HANDICAPPED

MARION HARLAND

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BY

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PREFACE.

"THE author who would commend a story to the public by insisting upon the fact that it is a sketch from Nature and substantially true in all its parts, commits a grave blunder. He may be a conscientious portrait-painter, but in the above declaration he writes himself down inartistic and devoid of taste."

This is the recent deliverance of a respected reviewer. I am not so rash as to quote the decree in order that I may appeal from it. I hope, rather, to keep the simple tales collected in this volume upon a safe level below his criticism by cataloguing them, "CARTOONS FROM LIFE."

I claim for them little beyond fidelity to Nature and that they were penned in deep sympathy with the unconscious, and too often (by mankind) unconsidered heroism that makes lowly lives sublime in the sight of GOD and His angels.

I esteem it an honor, not to be lightly held, that I have been permitted to recognize upon so many of earth's dusty highways the trail of an angel's robe; to discern under homeliest disguises, here, a warrior, and there, a saint.

MARION HARLAND.

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TWO.

PART I.

THE Rev. George Sherman stood by the open doors of his book-case, turning over the leaves of a volume he had not unclosed since his sophomore year. When he found the passage he sought, he read it aloud, although he was alone:—

"Finding, at last, however, that although I had been all this time a very porcupine or hedgehog, bristling all over with determination, I had effected nothing, it began to occur to me that perhaps Dora's mind was already 'formed.'"

"David Copperfield!" soliloquized the reader, restoring the book to its place upon the shelf, "I will profit by your experience, and save time, patience, and labor thereby. You and I are not the only men who have been *désillusionné* by a few months of married life. Ah, well! One cannot have all he wants in this world. I may as well recognize this truth now as after years of ineffectual striving and failures. The more moderate my desires, the greater the likelihood of my compassing them."

He looked like one who would not easily relinquish his hold upon a coveted good; one whom danger and

difficulty would not readily daunt, as he stood at the window of the cottage parsonage, whistling the air of the celebrated "prayer" in "Masaniello," softly and with unconscious expression, his thoughts busy with subjects totally diverse to the great composer and his music. His hands were clasped behind him, showing to advantage his breadth of shoulder and depth of chest. His frame was muscular, his head massive, his features too marked to be regularly handsome. The heavily-moulded chin and full lips would have been a decided blemish to his physiognomy, had not the impression of animal strength and appetite these conveyed been neutralized by the fine, clear chiselling of the nostrils and forehead, the steady light of the eyes. Already people began to prophesy that he would "make his mark upon the age," obscure as was his present station—a "settlement" in a country neighborhood, with no railroad within fifteen miles, over a church that was barely self-supporting, and which did not include in its communion a single person of liberal education or ample means. He tilled this field, unpromising though he must have felt it to be, diligently and with surprising cheerfulness. The unlettered farmer, lifting his head from the furrow over which he stooped with just such dull, patient eyes as his oxen bent on the same, when startled by the ringing shout of greeting from the roadside or adjoining meadow, was glad to see his visitor for his own sake, even more than because he was "the domine." Mr. Sherman did not own a horse, so paid all his pastoral calls on foot; and when his object was the laborer aforesaid, he would vault the intervening fence or hedge, and stride over

the uneven ground, swinging his oaken stick and have his friendly say out as he walked beside his parishioner.

"I won't stay unless you go on with your work," he would protest with good-natured obstinacy. "My dear fellow, don't I know how much your time is worth too well to have you give me so much as ten minutes of it?"

Then he would tramp on, following the ploughman and his yoked co-workers, discoursing in such genial, hearty fashion that the farmer forgot the heat of the sun and the hard-baked ground. Nothing escaped the notice of the student of mankind and natural laws. He prodded in the fallow ground of Hodge's intellect with his incisive questions and suggestions, as he uprooted wild carrots and May-weed, and brought to the surface botanical and mineralogical "studies" with the ferrule of his staff. He watched the throes with which the earth yielded virgin mould, unspent gases and salts to the subsoil plough; the seemingly contradictory yet effectual operation of the sharp harrow upon the naked seed; the springing, budding, and fruiting of the grain; the harvesting, the threshing, the grinding—the ever-renewed, never-ending labors of husbandry with interest the most suspicious critic could not but see was genuine. His parishioners were flattered by his "sociable ways" and lively appreciation of their cares and aims—the more for the scholarly reputation he had achieved in college and seminary, and of which they still heard occasionally through other clergymen and the few persons of culture and refinement who visited the retired township.

"He is a plaguy smart man," Farmer Hodge would inform such, in the nasal drawl peculiar to the district, "but not a mite proud. He's sot down in that very cheer you're in now, by the hour on a winter night, or under the tree with us when we were taking a noon spell in haying or harvesting, and talked to me about old times as my father and grandfather has told me of —fur back as the Reverlootionerry War. Ther' ain't a story about a mountain or a tree in these parts he ha'n't learned by heart. As fur farmin', you can't tire him out telling about manures, and seeds, and crops, and the good and bad times of the moon. And as for bugs, and worms, and other animiles—lor' bless you! you can't stump him there. He's a wonderful fellow, is Domine Sherman. And for all he is so learned, his sermons are so plain a child could understand 'em—what I call sort of *large print* as don't try one's eyes!"

George Sherman was studying his profession, reaping while he sowed beside all waters. Books and little else had been his helps for ten years. He was learning now from those most marvellous of volumes —too often hopelessly hieroglyphical to those of his calling—the human heart and the open page of Nature; storing up fact, illustration, and analogy that should be more to him than gold or precious stones in days to come.

While in college, he had fallen in love with the pretty face and engaging demeanor of Annie Deane, sister-in-law to one of the professors, and, a year after his settlement in Wilkeston, had married her. She had been mistress of the parsonage seven months at

the date of this chapter, and even in the estimation of the farmers' wives who had looked dubious at sight of her curling hair and fashionable *trousseau*, bade fair to become an excellent housekeeper. She had need to be a wise manager for her husband's salary was small and his ideas large. A dollar to him was a coin or a bit of paper that should without useless delay be exchanged for happiness in some shape—either increase his own comfort or that of some one who needed assistance more than he did. While he had money he was on the look-out for opportunities to spend it. When it had gone he felt a sensible relief—a want of responsibility that left him free to study, to plan, and to dream. He preached his best sermons when his pockets were empty he used to say laughingly—"perhaps because he carried less weight than when his purse was plethoric." Annie was an orphan and so nearly portionless that her brothers and sisters eked out the furnishment of her house by gifts of plate, table and bed-linen. Her brother-in-law's wedding present to her was a check for a hundred dollars, which, like a provident woman, she deposited at once in the savings' bank. It was drawn out at her first visit to her old home, three months after her marriage, but stealthily, without the knowledge of the donor, her sister, or even George.

"My wedding-fees all go for bread-and-butter," a clergyman's wife once complained to me confidentially. "I would not mind spending them for articles of use to my family which would add much to our comfort, while they are not exactly indispensable. But it is trying to hear them spoken of as my 'perquisites,'

when I know they will meet the next butcher's or grocer's bill that comes in when the exchequer is nearly exhausted. The worst of it is, I have not even my husband's sympathy in the sacrifice. He pleases himself by imagining, I believe—poor, dear fellow! that I invest all these windfalls in candy, or laces, or some other commodity in which women take delight, and I dare not let him guess what really becomes of them. He so enjoys giving them to me that I indulge the harmless fiction of my private purse."

It *hurt* Annie Sherman, who was yet no miser, to pay out the whole of her precious hoard for coal, potatoes and other homely necessaries of existence, but she had no option. These things must be had and George was penniless. He mentioned this circumstance incidentally to her the evening they reached her sister's.

"Dear George!" she cried, aghast. "Why, then, did you insist upon my coming here? How are we to get back?"

He laughed. "'Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof,' my love! I have faith to believe that the money will come when the pinching need arrives. I have always been helped along in some way without borrowing or otherwise sacrificing my independence. We can hire a barrel-organ and play ourselves across the country, if nothing else turns up. You can ride on the top. People would give you pennies and nuts sooner than to a monkey."

He did not inquire how the means were procured for their return journey, nor whence came the sums that met their household expenses until that quarter's

salary was due. The probability, which amounted to a certainty in his wife's mind, was that he had forgotten the whole matter of his impecuniosity. He was "absent-minded" with respect to the daily needs and practicalities of home-life, she had discovered.

"My wife is the princess of financiers," he declared one day to a brother clergyman in her presence. "I don't carry a pocket-book at all now-a-days. She is the fairy, the tap of whose wand brings dinner and breakfast-tables ready-spread through the floor. I obey literally the injunction to take no thought what I shall eat, drink, or wear."

She was a generous little soul, and loved him too dearly to parade the self-denials she practised for his benefit; but the "bread-and-butter" purchased by her wedding-gift had an ill flavor for her, and every dollar that thus passed from her hands preached its warning sermon to heart and conscience. She wished ministers were better paid and that they understood the value of money as well as they did the doctrines of election and free agency; had as clear views of prices current and the quantity of groceries, etc., requisite to feed their families as they had of Sheol and Hades and the like mysteries. But since this might not be for the wishing, nor for any arguments or persuasions she could offer, she must study carefulness in the minutest detail of her small housekeeping. There were no more savings' bank deposits to call upon in future straits. She screwed her courage up on the next quarter-day to suggest a plan she had revolved in her mind constantly for a month past.

"I wish you would give me a stated allowance for

family expenses, George," she said, entering the study as soon as the treasurer who, she knew, had come to pay "the domine's" salary, had departed. "It is not easy to make our income meet even our 'must haves,' let me be as prudent as I will. But I can manage better if I go entirely upon the cash principle. When the money is not there I *must* curtail my expenditures."

She said it with a nervous little laugh, and was not encouraged to urge her plea when George, who was walking up and down the floor with his hands behind him, stopped and stared silently at her. He was never cross with her, but his look showed plainly that the interruption of his train of thought was unwelcome. She faltered out the explanation his eye demanded.

"An allowance, dear! If you wouldn't mind setting aside a certain proportion of your salary for provisions and would let me pay it out as I have need"—

"Oh!" he uttered, and, still abstractedly, handed her a roll of bank-bills.

She discovered when she counted them over in her own room that he had given her the entire quarter's salary.

"Just like him! He is as liberal as he is absent-minded!" murmured the wife, tears moistening her blue eyes. "After all, how should he or any other student know anything about housewifery? His thoughts are engrossed by higher themes. Everything relating to these belittling cares is irksome to him. They should be my province. Shall I shirk my share of the burden when he has his career and his reputation to make—and"—reverently—"the Mas-

ter's work to do? Not while I have strength to stand between him and all that could divert his mind from his noble mission!"

To keep her resolution she labored faithfully; contrived and pondered and trimmed lopping off this and that "may want," and examining narrowly into the credentials of "must haves," until there were tight plaits between her eyebrows which did not always relax entirely when others were by to note and conjecture concerning them. To spare him anxiety she wrought ceaselessly with hands and wits from morning until midnight. "Help" was scarce in that region, and when procurable, usually very indifferent, and Mrs. Sherman's maid-of-all-work "bettered herself" about four months after she began housekeeping, by going to an easier place at higher wages. Her late mistress installed no one in her place.

"There are only two of us," she represented to her neighbors who "did their own work." "George lets me have my own way in the house, and since I prefer an active life and am fond of cooking, I shall hire somebody to do our washing and ironing. The rest I can manage without trouble."

"The rest" meant milking, churning, scrubbing, and general cleaning, in addition to the kitchen work. At first the washerwoman came two days in the week at fifty cents a day; then, feeling the call for four dollars a month a serious drain upon her slender means, Annie employed her only on Mondays and did the ironing herself, rising as early as four or five o'clock on Tuesday morning that she might get what the matrons thereabouts called "the heft of the work"

out of the way before George came down to prayers. Fond as she was of her husband she was almost glad on washing, ironing, or baking days when he took dinner or supper away from home. She prepared no regular meal on these occasions; only appeased her faint stomach with a sandwich—as often as not omitting the meat that George's supper or breakfast might be the more savory—and a glass of milk. The Chinese herb was too dear for her to become a tea-tippler after the fashion of so many overworked women. This slight refreshment she generally ate standing, then pushed on with her load. It went hard with her, this stress of unaccustomed toil. A busy bee she had been always, but the employments of her girlhood were lighter and more elegant. There was no one to interpose remonstrance or aid. She did no more than other wives and mothers about her were compelled to perform, said lookers-on of her own sex, forgetting the vast difference between their early training and hers. These were kind-hearted in their way, ready with useful advice when she was at a loss, and generous according to the pattern of giving known to the community. Many a pumpkin-pie and rice-pudding, a baking of rusk or biscuit—in "killing-time," sausage, spare-rib and chine—many a pat of butter, roll of pot-cheese and saucer of honey came to the parsonage kitchen from those of "the people" who honored and loved their domine and had a sincere liking for his nice wife. Homely compliments were often brought to her from this and that notable housekeeper—praise that gratified her because it showed that she was a helpmeet, not a hindrance, to him who

made her world. Nobody said to her, "You are overtaxing your strength, enfeebling your nervous forces—perhaps shortening your life. Moreover—and to this you should give diligent heed—you are cultivating the affections at the expense of the mind; guarding your idol from present inconvenience, it is true, but surely, if gradually, dividing his sphere from yours—making of your lives two, not one."

She had never been brilliant or profound. She was sprightly and intelligent, with a retentive memory and a commendable stock of facts and precepts gathered from school books and the "course of reading" which every theological student or graduate feels himself called upon to prescribe for his admiring betrothed. To please George and to render herself more fit to be the companion of one so rarely gifted, she had "kept up" her French and dabbled in Latin under the tuition of her brother-in-law. She had also penned weekly essays upon given subjects, or abstracts of her latest readings, which were dutifully forwarded to her lover. He had thought them very charming, read in the light of those days—chiefly, it must be owned, because they were written at his request. Her chirography was graceful—her sentences grammatical. As to originality or strength he never expected or looked for signs of these essentials to a really good essay. He wanted a wife, not a pedant. He was by no means insensible as we have seen to the reform she had wrought in his outward estate. A man with his mouth and chin must of necessity like to be well-fed and well-kept. He had a home—orderly, comfortable, tasteful. His daily fare was cooked to a charm and

always daintily served; his buttons and strings sewed on tightly; his clothes laid ready to his hand, instead of being huddled in wild confusion in all sorts of unlikely places; and his study hours were religiously respected. All this he perceived and was grateful to her to whom he owed these advantages. He was affectionate in disposition, and if his married life was not the scene of unmingled rapture he had pictured it to himself in his boyish visions when he quoted Moore by the page and Byron by the canto, he was honestly attached to his blue-eyed "angel in the house"—this was his favorite title for her—enjoyed the petting and adoration he received from her and was benign and loving in return.

Nor was he wholly neglectful of her intellectual culture while devoting so much time and thought to his own. Almost immediately after their establishment in their cottage, he had begun a system of fireside readings which were maintained with tolerable regularity. Annie made a pleasant picture to his artistic eye, as she sat near him, her fair head bent over her needle, while he read aloud in some instructive book selected by himself—always instructive, even when it was Racine or Virgil. He would polish up her French and Latin at stated intervals in this way, and introduced in their turn to her notice and understanding treatises upon natural and mental philosophy, rhetoric and history. He never catechized her, for he was too true a gentleman to treat her as he would a thoughtless, idle child, and he believed implicitly in her attentive mien and the apparent pleasure with which she listened. She always thanked him warmly at the

close of the sitting for "the treat he had given her."

"You are so good, darling," she would subjoin, "to bestow so much time and pains upon me! I cannot tell you how I enjoy these dear home evenings. I look forward to each all day long."

She did not add that it so rested and charmed her to be with him in the seclusion of their own dwelling that she would not have been discontented had he slept away the hours in his easy-chair, so long as he was in her sight; that his voice was such perfect music in her ear she would have listened enchanted had he discoursed in Greek or Hebrew. How was he to suspect that his French and Latin authors were quite as obscure to her understanding as Homer or Isaiah in the originals would have been? nay, more, that his scientific and art-treatises were but one degree more intelligible? She had fallen into the habit of following out her own reflections and fancies, while he imagined that he was improving her mind by the strong meat he digested with ease and delight. While his accents caressed her hearing and calmed her whole being, she had hopeful meditations upon to-morrow's dinner and next week's wash and Friday's mending; how she could alter the flounces upon her last summer's grenadine and make it long enough for this year's fashion, and there would be *one* thin dress for church and company; how she could make new bosoms and wristbands for the most worn of George's shirts out of a piece of fine linen left over from her wedding clothes; how, if he would only take tea out two evenings this week she could make the butter

"last" until Saturday's churning; how glad she would be when the cow should "come in" in June and they have an abundance of milk. With plenty of milk and eggs one could get up so many delicious and inexpensive dishes! Paltry, ignoble dreams and plans they were, all of them, but her life was made up of such trifles. They were matters of moment—almost of life and death to her. They meant bodily comfort and strength to her husband and herself, and were interfused with such wifely piety, such purity and singleness of desire for his welfare, his happiness, that the recording angel could not write them down as mean or trivial.

Moreover, she was too weary to bend her mind to anything else. Her back ached, her shoulders were stiff, and her fingers were growing rough and awkward at the fine sewing in which she used to be an adept. She never complained of these discomforts. That was not the way to help George and these three words were her talisman in seasons of perplexity and toil. He had to work hard, she was continually reminding herself when her feet grew heavy and her head unsteady, and could she be recreant with such an example before her? She liked to have him read to her in the evenings, for she was too tired to talk much, and since the family mending and making over must be done, she could hardly have kept awake but for his presence and the full, heartening tones that cheered her as the Arab's chant enlivens his drooping beast of burden.

It was on a warm Tuesday afternoon in early June that George, who had left home soon after dinner, ex-

pecting to sup at Farmer Lawson's, five miles away, walked into the parsonage yard, accompanied by a stranger. The Venetian blinds that did duty as a front door in summer were closed, and they paused upon the porch to breathe the delicious air and look down the valley. There was a smell of clover and new-mown hay in the breeze that was rising as the sun sank toward the mountainous horizon; honeysuckle and sweetbriar wreathed the rustic pillars of the piazza and hid the rude trellis that supported their stems.

"A wren's nest of a place, you see—but it is *home!*" said George's rich voice, with the unmistakable cadence of glad gratitude vibrating in every word.

Then he raised the door-latch and invited his friend into the hall. An ironing-table stood midway between the front and rear entrances, and a clothes-basket heaped with "done up" articles, barred the way to the parlor. An undergarment, half-ironed, was spread upon the table and the smoothing-iron stood on its trivet close by.

"What under the sun does all this mean?" ejaculated George, in laughing wonderment. He pulled the basket aside, shooting a pile of shirts that lay on the top pell-mell upon the oil-cloth and kicked one out of his path. "Walk in, Armstrong! I am afraid my wife is not in. She did not expect me home to tea. But I'll hunt her up. Excuse me for a moment!"

In the kitchen he found Annie, actually pallid with distress.

"Oh, dearest!" she began, "I am *so* sorry! It is

awfully hot in here, and I have had a raging headache all day and the hall was cooler"—

"Were *you* ironing?" seeing no one else present. "I thought you hired a woman to do that sort of work."

"I did, but she did not understand getting up starched clothes, and I really like it. I do, indeed."

George shrugged his shoulders.

"*Chacun à son goût.* Mine wouldn't be for clear-starching in summer. It is as hot in here as Tophet." He could hardly breathe, coming in, as he did, from the scented freshness of the outer world and made quick work of his errand. "I've brought home my old friend and classmate, Armstrong. You remember him? I met him in the stage, just this side of Lawson's. He will spend to-night with us. He has been travelling all day, and I suppose would like a substantial supper. Or," with a dawning sense of the unpromising situation, "perhaps I had better take him to Joynes'?" a small tavern half a mile distant.

"George! as if I would let you think of such a thing!" gasped Annie, who had sunk into the nearest chair at the announcement of a visitor for the night. "I can't promise you a very nice supper, but I will do my best. Please shut the parlor-door that I may get my ironing-board and clothes-basket out of the way. Then I'll run up-stairs and put the spare bedroom in order. It is a pity I beat up the bed yesterday and left it unmade to air. As soon as it is ready and I have carried up fresh water, I will tap at the door of the parlor to let you know."

It did not occur to the Rev. George, as he returned

to his classmate, and shut the door after him, according to directions, that it would be a manly, no less than a benevolent deed for him to relieve his wife of some of the labors thus suddenly thrown upon her; that his strong arms could hardly be more mercifully employed than in tossing over the mattresses in the spare chamber; in drawing water for the ewer there, and then to replenish the tea-kettle; in lifting the ironing-table back to its place in the kitchen and carrying the loaded basket up-stairs; and that his self-respect would suffer no damage if he further burdened her soul with thankfulness by offering to set the tea-equipage in order in the dining-room, while Mr. Armstrong was busy with his toilet. If the suggestion had been made by another, he would have done all this and more with hearty good-will; for he really pitied the wearied and warm worker in the stifling kitchen as he washed off the dust of his walk in sparkling cold water over the washstand in his breezy chamber above stairs; brushed his boots, coat, and hair; indulged himself in a spotless shirt, wondering, as he put it on, at Annie's queer taste about clear-starching, and observing how beautifully pure and glossy were bosom and cuffs. Then he ran down-stairs, humming a college-song, to which Armstrong added a second as he came out upon the porch a few minutes later. They walked and talked there together, taking in deep, refreshing draughts of the balmy air, and watching the brightening dyes of the sunset clouds, the purple bloom of the mountains beneath, until the timid tinkle of the bell called them to the evening meal.

Annie had snatched time to slip on another dress—a blue lawn, which was becoming to her a year ago—and to smooth her hair. But her complexion was sadly muddied by the red-hot stove, and could not be cleared in her present state of nervous agitation. She looked hot and hurried and the plaits between her brows showed very plainly even when she tried to smile her greetings to the guest. George confessed reluctantly to himself that he had never seen her when she was less pretty; and Mr. Armstrong, who remembered Annie Deane fresh and fair as the sweet-briar roses he had just left, lamented secretly that blondes "went off" so soon after they were married or had any experience of the realities of life. So conscious was the hostess of the unsuitableness of the impromptu repast to the needs of a hungry man, that she commenced an eager apology—poor child!—by the time George finished saying grace.

"I can offer you nothing more substantial as a relish than cottage cheese, Mr. Armstrong," she said to the elegant young lawyer. "If I had had notice of your coming, I would have had broiled chicken, or ham, or something nourishing. The biscuits are a trifle too brown, I am sorry to see, George, but the ovens get so hot on ironing-day. I wish I could give you a cup of nice coffee, Mr. Armstrong. George and I never drink it, so we rarely keep any in the house."

Here George frowned at her and checked her revelations; put her down at the same time for the rest of the evening, so abashed was she at the remotest intimation of his disapproval.

It was ten o'clock before she presented herself in

the parlor where the friends sat at the moonlighted window. Their gay voices and occasional bursts of laughter had made the kitchen, where she stood washing up the tea-things and setting the sponge for the morrow's baking, seem hotter and closer than she had ever felt it before. Both arose at her entrance and Mr. Armstrong, setting forward the easiest chair in the room for her, seated himself by her and tried to draw her into conversation.

There is such a thing as being out of society trim. Want of practice in small talk, ignorance of the popular themes at present current in society, general rustiness in repartee and embarrassment at being addressed in what sounds like a forgotten tongue—all these had grown upon Annie with rapidity and force during her half-year's sojourn in Wilkeston, and the study and practice of the numberless minute economies which were a part of her system of helping George. She despised herself for the dismay with which she recollected that there was no hope now of the butter "lasting," and that the breakfast omelette would take seven eggs; that the forty cents she had sent by a neighbor's child to "the store" for a pound of coffee was a formidable deduction from her little supply of ready money. But her mind would stray back to these reflections and her heart ache over her impoverishment as at real bereavement. She so wanted to keep even with the world! To contract a debt was to fall hopelessly behind-hand, for they had never a penny to spare for settling back accounts. To slip in this narrow, steep path was to tumble headlong. Then she was *tired*, with that horrible feeling of "goneness"

that has its headquarters just below the breast-bone with women, concerning which it is useless to talk with men—the favored ones to whom hysteria is *terra incognita.*

Mr. Armstrong spoke of the loveliness of her valley-home, grew enthusiastic in description of the various scenes through which he had passed in his tour and she assented to everything with a forced smile and a hackneyed phrase. "Yes, very much so!" "Do you think so?" "Ah!" and "Indeed!" succeeded each other slowly and mechanically, growing flatter with every repetition and George fidgeted in actual torment. Mr. Armstrong supposed she shared in her husband's fondness for walking and climbing, that his favorite views were likewise hers.

"I hardly ever go out, except on Sundays," was the answer. "I am a great home-body. George's business obliges him to be abroad a great deal. He must visit his congregation. My work is in the house."

"He tells me you are a model housewife. You must not scold him for telling tales out of school. We were boys together, you know, and whatever relates to him interests me."

"Yes!" said Annie, seeing he expected some reply, and trying to arouse herself to be pleased at his praises of herself and friendship for her husband.

She fancied, but she might have been mistaken, that she heard George, who sat back in the shadow, gnash his teeth—she had no idea upon what provocation.

"He has been exciting my envy yet more," pursued the man of the world, bent upon putting his shy companion at her ease, "by describing your study-even-

ings. He leaves no means untried to cure me of my bachelor proclivities. He was always a walking encyclopædia of art and literature. It is fortunate that he has married one who can sympathize with and aid him in the pursuits he loves so well. So you have been reading"—

A list of books and authors followed. A deadly, creeping cold passed from Annie's heart to the very tips of her fingers and toes; stirred the roots of her hair, as he proceeded to ask her opinion of one and another, their style, their theories, the force or sophistry of their arguments, the fairness or illogical nature of their deductions. It was all a confusing jargon. She could not have told whether Lord Rosse was famous for his big telescope, or if he had discovered the North Pole; whether Corneille wrote tragedies, or comedies, or history, or in what language. At the third pause in Mr. Armstrong's monologue, he began to suspect that she was wildly at sea; at the next, he understood that she was completely swamped. She was too weary and frightened to turn the conversation into other channels as a cunning woman would have done, or to pretend to knowledge she did not possess, a *ruse* one less truthful would have attempted. She sat dumb and stupid in an agony of shame, and longing to hide her disgraced head somewhere—the head that throbbed with such pain. She thought with desire of the cool and darkness of the grave. George came to the rescue just in season to prevent a burst of hysterical tears. He wanted to show Mr. Armstrong the valley and the river threading it, from the hill back of the parsonage. When they returned from their moon-

light stroll Mrs. Sherman had retired to her own room.

The mortifications of the evening were never mentioned between husband and wife. She was inexpressibly relieved and humbly grateful for George's forbearance ; ready to kiss his feet in worshipful love, because his behavior to her that night and next morning was exactly the same as usual. She was not privy to his consultation with David Copperfield after Mr. Armstrong's departure; did not dream then that he had abandoned the task of forming *his* Dora's mind. He reasoned the matter out coolly and clearly with himself. Annie was incurably domestic and commonplace. This did not oblige him to curb his natural love of learning or abate the ardor of his pursuit of eminence in his profession and the means of usefulness to his kind. Since he could not take her with him up the heights, she must lag behind. He could still be an exemplary husband; still cherish and love the wife of his youth. This resolution was the visible beginning of the parting of their ways, and feeling that this was so he made it deliberately and conscientiously. He gave up trying to elevate her intellect and cultivate her imagination. She was a good woman, true in heart, upright in principle, constant and fervent in endeavor to discharge her duty to her Creator and her fellow-creatures, pure in thought and deed—and she loved him with all her might. I am afraid he said, "her little might." If so, he only adopted the opinion of other men as learned and as just, in assuming that mediocrity of mental powers and shallowness of heart are inseparable.

The report carried by Mr. Armstrong into the outer world of his friend's talents led to results seriously affecting the Shermans' after-life. The one of these which was soonest apparent was a correspondence with a literary journal of some note which brought a small but welcome addition to their income.

"How kind in Mr. Armstrong!" exclaimed Annie, with glistening eyes, as her husband tossed a ten dollar bill into her lap—the payment for his first article. "I always believed that if your talents were but known you could make a handsome living."

George laughed carelessly, not sneeringly, yet something in the sound brought a flush to her cheek.

"Don't misunderstand me," she said, eagerly. "I know, of course, that you look for other and higher rewards"—

"Don't trouble yourself to explain, dear." George patted her head. "I comprehend just what you would say. You are a dear, sweet wife—a jewel of a practical woman. Perhaps we are better mated than if we were more alike."

In spite of his kindness the impression made by the unfortunate scene with his college-mate lingered persistently and painfully in her memory. Divining, by and by, with the ready intuition of a sore-hearted woman, the cause of the change in George's educational tactics, she made up a stout mind to "improve" herself. She abstracted, one volume at a time, Hallam's Middle Ages from her spouse's bookshelves as a promising specimen brick of solid literature, and gnawed at it secretly, like a conscientious mouse at a tough rind of cheese, at every odd moment, propping

the book up in unconscious plagiarism of Emily Bronté, in front of her bread-tray, and snatching paragraphs when she rested for a few seconds on the churn-dasher. It was mouldy, as well as tough. Ironing in the dog-days was easier and more entertaining; but she held on womanfully and nibbled her way out to "Finis" in three months. Being far from well now, and feeling the need of lighter intellectual diet, she attacked Pollock's "Course of Time." She got along faster with this, for it was "quite suitable Sunday reading," and she was often too much indisposed to attend church that fall. She did not skip a word; marked carefully each day the line at which she left off and resumed at that point on the morrow. The second undertaking was completed, without serious damage to health or spirits, one gloomy November Sabbath, when George, coming in at the close of afternoon service, beheld her fast asleep upon the lounge, the book on the floor at her side.

He picked it up, smiled pityingly and indulgently in glancing from the title to her face which even in slumber had not lost the wan, harassed expression the wise women of the congregation assured him was perfectly natural and would pass away in due time.

"Poor Pussy! No wonder she is exhausted," he said, under his breath. "She selected it because it looked religious I suppose and did not read a dozen lines before succumbing to its soporific effect."

Their first child was born that night—a fine girl, so like her father that the proud wife and mother would hear of no name but Georgina for her. In three weeks she dismissed the hired nurse and resumed her place

as housekeeper and servant-in-general, winning higher encomiums than ever from the clever managers of the parish upon her "faculty" and energy. Little Harry came next, eighteen months later; two years afterward, Willie; and Baby Emma was six months old when Mr. Sherman accepted a call to Aiken, a seaboard manufacturing town. The church that desired his services was an important one and the salary quadruple what he now received. Annie cried herself to sleep in silent joyfulness the night on which George announced to her his decision. She was like one long imprisoned when he hears his cell-door unbarred and knows it means liberty. Her present life was slavery, however cheerfully she might perform the labors crowded into the working-day which for her was never less than sixteen hours long. Her lungs, physical and spiritual, ached for one full, free respiration such as she had not had time to take since Georgie's birth.

"My faith in your final success has never wavered," she said to her husband, her face alight with prideful pleasure.

And he answered with the gesture and smile she remembered as well as if she had seen them first but yesterday, "You told me once I recollect that my talents would earn me a living in time. I am glad, for your sake, dearie, that there is a prospect of this. Still, lowly as is my position here, we have had a very happy, restful time in this, our first home. We shall hardly be so care-free and independent in a city."

"Restful!" repeated Annie's heart, with a groan, but she held her peace. Was not the day of her deliverance at hand?

PART II.

"WHAT is the reason that, while clergymen are proverbially careless about business matters, and have a very imperfect appreciation of the value of money, their wives so often develop parsimonious traits? learn the practice, not only of small economies in their own households, but also of cunning play upon the sympathies and means of others?" said a lady to me once. "Some of the most adroit beggars I have ever known, and, beyond all question, the sharpest managers, were the partners of popular preachers."

To which I replied: "She is dull indeed who does not learn in the school of Necessity, and that soul is of purest metal that does not tarnish in such an atmosphere of fretting anxieties and noisome dreads and corrosive disappointments as surrounds the modern pastor's wife. That there are exceptions to the universality of the latter situation, I cheerfully, gratefully admit, but they are notable and not numerous. That the pastor himself so frequently passes through the test unharmed is usually because the active wits and unceasing care of his helpmeet guard him from the influences that dwarf and canker her."

Annie Sherman had dreamed of rest, appreciation and help in her new home and in the imposing reception that greeted them there she tasted the first deli-

cious drops of the cup in which she was to forget toils and dangers overpast. Her cramped nature seemed to expand; the heart, so long stifled by the mighty aggregate of petty duties and trials, beat almost lightly. The parsonage was a modern, showy building, and the ladies of the congregation had carpeted it throughout, entirely furnished the parlors and study. The house was filled on the evening of the day succeeding the Shermans' arrival. A committee of ladies had taken possession of the premises at noon, and under their direction preparations for the festival were made upon a scale that seemed princely to the unsophisticated eyes regarding them. Mrs. Sherman had never seen anything like it in all her previous life, and the children betrayed their rustic breeding, despite her repeated checks, by exclamations of the wildest amaze and delight. If anything could have marred the mother's pleasure, it would have been the glimpses she caught now and then of amused and meaning smiles exchanged between the ladies, who treated the little ones to all sorts of delicacies, hitherto unknown to their palates, and answered their questions with unfailing good-humor. This was the first shadow that fell athwart the new-born brightness of her spirit but it was only a passing mortification. Children would be children, and they would soon become used to that which now excited their astonishment. Her complacency had a severer blow before the business of the evening fairly began.

Nothing doubting that the committee would remain where they were until the company assembled, she slipped away from them as darkness came on and ar-

rayed herself carefully in her gala costume—a brown silk, with raised satin figures of the same hue upon it. "Brocade," it was called in its day, which was the winter of her marriage, and, like most marked styles, it soon "went out." Annie had taken great care of the dress—had made it over this season and re-trimmed it with brown velvet, not grudging the expense that made it look "quite as good as new." She remarked upon the excellence of the texture and fit and the general freshness of the whole robe while she got herself ready.

"It *is* a comfort to feel that one is well-dressed!" she said to George, who was shaving in the same room. "And brown is such a modest, serviceable color! One is never overdressed in a small company, or feels out of place in a large assembly, when she has it on."

George let her twitter on as he would a small brown wren, and thought his own thoughts, never so much as looking at her when she pronounced the new blue cravat her sister had sent her at Christmas, "such a lovely contrast" to her dress; assented pleasantly to the supposition that she "had better go down, in case anybody should come a little ahead of time."

The supper, with the exception of creams and other perishable edibles, was laid in the dining-room, the parlors were ablaze with gas, and Mrs. Hayward, the chief manager of the entertainment, attended by three other ladies, was taking a final survey of the arrangements for doing their pastor—and themselves—honor. She was a handsome woman—a widow of large means and much popular talent, the recognized leader in the church and a personage of consequence

in the community. Her satisfied smile showed how well she had acquitted herself in the present enterprise. Mr. Sherman was her chosen candidate out of all who had preached in the vacant pulpit, and she meant the reception to be a "sensation."

"I am glad you have looked in upon us, Mrs. Sherman," she said, at Annie's entrance. "I am just going home. The carriage has been waiting some time. I shall return in less than an hour—be the first on the ground. You have nothing to do but to dress and rest until we come back. If we have seemed a little arbitrary in refusing to allow you to assist us, it was because we wanted you to be bright and fresh for the evening. Ah, Mr. Sherman!" this radiantly, as George appeared. "We are in flight, I assure you! We trust you to see that Mrs. Sherman does not weary herself in body and mind until we rally to her assistance in force. *Au revoir!*"

George handed the First Directress and her aides into the carriage, talking easily and gallantly on the way, shut them in and bowed them off.

"As if he had done the same every day of his life," reflected Annie, viewing it all from the entry. "I am glad he feels so much at home. They overpower me somewhat—these fine ladies who have so much manner! I suppose because I have lived in the backwoods so long."

"We could ask no more beautiful home—no kinder people, Annie," said George, treading the soft carpets with marked satisfaction and looking about him on the furniture that bore no resemblance to the plain appointments of the country parsonage.

"The lines have fallen to us in pleasant places," replied his wife, somewhat absently.

She was before the long pier-glass, pulling down and spreading out the skirts of the brown silk; untying and re-arranging the blue neck ribbon. A queer sensation was creeping over her, not unlike that she had felt in dreams of mingling in a gay company of ac quaintances, all in their best attire, and coming suddenly to the consciousness of the fact that she was in-her night-gown. She said to her discontented self that she looked like a Dutch doll, or the painted shepherdess upon the gaudy tea-tray that used to stand upon her grandmother's buffet—so short and scant had her dress grown under Mrs. Hayward's eyes. Her skin had lost its transparency in the steam of stove and wash-tub; her hair was thin and dry; there were crows-feet at the corners of her eyes and the blue of the eyes themselves had faded. She wished, for George's sake, that she were as bright and pretty as when he married her. *He* did not look a day older than then. His step was light, his complexion clear, his whole mien that of a man in the glory of his youth and strength. She had pursuaded him into the purchase of a handsome suit of clothes before entering upon his new pastorate. They became him well and he would become any station however exalted.

"It is only what you deserve my dear," she continued more heartily. "The people evidently understand that they have drawn a prize. I knew how it would be!"

She would not attract his attention to her an-

tiquated apparel by repeating Mrs. Hayward's observations.

"She probably did not notice in the hurry of the moment that I had changed my dress," she tried to comfort herself by saying. "Brown is such an unremarkable color. She could not be expected to know that I had nothing gayer than this. I suppose the children and I do look countrified. I can only hope that the guests will be too much taken up with their new pastor to bestow many remarks upon us. I shall be well content to stand in his shadow."

To do the guests justice, they did their best to make her forget her shabbiness—the more marked to her as to others when compared with the fashionable toilettes that presently filled the spacious rooms. Before the splendors of these the impression of being in absolute undress increased upon her until in the abjectness of her shame she felt like crawling under the nearest table or sofa to hide herself from the curious regards bent upon her; sympathized fully with the bashfulness that caused the two elder children who had been allowed to sit up "to see the party," to shrink into obscure corners, stick their fingers in their mouths, and obstinately resist all efforts to draw them from their covert. "Mrs. Sherman" was put into the most conspicuous place in the room beside her well-dressed, animated husband who remembered every visage he had ever seen before and fitted the right name to each owner as he took him by the hand, while her brain whirled dizzily; her senses were caught up and tossed to and fro by the restless sea of strange faces, the surge of many voices in her unaccustomed ears. She smiled

and bowed and tried to seem at her ease and to catch the prevailing tone of familiar converse and well-bred cordiality, the social spirit of those who, belonging to the same church, and most of them to the same neighborhood, rejoiced together as one family in the reunion and in the occasion for it.

She failed, and she knew it, but bore the knowledge without other sign of discomfiture than a certain constraint of tone and expression, greater awkwardness of movement and diffidence of speech. She impressed those among whom she was henceforward to dwell with the facts that she was rustic and not intellectual; amiable and not ambitious; timid, but very grateful for the kindness shown to herself and family. Things might have been much more unfavorable for her future comfort had she been a woman of more "character." The ladies of the congregation liked her none the less for being unassuming and ignorant. Their former pastor was a studious bachelor who never interfered in their department of action. They were too much in the habit of following in Mrs. Hayward's wake, and she was too fond of leading for them to contemplate cheerfully the prospect of submitting to the dictatorship which had from time immemorial been the prerogative of the minister's wife who chose to accept the reins. They could have wished, since Mrs. Sherman was so "incapable," that she were a more comely lay-figure, but, after all, it was tacitly agreed that her husband would not be less popular because she was uninteresting.

"She is a domestic dowdy without a symptom of style or manner; as destitute of dignity as she is of

brilliancy—but there is no harm in her," had been Mrs. Hayward's report that afternoon to her invalid sister who was not able to attend the house-warming.

The lady mentally added dullness of perception and feeling to the unflattering list of qualifications for the office of nonentity in parish and society as she noted Annie's apparent unconsciousness of the homely absurdity of her figure amid its present surroundings.

"She is naturally awkward and is unused to entertain company," thought the critic. "She looks like a good-natured dolt, but she feels none of the distress under which a sensitive person would writhe in discovering her unfitness for her present position. Why must our most gifted preachers marry while they are boys? Can her husband be blind to her deficiencies, or is he a miracle of self-control?"

She turned from these meditations with mingled compassion and admiration to the lion of the evening, and wasted no more thoughts upon his consort in name.

The lion of the town he speedily became and under the inspiration of the enthusiastic devotion of his parishioners, the tokens of kindliness and appreciation he received from the citizens at large, his genius ripened into more worthy fruitage than it had hitherto borne. During his seclusion in the mountain township he had laid up treasures for future use that stood him in good stead now—mental stores and a magazine of physical forces which were beyond all price. His learning and eloquence filled his church to overflowing within six months after he assumed the charge of it. At the end of a year they tore it down and built a

greater—one larger than any three other houses of worship in Aiken, and there was not a vacant pew in it three weeks after the dedication. "A prize," his wife had said, the evening of the reception. The Aikenites knew it now, if they had not then, and their pride in their acquisition leaped the bounds of the usual means by which a flock is fain to testify approbation of the shepherd's services. Figuratively they fell at his feet, kissed the hem of his garment and offered their necks to his tread. Literally they doubled his salary; let him have his own way in all ecclesiastical matters; *fêted* him continually and flattered him unceasingly, and wearied not of making him presents of every description under the sun that could contribute to his individual comfort and pleasure.

He would have been more—or less—than human had these things failed to move him. Being at heart true and earnest, and in purpose upright, they stimulated, instead of enervating him. His most determined detractors—for envy is begotten by eminence as surely as the sun draws water from the bog—called him dogmatic, vain, and arbitrary; bruited that adulation had turned his head, and talked wisely of the rocket and the stick and their willingness to abide the workings of time. Even they never said that he was idle or negligent; that he failed to play the man at the height of his dangerous elevation. Of course the ladies of church and congregation were foremost in the ranks of the brilliant preacher's allies and admirers.

I say "of course," in no invidious or sarcastic tone. While GOD'S own law of the mutual attraction of the sexes holds good, and while women's nature remains

more emotional as more devout than that of man, the clergyman will continue to find his warmest supporters and most faithful yoke-fellows among the imitators of Dorcas, Persis, Priscilla, and Damaris, of whose distinguished services the celibate Chief Apostle was proud to make honorable mention. It was natural, moreover, that the women of the Aiken Tabernacle should be fond of their attractive minister; should sit under his pulpit discourses with great delight, and hearken, with rapt ears, to the many profound, witty and pleasing sayings which made him the ornament of their parlors. He was a model pastor, they were agreed in affirming, sympathizing, instructive and entertaining, as circumstances appealed to his affluent heart and mind, and divided his visits so impartially between rich and poor that neither class could complain or feel slighted. In fine, he was all they could desire—more—far more than they had hoped for.

"For," said the very candid ones, "how could we imagine, without seeing and knowing him, that there was a faultless being in this imperfect world? But what a pity" (Full chorus here!) "that he has such an uncongenial wife!"

Which brings us, by a somewhat abrupt transition, from the high noon of our hero's career to the more checkered existence going on within the parsonage walls.

Mrs. Hayward had not been remiss in duty to those connected by lawful and blood ties with the Man of the Day. If she anticipated his wishes and seconded his endeavors in church and Sabbath-school; if she was an excellent listener to his sermons and lectures

and so discriminating in her praises of these that he soon found himself speculating in his study as to the probable effect of this, that, and the other passage upon her speaking face, or regardful of her views and desires as he expounded doctrines and enforced belief —he was also reminded of her at every turn in the home she delighted to beautify. She took Mrs. Sherman in hand the day after the reception, and had guided her in all important affairs ever since. Under her tutelage the brown figured silk had vanished from Aiken sight and ken before it was sported a second time in that lively place; the stiff little curls, like twisted wisps of pale straw, cherished by Mrs. Sherman as a souvenir of her youthful charms and courting days, when George called them "golden," and "sunny," were trained into more modest and modish bandeaux, and the children were made almost presentable. Another bud was added to the cluster in the parents' possession when they had lived eighteen months in Aiken—a little girl, who was baptized in the hearing of the congregation one fine Sabbath as "Aurelia Hayward." Her, the First Directress would have adopted but for the opposition of the real mother, who still held to certain obsolete notions touching the will of the Creator in such cases, as expressed by His disposition of what too many American matrons regard as questionable blessings.

"If he had not meant for me to have my baby for myself, He would not have sent her to me," said the benighted creature.

But "Baby Aura"—Mrs. Hayward's pet-title for her name-child—was a daily visitor at that lady's

house; was caressed, and indulged and adorned by her until she grew into such dissimilarity in appearance and behavior to her healthy, affectionate, country-born brothers and sisters as excited general remark. The same butcher, baker, and grocer served Mrs. Hayward and Mrs. Sherman, and they did their shopping in spring and autumn in company.

"It is very kind in you to spend so much time and pains upon that uninteresting woman," said the invalid sister already mentioned, one windy April afternoon, as the First Directress returned from a prolonged expedition through millinery and dry goods stores.

"I often ask myself why I do it," confessed the other, throwing off her velvet cloak and sables and sinking down wearily among the elastic cushions of her lounge. "But what would become of her if I were to let her go? She has not a liberal instinct in her composition. But for me she would never have a decent thing for herself and children. I have to be constantly on the watch lest she should sacrifice taste to cheapness, or get a scanty pattern for the sake of saving a dollar or two. Her disposition to pinch wherever she can is incorrigible."

"She yields to you generally, does she not?"

"In my presence, yes, for she is a poor-spirited creature, and easily put out of countenance, besides being shrewd enough to appreciate, in some sort, the value of a wealthy, generous friend. She knows she would suffer severely were I to withdraw my help. But she wears such a miserable face sometimes when I have argued down her fears that she 'cannot afford this,' and her suggestions that 'a simpler style will

answer her purpose as well' as that I have selected, that I am ashamed of her. The very clerks know her failings and appeal to me for directions. How a man like George Sherman ever, even in his 'veal' days, fancied himself in love with that piece of commonplace insipidity passes my comprehension. She is a clog about his neck and will be always. These lifelong blunders are miserable, hopeless complications!"

Her handsome face looked so nearly miserable as she said it; was changed from its ordinary brightness into such haggardness as no extremity of bodily fatigue could set there, that her sister refrained from a second glance at it. She was a good and pure woman who had learned wisdom and gentleness from suffering, yet she discerned no impropriety in this tender sympathy with a fascinating man who was unsuitably wedded; did not hesitate to speak out the form of consolation that came to her mind.

"He is fortunate in finding true friends who comprehend and can minister to his spirit-needs. But for their companionship and appreciation of his higher nature his life would indeed be barren."

The tears gathered slowly in the widow's dark eyes.

"You do not know how fearful is his need, Julia, or how blank is his home life; how exquisite are his sensibilities; how strong the cravings of the intellectual man for the ready intelligent response of a kindred soul to his aspirations and inquiries. Even I, who understand him as few others ever could; to whom he says he can reveal more of his inner self than to any one else alive, am daily discovering new

wants, new depths of thought and feeling, greater capabilities for enjoyment and suffering. And this, after our intimate friendship of six years' standing! But what does this dull-witted clod who bears his name and lives under his roof—whom the world calls his 'wife'—guess of all this! It is the union of the owl and the eagle!"

At the same hour, Mrs. Sherman, having laid away carefully her cloth cloak and mink furs, sat herself down at her writing-desk, opened a "Family Expense Book," and began to record in order the purchases of the day. There were no superfluities. She acknowledged this to herself; also, that Mrs. Hayward's maxim, "The best always the cheapest," was in the main sound policy. Her girls ought to have the dresses and hats she had ordered; her fast-growing boys the new suits from the tailor who made the young Haywards' clothes. The black silk, the lace collar and undersleeves, the steel-colored poplin walking-suit and bonnet to match, were only what a woman in her station should have if she would appear as well clad as her neighbors. Yet her face, which had been anxious when she begun her task, was sorrowful and perplexed as she wrote out the sum-total. There was nervous alarm in the twitching muscles of lips and fingers as she reviewed the columns of figures in the vain hope of discovering some mistake that should alter the result.

Finally she shut up the book with a heavy sigh and locked it out of sight, lest George should happen upon it and be annoyed by what he called her "Martha-like calculation of ways and means," and, leaning her

head upon her hand, sank into deep and painful reverie. She had no confidante, and sometimes she feared the seething brain would lose its balance. Was this to go on forever? this ceaseless tug at the income which, sweat and strain as she might, was always short of the outgo? this contriving, night and day, to make ends join that had never yet met—which shrank further and further apart every year? The salary which had seemed princely when talked over in the country-manse had dwindled and wasted like fairy gold in the handling. It took ten dollars in Aiken to do the work she used to accomplish with one. More things were needed in their town life; prices were higher, and everything was to be bought. She had not understood until their change of location that their means in their old home had been really enlarged by the homely donations of her fellow-housekeepers; that when Mrs. Johnson sent her a pound of butter, the gift saved her from buying it; that Mrs. Vandyke's freshly-baked loaf of rye bread which came to her every Wednesday and Saturday, and Mrs. Peyster's invariable rice-pudding for Sunday's dinner, were, in effect, as much money in her purse. City parishioners never took this into account. The stores and markets were as convenient to her as to them, and they chose to presume that she had as much money. Yet they were generous in their way. She could not complain of a want of presents. She had laced handkerchiefs, embroidered hand-screens, mantel ornaments in such profusion that her chimney-pieces looked like the show-counters of a fancy store; cut glass cologne flasks, five pair; match-boxes and paper-cutters and

paper weights; inkstands of all patterns and four writing-desks; easels for pictures and carved brackets for books; watch cases not a few, and six jewelry stands; three glove boxes and as many for handkerchiefs; such a profusion of flower vases, she had to keep half of them in the china closet; not to mention gift books in Turkish morocco and gilt, highly illustrated, and very expensive; elaborate and costly toys for the children, including gold and silver rattles for the baby; until from pleased surprise she passed by regular stages to a state of feeling akin to loathing. She liked "useful things." If they were pretty as well as useful, so much the better; but this shower of what she esteemed baubles dispirited and irked her. Her devotion to the practical equalled the reverent delight with which her spouse bent before the beautiful.

And all the while the money was taking to itself wings. The habit of painstaking economy, the study and planning, the sifting of "must haves" from "may wants" was closing in upon her again. Yet she had thought when she removed to this place to cast these behind her forever, as one would shake off a protracted nightmare from which she had just escaped with her life. She was beginning to supect what many other clergymen's wives have demonstrated as a certainty, viz., that large salaries invariably bring larger—and unavoidable—expenses in their train. They must maintain a creditable appearance in the eye of the world. The interests of the clerical profession and the Aiken church demanded it. This was one of Mrs. Hayward's cardinal doctrines.

Before it went down the brown silk. "Which was a handsome thing in its day. What a pity brocades had such a short run! I haven't seen one before in five years."

Thus Mrs. Hayward: The children's wardrobes were "quite unsuitable for them in existing circumstances. There was so much dress in Aiken!" The well-saved cottage furniture, which had been Annie's wedding gift from the aunt for whom she was named, was also condemned. "That will do very nicely for the servants' room, my dear. It is good policy to lodge and feed your domestics well, and the set is really extremely neat."

The white curtains Annie had made with her own hands for the spare bed-room in her former abode were "entirely out of date here, and troublesome on account of the coal-dust and all that, you know. The country is so much cleaner."

The bed-quilts, two of them "album" patch-work presented by the ladies and children of their late charge, were "just the thing for the servants' bed, and you can, if you like, put one under the Marseilles quilt in the nursery. It will keep the dust off the blankets."

Annie made no resistance. George had bidden her consult Mrs. Hayward upon all doubtful points, and the business of her life was to obey and please him. She knew all the same that she was not the mistress of her own house, and each concession, the relinquishment of each cherished project, gave her as sharp a pang as it would you or me, dear sister, pride ourselves upon our individuality though we may. In place of

the old familiar articles and the household ways she had learned with care, practised with satisfaction, uprose a legion of "Indispensables," hitherto undreamed of, which she yet dared not dispute. She may have been the clod her adviser deemed her, but the stupidest learn fast under the rod, and before the first quarter's salary became due, she had arrived at a pretty fair estimate of the proportion which their receipts were to bear to their expenditures. Her sensibilities were not acute perhaps, yet she endured absolute torture in lifting the remembered harness and buckling it upon her reluctant spirit. In her agony of distaste at the return to bondage, she made one cry in the ears of him whom she seldom troubled with complaint, with whom she had long ago ceased to share such trials as could be kept from his knowledge.

It was at Christmas time, and they had been ten months in Aiken. There was a Sabbath-school festival, with a loaded "tree;" distribution of prizes, and much speaking *at* the children—that inimitable invention of some modern Herod in Howard's clothing—an original story written for the occasion by the pastor, which was a gem in its way, and applauded to the echo by great and small—and in the evening a masquerade surprise party, a delightful novelty at the parsonage. Santa Claus led in a band of elves, decked with holly and other Christmas "greens," who piled their gifts in the shape of a pyramid in the middle of the parlor floor; danced, satyr-like, about it to a merry Christmas chorus, chanted as they moved, and retired without unmasking. Mr. Sherman pulled the ingenious structure to pieces, and distributed the presents

in obedience to the labels attached to each. The children were enraptured, the father as hilarious as any of them, and really gratified by his own acquisitions, the most valuable of which was a gold watch and chain. Mrs. Sherman's effort to seem pleased was so unsuccessful as to call forth a remark which was a virtual rebuke, and was understood as such by the rest as well as herself.

"Mamma is not as happy as we are; has a touch of the doldrums," said George, winding up Willie's race horse. "I hoped we should have no sober faces on this blessed Christmas day; that we should all be able to 'drive dull care away,' for a few hours, at least."

The wondering, reproachful eyes turned to her from the innocent faces about her were the severest ordeal to which he could at that instant have subjected Annie. Let us hope he did not know it. She felt each as a poniard thrust, and, like the blood following these, came the recollection that she could not defend herself then or ever from the unjust suspicions engendered in her children's minds. She could not tell them that solicitude for their welfare, much study of their interests and her husband's, many and pressing fears pertaining to present and future embarrassments, made her face and spirit "sober." All this would sadden them, and sorrow would come to them soon enough. She would not hasten it by her selfish repinings. Moreover, they might ask why she carried the whole load; why papa was light-hearted and she burdened, for children have an innate sense of justice that makes them swift in condemnation. She was sensitive and devoid of tact or address, but

she would have bled to death sooner than recriminate or lower the father a thousandth part of a degree in the esteem of his offspring.

Oh, the silent heroism of these commonplace women, who are slow of speech and heavy of visage, save when, perhaps once in a lifetime, they look into our eyes with a dumb piteousness that rives our souls and startles us as if the earth had caved under our feet in what we thought was a sure place, as if the stone had cried to us out of the wall. I caught such a glance the other day from a neglected wife who has neither beauty, nor youth, nor wit to win back the truant heart she has striven for long, patient years to hold, and, remembering her that night in my prayers for "the afflicted, and those who draw unto the grave," awful words were whispered into the ear of my spirit in reply:—

"*When He maketh inquisition for blood, He forgetteth not the cry of the humble!*"

Annie made a visible attempt to drive away the black brood of stinging tormentors who would not let her be at ease even on Christmas day.

"Mamma is a little tired and headachy to-night," she said. "She is not as young as she used to be."

"Papa was born last week and never ate a Christmas feast or saw Santa Claus until to-night!" retorted George, gayly. "Clear the course for Dexter! He is wound up all right. There he goes!" and off dashed the spirited courser in the ring left by the excited children.

Papa did not play with them every day, but he was the jolliest of comrades when he did; much livelier than

poor mamma, who "hadn't a bit of fun in her," and was too busy all the time to frolic with them. They left her to herself, therefore, without the most distant imagination of the sufferings hidden by the quiet face that watched them.

"That horse cost five dollars, at least," said poor, sore-hearted Annie, "practical" in her pain. "And Georgie's wax doll must have been twelve! I have not three dollars in the world! I am sure George must have been charged fifty for the engraving, frame and all, he gave me this morning! There is another bill to pay! He is very kind and generous, but if he only knew how little I enjoy such things when we need every cent of our salary for family expenses. How shall we get along until quarter-day—a month and a week off?"

It is by nursing such unhealthy thoughts as these that ministers' wives become contracted in ideas, mercenary in purpose.

When the children were in bed this one of the sordid creatures made the outcry to which I have referred.

"George," she said, with a low-spirited, babyish tremor in her voice, "I am sorry I cast a shadow over your spirits or the children's to-night. But I had a cause for my grave looks. Large as our income seems, it does not meet our expenses, and I couldn't help wishing that our kind friends had given us the money all these beautiful things cost. It would have been a real help to us just now. Or that they had sent in something really useful. For instance, I would rather have had a barrel of flour and a tub of butter than

this mantel clock, which I don't need in the least, and must have cost twice as much as they would."

I believe I have said elsewhere that George Sherman was never wittingly unkind or rough in word or deed to the wife he knew his inferior. But his quiet sneer hurt her now more than downright harshness would have done.

"Judged by your rule, this world should be a vast grocery and provision store. You must bear in mind that there are varieties of taste even in the same family. I regret exceedingly however that yours were not more correctly divined on this occasion. You are at liberty to carry your utilitarian principles into action and barter the trumpery you do not value for solid, sensible bread and butter. As you say, that clock, which is, I know, a present from Mrs. Hayward and her sister, must be valuable. The bronze figures upon it—the Muse of History watching the motions of Time—are remarkably fine. An auction sale of your Christmas gifts would replenish your larder abundantly—give you pocket money for six months to come."

Annie, recalling his words and look five years afterward, as she sat alone in the twilight of that windy April afternoon, casting up endless and unsatisfactory accounts in her aching head, felt again the positive physical constriction of heart and lungs that almost suffocated her then; the uprising of her loyal soul against insult and wrong done her by him who should have sheltered her from both. She had never given words to the protest; had tried to forget the occurrence. George had "always been careless about money." Besieged by the temptations of the city it was

not strange that he grew reckless. His love for the æsthetic was mounting, or degenerating, into a passion; his desire to possess and enjoy the books from which he had been shut out by his secluded position and straitened means threatened to become inordinate. He sought out and bought good pictures; he would have the finest library editions of his favorite authors, let them cost what they might. These were a substantial investment, he told himself and his friends—riches in which his children would revel when he had passed into the Land where all was Beauty. His wife might exhaust the powers of her intellect in remodelling last year's garments and saving candle ends. He fed his by his royal lavishness of the lucre which was only made filthy by hoarding. He made a telling point in a charity sermon by comparing such heaping up of wealth to the manna which the economical, long-sighted Hebrew stored in his vessel until the morrow, when he found it alive with corruption.

He was too manly ever to become a *petit maître*, but he cultivated his naturally refined tastes into fastidiousness. The appointments of his study were irreproachable—perfect in general effect and in detail.

"A rare poem! visible music!" Mrs. Hayward said, softly, one day, entering while he lounged in his reading chair and read Euripides in the sunshine. It was right—only just that this should be. Else how could fair fancies and exalted conceptions visit him freely? There were subtle harmonies of sense and soul which must be consulted if one would attain his highest development, mentally or spiritually. The room in which he studied and wrote was bright in

winter, shaded in summer, always luxurious, although simple enough to the casual eye. It was kept at an even temperature, that no extreme of heat and cold should remind him, at inopportune seasons, of his corporeal existence when he would be all mind and spirit. There was a fernery in the brightest window, and rustic stands of flowers, often renewed, filled the air with delicate fragrance.

These were not personal luxuries, but appliances of his art, as were the paintings, the two or three statues and the shelves of superbly bound books in the adjoining library. In preparing the lectures and sermons he meant to deliver without notes, it was his habit to walk up and down the length of the two rooms, his head bent, and hands behind him, with half-closed eyes, murmuring to himself in a sort of trance—a clairvoyant state, upon which no footstep or voice might break, unless the intruder's errand were one of life or death.

"The apartments seem to me like holy ground while I catch the sound of his communing with higher intelligences," said Mrs. Hayward once to Annie.

"I never go in, except to sweep and dust when he is out," rejoined Annie, in her simplicity. "He can't bear to have the chambermaid touch a thing of his. But I am very particular."

"I have no doubt of it," Mrs. Hayward answered, patronizingly. "It is an inestimable privilege to minister even to the temporal wants of such a man."

There was no retreat in the whole house for "Mamma's" spirit or body, not so much as a closet which she could call her own, in which she could sit her

down in quiet, secure of ten minutes for Bible reading and devotion. She said her prayers generally while nursing the baby; and when the last one was weaned lifted up her heart to Him who knew her infirmities and was acquainted with her griefs, as she could catch a moment's breathing space. A favorite season for her meditations and silent supplications was while mending the children's clothes after midnight had set the seal of soundest sleep upon other eyes. She did not quite comprehend her husband's fervent petitions from the pulpit in the hearing of the hundreds who hung breathless upon his lips; breathings after wider, deeper, richer Christian experience and the higher life; felt ignorant and dwarfish and wretched as she listened to these and his stirring exhortations to his hearers to live above the world; to spurn the fetters of earthly desire and earthly cares; to keep their minds calm and free, ever receptive to the influences of the Infinite Thought of which the human intellect was a part.

But then there was so little Annie did understand beyond housekeeping, and sewing, and baby-tending! She had not an idea of what was meant by the divinity of humanity, or the pre-Adamic period, or the Arian or Pelagian heresy. She had a shadowy fancy that Origen had something to do with original sin, and that the same firm manufactured the Elgin marbles and Elgin watches. But she did not pretend to know the difference between Tractarianism and Antinomianism, or what Doctor Pusey believed and Bishop Colenso did *not*. She read next to nothing except the nice little books her children brought home from the Sun-

day-school library. While Mrs. Hayward read everything, remembered all she read and heard and could talk so well of what she knew that even George confessed he sometimes gained new views of truth in his conversations with her. A wonderful woman was Mrs. Hayward! In her humility, Annie never thought of questioning this. It was very kind and disinterested in her to take her (Annie) everywhere in her carriage; to pilot her through shops and dressmaking establishments; to prescribe to her what should be eaten, drunk and worn at the parsonage. If her income equalled that of her chaperon, she might enjoy purchasing and ordering as much as she did. If her talents and education were more nearly equal to hers, she would take more pleasure in their intercourse. Oddly enough, there floated into her memory in this connection a text George had read that morning at prayers:—

"Whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?"

George would have laughed at this violent wresting of Scripture, but there was no danger of his knowing of it. She had long ago ceased to talk to him of such trifles as her private and individual religious experiences.

PART III.

It was strange, said the Aiken gossips,—even the more charitable among them,—that Mrs. Sherman did not dress herself and children more handsomely; allowed the tokens of painstaking economy to be palpable in turned silks and made-over woolens and in dozens of other ways. Her husband's salary was large and he generous to a fault. She was either deficient in taste, a bad manager, indolent, or stingy—a four-horned dilemma, any one prong of which would have pierced a sensitive woman through and through.

Mrs. Sherman did not seem to be aware of her shortcomings or to be moved by adverse criticism. But what she thought and felt was a matter of conjecture altogether; she had no confidante with whom she could discuss her peculiar trials, who would applaud her conscientious effort to do her duty in her home and sympathize with her sufferings under the non-appreciation of him whom she sought to please.

"No doubt, my dear, there are, as your cousin says, many points of sympathy between us," sighs the caustic Riccabocca, of "My Novel," to his Jemima, "even when I am thinking of feelings and you of—trowsers."

Bulwer has told the learned doctor's story for him. What Jemima thought and suffered under his failure

to enter into *her* views and feelings was deemed a matter of no consequence. Yet there are two sides to this as to other questions. Who does not read with a heartache how silly Dora begged with tears the privilege of holding the fresh pens while her author-husband wrote the books which were to make him immortal? Of her request that he would always think of and speak to her as his "child-wife?" How, as she lay dying in his arms—pale, blighted "Little Blossom"—she said: "I know I was too young and foolish; it is much better as it is?" To some is granted the gift of pathetic lamentation. It is the heart which has no outlet of expression that breaks. Wives have ere this accepted the post of mere housekeepers and general managers and the treatment due to the situation in the houses where they should have reigned beloved and honored queens; ceased to entreat or to expect the full measure of love which is as truly their rightful portion as the wages of the faithful hireling belong to himself; have resigned all this and lived on, making no plaint in the ears of the world to which they are conscious their humiliation is well known. They are not usually interesting objects in society, I own; but neither are girdled trees attractive features in a landscape.

Everybody pities the man of genius who is bound to an unintellectual partner,—especially the commonplace creature's fellow-women. Each of the compassionate beings seems to feel that her mission is to help fill the empty heart, to satisfy the thirsting spirit.

Dear sisters! women all and would-be consolers! bear with me while I say that I have not an atom of

patience with this rose-water, cold cream, and magic salve philosophy. Listen without scorn while I express the decided convictions of a practical mortal who has lived in this world of shams and self-deceit more years than she cares to count over to herself or confess to others, and has kept her eyes well open all the while. Your man of genius—be he John Milton married to Mary Powell, or Shakspeare to Anne Hathaway, Burns to Jean Armour, or Byron to Miss Millbanke—can get along excellently well without any or all of you. The fact is not complimentary to our sex, but it is wholesome. Love to a woman is like wings to the butterfly; it means life, liberty, beauty. To a man it is also wings, but such as the grasshopper carries folded under the skirt of his close-bodied coat—used for a short flight, convenient at times, always pretty; silky, gossamer appendages he delights to spread in sunny weather as he skims the meadow with his mates—a rollicking cricket club. But the business of his existence is upon the ground; he makes his living by means of his homely legs, and forgets for hours at a time that he has any wings at all.

Mr. Sherman's lady parishioners were not vainer or more susceptible than the majority of their kind; but in proportion to their admiration for their pastor and their low estimate of his spouse's qualifications for the exalted station to which her marriage had raised her was their desire to make good her deficiencies. Her they patronized in a civil way and ignored in all active public movements. To outsiders they deplored that Mrs. Sherman was reserved and taciturn to strangers and undemonstrative to her best friends; in short,

that her manners were the reverse of popular—"such a contrast" to the polish and engaging frankness of her husband's. These strictures were made with indignant pity—not for the cruel embarrassment of her who had been beguiled into a position where she could not but be extremely uncomfortable, if not miserable, by yielding to the passionate suit of the man she loved and who vowed that he loved her—but for him who had brought about this reprehensible state of affairs. Gradually people fell into the habit of inviting Mr. Sherman to dinner and evening parties, to excursions by carriage, boat, and rail without his wife. He was the soul of every company, however gay or select; she, "not to put too fine a point upon it," was a clod.

George would have apologized for the apparent neglect the first time this happened—he even revolved in his magnanimous mind the expediency of declining to go; but, seeing that Annie did not notice the slight, and hearkening to her earnest hope that he would enjoy the *fête*, he changed his mind, treated the form of the invitation as a matter of course, gave himself up to his friends, and found the absence of his much-lesser half no drawback to his pleasure. The omission ceased to be a novelty by-and-by. At last the appearance of husband and wife abroad together excited general remark.

This was the phase of their so-called joint existence when Annie was mightily strengthened and cheered by a visit from a sister whom she had not seen since her marriage. Mrs. Davenport, although two years the senior of Mrs. Sherman, looked younger by ten. She

was the wife of a successful merchant and a person of note in her circle for sprightliness and fashion. Her appearance in Aiken created a sensation in cliques where her sister was accounted a nobody. She was deluged with calls, and plied flatteringly with invitations. Mrs. Hayward gave her the first party.

"It has been such an age since I attended a large evening assembly that I shall hardly know how to behave," remarked Annie as the two sisters sat in her room that afternoon.

"So long!" said Mrs. Davenport, in surprise. "Several of your ladies have told me of the very gay winter you have had in Aiken; spoken of the town as always lively and the people social."

"That is true, but I have become an inveterate stay-at-home," returned the other between a smile and a sigh. "There is a habit in these things, you know. One loses her fondness for general society after she has fallen into the way of declining invitations, and as the cares of life accumulate they repress her desire to go abroad for amusement."

"One loses her vitality of thought, and often of body, if she sits still at home and lets her cares strangle her," responded Mrs. Davenport, emphatically. "It is especially the duty of the public man's wife to keep herself up in feeling and manner, while for her children's sake she should not become antiquated in ideas or apparel. Rely upon it, Annie, your girls will lose some portion of their respect for you, if you lag behind the age in which you live. Instead of remaining their standard and arbiter in matters of dress, etiquette, and the like, you will degenerate into 'only

mother, who thinks the world has stood still these thirty years.' This sounds like very worldly advice, but the children of this generation are wise. Nor do men like to see their wives grow old and dowdyish. It may be true that a good man's love once won, is won forever, but the rule does not hold always with his fancy. Excuse my plainness of speech, dear, but I do not believe it is to please George that you withdraw yourself from the scenes he enjoys with the zest of a college-boy, or that you dress so soberly—as if you descried temptation in a flounce, and lurking evil in a flowing ribbon. No wife, however fondly loved, can afford to despise the attractive adornments of person that commend her as a pleasing object to the eye of him whom she loves. It is by these and other womanly arts—all innocent and commendable—that one retains the lover in the husband. I am reading you a formidable lecture—am I not?" she interrupted herself to say, lightly. "Annie, dear child, are you crying? I did not mean to wound you. With whom can we be frank if not with one another?"

It was impossible to check by a single effort the long pent-up tide of feeling. But Annie cast herself beside her sister, hid her face in her lap and held her close, to show that her emotion had in it no strain of resentment.

"It has been so long," she said, when she could trust her voice; "such a weary darksome while since I have had any one talking to me as if it made any difference what I did, or how I looked, that the kindness overcame me. George is goodness itself, but men don't understand women as well as they do each

other—as well as you do me, for instance. Then, he knows nothing about ladies' dresses; never notices what I wear, or cares whether I go out or stay at home. 'Do as you please, my dear,' he says, when I appeal to him about anything that concerns me or my movements. He is so engrossed in his profession, you see, that these are trifles not worth his consideration. As to 'keeping myself up'—that takes money and time, and both are scarce with me. Our expenses are terribly heavy, economize as I will. I have to think twice before I buy a pair of new shoes when the old ones are so shabby I have to keep them tucked well under my skirts when others are by. Flounces and ribbons are costly, and I should lose hours from the plain sewing I cannot afford to put out to a seamstress, if I bedecked myself with them. I cannot speak of these troubles to anybody but you. I suspect the people think me mean, as well as old-fashioned, but I must bear it. I will not beg for money by telling how often and seriously I am cramped for it."

"George has some extravagant tastes that should be curbed," said the plain-spoken counselor. "It must make a formidable hole in his salary to buy such books and pictures as he has collected. His bronzes and cameos are a small fortune in themselves."

"He has so few personal luxuries," pleaded the loyal little woman, coloring at the implied censure of her idol. "You know that he does not use tobacco in any form and is very temperate in eating and drinking. His statuary and pictures are a great help in his studies. His books are his tools."

"The contents of them are, undoubtedly—but not the bindings. I know something about the cost of libraries. He has perfect taste in such things; that cannot be questioned. But, for all that, his prudent little wife should not suffer for want of shoes that his printed darlings may be sumptuously clad. You should have the independence to set the case fairly before him, Annie."

"I could not!" Annie shrank into her dismayed self at the suggestion. "You do not understand how disagreeable to him is every mention of business details. He doesn't know the difference between the value of one dollar and twenty."

"He contrives, nevertheless, to spend twenty to your one," interpolated the audacious sister-in-law.

Annie feigned not to hear her.

"All talk about accounts and expenditures disgusts him," she pursued. "This is apt to be the case with highly-gifted men, I believe. It is difficult to bring them down to the level of common things and sordid cares."

Mrs. Davenport was ready with another saucy interruption. "That is a very correct quotation from Mrs. Hayward."

"It is a true saying," insisted Annie who was obliged to smile at her tone and manner. "Seriously, Janette, when you look impartially at the matter, it is but right that the discharge of such duties as purchasing household stores, paying bills, etc., should devolve upon me. It is the only way in which I can really help him. You must see"—her blush deepening painfully—"that mentally I am no companion for him. He

has never breathed it—for he is the soul of delicacy and kindness—but I know I have disappointed his expectations in other respects. I am so dull—such a fool about books and solid reading and all that. I did try to cultivate my mind, to grow worthier of him; but study is fearful drudgery when one is tired out by a hard day's work in the kitchen or puzzled out of her wits by plans for the morrow. My brain wouldn't work, and as George didn't seem to care, I gave it up. He doesn't dream how badly I feel about all this," she continued, with feverish rapidity. "I believe he imagines that I never think of it—that I am content to sit still and stupid, and see him growing away from me, as an oak does from the dock-weed at its root. I do not want him to guess it for it cannot be helped, and it is his nature and duty to grow as tall and broad as he can. I never see the multitudes that flock to hear him without thinking of the text, 'Sitting in his shadow with great delight.'"

"He is developing magnificently," assented Mrs. Davenport, thoughtfully, studying her sister's flushed face, while she stroked the hardened hand she held, caressed the small forefinger made callous by needle-pricks. "You are not a woman of decided literary tastes, dear. You would never have these, were you to study fourteen hours per diem, for fourteen years to come. But harmony of intellectual likings does not make up the sum total of domestic happiness. Two peas of exactly the same shape would not fit well together in the pod. And you are far, very far from being a simpleton, or dull. You are, I dare assert, a better arithmetician than is your elegant husband,

and have as much executive ability in your province as he has in his. You are certainly an able financier, and the most energetic woman, in your quiet way, I ever saw. All your ways are quiet and superficial observers may be deceived by your want of pretension into an incorrect valuation of your worth. As to George's disappointment in you, he knew what he was about when he married you. If he has half as much common sense as his wife has he sees what you really are now. Finally"—kissing her affectionately—"I mean to dress you according to my whim to-night; get up a surprise for him."

She did her best. Annie was made ready in her sister's dressing-room and the two went down to the parlor together, to enjoy George's pleased astonishment. He was a little late as was his wont—and entered hurriedly when they had waited half an hour for his appearance.

"Ready, are you?" he said, carelessly. "Annie, I have pulled the button off my glove. Just sew it on —won't you?"

Mrs. Davenport watched him while his wife drew near the drop-light to perform his behest. He did not give her a second glance, although her gray silk was made elegant by a black lace shawl looped into an overskirt; her sleeves and collar were point lace; her hair tastefully arranged with a cluster of pink rosebuds, and lilies of the valley set above the left temple, and another of the same was fastened by her pearl brooch. She looked pretty, ladylike, almost girlish. Mrs. Davenport, in her chagrin, longed to box the unobservant husband's ears.

"You hav'n't told us what you think of your new wife," she was compelled to say, at last.

"Eh!" bewildered. "I do not comprehend!" stopping in his promenade over the parlor carpet.

"You have not praised Annie's toilette," she continued, more and more provoked.

"I had not noticed it. I see, now, that she has on a new gown. Am I right? Tell me what I ought to say, and I will obey orders," seeing her vexation and Annie's blushes. "I am a wretched ignoramus in the matter of ladies' apparel, but mean well."

The disappointed amateur Abigail had not the patience to continue the subject. If the party had not been spoiled for her by the prelude, a remark she overhead from a lady who did not know her by sight would have done this effectually.

"Mrs. Sherman really looks like other people tonight," said some one to the captious critic.

"Humph! More like a dress-maker's dummy; not quite so graceful, for she is evidently unaccustomed to being well dressed. And as for conversation, she hasn't an idea upon any subject higher than servants, children, and marketing."

With a sharper pang than she would have owned, even to herself, Mrs. Davenport recognized the truth that the habits of years were not to be overcome by one hour's lecturing and one evening's drill and society tactics. Recognizing it, she grew savage toward her brilliant brother-in-law. Annie might have been moulded into external comeliness had he appreciated her sterling qualities and her capabilities, instead of seeking to shape mind and tastes in con-

formity to a pattern of his own devising. As it was, he had let her drop out of his calculations of future effort and attainment; made her an "incidental" instead of an essential in his life. Janette's benevolent mission had been undertaken too late. She could love and sympathize with her sister; stay her courage with comforting and hopeful words, and leave her to her lonely walk, trusting that in time her children would do her the justice her husband and his world had denied her.

She made one effort to recall George's heart, and prick his conscience.

"Don't you think Annie is looking badly?" she asked, one evening, as they talked apart, and Annie sat with her work-basket under the shaded gas burner, hearing her third child read over his next day's lesson. "She was very pretty in her girlhood—the belle of our family. She is lovely still, for her soul speaks in her eyes, her sweet temper in her smile, but it saddens me to see her prematurely grave and faded. You must watch her, George, and compel her to take care of herself. Her thought is only for others. As for you, ungrateful creature, she kisses your footsteps in spirit. I must tell you something touching and beautiful she said about you, the other day." And she repeated Annie's simile of the oak and dock-weed. "A man incurs a serious yet sweet responsibility who inspires such love in the breast of a true, pure woman like our Annie. I have heard of wives who have won a place in the world's record of distinguished women by going to scaffold and stake with their husbands. She would die in your stead by axe or faggot, and account it great honor."

George tried to laugh at her earnestness.

"Why do you call me ungrateful?" he asked.

"I judge you by what I know of your sex in general. There are few who do not give to

"'Dust a little gilt,
More praise than gold o'erdusted.'

I wonder sometimes whether you are an exception to the majority. You might easily have married a more showy girl; one who would shine as the mistress of your house and do credit to your taste. It is odd that you did not, for you have an eye for a fine woman. Such a wife would have been a gorgeous ruby in your crown of manhood; and you could have displayed her with royal pride as Ahasuerus would have showed Vashti to his courtiers. But your Esther, modest as a wood-violet, with a heart as strong and clear as crystal, is above rubies in value."

"Who would think of my prosaic Annie as the inspiration of so many poetical images?" said George, with affected lightness; "when she—poor, dear soul!—does not know a trope from a syllogism!"

"She is none the worse wife for Mr. George Sherman on that account," was the stout rejoinder. "If the ideal, not the practical, were her forte he would be less comfortable and much poorer. Some make the fatal mistake—when those judged are their life-long companions—of believing that lack of brilliancy of thought and felicity of expression presupposes an insensitive nature and a shallow heart. Annie is keenly alive to your dissimilarities; and in the light

of her reverent appreciation of your talents and fame, her humility is likely to become morbid."

She changed the subject at that point, fondly believing that she read in her listener's softer eye and meditative aspect the proof that the hint was not dropped in vain.

George was very kind to his lonely little wife for some days after her sister's departure. Mrs. Davenport left Aiken by an early morning train, and Mr. Sherman invited Annie to drive with him that afternoon.

"Don't take any of the children," he stipulated. "I want you to have a restful, pleasant ride."

He settled her carefully in the buggy, wrapping the robes about her feet, inquiring if she were warmly clad, and exerted himself during the jaunt to select such topics as he thought would interest her, even mistaking the glow of conscious benevolence within his generous breast for enjoyment in the dutiful companionship.

"This is a slavish kind of life we are leading here, my pet," he said, seeing the color revive in the sallow cheeks that were no longer plump; the shy delight of her who had borne his name for upwards of a decade, in his tenderly gallant attentions. "I have scarcely a moment or a thought that I can call my own; have to run out of town if I want to say a nice thing or two to my wife. This is the price of popularity, and it is a dear one. Next summer, God willing, we will pack up baggage and babes, and hide in the up-country somewhere, letting nobody know in what direction we have gone; be all by ourselves, to live over our court-

ing days for a month at least. You are the best and least selfish of women to do and bear, with such angelic patience, all that is laid upon you by our position. I know and feel this, dear, however careless I may seem."

"I am sure, George, I never thought you careless," said the flattered woman, with a grateful sob. "And you are very good to be pleased with what I can do to help you along. I have always felt that you were the kindest husband in the world—too good for me."

She did not envy the happiest of newly-made brides her bliss while she revelled in that enchanted excursion. The frosty air was as balmy as June; the sere landscape fairer than vernal bloom. She went in the strength of it and the love-words her ears had drunk many days and nights.

Says Caroline Helstone of Moore's alternate freezing and thawing, his evident delight in her society, and her backwardness in securing this: "If I had a means of happiness at my command, I would employ that means often. I would keep it bright with use, and not let it lie for weeks aside, until it gets rusty."

Annie had never read "Shirley," but the same artless thought came into her simple head many times, when Janette's visit and counsels became one of the fast-fading by-gones to the man of the day, and his domestic affairs slid back into the old grooves. No doubt George loved her as truly as he said, and longed to be with her all the while he was out of her sight. He had declared that he esteemed the duty slavery that kept them so much apart. Were she in his place she could not be so conscientious. Temptation would

overcome resolution sometimes. She would snatch by stealth meat and drink for the famishing heart. But George was stronger of purpose than she.

There was a mighty Sabbath-school convention in Aiken in May. From far and near delegates came to speak and to hear, and be entertained by the hospitable townspeople, and to bear to their homes the fame of the paragon divine who, "when he stood among the people," was, in genius and popularity, "higher than any of the people from the shoulders and upward." Mrs. Hayward was his prime assistant, of course, and under her direction a mammoth festival was held in the lecture and Sabbath-school room at the close of the convention—a show of flowers and banners and illuminated legends and white uniformed Bands of Joy, Hope, Faith, and Love; of mountains of sandwiches and obelisks of creams and shaking towers of jelly; bulwarks of cake and confectionery and cascades of lemonade such as the guests had never beheld elsewhere.

"Excuse me, ma'am," said a stranger from the country to Mrs. Sherman, who sat in an obscure corner, feeding a small child belonging to the Mission school with cake and ice cream, "but isn't that Mr. Sherman's wife standing by him at the head of the table? My friend here has heard somewhere from somebody that she is an awfully ordinary kind of person, quite unsuitable to him, but I tell her she must be mistaken. I've been watching them two ever so long, and I'm certain they are husband and wife, and very fond of one another at that."

"That lady is Mrs. Hayward, *Mrs.* Sherman's most

intimate friend," answered Annie, with all the dignity she could muster at so short a notice. "She is the superintendent of the girls' department of the Sabbath-school, and the chairman of the committee of arrangements for to-day."

"Ah!" The old lady eyed her narrowly 'twixt confusion and curiosity. "She's as handsome a woman as ever I see—a'most like a queen, I should say. That's one reason I picked her out as the pastor's wife. Is Mrs. Sherman anywheres around here? If you spy her, won't you point her out to me? One always wants to see what the wife of a distinguished man is like, you know. 'Pears like we don't just know what to think of him until we see what kind of woman he's married."

"I don't see her just now." Annie was growing sick and cowardly, ashamed to reveal herself to the blunt dame. "She is, as you have heard; plain in appearance—*very* 'ordinary.' You would never single her out in a crowd as Mr. Sherman's wife."

Then she got herself away out of the throng while she had strength to move; slipped through a side door opening upon the parsonage garden, and so reached her home, deserted this afternoon even by the servants, and had several hours in which to think and to suffer.

The parsonage was crowded with visitors all that evening, but Mrs. Hayward was "to the fore," and diverted general attention from the harassed looks of the hostess, who poured out unnumbered cups of tea and coffee in the heated dining-room, in obedience to the orders of the young lady and gentlemen waiters, moving and speaking like one in a dream. She wore

a plain black silk, her hair was tucked tightly behind her ears, and her collar was crooked.

"Such a forlorn and don't-carish figure!" muttered one school-girl to another.

For once she applied her adjectives correctly. Annie was forlorn and she did not care how she looked or what became of her.

It was on that night that little Bennie, her dead father's namesake and the "mother's boy" of her flock, was taken ill with brain fever. Few men are born nurses; but some, under the teaching of love, rival woman in this her peculiar sphere; develop such patience, ingenuity, and tenderness as combine with their strength to make them blessed ministrants in the chamber of suffering. George was deeply attached to his boy. He would have lopped off his right hand without a murmur, if by the lesser loss he could save the priceless life that was in visible danger from the beginning of the attack. But, unskilled in household occupations, with a natural aversion to the homely details of a sick-room, and the shrinking from the contemplation of physical anguish common to those who are themselves faultlessly sound in health, he was a hindrance rather than a help to those who had the care of the unconscious child. The disease ran its course with direful swiftness. On the third day after the seizure the physicians pronounced the case hopeless.

The verdict was given beside the dying child and in the presence of both parents. Bennie lay in his mother's lap, his restless head pillowed upon her bosom. She did not quail at the dread sentence, did

not weep or move; only gazed upon her darling's face with an expression that awed and calmed those who saw it. Her eyes were clear and solemn and had a far-seeing look that seemed to follow him in anticipation into the shadowless land.

"My bonnie, bonnie boy!" she said, softly, forgetful that others were by, "your cross has been light; your crown has come very soon. The dark valley is a safe and easy road to such tiny travellers."

The family physician, a grave, observant man, heard the loving murmurs as he stood behind her chair, moved aside instinctively to make way for the father who had bowed his head upon the mantel with a heavy groan when the truth was told him, and now turned as if to approach his wife. He checked himself a few paces off, stared wildly at the changed face lying against the mother's breast and rushed from the apartment. The holy tranquillity of Mrs. Sherman's eyes was troubled.

"Poor papa!" she said, simply, "he will miss his boy. Doctor, will you go to him, please? He needs comfort."

"There is but one earthly friend whose presence would be acceptable to him at this moment, madam," was the respectful reply, "and that is his wife. Your child will not notice your absence; he does not suffer; your husband does."

She did not answer for several moments, and her face drooped lower until it rested on Bennie's. "You may be right," she said at length. "Can you hold him while I am gone?"

Her light footstep was soundless in the carpeted hall

and library. The door of the inner room—George's sanctum—was shut but not fast; it moved without sound upon its hinges, but she did not pass the threshold. Why should she when one glance showed her the physician's mistake?

George sat in his study-chair, one elbow on his knee, his face hidden in his handkerchief, weeping in the vehemence of woe so terrifying to the beholder when it shakes manhood from self-control. Mrs. Hayward knelt upon a hassock before him, her tears streaming as fast as his. Her left arm was about his neck, and his encircled her waist. An affecting tableau I should not dare describe were not the sketch taken from life.

"Dearest George!" she cooed, "for the sake of the children and friends left to you, for the sake of your work, do not yield to this crushing blow! Oh, if my love and sympathy could lesson one pang! the knowledge of my devotion comfort you!"

"Sweet comforter! my angel of mercy! what should I do in this hour without you?"

Annie saw her husband wipe away the grief marks from the face upturned to his, and stoop to kiss it. She shut the door as noiselessly as she had opened it and went back to her boy.

The last scene was very near. Mrs. Sherman held him all through the final convulsion, tearless and apparently composed. Some one suggested that Mr. Sherman should be summoned. The speaker's voice was guarded, but the wife heard and answered quietly but firmly: "No; he does not wish it."

With her own hands she closed the blue eyes that

had ever been fountains of love to her (who needed love so much!), arrayed the perfect little form for its last peaceful sleep and laid him upon his bed, bidding the sobbing children "kiss him good night." They clustered about her as she left the room and turned the key in the lock. She paused to scan their frightened, tear-stained faces.

"My darlings," she said, in her accustomed gentle tones, "it is late and you have had no supper. Shall mamma go down and give you some?"

Her first act on reaching the dining-room was to pour out a cup of coffee, sweeten and cream it as George liked to have it, and send it to the library by Georgina, the eldest daughter.

"Don't go into the study, dear," she directed. "Knock at the door and wait until papa opens it. Tell him you think it will do him good. He will be gratified that you have remembered him in your distress. Ask if you may not take him up something more substantial—a sandwich, or some biscuit and chicken."

"I always said she was an oyster!" ejaculated one of Mr. Sherman's enthusiastic disciples when this episode of the mournful history was reported to her. "She has not a grain of sentiment or delicacy about her. I never heard of anything more repulsive in my life."

Mrs. Hayward possessed feeling and refinement in generous measure, and she manifested these by coaxing her Platonic lover to sip the strong coffee in spoonfuls, feeding him with her white hands, and weeping with gratitude when he blessed her for her

loving solicitude, owning that the beverage had quieted and strengthened him.

I have told my story badly if I have produced upon the mind of a single reader the impression that Mr. Sherman and his favorite parishioner were hypocrites, or that either descried the remotest approach to criminality in an intimacy which they named the love of brother and sister. Mrs. Hayward really considered herself a model of purity and propriety and would have repudiated with honest horror the suggestion that her claim upon her spiritual mate trespassed upon Mrs. Sherman's legal or moral rights. George Sherman would have sworn in good faith upon the oracle of his holy religion that he was true to his wife in intent and in deed. I write this in sad sincerity with no thought of sarcasm, regretful the while that conscience has laid upon me the task of throwing light upon a blurred page of human nature.

I am assured that, among the errors of this age and land, none is gaining ground more rapidly in circles where morality and religion are openly acknowledged as ruling principles, than the laxity of respect for the sacredness, the *absoluteness* of the marriage tie. Hardly a week passes in which I am not appalled by the sudden gaping before my sight of gulfs as dark as night and deep as hell, sundering those whom the world has hitherto believed to be one in feeling as in name. I know women whose choicest trophies are the conquests of married men; wreaths of victory none the less honorable in their opinion because beaded with tears and blood wrung from the hearts of wives who are so old-fashioned in their creed as to consider that

their husbands' affections belong as entirely to them as do theirs to the men they call "lords."

There is but one safe test in cases of conscience of this description, for if Love is not a competent umpire, let Conscience sit in his stead.

The rule should work both ways.

George Sherman held his wife's devotion in light esteem, perhaps, but his wrath would have been deep and fierce had he chanced to discover her in the reception of such consolation from Mrs. Hayward's brother as the bewitching widow gave to him. I have written upon this subject before, and more than once. If I were to protest against the profanation of the names of marriage and friendship offered by the Platonic loves of the day, every time I set pen to paper, and every word were living fire to burn into the souls of the parties to the horrible fraud, I should not express too strongly the detestation which the lovers of truth and honor should feel for these.

But—and herein lie mystery and discouragement—those who teach and practice moral and pious precepts are *not* severe upon cruelties such as I have described. I have sat, with high, indignant pulses and set teeth, in a group of amiable Christian people, well-bred and well-educated, and listened to stories of this and that "soul friendship" (so styled in mockery by the most Christian narrators), illustrated by hand-squeezings and tender billets and the kiss of peace, these being retailed as pleasant jests, with zestful relations of the cleverly eluded arts of jealous wives to regain their lost property and punish their rivals; marvelled with growing horror at the number of authentic

anecdotes that followed hard upon one another after the subject was once broached, until I have sickened into disgust of my kind, and the Evil One has injected harrowing doubts of the existence of any right thing, anything pure, honorable, or of good report in this sin-defiled world.

The pastor's country-bred wife was unsophisticated. Mrs. Hayward said so, and she ought to know. She would have sneered more loftily than ever had she guessed that the tame, dull wife—the barn-yard fowl with whom Fate had yoked her eagle—crouching that night in the dim and dusty garret which was the only retreat available for her in all the house, sat in judgment upon the spirit union of her queenly self with the kingly bird, and pronounced it a sin against herself and HIM in whose name George and Annie Sherman had been pronounced ONE.

"She has *robbed* me!" said the narrow-minded woman, too spent by suffering to think of revenge; too true to her husband to meditate exposure. "I hope GOD will forgive her! Some day perhaps I may!"

Then she knelt by the trunk on which she had been sitting and asked the Hearer of the afflicted and needy to pardon her beloved and give her grace to be dumb as to her wrongs.

She did not die of her hurt. If wounds of this nature were mortal, the supply of widowers in the matrimonial market would divert the attention of the seekers after spiritual affinities from the pursuit of "charming" married men. George is Doctor Sherman now; a very pope in his principality of Aiken,

which has grown into a great city, and Mrs. Hayward is yet his prime minister. His wife still looks well to the minute economies of his household, and leaves church government, fancy bazaars and Sabbath-school festivals to an active corps of deaconesses. She has brought up her children in the fear of GOD, and to respect their father as a wise, good man. But they do not love him as they do their gray-haired mother, although they have never suspected the secret that blasted the sweetest of her earthly beliefs the night Bennie died.

Only once did the seal upon her lips bend as if ready to break. The temptation to indiscretion was a remark of Georgie's respecting an incongruous marriage between two of her young acquaintances.

"It is too bad to see such a man sacrificed to a silly doll," said the girl.

"My love," remonstrated the gentle mother, "since he wooed and wedded her of his own free will, is it not his duty, one from which nothing can absolve him, to submit himself like a man and a Christian to the consequences of his voluntary act?"

THE HEART OF JOHN STEWART.

THERE were no external marks of the hero about the subject of this story. He was tall, gaunt, and angular; he stooped slightly; his hair was iron-gray; his features, never handsome, were grave to severity. "Hard-featured," people called him who had never seen the rare, sudden smile that reminded those who remarked it of the break of the sunrise down and over the mountains. He was in his private office on a bright June morning, dressed in decent black, with a smooth white cravat tied after the fashion of forty years ago; the close-bodied dress coat he had never laid aside for the modern frock or sack worn by his associates during business hours, buttoned about his spare waist, and showing his shoulder-blades sharply, as he bent over his desk, reading the letters brought by the early mail.

The last opened was the longest, and bore the same signature as his own, with a "Jr." added flourishingly in the college-boy's boldest hand. The senior's eyes lingered upon this as they had not upon the subject-matter of the epistle.

"I suppose," he said, within himself, although his thin lips did not stir, "I suppose that would have been the name of my son if I had ever had one."

He docketed the rest of the letters, summoned a clerk to receive them with his instructions respecting the answers to be written, and, when again alone, sat in his revolving-chair, his head upon his hand, and eyes half-shut, his nephew's letter lying open before him. His nephew and heir, so decreed the world, ever ready to interest itself in rich men's affairs, and paid the boy due court accordingly. A nice boy, take him all-in-all; bright-faced and bright-tempered, who, as he had informed his uncle by mail, had taken the third honor in college, and was naturally desirous that his benefactor should attend the approaching Commencement. John Stewart's only and dead-brother's only child, whom he had maintained since his father's death, fifteen years back, although the widow had married a man in comfortable circumstances. The boy had behaved as well as could be expected from a lad "with expectations;" presuming less upon these than most persons of his age would have done; deporting himself respectfully, but not servilely, to the rich bachelor, and never vexing his moral, respectable soul with pathetic petitions for means to pay debts of honor, or pleading the unavoidable expenses of college life as a reason for the increase of the liberal allowance transmitted to him quarterly.

It was not anxiety about the actual John Stewart, Jr., which shaded the deep-set eyes with a sadder seriousness, drew more tightly the crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes, the wider, longer furrows about the mouth. It was the thought of that other to whom the name should have belonged, the boy who had never been, the fine youth who should have penned

that letter, or—for it did not seem to him that he could have suffered him out of his sight for long at a time—who should now be sitting opposite him, talking in the cheery, hearty way he liked to see in young men, although he had never had it himself; looking into his eyes with others as loving, and far more beautiful, dark gray, with long, black lashes, such as he used to meet so often at the church door, when Ursula Force sang in the choir of the Presbyterian church at the other end of town.

The church had been abandoned of its worshippers, and sold for a hat-factory twenty years since, and five years before that Ursula married the showy young clergyman, who turned all the girls' heads, and made those of their elders shake in doubting reproof, during the winter the old pastor lay dying of consumption. Faithful shepherd to the last, he still kept watch and ward over his flock, although heart and flesh were faint. All that concerned their welfare, temporal or spiritual, interested him, and John Stewart well understood the meaning of the long hand-pressure, the pitying look in the dim eyes, that were his salutation on the last night he sat up alone with him. He had taken his turn at watching, with half-a-dozen other young men in the church, for three months; learned many and lasting lessons from the lips which were so soon to be dumb. He had forgotten none of them, but he remembered that latest interview as distinctly as if it had taken place but yesterday. Not a word was spoken by either touching the weight that was crushing the spirit of one and sorely grieving that of the other, until the night was far spent. Then, the pastor laid

his trembling hand upon that which had just held the cup to his lips.

"My dear boy, GOD will help you bear it; I cannot. But I am praying for you all the time that you are breasting the deep waters."

Ursula Force had been to him almost as a daughter, and he had cordially approved of her engagement with John Stewart. She could hardly have done better—popular beauty though she was—than to put her happiness in the keeping of one whose sound principles and strong sense were fast earning for him a name and a place in the community, whose heart the pastor knew to be as true and pure as gold. The Reverend Norman Lansing had captivated her fancy and flattered her vanity, but the old clergyman doubted his ability or disposition to make her as happy as the less demonstrative wooer would have done.

"He loves himself too well," he had said to his wife. "The girl has made a mistake—a sad, sad mistake!"

He repeated this to John Stewart that night, in a sorrowful, absent-minded way, as if his eyes were peering down the vista of years to come. "She will live to repent it."

"Heaven forbid!" was the hoarse rejoinder.

He meant it then and always. She had flung him aside and the memories of years of single-hearted devotion, with as little apparent compunction as if she had been giving away a garment, useful once, but now out of fashion. The wrench had warped the man's nature, but the grain was too noble to allow him to harbor a thought of spite or revenge. The thing consecrated by his love was sacred for evermore.

His only intimate friend—the one confidant of this and every trial from their school-days up to manhood—died the following year, leaving a widow and an infant. John Stewart visited them, cared for them as if he had been in truth the lost husband's brother, until the young woman, her weeds still fresh, begged him, amid tears and blushes, to "discontinue his pointed attentions. They set people to talking, and—and—the truth was—she was engaged to marry Mr. Walsh, a *very* old friend, to whom she had been attached before her union with her lamented George, and he was disposed to be jealous about Mr. Stewart's visits. She was very grateful for all his goodness since dear George's death. She didn't know how she could have got along without his help—but people would talk!"

"Jealous of *me!*" said John Stewart, widening his sad eyes in blank amaze. "Why, Mrs. Judson, you, your new lover, and 'people' generally, should know that the fact that you were once George's wife would hedge you about from any thought or word of mine inconsistent with the respect I bear his memory. If he were living, you would not be more effectually protected from me."

But he obeyed her behest and "people's" scruples. From that day to this he had avoided the society of ladies. "Misogynist and mercantile machine," sneered flippant girls, not yet sufficiently world-wise to see in his wealth an ample cloak for his austerity and indifference to their charms. They thought him "an odious bear" and "a wooden man," and turned up their noses pertly at meeting him in the street. "A disap-

pointed being who deserves a better fate," and "Such a good chance thrown away," sighed manœuvring matrons and prudent spinsters. He had never looked upon Ursula Lansing's face, had not heard her name in a decade. He only knew that her husband was dead, and that she was childless.

Like himself. No son of hers, bearing another man's name, would ever strike him to the heart with her eyes. Was it the June sunshine or the little glass of mignonette set in the window by the Scotch porter —whom the clerks deemed half-witted, yet dared not tease because Mr. Stewart protected him—that brought her so vividly before him this morning? It certainly was not John Stewart Jr.'s letter lying unanswered upon the desk at his elbow.

By the way, it must be attended to. He shook himself as from sleep, and wrote to the lad less stiffly than was his custom, accepting his invitation for Commencement, and requesting him to engage a comfortable room on the second floor, with a sunny front, in the best hotel in the college town, for his accommodation. He wrote again, two days in advance of his departure, to notify the junior by what train to expect him, and found him dutifully awaiting him at the depot. The second-floor room had a sunny front, but the windows opened upon a piazza, and the fastidious bachelor closed his blinds upon noticing this, the more quickly and securely for seeing the flutter of a silk dress at a neighboring door as he leaned out to undo the fastening that held open a shutter.

The college-hall was thronged that night to hear the orations of the junior class. Mr. Stewart attended

to please his nephew. He was the boy's guest in some sense, and would sacrifice his personal ease for his gratification. From beginning to end of the exercises he sat with outward decorum and inward tortures, as destitute of sympathy with the enthusiasm of the students and the gay complaisance of the visitors as if he had been one of the moulded caryatides supporting the galleries. They were crowded with ladies—young, merry, fashionable, and intellectual—and a continual battery of bright eyes was bent upon the very gray-haired nabob in the dress coat and prim cravat, sitting immovable and unsmiling, in the centre aisle. But the most charming and the most watchful failed to detect a token of recognition of their existence. He was very callous or very shy, they decided, with various degrees of pique. Whoever would make *beaux yeux* at his fortune with any hope of success would have to select John, Jr., the presumptive legatee, as the means to an end.

"A little tired with the journey and the speeches, and the music made my head ache," confessed the uncle, politely suppressing a yawn, when John, Jr., had escorted him to his chamber. "And since there will be a good deal more of the same thing to-morrow, I must have a fair night's rest. That will set me up all right. I won't ask you in. It is late. Good-night! Thank you, but I seldom dream; that is a youthful habit," for the boy had wished him "sound slumbers and pleasant dreams."

The beams of the full moon streamed in between the movable slats of the window-blinds.

"I was sure I shut them up tight," thought John Stewart, and, before striking a light, crossed the room to exclude the white rays.

A waft of mignonette scent came to him from without. Some one was strolling up and down the piazza, singing very softly to herself an old-fashioned Scotch ballad, "Ye banks and braes." It was a rich, sweet voice, and the unseen occupant of the chamber stayed his hand that he might listen; his head bowed upon his chest, and eyes almost closed—his wonted attitude of reverie. Busy fingers, with talons of steel, seemed to tug and strain at his heart-strings, until he nearly swooned in the mingled anguish and pleasure of recollection. It was the song he used to love best, Ursula's favorite, as they rambled in the great garden behind her father's house, sauntering under the summer moon along the walk edged with mignonette. The mignonette that bloomed and blackened into dust in the last generation; the garden now built up with tall brick stores. Yet, in the blinding spasm of memory, he believed himself there still for one wild moment; felt Ursula's hand in his, her breath upon his cheek.

When he could look up and command his thoughts, a shadow lay athwart the moonlit floor. A lady, dressed in white, with a black lace shawl thrown over her head and shoulders, leaned on the piazza-railing, and gazed upward at the moon. She stood there still, without change of posture or gaze, five minutes later, when the blinds were unclosed and John Stewart stepped through the long French window.

"Ursula!"

A start of intensest surprise—a quick, impetuous movement toward him with both hands outstretched in rapturous welcome—then, a recoil as abrupt, a burying of the face in her hands as if overpowered by shame and tenderness—these told the whole story to the heart that had ached emptily for her for a quarter of a century.

"Ursula!" The long-locked tide surging up in a rush of passion, longing and pity. "Do we not stand in heart where we did in the blessed olden time—the dear lang syne when we loved and trusted one another? Oh, my darling, I have wanted you so long! so long! Come back to me!"

She made as though she would have fallen at his feet had he not upheld her. Her voice was tremulous with weeping.

"Noble! faithful! Can you forgive?" was all he could distinguish of the incoherent murmur.

"I forgave you always! I forget now," was the answer.

They talked together long and earnestly in the moonlight that mellowed the ravages of time in both.

"I did not know why I was too restless to think of sleep to-night," she said, clasping her hands upon his arm, in the well-remembered fashion that thrilled him through and through, raising the still lovely face and ever-matchless eyes to his view. "I could not divine what impelled me to walk here when I believed everybody else on this side of the house had retired; to muse of old times and lost happiness, and renew the vain repentance that has been my hourly companion

for years. I did not dream you were so near me. I understand it all now. O John, if I sinned against you, I also sacrificed my own peace of mind! I have suffered,—I can never tell you how much!"

"You never shall try to tell me—never, if I can help it, look back to the season we have passed apart from one another. We begin our new life—or join it on to the old so closely we shall never see the seam where it is welded—from this hour."

When John, Jr., called to breakfast with his uncle, he was directed to a private parlor he had not been instructed to engage. A handsome woman, in a flowing muslin *negligé* and a lace breakfast-cap, looking sweet and cool as a day-lily, in the shaded room, hot as was the July morning, was pouring out the millionaire's Souchong. John Stewart arose at his nephew's entrance, and shook hands with him, his face aglow with his rare smile.

"Mrs. Lansing, allow me to present my brother's son and my namesake. John, my boy, this lady has promised to become your aunt in season to listen to your graduation speech."

She kept her word, but the ceremony was performed at the house of the officiating clergyman, and so quietly that not three persons in the crowd packing every corner of the audience-hall to overflowing that scorching day, suspected the relation just formed between the pretty widow whose errand to the neighborhood was said by the gossips to be husband-catching, and the wealthy city merchant who chanced to get a seat in the same pew with her. They did not speak or look at one another, it was remembered afterward, al-

though both appeared to hearken with especial interest to poor, dazed John's oration.

Mr. and Mrs. John Stewart were off upon their bridal tour before the story of their renewed courtship and hasty wedding took wind. The honeymoon was spent by the time they settled themselves in their city home. The whirlpool of gossip that had dashed and roared into stormy foam at every mention of their names, seethed itself into meek whispers at Mr. Stewart's reappearance in his accustomed haunts, dignified and quiet as ever; as circumspect in demeanor and formal in attire, as vigilant and energetic in business. The most forwardly-inquisitive of his acquaintances durst not question him as to the causes that led to his change of life. The least gallant declared that his wife's face and manner were enough to turn the brain of a younger and more impressible man. That he had succumbed to their magic was a proof that old Jack Stewart had yet a morsel of heart hid away somewhere in his lean body; a thing nobody would have credited without indisputable evidence.

Mrs. Stewart was a remarkably well-preserved woman. In reality she was but six years younger than her husband. A stranger would have guessed sixteen, and then marvelled at her fresh complexion, dazzling teeth and sparkling eyes, at her lively flow of society chitchat, and the girlish music of her laugh. Her beauty and health had been her only capital all her life, and she had guarded both with scrupulous care, religiously avoiding disquieting cares and profound thought whenever she could. She came back to the city which was her girlhood's home without a visible

blush over the fickleness and perfidy that had preceded her departure from it as Norman Lansing's hastily-wooed bride; without a haunting memory, so far as lookers-on could discern, of the man who had lured her from her troth to her earlier lover, or regret that she had, in yielding to his suit, delayed her present good fortune. She had known privations as the spouse of an invalid clergyman—so ran the talk of the wise-acres—trials by poverty and the peevish humors of an arbitrary, sick and disappointed man. If she had ever laid these to heart, she hid their imprint successfully. She heartily enjoyed her altered position, the luxurious establishment of which she was mistress; the large circle of appreciative admirers collected about her by her husband's wealth; was unaffectedly grateful to him to whom she owed her prosperity.

Thus much Society saw. There could be no fault found with her demeanor to her mature bridegroom. It was respectful and affectionate without being foolishly fond. She was watchful of his comfort, quick in recognition of his attentions and many excellent qualities, and had the good taste to refrain from all public allusions to the circumstances of their old-time intimacy and their reunion. What common sense and the innate delicacy for which he seldom received credit did for him in the regulation of his behavior outside of his home, tact accomplished for her. Brilliant she had never been. The past had showed that she was neither deep-hearted nor stable. She was handsome and cunning, but never malicious or vicious—only thoroughly and altogether selfish in her amiable way.

The world is full of such people—those for whom the law and the prophets hang upon the proposition that self-preservation is the first law of nature. Having taken the best imaginable care of themselves, they are then willing—rather desirous, in fact—that the rest of mankind should have a comfortable time. It is disagreeable to see suffering and to listen to complaints. These are the women who spoil their children by indulgence, sooner than resist importunities and repress waywardness; who dupe instead of disputing with their husbands; whose god is their own ease, and whose watchword through life is, "Anything for peace!"—(to myself!)—the bracketed phrase being understood, not expressed. These are the women, too, for whose sweet sake men more often go mad, cut one another's throats and sacrifice their hopes for time and eternity—curse GOD, and die—than for a Lucretia, a Roland, a Sappho, or an Elizabeth Fry. This was the woman at whose shrine, broken and dusty, John Stewart had watched—a vestal—through the unlighted vigil of years; upon whom he now lavished the wealth of heart and purse without stint.

"It is ever so nice to be adored! You can't think!" lisped a pretty doll to me once, after describing the *incident* of her conquest of one of the noblest hearts that ever beat.

Ursula Stewart's tact saved her from such spoken folly, but this was her idea, all the same.

They had been married two months. No mortal ever knew how near to the widely-opened door of Paradise John Stewart had lived in those eight weeks; how abundantly his early dreams and the oft and

sternly repressed aspirations of riper manhood were fulfilled by them.

"I feel, half the time, like a dreaming man, who dreads the awakening," he said, one autumn morning, as he toyed with his tea-cup to prolong the breakfast talk with his wife. "As the children say about holidays, when they have actually come, 'It is too good to be true.'"

"It is very naughty and unkind in you to hint at the possibility of an awakening," retorted his *vis-à-vis*, with a charming pout, belied by the tender smile in the moist eyes.

"Unkind!" The word jarred upon his ear. He arose, came around to her and slipped his hand under her chin, brought the eyes he so tenderly loved to bear upon his. "I do not think I could ever be *that* to you, my darling. I know you could never deserve it."

"You *do* trust me a little—just a little, then?"

She shifted his hand to her lips, then rested her cheek, soft and rosy as a girl's, within his palm for a moment. He felt the warmth of the caress long after it was removed.

"If I did not, I should pray to die," he said, strongly, almost fiercely.

They had exchanged the parting salutation he never offered in the presence of a third person, and he was at the foot of the tall flight of marble steps which were the imposing entrance to his home, when her voice called him softly from the top.

"John, love!"

He glanced back, and noted, for the thousandth

time, how fair and winsome she was; how bewitching her smile; how like heaven her eyes.

"John, dear," bending forward with a mischievous laugh, and speaking almost in a whisper, "please don't wake up before you come back!"

He raised his hat in reply, as if he would have waved it in his triumphant security but for the thought that others might see the gesture; the sudden illumination she knew how to kindle, flashing over his countenance—and was gone.

John Stewart said a grave "Good-morning" to the clerks in the store and outer office; a kindly one to Scotch Jamie, who stood at the door of the inner, watching, with spaniel-like faithfulness, for his master's approach; passed into his private room, hung up his hat and folded his gloves in his methodical way; stooped, for a long second, to the glass of mignonette in the window and sat down to read the letters awaiting him. The first he opened was a bulky packet.

"MR. JOHN STEWART" (it began abruptly): "I have just returned to what was a dear home to me from a visit in the far West, to find the woman I have courted for five years has married you for your money. She was engaged, fast and firm, to me, as you will see from the letters I send with this—the last one written just the day before her marriage to you. She says in that that she loves me, me only, and is longing for the day that will give her into my arms. She calls me her 'darling husband.' And twenty-four hours afterward she sold herself to you. When you have read these letters give them to her and tell her to return mine; also the gifts I was constantly loading her with, like the blind fool I was. I don't mean to be insulting to you, but a man in my position can't pick his words. I am more sorry than angry with you; for a woman who has fooled one man as she has me, will fool another.

"Very respectfully,

"DAVID GUILD."

Mrs. Stewart was stepping into her carriage for a round of morning calls when Scotch Jamie touched his hat to her and handed a parcel. Seeing her husband's handwriting upon the cover and suspecting one of the surprise-gifts he had a habit of bestowing upon her, she nodded graciously to the bearer, with a pleasant "Thank you, Jamie!" and bade the coachman "Drive on," as she sank upon the yielding cushions. There were four seals upon the wrapping of the little bundle, stamped with John Stewart's monogram, and she broke them smilingly. Twelve letters dropped out into her lap. She knew them at a glance, and with a stifled cry of horror, clutched at a fresher, smoother envelope directed in Mr. Stewart's hand to his wife. David Guild's letter to him was folded up with a note to her.

Ursula, I have not read these, although bidden to do so. They are yours, not mine. If what this man says is true, you should this hour be his wife, instead of in my home. If he has spoken falsehood, you may give me the letters to examine when I come in to dinner, and I will answer him as he deserves. If you were indeed engaged to him when you married me, I desire no further discussion of the subject with him, or with you, now or ever. Words could not repair the wrong I have done him, or the wrong you have done me. I still hope that you can deny his accusation; shall trust you until I learn my error from your own lips.

JOHN STEWART.

For one moment the fortunate mistress of the finest mansion and carriage in the city thought of throwing herself beneath the wheels that were bearing her down the paved streets. For five minutes she revolved seriously the feasibility of writing twelve other letters, innocent, friendly epistles, to be slipped into the envelopes directed to Mr. David Guild, the well-to-do

land agent and speculator she had thought a very tolerable match until fate threw John Stewart at her feet. If she had been morally sure that her husband had spoken truth in asserting that he had not read the fatal—now abhorred—love-letters forwarded by the forsaken swain, she would have resorted to this subterfuge without a scruple. But it was difficult for a wily nature to comprehend an upright one. If John *had* inspected the contents of the packet even partially, her stratagem would work out her more grievous discomfiture.

"The straight path is always the safest," she uttered, virtuously, and ordered the carriage homeward.

When there, she locked herself in her room and proceeded to business. The returned letters were burned; then she made up a bundle of Mr. David Guild's presents, which were mostly flashy jewelry, unworthy of Mrs. Stewart's wearing and sent it off to him with a curt note, stating that she "had destroyed all *his* notes and letters prior to her marriage to the *man of her choice*, the only one she had ever *truly* loved." She gave the meddler to understand, furthermore, that "his impertinent and *most dishonorable* attempt to sow dissension between herself and her *honored* husband had been useless; had only cemented the confidence between them. She forgave him *freely*, however. She was too happy to cherish *resentment* against any living creature, least of all, one who had professed to be her *true* friend. She was disappointed and *grieved* by his unkindness, but she yet remained, with sincere wishes for his welfare and happiness, *his* friend, URSULA STEWART."

She was quite proud of the composition in reading it over. It was neat and magnanimous, and could do no harm should the wretch choose to send it to John. He *was* a wretch—a base, malicious villain, to cause her so much annoyance when she was so comfortable; a jagged gravel-stone in her bed of roses. She had not believed there were such cruel, wicked people in the world. Of course, the affair would blow over, but there would be a scene—apologies, and making-up, and all that—with John, and the sooner it was gone through with, the better. She dressed herself in her most becoming attire, called up her best looks, and went down to meet him when she heard his latch-key in the front door; was close beside him, while he hung his hat upon the rack, her lips held up for the usual welcome kiss. He did not offer it. Putting his hands behind him, he looked down steadfastly at her.

"Where are the letters?"

"I have burned them, John."

"I understand."

He turned on his heel and walked into the library; would have shut himself in, had she not followed.

"What is it, Ursula?" he asked, as she cast herself upon his neck.

"Don't speak so coldly to me, John. You break my heart," she sobbed.

He stood like a statue, the dry, nervous fingers interlocked behind his back, his features hard, his eyelids drooping.

"I was so poor! so lonely!" she went on. "He persecuted me with his attentions, and I thought you were lost to me forever."

"It was true, then, that when you married me you were solemnly pledged to him?" he said in a harsh voice, although his countenance did not change.

"But I never loved him," cried the wife, eagerly. "I knew that all the while."

"The more shame to you if that was so. I have heard enough."

He undid her arms, put them down to her side as if she had been a lay-figure, crossed the room, and picked up the evening paper. She understood, from that instant, that all efforts to bridge the gulf would be fruitless, and accepted the situation as she did all other inevitable things, with philosophical grace. She would no sooner have tortured her temper and sensibilities by combating his fixed purpose than she would have bruised her soft hands and arms by beating against a stone wall.

It is even a matter of doubt whether, as time wore on, she did not find their changed manner of life more to her taste than the former. She loved liberty and luxury, and both were hers. The allowance granted for her private wants was munificent, and she was not galled in the least by the circumstance that it was a stated sum paid at regular periods, instead of the constant outflow of a lover's bounty. "Mr. Stewart" had his apartments, and she hers. She liked society; he solitude. She was fond of amusements and gayety; he was wedded to his business. In short, he went his way and left her to hers. She had found it "nice" to be adored, but the present system had its advantages. It was not exactly a cross, when one had made up her mind to it, to be ever ready to receive and re-

turn caresses and love-words, but it did cost her some thought; was not, at all seasons, equally convenient. If forced to frank confession, she would have owned that she considered it sometimes a relief not to be called upon for demonstrations of affection. They were a bit of a bore when one was tired and dull, and, to tell the truth, a trifle absurd in people of their age. Courteous moderation was far more becoming. That her husband suffered more than herself from the rupture, in aught save in wounded pride, did not occur to her as a subject worthy of consideration. John was a sensible man and should have known better than to imagine that a fine woman like herself could have lived a widow ten years without admirers. He ought, if he could be persuaded to regard the matter in a proper light, to feel flattered, not incensed, that she threw the land speculator overboard for him. But men were apt to be jealous and unreasonable. She might thank her stars that there had been but one explosion. Some husbands would have growled about it incessantly.

They walked on, then, in their diverging paths; he growing daily more wealthy and more reserved, keener in driving equitable bargains, and more reticent in all pertaining to his personal affairs—"Freezing and drying up," his acquaintances repeated concerning him so often it grew into a by-word. She gained in popularity steadily, and lost none of her good looks with the revolving seasons that stole away the charms of many younger and more sensitive women, until, on the fifth anniversary of their wedding-day, she dropped dead before her toilet-glass while arranging her head-dress for a dinner-party at the house of a friend.

"Disease of the heart," reported the papers in their fulsome eulogies of the rich man's beautiful wife, and they but followed the lead of the doctors who had investigated the case. John Stewart may have doubted the correctness of the verdict, but he was as taciturn in his dry-eyed mourning as he had been during his wife's lifetime. The ways of the household continued the same. A housekeeper managed the servants, did the marketing, and looked after her employer's linen. His valet, a gray-haired Scotchman, kept his apartments in order. He had no intimate associates, although he gave freely and cheerfully to public and private charities. The needy never applied to him in vain, but he shunned verbal thanksgivings as he did women. Condolences and blandishments were alike ineffectual in drawing him from his citadel of dignified indifference to the sex who so pitied his loneliness and admired his fortune.

"Freezing and drying up!" echoed and re-echoed his best friends. He settled John, Jr., in business, and, when he married, made his wife a present of an elegant house. Upon the birth of John the third, he refused to attend the christening supper, but sent with his "regret" a cheque for a handsome amount, as a nest-egg for the boy's fortune. Yet he never entered his nephew's house or saw the child unless by accident.

"He cares for nothing but money," John complained to his spouse.

She, justly indignant at the obstinacy that kept her and hers out of their own, rejoined: "And means to live forever to enjoy it, I verily believe."

John Stewart was seventy-four years of age, when, slipping upon the upper step of the marble flight leading up to his door, on a sleety night, he struck his head with such force against the lower that he was taken up for dead. He breathed his last ten hours later. He never spoke after the hurt was received; only lay with closed eyes, the thin, gray hands folded upon the heart men said had frozen and dried up long, long ago, until death silenced the faint throbbing, and the John Stewart Jrs. could come into their kingdom.

His will was the town-talk for the conventional nine days. He had forgotten nobody who had ever showed him a kindness, it seemed, or who could be said to have the remotest claim upon his regard and wealth. All his clerks, including Scotch Jamie, had large legacies; the benevolent institutions of city and State were remembered, with dozens of his old pensioners, from whom, when he was alive, he would never hear a syllable of acknowledgment. Among the bequests which excited wondering comment were these two:—

"To David Guild, of ———, five thousand dollars, in memory of an unintentional wrong once done him."

And "To James Stewart Judson, only child of my very dear friend, George Judson, the sum of twenty thousand dollars."

"Why, George Judson died forty odd years ago!" cried the few who recollected that such a man had lived. "Who would have thought of remembering him all this while, except an eccentric Scotchman like Jack Stewart, who never parted with an idea when he had fairly taken it up?"

He had left no directions concerning his own tomb-

stone, and not one of the forty or fifty legatees felt himself called upon to give of his newly-gotten substance for the erection of the same. In the shadow of the stately shaft that adorns his wife's resting-place is a sunken mound, unmarked and untended, save when half-witted Jamie, now a white-haired man, walks all the way from town on Sabbath afternoons in the spring and summer to clip the tough grass and leave a bouquet of mignonette upon the breast of his old master.

"He had aye a kind word for me," says the silly old fellow, when rallied or questioned upon the subject of his devotion. "He had a wonderfu' gude heart, had yon. The Lord He kenned, and the angels, and meself. I doot if any ither body did."

His is the spoken testimony upon this point. I wish it were in my power to chronicle in a worthier manner, and upon a more enduring page, the history of the depth, the constancy, the stainless truth, the passion, the patience, and the pain of THE HEART of JOHN STEWART.

WALL-FLOWERS.

PART I.

THE weather was lovely, even for mid-April—a southern, not a northern April—full of promise of bloom and plenty in budding flowers and fruit trees, all aglow with pink, like sunset clouds, or white as from a new fall of snow. The March winds had piped their last and gone to sleep for twelve months to come, and the sunshine—still, bright, beneficent—lay upon the old town—lay nowhere more brightly and warmly than along a broad, quiet street lined with houses, that, ten years before, were neat as well as spacious and tenanted each by the owner thereof. This was the court end of the city, and the denizens of this particular block were some of the "best families" in the State. And in the palmy days of Richmond the seven-hilled, the phrase was not meaningless. In the sombre mansions over there on the sunny side of the way, there used to be brave merry-makings on holidays and family anniversaries of birth or marriage. Laces and jewels that had been heirlooms for generations were worn with quiet satisfaction the holders were too well-bred to exhibit. There was abundant, not ostentatious display of ancient silver stamped

with crests—tankards, goblets, and the like—and mighty mustering of courtly "gentlemen of the old school," with white neckcloths and shaven chins, smoothly-gallant speech and Chesterfieldian bows; and beautiful old ladies who were not ashamed to wear veritable caps of finest web over their own silvery hair, and whose silks were decorous in fashion and grave in hue, as befitted the autumn of life. The sons and daughters of these worthies bore well their part in the social world; ate savory meats, drank costly wines, danced, married, and were given in marriage, until the day that the war came and took the young men away, leaving the maidens to weep over the desolation of their people, the wasting of their pleasant places.

The fire which was the *finale* of the four years' tragedy had spared this aristocratic quarter, and none of the homesteads we speak of had passed into the hands of aliens. But a nameless shadow brooded upon roof-trees and thresholds, something more solemn than the decay which is the work of time alone. Two or three of the residents, keenly appreciative of the change, yet hardly comprehending in what it consisted, had tried to enliven the exterior of their dwellings by repainting the woodwork—window-frames, doors, etc.—but the appearance of the square was not more cheerful for their efforts. The other portions of the buildings thus treated looked yet more dingy, and their neighbors' domiciles more dreary.

The corner house had not been retouched since the fearful "three days" that enveloped the city in a shroud of pitchy smoke, hovering like a funereal ban-

ner over the deserted capital, leaving everywhere grimness in place of fairness, burning for beauty, ashes in hearts as upon hearthstones. The ornamental iron lamp-posts on each side of the stone steps—vestiges of a period antedating gas—were broken in some places and red with rust. The paint was scaling from the window-facings and the double-leaved front door in unsightly blotches, as if the building had broken out with leprosy. The inner shutters, once white, were now a dirty yellow, and in the attic story more than one yawning pane bespoke shiftlessness or abject poverty. Along the front of the first floor ran a balcony upon which opened the parlor windows. The flooring was rotten and discolored, gaping here and there into holes; but it was the most attractive feature of the exterior, filled, as it was from end to end with plants in pots—geraniums, orange-trees and citron aloes—the only ones in bloom being a fine show of wall-flowers, yellow and brown. The sun warmed them into brightness and fragrance, and the light breeze bore their breath into the room beyond the gay array.

"It is of no use!" a young girl was saying, standing in the middle of the floor, and looking despairingly about her. "Do what I will, the place is shabby and mean, even to my eyes which are used to it. How much more"— She threw her duster down petulantly, and sinking upon an ottoman surveyed the apartment with a curl of her pretty lip in which real sorrow blended with contempt.

Yet it had been a noble room in its day. There was melancholy grandeur in the lofty ceilings, defaced with dust and dampness, and massive cornices, from

which pieces had fallen, and never been replaced; in the oaken wainscot and curiously-carved mantels, the arched doorways, and the tarnished frames of the once august line of old portraits upon the wall. The floor was also of oak, stanch and tight, but uncovered, save for a faded rug in front of the fire-place. The furniture, heavy and dark with age, yet partook of the general air of decadence. The upholstery was frayed, and the originally warm tints had degenerated into one uniform shade of reddish brown. The windows were curtainless.

"If we had but white Holland shades," sighed the young lady, "or hanging baskets! But, dear me! where is the sense of talking and wishing? I might as well ask for Aladdin's lamp at once."

She tapped the bare floor with the toe of a neat foot, and looked heartily discontented, thoroughly discouraged.

Hers was a hard case, but in that section of our land one so common as to excite little remark. Dandled in the lap of luxury from her babyhood until she had passed her eighteenth year, she had known no heavier imposition upon mind and body than the usual course of study appointed to damsels of high degree, until the war put an end to her first season "out." Since then, to use her own phrase, she had not had "half a chance in life." Roswell Temple, her father, was a wealthy man in days gone by, a lawyer by profession, but had lived for years in elegant leisure upon the interest of his inherited and acquired property. Of his two sons, one had been slain at Manassas, the other at Sharpsburg. Peace found him impoverished, prematurely

aged, and so utterly without occupation that he was obliged to allow his eldest daughter, a widow, whose husband had also fallen in battle, to go out as a daily music-teacher; his wife and second daughter to take in sewing; while Bertha, the youngest, played maid-of-all-work, their only colored servant being cook and washerwoman. None of them grumbled in the hearing of the others or of their neighbors, and their reticence was the more praiseworthy, since they were not as a family what were called original secessionists. Mr. Temple had taken strong ground against disunion from the first, argued in support of his views in public and in private, and the elder daughters had gone so far as openly to sport Union colors, until the fall of Sumter. But Virginian blood runs deep; and the combat fairly inaugurated upon Virginian soil and the sons conscripted, the Temples had cast in their lot with the Confederacy, along with thousands of others as half-hearted in the cause. They had watched the progress of the army of which their "boys" made a part, with breathless interest; prayed for victory which meant their precious ones' safety; and mourned over disaster that stood almost as the synonym of the young soldiers' death or captivity. Mrs. Temple's carpets and silver went to help defray the cost of the later campaigns, and her husband considered that he could not hold back his means from the support of the government under which he lived.

Bertha, alone of her name, had been a thorough rebel from the beginning to the end of the needless strife. Her political teacher was a certain Sterling

Cabell, a law student at the university when hostilities began. He was twenty-three, Bertha nineteen, and there had existed between them a sort of unofficial engagement for more than a year. They exchanged letters every week, and for five months prior to the momentous fourteenth of April, the gentleman's epistles had preached in equal measure of secession and love. He had sprung to arms with the host of Southern braves, so many of whom lie beneath the sod on which they fought; and for a year, as Bertha stitched army shirts and wounded her fingers with stiff tent cloth, she was stimulated by the remembrance that she was a soldier's love and the hope of being a warrior's bride. But Cabell's expected promotion did not come. His patrician shoulders remained guiltless of straps, and his stout heart began to waver. Not with doubts of the justice of the cause but with misgivings as to the ultimate success of the right. He filled his letters with railings at iniquity and nepotism in high places, at unnecessary hardships laid upon the many and the privileges of the favored few; at general mismanagement and individual corruption, until Bertha felt the firm earth changing to a quicksand. At length, he obtained an indefinite leave of absence, upon the pretext of visiting relatives on the Eastern shore, and disappeared.

Bertha had a letter from him by post, announcing his departure for "other scenes than those that had worn out patience and hope," promising to keep her informed of his movements, and bidding her "trust in him, and wait." Then a year passed—a year that

made a woman of her, which would have broken the spirits and health of a weaker girl, for she heard not one word to indicate the direction of his flight, if he had flown—only cruel, and what she felt were slanderous rumors of defection and desertion. Then a blockade-runner brought her a full, she said a satisfactory explanation under his own hand. He had been misused, depreciated, kept down, in the Confederate army; and, in a moment of desperation, had accepted an invitation from his maternal uncle, an affluent New York citizen, to visit him. He intended then honestly to return to the South as soon as bodily and mental vigor was restored by rest, for he had been brutally overwrought in the service. Nor had he changed his mind. Should the strife be prolonged he would not be recreant to the holy cause.

"Once a Virginian, always a Virginian!" he wrote. "Wherever I may be, in heart and spirit I am ever with you and in my beloved State. In the hope that I may be granted an opportunity of serving her abroad, I have come to England. My uncle, a bachelor and a man of wealth, taste, and education, is my travelling-companion. He is as kind to me as if he were my father; but not this, nor any other consideration, will weigh with me one instant when the coveted moment shall arrive that opens the way to my home, to glory, and to you. I have a presentiment that the time is not far distant. Watch for me!"

The letter came to Bertha just after the news that Kidder, her second brother, had been left dead in Maryland.

"Sterling, at least, is out of reach of the bullets,"

she said, kissing the lifeless sheet. "What is glory compared with life?"

A question echoed by thousands of other women's hearts, however gallantly their owners have borne up to sustain the courage, to applaud the valor of lovers, husbands, and sons.

Hopefulness was Nature's best endowment to her—a high, buoyant spirit, that seldom bowed, and that not for long. She put Sterling's letter away with her precious hid treasure, and waited. Another billet—a mere flag-of-truce note, dated Alexandria, Egypt, and sent under cover to a friend in New York—had reached her just before the conclusion of the four years' struggle. He was then on his way to the Holy Land and did not expect to return for many months. The war had been over a whole year, now, and the card on the centre-table behind her was the only communication she had received meanwhile from him, who was never out of her true heart for an hour. A colored waiter from the Spottswood Hotel had brought it that morning.

DEAR MRS. TEMPLE: With your permission, my uncle, Mr. Dent, and myself will do ourselves the pleasure of calling upon you to-day at one o'clock P.M. Sincerely,

STERLING CABELL.

"How queer and formal!" said Ellen Temple. "To mamma, too! and not a word about us!" carefully refraining from looking at Bertha.

"I do not quite comprehend it, my dear," remarked Mrs. Temple, re-reading the brief lines. "I should have thought Sterling would feel sufficiently at home to come at once to us as he used to."

"Times have altered, mother dear," Bertha responded, gayly, dancing off with the priceless bit of pasteboard in her hand, to the music of her own heart-beats. "He is not sure what reception he will meet, yet does not want to take us by surprise," she said to herself, while she swept and dusted. "If he came alone, he would have to talk to all; so he brings his uncle."

"Bertha!" Mrs. Temple appeared at the door. "Your friends will dine with us, of course?"

"Not 'of course,' ma'am; but it will be only polite to invite them, I suppose," her countenance falling perceptibly. "In that case I shall go to market. Father's ideas are too lordly."

"What shall we have?" The Temples rarely had dinner company now, but the lady's hospitable instincts were ready as ever. "Soup, of course. Then for fish, boiled or baked shad, with egg-sauce. Poultry is out of season, but lamb is in."

Bertha shook her prudent head. "But frightfully dear. Beefsteak or mutton-chop would suit our purse much better."

"For a gentleman's dinner, my love?"

"Poor little mother! It is too bad I can't afford to please you in this respect. But a plain family dinner is all we can offer. We will give them a hearty welcome to compensate for deficiencies. For dessert, I will have whipped custards and sponge-cake, then black coffee. The wine, pastry, olives, and sauces they must do without for this once. I dare say they have dined less sumptuously in an Arab tent, or among the Laplanders, upon sour camel's milk and train oil."

"Sterling will be shocked at finding everything so changed," murmured Mrs. Temple, meekly retreating.

As I have said, audible repining was tacitly forbidden by the family policy, as were references to their former estate. They bore their altered fortunes with equanimity that would have excited amazement and admiration had this not also been the habit of most of their neighbors. They were conquered. That was an accepted fact which fretting would not alter. They must live by some means, and whatever handle came uppermost was laid hold of, provided it was an honest livelihood they hoped to earn by using it. Necessity made labor honorable. But her mother's sigh sank cuttingly into Bertha's heart. She had not thought how these things would strike her lover. She must remember that the experiences which had modified her views upon certain subjects, had not been his—that he would hardly know her home for the same he used to admire. Would her welcome blind him to the dullness and poverty of her surroundings? Would he not miss the appliances of wealth and refinement he had ever connected in thought with her?

"As if he didn't know why our circumstances are altered!" she said, aloud and rebukingly. "When he thinks of this, my purple calico will be a regal robe."

Nevertheless, she set about arranging the furniture to the best advantage, stepping like a young princess, to and fro, and carolling lightly—

> "Banish, O maiden, thy fears of to-morrow,
> Dash from thy cheek, love, the tear-drop of sorrow;
> Pleasure flies swiftly and sweetly away,
> Tears for to-morrow, but kisses to-day!"

she warbled, plying the feather duster the while, wheeling straight-backed chairs out of line with the wall, setting the sofas cornerwise, polishing the tall jars on the ends of the mantel, getting down on her knees to brush the dust from the carved legs of the piano, and, as she passed, dropping her fingers upon the keys in a snatched accompaniment to the roundelay. It was at this moment that a gentleman passing on the sidewalk turned his head at the sound of the music and saw her.

The sun streamed through an unshuttered side window, and glorified her as she stood against the background of a dark portrait—the full-length presentment of some remote ancestor—her light chestnut hair rippling back from her white forehead. "Fluffy," she called it, because it would never lie smooth. It was an aureola, now, every rebellious strand a thread of light. Her eyes were downcast, her cheeks flushed, and lips smiling apart with the words of her song—

"Tears for to-morrow, but kisses to-day!"

She moved away to a dusty old cabinet, still singing, and the spectator, recovering himself with a start, glanced at the upper windows as one nervous of observation, and walked on.

"Kisses to-day! kisses to-day!" The birds twittered it in the boughs above his head; the distant hum of the river pulsed an accompaniment to the tune he played with his fingers upon the cane he carried.

"A pure, rich soprano voice, and a striking-looking

girl!" he thought, as a plausible solution of the enchantment. "This was doubtless a handsome street in former days. The double row of shade-trees must be very pleasant in summer. Northern capital is all that is needed to make the city the joy of the whole South, as it is beautiful for situation. It is time I was making my way back to the hotel. The young people have returned from their ride by this. 'Kisses to-day! kisses to-day!'" He broke off with a half laugh as he detected himself humming air and words. "It must be because the rest of the world is so full of life and sunshine that I am betrayed into boyish lightness!"

There could not be a more attractive route to the lower part of the city than the way by which he had come, and this of necessity led him past the balcony where were the wall-flowers. He could smell them from the street, the front yard being a mere strip, and, that he might inhale the delicious odor his pace lagged, and he looked appreciatively toward the nodding, smiling ranks.

She was busy still, mounted on an ottoman, dusting the tinkling pendants of the old-fashioned chandelier, her round arms exposed by the pinned-up sleeves of the lilac print that fitted perfectly to the taper waist and beautifully-molded bust; her face upturned and earnest. But she was not singing. Perhaps she would break out again, as a bird trills after flight, when she stepped back to the floor. The fragment he had caught would haunt him until he heard the rest of the air—could fit the stray tones together in his mind. It was disagreeable to have a "singing in one's head."

He stepped to the curb-stone, gazed intently up, then down the street, and feigned to wait for some one, striking idly with his cane at a knot of dandelions on the edge of the gutter. The expected comrade did not appear, although he lingered two, three minutes, nor did the songster resume her strain. When convinced that waiting was vain, he pursued his promenade, first casting a final glance over and through the wall-flower hedge. The mute musician sat on the ottoman where she had stood just now, her palms pressed hard together in pain or vexation, her eyes on the floor—the picture of mutinous grief—in reverie, he was sure, for he could see that she was alone.

"Not *all* the tears for to-morrow, I am afraid," said the unseen spectator of the tableau, and went on his way. "I am the richer by a picture for the delay, if I did not learn my song."

Bertha did not weep. She had shed all her tears during the war, she was wont to say. It was certain she had learned rare lessons in that terrible discipline of life. Crying would not renovate the tattered cushions or recarpet the floor, or replenish the wine-vault, any more than it would call back Maury and Kidder from their bloody graves. Repining eased neither the greater nor lighter burdens laid upon the reduced family. There was no harm in wishing that she could give Sterling a better dinner, and please his fastidious eye in the matter of furniture, or offer him a ride behind such horses as her father once kept. There was folly in making of these inconveniences a sorrow.

"I thought the Temples had too much right pride to know false shame!" she railed at her passing weak-

ness. "*And* that I had too much common sense to be wasting time in useless regrets and unwarrantable forebodings, when I have to go to market and then make my custards and cake."

She went from the kitchen to the dining-room and laid the table there before she dressed. The napery was fine and white, and the necessary articles of silverware bore the unmistakable stamp of aristocratic antiquity. But the old China and cut-glass being fragile, were not a perfect set, and the additions made to it were of vastly inferior quality.

"When I have put flowers on the napkins and a bouquet in the center of the table where the *épergne* ought to be, it will be passable," she reflected. "If I had even small beer to pour into the wineglasses, I would set them on. They give an air to a dinner nothing else can. I am afraid my hankering after the pomps and vanities is incurable."

And to show how sore was the craving she sang all the way up-stairs—

> "Hear me, then, dearest, thy doubts gently chiding,
> Know'st thou not true love is ever confiding!
> Why snatch from Cupid his bandage away?
> Love knows no morrow—then kiss me to-day,
> Tears for to-morrow, but kisses to-day!"

Her sisters were in the dressing-room common to the three. Mrs. Venable the elder was eating a light luncheon before setting out upon her afternoon round of music-lessons. Ellen was sewing. They exchanged a meaning but affectionate smile, as the round, young voice preceded the singer along the echoing hall, rebounding clearly from the uncarpeted stairs and floor.

They were too lady-like to banter the happy girl, but there was sympathy with her gladness in the tones and glances that met her.

"What will you wear, dear?" queried Ellen, with an admiring look at the wealth of wavy hair her sister shook loose upon her shoulders.

"I mean to force the season slightly and adorn myself in spotless white," rejoined Bertha, striving vainly to temper her sunshiny face into a pretence of soberness befitting the occasion. "Fortunately, I had my white brilliante done up last week, *c'est à dire*, I ironed it with my own fair hands. This summer glory puts winter clothing to shame."

"I wish one of you girls would make over my gray silk and wear it," said the youthful widow, with an involuntary sigh. "I shall never want it again."

"Ellen must have it, then," said Bertha. "She looks like one who was born to walk in silk attire. Wash dresses suit my shepherdess style—cambrics, lawns, and the like cheap flimsiness."

"In that case put on my lawn, the one with the black spots. It will set off your complexion better than that opaque white," urged Ellen.

Bertha's wilful head was positive. "I'll be Bertha, or I'll be nobody! I am quite aware, my dear girls, that I shall not be stylish—possibly not handsome, in my year-old brilliante, but it is mine, and on it goes!"

She was Bertha, and nobody else, but she *was* handsome when she tripped down to the visitors at the appointed time. She could not be coy and stiffly proper when she had once heard Sterling ask if the ladies were at home, but followed closely upon the

heels of the servant who admitted them. She had not seen him in three years.

Seen in the semi-obscurity of the shaded hall and framed by the arched doorway, with her crown of bright hair, a bunch of purple pansies nestling in it, a cluster of wall-flowers and geranium-leaves in her brooch, and the simple white dress bound at the waist with a lilac ribbon; with her smiling mouth and large, eager eyes, she was a picture that seized the fancy of one of the inmates of the parlor; perhaps surprised the other into a warmer greeting than expediency would have dictated.

"Bertha!" said the voice she remembered so truly, the intonations malicious people deemed affectedly languid—which she thought peculiarly winning in their quiet, gentle manliness; and her hand lay in a close pressure that could only mean fondness. "Allow me to present my uncle Mr. Dent."

The reminder of the presence of a third person was not amiss, for there was mist in the wistful eyes, and her lips could not frame the welcome her heart would have given. In bowing to the uncle, her sight returned and her hysterical tendency abated. This was not the time or place for loverly reminiscences or raptures. She must content herself with the consciousness that he was here again and hers. It was Sterling—the impassioned wooer of her girlhood, the beloved of these long years of waiting—who stood before her. That is, those were Sterling's eyes and he spoke with Sterling's voice. But the foreign cut of his beard, his fashionable attire—only one remove from dandyism in such items as jewelled studs and the ring on his little

finger, the patent-leather boots and exquisite cravat—the gravely courteous air with which he turned from her to his companion, these were strange and puzzling. Was it because he had been away so long, or were they mannerisms engrafted upon the original stock—dainty exotics with which he had nothing to do? She was not chilled. That would have been childishly unreasonable, since she had not expected a tender greeting in the circumstances. But her face was less sunny as she took her seat. It chanced to be nearer the uncle than the nephew, and she was prompt in accosting him to avoid a pause she knew would be filled for her, with memories dangerous to composure.

"Have you ever been in our city before, Mr. Dent?"

It was trite and flat, but she must say something, and ideas did not rally readily. There was less risk in meeting the stranger's eyes than those she fancied were seeking to read hers. Very expressive eyes they were which she met, and met full, with a sort of electric start as she spoke. Not remarkably fine in color or shape, but honest and penetrating, and alive with interest in herself she could not mistake, or interpret to her satisfaction, unless Sterling had told him all about her. She blushed at the thought, and, oddly enough, a responsive tinge glowed in Mr. Dent's complexion.

"Once—many years since," he answered.

"Before 'Ichabod' was written upon our homes?" she finished the sentence for him. Then, turning to Sterling with a mournful smile, "You would hardly have known it, would you?"

"Oh, yes! the general features of the place are the same, although some of the ancient landmarks have been somewhat unceremoniously removed. The conflagration was the parting *feu de joie* of my ancient comrades, I have been told. A salute with which the citizens could have dispensed."

He spoke with easy grace, but Bertha bit her lip at the flippant reply. It is long after a wound has skinned over before one can bear the touch of a careless hand. Did he know that he jested at her father's ruin?

Mr. Dent took up the word. "Fortunately, nothing can mar the beauty of your natural situation. Richmond must ever sit a queen while her hills stand and the river flows at their base."

"Zenobia's robes need cleansing badly," laughed Cabell. "I have been rubbing my eyes all the morning, and muttering the old couplet—

> "The streets are narrow and the buildings mean.
> Did I, or Fancy, leave them broad and clean?"

"We have passed through many and grievous storms since you left us." The sensitive mouth quivered until Mr. Dent compassionately looked another way. Then Bertha arose abruptly. "If you will excuse me, I will tell my mother that you are here."

"As I feared, this is an awkward business," said the younger man, *sotto voce*, and stifling a yawn. "And if embarrassing to me, how much more it must be to them—this meeting in such altered circumstances. You cannot imagine what a fine old house this used to be and how they lived. It gives me the blues to

think of it. I almost wish I had spared them the trial—left town without calling."

This, lying lazily back on the sofa, where he used to sit with Bertha in those other days. The uncle tapped his boot thoughtfully with his cane and said nothing.

"She is a pretty girl still, though, and she would be stylish if she were fashionably dressed. Don't you think so, sir?"

"Yes!" drily or indifferently.

Mrs. Temple's entrance ended the *tête-à-tête*. A lovely old lady in mourning that would have been shabby on nine women out of ten. If she had worn linsey woolsey she would have dignified it into attire becoming a gentlewoman.

"My dear Sterling!" she said, affectionately. "We are rejoiced to see you again after this long sad separation. And you are welcome, sir!" putting her small hand into Mr. Dent's.

He bent the lower over it, for feeling how toil-hardened was the palm, for seeing the needle pricks on the forefinger of the left. Bertha brought in Ellen before their mother was seated, and the conversation became general. There was a little clever manœuvring on the part of the parent and second daughter to seat the whilome lovers together, but it was abetted by neither of the interested parties, and failed ignominiously. Bertha resumed her place near Mr. Dent and began to talk—not fast, but steadily—only her restless eyes and varying color testifying to excitement of any description. In no wise discomfitted by the fact that she did not cast a glance in his direction, Mr. Cabell

played the agreeable to the other ladies in the most approved manner of the *nil admirari* school.

He was rather above the medium height, with trim hands and feet; dark blue eyes, a straight, longish nose, small mouth, and drooping moustache. His whiskers were of the English mutton-leg pattern, and his brown hair was parted down the back of his head. His voice, a good tenor in singing, was somewhat effeminate in conversation. "A love of a man!" cried enthusiastic and musical misses. "His manners are perfect!" pronounced the mammas. And when bigger men with bass voices hinted that he "did well enough" physically and mentally—"what there was of him"—rosy lips hissed, indignant orbs—gray, black, and blue—flashed the traducers into silence.

Such as he was, he had been Bertha Temple's demi-god for six years and the habit of worship was not to be unlearned in an hour. If this had been possible the sudden death of love would have been agony exceeding even that of the suffocating heartache she was enduring without flinching from her attitude of civil attention to her stranger guest. Ellen wondered silently if her sister were really as much interested as she seemed to be in what Sterling's uncle was saying, and guessed, in her shrewd soul, that Bertha would have lent less diligent heed had not her fellow colloquist been her lover's near relative. They did not look at all alike. Mr. Dent was tall and dark, with hazel eyes, a square chin, and a mouth that was very grave and firm when at rest, very pleasant when he smiled. His hair and whiskers had a few gray hairs scattered through them, but he was very unlike

Bertha's preconceived ideal of the bachelor guardian of her errant knight. He talked well and with courtesy as simple as his nephew's was elaborate. The latter never forgot himself and the probable effect his charms were producing. His elder seemed unconscious that he had any especial claim upon the attention and regard of the ladies with whom he conversed. Bertha did not make these observations in the course of this visit. A galvanized manikin would have served her purpose as well as he did. She must talk at something that could reply at decent intervals, steady her gaze upon a human face instead of staring into vacancy, lest lookers-on should suspect the rack upon which she was stretched.

Her eyes darkened several times when Sterling's well-modulated laugh reached her ears, and when, at the end of three-quarters of an hour, he straightened his graceful form to the full measure of his manly stature, and reminded his senior, deferentially, as became his youth and wardship, that they were to say "farewell" to a party of fellow-tourists who expected to take a Petersburg train at three o'clock, Bertha turned majestically upon him, in rising with the rest, and, for the first time in her life, looked down upon him. Not that she was physically taller, but the calm disdain of brow and lip, the superb hauteur of the head and figure dwarfed him by comparison. He did not feel it. The Colossus of Rhodes could not have frowned him into a pigmy in his own estimation; but from their different points of view, the Temples thought how insignificant he appeared, and Mr. Dent said, within his heart, that this plainly-clad girl

was an empress in her own right in beauty and breeding.

"We had hoped you would dine with us," said Mrs. Temple, who could not forget how she had loved the boy who had been as free to come and go in her house as her own sons. "We old-fashioned people are not satisfied with these brief calls. Come back to us when you have seen your friends off. Mr. Temple will be bitterly disappointed if you do not. We dine at four."

Bertha was silent, and her face a blank page. At heart, she wished that all this was over. Having learned from Mr. Dent that he and his nephew had been two days in the city already, she could not believe that Sterling would be anxious to comply with her mother's request. Two days, and this was his first call!

"Mr. Dent shall decide!" said Sterling, blandly. "Do you think, sir, that the Edwardses will expect to see us at the *table d'hôte* as usual? Would it be quite polite to desert them after travelling with them for so long? And we have engaged a carriage for Hollywood at five."

"You can be released at that time." Mrs. Temple would not see Bertha's deprecatory gesture. "The day of six and eight course dinners is among the things that were with us. But we shall be delighted if you will partake of our family fare."

"We accept your invitation gratefully, madam." The frank phrase and clear voice were the uncle's. "Provided—unless it be ungracious to couple with a proviso consent that brings us pleasure—provided

the young ladies will afterward accompany us in our ride."

Before separating in the evening on their return from the excursion to the cemetery other plans, rides, and walks were proposed, most of them by Mr. Dent, whose desire to know Richmond and its environs well was explained by his nephew aside to Ellen Temple, as they stood together on the highest hill of Hollywood overlooking the river and town.

"My uncle has fallen in love with your city," he said, patronizingly. "I am somewhat surprised at his open admiration of climate and situation, for he has been a great traveller. He is a wealthy banker, as you doubtless know, and one of the objects of his visit here is to invest in land in the surrounding country and in city property, which, we hear, is very low."

"So like a Yankee!" said quick-tempered Ellen, that night, in repeating this to her eldest sister. "I felt like telling him so, then and there. It sickens me to see the swarm of tourists scrambling over and among our ruins. One text is continually in my mind when I notice how curious they are in prying into our poverty and wretchedness: 'Nay, but to spy out the nakedness of the land ye are come.' I could not help repeating it to Sterling Cabell."

"What did he say?" Mrs. Venable smiled, evidently pleased at the ready reply, whatever may have been her opinion as to her sister's indiscretion.

"He only laughed in a quiet, gentlemanly way. I believe he thought I was jesting. Bertha!"

"Well?" Bertha sat in the wide window-seat, her

face toward the street, and answered without looking around.

"Aren't you going to bed to-night?"

"It is too warm and close to sleep."

"What are you doing there?"

"Listening to the river and enjoying the fragrance of the wall-flowers in the balcony," she returned, in feigned lightness.

"'Music, moonlight, love, and flowers,'"

hummed Ellen, as she brushed out her hair.

"Precisely!" with a short laugh.

The others were asleep before long, and she could muse uninterrupted; hear in the song of the river the story of the days whose "tender grace" she had believed would be a joy forever; think of him, whose favorite flower she had cultivated during all these years of hoping and waiting. He loved it, he said, because it was like her, brave, sweet, and bright; wearing her fairest smile, shedding her choicest virtues in her home. She had worn it to-day for that reason, and no other. She had not put flowers in her hair and dress before since her brothers died—the noble brothers whose names he had not mentioned close as was the friendship between the three. And pansies, because he used to declare that their purple velvet was like her eyes when she was earnest in speech, or deep in thought. How often she had pushed his hand laughingly away when he held one of the richest and darkest to her face, that he might see how nearly it matched her irids! He remembered nothing of this.

They had met and looked in each other's faces, and talked like mere acquaintances. The affection that had leaped up, a laughing, eager fountain, to hail his coming, had fallen back from a rock.

"And I did believe in him, as he bade me, did hope to find him the same!" moaned the unhappy child, rocking herself back and forth like one in mortal pain. "Oh, my lost faith! my beautiful dead dream!"

PART II.

"THE Torreys are in Charleston, sir," remarked Sterling Cabell to his uncle one morning as they examined their early mail together in the room of the latter.

"Ah!" interestedly. "They went by sea, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, and had a delightful passage, arriving there last Wednesday."

"This is—what? Saturday, isn't it?"

Cabell smiled. "It is. Your ten days in Richmond have been as profitably as pleasantly spent, if Young speaks truly respecting the note we take of time."

"The Torreys are well, I hope?" seeming not to have heard his nephew's observation.

"Quite well, and anxious that we should join them in Charleston or Mobile. The season is advancing so rapidly they fear to protract their tour many more days."

Mr. Dent did not reply. He was replenishing with fresh water a wineglass on the mantel, which held a spray of wall-flower and one of citron-aloes he had begged from Bertha Temple the evening before. When it was full he stopped to inhale the odor with marked gratification.

"The combination of perfumes is singularly delight-

ful," said he, musingly, rather to himself than his companion. "Miss Ellen was explaining to me, last night, the art of arranging bouquets with reference to fragrance, instead of color. Her sister is proficient in it, she says. She divides perfumes into two classes—the active and passive. The wall-flower is a sample of the last—the citron-aloes of the more lively and spicy kind. The idea was new and attractive to me."

A shade of vexation crossed Cabell's face. But he held his tongue in with the bit of expediency and the bridle of self-interest. His demeanor to the rich bachelor was a model to penniless and enterprising expectants—never sycophantic, yet never inconsiderately frank.

"What answer had I better return?" he ventured, presently, after allowing a reasonable time for the indulgence of his relative's floral enthusiasm.

"To the Torreys, do you mean?" Mr. Dent set down the tiny vase, and awoke. "It would be pleasant to continue our tour in company—but I really do not see how I can leave Richmond yet. I am in treaty, through Mr. Temple, for that property on Main Street, and I promised moreover to ride up to Sydney, and out upon the Grove Road with him, Monday, to 'prospect' a little. He thinks the city is destined to grow fastest in that direction; and, from what I have seen, I am disposed to believe it. If I had a hundred thousand dollars to invest in land tomorrow, I could hardly do better than to lay it all out here. The returns would not be immediate, but they would be sure. The day is coming when this will be one of the chief manufacturing cities in the

Union. And as a place of residence its attractions are not to be surpassed."

Sterling, bored and impatient, only dared express his sensations by rustling the open letter which was in a lady's hand. He had no objection to his uncle's investing in anything that would pay well in a few years, by the time he—the heir apparent—should come to his own; but he was not especially interested in the details of these transactions; had little taste for business, although a partner in the firm of Dent & Co.

"I do not doubt the correctness of your views, sir," he replied. "And Mr. Temple is a safe guide in such speculations here. Shall I set the middle of the week, then, as the time of our departure—if the Torreys can wait for us so long? Or, had we better abandon the idea of reunion entirely?"

Something in the cadence of his inquiry caught Mr. Dent's ear. He looked around quickly—an expression of paternal kindness and lively sympathy in eye and half-smile.

"Abandon it? By no means, my boy! I have been selfish in keeping you in close attendance until now. If I have appeared to forget that others had claims upon you, forgive me. I cannot travel again immediately as you perceive. But I am comfortable and content in this place. I have a capital hotel, and acquaintances and business to hinder the time from hanging upon my hands. You must go on—say by Monday morning's train, and join our friends. I will meet you when and where I can—probably in New Orleans. I have already seen most of the gulf cities. They have not changed much since the war, I imagine."

Sterling demurred very handsomely, evincing just enough pleasure at the proposal to confirm the other in his resolution to carry it out.

"Give me credit for a moderate share of penetration," he said, with the same kindly gleam of humor. "If I have not spoken to you openly of my surmises, it has not been because I did not like the signs of the times; that I have not felicitated myself sincerely upon the anticipation of having the fair Imogen as a niece-in-law. I took it for granted that I should be taken into your counsels when the right time came."

"You are very good, sir." Sterling was pleased in a rational way, but not fluttered to nervousness by the discussion of the delicate topic. "I have not told you, in so many words, what were my intentions and my hopes, because I had not the lady's sanction to such a procedure until this morning. This letter—the answer to one which met her in Charleston—empowers me to announce our engagement to you and bespeak a welcome for her."

"Engagement! I was hardly prepared to hear that everything was already settled. But I am heartily glad!" shaking his nephew by both hands. "You are a wise man—a very wise and happy man to marry in your youth. Not that the heart must of necessity grow old as the frost falls upon the hair, but think of the fifteen or twenty years of bliss one loses by waiting until he is my age before he has a home of his own. The probability is then fearfully against his ever having one."

"You speak as if you were a septuagenarian, in-

stead of being in the hey-day of health and life," said the courtier. "Your heart is greener than mine, to-day. If I were a woman, I would rather have the love of mature years—the esteem of sound judgment than the idle fancy of adolescence. The difference is that between ripened and green fruit. The memory of my boyish love sets my teeth on edge. I wonder, sometimes, if the partner in the pretty folly feels as heartily ashamed of it as I do?"

He laughed—the well-bred token of amusement that always chilled Bertha with the idea that a current of derision underran the ripple.

"You have arrived at years of discretion now, at any rate—have proved the soundness of your judgment by deeds, not words," responded Mr. Dent. "But do not despise your youth. Maturity may be green and vigorous, but never dewy. Should I be disposed to marry, I should not like to mate with a middle-aged spinster, still less with a widow. And a young girl would prefer a swain nearer twenty than forty."

"*Cela dépend*," said Cabell flatteringly. "We youngsters would fare badly were you to take the field against us. Perhaps, if the truth were known, I am a debtor to your forbearance. Imogen has a hearty and affectionate appreciation of your merits."

This lightly, yet with no touch of irony.

"We visit the battle-grounds at the Chickahominy, to-day," was Mr. Dent's next observation, after a survey of his pocket-tablets. "Mrs. Venable takes Miss Ellen's place. She cannot go conveniently on any day but Saturday, on account of her music scholars."

"Why not Bertha's place, instead of Ellen's?"

interrogated Cabell, involuntarily, with a slight frown.

"The arrangement is their own," stiffly. In a moment he added, as if ashamed of the trifling asperity, "I gave the invitation to Miss Bertha for herself and sister. She doubtless did not feel at liberty to transfer it. We leave at ten. I am sorry this is the last excursion you will make with us. The past week has been a genuine holiday with me. I shall always be grateful to you for introducing me to these your friends, and now mine."

He hesitated, as if about to say more, but the action was unnoticed by Cabell who had already commenced a letter to his betrothed.

An elegant epistle it was—gossipy, with a piquant flavor of satirical mention of people and things; a neat phrase of affection dovetailed in here and there. It commenced: "My dearest Imogen," and concluded with, "Yours faithfully, Sterling Cabell."

At the same hour, Bertha was locked within her chamber, bent upon a deed she had meditated from the mid-April day that had opened all her wall-flowers and brought the cards of uncle and nephew to her door. A carved chest of dark wood lined with velvet—the legacy of an old relic-loving aunt—was open upon the floor, and beside it a heap of letters and notes, a photograph of a beardless youth with a Byronic collar, and of the same person fiercely moustachioed and wearing the uniform of the C. S. A.—both *cartes*, after the manner of their kind, shot with yellow streaks, an incurable jaundice very unbecoming to the pictured face. There were dried flowers in profusion; one bouquet of

wall-flowers and moss-rosebuds tied with white ribbon, and another of pressed pansies glued upon a card with an illuminated border; a pearl and gold paper-cutter, and divers books, chiefly poetry, with nameless trifles, presented by Sterling—the usual assortment to be found in such collections.

"Of no value except to the owner." Often never more valuable than when they are packed away in silence and tears to be returned to the giver. Bertha bestowed upon her souvenirs no baptism of tears. One by one they were laid in a wooden box, set side by side with the ancient casket; handled softly, sometimes lingeringly, as one lays his hand upon the marble brow of wife or child before the coffin-lid shuts over it. Each had its label—the date and place of presentation written and affixed by herself. Whenever it could be done without defacing the gift, this was removed. Appeal to the past would avail nothing. Had it been otherwise, she would have withheld it all the same. It was useless to blow upon cold ashes.

Very live coals had Sterling's flame been, if his letters at that epoch were to be accepted as testimony of his ardor. The fair Imogen would have thought him demented had he indited such rhapsodies to her. Bertha, when all was done, sat down by the packing-case — sarcophagus, if you will — and, leaning her elbow upon it, read over one and another of these compositions. Words of endearment and vows of eternal constancy were sown along the crowded pages as thick as stars in the milky way. An unofficial engagement, I called it, I believe, a little way back.

That it was not formal, binding, irrevocable, was not the gentleman's fault. That these indiscreet documents did not ruin his prospects with his uncle and his bride-elect, he owed to the delicacy and true womanliness of her he had deserted without a show of courteous renunciation. He had counted upon these; for he estimated her pride aright, however he may have misprized her love. Breach-of-promise suits were unheard of in the class to which she belonged, and she had no brothers to take up her cause. After all, the worst that could be said of him, if the affair took wind, was that he had got over a boyish fancy quietly—and because quietly—handsomely. There had been no definite mention of marriage between them, although of love-talk much. He was hampered by no actual betrothment when he consulted his inclination and interest, and addressed Miss Torrey. She was an heiress in her own right, an orphan resident with her married brother, but her wealth was not her only recommendation to the fastidious Southron's favor. Accomplished, sprightly and fashionable, she was a notable figure in society. The world had set its stamp of approval upon her, decided that her husband would be a lucky fellow. She reminded the thoughtful observer of the lady-bug who sat in the roses' heart, and Sterling felt that the perfumed silken retreat was the covert for which Nature and habit designed him. He had no misgivings touching his future happiness, almost as few conscience-pricks when he thought of Bertha and the "pretty folly" of which he was now ashamed.

She was a sensible girl, he reasoned, and, reverting

to the figure of the rose-covert, a very ant in homely industry and energy. Their paths had been separated by Providence. He had been lifted up, she put down. He was in no wise responsible for the revolution or the consequent changes of feeling he had undergone. For aught her conduct said to the contrary, she recognized this truth with as little emotion as himself. She must regret giving him up; any woman would. Still, she could not have expected anything else. None of the Temples had alluded, even remotely, to the early affair. One and all treated him with simple cordiality as the playfellow and comrade of the dead sons, and extended true Virginia hospitality to his uncle. Their visit was doubtless an agreeable variety in the humdrum tenor of their everyday life, and carriage-rides were rare with them now. He had no earthly objection to seconding his uncle's benevolent scheme of shedding all the light he could into the darkened home. They must see for themselves the manifest inexpediency of any closer bond of union between him and one of their fallen house.

The present, with its actualities—bleak and harsh—was very far from Bertha's mind as she dreamed for the last time over the faded papers—taking them in the order of their dates, beginning with the semi-gallant, semi-loving epistle marked "University;" perusing twice the first *real* love-letter, written after the vacation during which they were so much together in the country. That fairy summer, dyed in rainbow-hues by the prism of memory, all sunshine, and fragrance, and song! The sweet hush of one sunset descended about her now—a circle of blessed calm—

shutting out all recollections of discord, of absence, and of change. Again she stood on the bank of the radiant river, plucking leaf after leaf from the bunch of wild roses in her hand, and flinging them out upon the water, hardly knowing that she did it, only alive —and what a life it was!—to the truth that she was beloved, and hearing that this was so from *his* lips.

A knock at the door made her start.

"Bertha, what are you doing?" called Ellen. "It is almost ten. The carriage will soon be here."

It arrived promptly at the appointed time, Mr. Dent being a model of punctuality; but Bertha was ready, looking cool and pretty in a white cambric with black stripes, and a black straw hat, trimmed with white ribbon and black lace. The cambric was a bargain—only twenty-five cents a yard—and she had made it herself, with a deep Spanish flounce and ruffled sleeves. It fitted her well, and she wore it with an air that gave it the effect of a six-dollar silk, at the least. Her white shawl was also inexpensive, and she was her own milliner. Cabell was shrewd and observant enough to detect some of these things, and to guess the rest. His dainty taste shuddered at them all. Mr. Dent, who had lived in the world thirteen or fourteen years longer than he, only perceived that the girl was charming altogether, and that her spring-like raiment was crisp and fresh beside Mrs. Venable's mourning weeds. The excursion could not be a very merry one, since each milestone had its story of conflict and bloodshed, and the horrors of the Chickahominy Swamp were still vivid in the visitors' minds. But the party was outwardly cheerful, Bertha and Sterling doing most of

the talking. Her cheeks had a fever-flush, her eyes were unnaturally bright, her enunciation more rapid, her gesticulation more animated than usual. She was lively, witty, slightly caustic at times, coming down suddenly and severely upon certain of Sterling's affectations—behavior that made him stare and the others laugh.

Mrs. Venable took observations, and pondered them when she reached home. Bertha was a mystery to her family of late. She never seemed cast down, yet that her relations with Sterling were utterly changed was evident to all. She went singing about her work as of yore, and entered readily into whatever interested the others, apparently keeping nothing back from them; but no one, from her mother down, dared catechise her as to her engagement and its dissolution. It was a singular complication—take it altogether—her reserve, Sterling's defection, and the constant intercourse of the gentlemen with the various members of the Temple household. Mr. Dent's unfeigned enjoyment of the association was not accounted for to the feminine portion of the family by his disposition to purchase Virginia lands and Mr. Temple's abetment of the project. His frequent visits and repeated invitations to rides, walks, and places of public amusement were courtesies offered to the ladies. His evident appreciation of their society was susceptible of two interpretations. He was a man of gallantry, who could not live out of sight of the other sex; or he had some cherished object in view, sought their favor for a specific purpose. Was it for his nephew's sake? queried Mrs. Venable. Hardly, or he would have vetoed the

departure of which he had spoken that day. The widow was not astute, but she understood intuitively that Cabell's continuance of his tour, for pleasure merely, settled the question of his intentions towards Bertha. In leaving her thus he said emphatically that he would seek her no more. The need for his going seemed slight, as was that for the uncle's remaining in a place where he had so few acquaintances and so little to do.

A thought gleamed upon her, bold and striking. She had groped her way to the light,—she was sure of it. Flushed by her discovery, and being, moreover, prone to act upon impulse, she ran down stairs to confide it to some one else. It was the habit of the old people to sit at twilight in the library together—Mr. Temple with his pipe, his wife's hand on his shoulder—while they communed of days gone by and reviewed aloud their plans for those to come. A pleasant, lovely custom, so well understood in the family that the children seldom intruded upon the *tête-à-tête* unless some matter of importance called them thither. The tone of the conjugal dialogue was pensive to melancholy to-night. The weight of many losses and sorrow and the brooding dread of a morrow for which no store was laid aside pressed wearily upon the pair.

"If our boys had lived my anxieties for their sisters would have been slight," the father was saying, when Mrs. Venable entered from the hall.

"Do you know," she cried, gayly, "that I have found out something to-day—or think I have—that will astonish you, if you have been as blind as I was

until a few hours ago? What would you say, father, if Mr. Dent were to ask your permission to offer himself and his fortune to our Bertha?"

"I say, now, that you are dreaming, child. You are thinking of the nephew."

"That is all over. And very shabbily Sterling Cabell has behaved. He is not the ninth part of the man his uncle is. Call me a false prophetess if you are not waited upon by the stately banker before many days have passed. He is hopelessly captivated, and what moles we have been not to see it before! Bravo for little Bertha! He is a conquest to be proud of."

"But his age!" objected the mother.

"And Bertha would never marry a Northerner!" interjected Mr. Temple.

"I am not sure of that. I had rather take a full-blooded Yankee than a renegade Virginian, who ran away to avoid fighting and holds himself above those the war has reduced," retorted the daughter with spirit. "As to age, he is forty-one, and he will be young at sixty. This is all *entre nous*, however. Match-making is against our principles. I merely throw out the hint for your consideration, that you may not be unduly amazed when the declaration arrives," and she laughingly withdrew.

"This is a queer story," commented Mr. Temple, thoughtfully. "Yet if the child could bring herself to marry this worthy gentleman—for thorough gentleman he is—I could die more peacefully, and you, my love, would be comfortable for life."

"I would not bias her feelings or actions," said the

mother tenderly. "If this be true, and not a fancy of her sister's, Bertha must obey the dictates of her own heart and judgment. I own I should be happier to see her well married, if only for the assurance it would give me that her heart is not broken by Sterling Cabell's infidelity. I am sadly afraid that he has treated her cruelly and heartlessly, brave and uncomplaining as she is."

The door leading into the parlors was open, and a dim figure glided past it into the darkness. Bertha, worn out with fatigue and heart-struggles and lulled by the indistinct murmur of her parents' voices, had fallen asleep upon the lounge in the back parlor, and lay there unperceived until aroused by her sister's louder and livelier tones. Mastering her indignant impulse to show herself and refute the, to her, ridiculous statement made by her senior, she was quiet until the opinion of her father and mother had been given. Then she fled to the sanctuary of her little chamber; sat down on the spot where she had, that day, coffined the relics of her unhappy love, and buried her face in her hands, dark though it was, in such a paroxysm of horror, shame, and dread, as must effect an important revolution in a girl's life and character. Mr. Dent was in love with her, and her friends, parents, and sisters, would have her jump into his arms, marry him—Sterling's uncle—a man old enough to be her father!

"Must I sell myself—body and soul?" Thus she put the case. "Abridge the term of mourning for my beautiful dead dream, and make ready for a loveless bridal? I would die first!"

She was very angry—with her sister, with Mr. Dent,

with herself, in that she had permitted his attentions; with the whole world—treacherous, crooked, and unfeeling! But when her wrathful mortification had spent its force in tears and ejaculations, her father's words came back to her again and again. "I could die more peaceably; and you, my love, would be comfortable for life." The gray, worn father, so bowed with years and care; the meek mother, ever thoughtful for the weal of those she loved. Was it true that she—their child, was the keeper of their happiness? "Comfortable for the rest of your life!" That she might enjoy her holiday with a clear conscience, Bertha had arisen, that Saturday morning, at five o'clock to sweep the house from top to bottom, and clean the silver before breakfast. Mrs. Temple was already up, and sewing in the room adjoining her chamber. She could not sleep, she said, and it was tiresome lying in bed awake and thinking. Her daughter remembered it now, and wondered if this were a frequent occurrence; thought, moreover, of the slender appetite, untempted by fare that seemed coarse in comparison with former daintiness and abundance; of the pretty feet and hands for which the beautiful matron was noted in the days of carriages and best French kids; the feet now chilled by carpetless floors and damp pavements; the fingers roughened by labor; the dear, patient eyes, strained early and late over needlework for which she was to be paid like any vulgar, illiterate sewing-girl.

"Comfortable!" That meant leisure and ease of mind, along with physical rest; relief from the petty anxieties that swarmed about the poor lady like noisy

and vicious mosquitoes. It would be worth something —the sight of her father, walking erect among tradespeople, giving orders as he once did, instead of counting over his market money to see if he could afford this or that—formerly accounted one of the necessaries of life. Mr. Dent was rich and liberal, and money could accomplish so much! He could devise ways and means by which these objects could be attained without sacrifice of Mr. Temple's self-respect.

"If he only had something to do by which he could support mother and one of the girls, I would have the other with me"—She stopped, a burning heat rushing to her temples. Was she then meditating this marriage as a possibility? "I would die first!" she reiterated, passionately.

In five minutes more she was ringing the changes anew upon her father's declaration and her mother's gentle response. To please them would involve no sacrifice of happiness, she argued. Loss implied previous possession, whereas she was already a miserable bankrupt. If she ever married it must be for money or a home. She would never love again—nevermore trust in man's affection. Mr. Dent was a man of stanch principle and kindly impulses. He would treat a wife with generous consideration—see that she wanted for nothing wealth could buy.

"Is this tempter duty or the devil?" she aroused herself to ask. "I cannot trust myself to think longer. My wits are deserting me. It is more than likely that the whole theory is groundless. I will believe nothing —resolve upon nothing until the need for decision is forced upon me."

But all night long the conflict—ever beginning, never settled, went on within her. She felt like an old woman by the time the Sabbath chimes floated in at her open window, with the scent of the flowers from the balcony below.

Life was all out of joint that morning. Mr. Temple was confined to his room with a headache, and needed his wife's attendance. The only servant of the establishment was summoned, while building the kitchen fire, to see a sick brother, and left the wood unkindled, the dead ashes on the hearth. Ellen and Bertha made ready the simple meal, washed the breakfast dishes; cleaned up dining-room and kitchen, Mrs. Venable offering to prepare dinner while her sisters went to church.

"It can't be said that we are devotional for the purpose of showing our finery," remarked Ellen, jocosely, as they donned their cheap cambrics—the only spring dresses they had been able to buy.

Bertha looked and felt indifferent as to the value or becomingness of her costume. Sack-cloth, with a liberal garnish of ashes, would have suited the inner woman better than her smartly-made print.

"It is your turn to use the parasol," she said, as they started down stairs. The three had but one between them. Bertha had been the first to laugh at the law of rotation in office which governed the useful implement, but she could not jest about it, or any other "beggarly device" to-day. Each was a rivet in the shackles she fancied were forming upon her free agency. Her head ached and her eyes smarted. The sun was hot, the streets dusty, and it was so near noon

that there was next to no shade even upon the embowered sidewalks for which Richmond is famous. To crown her discontent, it was Easter Sunday, and every woman in town who could bedeck herself in a new hat and brave apparel, did so. They met nobody who looked as plain as themselves; and St. Paul's, in which Mr. Temple still continued to hold a pew, was thronged with finely-feathered birds. Light silks, summer poplins, aud other fashionable fabrics brushed their cotton dresses in the vestibule and aisles, and the heads of the congregation resembled a mammoth *parterre* of newly-blown flowers tossing and quivering in a light breeze.

Bertha heard neither Easter anthem, service, or sermon; hardly cast a glance at the floral decorations of the sanctuary. Heaven was very far away—the Father of mercies deaf or insensible to her cry. She had suffered until her sensibilities were benumbed—so she believed. She would not plead for a smoother path than that where pebbles bruised and flints lacerated her unsteady feet. A plain one—straight and well-defined, so there could be no mistake as to the route designed for her to tread, was all she asked of Providence. She was tired trying to find a way for herself. This was the prayer that arose in her heart when priest and people bowed together in the final act of worship.

"Give me a token that shall end this weary warfare! Show me what I ought to do—a sign I may not mistake. Thou seest, Lord—Thou alone, how heavy and sharp is my cross. I would do right. Help me! Point out the way, and I will walk in it."

Arising from her knees, pale, and faint of heart, she met Mr. Dent's eyes. He had sat in the pew directly behind her, and stood in the aisle quietly awaiting her pleasure, his head slightly bent, his features reverent.

"A thorough gentleman!" The thought leaped into her mind, almost escaped her tongue as she bowed silently in acknowledgment of his respectful salutation. Ellen had slipped away and was chatting with a lady, half way to the door. Bertha walked, still without speaking, by Mr. Dent's side down the long church, her heart beating fast and loudly. Was this the sign for which she had prayed? Was it in faith or superstition that she was inclined to accept it? The air without was like a furnace after the cool shadows within doors, and struck upon them like blinding steam as they cleared the vestibule. Mr. Dent cast a furtive look at his companion's empty hands, and raised a small sun-umbrella he had brought. The shield was pleasant, as was the reflection that, well-dressed and *distingué* as he was, he did not hesitate to single her out as the object of his regard in all that gay assemblage. It was a little thing to be grateful for, but she was so cast down in spirit that the touch of balm soothed her hurt in some degree. The torn tendrils could not learn to climb again, but it was a welcome boon—the shade in which they might lie while they bled away their life. There was a sense of protection and comfort in his society, in the notice he paid her whom the lover of her youth had discarded.

"Sterling complained that the unseasonable heat rendered him undevout," Mr. Dent said, as they

strolled up the street. "I suspect the irreverent excuse was the cover for a morning of letter-writing, although he will reach Charleston almost as soon as his epistle. Has he told you of his engagement?"

The pavement was scorching, and seemed to radiate living sparks into Bertha's eyes.

"No!" Her voice sounded oddly to herself through the rush and roar that oppressed her ears, but Mr. Dent observed nothing uncommon in the intonation.

"Ah! I supposed he had, since you are such old and intimate acquaintances. But he had not the lady's permission to announce the betrothal until yesterday morning. She is Miss Imogen Torrey, the sister of a particular friend of mine—a charming woman, and very popular with her associates; fine-looking, rather than regularly handsome; intelligent and refined, and in manner peculiarly fascinating. I wish you knew her, and hope you may meet, some day. You would harmonize delightfully, I think. The boy could not have made a more judicious selection. He is of the same opinion, judging from the complacency with which he regards his prospects. Miss Torrey is travelling with her brother's family, at present. It is to join them that Sterling goes to Charleston before I am ready to accompany him."

Bertha's answer was not very prompt. Her head was bowed, and her hat-brim hid her face. She laughed in looking up.

"I cannot tell you how queer it seems to us—your Northern fashion of publishing engagements. Here, they are only guessed at and whispered about outside of the lady's family. The gentleman's nearest relatives are

often kept in ignorance of the true state of affairs until the wedding-day is set. The custom has its manifest advantages. Perhaps not the least is the facility it affords for the exercise of masculine fickleness and feminine coquetry. I am glad to hear that your nephew's chances for happiness are so fair. I suppose it will be *selon les règles* for us to offer our congratulations?"

"He will be gratified, I am sure, to know that his old friends are interested in his welfare, and that he carries their good wishes with him into his new life," replied Mr. Dent, somewhat gravely.

He could not be displeased with her, but he was disappointed that she treated his communication with such levity. Betrothal and wedlock were to him such holy and solemn things that the tone in which they were usually named offended his taste. He had thought her feelings too fine, her sense of fitness too just, to allow her to fall into this reprehensible fashion.

"He knows nothing!" Bertha was thinking, with a swelling heart. "And this, although they were travelling together when those two foreign letters were written to me! Was the whole thing a farce from the beginning—the diversion of a heartless man, instead of, as I excused his faithlessness by imagining, the evanescent passion of a boy who did not know himself or the world? Was he trifling with me all the while?"

Both gentlemen called on the Temples that evening. Mrs. Temple and her three daughters were in the room, and the conversation was lively and gen-

eral, until, at Mr. Dent's request, Mrs. Venable went to the piano. Ellen's voice was a contralto, and, like her sister, she was extremely fond of sacred music. Mr. Dent was an admirable basso. Singing was his one accomplishment, but he rarely exhibited it, except in glees and choruses. Sterling's knowledge of music was superficial, as was his acquaintance with most of the arts and sciences. But he had a tolerable ear and could supply a showy tenor to any air with which he was familiar. He took a prominent part in the proceedings at the instrument; selecting music, expressing his views of this and that piece and composer, and carrying on his vocalization in the favorite style of operatic *tenores*—his chin well up, and eyes elevated at the same angle. Mr. Dent stood by, quiet and self-possessed, seldom speaking unless appealed to by the ladies, and singing, when his turn came, with precision of time and purity of tone that elicited the respect with the applause of his audience.

Bertha was "not in a singing-humor to-night," and, when her mother stole away to her husband's sick-room, the girl found the contrast forced upon her contemplation strangely painful and mortifying. She was resigned to the burial of her idol. She shrank from seeing it crumble into despicable dust. Sterling turned from the piano by and by. The others had begun to try new anthems and make daring dips into oratorios, and these irregularities barred the door of distinction to him. He supposed that the listeners had wearied, with himself, of the skirmishing into untried regions, for their chairs were vacant. Catching

sight of Bertha's light dress upon the balcony, he joined her there. The street lamp at the corner showed him her face distinctly, her eyes dark and haughty with their expression of surprised inquiry, and the recollection overtook him with disagreeable force that they had not been together without the restraint of a third person since their parting three years ago.

"It is warm in-doors," remarked Bertha, seeing him at a loss what to say, "and the music sounds well here. But you should not have left your post. A quartette is indispensable in sacred music."

"I wanted to speak to you."

He touched the hand that lay upon the iron rail. It was instantly removed, not petulantly, but with a composed assumption that the contact was accidental that made his task yet more difficult.

"I found a box awaiting me at my room last night when I returned from our ride," he resumed. "I have sought this interview to explain why I have nothing to send in return. Before I left Virginia, at the beginning of the third year of the war, I destroyed such personal effects as I could not conveniently take with me. Many of them were of great value to me, but I would not risk their falling into other hands than mine. Your letters and several of the few keepsakes I had received from you were of this number. I took with me into exile your photograph, ring, and a watch-chain made of your hair. The picture faded into a hideous caricature I could not bear to look at. The ring I lost while bathing in the Dead Sea. I wore the chain until it was frayed out. These are

the few and simple reasons why I stand before you now empty-handed."

He tried to laugh, but the effort was a melancholy failure.

The corners of Bertha's mouth broke into a smile that was very like genuine amusement, unmingled with chagrin or wounded feeling. A bystander might have thought that she enjoyed the situation and her obvious advantage.

"The inventory is circumstantial and quite satisfactory," she said, her dimples deepening and broadening. "But apologies are superfluous. I know that change is an immutable law of Nature and mankind. That sounds paradoxical, but it is true. Even valuables will get lost in Dead Seas of forgetfulness, be worn out and cast aside as worthless, and prettier things than girls' photographs fade into homeliness. You need not have taken the trouble to explain; I understood it all before."

She moved to go in, but he detained her.

"We are friends still, Bertha?"

"Why not? As the world rates friendship—yes. And the world is wiser than are boys and girls who play at love-making they are ashamed to recollect in the course of a twelve-month or so. We wish one another all the felicity compatible with human imperfection and the laws of which we spoke just now. Each is entirely willing that the other shall enjoy life in his or her chosen way. And that reminds me of an omission for which you must pardon me, although it was not until this morning that I had a definite assurance that you were engaged to be married."

She said it out in the plainest terms, gazing directly and without embarrassment at him. It was his look that fell, his hand that played nervously with the odorous shrubs.

"Accept my sincere congratulations. That your uncle thinks well of the object of your choice is a guarantee of her excellence. He considers the alliance suitable in every respect, and I have confidence in his judgment and taste."

The clear, even voice, fuller and yet more melodious than of old; the plaintive music within, a soprano solo of wondrous pathos; the stars in the soft Southern heavens, and the remembered perfume of the flowers—together touched a chord long rusted by the damp of selfishness, clogged by the dust of worldly policy. For that one instant the love of his boyhood was more real than the "suitable" attachment of his wiser years. He threw out his arm in an uncontrollable gesture of deprecation.

"Don't leave me in this way, Bertha. Have you forgotten, utterly abjured the past which we enjoyed together? We *were* happy then, were we not? The light of other days was sweet and dear. The remembrance of it is forever sacred to me. It is no disloyalty to my betrothed to wish, as I do sometimes, that I had lived in it always. You despise me, I know, consider me unstable and mercenary, but if you could understand the influences which have been brought to bear"—

"Explanations are disagreeable and inconvenient things, even where there is need for them," interposed Bertha, still clearly and without falter. "In this

case, as I have said, they are altogether unnecessary. Facts speak for themselves. I understand your position, and have no accusations to bring. Therefore you are not called upon to defend yourself. As for the past, I have only to thank you for making it so easy for me to forget it."

PART III.

MID-APRIL again, and the air of the beautiful Southern city palpitated with moonlight and fragrance. The stately horse-chestnuts, popular in the patrician purlieus wherein resided the Temples, were forward with their cones of white bloom, and a lively imagination might descry visible clouds of perfume arising from the pearly censers. The sidewalks were peopled with strollers—youths emancipated from the active duties of business, tasting the delicious moments with the zestful delight man can never know after five-and-twenty; happy girls in early spring attire, with uncovered heads, leaning on the arms of their attendant swains; with here and there a graver wedded pair reminiscent of their own days of wooing. The Richmond Eros greatly affects *al fresco* declarations, and makes a specialty of moonlight rambles. In no other place of the same size on this continent—certainly in no more Northern town—are more vows of eternal constancy exchanged under the opened heavens. Every one of the embowered streets of her seven hills is a lover's walk, and the time-honored custom of putting these to their proper use is one in which there are no signs of degeneration.

The Temple mansion had undergone many changes, manifest even in the mellow moonlight, during the two

years that had elapsed since Robert Dent halted before it on that smiling April morning to hearken to the carol within: "Tears for to-morrow, but kisses to-day." The songstress had been his wife for eighteen months, but he had not gloried in her upon their bridal day as he did this evening. She was receiving an informal party of friends who had flocked to her father's house to welcome her home from the foreign tour Mr. Dent—weary of wandering, and longing for home and quiet—had yet planned in consonance with what he divined were her tastes and desires.

They had landed in America barely a week ago, and had not unpacked a single trunk in New York. Bertha was anxious to see her parents and sisters, and the year-and-a-half-old bridegroom only waited to know her wishes to execute them. He was repaid, if the indulgence of this one had caused him inconvenience, by the sight of the lively pleasure the reunion brought to each member of the family. And, as of yore, the light and life of the house was Bertha. One, at least, of the dreams which had wrought upon her to accept Mr. Dent's suit was fulfilled. Her father, as her husband's agent in the supervision of the investments the latter had made in Richmond, was in receipt of a generous salary. The repairs of the homestead were a Christmas present to the family the year of Bertha's marriage. Mrs. Venable no longer gave music lessons, and Ellen was on the eve of marriage with a thriving young merchant of Baltimore. Mrs. Temple's hands were again fair and smooth, and upon her dear old cheek bloomed the late blush roses which are the more lovely because so rare. She was

a happy queen-mother to-night, sitting in an antique arm-chair, erect and alert, catching the meaning of every *bon mot*, appreciative of every graceful movement of her youngest daughter. They might well—one and all—worship her, for she had rescued them from abject poverty; proved herself in prosperity as open-handed and affectionate as when she had given her all of time and labor to lessen family expenses and increase the slender stock in the common purse. Her abundance was a very cornucopia to her kindred. It was a luxury to be rich in these circumstances, and her manner to her husband conveyed her recognition of the fact that he was the author of the great good. Dutiful, sweet-tempered, and cheerful she was always; but there was a deeper—he imagined, a tenderer meaning now-a-days in eye and voice when he drew near, and she called him by his Christian name habitually in the freedom and familiarity of her early home.

He hardly dared hope for her love when he sought her hand; had sued, with trembling earnestness, so foreign to boyish presumption as to be in itself a charm, for the opportunity to win affection by affection. She had not said that she loved him while they were betrothed, only that she liked and esteemed him beyond any other man of her acquaintance, and that she was entangled by no other attachment. He was very determined in his quiet way, and he resolved to stand in the highest niche in the temple he deemed so beautiful and holy—a true woman's heart. He was patient, too, and he had never endangered final success by importunity or exaction; never forgotten that he was her senior by sixteen years, and could not woo

with the impetuosity that is not unseemly in ardent youth. If he could gain her gratitude by benefits to those she loved, could by attentions timely and assiduous make himself necessary to her happiness, the rest would follow. The boon he craved must be won step by step, and was it not richly worth all it would cost?

He thought this over clearly and methodically, as it was his wont to treat subjects of importance, while moving about among his wife's guests, adapting himself with tactful readiness to the tone and character of each—an agreeable, handsome gentleman—decided the ladies, young and elderly. It was less surprising, now that they knew him better, that Bertha should have brought herself to the point of marrying him and that the Temples seemed so pleased with the match. She certainly (this same "certainly" drops from the tongues of the fast youths of Richmond with every other sentence, at least)—she certainly looked well and happy, and what woman of sense would not be susceptible to the influence of such toilets as that she had sported yesterday afternoon (they called it "evening") in her promenade with Mr. Dent on Franklin Street, and that she wore to-night? Neither was startling. Bertha's taste was always correct; but her dresses were rich in material, and in trimming and fashion heavenly and Parisian, very enchanting and very indefinable. She was not a bit spoiled by her good fortune. This was also voted with silent unanimity. Her manners were as fresh and frank as ever. She talked as Bertha Temple used to chat to her coterie of school-fellows, without affectation or hauteur;

asked after each of her old cronies, and entered heartily into everything that had happened during her absence.

"Do you ever sing English ballads now?" inquired Doctor Maxwell, a gentleman with white cravat and ruffled shirt-front—Bertha's god-father—and a fine specimen of the gallant sexagenarian, the school which is passing but too rapidly away. "Or am I a barbarian to ask the question of one who is, no doubt, mistress of the operatic style? Your sisters have told me how much attention you paid to music abroad."

"But not to the exclusion of ballads in my native tongue," replied Bertha, brightly. "Had it been possible for me to forget or neglect my early love, Mr. Dent would not have suffered it. His fondness for simple minstrelsy rivals yours, doctor." She smiled up at her husband, who was within hearing. "He used to make me sing for him in the purple Roman twilights Mrs. Hemans' version of:—

> 'Roma! Roma! Roma!
> Non e' piu come era prima!'

We trolled the 'Flower o' Dumblane' in the shadow of Ben Lomond, and 'Annie Laurie' in sight of Sevastopol, in memory of the brave fellows who chanted it every night in the trenches before that stronghold. You recollect it, don't you? And how delightfully Bayard Taylor has told the story:—

> 'Each heart recalled a different name,
> But all sang Annie Laurie?'"

"And when did you recall my favorite? By the

way, I have not heard it since you were married. The young ladies of this day know nothing about it they tell me, with a curl of their pretty lips."

"'Auld Robin Gray?' Isn't it a singular coincidence that you were the last person for whom I sang it?" said Bertha, perfectly unembarrassed.

Perhaps she did not detect a glance, furtive but polite, exchanged by several persons near. Mr. Dent was too intent upon her motions and words to observe it.

The doctor looked disappointed. "And I was about to beg you to sing it. You have forgotten it, then?"

"I never forget old friends."

She arose, put her hand into his arm, and moved toward the piano, most of the little company following. She was "Bertha and nobody else" still. Mr. Dent smiled in recollecting the phrase which Ellen had repeated to him in describing the scene that preceded their earliest meeting. Nobody else could equal her in grace, beauty, sprightliness—in all that was noble and comely.

An impulse people would call sentimental overtook him. He would listen to her singing aud watch her from without, from the balcony filled in her honor with wall-flowers and other of her pet plants. This was rather a habit of his—to retire to some secluded nook, whence he could feast his eyes without risk of curious or sarcastic scrutiny. He knew that gray-haired men with beautiful young wives are considered fair game, and he would not make his darling ridiculous, or himself if he could help it. Seizing the opportunity, when the attention of all was drawn to the

pianist, he passed through one of the long windows, and took his stand in the far corner of the balcony, now transformed into a veranda by the edition of a Chinese roof and light iron pillars. The shadow of the horse-chestnuts lay dense across the floor, the flower-breath was intoxicatingly sweet, and Bertha sang:

> "Never till now had it been given
> To lips of any mortal woman
> To utter notes so fresh from heaven."

The quotation was in his mind, when a couple strayed from the group at the piano and sauntered to the front window. They were Louise Morton, a near neighbor of the Temples, and Bolling Cabell, a cousin on the father's side, of Mr. Dent's nephew. The lady sank with an exclamation of pleasure into the lounging-chair her cavalier rolled to the threshold for her.

"How deliciously cool and fragrant it is here!" putting out her hand to pluck a geranium-leaf. "And isn't it *too* romantic and nice to sit in the moonlight and listen to Bertha's music?"

"She sings as delightfully as ever," remarked the impolitic gentleman. "And how handsome she has grown. I never saw a more queenly yet more fascinating woman."

"Pity a few more of us couldn't marry rich and elderly Yankees!" retorted Louise. "She has turned all the gentlemen's heads. I should think her nominal lord and master would be jealous."

"Jealousy is not a masculine foible," was the mischievous rejoinder. "And, so far as I can judge, she is very much attached to him—quite devoted, in fact."

"Perhaps!" a shrug and pout. "Hardly as devoted as she was to your Cousin Sterling in the *ante bellum* days however. By the way, what broke that off? Ellen told me they were certainly engaged all during the war."

"Hark! She will answer your question herself."

Bertha was singing—

> "Young Jamie lo'ed me weel, and sought me for his bride,
> But, saving a crown, he had naething else beside."

Mr. Dent in the covert he dared not leave, and the critics in the open window heard the verse through.

Then Louise laughed low and scornfully. "You acknowledge it, then? Yet you admire her—hold her up as a model to other penniless maidens?"

"*Et pourquoi non?*" Sterling's cousin resembled him strongly and not pleasantly as he said it. "'The greatest good to the greatest number, isn't a bad motto. Sterling alluded to the affair when he was here, year before last. He couldn't afford to marry a girl without money, especially where there was a chance that he would have to support her parents also. He had next to nothing himself and very expensive tastes. I don't believe he ever dreamed that his uncle whose heir he hoped to become would throw himself into the breach—but so it was. *He* was rich enough to indulge in luxuries. And he has certainly done the handsome thing by the Temples."

"It was a heartless transaction all around!" ejaculated Louise, fanning herself energetically.

"I might echo your 'perhaps' in reply. It is reasonable to suppose that Mr. Dent knew he was the

second best choice, and was not so vain as to fancy that his beauty married him through love *pur et simple.* He has too much sense for that."

The song was over, and Mr. Dent, finding his situation painfully awkward, was vibrating between the alternative of scaling the railing and escaping into the yard, and presenting himself boldly before the gossips, when Louise fluttered off, like a butterfly, to examine a folio of photographs upon the centre-table. Her escort went in pursuit, and the imprisoned eavesdropper emerged unseen from his bower.

Not to hide, like other stricken things, alike from the view of friend and foe. He had the presence of mind to see that he had made a mistake in leaving the room while "Auld Robin Gray" was sung. He doubted not that the majority of the guests had applied the ballad after Mr. Cabell's style, and he had given color to the impression by seeming to shirk observation. Unconsciously, Bertha abetted his resolution to deport himself with gay unconcern.

"I was just wishing for you," she said, looking over her shoulder, and espying him as she finished the doctor's second song. "Doctor, help persuade him to give us—'There is a song of the olden time.'"

"You need no other help than my cordial desire to please your friend," was the reply.

Did some alloy of ambition to prove that he had recommendations to an attractive girl's favor besides wealth and social position mingle with his readiness to oblige her? He was usually averse to whatever savored of display. Modest in his estimate of his abilities and with a hearty appreciation of real excel-

lence in musical, literary, or social talent, he, at all times, preferred that others should exhibit while he admired. To-night he took the initiative; sang several times with his wife, then a solo to her accompaniment, and finally, at her request, sat down to the instrument and treated the company to a German ballad —a masterpiece of pathos and passion, given in a style that elicited rapturous applause.

"I wonder at you no longer," said a vivacious belle aside to Bertha, real tear-drops beading her eye-lashes. "If he wooed you in such music as that, you could not have resisted had you wished to do so."

As the musician's fingers lingered upon the final chord, he looked up, not expecting to see his wife and met her gaze bent earnestly upon him. She leaned upon the end of the piano, her lips apart with delighted interest, her eyes beaming and dewy. But for the revelation of the last hour, he would have drawn dearest encouragements from the regards that sank bashfully under his, from the vivid blush with which she turned away. As it was, he strangled new-born hope with one fierce wrench, arose, outwardly placid and smiling, to receive the compliments which were showered upon him.

"I was so proud of you to-night," said Bertha, when they were in their room together, after the guests' departure.

Her husband stood by the window, looking out into the night, and, as she joined him, the scent of the wall-flowers came up in slow waves, like the creeping tide of memory in a still hour.

"So proud and happy," she repeated, linking her

arm in his. "How can I thank you for the pains you have taken to entertain my friends? I suppose it is weak and foolish in me when I know so well for myself what you are, but I was anxious to have others learn something of this also. I could hardly command myself into a decorous show of modest gratification as I listened to the handsome things that were said about you—of your singing, conversation, deportment, etc." —laughing. "Even Louise Morton called you a Bayard. *Entre nous*, she hasn't an idea whether Bayard was a Frank or a Greek, but she meant to be very complimentary."

"I am glad you were gratified." He did not intend to be reserved, still less to repel her, but his heart was aching sore with its green wound, and at her clinging touch, her kindly, almost loving words, a mocking strain seemed to float through the summer air:—

> "But I do my best a gude wife to be,
> For Auld Robin Gray is a kind man to me."

Bertha glanced up quickly. "You are very tired, are you not? I am too apt to forget that this sort of thing—the constant excitement of calls and evening gatherings cannot be so pleasing to you as to me—that my acquaintances are, most of them, strangers to you. We shall be more quiet after this week, I hope."

"Not on my account. The weight of years does not incapacitate me from the enjoyment of agreeable society. Nor am I at all weary. On the contrary, I was just thinking that I would take a walk toward the river with my cigar—the night is so tempting. Don't sit up for me."

He avoided the wondering reproach of her eyes; waited for no more apologies or expostulations. His mood was unjust, and being a middle-aged instead of a young man, he had the candor to acknowledge this to himself, and break off abruptly an interview that threatened to become agitating. That he had failed to teach her to love him, was, in the opinion of this staid and upright gentleman, no sufficient reason why he should tempt her to dislike him.

This was the first shadow of the cloud that gradually crept between two who, up to that date, had been sincere friends, if they were not lovers. On one side it was the darkness of pride and indignant amazement; on the other, of wounded affection and disappointment none the less scathing that it had fallen later in life than such sorrows generally befall men. The world saw in them an amiable and well-bred couple who had had weighty reasons for seeking to be joined together in the holy ordinance of matrimony and jogged along in harness more comfortably than did half of those who had contracted marriages of affection without regard to other desirable accompaniments. The Temples were complacent in their conviction that Bertha had done well for herself as for them.

"There was a trifling disparity in their ages, but it was on the right side and there was a perfect understanding between them."

Sterling Cabell, whose cleverly-suppressed resentment at his uncle's "folly at his time of life," and Bertha's fickleness had cooled down somewhat with time and reflection, yet said wicked things to himself

in his cynical way of the perfidy and mercenary proclivities common to all women when he attended one of Mrs. Dent's parties, or met her in the park, in velvets and sables, or silks and laces, as the season demanded. Sometimes her gray-haired husband was at her side—people began to whisper how fast the snow was falling on his temples—sometimes, a trio of laughing girls, or a couple of dignified matrons were with her in the luxurious chariot Mrs. Cabell was never tired of admiring and coveting.

"She ought to be satisfied with it and her lot generally," Sterling was surprised into saying to his malcontent Imogen. "She crucified her heart, sold herself, body and soul, perjured herself at the altar to secure the position she graces."

"Which means that she might have had the nephew instead of the uncle," returned the wife, coolly. "I don't blame her for what she did. It was an excellent match for her. A woman should make the best bargain she can in these matters. There is force, not folly in the saying about an old man's darling. Few wives, even though they may have brought their husbands wealth, have their every whim indulged as she has who came to hers penniless. I should like to learn how she contrives to have her way so thoroughly."

"Not by lecturing her legal lord, I imagine," rejoined Sterling, putting up his hand to conceal a yawn. "You recollect the fable of the sun and wind?"

"Unless her physiognomy belies her, she has spirit as well as sense," said Imogen, contemptuously regardless of the insinuation. "Mr. Dent is not the man he was, prior to his marriage. If the truth were known,

I have no doubt we should find that she carries it with a high hand when he dare oppose her sovereign will."

She was mistaken. From the memorable evening of the discovery that blasted his hopes, there was never the exchange of a jarring word between Mr. Dent and her who was called his wife. Better the jostling of impetuous waves that chafe and battle for an instant, but to sink into a closer embrace, to blend more quickly into one, than the wintry calm that locks them into even, glittering ice. By mutual and tacit agreement, the Dents discussed no subject concerning which they were likely to disagree; studied each the other's preferences in their domestic arrangements; were agreeable and courteous to one another in private as in public; very conscientious, very attentive, and altogether miserable. A woman whose moral principle was less stanch would have revenged herself for her consort's polite reserve by vigorous flirtation; one who had suffered less, and learned fewer lessons of self-control in a sharp school would have revolted openly at the unnatural life to which she was held by the iron hand under the velvet glove of seeming regard for her wishes and welfare. A weaker wife would have complained of her joyless fate in the ears of those who loved her and showed their love. The young Virginian carried a high—not a haughty head—through pain, and amaze, and repression was loyal in word as in deed to her grave-visaged spouse. In the handsome house of which she was mistress, she was hospitable, not gay, and when she went abroad her husband was her cavalier. Scandal-loving tongues might prate of the extreme probability that hers was

a marriage of convenience, but the most lawless among them never meddled with her serene propriety, never dared whisper that it was the screen of unlicensed desires or loves. If she felt her life to be a failure, wearied of decent routine and elegant bondage, she kept heart-burnings and regrets to herself.

For nearly two years after Ellen's marriage Bertha did not revisit her native city. One summer her father and mother passed with her in her Rockaway cottage, and, having seen them so lately she declined to go to Richmond the following winter. There was always some plausible excuse for postponing the journey Mr. Dent repeatedly proposed, and although surprised at her persistency of refusal he was far from suspecting the truth, viz., that she attributed their estrangement to a slight, real or imaginary, put upon him by some member of the company assembled at her father's the evening the chill first fell upon her spirit. He had heard or seen something that displeased him —what, she had racked her brain to conceive. Her levity had offended his taste, or some chance and indiscreet allusion to his age and her gayety sunk deeply into his mind. However this might be, the thought of going to Richmond was distasteful to her, and also, she believed, to him.

Early in April of the second year, a summons arrived that could not be disregarded. Mrs. Temple was very ill, and a telegraphic dispatch to that effect was sent to her absent daughters. Ellen's arrival at the homestead preceded Bertha's by a few hours, and for a fortnight the three sisters relieved each other as nurses of the mother they loved so fondly. They won

her back to life—would not let her go, she said to Mr. Dent, who surprised the family—his wife included—by appearing among them one day at the close of the third week of Bertha's stay.

"I trust you will never have experience of her proficiency in that line, but your wife is one of the cleverest, tenderest nurses in the world," she added, putting her wasted little hand in that of the son-in-law for whom she had had a decided fondness from the beginning of their acquaintanceship. "It was more than kind in you to lend her to us for so long. Have you come to take her away?"

"By no means. I am here on a flying business visit. I must return the day after to-morrow. It is my sincere wish that Bertha should remain with you as long as you require her services, or as she desires to stay. I did not expect her to accompany me to New York."

"I wish my other half would take lessons from you in self-denial—or is it indifference?" said Ellen, saucily. "I half believe he is tired of you, Bertha—that he finds himself more comfortable without than with you."

"She knows better than that." The remark escaped him involuntarily, but he did not offer to recall it.

Bertha smiled faintly, and, as her husband arose, saying he must go down town, she busied herself with her mother's pillows, answering his "Good-morning to you all!" with a silent bow.

"Don't you kiss your wife when you leave her in the morning?" cried the thoughtless sister, feigning to be shocked. "Suppose you were to be run over by a runaway horse, or shot by a drunken soldier as that

poor wretch was, the other day, or come to some other awfully sudden end, how would you feel to think you have parted from her in that frosty-genteel way? I was asked, last week, if you were not a very fashionably-cool couple. I denied it then, but I must say this looks like it. I should break my heart if my Will were to go out of the house without kissing me."

The two thus bantered blushed like convicted lovers.

"I will go with him as far as the door," said Bertha, hastily trying to laugh the matter off. "You must not regard Ellen's nonsense," continued she, when they were in the hall. "She does not understand."

"I know!" he answered, briefly—it seemed to her sadly. "Is there anything I can do for you in the city?"

"Nothing—thank you!"

"You ride or walk every day, do you not? You are looking pale and rather thin. At what hour shall I order a carriage for you?"

"We usually go about half-past four."

These sentences were exchanged in the lower hall, while his hand was upon the front door. At her last reply he opened it and stepped out upon the veranda.

"It will be a warm day!" he observed, glancing up at the sky, over which a whitish haze, like August exhalations, was gathering.

"The season is very forward, even for this latitude," was the answer, uttered mechanically.

He did not mean to kiss her, then. They were to part on this day of reunion, after long separation, as upon all other days, like common acquaintances. She

was no nearer to him at meeting for having dreamed of him by night and missed him with homesick longing during every waking hour. She would never be more to him than now—never!

There could be no pleasure in prolonging the exchange of commonplaces, yet something seemed to make him loath to go. It was very unlike his usual promptitude of character and manner to loiter as he did; his hat in one hand, while the other trifled with his cane. He appeared to be casting about in his mind for some topic of conversation that would give him an excuse for dallying yet longer, or to be revolving a subject he wished to introduce.

"Your wall-flowers are looking finely, this season," he remarked, surveying the smiling ranks. "They never display such affluence of bloom anywhere else as in this balcony."

"The fine weather has brought them on well, but they are hardy, constant bloomers always." Bertha said it with an odd stricture about heart and throat, absolute physical pain at the rush of emotions the words brought over her.

If Mr. Dent remarked the change and falter in her voice, he did not show that he had done so.

"Will you give me one?" he asked, gently, after a pause.

Without a word she broke off a spray, and, with sudden, inexplicable boldness, pinned it in his buttonhole.

"Thank you!" said he, gratefully. "I would beg you to walk with me before the heat becomes oppressive, but I promised to meet Mr. Burruss, who was

my travelling companion, in the court-room of the capitol at half-past ten. Good-morning!"

He raised his hat in the stately old-time courtesy she thought so becoming, and walked off down the street.

Bertha, leaning on the railing of the veranda, gazed after him, her eyes filled with bitter-sweet tears.

"If he knew!" she said, by and by, in a hoarse whisper. "But he never will. He would not care if he did. He has not missed me all these weeks. He would not have come to see me had not business brought him. Heaven help me!"

The passers-by were few in that neighborhood after the morning stream of business men had flowed past to empty itself into the lower town, and she sat down upon a low cushion in the French window. A goodly picture, thought the half-dozen who chanced to see her there, in her white dress, her chin resting in her palm, her eyes purple and velvety with thought, her bright hair curling with the heat and moisture of the unseasonably sultry day. She had sat in that spot hundreds of times before in the long, long ago that had never been so misty as now; sat there with Sterling's letters rustling in her bosom, and his miniature in her hand; sat there empty of hand and heart in the few days of mourning she allowed herself over her "beautiful, dead dream;" but she had never held sadder communings with herself than those that engrossed her after the echoes of the manly tread she knew so well had died away. There was so little to live for in her world. The sameness of the dreary

prospect disheartened her. All hope that her husband would ever love her again had departed from her weary soul. Association with her, the knowledge of her many faults, had changed his affection into indifference.

"I am but one of many items in his daily account of events, of pleasures, and of cares. I have striven —how earnestly only He who made me knows—to make myself necessary to his happiness, but in vain. Is it my fate never to retain affection? It was easy to recover from the mortification occasioned by the fickleness of a shallow, ignoble nature. But when a man like this withdraws his regard, there must be some grievous fault in me."

She was still crouched behind the flowery screen, her hands loosely clasped, her eyes cast down, and the unbent lines of the proud mouth indicative of listless wretchedness, when Mrs. Venable, who had gone out immediately after breakfast, ran up the steps with blanched face and quivering lips.

"The Lord have mercy upon our doomed city!" she cried, bursting into tears, as she saw her sister. "This fills up the cup of our woes, is the climax of our calamities!"

"What is it?" said Bertha, startled out of her apathy.

"Haven't you heard the alarm-bells, and seen the people rushing by? The floor of the court-room at the capitol has fallen in, and a large number of men—some say hundreds—were killed instantly. They were digging them from under the ruins as I came by. You know the decision in the mayoralty case was to be

given—Bertha, don't scream! We must keep the news from mother at all hazards. Child, where are you going?"

Bertha tore herself loose from the grasp of the terrified woman—more terrified by her sister's behavior and the wild glare of her eye than by the calamity she had described—sprang past her, and was in the street before the other could ask another question or summon help to detain her.

The sidewalks were thronged when she gained the lower end of the street, where it ran into Capitol Square. Swift, breathless pedestrians—men, women, and children, many elegant ladies bareheaded like herself—poured in a wild current into the inclosure, filled every avenue, were driven upon the turf by lines of carriages hurrying hither and thither at the bidding of friends and physicians. The vehicles leaving the square contained bleeding forms supported by attendants; some motionless and prone, covered with dust and gore; not a few embraced by weeping women whose lamentations rent the ears of the spectators. But the main tide set steadily toward the majestic building, for eighty years the city's pride, nevermore to be named without a shudder by those who visited it on that direful day. Through the multitude, when she could open the close ranks, with it, when she could not, the wife pressed on in frenzied haste, seeing nothing but the lofty walls ahead of her, hearing nothing save the ringing of Ellen's lightly-spoken words in her tortured brain: "What if you were to come to some awfully sudden end!"

"And he did not kiss me!" repeated the half-

crazed creature, again and again, whether aloud or inwardly she did not know.

She gained the goal, the centre of fearful interest to all, the railed space guarded by the police, a semicircle of turf directly beneath the gaping windows, through which were visible the torn walls and splintered beams. A dozen shapes were stretched upon the sward, gray with dust, dripping with blood. Knots of men were sponging the hideous disguise from features otherwise unrecognizable; straightening into decent, stark composure distorted limbs prior to the removal of the lifeless bodies of those who had been killed instantly; and, just as Bertha, clutching the railing for support, leaned over it to search with her own eyes for the one remembered form she beheld in imagination wherever she gazed, four attendants rolled up in a strip of carpeting, ripped from the fallen flooring, something crushed out of all semblance of humanity.

"Here comes another!" murmured the throng—the horrified sigh that heralded the appearance of each new victim.

A stalwart figure was borne down the steps, laid tenderly upon the grass. His hair was matted over his forehead, his sweeping beard hoary with the lime-powder that had proved the agent of death to many, and on his breast a spot of brighter color attracted instant and pitying notice—so incongruous was it with the horrors of the scene—a bruised cluster of yellow flowers clinging to the lappel of his coat.

"My husband! Oh! let me have him!"

In the midst of the tumult about her the wild cry

was heard by comparatively few. But, when she would have bowed to pass under the low rail that she might the sooner reach the inanimate form, a firm hand was laid upon her shoulder. She tried to shake it off, without withdrawing her eyes from the sight that had maddened her; struggled in the hold of the supposed policeman like a savage thing in a net.

"I tell you it is my husband! I love him better than anything else in the world! You have no right to keep me from him! You shall not!" she panted. "For the love of mercy let me go!"

An arm was wound about her waist, a cheek laid to hers.

"Bertha, darling wife!"

"Drive this way!" called a policeman to the driver of a passing hack. "A lady has fainted."

She was lifted into the carriage by the sympathizing officer and a tall gentleman with a full brown beard touched with silver, and a spray of wall-flowers in his button-hole.

"Poor thing! she must have recognized a friend among the wounded," said those near her, and straightway forgot the trifling incident in the new horror of the next instant.

"I met Burruss on the capitol steps," Robert Dent explained to his wife, when her sisters, having seen her recover from her long and death-like swoon, and heard Robert's brief statement of the cause of her indisposition, considerately withdrew, leaving her lying, pale and happy, in her husband's arms. "He told me that the court-room was crowded to excess, so that he doubted the possibillty of our finding

standing-places, much less seats. The day was so warm that after a minute's deliberation we abandoned the thought of going in, and I suggested, instead, that we should pass the time that must intervene before we could learn the decision, in visiting other portions of the building. We were in the central hall, looking at the statue of Washington, when the crash came, and immediately lent our aid in removing the rubbish and extricating the injured. I was upon the steps, having just assisted in carrying out a wounded man, when the gleam of your uncovered hair, and the flutter of your white dress on the outside of the rail, caught my eye, and I hastened around to you."

For two days, from sunrise to sunset, the throbbing of the funeral bells was the audible pulsation of the city's mighty heart of woe, and the mourners went about the streets. What was yesterday the busy mart of trade was deserted, and from every closed door floated a sable pennon below the placard :—

"*Closed on account of the calamity at the capitol.*"

Of the grief of desolated homes, the secrets of stricken hearts, the bewilderment and distress of the oft-smitten town—robbed in one little hour of nearly three-score of her noblest sons—it is not the province of my pen to write. Turn we rather to the holy calm of the Sabbath evening succeeding the disaster, when hand in hand, husband and wife in truth as in name, sat upon the balcony under the stars, listening to the requiem of the river, breathing the incense of wall-flowers ; and, when the fulness of their souls allowed

them to speak, talking softly of past mistakes, of present content, of the future, which should be as the present and even more abundant.

"Yet I could wish, for your sake, that I were younger in years, as young as I am in heart," said Robert, regretfully.

Bertha's answer was to kiss the luxuriant locks massed above the broad forehead.

"Beautiful hair!" she added, caressingly. "It is a crown of glory in my sight because it is you who wear it."

ABIGAIL'S WAITING.

A FAMILY CHRONICLE.

"I WASN'T surprised when I heard you had taken to story-writing," said Aunt Anne, unfolding the unfinished stocking I could have been sure was twin to that I had left her at work upon twenty years before. "It runs in the family, you know."

"No?" I returned, interested on the instant. "From whom is the gift inherited?"

"That is more than I can tell you, if you mean where the faculty started in the beginning. But I can trace it back four generations at least. There was your own grandmother on your mother's side, for instance. I've heard men like Doctor Speece and John Randolph say she was the best classical scholar of her sex and day they ever talked with, and she was forever busy with her pen. It wasn't so customary for people to print their writings in those times, but her letters and poems were *beautiful!* And she'd tell such stories to us in the winter evenings as would make us cry and laugh together. She was a genius and a delightful singer, and very lovely in person and disposition. Then there was my first cousin, Thomas Willard. He was an editor, and would have been famous only he

died young. My Will—but you read his one book and the magazine articles that made such a noise. I have everything he ever printed in the big oak chest up stairs, along with the family Bible and my husband's wedding coat. The last article was a camp letter that came out in a Richmond paper. We had just read it the day we heard from Gettysburg."

I did not look at her, but I heard the regular click of her needles as I turned my face aside and gazed out of the window, over the line of winter-gray hills to the northeastern horizon—the quarter whence the news had come that broke the father's heart, and caused the mother to take up the touching lament—"These two things have come upon me in one day—loss of children and widowhood!" I knew what Will Moore had been to those he left in the homestead, when he buttoned the gray coat over a swelling heart, and gave a rakish slouch to the military cap lest the light should sparkle upon the water that stood in his eyes. I could see the evergreens in the family graveyard at the foot of the garden from where I sat; knew under which the father's white head was pillowed, just two months after they "heard from Gettysburg." There was a space on each side of him for another grave. That on the right was to be filled by his wife; that on the left was meant for one who would never be laid there. But the earth covered the boy as kindly and securely in the far northern battleground, the sun shone as brightly, the grass was as green. What mattered the separation of the kindred dust so long as the spirits of father and son roamed the heavenly fields in company?

My eyes returned to the figure at the fireside—a comely old lady in a widow's dress, with eyes that saw too far in these latter days to be always mournful, and lips whose law was always that of kindness.

"But, Aunt Anne," I said, "you have mentioned but three in whom this scribbling propensity was developed. Were any other members of our family given to the same indulgence?"

"There have been clergymen by the score. I suppose they hardly come under the head of authors. And plenty of lawyers. You would call them makers of fiction, wouldn't you?" with a smile at the guileless satire. "But have you never heard of your great-aunt-in-law, Mrs. Abigail Carter, wife of Colonel Frank Carter, who fought in the Revolution? He lived and died on this plantation; indeed he built this part of the house just before he married the first time, for Abigail was his second wife. There is no portrait of the first, but *hers* is the fourth on the right-hand side as you go into the parlor from this room."

"I have noticed it. It is the lady in brown brocade and cherry breast-knot. Her hair is dressed in close curls on the temples, and she has a sampler in her hand."

"Something that looks like a sampler, but it isn't. It was a piece of her own work that the Colonel insisted upon her holding while the painting was made. I heard all about it while I was on a visit here in 1828 or '9. She was quite an old lady then, and her hair was like silver, but she wore it in the same way, and her hands were as elegant in shape. Her eyes were lively, and her voice sweet and clear as a bell. Her

step-daughters were here, too, with their children; they fairly worshipped her. And her husband! It was beautiful to see his pride in and love for her. One doesn't often meet such old married lovers. But she was very lovely, and such excellent company for everybody that she couldn't but be a favorite. I heard the story then, as I said—in whispers and bits, as it were—but I had almost forgotten it until four or five years ago my Will took it into his head on a rainy day to overhaul a trunk full of letters and papers that was in the garret when I came here to live, after the death of Colonel and Mrs. Carter. My husband was the Colonel's nephew. At the very bottom he found a book bound in leather, stamped in gilt letters on the cover with the name "ABIGAIL CARTER," and nearly filled with her writing. The paper was yellow, with brown spots all over it, as old manuscripts will be, no matter how dry they are kept, but Will never rested until he had made it all out. He read it aloud to his father and myself after he had been through it once; and when we told him that it was certainly true, just as she had set it down (and my husband said the listening to it was like hearing his aunt speak), Will was as excited as if he had opened a gold mine. Down he sat—it was in his college vacation—and began to copy it out, word for word. I know he intended to have it printed sometime—maybe to work it up into a book—but the war came. It is with the rest of his papers."

She knit away industriously, and I stared into the fire, trying to frame into fitting words the request I did not quite dare to prefer. Presently she resumed:—

"I've often thought of you, dear, since he left us, and wondered if you wouldn't like to read the story. It being true, and about your own kinspeople, it seemed to me likely you'd be interested in it. And I am loath to let it die out of everybody's mind, as it will, if it does not pass out of the keeping of my generation. There is but a handful of us left."

Thus it happened that I read, and carefully compared with the faded original, the heart-history of Abigail Gordon, who married Francis Carter, copied out in clerkly characters by the hand of her grand-nephew—the hand that would never hold pen again.

May 13th, 1802.

"Please get me a new scrap-book," I said to Colonel Carter, when he asked me what he should bring me from Richmond, whither business called him last week. "My old one is full."

He laughed at my moderate desire, likening it to Beauty's request for a rose when her sisters begged for jewels and fine clothes; but he brought me upon his return, besides an elegant brown brocade silk, this volume, so gay in its gilded binding, so fresh with its unturned leaves, it is almost a pity to defile it with ink, to use it as I did the bulky book stitched together and covered by myself. Yet there is fitness in the contrast. Times have changed with me as well as books. My shabby, home-made diary was the best I could afford. I have been thinking while sitting here gazing at the two lying side by side, whether I would, if I could, strike out from my memory so much of my life as is recorded in those two hundred and fifty foolscap pages;

put myself back where I stood this day fourteen years ago, and take from that point what seemed then the one easy step to this, as I expected and hoped at that date to do. It is well that GOD does not leave the decision of these knotty questions to us, for the flesh is very weak, human sight very short. HE must have had some gracious purpose in turning me back upon the very edge of the Promised Land, with the smell of the goodly spices, lilies and tender grapes in my nostrils; the sight of the sweet fields just before me; the sound of fountains, and south wind and singing-birds in my eager ears, and causing me to wander so long in a dry and bitter desert. But the pilgrimage was a sharp trial.

"You should write it all out, mother," said Frances to me last night.

She is never tired of catechising me about my past life; looks upon prosy, practical me as a heroine of romance. Whereas the truth is that, but for the happy ending of my probation, my experience is by no means remarkable. It saddens me to think to how few, whose night of weeping has endured longer than did mine, the day ever breaks this side of Jordan. Perhaps they will enjoy the eternal sunlight more for having groped so long in the darkness.

This is a delicious day. My table is drawn up to the open window about which the white jessamine climbs and flowers luxuriantly. The vine reared from the tiny root I wrapped in moss, and packed in one corner of Frank's knapsack the night of our parting! I thought it strange then that he asked for it, I so hoped he would come back to me in a day or two. It

was as if he had a presentiment of what was before us. The air is laden with the perfume that hung about another window, where I sat and sewed on that long-ago mid-May day, when, chancing to raise my eyes, I beheld close to me, outside the casement, a dusty soldier, his hat in his hand, waiting patiently my notice. He was one of a company of Virginia troops just arrived in our village, and had been quartered upon us. I was startled by his appearance, and not appeased when he made known his errand. I foresaw that the entertainment of a stranger would entail more care upon me than suited my taste. Mother was not well that spring, and while it pleased me to play the lady of the house in such matters as giving general orders to the well-trained servants, and sitting at the head of the table, and carrying a jingling bunch of keys fast to a silver chain at my girdle, I did not relish practical housewifery; detested confinement and regular hours. Moreover, to be frank, I was half Tory at heart, a lesson learned secretly from my delicate little mother, whom my father—a sturdy Whig—had transplanted to the then wild Northern Carolinas, like a white English rose, twenty years before. She never took root in the foreign soil, clung to old-world customs and prejudices, and regarded herself as an exile. She "had high notions," said our plainer neighbors, for our house, although not large, was better furnished than theirs; there was more state in our domestic arrangements; and I had a governess instead of going to school. This last appendage to our household was condemned as shameless extravagance by these good people, and my parents were too independent of their

opinion to explain that she was a reduced gentlewoman —my mother's cousin, in fact—who had no other home. We lived upon the outskirts of the village. My father was a planter, and I was eighteen years old when Frank Carter, then a private in the American army, was received as our guest; cordially by my father from the beginning, by my mother and myself because we could not help ourselves. I mention this because it seems so marvellous now, especially when I recollect how soon I learned to love him. I never called the feeling by any other name after the first week he spent with us. Before a fortnight had gone by, I knew that he loved me. I own that this was hasty, that my mother had reason on her side when she held up her hands and cried out vehemently against our betrothal as indecorous and imprudent. But those were not the times for useless and ceremonious delays. Frank might be ordered away at any moment, and we not look upon one another's faces again for months—perhaps never meet more in this world. Love grows and ripens fast under the spell of such thoughts. Then we had been together daily, almost hourly, and however others might carp and criticise, we two had no doubt that we were following the lead of destiny in vowing to be true to one another so long as we both should live. All this while I knew my Frank only as a private soldier, fighting on foot in the ranks of the Continental army, and dependent, for aught I could say to the contrary, upon the scanty pay doled out to the patriots when there chanced to be any money in the national treasury. By and by, after he had had a formal business talk with father,

mother told me a different story. I was going to marry into one of the best families in Virginia. Frank was descended from good old English stock, and he would be rich in time.

"That is, if the rebellion should succeed, which is very doubtful," added mother, trying to conceal her satisfaction at my prospects under a show of defiant loyalty to king and country.

For all that, I think she hoped that the Colonies would make good their assertion of independence. She loved her husband, and she loved me, and she was fast learning to love Frank. Who did not that knew him? There was no more popular man in his regiment, which was chiefly made up of gentlemen and gentlemen's sons. By the time he had been a week in our village, every dog and child knew and would follow him for a word or caress. Blessed is he whom dumb animals and babies love!

Did I know how highly-favored I was among women? I doubt it. True, I said to myself that I was perfectly happy. I remember the queer, giddy rush of rapture that overwhelmed me once in a while when I went to church, or walked the village streets with my noble soldier-lover, and saw how the gaze of all lingered upon his tall, erect figure and handsome, bronzed face, and the eyes that were so merry yet could be so tender; how I wondered, dizzily, if it were not too good to be true that he had really chosen me out of the whole world, and would make me his wife before long; that, happen what might, I was henceforth to be nearest and dearest to him of all living things. I believed, too, that nothing this side of heaven could be more

entrancing than the moonlight evenings we enjoyed in company, sitting upon the steps of the south porch —the one overrun most thickly with the white jessamine that grew, like a wild creeper, all along the front of the house. It was never out of bloom that summer, and I cannot recall a night without a moon. There must have been, of course, for Frank was with us two months, and I shall never forget how the new moon looked the night he went away. Still, as I was saying, I was too ignorant of life and life's changes to understand that mine was an unusual lot. It was only what I had expected all through my undisciplined, dreaming girlhood. I had been on the look-out for the fairy prince ever since I was allowed to put up my curls with a new, real tortoise-shell comb, and that he had appeared was not to be wondered at, however I might rejoice in it.

Many a girl's love—genuine, lasting love—is mixed with the alloy of vanity, and coquetry, and ungenerous triumph over those less fortunate than herself, although, Heaven knows! often more worthy. I am afraid I was not a better woman for this great happiness. It is certain that I was selfish in my enjoyment of it. I hope I had too much sense and taste to give myself unbecoming airs, in virtue of my new riches; but inwardly I thanked—not the Giver of every good and perfect gift—but my own charms—my bright eyes, rosy cheeks, and ready tongue; my superiority in education and refinement to those about me—that I was not as other girls of eighteen were. I need not wrinkle my smooth forehead, or muddy my complexion by anxieties about my future. My fortune had been

laid at my feet, instead of my going forth to seek it. I was but a child after all, an only and a spoiled child at that. The furnace-fires of the Father's wise love, not His wrath, purge our best affections from such unsightly and hurtful dross.

Two months, then—eight swift weeks—sixty-one golden, fragrant days—had sped by, and with no boding of sorrow or evil upon my young heart, I stood in the south porch, at sunset of a July day, watching for Frank's return from the afternoon drill. Mother had a headache; Cousin Abigail was at a neighbor's, helping nurse a sick child; and father was away from home. Frank and I were to be left to ourselves at supper-time; and I had ordered the cream-waffles and fried chicken, of which he was particularly fond, with coffee, fresh pound cake, and strawberry preserves, and dressed myself in white muslin, with jessamine stars in my hair, to do honor to his little feast. I felt fresh and joyous, although I had been hard at work all day upon a cartridge-box cover intended as a surprise for Frank. I had embroidered the canvas sides without exciting his suspicions, leaving him to suppose that they were for a work-bag. Every stitch was set to the music of my happy heart-beats; every leaf and tint had its association with loving thoughts of him. I had worked him into it all over, although other eyes could only see two nosegays of roses, lilies, clove pinks, and the like, bordered with a wreath of white jessamine—*our* flower from the instant he saw me, for the first time, framed by its branches, at the south window. I had coaxed the village saddler to cut out the morocco pieces for the ends and flap, and

to stitch the buckles on the straps, also to lend me an awl to puncture the holes for my needle. The rest I did myself, and many a sore prick my fingers received in the task. But it was finished, and very handsome it was, and how pleased my darling would be when I should rip away the tattered covers from the wooden frame he had used ever since his enlistment, and slip on the new one! said I to myself, with all manner of other sweet and pleasant things, idly noticing the while the bank of dun-colored cloud lying in wait on the tree-tops for the sinking sun; the shining rim that a few moments later showed where he had been swallowed up; the glittering dust in the public road, raised by a horseman going toward the country and by a drove of cows coming into the village,—and humming a little love-song Frank had taught me. At last I saw him walking up the lane faster than usual, because he was late, I supposed. Just before he reached me, I stepped down into the path to meet him, and as I did so I caught a glimpse of a pale young moon in the west.

"O Frank!" I cried, in pretended distress, "I have seen the new moon over my left shoulder." He did not say a word, only took me in his arms there in the broad daylight, and out of doors, in sight of everybody who might be passing, and kissed me again and again. I was frightened and angry, until I looked in his face and saw that he was pale as death, and his dear eyes full of tears. Then I begged him to tell me "all."

He kept back nothing. The regiment was to march in an hour, and there would be a battle on the mor-

row, with superior numbers, too. If victorious, he would come back to me in a few days. If not, it might be a weary while before we met again. I did not scream or faint. I even urged him to eat his supper, while I packed his knapsack—for was he not my promised husband?—and filled with my own hands the new cartridge-box I had prepared. We said "Good-by!" on the door-step, the jessamine streamers brushing our heads, as he stooped to lay his cheek to mine for the last time, and the faint, young moon looking sorrowfully at us as she entered the lead-colored clouds in the horizon.

"If all goes well with us you will hear from me very soon," he said. "If not, dear, trust in GOD! He will never forsake or disappoint you, and He lives forever!"

I did not take in the full meaning of the words when they were spoken. I hope to tell through all eternity how much they signified to me in the many days of darkness to which this farewell was but the gentle twilight.

The battle did take place—a desperate one, in which the patriots were driven back many miles from their original position with great loss. The victors poured into our little village, flooding it with a racketing, riotous rabble, foraging and pillaging, without let or stay, for a whole day, until their officers could restore discipline. Our able-bodied men were all absent with the army, where my father would also have been but for the lameness left by a violent attack of rheumatism. August, September, October, and November dragged wretchedly by, and there was neither message nor letter from Frank—only a report brought in

by an escaped scout to the effect that he had been seen to fall among the first that went down before the British fire, a rumor that every day made more likely. In December my father died suddenly from rheumatism of the heart, leaving us almost penniless. The executor told me this before that fearfully stormy February day, when I watched beside my mother's death-bed. She had never held up her head after her husband's funeral. I could feel and say even then, "The will of the Lord be done!" for she had not guessed how near the wolf was to the door, and she was utterly unfit to struggle with poverty. The plantation was heavily mortgaged, and there were no servants to work it, our best "hands" having been enticed or driven away by the enemy. The war had made all other kinds of property worthless. There was no use puzzling over the manner in which the sum was worked. The total was plain to sight, and it was "Ruin." Beggary or hard work—these were the alternatives set before my timid, terrified cousin-governess and myself. We could ply neither trade with any hope of success in the war-swept region in which we were. The winter was very severe. Between the frost and the royal troops, hardly enough remained by spring to keep a field-mouse alive. I sold everything that anybody would buy, gave away what I could not sell, and, slipping through the red-coat lines, made my way, slowly and arduously, with my one companion, northward. My mother's sister lived in Philadelphia, and I had a shadowy idea that she would find me work.

In Richmond my cousin sickened and lay ill so long

that when she died I had to apply to the town poor-master for means to bury her. The thought came to me, as I stood by the narrow pit into which they were lowering the unpainted pine coffin, what my mother would have felt and said had she been told that one of her kindred—a Gordon in blood and name—who had formed a part of her own household, would fill a pauper's grave. But I was past being hurt by this or any other stroke to my pride. I was thankful—I could never be glad again, so I believed—that my cousin—dear, patient, unworldly sufferer!—had got rid of this wearisome thing men call existence, and I wished, with a sort of leaden, dull heartache I ought to have got used to by this time, that I could be buried up with her, end my journey and my cares there. I did not weep over the humble mound covering my last earthly friend. Nor did I pray that the affliction might make me more fit to rejoin those who had gone before me to the land where none say "I am sick," where sorrow and crying are exchanged for crowns and psalms.

I only kept saying over and over to myself in a stupid way: "'This life which is a continual death,' 'a continual death,' 'a continual death!'"

Had I not found it so? First, my Frank gave up his breath in that bloody fight; then both my parents were taken; and now the kinswoman whose namesake and pet I was. All within one year! It was a July sun that beat sickeningly upon my head as I turned from the grave to answer the questions of a curious or conscientious man who had directed the sexton's movements.

"Must make an entry of the burial, you see," he said, producing a well-thumbed book from his pocket. "'Abigail Gordon, spinster,' you say?" writing it down. "No use asking her age. Spinsters never rise twenty-five. From North Carolina, I understand. That's all I want."

The colored sexton shouldered his spade and pick-axe, wound up the cord used in letting down the coffin, and went off whistling in one direction, the other man in another. I trudged back from the Potter's Field to my miserable lodgings; paid my bill with the last valuable I had—my father's watch—and, rather than trespass upon the grudged charity of my late hosts, set out to inquire from door to door for a situation as nursery-governess, seamstress, chambermaid, scullion—anything by which I could keep myself from vagrancy and starvation. I could not expect more than an humble position, dressed as I was in my threadbare mourning, and confessing with my first utterance to each person I accosted that I was a stranger in the city, without references or credentials. Yet if I had hoped at all, I should have aspired to something a degree better than the post of maid-of-all-work in the family of a man who kept a low grocery and liquor store, and lived in the same building. But I had a room to myself, and I stayed a month. My mistress was a coarse, raw-boned slattern, and a virago as well; the children were ungovernable; the place a hell by night with the fights and the swearing below, and uncomfortable as dirt and ill-temper could make it by day. I had no other hole in which to hide, and my sensibilities were benumbed, so I did

not mind all this so much as I did the familiarity of the master of the premises, when he, one day, in a drunken fit, offered to kiss me. I broke away from him unaided, his wife being absent at the time, flew up to my garret-chamber, made my clothes into a bundle, ran down stairs and out at the front door, and never saw him or his house again. It was a humiliation, yet it did me thus much good. It proved that I could feel, and act upon that emotion.

My next venture was as seamstress—the helper of an overworked mantua-maker, whose customers were all from the lower walks of life, most of them negroes. She was kind to me, and I smothered my disgust and labored early and late for eighteen months in the low-ceiled hut—it was scarcely more—breathing bad air winter and summer, for the place was never clean, until my employer married her second husband, and had no further use for my services. She was going to give up work, she said, and I fancy she thought me too good-looking to be a safe inmate of her new home. She made me a little present in money on her wedding-day, and when I put it with the scanty earnings I had hoarded up, I cried for joy at discovering that it would take me to Philadelphia. I had not written to my aunt except just after my mother's death to announce that event. I sent a letter before me now to ask for employment, and followed by the cheapest conveyances I could procure. It cost me some trouble and much perplexity to find my mother's sister. I had not expected that she would be so great a lady and live in so grand a house. Her husband was an army-contractor, and famishing though

the soldiers were said to be, the business must have been a profitable one, for everything in his style of living was on a very liberal scale—except my wages. My aunt would not hear of my attempting to earn my living.

"It would be a lasting disgrace to the family," she said. "My poor sister would not rest in her grave if I were to allow it. She, who thought so much of the Gordon name that she married her cousin, we used to say because she didn't think any other family in the land was fit to mate with hers! No, my sweet niece! my house must be your home until you leave it for one of your own. If you must have some nominal duties in order that you may feel independent, you may play at teaching my cherubs, look after their clothes, and so forth, and be as happy as your mother's daughter ought to be."

Then she embraced me. The plain English of all this was that I was to live ten years under that roof, a drudge, who was thanked superfluously with words, and paid for excessive and wearing labors with her board, lodging, and the cast-off clothes of her task-mistress. I slept in the room with two of the "cherubs;" washed and dressed all four, and made and mended their clothes; heard their lessons; took them out to walk, and bore without the right of complaint all their humors and petty tyranny; dressed my young lady-cousins for parties, and balls, and dinners; and, lest time should go heavily while I sat up for their return, nearly every night had set tasks of embroidery of various kinds.

"Active employment is beneficial for the mind and

body," my aunt would say, when she allotted each new burden, and I thought, but never spoke, of the Israelites in Egypt.

I was thirty years old when one who was a true gentleman, with birth, breeding, and wealth to support his claim to the title, sought my acquaintance; contrived to improve it by escorting me home from church, and meeting me when I was walking with the children—finally, offered to marry me. He was a childless widower of forty, with no near relatives except a married sister. I had heard of people being haunted by the shades of the loved and departed, but the night succeeding this proposal I learned for myself what such visitations were. I had watched out the small hours, being in an agony of indecision. My life was so mean and barren nowadays, had been so overloaded with sorrow in those that were past, that any change seemed welcome. I told myself that Mr. Seabrook merited my affection, as he had won my esteem; that the lot he offered me was like release from a hateful prison-house; that, since youth and its dreams had gone forever, it behooved me to make provision for old age and possible ill health. And how could this be done so surely as by accepting the hand of this kind and honorable gentleman? His was the only offer I had had in twelve years. It was not likely that the opportunity would be repeated shortly, if ever. I had told him I never meant to marry, and he had entreated me to think the matter over for one day more. No doubt my hesitation must have seemed odd enough to him, for he knew what my circumstances were. I had fallen asleep about four o'clock

—a restless, unrefreshing slumber, when I thought that I opened my eyes upon Frank Carter standing at my bedside. He had a spray of white jessamine in his hand, and laid it on my pillow. It was wet with dew, and smelled just as that did at home on the moonlight nights, when we sat together hand in hand on the doorstep.

"O Abby!" he said, in tender reproach, "can't you wait for me a little longer? just a little longer?"

I could feel his kiss upon my lips, and still smell the jessamine, when I awoke myself with my sobbing. I told Mr. Seabrook all about it the next day.

"He has been in his grave twelve years," said I, "but his image is as fresh in my heart as if we had parted yesterday. It would be a sin for me to marry any other man while this is so."

"You are right," he answered. "But few women are so faithful. I doubt if men ever are. I will not press you further, but I can never be less than your friend."

He kissed my hand at that and went away, and I cried heartily because I could not love him as he deserved to be loved. He sent his sister to see me, and to her under Heaven I owe the happiness of my after life. It was through her influence that I obtained the place of assistant in a large and popular boarding school for young ladies, much to my aunt's displeasure. She never visited or spoke to me after this glaring instance of disobedience and ingratitude. My new life was very pleasant, and my duties light, in comparison with the burden I had carried so long. I taught the primary classes in English, and instructed

the larger girls in fine needlework, embroidery, and painting upon velvet, and heartily enjoyed their society and my occupation.

One October day there appeared in my sewing class two new faces, fine frank ones, too, belonging to sisters, nine and eleven years old. They clung together, and looked so abashed by the formidable array of strangers that I pitied them, and instead of speaking to them across the room, went up close to their seat, and laid my hand encouragingly upon the shoulder of the elder, as I asked what were their names.

"Frances and Maria Carr," so I interpreted the shy whisper, twice repeated at my request, and thus it went down in my class-book.

If I had made any mistake in the surname, nobody corrected it, and I soon ceased to use it as I became better acquainted with the girls. They were from Virginia, and the discovery that this was so did not lessen the liking that I had conceived for them from the first. They returned my affection in abundant measures, and we were on affectionate terms before they had been my pupils a month. When I found out that they were motherless and had no visiting places in Philadelphia, I invited them to run into my room whenever they felt like it; let them talk as freely as their warm hearts prompted, of home and neighborhood gossip and "papa." About the middle of December Frances was confined to her bed by a cold, and the principal permitted me to remove her to my chamber, where I might nurse her and give her as much of my company as my school-duties allowed.

The dear child was charmed with the arrangement, and so grateful for the little I could do for her, that the charge was a pleasure, not a care to me.

We were all three together on the 23d of December, sitting around my cheerful fire. Frances in an easy chair, Maria and I busy with our needles. "Papa" had almost promised to pay his daughters a flying visit during the holidays, and each had prepared a present for him. Maria's was a buckskin tobacco pouch, worked with silk and beads; Frances had half finished a pair of braces when she was taken sick, and I had gone on with them much to her delight.

"Where did you learn so many beautiful stitches, Miss Gordon?" she inquired, watching the pattern as it grew under my hand. "How many do you know in all?"

"About a dozen, I believe," I replied, "And my teacher was my governess, an English lady."

"That is funny!" prattled on the child. "The handsomest piece of tapestry I ever saw until I came here was worked by an English lady. So Aunt Margaret—papa's sister—told me. She made it into a work-bag for me, but charged me to take great care of it, and not to let papa see it, for it would make him feel badly maybe. He loved the lady very dearly, but she died or ran away, or something else dreadful. It almost killed him, Aunt Margaret said, but after awhile he got over it and married mamma, who had been just like a sister to him always. 'Ria,' won't you please get the bag out of my trunk? There are some stitches I want to know the names of."

I was counting the stitches on the last row of my work, and did not take my eyes from it until Maria laid upon my knee the very cover I had embroidered for Frank's cartridge box! I must have behaved like one demented, for when I found my senses and right words I was kissing the embroidery as if it had been alive and conscious. Frances looked scared, and little Maria had begun to cry. It was this, I believe, that brought me to. * * * *

I can't write down all that happened in the next few days, but this is not because I have forgotten one of the events which crowded thick and fast upon me. Colonel Carter came on Christmas Day, and when introduced to his daughter's teacher and nurse, recognized me at once. I had not anticipated this. Still less had I dared hope that his love would revive with all the fervor of youthful passion when he found that I was alive and single. He had sought me in vain when military engagements suffered him to revisit my old home. With infinite trouble he had traced me to Richmond, then to the Potter's Field, having learned accidentally that a woman named Gordon had been buried there in July. Inquiry of the official who had jested over my poor cousin's newly-made grave led to an examination of his book. There he read, "Abigail Gordon, Spinster. Aged 20. Birthplace, North Carolina." Col. Carter erected a headstone above the neglected grave, and had the weeds cut down. I was grateful that it was thus honored, even by mistake. Then he went home, to mourn for me in bitterness of soul, as I had for him. A year later he married an orphan cousin who had

lived with his mother from her babyhood, and of whom she was extremely fond. Not even the knowledge of this could disturb the full peace of my soul in the thought that he was given back to my yearning heart. I felt sure, although he did not say it in so many words, that he was all the time waiting for me in spirit.

We were married on New Year's Day. Frank would not lose sight of me again. We brought our children home with us.

* * * * * *

Will Moore's copy broke off here, for there was a lapse of several months between this and the next entry. Evidently Mistress Abigail Carter found happiness and wedlock unfavorable to the habit of journalizing. On "Oct. 9th," there was a memorandum in a bolder hand.

"*This morning, at half-past six o'clock, our boy,* HENRY GORDON CARTER, *was born. He is a fine child. Weight, ten pounds. The mother is glad, and doing well. Bless the Lord, O my soul!*"

The births of three other children were recorded by the same hand within the next six years, and when the youngest was four summers old the mother resumed the pen. Homely chronicles, but pleasant, of plantation life, were set down in her genial style; comic and deep sayings of "the children;" bits of moralizing; criticisms of books she was reading, usually "with Frank;" and as time went on graver thoughts upon life and the beyond she felt she was

nearing; aspirations after purer and higher things than the fleeting joys of earth; until within three leaves of the end of the book a record was set in the middle of the page.

"*May 15th*, 1830. *My beloved husband passed before me into the visible presence of the Lord this day at sunset. I must wait yet a little while until my change come. Even so, Father, for so it seems good in Thy sight!*"

"You wouldn't believe," said dear Aunt Anne, as I softly shut the book, and fell into a reverie, hearkening to the drip of the February rain and the shrill sigh of the night wind, "that the white jessamine she talks so much about is alive still—or another that has come up from the old root—and that it blooms every summer!"

"Oh, yes!" I answered, dreamily, my thoughts still roaming back through the twilight vista I had been traversing all the evening, "I do believe it. I could believe, too, that it will never die."

HOW "MAD MARCY" WAS TAMED.

PART I.

JUDGE MARCY, the professor-in-chief of the law department of —— University, was a man of stately presence, grave visage, and dignified speech. His wife—"the present Mrs. Marcy," as those who remembered his first spouse styled her—was likewise stately, sedate, and rectilinear in ideas and language. "An admirably-matched pair," said the wiseacres who had never made a psychological test of the principle that the globular is not the best figure for snug and economical packing. The wonder was, continued the sage gossips—and of gossips, wise and foolish, there is always a superfluity in a college-town—the wonder was that a father so learned and a stepmother so exemplary in all the relations of life should have sent forth into society such a harum-scarum romp as the judge's second daughter, Madeline. Laura, the eldest child, was a pensive blonde, with languishing bronze eyes, a straight nose, low, smooth brow, and a captivating drawl, whom gushing sophomores and classic seniors addressed in trochaic and hexameter as each of the Muses in turn, as Sappho, St. Cecilia, and chaste Diana. She never transgressed the pro-

prieties, kept on amiable terms with her prim step-mother, worked marvellous chairs, and foot-rests, and fender-stools for fancy fairs, and was the "loveliest of created beings" to half the ladies in town, young and old. Dora, Madeline's junior by two years, was a rosy, dimpled darling, all coo, and purr, and smiles, with bewitching shoulders she had a trick of shrugging deprecatingly upon suitable occasions, and pretty hands she displayed in the most artless manner imaginable at the piano, at draughts, and most effectively at backgammon. Chess was "too much for her," she lamented, sweetly and frankly. "She had not brains enough for the management of castles, and kings, and queens, and she preferred *real* to chess knights," archly but shyly. Madeline played a dashing game, and her father was oftenest her opponent.

"The child has fair, natural abilities," he said, the first time she beat him, who was the ablest chess-player in town or university; "but she has not been trained to habits of diligent concentration."

After this he would have her in his study every day for six months to study mathematics under his guide. Mrs. Marcy shook her head dolorously over the scheme.

"There is no such thing as steadiness in her composition, judge. No amount of drilling will repair this radical defect."

The judge began to think as much when, at the conclusion of a serious lecture upon the importance of geometrical calculations as a regulator of thought, and, indirectly as a balance-wheel to character—pending which his daughter had sat mute and respectful, her head bent over her diagram-book, while she

seemed to scribble mechanically upon a blank leaf—she handed him a clever sketch of the *pons asinorum*, with a ragged, lean donkey, whose despairing face was a caricature of her own, vainly essaying the ascent of the steep sides. He frowned at it and at her, declared his course of lessons at an end and herself at liberty to follow the bent of her own tastes, and when she had gone examined the drawing in grim amusement.

"She is unique," he said to himself. "It is plain that the mathematical is not her *forte*. Her success in all branches of science and literature will be like her chess victories—a brilliant accident. Poor child!"

Madeline would have laughed at the idea of receiving pity even from the parent she loved, and whose partiality for herself she more than suspected. The gay, high spirit that had made sunshine even in the shadiest places of Euclid gilded whatever she looked upon. Life was a glorious holiday—and *hers!* She would make the best of the flying hours if only because they were fleeting. And possessing a body as sound and vigorous and instinct with vitality as was her spirit, her pranks were the theme of every tongue, the boast of her admirers, the text from which decorous censors preached fearful things. Music, instrumental as well as vocal, "came to her," instead of being taught. Without knowing the name of a note or learning a rule, she carried off the palm of delighted admiration from all the scientific performers in her circle of musical acquaintances.

"With a proper tuition she could be worked up into a prodigy," said a would-be art-critic once in her hearing.

Nobody dared laugh openly at the speech, except

audacious Madeline, who further horrified the cautious prophet by turning to the piano and whistling clearly and strongly to an ingenious accompaniment beautiful variations of a popular air.

"Like a veritable mocking-bird!" cried the majority.

"Like a rowdyish newsboy!" muttered the opposition.

The latter would have it that she deliberately planned the outrages upon rule and precedent that continually startled the arbiters of social and maidenly etiquette who kept watch and ward over the old collegiate town; that such straining after effect was not only "in miserable taste," but betokened a wilful and malicious disregard of others' feelings and opinions. And when the whisper crept around the shuddering circle that the students in their familiar talk with one another not only dropped the ceremonious prefix to her name, but actually dubbed her "Mad Marcy," the cup of reprobation was full, and mantled with blandest pity for her "poor parents and sisters." The strangest thing of all was that her defenders and retainers were not confined to the ranks of the frivolous and reckless. The distinguished president of the university was apt to be found oftener at her side, listening with relaxed brow and lips to her lively nonsense, or promenading with her on his arm, feasting his eyes upon her animated face, than in solemn, dutiful attendance upon honored matrons and erudite spinsters. And so through the whole corps of professors down to the young gentlemen of the law school, the most studious of whom sought relaxation and refreshment in her so-

ciety. With the college boys she was queen paramount, but that was less singular.

"Men are such inconsistent creatures!" sighed the slighted board of condemnation. "How would they relish such behavior as hers in their sisters, wives, or daughters? Yet after all you will see that they will be chary of serious attentions to her. She is well enough for an idle hour. In their quest for a life-long partner she will be passed by."

Madeline, hearing most of this through officious tale-bearers, did not trouble herself to contradict the prevailing impression. She had more *bona fide* offers of marriage than Laura and Dora put together, but she had kept the secrets of the discarded swains, and made them her friends forever by this and her sisterly frankness. They never called her a "rattle-pated flirt;" and, when they heard the title applied to her by others, chafed angrily at the reflection that the sex of her detractors put the thought of personal chastisement out of the question.

"It makes my blood run cold to see how free that girl is with the young men," said Miss Sophie Slayne one evening at a large party, as Madeline, escorted by an unmarried professor, stopped to speak to a youth who, leaning disconsolately against the wall, bent his fair brows upon the festive scene in a Manfredish frown.

"I have come all the way across the room to remind you that you have to dance the next set with me, Mr. Toler," she said brightly. "It is very ungallant in you to force me to spur up your memory."

The youth undid his arms from their hard knot—*à la*

Booth's Hamlet—but knitted his forehead yet more darkly.

"Excuse me, Miss Marcy, but I was not aware"—

"That I cared enough for you to take all this trouble?" put in Madeline. "But you see I do. So you are further indebted to me for a pleasant surprise. We are keeping the set waiting. Come! *Au revoir*, Mr. Rileigh! It is too bad that you're partnerless," nodding saucily at the handsome professor as she went off.

"Now, do you know," resumed Miss Sophie to her crony, with awful emphasis and raising her voice as the music struck up, "I no more believe she had an engagement to dance with that young man Toler than I believe that I had? He is rich and very clever, they say, and she is angling hard for him. He has been very attentive to her for some time past, and some true friend has warned him that he was in danger of committing himself, or he has gone as far with her as he cared to, and to-night he has avoided her in the most marked manner, as you must have seen. But it isn't an easy matter to shake her off, as he will find out to his cost. You saw how she threw herself at his head. How can a woman who so far forgets her self-respect and the dignity of her sex expect respectful treatment at the hands of the men with whom she associates?"

"She will tame down in time. She means no harm," ventured the crony, timidly.

Miss Sophie turned upon her sharply.

"Nothing but death will ever tame that creature! Disgrace would not. She has grazed it often enough to establish that point. Her friends may thank their stars if she doesn't go clean over the precipice some

day, as many a madcap has done before her. Such coarseness and trifling are sure indications of a vulgar, depraved nature."

"Oh, do be careful!" whispered the fellow-gossip, in an agony. "I tried to caution you by speaking as I did. Professor Rileigh must have heard you. He gave you *such* a look as he moved away."

"I am glad he listened." But, in spite of her doughty tone, Miss Sophie looked scared. "It may serve as a warning. He has been hovering around the poison-flower as giddily as any of them lately. I should have thought a man of his sense would not so demean himself. He may as well understand the position he has assumed in the eyes of the community by his absurd infatuation—if he *is* infatuated. Men are such hypocrites, you never can tell whether they are in earnest or not."

"If he is really in love with her, he will never forgive us," said the weaker-minded tattler. "That is, if he should marry her."

Miss Sophie sneered. "Marry her! I can set your mind at rest on that head. There is about as much likelihood of her becoming Empress of France as Mrs. Rileigh. He may divert himself with her for a while, but Frederick Rileigh knows too well what is due to himself and his family to run the risk of bringing this hoyden into it. His father was a member of Congress for years and is very wealthy and aristocratic, the leader in every public enterprise in his State; and his wife, I have heard, is an elegant woman. One of the sons is an eminent clergyman, one a rising lawyer. Frederick is the youngest. He marry Mad

Marcy! It would be equivalent to disinheritance, my dear."

"I was sure you would not misunderstand me, Rob," Madeline was saying to her partner, looking up in his face with a cordial smile Miss Sophie would not have scrupled to call "wanton." "I could not bear to see you so unhappy. And people were talking about it. I was afraid they would say that we had quarrelled, especially as you did not come near me. I wouldn't for the world have our names joined in such a connection as that. For we are better friends than ever before. I wish I could make you feel this as I do. *Balançez!* Miss Vass is waiting."

In his abstraction, Toler, although thus prompted, made a blunder in the figure which Madeline instantly covered by another so ridiculous as to excite the amusement of the whole set.

"You are too good," said the rejected lover, gratefully, when the fun had subsided and they were again side by side, awaiting their turn. "Too forbearing with my churlish, sulky mood. I am not worthy of you. I would have tried to make myself so. No, I am not beginning a fresh persecution," for Madeline's gesture was admonitory. "I promised to accept your decision as final, but it is not easy to submit. I wish," with a forced laugh, "that you would marry some good fellow out of hand and end my misery by putting yourself beyond my reach. It would be like curing the toothache by drawing the tooth."

Madeline's laugh was peculiarly infectious, and it set off a dozen others now, like a merry chime of differently-toned bells, although no one else guessed at

the cause of her mirth. Even the woe-begone swain could not resist the influence of the musical peal.

"Now you begin to look like yourself and to talk sensibly," commented Madeline, taking his arm for a promenade. "I think that would be the surest and quickest remedy for your fancy. I don't mean any disrespect to your attachment, but people do get over these things sometimes, and are none the worse for the experience. I have been wanting to tell you something I have not confided to another human being, not even to my father. I can trust you and I feel as if it was your right. I wish I had been perfectly frank with you last night, but you took me by surprise. Don't look astonished, for Miss Sophie Slayne's eyeglass is upon us. I have been engaged to Professor Rileigh for a month. Miss Sophie, you have the faculty of collecting the most agreeable people in your neighborhood. Haven't you a snug corner here for two more of the same sort? Where is the professor? I trusted him to keep you safe until I came back. He is down upon my tablets for the next waltz. If he thinks I am going to follow up all my recreant knights as I did Mr. Toler here, he is mistaken."

"He is quite able to take care of himself," retorted Miss Sophie, meaningly.

"Without your help? So it would seem," Madeline remarked, looking over her tablets. "Don't go, Mr. Toler. If he isn't up to time, I'll press you into service."

"That's the way she manages to have a string of beaux at her heels!" snorted Miss Sophie, in a rage, when the professor, looking cool and lofty, made his

bow in season to his partner. "Was there ever such a brazen face and tongue?"

"Walk home with me, if you are not too tired," requested Mr. Rileigh, parting with Madeline at the door of the dressing-room; and answering with a bright glance, she equipped herself accordingly, allowing her sisters to ride home without her.

"Excuse me if I shamble slightly in my gait," she laughed, when they were in the street. "I have on a pair of borrowed overshoes at least two sizes too large for me. I hope I shall not lose them altogether on our way."

"Were you really engaged to dance with Robert Toler to-night, or was your reminder to him an invention of your own to bring about an interview with him?" asked the professor abruptly, without noticing what she had said.

She laughed again, joyously and innocently as a child.

"Pure invention, of course. I thought you would guess as much. I wanted to comfort him a little, he looked such a knight of the rueful countenance. He had the blues horribly, and you know I am mother confessor to half the boys in the university."

"Toler is no boy, but a man of three-and-twenty, with a man's desires and hopes and a man's weaknesses," said the other, decidedly. "A man who has moreover the credit of being very much in love with Miss Madeline Marcy. Rumor says also that his suit is not discouraged by her. You may find the office of comforter an awkward one. What ailed the sweet youth this evening?"

"I won't have you make fun of him, Fred." Madeline was stung by the coarseness of the irony, but answered sportively: "He is a good friend of mine, who does not whine over trifles. We all have our ups and downs in this world, our shadows as well as our sunshine. I hope I did help him over a rough place. If so, I am content."

"You must confine your ministrations of mercy within a narrower circle in future," pursued the lover, uncompromisingly. "The work costs you too dear. I cannot have your name bandied from lip to lip again as I have heard it this evening. Nor must Mr. Robert Toler or any other sighing swain have it in his power to boast of favors so freely bestowed as to cheapen their value. The puppy deserves a horsewhipping for his sentimental foolery."

"Fred, I don't understand you!" The great dark eyes were full of genuine wonderment as they met his in the moonlight. "*You* can't be jealous of Rob Toler?"

In a calmer mood he would have perceived and been mollified by the implied compliment. His irritation laid hold of another part of the sentence.

"I am jealous of no one, only of your good name, Madeline, which is likely to suffer through your heedlessness and vanity. It is not strange that care for that should move me to strong language."

"It *is* strange, however, that, knowing me as you do, you should attach any importance to a wallflower's gossip," Madeline was moved to reply. "I take it for granted that you heard nothing worse than a spiteful fling from Miss Sophie Slayne at 'Mad Marcy.' I,

who have been used to that sort of thing from my cradle, am not likely to take it to heart as you seem to do. Dear Fred, *is* it worth while to make ourselves miserable because a cross old maid cannot live without scandal?"

Her coaxing tone might have won him from his angry purpose had her reasoning been less pertinent. He would not confess that he had behaved like a pettish school-boy; had acted less from rational conviction than from an impulse of wounded vanity and childish dread of the world's opinion, with an active spice at the bottom of all of the jealousy she had considered so absurd.

"It is the height of folly and imprudence to give needless occasion for scandal," he said, attempting the argumentative in his turn, but only succeeding in being dogmatic. "Your carelessness in this regard has given your best friends more trouble than you dream of. No one can afford to defy public opinion."

"Tell me what you want me to do, Fred. I do not understand generalities."

Her quiet tone emboldened, not warned him.

"I object, in the first place, to your familiar bearing to all young gentlemen. It provokes invidious remarks, besides awakening in the minds of the silly and conceited presumptuous and insulting expectations. I particularly dislike your intimacy, or flirtation, or whatever it may be termed, with Robert Toler. The fellow is in love with you, as I said just now, and you are fostering his passion. I have a decided aversion to being played off against him or any other man, and *vice versâ*. I have excused much in your conduct that

would have been culpable levity in another woman, in consideration of your high spirits, your youth, and the early death of your own mother. But the defects of which I speak are grave. I would have my betrothed wife above suspicion."

Madeline's worst enemies never denied to her the virtue of an exceptionally sweet and generous temper, but there was passion as well as pain in her exclamation.

"'Suspicion!' Fred, you must not use that word in speaking of my father's daughter. Your heart and conscience will tell you by and by, when you are less angry, that you have been unjust to me in what you have said; have distrusted and misjudged me cruelly—you will never know *how* cruelly. For love's sake I could do and dare everything. For the sake of expediency—to quiet false and venomous tongues, to escape envious criticisms—I will do and risk nothing. I have never flirted with Robert Toler, and this he knows, if nobody else believes it. You, at least, should credit it. A one-sided compact is worthless. If I trust you, you must also trust me."

She had struck at the root of his uneasiness. He *was* afraid to trust his reputation, his honorable name in the keeping of this hare-brained romp. Her beauty, her wild, witching grace of manner, and her sprightly conversation had beguiled him first into love, then into the declaration of a passion his judgment told him all the while was unwise, out of keeping with the dignity of his character and position. He was vexed with himself that, knowing and acknowledging this, he was yet as completely fascinated by the way-

ward rattle as was the "puppy" he affected to despise.

"The question is," he was so insane as to say, "whether I have a reasonable foundation for such trust, whether your antecedents are not such as would rather discourage than invite it"—

She stopped him there.

"You should have thought of that before you asked me to marry you. But, since the sober second thought has come to you, I thank you for the open expression of it. Remember, I told you from the first that, while I would do my best to please you, I was doubtful of success. Look well before you leap next time. Here is the ring you exchanged with me for mine." She pulled it off and gave it to him. "If you will return mine, there will be nothing to remind us of our short-lived comedy of errors."

Her light tone lashed him to frenzy. He threw the ring she had returned into the muddy street.

"I call Heaven to witness that this is your work, not mine!" he said, in a thick voice. "The work of a heartless, unprincipled coquette, who can laugh at the offering of an honest man's love, jest at the wreck of his happiness! This will come home to you with terrible force one day, if there is justice in heaven or upon the earth. A comedy! And I have been chief jester! I was a fool to put myself in your power!"

"As you like," responded Madeline, coolly. "Here we are at home. It is too late to ask you to come in, I suppose. Good-night!"

He dropped the ring he had worn silently into her hand, without touching it, and still without speak-

ing bowed, and walked away before the door was opened.

Madeline went straight to her father's study, where the fire always burned late. It was midnight, but he was still there, busy at his desk. He nodded consent as her slight pause at the door asked if she might enter, and did not look around again until a light tinkle caught his ear.

"Don't meddle with the fire, daughter!" he said, in alarm. "I allow no one to stir it excepting myself."

"I have not touched it, papa."

She was crouching upon the rug in the full glare of the red grate, and something in her attitude—her fixed gaze into the cavern of fiery coals, or the droop of her head—attracted his attention.

"Are you very tired, Madeline?"

"*Very*," she said, with emphasis, yet trying to laugh, as she arose to her feet. "I was never so weary before. And it is a bitter night, bitter!" She kissed him "good-night!" and left the room.

"The child looks pale," thought the great juror, going back to his notes. "A sudden chill, probably. I must speak to Mrs. Marcy about it in the morning."

He forgot it when the morning brought the "child" down to breakfast, rosy and vivacious, a marked contrast in appearance and conduct to her jaded sisters, who sipped strong tea, and moaned of headache and *ennui*. The little incident of her visit to his study never occurred to him again. He certainly did not associate it with the communication which Professor Rileigh laid before the board of trustees at their next meeting. He had received an appointment to another

college, one in his native State, which he wished to accept. He desired that his resignation should take effect so soon as they could supply his place to their satisfaction.

Miss Sophie Slayne "dropped in" upon the Misses Marcy that evening. Laura was placidly crocheting in the front parlor, with a moustached senior watching her languidly-graceful motions. Dora was exhibiting her pretty hands on the piano, with an enamored junior to turn over the music which was thin, flashy, and fashionable. Through the folding-doors Madeline was visible, deep in a game of chess with her father.

"I wonder you can look so comfortable and innocent!" was the beginning of Miss Sophie's attack. "Yes, I am talking to you, Miss Maddie, who are playing the dutiful daughter so properly! Do you know the whole town holds you responsible for the loss of its fairest ornament—the rich and handsome professor? They say you jilted him, flirted with him in the most outrageous manner, fairly drove him out of his senses and"—

"Out of town!" supplied Madeline, with a wicked little laugh. "*That* is a mistake, Miss Sophie.—Check to your queen, papa! This is the second time I have cornered her. Beware of the third."

"Do you mean to say"—continued Miss Sophie, confronting her victim, maliciously—"can you look me in the face and say that you don't know why our Admirable Crichton has 'left us all lamenting?'"

"If you refer to Professor Rileigh, I believe it is because he is wanted elsewhere."

A beleaguered knight achieved a daring leap for his life under Madeline's fingers.

"And because you don't want him here, eh?" tittered the gossip.

"I! Oh, yes I do! He is a prime favorite of mine. I am breaking my heart secretly over the prospect of his departure."

"Pity some kind friend doesn't hint as much to him? It might change his purpose."

"No!" Madeline shook her head positively. "It would have no effect. I told him myself it would be the death of me, but he didn't seem to see the necessity of my living. I wish you would entreat him not to leave us, Miss Sophie. I don't know anybody who has more influence with him."

The professor's aversion to the scandal-monger and his open avoidance of her on all occasions were so well-known that the quartette in the front room laughed in a well-bred, yet amused way, and the judge looked up with an air of annoyance at the repeated interruptions to his game. Even the hardy veteran could not mistake or disobey the meaning of this movement, and retreated to a safe distance. Under her eyes, Madeline won the game and was jubilant over her victory. Raked by a battery of curious and unfriendly regards, she held on her dizzy way during the days that preceded and followed the brief formal farewell call made by Frederick Rileigh upon the family, her father and stepmother included, never over-acting her part, yet never flagging in the sight of others. She had no confidante. To Robert Toler she only said:—

"The professor and I have agreed to disagree, Rob. Forget what I told you, with everything else foolish

in our intercourse, and you will do me the only favor I ask in this connection."

Eighteen months from the night in which she had dropped the ring yet warm from Frederick's hand, into the scarlet cavern of coals, brought her sister Laura's wedding-eve. Rileigh's successor had fallen an easy prey to her classic charms and found favor in the dove-like eyes. Madeline—hereafter to be "Miss Marcy"—was first bridesmaid.

"I have not 'gone off,' as the English girls say, a bit," she said to herself, when she was dressed for the ceremony. And to make sure of the reassuring fact, she turned the gas-burner so as to throw a stronger light upon her face. "I do not look more than my two-and-twenty years, I flatter myself."

Straight and pliant as a reed she stood in her flowing white draperies, her scarlet sash and the carnations in her hair hardly brighter than her lips, the fine oval of her face untouched by time or sorrow, the quick blood mantling her cheeks as she gazed at the comely picture in the glass. She fully justified at that instant the enthusiastic admiration she had inspired in the breasts of Rob Toler and his *confrères*—excused Fred Rileigh's temporary infatuation.

"I am glad, yet I should not have expected it," she continued, a wave of softness flooding the tell-tale eyes. "It has been a long time. A *long* time and a fierce fight."

She turned to go to the bride's dressing-room when she espied a package of irregular shape lying on a table near by. It was her bouquet-holder which she had sent to be mended a few days before, the chain having been broken.

"Done up in a piece of newspaper, as I live!" she ejaculated, in disgust. "I must give M. Bluet a lesson in the niceties of white or tissue wrapping-paper and pink twine."

Undoing the parcel with dainty fingers, a name caught her eye, and she unfolded the fragment with eager care, smoothing it out upon the marble top of the stand with fingers almost as cold. "*Fatal Accident!*" was the heading of the article in which she read the regrets of the editor and the community at large over the misfortune that had plunged a highly respectable family into the depths of affliction, and quenched prematurely the light of a useful and honored life. "A carriage containing the Honorable Edgar Rileigh and his son, the brilliant young professor, Frederick Rileigh, Esq., of ——— College, had been upset by a pair of unmanageable horses, and hurled down an embankment. The elder gentleman had escaped with a few bruises. Professor Rileigh had been extricated from the ruins of the vehicle in a dying condition and horribly mutilated. As we go to press," continued the reporter, "the heart-rending news is brought us that he has just breathed his last. We deeply sympathize"—

Madeline read no further then. She folded the paper when she had looked at the date, seen that it was a month old, and that the journal of which this was a part was published in her former suitor's birthplace. She laid it away in a drawer and locked it up from other eyes. Then she put her hands to her temples to still the beating that was taking her senses from her, and tried to think.

"Why has this been kept from me? It could not

have been accidental. Everybody hereabouts must have heard of this—he was so well-known—and this item must have been copied into our papers, although it escaped my eye. Have people known my secret all the while I believed I was hiding it? A month ago! And all this while I have never dreamed— If he had loved me as I did him, his spirit would have come to me—would have spoken to mine. For now he knows *all!* Fred! Fred!"

She stretched her arms to empty air in the stifled cry. For one moment her brave soul bowed and shook in the tempest of memory and despair. The next, she had turned her back upon the past, said to sorrow, "Not now. I have a life-time in which to mourn;"—to pride, "To-night I need you more than ever, my best of helpers."

Dora, who was the other bridesmaid, shed a sun-shower of becoming tears during the ceremony. Mrs. Marcy's stern eyes were wet at the anticipated parting with her favorite; even the judge was visibly moved, while aunts, cousins, and the great host of bosom friends who had rallied about Laura at this, the supreme moment of her life, wept more or less copiously. Madeline's head did not bow except slightly during the prayer; her eyes glittered, and her teeth gleamed in a play of radiant smiles she seemed to strive but ineffectually to restrain within the bounds of conventional decorum.

"You actually laughed at the very moment in which they were pronounced man and wife," said a sentimental miss, reproachfully, afterward. "I could hardly believe my own eyes."

"I could not help it," Madeline declared. "Miss Sophie Slayne was weeping into her laced handkerchief by mistake, and just then recollecting herself, snatched it away from her eyes and pulled from her pocket a plain one that she had brought along for use."

"It would have been more complimentary to me—at least, would have looked better, had you not seemed so happy at getting rid of me, Maddie," regretted Mrs. Laura Foster, as her sister helped her on with her travelling dress.

"And how ridiculous it was in her to insist upon everybody calling her 'Miss Marcy!'" interjected Dora. "Absolutely childish!"

"I thought you were pleased at marrying Charley Foster, Laura," said Madeline. "I love you quite as well as if I had whimpered."

"I know it, dear," conceded the newly-fledged matron, with amiable condescension. "And your spirits have never been tamed by love or sorrow."

One wet, windy evening, six months after Laura's marriage, Judge Marcy read his newspaper beside the study fire, the lamp-light falling softly upon his strong features and the massive head covered with silver hair. He was not a man whose mien invited familiarity, yet while he read, a slight figure glided unheard in at the door behind him, cast her arms about his neck, and a face all tears and smiles like a meteor seen through a mist, came between him and the *Evening Gazette*.

"Papa, papa, he is alive and he loves me! Help me to bear it!" cried Madeline, hysterically, clinging to his breast as she would have done to her own mother's. "He wants me, too! Read!"

She put a letter into his hands, and sinking to her knees at his feet, leaned upon him, watching his countenance as he perused the sheet she had given him. Mystification, intense and unmingled, was the reigning expression until he reached the bottom of the first page; then the rugged lineaments softened into pity and sympathy. Surprise and perplexity followed, and the last leaf concluded, he put his hand gently upon the head resting against his knee.

"My dear child! I am very sorry for all this. I heard of the accident when it occurred, but had no idea it was so serious"—

"Papa, I read that he was killed! And I have believed it all along, and I loved him better than I did my own life!" A great sob finished the sentence.

"Poor girl! Did you speak to no one of it?"

She shook her head. "How could I? I thought my right to mourn him had been taken from me."

The judge mused more and more gravely, his hand fast in hers.

"My daughter," he said, gently at last, "I honor you for your fidelity. I grieve with you at the thought of what you have both suffered. But do you understand all that Rileigh says in this letter? That he is a helpless cripple. 'A useless, distorted hulk,' he calls himself. He has been chained to his bed for six months and is just able to creep out into the open air upon crutches. His very handwriting is evidence of his feebleness. I should not know it for his."

Madeline had the letter and was passing her fingers lightly and lovingly over it.

"Who can wonder at it?" she said. "His right arm was shattered."

The judge caught at the word. "And a man needs a whole strong right arm for the support and defense of a wife. Dear," his voice trembling slightly, despite his iron will, "a father may surely hesitate to consign his best beloved child to such a fate. In asking you to be his wife, he would bind you to years of wearisome drudgery, of care and toil and wearying demands upon strength and patience. You are not fitted for the position of nurse to this or any other man."

"Papa, don't oppose me in this. I shall marry him in any event, for I am of age, but don't send me from your house without your blessing. *My* arm is strong, and my spirit not only willing but yearning to enter upon the blessed service you call wearisome. He does not say 'Marry me,' you see; only that he loves me; that he has loved me through all, and that he longs for me every hour. If he cannot come to me I shall go to him—be to him feet, hands, head, everything. God is very good to have kept him alive for me. I am so thankful for this, and that he needs me. I cannot be as sorry as I should be for what has happened. I shall write to him this very night, papa, and I want you to do the same. This is no time for foolish hesitation or girlish reserve, for"—with a prideful tenderness very pathetic to the listener, in the reiteration—"he *needs* me, you see, papa!"

PART II.

"SHE was fairly warned. I wrote to her so soon as Frederick informed me of the renewal of his engagement with her, telling her plainly what her future lot was to be should she persist in her intention of marrying him. I described without reserve his state, physical and mental, dwelling emphatically upon the effect his incurable lameness and the sufferings of the past half year had had upon his spirits and temper. No woman in her right senses could, after reading that letter, become his wife with the remotest expectation of happiness. When she stood by him at the altar she knew that she was tying herself for life to a cross-grained clog."

Thus spoke the Rev. Arthur Rileigh, walking up and down his father's spacious parlor, his hands clasped behind him, his bosom swelling under his strait-breasted vest, in the proud consciousness that he had risked his brother's anger and the disfavor of his sister-in-law in the conscientious discharge of an unpleasant duty. The family sat in full conclave and festive array, awaiting the arrival of the newly-wedded pair. Mrs. Rileigh, Sr., a comely dame in black *moire* and lace cap, spoke next.

"I do hope she will take good care of my poor Fred. But what Frank writes of her has led me to

doubt whether his brother has made a judicious selection of a nurse. I am afraid she is very giddy."

"She is likely to be sobered speedily," laughed Miss Felicia, the only daughter and youngest child of the household. "I am sorry for her, yet relieved that the burden of Fred's illnesses and humors is to fall upon somebody besides mamma and myself. It is queer though that any young girl should have had the courage to undertake the task. I should say positively that she must have been absolutely agonizing to enter the estate of matrimony, and that offers were distressingly scarce, but for Frank's report of her beauty and popularity. The whole thing is an enigma."

"There are two sides to the story of her belleship," said Mrs. Arthur Rileigh, with an air of extreme discretion. "I have an acquaintance—Miss Slayne—who is a resident of the same town with these Marcys. When the news of this extraordinary betrothal was imparted to me I wrote to her guardedly and confidentially for information respecting Miss Marcy. I destroyed her answer which was also confidential, immediately after reading it, without even showing it to Arthur. If the result of my inquiries had been satisfactory, I need hardly say that I should have been delighted to make it known to you all. I can only observe that mother has judged correctly in surmising that the young woman has been very giddy, and that she has also manifested her accustomed charity of thought and speech in applying no harsher term to her career. I fancy Miss Marcy was not sorry to leave the scene of her many escapades, even at the cost of

becoming the wife of a hopeless cripple. Indeed, his helplessness may have its advantages. Unless I have been grossly misinformed, she would not be tolerant of control or espionage."

"She shall play none of her scandalous pranks here," returned Rileigh *père*, his gray forelock bristling at the thought. "I'll see to that! As Arthur has said, she knew what she was undertaking when she married Fred, and if he cannot hold her to her duty and home, I will."

"You needn't alarm yourself, papa. Fred can fight his own battles," Miss Felicia said as flippantly as before. "I would rather be caged with forty porcupines than marry one man like him. He has worried all the flesh off my bones and the nap off my temper already. Of course the girl must have had some hidden motive for marrying him, and may deserve and need sharp discipline for this and other follies; and I don't feel amiably disposed toward her for forcing herself into our family, but I do pity her, as I remarked, sincerely."

"I pity Fred more. I learn that her *sobriquet* in her native place is 'Mad Marcy,' and that it was well bestowed," observed Mrs. Arthur, discreetly and demurely as before.

She had a very round, white face, brown hair, pale blue eyes, and small features; was plump and short, and reminded Madeline the first time she saw her, and always afterward, of a chestnut-worm. She had brought the Rev. Arthur a handsome dowry; she was rather active than popular in his parish, but maintained a high reputation for propriety and prudence, and was a chief favorite with her mother-in-law.

"Since the poor afflicted boy was bent upon marrying, I wish he had chosen as wisely for himself and for us all as you did, my son," sighed the matron, addressing her eldest-born. "But I suppose *that* could hardly have been expected."

"Maybe Fred's wife really loves him. You know they were engaged before—two years ago. Frank says she is very charming and her devotion to his brother beautiful."

The suggestion, modestly and timidly uttered, came from a young girl who sat in the shadow of Mrs. Rileigh's chair. She had a sweet but not pretty face, and blushed painfully at the laugh with which Felicia wheeled upon her.

"You dear little simpleton! If she loved him, why did she break the engagement? If I were in your place, I should not relish Frank's extravagant laudation of his new relative-in-law. What if she should reciprocate his admiration by preferring the sound, handsome brother to the injured one?"

"I am not afraid," responded the other, but her smile was hardly sincere.

Discreet Mrs. Arthur had her say again. "From what I can gather it was Fred, and not the lady, who retreated from the former engagement, and he was justified in his action by the unscrupulous flirtations of his betrothed. I trust, however, Alice, for your sake at least, that she *will* give up the habit, now she is fairly married."

The sound of a carriage stopping at the door ended the discussion. The gentlemen hastened out, the ladies following them as far as the hall.

The bridegroom came up the steps, supported by a brother on each side, and close behind them was his wife, carrying his crutches. They were light and elegantly wrought, with crimson cushions at the top. The wraps and air-pillow, without which Frederick could not have travelled with any degree of comfort, were in the hands of a servant, and Madeline had picked up her slight burden mechanically, and without a thought of the possible consequences of her appearing before her new relatives thus encumbered. As a matter of course, all eyes were bent upon her when hasty salutations had been exchanged between Fred and his friends. She stood in the full glare of the hall light, her lithesome figure displayed to striking advantage by her closely-fitting travelling dress, the dark fur with which it was trimmed heightening the effect of her rich brunette complexion; her eyes sparkling, lips apart and quivering with excitement and pleasurable anticipation. The incongruity of the badge of deformity with this impersonation of health, vigor, and symmetry could not fail to impress the most obtuse of the spectators. Felicia was foremost in the expression of this.

"You have invested her with the insignia of office, I see, Fred," she said, as she kissed Madeline.

"Arthur, Frank, one of you should have relieved her of these!" exclaimed Mr. Rileigh, offering to take them and evidently annoyed. "I am ashamed and shocked that we should have allowed this, my dear Mrs. Frederick."

"You need not be, sir," Madeline said, with frank cheerfulness. "They have been my especial charge

all through the journey. Anything but an unpleasant one, too, I assure you."

She would have fitted one under her husband's arm, but he caught it from her, adjusted it to its place, steadied himself upon it and held out a hand for the other, his face pale with anger and mortification.

"Let me pass, if you please," he uttered, making a movement toward the parlor.

Madeline fell back out of his way to the side of Frank's betrothed.

"We ought to be friends," she said, softly, taking the hand of the blushing girl. "I have known you as long as I have Frank, and we are already cronies—sworn allies."

The latter clause caught Fred's ear as he let himself down groaningly, with his brother's help, to the sofa heaped with pillows.

"Allies!" he echoed, with a harsh laugh. "That implies the existence of an opposing or obnoxious power. Am I to understand"—

"That you are at home again; that your friends are overjoyed to see you, and that, by and by, when you are rested, and appreciate what you have accomplished by the journey that has fatigued you, you will be the happiest man alive," interposed Madeline, saucily, arranging his cushions and putting away the hair from his forehead.

"Don't be absurd!" he muttered, ungraciously, and Mrs. Arthur lifted one fat shoulder, with one arched eyebrow, in dumb, horrified show to her mother-in-law. The gesture said: "When I was a bride, I would have been drawn by wild horses sooner

than use such language to my lord in the hearing of others. But what did I tell you?"

Felicia carried Madeline off to change her dress.

"You don't mind Fred's bearish moods, I see," she remarked on the stairway. "It is well you are so philosophical, for this is his normal state. He had always a villainous temper, but he used to make some show of controlling it. Now it is *awful!* I am glad you are not sensitive. If you were, he would kill you by inches."

"I think not. I have wonderful vitality," was Madeline's rejoinder in her gayest tone. More gently she added: "Seriously, I trust I shall never forget that it is pain, not temper, that speaks when he seems impatient."

"That is a comfortable view to take of the matter, certainly. I hope you will hold fast to your resolution. For human nature cannot bear friction forever. Life or patience must give way. These are your rooms. They are the pleasantest in the house. Fred would not be satisfied if he had not the best of everything, and since he was hurt all the rest of us have had to give way before his whims. He is a perfect Turk, as I suppose you have found out by this time. Dinner will be ready in half an hour. Can you find your way back to the parlor alone, or shall I send Arthur or Frank for you—your real master being out of the question? How odd to be obliged to supplement a bridegroom in that way!"

"I will come down alone, if you please," said Madeline, still pleasantly. "And you must not make a

stranger of me. I wish to take my place as a daughter of the house without delay."

She dressed rapidly but with care. Her quick eye had noted the elegant apparel of the ladies below stairs and she selected from her *trousseau* a light silk, with lace trimmings and a sweeping train that lent queenliness to her stature, decorated neck and arms with a set of handsome jewelry—Fred's bridal gift—and without trusting herself to think for one moment when a final look at the mirror had told her all was right, ran down to the drawing-room.

"Actually bounded down the steps like any school-girl," commented Mrs. Arthur to her husband that night.

Her father-in-law met her at the door, offered his arm with much ceremony and led her to a seat beside Fred's sofa. Her husband answered her smile by a half frown and an impatient movement of his head.

"You will excuse my travelling dress, mother," he said shortly. "It does not signify how *I* look. But you needn't have taken so much pains to make the contrast more marked, Madeline."

And she, smitten with sudden loathing of her brave attire and longing for sackcloth, ashes, and a safe corner in which she could cry out her homesickness, her disappointment and her dreads, yet replied, playfully—the Rileighs thought pertly: "You are fishing for a compliment now, Fred. As if Miss Slayne did not call our marriage 'the union of mind and matter!' You should have heard the girls of our town rave about his 'etherialized face' and 'spirituelle eyes,'" she continued to Felicia.

"You *are* acquainted with Miss Slayne, then?" queried Mrs. Arthur, with what was to Madeline unmeaning emphasis.

"I have known her ever since I can remember," she replied, unsuspectingly, and thereby sealed in her hearer's minds the truth of that lady's testimony touching herself.

Frank ended the awkward pause that followed by a rattling description of the pretty girls he had met at the wedding, and Madeline had time to steady her pulses and gather her scattering wits—to remind herself anew what a pitiable wreck in nerve and muscle was the man she had married; to rally about his image the great wealth of love and compassion that surged up in her heart when she remembered the handsome athlete who had wooed her two short years ago, and looked upon the pallid face and distorted body before her now. She had never been sick herself, but this very ignorance of physical infirmity invested the sufferer with sacredness; awed her into reverential pity in the presence of the mysterious anguish. She put away from her the recollection of the fact reverted to freely by Fred's own family, namely, that his disposition was naturally jealous and his temper irascible. She never owned even to herself that upon which her father had dwelt strongly in his dissuasive talk with her the evening she received her lover's first letter, and which she learned after her marriage he had also expressed, but more delicately, to her betrothed.

"It is gross, inexcusable selfishness in him to seek to tie you to the battered hulk he describes here," the

judge declared after re-reading Fred's account of his present condition. "The man has lost his senses, or is devoid of common humanity. It is monstrous!"

Madeline put her hand upon his lips.

"You are angry, papa, and do not know what you are saying, or I would not bear that, even from you. It is the 'honest hour' with him. I used to be sure it would come to him some time. The hour in which he understands how truly I love him and that he cannot live without me. Do you know what I shall write to him before I sleep? That if there is enough of his body left to hold his soul, I will marry him; that if he cannot come to me, I will go to him without scruple and without fear."

She had not known until the day after the wedding that they were to live in his father's house. Fred had property of his own—enough, he represented to Judge Marcy, to maintain his wife in modest comfort, and Madeline's portion of her mother's dowry was settled upon herself. She had hoped for a neat, tasteful cottage, in the dear seclusion of which she could devote herself to the holy work of making life as beautiful to her invalid husband as the assurance of his love had made it to her. Fred shrank visibly from the thought. His father's residence was spacious, his rooms in it luxurious and already arranged to suit his peculiar needs. The cares of housekeeping would consume much of Madeline's time, engross her attention often when he most needed her. Her father had broadly insinuated that he was moved by self-interest in renewing his suit, yet if he knew his own heart he consulted her happiness in every plan. He did desire

to have as much of her society as possible—he for whom life had so little else of brightness—but he did not want to cage his mocking-bird. He would have her free, unbound, save by the silken leash that would after every flight bring her back to his arms. His mother and sister would relieve her of the care of him for several hours each day or evening, and Frank be only too happy to escort her to concert, opera, or party. She must not cease shining because she was his wife.

"You shall make conquests by the score, and come home to talk over your victories with me, *ma belle*. People shall not say you are buried alive. And through you I shall keep up with the age, don't you see? It will be far better for me to make loop-holes of your bright eyes than to lie moping like Diogenes in his tub, 'the world forgetting, by the world forgot.'"

This was the song of the honeymoon, and while he chanted it he felt and believed what he said. But nature and habit together are well-nigh invincible. He had the grace to apologize to his wife for his ill-humor on the evening of their arrival, pleading extreme fatigue and great bodily pain as his excuse. Perhaps Madeline's forgiveness was too cordial and ready, for he grew daily more lax in his guard over himself, more exacting in his demands upon her time, patience, and strength. Until his accident, there had been no gayer house in the city than the Rileighs; and now that he was, to quote his sister's words, "quite off their hands," she was resolved to make good lost time and opportunities. Madeline received her bridal calls in person—"when Fred could spare

her." He persistently refused to appear below stairs upon such occasions.

"Would it not be wiser to delegate the whole duty to mother and Felicia?" said Mrs. Arthur to the "giddy" bride. "It looks so odd to see you alone in such a position, and—excuse me, my dear sister—hardly proper, as society is now constituted. The world demands such circumspection in a married woman. I actually—excuse me, but I am nothing if not frank—I actually overheard two wild young men the other evening pronounce you a 'bewitching grass widow.'"

Instead of being stunned and shamed, Madeline laughed outright.

"Am I so verdant, then? I must treasure that up for Fred. How he will enjoy it!"

She took good care, however, not to tell him of the equivocal compliment. She was learning to shun such reefs as she had already struck, and to watch narrowly for others. In reality the reception evenings, in which Felicia delighted, were to her a foretaste of purgatory. Fred insisted upon her bedecking herself in her best robes; was critical of the cut of a dress, the shade of a ribbon, the placing of a flower. When she was ready to go down stairs, he would admire her in the same breath that bewailed his own helplessness and evil fate. Sometimes he wept outright, and when she offered consolation, bade her "go and be happy. That is, forget my existence for a little while. I ought to have died before I asked you to marry such an ugly, blasted log."

True to her promise of keeping him apprised of what was going on in the gay world he shunned, Made-

line, so soon as she could escape from the parlors, would fly to his room with a merry story of the sayings and doings of the company, and such bits of gossip as she had gleaned for his amusement. He was greedy of news, yet prone to lament, when all was told, that he had pined in pain and *ennui* while she was enjoying herself below. A faithful servant generally sat in the ante-room in Madeline's absence from his chamber; now and then Mrs. Rileigh would bring her crochet needle and worsted basket to her son's side, and doze and prose away the evening. Felicia never offered her services, asking coarsely, when Frank suggested the propriety of her doing so: "What else Fred's wife was there for?" But Mrs. Arthur insisted frequently upon "performing her share of the sacred duty." Madeline soon noticed that after each of these exhibitions of sisterly attachment, Fred was more irritable and unreasonable with her than when another had been his custodian.

"I hate that woman, with her face like an overboiled dumpling, her honey-and-butter voice, and prying ways!" he had once said to his wife, and for awhile she had ascribed his dissatisfaction with herself to his annoyance at being compelled to submit to disagreeable companionship. She discovered her mistake through a sharp reprimand administered one night when she would have condoled with him upon the infliction.

"I wish you wouldn't press me to leave you alone with Amelia again, dear," she said. "I know she is smoke to your eyes and vinegar to your teeth. You always look wearied out after one of her visitations."

"What nonsense are you talking now?" he asked, roughly. "I wish you were one-tenth as conscientious in the discharge of your home duties as she is, and cared as little for the attentions of other men than your husband. She is a good, pious woman, whose example you would do well to imitate, instead of trying to poison my mind against her. I shall be glad when this hubbub of company is over. Your head is more topsy-turvey than when you came here, and that is saying a good deal."

"I only meet your friends because you desire it, Fred," the astonished wife had the self-command to answer.

"I understand that is one of your stock-phrases. I am sick of hypocritical cant."

She could get nothing more of explanation from him, but from that hour the thorns thickened in her path. It was a late day for her to begin a study so difficult as circumspection in word and look as in deed, but she addressed herself to it without hesitation, feeling that her husband's health and her own peace of mind might be the forfeit of indiscretion. She said not a word to any human being of her efforts and her failures; held up her head as gayly, smiled as radiantly, as when her heart lay bleeding under the knife of the sudden, angry parting from her just betrothed lover, or dumb and faint with the belief that he had died without forgiving or remembering her. Gradually and adroitly she withdrew from general society, seldom appearing in public except on Sabbath, when she sat beside her mother-in-law in the family pew of the church presided over by

the Rev. Arthur, and on fine days seated in a close carriage beside her invalid spouse. Fred's sufferings were often most acute at night; and when comparatively free from pain he could not sleep well, through excess of nervous excitement. It did not seem to occur to any of the family, except Frank, who might protest and fume, but was impotent to work any change in what he deprecated, that while they pitied Frederick, on hearing his account of the hours he had heard strike while tossing upon his torture-couch, compassion was also due her who was during them all his wakeful, busy attendant. If she was worn and had an indifferent appetite in the morning, the trifling circumstance passed unremarked by word of inquiry or sympathy. It seemed to be nothing to them that this girl, with her exuberance of vitality, accustomed from her babyhood to hours of exercise daily in the open air, and to sleep soundly at night without dream or awaking, was now bound down to the dispiriting routine of a sick-nurse's life, with none of the professional nurse's privileges. For all that the closest observer could tell, it was less than nothing to them that she bore the heavy brunt, morning, noon, and night, of Fred's peevishness; his fits of anger, violent or sullen; his incessant requests for attention and diversion; the sarcasms, the sneers, and causeless reproaches which they know were the portion of whomsoever fate condemned to be constantly near him and at the mercy of his caprices. They held on their way, and left her to that she had chosen without an effort to soften its harsher features.

"She knew what she was doing when she married

Fred," the mother would say, almost as often as did her selfish daughter. "Arthur warned her faithfully."

Which circumstance served as an ample excuse for their neglect of her, legitimate release from all duties which had devolved upon them as Fred's relatives and nurses while he was single.

"It is her business," was the invariable reply to Frank's assertion that "it was a deuced hard lot for any woman." "She has only herself to blame."

Madeline had been for eight months an inmate of the Rileigh mansion, when Frank, overtaking her on the stairs one evening, stayed her by seizing her arm and was shocked to feel how slight it was.

"This is going too far, Maddie," he said, feelingly. "Close confinement this hot weather is telling upon your strength. Fred must be made to hear reason. For your good, if not for his own, he must be taken to the mountains or sea-shore."

"Don't speak of it, please," replied she, lowering her voice. "He would miss the comforts of home, and you know his aversion to meeting strangers. I am none the worse for having less weight to carry in the summer, but decidedly the more comfortable. Don't you remember the man who longed in the dog-days to shake off his flesh and sit in his bones a little while?"

"You'll be a skeleton in reality if you don't take care of yourself," pursued the other. "Be reasonable for once. Alice and I are going out for a moonlight sail on the river. Come with us. I will send mother up to look after Fred."

Madeline shook her head, with a grateful smile into the kindly anxious face.

"You are very good to me, dear brother. But my poor boy has a bad headache to-night, and I must sing or read it away. Good-evening, and a pleasant sail to you!"

"Fred's abominable selfishness is killing that woman by inches," proclaimed Frank, indignantly, returning to the parlor. "And we shall not be guiltless if we do not interfere. I never saw another woman so changed in the same time. I have been begging her to go with us, Alice, but she cannot leave that pampered despot up-stairs."

"I shouldn't think Alice would feel complimented by your anxiety to increase the size of your party," said Felicia's over-ready tongue, while Mrs. Arthur looked unutterable things. "When you find your knight missing some day, don't say I didn't open your eyes—or try to."

"Absurd!" retorted Frank, contemptuously. "I say nothing of the taste and delicacy of such insinuations, Felicia, for there can be but one opinion on that head. I only object to your evasion of the question of our duty to Fred's wife. She cannot take care of her health and he will not. I should be ashamed to have her father or her sisters see her. Such a brilliant, beautiful creature as she was when she came to us! And look at her now! I don't believe she weighs a hundred pounds. I took hold of her arm just now, and it is as small as a baby's, without the plumpness."

Mrs. Arthur cleared her throat prudishly.

"Is not this a question to be considered by your brother rather than by yourself, Franklin?"

"Does he consider anything except the ease of his precious, patched-up body?" cried Frank, in generous heat. "If this glorious woman is to fall a victim to his selfishness, I shall be tempted to wish he had been killed when he went over the cliff."

Felicia's voice was loudest in the outcry that followed.

"I have often thought you were fast coming to that point."

Too angry to reply, Frank accosted his betrothed: "If you are ready, Alice, we will go."

She arose, without a word to him, said "Good-evening!" all around, and they left the house together. But when he would have turned down the street leading to the river, she held back.

"I prefer that you should take me home, Frank. *Then* I think Mrs. Fred Rileigh will go with you."

"*Alice!*"

"I mean what I say," she went on, her voice thinning as it heightened, after the manner of very amiable women when they are fairly enraged. "I have seen this drawing nearer and nearer ever since she came to your house, seen how you admired her and she you. I don't wonder she is getting thin and pale, but it isn't with waiting upon her husband. She is pining with love for you.'

"There! you have said enough," said honest Frank, quietly. "No one shall slander a good, pure woman while I can prevent it. I had given you credit for more justice, more charity, more common sense.

When you are calm, you will see for yourself how preposterous is the charge you have made against me and against my sister-in-law."

"Never!" beginning to sob. "And it is very rude in you to intimate that I am a fool or in a passion because you have forced me to speak plainly. This rupture must have come sooner or later. I have known it ever since that first fatal evening. I have not had a moment of real happiness since this bold, designing creature crossed my path. But when it comes to your wishing your brother dead it is time to act."

Great was the amazement and deep the regret of the Rileighs when Frank announced to them next day the dissolution of his engagement, declining however to give the particulars of the rupture or the cause.

"There's something in this more than a common lover's quarrel," said Felicia, sagely, to her mother. "And I will probe it to the bottom."

Without waste of time she betook herself to Alice's abode, ostensibly as a mediator, in fact as a spy, and came back laden with a big budget of scandal—a story that, leaking out through various channels, in three days had reached nearly every quarter of the city. It was excluded from Fred's apartments during this time. He was laboring under a brief but severe attack of illness, and Madeline did not leave him except for her meals. Disregarding, in her solicitude on his account, the moody silence and sulky or tart speeches that were the replies to her few remarks while at table, she had no suspicion of the event that had set the tongues of a thousand gossips to wagging

and stirred up in the breasts of her relatives-in-law deadly distrust and dislike of herself. It was, therefore, with no especial misgivings beyond a fear that the society of the discreet pastoress might work its usual consequences in vexing her husband, that she obeyed his directions to leave him with Mrs. Arthur, while she herself took an hour's rest. Seeking a spare bed-chamber in the third story as the most quiet in the house, since Frank's room was the only one near ever used by the family, and he never came home until evening—leaving door and sashes open to admit what little air might be abroad on the stifling afternoon—too weary and heavy with sleep to make any change in her dress, Madeline threw herself across the bed, and in less than a minute was in a profound slumber.

The hour went by—two—and she had not stirred. Mrs. Arthur felt the cords of her own home duties tugging at her conscientious soul more and more imperatively, and finally, urged by Fred, mounted the stairs in quest of the delinquent. Bars of gold penetrated the shutters, and lay, still and bright, upon the white-robed figure on the bed.

"What an indecorous but studied posture!" thought the immaculate matron, pausing to note the pretty feet, from one of which the slipper had fallen to the floor, the head pillowed by the bare arms, Madeline having been too tired to think of any other support. "Suppose Frank had passed the door! May be that was what she expected. He may talk of her worn looks, but she is handsome enough still to be a snare to most men—a very Delilah!"

In the excess of her virtuous indignation, she shook the sleeper by both arms—I am not sure but she pinched them, for the temptation was great. Madeline's eyes opened widely.

"Oh! is it you, Amelia?" Then, laughing nervously—Mrs. Arthur thought guiltily—"I was dreaming about Frank, and I really thought you were he. I was ascending Mount Vesuvius all alone and toppled over on the verge of the crater—down! down! when suddenly I heard him laugh and he jumped out from behind a rock and caught my arm. Thank you for waking me! My arms are fast asleep still," sitting up and rubbing them. "The nightmare was induced by something I was reading to Fred to-day about the last eruption of Vesuvius. Have I overslept myself? How is Fred? Why didn't you call me before? *Has anything happened?*" noting, as her eyes became accustomed to the mingled gloom and glare of the room, the awful severity of the round white face, the ominous set of the thin lips.

"Nothing new. But *your husband*, of whom you were *not* dreaming, wishes to see you," was the tremendous rejoinder.

"He is worse!" ejaculated Madeline, and without further stay or parley flew breathlessly down-stairs.

He was worse, for his mother was with him piling the pillows behind him in the posture that always indicated distress for breath, and his complexion was livid.

"Darling, what is it?" cried the terrified wife. "Why did you not send for me"—

She had stooped to put her arms about him and lift

him higher upon the lounge, when he struck her in the face with his clenched fist—a blow so true and heavy in the might of his fury that it dashed her to the floor. In falling, she caught the epithet he hurled at her with an oath. The scar of *that* wound never left her heart.

On the following day a card was brought to Madeline as she sat in the darkened room beside her husband, whose fit of rage had been succeeded by a night of pain and a day of utter prostration.

"Who is it?" he asked, sulkily, a suspicious gleam lighting his sunken eyes, as she half arose, then resumed her chair as if irresolute.

"My father and mother. Shall I ask them up here, or excuse myself and let them call again when you are better?"

Her steady, somewhat monotonous tone was not unpleasant to an ear unacquainted with her animated intonations, but Fred moved uneasily at the sound.

"What a ridiculous question!" he retorted, testily. "Would you have them think you a prisoner? Go down at once. Tell Mary to listen for my bell."

He was ashamed to glance at the dark bruise upon her cheek, but he tortured himself when she had gone with speculations as to how she would account for it to her parents. Would she expose his brutality of act, and the baser cruelty of the charge he was even yet but half convinced was groundless, so deftly had Mrs. Arthur done her benevolent work of enlightenment, so easily had the prepared train of jealousy in his breast been fired?

Mrs. Rileigh and Felicia were in the parlor with

other guests when Judge Marcy and his wife entered, and Madeline found the four engaged in conversation and already upon excellent terms of acquaintanceship.

As Fred had foreseen, the judge's first inquiry, after he had kissed his favorite, was: "My daughter, what have you been doing to your face?"

Mrs. Rileigh's stealthy look at her daughter met one as full of apprehension, and a sigh of relief escaped the bosom of each at Madeline's unembarrassed reply—

"I had a fall, papa. You know I never walked as safely through life as most people do."

"I never saw a more marked improvement in any woman," said Mrs. Marcy, who was renowned for her sagacity and excellent judgment of character.

They were back in their hotel, having spent the evening with the Rileighs, and the subject under discussion was her husband's second daughter.

"Her manners are the perfection of refined repose," the lady continued. "She has acquired dignity of demeanor and stability of thought. I am exceedingly gratified. I thought this marriage would tame and tone down her wild spirits, if anything could."

"True, my dear." The judge spoke musingly, and there was a regretful, yearning look in his face. "I have lost my madcap forever, I see. As you say, she is an elegant, dignified woman. But I wish I knew by what process the change was wrought."

Ten years later Madeline Rileigh laid in the grave the warped frame to which she had ministered so faithfully and so long and returned to her girlhood's home. Her step-mother was dead, but the old house was

scarcely the gayer for the coming of the new and younger mistress. Her footsteps fell without sound in hall and upon stair, as they had done upon the floor of the sick room; her voice was subdued with even cadences; her very smiles rare and chastened. Before his brother had been a twelve month dead, Frank Rileigh, the most petted bachelor of his circle, asked her to marry him.

"You have not your peer among women," he said. "I, who have watched you so long and closely, should know this. Let my love restore some of the lost brightness to the life so early and wantonly blighted."

She laid her hand upon his head, as a mother might caress a foolishly-fond son.

"There is not a gray hair here, Frank, while I have at least a hundred. You call yourself a year my senior, when in reality I am fifty years older than you. I love you too well, dear brother, to do you the wrong of marrying you. I can never love or hope again in the way you speak of. The germ of possible affection for any man was scorched out years ago. And," with a faint smile more mournful than tears, "trees killed by lightning don't put up from the root, you know."

LOIS GRANT, AND HER REWARD.

PART I.

ONE of the prettiest and most striking of the many picturesque bits of scenery to be found in the mountainous township of Berkeley was the Stony Ford Bridge and its surroundings. A hill arose abruptly on each side of the creek; one crowned by a venerable stone church, erected, it was said, in Queen Anne's time, a well-peopled graveyard, and the smart, new academy, but a year old, white, with green blinds and a sharp upstart of a cupola, which faced the antiquated building from the opposite side of the public road. The other and less rocky eminence was green with fields and orchards and capped by a spacious farmhouse. A long portico ran along the front, covered with roses and clematis and honeysuckles all ablow, at the season of which we are writing, and a flower-garden separated it from the dusty highway. It was a healthful situation and a beautiful one, the abode of thrift and comfort, and, judging from the excellent condition and the extent of mansion and outhouses, of wealth likewise. The weathercock upon the great barn—a gilded horse at full gallop—was visible for miles around, and had no compeer in the estimation

of the admiring population living within sight of it, until the district school committee mounted a rooster, colossean in dimensions, saucy in attitude, and yellowest gilt in color upon the pert spire of their model edifice.

The rival vanes were shooting back the slant sunbeams at one another on a breezy June afternoon when a man came out of the school-room door, locked it behind him, put the key into his pocket and walked slowly down the road to the bridge. This was a substantial structure, fifteen feet high and as many broad, spanning in one massive arch a rapid torrent, celebrated in the early summer for the number and size of the trout that lurked and leaped in its hollows and eddies, and in late winter for the height and violence of its freshets. The bridge was a match for these last, and had held its own for many years, said the lichens that had collected in slow gray circles upon the red sandstone of which it was built and the block of marble let into the parapet bearing the date of its completion. The pedestrian leaned over this in his halt upon the causeway. Many other passengers on foot and in carriages paused every day upon the same spot, and looked up the rapids into the far dark recess formed by perpendicular walls of rock and arching hemlocks, lit up by ghastly streaks of foam upon the boiling waters ; then down into the lighter vista of willows, golden in the spring-time, bright green all summer, through which the stream found its way into the low country. But the solitary man traversed this route twice, sometimes four times a day, usually without casting a glance either to the right or the left, and he

stood now, one hand clasped within its fellow laid heavily upon the parapet, his head bowed upon his breast, his eyes seeming to search the depths of the seething current as it entered the archway. Very white—almost effeminate looked the hands by contrast with the reddish-brown of the stone, and his face was many shades fairer than the bronzed tint prevalent in the complexion of the people of the district—hardy sons of the plough, who feared neither vertical sun nor the midwinter sleet. The features of the lounger were cast in a manly mould, and his erect port, broad chest and shoulders enforced commendation and respect from those who might otherwise have scoffed at his tastes and habits, in whose eyes a bookworm was utterly contemned, and a puny scholar found no favor. He had not the mien of one with whom it was safe to trifle or to bandy words. His gray eyes—melancholy now to moodiness, could grow very black and fierce under the knitted brows, and his handsome mouth could be scornful and stubborn as easily as it could smile. His dress was scrupulously neat, and the circumstance of his wearing it lent a touch of style—that nameless, potent charm—to the coarse gray sack and pantaloons, almost threadbare at the seams. He would have looked the gentleman in the disguise of a workman's blouse and paper cap, and there was something in this rough suit, the only one he owned that was comfortable for warm weather wear—which enhanced the independent grace of his carriage and asserted his lordly independence of Fashion's dictates as interpreted by those who were now his associates, his supreme indifference to the criticism of those he did

not acknowledge as his equals. In this respect, his manner belied the inner man, as he intended it should. No mortal living cared more for outward show, longed more greedily than did he for popularity and such distinction as talent and personal attractions can purchase.

These—David Rodman conceived the world owed him. Those who liked him least confessed that his abilities and scholarship were of no mean order, and that his noble figure and face would have made amends in the eyes of the multitude, for comparative poverty of mental gifts. He had carried off the highest honors of his Alma Mater at his graduation three years before; for one brief day, been lionized almost to his heart's content; had one hasty, intoxicating draught of the renown and applause that were his dream by day and by night; yet here he was, at the age of twenty-three, the teacher of a country "academy," with a salary that barely fed and clothed him and paid the very moderate fee for his tuition, out of school hours, in the office of a provincial lawyer in the village two miles away. The young man walked this distance and back five afternoons in the week, no matter how weary, or what the weather might be, returning to his farm-house lodgings at nightfall, bringing with him one, two, or three ponderous tomes, which he sat up into the small hours to study. Had his physical health been less firm he must have succumbed to the enormous labor and fatigue of his self-prescribed course of preparation for the career he had chalked out for himself. His energy matched his ambition, and in his sanguine moods he prophesied great and desirable results from the combined forces.

Not that he ever allowed himself to doubt that he would ultimately reach the goal of success and fame. But there were hours and days in the which he rebelled angrily at the fate which obliged him to undermine the opposing walls instead of vaulting over them; when the wish for money and influence was a passion, and a mad one.

He would sell his soul to be master of these, he said, this afternoon—blind to the beauties of the scene; deaf to the wooing voices with which Nature bade him enter her pavilion, and be calmed if not comforted.

"Kept down!" he muttered surlily, grinding his heel into the flooring of the bridge. "Compelled not only to climb unaided, but to build the ladder by which I would mount."

Kept down! That was ever the text of his gloomy musings. Kept down by his plebeian birth and his poverty. It would have been difficult to trace the origin of ideas and ambition seemingly so incongruous to his lineage and early education. His father, a small farmer, had died before David's birth, and his mother, whose only strength was in her affections, sustained by these had fought single-handed against penury until the marriage of her elder child, a daughter, to an industrious mechanic gave her a home for the remainder of her days. Her boy—her pride and darling, then a fine, handsome lad of sixteen—met with no encouragement in word or act from his brother-in-law to pursue the studies he had commenced with a steady eye to the practice of a learned profession.

"It was queer," said the puzzled artisan, "where

the fellow ever picked up his stuck-up notions. Learning was a good thing for rich people to spend money upon, but it was a blamed expensive luxury and ought not to be thought of by one who had to earn his living."

He offered, therefore, to take the youth into his shop as an apprentice, and when the proposal was declined with more haughtiness than gratitude, "only hoped"—this to the mother, who was present during the conference—"that the fool would not hang himself before he had played out the hull length of his line."

"My mother can trust me," rejoined David, proudly.

"If she does, she is the only person as will," answered the irate machinist.

"You are mistaken, my good sir," the boy said, in smiling insolence; "I believe in myself. I shall never receive alms from you nor ask assistance from any one else."

Nevertheless, his mother had secretly helped him through his collegiate course by means of the sale of her little property and sundry small gains from needle and knitting-work. David had noted the receipt of these remittances in his memorandum-book. Some day he would repay her with interest, compounded after a rule of his own.

That day had never seemed further off than it did at present. His preceptor, a man of sound sense and respectable attainments, had complimented him upon his proficiency in legal lore the preceding day.

"I can teach you nothing more," he admitted. "You must apply for a license when your school-term

is ended. You could pass an examination creditably in any law-school in the country."

"And then?" said David briefly.

The lawyer looked puzzled, and hesitated. "The truth is, Rodman," he broke forth at length in friendly bluntness, "your talents are thrown away upon this community. Should you put out your shingle in this town or any other within fifty miles of this place, you would have fewer clients than if you were a pretentious, illiterate pettifogger. I would take you into partnership if I could, but I am as poor as a church-mouse, you know. You should take an office in the city, and bide your time. There's an opportunity waiting for you somewhere, and you should be on the look-out. Haven't you influential friends who could give you a lift into notice? When you are once seen the rest will follow. You have within yourself the elements of success."

"So has the pearl hidden in the oyster," returned the student, with a smile more sardonic than gratified. "But it cannot pry open the jaws of its prison."

"An office in the city," he repeated aloud, recurring to the conversation while he hung over the parapet. "Who would be fool enough to trust me for a quarter's rent, I wonder? 'Bide my time,' indeed! What if starvation and the debtor's prison come to me before the golden opportunity Curtis so patronizingly assures me is waiting for me somewhere? An indefinite locality that, and one very far ahead of me, I fancy."

At that instant a light footstep struck the bridge behind him, and he glanced over his shoulder in an-

noyed expectancy of interruption. He was in no humor to play the gallant to simpering Chloe, or discuss neighborhood gossip with her mother, and he knew the step for a woman's.

The intruder was a stranger to him, and a lady. Her dress, although inexpensive in material and modest in fashion, her black straw hat, banded with crape, her dainty gauntlets and parasol would have set her apart for his notice among Chloe and her comrades, had not her even, gliding gait and quiet self-possession indicated her familiarity with carefully-graded pavements and the unobservant crowds she met thereupon. A city lady she was—well-dressed and graceful, but, the same glance showed him,not very young nor in the least pretty. She was short of stature, and very slender, with a dark skin and irregular features. Her mouth and nose were too large, her eyes too small, and her forehead low. David's regards, after the one swift look, were returning listlessly to their survey of the hurrying stream, when a sudden flaw of wind tore down the gorge, snatched the lady's veil from her hat and swept it past him over the parapet, lodging it upon a willow branch projecting far over the creek. Rodman caught at it as it flew above his head, and failing to touch it ran down the slight slope of the crossing and around the abutment below toward the tree from the highest peak of which fluttered the sable pennon.

"Do not trouble yourself, I beg. Please do not try to get it!" called a sweet, tremulous voice from the bridge.

"It is no trouble to me," he returned, laconically, springing upon a low bough.

It bent so far under his weight that the looker-on again exclaimed in deprecation, then held her breath in terror, mingled with admiration, as he made his way rapidly yet cautiously to the swaying topmost limb and drew himself along it within reach of the prize. She noted, moreover, the care with which he disentangled it from the twig, and that he folded and put it into his bosom lest it should be injured in his descent She met him upon the bank, coloring and smiling, but still self-possessed.

"You are very kind. I am much obliged to you. But I am sorry I have subjected you to inconvenience and danger," she said, receiving the trophy he presented with his best bow.

"The inconvenience, as you call it, was a mere nothing, and there was no danger at all. I am glad the tree intercepted the veil," was his reply, gravely polite.

He touched his hat again, and returned to his former position upon the bridge. The stranger was going up the hill in the direction of the farm-house, and he would not embarrass her by his company, would show her her error if she considered him a common rustic without breeding or tact. "If she were an acquaintance, I would give her my arm," he thought, watching the straight little figure on its way to the top of the toilsome ascent. "What a humbug is conventionality!" Yet in his heart he knew that he reverenced and feared it.

Half an hour elapsed before he presented himself in the supper-room in response to the shrill summons of the horn blown upon the porch. The family was

collected about the table, and directly opposite his vacant chair sat the owner of the vagrant veil eating her meal as composedly as if she had taken tea in the same place three hundred and sixty-five times a year for a decade at least.

"We have had an addition to our household while you were away," remarked Mrs. Bracy, the motherly farmeress. "Miss Grant, Mr. Rodman."

Miss Grant's eyes lit up with a smile of recognition. "Mr. Rodman and myself have seen each other before, Mrs. Bracy," she said, in the pure, pleasant intonations he had noticed in their earlier interview. "My veil blew off as I was crossing the bridge. He chanced to be standing there and was so kind as to bring it back to me."

The directness and ease of her style pleased him. She did not exaggerate the service he had rendered her into heroism, while she accepted it as a signal favor and a step toward acquaintanceship. "A lady," he decided, anew, "and the species is a rarity hereabouts."

Her appreciation of his agreeable qualities and gentlemanhood was apparently as ready, and in less than a quarter of an hour they were chatting freely and merrily. His first impression of her was correct. She was from the city and had always resided there except when absent upon a foreign tour and at various watering-places. These last she had frequented as she had taken the sea voyage, in company with an invalid aunt, whose adopted child she was, and their journeys had been in quest of health, not recreation.

This he learned incidentally through questions

asked and observations dropped by Mrs. Bracy. She had known the elder Miss Grant many years before, and it was this circumstance which had induced the niece to apply to her for summer board when the death of her relative left her free to choose a retreat for herself. She had followed the letter proposing this plan so quickly that Mrs. Bracy had not had time to communicate the news of the expected arrival to her gentleman lodger. He had slept in the village a couple of nights, while his final examination at the hands of his friend the lawyer was going on, and Miss Grant had been domesticated with her present hostess for twenty-four hours.

"She is a nice, kindly little creature," ruminated Rodman, in his own room, opening his books for his nightly studies when the party below had broken up. "Not particularly intellectual, but reasonably intelligent—gifted, I should say, with excellent common sense and a thoroughly good temper. It is a pity she is not prettier, but there is something attractive about her, despite her plain face—an air of refinement and purity more uncommon than mere prettiness. It is lucky for me that she is not younger and gayer. I have not time to undertake a brisk flirtation just now. I call her comfortable—an elderly-sister personage who will help make this dull old house endurable."

Miss Grant slipped at once and without friction or jar into the habits of the farmer's family—even to the early breakfast, noon-day dinner and six o'clock tea. But, little by little, the place began to show marks of her occupancy. New and tempting delicacies were compounded by her hands, or under her directions,

out of materials which are abundant upon every farm —custards, syllabubs, velvety creams, omelettes and cakes the names of which Mrs. Bracy never heard before. The table gradually lost its characteristic of rude abundance in that of elegant plenty; the furniture in the stiff, airless best parlor, left the spots to which the several articles had been rigidly condemned since Mrs. Bracy's wedding-day, and fell into positions that made the apartment formal no longer. The vault-like closeness was dispelled by currents of perfumed air from clover meadows and flower-beds that had leave to rove through the windows all day long, and David soon acquired the habit of repairing thither every afternoon on his return from school, in the confident expectation of finding the ladies cozily seated in the cool, green shadow of the vines draping the portico, engaged with their needles—always busy and always cheerful—ready to talk to him if he was disposed to be social, and as amiably willing, if he was silent, in weariness or thoughtfulness, to let him alone, going on with their gentle murmur of conversation in a subdued key, while he stretched himself upon the sofa and seemed to doze or read at the windows overlooking the orchard. He became very fond of the good genius of the household in the course of a month; confided to her his dreams, his prospects, and his discouragements more freely than he had ever done to any one else. She was an inviting listener, and so tactful in her sympathy, so unobtrusive, yet so sincere in her interest in whatever he chose to impart of his inner life and outer obstacles; so hopeful in her prognostications of his future, and resolute in her belief

that failure was an impossibility, that he could not deny himself the treat of letting her understand what he had overcome and the great things he meant to accomplish.

"You never had a brother, I think you said?" interrogated he, one evening as they sat together upon the steps of the portico.

So bright was the moonlight, and so clear the atmosphere that they could distinguish across the valley, the glitter of the academy watch-bird, and the solemn gleam of the stones in the churchyard, while the continuous flow of the creek over the rocky ford filled up the intervals of silence which occurred in their talk.

"No!" The accent was not exactly sad, but she sighed softly after saying it.

"It is a pity!" regretted David.

"Why?"

"Because you would be a nonpareil of a sister. There is much said and sung about woman as man's inspiration. Commend me, instead, to woman as his rest and his comforter. She should be the moon, not the sun of his heavens—appreciative rather than urgent; a sedative, not a stimulant."

"I am somewhat surprised to hear that from you," said Miss Grant, looking down at a cluster of roses he had plucked for her a moment before. "I fancied you would admire brilliant women, such as are learned in literature and skilful in accomplishments."

The shrug that prefaced his reply would have done credit to a beau *blasé* by the beauties of all climes and fifty years of successful gallantries. "My dear Miss

Lois"—everybody in the farm-house had dropped the ceremonious "Miss Grant"—"have pity upon me! A learned woman, and especially a talkative *bas bleu* is my favorite detestation. I would sooner marry a loving, gentle girl who could not write her name. My wife—should the gods ever vouchsafe me that crowning blessing of fallen man—must be a true fireside angel, not loud or voluble or self-assertive, but a shelter to me in a weary land; one whose beneficent office it shall be to unbend the long-used bow, not to strain it into severer tension. Such are the wives for whom men are ready to lay down their lives—who are most fondly cherished and most bitterly mourned. The queens of society are lamented by society at large, after the world's style of regret. They have lived for the circle outlying the sphere of home-loves and joys and griefs; and verily I say unto you they have their reward—such as will never be yours, pure and tender spirit."

He had never seen or conversed in *propriâ personæ* with three brilliant women in his life, or with one queen of society, but he had heard and read of such beings, and nobody who listened to his discourse upon the topic could have guessed at his inexperience.

Certainly Lois Grant did not. Sincere and unpretending in nature and conduct, she was ever slow to detect affectation in another. She took David Rodman at his own valuation, so far as talent and aim were concerned, and had already begun to concert schemes in her mind for his happiness and advancement. Up to to-night she had believed that she thought of and planned for him as one friend might

for another of the same sex. She had never had an acknowledged suitor, and, stranger still, never fancied herself in love. Existence had been a very practical affair with her, and a very grave one. A prisoner from her fifteenth year to the couch or easy chair of her sick aunt, she had learned in the wearisome service lessons of patience, humility, and self-sacrifice which should have been of signal advantage to her in after life, so hardly were they acquired. She had no leisure for girlish follies and pastimes—little temptation to girlish dreaming. But for her large, affectionate heart and exhaustless store of quiet energy, she would have degenerated into a misanthropic grumbler or mindless automaton before she was twenty-five. She never questioned the justice of the assertion often repeated in her hearing, to wit, that she owed all the duty she could pay her aunt, as a recompense for her guardianship of a penniless orphan. When the invalid querulously threatened her with disinheritance for some trifling fault or blunder, she received the rebuke in silence or with a mild disclaimer of any unworthy motive in the services she rendered.

"You have done more for me already than I had a right to expect," she would say in grateful truthfulness, the genuineness of which even the captious censor could not dispute. "I have never imagined that I was to become your heiress, that your death would make me any richer than I am now. It would be an unreasonable as well as an unfounded anticipation, since you have other relatives as near akin to you as I am."

Others thought the same. Miss Grant was known to be eccentric, and while the amount of her fortune was generally understated, the popular impression was that no private individual would get more than a moiety of it. She professed to be fond of public charities; gave liberally to them while living, and repeatedly alluded to her design of endowing an "Old Ladies' Home," or a "Woman's Hospital." Her behavior to her dependent ward strengthened those who knew them in the belief that she would have to provide for her own support after the guardian's demise.

When Lois the younger had passed her twenty-ninth birthday, the sick woman died, leaving her niece and namesake her sole legatee, and to an estate so handsome that enterprising bachelors and consoled widowers, who had not esteemed it an "object" to notice the poor relation, began to rub their eyes and their wits in profound consideration of the most feasible and least awkward method of teaching her forgetfulness of their previous neglect. Before they had fairly decided upon the manner of their siege, she disappeared—buried herself in the country, leaving the direction of her retreat a profound mystery. Such palpable cupidity was too much for her gentle charity, and her upright disposition revolted at their late and eager sycophancy. Partly to escape their persecution, partly to recruit her strength after her recent trial, and the tedious season of watchfulness that preceded it, she sent off her letter to Mrs. Bracy, and followed it two days afterward. She was safe here from fortune-hunters and holiday friends,

since she was careful not to inform her hostess of the alteration in her circumstances, and not another soul in the township had ever heard of her prior to her appearance at the hill farm. So well did she keep her secret that the rumor of her good fortune had not been bruited in the household. She passed among the inmates of the homestead as a sweet-tempered, social little woman, verging upon old-maidism, exquisitely neat in her person and habits, and with a marvellous deal of "faculty" in domestic affairs. From certain things that had escaped Rodman in their confidential talks, she knew that he deemed her almost as poor as himself, and that the simplicity of her dress and unostentatious behavior had wrought in Mrs. Bracy's mind the like conviction. This was as she would have had it. She would be loved and esteemed for intrinsic merit, or live unloved and unnoticed. She actually gloried in the consciousness that Mr. Rodman's liking for her and his unfeigned desire to possess her esteem and confidence were her honest gains. She suited him in many respects and won daily upon his regard. She had dared whisper as much to herself before, but this evening he had said it.

David, seated at his ease, his back against a column of the piazza in a position that gave him a full view of her, observed that her plain features were softened by the moonbeams into a nearer approach to comeliness than he had believed possible. Her small hands played nervously with her bouquet, her white dress flowed over the steps in graceful folds, and the honeysuckled doorway framed the picture. "A neat

crayon sketch," he reflected, critically. "But one that could not be worked up in colors without spoiling the effect."

He found the situation agreeable—verging upon the fascinating—the more inviting since his opportunities of love-making were exceedingly rare now-a-days. In college he had achieved quite a flattering reputation as a promising amateur in that line of innocent amusement, but the bouncing damsels of Berkeley were not available for flirtation according to his fastidious notions. The hands he pressed must be shapely, and not hardened by sweeping and butter-making; the tongue that faltered the responses to his fervent periods must not trip in grammar, nor be apt in provincial slang. He did not long to kiss lips that were freely and laughingly held up to meet his. The flavor of such a courtship would be—to use his figure—too strong for his palate. For he could never forget that he was a gentleman—by a freak of nature, if you will, since his birth and breeding were assuredly not aristocratic, but nevertheless a gentleman—and he cultivated an originally nice taste into squeamishness, lest he should forfeit, in the minutest particular, his title to the character. As I have said, he really liked Lois. If she were not irresistibly attractive, she pleased him generally, and his self-love was fed by her respectful admiration for himself. As he pondered upon this last and very strong point, the tone of his fraternal affection grew warmer. Had she been younger, many degrees handsomer, more clever and witty, and very many thousands richer than she was—poor little thing! he could have loved her with-

out an effort. As it was—what harm could come from letting her know how elevated was her stand in his imperial estimation? It would make her happier, be quite an event in her sober, monotonous history,—and his mood waxed benevolent.

She did not lift her face, indeed it sank further into shadow as he took her trembling fingers into his. "I wish I dared tell you how much I think of you, Lois. You will let me call you that, will you not? I seem to have known and loved you so long, years upon years. I hate to be reminded by that formal 'miss' how new is our real intimacy. May I leave it off when there is no one by to take me to task for my familiarity?"

"Yes."

He stooped lower than was needful to catch the monosyllable. "Lois, Lois," he repeated, in the most musical of his always rich tones. "It is a sweet name. I wish mine was more worthy of your lips. But you will say it for me once, just to let me hear if it can ever be made tolerable, won't you? Say it after me, like a good, obedient child—David."

She obeyed, laughing now in a sort of troubled yet joyous way that should have warned him not to go on.

It is not in all, perhaps, not in most men, to be generous at this stage of mock or real wooing, and generosity was not upon the list of David's weaknesses. Knowing, as he began to do, that Lois's reception of his advances was earnest, however sportive might be his humor, gallantry and vanity combined to push him further.

"Thank you," he murmured. "I am too well sat-

isfied with the result of the experiment ever to let you relapse into bad habits. We are David and Lois to one another henceforward; at any rate while you stay here. Afterward you will forget me."

"Do not believe it. But you cannot." She turned quickly, and the moonlight glanced upon the dew on her eyelashes. "You should know me better than to accuse me of such fickleness. I shall always remember my visit here as the happiest time of my life."

"Faithful and true," said David, as if thinking aloud. "There are few of whom that can be said. I do believe you could be both, Lois. Faithful to friend, true to lover." And, incited to madder folly by the averted face and the quiver that ran over her, he added: "Which may I be, Lois?"

There was no immediate reply, and, still holding her hand, he began to sing, not loudly, but in full, mellow tones and with marked expression:—

> "'I come to thee in friendship's name,
> Thou sayest I speak too coldly;
> I breathe of love's devoted flame,
> Thou sayest I talk too boldly.
> Which shall it be, love?
> How shall I woo?
> Dear one, choose between the two.'"

Unversed though she was in the guile of the world and the deceitfulness of men's tongues, something within Lois's deep heart told her that this was not the language of earnest, manly affection, that the honest attachment of a real suitor would hardly seek an outlet in trolling so light a lay.

"Now, you are jesting with me," she exclaimed, striving to withdraw her hand.

Her voice bespoke wounded feeling and alarmed pride. If the interview were terminated thus, all thought of friendship was at an end. In his anxiety to soothe her indignation and quell her fears, David stayed her when she would have risen. "Is this kind to me? Is it just to yourself, Lois? To you, whom I respect more than I do any other woman upon earth? If my presumption has offended you, do not charge me with the more grievous sin of trifling with regard to my feelings for you."

"Do not say presumption! That sounds still more like mockery," she interposed warmly. "Any woman, however beautiful and gifted, would be honored by your preference."

He raised her hands to his lips in an ecstasy of gratitude. "Noble girl! blessed comforter! Yet, Lois, would it not be the wildest, wickedest infatuation in me to talk to you, or to any woman, of a warmer sentiment than Platonic love—brotherly regard? Years must pass before I dare cherish the hope of having a home of my own; such a dear, cosy nest as you would make of the lowliest cottage, dear Lois. I have said much within the past hour which honor and expediency should have withheld me from uttering. Call it random raving, boyish badinage,—anything you like. Only forget it and never fear lest your true friend and brother should again offend you. You will still be my sister, won't you?"

He was getting earnest in his retractation, for her serious eyes were reading his with a meaning that made him restless.

"Do you mean," she said slowly, and with an evi-

dent effort, "that you are too poor to think of the home you speak of; that this is all which holds you back from hoping for it?"

"All!" echoed David. "Is not that enough? But what can a woman know of poverty; the sternest foe to human happiness, uncompromising and invincible?" tragically. "It has written a black '*Impossible*' upon the gate of the earthly Eden I covet. But for this—but I promised to say no more. Do not think me weak and unmanly because I sometimes quarrel aloud with Destiny. It would be criminal selfishness in me to ask a woman, tender and delicate, accustomed to refined society and a luxurious home, to share the hardships of my lot. It would be suicidal in her to accept such an offer."

"And this is *all?*" reiterated Lois, still gazing into his eyes, her own expressive of a strange excitement he could not interpret.

He turned from her with a pettish gesture. "What more can I say to convince you that I have given a truthful, if a mortifying statement of my position? Why do you torment me by useless questions? Confessions of this kind are not favorable to the growth of a man's self-respect. What cannot be helped must be borne, and I am not a craven to be forever whining."

He had relinquished her hand, almost tossed it away in what he was resolved should be a peremptory dismissal of the theme. The sport had become tiresomely serious; the scrape was tightening into a complication. Yet common civility forbade him to shake off the light touch that stole up to his shoulder.

"Forgive me, David. But I had a reason, an important one, for pressing the inquiry. You see—you must know—don't be offended if I seem to speak too openly. So much depends upon it. I am rich enough for us both," said Lois Grant.

Then hid her face in her lap in an agony of love and bashfulness.

PART II.

"YOU will be sure to bring Mr. Rodman?"

"If he has no other engagement, and if he will come. I can promise nothing more definite," answered Lois Grant, smiling and blushing.

She had not yet learned to hear allusions to her betrothal and supposed influence over her lover without embarrassment, although they had now been engaged half a year and the relation between them been acknowledged from the beginning.

"Oh! he will come, if you will but tell him how disconsolate I shall be in the event of his absence. I met him last week at Mrs. Price's, the evening he was off duty in consequence of your sore throat. I had never seen him quite untrammelled before. To console him for your absence I quite devoted myself to him and he—well—it does not become me to say more than that he appeared to be resigned. He has an enviable knack of masking his emotions, if he was not. If I were you, I wouldn't grant him too much freedom. He is far too fascinating to be trusted out of sight."

"I can trust him," replied Lois. "That is"—as the visitor laughed—"he is quite able to take care of himself."

"Maybe so. My advice is sound, notwithstanding. What a splendid specimen of a man he is! And how

strange it seems that you should be playing showman to the lion. You, quiet, demure, prudish little Lois, who used to be accounted merely an inoffensive, pious nonenity. Now, you are an heiress and engaged to a brilliant young lawyer who promises to be the rage of the season. But time and—money work wondrous changes. I am fast learning not to be surprised at anything. You won't fail me on Thursday evening? I know you are not music mad, and I don't suppose you would appear in a tableau if I were to ask you; but your superb knight professes to admire my singing and thereby shows his taste for the divine art, and I must have him for a partner in that scene of the 'Surprised Lovers.' If you come without him or both of you stay away I shall give out to everybody that you, having heard of our flirtation the other evening, are afraid to subject him again to the battery of my eyes. I engage to use them with discretion not to damage your prospects, if you will oblige me."

"I exact no such pledge," said Lois, flushing a painful red. "Mr. Rodman is his own master and need not remain on duty, as you call it, an hour longer than he wishes."

When her guest had spoken her rattling adieux, she was sorry she had been betrayed into the exhibition of the slight flash of spirit evident in her last remark. It was never worth while to mind what Christine March said. She was a spoiled beauty and, many people, including the young lady herself, thought a wit. She had fallen into the habit of considering—or, at any rate, speaking of all the marriageable gentlemen of her acquaintance as if they only required encour-

agement from her to become her slaves. She really appeared to believe herself irresistible and mankind her lawful vassals. But these were partly to blame for this impression, reasoned Lois, already beginning to accuse herself of harsh judgment. They surrounded the belle wherever and whenever she made her appearance abroad with assiduous attention and flatteries, and although but twenty-one years of age she had counted almost as many offers of marriage, if she and popular report were to be credited. By her own sex she was generally regarded with an unfavorable eye. It was not because she so far outshone most of them, they said, that they did not like her. Nor yet because those who might otherwise have languished at their respective shrines passed them unconsidered by to vie in doing her homage, but her demeanor to ladies differed widely from the petty trickery of flatteries, *bon mots*, and eye-language she played off upon her corps of emulous attendants. She was arrogant—good-humoredly, so far as demeanor went, smiles being at all times more natural to her face than frowns—but her blunt and saucy assumption of superiority over her plainer and less dashing mates was not easy to bear. She had a way of leaving minute nettles in their self-love that irritated the most amiable and unpretending, begetting sudden anger and often a rooted aversion to her that outlasted the glow of temper.

Even right-minded Lois, while she tried to argue herself out of her uncharitable fit, wished she could compromise with her conscience to the extent of withholding the invitation left in her charge, yet acknowledged that the threat, laughingly uttered of the con-

sequence of David's non-appearance, insured the delivery of Christine's message.

"It is very provoking that one is obliged to visit people whom one does not like; that society, not inclination, regulates our acceptance of invitations," she thought, with growing discontent. "I should be far happier at home, and so would David, yet it would never do to send a regret. I wish I had held to my original resolution to decline attending large parties until I was out of mourning for my poor aunt. I have lived in a whirligig all winter. Yet I thought I was acting for the best when I consented to go out."

Which meant for David Rodman's good; for the promotion of his interests, professional and social. He had come to the city in the fall succeeding their engagement, and opened a law office in a busy and fashionable street. The building in which it was situated belonged to Miss Grant, and he was soon known as the manager of the ample estate lately bequeathed to her; made his maiden speech in court in a suit growing out of the settlement of the same. He won the case—a trifling matter in comparison with the fact that his conduct of it, his noble appearance and graceful oratory, albeit the latter was slightly florid and sophomorical, were the subject of complimentary remark and procured for him a respectable position among the active barristers of the city. Until his footing should be made sure—and with this should come the promise of an income that justified him in the opinion of the world in taking to himself a wife—he proposed to remain single.

"If I have a favorite horror, it is lest I shall be stig-

matized as a needy fortune-hunter," he said, proudly, to Lois. "When I wooed you, you are my witness that I supposed you to be as poor as myself, did not know which of us had the odd sixpence. I cannot endure that other people should say that my little girl's chief recommendation to my preference was her money. Let me establish, at least a show of independence before we are wedded. Will my Lois wait one year for me?"

Would she? She would have lived as his betrothed ten years, thinking of, working for, and manœuvring to lift him toward the eminence she believed he would grace as no other man had ever done, and accounted herself his humble debtor in the end. Her dearest privilege was that he allowed her to aid him; the only drawback to this boon the overstrained delicacy, as she deemed it, that hindered him from accepting anything really valuable from her as a gift. She would have loaded him with keepsakes, but he showed his disfavor to this phase of generosity by wearing none of the jewelry she presented, excepting a ring he had taken from her finger the night of their betrothal and a chain made of her hair, and by discouraging inquiries into his personal wants. His profits as her agent and legal adviser were sufficient, he alleged, to cover his expenses, and the utmost concession her tearful expostulations could win from his Roman virtue was the promise that he would borrow from the funds intrusted to him whatever he required to help him in his business. His accounts were punctually presented for her inspection, and she invariably accepted them with a very bad grace, wounded, despite her native common sense, by a form

which implied that their interests were as yet not identical; kept them a day or two, and returned them to him without so much as glancing at the sum total. With her notions of the entireness of wedded faith, each in the other's worth, such an act would have been treason. David more than suspected how the case stood, and once charged her with her remissness.

"Where is the use of troubling my head with those long rows of figures, and fingering soiled receipts and bits of incomprehensible scrip?" she returned, playfully. "I always abhorred arithmetic when at school. The accounts are beautifully kept and look all right, and I am sure they are—am far more positive than if I had examined for myself. It is enough that you say so."

"Very unbusiness-like!" David shook his head in a pretence of grave rebuke.

"I dare say it is. And yet I have a guarantee of your honesty—that is what they call it—is it not? in the fact that you cannot cheat me without defrauding yourself. All that ever belonged to me is yours, whether you take it or not. You cannot help yourself."

The same principle of self-abnegation overcame her disinclination to enter gay society. Without spoken demur she accepted all invitations that allowed her to select her escort to the scene of amusement, and even went so far as to give small but choice entertainments in return, at which Mr. Rodman after a while gradually slid into the office of master of ceremonies. I say after a while, for he was too sagacious to assume honors until he felt himself able to wear them creditably. It took him an amazingly short time to become

learned, not only in the cardinal principles, but the by-laws of etiquette. Commencing with the resolution to allow nothing to shake his confidence in himself, or to surprise him into a show of embarrassment, he gained all needful knowledge and skill in his new pursuit by keen, stealthy observation and the fine gentlemanly instinct of which I have already made mention. The accident of slender hands and feet, well-turned and jointed limbs and a set of classic features was an invaluable auxiliary to him. If his courtly manner, purely correct accent and thorough self-possession were a counterfeit of perfect breeding and high blood, it passed current with the mass of those who were now his associates. The cautious inquiries into his antecedents that had hailed his *début* in the arena of polite society were exchanged before his trial season was over, for whispered marvel at the engagement which was the corner-stone of his success. Susceptible young ladies sighed over his "unfortunate entanglement," and shrewd mammas, accustomed to ring and otherwise test each new issue from Fashion's mint, decided him to be extremely eligible and were sorry he had sacrificed himself prematurely. A man with his address, talents, appearance and prospects, might have formed a more desirable alliance than with insignificant Lois Grant, if she *had* inherited the bulk of her aunt's fortune as the price of her years of toad-eating. Of course, all were agreed in the verdict that he was going to marry her for money, and that alone. What other earthly inducement could have urged him to offer himself to a woman so much his senior, and so destitute of beauty and accomplishments?

Up to the morning of Christine March's visit these murmurs had not reached Lois. Her happiness had hedged her in as with a wall, from suspicion, misgivings, and jealousies. She saw that David was admired and sought after, and did not wonder that he enjoyed the distinction he had already achieved; was far more proud of it than he could be—and of him. In her eyes he was a prince among his fellows for beauty, goodness, and mental endowments—a stainless and incorruptible knight in honor and integrity, and in the constancy of his affection for herself. It was still passing strange that he should have learned to love her, but since he had told her that his heart was hers, that she of all living beings could make him most happy, she incorporated the belief into her creed and would have died to defend it. She liked to see him meet other women's wiles with gracious courtesy, conscious as she was that he was hers—hers alone. She cared less than nothing for gay company for her own sake. It was too late for her to form a taste for it, had not her engagement put all thoughts of other lovers and possible conquests out of her loyal single mind. She dressed well in her modest second mourning because David liked to see her richly arrayed, and he was rapidly and studiously becoming a connoisseur in ladies' toilets. She refurnished her aunt's spacious house under the guidance of his taste, for it would be his ere long, and handsome, stately appointments befitted him as chaste and costly settings do diamonds. In whatever position he appeared to the best advantage, it was her delight to see him. In other respects also he found her the least exacting of *fiancées*—

sweetly credulous to the pleas of important business that now more frequently than of yore detained him from her side at such hours as she expected him; ever ready with a cordial welcome when he did come, and the rather anxious that he should be comfortable and happy in her presence than that he should entertain her with talk, amusing or amatory. His love-making was never very ardent, but having known no other she was satisfied with it. Judging him by herself, she believed that he did not express one tithe of what he felt; gave to his stock-phrases of endearment and protestation a might and richness of meaning that left her nothing of spoken fondness to desire. Altogether she was the best, most generous, and most indulgent woman alive, Rodman averred, with sincere warmth, that sent a happy flutter through her whole being, and he would be an ungrateful wretch ever to cost her a sigh or a regret. In fact he was not half good enough for her—and here Lois would arrest him with blissful stammerings of denial.

He meant to be very true, very considerate of her happiness, to take excellent care of her means, and for himself to be reconciled to the fortune the Fates had allotted him. He might have fared much worse at their hands matrimonially. A penniless beauty or a wealthy virago would be an evil exchange for his demure, low-voiced, gentle-tempered Lois. A man could not look for absolute perfection in wife or destiny, and he was forced to confess that her drawbacks were mostly of a negative character.

He spent the entire evening with her on the day of Christine March's call. The weather was stormy, and

in anticipation of his coming Lois had ordered a fire to be kindled in the library grate. The register warmed the room sufficiently, but it was one of David's fancies to dream and talk over a blazing bed of coals, and this room was his favorite retreat. He had selected the furniture, pictures, and most of the books that filled the shelves let into the wall between the long French windows. Here were his arm-chair, writing-desk, foot-rest and cigar-holder. Lois had resolutely overcome her antipathy to tobacco-smoke, when he resumed this one of his few college extravagances. Had he chosen he might have scented the damask curtains of her parlors with the stale odor of his choice weeds, but from this his ideas of propriety revolted. To do him justice, he would never have brought a cigar into the house but for her entreaties. Whatever tended to put him at his ease, to fill him with a sense of home-comfort and enjoyment, must be done. He was emperor of the domain and of her universe.

He lay back within the crimson depths of his *chaise-lounge*, his Habaña between his lips, gazing into the fire in an attitude of indolent grace, his luxuriant beard rippling over the breast of a black velvet smoking-coat which was always ready for him in the library closet—when Lois came down to him. She carried her work-basket in her hand; her dress was of gray silk, with lace collar and undersleeves, and her hair arranged in the prevailing mode. She could never be anything but prim, let her bedeck herself as she would. Every fold of drapery, every band of hair knew its place and kept it. Yet she was a pleasant if not a pretty picture to mount guard by a Sybarite's fireside.

David appreciated this when he stooped to kiss her on the forehead, with the apology—"I won't profane your lips with cigar smoke!" and held her for an instant in the curve of his arm as he might have embraced his maiden aunt or married sister. There was in tone and action, however, a hearty recognition of the truth that she was good and dear to him that salved, for the nonce, the stinging of Christine March's nettle.

They did not talk much or continuously, as is the custom of many absurdly happy lovers. But Lois's needle and David's cigar helped to make time pass cheerfully and without halting at the long gaps in the dialogue.

"I like this," broke forth David, presently, as a dash of sleet against the shutters was answered by the defiant laugh of the fire. "It reminds me of what the author of 'Eothen' says about steeping his eyes in the green shades of Egypt after crossing the desert."

"Ah!" said Lois, with a pleased smile. She had not an idea what "Eothen" was or who was the author, but she made out that her prince was comfortable, and that sufficed for her delight. "I am glad you like to be here. So do I," she added.

"It is a very dear haunt to me, love. And we have been tiresomely dissipated lately for such sober people."

"We have!" returned Lois, emphatically. "I am sadly weary of it sometimes. I was just wondering if we could not send a regret in reply to the latest invitation." Then she rehearsed Christine's scheme for a musical *soirée*, to be followed by *tableaux vivans.*

"She says it is to be a small party," she concluded. "But she cannot well give such. Her circle of acquaintances is too large."

"It is something of a bore," said David, languidly. "But we must go, I suppose. Indeed, Miss March intimated to me last week that she had this project in her head, and made me promise to assist her in the tableaux department. Men of a respectable stature are at a premium in town, she says."

She had intimated much more, which good taste, not modesty, restrained him from repeating even in the present company. The nettle pricked Lois again, as she divined this. Christine prided herself upon her frankness. She had not let slip without reasonable improvement this opportunity of flattering one whose good-will she wished to gain.

"She told him he was handsome and distinguished-looking as plainly as she talked to me about my being a nonentity," thought our heroine, her cheeks warming as the cheery fire had not heated them.

"Do you like her very much, David?" she asked abruptly.

He took his cigar from his lips and blew away a curl of smoke, his mouth relaxing with an indulgent smile, as it might at a child's folly. "That is a close question, and one I am puzzled to answer while my acquaintanceship with the lady is so slight. She is very beautiful in a certain way—very lively, and a fine musician. I know nothing more about her except that she seems to be more admired than any other lady in her 'set.' Did I detect a greenish tinge in your dove-like eyes just now?"

Lois averted her face over her sewing at the teasing accent.

"Take heart, my dear," David continued, in the same tone. "When I desert your colors it will not be to enlist under hers."

"I cannot imagine you as a deserter from any right and honorable position, David. I am sure of your fidelity to me as I am of mine to you. But Christine is an inveterate rattle, and she said some foolish things to me this morning about you; raved about your attractiveness, and so on. That is all. I will not think of it again."

She tried bravely to keep her word on the night of the tableaux party of which, by Miss March's contrivance, David was the star. He supported her in four out of the eight scenes, and won the plaudits of the fashionable spectators in such abundant measure that he was called to the front of the curtain at the close of the performance. He led his fair hostess into view, feigning to account his own success a secondary affair, bowed first to the benches filled with the *élite* of the city, then more profoundly to her, picked up the bouquets tossed to him, and presented them to Miss March with a generosity of gallantry that elicited fresh encomiums.

"A magnificent couple!" said a gentleman behind Lois. "Are their love-passages confined to the stage?"

"It is to be hoped so," replied a lady's voice, "since he is engaged to be married to another lady."

"That would not deter Miss March from attempting his conquest if she cared to do it," was the

rejoinder. "And her efforts in that line of speculation are usually successful."

Greatly to Lois' relief the lights were turned up at that moment, and the buzz of the crowd, as it broke up into knots for conversation and promenading, drowned what followed.

It was wickedly absurd in her to feel uneasy after David's assurances of indifference to Christine and love for herself; very mean and dishonorable in her to try, as she did, not to lose sight of them during the rest of the evening, and to torment herself with conjectures as to what was the purport of the semi-confidential communications exchanged when his head was bowed until the burnished waves of his beard almost swept her cheeks, and her sparkling face flashed up into his her response, or upon what subject Christine was expatiating when he laughed more heartily than Lois had ever seen him do at any other witticism; his eyes, if not his tongue, testifying to his keen appreciation of her humor. It was not innocent fun on Christine's part. Of that Lois was sure. Her most glittering arrows were as a rule directed at the foibles and peculiarities of her acquaintances. Lois did not blame David, but she would have been better pleased had he met these caustic or impertinent comments by rebuke, not merriment.

A little incident at supper-time augmented her discomfort, and was the prelude to a season of poignant anguish. When the company was summoned to the supper-room, Lois was separated from her betrothed by the length of both parlors,

and Miss March leaned upon his arm. I use the word advisedly. There was an appealing weight in her snowy hand and the slight droop of her pliant figure toward her attendant which the one occupying that position declared to be irresistibly engaging, and the women protested was disgusting. She did not weaken her hold upon David as the others fell into the line of march, although she could not but observe his involuntary movement to release her, and the troubled look he sent through the rooms in quest of Lois. Before he quite comprehended what he was doing, they had passed into the hall and across the threshold of the apartment in which the table was laid. Then he sought again and vainly in the mass of faces encompassing him for that of his affianced, his conscience clamoring loudly and reproachfully of his cowardly neglect of her to whom his first duty belonged.

"How thoughtless I am! Can you ever forgive me?" exclaimed Christine, withdrawing her hand from its support, and looking prettier than ever in her show of penitent consternation. "Of course you ought to be taking care of Lois—poor, dear little mouse! Don't let me detain you one second. I would not have let you wait upon me—I mean would not have chosen my escort anywhere except in my own house. But I thought I might please myself—might take the liberty here. How cruelly inhospitable she will think me. Somebody else has doubtless brought her in by this time, and she will never forgive me for detaining you. And you, too, are displeased—think me unkind."

"I do not! My place is where I would have it—here!" returned David. "As you say, Miss Grant must be provided with an escort before now."

"You see," the witch went on, granting him the full benefit of her dangerous eyes, "I cannot remember that you don't belong to yourself. You act, and look, and talk so little like an engaged man. They are as a class insufferably stupid. And it seems especially odd to me that you should be Lois' property. I have known her ever and ever so many years, you must know. She was one of the big girls at Madame Le Brien's when I was in the A B C class. Such a precise doll as she was even then with her aunt's dresses made over for her. She was like a woman of forty-five cut down a foot or two. She was the 'goody' of the establishment—reported all the naughty tricks of us wild ones, and never got a bad mark herself, or did anything that was not according to rule and compass. She had a hard life of it with that cross, stingy old Miss Grant. I used to pity her for having to play propriety all the time. But she has kept it up very creditably, and all is bright ahead of her now. She ought to be very happy, and I suppose deserves her good fortune more than wicked I do," with an abstracted look and stifled sigh. Then starting and recovering herself with a forced smile, "Some day—when we know one another better—and if she do not forbid it, you must tell me all about your romance; where you picked her up last summer, and how it all came about and so forth. I can be sentimental and sympathizing, although you do think me an empty-headed and light-hearted chat-

terbox. And excuse me for saying it"—the battery in active play again, and doing wonderful things—"but everybody will have it that there is some mystery about your engagement, and as I remarked you are *so* dissimilar, you might be natives of different spheres. The law of contrariety, not of counterparts, drew you together I am sure."

"I never considered you empty-headed or shallow-hearted." David seized upon this clause as the easiest to answer. "As for the flattering situation assigned me by Rumor, I can only say that the voluble dame has, as is her custom, taken too much for granted."

It was the nearest approach to a denial of his engagement he had ever made, and the wily coquette asked for the present nothing more explicit.

Lois, meanwhile, having declined the only offer of attendance made her with a polite "Thank you, but I believe I have an engagement," had seen the entire company file into the supper-room, until, to her amazement and chagrin, she remained the solitary occupant of great parlors. She waited five—ten minutes in the forlorn hope that David would yet return for her and explain his extraordinary defection, then, attacked by the fear of being discovered in her isolation by the returning revellers, she escaped to the dressing-room, and did not reappear below until her carriage was announced.

"I have been extremely uneasy about you," began David, as soon as the door was closed upon them. "Were you sick? or what kept you up-stairs all the evening? You vanished before supper, and not a glimpse have I been able to catch of you since. If

you were not well you should have sent me word that I might take you home."

"I was not sick," answered Lois, faintly; "but I was very unhappy, and—and—I did not suppose you would miss me"—

"If this is to be your habit in future, Lois, I shall not quit your side for an instant," interposed David. "I wish you to understand once for all that whatever may be my views of the claims and expediencies of society, and however important to a man situated as I am, personal popularity may seem, these are as nothing in comparison to your peace of mind. If it makes you 'very unhappy' to see me playing my part—the part assigned me by common civility—in a social gathering, I shall not speak to another woman beside yourself until marriage has made you certain of my allegiance. This is a new phase of your character."

Poor Lois! The meek remonstrances she had meditated were overspread and swept into nothingness by this loverly yet dignified reprimand. He had never had occasion to chide her before. He should never have again. In tearful haste she implored him to forgive her folly, and to behave in time to come precisely as he had in the past. He was always kind, always wise; who else so judicious? She was overjoyed at the sensation he had created that evening. She had heard his praises on every side.

"I am *so* proud of you, dear, when I see you so courted and caressed," she affirmed, squeezing his hand in both of hers when they reached home, and uplifting a visage discolored by recent and profuse

weeping, and haggard from the miserable thoughts that had been both food and torment to her mind during her tedious waiting in the dressing-room.

"Heavens! she looks forty years old," thought David, with a sick recoil of heart. And he was what she had said—what Christine March had told him in more eloquent language—as unlike in every respect, in mind and person, to this sallow, diminutive woman, who was no longer a girl, as if he had been born in another world. The pang of self-pity was very sharp.

"You are not angry with me?" queried Lois, piteously, seeing his change of complexion and the furrow of pain between his brows.

"Angry? No, but very tired—and so are you. I will not keep you up longer. Good-night!" He touched her cheek with cold, unwilling lips, and hurried away.

"Another moment and I should have suffocated!" he panted, in gaining the outer air. "What an idiot! what a consummate, measureless fool I have made of myself! When I think of what might have been and of what *is*, I could cut my own throat with great pleasure."

Nevertheless, he came to the conclusion next morning not to take a single step toward the annulment of his engagement. It was a very safe investment, a ladder, staunch and permanent. But for the use of Lois' money, he would be utterly impecunious. But for the advantages derived from the social rank of the Grants as an old and wealthy family, he would sink into a poor but daring adventurer. Why borrow trouble? He was not to marry for six months yet,

and in that time some blessed turn of Fate might delay or finally avert the catastrophe. That was the name he gave the sacrifice of his superb self upon the altar of Mammon. Reviewing the accident of his plighting to Lois, from the point on which he now stood, he blamed her bitterly for her imposition upon his youth and inexperience. She knew the world, and could estimate more correctly than could he what would be his value there. She had caught at him with alacrity that should have opened his eyes. In truth (he had never exactly said this before, even to himself), the proposal was virtually hers. It was her fault, not his, that she mistook his pseudo-wooing for very earnest. She had under this misapprehension thrown herself and her fortune at his head, and eminently convenient as was the latter, he would gladly resign one-half of it could he enjoy the remainder unincumbered by the nominal mistress thereof. *But*—again mindful of the unphilosophical and perilous nature of such reflections—since this might not be, he would accept the situation, and, unless a more benignant Destiny than that which had conducted the heiress to Mrs. Bracy's abode should interpose in his behalf, he would bow his lordly neck to the hymeneal yoke. Meanwhile let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die. While he might without sin toy with edge-tools, he would cultivate Christine March.

He had promised to call upon her that evening, contrary as the act was to the custom of allowing party-givers a day of rest in which to recover from their fatigue.

"A fashion born in the times when our great grand-

mothers made the good things and washed up the dishes," she said. "Now-a-days it is preposterous and a bore. If you will drop in after dark you will add another to the long list of your benevolent deeds, and find me *sola*. I can't say as much for other evenings."

A note, purposely more than usually affectionate, informed Lois that an imperative engagement detained him from her side; hoped she was well and entirely rested, and bade her look for him the following afternoon. He *would* tear himself out of the business-net long enough to drive with her. He had been wretched all day with the fear that she was growing paler and thinner of late, somewhat fagged out by late hours and over industry. She must recollect how important her health was to his happiness, and spare herself—indefatigable little bee that she was. He signed himself: "Yours, now and forever, D. R.," sent off the missive by his office-boy, locked the door, and threw himself upon the sofa for a siesta that should brighten up his energies for the interview with the "imperative" beauty.

She was mistress of her art. He was her only visitor, but her toilet was a model of elegance, her greeting warm and frank, and her whole manner so winning, yet so vivacious, that he succumbed to the spell set for him before the first five minutes of talk were over. This was not Christine as the world knew her, but the friend who recognized in him affinities that were a passport to her heart and mind, and shamed not to own it. She sang by-and-by at his request, selecting a pathetic English ballad instead of the Italian bra-

vuras with which she would have regaled a roomful of company. David named the second, and when she had melted his heart and almost his eyes by her exquisite rendering of it, she warbled like a seraph—or a syren—in a gush of tender melancholy:—

> "'Beloved eye, beloved star!
> Thou art so near, and yet so far.'"

David was a slave from the moment he met her large liquid eyes as the passionate refrain was poured from her swan-like throat, and, he could have sworn, her heart. With all his conceit of his invincibleness in love-tilts, he was the merest tyro compared with this ingenuous creature. She meant that he should be madly enamored of her, and the surest means to this end being to convince him that she was captivated by him, she scrupled not to seduce him into this persuasion. He was as vain as handsome, and cared not a rush for the woman he was going to marry. Christine used both levers adroitly. Ere their prolonged colloquy was over, she had elicited a mournful confession of the unhappiness none but she had ever suspected.

"A lifetime of disappointment and yearning is a terrible penalty to pay for a boyish indiscretion," he said, darkly.

"It is," in gentlest commiseration. "All this is nothing new to me. I felt from the hour in which we first met that my old school-fellow, estimable as all acknowledged her to be, was not the chosen of your soul. I dared to tell you last night that there was some mystery in this unnatural connection. You need not fear to speak out freely to me henceforward.

It will be a relief—for we understand each other, do we not? And isn't there a drop of comfort in the thought that there is upon this cold unfriendly earth one spirit that responds to the finer chords of your own?"

"Comfort? It is the boon of life to him who is ready to perish," said the infatuated creature. "Your friendship is more precious to me than would be the love of any other woman."

He raved as senselessly in the solitude of his chamber at an hour when sane and honest people were in bed and virtuously asleep, clutching his glossy locks with both hands, and stamping about the floor in a high tragedy frenzy. "Sacrificed! sacrificed!" he spluttered through his grinding teeth. "Bound to a commonplace elderly spinster whose fondness and companionship are a weariness, while across the gulf stands this angel, divine in a compassion which would have been love but for this wretched, fatal blunder. Was ever mortal at once so blest and so curst?"

"An easy conquest," smiled Christine to her image in the mirror. "But I have not had another affair as interesting in two years. I must follow up my advantage."

And Lois having read her nightly chapter in the Bible and prayed fervently and thankfully for the peace and welfare of her darling, slumbered tranquilly, keeping fast hold of his letter under the pillow with the hand that wore the betrothal ring.

PART III.

UBIQUITOUS and omniscient Everybody marvelled, first in corners, then upon the house-tops, that Lois Grant, although such a simple, amiable soul, did not see and resent the glaring defection of her lover; did not interpose to mar if she did not prohibit his intimacy with so notable a flirt and seductive a woman as Christine March was known to be.

His passion for her was, from the hour of its inception, positive fatuity. All the power and fervor of the man's originally earnest nature were mingled in the flood-tide of this, his first love. He could not have hidden it had he desired and attempted concealment. Instead of this he blazoned his infidelity to his plighted bride fearlessly as though it were his glory, not his shame. So discreet was Lois's household, consisting of herself, the elderly widow she had elected to the place of companion, and the trained servants who had served her aunt before her—that Everybody could not determine accurately the number and length of Mr. Rodman's visits to his lawful mistress; but he appeared daily in public at Christine's side, riding, walking, at dinner-parties, at balls, receptions, and *matinées*, until his devotion became a proverb. Sagacious business men shook their heads over the unavoidable neglect of his professional duties. No young

man could with impunity fritter away his time at the outset of his career. They had given him credit for a better balanced mind, more just ideas for the relative importance and fitness of things. Their wives had their say respecting the scandalous conduct of the coquette in permitting—nay, courting his attendance. It was plain to be seen that Mr. Rodman was led on by her, beguiled toward ruin without being conscious how far he had wandered from the path of honor and rectitude. It would be a kind act of some friend to open his eyes—to show his enchantress in her true form; but when it came to that none of the virtuous matrons felt herself called upon to undertake the benevolent office. They knew Christine too well, and there was hardly one of their band who had not at some period attempted to "take her in hand" and dropped her as they would have done a sentient nettle.

She kept her senses about her; understood exactly where David stood. He had not reached the *ultima thule* of her desires. While he kept up the hollow show of betrothal to another, he was not the abject vassal she would have him become. She surmised in the astuteness of her worldly wisdom that financial ruin would be the result of an open rupture with his rich client, but so insatiable was her thirst for conquest, so imperious her demand for the homage of all men who approached her, that she did not swerve from her purpose. She was not the fiend in angelic guise that steals into so many written romances—beautiful, vindictive, and, if need be, murderous. She was simply heartless and inordinately vain. Without hating

Lois, she meant to punish her for being richer than herself, and for the quiet impertinence of her rejoinder to the belle's patronizing pledge not to steal her lover from her. She needed to be taught her place, which was, in common with all other women, secondary to Miss March's. When this should be accomplished the humble learner was welcome to her Adonis. Christine herself was no salamander to live forever in the flame of such devotion as was his. And he would care as much for Lois when she, Christine, had done with him, as he had done before he fell in love in earnest.

Mrs. Miller, Lois's widowed aunt and duenna, once sought an opportunity of expostulating privately with Mr. Rodman upon his singular behavior. It was—the old lady stated stiffly, for she dearly loved her ill-used relative—dishonoring to himself and cruel to her who loved him so truly and generously.

"She has never complained of your behavior in this or any respect," she was careful to add; "but I can see that she suffers intensely. I think you do not quite appreciate her capacity for loving or for sorrowing, Mr. Rodman, or you would not impose this useless trial upon her. She has not deserved it at your hands."

David fired up angrily. Two of her shots had hit him more sorely than she suspected. "You are unfortunate in your use of terms," he said. "I do not question Miss Grant's fidelity to her plighted word, but I am at a loss to perceive any remarkable generosity in her attachment to myself. As I look at the matter, a man is not an applicant for charity when

he sues for a lady's hand. Nor am I conscious of having given her occasion of complaint to her family and friends. Excuse me for reminding you, Mrs. Miller, that it is her province—not theirs—to sit in judgment upon my actions and motives. If she desires an explanation, she has only to ask for it and it is hers."

The smart of this repulse gave the chaperone courage to broach the subject of Lois's wrongs to that young lady herself. Hitherto the rumors and comments rife in society had not been hinted at by either in their intercourse with one another. Mrs. Miller could not be positive that they had ever reached her niece, and she touched the tender subject very courteously.

"I met Mr. August in the street to-day, my dear," she began, one evening when they were alone.

Lois was standing by the window watching the passers-by, on the lookout, Mrs. Miller knew, for one figure which came now less punctually and surely than of old.

"Ah! how long has he been in town?" asked Lois, turning partly around and evidently interested.

Mr. August had been her aunt's man of business, tried and trusted for many years. He had petted her as a child, and often taken her part after she arrived at woman's estate against her aunt's peevish injustice. She liked and loved him, and was disappointed that his retirement from active life and removal to the country had deprived her of his services and counsel.

"Two days, I believe. He will call upon you to-morrow. He is anxious to see you, for several reasons. The truth is he is uneasy"—

"About me!" said Lois questioningly, as the other

hesitated. She spoke quickly but without surprise or visible perturbation.

"Yes. He is the soul of prudence, you know." Mrs. Miller paved each step with explanations that sounded deprecatory. "He fears that Mr. Rodman's management of your affairs is not altogether judicious; questions the wisdom of certain investments he has been making in your name—I suppose by your orders?"

If this clause were intended as a probe, the experiment was unsatisfactory to her who applied it. If news had been brought her that David had absconded with every dollar she owned, it would not have wrung from loyal Lois a syllable of censure. Too truthful to equivocate yet resolute in his defence she answered mildly but firmly, "I sanction whatever Mr. Rodman does. I do not know to what investment Mr. August refers, but I have perfect confidence in Mr. Rodman's judgment."

"He has been buying oil lands in your name, Mr. August states—lands which, by the way, lie near Berkeley, the place in which you spent last summer, further back in the mountains in a wild, uncultivated region. Such speculations are all the rage now, Mr. August says, but he thinks this will be succeeded by a panic. He happened to hear what Mr. Rodman had done through the agent of the company owning the bulk of these lands. You are a large stockholder, besides having bought through your agent an extensive tract which may become immensely valuable some day, but is more likely, in Mr. August's opinion, to prove almost worthless."

Lois remained motionless, leaning her arm against the sash, her forehead on her arm, and seeming still to gaze intently into the street. Was she hoping that David would appear to spare her the pain of a reply?

"I hope you don't consider your old friend and myself officious or curious meddlers, my love?" said Mrs. Miller, uneasy at the long silence.

"No, madam. I know you both have my good at heart," answered Lois without stirring. Her submissive accent was unlooked-for encouragement.

"We have, my child! You are a novice in business matters and inclined to be over-trustful in other respects. Don't you think you had better have a plain talk with Mr. Rodman? The straight path may be steep, but it is safest."

Again Lois was slow to reply. "It would be useless," she said then in a low, and Mrs. Miller fancied desolate tone. "Mr. Rodman manages my money as he would his own. It *is* his—or will be, if affairs terminate as had been proposed by us. If they do not—why, it makes no difference!"

She did not say in words—"what becomes of me and my property," but Mrs. Miller guessed that the sentence was thus finished in her mind, and waxed warmer in her compassionate indignation. "You may get angry if you like, Lois, but I cannot keep it back. You are too indulgent, too forgiving to that man. If you really mean to marry him it is time the day was set and arrangements commenced. And if he intends ever to become your husband, it is contrary to common decency for him to be dancing all the while in Christine March's shadow. He is seen with her every-

where, and is to all appearance desperately infatuated by her. The whole community cries 'shame' upon them, for one is as guilty as the other."

"The community does not know David Rodman as I do," began Lois, with an attempt at dignity that failed her ere she finished her little speech. "I trust him, Aunt Julia. Mutual confidence—perfect and lasting—was our compact, and I could never look into his eyes again if I allowed idle or malicious rumors to move me even in thought. He says he loves me—is true in heart, however others may misconstrue his deeds—and I must believe him. Don't try to break down my faith. When I learn distrust of him, I shall believe in nothing else—nothing!" She put out her hand in saying it in a piteous, unsteady way, as if groping for some support in darkness, left the window and went off to her chamber.

Mrs. Miller had never liked David Rodman, but from that night she hated him as heartily as her religion allowed her to hate an enemy. Her dislike was the greater for the spectacle of Lois's blind pertinacity of trust in one who the elder lady was persuaded was playing her false so far as affection was concerned, if not defrauding her of the wealth for which she believed, with the rest of the world, he had sought her.

Lois, strong in her knowledge of the groundlessness of this charge, was deaf to all others against the lover who had wooed her before he knew her to be richer than himself. He had loved her for what she was, not what she had, she had cause to remind herself continually, and wrought out from this by the sure rule of a woman's logic the sequence that since she was un-

changed, he must be true to her still. Vacillation implied weakness, and David was strong. His fancy might be allured by Christine's beauty, and he admired her as he did fine pictures and statues. She was sprightly and talkative, and he was amusing himself in her company. She—Lois—never amused anybody, was as little of a wit as a beauty, but she loved him so fondly he must come back to her by and by. She would be hopeful and patient; let him see how complete was her trust, how mighty her love until he wearied of diversion and resumed his old habits.

She made no inquiry into the truth of Mr. August's statement concerning the recent and ill-advised investment her lawyer had made. It was more than probable he had done as the cautious old gentleman had said. She had months ago given him a power of attorney to use her name as he pleased. He had not acted without legal warrant, although he had not consulted her. Why should he do this? She was the stupidest of ignoramuses in monetary transactions. If he had laid the case before her in all its bearings, she would have said—"Do as you think best," whatever might have been her forebodings. She was clever in nothing except in nursing, needlework and cookery; but she loved him.

So with regard to the questionable intimacy condemned by the community—a sentence which had no weight with her except as it impressed her with the idea that she ought to stand the more stoutly by him since others blamed him. She had promised never to annoy him again by her childish jealousy, and she would keep her word though the green corrosion were

to eat away her heart. Beautiful and gifted women could afford to toy with and to test their lovers' affection. The only art she knew whereby to keep hers constant was to show him how full, how fervent, and how free was her attachment, to study his wishes constantly, and to meet them whenever she could, esteeming nothing arduous or an act of self-denial that enabled her to do this.

It was about this time that Christine took it into her well-made head to be jealous of her plain and modest rival. She "did" this phase of the so-called tender passion as she did everything else, thoroughly and bewitchingly. She catechized the enamored swain as to the number of his visits to Lois per week, how long he stayed, what he said, and what he thought while there, when he was going again, and unmasked her battery finally by inquiring with naïve earnestness why he went thither at all. This was the crisis. Conscience, honor, feminine delicacy forbade her to permit his continued attentions while he was betrothed to another.

"We have been dreaming, I think," she said with a wistful, troubled smile that melted swiftly into a mist of undropped tears. "People are saying cruel things about us. Isn't it unaccountable how loth people are to let others be innocently happy? And we have had some sweet, happy hours together this winter, haven't we? But mamma is growing restless under the lash of the gossips' tongues, and I cannot defy her commands. I shall miss you terribly, and I am vain enough to think you will sometimes long for me when you are satiated with respectable dulness;

but since dulness *is* respectable, and obedience to parents a duty, we should not shirk the performance of it. I don't deny that it is pleasant, only too delightful to have you here as often as you have been of late; but the question is, have I a right to this happiness? We ceased talking about friendship long ago, you know, and if we had continued to cheat one another with the pretty names of brother and sister the wicked world would not believe us."

And when he protested, raved and prayed in agony at the bare prospect of banishment, she spoke yet more explicitly. When he was free or when he had told Lois everything, and had her consent to continue the intimacy she owned was one of her chiefest sources of earthly beatitude, then and not till then he could again appear in her presence. Otherwise—a mute look of anguish, a shudder and a burial of the mournful face in the lily hands completed the farewell to him and to hope.

And this was the way in which he told Lois everything:—

My very dear Friend: I must believe that you have for some time past anticipated the confession I am now impelled to make by feelings I cannot master. I have been conscious for several months of a growing change in my sentiments toward yourself. Esteem you I ever must as one whose rare excellence of character, amiability and gentleness of demeanor so won upon my regard in the familiar intercourse of the comparatively lonely life I led in Berkeley, that I was deceived by the sincerity of my appreciation of these into the belief that I loved you as man can love but once in a lifetime. It is only since I have learned what this love really is—how strong, how unconquerable and how tender—that I have understood what a wrong would be our union without it. This injustice at least I will not do you. I know you too well not to be certain that you will approve of my courage and frankness in

owning to you the mistake into which youthful impetuosity and immature judgment have led me, instead of giving you a hand without a heart and perjuring myself by uttering an empty vow at the altar. However harshly the world may condemn me, you, sweet saint, will say: "He obeyed the voice of conscience and of feeling. He wished to spare me misery even at the risk of his own reputation." For I shall be severely, unsparingly censured, Lois, when it is known that we are once again only dear friends. We ought never to have called ourselves anything else. *That* was the false step, not this.

Write me but one line to say that you pardon me, and do not cast me off utterly. I shall always pray for and love you as the best friend Heaven ever bestowed upon one so unworthy as is your faithful brother,

DAVID RODMAN.

"Wait for an answer," said the author of the manly epistle to the office-boy, who had carried so many others to the same address. "And hurry back; I have an engagement."

This was true, for within the hour he stood in Christine March's tasteful morning-room to which none but very highly-favored visitors were admitted, and without a word of preface laid a scrap of paper upon the desk at which she was pretending to write letters. It was an open note, and he retained the envelope while she read:—

MY DEAR MR. RODMAN: You were quite right to tell me the truth. I hope you may be very happy with her whom you have chosen, much happier than you could ever have been with me. LOIS GRANT.

Just three lines in Lois's clear, precise chirography, not an erasure or a blot, although the office-boy waited but five minutes for his answer.

Christine scanned them intently, a puzzled frown knitting her finely-pencilled brows; turned the sheet

as if hoping to find elucidation upon the other side, then looked up, very pretty in her bewilderment. "I don't understand it in the least. Is it a riddle without the other part of the correspondence? What have you told her? And whom does she speak of as 'her whom you have chosen?' Isn't that *too* much like Lois's quaint propriety of speech?" laughing lightly.

His stare of wonder was unfeigned. "It means," he said when he found his senses and voice, "that I am free from the chain that has fretted into my heart from the first moment I beheld you, my angel of light and mercy—that I am yours, yours only and forever."

The siren leaned back in her chair and adjusted her bracelet with a smile of gratified vanity and real amusement. "Dear me!" she said carelessly, "I shouldn't know what to do with you if you were. Did you never hear of the French lover who objected to marrying the lady to whom he had been betrothed for fifteen years upon the plea that if he did he would be at a loss where to spend his evenings? Make-believe courtship is very enchanting, but I sha'n't be ready for anything more solid and serious for a century to come. And you really took me at my word when I went off into heroics last night about the lawfulness of our interesting game? I thought better of your sense and experience. Why, I have talked in the same strain to a dozen men before and meant nothing by it. I didn't dream you could be so tiresome as to believe me in earnest, or so insane as to break a *bona fide* engagement, acknowledged too for so long and in so many ways, with a nice respectable, mature heiress, who would give you money without

stint and pet you to death just because a fickle madcap like me, whose praise as a veteran flirt—for flirtation's sake—is in all the ball-rooms, chose to make great, sorrowful eyes at you."

She laughed again—the merry peal David had so often likened to "fairy bells tinkling o'er the water," and his brain spun around madly—a bloody curtain seemed drawn before his eyes.

"Christine," he said hollowly, bending to the level of the fair, false face, "this is not a moment for jesting. You drive me to distraction by affecting to sport with love like mine. You know I worship you, that I exist only in your smile, that the mere imagination of losing you would kill me."

"Oh, no! it wouldn't." She shoved her seat further back as if annoyed by his proximity. "Rational beings don't die in that way. You know better, or you would stand convicted in your own sight as a murderer whenever you thought of Lois. And you cannot lose what you never possessed. I do not belong to you or to any other man, thank goodness! When I near the thirties I shall steal a page out of your book and cast about for some good, easy-going, elderly millionaire, who will give me a carriage, a footman in livery, ten thousand dollar diamonds, and piles of pin-money. Why, my dear Mr. Rodman—that is what Lois calls you, I see, and it would be naughty in me to be more familiar—your income wouldn't keep me in gloves and bouquets, and you won't have the handling of the heiress's money if you don't marry her, you know. Now don't be uncomfortable and profane," for in his frenzy he flung a curse at her in turning away. "Real

gentlemen don't swear in a lady's hearing. I really did not suppose you would take it so hard. You see I have been flirting ever since I was a baby. I cannot help it, and I honestly believed you an adept at the business, you helped me on so nicely; supposed it was diamond cut diamond between us. The idea that you would actually throw Lois over for me seemed too absurd."

He forgot manliness with gentlemanly instinct at that.

"It is a lie!" he said, in a thick, coarse voice, laying a hard hand upon her shoulder. "A lie, and you know it!" With another oath, sounding and savage, he strode from the boudoir and down the stairs, slam ming the front door after him.

Christine ran to the window to get a peep at him as he tramped furiously down the street, head bent and fists clenched. "Who would have suspected him of being such a bear?" she said, half-frightened, half-delighted. "I wonder how people get up a real passion. After all it is unmistakable and far more effective than the finest acting. I suppose I shall not see much of him for a while until he cools down, or goes back to his sisterly friend. 'Her whom you have chosen,' forsooth! They seem to have taken my consent for granted. He has learned a lesson in humility at any rate."

Four days went by, and neither at rout, opera or upon the public promenade did she see her discarded suitor, and, what was mortifying, nobody appeared to have heard of or guessed at his discomfiture. Questions as to his whereabouts were put to her, but the

meaning smile accompanying her denial of all knowledge of his movements, her maidenly wonder that she should be supposed to be cognizant of these, were thrown away upon the dull or wilful inquirers. The thought that he had committed suicide occurred to her more than once with a force that terrified her. Yet there was pleasurable excitement in the thrill, a feeling even she was ashamed to own to herself, that the catastrophe, when the cause should be told, would enhance her fame as a man-killer. He had left town upon urgent business, she learned at length, and she comforted herself for the postponement of her public triumph by the discovery that his departure bore the date of the afternoon of the day on which she had dismissed him from her service.

On the fifth evening after his disappearance she was interrupted while dressing for a party by a message that "Miss Grant was in the parlor, and wanted to see her immediately upon important business."

"You should have told her that I am engaged," she rejoined sharply. "It is time I was off now. That handkerchief, Jane, and turn the burner so as to throw the light upon me, not the glass. My complexion is fresh to-night. What can the woman want?"

"She says she must see you, ma'am, right away," repeated the maid. "I think there is something the matter; she looks queer-like."

"She always does," smiled the beauty, surveying the image in the mirror with undisguised satisfaction. "But show her up. And when Mr. Wilson and the carriage come, let me know just as if she were not here. She may take the hint."

Lois entered with her quiet step, and without other token of agitation than extreme paleness and a perceptible sharpening of her features. "Thank you, I have not time," she said briefly to Christine's offer of a seat. "I had this telegram a quarter of an hour ago. I thought it should have been sent to you rather than to me. So I have brought it."

It was from Mrs. Bracy.

"Mr. Rodman met with an accident to-night in crossing the ford. We fear his injuries are fatal."

"How shocking!" exclaimed Christine nervously, and, for her, awkwardly. "But I don't see why you should bring this to me. Of course, I am dreadfully concerned"—

"Will you go to him?" interrupted Lois.

Christine uttered a little scream. "My dear creature, what a notion! What could I do to help him? And he was nothing to me but a pleasant acquaintance—poor fellow!"

"You did not love him, then?" asked Lois, in the same dry manner.

"Mercy! no! The truth is"—

"Never mind about explanations. It is now ten o'clock. The train leaves at eleven. Good-night."

"Mr. Wilson is down-stairs, Miss Christine, and the carriage is waiting," announced the maid.

Lois paused upon the threshold. Christine had already thrown her white opera-cloak over her shoulders and taken up her bouquet. Lois noted this and the parting glance she cast at the mirror.

"You have no message to send in case he should be conscious when I get there?" she said with an effort.

"None! Except regards and condolences, and so forth. I hope the account of his danger is exaggerated. A pleasant journey to you; but you'll find it fearfully cold travelling all night."

The parlor door stood open, and Mr. Wilson, a perfumed exquisite of the first water, his curly hair parted in the middle and clustering symmetrically about his smooth temples, bowed and smirked to Miss Grant, who returned the salute coldly. "Is this the creature who has supplanted my poor David?" she thought for a second, then forgot that he had ever been born.

She set off on her journey by that night's train, and by noon on the morrow stood at David's bedside. Mrs. Bracy had met her with the intelligence that he was still unconscious, and related what was supposed to be a true history of the casualty. The spring torrents of Stony Brook, always remarkable for volume and force, had this year been unusually heavy, and early that week had suddenly swelled up to the flooring of the bridge, bursting it away from the beams in several places, and otherwise injuring it so seriously as to make the passage dangerous. A barricade was therefore erected at each end to prevent accidents, and the work of repairing it commenced. Mr. Rodman was travelling on horseback, and probably, after encountering this obstacle to his progress, had attempted the ford, the waters having greatly subsided. He would hardly have dared to do this in the daytime, but in the uncertain twilight of a cloudy day had no doubt been deceived as to the depth and violence of the stream, and relied upon his intimate knowledge of the crossing to insure his safety. His horse had

missed his footing among the stones and thrown him, or the two been swept down and whirled over and over by the current. Mrs. Bracy was walking upon the piazza when she heard a faint shout for help, and sent off two of the farm laborers in haste to the traveller's rescue. They found him lodged between two jutting rocks at the foot of a willow tree. "The very one on which your veil caught, you remember?" said Mrs. Bracy, beginning to sob anew. "His head was badly cut, and the doctors think his brain is injured, even if there is no other internal hurt. My first thought was of you, poor dear"—

Lois lifted her hand to stop her. Any expression of sympathy or compassion seemed such a vain mockery. "It was very thoughtful—very kind. If he is still insensible it can do him no harm for me to go in at once."

And Mrs. Bracy, never guessing that but for this insensibility her guest would have shrunk from showing herself to the wounded man, led the way to the chamber that had last summer been Lois's own. There had already been a consultation of physicians since her arrival, her aunt's favorite medical man having at her urgent entreaty travelled down with her. He liked and respected her, and was sure moreover of receiving whatever he choose to charge for his services and loss of time. Yet he wished heartily he had refused to come when he saw her close beside him as he turned from the bed.

"Is there *no* hope?" she whispered, fastening upon his arm a clutch that made him wince. Her mood admitted of no temporizing.

"I fear not, my child. The Lord's will be done!"

She knelt by the side of the sufferer, her lips upon the limp hand lying outside of the coverlet, her face hidden in the bedclothes. The doctors retired noiselessly, and Mrs. Bracy, as she followed them, heard the only audible expression of grief that ever escaped the poor girl in the presence of another.

"O David! would GOD I could die for you, my love! my only love!"

"Her heart broke then," the good woman would say in after years, never without weeping. "Don't tell me she didn't feel it as much as some women would!"

David spoke but once in the deadly lethargy that never released him while he breathed. That one word was "*Christine*," and Lois, who was supporting his head, heard the fond murmur. An hour afterward he died. His mother, to whom unselfish Lois had sent a telegram as she passed through the village on her way to the farm-house, arrived too late to close his eyes. They were sealed down by Lois's tearless kiss.

They buried him by the side of his father—the two stricken women, and then went their different ways, the parent greatly comforted by the tenderness and thoughtful care of her who was to have been her son's lady wife. Lois returned to her desolate home to learn how true had been Mr. August's predictions of the worthlessness of oil lands and oil stock. Her losses were large and irremediable. The bubble had burst utterly, and there were no fragments to glean. She learned also what interested her far more, namely, that David's sudden journey was taken in consequence

of a rumor of the coming crash. She sent for the gentleman who warned him of the danger, and obtained the particulars of the interview.

"I called at his office at four o'clock," he said. "He was not well, he told me, and looked very pale and haggard. My news shocked—then aroused him. At first, he would not credit the possibility of the failure I represented as imminent, but after hearing my reasons for the belief became excessively disturbed, getting up and pacing his office floor in intense excitement.

"'This is awful!' he said. 'It is bad enough for all interested, but to me it means ruin and infamy. I have betrayed the trust of another, and *such* trust!"

"'You allude to Miss Grant, I suppose," I replied, soothingly. 'She must know that you have acted as you thought was right and safe. If all I hear of you and your relations be true, you need fear no censure from her.'

"'Censure!' he repeated. 'If I were to murder her she would forgive me with her latest breath. I must save something from the wreck if I can.'"

The oil region was a trackless wild remote from any line of public travel, and he pushed on to his destination without halting for sleep or refreshment; spent twenty-four hours in investigations which only confirmed his suspicions that all was lost, and started for home. His route lay directly past Mrs. Bracy's door. He had not stopped there on his outward journey. Others bore him to the friendly shelter on his return.

"He met his death in the attempt to serve me," Lois said with sorrowful pride to Mrs. Miller. "I

have never mourned the loss of the money. Since I know that he died in trying to save it I am glad it is gone. It would have seemed like the price of his blood."

He had remembered her kindly and remorsefully; had never doubted the sincerity of her forgiveness; had by the manner of his death atoned for coldness, neglect, perfidy. If he had lived he would perhaps have come back to her. Now that he was dead, he belonged to her—her only. The heartless butterfly who had danced away the hours in which he lay dying; whose smiles were sunny and false to other men as they had been when he basked in them; who could name him to her—his widow—with a pert formula of condolence, had no part or lot in her hero-martyr. She wore mourning as for a beloved husband for whose sake likewise she assumed the entire charge of the aged mother, making of her latter years a peaceful and balmy twilight, and finding abundant compensation for all she did and expended in her behalf in the endless stories the parent delighted to tell of her boy—his courage, goodness, talents and beauty.

"And you would have made him such a good wife, my dear," she would conclude these by saying. "He always wrote to me and told me you were the best woman in the world. And he was right. No wonder he loved you."

"I loved him!" was all Lois's response. It was the key-note of her existence.

"It is more than absurd—it is pitiable—her veneration for the memory of that coxcomb!" Mrs. Miller

imparted confidentially to her crony, Mr. August. "She has given up society entirely, and lives like a Sister of Charity—visiting the poor and the sick. She will never marry now; and look at her widow's weeds! The library where he used to sit with her in the evening is just as he left it, except that his portrait, a full-length picture and a capital likeness, hangs over the mantel. I know everybody ridicules her, and you must allow that she deserves it. All this grief for a man who cared only for her money—who slighted, wounded, and at last openly forsook her! She hasn't a spark of womanly pride. Such behavior shows a very weak, shallow mind."

Mr. August was rubbing his nose and eyes to free them from the dust or other irritating substance. "Maybe so! maybe so! In fact I have no doubt you are quite correct, my dear madam. Women judge of such matters so much more impartially than men do. It is as you say a very singular case; but hasn't it occurred to you sometimes that it shows a very strong, deep heart?"

ONE OLD MAID.

THE Scribas were dining *en famille* on the afternoon of the last day of the year. Mr. Scriba, gentlemanly and quiet—one of the solid men of the town, who, if he found solidity a serious matter, was yet amiably disposed toward the world that had bestowed the distinction upon him—discussed the contents of his plate as he did most subjects, with deliberate care, the slight plait between his brows becoming a shrewd and solid man. Mrs. Scriba had been passably pretty in her youth, and being plump and well-dressed was even more comely in the autumn of her matronhood. Complacent in her house, the dinner, her toilet and her children; satisfied with her husband, and content for the time with her servants, she listened with beaming face to the merry rattle of the young people, answered indulgently and judiciously the various appeals to her judgment and memory.

There were four of her children at the table—John, Jr., aged twenty-five; Emma, twenty-two; Effie, eighteen, and Harry, thirteen. They were all goodly to look upon, pleasant of temper, well-educated and stylish. I do not like the word, but through much use it has come to express what I mean—a certain air of high-bred fashion and ease that is not put on

and off with one's clothes. The equally well-looking young gentleman who sat at Emma's right was Mr. Edwin Rowland, her betrothed, and therefore entitled to a place in the family circle even upon not-at-home days, and such is New-Year's Eve generally in households that expect to be overrun by emulous friends on the morrow. Only nobodies paid visits on this day, and the Scribas were too near the top of the tree to trouble themselves about that class of their fellow-creatures. Sitting there under their own frescoes and chandeliers, they suffered no thought of possible intruders to make them afraid, and enjoyed the goods of fortune with open hearts and happy faces.

Until the conversation struck something projected into the frothy current by John, that diverted it from its course. Effie, a giddy tease, had accused him of a lack of philanthropy in remaining single to the ripe age of twenty-five, "when so many worthy women were sinking into elderliness and melancholy without the husbands to which their merits entitled them."

"I am not a philanthropist!" asserted her brother boldly. "I have no patience with the stock cant about doing good to one's kind, self-immolation for the elevation of others and the like heroic humbug. I don't want to serve my age one-tenth as much as I want to serve myself; to make such use of my time, talents and money as will make me wisest and happiest. Providence has put me into John Scriba's keeping and he means to take excellent care of the consignment."

"But it is surely nobler to live for others?" ventured Emma, with a slight blush.

John laughed. "Put it in the singular, Em, and I grant you it must be a nice thing—so very comfortable as to come within the range of my philosophy of self-improvement. What I inveigh against is separation, not identification of interests; this making one man's meat to be another's bane. When it comes to that, I respectfully decline the bane. 'Live and let live' is a decent and sensible motto. To die that other people may live and have a jolly time is to my perception simply and barbarously unreasonable."

"That is a terrible blow at heroism, as exemplified by ancients and moderns," said young Rowland. "What would become of the poet-historians if you class Curtius, Lycurgus, Arnold Winkelried and a host of other stand-bys among the world's chief simpletons, instead of worthies? No, Emma is right. Self-abnegation is a glorious thing. There is a spring in every man's heart that stirs at such stories as these; that chokes and blinds him when he hears, in our day, of conduct like Herndon's, the commanding officer of the *Central America*. You remember it, Mr. Scriba? And so should you, John. When the vessel was foundering, he kept the men on board at bay by force of exhortation, command and threat, until all the women and children were in the boats, then suffered the remaining places to be filled by other passengers. There were still many on the sinking steamer for whom no room could be made. Herndon put his favorite servant in the seat reserved for himself, took off his watch and sent it by the man with a parting message to his wife. 'As for me, I shall stay by the ship, and with *these!*' he said, pointing to

the doomed band. These were the last words the survivors ever heard him speak."

"That was grand! sublime!" cried Emma, twinkling back the tears that applauded the story and her lover's rhetoric. "Is it possible, John, that you can see no beauty in such conduct?"

"Beauty! do you call it? I name it arrant folly, the rankest kind of absurdity, since he threw away his life for an idea. The sacrifice did not save the meanest creature in what you term 'the doomed band.' They died as surely as if he had not widowed his wife and perhaps beggared his children. You can extract no grains of romance out of my composition, Em. Even in my boyhood I saw the fatuity of that undersized, overrated prig, Casabianca, the boy of burning deck notoriety."

"I thought his name was Pat Malloy," interrupted Harry. "The song says so. What are you all laughing at?" hotly, as the merriment heightened.

"'The boy stood on the burning deck,
His baggage checked for Troy'"—

"Miss Boyle!" announced the footman, throwing wide the dining-room door.

A tall, meagre lady entered wrapped in a thick plaid shawl, simpering and blinking as the blaze of the gas-lights struck her eyes.

"I am afraid I have called at an inopportune moment, but I get out so seldom, and I could not deny myself, to-morrow being New-Year's, and I was at your very door as I may say"—

"Miss Boyle, allow me to present Mr. Rowland," said the stately host, checking her in mid-career.

"Happy to make your acquaintance, Mr. Rowland." Miss Boyle bowed stiffly, yet low, until Effie afterwards declared she was afraid she would break in the middle, backing away as she did so from the gentleman who had arisen to be introduced. "I have often heard of you from our mutual friends—cannot meet you as a stranger, as indeed I know you are not in this house," another simper. "Fine winter weather this, Mr. Rowland; bracing to the entire system. I enjoy walking—pedestrian exercise—in cold weather much more than I should riding—although the street cars *are* a great convenience—it imparts a fine glow to the whole frame. No thank you, my dear girls, positively nothing for me! It is near my tea-hour, as you are aware; I cannot think of tasting a morsel."

"Sit down, Co. Coffee will be brought up directly," said Mrs. Scriba, in the tone of good-humored patronage people near the top use to those at the foot of the allegorical tree aforesaid. "You will feel better for eating and drinking something warm. James, take Miss Boyle's hat and shawl."

"I won't trouble James—thank you, Juliana! Since you are so urgent, I will just loosen my shawl but not remove my bonnet. Thank you!" to the waiter who set a chair for her next Mrs. Scriba's. "I am absolutely ashamed to put you all to such trouble. I only said to myself in passing—I will just peep in for half an instant to see how they all are and to wish them 'Happy New-Year.' It has been such an age since I saw you, and I get out so seldom, and to-morrow of

course no lady can show herself in the street. No, my dear Harry, no oyster *pâté* for me, thank you! I rarely touch such rich dainties. No wine, *thank* you, John! Or, if you insist, just the wee-est drop—enough, thank you! Dear me! am *I* keeping the table waiting?"

"There is no haste," remarked Mr. Scriba, politely, while Effie said she was glad there was somebody to keep her in countenance, "since she was not half through her dinner, having talked while the others ate."

Miss Boyle would not be put at her ease. She felt that she ought to make herself agreeable, especially to her new acquaintance; but the walk in the frosty air had sharpened her appetite; the dinner, so much more savory than she was wont to see on her own board, appealed irresistibly to her senses. She was keeping everybody waiting, she could see, despite the well-bred feint of occupation kept up by most of the party; her bonnet-strings got into her plate; the wine titillated her palate until she *had* to cough behind her napkin, vulgar as she deemed the action; the trained waiter's attention embarrassed her, especially as she turned her head to thank him every time he offered a dish, and she was unused to eating in the presence of so many people. The sweat—she would have said perspiration—oozed in minute specks to the surface of her sallow skin by the time she laid down her knife and fork, her hunger but half-appeased. She remembered, just in season to mention it in justification of her ravenousness, how little dinner she had eaten at noon.

"I had just taken my seat at the table when I was interrupted, and when quiet was restored—I would say a degree of comfort—that is, when I could resume my meal, I found the zest had departed. Indeed I do not think dining alone is conducive to appetite at any time. I consider sociability the very sauce of—ahem! gastronomical refreshment. Do not you agree with me, Mr. Rowland?"

Emma thanked her lover in her heart that his smile was polite, not one of amusement.

"I do, madam, entirely. I think fasting is preferable to taking one's meals in solitary wretchedness. Cheerful society and conversation upon pleasant topics—even such accessories as the tasteful arrangement of the dishes—a clear, soft light, flowers and fair faces surrounding the board, undoubtedly promote not only appetite but digestion; and the reverse likewise holds true. We study these things too little as a nation and as individuals"—

"A very just observation," Miss Boyle interposed hastily. "Very neatly put. My dear Juliana, how well you are looking; and Mr. Scriba, also. You are actually renewing your youth. It is a gleam of genuine sunshine, the glimpse at this festive scene. This ice cream is truly delicious; and what luscious grapes."

Nevertheless Mr. Rowland noticed that she plucked but a single berry from the cluster, leaving the rest upon her plate.

"What noble oranges!" she exclaimed when they were passed to her, and selected one which was laid beside the grapes.

The gentlemen quitted the dining-room with the

young ladies, leaving Miss Boyle alone with the hostess. Mr. Rowland sat opposite the oper door of the parlor, fifteen minutes afterwards, when the lean figure tip-toed through the hall, still with the air of being in the house upon sufferance. She was accompanied by Mrs. Scriba and Harry, and the latter had a covered basket in his hand. The visitor's apologies, uttered in a wheezing undertone, were quite audible to the young lover, while she halted to put on her overshoes and tie a thick veil over her best bonnet.

"It is a downright imposition, Harry, dear, to make you play porter, but your mamma most generously pressed the hamper upon me. Say 'Good-night' to the girls for me. I hear the piano, so won't disturb them. If I were not pressed for time—for I have not outlived my love of music—I should be tempted to linger. I think one never outlives a real, honest love for anything. Good-night, Juliana! I have had a charming visit—*char*ming."

"Harry, be sure you put your aunt on the right car," was Mrs. Scriba's parting injunction.

"Aunt!" Emma's betrothed believed he had not heard aright. He had supposed the gaunt spinster who had made herself so uncomfortable as his *vis-à-vis* at table to be an old school friend, or at the nearest, a far-off poor relation of his plump mother-in-law-expectant. Yet he now recollected that Mrs. Scriba's maiden name was Boyle. This was then her own sister whom he had never seen, who had never been named in his presence. It was odd. The duet was finished and Effie flitted back to him from the piano.

"I hope your abstraction is born of our music, and

not of a sudden passion for our fascinating aunt," she said saucily. "Em, Mr. Rowland is congratulating himself upon your resemblance to Aunt Co. It is so nice to think that you will look just like her when you are—Mamma!" as Mrs. Scriba entered, "*how* old is Aunt Co? Forty? fifty? seventy-five? a hundred?"

"She looks older than she really is, and her secluded life has made her old-fashioned in dress—stiff in manner," responded Mrs. Scriba, with gentle seriousness. "Don't laugh at elderly people, dear, or papa and I will come in for our share."

"Now, mamma, as if I could. But why must old maids be"—

"Old maids!" supplied John. "Don't struggle for an expressive adjective. I have covered the whole ground. Celibacy in man or woman is an offence against natural laws, and the offender bears the stamp for all time. Nobody, for example, could mistake our excellent aunt for anything but an elderly maiden of increasingly uncertain age."

"She *is* an excellent woman," said Mrs. Scriba, yet more gravely. "And although you may not credit it, Miss Effie, she was really handsome in her youth, besides being very vivacious and pleasing in conversation. Young people are incredulous and uncharitable as regards the ravages of time and care."

"They needn't make one finical aud artificial," murmured Effie to her sister, somewhat sobered by her mother's manner. "What is it, James?" to the servant who appeared at the door with a card in his hand.

"A gentleman to see Mr. Scriba, ma'am."

Mrs. Scriba took the card, and her face lighted up instantly. "He's in the sitting-room, James. Take this to him when you have showed the gentleman in here." She advanced a step nearer the door, and the irrepressible Effie made time for her query.

"Who is he, mamma?"

"Mr. Lloyd—Aleck Lloyd we used to call him; an old friend whom I have not seen since John there was a baby."

The stranger was on the threshold as she said it. He was tall and sinewy, erect in figure, quick of eye and motion although his hair and beard were grizzled. The spectators noted without interpreting it the searching glance that swept the room ere his hand met Mrs. Scriba's in a long, hearty grasp.

"I cannot tell you how great this unexpected pleasure is," said the lady, cordially.

"What must it be, then, to me, who have not looked upon my former home and friends for almost a quarter of a century?" said a deep voice, so round and pleasant as to prepossess his youthful auditors at once in his favor. "And to meet you so becomingly surrounded enhances the enjoyment. Are these all yours?"

"Almost."

The visitor caught the meaning of her smile.

"More congratulations?" asked he, returning it brightly. "There is no need to tell me which are already and quite yours. I see father and mother in each face."

Effie was the prettier of the two, as the wicked witch well knew, and she was puzzled to understand why he

looked oftener and more earnestly at Emma during the half hour that he stayed.

"He's the most delightful old gentleman I have seen this century," she grumbled aside to John. "And I always had a fancy for being an 'auld man's darling.'"

Mr. Lloyd had lived in Mississippi since his removal from his native city, the Scribas learned in the course of their familiar chat. He had married there, had three sons born to him, and was now a widower. Effie imagined that her mother looked more serious at this announcement than was required by decorous regret, his wife having died three years before.

"I wonder if she suspects in him a possible aspirant for my hand!" she meditated, maliciously. "But won't I tease her for that when he's gone!"

The seriousness deepened into sadness when he contrived to talk aside with the lady of the house for a few minutes just before he took his leave. Effie was near enough to catch the drift of the conference.

"Your sisters are well, I hope? Do they live near you?"

"Mrs. Rawdon resides in Hartford, but I see her frequently. She has a fine family and a beautiful home. My youngest sister"—there was no mistaking the mutual embarrassment that prevented them from meeting one another's eyes—"still lives at the old homestead. It was left to her, you know. Her health is very good. She was here this evening a little while before you came."

A second's pause, in which his mien questioned—

the bent head and waiting eyes—and his lips were mute.

"She is still single," Mrs. Scriba added, unable to resist the silent interrogation. "The reason—or what she construed long ago into a reason for not changing her condition—exists still."

"I shall try to see her to-morrow," and he turned to his host to ask some question about local politics.

"Mamma," whispered Effie, crazed by curiosity, yet half-awed by the magnitude of her discovery, dancing up to her mother's side by the time the guest passed from the parlor, "was he an old beau of Aunt Co's? Did she really ever have one?"

"Yes, and threw him away for a whim," ejaculated Mrs. Scriba, petulantly, also *sotto voce.*

"You don't say so! But it seems so queer. Why, he's splendid! and she—isn't!"

"Hush, child! I will tell you all about it by and by. Some things are not suitable subjects for parlor talk."

To her husband, when they went together to their own sitting-room, she said: "What a wreck that obstinate girl has made of her life. But for her overstrained notions of duty and persistency in her mad scheme she might marry Aleck Lloyd even now. He cannot name her yet without emotion. He is going to see her to-morrow."

"She would do a good thing for herself in marrying him," observed Mr. Scriba, in a matter-of-fact way. "But it is not at all likely that he will be inclined to renew his suit when he sees her. He is rich

and a live man, full of energy and enterprise. He has kept up with his generation; she has fallen far behind it. You will see that nothing will come of the visit."

Meanwhile Miss Boyle was making her way by car and on foot to a quiet street quite on the other side of the city. The night was clear and cold; but the pavements were damp from recent heavy rains, and the stiffening mud at the crossings was mixed with half-melted snow. Aunt Co's feet sank into it several times above her rubbers, and more than once she clutched the basket tightly and threw out the other hand to balance herself upon the slippery flagging. It was a disagreeable thing—this going out on winter evenings alone. Yet it was nobody's business to look after her. Her nephews were kind and respectful when they met. Harry had stopped a car for her and seen her safely into it, getting on himself for a moment to put her basket in after her and to pay her fare, as she discovered when the conductor came through. His mother had given him his orders probably. His aunt could not have expected, indeed would not have allowed the lad to accompany her all the way—a full mile at least. Still less could she suppose that John would put himself to such inconvenience. She could get along safely enough; was accustomed to dispense with the service of an escort, as they all knew. Only there was a tremendous distance between her sister's home and hers on this New-Year's Eve; between the two who for twenty years had lived in the same house, known the same joys and griefs. Juliana's life had been growing

deeper, richer, brighter every year, and month, and day; hers narrowing and glooming in like ratio.

"Not that I would complain," she thought, deprecatingly, as was her wont to think and to speak, and she drew both ankles out of a very sloshy gutter. "Of course I know it is the Lord's will, but I do get sore and tired sometimes. I have learned not to mind many things that used to seem unbearable; but there are others that will get at the quick, do what I will to ward them off. I suppose it is with the sensibilities as it is with my feet," helped to the simile by another mud-hole; "the rubber doesn't go all the way up."

She was at home—a plain but spacious house, with what had been in its day a handsome flight of stone steps leading to the front door. It was a dingy quarter, from which fashion had long since fled, although it remained perfectly respectable. Miss Boyle let herself in with a latch-key and went along a dimly-lighted entry to a back room, whence issued an odd sound, like the plaining of a cross child, uttered in a coarse masculine voice. Shriller tones made response as Aunt Co's hand touched the lock.

"Hush up that noise! You'd ought to be well shaken, you had ought! It ain't my fault she isn't here to give you your supper. If I'd my way you would go to bed without it. Be quiet, or she shan't ever come home!"

Amid the burst of lamentations aroused by this threat Miss Boyle entered. Something sat on the floor in the middle of the room, whimpering and rubbing one eye with a big fist—a woman as tall as Miss Boyle herself, and obese to unsightliness; with a

thick hanging jaw and small eyes set very far apart, low forehead, beetling brows, long upper lip and a mane of coarse gray hair hanging over her shoulders—a creature from which sane humanity turned, sick at the caricature of itself. The face was wet with tears and smeared with dirt from her soiled hands, but she stopped crying at sight of her sister. Springing up, clumsy and eager, she ran to her, caught hold of her dress and babbled in furious gibberish, illustrating her meaning by angry gestures toward the other occupant of the apartment. This was a shrewish little woman in cap and spectacles, who without noticing the pantomime stooped to lift a tea-pot from the hearth to a round table set on one side of the fire.

"Yes, my baby; sister knows," responded the guardian, patting the fat cheek, and smiling fondly. "Sister didn't mean to leave her so long. Now Lulu will be good and she shall have something nice for her supper. Has she been very troublesome, Mattie?" to the sharp little maid.

"'Bout's usual. She's always ugly as sin. She throwed a new handkerchief of yours into the fire, and would 'a sent your work-box after it if I hadn't ketched it as 'twas goin'. You was out later'n common, and she worried awful 'bout that. She knows when time's up well as you do."

"It is wonderful how smart she is!" commented Miss Boyle, in plaintive admiration. "I didn't mean to be away so long—I just ran in for a minute to see Juliana."

She was washing the idiot's face with a wet cloth,

and panted out the broken bits of sentences in a frightened way that seemed to be habitual to her.

"Hold still, my precious child! You see I hadn't seen her for an age—and they were just at dinner—such an elegant affair it was, too—I wish you had seen it, Mattie—and Emma's betrothed was there, a very handsome, agreeable young man he is—and they would make me sit down, although I told them I hadn't time—and I ran away the minute I was through eating. That is," with conscientious accuracy, "the instant Juliana had this basket ready. Yes, there is something in it for Lulu," the idiot was tugging at the cover; "but she must eat her bread and milk first, like a nice girl, and not slop it over the table or pull the cloth off as she did at dinner-time."

Lulu began to cry again; then stopping suddenly laughed yet more disagreeably, and pointed to a large grease-spot on the carpet.

"The carpet will have to come up before that can be cleaned," snapped Mattie. "I've been at work scouring it, off and on, the whole afternoon. If she'd been mine I'd a boxed her ears for that job. She knowed better."

Lulu spit at her spitefully, and Miss Boyle stepped between them.

"Here, Mattie, that is for you," she whispered, covertly conveying an immense bunch of black Hamburg grapes into her hand—the cluster had been saved from her own dessert. Juliana had sent some to Lulu; but these were honestly her own, and she threw them as a sop to the household Cerberus. "Lulu doesn't mean to be naughty, but it is natural for Mat-

tie to get a little, just a little out of patience with her sometimes when she is very mischievous. Mattie is very good and kind, and Lulu mustn't be cross to her."

"She'd behave herself more like folks, if somebody else wasn't so partial with her," growled the sharp one. "It ain't the right way to manage 'em, as I've told you a thousand times. If she was in a 'sylum, she'd be taught after a different style, I can tell you."

Miss Boyle's face twitched. "Don't speak of it, Mattie. Haven't I thought of all that? I can't be hard upon her. I haven't the heart to do it even if I hadn't promised my mother. The Scotch call them 'innocents.' I remember mother told me that when I was a little child. It has helped me often and often when I remembered it."

They were twins—these two—and the fond mother, who had just finished Madame de Staël's popular romance, had them christened respectively Corinne and Lucile. Corinne grew up shapely in body and intellect; Lucile had never spoken an articulate word, never passed in mind the first year of babyhood. It was a sore affliction to the father, and, as they came to the understanding of it, a trial and mortification to the brothers and elder sisters. But to the mother and Corinne, Lulu was the most interesting member of the household. Her bursts of temper, her crying fits, the demon of wanton mischief that continually possessed her, the helplessness that demanded the constant services of one or the other of her devoted nurses, could not weaken their attachment. When the father, secretly urged by the other children, spoke of hiding what he was disposed to regard as a family

disgrace in the safe seclusion of an asylum, Mrs. Boyle's terror and indignation were like the rage of a bereaved lioness. The subject was never broached again while she lived. She survived her husband but a year; and dying bequeathed the unfortunate girl —a sacred legacy—to her twin-sister's keeping, exacting from her a promise that she would never be over-persuaded to abandon her to the care of hirelings; that while Corinne lived her household should be Lucile's also. Corinne gave the pledge without visible hesitation. She was alone with the sick woman. There was no one by to remind the parent of the blight she was laying upon her child's life, to remonstrate against a sacrifice so disproportioned to the end to be gained, or to mark how deadly white grew the girl's face as she made the vow. For Aleck Lloyd and she were troth-plight even then, and the mother knew it. In the death-hour she remembered it, perhaps with futile misgivings, for her eyes turned wistfully to the faithful daughter nearest her pillow.

"About Lulu," she whispered. "If there were any other way, if Aleck should not like it—but if he really loves you he will not mind! You will watch over her, will you not? Nobody else cares for the poor darling."

"My home shall be hers while she and I live," repeated Corinne, steadily. She had sworn to her own hurt, but she changed not at the united expostulations of brothers, sisters and friends; went not back from her word when her betrothed husband besought her to lift the shadow from his path and hers, to delegate to others the heavier duties involved by her accept-

ance of the trust. Without violation of her pledge to her mother she might engage a keeper—a trustworthy person, who could be with the imbecile night and day—and her asylum be his house.

"*Ours*, dearest, for in the sight of heaven you are my wife. Have mercy upon me! Be just to yourself! Is it right to bind down your free, full life to such a service? To crucify your heart that an idiot girl who cannot appreciate your devotion may not be subjected to the trifling pain of being tended by a stranger?"

"I see now more plainly than I ever did before that she would be a curse in any home but mine," was the sadly-patient rejoinder. "I will not take her into yours, Aleck; I love you too truly for that."

Within a month after the mother's death the twins were left to themselves in the old house. Mrs. Boyle had willed it to them with a sufficient sum for their support. The other daughters were married; the brothers settled elsewhere. Aleck Lloyd went "out West." The words were a synonym for "lost" at the date when the Boyle homestead was in a fashionable locality. It was out of the world now, and so were the inmates. For twenty-four years the twain had lived there together without other companionship than such servants as could be hired to assist in the work of an establishment to which there was such an objectional appendage as the mischievous, mindless "Lulu." Mattie had, as she put it, "stuck it out" for ten years as "help," not servant. She liked to rule; and in consideration of her privileges in this respect she stayed on from month to month, always grum-

bling, and making herself at once indispensable and terrible to the nominal mistress.

Twenty-four years! Aunt Co thought them over when the tea-tray had been removed and she had put Lulu to bed and waited to see her sound asleep. Her time was at her own disposal for some hours. The fire burned brightly in the sitting-room. Sharp Mattie was as neat as her mistress, and the old-fashioned furniture was in irreproachable condition, dustless and shining. The curtains were dropped, the reading-lamp was on a table in front of the grate, and a rocking-chair beside it. Miss Boyle understood the practice of many small economies. She was not as rich as when her mother left her this house and the rent of certain others. Her property had depreciated in value until her income just met the necessary expenses of the small family. She never complained; and her wealthier kinspeople spoke approvingly of her modest wants and thrifty management, and made her New-Year's presents of hot-house fruit and sweetmeats. She made over these to Mattie and Lulu. But she did like to read. A new book was a Lethean spring, in sipping which she forgot time and care. One lay on the stand now—a gift from Effie, who "found it too solemn for her taste," and amiably handed it over to her novel-reading aunt. The title was "Waiting for the Verdict," and a little silver paper-cutter Aleck had given her was laid between the leaves against a spirited wood-cut of a kneeling woman; her arms crossed on the sill of an open window, her head embraced by them. Her hair floated wide, and the tense clasp of the locked hands told the intensity of her

supplication. Underneath was written, "THOU *knowest I have need of these things!*"

Aunt Co adjusted her eye-glass and scanned the print long and fixedly. The book sank gradually to her knee; the eye-glass fell into the place of the silver marker. No need of that to read the record of the four-and-twenty years stretching in monotonous dreariness between her and all she could rightly term life. Youth was gone forever, and all of beauty and grace and sprightliness she had ever possessed. It was as if a butterfly had folded its wings tightly and been fastened again into the chrysalis. Whims and habits—little "old-maidisms"—learned in her straight and eventless existence—clung to her like barnacles to a becalmed ship. The petty, oftentimes annoying, oftener ludicrous peculiarities that incrust the characters of so many single women, are not always the offspring of selfishness. They seem to me more like dead shoots that would have been noble, beneficent growth, had not circumstances stifled them in their birth.

"I *am* different from most people," said the dreamer to herself, drawing a deep breath. "Different from what I once was. Most different from what I might have been had the Lord appointed to me the lot I would have chosen for myself. It's past my finding out. He knows I have needs, too," glancing at the book. "Somehow I feel them more than usual tonight. I suppose it was seeing them all so happy at Juliana's—and Emma and Mr. Rowland—Bless me!" aloud. "That is the door-bell! Somebody wanting to inquire the way to somebody else's house, probably."

But after the front door opened a man's footsteps came along the hall. Getting up in a flutter, she shook out the skirt of her black alpaca and adjusted her head-piece of brown ribbon. Announcements were a refinement of etiquette unknown to Mattie. She merely pushed back the door, said huskily, "There she be," and returned to the kitchen fire.

"Is this Miss Corinne Boyle?"

She saw nothing but the hand, half-extended, after she heard the unforgotten voice that hailed her ear, and, it seemed, her soul also.

"I don't wonder you ask, Aleck," faltered the poor lady, standing stock still by the chair from which she had arisen; "but I should have known you anywhere."

Then—she was ashamed of it even while the excitement of the meeting was fresh upon her—she put her handkerchief to her eyes and cried heartily. The soft-hearted Westerner came down at once from the stilts of comparative strangerhood. He made her sit down, helped himself to a chair and begged her to compose herself.

"I should not have come in upon you unexpectedly," he said, and went on to tell how, being in town for a day or two, he could not resist the temptation of calling to see a few of his oldest friends; and how he had just missed her at Mr. Scriba's. "I had a delightful visit there. What a charming family your sister has! Emma reminded me of you," he added.

By this time it was safe to lower the handkerchief and apologize for her nervousness. They talked for an hour after that; of old acquaintances and old

times, and the changes that had come into their lives —especially his—since they parted. Talked as elderly friends—nothing more. This was not the woman whose image Aleck Lloyd had kept locked away in the far-in chamber of heart and memory for the twenty years in which another woman had called him husband; which he had brought forth to the light, and studied of late until he had obeyed the ardent impulse that urged him to seek and woo her if she was still single. He had come to her from the gladness and beauty of her sister's home, the treasured picture the fairer and more distinct after seeing pretty, modest Emma, saying to himself as he hurried along, "We were made for each other, I will make her believe this."

He was met by a prim, neutral-tinted spinster, who towered up lankly and bonily for an instant, then dropped into a chair, without touching the back, and cried into a starched handkerchief until her prominent nose was red. The shock killed love, and romance fled affrighted out of sight. He could not squeeze the hand half covered with a black silk mitt. It would have been absurd to put his arm around the flat perpendicular of her waist. Cured were the passion and the pain of expectancy; gone like a mist was the dream of reunion and constant companionship. Something besides duty put and held them asunder now. What a fool! what a sentimental simpleton he had been to forget that a woman must fade fast in a life like hers! fade, and shrivel, and dry into hardness! He was very kind with all this going on within him; so sorry for her in her isolation that some sweet drops of comfort dropped through his talk into the starving heart.

"I may not see you again soon," he said, rising at half-past nine. "Perhaps never again in this world, for our ways lie far apart."

"Far, indeed," echoed his heart drearily over the crumbled image.

"But I wish you would let me help you feel that I had been of some use to you before we part."

A silvery tinkle on the marble-topped table diverted his eye from the face that was very gray and wan in the lamp-light, and strange, with the bunches of curls he had thought a bewitching setting for it when it was young and rosy, which were wiry corkscrews now. The book-marker had fallen off a pile of books where Miss Boyle had laid it. He took it up; looked at it intently as it lay in his palm.

"You have kept it all this while, Corinne?"

She did not speak. Knowing that he was going from her again—and why—how could she?

"It was a happy time," mused the disenchanted lover to himself, not to her, although he spoke aloud. "So fair, it grieves one to think it is dead with so many other dear and beautiful things. Yours is a sad lot, dear old friend. I wish I could comfort you in some way; do something to lessen your privations, or give you pleasure."

"I do not complain. I have fallen into the Lord's hand, not that of man," Miss Boyle said meekly, looking up at him. "I have tried to do my duty in a humble sphere, but still it was duty. I know my best friends have blamed me—do blame me. It has troubled me sometimes that they didn't see things as I do, but I have this great cause for thankfulness: The Lord

has never let me doubt for a moment that I was bearing the cross He meant for me and for nobody else. It would have been a great deal harder had I ever imagined that I had gotten hold of the wrong one. And there are compensations. The poor child is very fond of me. It keeps up one's heart to know that one is absolutely necessary to some living creature. She couldn't get along without me."

"This is all the comfort she has. This persuasion is all the fruit of her twenty-four years of bondage," thought Aleck Lloyd, as he tramped back to his hotel with a great void in his heart. "Heaven help her!"

Miss Boyle turned out the light, looked at the grate to see that the fire was safe, at the windows to be sure they were fastened, and went slowly up-stairs. The gates of Paradise had opened a very little way, and in swinging to had dashed her to the ground. The cross was heavy and sharp, and the thongs that bound it upon her very tight and cruel. Her face was grayer and more drawn as she made the arrangements for the night in her chamber, omitting none of her old-maidish precautions and "notions." When she knelt to pray the faded lips parted for the first time since she had said "Good-by" to Aleck.

"THOU knowest I have need of these things," she groaned. "THOU knowest! THOU *knowest!*"

It was the drowning wretch's death-clutch at the rock. She felt it beneath her—a sure foundation—when, far into the night that had been for her sleepless, the mindless creature who had not slept away from her side in all these years stirred and cried out in a distressing nightmare.

"Yes, my baby," as her hand was caught fast by the dreamer. "Sister knows."

The words came involuntarily to her lips, but they broke the spell of the dumb anguish. Slowly through the thick darkness the light of the better knowledge dawned.

"Sister knows!" She said it a hundred times a day. It meant protection, strength, sympathy, whatever was loving and reassuring. The imbecile did not grasp the full import of it; understood neither the extent of her will nor her power to serve her, but the mere sound quieted her.

"She trusts me as I ought to trust my Heavenly Father. I am in His sight as ignorant and helpless as she is in mine. As she gropes for me in the darkness, help me, LORD, to feel after THEE; and when I have found THEE, to hold!"

My story has preached its sermon. Sad—is it, dear and patient readers? I grant it; sad and yet so true that my heart has ached in the writing as it did in the hearing of the simple tale of the heroism of a lowly heart in one of life's by-places. In my short-sightedness I would—had this been a fancy sketch—have given Corinne's history a happier ending. And yet when she has passed through the mire and frost (for she still lives upon the earth), when no longer tired and sore, she finds all the goods of which she had need here with greater and more abundant riches in the light and warmth and companionships of the "other side," she may think that the tenderest love could have awarded her no more blessed portion even in this life than to "touch and hold."

NURSE BROWN'S STORY.

PART I.

I KNOW you feel real bad, dear, but when you've got so much left to be thankful for, isn't it a pity to grieve so for what's gone and can't come back?"

I turned my face on the pillow fretfully, and the tears that had been collecting under my eyelids overflowed upon my cheeks. They were not the first by many I had shed that day. The weather was wet and dark; my husband was away from home; and for two whole days I had seen no human faces except those of my servants and the nurse who had attended me through my six weeks' confinement to my room.

It had been six weeks to a day on that wild March afternoon since my baby came—the baby that never breathed, whom I never saw. It was laid under the snow before I awoke to consciousness after the fierce convulsions had spent their force. I was almost well now, able to walk across my chamber-floor, to sit up most of the day and to see a few intimate friends; but not allowed to read or work on account of my unsteady brain. And having nothing else to do I moped sadly and perversely. Some women do not care for or want babies. I did. In imagination I had held

mine in my arms a thousand times; dreamed a thousand times of his pretty tricks and winning wiles; saw him creeping, walking, talking, going to school, to college—a stately man, supporting his gray-haired mother with his strong arm. All this I had lost, you see, with the tiny baby that had not once opened his eyes upon my face. People talked lightly of my loss, even those who had children of their own, and this lack of sympathy with my sorrow made me sullen. It was nothing to anybody else that I suffered, not even to Charley, although my loss was his also. But then he had not had time to get acquainted with baby as I had during all those months of sewing and waiting and castle-building.

I was thinking of these and other sad things, lying upon the lounge, and seeming to watch the naked boughs of the cherry-tree outside the window as it wrestled with the wind and bowed before the fitful sweep of the rain. The rain that was falling upon the wee mound where my hopes were buried—the short low heap of earth I saw all the while, by day and by night, which nobody else remembered! How often within the last month had I said over to myself the simple words written to me by a friend whose sixth child had died before it was a month old:—

"The days drag by wearily over my *aching heart and empty arms.*"

That was just it! The empty arms telling the whole story of the heartache that would not be comforted. The phrase was in my mind when my nurse broke the silence of the room by her timid remonstrance. She was a quiet and hitherto reticent wo-

man, past middle age, and to my notion as commonplace a person as I had ever met. Charley had several times hinted his regret that I had not a younger and livelier attendant; but she was gentle, patient and diligent, and I invariably assured him I had no cause of complaint. She was darning his stockings, I recollect, as she interrupted my musings; sitting bolt upright in a low chair,—a prim little figure dressed in a snuff-colored merino, her usual afternoon attire, and which I detested. Her hair was gray and combed away smoothly from her temples to the back of her head, where it was twisted into a queer little hard knot. She had the sallow complexion common to American women who have not gained flesh with advancing age. I had a foolish hankering in those days to have pleasant-looking people as well as inanimate objects about me. I called it a love of the beautiful. Maybe it was, but it was selfish for all that.

"'So much to be thankful for!'" I repeated. "That is what everybody tells me. It is very easy to preach to other people, but each heart knoweth its own bitterness."

"That's so," assented my companion, meekly. "Yet those who are worst off get no more than the best of us deserve. Many's the time I've justified the Lord's doings with that saying when it seemed as if all His waves and His billows were a-going over me."

Her humility made me ashamed of my crossness; her allusion to her own griefs moved me to a faint degree of interest.

"Have you had much trouble, then, Mrs. Brown?" I asked more respectfully.

"Trouble, dear! So much it's a miracle of the Lord's strengthening mercy that I am alive this hour."

"Did you ever lose a child?" I ventured, for her manner invited inquiry.

"One—a dear lamb, three years old—my first. He has been with the Good Shepherd thirty-five years come the fifteenth of May. He may be a man grown in heaven; he'll always be 'little Eben' to me. But that was what I call a *soft* sorrow—one that opens the heart, and lets the tears run easy and plenty of them. That isn't the sort that breaks the spirit and fairly withers one up through and through."

"Withers one up!" The words struck me. They expressed what I had thought when I first saw her. She was not hard although uninteresting. Nor was she coarse or homely. She looked withered; like a fruit that had once been plump and sweet, out of which the sap had been dried by frost or heat.

"I don't understand," said I. "It doesn't seem to me I could bear any more than has been laid upon me lately."

"Would you think me too free if I was to tell you a little bit of my story?" she resumed, after a pause. "It's been borne in upon my mind very hard all day. Perhaps it's meant for me to talk it out to you and to do you good. Such thoughts are generally sent a purpose. Nothing happens by chance to the Father's children. That's a blessed thing to know and to think on."

"I should like to hear your history. I always enjoy tales of real life," I said patronizingly, yet sincerely enough.

Not that I supposed she had anything to narrate

that could entertain me particularly, but I was not displeased at the prospect of hearkening to something that would cause me to forget for a while the wind crying in the chimney and at the keyholes, like a baby-spirit that had lost its way in the storm. It kept me thinking against my will of the gloomy superstition that condemns the souls of unbaptized infants to wander and wail forever in the outer darkness.

"It's thirty-nine years to-morrow since I was married the first time," she began without further preface. "Maybe you never heard I had been married twice? My husband's name was Eben King, and I mind that Andrew Brown was our first groomsman. We had four, and four bridesmaids; and my father, for all he was a mechanic, gave us what was for people in our circumstances and in those times a real nice wedding. My dress was Swiss muslin, with white sash and shoes; and *he* wore a full suit of blue, except for his white waistcoat and such a ruffled shirt-bosom as you don't see now-a-days. He was always gentlemanly-looking, and carried himself like a lord, and was altogether the handsomest man at the wedding. We had been keeping company four years. I couldn't understand then, no more'n I can now what first made him like me. I was never a pretty girl, although I was 'counted to have a genteel figure, and my teeth and hair were good, and I had an easy temper besides being very handy with my needle. I had just learned the milliner's trade with Mrs. Bobbinet, who used to keep a millinery and fancy store on Broad Street above Cedar. The house is torn down now, but it was a neat place in its time. I saw some of my hap-

piest days there, for Mrs. Bobbinet was not overstrict, although very particular about her girls' morals and modest behavior. I boarded at home with my father and step-mother, and Eben used to come to the shop for me every night if he could get away from his business in time. Mrs. Bobbinet would ask him into the parlor, and talk to him while I put my things on. She said a great many good words for me to him, I guess, and she allowed to me once and again that she didn't think I could do better. We all attended the same church; she and my parents, and Eben and I. He and I 'joined' the same Sunday. He was very active in the Sabbath School, and sung in the choir. You wouldn't believe what a beautiful voice he had. I never hear 'Denmark' or 'Lenox' sung now that I don't find myself a-listening for him on the bass. All my friends were in favor of the match, and as for me, why, he was just perfection in my eyes. He was a clerk in a dry-goods store when I first knew him, and after a deal of planning and talking among us all it was settled that we should set up a fancy haberdashery when we were married. We had no bridal *tower*, but the day after the wedding we took possession of our house. Such a cosy home it was! Back of the shop was a dining-parlor, where we ate and sat, and saw the few friends who called to see us and where I did all my fancy sewing. The kitchen was behind this —small but convenient. I didn't need a larger seeing I did all my own work, and there were just we two. Up-stairs was our bedroom over the shop, and a wee bit of a spare bedchamber. That was all. But, dear me! we shouldn't have known what to do with more

room. And I may say I shouldn't have known what to do with more happiness that first year, my heart was so full. I worked hard to be sure, rising up early and lying down late, but I ate the bread of cheerfulness instead of carefulness.

"By nine o'clock the housework was all done up, and luncheon set ready in the pantry against we should want it at twelve o'clock. I studied to get up all manner of nice little dishes to please Eben, who had a real gentleman's taste about these matters, and when noon came, however busy I might be, I always contrived to set the table in regular style; to have the cloth clean and the silver bright. He noticed everything, and it would have mortified me terribly to have him find fault with my housekeeping. He tended the store and when there were more customers than he could wait on, he would call me in. I was naturally bashful, but I got to liking to be at the same counter with him—he had such elegant manners and was so much respected. It made my heart puff with pride to notice how polite the ladies were to him, and what pretty language he always used to them. He was very popular, as you may suppose, and Mrs. Bobbinet had a way of naming me to her customers that threw as much work in my way as I could do—such as embroidery in silk and cotton, baby-clothes, collars, caps, and so on. I was chirpy as a cricket, sitting in that little back room, stitching away for dear life, with the door open between that and the store, and Eben never out of sight or hearing from morning until night. We shut up at seven o'clock every day except Saturday and had something hearty and nourishing

for supper. Then I washed up the dishes, and got all ready for morning, while Eben settled the day's accounts. I learned how to do it from looking on. I was never a quick scholard, but I caught an idea from him very easy—got it by heart so to speak. After that we went out for a walk in all weathers except the very worst. There's streets and squares I could show you in this town where I haven't dared to walk in more'n thirty years; they put me so in mind of old times. But they were like the green pastures beside the still waters in those days. We laughed and talked like two children let out from school while we strolled along, and when we did speak of business, 'twas always to say how nicely we were getting along, and how we'd live snug and equinomical for some years to come, until we could buy a store and house of our own. We didn't care to be rich. We only wanted to make a respectable living, and to lay up a hundred dollars or so every year in the Savings Bank.

"By and by we began to plan for the children we hoped were coming. I often hear ladies with houses full of servants and as much money as they can spend fret at the prospect of an increase of family, because it is such a trouble and expense. We didn't feel so, although my time was money and Eben couldn't afford to hire help for me or for himself. I was happier than ever when I was able to be down-stairs again at my stitching and trimming, with my foot upon the rocker of my boy's cradle; so glad and proud of him, and that he was as like his father as two peas! A better tempered, sweeter baby never lived. He was next to no trouble at all. By the time he was six

months old he would roll about the floor, playing with his ball and rattle for two or three hours at a time, without asking me to do more than speak to or smile at him once in a while. It was lucky he was so forward, for in just eighteen months my little Ruthie was born. I had two children when I was twenty-one. I had to fly around brisk enough then you may be sure to keep things going straight. I don't think my business took any harm from the babies, but I got weakly, what with nursing my girl, and being kept awake at night with little Eby's teeth, and getting up by daybreak to sweep, and dust, and bake, so's to be able to dress both children and have breakfast over before customers began to call. Eben worried over my losing flesh, and not having any appetite, and when at last I had a dreadful faint spell in the middle of a hot August day, he *would* call in a doctor. They had a long talk in private about me, and the upshot was that I must drink port wine and take bark, and have in somebody to help me in the hardest part of my work, for the doctor would have it that I was killing myself fast.

"The Lord forgive me! but I've wished a million times I had gone clean off in that faint, and never come to in this world! I wanted to live then for my husband and children's sake, and I took the medicines and tried hard to think it did me good, and to persuade Eben that I was getting stronger.

"One day my step-mother came to see me with a letter in her hand. 'This is what I call a Providence, Becky,' says she. And she read to me how my great-aunt on my mother's side was dead. The letter was

from my sister Lizzie, who had been adopted by her when my own mother died, and lived with her constant ever since. She was three years younger than me, and I was just twenty-two. I hadn't seen her since she was fourteen, for my aunt lived in Ohio, and we had no money to spend in travelling. She was dead now, and there was no will though everybody thought there would be, and Lizzie had been raised to expect a good share of her property. The children and grandchildren came in for it all; and Lizzie had no home without father sent for her, and nothing except her clothes and such trifles as the heirs would let her bring away with her.

"'The very thing for you!' my step-mother says to me. 'There isn't so much as a spare bed in our house, and me and my girls do up the work, sewing and all. And seeing she is your only own sister it does seem a leading of Providence that you should take her right in here, now you are poorly and obliged to have somebody to lend a hand.'

"It wasn't very warm weather, and I was sitting by an open window, but I got deadly sick all of a sudden.

"'Mother,' says I, 'it seems so close and shut-up-like here, I can hardly get my breath. Our rooms are very small and there's very few of them. Now the children are here, we can hardly turn around without stepping on them. I am willing to help Lizzie all I can. I'll allow her half I earn to pay her board, and I know Mrs. Bobbinet will give her a place in her work-room, and maybe in her family, if I ask her. She wants another girl, for she told me so the other day. And,' says I—and very strange I thought it

afterward that the words should have come to my tongue—'I feel as if it would kill me to have anybody else to live in the house with Eben and me."

"With that I cried—'like a fool,' mother said. She scolded, and Eben coaxed and begged, and father he reasoned in his sensible way; and between them all I was overruled into writing Lizzie a letter asking her to make her home with us. It so happened (I don't know as I ought to use the word, but I hate to think that the Lord ordered it) that Eben had business in Pittsburg—something about an old debt he had hopes of collecting—and I wrote to Lizzie to meet him there, and he would bring her on to us.

"I felt real bright and spry, for all I had been doing double work the five days he was away, the evening they got home. Mother had spent the afternoon with me and taken care of the children, so I had got up a nice supper for the travellers—ham and eggs, and coffee and short cake—I had quite a name for my shortcake—and for dessert, a cracker-pudding with raisins in it, and wine sauce. Mother and father took supper with us, and we had a merry time. I couldn't keep my eyes off Lizzie the whole evening, she was so different from the rest of us. We were a sober, steady family, generally, who didn't set much store by finery and fashion. Mother was very *notional* about our behavior and the company we kept. I used to think she was too strict when I was a young girl, but I'd begun to understand her better lately. Lizzie was rigged out as I and my half-sisters never dreamed of fixing ourselves up. Her travelling dress was heavy and dusty, she complained, and she would change it

before we sat down to the table, putting on in place of it a buff *challé*, with pink rose-buds on it. Her hair was thick and dark, almost black, braided behind and curled in front, and the curls were looped behind her ears with bows of pink ribbon. She was dark complected, a real brunette, with a lovely little pink flush under the skin, and her eyes were like two fire-flies, they shone and danced so; her teeth were very white—that ran in the family—and she laughed a great deal besides doing most of the talking.

"'She's a regular little beauty,' said mother one side to me as she was putting on her bonnet to go. 'Keep an eye on her, or she'll be apt to go wrong; she's so flighty and vain. I wouldn't let her be much in the store if I was you; it's too public. Give her housework and sewing to do, and let her amuse the children.'

"Before three days were gone, I found this was easier said than done. She 'hated housework; it hardened the hands, and soiled one's clothes.' She 'abominated sewing; it always gave her the blues and a pain in her side,' and she was 'so stupid about such matters, she was sure she would spoil the nice things sent to me to make.' She said all this in a laughing way, but 'twas plain she meant it. In the shop she was wonderful quick and 'taking' with the customers —especially with the gentlemen, who wanted cravats, and gloves and handkerchiefs. She didn't get along with the children at all. They were always cross or got into mischief when I left them with her while I was in the kitchen or store.

"'I don't see why you trouble yourself with this

branch of the business,' says Eben to me when Lizzie had been with us about a fortnight. 'You always preferred to sew, and the doctor says it is bad for your back to be so much upon your feet. Your sister does well enough in here; better than she does in the nursery department, if we are to judge from the noise in the back room. I suppose she has never been used to children, and has no knack at amusing them. I agreed to your having her here upon condition that she should be made useful, and I don't call it usefulness when she increases your cares by undertaking what she can't do well.'

"I saw he was vexed—I thought because I was looking badly that morning, and Eby was shouting and baby fretting. We always tried to keep the store quiet and pleasant for fear of annoying the customers, and for the same reason we had no cooking done in the middle of the day. I didn't remind him that it was none of my doings, bringing anybody else into the family. All he wanted, as I believed then, was to make things easy for me, and it wasn't in me to throw it in his teeth that Lizzie's coming hadn't done it when he'd meant it for the best.

"'I'd rather she'd be in the store,' I said, speaking low, 'if you'd promise to watch her pretty sharp. She is so pretty and lively and so ignorant of the ways and tricks of the world, that mother and I thought she'd better be kept in the background out of the sight of the gay young men. I'd be loath to have her led astray in any way.

"Eben he laughed, and patted me on the head.

"'While I am here, you needn't be afraid the gay

young men will get a chance to make love to the sister you think so handsome,' he says. 'There's so many prettier girls behind counters, they won't bother her long when they see she's got a brother to take care of her.'

"It *was* something pleasanter for me to have her out of the way of my work, though I can't say I had any the less to do. What with her washing and the extra cooking—for she'd been brought up delicate and couldn't relish plain food—I hadn't any more time for sewing than before she came. Eben didn't understand this, and when I saw how contented he was in the notion that I was really better off, I didn't let on how matters really stood. I even took in more sewing than I had ought to have undertaken to make him quite satisfied with his own arrangement. I had said to him before Lizzie came that she must not make his load any heavier.

"'It wouldn't be fair,' says I. 'She shan't cost you a dollar. I'll pay all her expenses out of my own earnings and yet put in as much into the common stock as I do now, for I shall have so much more time for fancy work than I get now, and that always pays well. I can't have a sister of mine dependent upon my husband.'

"I kept my word, and when I found that while she had more fine dresses than suited a girl in her station she was bad enough off for underclothes, I stuck to my resolution and sat up nights until twelve o'clock, sometimes later, to make up for the outlay I hadn't expected so soon.

"'There's no need of that,' says Eben, when I done

this. 'Nobody wants you to slave yourself to death. It's your own choice. I wash my hands of any share in it.'

"And I couldn't tell him before Lizzie, or at any other time, how much need there was for me to stretch every nerve and seize every moment if I wouldn't have him go behindhand in his business. I *did* think myself ill-used in this sometimes, and cry when nobody saw me because he didn't understand that I was working more for him than for myself. I've learned since that many another woman has the same trial and is dumb about it.

"We allowed Lizzie wages for tending in the store when she'd been with us a month. I didn't see the economy in that, particularly as we had spent so much for her clothes and I said so, but Eben insisted.

"'It isn't just nor kind,' he said, 'to employ such a smart girl for her victuals and clothes. She brings enough custom to the store to pay her a liberal salary, if I was to give her a commission upon her sales.'

"And when I held back still, he said: 'You women are always hard upon each other, but I thought better of you than to suppose you'd grind the face of your own kin and blood.'

"I gave up at that, and never even asked him how much he allowed her. It wasn't enough to clothe her, I was made to understand from her talk, or she didn't use it for that purpose, for she 'borrowed,' as she called it, of me every month, five, ten, sometimes as much as twenty dollars, and never paid it back, to say nothing of the ribbons, collars, and stuff for other garments she had out of the store, and which I always

charged to myself. I wondered how she got rid of her money until I used to stumble over boxes of confectionery, and fruit, and all manner of knick-knacks in her room; and every few weeks she'd flash out in a new dress, or mantle, or something she'd had made out of the house unbeknownst to me. I dreaded to scold her. I was timid and easy to put down, and she'd a high way with her, a habit of taking things for granted, that cowed me from the first. I was no match for her, and I knew it, although we'd never had a bit of a quarrel. She was nothing but a spoiled child, I'd say to myself, ruined for every-day life and hard work by the old aunt's foolish petting, and I had ought to have charity for her when her giddy talk and extravagant ways frightened me who had been brought up so different. Above all things I wouldn't find fault with her to Eben. Blood is thicker than water. She was my sister, and I'd stand up for her. So long as I took care he wasn't the poorer for her fancies and follies, he had nothing to do with what she cost me. But 'twasn't till long afterward I discovered that he suspected I was stuffing a private purse of my own with what I made by extra work. The confinement in the store told upon Lizzie after a while. She had headaches and turns of low spirits and began to droop about the house. I had made her go out every day, while I took her place at the counter, but she said 'lonely walks gave her the horrors.' Then I sent her out in the evenings instead of asking her to sit with the children half an hour or so while I got a breath of fresh air, and I told Eben he must go with her; take her to a lecture or a panorama, or some-

thing now and then to freshen her up. He said 'No' at first, and something about my needing exercise and recreation, but a very little reasoning brought him around. Every night they were off together, at last staying later and later, and I hardly noticed how long they were away, so busy was I with the work I did on the sly, for fear Eben should guess what a care and a cost my sister was.

"Ten months after she came my Jamie was born. Mother was in every day to do the heavy work and dress the baby. She was very kind so far as words went, and I knew if she had a favorite among father's children it was me, but she tried me awfully by throwing slurs upon Eben—a thing she'd never done before. He ought to have got me a nurse, or at least a woman to scour and cook. It was plain to be seen he hadn't the consideration for me he used to have; that he was getting selfish and careless; that I had too much on my mind to get well fast; and much more of that sort of talk I was too weak to answer, or tried to pass off as a joke. This was nothing though to the way she went on to Lizzie. She told her up and down that she was a useless, expensive piece of furniture, fit for nothing but to look at; a bother to decent people and a snare to weak and wicked ones. Lizzie answered her back for a while, for she had a spirit of her own, though, to do her justice, she wasn't often cross or bad-tempered, but by and by she listened as mum as could be and nobody could tell from her face whether she minded it or not. I was the first to find out what this meant. One day, when mother had washed and dressed the baby and laid him down by

me, and gone home to get her own house to rights, Lizzie, she spoke right out.

"'I won't be hectored and bullied any longer!' says she. 'I've stood it as long as flesh and blood can. That woman's got no right to lecture me, and she sha'n't do it again. I made up my mind I'd let her have her say for a whole week, and that I wouldn't answer her; but there's no sign of her tiring herself out, and I must take care of myself. I shall speak to brother about it to-night.' (She always called Eben 'brother.') 'We'll see whether he will protect a motherless girl in his own house.'

"'For the love of mercy, Lizzie,' said I, 'don't open your mouth about this fuss to Eben! He's quick-tempered, and he's that fond of you he'd be ready to shut the door in mother's face the next time she comes.'

"'I don't see where the harm would be if he did,' says she, with a spiteful laugh. 'And excuse me for saying it, Becky, if you had the right feeling for your husband you couldn't take her abuse of him as quietly as you do. My blood boils to hear her speak of him as she does, and so ought yours.'

"'It does hurt me,' I says, as calm as I could speak. 'But I know mother so well that I can make allowances for her. Her bark is worse than her bite. Something has crossed her lately, and she can't hide it. She has been too kind a friend to me and too good a wife to father for me to pick a quarrel with her at this late day. Hard words break no bones,' says I, a-trying to laugh. 'And if we have patience we'll live through this pelting.'

"'I think, sometimes,' says she, looking right at me with her great, bright eyes, 'that you have no heart at all, you take life so easy. You're just like iced milk-and-water and I'm spiced wine. It's as much as I can do to hold my tongue when I see you going round and round in the treadmill every day, thinking of nothing but how much work you can crowd in between midnight and midnight, and caring for nobody except those whining babies. I often say to myself: "I'll give her my opinion of her, hot and hot, before this day is out. I always did hate these sanctified prudes."'

"I couldn't speak at once, I was so taken aback, and my heart got hotter and bigger until the aching fairly choked me.

"'I am sorry I don't please you, Lizzie,' I managed to say presently. 'It isn't natural to me to show my feelings by words, but I try to serve and help them I love as well as I can.' And then, being weak and nervous-like, the tears would come in spite of all I could do to keep them back.

"'Oh!' says she, with a sneer, 'if you're going to cry I have done talking. That's the style of all you meek, pious, yea-nay women!'

"At that minute we heard little Eby crying, downstairs, 'Yizzie! Yizzie!' in the most pitiful voice you can think of.

"She did not stir from her chair. She was crimping a frill for herself with a case-knife, and she kept on with it as if she didn't hear the darling. He called again, 'Yizzie! Yizzie!' and cried as if his heart would break. It's thirty-five years ago, Mrs. Marley, but I

am woke up sometimes now of nights by hearing him say it, and me a-laying there not able to move!"

The sallow face flushed. She dropped the needle, that had moved steadily up to this time, and raised her apron to her eyes.

"Don't go on!" I begged, little guessing what was to follow. "I cannot have you distress yourself in this way, Mrs. Brown, interested as I am in your story."

"It eases the load a little to talk about it to somebody who can feel for me," said the poor woman, simply, wiping her spectacles and picking up her work. "I won't give way again. I've been a-thinking too much to-day. It's David, isn't it, who says, 'While I was musing, the fire burned?' And, somehow the wind makes me feel kind of lonesome. After a little, says I, for I couldn't lie still and listen any longer, and I had a 'milk leg,' and wasn't able to rise:—

"'Lizzie,' says I, 'would you mind seeing what ails the child? He never cries that way without he's hurt.'

"'Hurt!' says she, and her eyes snapped. She acted that day as if she was possessed. 'Not he! He's perishing for the want of a rousing whipping, and I'll make it my business to see his pa gives him one. He's the crossest-grained, most contrary brat I ever beheld! And you're as big a baby as he is! Hold your noise there, will you?' for the child was coming up-stairs.

"She got up and flounced out of the room to stop him, leaving the door open. I could see the head of the stairs from my bed, and I had a fair glimpse of

Eby's face, all wet with tears, just above the floor. He was holding up his finger, which was streaming blood. We found afterward he had cut it badly with a piece of broken glass.

"'Yizzie!' he sobbed again, as she reached him, and clutched her apron with his bloody hands to steady himself in climbing to the top step, which was higher than any of the rest and awkward for children. She was always very nice with her pretty aprons and she tried to jerk it away from him. He held fast to save himself from falling; she lost her balance and down the stairs they both pitched head first.

"I screamed louder than either, and struggled and fought to get out of bed; but it was just as if I had been chained hand and foot. I could do nothing but lie there, and listen, and tremble, and pray—if you could call that praying which was just saying the same thing over and over again—'Father, have mercy upon them! Have mercy upon them!'

"There was a terrible commotion going on below. When they fell, it seems there were customers in the store; and at the noise they all rushed with Eben into the back entry, and saw the two lying in a heap at the bottom of the steps, the child undermost. I heard the talking, and the bustling back and forth and the groaning as them that were hurt was lifted up and carried into the parlor. Then somebody said: 'Run for the doctor!' And Eben called out two or three times like one distracted: 'My darling, my dear love, speak to me! Where are you hurt?' Next was the sound of the doctor's voice; I knew it in an instant.

"'Shut that door!' was the first thing he said, and I understood it was to prevent me from knowing what was passing.

"But I could judge something of what they did by what came up through the floor. I half raised myself on my elbow, and listened as for the sentence of my own doom; and when the baby awoke and fretted I put him to the breast, and leaned down again toward the floor. Once there was a sharp, awful scream from Lizzie, and Eben was trying to soothe her, and the doctor spoke louder and more positive-like, and she fell into hysterics, and there was worse confusion than ever. All this time I didn't hear a word nor a cry from my boy, strain my ears as I might, and I began to take comfort from this. Maybe he wasn't hurt, although the stairs were steep, and it had been a frightful crash when they struck the bottom. But children had such wonderful escapes; their bones were so soft, and their bodies light. It was strange he made no noise, but his father was there, and a word from him would have kept him quiet. Still I was repeating aloud: 'Have mercy upon them! Have mercy upon them!' at the end of half an hour (they said it wasn't longer, but it was more like half a year to me), when somebody came slowly up the stairs, and I saw it was mother, pale as the dead and so solemn my heart went down within me.

"They had sent for her to break the news to me that Lizzie had broken her arm, she said.

"'And Eby?' says I.

"'I won't deceive you, Becky,' she says, and told me that he had fractured his skull and was dying.

"'Tell Eben to fetch him up here,' I says, so quiet she stared at me. But I really didn't feel just then. I wasn't stunned neither, I think, for I knew exactly what I was saying and what had happened. 'Don't let anybody else touch him. Lay him right here by me.'

"'Mother made them do just as I ordered, although Eben was very unwilling to have it so, and the doctor would have hindered it if he could, for fear, he said, 'twould excite me too much. I was past being excited. I didn't shed a tear, though Eben was sobbing aloud as he brought up the boy—our *first-born*, Mrs. Marley—and put him where I showed him I wanted him to be.

"They had washed the tears off his face, but his eyelids were swelled from crying, and his sweet mouth was pouted with the distress and pain he thought nobody—not even his mamma—pitied him for. He lay close to me; his poor, bruised head upon my pillow, his cheek against mine, for an hour, breathing shorter and shorter until he died."

PART II.

"How *could* you bear it?" cried I, in a horror of grief and pity. "Didn't you feel like cursing her who had caused all this?"

"Not then," said the nurse in significant simplicity. "It does seem strange to me sometimes that I could bear it and live. But as I said awhile ago my heart melted instead of breaking. It couldn't have been otherwise when Eben threw himself down by his dead boy and prayed to die with him. I called him, and he came at once, took me in his arms and sobbed over me.

"'My precious wife!' he said. 'Can you ever forgive me? I am not worthy of your love. This is a judgment sent to chastise me for my great sin. But it has fallen upon the innocent too.'

"I thought he was raving, and tried to keep back my tears that I might comfort him. It was his talk about forgiving him who had never to my knowing injured me, that put Lizzie into my head.

"'She must feel dreadfully," I says to mother, who was helping move my Eby's body into the other room, and getting the clothes to lay him out in.

"'She'd ought to!' she put in, snappish-like.

"I minded afterward how Eben lifted his head from my shoulder, as if he was about to answer back. I didn't give him time.

"'She is more to be pitied than me,' said I. 'She didn't mean to hurt the child, yet she was the cause of what happened to him. I know she must be suffering terribly. Eben, dear, would you mind going to look after her? She is hurt badly in body, too; we may help her. Nobody can do *him* any good,' says I, beginning to cry again. 'But I've a notion the pain in my heart wouldn't be so sharp if I tried to ease somebody else's trouble. I want you should tell her from me, Eben, that I saw it all, and that we understand it and won't, either of us, lay it up against her seeing it was an accident.'

He got up to do as I said, but mother she stopped him.

"'Your place is with your wife,' she says, in her quick way. 'I'll see to the girl. She'll do well enough, never fear.'

"He minded her right off, but I could see he didn't relish her manner of speaking. He didn't like being dictated to at any time.

"'I hope she'll be kind to Lizzie,' he says presently. 'The poor girl is almost crazy. As you say, she is the one most to be pitied. You are a dear, loving, sensible creature, and know how to feel for others.' By and by he mentioned Lizzie again. It was plain that she weighed heavy upon his mind. 'She is so sensitive and impulsive,' he said, 'and has such strong feelings, I am really uneasy as to the effect this will have upon her.'

"At that I said: 'Mother is busy in the other room, and I think Lizzie is lying on the lounge in the parlor. Now and then I can hear her crying. Step down and see for yourself how she is getting along.'

"He kissed me and the baby before he went, and I lay still thinking and crying quietly to myself, and striving to make up my mind to the Lord's will, for ever so long. Mother was talking low with a neighbor in the next room, and I could catch the sound of Eben's voice through the flooring if I listened attentively, but nobody came near me until it was near dark. Then it was mother who knocked at the door.

"'Why! where's Eben?' she says, surprised.

"I told her how I had sent him down to Lizzie, and how anxious we were about her.

"'You needn't be,' says she. She always fired up when Lizzie was named. 'She'll never die nor go crazy with grief. I've no patience with her or her affectations. And I tell you what, Becky,' sitting down on the side of my bed, 'you're spoiling her with all your might. You'll be sorry for it some day.'

"'Maybe so, mother,' I said. 'But I can't be sorry to-day that I've done all I could to relieve her sufferings. She'll be haunted for life by my darling's last look and cry. I've been thinking it over lying here. We can't be too charitable or kind to her.'

"'I shall speak to your father about taking her home right away. I'll tell him she's in the way here at this time,' says mother, after thinking for a minute. 'And when she's well again, we must find another place for her. She's done harm enough in this house already.' She looked so stern that I was frightened at the idea of trusting Lizzie in her hands.

"'Don't, please?' I begged, as for my life. 'I wouldn't have her think that I dreaded to see her again, or that the sight of her could ever be painful

to me. It would be like accusing her of murder. Think what the Saviour says, "Whatsoever ye would, therefore, that men should do unto you, do ye even so unto them." If I were in her place, such treatment would kill me.'

"'You're not her,' says mother; but when I went on to plead with her she soothed me by promising to do nothing against my will at present. I didn't see Lizzie till the morning of the funeral. It was Eben who persuaded me to send for her. I suppose you'll think me inconsistent, Mrs. Marley, after all I've said of being sorry for and forgiving her, but I *did* shrink from meeting her, although she was never out of my mind for a minute. I'd only to shut my eyes, and I'd see her a-standing at the head of the stairs, frowning and scolding at the child, and jerking her apron away from his tight little fingers. It was this made me say I knew she'd be haunted all her days. I was to be kept perfectly still, said the doctor, for the brain was over-excited, and mother wouldn't let nobody but father and Eben so much as peep at me. She'd gone home to dress for the funeral, and Eben was sitting by me and they'd brought the coffin into my room and left it there that I might have a last, long look at my boy, when my husband said, kind and gentle as could be:

"'Dear wife, won't you see that broken-hearted child and be reconciled to her over this little coffin; tell her that you will try to feel towards her still as one sister should for another? She is grieving herself to death about your refusal to let her come into your sight. Can't you bury your enmity with our first-born?'

"*That* cut me to the quick. 'O Eben!' I cried, 'You don't think I could bear ill-will to anybody just now, least of all to my own flesh and blood? Haven't I said all along that I forgave her—freely?'

"'Actions speak louder than words,' he says, very solemn and sad. 'What is the feeling that makes you wish to shun her? Ask yourself the question.'

"I had but one answer to make. 'If you think it is unkind and unchristian not to ask her in to see me, I wish you would bring her. I don't want to deceive myself or to hurt her feelings.'

"She came in pale as ashes, her arm in a sling; and, at the sight of the black dress she'd put on to wear to the funeral, I burst out crying and opened my arms to her. She was my sister, you see, and my heart was very tender because it was so sore.

"'You won't send me away from you and brother will you?' she sobbed, after awhile, raising herself, and grieving as I was I couldn't but say to myself how pretty she was, for her curls were flying loose, and her eyes brighter than ever with tears. 'It's all the home I have in the wide world, and I'll serve you on my knees, if you will but love me and let me stay. I don't deserve any comfort from you, Becky, but I'm so miserable! so miserable! I wish I had been killed instead of Eby!'

"Eben was crying, too, with me, and his voice shook, but he said: 'You shall always have a home with your sister, Lizzie. She is too true and noble to be angry with you for what has happened. We will stand your friends, let what will come.'

"Mother came to see me a day or two after Eby

was buried, and began to urge me to let Lizzie go to father's to live until she could find something else to do.

"'She's no earthly account here,' says she. 'She's worse than useless, for she's killing you by inches, and she'll do more mischief yet if somebody doesn't take her in hand. I've talked to her time and again, and it doesn't do a mite of good. She's a hardened jade, and she wants a good tight rein. If you must hire a hand in the store, let it be a stranger. You pay this girl more than you would anybody else. And I'll let Matilda come around to help you in housework and sewing until you're strong and well again.'

"Matilda was my oldest half-sister and mother's right-hand at home. I felt her kindness so much in offering to spare her to me, it made it all the harder for me to explain what we had promised Lizzie. I never saw her so fretted by anything else as she was when I told her how it had come about.

"'It's a regular plot!' she says. 'A vile, hatched-up plan to take advantage of you when you wasn't able to judge for yourself what was best and right. I don't marvel at anything *she* does, but Eben had ought to be ashamed of himself! And you're a weak, silly baby of a simpleton, Becky King! You don't see further than the nose on your face. Because you're a decent, God-fearing woman, that fears to displease your Maker, and would harm yourself sooner than injure your neighbor, you take it for granted other people are like you. You'll repent this promise they've wormed out of you in dust and ashes before you die, take my word for it!'

"I was distressed at her going on so, but I hadn't the

least idea what she was hinting at nor why she was so set upon getting Lizzie away. The next thing I heard was she had quarrelled outright with Eben. Long afterwards she told me that she talked to him much plainer than she did to me, and warned him very faithful as to what would be the end of the course he was taking. All I was told at the time was that there had been words between them—so hard that they didn't speak for more'n two years—and mother wouldn't come to the house without she was sure Eben wasn't at home. He didn't object to my going to father's, but he wouldn't go further than the door with me. Yet I must say he behaved very well in the matter.

"'I wouldn't be the means of hindering you from visiting your father,' he used to say. 'And, although your mother and I don't agree, she is certainly fond of you and the children. Take them to see her whenever you like.'

"I did, often as I could, especially Sunday afternoons, when father was home. He was getting infirm, and was almost childish in liking to have me with him. He didn't care much for Eben, and he was cross with Lizzie sometimes when she was pert to mother or me, or seemed to look down on the other girls, Matilda and Maria, who were shy and didn't dress or talk as she did. She went with me though—say, once a month—but she hardly ever stayed the evening out. She had many young companions, and she was pretty sure to be off directly after supper, to go to church with this or that one. Eben got in the habit of spending Sunday evenings with his married

sister, who lived quite in the suburbs, and was occasionally very late in coming to see me home. It never struck me then as queer that he was always early when Lizzie was with me, but I did think once or twice that I wouldn't mind going down the street without him, if she was along to help with the sleepy children.

"So things went on for two years, until one evening—I shall never forget the date—it was the 20th of December, and very cloudy and raw. I had doubts about taking out the little ones that afternoon, only Eben said a little cold weather wouldn't hurt them. He was going to his sister's, and Lizzie meant to spend the night with Mary Bryson, a nice, steady girl who worked at Mrs. Bobbinet's in the place I used to have when I was there. She would often do this, and be home by sunrise Monday morning.

"'I met Matilda in the street to-day as I went to church,' says Eben, while I was still considering what was best. 'She told me your father was sick. She was on her way for the doctor.'

"This settled me. Lizzie walked with me as far as our ways lay together.

"'I 'most wish I had not given a positive promise to Mary,' she says, then. 'If I hadn't, I would go with you and see father. Take him my best love.'

"Mother met me at the front door. 'I'm ever so glad to see you,' she said. 'But it's too damp and bleak for the children to be out. You'd ought to have left them with Lizzie.'

"'She's gone to Mary Bryson's,' said I.

"'I'll warrant,' growled mother. 'She's a regular gad-fly.'

"Father wasn't seriously sick, but he had a feverish cold and a troublesome hacking cough that was very trying to the strength. About half-past eight he took some drops the doctor had left, and fell off into a sound sleep. I was afraid the children would disturb him, for they were wide-awake, by way of variety; and so when an old friend of ours—Andrew Brown by name—stepped in to see how he was, I made so bold as to ask him, for I'd known him all my life, if we might go along with him, seeing he had to pass right by our house on his way home. He was very kind, and would carry Jamie, although he was a stout boy, quite able to walk twice as far. I had Ruthie by the hand, and we went on pretty brisk, for it was beginning to snow. I carried the key of the side door always in my pocket when I went out, and as the shop stood on the corner we came up to it by the cross-street.

"'Why, there's a light in the sitting-room!' said I the minute we were in sight of the windows. 'That's odd when there's nobody at home. I hope nothing has caught fire.'

"'The light is too steady for that,' said Andrew, but we hurried on faster for seeing it.

"The shutters of one window were open, but the shade was down—a white one with a painted border—and as I stopped at the door and began to turn the key in the lock, which always went hard, a shadow passed across the blind.

"'There's Lizzie,' says I, 'I suppose she got dis-

couraged with the cold, and didn't go to Mary Bryson's after all. She's coming to the door for me. It's all right.'

"I gave a wrench to the key that unlocked the door, stopped to say 'Good night!' to Mr. Brown, and picked up Jamie, who didn't fancy being set down on the steps. Ruthie was pushing the door with all her might, but it didn't give way, and I put my shoulder to it. It flew open on a sudden, and there stood Eben.

"'Halloo!' he says. 'You almost knocked me over. What brought you home so early? Babies fretful, eh?' taking Jamie from me.

"I told him how it happened, and walked into the sitting-room. 'Where's Lizzie?' I asked, staring around, for she was nowhere to be seen.

"'At Mary Bryson's, I suppose,' and he said it so coolly it took my breath away. 'I haven't seen her since you walked off together this afternoon. I had *my* walk for nothing, for Julia was not at home; so I came back, made a cup of tea for myself, and have been sitting here alone ever since.'

"I didn't say a word, ma'am, nor so much as look as if I didn't believe him, but my heart dropped like a shot bird, for I had made no mistake when I said that was Lizzie's shadow on the curtain. I saw it plain as I do you this minute—her side-face, and her curls, and even the bow of ribbon fastening her collar, the long ends blowing behind her as she walked. There never was a painted profile that was more distinct.

"It's an awful lesson—that of distrust in your hus-

band—and it came in upon me like a thunderclap. Eben had lied to me, and done it so glibly and with such a straight face he must be used to that sort of work. I hadn't dreamed of complaining of him or of Lizzie for spending the cold, disagreeable evening at home in each other's company. Why should he want to deceive me? How often had he done it before? And why? She had run away to hide, and he had held the door against me until she was safe up-stairs. *Why?* Eben helped undress the children and frolicked with them, and I picked up their clothes and put them by in the parlor-closet, and answered his questions about father as if I was thinking of nothing but what he was saying, and all the while my brain danced and turned somersaults to the *Why*. I was like a person standing on the edge of a precipice, and throwing out his hands to keep from falling over, I felt so giddy. I kept busy as a bee until the children were ready for bed. I remember now how pleased their father looked when they said they wanted he should hear their prayers.

"'And he with a lie in his right hand!' said something in my ear.

"He carried them both up to bed in his arms, although Ruthie was a heavy lift of herself, but he was strong as a giant. I heard them having a great romp overhead, and I stole softly up to Lizzie's door, and tried it. It was locked. I poked my little finger in the key-hole, and felt that the key was on the inside. I didn't need proof of the deceit they had practised on me, but I had it in this. Everything in the room was still as death, and there wasn't a glimmer of light. She didn't mean I should suspect she was there—that

was clear—but why should she take such pains to hinder me? All night long I turned the question over in my mind, while Eben slept like a healthy child. He was an early riser, but I hadn't shut my eyes, and I was up before him, was dressed by the time he was awake. He tried to persuade me not to go down-stairs until he had made the kitchen fire, but I was set in my way. I had made up my mind to expose them, to put them to open shame, was foolish enough to think I could be smart enough to circumvent them. I never lost sight of the hall and the staircase all the while I was getting breakfast. Eben came in the kitchen once, and shut the door after him, but I had it wide open again in a second.

"'It's hot as fury in here,' says I. 'Leave that as it is, please.'

"Lizzie couldn't get down without my seeing her, so of course she didn't make her appearance.

"'Lizzie is late,' says Eben, when we sat down to table. He had been fidgeting from the top of the house to the bottom for an hour. 'I suppose the storm keeps her.'

"At that minute the milkman stopped at the side door. The snow was deep and still falling, and Eben had never let me do such a thing before in stormy weather; but he pretended not to hear the bell, went on cutting up Jamie's food and talking to him, while I got up to fetch the milk. I went to the kitchen for a pitcher, then out upon the sidewalk to the wagon. I had hardly crossed the threshold before the door slammed to behind me. Ruthie opened it almost directly.

"'Papa said the wind blew it to,' she said, 'and told me to run quick and open it, or you'd be froze.'

"I wasn't surprised to find Lizzie in the dining-room when I got back, as if she'd just come in through the shop. She had on her hood, and cloak and gloves; her cheeks were red as if she had been walking in the wind, and she was actually pulling off her rubbers.

"'Such a tramp as I've had!' says she all out of breath. 'I thought I'd never get here.'

"I went up to her and picked up one of her overshoes. It was dry and warm, while my shoes were full of wet snow from having stood in it a half-minute. I said nothing, but I ran my hand into the India-rubber shoe and looked her square in the eye. Then I threw it down and went around to my seat at the head of the table. They were taking a world of pains to fool me. *Why?*

"All this time and for a fortnight afterwards I was angry, and puzzled, and hurt, but not jealous. It didn't once come into my head that Eben preferred Lizzie to me. I was his wife—the mother of his children. He had vowed to be faithful to me, and I didn't doubt that he was. It wounded and displeased me that he had lied to me, yet I was a great ways from guessing at his real reason for doing so. Father grew worse, and I managed to see him every day; sat up with him two nights, leaving the children at home with Eben. I meant to watch a third night yet, but when I went to father's for this purpose, I found somebody else had offered to take my place. Mother walked part the way back with me, for I said I must go home, now there was no need of my staying.

"'You are right to keep watch upon things in your own house,' says she as we parted. 'And my advice to you is *to open your eyes well!*'"

"This speech made me uncomfortable somehow, and I suppose put me up to what I did when I reached the house. I had noticed that morning that a slat in one of the shutters was loose. They weren't movable but stationary, and as I opened them I had seen that I could push it up and down. The sitting-room was on the ground floor, and, thinks I to myself, 'I'll see if any passers-by could peek in. It isn't pleasant to imagine that some thieving vagabond may be looking at you when you are busy at night with your work, and maybe all alone in the house.'

"I pulled the slat ever so gently, and it slipped down an inch at least. There was a bright light in the room, and Lizzie was sitting upon Eben's knee, playing with his hair. I watched them several minutes before I had strength or sense to move, saw him kiss and fondle her, as he'd no right to treat anybody except only me—at least, those were my old-fashioned notions—then I knocked at the door. Eben let me in and said how glad he was to see me, and how pleased that I wasn't to have another night's watching; but I couldn't stay to listen. I ran up stairs and locked myself in my room with my children. But for them I would have killed myself then and there, or run away and never, never seen him again. At last I made out through the storm raging within me that he was at the door, and calling to me to let him in. I got up from my knees by the children's bed (although I hadn't been praying) and opened the door.

"'Don't touch me,' I said, as he offered to put his arm around me. 'I saw you through the window just now—you two. And I know why Lizzie hid from me Sunday night before last, and you told me she wasn't in the house.'

"He tried to laugh off the matter at first; then he talked about brotherly affection; and when I turned a deaf ear, and he saw that I had really seen enough to convince that all this was idle prattle and a false excuse, he owned right out that he did love my sister as a man does the girl he would marry if he could. He couldn't help it, he said. The affections were beyond the control of the will, and so on; and what harm was done without I chose to make scandal of what I'd found out? We might live together, a happy united family for years, if I would dismiss my absurd scruples and take a sensible view of the case.

"'A man isn't responsible for these accidents,' says he. 'I don't like you any the less for being so fond of Lizzie. I've been true to you all the time. You would not be the worse off for my intimacy with your sister if you hadn't chanced to see what I never meant you should.'

"'If 'twasn't wrong, why did you conceal it from me?' I asked.

"'Because I knew you well enough to be certain you'd disapprove of our sentiments and behavior one to the other,' he says. 'And although you don't believe it, I love you so well, I would spare you needless pain. You will do me and my affection justice in time, Becky, but you misjudge me fearfully now.'

"People didn't talk and write about free-love and

affinities and that sort of stuff in those days, and although his arguments sounded very fine, and he could reason me down, I could see what lay behind it all. I told him it was foolish and wicked, cruel to me, and insulting to Him who had ordained marriage and commanded a man to cleave unto his wife. That seemed to me the only right 'view of the case.' Moreover—for my spirit was fairly roused—I wouldn't bear it any longer. Lizzie must leave the house if I ever detected any more of such goings-on as I had witnessed that night, or I should take the children and go to father's. I was excited, and maybe spoke too harshly, but it was a sharp cross for a wife to bear—from her own sister too. I promised him I wouldn't expose them without they gave me further reason, and that I wouldn't open my lips to Lizzie on the subject. He took most of the blame to himself—'if there was any wrong in what they had done;' he slipped that in every other sentence. The girl had attracted him from the first, and she had loved him the instant she set eyes on him in Pittsburg. He'd got some flummery about 'involuntary affection' in his head, and neither common sense nor religion could work it out.

"Next morning we were sent for early to see father die. Eben was very kind and useful and sympathizing in all that followed, and he and mother made up their quarrel. There's nothing checks hard feeling like the cold hand of death. He was so like the old Eben to me that I used to fancy I had dreamed all that happened on that awful night. Anyhow I was willing to forget it, and to show that I did. Maybe I hadn't

acted just right myself, I would say in my thoughts. I had ought to have kept my husband more to myself. I had as good as given him over to her. True, I had spent labor and thought and health in his service, but it came to me like a bran-new idea, that men *must be amused as well as served.* That's so, I believe, ma'am, the world over. They mostly don't look deep enough to find the real spring of a woman's love. I often think that nine out of ten of them wouldn't be quite satisfied with less than two wives apiece—one to work for her husband, to see to his clothes, his food, and his housekeeping, to bear children and take care of them; the other to dress nicely, and look pretty, and pet her lord whenever he's at home. And I believe too that the one that did the fancy work would generally be the favorite."

I could not help smiling. "I never suspected before that you could be satirical, "Mrs. Brown," I said.

"I ain't sure I quite take your meaning," she answered gravely. "I hope I've said nothing ill-natured, but some things were burnt in very deep on my mind in those times. I would look at myself in the glass and actually cry over the loss of my color and my bright eyes, and notice how thin my hair got, and how my hands were rough and hard, and bony, and how plain and *no-stylish* my dress was, and compare myself with Lizzie—so handsome, and fresh and trim. I had always tried to keep myself neat and the house tidy and comfortable, but I had got to be old-fashioned and humdrum—and what wonder! What with babies and ill-health, and housework, and sewing,

and slaving over hours to keep my sister from being a drag upon my husband, it was strange I was alive and in my senses. When this would come very close to me I thought I should go wild, so I'd put it all behind me as a temptation of the Evil One, and try to do the duty of the day. I brightened up my talk, and smartened my dress, and humored my husband in every way I could think of. I got Matilda to run in of evenings to sit with Lizzie or take care of the children, and I'd fix myself up in my best and walk with Eben, and I'd put myself out to attend church and lectures, and such like entertainments with him. Mrs. Marley, it was like blowing on to cold ashes. The livelier I got, the soberer he was. I'd never seen him so down before; and Lizzie, she wasn't much better. It was up-hill work trying to make talk when we three were together, and you may be sure, though I did my best, it wasn't that I had much heart for the business. Still I felt I was helping to keep Eben out of temptation, and doing all I could to coax him back into the right path.

"So the months slipped on one after another, and another December had come. It was the first Saturday of the month when Eben showed me a letter from a little town a hundred miles away, telling him of some speculation in real estate, or something of that sort, in which he said he was interested.

"'I'll just slip up on the cars this evening, stay all night, and spend the Sabbath with my friend,' says he 'and be back by ten o'clock on Monday morning. It's too good a chance to lose.'

"It was all settled in a hurry before I could get

my senses together. He took me and the children over to mother's, and kissed us 'good-by' in haste, for fear he'd lose the train, he said. Lizzie was to follow me when the store was shut for the night, and she had a smart boy—a sort of porter and errand boy Eben employed in the busy season—to help her. About eight o'clock he brought me a note from Lizzie. She wrote that Mary Bryson had been into the shop since I left and begged her so hard to spend Sunday with her, she couldn't refuse.

"'I'm just as pleased as if she had come,' says mother in her dry fashion. 'But it's odd, seeing she's so fond of Mary, she doesn't copy her ways a little.'

"It stormed all day Sunday, and we kept in-doors. Such a quiet season of rest and peace as that looks to me now when I turn back to it! Mother was kindness itself, and so were the girls, and the children so good and happy! I hadn't been so free from care for years. Monday morning was clear as a bell, and I was astir betimes. I left the children asleep, and under Matilda's care, and ran home to open the shop and start the day right. I got me a mouthful of breakfast, and was tidying up the shop, when in walked two men, one of them with a paper in his hand.

"'Mrs. King?" says this one, civil enough.

"'Yes, sir,' I says, a-courtesying.

"'I'm sorry to disturb you, madam,' he went on, 'but we're in possession here. You may not know it, but your husband has been borrowing a lot of money lately, and has given a mortgage upon the stock and fixtures here; all his furniture and personal property generally, in fact; and hearing that other parties had

claims against him we thought it best to be forward with ours.'

"'My husband went to Denville in the six o'clock train Saturday evening,' I said, all in a flutter; 'but I'm expecting him home in an hour or so. There must be some mistake about this.'

"'Tisn't ourn, then,' says the other man, who looked and spoke rough. 'Your husband absconded by the ten o'clock through Western train on Saturday night, and took your sister along for company.'

"If I'd been asked beforehand how I'd take such news as this, I'd have said I should have dropped dead, but I stood perfectly still, and says I:—

"'You're in possession here, you say?'

"'We are,' says the first man.

"'What can I take away with me?' I asked.

"'Your clothes and your children's,' said both together. 'Nothing else.'

"I put them up in a big bundle, and afterwards borrowed a trunk from mother to keep them in. Eben had turned everything else into money and taken it with him.

"Well I won't weary you with going over what I felt in the weary months that followed. It's one of the things people — leastways women — can't talk about. It was fortunate I had to *do* as well as suffer. I lived with mother and took in fine sewing for seven years. Just before she died my eyes gave out—'as might have been expected,' said everybody, for I'd never spared them. Five years longer I fought with poverty, doing slop-work, house-cleaning, nursing—anything that I could lay hold of that would bring me

in a few dollars. Then Andrew Brown, who had courted me before Eben did, and been a firm friend of the family all along, asked me to marry him. In the twelve years Eben had been away I had heard from him but once—or of him rather, for he never sent me a line. It was Lizzie who wrote to Mary Bryson excusing what she had done, and throwing the heft of the blame upon me. 'But for my jealous, suspicious temper, and prying ways,' she said, 'we three might have lived in peace and happiness all our days. I had not cared to keep my husband's love when I had it; thought of nothing but work and making money; and these sordid tastes disgusted him. When I had lost his affection, instead of manœuvring to get it back, I had tried to hold him by the letter of the law, played the spy and jailor to him and wearied him out. I had never understood him in the beginning. Our marriage had been a mistake from first to last.'"

"Abominable!" I ejaculated.

"Yes, ma'am," said the nurse, in her quiet tone. "But somehow it made me sorrier for her than if she had been penitent, for I knew how much she would have to suffer before she was brought back to the right way—she'd strayed off so far. My few friends begged me hard to marry Andrew. My children were fond of him, and I couldn't educate them and keep them as I'd wish to out of my poor earnings. If I was to die they'd be left destitute, and what with thinking of these things, and not caring much what happened to me now, and knowing how good and steady and true Andrew was, I let him take out a

regular divorce for me, and then we were married. We got along nicely together. He often said how happy I made him, and *that* was a great comfort, you know. He did well by my children; never made any difference between them and the little girl that was born to us the second year after our marriage.

"She was near five years old when the strangest thing happened to me that I've known in all my up-and-down life. I was sitting at the parlor window with my sewing one summer afternoon, when a man who was passing along the sidewalk stopped and stared hard at me, then came up the steps and rang the bell. I went to the door.

"'Can you tell me, madam,' says he, 'if there's a family by the name of Dawson lives in this neighborhood?'

"'Not that I know of,' I says.

"'I have been misinformed then. I am a stranger in the city—and—and—have letters to them—and—I was told—was directed to this street.'

"He talked in a sort of hoarse, choked-up voice, hemming and hawing, and was very pale, besides being all of a tremble. I thought he was sick or in great trouble, and says I: 'If you will sit down here in the hall, I will look in the directory,' for Andrew always had one, being a tax collector by trade. I ran to the dining-room and searched through the D's. There were Dawsons enough but not one in our neighborhood, and I took a glass of ice water to him when I went back to tell him this. Just as he was drinking it my little Mamie came trotting into the hall.

"'Mamma,' she called, 'hasn't papa come home yet?'

"'No, darling,' I says.

"'*Mamma!*' repeated the man, looking as if he'd seen a ghost, and spilling the water as he tried to set down the glass on the table. 'Is this your child?'

"'It is,' said I, and I was so scared by his manner I caught up the little thing. I really fancied he would steal her or hurt her some way.

"He put his hand to his head and walked right out of the door like one in a dream or crazy; and as he did it I saw a scar on his wrist I recognized in a minute. I ran to the door and stared after him. His face was all whiskers, and they with his hair were gray as a badger; he was very thin and stooped a little, but I knew him well enough. He met Jamie and Ruthie face to face before he'd gone ten steps, turned and looked wistfully enough after them, and seeing them turn up my steps must have known for certain who they were, but he kept on down the street. I've never seen nor heard of him since nor of *her*. I didn't let on to the children who it was, but I told Andrew all about it, as was only right.

"I've been a widow eight years. Jamie and Ruthie are settled in homes of their own, and would like to have me with them, but there's Mamie. Her father lost most of his property before he died through another man's failure, but we manage to get along. Work is better than ease for me."

She got up, pulled the Afghan about my shoulders, and stirred the fire.

"It's time for your twilight nap now, dear. I'll go

down and see about your supper. It's a homely and a sorrowful story I've been telling, but it won't harm you to know how much trouble you've escaped thus far, and how mercifully the Lord sends strength with the day of trial. It's a true tale, too, every word of it."