

Write a commentary on one of the following:

1.

In her soft-carpeted, thick-curtained, richly furnished chamber, Mrs Marroner lay sobbing on the wide, soft bed.

5 She sobbed bitterly, chokingly, despairingly; her shoulders heaved and shook convulsively; her hands were tight-clenched. She had forgotten her elaborate dress, the more elaborate bedcover; forgotten her dignity, her self-control, her pride. In her mind was an overwhelming, unbelievable horror, an immeasurable loss, a turbulent, struggling mass of emotion.

In her reserved, superior, Boston-bred life, she had never dreamed that it would be possible for her to feel so many things at once, and with such trampling intensity.

10 She tried to cool her feelings into thoughts; to stiffen them into words; to control herself — and could not. It brought vaguely to her mind an awful moment in the breakers at York Beach, one summer in girlhood when she had been swimming under water and could not find the top.

In her uncarpeted, thin-curtained, poorly furnished chamber on the top floor, Gerta Petersen lay sobbing on the narrow, hard bed.

15 She was of larger frame than her mistress, grandly built and strong; but all her proud young womanhood was prostrate now, convulsed with agony, dissolved in tears. She did not try to control herself. She wept for two.

20 If Mrs Marroner suffered more from the wreck and ruin of a longer love — perhaps a deeper one; if her tastes were finer, her ideals loftier; if she bore the pangs of bitter jealousy and outraged pride, Gerta had personal shame to meet, a hopeless future, and a looming present which filled her with unreasoning terror.

She had come like a meek young goddess into that perfectly ordered house, strong, beautiful, full of goodwill and eager obedience, but ignorant and childish — a girl of eighteen.

25 Mr Marroner had frankly admired her, and so had his wife. They discussed her visible perfections and as visible limitations with that perfect confidence which they had so long enjoyed. Mrs Marroner was not a jealous woman. She had never been jealous in her life — till now.

Gerta had stayed and learned their ways. They had both been fond of her. Even the cook was fond of her. She was what is called 'willing', was unusually teachable and plastic; and Mrs Marroner, with her early habits of giving instruction, tried to educate her somewhat.

30 "I never saw anyone so docile," Mrs Marroner had often commented, "It is perfection in a servant, but almost a defect in character. She is so helpless and confiding."

She was precisely that: a tall, rosy-cheeked baby; rich womanhood without, helpless infancy within. Her braided wealth of dead gold hair, her grave blue eyes, her mighty shoulders and long, firmly moulded limbs seemed those of a primal earth spirit; but she was only an ignorant child, with a child's weakness.

35 When Mr Marroner had to go abroad for his firm, unwillingly, hating to leave his wife, he had told her he felt quite safe to leave her in Gerta's hands — she would take care of her.

"Be good to your mistress, Gerta," he told the girl that last morning at breakfast. "I leave her to you to take care of. I shall be back in a month at latest."

40 Then he turned, smiling, to his wife, "And you must take care of Gerta, too," he said, "I expect you'll have her ready for college when I get back."

This was seven months ago. Business had delayed him from week to week, from month to month. He wrote to his wife, long, loving, frequent letters, deeply regretting the delay, explaining how necessary, how profitable it was, congratulating her on the wide resources she had, her well-filled, well-balanced mind, her many interests.

45 "If I should be eliminated from your scheme of things, by any of those 'acts of God'
mentioned on the tickets, I do not feel that you would be an utter wreck," he said. "That is very
comforting to me. Your life is so rich and wide that no one loss, even a great one, would wholly
cripple you. But nothing of this sort is likely to happen and I shall be home again in three weeks
50 — if this thing gets settled. And you will be looking so lovely, with that eager light in your eyes
and the changing flush I know so well — and love so well. My dear wife! We shall have to have
a new honeymoon — other moons come every month, why shouldn't the mellifluous² kind?"

He often asked after 'little Gerta', sometimes enclosed a picture postcard to her, joked with
his wife about her laborious efforts to educate "the child", was so loving and merry and wise.
All this was racing through Mrs Marroner's mind as she lay there with the broad, hemstitched
55 border of fine linen sheeting crushed and twisted in one hand, and the other holding a sodden
handkerchief.

She had tried to teach Gerta, and had grown to love the patient, sweet-natured child,
in spite of her dullness. At work with her hands, she was clever, if not quick, and could keep small
accounts from week to week. But to the woman who held a Ph.D., who had been on the faculty of
60 a college, it was like baby-tending.

Perhaps having no babies of her own made her love the big child the more, though the
years between them were but fifteen.

To the girl she seemed quite old, of course; and her young heart was full of grateful affection
for the patient care which made her feel so much at home in this new land.

65 And then she had noticed a shadow on the girl's bright face. She looked nervous, anxious,
worried. When the bell rang, she seemed startled, and would rush hurriedly to the door.
Her peals of frank laughter no longer rose from the area gate as she stood talking with the always
admiring tradesmen.

70 Mrs Marroner had laboured long to teach her more reserve with men, and flattered herself
that her words were at last effective. She suspected the girl of homesickness, which was denied.
She suspected her of illness, which was denied also. At last she suspected her of something which
could not be denied.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Turned* (1911)

¹ plastic: capable of being moulded, compliant

² mellifluous: sweetly flowing (as honey)

2.

The Heaven of Animals

Here they are. The soft eyes open.

If they have lived in a wood

It is a wood.

If they have lived on plains

5 It is grass rolling

Under their feet forever.

Having no souls, they have come,

Anyway, beyond their knowing.

Their instincts wholly bloom

10 And they rise.

The soft eyes open.

To match them, the landscape flowers,

Outdoing, desperately

Outdoing what is required:

15 The richest wood,

The deepest field.

For some of these,

It could not be the place

It is, without blood.

20 These hunt, as they have done,

But with claws and teeth grown perfect,

More deadly than they can believe.

They stalk more silently,

And crouch on the limbs of trees,

25 And their descent

Upon the bright backs of their prey

May take years

In a sovereign floating of joy.

And those that are hunted

30 Know this as their life,

Their reward: to walk

Under such trees in full knowledge

Of what is in glory above them,

And to feel no fear,

35 But acceptance, compliance.

Fulfilling themselves without pain

At the cycle's center,
They tremble, they walk
Under the tree,
40 They fall, they are torn,
They rise, they walk again.

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