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It can always be depended upon and is pleasant to take.

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It contains no opium or other harmful substance and may be given to a baby as confidently as to an adult.

THE BEAUTIFUL COQUETTE.

By Laura Jean Libbey.

CHAPTER I.

"I wonder if it is true that coming events cast their dark shadows on before? To-day of all days I should be happy for Aurelia is coming home; and yet—Somehow there is a heavy oppression at my heart, a sense of coming evil that I cannot shake off.

"But, pshaw! I know it is wrong to allow my mind to run upon premonitions—they never come true," said Margaret Lancaster, a pale, slight young girl, turned slowly from the cottage window where she had been standing—gazing dreamily out over the wheat fields, waving golden under the rays of the June sunshine—crossed the room, and paused, with clasped hands, before two portraits hanging side by side on the opposite wall.

They were the portraits of two young and lovely girls—twin sisters—but as widely different in features as two mortals well could be.

The names carved on the gilded frames read "Margaret," and "Aurelia."

In the portrait of Margaret there was no mistaking the girl who stood before it, with her pale, sweet face, innocent blue eyes, and fair curling hair.

It was just such a face, with a pure white skin shining through it, that the old masters gave to the faces of angels.

But Aurelia! How can I describe to you what Aurelia was like? The artist who painted the portrait went mad for love of her.

Aurelia had a dark, dimpled face, with the deep crimson of a wild rose's cheek and smiling, pouting lips; dark, curling hair, and wine-dark eyes, passionate and wholly irresistible.

They were danger signals that might have warned men, but somehow they always courted the danger of looking into them.

A face like Aurelia's was never painted upon the pictured faces of angels; rather of the beauties of the gilded salons of Paris.

They were only seventeen, these twin sisters—Margaret and Aurelia Lancaster—whose past was so bitter, and whose future was to be the strangest that ever pen portrayed.

Alas, how cruel it was that the love of one man was destined to wreck the life of both!

How long Margaret stood there in silent contemplation of the portrait, she never knew. She started by a step and a cheery voice outside that brought the color to her face in a great surging glow.

The door was swung hastily open, and a tall, stalwart young man, with a fair, handsome face, came hurriedly into the room.

"Ah, here you are, Margaret," he said, cheerily, advancing and taking one of her little hands in his. "I have been looking everywhere for you. I might have known that I should find you here before Aurelia's portrait. Why, this is perfect idolatry, I should say, Margaret. I do not quite like it."

The girl laughed in a low, happy, sweet laugh.

"You must idolize Aurelia, too, for my sake, Gerald," she said, softly. "She is so bright—so beautiful."

Gerald Romaine bent his fair, handsome head and kissed the lily-white hands he held.

"Very generous of my wife—that is to be making arrangements for a place in my heart for another," he said, amusedly.

"But it is only for Aurelia," she answered, opening her blue eyes wide, "and for nobody else."

"Aurelia will, indeed, be very dear to me for your sake, Margaret," he responded; "but forgive me for changing the subject; I must tell you, hurriedly, that which I have sought you to say. And that is, that I cannot go over to the train; I have just received a telegram from New York which requires my presence there for the next two days."

start immediately. Father will be at the station to meet Aurelia. I am sorry, indeed, not to be here to welcome her, but it cannot be helped, dear. I have barely time to snatch one good-bye kiss. I must be off, Margaret."

A moment later her fair, handsome lover was waving her adieu as he galloped past the window, and was quickly lost to sight in a bend of the road.

Margaret turned away from the window with a beating heart.

"How good Heaven is to give me his love," she murmured, softly; "it was the one gift of God that I craved and prayed for above all others. I wonder, despite the fact that the wedding-day is already set, if I really am to be his wife? It seems too great a joy to be real."

"Margaret—Margaret, child! where are you?" called another voice. This time it was Mrs. Romaine summing her, from the old farmhouse kitchen, where all manner of good things known to culinary art were in a state of preparation in honor of Aurelia's coming.

"I do hope Aurelia will be glad to get home, but I almost doubt it," said Mrs. Romaine, seating herself on the cool, wide doorstep, and fanning herself vigorously with her gingham apron.

"What a deal of difference there is between you two sisters, anyhow," she went on, energetically; "you are as sensible as an old woman, Margaret, and Aurelia is that feather-brained little white hand came down suddenly over her lips.

"Don't speak in that way of Aurelia," said Margaret, in a pained voice; "indeed you hurt me, dear Mrs. Romaine. She is willful, disagreeable, gay, but she has a true heart—dear little Aurelia."

Mrs. Romaine shrugged her shoulders, answered never a word. Margaret would not have been pleased had she known what her thoughts were.

The story of the presence of these two young girls in the Romaine household was certainly a sad one—a few words will explain how it came about.

Sixteen years before the Romaines had kept the village inn down at the fork of the roads, and the hospitable, cheery place was known far and wide from the travelers who had chanced to pass night—ah! how well Mrs. Romaine remembered it—the driver of the stage, who always stopped there to change horses, deposited a traveler at the inn—a young and lovely woman—traveling alone, save for the two who were with her.

Despite the storm, Mrs. Romaine hurried out to meet her, and relieve the pale, slight creature of her burden.

"Come right into the sitting-room, ma'am," she cried, cheerily. "Lord bless me! it's an awful night to be traveling, and alone; are you going far?"

"I was to have gone to New York—but—I took the wrong train," said the stranger with a sob in her voice. "I—I was not used to traveling, you see," she went on pitifully.

"The hurrying crowds, the clanging bells, and deafening sounds confused me. I found out my mistake when the conductor came around to take up the tickets—they told me it would be best to stop off at the next station—stop over night at this inn, and take the early morning train down at the cross-roads for New York—and I followed their advice!"

"It was certainly the best you could have done," assented Mrs. Romaine, proceeding to unwrap the parcels or the heavy smocks that enveloped the babies. She gave a cry of delight as she saw them; never in the whole course of her life, had she beheld anything so beautiful as the two infantile faces turned simultaneously and wonderingly towards her—one dark—the other fair.

"What beautiful darlings!" she cried, with all a woman's rapture; "are they twins?"

A quick, sharp cry broke from the lips of the woman covering over the blazing fire.

Mrs. Romaine asked the question a second time before she answered "Yes."

"Of course you want a nice room with a comfortable fire in it and a hot supper," said Mrs. Romaine briskly. "I'll see that you have it at once, and I'll come and help you with the little ones."

"You are very kind," said the lady, laying a detaining hand on Mrs. Romaine's arm—"but I shall not require any supper—food would choke me—I want only—rest—rest—and the words ended in a heave-

But the children would like something to eat, wouldn't you, dears?" asked Mrs. Romaine, stooping and kissing their velvety lips.

A little later Mrs. Romaine announced that the room was ready, and soon after the trio were enclosed in it.

"I wish you would let me bring you a glass of wine at least," she said, turning towards the door—"you look so very pale, ma'am—like you might faint."

"I do feel weak," assented the stranger—"yes, you may bring me the wine if you like, I—"

The sentence never was finished; there was a low, stifled cry, and the beautiful lady who had been standing before the fire, staggered suddenly backward and sunk down apparently lifeless at Mrs. Romaine's feet.

In a trice Mrs. Romaine had raised her in her arms.

"My God!" she cried out in horror as her eyes fell on the ghastly face and staring eyes, "she is dead!"

But no—the heart beat faintly. The thread of life in that fair body was loath to snap in twain so easily—but there was a grayish pallor on Mrs. Romaine's heart.

Restoratives were quickly applied and strong brandy forced between the white lips, but it was all useless.

"Mercy on us!" cried Mrs. Romaine in great alarm to the housemaid whom she had summoned, "the lady is dying!"

CHAPTER II.

But even as Mrs. Romaine spoke, the lady's eyes opened slowly, and she cast a strange, yearning look into the kind, homely, pitying face bending over her.

"Am I dying?" she gasped; "tell me the truth, am I really dying? Answer me—do not mislead me."

"I am afraid so, my poor soul," replied Mrs. Romaine, huskily. "I have sent for a doctor, but the nearest one lives many a mile away."

"That was—useless," murmured the stranger; "my time has come. I feel it in my heart; oh, the poor babies—the poor little ones."

A terrible convulsion shook her frame as she spoke, which was rapidly followed by a second and a third, and, looking at the white, stark face, and the shadow of death was indeed creeping over it.

Oh, if the flickering flame of light might last until the doctor arrived. But it was not to be. The stranger grew worse so rapidly that Mrs. Romaine's alarm increased with each passing moment.

"My life is ebbing out," she gasped, speaking with difficulty; "but oh, I cannot die with the dark, horrible story I have to tell—untold. For the love of Heaven, send for a minister; I should not rest in my grave, though they buried me fatuously deep, with this on my soul."

"Oh, lady," sobbed Mrs. Romaine, pityingly, "there isn't a minister this side of Stillwell, and that's twenty-one miles from here. Is it anything you could tell me, poor soul?"

The strangely luminous eyes turned upon her, and their steady gaze seemed to burn down into the very depths of her soul—she felt almost afraid of being all alone with the dying stranger.

"Oh, God, if I could but trust you," the pale lips murmured.

"You can trust me," replied Mrs. Romaine with simple dignity.

"Take an oath that you will never betray that which I have to say to you—swear it, make your oath so binding that nothing on this earth could tempt you to break it!"

"No word that you may confide in me shall ever pass my lips in life or even on the threshold of death—say that—swear it!"

Mrs. Romaine repeated the awe-inspiring words slowly after her, and in the dark time to come she would have given her life if that solemn oath had not been wrung from her lips.

"Lock the door and come closer," she whispered faintly, "but first put the two little babes in my arms."

Mrs. Romaine did as requested, but to her amazement she noticed that all the mother-love of the dying woman seemed to be showered upon the dark-eyed infant. She was apparently utterly oblivious of the presence of the other child.

"Oh, I am so young to die and leave her all alone," she wailed.

"Please Heaven, she will still have her little sister," said Mrs. Romaine gently, but the woman did not hear.

"Listen," she cried, "the curse that falls on the daughters of the House

That is the reason, perhaps, that I have loved Aurelia best," she admitted piteously. "She, (pointing to fair-haired Margaret), will never know great sorrow, she will pass through life calmly. The sword will fall on Aurelia's head—only on Aurelia's."

"It may be kept from her for long years, but it will overtake her at last, in all the freshness of her girlish beauty, the horrible story will burst upon the world like a skeleton stalking forth from its charnel house, then—Oh, God! help my beautiful little Aurelia. I dare not think what will happen then," and the hapless young mother kissed the tiny rose-bud face, all the passion and anguish of love shining in her dying eyes.

"Listen!" she cried again, turning to Mrs. Romaine. "Let me tell you, while I have the strength, the most pitiful story that ever darkened a human eye, and show me whether there is peace and safety to be found on the wide earth, and justice in heaven. You will realize, when I have confessed all, that I am right in praying God in this, my dying hour, that Aurelia may never love; for she, the last dark-eyed daughter of the accursed race of the Lancasters, must never marry. Lend closer, while I tell you why. Oh, Aurelia, Aurelia, why must the sin of another fall on your innocent head, and blot out love, happiness and faith?"

The sentence was never finished. A violent spasm shook her slender frame, and her face grew rigid. How she tried to beat back the wave of death for one brief moment! How her fluttering soul clung to its tenement of clay, to do the bidding of her will, one terrible instant! But, alas! the words froze on her stiffening lips in a bitter wail. The vital secret, which was to bring a world of woe to so many lives, was destined to remain unrevealed until the fatal time she has foretold. She had fallen back upon her pillow—dead.

There was an experience in Rachel Romaine's life that always stood out clear. She never forgot how they searched for some clue to trace where her friends could be found; but there was not so much as a line about her to aid them in the search. So they put her in the little Rurichard hard by, and turned their attention to the two stray waifs who had been thrust so unceremoniously upon their hands.

The neighbors advised that they be sent to the home for foundlings, but this neither John Romaine nor his good wife would agree to do. "They have enough and to spare," Rachel, said John; "and we will keep the twin babies, and do for them as though they were our own. That will not cause us to love our own son Gerald any the less—bless the boy's heart!"

Thus it came to pass that the little ones, Margaret and Aurelia, became the proteges of John and Rachel Romaine, and fine sport they were for Master Gerald, their ten-year-old son, who was never tired of looking at the pretty white fairies, as he called them.

Swiftly, very swiftly it seemed to Mrs. Romaine—the years rolled on, and brought with them many changes.

The Romaines no longer kept the village inn. For years they had been domiciled at Romaine Farm, some distance down the valley; and here it was in this isolated spot, that the two waifs, their humble roof sheltered them into lovely girlhood.

But one event happened in those early years to cast a slight gloom over the household, and that was the departure of Gerald Romaine for college.

That was the last that Aurelia saw of her brother.

The time came at length when it was decided that the girls must have a better education than the village school had afforded them, for they were fourteen now. And it was the wide difference between the nature of sweet Margaret and willful, impetuous Aurelia became apparent.

When Farmer Romaine announced to them that he had made arrangements to send them to a boarding-school in Richmond, Margaret sobbed as though her heart would break at the thought of leaving the dear old farm and those who had been so dear to her; but Aurelia's joy was intense; she could not ask questions enough as to how soon they were to start, and when the day came it was the happiest of her life.

The first three weeks at Margaret and Aurelia spent at Miss Hulbert's "fashionable" seminary for young ladies, neither of the girls ever forgot. Margaret was timid and very shy of strangers, cried herself sick with longing for the sight of her dear old farm again, with the scent of the pink clover and the honey-suckle about it, and the dear old house where she had been born and reared to hear it mentioned.

"How can you ever bear to think of our little attic room and the stuffy parlor, as they call it downstairs, after seeing these magnificent reception rooms and the spacious grounds? Bah! But perhaps," continued Aurelia, flippantly, "I was intended for a lady, Margaret, and you were not."

"I suppose that must be the way of it, dear," returned Margaret, thoughtfully, thinking everything Aurelia said must be quite right.

In the seminary, as everywhere else, Aurelia was the best favored, easy, restless, piquant—her faults and follies were more charming than the other girls' virtues in every one's eyes. All the girls of the seminary fairly adored Aurelia, and Margaret was well content that it should be so.

These three weeks at the seminary were dark ones for Margaret. Aurelia enjoyed the new life immensely, but the studying, and the penmanship she wrote home every day, but there was never a line from Aurelia. And by the tone of Margaret's letters, they guessed at the farmhouse how homesick she was.

"I reckon I'll have to take a run down to Richmond, and cheer the lassies up a bit," only natural that they're feelin' cast down. They've never been five miles away from the old farm before, bless their pretty heads! Their Uncle John, as they call me, can set 'em straight."

The old farmer put his determination into execution at once, though

dozen times in the interim, declaring that he should hardly spare the time to go, for the clover fields down by the bridge wanted mowing, and he had promised to see some hands about hay-making. With great effort, his wife got him started off at last.

It was the noon-hour when he reached the seminary. Seeing so many lovely young girls on the lawn quite bewildered him. He stopped short as he was advancing up the broad, paved walk, and wiping his spectacles, peered eagerly about to discern Margaret and Aurelia among them.

Both girls were on the lawn at the time. In that instant two hands as cold as ice clutched Margaret's arm, and a horrified voice gasped in her ear:

"Oh, see what they are all making run of—run of—run of—don't look in that direction; if he should see us, and come this way, I should die of shame—I should, indeed, Margaret!"

And at that instant, in a voice as loud as a foghorn, the old farmer called lustily:

"Margaret—Aurelia! where are you, girls?"

CHAPTER III.

Farmer Romaine certainly presented a very ridiculous appearance as he stood there. He never looked his best dressed up in his Sunday clothes; he felt decidedly just as he did at his ease in a high starched collar and a cravat.

"For the love of Heaven don't let him see us," panted Aurelia, under her breath, with horror-stricken eyes; "let's run away, Margaret, and hide until after tea goes."

For the first time in all her gentle life an angry fire leaped into Margaret's sweet blue eyes.

"Oh, Aurelia, how can you talk so?" she cried, distressedly; "you grieve me beyond words—(you shame!)" and she tore herself free from Aurelia's detaining hands, and flew like a swallow over the greenward, throwing herself with a cry of joy into Farmer Romaine's arms. How could the girls laugh and make fun of this dear old Uncle John whom she loved with all her heart?

At length he called eagerly Aurelia, but to Margaret's dismay Aurelia was nowhere to be found. Seeing his dear old face once more was too much for Margaret; she clung to him with kisses and tears, beseeching him to take her home with him when he went.

"Bless this only a whim, child?" he asked, anxiously. "Are you quite sure, Mary, that you'd rather be at the old farm than here?"

"Quite sure," replied the girl, firmly, "do not leave me here, uncle."

He was not proof against her entreaties, and when he left Hulbert Seminary, Margaret went with him, to find Aurelia waiting to greet uncle John at the bend in the road—where all the girls could not witness it, she had said to herself. Her surprise to find Margaret with him, and to learn that she was going home with him, was great.

"I should just as well if I were to stay here any longer," said Margaret, piteously, "do come with us, dear."

"She shall decide for herself," said John Romaine, laying his rough, kindly hand on the beautiful dark, curly head. "Book-learnin' may do her a heap sight more good than chasin' butterflies round the old farm, eh, Aurelia?"

"I shall stay here, even though it parts us, Margaret," said Aurelia, drawing back from Farmer Romaine's outstretched hand. "I cannot go back to that dreary farmhouse, I would die of ennui."

So the twin sisters parted for the first time in their lives, whether it was for weal or for woe, is the story we have to tell.

For some time Aurelia's letters came regularly to the farm-house; then, at length, they became less frequent—when vacation time came Aurelia pleaded so hard to be permitted to spend it with some one of her schoolmates that John Romaine had not the heart to refuse her.

Margaret Lancaster's life at the farm would have been happy enough were it not for the slow flight of years that winged their slow flight by the face. She would have been inexpressibly lonely but for a new element that had crept into her life, and that was the happiness that the return home of Gerald Romaine brought to her.

It had been long years since he had parted from Margaret, and he seemed scarcely believe that the tall, fair, young girl who advanced to greet him was, indeed, the little Margaret whom he had left behind him.

Thrown constantly together during the happy days that followed, was it any wonder that Margaret learned to love Gerald Romaine with all the strength of her heart? But she would have died ere she would have let him read her sweet secret by either glance or word.

He was certainly a handsome man tall, broad-shouldered and muscular, with a cheery face and laughing blue eyes. The brow, from which the dark-brown hair was pushed carelessly back, was broad and high, and the thick, brown moustache covered a mouth that alone would have stamped his face, could it have been so, as honest, noble and true.

The love-story of Margaret Lancaster and Gerald Romaine did not have even the usual romance about it. Probably Gerald would never have looked upon her fair, pale Margaret in the light of a sweetheart if the idea had not been suggested to him.

Mrs. Romaine was the first to notice that Margaret's heart was going out to Gerald, and she was well pleased. She read her secret in a thousand different ways—in the sudden flush at the sound of his footsteps, in the girl's sweet, unnatural shyness in his presence, in the delight it seemed to give her to talk of him in his absence; and she saw, too, that Gerald was quite unconscious of it all.

She resolved upon a very diplomatic action; she would see if there was any possibility of Gerald's ever caring for Margaret; if not, she would warn the girl to never let her

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