

**THE LADY OF THE
AROOSTOOK**

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The Lady of the Aroostook by William D. Howells

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WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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THE LADY OF
THE AROOSTOOK

BY
WILLIAM D. HOWELLS



Author's Edition

VOL. I.

EDINBURGH
DAVID DOUGLAS, CASTLE STREET
1891

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THE
LADY OF THE AROOSTOOK.



I.

IN the best room of a farm-house on the skirts of a village in the hills of Northern Massachusetts, there sat one morning in August three people who were not strangers to the house, but who had apparently assembled in the parlour as the place most in accord with an unaccustomed finery in their dress. One was an elderly woman with a plain, honest face, as kindly in expression as she could be perfectly sure she felt, and no more; she rocked herself softly in the haircloth arm-chair, and addressed as father the old man who sat at one end of the table between the windows, and drubbed noiselessly upon it with his stubbed fingers, while his lips, puckered to a whistle, emitted no

sound. His face had that distinctly fresh-shaven effect which once a week is the advantage of shaving no oftener: here and there, in the deeper wrinkles, a frosty stubble had escaped the razor. He wore an old-fashioned, low black satin stock, over the top of which the linen of his unstarved collar contrived with difficulty to make itself seen; his high-crowned, lead-coloured straw hat lay on the table before him. At the other end of the table sat a young girl, who leaned upon it with one arm, propping her averted face on her hand. The window was open beside her, and she was staring out upon the door-yard, where the hens were burrowing for coolness in the soft earth under the lilac bushes; from time to time she put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"I don't like this part of it, father," said the elderly woman,—"*Lyddy's* seeming to feel about it the way she does right at the last moment, as you may say." The old man made a noise in his throat as if he might speak; but he only unpuckered his mouth, and stayed his fingers, while the other continued: "I don't want her to go now, no more than ever I did. I ain't one to think that eatin' up everything on your plate keeps it from wastin', and I never was; and I say

that even if you couldn't get the money back, it would cost no more to have her stay than to have her go."

"I don't suppose," said the old man, in a high, husky treble, "but what I could get some of it back from the captain; maybe all. He didn't seem any ways graspin'. I don't want Lyddy should feel, any more than you do, Maria, that we're glad to have her go. But what I look at is this: as long as she has this idea— Well, it's like this— I d'know as I can express it, either." He relapsed into the comfort people find in giving up a difficult thing.

"Oh, I know!" returned the woman. "I understand it's an opportunity; you might call it a leadin', almost, that it would be flyin' in the face of Providence to refuse. I presume her gifts were given her for improvement, and it would be the same as buryin' them in the ground for her to stay up here. But I do say that I want Lyddy should feel just so about goin', or not go at all. It ain't like goin' among strangers, though, if it is in a strange land. They're her father's own kin, and if they're any ways like him they're warm-hearted enough, if that's all you want. I guess they'll do what's right by Lyddy when she gets there.

And I try to look at it this way : that long before that maple by the gate is red she'll be with her father's own sister ; and I for one don't mean to let it worry me." She made search for her handkerchief, and wiped away the tears that fell down her cheeks.

"Yes," returned the old man ; "and before the leaves are on the ground we shall more'n have got our first letter from her. I declare for 't," he added, after a tremulous pause, "I was goin' to say how Lyddy would enjoy readin' it to us ! I don't seem to get it rightly into my head that she's goin' away."

"It ain't as if Lyddy was leavin' any life behind her that's over and above pleasant," resumed the woman. "She's a good girl, and I never want to see a more uncomplaining ; but I know it's duller and duller here all the while for her ; with us two old folks, and no young company ; and I'd know as it's been any better the two winters she's taught in the Mill Village. That's what reconciles me, on Lyddy's account, as much as anything. I ain't one to set much store on worldly ambition, and I never was ; and I'd know as I care for Lyddy's advancement, as you may call it. I believe that as far forth as true happiness goes she'd be as well

off here as there. But I don't say but what she would be more satisfied in the end, and as long as you can't have happiness, in this world, I say you'd better have satisfaction. Is that Josiah Whitman's hearse goin' past?" she asked, rising from her chair, and craning forward to bring her eyes on a level with the window, while she suspended the agitation of the palm-leaf fan which she had not ceased to ply during her talk; she remained a moment with the quiescent fan pressed against her bosom, and then she stepped out of the door, and down the walk to the gate. "Josiah!" she called, while the old man looked and listened at the window. "Who you be'n buryin'!"

The man halted his hearse, and answered briefly, "Mirandy Holcomb."

"Why, I thought the funeral wa'n't to be till to-morrow! Well, I declare," said the woman, as she re-entered the room and sat down again in her rocking-chair, "I didn't ask him whether it was Mr. Goodlow or Mr. Baldwin preached the sermon. I was so put out hearin' it was Mirandy, you might say I forgot to ask him anything. Mirandy was always a well woman till they moved down to the Mill Village and began takin' the hands to board,—so many of 'em.