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Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
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# **Homestead on the Hillside**

Mary Jane Holmes

# Imprint

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# THE HOMESTEAD ON THE HILLSIDE.

## CHAPTER I.

### MRS. HAMILTON.

For many years the broad, rich acres, and old-fashioned, massive building known as "The Homestead on the Hillside," had passed successively from father to son, until at last it belonged by right of inheritance to Ernest Hamilton. Neither time nor expense had been spared in beautifying and embellishing both house and grounds, and at the time of which we are speaking there was not for miles around so lovely a spot as was the shady old homestead.

It stood at some distance from the road, and on the bright green lawn in front were many majestic forest trees, on which had fallen the lights and shadows of more than a century; and under whose widespreading branches oft, in the olden time, the Indian warrior had paused from the chase until the noonday heat was passed. Leading from the street to the house was a wide, graveled walk bordered with box, and peeping out from the wilderness of vines and climbing roses were the white walls of the huge building, which was surrounded on all sides by a double piazza.

Many and hallowed were the associations connected with that old homestead. On the curiously-carved seats beneath the tall shade trees were cut the names of some who there had lived, and loved, and passed away. Through the little gate at the foot of the garden and just across the brooklet, whose clear waters leaped and laughed in the glad sunshine, and then went dancing away in the woodland below, was a quiet spot, where gracefully the willow tree was bending, where the wild sweetbrier was blooming, and where, too, lay sleeping those who once gathered round the hearthstone and basked in the sunlight which ever seemed resting upon the Homestead on the Hillside.

But a darker day was coming; a night was approaching when a deep gloom would overshadow the homestead and the loved ones within its borders. The servants, ever superstitious, now whispered

mysteriously that the spirits of the departed returned nightly to their old accustomed places, and that dusky hands from the graves of the slumbering dead were uplifted, as if to warn the master of the domain of the desolation; which was to come. For more than a year the wife of Ernest Hamilton had been dying—slowly, surely dying—and though when the skies were brightest and the sunshine warmest she ever seemed better, each morning's light still revealed some fresh ravage the disease had made, until at last there was no hope, and the anxious group which watched her knew full well that ere long among them would be a vacant chair, and in the family burying ground an added grave.

One evening Mrs. Hamilton seemed more than usually restless, and requested her daughters to leave her, that she might compose herself to sleep. Scarcely was she alone when with cat-like tread there glided through the doorway the dark figure of a woman, who advanced toward the bedside, noiselessly as a serpent would steal to his ambush. She was apparently forty-five years of age, and dressed in deep mourning, which seemed to increase the marble whiteness of her face. Her eyes, large, black, and glittering, fastened themselves upon, the invalid with a gaze so intense that Mrs. Hamilton's hand involuntarily sought the bell-rope, to summon some one else to her room.

But ere the bell was rung a strangely sweet, musical voice fell on her ear, and arrested her movements. "Pardon me for intruding," said the stranger, "and suffer me to introduce myself. I am Mrs. Carter, who not long since removed to the village. I have heard of your illness, and wishing to render you any assistance in my power, I have ventured, unannounced, into your presence, hoping that I at least am not unwelcome."

Mrs. Hamilton had heard of a widow lady, who with an only daughter had recently removed to the village, which lay at the foot of the long hill on which stood the old homestead. She had heard, too, that Mrs. Carter, though rather singular in some respects, was unusually benevolent, spending much time in visiting the sick and needy, and, as far as possible, ministering to their comfort.

Extending her hand, she said, "I know you by reputation, Mrs. Carter, and feel greatly pleased that you have thought to visit me. Pray be seated."

This last invitation was superfluous, for with the air of a person entirely at home, the lady had seated herself, and as the room was rather warm, she threw back her bonnet, disclosing to view a mass of rich brown hair, which made her look several years younger than she really was. Nothing could be more apparently kind and sincere than were her words of sympathy, nothing more soothing than the sound of her voice; and when she for a moment raised Mrs. Hamilton, while she adjusted her pillows, the sick woman declared that never before had any one done it so gently or so well.

Mrs. Carter was just resuming her seat when in the adjoining hall there was the sound of a heavy tread, and had Mrs. Hamilton been at all suspicious of her visitor she would have wondered at the flush which deepened on her cheek when the door opened and Mr. Hamilton stood in their midst. On seeing a stranger he turned to leave, but his wife immediately introduced him, and seating himself upon the sofa, he remarked, "I have seen you frequently in church, Mrs. Carter, but I believe I have never spoken with you before."

A peculiar expression flitted over her features at these words, an expression which Mr. Hamilton noticed, and which awoke remembrances of something unpleasant, though he could not tell what.

"Where have I seen her before?" thought he, as she bade them good night, promising to come again and stay a longer time. "Where have I seen her before?" and then involuntarily his thoughts went back to the time, years and years ago, when, a wild young man in college, he had thoughtlessly trifled with the handsome daughter of his landlady. Even now he seemed to hear her last words, as he bade her farewell: "You may go, Ernest Hamilton, and forget me if you can, but Luella does not so easily forget; and remember, when least you expect it, we shall meet again."

Could this strange being, with honeyed words and winning ways, be that fiery, vindictive girl? Impossible!—and satisfied with this conclusion Mr. Hamilton resumed his evening paper.



## CHAPTER II.

### LENORA AND HER MOTHER.

From the windows of a small, white cottage, at the extremity of Glenwood village, Lenora Carter watched for her mother's return. "She stays long," thought she, "but it bodes success to her plan; though when did she undertake a thing and fail!"

The fall of the gatelatch was heard, and in a moment Mrs. Carter was with her daughter, whose first exclamation was, "What a little eternity you've been gone! Did you renew your early vows to the man?"

"I've no vows to renew," answered Mrs. Carter, "but I've paved the way well, and got invited to call again."

"Oh, capital!" said Lenora. "It takes you, mother, to do up things, after all; but, really, was Mrs. Hamilton pleased with you?"

"Judging by the pressure of her hand when she bade me good-by I should say she was," answered Mrs. Carter; and Lenora continued: "Did you see old moneybags?"

"Lenora, child, you must not speak so disrespectfully of Mr. Hamilton," said Mrs. Carter.

"I beg your pardon," answered Lenora, while her mother continued: "I saw him, but do not think he recognized me; and perhaps it is as well that he should not, until I have made myself indispensable to him and his family."

"Which you will never do with the haughty Mag, I am sure," said Lenora; "but tell me, is the interior of the house as handsome as the exterior?"

"Far more so," was the reply; and Mrs. Carter proceeded to enumerate the many costly articles of furniture she had seen.

She was interrupted by Lenora, who asked, "How long, think you, will the incumbrance live?"

"Lenora," said Mrs. Carter, "you shall not talk so. No one wishes Mrs. Hamilton to die; but if such an afflictive dispensation does occur, I trust we shall all be resigned."

"Oh, I keep forgetting that you are acting the part of a resigned widow; but I, thank fortune, have no part to act, and can say what I please."

"And spoil all our plans, too, by your foolish babbling," interposed Mrs. Carter.

"Let me alone for that," answered Lenora. "I haven't been trained by such a mother for nothing. But, seriously, how is Mrs. Hamilton's health?"

"She is very low, and cannot possibly live long," was the reply.

Here there was a pause in the conversation, during which we will take the opportunity of introducing more fully to our readers the estimable Mrs. Carter and her daughter. Mr. Hamilton was right when he associated the resigned widow with his old flame, Luella Blackburn, whom he had never seriously thought of marrying, though by way of pastime he had frequently teased, tormented, and flattered her. Luella was ambitious, artful, and designing. Wealth and position was the goal at which she aimed. Both of these she knew Ernest Hamilton possessed, and she had felt greatly pleased at his evident preference. When, therefore, at the end of his college course he left her with a few commonplace remarks, such as he would have spoken to any familiar acquaintance, her rage knew no bounds; and in the anger of the moment she resolved, sooner or later, to be revenged upon him.

Years, however, passed on, and a man whom she thought wealthy offered her his hand. She accepted it, and found, too late, that she was wedded to poverty. This aroused the evil of her nature to such an extent that her husband's life became one of great unhappiness, and four years after Lenora's birth he left her. Several years later she succeeded in procuring a divorce, although she still retained his name. Recently she had heard of his death, and about the same time, too, she heard that the wife of Ernest Hamilton was dying. Suddenly a wild scheme entered her mind. She would remove to the village of Glenwood, would ingratiate herself into the

favor of Mrs. Hamilton, win her confidence and love, and then when she was dead the rest she fancied would be an easy matter, for she knew that Mr. Hamilton was weak and easily flattered.

For several weeks they had been in Glenwood, impatiently waiting an opportunity for making the acquaintance of the Hamiltons. But as neither Margaret nor Carrie called, Lenora became discouraged, and one day exclaimed, "I should like to know what you are going to do. There is no probability of that proud Mag's calling on me. How I hate her, with her big black eyes and hateful ways!"

"Patience, patience," said Mrs. Carter, "I'll manage it; as Mrs. Hamilton is sick, it will be perfectly proper for me to go and see her," and then was planned the visit which we have described.

"Oh, won't it be grand!" said Lenora that night, as she sat sipping her tea. "Won't it be grand, if you do succeed, and won't I lord it over Miss Margaret! As for that little white-faced Carrie, she's too insipid for one to trouble herself about, and I dare say thinks you a very nice woman, for how can her Sabbath-school teacher be otherwise;" and a satirical laugh echoed through the room. Suddenly springing up, Lenora glanced at herself in the mirror, and turning to her mother, said, "Did you hear when Walter is expected — and am I so very ugly looking?"

While Mrs. Carter is preparing an answer to the first question, we, for the sake of our readers, will answer the last one. Lenora was a little dark-looking girl about eighteen years of age. Her eyes were black, her face was black, and her hair was black, standing out from her head in short, thick curls, which gave to her features a strange witch-like expression. From her mother she had inherited the same sweet, cooing voice, the same gliding, noiseless footsteps, which had led some of their acquaintance to accuse them of what, in the days of New England witchcraft, would have secured their passport to another world.

Lenora had spoken truthfully when she said that she had not been trained by such a mother for nothing, for whatever of evil appeared in her conduct was more the result of her mother's training than of a naturally bad disposition. At times her mother petted and caressed her, and again, in a fit of ill-humor, drove her from the room, taunting her with the strong resemblance which she bore to

the man whom she had once called father! On such occasions Lenora was never at a loss for words, and the scenes which sometimes occurred were too disgraceful for repetition. On one subject, however, they were united, and that was in their efforts to become inmates of the homestead on the hillside. In the accomplishment of this Lenora had a threefold object: first, it would secure her a luxuriant home; second, she would be thrown in the way of Walter Hamilton, who was about finishing his college course; and last, though not least, it would be such a triumph over Margaret, who, she fancied, treated her with cold indifference.

Long after the hour of midnight was rung from the village clock, the widow and her daughter sat by their fireside, forming plans for the future, and when at last they retired to sleep it was to dream of funeral processions, bridal favors, stepchildren, half-sisters, and double connections all around.

## CHAPTER III.

### ONE STEP TOWARD THE HOMESTEAD.

Weeks passed on, and so necessary to the comfort of the invalid did the presence of Mrs. Carter become, that at last, by particular request, she took up her abode at the homestead, becoming Mrs. Hamilton's constant nurse and attendant. Lenora, for the time being, was sent to the house of a friend, who lived not far distant. When Margaret Hamilton learned of the arrangement she opposed it with all her force.

"Send her away, mother," said she one evening; "please send her away, for I cannot endure her presence, with her oily words and silent footsteps. She reminds me of the serpent, who decoyed Eve into eating that apple, and I always feel an attack of the nightmare whenever I know that her big, black eyes are fastened upon me."

"How differently people see!" laughed Carrie, who was sitting by. "Why, Mag, I always fancy *her* to be in a nightmare when your big eyes light upon her."

"It's because she knows she's guilty," answered Mag, her words and manner warming up with the subject. "Say, mother, won't you send her off! It seems as though a dark shadow falls upon us all the moment she enters the house."

"She is too invaluable a nurse to be discharged for a slight whim," answered Mrs. Hamilton. "Besides she bears the best of reputations, and I don't see what possible harm can come of her being here."

Margaret sighed, for though she knew full well the "possible harm" which might come of it, she could not tell it to her pale, dying mother; and ere she had time for any answer, the black bombazine dress, white linen, collar, and white, smooth face of Widow Carter moved silently into the room. There was a gleam of intense hatred in the dark eyes which for a moment flashed on Margaret's face, and then a soft hand gently stroked the glossy hair of the indignant girl, and in the most musical tones imaginable a low voice murmured, "Maggie, dear, you look flushed and wearied. Are you quite well?"

"Perfectly so," answered Margaret; and then rising, she left the room, but not until she had heard her mother say, "Dear Mrs. Carter, I am so glad you've come!"

"Is everybody bewitched," thought Mag, as she repaired to her chamber, "father, mother, Carrie, and all? How I wish Walter was here. He always sees things as I do."

Margaret Hamilton was a high-spirited, intelligent girl, about nineteen years of age. She was not beautiful, but had you asked for the finest-looking girl in all Glenwood, Mag would surely have been pointed out. She was rather above the medium height, and in her whole bearing there was a quiet dignity, which many mistook for hauteur. Naturally frank, affectionate, and kind-hearted, she was, perhaps, a little strong in her prejudices, which, when once satisfactorily formed, could not easily be shaken.

For Mrs. Carter she had conceived a strong dislike, for she believed her to be an artful, hypocritical woman, and now, as she sat by the window in her room, her heart swelled with indignation toward one who had thus usurped her place by her mother's bedside, whom Carrie was learning to confide in, and of whom even the father said, "she is a most excellent woman."

"I will write to Walter," said she, "and tell him to come immediately."

Suiting the action to the word, she drew up her writing desk, and soon a finished letter was lying before her. Ere she had time to fold and direct it, a loud cry from her young brother Willie summoned her for a few moments from the room, and on her return she met in the doorway the black bombazine and linen collar.

"Madam," said she, "did you wish for anything?"

"Yes, dear," was the soft answer, which, however, in this case failed to turn, away wrath. "Yes, dear, your mother said you knew where there were some fine bits of linen."

"And could not Carrie come for them?" asked Mag.

"Yes, dear, but she looks so delicate that I do not like to send her up these long stairs oftener than is necessary. Haven't you noticed how pale she is getting of late? I shouldn't be at all surprised —" but

before the sentence was finished the linen was found, and the door closed upon Mrs. Carter.

A new idea had been awakened in Margaret's mind, and for the first time she thought how much her sister really had changed. Carrie, who was four years younger than Margaret, had ever been delicate, and her parents had always feared that not long could they keep her; but though each winter her cough had returned with increased severity, though the veins on her white brow grew more distinct, and her large, blue eyes glowed with unwonted luster, still Margaret had never before dreamed of danger, never thought that soon her sister's voice would be missed, and that Carrie would be gone. But she thought of it now, and laying her head upon the table wept for a time in silence.

At length, drying her tears, she folded her letter and took it to the post-office. As she was returning home she was met by a servant, who exclaimed, "Run, Miss Margaret, run; your mother is dying, and Mrs. Carter sent me for you!"

Swift as the mountain chamois, Margaret sped up the long, steep hill, and in a few moments stood within her mother's sick-room. Supported in the arms of Mrs. Carter lay the dying woman, while her eyes, already overshadowed with the mists of coming death, wandered anxiously around the room, as if in quest of some one. The moment Margaret appeared, a satisfied smile broke over her wasted features, and beckoning her daughter to her bedside, she whispered, "Dear Maggie, you did not think I'd die so soon, when you went away."

A burst of tears was Maggie's only answer, as she passionately kissed the cold, white lips, which had never breathed aught to her save words of love and gentleness. Far different, however, would have been her reply had she known the reason of her mother's question. Not long after she had left the house for the office, Mrs. Hamilton had been taken worse, and the physician, who chanced to be present, pronounced her dying. Instantly the alarmed husband summoned together his household, but Mag was missing. No one had seen her; no one knew where she was, until Mrs. Carter, who had been some little time absent from the room reentered it, saying "Margaret had started for the post-office with a letter when I sent a

servant to tell her of her mother's danger, but for some reason she kept on, though I dare say she will soon be back."

As we well know, the substance of this speech was true, though the impression which Mrs. Carter's words conveyed was entirely false. For the advancement of her own cause she felt that it was necessary to weaken the high estimation in which Mr. Hamilton held his daughter, and she fancied that the mother's death-bed was as fitting a place where to commence operations as she could select.

As Margaret hung over her mother's pillow, the false woman, as if to confirm the assertion she had made, leaned forward and said, "Robin told you, I suppose? I sent him to do so."

Margaret nodded assent, while a deeper gloom fell upon the brow of Mr. Hamilton, who stood with folded arms watching the advance of the great destroyer. It came at last, and though no perceptible change heralded its approach, there was one fearful spasm, one long-drawn sigh, a striving of the eye for one more glimpse of the loved ones gathered near, and then Mrs. Hamilton was dead. On the bosom of Mrs. Carter her life was breathed away, and when all was over that lady laid gently down her burden, carefully adjusted the tumbled covering, and then stepping to the window, looked out, while the stricken group deplored their loss.

Long and bitterly over their dead they wept, but not on one of that weeping band fell the bolt so crushingly as upon Willie, the youngest of the flock, the child four summers old, who had ever lived in the light of his mother's love. They had told him she would die, but he understood them not, for never before had he looked on death; and now, when to his childish words of love his mother made no answer, most piteously rang out the infantile cry, "Mother, oh, my mother, who'll be my mother now?"

Caressingly, a small, white hand was laid on Willie's yellow curls, but ere the words of love were spoken Margaret took the little fellow in her arms, and whispered through her tears, "I'll be your mother, darling."

Willie brushed the tear-drops from his sister's cheek and laying his fair, round face upon her neck, said, "And who'll be Maggie's mother? Mrs. Carter?"