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THE LOOM OF LIFE.

All day, all night, I can hear the jar, Of the loom of life, and near and far It thrills with its deep and muffled sound, As tireless the wheels go always round.

Busily, ceaselessly goes the loom, In the light of day and the midnight's gloom: And the wheels are turning early and late, And the woof is wound on the warp of fate.

Click, click!—there's a thread of love woven in; Click, click!—another of wrong and sin; What a checkered thing this life will be When we see it unrolled in eternity!

When shall this wonderful web be done? In a thousand years, perhaps, or one, Or to-morrow! Who knoweth? Not you nor I; But the wheels turn on and the shuttles fly.

Ah, sad-eyed weavers, the years are slow, But each one is nearer to the end, I know; And soon the last thread shall be woven in— God grant it be love instead of sin.

Are we spinners of good in this life-web—say? Do we furnish the weaver a thread each day? It were better then, O, my friends, to spin A beautiful thread than a thread of sin.

An Unexpected Guest.

"I DON'T believe Hiram's folks are going to invite us over to their Thanksgiving, this year," said the Widow Rollins as she solemnly moved her knitting needles one gusty autumn twilight.

"Lor', well, what if he don't? I guess we kin be jest az thankful ter home," replied her sister, Miss Debby, an energetic spinster, who was always happy as long as there was a plenty of sickness in the town to talk about.

"I don't care so much on my own account, and I know you don't mind it, Debby, but I am sorry for Emily. It's dreadful dull for young folks to be forever at home, 'n' never go out into any kind of company. But folks that don't even own the farm they live on can't expect to be noticed. I don't suppose there's anything talked of in the village now-a-days but that Squire Jones is going to foreclose the mortgage, and turn us out-of-doors."

"You need not be sorry on my account, mother, I would rather not go to cousin Hiram's, I would rather stay at home than to go out anywhere," said Emily, a tall, slender girl, with a pale, pretty face, who was gazing dreamily into the fire.

"Cat's foot! I don't believe Squire Jones will foreclose the mortgage, anyhow," Aunt Debby blurted out.

"Hiram's Kate got home from the city yesterday, I suppose," pursued Mrs. Rollins, utterly regardless of her sister's speech. "She didn't answer the letter that you wrote her so long ago, did she, Emily?"

Emily shook her head, while a little scornful smile curled her lip.

"And you used to be such great friends. Well, since old Mis' Potter left all the property to that family, they have put on airs in the most extraordinary manner; but it wasn't so very much, after all."

"No, an' Squire Jones says they're a spendin' it awful reckless. There won't be none of it left in a year or two.—What with Kate a-goin' to the city to take music lessons, an' hev'ing two silk dresses. She didn't hev that last one trimmed with fringe after all. It was all kivered with knife plaitin'; Mis' Jones went an' asked the Port dress-maker, herself. They say neither Kate nor her mother scarcely speak to the neighbors now."

"But Hiram's good-hearted, an' I think he's kind of ashamed of their action," said Mrs. Rollins, presently.

"Emily, I wish you'd light the lamp; it's going to be an awful dark night." Emily arose and did as she was requested, then she drew the curtains, bolted the outside door, resumed her seat by the fire, and taking a book from the table, was soon absorbed in its contents. Miss Debby commenced to converse on the subject of fevers and sick people, half to herself and half to her sister, who did not seem to be in a talkative mood, but knitted away in pensive silence, every now and then raising her head to wistfully regard her daughter.

"Emily," she said, after a long, long pause, "I don't think Kate Sawyer's friendship is any great loss, after all. Do you know I have always cherished a suspicion that she was the cause of Joe Ashton's strange behaviour? I think that she spread the report of your flirtation with John Foster on purpose to put an end to everything between you and Joe. She wanted him herself; everybody saw that."

Emily colored violently, but made no reply. Joe Ashton's name had hardly been mentioned in the family for years. He was an old lover of hers, but she had not seen him for eight long years. She was twenty-six now, and he had left the place very suddenly and mysteriously when she was only eighteen, and she had never heard from him since. There had been no actual engagement between them, but they had been lovers ever since she was a little girl of five and he a boy of nine. He drew her to school on his sled, he whipped the boys who teased her, he brought her big red apples and many a hoarded bit of candy. As they grew older, he escorted her to and from singing school, he waited for her in the church porch every Sunday; he chose her as his companion on all the sleighing parties and picnics which were held in the town. They took long walks together in lovers' lane. He always spoke of the future as if they were to share it; indeed, he had often spoken of the time when she should be his wife, and they had planned what countries they would visit together, for he was a sailor. She loved the handsome, manly fellow with her whole heart, and trusted him entirely, and everybody said, what a fine couple they are, and what a suitable match it will be, or at least all but Kate Sawyer, who was a second cousin of Joe's, and Emily's neighbor and friend. Even in her little girlhood she had been exceedingly jealous of Emily, though as she grew older she tried to hide this feeling. But she often said, "I don't see what Joe finds in Emily that is so fascinating. She is a dear girl, to be sure, but she never will have a cent of money of her own, and she is so pale and quiet. I call her plain, and he is so smart and handsome."

The summer that he went away he had never been more devoted. Emily saw him every day. He talked of giving up his sailor life because he could not bear to leave her, he said, and was looking for a situation in some mercantile house in the city. Then all of a sudden he disappeared without one word of good-by. He left no message behind him. He wrote no letter of explanation. His grandfather, with whom he had always lived, for his father and mother died in his infancy, merely said that he had gone on another foreign voyage. In less than a year afterward the old man died. There was none of the Ashtons left in Bloomville, and people ceased to talk of Joe.

For two or three years his name was scarcely mentioned. Then there came a rumor that he was with his uncle, a rich old bachelor in the West Indies. Some sailor from the Port had seen and talked with him there, but still Emily heard no sound. She had up to this time believed him dead. Other lovers sought her favor, but all in vain. She would never marry, she said. She preferred to remain as she was. She was too busy to indulge in any vain regrets, for great misfortunes had come to the family, and she was obliged to teach school to keep her mother, Aunt Debby, and herself from actual want. In the first place the bank at the "Port," where all their possessions, with the exception of the rocky little farm upon which they lived, were placed, failed. Then the crops failed entirely one year, the best cows sickened and died, and in the midst of it all, Mrs. Rollins fell ill of a fever which lasted two or three

weary months. The farm was mortgaged in order to pay the doctor's bill, and since that time everything seemed to go wrong.

"Bless me," said Miss Debby, suddenly rushing into the room, "two men are a-comin' through the gate bringin' somethin' that looks like another man; ez like as not somebody's got hurt." And she flew to open the outside door.

"Man hurt, got run away with, Debby, an' you'll hev to take him in, seein' this is the nearest house," said Mr. Harding, one of the neighbors, who with his son, a stout lad of eighteen, was carefully bearing a limp and seemingly lifeless body.

"Good grashus! he's dead, I kin see by the looks of his face that he's a corpse," exclaimed Miss Debby, while Emily hastily led the way to the best bedroom.

"Lor', no, he's out of his head, though, and dangerous, I'm afraid. It's the stranger that came to the hotel ter the corner day before yesterday. He brought a perfect devil of a horse with him from the city," said Mr. Harding. "Tom, you stay here with the wimmen-folks, they might get scart, you know," turning to his son, "while I'll drive after the doctor as fast as I can."

Emily regarded the man with a strange, half-romantic interest. His features, though bronzed to such an extent that at a first glance she supposed him to be of a dark colored race, were singularly handsome. He was, apparently, about thirty years old. A dark, curling beard adorned his chin and half concealed a rather obstinate, determined mouth. A quantity of loose, dark hair fell over a broad brow, which was moulded after a different pattern from those of the slow, unambitious young farmers and rough sailors whom Emily was accustomed to see. His eyes were tightly closed, the jet-black lashes sweeping his brown cheek. Upon one of his long, aristocratic looking fingers glinted a brilliant diamond in an odd setting. Emily, who was as full of romance as a very young girl, and who had been reading Eastern poetry, thought that he looked like an Eastern king. A terrible bruise revealed itself on the left temple, and being placed on the back of his head, he turned it quickly with a moan of intense suffering.

"He don't b'long nowhere round here, but, somehow, he looks dretful familiar, don't you think so, Emily?" said Aunt Debby.

"I fancied that there was when I first glanced at him," replied Emily, "but of course it was only fancy. It is evident that he is a gentleman."

"Yes, some great gentleman," said timid, little Mrs. Rollins, regarding the diamond ring with a sort of awe.

Miss Debby hurried to make a fire on the hearth, while Emily proceeded to bathe the stranger's head very gently with cold water. This seemed to soothe him for a time, for he became immediately quiet, then he commenced to mutter incoherent words, and to make startled exclamations.

"No, no, she won't see me! she won't speak to me! It is too late!" he cried, looking Emily full in the face with his wild, burning eyes.

The doctor came bustling in, bearing his huge medicine chest.

"I don't think you can do anything, doctor, the man's in a dretful way. Completed like a furriner, ain't he?" said Aunt Debby.

"What is it? Got his head broke?" inquired the doctor.

"No matter, it wasn't good for much, it led its owner into the wrong track," said the patient, regarding the doctor fixedly. Then he commenced to rave and mutter again.

"Lor', did you hear what he said about gettin' onto the wrong track?" whispered Miss Debby. "Like ez not, he's a burglar, a reg'lar cut-throat. I ain't sure it's safe to hev him in the house, if he is a-dyin', but lor', he's a human bein' an' we must do all we ken."

"Too many people in the room," growled the doctor. "Miss Emily, you come and help me with these bandages. If you would leave the room for a while, marm," turning to Miss Debby, it would be better for the patient. Talking excites him."

Miss Debby indignantly remained at her post, but condescended to keep silence.

"What kind of a fellow is that hired man of yours,—Seth, I mean?" inquired the doctor.

"Rather stupid, but faithful in the extreme," replied Emily.

"Wouldn't fall asleep at his post if he sat up three nights running?"

"I think not."

"Then have him sent for at once."

Seth appeared,—a huge man who had the faculty of moving like a mouse. "You are not to take your eyes off this man one moment until six o'clock to-morrow morning. If you see any change in him, come for me at once. Miss Emily will watch while you are absent." And the doctor, having mixed his medicines and prepared his bandages, pinned a long list of directions on Seth's coat, and prepared to take his departure.

"Do you think he will live?" inquired Emily, following the doctor into the hall.

"Tell you better to-morrow. The crack in the skull ain't so much as the hurt in the temple. Much depends on the nursing."

"S'posin' the furriner should die in the night," shuddered Seth, who was as timid as he was huge. Emily smiled. "I will sit up too. I should not sleep if I was in bed."

No change was detected in the condition of the patient during the night.—He was quiet and delirious by turns.—Emily slept at intervals. Seth obeyed the doctor's orders literally, never daring to move an inch from the bedside.—In the morning the doctor pronounced him better, but not out of danger.

Emily felt a strange interest in the sick man. She was filled with anxiety if she left him for ever so short a time. She cared for him with a sisterly tenderness, and though he seemed unconscious of everything else around him, he was evidently soothed by her presence and missed her sorely if she was not always near to minister to his wants. He would take his medicine from no hand but hers, and still, at times the mere sight of her face would set him into the wildest excitement, and he would rave about some mysterious *she* in the wildest and most incoherent manner.

"What if he ain't good, 'n your folks don't git no pay for his keep'n' nussin'?" said Seth meditatively, on the third day of his illness.

Emily had just entered the room, and was standing by the bedside.

"Hush, Seth! How dare you talk like that?" said she, her eyes flashing with indignation.

"You don't even know his name anyhow. Jones, over to the hotel, says 't is registered Black, or suthin' like that, he couldn't tell 't was sich blind writin'."

The sick man had opened his eyes and was looking Emily full in the face. The fever seemed to have left him for a time, and his gaze was calm and intelligent.—Emily started and grew deadly pale.—What was there in those eyes which awakened so many memories, which brought back the old days with such a thrill? "Joe," she half whispered with stiff, white lips.

"Emily dearest, can you ever forgive me? Say that you will do so. I went away because I thought you were going to cast me off and marry John Foster. They said so." And then his mind commenced to wander again, and, in broken sentences, Emily detected the sound of Kate Sawyer's name. But he held her hand in a close clasp, and finally fell into a quiet sleep in this position, and if she tried to withdraw the hand held so closely in his own, he would move uneasily and grasp it all the tighter.

Seth, whose ears, eyes, and mouth had been wide open during the whole scene came near falling head first into the fire which he was mending, so overcome was he, so weak had he grown with amazement. He immediately thought of some pressing errand which would take him to the village store, and before nine o'clock that night, there was hardly a person in the whole town who was n't aware that Joe Ashton was the man who was ill at the house of the Widow Rollins.

The next day, in tripped Kate Sawyer all smiles and cordiality, so glad to see her dear cousins, so rejoiced that dear Cousin Joe was better, and that he was

at home once more. She had not been in the house before for nearly a year.

"I shall remain here and take care of him to-day," said she, addressing Mrs. Rollins. "I was always his favorite cousin, you know, and of course I could care for him as no strangers, however thoughtful, are able to do."

"Cat's foot!" ejaculated Miss Debby, sharply, "he's a dretful nigh cousin, a'n't he? Anyhow, we've hed strict orders not let him see nobody. I an' Miss Rollins ain't 'lowed into the room ourselves only once in a great while.—The doctor is dretful partickler, an' Joe, hisself don't seem to want to see nobody but Emily. They've been atakin' over old times this mornin': his head 'pears to be all right."

Kate grew scarlet with indignation but she choked down her anger as nearly as possible.

"The doctor means that he shall not see any strangers, of course, but in this case it is different. I am a dear friend and relative. Ma's coming over to watch to-night."

"Dretful dear, I should say. If yer ma comes over, she'll come fur nothin'. Joe sleeps most all night, now, an' Seth lays down on the lounge in the same room, an' gives him his medicine at the right time. Joe an' the doctor both sez, they wouldn't change Seth for a professional, he's so awful faithful, an' so awful still."

Kate made no reply, but marched toward the door of the forbidden room with a very erect head and flashing eyes.

"Sorry I can't 'commerdate yer, Miss but I've hed strict orders not to let a livin' soul but Miss Rollins an' Emily, cross that there thresholt," said Seth, appearing in the passage way just then.

"Wouldn't dare not to 'bey the doctor more'n I'd cut my head off. And he made his huge arm a barrier in her way."

"This is some of Emily's doings," said Kate energetically. "Where is she I wish to see her?"

"Well, I don't jest like to disturb her jest now, fur she an' the gentleman seem to be sayin' something awful important. They are old friends, you know, only she never knowed him at first, the climate of the West Indies had darkened his complexion so. He was jest a red-cheeked, smooth-faced young chap when he went away. I remember him, myself, an' now, he's come back with a dretful sight of whiskers, as well as a pocket full of money."

"Impudent creature! you shall pay dearly for insulting a Sawyer in this way," almost screamed Kate.

"Can't help it. If yer was more Sawyer an' you be, I couldn't let you enter that room."

That afternoon all the indignant Sawyers appeared in a body, but the doctor happened to be paying his daily visit at that time, and informed them, as he declared once for all, that they could not see Mr. Ashton for a week at least.

"I thought he was out of danger," said Mrs. Sawyer trembling with inward wrath, for it was now all over town that Joe had inherited nearly half a million from his eccentric old bachelor uncle who had gone out to the Indies when a boy. And here he was being petted and cajoled by the artful Emily.

"He wouldn't be out of danger if I should allow the whole town to pounce upon him; however, I tell you he must be kept perfectly quiet, marm."

A week passed away. Joe had gained strength very rapidly. He was able to sit up all day now. The fever had left him, his head was clear, and he was out in the family sitting-room for the first time this morning. He was seated in the chimney corner looking somewhat weak and bruised, but happy as a boy on a holiday. Emily, who was engaged in tidying up the hearth, had grown ten years younger within a few weeks in spite of all the care and wakeful nights which she had experienced. Joe was just praising the sparkle of her eyes, when in tripped Miss Kate Sawyer once more, taking him quite by storm with congratulations and affectionate greetings.

Joe smiled somewhat grimly, but suffered himself to be gushed over, while Emily looked on with quiet amusement.

"I hear that you are going out to-morrow, cousin," she said, "and I came to invite you over to our house. Of