

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE

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

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of *The Woman's Salon!* The smug success of the thing in relation to my instability will have the carrying weight of a whole trunkful of Paris frocks. I—Editor! I see the smile around Oscar's mouth, the patronising flicker of his eyebrows at the idea. I who have the general steadiness and business ability of a flying machine!

The whole thing is an absurd fluke; but the managing editor of the Salon Company is Irish, and with my Irish blood I am able to wheedle and transfix him with the idea that my occasionally intense manner means reserves of intellect ready to burst on the magazine world.

I don't blame him in the least. Most people think I am clever; but it's only myself that understands that it is not the things I know but the things I care for that make what I do significant.

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When I was talking to Kelly about the advisability of retaining a department on tatting, my whole soul, the cold sweat of unnamed agony, was clawing at his eyes and mouth to blind him, to make him think I was sincere. Department on Tatting! and any woman who would tat could be very sensibly hung up in her own threads. The Culinary Photographs—and the care that gives seasonable and not too expensive dainties, “but with a little touch of the unusual.” A little touch of the unusual! Yes, according to my private views of the readers of the magazine, I would suggest in everything a dash of prussic acid.

But I smiled and comprehended, and my voice coloured as my eyes dilated, and I cooed and comprehended till my fingernails had dug through the thickness of kid into the palm of my hand. Kelly informed me sweetly that he approved of

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temperament; "it gave motives of enthusiasm that would be beneficial to the Company's Work."

"We are like one great family," he would observe, looking around complacently over the dun blank acre-long loft with its stooping-shouldered, yellow-faced mass of mediocrities; "each in their way, however small, give their best to the Paper."

I murmured something about feeling the incomparable felicity of such a consummation, and added slowly, with my best Irish smile, "that I too would give my best." I glanced out of the dusty window at the blank grey wall beyond, and for some reason unfelt by myself my eyes slowly filled with tears. Unbusinesslike as I am, my physical weakness disgusted me; but the Celt laps up emotion with the eagerness of all the rest of the cat tribe, and Kelly only assured me raptur-

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ously that all his knowledge and experience were at my disposal—that he was so glad for the Company—what an inspiration to the London office!

I breathe morals, I radiate an air of inspired propriety, and so I go into New York to the *Salon* building each day to learn all the individual methods of the *Salon* Company.

The physical weariness of it beats me from head to foot—the race to catch the 8.10 train in the morning, the noisy trolley spurting through the dirty slum streets, the street itself full of packing-cases and bristling with straw under a sun that strikes you with a blow at half-past nine in the morning. And the puling insignificances that through the day I must treat as being of such monster importance. I grow insanely tired when they worry me over the English spelling of a word. I don't care how anything is spelled.

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What does spelling matter anyway, as long as one understands? Spelling is dogs' work.

Then every now and then that stab through my flesh warns me of how I was beaten in the last set of the game—not quite beaten. I learned a few tricks from you, Fate; I understand you better now.

It is a little world, this business, like all other worlds—a little, mean, shuffling, jealous world. The cataclysmic universal tragedy if some bit of type or the fraction of a measurement goes wrong, the queer mixture of use and sleek conventional lies that make the people and the paper. Kelly cries to me all the time, when talking of the London edition, "Nothing startling; the world doesn't want to be startled." Quite so. Did you ever see a donkey that had an instantaneous affection for a motor?

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Yes, it's all very well to pander to a mule public if you are paid ten thousand dollars a year for the cultivation of thistles; but for twenty-five dollars a week to correct proofs on the subject of the "Loves of Great Men," written in the Felicia Hemans style, is galling to anyone who judges by practical experience, with present-day genius, how those Great Men probably did in reality conduct their affairs of sentiment.

I have come to the limit of my strength. I could not endure very much longer the immense dusty rooms, the click of the typewriters, the herding together for hours with people, breathing, nerve-sucking human beings who talk mental choc-taw; then the brief glimpses of the water, the liquid vitality that foams around the ferry and bursts against it in white broken stars on the two daily trips, the one thing

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that helps to keep me alive, that and a huge flower-weighted, perfume-drenched mass of white honeysuckle that is the first thing I see in the evening when I leave the train at Woodlawn.

I could not endure any longer those abominable luncheons in the crowded restaurant, the watching the clock, the electric fans, the smell of cooking food, the walk back under the iron sun to the building through the straw-covered, packing-case-piled street.

But it is over: I sail next Saturday. They have given me my one hundred-dollar steamer ticket; and I, even I, shall descend on the people I know, and, what is more important, the people who know me. I shall descend on them as an editor. I who had visions of renting a house on Hill Street, of appearing in a mist of green spangles and opals.

I shall live up to the part, however, and

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wear Liberty serges and long chains of uncut stones. The one trail of the serpent, though, will be my feet. Sensible or unsensible, good or bad form, I can't renounce my stockings with the fronts of real lace, or the suede slippers with wicked heels. You can always judge a woman's morals by her feet, and I cannot induce myself to hide my polyandrous tendencies by assuming broader soles to my shoes.