THOMAS ALDRICH

DAISY'S NECKLACE, AND WHAT CAME OF IT

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Aldrich T.

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Thomas Bailey Aldrich
Daisy's Necklace, and What Came of It

TO THE UNFORTUNATE READER

In this little Extravaganza, I have done just what I intended.

I have attempted to describe, in an auto-biographical sort of way, a well-meaning, but somewhat vain young gentleman, who, having flirted desperately with the Magazines, takes it into his silly head to write a novel, all the chapters of which are laid before the reader, with some running criticism by T. James Barescythe, Esquire, the book-noticer of "The Morning Glory," ("a journal devoted to the Fine Arts and the Amelioration of all Mankind,") and the type of a certain class which need not be distinctly specified for recognition. I have endeavored to make the novel of my literary hero such a one as a young man with fine taste and crude talent might produce; and I think I have succeeded. It is certainly sufficiently unfinished.

In drawing the character of Barescythe, the point of my quill may have pierced a friend; and if you ask, like Ludovico,

> "What shall be said of thee?"

I shall answer, like Othello,

> "Why, anything:
> An honorable murderer, if you will;
> For nought I did in hate, but all in honor."

The only audacious thing I have done is the writing of this preface. If there is anything more stupid than a "preface," it is a book-critic. If anything *could* be more stupid than a book-critic, it would be a preface. But, thank heaven, there is not. In saying this, I refer to a particular critic; for I would not, for the sake of a tenth edition, malign in such a wholesale manner those capital good fellows of the press – those *verbal accoucheurs* who are so pleasantly officious at the birth of each new genius. Not I. I have and a love for them, which would seem like a bid for their good nature, if expressed here.

> "A fellow-feeling"

I have put my name on the title-page of this trifle from principle. My pen-children are all mine, and I cannot think of disowning one, though it may happen to be born hump-backed. But I beg of you, gentlest of unfortunate readers, not to take Daisy's Necklace as a serious exponent of my skill at story-telling. It is *not* printed at the "urgent request of numerous friends" – I am so fortunate as not to have many – but a seductive little argument in the shape of a *cheque* is the sole cause of its present form; otherwise, I should be content to let it die an easy death in the columns of the journal which first had the temerity to publish it. If the world could always know, as it may in this case, why a book is printed, it would look with kindlier eyes on dullness bound in muslin. It would say, with honest Sancho Panza: "Let us not look the gift-horse in the mouth."

When the sunshine of this dear old world has reddened the wine in my heart – melted down its sparkles to a creamy flavor, I will give you a richer draught – mayhap a beaker of Hippocrene.

Till then, may God's blessing be on us both, though neither of us deserve it.

Clinton Place, 1856.

PROLOGUE

It hath beene sayed, and it seemeth soe untoe me, that ye man who writes a booke maist have much vanitie and vexation of spirite.
Ye Two Poore Authors.

PROLOGUE

"Mrs. Muggins!"

"Yes, sir."

"Say that I am sick. Say I am dead – buried – out of town. In short, say anything you will; but deny my existence to every one who calls, with the exception of Mr. Barescythe."

"Yes, sir."

"I am going to write a novel, Mrs. Muggins!"

That lady did not exhibit much emotion.

"Yes, sir."

And Mrs. Muggins ambled out of the room-door, to which she had been summoned by some peremptory appeals of my bell. I was somewhat shocked at the cool manner with which Mrs. Muggins received the literary intelligence; but she, poor, simple soul, did not know that my greatness was a-ripening.

"Some of these days," said I to myself, turning toward the window, "some of these days, mayhap a hundred years hence, as the stranger passes through Washington Parade Ground, this house – wrinkled and old then – will be pointed out to his wonder-loving eyes as the one in which my novel was written; and the curious stranger will cut his name on the walls of the room which I never occupied, and carry away a slice of the door-step!"

I immediately fell in love with this fascinating thought, and followed it up.

The slender trees which now inhabit the Parade Ground had grown immensely – the trunks of some were three feet in diameter, and around them all was a massive iron railing. The brick and brownstone houses on Waverly Place and Fourth-street had long been removed, and huge edifices with cast-iron fronts supplanted them. I looked in vain for the little drug-store on the corner with its red and green bottles, and the fruit-man's below with its show of yellow bananas and sour oranges. The University, dimly seen through the interlacing branches, was a classic ruin.

Everything was changed and new.

All the old land-marks were gone, save the Parade Ground, and one quaint old house facing Mac Dougal-street: the which house was propped up with beams, for, long and long ago, before "the memory of the oldest inhabitant" even, an author, a sweet quiet man, once wrote a famous book there, and the world of 1956 would preserve the very floors he trod on!

And so I sat there by my window in the autumnal sunshine, and watched the golden clouds as the wind blew them against the square white turrets of the University, which peered above the trees.

Ah, Mrs. Muggins, thought I, though you only said "yes, sir," when I spoke of my novel – though your name is carved in solid brass on the hall-door, yet you will be forgotten like a rain that fell a thousand years ago, when *my* name, only stamped with printer's ink, on ephemeral slips of paper, is a household word.

So I came to pity Mrs. Muggins, and harbored no ill feelings toward the simple creature who was so speedily to be gathered under the dusty wings of oblivion. I wondered how she could be cheerful. I wondered if she ever thought of being "dead and forgotten," and if it troubled her.

Lost in the aromatic fumes of a regalia, I sat waiting the advent of my friend Barescythe – Barry for short – to whom I had addressed a laconic note, begging him to visit me at my rooms without delay.

I like Barescythe.

He is conceited, but that's a small fault with genius. His idea of literature does not exactly chime with mine, for he believes that there have been no novels, to speak of, since Scott's, and little poetry since Pope's. But, aside from this, he is a noble fellow; he carries his heart, like a falcon, on his hand, where everybody can see it. Barry is fond of wine – but that's a failing *not* peculiar to genius, and *not* confined to book-critics. He is a trifle rough in speech, not always the thing in manners; but "the elements so mix in him" – that I have a great mind to finish that excellent quotation.

I heard his familiar step on the stairs, and a second afterwards he kicked open my room-door with his characteristic disregard of ceremony.

"Ralph," said he, with some anxiety, "what's up?"

"Sit down!"

"Are you sick?"

"No."

"Are you going to be?"

"No."

"Then why, in the name of the many-headed Hydra, did you send me such an article as this? Read it."

The note ran as follows:

"Mac Dougal-street,
"June 30, 18 – .

"Dear Barry, —

"Come and see me without delay. I have got a —

"Eternally,
"Ralph."

"O, yes!" said I, laughing; "I left out a word. I meant to have said, 'I have got an idea.'"

"Humph! I thought it was a colic."

Mr. Barescythe had left a host of editorial duties in the middle and busiest time of the day, expecting to find me lying at the point of death, and was quite out of humor because I was not.

There is something extremely human in Barescythe.

"Criticus," I spoke as deliberately as the subject would allow, "I am going to write a novel."

This unfortunate avowal was the rose-leaf which caused the cup of his indignation to overflow.

"If it had been a case of cholera," commenced Barescythe, with visible emotion, "or the measles, or the croup, or the chicken-pox – if you had broken your thigh, spine, or neck, I wouldn't have complained. But a *novel*– "

And Barry began whistling wildly,

as he invariably does when annoyed. After using up a variety of popular airs, the shadow of his good-humor returned to him.

"Ralph," he said, taking my hand, "I have a great respect for you. I don't know why, to be frank, but I have. I like your little song of – what do you call it? – in Putnam's Monthly, and your prose sketches in the Knickerbocker; but don't be a fool, Ralph!"

With which piece of friendly advice, he put on his brown felt hat, drew it over his brows, and stalked out of the room, with

"A countenance more
In sorrow than in anger,"

like Mr. Hamlet's father.

I saw no more of Barescythe for two weeks.

The summer months flew away.

The nights were growing longer. The air had a vein of sparkling cold in it; at every gust the trees in the Parade Ground shook down golden ingots; and the grass-plots, and the graveled walks, and the marble bowl of the fountain, were paved with emerald and amethyst – a mosaic flooring of tinted leaves. The clouds were haggard faces, and the wind wailed like a broken heart. Indeed,

"The melancholy days had come,
The saddest of the year,"

and Mrs. Muggins had made a fire in my grate!

Blessings on him who invented fire-places! A poor day-dreamer's benediction go with him! The world in the grate! I have watched its fantastic palaces and crimson inhabitants – dipped my pen, as it were, into its stained rivers, and written their grotesqueness! Dizzy bridges, feudal castles, great yawning caves, and red-hot gnomes, are to be found in the grate; mimic volcanos, and ships that sail into sparry grottos, and delicate fire-shells with pink and blue lips!

Crash!

The coals sink down, and new figures are born, like the transient pictures in a kaleidescope. So it came to pass that I dozed over the metempsychosis of my fire-world, and commenced the novel.

Give me crisp winter days for writing, and the long snowy nights for dreamy slumber.

O antique humorist, quaint-mouthed Sancho Panza! with you, I say, "Blessings on the man who invented sleep!" Sleep, pleasant sleep! – that little airy nothing on the eyelids! – that little spell of thought which comes from no place and goes nowhere! – which comes upon us silently and splendidly, like a falling star, and trails its golden fancies on our waking hours. Sleep for the young – fresh, dewy sleep! Sleep for the sick! Sleep for the weary and disconsolate – sweet dreams and sweet forgetfulness for *them*! Smooth the white hairs of the old; place thy invisible fingers on their lips; close their eyes gently, gently. Sleep, and let them pass into nothingness!

In a dreamy mood, half awake and half asleep, I filled sheet after sheet with my curious back-handed chirography. The white feathery snow came down cygnet-soft, and I wrote. I heard the wind ditties in the chimney, the merry wrangling of sleigh-bells, the sonorous clash of fire-bells, and the manuscript grew under my pen, as if by magic. I came to love the nurslings of my fancy as no one else will. I liked the cold, cynical features of Mr. Flint, with his undertaker's aspect; the child-spirit, Bell; Daisy Snarle's eyes; the heart-broken old sailor; the pale book-keeper; Tim, the office boy; Mr. Hardwill, the great publisher; Joe Wilkes, and all of them!

Mrs. Muggins occasionally looked in on me.

Mrs. Muggins' regard for me was increasing. She never left the coal-scuttle on the stairs for my benefit, as she used to; she was eternally hearing my bell ring when it didn't, and answering it so promptly when it did, that I began to think that she lived night and day just outside my door.

Pleasant Mrs. Muggins!

I tried not to feel elated at these little widowy attentions; but *los hombres son mortales*.

She handed me my coffee with a motherly tenderness that was perfectly touching. She looked at me with the eyes of Solicitude, and spoke with the lips of culminating Respect; and once, in a burst of confidence, she told me that she had six orphan sons, who were "sealurs."

My respect increased for Mrs. Muggins. My novel might run through only one edition, but she, – she had six editions of herself afloat! And I thought that, after all, a woman like her who had produced a half a dozen Neptunes, founded perhaps a half a dozen races, was rendering more service to this apple-like globe, than one poor devil of an author prolifically pregnant with indifferent books.

I spoke to Barescythe about it, and it was pleasant to have him coincide with me once.

It is an agreeable fact, that

"The world goes up and the world goes down,
And the sunshine follows the rain."

The new year was four months old. The flowers were teething: the tiny robins were able to go alone, and above the breezy hum of many thousand voices, above the monotonous and ocean-like jar of omnibus wheels, I could hear the babbling of hyaline rills in pleasant woodland places! I could not see the silver threads of water winding in and out among the cool young grass; I could not guess where they were; but through the city smoke, over the dingy chimney-tops, they spake to me with kindly voices!

I knew that daisies were fulling in sunny meadows, and that the dandelion trailed its gold by the dusty road-sides: for

"The delicate-footed Spring was come."

I knew it by the geranium at my window. It had put forth two sickly leaves. Two sickly leaves for me, and the world alive with vernal things! Spring, thou Queen of the Twelve! Dainty, dewy Spring —

"Give me a golden pen, and let me lean
On heaped-up flowers,"

when I write of thee! Thy breath is the amber sunshine, and thy foot-prints are violets! Hide Winter in thy mantle: crown his cold brow with mignionette: hang morning-glories on his icicles: keep him from me forever!

"For winter maketh the light heart sad,
And thou – thou makest the sad heart gay!"

"Barry," said I, "the sunshine has taken me by the hand, to lead me into a sweet New-England village. There is my manuscript. Read it, if you can, condemn it, if you will, and tell me what you think of it when I return."

That awful critic put Daisy's Necklace under his arm, and walked away – a victim to friendship, a literary Damon of the Nineteenth Century.

I

As children gathering pebbles on the shore.

Milton.

No daintie flower or herbe that growes on grownd,
No arborett with painted blossomes drest
And smelling sweete, but there it might be found
To bud out faire, and throwe her sweete smels al around.

Edmund Spencer.

I.
THE LITTLE CASTLE-BUILDERS

The House by the Sea – the Round Window – God's Eyes in Flowers – the Day-Dreamers – A Picture – An Angel – Old Nanny – On the Sea-Shore – Shell-Hunting – Bell's Freak and Mortimer's Dream – Asleep.

Imagine, if you will, one of the quaintest old country mansions that was ever built – a big-chimneyed, antique-gabled, time-browned old pile, and you have a picture of the Ivyton House as it was in summers gone by.

The pillars of the porch were not to be seen for the fragrant vines which clambered over them; lip-tempting grapes purpled[1] on the southern gable of the house, and the full, bright cherries clustered thicker than stars among the leaves. The walks of the garden were white with pebbles brought from the sea-shore; the dewy clover-beds, on each side, lay red with luscious strawberries, as if some one had sprinkled drops of fire over them; and among the larches and the cherry trees there was a salt sea-smell pleasantly mingled with the breathing of wild roses.

A large, round window in one of the gables looked toward the ocean – a fine place for a summer view, or to watch, of a gusty afternoon, the billows as they swell and break in long waving battalions on the beach.

One evening near the end of summer, two children were sitting at this circular window. Ten Aprils had half ripened them. The boy had dark hair, and a touch of sunlight in his darker eyes. The girl was light and delicate – with a face of spiritual beauty, dream-like, heavenly, like the pictures of the Madonna which genius has hung on the chapel walls of the Old World.

"Bell," said the boy, "we never grow weary of looking at the sea."

"No; because while we are watching, we think that father may be coming home to us across its bosom; and we count the waves as if they were moments. We like to see them roll away, and feel that time grows shorter between father and us."

"Yes, that is so," he replied; "but then, we love night almost as much as the sea."

"That is because we have a Father in heaven as well as one at sea," and the girl shaded her angel face with a dainty little hand.

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[1] Mr. Barescythe, with his characteristic word-catching spirit, wishes to know if grapes and cherries are ripe at one and the same time in New-England.

"And we love the sunbeams and the flowers, Bell!"

"We do, indeed!" cried Bell, and the sunshine nestled among her curls. "We do, indeed! because God, like the good fairy in our story-book, comes in sunlight, or hides in flowers; and he reveals himself in ever so many ways, to all who love him."

"Hides in flowers," repeated the boy, musingly; "I never thought of that. Then, perhaps – only perhaps – the dew-drops which I showed you last night in the white japonica were God's eyes!"

"May be so," returned Bell, simply.

They were two strange children – nature, and, perhaps, circumstances had made them so. They were born and had always lived in the old house. Their mother was in heaven, and their father was one of those who go down to the sea in ships. With no one to teach them, save the old house-keeper Nanny, their minds had taken odd turns and conceits; they had grown up old people in a hundred ways.

The roar of the winds and the sea had been in their ears from infancy. In the summer months they wandered late on the sandy beaches, or slept with the silent sunshine under the cherry trees. They had grown up with nature, and nature beat in them like another heart. She had imbued them with her richer and tenderer moods.

Bell was the wildest and strangest of the two. She was one of those ærial little creatures who, somehow or other, get into this world sometimes – it must be by slipping through the fingers of the angels, for they seem strangely out of place, and I am sure that they are missed somewhere! They never stay long! They come to earth and sometimes ripen for heaven in a twelve month! The sweetest flowers are those that die in the spring-time: they touch the world with beauty, and are gone, before a ruder breath than that of God scatters their perfume. Bell was a *Gipsy angel*– one of those who wander, for awhile, outside the walls of heaven, in the shady pastures and by-ways of the world.

"Mortimer," said Bell, after a long silence, "how nice it is to sit here and watch the bits of sails coming and going – coming and going, never weary! I wonder how long we have sat at this window and watched the white specks? I wonder if it will always be so; if you and I will still be here, loving the sea and stars, when our heads are as white as Nanny's?"

"No!" cried the boy, impetuously. "I am going out into the broad, deep world, and write books full of wonderful thought, like the Arabian Nights!"

And he repeated it, the broad, deep world! Ah, child! what have such dreamers as you to do in the broad, deep world – the wonderful, restless sea, where men cast the net of thought and bring up pebbles?

"I would like that, Mort!" cried Bell, clapping her hands. "But then, what a grand place this would be to write them in! You can have your desk by the open window here; and when your eyes are tired, you can rest them on the sea. And I will be *so* quiet – as gentle as pussy, even, and do nothing but make pens for you all the time. Wouldn't that be fine?"

"Yes! and father should go no more away in ships. He might have a yacht to leap over the surge in, to sail around all those little islands and in the green bays; but never go off to sea. The books I am going to write will bring us money enough."

So the little castle-builders talked until the sun had melted into the waves, and twilight, like a pilgrim that had been resting by the roadside, rose up from the beach, and came slowly toward the old house.

Mortimer, who had been gazing dreamily at the beach – which grew fainter and fainter, till it seemed like a white thread running through the selvage of blue drapery – turned his eyes on Bell.

"Bell," said he, quietly, "as you sit there in the shadows, with your beautiful hair folded over your forehead, you look like an angel!"

"Do I?"

"I can put my hand on your neck, yet you seem far away from me."

"Come, rest your head in my lap, Mort," said the girl, tenderly, "and I will tell you of a real true angel who once came into this world."

The chestnut locks of the boy looked darker against her white dress, as Bell bent over him, and commenced, in a low, silvery voice, an old angel legend. She was in the midst of a strange description of Paradise, when a tremulous voice came up the stairway —

"Come to tea, children!"

Then the two looked at each other curiously. It was so odd to be called to tea, and they in Heaven! It was a long step from Paradise to the supper-table; but the dream was shattered. Bell laughed. Then they closed the window, and descended to the room below, where Nanny had prepared the evening meal of snowy bread and milk, and ripe purple whortleberries. It was very queer to see the three sitting at table – to see homely-looking, but kind-hearted Nanny, between the two children, like a twilight between two pleasant mornings.

When supper was over, and while Nanny was washing the tea-things, the children went down to the beach, shell hunting. The white moon stood directly over the sea, and the waves were full of silvery arrows, as if Diana had scattered them from her quiver. Mortimer's eyes drank in the sight, as they had a thousand times before, for Nature is ever new to her lovers. In the measured roll of the sea, he heard the diapason of a grand poem, and the far-off thunder, heard now and then, was the chorus of the gods.

But Heaven rapt the heart of little Bell! The waves fell on her finer ear like subtlest music; to her they were harps, and the fingers of angels were touching them, while the thunder was "God walking overhead!"

They wandered along the sands, picking up curious shells and cream-white pebbles, dashed with red or clouded with mazarine. Bell would hold them up to her ear, and listen to the "little whispers," as she called them; but the boy would skim them along the wave-tips, and shout when some great billow caught one, and hurled it back scornfully at his feet.

Bell saw a ridge of rocks which looked like the back of a whale, running out some distance into the sea, where the water was whiter and leaped higher than anywhere else; and soon her dainty feet picked a way over the jagged rocks. The boy was about to send a light shell skipping through the surf, when his glance caught Bell standing on the highest jut of the ledge, the wind lifting her long hair and the folds of her dress.

"Bell! Bell!"

"The stars are in the sea, brother," she replied, "and the winds are wild here."

"Bell! Bell!"

"I cannot come to you. I fear to walk over the rocks again! But it is beautiful here, and I am not afraid!"

"Ah, Bell!" he spoke sadly, "that's what I dreamt. I thought that there was a gulf between us, and when I called, 'Bell! Bell!' you answered, '*I cannot come to you, brother; but you can come to me!*' O, Bell – sister Bell! as you love me, come back. I tremble when you look so like an angel. Come to me, sister."

Mortimer ran out on the slender bridge of stone and led Bell back by the hand. After a little while they heard Nanny calling them to come home.

The children occupied a small chamber over the front door. A scented vine clomb all about the window, and taught the ruddy sun at morning to throw a subdued light into the room; and it broke the orange stream of sunset. At night the dreamers from their bed could see the stars hanging like fruit among its cloudy leaves.

When Bell and Mortimer came up from the sea-beach, the moonlight, breaking through this leafy lattice, made the chamber as that of Abon Ben Adhem – "like a lily in bloom." Nanny brought a lamp, and kissed them good-night.

"O, we don't want a lamp all this moon!" cried Bell.

The boy sat half undressed at the window. "Bell loves moonlight like a fairy," he said.

Bell's robe fell to her knees in snowy folds, and she stood like a *petite* Venus rising from the froth. Then brother and sister braided their voices in a simple prayer to Our Father in Heaven. They prayed for kind old Nanny, and for one on the wide sea.

"When will father come home?" asked Bell, for the hundredth time that day.

"It will not be long now. When the boughs of the cherry trees are an inch deep with ice, and the logs crackle in the fire-place – then he will come. Let us go to sleep, and dream of him."

And thus, hand in hand, the two went in to Dream-land —

The world of Sleep,
The beautiful old World!
The dreamy Palestine of pilgrim Thought!
The Lotus Garden, where the soul may lie
Lost in elysium, while the music moan
Of some unearthly river, faintly caught,
Seems like the whispering of Angels, blown
Upon æolian harp-strings! And we change
Into a seeming something that is not!

II

Ah, yes! with joy the April rain
Thrills nature's breast; but mine with pain
Sigheth: "He will not come again!"

Albert Laighton.

II.
THE DEAD HOPE

Time's Changes – Fall-down Castles – Little Bell Waiting – When will Father Come Home? – Little Bell Weary – What the Sea said – Never more.

Longfellow beautifully asks in Hyperion, "What is Time, but the shadow of the hour-hand on a dial-plate?"

The flowers of the earth and the hearts of men are dial-plates. The shadows coming and going on them are the hour-hands; when a flower fades, or a heart ceases to beat, it is only a weight run down. The whole universe is but one immense time-piece, throbbing with innumerable wheels, heavy with weights, and wearing itself away! Desire is a restless pendulum, one end linked to the heart, and the other pointing downward!

A year had added another link to that chain which stretches through eternity. A year! Battles lost and won: nations in mourning for their dead: ships gone down at sea; and new paths worn to graveyards!

O, for the castles that blow down in a year!

But time fell gently on the inmates of the Old House. The trees and vines were a little larger; and winter had somewhat browned the gables. Bell was paler and more beautiful, and Mortimer was still the same dreamer.

There was a question which haunted the Old House. It was heard in the garden, at "the round window," and on the stair.

"When will father come home?"

The months flew away, like carrier doves, with memories beneath their wings.

"When will father come home?"

And the question was asked again and again, till the little lips and heart of Bell grew weary. Then she folded her hands, and said:

"He will never come!"

Her blue eyes became more dreamy, and her slight form – so very slight – glided about the house. She would listen to the sea. Once she said, "Never more!" and the sea repeated it with a human voice. In the still night she asked, —

"When will father come home?"

"Never more," said the sea – and she heard it through the open window – "Never more!"

She waited, and the months went by.

Was the child Bell the only one in this world waiting?

Who has not some hope at sea? Who has not waited, and watched, and grown weary?

Who has not a question in his heart, to which a low spirit-voice replies:

"Never more!"

III

I saw our little Gertrude die:
She left off breathing, and no more
I smoothed the pillow beneath her head.
She was more beautiful than before,
Like violets faded were her eyes;
By this we knew that she was dead!
Through the open window looked the skies
Into the chamber where she lay,
And the wind was like the sound of wings,
As if Angels came to bear her away.

The Golden Legend.

III.
SOUL-LAND

Autumn and Winter – By the Fireside – Where little Bell is going – Nanny sings about Cloe – Bell reads a Poem – The flight of an Angel – The Funeral – The good Parson – The two Grave-stones.

It was autumn. The wind, with its chilly fingers, picked off the sere leaves, and made mounds of them in the garden walks. The boom of the sea was heavier, and the pale moon fell oftener on stormy waves than in the summer months. Change and decay had come over the face of Earth even as they come over the features of one dead. In woods and hollow places vines lay rotting, and venturesome buds that dared to bloom on the hem of winter; and the winds made wail over the graves of last year's flowers.

Then Winter came – Winter, with its beard of snow – Winter, with its frosty breath and icy fingers, turning everything to pearl. The wind whistled odd tunes down the chimney; the plum-tree brushed against the house, and the hail played a merry tattoo on the window-glass. How the logs blazed in the sitting room!

Bell did not leave her room *now*.

Her fairy foot-steps were never heard tripping, nor her voice vibrating through the entry in some sweet song. She scarcely ever looked out at the window – all was dreary there; besides, she fancied that the wind "looked at her." It was in her armchair by the antique fire-place that she was most comfortable. She never wearied of watching the pictured tiles; and one, representing the infant Christ in the manger, was her favorite. There she sat from sunny morn until shadowy twilight, with her delicate hands crossed on her lap, while Mortimer read to her. Sometimes she would fix her large, thoughtful eyes on the fantastic grouping of the embers at her feet, and then she did not hear him reading.

She was wandering in Soul-land.

Heaven's gates are open when the world's are shut. The gates of this world were closing on Bell, and her feet were hesitating at the threshold of Heaven, waiting only for the mystic word to enter!

Very beautiful Bell was. Her perfect soul could not hide itself in the pale, spiritual face. It was visible in her thought and in her eyes. There was a world of tender meaning in her smile. The Angel of Patience had folded her in its wings, and she was meek, holy. As Mortimer sat by her before the

evening lamps were lighted, and watched the curious pictures which the flickering drift-wood painted on the walls, he knew that she could not last till the violets came again. She spoke so gently of death, the bridge which spans the darkness between us and Heaven – so softened its dark, dreadful outlines, that it seemed as beautiful as a path of flowers to the boy and Nanny.

"Death," said Bell one day, "is a folding of the hands to sleep. How quiet is death! There is no more yearning, no more waiting in the grave. It comes to me pleasantly, the thought that I shall lie under the daisies, God's daisies! and the robins will sing over me in the trees. Everything is so holy in the church-yard – the moss on the walls, the willows, and the long grass that moves in the wind!"

Poor Nanny tried to hum one of her old ditties about Cloe and her lover; then suddenly she found something interesting at the window. But it would not do. The tears would come, and she knelt down by Bell's side, and Bell's little hand fell like a strip of white moonlight on Nanny's hair.

"We shall miss you, darling!" sobbed Mortimer.

"At first, won't you?" and Bell smiled, and who knows what sights she saw in the illumined fire-place? Were they pictures of Heaven, little Bell?

"What shall I read to you, pet?" asked Mortimer one morning. She had been prattling for an hour in her wise, child-like way, and was more than usually bright.

"You shall not read to me at all," replied Bell, chirpingly, "but sit at my feet, and *I* will read to you."

She took a slip of paper from her work-basket, and her voice ran along the sweetest lines that the sweetest poet ever wrote. They are from Alfred Tennyson's "May Queen."

"I did not hear the dog howl, mother, or the death-watch beat,
There came a sweeter token when the night and morning meet;

But sit beside my bed, mother, and put your hand in mine,
And Effie on the other side, and I will tell the sign.

All in the wild March morning I heard the angels call;
It was when the moon was setting, and the dark was over all;

The trees began to whisper, and the wind began to roll,
And in the wild March morning I heard them call my soul.

For lying broad awake I thought of you and Effie dear;
I saw you sitting in the house, and I no longer here;

With all my strength I prayed for both, and so I felt resigned,
And up the valley came a swell of music on the wind.

I thought that it was fancy, and I listened in my bed,
And then did something speak to me – I know not what was said;

For great delight and shuddering took hold of all my mind,
And up the valley came again the music on the wind.

But you were sleeping; and I said, 'It's not for them: its mine,'
And if it comes three times, I thought, I take it for a sign;

And once again it came, and close beside the window-bars,

Then seemed to go right up to Heaven, and die among the stars.

So now I think my time is near – I trust it is. I know
The blessed music went that way my soul will have to go;

And for myself, indeed, I care not if I go to-day,
But, Effie, you must comfort *her* when I am past away;

And say to Robin a kind word, and tell him not to fret —
There's many worthier than I would make him happy yet; —

If I had lived – I cannot tell – I might have been his wife;
But all these things have ceased to be, with my desire of life.

Oh look! the sun begins to rise, the heavens are in a glow;
He shines upon a hundred fields, and all of them I know;

And there I move no longer now, and there his light may shine —
Wild flowers in the valley for other hands than mine.

O sweet and strange it seems to me, that ere this day is done,
The voice that now is speaking may be beyond the sun —

To lie within the light of God, as I lie upon your breast —
And the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest!"

When Bell had finished reading, she took Mortimer's hand in her own.

"I shall not die until the violet comes – the beautiful violet, with its clouded bell!"

March melted into April – the month of tears! Then came blossoming May, and still Bell lingered, like a strain of music so sweet that the echoes will not let it die.

One morning in June, the sun with noiseless feet came creeping into the room – and Bell was dying. Mortimer was telling her of some sea-side walk, when the unseen angel came between them. Bell's voice went from her, her heart grew chilly, and she knew that it was death. The boy did not notice the change; but when her hand lay cold in his, he looked up with fear. He saw her beautiful eyes looking heavenward, and those smiles which wreathe the lips of the young after death – the sunset of smiles.

"Bell! Bell! Bell!"

But she did not hear him.

The viewless spirits of flowers came through the open window into the quiet room; and the winds, which made the curtains tremble, gently lifted the tresses of the sleeping angel. Then the chiming of village bells came and went in pulses of soft sound. How musical they were that morning! How the robins showered their silvery notes, like rain-drops among the leaves! There was holy life in everything – the lilac-scented atmosphere, the brooks, the grass, and the flowers that lay budding on the bosom of delicious June! And thus it was, in the exquisite spring-time, that the hand of death led little Bell into Soul-land.

One afternoon, the blinds were turned down: not a ray of light stole through them, only the spicy air. There was something solemn stalking in the entries, and all through the house. It seemed as if there was a corpse in every room.

The way the chairs were placed, the darkened parlor, the faded flowers on the mantel-piece, and the brooding silence said it – said that Bell was dead!

Yes! In the little parlor she lay, in her white shroud. Bell? No; it was *not* Bell. It was only the beautiful robe which her spirit in its flight had cast aside!

There was a moving of feet to and fro. Gradually, the room became full of forms. The village parson stood among them. His hair had the white touch of age, and his heart knew the chastening hand of God. "Exceeding peace" was written on his meek face. He lifted up his soul on the arms of prayer. He spoke of the dead, whose life had been as pure as a new snow. He spoke cheerfully and tenderly, and sometimes smiled, for his

> "Faith was large in Time,
> And that which shapes it to some perfect end."

He had drank at the fountain of God's word; his soul had been refreshed, and his were not the lips to preach the doctrine of an endless wail. He knew that there are many mansions in our Father's house; and he said that Bell was happier there than here. He glanced back upon her infant days, and ran along the various threads of her life, to the moment death disentangled them from the world. "This little one in her shroud," he said, "is an eloquent sermon. She passed through the dark valley without fear; and sits, like Mary, at the feet of our Saviour." Of this life, he said: "It is but an imperfect prelude to the next." Of death: "It is only a brief sleep: some sunny morning we shall wake up with the child Bell, and find ourselves in Heaven!"

The coffin was closed, and the train passed through the gravelled walk.

Then came that dull, heavy sound of earth falling on the coffin-lid, which makes one's heart throb. Did you ever hear it?

When Bell had been a year in Heaven, a plain head-stone was placed over Nanny. She lingered only a little while after her darling. She folded her arms and fell asleep one summer twilight, and never again opened her kind old eyes on this world. Age had weakened her frame, and the parting of soul and body was only the severing of a fragile cord.

Mortimer did not remain long in the old house; its light and pleasantness had passed away. The little stock of money which his father had left previous to his last voyage, was exhausted; he could earn nothing in the village. His early dream of the great city came over him again. He yearned for its ceaseless excitement, its grandeur – he never thought of its misery, its sin and pollution. Through the length of one July night he lay awake in bed, while his eyes were like kaleidoscopes, taking a thousand arabesque forms and fancies. Toward morning he fell asleep, having built some fall-down castles in the air. The next day he took a last, lingering look at the old rooms; a last ramble on the sea-shore; he sat an hour under the braided branches of the cherry trees, gave a parting look at the white caps of the sea, and turned his eyes to the city in the dim distance – the great city-ocean, with no one to point out to him its sunken reefs, its quicksands, and maelstroms.

Next to Bell's grave he placed a simple tablet to the memory of his father.

"This sod does not enfold him," said Mortimer to himself; "but it will be pleasant for me to think, when I am far away, that their names are near together."

So he left them in the quiet church-yard at Ivyton – left them sleeping among the thick musk-roses, in the warm sunshine; and the same berylline moss was creeping over the two mounds. One head-stone said "Little Bell," and the other:

SACRED

TO THE MEMORY

OF

OUR FATHER,

LOST AT SEA,

18 –

IV

The Almighty Dollar.
Washington Irving.

The age is dull and mean. Men creep,
Not walk; with blood too pale and tame
To pay the debt they owe to shame;
Buy cheap, sell dear; eat, drink, and sleep
Down-pillowed, deaf to moaning want;
Pay tithes for soul-insurance; keep
Six days to Mammon, one to Cant.

J. G. Whittier.

Every one is as God made him, and oftentimes
A great deal worse.

Miguel De Cervantes.

IV.
A FEW SPECIMENS OF HUMANITY

Down Town – Messrs. Flint & Snarle – Tim, the Office Boy, and the pale Book-Keeper – The Escritoire – The Purloined Package – Mr. Flint goes Home – Midnight – Miss Daisy Snarle – The Poor Author.

In one of those thousand and one vein-like streets which cross and recross the mercantile heart of Gotham, is situated a red brick edifice, which, like the beggar who solicits your charity in the Park, has seen better days.

In the time of our Knickerbocker sires, it was an aristocratic dwelling fronting on a fashionable street, and "Jeems," in green livery, opened the hall door. The street was a quiet, orderly street in those days – a certain air of conscious respectability hung about it. Sometimes a private cabriolet rolled augustly along; and of summer evenings the city beaux, with extraordinary shoe-buckles, might have been seen promenading the grass-fringed sidewalks. To-day it is a miasmatic, miserable, muddy thoroughfare. Your ears are startled by the "Extray 'rival of the 'Rabia," and the omnibuses dash through the little confined street with a perfect madness. Instead of the white-kidded, be-ruffled gallants of Eld, you meet a hurrying throng of pale, anxious faces, with tare, tret and speculation in their eyes.

It is a business street, for Mammon has banished Fashion to the golden precincts of Fifth Avenue. The green of Jeems' livery is, like himself, invisible. He has departed this life – gone, like Hiawatha, to the Land of the Hereafter – to the land of spirits, where we can conceive him to be in his element; but he has a "town residence" in an obscure graveyard, with his name and "recommendation" on a stone door-plate. His mundane superiors are reclining beneath the shadow of St. Paul's steeple, where they are regaled with some delectable music (if you would only think so) from the balcony of

the Museum opposite, and have the combined benefit of Barnum's scenic-artist and the Drummond light.

The massive door-plate, and highly polished, distorted knocker, no longer grace the oaken panels of number 85; but a republican sign over the family-looking doorway tells you that "the front room, second floor," is occupied by Messrs. Flint & Snarle. After passing up a flight of broad, uncarpeted stairs, you again see the name of that respectable firm painted on a light of ground glass set in the office door. Once on the other side of that threshold, you breathe mercantile air. There have been so many brain-trying interest calculations worked out on those high desks, that the very atmosphere, figuratively speaking, is mathematical.

The sign should not read Flint & Snarle, for Snarle has been dead six months, and it is not pleasant to contemplate a name without an owner – it is not to every one, but Mr. Flint likes to read the sign, and think that Snarle is dead. He was the reverse of Flint, and that his name should have been *Snarle* at all is odd, for in life he was the quintessence of quietness, and the oil of good nature. But Flint is well named; he is chalcedony at heart. Nobody says this, but everybody knows it. Nell, the pretty match-girl, who sells her wares in Wall-street, never approaches him, nor the newsboys; and blind men, with sagacious, half-fed dogs, steer clear of him by instinct. *He* doesn't tolerate paupers, and Italian hand-organs with monkey accompaniments – not he.

The man who has not as much money as the surviving senior of Flint & Snarle, is a dog – in Flint's distinguished estimation. His God is not that divine Presence, whose thought

> "Shaped the world,
> And laid it in the sunbeams."

Flint's God is Gold. —

> "Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!
> Bright and yellow, hard and cold,
> Molten, graven, hammered and rolled;
> Heavy to get, and light to hold;
> Hoarded, bartered, bought and sold;
> Stolen, borrowed, squandered, doled;
> Spurned by the young, but hugged by the old
> To the very verge of the church-yard mould;
> Price of many a crime untold:
> Gold! Gold! Gold! Gold!"

Flint is about fifty-three years of age; but if you could forget his gray hair, and look only at those small, piercing black eyes, you would hardly think him forty. His black dress-coat is buttoned around his somewhat attenuated form, and he wears a stiff white cravat because it looks religious. In this respect, and perhaps in others, you will find Flint's prototype on every corner – people who look religious, if religion can be associated with the aspect of an undertaker.

It is Monday morning.

Mr. Flint sits in his private office reading the letters. There is a window cut in the wall, and he glances through it now and then, eyeing the book-keeper as if the poor careworn fellow were making false entries. On a high consumptive-looking stool sits the office boy, filing away answered letters and sundry bills paid. The stool seems so high and the boy so small, that he at once suggests some one occupying a dangerous position – at a mast-head or on the golden ball of a church-steeple. For thus risking his life, he receives "thirty dollars per year, *and*

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.