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Miss Vernon's Lover.

"ASHES to ashes, dust to dust—"
Argeline Vernon said the words
over slowly—coldly—folding up closely
the withered hearts-case, and violets, in their
wrapping of silver paper. There was a
curl of soft, bright, chestnut hair twining
around them—she put the whole within a
little box that had treasured them for
years, snapped down the lid, and dropped
the whole upon the gleaming coals, in the
grate.

There was a flash—a momentary sparkle
—a wreath of thin, blue smoke ascended—
a pale, ghastly flame shot up, quivered, and
died, and then the fiery coals gleamed on,
blood red as before.

"There, Philip Desmond, rest in peace!"
She rose, and went to the mirror, push-
ing back the heavy braids of hair from her
face, as if they hurt her. The scrutiny to
which she subjected herself was no light
one. Perhaps she wanted to compare her
negative attractions with the fervid brilli-
ance of Miss Montgomery's beauty.

She recalled the sparkling, blonde face,
with its dark violet eyes; white and damask
complexion; pearly teeth; hair like spun
gold, and that nameless fascination of woman
that made the young belle's admirers
swear it was witchcraft that so enthralled
them. Yes, there was no disputing the
fact; Lettie Montgomery was very fair,
nay, more than fair, she was beautiful. It
was no matter of wonder that Desmond,
with his artist fancy, should love her.

For three years, Miss Vernon had been
the belle of her set. She was an orphan
heiress, residing with her father's widowed
sister, a woman of fashion and influence,
whose ruling ambition was to see her niece
well settled in life. Mr. Desmond suited
her, as far as personal attractions were
concerned, but in the way of property he
fell far short of Mrs. Marlowe's require-
ments.

But Argeline was of age, and had, be-
sides, a will of her own, and would brook
no interference, so Mrs. Marlowe had been
obliged to hold her peace. Now, that the
thing was all over, the lady secretly rejoiced
at Philip's falsity; especially as Argeline,
seeing the condition of things, had given
him a dismissal, even before he had dared
to think of asking it.

It was very hard for the girl to break off
this connection. As one knows, who has
been through a like trial, how these ties of
daily companionship and love wind around
our hearts. No one knows how it hurts to
sever them rudely, and take home to us
the cold fact that what has been so sweet,
can never be again! that all the pleasant
hours, when heaven seemed to be drawing
nigh to earth, are gone forever; and that
henceforth we must go on to the end, lack-
ing something; knowing and feeling al-
ways, that we have lost some sweetness
and glory out of life that can never return.

There was a great struggle in Argeline's
soul—she had nearly lost faith in creation,
because of this unstable Philip Desmond—
but after the first bitter disappointment,
better thoughts came back.

Two weeks after she had broken with
him, she saw a phase in his character,
hitherto concealed, that made her thank
God devoutly that she had been saved from
becoming his.

She was walking in Broad street one
morning, when a light phaeton drew up
at the door of a shop near her. Philip
sprang out and assisted Miss Montgomery
to alight. Just then, a tattered little
bigger girl laid her hand on the dainty,
trailing silk robe of the lady.

"Charity, sweet lady! for the love of
heaven, charity!" said the thin, dead
voice.

Miss Montgomery swept rudely on, the
child still clinging to her garments.

"Only a few cents, lady! My mother
is sick and hungry?"

"Begone, you little brat!" cried Philip,
"or I will have you placed in the hands of
the police!"

"Please, sir, my mother—"
"O yes, the old story!" and he struck
the feeble arms clasping the end of Miss
Montgomery's rich sables, with his whip.

The child's face crimsoned—she drew off
a little distance, and looked at him with
wondering surprise.

Argeline sprang forward, and laid her
hand on the shoulder of the beggar.

"I will go home with you, my child,"
she said, "and see your mother."

The little girl without a word, led the
way; and Argeline followed. The young
belle had never set foot in that part of the
city before, but she unhesitatingly followed
the lead of her conductor.

The room into which she was ushered
was low and meagre; the utmost poverty
reigned over the whole place. It was,
indeed, as Philip had said, the old story.
A woman widowed, poor, with only this
little Edith; she had tried to support her-
self by sewing, but close application had
ruined her health, and now she was too
near death to care for aught belonging to
the world.

Argeline sat by her, listening to the
plaintive story, while Edith, with the
money her visitor had given her, went out
to buy fuel and food. She returned in a
little while, but no fire could ever warm
that white, cold woman again!—for Mary
Ashle, all suffering was ended!

Argeline took Edith home with her, and
after she knew her better, she decided to
keep her always. She was already thirteen
years of age, and thanks to the careful
teachings of her mother, she was advanced
far beyond the generality of girls at that
age.

She now was sent to school, and neither
pains nor expense was spared to perfect
her education. Under the influence of
kindness, Edith's dark face grew positively
handsome. The great, black eyes lost their
frightened appealing expression—the sun-
ken cheeks glowed with faint crimson, and
the mass of neglected hair fell into heavy
curls, that were the delight and admiration
of the whole school.

Argeline still held her old place in so-
ciety, and many were the suitors who laid
their fortunes at her feet. She rejected
them all. She had been deceived once, by
one she thought faultless, and she was sat-
isfied to let all these pass from her thoughts.
She said she should never marry; she
should find enough in Edith to satisfy all
her woman's craving after love.

A year and more passed. Spring was
just opening. Philip and Miss Montgom-
ery had gone to Europe with a party of
friends. They were to be married in Paris.
Argeline read the notice of the wedding—a
grand affair at the American Legation—
without a thrill. Then she knew she had
overcome all tenderness for the banished
past.

In May, there came a great shock for
Argeline Vernon. Most women would
have wept and stormed over it—she only
sat quietly down to think.

A financial crisis was upon the country,
and taking advantage of the general con-
fusion, Elkins, the banker with whom
Argeline's funds were deposited, had em-
bezzled everything he could lay hands on,
and fled the country! There was no help
for it—the shrewdest detectives failed to
obtain trace of him—he had escaped and
left nothing behind.

Though not absolutely penniless, Miss
Vernon had not enough left to warrant her
continuing in idleness, even had she been
thus disposed. From the first, she knew
she must work—she, who had never even
dressed her own hair!

Her aunt was almost frantic at the change,
and sought with all her power to dissuade
Argeline from going out to earn her living.
She should be welcome to remain with her
as long as she chose, and Edith could go to
the orphan asylum.

Argeline made all her arrangements
quietly. Inclination pointed her to the
country—she looked to the green hills,
and fresh, free breezes that she knew swept
the New Hampshire meadows into billowy
seas of clover, in the sweet month of June.

At just the right time, a local paper fell
into her hands. She could never regard it
other than a special providence. It con-
tained an advertisement of the school com-
mittee of Ellwood—a village fifty miles
away. They wanted a young lady "of edu-
cation and respectability," so ran the
notice, "to take charge of a school of fifty
scholars, situated in the beautiful and sa-

lubrious village of Ellwood, on the western
boarders of Lake Winnepesaukee."

The very thing! Argeline answered the
advertisement immediately, and in less
than a week she had the reply of the com-
mittee. She might come out to Ellwood,
if mutually pleased, she could enter upon
her duties at once. She could come to the
house of Esquire Dracut, where the teachers
always boarded.

She packed up her wardrobe, took Edith,
and went to Ellwood. The place disap-
pointed her most agreeably. One might
travel hundreds of miles, and not come
across so attractive a spot as the quiet val-
ley in which Ellwood was situated.

Esquire Dracut met her at the depot, and
carried her home with him, in the super-
annated, bellows-topped chaise. The
Dracut farm-house was a gem, she thought,
as they wound slowly up to the broad porch
through a green lane of sycamore trees.
It was set down in the middle of a great
field—old, rambling and roomy—surround-
ed by trees a century old; and command-
ing from its windows the most delightful
view in the world. The blue, hazy hills
stretching away into the distance, pile
upon pile; the unruffled lake, mirroring
every tree and shrub with life-like ac-
curacy; the dense forest of maple and beech
clad in their young green—O, it was beau-
tiful to Argeline; and to Edith, the city
child, who had never seen a field larger
than the dusty park, it was like a glimpse
into paradise.

Mrs. Dracut was just the woman one
likes to see the mistress of a farmhouse.
Robust, ruddy, active, cheerful—she made
her guests at home without ceremony.

The school would begin the ensuing
Monday, if Argeline passed the examina-
tion. She did pass it, so splendidly that
old Deacon Grimes rubbed his hands, and
declared that she must have managed to
smuggle herself through Dartmouth. The
old man had a prevailing belief that no one
ever achieved eminence unless he had been
graduated at his own Alma Mater.

The school was new business to the
young teacher. It was her very first at-
tempt to apply herself to work, and it came
hard, but she had brought to it a brave
heart, and a determination to succeed.

She did well. The scholars liked her;
she pleased their parents. She was solicited
to take charge of the fall term, and gladly
accepted the offer. She liked Ellwood—
Edith could keep on with her studies the
same as though she were in the city, and
the country air made such a beautiful girl
of her!

The term closed with an examination,
and among the strangers present, Argeline
saw a face that interested her strangely.
She did not inquire to whom it belonged;
it was not like her, but she heard George
Phelps, the medical student, address him
as Mr. Ashcroft.

So the pale-faced, dark-haired man, with
the singular expressive eyes, and smile of
womanly sweetness, was Eugene Ashcroft,
the master of Ashcroft Hall. Argeline
passed the grounds of this fine old mansion
every day on her way to school, and more
than once she had stolen a blood-red rose
from the profusion of vines that had crept
over the high fence to brighten the dusty
road.

She had heard a great deal of Mr. Ash-
croft since she had come to Ellwood. He
had been absent in New York through the
summer; now he had come home to oversee
the harvesters. Is there a country village
under the sun which has not its celebrity?
its own particular great man? Of course
not. And Ellwood was no exception, for
it claimed Eugene Ashcroft.

Argeline heard his praises rung, and his
faults chronicled by every young lady
whom she had met—they said he was hand-
some, wealthy and very self-conceited.
Women have a way of flattering men till
they fill them with self-conceit, and then
blame them for it.

Mr. Ashcroft was naturally noble-heart-
ed—but flattery, and the world's fame had
tarnished the fine gold of his character, and
given him, perhaps, too exalted an idea of
his own attractions.

Argeline could not help thinking of him
that night; seldom had she been more in-
terested. She was obliged to confess the
humiliating truth that she thought of him
so deeply as to dream of him when she
went to sleep, and remembered the very ex-
pression of his eyes the first thing when
she awoke in the morning.

A week afterwards, there was a picnic
in Harvey's woods. Argeline was rather
late. John Dracut, the oldest son of the
squire, drove her over. The party had
straggled off, some in one direction, and
some in another; John went to find some

friends of Argeline, and she sat down be-
hind a clump of trees to wait their coming.
The fragrance of a cigar warned her of
some gentleman's propinquity, and at the
same time she heard George Phelps pro-
nouncing her own name.

"Argeline Vernon—rather a romantic
cognomen for a school-mistress, isn't it?
There is another lady added to your train,
Ashcroft."

"Thank you," replied a rich-toned,
careless voice, languidly, "I have no pen-
chant for school-mistresses. All that I
ever knew were lean, snuffy, wore cork-
screw curls, and had been just twenty-five
for the previous twenty years. Excuse me,
if you please."

"Wait till you see Miss Vernon. She is
young, beautiful and has been a great heiress—
also a belle."

"O, of course. A princess in disguise,
no doubt."

"Miss Vernon is a lady—you will admit
that when she comes."

"Don't get enthusiastic, Phelps; most
likely she's seeking a husband, and it would
hardly be safe to be too much exercised on
the subject of her attractions."

The twain sauntered away. Argeline
was high-tempered and proud. She was
cut to the quick by the unmeaning insolence
of this Eugene Ashcroft. He had no right,
she said, to judge her thus, having never
seen her; and when a half hour after he
came up with Mr. Phelps, she was cold as
an iceberg. Ashcroft's manner was def-
erential enough now, as his friend pre-
sented him.

"Mr. Ashcroft, Miss Vernon."

She swept his person with her calm,
proud eye, and bowed slightly.

"Will you take my arm for the prome-
nade?" he asked, courteously.

"Thank you, I am engaged."

"I regret it, but if you will dance the
first set with me, the disappointment will
not be so great."

"I have not decided to dance."

He looked a little disconcerted, but quick-
ly recovered himself. He had a cluster of
scarlet cardinal flowers in his hand. He
offered them to her with some gallant
speech.

"Excuse me—I do not like them. They
burn me."

John Dracut came back and led her
away. Ashcroft looked after her in silent
surprise. A farmer's clod-hopper boy pre-
ferred before him! The thing was incom-
prehensible.

Through the day, Mr. Ashcroft made
numerous attempts to enter into conversa-
tion with Argeline, but all to no effect.
She avoided him persistently. And this
very avoidance only made him the more
eager to know her better. Surely the wo-
man who had independence enough to turn
away from his admiration, to the society
of a bashful, country clown, must have
something original about her, worth cul-
tivating.

After that, they met frequently. Argeline
was invariably cold—Ashcroft silent,
reserved, though always courteous. He
became the best of friends with Edith.
They had taken to each other from the
very first. He brought her books and
fruits and flowers; took her out walking
and riding, and taught her the barbarous
Russian language, which he had acquired
during a ten years' residence in that in-
hospitable clime.

One day, Argeline was returning from a
walk to Frinton—a village four miles dis-
tant. It began to grow dark suddenly, and
she saw the top of a dense thunder-cloud
looking over the mountains. She hurried
her steps, the cloud opened, the thunder
reverberated among the hills, and the wind
began to arouse the forest.

Ashcroft was the nearest house, but she
would not seek shelter there—not if she
were drenched. A quick rumble of wheels
behind her crossed the bridge over the
brook, and in a moment halted at her side.
Mr. Ashcroft stepped from the chaise.

"It is going to rain, Miss Vernon—let
me assist you in!"

She would have resisted, but he did not
stop for her remonstrances. He was seated
beside her, and urging on his horse be-
fore she got breath to speak. The rain
began to fall heavily—he turned into the
avenue leading to the hall—she touched his
arm.

"I will get out here, if you please. I do
not wish to go in."

He pointed to a huge ash tree a little in
front of them, that a fierce thunder-bolt
had riven from top to root.

"I am sorry to force my hospitality upon
you, but there is no other way. You must
come in."

He stopped at the hall door, and lifting

her out, ushered her into the sitting-room.
While he was gone to find the hostler, Ar-
geline opened one of the low, French win-
dows, and stepping out on the terrace,
crossed the lawn, and then the meadows,
reaching the Dracut farmhouse in a few
minutes, drenched to the skin.

Mr. Ashcroft called that evening to ask
Edith to ride to Lily Pond with him, the
next morning. He made no allusion what-
ever to Argeline's escapade, and she occu-
pied herself with a book while he remain-
ed. Edith went out on the piazza with
him. He put a shawl around her, his arm
with it; she rested her head on his arm,
and they talked in subdued voices. Edith
was fourteen now, and royally beautiful.
Argeline saw them, and wondered from
whence arose the sharp pain at her heart.
She dashed down the window and went up
to bed.

Late in October, she was walking with
Edith on the shore of the lake. It was
near sunset, and everything was wrapped
in a glory of crimson and gold. Great piles
of amber clouds reclined against the bosom
of the west, and a light breeze swept down
from Mount Belknap, ruffling the water
into tiny ripples, and stirring weirdly in
the forest branches.

Argeline sat down on a great rock, and
gazed out listlessly over the blue sheet of
water. Edith untied a little boat that float-
ed near, and stepped into it. She bent her
head, letting her heavy curls trail along in
the water, as the little craft with almost
imperceptible motion receded from the
shore.

Argeline looked up with something like
alarm in her face.

"Come back, quick, Edith!" she cried—
"use the oars—you will upset that frail
shell if you go further out where there is a
current!"

The beautiful child arose quickly to seize
the oars—the boat careened—in another in-
stant she was in the water, and before she
could utter a single cry, it had closed over
her. Argeline sprang forward—she would
have lost her own life in the vain attempt
at recovering Edith—but a strong hand
forced her back.

"Remain where you are," said Eugene
Ashcroft, "I will attend to Edith."

She closed her eyes, and sat down.—
Strangely enough, after she had heard his
voice, she felt no more fear. A moment
afterwards, she had Edith in her arms,
pale, cold and wet as she was. Ashcroft
stood by, silently regarding them. He held
out his hand to Argeline.

"Will you touch my hand now, Miss
Vernon?"

The fingers she extended were locked up
in his firm clasp. He held her thus all the
way to the house. Edith went in, and left
them together at the door. Their eyes
met. Something Argeline saw in his that
made the crimson come to her very tem-
ples. She tore her hand away, and left
him without a word.

The first week in November, there came
a terrible rain-storm. Dwellers in sea-
coast towns can hardly form any idea of
what a "freshet" is like in one of the
mountain valleys. The little streams
swelled to mighty rivers, and went tum-
bling, snow-white into the lake—low lands
were inundated—roads submerged and
bridges swept away.

Just below Ashcroft Hall, the road cross-
ed a violent little stream known as Thun-
der Run, on a bridge more than twenty
feet from its bed; but in times of great
rains, this brook frequently rose to an un-
precedented height—sometimes taking off
the very plank itself.

Towards sunset, the rain having ceased,
Argeline threw on her shawl, and went out
through the wet grass to see the water
foam over the rocks. It was quite a long
walk to the bridge, and she followed the
course of the stream, thus increasing the
distance by, at least, one-half. It began
to grow dark, early night was coming on.
She quickened her steps, and reached the
bridge. The water roared madly through
the narrow gorge, overflowing the banks in
some places, and casting the spray, cold
and drenching, over the figure of Argeline.
She went nearer—good heaven! the cover-
ing of the bridge was gone! only the two
"stringers" remained!

The water had fallen a little, evidently;
it was not entirely up to the timbers, now;
but some time during the afternoon it had
been above them. She stood a moment,
looking at the ruin, then turned to go home
but lightning-like a thought flashed through
her brain that rooted her to the spot. She
had heard Edith say that Mr. Ashcroft had
ridden horse-back to Frinton, and would
return that very night, sometime before
nine o'clock! He must be near there then,
CONCLUDED ON SECOND PAGE.