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Select Poetry.

THE STRANGER ON THE SILL.

Between broad fields of wheat and corn,
Is the lovely home where I was born;
The peach tree leans against the wall,
And the woodbine wanders over all;
There is the shaded doorway still—
But a stranger's foot has crossed the sill.

There is the barn—and, as of yore,
I can smell the hay from the open door,
And see the busy swallows throng,
And hear the pewee's mournful song,
But the stranger comes, O! painful proof—
His sheaves are piled to the heated roof.

There is the orchard—the very trees,
That knew my childhood so well to please,
Where I watched the shadowy moments run,
Till my life imbibed more of shade than sun;
The swing from the bough still sweeps the air,
But the stranger's children are swinging there.

It bubbles, the shady spring below,
With its bulrush brook where the hazles grow,
'Twas there I found the calamus root,
And watched the minnows poise and shoot,
And heard the robin lave his wing—
But the stranger's bucket is at the spring.

Oh, ye who daily cross the sill,
Step lightly, for I love it still;
And when you crown the old barn eaves,
Then think what countless harvest sheaves
Have passed within that scented door,
To gladden eyes that are no more.

DOCTOR BURGESS' PRESENT.

"IT'S ONE o'clock, gentlemen," said the obsequious and weary waiter, entering a luxurious brilliantly lighted room in a fashionable club house, where a jovial little party of young gentlemen had assembled.

"What a bore you are, Dennie," answered Hal Burgess. "Why don't you stop the clock? Are you aware my good fellow that this is my last night here for a long time? Give us a fresh pack of cards to change the luck. We must have one more game while you are bringing us another bottle of Carte Blanche for a farewell bumper. Just think," he continued, appealing to his companions seated around the table, "to-morrow night at this hour I shall be playing a lively game of pitch and toss with old Neptune, and getting badly worsted in the encounter."

"Don't speak of it, Hal. We hate to hear of your going," chorused several voices in tones of genuine regret, that proved what a favorite he was in that coterie of gay young bachelors.

The card party which had been interrupted, was the sequel of a farewell dinner, given on the occasion of his departure for Europe, where he intended to pass several years before entering upon the practice of his profession. It was the last of many similar festivities in which he had been a leading spirit, and reluctant as they were that it should come to an end, 'the wee sma' hours a yont the twa' refused to tarry at their bidding; the round was finally played, and the last merry toast proposed. Hal had won largely and rose cramming a roll of bills carelessly in his pocket, and promising his opponents their revenge when he returned. Their cordial adieus were spoken, and leaving his friends at the door he walked briskly up the avenue. At that late hour of the night it was silent and deserted; but, turning a corner, he saw a young girl coming hastily from the opposite direction.—The bewildered, frightened expression of her wan but beautiful face, revealed by the gaslight caused him to stop and exclaim:

"What's the matter? Can I do anything for you?"

"I must find a doctor; do you know where there is one?" she answered hurriedly, with a quick, questioning glance and reassured by his respectful manner.

"There is none very near here," Hal said after a moment's reflection, and added, from what the young men he had just left would have deemed a most Quixotic impulse, "but I am almost a physician myself; unless the case is very serious, perhaps I can attend to it."

"Oh please come quickly, then," replied the girl as she led him the way rapidly past several blocks of stately houses, to one of those poor neighborhoods which are sometimes found crouching at back doors of an aristocratic quarter.

"Who is sick?" Hal asked, as reaching a small house, she held open the door for him to pass, and taking up a flickering candle lighted his way up two flights of stairs.

"My mother," she answered in a trembling voice.

"And was there no one in the house you could call upon to help you?" he asked.

"No; the people who live in the lower rooms go away at night. I was obliged to leave her all alone."

On the bed in the room they entered, lay a woman apparently insensible, with sickening marks of blood about her, and crimson drops still oozing from her lips. The girl hastened toward the bedside in a mute terror at what might have happened during her absence, but Hal's practised eye saw that she had a bad but not fatal hemorrhage and could soon be restored to consciousness. With a few consoling words to the daughter which enabled her to assist him, he proceeded to treat the case as well as circumstances would permit, noting as he did so that ghastly as was the pallor of the thin, care-worn face, it still showed traces of former beauty and of unmistakable refinement.

At last the sufferer opened her eyes, with the vague, indifferent look of complete physical exhaustion, but closed them again wearily.

"Do not speak to her," said Hal in a whisper, "she must be kept perfectly quiet; but I think she will do well now."

As he proceeded to give the necessary directions for further treatment his eyes wandered round the room, which was neat, though meagerly furnished, and bore witness to that struggling destitution so much more pitiable than thriftless, squalid poverty.

Under a lamp on a table lay several pieces of fine needle work, in a confusion that showed how recently the labor had been interrupted. Ostensibly searching for something in his letter case, Hal bent over the delicate embroideries with a wondering pity for the patient hand by which they were produced. The girl came toward him trying to express gratitude.

"Have you no relatives or friends?" he asked.

She shook her head sadly.

"Your father?"

"He died two years ago, just after we came here to live. We have no money just now," she continued, misunderstanding the motive of his questions, "but I shall get some as soon as this work is finished, and if you give me your address I will—"

"I do not mean that," he interrupted hastily; but he did not add that he was really thinking how soon she might be alone in the world, for her mother was evidently a victim to a quick consumption.

"I am going to Europe to-morrow," he went on, "so I shall not be able to call again; but I will leave a prescription for your mother, which I trust will do some good."

He wrote a few lines on a scrap of paper; then, availing himself a of moment when he was unobserved, he slipped the money he had recently won into an envelope and left it on the table.—Fortunately, it was a considerable amount, although he regretted that it was not in his power to give something beside money, and left, thoughtful at the contrast between prodigal, careless pleasures, and anxious want which the last few hours had forced upon him.

Amid the distractions of foreign travel, however, the incident was soon forgotten; but before a year had passed he was reminded of it by receiving a note from a large Western city, and enclosing a draft for the amount he had given away that night. The style of the missive was curt and business like:

DEAR SIR—Though personally unknown to you, I am under great obligations for your kindness to my sister and niece at a time of need. Without wearying you with my personal affairs, I will merely explain that the lady to whom you attended for hemorrhage one night last year, was my sister. She married against my wishes a man who gradually squandered the little fortune she possessed. All intercourse between us had ceased, and I knew neither of her husband's death nor the destitution which followed, until the dread of leaving her daughter without any protector overcame her pride and resentment, and she wrote to me. I reached her only a few hours before her death, and it is only within a week that I have learned through my niece that it was to your charity she was indebted for her last earthly comforts. A card which was found upon the floor, after you left, furnishes us with your address, and I hasten to remit to you the amount of the pecuniary indebtedness, as well as to express my gratitude for the services you rendered to the members of my family.

Respectfully yours,
JOHN J. RHODES.

"Rather a romantic ending to that little episode," mused Hal. "Well, I am glad that lovely girl found a home, and some one to care for her after her mother died. I wonder if I shall ever see her again. The uncle is evidently well off, since he has discharged his 'pecuniary indebtedness,' as he calls it, so promptly. Judging from the note it wounded his pride, and I wish I had not been so careless as to drop that card.—What the deuce am I to do with the money?

He would not have asked that question two years later, when the news of a great fire in his native city came across the cable, and he learned that the riches he had enjoyed so thoughtlessly had vanished on the swift wings of flame.

He returned at once, self-reliant and hopeful, the change of his circumstances developing all the latent energy of his character. The necessity of gaining a livelihood which he had formerly looked upon as an outlet of a certain philanthropic ambition, was just the stimulus he needed, though even in his prosperity he had never been an idler with no earnest or endeavor. But, knowing as he did from experience the butterfly life of club and ball room, he realized that it would be incompatible with the practical work that lay before him, and he felt that it would be easier to sever old social ties at once and seek his fortune among strangers.

He went to a western city; but even there to his surprise he found some old friends in an agreeable family he had met while traveling abroad. They were gay people, who entertained handsomely, but he persistently declined all their invitations, until he was overpersuaded to attend the *debut* of one of the younger daughters.

He did not repent the concession when he found himself in the midst of the brilliant scene, but yielded gracefully to its exhilliration. The fair *debutant* showed him much favor, but in the midst of her lively chatter his eyes wandered to the door through which a tall, graceful girl was just entering.

She was indeed lovely; form, coloring, movement, were all exquisitely perfect. The shining ripples of golden hair, the dewy violet eyes, the rose leaf complexion, the arch, smiling mouth, the supple, rounded figure, revealed each other as being the chief charm of her fair presence. Hal's genuine admiration was very evident, as he asked abruptly:

"Who is that lady?"

"If you were not such a recluse you would not ask," replied his companion. "That is Laura Gresham, the belle of the season. Is she not lovely?"

"Yes, very," answered Hal; "she has that rare beauty that reminds one of a flower, delicate and perfect, yet living.—I think I have seen her before."

"That is hardly possible, for she has been in a convent school all her life until this winter. Let me introduce you."

Hal assented eagerly, but was surprised to see a sudden blush suffuse Miss Gresham's face when his name was mentioned, and he fancied her manner nervous and distraught. She had no dance left to give him, but they chatted a few moments on ordinary topics, and a chance allusion elicited from her the question:

"Is it long since you returned from Europe?"

"Only about six months. I should have remained a year longer, but all my worldly goods being converted into dust and ashes one night, it behooves me to exchange the life of a vagabond for the practice of my profession, which began here in preference to my native city."

The lightly spoken words seemed to astonish her. "What a misfortune," she exclaimed.

"I trust it will not prove so in the end," he answered, thoughtfully, but the next dance had already begun, and the *tete a tete* was inturrupted.

Later in the evening his hostess said to him playfully: "You should feel much flattered; Miss Gresham has been asking all about you, and it is not often she takes so much trouble. Of course you have fallen in love at first sight."

"Perhaps I should if I had not, long since, outgrown such a possibility," Hal answered carelessly.

Nevertheless, as he sat next morning in his modest little office, Laura's beautiful face came between his eyes and the dry reports of the medical works he was reading, with such persistency, that it was a relief when the bell rang and he was interrupted by a message desiring his attendance upon Mr. Rhodes as soon as possible.

"Rhodes!" thought Hal, as he prepared to obey the summons, "surely I have heard that name before. Why, it is the same as that of my crusty old correspondent, and this is the city he lived in. Strange I never thought of it before. I should like to see his little niece again."

But when he reached the handsome house to which he had been directed, he found only an irascible, dyspeptic old gentleman, who made no allusion to any previous intercourse, and who proved a most exacting and exasperating patient. It was not until a third visit that he found a young lady in the room, who was introduced as "my niece, Miss Gresham."

So this was the poor, needy girl he had succored — this courted belle and heiress. Truly, circumstances had changed with both of them since their first meeting.

"I have had the pleasure of seeing Dr. Burgess before," she said, with a slight hesitation; but beyond the significance that might be attached to those few words, no reference was made to any previous incident in their acquaintance. Apparently she desired that it should be ignored, and Hal had far too much tact and good breeding to betray by word or look his own remembrance of it. Yet he often wondered at this silence, as in the course of several months' professional attendance he became better acquainted with herself and her uncle.

The latter was a confirmed invalid, to whom his niece was exceedingly devoted, and she found an efficient aid in the young doctor, who although his practice was rapidly enlarging, somehow always managed to have considerable time to devote to this special case.

Seeing Laura thus frequently and intimately, Hal became more and more interested in her, and consequently this persistent reserve, which apparently arose from false shame of the past or shallow pride in the present, vexed and puzzled him. It was the one blemish he found in her character, and he neither understand it nor excused it.

It kept him from falling in love, at least from ever avowing his affection; one who attached such undue importance to wealth and position would hardly tolerate the addresses of a poor physician, he reasoned, although Laura's manner certainly gave him cause to entertain a contrary opinion. One morning he met her in the hall.

"Can I speak with you a moment before you go to my uncle?" she asked.

"Certainly," he replied, following her into the reception room. Closing its door she came toward him, saying with a smile:

"Have you quite forgotten me?"

"Surely, Miss Gresham need never ask a question like that," he said gallantly. "Besides, I saw you yesterday."

She made a slight movement of impatience.

"I do not mean that. I want to know whether you have never guessed that I was the poor girl you met on the street that dreadful night when my mother was so ill, and you befriended us? Am I so much changed that you did not know me?"

'No,' he answered; 'but I thought—'

Thought that I had such a foolish, false pride that I shrank from acknowledging my indebtedness to you, and recalling my former pride and wretchedness," she interrupted, her soft eyes filling with tears and her lips quivering with suppressed emotion. "I am sorry, but you have had good reason. My uncle is always so annoyed by any allusion to that miserable time—it wounds his pride, and, besides that he reproaches himself so bitterly for ignorantly allowing my mother to struggle and suffer as she did, and I have never dared to speak of it before him. In fact, I resorted to a ruse to induce him to have you attend him, telling him though the names were the same, the Dr. Burgess he remembered was rich, and probably still abroad."

"Then you recognized me yourself at once?"

"Certainly, and I am not so ungrateful as I have seemed. I have so longed for an opportunity to thank you, though words never can for all you did for us."

"Do not say any more about it, Miss Gresham," said Hal, much embarrassed. "It was a trifling service I was so fortunate as to render you, and you may be sure I should never have reminded you of it."

"But I feel under such a weight of unacknowledged obligation," she protested, earnestly, "and besides I think I may venture to tell my uncle now.—You have become such a favorite with him that I think he will be able to forgive you even for your charity to us."

Hal winced at the words spoke half playfully, yet with genuine humility.

"I assure you, Miss Laura, there is no such debt of gratitude between us as you assume; any benefit I was to you at that time has already been more than repaid by the patronage which has been secured for me through your uncle's influence since I came to your city a poor, unknown physician."

She shook her head incredulously.

"That is nothing. Your own talent would have secured it all without any aid from us. I do wish there were any way in which I could repay you."

"There is one," he said, yielding to a sudden impulse as he looked down into her eager eyes, "but no—it would suppose the original debt increased by such enormous usury, that I dare not propose it."

"Our estimates might differ," she murmured, the long lashes dropping shyly, and the tell-tale color flushing her cheeks.

"All debts are more than cancelled by the gift of love," was the reply.

A few mornings later, Laura leaned over the back of her uncle's chair, and said coaxingly:

"Dr. Burgess has done you a great deal of good, uncle; I should think you would like to make him a present."

"So I would, Laura, so I would.—What shall it be? You may select it."

"Well, uncle, it is a strange fancy, but he thinks he would like me."

"You!" cried Mr. Rhodes, in utter astonishment. "Even as well as I like the fellow, that is a little too much."

"Oh, don't say that, uncle,' answered Laura, blushing. "Think of all his services and kind attentions to you, as I am sure I owe him everything—for he proved to the very Dr. Burgess who befriended me when I was in such sore trouble."

The old gentleman sat speechless for some moments, engrossed by conflicting emotions.

"You said I might choose the present for him," urged Laura, timidly, "and it really will not be giving me away, for we shall belong to you."

Her uncle kissed her fondly and Hal, appearing at that instant to the doorway, he called to him:

"This little woman has pleaded your case so well that all is left for me to say is, take her and be happy."

☞ If you are determined to get the beam out of your own eye before you put your fingers into your brother's eye to get his mote out, you will probably be very busy for the next few years.

☞ Knowledge will become folly if good sense does not take care of it.