

# THE ANGEL OF HIS YOUTH

By Octave Thanet



It was twenty years since Giles had seen his native town. Much had happened to him during that time. He had left the green Iowa hills, with something clutching at his throat, a college boy of twenty-two, fresh from his college triumphs, glowing with his college ideals and friendships, a warm-hearted lad who had just made the sacrifice of his life—so he called it—for his best friend. He had splendid physical powers, dim ambitions, a dogged tenacity of purpose, and an immense interest in his fellow-creatures. He came back a successful man, the president of a great railway who had kept his honor, but had lost a good deal of his belief in his fellow-creatures. He was married, he was happy in his home; yet he had not brought his wife with him. Many times he had promised to bring his wife and his children to see his birthplace; but he always made a mental reservation that it should not be the first time. He wanted that first visit alone, with his memories and with the romance of his youth.

It had been a tremendous experience; and a clinging sweetness still exhaled from the ashes of the past. For years he had not heard her name; he had never told her that he loved her; and yet the memory of those passionate hours that she haunted, had stayed with him through all his strenuous years.

He drove slowly along the road under the hills; twenty years ago, he knew the road well. How often at dawn had he galloped through the dewy freshness of summer, the pageant of harvest spread, below, for his unheeding eyes, above, the shaded hill-sides. He could feel the soft breeze, now, in his hair, just such a breeze; and there, through the maples, was a glimmer of white columns. Only a glimmer, the trees were denser now; he could not recover the outlines, to match the house with his memories. Then, it was the finest country-seat in miles around. Judge Burn-

ham was a rich man for the times and the place; Giles, with a smile that had a dash of sadness in its irony, recalled how his father's head clerk (Giles's father was the leading grocer of the town) used to say, "Judge Burnham must be worth upward of a hundred thousand dollars!" And Lilian was his only child. Giles stopped his horse. Over him surged a thrill of the old delicious tumult that had used to tingle in his veins whenever he rode this way. He could see her standing in her white frock with the roses blooming about her, and her wistful, beautiful blue eyes fixed on her father. The Judge was not so well those days—it was the beginning of the end with him. He had worked too hard, and it told on him; and when his son was drowned, some spring broke in the father—he only lived a year. But she—was there ever a creature so delicately sweet as she! The very clothes that she wore were different from the other girls. Fanny, his wife, was the best woman in the world—now his mother was dead—a thoroughbred who would run until she dropped, and drop with a smile; she might have a spice of temper but she never bore malice—she never was ungenerous; she had stood by him through a hundred rough bits of travel; she was a handsome woman, a woman with a grand air; he was proud of her, and he loved her with all his heart; but little Lilian, gentle, little, sweet, little Lilian was an angel. And he had not seen her for twenty years. The long absence had come about so easily, because his people had left the town the same year of his going; and for a long time he kept away, because his heart was too sore. Then, he met Fanny, and life became too keenly interesting for regrets; but still he kept away. Lilian had been married that same year; she must be a woman now—a beautiful woman. He pictured her, with her children about her; and in the vague pang that stirred his heart there was a pensive sweetness. After all, he mused, it was something to have loved a creature of so fair and ethereal a mould, even if he had lost her;

and she had never known of his love. In the past he had had moments of regret, transient but bitter, that she never had known; now he was glad. The very forcing such a feeling into words might have made it less unselfish and less pure. He had dreamed of her, only with the ardent reverence of a clean young heart's first love; she had never passed the threshold of his fancy, into any bolder imaginings; it was his angel, not his wife that he worshipped; and something of the angel's radiance illumined her image to him still. He was a busy man; he had keen and large interests; he was a happy husband; he was a fond father; and he was content that he had lost the desire of his youth. He would not exchange his Fanny, who knew all his secrets and had saved him more than once from making a fool of himself, and told him he was a fool in time, but never twitted him with his folly if she came too late; the woman who had drawn his head to her breast when he came back to find his first-born dead on the day of his birth, saying, "But I have you, Giles; and *he* will never have to suffer!" he would not exchange her, his wife, his children's mother, for any angel; he thought of her, now, with a swelling heart. And yet—and yet—he did not go back often to his lost love; but when the past was recalled to him, she came to him as the incarnation of the uncalculating joy and pain and sacrifice of youth. He had not heard of her for years; he only knew that she had not married his friend, but another man, a fellow that he did not know, said to be a man of charm and the heir to a fortune. Once, of late years, he had heard that her husband was not doing well—that he was a spendthrift, and that his habits were not good. He knew that she had a little lame child, and that no one could persuade her to leave her husband. This was all he knew. As his eyes questioned the foliage hiding the house, he felt at once a yearning and a dread to turn up the winding hill-side road. He knew that he was here as much because he wanted to help her, as her brother might, as because he wanted to see his old friend. The repelling force conquered; it was as strong as it was obscure. "No, I'll see old Billy first," he murmured; and drove past the turn. It was then that he was aware of another driver on the road, a

shabby, handsome man, whose swollen and flushed features showed his condition. He was driving a rattling, decrepit road-wagon and a thin white horse that limped of one leg. So far gone was he in liquor that he could barely keep his seat; for that matter, when the wheels bounced over a stone, he lurched forward and nearly toppled over.

"Take care!" Giles shouted, involuntarily.

The man righted himself with an effort, and threw a furious oath at Giles for his caution; then he caught his whip to lash the horse. They went past Giles, not yielding an inch of the road, so that but for his own turning, the wagons must have collided; and Giles could hear the swish of his blows on the lame horse as the man passed. He turned the corner, and took the road up the hill.

Giles frowned. "What a ridiculous notion," said he. "Of course he's not necessarily her husband because he drives on that road. I hope the horse will throw him and break his brute neck!"

He drove faster toward the town. Where the farms had spread their sumptuous tints in rippling masses of greenery and golden waves, now a multitude of wooden cottages, some large and smart enough to call themselves villas, dotted smooth green lawns or gay little gardens. He hardly knew the road, so rapidly does a Western town change. He drove into the business streets, more changed than the suburbs. No mark remained of his father's store (once the pride of the street) in the tall brick block with its arched windows and terra-cotta ornamentation. But the old doctor's house, the house that was Billy's father's, where Billy, since his father's death no longer "the young doctor," still abode with his spinster sister, last of the six children who had made the house merry, could be recognized at a glance. Only—he had been used to think it a large house, for it had two wings and three stories and broad piazzas; now, it had shrunk; and the old-fashioned piazzas, with their scroll-work bedizenment and thin pillars, looked narrow; but there was the same air of comfort and care and liberal hospitality about the mansion and the stable and the well-kept yard with the improvised fountain of hose and the old-fashioned border of flow-

ering shrubs along the gravel walk. "Good old Billy!" said Giles, affectionately. He found Billy's sister on the piazza. She had not changed so much. At thirty she had looked old for her years; at fifty she looked young. Her hair was gray, but she wore it in the same fashion; she protected her hands with rubber gloves in the same way. It was disconcerting, however, to have her peer at him through her glasses and ask if he wanted to see the Doctor; but he answered, cheerfully, "Why, yes, Miss Hannah, I want to see Billy; but I should like to see you, too; don't you remember Giles Wayland?"

She caught the words off his mouth, and was delighted cordially at once; but wasn't it a shame, she cried, that Billy should be away; he was gone to a consultation in another town; he would be so sorry; but Giles—she wasn't going to call him Mr. Wayland—Giles must come in and let her thank him for what he had done for Billy and for the town—the idea of his not seeing the beautiful library building he had given the town until two years after it was done. Wouldn't he come in and let her send the man to the hotel for his bag; he surely didn't expect that he could stop anywhere in town except at their house?

She was pleased and kind, just as she used to be when Giles had been a boy; and she had been the two lads' counsel to secure indulgences. Giles felt his heart warm.

"It is a shame," he confessed, ten minutes later, sitting in the biggest rocking chair on the piazza, with a glass from the Doctor's choicest bottle in his hand, and a cigar out of the box that a grateful patient had sent him, "it is a shame I haven't been back before; but, you see, I have seen Billy occasionally, and I've written him, although I don't believe I ever saw the rascal's fist myself—"

"He never writes," interrupted Billy's sister; "he is so awfully occupied, you see, a very busy man."

"Oh, I understand," said the great railway man who had thousands of men working for his projects and millions of dollars in his care; he spoke as seriously as she. "He has a big practice," said he.

"Oh, very big, enormous."

"And I hope he makes a lot of money."

She sighed, "Why, you know Billy, she said, "he will work day and night over a patient; when one thing fails, he'll think up another, and he'll go three times a day and then not charge a cent if the patient is poor; I assure you, Giles, the poor people in this town will wait hours just to get hold of Billy; and when they get him they keep him running; and they lined that street, they did, indeed, last winter when he had pneumonia, and the tears were running down their faces, men's as well as women's, when he was at the worst; and when Dr. Brayton came out, the afternoon the crisis was past, and stood there—right there by the syringa-bush by the gate, he stood—and lifted his hand, they held their breath; he said he never saw anxiety painted more vividly on any faces than it was on theirs; and when he said—his own voice wasn't quite steady—'The worst is over, we hope he will recover,' a kind of sigh ran through them, and all at once, first two or three women and then everyone of the crowd dropped on their knees, there on the cold sidewalk, and prayed a minute. Then someone whispered to be quiet; and they got up and walked away; and oh, dear! Giles, I wish you could have seen the queer things they poured in on him to eat. Oh, there's no question he's beloved; they'll do everything on earth for him—except pay him; and he won't let them when they try. Some doctors would make it up with fancy prices to the rich; but he says, 'I'm a doctor, not a robber baron;' and everybody says that his prices are ridiculously low. But I don't mean to say that he doesn't make a large income; he does, for he is so sought after; and then it is a help you appointing him Surgeon-in-Chief of the Road. I want to thank you—"

"Why? I think it is the road that ought to thank me. I appointed the best doctor I knew."

"He is a good doctor," said his sister; "and he has made discoveries. Sometimes I think if he had left here when he thought of it, the year you did, and gone to a city, he would have had a reputation not only all over the State but all over the country. But—well, you know why he stayed."

"No," said Giles, "I only know why I left."

"But you knew he was in love with Lilian Burnham?"

"Oh, yes," said Giles, smiling dryly, "but so was pretty much every young man in town; I was myself." He spoke lightly enough, yet there was an odd longing on him to hear of Lilian; the very sound of her name moved him.

"Were you?" said Billy's sister; "I always thought you were, and when you went away I fancied that she had refused you; and forgive me, though I liked you so much I was glad, for I knew poor Billy's whole soul was bound up in her; and I didn't think yours was. Billy never knew she refused you, did he?"

"He never knew I cared for her," said Giles, quietly; "he couldn't know I asked her to marry me, for I never did."

He wasn't aware that his tone had changed, but he saw her face light up suddenly. "And that night," said she, "the night before you went away, when you sat up so late with Billy, smoking, Billy told you what he felt for her?"

"Yes," said Giles.

"And you wouldn't work against Billy?"

"Billy saved my life, you know," said Giles.

"You're a good man and a good friend, Giles Wayland! And you didn't tell Billy?"

"Why, you know Billy. If I'd told him, he would have been insisting that I speak first, just as he made them take me into the boat before him. No, I said, let Billy have his track clear for the run; if he couldn't make it, then I would tell him and try my luck. I was only decent, you see."

"You were as decent as Billy would have been in your place; I can't say more."

"No"—Giles smiled as the boy she had known used to smile—"you *can't*."

"Well, it has turned out well for you, I guess; I've heard about your wife. I saw her picture, too, in the *Saturday Club Woman*."

"It has turned out very well for me. I can never be thankful enough I was in time to win my wife. Some time I hope you will see her for yourself. She is the very best woman in the world."

He spoke with his kindling face as well

as his lips; and she nodded with womanly appreciation; yet he was secretly longing for some turn of the talk back to Lilian; and he spoke to himself, perhaps, rather than to Billy's sister.

"I wish Billy had met such a woman," said Billy's sister.

"But you two are very comfortable together."

"Oh, comfortable? Of course I make Billy comfortable; and if I do say it, I take good care of his money; and I've it well invested. Billy"—her voice sank and she cast a furtive glance about the empty sunlit yard and over her shoulder behind the white screen of the curtains—"Billy's got a good deal more money than he knows; I don't mean he *shall* know it either. He wonders, sometimes, how I can always find the money for him to go to medical councils, or such thing, or to buy books or instruments; but he's as simple as a child outside of his profession, you know."

"Dear Billy," said Giles, smiling again.

The tears brightened her eyes; she nodded vehemently. "Somebody has to manage for the saints, I suppose, even if they do wear trousers, they're just as helpless. If Billy had known, that money would have gone in the same hole where so much has—and nobody the better—surely not he and I don't believe she——"

"*She?*"

"Yes, she, Lilian Burnham, Lilian Phillips. I never have opened my lips about it, except a little to father before he died; I suppose if mother had been alive I should have talked to her; but as it was I didn't feel right; but you—it does seem as if I had a right to talk to you whom Billy thinks so much of, and I'm going to."

"If there is anything I can do I shall be glad."

"There is nothing to do. That's it. I have to sit still and see him, a lonely man who never looks at a child without something sad in his smile; and I know we are both getting on; in ten years I'll be an old woman; and I want to see him not only comfortable but *happy*, loved the way he deserves to be, before I die; I want to live long enough to teach his wife the way he likes things, about the house never getting above seventy temperature and how to make the things he likes to eat, and all his



little ways ; I think of it so often ; and yet —there she is."

"You mean he is fond of her still ?" faltered Giles ; he wished he knew some retreat out of the conversation ; at the same time he was pricked by an uncanny longing to hear more.

"I don't know. I don't see how he can be." Giles dropped his fan and picked it up ; the exertion brought a little flush to his cheek. "But this is sure, he has about supported her for these last five years, besides what he has paid out—you see, it was this way : Billy worshipped Lilian for three years and never could screw up his courage to speak to her. She went away to school and came back ; and went away on a visit and came back ; then you remember how he told you how he felt. He went that very same month and asked her to marry him. I knew what had happened when he walked the floor of his room all night long, knew it just as well as when I heard of her engagement to Talbot Phillips two days after. She met him when she was away. Well, they were married very soon ; and I thought when Billy got me to get the prettiest clock in the catalogue, that here was the last money he would spend on her. I was sorry, *then*. She was certainly a beautiful girl and very sweet-tempered. They had a great wedding ; Billy didn't go, nor I. Her husband had property, and he came here to live because she wouldn't leave her father, who was feeble. They all lived here and her children were born here. Then the old Judge died, perhaps he had been some restraint on Talbot ; I don't know. He went from bad to worse."

"He drank ?"

"Yes, he drank, and he was unfortunate. He is one of those pig-headed fellows who think that nobody can tell them anything. He never had been trained to anything ; but he studied law ; and when he is sober they say he makes a beautiful speech ; but he has no head for business, and thought he had, and everything he touched went wrong. Little by little they lost everything. After father died, Billy was their doctor ; in that way he found out how things were going. And—you know Billy, how faithful he is ; and she *was* sweet-tempered, and hadn't lost her beauty or her pretty ways—then.

One day Billy came to me and said, 'Sis, you have always stood by me, will you stand by me now ?' I said, of course, what was he going to do ? He said he was going to try persuade Lilian Phillips to get a divorce from Tal ; that Tal had knocked her down the day before ; that he often was violent and cruel to her. 'And what is more,' said he, 'if she gets the divorce I mean to try to persuade her to marry me, after a decent while ; and I want you to ask her to come here ; I wouldn't think it fair not to tell you that much before I ask her.'

"And you ?"

"I love Billy ; and though I didn't feel drawn to Lilian, she did seem like a nice sweet girl—well, she was, I think. I told Billy I would stand by him. But I didn't need to ; she wouldn't leave her husband ; she said she couldn't think it was right. I don't know whether such things are right or wrong ; I used to think they were all wrong ; but it is easier to say 'Do right and be dreadfully unhappy,' when it isn't in your own family. I don't know whether she did right to refuse to leave Talbot or not ; but I do know it was bad for Billy and worse for her ; and I guess the little girl would be alive to-day, if it had been the other way, for Talbot somehow suspected that Billy had urged his wife to leave him ; and they had high words. Talbot drew a pistol on Billy, but Billy knocked his hand up, and wrenched the pistol away from him."

"Pity he didn't blow his brains out !" came between Giles's teeth.

"I thought it was, then," said Billy's sister, calmly ; "certainly it would have been a good thing for the poor little girl, such a pretty little thing, the image of her mother. But he didn't ; he flung Talbot out of the door of his office and he went raving down the street, swearing and crying. Of course Billy couldn't be the doctor after that, and when the little girl was taken with diphtheria they called in a foolish young fellow. Billy says he means right and studies and he will improve ; but it seems to me rather hard that a young doctor improving can kill so many people if he is allowed."

"The child died ?"

"Yes, she died, before Billy knew she was sick."

"Did Billy think——"

"I don't know what Billy thought ; he said, 'We don't any of us know anything about diphtheria ;' and he tried to think the doctor did all there was to do, but he had such success with those cases, even then, before anti-toxin. The next time one of the children fell sick, Lilian, herself, came for Billy ; and he always has gone since ; she made him promise he wouldn't ever ask her again to leave Talbot and he never has ; but as they grew poorer and poorer he has simply found the money to keep them ; he bought in the mortgage on the house and gave it to her. It was foolish ; he would better have taken the house and let them live there rent free. At first, she made difficulties and didn't want to take money, now, she is so crushed and careless, she takes it. Why, he paid all the expenses of the boy's trial——"

"Trial ?"

"You didn't know—but why should you ? it was hushed up ; the boy is like his father, handsome, winning, a nice boy lots of ways, but crazy if he drinks ; and precisely the kind of boy to need a firm hand. The only person in the world he pays any attention to, is Billy. He got into a fight and stabbed a man ; it was hushed up and money paid the man ; and the boy was sent to the Philippines ; only eighteen, and the other child is lame—hopelessly, Billy says, although he is always thinking of new things."

Giles did not speak for a moment ; he did not see his way.

Billy's sister went on : "Billy doesn't go there often, only when the child is to be treated or when Talbot is drunk ; Talbot sometimes keeps sober six months at a time, and he gets cases and picks up a little and buys new clothes and brags about getting into politics and is sure he will never backslide again ; and is seen driving the little boy and his wife ; and wants me to propose his wife for the Woman's Club, and all such nonsense ; the next you hear he has knocked down a policeman and wants Billy to bail him out at the police-court. Billy carries them on his shoulders. There is no telling what they will do next ; and that is how Billy's honest money goes. If he would not help them they would come to the end of their resources and they would have to sepa-

rate ; it would be better for them and better for him. He wouldn't think it right, I suppose."

"It would be hard for him, if he cares for her," said Giles.

"I don't see how he *can* !" declared Billy's sister with sudden vehemence. She caught at her self-control and smiled feebly. "You don't understand, you haven't seen her, she wasn't strong enough to raise her husband ; she wasn't strong enough to leave him ; he has dragged her down, she has lost her beauty, but that isn't the worst of it ; she has grown so small, she isn't interested in anything outside of her own troubles, and those she is always pouring on Billy, and he is trying to help her. Now, you know, a pretty woman who occasionally tells her sorrows is very attractive to a man, but a poor, faded, whining creature who has lost her good looks and her charm and is nothing but pitiful and keeps on complaining—why, she *must* be tedious ! But Billy is so loyal, he never says a word. I suppose it's awful, but it seems to me that she's more fatal to Billy than if she had been a wicked woman ; because then his conscience might have rescued him ; and now, his conscience only ties the weight on tighter. He might be almost anything in his profession but for her ; he has stayed here to help her. When he's tired and depressed, he has to go out to her and hear about how they can't keep a girl the minute Tal begins again, and they didn't get their potatoes in early enough and now the rain is rotting them, and how bad her sick headaches are ; and how Tal wants to put some money into a splendid scheme, and he can't get it—the whole wretched round, over and over. I should think Billy *would* look careworn ; when I see him with that stoop in his shoulders and those gray hairs at forty-five, I almost hate her. And I don't feel the more kindly toward her that I am sure if Tal were to die that Billy would feel he must marry her. Giles, doesn't it seem the awfulest thing we know that people may not only ruin their lives as far as happiness or worldly success goes, but may drag down their souls by obeying their consciences ? I know, I don't guess, I *know* that Lilian, if she had left Talbot, would have been a better woman. She is the kind of nature that needs sunshine.

She would have married Billy, then, before she had lost her love for dainty things and her cheerfulness; and she would have been happy and tried to please him and been interested in the large things that interest him; she is a weak creature, but she was charming once; she might be charming still if she had put things on her hair in time to keep it from coming out, and had a decent dressmaker and been happy! And, now, she has sunk into a complaining drudge who accepts money and sympathy and sacrifices from a man who owes her nothing; and doesn't give a thing in return. Isn't it Emerson who says that, he is base and he, only, who accepts favors and returns none. There's where *she* is; she seems to me to be as low, and lower, than the poor creature who loves a man and is false to her husband for him; for at least she gives something *back*. And yet—it has all come from them both trying to do their duty. Giles, I have seen the same thing in other cases, and it appalls me."

Giles had sat, as a man of the world sits, with no visible agitation on his features, sometimes looking at his boots, sometimes at his cigar, which had gone out. Yet, all the while, he was feeling as if his soul were under a rain of blows. He was dizzy. The single hint of comfort he could find was in the time-honored belief of man that women are always unjust to women; it might not be so bad. He shrank from any further discussion of Lilian, as from new blows; and he caught at the possible diverting of the subject. What he said came out of his past thought, his life's experience, and the rough-and-ready working solution of the problems of life that a man who has lived intensely and amid many interests, makes for his own guidance, of necessity rather than intellectual luxury; he had not vigor enough in his soul to have grappled with any question at that moment; unconsciously he fell back on his unspoken creed. "I think," said he, "that we have to have our consciences enlightened as much as our minds; and we pay for our mistakes there, just as we do everywhere else. I suppose we make our own consciences, if it comes to that."

Billy's sister sighed: "Well, maybe; I think Billy's needs hardening; it's too ten-

der. Giles, you're very patient to listen to all this. Come in and see Billy's den, and his room, and the portrait the doctors have had painted of him for the new hospital—I let Billy give five hundred for an operating-room and he was so pleased; he didn't know he had the money."

For the rest of his visit there was little more said on the subject that Giles dreaded. Indeed, Billy's sister had said herself there was nothing to be done, and patience was the only virtue available. "But do get Billy away, all you can," she begged at parting. And Giles promised. He drove back to the station over the hill-road, and he turned up the Burnham drive. His jaws were set as in a vice. His thoughts were not so much thoughts as dim, heavy sensations. He put them into no words; he only drove doggedly on. Every rod on the way into the Burnham grounds, deepened his dejection. The grass waved rank, yet scant, as grass too seldom mowed, will grow; there were thickets in the rye-field; the drive was overgrown with pussly and tansy and flaunting narrow dock; the little purling stream that he remembered on the hillside was choked by a squalid heap of household refuse; nearer the house a few shrubs, harder than the most of their kind, altheas and lilacs and syringas, still fought for life in the neglected, weed-entangled flower-beds. Some yellow roses were in bloom, withering on their stems. Giles could see Lilian's light figure in the trim garden of the past, with her basket of roses. He could hear her laughter. He looked about him with a smile bitterer than a groan. There was the house, falling into ruin, patched here and there. The wide porch under the white columns was covered with a muddy printage of dog-tracks; the flies buzzed noisily through the cracks of the broken screen door. Giles tied his horse—Billy must have mended the post, for it stood firm and there was a good iron ring in it. A half dozen hens, disturbed at his approach, rose with a whirr. The noise muffled Giles's footsteps so that a man and a woman in the room with the open windows did not hear his approach; but he could hear their high voices distinctly. The woman sobbed: "I did *not*!" The man snorted derision, not so much violent as

brutally contemptuous. "You're a liar; you did pay her; she said her mother was sick and you got her wages from Billy; he was just fool enough to let you have the money; Maggie told me, herself."

The woman sobbed more bitterly. "I was so afraid you'd be angry; and Billy offered—and her mother was sick—I sent her some soup——"

"My soup?"

"No, indeed, no, Tal; what you left for me."

"Well, more fool you; but I'm not mad; go and get me my soup and some beer; and for God's sake do tidy yourself up a little!"

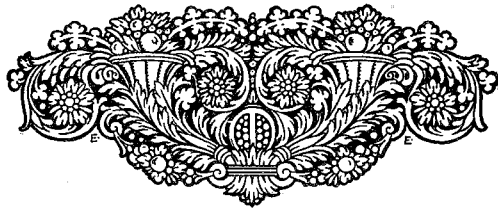
"I was working in the garden, and Burnham was so fretful when I came in I hadn't time; I guess if you had to keep the garden and the house and had such a backache, you wouldn't be dressed up much, either—yes, yes, I'm going, Tal." The voice was in the dreary, querulous pipe of a habitual complainer, but it was Lilian's voice. She came into the light, and put out one hand to draw the curtain; Giles would not look up; he would not see her; but his eyes could not escape her hand. He saw it plainly. Sick at heart, he stole away. Like a thief, he softly unhitched the horse, noiselessly swung himself into the wagon, and then drove swiftly and more swiftly, down the hill, along the road.

Half an hour later he was at the car-window, watching the fields drift by.

"And I thought I had lost her twenty years ago," he shuddered to himself; "my God, how little I knew!"

A sombre dejection beyond his shaking off, weighed on him all through the journey; he felt ill and shaken; and he was conscious only of a childish, homesick longing for his wife. Once, it came to him, with the force of a discovery, that during the last ten years he had not had an anxiety or disappointment or hardly a puzzle that he had not brought to Fanny. But this he could never show to any human soul, not even to Billy, poor Billy. He felt a shrinking even from the dishonor of thinking of her, so sunken and battered by the merciless years. He had a smothering recoil from the black and heavy mystery before him; how weakness should always be punished so rigorously and sin sometimes so lightly. Long and sadly he pondered, finding no light. But—it was as the train rolled into his home-station—suddenly his heart freed itself with a leap, as a bird flutters from the snare; for he said, proudly, "Nothing, no man, no poverty, no conceivable state of things would have pulled Fanny down like that!" His eyes, flashing with an only half-comprehended exultation, suddenly ran to one placid, well-poised figure in the crowd, and fastened on her faithful face.

He did not know all that he felt; but he knew that if he had lost his angel forever, he had at last found his wife.





# THE VIGIL-AT-ARMS

By William Lucius Graves

ILLUSTRATION (FRONTISPIECE) BY MAXFIELD PARRISH

THE stir of dawn is in the air,  
Outside I hear a robin sing;  
And so, forespent with fast and prayer,  
My watching to an end I bring.

To-day my youth comes to its flower;  
To-day my hope its harvest reaps;  
And all my blithe soul to its hour  
Of mastery and manhood leaps.

Yet while the young dawn, keen and chill,  
Lies dark across the quiet grass,  
In sanctuary dim and still  
I kneel and vow what may not pass:

My heart elate and strong shall be  
To laugh at Fortune's lowering frown,  
Uplifted high and fixed on Thee  
Whose love is knighthood's very crown.

These spurs that twinkle faintly here,  
A gold spark in the pallid light,  
To quivering flank shall not come near,  
Save when I speed me for the right.

My lance shall never lie in rest,  
Nor flash its star-point at a foe,  
But that I ride at God's behest  
And in His name to combat go.

And last, thou slender sheathèd death,  
Yet to my aching hand unbroke,  
That hour speed my passing breath  
When thou art smirched by coward stroke!

Amen! Amen! And at the door  
Stands one whose face, lit by the dawn,  
Shows that my long, lone night is o'er.  
My sleepless time of vigil gone.

Ah Lord, make me Thy knight-at-arms,  
And bring me quick where perils are;  
But 'midst of shuddering alarms  
Set honor on me like a star!