

A Tragedy of South Carolina

Sarah Morgan Dawson

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Then why did she not keep the pigs from his cotton patch? He had warned her! No man of his race ever failed to keep his word! By the eternal powers of mud and the state of South Carolina, he was a gentleman! He never said a thing he did not mean! This thing had gone on long enough. Again and again he had said, "Sure as you let those hogs of yours in my cotton, I'll blow your brains out!" "Did they believe him? Well, they knew now whether he kept his word or not! Thank themselves for playing with fire once too often! Why did he not kill the pigs? Well, he had not thought of that! He had remembered he had to keep his word. By the powers of mud, a gentleman has to think of that first!

But this was in his twilight, whiskey-strengthened meditation on the broad piazza.

When the sun had been overhead, hours ago, he was standing there looking at Scipio, who had fallen asleep bolt upright, sustained by the handle of his hoe, which had ceased to turn the soil. The colonel had retired to the house to fortify himself with his midday toddy. Scipio took the next best thing, from his point of view—a nap. As the colonel, mellowed by the subtle influence of the old corn whiskey, stepped out on the sunlit piazza, those depraved pigs, before his very eyes, were ravaging his one hope of earning a living. Scipio, with a jerk that made the hoe scatter the soil, awakened at the ringing cry, "Here, you, Scipio!" He sprang forward briskly.

The colonel advanced with compressed lips and resolute stride. His hands grasped a gun. "Come along!" was his brief command.

Scipio followed, neither demurring nor questioning. Indeed, a bolder man than Scipio would have shrunk from inquiring the meaning of that deadly and intense silence. The colonel's fixed eyes and martial stride inspired caution. A clear, young voice rang out on the silence. "Pa—a!"

The colonel half turned, without looking at the speaker. Waving the hand that was not clutching the gun, he tenderly cried, "You go back, Lorena! I'll come back, by and by!"

"Well, pa—a! What you goin' to shoot?"

"Hogs, child!"

"I'll go, too!"

"No you won't! You go just where I tell you: right in that house. And stay there, too!"

She was a strange, frail, elflike child; tall, slender, on the debatable land between childhood and girlhood. Her thread-bare, outgrown garments accentuated, in rents, the poverty sufficiently proclaimed by the naked feet and long stretch of stockingless legs. The mass of black hair hanging raggedly over her shoulders betrayed the absence of a mother's care. The pose and tone of this fresh young creature bespoke a freedom and self-reliance rarely found in one of so few years. Her mother had passed away within her brief span of memory. Young as she was, she remembered the patient endurance, the poverty, toil, and humiliation that had been the portion of that mother in those latter days. "Befoh de wah," the colonel had been the owner of more lands and of nearly as many "subjects" as fall to the lot of some European kings. The bride he had enthroned in his ancestral home was envied by all the maidens of the land, because of the rare fortune that had come to her. No matrimonial candidate of the country could rank with the colonel. The wife never forgot this when poverty and degradation banished from the fine old house every sound of mirth and almost every trace of pardonable pride. It was her misfortune to fade with his waning fortunes. Loyally she ministered, as servant, to him who had crowned her queen of his princely home. But her fragile physique was ill suited to rough fare and coarse work. She sank visibly and without a murmur. She would have held herself as unworthy, had she failed to conceal from him the burden under which she was crushed. The end was sudden, fortunately. She died in a superhuman effort to accomplish some menial task beyond her strength.

Only then did the colonel fully understand what her life had been. Henceforth, he was more than ever silent, and more than ever devoted to the one living child. His library, which had been his delight in days of luxury, was

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still his favorite retreat. But external contact with books now sufficed him. Rarely were they touched, save by the child who lay on the well-trodden carpet, striving to unravel their secrets. Her singular inspiration in drawing was his chief interest. Untaught, she had mastered the art of reproducing her childish fancies with wonderful ability. Her father was her sole companion. She was not aware that the demon drink did not always leave him in a state for ideal intercourse. Drunk or sober, she never saw the difference. And he had the grace to save his deeper potations for the night, when they would kill him more speedily and make him less offensive. Through the day, he merely drank enough to deaden himself to the memory of the galling poverty that had blasted his life. All the tenderness lavished on his wife was now centered on the child. She followed him afield; she ran beside him as he hunted the game that occasionally varied their common fare. In earliest youth she learned to light his pipe, bring his whiskey, and to discharge the household duties within her limits. The toil of others was the play of this little one. Apart from the whole unheeding world, father and child clung to each other. They neither knew nor cared for other interests. Had she died, he would have avenged himself on an unjust omnipotence by rushing unbidden into the awful mysteries of the unseen. In the elementary instructions unconsciously bestowed upon the child he had never included the knowledge of a Heavenly Father. Long ago she had ceased to repeat the half-forgotten prayers her mother had taught her. If the name of God suggested anything to her mind, it was chiefly as a potent curse of her father's when things went wrong in the field. And so the little weed grew with its own peculiar use and beauty, neither knowing nor caring that development, fruition, and decay were the inscrutable laws illustrated in its obscure sphere.

Hearing the beloved father order her to the house, she turned without demur and busied herself with her daily duties.

Meanwhile, the stern, silent man stalked on, bearing his gun, and followed by Scipio, who reluctantly dragged behind. It was but two hundred yards to the next house, a rough log structure which stood bleak and somber in its few acres of neglected land. The poor dwelling consisted of two rooms, divided by a broad, open passage. A single mud chimney relieved the dark outline; a thin wreath of smoke arose in delicate waves in the limpid atmosphere. On this balmy day, it could only be a kitchen fire that was needed within.

The mistress of this lowly home was standing on the porch. Three rough steps led down to the littered ground. She had stepped from the room that served as kitchen, bedroom, parlor, and workroom. Glancing through the rude opening that served as a window, she had seen the colonel and his dusky attendant in their singular progress. Curiosity prompted her to leave the double rasher of bacon frying in the skillet and made her hasten out to watch them pass. Her son, a gaunt, tall youth of twenty, collapsed, rather than crouched on the hearth to take her place. No word of explanation passed between them. His lank yellow hair crowned him as the stubble crowns the neglected field. The coarse homespun shirt of dubious tint served alike as coat and shirt. Certainly they are never worn together. One broken and patched suspender held his recalcitrant butternut trousers as much in place as they ever would be. A pair of suspenders was never owned in its entirety by any one of his caste. "Galluses" they called them; if originally purchased, they could only have been to divide between father and son, or near neighbors; they twain were never again one flesh.

The youth raked hotter embers on the sweet potatoes banked in the ashes that ever lay half a foot deep in the yawning fireplace. A few more minutes, and the last crisp brown shade would touch the frying bacon. Already the hoecake was firmly crusted on the side presented to the live coals opposite the board on which it was spread. The primitive table with its yellow earthenware stood near the fire. The loom, with its half-finished cloth, was at one end of the room, and the bed, with its dingy appurtenances, was at the other. Halfway between these two prominent pieces, knelt the young "cracker" on the hearth. His protruded tongue was held upside down between his discolored teeth as he thrust his iron fork in the hoecake, the bacon, or the potatoes, to test their fitness for serving. Absorbed in this critical examination, he hardly heeded when his mother suddenly called, "Teddy!" Turning the last slice of bacon in its dripping fat, he laid the fork on the ashes and reluctantly arose to join her. As he shambled to the porch through the open hallway, once more his mother cried, "Teddy!"

No one ever called him again—not even to dinner!

The bacon sizzled angrily in its neglect; fretted and puckered up its edges, and burned away to crisp, black ashes. The hoecake baked through to the board, which slowly and sullenly charred and crumbled in hot resentment. The sweet potatoes, but now luscious with their hidden sugar exuding on the skin in soft candy, stiffened, hardened, and burned in their stifling bed, unseen and untasted.

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For the colonel had kept his word as a gentleman, "by the eternal powers of mud and the state of South Carolina!"

When Teddy's mother had abandoned her cooking duties to her son, she had stepped out wearing that calico sunbonnet, without which this peculiar class of women are never seen. Sometimes strips of pasteboard serve to give those shapeless hoods an evanescent form. But these soon collapse and dangle helplessly around the face. The next device is to wear them loosely folded over backward, and drawn forward to fall in any random plait that calico can assume. So decked, the southern "cracker," or "sand-hiller," is apparently unconscious of the lack of any other garment, at home or abroad. These bonnets are worn afield, to keep off heat, cold, sun, rain. They are worn in the house, to be prepared for any of these possibilities in their constant visits to the outer air. Whether it be a stroll to the woodpile, or to the pigsty, or to the "branch," or to the corner where the daintiest bit of clay lies hidden for the dirt-eater's delectation, the sunbonnet crowns the woman from the cradle to the grave.

So Teddy's mother stepped from the hearth to the porch, the sunbonnet that shielded her from the fire still falling around her eyes. From under its shadow she glanced at the colonel, who was now some paces from the wooden steps, Scipio respectfully halting in the rear.

"Them hogs of yourn," said the colonel, adopting the vernacular familiar to Teddy's mother, "have got in my cotton again."

She looked at him in silence. To her dull mind it must have seemed unimportant where they "got," provided they got enough to fatten them for killing. It did not matter to her; she planted no cotton herself. Indeed, she planted nothing that required care.

The colonel was very quiet—frightfully so, had she been intelligent enough to see the danger signal. Then he said deliberately:

"I told you I'd blow your brains out if you let your hogs in my patch again. I'm going to keep my word. Here, Scipio, shoot that old hag! Quick, fool, before I brain you!"

"Fore God, colonel, I kint! 0 Lawd! Maussa, don't mek po' Scip shoot buckra same like 'possum! You kin shoot bes', colonel! Shoot, please, maussa! Let Scip go!"

The colonel saw crimson. Purple veins distended his temples; crimson veins swelled in his eyeballs; a Niagara of curses burst from his livid lips. His hand was raised with the gun pointed at the Negro who groveled at his feet.

"Teddy!" cried the motionless woman, just as she would have said, "Teddy, dig some more 'taters!"

"Take it, you fool, or I'll shoot you! Shoot and be——"

"Teddy!" monotonously repeated the mother the second time.

Teddy had shuffled out, one hand grasping his sagging trousers, the other shading his fishy eyes from the noontime glare. In a flash he had seen more than living man can boast; for the swift bullet that pierced his mother's body had sped through his yokel heart. Together they fell on the rough flooring, he already seeing with eyes that were not of the flesh; and she, poor soul, doomed to a brief space of horror and pain—a sense of awful isolation and merciful oblivion at last.

The colonel turned stoically away, mindful to take his gun from Scipio's trembling hands. He gave neither look nor regret to the dead, nor yet to the death in life lying in a long, ghastly, straggling line along the porch and gaping passage. Scipio's slouch became grotesque as he followed his master home. Fear suggested flight; but the innate instinct of the former slave recognized that the colonel was his refuge and the arbiter of his fate. His ashen face expressed abject terror and a passive irresponsibility to leave "consequences" to higher natures; for, even in his mortal panic, he felt that he and the gun had nothing to do with the murder. It was the colonel who had "gone off!" And the colonel was the biggest man in the county: twice as big as the sheriff and the jailor. The colonel would "fix it."

Within a few steps of home the colonel halted. Scipio shifted from one foot to the other, an ebony image of degradation and helplessness. The colonel was strangely touched by this silent appeal. "Scipio," he said kindly, almost tenderly, "there will be some talk about this and I don't want you to get in trouble. You know the canebrake; and if you don't get victuals enough, you know where to find more. You are welcome to all you can take of mine. But canebrakes are not always safe. Travel on; better go when you can than run when you must. You are too good a Negro to waste on a hanging, and you have done nothing to deserve hanging—only some people are born fools and think they can carry things as they please! It is all right; you had it to do. Don't worry about it any more than I shall. I have no money; and money won't help you. Take my flask, though; you'll need

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that. And be off while the coast is clear."

"Thankee, colonel! I'll go. 'Tain' like I had a fambly. I kin git up an' git. No one ain' gwine find me. Goodby, colonel! Thankee kindly!"

The colonel gazed calmly at the retreating form of the lithe Negro who swung lightly along the untraced path to the canebrake. Fresh life had clearly been awakened in his down-trodden breast by the prospect of travel and new scenes unconnected with any prospect of toil.

Lorena came dancing from the house.

"Did you shoot the pigs, pa-a?"

"Yes, both."

"Why, there was lots of them, pa-a! Two ain't shakes to what's in the patch now!"

"The worst are done for; the rest don't matter," said the colonel, indifferently.

She caught the gun to relieve him of the burden. Quickly he held it above her grasp.

"Look out; you'll get hurt!"

"O pa-a! Would you take me for a pig?" she laughed.

Echoing the laugh tenderly, he led her by the hand to the place where the gun habitually rested, and then to the frugal dinner she had prepared for his return.

The disheveled chicken with the disjointed leg had grown weary of the social void in its haunts. There had been no implied invitation to potato peelings and hoecake crumbs. The land around was too poor to offer spontaneous hospitalities of attractive character. Chickie felt that an unwonted gloom had settled on its limited prospects. At best, life held no charms for her. "Cracker" chickens are so imbued with the shiftlessness and indolence of their owners that they speedily lose even the instinct of laying eggs. Poultry can hardly be said to be "cultivated" in such circles. No energy remains. Enough chickens to pick the casual worm from the neglected path, or clear the refuse from the family living rooms—enough to spare for the hawks and the wild things that prowl in the night—these amply content the modest aspirations of the "cracker." If they ever vary the monotony of bacon and cornbread by an occasional ration of chicken, no stranger has yet witnessed the orgy.

The frowzy little pullet fluttered up from step to step, ever pausing for a remark from the mother and son who lay supinely motionless in the rays of the sinking sun. Within the compass of her chicken life, familiar as she was with their idleness, never had she known them to be as lazy as this. Clucking and peeping in a shrill falsetto, vainly she interrogated them as to their eccentricity. Bright eyes blinking, head askew, feathers apparently developed during a stiff gale which had impelled her ever forward, she circled around and around the twain in irritating inquiry. Suddenly, a satisfactory reply seemed vouchsafed. The raw dough of the hoecake still clung to the dead woman's hands. Going from the hearth to her death, there had been no thought of the toilet observances all too rare among "crackers." The chicken accepted the dough as an answer to prayer for enlightenment and sustenance. It solaced itself pecking the stiff cold fingers clean of every trace of meal. While thus actively engaged a man passed by. Attracted by the extraordinary situation, he drew near the porch. To glance, to shudder, to fly was the work of half a minute. Nor had he run far when he met another "one gallus" man, hands in pocket, slouch hat drawn over his eyes, sauntering toward him.

"Bill! Teddy an' his ma—a is lyin' there dead. Murdered!"

The other nodded. "Knowed it sence noon. Been awaitin' to see who's goin' to tell on the colonel."

"The colonel! Did he do it?"

"N—o—o—o! Yes! Leastways, he made Scipio do the shootin'. I was outside the fence, an' I took keer to lay low. Jim an' Pete was along. They've done gone. Reckon I'll go, too."

"Well, we won' git our heads blowed off for tellin' on Scipio!"

"Tell an' be blowed, if you've a min' to. I'm goin' to min' my own business an' git out! I ain't fool enough to stay here an' tackle the colonel."

"Bill! You won' leave 'em there, an' all these pigs an' things a—roamin' in the night?"

"Well, you go tell the sheriff, kin' er keerless like, he better ride out this way. He'll think it means whiskey, an' he'll ride fast enough. I'm off for a run up the country." And even as he spoke he strode past the frightened man. The latter sauntered to town and intimated to the sheriff that some interest might attend a ride out that road. The story was whispered as he went along. When the sheriff arrived in the fast-falling twilight, pine torches flared

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their banners of crimson and yellow and smoke over the dreary scene. Hemmed in by the living half-circle, the faces of the dead seemed to mock and mow in answer to fearful comments and vain queries. Those who pressed too near, in their curiosity, or urged by eager neighbors, struggled back to place a barrier of life between themselves and the dead.

From his broad piazza, where he sat smoking and meditating on the events of the day, the colonel saw the fitful light and wavering forms so near. If anyone wanted him they knew where to find him.

Presently the sheriff walked up the avenue and respectfully accosted him. The colonel received him as though this were his reception evening and the sheriff his first and most honored guest. The sheriff began painfully.

"Of course, colonel, it's all nonsense them fellows is talkin'; but you'll not think hard of me for askin' you——"

"Anything you like, sheriff! Take your time. Anything!"

The sheriff, with a gasp, seized the other horn of the dilemma. "They say, colonel, that Scipio killed Teddy and his ma—a yonder."

"Indeed!" said the colonel.

"Yes, sir; and I hope you don't min' our ketchin' an' hangin' him so close to your house, sir?"

"Oh! Hang him, by all means, if you catch him!" said the colonel cordially.

"An' you won't take no offense, colonel? 'Most on your place; one of your hands, too! It's hard on me, colonel, to have to do things displeasin' to you! You know my duty——"

"No one knows better than I, sheriff! Do what you think best. Have a drink? Well! Here's to you sheriff!"

Drink was never far from the colonel's hand. It was only decorum with him to drink with any chance visitor, and any number of them, night or day. So with the glow of the corn whiskey in their veins, he and the sheriff considerably told each other as little as the law required under the awkward circumstances. Each was ready to declare that the other was a "perfect gentleman," warranted to evince no conscientious scruples in critical moments. The colonel had merely sanctioned the lawful prosecution of Scipio—if he could be found, and if guilt attached to him. The sheriff thanked him effusively and returned to the seething crowd around the two cadavers.

"Where's Scipio?" he called in a voice mellow with recent whiskey.

Silence was only broken by the thick utterance of Negro whispers. Again he called, "Come here, Scipio!"

A skinny old Negress drew near.

"Law, maussa! Scipio done dead long time. 'Fo' freedom come."

"Who are you?" roared the sheriff.

"I Scipio ma—a! He ain't never live here, no how," she sturdily asserted. The black faces remained unshaken in their gravity. Some of the white men laughed aloud, even in the presence of death, at this astounding invention.

"We'll find him when we want him," said the sheriff curtly. "But first, we'll have an inquest. Any of you got an opinion about this here murder— if it is a murder?"

"No, sir!" "I ain't!" "Taint no murder!" "Serve 'em right!" "Nuffin' but po' white trash!" "Buckra." "Does de jury git pay same like de courthouse?" These, simultaneously, from many voices.

"Well, all you who don't know and don't keer, step up an' form the jury."

"Mebbe dey is playin' 'possum," suggested a wary African.

"Dey's dead sure 'nuff!" replied another, stirring the old woman tentatively with his distorted shoe end.

"Who am dat say Scipio shoot 'em?"

There was an implied menace in this question which led to silence. No man cared to make himself responsible for the rumor in the face of unknown possibilities. White men stood stolidly; Negroes shifted restlessly, eager for a pretext for a row.

"If Scipio ain't here, an' no one ain't see him shoot, den Scipio ain't do it."

"Bress God! Dat so!" groaned the religious element.

"An' if Scipio ain't shoot, dey ain't shoot!" logically deducted an old ebon solon.

"Amen! Dat so, Lawd! Black man, white man, can't tell by de bullet who pull de trigger."

This audaciously irrelevant insinuation was greeted with a gasp of amazement. Mindful of late hospitalities, the sheriff was equal to the emergency.

"See here, Joe Saunders! An' you, Pompey; an' you fellows there! You ain't got nothin' to do with who did it, nor why it was done! That's none of your business; you've only got to say they were shot. The law does the rest."

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On this simple basis, the jury was rapidly impaneled. As quickly the stereotyped verdict was formulated: "Came to their death by gunshot wounds inflicted by a person or persons unknown to the jury."

Time flies rapidly, even with those who chide its droning. But to Lorena, transformed into an ideal nymph of seventeen, time had brought no solace nor prosperity. She still roamed the woods, barefooted, driving cows which neither increased nor profited. Her father, her books, her sketches, these formed her world. Her drawing was inspired. She had no training, no theories to follow; she obtained results as the bird learns to sing, as the bee learns to make honey. On that plane, there was no room for improvement.

The colonel kept aloof from the world and sought no sympathy. But the girl's isolation weighed heavily upon him. Still more and more he resorted to the grave of his beloved wife, as though she could give him the help he dared not ask of heaven and would not ask of men. But he ever returned home bowed down by a burden that only increased with years.

Though he never spoke of it, whispers were afloat of a ghastly woman with a calico sunbonnet drawn over her eyes, who daily, in the gloaming, walked around the colonel's once beautiful home. It was not a pleasant topic; but there were those who averred that they had seen the gruesome vision. Under the seal of secrecy, scores likewise confessed that they, also, had met a woman in that peculiar guise, silent and intent on her mission. No one could question the colonel; but no one could doubt that he, also, was conscious of her presence. He never complained, whatever the mortal stress laid upon him. Year after year, he endeavored to wrest from the earth the return other men could so confidently expect—always meeting with loss, or at best, a scanty return. And ever, in the twilight, as he sat on the wide piazza, while Lorena prepared the meager supper, his meditations were disturbed by the quiet apparition of a woman, who glided out of the surrounding shadows and came toward him. The form was the homely one so familiar to him in life. The routine never varied. Up to where he sat, then around and around the house—the face in the limp sunbonnet felt rather than seen. While he remained without, she walked her weary round; when he entered the library, she peered into each window as she passed. The monotonous tramp continued until he fled from the house. She never spoke. She seemed merely a typical "cracker," indifferent to surroundings, shielded by the calico sunbonnet that drooped over her eyes. Her face was ever turned on the colonel, though she uttered no word.

The colonel stoically accepted this as one of the incomprehensible hostilities with which an inscrutable fate had long pursued him. When the monotony became intolerable he withdrew from the piazza, where he had passed his evenings for a lifetime, and retreated to the library. But in the twilight within he still listened acutely for the familiar step on the crisp leaves or on the rain-soaked earth. He learned to shrink nervously from the faint sound and from the shadowy form that flitted past each window, the face with the unseen eyes always turned fixedly toward him. Finally, he learned to close the great shutters before sunset. It was unendurable suspense waiting for the unwelcomed form that never failed to glide by. His ear, grown doubly acute, learned all that his eyes refused to look upon, so that his soul loathed life and chose rather strangling and death. He dreaded the day; but the night was still more awful. He would leave the house when Lorena slept, and walk all night, never resting, save when he could throw himself on his wife's grave, Earth held no other refuge for him. By and by, he intuitively understood that the woman in the sunbonnet was familiar to all who passed him by. No one dared tell him; yet he knew that she was so notorious that no one cared to pass his house after sunset. He only grew more reticent and more lonely.

After some years of stoic endurance, the strain could no longer be borne. The colonel nailed the doors and windows of his ancestral home and abandoned the place to ruin. He moved to a poor cottage on the outskirts of a large village some miles away. Isolation was still their portion. Poor as they were, he would take almost nothing from his beloved home. The associations which he sought to escape were too closely entwined with all that house contained. Nameless treasures, ancient furniture that had survived the wreck of fortune—all were left to molder in the deserted house. Lorena made no protest. The books dearest to her he transferred to the cottage. One drawing, which revealed her singular genius, he carried away with him. This erratic sketch which so impressed him, long survived him. It remains a singular memento of the family history. He wanted no other token from that once happy home. His whole mind was absorbed by the one image he sought to flee—the ghastly woman in the sunbonnet. Remorse needed no external suggestion to feed the fire that ever burned in his heart.

Far from the home he loved, in this new and humble shelter, fate might well have sent some respite to the

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broken and desolate man. But a nemesis who never relented stalked beside him when he fled from his past, and ruthlessly she scourged him to the bone. She was neither triumphant nor aggressive. She merely conveyed the impression that somewhere from the remote depths of that limp calico cavern, her dead eyes were fixed on him. When he could endure no more, the colonel stalked in grim despair to the grave of his wife, where the woman in the sunbonnet never came. Exhaustion always brought him merciful sleep on that desolate mound of earth. The villagers whispered of the new sentry—round followed by the silent woman who watched over the colonel in the gloaming.

Five years more of this unsought and undesirable companionship proved the limit of endurance for the colonel. The last time came for him as it comes for all. Whether, that night, the eyes finally gleamed from the depths of that shabby bonnet, or whether she had summoned him to confront them elsewhere, cannot be known. Only, the night came when he kissed Lorena with more than usual tenderness, and, as she left the room with the step of a young goddess, followed her with loving gaze. Presently he passed out of the cottage for the last time. He was not alone. He carried the gun which Scipio had so ably handled on that memorable day. And as he walked down the path, clutching the gun with an iron grip, the woman in the sunbonnet followed him. Where he went—what he felt—what he saw—remains untold.

It was Lorena who traced him to her mother's grave in the early morning. Often she had found him there, oblivious of all pain and sorrow, pillowed on the only refuge he had known in weary years. She caroled on her way, through field and woods, knowing where she would find him sleeping. The voice he so loved would awaken him with no startling consciousness of new torment to be faced.

Stooping over, the more gently to arouse him, she tripped on a gun lying by his side. With a stifled cry the girl fell on the still heart of the desolate suicide.

She did not long survive him; nor did she make her moan to heaven above or earth beneath. She held aloof, as ever, from the compassion that would gladly have encircled her. For a brief space, she roamed the woods and old haunts alone. Silent now, she lived her life of isolation, refusing all proffer of companionship or sympathy. And one morning those who pitied her from afar found her lying at the foot of a slight precipice, her faultless face with its inscrutable smile turned to the sky. One beautiful arm was thrown over her head; the dead hand grasped trailing vines and wildflowers that delicately traced a shrine around the exquisite form. There was no indication of struggle, no evidence of pain. Was it accident? Was it design? Did a demon force or did a spirit lure her to her doom? Who knows?

They carried her to the deserted cottage, and there they stood astounded before the sketch her father had loved best of all. It was hanging just over the couch where she lay in her final sleep. Years before, in her elfin girlhood, she had with unconscious and prophetic hand sketched her young divinity that was to be and its pathetic end.

The picture represented a girl in the dawn of womanhood, of rarest beauty, lying dead at the base of the crag they had just seen. The faultless arm was tossed upward, a long spray of vines and wildflowers had encircled the radiant sylphlike form. In awestricken whispers they noted every strange detail of the singular coincidence. Nor did any false sympathy murmur, "Would she could have tarried with us!" If ever a hope had crossed her piteous life, it could only have gleamed from the unknown beyond the grave.

Near a well-known town of today, the old ancestral residence of the colonel stands deserted and shunned. No one loiters near it or cares to fathom the mysteries within. The faded carpets and dusty furniture and books may still be discerned through the slats of the window shutters which were so firmly nailed by the colonel, when he hoped to escape the memory of the past. What was once luxury, is now the haunt of uncanny things that scurry through the obscurity and decay. No one dares penetrate within the silent house. It is the haunt of the woman in the sunbonnet, keeping watch and ward over the phantom of her murderer. Only a soul as vacuous as hers, as idle and as lonely, would brave the lion in his den! Only the tranquil ghost of the woman in the sunbonnet would venture to encounter the shade of the colonel in that moldering house! Today he is still shrinking, yet eagerly listening for the unflinching footstep that hounded him to suicide.