

# Mary Is Here

By Fannie Heaslip Lea

She came upon Wallace, sitting beside the table, his hand before his eyes. "Well, for pity's sake!" asked Dulcibella, "Where's Vivien?"



### Three Words Out of a Lilac-Scented Night, and What They Meant to One Man and One Woman.

was always able clearly to distinguish in her beautiful sister the echoes of whatever masculine voice was at the moment dominant in Dulcibella's life, and it somehow annoyed her.

"We disprove things by investigation, not by sneers," said Dulcibella. "What a human diagraph you are!" said Vivien.

"What's a diagraph?" asked Dulcibella. They were bad for her, she knew, being so many invitations to ultimate corpulence, but she never denied herself anything that she could reach.

Vivien turned away with her straight little nose in the air. That night Dulcibella called to her from the foot of the stairs:

"Vivien—come down, honey—I want you"—and Vivien went with honest reluctance.

Why Dulcibella had wanted her. About the old-fashioned center table in the living room, from which had been removed all customary impedimenta, sat Dulcibella, an ex-swain called Robbins, a possibly future swain called Blake, the Wallace man, and a very pretty girl named Sally Carter. Dulcibella was seated between Wallace and Blake. The chair upon Wallace's other hand was empty.

"Come and sit down, Vivien, there's a lamb!" cried Dulcibella languidly. "We need one more." She indicated the seat next Wallace.

Vivien understood at once what was transpiring in her sister's mind. The Carter girl was very pretty, delightfully friendly. Vivien was to serve for the insulating, as one might say, of Arthur Wallace—Vivien being a nonconductor. A cold little trickle of anger went through her. She sat down, nodded curtly in answer to Dulcibella's careless introduction, and laid her nervous, slender little hand on the bare table top.

"I hate this sort of thing," she said frankly in her cool, aloof voice, "and I can stay only a little while."

"Oh, don't be so prejudiced, dear!" said Dulcibella softly. She had turned off all the lights except a big, round, shaded lamp on a smaller table, and the wide, comfortable old room was wrapped in a rosy twilight, out of which the dull gold lines of picture frames, the duller shine of an aged grand piano, and the dim branching sweetness of lilacs in a bowl on the white mantle shelf showed charmingly vague.

Dulcibella's look was sibylline, abstracted. She leaned over so little, or was that Vivien's austere, unforgiving fancy?—the tall, blonde man on her right. He had thick, fair hair. He had a Greek look. His eyes were gray and deep. He did not look like the man he made a fool of by a cooling, silly, obvious Dulcibella. He had not spoken. One wondered what his voice would be like. His hands, lying upon the table before him, were rather interesting—no, not too white, not too small, and extraordinarily strong looking—long, fingered and quiet.

"Well," cried Miss Carter with pretty impatience, "are we ready?" "Take hands!" said Dulcibella dreamily.

And one of the hands which Vivien had been so critically observing moved over and engulfed her own. She bit back a little startled cry. She knew, of course, that this was the thing one did, to invite the infinite—

but she was not, after all, accustomed to having her hand held—

and that crushing masculine hand, which she had involuntarily shrank from it, involuntarily held her.

"Sorry—did I hurt you?" inquired a pleasantly impersonal baritone, somewhere above her head. He released her hand and took it back again as casually as if it had been one of Vivien's own library books, shellacked and numbered, Vivien recalled her unaccountable reaction sternly. She endeavored to withdraw her sensation from her startled fingers, as a hypnotist draws away the blood from the hand of a sleeping subject. In the tension of the moment she neglected to be either startled or affrighted by the deferential Robbins, a slim, dark youngster, upon her other hand. About the table looked hands formed a wreath of fingers. Wallace's other grasp imprisoned Dulcibella.

"How utterly ridiculous!" said Vivien disdainfully.

"Darling, please be still," begged Dulcibella, in a tone of milk and honey.

"We really seem to get quicker results this way," explained Wallace kindly.

Dulcibella's five free fingers manipulated Planchette.

This, however, is not a story of Planchette. Nothing of vital importance to an inquiring universe did Dulcibella write that night. Much vague, mellifluous platitudes, a certain amount of meandering Spencerian comment on the probable happiness of another sphere.

Dulcibella, no more than the rest of us, had escaped the flood of spiritualistic literature following the war across the world—and Dulcibella, as has been said before, was an excellent echo.

She wrote, with slim, exquisitely drawn fingers resting delicately upon the active wooden heart of Planchette. Her eyes for the most part were lowered—she had wonderful eyelashes—and occasionally her white breast heaved beneath its flesh-colored georgette blouse.

The line from hand to shoulder was really perfect in Dulcibella. The others leaning over the table in a delightfully induced excitement, asked questions, dramatically significant, to which Dulcibella, by means

of her instrument, returned answers interestingly capable of any interpretation desired. . . . at length she put Planchette from her and leaned back in her chair with a soft sigh of weariness.

"I can't—any more—don't ask me. It tires me terribly."

"Shake your hand hard," Vivien advised heartlessly. "It's probably cramped—no wonder!"

She had not asked any questions. Neither had Wallace. He had worn, to Vivien's mind, an aspect faintly vivisectitious in its unflattering observance of Dulcibella's performance.

Now he released Vivien's fingers and smiled, for the first time—

that prolonged contact had been incredibly disconcerting; she winced away from it with a breath of relief.

"Then you don't believe that your sister's a psychic?" he suggested equably. His eyes were gray as a frozen pool.

"If she is, I never heard of it," said Vivien. Her heart was pounding in her breast, an emotional manifestation entirely unnecessary on her part, for he had moved away from her almost at once and did not look back again.

"I've known it ever since I was a child," said Dulcibella very softly.

Miss Carter uttered a thrilled monosyllable. . . . "but I never tried this until a little while ago—it comes in the strangest way."

"Distinctly interesting," said the Wallace man.

"Afterward—I am almost exhausted," continued Dulcibella.

"I should think you might be," commented Vivien dryly.

The subject fell to the ground somehow. There was a general shoving back of chairs and a sort of general exit to the hallway.

In the matter of psychics did the party differ from any other of Dulcibella's parties—and perhaps not so widely there. Vivien made her escape and went upstairs to bed.

Three days later she discovered that she was horribly, hopelessly in love with Dulcibella's most recent acquaintance.

New Vivien had been afraid, all of her 23 years, of falling in love. Thanks to Dulcibella, she regarded it as a phase of mental and spiritual idleness which one ought, with any luck at all, to be able to avoid. She had done no philandering. She had occupied herself delicately and extensively with other things. She coached high school students in English and history and she did all the welfare work the town would stand for. It was not a large town and Vivien had a good deal of energy.

She had steered clear of emotional reading. . . . the gay jacketed "Oh, don't be so prejudiced, dear!" said Dulcibella softly. She had turned off all the lights except a big, round, shaded lamp on a smaller table, and the wide, comfortable old room was wrapped in a rosy twilight, out of which the dull gold lines of picture frames, the duller shine of an aged grand piano, and the dim branching sweetness of lilacs in a bowl on the white mantle shelf showed charmingly vague.

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The writing was nervously eager: "Lines—lines—lines—"

He put the next question instantly: "For the theater? Were you on the stage?"

Unleashed, the pencil darted off. It moved faster and faster, with Wallace's fingers slipping in a fresh sheet of paper as soon as the old one gave out.

"Yes—I was on the stage—only a little part. For a long time I had nothing. I wore a black dress and an old hat, in a crowd. Afterwards I was the old man's daughter. I had ten lines to say. I died in the first act. Then I used to take the part off my face and go home and read in the little room. I studied hard. I read plays. I had enough to eat, but not too much. I had enough to wear, but not pretty things. I was young, but I had nowhere to go—"

"After a while you had a bigger part," asked Wallace. He leaned so near Vivien that his shoulder brushed hers. His eyes were gray as knives on her small, tense face.

Without looking at him she wrote: "After a while I fell one day crossing a slippery street on my way to the theater and a taxicab ran over me and I died on the way to the hospital."

"Oh, good Lord!" said Blake. He ended on an odd sound of horror.

"Vivien," said Dulcibella languidly, "aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Hold your hand and arm relaxed—don't offer any resistance," said Wallace curtly.

She did as he told her, looking up into his face—it was inhumanly quick—his eyes so deep and cold—his mouth unsmiling. Her hand moved again. . . . in circles. . . . faster and faster. . . . it swerved. . . . scrawled madly back and forth. . . . how still the room was! Faces were white in a still room—or did she . . . The scrawl broke off into a series of dots. . . . "Little ones . . . big ones . . . jagged ones . . . coming faster every second . . . then, violently and outrageously, with no warning whatsoever, her hand rose in the air—rose and fell—three times crashingly—crucelly, even—upon the table.

The pencil, broken off short, flew out of her fingers. She caught her hand to her lips with an exclamation of pain.

"Judas Priest!" said Blake very solemnly. He was a dark-headed young man, with a darkly freckled skin, at the moment a little less dark than usual.

"For pity's sake, Vivien!" cried Dulcibella. "What are you trying to do?"

"I wasn't trying to do anything at all," said Vivien simply. She added, looking into Wallace's eyes, "I kept my arm relaxed—as you told me."

She was breathing a little quickly.

"I've heard of automatic writing—do you want to try again?" asked Wallace.

The spark was lit at last in the cool, gray depths of his eyes. He looked eagerly at Vivien, but Vivien knew it for what it was, the impersonal flame of science. Nevertheless she took the pencil he gave her, fresh pointed, and bent once more above the paper, this time with an untouched sheet.

"Absolutely unresistant," he warned her.

The others sat breathlessly still. The scent of lilacs, wet lilacs, came in at the window. Down the street, some one was singing in a sweet, ready soprano to the tinkle of an old piano.

Vivien's hand began to move. It moved nervously but without violence. "I don't believe it will repeat that first performance," said Wallace under his breath.

It didn't.

All at once, after the merest of preliminary flourishes, it wrote in a delicately angular way, but largely, covering half the paper:

"Mary is here."

Wallace read it aloud. He made no comment for a moment. Vivien sat still and looked at him.

"Can you beat that?" demanded Blake. Miss Carter laughed uncertainly.

"Ask whom Mary wants to speak to?" said Dulcibella in deep, urgent tones.

If one were not shy of oneself one might at least be guide.

Vivien touched pencil to paper. The writing came daintily clear. It was Wallace's name.

There was a general outburst of laughter, in the midst of which Vivien asked him quietly, "Did you ever know a girl named Mary?"

"Who hasn't?" he answered, equally low. "Do on—this is rather interesting. Automatic writing, I think they call it. Ever do it before?"

"No," said Vivien.

She wrote again, looking straight before her and covering successive sheets of paper with the large, faint, shadowy, inconspicuously delicate: "Don't you remember the dogwood that spring?" Wallace read the lines aloud, over her shoulder.

"Do you, old dear?" asked Blake. "Suppose, for the sake of continuity, we say I do," returned Wallace coolly. Quiet, everybody! I'd like to see how this works out."

So they all sat quiet while the pencil in Vivien's hand went on writing. Dulcibella's soft pink mouth wore an incredulous smile—not, perhaps, without reason. If Dulcibella had failed to do the Delphic thing, what earthly reason for supposing funny little Vivien would achieve it?

Vivien sat with her eyes on the wall before her—a flush had begun to burn in her cheeks. She wrote:—the dogwood in the hollow, behind the village. I used to meet you there after school. The Judas trees like a mist of mauve. And the apple blossoms in your father's orchard. And the lilacs at the gate. The spring you went away. Lilacs behind glass in a window with roses, on a daisy city street. I looked at them while I studied. They were so sweet I cried. I threw them out because I hadn't time to cry."

The pencil trailed off into a long, wavering y—Wallace put his fingers on Vivien's wrist. "Where," he asked in a low, distinct voice, "was the little room?" The rest of them sat in absolute silence. Only Blake suppressed a gentle whistle of amazement.

Vivien's pencil wrote: "On a high hill, in a big town, with many people but no friends."

Wallace urged again: "What were you studying?"

All the difference in the world to Vivien, but she could not, in common decency, tell him so. She said desperately:

"Very well—tomorrow night then!" upon which remarkable endeavour, or rather upon the appointing of it, entered Dulcibella, gently amused, as who would not have been, to find another Richard in the field.

"Coming back, dear?" said Dulcibella to Vivien, smiling slightly.

"Not tonight," said Vivien, and went on up the stairs.

It was, perhaps, the tone of Dulcibella's question as much as anything else that hardened Vivien in her decision to invite Mary's presence again. She was startled and considerably disturbed by what had happened in the living room. That she could have stopped the writing was probable. As Wallace had suggested, she had held herself unresisting and had let herself go with the remarkable impulse that moved her. Certainly she had not known what she was going to write until the word formed itself on the paper before her. She, as well as young Blake, had drawn back in sensitive horror from that simple phrase . . . and I died on the way to the hospital."

There was about it something hideously final—and yet, if Mary could speak through the rain-washed, lilac-scented gloom of that night in April, not final at all!

Erail, whispering shadows clung about Vivien's dreams that night. Just before morning she dreamed that she was walking in a wood with Wallace—a spring wood, with Judas trees in bloom and dogwood silvering all the shadows. There were wild violets underfoot. . . . the air was heaven to breathe. . . . there was a bird that cried, out of a treetop somewhere, over and over, one tender, opportunistic note. . . . and Wallace called her and who Mary was—big and she so small—and carried her through the wood and said to her, smiling: "I've got something to tell you, Mary?"

Vivien woke at that and tried to go back to sleep and dream it over when she found herself awake. It was not just at first that she realized what he had called her and who Mary was—or was not. The realization, when it came, brought her an odd feeling of fright, deepening into recklessness. If Mary drew Wallace and if he did not—had not—come without her. . . . then Vivien was ready even for Mary.

She avoided discussion with Dulcibella of Wallace's coming. She put on an old frock, and, as an unbecoming note, did her hair with casual neatness, and kept him waiting a good ten minutes after he entered the living room.

At the end of that time she went downstairs with the tips of her fingers like ice and found him exchanging controlled personalities with Dulcibella. . . . the personalities were Dulcibella's, the control was Wallace's own. Later Dulcibella, accompanied by young Blake, whose star was visibly ascending, and looking radiantly lovely in something all silver lace and coral velvet, went forth to conquer.

Vivien sat on one side of the living room table and Wallace sat on the other. She remembered her dream and flushed faintly when he spoke to her. He wore, a little determinedly—she might or might not have had dreams of his own—the aspect of an explorer in new countries. He set forth the paper, sharpened several pencils, cleared a general space of table top, said to her without emotion: "I don't believe it." "I don't believe it," she said.

"I'll give the Planchette away tomorrow," thought Dulcibella. "This sort of thing is getting to be a bore."

With a soft word or so she attached young Blake. She had perhaps been overlooking him, rather.

Eventually she turned about for Wallace, having, to her own satisfaction, restored the balance of power, but Wallace was not in the room.

"He went out in the hall after his day in Dulcibella's favor, and had come forth not without a certain understanding of her methods."

"In the chilly hair-raising of the narrow hall Wallace was standing, one foot on the first step, looking up at Vivien. He had stopped her in mid-flight, four steps above him, and she had not been easily stopped.

"Dulcibella thinks I did it," she told him. "I don't want to talk about it. It wasn't pleasant—the whole thing. Please go back to the others, Miss Wallace. They will be wondering."

"Let them wonder," said Wallace imperturbably. "I am deeply interested in what happened in there this evening. One doesn't often get an absolutely honest and intelligent subject for experiment like yourself."

"I am not a subject for experiment, if you please," said Vivien coldly. "Say so to the others, please."

"I'll amend quickly. 'Would you consider that, Miss Doane?'"

He smiled. As Dulcibella had said, it went straight through one. Vivien winced under it: as if he had hurt her. She began defensively:

"I didn't understand tonight—I don't at all believe in that sort of thing. I'm not an hysterical person."

"Which makes it all the more valuable data," Wallace explained. "You just relaxed as I told you, eh? There seemed to be some outside force at work—did you know what you were going to write before you wrote it?"

Vivien gave him big honest eyes to read.

"I knew as I wrote each word what it was—before. The whole thing isn't a bit clear to me. I don't like it. I shall never do it again."

"I'm sorry to hear you say that," said Wallace quietly, "because I was going to ask if I might come over tomorrow night and try it out a second time."

"Tomorrow night is the Golf club dance," said Vivien stiffly. "Dulcibella will be going to that—"

"Exactly why I thought we might experiment coolly—without the dramatic element of a crowd."

"You mean just me?"

"And myself," said Wallace. He smiled again, most unexpectedly. Vivien's heart stumbled in her slim little body. She choked back a feeling of shame that he should be able to move her so, without himself caring. She tried to refuse him and failed. At some stir beyond the curtained doorway of the living room he insisted hurriedly:

"You'll do it, won't you? I'm really very much in earnest about it—I can explain when we're getting at it, quietly, a number of things which will make it seem not so uncanny—"

The stir beyond the curtains grew more definite. Vivien said suddenly, with a queer intonation:

"Did you really know a girl named Mary?"

She held her breath before his answer, which, however, came maddeningly deliberate and noncommittal: "That, as you'll see, when I go over with you tomorrow night, makes very little difference."

The writing broke and began again. . . . Once—I passed a house near a park. It was a little house, white with a green roof and a rose vine over the doorway. There were white seats on each side of the door. Windows were open. I could see lamps with rosy shades, white curtains, a big fireplace, a deep seat with cushions, a big bowl of roses, a picture of you over the fireplace, a dog sleeping near the hearth—

a small dog with pointed ears. You were reading in a big chair beneath a lamp. I looked at it as you through very little difference."

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