

*Twelve
Tales*

*by
Nathaniel
Hawthorne*

TWELVE TALES



Nathaniel Hawthorne

A LADDER EDITION
at the 2,000-Word Level

Adapted by
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Sylph Etherege



On a bright summer evening, two persons stood among the bushes of a garden, secretly watching a young girl who sat in the window-seat of a neighboring home. One of these unseen observers, a gentleman, was youthful, and had an air of being of good family, and the face of a thinker. He was not otherwise handsome in appearance. His face wore a threatening, though somewhat satisfied expression, while he pointed his long finger at the girl, and seemed to regard her as a creature completely within his influence.

“The trick works!” said he, in a low whisper.

“Do you know, Edward Hamilton—since so you choose to be named—do you know,” said the lady beside him, “that I am almost prepared to tell the truth at once? What if the lesson should prove too hard! True, if my ward could be thus laughed out of her foolish nonsense, she might be the better for it through life. But then, she is such a delicate creature! And besides, are you not ruining your own chance by putting forward this shadow of another person?”

“But will he not disappear into thin air, when I so command?” replied Edward Hamilton. “Let the trick work!”

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The girl's thin and sylph-like figure was colored with light from the sunset clouds, surrounded by rich, silken curtains, and set within the deep frame of the window. It was a perfect picture. Though her occupation excited much interest in the two observers, she was merely gazing at a miniature which she held in her hand, framed in white silk and red leather. There did not appear to be any other cause for the evil smile with which Hamilton regarded her.

"The trick works!" he whispered again. "Our pretty Sylvia's lack of interest will be paid for dearly!"

At this moment the girl raised her eyes. Instead of a living likeness of the miniature, she beheld the un-beautiful shape of Edward Hamilton, who now stepped forth from his hiding place in the bushes.

Sylvia Etherege was a girl without father and mother. Till a few months before, she had spent her life under the care of an unmarried uncle, in whose home she lived. While yet a child, she had been promised in marriage to a cousin, also still a child. Their future marriage had been planned as the means of uniting two rich families, and had been agreed upon by the parents on both sides. Edgar Vaughan, the promised husband, had been raised from babyhood in Europe. He had never seen the beautiful girl whom he was to marry. But already, for several years, letters had been exchanged between the cousins. A relationship had grown be-

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tween them, though they knew little about each other's character.

Sylvia was gentle, quiet, and fanciful. Her uncle's lonely habits had shut her out from the world, even so much of it as is generally open to maidens of her age. She had been left to seek friends for herself in the world of imagination. She conversed with them, sometimes in the language of dead poets, oftener in the poetry of her own mind. The companion whom she most often imagined was the cousin with whom her earliest thoughts had been connected. She made an imaginary picture of Edgar Vaughan, and colored it with many bright and delicate perfections. To this shadow she was lovingly faithful. With its airy presence sitting by her side or walking along her favorite paths, the loneliness of her young life was happy. Her heart was satisfied with love, while its purity was untouched by the earthliness that the touch of a real lover would have left there. Edgar Vaughan seemed to sense her character. For in his letters, he gave her a name that was proper to her delicate character and to the spiritual beauty of both her mind and person. Instead of Sylvia, he called her Sylph—with the authority of a cousin and a lover—his dear Sylph Etherege.

When Sylvia was seventeen, her uncle died, and she passed under the care of Mrs. Grosvenor, a lady of wealth and fashion. She was Sylvia's nearest relative, though a distant one. While living with Mrs. Grosvenor's family, she still kept some of her lifelong habits of loneliness, and drew back from a too

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familiar companionship with those around her. Still, too, she was faithful to her cousin, or to the shadow which bore his name.

The time now drew near when Edgar Vaughan, whose education had been completed by a period of travel, was to revisit the land of his birth. Edward Hamilton was a young gentleman who had been Vaughan's companion, both in his studies and travels. He had already recrossed the ocean, bringing letters to Mrs. Grosvenor and Sylvia Etherege. These letters earned him a warm welcome. However, on Sylvia's part, the welcome was not followed by personal preference, or even the respect that seemed due to her cousin's closest friend. She herself could have given no cause for these feelings. Hamilton, it is true, was not handsome, especially when beheld for the first time. Yet, in the eyes of most people, the lack of good looks was made up by his fine manners, and by the quick mind which so often shone through his dark features. Mrs. Grosvenor, with whom he immediately became a great favorite, tried to overcome Sylvia's feeling. But, in this matter, her ward could not be reasoned with. The presence of Edward Hamilton was sure to make her cold and distant.

Sylvia's simplicity made it easy for so sharp an observer as Hamilton to read her feelings. Whenever he saw her, a strange smile might be seen to come over the young man's face.

A few weeks after Hamilton's arrival, he presented to Sylvia Etherege a miniature of her cousin.

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He said that he would have delivered it sooner, but it had arrived late with a portion of his possessions. This was the miniature which we beheld Sylvia looking at with so much attention at the start of our story. Such, in truth, was too often the habit of the lonely and fanciful girl. The beauty of the pictured face was almost too perfect to represent a human creature. Sylvia feared that such a being would be too delicate to love a simple girl like her. Yet, the picture showed a sylph-like beauty quite like that of Sylph Etherege's own. There was the similarity between her own face and the miniature which is said often to exist between lovers. In this case, it might be due to the family blood of the two persons. Sylvia felt, indeed, that there was something familiar in the face because the eyes smiled upon her so like a friend, and seemed to show a knowledge of her thoughts.

But now, having the miniature, Sylvia could give greater reality to her daydreams. Pressing the picture to her heart, the life-like shadow could wander with her in the moonlight garden. Even at noontide it sat with her in the garden. Those heavenly eyes gazed forever into her soul. She heard the music of a voice breathing thoughts which agreed with her own. For her lover called Sylvia away from earth, which seemed strange, and common, and fearful. He took her to a country where her spirit wandered in peaceful dreams, as if it had found its home. Sometimes, at the height of her happiness, the features of the miniature would suddenly change,

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and darken, and be changed into the face of Edward Hamilton. And always, when such a change occurred, the face wore that strange smile with which Hamilton had glanced at Sylvia.

Before the close of summer, Sylvia Etherege was told that Vaughan had arrived from France, and that she would meet him—would meet, for the first time, the loved one of years—that very evening. We will not tell how often she gazed upon the miniature, thus trying to prepare herself for the approaching visit. While the evening grew deeper and darker, she sat with Mrs. Grosvenor in an inner room. It was lighted only by a lamp, which was burning at a distance on the center table of the parlor. Never before had Sylph Etherege looked so sylph-like. Mrs. Grosvenor, while she watched Sylvia tremble with emotion, was about to speak, when the opening of the street-door stopped the words upon her lips.

Footsteps came up the staircase, with a confident and familiar step, and someone entered the parlor. From the place where they sat, in the inner room, Mrs. Grosvenor and Sylvia could not see the person.

“Sylph!” cried a voice. “Dearest Sy'ph! Where are you, sweet Sylph Etherege? Here is your Edgar Vaughan!”

But instead of answering, or rising to meet her lover—who had greeted her by the sweet and fanciful name, which was known only to him—Sylvia grasped Mrs. Grosvenor's arm. Her whole frame shook with the beating of her heart.

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"Who is it?" she whispered. "Who calls me Sylph?"

Before Mrs. Grosvenor could reply, the stranger entered the room, bearing the lamp in his hand. Coming nearer, he displayed to Sylvia the features of Edward Hamilton, lighted by that evil smile which was special to his face.

Sylvia trembled, but had not power to turn away her white face from his gaze. The miniature, which she had been holding in her hand, fell down upon the floor. Hamilton, or Vaughan, set his foot upon it, and crushed the false picture to bits.

"There, my sweet Sylph," he exclaimed. "It was I that created your dream-lover, and now I destroy him! Your dream is over. Awake, Sylph Etherege, awake to truth! I am the only Edgar Vaughan!"

"We have gone too far," said Mrs. Grosvenor, catching Sylvia in her arms. Edgar Vaughan's idea had been accepted by Mrs. Grosvenor in the hope of curing Sylvia of her fanciful thoughts, and bringing her to face the truths and realities of life. "Look at the poor child!" she continued. "I fear what the results will be!"

"Indeed!" replied Vaughan, unkindly, as he threw the light of the lamp on Sylvia's closed eyes and pale face. "Well, I feel no guilt. It is no new tale. Many a sweet maid has fallen in love with a dream!"

"And now, Edgar Vaughan," said Mrs. Grosvenor, as Sylvia's heart began faintly to beat again, "now try, in good faith, to win back her love from the dream which you created. If you succeed, she

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will be the better, her whole life long, for the lesson we have taught her."

Whether the result of the lesson was what Mrs. Grosvenor hoped, may be gathered from the closing scene of our story. It had been made known to the fashionable world that Edgar Vaughan had returned from France, and, under the name of Edward Hamilton, had won the love of the beautiful girl to whom he had been promised in his boyhood. The wedding was to take place at an early date. One evening, before the day of the wedding arrived, Edgar Vaughan entered Mrs. Grosvenor's parlor, where he found that lady and Sylph Etherege.

"It seems that the town air is not good for Sylvia," said Mrs. Grosvenor. "She was always, indeed, a delicate creature; but now she is a mere shadow. Do but look at her! Did you ever imagine anything so delicate?"

Vaughan was already carefully observing the girl. She sat in a shadowy and moonlighted corner of the room, with her dreamy eyes fixed steadily upon his own. The branch of a tree was waving before the window, and sometimes covered her in its shadow, into which she seemed to disappear.

"Yes," he said, to Mrs. Grosvenor, "I can hardly consider her of this earth. No wonder that I call her Sylph! I think she will disappear into the moonlight, which falls upon her through the window. Or she might fly away into the open air!"

Sylvia's eyes grew bright. She waved her hand to Edgar Vaughan, with a look of victory.

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"Good-bye!" she said. "I will neither disappear into the moonlight, nor fly away into the air. Yet you cannot keep me here!"

There was something in Sylvia's look and tones that frightened Mrs. Grosvenor. But, as she was rushing towards the girl, Vaughan held her back.

"Stay!" he cried, with a strange smile of pain.

"Can our sweet Sylph be going to heaven, to seek the original of the miniature?"

The Snow-Image

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One afternoon of a cold winter's day, when the sun shone forth brightly after a long storm, two children asked their mother if they could run out and play in the new-fallen snow. The older child was a little girl whom her parents called Violet. But her brother was known by the name of Peony, on account of the redness of his broad and round little face, which made everybody think of sunshine and great red flowers. The father of these two children, a certain Mr. Lindsey, it is important to say, was an excellent but very matter-of-fact sort of man, a shopkeeper, who always took what is called the common-sense view of all matters. With a heart about as tender as other people's, he had a head as hard, and therefore, perhaps, as empty, as one of the iron pots which it was a part of his business to sell. The mother's character, on the other hand, had a bit of poetry in it, a touch of unwordly beauty—a delicate flower, as it were, that had grown out of her fanciful youth, and still kept itself alive among the dusty realities of marriage and motherhood.

So Violet and Peony, as I began with saying, begged their mother to let them run out and play in the new snow. The children lived in a city and had no wider play place than a little garden in front

The Snow-Image

of the house, just in front of the parlor windows.

"Yes, Violet—yes, my little Peony," said their kind mother, "you may go out and play in the new snow."

Accordingly, the good lady dressed her dear ones in heavy woolen clothes and gave to each one a kiss. Out went the two children, with a jump that carried them at once into the very heart of a huge snow pile. Then what a merry time they had! To look at them playing in the wintry garden, you would have thought that the storm had been sent for no other purpose but to provide a new plaything for Violet and Peony.

At last, when they had covered one another all over with handfuls of snow, Violet, after laughing heartily at little Peony's figure, was struck with a new idea.

"You would look exactly like a snow-image, Peony," she said, "if your face were not so red. And that reminds me! Let us make an image out of snow—an image of a little girl—and it shall be our sister, and shall run about and play with us all winter long. Won't it be nice?"

"Oh yes!" cried Peony, as plainly as he could speak, for he was but a little boy. "That will be nice! And Mamma shall see it!"

And straightaway the children began this great business of making a snow-image that should run about; while their mother, who was sitting at the window and overheard some of their talk, could not help smiling at the seriousness with which they set

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about it. They really seemed to imagine that there would be no difficulty whatever in creating a live little girl out of the snow. The mother delighted to watch their little figures—the girl, tall for her age, quick, and delicately colored; while Peony was broader than he was tall. Then the mother continued her work. Again and again, however, she could not help turning her head to the window to see how the children got on with their snow-image.

“What unusual children mine are!” she thought, smiling with a mother’s pride. “What other children could have made anything so like a little girl’s figure out of snow? Well; but now I must finish Peony’s new dress, for his grandfather is coming tomorrow, and I want the little fellow to look handsome.”

So she took up the dress and was soon busily at work again. The mother made her work light and happy by listening to the voices of Violet and Peony. At times, she could not clearly hear what was said. But you must know a mother listens with her heart much more than with her ears.

“Peony, Peony!” cried Violet to her brother, who had gone to another part of the garden, “bring me some of that fresh snow, Peony, from the very farthest corner, where we have not been walking.”

The mother, as she listened, thought how proper and delightful it would be, if little children were to come from Heaven and play with her own dear ones, and help them to make their snow-image.

“My little girl and boy deserve such playmates,

The Snow-Image

if children ever did!" said the mother to herself; and then she smiled again at her own motherly pride.

Nevertheless, the idea seized upon her imagination; and, time and again, she took a glimpse out of the window, half dreaming that she might see the golden-haired children of Heaven playing with her own golden-haired Violet and bright-faced Peony.

"Peony!" cried Violet, "Bring me some of the snow from the lower branches of the tree. I want it to make some soft hair for our snow sister's head!"

"Here it is Violet!" answered the little boy. "Take care you do not break it. Well done! How pretty!"

"And now we must have some little shining bits of ice," cried Violet, "to make the brightness of her eyes. She is not finished yet. Mamma will see how very beautiful she is; but papa will say, 'Nonsense!—come in out of the cold!'"

"Let us call Mamma to look out," said Peony; and then he shouted, "Mamma! Mamma!! Mamma!!! Look out, and see what a nice little girl we are making!"

The mother put down her work for an instant and looked out of the window. The rays of the setting sun shone into the lady's eyes so she could not very clearly observe what was in the garden. Still, she beheld a small white figure in the garden, that seemed to have a human likeness about it.

"They do everything better than other children,"