

THE HOUSE

New York, Diamond Crescent.—I see him as he half turned to me from the bureau, winding his watch. His wide-brimmed sailor hat was tipped back, showing the heavy black curls—not hyacinthine, as I had said. He was smiling up at me from under the brim of his eyelashes, the straight, firm lips parting over the even white teeth. I noticed that his belt was heavy leather. The light caught the flash of the diamond on each side of the white sapphire on the little finger of his right hand.

The floor swayed under me as I dragged the silk and lace of my frock, with purposed noise, over the rugs, and flung, with a careful thought of its re-

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pressed beauty, the pale green brocade lining of my long cloak open on the top of the divan. I wanted the sense of its beauty to help me. I wanted the protection of my white ostrich boa, that still trailed over my shoulder. I wanted everything in the world, but the sense of the shutting door that paused in an eternity of waiting instant till the servant softly closed it. That other night with him was billowing back to me in waves of soft suffocating oblivion, of forgetfulness, of enthrallment. I was afraid—afraid of myself, afraid of him, afraid of the mystery, the ecstasy of the moment.

I felt, in shuddering pangs of understanding, the simplicity of our meeting. The sham, the pretence, the babbling intellectuality with the others was out of place, impossible now. I was understood, computed at my true level.

Even here Jack Baird's extremes are

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unique. But though it is just the kind of thing that I might have thought would interest me, yet the sinister regularity of his coming, the entire lack of emotion or excitement in the habit of these incidents, takes away from it all life and colour. Even vice, once a habit, is conventional and stupid. He was merely degenerate. There was no more avidity in all these excesses than in the slightest action of more healthy people. It interested me as little as would the lewdness of a monkey.

Yet last night, after Peter left, I felt I had been shaken out of my calm. I had to get some outside thing to bring me back to my speculative curiosity. I was still shaking from his dominant, "You know you care—you know you care!" I sent him away; but still to think that he should even suppose for a moment I cared, infuriated me. Because I do. You beautiful calm monster! You stupid thing of

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polo and the stock exchange! You manage me as you would manage an uncertain thoroughbred, and men who understand horses are the men who understand women.

To see a horse stand on its hind legs, and go sideways at a gate, one would naturally infer it had some objection to going through. But those who really know are aware that these evolutions are merely an embellishment of entrance. And on our side we only ask from a man just about the same amount of intelligence that he requires to play polo well—and physique, you Mercury of the Vatican come to life!

"I could break your little spine across my knee"; and he throws me from hand to hand, and never leaves a bruise, though my skin turns black if the maid rasps my shoulder in fastening my frock.

I sent in my conditions to Jack, though,

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first, and they were clamorously accepted—“Only come”!

It was now two in the morning, and Jack had been drinking alone since eleven the night before.

Jack stood, big, ponderous, and fair beside the table, looking like a well-bred acrobat in the tightly-stretched pink silk.

I felt like the champagne; I felt like the cigarettes.

I took the glass, shaped like a lily with its bubbling excitement, from Jack, and curled up at the end of the divan and scowled at him. Fair men are always so affectionate. I detest affection.

“Do you know of anything interesting?” I asked. “I have only heard of you as being quite the most dissipated man who comes to the house. Have you anything worth while about you at all?”

He smiled. “Do they say that of me?”

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Perhaps I can prove to you I am not so bad——”

I drew away the fold of my train from his hands. “No, talk,” I interrupted; “I want to be amused. If you can tell me anything exciting I shall stay; if not, I go as soon as I finish my cigarette.”

He looked at me with lifted eyebrows. “You want to be amused, to know something new, something different? I too have heard about you, you know.”

I shook the ashes off my cigarette placidly. “No doubt, I have an invincible curiosity about everything.”

He laughed and bit his lips. It's remarkable how much you can say and yet keep that stone wall around yourself. He did not dare to stir.

He talked on and on. I just felt myself vampiring the vitality out of him—fine brute that he is—as I watched the black lines deepen under his eyes and his face

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flame suddenly till the veins swelled or turned white. The attendant came and went silently, with freshly cooled wine, and the dawn was showing like a chink of green ice in a crevice of raised lace at the window, when I heard one sentence shiver through the veil of smoke—"But that was the year I fought in the Rebellion in Canada."

My cigarette dropped from my fingers to the floor. "You served—in Canada! But you belong—here."

"Well," he said indolently, "I imagine you do the same. I think you told me, after I had, with a good deal of labour, elicited some information about your birthplace, that you were born in New York."

"Exactly, Vita Nuova, Inferno, and all the rest of it. Ever read Dante, Jackie? Longfellow's translation's rotten." I glanced at him, feeling like a wolf holding

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a nosegay over its fangs. If I had been drinking champagne, and it ever occurred to me that I would like to murder anyone, I don't think I would let any ulterior considerations stand in the way of permitting myself the satisfaction I desired. "But go on," I added, pulling out another cigarette, "tell me how you deserted these United States for—the Nation to the North."

"Are you a Canadian?" Jack was taking risks. It doesn't do to make people themselves.

"I told you that I am a citizen of the United States, born in New York, made of the world here—more or less." It is a thing out of thought that I should sully my country by either naming it or claiming it in this place. It also pleases me—under the circumstances—to call myself a citizen of the United States.

"Well, if you are not a Canadian, the

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fact seems to remarkably alter you." He flung his head back on his folded arms. "You look for the first time as though you could feel, as though you could love—or hate." This time it was Jack who was scowling at me.

"Never mind, Jack," I laughed. "Wait, I want some more wine. No, don't get up; I want to get it myself. I am restless. I like doing it. I will give you some for yourself." I poured it out. It seemed to me it was some oblation or potion.

The rivers, the mountains! The wonder of Canada was flooding before me, the air tinkled with the shiver of pine trees. I bent over him with the glass: "Tell me all; tell me everything, everything you heard, felt, saw."

"Oh, I just got in at the end. I was educated at M'Gill, you know; and when I went over that year all the fellows were in a blaze, and so I tried and—got in."

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He paused. "I didn't chance to be where there happened much to tell"—he was looking at me steadily, his big chest rising and falling—"only, when he was taken prisoner, our regiment was the guard for Louis Riel."

"Yes," I breathed. This was my country. Louis Riel: the traitor Riel. Suddenly my soul, who sneers at one side of the room and only watches me in all I do, leaped into myself. I trembled with the shock. "Go on," I stammered. "You saw him—was he young, handsome, old, ugly?" I stretched myself out full length at the foot of the divan, and propped up my head in my hands.

Jack's voice had changed. "No, he was an ugly cur, dark and little—about fifty."

"He was ugly and little and old"—I licked up the words. "How did he act? Was he—brave?"

"Brave? No; he carried his sixty-four

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pound shot in his hands and cried." His eyes had become luminous looking into the distance. "The boys would pretend to take shots at him, and he would try to—run."

I crept a little nearer—"They only pretended."

"Oh, yes, he was such a damned coward, one couldn't resist baiting him. And then they hate—you Canadians."

I let the word go. "And the end?"

"Yes, the end. I was there then." Then after a minute, "I have told you all. A man doesn't see these things twice in a life. They are not things one likes to go through a second time."

But I crept nearer, tense, all muscle, every nerve silenced, only devouring the meaning out of his eyes, eating the words out of his mouth. "No, you have not told me all."

He pushed back the hair from his fore-

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head. "The word came from Ottawa that night"—I felt as though I were racking the sentences out of him—"that her Majesty's Canadian Government ordered that—Louis Riel was to be hanged by the neck, until dead, at eight the next morning."

"Yes."

"But I have brought you down to the very moment." His eyes looked at me almost with fear.

"I would have pulled the rope myself," I said steadily; "and I would have throttled the life out of him, gloried in his agony. I who would shudder with grief at the pain of a fly."

"And then the next morning—there is nothing more—he was—afraid—there is nothing more." I laid my hand on Jack's knee. "Then—yes—but to see a man die. I closed my eyes—but still I thought it was my duty to—look—I saw—it." He

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could say no more. I could ask no more. . . . Of course, I paid Jack the price he asked for his story; but I don't wonder that even here his reputation is distinctive.

Monday.—How ridiculous the accepted view of life is—how pitiful, how absurd! I was looking over a magazine to-day that is supposed to be very superior, and found some chapters of a very female story.

She says, "When you kneeled at me, and called me all the goddess names"—and only a couple of nights ago he kneeled to me—where—and called me all the names love knows. Love knows no other names.

After this person in the story is married, her husband goes to town for a few hours, and she sends notes to him every little while, saying, "How he will teach her how to love, that every month will be their bridal month"—she was evidently

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rather interested; that she "wants to be everything he wants"—he is evidently rather experienced.

And this kind of thing is considered by the average feminine public sacredly matrimonial; or if a shuddering aside is permitted, the awful red glare from some passion for which the accommodating woman is supposed to sacrifice the world. And all the same words and adorations and honours are given in fast houses every night to women men have only known an hour. Other women do not understand.

We have loved again and again, fresh love, new kisses, as hard, as real, as any that part the lips of a bride; but we know that it is a Renaissance of each new night, that these things die with the dawn to be reborn in any flame of responsive eyes.

We lose the faith of the quality of love. If women lead the lives they are supposed to lead, we do only and honestly love but

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one man, because but one man possesses us; but men, in the ratio of their brains and habit, love many women.

And poetry has given us our part—to weep. But why is not one woman so superb that she can be sufficient for ever to a man?

However, as a matter of fact, I would get awfully tired of only one man myself.

November.—The world is made of grey slime. I am sick of being clay for the gods.

It rains all day, and the wind beats up the mud into diseased pools.

The very sight of a glass of champagne nauseates me; when any one touches me I look down to see if my flesh has risen into bubbles of poison.

I am tired—God, but I am tired! The self I drag around is rebelling, it is diffi-

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cult to make it obey me now. I whine down each time I wake, in anticipation of what it will have to bear in the next space of being awake. I will not permit any kisses on my lips. I kept that apart. Surely I can assume some right over myself against that mind monster that grinds me down to get the money for—what? I have almost forgotten for what—Europe, revenge—revenge, why should I revenge?—the East. What folly it is, what consummate folly it all is! I am now almost too weak to break loose, to get free from myself. I am afraid, I have stretched my will like a piece of elastic. I have stretched it in front of my very eyes. If it should break and snap back?