

## Week Three: Prosperity and Social Justice at the Turn of the Century Part I

## CROSSCURRENTS

### Prosperity and Social Justice at the Turn of the Century

By the end of the nineteenth century, the new American nation that had begun the century clinging to a narrow strip of land along the Atlantic seaboard, untested in its politics, shaky in its economy, and an infant in its arts, had spread westward over a vast continent, established its military and political might in conflicts at home and abroad, built an astonishing prosperity from its natural resources and its national talent for invention and industry, and developed a rich and enduring literature.

That was the body, but where was the soul? Although the new Eden of Puritan aspiration had promised and provided much, many of its later inhabitants were beginning to ask, At what cost? The gap between rich and poor had widened astonishingly, reaching proportions unequaled again in our history until, as the twentieth century turned into the twenty-first, Americans found their collective wealth distributed once again in vastly unequal sums between the richest and poorest among them. In the 1890s, elaborate mansions, sprouting in cities and at seashore and forest retreats, struck discordant notes beside the slums of urban immigrants and the hovels of hungry and dispirited farmers. A nascent labor movement pitted industrial workers in violent battles against the hired guns of factory owners, and the financial panic of 1893 produced a serious economic depression with long-lasting effects. In 1898, the Spanish-American War resulted in the acquisition of Puerto Rico, the Philippines, and Guam, signaling imperial ambitions that many thought unsuited to a nation struggling to put its own house in good order. Meanwhile, Indians, blacks, Hispanics, and other minorities had not fully shared in and often suffered from the new expansiveness. These developments cried out for explanation and justification.

In the selections that follow, Andrew Carnegie's "Gospel" of wealth remains an influential concept, Stephen Crane's and William Vaughn Moody's qualms concerning America's unequal distribution of wealth and the fragility of the nation's moral well-being remain issues for later times, and Zitkala-Sa's and W. E. B. Du Bois's concerns about the integration into American society of Indians and African-Americans have not yet been fully resolved to the satisfaction of all our citizens.

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#### ANDREW CARNEGIE

(1835–1919)

*In his almost unparalleled ability to acquire wealth and power, Andrew Carnegie seemed to embody Horatio Alger's rags-to-riches dream. Born in Scotland, he began life in America as a bobbin boy in a cotton mill, became a telegrapher, and then a superintendent on the Pennsylvania Railroad. At thirty, he was rich enough*

*to quit the railroad and turn to investments. After dominating the steel industry, in 1901 he sold out to the United States Steel Corporation as one of the richest men in the world. He was also one of the most philanthropic, giving away \$350 million, building nearly three thousand libraries, and funding numerous institutions, including Carnegie Hall in New York, the Carnegie Institution in Washington, and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.*

*He was not without critics: His success came in part from his genius at depressing wages, increasing production, and fighting unions. In the Homestead strike of 1892, nine strikers and seven Pinkerton guards, hired by Carnegie's partner Henry Clay Frick, were killed, many others were injured, the union was broken, wages came down, and hours went up. Nevertheless, demonstrating that he knew how to make money, he also acted on his conviction that he had a moral obligation to spend it well. A man who dies rich, he suggested, dies disgraced. "Wealth" was published in June 1889 in the North American Review.*

### *From Wealth*

The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized, within the past few hundred years. In former days there was little difference between the dwelling, dress, food, and environment of the chief and those of his retainers. The Indians are to-day where civilized man then was. When visiting the Sioux, I was led to the wigwam of the chief. It was just like the others in external appearance, and even within the difference was trifling between it and those of the poorest of his braves. The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization.

This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. It is well, nay, essential for the progress of the race, that the houses of some should be homes for all that is highest and best in literature and the arts, and for all the refinements of civilization, rather than that none should be so. Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor. Without wealth there can be no Maecenas.<sup>1</sup> The "good old times" were not good old times. Neither master nor servant was as well situated then as to-day. A relapse to old conditions would be disastrous to both—not the least so to him who serves—and would sweep away civilization with it. But whether the change be for good or ill, it is upon us, beyond our power to alter, and therefore to be accepted and made the best of. It is a waste of time to criticize the inevitable. \* \* \*

The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still, for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train. But, whether the law be benign or not, we must say of it, as we say of the change in the conditions of men to which we have referred: It is here; we cannot evade it; no substitutes for it have been found; and while the law may be sometimes hard for the individual, it is best for the race, because it insures the survival of the fittest in every department. We

1. Wealthy Roman statesman (70?–8 B.C.), patron of Horace and Virgil.

accept and welcome, therefore, as conditions to which we must accommodate ourselves, great inequality of environment, the concentration of business, industrial and commercial, in the hands of a few, and the law of competition between these, as being not only beneficial, but essential for the future progress of the race. Having accepted these, it follows that there must be great scope for the exercise of special ability in the merchant and in the manufacturer who has to conduct affairs upon a great scale. That this talent for organization and management is rare among men is proved by the fact that it invariably secures for its possessor enormous rewards, no matter where or under what laws or conditions. \* \* \*

There remains, then, only one mode of using great fortunes; but in this we have the true antidote for the temporary unequal distribution of wealth, the reconciliation of the rich and the poor—a reign of harmony—another ideal, differing, indeed, from that of the Communist in requiring only the further evolution of existing conditions, not the total overthrow of our civilization. It is founded upon the present most intense individualism, and the race is prepared to put it in practice by degrees whenever it pleases. Under its sway we shall have an ideal state, in which the surplus wealth of the few will become, in the best sense, the property of the many, because administered for the common good, and this wealth, passing through the hands of the few, can be made a much more potent force for the elevation of our race than if it had been distributed in small sums to the people themselves. Even the poorest can be made to see this, and to agree that great sums gathered by some of their fellow-citizens and spent for public purposes, from which the masses reap the principal benefit, are more valuable to them than if scattered among them through the course of many years in trifling amounts. \* \* \*

Thus is the problem of Rich and Poor to be solved. The laws of accumulation will be left free; the laws of distribution free. Individualism will continue, but the millionaire will be but a trustee for the poor; intrusted for a season with a great part of the increased wealth of the community, but administering it for the community far better than it could or would have done for itself. The best minds will thus have reached a stage in the development of the race in which it is clearly seen that there is no mode of disposing of surplus wealth creditable to thoughtful and earnest men into whose hands it flows save by using it year by year for the general good. This day already dawns. But a little while, and although, without incurring the pity of their fellows, men may die sharers in great business enterprises from which their capital cannot be or has not been withdrawn, and is left chiefly at death for public uses, yet the man who dies leaving behind him millions of available wealth, which was his to administer during life, will pass away “unwept, unhonored, and unsung,” no matter to what uses he leaves the dross which he cannot take with him. Of such as these the public verdict will then be: “The man who dies thus rich dies disgraced.”

Such, in my opinion, is the true Gospel concerning Wealth, obedience to which is destined some day to solve the problem of the Rich and the Poor, and to bring “Peace on earth, among men Good-Will.”

1889

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◀ STEPHEN CRANE ▶

(1871–1900)

*In the year of the financial panic that followed the Homestead strike, Stephen Crane published Maggie: A Girl of the Streets, vivid in its depiction of slum conditions in New York. Six years later, in War Is Kind, the poem that follows provided succinct commentary on the concept of economic and social survival of the fittest as championed by Andrew Carnegie and the social Darwinist Herbert Spencer.*

**The Trees in the Garden Rained Flowers**

The trees in the garden rained flowers.  
 Children ran there joyously.  
 They gathered the flowers  
 Each to himself.  
 Now there were some 5  
 Who gathered great heaps—  
 Having opportunity and skill—  
 Until, behold, only chance blossoms  
 Remained for the feeble.  
 Then a little spindling tutor 10  
 Ran importantly to the father, crying:  
 “Pray, come hither!  
 See this unjust thing in your garden!”  
 But when the father had surveyed,  
 He admonished the tutor: 15  
 “Not so, small sage!  
 This thing is just.  
 For, look you,  
 Are not they who possess the flowers  
 Stronger, bolder, shrewder 20  
 Than they who have none?  
 Why should the strong—  
 The beautiful strong—  
 Why should they not have the flowers?”  
 Upon reflection, the tutor bowed to the ground, 25  
 “My lord,” he said,  
 “The stars are displaced  
 By this towering wisdom.”

1899

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◀ WILLIAM VAUGHN MOODY ▶

(1869–1910)

*Born in Indiana, poor but brilliant, William Vaughn Moody made his way through Harvard and became a prominent professor of English at the University of Chicago. Younger than Whitman and Dickinson, he stood high among the poets of his generation, including Edgar Lee Masters, Edwin Arlington Robinson, Stephen*

*Crane, and Robert Frost, who broke away from the strictures of nineteenth-century verse and helped prepare the way for the modernist ascendancy that followed the First World War. In the arid poetic decade between 1900 and 1910, after Crane's death and while Masters, Robinson, and Frost struggled toward their eventual fame, his was a lonely voice of the future.*

### Gloucester Moors<sup>1</sup>

A mile behind is Gloucester town  
 Where the fishing fleets put in,  
 A mile ahead the land dips down  
 And the woods and farms begin.  
 Here, where the moors stretch free 5  
 In the high blue afternoon,  
 Are the marching sun and talking sea,  
 And the racing winds that wheel and flee  
 On the flying heels of June.

Jill-o'er-the-ground is purple blue, 10  
 Blue is the quaker-maid,  
 The wild geranium holds its dew  
 Long in the boulder's shade.  
 Wax-red hangs the cup  
 From the huckleberry boughs, 15  
 In barberry bells the grey moths sup  
 Or where the choke-cherry lifts high up  
 Sweet bowls for their carouse.

Over the shelf of the sandy cove  
 Beach-peas blossom late. 20  
 By cove and cliff the swallows rove  
 Each calling to his mate.  
 Seaward the sea-gulls go,  
 And the land-birds all are here;  
 That green-gold flash was a vireo, 25  
 And yonder flame where the marsh-flags grow  
 Was a scarlet tanager.

This earth is not the steadfast place  
 We landsmen build upon;  
 From deep to deep she varies pace, 30  
 And while she comes is gone.  
 Beneath my feet I feel  
 Her smooth bulk heave and dip;

1. According to Robert Morss Lovett, the poet's friend, this poem had its inception during the summer of 1900, when Moody spent a vacation on Cape Ann, Massachusetts. He was fresh, as he said, from "the heart of the debtor's country," Chicago, where he had been teaching. This is the best known of the poems reflecting his literary connection with social protest and the reform movement. It was published in *Scribner's* for December 1900, and collected in *Poems* (1901), which the present text follows.

With velvet plunge and soft upreel  
 She swings and steadies to her keel 35  
 Like a gallant, gallant ship.

These summer clouds she sets for sail,  
 The sun is her masthead light,  
 She tows the moon like a pinnacle<sup>2</sup> frail  
 Where her phosphor wake churns bright. 40  
 Now hid, now looming clear,  
 On the face of the dangerous blue  
 The star fleets tack and wheel and veer,  
 But on, but on does the old earth steer  
 As if her port she knew. 45

God, dear God! Does she know her port,  
 Though she goes so far about?  
 Or blind astray, does she make her sport  
 To brazen and chance it out?  
 I watched when her captains passed: 50  
 She were better captainless.  
 Men in the cabin, before the mast,  
 But some were reckless and some aghast,  
 And some sat gorged at mess.

By her battened hatch I leaned and caught 55  
 Sounds from the noisome hold,—  
 Cursing and sighing of souls distraught  
 And cries too sad to be told.  
 Then I strove to go down and see;  
 But they said, “Thou are not of us!” 60  
 I turned to those on the deck with me  
 And cried, “Give help!” But they said, “Let be:  
 Our ship sails faster thus.”

Jill-o’er-the-ground is purple blue,  
 Blue is the quaker-maid, 65  
 The alder-clump where the brook comes through  
 Breeds cresses in its shade.  
 To be out of the moiling street  
 With its swelter and its sin!  
 Who has given to me this sweet, 70  
 And given my brother dust to eat?  
 And when will his wage come in?

Scattering wide or blown in ranks,  
 Yellow and white and brown,  
 Boats and boats from the fishing banks 75

2. Small boat, accessory to a larger vessel, often towed behind.

Come home to Gloucester town.  
 There is cash to purse and spend,  
 There are wives to be embraced,  
 Hearts to borrow and hearts to lend,  
 And hearts to take and keep to the end,— 80  
 O little sails, make haste!

But thou, vast outbound ship of souls,  
 What harbor town for thee?  
 What shapes, when thy arriving tolls,  
 Shall crowd the banks to see? 85  
 Shall all the happy shipmates then  
 Stand singing brotherly?  
 Or shall a haggard ruthless few  
 Warp<sup>3</sup> her over and bring her to,  
 While the many broken souls of men 90  
 Fester down in the slaver's pen,  
 And nothing to say or do?

#### On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines<sup>4</sup>

Streets of the roaring town,  
 Hush for him, hush, be still!  
 He comes, who was stricken down.  
 Doing the word of our will.  
 Hush! Let him have his state, 5  
 Give him his soldier's crown.  
 The grists of trade can wait  
 Their grinding at the mill,  
 But he cannot wait for his honor, now the trumpet has been blown;  
 Wreathe pride now for his granite brow, lay love on his breast of stone. 10

Toll! Let the great bells toll  
 Till the clashing air is dim.  
 Did we wrong this parted soul?  
 We will make up it to him.  
 Toll! Let him never guess 15

3. To move a vessel by hauling on a line attached to a buoy or some other fixed object.

4. Cuba's conflict with Spain (1896–1901) over independence was supported by American liberals who believed in self-determination. However, the war in the Philippines reflected escalation of “manifest destiny” into Pacific areas; the result of Admiral Dewey's victory at Manila was American occupation of the Philippines. American liberals also were concerned about the fate of the Filipino Emilio Aguinaldo, who had succeeded in establishing a popular government two years before the fall of the flimsy Spanish power in 1898 and who continued to maintain his government, as elected president, in spite of harassment by American-supported guerrillas. Moody represented the outraged liberal opinion in two poems still well known. In “An Ode in Time of Hesitation” (*Atlantic Monthly*, May 1900) satire was derived from the image of the Saint-Gaudens statue in Boston of a Civil War colonel, Robert Gould Shaw. Shaw had recruited the first Negro regiment for the Northern army, which he led until he was killed in action at Ft. Wagner, S.C. (1863) and was buried in one grave with his comrades. The companion poem “On a Soldier Fallen in the Philippines” (*Atlantic Monthly*, February 1901) reverses the image—the soldier was fighting against freedom, not for it. President Aguinaldo had been captured and was in American custody only one month later. The text is that of *The Poems and Plays*, 1912.

What work we set him to.  
 Laurel, laurel, yes;  
 He did what we bade him do.  
 Praise, and never a whispered hint but the fight he fought was good;  
 Never a word that the blood on his sword was his country's own  
 heart's-blood. 20

A flag for the soldier's bier  
 Who died that this land may live;  
 O, banners, banners here,  
 That he doubt not nor misgive!  
 That he heed not from the tomb 25  
 The evil days draw near  
 When the nation, robed in gloom,  
 With its faithless past shall strive.  
 Let him never dream that his bullet's scream went wide of its island mark,  
 Home to the heart of his darling land where she stumbled and sinned in  
 the dark. 30

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❖ ZITKALA-SA ❖  
 (1876–1938)

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*Child of a white father and a Sioux mother, Gertrude Simmons Bonnin left the Yankton Sioux Reservation in North Dakota for education in a Quaker boarding school in Indiana, at Earlham College, and at the New England Conservatory of Music. She taught briefly at the Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. Her essays on the plight of Indians caught between two ways of life were written under the name of Zitkala-Sa (Red Bird). "The School Days of an Indian Girl," the source of the following selection, appeared in the Atlantic Monthly for February 1900.*

### Retrospection

Leaving my mother, I returned to the school in the East. As months passed over me, I slowly comprehended that the large army of white teachers in Indian schools had a larger missionary creed than I had suspected.

It was one which included self-preservation quite as much as Indian education. When I saw an opium-eater holding a position as teacher of Indians, I did not understand what good was expected, until a Christian in power replied that this pumpkin-colored creature had a feeble mother to support. An inebriate pale-face sat stupid in a doctor's chair, while Indian patients carried their ailments to untimely graves, because his fair wife was dependent upon him for her daily food.

I find it hard to count that white man a teacher who tortured an ambitious Indian youth by frequently reminding the brave changeling that he was nothing but a "government pauper."

Though I burned with indignation upon discovering on every side instances no less shameful than those I have mentioned, there was no present help. Even the few rare ones who have worked nobly for my race were powerless to choose work-

men like themselves. To be sure, a man was sent from the Great Father to inspect Indian schools, but what he saw was usually the students' sample work *made* for exhibition. I was nettled by this sly cunning of the workmen who hoodwinked the Indian's pale Father at Washington.

My illness, which prevented the conclusion of my college course, together with my mother's stories of the encroaching frontier settlers, left me in no mood to strain my eyes in searching for latent good in my white co-workers.

At this stage of my own evolution, I was ready to curse men of small capacity for being the dwarfs their God had made them. In the process of my education I had lost all consciousness of the nature world about me. Thus, when a hidden rage took me to the small white-walled prison which I then called my room, I unknowingly turned away from my one salvation.

Alone in my room, I sat like the petrified Indian woman of whom my mother used to tell me. I wished my heart's burdens would turn me to unfeeling stone. But alive, in my tomb, I was destitute!

For the white man's papers I had given up my faith in the Great Spirit. For these same papers I had forgotten the healing in trees and brooks. On account of my mother's simple view of life, and my lack of any, I gave her up, also. I made no friends among the race of people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick.

Now a cold bare pole I seemed to be, planted in a strange earth. Still, I seemed to hope a day would come when my mute aching head, reared upward to the sky, would flash a zig-zag lightning across the heavens. With this dream of vent for a long-pent consciousness, I walked again amid the crowds.

At last, one weary day in the schoolroom, a new idea presented itself to me. It was a new way of solving the problem of my inner self. I liked it. Thus I resigned my position as teacher; and now I am in an Eastern city, following the long course of study I have set for myself. Now, as I look back upon the recent past, I see it from a distance, as a whole. I remember how, from morning till evening, many specimens of civilized peoples visited the Indian school. The city folks with canes and eyeglasses, the countrymen with sunburnt cheeks and clumsy feet, forgot their relative social ranks in an ignorant curiosity. Both sorts of these Christian pale-faces were alike astounded at seeing the children of savage warriors so docile and industrious.

As answers to their shallow inquiries they received the students' sample work to look upon. Examining the neatly figured pages, and gazing upon the Indian girls and boys bending over their books, the white visitors walked out of the schoolhouse well satisfied: they were educating the children of the red man! They were paying a liberal fee to the government employees in whose able hands lay the small forest of Indian timber.

In this fashion many have passed idly through the Indian schools during the last decade, afterward to boast of their charity to the North American Indian. But few there are who have paused to question whether real life or long-lasting death lies beneath this semblance of civilization.

1900

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❖ W. E. B. DU BOIS ❖

(1868–1963)

*Born of mixed ancestry in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, W. E. B. Du Bois experienced few racial problems before his years as a student at Nashville's Fisk University (1885–1888). "From a section," he wrote, ". . . where the status of me and my folk could be rationalized as the result of poverty and limited training, and settled essentially by schooling and hard effort, I suddenly came to a region where the world was split into white and black halves, and where the darker half was held back by race prejudice and legal bonds." After Fisk, he completed his studies at Harvard (B.A. 1890, M.A. 1891, Ph.D. 1895) and taught at Wilberforce College, the University of Pennsylvania, and Atlanta University. In 1905 he was among the founders of the Niagara Movement, seeking to replace Booker T. Washington's program of conciliation with active pressure for complete equality. In 1909 he helped found the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and from 1910 to 1934 he edited the NAACP magazine Crisis.*

*The Souls of Black Folk (1903), the book that brought him his first national attention, played a major role in the development of American racial consciousness. In the third chapter, excerpted below, he briefly outlined his argument for a strengthened commitment to the promise of the future.*

From *The Souls of Black Folk*

Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others

\* \* \* Mr. Washington represents in Negro thought the old attitude of adjustment and submission; but adjustment at such a peculiar time as to make his programme unique. This is an age of unusual economic development, and Mr. Washington's programme naturally takes an economic cast, becoming a gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life. Moreover, this is an age when the more advanced races are coming in closer contact with the less developed races, and the race-feeling is therefore intensified; and Mr. Washington's programme practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the Negro races. Again, in our own land, the reaction from the sentiment of war time has given impetus to race-prejudice against Negroes, and Mr. Washington withdraws many of the high demands of Negroes as men and American citizens. In other periods of intensified prejudice all the Negro's tendency to self-assertion has been called forth; at this period a policy of submission is advocated. In the history of nearly all other races and peoples the doctrine preached at such crises has been that manly self-respect is worth more than lands and houses, and that a people who voluntarily surrender such respect, or cease striving for it, are not worth civilizing.

In answer to this, it has been claimed that the Negro can survive only through submission. Mr. Washington distinctly asks that black people give up, at least for the present, three things,—

First, political power,

Second, insistence on civil rights,

Third, higher education of Negro youth,—and concentrate all their energies on industrial education, the accumulation of wealth, and the conciliation of the

South. This policy has been courageously and insistently advocated for over fifteen years, and has been triumphant for perhaps ten years. As a result of this tender of the palm-branch, what has been the return? In these years there have occurred:

1. The disfranchisement of the Negro.
2. The legal creation of a distinct status of civil inferiority for the Negro.
3. The steady withdrawal of aid from institutions for the higher training of the Negro.

These movements are not, to be sure, direct results of Mr. Washington's teachings; but his propaganda has, without a shadow of doubt, helped their speedier accomplishment. The question then comes: Is it possible, and probable, that nine millions of men can make effective progress in economic lines if they are deprived of political rights, made a servile caste, and allowed only the most meagre chance for developing their exceptional men? If history and reason give any distinct answer to these questions, it is an emphatic *No*. And Mr. Washington thus faces the triple paradox of his career:

1. He is striving nobly to make Negro artisans business men and property-owners; but it is utterly impossible, under modern competitive methods, for workmen and property-owners to defend their rights and exist without the right of suffrage.
2. He insists on thrift and self-respect, but at the same time counsels a silent submission to civic inferiority such as is bound to sap the manhood of any race in the long run.
3. He advocates common-school<sup>1</sup> and industrial training, and depreciates institutions of higher learning; but neither the Negro common-schools, nor Tuskegee itself, could remain open a day were it not for teachers trained in Negro colleges, or trained by their graduates. \* \* \*

It would be unjust to Mr. Washington not to acknowledge that in several instances he has opposed movements in the South which were unjust to the Negro; he sent memorials to the Louisiana and Alabama constitutional conventions, he has spoken against lynching, and in other ways has openly or silently set his influence against sinister schemes and unfortunate happenings. Notwithstanding this, it is equally true to assert that on the whole the distinct impression left by Mr. Washington's propaganda is, first, that the South is justified in its present attitude toward the Negro because of the Negro's degradation; secondly, that the prime cause of the Negro's failure to rise more quickly is his wrong education in the past; and, thirdly, that his future rise depends primarily on his own efforts. Each of these propositions is a dangerous half-truth. The supplementary truths must never be lost sight of: first, slavery and race-prejudice are potent if not sufficient causes of the Negro's position; second, industrial and common-school training were necessarily slow in planting because they had to await the black teachers trained by higher institutions,—it being extremely doubtful if any essentially different development was possible, and certainly a Tuskegee was unthinkable before 1880; and, third, while it is a great truth to say that the Negro must strive and strive mightily

1. Public elementary school.

to help himself, it is equally true that unless his striving be not simply seconded, but rather aroused and encouraged, by the initiative of the richer and wiser environing group, he cannot hope for great success.

In his failure to realize and impress this last point, Mr. Washington is especially to be criticised. His doctrine has tended to make the whites, North and South, shift the burden of the Negro problem to the Negro's shoulders and stand aside as critical and rather pessimistic spectators; when in fact the burden belongs to the nation, and the hands of none of us are clean if we bend not our energies to righting these great wrongs.

The South ought to be led, by candid and honest criticism, to assert her better self and do her full duty to the race she has cruelly wronged and is still wronging. The North—her co-partner in guilt—cannot salve her conscience by plastering it with gold. We cannot settle this problem by diplomacy and suaveness, by “policy” alone. If worse comes to worst, can the moral fibre of this country survive the slow throttling and murder of nine millions of men?

The black men of America have a duty to perform, a duty stern and delicate,—a forward movement to oppose a part of the work of their greatest leader. So far as Mr. Washington preaches Thrift, Patience, and Industrial Training for the masses, we must hold up his hands and strive with him, rejoicing in his honors and glorying in the strength of this Joshua<sup>2</sup> called of God and of man to lead the headless host. But so far as Mr. Washington apologizes for injustice, North or South, does not rightly value the privilege and duty of voting, belittles the emasculating effects of caste distinctions, and opposes the higher training and ambition of our brighter minds,—so far as he, the South, or the Nation, does this,—we must unceasingly and firmly oppose them. By every civilized and peaceful method we must strive for the rights which the world accords to men, clinging unwaveringly to those great words which the sons of the Fathers would fain<sup>3</sup> forget: “We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

1903

## — CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN —

(1860–1935)

Convinced that middle-class women were enslaved by “masculinist” ideas and a cult of domesticity, Charlotte Perkins Gilman crusaded her entire life for liberation from housework and child care and for increased opportunities for meaningful work for women. She defined work as “joy and growth and service, without which one is a pauper and a parasite” and envisioned a series of reforms, including an organized day care system, which would enable women to be more active in the public sphere.

Though her father, Frederick Beecher Perkins, was the grandson of the prominent preacher Lyman Beecher and a nephew of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Henry Ward Beecher, Charlotte Anna Perkins grew up in isolation from those prominent relatives, living in or near her birthplace of Hartford, Connecticut. Her father abandoned his family soon after her birth, and Charlotte was raised by her mother, Mary Fritch Perkins, with her father’s influence limited to the lists for suggested reading that he mailed to his daughter sporadically. Her haphazard education, including a brief stint at the Rhode Island School of Design, was combined with a series of jobs: governess, commercial artist, and teacher among them. She began writing at an early age and published her first newspaper article in 1883. The following year she married an artist named Charles Stetson and published a poem that began, “In duty bound, a life hemmed in.” Within nine months, her daughter Katherine was born, and Charlotte was plunged into a depression that continued for three years.

Desperate for help, she accepted her husband’s suggestion and put herself into the care of S. Weir Mitchell, a prominent Philadelphia physician who had also treated her cousin Georgiana Stowe and many others suffering from depression. Dr. Mitchell’s treatment for women patients called for complete rest, lots of food, and no intellectual stimulation. As she later described the experience in “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (*The Forerunner*, October 1913), “[I] came so near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over,” and after three months she fled the doctor and her marriage to retain her sanity. Part of her self-prescribed cure was to write the story of her ordeal. When “The Yellow Wallpaper” was published in the *New England Magazine* in 1892, she sent a copy to Dr. Mitchell. Though he never acknowledged receiving it, she was told later that he altered his treatment of nervous disorders as a result of reading her work.

With her move to California (1888) and subsequent divorce (1894), she was now ready to devote her life to what she saw as her destined work—writing. A collection of poetry, *In This Our World*, was published in 1893; she also began lecturing and writing on women’s rights and social reform. *Women and Economics* appeared in 1898, *Concerning Children* in 1900, and *The Home* in 1904.

Her second marriage, to George Houghton Gilman, a New York lawyer who was her first cousin, was an egalitarian match between people who shared progressive social attitudes. The Gilmans lived happily in New York and Connecticut while, with her husband’s enthusiastic support, she continued her writing under the name Charlotte Perkins Gilman. From 1909 to 1916 she published and edited the progressive monthly *The Forerunner*, and she continued to produce feminist writings in fiction and nonfiction. Novels include *What Diantha Did* (1910), *The*

*Crux* (1911), and the feminist utopia *Herland* (1915), all published in *The Fore-runner*. Among her works on social reform are *Human Work* (1904), *The Man-Made World* (1911), and *His Religion and Hers* (1923).

After George Gilman's death in 1934, she went to live with her daughter in Pasadena, California. There, ill with breast cancer and convinced her useful life was over, Charlotte Perkins Gilman committed suicide with chloroform she had accumulated for the purpose. *The Living of Charlotte Perkins Gilman: An Autobiography* appeared in the year of her death.

In addition to those named above, Gilman's works include the utopian novels *Moving the Mountain*, 1911, and *With Her in Ourland*, 1916. Denise D. Knight edited *The Diaries of Charlotte Perkins Gilman*, two volumes, 1994. Mary A. Hill edited *A Journey from Within: The Love Letters of Charlotte Perkins Gilman, 1897–1900*, 1995.

Studies include Mary A. Hill, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Making of a Radical Feminist, 1860–1896*, 1980; Polly W. Allen, *Building Domestic Liberty: Charlotte Perkins Gilman's Architectural Feminism*, 1988; Sheryl L. Meyering, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: The Woman and Her Work*, 1989; Ann Lane, *To Herland and Beyond*, 1990; and Carol Farley Kessler, *Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Her Progress toward Utopia, with Selected Writings*, 1995.

— CHARLOTTE PERKINS GILMAN —

The Yellow Wallpaper<sup>1</sup>

It is very seldom that mere ordinary people like John and myself secure ancestral halls for the summer.

A colonial mansion, a hereditary estate, I would say a haunted house and reach the height of romantic felicity—but that would be asking too much of fate!

Still I will proudly declare that there is something queer about it.

Else, why should it be let so cheaply? And why have stood so long untenanted?

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and *perhaps*—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—perhaps that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see, he does not believe I am sick! And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency<sup>2</sup>—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is—and tonico, and air and exercise, and journeys, and am absolutely forbidden to “work” until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

I did write for a while in spite of them; but it *does* exhaust me a good deal—having to be so sly about it, or else meet with heavy opposition.

I sometimes fancy that in my condition, if I had less opposition and more society and stimulus—but John says the very worst thing I can do is to think about my condition, and I confess it always makes me feel bad.

So I will let it alone and talk about the house.

The most beautiful place! It is quite alone, standing well back from the road, quite three miles from the village. It makes me think of English places that you read about, for there are hedges and walls and gates that lock, and lots of separate little houses for the gardeners and people.

There is a *delicious* garden! I never saw such a garden—large and shady, full of box-bordered paths, and lined with long grape-covered arbors with seats under them.

There were greenhouses, but they are all broken now.

1. The text is of the 1892 *New England Magazine* version.

2. In the nineteenth century, nervous disorders were thought to be connected to the uterus, so the word applied—“hysteria”—was derived from the Greek *hysterikos*, “of the womb.”

There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow, the place has been empty for years.

That spoils my ghostliness, I am afraid, but I don't care—there is something strange about the house—I can feel it.

I even said so to John one moonlight evening, but he said what I felt was a draught, and shut the window.

I get unreasonably angry with John sometimes. I'm sure I never used to be so sensitive. I think it is due to this nervous condition.

But John says if I feel so, I shall neglect proper self-control; so I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired.

I don't like our room a bit. I wanted one downstairs that opened on the piazza and had roses all over the window, and such pretty old-fashioned chintz hangings! But John would not hear of it.

He said there was only one window and not room for two beds, and no near room for him if he took another.

He is very careful and loving, and hardly lets me stir without special direction.

I have a schedule prescription for each hour in the day; he takes all care from me, and so I feel basely ungrateful not to value it more.

He said we came here solely on my account, that I was to have perfect rest and all the air I could get. "Your exercise depends on your strength, my dear," said he, "and your food somewhat on your appetite; but air you can absorb all the time." So we took the nursery at the top of the house.

It is a big, airy room, the whole floor nearly, with windows that look all ways, and air and sunshine galore. It was nursery first and then playroom and gymnasium, I should judge; for the windows are barred for little children, and there are rings and things in the walls.

The paint and paper look as if a boys' school had used it. It is stripped off—the paper—in great patches all around the head of my bed, about as far as I can reach, and in a great place on the other side of the room low down. I never saw a worse paper in my life. One of those sprawling flamboyant patterns committing every artistic sin.

It is dull enough to confuse the eye in following, pronounced enough to constantly irritate and provoke study, and when you follow the lame uncertain curves for a little distance they suddenly commit suicide—plunge off at outrageous angles, destroy themselves in unheard-of contradictions.

The color is repellant, almost revolting; a smouldering unclean yellow, strangely faded by the slow-turning sunlight. It is a dull yet lurid orange in some places, a sickly sulphur tint in others.

No wonder the children hated it! I should hate it myself if I had to live in this room long.

There comes John, and I must put this away—he hates to have me write a word.

\* \* \* \* \*

We have been here two weeks, and I haven't felt like writing before, since that first day.

I am sitting by the window now, up in this atrocious nursery, and there is nothing to hinder my writing as much as I please, save lack of strength.

John is away all day, and even some nights when his cases are serious.

I am glad my case is not serious!  
But these nervous troubles are dreadfully depressing.  
John does not know how much I really suffer. He knows there is no reason to suffer, and that satisfies him.  
Of course it is only nervousness. It does weigh on me so not to do my duty in any way!  
I mean to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already!  
Nobody would believe what an effort it is to do what little I am able—to dress and entertain, and order things.  
It is fortunate Mary is so good with the baby. Such a dear baby!  
And yet I *cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous.  
I suppose John never was nervous in his life. He laughs at me so about this wallpaper!  
At first he meant to repaper the room, but afterwards he said that I was letting it get the better of me, and that nothing was worse for a nervous patient than to give way to such fancies.  
He said that after the wallpaper was changed it would be the heavy bedstead, and then the barred windows, and then that gate at the head of the stairs, and so on.  
“You know the place is doing you good,” he said, “and really, dear, I don’t care to renovate the house just for a three months’ rental.”  
“Then do let us go downstairs,” I said. “There are such pretty rooms there.”  
Then he took me in his arms and called me a blessed little goose, and said he would go down cellar, if I wished, and have it whitewashed into the bargain.  
But he is right enough about the beds and windows and things.  
It is as airy and comfortable a room as anyone need wish, and, of course, I would not be so silly as to make him uncomfortable just for a whim.  
I’m really getting quite fond of this big room, all but that horrid paper.  
Out of one window I can see the garden—those mysterious deep-shaded arbors, the riotous old-fashioned flowers, and bushes and gnarly trees.  
Out of another I get a lovely view of the bay and a little private wharf belonging to the estate. There is a beautiful shaded lane that runs down there from the house. I always fancy I see people walking in these numerous paths and arbors, but John has cautioned me not to give way to fancy in the least. He says that with my imaginative power and habit of story-making, a nervous weakness like mine is sure to lead to all manner of excited fancies, and that I ought to use my will and good sense to check the tendency. So I try.  
I think sometimes that if I were only well enough to write a little it would relieve the press of ideas and rest me.  
But I find I get pretty tired when I try.  
It is so discouraging not to have any advice and companionship about my work. When I get really well, John says we will ask Cousin Henry and Julia down for a long visit; but he says he would as soon put fireworks in my pillowcase as to let me have those stimulating people about now.  
I wish I could get well faster.  
But I must not think about that. This paper looks to me as if it knew what a vicious influence it had!

There is a recurrent spot where the pattern lolls like a broken neck and two bulbous eyes stare at you upside down.

I get positively angry with the impertinence of it and the everlastingness. Up and down and sideways they crawl, and those absurd unblinking eyes are everywhere. There is one place where two breadths didn't match, and the eyes go all up and down the line, one a little higher than the other.

I never saw so much expression in an inanimate thing before, and we all know how much expression they have! I used to lie awake as a child and get more entertainment and terror out of blank walls and plain furniture than most children could find in a toy-store.

I remember what a kindly wink the knobs of our big old bureau used to have, and there was one chair that always seemed like a strong friend.

I used to feel that if any of the other things looked too fierce I could always hop into that chair and be safe.

The furniture in this room is no worse than inharmonious, however, for we had to bring it all from downstairs. I suppose when this was used as a playroom they had to take the nursery things out, and no wonder! I never saw such ravages as the children have made here.

The wallpaper, as I said before, is torn off in spots, and it sticketh closer than a brother—they must have had perseverance as well as hatred.

Then the floor is scratched and gouged and splintered, the plaster itself is dug out here and there, and this great heavy bed which is all we found in the room, looks as if it had been through the wars.

But I don't mind it a bit—only the paper.

There comes John's sister. Such a dear girl as she is, and so careful of me! I must not let her find me writing.

She is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession. I verily believe she thinks it is the writing which made me sick!

But I can write when she is out, and see her a long way off from these windows.

There is one that commands the road, a lovely shaded winding road, and one that just looks off over the country. A lovely country, too, full of great elms and velvet meadows.

This wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then.

But in the places where it isn't faded and where the sun is just so—I can see a strange, provoking, formless sort of figure that seems to skulk about behind that silly and conspicuous front design.

There's sister on the stairs!

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, the Fourth of July is over! The people are all gone, and I am tired out. John thought it might do me good to see a little company, so we just had Mother and Nellie and the children down for a week.

Of course I didn't do a thing. Jennie sees to everything now.

But it tired me all the same.

John says if I don't pick up faster he shall send me to Weir Mitchell<sup>3</sup> in the fall.

3. Silas Weir Mitchell (1829–1914), physician, poet, novelist. Among his medical works is *Fat and Blood* (1877), describing his rest cure. He also wrote several historical romances and volumes of poetry.

But I don't want to go there at all. I had a friend who was in his hands once, and she says he is just like John and my brother, only more so!

Besides, it is such an undertaking to go so far.

I don't feel as if it was worthwhile to turn my hand over for anything, and I'm getting dreadfully fretful and querulous.

I cry at nothing, and cry most of the time.

Of course I don't when John is here, or anybody else, but when I am alone.

And I am alone a good deal just now. John is kept in town very often by serious cases, and Jennie is good and lets me alone when I want her to.

So I walk a little in the garden or down that lovely lane, sit on the porch under the roses, and lie down up here a good deal.

I'm getting really fond of the room in spite of the wallpaper. Perhaps *because* of the wallpaper.

It dwells in my mind so!

I lie here on this great immovable bed—it is nailed down, I believe—and follow that pattern about by the hour. It is as good as gymnastics, I assure you. I start, we'll say, at the bottom, down in the corner over there where it has not been touched, and I determine for the thousandth time that I *will* follow that pointless pattern to some sort of conclusion.

I know a little of the principle of design, and I know this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of.

It is repeated, of course, by the breadths, but not otherwise.

Looked at in one way, each breadth stands alone; the bloated curves and flourishes—a kind of “debased Romanesque”<sup>4</sup> with delirium tremens—go waddling up and down in isolated columns of fatuity.

But, on the other hand, they connect diagonally, and the sprawling outlines run off in great slanting waves of optic horror, like a lot of wallowing sea-weeds in full chase.

The whole thing goes horizontally, too, at least it seems so, and I exhaust myself trying to distinguish the order of its going in that direction.

They have used a horizontal breadth for a frieze,<sup>5</sup> and that adds wonderfully to the confusion.

There is one end of the room where it is almost intact, and there, when the crosslights fade and the low sun shines directly upon it, I can almost fancy radiation after all—the interminable grotesque seems to form around a common center and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction.

It makes me tired to follow it. I will take a nap, I guess.

\* \* \* \* \*

I don't know why I should write this.

I don't want to.

I don't feel able.

And I know John would think it absurd. But I *must* say what I feel and think in some way—it is such a relief!

But the effort is getting to be greater than the relief.

4. The description of the wallpaper refers to several styles and theories of design.

5. Border.

Half the time now I am awfully lazy, and lie down ever so much.

John says I mustn't lose my strength, and has me take cod liver oil and lots of tonics and things, to say nothing of ale and wine and rare meat.

Dear John! He loves me very dearly, and hates to have me sick. I tried to have a real earnest reasonable talk with him the other day, and tell him how I wish he would let me go and make a visit to Cousin Henry and Julia.

But he said I wasn't able to go, nor able to stand it after I got there; and I did not make out a very good case for myself, for I was crying before I had finished.

It is getting to be a great effort for me to think straight. Just this nervous weakness, I suppose.

And dear John gathered me up in his arms, and just carried me upstairs and laid me on the bed, and sat by me and read to me till it tired my head.

He said I was his darling and his comfort and all he had, and that I must take care of myself for his sake, and keep well.

He says no one but myself can help me out of it, that I must use my will and self-control and not let any silly fancies run away with me.

There's one comfort—the baby is well and happy, and does not have to occupy this nursery with the horrid wallpaper.

If we had not used it, that blessed child would have! What a fortunate escape! Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine, an impressionable little thing, live in such a room for worlds.

I never thought of it before, but it is lucky that John kept me here after all, I can stand it so much easier than a baby, you see.

Of course I never mention it to them any more—I am too wise—but I keep watch for it all the same.

There are things in that paper that nobody knows about but me, or ever will.

Behind that outside pattern the dim shapes get clearer every day.

It is always the same shape, only very numerous.

And it is like a woman stooping down and creeping about behind that pattern. I don't like it a bit. I wonder—I begin to think—I wish John would take me away from here!

\* \* \* \* \*

It is so hard to talk with John about my case, because he is so wise, and because he loves me so.

But I tried it last night.

It was moonlight. The moon shines in all around just as the sun does.

I hate to see it sometimes, it creeps so slowly, and always comes in by one window or another.

John was asleep and I hated to waken him, so I kept still and watched the moonlight on that undulating wallpaper till I felt creepy.

The faint figure behind seemed to shake the pattern, just as if she wanted to get out.

I got up softly and went to feel and see if the paper *did* move, and when I came back John was awake.

"What is it, little girl?" he said. "Don't go walking about like that—you'll get cold."

I thought it was a good time to talk, so I told him that I really was not gaining here, and that I wished he would take me away.

"Why, darling!" said he. "Our lease will be up in three weeks, and I can't see how to leave before.

"The repairs are not done at home, and I cannot possibly leave town just now. Of course if you were in any danger, I could and would, but you really are better, dear, whether you can see it or not. I am a doctor, dear, and I know. You are gaining flesh and color, your appetite is better, I feel really much easier about you."

"I don't weigh a bit more," said I, "nor as much; and my appetite may be better in the evening when you are here but it is worse in the morning when you are away!"

"Bless her little heart!" said he with a big hug. "She shall be as sick as she pleases! But now let's improve the shining hours by going to sleep, and talk about it in the morning!"

"And you won't go away?" I asked gloomily.

"Why, how can I, dear? It is only three weeks more and then we will take a nice little trip of a few days while Jennie is getting the house ready. Really, dear, you are better!"

"Better in body perhaps—" I began, and stopped short, for he sat up straight and looked at me with such a stern, reproachful look that I could not say another word.

"My darling," said he, "I beg of you, for my sake and for our child's sake, as well as for your own, that you will never for one instant let that idea enter your mind! There is nothing so dangerous, so fascinating, to a temperament like yours. It is a false and foolish fancy. Can you not trust me as a physician when I tell you so?"

So of course I said no more on that score, and we went to sleep before long. He thought I was asleep first, but I wasn't, and lay there for hours trying to decide whether that front pattern and the back pattern really did move together or separately.

\* \* \* \* \*

On a pattern like this, by daylight, there is a lack of sequence, a defiance of law, that is a constant irritant to a normal mind.

The color is hideous enough, and unreliable enough, and infuriating enough, but the pattern is torturing.

You think you have mastered it, but just as you get well under way in following, it turns a back-somersault and there you are. It slaps you in the face, knocks you down, and tramples upon you. It is like a bad dream.

The outside pattern is a florid arabesque, reminding one of a fungus. If you can imagine a toadstool in joints, an interminable string of toadstools, budding and sprouting in endless convolutions—why, that is something like it.

That is, sometimes!

There is one marked peculiarity about this paper, a thing nobody seems to notice but myself, and that is that it changes as the light changes.

When the sun shoots in through the east window—I always watch for that first long, straight ray—it changes so quickly that I never can quite believe it.

That is why I watch it always.

By moonlight—the moon shines in all night when there is a moon—I wouldn't know it was the same paper.

At night in any kind of light, in twilight, candlelight, lamplight, and worst of all by moonlight, it becomes bars! The outside pattern, I mean, and the woman behind it is as plain as can be.

I didn't realize for a long time what the thing was that showed behind, that dim sub-pattern, but now I am quite sure it is a woman.

By daylight she is subdued, quiet. I fancy it is the pattern that keeps her so still. It is so puzzling. It keeps me quiet by the hour.

I lie down ever so much now. John says it is good for me, and to sleep all I can. Indeed he started the habit by making me lie down for an hour after each meal.

It is a very bad habit I am convinced, for you see, I don't sleep.

And that cultivates deceit, for I don't tell them I'm awake—O no!

The fact is I am getting a little afraid of John.

He seems very queer sometimes, and even Jennie has an inexplicable look.

It strikes me occasionally, just as a scientific hypothesis, that perhaps it is the paper!

I have watched John when he did not know I was looking, and come into the room suddenly on the most innocent excuses, and I've caught him several times *looking at the paper!* And Jennie too. I caught Jennie with her hand on it once.

She didn't know I was in the room, and when I asked her in a quiet, a very quiet voice, with the most restrained manner possible, what she was doing with the paper—she turned around as if she had been caught stealing, and looked quite angry—asked me why I should frighten her so!

Then she said that the paper stained everything it touched, that she had found yellow smooches on all my clothes and John's, and she wished we would be more careful!

Did not that sound innocent? But I know she was studying that pattern, and I am determined that nobody shall find it out but myself!

\* \* \* \* \*

Life is very much more exciting now than it used to be. You see I have something more to expect, to look forward to, to watch. I really do eat better, and am more quiet than I was.

John is so pleased to see me improve! He laughed a little the other day, and said I seemed to be flourishing in spite of my wallpaper.

I turned it off with a laugh. I had no intention of telling him it was *because* of the wallpaper—he would make fun of me. He might even want to take me away.

I don't want to leave now until I have found it out. There is a week more, and I think that will be enough.

\* \* \* \* \*

I'm feeling so much better!

I don't sleep much at night, for it is so interesting to watch developments; but I sleep a good deal during the daytime.

In the daytime it is tiresome and perplexing.

There are always new shoots on the fungus, and new shades of yellow all over it. I cannot keep count of them, though I have tried conscientiously.

It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul, bad yellow things.

But there is something else about that paper—the smell! I noticed it the moment we came into the room, but with so much air and sun it was not bad. Now we have had a week of fog and rain, and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here.

It creeps all over the house.

I find it hovering in the dining-room, skulking in the parlor, hiding in the hall, lying in wait for me on the stairs.

It gets into my hair.

Even when I go to ride, if I turn my head suddenly and surprise it—there is that smell!

Such a peculiar odor, too! I have spent hours in trying to analyze it, to find what it smelled like.

It is not bad—at first—and very gentle, but quite the subtlest, most enduring odor I ever met.

In this damp weather it is awful, I wake up in the night and find it hanging over me.

It used to disturb me at first. I thought seriously of burning the house—to reach the smell.

But now I am used to it. The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper! A yellow smell.

There is a very funny mark on this wall, low down, near the mopboard. A streak that runs round the room. It goes behind every piece of furniture, except the bed, a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over.

I wonder how it was done and who did it, and what they did it for. Round and round and round—round and round and round—it makes me dizzy!

\* \* \* \* \*

I really have discovered something at last.

Through watching so much at night, when it changes so, I have finally found out.

The front pattern *does* move—and no wonder! The woman behind shakes it!

Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over.

Then in the very bright spots she keeps still, and in the very shady spots she just takes hold of the bars and shakes them hard.

And she is all the time trying to climb through. But nobody could climb through that pattern—it strangles so; I think that is why it has so many heads.

They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!

If those heads were covered or taken off it would not be half so bad.

\* \* \* \* \*

I think that woman gets out in the daytime!

And I'll tell you why—privately—I've seen her!

I can see her out of every one of my windows!

It is the same woman, I know, for she is always creeping, and most women do not creep by daylight.

I see her in that long shaded lane, creeping up and down. I see her in those dark grape arbors, creeping all around the garden.

I see her on that long road under the trees, creeping along, and when a carriage comes she hides under the blackberry vines.

I don't blame her a bit. It must be very humiliating to be caught creeping by daylight!

I always lock the door when I creep by daylight. I can't do it at night, for I know John would suspect something at once.

And John is so queer now that I don't want to irritate him. I wish he would take another room! Besides, I don't want anybody to get that woman out at night but myself.

I often wonder if I could see her out of all the windows at once.

But, turn as fast as I can, I can only see out of one at one time.

And though I always see her, she *may* be able to creep faster than I can turn! I have watched her sometimes away off in the open country, creeping as fast as a cloud shadow in a wind.

\* \* \* \* \*

If only that top pattern could be gotten off from the under one! I mean to try it, little by little.

I have found out another funny thing, but I shan't tell it this time! It does not do to trust people too much.

There are only two more days to get this paper off, and I believe John is beginning to notice. I don't like the look in his eyes.

And I heard him ask Jennie a lot of professional questions about me. She had a very good report to give.

She said I slept a good deal in the daytime.

John knows I don't sleep very well at night, for all I'm so quiet!

He asked me all sorts of questions, too, and pretended to be very loving and kind.

As if I couldn't see through him!

Still, I don't wonder he acts so, sleeping under this paper for three months.

It only interests me, but I feel sure John and Jennie are affected by it.

\* \* \* \* \*

Hurrah! This is the last day, but it is enough. John is to stay in town over night, and won't be out until this evening.

Jennie wanted to sleep with me—the sly thing; but I told her I should undoubtedly rest better for a night all alone.

That was clever, for really I wasn't alone a bit! As soon as it was moonlight and that poor thing began to crawl and shake the pattern, I got up and ran to help her.

I pulled and she shook, I shook and she pulled, and before morning we had peeled off yards of that paper.

A strip about as high as my head and half around the room.

And then when the sun came and that awful pattern began to laugh at me, I declared I would finish it today!

We go away tomorrow, and they are moving all my furniture down again to leave things as they were before.

Jennie looked at the wall in amazement, but I told her merrily that I did it out of pure spite at the vicious thing.

She laughed and said she wouldn't mind doing it herself, but I must not get tired. How she betrayed herself that time!

But I am here, and no person touches this paper but Me—not *alive!*

She tried to get me out of the room—it was too patent! But I said it was so quiet and empty and clean now that I believed I would lie down again and sleep all I could; and not to wake me even for dinner—I would call when I woke.

So now she is gone, and the servants are gone, and the things are gone, and there is nothing left but that great bedstead nailed down, with the canvas mattress we found on it.

We shall sleep downstairs tonight, and take the boat home tomorrow.

I quite enjoy the room, now it is bare again.

How those children did tear about here!

This bedstead is fairly gnawed!

But I must get to work.

I have locked the door and thrown the key down into the front path.

I don't want to go out, and I don't want to have anybody come in, till John comes.

I want to astonish him.

I've got a rope up here that even Jennie did not find. If that woman does get out, and tries to get away, I can tie her!

But I forgot I could not reach far without anything to stand on!

This bed will *not* move!

I tried to lift and push it until I was lame, and then I got so angry I bit off a little piece at one corner—but it hurt my teeth.

Then I peeled off all the paper I could reach standing on the floor. It sticks horribly and the pattern just enjoys it! All those strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!

I am getting angry enough to do something desperate. To jump out of the window would be admirable exercise, but the bars are too strong even to try.

Besides I wouldn't do it. Of course not. I know well enough that a step like that is improper and might be misconstrued.

I don't like to *look* out of the windows even—there are so many of those creeping women, and they creep so fast.

I wonder if they all come out of that wallpaper as I did?

But I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope—you don't get *me* out in the road there!

I suppose I shall have to get back behind the pattern when it comes night, and that is hard!

It is so pleasant to be out in this great room and creep around as I please!

I don't want to go outside. I won't, even if Jennie asks me to.

For outside you have to creep on the ground, and everything is green instead of yellow.

But here I can creep smoothly on the floor, and my shoulder just fits in that long smooch around the wall, so I cannot lose my way.

Why there's John at the door!

It is no use, young man, you can't open it!

How he does call and pound!

Now he's crying to Jennie for an axe.

It would be a shame to break down that beautiful door!

"John dear!" said I in the gentlest voice. "The key is down by the front steps, under a plantain leaf!"

That silenced him for a few moments.

Then he said—very quietly indeed, "Open the door, my darling?"

"I can't," said I. "The key is down by the front door under a plantain leaf!"

And then I said it again, several times, very gently and slowly, and said it so often that he had to go and see, and he got it of course, and came in. He stopped short by the door.

"What is the matter?" he cried. "For God's sake, what are you doing?"

I kept on creeping just the same, but I looked at him over my shoulder.

"I've got out at last," said I, "in spite of you and Jane. And I've pulled off most of the paper, so you can't put me back!"

Now why should that man have fainted? But he did, and right across my path by the wall, so that I had to creep over him every time!

1892

## Edith Wharton

(1862–1934)

Among American women writers born in the nineteenth century, Edith Wharton stands with Emily Dickinson as an author whose work has long held an assured place in literary history. In the 1920s Wharton was one of the most acclaimed of American writers of fiction, having earned a Pulitzer Prize as well as having produced more than one best-seller. Her fiction's subject matter spans the two eras she lived in, both the late Victorian and the modern periods; her style is distinctly modern.

Edith Newbold Jones was born in 1862 into the most privileged class of old New York society, to George and Lucretia Rhinelanders Jones, both of whom could trace their lineage back for three centuries. She inhabited the world of the very rich, spending winters in New York and summers in Newport, Rhode Island, and growing up with every expectation of taking her place as a prominent social figure in her turn. She had the typical upper-class young woman's private education, consisting of languages, liberal arts, and etiquette, and she had a formal social debut in 1879. Despite her conventional upbringing, however, she was a voracious reader and she experimented with writing poetry. She traveled in Europe often during her youth, thus preparing for her later sojourns there. In 1885 she married Edward Wharton, of an equally prestigious family, and she took up the duties of a high-society wife in their homes in New York; Newport; Lenox, Massachusetts; and France.

Edith and Edward ("Teddy") Wharton appear to have had little in common; he had no interest in her literary talents or aspirations. Nevertheless, Edith began writing short stories, which she placed in prominent periodicals; she also produced *The Decoration of Houses* (1897), written collaboratively with Ogden Codman, Jr., an architect from Boston. The book argues against Victorian principles of interior decoration and promotes openness, airiness, and light as the new standard of taste. In 1894, despite her literary productivity, Edith had a breakdown and sought treatment from S. Weir Mitchell, the originator of the so-called rest cure.

After recovering from her depression, Wharton wrote steadily and tirelessly, completing an average of one book every year until her death. Her best-remembered novels are *The House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), and *The Age of Innocence* (1920). The first tells the story of Lily Bart, a woman born and bred to be an upper-class wife whose circumstances make her marriage—and therefore her survival—impossible; the second presents a stark tragedy of love, frustration, and ironic sacrifice set in a New England village; the third chronicles the manners and mores of old New York society from an almost anthropological perspective, contrasting the range of available life choices in the period with those of the next generation of wealthy New Yorkers. An astute critic

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Wharton's other works include *Verses*, Anonymous (1878); *The Greater Inclination* (1899); *The Touchstone* (1900); *Crucial Instances* (1901); *The Valley of Decision* (1902); *Sanctuary* (1903); *Italian Villas and Their Gardens* (1904); *The Descent of Man and Other Stories* (1904); *Italian Backgrounds* (1905); *Madame de Treymes* (1907); *The Fruit of the Tree* (1907); *The Hermit and the Wild Woman and Other Stories* (1908); *A Motor-Flight through France* (1908); *Artemis to Actaeon and Other Verse* (1909); *Tales of Men and Ghosts* (1910); *The Reef* (1912); *The Custom of the Country* (1913); *Fighting France, from Dunkerque to Belfort* (1915); *Xingu and Other Stories* (1916); *Summer* (1917); *The Marne* (1918); *French Ways and Their Meaning* (1919); *In Morocco* (1920); *The Glimpses of the Moon* (1922); *A Son at the Front* (1923); *Old New York* (1924); *The Mother's Recompense* (1925); *Here and Beyond* (1926); *Twelve Poems* (1926); *Twilight Sleep* (1927); *The Children* (1928); *Hudson River Bracketed* (1929); *Certain People* (1930); *The Gods Arrive* (1932); *Human Nature* (1933); *The World Over* (1936); *Ghosts* (1937); and *The Buccaneers* (1938).

The main biographies of Wharton include Louis Auchincloss's *Edith Wharton: A Woman in Her Time* (1971), R. W. B. Lewis's *Edith Wharton: A Biography* (1975), and Cynthia Griffin Wolff's *A Feast of Words* (1977). Selected studies of her fiction include Blake Nevius, *Edith Wharton: A Study of Her Fiction* (1953); Gary Lindberg, *Edith Wharton and the Novel of Manners* (1975); Elizabeth Ammons, *Edith Wharton's Argument with America* (1980); Carol Wershoven, *The Female Intruder in the Novels of Edith Wharton* (1982); Judith Fryer, *Felicitous Space* (1986); Susan Goodman, *Edith Wharton's Women: Friends & Rivals* (1990); David Holbrook, *Edith Wharton and the Unsatisfactory Man* (1991); and Candace Waid, *Edith Wharton's Letters from the Underworld: Fictions of Women and Writing* (1991).

of conspicuous consumption, class snobbery, and prescribed gender roles, Wharton creates complex psychological portraits of the persons who inhabit her fictionalized social world.

Wharton is reported to have had a passionate affair with a fellow writer in 1910; her marriage ended in divorce in 1913. By that time she was living primarily in France, one of many American expatriate writers who were to settle there during the modern period. She had a close professional relationship with Henry James, who admired her writing, as well as with other writers and thinkers of the time. Like other modernists, she was self-conscious about the construction of stories and novels, which she discusses in *The Writing of Fiction* (1925). During World War I, she devoted her energies to charitable efforts, finding work, food, and shelter for refugees. When the war ended, she remained in France, where she died of a stroke at the age of seventy-five, after completing her autobiography, *A Backward Glance* (1934).

Our two selections, “The Muse’s Tragedy” (1899) and “The Other Two” (1904), demonstrate one of Wharton’s characteristic techniques in writing about women: she presents the central female character from the point of view of a man. “The Muse’s Tragedy” introduces a woman who had been the inspiration for a fictional Victorian poet’s masterpieces; she is portrayed first from the perspective of a young male admirer and then in a revelatory letter written by herself. In its unusual angle on women in literature, the story asks more questions than it answers. “The Other Two” leaves ambiguous the question of whether Alice Waythorn is culpable, as her husband ultimately finds her to be, for her evident ability to adapt herself to the various men she has married.

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 EDITH WHARTON
 

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Roman Fever<sup>1</sup>

## I

From the table at which they had been lunching two American ladies of ripe but well-cared-for middle age moved across the lofty terrace of the Roman restaurant and, leaning on its parapet, looked first at each other, and then down on the outspread glories of the Palatine and the Forum, with the same expression of vague but benevolent approval.

As they leaned there a girlish voice echoed up gaily from the stairs leading to the court below. "Well, come along, then," it cried, not to them but to an invisible companion, "and let's leave the young things to their knitting"; and a voice as fresh laughed back: "Oh, look here, Babs, not actually *knitting*—" "Well, I mean figuratively," rejoined the first. "After all, we haven't left our poor parents much else to do . . ." and at that point the turn of the stairs engulfed the dialogue.

The two ladies looked at each other again, this time with a tinge of smiling embarrassment, and the smaller and paler one shook her head and coloured slightly.

"Barbara!" she murmured, sending an unheard rebuke after the mocking voice in the stairway.

The other lady, who was fuller, and higher in colour, with a small determined nose supported by vigorous black eyebrows, gave a good-humoured laugh. "That's what our daughters think of us!"

Her companion replied by a deprecating gesture. "Not of us individually. We must remember that. It's just the collective modern idea of Mothers. And you see—" Half guiltily she drew from her handsomely mounted black hand-bag a twist of crimson silk run through by two fine knitting needles. "One never knows," she murmured. "The new system has certainly given us a good deal of time to kill; and sometimes I get tired just looking—even at this." Her gesture was now addressed to the stupendous scene at their feet.

The dark lady laughed again, and they both relapsed upon the view, contemplating it in silence, with a sort of diffused serenity which might have been borrowed from the spring effulgence of the Roman skies. The luncheon-hour was long past, and the two had their end of the vast terrace to themselves. At this opposite extremity a few groups, detained by a lingering look at the outspread city, were gathering up guide-books and fumbling for tips. The last of them scattered, and the two ladies were alone on the air-washed height.

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1. "Roman Fever" exemplifies the author's narrative style; her genius for integrating plot, character, and situation; and, finally, her ability to infuse a story with action, even when dialogue is its formal vehicle. This story is in the genre of *The House of Mirth* and *The Age of Innocence*. The story was first published in *Liberty Magazine* in 1934. *The World Over*, 1936, is the source of the present text.

"Well, I don't see why we shouldn't just stay here," said Mrs. Slade, the lady of the high colour and energetic brows. Two derelict basket-chairs stood near, and she pushed them into the angle of the parapet, and settled herself in one, her gaze upon the Palatine. "After all, it's still the most beautiful view in the world."

"It always will be, to me," assented her friend Mrs. Ansley, with so slight a stress on the "me" that Mrs. Slade, though she noticed it, wondered if it were not merely accidental, like the random underlinings of old-fashioned letter-writers.

"Grace Ansley was always old-fashioned," she thought; and added aloud, with a retrospective smile: "It's a view we've both been familiar with for a good many years. When we first met here we were younger than our girls are now. You remember?"

"Oh, yes, I remember," murmured Mrs. Ansley, with the same undefinable stress.—"There's that head-waiter wondering," she interpolated. She was evidently far less sure than her companion of herself and of her rights in the world.

"I'll cure him of wondering," said Mrs. Slade, stretching her hand toward a bag as discreetly opulent-looking as Mrs. Ansley's. Signing to the head-waiter, she explained that she and her friend were old lovers of Rome, and would like to spend the end of the afternoon looking down on the view—that is, if it did not disturb the service? The head-waiter, bowing over her gratuity, assured her that the ladies were most welcome, and would be still more so if they would condescend to remain for dinner. A full moon night, they would remember. . . .

Mrs. Slade's black brows drew together, as though references to the moon were out-of-place and even unwelcome. But she smiled away her frown as the head-waiter retreated. "Well, why not? We might do worse. There's no knowing, I suppose, when the girls will be back. Do you even know back from *where*? I don't!"

Mrs. Ansley again coloured slightly. "I think those young Italian aviators we met at the Embassy invited them to fly to Tarquinia for tea. I suppose they'll want to wait and fly back by moonlight."

"Moonlight—moonlight! What a part it still plays. Do you suppose they're as sentimental as we were?"

"I've come to the conclusion that I don't in the least know what they are," said Mrs. Ansley. "And perhaps we didn't know much more about each other."

"No; perhaps we didn't."

Her friend gave her a shy glance. "I never should have supposed you were sentimental, Alida."

"Well, perhaps I wasn't." Mrs. Slade drew her lips together in retrospect; and for a few moments the two ladies, who had been intimate since childhood, reflected how little they knew each other. Each one, of course, had a label ready to attach to the other's name; Mrs. Delphin Slade, for instance, would have told herself, or any one who asked her, that Mrs. Horace Ansley, twenty-five years ago, had been exquisitely lovely—no, you wouldn't believe it, would you? . . . though, of course, still charming, distinguished . . . Well, as a girl, she had been exquisite; far more beautiful than her daughter Barbara, though certainly Babs, according to the new standards at any rate, was more effective—had more edge, as they say. Funny where she got it, with those two nullities as parents. Yes; Horace Ansley was—well, just the duplicate of his wife. Museum specimens of old New York. Good-looking, irreproachable, exemplary. Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley had lived opposite each other—actually as well as figuratively—for years. When the drawing-

room curtains in No. 20 East 73rd Street were renewed, No. 23, across the way, was always aware of it. And of all the movings, buyings, travels, anniversaries, illnesses—the tame chronicle of an estimable pair. Little of it escaped Mrs. Slade. But she had grown bored with it by the time her husband made his big *coup* in Wall Street, and when they bought in upper Park Avenue had already begun to think: “I’d rather live opposite a speakeasy for a change; at least one might see it raided.” The idea of seeing Grace raided was so amusing that (before the move) she launched it at a woman’s lunch. It made a hit, and went the rounds—she sometimes wondered if it had crossed the street, and reached Mrs. Ansley. She hoped not, but didn’t much mind. Those were the days when respectability was at a discount, and it did the irreproachable no harm to laugh at them a little.

A few years later, and not many months apart, both ladies lost their husbands. There was an appropriate exchange of wreaths and condolences, and a brief renewal of intimacy in the half-shadow of their mourning; and now, after another interval, they had run across each other in Rome, at the same hotel, each of them the modest appendage of a salient daughter. The similarity of their lot had again drawn them together, lending itself to mild jokes, and the mutual confession that, if in old days it must have been tiring to “keep up” with daughters, it was now, at times, a little dull not to.

No doubt, Mrs. Slade reflected, she felt her unemployment more than poor Grace ever would. It was a big drop from being the wife of Delphin Slade to being his widow. She had always regarded herself (with a certain conjugal pride) as equal in social gifts, as contributing her full share to the making of the exceptional couple they were: but the difference after his death was irremediable. As the wife of the famous corporation lawyer, always with an international case or two on hand, every day brought its exciting and unexpected obligation: the impromptu entertaining of eminent colleagues from abroad, the hurried dashes on legal business to London, Paris or Rome, where the entertaining was so handsomely reciprocated; the amusement of hearing in her wake: “What, that handsome woman with the good clothes and eyes is Mrs. Slade—the Slade’s wife? Really? Generally the wives of celebrities are such frumps.”

Yes; being *the* Slade’s widow was a dullish business after that. In living up to such a husband all her faculties had been engaged; now she had only her daughter to live up to, for the son who seemed to have inherited his father’s gifts had died suddenly in boyhood. She had fought through that agony because her husband was there, to be helped and to help; now, after the father’s death, the thought of the boy had become unbearable. There was nothing left but to mother her daughter; and dear Jenny was such a perfect daughter that she needed no excessive mothering. “Now with Babs Ansley I don’t know that I *should* be so quiet,” Mrs. Slade sometimes half-enviously reflected; but Jenny, who was younger than her brilliant friend, was that rare accident, an extremely pretty girl who somehow made youth and prettiness seem as safe as their absence. It was all perplexing—and to Mrs. Slade a little boring. She wished that Jenny would fall in love—with the wrong man, even; that she might have to be watched, outmaneuvered, rescued. And instead, it was Jenny who watched her mother, kept her out of draughts, made sure that she had taken her tonic . . .

Mrs. Ansley was much less articulate than her friend, and her mental portrait of Mrs. Slade was slighter, and drawn with fainter touches. “Alida Slade’s awfully

brilliant; but not as brilliant as she thinks," would have summed it up; though she would have added, for the enlightenment of strangers, that Mrs. Slade had been an extremely dashing girl; much more so than her daughter, who was pretty, of course, and clever in a way, but had none of her mother's—well, "vividness," some one had once called it. Mrs. Ansley would take up current words like this, and cite them in quotation marks, as unheard-of audacities. No; Jenny was not like her mother. Sometimes Mrs. Ansley thought Alida Slade was disappointed; on the whole she had had a sad life. Full of failures and mistakes; Mrs. Ansley had always been rather sorry for her . . .

So these two ladies visualized each other, each through the wrong end of her little telescope.

## II

For a long time they continued to sit side by side without speaking. It seemed as though, to both, there was a relief in laying down their somewhat futile activities in the presence of the vast Memento Mori which faced them. Mrs. Slade sat quite still, her eyes fixed on the golden slope of the Palace of the Cæsars, and after a while Mrs. Ansley ceased to fidget with her bag, and she too sank into meditation. Like many intimate friends, the two ladies had never before had occasion to be silent together, and Mrs. Ansley was slightly embarrassed by what seemed, after so many years, a new stage in their intimacy, and one with which she did not yet know how to deal.

Suddenly the air was full of that deep clangour of bells which periodically covers Rome with a roof of silver. Mrs. Slade glanced at her wrist-watch. "Five o'clock already," she said, as though surprised.

Mrs. Ansley suggested interrogatively: "There's bridge at the Embassy at five." For a long time Mrs. Slade did not answer. She appeared to be lost in contemplation, and Mrs. Ansley thought the remark had escaped her. But after a while she said, as if speaking out of a dream: "Bridge, did you say? Not unless you want to . . . But I don't think I will, you know."

"Oh, no," Mrs. Ansley hastened to assure her. "I don't care to at all. It's so lovely here; and so full of old memories, as you say." She settled herself in her chair, and almost furtively drew forth her knitting. Mrs. Slade took sideway note of this activity, but her own beautifully cared-for hands remained motionless on her knee.

"I was just thinking," she said slowly, "what different things Rome stands for to each generation of travellers. To our grandmothers, Roman fever; to our mothers, sentimental dangers—how we used to be guarded!—to our daughters, no more dangers than the middle of Main Street. They don't know it—but how much they're missing!"

The long golden light was beginning to pale, and Mrs. Ansley lifted her knitting a little closer to her eyes. "Yes; how we were guarded!"

"I always used to think," Mrs. Slade continued, "that our mothers had a much more difficult job than our grandmothers. When Roman fever stalked the streets it must have been comparatively easy to gather in the girls at the danger hour; but when you and I were young, with such beauty calling us, and the spice of disobedience thrown in, and no worse risk than catching cold during the cool hour after sunset, the mothers used to be put to it to keep us in—didn't they?"

She turned again toward Mrs. Ansley, but the latter had reached a delicate point in her knitting. "One, two, three—slip two; yes, they must have been," she assented, without looking up.

Mrs. Slade's eyes rested on her with a deepened attention. "She can knit—in the face of *this!* How like her . . ."

Mrs. Slade leaned back, brooding, her eyes ranging from the ruins which faced her to the long green hollow of the Forum, the fading glow of the church fronts beyond it, and the outlying immensity of the Colosseum. Suddenly she thought: "It's all very well to say that our girls have done away with sentiment and moonlight. But if Babs Ansley isn't out to catch that young aviator—the one who's a Marchese—then I don't know anything. And Jenny has no chance beside her. I know that too. I wonder if that's why Grace Ansley likes the two girls to go everywhere together? My poor Jenny as a foil—!" Mrs. Slade gave a hardly audible laugh, and at the sound Mrs. Ansley dropped her knitting.

"Yes—?"

"I—oh, nothing. I was only thinking how your Babs carries everything before her. That Campolieri boy is one of the best matches in Rome. Don't look so innocent, my dear—you know he is. And I was . . . wondering how two such exemplary characters as you and Horace had managed to produce anything quite so dynamic." Mrs. Slade laughed again, with a touch of asperity.

Mrs. Ansley's hands lay inert across her needles. She looked straight out at the great accumulated wreckage of passion and splendour at her feet. But her small profile was almost expressionless. At length she said: "I think you overrate Babs, my dear."

Mrs. Slade's tone grew easier. "No; I don't. I appreciate her. And perhaps envy you. Oh, my girl's perfect; if I were a chronic invalid I'd—well, I think I'd rather be in Jenny's hands. There must be times . . . but there! I always wanted a brilliant daughter . . . and never quite understood why I got an angel instead."

Mrs. Ansley echoed her laugh in a faint murmur. "Babs is an angel too."

"Of course—of course! But she's got rainbow wings. Well, they're wandering by the sea with their young men; and here we sit . . . and it all brings back the past a little too acutely."

Mrs. Ansley had resumed her knitting. One might almost have imagined (if one had known her less well, Mrs. Slade reflected) that, for her also, too many memories rose from the lengthening shadows of those august ruins. But no; she was simply absorbed in her work. What was there for her to worry about? She knew that Babs would almost certainly come back engaged to the extremely eligible Campolieri. "And she'll sell the New York house, and settle down near them in Rome, and never be in their way . . . she's much too tactful. But she'll have an excellent cook, and just the right people in for bridge and cocktails . . . and a perfectly peaceful old age among her grandchildren."

Mrs. Slade broke off this prophetic flight with a recoil of self-disgust. There was no one of whom she had less right to think unkindly than of Grace Ansley. Would she never cure herself of envying her? Perhaps she had begun too long ago.

She stood up and leaned against the parapet, filling her troubled eyes with the tranquillizing magic of the hour. But instead of tranquillizing her the sight seemed to increase her exasperation. Her gaze turned toward the Colosseum. Already its golden flank was drowned in purple shadow, and above it the sky curved crystal

clear, without light or colour. It was the moment when afternoon and evening hang balanced in mid-heaven.

Mrs. Slade turned back and laid her hand on her friend's arm. The gesture was so abrupt that Mrs. Ansley looked up, startled.

"The sun's set. You're not afraid, my dear?"

"Afraid—?"

"Of Roman fever or pneumonia? I remember how ill you were that winter. As a girl you had a very delicate throat, hadn't you?"

"Oh, we're all right up here. Down below, in the Forum, it does get deathly cold, all of a sudden . . . but not here."

"Ah, of course you know because you had to be so careful." Mrs. Slade turned back to the parapet. She thought: "I must make one more effort not to hate her." Aloud she said: "Whenever I look at the Forum from up here, I remember that story about a great-aunt of yours, wasn't she? A dreadfully wicked great-aunt?"

"Oh, yes; Great-aunt Harriet. The one who was supposed to have sent her young sister out to the Forum after sunset to gather a night-blooming flower for her album. All our great-aunts and grandmothers used to have albums of dried flowers."

Mrs. Slade nodded. "But she really sent her because they were in love with the same man—"

"Well, that was the family tradition. They said Aunt Harriet confessed it years afterward. At any rate, the poor little sister caught the fever and died. Mother used to frighten us with the story when we were children."

"And you frightened *me* with it, that winter when you and I were here as girls. The winter I was engaged to Delphin."

Mrs. Ansley gave a faint laugh. "Oh, did I? Really frightened you? I don't believe you're easily frightened."

"Not often; but I was then. I was easily frightened because I was too happy. I wonder if you know what that means?"

"I—yes . . ." Mrs. Ansley faltered.

"Well, I suppose that was why the story of your wicked aunt made such an impression on me. And I thought: 'There's no more Roman fever, but the Forum is deathly cold after sunset—especially after a hot day. And the Colosseum's even colder and damper'."

"The Colosseum—?"

"Yes. It wasn't easy to get in, after the gates were locked for the night. Far from easy. Still, in those days it could be managed; it was managed, often. Lovers met there who couldn't meet elsewhere. You knew that?"

"I—I daresay. I don't remember."

"You don't remember? You don't remember going to visit some ruins or other one evening, just after dark, and catching a bad chill? You were supposed to have gone to see the moon rise. People always said that expedition was what caused your illness."

There was a moment's silence; then Mrs. Ansley rejoined: "Did they? It was all so long ago."

"Yes. And you got well again—so it didn't matter. But I suppose it struck your friends—the reason given for your illness, I mean—because everybody knew you were so prudent on account of your throat, and your mother took such care of you . . . You *had* been out late sightseeing, hadn't you, that night?"

“Perhaps I had. The most prudent girls aren’t always prudent. What made you think of it now?”

Mrs. Slade seemed to have no answer ready. But after a moment she broke out: “Because I simply can’t bear it any longer—!”

Mrs. Ansley lifted her head quickly. Her eyes were wide and very pale. “Can’t bear what?”

“Why—your not knowing that I’ve always known why you went.”

“Why I went—?”

“Yes. You think I’m bluffing, don’t you? Well, you went to meet the man I was engaged to—and I can repeat every word of the letter that took you there.”

While Mrs. Slade spoke Mrs. Ansley had risen unsteadily to her feet. Her bag, her knitting and gloves, slid in a panic-stricken heap to the ground. She looked at Mrs. Slade as though she were looking at a ghost.

“No, no—don’t,” she faltered out.

“Why not? Listen, if you don’t believe me. ‘My one darling, things can’t go on like this. I must see you alone. Come to the Colosseum immediately after dark tomorrow. There will be somebody to let you in. No one whom you need fear will suspect’—but perhaps you’ve forgotten what the letter said?”

Mrs. Ansley met the challenge with an unexpected composure. Steadying herself against the chair she looked at her friend, and replied: “No, I know it by heart too.”

“And the signature? ‘Only *your* D.S.’ Was that it? I’m right, am I? That was the letter that took you out that evening after dark?”

Mrs. Ansley was still looking at her. It seemed to Mrs. Slade that a slow struggle was going on behind the voluntarily controlled mask of her small quiet face. “I shouldn’t have thought she had herself so well in hand,” Mrs. Slade reflected, almost resentfully. But at this moment Mrs. Ansley spoke. “I don’t know how you knew. I burnt that letter at once.”

“Yes; you would, naturally—you’re so prudent!” The sneer was open now. “And if you burnt the letter you’re wondering how on earth I know what was in it. That’s it, isn’t it?”

Mrs. Slade waited, but Mrs. Ansley did not speak.

“Well, my dear, I know what was in that letter because I wrote it!”

“You wrote it?”

“Yes.”

The two women stood for a minute staring at each other in the last golden light. Then Mrs. Ansley dropped back into her chair. “Oh,” she murmured, and covered her face with her hands.

Mrs. Slade waited nervously for another word or movement. None came, and at length she broke out: “I horrify you.”

Mrs. Ansley’s hands dropped to her knee. The face they uncovered was streaked with tears. “I wasn’t thinking of you. I was thinking—it was the only letter I ever had from him!”

“And I wrote it. Yes; I wrote it! But I was the girl he was engaged to. Did you happen to remember that?”

Mrs. Ansley’s head dropped again. “I’m not trying to excuse myself . . . I remembered . . .”

“And still you went?”

“Still I went.”

Mrs. Slade stood looking down on the small bowed figure at her side. The flame of her wrath had already sunk, and she wondered why she had ever thought there would be any satisfaction in inflicting so purposeless a wound on her friend. But she had to justify herself.

"You do understand? I found out—and I hated you, hated you. I knew you were in love with Delphin—and I was afraid; afraid of you, of your quiet ways, your sweetness . . . your . . . well, I wanted you out of the way, that's all. Just for a few weeks; just till I was sure of him. So in a blind fury I wrote that letter . . . I don't know why I'm telling you now."

"I suppose," said Mrs. Ansley slowly, "it's because you've always gone on hating me."

"Perhaps. Or because I wanted to get the whole thing off my mind." She paused. "I'm glad you destroyed the letter. Of course I never thought you'd die."

Mrs. Ansley relapsed into silence, and Mrs. Slade, leaning above her, was conscious of a strange sense of isolation, of being cut off from the warm current of human communion. "You think me a monster!"

"I don't know . . . It was the only letter I had, and you say he didn't write it?"

"Ah, how you care for him still!"

"I cared for that memory," said Mrs. Ansley.

Mrs. Slade continued to look down on her. She seemed physically reduced by the blow—as if, when she got up, the wind might scatter her like a puff of dust. Mrs. Slade's jealousy suddenly leapt up again at the sight. All these years the woman had been living on that letter. How she must have loved him, to treasure the mere memory of its ashes! The letter of the man her friend was engaged to. Wasn't it she who was the monster?

"You tried your best to get him away from me, didn't you? But you failed; and I kept him. That's all."

"Yes. That's all."

"I wish now I hadn't told you. I'd no idea you'd feel about it as you do; I thought you'd be ashamed. It all happened so long ago, as you say; and you must do me the justice to remember that I had no reason to think you'd ever taken it seriously. How could I, when you were married to Horace Ansley two months afterward? As soon as you could get out of bed your mother rushed you off to Florence and married you. People were rather surprised—they wondered at its being done so quickly; but I thought I knew. I had an idea you did it out of *pique*—to be able to say you'd got ahead of Delphin and me. Girls have such silly reasons for doing the most serious things. And your marrying so soon convinced me that you'd never really cared."

"Yes, I suppose it would," Mrs. Ansley assented.

The clear heaven overhead was emptied of all its gold. Dusk spread over it, abruptly darkening the Seven Hills. Here and there lights began to twinkle through the foliage at their feet. Steps were coming and going on the deserted terrace—waiters looking out of the doorway at the head of the stairs, then reappearing with trays and napkins and flasks of wine. Tables were moved, chairs straightened. A feeble string of electric lights flickered out. Some vases of faded flowers were carried away, and brought back replenished. A stout lady in a dust-coat suddenly appeared, asking in broken Italian if any one had seen the elastic band which

held together her tattered Baedeker. She poked with her stick under the table at which she had lunched, the waiters assisting.

The corner where Mrs. Slade and Mrs. Ansley sat was still shadowy and deserted. For a long time neither of them spoke. At length Mrs. Slade began again: "I suppose I did it as a sort of joke—"

"A joke?"

"Well, girls are ferocious sometimes, you know. Girls in love especially. And I remember laughing to myself all that evening at the idea that you were waiting around there in the dark, dodging out of sight, listening for every sound, trying to get in—. Of course I was upset when I heard you were so ill afterward."

Mrs. Ansley had not moved for a long time. But now she turned slowly to her companion. "But I didn't wait. He'd arranged everything. He was there. We were let in at once," she said.

Mrs. Slade sprang up from her leaning position. "Delphin there? They let you in?—Ah, now you're lying!" she burst out with violence.

Mrs. Ansley's voice grew clearer, and full of surprise. "But of course he was there. Naturally he came—"

"Came? How did he know he'd find you there? You must be raving!"

Mrs. Ansley hesitated, as though reflecting. "But I answered the letter. I told him I'd be there. So he came."

Mrs. Slade flung her hands up to her face. "Oh, God—you answered! I never thought of your answering . . ."

"It's odd you never thought of it, if you wrote the letter."

"Yes. I was blind with rage."

Mrs. Ansley rose, and drew her fur scarf about her. "It is cold here. We'd better go . . . I'm sorry for you," she said, as she clasped the fur about her throat.

The unexpected words sent a pang through Mrs. Slade. "Yes; we'd better go." She gathered up her bag and cloak. "I don't know why you should be sorry for me," she muttered.

Mrs. Ansley stood looking away from her toward the dusky secret mass of the Colosseum. "Well—because I didn't have to wait that night."

Mrs. Slade gave an unquiet laugh. "Yes; I was beaten there. But I oughtn't to begrudge it to you, I suppose. At the end of all these years. After all, I had everything; I had him for twenty-five years. And you had nothing but that one letter that he didn't write."

Mrs. Ansley was silent again. At length she turned toward the door of the terrace. She took a step, and turned back, facing her companion.

"I had Barbara," she said, and began to move ahead of Mrs. Slade toward the stairway.

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