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Poetry.

Gray Hair.

'The first gray hair!' Others have sung the theme,
And I have smiled in youth's unthinking way,
That the first child of age's wintry gleam
Should wake to rhyme a poet growing gray!

Ah! earth was bright about me in those days;
The years by Summers noting time's elapses
Slow-footed age approached by lingering ways
Down the long vista of life's future hap!

But time are these wan threads so ghostly white,
Paling the brown locks with their fateful hue,
And if I smile to see him here to-night,
'Tis with a sigh for life's lost morning, too!

But I am not so very, very old,
Th at the grim gray beard there should set his seal.
Some nobler cause has paled their dusky gold,
'Thought's central fires' or life's untempered zeal!

No, no! The vanguard of the conqueror, Time
Notes his approach, and Youth—a craven part!
Fearing the works, unmanned, presumed to
And raise the 'white flag' o'er a guarded heart!

The traitor vain hath fed that fatal day,
But Love with swift arrest declared his claim
Since, prisoned in the heart he would betray,
With new-found zeal he wards the shocks of Time.

Beauty may look askance at that pale sign,
But wisdom reads a glorious promise there
Illumed by the light of Love divine,
A fadeless crown art thou, despised gray hair!

THE MOON TRIAL.

Indian summer had come in "Ole Virginia." A dreamy haze hung in the still air; the cardinal flower blazed down by the river. It leaped far over the grassy stream, lingering to gaze at its sweet reflection, ere it withered; the queen of the meadow flashed golden in the last rays of the setting sun. Ever and anon it bent graciously to whisper to the drowsy clover at its feet; the pokeberry bushes by the fences were flinging their red purple on stalk and leaf, like an eager painter. A mist lay on the distant hills, freshed flushed with the thought of fall. Nature seemed intoxicated with the red wine of pleasure. All was still, save the "tinkling herd" that grazed lazily in the meadow, when, lo! the shrill laughter of a party out gipsying rent the air, and four open wagons, drawn by powerful horses, appeared, bowling on the soft Virginia road.

Uncles and aunts, and cousins and friends, were there, all attired as gipsies, and plenty of colored help, with provisions and cooking utensils, in a rear conveyance. Behind all came (barking and panting) Black-eye, Pinkum and Snort, three of the smartest and happiest dogs in all Virginia.

'Now, children,' spoke Aunt Hester, 'it is after sunset—'
'Alas! my stomach says it is after tea-time,' interrupted Dick Jones, a curly-headed youth, with honest blue eyes.

'It is both,' continued Aunt Hester, glancing critically at the last ray of the retreating orb of day, 'and we ought to stop and eat.'

'Yes, yes!' cried several merry voices, 'stop and eat.'
'After supper we will order up the full harvest moon,' said Dick.

'Goosey, there is the moon now, big as a cart-wheel,' replied his Cousin Susie.

'And yellow as your dress,' answered Dick.

'It will be as red as your hair before we are on the road again,' responded Susie.

By this time both teams had stopped and were being unloaded. They had discovered a beautiful spot under a chestnut tree in the meadow, near the road. Here they pitched their gipsy camp and prepared to kindle a fire.

On a high rock overlooking the scene, and commanding a view of the rising moon, perched a dark-haired, dark-eyed girl. No sooner had she flung herself down than old, black Aunt Clee hobbled to the summit of the rock, whispering shrilly:

'Honey, I's such news for you! Dis afternoon I's heard young Mars Alfred an' Mars Fred talkin' 'bout you in de woods. Dat was when you was all fish in', chile. Dey bofe said how as dey had tried for weeks to see you alone, an' dat drestful dragon-ey aunt ob yours wouldn't 'low it nowhow; an' how as dey had determined to settle dere troubles dis yere night by axin' you fa'r and squar' to marry dem?'

'Did they wish me to marry both, or

only one?' asked the girl, merrily.

'Only one, chile; an' dey shook han's when dey parted, an' swore to 'abide-dat were de word, chile—to abide by your decision' an' be friends ever arter. Oh, Miss Bessie, 'lak de matter well ober, an' take the right man!' said Aunt Clee, stroking with loving hands the silky black hair of the child she had nursed when an infant. 'What you laughin' 'bout, baby?' as the girl suddenly shook with merriment.

'To think, auntie, of the impertinence of those puppies!' replied Bessie. 'I'm not a chine doll, or a bag of candy to be won at a raffie,' continued she with flashing eyes. 'That is always the way, auntie. The men we don't want pursue us relentlessly, while the one we love stands coldly aloof.'

'A—what?' asked Aunt Clee, glancing shrewdly at the girl's tearful eyes. 'Aloof! what's dat?'

'Stands at a distance, Aunt Clee, with his back turned, thinking about his dinner, his hunting, his books—anything but the girl who loves him,' answered Bessie, with rising color.

'She lubs young Mars Gustave,' muttered old Aunt Clee, as she hobbled back to her boiling kettle. 'There he stan's now alone, an' in sight of Miss Bessie, his back turned, an' thinking, Mars Gustave,' and the old negress touched his arm, a moment later, 'let me read your palm.'

He turned quickly, smiling, and extended his handsome, strong white hand.

'I sees a lady. She am young an' she am dark,' said the old negress, glancing keenly at his face. 'She am rich an' she am proud, but she lubs you, Mars Gustave. Dis berry night two suitors hab sworn to ax her han'. If you lubs her, hower, dere is no time to stan' here thinkin'.'

And before the astonished gentleman could reply, old Aunt Clee had hobbled away.

'Witchcraft!' exclaimed he, 'is this a cable dispatch of information and guidance for me, direct from—'
'The Devil's Soup Ladle!' shouted a voice from the encampment. 'That's the place.'

'It is, is it?' replied Gustave, under his breath. 'Then I return thanks to the Devil's Soup Ladle for the information, and will act upon it. Can it be possible that Bessie loves me? There she sits on a rock, with her Cousin Jack and the dogs, while her two suitors—if I mistake them not—are drowning their tender passion in the occupation vulgarly termed "broiling frogs" headquarters, before the gipsy fire yonder. Philosophers, both of them. They catch frogs and forget their troubles in cooking and eating them. May they experience more difficulty in securing and devouring the desert which they propose to tackle after the frogs!'

And, with this hasty colloquy upon the frailty of man, Gustave Melville glanced tenderly at the girl on the rock, then at the moon, loosened his necktie, as though to give freer play to his fancy, muttered, as he faced for the encampment:

'By the blueimps which haunt this spot, I will know my fate to-night!'

Nine o'clock found the party once more upon the road. The moon was high and quite as red, Susie affirmed, as her Cousin Jack's hair. The soft and balmy air was heavy with delicious odors from field and wood. Crickets chirruped joyously in the bushes, and fire-flies flashed their tiny lanterns in the gleam of the shadows. Here and there a stray squirrel shot, meteor-like, up the trunk of a tree, the stripes on its back appearing distinctly in the moonlight; while ever and anon a hoarse grandfather bull-frog would give a grunt, as though suddenly awakened from a bad dream and turning uneasily in his miry bed, while, all, the joyous bark of the dogs and the gay voices of the travelers rang out clear and sweet.

Ten o'clock found the little band unloading for the night. At last they had reached their destination, a spot that they had traveled twenty long miles to see.

This was a wild and beautiful ravine, known as 'The Devil's Soup-Ladle.' It was noted for its picturesque scenery and for its many tales of witchcraft and hobgoblins. Neither money nor persuasion could induce the colored help to remain on this haunted ground during the night. So after pitching the tents, building a cheerful camp-fire and carefully arranging all for the night, they retired to a neighboring field overlooking the unholy ground and prepared to offer prayers for the souls of their masters, whom it was their firm conviction daylight would never again behold!

And now the merriment began, Pat

McCormick, a one-legged Irishman, whose chief delight was to discourse sweet sounds on the fiddle, seated himself astride a rock and struck 'The girl I left behind me,' while a gay party took their place for a dance.

Around the fire stood a group of children, intent on watching a huge kettle of molasses boil preparatory to a candy-pull, and still another knot of gipsies sat upon the grass in the moonlight, recounting the blood curdling tales which belonged to the haunted ravine.

It was a beautiful picture—the white tents standing in solitude on the moonlight hillside, while below appeared the camp-fire and suspended kettle, the happy children, the music, the dancing, the loungers and the story-tellers, the crouching dogs and the unharassed horses grazing peacefully beside their wagons, and, below all this, the shade w ravine, or 'Soup-Ladle,' where e foamed and surged the sparkling stream, which was said to quench the almost insatiable thirst of the Evil One during his tempests of fury.

'Tell us the legend of the 'Soup-Ladle,' said one of the loungers, lighting his pipe as he stretched upon the grass.

'Which legend?' asked his companion, leaning his elbow on the turf and puffing graceful columns of cigar smoke toward the moon.

'Are there so many?' asked Aunt Hester, looking up suddenly, while the moonlight struck her glasses, causing them momentarily to flash like calcium lights.

'At least a dozen,' replied the gentleman gipsy, who seemed posted in the history of the 'Soup-Ladle.' 'But the most appropriate on this occasion, I should think, would be the one they call 'The Moon-Trial.'

'Tell us the legend,' said one and all.

'Yes, tell us the legend, whatever it is!' cried a gay, young voice.

And Bessie, leaning on the arm of Gustave Melville, joined the group at that moment, followed by a merry party, among whom were the two unhappy lovers.

'W-e-l-l,' began the story-teller, knocking the ashes from his pipe, 'it isn't much, but it's appropriate to the place and hour. 'That's why I tell it. Behold! the harvest-moon is at its full, and—looking at his watch—it is a quarter before 12. The little tale runs thus: Any creature, youth or maiden, who goes alone, by the light of yon harvest-moon, at its full, while the clock strikes 12, to the stream below for a drink of water, will meet, on reaching the bank, the phantom of his or her fate, who will present them with a cup of water. Should the youth or the maiden drink from the cup they thus pledge themselves to wed the phantom's earthly counterpart, when fate is pleased to bring the two together.'

'What rubbish!' exclaimed Aunt Hester, with her nose in the air. 'What girl ever tried it?'

'One unhappy maiden, so history tells, did go to the bank,' said the story-teller, solemnly, stroking his beard.

'And she never returned?' inquired several anxiously.

'Not that night,' replied the story-teller, in a sepulchral voice.

'And did no one go after the silly thing?' Asked Aunt Hester.

'No one knew she went,' replied the story-teller. 'After waiting on the bank a long time, looking for her fate, and making at least a dozen mud pies to pass the time away—this artless country maiden afterward confessed—she fell sound asleep, until the hot sun next morning waked and hurried her home to breakfast with a terrible appetite from sleeping out all night.'

'That shows there is no virtue in the Moon Trial!' exclaimed Susie, with a superior air.

'Not at all,' answered the story-teller. 'The Moon Trial was correct. The girl had no fate to come. She died an old maid, years ago.'

'Who will try it to-night?' asked some one.

'Nobody if I can help it,' exclaimed Aunt Hester, quickly. 'It is foolish and wicked.'

'Then I am both foolish and wicked,' said Bessie, 'for I will try it.'

'Away she darted, like a sprite, toward the ravine, while the distant strokes of a village clock slowly tolled out the midnight hour.

A well-worn path through the woods, which excursionists had already explored, led directly to the water's edge, and along this the girl flew like a spirit in the moonlight. More and more lonely grew her path, fainter and more distant the voices of her companions abate; while nearer and clearer sounded the

surging and tumbling of the waters beneath. Her heart beat wildly. She stopped in sudden terror and would fain have turned back, but for the thought of Aunt Hester's triumph over her fall ure.

On she pressed. The last stroke of the clock was dying on the air, as she reached the water's edge, and stepped timidly into the fall glow of the moon. On every side lay sleeping forests.

No sound broke the awful stillness but the sullen roar of the waters, as they tumbled in ghostly white over the uncouth rocks that jutted from the river's bed. But what was this phantom-picture before her? Bessie shaded her eyes, and peered eagerly forward. Had the too powerful rays of this glorious harvest moon indeed turned her brain? There stood seven stalwart gentlemen, phantoms in line, upon the water's edge each presenting her, in silence grim, with a cup.

Suddenly, a succession of piercing screams sounded in the woods above. Like a flash each phantom dropped his cup and dashed up the bank. Faint with terror, Bessie sank upon a rock, and but for the timely assistance of a pair of arms, accompanying a manly form, which sprang to her side, would have fallen into the torrent.

'Foolish child!' exclaimed Gustave Melville, sprinkling her face with water.

'Why did you come on such a goose-chase? Did you want to meet your fate, Bessie? May I suggest the name of one who would gladly fill the position?' and he gazed tenderly at the still white face.

'Whose cup have you just drank from?' and he smiled roguishly. 'Mine, of course,' and he laid his handkerchief wet from the stream, upon her forehead.

'You would not break such a promise, would you, Bessie?'

She smiled faintly, while the color stole slowly back to her cheeks.

'What were those cries?' she exclaimed, springing suddenly to her feet as she recalled what so frightened her.

'Only Mrs. Jones, dear, who slipped on a stone in hurrying down here to see the amusement?' answered Gustave.

'What amusement?' cried Bessie.

'And those men with cups standing here—who were they?' she asked, shivering nervously.

'My dear, I greatly fear,' said Gustave, humorously, 'that they were the gentlemen who listened with you a few moments ago to the story of 'The Moon Trial! All I know is, I saw each man catch a cup from the wagon near, and as you disappeared in the path they took a short cut through the woods to the water, followed by Mrs. Jones and a number of other ladies. My own darling,' and he tenderly lifted the fair young face to the moonlight, 'would you refuse to listen to one who has loved you so long and saved you at last from seven phantoms and a watery grave? Quick, my dear! I hear them coming. We have but a moment to be alone. Say, Bessie, will you not be my dear little wife?'

'Oh, Gustave, how can you doubt it?' she answered, with dazzling eyes.

'Then 'The Moon Trial' has proved true,' replied her lover, holding her close to his heart.

'Too true!' whispered she, joyously.

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They had been engaged to be married fifteen years, and still he had not mustered up resolution enough to ask her to name the happy day. One evening he called in a particularly spooney frame of mind; and asked her to sing him something that would "move" him.

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