

NEW JERSEY

Woodlawn.—In the long slumberous days in bed after the operation, I loved the stillness, the isolation, the utter rest, the darkened room, the low distinct voices of the nurses saying only necessary things. It seemed natural to be fed, natural to be lifted, to be bathed, to sleep from eight to eight. I would open my eyes to see the nurses show me fresh flowers each day, and then close them to that exquisite unthinking torpor, open them again to see one of them sitting in just a glint of light from one side of the curtain while she endlessly embroidered rosebuds on a linen cloth. To embroider rosebuds; what an existence of euthanasia!

Then the doctor would come and hurt

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me, and I would struggle for a while and then faint. I bore pain very badly, they said, for a woman with such a magnificent physique and constitution. They seemed to consider that the sole advantage to a woman of a fine physique was her ability to bear pain; they seemed to think it was natural and right for a woman to bear pain; whereas I fainted because of my impotent rage at the gods that made pain possible. For I think physical pain a personal insult from the gods not to be borne, very rarely to be borne—to curse us with life, and then to make us suffer. Every breath of agony was another blow straight from the invisible torturer of creation; and I was powerless to hit back.

This illness seems a backwater of the fictional virtues. Two doctors and two nurses all in the secret, all stolidly and unanimously proclaiming to the small self-

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important suburban world that I had happened to have a slight accident which they found later had brought on unforeseen complications.

It may, of course, be professional secrecy, and it's certainly what I demand; but I am tempted to think it is rather on account of the fact that they would lose their big fees and their big wages if they told. So I am safe—money can always buy respectability; it buys for me now chastity and maidenhood.

Of course, my money is all going through this illness like sand through a sieve; I shall start again pauperised as before, but this time with a hideous handicap. I feel so broken and unmanageable. My nerve is there. I am mentally ready for anything still, but the thing I fight with is helpless to answer me. My body seems to myself like a cruelly hurt dog that tries to answer to a call but only

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quivers through its limbs and raises the flicker of an eyelash in anguished impotence. My body is useless to me now for a while. I shall have to scheme and think. It all rests on my mind—my miserable mind.

If I cannot revenge myself on the gods I can revenge myself on society. They come and see me, these queer small people of another world, the petrified inflated world of puddle positions, the world of suburban golf clubs and smug At Homes and club women.

They are very kind. They bring me exquisite flowers, they send me baskets of out-of-season fruit, their carriages are always at the disposal of myself and my nurse.

I receive them, critical and pallid, in voluminous pink, my comprehending fox-terrier snuggled in some cushions beside

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me, my nurse sitting on one side embroidering pink rosebuds on linen. I want her there to turn them out, with the divine prerogative of the sick-room, when I get bored. Why can't one always keep a trained nurse to dispose of people when one is bored?

I have a barricade beside me of the pink azaleas. I don't want any of them to draw their chairs too close, to take my hands, or, unthinkable horror, to attempt to kiss me. Sentiment always nauseates me; and these women, weighing one hundred and nineteen or two hundred and nineteen pounds, are very unkissable. They are good, of course, but you can't kiss virtue; that's why it is virtue—and unkissed.

How bored I do get! They cluster around the fact of my operation like flies. Being unmarried allows me to be blandly non-committal; and, of course, married

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women—women with a husband—are always grotesquely mysterious.

What do they know about men? But they come and buzz around me, and I see nothing but the fact that they are married women, and I am not, and that they generally have no figure, and I have . . . and if they only knew that my unseen, unborn, unformed child had been carried through the mists of ether in this very room!

I finger the ears of the fox-terrier while Mrs. Denison talks of her baby. I remember the story of Socrates and Diotima—and the hedge. I feel a hysterical longing to laugh, and turn my face to the nurse. She understands; and in a few minutes she and I are alone, and I am trembling into spasms of nervousness.

I could imagine the catastrophic moment if by any impossible chance they dis-

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covered the truth. I—who have been one of the professional outcasts of the race.

But yet the absurdity of calling fast women all the contemptuous names that language affords! I remember the life as I have seen it: the men who come cringing with lust; the women who, with cool common sense, make a universal demand serve as a financial asset.

And at least in the one vital decision that every man and woman has to make, fast women are clean of the sin that makes a mockery of most of the virtuous; the penurious marriages, the squalid marriages, with their ill-fed, diseased, ill-made children, who pave the cities with pain.

They know the awful possibilities of life, and life is no boon to thrust on part of your flesh unless you can give it all that the world holds of material and mental good.

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For the most stupendous crime of humanity is to bring a human being into the world when there is no prospect of its having the easiest way the penalty of life allows us. Without the way made as nearly broad and smooth as possible for the unborn helpless creature's feet, it is the cruelty of brainless brutes to launch this thing, who should be above all things loved, into the prison of human life.

I detest doctors who look on suffering with their air of urbane, intelligent interest.

"Well, how can you stand it? can't you see I'm suffering?" I would snarl at my doctor.

"I am helpless—helpless," he would say; and then I would tell the nurse to leave the room, and leave me alone, and let me suffer without any eyes to see me. You can let yourself go then, rip your

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whole soul in pieces, and lie broken for the gods to rejoice over, but only when there is no one human to see.

Pain degrades, brutalises; there is no doubt about it. I have lost some keen edge to my interest in this loathsome illness, this occasional stabbing suffering. You are simply drained of mind and only left your nerves to tell you how much the body can endure without losing consciousness. Only a fool would associate anything noble, elevating, with that kind of bestial drawing of breath. What insufferable drivel is the talk about pain borne with noble fortitude! a dog or a horse will bear pain without squealing when they want to; and anyway, what is the use of squealing? The heavens are very far away, and nothing that hears can help. A dose of morphia or a cone of ether is about the only celestial element in an ill-

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ness. I hate sick people; they are less than human. Oh, yes, I know I am sick myself, and am waited on faithfully day and night; but they are paid for it, well paid for it, in good glittering gold.

Sometimes as I lie here at the wide window overlooking the hills I feel that the only things important are the perfume of new budding trees, the opening smell of the earth, the winds, the sea, the changing sky, these and Art, the mystery, the inscrutable face of Art through its veil of our senses. These are the things that make life. Everything we feel is only a step nearer, a light to see that face, to interpret closer that ecstasy of Nature.

People have been sending me such a lot of new books while I have been ill, that this afternoon I asked the nurse to pile them up beside me so that I could glance into them. I couldn't be bothered read-

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ing that kind of thing, still I could look through them enough to be able to babble politely over their titles.

But after the third they have left me with my hands like ice and my teeth chattering with rage. The false view, the distorted sentiment, the lack of experience, the imitation passion, the imitation immorality: lies that are only insults to humanity.

These stories are not about human beings, they are about brutes—the annals of the kennels. Do we want to read of how the fox-terrier bitch had puppies with curly hair? We might as well read that as books modelled on *The Scarlet Letter* and *Adam Bede*. The verbal hallucinations of people of more or less quite blameless lives. Situations that are merely trash to the sensualist who has seen life naked. Books can tell of deliberate vice or the rankest sensuality, every variation

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of sex and instinct. We can laugh at that, or our nerves can shiver over it, but we do not want to hear how the baboon dragged the ape down the cocoanut tree; how, as they phrase it, “in a moment of weakness, Nature triumphed.”

I hold no brief for men, but I object to seeing books stained with statements that do not exist in real life.

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The nurse came in and found me gibbering over the paper and pencil and the books, and took them all away from me, and scolded me, and knew it had brought back the pain in my side again, and opened the window to let the wind from the pine hills blow over me, and bathed my flaming face in scented water, and held steadying nerve stuff in a glass against my clinking teeth. How beautifully she soothed me!—these wonderful nurses!—told me “yes,” it was lies—no

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one was unhappy—it was all lies; and all the time she was lifting away the crushed cushions, and putting cool, smooth pillows in their place, and bringing me flowers from the next room. She does not allow many flowers to stay here to take up the air, but now she brought me the bowl of hyacinths, and the great jar of heavy scented white lilies that Max sends me. She knows I love them, that they rest me.

She looked so pure, so calm, with the delicate white cap on her dark hair, her immaculate white piqué dress, the fine snowy fichu and apron and cuffs. She is virgin, absolutely virgin. The sense of her utter chastity is as refreshing to a woman of my temperament and life as the rectitude of white marble or the austere frescos of mediæval saints.

NEW YORK

"The Woman's Salon," May.—I do not know whether I shall be able to carry it through, but it doesn't at least ask any personal spending of myself, only physical strength for the daily strain and some simulated appearance of intelligence.

I shall have to take my mind out of its ghoul precincts, and bring it into a crowded room to play some parlour tricks. It is like a terrier torn away from burrowing for its beloved rat, and told to sit on a chair with a lump of sugar on its nose. But I want my lump of sugar. I want Europe, and it means Europe. A free trip, and a sufficiently unexpected manner of descent.

To be the Editor of the London edition