

SCRIPTOLOGY

By Egbert Martin

**Edited with an Introduction by Manu
Samriti Chander**

SCRIPTOLOGY by Egbert Martin
Edited with an Introduction by Manu Samriti Chander

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Series Preface by the President of Guyana,
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SERIES PREFACE

Modern Guyana came into being, in the Western imagination, through the travelogue of Sir Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of Guiana* (1595). Raleigh was as beguiled by Guiana's landscape ("I never saw a more beautiful country...") as he was by the prospect of plunder ("every stone we stooped to take up promised either gold or silver by his complexion"). Raleigh's contemporaries, too, were doubly inspired, writing, as Thoreau says, of Guiana's "majestic forests", but also of its earth, "resplendent with gold." By the eighteenth century, when the trade in Africans was in full swing, writers cared less for Guiana's beauty than for its mineral wealth. Sugar was the poet's muse, hence the epic work by James Grainger *The Sugar Cane* (1764), a poem which deals with subjects such as how best to manure the sugar cane plant, the most effective diet for the African slaves, worming techniques, etc. As John Singleton confessed (in his *General Description of the West Indies*, 1776), there was no contradiction between the manufacture of odes and that of sugar: "...a fine exuberant plant, which clothes the fields with the richest verdure. There is, I believe, scarcely any cultivation which yields so lucrative a return per acre as under favourable circumstances, than that of the sugar cane. So bountiful a gift of Providence seems not only calculated to call forth the activity and enterprise of the agriculturalist and merchant, but to awaken also feelings of a higher and more refined enthusiasm." The refinement of art and that of sugar were one and the same process.

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of Indian indentureship, but as the sugar industry expanded, literary works contracted. Edward Jenkins' novel *Lutchmee and Dilloo* (1877) was the only substantial fiction on Guiana, and whilst it was broadly sympathetic to the plight of Indian labourers, it was certain of Britain's imperial destiny, and rights over mineral resources. It was not until the period leading up to

Guiana's Independence from Britain (1966) and the subsequent years, that our own writers of Amerindian, African, Asian and European ancestry (A. J. Seymour, Wilson Harris, Jan Carew, Edgar Mittelholzer, Martin Carter, Rajkumari Singh et al.) attempted to purify literature of its commercial taint, restoring to readers a vision of the complexity of the Guyanese character and the beauty of the Guyanese landscape.

The Guyana Classics Library will republish out-of-print poetry, novels and travelogues so as to remind us of our literary heritage, and it will also remind us of our reputation for scholarship in the fields of history, anthropology, sociology and politics, through the reprinting of seminal works in these subjects. The Series builds upon previous Guyanese endeavours, like the institution of CARIFESTA and the Guyana Prize. I am delighted that my government has originated the project and has pledged that every library in the land will be furnished with titles from the Series, so that all Guyanese can appreciate our monumental achievement in moving from Exploitation to Expression. If the Series becomes the foundation and inspiration for future literary and scholarly works, then my government will have moved towards fulfilling one of its primary tasks, which is the educational development of our people.

President Bharrat Jagdeo

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Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	i
INTRODUCTION	iii
A NOTE ON THE TEXT	xi

SCRIPTOLOGY

ORIGINAL TITLE PAGE FROM 1885	1
-------------------------------------	---

AUTHOR'S PREFACE	3
------------------------	---

THE HOLE IN THE PAN	5
----------------------------------	---

BASIL EMERY'S CORRESPONDENT: A PECULIAR INCIDENT IN THREE CHAPTERS

CHAPTER I	17
-----------------	----

CHAPTER 2	23
-----------------	----

CHAPTER 3	29
-----------------	----

THE TWO HARVEST THANKSGIVINGS

CHAPTER I	35
-----------------	----

CHAPTER II	39
------------------	----

CHAPTER III	43
-------------------	----

CHAPTER IV	47
------------------	----

CHAPTER V	51
-----------------	----

CHAPTER VI.....	55
-----------------	----

ASPHYXIA	57
-----------------------	----

AUTHOR'S NOTE.....	65
--------------------	----

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INTRODUCTION

I. Scriptology as Talisman

*“Should these stories meet with sufficient encouragement, it is the author’s intention to publish more **Scriptology**...”*

Without Egbert Martin, there would be no such thing as “scriptology.” Martin (writing under his penname ‘Leo’) seems to have coined the term to describe the four stories published in 1885, between his two poetry collections, *Leo’s Poetical Works* (1883) and *Leo’s Local Lyrics* (1886). Like those other works, *Scriptology* announces its genre, or rather it *suggests*—in the absence of a ready definition—a genre, the conventions of which are left for us, his readers, to determine.

Some sense of the author’s history provides a point of departure. Though we know little about Martin’s life, it is believed his ancestry was at least partly German and African or Afro-Caribbean.¹ From his remarks on *Scriptology* it is certain that he identified as Creole, a descendant of colonial settlers, which places him within a group experiencing a new kind of self-awareness in the nineteenth century. By the time of Martin’s death in 1890, the population of Guyana had grown drastically, mostly due to heavy immigration from Portugal, India, Africa, and China. Consequently, the native Creole population found itself working to establish an identity that would distinguish it from the newly arrived communities.²

Martin speaks to the important function of literature in Creole identity-formation in his preface to *Scriptology*:

I lay these efforts before their view, expecting...support from all in general, but from creoles in particular... Why, the very fact of anything literary...being published in Demerara by a Demerarian, ought to be a kind of talismanic pass-word to other creoles for recognition and support.

The ‘talismanic’ aspect of Martin’s collection is worth consideration. The Greek root of the word “*telesma*”, describes a religious offering, a religious tribute with a specific end (*telos*). Generally speaking, the purpose of a talisman is to ward off danger, although in the seventeenth century the word took on a particular nuance. “A statue,” according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, “set up...to preserve the community, house, etc. from danger,” a talisman performed an important public function. It reflected the boundaries of a community—distinguishing those whom the object would protect—while promising to keep that community whole.

As a talisman, *Scriptology* organizes Creole audiences into a cohesive unit. For, while the collection is meant to appeal to readers ‘in general’, it is the Creole reader who will see his or her own story reflected in Martin’s collection. It is the Creole reader who will identify with the situations of the characters, Harry Seymour’s “colonial fever” in ‘**The Hole in the Pan**’, for example, or Mr. Price’s alienation from the small and ever-scrutinizing community of gossips in ‘**The Two Harvest-Thanksgivings**’. It is the Creole reader who will recognize the “Court-house, the Hospital and the Bridge” that Basil Emery visits in the town of “B—” as the familiar sights of any modernizing colonial settlement. It is the Creole reader who will know the heavy perfume of “the great spotless *Victoria Regia*” that the unnamed narrator imagines in ‘**Asphyxia**’.

Martin’s characters form a discrete class of people, held together by something stronger than geography (in fact, specific geographical references are carefully excluded from *Scriptology*). They share a language—English—with its own peculiarities (the homophonic “Ware” and “where” that enchants Bob in ‘**The Hole in the Pan**’). They share an unspoken vocabulary as well, a system of social codes, assumptions and expectations (the ideal of companionate marriage that Harry Seymour pursues without success, that Mr. Price finds and loses, and that Basil Emery is too dense to comprehend). *Scriptology* gives voice to these ideas, sometimes to affirm them, often to satirize them, always to make them visible to an audience familiar with Victorian colonial mores.

II. Scriptology as Historiography

“I lose myself in thought of the many knots and notches in the everyday life of the world, each with its unspoken, but not unspeakable, history.”

If, as I have suggested, scriptology functions as a cultural talisman, it also represents a kind of historiography. It documents the “knots and notches” that comprise colonial life, offering a record of the quotidian that is at once fictional and real. Not non-fiction, but not *not* non-fiction. Martin’s preface puts it this way:

With the idea...of affording a few moments mental recreation to our local Carlyles and Beaconsfields, and colonial thinkers generally, I have written the matter of this volume, which, it is almost useless to say, is all imaginative, for *that* will be seen at a glance. Perhaps, however, there *is*, thrown in, here and there, a fact the offspring of observation.

I take this last sentence as a moment of meiosis: the understatement is rather humorous when we consider how prominently observation figures in *Scriptology*. Particular details such as local flora and common attitudes as well as the author’s own philosophical reflections on the nature of colonial society—its problems and its promise—abound in the collection, from the first story to the last. “I need not assure those who have had a touch of colonial fever, what a sweet thing convalescence is,” claims Harry Seymour in the collection’s opening line; “any depression in life is better than a weird ecstasy in dreams,” reflects the narrator after coming out of an opium daze in the final sentence of the final story. Martin’s health—he died of tuberculosis—likely would have given him direct experience on which to base these observations on convalescence and laudanum, the mixture of opium and alcohol used to treat a range of ailments during the period.

His experience of colonial society certainly would have given plenty of inspiration for his frequent remarks on the world his characters inhabit.

As imaginative historiography, Martin's scriptology details the ordinary thoughts of ordinary people. It is, however, a necessarily incomplete history that *Scriptology* describes. Not a whole history but, as Harry Seymour puns to his interlocutor Bob, "a *hole* history—a history of a hole." For one of the key themes of Martin's stories is language's inevitable limitations, its gaps and fissures, the holes that at once inhibit communication and compel us to communicate. Thus '**Asphyxia**' begins, "I am at a loss to relate what I am about to relate." Of course, to relate one's story is to forge a relationship with one's audience and to allow the audience to relate reciprocally with the speaker: "How must I get myself in train with the reader's thoughts?" the narrator continues. In fact, each story in the collection confronts the problems of misspeaking and misreading, exposing the liabilities of miscommunication. Emma Ware's attitude to Harry Seymour, Alicia Denier's letters to Basil Emery, Price's forlorn visage, which the community mistakes for coldness, and the narrative of '**Asphyxia**' itself. Each of these texts is subject to misinterpretation, relying on fallible readers to make meaning in the absence of certainty.

It is not just writing, then, but the logic, the *logos*, of writing, the inner workings of narrative language that concerns Martin's stories. "Scriptology" is writing about writing, history about history, storytelling about storytelling. It is a study of its own procedure.

III. Scriptology across Borders

“I felt with Tennyson that ‘A sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happier things’.”

That Martin was a student of literary language is clear from the several nods to other authors throughout the collection. At the outset he likens *Scriptology* to the novels of Wilkie Collins and Frederick Marryat, which, according to Martin, provided serious thinkers “a mental safety-valve to the heavier steam-pressure labours of the mind.” Elsewhere he quotes popular authors of his day, such as Tennyson, Poe, and Longfellow, as well as those who had already attained canonical status by the end of the nineteenth century, such as Byron and Coleridge. These references do more than demonstrate Martin’s wide breadth of reading. They also attest to his literary aspirations. In his preface to *Leo’s Poetical Works*, Martin notes that “Success is the ultimate object of every endeavour,” without hope for which one would never bother to publish.³ He disavows in the same preface the pursuit of fame (which explains why he wrote under the name ‘Leo’), claiming to define success as a fulfilment of the desire for “the words of his mouth...[to] reach the outward ears...of some of his fellow-pilgrims through this ‘valley of tears’.”⁴ There is no reason to doubt the sincerity of this claim, especially since it speaks directly to the broader theme of communicability his works so strongly feature.

Yet we also know from his prefaces to *Leo’s Local Lyrics* and *Scriptology* that Martin took public opinion very seriously, that recognition was an unavoidable motivation for literary production. And while he clearly was concerned with reaching readers at home, Martin also creates a dialogue in his stories that is at once intertextual and international. That is, by calling upon his contemporaries from England and the United States, Martin situates his local stories within a transnational literary field, establishing a kinship between himself and his fellow writers. This is particularly important

given Martin's cultural identity. For the educated, elite Creole of late nineteenth-century Guyana, cultural capital was tied to the success with which one could assimilate metropolitan trends, ideas, and attitudes—this was doubly important for members of the burgeoning black middle-class.⁵ Thus I would suggest that when Martin invokes Tennyson, Longfellow, et al., he implicitly argues for the equal status of the Guyanese writer with the writer from culturally dominant (though not culturally superior) nations.

One of the ways Martin connects his stories to the wider world of nineteenth-century literature is by fusing different genres—indeed, it is by assembling these other genres into a unit that scriptology takes on its unique generic identity. Among the most prominent of these is the parable. The stories warn against hubris and ignorance; their lessons range from issues of propriety to issues of ethics, criticizing equally Basil Emery's pompousness and the hypocrisy of the judgmental Christian community that destroys Margurita Foli.

At the same time, '**Asphyxia**' mobilizes ideas found in science-fiction, bringing together philosophy and otherworldliness by exploring the effects of laudanum on the imagination; '**The Two Harvest-Thanksgivings**' examines Creole superstition (a topic Martin raises in *Leo's Local Lyrics* as well), bringing an element of the Gothic into the story, both thematically and, through the epigraphs drawn from Poe, literally. The story to which Martin refers in his concluding note, '**The Effects of Mesmerism**,' which he seems to have completed but has not yet been discovered, recalls Arthur Conan Doyle's and Wilkie Collins's interest in occultism, perhaps suggesting a relationship between scriptology and detective fiction.

Of course, without access to '**The Effects of Mesmerism**' and the other stories that Martin wrote or planned to write, our understanding of scriptology must be tentative rather than definitive. In the end, we may end up falling back on reading the present collection with Martin's stated intention in mind: "The short stories composing this little volume are given with the simple idea of amusing the reader." They *are* amusing. Martin's wit and style, his sense of character and his insights

on social life—these make for an enjoyable reading experience, just as the picture we are given of colonial society teases the imagination. Yet they are not *merely* amusing. They also present an occasion to reflect on the moment at which these stories were produced and the mind that produced them. After over a hundred years during which *Scriptology* lay in relative obscurity, we now have the opportunity to examine an endlessly fascinating period in Guyanese history through the lens of an endlessly fascinating Guyanese author.

MANU SAMRITI CHANDER
Rutgers University-Newark,
March 2014.

Endnotes:

¹ For further details on Martin's ancestry see David Dabydeen's introduction to *Selected Poems of Egbert Martin* (Coventry: Derek Walcott Press, 2007).

² On demographic and cultural trends in nineteenth-century Guyana, see Brian Moore's *Cultural Power, Resistance, and Pluralism: Colonial Guyana: 1838-1900* (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1995), especially chapters 1 and 2.

³ *Selected Poems of Egbert Martin*, p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ On the rise of Guyana's black middle-class, see Brian Moore's *Race, Power and Social Segmentation in Colonial Society: Guyana after Slavery 1838-1891* (Philadelphia: Gordon and Breach, 1987).

A NOTE ON THE TEXT

In presenting *Scriptology*, I have tried to preserve the feel of Egbert Martin's prose, which often resists literary conventions and plays with formal rules of grammar. Where I have suspected typographical errors in the original, I have corrected these, including the occasional misspelled word and misused punctuation mark. The notes provided are meant to facilitate the experience of reading and demonstrate Martin's engagement with diverse literary texts. They are by no means exhaustive but will, I hope, highlight the author's interest in nineteenth-century world literature, of which *Scriptology* is an important if heretofore under-acknowledged part.

SCRIPTOLOGY.

A SERIES OF FOUR SHORT NARRATIVES

BY

LEO.

DEMERARA:
PRINTED BY BALDWIN & CO, WATER STREET.
1885.

Original Title Page

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

The short stories composing this little volume are given with the simple idea of amusing the reader. They have been especially written to meet the popular taste, and in that light vein which is said to be a mental safety-valve to the heavier steam-pressure labours of the mind.

Carlyle, before writing his "French Revolution," read Marryat's novels freely—the late Lord Beaconsfield, after arduous ministerial labours, would luxuriate in Wilkie Collins' books; and it is a pretty well-known that nothing so beguiles a mind of worry and trying labour into something outside of itself, as light reading. With the idea, therefore, of affording a few moments mental recreation to our local Carlyles and Beaconsfields, and colonial thinkers generally, I have written the matter of this volume, which, it is almost useless to say, is all imaginative, for *that* will be seen at a glance. Perhaps, however, there *is*, thrown in, here and there, a fact the offspring of observation.⁶

It may be asked, why continue to provide for the public what very few care to read? The answer to this is easy enough, for although such a query may be very smart in a calculative sense, it is by no means creditable to the intelligence of that public on whose behalf it would speak. Having, accordingly, a higher opinion of, and greater trust in, the public, I lay these efforts before their view, expecting that support from all in general, but from creoles in particular, which, *all* local ventures should call forth. Why, the very fact of anything literary—however poor and unassuming—being published in Demerara by a Demerarian, ought to be a kind of talismanic pass-word to other creoles for recognition and support. That, however, is not all I desire to say. In buying a book—especially a local production—one is apt to pride himself of having thrown away a shilling or two in a fit of philanthropic prodigality; he never seems to take into account the fact that he buys much thought, much mental worry and perhaps, I don't say in *all* cases, a drop or two of the writer's heart's

blood. This is *not* poetry! I am therefore of opinion that a shilling laid out in a book is money well spent.

I say nothing particularly of the stories themselves. I have tried not to make them dull, therefore I leave them to the judgment of the reader; but what I do repeat is that I expect some support, not getting which, I will confess beforehand, will be to me a very real disappointment.

LEO.

DEMERARA,
April, 1885.

Endnotes:

⁶ Martin refers to here to Thomas Carlyle, whose three-volume history of the French Revolution was published in 1837; Frederick Marryat, popular novelist best known for integrating his experiences as a naval officer into his fiction; Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield and British Prime Minister, also famous for his novels; and Wilkie Collins, pioneer of the detective novel and author of *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*, among others. The story of Carlyle's fondness for Marryat was related in Henry James Nicoll's 1881 biography of Carlyle.

THE HOLE IN THE PAN

The scene is my bedroom. I am there reclining in delicious ease, a languid convalescent, and I need not assure those who have had a touch of colonial fever, what a sweet thing convalescence is. It is a calm, sweet pool in a desert—a balmy, breezy, dusky twilight on the heels of a burning noon. But let me proceed. I am in my hammock, surrounded with pillows, cool sheets, and other convalescent furniture, and by my side, his chair tilted back against my bedstead post, his right foot elevated at an angle of about sixty degrees upon the washstand, and with enlocked fingers around his left knee, the foot to which hangs quiescent, sits my chum Bob. “Ah!” he is saying, “I’m so glad, old boy, to see you pulling through all right, and—Hullo! what’s *that* for, eh?”; and following with my eye his outstretched finger, my gaze falls on the semi-circular bottom of an antiquated bath-pan, in the centre of which, a round hole with charred edges appears.

“That,” I say faintly. “Can’t you see it’s my bath pan?”

“Just so,” continues he, “but surely you *don’t* mean to say you bathe in *that* thing! No! sir, such a statement would be much like your pan, it won’t hold water.”

Now, Bob is a very nice fellow, but he has three disagreeable characteristics, to wit: a terrible habit of accentuating his language, a great addiction to punning, and he is so exceedingly inquisitive.

“No!” I explain. “It can’t hold water now, but it used to a while ago, and—and—.” Here I stop short.

“Go on,” he says impatiently, “go on! Why what a fellow you are, Harry, for keeping one on tenterhooks. Don’t you know the more you hesitate the more anxious I grow in the matter?”

“Well,” I proceed, getting deeper and deeper in the mire of confusion, “that hole has a history.”

“A *what*?” he asks. “A *history*?”

“Upon my word, a *hole* history—a history of a hole.” This is muttered musingly, and he looks scrutinizingly at me, as if

he half suspects my fever has returned and got upon the brain. I am obliged to laugh at his perplexed face.

"Yes! a history," I repeat. "I owe the presence of that hole to Miss Emma Ware."

So far from making matters plainer, this speech seems only to assure Bob that I am making fast for lunacy. He gives a sigh, looks at the ceiling, gradually lowers his eyes to mine and, finding my gaze still fixed on him, turns them away hurriedly, but, with such a comical look of pity, that I laugh until my side aches.

"Ah!" he murmurs in that tone a mother might adopt in attempt to soothe an irritable child. "Don't you think, old man, that you are exerting yourself too much?"

"No, oh! No!" I cry when my merriment will allow of it. "But there! I may as well tell you the story, make a clean breast of it and re-assure you, for at present, you certainly appear in a sublime state of muddle."

The manner, more than the words of my speech, brings back the smile to his eyes, and with a laconic "Go on!" he prepares to listen and I obey.

"You know Miss Ware," I begin—he nods. "Well, it was in September, a year or two ago that, under the most peculiar circumstances, I met the young lady. Going down L— street I got caught in the rain, and was compelled to seek shelter under a projecting gallery where I had been preceded by a young lady of eighteen possibly, small and neat, not particularly good-looking, but just my style of woman—lone and pensive! A kind of sweet, appealing placidity of feature, which invariably attracts a man's deepest feelings

"Well, this meeting was not much in itself, and hardly anything of which to speak, but a week later going by invitation to see Arthur Hamilton, whom should I meet but my friend of the rainy day. Imagine my scarcely repressible surprise! Not expecting such a meeting and—but you can partly realize it for yourself.

"After being introduced—for Hamilton has a nasty habit of promiscuously introducing all the people who meet at his house, although it was lucky for me in this instance—an unmeaning flow of small talk naturally followed, during which I recalled the circumstance of our first meeting—why,

I know not, must have been kismet, if there's such a thing—and opened a witty fusilading upon it. I was in happiest vein! I felt it. I compared the rain to fate driving two souls to a common haven—much suggestive, I adverted parenthetically, of a church—touched upon German mysticism—said that every heart was like a broken ring, or semi-circle, driven about by the laws of volition, until it finds its other half, its sweeter self, to be welded into completeness. How it ever would remain an incomplete entity unless—here I looked at the lady—it found its other half. With this and similar flashes I kept her like a sun-kissed apple before the brightness of my fire. It wasn't quite the thing to do on a first acquaintance, I admit, but I felt as I often have on many other occasions, as if all the quivering excitabilities of my nature were in full action—as if I could not have said a dull thing if I had tried, and a volatility of spirit that was positively intoxicating. We are each and every of us mad—undoubtedly mad, at some moments of our existence, and I firmly believe, had I been left alone with that girl at that instant, I should have sworn eternal fidelity or made an ass of myself, some how or other. As it was, I completely surprised Arthur Hamilton who rubbed his hands together—a pretty and favourite habit of his—wondered, smiled, rubbed his hands, and wondered again. As for Miss Ware—never have I beheld a prettier picture! Just imagine a placid face with large, soft black eyes—intensely black eyes—following out your slightest thought with a liquidity of light that spoke in flashes. Imagine two cheeks—rather thin—alternately paling and flushing like a rosy mango that swings now into shade, now into light. Imagine ten of the most fidgety fingers clasping and unclasping in perfect rhythm with the light of the eyes, and you have Miss Ware at our first acquaintance. What did she say? Not a word. But she did not need the use of her tongue, my dear fellow, when her eyes were such splendid substitutes. What would you have done under such circumstances? I will not appeal to *your* judgment, for who ever does use his judgment on these occasions? I appeal to your susceptibility, what—would—you—have—done?

“Ah! me, when I look back to that time I cannot help thinking that if our truly happy and unalloyed moments were

recorded in the purple records of fate by the golden asterisks of the recorder's pen of light, that just here would appear a tremendous asterisk against the name of Harry Seymour.

"That the human heart is liable to sudden and profound transitions, this subject evening at Hamilton's taught me, for when the time arrived that I should take home Miss Ware—for I did take her home—I felt as terribly melancholy and sentimental as it is possible for any ordinary fellow to feel. It was simply mental re-action, you see! But I did not pause then to engage in metaphysical analysis; consequently, it seemed as if all the world in general, but Miss Ware in particular, was looking in pity on me, and I beguiled our walk by all the melancholic distiches I could summon from Shakespeare, Byron, Moore and Tennyson. Indeed, I even went the length of throwing in some of my own sentiments. What was life, I argued as if she had asked my opinion on the subject, when 'The burden laid upon (one) is greater than he can bear?'"⁷

"My companion began to look puzzled, whereupon I asked if she liked music, and receiving an affirmative reply, I further questioned whether she knew Moore's melodies.

"Yes! she, 'knew some of them.'

"Did she know the one with those lines?"

'That heart that has truly loved never forgets,
But as truly loves on to the close,
As the sunflow'r turns to his god when he sets
The same look that he turned when he rose.'⁸

'Yes!' she did, she said, further, it was a 'favourite one' of hers—she agreed entirely with the sentiment. Said she did not like Tennyson, for he too severely criticized woman, 'but his satires were wrong—were not just for'—and she ended with two quotations:

'Man's love was of man's life—a thing apart,
'Twas woman's whole existence.'⁹

'For woman, if she truly loves she loves and loves forever.'¹⁰

At this juncture, I felt my spirits, like the mercury of a thermometer, steadily rising. They did not however attain the 110 degrees in the heat of the volubility as they had done hitherto. No! they preserved a golden mean between profound melancholy and bubbling—over-excitement. I was now in a frame of mind, in which one reasons calmly to himself, and has a full knowledge of the length he may go. Perhaps it was the speech, and especially the quotations of my new acquaintance, that relegates me to this *via media*. Whatever it was, I assured her that in my speculative moments, and these were not a few, I had always stood out with myself that the love of a woman surpasses that of man, immeasurably. More even than the sweetness of the tube rose exceeds that of the dahlia, which was nil. That a man could fall back on reason, or philosophy, or stoicism, for comfort when expectation failed him; but that woman, in her unreasoning, unquestioning love, would twine her arms around the object of her affection, close-clasp them on the farther side, and cling thereto for all time.

“I found the eyes of the young lady fixed, with a semi-admiring semi-confiding look, on my face, and I made a mental memorandum to the effect that, of all eyes in the world, *black* eyes were the most luminous and persuasive.

“We soon after gained her residence. I took her hand in mine, one gentle pressure, the door opened then closed behind her and she was gone. I paused a moment, feeling like one who has listened to the last bars of a very sweet melody and wishes it repeated but who knows that no fury of *bravas* and *encores* can recall a single note. I came home, locked myself in my room, drew forth my desk, and setting a sheet of paper before me, scribbled as follows:

Fair one thy liquid eyes.

I passed my pen through that, it would not do. Again I essayed:

Oh! but for that last touch
That thrill'd my heart to-night.

"This also was erased, and as, after sundry other trials, I found poetry no good, I went forth into the night, and strolling to and fro a given distance, thought and thought—and about one name only—Emma Ware."

"Couldn't you say all the time that you were *gone* on the girl?" asks Bob impatiently. "But what is all that to do with this hole in your bath-pan, *that's* what I'd like to know."

"I am coming to it," I insist, "only be patient, my dear boy—time's of no account to you or me, and you may as well listen as not. After this night's business, I haunted Hamilton's house like a ghost, and often, I would meet Miss Ware, quite by accident, of course. But, you know yourself, how these little things are managed! They *are* delicate operations to successfully carry out 'tis true; but a little patience, a little persistence, a little hope, a little *finesse*, and *voilà!* the matter's done."

"Having cleared the way, I began to storm the fort in good part, and the more intimate I became with Miss Ware the more I liked her; and it was not long after our first meeting, considering, that I got the soul expanding intelligence that I was not altogether indifferent to the young lady; that she, indeed, cared for me quite as much as my unqualified admission led her to believe that I cared for her."

"Have you ever felt as if your legs were converted to eccentric steam-cranks, your body to tissue paper, and your entire intestines to one raging circumvolution of ether, as if a hop from here to the moon would be, in your case, a mere incident, a simple step over? No?"—for Bob is shaking his head negatively in a most ruefully insinuating manner—"Well that is how I felt after I was fully convinced of Miss Ware's unalloyed, womanly, loyal, heart-whole, splendid, unsullied affection. By day, the walls of my sitting-room rang with the name of Emma; and, in silent watches of the night, I would lay with closed eyes under whose burning lids the camera of thought would produce transitory pictures of her face, her eyes, how she walked and looked, while, like echoes from the winds of memory, her voice—and she had such a peculiarly sweet one—would sound with many an endearing word as its theme. Even in the flaring intensity of noon-day heat the sunbeams would seem to steal along the wall and form in golden threads the letters of her name."

“Alas! for the fervid sweetness of those days. They were like the pressure of sweetest fruit upon the sensitive palate of untried affection. ‘Too bright, too fair to last!’¹¹

“I never felt so wildly happy in my life, and never expect to again.

“Sometime after, I began to discover in my fair one little things I could not understand. Every now and again some little window in her nature would open and let in the light on spaces of which I could not judge, so lightning-like were the movements of these active mental shutters.

“You have heard Wagner’s Music, haven’t you? You’ve heard how a discord is every now and again introduced in the sweet melodies! Well, even so it was with Emma. Days would pass by, and she would shine on my sight a clear, resplendent star; but just as I began to loose my disagreeable thoughts on her little peculiarities, a twinkle would occur. A mere word sometimes, sometimes a remark made of others or maybe of herself, and doubt would, like a postman, knock loudly at my heart and leave a despatch with the laconic proverb ‘all that glitters is not gold.’ Perhaps I had set a greater value on the young lady than I ought to have done. Or, perhaps, it was the bare froth and scum of a whirling, irritable current of affection. However, I thought I began to discover signs of change in her, and I watched thereunto with the keen anxiety of one who dreads the loss of something which is all the world to him. At last, I was assured, *quite* assured that something—what I knew not—had gone wrong with Miss Ware, and I determined to guide my conduct in the light of her desires. As she signalled so would I respond, for, riddled with faults as I am, I would not accept a strained affection for all the mines of Golconda, and, as I was quite sure that the young lady was beginning to lose conceit in ‘Yours truly,’ for to be plain, I do not think that, with all her sentiments about woman’s love and its immutability, she did love me at all, I decided to take the initiative and step boldly to the conclusion to which she was lagging by painfully protracted stages.¹² I therefore wrote (I could not for my life have spoken on the subject, for I did, I did indeed love the girl truly and sincerely, she was so sweet a creature) and dissolved our hardly-formed understanding; and so the roseate

hues of our mellow twilight passion so bred down into the dark and silent void of night.

“Now came the time of bitterness me. I am imbued with a nature suffering much from anything like regretful retrospection. I felt with Tennyson that ‘A sorrow’s crown of sorrow is remembering happier things.’¹³ But I was not wrong in telling her that a man has reason to fall back upon when disappointment, with drawn sabre, menaces his breast. Apart from that, I have, in my time, cultivated a very useful habit of taking out my skeletons and talking with them, of arranging my troubles and staring them partly out of countenance, and failing that, getting so familiar with them that they at last come to lose some of their hard and ugly lines. This habit now stood me in good stead. When the first blush of heart-anguish was over—and heaven knows it was deep enough while it lasted—I thought dispassionately of all the circumstances, and arrayed them as follows: I found, firstly, that my acquaintance with the young lady was strained and unnatural from the beginning. Secondly, that although I had known her over a year, I was by no means *intimate* with her, and this is true, although seeming strange. That thirdly: I did not, could not in fact make head nor tail of her character, and fourthly, in which, possibly, was the grand climax, whatever *my* ideas on the subject, *she* did not care for me—never had in fact—and after the preliminary infatuation into which she had persuaded herself had worn off, thought me—well, not a bad sort of chap, but *nothing more*. From these inferences I accordingly concluded that a decided casting into oblivion of the whole affair would be the best medicine for me. It was a bitter pill to swallow, but I swallowed it any way. Everything that reminded me of her I destroyed, that is everything that I could without attracting ribald attention, and when I came to a batch of letters, and they were a steady accumulation of a year or so, I could have almost cried, so deeply affected I was. I could not have read one over to save my life. I brought them in this very room, locked my door, feeling all the while awfully sick at heart, I hardly knew what I did. How could I destroy them? Burn them! aye—but where? Just where you see it now that bath pan stood, as if appealing to me to burn them in its ready bosom. I hastily drew a match, lit one of the letters,

inserted it among the others, threw all in the pan, and watched them gradually burn.

“What thoughts then were mine I cannot describe, but as the yellow, flickering flame crackled crisp and gaily, I thought of my introduction to Miss Ware, its wit and merriment, its buoyancy and brilliancy, and of its subsequent subsidence and rise, of all of which the flames in their playful manner, reminded me. When they had fairly gained a hold on the pile, they burnt steadily, like my settled passion. Puff! a curl of black smoke,—there went my first doubt! Puff! puff! another and another, in the pauses between which, the flames would burst forth with redoubled brightness. And so it went on, flame and smoke in striking contrast, until the charred and black ruins remained cold, and gloomy, and unsightly, a very fit emblem of my disappointment. The holocaust was over, but a human heart was also thereon immolated. I gathered the *debris*, scattered it through the window, and watched it go hurtling down the wind. Mere dust and ashes—a mimic story of the life of man; the happy trust and love having fled, what was the rest but dust and ashes! and man’s soul departed, what else is the body? when I afterwards looked at my pan, the fire had burnt that hole through it, and that, as you see, is the only tangible memory I have of Emma Ware. I might with fitting pomp inscribe around its edges, since I have recovered my serenity of heart—

Here lie

In dust and ashes, these charred remains that are the
Solemn ghosts of the hopes of Harry Seymour.”

I end, being almost exhausted by my long recital, and, laying back my head, look at Bob. “Are you satisfied?” I ask.

“Quite!” he says coolly, “you are a bigger fool than I took you for.”

“Thanks! That’s complimentary! altho’, coming to think of it, I *did* perform somewhat in the character with the cap and the bells.”

“Of *course* you *did*,” he reiterates emphatically, “not the slightest doubt about it. I wouldn’t sacrifice the bottom of a pan for *any* girl, the *best* of them are not worth it. And this—what’s-her-name—this Emma Ware, *where* is she?”

“Drop your punning,” I grumble. “She’s there, rustivating somewhere near Arcadia I suppose.”¹⁴

“And you are sure have *quite* got over this monomania of yours?”

“Quite! I’ve a little knowledge of myself, just now. I could calmly stand by and see her marry any other fellow and act groomsman if need be, which is the highest point of indifference attainable.”

“Right! *Now* you are a sensible fellow!” says Bob smiling. “But in future, Harry, take care your bathing-pans; coal-pots are plentiful, old man, and *if*—I don’t say you *will* you know—but if you *do* have any other of these little affairs to get through, by all that’s reasonable, don’t burn a hole in your pan to fill a void in your heart.”

He brings his feet to the floor with a band, rises, stretches himself lazily, and leaves the room with a graceful adieu, saying, “Do now, *remember!*”

I feel, indeed, weary, and closing my eyes, I lose myself in thought of the many knots and notches in the everyday life of the world, each with its unspoken, but not unspeakable, history.

Endnotes:

⁷ The quoted phrase appears in various nineteenth-century texts on Christianity; Matthew Arnold writes in his 1863 essay on Marcus Aurelius, “It is impossible to rise from reading Epictetus or Marcus Aurelius without a sense of constraint and melancholy, without feeling that the burden laid upon man is well-nigh greater than he can bear.” A similar phrase is used several times in the Quran as well, as in 2:282: “On no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear.”

⁸ From the final lines of Thomas Moore’s Irish melody, ‘**Believe Me, if All Those Endearing Young Charms.**’ The poem describes enduring love.

⁹ From Dona Julia’s farewell letter to Juan in Canto I of Lord Byron’s ‘**Don Juan**’. Though the poem is slightly misquoted (in the original, the verbs are in the present tense), the reference foreshadows the conclusion of Harry’s story.

¹⁰ Likely from Thomas Love Peacock’s ‘**She Loves and Loves Forever**’, though the first part of the quotation does not appear in Peacock’s poem.

¹¹ Another common poetic phrase used by Adeline H. Develling in ‘**Reminiscence of the Past**’, Robert Allan in ‘**The Love o’ Auld Langsyne**’, and E. Curtiss Hine in ‘**Christine**’, to name but three examples.

¹² Golconda is the site of famous diamond mines in the south of India, known especially for the Hope Diamond and the Kohinoor Diamond, which serve as an important point of reference in Collins's *The Moonstone*.

¹³ From Tennyson's '**Locksley Hall**'; Harry's sympathy with Tennyson recalls Emma's stated dislike of Tennyson and therefore reaffirms the incompatibility of the two.

¹⁴ Arcadia is a mountainous region in Greece associated with the rustic; the reference is doubly suggestive here, as Arcadia is also a village on the east bank of the Demerara River.

BASIL EMERY'S CORRESPONDENT: A PECULIAR INCIDENT IN THREE CHAPTERS.

CHAPTER I

Basil Emery and Walter Wilson are close friends. They are not, 'tis true, a modern instance of David and Jonathan, for their love is not surpassing that of woman, and neither would sacrifice a kingdom for the other. Nor are they a fit representation of Damon and Pythias, for while they recognise the duties of friendship, the sentiments of the heart, and what Emery calls "that sort of a thing"; they do not defend the admission to the death, and would as soon think of flying for each other as dying for each other.¹⁵ Nevertheless, they are friends, pretty steadfast and confidential. Walter is a quiet unassuming fellow, with a face more indicative of easy good nature than particular intelligence, while Basil is a sharp, quasi-cavalier, with very original ideas of social ethics and his own privileges. Just as their friendship begins to deepen into those grooves of habit, to get out of which one finds it painfully disagreeable, after being in, Walter is called upon by the winged little God, who shakes him out of apathy by reasoning him into the belief that Julia Weldon is exactly the kind of maiden with whom he would feel himself supremely happy. He, therefore, follows his inclinations, with the effect that he is led to unbosom himself to the young lady, who, after many set aphorisms beyond the promise of her youth, quietly accepts Mr. Wilson, and this matter now forms the conversational subject of the two gentlemen who are sitting, very much at their ease, in a trellised gallery.

"Good-bye to our old-time friendship," says Basil. "Here's to the days that are no more, for

'Where a lady's in the case,
All other matters must give place'

and, in auctioneer phrase, you are not 'going—going'—but 'gone!'"¹⁶

"I should hope that a friendship like ours will survive my engagement with Miss Weldon," returns Walter.

"I should hope so myself, and as the chief principle of my philosophy is beautifully exemplified in the words 'grin and bear it,' I must be content to fall in as second fiddle in your regard. Meanwhile, I shall trouble you to introduce me to the young lady, just by way of shewing you I'm in earnest you know."

"With the greatest pleasure! When will you go?"

"As early as you please, to-night if you like."

"Well to-night, then, be it." And so it is settled.

In the evening Mr. Basil Emery is presented to Miss Weldon.

"This is my *fidus amicus*," says Mr. Wilson, as the two gentlemen bend before the lady.

"So happy to make your acquaintance," murmurs Basil. "I was very anxious to see the young lady to whom my friend has given his heart. Knowing his discriminating taste and judgment of feminine beauty, I expected to behold in you a beautiful object—need I add that I am not disappointed!"

Miss Weldon blushes, and is silent, for Mr. Emery's voice has just that painful ring of satire, which leaves it doubtful whether he is not secretly laughing at her.

Walter, however, comes to the rescue. "Not too many compliments, Basy,"—this is his familiar title for Mr. Emery—"for I'm afraid"—laughing—"that too much sugar causes thirst. Not that I believe Julia will ever desire to be flattered, because"—and he stops short and looks unutterable things at the young lady.

"Undoubtedly!" responds his friend. "I quite understand you."

But so far is he from understanding the words which, in reality, bear very little meaning, that his eyes are busily casting about for some object on which to devote their attention. At length they fall upon a portrait album.

"May I?" he says taking it up.

"Certainly!" assures Miss Weldon, and he unclasps the cover and begins to look carelessly at the faces as they pass in review. At last his gaze concentrates itself to intensity, he lays the book softly on his knees, and for the present Basil is as truly lost to the outer world as if in a dream. He is gazing on

a dark profile, over whose clear-cut features a defiant smile hovers, while, above the shoulders, or what can be seen of them, a dark mass of silly-looking hair falls. The face looks very like that of an East Indian, but it is a face full of fire, and those eyes, he judges, are full of sparkling brightness too.

"Who is this?" he asks without raising his eyes.

Miss Weldon bends over from her seat and gives a careless glance at the picture. "That!" she says, softly, "that's my friend Alicia Denier."

"French?"

"No-o-o! but of French extraction I believe."

"Fine creature," he continues, then lifting his quizzical eyes, he says, "Where is she?"

"In the County of B— she lives there."

"Any brothers and sisters? father and mother still alive?"

"Yes! to all."

"You correspond?"

"We do."

"Good! —when you next write, please mention" —and he laughs merrily— "that she has made a wonderful impression on me."

"I shall!" says Miss Weldon, and she really intends to do so, for she does not forget the left-handed compliment paid her awhile ago. And then she partly dislikes the man already.

"Many thanks! Very many thanks!" says Basil, rising and bowing low, "I shall be eternally obliged."

He takes his leave, and the last impression he gives Miss Weldon is the memory of a careless face the chief features of which are a sarcastic mouth and two sparkling eyes with a satirical light flashing therefrom. No sooner is he fairly away than Miss Weldon repairs to her desk and dashes off a letter, summons her little Hermes, and sends to the pillar-box, immediately.

"You surely are not going to send Basil's silly message—eh?" questions Mr. Wilson.

"Am I not though?" returns the lady, and at this instant one can plainly detect that she has a will and temper of her own. Walter makes it a point of principle never to argue, hence he at once subsides, and shortly after, forgets the incident itself. Not so Miss Weldon, however. A week after Mr. Basil Emery

is again on visit there, and without a word of preface, she lays in his hand a daintily-written pink-paper letter, opening which, he reads as follows: —

Dearest Jue,

Your letter has made me very anxious to know more about that gentleman who grew so rosy over my photo. What sort of man is he? Is he tall, short, brown or fair? Good-looking or ugly? Has he black eyes or cat-eyes—which I detest—and is he a gentlemen or a donkey? Do tell me! No more time.

Yours in haste,
ALICIA.

P.S. —Write soon, I'm all anxiety to hear more of this.

"H'm!" exclaims Mr. Emery, "a gentleman or a donkey? Didn't know before that there was a parallel between the two animals. A gentleman, of course!" He continues, thinking that he holds within his hand a splendid opportunity for having what he styles 'some fun.' "Should you reply to this letter," he proceeds, feeling all the while an immeasurable superiority to the writer of the epistle, in point of brainpower and capability of *finesse*, at least. "Give the writer this description: — Mr. Basil Emery—gentleman—height, five feet nine—athletic built—black hair—black eyes—straight nose—full lips—*aetat* 26. And do you please add: —able to take care of himself."

Miss Weldon with commendable good humour, jots down the foregoing category, and her dislike for the gentleman sensibly increases, "Would you not like a line from her own—own self in return for this pretty little description?" she asks sneeringly.

"Well—I don't mind," returns Basil, not at all ruffled by the acidity of her tone, "but, saving your presence, women are invariably such wretched writers and unpunctual correspondence, that if your friend does honour me with the reply, I do not promise to keep up the thing, you know. One can hardly expect it—the days of martyrdom are passed."

At this speech Miss Weldon positively detests the man, and in her next letter to her friend, the following expresses her opinion: "He is intolerably conceited, and overbearingly egotistical. Do write direct to him—and is there no way of humiliating him, for I would like to see him taken down."

Mr. Basil Emery's return visit to the Weldon residence is made after a shorter interval, and when he is there, he receives from the young lady another little pink-paper note. This time it is addressed:

"To Mr. Basil Emery—Gentleman."

"Aha!" he exclaims, "here we are again." And tearing open the note in the most unconcerned manner possible, he skims over its contents. It runs thus: —

Mr. Basil Emery, Gentleman,

I am Alicia Denier—Lady. Height, five feet four—raven hair, very silky and beautiful—liquid black eyes, a pair of the very best in B—retroussé nose, rather charming though—fine lips—*aetat* 20, and, so far from being able to take care of myself, *want taking care of*.

ALICIA DENIER.

Basil smiles. "What a spirit of modesty characterizes the note," he says, "and a by no means loud hint is given about her wanting to be taken care of. But you, Miss Weldon, tell me candidly, do you observe anything particularly green in my optics?" He receives no answer and continues: "I shall not further trouble you to transmit any message for me. I'm going to enact the part of Sampson, lift these gates of Gaza on my own shoulders, and vanquish the Philistines. I shall myself reply to this very modest and praiseworthy epistle." Saying which he takes his departure.

"And I wish you joy of your bargain," murmurs Miss Weldon, following his retreating figure with her eyes.

Endnotes:

¹⁵ The story of David and Jonathan is told in the Hebrew Book of Samuel; Damon and Pythias are legendary Greek figures who represent, like David and Jonathan, the ideal of Platonic love. The references here suggest that Walter and Basil are anti-heroic parodies of homosocial fidelity.

¹⁶ Likely aphoristic, the phrase is used in William Leman Rede's novel, *The Wedded Wanderer; or, the Soldier's Fate*, with "When" substituting for "Where".

CHAPTER 2

A month passes by. It is the dim, cool hour of early eve, that delicious time when day is just languishing through all her farewell colours of purple, grey and dun, into the full darkness of the night—a most enjoyable hour!—and Mr. Basil Emery is sitting in a rocking-chair in deep thought about this same correspondence of his. It has progressed “as merry as a marriage bell,” but it has, somehow, gained that point at which Mr. Emery begins to grow tired, and has determined to give it up. But scarcely does he form this intention, than the head of the office in which he holds an onerous position decides to send him to B— to unravel a knotty hitch that has occurred in the wires of business; and now he feels all interest in Alicia Denier strong upon him, from the fact that he is actually to go to the town in which the lady resides. Shall he see her? Should he pay her a visit, and would that be the proper thing to do? These are the questions that engage his mind. He thinks until he feels positively dizzy, but finding himself as far as ever from a solution of either, let alone a decided plan of action, he rises with the intention of allowing matters to take their course and be decided by *chance*, for, like most men who’ve no clear opinions of anything except themselves, Mr. Emery is a firm believer in chance. He, therefore takes his way to Miss Weldon’s and apprises her of his proposed departure on the succeeding morning. She, however, takes no notice of his many hints and suggestions, and, in reply to a plain question whether she thinks it advisable for him to venture on a visit to Alicia Denier, she downright refuses to express an opinion, ignores, in fact, the whole affair and Mr. Emery is, perforce, thrown back on his own resources in the matter. But, he is a gentleman quite competent to take care of himself, and just as this satisfying idea permeates his soul and reassures it, Mr. Walter Wilson enters the room.

“Ah! Basy, old boy,” he says after having saluted Miss Weldon, “glad to find you here. So you are bound for B—to-morrow, eh?”

"Yes!" rejoins Basil, "the very best thing that could happen for me. I am never sea-sick, and the trip will be a kind of holiday. Then, to B— above all places, is where I desire to go just now." Here he gives a triumphant look at Miss Weldon, and adds — "Aint I a lucky dog?"

"Are you not!" echoes his friend, exclamatorily. Shortly after Mr. Emery bids goodbye and takes his leave for a week or two. "You should hear from me, Walter, first thing"—are his farewell words and he is gone. Next morning, with a black leather portmanteau, Mr. Emery finds himself *en route* to B—. The day is a beautiful one, and as the gentleman is not sea-sick, he finds time hanging rather heavily on his hands. He bends over the gunwale and communes with his heart. "Now!" he murmurs to himself, mapping out an imaginary plan. "Suppose I go to this place—see this very modest young lady—find her more fascinating than I suspect—with a little money of her own—yes!—*a little money of her own!*—what should prevent me diving into the matrimonial net? Man's destiny is already chalked out for him. A few incidents are the distributory largess of chance, but after all Fate rules! Say what we will; and, I can see my destiny as plain as a pike-staff before me. It is to be a social martyr—nothing short of immolation on the altar-fires of society. And if my martyrdom is to assume the form of marriage with this Alicia Denier as Nemesis, I may as well be prepared beforehand. Then, I am six-and-twenty—a time of life when callow boyishness ought to begin to assume those responsibilities germane to the offices of staid manhood, and why should not I?"—The rest of his cogitation is, evidently, lost in the river, for he gazes fixedly down into its heaving swell, as if that could help them on to a decision. "I'll do it!" he presently exclaims aloud, bridging the hiatus of thought with a back-glancing shaft of expression, "I'll do it, and write immediately to Walter." He opens his portmanteau which he has never let go, for one of his favourite proverbs (an original one) is "If you hold on to your goods you can't lose them without a struggle," takes out pen, ink and paper, seats himself in a convenient nook, and begins to write:

Dear Old Walter,

The rural serenity of Vespation on his sabine farm is not comparable to the simple impassibility of your humble servant. I am as cool as a cucumber, that is, outwardly; but inwardly, I am in a state of mental insomnia.¹⁷ Never, at any time of my existence, have I been so disagreeably thoughtful, and whenever I write a book, which I intend doing shortly, I shall call it: Theories and Speculations, or the Ins and Outs of Whys and Wherefores, and my first proposition shall be that a sea-voyage accelerates thought to a surprisingly abnormal degree, as I find it in my case. For, since I've set foot on board this rickety old tub which a popular superstition believes to be a *steamer*, 'save the mark'! I've been not Basil Emery, Esquire; but a thought-machine on legs. The second proposition shall be that sea-air has certain indescribable properties well calculated to produce sentimentality. And, as in my former premiss, I shall constitute myself exemplar of its justice, for, while I left the city with no idea whatever of speculating on the probabilities that might lead or rather induce me into following your example with Miss Weldon, here am I, with all the outstretched tendrils of my heart quivering around the golden edges of a wedding-ring. "Absurd!" you say. I admit the justice of the accusation, but my excuse is there—the sea air. My book shall further propose that the unrest of the river will always remind single gentlemen of their unsettled state, and, if the day is calm, a glance from sea to sky must assure any ordinary observer that the very natural transition of man is, from the ever-heaving, indecisive sea of bachelorship to the azure, celestial calm of matrimony. My distinguishing characteristic as a boy at school was a remarkable aptitude for 'taking hints.' This has not failed me yet, for the supreme peculiarity of my riper years is a surprising avidity for what is vulgarly termed "dropping on" to a thing. In this instance nature herself gives the hint—and I follow! Where? Into the town, house, family, impressions, affections and heart of Alicia Denier; by gradual and polite stages, of course, but I *do* follow, nevertheless. And, according to the Mahommedenism formula: "I've spoken!" When I shall return to the city, please expect me with despatches in my

portmanteau: despatches from the court of Hymen—detailing the successful siege and bombardment of the heart-tower of Alicia Denier by

Votre très sincèrement,
B. EMERY.

The gentleman is rather proud of this note; he thinks it very characteristic of the writer, which, perhaps, it is. He addresses the envelope – seals it – stamps it – carefully inserts it in his breast pocket – locks his portmanteau, and again leans over the gunwale, and gazes abstractedly into the river. Presently he sees a fellow-passenger beside him, and, as a certain roughness of exterior, skimpishness of dress, and general rusticity of appearance lead him to the belief that he is a native of B— returning to the town, Mr. Emery addresses him with the idea of making a few points in the game he's playing.

“Fine day, sir!” he observes.

“Yes!” returns the stranger, in a voice whose strong point is, certainly not music, “going to B—?”

“Of course!” returns Basil, somewhat emphatically, supposing the man an idiot, for, as the steamer does not touch at any intermediate station, he fails to see where else he can go to, save the regions of Neptune, and an immediate trip thither, he by no means contemplates.

“What sort of place is it?” he continues.

“Small, but good! Not too cool, but comfortable! Never been there before?”

Mr. Emery mentally concludes that the man at his side *is* an idiot, belonging to that genus who possess a faculty for asking nonsensical questions. “No! I’ve never been there,” he says. “And that’s why I ask you of the place. Do you know many people there?”

“Most everybody!”

“Do you know the Deniers?”

This is asked as in a general enquiry after the family.

“Yes!” replies the man, looking hard at him. “Thought you said you hadn’t been there.”

“Well, I’ve not!” he returns, irritably. “Can’t one person know another without having been to his native town?”

“Oh! yes, certainly! Didn’t think of that. Nice fellow is Denier, works at Cashmere and Drill’s.”

“Why, that’s the very firm to which I am going,” says Mr. Emery, supposing the Deniers referred to the brother of Alicia, and at this point he again relapses into his silent mood.

Everything is working splendidly; he thinks, and he’ll have a quiet walk over. When he again lifts his eyes, his informer has disappeared, and Mr. Emery falls into another of his murmuring soliloquies. “Good!” he says, “easiest thing in the world to form the acquaintance of this Denier, get him to take me home and confront Alicia *in propria persona*. He, as her brother, can hardly know anything of this correspondence, and after relegating the woman to her proper level, I shall lift her, thereafter, to the eminence of Mrs. E.” This little plan being settled, he begins with impatience to wish for the end of the voyage. The heat is now intense, and he lolls under the awning on deck, closes his eyes, and seems to float into nothingness, for he soon after falls asleep. When he wakes he finds it is time for landing. He, accordingly, takes up his portmanteau which had been his pillow, and steps onto the stelling, thence into town.¹⁸ He cannot possibly miss his way, for there is hardly any way to miss. He puts up at the only hotel in the place – for he will not execute his business until the next morning – summons a waiter, sends off his letter to the post, and orders a beefsteak, potatoes and bread.

Endnotes:

¹⁷ Emperor Vespasian was descended from Sabine farmers, although the Sabine Farm is more frequently associated with Horace, who retired his farm and wrote several poetic works about its serenity.

¹⁸ A specifically Guyanese word descended from the Dutch, “stelling”, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, refers to “a wooden pier or landing-stage”.

CHAPTER 3

B— is a sleepy little old town with a great reputation for hospitality, which Mr. Emery soon discovers wholly unmerited. He meets a few gentlemen whom he recognizes as having seen in the city, and with one or two of whom he is acquainted. He is offered 'treats' but he declines them on principle, for another proverb of the gentleman's is: 'No treat, no treat'; this meaning, in unepigrammatic verbosity, if I do *not* accept a "treat," I can't be expected *to* treat. He is not, accordingly, very popular, but what cares he for that? He doesn't find it disagrees with his digestion and general comfort, and he is consequently quite unconcerned. The next morning Mr. Emery, scrupulously dressed, repairs to the office of Messrs. Cashmere and Drill, presents his letter of introduction and instructions to the head man there, and finds himself under the keen scrutiny of a pair of very perceptive grey eyes the property of Mr. McIvor, the gentleman in charge.

"Ah!" says Mr. McIvor, "you are the gentleman sent to unravel the conundrums of the ledger."

Mr. Emery bows.

"Come this way!"

And followed by Basil he takes his way to the desk of one of the clerks.

"This," he says, "is Mr. Denier who will tell you all you desire to know. You can use this desk beside his, and acquaint me as soon as you're through with the business."

Mr. Emery bows again and raising his eyes, fixes them on the features of Mr. Denier. The gentleman is brown, with a head like an indented calabash, it is so peculiarly ruffly, yet round. He is glad that Mr. McIvor has not mentioned *his* name; he prefers introducing himself in his own way. Mr. Denier is certainly unlike Alicia, for a while *her* face is intense, *his* is only relieved from hopeless dulness by a gleam of humour in his twinkling little eyes. He is one, however, whom metaphysicians would pronounce 'more knave than fool.' He takes little notice of Mr. Emery who soon settles down to the

business in hand, and, for the time being, all other calculations are lost in the figures before him.

After a while Mr. Denier addresses Basil, and, to his surprise, in a most unpardonably familiar manner.

"How are things in town, sir?" he asks.

Mr. Emery lifts his eyes and stares hard. "As usual," he replies.

"Plenty of grub and very few men to eat it eh?"

"To the contrary," puts in Basil, thinking it politic to fall into the gentleman's off-hand manner, "plenty of men and very little with which to feed them."

"Aha! that's bad."

"This doesn't seem to be much of a place."

"Well, no. Quiet place and quiet people – quiet people," repeats Mr. Denier plaintively.

"How do they spend their time? They don't seem to *live*; they appear to be gradually dying. An existence in which motion is the most violent emotion."

"Oh! no, don't you believe it. They get through life well enough! The women are continually talking scandal, and the men – but look at that fellow!" And following the outstretched finger of his companion, Mr. Emery is barely in time to see, in a distant corner of the store, a man hastily laying a glass down. "Drink!" he exclaims, and again his eyes travel over the columns of figures.

"You won't mind showing me about a little, after business?" he asks after a long pause. "Not at all! only too happy to oblige you. Where do you put up?" "At the hotel belonging to that man with the queer name, Coorbay or Coorbie, however you pronounce it."

"Courbeiz's, I know it, new place send and respectable hotel in B-. Expect me after dinner, then. What hour do you dine?"

"Five, but you needn't call till seven."

"Oh! all right; but for whom must I ask?"

Mr. Emery's opportunity arrives, he will astonish the natives. With a great amount of unnecessary ceremony he produces his little brown leather card case, pulls out a card and hands it to Mr. Denier, watching the gentleman's face all the time, for he reasons thus: "If he knows anything of this correspondence, he will surely betray himself." Mr.

Denier looks at the card, and, just for the merest moment, a smile plays about his lips, and a perfect battery of rays flashes from his eyes, but this is all. Mr. Emery notices it, of course, and concludes that he knows about the correspondence, but when Mr. Denier next speaks, the very calm tone of his voice completely reassures him.

“I shall be there!” he says.

“Very well!” says Basil, and he now thinks that while the man *may* have heard his name casually, he is by no means *au courant* with the little history of its owner. It is with a quiet, self-congratulatory spirit, therefore, that he again bends to his task. He is a good book-poster, his powers of analysis make him one; the difficulties therefore begin to disappear, and he is certain that the nature of the job will not keep him in B-longer than a week.

The afternoon arrives, and, as the office closes, he gives an admonitory word to Mr. Denier who smiles, repeats his promise and disappears. True to the hour, Mr. Denier is at the Hotel from which Mr. Emery accompanies him to behold the sights; and these are miserably few. The market, the Court-house, the Hospital and the Bridge which last is, perhaps, the only thing worth seeing. By nine, Mr. Emery is fast asleep, dreaming of an invitation he has received from Mr. Denier to visit him that day week. Time now passes very slowly to Basil. He has been extremely guarded in his conversations with Denier to whom he has not mentioned a word about Alicia, for he wants to take the lady by surprise. At last the evening for the visit arrives. Mr. Emery stands before the mirror, giving the last touches to a very exquisite toilet. He is, undoubtedly, well got up. The most punctilious care has been expended on the ‘set’ of his pants – the right consistency of tightness – the gloss of his boots – and, even his mostaches appeal for admiration, they are *so* bewitchingly precise. He only awaits Mr. Denier’s arrival, and that gentleman is soon on hand, and then they take their way to the place of visit. In the meantime, it is necessary to explain that Mr. Emery’s business is quite settled with credit to himself and satisfaction to the heads of the firm, and it is now left entirely to his will to go back to the city by the next steamer or to prolong his stay for another week. As to whether he

goes by steamer, or stays another week, the gentleman leaves aucciliary to his visit to Alicia Denier. A very short walk brings the two gentlemen to Mr. Denier's residence, which is a pretty little cottage, all on one floor, with a pretty little green and white portico, looking out on a pretty little garden. Through this they now take their way. Mr. Denier goes up to the door, turns the brass, and ushers in his friends to a natty looking comfortable little sitting-room. The scene upon which Mr. Emery's vision falls is an engaging one. There is a piano and a music-stand, two airy looking couches, a centre table on either side of which are rocking chairs, sitting in one of which he sees, in all the vivid reality of animation which a photo could not give, the living presence of Alicia Denier. He strikes a very imposing attitude waiting Mr. Denier's introduction to give one of his most 'killing bows.' He does not wait long either, the introduction comes—

“Mr. Basil Emery, permit me to present you to *my wife*.”

Mr. Emery feels as if every nerve in his body runs down like the unstable springs of a clock, he grows cold as ice and pale as candle grease, then his face assumes a hue like very juicy beef. He wildly wishes for wings to depart to Timbuctoo or Tahiti; he is, in a word, hopelessly, utterly extinguished. In relating this scene afterwards, he would affirm “I never felt so queer in my life, if a fly had alit on my head I should have sunk beneath its weight, 'pon my honour I should!”

The lady has risen and given one of the coolest, most distant greetings possible.

Five minutes after Mr. Emery pleads another engagement and departs. He sees through it all now, he has been the victim of Miss Weldon's spitefulness. The next morning he leaves B-. He doesn't think it's such a quiet place after all.

No sooner does the boat touch the stelling in town than he is off, but before he gets home his placidity has partly returned.

“A deliberate falsehood!” he murmurs, “giving me to understand that it was *Miss Denier*.” His first intention is to set off at once to Miss Weldon's and upbraid her with the most cutting satire of which he is capable. But he defers his visit until the evening, when he presents himself to the young lady with whom he finds Mr. Wilson. Icelandic frigidity is a trifling matter to the coolness with which he greets them.

“Why Basy!” exclaims Walter, stretching out his hand, “when did you return?”

“I returned this afternoon, sir,” he replies, ignoring the proffered hand and bowing distantly, “and will not long trouble you with my presence. I simply desire to remark that mendacity, while it may be a lady’s distinguishing quality, should be kept within bounds and not used to mislead people who”—“Are able to take care of themselves,” fills in Miss Weldon. “But,” she continues, speaking rapidly, “I think I can surmise what you refer to for I’ve seen ‘your very modest and praiseworthy epistle’ to Walter, but if your memory serves you, it can easily be proved that I referred to my friend as Alicia Denier, I never said that she was *not* married.” This is quite true, as it now for the first time flashes upon Mr. Emery that the lady was always spoken of as Alicia Denier.

“Neither did you say that she was,” he persists, walking towards the door. “In regard to the falsehood it’s there! evade it how you will. I wish you a very good evening.”

He departs, and Miss Weldon explains the matter to Walter as far as she can and with no little merriment over it. The next day she receives from Mrs. Denier the following letter.

Dearest Jue,

Fortune has thrown our friend of the photo, with whom I corresponded for some time with Mr. Denier’s knowledge, on my mercy. You should have been aside to *see* his ludicrous confusion and collapse on being introduced to *Mrs. D.* I pitied him, but trust that he will be a “wiser” man if not a “sadder” one. I’m sure his conceit has been taken down a peg or two, and I suppose *you* are satisfied. To him if to prove the significant lesson.

Yours sincerely,
ALICIA.

Mr. Emery is decidedly “a wiser man.” But, at the present time Mr. Walter Wilson and himself are not on speaking terms.

THE TWO HARVEST-THANKSGIVINGS

CHAPTER I

(THE FIRST HARVEST THANKSGIVING)

'There is a beautiful spirit breathing now
Its mellow richness on the clustered trees.'
— LONGFELLOW¹⁹

It is early in the year, the season at which the churches in the city will celebrate the Harvest-thanksgiving, and the day is clear and bright and beautiful. There are many ladies and gentlemen in the Cathedral decorating its hoary walls and grey arches. The morning sunlight streams richly through the painted glass-windows, radiating the heads of pictured saints and throwing patches of amber and blue and crimson light along the dusty floor-mats. It is a fact outside the pale of reason, but it, nevertheless, *is* a fact, that a dim, indescribable awe pervades the pile. Far up in the lofty ceilings, over the walls, and through the arches away into the vestry, some presence—I know not what—prevails. A whisper within these walls is more impressive than the voice of a multitude any other where. The decorations are progressing nicely. Along the nave are beautiful palms which wave their graceful fronds, soothingly, in the soft breezes that flutter through the Cathedral. Ferns, exquisite and intricate in texture and design as cunningly-worked lace, are lined along the communion rail—these are the loan of a wealthy gentleman—and upon the altar-piece one beholds the *chef d'œuvre* of the decorative ingenuity displayed. This is a simple, but matchless wreath of Jasmines—Tuberoses and Stephanotis, lying on the black, fall-like, altar-cloth, like a jewel in its case. The design is simplicity in purity! One is afraid to touch it—it looks so ethereally beautiful.

Ah! me, what must God's comprehension of sinless beauty be—when He gives us, even on this sinful planet, such pearline images of loveliness—such innocent, but alas! fading pleasures.

The young lady who has planned and executed this design is Miss Margurita Foli who now stands, in a distant part of the Cathedral, with one hand uplifted to give, to a gentleman on a ladder, a long trail cut from a jasmine-vine, full of flowers. And as the green flows adown her arm and over her head, enveloping her shoulders in a wealth of leaves and perfume, she looks like a picture of Summer one sees in books. Her eyes, large and luminous, are upturned to the point of decoration, and the attitude brings out her lithe figure to its full capacity. The *tout ensemble* is like a *mater dolorosa* playing at May Queen. She is a beautiful lady, but so spirituelle! and some say that she is in failing health; but if this be true, there is yet no actual signs of it; and she is young, too, just three and twenty. There are other forms scattered about the Cathedral, and every one speaks in a low, suppressed tone, as if it is a season of sorrow instead of thanksgiving.

"Ah! Miss Foli," says a mere youth of about nineteen, coming up hat in hand, "I've just arrived, and understanding that you were designer and part creator of that beautiful altar wreath, I come to congratulate you on your success. It is positively lovely! On your wedding morning, expect just such another from me."

She smiles. "It seems to me," she replies, "that a wreath like that is more suggestive of death. If I had any preference in the matter, I should say lay one upon my breast when I am dead."

"Oh! you surely can't mean that?"

"Indeed I do! perhaps it is from bygone associations; but I always think of the flowers which compose that wreath in conjunction with death and not life. They should not plant them in cemeteries—they should not scatter jasmines and tube roses over the dead; after a time when comes to think of them only as an offering to death, and even the perfume seems to float from an open tomb or yawning grave."

Mr. Albert Olden (the young gentleman) is, naturally, of a married turn, and he hardly understands Miss Foli.

"Eh!" he exclaims.

"Yes!" she continues, "and I have a like experience with tunes. I can never hear that tune 'The Auld Kirkyard' without having an accompanying vision of my mother, sitting beside

a little table, sewing and singing. And as to that gloomy death-hymn commencing 'when our heads'—it appals me, so that now I actually detest it."

"Your nerves are two highly strung"—says the gentleman on the ladder.

"Or you are 'ultra-poetical,'" suggests Mr. Olden.

"Neither!" says Miss Foli, "I am more matter of fact than people take me to be, but the most matter of fact will have some strange beliefs – superstitious if you like, and this one of flowers and tunes is mine."

"H'm!" observes Mr. Olden, "don't care for beliefs and superstitions, they make one feel uncomfortable. But here comes Mr. Price."

These words, the gentleman full six feet high, and well-proportioned, comes slowly towards them. He is a big man, rather brown, with a profusion of hair about his face, which, perhaps, accounts for his savage appearance. One expects, when he speaks, to hear a harsh, unmusical voice, but in this, however, one is generally disappointed, for when he does speak, his voice is wonderfully soft and deferential. He is, in short, a thorough gentlemen.

"Well Madge," he says, addressing Miss Foli to whom he is shortly to be united once and forever, "are your labours completed? I've called for you as you requested, but, dear me, how flushed you do look."

"Yes!" puts in the gentleman on the ladder, "I've tried to persuade Miss Foli to give over, but she is so ardent where these matters are concerned that one is loath to check such enthusiasm."

A minute after, Miss Foli is being driven to her home, and as if her departure gives to conversation another theme, she becomes the subject of the group of four who are twining a few evergreens in designs the mystic meaning of which no less a personage than Œdipus himself could unravel.

"I wonder what strange law compels people to get very delicate just as they are about to be married?" enquires one.

"The very law that constrains some other people to talk nonsense," returns another.

"Now! there is Miss Foli," resumes the first, who is a lady, "trying hard to infect people with the idea that she's fast

going into consumption. What a languid air! and do you notice how she turns up her eyes? Ha! ha! absurd!”

“It *is* very foolish to act so,” adds a third, “but when is she to be married?”

“Next week Thursday, a lucky day, isn’t it?”

“Perhaps, and perhaps not. I’ve never tested the truth of it.”

“No!” adds a sour-visaged old lady, “marriage my dear don’t seem to be in ‘your line,’ as the merchants express it.”

Here daggers pass current for looks, and even in the Cathedral’s awful precincts scandal progresses swimmingly. At last the decorations are complete, and the setting sun flooding to the western windows, lays a farewell touch on a palm here, a fern there, then on a piece of the altar—slips over a pew – then through a rail, then again leaves a patch on the carpet, and at last a cross-bar of light and shade in the chancel. The silence seems to deepen with the night, and as the shadows gradually steal along the wall and replace every ray, one can easily fancy that invisible spirits are holding commune of thought in the deserted building. There are a few emotions more deep than that which is called the religious feeling, and few more transitory and unreliable.

Endnotes:

¹⁹ From Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s ‘**Autumn**’. The poem concludes with the lines, “He shall so hear the solemn hymn that Death/Has lifted up for all, that he shall go/To his long resting-place without a tear.” The reference thus foreshadows the events of the narrative.

CHAPTER II (THE WEDDING)

Hear the mellow wedding bells—
Golden bells!
What a world of happiness their harmony foretells.
—POE.²⁰

It is two o'clock on the succeeding Thursday. The bells cease with a grand metallic harmony as the bride's carriage rolls up and Margurita, looking indeed like the interpretation of her name – a pearl – walks slowly to the door hanging on the arm of her father. Breathe gently around her ye ministers of air!²¹ And, shortly, it seems as if even the breezes are wishful of doing honour to the bride, for they press her veil close to her cheek, ruffle the edges of her sleeves, and make themselves very generally busy with the lady. Miss Foli is dressed in what may be termed the splendour of simplicity. But why does she look so sylph-like? what eyes are those for a bride – and what cheeks! Too bright, too unnaturally ruddy they are. And now they form in the aisle, Bride's maids on one hand, like so many jewels on a string; and Groom's men on the other. Just at this instant a very officious little sunbeam slants through the dusk from away up in the height and falls in flickering agitation on the bride's wreath. A wreath of orange blossoms, all real and smelling as sweet as sweet can be. This is instantly set down, by the spectators, as a 'happy omen.'

Now the service begins. The Cathedral is crowded and comments pass freely. Some say Mr. Price is like the unyielding Greenheart, around whose ample girth Miss Foli, like the graceful lichen, can twine all the clinging tendrils of her heart. Some that he is too stern, she, too ghost-like, others that she is too pale and frightened. She is pointed out as the lady who made the harvest thanksgiving wreath, she is blessed often and deeply, and good wishes flow freely. And now the hymn rises sweetly and clearly:–

Father above, Who, in mystical love,
Dost the hands and the hearts of thy creatures entwine,
Oh! bless them! O! ward them! care, keep them and guard them,
And bind them with ties that are truly divine.

Sweeten their lives with that heavenly joy
That was innocent Eden's inspiring breath;
Their dual endeavour – Oh! prosper for ever,
And lead in a gentle incline unto death.

Many eyes are bathed in tears, but as the grand strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March roll inspiringly from the organ, the Cathedral seems one vast cloud of butterflies, such is the appearance given by the many fans in requisition, and the buzz of conversation is quite audible.

"Does she not look sweet?" asks one lady of another.

"More frail than anything else," is the reply.

And at this hour, Margurita Foli, now Mrs. Price, is a heroine. She is discussed with all the ardent vigour of which a small community is capable. It is told how old she is—who her mother is—where she went to school—who were her playmates; her relations are severally pointed out, and every item of information about the bride, known or inferred, is given with a volubility quite worthy of the occasion.

Meanwhile the wedding party are filing out of the Cathedral, and are now on their way to the *dejeuner*. Everything at the house passes off beautifully, everybody is agreeable and witty. The Editor of *The News*, especially so. In his speech he makes a happy epigram when he says:

'If these were days to buy and sell
Our ladies fair as nice,
I would not hesitate to say,
Our Pearl has got her PRICE.'

Weary at length with congratulations and homage, the bride escapes from the fashionable hurly-burly, and after a time even the grand wide hall itself, where dancing has been going on, is deserted. And it is true that a deserted ball-room has as

much sombre philosophy as a battle-field after an engagement. The first faint rays of the morning break through the windows upon a conglomeration of sickly perfume, ill-smelling spirits, overturned chairs, limp and tawdry decorations, and mayhap, a drunken servant or two who have sunk amid the sickening *debris* into a profound sleep. Vanity of vanities saith the Preacher. The same old story! Ever and ever the same! And now that the excitement is over, the real business of their lives narrows itself closely around Mr. and Mrs. Price with whom alone we have now to do.

Endnotes:

²⁰ From Poe's '**The Bells**'.

²¹ Margarita Island in the Caribbean Sea is known for its rare, yellowish pearls.

CHAPTER III (SHADOWS)

The first slight swerving of the heart,
That words are powerless to express
And leave it still unsaid in part,
Or say it in too great excess.
— LONGFELLOW.²²

The young couple are living through the first months of their married life in quiet joy. They are very, very happy, until— heaven only knows how it happens —but it does happen that rumour gets about, to the effect that Mr. Price does not treat his young wife well. That he is tyrannical and rules her secretly with a rod of iron. This is utterly false, and there is only one way to account for its diffusion. Mr. Price is a man of strong passions and taciturn nature, preferring to live a quiet life, with a heart full of devotion to *one* object—his young wife. Envy and Malice, the black-browed scowling genii, stand in their dark corners, put their little twos and twos together, and, by an arithmetic known only to themselves, make them attain to those numerical points at which they would have them rest. It is very hard that a man can be entirely deprived of happiness by a few unscrupulous, idle tongues!

It is very hard that people should so lightly disturb the peace of mind of others! It is, indeed, monstrous that they should prey upon a sensitive nature, by the fretwork process of hints, insinuations and all the extra jugglery sleight of hand passes of scandal, until they kill their subject outright! It is marvellous how they get these things to poor Mrs. Price's ear— sometimes through the offices of a meddling friend, sometimes through the media of servants' hints. Anyhow the lady does hear these rumours, and so far was she from being unhappy, that they are the causes of "the first little rift in her lute" that hitherto has known no discord tone. She thinks them a downright injustice to her husband, and so they are. Mr. Price sees his wife is beginning to look very thin and colourless, but he attributes it to another cause, for he hears nothing whatever of these rumours. Whoever does dare go up to a

man and level any insinuations at *him*—oh! no, the operations are done with all the delicacy of management of which the feminine mind is so peculiarly capable. It is the wife who gets the first few drops of social poison poured in her ear. Poor soul! what can she do? She pines and sickens beneath her husband's gaze, 'tis true, but the work goes on as surely and steadily as ever.

They are sitting together in their little brown-jaloused gallery, which, with the whole house, still bears a new, unused appearance.

"I shall have to guard you like the apple of my eye, Madge," says Mr. Price, "you look a perfect little old lady already."

She does not reply, but longs ineffably to unburden herself to her husband, telling of these rumours—how they *do* worry her! Oh! if she only would! But her courage fails and she says nothing.

"You look as if you need rest," he continues, "what is it dear—what can I do for you?" And his large hand strays over her little head, far more tenderly than a woman's. He pats her cheeks, he takes them between both his hands—and who is able to describe the look speaking from those quiet grey eyes of his?

"I am quite well," she returns languidly "quite well! Do you think I'm superstitious Tom?" She asks abruptly.

"Of course! you little fidget"—for she is fraying away at the braid of his coat. "But why?"

"Because"—and here the woman actually bursts into tears.

Mr. Price is silent. He does not take direct notice of his wife's tears, nor does he try to soothe them, but when they've subsided of themselves, he speaks to her much as one reasons with a little child. He knows his wife's nature well, how sensitive it is, and, like a skilful pilot, he shields her through the breakers and quicksands of her varying moods. This is the couple of whom people declare "all manner of evil," and the next day when Mr. Price is away at business, the same old process continues. A word here and there, another burning coal upon the sore heart of the suffering woman—why, they are killing her! slowly, slowly killing her.

Oh! ye who are blest with insensitive natures, rejoice, for you escape many agonies of life—many draughts of Mara.

And ye! who are ever ready to give tongue to "thing heard," a rumour, a strange story, a "funny something" about your neighbour, just think a while to what it may lead. You may add an extra weight to shoulders already "heavy laden"—a deeper pang to hearts already deeply scarred, you may help a life *one step nearer to the grave*. Leave, therefore, your hearings unspoken.

Things go on for some time longer, and again a Harvest thanksgiving festival is approaching; but Mrs. Price is expecting her own harvest and she is also preparing for her harvest thanksgiving. Often and often enough can she be seen sewing by the little table in the cheerful light of the hall-lamp, while her husband, playing at reading, looks over the top of his book simply to trace the expressions passing over his wife's face. Her eyes look larger—not that they have grown any—but her face is thinner, and that is the reason why. Would that I could describe the look on the lady's face, as she bends over an insertion-edged, snowly little lawn gown! I only wish I could explain the indescribably soft light in her eyes—the half-parted lips around which curls some expression which you can and cannot call a smile—a kind of hesitancy between hope and fear—and the sharp chin which curves gracefully into the sloping neck.

"You remember last years' harvest-thanksgiving," says Mr. Price, "how you were the heroine of the wreath?"

She nods!

"How I wish I had it to crown you now."

She looks up and says, softly, "No! dear, I would not be crowned with a wreath of jasmines and tube roses for anything."

"Why, how superstitious you are."

"Don't laugh at me, perhaps you will tell me I am right, one of these days. Those flowers are for the dead and not the living."

"Why do you persist in such a strange belief, Madge? I've never heard anyone else express such sentiments in regard to flowers."

"The sentiment—as you call it—is passion with me. It has grown with my growth, for I cannot remember the time when I did not think thus in regard to those flowers."

“Very well! but say nothing more about dying, child, I can’t lose you, and what’s more I won’t. You remember those lines of Coleridge, addressed to a convalescent:

“Besides what vexed us worse, we knew,
They have no need of such as you
In the place where you were going;
This world has angels all too few,
And Heaven is overflowing.”²³

“You are not going to make the transition for yet a while.” Mrs. Price smiles and proceeds with her work.

“Next week will be the harvest festival,” resumes Mr. Price, returning to the subject. “I wonder whether the gatherings will be as plentiful as last year.”

He finds his wife is disinclined to talk, so he watches her busy fingers arrange the hems, and set the frills, and add stitch to stitch. It is easy to tell which of the two is happiest at the moment, for, despite the lady’s placidity, on her serene countenance there are unmistakable signs of shadows.

Endnotes:

²² From Longfellow’s ‘**The Fire of Drift-Wood**,’ which describes an interior domestic scene much like the one in this chapter.

²³ From Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s ‘**To a Young Lady, on Her Recovery from a Fever**.’ The original closes with an exclamation mark rather than a period.

CHAPTER IV (THE SECOND HARVEST-THANKS- GIVING)

Now send we far around
Our harvest lay!—
Alas! a heavier sound
Comes o'er the day!
—MRS. HEMANS.²⁴

Once more the scene is the Cathedral. Once more busy fingers are decorating its sombre interior. It is the day before the celebration of the harvest festival, and the ladies and gentlemen, many of whom have been there on former occasions, are twining flowers and leaves into pretty designs. Here is the yellow and green length of the sugar-cane, peeping forth a graceful coconut palm branch. Here are a cluster of ruddy-cheek mangoes—then a dainty basket of sapodillas, which bear the essence of sweetness in their breasts, clusters of grapes—purple and white—large bunches of plantains and bananas, and beyond them all the blank altar-piece, waiting for its usual decoration—the wreath. Far more excitement prevails than at last year's harvest. The offerings are more abundant and the helpers more numerous.

"About the wreath!" whispers Mr. Olden to a lady beside him, "Do you not think it is time to begin that?"

"Don't trouble yourself about it," returns the lady, "it will be sent for from Mrs. Verney's where they've a quantity of flowers. I believe it will be composed only of jasmines."

"Better than last year's?"

"Well, 'tis hard to say; but if the execution fulfils the conceit of the Verneys, it ought to be simply perfect."

"Simply perfect?"—echoes Mr. Olden. "To expect perfection in a world like this is perfectly simple. But see! they are beckoning to me from over there."

He leaves the lady and takes his way to another group who desire him to assist in pinning up a strip of red cloth with bright golden letters composing the following text:

“HONOUR THE LORD WITH THY SUBSTANCE AND WITH THE FIRST FRUITS OF ALL THINE INCREASE.”²⁵ This being over, Mr. Olden is here, there, and everywhere; now advising, now planning, again standing *a la distance* and loftily scrutinizing a design in order to pass judgment on its execution.

The hours gradually slip by and it is now time to leave. The litter has all been swept away and everything is cool. Only Mr. Olden and one or two other ladies and gentlemen linger behind, expecting the arrival of the wreath. Far down in the western aisle stands the sexton, a rich glow of flame steals along the letters of the text and throws them vividly upon the gathering darkness. At last the wreath arrives and is put in its place. It is, indeed, very lovely! a little smaller than last year's, but more symmetrical—composed entirely of jasmines, cape jasmines and vine jasmines: they are all there. As it lays at rest upon the altar-cloth, the few remaining bend over it in silent admiration. It is while they are thus engaged that a servant enters with noiseless tread, and before he is noticed, is well up to them. Presently he speaks.

“I am sent here” he says, in a low tone, “with the hope of finding some of the ladies and gentlemen who have been at work here to-day. Mr. Price desires me to say that his wife died an hour ago. She suffered much, poor lady! And her baby is dead also.”

The impression made by this message is painful in the extreme. Mr. Olden remembers his words so lightly spoken last year, and as he looks at the fragile, beautiful wreath before him, he actually shudders, and partly believes Mrs. Price's spirit hovers somewhere about the air.

How varied are the emotions that enter into the human heart!

The dusky hue of the short twilight begins to glimmer in the church, and, in the distant corners, fantastic shadows rise and fall like weird shapes in revel. “Mrs. Price dead!” murmurs a lady, when she at length finds voice to speak. “How sudden!”

It is here however that the mistake is made. The woman has been killed by a gradual but refined system of social torture!

"What has the doctor said?" is next asked.

"That death ma'am," returns the servant, "was brought on by extreme debility and lowness of spirits."

"And how does Mr. Price bear it?"

"Very well, ma'am! considering, says the servant, whose idea pictures deep grief as an ebullition of groans, awful cries and stage-like tears."

"So, he bears up well, eh?"

"Oh! yes, ma'am, very well indeed!" And with this information the servant departs.

"Such is a woman's destiny," says another lady, as they prepare to follow, "to suffer and die for cruel man who is as heartless as stone."

"Too bad! too bad!" comments Mr. Olden, "never thought Price was that kind of fellow! such a fine little woman too."

"Yes!" resumes the lady, "you men will have much to answer for. See this case as an example: The man in his utter selfishness, marries a woman who is a queen to him, treats her miserably, and at last succeeds in killing the poor creature." And, as if her little drama, hurriedly sketched, affects her to tears, the speaker wipes the corner of her eye with the extreme edge of her handkerchief.

This is just the little bit of burlesque that *will* occur in the most serious and painful episodes. It is without doubt a very striking truth that people are wonderfully quick to condemn and disbelieve whatever they cannot understand. Show a new puzzle to man—tell him that such an effect is capable from that as a cause—ask him to try and bring about this effect with but his own ingenuity as sole auxiliary: he tries and fails. He tries again, and fails again. And after sundry other trials and failures, he is quite ready to maintain that the effect you declare is impossible; because—and it is the only evident reason—*he cannot understand it*. Thus it is with Mr. Price. He is a psychological puzzle which, being understood by few, is put down as utterly bad and unworkable. Whereas the man's tender solicitude for his young wife only equalled his heart-whole devotion to her.

Endnotes:

²⁴ From Felicia Hemans's '**Brandenburgh Harvest-Song**'.

²⁵ Proverbs 3:9.

CHAPTER V (GATHERED AMONG THE JEWELS)

Death's cold white hand is like the snow,
Laid softly on the furrowed hill;
It hides the broken seams below,
And leaves the summit brighter still.
—OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES.²⁶

Hear the tolling of the bells—
Iron bells!
What a world of solemn thought their monody compels.
—POE.²⁷

The next day is harvest-Sunday, and in the afternoon the tolling of the bell announces the arrival of the funeral procession of Margurita Price—dead after one short year of married life. The bearers file into the aisle and rest the coffin just near the altar with the wreath; and so, after all, the wreath is there at the poor lady's funeral. Poor? No! The hand of Omnipotence has stretched down and gathered another jewel to its harvest.

Mr. Price is there! he looks very much as usual, only a little more taciturn, if anything. No one knows whether he is suffering or not, but the general belief seems to be that he is *not*. The gentleman catches sight of the harvest text in all its bold array of gold and colour, and it is with difficulty he stifles a sob, and yet it is thought that he is not suffering. He sees the wreath and the waving palms—the ferns and other signs of thanksgiving, and he remembers last year's harvest, and the heroine of the wreath; then a clear picture of that still white face below the coffin lid rises to his eyes—was it not all to him?—whom on earth did he care for besides that one woman.

The preacher comes forth and does his duty—he intones a few set aphorisms, but what are they to him? He knows that man's life is short and he must die, but can that knowledge lessen his grief? He knows the Lord has gathered His harvest, but must he who weeps rejoice and be thankful? He is half-

tempted to give vent to the great choking sensation he feels surging up in his throat, but he knows his own heart, and he must silently bear his great burden. He will not surprise people—he will not appear mad—for this he assuredly will if he once loses his self-command. Who has seen a damned torrent boiling and bubbling, but completely checked by the quiet impassible barrier? This grief is surely the most stifling of all.

The minister makes a little digression: He tells how the lady has been married but one short year, last harvest time—the story of the wreath, of her kind, lovable nature, modest ways; and remarks how strange it is that just at another harvest she is departed to where all tears are wiped away and there is no more sorrow nor night.

These words partly soothe Mr. Price's feelings, and for a moment, he thinks of pearly gates and streets of gold, and the clear crystal river beside the throne, and angel-forms crowned with sapphire wreaths, and holding palm branches in their hands; their snowy robes contrasting brightly with the light thereon. His gaze wanders again to the text, and lo! it is all glittering in a flood of light, and the reflection falls on the coffin plate and that glitters too. The letters seem to be all of silver:

Margurita Price; aged 24 years.

Just that! How the rays play and flicker! And now he thinks again of the face beneath the plate, and the empty home, and the little messenger beside the mother—not even *that* little one left him! and through all this returning anguish one question swathed o'er all the deadness of his soul lays itself mutely before God's throne—'why! ah why?'

None can *see* these thoughts but they are there, nevertheless! He exhibits no outward grief—but is the bitter agony with him less bitter?

There they go, two by two, lifting the coffin now, and the mournful strains of the march in 'Saul'²⁸ roll through the wide spaces of the Cathedral, fill the aisles, falter in distance and echo through the windows dying moaningly upon the crisp air.

They have all passed out leaving the blowing ferns, and luscious fruit, and waving palms as joyous as ever. The organ stops; the minister prepares for the next service, and soon forgets he but awhile ago attended to a funeral; the procession goes to the grave and leaves there its burden, and straightway it departs. In the Cathedral the playful sunlight gleams and dances merrily over the text and decorations, and from where a laver of water stands it throws one of those familiar reflections far up in the roof, and as the wind ruffles the water, it whirls merrily, madly jubilant, but in that little cottage where once the gentle presence of Margurita dwelt are gloom and utter darkness.

Endnotes:

²⁶ From '**Daniel Webster**' by Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr., father of the American Supreme Court Justice.

²⁷ From '**The Bells.**'

²⁸ Handel's '**Death March**'.

CHAPTER VI (BEREFT)

I feel like one,
Who treads alone
Some banquet hall deserted,
Whose lights are fled,
Whose garlands dead,
And all but he departed!
—MOORE.²⁹

Two harvest-thanksgivings, insignificant in themselves, but a measure of the whole heart-history of life. Mr. Price goes about his daily avocations as usual. His reputation as a hard-hearted man is being intensified rather than softened. But when some other shall come—if ever—to get behind the cold exterior, perhaps one other, at least, may discover the general mistake.

In the meantime the very knowledge that Mrs. Price ever lived is passing out of memory. The keen tooth of scandal will kill others as it has killed before and as it is even at the present time killing. Harvest-thanksgivings come and go—changes occur in the natural order of things—the tide of advancement sweeps over the old, obliterates it, and asserts the new, and the Cathedral is the same as ever, with its lofty ceilings and indefinable presence. Its sunflecked walls, and ray-chequered pews, but the stories of life that occur beneath its hoary dome are untold, and if, perchance, some enquiring heart sets itself task to discover a few of the strange and pitiful stories of its care, it will find that even those few are beyond its comprehension, because the aims and ends of unequal strifes, sad vicissitudes, and burdensome cares, rest entirely in the hands of Omnipotence.

Endnotes:

²⁹ From Thomas Moore's 'Of, in the Stilly Night (Scotch Air).'

ASPHYXIA

I dreamt, but what care I for dreams?
And yet I tremble too:
It looked so like the truth, it seems
As if it would come true.
—Montgomery.³⁰

I am at a loss to relate what I am about to relate. How must I get myself in train with the reader's thoughts? Have you ever felt a mental weariness that no power of words can describe? Are you subject to sudden transitions of thought from the very height of hope, even unto the deepest depth of despair? If you are not, then try and imagine how one feels at such a transition.

Well, I am the victim of one of these sudden changes, and I am willing to do anything to be quit of this unspeakable depression—this dumb weight of my mood.

"In every extremity, help is near!" I suddenly bethink me that there is a little phial of laudanum hidden somewhere—fifty drops will just set me straight.

Happy thought! I find my laudanum—carefully drop one—two—three, reckoning as I go, to fifty—dilute them with a little water, and eagerly drink them.

My temperament is nervous! Ah! this, now, is something like comfort! what follows? Thought begins to mingle into indistinguishable disorder, and a temporary blank ensues—that passes, and now, I am a new creature in a new region.

I rise and float upward, downward, backward, forward, in a sea of dusky light. I've never yet beheld anything like it. It appears that I'm in a city of the dead, for glimmering about it, I see forms that I know, and stranger still: the forms I see are those whom I've known and loved—those whom I know and love, and those whom I would like to nearer know and love.

Why, this is pleasant! Now I drift dreamily through and through the air of this place in which the light appears to drop in large prismatic splashes, and with a hue as of scarlet seen thro' a sheet of glass.

Presently, I feel a presence beside me, and, turning my eyes, behold a shadowy form, the wraith of one I knew. Her hair

seems to flow in long shining strands, each particular strand, a strand of gold; her eyes humid, but not with tears, it is from the excess of light in them, and her whole face and form, shadowy and unsubstantial.

This, I feel instinctively to be my guide through this wonderful region—my wraith.

I am not mistaken, for her look compels my following, and I follow, and come upon a lake of liquid silver. I touch it to be sure it is silver, but it gives no sensation to my touch.

Above it hover gorgeous rainbows like the outstretched wings of angels, and from these shoot perpendicular rays trembling through the pellucid lake below.

I beckon my wraith and enquire concerning the region. Soon the answer comes:

“This is the heaven of memory, peopled with the wraiths of those we hold dear.”

“So all who are here are dear to each other?” I question.

“Even, so,” she returns, “but come!”

I follow, and drifting away, come upon a palace of thin glass.

It assumes the shape of a great cupola studded with rubies, and within its spacious walls, forms of exceeding loveliness pass and repass, making no sound whatever.

They move about so gracefully that, perforce, I ask how they move.

“From mere wish volition ensues,” instructs my guide, “let me show you how we can go.”

And ere I can add another word, I am floated beside a lambent sea, clear as crystal, whose depths are floored with a ruffly azure. A boat composed of one monster pearl rises and falls on the tide.

We enter: the oars are of beaten gold with ivory blades, but we do not use them, volition is dependent on will and away we go dancing merrily over the trembling waters.

“Where are we now?” I ask.

“Approaching the garden of sunshine,” she replies, “so called from the many sensations the air produces.”

“Let us enter!”

We do enter: passing through a portal of coral in a wall of burnished gold, we come upon a wide expanse where not a tree or flower is to be seen.

“Do you call this a garden?” I ask.

“Wish!” she returns.

And while I wish, around me rise all kinds of flowers, from the great spotless *Victoria Regia* to the fairy rose. But the perfume is so heavy that the air sickens under its burden, and just as we are like to be dissolved in scent, my wraith floats upward and I follow.

Again in mid air, and since wishing is all—I will luxuriate.

I wish into existence tiny stars of all colours and splendour—strange and unique constellations—showers of meteors—mimic moons—arcs convoluting in arcs, like Gregorian wheels—through all of which we float lazily and luxuriously.

The beauty is transcendent! Perfectly gorgeous! Exceeding all imagination can invent! Sublime!

“Is this the existence you lead always?” I ask.

“We have just what we will,” she replies, “we cannot will anything evil. To us, unloveliness is impossible and beauty is infinite, hence, we are ever interested, ever happy.”

“But what is the use of being here and knowing our friends are near us if we cannot ever be together?”

“Wish!” she says.

I obey, and in an instant above, around and below and a cloud of ethereal beings rise and fall, floating in air as we do. Amazement takes the place of joy and I again wish them away, whereat, they disappear. All, except my wraith.

“Can you leave me?” I ask.

“Never!” she replies.

“But why?”

“Because I am of yourself, your indivisibility, your *alter ego*.”

“How can that be?” I plead. “You may be my *alter ego*—my sweeter self—my more complete reflection—but, being as you are distinct and separate, how can you be my indivisibility? I cannot understand it!”

“Neither are you expected to,” she answers.

I may tell you that this is our first stage. Our happiness is to be eternal, and how do you think happiness could last except in change? Change, therefore, is infinite! There are a million million of these worlds, rising in degree from high to higher. This is the first, and we will take æons of centuries to

get through this, and when we are through—on to the next, and so upward—ever rising. We can never end for we circle after infinity.

I grow confused when I feel myself sinking—sinking—sinking.

“Where are we now?” I ask, when we at last pause.

“Below the river,” she replies, “behold!”

And as I look, three immense arches appear connected with each other. Their architraves are all of a clear, impressive azure blue, exactly like the sky after a copious shower, and from their convexity droop alternate globules and spatulas of light that twinkle like distant suns. The hues vary with every twinkle, now amber, now gold, now violet, and purple and green and crimson. The effect is past description—beyond words—beautiful. No conception, however vivid, can realize it.

“This is the court of Promise!” says my wraith.

“Of what promise?” I question.

“List!” exclaims she, lifting a shadowy finger, and, while I incline my ear, from beyond—I know not where, but somewhere beyond—comes a conglomeration of sweet sounds. It isn’t music as we conceive it, it is what one might conceive to be desultory echoes from other echoes of distant music. A dreamily indecisive murmur ever and again falling on the ear. Now scarce-heard, now a little clearer, then a little more clear; again a subdued echo followed by a moan that is scarce more than silence.

“Whence comes these strains?” I ask.

“Wish!” she returns.

I wish and am surprised at the effect. Myriads of little mimic orbs hover above and around, and radiate, and unite, and expand again, producing the sound I have but lately heard.

“These,” explains my wraith, “are aureolas of sound. They are sound in themselves, but enveloped in the light which you see; and by a strange process, they can produce and re-produce themselves in all kinds of variations. They have nothing to do but to revolve. They’ve no consciousness of existence, but play in an unceasing revolution, without aim or design; hence, the confusion of sounds you hear. A million of their notes in chorus cannot produce the volume in tone

given by the softest sound of a flute.”

“Do they ever cease?”

“No! they cannot. They are as powerless to cease sounding as they are unable to leave this region. See here!” And while I attend, I behold a hollow shaft of pure sapphire with two large diamond disks at its upper end.

“That,” explains my wraith, “is memory’s processional box. Enter!”

She touches a spring—an aperture of about six inches appears, and, like a spiral column of smoke, I whirl clear into the shaft and fix my eyes to the gleaming, scintillant disks.

No sooner am I thus, than a train of other wraiths, every one known to me, float by. They pass with an easy, graceful motion—all I knew on earth.

There they go! on, and on, and on. The same, and yet not the same. I can recognise them, but they are like clouds—silent and cold. I wish to be among them, and so I am, but I cannot speak to any although I try.

“What is this?” I ask my wraith, “I essay to speak to these, but I cannot.”

“Of course not,” she returns, “there is no connection by voice between you and any other wraith except me, and it is not necessary. A wish can reveal all the sentiments of their spirit; they never reveal their hearts for they have none, they communicate by the electric flashes of the spirit, which is so sensitive, that the mere act of wishing compels another to response of emotion, or revelation of thought or any other sentiment.”

“Let us leave this then,” I say, “for I prefer to talk,” and like two bubbles, we rise to the surface of the river and again float in the current of the wind. I close my eyes for an instant, and when I re-open them, I see in the distance a glittering, gauzy curtain, like the thinnest possible cloud on which the sun has impress the most delicate rose pink colour, imaginable.

“What is that?” I enquire.

“The web that gives us dreams of eternity,” she replies. “If you would have a hint of what eternity is, plunge into it.”

And taking the direction, swift as an arrow, I plunge and envelope myself in the roseate film.

What a weight follows! I feel as if my whole spirit

expands—as if an immensity of mind is circling through and through me in narrowing circles; at last it all concentrates into one clear, luminous thought, and I seem to feel a tangible impression of the following words:

The entire universe with its million million worlds is merely a transitory incident in eternity.

I was floating out of the glittering veil.

“Well!” says my wraith, “what is your experience?”

“Ineffability!” I reply, “Oh! give me relief? I am apparently dissolving in my own intensity—relief! relief!”

“Lower your thoughts to a simpler subject,” advises my wraith.

I make an effort, and at last am placid enough to say:

“Tell me of myself, look at me, how do I look to you?”

“Like one of us, bearing the impress of etherealness.”

“And I can never cease to be?”

“Never?”

“And you are my other self?”

“Even so.”

“Which the stronger—you or I?”

“Neither! Equality is the justice of spirit in this world, and the equipoise of its order—we are equal!”

“Come away,” I murmur, “let us have action.”

We drift lazily through the air, until we are poised above a wide basin of crystal, filled to the brim with a liquid of a deep bloodstone colour, lambent and sparkling.

“What have we here?” I ask.

“The wine of velocity,” she returns, “if you drink of this you will cleave upward through the air at a rate of a million leaves a second.”

“What!” I exclaim, “impossible!”

“Nothing here is impossible except pain,” she returns, “but try.”

I hover over the enchanting-looking draught like a bee that hangs by a flower, and drink my fill.

As I raise my lips I feel myself rising—cleaving upwards, cannot describe the sensation—electricizing is the only term in any way capable of giving an idea of the progress. The very core of my spirit is cold, aghast and sick at the speed.

Imagine the sensation imparted by the violent motion in a

swing intensified to infinity and you've a good idea of the awful, eager, ghastly rushing up, up, up, farther—yet farther and farther. Oh! it is eternity compressed into flight.

All the while my wraith never leaves me. Her beautiful eyes are as placid as the moon, her hair streams lovelily behind her, her every twirl and convolution is one of exceeding grace. How we *do* go! Cutting clear through the blue immeasurable immensity, like wings of lightning, ever, ever, ever upwards.

Presently a strange thought assails me.

"Suppose we enter another world," I say, and my voice sounds shrill and horrible from the pace at which we are going.

"Ha ha!" she laughs, "You've no idea of space. Space I can secretly tell you is the angel-name for eternity—void—endlessness! Ever peopled, never full."

I am congealing, I feel it. I shout to my wraith to pause but she cannot, and she says so.

"You will be compelled to mount until your spirit congeals into a clear, crystalline particle, when you will sink in perfect coma."

This process soon takes place, and with what velocity we sink, I know not. When I look around me and feel the old expansion of spirit, I behold, as it were, a forest of tall minarets, all seemingly of frosted silver, tipped with circular nobs of dead gold.

"These are the palaces of fancy," says my guide, "where one's fancies are radiant and beautiful! Go within their walls."

I obey, and with the motion as of a cloud that floats steadily down the wind, I enter, and hanging motionless amid the gleaming splendour, I dream what is indescribable.

My eyes are closed all the while—and now a motion begins as of a ship which floats at anchor—presently with a shudder, I reopen my eyes.

Can it be a dreadful transition? Yes—no—yes! I am in my own room, just recovering from the effects of the laudanum.

* * * * *

So, after all, it is nightmare produced by the narcotic. My

head aches—I am dry and feverish, and in the freshness of my new trouble I solemnly abjure laudanum for the future; thinking, ‘come what come may,’ any depression in life is better than a weird ecstasy in dreams.

THE END.

Endnotes:

³⁰ From ‘**The Climbing Boy’s Soliloquies**’ by James Montgomery.

NOTE

Should these stories meet with sufficient encouragement, it is the author's intention to publish more Scriptology, including 'The Midnight Marriage', founded on the Old Story retold in the 'Chronicle', and of much local interest, bearing on the legal marriage question, with local hits. And 'The Effects of Mesmerism', a story also of local interest.

DEMERARA, 1885.

