

# THE SHORTEST DAY IN THE YEAR

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TO-MORROW," ETC.

THE snow was still falling steadily, although it had already thickly carpeted the avenue. It was a soft, gentle snow, sifting down calmly and clinging moistly to the bare branches of the feeble trees, which stood out starkly sheathed in white, spectral in the grayness of the later afternoon. Gangs of men were clearing the cross-paths at the corners and shoveling the sodden drifts into carts of various sizes, impressed into sudden service. It was not yet dusk, but the street-lamps had been lighted; and the tall hotel almost opposite was already illuminated here and there by squares of yellow.

Elinor stood at the window of her aunt's house, gazing out, and yet not seeing the occasional carriages and the frequent automobiles that filled the broad avenue before her. The Christmas wreath that hung just over her head was scarcely more motionless than she was, as she stared straight before her, unconscious of anything but the deadness of her own outlook on life.

She looked very handsome in her large hat and her black furs, which set off the pallor of her face, relieved by the deep eyes, now a little sunken, and with a dark line beneath them. She took no notice of the laborers as they drew on one side to allow her aunt's comfortable carriage to draw up before the door. She did not observe the laughing children at an upper window of the house exactly opposite, highly excited at the vision of a huge Christmas-tree which towered aloft in a cart before the door. She was waiting for Aunt Cordelia to take her to a tea, and then to a studio, where her portrait was to be shown to a few of her friends.

Her thoughts were not on any of these things; they were far away from wintry New York. Her thoughts were centered on the new-made grave in distant Panama, in which they had buried the man she loved less than a week ago.

And it was just a year ago to-day, on the 22d of December, the shortest day in the year, that she had promised to be his wife. Only a year—and it seemed to her that those twelve months had made up most of her life. What were the score of years that had gone before in comparison with the richness of those happy twelve months, when life had at last seemed worth while?

As a girl, she had wondered sometimes what life was for, and why men and women had been sent on this earth. What was the purpose of it all? But this question had never arisen again since she had met him; or, rather, it had been answered, once for all. Life was love; that was plain enough to her. At last her life had taken on significance, since she had yielded herself to his first kiss, and since the depth of her own passion had been revealed to her swiftly and unexpectedly.

As she looked back at his unexpected appeal to her, and as she remembered that when he had told her his love and asked her to be his, they had met only ten days before, and had spoken to each other less than half a dozen times, she realized that it was her fate which had brought them together. Although she did not know it, she had been waiting for him, as he had been waiting for her. She was his mate, and he was hers, chosen out of all others—a choice foreordained through all eternity.

Their wooing was a precious secret, shared by no one else. They knew it themselves, and that was enough; and perhaps the enforced mystery made the compact all the sweeter. Ever since they had plighted their troth, she had gone about with joy in her heart and with her head in a heaven of hope, hardly aware that she was touching the earth. All things were glad around her; and a secret song of happiness was forever caroling in her ears.

And yet she knew that it might be years before he could claim her, for he was only

now beginning his professional career, as an engineer. He had just been appointed to a good place on the canal. His chief was encouraging, and put responsibilities on him; he had felt sure that he would have a chance to show what he could do. And she had been almost angry how any one could ever doubt that he would rise to the head of his profession. She had told him that she would wait seven years, and twice seven years, if need be.

Aunt Cordelia was hoping that she would make a splendid match. Within a week after John Grant had said good-by, she had rejected Reggie Eames, whom her aunt had been encouraging for a year or two. She liked Reggie well enough; he was a good fellow. When he had asked her if there was another suitor standing in his way, she had looked him in the face and told him that there was; and Reggie had taken it like a man, and had made a point of being nice to her ever since, whenever they met in society.

As she stood there at the window, she gave a slight start, and then nodded pleasantly to Reggie, who had bowed as he passed the house on the way to the Union Club. And then the avenue, with all its passers-by, its carriages and automobiles, its shoveling laborers and its falling snow, its Christmas greens and its lighted windows, faded again from her vision, as she tried to imagine that unseen grave far away in Panama.

She wished that she could have been with him—that they could have had those last few hours together. She had had so little of him, after all. An unexpected summons had come to him less than a week after they were engaged; and he had gone at once. Of course, he had written by every steamer, but what were letters when she was longing for the clasp of his arms? And every month, on the 22d, there had come a bunch of violets, with the single word "Sweet-heart." He had laughed when he told her that the 22d of December was the shortest day in the year—which was not very promising if they expected to be "as happy as the day is long"!

The months had gone, one after another; she had not seen him again; and now she would never see him again. He had been hoping for leave of absence early in the spring; and she had been looking forward to it. He had written that he did not know how the work would get along without him, but he did know that he could not get along without her. Hereafter she would have to

get along without him; and she had never longed for him so much, wanted him, needed him.

The long years to come stretched out before her vision, as she stood there in the window, lovely in her youthful beauty; and she knew that for her they would be desolate, barren, and empty years. The flame of love burned within her as fiercely as ever; but there was now nothing for it to feed on but a memory; yet the fire was hot in its ashes.

She opened her heavy furs, for it seemed to her that they were stifling her. She knew that they had been admired by her friends, and even envied by some of them. Aunt Cordelia had given them to her for Christmas, insisting on her wearing them as soon as they came home, since they were so becoming.

Aunt Cordelia meant to be kind; she had always meant to be kind, ever since Elinor had come to her as an orphan of ten. Her kindness was a little exacting, at times; and her narrow matrimonial ambitions Elinor could not help despising. What did it profit a girl to make a splendid match, if she did not marry the one man she was destined to love?

The furs were beautiful, and they were costly. Were they the price of her freedom? Was it due to these expensive things she did not really want that she had not been able to take John Grant for her husband a month or a week after he had asked her?

Everything in this world had to be paid for; and perhaps she had sold her liberty too cheap. If it had not been for the furs, and for all the other things that her aunt had accustomed her to, she might have gone with him to Panama and nursed him when he fell ill. She felt sure that she could have saved him. She would have tried so hard! She would have put her soul into it. Her soul? She felt as if the sorrow of the past week had made her acquainted with her own soul for the first time. And she confessed herself to be useless, and feeble, and weak.

That was what made it all seem so strange. Why could she not have died in his place? Why could not she have died for him? It seemed to her as if she had lived, really lived, only since she had known him; and it was only since he had gone, that she had known herself. She had meant to help him—not that he needed any assistance from anybody. Now she could help no one in all the wide world. She

was useless again—a girl, ignorant and helpless.

Why could she not have been taken, and why could not he have been spared? He had a career before him; he would have been able to do things—strong things, brave things, noble things, delicate things. And he was gone before he had been able to do anything, with all his possibilities of honor and fame, with all his high hope of honest, hard work in the years of his manly youth, with everything cut short, just as if a candle had been blown out by a chance wind.

She marveled how it was that she had been able to live through the long days since she had read the brief announcement of his death. She did not see how it was that she had not cried out, how it was that she had not shouted aloud the news of her bereavement. She supposed it must be because she had inherited self-control; because she had been trained to keep her feelings to herself, and never to make a scene.

Fortunately, she was alone when she learned that he was dead. She had been up late at a ball the night before; and, as usual, Aunt Cordelia had insisted on her staying in bed all the morning to rest. When she had finished her chocolate, Aunt Cordelia had brought in the morning paper, and had raised the window-shade for her to read, before going down for a long talk with the lawyer who managed her affairs.

Elinor had glanced over the society reporter's account of the ball and his description of her own gown; she had read the announcement of the engagement of a girl she knew to a foreign count; and then she was putting the paper down carelessly when her eye had caught the word "Panama" at the top of a paragraph. Then, at a flash, she had read the inconspicuous paragraph which told how John Grant, a very promising young engineer, in charge of a section of the work on the canal, had died suddenly of pneumonia, after only two days' illness, to the great grief of all his associates, especially of the chief, who had thought very highly of him.

The words danced before her eyes in letters of fire; and she felt as if an icy hand had clutched her heart. She was as stunned as if the end of the world had come; and it was the end of her world.

She did not recall how long she had held the paper clutched in her hand; and she did

not know why she had not wept. It seemed to her as if tears would be a profanation of her grief, too deep to be washed away by weeping. She had not cried once. Perhaps it would have been a relief if she could have had a good cry, petty and pitiful as it would be.

When Aunt Cordelia had called her, at last, to get ready for luncheon, she had arisen as if she had been somebody else. She had dressed, and gone down-stairs, and sat opposite her aunt, and chatted about the ball. She recalled that her aunt had said that there was nothing in the paper that morning, except the account of the ball. Nothing in the paper! She had kept her peace, and had made no confession. It seemed to her that it could not have been herself who sat there calmly and listened and responded. It seemed as if she was not herself, but another girl—a girl she did not know before.

So the days had gone, one after another, and so they would continue to go in the future. She was young, and she came of a sturdy stock; she might live to be three-score and ten.

As she stood there at the window, staring straight before her, she saw herself slowly changing into an old maid like Aunt Cordelia, well meaning and a little fidgety, a little fussy, and quite useless. She recoiled as she surveyed the long vista of time, with no husband to take her into his arms, and with no children for her to hold up to him when he came back from his work. And she knew that she was fit to be a wife and a mother; and now she would never be either.

What was there left for her to do in life? She could not go into a convent, and she could not study to be a trained nurse. There she was at twenty-one, a broken piece of driftwood washed up on an unknown island. She had no hope any more; the light of her life had gone out.

She asked herself whether she had any duty toward others—duty which would make life worth living once more. She wished that there was something for her to do; but she saw nothing. She set her teeth and resolved that she would go through life, whatever it might bring, and master it, for his sake, as he would have expected her to do. He was dead, and lying alone in that distant, lonely grave; and she would have to live on and on—but at least she would live as he would approve.

But whatever her life might be, it would

not be easy without him. She had lived on his letters; and she had taken a new breath of life every month when his violets came. And now nothing would come any more—no message, no little words of love, nothing to cheer her and to sustain her. Never before had she longed so much for a message from him—a line only—a single word of farewell.

It was again the shortest day of the year; and it was to her the longest of all her life. But all the days would be long hereafter, and the nights would be long, and life would be long; and all would be empty, since he would never again be able to communicate with her. If only she believed in spiritualism, if only she could have even the dimmest hope that some day, somehow, some sort of communication might come to her from him, from the shadowy realm where he had gone, and where she could not go until the summons came to join him!

So intent was she upon her own thoughts that she did not hear the ring of the door-bell; and a minute later she started when the butler entered the room with a small parcel in his hand.

"What is it, Dexter?" she asked, mechanically.

"This has just come for you, miss," he answered, handing her the parcel.

She held it without looking at it until Dexter had left the room. Probably it was a Christmas present from one of her friends; and she loosened the strings listlessly.

It was a box from a florist; and she wondered who could have sent her any flowers on the day sacred to him. It might be Reggie, of course; but he had not done that for nearly a year now.

She opened the box carelessly, and found a bunch of violets. There was a card with it.

She took it nearer to the window, to read it in the fading light. It bore the single word, "Sweetheart."

She stood for a moment, silent and trembling.

"John!" she cried aloud. "From you!"

She sank into a chair, with the violets pressed against her heart, sobbing; and the tears came at last, plentifully.

Then she heard footsteps on the stairs; and in a moment more her aunt was standing at the door and calling:

"Elinor, are you ready? We are late."

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#### BRUISED HEATHER

MORN is saft breaking—

Rise, Jeanie Rae!

The wee lark is waking

Fra sleep in the brae;

The love rose is sighing,

For dream roses dying,

An' darkness is cying

O'er birth o' the day.

Why must ye tarry,

Sweet Jeanie Rae?

Oh, come, let us marry

Ere life slips away;

An' close in love's tether

We'll sing together

Auld songs, to weather

The grave days and gay.

Where be ye roaming,

Lost Jeanie Rae?

Poor bruised bird, na homing

Though years wither gray!

Oh, where be ye keeping?

In what land a weeping?

Or oh, be ye sleeping

Wi' God, lass, for ay?

*Gordon Johnstone*





**JULIANA WILHELMINA, PRINCESS OF ORANGE, HEIRESS TO THE  
THRONE OF HOLLAND**

*From her latest photograph by Coral, Amsterdam*

Queen Wilhelmina of the Netherlands has been married for nearly ten years, but she has only one child, the baby princess whose interesting and characteristic portrait appears above. Once more, therefore, as was the case when the late King William III left the crown to his daughter, the present queen, the sole hope of the historic house of Orange centers in the life of a little girl. The Princess Juliana is now sixteen months old, the first anniversary of her birth having been celebrated with great popular rejoicings on the 13th of April last. To judge from her photograph, she is a healthy, sturdy little Dutch lady, with a normal child's fondness for playthings.