

GLORIA VICTIS

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Gloria victis by J. A. Mitchell

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J. A. MITCHELL

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They say, best men are moulded out of faults.

MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

Gloria Victis

By

J. A. Mitchell

Editor of *Life*, author of "Amos Judd"
"That First Affair," etc.

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I

ON Staten Island, in the garden before a modest cottage, a plump, sunburnt little girl was sitting among the flowers.

Her companion, a doll of uncertain character, whose champagne tresses and gaudy attire betokened a career of Gallic levity, or, at the very best, a purely fashionable existence, appeared strikingly out of harmony with her humble surroundings. This pretentious effigy, face down across her guardian's lap, was about to receive the punishment we associate with that attitude, when a voice from the road caused the uplifted hand to pause in its descent. A horse and buggy had stopped before the gate, and the driver repeated his question.

"Does Mrs. Zabarelli live here?"

"Yes, sir, but she's not at home."

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"You expect her soon, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I guess so. At one o'clock."

The man climbed down from the vehicle, hitched his horse, and entered the yard. He wore a long linen duster buttoned from his throat to his ankles, leaving nothing of the other raiment visible except a white collar, the tips of his trousers, a straw hat, and a pair of russet shoes. His hair was gray, almost white, hanging thick about his ears; and he was very round-shouldered. Judging from appearances he might have been either forty-five or sixty years of age, his hair and figure seeming more venerable than his face. He was clean shaven, with thin lips, a rather sharp nose, and a strong jaw. Altogether he gave the impression of a conservative, indefinable citizen, who could have passed for anything from a book agent to the president of a trust company.

The child had struggled to her feet, and, as she stood regarding him, he stopped in front of her, looked down, and smiled. She returned the smile, and came a little nearer. She found, as many others had found, a fascination in this person's eyes. They were

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gray, and not remarkable except from their excessive honesty. Under all conditions they appeared sincere and frank; but when the owner smiled, the soul behind seemed to shine through and out, convincing you, in a way you had never realized before, that honesty — transparent, immaculate, incorruptible honesty — was, after all, the highest human attribute. As these translucent orbs beamed kindly upon the child, her young heart, under their supernal influence, expanded with a trustful love.

“Are n't you afraid of the sun, out here with no hat on?”

“No, sir; I like it.”

He took out his watch and held it a moment, absorbed in a calculation.

“Did your mother say she would be back by one o'clock?”

“Yes, sir.”

He appeared undecided, looking first toward the open door of the cottage, then over the opposite fields to the harbor beyond, where floated the craft of every nation. The day was warm, but a gentle breeze from the water somewhat tempered the heat; not

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enough, however, to cool the rays of a blinding sun now directly overhead. The air near the earth quivered beneath the scorching light, and in this neglected garden stray bees and humming-birds, drunk with heat and honey, reeled blindly to and fro.

The visitor's glance, drawn by the brilliant colors, rested for a moment upon the pretentious doll, now pressed with loving care against its owner's stomach. Then, as if to aid his reflections, he opened his mouth a very little, drew in his lips, and slowly rubbed his chin. Perhaps the temperature of the garden hastened a decision, or it may have been the nature of his errand, for, with another smile to his young admirer, he turned and walked into the house.

Although a diminutive and somewhat uninviting room, the Zabarelli parlor at the present moment proved a welcome refuge. The air fluttered gently through the closed blinds, and the subdued light, after the outer glare, was soothing to the senses. This room bore indications of modest comfort; but the extreme simplicity of its furniture strengthened the impression already given by