

**THE LADY OF THE
AROOSTOOK,
VOL. I**

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The Lady of the Aroostook, Vol. I by William D. Howells

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WILLIAM D. HOWELLS

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BY
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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 unstarched 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.