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A DESECRATED MEMORY.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS.

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PART I.

"ANN SLOSSON," said Miss Araminta, "I've been considering, and the result of my reflections is this: it will be flying in the face of Providence if you do not tell Reginald Paine your story."

Miss Ann gave a faint gasp.

"My story?" she repeated, in vague alarm, lifting two startled old eyes to her friend's face.

Miss Araminta nodded slowly and dogmatically. She was the acknowledged critic of Meadowville, being not only so versed in English literature as to be able to pick flaws all the way down the centuries, but having also made partial acquaintance, through a well-thumbed book called "*Les Malheurs de Sophie*," with the mysteries of French literature as well, which she unhesitatingly pronounced to be singularly puerile, tho at least perfectly innocuous.

"Yes, certainly, Ann Slossen," she continued; "your story. It is your duty to tell Reginald that love-story of yours. It belongs to him by rights now. The boy, with his marvelous genius, can turn it to account. The best writers always took real characters for their stories. Shakespeare, for instance, did it invariably; he stole them from other writers; and so, I presume, did our sweet Miss Ferrier; and there's that immoral tale of "Adam Bede," that I've just been reading—I am convinced from internal evidence that it is the history of George Eliot himself in the person of Arthur Donnithorne. Now, I have been thinking about this thing ever since Reginald came, and your duty in the matter is as plain as in house-cleaning or stocking-darning."

Miss Ann made no reply at first. It was very hard to contradict Miss Araminta in her own field. But a little rush of hot color came into her gentle old face, and she turned her head aside.

"Oh, no! I could not, I could not! I never could," she said at last, under her

breath, and suddenly got up and went away.

Yes, Miss Ann had had a love-story once in the dim, far past, and everybody in Meadowville knew that she had had one without knowing what it had been. But the film of tradition and guess-work had gathered about it, and hung over it as the delicate gray moss hangs about the Southern oaks, while Miss Ann never lifted a hand to unveil it to the eyes of any. It was too sacred a thing to be made the theme of common talk, and she kept it hid in her heart, like the withered blossoms from some dearest grave laid away between the pages of a bedroom Bible.

Miss Ann Slossen was one of the oldest of all the old maids of Meadowville, of whom there was a surprising quantity, considering how few the people numbered in all; but the fact that she had had a story, whatever it was, marked her out from the rest and lent her a certain rank among them, yielded to her by tacit consent as to one born to better things, since she was only an old maid by accident, whereas the others, as they frankly confessed, were old maids from necessity, there never having been any one at all to marry them. It was ages and ages since any wedding bells had been rung in Meadowville, and the women were reduced to reading over the marriage service occasionally in their own homes in order to keep familiar with it.

Meadowville, it need scarcely be said, was one of the tiniest villages in all the Empire State, being so tiny in fact that Time himself had overlooked it and passed it by altogether, leaving it at least a century behind in the world's reckoning. It consisted of but one short street running out at right angles with the highway connecting it with Newtown, which was only a little larger village a few miles away, but which to the few inhabitants of Meadowville represented the very center of commerce and activity. Existence was an exceedingly quiet affair at Meadowville; very reposeful, the old people called it, contrasting it contentedly with the bewildering bustle and stir of New-

town, which, besides its shops and its market, had a railway station all of its own, adding to its importance and noise and dirtiness. It must be *very* unpleasant to live on a railroad, the placid old dames of Meadowville said to each other as they ruthlessly ran down their neighbors' blessings by way of appreciating their own.

So inordinately quiet indeed was life at Meadowville, that it made a perceptible stir there when one summer little Reginald Paine was left by his parents for a few weeks with Miss Ann, while they were off pleasuring at Saratoga. An out-and-out country place was infinitely better for a child than a fashionable watering resort, the Paines very wisely asserted, and they were sure they could never feel safe about him left anywhere else than in this wee house with this dear old Miss Ann, who being a cousin of some cousins of theirs, was just near enough of kin to be always remembered when they had need of her.

Little Reginald came to Meadowville in holiday time for many a summer after that, until Miss Ann began to regard the boy in a way as her own, and to take an almost maternal pride in his development. He was a handsome, attractive lad, somewhat too showy in appearance for the old-fashioned settings of the face, where he speedily became a sort of little king, with Miss Ann as regent mother. The yearly advent of this autocratic little visitor grew at last to be the chief event in her monotonous life, the one thing to plan for, to watch for, to look back upon and to talk over, the entire year seeming only to come to a focus during the few weeks that Reginald spent with her, when she was at his service heart and soul, her best of everything being thrown at his feet for but the lifting of his imperious little finger, as is commonly love's way.

And thus Reginald had grown up, the confessed Lord of Meadowville by virtue of his beauty and his sex, having his dominions the more completely under subjugation perhaps, from the fact that he was among his subjects for too short a time each year for them to weary of his tyranny. But at last the time came when he went to college, and after that his visits were suspended for so long that it seemed as if Miss Ann were quite forgotten. The other old maids looked at her with sorrowful sympathy and despondently shook their heads.

"It is the way of men to forget the homes of their youth and the benefactors of their early years," they said, speaking out of that intuitive acquaintance with

masculine nature which Heaven seems generously to grant to spinsterhood as its only means of acquiring it. "Reginald is now become a man, and you can expect nothing else of him."

But Miss Ann smiled softly.

"He has not forgotten," she answered gently, with perfect faith. "No one forgets who has ever loved."

And then all of a sudden one day something marvelous happened. Miss Ann received a magazine—a thing almost unknown in Meadowville—directed to her in Reginald's bold, splashing hand, and when she opened it, lo, one of the leaves was turned down at the beginning of a story, directly under whose title, in clear, unmistakable immortalizing type, there stood these wonderful words: "By Reginald Harris Paine."

Miss Ann could scarcely believe her eyes. She read the mystic syllables over and over again, with increasing reverence and joy. There they stood: "A Leonidas of To-day." "A Leonidas of To-day." "By Reginald Harris Paine." "By Reginald Harris Paine." "By REGINALD HARRIS PAINE."

When at last her amazed old senses had taken in the full significance of these astounding words, she closed the book, went to her little bedroom and solemnly got out her best shawl and bonnet, put them on with trembling haste, and glancing in at the kitchen to tell her little maid that she was going out on very important business and might be late for tea, she took the precious magazine in both hands and started off to acquit herself of the paramount duty of imparting the news to Meadowville. Her soft cheeks were flushed with elation. Her breath came quickly and unevenly. Her gray eyes shone. She held her head high, and stepped with new and stately dignity along the boarded walk. Reginald Paine had joined the ranks of the immortals. Reginald was an author!

That was a wonderful day in Meadowville. The news set every old maid in it a quiver with excitement. To think that Reginald—their own Reginald!—But then they had always known that he was born to no common destiny. They had always felt that he had in him the elements of surpassing greatness. Miss Elmira Jackson had long seen something Byronic in the way his hair would not lie smooth on his forehead. Miss Hannah White had often been reminded by his shirt-collars of Dickens. Miss Araminta Hazeldown, the critic, had realized from the instant that she first set eyes on his

childish face, that Nature had molded him to become in after-years a Thompson, or a Milton, or perhaps even another Fitz-Greene Halleck. Miss Jane Barney thought the Grecian title of his story the most striking coincidence, remembering that she had declared there was something Hellenic in the boy's love of curious sports, one day when he was turning somersaults in her front yard at a rate that nearly gave her a turn herself. Yes, she had used that very word Hellenic, for she had heard Miss Araminta say it just the day before, altho Miss Jane confessed that at the time she had thought it only a polite synonym for a word that is generally written with a blank. They had indeed, each and all, so much to say about Reginald's early years, and the marvelous promise he had always shown, that Miss Ann hardly got through her rounds in time even for a half-past seven o'clock tea, an hour which she felt was so late as to be positively sinful had not the magnitude of the occasion justified it.

She could hardly sleep that night for joy in thinking of her lad; and she read his story early the next morning, as soon as she had dusted her little parlor and read her Bible; and then all the other old ladies had it in turn, one after another, in strictly impartial alphabetical order, taken by their Christian names so that the rounds might begin with Miss Araminta, who very kindly lent a copy of Pinnock's "History of Greece" to go about with it, in order that everybody might find out who the original Leonidas had been; and after that they all talked of nothing else for the next three weeks. They cried over it; they laughed over it; they quoted it on every occasion, unhampered by too strict a regard to its appropriateness. They copied extracts from it in their albums. They hinted to their venerable and half-palsied clergyman, whose long-familiar sermons had hitherto seemed to them the *ne plus ultra* of literary excellence, that a close study of its style and finish might not be without benefit even to himself, in the event of his ever again taking up his pen. They compared it with the writings of the great and honored dead (the old ladies of Meadowville only read the dead writers, not having yet caught up with the living), and felt unanimously that these all paled to nothingness beside this young and gifted pen, as stars fade and are forgotten in the presence of the sun.

They were still full of this inexhaustible subject, when Reginald himself, a lit-

tle taller, a little handsomer, and a very great deal more conceited than of old, suddenly re-appeared in their midst, and the cup of their pride ran over. If they had petted him in the past when he was nothing but a boy, they could not do enough for him now that he was not only almost a man, but quite an author. They installed him at once as their guide and mentor in all intellectual matters, suffering him to destroy their every preconceived opinion, and to revolutionize their entire mode of thought at one fell swoop. They accepted his lightest criticism as absolute and unalterable law. Even Miss Araminta meekly laid down her ideas at his feet, and invited him to walk over them rough-shod, with a self-effacement that confounded the maiden sisterhood.

"What am I beside such an authority as Reginald?" she inquired, with sublime humility, as the young fellow ruthlessly pulled up by the roots one after another of her most cherished convictions, boldly planting in weeds where he tore out flowers, and looking brightly at her all the time with his charming, self-assertive unanswerable smile.

It was Miss Araminta, therefore, in that increased assumption of supremacy over all the rest, so apt to follow upon any act of self-abasement toward the one, who shortly thereafter pointed out to Miss Ann that in withholding her story from Reginald she was denying him a God-given perquisite. But Miss Ann, usually so ready to be convinced of anything that any one wished to convince her of that it was a perfect delight to argue with her, now only shook her head and turned away with tears smarting under her lids. She could do everything for Reginald's sake, except this, and surely if anything on earth belonged exclusively to herself, it was this story of her past. What right had even Reginald to it?

Miss Araminta was effectually silenced by that look which came into Miss Ann's face, a look first of excessive astonishment, then of intolerable pain, and then of frightened and complete withdrawal into herself. It was as if a rose should suddenly refold all its fragrant petals at the out-reaching of an unexpected hand. Miss Araminta gave it up.

But Reginald was less easily rebuffed. His curiosity had been aroused both by that lady's words and by Miss Ann's scared, pained manner; and no sooner were he and his cousin alone together after tea that evening, than he besought her, with every wile at his command, to tell him what this story of hers had been.

But in vain.

"I could not! Oh, I never could!" Miss Ann repeated with a frightened catch of the breath, like a rising sob.

Reginald at last grew cross over her unwilling resistance.

"It is really abominably unkind and selfish of you, Cousin Ann," he said, pettishly, pushing away his chair from her side. "Here am I exhausting my brain hunting for some good subject for another story, and yet you, with one all made to my hand, obstinately refuse to give it to me. It is no manner of use to you, you know, and think what it might be to me! Upon my word, I shouldn't have thought you could be so selfish."

Miss Ann looked at the young fellow a moment, with a world of distress and appeal in her faded gray eyes; then, with a heavy sigh, she took up the Bible from the table and put on her spectacles.

"We will have evening prayers now, Regie dear," she said, very gently, "and then I will go up-stairs. I must think it over before I can talk any more about it."

The next morning there was no allusion made to the question under discussion, and in the afternoon Miss Ann put on her second-best bonnet, and stole away by herself to the little, empty, ugly church, and sat down there in the stillness to think.

When she returned, she found Reginald extended at full length across her tiny porch, effectually barring the entrance, and indulging in alternate naps and cigarettes. He half opened his eyes and looked sleepily up at her from under his black lashes as she came toward him. He had already forgotten his baffled curiosity of the preceding night, having a comfortable way of putting aside little failures, which went far toward preserving his self-love uninjured; but the solemn, intense look in all the little, old lady's aspect and manner, roused him in a moment.

"Well?" he said, interrogatively.

"I have been thinking it over, Regie," she said, simply. "Perhaps it was selfish in me, but I could not bear to speak of it. I have never told any one. It seemed too—too *sacred*," she went on, blurting out the word with a little apologetic flush for the use of it. "But I will tell you now if you wish it. Of course, I ought to tell you if you think it will help you in your work."

Reginald folded his arms comfortably under his head for a pillow, and fastened two interested, handsome, speech-com-

pelling eyes on her face.

"Of course, it will," he replied, promptly. "You have no idea of the start it gives a fellow to have a foundation to go upon—the bare walls all built, as it were, and his genius free to devote itself wholly to artistic decoration. Just go ahead as quick as you can, Cousin Ann. I am all ears."

Miss Ann suppressed a sigh and untied her bonnet-strings with nervous, shaking hands. Reginald did not offer to get her a chair. City courtesies are easily laid aside in the country; besides, he was so comfortable that it would have been a shame to stir. But he graciously moved his long legs a few inches aside to enable her to pass him and bring out a seat herself from the hall. She placed it just within the threshold of the door and sat down, looking out across Reginald down the straight wooden path leading to the gate, and folding her hands loosely together in her lap. The open doorway framed her in and made a picture of her.

"It was a long time ago, you know, Regie," she began.

"Yes, yes," said Reginald, encouragingly, "of course. I never supposed it was an affair of yesterday. How old were you, by the by? Sixteen?"

Miss Ann smiled.

"Sixteen? Oh no, Regie. Why one is scarcely more than a baby at sixteen. I was twenty-seven, dear."

"Twenty-seven!" echoed Reginald, incredulously. "Whew! You weren't really all that were you, Cousin Ann? At twenty-seven a woman is done for good with any love stories, you know."

"But I never had any before that, Regie, and I did have one then, when I was twenty-seven—twenty-seven and three months, for my birthday is in February and this was in May. It was when I went away one spring to make the Pendergasts a visit. His wife was my cousin. I had never been away anywhere before, and I have never been away since—except sometimes to Newtown."

"To Newtown!" repeated Reginald, with a contemptuous grimace. "That's like saying you do occasionally go to the street corner. Where did you go that spring? To New York?"

"Oh no! Of course not!" exclaimed Miss Ann, to whom a journey to New York seemed little less of an affair than a trip to Europe. "But I went to Ithaca. Ithaca is a magnificent city. I don't suppose there is anything as fine in all the state, unless it may be New York,

and the Prendergasts had a very handsome place, much, oh much bigger than this, grander even than Miss Araminta's. They lived most elegantly. They had several servants, and all the forks and spoons were real silver, and they had a buggy and carry-all besides a nice market-wagon that nobody need have been ashamed to drive in, and they had gas all over the house way up to the attic."

"Of course—of course," interrupted Reginald, scantly interested in these details. "That's all nothing. That isn't the story, you know. Go on with the story. Was it your cousin you fell in love with?"

A crimson flush shot furiously up into Miss Ann's face. She recoiled with indignation.

"For shame, Regie! You know my cousin was a married man!"

Reginald laughed.

"Oh! I forgot. That settled it for the cousin, I suppose, in those innocent, primeval days. But who was it then? Some one in Ithaca?"

"Yes. That is, he was visiting there at the time I was. It was the strangest coincidence, for otherwise we should never have met at all, as he lived in New York."

"In New York? Come, that's better," commented Reginald, gayly. "I couldn't take a great country lout for a hero, you know. But a gentleman from the city"—he interrupted himself, looking doubtfully at Miss Ann—"he was a gentleman, a *real* gentleman, wasn't he, or was he one of these brilliant-waistcoated, coral watch-chained Bowery specimens, I wonder?"

Miss Ann reddened again, and drew up her head with a quaint little haughtiness, altho she had not the remotest idea what Reginald's words implied.

"I don't know what you intend by a *real* gentleman, Regie, since there is no such thing as a *false* gentleman. He was a gentleman, of course, and he had such beautiful manners and such a taking way, that any one might have been proud of his acquaintance. But I can't say about the coral watch-chain, and I don't presume he had one, for he hadn't much money to waste on jewelry, altho he had the finest taste I ever saw, and I daresay he would have had one if he could have afforded it."

"And so he fell in love with your pretty face, Cousin Ann, did he? You were pretty then, weren't you? You've sweet eyes even now, and your features must always have been good enough, and country girls are bound to have nice skins in

spite of the tan. I daresay, too, you took precious good care not to give away your twenty-seven years, eh, Cousin Ann?"

"Indeed, Regie, I do not know that we ever conversed about my age, or I should have seen no cause for concealing it from him," replied Miss Ann, with gentle dignity. "And as for my looks, I wasn't given to pronouncing upon them much myself—no proper girl is—the I may say that I was not generally considered unpleasing to look upon. But I had a picture taken that very summer; I will show it to you. Maybe you would like to see the dress, too; for things are not made quite the same now as they were then."

Miss Ann rose as she spoke and went in search of an old daguerreotype, with which she presently returned. Reginald raised himself on his elbow to open the case, and burst into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

"Things are not made quite the same now!" he echoed, as soon as he could find breath to speak. "Thank Heaven that they're not! Gracious goodness, Cousin Ann! You were pretty, to be sure, but how on earth did any young man ever fall in love with you in such a ridiculous rig as that! Do you mean you really wore long sleeves with a low-necked dress? What a barbarous fashion! And what hideous sleeves to boot! And just look at that skirt puckered up about your waist till you look a mile round! And what conscienceless merchant ever sold you that outrageous stuff for a gown! Those are sunflowers all over it as I live! Life-size too, by Jove?"

Miss Ann was leaning over Reginald's shoulder, looking down at the daguerreotype with affectionate old eyes, moist with the memories of a lifetime.

"It didn't look odd in those days, you know," she said gently. "Every one dressed so in Meadowville. However, that wasn't my best frock. It was the one I used to wear in the afternoons on week-days when I had done my work. But I liked the sun-flowers; I thought them sweetly pretty, and so natural, just like those in our front yard."

"Well i 's no get-up for a heroine, that's positive," declared Reginald, with another peal of laughter. "It's too abominably unbecoming. I hope your lover never saw you in it, Cousin Ann. He would have taken the next stage away."

Miss Ann sighed.

"I had it on the day—the day I last saw him," she faltered. "But I don't think he regarded it as you do. He said that I looked"—she dropped her poor old-faded

head—"that I looked like a flower plucked where bees were thickest."

Reginald raised his eyebrows in great amusement.

"Hullo. He wasn't too primitive to make speeches, was he? Well go on. What was he like? What was his name?"

Miss Ann hesitated a long, long moment. To say his name aloud was like yielding up her very soul.

"It—it was Hiram," she answered at last—"Hiram Jones." The loving inflection of her tone lent the name a certain pathos of ugliness.

"Jones? One of the Floyd-Joneses?" asked Reginald briskly, kicking a tattoo against the clumsy white-washed pillars of the little porch. "He must have been. Jones is too awful a name with no redeeming hyphen."

Miss Ann stared at the boy blankly.

"A hyphen? What's that?"

"Oh well, it's just a mark of family, that's all. It's the American form of title. He must have had it if he was anybody. What family was this especial Mr. Jones of yours of?"

Miss Ann looked more puzzled than ever.

"Why as to family, dear, he was an only child and an orphan. Still he may have had other relatives; indeed, now I come to think of it, it was unlikely he should have had none at all. But I am afraid we rather neglected his relatives in our talk. We discoursed a great deal too much, I daresay, just about ourselves. But young people are often very thoughtless; and love, my dear," added Miss Ann with suddenly widened mental vision—"love, I fear, is *very* selfish."

Reginald allowed this great moral axiom to pass unassailed as of no account.

"Poor and no family. Must have been good-looking to make up for it," he said, idly flapping away a misguided bee that was buzzing hungrily about a sweet clover head just within reach of his handkerchief. "What did he look like, Cousin Ann? But never mind; I'll have to make him dark anyway as you're a blonde."

"But he wasn't dark, Regie. He was as fair a man as could be. His hair was as light as mine, soft and fine as silk, and it curled all over his head. He had the prettiest hair I ever saw. And his eyes were as blue—oh, as blue as anything."

"I can't help that, Cousin Ann, unless I reverse it and make you dark. One of you two has *got* to be a brunette. No man ever falls in love with a girl of his own type."

"But he fell in love with *me*, you know, Regie."

"Then he *did* fall in love with you, did he? So it was not a case of unrequited affection, blighted heart, and the rest of it? I beg your pardon, but I haven't heard the story yet, you know. Did he offer himself to you at Ithaca?"

"No, he did not declare himself there, altho I thought—I feared—I couldn't help perceiving that he had come to esteem me greatly." Miss Ann's voice was very sweet and low. "But I had to come home unexpectedly, because our hired girl took offense at my being away and leaving her to do all the work, and just departed early one morning on baking day, saying she was going to make her folks a visit the same as I was doing, and Mother might make what shift she could. So, of course, I had to return in haste, and when I bade him good-by he held my hand fast in a fashion I was unused to, and said that with my permission he should very shortly call upon me in Meadowville, as he had that to impart to me which could only fittingly be said under my own roof. And he looked at me as he spoke, and his look gave a significance to his words that I could hardly miss of understanding."

"And then the fellow never came?"

Miss Ann looked up, her eyes full of grave reproof.

"I told you he said he would come. How could he not come?"

Reginald imperturbably hit out at the bee again, just as it was settling comfortably down to its dinner.

"I thought it might be that that made the story, you see, Cousin Ann. There isn't any story to it thus far. Something has to happen. And evidently something *did* happen since you didn't marry him. Why didn't you marry him? You just adored him, didn't you?"

A lovely look came over the sweet old face that not even the ungainly bonnet, with its monstrous silk ruche and its flapping strings could spoil.

"No creature may adore anything but the Creator," she said, reverently. "But I reciprocated his sentiments toward myself, certainly, and, as I told him in reply, I felt that his request did me honor, and that I would be proud to bear his name."

"Humph," said Reginald, cruelly check-mating the bee by plucking the clover-head and thrusting it down a crevice between the boards; "it must take a precious lot of love to reconcile one to becoming a Mrs. Hiram Jones. However, some of those Joneses are uncommonly good families, even without the hyphen."

I say, Cousin Ann, was that the first time he ever came here?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Had you ever told him what the place was like?"

"Why, my dear, what should I have told him about it? It's a sweet, homelike place to be sure, and always was, tho less lively maybe for strangers than Newtown; but I don't know that I made any special remarks to him about it."

"You hadn't then. By George, how it must have struck him just to come on it all of a sudden!" cried the boy, striking his hand against his knee. "I am used to Meadowville, you know. I've been educated up to it by degrees, as it were. But just fancy a swell New Yorker meeting you first in your best bib and tucker in your cousin's fine house, and never imagining but what that was the sort of style you had always been used to, and then being suddenly set down in this stuffy little parlor here on a slippery horse-hair sofa that he couldn't stick to if he tried, to make love to you in a horrible sunflower gown! Dear, dear! I wonder what he thought! But why didn't you marry him, Cousin Ann? Was he too poor? Too wicked? Did it turn out that he was an escaped jail-bird or that he had another wife already? That would work out capitally. Say, was that it?"

Miss Ann had grown very pale. The young fellow's flippant speech made a sudden sharp discord within her as when a violin is rudely struck by an untaught hand and its strings jar.

"He left here that same day," she replied in a constrained, hard voice; "and when he left he took with him my promise that I would be his wife that day six months. I walked down to the stage with him and saw him off for Newtown. He was to take the train there that night for New York. The driver brought me back a note from him written at the station. I doubt if even you, with all your skill, could have written a prettier letter, Regie, tho as he hadn't any wafer by him, he had to be careful what he said in it, knowing that the driver might very well read it on the way back, if he chose, to enliven the time, and, indeed, one couldn't blame him if he did. It's a tedious way to Newtown."

"And then the wretch jilted you, after all, Cousin Ann? Was that it? How was it?"

There was a pause. Miss Ann moistened her dry lips before she spoke.

"There was an awful accident on the line that night," she said at last, growing

whiter as an old scar throbbed anew in the faithful heart that had been so sorely wounded a whole lifetime before. "There was a collision. One of the cars was completely wrecked. Ten people were killed outright—and—and two of them were mangled and crushed beyond recognition; their own mothers could not have known them. The people just buried them where they lay. One of those two was my Hiram."

Reginald sat up and looked at Miss Ann with eyes sparkling with interest—interest in her story, not in her suffering. He was not listening to it from the sympathetic side but from the literary standpoint. Besides, it had all happened so long ago that by this time he felt it must have come to have an impersonal sort of flavor even to herself.

"By Jove," he exclaimed; "there's a chance for the sensational! I never thought of an accident. But if those two couldn't be recognized, how did you know for certain that he was one of them?"

"Of course I did not know at first. I didn't even hear of the accident for some days. And when I did—he was so strong, so young, so full of life, I thought he must have escaped somehow—that he would still come back, or write, and that I should some day still be his wife. But I never saw him again. That note he sent me from Newtown station was the last word I ever had from him. He would have come back if he had not died."

"And was that your only proof, Cousin Ann? Didn't his people ever send you any word about it?"

"How could they, Regie? I knew nothing about his people, and they knew nothing about me. There was not time for him to have told. We were only affianced that very afternoon. And what was there for them to tell me? I knew it already. He died in that awful night, and he and an unknown companion lie buried in one grave."

There was a long silence. Miss Ann sat with her ringless hands clasped together, and two tears trickling slowly over her withered cheeks. It was fresh to her yet, that old, old past, and the memory of its short rose-time was passing sweet to her; yet the shock and bitter pain of its ending were no less vivid in recollection, and outweighed the joy. Finally she got up and went to Reginald and laid her hand on his shoulder.

"There, dear," she said, simply; "that is all my story. It is a sad one, and it was hard to tell it even to you. I should not have told it only you said you

needed it, and that it was selfish of me to refuse because of my own pain."

Reginald turned his head and lightly touched her wrinkled finger-tips with his warm, red lips.

"Poor Cousin Ann!" he murmured, suddenly realizing the part she had borne in her tale. "Poor, old Cousin Ann! It was hard."

Then he gathered himself together and rose, stamping his feet to shake his strong young legs out of their cramped position, and nodded his head sagaciously two or three times, with a brilliant smile at his cousin.

"I tell you what, Cousin Ann," he cried, joyously, "I'll work you up such a story out of that as you have never read yet. You can't think how inspired I feel. Just wait and see. And in the mean time, tell me, you sweetest, dearest, prettiest of all dear, sweet, pretty, little old cousins"—he came nearer, and, stooping his young face to the level of hers, kissed her coaxingly on brow and chin—"tell me, dear, couldn't we have some of those wonderful waffles again to-night for tea?"

For the next few days Reginald went about with a scowl of deep abstraction, wrinkling his boyish forehead, and innumerable half-sheets of loosely scrawled and badly blurred foolscap crumpled in his hand or protruding significantly from his pockets.

"It's going to be a stunner!" he observed confidently, whenever any one inquired of his story's progress, as every one did continually. "It's the best work I've done yet."

All Meadowville watched and waited with breathless interest. Here was a thing of fame—a second Iliad—being produced in their very midst, laurel springing into absolute leaf and blossom under their actual eyes. They were so near to it all that it gave them the sensation of being over-spattered with the dew of glory from some of its outermost petals, and they began to take on airs of importance and mystery, while they treated Miss Ann with greater distinction than ever. She alone showed no sense of elation in this sudden immortality that was being bestowed upon her. On the contrary, there was a wistful, pathetic look in her face, and something in her manner as of embarrassment and shame. She had done only what she felt to be her duty, but she could not forget that in so doing she had lifted the curtain from her life's holy secret and bared it to an irreverent gaze. It seemed to her as if she had been uprooting flowers from round her lover's

grave.

Eventually the last word was written, the last revision given, and Reginald, his manuscript neatly copied and ready for the press, graciously announced to Miss Ann that he would read it aloud to herself and her friends as soon as she could call them together. Miss Ann dropped her knitting and looked up at him in evident agitation.

"Yes, of course, dear," she said, hurriedly. "They all want to hear it and—and of course so do I. You must read it to us of course, Regie. I will ask them all here to-morrow."

"Oh, no, not *here*, Cousin Ann. Don't do that," begged the young fellow. "Get Miss Araminta to let us all come there. I never could do myself justice reading the story here."

Miss Ann sat looking up into Reginald's handsome gypsy face.

"But it was here that it happened, you know, Regie."

"Oh, well, perhaps," assented the boy, impatiently; "but it doesn't do to read *all* histories on the field of battle, you know. My voice would crack in ten minutes reading aloud in such a contracted, suffocating, little place as this. I have it all planned. The reading shall be at Miss Araminta's. She has the best house and grounds here, and we'll sit out under those old oaks in the front. They are really fine old oaks. It's as ideal a spot for the purpose as one could ask. The story will sound another thing out there."

Miss Ann gave an uneasy glance around her little room. Those four narrow walls inclosed the dearest place in all the world to her. She did not appreciate Reginald's objections. However, perhaps, the afternoons were getting rather hot, and the windows fronted full west. It might be cooler out-doors.

"We will sit outside certainly, Regie dear, if you wish it," she said. "Only we needn't go to Miss Araminta's. We can sit in my own front yard. There's a good deal of shade under that big lilac tree."

Regie burst into a laugh.

"It's a dear, old lilac bush," he said, merrily. "It does its very best to pass itself off as a tree, and gives itself the most umbrageous airs possible. Some day I'll write a poem on it. But to sit in your cramped front yard with the vegetable-garden just the other side of the tan-road—fancy Dickens giving a reading there, if you can! No, Cousin Ann, I can't have your applause all mixed up with the smell of cabbages and black currant bushes. You don't know what in-

sidious impressions one's surroundings makes on one. So my plan is the best, if you please. We'll meet at Miss Araminta's to-morrow."

WASHINGTON, D. C.

JUNE 20, 1889.

A DESECRATED MEMORY.

A STORY IN TWO PARTS.

BY GRACE DENIO LITCHFIELD.

PART II.

REGINALD'S will of course carried the day, and on the following afternoon all the old ladies of Meadowville assembled under the shade of Miss Araminta's beautiful old oaks on her front lawn, if one might dignify by that name the sloping ground stretching from the front door to the gate, and covered with short, coarse, stubby country-grass never mowed more than twice the entire summer through. Reginald had coaxed Miss Araminta's carriage rug from her (a brilliant blood-red robe which she only used on state occasions, spending the rest of the year in airing it on her back piazza), and having spread this in the most comfortable spot of combined shade and breeze that he could find, he threw himself picturesquely down upon it in an attitude of enviable ease, smiling affectionately at each of the gentle old dames in turn as they drew their conglomeration of chairs into a circle around him, and peered at him through expectant, pleased spectacles. They were not at all used to sitting outdoors in this way. No one of them had ever before had the inspiration to take a chair farther than to the porch. So what with the novelty of the procedure and the nature of the entertainment, they felt excited and fluttered from the outset. Only Miss Araminta, being the cleverest and having the coolest head of them all, was able to preserve her usual calm, tho even she rather overdid it, thus betraying that it was with an effort that she maintained it. Miss Ann sat behind Reginald, somewhat hidden from general sight by a friendly shrub, her head bent very low and a feeling of desperate strangeness upon her. She felt that it would have been easier to hear her story read on the spot where it had happened. It could not sound natural anywhere else. Miss Araminta, coming out strongly in her character of critic was, naturally, next to Reginald, the most conspicuous figure in the small audience, and sat leaning forward with head stiffly erect, and wearing an

impressive benignity of aspect intended to convey fullest encouragement to the young author.

But Reginald was not timid by nature, and did not show himself in the very least bashful or nervous under the present trying ordeal. He lightly turned over the leaves of his manuscript, smiling approvingly to himself as certain lines here and there caught his appreciative eye; then threw back his head to toss his black locks from his forehead, struck a still more artistic pose, smiled around with impartial and indulgent amiability, and began to read in resonant, dramatic tones that gave immense effect to even his most commonplace periods.

The story opened with a grandiose description of the house at Ithaca where Miss Ann had met her fate. Upon this description, Reginald lavished the riotous wealth of a youthful and undaunted imagination, ransacking the entire known world for one luxury after another, till for profuse and daring magnificence there was not a palace in the "Arabian Nights" to compare with it. The little old ladies almost stopped breathing for wonder and delight, and Miss Araminta gave low grunts of approval such as might be expected from an intellectual member of the porcine family, finding itself suddenly immersed knee-deep in a troughful of swelling metaphors, high-sounding, bombastic phrases, and an over-spreading flood of tumultuous, foamy adjectives.

"Attention!" she said, authoritatively, raising a mittened forefinger like a freckled exclamation-point. "There is nothing like it in Richardson, nor Goldsmith, nor in that new writer Thackeray; no, nor in all dear Mrs. Opey. Attention!"

Miss Ann looked more and more bewildered as Reginald's sentences rolled along. Her cousin's house, as it stood out sharply defined in her memory against a golden background of happiness, had fewer windows and only one piazza, and as to domes, turrets and broad marble terraces, there had been nothing of that sort about it at all. It was a thoroughly, comfortable house, she recollects and to her mind its best carpets, with their big bunches of vivid and perfectly recognizable flowers strung together with garlands of lively green, were pleasanter to the eye and to the foot than such mosaic floors as Reginald described, covered over with loose rugs to an extent that must make it a marvel if one could walk there without tripping. It was queer to hear of a

splashing fountain inside the house; it struck her as peculiarly out of place there as the village pump would have been; and she felt sure that Cousin Josiah would never have had one there to spatter harmfully over all his beautiful velvet chairs. And as to Cousin Betsey, she would have had a fit to see those gorgeous embroidered cushions that Reginald spoke of thrown so promiscuously abroad and would have picked them up and covered them with calico in less than no time; for wealthy tho she was, Cousin Betsey was never given to any foolishness, Miss Ann remembered, even tho she did use her silver forks every day, and had two silk dresses.

Miss Ann had still more difficulty in recognizing her cousins themselves in Reginald's ideal portraits, which seemed to her something like those of royal personages in court attire. However, she realized that it might not have sounded quite well in the story had Reginald depicted the real Cousin Josiah's usual work-day coat of yellow nankeen and his wife's queer habit of never doing her hair until dinner-time, always wearing a sun-bonnet in the early morning to conceal her head, as well as that other odd way she had of drawing on felt slippers over her ordinary shoes when she went up-stairs, lest her soles should scratch the polished wood. Miss Ann was glad on the whole that she had not described the worthy pair more exactly to her boy.

Then she gave a great start. Reginald was telling of some one whom he called Lancelot Stuyvesant, some one straight and lithe as a young forest tree, with hair fine and flossy and golden as a girl's, with a smile sweet as any siren's and with eyes bluer than a midsummer sea when the morning sun is on it. It was her lover, Hiram Jones. She could see him distinctly in every word as Reginald went on. Her simple child-like soul leaped back across all the years and she looked in his beautiful face once more and loved him again for his exceeding comeliness. She was glad Reginald had not called him by his name. It was considerate of Reginald, she thought. She could hardly have borne it had he pronounced aloud before this little gaping world of hers, that sacred name that all these long years through had never crossed her lips save when she was on her knees with only God to hear. She looked at the handsome, animated, self-conscious boy with eyes suffused with a grateful mist.

Suddenly Reginald threw himself half over toward her.

"And now," he cried, with a theatrical

flourish of his hand in her direction—"and now, ladies, permit me to introduce my Cousin Ann—my Cousin Ann as she should have been at the ravishing age of eighteen."

"Eighteen?" echoed Miss Ann, in surprise. "But Regie, dear, you know I was twenty-seven that summer. I told you so."

"Never mind," answered Reginald, smiling; "I must have you younger than that, or the story won't go down. Why, a woman is already an old maid at twenty-seven. Nobody would believe Lancelot could have fallen in love with you at that age. I'll wager anything that the real Lancelot never guessed you to be half so old, or it would have taken all the romance out of him on the spot."

"Quite right—quite right," interposed Miss Araminta, decisively. "Juliet was but fourteen."

"I have called you Nanette," continued Reginald, still smiling at Miss Ann with condescending exuberance of affection. "Pretty, isn't it? I don't doubt your Lancelot found some such softened pet-name for you too. The tender passion is altogether unreconcilable with anything so hideously uncompromising and up and down as Ann."

"But I was always called Ann—just Ann," Miss Ann murmured, shrinking back a little. "My parents said there was no more sense in giving a child a nickname, than in calling a table a tub, or a house a horse, and they chose a good easy name for me, so that everybody could spell it. Father's name was Eliphilet, and it had gone hard with it. I should not know myself as Nanette."

And she sighed softly to herself, listening with pained attention to the detailed fascinations of this dark-browed, velvet-eyed maiden whom Reginald was so boldly putting in her lawful place. He glanced up once at Miss Araminta.

"I had to make Cousin Ann, dark, you know," he explained, in an easy undertone. "You understand the exigencies of the case. Love follows a natural law of contrasts. I, for instance, when I love, from the very nature of things, can only lose my heart to a blonde—a blonde of the fairest type."

He tossed back his waving black locks with a conceited gesture. Miss Araminta said "Shucks!" but with a strikingly indulgent intonation, and all the other little old ladies, sitting bold-upright in stiff discomfort on the edges of their chairs, with their cloth gaiters tucked up on the rungs, out of the way of any possible damp,

smiled knowingly around on each other, as much as to say that this was a subject they could perfectly well understand, even without personal experience of it; and Miss Ann, leaning back more and more out of sight, listened silently while Reginald proceeded with an account of the courtship. It gave her a dull pain at her heart that any one could think she ought to have been so radically different from what she was, before Hiram could have loved her.

So Reginald's story went on to tell how Nanette was suddenly summoned home to her father's deathbed, and how Lancelot, as he lifted the weeping girl into the magnificent equipage that was to bear her away, had but time to whisper in her ear a promise couched in the utmost eloquence of passion, to the effect that he would follow her to the very ends of the earth, if need be, to win her for his own; and then as she was whirled away, giving him one all-revealing look as she went, he retired to pace the secluded avenues of the extensive park wherewith Reginald, in fine disregard of town taxes, had endowed the Prendergast mansion, dwelling with love's enraptured fancy upon the memory of his beloved's graces, and picturing to himself over and again the romantic little sylvan nest in which so fair a flower must dwell, and where, as soon as decency would allow, he should follow to find and claim her.

The scene then changed abruptly from Ithaca to Meadowville, beginning with Lancelot's sensations, when, stepping out of the lumbering old stage, he found himself in the heart of the little village, and walked up its one street to the small, square, log-like house of his beloved. No, surely this was not Meadowville that Reginald was describing now—this dull, dismal, stagnating, hideous little spot, repellently primitive and out-of-date, bare of all that makes the charm of lesser places, denuded of every grace, every embellishment, every extenuating or palliative accessory! Surely this—*this* was not Meadowville—their dear, quiet, home-like, reposeful Meadowville!

A gasp of astonishment went around the circle. What on earth did Reginald mean?

He looked about him, brightly, quite unconscious of the unresponsiveness of their faces. "My Lancelot is a New Yorker, you know, one of the high-stepping, old Dutch families. One can just fancy how it would strike a swell like that, accustomed to the top creard in everything, to be suddenly let down with-

out warning into skim-milk Meadowville!"

There was no reply, not even from Miss Araminta. The light had suddenly gone out of every face. Each little old lady sat more painfully erect than ever, with eyes carefully averted from Reginald and her neighbors. Some looked at the trees. Some studied the ground. Others gazed steadily off at the horizon; but no one looked at any one else. Miss Araminta grew a dark rebellious red, but compressed her lips sternly. As critic, was she not bound to disregard the misleading voices of any purely personal emotion?

Reginald, however, was too much absorbed to notice anything unusual in the silence, and he went on to describe Nanette's house as it first struck the lover's bewildered vision, the hopeless commonplaceness of its exterior, the oppressive, annihilating ugliness of the pitiful little parlor into which the lordly young aristocrat, clad like a prince, was ruthlessly ushered by a loud-voiced, coarse-featured, red-armed, familiar-mannered and altogether intolerable waiting-maid. Miss Ann grew gray about the lips as she listened. And now in came Nanette to receive her lover—Nanette in her every-day dress, the low-necked, long-sleeved, sunflower-patterned frock of daguerreotype memory. Was Reginald only portraying what he had seen in the picture, or was he drawing upon his imagination when he told how miraculously the girl's every charm seemed to have vanished in these new and disillusionizing surroundings, and how Lancelot, shocked, dismayed, utterly unprepared for the swift and utter revulsion of feeling that swept over him at sight of her, could but stammer out some faint half-sentences, which Nanette in her glad security mistook for words he had himself led her to expect, and to which she responded with all the frankness and fervor of her nature, scarcely waiting till she had heard him through!

Poor old Miss Ann, listening with beating heart and crimson cheeks, could find no word wherewith to interrupt the fluent reader, who, quite lost now in the interest of his tale, had wholly forgotten her and her share in it.

And so the cruel story went on, each syllable a stab in an innocent, faithful old heart, as Reginald told how Lancelot, sick at soul, and anxious only to get away from this unbearable place, and think out some plan of escape from the predicament in which his own precipitancy had placed him, tore himself from his newly

solemnity of the occasion, and after a moment's further struggle she rose to meet it. She had succeeded in thrusting self quite aside. She was first and foremost the critic—only secondly an inhabitant of outraged Meadowville. She could be just, even tho she was a woman.

"Reginald Paine," she said, with intense gravity, giving every syllable its full judicial weight, "posterity will have but the one verdict upon your story. It will be called an unparalleled stroke of genius. Simply that. An unparalleled stroke of genius."

But before Reginald had time to do more than make her a splendid acquiescent bow, while the rest immediately took up Miss Araminta's words and rang a sort of anthem out of them, there came an unlooked-for interruption from Ann. She had left her seat and stood before Reginald, her cheeks dyed with scarlet, unbearable shame, her gray eyes kindled to anger, her whole frame trembling visibly like a leaf in an autumnal gale.

"How dared you, Regie—oh, how dared you!" she cried, hoarsely. "You know it was not—oh, it could not have been so! He died! Hiram died! He was killed that night in that collision! Oh, there was not any doubt—not any!—not any! There were ten people killed, and he was one of the ten—one of those two who could not be recognized, or he *would* have come back to me, oh he *would*, he *would* have come back! For he loved me—he *did* love me—he loved me with all his heart, and I *know* it was not as you have said! Oh, never, never! You did not know him, Regie! it could never, *never* have been as you have said, for he loved me with all his heart!"

"Oh, but dear Cousin Ann," returned Reginald brightly, not a little surprised at her outburst, yet secretly gratified by it as a testimony of his skill; "you know I am only saying what *might* have been, that is all. A writer must show some imagination, some invention, you know. He cannot present just bare, every-day facts. Of course I am not saying that it was all really so, only that it *could* have been so. Don't feel so distressed. Don't look at me like that! Why I *had* to make a story out of it—you told me I might—and it was no story at all just as you told it to me."

Miss Ann stood motionless, looking at him with straining gaze and quivering

lips; then her look passed from him round the circle of startled dames, mutely appealing, questioning, imploring, expostulating with each in turn in rapid, passionate succession, and then, putting out her hands before her to ward them all off from her, she turned and went down over the uneven broken hill with hurrying stumbling feet, and blindly found her way out of the place and along the rough walk to her own fence, her own gate, her own porch, her own dingy, worn-out, old-fashioned, ugly little parlor, and shut and locked the door behind her, and stood looking around it with eyes full of a new and terrible doubt. This room had been a very holy of holies to her ever since that day when within it the only words of love that she had ever heard, had breathed their consecration upon her life; and it was there, by that great high-backed arm chair, as she sat listening to him so shame-facedly, so rapturously, so silently, that he had suddenly snatched her up out of it to his heart, and kissed her with a kiss that had lain warm on her lips ever since as the seal of an eternal pledge. She had not told Reginald of that kiss. She could not. That was something between her and her love alone. No one but God might know of that.

And there she fell down by the big awkward, uncouth old chair, and laid her arms across it, and bent her poor gray old head upon them, and rocked to and fro and moaned. At one careless blow Reginald had spoiled all her sweet, sad past forever. Over the one lovely memory of her life he had flung the poison of a horrible suspicion. He had stolen into the temple of her heart to rob its altar of the object of her secret worship, and hold it up before the world as a thing of shame and scorn. Whether it was so or whether it was not so, who could ever tell her now? Even could she know that her young lover had really died on that fatal July night so long ago, who could assure her now, even so, that he had died in changeless faithfulness to her, his love unstained by any of those unknightly thoughts of Reginald's tale? No, she would not—she would not doubt him! And yet it *might*—oh it *might* all have been just as Reginald had said. And now she could never know. Reginald's unparalleled stroke of genius had planted a lifelong thorn in her very heart of hearts.

WASHINGTON, D. C.