

Corona and Coronet: Being a narrative of the Amherst Eclipse Expedition to Japan, in Mr. James's schooner-yacht Coronet, to observe the Sun's total obscuration 9th August, 1896

**Mabel Loomis Todd
Chapter 29, "The Eclipse"**

Then an instantaneous darkness leaped upon the world. Unearthly night enveloped all.

With an indescribable out-flashing at the same instant the corona burst forth in mysterious radiance. But dimly seen through thin cloud, it was nevertheless beautiful beyond description, a celestial flame from some unimaginable heaven. Simultaneously the whole northwestern sky, nearly to the zenith, was flooded with lurid and startlingly brilliant orange, across which drifted clouds slightly darker, like flecks of liquid flame, or huge ejecta from some vast volcanic Hades. The west and southwest gleamed in shining lemon yellow.

Least like a sunset, it was too somber and terrible. The pale, broken circle of coronal light still glowed on with thrilling peacefulness, while nature held her breath for another stage in this majestic spectacle.

Well might it have been a prelude to the shriveling and disappearance of the whole world — weird to horror, and beautiful to heartbreak, heaven and hell in the same sky.

Absolute silence reigned. No human being spoke. No bird twittered. Even sighing of the surf breathed into utter repose, and not a ripple stirred the leaden sea.

One human being seemed so small, so helpless, so slight a part of all this strangeness and mystery! It was as if the hand of Deity had been visibly laid upon space and worlds, to allow one momentary glimpse of the awfulness of creation.

Hours might have passed — time was annihilated; and yet when the tiniest globule of sunlight, a drop, a needle-shaft, a pinhole, reappeared, even before it had become the slenderest possible crescent, the fair corona and all color in sky and cloud withdrew, and a natural aspect of stormy twilight returned. Then the two minutes and a half in memory seemed but a few seconds — a breath, the briefest tale ever told.

