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THE OLD HOUSE IN THE HOLLOW.

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"What a funny little place exclaimed Letty Walsh, as she examined the two small rooms comprising the deserted building in which the rustic picnic party had taken shelter from a sudden shower. 'Packed away down in this hollow, why its like being out of the world! Oh, I'd like to keep house here.'"

"Promise you'll keep house for me, too, won't you, Letty?" said Larry Underhill, laughing, from where he sat on a dilapidated table.

"And me!" chorused all the young fellows, except one leaning apart, who now turned a dark and scowling face upon the rest.

Letty blushed as she glanced toward him, and answered evasively: "But there isn't room for all of you."

"Make your choice, Letty," said Underhill, gravely. "Shut your eyes, turn round three times, and stretch out your right hand."

The girl laughingly obeyed, and, whether by accident or design, put her hand in that of the dark young man standing alone. He grasped it firmly, with a sudden smile like sunshine on his lowering face, and forced her to remain there with him, facing them all.

"Bravo!" cried Underhill. "You're in luck, Dallas. Now, just stand still while I make a sketch of you both."

But Gabriel Dallas' face darkened again. "No," he answered, "some other time, Mr. Underhill."

Steve Thatcher gave a coarse guffaw: "You needn't mind if its about Letty, Gabe, for he's got a whole cargo o' pictures of her. hant' you Mr. Underhill?"

Gabriel Dallas looked like an Italian picture and Steve Thatcher like a clown, and perhaps Underhill's appreciation of this, rather than Steve's evident desire to irritate Gabriel made the young artist snub his foolish questioner.

"I don't precisely know what you mean by a cargo," he said suspiciously, "but I generally jot down anything which strikes me. In that way I hope to preserve the remembrance of your own picturesque figure Mr. Thatcher."

There was a laugh at this, for Steve was long, lank and ungainly. He colored angrily now, but, not being able to answer Underhill's mockery in kind, was silent. Presently it ceased raining and they all went out into the open air again. Letty still with Gabriel Dallas.

Letty had come to Stonybank the previous spring with a family named Barton, to whom she was a kind of adopted daughter. They themselves were shiftless, ne'er do well people not thought of much account in Stonybank. But Letty was not like them and then she so bright, so winning, and so exceedingly pretty that before she had been long in the village she was its acknowledged belle. Gabriel was supposed to be the favored lover but they had been kept apart by his moody jealousy, which, once aroused, amounted to a positive passion, making him suspicious, unreasonable and obstinate.

Gabriel came naturally by these jealous instincts. Old Lawyer Fernald, down at Stonybank Corner, who was a living record of all the country history roundabout, said that the young fellow was a descendant from a French or Spanish sailor Manuel Daloz by name who had wandered to Rockport the nearest seacoast town and from there to Stonybank where the local usage converted Daloz into Dallas. Gabriel, the latest descendant possessed the peculiar family temperament which had marked Manuel Daloz, the wanderer from the hills of Southern France.

Gabriel had a good farm, he was sober and industrious, and when not in one of his dark moods open and kindly. He was strikingly handsome, too, with his black, liquid eyes, his clustering tawny hair, and the warm-toned bronze of his complexion. He might almost have his pick among the village girls, but no one had seemed to make any real impression on him until he fell in love at first sight with Letty Walsh with whom however his jealousy had prevented a definite understanding till the day when the girl laid her hand on his, down there in the house in the hollow.

They were married after a very short engagement. The Bartons, like true rolling stones, were about to leave Stonybank for some place in the far West so the wedding took place before they went. All Stonybank there besides a good part of "the corner" the families of which mostly represented a much higher social grade. Among those who came was Laver Fernald with whom Gabriel was a favorite, and his granddaughter Cora, a young lady who had been "finished" in a city boarding school. The other guests were not surprised to see so surprised to see how much attention Larry Underhill paid to pretty Cora. He was considered a mark above most of the village belles—although Letty had sometimes been rallied about him—so they did not mind his devoting himself to Miss Fernald, who also moved in a range beyond their own. Letty herself was really the prettiest girl in the room, and her deep blue eyes, with their shading of curling black hair and lashes, her bright complexion and soft, sweet look contrasted effectively with Gabriel's intense southern beauty. So thought Underhill as his eyes lingered on them. The young artist was an old acquaintance of Letty's, having boarded with the Bartons the summer before they came to Stonybank. Careless as going and reflecting, he led a wandering life in pursuit of his art, but being independent of it, he was not forced to continued exertion so that his painting was like himself a thing of beginnings and caprices.

The weeks went by, the Bartons had long been gone and still Larry Underhill stayed on in Stonybank driving, walking and sketching with Cora Fernald. He did not leave the place until near November and then it was reported that she had received a letter from him.

"What'd I tell you that night at Gabe's wedding?" sagely remarked Eben Wrentham. "And since then I've seen, many's the time, trampin' the woods after leaves and things for her."

Steve Thatcher gave a coarse laugh. "Did ye ever watch a ground-sparrow try to get you off the track of its nest? I'll keep flutterin' round a tree stump as if there warn't anything on this earth it cared for but that particular spot."

"You mean the Fernald girl's the tree stump?"

"How bright you are Eb, to find that out!" answered Steve mockingly.

"But where's the nest, Steve?" asked Eben looking puzzled.

Steve turned his head, and a look of consternation came over his heavy face as he saw that Gabriel Dallas was listening. "I must be gone home," he said abruptly. "I ain't got no more time to fool round here," and he started up the road.

Steve shuffled and coughed; finally he broke down altogether. "Gabe" he stammered, "I—I can't tell ye that. Don't ask me no more. Well, then?" as Gabriel's grasp still tightened on his arm, "If you will have it, don't blame me."

He then described a scene between Underhill and Gabriel's wife which he (Steve) had witnessed in the woods on the evening before Underhill's departure from Stonybank. He said that the artist had held Letty in his arms, and given her repeated kisses which she had returned. There had been allusions to former evenings when she had been with him under cover of going to meet her husband and not until an incautious movement of Steve's startled them, did they separate, Underhill going back to the corner and Letty hurrying home.

Gabriel did not say a word during this story, only his clenched hand shook Steve's arm whenever the latter made a pause. At the close he said hoarsely: "If you have lied to me—" For a moment Steve saw his face livid in the sunset glow, and then he was gone down the wood road.

He went striding along his homeward way with a devil tearing his heart, that old stubborn devil of jealousy, which, once entered took utter possession. When he opened the door Letty sprang up but stopped at the sight of his changed face.

"Why Gabriel?" she faltered, "is anything the matter? Are you—?"

He cut her short, seizing her hands and dragging her to the window, where the light fell full on her face. Then without any preface:

"Did you meet Larry Underhill in the woods last Friday afternoon?" he said.

Letty blushed crimson.

"Yes," she began pleadingly, "but—"

"And did he kiss you?" interrupted Gabriel between his set teeth.

"Oh Gabriel let me tell you how—"

"Yes or no, did he kiss you?" repeated Gabriel, with fierce eyes searching her face: There was a long, sickening pause, then Letty faltered again:

"Yes but—"

He let go her hands so suddenly that she fell back against the wall. He had walked away to the other window, where he stood with averted face. There was another silence then Letty said with trembling eagerness: "Gabriel, dear, let me tell you how it all was—may I?"

There was no answer. She crept up behind him and laid her hand on his arm. He flung it off. "Don't touch me!" he said in a voice she would not have known for his.

"Oh! Gabriel, darling, only hear me!" and again she caught at his sleeve. He turned round then.

"Hear me," he said, "I don't want any explanations, I don't want you to touch me, only to go away where I never shall see your face again—wait a minute," as Letty tried to speak, "I don't want to hurt you but if you don't go in five minutes I swear I will shoot myself where I stand."

He took a revolver and placed it with his watch on the table beside him. Then he turned his back to his wife again and waited.

The minutes ticked on monotonously. Letty sat in stunned silence until she saw him make a movement which she sprang forward and threw herself upon him. "Gabriel!" she cried in a voice of agony, "oh for the sake of our love—"

"Not a word of that," he interrupted, it is time. Will you go—?" He put his hand on the revolver. She gave him a look of passionate desperate appeal, then as he made another movement with a wild scream she rushed out of the house.

It was soon noised about Stonybank that Letty Dallas had left her husband's home and disappeared from the town. Old Lawyer Fernald questioned Gabriel, but found him taciturn and obstinate. "Don't ask me any more, Mr. Fernald," he said respectfully but firmly. "You've always been very good to me, and I don't want to offend you, but I can't and shan't talk about this." The old man shook his head and turned away, for he saw that the trouble was beyond his mending.

After this no one mentioned Letty's name to Gabriel except that once Steve Thatcher suggested that she had gone to join Underhill. But the sullen fury with which Gabriel turned on him restrained him from ever repeating this idea and presently the only reminder of Letty's flight was the change it had wrought in Gabriel.

That occasional darker mood of former days seemed to have taken possession of him now. He was gloomy and abstracted, he went no where and spoke to no one save on business, and day after day he worked as if driven by a fierce unrest. So passed the first year of the marriage which had known only a few happy months; the long cold winter wore away, the spring blossoms opened and fell and the leafy glory of mid-summer had nearly completed its round, and still no word from Letty.

But one hot day in August Letty herself—though the mere shadow of her former self—came back to Stonybank. She carried in her arms a little sickly wailing infant, and looked weary enough to have dropped by the way yet she pressed on to the corner where Lawyer Fernald lived. He owned the old house in the hollow and she wanted to get his leave to occupy it. The old man tried to induce her remain for a time under his roof but here he came in sudden conflict with a certain gentle pride and obstinacy which were marked constituents of Letty's character. No arguments could make her open her lips about Gabriel or consent to any favor more than the use of the old house and Mr. Fernald was reluctantly obliged to give way.

So Letty set up her poor little home within the deserted walls where she had once laughingly declared she would like to keep house. She supported herself and little Gabriel—for so she had named the baby—by needle work and by such odd jobs as she could find among the village housewives. They were glad to do what they could for her; and, as she was thrifty, and the means of living cost but little in Stonybank, her small earnings answered well enough.

People wondered at first what Gabriel Dallas would do, now that his wife had returned to the neighborhood. But Gabriel simply ignored her. Once only did he show that he was aware of her presence. Letty has gone over to Stonybank Corners to do a piece of work, and the baby was with her, one thin arm clasped about her neck. At Lawyer Fernald's gate they came suddenly face to face with Gabriel, who was going out, and the child, moved by some impulse, began to cry and stretch out its little frail hands to him, almost falling from its mother's shoulder. Gabriel instinctively put up his hands to steady it, and over the babies head the husband and wife for a moment looked into each other's faces. Gabriel's dark and sullen as usual now, Letty's pale and wasted, but with the same sweet look in the deep blue eyes. Then Gabriel turned away without a word, and Letty passed on silently.

"Poor Letty! how she has changed," said Mr. Fernald, who, from his doorstep, had seen the meeting. Gabriel made no answer. "She used to look so bright and fresh," pursued the old gentleman reproachfully to Gabriel's back, "I remember your wedding Gabriel, I thought I'd scarcely ever seen such a pretty girl—and now—"

Gabriel's shoulder twitched, but that was all.

"Gabriel Dallas," burst forth the old man indignantly, "are you a stone, to see your wife die by inches! And the baby, too, poor little thing, your own flesh and blood—"

Gabriel turned round, then, and his face was like one in torture. "Mr. Fernald," he gasped, "don't don't—I can't bear any more!" And he started running down the road in the opposite direction to that which Letty had taken.

No one at the Corner saw Gabriel for a week after this, and when he reappeared he was more taciturn than ever. As for Letty, whatever she suffered she kept it to herself, and went on as before.

But one October day the baby died, withered up like a frail little flower in the autumn frost. Every one was sorry, for whatever the rights of it between Gabriel and his wife, Letty and the baby had enlisted general sympathy. So, in their simple way, they did their best to comfort her, and, by her wish, the tiny grave was made beneath the branches of a hemlock tree beside the window, where she could see it at her work.

Again people wondered about Gabriel. Would he be at the funeral? He was not there, but one who was, and who saw him the same day, thought she could never forget the scene. Cora Fernald had come over with her grandfather to the old house in the hollow, but, when they were about to return home, Mr. Fernald recollected a matter of business some few miles further on, so Cora concluded to walk through the woods. After the close little room down there, it was a relief to be in the open air, and she went along enjoying the beautiful Indian summer-like day, the splendid colors of the forest foliage and the sweet smell of the withering bracken. A branch of brilliant scarlet maple caught her eye and drew her in search of it. Entering a small clearing, she came suddenly upon Gabriel Dallas at the foot of the blood-red maple tree. He was sitting on a log, his head in his hands, and great tears dropping down his cheeks. The girl spoke with impulsive pity:

"Oh, Gabriel," she said, "I am so sorry the poor little thing is dead—so sorry for you and Letty!"

Gabriel had started up and dashed his hand over his face. He stood looking straight at her, as she stopped confused.

"Thank you," he answered with grave courtesy, "but there are some things it does no good to talk about." He touched his hat and turned away, then, as if moved by a sudden thought, came back again.

"Miss Fernald," he said abruptly, "do you hear from Mr. Underhill now?"

The young lady was taken aback by this question, so directly yet so respectfully put. Gabriel stood waiting and under the spell of his gloomy black eyes she answered hesitatingly:

"Why, yes—sometimes—"

"Don't marry him," said Gabriel earnestly. "Don't have anything to do with him. He is a bad man."

He paused and added simply: "Don't be offended with me for speaking so to you; but you and your grandfather have been very good to me, and I don't want you to be unhappy. If I ever saw that man again I should kill him." With that he struck off into the woods.

Cora Fernald was completely bewildered, and told her grandfather that she thought Gabriel's troubles had turned his brain. But the old man thought he saw a glimmer of light upon the mystery. Quietly, without a word to Cora, he wrote to Underhill, asking him some very direct questions. With this he was forced to be content. Any further appeal to Gabriel would be useless, and with Letty it had already been made in vain at the baby's death. Less than ever would she attempt any reconciliation with her husband, that chance meeting when she had seen his sullen face and abrupt withdrawal, but not his subsequent emotion. Her life was hard, but if it had not mattered before her child's death, it surely did not matter now. Fearfully but firmly she thanked Mr. Fernald for his kindness begged him to urge her no more.

So Letty was left alone in the old house in the hollow. The leaves

lost their brilliant colors, and winds swept them through the islands; the days grew short and cold and the snow fell and the time had ten out of a year the little grave under the hemlock. Letty had her way, undisturbed for the present by Mr. Fernald. He was hiding his time.

The event justified him. Some weeks later came a letter from Underhill, away across the ocean, containing an indignant denial of any connection with the trouble in Gabriel's household. The writer added that he should come it person to Stonybank to investigate a mystery with which his name was mixed up.

Mr. Fernald rubbed his hands gleefully over the young artist's manly and straightforward letter, armed with which he felt that he could approach Gabriel with a much better chance of success than formerly. And, apart from instinctive unwillingness to let any mystery baffle his leg-^l women, he had the young couple's happiness very much at heart. He would have liked to go at once to Gabriel, but the first great snow-storm was on its way and the thick air and heavy roads obliged him to defer his purpose till the morrow.

That same afternoon Gabriel was out jogging with Steve Thatcher and the Wrentham brothers. Enough snow had fallen earlier in the month to make good sleighing, but the present severe storm seriously interfered with their work; so, loading up their dogs, they started for home. Steve had been drinking more than usual that day and was very uncertain in his movements. Finally by a sudden lurch he fell under the team, and must have been kicked outright if Gabriel had not quickly pulled him out. As it was he suffered very serious injury, while Gabriel's arm was terribly lacerated.

"Here's a bad business," said Eben Wrentham, as he held Steve upon the cart. "Snowing, too, like all possessed! How'd ye feel now, Steve? Looks like death, don't he?" in an audible aside.

Steve was ghastly pale indeed, and his teeth chattered and his eyes rolled round continually.

"Oh, Lord!" he moaned, "I'm all gone to smash. Get me home, boys, quick!"

Gabriel spoke to him reassuringly as he started up the team. But at the motion Steve gave a groan and his head fell to one side. Then he opened his eyes a gain and called out, "Gabriel!"

Gabriel bent down. "What is it Steve?"

"I'm done for," said Steve, who evidently fancied himself dying, "and I want to tell ye something, Gabe, I—I lied to ye that time, about—about Letty—"

Gabriel had drawn away his hands and stood pale and lowering over Steve. The other two fell back, looking on wonderingly, while Steve in broken sentences told the true story of that evening. Underhill had met Letty by chance in the wood-road and had said goodbye to her, saying that he was going away on the morrow. As he held her hand in parting he bent down and kissed her; but Letty sternly freed herself, with an exclamation of anger. Underhill laughed and promised not to offend again, and presently they separated. This was the kernel of truth in that lie which had changed Gabriel's whole life. As for the repeated meetings, the frequent embraces, these were all the coinage of Steve's angry and envious mind, bent on injuring the three against whom he had a grudge.

When Steve had finished his story, Gabriel said hoarsely: "You swear before God this is true?"

"As I hope to be forgiven!" gasped Steve.

Gabriel lifted his clenched hand. Eben Wrentham caught it. "No, no, Gabe, you wouldn't—not when Steve's hurt so bad—!"

"Hurt!" muttered Gabriel, "but!—where's my baby? That's dead!—and Letty—?"

He wrenched his hand suddenly free, and brought it down so violently that the blood gushed afresh from the ragged wound made in

rescuing Steve. "Curse the hand that saved him!" He muttered again as he dashed down the road.

The Wrentham brothers, after one blank stare, turned back to the business of the moment. "Well, Steve," said Eben, a good job you've made of it altogether! I s'pose we'll have to get you back somehow now."

Steve only groaned as they started up the team again. They were forced to go slowly on his account, and the rapidly falling light and fast falling snow rendered progress difficult, while the night was setting in bitterly cold with a stinging wind.

The next day dawned bright, but with that intense cold which sometimes follows a heavy snow storm. The sky had the clear, pale blue of ice, the air was like ice-crystals, everything froze and sparkled. Lawyer Fernald, looking out at the piled up drifts, concluded that he would have to wait yet another day to see Gabriel Dallas.

The Wrentham brothers, however, who lived in Gabriel's neighborhood, were concerned to know how he reached home, in view of his injured arm and his desperate state of mind. So, after breakfast Eben broke his way over.

Gabriel was not there. The house was shut up, and there was no appearance of life about the place. Eben made his way to the next house, where Gabriel had used to take his meals since his wife's departure. But nothing had been seen of him there either, since the previous morning when he started off with the logging party. Eben, uneasy, went home and informed his brother of the result of his expedition. The two stood looking at each other, and the same thought came into the eyes of both.

"Letty!" said Eben.

"The old house in the hollow!" exclaimed William in the same breath.

They harnesses a heavy sledge, and started out toward the old house. There were no indications that Gabriel had passed along the wood-road diverging to the hollow, but yesterday's abundant snowfall would doubtless efface his tracks. They labored on until the house itself was reached. Here, too, was the same silence, the same desolate loneliness. The only suggestion of life—a life which had gone out in death—was the little white grave under the hemlock tree.

They went up to the door, which the wind had wrenched partly off in the night. A great heap of snow lay within the small passage as they stepped inside, but there was no sign of human presence, only a dead cold that seemed to chill the blood in their veins. William stopped with his hand on the latch. "I don't believe they're here, Eb," he said hesitatingly.

"They must be, Letty at any rate," answered Eben; "open the door, will you, Bill?"

They entered, but there was no one there. They crossed the floor and paused on the threshold of the next and only other room of the rude little structure. William stood still, with chattering teeth, for the cold seemed to increase at every step. The door was just ajar, and over his brother's shoulder Eben reached forward and pushed it gently open.

At first they thought that this room, too, was empty; but after a moment the figures of a man and woman were discernable at the barber-end. The man was lying on a narrow bed, the scanty covering of which was reddened with a great dark stain. Half-knee-high beside him, with her head close to his and her arm about him, rested the woman's form. Neither stirred at the noise of the entrance.

"It's Gabriel, and they're both fast asleep," said Eben in a tone of relief. "But I should think they'd freeze!"

He looked at his brother, but William's eyes, as they met his, were dilated with a strange terror.

"Oh, Eben," he gasped, "that ain't sleep, they—they are froze!" Eben started, speechless for a mo-

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