THE EBONY FRAME

To be rich is a luxurious sensation—the more so when you have plumbed the depths of hard-up-ness as a Fleet Street hack, a picker-up of unconsidered parts, a reporter, an unappreciated journalist—all callings utterly inconsistent with one's family feeling and one's direct descent from the Dukes of Picardy.

When my aunt Dorcas died and left me five hundred a year and a furnished house in Chelsea I felt that life had nothing left to offer except immediate possession of the legacy. Even Mildred Mayhew, whom I had hitherto regarded as my life's light became less luminous. I was not engaged to Mildred, but I lodged with her mother, and I sang duets with Mildred, and gave her gloves when it would run to it, which was seldom. She was a dear good girl, and I meant to marry her some day. It is very nice to feel that a good little women is thinking of you—it helps you in your work—and it is pleasant to know she will say "Yes" when you say "Will you?"

But, as I say, my legacy almost put Mildred out of my head, especially as she was staying with friends in the country just then.

Before the first gloss was off my new mourning, I was seated in my aunt's own armchair in front of the fire in the dining room of my own house. My own house! It was grand, but rather lonely. I did think of Mildred just then.

The room was comfortably furnished with oak and leather. On the walls hung a few fairly-good oil paintings, but the space above the mantlepiece was disfigured by an exceedingly bad print—"The trial of Lord William Russell"—framed in a dark frame I got up to look at it. I had visited my aunt with dutiful regularity, but I never remembered seeing this frame before. It was not intended for a print, but for an oil painting. It was of fine ebony, beautifully and curiously carved.

I looked at it with growing interest, and when my aunt's housemaid—I had retained her modest staff of servants—came in with the lamp, I asked her how long the print had been there.

"Mistress only bought it two days afore she was took ill," she said; "but the frame—she didn't want to buy a new one—so she got this out of the attic. There's lots of curious old things there, Sir."

"Had my aunt had this frame long?"

"Oh, yes, Sir. It come long afore I did, and I've been here seven years come Christmas. There was a picture in it—that's up stairs, too—but it's that black and ugly it might as well be a chimney-back."

I felt a desire to see this picture. What if it were some priceless old master in which my aunt's eyes had only seen rubbish?

Directly after breakfast next morning I paid a visit to the lumber room.

It was crammed with old furniture enough to stock a curiosity shop. All the house was furnished solidly in the early Victorian style, and in this room everything not in keeping with the "drawing-room suite" ideal was stowed away. Tables of papier mache and mother of pearl, straight-backed chairs with twisted feet and faded needlework cushions, fire screens of Old-World design, old bureaus with brass handles, a little work table with its faded moth-eaten silk flutings hanging in disconsolate shreds; on these and the dust that covered them blazed the full daylight as I drew up the blinds. I promised myself a good time in re-enshrining these household gods in my parlor and promoting the Victorian suite to the attic. But at present my business was to find the picture as "black as the chimley-back"; and presently, behind a heap of hideous still-life studies, I found it.

Jane, the housemaid, identified it at once. I took it downstairs carefully and examined it. No subject, no color was distinguishable. There was a splodge of a darker tint in the middle, but whether it was figure or tree or house no man could have told. It seemed to be painted on a very thick panel bound with leather. I decided to send it to one of those persons who pour the waters of eternal youth on rotting family portraits—mere soap and water, Mr. Besant tells us it is—but even as I did so the thought occurred to me to try my own restorative hand at a corner of it.

My bath sponge, soap, and nailbrush vigorously applied for a few seconds showed me that there was no picture to clean! Bare oak presented itself to my persevering brush. I tried the other side, Jane watching me with indulgent interest. Same result. Then the truth dawned on me. Why was the panel so thick? I tore off the leather binding, and the panel divided and fell to the ground in a cloud of dust. There were two pictures—they had been nailed face to face. I leaned them against the wall, and next moment I was leaning against it myself.

For one of the pictures was myself—a perfect portrait—no shade of expression or turn of feature wanting. Myself—in a cavalier dress, "love-locks and all!" When had this been done? And how, without my knowledge? Was this some whim of my aunt's?

"Lor', Sir!" the shrill surprise of Jane at my elbow; "what a lovely photo it is? Was it for a fancy ball, Sir?"

"Yes, I stammered. "I—I don't think I want anything more now. You can go."

She went; and I turned, still with my heart beating violently, to the other picture. This was a woman of the type of beauty beloved of Burne Jones and Rossetti—straight nose, low brows full lips thin hands large, deep, luminous eyes. She wore a black velvet gown. It was a full-length portrait. Her arms rested on a table beside her, and her head on her hands; but her face was turned full forward, and her eyes met those of the spectator bewilderingly. On the table by her were compasses and instruments whose uses I did not know, books, a goblet, and a miscellaneous heap of papers and pens. I saw all this afterward. I believe it was a quarter of an hour before I could turn my eyes from hers. I have never seen any other eyes like hers. They appealed, as a child's or a dog's do; they commanded, as might those of an empress.

"Shall I sweep up the dust, Sir?" Curiosity had brought Jane back. I acceded. I turned from her my portrait. I kept between her and the woman in the black velvet. When I was alone again I tore down "The Trial of Lord William Russell," and I put the picture of the woman in its strong ebony frame.

Then I wrote to a frame maker for a frame for my portrait. It had so long lived face to face with this beautiful witch that I had not the heart to banish it from her presence; from which it will be perceived that I am by nature a somewhat sentimental person.

The new frame came home and I hung it opposite the fireplace. An exhaustive search among my aunt's papers showed no explanation of the portrait of myself, no history of the portrait of the woman with the wonderful eyes. I only learned that all the old furniture together had come to my aunt at the death of my great-uncle, the head of the family, and I should have concluded that the resemblance was only a family one, if every one who came in had not exclaimed at the "speaking likeness." I adopted the "fancy ball" explanation.

And there, one might suppose, the matter of the portrait ended. One might supply it—that is, if there were not evidently a good deal more written here about it. However, to me, then, the matter seemed ended.

I went to see Mildred; invited her and her mother to come and stay with me. I rather avoided glancing at the picture in the ebony frame. I could not forget nor remember without singular emotion the look in the eyes of that woman when mine first met them. I shrank from repeating that look.

I reorganized the house somewhat, preparing for Mildred's visit. I turned the dining room into a drawing room. I brought down much of the old-fashioned furniture, and, after a long day of arranging and rearranging, I sat down before the fire, and, lying back in a pleasant langour, I idly raised my eyes to the picture. I met her dark, deep, hazel eyes, and once more my gaze was held fixed as by a strong magic—the kind of fascination that keeps one sometimes staring for whole minutes into one's own eyes in the glass. I gazed into her eyes and felt my own dilate, pricked with a smart like the smart of tears.

"I wish," I said. "Oh, how I wish you were a woman and not a picture! Come down! Ah, come down!"

I laughed at myself as I spoke, but even as I laughed I held out my arms.

I was not sleepy; I was not drunk. I was as wide-awake and as sober as ever was a man in this world. And yet, as I held out my arms, I saw the eyes of the picture dilate, her lips tremble—if I were to be hanged for it, it is true. Her hands moved slightly, and a sort of flicker of a smile passed over her face.

I sprang to my feet. "This won't do," I said still aloud. "Firelight does play strange tricks. "I'll have a lamp."

I pulled myself together, and made for the bell. My hand was on it, when I heard a sound behind me, and turned—the bell still unrung. The fire had burned low, and the corners of the room were deeply shadowed; but, surely, there—behind the tall worked chair—was something darker than a shadow.

"I must face this out," I said, "or I shall never be able to face myself again." I left the bell, I seized the poker, and I battered the dull coals to a blaze. Then I stepped back resolutely and looked up at the picture. The ebony frame was empty. From the shadow of the chair came a silken rustle, and out of the shadow the woman in the picture was coming.

I hope I shall never again know a moment of such blank and absolute terror as that. I could not have moved or spoken to save my life. Either all the known laws of nature were nothing, or I was mad. I stood trembling, but I am thankful to remember, stood still, while the black velvet gown swept across the hearthrug toward me.

Next moment a hand touched me—a hand soft, warm, and human—and a low voice said; "You call me. I am here."

At that touch and that voice, the world seemed to give a sort of bewildering half-turn. I hardly know how to express it, but at once it seemed not awful—not even unusual—for portraits to become flesh—only most natural, most right, most unspeakably fortunate.

I laid my hand on hers. I looked from her to my portrait. I could not see it in the firelight.

"We are not strangers," I said.

"Oh, no, not strangers." These luminous eyes were looking up into mine—those red lips were near me. With a passionate cry—a sense of having suddenly recovered life's one great good, that had seemed wholly lost—I clasped her in my arms. She was no ghost—she was a woman—the only woman in the world.

"How long," I said, "oh, love—how long since I lost you?"

She leaned back, hanging her full weight on the hands that were clasped behind my head.

"How can I tell how long? There is no time in hell," she answered.

It was not a dream. Ah, no—there are no such dreams. I wish to God there could be. When in dreams do I see her eyes, hear her voice, feel her lips against my cheek, hold her hands to my lips, as I did that night—the supreme night of my life? At first we hardly spoke. It seemed enough,

after long grief and pain,
To feel the arms of my true love
Round me once again.

* * * * * * *

It is very difficult to tell this story. There are no words to express the sense of glad reunion, the complete realization of every hope and dream of a life that came upon me as I sat with my hand in hers and looked into her eyes.

How could it have been a dream, when I left her sitting in the straight-backed chair, and went down to the kitchen to tell the maids I should want nothing more—that I was busy and did not wish to be disturbed; when I fetched wood for the fire with my own hands, and bringing it in, found her still sitting there—saw the little brown head turn as I entered, saw the love in her dear eyes; when I threw myself at her feet and blessed the day I was born, since life had given me this?

Not a thought of Mildred; all the other things in my life were a dream—this, its one splendid reality.

"I am wondering," she said after a while, when we had made such cheer each of the other as true lovers may after long parting—"I am wondering how much you remember of our past."

"I remember nothing," I said. "Oh, my dear lady, my dear sweetheart—I remember nothing but that I love you—that I have loved you all my life."

"You remember nothing—really nothing?"

"Only that I am yours; that we have both suffered; that—Tell me, my mistress dear, all that you remember. Explain it all to me. Make me understand. And yet—No, I don't want to understand. It is enough that we are together."

If it was a dream why have I never dreamed it again?"

She leaned down toward me, her arm lay on my neck and drew my head till it rested on her shoulder. "I am a ghost I suppose," she said laughing softly; and her laughter stirred memories which I just grasped at and missed. "But you and I know better, don't we? I will tell you everything you have forgotten. We loved each other—ah! no, you have not forgotten that—and when you came back from the war we were to be married. Our pictures were painted before you went away. You know I was more learned than women of that day. Dear one, when you were gone they said I was a witch. They tried me. They said I should be burned. Just because I had looked at the stars and had gained more knowledge than they, they must needs bind me to a stake and let me be eaten by the fire. And you far away!"

Her whole body trembled and shrank. Oh, love, what dream could have told me that my kisses would soothe even that memory?

"The night before," she went on, "the devil did come to me. I was innocent before—you know it, don't you? And even then my sin was for you—for you—because of the exceeding love I bore you. The devil came, and I sold my soul to eternal flame. But I got a good price. I got the right to come back, through my picture, (if anybody looking at it wished for me,) as long as my picture staid in its ebony frame. That frame was not carved by man's hand. I got the right to come back to you. Oh, my heart's heart, and another thing I won, which you shall hear anon. They burned me for a witch, they made me suffer hell on earth. Those faces crowding all round, the crackling wood, and the smell of the smoke—"

"Oh, love! no more—no more."

"When my mother sat that night before my picture she wept and cried: 'Come back my poor lost child!' And I went to her, with glad leaps of heart. Dear, she shrank from me, she fled, she shrieked, and moaned of ghosts. She had our pictures covered from sight and put again in the ebony frame. She had promised me my picture should stay always there. Ah, through all these years your face was against mine."

She paused.

"But the man you loved?"

"You came home. My picture was gone. They lied to you, and you married another woman; but some day I knew you would walk the world again and that I should find you."

"The other gain?" I asked.

"The other gain," she answered slowly, "I gave my soul for. It is this. If you also will give up your hopes of Heaven I can remain a woman, I can move in your world—I can be your wife. Oh, my dear, after all these years, at last—at last."

"If I sacrifice my soul," I said slowly, with no thought of the imbecility of such talk in our "so-called nineteenth century"—"if I sacrifice my soul, I win you? Why, love, it's a contradiction in terms. You are my soul."

Her eyes looked straight into mine. Whatever might happen, whatever did happen, whatever may happen, our two souls in that moment met and became one.

"Then you choose—you deliberately choose—to give up your hopes of Heaven for me, as I gave up mine for you?"

"I decline," I said, "to give up my hope of Heaven on any terms. Tell me what I must do that you and I may make our own Heaven here—as now, my dear love."

"I will tell you to-morrow." she said. "Be alone here to-morrow night—twelve is ghost's time, isn't it?—and then I will come out of the picture and never go back to it. I shall live with you, and die and be buried. and there will be an end of me. But we shall live first, my heart's heart."

I laid my head on her knee. A strange drowsiness overcame me. Holding her hand against my cheek, I lost consciousness. When I awoke the gray November dawn was glimmering, ghostlike, through the uncurtained window. My head was pillowed on my arm, which rested—I raised my head quickly—ah! not on my lady's knee, but on the needle-worked cushion of the straight-backed chair. I sprang to my feet. I was stiff with cold and dazed with dreams. but I turned my eyes on the picture. There she sat, my lady, my dear love. I held out my arms, but the passionate cry I would have uttered died on my lips. She had said twelve o'clock. Her lightest word was my law. So I only stood in front of the picture and gazed into those gray-green eyes till tears of passionate happiness filled my own.

"Oh, my dear, my dear, how shall I pass the hours till I hold you again?"

No thought, then, of my whole life's completion and consummation being a dream.

I staggered up to my room, fell across my bed, and selpt heavily and dreamlessly. When I awoke it was high noon. Mildred and her mother were coming to lunch.

I remembered, at one shock, Mildred's coming and her existence.

Now indeed the dream began.

With a penetrating sense of the futility of any action apart from her, I gave the necessary orders for the reception of my guests. When Mildred and her mother came I received them with cordiality; but my genial phrases all seemed to be some one else's. My voice sounded like an echo; my heart was otherwhere.

Still, the situation was not intolerable until the hour when afternoon tea was served in the drawing room. Mildred and her mother kept the conversational pot boiling with a profusion of genteel commonplaces, and I bore it as one can bear mild purgatories when one is in sight of Heaven. I looked up at my sweetheart in the ebony frame, and I felt that anything that might happen, any irresponsible imbecility any bathos of boredom, was nothing, if, after it all, she came to me again.

And yet, when Mildred, too, looked at the portrait and said, "What a fine lady! One of your flames, Mr. Devigne?" I had a sickening sense of impotent irritation, which became absolute torture when Mildred—how could I ever have admired that chocolate-box barmaid style of prettiness?—threw herself into the high-backed chair, covering the needlework with her ridiculous flounces, and added: "Silence gives consent? Who is it, Mr. Devigne? Tell us all about her; I am sure she has a story."

Poor little Mildred, sitting there smiling, serene in her confidence that her every word charmed me—sitting there with her rather pinched waist, her rather tight boots, her rather vulgar voice—sitting in the chair where my dear lady had sat when she told me her story! I could not bear it.

"Don'e sit there," I said; "it's not comfortable!"

But the girl would not be warned. With a laugh that set every nerve in my body vibrating with annoyance, she said: "Oh, dear! mustn't I even sit in the same chair as your black-velvet woman?"

I looked at the chair in the picture. It was the same, and in her chair Mildred was sitting. Then a horrible sense of the reality of Mildred came upon me. Was all this a reality after all? But for fortunate chance might Mildred have occupied, not only her chair, but her place in my life? I rose.

"I hope you won't think me very rude," I said, "but I am obliged to go out."

I forget what appointment I alleged. The lie came readily enough.

I faced Mildred's pouts with the hope that she and her mother would not wait dinner for me. I fled. In another minute I was safe, alone, under the chill, cloudy Autumn sky—free to think, think, think of my dear lady.

I walked for hours along streets and squares; I lived over again and again every look, word, and hand-touch—every kiss; I was completely, unspeakably happy.

Mildred was utterly forgotten; my lady of the ebony frame filled my heart and soul and spirits.

As I heard 11 boom through the fog I turned and went home.

When I got to my street I found a crowd surging through it, a strong red light filling the air.

A house was on fire! Mine!

I elbowed my way through the crowd.

The picture of my lady—that, at least, I could save!

As I sprang up the steps, I saw, as in a dream—yes all this was really dream-like—I saw Mildred leaning out of the first-floor window, wringing her hands.

"Come back, Sir," cried a fireman; "we'll get the young lady out right enough.

But my lady? I went on up the stairs—cracking, smoking, and as hot as hell—to the room where her picture was. Strange to say, I only felt that the picture was a thing we should like to look on through the long glad wedded life that was to be ours. I never thought of it as being one with her.

As I reached the first floor I felt arms round my neck. The smoke was too thick for me to distinguish features.

"Save me!" a voice whispered. I clasped a figure in my arms, and, with a strange dis-ease, bore it down the shaking stairs and out into safety. It was Mildred. I knew that directly I clasped her.

"Stand back," cried the crowd.

"Every one's safe," cried a fireman.

The flames leaped from every window. The sky grew redder and redder. I sprang from the hands that would have held me. "As long as my picture remains in the ebony frame." What if picture and frame perished together?

I fought with the fire, and with my own choking inability to fight with it, I pushed on, I must save my picture, I reached the drawing room.

As I sprang in I saw my lady—I swear it—through the smoke and the flames, hold out her arms to me—to me—who came too late to save her and to save my own life's joy. I never saw her again.

Before I could reach her or cry out to her I felt the floor yield beneath my feet, and fell into the fiery hell below.

. . . . . .

How did they save me? What does that matter? They saved me somehow—curse them. Every stick of my aunt's furniture was destroyed. My friends pointed out that, as the furniture was heavily insured, the carelessness of a nightly-studious housemaid had done no harm.

No harm!

That was how I won and lost my only love.

I deny, with all my soul in the denial, that it was a dream. There are no such dreams. Dreams of longing and pain there are in plenty, but dreams of complete; of unspeakable happiness—ah, no—it is the rest of life that is the dream.

But if I think that, why have I married Mildred, and grown stout and dull and prosperous.

I tell you it is all this that is the dream; my dear lady only is the reality. And what does it matter what one does in a dream?

The Household Prize.

135 Adelaide St. W., Toronto, Ont.: "Your reliable preparation, St. Jacobs Oil, has proved a benefit to me in more ways than one. I have used it for quinsy (outward application) with very beneficial results, and for a case of rheumatism, where its action was swift and sure, and a perfect cure was performed. I consider it a remedy to be prized in every household." THOS. PIERDON, with Johnson & Brown.

Horrible Child-Murder Story.

Madame Laovari, wife of the ex-Minister of War in Roumania, was staying in the Grand Hotel in Paris since August 10th. She was accompanied by her son and a German servant named Anna Mielvitz. On Wednesday the party left for Bucharest. Early on Wednesday morning a workman attending to the drains which led from the apartments lately occupied by the visitors, discovered the corpses of two newly-born infants, a boy and a girl, both headless. Proceeding a little further he discovered the missing heads, which must have been thrown down the closet before the bodies. An investigation was immediately set on foot, and then it was remembered that the servant had been mysteriously indisposed, and had refused to see a doctor when her mistress offered. On the mattress there were large spots of blood, and stowed away in a corner of the room were found some linen, a table-knife, and other objects, all blood-stained. The table-knife had evidently been used to cut the heads off the two babies. A *post-mortem* examination proves that the children were born alive. A warrant for the apprehension of the woman has been sent to Bucharest.

Makes the Weak Strong

The marked benefit which people in run down or weakened state of health derive from Hood's Sarsaparilla, conclusively proves the claim that this medicine "makes the weak strong." It does not act like a stimulant, imparting fictitious strength from which there must follow a reaction of greater weakness than before, but in the most natural way Hood's Sarsaparilla overcomes

That Tired Feeling

creates an appetite, purifies the blood, and, in short, gives great bodily, nerve, mental and digestive strength.

"I derived very much benefit from Hood's Sarsaparilla, which I took for general debility. It built me right up, and gave me an excellent appetite." ED. JENKINS, Mt. Savage, Md.

Fagged Out

"Last spring I was completely fagged out. My strength left me and I felt sick and miserable all the time, so that I could hardly attend to my business. I took one bottle of Hood's Sarsaparilla, and it cured me. There is nothing like it." R. C. BEGOLE, Editor Enterprise, Belleville, Mich.

Worn Out

"Hood's Sarsaparilla restored me to good health. Indeed, I might say truthfully it saved my life. To one feeling tired and worn out I would earnestly recommend a trial of Hood's Sarsaparilla." MRS. PHEBE MOSHER, 90 Brooks Street, East Boston, Mass.

N. B. If you decide to take Hood's Sarsaparilla do not be induced to buy anything else instead. Insist upon having

Hood's Sarsaparilla

Sold by all druggists. $1; six for $5. Prepared only by C. I. HOOD & CO., Apothecaries, Lowell, Mass.

100 Doses One Dollar

English as She are Spoke.

In a hotel not 100 miles from the top of the Rigi, the following announcement gives great satisfaction: "Misters the venerable voyagers are advertised that when the sun him rise a horn will be blowed." That announcement sufficiently prepares the visitor for the following entry in the wine list: "In this hotel the wines leave the traveler nothing to hope for."

He Wanted to be Sure.

"I beg your pardon," remarked a man on his way home at 3 a.m.; "are you a policeman?"

"Yes, sir," responded the officer confidently.

"Excuse me," continued the man. "I wasn't sure, seeing you were awake."

"August Flower"

How does he feel?—He feels cranky, and is constantly experimenting, dieting himself, adopting strange notions, and changing the cooking, the dishes, the hours, and manner of his eating—**August Flower the Remedy.**

How does he feel?—He feels at times a gnawing, voracious, insatiable appetite, wholly unaccountable, unnatural and unhealthy.—**August Flower the Remedy.**

How does he feel?—He feels no desire to go to the table and a grumbling, fault-finding, over-nicety about what is set before him when he is there—**August Flower the Remedy.**

How does he feel?—He feels after a spell of this abnormal appetite an utter abhorrence, loathing, and detestation of food; as if a mouthful would kill him—**August Flower the Remedy.**

How does he feel?—He has irregular bowels and peculiar stools—**August Flower the Remedy.**

If we had no faults of our own we would not take so much pleasure in remarking those of others.

It is not true that the world hates piety. The modest and unobtrusive piety which fills the heart with all human charities and makes a man gentle to others and severe to himself is an object of universal love and veneration. But mankind hates the lust of power when it is veiled under the garb of piety; they hate canting and hypocrisy; they hate advertisers and quacks in piety; they love to tear folly and impudence from the altar which should be a sanctuary only for the wretched and the good.

THIRTY YEARS.

Johnston, N. B., March 11, 1889.

"I was troubled for thirty years with pains in my side, which increased and became very bad. I used

ST. JACOBS OIL

and it completely cured. I give it all praise."

MRS. WM. RYDER.

"ALL RIGHT! ST. JACOBS OIL DID IT."