

# SUPPORT

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## By The Fountain.

MARGARET HOUSTON.

There was nothing in the aspect of the white brick mansion to indicate that a tragedy was going on inside. A woman quietly dressed, her face glowing delicately above her dark furs, came lightly down the steps. She paused a half second at the gateway and looked back, but there was no hesitation in the glance.

"Jules," she said to the coachman, "you may drive to the park."

She did not look back as they drove away.

There should be no gossiping among the servants. Everything should be done decently. From the park she could take the suburban and go quietly into town. From there—the world was wide. There was a note on his dresser, he would read it tonight and understand—no, not understand, she had ceased to expect that of him—but he would know—in some dull, stern way he would see—he would see. She caught sight of her face in the little mirror of the brougham and lowered her veil. Ah, it was a bitter, barren thing, this striving, striving, endlessly striving to be understood. She had endured it for four years and she was worn heartsick with the strain. Her soul cried out for warmth, for life, for breathing room; was not one's first duty to one's self after all? She turned suddenly—Jules stood by the open door.

"Jules," she said, summoning a little severity of manner to counterbalance the tremor in her voice, "you need not come back for me. Jules," she added, turning again, "good-by—you have—you have been very faithful."

The man touched his hat gravely and stood like a sentinel till she had passed from sight among the trees.

It was late in November, and the maple boughs were a riot of red and gold. The sky beyond them looked pale and far away as though a white veil had been drawn across its tender southern blue. She rejoiced now that she had elected to spend this last hour in the frosty outdoor gladness. With a little impulse of relief, she flung back her veil and drew a deep breath. Then she locked her hands inside her muff and began to walk briskly.

At the park's further end there was a bench, inside a sort of roofless summerhouse, where on warm days the fountain played in a rainbow. She knew the place well—she had sat there many times—with him and with another—she would go there now and think her own thoughts. It was hidden from the driveways, and the place was sweet with memories which need not goad or pain her. She remembered the last time she had sat there. It came back to her now with a sudden vividness. It was the day she had refused—the other one. She remembered the dress she wore—a thin little mull, cut low about the throat and strewn with pink rosebuds. And it was on that same bench. She had done it very gently. She had simply shown him her ring, and begged him with a little catch of the breath to be her friend—always. He was tender and impulsive like herself, and he had always understood—always. How could she have forgotten for so long? Friends were rare—and he had promised to be her friend through everything. Her friend! Had he realized how much that meant?

Her step had grown very slow: she quickened it, lifting her head, and reached the little plaza near the fountain, her face flushed with the walk, the dark tendrils of her hair fallen from beneath her floating veil.

It was very sad here now, and very lonely. She had not thought that any place long familiar could look so strange. She paused, almost dreading to enter the old retreat, clothed as it was in the withered vine robes of dead springs. It was so like the rainbow fountain of her own years checked and desolate and still. A whirlwind of red and yellow leaves swept about her feet. She started nervously, and, opening the little gate, went in.

But the place was not deserted. A man sat on the bench. He rose as she closed the gate, and when she would have withdrawn, he came toward her and held out a hand.

"Oh," she said, feeling as if she were speaking in a dream, "is it—where did you come from?"

"It seems very natural to see you here," he said.

His face was bronzed and he had more beard than formerly, but his eyes were the same when he smiled.

"I did not dream you were anywhere near us," she went on, the wonder deepening in her eyes. "I was—you seem part of my thoughts—I was thinking of you only a moment ago."

"You were always kind," said the man. "Let me spread my overcoat on the bench—the stone is cold. You have been walking, haven't you?"

"Yes. I don't walk much—it tries me easily." She sat down, loosening the furs at her throat, breathing quickly; her eyes searched his face, half dazed, half questioning. "But where have you been?" she asked. "Were you not in Africa?"

"Yes. I have been home only a few days—I don't wonder you are surprised finding me here; people don't often sit in the park at this time—but I find it cozier than the station across the way. I came out on the hill early this noon to look up old friends, and I found I'd an hour to wait."

"Am I not an old friend?" she asked.

"Why have you not been to see—us?"

"I hope I may count you such," said the man. "I knew your husband, too, many years ago; but he said that you were ill; I saw him this morning."

"I have been ill," she answered, quickly, and looked away, pushing back her hair with the little movement he knew so well.

"I am sorry for that," he said. "I heard of your loss.—I did not lose sight entirely of my friend. Your little boy," he added, his voice softening—"your little boy—"

"My baby died," she said.

"I know—I heard of it—I knew how keenly you could suffer. But I knew, too, how brave you were—"

"Oh!" she said, catching the lace at her throat. "If he—if my baby had lived—I might—I could—"

She checked herself with a sudden biting of the lip, but the tears broke from her eyelids and she bowed her face.

"Ah," said the man, "I know—this is very hard; but it is something, after all, to have felt—to have known. No loss can be so bitter as a lack—a need."

There was a moment's silence between them.

"Tell me of yourself," she said, quietly, at length.

"There is little to tell. My life is very much the same. I have neither wife nor child. Until a man finds those, he's a most indifferent topic."

"You have never married?" she asked.

"No. Your life is fuller, sweeter, better. Tell me of that. I used to know your husband—did you know?"

"No," she said, "I did not know."

"Yes, we were chaps together, he and I, the same age, though he seemed older—he was a plucky little fellow—you did not know him long, I believe before you married."

She was looking straight before her at the still foundation. "No," she said, "I did not know him long."

"Ah," mused the man, "I know him well. He is a prince—one of God's own. Somewhat quiet now, I find, but he was always rather reserved, his life made him so; he was such a kid when he began to support them all—the mother and the girls, you know. But he worked along going to night school—always ready, always courageous. My father used to say he'd give all his four boys for that one. We never worked much, you know. I suppose those who don't know him call him stern, but he has carried a pretty heavy load all his life, and that sobers a man and takes the spring out of him—of course you know, though."

But the woman said nothing. The man paused, regarding her a moment, then he let his gaze follow hers.

"I was thinking of the foundation," she said; "how it once flashed and sang and played—and now—"

"And now," said the man, "it is silent and cold—but the bright water is there still, and when the spring comes back it will leap forth again. It reminds me of my friend of whom we were just speaking—your husband. All the glow and life are still in his heart, and you will waken them. I said when you were married, that he needed just that—a union with a rich, sunny nature like your own, to teach him all that he had missed, and give back to him all that he had lost."

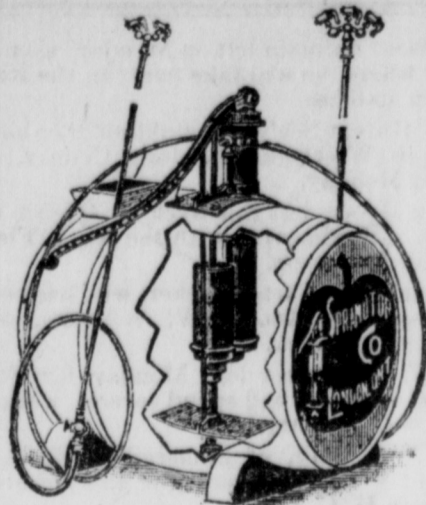
Her lashes fell slowly, and she stroked her muff with one white hand.

The man spoke on, musingly. "I suppose even you do not realize the good he does—the help he gives to others. He doesn't talk of himself—he never did—even to you, I suppose? No? It is like him, he was always

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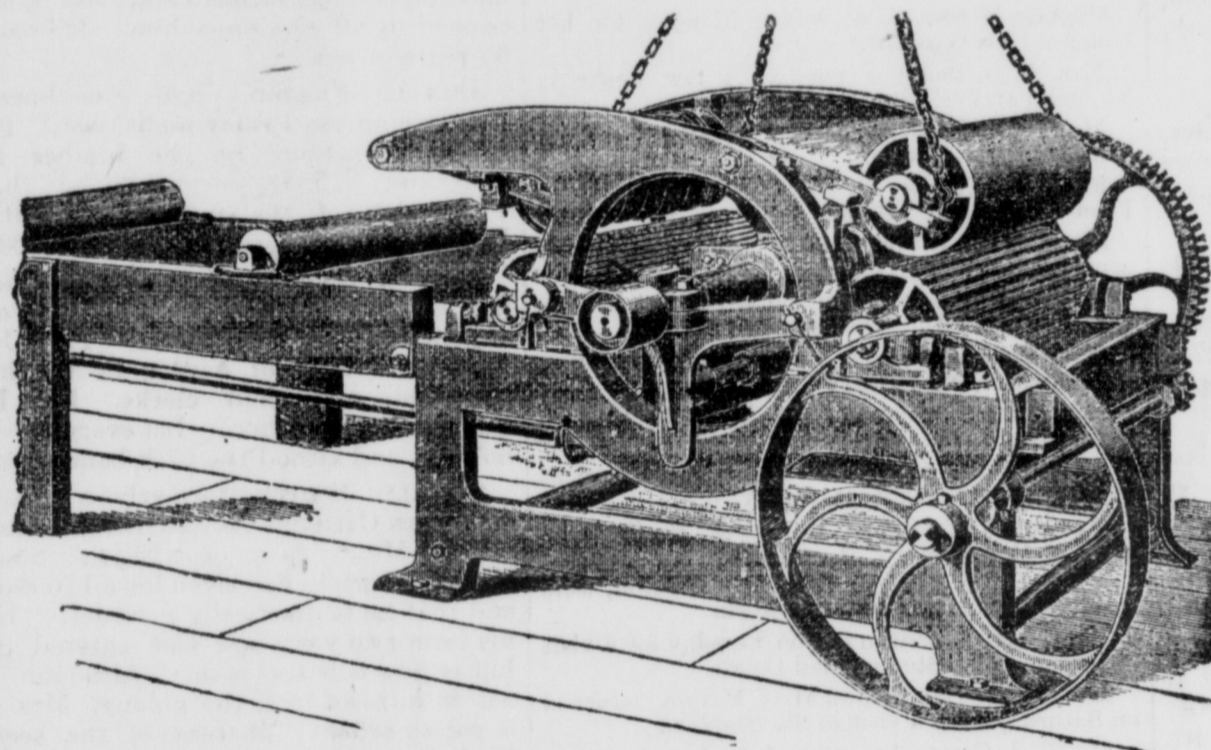
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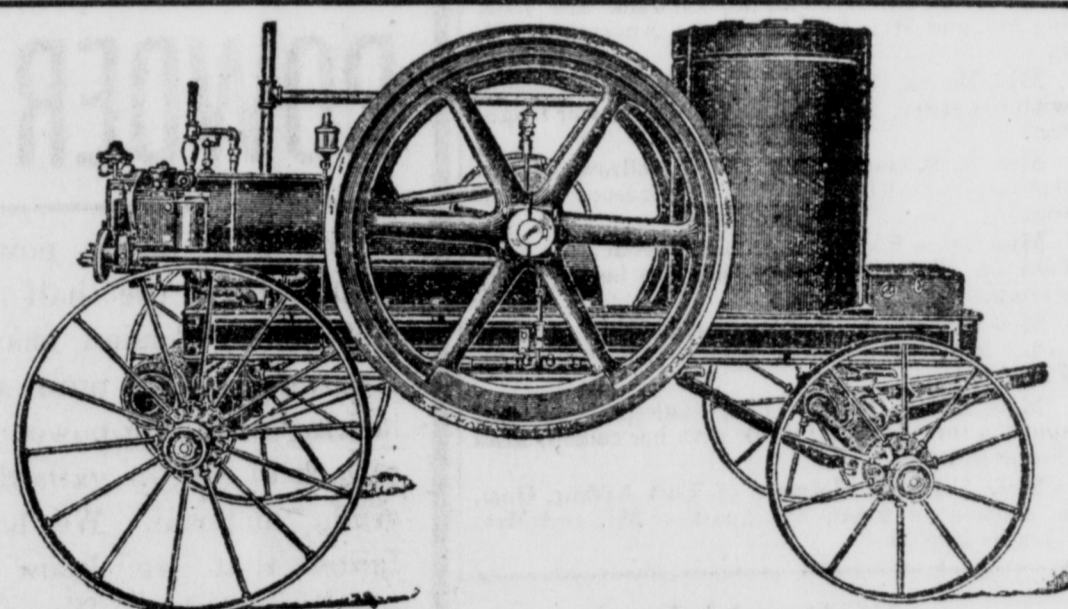
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so. It was—it was in the cemetery I saw him this morning. I—when I come home—I always go there—my mother is there, you remember—I found him by—by your little boy. He was talking with the sexton when I came up. It seems the grass didn't grow about the little fellow's—bed. The man admitted that his own little folks were accustomed to play there—the lot is shady and close to the house—they bring their toys and frolic there till the grass is quite worn away. You should have seen his face when the man told him that. 'Let them come', he said; 'don't stop them; the grass doesn't matter.' 'The boy won't be so lonely,' said he to me. 'It seems so far away out here—and he all by himself—he was such a little chap—I sort of feel one of us ought to stay with him—at night.'

The woman raised her eyes to his face. "Ah," she said, softly, "did he—did he say that?"

"Yes—and it goes to show, what you doubtless know better than I, how deep and true and tender he is beneath it all. Shan't I lay this coat more about you? I think the air has grown chillier."

"No, thank you," she said rising. "Yes, it is chillier."

The man rose also. She stood a moment—her hand on the little gate, her eyes grown dark and deep. He waited at her side.

Her fingers sought the latch absently.

"Let me open it for you," he said. "Where you going into town, or did you come for the walk?"

"I?" she said. "Oh, I told Jules not to come back for me—it's a short walk home." She smiled up at him for the first time with her old-time brightness. "And you," she said, "you haven't completed the round of your 'old friends' yet—you will come with me."

### Bubbles.

Minor strains—the baby's.  
Seen in many lands—gangplanks.  
Detectives are interested in the "collar" industry.

The Whirling Dervish would be lost in the whirl of society.

The miser can keep most things easier than friends.

A spiral staircase isn't done until it is wound up.

It's a pretty bright candle that is always up to snuff.

Money talks, but the wise bank teller doesn't tell all he hears.

As a rule, the hens calculate to cackle early.

Even the short man may truthfully talk about his "long suit."

No matter what the cause be, a woman thinks her "Because" is sufficient.

Don't present the woman who is growing stout with "The Light of Other Days."

In tanning the dudes, Old Sol does things up brown.

A spite fence is not a thing to be easily overlooked.

The most successful railroad director may not be able to direct an envelope readably.

A man doesn't like being run after by a woman; especially a woman detective.

With some people, the most important thing seems to be to realize their own importance.

The miner isn't always obliged to stop working because he is under the weather.

### Handful Habit Is The Limit.

Fort William Times-Journal.

"About half the people who come in to my store," said a Fort William grocer last Saturday, "seem to think that apples, plums, nuts and peaches displayed here are for them to sample free. They make their purchases and then, on their way out, take handfuls from the baskets. As they are my customers I say nothing. Some of the baskets I keep covered, but lots of people lift the screens. I decided once, not long ago, to keep track for one day and estimate what I was loser thru the pilfering of customers. It amounted to 70 cents worth. I figure I lose in that way about \$4.25 a week.

"On the day of the last C. P. R. pay cheques arrived a woman who had the handful habit surprised me. She came to pay her monthly bill, which was \$28. She handed me three tens. I offered the two dollars change, but she declined to accept it.

"'Keep it, please,' she said, 'I have eaten about \$2 worth of things from your baskets since I have been trading here and I want to pay for them.'

"If the rest of my 'customers who have the handful habit would come in with a couple of dollars each I might be able to retire from business."

### The Chugs.

Mrs. Chugwater: This paper says the passengers escaped on a raft. How could they make a raft at sea?

Mr. Chugwater: They could use the ship's log, couldn't they? Why don't you use your own reasoning faculties once in a while

The heroine of "Annie Laurie" was the daughter of Sir Walter Laurie of Maxwelltown. The composer of the song was William Douglas of England in the stowaway of Kirkcubright.