him. I am quite certain he was rude to you—else, why these tears?"

Dorus bit her lip. Her face still flushed and her eyes flashed, but she controlled herself.

"No one has been rude to me, Auntie," she said quietly.

"But why did you come here alone?" the aunt went on.

"I came for a walk," the girl answered hotly.

"Not with him?" persisted Miss Clifton. "Who was the man I saw?"

"Might it not have been Herman—looking for me?"

"Herman has been looking for you—riding up and down the road on Dan. But it was not Herman. If so, why did he leave you—and in tears? Was it Herman, Dorus?"

"No."

"Who was it?"

"Oh, Auntie, do not question me now," said the girl. "Let us go home."

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## *A Chance Encounter*

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In Miss Clifton's features a storm was gathering. She was angered with her niece, and felt the necessity of obliging her to answer.

"Dorus, I am pained beyond expression," she asserted, with an air of severity. "Is it possible that you can have secrets from me—you, whom I have so loved and trusted? What am I to think? I command you to tell me who that person was."

All the passion that had been growing in the girl burst out at this. "You command me?" she cried. "Then let me tell you that you have no right to command me. I will not tell you. I am no longer a child. If I choose to have secrets, you, at least, cannot prevent it."

Dorus stood facing her aunt, her shoulders back, and her head held high. Lenore was furious.

"Then I shall go to your father. Do you imagine that he would allow you to meet secretly any person whom he does not know?"

"I dare you to go to him with a story like that."

"What story?" Lenore looked frightened.

"That I am meeting any one clandestinely so soon after my return home. You dare not tell him such a preposterous thing, for you know he would not believe you. Neither has he appointed you to

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## *The Letter H*

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spy upon my actions. I will do what I like, unless papa forbids it."

Lenore was startled at the girl's defiance.

"Oh, Dorus," she said sadly, and there were signs of tears in her eyes, "you have never spoken like this to me before. Ever since you lay in my arms, a poor, motherless baby, I have loved and cared for you. I had thought that you loved me and would confide in me as you would have done in your own mother. But you do not need me any longer." She turned away sadly.

Under the softness and gentleness of the older woman's voice, the defiance in the girl's attitude gave way to another emotion.

"Oh, Auntie," she cried, springing after Miss Clifton, "I do need you. I could not live without you. You know I love you as if you were my own mother. Forgive me—I did not mean to wound you. Won't you trust me a little while longer, Auntie? Sometime I will tell you all—but not now. Say you forgive me."

"I forgive you, dear, and I will wait until you are ready to confide in me."

The lips of the older woman touched the girl's forehead. Then, noticing how damp the atmosphere

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## *A Chance Encounter*

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had grown, she said, "Come, Dorus, let us hurry in. The dew is falling and you are shivering."

She took Dorus by the hand as though she feared that she would again escape her, and together they started through the woods towards Harlington Hall.

## CHAPTER X

### TWO GUESTS FROM ITALY

Ernesto made his way down the road towards the little town which lay nestling between the hills and the river. He was all unconscious of the picturesque forest vistas and of the last faint rosy gleams of the sun filtering through the lacework of the arching elms. The brambled berry bushes at the roadside; the daisies nodding to him from the field; even the woman behind him, striving vainly to attract his attention and to catch up with him, were unnoticed. His head up, his hands in his pockets, and his thoughts still with the girl whom he had left so shortly before, he moved on, careless and unconscious of all else.

It seemed almost as though she had just gone. Ernesto already thought of her as alone, apart from others—the one woman in the world. The faint fragrance of violet that was as much a part of her personality as her soft southern accent, seemed to linger about him and compelled him more forcibly to conjure up the sweet, sad face of the girl as he

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## *Two Guests from Italy*

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had last seen it—soft, but suffused with animation, and, he thought it reverently, with love. He called it that for lack of a better name, for even though it was such a strange, unusual love, it seemed none the less sacred to him.

“Ernesto! Ernesto!”

He turned and saw his mother. She was breathless from walking far faster than her wont in the effort to overtake him.

“Ernesto!” there was dismay in the voice. “I am all out of breath. I’ve been calling to you, but I could not make you hear—and you walk so fast,” she went on, as she caught up with him.

Ernesto’s eyes had less welcome in them than probably they had ever shown before when he turned to greet his beloved mother. But she did not notice. Indeed, her entire attention was occupied with her dress, which had caught on a briar and was torn. It was a picturesque dress and was wondrously becoming to her. She had pulled a cluster of wild roses from a bush and thrust them into her corsage. Her soft hair was rumpled a bit, and her cheeks were flushed. Even the pathetic little droop at the corners of her mouth was hidden by a half smile that played about her lips.

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## *The Letter H*

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“ Oh, June! June!” she cried, lifting her face to the faint, odorous breeze, as she fastened the torn place deftly with a pin. “ Oh, Youth! Youth!” she finished, looking at the boy.

For the first time she caught the somber, doubting expression on the face of her son.

“ Why, lad, what is the matter?” Carmelita’s thoughts went no farther than a broken string of the violin, or a rebuff from the listeners. “ Where have you been?”

Across Ernesto’s consciousness flashed one clear thought—Carmelita must not know of the girl’s infatuation. So he said, nonchalantly:

“ I wandered near that big gray house, and the young lady heard me and called me in. She wishes me to come and amuse the company this evening.”

Carmelita clapped her hands with childish happiness. “ Good! You are going?” she asked, struck by Ernesto’s expression.

“ Of course I am,” Ernesto wished to get the conversation away from Dorus, so he added, apropos of nothing:

“ I have been fortunate enough to pull a young man from under his horse, which had fallen on him. He gave me his card.”

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## *Two Guests from Italy*

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Ernesto fumbled for it. "He lives at Mr. Harlington's."

Camelita started. "Harlington?" she cried.

"His name," said Ernesto, "is Higby—son of Colonel Henry Higby, of——"

"Great God!" cried the woman. "Harlington—and Higby—here?"

At the first exclamation Ernesto glanced at his mother, and the expression on her face brought all the passion in his blood to the fore. His eyes glowed and his lips tightened in response to the appeal in her voice. There was no need to ask the meaning. While Harlington meant nothing to him, he remembered like a flash that Higby was the name of the man in search of whom his mother had spent her life. In the press of thoughts that were new to him, Ernesto had failed to connect the Higby of the incident of a few moments before with that other Higby, who had stood to him—since he had learned the story—as the synonym for all that was evil, and bad, and vile. Now, at the sound of his mother's voice as she pronounced the names together, it flashed across his mind that while the one name Higby alone would fail to identify the person, its association with Harlington, a much rarer name, would preclude the

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## *The Letter H*

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possibility of a mistake. Through all the long years they had been searching, not for a person high in the counsels of his country, but for a man of obscurity whose name was Henry Higby—never had they dreamed that the Congressman, whose name was the same, was the man for whom they sought.

Now Ernesto knew. This was the Higby of whom they were in search—the search which would have been so easy of accomplishment had they but connected the two and gone directly to the War Department; but which they had elected to conduct in this blind, childish way of travelling from place to place, in the hope of finding him by chance. There was not the shadow of a doubt in Ernesto's mind that, at last, they were on the eve of discovery. Yet it occurred to him, curiously, that he wished it had been otherwise. He was surprised that there was no thrill of triumph in his heart answering to his mother's exultant thought that, at last, justice was at hand. Instead, there was a dull dread that the girl would hear of it and despise him. He felt that he would rather have her remember him as the struggling violinist del Tonjours than as the neglected, forgotten son of Henry Higby. He was vaguely conscious that it seemed no longer his affair;

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## *Two Guests from Italy*

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that, already, he had divorced the purpose that heretofore had been his life's aim; and that there was something infinitely finer and as infinitely important at the end of his ambition than Colonel Henry Higby.

All this while he watched the little mother, pacing like a caged tigress up and down the fairy-like bower into which they had turned from the highway. Suddenly she stopped before her son.

"Ernesto," she said, with decision, "I am going with you to Mr. Harlington's to-night to meet the Messrs. Higby—the father and the son. I, too, can amuse the company."

Like a flash Ernesto saw what it would mean should she carry out her purpose. She must be prevented from following that course.

"No, mother," he spoke as decidedly as she had done, "you must not go."

"I shall go," she returned, hotly.

"Mother," said the man, not at a loss for an explanation, "I have not told you the whole truth. I will not try to give the young lady's reasons, for I do not know them, but she wished me to come as a guest to the party to-night. I am not to play, as I led you to suppose. She has invited me as she might invite any gentleman whom she knew."

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## *The Letter H*

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“Such an informal invitation could surely include your mother.” The woman’s tone was haughty.

“But, to please the young lady, I am to be introduced as Signor Arturo Brindelli, an Italian—a friend whom she met in Italy.” Ernesto’s tone was expostulatory.

“Then, to please myself,” cried the woman, “I will be introduced as the Signora Lucia Brindelli—your mother.”

“But, mother, she may be angry.”

“Let her be angry. I, too, can be angry.”

Carmelita threw back her head. There was no sign of pathos in the voice now. The soft, sympathy-inviting eyes were blazing, the flush on her cheeks was angry, every fibre of her body was quivering. A woman’s wrath makes an animal of her, and a wonderful, beautiful animal the Mexican woman seemed transformed into, as the light of her great desire was shed upon her. Ernesto remembered having seen somewhere a painting of Deborah, a Judge of Israel; and he unconsciously compared the two, thinking that there was only a slight difference between them; despite the thousands of years gone by.

“Ernesto,” she stopped in her walk, “would you like to see your father?”

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## *Two Guests from Italy*

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For the first time in his life the question failed to arouse the quick temper.

"He deserted you," he answered dully. "He deserted both of us. I have no love for him."

"Love!" A sudden glory of scorn sprang to her eyes. "Do you suppose I am trying to find him because I love him? It is because I hate him."

After a pause she spoke again; the hardness was gone from her voice, and in its place was the old tenderness.

"Come to me, Ernesto."

As the man moved towards her slowly, once more the look of ineffable sweetness came into her eyes, and she brushed the dark hair back from his forehead. She pressed her lips upon the scar—passionately—once, twice.

"The letter H," she whispered; "Harlington—Higby—Hatred!"

As she released him, the last, lingering rays of the red sun went down beyond the hills; and the little woodside bower grew dark. She turned swiftly.

"Come, Ernesto, we must go. We have no time to lose. Signor Brindelli, attend your mother." The last she added playfully, but the man knew that her mind was made up and that nothing could change her.

## CHAPTER XI

### ANOTHER REBUFF

Herman limped back to the house, taking the path through the woods. He felt worse over the death of the horse than he cared to show, and his thoughts were still on the poor beast when he came in sight of Harlington Hall. Chinese lanterns were being hung from tree to tree and about the veranda, and he made out the forms of Lenore Clifton and the General, superintending a small army of maids and men.

He went toward them, glad enough, manlike, that he had walked the numbness out of his leg, so that he would not be the object of a lot of solicitude.

“Hasn’t Dorus returned?” he called, as soon as he was within speaking distance.

But before he could be answered Dorus herself came to the French window, with her arms piled full of June roses. The melancholy was gone from her face, and she seemed her own sweet self again. The old quizzical, bantering expression had come again into the brown eyes. It was a fair picture

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## *Another Rebuff*

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that she made, framed by the wide window sash; the background hazy and dull, the shadows deepening and softening the outline of her figure. Herman was up the steps in a second, his heart in his eyes.

"Which are the fairest I cannot tell," he quoted softly, his eyes on the mass of roses in her arms. He raised his gaze from the flowers to her face. Its inestimable sweetness was like incense. Involuntarily he stretched out his arms towards her, and the glory of his awakening passion dawned in his face. He turned the seriousness of his mood away with an effort.

"Have you been quietly playing mistress here while we searched the forest for you, Rosalind?" he asked playfully.

"Was it Arden?" she returned, archly.

"No, for there was no Rosalind," he spoke seriously again, "only a poor copy of Orlando, who killed his horse searching for his Rosalind. Dan is dead. His neck was broken by a fall."

"Oh, what a shame," cried the girl, all sympathy. "Dear old Dan." There was genuine grief in her voice.

"I believe you're more sorry for the horse than you are for me," said the man jealously.

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## *The Letter H*

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“And why not?” was the quick question; “you have everything you can ask for—why should I be sorry for you?”

“You’re mistaken.” The man’s eyes were shining steel blue, and his voice was grave. “I’ve got everything I haven’t asked for, and that which I want more than anything else I—can’t—even—ask—for.”

“You have no business to wish for what you can’t have,” was the short reply.

There was something in Herman’s face as the girl turned away with her roses that would have warned her, but she did not look. His lips tightened and his eyes narrowed. When it is a woman a man wants, the chances are that he will stop at nothing to get her. He watched her arrange the flowers about the hall—a cluster here—a few long-stemmed beauties there—with the careless grace of the artist. The big fireplace she had banked with green vines, and upon the clustering honeysuckle she laid a mass of red Jacqueminot roses. As she knelt before the fireplace, in her clinging, cornflower gown, her face nestled against the soft blush of the flowers, Herman caught his breath. The marvel of her sweet, sad beauty, with the piquancy of her ever-changing

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## *Another Rebuff*

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moods, had worked the miracle of the ages. He leaned against the window sash, his thoughts growing more maddeningly sweet each moment as he watched her. She finished her pretty work, and, turning, saw him regarding her with an intent expression.

“You brute!” she cried laughingly.

“Please——” he started.

“You not only stand there without lifting a hand to help me, but you are deliberately laughing at my efforts.”

“Dolly,” it was the old baby name that she had not heard for years.

She drew herself up with mock haughtiness: “Not for you to play with.”

“To take care of,” he ventured, emboldened by her attitude.

“Indeed, then,” she said, turning to her vases, “I am very, very well able to take care of myself. So there is only one, and not two dollies for you to look after.”

The roses were very absorbing just then. She placed them here, she changed them to another position; and she laughed over her shoulder at him at every turn. The violinist seemed forgotten.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Did you think of me often while in Europe?” he asked wistfully.

“Oh,” the mischief danced in her face as she spoke, but her lips were serious, “you were never out of my mind.”

“If I could believe you, I should be the happiest man on earth.”

“Well, don’t believe it, then. I hate to see an over-joyful countenance.”

“Did you mean it, Dorus?”

“Silly! Do you think I would say it that way if I did?”

“I’m afraid not;” Herman was desperately in earnest.

“I came near bringing a title home,” she said. “Dad’s fortune was just too small.”

“Thank the Lord!” fervently.

“What did you say? I didn’t quite catch it.”

“Oh, nothing. Simply that I was glad you hadn’t. I should have been afraid of you.”

She came towards him, wistfully: “Are you really glad that I’m home?”

“Glad? I can’t find words to tell just how glad I am.”

“Try!” How tantalizing she was!

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*Another Rebuff*

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Herman went white to the lips. She was so near—  
so frail, so sweet, so fair!

“D-de f-folkses is a’ comin’, M-miss Dorus!”

“D-d-dey’s a’ comin’ up d-de road, Miss Dorus!”

“Heavens! the guests!” the girl turned and fled—  
nearly upsetting the two little coons.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE DANCE AT HARLINGTON HALL

Lights blazing among the trees and on the veranda and from the long wide windows; everywhere was heard the soft strains of violin and harp, the musical sound of laughter and happy chatter of gay voices, the rustle of silks, and the flutter of fans. The dance was on at Harlington Hall. It was late enough for the young people to have discovered half-hidden nooks and corners and to have betaken themselves off, after the manner of youth, to listen to the music—or to forget it. The old house had never been so gaily decked or seen so gay a throng of guests.

Roses without and within there were, and the fragrance of June lilacs and honeysuckle was heavy on the air. A perfect night it was, and the entire countryside had turned out to welcome the young mistress of Harlington back to her home again. There were great ladies from New York and Albany, who came because General Harlington was a power in his party; there were the young girls who had been Dorus's playmates; and there were the youths

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## *The Dance at Harlington Hall*

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who crowded there because of the pretty maids and because Dorus was the only daughter of one of the richest men in the county.

The girl herself was as happy as a lark. Her quick, ready smile came and went, and her laugh was the merriest in the room. Travis, her friend on the voyage, had come all the way from town for the occasion. She greeted him with the utmost cordiality, which was warmly echoed by General Harlington. For was not Travis the nephew of Dr. Burslem, the great specialist, who had been the family friend for more than twenty years, and whose care and affection for Dorus was unbounded?

Travis had long since discovered a fragrant corner where the honeysuckle clambered over the end of the porch; and had ensconced himself and his partner, a dainty creature in pink and white, on the willow seat arranged there. Miss Quimby tapped her fan to the rhythm of the music. They had talked of the stars, and the music, and the guests. Then they heard some one laughing in sweet, unmistakable tones.

“That is Dorus. She is more beautiful than ever,” said the girl, indicating the direction whence came the sounds of laughter.

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## *The Letter H*

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Travis saw for a second a star-kissed face in the darkness—tumbled, ruffled hair, and the light of infinite sweetness in the eyes, as he had seen them that last night on the ocean. His memory conjured up, even now, the sound of the lapping of the waves on the *Altruria's* side.

“ Oh, I don't know,” he said.

“ She used to be an ugly little thing,” Miss Quimby rattled on; “ everything about her was so indistinct. You could never tell the color of her eyes or her hair. But she really blossomed out wonderfully—like the ugly duckling.”

Travis glanced at the girl as she spoke, noted the distinctness of her blue eyes and golden hair; and marvelled not that the dreamy, indefinable mystery of the other was the more potent to charm.

“ Yes,” he said, absently.

“ She used to be queer, too, and they do say that she hasn't outgrown that yet;” her voice was low, almost a whisper.

“ How so?” he asked.

“ Oh, in different ways,” she answered. “ She used to be always dreaming, and seeing and hearing strange things that none of the rest of us ever saw or heard.”

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## *The Dance at Harlington Hall*

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“Really—that sounds rather interesting,” said Travis. “She looks psychic.”

“Psychic,” echoed his companion, “I call her downright queer.”

“Shall we dance?” he asked abruptly. He disliked to hear Dorus spoken of in this light way. Her frailty appealed to him; and, more than all else, the sad, wistful light in her deep eyes. That she was queer he would not admit. Women of the over-sensitive kind often were rather erratic, he reasoned. For them the world was out of focus—the great things were of little consequence, the trifles were of vast moment. They were either on the high peak of happiness or down under the waves of despair. Such was Dorus. She lived within herself, and looked out upon the world with eyes which distorted all things that came within her vision, mental or physical. As in a play, the ghastly green light brings out the horror of some weird scene; and the red light softens it all; so the imagination of Dorus colored the world with artificial tints—now this, now that. It was the result of over-sensitiveness, Travis reasoned; and unsympathetic outsiders called her queer. Interesting, dreaming child that she must have been—and was she not still half a child?

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## *The Letter H*

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As he started with his fair companion toward the door, they found themselves immediately behind two late arrivals—a man and a woman. The woman wore a gown of velvet—black velvet, cut low at the neck—and in her hair was the sparkle of diamonds. Her carriage was easy and gracious, and Travis noted the faultless beauty in the lines of her face and form. There was a smile in the dark eyes—a cold, forced smile, and in the lips was a little droop, half sad.

The man was in conventional evening dress, and was strikingly handsome. He seemed to be unconscious that all eyes were turned for a moment upon him and his companion.

“Signora Lucia Brindelli,” announced the servant, “Signor Arturo Brindelli.”

The red blood leaped to Dorus’s usually pale face, and her eyes sparkled brilliantly at the sound of the name. She had been talking with old Dr. Burslem, but stopped in the middle of a sentence to turn to the new guests. In her gown of flimsy white tulle she looked like some lovely flower; and the cluster of blood red roses at her breast heightened her charm.

The cordiality of her greeting and the warmth of her welcome were not lost upon Herman nor upon

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## *The Dance at Harlington Hall*

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Dr. Burslem. Both men, from different points of view, watched her thoughtfully.

Ernesto introduced his mother, murmuring apologies for bringing her without a special invitation, which Dorus quickly hushed with words of sincere hospitality. She gave her little gloved hand to the woman, admiring her immensely; for the rather careless beauty of Carmelita as we have seen her before, had become, by a more careful costuming, the soft, sensuous loveliness of the ballroom. The Mexican was perfectly at her ease, but Dorus's voice trembled a little as she glanced from the woman to the broad-shouldered youth.

"I—I am so glad to see you," she began. "I was so afraid that you would not be able to come."

Then, for a moment, her hand rested in the big, strong clasp of the musician. She wondered vaguely if the people around them could see the tremor of her arm, or hear the wild beating of her heart. But all they heard was the conventional greeting:

"I am so happy to see you here, Signor Brindelli."

"And I to be here."

Dorus turned to her father. "Papa," she said, with seeming candor, "I want you so much to meet Signora Brindelli, and the Signor also. You know

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## *The Letter H*

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he saved my life in Florence, and I've been longing to have him meet you ever since. When I heard that they were travelling in this country, and were in our neighborhood, I begged them to join us this evening."

General Harlington grasped the young man's hand heartily: "This is indeed an unexpected pleasure," he said. "Let me tell you how glad I am of the opportunity of thanking you."

Unmerited gratitude was almost more than the Mexican could bear; his face flushed scarlet.

"I'm afraid——" he began.

"No, no," interrupted the girl, eagerly. "You saved my life—what more can be said?"

"Yes, but——"

"No buts, Signor," cried the General, "'tis only youthful modesty, so we'll say no more about it."

"It was in Genoa that I last saw you," said Dorus, anxious to get away from the subject, for she feared that Ernesto intended to speak out at the first opportunity. "Do you think it more alluring than Paris?"

"I love it better," he said, softly, "and my mother—it is like home to her."

For a moment the throng moved away, leaving the two standing alone.

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## *The Dance at Harlington Hall*

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“It was cruel of you to make me act deceitfully,” he said, gently.

“Ah, Ernesto!” sadly.

“You did not tell me I must play so hard a part,” he went on. “It is a tangled web we are weaving, and I doubt where the end may be.”

“It will come out all right,” she said, with a woman’s optimism.

“Does the right ever come from wrong-doing?”

“So you have become a preacher since this afternoon?” She looked up at him playfully.

“Yes, for you,” and his tone was serious.

Then the guests gathered about them again, and they all chatted gaily together. They talked of Italy, of Rome, and Florence, and Munich. Dorus seemed to forget her other guests, and was wholly unconscious of Herman, who watched her like a hawk.

Meantime, out in the servants’ quarters, there was some strange gossiping. Most of the guests having arrived, Luke, large with the importance of discovery, resigned his place at the door to Rastus, and hastened back to the kitchen. As he neared the door, he heard Saida’s voice calling him:

“Luke! where are you, Luke? That man used to work fast and try to talk fast—but now he talks slow

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## The Letter H

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and works slower than he talks. There's one consolation—both the children take after me, all except that horrid sta-a-a-m-mer." Saida drawled the last word just as Luke came in.

"Pr-a-actisin', Saida?" he asked.

"Yes, an' I'd practis' mo' ef 'twould only mak' yo' perfect. I'se mighty glad ma tongue is all right."

"C-c-a-a-n't say as I'm as h-h-appy as yo' are 'bout dat, but I'se got good eyes, I has."

Luke deliberately tried to mystify Saida, and she took the bait; and putting upon the table the salad bowl that she was carrying, came towards him eagerly:

"What yo' done saw?"

Deep silence was the answer, while Luke slowly filled his pipe.

"Tell yo' ole woman, Luke," she begged. "I'se yo' wife, sho' 'nuff."

"A-are yo'?" asked Luke, banteringly. "I a'mos' done forgot dat a f-f-a-ct."

"Don' yo' be no fool, Luke," said the woman, picking up her bowl again. "Wha' have yo' done gone an' saw?"

Luke took her by the arm and pulled her under the gas light, looking her full in the face.

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## *The Dance at Harlington Hall*

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"Don' yo' tell?" he questioned.

"No, no; go on, yo' good fur nothin' nigger."

"Don' yo' hurry m-m-e so," he protested.

"No, no," the woman repeated. "Go on."

"We-e-ll, I'se goin' on, ain' I? Do yo' th-th-ink, fo' sartin sho', dat you' 'member dat M-m-exican woman, down in Louisian' when de young m-m-issus went m-m-ad?"

Saida's good-natured, dusky face sobered instantly:

"Reckon we uns won' neber ferget her, and pray de good Lor' dat he neber forgib her," she said solemnly.

Luke put his fingers across his lips and pointed mysteriously to the big hall where the guests were assembled.

"She in dar," he whispered.

Saida gave one frightened glance at the door which separated the kitchen from the hall, and back again at Luke.

"Don' yo' be a fool," she said.

"D-d-ats de reason I knowed h-h-er, 'cos I'se no fool."

Saida wrung her hands in dismay. "De Lor' protee' de precious lam'," she wailed.

Long before Saida was able to reach the General,

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## *The Letter H*

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Dr. Burslem thought he had made the same discovery that Luke was so positive about. He found his way to his host, and the two watched the merry throng of dancers.

“Who are your distinguished looking guests, General?” asked Burslem, at length.

“A Signor Brindelli and his mother—two Italian friends of Dorus. She says she knew them in Florence. The young man caught her horse when it had been startled by a runaway. They are travelling through the country, and I think that I ought to ask them here for a visit.”

Then the General went on in a lower voice :

“There is one question, Burslem, that I have started to ask you several times. Have you any idea what became of that Mexican girl and her child? I’ve never heard a word about them or seen a trace since that—terrible day. To-night I cannot get them out of my thoughts, though this gay scene seems a strange place to ask so serious a question.”

Burslem started, and looked quickly from the white-haired old soldier to the two strangers. His suspicions were growing to a certainty.

“I think I have met them—once,” he said, guardedly.

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## *The Dance at Harlington Hall*

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“When? where?” cried the General, eagerly.

“At a social gathering not long ago,” said the Doctor, still guardedly.

“A social gathering?” asked the General, perplexed. “What name do they go by?”

Dr. Burslem hesitated: “I am afraid the name will sound too familiar,” he said.

“Then she has not forgotten the name,” said the General, in some anxiety, “the fatal H, and still calls herself Harlington?”

“I can’t say whether she has forgotten the name Harlington, but she was not known by it when we met.”

“What then?”

Burslem turned to the old soldier and scanned his face closely.

“Harlington,” he began, “no man lives with whose life I have been more intimate than yours, and I know that we are friends.”

The physician’s serious mood affected Harlington, and he paled slightly. He clasped the doctor’s hand.

“We are,” he said, “true friends. Speak out.”

“You are the last man to whom I would breathe my suspicions did not my whole being—all my sense, sharpened by years of active use——”

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## *The Letter H*

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“Yes, yes,” interrupted the General, “speak out. I trust you.”

“Mr. Harlington,” said Burslem, impressively, “I honestly believe that the Mexican woman and her son are in your house at this very moment.”

Harlington went white to the lips. His hand shook as he tried to steady himself by a table that stood near.

“Those Italians! What do they want—here?” he whispered hoarsely. “She killed my wife. Does she come to kill my child? Come, they shall leave the house.”

Harlington strode towards the ballroom, followed by Burslem. When they gained the entrance, they looked in vain for the distinguished foreigners. They were not there.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE REVENGE OF CARMELITA

Dorus led the way from the brilliant ballroom into the vine-covered arbor in the garden, followed by Herman, who thought he had never seen anyone look more stately and dignified. The girl's face was almost expressionless, and her whole manner was one of calm self-possession. Herman looked pleadingly at her, but she did not seem to see him.

"Dorus," he began, "I asked the favor of a private interview with you."

The girl tapped her dainty fan impatiently.

"Well," she said, "we are alone, are we not? All that is necessary now to make the private interview is for you to speak."

Herman took a quick step nearer to her, and the unimpassioned calm of his face gave place to another expression.

"Dorus," he cried bitterly, "why are you so indifferent to me? I have loved you so, all the years I have known you. For me, there has never been another woman."

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## *The Letter H*

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He was close to her now, his lips almost touching the fragrant dust-brown hair, misty in the rosy light of the lanterns.

“Dear,” he went on, passionately, “though you played with me, though you laughed at me sometimes, I know that you, too, cared for me—until you went away. Dorus, it would well-nigh kill me if I should know that one of those foreigners had stepped into my place in your heart. Tell me, why are all your pleasant words given to—him?” Herman motioned indoors, whence came the sounds of music.

Dorus bit her lip: “Is Signor Brindelli to blame for having been born in Italy?”

“He is to blame for not staying where he was born,” was the quick answer.

Dorus laughed contemptuously: “A very foolish speech, Herman,” she said coldly; “the offspring of envy—a noble feeling, truly.”

“No, Dorus,” said Herman; “but it sprang from a noble feeling.”

“Yes?” she questioned.

“From love, Dorus.”

The girl drew in her breath. She toyed with her fan, and looking at the man from the corner of her eye, said quietly:

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## *The Revenge of Carmelita*

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“Then—ah, yes—you are jealous.”

Herman drew himself up proudly. “I am not ashamed to own it—to the woman I love.”

“When the woman says she loves you, your jealousy may be excusable. At present, it is bordering on presumption,” answered Dorus. “Is the private interview at an end?”

“It is,” replied Herman, with dignity. “Shall I take you back to the house?”

Dorus sank upon the rustic seat: “I would rather wait here—just a little.”

Standing over her, he looked down tenderly. “Dorus,” he said, “some day you will be sorry.”

“When that time comes, Herman, I shall beg the private interview.”

As the sound of the man’s footsteps grew more indistinct as he went back alone to the ballroom, Dorus pulled one of the crimson roses from her breast, tearing leaf from leaf.

“What a mess I am making of it all,” she thought. “Scarcely two years ago, it was the dream of my life to have Herman say such things to me—to tell me that—he—cared—for—me. And now, it only bores me. Heigh ho! and now I am dreaming the most impossible of all dreams. A musician—but

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## *The Letter H*

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how splendid he is!" Her breast heaved and her eyes grew luminous as she thought of Ernesto.

The sound of the crunching of the gravel under approaching footsteps broke upon her reverie, and she looked up, startled, into the great, dark eyes of the Mexican.

"Oh, Ernesto!" she cried delightedly, extending both little hands. "How you frightened me!"

He took them and bowed over them, the laughter of youth in his eyes. They laughed together, joyously.

"I trust," he said, "that you do not regret the hospitality you have shown to your two Italian guests. You were so cordial to my mother. I thank you sincerely.

Dorus looked at him intently—noting his stalwart build, his frank, dark face, his ease of bearing.

"You both have added so much to the evening," she cried. "I hope you have enjoyed yourself—if you have, I am fully repaid for my—" She stopped, embarrassed.

"Your—what did you say?" the Mexican queried.

"My—I can't explain myself here," she said.

"Give me your arm and we will walk in the garden."

"Shall—shall I not deprive other friends of your

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## *The Revenge of Carmelita*

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company—older acquaintances who have claims upon you, while I have none?”

“As my guest,” the girl spoke with dignity, “you have a strong claim upon my hospitality. And, besides, an explanation is due you for my conduct——”

But Ernesto interrupted her. “How I wish you could explain, or indeed that I could explain,” he said; “but I feel utterly bewildered, and I think you feel the same. What impelled me to come here this afternoon I do not know. I suddenly felt drawn towards the window where you were standing; I fought against it, but in vain; my footsteps lagged, yet I drew nearer and nearer, until I actually entered your library and saw the magnet that had drawn me thither—your eyes.”

The girl answered him with a look of understanding and admiration. She would have spoken, but he went on. “The only thing I cannot bear,” he said, “is to be here under false pretences—to bear an assumed name. I want to throw off this mask.”

As he spoke they started out of the arbor, when Herman Higby confronted them. His face was flushed, blue fire flashed from his eyes and his lips were set hard together. This was a new Herman.

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## *The Letter H*

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He had not seemed tall before, but now he quite filled up the doorway of the summer-house.

“I overheard your words, sir,” he said, ignoring Dorus. “I do not make an apology for that. Now is the time to throw off your mask and tell who and what you are, and why you are here.”

There was no sign of either confusion or embarrassment on Ernesto’s face. “Certainly—” he began.

But Dorus, a curious, hard look in her eyes, thrust herself before Ernesto and faced Herman.

“Stop,” she cried angrily. “He is my guest, here at my invitation. Have you any right to interfere?”

“I have, after what I have heard,” the young fellow answered. “As a friend of your father’s, as your suitor, I have a right to ask who this man is—for he confesses he bears a false name.”

While Herman was speaking, his father, attracted by the sound of the loud voices, approached the arbor, and on the step ran against Harlington and Burslem searching for the Mexican. Colonel Higby was frightened, and he stepped forward hurriedly. “What is the trouble?” he demanded. “Herman, what has happened?”

Young Higby’s face was flushed. He stood alone,

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## *The Revenge of Carmelita*

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while at the farther side of the arbor stood Dorus and Ernesto—the former, queenly in her fresh young beauty and womanly dignity; the latter calm and resolute. Dorus inclined her head gracefully towards Herman, and with a suggestion of sarcasm in her voice, said:

“By all means, let Mr. Herman Higby explain.”

The young fellow turned eagerly to the recent arrivals upon the scene. “From my own suspicions, and from words which I heard this man utter,” he said, “I am convinced that he is not what he claims to be—an Italian gentleman named Brindelli.”

The General turned to his daughter: “That point can be easily settled. Dorus, who are your guests?”

Ernesto looked at the girl, and without even endeavoring to lower his voice, said:

“I will tell them.”

But Dorus motioned to him to be silent.

“Mr. Higby’s ears deceived him, father,” she said. “He is jealous, so he has brought about this scene. My guests are Signor Arturo Brindelli and his mother.”

But Lenore had softly entered the arbor with an open letter in her hand. At Dorus’s words, she cried:

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## *The Letter H*

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“ Oh, Dorus, how can you ? ”

“ Lenore,” questioned the General, “ what do you mean ? ”

“ Horace,” she said, “ I cannot speak. Read that letter.” She handed him the open letter, with an appealing glance at Dorus.

The General grasped it. “ Florence—My dear Auntie,” he read, then exclaimed: “ Why, this is Dorus’s writing ! ”

The girl’s gray eyes were blazing. “ Yes, father, my private correspondence, to be read for the amusement of our guests.”

“ No, Dorus, I will not read it,” he cried.

“ Then I will,” interposed Colonel Higby, taking the letter from the General’s hand, “ with Miss Clifton’s permission, whose rightful property it is.” He looked to Lenore for her consent, and she nodded her head.

But Harlington interrupted. “ Not one word of it shall be read without my daughter’s full and free consent,” he said, watching Dorus.

The girl looked puzzled. “ I am at a loss to understand what connection this letter can have with Signor Brindelli,” she said, “ for Aunt Lenore never met him. I am as curious as you can be, Colonel

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## *The Revenge of Carmelita*

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Higby, and you have my full and free consent to read it.”

Colonel Higby read aloud: “I am staying here with Mrs. Harlow, and we are having a delightful time visiting the galleries. Mrs. Harlow introduced me to a young artist, Signor Arturo Brindelli, and yesterday we called on his father, who is a widower——”

There was a dull silence, broken at last by Herman’s exclamation: “Then the mother is dead.”

Dorus grew as white as the snowy gown she wore, but her eyes were dark with anger.

“When they were announced this evening,” she heard Lenore say, “I remembered this letter, and went and found it. Dorus, what does all this mean?”

Without waiting for Dorus’s answer, Herman broke in, addressing Ernesto:

“Sir, if you are not Signor Brindelli, then who are you?”

“This card may explain,” said Ernesto, passing a slip of pasteboard to Herman. It was the card young Higby had given him in the afternoon, in the woods where the horse had fallen. Herman started when he saw it:

“My card! How came you by this?”

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## *The Letter H*

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“ You gave it to me this afternoon, when we met in the forest. You remember? ”

Herman turned to his father. “ This is the young man I told you of, who pulled me out from under my horse. But why this mystery? If he is a friend of Dorus, why come this evening pretending to be another gentleman, who has claims on General Harlington’s gratitude for having saved Dorus’s life? What does this mean? What does this mean? Dorus, speak out.”

But the girl seemed deaf to his entreaties. Her attention was distracted, and indeed all his hearers had grown suddenly inattentive. All eyes were turned upon the Mexican woman, who had noiselessly joined them. She stood, a magnificent figure in the doorway, proudly erect, anger in her eyes. Ernesto glanced at Dorus, then, taking his mother’s hands in his, whispered gently:

“ We will go now, mother.”

“ Not yet, Ernesto,” she said firmly.

“ No, not yet,” echoed Colonel Higby. “ Not until this affair is explained. As a guest of my old friend, General Harlington,” he went on importantly, “ and a life-long friend of the family, I have a right to denounce this man as an impostor. If he,

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## *The Revenge of Carmelita*

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and the woman whom he calls his mother, will not tell who they are and why they are here, they shall be arrested, and Henry Higby will make them face the law."

During Higby's speech Carmelita had turned towards him. Her face was white with passion, and her dark eyes sparkled angrily. She was like a lioness, ready to spring upon her prey and tear him limb from limb. Dr. Burslem, tugging at his white whiskers, whispered, "It is the Mexican." Ernesto saw the gathering storm and laid his hand upon his mother's arm. But it was too late. Her voice was low and deep, but wonderfully clear.

"So," she said, "so Colonel Higby will make this poor boy and his mother face the law? But, mind you, Carmelita will make you face your own conscience. Look upon the woman you deceived—upon your son—Ernesto, look at him—after long years, there he is—Ernesto, Colonel Higby, Colonel Henry Higby, is your father!"

## CHAPTER XIV

### MORE DISCLOSURES

At the words of the Mexican woman an ominous silence fell upon the little group gathered in the summer-house. Afar off, the music sounded soft and rhythmic; the confused murmur of voices mingled with it. The lights within the house were brilliant; without, the rows of colored lanterns threw a mellow glow. Only in the little rustic arbor the silence hung heavy, intense.

Dorus, her eyes wide with horror, stared as though fascinated at Colonel Higby. Herman, fearfully shocked, kept his gaze on the Mexican woman. Harlington's deep breathing, and the low "My God!" that escaped his lips, showed his feelings. Higby alone was utterly unmoved.

What passed within his mind was given to none to understand, but at the corners of his hard, cold mouth there was a cynical droop that boded ill for those who counted on either his honest purposes or his charitableness.

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## *More Disclosures*

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Ernesto, his shoulders squared as if to meet a blow, his lips pressed firmly together, his usually gay face pale and drawn, looked straight into Higby's eyes. Carmelita herself, now that her life purpose had been accomplished—the man she had loved and honored in the old days brought face to face with his son—seemed infinitely wan and tired.

The silence grew more and more oppressive. Higby's icy laugh was the first sound to break the stillness.

"Melodramatic—and stupid," he said gruffly. "They are mad, poor things, but quite harmless. Harlington," he continued, turning to his host, "had you not better have them removed?"

The brutality of the speech struck all his hearers. Ernesto strode forward. In his face and bearing was the strength of right and justice.

"If we are mad, Colonel Higby—Colonel Henry Higby," he said, repeating the name as his mother had done, "it is to your door we may lay it. Carmelita del Tonjours knows the truth and speaks it, but your friends do not believe her. You, too, know the truth, but you are a coward and dare not speak it. And God in Heaven, who sends His showers upon the just and the unjust alike, He, too, knows

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## *The Letter H*

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the truth, and in His own good time will judge between us." He turned towards Dorus. "Good-by," he continued, bending gravely over her hand. "Some day, perhaps, we shall meet again under kinder circumstances for us both; until then, think charitably of me and of my mother, Signora del Tonjours, whose name I bear. In the world of art and of music the name of Ernesto de Tonjours may yet be known."

With a courtly gesture, he gave his arm to Carmelita, and together they passed out.

As they withdrew, Dr. Burslem smothered an ejaculation, and tried in vain to master the anger that possessed him. He was anxious to get away from the temptation of meddling with affairs which he saw were essentially private, so he left the arbor quickly and ran at once into Travis, who had come there in the hope of finding Dorus. Travis had heard enough to give him the clue of the whole matter, and he stood amazed and appalled. If anyone's opinion on these remarkable events would be of value, he knew it would be his uncle's. The two men were always in perfect sympathy. Now they fell into step without any comment and walked silently towards the river side.

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## *More Disclosures*

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The white-haired physician looked steadfastly into the young man's face.

"Your father stood beside me, Richie," he said, "when Harlington's girl-wife breathed her last, in the sanitarium in New Orleans. We both said that in the eyes of God, Henry Higby was her murderer. After to-night, what do you say?"

"That he will finish his work by murdering the Mexican woman—his wife, if you will, though he seems not to like the name—unless he is prevented in some way."

"Right, my boy," cried the Doctor warmly. "Harlington, poor man, believes in his friend implicitly, though Dorus distrusts him. I can see that. The young Mexican lad—how did he impress you?"

"Too good for the father," said Travis tersely.

"Right again," said the Doctor. "What a fine, strong face he has! What I cannot understand is Dorus's apparent infatuation. You know, Richie, it was that woman and her child, and the lies that Higby told of them, that drove the poor lady insane. The mother, in her insanity, hated the Mexican boy—he seems to arouse the opposite emotion in the daughter. Curious, is it not?"

They had reached the last terrace as it sloped

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## *The Letter H*

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steeply down, gray-green in the pale light of the moon. They seated themselves on a rustic bench; the silence was broken only by the far-away sounds of gaiety.

Richie," asked the older man, after they had smoked quietly for a while, "did you ever hear the whole story?"

"No," said Travis. "All I know is what I have seen and heard to-night. I met Dorus—Miss Harlington on the steamer coming back from Europe, but she doesn't know the story herself."

"No, and may the Lord keep her from ever hearing it," said the Doctor devoutly.

"In the old war days, Richie, I was only a young surgeon in the 18th New York, and Harlington was the general in command of the brigade stationed at Thibodeauxville. By a mere chance, I was thrown most intimately into association with him at what proved to be the crisis of his life. The matter has always been more or less of a mystery to me.

"While we were at Thibodeauxville, just before our capture by the Confederates, this Mexican woman with her son, then a toddling baby, appealed to the commanding officer for help in an effort to find her husband. She declared that he was one, Horace

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## *More Disclosures*

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Harlington, who had deserted her some years before, in Guadalaxara. She had evidently no idea that this was actually the name of the officer to whom she was speaking, and Harlington, who had never seen the woman before, was at his wits' end. He had never been to Mexico, and never knew that he had a double. Higby turned up soon after the General had rid himself temporarily of his embarrassing guests, and, after hearing the General's story, told a yarn about a very dear friend of his—who had since died—who had had some sort of an escapade with a woman in Mexico. This friend had further complicated matters by masquerading under the name of Horace Harlington; using it, probably, because Higby had mentioned it so often. A man in such a case frequently takes the first name that comes into his mind.

“ When the Mexican woman found out the name of the General, she thought he was her recreant husband, changed beyond recognition by time and circumstances. She entreated him pitifully to take care of her and the boy. The General's wife, by some chance, overheard the woman's pleading, and the shock—for she was devoted to the husband—drove her completely insane. Her one idea was to

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## *The Letter H*

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kill the boy—once, during a paroxysm, she plunged a dagger into a pillow on a divan, under the impression that it was the child.

“Higby took the best of care not to be seen by the Mexican claimant, saying that he could not endure to look upon the girl whom his friend had wronged. But in spite of his precautions, she finally got a glimpse of him, and declared that he was the Horace Harlington who was her husband. He wormed himself out of it in some way, but his explanations always sounded very lame to me, though the General believed in him implicitly. I had always been interested in the study of insanity, and was making it my specialty when the war broke out, and I was obliged to turn from it to the care of the wounded. The case of poor Mrs. Harlington was pitiful indeed, and I had every hope that with her youth and strength she might recover. But she died in giving birth to her daughter. Thus poor Dorus came into the world under very sad circumstances, and it is impossible to say just what influence her mother’s condition may have had upon her, or how this may develop. It may have had no influence at all—beyond making her dreamy and somewhat visionary. I have always watched her with great

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## *More Disclosures*

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care, and I hope the curse may never descend upon her."

Travis's brows had contracted sternly at the Doctor's story. In his excitement, he had risen from his place on the bench, and strode restlessly up and down. Now he paused before the physician:

"You think that Dorus may have inherited some sort of a mania from her mother?"

"Lenore calls it a curse," was the Doctor's simple statement.

"And what is your idea of its possible manifestation?" Travis had always been more than half detective.

"I cannot tell," said Dr. Burslem. "I can only repeat what I have said before, that it may never go beyond the moody spells that Lenore says the girl has, and—the musician episode to-night, does it not explain that in a measure?"

"The mother tried to kill him—the daughter has been strangely attracted to him—it is curious," said Travis, thoughtfully.

"It is very strange, and all this matter about Higby is very strange, too," said the wise old doctor. "And I predict that the little scene up there is only the beginning of the disclosures that will come. It

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## *The Letter H*

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is a matter that lies very close to my heart. Dorus has a sweet, lovely character, but such an inheritance sometimes plays strange freaks when least expected. All the science of the century may be baffled by some influence that is beyond the knowledge of the wisest. Some influence that seems a message from the 'undiscovered country, from whose bourn no traveller returns.'” So saying, Dr. Burselm departed in the direction of the house, and Travis paced up and down the narrow path, his thoughts with the winsome girl. He saw her pictured as he remembered her that last night on the *Altruria*—her star-kissed face, with the glory of the limitless immensity upon it. Then, again, he saw her as she looked on the morning of their arrival; saw again the admiration in her eyes as the sky-line of New York grew more distinct; heard again her voice, singing,

“Land where my fathers died,  
Land of the pilgrim’s pride.”

He remembered the joyousness of her welcome, early that evening; her merriment and apparent happiness. Then, clear and vivid, without bidding, came the picture of her face in the little arbor—the

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## *More Disclosures*

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exaltation and—yes, the love in her eyes as she looked upon Ernesto.

But the more he thought the less he could come to any solution, until, throwing away his cigar, he sought relief from his reflections in the society of others, and made his way towards the house.

As he was re-entering the ballroom, he met Miss Quimby.

“Runaway!” said the girl in a laughing voice, with just a suggestion of reproach in it.

“Did you miss me?” he questioned, with a long glance at her face.

“Naturally.”

“But you had so many partners—how could you find time even to think of me?”

“Don’t ask such absurd questions, and then perhaps I can answer them,” she said, with a shake of her head.

“Did I stop you? Were you going outdoors?” he asked, for he had come face to face with her on the threshold of the hall.

“I was just about to start in search of the run-aways,” she replied saucily. “I half expected to find you and Dorus together.”

“You did?” he queried, with as little interest as

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## *The Letter H*

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possible. "What could give you the idea that we should be anywhere near each other?"

"Oh—because," she said, at a loss.

"But that's a woman's reason."

There was a great fear in Travis's heart. If something had happened after the scene! Where could Dorus be? He felt that somehow he must keep the guests from finding her—she should have time to recover herself.

"But I'm a woman, and so I have the privilege of giving such a reason."

"It isn't a reason at all. Come, tell me, what made you think that?"

"Dorus is so pretty." The answer was low, and the girl's head drooped so that he could not see her face.

"Pretty? Prettiness is not enough in itself to attract a man. That is, not when the man is as old as I am."

"Don't you care for pretty girls?" She looked up with wonder in her eyes.

"Not unless they have other attractive qualities," he said. "Yet I must confess that most of the attractive girls I know are—pretty."

They had wandered out to the big fireplace in the

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## *More Disclosures*

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hall, which Dorus had piled with blood-red roses and trailing vines.

Above the mantel were masses of roses, and Miss Quimby stood with her fresh young face outlined against the flowery background. Travis, his hands behind him, watched her intently.

"It was worth coming all the way up from New York for," he said at last.

"The dance?" she questioned.

"The dancer," he corrected.

She blushed brightly.

"I hope you won't forget me when I go back," the man went on.

"I never forget my friends," softly.

"Then," he questioned, "I am one?"

It was a quiet little game that Travis was playing. His thoughts were with the other girl—the gray-eyed girl, with the mystery upon her. He was wondering how she had stood the exciting scene in the arbor. He felt instinctively that if the story got around, if it reached the ears of such little gossips as the bewitching girl whose mind he was doing his best to occupy for the time being, there would be serious complications for Dorus. He thought that the prospect of a flirtation might serve to keep Miss

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## *The Letter H*

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Quimby sufficiently engaged to take her mind effectually from Dorus.

“Then you will count me as one of your friends?” he repeated, taking her fan from her and toying with it.

“I should be glad to,” was the low answer.

“I should like—” he began, then stopped for an instant.

There was a vision of shimmering white upon the stairway, and a breath of fragrant roses, and Dorus, her eyes shining unnaturally, but otherwise quite calm, went past them into the ballroom. Travis drew a breath of relief.

“—I should like the pleasure of this waltz,” he finished.

## CHAPTER XV

### WHAT CAME AFTERWARD

Under cover of the darkness, mother and son made their way back to the little inn at which they had put up over night. Carmelita, her high-strung, nervous body quivering, her head held high, and her breath coming in little gasps, walked swiftly. Ernesto, whose overmastering emotion was anger, walked silently beside her.

Out from the shadow of the little arbor, while the silence remained unbroken; out from the glare of the red Japanese lights, past the twin cedars, rising tall and protecting into the starry sky; on into the outer darkness they went; as of old, Hagar and Ishmael passed out from the shelter of Abraham's tent. The soft caress of the summer air, the steady gleam of lights from across the river, the rustle of the leaves in the silence, made no impression upon them.

About all was peaceful, all calm, all content; but the peace of the night did not enter the thoughts of

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## *The Letter H*

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Carmelita. Dominant over all else was her fury against Higby. Her very impotency filled her with an absorbing anger. Through the years of her young womanhood she had nursed the hope that the man still loved her; or, failing that, she had prayed that he had died. But he had not died, and the chill of his denial had struck ice into her heart. She shuddered, and something like a sob passed her lips.

They came to a place on the road where tall rocks rose out of the darkness, cutting off the view of the house. Carmelita paused, and turned to look at the great mansion. How vast it seemed, with the darkness hanging over it, and the bright lights twinkling from all the windows. Gray, massive, stately, the house was transformed—for the time at least—into a centre of gaiety. The lights blazed and twinkled all over the grounds, the sound of laughter and merrymaking, softened by distance, floated out to Carmelita's ears. She lifted her hands towards it as though she would wrap it in her arms, and on her impassioned face was written the story of love denied.

“Oh, God!” she cried, in her soft Mexican voice, “oh, God, it was love, wild, sweet love I would have given him, but he would have none of it, and now I hate him—I hate him! Why did he make me

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## *What Came Afterward*

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love him? Why did he call himself Harlington when his name is Higby? Why did God give me a heart to love, and then forbid me to love?"

Ernesto bent low. "We will leave him, mother, forever. We two can be happy, and my violin will buy us a little chateau where we can grow old together. There will be no other, Carina Mia, just you and I."

Carmelita looked from the house to the boyish, eager face. "Thank God," she said, "I have a son like you."

The next day the Mexican woman and her handsome son took passage on one of the Hudson River steamboats for a point higher up the State, whence they could strike into the mountains.

The going of the pair had made comment, as their coming had done the day before. In a small country village like Newford, every act on the part of strangers and country folk alike, makes food for gossip. Old Si Cranford was the keeper of the hostelry at which the musicians had stayed, it being, in fact, the only one in town. He and his cronies were wont to sit sociably about on the end of the veranda, just outside of what was the equivalent of a bar-room. Very little liquor was sold, however, and

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## *The Letter H*

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“bar-room” was hardly the name for the cheery little place where sarsaparilla, ginger ale and tobacco could be purchased. It was the countryman’s club; and thither the farmers from all parts of the surrounding country would gather for a word of good cheer, a bit of gossip and a comfortable pipe. Si was always the centre of attraction. He was one of those big, bluff, hearty farmers found all up through the Hudson River districts. He had grown up in the country, and he expected to die there.

On this fair June morning, the farmers, awaiting the arrival of the boat, took their places in the comfortable seats provided on the veranda of the hostelry and proceeded to smoke and gossip. The ball of the night before, at “The Hall,” as the country people called the Harlington residence, furnished food for conversation.

“’Twas a great time they had up at the Hall last night,” said Sands reflectively, by way of introduction.

Deacon Constable, whose place adjoined the Hall, and who had been among the guests, was the next speaker.

“I calculate it’s been the biggest thing around these parts for these many years.”

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## *What Came Afterward*

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“Aye,” said Sands, “there’s them that says it was finer than the old Assembly in the city. My darter Louise was up to help Nanny with the ladies’ things, and she says the way the laces, and the silks, and the velvets was thrown ’round was a caution.”

“And the heiress herself was handsomer than all of her rich guests,” said one of the younger men.

“Indeed, then,” said Si cautiously, “I’m not so sure they was all rich. Two of my guests, that was livin’ in my cheapest rooms, did themselves up fine in broadcloth and velvets, and it was up to the “Hall” they went, all dressed up. They wa’n’t there over long, and after they came back I heard them talking way into the morning. And to-day they give me word that they’re going on the up boat. They’re down at the landing now, waiting for it. It may be all right, but it beats me.”

Sands looked startled. “Ye don’t say,” he ejaculated. My darter Louise says they took Miss Dorus up to her room last night after the dance was over, and that they worked over her for a long time, and had to send for the doctors, and the Lord knows what.”

“That’s right,” said the young man who had spoken before. “Miss Nanny says that they are

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## *The Letter H*

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worried about her considerably, and there's two doctors there this morning. Nanny was trying to explain to me something about her being a little morbid, or melancholy, about something. They do say her mother wasn't over strong in her mind, and there's some story we never heard the rights of up here, about how she died, down in Louisiana, when the General was captured by the Southerners. I hope this ain't anything serious, though."

The men puffed away at their old corn-cob pipes, then Si said:

"The General ain't never been the same since he came back from the war; and I couldn't never straighten it out whether his hair got so white in the rebel prisons, or whether it was by his wife. I always knowed there was somethin' funny about her. Perhaps Miss Dorus will turn out a bit queer, too. Well, the Lord preserve the sweet young thing, and the good old General," concluded Si reverently.

When Herman left Harlington Hall on the ill-fated night of the ball, it was with the intention of never looking his father in the face again. In one hour his boyish, care-free attitude towards life had gone, and in its place was a new dignity of manhood. He had been through the Valley of the

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## *What Came Afterward*

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Shadow of Doubt, and the journey though short was a hard one. It took the smile away from the blue eyes, and left the face strong, and resolute, and manly. To discover in little more than a minute, without premonition or warning, that his father had lived a life of deceit, not only to him, but to this poor Mexican lady, was the bitterest of the dregs of the cup of which Herman Higby drank.

If the woman had been rich, or even if she had been of the aggressive type, Herman would still have felt the shame of his father's act of sinning against her. But she was a little woman, with dark eyes that were pleading and wistful, and all the chivalry that had lain dormant in the boy's make-up rose in revolt against the idea of wronging her. That it was his own father but made the protest the stronger. He did not remember his mother, but he had heard everywhere of the sweetness and the charm of Ida Delmaine, and now he wondered vaguely if she, too, had suffered.

Herman went directly to New York. His mother had left him a goodly income, and he felt that with this he would not need to appeal to his father. But the Colonel sought him out, and, with the wiles of which he was past master, induced the boy to return

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## *The Letter H*

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with him to his cottage at Lake George. He proved his innocence of the strange woman's charges to his son as he had proved them to the General. He persuaded them both that the woman had lied; that, failing to find his dead friend, she had seized the opportunity to accuse him. Herman listened and believed, and went with his father to their summer home.

This was pleasanter, in that the family from Harlington Hall were to spend the greater part of a month there, for the sake of Dorus's health. She had had a severe nervous shock, and the physicians were in constant attendance. One thing that the Colonel had failed to disclose to his son was the fear that Dorus's mind was unbalanced. The doctors, among whom were several specialists, could not arrive at a decision. While quite herself on everything else, she seemed fairly distracted on the subject of the musician. She had begged to see him, had pleaded, stormed, threatened, but all to no avail. The musician and his mother had dropped as completely out of her life as though they were dead. Higby gloried in this, but General Harlington was considerably worried about it and made several futile efforts to locate Ernesto.

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## *What Came Afterward*

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When Higby had persuaded the General that the Mexican woman's story was all a myth, he urged him to bring Dorus and Miss Clifton to pay a visit at Lake George, where the Colonel owned quite an estate, and a roomy, comfortable mansion called Belle Aire.

“It is not much we have to offer you, Horace, but the air is fine, and I know it will do Dorus good,” said Higby, concluding his argument.

Virtue sat on Higby like the smile upon a marble statue. He was in a delicate position, but his air of aggrieved innocence won—from Harlington at least—the old-time confidence. This once secured, Higby felt that his case was concluded and dismissed from his mind all thoughts of the Mexican woman and her son.

## CHAPTER XVI

### ON NEWSPAPER ROW

Travis sat in the inner sanctum of the editorial department of his paper, a cigar between his teeth. He did not look the editor. About him, piled up on all sides, were copies of the various editions of rival papers. One or two lay open upon the floor, the later editions remained untouched. The managing editor was in a reverie.

Richard Travis was not like other managing editors. The rush, and the struggle, and the hurry of newspaperdom had failed to convert him from a clean, wholesome young fellow with ideals into the heartless, unsympathetic machine that it tried hard to do. He was clever, vigilant and faithful, and feared none of his rivals—if, indeed, he feared anyone. His paper was conservative and clean through and through. There was many an exclusive story published under a modest headline in its columns, but it was never accompanied by the blare of trumpet, or sound of cymbals, or the modern substitutes for those noisy heralds. It was a good newspaper,

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## *On Newspaper Row*

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for the men of the staff served it faithfully and well. They were made to know that their best efforts were appreciated, and that nowhere else could they find a more substantial token of this same appreciation than in their own office. It was Travis's theory that when one of his own men turned in a good exclusive he was entitled to commendation, just as he deserved criticism when he let another paper get one in ahead of him.

So Travis sat, this warm afternoon in August, in the big front office, the rival papers unopened, watching the rings of smoke from his cigar rising, widening and dissolving in the atmosphere.

"So we come into being, widen our sphere of usefulness and finally dissolve into the air," he mused. "The world goes on unmoved, and who is the better for our coming?"

He was fingering a big square envelope, directed in a large, fearless hand, with a pretty avoidance of abbreviation, and postmarked a month before. It was an old letter that had turned up that day in one of the pigeon-holes of his desk—that marked "Private."

"It's not like Dorus one bit," he was saying to himself, as he brought his mind back from the smoke-

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## *The Letter H*

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rings; "not like her in the least. Now, one would think from looking at this that she was a great, big, athletic creature, not afraid of anything short of a bull-fight. While, really, Dorus is rather frail, and though morally she is absolutely fearless, I—I don't believe that you could persuade her to go to a bull-fight—oh, no, not anything like that. It was mighty nice of her to write that little note—I could do so little when she was ill, but I'm glad I did what I could, if only for the pleasure of getting the letter from her."

His reverie was disturbed by a timid knock at the door of the inner sanctum. Travis did not move. His back was towards the door, and out of the window he looked down upon the hot, crowded sidewalks.

Again the knock came. A man caught in a day-dream is much like a schoolboy caught walking with a girl. He was annoyed at the intrusion, and consequently his answer was gruff.

"Come in," he growled.

He heard the door open, but did not turn. Then he heard a step, and a girl's voice, soft and low:

"Mr. Travis!"

He turned quickly, and rose hastily with an apology on his lips. He had never seen the girl before, but

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## *On Newspaper Row*

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something in the daintiness of the blue-and-white shirt-waist suit and the broad, white walking-hat she wore attracted him. He noted in a second how blue were her eyes, how sunny her hair, how smiling her lips. He tossed his cigar aside quickly.

“I beg your pardon,” he said, with grave courtesy. “Is there anything I can do for you?”

“I—I—wanted to ask for advice, Mr. Travis,” the girl said hesitatingly. “I haven’t been here long, and I’m afraid that you don’t know me.” There was dismay in her voice.

Travis looked at her sharply, and remembered suddenly that she must be the new girl in the City Room. Lange had told him that she was a thoroughbred, but he had not imagined that she was quite like this. In a quick flash of comparison, the managing editor saw the women he had known as he fought his way from the reporter’s bench to the desk of the chief executive of the paper. Some of them had been good—yes, but they were old—and the others, with their bold eyes and bolder manners—ah, no, she was not like that. He heard her voice even while he was wondering how, with her clear, innocent baby eyes, and her sunny hair, she had drifted into the craft.

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## *The Letter H*

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She was speaking. "I—I—have a story, and I wanted to ask you about it."

Then he realized that she was standing. "Oh," he cried, "won't you sit down?"

"I won't be long," she answered, a slight smile on her lips, but she impulsively came close to the desk. She went straight to the point:

"I heard, Mr. Travis, that one of the young society women is out of her mind, and I wanted to know if you wished the story written."

Travis looked down at the girl quizzically, and wondered why she had come to him about it. There was the city editor—he was her chief. Then he asked pleasantly:

"Do you like to write stories like that, Miss——"  
"MacDonald," she supplied. Her face flushed at his question, and she looked startled. She waited a minute, and then spoke slowly:

"They make good reading."

"Yet you want me to say—don't write it."

The startled look came again into her eyes. "I wanted your advice," she said simply.

"More than the city editor's?" he asked.

"I presumed you would look at it from a different standpoint," she said, with dignity.

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## *On Newspaper Row*

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“What made you think that?” he asked quickly.

“I—I—had heard of you before I came on the paper,” she said, with embarrassment; “and then, I had seen you,” as though that settled the matter.

Travis turned to the outlook from his window, to hide a smile. “Miss MacDonald,” he said quietly, turning to her again, “will you explain the circumstances, please?”

“Why, yes,” she answered, relieved. “The girl, it seems, has been abroad some time, but since she has been home she has had a nervous breakdown, and ever since she has had a curious infatuation for a young musician.”

“And the girl—who is she?” asked Travis dryly, knowing what the answer must be.

“She is General Harlington’s only daughter—Why, Mr. Travis, what is the matter?”

Travis had brought his hand down fiercely upon his desk, with an exclamation.

“I beg your pardon, Miss MacDonald,” he said; “excuse my lack of control. No, you need not write the story about Dorus Harlington. I have been working on it some time myself, and I consider it my own story. If we are beaten it will be my fault,” and the managing editor smiled as he opened the door to let the girl pass out.

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## *The Letter H*

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She went away wondering, and as she passed him she said softly: "Thank you—I did not want to write the story."

When she had gone, Travis sat down to reason it all out. He had not seen Harlington or Dorus since the ball, and the only message he had received from them was the little note that Dorus had sent after her sickness, and which even now was crumpled in his hand. He had seen his uncle, Dr. Burslem, once or twice, and he had relied on the physician's information that the girl was recovering. The announcement of her condition, made in his own office as a matter of news, was sufficiently startling to keep him busy. Then he remembered that he had not found out from the girl where the Harlingtons were at present—in fact, he had not learned all she knew. He realized that he must see her again and find out exactly how much of the Harlington family history she knew. It would never do to have such a story get out on Newspaper Row.

He lighted another cigar, and, in the frame of smoke, he saw a girlish face with the innocent blue eyes and the baby lips of the new woman on the paper.

That night Travis dreamed that Edith MacDonald

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## *On Newspaper Row*

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—he had been interested enough to look over the list of employees to find her full name—had written the story of the year about a mad escapade of his, and he could see the blue eyes, and hear the girlish voice say:

“I did not want to write the story.”

Having made the acquaintance of the new member of the city staff, he seemed fated to meet her everywhere. Once they brushed elbows hurrying across City Hall Park, and unconsciously he had carried the elbow she had touched quite stiffly for the rest of that day. Then the elevator was about to start on its upward journey one morning, when there was a sudden rustle of skirts, and the elevator man, with an unwonted smile, held his passengers waiting until the girl, flushed and out of breath, was well aboard.

“Thank you, David,” she said, and the elevator man smiled broadly.

Travis watched her in pure delight. She was the first of the feminine kind whom he had not looked upon as a problem to be solved. Indeed, so simple and ingenuous was she that she did not appear to be a problem at all. He noted how fresh and clear was her skin, how her lips parted for the hurried breath-

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## *The Letter H*

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ing. She did not see him, but, as he followed her out of the elevator, he said:

“Good morning, Miss MacDonald.”

And she had answered: “Oh, Mr. Travis—good morning,” and tripped on to her own department.

Travis rarely went to the city room. He made it a point to let the city editor rule supreme in his own realm. But near noon one day, shortly after his first meeting with the new girl, somewhat to his own surprise, he found himself at the door of the local room. Not far from the door, he caught a glimpse of a sunny head bending down to the desk, and an arm in the blue-and-white material of her well-remembered shirt-waist suit moving rapidly across the paper. Even as he watched her, he saw her throw down her pencil, gather up the sheets of copy and call:

“Boy!”

No one appeared to hear. She repeated the cry.

“Boy!”

The managing editor was the only person near enough to hear, and he glared about for one of the boys, who at other times seemed fairly to fill the room. He caught Lemmie by the coat sleeve as he returned from “rushing” copy.

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## *On Newspaper Row*

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“Miss McDonald wants a boy,” said the managing editor wrathfully.

He walked over to the girl’s desk. “Good-day, Miss MacDonald,” he said. She looked up, surprised and half frightened. “Have you any idea,” he went on, “where the Harlingtons are now?”

“Yes, indeed,” she said, relieved. “They are visiting the Higbys, I think, at their cottage at Lake George. Terribly swell, but not nearly as fine as the Harlingtons.”

“I should say not,” Travis remarked gravely. “Thanks, Miss MacDonald. “I’m having poor luck with my story.”

“That’s too bad,” was her sympathetic answer. “I’m sorry.”

“Would you—er—mind telling me where you heard about it?” he questioned seriously. “It’s not quite professional,” he added, as he saw the startled look in her eyes again, “but I have been wondering how it could have been heard down here on Newspaper Row.”

“I didn’t hear it down here,” she laughed. “No, I hope that for Dorus’s sake it will not fall into the hands of other managing editors. It happens, Mr. Travis, that my home is up in Newford, not very

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## *The Letter H*

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far from Harlington Hall, and though I have not seen Dorus for many years, I sometimes hear from the girls who know her, and see her often. It was purely a private matter, but I felt that I ought to tell some one—I want to be loyal to the paper, you know.”

“So I see,” and Travis was thinking that she was indeed a very loyal member of the staff. “It is not always easy to be loyal to our friends and our business interests at the same time.”

“Do you know,” he persisted, after a pause, “whether it is generally known up there—up where the Harlingtons live?”

“Well, Dorus has always been an unusual sort of girl. I don’t think any of us understood her very well. We were all rather ordinary, you know——”

Travis was vigorously shaking his head in denial of this.

“—and Dorus was really a remarkable child. Some of the ideas she used to have—imagining things, you know—used to quite scare me. Of course it’s as ignorant as it can be to think a person isn’t in her right mind because she does not act just as every one else does; but what with General Harlington’s social position and Dorus’s beauty, and the

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## *On Newspaper Row*

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clamoring there is for news whether it is true or not, I feel that if some of the journals near here were to get the least inkling of this it would be out in great headlines that Dorus was insane—and that would be too awful. I'm so glad I'm in this office."

She smiled so sweetly and frankly at him as she spoke that Travis found it hard to remember that he was trespassing on the city editor's time.

When he got back to his office, he tried seriously to reason it all out. He had certainly been drawn to Dorus, and her story was an absorbing one. What the Doctor had disclosed concerning her mother and her infancy was a remarkable tale. He reasoned, logically enough, that if the Harlingtons were at the Higby cottage Dorus must not only be considerably better, but Herman's romance was progressing.

"Heigh ho!" he said. "I should like to be on hand to watch them."

Then, having finished the subject, he went back to his papers and his cigar; and through the smoke, as before, he saw the sweet, lovely face of the girl in the city room.

Edith MacDonald was a girl of dreams. How she got into the office of the "Metropolitan" was almost as great a mystery to her as it was to her

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## *The Letter H*

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friends, and she marvelled at the chain of circumstances that had taken her there. The charm of it was upon her, and she knew that as long as the "Metropolitan" and Newspaper Row would have her, she would stay with the craft. The girl of dreams, in the most practical place in the world—a newspaper office—was in her right sphere.

One day she picked up the story of a yellow dog that had faithfully guarded Newspaper Row and had been run over by accident, and the pathos of it, and the humor of it, had brought tears to the eyes of thousands of readers. Creel, the owner, and Travis, the managing editor, had asked who had written it, and the city editor had told them with no little pride.

The girl's salary was increased, and on Monday—pay day at the "Metropolitan"—she had gone impulsively to the managing editor and thanked him; and he noticed particularly how blue eyes could shine under certain circumstances. He had a wild idea of increasing her salary every week if she would come to thank him each Monday. He remembered in time that joys too frequent lose their charm, and got to wondering what else might bring that soft flush to the rosy cheeks and the shine to the blue eyes.

## CHAPTER XVII

### A SEWING LESSON

The season at Golden Harbor was in full swing. Never before had there been so great a crush at the Montignac Inn. Every room in the fashionable hostelry was occupied, and cots in the halls and parlors were in demand. With nothing to mar the summer's success financially, the manger, always sleek, looked sleeker than ever; and his air of self-satisfaction was more than usually palpable. With its picturesque environment of lake and hills, its croquet grounds and tennis courts, its livery facilities and opportunities for canoeing, and especially its attractive feminine guests, no wonder the place had proved popular—and profitable to the management.

This bright August morning the management, in the person of Harvey Crowell, the aforementioned person of sleekness and self-satisfaction, was particularly well pleased with what he was apt to term, in similar instances, his luck. Here, at the very height of the season, his so-called orchestra had mutinied and left him with the cheering prospect of

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## *The Letter H*

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having to abandon the material feature—"dancing every evening." Were that necessary, he knew he would have to count on a further mutiny, this time by the exacting guests. But there was his luck, which he foolishly had left out of consideration. With its proverbial fidelity, the very morning of the mutineers' departure, it had brought him substitutes; who, as the days sped on, gave promise in more ways than one of outshining their faithless predecessors. Of further advantage, the change had shown the virtue of variety; for the advent of the new musicians had been like getting a new toy for a child, as Crowell put it. It pleased him to consider the boarders as his children, the more so because personally he did not have to pay for their toys.

This morning the glory of the magnificent weather had drawn an unusual number of guests to their pet "coigns of vantage" on the verandas. These were quite impassable; crowded with young girls in gowns of filmy lawns and muslins; young men in duck and flannels; mothers with fancy work, or magazines, or novels,—everyone was busily chatting. Near the main entrance the groups sat quite close together, and it was into their midst that Ernesto unwittingly stepped as he came from the office. Before he real-

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## *A Sewing Lesson*

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ized it, he was fairly in the centre of an animated party. Too late to withdraw gracefully, he was equally hindered from advancing; for the large wicker chairs and their occupants blocked the way to the outer edge of the veranda. Still more embarrassing was the almost instant cessation of the buzz of conversation; and the silent unity of the glances he could not help observing, came not far from completely disconcerting him. Of course, it was over in a few seconds, but it was painfully prolonged to the modest youth. He had been there some days, and the favorable impression he had made bore fortunate fruit in his present predicament. A kindly and cordial "Good morning" and a "Won't you be seated?" from a generally frigid dowager soon put him at his ease; and, incidentally, into a chair. He had been presented to several of those about him, and with reassuring signs of approval, additional introductions followed, until his confusion of a moment before was quite forgotten.

"Oh, Mr. del Tonjours,"—it was a pretty, blue-eyed girl who dropped her work and looked up at him—"haven't your ears been burning? They should have been, for we have just been talking about you."

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## *The Letter H*

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“Indeed,” he returned; “saying pleasant things, I hope.”

“Of course we were. We were arguing about your violin. It’s a real Strad’, is it not?”

Ernesto looked around the circle, then back at the questioner. “Alas that it is not,” he said; “the knight must win his spurs, the fiddler his Strad’. I shall be old and fat by that time, I fear.”

“But yours sounds so beautifully.”

“Oh, it is the instrument, not the player, that is responsible for the music.” Ernesto looked searchingly at the girl and her eyes rebelled at meeting his even half way. Her face was very flushed—perhaps at the gaze as much as at the words—when she rejoined:

“No, Mr. del Tonjours; you know I didn’t mean that.”

“How could I know?” impressively, and, the girl thought, coldly.

To her relief, he turned to one of the older women whom he had met before.

“Working on this glorious morning?” he asked.

“Indeed, yes,” was the reply, “I do all my embroidery during the summer—Miss MacDonald, won’t you show me that stitch again?”

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## *A Sewing Lesson*

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The older woman leaned towards the younger, glancing as she did so at the youth who sat between them. On his features was an expression of utter indifference; a poor index, though, to the spirit behind his words, as shown by his next remark. "Show me, too, Miss MacDonald, won't you?" he said, exchanging his seat for one nearer the girl.

"I should be glad to." The voice was low and sweet, though quite matter of fact, as she bent her attention to the elder lady's request. But when Mrs. Nevins had been shown the puzzling stitch, the girl turned towards him once more, though more shyly. "Do you want me to show you here?" she ventured, and laughing at the simulated sign of horror in his face as he nodded negatively, she arose, and, carrying her embroidery carelessly in one hand, they walked together to the farther end of the veranda.

Ernesto pulled one of the big, cosy rockers into position for her, setting it so that she might look far out over the clear, blue stretch of the lake. His own rigid wicker he placed so that he could watch her as she talked.

That Ernesto was a handsome fellow no one could deny, and he seemed particularly so in the rough

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## *The Letter H*

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garments suited to country wear which almost all the masculine guests of the hotel affected. So, in the matter of makeup, at least, Edith MacDonald had no fault to find with her companion as they lingered in the shady corner of the veranda. In the silence which followed the first few minutes of getting themselves comfortably settled Edith felt a suggestion of embarrassment and constraint. She wondered if in escaping from the crowd she had done something terribly in defiance of the conventions. She was almost able to hear Mrs. Grundy's groan, but there was a shocking absence of remorse in her. Neither was there much reserve in the little flutter she gave her embroidery hoop as she held it near him. The piece was intended for a picture frame, and it was the daintiest linen worked with the palest of wild roses.

“What will you do with it after I have taught you my new stitch?”

“I would—I should put somebody's picture in it,” Ernesto replied.

“Oh, I meant the stitch; what would you do with the stitch?”

“Do you think that mere man could even begin to learn the intricacies of—of that?” He looked gravely at the stitches already taken so exquisitely.

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## *A Sewing Lesson*

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“ You seemed to think that you might.”

“ It would take—a long time ”—hesitatingly, “ to teach me.”

“ I am not going to be here a long time,” said the girl.

“ Nor I,” said the man.

“ Why, I thought that you and your mother would certainly remain till the close of the season.”

“ No, it's not likely. We're rolling stones; we come and go, and we never stay very long in one spot. We're nomads; that's what we are.”

“ Why?” the girl questioned, without thinking. She regretted this a moment later as, watching him closely, she saw his eyes close partially, and his lips, that had been laughing, suddenly grow tense.

“ Why?” he echoed, with just a slight catch in his tone. “ Because—but there's no real reason; no reason now at any rate. We have got into bad habits, that's all, and keep on rolling.”

It was not what he said, as much as something in his voice that told her there was sorrow deep and poignant behind the superficial cynicism.

“ And you will not stay here long?” she repeated.

“ It is not that I will not,” he said. “ It is rather that I cannot. I am restless.”

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## *The Letter H*

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The wild-rose embroidery lay unnoticed in the girl's lap; her eyes wandered vacantly over the verdant lawn and past the shore of the inlet, where the rippling eddies broke, glistened with the radiance of the meridian sun. For a moment, they saw nothing, though the mind behind them travelled even beyond the farther outlines of the bay. It was only a moment, for her companion's next words recalled her wandering thoughts.

"The world is not gentle with a fellow who is down," he said bitterly.

"Ah, but women are," and the girl's eyes glistened; "women's sympathies are always with the one who is under."

"Some women's, yes," he conceded; "I must admit that, for I have known you."

"Tell me," she said, suddenly looking up at him, "why you are sometimes so—so cynical?"

"Cynical?" he repeated. "Is it another name for hopelessness?" he asked absently.

"Oh," she cried, "it is not that; you are not hopeless."

"When a man has been the fellow that's down all his life, perhaps life is rather hopeless to him," he vouchsafed, choosing his words deliberately.

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## *A Sewing Lesson*

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She had forgotten all about her fancy work; she had ceased to speculate as to what the other women were saying or thinking about her tête-a-tête with Ernesto. She realized only that a great wave of pity for him was sweeping over her. She had the sturdy American spirit, and she could not help asking:

“Why—why have you been down?” She had known of men who, beginning as newsboys, with apparently everything against them, had risen, step by step, to positions of success and honor; and she could not comprehend what conditions could keep a man down—that is, for long.

For a full minute the musician looked at her earnestly, intensely, almost piercingly. “You do not believe in Fate?” he hazarded, and his face flamed.

“Not the tiniest mite,” she declared unreservedly, “not the——”

“Yet when Fate,” he interrupted, “when circumstance, tugs at the wires, we all dance like puppets; and some of us dance to one tune, and some to another. Some of us dance to “Shoo Fly,” and some to—the “Traumerei,” and for some there is only a dirge.”

It seemed as if she who listened so intently to his

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## *The Letter H*

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words was farther than all else from his mind; his eyes were on a small launch that was cutting the quiet waters of the lake and coming swiftly towards the landing.

“See the little boat?” he began softly. “See how brightly it is dancing—how happy, how joyous? It’s a bright tune that Fate is playing for it; but who shall say when the key shall change and the merry music give way to the rolling of the thunder and the fury of the storm?”

“Fate has played a bright tune for you, too,” he said, “but her music to me has been more than harsh.”

“Have you had some great sorrow?” she asked, awed somewhat at the temerity of her question.

“Sorrow?” and he laughed. “What is sorrow to shame? Fate is kind if she gives only sorrow; she has given me—the other.”

Minutes passed before either spoke again. The man had never before committed himself so frankly to any person; the maid had never seen so deeply into another’s heart, not even that of her dearest friend. The experience saddened him, it startled her.

It required an effort to turn towards her, but it

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## *A Sewing Lesson*

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did not surprise him to see that she had been moved, and deeply. There was a darker shadow beneath her eyes, and the laugh had left the red lips. .

She felt his gaze upon her, and looked up. "I am sorry, very sorry," was all she could trust herself to say.

"You have given me back my faith in women," he said, and for the time did not dare go farther.

"And now," he resumed, in a changed tone, "may I ask you a question?"

"You may, but can I answer it?" She was laughing now.

"I believe you can. It is: Do women ever fall in love with ideals?"

She looked at him, sharply, but all she saw was an anxious, inquiring gaze. "Always," was her answer.

"And do the ideals ever materialize?" he pursued.

"Sometimes, but not often."

"And if they did, would it be something unusual?"

His evident seriousness puzzled her, but she tried to answer lightly:

"Girls make their ideals fit the men—the men they fall in love with."

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## *The Letter H*

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“I don’t mean that,” said the man thoughtfully. “Do they—are there ever—affinities, shall I call them, something binding between people who have never seen each other?”

“I can’t say positively,” the maid replied slowly; “but of course everyone has heard of such cases. Just how true they are is a question.”

The man breathed heavily a moment; then, leaning forward, he touched the wild rose frame ever so lightly. “It is a difficult stitch, Miss MacDonald,” he said, “and though I haven’t mastered it, I’m obliged to you. Will you give me another lesson some day, please?”

“As I have this morning?” asked the maid.

“As you have this morning,” said the man.

“Perhaps,” she ventured.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE NEW ARRIVAL AT THE MONTIGNAC

“Oh! Miss MacDonald! Miss MacDonald! We are going to have a real ball to-night—a genuine hop, and we want you to help us.” This in treble diapason from a bevy of girls, who fairly flung themselves upon the pair in the shady corner of the piazza. “We are going down to the village for the dance orders, and we want you to go with us. Do come.”

Ernesto dropped back into his chair as the committee, having failed to secure him as an escort, started on their errand, taking with them his companion.

“So they are going to have a ball,” he mused. It recalled that other ball which had begun so like a frolic and ended so like a funeral. The remembrance of the beautiful girl of that ball was ever present, though he never mentioned her, even to his mother. He had locked the image of her in his heart, and his thoughts of her were too sacred to share with others. His mother had grown thin and wan since Higby’s

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## *The Letter H*

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brutal repudiation of her. She kept to her room, appearing only when obliged to accompany Ernesto on the piano. The hope which had buoyed her up through all the years of her son's childhood and his approach to man's estate had been snatched away. She had found her husband after weary years, and once more, as long ago at Thibodeauxville, he had denied all knowledge of her. She wished never to see him again.

With Ernesto there was another reason for reverting again and again to the scene of that other ball. The sad, lovely face of the girl haunted him incessantly. The glory of her personality, and her words—"It is yours for the asking"—thrilled him, waking or sleeping. He tried to solve the problem of her actions by a score of explanations. Then would come back her passionate speech, "but I love you; how I love you!" and then—the memory of the touch of her delicate little hands upon his, as they sat in the woody bower. He remembered her perfectly as she was the night of the ball—so frail, so fair in her gown of shimmering tulle, with the blush roses on her breast and the radiance of love reflected in her eyes. He remembered how proudly she had borne herself; how proudly she had said before them

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## *The New Arrival at the Montignac*

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all: "He is my guest." His thoughts were almost more than he could bear when they were interrupted by the arrival of the hotel 'bus with the week's-end guests, which proved to be mainly a welcome contingent of men.

Ernesto swung his chair around and sat watching the newcomers as they reached the veranda. What a fuss the women made! How their tongues did go; how glad they seemed to see the men. Yet they had seemed well satisfied before. Suddenly the Mexican leaned forward, an exclamation of surprise escaping him.

A man had jumped into view from the farther end of the coach as it stood before the main entrance door. His hair was almost white, but his face was ruddy and youthful. There seemed to be no one waiting to welcome him, and as he ran up the steps and entered the hall, Ernesto saw him speak to the manager, who stood beaming on the threshold. Before this arrival had finished entering in a bold hand on the register, Ernesto had risen and sauntered close enough to the desk to note where the signature was placed. Presently he had a chance to see the entry and read the name.

"Richard H. Travis—New York."

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## *The Letter H*

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The musician had had enough of society, and leaving the house by a side door, he went down the path to the boathouse. Unfastening one of the cedar skiffs and getting in, he pulled towards a little point that jutted into the inlet, a mile to the north.

It was a pretty spot towards which he was rowing. He had found the air there sweeter, the aroma of the balsam more invigorating, and the view from the pigmy peninsula of wider scope than from any other place within a reasonable distance.

“Travis! Travis!” he repeated the name. It meant nothing to him. Yet, midst his dreams of the Harlington ball a while before, that face had crossed his vision as if in veritable resurrection. He had seen it there, he knew, yet he could not place any circumstance with it that might aid his memory. Was it, after all, at the hotel in Newford? He smiled as he thought of old Si and his tactless curiosity. No, he reassured himself, it was surely at the house; it was among that sea of faces that had turned towards him and the young mistress of Harlington as they danced together. He wondered how many of that throng would recognize him now; he wondered if this Travis would recognize him.

The boat slid easily upon the shore, and Ernesto

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## *The New Arrival at the Montignac*

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sprang out and hauled the light thing out of the water. A few yards inland he threw himself down under the shadow of the largest canopy of pine and drew from his pocket a current periodical. Listlessly he turned the pages; their contents were not as interesting as when, some hours before, he had laid the magazine aside to find a place on the hotel veranda. "A Japanese Rosamund," "The Comedy of a Comedian"—neither could ensnare his attention. Then he came to "Hereditary Manias," and as he scanned the leaves of this treatise, his eye caught the sentence: "It is infrequently observed that inherited mania expresses itself in actions in direct opposition to its expression in the mother or father, or, in some cases, in the grandparent of the afflicted. Hate becomes love; love, hate. A mania for charitable work possessed in a parent has been known to be transformed in the child to a powerful aversion to the same. . . . There is one case on record in which the mania asserted itself in this way; but, with the turning of the ideas of the victim into the direction followed by those of the parent, the disease left the body of the victim entirely, and the latter was restored to his normal state."

"It is an ideal place; no better could be found."

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## *The Letter H*

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Ernesto was startled by the proximity of the voice, and still more so by the familiar ring in it which he immediately detected.

“If anything will cure her, this air will,” it went on. Then another equally familiar voice replied: “This pine grove is the finest within miles. We must bring her here every day; this ozone is a perfect elixir.”

“She seems to be finally on the way to recovery.”

“Oh, she’ll get over it,” the voices were moving away, “just leave her to——” and only an indistinct murmur floated back to the recumbent listener.

Ernesto crushed the leaves of the magazine together. “Curse that ball!” he cried, fretfully. “First it’s that new man at the house. Now it’s those voices! Hanged if the thing isn’t getting into my brain. Here goes for a jolly good swim, and may it help me to forget the whole business.”

The measure seemed to have been effectual, for when he got back to the hotel for a late dinner he sprang lightly up the steps; his face aglow with health, his dark hair clinging to his forehead. As he entered the hall he met the girl of his *piazza tête-a-tête*.

“Had you a pleasant walk?” he greeted her.

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## *The New Arrival at the Montignac*

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"Oh, very," she acknowledged; "and you?"

"An excellent row and swim."

She was looking out of the door. Across the threshold a shadow fell; and the gray-haired, youngish-looking man who had been among the morning arrivals came into the lobby. The girl saw him, and instantly a deep flush mantled her cheeks. As she moved quickly as though to escape from both men, Ernesto made good his retreat before the stranger had a chance to see him. But there was no doubt that Travis saw the girl.

"Miss MacDonald!"

Travis came towards her with a compelling, frank gladness. As impulsively as she would have avoided the meeting, she gave him a rather willing hand.

"I'm awfully pleased to see you, Mr. Travis," she said.

"Not half as glad as I am to see you," he returned gallantly, still holding the hand he had taken.

"How did you get up here?" she queried. She had forgotten about the hand.

"Part of the way on the train," he rallied her, "the rest of the way on an old tub of a boat." With the laugh that followed she remembered her hand, and wriggled it from the firm grasp.

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## *The Letter H*

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“I was so glad to see you, I forgot,” he apologized, and then wondered why she frowned just a tiny bit.

“Have you dined?” he inquired.

“Not yet,” the girl replied. “Have you?”

“No, and I hope they’ll put me beside you.”

“Will you not sit with your friends?” she asked.

“As I said, I hope to,” he retaliated. “You see, I haven’t any but you.”

“You poor man,” she rejoined laughingly, and with no noticeable restraint.

Later she was surprised to find that they had placed him very near her. The small table at which she sat had been placed so that she had an unimpeded view of the little harbor. Now another table had been set directly in this line of vision, and at one side Travis was installed.

Immediately after dinner Travis joined her on the veranda. “Won’t you come out on the water?” he asked. And a few minutes later she was seated in a skiff.

“Mr. Travis, you didn’t know I was here, did you?” she asked, as she settled her skirts. Travis was struggling with the painter, and at this he bent lower and struggled harder.

“How could I know?” he answered, and his smile was unseen. “You ran away without telling me.”

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## *The New Arrival at the Montignac*

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“I didn’t think you would be interested,” she ventured, and when he looked up, she too, was smiling.

“I take a personal interest in all of my men, or, rather, I should say, my entire staff,” was his retort.

When they had returned and Edith was in her room dressing for the dance, as she slipped her little gold locket about her throat and arranged the folds of her shimmering pink gown, she laughed to herself: “I wonder if you take enough interest in all your staff to see that they have a good time on their vacations—you silly, silly man.” An hour later, when she had finished the first dance with Travis, she had ceased to wonder. And it would not be breaking confidence to tell that she was ready to believe when the ball was over that she had never danced before.

Not a word had been said as they glided over the waxed floor. Near the doorway Signora del Tonjours sat at the piano; and beside her stood Ernesto. How soft, how sweet, the music was! Edith had never heard a more caressing melody. Nearer and nearer they came to the music—now they were going to turn—now they were almost touching the musicians.

“Holy Smoke!” Travis’s ill-repressed ejaculation brought their waltz to a sudden end. The girl could

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## *The Letter H*

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feel his deep breathing, and she looked up, frightened at she knew not what. Travis was staring at the violinist, while the violinist was steadfastly following the score on the rack before him. Edith felt herself drawn out of the room.

“Will you forgive my rudeness, Miss MacDonald?” her partner begged. “My only excuse is that musician. He looks infernally like the Mexican in poor Dorus Harlington’s case.”

## CHAPTER XIX

### THE LOVE MAKING OF HERMAN

“ We have had a long walk. You must be fatigued.” It was a man’s voice, solicitous and gentle.

“ Why should I be?” It was a girl’s voice, petulant and cross.

The man’s face flushed, and he closed his lips resolutely.

“ Won’t you sit here?” he asked, with restraint, indicating a rustic seat.

“ Thank you, I will sit here,” said the girl, seating herself in a little hollow in the rock which formed a natural seat.

Behind them was Belle Aire—a long, wide, rambling, rustic house. The shingles were unpainted, and the veranda ran all the way around the building. It was a picturesque abode, fitting in well with the miles and miles of woodland behind it, the hills all about, and the blue lake stretching away to the north and south.

Dorus looked out over the lake. Her face was

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## *The Letter H*

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thinner than it had been that June morning on board the *Altruria*, when the salt breeze brought the roses to her cheeks and tossed her little waving curls about. Her eyes were dull, and the long lashes shadowing them made them soft and pathetic. When she spoke, a suggestion of satire played about her lips, and beyond the gray of her eyes was a fathomless mystery. Her expression was sometimes bantering, sometimes questioning; but the moment it settled into repose, the patient sadness was there.

It was there now, indelibly marked on every feature of her face. Silently she gazed far out over the lake to the purple hills in the distance, and the man beside her watched her narrowly. His nature was waking up slowly to something he had never known before. Herman Higby had grown up so much alone that as a natural result he was essentially selfish. He had never known his mother, and years away from home had made his father little more than a stranger to him. The doubt that Herman entertained of his father had not quite gone, although he would scarcely admit this to himself. He was intellectual, and well informed in matters that interest a cultivated mind, but his manner of expression was often bookish. In his short existence there had been,

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## *The Love Making of Herman*

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as yet, no need for unselfish devotion. His love for Dorus had been the strongest affection of his life, but even this had been somewhat weakened by the thought that, owing to the parental agreement, she would surely be his wife. Until her return, he had never realized that Dorus might slip out of his hands, yet now he was obliged to face this problem. The indifference that had made itself actively felt during all the time that she had been home but enhanced her charm to the young man. He had been so encompassed with his own interests that he had hardly considered the probable result of two years abroad. He had never dreamed that her sphere would widen into a world in which there was no room for him, and day after day he tried to interest her, to win her regard, to find any way to her heart. For from the first moment that he had set eyes upon her, he had been desperately, madly in love.

The sweet loveliness of her face, with its strange beauty, called to arms all the manhood that was in him. Her quick, impulsive speeches he found charming. Even the curious aberration shown in her escapade with the musician became of less and less importance to him as he saw more and more of the girl. She was so sweetly yielding at times, so wilful again,

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## *The Letter H*

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and the charm of her was her very variableness. In her gentler moods, when she let him talk to her of his hopes and his ambitions, he adored her; in her bantering moods, when she laughed at him for his pedantic, bookish expressions, he loved her, despite her raillery; even when she was cross and petulant, he loved her still.

Down near the shore, in a clump of trees, was a hammock. Over the tops of the trees Dorus fixed her eyes on a little rock that jutted out into the water. Herman followed her gaze, and thought she was looking at the hammock.

“Won’t you go down by the lake and rest in the hammock?” he asked.

“Thank you,” said the girl, indifferently; “it would take a grand convulsion of nature to throw me into a restful mood—a terrible earthquake, for instance.”

Herman compressed his lips. It was a little trick he had when he was puzzled. He leaned over and looked at her with positive adoration. She seemed altogether perfect, this slip of a girl, with her wide, gray eyes and masses of soft brown hair; but there was a joy of argument that even Herman could not resist. It is the heart’s desire of every man to stir

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## *The Love Making of Herman*

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up the splendor in a woman's eyes and the flashes of her wit.

"That is where you make a mistake, Dorus," Herman began, with a sudden feeling that she was capable of making mistakes. "You are too self-reliant. It is unfeminine. You should cultivate a desire—a feeling—you should acknowledge the want of somebody—I mean something stronger than yourself—to lean upon." Herman uttered the words with a pang of conscience at saying it was unfeminine to be so bewitchingly contrary.

"Well," said Dorus, "this rock seems to be quite firm, and I have perfect confidence in its ability to sustain me."

"Do not jest, Dorus. From the tree and the vine, men and women can learn a lesson. Did you ever observe the sturdy oak?"

"Yes, I have," interrupted Dorus, jumping up quickly, "many, many times."

Herman looked surprised. "What?" he asked, in astonishment. After all, he had never had much to do with women.

"I mean the story of the sturdy oak and the clinging vine," answered Dorus shortly. "Please don't tell it again, but, if you must, please make the tree

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## *The Letter H*

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a sugar maple—I should much prefer clinging to a sugar maple than an oak.”

Herman laughed, though he felt hurt that she should speak lightly of what he considered of such vast moment; but the half-merry, half-cynical expression of her lips was too much for his sense of humor:

“My romance is all thrown away on you, Dorus. I soar up into the regions of poetry, and——”

“I come down to maple sugar,” Dorus finished the sentence for him. “Well, the fact is, Herman, I am so decidedly practical that I prefer a griddle-cake to a sonnet; and think maple sugar sweeter far than Tom Moore or Tennyson. It’s a mere matter of taste, you know.”

Herman still looked at her, the adoration in his eyes unconcealed. “Dorus,” he said, “if you really are so practical, let us talk about a practical matter which to me is far sweeter than poetry, and which I hope has more charms for you than maple sugar.”

“It must be a sweet subject,” said the girl, laughing.

“It is—yourself,” said Herman, almost reverently. “It is you,” he repeated, “you, and the plans of our fathers. Can’t you guess what it is, dear?”

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## *The Love Making of Herman*

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he spoke the last word so softly that it seemed less than a whisper.

“Plans?” questioned Dorus, absently. “No! Are we all going to Niagara or the Yosemite?”

The man’s hands twitched and his lips closed—that little trick of his. “Anywhere you wish, Dorus,” he said, low and tensely.

The girl moved nervously. There was the tired look in her eyes, and a patient little droop at her lips. She felt that she had done all she could to ward off the issue, and she was conscious of her incapacity to keep it away any longer.

Herman waited an instant and then said: “Bridal tours are usually of an erratic nature.”

“Why, who is going to be married?” asked Dorus. “Not my father, surely—it must be yours.” She turned to him, her eyes filled with mock seriousness. “Herman, I hope your father has made a good choice—that he has found a woman who will be a mother to you—bring you up well—and make a good man of you.”

When Dorus stopped, she was laughing merrily at the flushed face of the young man. Herman was nonplussed. He was really serious—too serious to have the girl laughing at him.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Dorus,” he said, “you are incorrigible.” Then he grew grave: “For eighteen years our fathers have had a pleasant dream. That dream was to see us—you and I, Dorus—man and wife.”

The girl turned away wearily: “If they have had such a nice time for eighteen years, Herman, dreaming about it, don’t let us wake them up. Let them dream on—forever.”

“Dorus,” said the man, his steel-blue eyes full of the unutterable things a man thinks but once in his life, “Dorus, are you trifling with me? Can you be so cruel and heartless?”

The girl was silent. Her gray eyes were very soft now, and full of some far-away dream. Then she rose and straightened her shoulders, as a man would do.

“I think you are the cruel and heartless one. I came here at your father’s urgent invitation to have a good time during your vacation. We might have gone on enjoying ourselves, having lots of fun, but now you have gone and spoiled it all. I wish I had not come. I wish you were back at college. There will be no peace for us now. I shall get nervous, have headaches and be cross, and make myself and everybody else miserable. I don’t understand it.”

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## *The Love Making of Herman*

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“Had I known Miss Harlington,” began Herman, contritely, but he was cut short by Dorus, who turned on him with a real display of feeling:

“Now stop, you—you—” she seemed unable to find the word that she wanted—Miss Harlington! Aren’t you ashamed of yourself, Mr. Higby? Herman, don’t let us have any nonsense.”

Herman’s face was white to the roots of his hair, and his expression was most supplicating. “Dorus, I won’t,” he said gently. “I was a fool to dream, as our fathers are doing. I thought—they told me—but I know now that they did not know you, dear. Dorus—” he bent towards her just as a sudden gust of wind sent a wisp of brown silken hair over her white forehead. He drew himself up quickly, with a half-smothered sound that might have been a gasp, and might have been a sob——

“Dorus, just one question. May I hope?”

She turned her face towards him sadly. “She must be merciless indeed who would deprive one of so trifling a solace,” she said softly.

“When—when—can I hope—again?” he stammered.

“I do not—await my answer. If I send for you, come; if not——” There was a pause; then he said:

“I understand.”

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## *The Letter H*

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He started off alone towards the cottage, but stopped to ask, "Are you going in, Dorus?"

"Not now, Herman. If you don't mind, I will sit here awhile and think—of you," she glanced up brightly at him.

He bowed, with something of the old-style courtesy of the General:

"I could have no pleasanter thought than that you are thinking of me," he said, and again turned towards the cottage.

For a few minutes Dorus sat quietly where he had left her, her thoughts far away. She remembered, with sudden contrition, the day she had pushed Herman Higby's picture down behind her dressing-table. She remembered how glad she had been, that first year, to be away from him, and how resolutely she had put him out of her thoughts. She had come to know, though how she could not tell, of the compact that bound her to the lad; and at first the idea had been repugnant. She thought of the strange dream that had come to her again and again; and of how she had felt her life inextricably interwoven with the life of another. Of that dream, she had never been able to rid herself—it had been with her night and day; and the face the dream had brought

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## *The Love Making of Herman*

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—the dark, strong, resolute face, with its sad, accusing eyes—had been painted on her heart with the brush of eternity. For an instant she thrilled again as she had done that June morning on her way into the Grand Central, as she had brushed against some one, and turned to find the dream-man. Then it seemed as though she heard the sad, plaintive melody of the “Traumerei;” and in the shadow of the trees her face flushed with ecstasy. She saw him as he stood in the mottled shadows of the woodland bower, the sun lighting up the dark ruddy brown of his face. Thus she went over all the history of her strange love, indelible in her memory; relentlessly painting every detail in colors that were only too true, and too fascinating.

“Ernesto!” she breathed softly. Then—of a sudden—the pain of it swept over her, and she grew white at thought of the future; for she knew, in that one bleak moment of despair, that the object of her love might as well be the stars as the musician, Ernesto del Tonjours. Then her thoughts came back to Herman, and it seemed as though the dream-man and the musician, who were the same, had been standing between them for years before she had seen him.

## CHAPTER XX

### A RETROSPECT AND A FORECAST

“But I say, young man—” Travis flicked the ashes from his cigar—“how did you happen to know Miss Harlington?”

Midnight had long since gone by, and the last of the boarders had betaken themselves to their rooms. Out on the veranda, in the pale light of the moon, the musician and the newspaper man sat talking confidentially. After Travis's first surprise, he had quickly made up his mind that before the night was over he would have some sort of an explanation of the mysterious scene at the Harlington Hall ball. He found Ernesto in a responsive mood. In fact, the Mexican was as eager for an explanation of his hitherto unaccountable intimacy with Dorus Harlington as was Travis. Reason as he might, Ernesto could not fathom the motive of the girl's caprice, or his own peculiar sensations, and he welcomed the promise of anything that gave hope of throwing some light upon his bewildered brain.

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## *A Retrospect and a Forecast*

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“As a matter of fact,” said the musician, in response to the question, “I don’t know—I really don’t know—how I did manage to get mixed up in the affair. Of course, you know my relation to Higby—you know as well as I do that he lied when he said that I was not his son?”

He waited for an answer.

“I surmised as much. Go on.”

“Well, the morning of the ball, my mother and I arrived at Newford, and I started out for a walk, and stumbled, quite unexpectedly, upon the old house. Believe me, Mr. Travis, I had never heard of the Harlington house at Newford until I came upon it; and, in fact, I did not know that it was the home of General Harlington until after I had seen and talked with his daughter.

“How very strange!” said Travis.

“Strange!” echoed Ernesto, “the whole thing was most unusual, for I began to play, a thing I would not dream of doing ordinarily when I was so near a house; and I played Schumann’s old air of the “Traumerei” over and over again, as though I was repeating a call to some one. I waited in all expectancy, feeling that I would be answered. Then—I assure you that I am telling the exact truth—I felt

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## *The Letter H*

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irresistibly drawn across the lawn. I tried to turn back, but that was impossible. I came nearer and nearer to the house, until I entered the library and found the young lady, and——” there was a long silence.

“ Well? ” questioningly.

“ Well,” Ernesto sighed, “ it seemed as though we had known each other for years. At least, she said it seemed that way to her, and then I knew that that was the way I felt. She looked so sweet and young that I knew it would be unmanly for me to take advantage of the situation. Some curious power seemed to be controlling us both, and I tried to use all my force of will against it. I got away as soon as I could.”

“ That was all? ” asked Travis, curiously.

“ That was all—from that time on she appeared to want me near her. She begged me to go to her ball. You know the consequences. My mother found out about Higby’s being there and determined upon facing him. I did my best to persuade her to give up the idea, but she was resolute. So we went. You were there, and you know whether we were successful or not in our search for justice.”

“ Yes, I know.”

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## *A Retrospect and a Forecast*

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The two men smoked in silence.

“Do you know where she is now?” Ernesto asked finally.

“Why, the whole Harlington family are visiting Higby up here.”

“Visiting Higby—here?” cried the Mexican.

“Yes.”

“Then—yes, it must have been her father and Higby **that I** heard talking to-day.”

Ernesto then told Travis about hearing the voices in the afternoon, and it naturally occurred to him that the “she” referred to so frequently in the course of the conversation was Dorus. The next day was the Sabbath and the morn dawned clear and bright. Fragrant was the breath of the balsam, and clear and beautiful was the air. While the birds were yet singing their matins, Ernesto sprang down the hotel steps and made for the little rowboat at the landing. He felt cheerier than he had for two months past, for he had parted from Travis with a hearty handshake, and the newspaper man had promised to do all he could to obtain justice for him from Higby.

Out over the blue waters Ernesto went, whistling gayly. As he turned a woody joint that jutted out

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## *The Letter H*

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into the lake, a long, low, rambling house on the hill-top came into view.

“Hello,” he said to himself, “that’s the first time I’ve seen you. I’ll investigate.

He pulled the boat in towards the shore, and rowed cautiously about the rocks in the direction of the little boathouse. It was an elaborate structure, though small, he noticed; and appeared to be supplied with several kinds of boats. A little launch, canvas covered, floated blithely on the blue waters.

“That’s a mighty pretty little affair,” said Ernesto admiringly.

It was all white, and as his boat passed it closely, Ernesto spelled out the name in gilt letters on the bow—“Dorus.”

The tune he was whistling died instantly upon his lips. His quick glance swept over the broad, fine house again, but this time there was less of admiration in it. He noted again its spaciousness, its broad verandas, its appearance of being kept in perfect order, as were also the beautiful grounds, in which stood many fine old trees. His gaze rested sadly upon the perfect scene.

“My house,” he said aloud, saluting it gravely, “I bid you a very good day! When will the time

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## *A Retrospect and a Forecast*

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come that I shall claim you, you lovely house on the hill."

Ernesto leaned back and dreamed again of the June-time. Once more, as he had done a thousand times, he thrilled at the memory of the dance on the smooth floor of the Harlington ballroom. He felt the tremor of the slight figure. He breathed again the faint odor of violet—and once more he heard—"It is yours for the asking."

"What a fool I am," he cried aloud, and, looking far down into the transparent depths of the lake, he continued: "I wonder if the bottom of this lake is comfortable. I've half a mind to try it. By Jove, I would if it weren't for the little mother."

## CHAPTER XXI

### “OVER THE SUMMER SEA”

The sound of voices behind him made him look back in the direction of the house. A young man in light flannels and a girl all in white were discernible on the little dock, making ready, apparently, to get into one of the rowboats. Ernesto swung about so that he could watch them, and until the clump of pines on the little peninsula cut them off from view he kept his eyes fixed upon them; for they were Dorus Harlington and Herman Higby.

The brilliancy seemed to have gone out of the sunlight as the man in the boat drifted on. “Mine for the asking!” he repeated bitterly. “The girl was mad.” He brought his jaws together, and his face looked stern and resolute.

Across the distance between them came the sound of merry voices and gay, half-smothered laughter from the two on the dock; then the splash of oars in the quiet lake, and Ernesto knew that they were in the boat.

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*“Over the Summer Sea”*

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Herman surveyed the petite figure before him soberly and attentively. She was immaculate in her flannel boating costume. It hung in loosely-caught folds about her form, showing the softly-rounded curves. She wore on her head a wide-brimmed white hat, with a dash of color in the bright Persian ribbon about the crown.

“Is it in the code that I must not say when you look like an angel?” he asked anxiously.

“Dear me! then every time you don’t say it I am to take it for granted that I don’t look like one,” she laughed.

They were in the boat by this time.

“What would you do if I were to upset the boat?” Herman asked, foolishly.

“Swim,” was the prompt answer. “It’s a deal easier to get out of a little thing like Lake George than—lots of other things.”

“What, for instance?”

“Oh, I don’t know. I leave that for you to guess.”

“Love affairs?” he suggested slyly.

“Sentimental Herman! Do you find it so difficult to get out of love affairs?”

“I haven’t tried to get out of the only one I ever got into, so I am not qualified to say. But you don’t

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## *The Letter H*

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seem to have overmuch trouble getting out of them unscathed."

"Don't I? That's all you know about it." She was leaning forward now, with her arms resting on her knees.

"Oh, Herman, it is in Florence where you can most easily fall in love. You should go there, Herman," she cried.

"I would if you were there," he ventured. "I've been trying to find a place which you might think conducive to love affairs."

She ignored the remark: "Listen, Herman. It was in Florence that I first met Signor Arturo."

The man started at the mention of the name. "I had hoped that you had forgotten him, Dorus," he said, soberly.

"Dear me, no. He was too adorably funny to forget. He saved me, you know, from a runaway. I had known him only a week, but that night when he came to inquire for me, he insisted that I promise to marry him. Imagine!"

"I can't blame the poor fellow for wanting to marry you, but I'm mighty glad you wouldn't have him."

"What possible difference can it make to you?"

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“*Over the Summer Sea*”

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“Well, as matters stand at present, there’s still hope.”

She leaned back laughing, the sun playing with the dusk-dark hair beneath the broad white hat. A laughing answer was on her lips, smiles were dancing in her eyes; when suddenly from somewhere far over the lake came a clear, piercing whistle, repeating the sweet, sad notes of the “Traumerei.” Not the plaintive wail of the violin, just the sad, sad whistle; softened, yet not made less distinct, by the distance. As Dorus grasped the sides of the boat, in a sudden tremor of wonder and amazement, she knew that somewhere up there in the beautiful hill country was Ernesto del Tonjours.

## CHAPTER XXII

### UNDER THE PINE BALSAMS

Lazily the little ripples broke against the rocks, gurgling musically; the blue transparency of the lake, stretching on and on, was peaceful in the haze of the afternoon; swift-drifting clouds, like shadows splashed across the sky, came and passed upon the broad arch above. In a blaze of yellow and crimson, and deep, deep green, the mountainside lay flushed with the kisses of the early autumn. Dreamily, her magazine fallen forgotten to the fragrant carpet of dried pine needles, Dorus reposed in the hammock, caressed by the red glory of the dying sunset, swift dropping beyond the color-flecked mountains.

Her tumbled dusk-dark hair, with its wayward curls, sparkled and shone in the warm radiance—a thousand little lights dancing hither and yon. Her face was burned to a healthy brown, and the brisk breeze had brought to her cheeks a brighter flush. The sweeping shadows of her lashes lay upon her cheeks, and like the radiance of the sunset, came the

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## *Under the Pine Balsams*

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shy smile to her lips. Of many things and yet of nothing was she dreaming, as one dreams on the days that were made for dreaming. She was glad that they had left her alone, particularly just at this time, when the afternoon was waning into the evening.

Naturally her thoughts turned to Herman. They seemed to be with Herman the greater part of the time these days at Lake George. She found herself constantly wondering and planning how best to keep out of his way—how to avoid him. She felt sorry for him—that was all, just a despairing, helpless pity. He was so strong, so well built, with his powerful frame, and his muscles so splendidly developed by the college athletics that there was not an ounce of superfluous flesh upon his body. And his will—how indomitable it was! And Herman was the soul of honor. Dorus realized this with something akin to sadness, for she knew that it was the assurance that he regarded her most careless confidence as absolutely sacred that made her so perfectly at home with him. Yet she shunned him as though he were some kind of a dishonest and dishonorable bugbear. If he only would not show that he was in love with her. If he would only treat her with the careless

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## *The Letter H*

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unconcern with which she had seen him address other girls.

But no. When Herman spoke to Dorus it was with the greatest deference. He never heard any one else when she was talking, and in a thousand ways he showed that, while his promise not to speak until she bade him kept him from any further declaration of his love, it could not suppress the emotion itself.

Unconsciously Dorus looked out through the trees to the lake, and her gaze was caught and held by a trim little St. Lawrence skiff, with a dash of color in the stern, as it came dancing over the water. Many times had the guests from the Montignac come rowing around the balsam point lying below Belle Aire, and Dorus had grown to know some of them by sight. She wished sometimes that her father and Lenore would take her over to the hotel—away from Colonel Higby and his son. The parties of hotel people always seemed so merry, laughing and chatting, and once in a while there would come two, just two, and there would be less laughing and chatting. Then of late there had come one alone, and she had grown to wait for him. It was in a tiny rowboat that he came, and if it chanced that she was not

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## *Under the Pine Balsams*

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there, in the shady grove of balsam trees, she would hear, far away, the dreamy notes of an old Mexican song. And that had never failed to attract her, like some strong human magnet, to the place whence the dream-notes came.

But now the newcomers were near at hand. The splash of color in the stern of the boat had developed into a shirt-waist. It was a pretty shirt-waist, and Dorus noticed with appreciative eyes that the wearer was also pretty—exceedingly pretty. There was another patch of color—the outing-shirt of the man at the oars. Over the still calm of the lake came the girl's voice, sweet and clear, trilling the vibrant melody of a popular song:

“ Driftin' on de ribber wif ma little lady bee,  
Waitin' fo' de answer dat it ain't so hard to see,”—

The girl's hand dragged in the water as she sang, and gently to the rhythmic music of her voice the oars splashed in the blue—

“ Ma fairy queen, ma little lady bee,  
Yo' don' need speak, cos I know dat yo' loves me”—

Nearer they came and nearer to the point of balsam trees jutting out into the lake, all unconscious of

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## *The Letter H*

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the little figure lying so listlessly in the hammock among the pines which were to work her cure—

“ Won’ yo’ tak’ yo’ honey,  
Ef I ain’ got no money,  
My lady bee.”

They were quite close now—so close that Dorus could discern more clearly the sweet, young face of the girl. How low and clear her voice was! Then Dorus looked at the man. There were only the broad shoulders and the finely-shaped head to be made out. The song ceased suddenly.

“ What a lovely place for a hammock! ”

The man pulled the boat around and turned to look. With a little cry, Dorus dropped her eyes and turned aside so that they might not recognize her.

It was Travis. No, he must not see her—not here. With a half shudder, she remembered the question he had asked that starry night on the *Altruria* and the anger even the thought of Herman and that old, old contract had aroused in her.

It was hard for the girl to keep herself sufficiently screened by the hammock to remain unrecognized. The two in the boat, unconscious that in the rare atmosphere their softest whisper could be distinctly heard by the occupant of the hammock, talked on.

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## *Under the Pine Balsams*

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“What a pretty place for a pretty girl!” was the man’s first exclamation. “I wish that hammock was empty.”

“So do I—but perhaps it would be trespassing to land,” answered the girl’s voice.

“Fine house, that,” said Travis, resting his oars and nodding upward to where Belle Aire stood, crimsoned by the ruddy light of the sunset.

“That is Belle Aire,” Miss MacDonald answered, as she let her hand trail idly in the water.

“Then Miss Harlington must be up here somewhere. I wonder if she is the occupant of the hammock?”

The man took the oars, with the intention of rowing closer inshore. But Dorus rose, shook out her gown, and started rapidly through the balsam grove toward the house.

“I believe that was Miss Harlington, and I believe she heard us talking,” said Travis, contritely.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### THE LOVES OF RICHARD

They rowed back slowly in the gathering dusk. It is then, when the red light of the late sun paints the wonderland of nature, when the blaze and the splendor of the changing foliage throw a mystery upon the hills, that the lake is at its loveliest. It is then that the world is rose-hued, indeed.

Edith MacDonald leaned back in the stern of the boat and the soft rosiness of the air lay upon her face like a caress. Little fluffs of fair brown hair, glinting in the light, made an aureole for her face. Plump and full was the sweet, grave contour of cheek and chin; and as Travis looked upon her, the memory of the other women he had known faded.

"How much good the air has done you," he said at last, breaking a silence that was full of unsaid things, with the commonplace remark.

"It is not the air only," she corrected.

"The good time?" he questioned.

"Nor the good time. It is the rest—just the beau-

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## *The Loves of Richard*

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tiful rest. It is the feeling that just so much is not required of one to-day."

"Yet you chose that——" Travis's tone was half-inquiring.

"Yes—in preference to letting my mother and brother provide for me." The girl's lips were very firm now.

"How very independent we are," he said, banteringly.

She smiled across at him. "Yes, we are," she said, with decision.

"Do you know," he went on, after a moment's silence, "you are the first real newspaper girl I ever knew."

"No!—really?" she queried. "Why, you must have known lots of them, with all your experience."

"Oh, of course I've known them, but not like this," he said, watching her face as he pulled long, even strokes. "They've always been very quiet, so quiet you couldn't know them; or very noisy—so noisy you wouldn't know them. And they haven't been real. I've often wondered how so many freaks got in and why some nice, good, sane, sensible girl wouldn't try her hand at it."

"Am I a freak?" she laughed.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Oh, no. You’re the nice, good, sane, sensible girl come at last.”

“The exception that proves the rule?” she persisted.

“I ought not to say that there is a rule,” said the managing editor. “I don’t know enough about your sisters in the craft. As I say, I haven’t known them personally at all. They’ve done their work satisfactorily or they haven’t done it satisfactorily; and that’s all there has been to it, as far as I know. How have you found them?”

A shadow crossed the girl’s face. “I have found some who were not quite nice, and some who were very bright and clever, but whom I wouldn’t care to make chums of. Then I think some of the bravest, noblest, most lovable women are—in the craft, as you put it—honest girls, making an honest living.”

“Do you like it?” he asked, half-wistfully.

“I love it,” she answered gravely. “It has been very good to me, this newspaper craft. It has given me a chance to hear and see all the things I have so longed for—it has given me the chance to shake hands with people I used to dream about. They are nice to me, too—just because I represent the “Metropolitan,” I suppose, but still they are nice to me,

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## *The Loves of Richard*

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those writers, and singers, and statesmen, and politicians. And I love to write—I love it all.”

“ Couldn’t you be persuaded to give it up? There are so many temptations—I mean trials—for a young girl. Sometimes I’m half-afraid they will drag you down.”

If Edith felt a little thrill when he acknowledged that he sometimes thought about her and that he had a personal interest in her welfare, she did not show it.

“ Temptations?” she laughed gayly. “ Tell me some. They told me I would be surrounded by temptations and sin—but I’ve been with the “ Metropolitan ” now for several months, and I haven’t had a single temptation, and I really haven’t seen much evil at all. Tell me some of the bad things, please.”

Travis fixed his clear, gray eyes gravely upon the girl. What he saw was a fresh, eager, innocent, pretty face, flushed with health and excitement.

“ Tell me some of the temptations, please,” she repeated.

“ You’re a temptation,” he answered, laughing. “ You could easily tempt a man to go through—shades of Eros, for you, you know.”

“ A boy, I might,” she returned, flushing, “ and

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## *The Letter H*

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he would do it solely for the excitement of it. A man——”

“Would do it for you,” he finished.

The sun had dipped down now, and in the quickly-gathering twilight the boat moved slowly on toward the hotel. A silence fell upon the two, and as they drifted on to the musical sound of the waves lapping against its sides, the thoughts of both were busy, each with the other. The man was dreaming of the girl—how lovely she was, yet how unnecessary, seemed any plans that he might make for the filling of her life. The girl was thinking what good company he was, and how much she enjoyed hearing his subtle flatteries.

Then a canoe passed them—so swiftly, so noiselessly, that it seemed only a shadow. A solitary figure, silhouetted against the reflecting lights of the lake, turned the paddle regularly, monotonously, looking neither to the right nor to the left. The bow was headed straight for the balsam point lying dark below the twinkling lights of Belle Aire.

“S-sh——” murmured Edith MacDonald, leaning forward with her finger placed warningly upon her lips, “It is Ernesto.”

## CHAPTER XXIV

### INFINITE PASSION AND FINITE PAIN

When Ernesto reached the balsam point, Dorus, who had returned and was lying in the hammock, sat up erect and tense the moment she heard the sounds of his approach. Her gaze, fastened upon him as he drew near, held not less than devotion. She rose slowly, and moved towards him quietly over the fragrant, brown carpet of pine needles. Her dress of dotted muslin fell in long, graceful folds about her slender figure. The little sleeves that stopped at the round elbow with a tiny puff of gauzy stuff showed grace in every curve. Above the knot of cornflower chiffon at her breast, the swelling loveliness of its white beauty showed through the thin fabric. Her hair was high, as it had been when Ernesto saw her first. About the white pillar of her throat was a dainty fichu, half revealing, half concealing the round, youthful curves; a full, short curl fell on one shoulder, and as she moved the old, familiar odor of violet clung to the air. It was incense to the man.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Ernesto,” she said, very gently, coming to a standstill before him, “Ernesto, I have gone too far now ever to turn back. I have been vague and undecided—could you not tell what those strange actions meant? Did you think me mad? Sometimes I am half afraid that I am mad. Do mad people ever think that they are mad? Have you wondered, Ernesto, why I have shown you—that—I—have—loved you? Was it unwomanly?”

“Ernesto, I have been thinking that love is like some great tidal wave that comes up out of the fullness of the sea and sweeps down the barriers of time, and tide, and place, and circumstance. The tidal wave levels the hills to the valleys; it tears down the bulwarks of all nature. Nothing can stand against it. So love sweeps upon our souls—over all the defences that custom, and education, and wealth have built. It makes us all equal—it makes us all animals, or it makes us all divine.

“Have I shown you in my actions that I loved you? Was it I, Ernesto, or was it some unseen force, as irresistible, as all-mighty, as all-powerful as a tidal wave, that pushed me on? Tell me, Ernesto, what you have thought of me.”

The man crossed his arms upon his breast. His

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## *Infinite Passion and Finite Pain*

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attitude showed his intense repressed emotion, his pulses beat wildly as he looked into her eyes. Oh! the adorable loveliness of that dark, brilliant face; oh! the depth of the gray, gray eyes, with the sadness and the mystery in them. The fragrance of the violet in the air blended with that of the pines, and out through the shadowy gloom the lake lay crimson in the sunset glow, and the little canoe scraped upon the pebbles. Long he looked into the gray eyes, and the steady glow of his own baffled the girl.

“I have not dared to think,” he said.

“Has it seemed more strange to you than to me, Ernesto? Have you stood aghast at my actions—as I have done? Have you wondered with horror, perhaps, or with ecstasy, as I have, at the marvel of my love for you?”

“Dearest, from the time that I was a little, innocent baby in the cradle, from the time of my earliest remembrance, I have seen one face and form constantly before me—sometimes near, sometimes far away. He has played with me in the days gone by—a little curly-haired fellow with deep-set eyes and a resolute chin. They used to say I was such a good child, for I would play for hours all by myself. They did not know that I had a playfellow, a lad who

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## *The Letter H*

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never hurt me, who loved me and cared for me. As I grew older, they called me queer—never to my face, for I was an heiress, you know, but, nevertheless, I knew they called me so. Then, sometimes, my playmate would go away, and often I have leaned my head against the window-sash and awaited his coming, with my eyes reddened with weeping—a sign of sorrow I could not explain and none could understand. They used to say it was because my mother was dead.

“Since I have become a woman, I have longed to meet him with an intensity that is almost unendurable. To meet him face to face, to touch him, to talk with him, to hear him say he loved me—” The low voice ceased, almost in a sob. She was touching him now, with a tense, frightened grasp. His muscles strained and his lips met in a hard effort for self-control:

“He would be ungrateful, did he not say so.”

Again the sweet, despairing voice went on:

“I knew that our destinies were inseparable. I knew, too, that some day he and I would come face to face. Sleeping or waking, those dark eyes have looked into mine. In my dreams, I have lifted the dark curls from his forehead and twined them about

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## *Infinite Passion and Finite Pain*

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my fingers. I have tried to speak his name, but it never came to my lips. It would seem as though I were just to utter it, and then it would be gone before my memory could grasp it. And so this phantom Something has lured me on—has taken possession of my heart and soul. It enthralls my whole being. It is part of myself. I love it better than I do my life.”

The girl’s grasp tightened upon his arm. She forced him to look at her :

“ Ernesto, do you think, if I were to meet him, to find him a mortal being like myself, that it would be wrong to tell him of my love—my life-long love for him ? ”

Once more Ernesto spoke, slowly :

“ No, no.”

“ Listen, Ernesto. Only two months ago, when we came back from Europe, as we were hurrying from the cab to the station, I brushed against a passer-by. I looked up, straight into his eyes—the dark eyes that I had loved. And he knew me. There shot back, in that one instant’s recognition, the thrill of eternity. A week later, as I sat in my father’s house at Newford, I heard the melody of the ‘ Traumerei ’—the melody that filled me with

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## *The Letter H*

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its passion and its pain. 'Infinite passion and the pain of finite hearts that yearn.' Could Browning have known what it was as I do? Then I saw my dream hero standing before me in human form, looking into my eyes as he had looked thousands of times before."

Ernesto straightened himself once more. It was his own condemnation that he was speaking:

"Did he—did he know you?"

Low and clear the voice answered: "No. He saw my heart speaking through my eyes, but there was no answering look in his. He saw the struggle raging in my breast, but there was no response from him. He was calm, cold, respectful. I called my pride to my aid. I tried to forget him. I tried, oh, how hard! to tear his dear image from my heart, but I cannot struggle any longer."

Her head drooped in exhaustion. Ernesto watched her narrowly.

"He would perhaps love you—if he knew." He had spoken thus to hear her say again, "I love you,"—this lovely, beautiful creature.

She looked up at him suddenly, her face ablaze with the glory of her love:

"Oh, Ernesto, if I had found him rich, high-born,

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## *Infinite Passion and Finite Pain*

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of great reputation, I could have loved him no more, but I could have loved him more hopefully. I still love him—blindly—madly—hopelessly, the world would say, for he is only a poor, wandering violinist—but he is my fate. Oh, Ernesto, Ernesto, comfort me!”

Sobs shook her slender frame. The man was calmer now. He knew that somehow he must get away. He felt instinctively that his strength of purpose could not last much longer. Oh, to take her in his arms, to comfort her indeed!

“What can I say,” he asked, trying to be calm. “What would comfort you?”

“Say that you pity me—that you love me.”

“I dare not say that. I am a penniless, nameless, wandering outcast, it is true; but I could not do that. It—it would be dishonorable.”

“Dishonorable?” the girl’s voice was frightened. “Is it dishonorable to love me?”

“For one like me to presume so far would be very—dishonorable. I have not even a name to give you. I should deserve all the contempt which your father would heap upon me.”

Dorus turned away from him sadly. “You do not love me,” she said helplessly.

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## *The Letter H*

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Upon the man's face there came a flicker of yielding. His resolution almost gave way.

"I have nothing to offer you but poverty—and—disgrace, in exchange for all your trust, and your beauty, and your fortune. The world would call you foolish, at the least, and me—a worthless scamp."

There was a gleam of hope in Dorus's eyes.

"I have a fortune in my own right," she said, "and yet it will not secure for me that single bit of happiness that I crave—have craved for years. It would make a thousand say they loved me—yet it will not give me the one I love best in the whole wide world. If you could but love me, Ernesto," she went on, wistfully, "I should care nothing for the rest."

"But your father?"

"My mother was an heiress, Ernesto. She married for love a brave man, who was but a poor one then. I have the same right. Ernesto, when a thing is right, all arguments against it must be wrong. For your sake, Ernesto—for my sake—tell me that—that you care."

The Mexican drew himself up sharply. If he listened much longer to the pleading, plaintive Southern voice he must give way.

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## *Infinite Passion and Finite Pain*

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“No, no!” he cried. “For your sake, Dorus, I must leave you. I would rather die than bring misery upon you—and to say that I loved you would surely bring it.”

Ernesto unfolded his arms and taking her two little hands in his, pushed her gently from him. A sound of far-away laughter came floating towards them. Through an opening in the grove he caught sight of the little launch “Dorus” moored to the tiny wharf, and a party of people coming ashore. He knew that they must come this way through the grove to get to the house. He pressed the soft hands gently.

“Good-bye,” he whispered.

But the girl was aroused. She paid no attention to the distant voices. She felt that Ernesto was going—forever, perhaps.

“You must not go!” she cried passionately. “You shall not leave me. I cannot live on without you. Oh, Ernesto, have you no pity? Can you go so calmly, after all the years I have waited for you? You must love me, I say.”

Gently, he pushed her away from him. The voices were very near now. They must not find her clinging to him.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Go, dearest,” he said softly, and again he pushed her from him. Her foot slipped upon the pine needles and she fell to the ground. Ernesto, forgetful of the coming witnesses, sprang to her side. He lifted her tenderly in his arms.

“Dearest, are you hurt?” he whispered.

It was upon this tableau that General Harlington, Lenore, Colonel Higby and Herman gazed. With cries of horror the General and Lenore, who were in advance, sprang towards the pair. The girl’s face was ashen. Upon her cheeks the dark lashes lay like lovely shadows. She seemed stunned, and lay almost as though dead.

Higby turned with fury upon the Mexican. For an instant he did not recognize him. The picture of the handsome fellow at the ball had almost faded from his mind, and he did not dream of finding him here in the heart of the mountains. Ernesto stood back, his face drawn and his arms folded upon his breast.

“You villain,” cried the Colonel, “to attack a woman in open daylight and in very sight of her own home! Are you crazy—or drunk? What woman’s safe with such a brute as you at liberty?” He grasped the Mexican’s arm and shook him.

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## *Infinite Passion and Finite Pain*

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“What have you got to say for yourself? Did you mean to rob her?”

Ernesto looked down upon him calmly. “I did not attack her nor molest her in any way,” he said quietly.

“You lie!” cried the Colonel fiercely, striking the musician.

Ernesto’s face flamed crimson at the insult. His hot Southern blood rushed to his eyes and his lips. With an Herculean effort, he calmed himself. His breath came in heavy gasps, but he kept his arms folded. Near to him stood Herman. His face, too, was flushed with passion, and the hard, steely light in his eyes was flashing.

“You will hear more when the ladies have gone,” he said quietly. “The law fails to reach such cowards as you.”

Ernesto turned to the younger man. He was calm now—calm with the anger that is the stronger for its control.

“Mr. Herman Higby,” he said, “do not touch me if you value your life. I would not submit to a blow from you.”

Dorus, meantime, had recovered from the shock and had arisen. She heard the Colonel bid Lenore

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take her to the house, and add that he would see that the fellow got his deserts. With a quick cry, she broke from Lenore and fairly flew to Ernesto, laying her hands upon his arm as she had done before.

“You will not harm him,” she cried piteously to her father. “It was not he—it was I! It was I, Dorus Harlington. I urged him to meet me here. I—I threw my arms about him and begged him to love me as I—loved him. He would not have me—said it would be dishonorable for him to love me. I clung to him—he pushed me away—I slipped and fell.”

She turned for corroboration to the man. In his face was a smouldering fire, and neither by look nor word did he respond to the interrogation which her looks implied.

“And you could refuse my love for him?” asked Herman.

“I did not make my heart, Herman,” she said gently. “God made it.”

The General, looking years older than he had done an hour before, shook his head sadly. “Poor little girl,” he said brokenly, “this is more terrible far than even your death could have been.”

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## *Infinite Passion and Finite Pain*

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“Horace, the girl is mad—mad,” the Colonel broke in testily. “Why do you stand here and listen to her ravings? Take her to the house and send for a doctor. Burslem is at the hotel, with his nephew. Call him over.”

Lenore went to her and took her hand gently in her own. “Come, Dorus,” she said, “let us go back to the house.”

Into the girl’s clear eyes came a baffled, hunted look. She seemed utterly unnerved. She still clung to Ernesto, who stood like a statue.

“I will not leave him here with these men. They will kill him,” she cried.

“Come, dear,” insisted Lenore, “come with me.”

“I will not go,” she cried again. “They shall not kill him.”

Colonel Higby moved towards her, and she shrank closer to Ernesto, who put out his arm as though to protect her, and said quietly:

“If you will permit me to speak to her, I think she will go in.”

Higby’s temper flared up anew. “What do you mean?” he cried.

“What I say,” said the Mexican, with repressed emotion. “I think, perhaps, I can induce the young lady to go into the house.”

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## *The Letter H*

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“There is witchcraft here,” growled the Colonel. “Speak to her then—but, remember, every word you utter will be used against you in a court of law.”

Ernesto looked down upon the girl, in his eyes ineffable tenderness. There was ecstasy in her expression as she met his glance.

“Dorus,” he said, “Dorus, you must go into the house with your friends.” It was as though he were talking to some lovely, wayward child.

“Why, Ernesto?” she questioned softly.

“Because I love you, dear.”

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE LETTER H

The low, faint whisper brought the glory of love triumphant to the sweet face of Dorus. With a little cry of joy she put her hand timidly upon Ernesto's shoulder. Into her eyes there sprang the suffused radiance of perfect peace. Not so with the Mexican. His lesson said, the swift tenderness of the gesture, the ecstasy of her touch passed, he was like a pillar of marble—so calm, so proud, so cold. The low words of pity for her fell unheeded on his ears. It was as though all was but a dream. The voices of the people about, the swaying branches, the ripples breaking upon the pebbles, the scraping of the boat, all were unreal. Only the faint fragrance of violet mingled with the scent of the balsam; only that, and the sweet, radiant face of the girl in his arms seemed real. He wondered vaguely if she were dead, and he, too—if they would wake up presently and feel, as before, the great gulf between them. For a second, he felt the throbbing of the girl's heart, then again he heard

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the voices of her friends. He roused himself; the dream must cease.

“Now, Dorus,” he said, stroking the little fluff of hair upon her temples, “go in with your father. I will see you again soon.”

Dorus was absolutely unconscious of the people about. She straightened herself and pushed the man to arm’s length from her:

“You said you loved me, Ernesto, and I won’t go. They might lock me up; they might send you away—kill you, dear, and I might never see you again. No, Ernesto, I won’t leave you.” She shook her head teasingly: “No, no; don’t ask me to.”

Suddenly she turned to the others. “Do you—do you think I should leave him, when it has taken a whole lifetime for me to find him? Go away, all of you, and leave me alone with Ernesto.”

With an almost heart-broken sob, Herman turned away:

“This is too much; I love her better than life—” To Herman it seemed as though this was the blasting of all his hopes. He was torn, too, by doubts of his father. One of the two—either Colonel Henry Higby or the Mexican—was playing a treacherous part. One

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## *The Letter H*

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was a scoundrel—which was it? In the cry of his soul to vindicate his father, he turned to the violinist angrily, as though to strike him.

Ernesto watched him calmly. “Stand back, Herman Higby,” he said coldly. “Ask your father why I do not wish to quarrel with you.”

Colonel Higby looked nervously at the speaker—a cold, close scrutiny. With a smothered oath, he stepped backward as though struck. The man was indeed the Mexican—Ernesto del Tonjours. Harlington, too, in one swift glance of recognition, saw no less unmistakably that it was the same stranger whom he had last seen beneath his own roof. Instinctively, he looked from Higby to Ernesto. As the first moonlight broke through the trees, it fell slantingly upon Ernesto’s head and shoulders. The same ray, by some strange freak of nature, fell full upon Henry Higby. Both men were turned full face towards the General. The likeness was unmistakable; there were the same features, the same erect carriage, the same look in each. As in that other place—in the arbor, on the night of the Harlington ball—when the mother and son had stood side by side, Harlington had said, “There is no question that he is her son, he has her features, her expres-

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## *The Letter H*

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sion," so now, as the tricky moonlight shone upon these two, he saw even a more striking resemblance. With the conviction growing within him that, after all, Higby had lied—worse than lied—he turned away. Taking Lenore's arm, he said sharply:

"Come away; leave them alone."

The crunching of their footsteps upon the dry twigs marked their going, and Higby and his son followed slowly. The moon's rays had shown to the son what it had shown to the old soldier.

As they went—Colonel Higby unconscious that, at last, retribution was very near, and Herman with his head bowed in broken pride—Dorus rattled on:

"You wouldn't hurt me, would you, Ernesto? You love me—you said so. See! I can defend myself. Here is my mother's dagger."

To Ernesto's horror, she pulled from somewhere within the folds of her gown a quaint, Oriental dagger, sharp and gleaming. It was a tiny toy, bright and beautiful, and she had been using it for a paper-knife. She touched it to her fingers, to her lips, the jewels in the handle sparkling between her white fingers. "It was my mother's," she said. "Is it not a pretty thing?"

She looked up into the man's face—sad and drawn.

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## *The Letter H*

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Something she saw there made her forget the knife.

“Ernesto,” she cried, with all her feeling in her voice, “you can never know how happy I was to hear you say, so bravely, so proudly, before them all, that you loved me. Will you ever be sorry that you said it?”

“Only for your sake. You will always be sorry that I said it, I fear.”

“Stop, Ernesto,” she cried, putting her finger upon his lips. “I will not hear you speak so meanly of yourself. I could be happy with no one else. Kiss me, Ernesto!”

She stood before him, tantalizing and betwitching in her sweet, innocent appeal. The man’s face grew red, then white. He drew back, almost haughtily.

“Won’t you?” she pleaded wistfully, and impelled by a force he could not resist, Ernesto pressed his lips upon her forehead.

For a moment she was still, then she lifted her red, full lips to him. “Kiss me!” This time it was command, not entreaty. In a second, he had put his arm around her, and their lips met. He felt the quiver of her body; he felt the warm flush on her cheek. After the first ecstasy of it—the pity of it—the hopelessness of it swept upon the man’s soul.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Ernesto,” she said, “I am so happy; yet, you are not, that I can see. There is no joy in your face; I fear there is none in your heart.”

“If I were only worthy of you!” he said wearily, “This must be a dream of happiness from which we shall soon awake.”

“It was a dream,” she acquiesced smilingly; “a dream of life. Now it is a reality. Now that I have found the hero of my dreams, I have only one fear.”

“And what is it?” he asked apprehensively.

“That I may be jealous of my hero,” she laughed.

“Dorus,” he said, “we have both forgotten our duty; yours to your father, mine to my mother. Remember what she is—a woman with two passions; her love for me, and her hatred of the man who deserted her. Remember what I am—a nameless outcast.”

“You are my Ernesto,” she cried; “so what else matters?”

“Dorus, a heart of steel could not withstand such trusting love as yours. But I have sworn before Heaven and my mother that I would never falter in my search for—that I would never forsake her until my father, if living, makes restitution to her for the past.”

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## *The Letter H*

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“We will keep your promise to your mother, together—you and I, Ernesto. My money will help us. I have all my mother’s money—I never saw my mother,” she added wistfully. “She died when I was a little child. But I have her picture and many other things, and I love them because they were hers. Here is one, this little knife.” Once more Dorus held up the pretty trinket. “Aunt Lenore says it is a family heirloom. See the angel’s head carved upon the handle, Ernesto? This is my talisman against evil.”

“It is very beautiful, Dorus. Is it sharp?”

“Very. I will show you. Oh, yes, Ernesto, I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll cut off one of your curls, and I will keep it as long as I live. May I, Ernesto?”

“Yes, Dorus, if you wish,” he said gently, bending his head.

Ernesto was so tall that he towered way above her. The dark, clustering curls upon his forehead were one of his distinguishing marks. It was this cluster of curls that Dorus touched with her delicate hands. And he felt almost overpowered by the charm of her loveliness as she twined her fingers about those precious locks, preparing to cut them.

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## *The Letter H*

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But, as she lifted the locks of curly hair from his forehead, it disclosed his mark of shame—The Letter H!—a blood-red scar upon the flesh. The Letter H! As the girl looked at it, startled and bewildered, the lovelight in her eyes gave way to a look of horror—of horror intensified. All the terror in her soul sought utterance. The cry that left her lips was a piercing, frightened scream. Still she clung to the curls, her eyes never moving from the blood-red mark. The Letter H!

With another shrill cry, she drove the polished steel into the Mexican's breast—not once, but twice, thrice. As he fell backward, Dorus, the weapon clasped in her hand, dropped forward, prone upon his body, the blood from his wounds dyeing the light gown she wore and staining her little white hands.

“Ernesto, Ernesto,” she shrieked, “I have killed you! I have killed you!” Crashing through the grove came General Harlington, with Higby and Herman close behind him. Following them were Lenore, Luke and Saida.

Meantime the hotel launch, bringing Dr. Burslem and Carmelita, was making straight for the landing.

“He has killed her,” cried Colonel Higby excitedly. His infernal work is done at last.” It was

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## *The Letter H*

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the General, bending over his daughter, who discovered that she was unharmed, even while the physician and Carmelita, hastening towards the group, saw that it was Ernesto who was wounded.

“My poor boy! My poor boy!” cried the mother brokenly, as she knelt by the prostrate figure. Then she turned fiercely on Higby. “His blood be upon your hands, Henry Higby,” she continued, in a frenzy of grief. “He stood in your way. The girl loved him—and you have murdered your own son. Do not deny it. Look upon this brand—The Letter H! I have never forgotten it, nor shall you.”

She bent over the boy again, as Dr. Burslem was trying to stanch the flow of blood.

In the woman’s anathema, one phrase had aroused the girl from her stupor. “The Letter H!” she cried. “Yes, I saw it—saw it beneath his curly hair, on his white forehead. Poor Ernesto, they shall not take you from me——”

## CHAPTER XXVI

“IT IS ALL MINE!”

Long, dreary hours for the watchers; long, blissful intervals of unconsciousness for the sick ones. They thought once that there would be two graves beneath the balsam trees before the last of the red-gold leaves had dropped from the thinning boughs of the mountain maples. The last vestige of summer waned and faded. The Montignac, crowded all the season, first closed one wing, and then the other. The haze of August gave place to the mellowness of September; then came the crisp air of October.

Still the inmates of Belle Aire gave no sign of leaving. The physician and the nurses still lingered. They went on tiptoe through the wide hallways and spoke in whispers when they gathered about the roaring, open fires.

They were dull weeks, those dreary weeks when Dorus lay near to death; when, in another room, it seemed that Ernesto, too, must pass into the dark valley.

Then came the days of convalescence. The strange mania that had warped the brain of Dorus Harlington seemed gone—utterly. Dr. Burslem, with loving care, made tests innumerable. The phantom love, which had played havoc with her life, had vanished—forever, the Doctor said. In the languor of her weak condition, she was all patience, sweetness and gentleness. She liked to lie for hours in the sunny bay-window of her room and look out over the blue lake. She watched the birds as they flew south, and she listened quietly when Lenore read to her from her favorite books.

For weeks they feared to mention Ernesto's name to her—feared that it might bring back all the horrible delusion. Then there came a day when she asked softly: “ Where is Ernesto ? ” And Lenore had answered: “ He is quite safe, Dorus.”

The girl looked out over the lake again, and sighed happily. “ I can get well now,” she said. “ I was afraid that I had killed him.”

A few days later she spoke of him again. “ Where have they taken him ? ” she asked. Lenore wondered what the truth might disclose. “ He is over in the east wing, Dorus.” “ Here ? ” The girl turned anxiously. “ Yes, Dorus. He, too, has been very

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## *The Letter H*

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ill." "But he is better now?" "Oh, yes. He is to go out very soon."

Meanwhile, in the east wing, there had been anxious hours, too. Carmelita, paler and thinner than before, watched tirelessly over her boy. The doctor and the nurse came and went regularly. In the night, when the nurse took her place beside the bed, Carmelita would slip into the little room adjoining, and throw herself upon the cot for needed rest.

It was at these times, when the boy and the nurse were alone, that Henry Higby would steal softly down the corridor and in at the open door. Then he would stand silently at the foot of the bed and watch the still form upon the pillows.

It was when the young man's life was first despaired of that the Colonel had found his way into the quiet chamber. Once he had entered, to see Carmelita kneeling by the foot of the bed, her face hidden in her hands. The hard, cold man had retreated, with bowed head, and something like a sob upon his lips.

But at last, after weary, weary weeks of waiting and of watching, the tide had turned, and with the beginning of October all danger for both had passed.

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*“It Is All Mine!”*

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The nurses finally departed, and although Dr. Bur-  
slem remained, it was as a guest rather than in his  
capacity as a physician.

Dorus was still confined to her room. As a mat-  
ter of fact, both her aunt and her father feared  
the inevitable meeting with Ernesto, and put off the  
dreaded moment as long as possible. He was im-  
proving day by day, and was able to be about the  
spacious mansion long before Dorus left her cham-  
ber. He, too, dreaded the meeting with Dorus, and  
hoped that he would be able to go away before she  
was downstairs. While the charm of her beauty and  
her adorable, lovable ways had forced admiration  
from him, he tried to persuade himself that it was  
never love that he had given her. He knew that  
it could not have been real love that she had given  
him. He realized that from the moment he saw  
the love-light die out of her eyes and the horror and  
the terror come into them as she looked at the brand  
upon his forehead—the almost fatal Letter H.

From that moment on it had all been as a dream.  
He remembered the glittering trinket that she had  
shown him—he remembered the flash of it in the  
streak of moonlight that fell upon them through the  
intertwined branches above their heads. And he

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## *The Letter H*

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remembered, too, the transfiguration of the girl's face as she touched his hair—the awful change. He had felt a queer, cold sensation in his breast and shoulder, and that was all he could recall. Until he woke up, very faint and weak, in the pretty little room in the east wing, with his mother bending anxiously over him, his memory was a blank. Little by little, however, as he grew stronger, he managed to piece the whole story together. The one thing which had puzzled him was the reason for the very evident kindness of their host towards both his mother and himself. Every want, every wish of theirs had been gratified.

To his astonishment, on his first appearance downstairs, he found himself most courteously received by his host and the other guests. They made quite a little fuss over him—insisted upon his taking the biggest and most comfortable chair, in the warmest corner of the library. And they had not to try very hard to get him to talk of his journeys with his mother across the sea in far-away lands.

He had dreaded this first meeting with them, even though Lenore had promised to pilot him downstairs, and not to desert him in his first reintroduction to society. He had grown great friends with Lenore,

since one day early in his convalescence when he had opened his eyes to see her standing beside his bedside, with her arms full of autumn flowers and in her hand some delicate fruit to tempt his appetite. She laid the fruit upon the table and put the flowers in a vase. Then she had come close beside him, placed her hand caressingly upon his forehead and said cordially:

“We are all glad you are getting along so nicely.”

He had wondered what her motive might be, and had answered with a touch of bitterness:

“I couldn’t be so ungrateful as to make Dorus an unintentional murderer.”

Lenore shuddered, and Ernesto was sorry he had spoken. She came every day after that, and when Carmelita could leave him alone she insisted upon taking the little Mexican lady down to dinner with her.

Poor Carmelita! Those were hard days for her. She had determined, in the silence of the night-time, when Ernesto’s life hung by a thread, that she would take, at last, whatever Fate had in store for her, and that as long as she lived she would make no more demands. But the first dinner in the big dining-hall made the fury in her rise once more.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Oh, Ernesto,” she cried piteously, when she reached the privacy of his room again, “oh, Ernesto! The injustice of it all! The dreadful, dreadful injustice! It is my house, it is all mine—this lovely mansion, with its silver and its gold. They are my servants, for me to direct. They are my guests, these people, and I should be mistress here.”

“Carina mia!” said the low voice from the bed, “don’t think about it at all. Soon I shall be well, and we will go away together.”

“Oh, but, my dearest,” she cried, burying her face in the pillows beside him, “I don’t want to go away. I want to stay here, in this beautiful home. I want him to love me again in the old, old way. I want to be proud of my name and my position, as I was when Carmelita Lucello—the handsomest girl and the daughter of the richest man in Guadalajara.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### A TALE HALF TOLD

Lenore had seen a great deal of Carmelita and Ernesto—much more than Colonel Higby quite approved of, or, indeed, than even General Harlington entirely sanctioned. But whether it was the magic of the autumn upon them, or only the old, time-worn law of propinquity, a change was gradually coming over the household.

The beautiful, half-Spanish woman, with the lines of her face softened and refined by infinite pain, walked often among the balsam trees, and those at the house grew to watch her. How sad she seemed! Little by little, the General grew to see in her less of the adventuress and more and more of the brave womanliness that makes women fight for their affection and their children. Lenore walked with her frequently, and in the house they were often together. Day by day the intimacy grew. Day by day Lenore learned to see a little farther beneath the curtain of reserve that the Mexican kept so

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## *The Letter H*

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securely over her life. Gradually the depth of love for the boy lying up in the east wing unfolded itself to Miss Clifton. But not once did the name of Colonel Higby pass Carmelita's lips! Lenore was puzzled. Was Madame del Tonjours thinking better of her former passionate denunciation of the man, and now trying to shield him?

At any rate, Lenore had grown to have a most sincere regard for Carmelita. For the boy upstairs, her first feeling of mere endurance gave place rapidly to an affection that grew stronger constantly.

But the problem remained. Carmelita studiously avoided Higby; Higby assiduously avoided Carmelita. Dining at the same table, living under the same roof, it seemed almost impossible to keep it up; but from the time of Carmelita's first appearance in their midst no word had passed between them. Lenore often caught the Colonel watching Madame del Tonjours. With head bent, he would listen to the general conversation, his mind apparently intent upon what was being said, but Lenore knew that his thoughts were far away from the pleasant table-talk.

Lenore found him, again and again, at the library window, watching Carmelita as she started out for

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## *A Tale Half Told*

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her daily walk. It amused her to note the intensity of his gaze, and to note, too, that he watched restlessly for her return. He would often stand silently in the doorway, his eyes upon the graceful outline of her figure.

“Henry,” said the General one day, “I believe you are growing morose. Are we wearing out our welcome?”

“Heavens, no, Horace. I wish I might keep you all, forever.”

The unwonted solemnity of the Colonel’s tone struck the General. “I—I should hardly blame you for wanting to keep one member of the party,” he said tentatively.

There was a long pause, then the Colonel sighed and relighted his cigar. “Horace,” he began, “can you imagine a life in which there has been no love—no real, tangible love?”

The General was silent a moment. “Hardly,” he said at last.

“Then you won’t know how to pity me.”

Harlington turned to his friend with an exclamation of surprise. “Without love?” he questioned. “But you married——”

“Yes, I married. Ida Delmaine was a pure,

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## *The Letter H*

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lovely woman, as free from guile as an angel. We passed four years of content—just content—and then she died, and I missed her—that was all. As good, and true, and pure a woman as she was, Horace, I never loved her.”

“I—I don’t understand, Henry.”

“Of course not, Horace,” said the Colonel, half bitterly. “I hardly expected that you would. The truth is, Horace, I never loved but one woman in my life—and she was not Ida Delmaine. The woman I loved was beautiful, but she would not have pleased my father. If I had taken her home, she would have thrown our set into convulsions. I wish to Heaven that I had been true to her, and to myself—and let my father—and the money—and the set—all go to the devil,” he finished fiercely.

“And she—she has gone entirely out of your life?”

“She went out of my life,” corrected Higby.

Just then there came the swish of a woman’s gown in the hall, and Carmelita, humming the air of an old-time love song, passed the door of the library.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### A LOVE WON—AND LOST

“Are you blind, Horace?”

“Why, no, Lenore. What makes you ask such a question? Are my eyes—er—dull?”

“Not from this side,” cried Lenore laughing, and looking deep into the clear, cool blue of the General’s eyes. “Dear knows how they look from your side—if you can’t see our problems all working out of themselves.”

“But they are not Lenore. They are still as unsolvable as they were eight weeks ago.”

“Only eight weeks?” questioned Lenore seriously, dropping her half-playful tone.

“Why, yes. It was just eight weeks ago to-day that—it happened.”

“Yes, Horace—the climax. But what about the problem that has baffled us for eighteen years?”

“That question is unanswerable, Lenore.”

They were sitting in the gloaming, beside the wide hearth. The steady tramp, tramp, tramp of sturdy

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## *The Letter H*

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masculine feet sounded from the veranda, and the figures of Ernesto and Colonel Higby passed and re-passed the window. From the music-room came the notes of a piano.

“But is it unanswerable?” persisted Lenore. “Ever since that day, eighteen years ago, when I took the little motherless babe in my arms, I have felt that there was a mystery, a curse upon her, which must some day be explained, which must some day be—what shall I say?—exorcised. I think that time has come.”

Lenore arose in agitation. She was still a young woman, but she affected styles suitable for settled matrons. Her hair, though still unstreaked with gray, was drawn back loosely and fastened simply in a heavy, shining knot. She was gowned in black, and wore a little white linen collar and cuffs.

The General watched her, and the fear that perhaps she might leave them soon and go back to her home in New Orleans began to trouble him again. It had worried him a great deal lately, especially since the leaves had turned red-gold and the splendor of the autumn had come into the air.

“But can it be explained, Lenore? Hasn't Burslem done his best for us? Haven't we all gone

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## *A Love Won—and Lost*

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nearly crazy trying to explain it? Now that Dorus is well again, and seems at last to be in a normal condition, why need we think about causes any more, dear?"

The word was out. Lenore's face grew red as a peony, and the General coughed abstractedly. He had never called her "dear" before. They had been like brother and sister in the years that had come and gone since the first Dorus Harlington had left her motherless babe to the care of her twin sister. They had been brother and sister, but that was all. All, until the fear had crept into the General's heart that perhaps Lenore would decide to go back to New Orleans. He had not realized, until that little word of endearment had tripped so unconsciously over his lips, just how much he cared for her.

While he was still debating on the wisdom of following up the little word with ones that were longer and meant more, Dr. Burslem entered the library. He did not at first see the General in the big chair, and stood watching Lenore. She seemed very fair to Gerald Burslem.

"Miss—Clifton," he began, embarrassed, "I—I should like to have a little talk with you."

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## *The Letter H*

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“Perhaps I had better go,” said the General, suddenly coming up from the depths of the chair.

“I beg your pardon, General,” cried the Doctor, excitedly pulling his handkerchief out of his pocket, “I hope I have not intruded.”

“Not at all,” asserted the General, moving towards the door.

“I wish you would stay,” begged the Doctor. “It was—it is about our patients that I wished to see Miss Clifton.”

“Oh!” there was relief in Harlington’s tone.

“They are really both getting on famously,” Burslem continued, trying to remember what it was he had to say about the patients. “Er—Ernesto says that he wants to leave to-morrow, or at least as soon as possible. I have said that he was able to go, but I have not yet seen the master of the house—Colonel Higby. The boy wishes to go without seeing Dorus, and she is to come down in a day or two.”

“Yes, he must go. Dorus must not see him—though, the Lord knows, he’s a better man than we ever thought,” said the General.

Dr. Burslem turned, his eyes flashing beneath their heavy brows:

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## *A Love Won—and Lost*

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“Dorus must see Ernesto again if we wish to learn the truth about this hallucination of hers—and I’m going to have a good, plain talk with the boy’s mother, if I can find her and make her talk. It’s the strangest case I ever had, but I’m making every step sure. I know I’m on the right track.”

Burslem walked nervously back and forth.

The General, too, had arisen, and Lenore stood quite still by the old-fashioned fireplace.

“Well, Doctor,” said the General, after a pause, “what is your idea?”

Burslem came to a stand-still before them:

“General, to speak plainly, your wife’s mind gave way under the terrible strain of an unjust suspicion of you. She hated that child—Ernesto—and would have killed him, had it been in her power to do so. Then Dorus was born. Your wife died in a delirium, cursing the Mexican. Her faith in you was dead. And your little girl, General, has been the victim of those circumstances. She has borne upon her life the marks of that sad mania of her mother’s—she inherited her mother’s own emotions, her mother’s feelings.”

“But Dorus apparently loved the man who, when a child, my sister hated so bitterly.” Lenore’s voice was eager.

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## *The Letter H*

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“That is according to the law of opposites, which is very well established in mental cases,” the Doctor went on. “The parent’s delusion will often be exactly reversed in the child. What is strange is the sudden change in Dorus when she saw the mark—the brand which your poor wife, Horace, thought conclusive proof of your guilt.”

The General, with his head in his hands, was listening intently. “How do you explain that change, Doctor?” he asked at length.

“I can’t, and I’m honest enough not to invent an explanation. I only see the fact and acknowledge it. Delusions—inherited influences especially—are different from everything else under the sun. In measles or scarlet fever you know what to expect, but in cases like this we can never anticipate anything—we can only watch and wait.”

“Yet, Doctor,” interrupted Lenore, “in making a diagnosis, one’s intuition would help.”

Only women have reliable intuition,” said Burslem, smiling. “Now, if you were a physician, I suppose your intuition would help you to give the reason why Dorus tried to kill the man she loved.”

“I would hazard an explanation even now,” she cried eagerly. “I think Dorus has been under a

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## *A Love Won—and Lost*

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spell, a curse, whatever you may call it, from her birth, and that this led her towards the other child, and yet she knew not why.”

“ Allowed—but the explanation? ”

“ You remember that it was not until she looked upon The Letter H, as her mother did eighteen years ago, that the spell of revulsion came over her. You know that you have explained to us that Dorus’s love for Ernesto was but following the well-authenticated theory of such inherited ideas—the child taking exactly the opposite course to the parent. Where Dorus’s mother hated, the daughter loved, until she saw the fatal Letter H, then, with the same knife that her mother used to stab the pillow, thinking that it was the child, Dorus stabbed Ernesto—for the instant she was not Dorus the child, but Dorus the mother.”

Both the General and the physician stood thinking a moment after Lenore had finished speaking. Then Burslem began to walk up and down the room again.

“ Very ingenious,” he said. “ Perhaps you are right. I am a firm believer in psychological influences. Perhaps, who knows but such influences might extend over eighteen years, or a lifetime even.

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## *The Letter H*

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Thank you, Miss Clifton," he continued. Although I am such an old practitioner, I must confess that a case like this is so very irregular that it entirely baffles all science." With this he bowed to them both, as though considering the conference at an end, and left them alone again.

The silence remained unbroken. From a distant apartment came the tones of the piano and a low, sweet voice singing an old Mexican love song. In the gathering dusk, the General stepped close to the still, dark figure by the fireside. The flickering embers, with a sudden start, flared up, and Harlington saw the sweet face of Lenore bathed in the firelight.

"Lenore," he said, "our long vigil is almost over."

"Yes, Horace," she answered thoughtfully, "and I think, when Dorus is quite strong and well again, that I shall go back to Louisiana. You have no use for me—now."

"Lenore! Lenore!" The General's breath came quickly. "You will not leave us. You cannot, Lenore. How could Dorus do without you—how could I, Lenore?"

In a sudden, fierce wave, the love of her came

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## *A Love Won—and Lost*

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over him. In a single moment—a wild, sweet, delirious moment—he realized what for years had been growing up in his heart. Oh, the wiles of a good woman. Why had she waited until just then to say she was going home to Louisiana. With a strength tempered by tenderness, he took her hands and held them closely in his own.

“You can’t go now, Lenore,” he cried triumphantly. “I have locked you up in the temple of my heart—you can’t get away now, Lenore—for I love you. You won’t try to go now, will you, dear?” Again the little, little word of endearment.

Lenore looked up mischievously:

“I couldn’t put you to the trouble of unfastening all the locks, could I?”

Out on the veranda, Higby was getting acquainted with Ernesto. Little by little, in the days that had elapsed since the fateful moment in the pine grove, Higby had learned to know the youth. The older man had always been a judge of human nature—too often he had used his knowledge to the undoing of his victims and to his own advantage. He knew men like a book. But this boy, with his strong, resolute face and his inner soul full of music, presented

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## *The Letter H*

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something which was most attractive. The charm of his mother was there—perhaps that explained the interest. At any rate, in the company of Ernesto Higby had found a solace for the absence of Herman.

For, this time, there was to be no forgiveness for Higby from his younger son. Herman might doubt the protestations of others, but the evidences of his own senses were irrefutable. While the thought that at Belle Aire Dorus lay hovering between life and death, and that he was powerless to help her, was maddening, still he made no effort to stay beneath his father's roof. He took rooms in the Montignac, and day by day waited with anxious forebodings for the report of the physician. As the days passed and there came no word of improvement from the sick chambers, a change came over him. Herman was not religious, but one night he found himself upon his knees praying that Dorus might be spared—and Ernesto, too, for her sake.

It was then that Herman renounced Dorus. In that supreme moment of denial of his dearest hopes and plans, Herman crowned himself. For even while his heart was aching he decided, with true nobleness, that he would never rest until Ernesto

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## *A Love Won—and Lost*

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had been installed, if not beside him as Higby's son, then—in his place. It is probable that if Dorus's illness had not carried her so near to death's door, Herman's wrath would have remained unquenched against the musician who had called forth the girl's love. But now Herman had no wish but that her heart's desire should be given to her. If Ernesto del Tonjours—if Ernesto Higby could make her happy, then it should be his, and not Herman's task.

And this love-task he undertook with a heart that was almost breaking. He wondered what he was to do. All his life, Dorus had been a part of his plans. Even as a young boy in the years before the wonderful love of her had dawned upon him, he had looked upon her as a necessary part of his life's equipment. That it had been part of a bargain made by his father and her's mattered not to him one iota. It was only the pulsing, throbbing, trembling love that had blossomed in all its beauty since he had come to know her after her home-coming that mattered now. And how much it all meant to him! It had seemed so easy to win her love—at first. He had not thought that there would be another. Somehow, he had not ever considered anyone else in his plans. If it had been anyone but Ernesto! Yet

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## *The Letter H*

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it was Ernesto, and he could not alter the picture that had been painted by the hand of Fate. He loved her, but her heart was Ernesto's, not his. There was no other way. His soul seemed shut up with the pain of it, yet, with brave eyes and a sympathy that included the whole wide world, he turned to a future in which there was no gray-eyed girl with dust-brown hair.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE LAST OF THE RED-GOLD LEAVES

Pale shades of evening splashed across the sky—red-gold and crimson-amber flooding the west like a sunset echo, and reflected its glory in the lake, which shone like a precious jewel in the clear transparency of the autumn air.

On the veranda of the Montignac, deserted now but for a little group of health-seekers, Herman Higby paced restlessly back and forth. He was unconscious of the splendor of the evening, unconscious of the lake, more beautiful in the chaste air of the fall than ever it was in the sultry summer, unconscious of the little group at the end of the porch, deep in the recital of their respective troubles.

Ever and anon his eyes would turn to the southward. Through the bare branches of the trees the highest gables of Belle Aire, hidden when the foliage was thick, could be plainly seen.

“Shall I go, or not?” he thought, studying the sky-line.

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## *The Letter H*

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He expected to leave the place on the morrow, and the question in his mind was whether or not to see Dorus before he went. He knew himself well enough to realize that if he should see her again his renunciation of her would be doubly hard to bear. He knew, too, that simple friendship with her was impossible. The break now must be final. To be near her, to see her, was to love her—for Herman.

Yet, to go from her into this voluntary exile seemed more than Herman could bear. He had hoped so much in those dear, dear days when they had been so gay and foolish. He remembered the day of the ball at home in the great Harlington mansion, and conjured up the memory of her as she had knelt before the wide fireplace, with the red roses in her arms. She had been so utterly adorable——

Then the early days at the lake, after her first illness. To be sure, there had been many a sharp bit of repartee between them in those days, and many a time Herman had been cut to the quick. But one does not remember those things of one's beloved. Time mercifully paints out the brambles and thorns with neutral tints—it leaves the roses, the violets and the lilies.

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## *The Last of the Red-Gold Leaves*

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Should he go, or should he not?

Remorselessly his memory went back over their childhood. He thought of Dorus as she had been when she wore that dusk-dark hair in braids, and when the sad eyes were laughter-loving, and the fair face, which now had an indefinable mystery upon it that made it Madonna-like, was browned by the sun. He caught his breath with the memory of the hand-clasp that had brought no thrill in those days.

Should he go back to the little girl with the two pigtailed and the brown face?

Once more a picture rose in his memory. He saw her as she stood so proudly by the Mexican, her face suffused with love, her soul in the gaze she fixed upon him.

Should he go?

The little girl with the pigtailed was only a fancy. Yet he knew that the hand-clasp, which in those days held no joy for him, would make him supremely happy—to-night.

Meantime, beyond the curving shore of the lake, comfortably ensconced in a broad bay-window, where the last rays of the westerning sun lingered cheerily, Dorus lay back in her steamer-chair. She, too, was dreaming, and her thoughts turned as often as her

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## *The Letter H*

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eyes towards the northward, where stood the Montignac.

Would Herman come?

She had been down two days now, and had been waiting for the step which as yet had not sounded. Her eyes rested upon the low hill that cut off the view of the Montignac. They had told her that Herman was over there—that he had left Belle Aire while all the doctors and nurses were in the house—that he had gone to make room for the latter, and Dorus had believed it. Now that all were gone, all but Dr. Burslem, she began to wonder why Herman did not come. She was still too weak for analytical reasoning. She only knew that she wanted to see Herman—to hear him talk, to have him look at her in the old, old way.

There was a step—a slow, steady step, coming nearer and nearer.

“Are you dreaming?”

It was Ernesto—the first time she had seen him since the nearly fatal evening among the pines.

“Ernesto!” she cried, her eyes brightening, her face lighting up. “Why, Ernesto, you mean thing, to keep so entirely out of my way when I couldn’t get up and run after you. Why have you done it?”

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## *The Last of the Red-Gold Leaves*

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Ernesto hesitated in embarrassment. "I didn't want to agitate you," he said at last, "and I was afraid——"

"But it hasn't," she interrupted eagerly. "You see I'm very much composed. And are you nearly well?"

"So well that I don't understand why the doctor won't let me go," he responded dejectedly.

Dorus raised her finger, threateningly. "Don't you dare question my Dr. Burslem," she cried, laughing.

"But I've wanted to go for a week back, and he keeps saying, 'Not yet, my boy,' as though I were a child."

"You wanted to go before you saw me?" she queried seriously. "Do you hate the sight of me so much that you could do that?"

"Oh, it was not that—not that. I was only afraid——" he stopped, embarrassed.

"I know, Ernesto," she began, with heightened color—"I know that I have done you a great—a very great wrong. I know now that you were right when you said that my love was all a dream. We have forgotten that dream now, have we not?"

He was sitting so that he could watch the outline of

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## *The Letter H*

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her face. As she spoke, she turned her eyes from the hilltop, where the red light of the sunset was slowly fading to purple, and looked straight into the face of the man beside her.

“Ernesto, Ernesto——” her voice broke, “it was a dream—a dear, mad dream, but it is all over now.”

She buried her face in her hands.

“When I think of the pain and the trouble I have caused you, Ernesto—I am willing—I will—put my own joy—whatever shall come to me hereafter—aside—in reparation.”

“Why should you make reparation?” The man’s voice was almost cold, in his endeavor to be calm. “Why should there be any reparation?”

“Oh, Ernesto, I told you I—I—cared for you. I made you listen to me. I made you tell me, I—oh, Ernesto, I cannot repeat it.”

“Dorus,” he said, slowly rising, and beginning to walk up and down before the big steamer-chair, “Dorus, I knew that you never loved me—really.”

“You knew?” she cried, lifting her head quickly. “You knew, even when you said you—cared?”

“Yes, Dorus. God forgive me! I knew that you were dreaming—the sweetest dreaming—a dream to show me what heaven could be like. Dorus—Dorus

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## *The Last of the Red-Gold Leaves*

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—you taught me to say it—to know what love was—yet in my heart of hearts I knew that it was only a trick—a dream from which we must both awaken.” The man’s eyes were blazing into hers. His jaw was set in resolute lines, and his arms were folded tightly across his breast.

The girl shrank back, her face tense and pleading.

“I knew you could not mean it, Dorus—that it was not you who taught me the lesson a man learns but once, but some wild, sweet thing that lives only in my dreams. God forgive me for telling you this, but after to-morrow I—I shall never see you again, Carina. God only knows where my life will lead me, but I shall never forget you.”

He paused and turned away. The twilight had already fallen thick and dark. When he looked back at the girl it was with an assumption of lightness. He touched her hands gently, and quoted an old Scotch ballad :

“Ye’ll gang the high way,  
An’ I’ll gang the low way,  
An’ I’ll be in Scotland afore ye;  
But me an’ my true love,  
We’ll never meet again,  
On the bonnie, bonnie banks of Loch—George.”

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## *The Letter H*

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“ Good-night, Dorus. It’s getting cold and chilly here now. Let me move you over beside the fire.”

She leaned upon his arm, and together they walked slowly into the great hall. There, in the light of the blazing hickory logs, he settled her into a chair.

“ I—I may not see you again, Dorus,” he said, hesitatingly. “ Aren’t you going to wish me god-speed? ”

She took his hand and pressed it between her own.

“ Ernesto,” her voice thrilled him; “ Ernesto, I wish you the best and the loveliest that God can give His children. Something tells me, Ernesto, that it is all coming out right—that the tangled web we have woven is being straightened out at last; and that after all our pain and sorrow the Great Weaver has unravelled the twists and the knots and is moving the shuttles to the music of love. The best, Ernesto, the best that God can give you! ”

Ernesto’s lips touched the tips of her fingers as they lay passive in his great hand. And with the fairy firelight playing over her pale, sweet face, he left her.

Dorus lay pensive and still in the cheery light of the hickory logs. He had really loved her, then. What was there for her to do? Wearily she brushed

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## *The Last of the Red-Gold Leaves*

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her hair back, and laid her cool palm upon her forehead.

“Dreaming, little girl?”

Dorus started—Ernesto’s question! Dr. Burslem was filling the doorway with his portly form.

“Oh, Doctor,” she cried, “I want your advice.” She pointed to some cushions piled upon a couch and laughingly bade him sit among them.

“Doctor,” she asked seriously, “what would you call a girl who made a man—care for her—and then found—that it was only—a dream?”

“A coquette,” he answered quickly.

“Am I one?” plaintively.

“Why, what have you been doing to warrant the name?”

“Why, I did that, Doctor. I made Ernesto care for me, and now I find I don’t care that way for him.”

The physician left his seat to come close to her side. He rested his hand caressingly upon her hair.

“Don’t worry about that, Dorus. That’s a dose every man has to take in this life; and he’s mighty lucky if it happens only once. It’s like cod liver oil—you’ve got to take it some time, and it helps make backbone, too. And on those southern natures, Dorus, it doesn’t always make a lifelong impression.

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## *The Letter H*

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“Ernesto? Dear me, child, if you could have seen how very anxious all the young girls over at the Montignac were to keep him from being lonesome, you wouldn’t worry about Ernesto. There was a mighty fine girl over there that my nephew Richard seemed to like pretty well. She’s a newspaper woman, and it began to look as though it would be a neck-and-neck race between Ernesto and Richie. By Jove! little girl, I don’t know which I’d rather have win out. I’m fond of my sister’s boy, of course, but I’m fond of our Ernesto, too. He is a fine, strong, reliable fellow, I’ve found out. He is a born musician, and some day will wield a baton over his own band or orchestra.”

The doctor looked down at her thoughtfully. How pretty she was in the firelight. As pretty as Lenore had been in the old, old days, he reflected. Something like bitterness crept into his voice as he thought of the aunt and the lost opportunities in the years gone by.

“Well, well, lassie, it doesn’t come to all of us, this love they talk about. And if it doesn’t come, we can make fame and reputation take its place—if we are men. Women don’t usually think about fame until after their chances for happiness and love are over.”

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## *The Last of the Red-Gold Leaves*

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Outside in the silver light, with an arch of stars hanging so near they seemed like baubles which one might catch and toss with scarce a thought, Lenore and General Harlington were talking softly.

“ Shall it be Genoa, Lenore,” he was asking, “ or shall it be Venice? Whichever you choose, dear.”

It was astonishing how easily the little word tripped over his lips.

“ Could Dorus travel so far, do you think?”

“ Ah, Lenore, perhaps by April Dorus will be choosing her own wedding journey.”

“ Horace, Herman has not been over yet. I wonder if Dorus misses him?”

“ Did you see her watching the hills between us and the Montignac to-day, dear? When one loves, one’s eyes are clear for the signs of love in others. To-morrow Herman will come.”

For the last of the red-gold leaves had fallen from the bare, brown boughs, and the magic had wrought its spell.

## CHAPTER XXX

### LOVE'S LAURELS

“ After many years, Carina ! ”

In the pale moonlight, Henry Higby held out his arms to the little woman at the foot of the low steps. From sunset to dusk, from dusk to darkness, from darkness to silver starlight; and until the glory of the stars had faded into cold moonlight, he had waited. He heard the doctor's heavy step as he went early to his room. He had heard Dorus and her maid mount the stairs. He had seen Harlington and Lenore go into the library, and as he passed and re-passed the window he saw their shadows reflected on the shade.

Yet she for whom he had waited had not come. She had gone out directly after tea; and from his accustomed place in the window he had watched her as she went swiftly down the path.

So he had waited. His cigar glowed dull-red in the darkness. He did not realize the passing of the time; his thoughts were busy with the years that had gone, and the years that were to come. The past

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## *Love's Laurels*

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was empty—empty, except for the months at Guadaluaxara, those months in the dreamy South, under the sunshine and the palm trees, with the beautiful girl who was half-intoxicated with love. And the future was empty, too, except for the girl who was the embodiment of the Southland. The cigar had burned to a finish, and he had tossed it carelessly away. He lighted another, and it, too, had burned away. Still his thoughts were busy with the years that were passed and those to come.

Then, into the silvery flood of the moonshine, she had come—the woman who had been the soul of the dreamy-eyed South, who had been, in the days of the long ago, the girl intoxicated with love.

“After many years, dearest.”

The man's voice was thrilled with the passion of it. The woman shrank back, and drew her fluffy shawl more closely about her gown of sombre black. Thus she stood, absolutely motionless, a superb statuesque figure, while the moonlight painted her in a radiance of silver sheen.

The fire in the man's eyes compelled her—his arms, open, waited for her.

“Dearest—won't you?”

His voice was pleading. He seemed no longer

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## *The Letter H*

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Colonel Henry Higby, member of Congress for the Twentieth District, cold, calculating, emotionless, passionless. The habitual skepticism of his voice and manner dropped as a robe from his shoulders.

His arms waited—his eyes burned into hers.

“Dearest—come.”

And then, slowly, hesitatingly, step by step, she came near, near, until his arms folded about her; near—until his lips touched her forehead, tenderly, reverently.

“—— And he arose and came unto his wife. But while he was yet a great way off, his wife saw him and had compassion on him, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him——And he said, Wife, I have sinned against Heaven and against thee and am no more worthy to be called thy husband. But the wife—oh, Carina, Carina—for this his wife was dead and is alive again, was lost and is found.”

Once more his lips touched her forehead, and the silver moonlight wrapped them close. Long shadows fell athwart the pathway—two shadows so close they seemed as one. Then she spoke, so softly that had his face not been so near he would have missed the words:

“It is I, dear, who have strayed away. It is I

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## *Love's Laurels*

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who grew to hate you, because you forgot me. It is I who am the prodigal. Have I not eaten of the husks—that the swine did eat? Have I not longed to arise and go unto my husband? Oh, Carina, Carina! Those long, long years—I brought myself to hate you; I have taught my boy to hate you. Together, my boy and I, we plotted for your undoing. Dear, will you forgive?”

Very humbly, the man returned:

“Nay, Carmelita, it is I who need forgiveness. Oh, God! it was my pride, my fear, my—oh, Carmelita, I cant’ ask you to forgive me. It is a sin too great. But can’t we begin all over again, sweetheart? Cant’ we pick up the thread of our lives where we dropped it? Dearest, there is no time for those who love—no time—for the years are not. I have not lived, dear, since those old, old days under the sunshine and the palm trees. Let us go back to God’s country, dearest—back to God’s own country.”

“Beloved, where you are—you and my boy—that is God’s country.”

The dawn broke brightly on the day that was to be Herman’s last at Montignac. The sun crept up

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## *The Letter H*

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the eastern wall of blue and peeped coyly over into the Lake George valley. The last of the red-gold leaves had fallen long ago; but it was a fair valley and a fragrant one that the sun looked down upon that sweet October day; for the balsam and the evergreens stood as fresh and beautiful as in the scarce more lovely summer-time.

Herman was up early enough that morning. All night long the battle had raged—all night long had the unanswered question arisen, "Shall I go?"

The rising sun had found him wide-eyed and weary, still pondering the question. His vis-a-vis at breakfast was a friendly young fellow, who was rather fond of harmless gossip. But Herman did not prove very expansive at first.

"Do you remember that little newspaper girl who was up here five or six weeks ago, Higby?" asked his neighbor.

"Miss MacDonald?" questioned Herman, with an air of indifference. "I remember who she was. I never knew her, but the chap with the gray hair who went about with her so much was the nephew of our family physician. What is the matter with her?" Herman sipped his coffee leisurely.

"Oh, nothing," returned the man, "only she was

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## *Love's Laurels*

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a deucedly nice girl. Had the soundest sense and the best head of any girl I ever knew."

"Limited acquaintance?" suggested Herman, wickedly.

"Limited nothing," the man answered, flushing. "I've known enough girls to load a big steamer, but Edith MacDonald was the nicest of the lot. She said something once that impressed me. If it wasn't for that editor I'd hunt her up and try to get her myself."

"What was it?" asked Herman listlessly.

"Why, she was talking about a fellow who was hanging around, trying to tell a girl he cared for her, and he was afraid to; and she said: 'Girls are usually more anxious to hear that sort of thing than men are to tell it.'"

How much longer the man talked on Herman did not know. "Girls are usually more anxious to hear that sort of thing than men are to tell it." It went through his head again and again.

Should he go or stay?

"By Jove, I'll go."

He sprang from the table and made for his room. With the utmost care he looked himself over. Then, satisfied, he lifted his hand and made a military salute to his reflection in the mirror. "Here's hoping

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## *The Letter H*

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that Dorus will be the least bit sorry I'm going away," he said.

It was a longer tramp around by the road to Belle Aire than by the way that led over the water. Herman had plenty of time to think it all over once more. Yet when at last the great house was close at hand and the gravel of the walk was crunching under his feet, his courage almost deserted him. He could not face his father—he was ashamed to, even before Dorus. There were no signs of life about the place, but he sauntered up the steps and pushed open the heavy oaken door.

Standing by the wide fireplace in the hall, he saw Ernesto, and the Mexican seemed stronger and better than ever before. They faced each other silently for a moment, then Herman went forward, impetuously, his hand outstretched:

“Brother!”

Just one word, but the hand-clasp was long and fervent, and each knew that it meant the honor of Ernesto.

It was in the library that Herman found Dorus at last. From the doorway he spoke her name softly:

“Dorus.”

The girl started.

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## *Love's Laurels*

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“Herman! You here?”

“I am going back to college to-day, Dorus, and I’ve come to say good-bye.”

“Going away?” she repeated, half sadly. “Is everybody going away? I have been ill a long time, Herman—won’t you say you’re glad I’m better before you go?”

“You know that, Dorus. It seems an age since I saw you.”

“An age?” she asked, affecting her old gayety. “Why, it is not even two months. And then——”

“Only two months, it is true, Dorus,” returned Herman, coldly, although it was in this mood, when she was half gay, half sad, that he loved her best. “But so much has happened since then.”

“Yes—how much has happened?” said Dorus, and added, with womanly solicitude, “Have you seen your father, Herman?”

“Not since—since that day, when I learned the truth—that he had been false to all the moral precepts that he had taught me made the true gentleman. My brother——”

“Your brother?” interrupted Dorus.

“In the sight of heaven, if not of man,” said Herman, solemnly. “Cheated of his rightful name, of

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## *The Letter H*

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his rightful fortune, of the advantages of wealth as rightfully his as mine—I cannot stand longer in his way, Dorus. If he wins you——”

“Herman! Stop, this minute!” Dorus stamped her foot impatiently. “Why do you talk so? Why should Ernesto want to win me, Herman?”

Herman drew a deep breath. “He might love you,” he suggested, almost haughtily.

“Love me? Ah, Herman—and if he did? Would not my feelings on the subject count?”

“You have shown us, I rather think, just where your heart is.”

Dorus rose and came towards him. The morning sunlight lay in a broad patch upon the floor; it kissed her hair, her cheeks, her whole slender frame.

“Herman,” she said seriously, “I can’t tell what it was that made me act that way. I only know that it was not I—that it was a long, long dream in which another Dorus Harlington made love to a man named Ernesto. It was not I, Herman.”

Her voice, more than her words, thrilled him.

“And you don’t love him?”

“I don’t love him that way, Herman,” she repeated softly.

Her eyes were shining now, and her mouth was

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## *Love's Laurels*

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curved with a smile. She was the little girl of the braids, with the brown face, and the berry-stained lips. Yet Herman still watched her coldly.

“Yet you are going to marry him,” he persisted.

“No, Herman,” and she smiled again. “What made you think that?”

“You said so.” Just his old, old confidence in every word she uttered.

“But I’m not,” she said quietly. “Colonel Higby is to marry Madam del Tonjours and Ernesto is to be his son. Why, Herman!” she cried, seeing his look of astonishment.

“Thank God!” the man breathed fervently. “Then it would be no disgrace for you to marry him.”

“Colonel Higby’s son?” she queried, mischievously.

“One of his sons—Ernesto,” he corrected.

“Silly! Didn’t I say I should never marry Ernesto?”

“Then whom do you mean?”

She came so near that she touched him gently, and the sunlight painted her with its glory once more:

“Herman, Herman, would you let a poor girl do it all? Won’t you help me the least little bit?”

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## *The Letter H*

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His eyes were drinking in her loveliness, his arms ached for her. But he had renounced her——

“Help you? How?” he asked, stupidly.

“Herman, I said I was going to marry Colonel Higby’s son—one of his sons—and that I was not going to marry Ernesto.”

A great light was dawning in his heart, and his eyes were blazing:

“Then you mean—oh, Dorus, Dorus—of course I’ll help you, sweetheart.”

The first snow lay white on the broad acres about Harlington Hall. The river, frozen half-way across, flashed and glistened in the sunshine. The big house was being redecorated and refurnished, and there was an unmistakable air of bustle and preparation about it. The two little curly-headed coons tugged a diminutive sled after them as they ambled up the hill at the back of the house.

“R-Rastus, does yo’ knowed dat de Gen’ral’s c-c-comin’ back h-h-home dis yere very day, an’ dat M-M-iss Dorus is gwine hab a big w-weddin’ here nex’ month, an’ dat’s what all dis yere f-f-fus’ is about?”

“Will it be lak de l-l-las’ f-fes’val, Jimmy?”

“Nop. Dat b-b-ball we’s had ain’ gwine hol’ a

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## *Love's Laurels*

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c-c-candle to dis yere feast. When M-M-Miss Dorus and young Marse H-Higby is tied up in de h-h-holy bonds ob m-m-matrimony, an' de Gen'ral gibs us a new missus, de strings what tie de money bags sure be untied, an' we uns is all g-g-gwine feas' lak de c-c-children ob Israel."

The two little figures settled themselves on the diminutive sled and went whizzing down the incline, as happy as two little Louisiana negro lads could well be in a northern winter.

At the same moment, down on Newspaper Row, Edith MacDonald presented herself at the door of the holy of holies in the office of the "Metropolitan."

"Oh, Dick," she cried, as she opened the door without the formality of knocking, "I've just had a letter from that interesting Mexican, Ernesto del Tonjours. He signs himself Ernest Higby, and says that Dorus is quite well now, and that she and Herman are to be married on Christmas day. Isn't that a fine ending to our story? And, oh, Dick, he, of course I mean Ernesto, is going to Leipsic to finish his musical education. Some day he will come back to America."

"What as?" interrogated Travis.

"A great violinist, or as a conductor of grand opera. I know he will, it's in him."

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## *The Letter H*

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Edith's eyes were laughing, her cheeks rosy with health and happiness. Richard Travis put his arm about her and kissed her:

“And it is only two months until we——”

“Only two months—I wonder who'll write our story?”

THE END.

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