

Alexandre Mas

an excerpt from

The Color of Darkness

MANY years ago, when I was little more than a girl, my eyes failed me. My family spent summers in the country then, in New Hampshire, with Father joining us when he could spare time from his work as an architect in New York. I always found that the world glowed more brightly in his company, so it was strange during his longest stay that summer to find everything steadily dimming, as if thin films were being laid across my eyes that no amount of squinting or cool splashes of water could clear.

A few days before Father returned to New York, I told him about my growing fear that there was a problem with my eyes. Three weeks later I had seen all of the doctors, and before the start of the next summer my left eye and then my right had blinked out completely. That was in May of 1913. I had been a young girl with promise, bright and determined, from a family of means. Suddenly the stories Father told me were of music and how sweet it would sound, but not of the dances and the strings of suitors—and of how my tongue would take new pleasure from sweet breads, but not of the home I would fill with my baking. The shift was immediate and devastating, and at fifteen I felt as if my life were ending.

One of the great surprises in going blind is discovering which of the people in your life turn away from you and which do not. My anger and self-loathing were so deep that year that I was certain the world would find me equally loathsome. I considered myself Father's favorite, with a child's notion that he was grooming me to be a great painter one day. When the light finally left me completely, and the doctors confirmed that it was gone for good, I was so sure Father would cast me off that I hid from him for three days, running from the sound of his voice and crashing my way into a closet's back corner or

the dusty reaches under a bed. I knew him so fully, I thought then, that I was sure he would not stand to see his dream for me ruined by the fluke of disease. His only choice, I was certain, would be to banish me from his world.