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# THE HARVEST MOON

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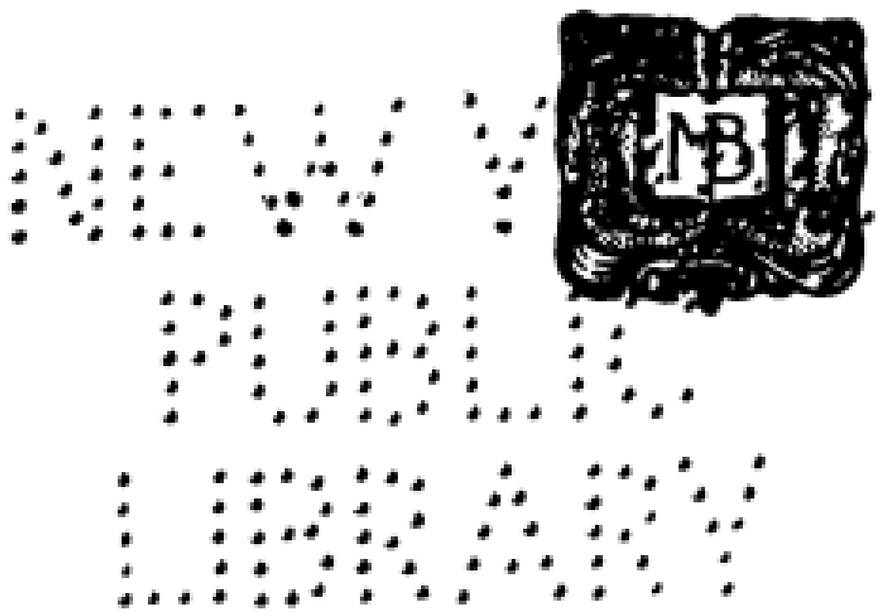
# THE HARVEST MOON

BY

J. S. FLETCHER



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# PART ONE

## *UNTHINKING YOUTH*

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a methodical way. He was one of those elderly men who, by recollection of early training and from the inclination which comes with advancing age to stand by the things first thought, are lovers of system and order, liking to do to-day what they did yesterday and will do to-morrow. When the house was quiet, Linda having departed to church and the old folks to chapel, it was his custom to take the old family Bible from the great oak desk in which it was religiously enshrined and to read a chapter aloud to himself, the old dog standing by with alert eyes and cocked ears. This sacred duty over, he replaced the Bible in the desk, and from a secret drawer in that ancient receptacle drew forth certain bundles of letters tied up with strips of faded ribbon. These bundles were all superscribed in Cornelius's crabbed handwriting—some, "My Father's Letters"; some, "My Mother's Letters"; some, "My Good Wife's Letters." He used to untie the ribbons with his gnarled fingers, and spread the letters out with reverent care, as if he had been a devotee handling the relics of a saint, and he would read a sentence or two here, or a page or two there, and sometimes a letter right through, and now and then he would come across a dried geranium leaf or

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the petal of a rose, and these he would lightly touch with the tip of his little finger as if he feared they might crumble. Then he would make the letters into bundles again, and retie the faded ribbon, and put the bundles back into the secret drawer and relock the desk, and that done would fill and light his pipe, and, with the sheep-dog at his heels, would go out into the flower-garden in front of the house to look around him at his well-filled stack-yard and at the broad acres from which he had once again reaped a good harvest.

Cornelius Van de Linde's farmstead stood in the midst of as level a tract of land as can be found in England outside the Fens. In all directions the country stretched away in an unbroken level for mile upon mile. The towers and spires of churches, the tall poplars which rose here and there, the gables and chimneys of an occasional manor-house—these objects were discernible at long distances, so uniformly level was the land. But though it had once been nothing but bog and morass and fen, with great stretches of mere in which more than one royal sportsman had fished to his heart's content, there was nothing cheerless or monotonous in its aspect. Unlike much reclaimed fen-land

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it was well wooded, well supplied with thick hedgerows and prolific orchards and gardens, and it produced corn crops at which no farmer could grumble. But, as its own folk were fond of saying, it was as flat as a pancake.

Cornelius strolled through his garden, still gay with flowers, and opening the gate passed out beneath a rustic arch on to the road which ran east and west of him for miles—a strip of yellow cutting through a carpet of purpling grey. He looked up the road and down the road; there was not a soul in sight. Cornelius, holding his long pipe in one hand, planted the other under the tails of his coat and turned to look at what, after his daughter, he considered the finest sight in the world—his own house; his own buildings; his own stacks of wheat, barley, oats, hay; his own orchard; his own garden. In his opinion there was no such farmstead as his in all that part of the country. And it was all the dearer to him because it had been his father's, and his grandfather's, and his great-grandfather's.

The old house made an attractive picture in the gathering twilight. Originally a manor-house which had been crenellated in feudal days, a great deal of its ancient architecture

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remained; no additions had been made to it since the seventeenth century. It was a house of infinite charm and of many surprises; there was a square tower, low in stature, but grim of aspect, which suggested wars and ghosts and haunted chambers; there were mullioned windows with diamond panes which made one think of fair ladies, leaning out upon adoring lovers through frames of ivy and jasmine; there were nooks and corners and quaint projections and recesses. In some places the stone roof bent inward in such a fashion that any one who saw it for the first time would have prophesied its immediate fall; Cornelius van de Linde viewed these subsidences with equanimity, for they had been there ever since he could remember anything. The old house would last not only his time, but to the time of his children's children, and longer.

"A bonnie place!" said Cornelius, as he paced up and down the road. "A bonnie, bonnie place, Shepherd, my lad!"

The old dog, hearing his master's voice pronounce his name, gave a sharp bark of appreciation and wagged his tail. He began to frisk about Cornelius in quite a youthful manner, but suddenly stopped, faced about, and stood

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on the alert, gazing down the road. Cornelius, noting his cocked ears, followed his gaze.

A moving figure was coming along the road from the eastward—a grey speck against the pale yellow of the sky beyond. Cornelius soon perceived it to be the figure of a man who rode a bicycle, and he called the dog to heel—he had a dislike to bicycles and a tendency to rush at them.

"Down, boy, down!" he said. "Steady, now!"

The man on the bicycle came slowly onward, presenting himself at last as a very young-looking man, who carried a knapsack on his shoulders and a small load of luggage disposed about his machine. He saluted Cornelius with a polite word as he slowly passed him on the road, then lifted his head mechanically to look at the house. The slow pace of the well-loaded bicycle grew slower and still slower; at the end of the garden wall its rider dismounted and resting on the handle-bars gazed searchingly at the scene before him.

Cornelius grew interested. He was sure that the stranger was admiring his house, and he felt a sympathetic regard for him at once. He drew nearer, with the old dog at his heels. The

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stranger looked at him and pushed his bicycle towards him. He spoke.

"May I ask, sir, if this is your house?"

Cornelius smiled with pride and gratification.

"It is, sir. Mine and my father's before me —and his father's before him."

"It is a very fine old place—a beautiful old place. It is just the place I have been searching for. I wonder if you would let me make a sketch of it?"

"You may make a hundred sketches of it, sir, inside and out, with all the pleasure in the world."

"That is very kind of you. I am going on to Doncaster now—to-morrow I shall certainly return and avail myself of your kindness. There must certainly be some fine rooms inside. A stone hall, no doubt?"

"If you will step inside and take a friendly glass with me, sir," said Cornelius, "I will show you what there is inside and you can judge for yourself. I'll warrant it will please you."

The traveller hesitated for a moment, glanced at his watch, and then thanked Cornelius for his hospitable invitation.

"I am much obliged to you, sir," he said, with an air of old-fashioned courtesy which made

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almost whimsical contrast with his youthful appearance. "I shall be glad to spend half an hour with you."

"Well said!" cried Cornelius. He led the way through the garden to the stone porch which gave entrance to the house. Pausing before it he pointed with pride to an inscription carved above the lintel: "CORNELIUS VAN DE LINDE BOUGHT MORCARSTOFT, A.D. 1725." The stranger, reading this aloud, raised his eyebrows.

"An ancestor of yours?" he said.

"Great-great-great-grandfather, sir," replied Cornelius. "Every man of us has borne the name since." Having said this he sighed, remembering, as he spoke, that he had no son.

"You are of Dutch descent, Mr. Van de Linde?"

"We are, sir. We came over with Vermuyden in the reign of Charles the First—came to drain the Fens. That done we came still further north to drain Thorne Waste, in the middle of which we now stand. My ancestor stayed hereabouts and began to farm—he did well, and his grandson—this Cornelius—bought the homestead. We are not tenants—we are proprietors. But come in, sir—come in."

The young stranger set his bicycle against

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the wall of the porch and followed Cornelius into the house.

"You are very kind, Mr. Van de Linde," he said. "Allow me to introduc myself—my name is Darrell, Adrian Darrell."

"Very glad to welcome you, Mr. Darrell. A Londoner, no doubt?"

"I live in London at times Mr. Van de Linde."

"And an artist? My daughter will be interested in seeing your work. She draws a bit herself. But you are, no doubt, a professional artist—perhaps a noted painter?"

Darrell laughed.

"I'm afraid I'm too young for that, sir, but—I hope to be."

"That's right—nothing like hope. And as for youth, sir, you'll mend of that. Now then, perhaps we can see."

While the conversation had been going on, Cornelius had set a large silver lamp on a centre table and occupied himself in lighting it. He turned up the light; Darrell uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

"Ah!" he said. "As I thought—a stone hall!"

Cornelius, hands plunged in pockets, smiled with pleasure and gratification as he watched

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his guest look about him. Darrell smiled too —smiled with the delight of the artist who has chanced on something that appeals and pleases.

"It's delightful," he murmured, "delightful."

The light revealed a square hall of some size. To half their height the four walls were panelled in black oak; the space above that was bare stone. The roof was spanned by heavy oaken beams and rafters; the floor was of square red tiles, uncovered except before the wide fireplace, where a thick carpet was spread between a great chair and a wide, cushioned long settle; deeply recessed window-places were hollowed out of the wall on either side the porch entrance; on the side opposite the hearth a staircase of oak rose to a small gallery from which three doors opened. All the furniture of the hall was of oak; there were no pictures, but on a broad ledge which ran round the panelling was set out a collection of old china plates, bowls, dishes, arranged with taste and discernment. In the light of the silver lamp and the crackling fire the place was a picture in itself.

Darrell sighed with pleasure and turned to his host with a smile of gratification. For a moment the two men stood looking at each other—the elder a sturdy, broadly built man

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with cherry coloured cheeks, clear blue eyes, and crisp silvery hair, strong and hearty in spite of his years; the younger a tall, slender young man, little more than a lad, singularly handsome of feature, with dark hair and eyes and a sensitive mouth, graceful of figure and movement, and wearing unconsciously a certain dignity of manner which seemed incongruous in one so young and was yet undoubtedly becoming since it was so evidently natural. At the end of that mutual inspection each man was conscious of admiration for the other—the young man admired the elder for his sturdy strength, his ripe old age; the old man admired the younger for his handsome face, his fine eyes, his winning air. He suddenly clapped his hand on Darrell's shoulder.

"You're a handsome lad!" he said with hearty frankness. "Sit down and have something to drink. What shall it be—wine, spirits, or ale? Say the word, Mr. Darrell."

"Ale, then, if you please, Mr. Van de Linde. I never drink spirits, and I'm a poor judge of wine."

"And I can give you as good a glass of ale as you'll find in England," said Cornelius. "Home-brewed, sir, home-brewed—a rare thing

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in these days. If you smoke, try one of those cigars in the box on the chimney-ledge there. Now for the ale."

He left the hall by a door which opened behind the long settle and Darrell heard his solid tread sounding along a stone-paved passage. Presently the solid tread returned and Cornelius entered with a jug topped by a fine crown of foam. This he set down with a glass at his guest's elbow.

"There, sir," he said, "give me your opinion of that. I won't join you in it, for at my time of life ale begins to get a little too cold for the stomach, but I'll pledge you in a drop of Schnapps —the real stuff, Mr. Darrell, that I've no doubt my forefathers drank before they left the country over-seas. Your very good health, sir, and success to you."

"It is most interesting," said Darrell, when he had suitably replied to these hospitable wishes, "to find the descendants of Dutch settlers in this part of the country. I had no idea of such a thing."

"Oh!" replied Cornelius, re-lighting his pipe. "There are a great many of us. If you look into our village churchyards, Mr. Darrell, here-abouts you will find plenty of names which you will recognise as Dutch. Plenty of 'vans,' I

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assure you—Vanderpants, Vandravarts, Van Gelders, Van der Huysens. My wife was a Vandravart. Of course we are all good English now, but I sometimes think the old Dutch strain comes out. Our women, now, are scrupulous about the cleanliness of their houses, and we have a great love of tulips. But I think that's about all—I doubt if any of us know a word of any language but English."

"And you are all descendants of men who came with Vermuyden to drain the Fen lands?" said Darrell.

"That is so, sir. Cornelius Vermuyden, after draining the Lincolnshire fens, came into these parts to drain the great fen that stretched from the Don to nigh upon Doncaster. Charles the First gave him so much out of the land he reclaimed. Naturally he brought many of his own folk across the water to share in the work and in the reward. Many of them no doubt went back, but many of them stayed, as my ancestor did. I am glad he did, sir, I am glad he did!"

"You are fond of your farm, Mr. Van de Linde."

Cornelius smacked the oak table.

"The best farm hereabouts, Mr. Darrell, the

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very best! You shall see it. And yet"—here Cornelius sighed—"I shall be the last of my name to hold it."

Darrell looked a polite inquiry.

"I have no son, sir," said Cornelius. "I have but one child, a daughter—the apple of my eye. Perhaps she will marry and call her eldest son after me. But he will not be a Van de Linde, even then."

Before Darrell could think of anything to say in reply to this, steps and voices were heard in the porch. The door opened.

A girl stepped into the hall—into the full light of the lamp. She paused, glancing from Cornelius to the stranger.

Adrian Darrell and Linda Van de Linde looked into each other's eyes.

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## II

"THIS," said Cornelius Van de Linde, "is my daughter, Linda. Linda, this young gentleman is Mr. Adrian Darrell. He is an artist, on his way to Doncaster, and he is going to make a picture of the house. He is also going to stay to supper."

The girl came forward and gave Darrell her hand, responding to his respectful pressure with a grip as strong and firm as a man's. She looked him squarely and frankly in the face; he, on his part, stared back at her as he might have stared at some wonderful picture, uncurtained to him for the first time. He had thought the old house beautiful; he thought the daughter of the house a vision of delight. And as she gazed at him with a frank candour with which speculation and curiosity were mingled he gazed at her with a smiling admiration which he took no pains to conceal. For a brief space these two young people, hand in hand, looked at each



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other with that curious, fluttering sympathy of youth which springs up most readily in such unexpected meetings as these.

Linda Van de Linde was at that time a gloriously handsome and healthy young woman of eighteen. She was one of those maidens upon whom Nature lavishes her gifts freely. Tall, finely proportioned, much more of a Juno than a Venus, she gave infinite promise of love, wifehood, motherhood. Her whole personality breathed a subtle femininity; her erect bearing, her generous bosom, her finely rounded limbs, suggested strength, power, vast possibility. To see her was to be made to think of some tract of rich virgin soil open to the sun and the rain, the snows and the winds, concealing within itself the power to yield the richest harvest. Adrian Darrell felt his heart leap as her hand grasped his; every pulse in him quivered as he looked into the unfathomable depths of her great soft eyes, black almost as the masses of glossy black hair which crowned her wide, placid brow. She was a dark beauty, he said to himself —yes, dark as night—but what a complexion—and what a warm, red mouth!

He would have fallen at her feet and worshipped her (as he would have worshipped anything

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beautiful, picture or statue) there and then. She was a young goddess.

As for her, she, in that moment (which, of course, was not a moment, but perhaps the hundred-thousandth part of a second) felt, for the first time in her life, a vague sense as of something new. The rich colour in her cheeks deepened a little.

"How you surprised me, father! To come home and find you with company! Sit down, please, Mr. Darrell—we will soon have supper. Father, there is Dr. Garrendon outside—he is doing something at his bicycle. He is coming in for a minute or two just to see you. Excuse me, Mr. Darrell." Her voice was like the rest of her—full, rich. Darrell felt sure that she sang, and sang well. He watched her as she crossed the hall and climbed the old stairway to the gallery above—she moved with the freedom and grace which had come to her from an active childhood and girlhood in the fields and woods.

At the top of the stairs she paused, and looking down into the hall, said: "Father, make Dr. Garrendon stay to supper—he has walked all the way from Fishlake with me, wheeling his bicycle. He must stay!"

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As she disappeared into one of the rooms opening from the gallery a man entered from the porch. Darrell looked at him with some curiosity, not unmixed with a certain feeling of jealousy that he should have been this fine young beauty's escort through the September twilight across a land still fragrant with the scent of harvest. He had half expected to see some strapping, handsome young medico; instead, he found himself looking at a man of apparently thirty years, of medium height, clean-shaven, spectacled, who, at sight of a stranger, showed certain signs of shyness and seemed to hesitate about his further entrance.

"Come in, come in, doctor!" exclaimed Cornelius. "Glad to see you, sir, glad to see you! This young gentleman, doctor, is Mr. Darrell, an artist from London, who's fallen in love with the old place and wants to make pictures of it—Mr. Darrell, sir, this is Dr. Garrendon, nearly as much a stranger to these parts as you are, seeing that he's only been with us two years. Now, doctor, what will you take to drink?"

"No one is a stranger very long in your neighbourhood, Mr. Van de Linde," said Garrendon, smiling, as he turned from shaking hands with

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Darrell. "I daresay Mr. Darrell has found that out already. Have you been long in these parts?" he continued, looking at the young man with obvious interest through his spectacles, which Darrell quickly perceived to hide a pair of very kindly eyes. "There is much to see hereabouts."

"No," said Darrell. "I am here quite by accident. I was cycling past the house on my way to Doncaster when Mr. Van de Linde very kindly asked me to step in and see the interior."

"A beautiful old house it is," said the doctor, taking a tumbler of whisky and soda which Cornelius handed him. "Thank you, Mr. Van de Linde—I am sure that will be very good after my walk; it is a long way round by the road. And you are going to paint a picture of it?" he went on again, turning to Darrell.

"With Mr. Van de Linde's permission I should like to make some water-colour sketches. I have been searching for such a house as this for weeks without success," answered Darrell.

"I have told him," said Cornelius, "that he is welcome to make as many pictures as he likes, inside and outside. If," he added, with a sly

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twinkle of his eye, "if he will leave one behind him we will frame it and hang it on the parlour wall, eh, doctor?"

"You are a true Yorkshireman," said the doctor, smiling. "I shall be interested in seeing your work, Mr. Darrell. You will stay in the neighbourhood, of course, for a while?"

"Yes, I shall stay in Doncaster," replied Darrell. "It is within a short distance, I believe."

"Oh, only a few miles," answered Garrendon. "You'll cycle it in forty minutes easily. Well, Mr. Van de Linde, now that I have said 'How do you do' I must further say 'Good-night,' and be off—I have work to do."

"What, not stop and take a bit of supper!" exclaimed Cornelius. "Nay, man, don't be in such a hurry—I was looking forward to a pleasant hour with you two gentlemen."

Garrendon smiled ruefully, glancing at Darrell.

"I wish I could!" he said. "But I can't—I've three old women to visit to-night. Pity the woes of a country practitioner! No—I must go. Good-night, Mr. Darrell; we shall meet again. Good-night, Mr. Van de Linde."

"Well, if you must, you must," said Cornelius

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disappointedly, as his guest moved off towards the porch. "But——"

A door in the gallery opened and Linda appeared. She caught sight of the doctor's retreating figure and ran down the stairs.

"You're not going, Dr. Garrendon?" she exclaimed. "You must stay to supper—you must!"

Garrendon smiled at her and shook his head.

"Ah, but I mustn't!" he said. "Old Sally Brewster and old Mary Smith and old Jane Scholey would never sleep to-night if I didn't give them their physic and coddle them up, and it's time they were asleep now. No—many thanks, Miss Van de Linde. Good-night."

"Well, if you must, you must," she said, echoing her father's words. "But——"

"I, too, should be on the road," said Darrell. "If Dr. Garrendon is going my way——"

"Nay, come, come!" exclaimed Cornelius. "I'm not going to be done out of both of you. Sit you down, Mr. Darrell—the doctor's riding in the opposite direction."

Darrell required no pressing to remain. He wanted to look at Linda Van de Linde. Once more, while Cornelius walked down to the garden gate with the doctor, he and she studied

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each other's faces—in silence. She broke that silence with an abrupt question.

"Are you a famous artist?"

Darrell smiled.

"Not at all!"

"Are you going to be famous? Do you want to be famous?"

He smiled again.

"I want to be famous—I do not know whether I shall be famous."

She knitted her brows a little, examining him with a curiously penetrative scrutiny.

"Oh, yes, you will!" she said, suddenly.

"I shall?"

"Yes."

"Have you the gift of second sight?" he asked her, laughing.

She lifted her hands and smoothed the heavy locks of dark hair from her temples; then shook her head.

"I don't know. But you will be a famous man. It is in your face. Please come to supper. Father will know where to find us."

She led him into a parlour which opened off the stone hall, and pointed a seat to him at a supper-table spread with good things. Cornelius came in jovial and bustling—for the next half

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hour Darrell found himself pressed to eat and drink. Having ridden some distance that evening he was hungry; he could not fail to notice that Cornelius, himself a mighty trencherman, was glad to find that his guest possessed a hearty appetite.

After supper they went back to the stone hall. The old man settled himself in his easy chair; Linda sat on a stool at his feet, her head resting against his knee; Darrell dropped into the corner of the long-settle nearest to the glowing fire. Some chance word at supper had revealed the fact that he had travelled—the girl began to question him about the lands and cities he had seen. Darrell could talk, and talk well—he began to tell them of Rome, of Venice, of Antwerp, of Bruges; of sunsets in this land, of sunrises in that. It was good to sit there in that old stone hall, by the cheery fire, and to watch the girl's mobile face, her glorious eyes, her red mouth. . . .

He rose at last, looking at his watch.

"How I must have tired you out!" he exclaimed. "I must go—it is late."

Linda looked up at her father.

"Father," she said, "why should Mr. Darrell go at all? Why shouldn't he stay?"

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Cornelius slapped his knee.

"That's my lass!" he exclaimed. "The very thing! What need to go? Fetch your bicycle inside, sir, and make yourself at home. You're heartily welcome."

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## III

DARRELL found himself an hour later in a chamber which smelt of lavender and dried rose-leaves. He looked round about him at the quaint things with which the room was furnished—the great four-poster bed, with its dimity hangings; the old clothes-press, big enough to hide half a dozen people in; the samplers framed in queer old frames on the walls; the two or three old pictures, dark with age, which flanked them; the china shepherds and shepherdesses on the mantelpiece. It was all so old-world; so charming; so fragrant and clean.

He opened the diamond-paned window and looked out. The land was silent as a windless sea. Up to his nostrils stole the sweet insidious scent of barley mingling with the smell of the brown soil. The heavens were one vast dome of darkest blue; above him the stars glittered like points of fire. And away to the eastward



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he saw the first pale crescent of a new moon cut clear against the sky.

He closed the window and again looked round him. He smiled at the thought of Linda. He was under the same roof with this splendid young creature ; he would see her on the morrow, and the next day, and the next. He smiled again . . . thinking of the Gifts of the Gods. And he told himself that when the Gods give Gifts one should take them lest the Gods be displeased.

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# IV

DARRELL woke in the morning as suddenly as he had gone to sleep over-night. He gazed about him, realised his unfamiliar surroundings, saw that the sunlight was flooding the room, and rose. It was half-past seven; Linda had told him that they breakfasted at eight o'clock; he had time, then, to dress in leisure.

He drew the blind and threw his windows wide open. In the garden beneath he saw Cornelius and his daughter, talking to a labourer who was evidently receiving instructions as to some gardening operation. The old gentleman, who on the previous evening had been arrayed in broadcloth, was now arrayed in a riding suit of drab whipcord, but in a somewhat rakish fashion; he wore a cream-coloured top hat and sported a flower in his button-hole. Linda was in a white linen gown; strolling about the paths of the garden on her father's arm she looked the perfection of glowing health. Once she



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lifted her face in the direction of Darrell's window—her eyes and mouth were more appealing than ever.

He dressed quickly and went down to the parlour, where he found breakfast spread on the same generous lines as the previous night's supper. Once more there was the same hearty welcome; the same honest pleasure at his presence; the same unaffected simplicity. Utter strangers to each other but a few hours previously these three would have been taken by any one who had seen them at breakfast that morning to be old acquaintances, so thoroughly did Cornelius and his daughter do their best to make Darrell feel at home.

After breakfast Cornelius lighted a cigar, bade his guest help himself to the contents of the box whenever he felt inclined, and taking down a hunting-crop from a rack above the mantelshelf, announced his departure on his usual morning ride round the land.

"I suppose you'll occupy your time with your brush, sir," he said to Darrell. "Draw the old place fine, sir, draw it fine! And when there's anything you want, my boy, a glass of ale or a crust of bread and cheese, to put you on till dinner-time, don't be afraid to ask for it."

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"I'll see that Mr. Darrell doesn't starve, father," said Linda.

"I think there is little fear of that while I am under your roof, Mr. Van de Linde," said Darrell, laughing.

When Cornelius had ridden away, Darrell unpacked a valise in the stone hall and took from it a sketch-book and his sketching materials. He unstrapped a portable easel from his bicycle and made everything in readiness for a morning's work. Thus occupied, Linda came to him.

"What are you going to paint first, Mr. Darrell?" she asked.

"First, Miss Van de Linde, I am going to look round the house, examining it from every standpoint. In the end I suppose I shall make a sketch of it from the corner of the garden."

"Yes," she said, "it looks pretty from the old summer-house, especially when the sun shines on it as it does this morning."

He opened his sketch-book and laid it on the table before her.

"That is the last water-colour sketch I made," he said. "I finished it yesterday."

Watching her face he saw the colour deepen in her cheeks and a new light come into her eyes. She uttered a little cry of pleasure.

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"Oh!" she said. "But that is beautiful! I—I didn't know—I mean I didn't realise that—that you did such work as that. Why, of course, you are a great artist!"

"Do you recognise the picture?" he asked.

"Why, yes, of course. It is Howden church. Father will love to see that. You will show us some more of your pictures?"

"All that I have with me—two books full. I have been two months in the north. Would you like to see some of them now?"

"I should, but I mustn't. Because, you see, I have a great deal of work to do, every morning. But after dinner, or to-night——"

"I was hoping," said Darrell, "that you would come and talk to me while I work."

She smiled.

"I should like to watch you work," she said. "But I mustn't neglect my work. Perhaps I may have finished it by eleven o'clock."

"And then you will——"

She moved away, giving him a glance that was half-mischievous.

"Then I will bring you a glass of our famous ale," she said, and went off jangling a bunch of keys.

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Darrell lighted a pipe and strolled out into the garden. The September morning was delightful; the air balmy and warm, and yet with a certain sharp exhilaration in it. He looked about him at the evidences of well-to-do-ness; he reflected on the ease and comfort of the old house; on the good-nature of the old man and the beauty of the daughter, and, a sybarite to his finger-tips, he once more informed himself that he was in luck. Strange, he thought, that mere accident should throw him into such comfortable quarters, that the Gods, those cynical players of such inexplicable games, should have placed such Gifts in his path! And once more he bade himself take what the Gods give.

He wandered about the house, through the orchard, across the stackgarth, studying the place from various positions and angles, and finally set up his easel in a corner of the garden, in front of the old summer-house of which Linda had spoken. He became absorbed in his work; the sun, steadily mounting in the clear September sky, made fine effects on the old walls and gables, and he wanted to catch these while they lasted. The labourer, working in the garden, whose sole notion of a day's work was



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to perform whatever task it consisted of in as leisurely a fashion as possible, marvelled at the way in which the young gentleman in the knickerbocker suit and queer-shaped hat stuck to his task. For himself he smoked a clay pipe as he worked, and took every other five minutes off to straighten his back and look about him, and he was astonished that the picture-drawing young man did not even smoke a cigarette and never looked up, except to study the old house or to measure something with his pencil. Idle folk came along the road outside and stopped to peer over the privet hedge at the unusual spectacle of a man making pictures. Darrell appeared to be unconscious of their presence, though he must have seen them out of the tail of his eye.

"An onsociable sort o' gentleman," decided the labourer. "Mornin', Thomas," he remarked loudly to a member of his own order, who came up to the hedge, leading a horse, and stopped to gaze, open-mouthed, at the picture-drawing process. "Fine mornin'."

The man, after a solemn pause, contrived to close his mouth and, in due course, to open it again.

"Aye, t' mornin's reight enough," he assented.

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"I've nowt to say agen it. Hev yer gotten all yeer harvest in, James?"

James made a lengthy show and convenient business of scraping the clinging earth off his spade.

"We gat it all in—raäkin's an' all—a fotnit sin' come next Tewsda," he answered, with a tone of superiority. "Hev ya gotten all yeers in?"

"Why, no—we hev one o' them Low Fields out yit," replied Thomas, in the tones with which the vanquished addresses the victor.

James sniffed.

"We allus are t' fost," he said. "Our maister wodn't lig comfortable i' his chaymer at neets if we worrn't fost. He aims at that theer."

"Aw, he's a good farmer, is Maister Vandylindy!" agreed Thomas. "I've allus allowed at he wor. Weel, I mun away—I'm takkin owd Captain here to be shod, but I'm shewer it's heigh time he wor takken to t'kennils. Weel, mornin', James."

"Mornin', Thomas."

When the sound of the old horse's hoofs had died out along the hard road, Darrell, without looking up from his work, said:

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"What did Thomas mean when he said it was high time that Captain was taken to the kennels?"

James's countenance brightened. Nothing pleases a countryman so much as being asked to instruct the ignorant townsman. Besides, Darrell's question gave him another opportunity of straightening his back and scraping his spade.

"Why, you see, sir," he said. "It's t' custom i' these parts when an owd hoss gets past work to send him to t' nearest kennels. That's t' rule, as you might term it."

"But what do they do with them there?" asked Darrell, working steadily at his picture.

"Why, they give 'em to t' hounds to ate," replied James.

"What—alive?"

"Why, no, not alive, o' course. I neer seen t'operation, as you might term it, mister, but I unnerstan' 'at they boil 'em up and mix 'em wi' meal and sich-like, and mak' t' lot into a dinner for t'hounds. That's what happens to t' owd hosses i' this country, onnyway," concluded James, conscious that he had added much to the stranger's knowledge. "It's t' custom as they call it."

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While Darrell was reflecting upon this information he heard a light footstep on the gravelled path, and looked up to see Linda, who was bearing down upon him with an old silver tray, whereon she had set out a jug of foaming ale, a loaf of dusky-crusted bread, and the half of a Stilton cheese. She smiled as she set the tray down on the little table in the old summer-house.

"It is eleven o'clock," she said, "and I have brought you your drinking."

Darrell stared at her.

"My—what?" he said.

"Your drinking," she replied. "Don't you know what that means?"

"I haven't the remotest notion of its meaning as a word," he said.

She smiled and dropped her voice and glanced at James, who was now digging with unusual vigour.

"You'll see that James knows," she murmured. Then she raised her voice and said loudly, "James!"

James straightened himself. Expectancy was written all over his face.

"Yes, Miss Linda?"

"Go round to the kitchen and tell them to

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give you your drinking. I'm sure you can do with it."

Linda laughed when James had uttered his evidently heartfelt thanks and set off post-haste across the garden.

"He knew, you see," she said. "No need to give James a definition. Now, do you know what he'll do? He'll get a pint of ale, and cut himself an enormous slice of bread, and an equally enormous piece of cheese, and he'll eat and drink by the kitchen fire as long as ever he can, and then waste a few more minutes gossiping with old Sarah, and then he'll come very slowly back and dig again—and all of a sudden he will look at his watch, and lo! it will be twelve o'clock and he will go home to dinner. But won't you have your drinking?"

"Since you have been so kind as to bring it to me with your own hands," said Darrell, leaving his easel, "I will. But on one condition."

"A condition? What condition?"

"That you stay and talk to me."

She shook her head—then suddenly sat down in the summer-house and poured the ale out into his glass.

"Well, five minutes, then," she said. "But

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what would you say if no dinner appeared at one o'clock?"

"Why, do you cook the dinner?"

"Truthfully," she said, "I don't. The girls do that, but under my strict superintendence. But there are lots of things which I do in connection with it—I am housekeeper, you see."

Adrian was watching her admiringly from the opposite side of the table. She was leaning back against the decaying wood-work; her head inclined a little to one side; her shapely hands folded idly in her lap. A sudden notion seized upon him.

"Do you know what I should like?" he said.

She opened her great eyes full upon him.

"No!" she answered. "What?"

"I should like to see you in a Dutch dress—the real national dress, with the proper ornaments. It would suit you so well."

Linda clapped her hands and broke into a ripple of laughter. It set his nerves tingling to hear her laugh—it was full, rich, pure as her eyes and ripe lips.

"Why, how funny!" she said. "I have such a dress and all the proper ornaments, and the cap and the shoes! How strange that you should think of that!"

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"Not at all," said Darrell, making another dig into the fine old Stilton. "It's just the thing to suit you. Where did you get your dress?—is it modern?"

She shook her head gravely.

"Oh, no!" she replied. "It's very, very old. It belonged to the—I never can remember which generation—the wife of the Cornelius Van de Linde who bought this place and land. I keep it in an old press in my room, in lavender. Every few months I examine it carefully for signs of moths. It is in beautiful preservation. Sometimes I put it on, ornaments and everything. Then I look—Dutch."

She laughed and smoothed out her white apron, looking at him with eyes which danced with healthy life.

"Quite Dutch," she repeated.

"Put it on for me," said Darrell, entreatingly. "Do!"

She laughed and interlaced the strong, shapely fingers in her lap.

"Why should I dress myself up to please you?" she asked, smiling.

"Why should you not?" he said, "knowing that it would please me?"

She laughed again, and picking up the old tray,

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rose and left the summer-house. She pointed to the easel.

"Go on with your work," she said, with a smiling glance backward. "One should never waste time in idle chatter."

Then she went up the gravelled path singing.

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## V

WHEN they were comfortably gathered around a glowing fire in the stone hall that evening, the labours of the day over, a Yorkshire high tea solemnly celebrated, Cornelius's pipe in full blast, and peace lying heavy on house and land, the host and hostess demanded to see their guest's sketch-books. Darrell rose to get them; Linda sprang up before him and ran up the stairs.

"I will fetch them," she said. "No one but myself knows where they are. You left them lying in the window-seat this morning, so I took them away and locked them up. And though I wanted to, I didn't peep into them once."

She came running downstairs again within the minute, placed the canvas-bound sketch-books on the centre table, set the lamp where its light fell to the most advantage upon them, took down her father's spectacles from the mantelshelf, fixed them upon his nose, and



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pushed him into an elbow-chair immediately in front of the books. She knelt down at his side, with one hand laid on his shoulder, and signed to Darrell to take up a position on the other side of the old man.

"Now begin," she said, half-imperiously. "The audience is ready."

"I hope the audience won't be disappointed," said Darrell, laughing, as he picked up one of the sketch-books and unclasped the covers. "You must remember that these are merely rough water-colour sketches—studies, in fact, though some are rather elaborately finished, of certain scenes in the north of England. You see, I wanted to study the scenery in Northumberland and Durham, and in Yorkshire, so I went straight to Berwick by train, and then came slowly southward by bicycle, turning aside wherever fancy took me, or wherever I heard of a good subject. And eventually I got —here."

"And how long have you been at that job sir?" inquired Cornelius. "It's a long journey all that, to my thinking."

"It is nearly ten weeks since I left London," replied Darrell. "Well, here is the first of the series—Berwick-on-Tweed, looking across the

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Border Bridge towards the harbour. Quaint old town, isn't it—and aren't the sunlight effects fine on the roofs and gables ? "

Linda uttered a low, cooing "Ooh ! " of admiration ; her father, after a first glance, took his long pipe out of his mouth, pushed it across the table, and propping his chin in his hands made long and critical inspection.

"Well, I consider that's a very fine piece of work, sir ! " he said heartily at last. "The way you've made the sun shine on those walls, and the naturalness of those sea-birds, is wonderful. Isn't it, my pretty ? "

"It's beautiful," said Linda, in a low voice.

"And this," continued Darrell, turning the page, "is Norham Castle from the north bank of the Tweed—an early afternoon effect."

"Beautiful, sir, beautiful ! " said Cornelius. "That must be a grand grazing country, and I should say from its appearance there are both trout and salmon in that fine river."

Linda pulled her father's ear.

"Father ! " she said. "How can you talk about cows and fish when you're looking at such lovely pictures ? "

"Why, why, my pretty ! " said Cornelius. "It was the naturalness of the river and the

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meadows that made me think of the fish and the cows. Ah, and what's this fine bit, Mr. Darrell ? "

For a good hour Darrell went through his harvest with them, interspersing his accounts with anecdotes of the various scenes and places which he had visited. Many of the sketches were finished ; some nearly so ; others were outlines. It was an interesting and varied collection—there were studies of the hill country round about the Cheviots and in the wilder districts of mountainous character between Westmoreland and Yorkshire ; studies of river scenery on the Tees, the Swale, the Wharfe ; studies of castles like Bamborough, Richmond, Knaresborough, Warkworth ; studies of coast scenery around Whitby and Robin Hood's Bay ; studies in the grey cathedral cities ; studies of Rievaulx and Fountains and Byland ; studies of " bits " seen here and there in the little market towns. To the father and daughter, who had travelled little, the sight of these pictures gave a delight which widely travelled folk would not have experienced. They sighed with pleasure and with a regret that was evident when the last page was turned.

" You're a very clever young gentleman,

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sir!" said Cornelius. "Allow me to shake your hand, sir—you'll go a long way in your profession."

"Thank you," said Darrell. "I'll try. Now which of these sketches do you like the best, Mr. Van de Linde?"

"Well sir," replied Cornelius, slowly ruminating, "if my opinion goes for anything I should say that last one you showed us—Howden church. I consider that you've done that grand old monument more justice than I've ever known it done. That's a beautiful piece."

"And you, Miss Van de Linde?"

"I?—I like the one of Bamborough Castle best," she said. "It's so grand, and gloomy, and strong."

Darrell whipped out a penknife and before they realised what he was doing, had cut the two pictures neatly out of the books. He placed one in Cornelius's hands; the other in Linda's.

"Then honour me by accepting them," he said. "If you will let me I will get them properly framed for you in Doncaster, and then I should suggest that you hang them just there—on this panel."

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Linda's face flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, that's too good of you!" she said impulsively. "It's too good, isn't it, father?"

"I'm sure I'm very much obliged to you, sir," said Cornelius, whose honest face shone with pleasure. "I don't know that any one ever gave me a real first-class picture before, though we've had plenty from the grocers and drapers on almanacks at Christmas-time. There, my pretty—put those safely away till Mr. Darrell can see to their framing. And now, sir, let's turn to the hearth and have a bit more tobacco and another glass."

Linda, looking highly delighted, went away with the pictures. She was a long time in returning, and Darrell, sitting in the corner of the oak settle and listening to Cornelius's discourse on farming, began to wonder when she was coming back. Half an hour had gone by, and he was becoming impatient of her absence when a half-mocking, half-merry laugh sounded from the gallery above. The old man and the young man looked up. There, holding a candle above her in such a fashion that the light fell full upon her face and bosom stood Linda, smiling down upon them. She was in

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the Dutch dress of which she had spoken that morning.

"May a poor Dutch maiden appear before such great gentlemen?" she asked.

Cornelius slapped his knee.

"Well, now, if the girl hasn't been and put on that old dress that was my great-grandmother's!" he exclaimed. "What cantrips will she be up to next? Come down, my pretty, come your ways down!"

"Yes, do come down!" entreated Darrell. "Do! I want to see the dress—it's so quaint."

She hesitated.

"I am shy," she said. "I am not Dutch."

"Then be Dutch for five minutes. Come!"

Still carrying the candle she came down the stairs, and advancing into the full light made Darrell a modest curtsey.

"Every woman of our family that ever I knew has been fond of dressing up in that old gown and those fal-lals," murmured Cornelius reflectively. "Seemed to please them, Mr. Darrell, somehow, just as it pleases little girls to dress their dollies. But I never remember any of them that looked as well in it as my lass there looks."

Darrell scarcely heard what Cornelius said.

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The artist-feeling in him was stirred to a keen hunger.

"Ah!" he said suddenly, with a deep sigh "How I should like to paint you, like that!"

"And an uncommonly pretty picture it would make, sir," exclaimed Cornelius.

Linda smiled and looked down at her gown, her ornaments. There was an old-fashioned mirror close by—she turned to it and studied the effect which she and the Dutch gown and its accessories made.

"Should I look as nice as in my very best bib and tucker and my newest picture-hat?" she inquired, archly.

"You would look beautiful in anything," said Darrell, with candid fervour, "simply because you are beautiful. But there's something in that gown—in the combination of you and the gown—that appeals strongly to me. I suppose it's because of your Dutch extraction."

"That's it, sir," said Cornelius. "I always noticed that whenever any of our women donned those things the Dutch in them came out very strong. It's the lace and the old silver that does it."

"If I painted you in that dress," continued



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Darrell, "I would pose you leaning against an old delf-rack—I daresay you have one?"

"Yes—in the kitchen—full of old blue delf-ware," said Linda.

"With a great bunch of tulips in your hands, and in the background, seen through an open window, a garden gay with tulips," he said. "I'd like you to see what a picture I could make of *that!*"

Cornelius suddenly smote his knee.

"Make it, sir, make it! I would like to see that picture—you explain it so clear that I can see it now. I say—make it!"

"But, Mr. Van de Linde, it would take some time—weeks—to——"

Cornelius wagged his head.

"Nothing is done without time," he said, sententiously. "Are you your own master, sir?"

"Indeed, I am."

Cornelius smote his knee again.

"Then be my guest as long as you please—but make that picture!"

Later that night when Linda was divesting herself of the Dutch gown, the exquisite old lace, and the quaint ornaments of silver, she found herself smiling at the reflection of her own face—and wondered why.

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## VI

ONE afternoon, some days later, Darrell, working at his easel in the garden, became quite suddenly impressed by a sense of intense solitude. Everything about him was very quiet—its quietness seemed to descend upon him like a pall that is spread over a dead man. Sometimes, at rare intervals, he heard the voice of a ploughman calling to his horses as he and they traversed far distant fields; sometimes, in some adjacent farmstead, a dog barked. But all around Morcarstoft the autumnal silence was profound. The old house might have been deserted for ages—there was no sign of life about it, save in the spirals of smoke which curled to the placid blue of the heavens. He knew that within its walls, save for old Sarah, who was without doubt fast asleep in her easy chair by the kitchen fire, there was not a living soul. Cornelius had gone to Selby market; Linda had gone to see one of the labourers' wives, who was ill. Darrell



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had wanted to go with her; she had bade him go on with his work, pointing out how useless it would be to kick his heels outside the cottage door during the time which she must necessarily spend within. The garden was as empty as the house—James had finished his digging and had set his hands to the stilts of his plough again.

The sudden sense of solitude began to get on Darrell's nerves. He laid his brush down, left his easel, and walked about restlessly. He went outside the garden gate, and standing, hands in pockets, on the road, looked east and west, and saw—nothing. Nothing but the straight, formal hedgerows running in mathematically correct lines until they seemed to meet in the distance, where the yellow strip of road between them vanished. Here and there clumps of trees broke the monotony of the dead level. To the north a long row of sentinel-like poplars showed clear against the sky. As there was not even a slight sighing of the wind, trees and hedgerows were alike motionless—as ghosts suddenly subjected to petrifaction. Over all this silence there was a domination of scent. The scent of the barley had not yet died out of the shorn fields; in the stackgarth it was strong and pungent. Mingling with it, now

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that ploughing had begun, came the good smell of the earth, fresh, strong, powerful, asserting itself with insistent force as the shining ploughshares turned its new-born face to the sky and the sun. Mingling with both was the rich odour of the apple-orchard, wherein the yet ungathered apples made spots of glaring crimson and yellow against the mysterious gloom of the interlacing boughs. Darrell left the road, and still heavily burdened with a sense of solitude which amounted almost to dismal despair, wandered aimlessly towards the old house. He walked into the stone hall, and standing with bent head before the glowing fire, gazed into it with lack-lustre eyes. He was wanting something, and he did not know what; he did not even know why he wanted it. All he knew was that something in him was crying for something that was not there, not to be seized upon at the moment. He began to pace up and down, restlessly. He wandered all round the room, staring at the various objects which it contained without comprehending them. In this peregrination he came upon a door behind the long settle, and, with absolute unconsciousness of what he was doing, he turned the handle and walked into the room upon which it opened. And as he

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stepped across the threshold he uttered a sudden ejaculation of delight, and as suddenly recognised what it was that he had been wanting.

Beyond the stone hall, the dining-room, the kitchen, and his own bed-chamber, Darrell had as yet seen little of the old house to which fate had led him. He now found himself standing in what is usually called in well-to-do Yorkshire farmsteads the best parlour. It was a quaint old room with a subtle fragrance of dried rose-leaves, geranium, and lavender hanging thickly about it, and he fancied it as being more usually tenanted by the ghosts of the dead than by the bodies of the living. The furniture, old and black with age, was upholstered in ancient tapestry; the walls were chiefly decorated with old samplers. But Darrell scarcely saw anything of these things. Between him and the deep window-seat stood a grand piano!

He could scarcely believe his eyes. Next to his own special art music was the joy of his soul and the piano his favourite instrument. He trembled with eagerness as he approached the piano. Then he experienced a deadly fear lest it should be locked. Joy of joys!—the key was in the lock. He turned it—lifted the lid—actually an Erard!

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With a great sigh of content and abandonment he dropped on the stool and let his fingers fall on the keys. The music of the first chords flowed into his soul as water flows into the body of the thirsting man.

Half an hour later Linda, opening the garden gate, suddenly stopped short as if a bullet had passed through her heart. She stood, open-mouthed, for a moment; then, with a swift glance at the deserted easel, she walked quickly up the path, into the house, and stealing to the parlour-door on tip-toe, looked in.

Darrell was by this time utterly unconscious of all the world. His eyes, half-closed, were fixed on some point straight in front of him; his face wore a dreamy, rapturous expression.

Linda stole back to the stone hall and sank into her father's chair. She sat there with throbbing heart, leaping pulses, glowing eyes, for a good hour by the old grandfather's clock in the corner. And Darrell went on playing as if there were only himself and the piano and the music he was drawing from it in the world—or in Eternity.

In Darrell's musical Olympus three gods sat enthroned high above the rest—Wagner, Grieg, Chopin. His manner of paying court to each

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was somewhat whimsical—he turned from the knees of one to the feet of another as the moment's caprice prompted him. To the weird and sonorous thunders, the mystic whisperings and shadowy suggestions of Wagner suddenly succeeded the May-day murmur and greenwood-enveloped light-song of Grieg; to this, likely as not, some of the more mournful strains of Chopin, which in their turn were as likely to give place to Grieg as to Wagner. There was thus an infinite variety in any of his impromptu recitals, but it was a variety of rare charm.

The music suddenly ceased—she heard him close and lock the piano. A moment later the parlour-door closed. She sat up in her father's chair, trembling all over, looking towards the big settle.

Darrell came round its corner with a sort of spiritual exaltation in his face. He caught sight of her and started. For a moment they looked keenly at each other. Then she spoke.

"Why did you not tell me that you played?—and like that?" she said.

The question pulled Darrell together. He smiled.

"I—I didn't think of it," he said. "And I didn't know you had a piano."

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"It was my last birthday present," she said. "It is much too good for me—but father will give me nothing but the best."

"Forgive me for finding it without your permission," he said. "I—somehow, I suddenly became restless and uneasy, and began to wander about, and quite inadvertently I opened that door and saw the piano—and then, well, I'd just got to play. I'm a lot better now."

She sat with her chin in her hands watching him as he filled his pipe and lighted it.

"Which are you really," she suddenly burst out, "a painter or a musician?"

Darrell laughed.

"A painter, I hope," he said. "And that reminds me that I can just do half an hour's work before the light fails. How idle I have been!"

That night, after the usual high tea, as Cornelius and Darrell sat smoking in the stone hall, Linda came in from the kitchen regions, and, with a commanding air, beckoned to both.

"There is a magnificent fire in the parlour," she said. "Come, father: Mr. Darrell is going to play to you. Bring your pipe and glass—but come!"

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## VII

WITHIN a few days after his promise to paint a picture of Linda in the Dutch dress and silver ornaments Darrell had obtained his necessary materials from London and after careful consideration of its facilities for light decided that the stone hall would suit his purpose. In one corner of it, then, near one of the windows looking into the garden he set up his easel and fixed his canvas—an operation in which Cornelius took the most curious interest, remarking frequently that he had often wondered how these things were done and should now see for himself. Next day the actual work began. But there was first a solemn stipulation on the part of Linda. She would only give him such time as she could conscientiously spare from her household duties. Until eleven o'clock, she declared, she was always fully occupied, and from half-past twelve until one she must superintend the final arrangements for dinner—Darrell



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must therefore be content with an hour and a half every morning. To this Darrell said nothing, but Cornelius was inclined to be restive, being keenly impatient to see the work finished. Linda's word, however, was law with him, and he finally bade her have her own way, only charging her to do as Mr. Darrell told her and not to chatter too much to him while he was, as Cornelius phrased it, drawing her picture.

From this time the days went on with a smooth and pleasant flow. These three, brought together so strangely by some ordinance of Fate, were as close friends of long standing within a fortnight of their meeting. They lived together like a happy family. There were the pleasant homely meals together; the cheerful, chatty conversations. Round the fire in the stone hall in the hour before bed-time Cornelius recalled stories of his youth; Darrell told stories of places he had seen abroad. Every night there was music. Father and daughter were never tired of hearing Darrell play, and after a little pressure Darrell had induced Linda to sing, finding, as he had expected to find, that she possessed a fine voice which only needed a proper training. It was a life of infinite peace

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and homely comfort; he told himself that he should miss it when it was over.

It was not necessary that there should be silence between Darrell and Linda during the sittings which she gave him. They talked of many subjects—of books, of music, of other lands and cities (in that case she listening, he talking); they laughed, and were light of heart. But she noticed with feminine subtlety, that he never spoke of himself or his family, and her feminine curiosity was first aroused and then piqued.

She was resting one morning for a few minutes, and glancing across at her from his work he caught her looking at him with a curiously wistful expression in her great eyes.

"Yes?" he said, quietly.

"I was wondering," she said, "if you have a father and mother—and brothers and sisters. You never speak of them."

"I was always taught," he answered, "not to talk of one's own people. They were very strict with me on that point. No—I have no brothers and no sisters, and my father is dead —long since. My mother is living."

"And you love her very much?" said Linda, eagerly.

Darrell shifted his easel a little.

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"To be truthful," he said, "I don't. I have never had much chance. I haven't seen her for several years—she lives abroad. There—are you rested enough to stand again? We're getting on famously this morning."

Linda moved to her place with a rebellious feeling at her heart.

"He won't tell me anything," she said to herself, and she began to wonder and to speculate all the more. She wanted to know all about him; about his early life; his school-days; his art-training; his life in London; everything. Who were his friends?—what did he do with himself when he wasn't painting?—why didn't he tell her?

"But then, why should he?" she reminded herself. "And yet—I'd tell him everything—everything! Only—I've nothing to tell—except how many pounds of butter went to market last week, and how many eggs were laid."

Two or three mornings later she came into the stone hall with a countenance in which a sort of motherly reproof was mingled with irrepressible feminine inquisitiveness.

"You must be either a very rich or a very, very careless man," she said. "See here!—

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look what I found on your dressing-table when I went in to see that your room was tidy."

She opened her hands and displayed several bank-notes and a small heap of gold.

Darrell laughed, took the money from her, and pocketed it.

"It was careless!" he said. "I forgot to put it into my purse this morning."

Linda looked grave.

"Supposing we had had dishonest servants?" she said.

"Yes—you are quite right. I beg your pardon."

"It is yours. But I am angry with you."

Darrell turned and looked earnestly at her.

"Not that!" he said. "Don't—look angry. Come—smile at me."

She looked at him candidly. Gradually the storm went out of her eyes and she smiled with eyes and lips. He took a half-step towards her. She pointed to the easel.

"Go on with your work, Mr. Darrell," she said.

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# VIII

AT the intersection of two highroads, a mile or so away from Morcarstoft stood one of those old-world wayside inns which are fast vanishing from amongst us as hostelries, or are being converted into dwelling-houses, or suffered to fall into gradual, if picturesque decay. Once upon a time these places were centres of busy life—the mail-coaches rattled up to the door three or four times a day; fresh horses were brought out from the capacious stables; the guard rummaged in his box for letters and parcels; the driver got down to stretch his legs and the passengers followed his example; there was good liquor and plenty of it at the bar presided over by a buxom landlady or a rosy-cheeked maid; there was always a fine round of beef, a chicken or two, and a ripe cheese on the sideboard in the coffee-room. Here occasionally stopped my lord's travelling carriage—my lord in a coat of many capes and a beaver hat of great height



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and curly brim; my lady in a bonnet which completely buried her, and a shawl that had come from no nearer than the Indies. Here, at all hours, came post-chaises, their occupants wanting horses, or food, or drink, and sometimes accommodation for the night. With the advent of the railways all these features of English life changed. One by one the coaches disappeared; one by one the post-chaises were relegated to the scrap-heap; one by one great lords and country squires gave up travelling by road and took (however unwillingly) to travelling behind the steam-engines, the intrusion of which upon their pheasant-coverts and peaceful manor-parks they had so bitterly resented. Then the old wayside inns began to fade—began to fade as rapidly as an old maid whose day is gone by, never to come again. There was something pathetic in their very look. The still open doors, through which few people passed; the bow-windows, through which few faces looked out; the echoing halls and corridors, along which few feet trod—all seemed to be asking wistfully why the old order had changed. But the inexorable law knows nothing of pathos, or wistfulness, or regret. The old houses emptied; the spacious stables emptied; there were no 'shays in the

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big coach-houses, and no bandy-legged men with straws in their mouths hanging about the entrance to the stable yards; and in the gardens, once gay with flowers and rich in vegetables, the weeds smothered everything. It was only here and there that one of these wayside hostelries could manage to keep open—even then it was no more than a house of call for passers-by; farmers going to or from market; cattle-drovers journeying along the road; pig-jobbers with a cart full of squealing pigs secured by a net; any stray atom of humanity, from a tourist in a new Norfolk jacket and the latest thing in caps, to a tramp in patched boots and scarcely-held-together rags.

Up to the door of the "Duke of Orange," one fine morning that September, came Dr. Garrendon on his bicycle. His spectacled eyes took in once more a scene which he had often wished he had the ability to paint, or at any rate to sketch. There was the fine old house with its queer and almost impossible angles, gables, and chimneys; there was the tall sign-post with the "Duke of Orange" in primary colours, all the more glaring because of recent renovation by a local journeyman painter; there were the long ranges of stabling, falling surely if slowly to decay;



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there was the deserted garden, a mass of bind-weed and nettles. A vague feeling of wonder crossed Garrendon's mind—how was it that ruin, decay, inevitable change invariably produced picturesque effect? He knew that the old house was damp, that its sanitation was bad, that it ought to be razed to the ground in the interests of health, and yet he also knew it to be undeniably picturesque. With its ivy-covered walls, its lichened roof, its quaint old windows, it made a picture which no modern building could have made.

The doctor got off his bicycle and set the machine against the wall of the inn. There were two vehicles near the door—one he recognised as the smartish dog-cart of a certain dissolute young farmer of the neighbourhood whose time was commonly reported to be spent much more in the tavern than on his land; the other as the less pretentious trap of a local butcher, who was well known to like a morning glass. In the farmer's dog-cart sat a small boy who amused himself as he waited his master's pleasure by flicking the sign-post with the whip; the butcher's trap had been secured by the simple expedient of fastening the horse which drew it to one of the many staples driven into the wall.

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In both dog-cart and trap the horses were dozing —each knew that he might have to wait there till noon and dinner-hour arrived.

Garrendon stepped into the wide, stone-paved hall, drawing off his gloves as he entered. A draggle-tailed servant-girl, busied with a pail of water, was scrubbing the floor—from the little bar-parlour on the right came a babel of loud voices, the odour of rank tobacco, the smell of spirits, the nauseating smell of stale ale. The farmer, the butcher, and the landlord were enjoying a social hour.

The draggle-tailed girl looked up and recognised the doctor. She spoke, drying her hands on her rough brown apron.

"Oh, if you please, sir, the nurse saw you a-comin' up the road, and she said would you mind waitin' a few o' minutes, 'cause she's a-tidyin' the missis's room up, and washin' of her?"

"Very well," said the doctor, resignedly, and with inward reflection that eleven o'clock was a somewhat late hour whereupon to perform these sick-room duties. "I will wait."

"Perhaps you'll step into the parlour to the other gentlemen, sir?" said the girl, hospitably.

"No thank you," replied the doctor. "I will stay here."

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The girl picked up her pail and disappeared through a door at the end of the hall, and Garrendon, leaning against an old oak table looked around him. There were still some remains of the former good estate of the old house—some old oak, a picture or two, an old rack, full of dirty pewter and cracked china, a fox's mask over one door, a stuffed owl over another—but all was lost, cold, dirty, desolate.

The men were talking loudly in the parlour—now two at a time, now, so it seemed, altogether. Suddenly the butcher's voice, thick, raucous, made itself heard above the rest.

"All t' same, I say he's nowt but a silly owd fool, is yon Cornelius Vandy Lindy for lettin' a handsome-lookin' young chap like that theer stop i' t' house wi' yon theer lass o' his! I hear a thing or two, I can tell yer. Theer'll be trouble theer—ye mark my words."

The landlord's voice broke in.

"Where dost t' young man come fro'?"

"Why, he's a Londoner, and we all know what Londoners is. He's one o' them paintin' chaps—I've seen him paintin' i' t' garden more nor once. An' they say he's paintin' t' lass's pictur'—lot o' softness! What's a lass o' that age want her pictur' paintin' for? It's nowt

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but fillin' her head wi' grand notions. I'm surprised at Cornelius hesn't more sense."

The voice of the young farmer broke in—evil, sneering.

"Eh, but ye know Mr. Cornelius Vandy Lindy were allus a very high-and-mighty sort o' gentleman. He thinks hisself a good deal above us poor farmers 'at rents t' land, instead o' ownin' it. We'm nowt but a bit o' muck i' my lord's eyes—aye, in i' t' dowter's an' all. I met her one day on t' road-side and raised mi hat to her, polite-like—shoo just gev me a nod as if shoo'd been a princess an' I'd been as nowt. But ye'll see!"

"Why, of course," said the landlord, "pride allus goes before a fall—that's a well-known thing, is that—I've heard my owd mother pass that remark a mány times."

"Well, he's a consarned owd fool, is Cornelius Vandy Lindy," asserted the butcher. "I hear a good deal i' t' exercise o' my callin', and I say 'at ye can't throw a handsome lad like yon and a fine young wench like Cornelius's dowter together, wi'out summat happenin'. Theer's such a thing as human natur' i' this world—don't mak no mistak!"

The young farmer voiced a certain coarse

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jest, common to the country-side, that made Garrendon's blood tingle and his fists clench. He was about to walk out of the hall into the clear, unpoisonous sunlight when he heard the nurse calling him from the stairs and he turned to perform his professional duties.

When he left the "Duke of Orange" Garrendon went further afield to make other calls, and it was past his usual luncheon-hour when he returned home. He lived in a pretty house in an old-fashioned village three miles from Morcarstoft, in company with his sister, a woman a little older than himself, who had been devoted to him from childhood, and from whom, even during his student days, he had scarcely ever been separated. She was waiting for him in their dining-room when he entered—a pleasant-faced, kindly eyed woman, very like himself, with a sweet voice and gentle manners, and an attitude towards him which was as much that of a mother as of a sister.

"You look tired, John," she said, as they sat down to lunch.

"Yes," he replied, "I am tired—I had a rather longer round than usual. And the sun was very warm this morning, although we are in September."

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Usually, these two talked a great deal during their meals. All their lives they had had many tastes in common. They read the same books, pursued the same studies, exchanged thoughts on both. But that day Garrendon was silent even to taciturnity—he scarcely spoke, and his sister noticed that he seemed to have little appetite for his food. Being a woman of great tact and good sense, she made no comment and forbore to ask questions. She knew, from long experience of him, that if he had any trouble he would tell her of it at his own time and in his own way, and with that knowledge of his complete trust in her, she was content to wait.

The brother and sister always spent a quiet hour together after lunch—the doctor over a cigar and a cup of coffee, Mary Garrendon over her fancy work or a new book. But Mary noticed that day that her brother was in no haste to light a cigar; he fidgeted about the room, looking first out of one window, then out of the other, staring at books and pictures and obviously seeing nothing that he seemed to stare at. At last, with an unconscious sigh, he took a cigar out of its box, lighted it, and sat down in his usual chair. After that there was silence for a little time—then he spoke.

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"Mary," he said, "you and I have never had a secret from each other, have we, at any time?"

"Never!" she answered, emphatically.

"I was disturbed—troubled—put out—this morning," he said. "I went to the 'Duke of Orange' to see Mrs. Foulds, and while I waited in the hall I heard some men talking in the bar-parlour—Foulds himself, and that drunken sot, young Marshall, and Grinder, the butcher. And it wasn't pleasant hearing."

"What were they talking of?"

"Of the Van de Lindes."

Then he told her of all that he had overheard.

"What a hot-bed of scandal and back-biting a country village seems to be!" he exclaimed, bitterly. "I couldn't have believed that it could be what it is if I hadn't found it out for myself. Town life isn't like that."

"It may be that it is more noticeable in small places," Mary Garrendon said. "Country people have little to interest them."

"What troubles me," said Garrendon, "is that these people should say things like that. I think Mr. Van de Linde ought to know. And yet—I could not tell him."

His sister shook her head.

"No," she said, slowly, "you could not tell

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him. And no one—no one—can stop evil-minded people from talking."

"But it will spread," he said, "that sort of thing always does."

"Yes, no doubt. But who can stop that?"

He was silent for a moment; then he said in a low voice:

"And then it will come to Mr. Van de Linde's ears—and to his daughter's.

"No one can stop that either, John."

He uttered an exclamation of disgust, and for some time smoked furiously in silence. Then:

"Mary!" he said.

"Yes, dear."

"When we were there to supper the other night, did you—did you think that—that she cared for Darrell?"

Mary Garrendon's head was bent over her work, and she did not look up.

"No-o," she answered. "I thought she was very much attracted to him, and by him, especially when he was playing to us. Why?"

He made no answer to this question, and suddenly looking up she saw that he was staring abstractedly into the fire. In an instant she had sprung to his side and thrown an arm round his neck and turned his face to hers. He

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faced her bravely, but his eyes were miserable, and in them she read his secret.

"John!" she said. "John—dear?"

He got up and threw his cigar into the fire.

"I've loved her ever since I first saw her," he said. "But it will never be any use!"

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# IX

CORNELIUS had gone away—gone away on what was, for him, a long journey. He was desirous of improving his breed of sheep, and hearing through private sources of a Wensleydale farmer who was not indisposed to part with two or three prize-winning rams, he determined to take a look at them himself, and at the same time to get a fleeting glimpse of a country which he had never seen but had heard much of. After much poring over the railway time-tables, he at last discovered that by catching a very early morning train at Doncaster he could get to Leyburn by way of York at a sufficiently early hour to enable him to spend some time at the sheep-farm, and yet return home the same day. His cob had accordingly carried him off to the train about six o'clock one morning—he himself as light-hearted as a school-boy who gets an unexpected holiday. It was not often that he left his farmstead, save for the usual visits to



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the neighbouring markets and fairs and the annual trip to London for the Cattle Show, and he felt it a fine thing to shake a loose leg even for eighteen hours. Besides, anything north of York was to him a foreign country. He had heard that the Dalesmen spoke a different language to that to which he was accustomed—he comforted himself with the knowledge, however, that all men understand languages written in gold and silver and in crisp bank notes.

That was a day in the first week of October: a crisp, sunshiny day on which it was very good to be alive. There were gossamers hanging in silvery filaments all over the hedges in the morning, and the wide stretches of grass which bordered the level highroad sparkled as if some extravagant hand had strewn diamonds over their green carpets. But dew and gossamer alike had gone long before noon, and noontide found the land sleeping as the land only can sleep in an autumnal sunshine—calmly, happily, smilingly. It was the apotheosis of the year's peace. James was lazily gathering apples in the orchard; from the tall elms across the highroad a russet leaf or two fell just as lazily to earth. Equally as lazily the leaves in thicket and hedgerow, wood and coppice, were changing

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from green to yellow, from yellow to red. Langour—not the hot languor of summer, but the infinitely sweeter, more yearning and desirous languor of autumn—lay on everything.

Linda, her chin propped on her hands, her elbows propped on the dinner-table, her great dark eyes staring across the remains of the feast at Darrell, who was slowly and discriminatingly paring an apple and wholly engaged in his task, said suddenly :

"Let's go nutting this afternoon ! "

Darrell looked up.

"Nutting ? Can we find some nuts ? "

"Lots. I know a coppice where we can fill a basket in half an hour—splendid nuts."

"I should think they are all gone by this time."

"No, because the coppice is on our land, and no one would think of going into it."

Darrell finished paring the apple and held up the unbroken peel with an air of triumph.

"There ! " he said.

Linda's eyes flashed.

"How fond you are of little things ! " she said. "Yesterday, when we were out you spent a whole hour in making a ridiculous whistle, and never spoke to me once except to say 'Hum' and 'Hah' ! "

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Darrell looked at her with innocent eyes.

"But then, you see," he said, "I hadn't made a whistle for years!—since I was a child."

"But you're not a child now," she said.

Darrell bit into the apple with his strong white teeth. He looked at her with provoking innocence.

"I thought it was only children who went nutting," he said.

Linda stamped her foot. She rose and began to collect the silver.

"I shall be ready in half an hour," she said over her shoulder, as she carried the silver-basket away.

"So shall I," he replied, lighting a cigarette.

She paused and looked fixedly at him.

"I don't believe you want to go," she said.

He looked just as fixedly at her.

"You know very well that I do want to go," he said in a low voice. "I like to go anywhere with you."

She studied his face for a swift moment; then went away. When she came back—well within the half-hour—he saw that she was wearing something which he had never seen her wear before—a smart scarlet jacket and an

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equally smart and coquettish toque of the same tint, perched a little on one side of her dark hair.

"How well scarlet suits your hair and eyes!" he said involuntarily.

She flashed a half-mischievous look at him.

"As well as the Dutch gown?"

"Better, I think."

"Perhaps you would like to paint me as I am?"

"I would like to paint you as you are at any time—at all times."

"Which would you rather do—paint me or make whistles?"

Darrell laughed.

"If you make whistles to-day I shall throw all the nuts away and come straight home. Take those two hooked sticks out of the stand."

While he was obeying this peremptory command, Linda produced a basket from a cupboard and slung it over her arm.

"Now we're ready," she said. "Come along."

Linda was right as to the nuts. The coppice was bursting with them, and they were just ready for gathering. Within half an hour they had filled the basket and Darrell was regretting that they had not brought another.

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"What does it matter?" said Linda. "We can come again to-morrow."

"But what shall we do now?" he said.

Linda sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, propped her elbows on her knees, put her round chin in the cup of her hands, and stared at the patches of sky which showed through the brown and yellow of the hazels.

"Throw them all away and get another basketful," she said. "And then throw that away and get a third—if you want something to do."

Darrell, who was filling his pipe, paused and stared at her.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

She flashed a swift look at him.

"Nothing's the matter," she said shortly.

Darrell completed the filling of his pipe to his own satisfaction. He began to feel for his match-box.

"I should say we shall have a touch of frost to-night," he said, looking around him and sniffing. "I can feel it in the air."

"How clever of you!" she said. "So can I."

Darrell found the match-box and lighted his pipe. He looked meditatively at Linda. She was conscious that he was looking at her, and

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the kept her eyes steadily fixed on the patches of sky overhead.

"I say," he said, "that russet and gold would make a splendid background for your scarlet jacket."

Linda jumped to her feet.

"Let's go home," she said, and moved off.

"Home? Why, we've only just come!"

She half-turned and pointed to the basket.

"Bring the nuts," she commanded.

Going along the road they met a party of children returning from school, each member of which put his or her finger in his or her mouth and stood stock still at sight of the fine lady and gentleman. Linda paused.

"Would you like some ripe nuts?" she said addressing the eldest juvenile.

"Yes, miss, if you please, miss."

Linda took the basket out of Darrell's hand.

"Very well, there you are—share them out amongst you. And be sure to bring me my basket back when you come to school to-morrow."

As the children went one way and they another, Darrell said:

"I think you might have given me a handful of nuts—I helped to gather them."

"Did you really want some?



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"Yes, of course I did."

Linda gazed straight down the road.

"Why don't you go back and get some more, then? You said you wanted something to do."

Darrell whistled.

"Oh, so you want to make whistles now?" she said. "You can cut a nice piece of young ash out of the hedge there."

"I think it's you who are making whistles," said Darrell. "What is the matter?"

She turned and looked at him quite innocently

"Is anything the matter?" she asked.

Darrell rubbed his chin reflectively.

"I don't know," he answered lamely.

"Neither do I," she said. "Let's see—what were we talking about?"

"You," said Darrell, "were talking of—whistles."

"Now," she said with emphasis, "I will *not* talk to you again, and we *will* go straight home."

"We're only fifty yards from the garden gate now," said Darrell.

She marched straight upstairs as soon as they entered the stone hall, and he heard her slam her door. He laughed a little at that, and wondering what had caused this new revelation, sat down before the fire and smoked in comfort

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for a long time until Linda reappeared from the kitchen regions, carrying the big silver lamp. She set it down on the centre table and lighted it, and then, as he turned towards her, came to him with a winning smile and outstretched hand.

"I believe I have been rude and horrid and nasty to-day," she said. "Forgive me!"

Darrell got a tight grip on himself. She had changed her gown for one all of white, which made her dark eyes and hair darker than ever. Her beauty called to him, set all his pulses throbbing, fired his blood—for one mad second which seemed an age he wanted to seize her in his arms, to feel her lips against his. . . .

"That's all right!" he said, with an effort at unconcerned cheeriness. "Perhaps you were feeling a bit—out of sorts, eh?"

She gave him a whimsical look.

"Perhaps I was in a bad temper?" she said, slyly.

"Oh, no, I don't think that!" he said hastily. "You are always so bright and cheerful, and, and——"

"Yes? And—and——?"

"And sensible," he said. "I couldn't think of you as bad-tempered."

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"I can assure you that I have a very hot temper," she said. "Come, tea is ready."

As they sat at tea old Sarah came into the dining-room.

"Theer's a tallygraft for you, Miss Linda, and the boy says is theer onny answer," she said.

Linda tore the yellow envelope open and read the contents over with a puckered brow. Then she laughed and turned to the old woman.

"No, there's no answer, Sarah, thank you. Give the boy something to eat and drink."

She tossed the telegram over to Darrell with another laugh.

"Poor father!" she said. "This will be quite an event for him—he will talk about it for years."

Darrell read the message.

"Mr. Thornthwaite will have me to stay the night here won't let me go shall return to-morrow love to you best respects Mr. Darrell."

"That's the first time father has slept out of his own room for years," said Linda, "except when he goes to London for the Cattle Show, and that, of course, is all in the day's march."

That night she was as bright and cheerful as she had been moody and wayward in the after-

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noon. They sat in the stone hall talking for a long time. She was never tired of asking Darrell about his travels and the places he had seen, and that night she asked him a question which she remembered afterwards.

"If you wanted a really peaceful retreat, where would you go?"

He answered without hesitation:

"To Bruges—in Belgium."

Later that evening he played to her for an hour, and at last, at her request, began to improvise for her. She came nearer and nearer to the piano as he played, until at last she sank into a low chair at its side and watched him steadily. . . .

The music stopped. They both stood up . . . at last their eyes met. She held out her hand. He was conscious that he took it, that they drew nearer, nearer . . . then his arm was about her waist, his lips on hers . . . and then, rosy red, but smiling divinely, she was gone.

Darrell stood trembling like a leaf. Suddenly he dropped into the nearest chair and covered his face with his hands. The Gifts of the Gods had come too near,

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# X

HALF an hour later, when Darrell turned out the light in the big silver lamp, the stone hall was suddenly illuminated as if day, bright and refulgent, had come again. He walked over to one of the windows and drew the blind aside, and could have cried out at the glory of the scene before him. Sailing upward through a sky made clear by the frost was such a moon as he had scarcely ever seen, in these or any other countries. It seemed twice as large as usual, and on this night it was at its full. He wondered, as he watched its rays gilding the tops of the trees and hedgerows and turning the roofs of the outbuildings to glistening planes of silver, how it was that he had not noticed it as it drew towards the full. Then he remembered that he had always gone to bed while the big lamp was burning (Cornelius always remaining behind to patrol the house and turn out the lights), and that his own room was heavily curtained.



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He was glad that chance had revealed this marvellous sight to him.

He stood gazing out upon the moonlighted garden for some moments, and then dropped the blind, and sighing, for what reason he knew not, he took up his candle and went slowly to his room. His brain was still on fire, his pulses throbbing with the memory of the kiss he had given, and the kiss that had been given back. She had been so near to him in that intoxicating moment's embrace !—and she was so near now.

He sat for a long time on the edge of his bed, living that moment over again, seeing her, feeling her. Her great liquid eyes, her warm red mouth, the beating of her heart against his. . . .

He went to bed at last, but sleep was hard to woo. His mind was full of her.

"I shall have to go away," he said. "I must go away—I must go away at once."

After a long time he began to doze. On the borderland of sleep he thought he heard a light tapping at his door—so light that it might have been a bird pecking at a tree. He sat up and listened. The tapping went on; became a little louder. He thought he heard his name

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whispered faintly. Darrell sprang out of bed and went to the door. As he reached it the tapping became still louder, and he heard Linda's voice pronounce his name distinctly.

"Yes?" he said, in a low voice.

"Please come!" she whispered back. "There is something wrong."

Darrell snatched down his dressing-gown, thrust his feet into a pair of bedroom slippers, and opened the door. She, too, was in her dressing-gown, her black hair falling in a great cloud over her shoulders and half-enveloping her, and her eyes, bigger and darker than ever in the moonlight which flooded the corridor, looked frightened.

"What is it?" asked Darrell. "What is it?"

She caught her breath a little.

"I am certain there is some one moving about in that little room where father keeps all his account-books and papers and the loose money," she whispered. "It is just under my room, you know. I—I couldn't sleep, and I have heard it two or three times. Come quietly and listen."

She led him to the open door of her room, and motioned him to follow her noiselessly inside.

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"Listen!" she whispered.

Holding his breath, Darrell listened. And presently he heard a stealthy sound in the room beneath—a sound as of a slight crack.

"Did you hear it?" whispered Linda.

"Yes—I heard it. Come along."

She followed him into the corridor. Then he turned and looked at her.

"I'm going to slip a revolver into my pocket and go down," he said. "Don't be afraid. Is there a side staircase?"

"Yes—through that door. But it's old, and may creak. The hall staircase is better."

"All right. I'll have him, or them."

He turned into his room, felt for and found a revolver which he always carried in his portmanteau, and slipped it into the pocket of his dressing-gown. Then he went back to Linda.

"You wait at the top of the stairs," he said. "And if you hear me whistle, bring a light. I'll take care you're in no danger."

"But—you?" she said, unconsciously laying her hand on his arm.

"Don't be afraid—I'm a dead shot if it comes to a row. But it won't."

Then he went off, stealing gently along the corridor and down the stairs in the stone hall,

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while Linda, going back to her room for a candle, shivered with fear as to what might happen. She crept slowly after him, and at the head of the stairs waited.

Presently she heard a door open, a sudden commotion, the sound of furniture overturned, and then Darrell's voice, firm and com manding.

"If you move another foot I'll shoot you. Stand there!"

Then came a sharp low whistle.

Linda lighted the candle and ran down the stairs to her father's little office-room. Just within the door stood Darrell, a very bright and business-like revolver in his right hand, evelled upon a loutish-looking lad of twenty or thereabouts who gazed at the deadly weapon with eyes full of horror. His teeth chattered; his knees shook; no burglar was ever less formidable. And at sight of Linda he screwed a couple of bony knuckles into his eyes and began to blubber.

Linda almost dropped her candle.

"Why—why!" she exclaimed. "It's Bob! Oh, Bob, how could you?"

Darrell slipped the revolver into his pocket and laughed.

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"So the gentleman is known to you?" he said.

"Yes—he used to work here—he slept in the house—two years ago. Oh, Bob, what were you doing?"

But Bob was still knuckling his eyes.

"I'll tell you what he was doing," said Darrell. "He was trying to break open your father's desk. Weren't you, you scoundrel?"

"Don't speak harshly to him," said Linda. She went up to the culprit and laid a hand on his arm. "Tell me about it. Bob—what made you do such a dreadful thing? Don't cry, but tell me."

The culprit swallowed several large sobs.

"Wish I may die, Miss Lindy, if I ivver meant onny harm to eyther you or the maister!" he wailed. "But I were out o' wark, and nigh on to starvin', and I knew as how the maister allus kep' a matter o' money i' that theer desk, and I were desp'rate, like, and I knew how easy I could get into the house, 'cause theer's a windy i' th' back-kitchen 'at doesn't fasten reight, and I thowt a pound or two wodn't be missed—aw dear, aw dear! Don't send me to t' hoil, Miss Lindy, don't now!"

"You'll get five years for this, my man," said Darrell.

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The would-be burglar howled.

"Aw, dear; aw, dear; aw, dear! Whativver mun I do—whativver mun I do! Aw, dear, aw, dear!"

"Or perhaps ten."

"Don't frighten him," said Linda. "Now, Bob, listen to me. Why didn't you come to us when you were in want?"

"Doänt know, 'm. Aw, dear!"

"Have you ever done anything like this before, now, Bob? Tell me the truth."

"Naw, mum—naw, Miss Lindy! I'll tak' my solemn 'davy 'at I nivver did. Leastways I did once steal one o' Farmer Strawson's ducks, but I put t' vally on it i' t' collectin' box at t' chapel next Sunday."

Darrell burst into laughter.

"Be quiet!" said Linda. "Now, Bob, will you promise never, never, to do anything like this again?"

"I will, Miss Lindy, I will, faithful! I nivver meant no harm."

"Then I'll give you something to eat, and something to help you on with, and the day after to-morrow you'll come and ask Mr. Van de Linde for work—I shall not tell him what you've done to-night."

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"I say—I say!" said Darrell. "You're compounding a felony, you know. The law——"

"What do I care for the law?" she said. "Stay there while I get him something to eat."

"I'm afeard o' bein' left alone wi' that theer gentleman," whined the favoured culprit. "I don't like that shinin' pistil—it flays me."

"Oh, he won't shoot you, now," said Linda, reassuringly. "He'll be very kind to you—for my sake," she whispered, as she passed Darrell on her way to the pantry. When she came back a few moments later she carried a parcel of food, and an old overcoat.

"Now then, Bob," she said, "here's something for you to eat, and here's a coat for you. And here's some money to help you on. Now go home, and do as I tell you about the day after to-morrow."

"Thank you, kindly, Miss. I'll do owt 'at you say, Miss. An' I'm sure 'at I nivver meant no harm. . . ."

"No—well, now, come along. We'll let him out at the front," she said to Darrell. "I'm so afraid of waking the servants—it's lucky they're right away on the other wing of the house."

When she had fastened the door upon the

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baffled burglar's slinking figure she turned back into the stone hall to find Darrell standing near what remained of the fire. She went up to him, searching his face.

"It was the right thing to do," she said. "The poor lad's half-witted—he always was. It would have been cruel to send him to prison."

Then, with a sudden catch in her voice, she said:

"Did you see the moon—the harvest moon—the moon that comes when harvest is safely home? Look!"

She blew out the candle, and moving over to the window, drew up the blind. The moonlight, strong and clear, flooded the stone hall, lit up her face, her dark hair, her great, liquid eyes.

"Good-night—for the second time," she said, coming back to him.

Once more they drew nearer and nearer . . . his lips sought hers again . . . she came into his embrace . . . and this time she stayed there.

A long, deep, drifting cloud, dark and menacing, came over the moon and plunged the land and the night into semi-darkness. When it passed, and the moon shone out again, the stone hall was empty and all the house was very still.

But the Gifts of the Gods had been given.

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## XI

SHE came down to him next morning, rosy and smiling, and gave him her good-day kiss as candidly as if she had been his for years of happy and understanding life. He took her into his arms and searched her eyes—she smiled back at him, blushing under his inspection.

"Heavens! how beautiful you are!" he breathed.

She laughed, patted his cheek, and pointed to the breakfast table.

"If I am as beautiful as I am hungry," she said, "I must be a compound of all that is bewitching. Will you carve that cold ham?"

She talked with her usual lack of self-consciousness as they breakfasted, and her happiness would have been patent to any observer. She was bursting with it, and with life, and spirits, and health. But Darrell was quiet, and talked little, and at last his comparative silence struck her. She jumped up from her seat and coming



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round the table put one arm round his neck and with her disengaged hand lifted his face to hers.

"You are very quiet—Adrian."

He smiled back at her.

"Perhaps I have much to think of—Linda."

She nodded.

"I know. Yes—we have much to think of. We must be good—and at present not think too much of ourselves. I am yours for ever, am I not?"

He drew her down to him and kissed her fondly.

"Yes, for ever!" he said.

She sighed deeply, kissed him on forehead, eyes, and lips, and patting his head as if he had been a small boy went back to her place.

Old Sarah came in with letters and newspapers.

"Here's the post, Miss Linda," she said.

Linda took the budget and began to turn it over.

"*Yorkshire Post—Mark Lane Express—The Field—The Queen* (that's my only extravagance, sir, but I must know how to dress myself) Cornelius—Cornelius—A. Darrell, Esq. (why Esq., when you're only a plain 'Mr.' and cheap at that!) more Cornelius's—lots of them—and nothing for me but a concert programme and

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a dressmaker's bill. There's yours, Adrian dear."

Darrell took the letter which she handed to him and glanced carelessly at the handwriting on the envelope. A puzzled expression came into his face; he turned the envelope over. A sharp exclamation escaped his lips—he jumped to his feet, and crossing over to the window tore the letter from its covering and hastily read its contents.

When he turned round again Linda saw that his face was ashen pale. She was at his side on the instant, her hands on his shoulders, her eyes searching his.

"Adrian, dearest!—what is it? You have had bad news?"

He seemed to fight for speech.

"I must get up to town at once," he jerked out. "A—a relative is dead. What time is it—within a minute of nine? I can just catch the nine forty-five, but I shall have to ride hard. I must leave everything just as it is until—until I return. Let's see, the bicycle is in the porch, isn't it? Come—I must go just as I am. I must be in town this afternoon."

He hurried out into the stone hall, snatched up a cap and a pair of gloves from one of the



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window-seats, and hurried still more hurriedly into the porch. He felt the tyres of the bicycle.

"All right," he said. "I'll do it—just three-quarters of an hour."

Then he turned to her—held out his arms. For a moment he showered kisses on her hair, her face, and at last one long, passionate kiss on her lips. Then with a murmured word, he was gone.

Linda closed her eyes and sank back against the door-post. She heard him run the bicycle down the path, she heard the garden-gate open and close. It seemed an age before she dared to open her eyes again—when she did she ran down the path and on to the road. Darrell was already a speck in the distance, racing along as if for his life. A bend in the road—he disappeared.

She went slowly back to the house, feeling as a bird may feel whose wing is broken. Five minutes before she was wildly, blissfully happy—now she was reduced to the very depths of solitude. If he had only told her, confided in her. . . .

"But he had no time, poor boy!" she said, being anxious, woman-like, to excuse him. "He will write—he will be sure to write to-day."

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What could it be that had called him away so suddenly—that had given him such a shock? There was no mistaking the effect of the letter—his face was colourless, and its expression tense and almost wild. And yet he had said it was not bad news.

"But he will tell me," she said. "He will be sure to tell me—*now*."

Then memory brought the hot blood to her cheeks, and she sat down and covered her face with her hands and lived the last few hours over again. At last she got up and began to move about the breakfast table, collecting the china and the silver.

"I shall be brave—for his sake," she said. "He will be sure to write. I wish I could write to him. . . ."

A sudden thought struck her with the force of a thunderbolt. She did not even know Adrian Darrell's address. Beyond the fact that he lived in London when he was in England she knew nothing. He had never talked much of his private life, nor mentioned his London life more than casually.

She ran out into the stone hall, to the window-seat where his sketch-books lay, and hurriedly turned them over. No—there was neither

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name nor address in any of them. She ran upstairs into his room. There were all his things lying about. She remembered that a portmanteau had been sent down to him after the painting of her picture was decided upon—she pulled it out of the cupboard and overhauled its contents. There was nothing but a quantity of clean linen and underclothing—she noticed, as people will notice unimportant things in the search for important ones, that all was of very fine quality; she noticed also that nothing was marked.

She put the portmanteau back in the cupboard and looked around her. Two suits of clothes, both new, which had come down in the portmanteau, lay neatly folded on top of a low chest of drawers. She felt in the pockets of each. There was not a scrap of paper to be found anywhere. She examined the pockets of the dressing-gown and of the overcoat hanging behind the door—there was nothing in one, and only a pair of gloves and a briar pipe in the other. She looked in the chest of drawers, and found a quantity of pocket-handkerchiefs, a number of collars, a collection of neck-ties, somewhere about two dozens of pairs of socks, and the revolver which had so frightened the

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would-be burglar. She picked this up forthwith, and holding it gingerly and at arm's length, carried it off and locked it up in a place of safety where she knew that no one but herself could ever get at it. Then she returned to the bedroom, having remembered that there was a dressing-case on the table which might contain some papers with his address on. The dressing-case was unlocked—she opened it expectantly. Everything in it was of solid silver; she knew because of her acquaintance with the considerable stock of silver which lay in the family chest downstairs in the strong room, that it was all very old. But there were no papers. She was about to close the dressing-case when she noticed that one of the compartments which she had at first taken to be empty contained a small leather casket. Opening this she found it to contain a miniature, set in pearls and diamonds—a miniature of Darrell as a boy. Of that she was sure. She looked at it long and earnestly before she kissed it. A thought struck her—she compared the pearls and diamonds with those of a ring which he had slipped on the third finger of her left hand the night before. The pearls and diamonds in ring and miniature matched in every respect.

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# XII

CORNELIUS rode his cob up to the gate that afternoon at five o'clock. Linda, who had been watching for him for the previous two hours, made haste to get him into the stone hall and to bring him something hot to drink.

"You look cold and tired, father dear," she said. "You've been gallivanting too much, You always have to pay for it, you know."

Cornelius smiled and patted her head as she knelt beside him, unbuttoning his gaiters.

"Well, now, my pretty," he said. "I'm not going to deny that I am cold or that I am tired. It's a long journey into that part of the world, and a rare cold job travelling by the railway trains early in the mornings."

A slight huskiness in her father's speech brought a shadow over Linda's face. The old man was subject to attacks of bronchitis, and at times was so ill that she feared for his life.



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"I hope you haven't caught cold, father," she said, as she put his warmed slippers on.

"Well, now, I shouldn't wonder if I have," he said, sipping his hot gin-and-water. "Mr. Thornthwaite and me, we got very wet last night in walking from a neighbour's house where we'd been to take a friendly glass or two—my, but the rain knows how to come down in those parts, my lass!—I was wet to the skin about my shoulders."

"Oh, father! Now hadn't you better let me light a fire in your room and warm the bed, and take you up as soon as it's all ready?"

"No—no, my pretty—I'll have some tea first. But where's Mr. Darrell?"

"He had to go to London on business early this morning," replied Linda. "He went off soon after nine."

"Dear, dear!" said Cornelius. "Nothing serious, I hope?"

"Oh, no!" answered Linda. "He'll come back."

She got him into the dining-room, and while he was eating went out and saw that his bedroom was duly warmed. When she returned he was sitting by the fire, shivering.

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"I'll go to bed now, Linda joy," he said, wearily.

Linda's heart became heavy as lead. She gave him her arm in silence.

So Cornelius went to bed for the last time.

He was dead within three days, and sleeping with his forefathers within seven. Linda went about dry-eyed, and Mary Garrendon, who came to stay with her, prayed that she might break down and weep.

And so far no news of Darrell had come to her.

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# XIII

It was some little time before Linda Van de Linde awoke to the realisation of fact. She went about the house mechanically, day after day, discharging her accustomed duties. With the exception that its master no longer went out and came in, strolled about the garden of a morning and sat in his chair by the fire o' nights, the old place looked just the same. Linda took his duties upon herself. There was a capable foreman in charge of the labourers, a man who had been in the employ of Cornelius for twenty years—with him Linda took counsel every morning as to what was to be done on the land. She had always identified herself with her father's interests, and had a good, practical knowledge of farming, and as the foreman was trustworthy and hard-working the machinery of the farm rolled on as smoothly as ever. There was nothing missing in the fields and meadows but Cornelius himself on his old cob.



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This, however, was not to go on for always. When Cornelius Van de Linde's will was opened it was found that with the exception of some legacies to his servants and workmen and due provision for his two old pensioners, Matthew and Sarah Jennett, he had left everything of which he died possessed to his daughter, with instructions that his estate should be sold, either privately or at auction, and the proceeds invested in one or other of certain approved securities. This sale was to take place if possible within six months of his death: Linda's stay at Morcarstoft was therefore but a matter of a short time.

Cornelius had named two executors of his will—one of them his solicitor, Mr. Laidman, of York; the other, Dr. Garrendon. There was found a letter with the will addressed to Garrendon, in which the old man begged the doctor to accept this trust as a proof of the high esteem in which he, Cornelius, held him. Garrendon would far rather have been free of the duties imposed upon him—in some way it seemed to put a bar between himself and Linda, and although he had said to his sister that it would "never be any use," he was still hoping against hope that he might eventually win her. But

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when he re-read the old man's letter, and saw how laboriously Cornelius had endeavoured to make his meaning plain, he readily consented to undertake the task.

When he and his co-executor had their first business conversation with Linda they were able to tell her that she was a well-to-do woman. Cornelius had always been a thrifty and a saving man; he himself had often been heard to say that he had never had a really bad year from the time he inherited Morcarstoft from his father, who, moreover, in addition to the farm had left him a nice little fortune. There was a good deal of money invested in first-class securities; a considerable sum in the hands of the bankers; the house, land, and dead and live stock would produce a small fortune in themselves. Already there was a handsome offer for the house and land; one of the great neighbouring land-owners, knowing the high pitch of perfection to which Cornelius had brought his farm, and anxious to add the Morcarstoft property to his own, which ran up to it, had hastened to make an offer for it which Mr. Laidman felt to be an exceedingly good one.

"But I do not wish to sell Morcarstoft," said Linda, when they put this offer before her.

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"Why does Lord Illingham wish to buy what I do not want to sell?"

They explained to her that by the terms of her father's will the estate must be sold.

"I thought that everything was mine," she said. "If it is, why cannot I do what I like with it?"

They made further explanations. She listened to them with a frown.

"I meant to go on living here, and to farm the land myself," she said, somewhat angrily. "If you sell the house and land to Lord Illingham shall I have to leave Morcarstoft?"

They told her that the house would be wanted for a new tenant.

"Is the furniture to be sold, too, then?" she asked, looking round about her at the familiar objects in the stone hall, where they were sitting in company with Mary Garrendon.

No, they answered, the furniture, plate, linen were all at her own disposal—hers absolutely.

"I do not want it all," she said. "Lots of it can be sold. I shall choose what I want, and you can sell the rest. And, pray, where am I to live?"

Mr. Laidman pointed out to her that she could live wherever she pleased. She would be suffi-

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ciently well-to-do to live in any place that took her fancy. She would have at the very least fifteen hundred pounds a year to live upon—probably more, but quite that, at the very lowest estimate. Therefore, she could pick and choose.

She looked at the two men for some time without speaking: then she once more glanced round the place of which she had so many various memories, sad and happy.

"It really doesn't matter," she said. "I wanted to stay here—I wish my father had left things so that I could have stayed here. But since I can't—well, do what you think best, and tell me when I am to go."

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## XIV

**October passed; November passed; Christmas came and went; the New Year dawned, and yet no news came to her of Adrian Darrell. Every morning throughout that weary time she used to come down heart-sick with longing for the sight of a letter; every knock that came to the door made her pulses leap with a wild hope that it might be his, and that in another moment she would feel his arms about her and his face against hers. But day after day went by, and nothing happened. He might have been swallowed up into the blackness which nothing mortal can penetrate. She went about her work in the usual way; held consultations with the foreman; gave orders to the servants; saw that the house was kept up to its usual standard of neatness and order; took care that the garden was looked after according to her father's ideas; cleaned silver; dusted china; ate, drank, and, as well as she could, slept. Every**



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day, forcing herself to do it, she went out for a sharp walk—every day saw her take that walk in the same direction—towards Doncaster. Something told her that it was foolish, but she always expected to meet Darrell—and always went back, lonely and sore hearted.

Long since, soon after the death of Cornelius, she had locked the door of Darrell's room and put the key in her pocket. She used to visit it every day, brush the clothes which he had left, arrange and fold them, and leave the room just as he had left it. It should be ready for him when he came back. In the stone hall the easel with his unfinished picture on it still stood just where he had last placed it—on the little table at its side lay his painting materials, his brushes uncleansed, his palette, uncleaned. In the window-seat close by lay his sketch-books, some odds and ends of paper on which he had made an outline or two; the ashen whistle about which she had teased him; a tobacco pouch, open; a book; a pipe; a stick—all just where he had carelessly thrown them. She would have none of them touched. On the occasion of Cornelius's funeral somebody had suggested removing all these things, seeing that so many guests would be present—she had forbidden their

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removal with an imperious sternness, and with her own hands had fetched two great screens from the parlour and had screened the corner off. Nothing should be touched until he came, or until she had to leave the old place for ever.

Mary Garrendon came to sit with her every day, but got little conversation out of her. She used to sit for hours in her favourite attitude; her elbows propped on her knees, her rounded chin in the cup of her hands, her great eyes staring fixedly at the leaping flames on the hearth. And after three months had gone by Mary Garrendon could bear it no longer and one afternoon she spoke.

"Linda," she said, laying her hand on the girl's shoulder. "You're in great trouble; you know you are."

"Well?"

"And it's not because of your father's death, you know."

"Well?"

Mary Garrendon hesitated—Linda's voice was hard and dry.

"Come, Linda, tell me. Isn't it, now—tell me—are you in love with Mr. Darrell?"

Linda laughed. She turned and looked at Mary Garrendon with half-closed eyes as if she

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were endeavouring to estimate her mental capacity.

"I should think any fool could see that!" she replied, half-scornfully.

Mary Garrendon put the retort aside.

"Linda, be frank with me—was there anything between you before he went away?"

Linda's voice was hard as ever.

"We loved each other—if that's what you mean. Of course we did—we were madly in love with each other from the very first moment we met—madly."

"Then, Linda, why doesn't he come back to you?"

Linda shrugged her shoulders.

"Of course, he writes to you?"

Linda shrugged her shoulders again.

"I have never heard a word of or from him since he went away," she answered.

"Linda! All that time! And you think that a man can love you who can treat you in that way? Why, it's——"

Linda sprang to her feet with blazing eyes and hot cheeks.

"Don't you dare to speak to me like that!" she burst out. "I know he loves me—know, do you hear? Do you think I don't trust him?"



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Then she flung out of the place, and Mary Garrendon, knowing that she would not reappear that day, went home, very sad and sorrowful.

It was about three weeks after that, just as February was setting in, that John Garrendon, who had been with his co-executor to see Linda on business, came reeling like a drunken man into his sister's parlour, and, when he had calmed down, told her in broken sentences something that sent her off post-haste on her bicycle to Morcarstoft. She came back two hours later to find him pacing up and down the parlour like a caged wild beast.

"Well?" he said. "Well?"

She shook her head.

"It's true, John," she answered. "It's quite true. She admitted it."

He stared at her for a moment like a man distraught: then he said, "Very well, I shall go to London to-morrow morning. I'll find him!"

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# XV

THEY talked far into the night, these two, as to what steps Garrendon might take in London towards finding Darrell. Mary Garrendon knew that Linda possessed next to no information about him, that she did not even know his address; that, oddly enough, although he had lived in her father's house for nearly a month she had never even seen his handwriting. Brother and sister alike knew that Garrendon's mission must be kept secret from her—she would have been furious had she known that he had gone to seek her lover. That he must go, in her interest, and in fulfilment of the trust which Cornelius had reposed in him, was, however, evident.

"And yet whatever can you do?" said Mary. "To find one man amongst millions!—think of it!"

"There are not millions nor thousands nor even hundreds of men like that," replied



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Garrendon. "Think of his talents—positively amounting to genius—in two directions. Such a man must be known. I'll see Demmler—he was with me at Guy's, you know, and gave up medicine for painting—he'll be able to put me on the track. Darrell must be found, and he must marry her at once."

Mary Garrendon gazed thoughtfully at the fire over which they were sitting. "I wonder," she said, "if there has been any foul play."

"Foul play? Why foul play?"

"Because from what I saw of him—and you have often said I am a keen judge of character—I should say that he was not the sort of man to act dishonourably."

"Dishonourably! Why——"

"I know what you mean, John. But we all know that it is a very easy thing to sin. It's no use talking about *that*, now, when things are as they are. From Linda's account of what took place when he left so hurriedly it is very evident that he was highly excited by whatever news it was that he had received. What could that news be? That it is connected with his disappearance I have not the slightest doubt."

Garrendon threw out his hands with a gesture of impatience.

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"Well," he said, "if he's to be found in London, I'll find him. While I am away you must stay with her, Mary. I'll get Brinckman to come on and take my cases—but do you stay with her."

"Yes," she answered. "I'll do that. But, John, if he's not to be found?"

"She'll have to be taken away—right away," Garrendon said, with a groan. "For her father's sake she mustn't stay here a month longer."

"And, of course, John, you'll have to tell Mr. Laidman."

"Yes," he answered. "Laidman will have to know. But he will keep counsel. And now, Mary, you go to bed—I've got to write instructions for Brinckman and make my preparations."

He went off to town early next morning, and for ten days his sister heard nothing of him. Then she received a telegram one afternoon stating that he would be home that evening, and asking her to meet him at their own house. She had supper ready for him on his arrival, but she knew from the way in which he looked at the cheery table as he entered the room that he had failed in his mission. He sank, utterly worn out, into his chair and threw out his hands.

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"It's all been of no use, Mary," he said. "I haven't so much as even come across a trace of him—not a trace."

He took the cup of coffee which she handed him, drank a little, and went on. "I got hold of Demmler, and told him everything, though of course I didn't mention Linda's name. He has spent every day—the whole of each day—with me, trying to trace him. It was utterly useless. Demmler knows everybody and everything in art circles—he took me all over, into all sorts of artists' clubs, societies, and places where artists meet. No one had the slightest recollection of Darrell from my description of him. It is certain that he has never exhibited in London—at any rate under his own name—for the past twelve years, and of course before that he would be a mere child. If he has lived there it must have been like a hermit, and in absolute independence of his art. Nobody knows anything of him—artists, critics, dealers. But I have formed an impression of my own, and Demmler shares it."

"And that is——?"

"That his name here was an assumed one. However, there we are. I've failed—and I've been so thorough in my investigations that I

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don't see how any one else can succeed. Now, Mary, listen to me. Linda must be got away at once—at once! Let her go wherever she pleases. But—you must go with her, Mary."

Mary Garrendon put her hand on her brother's shoulder.

"John, it will be the first time we've been separated! And what will you do?"

He looked at her steadfastly.

"Do you think I shan't feel it, dear?" he said. "Shan't I? But it's the right thing to do, Mary, it's the right thing to do. We must stand by her! You must go with her, and stick to her, and I must get a housekeeper. You'll make me all the happier by doing this. I shall know she's—safe."

Mary stooped and kissed her brother.

"Very well, John," she said. "I'll stand by her."

Early next morning Mary Garrendon went down to Morcarstoft and found Linda gathering snowdrops in the garden. She drew her inside the stone hall and made her sit down.

"Linda, dear," she said, gently but with firmness, "you must go away from here."

Linda stared at her.

"Go away? But why should I go away?"

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"You must go away because—because of what is going to happen."

Linda began to bunch the snowdrops. Her mouth and eyes grew mutinous.

"Think, Linda, dear, of your father.'

Linda let the snowdrops fall—her lips quivered.

"Yes," she said in a softer voice than Mary had heard for a long time. "Yes, I see. Very well, I will go."

"And I shall go with you—and stay with you."

Linda threw her arms round the elder woman's neck and kissed her impulsively. Then a cloud came over her face.

"But when Adrian comes—because he will come—how will he know where to find me?" she said.

"That is easy. John will see that he is sent on to you. And now, Linda, where would you like to go? Because, dear, we must go at once."

Linda sat musing in silence for a time. Suddenly the memory of a question and an answer flashed across her. Again she saw the autumn fireside; again she saw Darrell and herself sitting in its cheery glow; again she heard her own voice and his.

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"*If you wanted a really peaceful retreat, where would you go?*"

"*I would go to Bruges—in Belgium.*"

She turned to Mary Garrendon and laid her hand on hers.

"I will go to live in Bruges—in Belgium," she said

Nobody made any objection to that—she would be able to live like a princess in Bruges, on her ample income. And so matters were quickly settled. She was to mark all the articles of furniture which she required, and when she and Mary Garrendon had found a house in Bruges to their liking, they were to be shipped over to her. She would be able, with all that fine old furniture, with her silver, her china, her glass, her stores of linen, to set up quite an establishment.

There was one thing she did before leaving. With her own hands she packed into one trunk everything which Adrian had left; she superintended the packing by workmen of the unfinished picture. And these things she took with her.

END OF PART ONE

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# PART TWO

## *IN BRUGES—TWELVE YEARS LATER*

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# I

It was a May morning in Bruges, and the quaint old Flemish city smiled back at the sky and the sun. Sunlight and springtide were everywhere—in the little lonely squares and narrow streets as in the wide expanse of the Grand Place. The sunlight dwelt lovingly on the great tower of the Cathedral and on the graceful spire of Nôtre Dame; it played about the old Belfry, wooing the music of the chimes within, and danced and glided on hundreds of queer old roofs and gables. The springtide laughed in many a nook and corner, and watched its own reflection in the mirror of the Minnewater and in the placid basins of the quiet canals. Everywhere the spirit of springtide peace reigned supreme. The thrifty housewives had long since finished their marketing, and were now busied behind closed doors in their domestic avocations; everybody, except a few belated ones, had been to Mass and gone home again; in all the place there was a



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sense of mid-morning rest. In the Rue de Sud Sablon and in the Rue des Pierres there was something of life, for there are the best shops and thither the tourists repair, but in the Grand Place there was a delightful solitude. An officer looked out of the window of the Civil and Military Club; he twirled a very black moustache in a thoughtful manner, and his dark eyes were melancholy with the sweetness of spring. An elderly man read a newspaper in front of one of the little café-restaurants; now and then he sipped languidly at a glass of coffee which stood in its metal holder at his elbow. In the middle of the square two boys, bare-legged and black-pinafored, were playing tricks with a poodle; at the entrance to the museum under the Belfry, the custodian, hands in pockets and cap on one side, stood idly looking about him. A vendor of milk, his cart drawn by two great dogs, came round the corner from the Rue Flamande and clattered over the stones towards the Rue des Pierres; a mounted officer, very spick and span, rode a chestnut charger across the Grand Place in the direction of the post office. The rattle and jingle of the milk-cans in the dog-drawn cart; the stamp of the horse's feet; the joyous barking of the poodle—these were all the sounds

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which broke the stillness until from the great Belfry overhead stole the silver sounds of its matchless carillon chiming the three-quarter hour.

Almost as quiet as its sunlit Grand Place was the rest of Bruges that morning. Here and there men hung over the little bridges which span the canals and watched the white swans sailing gracefully about the green waters; here and there men came and went along the quay-sides. In the outer streets women, old and young, sat at their doors, making lace; in the courtyards of the convents, superintended by some placid-faced, meek-eyed nun, classes of young working girls were busy—also making lace. Near the Porte de Damme there was perhaps more evidence of life and bustle; in the Place de la Station there was the usual assemblage of loafers and leisured, awaiting the immense excitement of the arrival of a train from Ostend or the mail from Brussels. But in most of the streets and the little tree-shaded squares, each with its statue or its monument of some great hero, soldier, statesman, artist, there was nothing but profound peace. High walls, through which it seemed impossible for aught of the outside world to penetrate, shut out seminaries, schools,

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convents, presbyteries from extraneous life—never was such a city, the stranger would say, for these institutions or for hospitals and refuges for the sick and needy. And all round the place, fringed in places by long belts of poplar and aspen, wound the canals, spanned here and there by the ancient gates, stern and frowning as in the old days when the Baldwins were lords of the level land which stretches north and south and east and west as far as the eye can see from the summit of the Belfry.

There was no quieter spot in Bruges that morning than the Béguinage—that paradise of peace within whose walls the world seems so far off as to be for ever unreachable again. The trees in its midst, now full of fresh green foliage, cast entrancing shadows on the quaint little houses which surround the turfed quadrangle; the little houses themselves, with their queer chimneys, eccentric gables, old-world windows, and tightly shut doors, looked like nuns at prayer, whom nothing can disturb. Not more quiet was the high spire of Nôtre Dame, piercing the clear blue of the May morning.

Yet there were abundant evidences of life in the Béguinage, quiet and peaceful as it was. No one who can make the faintest pretension to

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even an elementary acquaintance with art ever visits Bruges without attempting at least a pencil sketch of the retreat which Jane of Constantinople endowed so liberally nearly eight hundred years ago. There are so many things within its precincts that are as notable as they are picturesque—the old gateway at the head of the bridge which crosses the shining Minnewater; the ancient chapel with its tombs, its paintings, its carved wood, its monumental brasses; the queer-fronted houses; the tall trees; the wonderful lights and shades on the wide stretch of vividly green turf. And so in springtide and in early summer, and in fact whenever travellers are in Bruges, one finds easels set up here, and sketch-books on knee there, and the Béguinage is being transferred to canvas or to paper—happily, in silence.

On this particular morning there were a great many artists of all sorts in and about the Béguinage. On the bridge outside, an obviously English bridegroom was adjusting his camera while his obviously English bride, fair of hair and blue of eye, was making a hurried pencil-sketch of the old gateway. Within the sanctuary itself a man with a velvet coat and very long hair had set up a canvas of some size and was sketching



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in a general view of the place. Under the trees various young ladies, whose severely cut skirts leather-belted waists, and plain blouses seemed to proclaim them English, were working with brush or pencil, each at some particular subject which had taken her fancy. Under the trees, also, or around the roadway which enclosed the quadrangle, or on the pebble-paved paths which intersected it, slowly moved folk who were doing nothing more than was required to drink in the spirit of the place as they drank in the air of the May morning.

In one of the quietest corners of the Béguinage, seated on a camp-stool which he had placed beneath an overshadowing tree in such a position that he could when he chose lean back and rest himself against the trunk, a boy was thoughtfully regarding a water-colour sketch which filled a page near the end of an already well-furnished sketch-book. On another camp-stool at his side lay his box of colours, his brushes and pencil, all set out with mathematical precision. Now, after viewing his picture from various angles, he mixed some more colour, took up his brush again, and set soberly to work, quite unconscious of the fact that a stranger who had been strolling about the Béguinage for some

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time had drawn near and was watching him intently.

It seemed to the stranger that this boy might be eleven or twelve years old. He was a big boy, tall and well-knit for his age, of a very graceful and slim figure, which was shown to advantage by a plain, but perfectly cut suit of Scotch tweed. Something in that suit, in the snowy turn-down collar which topped the jacket, in the neatly tied sailor's knot, in the straw hat which its wearer had thrown on the ground at his side, suggested an English atmosphere to the looker-on. He set down the youthful artist as an English school-boy on holiday.

But when the boy lifted his face again the stranger was puzzled. It was a handsome face, pure oval in outline, pure olive in tint, and crowned by a mass of the blackest and curliest hair that ever boy wore. Some hand had recently reduced this luxuriant growth to reasonable dimensions—there were no stray locks falling about ears or over collar—the shapely head was close-cropped if anything. But what remained was obviously rebellious—there could never be any parting in that blue-black mass, which formed itself into rings and twists and curls and tendrils from the nape of the neck

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to the broad, well-shaped forehead. No—that was not an English head; it was pure Roman.

The boy lifted his head and his brush to make a measurement. Out of the tail of his eye he caught a glimpse of the stranger, and for the tenth part of a second he favoured him with a sharp, inquisitive glance. The man thus inspected saw then that the boy's eyes were in keeping with his hair—they were black as midnight. But they were more than that—the flash of them was like that which comes and goes in the eyes of a hawk, and it came from under level black brows. Great, wide eyes they were, heavily fringed with eyelashes as black and curly as the hair above, and set well apart from a nose which was as distinctly Roman as they and the hair were. A strong, proud, mutinous mouth, scarlet as a rose, a square, resolute chin which led by well-chiselled lines to a small, delicate ear—these features made up a handsome young face.

The stranger produced a cigar-case and lighted a cigar. He drew nearer the tree and addressed the young artist in French.

"This is a delightful morning for out-of-door work," he said.

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