

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
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Chamberlain Langbein Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Claudius Schiller Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Katharina II. von Rußland Gerstäcker Raabe Gleim Vulpius
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Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
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St. Elmo

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ST. ELMO

BY

AUGUSTA J. EVANS

Author of "Beulah," "Macaria," "At the Mercy of Tiberius" "Infelice"
Etc., Etc.

"Ah! the true rule is—a true wife in her husband's house is his servant; it is in his heart that she is queen. Whatever of the best he can conceive, it is her part to be; whatever of the highest he can hope, it is hers to promise; all that is dark in him she must purge into purity, all that is failing in him she must strengthen into truth; from her, through all the world's clamor, he must win his praise; in her, through all the world's warfare, he must find his peace."—
JOHN RUSKIN.

TO

J. C. DERBY,

IN GRATEFUL MEMORY OF MANY YEARS OF KIND AND
FAITHFUL FRIENDSHIP, THESE PAGES ARE

AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED.

"Ah! the true rule is—a true wife in her husband's house is his servant; it is in his heart that she is queen. Whatever of the best he can conceive, it is her part to be; whatever of the highest he can hope, it is hers to promise; all that is dark in him she must purge into purity; all that is failing in him she must strengthen into truth; from her, through all the world's clamor, he must win his praise; in her, through all the world's warfare, he must find his peace." — JOHN RUSKIN.

ST. ELMO.

CHAPTER I.

"He stood and measured the earth: and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills did bow."

These words of the prophet upon Shigionoth were sung by a sweet, happy, childish voice, and to a strange, wild, anomalous tune—solemn as the Hebrew chant of Deborah, and fully as triumphant.

A slender girl of twelve years' growth steadied a pail of water on her head, with both dimpled arms thrown up, in ancient classic Caryatides attitude; and, pausing a moment beside the spring, stood fronting the great golden dawn—watching for the first level ray of the coming sun, and chanting the prayer of Habakkuk. Behind her in silent grandeur towered the huge outline of Lookout Mountain, shrouded at summit in gray mist; while centre and base showed dense masses of foliage, dim and purplish in the distance—a stern cowed monk of the Cumberland brotherhood. Low hills clustered on either side, but immediately in front stretched a wooded plain, and across this the child looked at the flushed sky, rapidly brightening into fiery and blinding radiance. Until her wild song waked echoes among the far-off rocks, the holy hush of early morning had rested like a benediction upon the scene, as though nature laid her broad finger over her great lips, and waited in reverent silence the advent of the sun. Morning among the mountains possessed witchery and glories which filled the heart of the girl with adoration, and called from her lips rude but exultant anthems of praise. The young face, lifted toward the cloudless east, might have served as a model for a pictured Syriac priestess—one of Baalbec's vestals, ministering in the olden time in that wondrous and grand temple at Heliopolis.

The large black eyes held a singular fascination in their mild, sparkling depths, now full of tender, loving light and childish gladness; and the flexible red lips curled in lines of orthodox Greek perfection, showing remarkable versatility of expression; while the broad, full, polished forehead with its prominent, swelling brows, could not fail to recall, to even casual observers, the calm, powerful face of Lorenzo de' Medicis, which, if once looked on, fastens itself upon heart and brain, to be forgotten no more. Her hair, black, straight, waveless as an Indian's, hung around her shoulders, and glistened as the water from the dripping bucket trickled through the wreath of purple morning-glories and scarlet cypress, which she had twined about her head, ere lifting the cedar pail to its resting-place. She wore a short-sleeved dress of yellow striped homespun, which fell nearly to her ankles, and her little bare feet gleamed pearly white on the green grass and rank dewy creepers that clustered along the margin of the bubbling spring. Her complexion was unusually transparent, and early exercise and mountain air had rouged her cheeks till they matched the brilliant hue of her scarlet crown. A few steps in advance of her stood a large, fierce yellow dog, with black, scowling face, and ears cut close to his head; a savage, repulsive creature, who looked as if he rejoiced in an opportunity of making good his name, "Grip." In the solemn beauty of that summer morning the girl seemed to have forgotten the mission upon which she came; but as she loitered, the sun flashed up, kindling diamond fringes on every dew-beaded chestnut leaf and oak-bough, and silvering the misty mantle which enveloped Lookout. A moment longer that pure-hearted Tennessee child stood watching the gorgeous spectacle, drinking draughts of joy, which mingled no drop of sin or selfishness in its crystal waves; for she had grown up alone with nature—utterly ignorant of the roar and strife, the burning hate and cunning intrigue of the great world of men and women, where, "like an Egyptian pitcher of tamed vipers, each struggles to get its head above the other." To her, earth seemed very lovely; life stretched before her like the sun's path in that clear sky, and, as free from care or foreboding as the fair June day, she walked on, preceded by her dog—and the chant burst once more from her lips:

"He stood and measured the earth: and the everlasting mountains were scattered, the perpetual hills—"

The sudden, almost simultaneous report of two pistol-shots rang out sharply on the cool, calm air, and startled the child so violently that she sprang forward and dropped the bucket. The sound of voices reached her from the thick wood bordering the path, and, without reflection, she followed the dog, who bounded off toward the point whence it issued. Upon the verge of the forest she paused, and, looking down a dewy green glade where the rising sun darted the earliest arrowy rays, beheld a spectacle which burned itself indelibly upon her memory. A group of five gentlemen stood beneath the dripping chestnut and sweet-gum arches; one leaned against the trunk of a tree, two were conversing eagerly in undertones, and two faced each other fifteen paces apart, with pistols in their hands. Ere she could comprehend the scene, the brief conference ended, the seconds resumed their places to witness another fire, and like the peal of a trumpet echoed the words:

"Fire! One! — two! — three!"

The flash and ringing report mingled with the command and one of the principals threw up his arm and fell. When with horror in her wide-strained eyes and pallor on her lips, the child staggered to the spot, and looked on the prostrate form, he was dead. The hazel eyes stared blankly at the sky, and the hue of life and exuberant health still glowed on the full cheek; but the ball had entered the heart, and the warm blood, bubbling from his breast, dripped on the glistening grass. The surgeon who knelt beside him took the pistol from his clenched fingers, and gently pressed the lids over his glazing eyes. Not a word was uttered, but while the seconds sadly regarded the stiffening form, the surviving principal coolly drew out a cigar, lighted and placed it between his lips. The child's eyes had wandered to the latter from the pool of blood, and now in a shuddering cry she broke the silence:

"Murderer!"

The party looked around instantly, and for the first time perceived her standing there in their midst, with loathing and horror in the gaze she fixed on the perpetrator of the awful deed. In great surprise he drew back a step or two, and asked gruffly:

"Who are you? What business have you here?"

"Oh! how dared you murder him? Do you think God will forgive you on the gallows?"

He was a man probably twenty-seven years of age—singularly fair, handsome, and hardened in iniquity, but he cowered before the blanched and accusing face of the appalled child; and ere a reply could be framed, his friend came close to him.

"Clinton, you had better be off; you have barely time to catch the Knoxville train, which leaves Chattanooga in half an hour. I would advise you to make a long stay in New York, for there will be trouble when Dent's brother hears of this morning's work."

"Aye! Take my word for that, and put the Atlantic between you and Dick Dent," added the surgeon, smiling grimly, as if the anticipation of retributive justice afforded him pleasure.

"I will simply put this between us," replied the homicide, fitting his pistol to the palm of his hand; and as he did so, a heavy antique diamond ring flashed on his little finger.

"Come, Clinton, delay may cause you more trouble than we bargained for," urged his second.

Without even glancing toward the body of his antagonist, Clinton scowled at the child, and, turning away, was soon out of sight.

"Oh, sir! will you let him get away? will you let him go unpunished?"

"He cannot be punished," answered the surgeon, looking at her with mingled curiosity and admiration.

"I thought men were hung for murder."

"Yes—but this is not murder."

"Not murder? He shot him dead! What is it?"

"He killed him in a duel, which is considered quite right and altogether proper."

"A duel?"

She had never heard the word before, and pondered an instant.

"To take a man's life is murder. Is there no law to punish 'a duel'?"

"None strong enough to prohibit the practice. It is regarded as the only method of honorable satisfaction open to gentlemen."

"Honorable satisfaction?" she repeated — weighing the new phraseology as cautiously and fearfully as she would have handled the bloody garments of the victim.

"What is your name?" asked the surgeon.

"Edna Earl."

"Do you live near this place?"

"Yes, sir, very near."

"Is your father at home?"

"I have no father, but grandpa has not gone to the shop yet."

"Will you show me the way to the house?"

"Do you wish to carry him there?" she asked, glancing at the corpse, and shuddering violently.

"Yes, I want some assistance from your grandfather."

"I will show you the way, sir."

The surgeon spoke hurriedly to the two remaining gentlemen, and followed his guide. Slowly she retraced her steps, refilled her bucket at the spring, and walked on before the stranger. But the glory of the morning had passed away; a bloody mantle hung between the splendor of summer sunshine and the chilled heart of the awe-struck girl. The forehead of the radiant, holy June day had been suddenly red-branded like Cain, to be henceforth an occasion of hideous reminiscences; and with a blanched face and trembling limbs the child followed a narrow, beaten path, which soon terminated at the gate of a rude, unwhitewashed paling. A low, comfortless looking three-roomed house stood within, and on the steps sat an elderly man, smoking a pipe, and busily engaged in mending a bridle. The creaking of the gate attracted his attention, and he looked up wonderingly at the advancing stranger.

"Oh, grandpa! there is a murdered man lying in the grass, under the chestnut trees, down by the spring."

"Why! how do you know he was murdered?"

"Good morning, sir. Your granddaughter happened to witness a very unfortunate and distressing affair. A duel was fought at sunrise, in the edge of the woods yonder, and the challenged party, Mr. Dent, of Georgia, was killed. I came to ask permission to bring the body here, until arrangements can be made for its interment; and also to beg your assistance in obtaining a coffin."

Edna passed on to the kitchen, and as she deposited the bucket on the table, a tall, muscular, red-haired woman, who was stooping over the fire, raised her flushed face, and exclaimed angrily:

"What upon earth have you been doing? I have been halfway to the spring to call you, and hadn't a drop of water in the kitchen to make coffee! A pretty time of day Aaron Hunt will get his breakfast! What do you mean by such idleness?"

She advanced with threatening mien and gesture, but stopped suddenly.

"Edna, what ails you? Have you got an ague? You are as white as that pan of flour. Are you scared or sick?"

"There was a man killed this morning, and the body will be brought here directly. If you want to hear about it, you had better go out on the porch. One of the gentlemen is talking to grandpa."

Stunned by what she had seen, and indisposed to narrate the horrid details, the girl went to her own room, and seating herself in the window, tried to collect her thoughts. She was tempted to believe the whole affair a hideous dream, which would pass away with vigorous rubbing of her eyes; but the crushed purple and scarlet flowers she took from her forehead, her dripping hair and damp feet assured her of the vivid reality of the vision. Every fibre of her frame had received a terrible shock, and when noisy, bustling Mrs. Hunt ran from room to room, ejaculating her astonishment, and calling on the child to assist in putting the house in order, the latter obeyed silently, mechanically, as if in a state of somnambulism.

Mr. Dent's body was brought up on a rude litter of boards, and temporarily placed on Edna's bed, and toward evening when a coffin arrived from Chattanooga, the remains were removed, and the coffin rested on two chairs in the middle of the same room. The surgeon insisted upon an immediate interment near the scene of

combat; but the gentleman who had officiated as second for the deceased expressed his determination to carry the unfortunate man's body back to his home and family, and the earliest train on the following day was appointed as the time for their departure. Late in the afternoon Edna cautiously opened the door of the room which she had hitherto avoided, and with her apron full of lilies, while poppies and sprigs of rosemary, approached the coffin, and looked at the rigid sleeper. Judging from his appearance, not more than thirty years had gone over his handsome head; his placid features were unusually regular, and a soft, silky brown beard fell upon his pulseless breast. Fearful lest she should touch the icy form, the girl timidly strewed her flowers in the coffin, and tears gathered and dropped with the blossoms, as she noticed a plain gold ring on the little finger, and wondered if he were married—if his death would leave wailing orphans in his home, and a broken-hearted widow at the desolate hearthstone. Absorbed in her melancholy task, she heard neither the sound of strange voices in the passage, nor the faint creak of the door as it swung back on its rusty hinges; but a shrill scream, a wild, despairing shriek terrified her, and her heart seemed to stand still as she bounded away from the side of the coffin. The light of the setting sun streamed through the window, and over the white, convulsed face of a feeble but beautiful woman, who was supported on the threshold by a venerable, gray-haired man, down whose furrowed cheeks tears coursed rapidly. Struggling to free herself from his restraining grasp, the stranger tottered into the middle of the room.

"O Harry! My husband! my husband!" She threw up her wasted arms, and fell forward senseless on the corpse.

They bore her into the adjoining apartment, where the surgeon administered the usual restoratives, and though finally the pulses stirred and throbbed feebly, no symptom of returning consciousness greeted the anxious friends who bent over her. Hour after hour passed, during which she lay as motionless as her husband's body, and at length the physician sighed, and pressing his fingers to his eyes, said sorrowfully to the grief-stricken old man beside her: "It is paralysis, Mr. Dent, and there is no hope. She may linger twelve or twenty-four hours, but her sorrows are ended; she and Harry will soon be reunited. Knowing her constitution, I feared as much. You

should not have suffered her to come; you might have known that the shock would kill her. For this reason I wished his body buried here."

"I could not restrain her. Some meddling gossip told her that my poor boy had gone to fight a duel, and she rose from her bed and started to the railroad depot. I pleaded, I reasoned with her that she could not bear the journey, but I might as well have talked to the winds, I never knew her obstinate before, but she seemed to have a presentiment of the truth. God pity her two sweet babes!"

The old man bowed his head upon her pillow, and sobbed aloud.

Throughout the night Edna crouched beside the bed, watching the wan but lovely face of the young widow, and tenderly chafing the numb, fair hands which lay so motionless on the coverlet. Children are always sanguine, because of their ignorance of the stern, inexorable realities of the untried future, and Edna could not believe that death would snatch from the world one so beautiful and so necessary to her prattling, fatherless infants. But morning showed no encouraging symptoms, the stupor was unbroken, and at noon the wife's spirit passed gently to the everlasting reunion.

Before sunrise on the ensuing day, a sad group clustered once more under the dripping chestnuts, and where a pool of blood had dyed the sod, a wide grave yawned. The coffins were lowered, the bodies of Henry and Helen Dent rested side by side, and, as the mound rose slowly above them, the solemn silence was broken by the faltering voice of the surgeon, who read the burial service.

"Man, that is born of a woman, hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up, and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. Yet, O Lord God most holy, O Lord most mighty, O holy and most merciful Saviour, deliver us not into the pains of eternal death!"

The melancholy rite ended, the party dispersed, the strangers took their departure for their distant homes, and quiet reigned once more in the small, dark cottage. But days and weeks brought to Edna no oblivion of the tragic events which constituted the first great epoch of her monotonous life. A nervous restlessness took possession of her, she refused to occupy her old room, and insisted

upon sleeping on a pallet at the foot of her grandfather's bed. She forsook her whilom haunts about the spring and forest, and started up in terror at every sudden sound; while from each opening between the chestnut trees the hazel eyes of the dead man, and the wan, thin face of the golden-haired wife, looked out beseechingly at her. Frequently, in the warm light of day, ere shadows stalked to and fro in the thick woods, she would steal, with an apronful of wild flowers, to the solitary grave, scatter her treasures in the rank grass that waved above it, and hurry away with hushed breath and quivering limbs. Summer waned, autumn passed, and winter came, but the girl recovered in no degree from the shock which had cut short her chant of praise on that bloody June day. In her morning visit to the spring, she had stumbled upon a monster which custom had adopted and petted — which the passions and sinfulness of men had adroitly draped and fondled, and called Honorable Satisfaction; but her pure, unperverted, Ithuriel nature pierced the conventional mask, recognized the loathsome lineaments of crime, and recoiled in horror and amazement, wondering at the wickedness of her race and the forbearance of outraged Jehovah. Innocent childhood had for the first time stood face to face with Sin and Death, and could not forget the vision.

Edna Earl had lost both her parents before she was old enough to remember either. Her mother was the only daughter of Aaron Hunt, the village blacksmith, and her father, who was an intelligent, promising young carpenter, accidentally fell from the roof of the house which he was shingling, and died from the injuries sustained. Thus Mr. Hunt, who had been a widower for nearly ten years, found himself burdened with the care of an infant only six months old. His daughter had never left him, and after her death the loneliness of the house oppressed him painfully, and for the sake of his grandchild he resolved to marry again. The middle-aged widow whom he selected was a kind-hearted and generous woman, but indolent, ignorant, and exceedingly high-tempered; and while she really loved the little orphan committed to her care, she contrived to alienate her affection, and to tighten the bonds of union between her husband and the child. Possessing a remarkably amiable and equitable disposition, Edna rarely vexed Mrs. Hunt, who gradually left her more and more to the indulgence of her own views and capric-

es, and contented herself with exacting a certain amount of daily work, after the accomplishment of which she allowed her to amuse herself as childish whims dictated. There chanced to be no children of her own age in the neighborhood, consequently she grew up without companionship, save that furnished by her grandfather, who was dotingly fond of her, and would have utterly spoiled her, had not her temperament fortunately been one not easily injured by unrestrained liberty of action. Before she was able to walk, he would take her to the forge, and keep her for hours on a sheepskin in one corner, whence she watched, with infantile delight, the blast of the furnace, and the shower of sparks that fell from the anvil, and where she often slept, lulled by the monotonous chorus of trip and sledge. As she grew older, the mystery of bellows and slack-tub engaged her attention, and at one end of the shop, on a pile of shavings, she collected a mass of curiously shaped bits of iron and steel, and blocks of wood, from which a miniature shop threatened to rise in rivalry; and finally, when strong enough to grasp the handles of the bellows, her greatest pleasure consisted in rendering the feeble assistance which her grandfather was always so proud to accept at her hands. Although ignorant and uncultivated, Mr. Hunt was a man of warm, tender feelings, and rare nobility of soul. He regretted the absence of early advantages which poverty had denied him; and in teaching Edna to read and to write, and to cipher, he never failed to impress upon her the vast superiority which a thorough education confers. Whether his exhortations first kindled her ambition, or whether her aspiration for knowledge was spontaneous and irrepressible, he knew not; but she manifested very early a fondness for study and thirst for learning which he gratified to the fullest extent of his limited ability. The blacksmith's library consisted of the family Bible, Pilgrim's Progress, a copy of Irving's Sermons on Parables, Guy Mannering, a few tracts, and two books which had belonged to an itinerant minister who preached occasionally in the neighborhood, and who, having died rather suddenly at Mr. Hunt's house, left the volumes in his saddle-bags, which were never claimed by his family, residing in a distant State. Those books were Plutarch's Lives and a worn school copy of Anthon's Classical Dictionary; and to Edna they proved a literary Ophir of inestimable value and exhaustless interest. Plutarch especially was a Pisgah of letters, whence the vast domain of learning, the Canaan of human

wisdom, stretched alluringly before her; and as often as she climbed this height, and viewed the wondrous scene beyond, it seemed, indeed,

..... "an arch where through Gleams that untraveled world,
whose margin fades Forever and forever when we move."

In after years she sometimes questioned if this mount of observation was also that of temptation, to which ambition had led her spirit, and there bargained for and bought her future. Love of nature, love of books, an earnest piety and deep religious enthusiasm were the characteristics of a noble young soul, left to stray through the devious, checkered paths of life without other guidance than that which she received from communion with Greek sages and Hebrew prophets. An utter stranger to fashionable conventionality and latitudinarian ethics, it was no marvel that the child stared and shivered when she saw the laws of God vetoed, and was blandly introduced to murder as Honorable Satisfaction.

