

Woolson Constance Fenimore

**Rodman the Keeper:  
Southern Sketches**



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# Constance Fenimore Woolson

## Rodman the Keeper: Southern Sketches

### PREFACE

THE sketches included in this volume were written during a residence in the South, which has embraced the greater part of the past six years. As far as they go they record real impressions; but they can never give the inward charm of that beautiful land which the writer has learned to love, and from which she now severs herself with true regret. Two of these sketches have appeared in the "Atlantic Monthly," four in "Appletons' Journal," and one each in "Scribner's Monthly," "The Galaxy," "Lippincott's Monthly," and "Harper's Magazine."

*C. F. W.*

## RODMAN THE KEEPER

The long years come and go,  
And the Past,  
The sorrowful, splendid Past,  
With its glory and its woe,  
Seems never to have been.  
– Seems never to have been?  
O somber days and grand,  
How ye crowd back once more,  
Seeing our heroes' graves are green  
By the Potomac and the Cumberland,  
And in the valley of the Shenandoah!

When we remember how they died, —  
In dark ravine and on the mountain-side,  
In leaguered fort and fire-encircled town,  
And where the iron ships went down, —  
How their dear lives were spent  
In the weary hospital-tent,  
In the cockpit's crowded hive,  
– it seems  
Ignoble to be alive!

*THOMAS BAILEY ALDRICH.*

"KEEPER of what? Keeper of the dead. Well, it is easier to keep the dead than the living; and as for the gloom of the thing, the living among whom I have been lately were not a hilarious set."

John Rodman sat in the doorway and looked out over his domain. The little cottage behind him was empty of life save himself alone. In one room the slender appointments provided by Government for the keeper, who being still alive must sleep and eat, made the bareness doubly bare; in the other the desk and the great ledgers, the ink and pens, the register, the loud-ticking clock on the wall, and the flag folded on a shelf, were all for the kept, whose names, in hastily written, blotted rolls of manuscript, were waiting to be transcribed in the new red-bound ledgers in the keeper's best handwriting day by day, while the clock was to tell him the hour when the flag must rise over the mounds where reposed the bodies of fourteen thousand United States soldiers – who had languished where once stood the prison-pens, on the opposite slopes, now fair and peaceful in the sunset; who had fallen by the way in long marches to and fro under the burning sun; who had fought and died on the many battle-fields that reddened the beautiful State, stretching from the peaks of the marble mountains in the smoky west down to the sea-islands of the ocean border. The last rim of the sun's red ball had sunk below the horizon line, and the western sky glowed with deep rose-color, which faded away above into pink, into the salmon-tint, into shades of that far-away heavenly emerald which the brush of the earthly artist can never reproduce, but which is found sometimes in the iridescent heart of the opal. The small town, a mile distant, stood turning its back on the cemetery; but the keeper could see the pleasant, rambling old mansions, each with its rose-garden and neglected outlying fields, the empty negro quarters falling into ruin, and everything just as it stood when on that April morning the first gun was fired on Sumter; apparently not a nail added, not a brushful of paint applied, not a fallen brick replaced, or latch or lock repaired. The keeper had noted these things as he strolled through

the town, but not with surprise; for he had seen the South in its first estate, when, fresh, strong, and fired with enthusiasm, he, too, had marched away from his village home with the colors flying above and the girls waving their handkerchiefs behind, as the regiment, a thousand strong, filed down the dusty road. That regiment, a weak, scarred two hundred, came back a year later with lagging step and colors tattered and scorched, and the girls could not wave their handkerchiefs, wet and sodden with tears. But the keeper, his wound healed, had gone again; and he had seen with his New England eyes the magnificence and the carelessness of the South, her splendor and negligence, her wealth and thriftlessness, as through Virginia and the fair Carolinas, across Georgia and into sunny Florida, he had marched month by month, first a lieutenant, then captain, and finally major and colonel, as death mowed down those above him, and he and his good conduct were left. Everywhere magnificence went hand in hand with neglect, and he had said so as chance now and then threw a conversation in his path.

"We have no such shiftless ways," he would remark, after he had furtively supplied a prisoner with hard-tack and coffee.

"And no such grand ones either," Johnny Reb would reply, if he was a man of spirit; and generally he was.

The Yankee, forced to acknowledge the truth of this statement, qualified it by observing that he would rather have more thrift with a little less grandeur; whereupon the other answered that *he* would not; and there the conversation rested. So now ex-Colonel Rodman, keeper of the national cemetery, viewed the little town in its second estate with philosophic eyes. "It is part of a great problem now working itself out; I am not here to tend the living, but the dead," he said.

Whereupon, as he walked among the long mounds, a voice seemed to rise from the still ranks below: "While ye have time, do good to men," it said. "Behold, we are beyond your care." But the keeper did not heed.

This still evening in early February he looked out over the level waste. The little town stood in the lowlands; there were no hills from whence cometh help – calm heights that lift the soul above earth and its cares; no river to lead the aspirations of the children outward toward the great sea. Everything was monotonous, and the only spirit that rose above the waste was a bitterness for the gained and sorrow for the lost cause. The keeper was the only man whose presence personated the former in their sight, and upon him therefore, as representative, the bitterness fell, not in words, but in averted looks, in sudden silences when he approached, in withdrawals and avoidance, until he lived and moved in a vacuum; wherever he went there was presently no one save himself; the very shop-keeper who sold him sugar seemed turned into a man of wood, and took his money reluctantly, although the shilling gained stood perhaps for that day's dinner. So Rodman withdrew himself, and came and went among them no more; the broad acres of his domain gave him as much exercise as his shattered ankle could bear; he ordered his few supplies by the quantity, and began the life of a solitary, his island marked out by the massive granite wall with which the United States Government has carefully surrounded those sad Southern cemeteries of hers; sad, not so much from the number of the mounds representing youth and strength cut off in their bloom, for that is but the fortune of war, as for the complete isolation which marks them. "Strangers in a strange land" is the thought of all who, coming and going to and from Florida, turn aside here and there to stand for a moment among the closely ranged graves which seem already a part of the past, that near past which in our hurrying American life is even now so far away. The Government work was completed before the keeper came; the lines of the trenches were defined by low granite copings, and the comparatively few single mounds were headed by trim little white boards bearing generally the word "Unknown," but here and there a name and an age, in most cases a boy from some far-away Northern State; "twenty-one," "twenty-two," said the inscriptions; the dates were those dark years among the sixties, measured now more than by anything else in the number of maidens widowed in heart, and women widowed indeed, who sit still and remember, while the world rushes by. At sunrise the keeper ran up the stars and stripes; and so precise were his ideas of the accessories belonging to the place, that from his own small store of money he had taken enough,

by stinting himself, to buy a second flag for stormy weather, so that, rain or not, the colors should float over the dead. This was not patriotism so called, or rather miscalled, it was not sentimental fancy, it was not zeal or triumph; it was simply a sense of the fitness of things, a conscientiousness which had in it nothing of religion, unless indeed a man's endeavor to live up to his own ideal of his duty be a religion. The same feeling led the keeper to spend hours in copying the rolls. "John Andrew Warren, Company G, Eighth New Hampshire Infantry," he repeated, as he slowly wrote the name, giving "John Andrew" clear, bold capitals and a lettering impossible to mistake; "died August 15, 1863, aged twenty-two years. He came from the prison-pen yonder, and lies somewhere in those trenches, I suppose. Now then, John Andrew, don't fancy I am sorrowing for you; no doubt you are better off than I am at this very moment. But none the less, John Andrew, shall pen, ink, and hand do their duty to you. For that I am here."

Infinite pains and labor went into these records of the dead; one hair's-breadth error, and the whole page was replaced by a new one. The same spirit kept the grass carefully away from the low coping of the trenches, kept the graveled paths smooth and the mounds green, and the bare little cottage neat as a man-of-war. When the keeper cooked his dinner, the door toward the east, where the dead lay, was scrupulously closed, nor was it opened until everything was in perfect order again. At sunset the flag was lowered, and then it was the keeper's habit to walk slowly up and down the path until the shadows veiled the mounds on each side, and there was nothing save the peaceful green of earth. "So time will efface our little lives and sorrows," he mused, "and we shall be as nothing in the indistinguishable past." Yet none the less did he fulfill the duties of every day and hour with exactness. "At least they shall not say that I was lacking," he murmured to himself as he thought vaguely of the future beyond these graves. Who "they" were, it would have troubled him to formulate, since he was one of the many sons whom New England in this generation sends forth with a belief composed entirely of negatives. As the season advanced, he worked all day in the sunshine. "My garden looks well," he said. "I like this cemetery because it is the original resting-place of the dead who lie beneath. They were not brought here from distant places, gathered up by contract, numbered, and described like so much merchandise; their first repose has not been broken, their peace has been undisturbed. Hasty burials the prison authorities gave them; the thin bodies were tumbled into the trenches by men almost as thin, for the whole State went hungry in those dark days. There were not many prayers, no tears, as the dead-carts went the rounds. But the prayers had been said, and the tears had fallen, while the poor fellows were still alive in the pens yonder; and when at last death came, it was like a release. They suffered long; and I for one believe that therefore shall their rest be long – long and sweet."

After a time began the rain, the soft, persistent, gray rain of the Southern lowlands, and he staid within and copied another thousand names into the ledger. He would not allow himself the companionship of a dog lest the creature should bark at night and disturb the quiet. There was no one to hear save himself, and it would have been a friendly sound as he lay awake on his narrow iron bed, but it seemed to him against the spirit of the place. He would not smoke, although he had the soldier's fondness for a pipe. Many a dreary evening, beneath a hastily built shelter of boughs, when the rain poured down and everything was comfortless, he had found solace in the curling smoke; but now it seemed to him that it would be incongruous, and at times he almost felt as if it would be selfish too. "*They* can not smoke, you know, down there under the wet grass," he thought, as standing at the window he looked toward the ranks of the mounds stretching across the eastern end from side to side – "my parade-ground," he called it. And then he would smile at his own fancies, draw the curtain, shut out the rain and the night, light his lamp, and go to work on the ledgers again. Some of the names lingered in his memory; he felt as if he had known the men who bore them, as if they had been boys together, and were friends even now although separated for a time. "James Marvin, Company B, Fifth Maine. The Fifth Maine was in the seven days' battle. I say, do you remember that retreat down the Quaker church road, and the way Phil Kearney held the rear-guard firm?" And over the whole seven days he wandered with his mute friend, who remembered everything and everybody in the most

satisfactory way. One of the little head-boards in the parade-ground attracted him peculiarly because the name inscribed was his own: " – Rodman, Company A, One Hundred and Sixth New York."

"I remember that regiment; it came from the extreme northern part of the State. Blank Rodman must have melted down here, coming as he did from the half-arctic region along the St. Lawrence. I wonder what he thought of the first hot day, say in South Carolina, along those simmering rice-fields?" He grew into the habit of pausing for a moment by the side of this grave every morning and evening. "Blank Rodman. It might easily have been John. And then, where should *I* be?"

But Blank Rodman remained silent, and the keeper, after pulling up a weed or two and trimming the grass over his relative, went off to his duties again. "I am convinced that Blank is a relative," he said to himself; "distant, perhaps, but still a kinsman."

One April day the heat was almost insupportable; but the sun's rays were not those brazen beams that sometimes in Northern cities burn the air and scorch the pavements to a white heat; rather were they soft and still; the moist earth exhaled her richness, not a leaf stirred, and the whole level country seemed sitting in a hot vapor-bath. In the early dawn the keeper had performed his outdoor tasks, but all day he remained almost without stirring in his chair between two windows, striving to exist. At high noon out came a little black bringing his supplies from the town, whistling and shuffling along, gay as a lark. The keeper watched him coming slowly down the white road, loitering by the way in the hot blaze, stopping to turn a somersault or two, to dangle over a bridge rail, to execute various impromptu capers all by himself. He reached the gate at last, entered, and, having come all the way up the path in a hornpipe step, he set down his basket at the door to indulge in one long and final double-shuffle before knocking. "Stop that!" said the keeper through the closed blinds. The little darkey darted back; but as nothing further came out of the window – a boot, for instance, or some other stray missile – he took courage, showed his ivories, and drew near again. "Do you suppose I am going to have you stirring up the heat in that way?" demanded the keeper.

The little black grinned, but made no reply, unless smoothing the hot white sand with his black toes could be construed as such; he now removed his rimless hat and made a bow.

"Is it, or is it not warm?" asked the keeper, as a naturalist might inquire of a salamander, not referring to his own so much as to the salamander's ideas on the subject.

"Dunno, mars'," replied the little black.

"How do *you* feel?"

"'Spects I feel all right, mars'."

The keeper gave up the investigation, and presented to the salamander a nickel cent. "I suppose there is no such thing as a cool spring in all this melting country," he said.

But the salamander indicated with his thumb a clump of trees on the green plain north of the cemetery. "Ole Mars' Ward's place – cole spring dah." He then departed, breaking into a run after he had passed the gate, his ample mouth watering at the thought of a certain chunk of taffy at the mercantile establishment kept by Aunt Dinah in a corner of her one-roomed cabin. At sunset the keeper went thirstily out with a tin pail on his arm, in search of the cold spring. "If it could only be like the spring down under the rocks where I used to drink when I was a boy!" he thought. He had never walked in that direction before. Indeed, now that he had abandoned the town, he seldom went beyond the walls of the cemetery. An old road led across to the clump of trees, through fields run to waste, and following it he came to the place, a deserted house with tumble-down fences and overgrown garden, the out-buildings indicating that once upon a time there were many servants and a prosperous master. The house was of wood, large on the ground, with encircling piazzas; across the front door rough bars had been nailed, and the closed blinds were protected in the same manner; from long want of paint the clapboards were gray and mossy, and the floor of the piazza had fallen in here and there from decay. The keeper decided that his cemetery was a much more cheerful place than this, and then he looked around for the spring. Behind the house the ground sloped down; it

must be there. He went around and came suddenly upon a man lying on an old rug outside of a back door. "Excuse me. I thought nobody lived here," he said.

"Nobody does," replied the man; "I am not much of a body, am I?"

His left arm was gone, and his face was thin and worn with long illness; he closed his eyes after speaking, as though the few words had exhausted him.

"I came for water from a cold spring you have here, somewhere," pursued the keeper, contemplating the wreck before him with the interest of one who has himself been severely wounded and knows the long, weary pain. The man waved his hand toward the slope without unclosing his eyes, and Rodman went off with his pail and found a little shady hollow, once curbed and paved with white pebbles, but now neglected, like all the place. The water was cold, however, deliciously cold. He filled his pail and thought that perhaps after all he would exert himself to make coffee, now that the sun was down; it would taste better made of this cold water. When he came up the slope the man's eyes were open.

"Have some water?" asked Rodman.

"Yes; there's a gourd inside."

The keeper entered, and found himself in a large, bare room; in one corner was some straw covered with an old counterpane, in another a table and chair; a kettle hung in the deep fireplace, and a few dishes stood on a shelf; by the door on a nail hung a gourd; he filled it and gave it to the host of this desolate abode. The man drank with eagerness.

"Pomp has gone to town," he said, "and I could not get down to the spring to-day, I have had so much pain."

"And when will Pomp return?"

"He should be here now; he is very late to-night."

"Can I get you anything?"

"No, thank you; he will soon be here."

The keeper looked out over the waste; there was no one in sight. He was not a man of any especial kindness – he had himself been too hardly treated in life for that – but he could not find it in his heart to leave this helpless creature all alone with night so near. So he sat down on the doorstep. "I will rest awhile," he said, not asking but announcing it. The man had turned away and closed his eyes again, and they both remained silent, busy with their own thoughts; for each had recognized the ex-soldier, Northern and Southern, in portions of the old uniforms, and in the accent. The war and its memories were still very near to the maimed, poverty-stricken Confederate; and the other knew that they were, and did not obtrude himself.

Twilight fell, and no one came.

"Let me get you something," said Rodman; for the face looked ghastly as the fever abated. The other refused. Darkness came; still, no one.

"Look here," said Rodman, rising, "I have been wounded myself, was in hospital for months; I know how you feel. You must have food – a cup of tea, now, and a slice of toast, brown and thin."

"I have not tasted tea or wheaten bread for weeks," answered the man; his voice died off into a wail, as though feebleness and pain had drawn the cry from him in spite of himself. Rodman lighted a match; there was no candle, only a piece of pitch-pine stuck in an iron socket on the wall; he set fire to this primitive torch and looked around.

"There is nothing there," said the man outside, making an effort to speak carelessly; "my servant went to town for supplies. Do not trouble yourself to wait; he will come presently, and – and I want nothing."

But Rodman saw through proud poverty's lie; he knew that irregular quavering of the voice, and that trembling of the hand; the poor fellow had but one to tremble. He continued his search; but the bare room gave back nothing, not a crumb.

"Well, if you are not hungry," he said, briskly, "I am, hungry as a bear; and I'll tell you what I am going to do. I live not far from here, and I live all alone too; I haven't a servant as you have. Let me take supper here with you, just for a change; and, if your servant comes, so much the better, he can wait upon us. I'll run over and bring back the things."

He was gone without waiting for reply; the shattered ankle made good time over the waste, and soon returned, limping a little, but bravely hasting, while on a tray came the keeper's best supplies, Irish potatoes, corned beef, wheaten bread, butter, and coffee; for he would not eat the hot biscuits, the corn-cake, the bacon and hominy of the country, and constantly made little New England meals for himself in his prejudiced little kitchen. The pine-torch flared in the doorway; a breeze had come down from the far mountains and cooled the air. Rodman kindled a fire on the cavernous hearth, filled the kettle, found a saucepan, and commenced operations, while the other lay outside and watched every movement in the lighted room.

"All ready; let me help you in. Here we are now; fried potatoes, cold beef, mustard, toast, butter, and tea. Eat, man; and the next time I am laid up you shall come over and cook for me."

Hunger conquered, and the other ate, ate as he had not eaten for months. As he was finishing a second cup of tea, a slow step came around the house; it was the missing Pomp, an old negro, bent and shriveled, who carried a bag of meal and some bacon in his basket. "That is what they live on," thought the keeper.

He took leave without more words. "I suppose now I can be allowed to go home in peace," he grumbled to conscience. The negro followed him across what was once the lawn. "Fin' Mars' Ward mighty low," he said apologetically, as he swung open the gate which still hung between its posts, although the fence was down, "but I hurred and hurred as fas' as I could; it's mighty fur to de town. Proud to see you, sah; hope you'll come again. Fine fambly, de Wards, sah, befo' de war."

"How long has he been in this state?" asked the keeper.

"Ever sence one ob de las' battles, sah; but he's worse sence we come yer, 'bout a mont' back."

"Who owns the house? Is there no one to see him? has he no friends?"

"House b'long to Mars' Ward's uncle; fine place once, befo' de war; he's dead now, and dah's nobuddy but Miss Bettina, an' she's gone off somewhuz. Propah place, sah, fur Mars' Ward – own uncle's house," said the old slave, loyally striving to maintain the family dignity even then.

"Are there no better rooms – no furniture?"

"Sartin; but – but Miss Bettina, she took de keys; she didn't know we was comin' –"

"You had better send for Miss Bettina, I think," said the keeper, starting homeward with his tray, washing his hands, as it were, of any future responsibility in the affair.

The next day he worked in his garden, for clouds veiled the sun and exercise was possible; but, nevertheless, he could not forget the white face on the old rug. "Pshaw!" he said to himself, "haven't I seen tumble-down old houses and battered human beings before this?"

At evening came a violent thunderstorm, and the splendor of the heavens was terrible. "We have chained you mighty spirit," thought the keeper as he watched the lightning, "and some time we shall learn the laws of the winds and foretell the storms; then, prayers will no more be offered in churches to alter the weather than they would be offered now to alter an eclipse. Yet back of the lightning and the wind lies the power of the great Creator, just the same."

But still into his musings crept, with shadowy persistence, the white face on the rug.

"Nonsense!" he exclaimed; "if white faces are going around as ghosts, how about the fourteen thousand white faces that went under the sod down yonder? If they could arise and walk, the whole State would be filled and no more carpet-baggers needed." So, having balanced the one with the fourteen thousand, he went to bed.

Daylight brought rain – still, soft, gray rain; the next morning showed the same, and the third likewise, the nights keeping up their part with low-down clouds and steady pattering on the roof. "If there was a river here, we should have a flood," thought the keeper, drumming idly on his window-

pane. Memory brought back the steep New England hillsides shedding their rain into the brooks, which grew in a night to torrents and filled the rivers so that they overflowed their banks; then, suddenly, an old house in a sunken corner of a waste rose before his eyes, and he seemed to see the rain dropping from a moldy ceiling on the straw where a white face lay.

"Really, I have nothing else to do to-day, you know," he remarked in an apologetic way to himself, as he and his umbrella went along the old road; and he repeated the remark as he entered the room where the man lay, just as he had fancied, on the damp straw.

"The weather *is* unpleasant," said the man. "Pomp, bring a chair."

Pomp brought one, the only one, and the visitor sat down. A fire smoldered on the hearth and puffed out acrid smoke now and then, as if the rain had clogged the soot in the long-neglected chimney; from the streaked ceiling oozing drops fell with a dull splash into little pools on the decayed floor; the door would not close; the broken panes were stopped with rags, as if the old servant had tried to keep out the damp; in the ashes a corn-cake was baking.

"I am afraid you have not been so well during these long rainy days," said the keeper, scanning the face on the straw.

"My old enemy, rheumatism," answered the man; "the first sunshine will drive it away."

They talked awhile, or rather the keeper talked, for the other seemed hardly able to speak, as the waves of pain swept over him; then the visitor went outside and called Pomp out. "*Is* there any one to help him, or not?" he asked impatiently.

"Fine fambly, befo' de war," began Pomp.

"Never mind all that; is there any one to help him now – yes or no?"

"No," said the old black with a burst of despairing truthfulness. "Miss Bettina, she's as poor as Mars' Ward, an' dere's no one else. He's had noth'n but hard corn-cake for three days, an' he can't swaller it no more."

The next morning saw Ward De Rosset lying on the white pallet in the keeper's cottage, and old Pomp, marveling at the cleanliness all around him, installed as nurse. A strange asylum for a Confederate soldier, was it not? But he knew nothing of the change, which he would have fought with his last breath if consciousness had remained; returning fever, however, had absorbed his senses, and then it was that the keeper and the slave had borne him slowly across the waste, resting many times, but accomplishing the journey at last.

That evening John Rodman, strolling to and fro in the dusky twilight, paused alongside of the other Rodman. "I do not want him here, and that is the plain truth," he said, pursuing the current of his thoughts. "He fills the house; he and Pomp together disturb all my ways. He'll be ready to fling a brick at me too, when his senses come back; small thanks shall I have for lying on the floor, giving up all my comforts, and, what is more, riding over the spirit of the place with a vengeance!" He threw himself down on the grass beside the mound and lay looking up toward the stars, which were coming out, one by one, in the deep blue of the Southern night. "With a vengeance, did I say? That is it exactly – the vengeance of kindness. The poor fellow has suffered horribly in body and in estate, and now ironical Fortune throws him in my way, as if saying, 'Let us see how far your selfishness will yield.' This is not a question of magnanimity; there is no magnanimity about it, for the war is over, and you Northerners have gained every point for which you fought. This is merely a question between man and man; it would be the same if the sufferer was a poor Federal, one of the carpet-baggers, whom you despise so, for instance, or a pagan Chinaman. And Fortune is right; don't you think so, Blank Rodman? I put it to you, now, to one who has suffered the extreme rigor of the other side – those prison-pens yonder."

Whereupon Blank Rodman answered that he had fought for a great cause, and that he knew it, although a plain man and not given to speech-making; he was not one of those who had sat safely at home all through the war, and now belittled it and made light of its issues. (Here a murmur came up from the long line of the trenches, as though all the dead had cried out.) But now the points for

which he had fought being gained, and strife ended, it was the plain duty of every man to encourage peace. For his part he bore no malice; he was glad the poor Confederate was up in the cottage, and he did not think any the less of the keeper for bringing him there. He would like to add that he thought more of him; but he was sorry to say that he was well aware what an effort it was, and how almost grudgingly the charity began.

If Blank Rodman did not say this, at least the keeper imagined that he did. "That is what he would have said," he thought. "I am glad you do not object," he added, pretending to himself that he had not noticed the rest of the remark.

"We do not object to the brave soldier who honestly fought for his cause, even though he fought on the other side," answered Blank Rodman for the whole fourteen thousand. "But never let a coward, a double-face, or a flippant-tongued idler walk over our heads. It would make us rise in our graves!"

And the keeper seemed to see a shadowy pageant sweep by – gaunt soldiers with white faces, arming anew against the subtle product of peace: men who said, "It was nothing! Behold, we saw it with our eyes!" – stay-at-home eyes.

The third day the fever abated, and Ward De Rosset noticed his surroundings. Old Pomp acknowledged that he had been moved, but veiled the locality: "To a friend's house, Mars' Ward."

"But I have no friends now, Pomp," said the weak voice.

Pomp was very much amused at the absurdity of this. "No friend's! Mars' Ward, no friend's!" He was obliged to go out of the room to hide his laughter. The sick man lay feebly thinking that the bed was cool and fresh, and the closed green blinds pleasant; his thin fingers stroked the linen sheet, and his eyes wandered from object to object. The only thing that broke the rule of bare utility in the simple room was a square of white drawing-paper on the wall, upon which was inscribed in ornamental text the following verse:

"Toujours femme varie,  
Bien fou qui s'y fie;  
Une femme souvent  
N'est qu'une plume au vent."

With the persistency of illness the eyes and mind of Ward De Rosset went over and over this distich; he knew something of French, but was unequal to the effort of translating; the rhymes alone caught his vagrant fancy. "Toujours femme varie," he said to himself over and over again; and when the keeper entered, he said it to him.

"Certainly," answered the keeper; "bien fou qui s'y fie. How do you find yourself this morning?"

"I have not found myself at all, so far. Is this your house?"

"Yes."

"Pomp told me I was in a friend's house," observed the sick man, vaguely.

"Well, it isn't an enemy's. Had any breakfast? No? Better not talk, then."

He went to the detached shed which served for a kitchen, upset all Pomp's clumsy arrangements, and ordered him outside; then he set to work and prepared a delicate breakfast with his best skill. The sick man eagerly eyed the tray as he entered. "Better have your hands and face sponged off, I think," said Rodman; and then he propped him up skillfully, and left him to his repast. The grass needed mowing on the parade-ground; he shouldered his scythe and started down the path, viciously kicking the gravel aside as he walked. "Wasn't solitude your principal idea, John Rodman, when you applied for this place?" he demanded of himself. "How much of it are you likely to have with sick men, and sick men's servants, and so forth?"

The "and so forth," thrown in as a rhetorical climax, turned into reality and arrived bodily upon the scene – a climax indeed. One afternoon, returning late to the cottage, he found a girl sitting by the pallet – a girl young and dimpled and dewy; one of the creamy roses of the South that, even in

the bud, are richer in color and luxuriance than any Northern flower. He saw her through the door, and paused; distressed old Pomp met him and beckoned him cautiously outside. "Miss Bettina," he whispered gutturally; "she's come back from somewhuz, an' she's awful mad 'cause Mars' Ward's here. I tole her all 'bout 'em – de leaks an' de rheumatiz an' de hard corn-cake, but she done gone scole me; and Mars' Ward, he know now whar he is, an' he mad too."

"Is the girl a fool?" said Rodman. He was just beginning to rally a little. He stalked into the room and confronted her. "I have the honor of addressing – "

"Miss Ward."

"And I am John Rodman, keeper of the national cemetery."

This she ignored entirely; it was as though he had said, "I am John Jones, the coachman." Coachmen were useful in their way; but their names were unimportant.

The keeper sat down and looked at his new visitor. The little creature fairly radiated scorn; her pretty head was thrown back, her eyes, dark brown fringed with long dark lashes, hardly deigned a glance; she spoke to him as though he was something to be paid and dismissed like any other mechanic.

"We are indebted to you for some days' board, I believe, keeper – medicines, I presume, and general attendance. My cousin will be removed to-day to our own residence; I wish to pay now what he owes."

The keeper saw that her dress was old and faded; the small black shawl had evidently been washed and many times mended; the old-fashioned knitted purse she held in her hand was lank with long famine.

"Very well," he said; "if you choose to treat a kindness in that way, I consider five dollars a day none too much for the annoyance, expense, and trouble I have suffered. Let me see: five days – or is it six? Yes. Thirty dollars, Miss Ward."

He looked at her steadily; she flushed. "The money will be sent to you," she began haughtily; then, hesitatingly, "I must ask a little time – "

"O Betty, Betty, you know you can not pay it. Why try to disguise – But that does not excuse *you* for bringing me here," said the sick man, turning toward his host with an attempt to speak fiercely, which ended in a faltering quaver.

All this time the old slave stood anxiously outside of the door; in the pauses they could hear his feet shuffling as he waited for the decision of his superiors. The keeper rose and threw open the blinds of the window that looked out on the distant parade-ground. "Bringing you here," he repeated – "*here*; that is my offense, is it? There they lie, fourteen thousand brave men and true. Could they come back to earth they would be the first to pity and aid you, now that you are down. So would it be with you if the case were reversed; for a soldier is generous to a soldier. It was not your own heart that spoke then; it was the small venom of a woman, that here, as everywhere through the South, is playing its rancorous part."

The sick man gazed out through the window, seeing for the first time the far-spreading ranks of the dead. He was very weak, and the keeper's words had touched him; his eyes were suffused with tears. But Miss Ward rose with a flashing glance. She turned her back full upon the keeper and ignored his very existence. "I will take you home immediately, Ward – this very evening," she said.

"A nice, comfortable place for a sick man," commented the keeper, scornfully. "I am going out now, De Rosset, to prepare your supper; you had better have one good meal before you go."

He disappeared, but as he went he heard the sick man say, deprecatingly: "It isn't very comfortable over at the old house now, indeed it isn't, Betty; I suffered" – and the girl's passionate outburst in reply. Then he closed his door and set to work.

When he returned, half an hour later. Ward was lying back exhausted on the pillows, and his cousin sat leaning her head upon her hand; she had been weeping, and she looked very desolate, he

noticed, sitting there in what was to her an enemy's country. Hunger is a strong master, however, especially when allied to weakness; and the sick man ate with eagerness.

"I must go back," said the girl, rising. "A wagon will be sent out for you, Ward; Pomp will help you."

But Ward had gained a little strength as well as obstinacy with the nourishing food. "Not to-night," he said.

"Yes, to-night."

"But I can not go to-night; you are unreasonable, Bettina. To-morrow will do as well, if go I must."

"If go you must! You do not want to go, then – to go to our own home – and with me" – Her voice broke; she turned toward the door.

The keeper stepped forward. "This is all nonsense, Miss Ward," he said, "and you know it. Your cousin is in no state to be moved. Wait a week or two, and he can go in safety. But do not dare to offer me your money again; my kindness was to the soldier, not to the man, and as such he can accept it. Come out and see him as often as you please. I shall not intrude upon you. Pomp, take the lady home."

And the lady went.

Then began a remarkable existence for the four: a Confederate soldier lying ill in the keeper's cottage of a national cemetery; a rampant little rebel coming out daily to a place which was to her anathema-maranatha; a cynical, misanthropic keeper sleeping on the floor and enduring every variety of discomfort for a man he never saw before – a man belonging to an idle, arrogant class he detested; and an old black freedman allowing himself to be taught the alphabet in order to gain permission to wait on his master – master no longer in law – with all the devotion of his loving old heart. For the keeper had announced to Pomp that he must learn his alphabet or go; after all these years of theory, he, as a New-Englander, could not stand by and see precious knowledge shut from the black man. So he opened it, and mighty dull work he found it.

Ward De Rosset did not rally as rapidly as they expected. The white-haired doctor from the town rode out on horseback, pacing slowly up the graveled roadway with a scowl on his brow, casting, as he dismounted, a furtive glance down toward the parade-ground. His horse and his coat were alike old and worn, and his broad shoulders were bent with long service in the miserably provided Confederate hospitals, where he had striven to do his duty through every day and every night of those shadowed years. Cursing the incompetency in high places, cursing the mismanagement of the entire medical department of the Confederate army, cursing the recklessness and indifference which left the men suffering for want of proper hospitals and hospital stores, he yet went on resolutely doing his best with the poor means in his control until the last. Then he came home, he and his old horse, and went the rounds again, he prescribing for whooping-cough or measles, and Dobbin waiting outside; the only difference was that fees were small and good meals scarce for both, not only for the man but for the beast. The doctor sat down and chatted awhile kindly with De Rosset, whose father and uncle had been dear friends of his in the bright, prosperous days; then he left a few harmless medicines and rose to go, his gaze resting a moment on Miss Ward, then on Pomp, as if he were hesitating. But he said nothing until on the walk outside he met the keeper, and recognized a person to whom he could tell the truth. "There is nothing to be done; he may recover, he may not; it is a question of strength merely. He needs no medicines, only nourishing food, rest, and careful tendance."

"He shall have them," answered the keeper briefly. And then the old gentleman mounted his horse and rode away, his first and last visit to a national cemetery.

"National!" he said to himself – "national!"

All talk of moving De Rosset ceased, but Miss Ward moved into the old house. There was not much to move: herself, her one trunk, and Mari, a black attendant, whose name probably began life as Maria, since the accent still dwelt on the curtailed last syllable. The keeper went there once, and once only, and then it was an errand for the sick man, whose fancies came sometimes at inconvenient hours

– when Pomp had gone to town, for instance. On this occasion the keeper entered the mockery of a gate and knocked at the front door, from which the bars had been removed; the piazza still showed its decaying planks, but quick-growing summer vines had been planted, and were now encircling the old pillars and veiling all defects with their greenery. It was a woman's pathetic effort to cover up what can not be covered – poverty. The blinds on one side were open, and white curtains waved to and fro in the breeze; into this room he was ushered by Mari. Matting lay on the floor, streaked here and there ominously by the dampness from the near ground. The furniture was of dark mahogany, handsome in its day: chairs, a heavy pier-table with low-down glass, into which no one by any possibility could look unless he had eyes in his ankles, a sofa with a stiff round pillow of hair-cloth under each curved end, and a mirror with a compartment framed off at the top, containing a picture of shepherds and shepherdesses, and lambs with blue ribbons around their necks, all enjoying themselves in the most natural and life-like manner. Flowers stood on the high mantelpiece, but their fragrance could not overcome the faint odor of the damp straw-matting. On a table were books – a life of General Lee, and three or four shabby little volumes printed at the South during the war, waifs of prose and poetry of that highly wrought, richly colored style which seems indigenous to Southern soil.

"Some way, the whole thing reminds me of a funeral," thought the keeper.

Miss Ward entered, and the room bloomed at once; at least that is what a lover would have said. Rodman, however, merely noticed that she bloomed, and not the room, and he said to himself that she would not bloom long if she continued to live in such a moldy place. Their conversation in these days was excessively polite, shortened to the extreme minimum possible, and conducted without the aid of the eyes, at least on one side. Rodman had discovered that Miss Ward never looked at him, and so he did not look at her – that is, not often; he was human, however, and she was delightfully pretty. On this occasion they exchanged exactly five sentences, and then he departed, but not before his quick eyes had discovered that the rest of the house was in even worse condition than this parlor, which, by the way, Miss Ward considered quite a grand apartment; she had been down near the coast, trying to teach school, and there the desolation was far greater than here, both armies having passed back and forward over the ground, foragers out, and the torch at work more than once.

"Will there ever come a change for the better?" thought the keeper, as he walked homeward. "What an enormous stone has got to be rolled up hill! But at least, John Rodman, *you* need not go to work at it; *you* are not called upon to lend your shoulder."

None the less, however, did he call out Pomp that very afternoon and sternly teach him "E" and "F" using the smooth white sand for a blackboard, and a stick for chalk. Pomp's primer was a Government placard hanging on the wall of the office. It read as follows:

**IN THIS CEMETERY REPOSE THE REMAINS OF FOURTEEN THOUSAND  
THREE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-ONE UNITED STATES SOLDIERS**

"Tell me not in mournful numbers  
Life is but an empty dream;  
For the soul is dead that slumbers,  
And things are not what they seem.

"Life is real! Life is earnest!  
And the grave is not its goal;  
Dust thou art, to dust returnest,  
Was not written of the soul!"

"The only known instance of the Government's condescending to poetry," the keeper had thought, when he first read this placard. It was placed there for the instruction and edification of visitors; but, no visitors coming, he took the liberty of using it as a primer for Pomp. The large letters served the purpose admirably, and Pomp learned the entire quotation; what he thought of it has not transpired. Miss Ward came over daily to see her cousin. At first she brought him soups and various concoctions from her own kitchen – the leaky cavern, once the dining-room, where the soldier had taken refuge after his last dismissal from hospital; but the keeper's soups were richer, and free from the taint of smoke; his martial laws of neatness even disorderly old Pomp dared not disobey, and the sick man soon learned the difference. He thanked the girl, who came bringing the dishes over carefully in her own dimpled hands, and then, when she was gone, he sent them untasted away. By chance Miss Ward learned this, and wept bitter tears over it; she continued to come, but her poor little soups and jellies she brought no more.

One morning in May the keeper was working near the flag-staff, when his eyes fell upon a procession coming down the road which led from the town and turning toward the cemetery. No one ever came that way: what could it mean? It drew near, entered the gate, and showed itself to be negroes walking two and two – old uncles and aunties, young men and girls, and even little children, all dressed in their best; a very poor best, sometimes gravely ludicrous imitations of "ole mars" or "ole miss'," sometimes mere rags bravely patched together and adorned with a strip of black calico or rosette of black ribbon; not one was without a badge of mourning. All carried flowers, common blossoms from the little gardens behind the cabins that stretched around the town on the out-skirts – the new forlorn cabins with their chimneys of piled stones and ragged patches of corn; each little darkey had his bouquet and marched solemnly along, rolling his eyes around, but without even the beginning of a smile, while the elders moved forward with gravity, the bubbling, irrepressible gayety of the negro subdued by the new-born dignity of the freedman.

"Memorial Day," thought the keeper; "I had forgotten it."

"Will you do us de hono', sah, to take de head ob de processio', sah?" said the leader, with a ceremonious bow. Now, the keeper had not much sympathy with the strewing of flowers, North or South; he had seen the beautiful ceremony more than once turned into a political demonstration. Here, however, in this small, isolated, interior town, there was nothing of that kind; the whole population of white faces laid their roses and wept true tears on the graves of their lost ones in the village churchyard when the Southern Memorial Day came round, and just as naturally the whole population of black faces went out to the national cemetery with their flowers on the day when, throughout the North, spring blossoms were laid on the graves of the soldiers, from the little Maine village to the stretching ranks of Arlington, from Greenwood to the far Western burial-places of San Francisco. The keeper joined the procession and led the way to the parade-ground. As they approached the trenches, the leader began singing and all joined. "Swing low, sweet chariot," sang the freedmen, and their hymn rose and fell with strange, sweet harmony – one of those wild, unwritten melodies which the North heard with surprise and marveling when, after the war, bands of singers came to their cities and sang the songs of slavery, in order to gain for their children the coveted education. "Swing low, sweet chariot," sang the freedmen, and two by two they passed along, strewing the graves with flowers till all the green was dotted with color. It was a pathetic sight to see some of the old men and women, ignorant field-hands, bent, dull-eyed, and past the possibility of education even in its simplest forms, carefully placing their poor flowers to the best advantage. They knew dimly that the men who lay beneath those mounds had done something wonderful for them and for their children; and so they came bringing their blossoms, with little intelligence but with much love.

The ceremony over, they retired. As he turned, the keeper caught a glimpse of Miss Ward's face at the window.

"Hope we's not makin' too free, sah," said the leader, as the procession, with many a bow and scrape, took leave, "but we's kep' de day now two years, sah, befo' you came, sah, an we's teachin' de chil'en to keep it, sah."

The keeper returned to the cottage. "Not a white face," he said.

"Certainly not," replied Miss Ward, crisply.

"I know some graves at the North, Miss Ward, graves of Southern soldiers, and I know some Northern women who do not scorn to lay a few flowers on the lonely mounds as they pass by with their blossoms on our Memorial Day."

"You are fortunate. They must be angels. We have no angels here."

"I am inclined to believe you are right," said the keeper.

That night old Pomp, who had remained invisible in the kitchen during the ceremony, stole away in the twilight and came back with a few flowers. Rodman saw him going down toward the parade-ground, and watched. The old man had but a few blossoms; he arranged them hastily on the mounds with many a furtive glance toward the house, and then stole back, satisfied; he had performed his part.

Ward De Rosset lay on his pallet, apparently unchanged; he seemed neither stronger nor weaker. He had grown childishly dependent upon his host, and wearied for him, as the Scotch say; but Rodman withstood his fancies, and gave him only the evenings, when Miss Bettina was not there. One afternoon, however, it rained so violently that he was forced to seek shelter; he set himself to work on the ledgers; he was on the ninth thousand now. But the sick man heard his step in the outer room, and called in his weak voice, "Rodman, Rodman." After a time he went in, and it ended in his staying; for the patient was nervous and irritable, and he pitied the nurse, who seemed able to please him in nothing. De Rosset turned with a sigh of relief toward the strong hands that lifted him readily, toward the composed manner, toward the man's voice that seemed to bring a breeze from outside into the close room; animated, cheered, he talked volubly. The keeper listened, answered once in a while, and quietly took the rest of the afternoon into his own hands. Miss Ward yielded to the silent change, leaned back, and closed her eyes. She looked exhausted and for the first time pallid; the loosened dark hair curled in little rings about her temples, and her lips were parted as though she was too tired to close them; for hers were not the thin, straight lips that shut tight naturally, like the straight line of a closed box. The sick man talked on. "Come, Rodman," he said, after a while, "I have read that lying verse of yours over at least ten thousand and fifty-nine times; please tell me its history; I want to have something definite to think of when I read it for the ten thousand and sixtieth."

"Toujours femme varie,  
Bien fou qui s'y fie;  
Une femme souvent  
N'est qu'une plume au vent,"

read the keeper slowly, with his execrable English accent. "Well, I don't know that I have any objection to telling the story. I am not sure but that it will do me good to hear it all over myself in plain language again."

"Then it concerns yourself," said De Rosset; "so much the better. I hope it will be, as the children say, the truth, and long."

"It will be the truth, but not long. When the war broke out I was twenty-eight years old, living with my mother on our farm in New England. My father and two brothers had died and left me the homestead; otherwise I should have broken away and sought fortune farther westward, where the lands are better and life is more free. But mother loved the house, the fields, and every crooked tree. She was alone, and so I staid with her. In the center of the village green stood the square, white meeting-house, and near by the small cottage where the pastor lived; the minister's daughter, Mary, was my

promised wife. Mary was a slender little creature with a profusion of pale flaxen hair, large, serious blue eyes, and small, delicate features; she was timid almost to a fault; her voice was low and gentle. She was not eighteen, and we were to wait a year. The war came, and I volunteered, of course, and marched away; we wrote to each other often; my letters were full of the camp and skirmishes; hers told of the village, how the widow Brown had fallen ill, and how it was feared that Squire Stafford's boys were lapsing into evil ways. Then came the day when my regiment marched to the field of its slaughter, and soon after our shattered remnant went home. Mary cried over me, and came out every day to the farmhouse with her bunches of violets; she read aloud to me from her good little books, and I used to lie and watch her profile bending over the page, with the light falling on her flaxen hair low down against the small, white throat. Then my wound healed, and I went again, this time for three years; and Mary's father blessed me, and said that when peace came he would call me son, but not before, for these were no times for marrying or giving in marriage. He was a good man, a red-hot abolitionist, and a roaring lion as regards temperance; but nature had made him so small in body that no one was much frightened when he roared. I said that I went for three years; but eight years have passed and I have never been back to the village. First, mother died. Then Mary turned false. I sold the farm by letter and lost the money three months afterward in an unfortunate investment; my health failed. Like many another Northern soldier, I remembered the healing climate of the South; its soft airs came back to me when the snow lay deep on the fields and the sharp wind whistled around the poor tavern where the moneyless, half-crippled volunteer sat coughing by the fire. I applied for this place and obtained it. That is all."

"But it is not all," said the sick man, raising himself on his elbow; "you have not told half yet, nor anything at all about the French verse."

"Oh – that? There was a little Frenchman staying at the hotel; he had formerly been a dancing-master, and was full of dry, withered conceits, although he looked like a thin and bilious old ape dressed as a man. He taught me, or tried to teach me, various wise sayings, among them this one, which pleased my fancy so much that I gave him twenty-five cents to write it out in large text for me."

"Toujours femme varie," repeated De Rosset; "but you don't really think so, do you, Rodman?"

"I do. But they can not help it; it is their nature. – I beg your pardon, Miss Ward. I was speaking as though you were not here."

Miss Ward's eyelids barely acknowledged his existence; that was all. But some time after she remarked to her cousin that it was only in New England that one found that pale flaxen hair.

June was waning, when suddenly the summons came. Ward De Rosset died. He was unconscious toward the last, and death, in the guise of sleep, bore away his soul. They carried him home to the old house, and from there the funeral started, a few family carriages, dingy and battered, following the hearse, for death revived the old neighborhood feeling; that honor at least they could pay – the sonless mothers and the widows who lived shut up in the old houses with everything falling into ruin around them, brooding over the past. The keeper watched the small procession as it passed his gate on its way to the churchyard in the village. "There he goes, poor fellow, his sufferings over at last," he said; and then he set the cottage in order and began the old solitary life again.

He saw Miss Ward but once.

It was a breathless evening in August, when the moonlight flooded the level country. He had started out to stroll across the waste; but the mood changed, and climbing over the eastern wall he had walked back to the flag-staff, and now lay at its foot gazing up into the infinite sky. A step sounded on the gravel-walk; he turned his face that way, and recognized Miss Ward. With confident step she passed the dark cottage, and brushed his arm with her robe as he lay unseen in the shadow. She went down toward the parade-ground, and his eyes followed her. Softly outlined in the moonlight, she moved to and fro among the mounds, pausing often, and once he thought she knelt. Then slowly she returned, and he raised himself and waited; she saw him, started, then paused.

"I thought you were away," she said; "Pomp told me so."

"You set him to watch me?"

"Yes. I wished to come here once, and I did not wish to meet you."

"Why did you wish to come?"

"Because Ward was here – and because – because – never mind. It is enough that I wished to walk once among those mounds."

"And pray there?"

"Well – and if I did!" said the girl defiantly.

Rodman stood facing her, with his arms folded; his eyes rested on her face; he said nothing.

"I am going away to-morrow," began Miss Ward again, assuming with an effort her old, pulseless manner. "I have sold the place, and I shall never return, I think; I am going far away."

"Where?"

"To Tennessee."

"That is not so very far," said the keeper, smiling.

"There I shall begin a new existence," pursued the voice, ignoring the comment.

"You have scarcely begun the old; you are hardly more than a child, now. What are you going to do in Tennessee?"

"Teach."

"Have you relatives there?"

"No."

"A miserable life – a hard, lonely, loveless life," said Rodman. "God help the woman who must be that dreary thing, a teacher from necessity!"

Miss Ward turned swiftly, but the keeper kept by her side. He saw the tears glittering on her eyelashes, and his voice softened. "Do not leave me in anger," he said; "I should not have spoken so, although indeed it was the truth. Walk back with me to the cottage, and take your last look at the room where poor Ward died, and then I will go with you to your home."

"No; Pomp is waiting at the gate," said the girl, almost inarticulately.

"Very well; to the gate, then."

They went toward the cottage in silence; the keeper threw open the door. "Go in," he said. "I will wait outside."

The girl entered and went into the inner room, throwing herself down upon her knees at the bedside. "O Ward, Ward!" she sobbed; "I am all alone in the world now, Ward – all alone!" She buried her face in her hands and gave way to a passion of tears; and the keeper could not help but hear as he waited outside. Then the desolate little creature rose and came forth, putting on, as she did so, her poor armor of pride. The keeper had not moved from the door-step. Now he turned his face. "Before you go – go away for ever from this place – will you write your name in my register," he said – "the visitors' register? The Government had it prepared for the throngs who would visit these graves; but with the exception of the blacks, who can not write, no one has come, and the register is empty. Will you write your name? Yet do not write it unless you can think gently of the men who lie there under the grass. I believe you do think gently of them, else why have you come of your own accord to stand by the side of their graves?" As he said this, he looked fixedly at her.

Miss Ward did not answer; but neither did she write.

"Very well," said the keeper; "come away. You will not, I see."

"I can not! Shall I, Bettina Ward, set my name down in black and white as a visitor to this cemetery, where lie fourteen thousand of the soldiers who killed my father, my three brothers, my cousins; who brought desolation upon all our house, and ruin upon all our neighborhood, all our State, and all our country? – for the South *is* our country, and not your North. Shall I forget these things? Never! Sooner let my right hand wither by my side! I was but a child; yet I remember the tears of my mother, and the grief of all around us. There was not a house where there was not one dead."

"It is true," answered the keeper; "at the South, all went."

They walked down to the gate together in silence.

"Good-by," said John, holding out his hand; "you will give me yours or not as you choose, but I will not have it as a favor."

She gave it.

"I hope that life will grow brighter to you as the years pass. May God bless you!"

He dropped her hand; she turned, and passed through the gateway; then he sprang after her.

"Nothing can change you," he said; "I know it, I have known it all along; you are part of your country, part of the time, part of the bitter hour through which she is passing. Nothing can change you; if it could, you would not be what you are, and I should not – But you can not change. Good-by, Bettina, poor little child – good-by. Follow your path out into the world. Yet do not think, dear, that I have not seen – have not understood."

He bent and kissed her hand; then he was gone, and she went on alone.

A week later the keeper strolled over toward the old house. It was twilight, but the new owner was still at work. He was one of those sandy-haired, energetic Maine men, who, probably on the principle of extremes, were often found through the South, making new homes for themselves in the pleasant land.

"Pulling down the old house, are you?" said the keeper, leaning idly on the gate, which was already flanked by a new fence.

"Yes," replied the Maine man, pausing; "it was only an old shell, just ready to tumble on our heads. You're the keeper over yonder, an't you?" (He already knew everybody within a circle of five miles.)

"Yes. I think I should like those vines if you have no use for them," said Rodman, pointing to the uprooted greenery that once screened the old piazza.

"Wuth about twenty-five cents, I guess," said the Maine man, handing them over.

## SISTER ST. LUKE

She lived shut in by flowers and trees,  
And shade of gentle bigotries;  
On this side lay the trackless sea,  
On that the great world's mystery;  
But, all unseen and all unguessed,  
They could not break upon her rest.  
The world's far glories flamed and flashed,  
Afar the wild seas roared and dashed;  
But in her small dull paradise,  
Safe housed from rapture or surprise,  
Nor day nor night had power to fright  
The peace of God within her eyes.

*JOHN HAY.*

THEY found her there. "This is more than I expected," said Carrington as they landed – "seven pairs of Spanish eyes at once."

"Three pairs," answered Keith, fastening the statement to fact and the boat to a rock in his calm way; "and one if not two of the pairs are Minorcan."

The two friends crossed the broad white beach toward the little stone house of the light-keeper, who sat in the doorway, having spent the morning watching their sail cross over from Pelican reef, tacking lazily east and west – an event of more than enough importance in his isolated life to have kept him there, gazing and contented, all day. Behind the broad shoulders of swarthy Pedro stood a little figure clothed in black; and as the man lifted himself at last and came down to meet them, and his wife stepped briskly forward, they saw that the third person was a nun – a large-eyed, fragile little creature, promptly introduced by Melvyna, the keeper's wife, as "Sister St. Luke." For the keeper's wife, in spite of her black eyes, was not a Minorcan; not even a Southerner. Melvyna Sawyer was born in Vermont, and, by one of the strange chances of this vast, many-raced, motley country of ours, she had traveled south as nurse – and a very good, energetic nurse too, albeit somewhat sharp-voiced – to a delicate young wife, who had died in the sunny land, as so many of them die; the sun, with all his good will and with all his shining, not being able to undo in three months the work of long years of the snows and bleak east winds of New England.

The lady dead, and her poor thin frame sent northward again to lie in the hillside churchyard by the side of bleak Puritan ancestors, Melvyna looked about her. She hated the lazy tropical land, and had packed her calf-skin trunk to go, when Pedro Gonsalvez surprised her by proposing matrimony. At least that is what she wrote to her aunt Clemanthy, away in Vermont; and, although Pedro may not have used the words, he at least meant the fact, for they were married two weeks later by a justice of the peace, whom Melvyna's sharp eyes had unearthed, she of course deeming the padre of the little parish and one or two attendant priests as so much dust to be trampled energetically under her shoes, Protestant and number six and a half double-soled mediums. The justice of the peace, a good-natured old gentleman who had forgotten that he held the office at all, since there was no demand for justice and the peace was never broken, married them as well as he could in a surprised sort of way; and, instead of receiving a fee, gave one, which Melvyna, however, promptly rescued from the bridegroom's willing hand, and returned with the remark that there was no "call for alms" (pronounced as if rhymed with hams), and that two shilling, or mebbe three, she guessed, would be about right for the job. This sum she deposited on the table, and then took leave, walking

off with a quick, enterprising step, followed by her acquiescent and admiring bridegroom. He had remained acquiescent and admiring ever since, and now, as lighthouse-keeper on Pelican Island, he admired and acquiesced more than ever; while Melvyna kept the house in order, cooked his dinners, and tended his light, which, although only third-class, shone and glittered under her daily care in the old square tower which was founded by the Spaniards, heightened by the English, and now finished and owned by the United States, whose Lighthouse Board said to each other every now and then that really they must put a first-class Fresnel on Pelican Island and a good substantial tower instead of that old-fashioned beacon. They did so a year or two later; and a hideous barber's pole it remains to the present day. But when Carrington and Keith landed there the square tower still stood in its gray old age at the very edge of the ocean, so that high tides swept the step of the keeper's house. It was originally a lookout where the Spanish soldier stood and fired his culverin when a vessel came in sight outside the reef; then the British occupied the land, added a story, and placed an iron grating on the top, where their coastguardsman lighted a fire of pitch-pine knots that flared up against the sky, with the tidings, "A sail! a sail!" Finally the United States came into possession, ran up a third story, and put in a revolving light, one flash for the land and two for the sea – a proportion unnecessarily generous now to the land, since nothing came in any more, and everything went by, the little harbor being of no importance since the indigo culture had failed. But ships still sailed by on their way to the Queen of the Antilles, and to the far Windward and Leeward Islands, and the old light went on revolving, presumably for their benefit. The tower, gray and crumbling, and the keeper's house, were surrounded by a high stone wall with angles and loopholes – a small but regularly planned defensive fortification built by the Spaniards; and odd enough it looked there on that peaceful island, where there was nothing to defend. But it bore itself stoutly nevertheless, this ancient little fortress, and kept a sharp lookout still over the ocean for the damnable Huguenot sail of two centuries before.

The sea had encroached greatly on Pelican Island, and sooner or later it must sweep the keeper's house away; but now it was a not unpleasant sensation to hear the water wash against the step – to sit at the narrow little windows and watch the sea roll up, roll up, nearer and nearer, coming all the way landless in long surges from the distant African coast, only to never quite get at the foundations of that stubborn little dwelling, which held its own against them, and then triumphantly watched them roll back, roll back, departing inch by inch down the beach, until, behold! there was a magnificent parade-ground, broad enough for a thousand feet to tread – a floor more fresh and beautiful than the marble pavements of palaces. There were not a thousand feet to tread there, however; only six. For Melvyna had more than enough to do within the house, and Pedro never walked save across the island to the inlet once in two weeks or so, when he managed to row over to the village, and return with supplies, by taking two entire days for it, even Melvyna having given up the point, tacitly submitting to loitering she could not prevent, but recompensing herself by a general cleaning on those days of the entire premises, from the top of the lantern in the tower to the last step in front of the house.

You could not argue with Pedro. He only smiled back upon you as sweetly and as softly as molasses. Melvyna, endeavoring to urge him to energy, found herself in the position of an active ant wading through the downy recesses of a feather bed, which well represented his mind.

Pedro was six feet two inches in height, and amiable as a dove. His wife sensibly accepted him as he was, and he had his two days in town – a very mild dissipation, however, since the Minorcans are too indolent to do anything more than smoke, lie in the sun, and eat salads heavily dressed in oil. They said, "The serene and august wife of our friend is well, we trust?" and, "The island – does it not remain lonely?" and then the salad was pressed upon him again. For they all considered Pedro a man of strange and varied experiences. Had he not married a woman of wonder – of an energy unfathomable? And he lived with her alone in a lighthouse, on an island; alone, mind you, without a friend or relation near!

The six feet that walked over the beautiful beach of the southern ocean were those of Keith, Carrington, and Sister St. Luke.

"Now go, Miss Luke," Melvyna had said, waving her energetically away with the skimmer as she stood irresolute at the kitchen door. "'Twill do you a power of good, and they're nice, quiet gentlemen who will see to you, and make things pleasant. Bless you, *I* know what they are. They ain't none of the miserable, good-for-nothing race about here! Your convent is fifty miles off, ain't it? And besides, you were brought over here half dead for me to cure up – now, warn't you?"

The Sister acknowledged that she was, and Melvyna went on:

"You see, things is different up North, and I understand 'em, but you don't. Now you jest go right along and hev a pleasant walk, and I'll hev a nice bowl of venison broth ready for you when you come back. Go right along now." The skimmer waved again, and the Sister went.

"Yes, she's taken the veil, and is a nun for good and all," explained Melvyna to her new guests the evening of their arrival, when the shy little Sister had retreated to her own room above. "They thought she was dying, and she was so long about it, and useless on their hands, that they sent her up here to the village for sea air, and to be red of her, I guess. 'Tany rate, there she was in one of them crowded, dirty old houses, and so – I jest brought her over here. To tell the truth, gentlemen – the real bottom of it – my baby died last year – and – and Miss Luke she was so good I'll never forget it. I ain't a Catholic – fur from it; I hate 'em. But she seen us coming up from the boat with our little coffin, and she came out and brought flowers to lay on it, and followed to the grave, feeble as she was; and she even put in her little black shawl, because the sand was wet – this miserable half-afloat land, you know – and I couldn't bear to see the coffin set down into it. And I said to myself then that I'd never hate a Catholic again, gentlemen. I don't love 'em yet, and don't know as I ever shell; but Miss Luke, she's different. Consumption? Well, I hardly know. She's a sight better than she was when she come. I'd like to make her well again, and, someway, I can't help a-trying to, for I was a nurse by trade once. But then what's the use? She'll only hev to go back to that old convent!" And Melvyna clashed her pans together in her vexation. "Is she a good Catholic, do you say? Heavens and earth, yes! She's *that* religious – my! I couldn't begin to tell! She believes every word of all that rubbish those old nuns have told her. She thinks it's beautiful to be the bride of heaven; and, as far as that goes, I don't know but she's right: 'tain't much the other kind is wuth," pursued Melvyna, with fine contempt for mankind in general. "As to freedom, they've as good as shoved her off their hands, haven't they? And I guess I can do as I like any way on my own island. There wasn't any man about their old convent, as I can learn, and so Miss Luke, she hain't been taught to run away from 'em like most nuns. Of course, if they knew, they would be sending over here after her; but they don't know, and them priests in the village are too fat and lazy to earn their salt, let alone caring what has become of her. I guess, if they think of her at all, they think that she died, and that they buried her in their crowded, sunken old graveyard. They're so slow and sleepy that they forget half the time who they're burying! But Miss Luke, she ought to go out in the air, and she is so afraid of everything that it don't do her no good to go alone. I haven't got the time to go; and so, if you will let her walk along the beach with you once in a while, it will do her a sight of good, and give her an appetite – although what I want her to hev an appetite for I am sure I don't know; for, ef she gets well, of course she'll go back to the convent. Want to go? *That* she does. She loves the place, and feels lost and strange anywhere else. She was taken there when she was a baby, and it is all the home she has. *She* doesn't know they wanted to be red of her, and she wouldn't believe it ef I was to tell her forty times. She loves them all dearly, and prays every day to go back there. Spanish? Yes, I suppose so; she don't know herself what she is exactly. She speaks English well though, don't she? Yes, Sister St. Luke is her name; and a heathenish name it is for a woman, in my opinion. *I* call her Miss Luke. Convert her? Couldn't any more convert her than you could convert a white gull, and make a land-bird of him. It's his nature to ride on the water and be wet all the time. Towels couldn't dry him – not if you fetched a thousand!"

"Our good hostess is a woman of discrimination, and sorely perplexed, therefore, over her *protégée*" said Keith, as the two young men sought their room, a loft under the peaked roof, which was to be their abode for some weeks, when they were not afloat. "As a nurse she feels a professional

pride in curing, while as a Calvinist she would almost rather kill than cure, if her patient is to go back to the popish convent. But the little Sister looks very fragile. She will probably save trouble all round by fading away."

"She is about as faded now as a woman can be," answered Carrington.

The two friends, or rather companions, plunged into all the phases of the southern ocean with a broad, inhaling, expanding delight which only a physique naturally fine, or carefully trained, can feel. George Carrington was a vigorous young Saxon, tall and broad, feeling his life and strength in every vein and muscle. Each night he slept his eight hours dreamlessly, like a child, and each day he lived four hours in one, counting by the pallid hours of other men. Andrew Keith, on the other hand, represented the physique cultured and trained up to a high point by years of attention and care. He was a slight man, rather undersized, but his wiry strength was more than a match for Carrington's bulk, and his finely cut face, if you would but study it, stood out like a cameo by the side of a ruddy miniature in oils. The trouble is that but few people study cameos. He was older than his companion, and "one of those quiet fellows, you know," said the world. The two had never done or been anything remarkable in their lives. Keith had a little money, and lived as he pleased, while Carrington, off now on a vacation, was junior member of a firm in which family influence had placed him. Both were city men.

"You absolutely do not know how to walk, señora," said Keith. "I will be doctor now, and you must obey me. Never mind the crabs, and never mind the jelly-fish, but throw back your head and walk off briskly. Let the wind blow in your face, and try to stand more erect."

"You are doctor? They told me, could I but see one, well would I be," said the Sister. "At the convent we have only Sister Inez, with her small and old medicines."

"Yes, I think I may call myself doctor," answered Keith gravely. "What do you say, Carrington?"

"Knows no end, Miss, Miss – Miss Luke – I should say, Miss St. Luke. I am sure I do not know why I should stumble over it when St. John is a common enough name," answered Carrington, who generally did his thinking aloud.

"No end?" repeated the little Sister inquiringly. "But there is an end in this evil world to all things."

"Never mind what he says, señora," interrupted Keith, "but step out strongly and firmly, and throw back your head. There now, there are no crabs in sight, and the beach is hard as a floor. Try it with me: one, two; one, two."

So they treated her, partly as a child, partly as a gentle being of an inferior race. It was a new amusement, although a rather mild one Carrington said, to instruct this unformed, timid mind, to open the blinded eyes, and train the ignorant ears to listen to the melodies of nature.

"Do you not hear? It is like the roll of a grand organ," said Keith as they sat on the door-step one evening at sunset. The sky was dark; the wind had blown all day from the north to the south, and frightened the little Sister as she toiled at her lace-work, made on a cushion in the Spanish fashion, her lips mechanically repeating prayers meanwhile; for never had they such winds at the inland convent, embowered in its orange-trees. Now, as the deep, low roll of the waves sounded on the shore, Keith, who was listening to it with silent enjoyment, happened to look up and catch the pale, repressed nervousness of her face.

"Oh, not like an organ," she murmured. "This is a fearful sound; but an organ is sweet – soft and sweet. When Sister Teresa plays the evening hymn it is like the sighing of angels."

"But your organ is probably small, señora."

"We have not thought it small. It remains in our chapel, by the window of arches, and below we walk, at the hour of meditation, from the lime-tree to the white-rose bush, and back again, while the music sounds above. We have not thought it small, but large – yes, very large."

"Four feet long, probably," said Carrington, who was smoking an evening pipe, now listening to the talk awhile, now watching the movements of two white heron who were promenading down the beach. "I saw the one over in the village church. It was about as long as this step."

"Yes," said the Sister, surveying the step, "it is about as long as that. It is a very large organ."

"Walk with me down to the point," said Keith – "just once and back again."

The docile little Sister obeyed; she always did immediately whatever they told her to do.

"I want you to listen now; stand still and listen – listen to the sea," said Keith, when they had turned the point and stood alone on the shore. "Try to think only of the pure, deep, blue water, and count how regularly the sound rolls up in long, low chords, dying away and then growing louder, dying away and then growing louder, as regular as your own breath. Do you not hear it?"

"Yes," said the little Sister timidly.

"Keep time, then, with your hand, and let me see whether you catch the measure."

So the small brown hand, nerveless and slender, tried to mark and measure the roar of the great ocean surges, and at last succeeded, urged on by the alternate praises and rebukes of Keith, who watched with some interest a faint color rise in the pale oval face, and an intent listening look come into the soft, unconscious eyes, as, for the first time, the mind caught the mighty rhythm of the sea. She listened, and listened, standing mute, with head slightly bent and parted lips.

"I want you to listen to it in that way every day," said Keith, as he led the way back. "It has different voices: sometimes a fresh, joyous song, sometimes a faint, loving whisper; but always something. You will learn in time to love it, and then it will sing to you all day long."

"Not at the dear convent; there is no ocean there."

"You want to go back to the convent?"

"Oh, could I go! could I go!" said the Sister, not impatiently, but with an intense yearning in her low voice. "Here, so lost, so strange am I, so wild is everything. But I must not murmur"; and she crossed her hands upon her breast and bowed her head.

The two young men led a riotous life; they rioted with the ocean, with the winds, with the level island, with the sunshine and the racing clouds. They sailed over to the reef daily and plunged into the surf; they walked for miles along the beach, and ran races over its white floor; they hunted down the center of the island, and brought back the little brown deer who lived in the low thicket on each side of the island's backbone. The island was twenty miles long and a mile or two broad, with a central ridge of shell-formed rock about twenty feet in height, that seemed like an Appalachian chain on the level waste; below, in the little hollows on each side, spread a low tangled thicket, a few yards wide; and all the rest was barren sand, with movable hills here and there – hills a few feet in height, blown up by the wind, and changed in a night. The only vegetation besides the thicket was a rope-like vine that crept over the sand, with few leaves far apart, and now and then a dull purple blossom – a solitary tenacious vine of the desert, satisfied with little, its growth slow, its life monotonous; yet try to tear it from the surface of the sand, where its barren length seems to lie loosely like an old brown rope thrown down at random, and behold, it resists you stubbornly. You find a mile or two of it on your hands, clinging and pulling as the strong ivy clings to a stone wall; a giant could not conquer it, this seemingly dull and half-dead thing; and so you leave it there to creep on in its own way, over the damp, shell-strewn waste. One day Carrington came home in great glory; he had found a salt marsh. "Something besides this sand, you know – a stretch of saw-grass away to the south, the very place for fat ducks. And somebody has been there before us, too, for I saw the mast of a sail-boat some distance down, tipped up against the sky."

"That old boat is ours, I guess," said Melvyna. "She drifted down there one high tide, and Pedro he never would go for her. She was a mighty nice little boat, too, ef she was cranky."

Pedro smiled amiably back upon his spouse, and helped himself to another hemisphere of pie. He liked the pies, although she was obliged to make them, she said, of such outlandish things as figs, dried oranges, and pomegranates. "If you could only see a pumpkin, Pedro," she often remarked,

shaking her head. Pedro shook his back in sympathy; but, in the mean time, found the pies very good as they were.

"Let us go down after the boat," said Carrington. "You have only that old tub over at the inlet, Pedro, and you really need another boat." (Carrington always liked to imagine that he was a constant and profound help to the world at large.) "Suppose anything should happen to the one you have?" Pedro had not thought of that; he slowly put down his knife and fork to consider the subject.

"We will go this afternoon," said Keith, issuing his orders, "and you shall go with us, señora."

"And Pedro, too, to help you," said Melvyna. "I've always wanted that boat back, she was such a pretty little thing: one sail, you know, and decked over in front; you sat on the bottom. I'd like right well to go along myself; but I suppose I'd better stay at home and cook a nice supper for you."

Pedro thought so, decidedly.

When the February sun had stopped blazing down directly overhead, and a few white afternoon clouds had floated over from the east to shade his shining, so that man could bear it, the four started inland toward the backbone ridge, on whose summit there ran an old trail southward, made by the fierce Creeks three centuries before. Right up into the dazzling light soared the great eagles – straight up, up to the sun, their unshrinking eyes fearlessly fixed full on his fiery ball.

"It would be grander if we did not know they had just stolen their dinners from the poor hungry fish-hawks over there on the inlet," said Carrington.

Sister St. Luke had learned to walk quite rapidly now. Her little black gown trailed lightly along the sand behind her, and she did her best to "step out boldly," as Keith directed; but it was not firmly, for she only succeeded in making a series of quick, uncertain little paces over the sand like bird-tracks. Once Keith had taken her back and made her look at her own uneven footsteps. "Look – no two the same distance apart," he said. The little Sister looked and was very much mortified. "Indeed, I *will* try with might to do better," she said. And she did try with might; they saw her counting noiselessly to herself as she walked, "One, two; one, two." But she had improved so much that Keith now devoted his energies to teaching her to throw back her head and look about her. "Do you not see those soft banks of clouds piled up in the west?" he said, constantly directing her attention to objects above her. But this was a harder task, for the timid eyes had been trained from childhood to look down, and the head was habitually bent, like a pendant flower on its stem. Melvyna had deliberately laid hands upon the heavy veil and white band that formerly encircled the small face. "You can not breathe in them," she said. But the Sister still wore a light veil over the short dark hair, which would curl in little rings upon her temples in spite of her efforts to prevent it; the cord and heavy beads and cross encircled her slight waist, while the wide sleeves of her nun's garb fell over her hands to the finger-tips.

"How do you suppose she would look dressed like other women?" said Carrington one day. The two men were drifting in their small yacht, lying at ease on the cushions, and smoking.

"Well," answered Keith slowly, "if she was well dressed – very well, I mean, say in the French style – and if she had any spirit of her own, any vivacity, you might, with that dark face of hers and those eyes – you *might* call her piquant."

"Spirit? She has not the spirit of a fly," said Carrington, knocking the ashes out of his pipe and fumbling in an embroidered velvet pouch, one of many offerings at his shrine, for a fresh supply of the strong aromatic tobacco he affected, Keith meanwhile smoking nothing but the most delicate cigarettes. "The other day I heard a wild scream; and rushing down stairs I found her half fainting on the steps, all in a little heap. And what do you think it was? She had been sitting there, lost in a dream – mystic, I suppose, like St. Agnes —

Deep on the convent roof the snows  
Are sparkling to the moon:  
My breath to heaven like vapor goes.  
May my soul follow soon —

and that sort of thing."

"No," said Keith, "there is nothing mystical about the Luke maiden; she has never even dreamed of the ideal ecstasies of deeper minds. She says her little prayers simply, almost mechanically, so many every day, and dwells as it were content in the lowly valleys of religion."

"Well, whatever she was doing," continued Carrington, "a great sea crab had crawled up and taken hold of the toe of her little shoe. Grand tableau – crab and Luke maiden! And the crab had decidedly the better of it."

"She *is* absurdly timid," admitted Keith.

And absurdly timid she was now, when, having crossed the stretch of sand and wound in and out among the low hillocks, they came to the hollow where grew the dark green thicket, through which they must pass to reach the Appalachian range, the backbone of the island, where the trail gave them an easier way than over the sands. Carrington went first and hacked out a path with his knife; Keith followed, and held back the branches; the whole distance was not more than twelve feet; but its recesses looked dark and shadowy to the little Sister, and she hesitated.

"Come," said Carrington; "we shall never reach the salt marsh at this rate."

"There is nothing dangerous here, señora," said Keith. "Look, you can see for yourself. And there are three of us to help you."

"Yes," said Pedro – "three of us." And he swung his broad bulk into the gap.

Still she hesitated.

"Of what are you afraid?" called out Carrington impatiently.

"I know not, indeed," she answered, almost in tears over her own behavior, yet unable to stir. Keith came back, and saw that she was trembling – not violently, but in a subdued, helpless sort of way which was pathetic in its very causelessness.

"Take her up, Pedro," he ordered; and, before she could object, the good-natured giant had borne her in three strides through the dreaded region, and set her down safely upon the ridge. She followed them humbly now, along the safe path, trying to step firmly, and walk with her head up, as Keith had directed. Carrington had already forgotten her again, and even Keith was eagerly looking ahead for the first glimpse of green.

"There is something singularly fascinating in the stretch of a salt marsh," he said. "Its level has such a far sweep as you stand and gaze across it, and you have a dreamy feeling that there is no end to it. The stiff, drenched grasses hold the salt which the tide brings in twice a day, and you inhale that fresh, strong, briny odor, the rank, salt, invigorating smell of the sea; the breeze that blows across has a tang to it like the snap of a whip-lash across your face, bringing the blood to the surface, and rousing you to a quicker pace."

"Ha!" said Carrington; "there it is. Don't you see the green? A little farther on, you will see the mast of the boat."

"That is all that is wanted," said Keith. "A salt marsh is not complete without a boat tilted up aground somewhere, with its slender dark mast outlined against the sky. A boat sailing along in a commonplace way would blight the whole thing; what we want is an abandoned craft, aged and deserted, aground down the marsh with only its mast rising above the waste."

"*Bien!* there it is," said Carrington; "and now the question is, how to get to it."

"You two giants will have to go," said Keith, finding a comfortable seat. "I see a mile or two of tall wading before us, and up to your shoulders is over my head. I went duck-shooting with that man last year, señora. 'Come on,' he cried – 'splendid sport ahead, old fellow; come on.'"

"Is it deep?" I asked from behind. I was already up to my knees, and could not see bottom, the water was so dark.

"Oh, no, not at all; just right," he answered, striding ahead. 'Come on.'

"I came; and went in up to my eyes."

But the señora did not smile.

"You know Carrington is taller than I am," explained Keith, amused by the novelty of seeing his own stories fall flat.

"Is he?" said the Sister vaguely.

It was evident that she had not observed whether he was or not.

Carrington stopped short, and for an instant stared blankly at her. What every one noticed and admired all over the country wherever he went, this little silent creature had not even seen!

"He will never forgive you," said Keith laughing, as the two tall forms strode off into the marsh. Then, seeing that she did not comprehend in the least, he made a seat for her by spreading his light coat on the Appalachian chain, and, leaning back on his elbow, began talking to her about the marsh. "Breathe in the strong salt," he said, "and let your eyes rest on the green, reedy expanse. Supposing you were painting a picture, now – does any one paint pictures at your convent?"

"Ah, yes," said the little nun, rousing to animation at once. "Sister St. James paints pictures the most beautiful on earth. She painted for us Santa Inez with her lamb, and Santa Rufina of Sevilla, with her palms and earthen vases."

"And has she not taught you to paint also?"

"Me! Oh, no. I am only a Sister young and of no gifts. Sister St. James is a great saint, and of age she has seventy years."

"Not requisites for painting, either of them, that I am aware," said Keith. "However, if you were painting this marsh, do you not see how the mast of that boat makes the feature of the landscape the one human element; and yet, even that abandoned, merged as it were in the desolate wildness of the scene?"

The Sister looked over the green earnestly, as if trying to see all that he suggested. Keith talked on. He knew that he talked well, and he did not confuse her with more than one subject, but dwelt upon the marsh; stories of men who had been lost in them, of women who had floated down in boats and never returned; descriptions clear as etchings; studies of the monotone of hues before them – one subject pictured over and over again, as, wishing to instruct a child, he would have drawn with a chalk one letter of the alphabet a hundred times, until the wandering eyes had learned at last to recognize and know it.

"Do you see nothing at all, feel nothing at all?" he said. "Tell me exactly."

Thus urged, the Sister replied that she thought she did feel the salt breeze a little.

"Then take off that shroud and enjoy it," said Keith, extending his arm suddenly, and sweeping off the long veil by the corner that was nearest to him.

"Oh!" said the little Sister – "oh!" and distressfully she covered her head with her hands, as if trying to shield herself from the terrible light of day. But the veil had gone down into the thicket, whither she dared not follow. She stood irresolute.

"I will get it for you before the others come back," said Keith. "It is gone now, however, and, what is more, you could not help it; so sit down, like a sensible creature, and enjoy the breeze."

The little nun sat down, and confusedly tried to be a sensible creature. Her head, with its short rings of dark hair, rose childlike from the black gown she wore, and the breeze swept freshly over her; but her eyes were full of tears, and her face so pleading in its pale, silent distress, that at length Keith went down and brought back the veil.

"See the cranes flying home," he said, as the long line dotted the red of the west. "They always seem to be flying right into the sunset, sensible birds!"

The little Sister had heard that word twice now; evidently the cranes were more sensible than she. She sighed as she fastened on the veil; there were a great many hard things out in the world, then, she thought. At the dear convent it was not expected that one should be as a crane.

The other two came back at length, wet and triumphant, with their prize. They had stopped to bail it out, plug its cracks, mend the old sail after a fashion, and nothing would do but that the three

should sail home in it, Pedro, for whom there was no room, returning by the way they had come. Carrington, having worked hard, was determined to carry out his plan; and said so.

"A fine plan to give us all a wetting," remarked Keith.

"You go down there and work an hour or two yourself, and see how *you* like it," answered the other, with the irrelevance produced by aching muscles and perspiration dripping from every pore.

This conversation had taken place at the edge of the marsh where they had brought the boat up through one of the numerous channels.

"Very well," said Keith. "But mind you, not a word about danger before the Sister. I shall have hard enough work to persuade her to come with us as it is."

He went back to the ridge, and carelessly suggested returning home by water.

"You will not have to go through the thicket then," he said.

Somewhat to his surprise, Sister St. Luke consented immediately, and followed without a word as he led the way. She was mortally afraid of the water, but, during his absence, she had been telling her beads, and thinking with contrition of two obstinacies in one day – that of the thicket and that of the veil – she could not, she would not have three. So, commending herself to all the saints, she embarked.

"Look here, Carrington, if ever you inveigle me into such danger again for a mere fool's fancy, I will show you what I think of it. You knew the condition of that boat, and I did not," said Keith, sternly, as the two men stood at last on the beach in front of the lighthouse. The Sister had gone within, glad to feel land underfoot once more. She had sat quietly in her place all the way, afraid of the water, of the wind, of everything, but entirely unconscious of the real danger that menaced them. For the little craft would not mind her helm; her mast slipped about erratically; the planking at the bow seemed about to give way altogether; and they were on a lee shore, with the tide coming in, and the surf beating roughly on the beach. They were both good sailors, but it had taken all they knew to bring the boat safely to the lighthouse.

"To tell the truth, I did not think she was so crippled," said Carrington. "She really is a good boat for her size."

"Very," said Keith sarcastically.

But the younger man clung to his opinion; and, in order to verify it, he set himself to work repairing the little craft. You would have supposed his daily bread depended upon her being made seaworthy, by the way he labored. She was made over from stem to stern: a new mast, a new sail; and, finally, scarlet and green paint were brought over from the village, and out she came as brilliant as a young paroquet. Then Carrington took to sailing in her. Proud of his handy work, he sailed up and down, over to the reef, and up the inlet, and even persuaded Melvyna to go with him once, accompanied by the meek little Sister.

"Why shouldn't you both learn how to manage her?" he said in his enthusiasm. "She's as easy to manage as a child –"

"And as easy to tip over," replied Melvyna, screwing up her lips tightly and shaking her head. "You don't catch me out in her again, sure's as my name's Sawyer."

For Melvyna always remained a Sawyer in her own mind, in spite of her spouse's name; she could not, indeed, be anything else — *noblesse oblige*. But the Sister, obedient as usual, bent her eyes in turn upon the ropes, the mast, the sail, and the helm, while Carrington, waxing eloquent over his favorite science, delivered a lecture upon their uses, and made her experiment a little to see if she comprehended. He used the simplest words for her benefit, words of one syllable, and unconsciously elevated his voice somewhat, as though that would make her understand better; her wits seemed to him always of the slowest. The Sister followed his directions, and imitated his motions with painstaking minuteness. She did very well until a large porpoise rolled up his dark, glistening back close alongside, when, dropping the sail-rope with a scream, she crouched down at Melvyna's feet and hid her face in her veil. Carrington from that day could get no more passengers for his

paroquet boat. But he sailed up and down alone in his little craft, and, when that amusement palled, he took the remainder of the scarlet and green paint and adorned the shells of various sea-crabs and other crawling things, so that the little Sister was met one afternoon by a whole procession of unearthly creatures, strangely variegated, proceeding gravely in single file down the beach from the pen where they had been confined. Keith pointed out to her, however, the probability of their being much admired in their own circles as long as the hues lasted, and she was comforted.

They strolled down the beach now every afternoon, sometimes two, sometimes three, sometimes four when Melvyna had no cooking to watch, no bread to bake; for she rejected with scorn the omnipresent hot biscuit of the South, and kept her household supplied with light loaves in spite of the difficulties of yeast. Sister St. Luke had learned to endure the crabs, but she still fled from the fiddlers when they strayed over from their towns in the marsh; she still went carefully around the great jelly-fish sprawling on the beach, and regarded from a safe distance the beautiful blue Portuguese men-of-war, stranded unexpectedly on the dangerous shore, all their fair voyagings over. Keith collected for her the brilliant sea-weeds, little flecks of color on the white sand, and showed her their beauties; he made her notice all the varieties of shells, enormous conches for the tritons to blow, and beds of wee pink ovals and cornucopias, plates and cups for the little web-footed fairies. Once he came upon a sea-bean.

"It has drifted over from one of the West Indian islands," he said, polishing it with his handkerchief – "one of the islands – let us say Miraprovos – a palmy tropical name, bringing up visions of a volcanic mountain, vast cliffs, a tangled gorgeous forest, and the soft lapping wash of tropical seas. Is it not so, señora?"

But the señora had never heard of the West Indian Islands. Being told, she replied: "As you say it, it is so. There is, then, much land in the world?"

"If you keep the sea-bean for ever, good will come," said Keith, gravely presenting it; "but, if after having once accepted it you then lose it, evil will fall upon you."

The Sister received the amulet with believing reverence. "I will lay it up before the shrine of Our Lady," she said, carefully placing it in the little pocket over her heart, hidden among the folds of her gown, where she kept her most precious treasures – a bead of a rosary that had belonged to some saint who lived somewhere some time, a little faded prayer copied in the handwriting of a young nun who had died some years before and whom she had dearly loved, and a list of her own most vicious faults, to be read over and lamented daily; crying evils such as a perverse and insubordinate bearing, a heart froward and evil, gluttonous desires of the flesh, and a spirit of murderous rage. These were her own ideas of herself, written down at the convent. Had she not behaved herself perversely to the Sister Paula, with whom one should be always mild on account of the affliction which had sharpened her tongue? Had she not wrongfully coveted the cell of the novice Felipa, because it looked out upon the orange walk? Had she not gluttonously longed for more of the delectable marmalade made by the aged Sanchita? And, worse than all, had she not, in a spirit of murderous rage, beat the yellow cat with a palm-branch for carrying off the young doves, her especial charge? "Ah, my sins are great indeed," she sighed daily upon her knees, and smote her breast with tears.

Keith watched the sea-bean go into the little heart-pocket almost with compunction. Many of these amulets of the sea, gathered during his winter rambles, had he bestowed with formal warning of their magic powers, and many a fair hand had taken them, many a soft voice had promised to keep them "for ever." But he well knew they would be mislaid and forgotten in a day. The fair ones well knew it too, and each knew that the other knew, so no harm was done. But this sea-bean, he thought, would have a different fate – laid up in some little nook before the shrine, a witness to the daily prayers of the simple-hearted little Sister. "I hope they may do it good," he thought vaguely. Then, reflecting that even the most depraved bean would not probably be much affected by the prayers, he laughed off the fancy, yet did not quite like to think, after all, that the prayers were of no use. Keith's religion, however, was in the primary rocks.

Far down the beach they came upon a wreck, an old and long hidden relic of the past. The low sand-bluff had caved away suddenly and left a clean new side, where, imbedded in the lower part, they saw a ponderous mast. "An old Spanish galleon," said Keith, stooping to examine the remains. "I know it by the curious bolts. They ran ashore here, broadside on, in one of those sudden tornadoes they have along this coast once in a while, I presume. Singular! This was my very place for lying in the sun and letting the blaze scorch me with its clear scintillant splendor. I never imagined I was lying on the bones of this old Spaniard."

"God rest the souls of the sailors!" said the Sister, making the sign of the cross.

"They have been in – wherever they are, let us say, for about three centuries now," observed Keith, "and must be used to it, good or bad."

"Nay; but purgatory, señor."

"True. I had forgotten that," said Keith.

One morning there came up a dense, soft, southern-sea fog, "The kind you can cut with a knife," Carrington said. It lasted for days, sweeping out to sea at night on the land breeze, and lying in a gray bank low down on the horizon, and then rolling in again in the morning enveloping the water and the island in a thick white cloud which was not mist and did not seem damp even, so freshly, softly salt was the feeling it gave to the faces that went abroad in it. Carrington and Keith, of course, must needs be out in it every moment of the time. They walked down the beach for miles, hearing the muffled sound of the near waves, but not seeing them. They sailed in it not knowing whither they went, and they drifted out at sunset and watched the land breeze lift it, roll it up, and carry it out to sea, where distant ships on the horizon line, bound southward, and nearer ones, sailing northward with the Gulf Stream, found themselves enveloped and bothered by their old and baffling foe. They went over to the reef every morning, these two, and bathed in the fog, coming back by sense of feeling, as it were, and landing not infrequently a mile below or above the lighthouse; then what appetites they had for breakfast! And, if it was not ready, they roamed about, roaring like young lions. At least that is what Melvyna said one morning when Carrington had put his curly head into her kitchen door six times in the course of one half hour.

The Sister shrank from the sea fog; she had never seen one before, and she said it was like a great soft white creature that came in on wings, and brooded over the earth. "Yes, beautiful, perhaps," she said in reply to Keith, "but it is so strange – and – and – I know not how to say it – but it seems like a place for spirits to walk, and not of the mortal kind."

They were wandering down the beach, where Keith had lured her to listen to the sound of the hidden waves. At that moment Carrington loomed into view coming toward them. He seemed of giant size as he appeared, passed them, and disappeared again into the cloud behind, his voice sounding muffled as he greeted them. The Sister shrank nearer to her companion as the figure had suddenly made itself visible. "Do you know it is a wonder to me how you have ever managed to live so far," said Keith smiling.

"But it was not far," said the little nun. "Nothing was ever far at the dear convent, but everything was near, and not of strangeness to make one afraid; the garden wall was the end. There we go not outside, but our walk is always from the lime-tree to the white rose-bush and back again. Everything we know there – not roar of waves, not strong wind, not the thick, white air comes to give us fear, but all is still and at peace. At night I dream of the organ, and of the orange-trees, and of the doves. I wake, and hear only the sound of the great water below."

"You will go back," said Keith.

He had begun to pity her lately, for her longing was deeper than he had supposed. It had its roots in her very being. He had studied her and found it so.

"She will die of pure homesickness if she stays here much longer," he said to Carrington. "What do you think of our writing down to that old convent and offering – of course unknown to her – to pay the little she costs them, if they will take her back?"

"All right," said Carrington. "Go ahead."

He was making a larger sail for his paroquet boat. "If none of you will go out in her, I might as well have all the sport I can," he said.

"Sport to consist in being swamped?" Keith asked.

"By no means, croaker. Sport to consist in shooting over the water like a rocket; I sitting on the tilted edge, watching the waves, the winds, and the clouds, and hearing the water sing as we rush along."

Keith took counsel with no one else, not even with Melvyna, but presently he wrote his letter and carried it himself over to the village to mail. He did good deeds like that once in a while, "to help humanity," he said. They were tangible always; like the primary rocks.

At length one evening the fog rolled out to sea for good and all, at least as far as that shore was concerned. In the morning there stood the lighthouse, and the island, and the reef, just the same as ever. They had almost expected to see them altered, melted a little.

"Let us go over to the reef, all of us, and spend the day," said Keith. "It will do us good to breathe the clear air, and feel the brilliant, dry, hot sunshine again."

"Hear the man!" said Melvyna laughing. "After trying to persuade us all those days that he liked that sticky fog too!"

"Mme. Gonsalvez, we like a lily; but is that any reason why we may not also like a rose?"

"Neither of 'em grows on this beach as I'm aware of," answered Melvyna dryly.

Then Carrington put in his voice, and carried the day. Women never resisted Carrington long, but yielded almost unconsciously to the influence of his height and his strength, and his strong, hearty will. A subtler influence over them, however, would have waked resistance, and Carrington himself would have been conquered far sooner (and was conquered later) by one who remained unswayed by those influences, to which others paid involuntary obeisance.

Pedro had gone to the village for his supplies and his two days of mild Minorcan dissipation, and Melvyna, beguiled and cajoled by the chaffing of the two young men, at last consented, and not only packed the lunch-basket with careful hand, but even donned for the occasion her "best bonnet," a structure trimmed in Vermont seven years before by the experienced hand of Miss Althy Spears, the village milliner, who had adorned it with a durable green ribbon and a vigorous wreath of artificial flowers. Thus helmeted, Mme. Gonsalvez presided at the stern of the boat with great dignity. For they were in the safe, well-appointed little yacht belonging to the two gentlemen, the daring paroquet having been left at home tied to the last of a low heap of rocks that jutted out into the water in front of the lighthouse, the only remains of the old stone dock built by the Spaniards long before. Sister St. Luke was with them of course, gentle and frightened as usual. Her breath came quickly as they neared the reef, and Carrington with a sure hand guided the little craft outside into the surf, and, rounding a point, landed them safely in a miniature harbor he had noted there. Keith had counted the days, and felt sure that the answer from the convent would come soon. His offer – for he had made it his alone without Carrington's aid – had been liberal; there could be but one reply. The little Sister would soon go back to the lime-tree, the white rose-bush, the doves, the old organ that was "so large" – all the quiet routine of the life she loved so well; and they would see her small oval face and timid dark eyes no more. So he took her for a last walk down the reef, while Melvyna made coffee, and Carrington, having noticed a dark line floating on the water, immediately went out in his boat, of course, to see what it was.

The reef had its high backbone, like the island. Some day it would be the island, with another reef outside, and the lighthouse beach would belong to the mainland. Down the stretch of sand toward the sea the pelicans stood in rows, toeing a mark, solemn and heavy, by the hundreds – a countless number – for the reef was their gathering-place.

"They are holding a conclave," said Keith. "That old fellow has the floor. See him wag his head."

In and out among the pelicans, and paying no attention to them and their conclave, sped the sickle-bill curlews, actively probing everywhere with their long, grotesque, sickle-shaped bills; and woe be to the burrowing things that came in their way! The red-beaked oyster-bird flew by, and close down to the sea skimmed the razor-bill shear-water, with his head bent forward and his feet tilted up, just grazing the water with his open bill as he flew, and leaving a shining mark behind, as though he held a pencil in his mouth and was running a line. The lazy gulls, who had no work to do, and would not have done it if they had, rode at ease on the little wavelets close in shore. The Sister, being asked, confessed that she liked the lazy gulls best. Being pressed to say why, she thought it was because they were more like the white doves that sat on the old stone well-curb in the convent garden.

Keith had always maintained that he liked to talk to women. He said that the talk of any woman was more piquant than the conversation of the most brilliant men. There was only one obstacle: the absolute inability of the sex to be sincere, or to tell the truth, for ten consecutive minutes. Today, however, as he wandered to and fro whither he would on the reef, he also wandered to and fro whither he would in the mind, and the absolutely truthful mind too, of a woman. Yet he found it dull! He sighed to himself, but was obliged to acknowledge that it *was* dull. The lime-tree, the organ, the Sisters, the Sisters, the lime-tree, the organ; it grew monotonous after a while. Yet he held his post, for the sake of the old theory, until the high voice of Melvyna called them back to the little fire on the beach and the white cloth spread with her best dainties. They saw Carrington sailing in with an excited air, and presently he brought the boat into the cove and dragged ashore his prize, towed behind – nothing less than a large shark, wounded, dead, after a struggle with some other marine monster, a sword-fish probably. "A man-eater," announced the captor. "Look at him, will you? Look at him, Miss Luke!"

But Miss Luke went far away, and would not look. In truth he was an ugly creature; even Melvyna kept at a safe distance. But the two men noted all his points; they measured him carefully; they turned him over, and discussed him generally in that closely confined and exhaustive way which marks the masculine mind. Set two women to discussing a shark, or even the most lovely little brook-trout, if you please, and see how far off they will be in five minutes!

But the lunch was tempting, and finally its discussion called them away even from that of the shark. And then they all sailed homeward over the green and blue water, while the white sand-hills shone silvery before them, and then turned red in the sunset. That night the moon was at its full. Keith went out and strolled up and down on the beach. Carrington was playing fox-and-goose with Mme. Gonsalvez on a board he had good-naturedly constructed for her entertainment when she confessed one day to a youthful fondness for that exciting game. Up stairs gleamed the little Sister's light. "Saying her prayers with her lips, but thinking all the time of that old convent," said the stroller to himself, half scornfully. And he said the truth.

The sea was still and radiant; hardly more than a ripple broke at his feet; the tide was out, and the broad beach silvery and fresh. "At home they are buried in snow," he thought, "and the wind is whistling around their double windows." And then he stretched himself on the sand, and lay looking upward into the deep blue of the night, bathed in the moonlight, and listening dreamily to the soft sound of the water as it returned slowly, slowly back from the African coast. He thought many thoughts, and deep ones too, and at last he was so far away on ideal heights, that, coming home after midnight, it was no wonder if, half unconsciously, he felt himself above the others; especially when he passed the little Sister's closed door, and thought, smiling not unkindly, how simple she was.

The next morning the two men went off in their boat again for the day, this time alone. There were still a few more questions to settle about that shark, and, to tell the truth, they both liked a good day of unencumbered sailing better than anything else.

About four o'clock in the afternoon Melvyna, happening to look out of the door, saw a cloud no bigger than a man's hand low down on the horizon line of the sea. Something made her stand

and watch it for a few moments. Then, "Miss Luke! Miss Luke! Miss Luke! Miss Luke!" she called quickly. Down came the little Sister, startled at the cry, her lace-work still in her hand.

"Look!" said Melvyna.

The Sister looked, and this is what she saw: a line white as milk coming toward them on the water, and behind it a blackness.

"What is it?" she asked.

"A tornader," said Melvyna with white lips. "I've only seen one, and then I was over in the town; but it's awful! We must run back to the thicket." Seizing her companion's arm, the strong Northern woman hurried her across the sand, through the belt of sand-hills, and into the thicket, where they crouched on its far side close down under the projecting backbone. "The bushes will break the sand, and the ridge will keep us from being buried in it," she said. "I dursn't stay on the shore, for the water'll rise."

The words were hardly spoken before the tornado was upon them, and the air was filled with the flying sand, so that they could hardly breathe. Half choked, they beat with their hands before them to catch a breath. Then came a roar, and for an instant, distant as they were, they caught a glimpse of the crest of the great wave that followed the whirlwind. It seemed to them mountain-high, and ready to engulf the entire land. With a rushing sound it plunged over the keeper's house, broke against the lower story of the tower, hissed across the sand, swallowed the sand-hills, and swept to their very feet, then sullenly receded with slow, angry muttering. A gale of wind came next, singularly enough from another direction, as if to restore the equipoise of the atmosphere. But the tornado had gone on inland, where there were trees to uproot, and houses to destroy, and much finer entertainment generally.

As soon as they could speak, "Where are the two out in the sail-boat?" asked the Sister.

"God knows!" answered Melvyna. "The last time I noticed their sail they were about a mile outside of the reef."

"I will go and see."

"Go and see! Are you crazy? You can never get through that water."

"The saints would help me, I think," said the little Sister.

She had risen, and now stood regarding the watery waste with the usual timid look in her gentle eyes. Then she stepped forward with her uncertain tread, and before the woman by her side comprehended her purpose she was gone, ankle-deep in the tide, knee-deep, and finally wading across the sand up to her waist in water toward the lighthouse. The great wave was no deeper, however, even there. She waded to the door of the tower, opened it with difficulty, climbed the stairway, and gained the light-room, where the glass of the windows was all shattered, and the little chamber half full of the dead bodies of birds, swept along by the whirlwind and dashed against the tower, none of them falling to the ground or losing an inch of their level in the air as they sped onward, until they struck against some high object, which broke their mad and awful journey. Holding on by the shattered casement, Sister St. Luke gazed out to sea. The wind was blowing fiercely, and the waves were lashed to fury. The sky was inky black. The reef was under water, save one high knob of its backbone, and to that two dark objects were clinging. Farther down she saw the wreck of the boat driving before the gale. Pedro was over in the village; the tide was coming in over the high sea, and night was approaching. She walked quickly down the rough stone stairs, stepped into the water again, and waded across where the paroquet boat had been driven against the wall of the house, bailed it out with one of Melvyna's pans, and then, climbing in from the window of the sitting-room, she hoisted the sail, and in a moment was out on the dark sea.

Melvyna had ascended to the top of the ridge, and when the sail came into view beyond the house she fell down on her knees and began to pray aloud: "O Lord, save her; save the lamb! She don't know what's she is doing, Lord. She's as simple as a baby. Oh, save her, out on that roaring sea! Good Lord, good Lord, deliver her!" Fragments of prayers she had heard in her prayer-meeting days came confusedly back into her mind, and she repeated them all again and again, wringing her

hands as she saw the little craft tilt far over under its all too large sail, so that several times, in the hollows of the waves, she thought it was gone. The wind was blowing hard but steadily, and in a direction that carried the boat straight toward the reef; no tacks were necessary, no change of course; the black-robed little figure simply held the sail-rope, and the parouquet drove on. The two clinging to the rock, bruised, exhausted, with the waves rising and falling around them, did not see the boat until it was close upon them.

"By the great heavens!" said Keith.

His face was pallid and rigid, and there was a ghastly cut across his forehead, the work of the sharp-edged rock. The next moment he was on board, brought the boat round just in time, and helped in Carrington, whose right arm was injured.

"You have saved our lives, señora," he said abruptly.

"By Jove, yes," said Carrington. "We could not have stood it long, and night was coming." Then they gave all their attention to the hazardous start.

Sister St. Luke remained unconscious of the fact that she had done anything remarkable. Her black gown was spoiled, which was a pity, and she knew of a balm which was easily compounded and which would heal their bruises. Did they think Melvyna had come back to the house yet? And did they know that all her dishes were broken – yes, even the cups with the red flowers on the border? Then she grew timorous again, and hid her face from the sight of the waves.

Keith said not a word, but sailed the boat, and it was a wild and dangerous voyage they made, tacking up and down in the gayly painted little craft, that seemed like a toy on that angry water. Once Carrington took the little Sister's hand in his, and pressed his lips fervently upon it. She had never had her hand kissed before, and looked at him, then at the place, with a vague surprise, which soon faded, however, into the old fear of the wind. It was night when at last they reached the lighthouse; but during the last two tacks they had a light from the window to guide them; and when nearly in they saw the lantern shining out from the shattered windows of the tower in a fitful, surprised sort of way, for Melvyna had returned, and, with the true spirit of a Yankee, had immediately gone to work at the ruins.

The only sign of emotion she gave was to Keith. "I saw it all," she said. "That child went right out after you, in that terrible wind, as natural and as quiet as if she was only going across the room. And she so timid a fly could frighten her! Mark my words, Mr. Keith, the good Lord helped her to do it! And I'll go to that new mission chapel over in the town every Sunday after this, as sure's my name is Sawyer!" She ceased abruptly, and, going into her kitchen, slammed the door behind her. Emotion with Melvyna took the form of roughness.

Sister St. Luke went joyfully back to her convent the next day, for Pedro, when he returned, brought the letter, written, as Keith had directed, in the style of an affectionate invitation. The little nun wept for happiness when she read it. "You see how they love me – love me as I love them," she repeated with innocent triumph again and again.

"It is all we can do," said Keith. "She could not be happy anywhere else, and with the money behind her she will not be neglected. Besides, I really believe they do love her. The sending her up here was probably the result of some outside dictation."

Carrington, however, was dissatisfied. "A pretty return we make for our saved lives!" he said. "I hate ingratitude." For Carrington was half disposed now to fall in love with his preserver.

But Keith stood firm.

"Addios," said the little Sister, as Pedro's boat received her. Her face had lighted so with joy and glad anticipation that they hardly knew her. "I wish you could to the convent go with me," she said earnestly to the two young men. "I am sure you would like it." Then, as the boat turned the point, "I am sure you would like it," she called back, crossing her hands on her breast. "It is very heavenly there – very heavenly."

That was the last they saw of her.

Carrington sent down the next winter from New York a large silver crucifix, superbly embossed and ornamented. It was placed on the high altar of the convent, and much admired and revered by all the nuns. Sister St. Luke admired it too. She spoke of the island occasionally, but she did not tell the story of the rescue. She never thought of it. Therefore, in the matter of the crucifix, the belief was that a special grace had touched the young man's heart. And prayers were ordered for him. Sister St. Luke tended her doves, and at the hour of meditation paced to and fro between the lime-tree and the bush of white roses. When she was thirty years old her cup was full, for then she was permitted to take lessons and play a little upon the old organ.

Melvyna went every Sunday to the bare, struggling little Presbyterian mission over in the town, and she remains to this day a Sawyer.

But Keith remembered. He bares his head silently in reverence to all womanhood, and curbs his cynicism as best he can, for the sake of the little Sister – the sweet little Sister St. Luke.

## MISS ELISABETHA

In yonder homestead, wreathed with bounteous vines,  
A lonely woman dwells, whose wandering feet  
Pause oft amid one chamber's calm retreat,  
Where an old mirror from its quaint frame shines.  
And here, soft wrought in memory's vague designs,  
Dim semblances her wistful gaze will greet  
Of lost ones that intrall phantasmally sweet  
The mirror's luminous quietude enshrines.

But unto her these dubious forms that pass  
With shadowy majesty or dreamy grace,  
Wear nothing of ghostliness in mien or guise.  
The only ghost that haunts this glimmering glass  
Carries the sad reality in its face  
Of her own haggard cheeks and desolate eyes!

*EDGAR FAWCETT.*

OVERLOOKING the tide-water river stands an old house, gleaming white in the soft moonlight; the fragrance of tropic flowers floats out to sea on the land-breeze, coming at sunset over the pine-barrens to take the place of the ocean winds that have blown all day long, bringing in the salt freshness to do battle with the hot shafts of the sun and conquer them. The side of the house toward the river shows stone arches, door-less, opening into a hall; beyond is a large room, lighted by two candles placed on an old-fashioned piano; and full in their yellow radiance sits Miss Elisabetha, playing, with clear, measured touch, an old-time minuet. The light falls upon her face, with its sharp, high-curved features, pale-blue eyes, and the three thin curls of blonde hair on each side. She is not young, our Elisabetha: the tall, spare form, stiffly erect, the little wisp of hair behind ceremoniously braided and adorned with a high comb, the long, thin hands, with the tell-tale wrist-bones prominent as she plays, and the fine network of wrinkles over her pellucid, colorless cheeks, tell this. But the boy who listens sees it not; to him she is a St. Cecilia, and the gates of heaven open as she plays. He leans his head against the piano, and his thoughts are lost in melody; they do not take the form of words, but sway to and fro with the swell and the ebb of the music. If you should ask him, he could not express what he feels, for his is no analytical mind; attempt to explain it to him, and very likely he would fall asleep before your eyes. Miss Elisabetha plays well – in a prim, old-fashioned way, but yet well; the ancient piano has lost its strength, but its tones are still sweet, and the mistress humors its failings. She tunes it herself, protects its strings from the sea-damps, dusts it carefully, and has embroidered for it a cover in cross-stitch, yellow tulips growing in straight rows out of a blue ground – an heirloom pattern brought from Holland. Yet entire happiness can not be ours in this world, and Miss Elisabetha sometimes catches herself thinking how delightful it would be to use E flat once more; but the piano's E flat is hopelessly gone.

"Is not that enough for this evening, Theodore?" said Miss Elisabetha, closing the manuscript music-book, whose delicate little pen-and-ink notes were fading away with age.

"Oh, no, dear aunt; sing for me, please, 'The Proud Ladye.'"

And so the piano sounded forth again in a prim melody, and the thin voice began the ballad of the knight, who, scorned by his lady-love, went to the wars with her veil bound on his heart; he dies on the field, but a dove bears back the veil to the Proud Ladye, who straightway falls "a-weeping and

a-weeping till she weeps her life away." The boy who listens is a slender stripling, with brown eyes, and a mass of brown curls tossed back from a broad, low forehead; he has the outlines of a Greek, and a dark, silken fringe just borders his boyish mouth. He is dressed in a simple suit of dark-blue cotton jacket and trousers, the broad white collar turned down, revealing his round young throat; on his slender feet he wears snowy stockings, knitted by Miss Elisabetha's own hands, and over them a low slipper of untanned leather. His brown hands are clasped over one knee, the taper fingers and almond-shaped nails betraying the artistic temperament – a sign which is confirmed by the unusually long, slender line of the eyebrows, curving down almost to the cheeks.

"A-weeping and a-weeping till she weeps her life away," sang Miss Elisabetha, her voice in soft *diminuendo* to express the mournful end of the Proud Ladye. Then, closing the piano carefully, and adjusting the tulip-bordered cover, she extinguished the candles, and the two went out under the open arches, where chairs stood ready for them nightly. The tide-water river – the Warra – flowed by, the moon-path shining goldenly across it; up in the north palmettos stood in little groups alongshore, with the single feathery pine-trees of the barrens coming down to meet them; in the south shone the long lagoon, with its low islands, while opposite lay the slender point of the mainland, fifteen miles in length, the Warra on one side, and on the other the ocean; its white sand-ridges gleamed in the moonlight, and the two could hear the sound of the waves on its outer beach.

"It is so beautiful," said the boy, his dreamy eyes following the silver line of the lagoon.

"Yes," replied Miss Elisabetha, "but we have no time to waste, Theodore. Bring your guitar and let me hear you sing that *romanza* again; remember the pauses – three beats to the measure."

Then sweetly sounded forth the soft tenor voice, singing an old French *romanza*, full of little quavers, and falls, and turns, which the boy involuntarily slurred into something like naturalness, or gave *staccato* as the mocking-bird throws out his shower of short, round notes. But Miss Elisabetha allowed no such license: had she not learned that very *romanza* from Monsieur Vocard himself forty years before? and had he not carefully taught her every one of those little turns and quavers? Taking the guitar from Theodore's hand, she executed all the flourishes slowly and precisely, making him follow her, note for note. Then he must sing it all over again while she beat the time with her long, slender foot, incased in a black-silk slipper of her own making. The ladies of the Daarg family always wore slippers – the heavy-sounding modern boot they considered a structure suitable only for persons of plebeian origin. A lady should not even step perceptibly; she should glide.

"Miss 'Lisabeet, de toas' is ready. Bress de chile, how sweet he sings to-night! Mos' like de mock-bird's self, Mass' Doro."

So spoke old Viny, the one servant of the house, a broad-shouldered, jet-black, comfortable creature, with her gray wool peeping from beneath a gay turban. She had belonged to Doro's Spanish mother, but, when Miss Elisabetha came South to take the house and care for the orphan-boy, she had purchased the old woman, and set her free immediately.

"It don't make naw difference as I can see, Miss 'Lisabeet," said Viny, when the new mistress carefully explained to her that she was a free agent from that time forth. "'Pears harnsome in you to do it, but it arn't likely I'll leabe my chile, my Doro-boy, long as I lib – is it, now? When I die, he'll have ole Viny burred nice, wid de priests, an' de candles, an' de singing, an' all."

"Replace your guitar, Theodore," said Miss Elisabetha, rising, "and then walk to and fro between here and the gate ten times. Walk briskly, and keep your mouth shut; after singing you should always guard against the damp."

The boy obeyed in his dreamy way, pacing down the white path, made hard with pounded oyster-shells, to the high stone wall. The old iron-clamped gate, which once hung between the two pomegranate-topped pillars, was gone; for years it had leaned tottering half across the entrance-way, threatening to brain every comer, but Miss Elisabetha had ordered its removal in the twinkling of her Northern eye, and in its place now hung a neat, incongruous little wicket, whose latch was a standing bone of contention between the mistress and the entire colored population of the small village.

"Go back and latch the gate," was her constantly repeated order; "the cows might enter and injure the garden."

"But th' arn't no cows, Miss 'Lisabeet."

"There should be, then," the ancient maiden would reply, severely. "Grass would grow with a little care and labor; look at our pasture. You are much too indolent, good people!"

Theodore stood leaning over the little gate, his eyes fixed on the white sand-hills across the Warra; he was listening to the waves on the outer beach.

"Theodore, Theodore!" called Miss Elisabetha's voice, "do not stand, but pace to and fro; and be sure and keep your mouth closed."

Mechanically the boy obeyed, but his thoughts were following the sound of the water. Following a sound? Yes. Sounds were to him a language, and he held converse with the surf, the winds, the rustling marsh-grass, and the sighing pines of the barrens. The tale of the steps completed, he reëntered the house, and, following the light, went into a long, narrow room, one of three which, built out behind the main body of the house, formed with its back-wall a square, surrounding a little courtyard, in whose center stood the well, a ruined fountain, rose- and myrtle-bushes, and two ancient fig-trees, dwarfed and gnarled. Miss Elisabetha was standing at the head of the table; before her was a plate containing three small slices of dry toast, crisp and brown, and a decanter of orange-wine, made by her own hands. One slice of the toast was for herself, two were for the boy, who was still supposed to be growing; a Northerner would have said that he was over twenty, but Spanish blood hastens life, and Teodoro in years was actually not yet eighteen. In mind he was still younger, thanks to Miss Elisabetha's care and strict control. It had never even occurred to him that he need not so absolutely obey her; and, to tell the truth, neither had it occurred to her. Doro ate his simple supper standing – the Daarg family never sat down gluttonously to supper, but browsed lightly on some delicate fragments, moving about and chatting meanwhile as though half forgetting they were eating at all. Then Miss Elisabetha refilled his little glass, watched him drink the clear amber liquid to the last drop, and bade him good night in her even voice. He turned at the door and made her a formal bow, not without grace; she had carefully taught him this salutation, and required it of him every night.

"I wish you a blessed rest, Theodore," she said, courtesying in reply; "do not keep the light burning."

Half an hour later, when the ancient maiden glided out of her chamber, clad in a long frilled wrapper, the three curls in papers on each side of her head, she saw no gleam from under the low door of the little room across the hall; she listened, but there was no sound, and, satisfied, she retired to her high couch and closed the gayly flowered curtains around her. But, out on the small balcony which hung like a cage from his eastern window, Doro stood, leaning over the iron railing and listening, listening to the far sound of the sea.

Such had been the life down in the old house for sixteen long, winterless years, the only changes being more difficult music and more toast, longer lessons in French, longer legs to the little blue trousers, increased attention to sea-baths and deportment, and always and ever a careful saving of every copper penny and battered shilling. What became of these coins old Viny did not know; she only knew how patiently they were collected, and how scrupulously saved. Miss Elisabetha attended to the orange-grove in person; not one orange was lost, and the annual waste of the other proprietors, an ancient and matter-of-course waste, handed down from father to son, represented in her purse not a few silver pieces. Pedro, the Minorcan, who brought her fish and sea-food, she had drilled from boyhood in his own art by sheer force of will, paying him by the day, and sending him into the town to sell from door to door all she did not need herself, to the very last clam. The lazy housewives soon grew into the habit of expecting Pedro and his basket, and stood in their doorways chatting in the sun and waiting for him, while the husbands let their black dugouts lie idle, and lounged on the sea-wall, smoking and discussing the last alligator they had shot, or the last ship, a coasting-schooner out of water, which had sailed up their crooked harbor six months before. Miss Elisabetha had learned

also to braid palmetto, and her long fingers, once accustomed to the work, accomplished as much in a week as Zanita Perez and both her apprentices accomplished in two; she brought to the task also original ideas, original at least in Beata, where the rude hats and baskets were fac-similes of those braided there two hundred years before by the Spanish women, who had learned the art from the Indians. Thus Miss Elisabetha's wares found ready sale at increased prices, little enough to Northern ideas – sixpence for a hat – one shilling for a basket; but all down the coast, and inland toward the great river, there was a demand for her work, and the lines hung in the garden were almost constantly covered with the drying palmetto. Then she taught music. To whom, do you ask? To the black-eyed daughters of the richer townspeople, and to one or two demoiselles belonging to Spanish families down the coast, sent up to Beata to be educated by the nuns. The good Sisters did their best, but they knew little, poor things, and were glad to call in Miss Elisabetha with her trills and quavers; so the wiry organ in the little cathedral sounded out the ballads and *romanzas* of Monsieur Vocard, and the demoiselles learned to sing them in their broken French, no doubt greatly to the satisfaction of the golden-skinned old fathers and mothers on the plantations down the coast. The *padre* in charge of the parish had often importuned Miss Elisabetha to play this organ on Sundays, as the decorous celebration of high-mass suffered sadly, not to say ludicrously, from the blunders of poor Sister Paula. But Miss Elisabetha briefly refused; she must draw a line somewhere, and a pagan ceremonial she could not countenance. The Daarg family, while abhorring greatly the Puritanism of the New England colonies, had yet held themselves equally aloof from the image-worship of Rome; and they had always considered it one of the inscrutable mysteries of Providence that the French nation, so skilled in polite attitude, so versed in the singing of *romanzas*, should yet have been allowed to remain so long in ignorance of the correct religious mean.

The old house was managed with the nicest care. Its thick coquina-walls remained solid still, and the weak spots in the roof were mended with a thatch of palmetto and tar, applied monthly under the mistress's superintendence by Viny, who never ceased to regard the performance as a wonder of art, accustomed as she was to the Beata fashion of letting roofs leak when they wanted to, the family never interfering, but encamping on the far side of the flow with calm undisturbed. The few pieces of furniture were dusted and rubbed daily, and the kitchen department was under martial law; the three had enough to eat – indeed, an abundance – oysters, fish, and clams, sweet potatoes from the garden, and various Northern vegetables forced to grow under the vigilant nursing they received, but hating it, and coming up as spindling as they could. The one precious cow gave them milk and butter, the well-conducted hens gave them eggs; flour and meal, coffee and tea, hauled across the barrens from the great river, were paid for in palmetto-work. Yes, Miss Elisabetha's household, in fact, lived well, better perhaps than any in Beata; but so measured were her quantities, so exact her reckonings, so long her look ahead, that sometimes, when she was away, old Viny felt a sudden wild desire to toss up fritters in the middle of the afternoon, to throw away yesterday's tea-leaves, to hurl the soured milk into the road, or even to eat oranges without counting them, according to the fashions of the easy old days when Doro's Spanish grandmother held the reins, and everything went to ruin comfortably. Every morning after breakfast Miss Elisabetha went the rounds through the house and garden; then English and French with Doro for two hours; next a sea-bath for him, and sailing or walking as he pleased, when the sun was not too hot. Luncheon at noon, followed by a *siesta*; then came a music-lesson, long and charming to both; and, after that, he had his choice from among her few books. Dinner at five, a stroll along the beach, music in the evenings – at first the piano in the parlor, then the guitar under the arches; last of all, the light supper, and good-night. Such was Doro's day. But Miss Elisabetha, meanwhile, had a hundred other duties which she never neglected, in spite of her attention to his welfare – first the boy, then his money, for it was earned and destined for him. Thus the years had passed, without change, without event, without misfortune; the orange-trees had not failed, the palmetto-work had not waned, and the little store of money grew apace. Doro, fully employed, indulged by Viny, amused with his dogs, his parrot, his mocking-birds, and young

owls, all the variety of pets the tropical land afforded, even to young alligators clandestinely kept in a sunken barrel up the marsh, knew no *ennui*. But, most of all, the music filled his life, rounding out every empty moment, and making an undercurrent, as it were, to all other occupations; so that the French waltzed through his brain, the English went to marches, the sailing made for itself *gondelieds*, and even his plunges in the Warra were like crashes of fairy octaves, with *arpeggios* of pearly notes in showers coming after.

These were the *ante-bellum* days, before the war had opened the Southern country to winter visitors from the North; invalids a few, tourists a few, came and went, but the great tide, which now sweeps annually down the Atlantic coast to Florida, was then unknown. Beata, lying by itself far down the peninsula, no more looked for winter visitors than it looked for angels; but one day an angel arrived unawares, and Doro saw her.

Too simple-hearted to conceal, excited, longing for sympathy, he poured out his story to Miss Elisabetha, who sat copying from her music-book a certain ballad for the Demoiselle Xantez.

"It was over on the north beach, aunt, and I heard the music and hastened thither. She was sitting on a tiger-skin thrown down on the white sand; purple velvet flowed around her, and above, from embroideries like cream, rose her flower-face set on a throat so white, where gleamed a star of brilliancy; her hair was like gold – yellow gold – and it hung in curls over her shoulders, a mass of radiance; her eyes were blue as the deepest sky-color; and oh! so white her skin, I could scarcely believe her mortal. She was playing on a guitar, with her little hands so white, so soft, and singing – aunt, it was like what I have dreamed."

The boy stopped and covered his face with his hands. Miss Elisabetha had paused, pen in hand. What was this new talk of tiger-skins and golden hair? No one could sing in Beata save herself alone; the boy was dreaming!

"Theodore," she said, "fancy is permitted to us under certain restrictions, but no well-regulated mind will make to itself realities of fancies. I am sorry to be obliged to say it, but the romances must be immediately removed from the shelf."

These romances, three in number, selected and sanctioned by the governess of the Misses Daarg forty years before, still stood in Miss Elisabetha's mind as exemplars of the wildest flights of fancy.

"But this is not fancy, dear aunt," said Doro eagerly, his brown eyes velvet with moisture, and his brown cheeks flushed. "I saw it all this afternoon over on the beach; I could show you the very spot where the tiger-skin lay, and the print of her foot, which had a little shoe so odd – like this," and rapidly he drew the outline of a walking-boot in the extreme of the Paris fashion.

Miss Elisabetha put on her glasses.

"Heels," she said slowly; "I have heard of them."

"There is nothing in all the world like her," pursued the excited boy, "for her hair is of pure gold, not like the people here; and her eyes are so sweet, and her forehead so white! I never knew such people lived – why have you not told me all these years?"

"She is a blonde," replied Miss Elisabetha primly. "I, too, am a blonde, Theodore."

"But not like this, aunt. My lovely lady is like a rose."

"A subdued monotone of coloring has ever been a characteristic of our family, Theodore. But I do not quite understand your story. Who is this person, and was she alone on the beach?"

"There were others, but I did not notice them; I only looked at her."

"And she sang?"

"O aunt, so heavenly sweet – so strange, so new her song, that I was carried away up into the blue sky as if on strong wings – I seemed to float in melody. But I can not talk of it; it takes my breath away, even in thought!"

Miss Elisabetha sat perplexed.

"Was it one of our *romanzas*, Theodore, or a ballad?" she said, running over the list in her mind.

"It was something I never heard before," replied Doro, in a low voice; "it was not like anything else – not even the mocking-bird, for, though it went on and on, the same strain floated back into it again and again; and the mocking-bird, you know, has a light and fickle soul. Aunt, I can not tell you what it was like, but it seemed to tell me a new story of a new world."

"How many beats had it to the measure?" asked Miss Elisabetha, after a pause.

"I do not know," replied the boy dreamily.

"You do not know! All music is written in some set time, Theodore. At least, you can tell me about the words. Were they French?"

"No."

"Nor English?"

"No."

"What then?"

"I know not; angel-words, perhaps.

"Did she speak to you?"

"Yes," replied Doro, clasping his hands fervently. "She asked me if I liked the song, and I said, 'Lady, it is of the angels.' Then she smiled, and asked my name, and I told her, 'Doro' – "

"You should have said, 'Theodore,'" interrupted Miss Elisabetha; "do I not always call you so?"

"And she said it was a lovely name; and could I sing? I took her guitar, and sang to her – "

"And she praised your method, I doubt not?"

"She said, 'Oh, what a lovely voice!' and she touched my hair with her little hands, and I – I thought I should die, aunt, but I only fell at her feet."

"And where – where is this person now?" said the perplexed maiden, catching at something definite.

"She has gone – gone! I stood and watched the little flag on the mast until I could see it no more. She has gone! Pity me, aunt, dear aunt. What shall I do? How shall I live?"

The boy broke into sobs, and would say no more. Miss Elisabetha was strangely stirred; here was a case beyond her rules; what should she do? Having no precedent to guide her, she fell back into her old beliefs gained from studies of the Daarg family, as developed in boys. Doro was excused from lessons, and the hours were made pleasant to him. She spent many a morning reading aloud to him; and old Viny stood amazed at the variety and extravagance of the dishes ordered for him.

"What! chickens ebery day, Miss 'Lisabeet? 'Pears like Mass' Doro hab eberyting now!"

"Theodore is ill, Lavinia," replied the mistress; and she really thought so.

Music, however, there was none; the old charmed afternoons and evenings were silent.

"I can not bear it," the boy had said, with trembling lips.

But one evening he did not return: the dinner waited for him in vain; the orange after-glow faded away over the pine-barrens; and in the pale green of the evening sky arose the star of the twilight; still he came not.

Miss Elisabetha could eat nothing.

"Keep up the fire, Lavinia," she said, rising from the table at last.

"Keep up de fire, Miss 'Lisabeet! Till when?"

"Till Theodore comes!" replied the mistress shortly.

"De worl' mus' be coming to de end," soliloquized the old black woman, carrying out the dishes; "sticks of wood no account!"

Late in the evening a light footstep sounded over the white path, and the strained, watching eyes under the stone arches saw at last the face of the missing one.

## **Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.**

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